

Hwal'bay Ba:ja Gwe av bada đop Gana:v ja

(Stories of a Bad Virus
that Came to the
Hualapai People):

Hualapai Stories of
Community, Hardship,
and Endurance
During the Covid-19
Pandemic



Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to the Hualapai people who left us during the COVID-19 pandemic and those who continue to struggle with the lasting effects of the pandemic. The teachings, laughter, and strength of those who left us will never be forgotten, and for those who continue to experience the ongoing effects of the pandemic, please know that you are not alone.

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and Endurance During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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About This Booklet

This booklet contains the personal memories of Hualapai Tribal members who lived through the COVID-19 pandemic that arrived in Peach Springs in the Spring of 2020. It is designed to both provide a space for present-day community members to reflect and heal from the terrible events that befell the community and to preserve the community's experiences for future generations of Hualapai people. We also hope that reading these reflections encourages others to remember those who could not be properly mourned during the pandemic. The stories contained in this booklet demonstrate the strength, wisdom, endurance, and cultural values that supported the community through a time of crisis.

We thank the following people for their courage and strength in sharing their personal memories of the pandemic for the benefit of future generations. Their voices are the heart of this book.

Cheryle Beecher

Brook Bender

Duane Clarke

Ayesha Havatone

Nicholas Hunter

Carrie Imus

Hubert Imus

Mary Imus

Randi Mahone

Cheyenne Majenty

Juliana Nez

Camille Mahone Nighthorse

Vivian Sue Parker

Jorigine Paya

Arnell Powskey, Jr.

Gensean Putesoy

Sterling Selana

Wynona Tapija Sinyella

Zeke Smith

Rosemary Sullivan

Cooper Susanyatame

Barbara Tinhorn

Angeline Walema

Lucille J. Watahomigie

Tifany Watahomigie

Donnell Yazzie

Overview of the Project

I hope that [readers] get that they were not alone, that their experiences [were] shared, whether they knew it or not, and that everybody was experiencing it. –*Brook Bender*

From March 2020 to December 2022, 321 members of the Hualapai community were confirmed to have contracted the COVID-19 virus. Of those cases, 23 people are known to have passed away from the ensuing illness. This official accounting documents the devastating toll the pandemic had on the Hualapai community but fails to capture the experience of those living and working on the Hualapai Reservation during the height of the pandemic. Each person who contracted and passed away from the virus was not an anonymous stranger but a relative, friend, and valued member of the vibrant Hualapai community. Each loss was felt by the whole community. Each sickness brought concern. On November 4, 2023, the Hualapai Tribal Council sponsored *Gud U:k* – a Hualapai Traditional Memorial to commemorate those that were lost during the pandemic.

Now, more than five years after the start of the pandemic, 26 Hualapai Tribal and community members reflect on their own experience with the pandemic. This booklet is the result of a Hualapai-led oral history project developed to document and reflect on the Hualapai community's experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. Through interviews with Tribal elders and youth, the project captured the lived experiences, collective memory, and ongoing legacy of the pandemic within the Hualapai community. Hualapai elders and youth interviewed for this project were asked to reflect on several broad themes including their knowledge of previous disease outbreaks that have affected the Hualapai, community life in Peach Springs prior to the pandemic, personal and community experiences during the pandemic, lasting impacts, and messages for future generations. This booklet shares excerpts of these interviews. The complete audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews are housed at the Hualapai Tribe's Cultural Center.

Gathering these oral histories required patience, care, and respect. Interviews were conducted by staff members from the Hualapai

Department of Cultural Resources and the Elderly Services Program, with the support of a professional historian. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing participants to guide the conversations, which primarily took place in English, though some interviews included the use of the Hualapai language. The interviews followed protocols designed jointly by the Department of Cultural Resources and the Elderly Services Program to ensure that elders and knowledge holders were treated with dignity and that the information they shared was collected in an informed and voluntary basis. The process created opportunities not only for the recording of stories but also for healing, reflection, and connection between generations. Many participants reflected on how talking about periods of hardships can help in the healing process and encouraged others to reflect on their own histories and shared history as Hualapai people.

While this booklet does not contain the whole community's perspectives and experiences, it is our hope that you as the reader find some of your own feelings and memories reflected in these pages. This event is not the first time that Hualapai people have had to come together to persevere and take care of each other. We hope the stories and information in this book serve as a memorial to an unprecedented time for the Hualapai people and the world.

Hana ga and thank you,

Editorial Team

Hualapai Community and Reservation Prior to the Pandemic

I felt that our little community was thriving. –*Carrie Imus*

The Hualapai Tribe is comprised of approximately 2,300 enrolled Tribal members, 1,353 of whom live on the Hualapai Reservation. *Hàkđugwi:v*, Peach Springs, serves as the Nation's capital and principal community on the Hualapai Reservation, which spans over one million acres in northwestern Arizona. As a sovereign Nation, the Tribe is governed by a nine-member Tribal Council.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Peach Springs was described as a thriving and bustling community. Traditional events, language classes, arts and crafts classes, and community social events were held on a regular basis. The Tribe's enterprises, including the Hualapai River Runners and the Grand Canyon Resort Corporation, supported critical programs for the Hualapai community while hosting millions of visitors during their visits to the Hualapai Reservation. A typical day in Peach Springs saw elderly people active in their community, children attending school, and a steady flow of visitors. Those interviewed for this project recalled an active and open community life in Peach Springs.

