

## Good Health and Wellness in Indian Country: Success Stories



August 2016

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently fund tribes and tribal organizations to participate in the Good Health and Wellness in Indian Country (GHWIC) initiative. The purpose of GHWIC is to create community-driven, culturally tailored projects that use Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) changes to reduce health disparities in American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities. The long-term goal of GHWIC is to reduce rates of AIAN death and disability from diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. GHWIC also supports tribal and tribal organization projects that reduce obesity rates and tobacco usage among AIAN.

The California Rural Indian Health Board, Inc. (CRIHB) is a tribal organization that uses GHWIC funds to run a program called ACORNS (Advancing California Opportunities to Renew Native health Systems). ACORNS assists 37 sub-awardees to conduct community health needs assessments, develop community action plans, and implement tribe- and/or health program-specific chronic disease prevention programs.

This portfolio includes GHWIC success stories from several ACORNS sub-awardees.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bakersfield American Indian Health Project</li><li>• Big Valley Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians</li><li>• Bishop Paiute Tribe</li><li>• Bridgeport Indian Colony</li><li>• Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians</li><li>• Cold Springs Rancheria</li><li>• Greenville Rancheria Tribal Health Program</li><li>• Indian Child and Family Preservation Program</li><li>• Indian Health Council, Inc.</li><li>• Karuk Tribe</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians</li><li>• Native Women's Health And Wellness Alliance, Inc.</li><li>• Pit River Health Service, Inc.</li><li>• Quartz Valley Indian Reservation/Anav Tribal Health Clinic</li><li>• Redwood Valley Rancheria</li><li>• Round Valley Indian Health Center</li><li>• Santa Ynez Band Of Chumash Indians</li><li>• Sonoma County Indian Health Project, Inc.</li></ul> |
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California Tribal Epidemiology Center  
California Rural Indian Health Board  
4400 Auburn Blvd. Phone: 916-929-9761  
2nd Floor Fax: 916-929-7246  
Sacramento, CA 95841 Email: [epicenter@carih.org](mailto:epicenter@carih.org)

The development of this document was funded by the  
Indian Health Service Cooperative Agreement  
#U1B1HS0014



## **BAKERSFIELD AMERICAN INDIAN HEALTH PROJECT**

The Bakersfield American Indian Health Project's ACORNS project aims to increase access to local foods and implement a healthy food policy. For example, the local organic community garden increases access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and the garden is linked to a registered dietician who conducts a nutrition class once a month. Community members work two to five hours a month in the garden and receive half a bushel of fruits and vegetables. Another focus of the ACORNS project is to increase access to physical activity. Providers approve medical necessity and medical clearance forms so that community members can attend exercise classes twice a week and also have unlimited gym memberships. The most noticeable success of the ACORNS project so far is the positive difference in overall well-being. The project lead indicates that when clients first started, many were obese and diabetic. Now that the clients are moving and eating better, there is an improvement in their A1c levels and a reduction of their body mass index (BMI). Where clients used to be sluggish, slow, and depressed, now they have brightened up and engage with one another by participating in the garden and nutrition and exercise classes. Clients have been more social, which also makes them more encouraged, energetic, and motivated.



ACORNS sub-awardee walking trail.



## BIG VALLEY RANCHERIA BAND OF POMO INDIANS

The Big Valley Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians' ACORNS project aims to increase access to nutritious foods and physical activity, and decrease tobacco use. The major activities of the project are to implement a weekly walking group and nutrition class for the community, as well as tobacco policies in the workplace. The tribal office and health program is a centralized hub for the community, and many of the ACORNS project efforts are aimed at changing policies and environments surrounding this location. The project lead indicates the biggest success of the Big Valley Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians' ACORNS project is that it has the community's attention. People are excited and willing to engage in the policy, systems, and environmental changes promoted by the ACORNS project. One example of a successful environmental change is the implementation of a walking group. During the winter and summer months, a group meets every Thursday evening to walk laps inside the gymnasium located at the tribal office. In the spring and fall, the group meets outside to enjoy the outdoors and to recruit more walkers. On the last Thursday of each month, project staff members provide a healthy cooking class. Project staff members report that it has been nice to revitalize the gymnasium for adult use. Before the ACORNS project, only children used the gymnasium on rare occasions. Thanks to the Community Health Assessment provided by the ACORNS evaluation team, project staff members identified the gymnasium as an asset that could be used to promote healthy living. Now the gymnasium is a hub for multiple uses that

promote health. In addition, the project lead reports that community members are finding fellowship in these group settings. People share their challenges about living a healthy lifestyle, and the group offers support and resources. Lastly, an example of a successful policy change includes the implementation of a tobacco-free workplace policy. Staff members have already reported a decrease in the frequency and amount of smoking.



