



SERVING  
AMERICAN INDIAN FAMILIES  
SINCE 1986

# 2024 Annual Report Walking Shield, Inc.



*Children receive a pair of brand-new glasses at the OneSight vision clinic, hosted by the Pala Band of Mission Indians, April 22 – 26, 2024 (Left). Reader glasses are distributed for Native American people through our Restoring Vision Program (Right). Please see pages 2 and 3 for additional information about our vision care program.*

## Serving Native American 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.

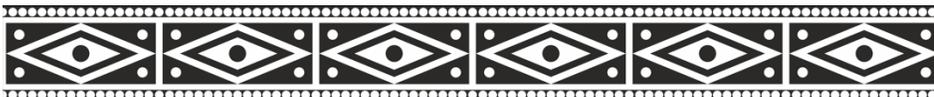
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November 2024

Dear Friends,

2024 was a year of challenges and opportunities, as well as wonderful accomplishments. On behalf of everyone at Walking Shield, we thank you for your steadfast support which is integral to our work. As we enter the harvest season of gratitude, reflecting on all the good that we achieve together, we are grateful for *You*, our beloved community. We continue to be inspired by your support for our mission to improve the quality of life for American Indian families. May your holiday season be filled with warmth and love and may the following stories that *You* made possible in 2024, warm your heart.

## 2024 Walking Shield Annual Report

2024 was an outstanding year for Walking Shield as we worked with our supporters, partners and community members, achieving so much more together than we could ever accomplish alone. Highlights of 2024 include coordinating efforts to improve healthcare and infrastructure on reservations, coordinating a OneSight vision clinic, continuing to provide humanitarian aid year-round, and hosting our 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Charity Golf Tournament, which keeps our college students “Soaring to Success!” Your continued support helps make this all possible.

### OneSight Partnership

Quality vision care is one of the most important elements that is needed to achieve health equity for Native American communities. Many of the tribal communities that Walking Shield serves are rural. We have found that many tribal members are experiencing poverty with limited access to medical care, and even less access to vision care. The current lack of eye exams and corrective eyewear on reservations means that children and youth are far less likely to succeed in school and in life as they grow, and adults are less able to carry out the activities of daily living. Lack of vision care also means that conditions such as diabetic retinopathy often go undiagnosed, posing risks, detriments and hazards to the health and wellbeing of Native Americans.

In helping to fulfill a high rate of need for vision care on reservations, our partnership with a group called OneSight EssilorLuxottica is vital to our work. Together with our OneSight partners, we work to coordinate vision clinics, which we have brought to over 33 American Indian reservations, providing over 40,000 eye exams and eyewear fittings. Our OneSight partnership has provided services valued at over \$15,266,000. Walking Shield also has an extensive history of serving Urban Indian communities whom we would like to serve with vision care.

This year, Walking Shield was thrilled to work with our OneSight partners to bring a vision clinic to the Pala Band of Mission Indians. The clinic served the nearby surrounding tribal communities from April 22 – 26, 2024. What an amazing experience this was, where Walking Shield took part in the life-changing, gratifying work of bringing eye exams and glasses to those in the greatest need. In some cases, we would see tribal members that were desperately in need of a new pair of glasses. To see tribal members leave the clinic with brand-new pairs of glasses, having a renewed sense of health and wellbeing, comfort, and dignity – there’s no putting a price on that.



*A child receives a beautiful, custom made, brand-new pair of glasses at our OneSight Vision Clinic, Pala 2024.*

For the past two years, we have partnered with Restoring Vision, a nonprofit which distributes reader glasses for individuals that need them. They provided us 80,000 pairs of glasses which we distribute to over 30 tribes and off-reservation Native American communities across the United States. Walking Shield distributes these glasses at local community events including powwows in the past two years. We are grateful for the generous support of Restoring Vision which improves both safety and vision health in our communities.