It was freedom. We were free to roam and come and go to work and children [were] going to school, whether it was with buses or walking, and everybody seemed to be content with their lifestyle and their way of living. –*Angeline Walema*

Before COVID hit within Peach Springs, it was really lively, a lot of tourism, a lot of things going on within the community. ... Departments were really up and going, everybody was working hard to make a living, a lot more openness than ... how it is today. – *Hualapai Tribal Member*

Pre-COVID, you had more sense of community. You had larger gatherings. We had powwows or bird gatherings. We had Pai camps. There was a lot more interaction amongst ... community members and [with] outside Tribal communities too. ... We were reaching almost ... a million visitors [annually] out at Grand Canyon West, and you were seeing all kinds



Angeline Walema, a resident advocate at the Hualapai Healing House and Hualapai elder. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.

of nationalities coming from the Asian communities, African communities, Canadians, people from south of Mexico ... to view what we had out at Grand Canyon West and also with ... the river rafting. So this was and still is a destination.
–*Cheyenne Majenty*

We would have our gatherings, we would have bake sales, we would have bingos, and when it was time, we had wakes ... it was just very lively. –*Barbara Tinhorn*

The Beginning of the Pandemic: Global News Stories

I was in shock. A lot of fear had overcome me. I felt lost and just confused of what to expect. I thought it was the end of the world. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

From January to March 2020, alarming news stories of a respiratory coronavirus called COVID-19 that emerged in China and was rapidly spreading across the world filled news broadcasts and social media feeds throughout the world, including on the Hualapai Reservation. For many

community members living in Peach Springs, the initial reports of the COVID-19 virus seemed like a far-away concern that was unlikely to affect the Hualapai community directly.

I thought it was a hoax at first. That's what I thought, like, "oh my God, they're just doing something to scare us again ... it's Y2K all over again." –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

When I first heard about it, it was during that time when fentanyl started coming out too, and I was in Kingman, Arizona, locked up in the county jail... and I didn't really pay no mind until it was serious. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

Well in the beginning ... it was just like any other disease. –*Sterling Selana*

As news of the coronavirus became more widespread, however, many people recalled becoming filled with concern and uncertainty about how the community would be affected.

It brought fear because it was a serious illness. ... It was like everything was going to change and it scared everybody. –*Angeline Walema*

My family always called me paranoid because my son was born ... immunocompromised. I had seen what was going on in China probably about four months prior to it becoming a national emergency here in the U.S. and I kept telling my family that it's coming. There's some ... sickness coming. We need to be ready. –*Cheyenne Majenty*

I went shopping [and saw] ... things just start to disappear off the shelves and ... it was March. ... And we went back again after the pandemic set in and it was even worse ... I mean, everything was empty. –*Rosemary Sullivan*

The Pandemic Officially Arrives at Peach Springs

It was a fight for our modern existence ... with that invisible enemy. –*Duane Clarke*



Rosemary Sullivan, pictured in her office, is a program manager with the Hualapai Special Diabetes Project. She served on the Hualapai Tribe's Incident Command Team during the pandemic. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 29, 2025.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization categorized the spread of the COVID-19 virus as a pandemic, and on March 17, 2020, the Hualapai Tribal Council declared a state of emergency in response to the global spread of the virus. For many Hualapai people, this order confirmed their fears that the new virus was a serious threat to the community. At this early stage of the pandemic, the Tribal response team and community members were dealing with a lot of unknowns with regards to the virus.

In March of 2020 is when the Tribe declared a state of emergency and we had, ironically, a very large community meeting down at the Tribal gym to announce that we ... were declaring a state of emergency ... we didn't have an active case at that point yet ... but just to declare a state of emergency ... you saw a lot of panic. You saw fear. There were a lot of community members worried about the government coming and putting us [up] or taking away our rights. That's what a lot of people were scared of. Or that we were going to die. –*Cheyenne Majenty*

My initial thoughts was to look for the truth of what was happening. And as I prayed and sought for truth, I thought

Cheyenne Majenty currently serves as a Hualapai Tribal Council Member (2022-2026) and is the Hualapai Tribal Emergency Manager at Hualapai Tribe Emergency Response. She also served on the Hualapai Tribe's Incident Command Team during the pandemic. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 29, 2025.



Hualapai elder Camille Mahone Nighthorse. The Hualapai dress she is wearing was made by Augustine Butler. The cradleboard was made by Ms. Nighthorse. Photograph provided by Camille Mahone Nighthorse, undated.

there is something going on here that's uncontrollable and that we need to just lean on our Creator to help us through what is going on. We needed to support each other, but it was so hard because many people were sick, so we didn't want to go near them to catch it. Everybody was isolating themselves. –*Camille Mahone Nighthorse*

On April 8, 2020, the first Peach Springs resident tested positive for COVID-19, ushering in a wave of Tribal government efforts to try and limit the spread of the virus.

April, that's when I would say our world changed here on Hualapai. ... We implemented more stringent responses as far as issuing curfews, and this was even prior to our first case ... [coming] about. It justified why we needed to implement these security measures that we had in place ... I just remember the team in a state of unknown, and pulling the team back together and telling them, "hey, we just got to be precautious, got to take all the precautions that we know of at that time." I remember we were seeking any type of mask, anything to shelter our eyes. I remember having goggles on at the time, always wearing gloves. If we could find any type of something to protect ourselves, we were doing that at that time. –*Duane Clarke*

Experiencing the Stay at Home Order at Peach Springs

On April 11, 2020, following reports of the first case in Peach Springs, the Tribal Council issued the first stay-at-home order. That order would remain in effect until September 4, 2020, when the Tribe adopted a color coded system, which mandated graduated restrictions depending on the level of infection within the community. Interviewees recall that the stay-at-home order disrupted everyone's daily lives but was also viewed as a critical step in limiting the spread of the virus and protecting the community.

I remember that's the longest time I've spent away from my mother. Four months. The most that she did was come to the driveway and just stare at me while I was at the front porch. That was probably one of the hardest things I had to

***** UPDATED *****
PUBLIC NOTICE
RED ALERT
STATUS
AS OF 10AM ON 11.24.20
LOCKDOWN WILL GO
INTO EFFECT ON
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER
25, 2020 AT 8PM

For more information call ICT
(928)769-0001,0002 or 0003



Sign communicating curfews to the Peach Springs community during the pandemic. Image courtesy of the Hualapai Tribe's Emergency Operations Center.



