



FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

OUTCOMES

Under the

Nourishing
Native
Children:

FEEDING OUR FUTURE

P R O J E C T



OUR MISSION

To strengthen American Indian economies to support healthy Native communities. We invest in and create innovative institutions and models that strengthen asset control and support economic development for American Indian people and their communities.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE

We believe that when armed with the appropriate resources, Native peoples hold the capacity and ingenuity to ensure the sustainable, economic, spiritual and cultural well-being of their communities.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was funded by Walmart Foundation. We thank the foundation for its support but acknowledge that the contents presented here are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation. This paper was written by Marian Quinlan, consultant to First Nations Development Institute.

We thank all the grantees who received grant support through First Nations' broad Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative and, specifically, through this effort under the initiative. Their hard work informs the content of this report.

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Suggested citation: First Nations Development Institute. (2018) "Outcomes Under the Nourishing Native Children: Feeding Our Future Project." Longmont, CO: First Nations Development Institute.

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ABOUT First Nations' Nourishing Native Foods & Health Program

Since 2002, First Nations has become the recognized leader in Native American food systems work under its Nourishing Native Foods and Health program. As the largest private grantmaker in this area in Indian Country, First Nations works to support efforts to reclaim control of Native food systems. In this capacity, First Nations supports tribes and Native communities in developing strategies to reclaim local food systems, build sustainable food systems that improve health and nutrition, strengthen food security, alleviate hunger, and increase control over Native agriculture and food systems. This includes supporting Native community-led strategies to end hunger and food insecurity, support community gardens, agribusinesses, food policy, business development, transference of traditional food knowledge and other projects related to increasing control of and growing local and traditional food systems.

For Native American children, their school or school-related meals may be the most reliable, consistent and nutritionally-balanced meals they receive. However, funding for these feeding programs and the opportunity for meal providers to network is extremely limited – to the detriment of alleviating Native children's hunger and being able to determine how to most effectively support this vital work.





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Executive Summary

For Native American children, their school or school-related meals may be the most reliable, consistent and nutritionally-balanced food they receive. Many of these programs feed children at their school/facility and/or provide backpacks of food for the children to take home.

However, funding for these programs and the opportunity for meal providers to network is extremely limited – to the detriment of alleviating Native children's hunger and being able to determine how to most effectively support this vital work.

The Walmart Foundation and First Nations Development Institute created the Nourishing Native Children: Feeding Our Future Project to support 10 Native American community-based children's feeding programs and to learn from the overall field.

This infusion of funding had exponential results, in terms of numbers of children served, partnerships created, and community support stimulated.

While we originally projected to serve a total of 350 children aged 6-14, the funded programs exceeded this expectation by 4,400% – in fact, serving 15,434 youth.

Even beyond feeding hungry children, the grantees catalyzed children's awareness of healthy nutrition, improved student performance and attendance, brought together their communities to celebrate their culture and bonds, built durable relationships that will undoubtedly serve them in the future, increased food production, and moved toward community food sovereignty.

This report highlights the grantees' models as well as the learnings from the grantees and others about their best practices, issues encountered, and recommendations for community, tribal and systems efforts.

We hope this report will inform stakeholders of Native children's health and help them to adapt, support and begin to make productive changes.

The future of Native children depends on it. Our work is not yet done.



OVERVIEW of Native American Children's Hunger and Nutrition

That Native American children are hungry is an inarguable fact.

American Indian households with children had a food insecurity rate of 28% compared to a rate of 16% for non-American Indians.¹

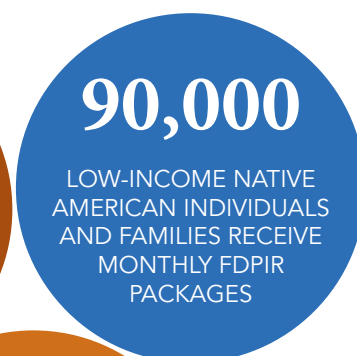
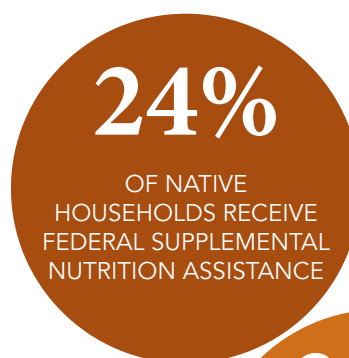
Even without discussion of centuries of colonization as well as disruptive and destructive federal Indian policy, the reasons are complex. Low income levels are a major factor.

In 2016, 34% of American Indian children under age 18 lived in families below the federal poverty level.² This number compares unfavorably to 19% of the general population.

This poverty leads to many Native families participating in federal feeding programs that often do not provide foods meeting their nutritional and cultural needs:

- Over 24% of Native households received federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in 2010 (compared to 13% of the U.S. population).
- 90,000 low-income Native American individuals and families not receiving SNAP receive monthly food packages from the federal Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), one of the most important feeding programs on reservations.

Those who want and need to supplement these foods face an uphill battle, dealing with distances of 60-100 miles to a grocery store (if transportation is available at all) and/or local convenience stores emphasizing high-priced, nutritionally-deficient foods. Almost every American Indian reservation is classified as a “food desert,” with extremely limited access to affordable and quality, healthy food.



¹ Gunderson C. Measuring the extent, depth, and severity of food insecurity: an application to American Indians in the USA. Journal of Population and Economics. 2008; 21: 191-215

² Kids Count Data Center, a Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, based on U.S. Census data. <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.



