



Moccasins on the ground: members of Seeding Sovereignty and Pueblo Action Alliance

Seeding Sovereignty

Indigenous Impact Community Care Initiative



Seeding Sovereignty's Indigenous Impact Community Care Initiative is raising funds and responding to the physical and mental health, economic, and cultural needs of Indigenous peoples in New Mexico.

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IICCI co-director Eryn Wise hands out reusable masks to a community member of the Jicarilla Apache Nation

SUMMARY

History tells us that vulnerable communities are hit the hardest by global health crises. History is repeating itself at this moment, as Indigenous communities across Turtle Island face catastrophic impacts brought on by the spread of COVID-19. In the Navajo Nation alone, 6,378 positive cases and 298 deaths have been reported as of June 12th. The virus has quickly spread from the Navajo Nation into surrounding communities including the Zia, Zuni, San Felipe, and Isleta pueblos.

As emergency relief funds spring up across the country and philanthropic dollars are redirected, Indigenous communities in New Mexico are being neglected. Those most impacted are the people on the frontlines of the ever-escalating climate crisis, protecting living forests, waterways, and territories, resisting extractive industries and other threats to their traditional homelands. These communities have long put their lives on the line and badly need our mutual aid. Now is the time to double down on our support to Indigenous peoples who have a crucial role to play in ushering in a regenerative economy, redistributing wealth, and leading us away from climate catastrophe.

Recognizing the ongoing commitment of mutual aid, Seeding Sovereignty is invested in working with the communities impacted during and beyond times of crisis. In early April, we launched the Indigenous Impact Community Care Initiative in partnership with Pueblo Action Alliance, to respond to the physical and mental health, economic, and cultural needs of Indigenous partner communities in New Mexico. Our initiative is:

- Prioritizing the delivery of PPE to community members and medical personnel
- Raising funds to redistribute to those committed to community care during and post-COVID
- Providing remote mental health support in partnership with mental health professionals
- Shipping handmade books and distributing healthy meal kits for our students and elders

We are actively seeking partners to donate to our grassroots fund; donate essential supplies; and raise awareness about the impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous lands.

IMPACT TO DATE

As of June 2020, the Indigenous Impact Community Care Initiative has:

- Distributed 20,000 KN95 and surgical masks, 10,000 gloves, 140 face shields, and 39,000 reusable masks
- Re-granted funds to Tatanka Wakpala Tiyospaye, Transgender Resource Center of NM, and Zuni Mountain Sanctuary to provide aid to our LGBTQIA+/Two Spirit/GNC/NB/gender-expansive relatives in NM, as well as our relatives Luke & Linda Black Elk who are providing elder care kits to those in Oceti Sakowin territory
- Sent Indigenous-authored books to families in quarantine via community school partners
- Provided crucial care to affected areas across New Mexico (Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache Nation, and Pueblo Nations in New Mexico)
- Outside of New Mexico, provided PPE and essential aid support to the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, and Wet'suwet'en Nation

We are grateful for our relatives at Tohaali Community School, Jicarilla Child & Family Education Center, SRSU Northern Navajo Medical Center, First Nations Clinic, Dr. Michelle Tom, Orenda Tribe, Pueblo Action Alliance, BYellowtail, and Suay Sew Shop for their partnership and support.

THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights long standing structural inequities in our country and exacerbates the already precarious situation for Indigenous communities. Advice to buy essential sanitary supplies, work from home, wash hands, shelter in place, and buy two weeks of groceries is not feasible for Indigenous communities on reservations that have less access to resources, often live in food deserts, occupy overcrowded and sub-standard homes, and can't afford running or hot water.

A lack of access to basic services leaves Indigenous nations in remote regions particularly vulnerable. Access to healthcare has been historically out of reach, with Indigenous communities often the last to receive medical care and support in times of crisis. Hospitals and urgent care centers are miles outside of reservations, and emergency support personnel are in limited supply. The list of pre-existing medical conditions that increase risk for the coronavirus are the same as those (heart disease, cancer, and diabetes) that have plagued Indigenous communities for generations, since being displaced from their homelands to live on reservations and forced to eat commodified foods.

