

FROM THE COMMUNITY

"Good morning, I am writing this letter on behalf of my grandmother. We are so, so thankful and blessed that we were chosen to receive such needed improvements to our home. We can't express how grateful we are. Due to her health conditions, it is safer for her to stay home more often and this winter is something that we were dreading. Over the years, we were trying to find and repair our leaking roof with no avail. Thanks to your organization, we no longer have to worry about putting out the buckets. Last night's thunderstorm really put the roof to a very successful test. A new stove means a warmer home and less dependency on electric heaters. I am so grateful beyond words. So once again, thank you and a bigger thank you to the workers who did the job of installing all the hardware."



PARTNER SHOUT-OUT



Jonathan Yazzie of Tolani Lake started his grassroots community action and service organization, Community Strong, to meet the needs of his community. During the pandemic, he delivered water, food and firewood to elders he knew couldn't haul their own water or get necessities easily, and he has been an essential partner of Red Feather as he continues this work, helping us get healthy home items to those that need them most in the areas surrounding Tolani Lake.

-Thanks for all you do Jonathan!

THE BIG PICTURE

Wood for Life turns downed trees into firewood for Indigenous communities, teaches job skills

Lacey Latch | Arizona Republic

This article was originally published on azcentral.com on May 24, 2023. Read the full article at azcentral.com

The need for reliable fuel for cooking and heating on reservation land in the Four Corners region has been exacerbated by the 2019 closure of the Navajo Generating Station, officials said.

When Matt McGrath first started as the Flagstaff District Ranger for the U.S. Forest Service almost five years ago, the agency struggled to manage materials leftover from forest health and wildfire prevention projects. At the same time the agency was looking for ways to manage their stockpiles of timber, indigenous communities across Arizona and in the Four Corners region were really struggling due to a lack of fuel for cooking and heating, a situation that was only exacerbated by the 2019 closure of the Navajo Generating Plant. To meet both needs, Wood for Life was born.

Marshall Masayesva, the Hopi Coordinator for the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps, was integral in the development of the program and worked to ensure the mission was guided by an indigenous perspective. For example, the smaller branches and tree limbs that ultimately become slash piles can instead be turned into much-needed mulch for gardening and agriculture, which is needed more and more because of climate change and the continued desertification of reservation land, Masayesva said.

"The entirety of the tree can be used for a purpose," he said. "We could utilize the entire tree and our forest resources to address a lot of the issues that we have at home."

For the first time, in addition to firewood, the crews are also preparing large posts for building, which Masayesva hopes will also begin addressing the community's housing crisis.

"So the more that we encourage our own people to revitalize our building practices and provide the material to be able to do so ... we could address multiple issues at the same time," he said.

Read the full article at <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2023/05/24/wood-for-life-thinned-trees-become-firewood-for-native-reservations>

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RED FEATHER

Summer 2023 Newsletter

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AS THE SNOW AND COLD START TO RECEDE, RED FEATHER CAN MOVE FULL STEAM AHEAD ON HOME REPAIRS, ROOFING FIXES, AND WATER PROJECTS. WE ARE GETTING PLUMBING CONNECTED, BATHROOMS REMODELED AND HYGIENE SOLUTIONS TO FAMILIES WITHOUT RUNNING WATER ON BOTH THE HOPI AND NAVAJO NATIONS.

JOIN US IN OUR TIRELESS FIGHT TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE HAS A HEALTHY HOME!
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AND BECOME PART OF THE MOVEMENT FOR HOUSING FOR ALL. GIVE NOW!
You can send check donations to PO Box 907, Bozeman, MT 59771.



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Red Feather Development Group

*Where We Fit and Why We Matter:
The Role of Nonprofits in Community Housing Work*
INTERVIEW WITH COMMUNITY COORDINATOR FOR HOPI ALFRED LOMAHQUAHU

What makes Red Feather's work so vital in the community?

"In my experience I haven't really seen any other nonprofits working towards helping people maintain or improve their homes. Hopi has a lot of vibrant nonprofits and organizations working on a host of issues, but in the housing space Red Feather remains relatively unique.

"There is of course the government housing agencies; we have HUD housing here, but they are looking mainly at building new homes. A few years ago they were doing remodeling and renovations of older houses, and they did a pretty good job, but with HUD it's always a long wait. And as with any agency, there is a lot of turnover, so that can make things hard. The problem is you have to basically be an expert in administration and NAHASDA legislation itself to get anything done- and that creates a challenge for anyone on the tribal side to really get the most out of that federal funding.

"The whole process of actually getting assistance from HUD can also be challenging for individuals and homeowners. It can be very paperwork intensive and hard to gather all the information needed from the Village administration and other agencies, and this can just be prohibitive for some people. So Red Feather really provides the easiest pathway to help for people. And of course, we can still improve our own processes but it's so much easier to do that as an independent nonprofit without all the government red tape.

"Even for our own Hopi Housing Authority, it can be hard for them to really get down to the bones of what we are doing at Red Feather, because they just don't always have the staff capacity. The administrative burden can be immense. And they are the main entity out here that focuses on housing. Red Feather is really the only nonprofit that is in the housing space trying to fill the gaps in government housing assistance.

How does your previous experience in tribal government inform your view of Red Feather and tribal housing issues?

