What is Department of Indian Work’s mission and vision for the American Indian community? What are your broader goals for the American Indian community?

We will always be here and happy to provide our families with more basic and emergency needs such as food, clothing or gas to get to a funeral, but we also want to be able to help them uplift their economic mobility and focus on their bigger goals. We will do what we can to help families get to the next step where our services aren’t needed and we can start to break that generational poverty.

We were able to purchase our delivery van at the height of when the pandemic first started and can now deliver to families that have limited access to transportation, are homebound, or for whatever reason are not able to get to us.

We were created to serve American Indian families and our focus will always be the American Indian community, but no matter who you are, you’re welcomed and you’re greeted with respect at our food shelf.

What makes Department of Indian Work’s food shelf unique?

We’re the only SuperShelf food shelf for the American Indian community in the state of Minnesota. In 2019, we did a complete overhaul on our food shelf and started emphasizing what is nutritious, spending more money on those fresh fruits and vegetables, and placing them up front right when you walk in.

Another thing that makes our food shelf so special is our staff. The people we serve say the staff at DIW is friendly, respectful, and greets you by name when you walk in the door. I like to say we’re a family and we treat our families like family. When you’re part of a family and someone is going through a tough time, then that’s where your family comes in to support you. DIW is the family support for those hard times, a trusted community resource for the people we serve.

What is coming up next for Department of Indian Work?

We are currently looking for a new space to move into as we have outgrown our current food shelf and clothing closet after 69 years in this same space. We have seen a 150% increase in usage in the past year and need to continue operating at this higher level. Stay tuned for a new location announcement later this fall!

How can co-op shoppers best support the food shelf right now? Or maybe Department of Indian Work in general?

Donating food, money or even your time all are very helpful for us. Financial assistance in particular is always great because we can stretch that dollar further at the food shelf. Once we move this winter, we will also be accepting clothing donations again.
What are the most needed items at the food shelf right now?

Baking items, peanut butter, tuna, kids’ snacks, and hygiene items such as masks, hand sanitizer, laundry soap, dish soap, shampoos and conditioners.

Beyond the food shelf, what are some of the other support services and programs DIW offers?

DIW has three main focus areas plus a COVID-specific program right now:

1. Emergency services: food shelf, clothing closet, and referrals and resources.

2. American Indian youth enrichment program: an after-school and summer program for American Indian youth, grades 1 through 8, in Saint Paul.


4. COVID-19 Community Coordinators: current partnership with Minnesota Department of Health to serve as a COVID-19 resource hotline for the American Indian community in the Twin Cities, host vaccine and testing events, and give families accurate COVID-19 information in a timely manner.

This fall as we think ahead to Native American Heritage Month, Thanksgiving, and other celebrations, are there any events or ways the food shelf will be celebrating with special meals that the co-op can support?

We do a Thanksgiving meal every year even though some of our families don’t celebrate Thanksgiving. For example, my family doesn’t celebrate Thanksgiving in the traditional Thanksgiving way, but we use it as a time to have a meal, spend time with our family and celebrate each other rather than celebrate the history of that day.

We create 250 Thanksgiving bags that have a turkey, real Native wild rice, onions, stuffing, cranberry sauce, and more. You can help support Thanksgiving meals directly by donating during the month of November.

Support this critical work by rounding up or donating at the register to support the Department of Indian Work during November! Learn more on pg. 17.
October Recipient

*Sweet Potato Comfort Pie (SPCP)* works to advance racial justice and equity, heal damage caused by race-based trauma and elevate marginalized voices and experiences. SPCP does this by using the powerful Black cultural food tradition of making and delivering sweet potato pies; facilitating story-circle dialogues with intentional listening and authentic sharing; and by building multicultural alliances that deepen commitment to racial justice work.

Donations will support the Rose Service Scholars program that links 11th- and 12th-grade girls to highly respected and professionally acclaimed Elder Mentors. Each youth participant receives an honorarium along with other gifts and resources that promote cultural identity, food appreciation, and career guidance.

November Recipient

*Department of Indian Work* provides a safe, Indigenous space to empower American Indians toward self-determination while respecting cultural and spiritual diversity. Department of Indian Work operates the only SuperShelf food shelf specific for the American Indian community in the state, along with additional diabetes prevention, youth enrichment, and COVID-19 support programs.

Donations will help stock the food shelf and distribute healthy and culturally specific food such as wild rice, bison, walleye and teas for over 900 American Indian families living in the East Metro.

December Recipient

*Keystone Community Services* is a community-based human service organization helping feed the hungry and assisting people in crisis in Ramsey County. Keystone serves over 33,000 people through two food shelves, their Foodmobile, and via food distribution programs to meet basic needs.

Donations will ensure the food shelves are stocked with healthy foods like milk, meat and produce to keep our neighbors in need fed and nourished. The funds will also expand drive-through food distributions, a new food shelf delivery program, and the start of planning for a new Community Food Site.