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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Navajo Nation Special Diabetes Program is going into its second year under the leadership of Lucinda Charleston, Program Manager III, and the staff has worked diligently during the past year providing diabetes education, nutrition education and physical activities to people in seven service areas across the Navajo Nation.

During the past quarter (October, November, December), NNSDP provided 402 activities and served 22,513 people through classes for diabetes prevention, teaching people how to eat better for health, and providing physical activities with chair exercises, walks, runs, health fairs, BMI screenings, youth games, senior center events, and work-outs in wellness centers.

The staff have been engaged in teaching Native Lifestyle Balance to help people lose weight by counting calories and keeping track of what they eat. Sessions are held at NNSDP Service Area offices, school classrooms, or conference rooms of tribal programs.

For example, the Chinle Fleet Management Personnel met in their conference room weekly for the NLB sessions. The sessions are convenient for the personnel so they don’t have to leave the facility. The men encouraged each other to do their assignments and worked toward losing weight.

In Pueblo Pintado, school staff and parents meet each week in a school classroom for their NLB session. The staff are there at the school and parents come from various areas in the community to meet.

The sessions last 16 weeks, but NNSDP staff are aware of challenges on the reservation so they take it at the pace of the clients. It may take some clients a month to fully get into the lessons, but there is no hurry as long as they make progress towards losing weight and changing their lifestyle. NLB sessions is not a race to see who gets through the course first, but a course to help make changes in eating habits, knowing what is composed of the food they eat, and improving their way of life to better health.

Nutrition classes are also taught in various locations such as schools, chapter houses, Tribal program facilities, and other governmental buildings. NNSDP nutritionists report that many people are requesting traditional food cooking such as blue corn mush, sumac berry mush, and squash dishes. Cultural lessons has to be included in the food demonstrations because there are traditional teachings involved with blue corn and when certain items can be made from it such as the mush that is runny, mush that is more thick, and mush made into dumplings.

Nutrition lessons are also a part of Native Lifestyle Balance. The lessons are aimed to provide motivation for clients to be aware of what they eat and to help them lose weight and to utilize food items in their cupboards in creating home cooked meals rather than eating out in a restaurant or fast food outlet.

Children in schools are also taught to learn about nutrition and the different types of food that is healthy for them. Lessons from curriculum such as “Cooking with Kids” is used to provide children with many healthy food choices. Nutritionists report that children take ideas and recipes home where they encourage their parents to cook what they learned at school.

Physical Activity is continuously encouraged for school children all the way to senior citizens. NNSDP staff are certified to teach and work with children using Sports Play and Recreation for Kids (SPARK) curriculum as well as others such as Physical Activity for Kids (PAK) and Diabetes Education for Tribal Schools (DETS).

Adults go through chair exercises, walking, jogging, or even running as part of their activities. Some of the Service Areas have gardening projects where clients clear the fields and plant. It is something people enjoy and it helps them to move. This gives the elders in the community an opportunity to share and teach their children and families about being self-sustaining.

There are collaborations with other health programs and health providers that keep the NNSDP staff busy.