"After working in tribal government, as the Vice Chairman and the CSA (Community Service Administrator), I wanted to really see how nonprofits work, and see how they fit in the picture of serving the people. As a CSA, your job is really to work for the people and provide services for the community. But their only budget is from the yearly tribal allotments, and that is not a lot. Due to Peabody closing their mine here, 80% of the Hopi tribal budget is gone. So the villages aren't getting the tribal allotment that they used to get, because the tribe just doesn't have that money anymore. Unfortunately, the village governments just don't currently have the capacity to apply for and manage large grants. There just isn't the administrative capacity to take that on at the local government level.

"So that's where nonprofit organizations can come in and really shine. Red Feather doesn't have term limits and changeovers and has experience managing grants. Our administrative system at Red Feather is set up for that, and so sometimes that allows us, as a nonprofit, to do things for the community right now that sometimes tribal government can't. Navigating the bureaucratic system is challenging, and on the reservation, it can just take a long time to get things done. This can be good, we have our tribal decision-making processes for a reason, and because we have to navigate these outside systems that were never our systems, but the challenge can but getting things to move quickly.

"So outside entities like Red Feather that don't have to follow the bureaucratic systems of HUD housing or tribal governments can really offer people help in a much quicker, more streamlined way. Nonprofits also can have this benefit of longevity. So yes, I see nonprofits as filling a huge gap in services, trying to address a huge unmet need. That's why we exist. This can be overwhelming at times for staff, but if we have support, it can also be really rewarding.

How do you see this nonprofit structure serving the Hopi community?

"Here at Hopi, no other group is doing home repairs, roof repairs, heating services... A lot of the people we are working with are on fixed incomes, so they can't finance major home repairs. Which they would want to do themselves, but they can't, it's just not reasonable for them on a fixed income. Which goes for many people on the reservation. Most people who stay on the reservation are low-income, because of the lack of jobs. Unless you work for the tribe, or IHS (Indian Health Service) or the schools, but that's probably only 20% of the population that has a reasonable job, most other people are on social security, using arts and crafts to try and survive, and those are the individuals we at Red Feather are really targeting.

What are the biggest housing needs you see on a regular basis?

"Things like roof repairs are so vital, because if your roof is leaking or falling apart, everything inside your house will get ruined too. These are also often really expensive, so harder for people to self-finance. A lot of people are also living in G-sheds, these tiny home shells, because that is what they can afford. Those are the homes that really need help, because a G-shed doesn't come with wiring, insulation, plumbing, or any type of heating, it's just a shell. So people are living in these shells. And because they aren't considered 'proper housing' IHS can't connect them to plumbing and water services. So people can't really get the services they need. Some villages will hook these types of homes up to electricity, some won't. But if these people can't get any water services, Red Feather can at least help them get water storage tanks, install septic tanks, etc.

"So Red Feather really is filling in a huge gap, because these are just basic sanitation and hygiene needs. Even me, now that I'm back at Hopi, and working full time, it can still be challenging to get basic amenities. I live in a house without power and plumbing too. This is often just part of our life.

Why is housing specifically such a challenge for on-reservation communities?

"Housing here is challenging for many reasons. Reservation land is trust land, so you can't get a mortgage to build a house here the same way you can on off-reservation land. In my case, I have the opportunity to get a home loan from the VA because of my veteran status, but I can't get it here on my homeland at Hopi, because it's all trust land. Even with HUD, there are lots of programs to help individuals get home loans, but not on the reservation. There is a gray area about what HUD can and can't really do on reservation land.

"So most people are living in what they can afford out-of-pocket. So we're back to G-sheds, because people can get a downpayment for a G-shed together, but even then they will end up paying so much more than the value of those sheds over the lifetime of their payments. But if that's the option you have, that's the option you have. The other thing we see a lot of is people needing help repairing after house fires. No one has insurance on the reservation. So if you have a house fire, I mean, you can lose everything. So who comes if you need to fix a home after a fire? Red Feather.

"I'm currently working with three families dealing with the aftermath of home fires. Two of the homes are still livable, and they just need their roofs repaired so the family can move back in. So we're working on helping to make that happen. At least that is something we can do that not a lot of other groups or people can do.

What has been the most impactful thing for you so far in doing this work?

"To see the people happy, especially the elderly. They are always so grateful. They are always like "we've never gotten anything, we never get any help, no one's even come by to check on us or follow up or anything". So even when we just deliver firewood or those sorts of smaller solutions, it can make such a difference. It's just really impactful to see people getting the services they really need."



ALFRED LOMAHQUAHU



EVERYONE DESERVES A HEALTHY HOME



Mr. Manymules of Tonalea needed home insulation and significant roof repairs to make his home livable. His house also needed a completed bathroom, including plumbing and septic work so he could have access to basic hygiene within his home. Red Feather was able to complete his repairs and bathroom installation, including the installation of aging-in-place inputs like grab bars to ensure his safety, allowing him to move into the home.

Thanks to the Northern Arizona Housing Fund of the Arizona Community Foundation for helping to fund this project!

PROGRAM METRICS

COMMUNITIES THAT GOT FIREWOOD DELIVERIES TO HELP WITH HEATING NEEDS THIS WINTER:

18

TOTAL CORDS OF FIREWOOD PROVIDED FOR COMMUNITY HEATING SUPPORT:

372

FAMILIES RECEIVING A WATER OR HYGIENE SOLUTION IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS:

80+

DIY HOME WEATHERIZATION KITS DISTRIBUTED THIS FALL AND WINTER TO IMPROVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND KEEP HOMES WARM:

70

