

MAKATE WAAGAMICHIWANANG GAKINAA'AMAATIWIN
THE YOUTH AND FAMILY WELLNESS CAMP

2025-26

ANNUAL

IMPACT

REPORT

THE PROMISE WE MADE



WHY THIS EXISTS

BUILT WITH COMMUNITY. GROWING ACROSS NATIONS.

Across Treaty 3 and the City of Kenora, Indigenous children and families are deeply connected to culture, community, and land. Strong spaces for learning and belonging already exist within Nations. This camp builds on that strength. The Youth & Family Wellness Camp brings children, families, and communities together—across Nations—in one shared place. That didn't exist before. It started simply: by listening. Communities spoke about the importance of spaces where children could gather across Nations. Families wanted more time together on the land. Youth were ready for new experiences, new relationships, and opportunities to lead. So we started building. Not all at once. Not perfectly. But with urgency and care. We opened the gates—and children came. From eight First Nations and the City of Kenora. Some returning. Many for the first time. Meeting new people, trying new things, stepping into something bigger than themselves.

And it's working. Friendships are forming across communities. Youth are stepping into leadership. Families are spending meaningful time together on the land. What began as an idea is now a fully operating, year-round place—serving thousands of children and families, and growing every year.

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THE PROMISE WE MADE

The Youth & Family Wellness Camp is a gathering place for Indigenous children and families—where land, water, and culture guide connection, learning, and healing across generations.

These words, gifted by youth, guide everything we do:

FOR THE LAND. FOR THE PEOPLE. FOR THE FUTURE.

This is not a slogan. It is a commitment:

To create spaces where children feel safe, proud, and connected.

To bring communities together in meaningful ways.

To build something that lasts.



This work is carried forward with communities, Elders, and partners who believe in what is possible when young people are given the right conditions to grow.

Our camp's traditional name, Makate Waagamichiwanang Gakinad'amaatiwin, was gifted by Elders. It reflects the deep connection between land and water—a place where communities have gathered for generations. It means more than just "camp." It is a place of healing and learning, where the land itself teaches, and where the water connects us all.



B O O Z H O O

This year, we saw what happens when you create the right conditions—and trust young people to step into them. Buses arrived carrying children from across Treaty 3 and Kenora. Some returned to a place they already knew. Many were arriving for the first time. Within hours, you could see the shift. Kids who arrived quietly were soon running across the field with new friends. Groups formed quickly—across communities, across ages. By the end of the week, it was hard to tell who had just met and who had known each other for years.

That matters.

Because these are connections that don't often happen—children from different Nations, sharing space, learning together, and building relationships that last beyond camp. We saw the same thing with families; time on the land, meals together, space to slow down. Simple things—but not always easy to access.

We also saw something else take hold: leadership. Youth who were campers not long ago are now leading activities, mentoring younger children, and taking on real responsibility. They are gaining skills, confidence, and a clearer sense of who they are becoming. That pathway—from camper to leader—is one of the most important outcomes of this work. It's how impact lasts.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers continue to guide everything that happens here. Their presence ensures that this is not just a camp—it is a place grounded in culture, language, and relationship to the land.

Importantly, this camp does not replace what exists in community. It connects it—a space where strengths are shared across Nations, relationships are built, and something collective is taking shape. There is more demand than we can currently meet. More children want to come. More communities are asking to participate. More opportunities are emerging to expand leadership pathways for youth. That's the work ahead.

This year showed us that the model works. It is reaching thousands of children, building relationships across communities, and creating real pathways for youth to grow into leaders.

To everyone who has helped make this possible—community members, staff, Elders, partners, and donors—thank you. You are part of building something that matters. And we are just getting started.

For the land. For the people. For the future.

Stefanie Bryant, Executive Director.



OUR IMPACT THIS YEAR

PROGRAMS THAT REACHED THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES ACROSS COMMUNITIES.

This year, the camp was in constant motion. Children arrived in every season. School buses pulled in during the week. Families gathered on weekends. Communities came together for celebration, learning, and healing.

Youth stayed—not just to participate, but to lead.

What began as a summer experience has become something much bigger: a year-round space where children feel safe, culture is lived and shared, and community continues to grow stronger.



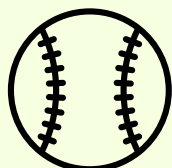
RIGHT TO PLAY

487

sessions

3,458

participant visits



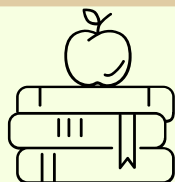
INDIGENOUS ROOKIE LEAGUE

40

games

363

participant visits



SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

17

schools

1200

participant visits



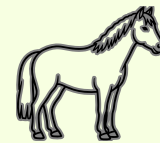
EVENTS

179

events

5,469

participant visits



EQUINE

618

sessions

4,425

participant visits

Participant visits reflect total attendance across sessions; some children attended more than once

Z I I G W A N

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SEASON

SPRING 2025: Deepening partnerships. Opening the doors wider.

Spring marked a season of renewal, growth, and deepening connection. We expanded our reach into schools partnering with seventeen schools and welcoming over 1,200 students for weekly, land-based programming grounded in culture, relationship and respect.