ACORNS sub-awardee walking trail through garden.

### BISHOP PAIUTE TRIBE

The primary focus of the Bishop Paiute Tribe's ACORNS project is revitalizing an existing fitness center located on tribal land, while increasing access and overall use of the fitness center. Previously, some community members voiced concern about going to the fitness center due to the center's inconsistent hours of operation. To resolve this issue, project staff members hired a new fitness center attendant so the fitness center can be open more often and more consistently. The project lead reports that addressing this issue is the biggest success of Bishop Paiute Tribe's ACORNS project thus far. In the near future, project staff members will develop systems to track use of the fitness center (e.g., machine use, peak hours) and will use these data to inform the construction of a larger fitness center, which the Bishop Paiute Tribe hopes to build in the near future.

### BRIDGEPORT INDIAN COLONY

The primary focus of the Bridgeport Indian Colony's ACORNS project is promoting healthy eating and nutritious food access in order to reduce risk factors for obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. The biggest success of the ACORNS project thus far is having a large harvest from the community garden. Currently, project staff members share the crop yield with anyone in the community center for free and hope to eventually host two farmer markets. Despite challenges such as rocky soil, cold nights, lizards, and bugs, the community garden thrives and produces many vegetables. In fact, project staff members are currently preparing to host a canning class in



ACORNS sub-awardee fitness center.

order to preserve some of the crop yield for the winter. Also, there are currently three to four families in the community that help in the garden. The project lead hopes that the harvest from the garden will bring in more community volunteers, especially elders. The project lead notes that the community garden is something that many of the community members are proud of and hopes the garden will provide for the community for years to come.



## CLOVERDALE RANCHERIA OF POMO INDIANS

The primary focus of the Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians' ACORNS project is to increase access to opportunities for physical activity in the work sector. The project lead indicates that the biggest success in the ACORNS project is tribal staff members' response to Fit Bits. Fit Bits are devices that people wear to capture their movement and the devices provide 'real-time data' estimates of the number of steps walked and calories burned in a day. In October 2015, after one month of wearing the Fit Bits, tribal staff took roughly 200,000 steps. Everyone was surprised by the low number of steps taken in a month, so the next month, the tribal staff took over a million steps. Since the implementation of Fit Bit technology in the workplace, the 12 tribal staff have maintained over a million steps per month. Also, an unexpected benefit of the Fit Bit implementation is tribal staff have reduced their fast food intake because Fit Bit has a food tracking system. The project lead indicates that the group buy-in, support, accountability, and healthy competition assisted in the development of this success story. The project lead also reports that staff members responded positively to the Fit Bits

because they were able to view their daily steps and compare their movement to health standards. All 12 tribal staff members wear Fit Bits, which creates a healthy competition to get steps in every day. According to the project lead, tribal staff now actively seek out information to see how they match health standards for physical activity and caloric intake, which is an improvement from tribal staff being passive consumers of information like they were in the past. Now many tribal staff eagerly await the release of the tribal newsletter in order to receive more health tips and educational resources.

## COLD SPRINGS RANCHERIA

The Cold Springs Rancheria's ACORNS project aims to encourage healthy eating by providing nutritious food options and to increase opportunities for physical activity among community members. The project lead indicates that the biggest success of the ACORNS project thus far is the harvest from the community garden. Specifically, the garden has a wonderful cherry tomato yield this season, and each day staff members and volunteers pick fruits and vegetables. The tasty fruits and vegetables from the garden encourage community members to get outside and harvest, as well as to engage in healthy eating. Community members have the opportunity to review a community recipe book to get new ideas for preparing the fruits and vegetables harvested from the garden. The project lead indicates that the various wellness workshops and time spent in the garden have helped community members convene, share health tips, and receive encouragement to live healthy.



Canned vegetables from ACORNS sub-awardee community garden.

