



Monthly Gathering

On December 1st 2016, the Gathering of Good Minds project held our third meeting and talking circle. Continuing the theme of health and historical trauma, our Action Planning Committee suggested that our next meeting focus on Food and Wellness.

We met again at our new location at UCR's Glen Mor student dorms. Our meeting began with time to visit and check-in and learn how to take our own blood pressures. Our small notebooks continue to be a terrific way keep track of our blood pressure and what we eat from meeting to meeting. Sean Milanovich (Cahuilla) provided a blessing and we shared a meal.

Brief Review of Food and Wellness Research



The Khumalo Family - Afua Khumalo is on the right

Afua Khumalo, RSBCIHI's Nutrition Director began our talking circle by sharing information on the benefits of a traditional diet. The diet of tribes in the local area included semi-cultivated acorns, greens, and grains, as well as fruits, seeds, bulbs, roots, game, fish. The diet changed dramatically as life was forcibly moved to reservations, and government commodities were

distributed as a food replacement. Cheese, canned meat, lack of fresh foods transformed Native Americans diet for the worse.

Traditional Native American diet included many grains and beans and approx. 200-400 grams of fiber. Research has shown that we crave putting a grain and bean together which makes for very high protein eating. The recommended is about 25, today we eat on average 15. Today's diet is not healthy.

We also discussed the Three Sisters: corn, beans, and squash. From Iroquois knowledge, the Three Sisters are precious gifts from the Great Spirit. Corn provides a natural pole for bean vines to climb. Beans fix nitrogen on their roots, improving the overall fertility of the plot by providing nitrogen to the following years corn. Bean vines also help stabilize the corn plants, making them less vulnerable to blowing over in the wind. Shallow-rooted squash vines become a living mulch, shading emerging weeds and preventing soil moisture from evaporating, thereby improving the overall crops chances of survival in dry years.

Sources:

North American Food - <http://quatr.us/northamerica/before1500/food/>

Ancient Poop Gives Clues to Modern Diabetes Epidemic -

<http://www.livescience.com/21824-fossilized-poop-diet-diabetes.html>

<http://www.rsbcih.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=xslsHQcAKGU%3D&tabid=179>

Talking Circle

Home cooked meals and sources of struggle

The talking circle began with memories of home cooked meals. Remembering that every meal was made at home and all the work that women do to keep the family well. Even though the government commodity foods would end up in the house, it was not something people wanted to eat. The preference was to have the foods that were growing and raised nearby. Many people in the group wished they could have more home cooked meals.

While commodity foods were one problem, now we are faced with fast food options every day. We discussed concerns about the numbers of youth who tend to prefer the fast foods, especially the spicy hot Cheetos. Between school and work it's a struggle to have home cooked meals. Fast food makes it easy to deal with busy schedules.

Another concern had to do with youth programs that still bring chips and hot dogs. While we recognized that kids like these foods, as a health center we think we should have better options.

The struggle for healthy foods was summarized in the statement that even if you want to eat healthy, purchasing healthy foods is more expensive than buying fast foods.

We also discussed the importance of barriers to accessing healthy foods. If you want to gather or fish you have to obtain permits and licenses. There are even larger problems with the way institutions use the land. The windmills across the desert have displaced the barrel cactus and knocked down many of the basket weaving plants. Cactus is a delicious and nutritious food, and basket weaving assists in the gathering of food.

Traditional foods

Conversations around the efforts to eat local traditional foods centered around wewish. Wewish is made from acorn and many joked about it being an acquired taste. Gathering the acorns and cooking the wewish is important as it brings generations together cooking for funerals and other gatherings.

When thinking about traditional foods, we are reminded that we need to teach our kids the creator's story. To know that Mūkat's ashes made the plants grow, that they are the creator's body.

Activities that work

A few activities that worked for group members were eating more plant-based foods and eating less meat. Benefits they experienced were decrease in pain, and generally feeling better.

Some participants had participated in a 13 week diabetes prevention program. During the program they ate healthier, lost weight, and reduced their sugar levels. Many in the group expressed interest in seeing the program implemented again.

Possible paths

If we want to eat more vegetables we should learn about our local area, see what's in our own backyard. This allows us to know our neighbors, gather foods together, and can care for each other.

Other ideas from the group included classes to teach us about the body. We can learn what food does to our cells and organs. The classes could also help us learn to prepare our foods so that making healthy choices is easy. Our kids will know how to cook because you've been modeling it for them.

Our group was interested in community gardens and gardening. We discussed ideas about building a garden at the San Manuel clinic. We could also look for funding or model projects like Jane Goodall's roots and shoots (<https://www.rootsandshoots.org>).

Finally people suggested exploring a project to gather and raise native seeds. We could draw on the resources of the Native Seed bank in Tuscon <http://nativeseeds.org/about-us> and the Mohave desert seed bank <https://www.mdlt.org/headquarters/> run by the Mojave Desert Land Trust.

We ended the evening with a creative writing exercise led by our new Creative Writing Professor, Alison Hedge Coke.

1. Think of a comfort food that you're drawn to. A food that you turn when you're struggling.
2. Remember the first time that you came to that food.
3. Consider the memory with which the food is associated.
4. Replace eating the food with the memory
 - a. If it is a disturbing memory, go deeper. In the memory is probably a happier first memory.
5. When you replace eating the food with the good memory it helps with eating less, and not feeling bad about self.

Additional resources:

Traditional Foods in Native America: A compendium of stories from the Indigenous food sovereignty movement in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndwp/pdf/part-i---traditional-foods-in-native-america-april-21.pdf>

Upcoming Meetings

Our monthly gatherings meet at the University of California Riverside from 5-7:30pm.

Glen Mor, Room J315
University of California
Riverside
400 W. Big Springs Rd.
Riverside, CA 92507

For directions see -
<https://osf.io/ey4p7/>
Upcoming meetings will be held
on January 5th, February 2nd,
and March 2nd.

January 5th meeting topic will be **Traditional Medicine**.

If you'd like to know more about the Gathering of Good Minds Project, please contact Juliet McMullin - julietm@ucr.edu or 951-827-7853. Or visit our website

http://healthycommunities.ucr.edu/projects/good_minds.html