The scarcity of healthy foods, and food insecurity, contributes in no small part to instances of obesity and related health problems such as diabetes.³ Current estimates are that excess weight and obesity affect one-third to one-half of American Indian/Alaska Native children.⁴

Beyond compromised physical health, hunger and food insecurity have widespread negative effects on children's development. Hungry children are more likely to experience growth deficits, behavioral and emotional health issues, and poor academic performance.⁵

In short, Native children are set back before they have even started.

Nourishing Native Children: Feeding Our Future PROJECT

In recognition of Native children's need, the Walmart Foundation and First Nations Development Institute joined forces to support 10 Native American community-based programs that provide nutritious food to children ages 6-14.

Each group received an eight-month grant of \$15,000 and participated in a one-day facilitated convening with 10 additional programs that did not receive financial assistance. Through this gathering, they shared what makes them successful, what challenges they face, and recommendations for others concerned about Native children's hunger.

Grantees were competitively selected based on their intention to reach additional Native children and on their project's potential for sustainability and to work toward systemic change in their community.

This project's original goal was for the grantees to collectively reach at least 350 children – a number far, far exceeded. Together, three Native schools serving a primarily Native student body, five Native nonprofit organizations that are Native-controlled 501(c)3s and two Tribes served more than 15,434 Native American children reaching 12 Tribal communities providing 65,443 meals. Yet so much needs to be done to increase resources for children's feeding programs. The key actions that can be taken to systemically address native children's hunger and development in the context of the programs that are sustainable is to involve Tribal governments and leadership, schools, other service providers that are connected to the community, and others like AmeriCorps, university cooperative extension programs, other nonprofits, allies, advocates, and funders.

³ S. Olshansky, et al., "A Potential Decline in Life Expectancy in the United States in the 21st Century," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 352 (2005): 1138-1145.)

⁴ Gordon, A. and Oddo, V. *Addressing Child Hunger and Obesity in Indian Country: Report to Congress*. Mathematica Policy Research, 2012.

⁵ American Psychological Association; *Effects of Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness on Children and Youth*; <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx#>



Our Grantees	Location
Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club lawekon Nutrition for Kids Project	<i>Akwesasne, New York</i> Serving the Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation
The Center Pole Food Recovery Project	<i>Garryowen, Montana</i> Serving the Crow Tribe of Montana
Fremont County School District 38 Backpack Nutrition Program	<i>Arapahoe, Wyoming</i> Serving the Arapahoe Tribe of the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming
Keres Children's Learning Center Nourishing Native Iiwas	<i>Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico</i> Serving the Pueblo of Cochiti, New Mexico
Lower Brule Community College Bountiful Backpack Program	<i>Lower Brule, South Dakota</i> Serving the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe of the Lower Brule Reservation, South Dakota
Lummi Indian Business Council Lummi Kids First Community Garden Project	<i>Bellingham, Washington</i> Serving the Lummi Tribe of the Lummi Reservation
Moenkopi Developers Corporation Take & Make Healthy Foods Project	<i>Tuba City, Arizona</i> Serving the Hopi Tribe of Arizona and the Navajo Western Agency-Tuba City
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Nourishing Native Children: Feeding our Future	<i>Bayfield, Wisconsin</i> Serving the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
Rocky Boy Public School District 87 J & L Helping Hands Backpack Program	<i>Box Elder, Montana</i> Serving the Chippewa Cree Indians of the Rocky Boy's Reservation, Montana
Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota Bountiful Backpack and Pilot Supper Meal Programs	<i>Wagner, South Dakota</i> Serving the Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota





Akwesasne, New York Iawekon Nutrition for Kids

In upper New York at the Canadian border, the Akwesasne (St. Regis Mohawk) Nation is fortunate to have the Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club. The Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club has been dedicated to the youth of its community since 2001. It provides many services through after-school programming, ranging from educational and cultural activities to health and fitness for younger children and teens. It serves 650 youth annually from the Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation and youth who attend the Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club (ABGC), St. Regis Mohawk School, and Akwesasne Freedom School in Akwesasne, New York.

The club stands between Akwesasne children and hunger, and offers these youth hope, opportunity, safety and caring. Youth receive after-school homework help, specialized education and cultural programs, health and safety counseling, access to technology, daily physical activity as well as suppers and snacks. Seventy-five percent of the children served benefit from free and reduced-cost school lunches.

Myra Lafrance is the assistant director for the ABGC, and is a member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe in Akwesasne. She says the Iawekon Nutrition for Kids program provided food during the weekends and when school was on breaks, and it filled a great need. Many of the 174 children who received food are from low-income homes, and some receive services through local domestic violence shelters.

Far surpassing its original goal of feeding 100 children, the club's Iawekon Nutrition for Kids initiative served 174 children with 5,200 easy-to-prepare, take-home meals for weekends and extended school breaks. This expansion was due to a partnership with the Joint Council for Economic Opportunity of Clinton and Franklin Counties, which accessed free or reduced-cost food through the regional food bank.

Each meal kit included two nutritionally-balanced meals plus two snacks. In addition, each meal kit included educational materials for children and families on healthy nutrition, diabetes prevention, community resources for food assistance and information on how to obtain a GED education.

Participating children were students from the St. Regis Mohawk School (local elementary school), Akwesasne Freedom School (K-8 Mohawk cultural and language immersion) as well as those served through two local domestic violence shelters.

