

SERVING
AMERICAN INDIAN FAMILIES
SINCE 1986

2023 Annual Report




Walking Shield Staff and San Manuel Band of Mission Indians Tribal Council at the Forging Hope Yawa' Award Ceremony on April 18, 2023. Walking Shield Staff (Center Left); San Manuel Tribal Council (Center Right). More information on page 4.


Serving American Indian Communities Since 1986

Walking Shield's mission is to improve the quality of life for American Indian families by coordinating programs that provide shelter, healthcare, community development support, educational assistance, employment development, and humanitarian aid.

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Dear Friends,

As 2023 draws to a close, Walking Shield would like to thank you for your incredible support, and to wish you a warm and wonderful holiday season! This was an extraordinary year with many new opportunities to serve American Indian people. We hope that the stories that follow give you a sense of how much your support means, and the incredible positive difference that we make together for American Indian families and communities. With heartfelt gratitude, and in the community spirit that unites us all, we are so pleased to present to you our 2023 Annual Report.

2023 Walking Shield Annual Report

This year, our valued community members and partners worked together with Walking Shield to make 2023 one of our best years yet for improving the quality of life for American Indian families. Highlights of 2023 included coordinating efforts to improve healthcare and infrastructure on reservations, receiving the Forging Hope Yawa' Award from San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, launching our KeepCHA (Ages 0-5) Video Series, continuing to provide humanitarian aid year-round, and hosting our 11th Annual Charity Golf Tournament, with the theme of "Swinging for our Scholars!" Thank you for helping make all our work possible.

Vision Care

Access to quality vision care is one of the most urgent and prevalent health needs in American Indian communities today. According to the Review of Optometry, American Indian people experience "significantly increased rates of retinopathy, cataract, visual impairment, and blindness." Ophthalmologic conditions such as these, can often be a sign of an underlying problem, as with diabetic retinopathy. For Native American people experiencing poverty, who often lack access to basic healthcare needs, an eye exam is often the only way to diagnose a serious condition such as diabetes. Yet, despite the prevalence of eye health problems, these conditions often go untreated, and the need for vision care is largely unmet.

Together with our partners at OneSight EssilorLuxxotica Foundation, and at Restoring Vision, we are working to improve access to quality vision care and eyewear for American Indian people. Walking Shield has worked together with our partners at OneSight EssilorLuxxotica Foundation, for over 20 years, to coordinate vision clinics in American Indian communities. Together, we have served over 33 reservations and off-reservation locations throughout the United States. OneSight brings a dedicated team of optometrists, ophthalmologists, and other professionals to serve people in the greatest need with free eye exams and customized eye wear, made directly at the vision clinic site. Over the many years of our partnership, we have found that the need rate for vision care in American Indian communities is overwhelming. In 2022, the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians hosted a vision care clinic for 888 recipients, including elders, and families with young children from surrounding



Families receive free vision care at a vision clinic hosted by Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians, 2022.

tribes and off reservation communities. The need rate for corrective eyewear was 91%. Our next vision clinic is currently being planned for 2024 to be hosted by the Pala Band of Mission Indians.

Walking Shield has partnered with RestoringVision, a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose goal is to solve the global vision crisis by distributing free reading glasses to the poorest communities around the world. Clear vision is essential: the ripple effects of forgoing eyecare include the loss of productivity, livelihoods, education opportunities, and independence. Through this program, Walking Shield has partnered with 17 Native American Tribal Organizations and has provided over 80,000 pairs of free reading glasses in North Dakota, Montana, Arizona, and California. The program will continue through October 2024. The glasses have been distributed at Pow Wows, Health Fairs, Back to School Events, On-reservation Medical Clinics and through Tribal Police Departments. Many of the recipients couldn't wait to share how their new glasses would impact their lives:

- *"I was always reading books to my great grandkids until my reading glasses broke. Now we can share more memories and spend time reading again."*
- *"As a pharmacy technician I need to be able to see small fine print on tablets and pills. Readers have really played a big part in my work and personal life."*
- *"Thank you for the reading glasses. I need the ability to read simple material around the house and with the new glasses I feel confident and happy."*
- *"I do a lot of reading at work, as well as for leisure. I get headaches, glasses helped my eyes not to strain so I can keep reading comfortably."*
- *"I really needed these glasses, thank you!"*



A community member receives free reader glasses at the Intertribal Earth Day Event, June 2023

Education

Our Education program is our oldest service to assist our American Indian communities. In 1986, a group of Jesuits from the Red Cloud Indian High School on Pine Ridge asked our founder, Phil Stevens, to help provide computers for the students of the school. Phil decided he would help and hosted a fundraising event called the White Buffalo dinner. In order for donors to receive a tax donation receipt, he established a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization which became Walking Shield. Today, according to Red Cloud High School, 100% of their students plan to further their education and training upon graduation.