The 70+% of Indigenous community members who live in cities face their own set of challenges, as abundant resources are directed away from them and toward other populations. Government agencies are overrun as they deal with the virus outbreak in major cities, and have few resources to allocate to emergency efforts for Indigenous nations. Indian Health Services (IHS) lacks sufficient capacity, equipment, supplies, and facilities to appropriately treat or isolate COVID-19 patients. Today, the 26 IHS hospitals in the United States (intended to serve approximately 2.2 million of the country's estimated 3.7 million Indigenous peoples across) are home to fewer than 71 ventilators and 33 intensive care units.

In New Mexico specifically, some of the most populated Indigenous communities overwhelmingly live in food deserts, and those in border cities face ongoing violence that inhibit access to jobs and other resources. The impacts of extractive industries such as fracking, mining, and refining contribute to a range of human and environmental violations. In a recent survey disseminated by the All Pueblo Council of Governors in response to the spread of COVID-19, Pueblos reported among their top concerns a lack of testing, sanitation supplies, as well as elderly care and support services.

SEEDING SOVEREIGNTY'S RESPONSE

Seeding Sovereignty is well placed to respond to the unique set of challenges now facing Indigenous communities – the bulk of which we have been responding to for years and are further exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19. We are in community with and connected to Indigenous Nations across the country, especially those in remote parts of New Mexico, and have widespread reach on social media to rally support and amplify issues facing Indigenous communities. We have spent the past few months listening closely to what Indigenous communities need, assessing our value-add, and determining a strategic response to this unprecedented health and human rights crisis.

The Indigenous Impact Community Care Initiative responds to the physical and mental health, economic, and cultural community needs of Indigenous folks in New Mexico. We are collecting donations to directly assist Indigenous peoples impacted by COVID-19 in New Mexico, with a focus on those most vulnerable (disabled, immunocompromised, single parent), and/or those who identify as LGBTQIA+, Two-Spirit, gender-expansive, non-conforming, fluid, or nonbinary.

We are implementing the following coordinated response:

1 Sending masks and seeding sewing skills

Indigenous populations typically do not have access to the same quantity or quality of supplies as other communities across the country. Acknowledging that masks are crucial to prevent the further spread of infection, we are shipping masks to communities in need across New Mexico. In addition to providing supplies, we will seed skills; and plan to send sewing machines and materials to assist on-the-ground, daily distribution efforts.



Collective Community Care: The Red Nation receiving a mask donation



The two-month anniversary of our initiative, featuring Seeding Sovereignty and Pueblo Action Alliance

2 Providing general support stipends

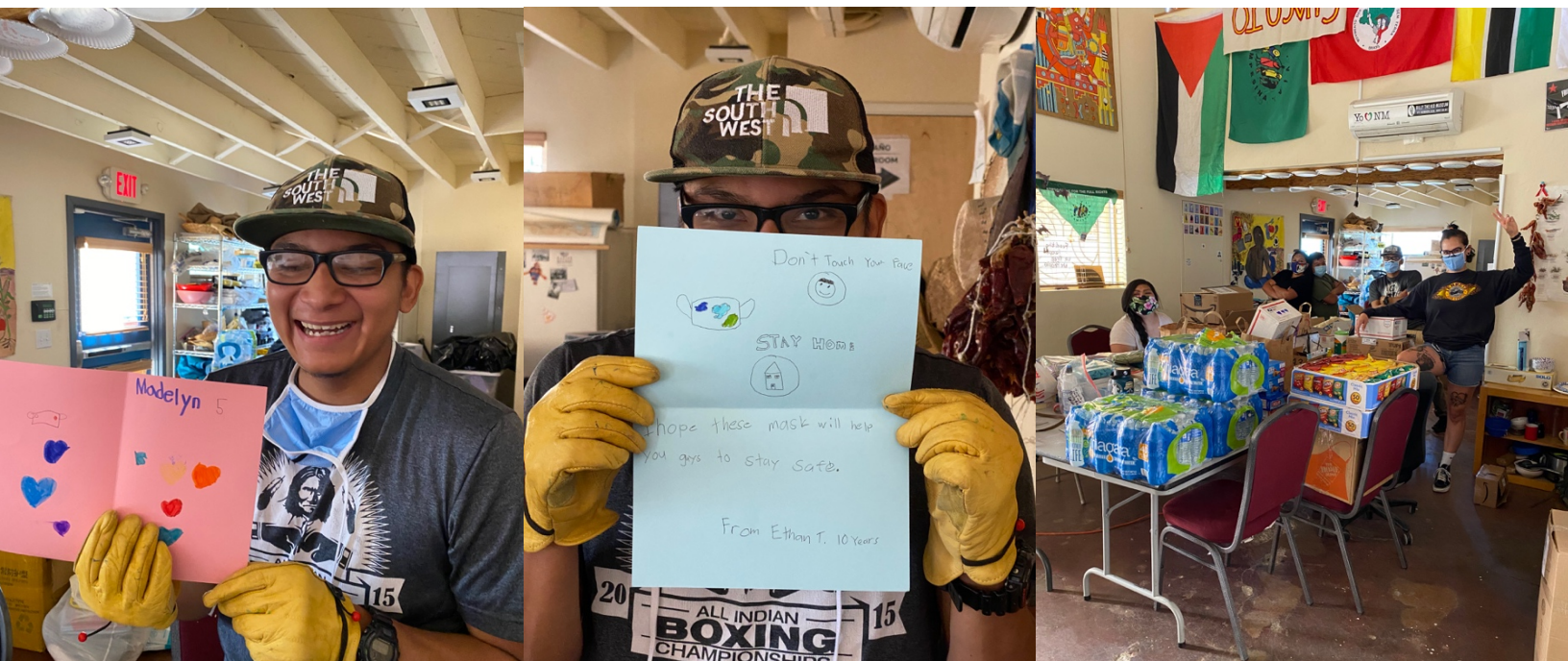
As Amazon employees and other “essential” service industry workers go on strike, and as supply shipments carry the risk of contamination, vulnerable communities face accelerated economic hardship. We have established a network to funnel critical monetary support to community organizations supporting those facing dire circumstances (e.g. eviction, repossession, displacement, loss of job, health or childcare) to support their essential needs such as running water, providing residential addresses through their community care centers, access to showers and laundry, and support for utilities for residents in need of financial aid. Through this network, we are regranting general support stipends to Indigenous-led or serving community organizations to support a range of essential needs. Our goal is to put the power in the hands of the people to prioritize their own critical needs as brought on by COVID-19.

