

## Goodthinking 4 All Our Relations Addresses the Needs of Impoverished Tribes and the 'Seemingly Forgotten'

BY EISA ULEN

Food insecurity. Inadequate medical and dental care. Insufficient mental health support.

For far too many people in Indian country, these barriers to optimal health are the norm. But when even such basic elements of survival as fuel, underwear and indoor plumbing are extravagances beyond financial reach, the nonprofit group Goodthinking 4 All Our Relations steps in to help fill the gap.

Founded in July 2009, Goodthinking 4 All Our Relations provides warmth in the form of blankets, coats, clothing and shoes, as well as diapers, infant care products and personal hygiene products. Its targeted beneficiaries are "Native children and elders who are most in need," said Alex "Kisa" Jimenez (Hopi), the organization's founder and executive director.

Goodthinking 4 All Our Relations, headquartered in Enumclaw, Washington, is not a large operation. Its small staff—down to its grant writer and website specialist—is composed entirely of volunteers. Nonetheless, even with a budget of only about \$18,000 for the 2012–2013 fiscal year, Goodthinking has delivered approximately 18 to 20 tons of "warmth" and about \$2,500 worth of propane and electricity in that period so far, according to Jimenez. It can also pay some fuel bills for those who are in exceptional need.

"Goodthinking 4 All Our Relations was formed because our grandmothers are crying and praying every night for our help," Jimenez said. "After many years of traditional ceremonies, they came during ceremony and whispered: 'For far too many years our people have been suffering in severe poverty. Elders freeze to death in winter. Our children are ending their lives. Because of these conditions, and the residuals of these

conditions, it is time to make a change.'"

Jimenez believes that the dispossessed in Indian country must first receive basic necessities before they can begin to disentangle themselves from suicide, health disparities, domestic violence, substance abuse and other life-threatening issues that have long held them back. The idea



*Hope comes from inside a 14-foot box van.*

is to "advance quality of life while promoting social dignity though relief of the poor, the distressed and the underprivileged, honoring all paths of cultural and spiritual traditions."

Unlike similar organizations that are burdened by bureaucracy or red tape, Goodthinking 4 All Our Relations can help people quickly. Jimenez cited examples like a mother and her children who have run from a domestic abuse situation with only the clothes on their backs; Goodthinking also delivers on a large scale to entire communities.

"We deliver the 'warmth' in our 14-foot box van," Jimenez said. On just one trip to the Navajo Nation in December 2012, the group delivered 5.3 tons of supplies and clothing.

"We delivered much of the diapers and baby products to the Women Infants and Children and Indian Health Service programs," Jimenez said, "then

with the help of our tribal liaison set up different pickup spots on their reservation's different districts where we had an old fashioned giveaway."

Residents did not have to show proof of need to obtain the supplies and clothing. "We operate on the honor system," Jimenez said.

Goodthinking has no corporate sponsorship or government grant funding. But it is sponsored by the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, the Snoqualmie Tribe, the Chehalis Tribe and the Squaxin Indian Tribe. As Jimenez puts it, the sponsors not only provide the group with financial support, but also "a voice in the process of carving out a path for creating future programs." The entire operation is overseen by a private executive board composed "exclusively of tribal elders, who are spiritual leaders, who make the final decisions."

Identifying and reaching out to those who stand most to benefit from Goodthinking's services entails a multipronged approach. Sometimes, Jimenez said, tribal organizations that offer suicide intervention, utility assistance and domestic violence intervention contact his office. Outreach also comes from local Indian Child Welfare offices and the federal Women, Infants and Children program. And Goodthinking makes its own proactive efforts.

"We use government data from the U.S. Census Bureau, IHS, and the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs," he said. "Then we contact the tribe itself, obtaining an upstanding tribal member as our liaison, and speak with at least one tribal elder. We do research the particular tribes we help for their poverty level and unemployment rates."

In the nearly four years that Goodthinking has been around, Jimenez has encountered challenges aplenty. But he is convinced that it is all worth it.

"What we have witnessed in spite of the conditions," he said, "is our people wanting to be educated, wanting to succeed, wanting to keep their dignity—when it seems as though nobody cares." ☪