

## **AZWP 2020 Grant: Year-End Summary**

Submitted by NavajoYES – January 2021 - Tom Riggbach

Our 2020 grant was written to support two essential elements of our program – our youth adventure outings and our kids running (aka Kids Marathon) programs. In the early months of the year, we were able to undertake several outings and youth activities. However, after this time, our programming – and elements of our AZWP grant – shifted appreciably due to the widespread nature of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Navajo Nation. The AZWP funds were also adjusted to meet new and unexpected needs.

As elsewhere, our shift was sudden but yet seemingly temporary. Commencing in mid-March, we began a major emphasis to addressing the needs of the Dine' communities impacted by COVID on the Nation. At the same time, we had no indication that this shift would be so long-lasting. Obviously, we were not alone in this underestimating the magnitude and gravity of the situation.

The initial elements of our efforts focused on relief assistance for local families impacted by the pandemic. We became for a time a relief agency, providing food boxes, masks, water, firewood/pellets and household hygiene supplies. Our outreach focused on some of the hardest hit regions, including the community of Chilchinbeto, which was the initial site of the virus on the Nation and quickly its epicenter. Monument Valley, Navajo Mountain, Cove, Shonto, Red Valley, T'iis Nazbas and Red Mesa were among the communities that we were able to assist. For a period of four months, we were providing regular food distributions to two of the legendary Navajo Code Talkers.

As the initial shock and impact of the virus began to wane by early summer, we began a new aspect of our outreach: providing bikes to youth and families in the affected communities. Our Dine' Bike Project geared up and stepped in to action during this time, restoring and sharing over 100 bikes across the reservation. We did major bike distribution in many of these same communities, through which we were able to share a bit of hope and joy during some days that were otherwise troublesome. A portion of AZWP funds were used to purchase helmets for youth who received bikes during this time.

NavajoYES also continued its shift to community wellness by focusing on local trail restoration and promotion, encouraging families to get out and enjoy the fresh air and light, and all that these elements bring to our lives. One Shonto resident recently remarked in a note to us: "Thanks for the trails. They have kept me sane." We are humbled to have such an impact in the lives of our Dine' communities.

The many events that we generally host through the year became virtual in 2020. Yet, even in that format we were able to offer a reprieve from the nightmare that was COVID. The participants spanned the gamut: entire families, youth and elders; runners, walkers and bikers; elite athletes, weekend warriors and casual participants. No matter the category, all of the above benefited from participation in events that, for a moment at least, took our minds off the suffering.

Clearly, the year 2020 has been different from what we ever could have imagined just 12 months ago as we entered that grant cycle. Yet, in the face of some of the darkest days that we have witnessed and experienced, we have worked tirelessly to have a positive impact on reservation life.

We appreciate the long-standing partnership with AZWP and hope to continue our work on the Nation with your support.