A homemade sign urging residents to wear a protective mask in Peach Springs, Arizona. Photograph by Madelena Herrera, 2020.

do. I couldn't hug her, I couldn't see her. I think within those four months, I'd only seen her twice. And that kind of put a strain on me. Within the family as well, because I know my siblings did miss our mom. It was hard for all of us.
–*Arnell Powskey, Jr.*

I didn't see my mom for three months. And it was just really sad ... that's time that I lost. ... Because she passed not too far after that.
–*Brook Bender*

Well, we knew at times we had to stay within our yard, and we couldn't go past the fence. –*Vivian Sue Parker*

Everybody was kind of like ants being scattered, like a lot of fear overcame them ... and it was very scary. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

I think in that time, too, we were living in an unrealistic world because it was hard for us to accept that that was the real day-to-day living, being locked down, confining in your own home, having to eat what's within your pantry. –*Gensean Putesoy*

Though the Hualapai Tribe acted quickly to limit the spread of COVID-19 through social distancing measures, those measures were unable to fully contain the spread of the virus. Tragically, the Hualapai community began to experience the loss of community members from illnesses tied to contracting COVID-19. Well-known elders within the community were some of the first community members to pass away from the illness.

My sister caught that COVID again in April of 2020. She was just at home for a whole month, the whole month of April, and then she ended up going to the hospital. She went into surgery a couple times while she was in the hospital, and on May 5th, she passed away from that COVID. She had just come out of being intubated. ... she was one of the first ones on our reservation to catch that COVID and pass away. –*Lucille J. Watahomigie*

For many Hualapai community members, the isolation experienced during the stay-at-home order was extremely difficult. This included not being able to visit and comfort loved ones in the hospital struggling



Lucille J. Watahomigie is the former director of the Hualapai Bilingual Education Program and a Hualapai elder. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.

for their lives. For a community used to being with their families, forced isolation was an unprecedented experience and hardship.

Life was depressing for me. I feel as if the whole Tribe went into a deep depression because everything shut down. Nobody was walking the streets, never even seen any kids outside. Yeah, it was just all bad. – *Hualapai Tribal Member*

I couldn't see my family and I see them every day ... and I remember one time it was about two weeks straight and that was really difficult living alone. – *Vivian Sue Parker*

I couldn't talk to [Hubert, my husband, while he was hospitalized for COVID-19]. That was more devastating because I couldn't hear his voice. – *Mary Imus*

During the stay-at-home order, movement on and off the Hualapai Reservation was greatly restricted through checkpoints.



Mary Imus and her husband Hubert Imus are both elders in the Peach Springs Community. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 29, 2025.

I remember that I had to go with my family and go to these checkpoints. You had to state where you were going, what time you were supposed to be back. But if you had to leave, then you would provide documentation and the time that you left. Also you would have to open up your trunk and say, “Yeah, look, I got groceries,” but it was pretty crazy times. –*Juliana Nez*

We were really [only] supposed to go two times out of the community but when you went out there was a station. There was different stations like checkpoints. ... And they would write your name, where you were going, they took your license plate, and they also [noted] the time. –*Barbara Tinhorn*

Many community members recall the stay-at-home order as being associated with an unprecedented restriction of their movements.

I compare it to Gotham, like [in] Batman, because ... it was almost like martial law here because we had multiple resolutions that were upheld and enforced. ... People were not allowed to leave ... outside their yards from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. We had



A guard station and checkpoint in operation on the Hualapai reservation during the pandemic. These guard stations were situated at entry points to the Hualapai Reservation and used to regulate movement on and off the reservation. Photograph provided by Duane Clarke, undated.

checkpoints set up throughout the whole community. You were only allowed in and out per checkpoint three times a day. If you had to go out during those midnight hours for a medical emergency, you had to bring back ... some kind of note stating you went to the hospital or if you went out, you stayed out. You know, if you didn't, then you got fines or it even escalated and ones went to jail, especially when prohibition happened.
–*Cheyenne Majenty*

I think the big takeaway for me when [the] pandemic hit our community was our freedom. We lost our freedom. We weren't able to move about like we did before and ... that affected the family and the kids that were going to school. –*Carrie Imus*

I know when COVID had hit this community, there were lockdowns. People weren't even allowed to go out of their homes. For people who were in nursing homes or hospitals, their family members were not able to go visit them. It was such a sad and scary time for most people. ... I felt bad for those who were experiencing the illnesses, schools being shut down, and people



A pandemic-era social media post encouraging residents to stay home. Image courtesy of the Hualapai Tribe's Emergency Operations Center.

not going to work. It kind of just put a stop to everybody's daily living, which was just the worst thing that could happen to a community. And so many people were dying and the loss of so many elders was tragic. –*Camille Mahone Nighthorse*

They had security ... everywhere throughout the community ... They had big barricades all over. We [were] really like we are going to war. But that's how it was. And then if the police see you coming out, pulling out of your yard, they will be right there, [asking], "Where are you going? Did you get permission?" –*Gensean Putesoy*

I didn't like [being quarantined in the Lodge]. I cried most of the night. I was calling [my family]. My sister was right next door. ... I was just like scared and I was crying, calling my sister, "I'm going to die." – *Hualapai Tribal Member*

I was in the lodge for like two months, me and [my mom]. We were doing everything they were telling us to do, everything we could do to get rid of it. But ... it was frustrating. I wanted to leave. I wanted to get out. –*Nicholas Hunter*

The Pandemic and Schooling

The pandemic also disrupted traditional school routines for many Hualapai children and young adults. For many, the pandemic brought an end to in-person learning and a switch to online learning.

