

Newsletter



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: AICHO

American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO)

AICHO has a mission to honor the resiliency of Indigenous people by strengthening communities and centering Indigenous values in all aspects of our work.

Food sovereignty is based on core universal principles, centered on the right to produce your own food, with an emphasis on local sources and cultural integrity. The American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) has been engaged in increasing food security and food access through food sovereignty strategies since 2012, beginning with internal access at the Gimaajii-Mino-Bimaadizimin (We Are, All of Us Together, Beginning a Good Life) permanent supportive housing program. Staff made conscious decisions to offer healthy and fresh snacks, meals, and pantry items to Gimaajii residents, instead of heavily processed foods or sugar laden items. Traditional Indigenous foods and beverages are served in daily meals and community events. An urban rooftop garden space was developed, where staff and residents worked together to grow vegetables, herbs, traditional and sacred plants like sage, sweetgrass, and traditional tobacco.



Food sovereignty means food security that lasts and where the community is rooted in the process.

Written By LeAnn Littlewolf (Anishinaabe, Maaiin'gan Doodem), AICHO Co-Executive Director

AICHO purchased a corner grocery store in 2018, which will become the region's first Indigenous Food Market. The grocery store will offer local Central Hillside residents access within walking distance to eggs, milk, bread, fresh produce, and other food items. In addition, Indigenous food will be featured. The store will have a deli and coffeeshop area. To build greater community engagement with the Indigenous food system, AICHO developed community education events and an Indigenous Food Expo, the Indigenous Food & Art Markets (a BIPOC farmers market), a co-created Native community-supported agriculture (CSA) with Native Wise Farm, and greater retail access at the AICHO social enterprise Indigenous First Art Gallery & Gift Shop. The Indigenous Food & Art Market accepts EBT/SNAP benefits and offers Hunger Solutions Market Bucks match program, to amplify food purchasing power. In 2020, AICHO mobilized emergency food distribution with PPE and health information access in response to the COVID global pandemic. Food distribution happens every two weeks with curbside pickup. On alternate weeks, food bags are delivered to unsheltered community members and older adults/elders. Food items distributed include Indigenous traditional foods, local, organic, and healthier options. AICHO actively purchases from a variety of Indigenous and local vendors, strengthening the local economy and supporting a new Indigenous economy.

SUCCESS STORY - ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY AND WELL-BEING IN A CLINIC SETTING

Access to healthy food is one key component of the social determinants of health. During the winter of 2021 Hunger Solutions, a statewide non-profit focus on addressing food insecurity, hosted a networking meeting focused on increasing food access. Itasca SHIP participated in this meeting, and they saw an opportunity to make a connection between local public health and Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital. This connection led to a system change in the way Itasca County residents who are experiencing food insecurity and other well-being issues can get support to lead healthier lives.

Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital was already interested in addressing food insecurity in the Itasca County region. Itasca SHIP organized a follow up conversation to connect the key partners. A pilot project emerged to begin to address food insecurity in the clinic setting. Through this pilot, all patients answered two food insecurity questions during the intake process. If the patient answered that they would like assistance, they were referred to Hunger Solutions through an internal process at the clinic. Then Hunger Solutions staff would follow up with the patient to connect them with resources. 164 referral applications were sent to Hunger Solutions as part of the pilot project.

Of these, 48 patients were connected to resources, including SNAP applications, information about food shelves, WIC, and a local farmers market. During these interviews, it became clear that other social determinants of health needs were unmet for many patients. Hunger Solutions also assisted many of these patients with connections to resources to support other well-being needs, such as energy assistance and rent help.

This pilot project has now developed into a permanent process at Grand Itasca. In collaboration with Itasca Public Health, patients who screen as food insecure are referred to Itasca County Health & Human Services and KOOTASCA Community Action for a follow-up connection to healthy food and well-being resources. Kelly Campbell with Grand Itasca Clinic and Hospital said, "the change in process has been really good for us as an organization." Grand Itasca is now exploring other ways to improve access to healthy foods in the community.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT - KRISTINA MATTSON

Position: Cook County State Health Improvement Coordinator

Married, 3 kids, 1 guinea pig, and many dust bunnies. I love to cook, bake, knit, bike, and explore the North Shore with my family and friends. My eldest daughter and I have a gluten/ dairy-free bakery booth at our Local Foods Market during the summer. Looking forward to grow and learn!



UPCOMING EVENTS AND RESOURCES

- **Hwy 61 Project Completion Celebration** - Thursday, Sept. 15, from 11:30 AM to 1 PM at the Grand Marais Library
- The Remember Project "Fortune Cookies" play to promote dementia-friendly communities - Tuesday, Sept. 20 from 10 - Noon. In-person and via Zoom. [Register Here.](#)
- **MN Health Equity Networks** Core Trainings on Thursday, September 22 from 1 - 4:30 - **Register Here**
- Health Equity Core Training (1-2 PM); Community Engagement Core Training (2:10-3:10 PM); Networks Core Training (3:20-4:20 PM)
- Walk to School Day 2022 - Wednesday, October 12 - **[Click here to visit the MN Walk to School Day](#)**

Toolkit



The Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) supports community-driven solutions to expand opportunities for active living, healthy eating, commercial tobacco-free living, and well-being.