

Native Health

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

NATIVE AND COMMUNITY GARDENS, READ-IT-AND-EAT, FOOD BACKPACKS, KIDS CAFÉ, WELLNESS WARRIORS AND MORE

On a bright February day, preschoolers sprawl on the floor in the community room as they listen to a story about corn, beans and carrots. “Corn grows UP, carrots grow DOWN, and beans grow ROUND and ROUND,” says the librarian, teaching hand motions to the children.

Meanwhile, the adults sit at tables, listening and joining in. As story time ends, fresh produce is distributed, along with today’s recipe for lunch: tuna apple salad and raw veggies with dip in a

bell pepper bowl. Children help prepare the food while parents learn about healthy eating on a budget.

Read-It-And-Eat is Native Health’s latest innovative food project. Linking literacy and healthy food, the Phoenix library staff host

story time every Wednesday while the center staff educate about nutrition and food preparation. A meal is prepared and shared, and everyone leaves with library resources and a bag of fresh produce.

This is just one of the many ways Native Health serves as a food oasis. Serving urban tribal members as well as other underserved Phoenix residents, the center is in a food desert with a 30 minute drive to the nearest grocery stores.

Native Health invited leaders from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to examine the needs of their population, becoming the first health center to offer Summer Meals. Partnering with St. Mary’s Food Bank, breakfast, lunch and dinner are served. Called “Kid’s Café,” cold meals are prepackaged and handed out on site to any child requesting one. No eligibility is required, and not all recipients are patients of the center. A Sharing Basket in the lobby allows families to put in extra food they don’t want so that it is available for others. A refrigerator on-site holds all the meals.

The Backpack Program is typically done at schools, but Native Health is piloting it as a health center activity. Nonperishable food provided by the food bank is given to families for weekend and emergency use. Any child in need may receive a backpack.

Cooking Matters, a national program, is linked with Read-It-And-Eat as well as other classes. Kitchen supplies, cooking classes and produce are shared with participants.

What are their keys to success? Susan Levy, the staff person overseeing these projects, credits CEO, Walter Murillo, with vision and a spirit of collaboration. The leadership allows staff to try ideas, even if they fail. Native Health grows not just food, but community, health and innovation.

At Native Health, addressing food insecurity is integrated into all center operations. A spirit of innovation, participatory leadership and volunteerism permeates this health center.



TRADITIONAL AND COMMUNITY GARDENS AND ADAPTATIONS

Native Health partnered with the city of Phoenix and Native Seed Search to plant a half acre traditional garden using indigenous seeds such as Hopi corn and beans. The same site also contains many community gardens, over 30 of which are sponsored by Native Health and open to the community. Several are designed for wheelchair access.

Garden-based activities include plant and nutrition education, Wellness Warriors meetings, indigenous recipes and cooking classes. A walking path is adjacent to the beds and passive exercise equipment is planned.

The gardens are part of a downtown beautification project and directly across from the center. When the land suddenly became slated for urban development, the gardens had one week to relocate before being removed. Native Health tried to intervene, and then got busy preserving the gardens. In the space of one week they had secured a new site, and with volunteers, were able to relocate their work!

A site visit showed this vision permeates the center, with every staff member a part of making a difference.

INTERVENTIONS

PARTNERING WITH A LOCAL FOOD BANK TO OFFER A SUMMER MEALS PROGRAM (SERVING 35,000 MEALS) WITH "KIDS CAFÉ" BACKPACK MEALS

AN AFTER SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAM (SERVING 5000 MEALS) CREATED WITH PARTNERS

WEEKLY READ-IT-AND EAT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PHOENIX PUBLIC LIBRARY

A WELLNESS WARRIORS PROGRAM WITH CHILDREN WHO LEARN HEALTHY LIFESTYLE LESSONS

A TRADITIONAL NATIVE GARDEN WITH INDIGENOUS PLANTS (SOME ARE WHEELCHAIR FRIENDLY) CREATED IN FOOD DESERTS. NUTRITION AND GROWING CLASSES ARE OFFERED.

A "SHARING BASKET" OFFERED IN THE CLINIC LOBBY

PARTNERS

AZ DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

AZ DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NATIVE SEED SEARCH

PHOENIX PUBLIC LIBRARY

SPROUTS GROCERY

ST. MARY'S FOOD BANK

USDA