I feel like that's one of the reasons why I never finished school. Because when I went back, it was just never the same. The online experience, like not really having a teacher in front of you, I didn't learn. *–Hualapai Tribal Member*

I had a wonderful high school life. I hung out with friends, I was in sports, I was in clubs. But as soon as [COVID-19] hit high school, I had to either switch online or stay on campus. So, I switched online and it was a tragic change for me. Especially as a senior because you get those senior things. And I felt like I got left out. *–Juliana Nez*

I believe I was around maybe 13 turning 14, somewhere around there. ... The first thing that comes to mind is my promotion



Donnell Yazzie was in high school when the pandemic began in 2020. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.

parade. ... What I remember is they put on a little parade for us where everyone was still locked down. ... Everybody stayed in their little yards and we just went around. And that's probably the first thing that comes to mind, because that was the last time I seen any of my friends. –*Arnell Powskey, Jr.*

Serving as an Essential Worker During the Pandemic

For some Tribal members, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic meant working as essential workers. This included serving in Tribal Administration, on the Tribe's Incident Command Team (ICT), in Elderly Services, or at the Hualapai Healing House, as well as operating the Walapai Market. The Tribe's response was a coordinated effort between the Tribal Council, the ICT, and Indian Health Services (IHS). These groups became responsible for determining the policies and procedures that the community would follow.

I want to say that during [the] pandemic time, [Elderly Services was] providing up to 30,000 or plus meals a year for those two years... it was a trying time for the senior program. They did what they could. They did a really good job at supporting the elders, ... And our average meals per year are nowhere near 30,000 ... maybe 3,000 a year. –*Brook Bender*

I was employed with the Hualapai Tribe here at the Hualapai Healing House. ... we were all fine, the ones that were here. And we already knew this is what we're going to do. We were making our own plans. And we were just to [ourselves]. That's why we didn't want any more [clients] to come in. But then [they] brought somebody in. And that person was a close contact ... Luckily, none of us tested positive out of that group. ... But it was scary. And they shut this place down. –*Gensean Putesoy*

What I witnessed was a team [of workers at the Hualapai Tribe and IHS] that was ready to protect Hualapai at any cost. It didn't matter to them the hours, it didn't matter to them the exposure, but definitely we took the precautions. –*Duane Clarke*



Members of the Hualapai Tribe’s Incident Command Team delivering flowers to a Hualapai Tribal member on their birthday during the pandemic. Photograph provided by Duane Clarke, May 2020.

I was working as a [Community Health Representative] at the health department. ... And as a [Community Health Representative], there was no education or anything coming out. So, we ... developed this little flyer about ways to help stop the spread of a cold. –*Brook Bender*

One challenge for the Hualapai Tribe during the pandemic was communicating the complex terminology associated with the COVID-19 pandemic to Tribal members whose first or primary language was Hualapai. In these situations, bilingual Tribal employees and members had to come up with novel ways to explain the virus, its impacts, and safety precautions.

Some of the [elders] were not really understanding, comprehending English. So, I would talk to them, a group at a table, in the language, and they would say, “we do not really understand what it is. Is it a type of disease that occurred years back in Valentine at the school?” And I said, “yes, it’s something like that. But then they say this COVID is some illness, I could say disease,

because they say it's going to affect some people for life. And it's something like a cold. Then they say in your nostrils, you won't be able to smell anything. Like if you were burning your bacon or your eggs, then your tasting, you won't taste it either. So then some will come down with headaches and their energy will be taken away. And it's something like a cold, but just be prepared. It occurred already at different areas, but it's going to come through here. And just prepare yourself. If you watch news, that tells a lot about it too." But an elder said, "we don't really understand the terminology that they use. What is a hand sanitizer?" And I would tell them it's like washing your hands but with a mixture of a little bit of alcohol so it will kill the germs" –*Jorgine Paya*

One essential service of the Hualapai Tribe during the COVID-19 pandemic was operating the Walapai Market. Throughout the duration of the pandemic, this market continued to receive and deliver food for the community, while constantly having to adjust to changing safety protocols and the needs of community members.



Judy Gala, an employee at Elderly Services, prepares meals for seniors at the center. Elderly Services provided up to 30,000 meals a year during the height of the pandemic. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.



The Walapai Market remained open and provided food to the community throughout the pandemic. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.

When we first went on lockdown, I was working at the Walapai Market. We closed for a week. ... I was locked down by myself in my mom's house. ... I was alone, and it was scary. ... And then we got our calls to go back. They wanted us to go back because people were running out of food, people were needing things. So we pretty much supplied the community when they were on lockdown. They'd call in, order, give us their card numbers, and we'd deliver. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

Even towards the end [of the pandemic] ... it was still hectic and chaotic, because ... it wasn't planned, it was just something thrown at us, and we did it. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

Hardships Caused by the Pandemic

Some of the hardships brought on by the stay-at-home orders put in place by Tribal leadership to protect the Hualapai community from COVID-19 resulted in not being able to comfort community members who experienced the loss of family members or to physically say goodbye to loved ones before they passed away.

I mean, there was a lot of hardships ... during the pandemic. ... when a family ... lost [some]one ... and you couldn't be there ... all we could do from our homes was pray for them, burn the medicine, and that was our way of supporting the loved ones and the ones that were healing. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

It was pretty scary. ... When COVID hit our homeland, we lost a lot of loved ones ... some were pretty young and we never thought that they would catch this illness and pass on. ... It was devastating to our people. –*Cheryle Beecher*

That's when a lot of our elders died, a lot of them ... and the bad thing about it too is you couldn't go to the hospital, you couldn't go in there, you couldn't say goodbye to them, and there were no wakes, no church service. Only a couple of the family members could go to the graveyard to bury them. –*Barbara Tinhorn*



Hualapai elder
Barbara Tinhorn at
her home in Peach
Springs. Photograph
by Madelena Herrera,
May 13, 2025.



The Hualapai Tribe's Emergency Service Building. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 29, 2025.

