



Organization helps thousands of Native Americans in need in Arizona

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Reporter

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A Navajo elder thanks a National Relief Charities reservation partner after a firewood donation. (Photo: National Relief Charities)

PHOENIX -- Poverty is pervasive in the communities on 13 Arizona reservations served by National Relief Charities.

"The most important thing for people to understand is that in this country, we have Third World conditions, and that's what we see on many reservations that we serve," said Helen Oliff with National Relief Charities. "This is the highest rate of poverty in the United States, but the charitable giving is three-tenths of one percent of all giving."

NRC provides food, winter fuel and emergency and disaster relief support.

"We have emergency preparedness-type programs like home repairs and weatherization for elders and food boxes, in the event elders get shut in during the winter," Oliff said.

NRC supports preventative healthcare on the reservations and education is a major focus as well.

"We provide everything from school supplies to college scholarships to supporting literacy and job training programs," Oliff explained. "Education is a cornerstone of self-sufficiency."

This holiday season, NRC is gearing up to serve thousands of Thanksgiving and Christmas meals.

Oliff said tribal elders will get emergency items like smoke detectors and fire extinguishers under the tree. Children will receive games, books, DVDs and maybe gloves and hats.

"It's so heartwarming and it's the best part of the job, and of course I'm drawn to the children," Oliff remarked. "Everyone is so grateful. When you bring everyone together during the holidays, there's a sense of belonging."

If not for National Relief Charities, Oliff said some of these children and elders wouldn't have a Christmas.

"I have had elders say, 'This is the first gift I have ever received,' or 'This is the first time I ever saw Santa Claus,'" Oliff said.

One of them was 92.

NRC hopes even more people will consider them during the annual Giving Tuesday national event.

[Giving Tuesday](#) occurs on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, so this year, the event is on Dec. 3.

Giving Thanks is an annual, national day of giving to and volunteering at non-profit organizations as a way to kick off the holiday season.

There's a holiday store where people can help by purchasing gifts in the [Southwest Holiday Store](#) for children and practical gifts such as firewood and food boxes for elders, and emergency preparedness.

The [NRC blog](#) also keeps people informed about issues in Indian country.