"One of our families is an elderly woman who has recently become a widow. She is one of our community's few remaining primary Mohawk speakers. She cares for her very energetic 7-year-old grandson. She did not initially sign up for the program because she thought she could not afford it on her \$12,400/year fixed income. When we called to ask her to participate, she was overjoyed to find out that it wouldn't cost her a thing. She was very gracious and thankful for the help. When we have extra meal kits left over, those go home with her too."

– Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club





Elders often qualify for only \$27 a month in food stamps, even with a houseful of children they must feed and who aren't legally their dependents. Our program operates in a different way than government programs. If people have children in their home and need food, they are eligible. If someone is hungry, they qualify. Community members thank us – bless us – all the time for what we do because hunger is rampant and blocks all progress.

– The Center Pole



Garryowen, Montana Food Recovery Project

Located in the heart of the Apsaalooke (Crow) Nation in southwestern Montana, The Center Pole's mission is to build knowledge, justice, opportunity and sovereignty in Native communities and to preserve and protect Indigenous ways.

The Center Pole is a catalyst for Crow Nation food sovereignty, traditional leadership development, youth development, sustainable energy, and community connections through a radio station and youth entrepreneurship. Its 15-year-old food bank serves 300 families a week (with each having between one and 20 children) while its 2-year-old, community-supported farm provides fresh, traditional foods.

The Center Pole's resolve in the face of rampant hunger, with 25.4% of families below the federal poverty line and the nearest grocery store 60 miles away, led the organization to see opportunity where others may see only need.

Recognizing the foods that are being wasted in urban areas such as Billings, Montana and Sheridan, Wyoming, The Center Pole's Food Recovery Project, the first on the Crow Reservation, was a natural next step. Food recovery programs redirect edible, safe foods that would otherwise be discarded to, instead, feed hungry families.

Despite unreliable and inadequate vehicles to reach the reservation's seven communities on 2.2 million acres, The Center Pole and its many volunteers recovered 7,500-10,000 pounds of food per week, driving 120 miles twice a week, sometimes twice a day depending on what was available. The food was primarily fresh: vegetables, fruits, eggs, dairy products and meat.

The Food Recovery Project boosted The Center Pole from distributing between 200 boxes monthly to 800 per month, with each box weighing between 40 and 50 pounds. An estimated 4,800 children ate 3,600 meals thanks to The Center Pole and First Nations' grant. Each food recipient learned about healthy and traditional foods, natural farming, and food sovereignty.

Now, The Center Pole is hoping to secure more and better transportation and food storage facilities. It is even planning to open a satellite food bank to take the excess food recovered.



Fremont County School District 38

Arapahoe, Wyoming Backpack Nutrition Program

On the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, 469 Arapahoe children received take-home backpacks each Friday filled with between eight and 10 pounds of nutritious, kid-friendly food to tide them over the weekend.

The Fremont County School District 38 (FCSD) recognized that its students, 100% of whom are eligible for free and reduced-cost meals, were experiencing hunger during out-of-school time.

The backpack program engaged students and community members on the importance of food sovereignty. Tribal elders provided lessons on traditional food preparation and preservation.

FCSD's greenhouse and new mobile kitchen were helpful in growing and preparing the food for the backpacks. Interest in the greenhouse increased, resulting in five new student volunteers. The students now want to expand the greenhouse to grow more vegetables and to start growing berries, such as chokecherries, that will be part of learning about Arapahoe culture.

Thanks to partnerships with local grocers, FCSD has committed to sustaining the backpack nutrition program.



Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico Nourishing Native Iiwas

Grounded in family, community and the Keres culture of the Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico, the Keres Children's Learning Center (KCLC) is widely seen as an innovator in its field.

At KCLC, children ages 3 through 9 are immersed in the Keres language using the Montessori "whole child" approach. From a very young age, they develop Cochiti identity, self-discipline, a sense of community and a Pueblo worldview.

Health and wellness, with nutritious food and exercise as fundamentals, sustained the Cochiti Pueblo people for thousands of years, and are vital to their future. KCLC children and families know that Keres culture is built on food – growing, blessing, harvesting, celebrating, and honoring it – which is then tied to caring for children, community and the natural world.

KCLC's Nourishing Native Iiwas initiative centered on community engagement, family engagement, and increasing the availability of and the familiarity with healthy and traditional foods within KCLC and Cochiti Pueblo.

Children ages 6 through 9 surveyed Cochiti elders, parents and peers about food practices 50 years ago and now, raising awareness about nutrition, health and wellness issues. In a small community such as this, ripple effects are felt in conversations around feast tables, in the elder center, and at homes.

Each KCLC family was consulted about KCLC's healthy food policy. Most parents described how having healthy foods at school supports healthy eating at home. Parents reported that their children remind friends and/or family to eat healthy and many – although not all – children show greater willingness to try new and different-tasting foods.

KCLC expanded the use of traditional foods in the daily breakfasts and twice-weekly lunches (1,872 meals total) for the 18 students as well as twice-monthly parent suppers, reintroducing atole (blue corn drink), mush, beans, squash, piki bread, venison and melon. Weekly hands-on learning experiences involved the children in preparing recipes handed down from their ancestors. Now the children enjoy their wider taste range, and several say they like the taste of traditional foods and healthy meals.





Lower Brule, South Dakota Bountiful Backpack Program

Lower Brule Community College (LBCC) meets a vital need for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe in central South Dakota by linking tribal members to higher education and by feeding its future students.

The evidence-based Bountiful Backpack program, created by South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension, provides food, recipes, nutrition education, and cooking classes to 3rd through 6th graders on the Crow Creek, Lower Brule, and Standing Rock Reservations.