Well, while being locked up and being away from home, you know, I heard about the health crisis here. ... [I] lost family members due to COVID-19. Hearing [about] these deaths in prison, ... it really took my spirits away and I couldn't do anything about it. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

It was difficult because I hear [of] families losing several family members. I lost an older sister, Sarah, and we had the wake at Cholla Ranch, near mom's ancestral land — Big Sandy. It was only our family and three bird singers. Wakes were not always done traditionally as [they were] done before Covid. –*Vivian Sue Parker*

A lot of people were passing away. I remember one of the first few people passing away. ... I knew them and not having a funeral service for them, as Hualapai people we do a traditional wake for them, and that was never done for them. And that, I was really sad to know that they did not get the chance to have that. And so I guess emotionally it kind of broke me. –*Sterling Selana*

I lost my daughter. It wasn't through COVID, but it was an incident that occurred concerning domestic violence. ... Losing a loved one ... we have to do things right there and then. And then with me, I couldn't put her away in a way that I wanted to. –*Angeline Walema*

The pandemic did impact the community by taking a lot of our loved ones. I lost over 13 of my own family members from COVID and, you know, it really hurt when we couldn't put them away traditionally. We couldn't have wakes. We couldn't be there with them ... Some died alone. ... I think it's important that we don't forget the ones that we lost.
–*Cheyenne Majenty*

The hardest part was definitely dealing with the death and seeing the loved ones and seeing the families and just some of the restrictions that were in place at that time. If a loved one was in the hospital, it was hard for any of the Tribal members to see their loved ones in the hospital because of the restrictions that the hospitals had. And just the emotional toll that was with the families. We felt every tear. We felt every emotion that you could think of in this response and like I stated earlier, it did take a toll on me and today it still takes a toll on me, you know, thinking of what we went through. –*Duane Clarke*

That was a real hardship for all of us Tribal members because our way of putting away a person who passed on is by having a big gathering and having a wake all night and singing and dancing, eating and talking and crying about the loved one that has passed on and offering condolences to each other ... [but] families couldn't gather at that time and ... it was just a real bad situation socially and mentally and physically.
–*Lucille J. Watahomigie*

It was still. It was quiet. It was heartbreaking. Our emotions were high. It was sad. You could just feel it, you know. Even during the time when I had lost my brother and my family members to it. They allowed us to go ... make the arrangements. And everywhere from here to Bullhead to the funeral home and then coming back home, you could just feel the hurt and the pain that we were going to go through. There was no movement. –*Nicholas Hunter*

For members of the Tribe's Incident Command Team (ICT), enforcing safety protocols and restrictions on their own community was challenging.

We're here because we're trying to protect all of our people because we're not a large population, and we're trying to do the best we can do to make sure things are okay ... they have food to eat, they have water, you know, and just trying to make the best of it, even though we did have some ... resistance to what we were doing. But ... I think the first part of the pandemic was probably the scariest part, because that was the one where we really lost a lot of people pretty quick ... I think because of the community being so small, you know, everybody, you either know them as a casual acquaintance, or they're part of your family. –Rosemary Sullivan

We were trying to develop mechanisms and protocols for people to get back to work. What is the testing pattern? How often should we test people, getting them supplies for [things] like masks, because we're still masking at that point. And then trying to make people comfortable with going back in public and stuff. And that was our whole transition, trying to get people

Hualapai Tribe COVID-19 Color Coding Alert System			
GREEN ALERT	BLUE ALERT	ORANGE ALERT	RED ALERT
COVID-19 Lowest Risk	COVID-19 Active	COVID-19 Active	COVID-19 Active
No Active Cases being Monitored by Health Officials on the Hualapai Reservation.	No Active Cases being Monitored by Health Officials on the Hualapai Reservation.	No Community Spread According to Contact Tracing.	Community Spread is evident according to Contact Tracing.
No Community Spread	No Community Spread	Required Mask Wearing	Mask Mandate: All individuals wear a Mask on the Hualapai Reservation.
Herd Immunity at 70 %	All Precautionary Measures in place as directed by CDC to ensure the spread of virus is limited. Use of Face Mask Wearing, sanitizing methods and properly washing of hand.	Parks Closed	Parks Closed
All Precautionary Measures in place as directed by CDC to ensure the spread of virus is limited. Use of Face Mask Wearing, sanitizing methods and properly washing of hand.	Social Distancing practices and limiting visiting household or social gathering.	CURFEW for age 17 and Younger	CURFEW for age 17 and Younger
Social Distancing practices and limiting visiting household or social gathering.	Food Vending allowed; follow CDC Guidelines	Gatherings not to exceed 80 People Must Follow CDC Guidelines	Non-Essential Gatherings are Prohibited.
Food Vending allowed; follow CDC Guidelines		Limiting household visiting.	Household visiting discouraged.
		Food Vending allowed; follow CDC Guidelines	NO FOOD FENDING ALLOWED
			Stay Home, Stay Alert in Place
WEBSITE INFORMATION: WWW.HUALAPAI.NSN.GOV SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION: FACEBOOK/Hualapai Tribe Response			

The Hualapai Tribal Council implemented a color coded graduated alert system to manage COVID-19 risks, issuing notifications to inform the community about the current spread of the virus and required precautions. Image courtesy of the Hualapai Tribe's Emergency Operations Center.

to follow whatever was approved. And it was hard at that point because people were tired. People were tired of being controlled.

–*Brook Bender*

For some people, the stress of the pandemic drove them or loved ones to cope with the stress and isolation by using alcohol or other illicit substances. While for others, the experience of the pandemic helped them overcome cycles of incarceration and substance abuse, including by receiving services through the Hualapai Healing House.

I did have a drinking problem before the pandemic. I was smoking several different contrabands. It made me feel less anxious to think about what was going to come next, what was going to happen. It was probably the main challenge that I did face. The depression and feeling like I was alone. No one was out there. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

It would probably be easier to list things that weren't a challenge. But the main things were, like I said, getting tired of each other. All kinds of contraband coming through the house.