## Education

Since 1986, our Education program is the longest-running service we offer to support American Indian communities. In 1986, Jesuits from Red Cloud Indian High School on Pine Ridge approached our founder, Phil Stevens, requesting assistance in providing computers for the school’s students. Phil agreed to help and organized a fundraising event called the White Buffalo Dinner. To ensure donors could receive tax-deductible receipts, he established the 501(c)(3) nonprofit that became Walking Shield. Today, Red Cloud High School reports that 100% of its students plan to pursue further education and training after graduation.

Walking Shield believes that education is a pathway out of poverty. Since 1986, we have consistently provided school supplies, backpacks, and other educational materials to support this mission. Our program has evolved over the years. In 2005, in partnership with Southern California Edison, we brought together American Indian educators from the Greater Los Angeles area at the Beckman Center in Irvine to discuss ways to help more Native students attend college. Shortly after, Walking Shield launched the American Indian College Access Program. Over the years, numerous corporations, companies, foundations, tribes, and individual donors have partnered with us to strengthen our efforts in promoting higher education.



*Students at the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association Graduation ceremony stand with Dr. John Castillo (far left) and Lynda E. Gonzales (far right).*

Along with our culturally competent staff, a key component to our education program is a college process called PARGE, which helps students achieve successful outcomes to their academic journey. PARGE stands for Prepare, Admit, Retain, Graduate, and Employ. We offer support in identifying financial aid opportunities and navigating the college application process, as well as providing scholarships (tuition assistance), tutoring, mentorship, and comprehensive wraparound services. These services include books, backpacks, computers, school supplies, and transportation assistance.

Since 2010, we have provided over \$3.65 million in college scholarships and wraparound services. Thanks to the support of numerous groups and individuals, we now have over 130 college graduates, many of whom are successfully employed in their fields or pursuing postgraduate degrees. For the academic year 2024-2025, we expect to support at least 50 students. We are incredibly proud of our students, who represent the future of American Indian families and communities.

Walking Shield held its 12th Annual Charity Golf Tournament on September 23, 2024, at Soboba Springs Golf Course in San Jacinto, CA. This exciting event brought together our communities and supporters for a fun-filled day, both on and off the green, to benefit our American Indian College Access Program in a celebration of “Swinging for our Scholars!” We are deeply grateful for the incredible support from our sponsors and donors, including *Tournament Sponsors*: Soboba Foundation, Inc., Morongo Band of Mission Indians, and Cahuilla Band of Indians; *Eagle Sponsors*: Pala Band of Mission Indians, Southern California Tribal Chairmen’s Association, and Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians; *Spirit Sponsors*: Barona Band of Mission Indians, Pechanga Resort Casino, Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation and Blue Owl Innovations. For additional information, please see page 7.

## Humanitarian Aid and Holiday Gifts Program

Walking Shield's Humanitarian Aid & Holiday Gifts Program is one of our longest-standing programs serving Native American families in need. It is at the very heart of Walking Shield, and through it, we experience so clearly our purpose, to improve the quality of life for Native American families, and to bring them joy. This program is made possible through the generosity and continued support of amazing donors and volunteers. Each year, we receive pallets with tens of thousands of high-quality toys from our partners at Toys for Tots, through the outstanding Toys for Tots Native American Program, in service since 1980.

<https://www.toysfortots.org/programs/native-american-program/>.

Walking Shield is grateful for these toys, and for the opportunity to distribute them to Native American children and families every year.

Walking Shield is also very fortunate to have the support of a local organization called Yarn Spinners. Through the Yarn Spinners, each year we receive gorgeous hand-knitted and crocheted blankets, baby clothes, scarves, caps for all ages, and a variety of other handmade items. The Yarn Spinners' work is exceptional, and we are so thankful that they share with us, and with the communities we serve, these gifts made with so much talent, beautiful craftsmanship, and love.