## **GREENVILLE RANCHERIA TRIBAL HEALTH PROGRAM**

The primary focus of Greenville Rancheria Tribal Health Program's ACORNS project is implementing healthy eating strategies, and a secondary focus is increasing access to physical activity through its Living Well Program. As part of the Living Well Program, providers refer patients who are obese or at risk for diabetes to a dietician and exercise trainer. Thanks to the Living Well Program, referred patients are seen one-on-one, given educational information with follow-up appointments, and are referred to free and low-cost exercise activities. The Living Well Program also provides monthly cooking classes, with enrolled patients receiving healthy food information while attending exercise sessions at their gym. The greatest success of the ACORNS project so far is the monthly cooking classes that have a 97% participation rate among referred patients. These classes provide healthy recipes with items purchased from the stores at which the patients shop and give patients the skills necessary for them to make the recipes at home. Each cooking class concludes with a talking circle where the patients share successes and challenges followed by affirmations and esteem building. The project lead indicates that at least 50% of the patients have tried the recipes at home and have made them a part of their regular meals.

## **INDIAN CHILD AND FAMILY PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

The Indian Child and Family Preservation Program's ACORNS project aims to impact the community and school sector by increasing access to nutritious fresh food and opportunities for physical activity. The primary focus of the ACORNS project is creating a community garden and a recreational complex. An important success of this project thus far is the effort to create sustainable changes by forming key partnerships. For example, project staff members have partnered with their local tribal health program and a nearby tribal organization. A formal land use policy is in place with Ya-Ka-Ama Indian Education Development, Inc., and informal agreements are in place with Sonoma County Indian Health Project, Inc. to refer patients to the garden and recreational center. In addition, the project lead already expects a bountiful yield from the crop this year, which will contribute to the sustainability of this project. Overall, the project lead believes these efforts instill hope and refreshment in the community, which will result in long lasting change.



ACORNS sub-awardee community garden.



## INDIAN HEALTH COUNCIL, INC.

The primary focus of the Indian Health Council Inc.'s ACORNS project is increasing access to physical activity, which is accomplished by providing an onsite gym with weekly exercise classes. A secondary focus is creating a Community Health Profile, which is part of a needs assessment that assesses the levels of physical activity among clinic users. The biggest success so far of the ACORNS project is the positive response to the collection of information that will be used in the Community Health Profile. Project staff are collecting data through surveys administered on iPads. The project lead indicates that using this technology enhances and improves data collection because staff do not have to enter data manually.

## KARUK TRIBE

The primary focus of the Karuk Tribe's ACORNS project is creating a walking path. Specifically, project staff members hope to enhance a wildlife area near the town's center by creating a walking path with a built-in obstacle course. The project lead indicates that the biggest success of the ACORNS project thus far is that: "Excitement is brewing, and people are working together!" For example, during a community meeting, many community members rallied behind the idea of using their wildlife area for a walking path. One community member suggested creating an obstacle course along the path, which ignited even more excitement. Collectively, the community came together to make a decision to alter the surrounding environment to increase access to opportunities for physical activity.



ACORNS sub-awardee walking trail.

## **MANCHESTER-POINT ARENA BAND OF POMO INDIANS**

The Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians' ACORNS project aims to improve health and wellness in the community by focusing their efforts on creating a walking path and providing culturally relevant educational health information. The project lead indicates that the biggest success of the ACORNS project thus far is clearing debris for a walking path and laying out gravel to maintain the walking path. In the near future, project staff members hope to include educational signs on the walking path that provide cultural and safety information, as well as mileage markers. Already, project staff members notice people using the trail. Project staff members are eager to roll out additional ACORNS projects in the future, like creating gardening boxes for elders to use and generating a healthy recipe cookbook.

## **NATIVE WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WELLNESS ALLIANCE, INC.**

The primary focus of the Native Women's Health and Wellness Alliance, Inc.'s ACORNS project is promoting community gardens. Thus far, the project lead indicates that the biggest success of the ACORNS project is getting community buy-in and interest. For example, the local school hosts one community garden where students have access to the fresh fruits and vegetables and an opportunity to learn about gardening. The project lead indicates that through ACORNS funding she is able to host two annual events that educate community members about gardening practices, and she provides seeds and starter plants for community members to create their own gardens. The project lead is excited to see the harvest from these efforts.



ACORNS sub-awardee community garden.