By sending the backpacks home with the students on Fridays (or the last day of the school week), LBCC ensured that 364 children had 14,079 meals on weekends, when they were not fed at school. LBCC exceeded even its own expectations, serving 192 more children than originally planned.

One of the innovative components of the Bountiful Backpack program is that the recipes taught include food items that are typically included in the commodity food program. The children can easily recreate the recipes with the ingredients in the backpack and, in the future, using items they receive through commodities, such as canned beans or brown rice.

Food was sourced from local grocers when possible, helping LBCC to form relationships with small retailers and spread the word about the Bountiful Backpack program.

Providing a series of six or nine classes (depending on the season) ensured that the children absorbed and practiced their learning. Increases in diet quality, physical activity and food safety knowledge were experienced by 76%, 44% and 33%, respectively, of the participants.

At the end of each Bountiful Backpack lesson, the whole class (and the teachers), tasted the recipe prepared that day. Children were encouraged to taste one bite even if they were a little unsure about trying something new. Many times, an unsure child would cautiously take a bite, pause, and take another bite saying something like “Oh this is actually yummy!”

Children are the heart of these communities in many ways, and their teachers, parents, and families learned from what they [the children] learned from the program – a ripple-effect that we didn’t necessarily plan for, but that is very powerful.

– Lower Brule Community College





Lummi Indian Business Council

Bellingham, Washington

Lummi Kids First Community Garden Project

The people of the Lummi Tribe have a saying: “When the tide is out, the table is set.”

Located on a peninsula with over 10,000 acres of tidelands in Washington’s Puget Sound, the Lummi Reservation is fortunate in its abundant natural resources and seafood.

The Lummi Indian Business Council’s (LIBC) Kids First Community Garden Project engaged 4,275 at-risk youth and their families/caregivers in growing food, learning about healthy nutrition and, of course, eating!

Food-centered gatherings brought families and community together and provided “teachable moments” for nutrition education and cooking experiences. Events included holiday-themed dinners, a Back-to-School Bash, a first annual Greatest, Biggest Pumpkin Contest in October, and more. Homeroom students at Lummi Nation School received cooking lessons and nutrition education. Four- and five-day summer camps focused on healthy foods, portion sizes, Lummi traditional foods, healthy food demonstrations, and gardening. Learning how to can salmon, make jam and a two-day Basketball Camp with Native NBA player Derek Willis sparked big turnouts.

Community box gardens and families’ “kitchen” gardens provided tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, lettuce, squash, zucchini and paprika for the events and Lummi Community Services’ food bank.





Tuba City, Arizona Take & Make Healthy Foods Project

With a mission of economic development for the westernmost village of the 12 villages that comprise the Hopi Tribe (Upper Village of Moenkopi), the Moenkopi Developers Corporation in Arizona recognized the importance of a food system as both a source for the local economic engine as well as a necessity for the future workforce.

The Moenkopi Developers Corporation's (MDC) Take & Make Healthy Foods Project makes the link between tribal elders who maintain a strong connection to Hopi food traditions before fast food, and Hopi youth who may be disconnected from healthy foods and faced with the ever-growing reality of diet-related diseases such as diabetes. This project gathers and ignites the potential of the Hopi community.

Partnering with the Moenkopi Day School, MDC provided 168 K-6 grade students with 11 bi-weekly take-home packages of ready-to-make foods for the students to prepare at home with their families (up to 1,848 meals). Each Take & Make pack included one to two serving sizes of a provided recipe, step-by-step instructions on how to use the ingredients, along with nutrition benefit information.

MDC knew it was on the right track of motivating entire families when it heard that the older sisters of a kindergartner receiving the Take & Make healthy food packs were even more excited than their younger sister. The last couple months of the project, when the sisters saw a plastic bag of groceries, they kept asking, "Did you get a Take & Make today?"

Over the course of the grant period, Take & Make packs incorporated at least six local/traditional foods as ingredients and at least four packs included ingredients grown in the Moenkopi Day School greenhouse (lettuce, basil, peaches and cucumbers). This approach ensured that the healthy food the students received was culturally relevant and attainable (able to get the ingredients and prepare in a reservation setting), imbued pride in Hopi cultural tradition and the future revitalization of the Native food system, and strived to improve the eating habits of the students' families.

Future hopes include a salad bar at Moenkopi Day School with produce from the school greenhouse and garden, strengthening the relationship with the Hopi Special Diabetes Program to expand the Take & Make project to other Hopi schools, and advocating to the Hopi Tribal Council for more nutrition-based programs.



Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Bayfield, Wisconsin Nourishing Native Children: Feeding our Future

At the uppermost western tip of Wisconsin, jutting into Lake Superior, is the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

The harsh winter climate in this geographically remote area means a short growing season, families struggling with hunger (36.6% of families with children under age 18 are below federal poverty level), and instability.

The tribe's Red Cliff Food Distribution Center, Youth Center (now known as the Boys and Girls Club of Gitchigami) and Tribal Farm joined forces to provide suppers five days a week to 120 children age 6 through 14 at the Red Cliff Boys and Girls Club. As a result, 3,844 children benefited from a total of 3,920 meals.

Partnering with other groups such as the Tribal Garden, Boys and Girls Club, Brighter Futures Initiatives through the tribal Early Childcare Center and Health Clinic, USDA, Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Community Nutrition, University of Wisconsin-Extension, and others allowed the Food Distribution staff to find common ground around the health, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of the Red Cliff youth and offer more supportive services at no addition cost.