Walking Shield believes that education is a pathway out of poverty. Since 1986, we have continued to provide school supplies, backpacks, and other educational materials to assist in this effort. Our program has continued to evolve over the years. In 2005, in partnership with Southern California Edison, we convened with American Indian educators from the Greater Los Angeles community at the Beckman Center in Irvine to discuss how to assist more Native students to attend college. Soon thereafter, Walking Shield created the American Indian College Access Program. Throughout these many years, several corporations, companies, foundations, tribes, and individual donors have joined in partnership to enhance our efforts to promote higher education.

The foundation of our program, called PARGE, stands for Prepare, Admit, Retain, Graduate, and Employ. Our program provides assistance with identifying financial aid opportunities and with the college application process, scholarships (tuition assistance), tutoring, mentorship, and wraparound services including books, backpacks, computers, school supplies, and transportation assistance.

We have provided over 3.5 million dollars in college scholarships and wraparound services. In partnership with the many groups and individuals who have supported us, we now have over 120 college graduates, most of whom are gainfully employed in their fields of study, or pursuing post graduate degrees. Typically, we provide educational services for approximately 50 scholars each year. For the academic year 2023-2024, we anticipate serving 71 scholars, which is an increase from the 50 scholars we normally reach. We are so proud of our students, who are the future of our American Indian families and communities.



Walking Shield scholarship recipient majoring in Nursing.



Walking Shield scholarship recipient at the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association Graduation Ceremony

On April 18, 2023, Walking Shield had the exceptional honor of receiving the Forging Hope Yawa' Award from San Manuel Band of Mission Indians – an integral and long-time supporter of our Education services - in honor of our work helping American Indian students achieve their dreams of a higher education. This award inspired Walking Shield to continually enhance our American Indian College Access Program, to provide the highest quality, culturally relevant support for American Indian students.

Walking Shield is excited to host our 11th Annual Charity Golf Tournament on November 13, 2023, at the Soboba Springs Golf Course in San Jacinto, CA. On this fun-filled day both on and off the green, our communities and supporters come together to benefit our American Indian College Access Program in a day of "Swinging for our Scholars!" We are so grateful for the extraordinary support of our sponsors and donors, including Colusa Indian Community Council, Soboba Foundation, Inc., Barona Band of Mission Indians, Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association, Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians, Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, and Pala Band of Mission Indians.

Humanitarian Aid and Holiday Gifts Program

Our Humanitarian Aid & Holiday Gifts Program is one of Walking Shield's most delightful, and most gratifying programs. We are so grateful for Toys for Tots Native American Program for providing us pallets of high-quality toys every year, filling our warehouse, and filling the hearts of so many people, with joy and gratitude. The Toys for Tots Native American Program, which began in 1980, has grown to benefit over 180,000 Native American children annually providing toys and books to participating reservations as well as actively supporting the Office of the Vice President of the Navajo Nation with the Navajo Literacy Program. <https://www.toysfortots.org/programs/native-american-program/>. Toys for Tots Native American program is integral to our work. Each year, they provide Walking Shield with tens of thousands of toys and gifts, which we distribute for Native American people in need both on reservations and with urban organizations.

Thanks to the continued support of our local Yarn Spinners organization, Walking Shield receives beautifully knitted blankets, beanies, and scarves for all ages, and crocheted clothing for little ones every year. We are thrilled to be able to provide these wonderful gifts for Native American people in need, to help keep them warm during the cold winters. Also, our local wooden toy makers from Huntington Landmark in Huntington Beach provide an incredible assortment of high quality, vintage style wooden toys, which we are delighted to distribute for Native American families and communities experiencing financial hardship.



Walking Shield's dedicated team of volunteers help package and send toys to Native American children in need.



Huntington Landmark provides Walking Shield with beautiful, vintage wooden toys for Native American families.

Walking Shield works with a dedicated team of volunteers, donors and supporters who help make this work possible. Many of the families for whom we provide this service, would otherwise not have toys and gifts to provide for their children. We are so grateful to everyone who helps us bring joy to families in need.

Infrastructure and Healthcare Support Program

For over 25 years, Walking Shield has worked together with tribal leaders and with our partners at the U.S. Military to coordinate missions for infrastructure and healthcare support on reservations in need. Our partnership with the U.S. Military is accomplished through the Innovative Readiness Training Program (IRT), which is a "Department of Defense (DoD) military training opportunity, exclusive to the United States and its territories, that delivers joint training opportunities to increase deployment readiness. Simultaneously, IRT provides key services (health care, construction, transportation, and cybersecurity) with lasting benefits for American communities." (Retrieved from: <https://irt.defense.gov/Community/>). In 2023, Walking Shield continued this important work along with our partners, which is integral to our mission of improving the quality of life for Native American people.

Homelessness and lack of affordable housing, are some of the most widespread problems in American Indian communities today. With our tribal and U.S. Military partners, Walking Shield is working to build new housing for Native American communities in need.



