



2021 Walking Shield Annual Report

2021 was an exciting year for Walking Shield, as many of our services which had to be postponed last year due to the pandemic, resumed this year with a focus on the safety and wellbeing of our Native American communities. With the vital support of partners such as yourself, we continue to assist both rural tribes and urban Indian organizations in the areas of: OneSight, Education, Healthcare, Humanitarian Aid, and Workforce Development. We also launched a new program called KeepCHA which stands for Keeping Curiosity and Hopes Alive for Children Ages 0-5. The following report provides an overview of our efforts this year. We thank you for continuing to partner with us in our mission to improve the quality of life for Native American families.

OneSight Partnership

For over 30 years, Walking Shield has partnered with OneSight to bring vision care to Native American communities, many of which experience poverty and for whom access to vision care is often limited. We have found that, on most reservations that we assist, over 71% of children and over 95% of adults need corrective eyewear.

Quality vision care is also connected to the overall health of people of all ages. For example, higher rates of diabetes are prevalent in Native American communities, as are increased rates of diabetic retinopathy and thus an even greater need for eye exams and corrective eyewear. At every age, being able to see clearly is essential to our Native American people to attend to their health and activities of daily living both individually and collectively.



As the pandemic slows in 2021, we were excited to bring a OneSight clinic to the Pascua Yaqui Tribe and the Tohono O'odham Tribe in Arizona in November. Our goal was to assist 1,200 individuals with a complete free eye exam and provide free brand-new glasses made on site for those who were visually impaired. We assisted 1,506 individuals with vision care, 92% of whom needed glasses. We also are planning to hold two additional OneSight clinics in 2022, one with the La Posta Reservation to assist seven local tribes in San Diego, California, and the other with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota.

Children from the Pascua Yaqui Tribe receive an eye exam and much needed vision care.

Education

In 2021, one of Walking Shield's goals was to be a source of stability and support for our students during times of uncertainty in the pandemic. For many students, classes remained virtual throughout this year. This meant less access to computers, tutoring, and other in-person resources that they would normally receive at school, all of which compounds existing academic challenges. In Fall of 2021, many students are still contending with the challenges of virtual learning. In addition, we found that many students experienced higher rates of mental health issues this year due to the pandemic. Students reached out to Walking Shield for assistance and we provided as many resources as possible. Currently, we are providing 55 students with college scholarships.

We are grateful for the continued generous support from San Manuel Band of Mission Indians which allows our program to assist Native American students with wrap around services, along with scholarships to achieve their dream of a college degree. In addition to the 55 college scholarships, our Education assistance in 2021 included providing 20 students with tutoring, 45 students with tuition assistance, 55 students with academic advising, 75 students with computers and laptops, 80 students with books and programs, 82 students with office equipment, 93 students with gas for their vehicles, 115 students with living and food expenses, 130 students with school supplies, and 350 students with Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) virtual workshops. Despite these difficult times, the majority of our students managed to stay on track and successfully complete their courses. We are very proud of our students and continue to support them with academic, mental health, and other resources.

This year, we were excited to launch our Walking Shield Alumni Society (WSAS) which is made up of our former scholarship recipients who have now graduated with a college degree. They are helping our current students with many items such as providing more support and mentorship for them. WSAS began virtually early in 2021.

In the summer, we expanded into an opportunity for our Native American community to gather safely outdoors. We brought together our Walking Shield Alumni Society, current scholarship recipients, workforce clients, local nonprofits, vendors, and our Native American community for a fun summer mixer event.

Over 140 people attended and enjoyed an evening filled with music, food, raffle prizes, and authentic Hawaiian shaved ice! With the help of the Orange County Health Care Agency, we offered a vaccine clinic for attendees and for the public. In addition, Walking Shield distributed bags of personal protective equipment such as cleanser and sanitizing wipes, for our Native American families for safety and wellness during the pandemic.



A family enjoying our summer mixer event

At this event, Walking Shield celebrated and honored our students and alumni. Thanks to donors like you, we have over 100 college graduates and have awarded over \$2 million dollars in college scholarships over the past 10 years. We expect to see another 15 students graduate in 2022.

Keeping Curiosity and Hopes Alive for Children Ages 0-5 (KeepCHA)

Walking Shield is excited for the launching of our newest program called KeepCHA, which stands for Keeping Curiosity and Hopes Alive for Children Ages 0-5. Research indicates that the mind of a child is 90% developed by age five. <https://azpbs.org/2017/11/early-childhood-brain-development-lifelong-impact/>. The first five years of a child's life are a critical time for cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and social development, which sets the foundation for everything to come. They also provide indicators of those who will most likely attend college.

KeepCHA began with the vision of Dr. John Castillo who created PARGE which stands for Prepare, Admit, Retain, Graduate, and Employ to offer assistance and college scholarships to Native Americans to provide a pathway out of poverty. He has seen the impact as graduates return to their communities to provide services and opportunities to others. Dr. Castillo has also seen students struggle to meet the rigorous academic standards of college and the challenges of the job market and, as a result, he researched the First Five movement in California, Cradle to Career in Ohio, and similar programs elsewhere.