Another local organization that donates such unique and lovely gifts each year, is Huntington Landmark Toy Makers. They provide beautiful wooden toys, which have a vintage feel to them and are unlike any other donations. Some examples of the types of toys that we receive from them include wooden cars, helicopters, buses, trucks, other vehicles with wheels that move, and adorable toy animals. Huntington Landmark Toy Makers' toys are hand-painted, high quality, and stunning. We are lucky and grateful to have their support!

Walking Shield's capacity to distribute tens of thousands of toys for reservation and Urban Indian communities is made possible through the efforts of our group of dedicated volunteers, whose hard work and love shine like the brightest of stars, year after year. They drive forklifts, pack toys on pallets, lift heavy loads, measure and package, and they bring smiles to countless Native American families. Words are not enough to express our gratitude for them.

## Infrastructure and Healthcare Support Program

Among the greatest challenges for rural reservation communities are a lack of high-quality infrastructure, and a lack of healthcare services that honor the sovereignty and expressed needs of tribal nations. Operation Walking Shield addresses both Infrastructure and Healthcare needs. Through this effort, we partner with tribal leaders and the Department of Defense's (DoD) Innovative Readiness Training Program (IRT), to create and implement Five-Year Plans for improvements in these areas, benefitting reservation communities. Together with our partners, we have spent over 25 years coordinating Infrastructure services which include but are not limited to: constructing over 950 miles of roads; drilling dozens of water wells; building homes; installing miles of new sewer, water, and utility lines; constructing culverts; and coordinating a dam restoration project on Indian reservations. Through Operation Walking Shield's Healthcare Support, we work with our partners to coordinate a variety of medical, dental, vision, and even veterinary care services for tribal communities.



*A child from the Karuk Tribe with his mom, enjoys a visit from Santa Claus, and a beautiful, brand-new toy!*



*Yarn Spinners of Westminster, CA donate beautiful hand-knitted and crocheted gifts every year!*

The Innovative Readiness Training mission is a DoD military program exclusive to the United States and its territories that delivers joint training opportunities to increase deployment readiness while simultaneously providing key health care to communities with limited access to resources.

This year, through Operation Walking Shield, The Air Force Reserve has partnered with the K'ima:w Medical Center “to provide no-cost civil engineering services to the community of the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation. Service members will receive combat engineering training in vertical and horizontal construction, wood frame carpentry, concrete pouring and finishing, electrical, and utilities work.” Retrieved from: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/478428/hoopa-valley-tribe-welcomes-nation-builders>.

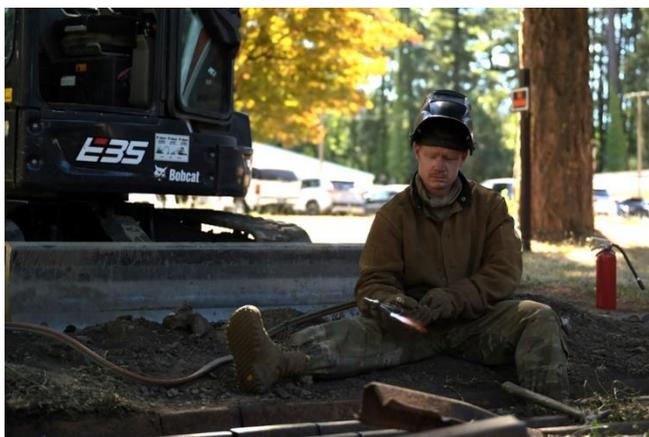
“In early August, members of the Minnesota Air National Guard’s 148th Fighter Wing participated in a unique mission at the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana as part of Operation Walking Shield. Fort Belknap encompasses 675,147 acres, is homeland to the Assiniboine (Nakoda) and Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) Tribes and has a tribal membership of 7,000. The event, part of an Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) initiative, provided vital healthcare services to the local (Native) American population and their pets.” Retrieved from: <https://www.148fw.ang.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3908651/148th-medical-group-conducts-irt-mission-at-fort-belknap-reservation-montana/>

Walking Shield is excited to embark on a new year of service for tribal communities in 2025!