Twelve educational sessions taught 245 children balanced nutrition, the benefits of physical activity, where food comes from, and the problems with sugary drinks. Activities were coupled with the Agindaasoda Miskwaabikong summer reading project through which children checked out, read and discussed books.





Rocky Boy Public School District 87 J&L

Box Elder, Montana Helping Hands Backpack Program

On the high plains in the shadow of Montana's Bear Paw Mountains, the Chippewa Cree Indians of the Rocky Boy's Reservation are in a setting of abundant beauty, yet face economic hardships and harsh weather. The fall of 2017 saw forest fires threatening tribal members' homes, followed by a winter with record snowfall and low temperatures. With 36.3% of families below the federal poverty level, it is no wonder that 100% of the 525 students in the local school district are eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch.⁶ With unsafe drinking water and a shortage of heating propane on the reservation, many children face living conditions lacking in basic amenities, including nutritious meals.

The Rocky Boy Public School District strives to help its students overcome all barriers to their academic and personal success. The Helping Hands Backpack Program began with the goal of providing weekly backpack food (and other supplies) to 30 elementary school children, and ended up serving 107 children 1,250 meals. Students attending a culinary arts class on Chippewa and Cree foods received a water-filtration pitcher, ensuring safe water at home. Students who received the backpacks began seeing school as a positive resource in their lives, resulting in increased attendance by 10.8%, and reduced number of behavioral referrals.

Invaluable partners included Stone Child College, the Chippewa Cree Tribe, Native American Partnerships, Montana Food Bank, and others.

Plans include a new curriculum for gardening and using Indigenous foods, changes in school cafeteria foods, and continued distribution of the backpack supplies.

⁶ U.S. Census; 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Wagner, South Dakota Bountiful Backpack and Pilot Supper Meal Programs

On the Yankton Sioux Reservation in eastern South Dakota, families struggle to make ends meet, resulting in food insecurity, poor nutritional options, and actual hunger. According to the U.S. Census, 29.6% of families with children under the age of 18 fall below the federal poverty level.⁷

To meet this need, the Yankton Sioux Tribe's Bountiful Backpack and Pilot Supper Meal Programs fed 1,215 children a total of 19,113 meals during summer through fall 2017.

Created by South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension, the Bountiful Backpack program provides take-home meal kits with food and recipes, combined with hands-on cooking lessons for children (and their families) to cook easy, healthy meals. Between six and eight lessons were offered primarily to 4th and 5th graders during summer and fall, teaching balanced nutrition as well as how to read a recipe, measure ingredients, and safely use kitchen equipment.

A total of 1,215 youth in three communities received 1,227 backpacks (providing 19,113 meals) and participated in the hands-on lessons. We know that the learning from the lessons significantly led to children's healthier habits.

The response to the Supper Meal component was positive and overwhelming. Rather than the 20 youth PER WEEK expected, 20 youth PER NIGHT attended suppers each weeknight during June, July and August. 830 youth and 36 adults (total of 866) were served nutritious meals that included fresh garden produce and received nutrition education information. Lake Andes Carnegie Public Library staff graciously prepared, served and hosted the meals.

Even though this grant has concluded, the work is not over. Inspired by the need demonstrated by the Supper Meal program, the City of Lake Andes secured funding from the South Dakota Department of Education to provide suppers in summer 2018. SDSU Extension will continue with its nutrition education, food preparation and safety lessons in the schools and through after-school programs, but will not have the funds to provide the meal kits. In addition, the Yankton Sioux Tribe plans to work closely with SDSU Extension on gardening initiatives to increase access to fresh, healthy foods.

Parents have commented that their children now want to help them with the meals they make at home. This is changing the family dynamic and possibly decreasing screen time. If the children are helping make a meal, then they aren't playing a video game or watching TV.

Parents also noted that their children (and even themselves) were more likely to try a new food than before the Bountiful Backpack program.

⁷ 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



SPECIAL CONVENING

Summary of Findings

In fall 2017 in Green Bay, Wisconsin, First Nations convened representatives of the 10 model Native children's feeding programs funded by the Walmart Foundation grant and an additional 10 programs that did not receive financial assistance to learn what makes them successful; what challenges they face (and how these are addressed); what funding sources, partners and allies are engaged (or who should be engaged); program evaluation; and how their efforts link (or may link) to needed systemic or policy changes.

This gathering was a rare opportunity for these groups to network, learn from each other's models and best practices, and participate in specialized training by attending the Food Sovereignty Summit co-hosted by First Nations and the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin that immediately followed.

The attendees represented a range of programs such as a first-time backpack food program to supper five days a week.

NEED

All agreed that because the level of need of hungry children in Indian Country is daunting and exceeds current resources, the work is urgent and critically needed.

In the face of this need, members of the group "make do," but face inadequate infrastructure (such as not enough food storage areas), aging or nonexistent equipment (kitchen facilities, refrigeration), transportation (traveling long distances to get food, deliver food, and lack of road maintenance/inclement weather), lack of locally-grown food and Indigenous foods, and funding to purchase healthy foods.

Even the families served faced possible lack of transportation to a central food distribution site and kitchen equipment.

During the school year, feeding programs serve kids regularly but during the summer months, many of the kids do not have access to transportation to get to the feeding sites. One solution to this challenge is a mobile food truck and/or to partner with service providers that work out in the community.





COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The response to the feeding programs offered has been heartening and the community impact of this nutrition feeding grant has been immeasurable. Due to a variety of issues including inadequate funding, many of the children's backpack programs do not have the funding for healthy foods to be sent home with hungry children. While tribes and others continue to advocate for increased funding for these feeding programs and the development of policies to meet the nutritional needs of the communities, Native people are also developing their own solutions that ensure more positive health outcomes for their families and communities. Specifically, there is a shift occurring in Indian Country as Native people are producing their own traditional foods on their own lands to sustain themselves,

their families and their communities.

