

2020 Walking Shield Annual Report

Walking Shield has met the unique challenges and opportunities of 2020, including those of COVID-19, with enthusiasm, compassion, and service. Through partnerships with valued supporters such as yourself, we have assisted tribes and urban Indian organizations with vital resources in the areas of OneSight, Education, Housing, Infrastructure and Healthcare, Humanitarian Aid, and Employment Training. The pandemic has both complicated and increased the need for these services. The following is a summary of our story in 2020. We thank you for taking part in our mission of improving the quality of life for Native American families and communities.

OneSight Partnership

Walking Shield has partnered with OneSight for over 30 years, bringing vision care to Native American communities on some of the most impoverished reservations in the United States. Typically, the need rate on most of the reservations we assist reflects that over 71% of children and over 95% of adults need corrective eye wear. Unfortunately, vision care at tribal facilities is almost non-existent.

We have hosted over 40 charitable eye clinics from Wisconsin to California, providing over 40,450 eye exams and distributing more than 32,360 glasses. Our OneSight partnership has provided services valued at over \$15,000,000. This is an incredible partnership and has truly made a positive difference for our Native American communities.



A child from the Yurok Tribe receives the gift of sight!

School principals and teachers within these communities report that students' academic levels have vastly improved now that they can see the white boards and read their books. Studies have shown that a simple pair of glasses can have a life changing impact, from giving students the chance to learn up to 2x more in the classroom and helping adults earn up to 20% more, to empowering people to see their world and possibilities.

The pandemic made 2020 a difficult year on so many levels. Sadly, the need for social distancing which is especially important to the health and safety of Native American communities, also prevented our OneSight program from providing direct services of eyecare. We had to postpone the four clinics for this year that were going to be held on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, the Yaqui Pascua Reservation in Tucson, Arizona, La Posta Reservation in San Diego, and the Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota. The groundwork has taken place which included selected sites for the clinics on each reservation, the tribal departments and schools that will participate, and other logistical details. They will now take place in 2021.

Education

In 2020, Walking Shield's Education Program faced the challenge of education going virtual due to COVID-19. The rapid movement to virtual learning meant that many students were suddenly in need of laptops which have become a scarce commodity during these times. Students also faced an increased need for printers, books, and supplies. The crisis particularly impacted nursing students and students with lab assignments, such as those taking biology courses.

Walking Shield was fortunate to receive \$60,000 in emergency funding from San Manuel Band of Mission Indians. In 2020, Walking Shield helped to address the digital divide which particularly affects Native American youth. Education assistance included providing 67 students with computers and laptops, 18 students with office equipment, 10 students with tutoring, 20 students with tuition, 32 students with academic advising, 48 students with school supplies, 55 students with books and programs, 200 students with college admission workshops, and 450 students with FAFSA workshops. In addition, to help address the challenge of job loss during the pandemic, Walking Shield's Education Program provided 60 students with living and food expenses, 29 students with gas cards, and 30 students with parking permits.

Since 2010, \$2 million dollars in scholarships have been awarded along with \$330,000 in wrap-around services. This year we provided 54 students with college scholarships. Walking Shield's culturally competent education program has graduated 95 students since its inception in 2010. Many students continue their education while other students pursue gainful employment in their field of study. The scholarships and wraparound services provided would not be possible without the generous support of LASIF (Los Angeles Scholars Investment Fund & California Community Foundation), The San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, Walking Shield's Annual Golf Tournament, individual donors, and corporations.

Many graduates are successfully employed within Native American tribes or Indian service programs. During the challenging year of 2020, Walking Shield met its goal of graduating 15 students and exceeded its goal in serving a total of 1,073 students.

One of our students, LeeAna Espinoza Salas, who is now working towards completing an M.A. in American Indian Studies in 2021, describes her experience as a participant in our Education program: "In my time as an undergraduate student at UC Riverside, Walking Shield was continuously supportive of my educational journey. Not only has the organization supported me financially but they have provided a community of support and accountability. Overall, Walking Shield improved my undergraduate experience through their generosity which allowed me to focus my time and energy towards my education rather than the financial burden often associated with attaining a higher education."



Recent graduate LeeAna Espinoza Salas (Cahuilla) stands tall as she earned her B.A. Media and Cultural Studies, University of California, Riverside, Class of 2019.

Dr. Castillo is in the final stages in the development of the Walking Shield College Graduate Alumni Society. His team has developed a google survey form to be completed by each student. Part of the survey contains a section on their employment status. Each graduate will be invited to an exclusive LinkedIn account and participate in multiple activities. We are proud of all our students' achievements. We are working remotely to keep everyone safe, encouraging students during this time of uncertainty, and continuing to provide culturally competent services and support. The assistance that we receive from our generous partners is especially critical during the pandemic. In keeping with social distancing safety practices, our 10th Annual Charity Golf Tournament which helps support our students is rescheduled for 2021.

Housing Relocation

Walking Shield's Housing Relocation Program is an essential way that we put into action our mission to improve the quality of life for Native families and communities. Never has the need for housing been more crucial than in tribal communities which are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The need for social distancing, isolation of COVID cases, and stay at home mandates make our Housing Relocation Program more essential than ever.