## Workforce Development Program

Walking Shield is in partnership with United American Indian Involvement (UAI) to offer resources and support services to clients seeking employment. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Grant, the program aims to provide long-term career opportunities for low-income, unemployed, and under-employed American Indians, helping to reduce workforce disparities. Many of our clients are post-secondary students; most are pursuing bachelor’s degrees while other clients are pursuing other types of degrees and certificates. The following story is from one of our workforce clients; Mike Ward.

“I am a proud tribal member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I am a Veteran who started my journey with a commission into the United States Air Force where I served as part of the first response team to the tragic 9/11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon. Following my military service, I transitioned into the field of chiropractic care where I started a Saturday free clinic for low-income residents. My commitment serving those in need extends beyond healthcare, as I also served as a lead interrogator with the Los Angeles Police



*Staff Sgt. Jonathan Dale, 944th Civil Engineer Squadron, Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, prepares to weld, July 20, 2024, at K'ima:w Medical on the Hoopa Valley Reservation, California (DVIDS).*



*Members of the 148th Fighter Wing’s Medical Group watch a Powwow during an IRT initiative that provided vital healthcare services to members and pets of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, Montana August 2024 (DVIDS).*

Department. There I successfully secured countless confessions for heinous crimes ensuring justice for victims. Fate took an unexpected turn one day in 2017 when my life was forever altered by a severe car accident caused by a drunk driver. The high-speed collision left me with permanent disabilities, hindering my ability to return to the workforce despite years of medical interventions. After years of recovery, I became determined to rebuild my life after I identified a sustainable career passion in the form of respiratory therapy. Eager to reconnect with healthcare, I faced a significant obstacle in the form of financial burden. The cost of obtaining an associate degree in respiratory therapy was prohibitive. That's when Walking Shield stepped in. Upon learning of my situation, Walking Shield was able to provide scholarship support and wraparound services which became lifeline for me. I am so grateful to Walking Shield, I would not be where I am today without them. Lynda and everyone at Walking Shield focused on finding solutions to workforce barriers and were a profound source of hope, encouragement and accountability along my academic journey.



*Mike Ward,  
Workforce Program Client*

Presently preparing to enter my last term at Concorde Career College, I have maintained a (4.0) academic grade point average throughout all six completed terms thus far. My program director chose me as a Lamplighter Student Ambassador, an honor bestowed upon students who exemplify academic excellence. As I approach the completion of my academic journey, my sights are set on obtaining Board certifications in respiratory therapy this May. In the midst of a severe staffing shortage in critical care fields post-Covid, I am eager to contribute my skills to neonatal intensive care units, where my passion for patient care can make a meaningful impact. My story is not just one of overcoming adversity. It's a testament to the transformative power of the unwavering pursuit of one's dreams propelled by a professional community support program.

## Community Services Block Grant Program

In collaboration with the Northern California Indian Development Council, we are able to help Native Americans with emergency services in Orange County, Riverside County and San Bernardino County. Housing services include help with relocation or eviction prevention. We can help with utility assistance to prevent disconnections or service reconnection. We also assist with food resources and provide support services for vocational education and employment.

To qualify, new applicants need to have proof of Native American heritage and be at least 18 years old. Also required is proof of residency in either Orange, Riverside or San Bernardino counties. Finally, you need to meet federal poverty level income guidelines and to provide verification of household income for the past six months. Our staff will help you with the entire process. For the past three years we have helped over 150 families with these services. You may apply online for this program at [intake.ncidc.org](http://intake.ncidc.org). If you prefer to call or email us, we can be reached at (657) 900-2197 or at [walkingshieldinc@gmail.com](mailto:walkingshieldinc@gmail.com). We are here to be of service to you.