The Hualapai Healing House provides services for individuals recently released from jail, rehabilitation, or probation. The program is designed to provide life skills and culturally based activities to assist clients with reintegrating into the community. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.

I still to this day don't know how it ended up in the houses.
–*Hualapai Tribal Member*

As of today, my family ... was just hurt and disappointed, [saying], "... We need you. We need your help. We need you to be out here. We need you to stop going in and out of jail," things like that. So that's what I'm doing today. I'm trying to make a better self and a better opportunity for myself, you know, and be a part of the Tribe, be a part of something. So I really take that into consideration today. I'm doing well right now and doing okay ... I'm here today. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

Coping with Pandemic

During the pandemic, Tribal members found a variety of ways to cope with the fear, isolation, and sickness that surrounded them.

I am a Type A personality, and I am used to being around people. I'm a single person, I live by myself. So, it was really hard because I love to socialize. ... I was grateful to have my granddaughter [living with me]. ... We played games like UNO and Yahtzee. ... And to keep myself busy I had the TV, word search, and reading. –*Barbara Tinhorn*

Listening to certain naturopathic doctors, I made sure I was getting enough vitamin D, zinc, vitamin C, and just staying away from people. ... I did not let it scare me. I did not let it stop me, but I just was more careful and stayed away from the general public. I felt like the best place to be was out in nature, to have the clear natural settings and natural air, the clean air, and to stay away from the cities.
–*Camille Mahone Nighthorse*

I did a lot of writing and just kind of trying to speak about the Hualapai ... and positive affirmations and things like that. I've always been like that. I really care for the Hualapai, and I love where I come from and who I am, and I know that we're small, and we're barely on the map, but we are on the map. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

Well aside from my job on ICT ... I did a lot of paintings, drawings, ink drawing, water color. ... I still have some of the pieces that I made during the pandemic. ... Yeah that was my main coping mechanism for the time. –*Sterling Selana*

I am always busy cleaning, baking and projects of hand sewing Hualapai skirts and vests, quilts for my family. My garden is something I look forward to each year. I grow sweet corn and zucchini and have 9 trees in my yard along with blue agave cactus and gopher plants; both clone themselves so they are numerous in the yard. My Alberta peach tree continues to harvest 350–700 peaches! –*Vivian Sue Parker*

Our virtual gatherings for the Hualapai Tribal community members was online bingo. ... And that was fun. You know, that took our minds off of what was going on. And that was our moment to come together as a community, be happy. –*Gensean Putesoy*



Sterling Selana participating during the Hualapai Day Parade. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, September 26, 2024.

I grew pumpkins, squash, melons, and sunflowers. –*Sterling Selana*

I did resort to dancing. That was one of the main things that I did. It was probably one of the things where I can be outside. I couldn't walk anywhere, so I might as well get some exercise someday ... And that was a big help for me. My very outgoing personality and charisma and dramatic flair really got me out there ... [Whether] it was hot, cold, snow, I was out there on that pavement moving around. Well, permitted we were allowed to be outside. And I think one day I made an account, posted one of my dancing videos. It got a lot of likes, I think it was like 20, but that was a lot for me. So I kept doing it, kept doing it and I got pretty up there. I think before I ended that account, I was at 600 or 700 followers. And that was pretty good for me. I felt good. –*Arnell Powskey, Jr.*

I think one of the highlights is ... we had piñons coming out in the fall. And people were saying, "There's piñon!" And I said, "well, can we go piñon picking?" ... And we were able to get permits ... [and] we went out as a family and to hear the kids running and laughing being out in the country and doing something that we do traditionally. ... I think they really enjoyed [it]. –*Rosemary Sullivan*

The Pandemic's Legacy

As I reflect back ... [the pandemic] was our modern fight for existence. It was a modern battle that our ancestors had gone through. –*Duane Clarke*

On May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization ended the Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and the Hualapai Tribe began easing restrictions. For all the people interviewed, the pandemic generated lasting changes for themselves, their families, and the community.

For many in the Hualapai community, the experience of the pandemic left lasting lessons in terms of practicing self-care, cherishing time with loved ones, reconnecting with and actively participating in Hualapai traditional practices, and taking precautions to protect their families and community.

The lasting thing is that we've learned to be more careful about our health. We hear that COVID is still out there. So the practices of washing your hands, wearing your mask, being in tune with news, new epidemics [that] we hear about.
–*Cheryle Beecher*

I just want to share that it really affected a lot of us because we dealt with a lot of loss, a lot of death unexpectedly. ... Had the pandemic not come about ... our people would still be here. ... But I think ... we've all learned something from it, to love and appreciate your people more ... because you never know what could happen ... especially [to] your family. –*Nicholas Hunter*

I guess my message to everybody is in this time, everyone needs to at least come together and appreciate each other and appreciate the time that you have with people in your life because they can just be gone in the blink of an eye. ... And like I said, it is not the first or the last time that we will have pandemics like this. Our ancestors went through it. Our grandparents probably went through that too. So just appreciate your time here, the people you have in your life because we don't when something like this will happen. –*Sterling Selana*

I think with the Tribe ... just passing on what you learn or what you've learned to those around you, that's what I try to do, is try to teach people how to do things. And one of my other coworkers says, "well, if you teach them to do it, then they'll continue to do it." –*Rosemary Sullivan*

Other community members reflected on how the pandemic has left a lasting mark on the community. Many community members saw the isolation experienced during the pandemic as leading directly to reduced engagement within the community and negative behaviors that developed during the pandemic.

Because of isolation, because of alcohol and drug use. ... It changed a lot of people. I've seen people that sobered up because of it. And I've seen people that have gone downhill because of it. And this community, I feel it's not the same.
–*Arnell Powskey, Jr.*



Cheryle Beecher is a Hualapai elder and a former bilingual education instructor. She has held many positions in Peach Springs over her lifetime. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.