Members of the group have witnessed more interest in farm-to-table programs and community gardens, children's improved test scores, increased parent/child involvement, increased awareness/use of local and traditional foods and Native cultures, and positive attitudes toward food providers.

And, of course, the most important outcome has been more children fed and nourished with food and community support.

SOLUTIONS

A recurrent theme in the facilitated discussion was collaboration, networking, and partnerships with institutions, tribal (and other) governments, and community members.

Key players identified included schools, local wellness coalitions, program administrators, researchers and evaluators, state university extension programs, nonprofit organizations, funders, tribal governments, county and state officials, departments of social services, Indian Health Service, diabetes prevention programs, food vendors, farmers' markets, students, parents and elders.

These partners were envisioned to help identify families in need; reach hungry children; receive, and distribute, provide and/or grow food; offer nutrition/health education; inform how to improve programs and identify best practices; resolve and sustain program logistics; advocate for beneficial policies; and ground programs in Native traditions, cultures and community.

Relationship-building and in some cases additional formal agreements would facilitate these collaborations.



Coming from an Indigenous systems-thinking approach led the convening participants to envision a community-based, “healthy healing” mindset.

In discussing systemic community and policy changes, the group was inspired by:

- Hopi schools’ policy on food health and wellness that could be a blueprint for other schools;
- The Navajo Nation’s cutting-edge 2015 legislation that reduces taxes on healthy food sales, and adds an additional 2% tax on sales of “minimal-to-no nutritional value food items,” with the collected taxes funding community wellness programs; and
- Collaborative software through which various agencies can communicate and help families and individuals achieve goals they set.⁸

The group saw an opportunity for tribal government intervention to purchase locally-grown (and/or healthy) foods for child tribe members, support tribally-run schools’ inclusion of culturally-relevant foods and/or purchase of locally-grown foods, fund Native nonprofits’ children’s feeding programs, and support tribal members to produce local foods.

Other tribal, school or state policy opportunities discussed included:

- Creating and supporting food and wellness councils;
- Sharing transportation resources (for hungry children to access food); and
- Requiring nutrition education/culinary arts in schools.

Federal laws were not exempt from the group’s discussions. USDA policies may inhibit schools from buying from local farmers. Native stakeholders need to better understand the current USDA Farm Bill and its impact on local feeding programs. In addition, current HIPAA laws that hinder medical providers from talking to nutritionists and food providers could include waivers for select personnel.

However, knowing how to create policy change remains inaccessible to some. Educators, tribal leaders, and other impassioned people ready to invest in policy change could benefit from training in policy development/change/advocacy. Trained advocates could be effective at telling the local story and advocating at the local, state, tribal and federal levels.

⁸ Such as MPOWR software; <https://www.mpowr.com/>.



BEST PRACTICES

There is a critical need in Indian Country for children's feeding programs in order to increase control of their health and address diet-related diseases with the goal of improving community nutrition and health habits.

Best practices discussed centered on culture, behavioral economics, logistics, community and family outreach, relationships and sustainability.

- Weave in culture: Feature traditional tribal foods, speak to the children in their Native language, encourage tribal elders to share their wisdom,
- Leverage the principles of behavioral economics through the use of incentives (i.e., to improve the return of reusable backpacks) and letting families/students "opt out" rather than "opt in" to participation.
- Community outreach: Posters, mailers/reminder cards, community events with food, texts, emails, face-to-face interviews, and a social media presence are all ways to engage community members.
- Family buy-in: Engage families to support what is being taught and to incorporate that into home life to make the healthy choice the easiest choice.
- Make it easy: Transportation for participants, consistency in time/day of food delivery, provide recipes (that incorporate words in the Native language), and have an open-door policy to all in need.
- Build relationships: Offer mentoring programs; recruit and engage volunteers, enlist schools' support, collaborate with other organizations/businesses/institutions, solicit in-kind donations/raise funds.
- Organizational capacity: Each organization/institution with a feeding program needs short- and long-term plans to ensure their sustainability. Each will need to ask themselves the following hard questions: "Where are we today? Where will we be tomorrow? Where do we want to be in the future? How do we get there?"

One of the early recommendations around this project is centered on partnerships. When partnering on a project, it's important to implement a written agreement covering the division of work duties, timelines and other factors. This will greatly help organizations move a project forward in a way that is consistent with project outcomes and goals. Models used by grantees that may be adaptable in other Native communities include:





- The Bountiful Backpack Program provides food to tide students over on the weekends and when school is not in session. In addition, youth learn basic cooking skills, nutrition education, and how to prepare healthy recipes featuring commodity foods.
- Take & Make integrates school-based learning with culturally-relevant, realistic-to-prepare foods to be made at home, addressing the students' home environments and the eating habits of their entire households.

EVALUATION

Evaluating programs with an Indigenous criteria, while meeting Western information needs, is a “must” for Native-controlled programs. The group discussed qualitative and quantitative evaluative tools that will allow them to tell their story and control their narrative as well as the tools at their disposal.





