

COEUR D'ALENE INDIAN RESERVATION PLUMMER, IDAHO

One Sky/One Earth Food Coalition

On the rural Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation in Plummer, Idaho, the incidence of obesity, diabetes, and other food-related illnesses are exceptionally high. Disconnected from the traditions of their native ancestors, members of this community are often left with unhealthy food choices, such as processed foods, deli foods, fast food, or microwaveable options. To tackle this issue, the Youth Activity Director, an active member in the art community, and Laura Laumatia collaborated with one another to create the One Sky/One Earth Food Coalition, with the simple goal of “making it easier for individuals to make good food choices.”

The coalition began as a simple conversation between like-minded individuals who were concerned with the unhealthiness of the reservation's food system. Through discussions with various community members involved with youth, community health, and growing food, the Coalition discovered a fundamental problem within the community—most people did not know how to cook. Many individuals were capable of heating up pre-processed foods, however, when it came to using fresh ingredients and spices, most were unsure of what to do. And with the poor variety of food selections available and the nearest grocery store being a good 35 miles away, it was not a surprise that the community's health was suffering.

Aware of the resistance and intimidation community members may express if change was too forceful, the One Sky/One Earth Food coalition decided the best way to approach this issue was to incorporate their goals into the traditions of the community. Celebrations from holidays to funerals are central in this community, and food is a key feature to these celebrations. With the notion that “food should bring people together, taste good, and be real,” the coalition began to host dinners



Members of the One Sky/One Earth Food Coalition pick berries on the reservation

where community members could come and enjoy some food. At these dinners food documentaries such as *Food, Inc.* and *Fresh* were shown. After the screenings, members from the Coalition would facilitate discussions with community members about food and health. Rather than bombard the community with diets foods or nutritional facts, the coalition fostered an enjoyable and friendly environment where community members could learn more about how food affects health and voice their own opinions.

One of the main barriers that the Coalition faces is changing the perception within the community that health is not of primary importance. Many are unaware of how food choices can alter health, and how one's health influences almost every aspect of their lives—from daily activities to school grades. And with the perception that choosing the healthier food choices will cause extra strain on food budgets, many are resistant to accept the words of the Coalition. In order to tackle this issue, the Coalition has used various research and findings to show the community that health is a real issue. Through meetings and discussions, the Coalition teaches community



One Sky/One Earth Food Coalition aims to bring back the foods that their ancestors once used, such as huckleberries

members how to fit healthy food choices into their grocery budget, and how such choices will benefit them in the long run.

The coalition has not only aimed its focus on changing individual choices, but hopes to expand its reach to the community as a whole. The reservation is home to commodity wheat and lentil production, all of which are exported out and never kept in the community. With the goal of helping the community return to its native roots and be more self-sustainable, the Coalition hopes to retain at least 10% of this production for use by members of the community. In addition, there has been a push to develop community gardens, where the community will be able to grow food for their own consumption. The Coalition is also in the process of developing a producer directory, which will list local community producers where community members can go to purchase such items as herbs, jams, milk and eggs. Eventually, they hope this will lead to a more sustained farmer's market for the warmer seasons.

The coalition also hopes to instill change in various institutions in their community. With the aid of partners and nurses from the University of Idaho, the coalition aims to push local schools to transition from unhealthy pre-processed foods to scratch-cooking using healthy ingredients. The Tribal Wellness Center and the Youth Activities Director have already revamped meals offered during summer camps and the food options available

at the Wellness Center snack bar. With this, the Coalition hopes to tackle the issues of childhood obesity and improve the day-to-day food choices that children are exposed to.

The reservation is also home to a casino, where hundreds of employees go to work every day. The employees have access to a meal room 24/7, which is often filled with leftover food from the restaurants that are not necessarily healthy. The coalition is pushing for the casino to offer more healthy food options such as a salad bar, and also allow employees to take a 20 minute exercise break. Through these institutional changes, the Coalition hopes that these behavioral changes will have a trickle-down effect and infiltrate other parts of the community.

Through community building and awareness, the One Sky/One Earth Food Coalition envisions a community who is not only able to make healthier food options, but wants to. By instilling in community members an active desire to be healthy, the coalition hopes to rebuild and restore a community that has been plagued with unhealthy foods and health-related illnesses. And by changing the structural foundations that cause these unhealthy food choices, the Coalition is able to improve the health of the community as a whole.

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