3 Supporting our Elders

Our elders hold a special place in our society as culture and language bearers; their well-being is essential to the perpetuation of our traditions and knowledge. Our elders face elevated threats from chronic illnesses that make them particularly susceptible to COVID-19. We have supported our Board member Linda Black Elk in the production and dissemination of survival meal kits for a group of elders on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reservations. We seek to continue providing aid to community organizations committed to food sovereignty during the time of COVID-19. Through our work with Zuni Mountain Sanctuary, we aim to support LGBTQIA+, Two-Spirit, GNC, nonbinary, and/or gender expansive elders being cared for at the sanctuary during this unprecedented time.

4 Shipping Indigenous-authored Books

As schools across the country close or transition to remote learning opportunities that are inaccessible to many families, many Indigenous children find themselves without access to school or public libraries. Through an educational partnership with Haymarket Books, Seeding Sovereignty seeks to send stories written by impactful authors to families learning from home. Possible titles include Missing Daddy by Mariame Kaba, Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities by Rebecca Solnit, and Freedom Is a Constant Struggle by Angela Y. Davis. It is our fervent hope that in this time of self-isolation and quarantine, all families have the ability to escape into other worlds and ways of knowing.



Homemade cards with mask deliveries and the making of PPE/essential food kits for unsheltered relatives in Albuquerque

5 Connecting Isolated Folx

COVID-19 has contributed to increased rates of social isolation, limiting access to support and community. Rising rates of suicide and domestic violence across the country are likely to peak within communities lacking access, exacerbating issues that are already pervasive in Indigenous communities. The need for coping skills and mental health support is at an all-time high. In response, Seeding Sovereignty will organize a series of remote support calls on the platform Zoom, to be hosted by renowned trauma therapist Dr. Karen Binder-Byrnes.

CONCLUSION

The womxn of Seeding Sovereignty and our Indigenous Impact Community Care Initiative partners (Pueblo Action Alliance) are doing everything in our power to ensure that history doesn't repeat itself. Through this Indigenous Impact Community Care Initiative, we are ordering, rallying, and distributing badly-needed and deserved support for communities that are facing unprecedented health, economic, and cultural challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic daily. This moment of challenge is accompanied by opportunity; we are eager to tap into the abundance of peer support and community aid networks that are springing up in response to the crisis, and to push harder than ever for equity – redistributing wealth from families with resources to Indigenous families in need.

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Donated materials are turned into mask making kits and sent to community sewists (pictured: PAA)