FOLLOW-UP RESOURCES

Each attendee was provided with resources on how to start or enhance a summer feeding program, a toolkit on how to start a backpack food program, and a list of healthy food funding and opportunities.^{9, 10, 11}

Models

Models used by grantees that may be adaptable in other Native communities include:

- The Bountiful Backpack Program provides food to tide students over on the weekends and when school is not in session. In addition, youth learn basic cooking skills, nutrition education, and how to prepare healthy recipes featuring commodity foods.
- Food recovery programs collect edible, safe foods that would otherwise be discarded and, instead, distribute them to hungry families.
- Take & Make integrates school-based learning with culturally-relevant, realistic-to-prepare foods to be made at home, addressing the students' home environments and the eating habits of their entire households.

Resources

Grantees accessed several resources, including:

- The Charlie Cart (<http://charliecart.org/>), a mobile kitchen combined with a hands-on nutrition curriculum for Kindergarten through 5th grade.
- Extension services help farmers, gardeners, families and service providers grow and market food and learn about nutrition.
- FoodCorps (<https://foodcorps.org/>), part of the AmeriCorps Service Network, places volunteers in schools, school districts, local government agencies, or nonprofit organizations to connect kids to healthy food in school.
- Local food banks can offer help with infrastructure and low-cost foods to make scarce dollars go farther.
- Tribal colleges provide much-needed educators, programs, volunteers and curricula.

⁹ https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/6_Resources_and_Research/Operations/Summer_Feeding_Toolkit/Summer%20Feeding_Toolkit%202014.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.hungerfreecommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/HFC-Toolkit-for-starting-a-BackPack-Food-Program.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/>



LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

Partnerships, Relationships & Leveraging

The issue of Native children's hunger – the whys and hows – are too vast to be addressed by one group.

Grantees emphasized again and again the value of calling on others to lend their strength. That required developing formal and informal partnerships with tribal departments, schools, colleges, health care providers, nonprofits, extension units, retailers and community. All had a vital role to play.

Building relationships meant finding common ground around the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of Native youth.

“A key for anyone else doing this: be thankful, write thank you notes and send photos.” – *The Center Pole*

“By collaborating with other programs we learned we can afford to offer more supportive services at no additional cost.” – *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*

“The biggest lesson we learned is that we could serve more children by reaching out to the experts in alleviating hunger in communities. The food banks and economic opportunity partners were able to utilize their expertise and buying power to help us to provide more food to more children.” – *Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club*

“By partnering, organizations are able to share resources and leverage different knowledge bases and funds. This project was a great example of what partnerships can do!” – *Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota*

As a result, an incalculable amount of in-kind donations of food, services and use of facilities/infrastructure multiplied grant dollars provided by First Nations and the Walmart Foundation manyfold.

And in turn, the number of children served by this project increased by 4,400% over original projections.





Teachable Moments

Food is a Gateway to...

... Health

“This program looks to give participants the tools, resources and knowledge to be successful in preparing meals for their families and being aware of the food they are putting into their bodies. It also seeks to increase their knowledge about where their food comes from and how to plant and prepare foods from the garden.” – *Lower Brule Community College*

“Exposing children to balanced meals in multiple areas of their lives provides consistent opportunities to learn about healthy eating, which they can use to prepare meals for themselves.”
– *Lower Brule Community College*

“98% of students at Moenkopi Day School reported trying and enjoying one or more foods that they had not tried prior to receiving FoodCorps programming. We are confident that this pattern will continue in the 2017/2018 school year.” – *Moenkopi Developers Corporation*

... Culture

“By incorporating a minimum of one local/traditional food into each Take & Make pack ... the healthy food that the students receive is culturally relevant, and realistic to get ingredients for and prepare in a rural reservation setting. This also assures pride in our cultural tradition and the future revitalization of our Native food system, lessening our dependence on unhealthy fast foods and supermarket chains.”
– *Moenkopi Developers Corporation*

... Volunteering

“We normally find students [to volunteer] who have a generous spirit and then use several who also receive bags. They promote the program among their peers and do an excellent job filling bags, stocking shelves and organizing the storage room.”
– *Rocky Boy Public Schools District*

... Being better students

“We fed children, families and futures. Attendance increased by 10.8%. We have also seen a decrease in behavioral referrals with students on our backpack list.” – *Rocky Boy Public Schools District*

“There are many positive outcomes to be shared: happier students, more buy-in at the school, service learning, caring for each other, and genuine appreciation. Students have control over their own lives and that is far more powerful than anything else we can provide. Elementary students are coming to school for the backpacks. They are seeing school as a resource in their lives and it is improving their nutrition and overall quality of life.” – *Rocky Boy Public Schools District*



... Community

“Our food bank has become part of the media of the reservation; it’s where people come to get and share information to pass on.”

– *The Center Pole*

... And more

By including the Agindaasoda Miskwaabikong reading project, “Children were able to have books read and discussed with them and they were also allowed to take books home with them.”

– *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*

Buy Locally When Possible

“This truly is a program that impacts parts of the whole community ... We did our best to source the recipe ingredients from local grocers, when possible. This helped us form relationships with small retailers, support their stores (and the community as a whole), and spread the word about the Bountiful Backpack program.” – *Lower Brule Community College*

Tap Into Existing Programs

Schools and existing summer programs provide structure and consistency that will boost children’s participation in a feeding program.

Know Your Audience

“We serve a lot of homeless families with children. Many live in cars. Try to find out each personal situation so you don’t give a turkey to someone without access to an oven.”

– *The Center Pole*

“Instead of I-Pads or I-Pods, we are asking that school incentive programs award shoes. We also have asked community programs to provide washers and dryers and even used cars to families who complete healing programs, instead of technology. What can our families really use? What do they really need? How would their lives be different if they have this one thing? These are the questions that are on forefront of our minds.”