The goal of KeepCHA is to expand the PARGE program to focus on the first 5 years of a child's life as the foundation of education and to provide scholarships and then employment opportunities for early childhood educators in their Native American communities of origin. KeepCHA utilizes culturally relevant educational 0 – 5 programs for parents and the youngest in the Native American community to create a legacy of hope for future generations.



Without hope, young Native Americans will continue to be afflicted with the highest high school dropout rate and the highest suicide rate of any ethnic group in the United States. The suicide rate among Native Americans across the nation ages 15 to 34 is twice the national average and 3 out of 10 drop out of high school before graduating both in cities and on reservations. With the elements of Exposure and Encouragement in place, children still need Educational Opportunities and Experiences to Keep Curiosity and Hopes Alive. KeepCHA is designed to inspire parents, families, educators, and communities to provide such Opportunities and Experiences for Native American children ages 0-5.

Walking Shield has spent over a year researching best practices, bringing together 22 chapters of culturally relevant materials for Native American families to support the education and development of young children. Now that the research phase is completed, we have launched

KeepCHA on our website in Fall of 2021. We are also working with our partners in Native American tribal governments toward the delivery of this program for the tribes that we serve.

Please visit our newly launched KeepCHA program at: <http://walkingshield.org/keepcha-keeping-curiosity-and-hope-alive-for-children-0-5-and-their-families/>

Healthcare Support Program

For over 25 years, Walking Shield has partnered with the Department of Defense and with Native American tribes to bring essential healthcare services such as medical and dental care to tribes across the United States. Through the U.S. Military's Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) requirement, our Healthcare Support Program has provided over \$5,000,000 in healthcare and dental services to more than 150,000 Native American tribal members across the nation.

Many of the tribes that we serve are experiencing poverty and lack access to healthcare. Our Healthcare Support Program provides essential services including, but not limited to minor surgery, immunizations, x-rays, nutritional and mental health services, dental care, and health education which are especially important during COVID-19.

Sadly, in 2020 Walking Shield had to postpone our healthcare deployments due to the pandemic. However, we were pleased to resume these services in 2021. Your generous contribution enabled us to bring U.S. Military medical deployments to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota, The Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes in Montana, The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians in North Dakota, and the Hoopa Valley Tribe in California.

The kind support of donors like you helps to make it possible for Walking Shield to coordinate these essential healthcare services. In 2022, several healthcare deployments are being planned on various reservations. We thank you for the difference you make in the lives and wellbeing of Native American children and families.



A child receiving essential dental care at a health care deployment

Humanitarian Aid and Holiday Gift Distribution Program

The Humanitarian Aid Program and the Holiday Gift Distribution Program are Walking Shield's most long-standing programs, having been offered since our beginning in 1986. As the holiday season approaches, Walking Shield begins the exciting work of our Holiday Gift Program in 2021. Our warehouse, brimming with toys, turns into a Santa's workshop where we package, organize, and coordinate the giving of toys for Native American families. Many of the reservations that we serve often experience deep levels of poverty, so these gifts are especially appreciated.

We are grateful for the generous support of long-term partners such as Hasbro and Toys for Tots Native American Program. 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. With this amazing support, we plan to send thousands of toys to Native American children on reservations across the nation.



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 and other Reservations 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 2022.

Workforce Development & Training Program

In collaboration with United American Indian Involvement (UAI) who has been awarded the U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Grant for Indian and Native American Program, Walking Shield serves the American Indian community residing in Orange 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 American Indians to minimize the disparities they face in the workforce.

Currently, we have 42 individuals participating in our Employment Training program. This program also assists individuals who want to enter college to obtain a degree. Many of these participants are in colleges working on their degrees and many others have become gainfully employed.

Community Services Block Grant Programs

In 2021, Walking Shield is pleased to introduce our Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program and our CARES Program which both provide emergency supportive services for our Native American communities.

Our CARES Program is made possible through our partnership with the Northern California Indian Development Council, and with funding provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This program provides statewide emergency assistance such as housing, utility, and nutrition services for Native American households located in California which have been affected by the pandemic. It does not matter if the client is on or off reservation, or from an out-of-state Tribe.



Our Community Services Block Grant Program offers many services such as those listed below to qualifying Native Americans residing in Orange County:

- ❖ Housing assistance provided for relocation or eviction prevention.
- ❖ Utility assistance provided for disconnection prevention, or service reconnection.
- ❖ Nutrition assistance provided for limited food resources.
- ❖ Supportive services provided for vocational education and employment.

This program is designed to offer emergency assistance to Native American people experiencing poverty. Walking Shield's goal in offering this program, as a source of support at the most difficult times, is in step with our mission to improve the quality of life for Native American families.