Nicholas Hunter is the Wellness Coordinator and Lead Advocate at the Hualapai Healing House. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.



Jorigine Paya is a Hualapai elder and Hualapai Language Program Manager at the Department of Cultural Resources. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 29, 2025.

There's more opioids. ... Out of all the kids I have taught all these years, I am on number 28 of the kids that have either died from alcohol, from COVID, suicide. ... I don't see us ... together. I see us separated. –*Barbara Tinhorn*

I guess it is not really community-based like it used to be. People are more to themselves it feels like. I remember before the pandemic you had kids running around outside, it was lively. –*Sterling Selana*

The lasting effects [are] the pain and sorrow of losing all our loved ones who passed on unnecessarily. ... I just felt like the protocols in the hospitals were wrong. And so that's one of the main effects, along with a lot of our young people who were made to stay indoors and not able to get out and exercise, to play or go to school. I'm sure it affected them greatly. I think also a lot of people who didn't go to work or couldn't go to work anymore and then being made to go to work after everything was lifted, everybody kind of lost the momentum and energy from being used to not working for many months. –*Camille Mahone Nighthorse*

I think it kind of made me more isolated. It kind of made me [feel] like, “Yeah maybe I should just stay home and not go anywhere as much.” ... I haven't really gotten to that point to think about it too much. Because it is still fresh. –*Juliana Nez*

Our way of life definitely changed after March 17th of 2020. And it has taken a toll on the Hualapai Tribe and the Hualapai people ... it's just the emotional toll is still there. If I'm feeling it, I could only imagine just how my relatives are feeling, how my neighbors are feeling. –*Duane Clarke*

Many community members also reflected on how the pandemic interrupted Hualapai lifeways. This included through the loss of knowledgeable elders and the increased difficulties in engaging in community events.

I believe, in a sense, that it has affected ... the way we present ourselves as a culture or as a community as well. I remember for a whole year after the pandemic, they didn't do any dances,

Hualapai Tribal member Juliana Nez, pictured at Window Rock, Arizona. Photograph provided by Juliana Nez, undated.



no gatherings, no events. ... It [struck] fear into a lot of people, because we did lose a lot of people because of the pandemic.
–*Arnell Powskey, Jr.*

When I was growing up, I used to hear my grandfather sing every morning ... he used to sing songs in the middle of the day and Sunset songs. He just sang every day in Hualapai. ... That's before the pandemic was happening. Afterwards, I just don't see as much ceremonies happening ... People in my generation, which are millennial people in our 40s, we still have questions, but it's hard to ask those questions from people because some people are guarded. –*Brook Bender*

A lot of the people that passed away were the people that held a lot of knowledge. ... And just like a blink of an eye, they were gone. So I guess it affected people that were still wanting to learn the culture and they'll never have those mentors that we had. ... To have the people that were so deep into the culture and people that actually believed it and people that actually followed it and lived it. –*Sterling Selana*

People also expressed positive changes they have seen in the community since the pandemic in terms of more services being offered and systemic problems associated with housing and mental health services beginning to be addressed.

I see that the lasting change that's stuck within this community is resilience. The resilience of our community is just an example of our ancestors' resilience. We were able to adapt and overcome and I think our people just know how to roll with the punches. They do. You see that a lot of needs were identified through the COVID pandemic and a lot of them are being addressed now. You know, we had homelessness that was going on, overcrowding in homes. We had a need for food distribution programs and you see a lot of those things are being addressed now and there are resources now in the community that our people need and that they appreciate because the pandemic showed where our weaknesses were within our Tribe, but it showed us how to be resilient and adapt and overcome. –*Cheyenne Majenty*

There are services that are coming back. ... There's home modifications for the community with the pandemic money. ...



The recently constructed Hualapai Tribe Emergency Operations Center.
Photograph by Madelena Herrera, October 21, 2025.

Some of the new buildings that are coming through are being paid for by the money that the government had allocated for communities. ... A lot of jobs were created in the community that came out of the pandemic related to funding. There was an EOC building, the Emergency Operations Center, that was built. It created a position for the community and food distribution centers. –*Brook Bender*

A lot of good things came out of it because we can prepare ... and hopefully have our community prepared enough now to, or at least in progress of being ready, if something else happens. And just to know that there are people that are willing to do that work for the community. No questions asked. We didn't ask any questions. We just did it. And everybody supported what we did, good or bad, we did it and made it through it. –*Rosemary Sullivan*

Closing and Words for the Future

The COVID-19 pandemic did show how we came together as a community and that we are Hualapai Strong. –*Cheyenne Majenty*

The experiences captured in this booklet reveal a story of resilience of how the Hualapai community navigated the COVID-19 crisis. The Hualapai people have long faced challenges to health, land, and lifeways, yet the community continues to adapt and persevere. This oral history project is a testament to that resilience—a resilience rooted in culture, language, land, and the strength of relationships. As new generations are born, these stories hopefully will guide them in facing their own challenges, grounded in the knowledge and values of their ancestors.

Throughout its history, the Hualapai Tribe has overcome hardship with strength and unity to protect its people, land, and lifeways. The COVID-19 pandemic not only tested these values but reaffirmed and strengthened them. The stories shared here document more than just a time of crisis; they document the endurance and strength of the Hualapai community. These narratives demonstrate how cultural teachings, traditional knowledge, and a shared commitment to protecting one another carried the Hualapai people through a time of loss and hardship. These stories are



Members of the Hualapai community performing a social dance during the Hualapai Day Parade. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, September 26, 2024.

meant to honor those who were lost, those who stepped forward to lead, and every member of the Hualapai community who carries Hualapai traditions, values, and history into the future.

Hualapai people interviewed for this project stressed that the pandemic reinforced in them the desires to appreciate their family, loved ones, children, and elders; not to take life for granted; to take care of one's health; and to be prepared and informed about events or situations that could pose another danger to the Hualapai community, land, and way of life.

We leave you now with messages to the future.

