

Navajo, Hopi Families Relief Fund completes one year of COVID support

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Looks to build stronger future

CH'ÍHOOTSOOÍ, DINÉTAH, (WINDOW ROCK, NAVAJO NATION)— Navajo and Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund commemorated one year of successfully strategizing, organizing and distributing critical humanitarian resources to communities across the Navajo and Hopi nations.

In March 2020, as the number of positive COVID-19 cases exploded across the Navajo and Hopi nations, these communities sought the basic living essentials they needed to undertake protective self-isolation. Both nations have been long-time food deserts with only 13 full-scale grocery stores on their combined 29,945 square mile-territory—an area larger than the combined areas of Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire. They also face unique challenges in the face of COVID with a third of their communities lacking indoor plumbing and another third without electricity in their homes. Other complicating factors include unemployment rates regularly exceeding 50 percent in these communities, significant rates of overcrowded housing, and a high incidence of underlying conditions due in part to almost a century of federal overburdening of Navajo lands with extractive development and unremediated Superfund sites.

Given the extreme food desert conditions on the two nations, many tribal members do their shopping in off-reservation communities where the selection is broader, food is fresher and prices are lower. Unfortunately many shelves were barren in the border towns by mid-March 2020. The pandemic also caused many tribal businesses and departments to immediately shut

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down or reduce their hours of operation, which included critical water access points. Combined, these factors caused an unexpected crisis among many families who needed access to basic living essentials.

On March 15, 2020, knowing the extreme vulnerability of these communities and the unique challenges they would face in protecting themselves from COVID-19, former Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch established a GoFundMe Campaign as a means to provide at-risk COVID-19 populations on Navajo and Hopi land--including elders, people who are immunocompromised, and struggling families--with two weeks' worth of essential living items so they could safely shelter at home and avoid spreading COVID-19.

By the end of March 2020 the group had formed a Utah-based nonprofit, Yee Ha'ólníi Doo, which does business as the Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund. Yee Ha'ólníi Doo translates into "May our people have fortitude in times of difficulty." The group now operates under a fiscal sponsorship by Nonprofit Fiscal Services to ensure federal tax exemption for donations until it secures its own 501(c)(3) designation.

To date, the team has raised over \$18 million, most of which the Relief Fund has strategically channeled toward providing food, water, Personal Protective Equipment and other essential items to over 370,000 Navajo and Hopi people.

The Relief Fund has also utilized its funding to launch an important, culturally relevant public health education campaign designed to equip Navajo and Hopi community members with the knowledge they need to protect their families from the spread of COVID-19. The team has also assisted Navajo and Hopi communities by infusing them with the following resources:

Approximately 800 hand washing stations for households that lack indoor plumbing

Over 100,000 masks, surgical gowns, and related Personal Protective Equipment for elders, immunocompromised, and first responders sewn by volunteer seamstresses

48,000 pounds of critical relief supplies airlifted to remote Navajo and Hopi communities in

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collaboration with Air Serv International

Over 75 boxes of donated winter clothing items for children

Over 140 tons of coal for elders as part of a winter home heating program

17 industrial-sized refrigerators and 22 industrial-sized freezers to facilitate local food distributions

261,000 gloves for Northern Navajo Medical Center during a nationwide glove shortage

The governing board of Yee Ha'oolniidoo is composed entirely of Navajo women, and Hopi women play a vital role in ensuring delivery of services to Hopi community members.

To learn more about the organization, please visit <http://navajoandhopifamiliescovid-19r.godaddysites.com/>