

“The key is **stability**. Knowing that you are there for the community, knowing that the community and the families can count on you to be there for them. To hear them out, to see if they need anything, to hear their concerns. ... So I think stability is a key to overcoming, to eradicating poverty.”

ERICK SANDERS

Dear Friends,

Erick Sanders has been part of the ATD Fourth World team in Gallup, New Mexico for the past five years - supporting families facing obstacles because of poverty, leading Story Garden activities, and building partnerships within the local community. A member of the Navajo Indian Tribe, Erick grew up and continues to live near his family’s native lands, 30 miles outside of Gallup. We asked Erick to tell us about his role with ATD Fourth World, the rural community he lives and works in, changes with Covid-19, and his approach to overcoming poverty.

Poverty, and extreme hardships for many families means *“isolation, poor living conditions, lack of indoor plumbing, electricity, and internet, as well as language barriers for the older generation,”* Erick said. Distances are vast and not everyone has reliable transportation. Parents ask themselves: *How will I get to the hospital if the kids are sick? Who can I depend on, who can I ask? Do I have enough gas money?*

Community collaboration, working with others to fill the gaps, is the way to address these challenges. The ATD Fourth World team has built relationships with people through Story Garden that are key to a web of community support, as Erick describes it, especially throughout the Covid-19 pandemic when being together was not possible. Erick explains:



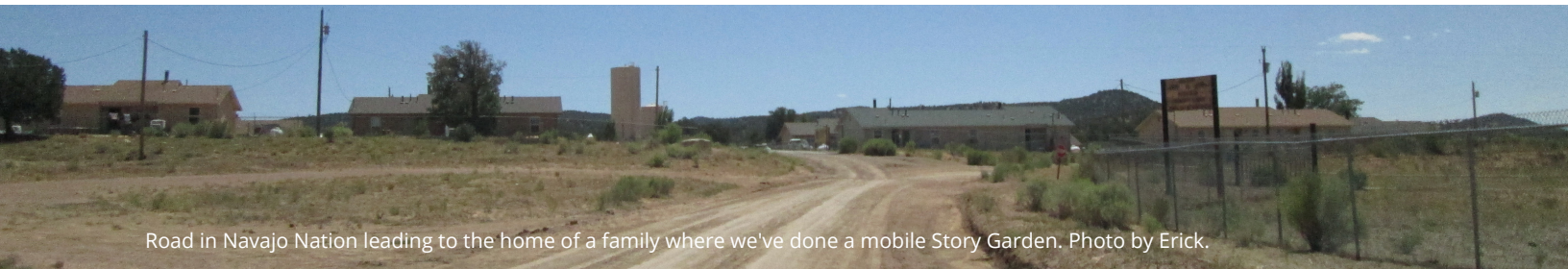
“But, regardless of that we are still trying to overcome. We connected with families that we have phone numbers for. We called them (early in the pandemic) and through this decided to support them by mailing activities that families can do.

We also partnered up with another organization that created a list of activities for families to get online. A lot of people, especially on a reservation, lack a lot of basic materials and items to print these. So we decided to print them and mail them to families to help them. ... Not having internet access during the pandemic is a big issue for families.”

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Erick continues:

“For us it’s not one simple answer. It’s kind of like a web of support that families would need to lift themselves out of poverty. ... In order to really bring the community together, we need to reach out to other organizations who are trying, in a way, to fill in the gaps. People will meet either through emotional support, financial support, housing, education, creativity.”



Road in Navajo Nation leading to the home of a family where we've done a mobile Story Garden. Photo by Erick.

Looking forward, Erick and teammates have started visiting people in Gallup and some remote areas of Navajo land with a small mobile Story Garden. Using social distance practices, these visits continue to be a bridge between people, the joy of Story Garden, and needed resources, like food boxes provided through a local relief organization.

“We’ve been visiting families to see how they are doing and do small activities with the kids. ... When they see us and understand that we are there it’s like a regular old Story Garden – they’re happy to participate, they’re excited.”

With our connections, both personal and through ATD Fourth World, we are thinking of families who need these food boxes. We can be a middle person, for families that may be afraid of asking for assistance.”

Thank you for taking this time to learn from Erick what it means for him to stand alongside the families in his community most impacted by the hardships of poverty, and the way he builds bridges between them and others in the community.

Please consider a donation in the amount you are able to join and support Erick as this community building continues.

In Solidarity,  
Maria Sandvik, National Team



Erick leading a Story Garden activity before Covid-19

### *Here are a few ways your gift makes an impact:*

- \$50** contributes to art supplies for one mobile Story Garden visit
- \$150** mails 3 packages of books, art materials, and living supplies to people we can't reach in person
- \$300** covers travel expenses to visit a family living 2-3 hours outside of town
- \$500** helps keep our lights on, Volunteer Corps members and team members cared for as we all keep going