– *Rocky Boy Public Schools District*

Encourage Families to Accept Help

“We have learned that for many working families it is difficult to accept help and it affects their pride, but in keeping with our oral traditions, simply having a one-on-one candid conversation with parents has helped remove the shame from getting help. We as an organization have made it a known part of what we do here is to help families.” – *Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club*



Creative Problem-Solving

“One of the largest continual expenses is the bags used each week. Students now receive an incentive for returning bags each week. This results in an additional food item for each bag returned and provides sustainability for the bags used in the program.”

– Rocky Boy Public Schools District

To eliminate the potential barrier of parental compliance for children’s participation, “We removed the adult compliance component. We gave the power to the kids. This paradigm shift was significant. Our kids can now decide what they need and how much ... This is a powerful shift.” – Rocky Boy Public Schools District

“Theft is something that happens. The room is full of yummy goodies. Whenever we have a problem, we have easily found the student (usually a new student), explain(ed) the program and hand(ed) them an interview sheet. They can have all that they need every week if they just fill out the form. We have no long-term issues after we hold such a meeting.”

– Rocky Boy Public Schools District

“We learned that providing access to fresh foods was much more of a challenge than anticipated ... We would consider developing a gift card system which would allow families to purchase food from local markets at their own discretion.”

– Akwesasne Boys & Girls Club

Sustainability

Sustaining programs and their outcomes is always a concern in Indian Country. Funding for food and nutrition education is scarce and competitive.

“The Bountiful Backpack program, as it is meant to be implemented, is not sustainable without grant funding to provide the food to be sent home.”

– Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota

“In the summer, we reach many children that want to get to our site for lunches and snacks. However, in the winter months we don’t really have any programs that feed our children except while they are at school. [These are] very tough questions, and I don’t know the answer.”

– Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Grantees turned to grassroots fundraising to supplement grants.

“Staff and community members have also donated time and funds to raise accessibility to the program. A silent auction was organized by our very own superintendent at the annual Back-to-School Barbeque.” – Rocky Boy Public Schools District



Be Prepared for the Long Haul

“Some root causes of Native children’s hunger include systemic poverty (caused by historical trauma in many cases), food deserts and limited access to food, and possibly lack of education about resources that are available ... There is no “quick fix” to solve these root causes – it will take persistent collaboration between community entities and agencies, economic development, and education about available resources and grant programs.” – *Lower Brule Community College*

More Advice from the Experts

“Do some planning before you take on a project like this. You will need appropriate storage space, funding, food safety training, staff that is willing to take on another full-time job, record keeping, and accurate documentation ... Taking on this project was difficult at times but also very rewarding.”

– *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*

“Start small. Food is being wasted everywhere and can be recovered. Be creative. Appreciate any partners you can find and go from there. Don’t wait for a government program or funding. One thing we like about our project is all its parts are evolving into a healthy food system that is based in sharing, creativity and reciprocity, traits of Indigenous communities.”

– *The Center Pole*





RECOMMENDATIONS for SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Partnerships

Grantees once again emphasized the power of partnerships in striving toward community-wide and systemic changes for Native children's futures.

"The most helpful thing these groups can do to systematically address Native children's hunger and development is to collaborate and get to the same table to discuss solutions. If all of these groups work in their own 'silos,' they might take some small steps towards addressing Native children's hunger, but staying in their own worlds is limiting. There is power in collaboration and stepping back to look at the issue as a systematic issue to be solved on a broad, community-wide level. Beyond collaboration, these groups could work together on community gardening efforts – an affordable, albeit not simple or easy, solution to hunger that has many possibilities for nutrition education, physical activity, and social connectedness in communities.

– *Lower Brule Community College*

"KCLC believes that tribal governments, schools, service providers and others need to collaborate and develop a plan that can systemically address Native children's hunger and development. These entities need to come together, work together and support children and families." – *Keres Children's Learning Center*

Referral Systems

"Service providers could be taught how to refer children to programs that are feeding our children. Working with the school regarding referrals and letting them also know about what services are available." – *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*

Food Policy Development

"... Gathering stakeholders at tribal level to begin the conversation of beginning a food policy system within our reservation. We feel that once we consistently gather at a local level, we can continue to gather tribal and federal officials and organizations to improve our progress of creating awareness of healthier food systems within our Hopi Reservation."

– *Moenkopi Developers Corporation*



Replicate Successful Models

“Our goal is to utilize the Take & Make project as a blueprint for other schools to seek funding to implement similarly-run projects within their schools.”

– *Moenkopi Developers Corporation*

Food Systems Development

“There is no local, Native food system here. We need to create one and we are working on it. We need to make use of our historical sustainable ways: wild game, wild vegetables and fruits, and the growing talents of the Crow people that have been lost, and create an economy based on what we can gather and grow.” – *The Center Pole*





Founded in 1980, First Nations Development Institute is a Native American-led nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to strengthen American Indian economies to support healthy Native communities. First Nations invests in and creates innovative institutions and models that strengthen asset control and support economic development for American Indian people and their communities. First Nations' program areas are Achieving Native Financial Empowerment, Strengthening Tribal and Community Institutions, Nourishing Native Foods & Health, Investing in Native Youth, and Achieving Household and Community Asset-Building Strategies. First Nations has worked to support Native agriculture initiatives and Native community food systems since the early 2000s.

The Walmart Foundation and First Nations have regularly partnered since 2011 to support tribes and Native communities as they build sustainable food systems that improve health, strengthen food security and increase control over Native agriculture and assets.





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