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

According to research from The Harvard Centre on the Developing Child, 90% of a child's mind is developed by age five (<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/>). What children learn and experience during the first five years of life has

a profound impact on the rest of their lives. Early childhood education can have many lasting positive effects for children and families. For Native American families, it is vital that the education provided be culturally relevant. Walking Shield's KeepCHA Program stands for Keeping Curiosity and Hope Alive for Children Ages 0-5. This program is designed to be culturally relevant for Native American families and communities. KeepCHA provides 15 chapters of resources, and a video series with Native American parents and experts on early childhood education. Please visit: <https://walkingshield.org/keepcha-keeping-curiosity-and-hope-alive-for-children-0-5-and-their-families/>.

This year, Walking Shield was very fortunate to receive the most beautiful donation from another Native American serving organization. They provided us with "Raising a Reader" bags, which we were honored to distribute for families from Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) locations and other Indian organizations and tribes. It was a privilege to share with these families our KeepCHA Program as well. It is our hope that our KeepCHA Program resources and the "Raising a Reader" bags encourage literacy, will instill values such as caring for Mother Earth and community and will help children grow in a good way.



*A child receives a Raising a Reader bag, with culturally relevant books, puppets and toys!*

## Walking Shield's 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Charity Golf Tournament

Walking Shield's 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Charity Golf Tournament was a hole-in-one, and so much fun! On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, we hosted 88 golfers at Soboba Springs Golf Course in San Jacinto. All proceeds benefit students in our American Indian College Access Program with scholarships, culturally relevant mentorship, school supplies, and more. This year's tournament featured golfing, delicious food, raffles, silent auction opportunities, and a special time set aside to honor our wonderful students and alumni. What a beautiful day it was, both on and off the green! A heartfelt thank you to our volunteers, golfers, and to the following donors.



*Golfers enjoy a day out on the green in support of American Indian college students "Soaring to Success!" 2024.*

AGUA CALIENTE  
 BAND OF CAHUILLA INDIANS  
 ALLIANCE 360 INSURANCE SOLUTIONS  
 ANGELS BASEBALL  
 AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC  
 ARROYO TRABUCO GOLF CLUB  
 AVLIA'S EL RANCHITO  
 THE BLACK MARLIN  
 CHEESECAKE FACTORY  
 CITY NATIONAL GROVE OF ANAHEIM  
 CITY CRUISES  
 CLEVELAND GOLF  
 GARY WASOSKI  
 THE GEM THEATRE  
 THE HARP INN  
 HARRAH'S RESORT SO CAL  
 HI-TIME CELLARS  
 THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY,  
 ART MUSEUM, AND  
 BOTANICAL GARDENS  
 IN-N-OUT BURGER  
 KING'S SEAFOOD, CO.  
 LANDRYS

LYON AIR MUSEUM  
 METROPOLITAN THEATRES  
 MONARCH BEACH GOLF LINKS  
 MUSEUM OF MAKING MUSIC  
 ORANGE COUNTY SOCCER CLUB  
 PANERA BREAD  
 PASADENA SYMPHONY & POPS  
 PAUMA BAND OF LUISEÑO INDIANS  
 PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY OF ORANGE  
 COUNTY  
 RINGER'S ROLLER RINK  
 ROGER DUNN GOLF SHOPS  
 ROMA D'ITALIA  
 RUTABEGORZ  
 SAN DIEGO CRAWLING  
 SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL  
 FILM FESTIVAL  
 SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART  
 SAN DIEGO PADRES  
 SAN DIEGO SOCKERS  
 SANTA ANA ZOO  
 SANTA BARBARA ZOO  
 SANTA MONICA SEAFOOD

SANTA ROSA BAND OF CAHUILLA INDIANS  
 SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS  
 SNOOZE EATERY  
 SOUTH COAST BOTANIC GARDEN  
 SOUTH COAST REPERTORY  
 STONEFIRE GRILL  
 TOTAL WINE & MORE  
 UCLA FOOTBALL  
 URBANE CAFÉ  
 US BANK  
 USS MIDWAY  
 VIBE ORGANIC KITCHEN  
 WOOD RANCH  
 YARD HOUSE