May those reading this find strength and comfort in knowing that Hualapai people can always overcome any hardship, together.

As we go forward and we look back and reflect, it's important to understand that we as Hualapai people are resilient. We are strong and we always will be ... that Tribe that will get through anything as long as we come together as one. And that's certainly what happened during COVID-19. ... When we laughed, we all laughed. When we cried, we all cried. And we all shared

the same fears, the same unknowns. But the most important thing as a community, [is that] we came together. And that's what made Hualapai strong through this whole response. –*Duane Clarke*

It is not the first or the last time that we will have pandemics like this. Our ancestors went through it ... so just appreciate your time here, the people you have in your life because we don't [know] when something like this will happen. –*Sterling Selana*

[Take] care of yourself because in the long run it will only help you and keep you going. – *Hualapai Tribal Member*

If there's ever a time in the future that ... something like that did happen again, ... don't take it as a joke, take it seriously. –*Hualapai Tribal Member*

People need to be prepared and work with one another, love one another, help one another and just enjoy life while you're here and don't take life for granted. Take care of yourself and help your loved ones. –*Angeline Walema*

Value life. And [do] not take it for granted that your elderly are going to be alive, because ... there's maybe ten or less at the most, and they are our historian tellers of what happened during their time. –*Barbara Tinhorn*

Be proud of who you are. ... Here is home. We take care of each other. ... I knew that I would never go without when I came here. ... Home is not a house. Home is a place. Home is a community. –*Brook Bender*

All those things that we were told way back in the day, they are very good principles and very good values, and I think we tossed them all away. So I think we just need to regroup and tell our families that I love you. –*Carrie Imus*

Don't fear the unknown, but be ready and protect yourself. To my grandchildren, I lived through it, Y2K, COVID. We're a strong and resilient community, the Hualapai people, and we'll get through this. –*Gensean Putesoy*



Hualapai elder Carrie Imus currently serves as a Community Health Worker with the Hualapai Elderly Services Program. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July, 28 2025.



Gensean Putesoy is a Hualapai Healing House resident advocate. She served on the Incident Command Team during the pandemic. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.



Hualapai elder Wynona Tapija Sinyella. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 29, 2025.

My message to the future generations would be to listen to our bodies, listen to the earth, listen to the signs that are telling us when sicknesses are coming or when something is a threat to our way of life, then to take it serious and to be mindful and don't forget where you come from. Don't forget your people and just help one another get through it because we would not have survived the pandemic if each individual was selfish and just worried about themselves. We would not have made it together and just make sure that you're here for your community and that you ... uphold that and don't forget where you come from.
–*Cheyenne Majenty*

I say if you live on the right path and do what's right, you really have nothing to fear no matter what happens. Because there will always be calamities and tragedies, pain and sorrow. It's just all a part of life. Knowing that this life is just a small portion of our eternal life, there's really nothing to fear because we're here to learn, to grow, and to love our family, neighbors, to love everyone and to help serve others. Be kind, be gentle because we never know what's going on in another person because we're not in their shoes. Don't be quick to judge. –*Camille Mahone Nighthorse*

The most important thing that any of us can do is communicate and talk with somebody and just know that you're not alone because everybody is out there. We're there to make sure that we encourage each other, lift up each other. That's the Hualapai way ... looking out for each other.
–*Duane Clarke*

The Hualapai Tribe

The people of the Hualapai Tribe, or *Hwal'bay*, meaning “People of the Tall Pines,” have lived in their ancestral homelands, which include Spirit Mountain, *Wukahme'*, since time immemorial. For untold generations, the Hualapai have lived in the mountains, desert valleys, rivers, springs, and canyons on the western slope of the Colorado Plateau and the southern edge of the Grand Canyon. Today, the Hualapai Reservation, which was established through executive order in 1883, encompasses nearly one million acres of the Hualapai homeland in northwestern Arizona, including parts of the Grand Canyon and the Colorado River, *Ha'Yitada*.

Traditionally, Hualapai people came from 14 Hualapai bands that had their own dialects, history, and traditions. Today, the Hualapai Tribe is composed of descendants of those different Hualapai bands. Despite centuries of hardship brought on by colonialism, Hualapai people have retained their language, customs, and identity, and the Hualapai Tribe remains united in creating a better world for future generations of Hualapai people. Today, the Tribe actively commemorates its past and advocates for its future through events such as the La Paz Healing Run, *Yu'NyahayJamjVo:jo*, the annual Pai Gathering, the Pai Language Immersion Camp, and through the Hualapai Moving Forward initiative that includes more than 30 projects to enhance the quality of life for all Hualapai and preserve the Tribe's heritage for future generations.

Mission Statements

The mission of the Hualapai Tribe Cultural Center is to preserve, protect, and promote the cultural heritage and traditions of the Hualapai people through education, outreach, and community engagement.

The mission of the Elderly Services Program is to enhance the quality of life for Hualapai elders through culturally responsive services, nutritional support, and opportunities for social and intergenerational connection.

Funding Statement

Funding for this project was initially provided through a Community Health Workers for Covid Response and Resilient Communities (CDC-CCR) Grant (No. YH220090), awarded to the Arizona Advisory Council on Indian Health Care and its partners, including the Hualapai Tribe. Funding was terminated in the Spring of 2025 and funding to complete this project was provided by the Hualapai Tribe through the Elderly Services Program.

Front Exterior Cover: Hualapai elder Vivian Sue Parker and her grandson Dorvian. Photograph by J. Daniel Hud, July 28, 2025.

Back Exterior Cover, Top: A social dance being performed by the Hualapai Tribe's Cultural Center Staff and Hualapai youth during the Hualapai Day Parade in Peach Springs. Photograph by J. Daniel Hund, September 26, 2024.

Back Exterior Cover, Bottom: A homemade mask made during the pandemic in the style of a Hualapai ribbon skirt. Photograph courtesy of the Hualapai Tribe.