Walking Shield is the only nonprofit in the U.S. that has first right of refusal for excess homes for all military branches in all 50 states. The Department of Defense has valued these homes at \$50,000 per home. The 1,235 homes that have been transferred and relocated to reservations thus far have a total value of \$61,750,000.



Relocating an excess military home to improve the quality of life in American Indian communities.

In this past year, appliances from 100+ excess military homes were donated to the Spirit Lake Tribe. Walking Shield has been contacted by the U.S. Airforce Academy in Colorado Springs and the McAlester Army base in Oklahoma who will have housing available in the next few years. Once we have the number of homes available and when they want them moved, we will contact the local tribes to see if they are interested.

Infrastructure and Healthcare

Walking Shield has a long history of partnership with the Department of Defense which has made a significant impact improving the quality of life for American Indian people across the country. Through the Innovative Readiness Training program (IRT), Walking Shield partners with the Department of Defense in helping tribal communities to meet both infrastructure (engineering) and healthcare needs. This partnership, known as Operation Walking Shield, has never been so direly needed as during these difficult times. The lack of access to clean water and to healthcare in American Indian / Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities has contributed to the highest per-capita COVID-19 infection rate in the U.S.

This year, Walking Shield developed a Tribal Consortium which is a collaborative effort of federally recognized Native American Tribes in the San Diego region to develop Five-Year Work Plans for hard infrastructure projects on their reservations that will prevent, prepare, and respond to the pandemic. Through the Walking Shield Capacity Building Program, tribal partners will identify immediate and long-term infrastructure projects to initiate, implement, and integrate economic development plans on “micro” and small Indian reservations to ensure tribal recovery and resilience against COVID-19 and related impacts. The partnership with IRT will be integral to this effort. This program plans to complete scheduled projects for economic development that will improve the quality of life of Native people living on reservations, promote Native American investment opportunities, and new philanthropic and impact investments from national and local sources.



A child receiving much needed dental care at a healthcare deployment.

Walking Shield is excited for our plan, beginning in 2021, to bring infrastructure improvements to the La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians. These improvements are to include the construction of a fire station, to improve public safety by widening a road into the La Jolla Campground to provide for quicker ingress/egress, to improve safety and access to domestic water infrastructure through road construction and water tank pad construction, and to build an equipment and materials storage yard. This is but one example of how Walking Shield and the Department of Defense will work with tribal communities to help meet vital infrastructure needs through our IRT program in 2021. In addition, healthcare deployments are now being scheduled on reservations for 2021.

Humanitarian Aid and Holiday Gift Distribution Program

The Humanitarian Aid Program and the Holiday Gift Distribution Program are the oldest programs that Walking Shield has offered since our beginning in 1986. These programs have made a huge impact on some of the most impoverished Tribes in the United States.

As reflected in our most recent annual audit, Walking Shield distributed over \$300,000 of humanitarian aid products and holiday toys to 56 tribes and off reservation Native American organizations in need. Walking Shield is fortunate to have long-term partners such as Hasbro and Toys for Tots Native American Program who generously contribute to this effort. We also receive numerous donations of products for children from a variety of different companies. Other products such as handmade knitted items including blankets, beanies, mittens, etc., are donated by many other civic groups.



Children from the Yurok Tribe happy with their gifts and excited to see Santa!

The most recent addition to our family in the past three years is our friends from Football for Life. Their purpose is to help reduce suicide rates on Pine Ridge Reservation by utilizing football as a vehicle to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth. Their most recent efforts are making a positive difference on Pine Ridge Reservation which is located in the most impoverished county in the U.S., Oglala Lakota County. Football for Life is providing young athletes with football camps, new equipment and jerseys, college scholarships, and supplies such as laptops. Walking Shield anticipates another great year of supporting Native American communities through these programs in 2021.

Employment and Training

Walking Shield's most recent program is called the Workforce Development and Training Program. Native Americans have experienced overall higher rates of unemployment than any other ethnic group in the U.S., even prior to COVID-19. Our Workforce Development and Training program addresses an especially urgent need during these times as Native workers face more widespread unemployment and are more vulnerable to economic disruption during the pandemic recession.

In collaboration with United American Indian Involvement (UAI) who has been awarded the U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) Grant for Indian and Native American Program, Walking Shield serves the Native American community residing in Orange and Los Angeles County. This program provides job seekers access to employment training, support services, and the education necessary to succeed in today's competitive job market. The program's goal is to provide a long-term career path to low income, unemployed, and under-employed Native Americans to minimize the disparities they face in the workforce.

A significant challenge brought about by the pandemic is that of job loss among Native American youth. Walking Shield works with partners in the community such as local food banks and Working Wardrobe, to provide participants with as many resources as possible. Walking Shield in 2020 provided approximately \$200,000 in services and in 2021 we plan to provide over \$200,000 in services.

One of our clients, Pearson Tahuka, received tuition assistance from Walking Shield in 2020 and graduated from the Harry Wendelstedt Umpire School this year. We are proud of Pearson who we believe is well on his way to becoming the first Native American professional umpire.



Workforce participant, Pearson Tahuka completing program paperwork.



Workforce participant, Pearson Tahuka, recent graduate of Harry Wendelstedt Umpire School.