"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."

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 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

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.

You can send check donations to PO Box 907, Bozeman, MT 59771.
What makes Red Feather’s work so vital in the community?

“In my experience I haven’t really seen any other nonprofits working as closely with people, maintaining or improving 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.”

“Their experience has been an eye-opener for housing advocates. They have HUD housing here, but they are looking mainly at building new homes. A few years ago they were doing remodeling and rehabilitation of older homes, and they did a pretty good job, but with HUD it’s always a long wait. And with as 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 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 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 to the homes 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 there that focuses on housing. Red Feather is really the only nonprofit that is in the housing space trying to fill that gap in housing government 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 serving the people. As a CSA, your job is really to work for the 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.”

“Due to Peabody closing their mine here, 80% of the Hopi tribal budget is gone. So the villages aren’t getting the tribal allotments 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 that sometimes 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 also get things moving quickly.”

“So outside entities like Red Feather that don’t have to follow the bureaucratic systems of HUD housing or tribal government 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.”