



COMMUNITY SAFETY INCUBATOR REPORT

Tohono O'odham Nation
Sells, Az



June 28th, 2025

hello@justcomaz.org

www.justcommunitiesarizona.org

ABOUT JCA

MISSION: To create, foster, and resource community-based models for safety and justice outside the punishment system.

We work with people impacted by the punishment system to promote a holistic view of safety that encompasses physical, emotional, and economic health and wellness; cultivate the next generation of community leaders; and build community-based solutions.

Community Safety Incubator Projects

Goal: To invest in projects or services identified by neighborhood residents as solutions to the problems they face in order to increase safety and wellbeing of all community members.



Incubator Projects are designed to:

1. Generate dialogue, engagement, and cohesion in neighborhoods.
2. Invest in interventions, projects, and programs that increase community safety for all.
3. Strengthen, expand, and replicate holistic approaches to community safety that already exist in our neighborhoods.
4. Increase the capacity and sustainability of community-based organizations and initiatives that represent and serve under-resourced communities that have experienced high rates of arrest and incarceration.



BAHIDAJ CAMP

Location: Outside of sells TO nation.

Community Safety Team Members: Noland Johnson, Vivian Donahue

Project Consultant: Jesse Pablo

Project Duration: June, 2025

PROJECT COMPONENTS

- Preparing the site for a three day long camp by clearing brush and flattening the ground to accommodate all the campers as well as building the k'uipud (harvesting tool)
- Selecting the harvest zone and organizing the campers to rise bright and early (3:30am!) to be ready to harvest the cactus fruit.
- A well attended day of making traditional tohono o'odham sitol (syrup) out of bahidaj (cactus fruit).
- And of course, bonding and laughter over delicious meals served under the shade of a large canopy.



A DAY OF TRADITIONAL HARVEST

Jesse and his family have been carrying on the ancestral tradition of harvesting the saguaro fruit (bahidaj) for many years. For the Tohono O'odham, the harvest is crucial to ensuring a good summer monsoon season, and marks the beginning of a new year.



Noland presents native seeds to the youth.



Collecting bahidaj using a k'uipol

The fruit is collected from the tops of cactus that can be as tall as 50 feet, then cleaned, and the pulp is then cooked over a fire for many hours until reduced to a syrup (sitol).

Prior to the big day, Jesse and the safety team made careful preparations, building k'uipol harvesting tools out of the ribs of dried saguaro. Then they led the 30 campers out to the harvest site, instructing youth and elders alike on how to collect bahidaj.

An important part of the weekend was an education on traditional Akimal farming techniques. Flood water farming has been a tradition way of life for the TO for hundreds of years. Noland keeps that tradition by passing flood irrigation techniques and his knowledge of native seeds to the next generation.



Bahidaj (Saguaro fruit)



Jesse boils down sitol (syrup) over a hot fire on a hot day

PASSING DOWN A TRADITION



Lining up for a delicious breakfast



Preparing a k'uipol



Preparing the bahidaj into sitol



Eating breakfast together!

IMPACT

At each Incubator site we offer up a survey to participants--whether they are members of the Community Safety Team, volunteers who help with the project, or just neighbors who attend events.

The surveys are designed to capture a snapshot of who was served by the project and how they feel it impacted their safety, social connectedness, and wellbeing.

Generally, the surveys are shared via a QR code so that participants can complete them on their phone. We failed to anticipate that there is no cell service or wifi on this part of the Tohono o'odham reservation. Although we made several efforts to reach participants after the event, we were only able to collect two surveys.

While disappointing, this was an important reminder of the challenges faced by native and rural people in Arizona. Going forward, we will always have paper copies of the surveys for those without phones or wifi.



WHO WAS SERVED?

Survey responses confirm that participants in the incubator mirror the makeup of the community. One identified as Latino and the other as Native American. One man, one woman.

Both respondents have been personally impacted by the criminal punishment system or have had a close family member who was systems-involved.



IMPACT

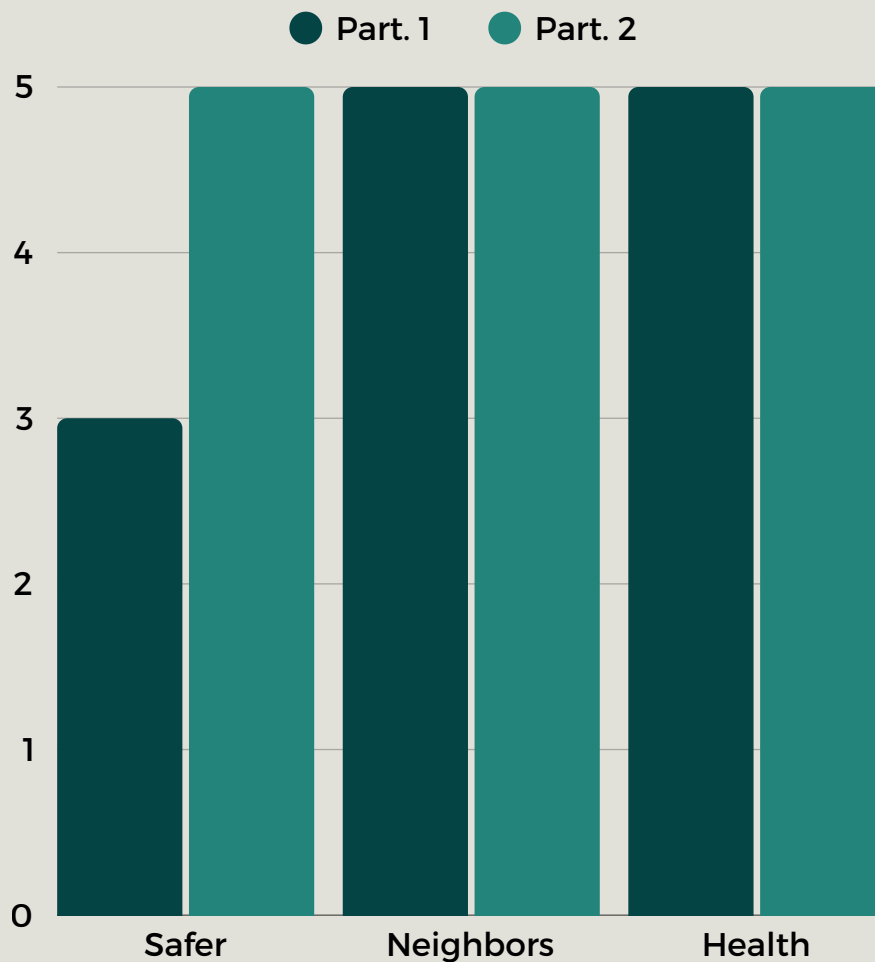


SAFETY:

The majority (81%) of residents surveyed said **the project made them feel safer in their neighborhood.**

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS:

Both respondents said that **the project helped them get to know their neighbors better.**



WELLNESS:

Respondents unanimously (100%) reported **that the project would contribute to greater health and wellness of people in their neighborhood.**

FEEDBACK



Bahidaj camp is such a special experience and brings together community members and newcomers visiting from different parts of the world to learn about the process. It was a fun , safe weekend for all the families who came.



Was a good experience to harvest fruits from the saguaro cactus



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