

# Increasing Access to Healthy Beverages One Water Station at a Time

by: Serena Johnson

## SUMMARY

Awa Paya-na A-hibi! Bebe Agua! Drink water!

These messages resounded across Inyo County in 2015 as Toiyabe Indian Health Project (TIHP) partnered with Team Inyo for Healthy Kids (Team Inyo) to increase access to water through the installation of a bottle filling water station.

- Team Inyo is working to prevent and reduce childhood obesity
- About 50% of youth have an unhealthy weight in Inyo County
- Team Inyo's vision is that everyone in Inyo County will have access to water
- Partnerships are the foundation to the success of this project



## CHALLENGE

Inyo County is a rural, geographically isolated county with 18,410 people. According to the American Community Survey 2009-2013, the majority of the population identifies as white, with 20.8% identifying as Hispanic and 12.7% identifying as American Indian.

Childhood obesity is a national epidemic effecting youth in Inyo County. According to the California Department of Education (2014), 44.3% of 5th graders, 51.3% of 7th graders, and 42% of 9th graders in Inyo County are not a healthy weight.

Team Inyo saw the need to shift strategies in order to have a positive impact. The California Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Branch lists access to drinking water as one of thirteen priority PSE strategies. The coalition selected

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Thirsty for more?

You can be a part of increasing water access by sharing your knowledge: where else in our community would benefit from a water station? Do people know how fresh and pure our local water source is? "We live in a place with awesome water," says Waylan Cleland, a Team Inyo member and City of Bishop staff. "It's cool and refreshing, and people often say it's the best they ever tasted. We can be proud of that." As a coalition, Team Inyo values the input of the community.

*"We want to create an environment where families can easily find free water within easy reach of their high traffic areas," says Team Inyo leader April Eagan. "Water stations have been proven to increase hydration where they are installed."*

- April Eagan

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## SOLUTION

To make water the healthy and easy choice, water needs to be easily accessible and free. To find out where water access is needed community members were surveyed at the Bishop Paiute Tribe's World Water Day event. Taking this input, Team Inyo decided on an innovative solution: install a water fountain where students pass by during their open campus lunch or on their way to the library. The location is also near a grocery store and movie theater. The City of Bishop Public Works department helped install the water station and have committed to maintaining the station into the future. Articles to the local media and schools helped promote the water station.

## RESULTS

This initiative was the seed planting the desire for greater change. One water station was installed in the first year, providing access to 925 youth in Bishop to healthy fresh water. It also inspired plans for eight water stations to be installed across Inyo County, in public locations and on tribal reservations, reaching almost 5,000 children in three rural communities.

"The community has shown a need for a drinking water faucet in the community space around the garden and farmers market areas," said project partner Alan Bacock, Water Coordinator with the Big Pine Paiute Tribe, "A drinking water faucet supplied through the Tribe's domestic water system will provide not only an alternative to sugary drinks, but also an alternative to the consumption of unsafe water by visitors to the community space."

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

"Awa Paya-na A-hibi" is Paiute for "Drink Lots of Water." Team Inyo's long-term vision is that everyone in Inyo County will have a water station within 5-minute walking distance of their daily lives. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, TIHP staff will continue to be an active member of the coalition, supporting efforts to engage school age children in water station projects.

Since the completion of the first water station with Team Inyo, TIHP has partnered with multiple organizations to install water stations. This ensures the sustainability of the water access campaign, with each organization committing to the long-term maintenance and upkeep of the water stations.