In 2023, The Air National Guard works together with Walking Shield, on a current housing rehabilitation and construction mission, to benefit the Blackfeet Tribe.

We are currently Working with The Air National Guard and with Blackfeet Tribal leaders on a construction project for rehabilitating vacant homes on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The Air National Guard provides civil engineering support, and Walking Shield performs service readiness training along with additional administrative and personnel support functions. This is just one example of the Infrastructure and Housing support provided by Walking Shield for American Indian people on rural reservations.

In addition to lack of housing, American Indian people experience vast health disparities in comparison to the general American population. Through partnerships with tribal leaders both in California and across the nation, and with the U.S. Military, Walking Shield seeks to improve overall health in American Indian communities, and to improve access to healthcare.

“The Air National Guard, in partnership with the K’ima:w Medical Center, offer(ed) medical services and education to community members of the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation in California. This mission (supplied) medical, logistics, Personnel Support for Contingency Operations (PERSCO), Force Support Squadron (FSS), communications, public affairs, Joint Operations Center (JOC), plans, leadership, and chaplain training for unit and individual readiness training.”

Retrieved from: <https://irt.defense.gov/Missions/>

“The Army Reserve (led) the mission with the Round Valley Indian Health Center to furnish real-world medical training for military personnel in California with no-cost medical services, logistics, communications, and public affairs functions to increase overall deployment readiness. The Marine Corps Reserve, Navy Reserve, and Air National Guard support(ed) this mission.” Retrieved from: <https://irt.defense.gov/Missions/>
In supporting these and other missions, Walking Shield assists to coordinate the provision of basic healthcare, dental, vision, and other medical support.

Workforce Development Program

Walking Shield continues to partner with United American Indian Involvement (UAI) in providing resources and support services to our employment-seeking clients. Funded through the U.S. Department of Labor’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Grant, 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. The majority of our clients are students at the post-secondary level of their educational journey. Three students are pursuing their bachelors in nursing, and another student is getting her masters in nursing. A June graduation was celebrated by 10 of our scholarship students, who will now be searching for careers in their field of study with Walking Shield’s assistance. Likewise, those same 10 graduates will be mentoring the current Walking Shield scholarship students as they navigate



California - Hoopa IRT (Medical)



California - Round Valley Indian Health: Operation Walking Shield (Medical)



We are proud of our Workforce clients who contribute so much to our communities.

their educational journey. While Walking Shield has been serving the American Indian job-seeking community in Orange County up to this point, our territory has now expanded to include Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties. We are looking forward to the opportunity to serve and make a difference through this most effective and far-reaching program, as we strive to establish a clear career path that leads to employment and self-sufficiency.

Community Services Block Grant Programs

Walking Shield is grateful for the opportunity to serve our local American Indian communities by providing emergency services, in partnership with the Northern California Indian Community Development Council. Community Services Block Grant Programs (CSBG) provide services in the areas of: Housing and Rental Assistance, Utilities and Nutrition Assistance, to name a few. This year, Walking Shield expanded our CSBG Program from Orange County, out to the Inland Empire counties of Riverside and San Bernardino. Walking Shield has seen a very high rate of need as we have provided emergency services for local American Indian families and individuals. In August, Hurricane Hilary greatly compounded these needs in our communities. We experience profound gratitude from our clients upon receiving this life-sustaining assistance. Walking Shield believes that together with our partners and communities, we can help to end hunger and homelessness and achieve improved quality of life for American Indian people.



Community Service Block Grant Network Training Conference attendees. The conference was hosted by the Northern California Indian Development Council.

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

2023 was a banner year for our program called Keeping Curiosity and Hope Alive for Children Ages 0-5 (KeepCHA). This year, Walking Shield revised our website to make it more relevant and user-friendly. For American Indian families, our 15 KeepCHA chapters provide a compendium of culturally relevant resources supporting young children to grow up healthy and happy. Resource topics include, but are not limited to – milestones, the importance of good nutrition, literacy, positive interactions, Earth-centered living, and American Indian stories and cultural teachings.

Combining the talents of three remarkable presenters who are American Indian experts in early childhood education – and who are parents themselves – our KeepCHA video series was launched this summer! The purpose of the video series is to provide an introduction and guide to our KeepCHA chapters, in a fun way that keeps American Indian parents and communities engaged. We are so very grateful to each of our wonderful presenters, and to our videographer, all of whom worked so hard to help our KeepCHA video series come to life.



Walking Shield is now working to spread the word about KeepCHA, and to share our resources with tribes and with other American Indian organizations. We sincerely hope that KeepCHA will benefit American Indian communities, helping to create a good foundation for young children and supporting families to bring them up in a good way. Please visit our KeepCHA website at:

<https://walkingshield.org/keepcha-keeping-curiosity-and-hope-alive-for-children-0-5-and-their-families/>

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