### PIT RIVER HEALTH SERVICE, INC.

The Pit River Health Service Inc.'s ACORNS project aims to improve nutrition and overall fitness in the community. Fruit and vegetable vouchers are provided to families and there are weekly workouts and monthly cooking classes. The project lead indicates that it was initially difficult to get people, like elders and youth, to participate in exercise classes. The project lead started calling the exercise classes "walking groups," which increased participation. In addition to motivating people to start walking, the biggest success of the ACORNS project is the cooking classes. The instructor makes meals together with class attendees so that the class learns how to modify recipes to be healthier. Some class members take what they learn and prepare meals at home later. The project lead indicates that community members are responding positively to the healthier ways to cook their favorite foods and want to learn other recipes. Many families attend the classes, which encourages children to get involved in the kitchen too.

### QUARTZ VALLEY INDIAN RESERVATION/ANAV TRIBAL HEALTH CLINIC

The primary focus of the Quartz Valley Indian Reservation/Anav Tribal Health Clinic's ACORNS project is increasing access to opportunities for physical activity and nutritious food. Project staff members have specifically focused on improving an old fitness center. The biggest success of the ACORNS project thus far is reaching every household in the rural valley where the health center is located by sending out a postcard using a resource called 'Every Door Direct Mail.' The project lead indicates that this approach has drawn multiple community members to the clinic, fitness center, and community garden. The lead contact reports that community members seem more encouraged to use the fitness center with the recent purchase of new equipment too.



ACORNS sub-awardee fitness center.

## REDWOOD VALLEY RANCHERIA

The primary focus of Redwood Valley Rancheria's ACORNS project is to increase access to local foods by creating a community garden. The biggest success so far involves youth participating in the development of the community garden. For example, youth planted seeds near the end of spring, and by summer the project lead described the garden as "flourishing" and "amazing." The project lead indicates that children benefit from this project because they are able to see the product of all their hard work. Youth work has included the development of a watering schedule and building a structure around the plant beds to keep deer out of the garden. The project lead said the children who are actively involved in the garden are excited to show off their work. Ultimately, there are plans to coordinate a field trip to the garden so all school-aged children can see it.



ACORNS sub-awardee community garden.

## ROUND VALLEY INDIAN HEALTH CENTER

The primary focus of the Round Valley Indian Health Center's ACORNS project is reducing tobacco use in the work sector. Thus far, project staff members report that the biggest success is beginning the conversation about tobacco use with their community action committee and board of directors. Even though there are smokers within project working groups, these individuals still want to see changes for future generations and firmly believe that changing themselves will serve as a crucial first step toward becoming role models for the community. Project staff members report that the ACORNS project also allows them to take the time to educate themselves on the harmful effects of tobacco beyond cancer. Personal education and awareness has greatly influenced the actions of community members and key decisions makers. For example, according to the project lead, one staff member reduced her smoking habits from smoking four packs of cigarettes per day to one pack per day, and she hopes to quit smoking soon. As a result of tobacco education, the Round Valley Indian Health Center expects to post smoke-free signage on their campus by the end of the summer.



ACORNS sub-awardee no smoking sign.



## SANTA YNEZ BAND OF CHUMASH INDIANS

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians' ACORNS project aims to create an outdoor recreation area and bolster the usage of walking trails in the community. One of the biggest successes of the project thus far is engaging many of the key staff members at the tribal administration office and tribal clinic in planning for ACORNS. For example, the tribe's cultural director, environmental specialist, and clinic health staff members are all involved in carrying out the ACORNS project. Currently, the project lead is assisting with



ACORNS sub-awardee community garden.

development of a traditional Indian house called an 'Ap,' which will be at the center of the recreation area. This ACORNS team is creating educational and cultural signage for the walking path, which will also include the use of 'hashtags' so community members can connect to social media as they walk. Project staff members are happy to report that many clinic patients are actively engaging in the development of the walking path.

## SONOMA COUNTY INDIAN HEALTH PROJECT, INC.

The primary focus of the Sonoma County Indian Health Project, Inc.'s ACORNS project is increasing physical activity. A secondary focus is increasing access to healthier food for their employees and the elders who attend the onsite congregate program. To help achieve these goals, Sonoma County Indian Health Project, Inc. has a Wellness Committee that is dedicated to increasing access to different forms of physical activity. The project lead is also creating a Wellness Policy that requires menus for staff meetings to be approved by the Wellness Committee. The biggest success of the ACORNS project thus far is the noticeable increase of physical activity among community members. The project lead reports that people are excited and thankful. She describes the excitement as "infectious," and that it has led to more suggestions for healthy living (e.g., requests to stretch during meetings) and people being active participants in improving their own health. Ultimately, there is enthusiasm for the program and for overall wellness.

