

Bishop Community Garden: Building healthy communities through family formation

by: Katie Larsen

SUMMARY

Prevalence of obesity and diabetes, are highest among the AI/AN populations of North America. Access to inexpensive, local healthy food, until recently, been hard to come by in these communities. The Owens Valley Career Development Center, in partnership with the Toiyabe Indian Health Project REACH program, has created the Bishop Community Garden, to demonstrate crop propagation, animal husbandry, food sharing, family formation and healthy food assistance to local tribal families. Through these efforts they have inspired, bringing old skills back to life, starting new family traditions and helping health be achieved by all.



CHALLENGE

Inspiring change through gardening is no easy task. In a world filled with screen time, junk food, and loss of culture, Native American families are struggling to find healthy lifestyle balance. Luring people back to healthy foods, foods that many are unfamiliar with, is an uphill battle, to say the least. In 2013 CDC estimated that over 80% of the 3.9 million American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people in the U.S. were overweight or obese and that 1 in 2

AI/AN children would be diagnosed with Type II Diabetes in their lifetime. This same population, according to the 2012 U.S. census sees, 1 in 4 people living below the poverty line, most living in rural areas across the country. Providing low cost, healthy food and simultaneously providing inspiration, education and a culture of health is no small task.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Joining a community garden and supporting local food systems builds community strength and creates a culture of health. By being active in the local food movement you're promoting your family to think fresh and healthy and to enjoy working hard to see great results. Contact the Bishop Community Garden to learn about opportunities available to you and share your passion for being healthy and eating fresh fruits and vegetables with your family and friends.

"...Locally produced foods that are a product of community collaboration, coordination and participation are essential to alleviating many of the dietary and lifestyle trends that are negatively impacting Tribal reservations."

- Keith Glidewell

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SOLUTION

Keith Glidewell and Tony Brown of the Owens Valley Career Development Center in Bishop, CA building and managing the Bishop Community Garden and know that diversification draws a big crowd. Through a partnership with the Toiyabe Indian Health Project REACH program, their multi-faceted healthy food access efforts have provided family formation participants, and community members the opportunity to learn first-hand food self-sufficiency. Their outreach is focused on established local groups like Tribal Cross-fit, Indian Education Center, Tribal Head Start, all to reach as many community members and inspire community health change, while building a diverse, and economically viable venture.

RESULTS

In a single year, the Bishop Community Garden has seen dramatic increases in volunteer action, with regular participation in everything from planting and weeding to poultry processing and hoop house erection. The garden has seen new interest from youth and elders, all eager to eat fresh fruits and vegetables directly from the garden and an increase in engagement with whole families, who are interested in learning skills to make their lives healthier through food. Community members see this garden as an opportunity to learn skills that have not been known in this community for many generations, and recognize that raising your own food supports the next generation in making healthy choices easily and with pride.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Bishop Community Garden and the Owens Valley Career Development Center (OVDC) recognize that farming and animal rearing takes time and money and are taking steps to build on their ability to process their produce and livestock, allowing them to sell value added products at affordable prices to the local community. Through continued partnership with the Toiyabe Indian Health Project REACH program, and further collaboration with local tribal farmers/clinic markets, area food service programs and other local growers, OVDC is taking steps to ensure that they have economic viability and continued interest from many different stakeholders.