As the school year came to a close, students marked the completion of their programming—including the Leaders in Training program and school choir—by sharing what they had learned through the camp. Their journeys culminated in a sweat lodge orientation and in leading our first Spring Feast through song and ceremony.

Moments of gathering and celebration—such Field of Dreams Grand Opening and National Indigenous Peoples Day event—brought community members together through ceremony, culture and shared experience.

We also invested in the future of camp, breaking ground on the Arts & Welcome Centre, expanding trail systems, and opening the Field of Dreams baseball diamond—enhancing our ability to serve community year-round.

Spring reaffirmed that camp is not just a place, but a vital part of community life.

“The staff taught us that it’s okay to be free if we want - if you have sadness it’s okay to feel whatever emotion you feel”

CAMPER



4,170 participants brought camp to life this Spring

Honouring MMIW

New trails were initiated and dedicated in honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

Spring Feast:

Our first annual feast brought community together in the teaching lodge through songs and ceremony led by the Evergreen School choir.

Breaking Ground:

Construction began on the new Arts & Welcome Centre, a future hub for gathering, creativity, and community.

Field of Dreams Opening:

With the help of Jays Care Foundation, a new baseball diamond opened, expanding opportunities for play and connection.

Outdoor Education Overnight Camp:

Grade 7 students experienced land-based learning under the stars.

Youth Employment

Pathways:

We hosted hands-on employment workshops and a Camp Career Fair, helping youth explore employment pathways. We also onboarded, prepared, and trained our 33 summer staff for the season ahead.

Community Connections:

Highlights included a friendly game with Treaty 3 Police Service who joined us for a friendly (and spirited) baseball game, and hosting Wauzhushk Onigum Nation’s year-end school celebration.

National Indigenous Peoples Day

Community gathered to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day with a full day of culture, connection, and pride.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SEASON

Youth Employment Services (YES)

33 summer staff built practical, job-ready skills through resumes, cover letters, and headshots, reflecting the training and experience gained throughout the summer.

Camp, camp, and more camp:

We hosted 541 children and youth from 8 communities at our day and overnight camps.

Celebrating Our Summer Staff

We celebrated our summer staff, recognizing their leadership, care, and the energy they brought to the season.

Community Family Days

We hosted biweekly baseball and beach days, creating space for families to gather and connect.

Sports Symposium & Sabe Bush Crawl

We brought together community and local partners for movement, connection, and community spirit events.

Leaders In Training

Youth stepped into leadership roles at camp, building confidence and skills as they planned and led Friday programming for all campers.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

In partnership with Grand Council Treaty 3, we gathered at the Cecilia Jeffery Residential School Memorial Site to honour residential school survivors and reflect on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

NIIBIN

Summer 2025: a season of joy, growth, and firsts.

Summer marked a season of energy, expansion and deepening impact. Over six weeks, we welcomed 541 campers into day and overnight experiences grounded in safety, culture, and joy—many attending camp or staying away from home for the first time.

Through swimming, canoeing, horseback riding, sports, arts, and cultural teachings, campers built confidence, connection, and a strong sense of belonging. In our second year of summer programming we expanded capacity with new cabins and continued to invest in youth leadership.

More than 35 were employed—a 64% increase from the previous year with 72% identifying as Indigenous. Young people stepped into meaningful roles as mentors and leaders, helping shape the camp experience.

Partnerships with organizations like Right To Play and Jays Care, enhanced our sport and recreation programming, supporting teamwork, skill-building, and shared experiences.

Equine programming added another layer—offering opportunities for trust, confidence, and emotional growth through hands-on, culturally grounded connection with the horses.

As summer transitioned into fall, community gatherings—the Sports Symposium, the Sabe Bush Crawl, and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—brought people together in deeply meaningful ways.



4,424 participant visits filled camp with energy all Summer long

DAGWAAGI

Fall 2025: Slowing down. Going deeper.

As the season shifted, so did the pace. Fall invited us to slow down and go deeper—welcoming schools, community groups and families into land-based, culturally grounded experiences.

This was a season of gathering and giving thanks. Our Fall Feast and multi-day Harvest brought more than 1,000 people together on the land—creating space for reflection, preparation and shared care.

Partnerships continued to grow in meaningful ways. In collaboration with Experimental Lakes Area, youth and Elders came together for wild rice restoration, including a reseeding effort that supported sustainable, land-based learning and stewardship of the land.

Ceremony remained central. Full moon gatherings, sweats, and cultural practices offered consistent space for healing, reflection, and connection, guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

While the pace softened, the work continued. A second baseball field was completed, strengthening our ability to host programs and gatherings year-round. Fall reminded us that growth can be quiet—steady, relational, and deeply rooted.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SEASON

Dagwaagin Gabeshiwin: Fall Feast & Harvest

We welcomed more than 1000 guests to share food, stories, and time together on the land as part of our celebrations.

National Chief Visit

National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak and Grand Chief Ogichidaa Kavanaugh joined us to celebrate culture and tradition.

Wild Rice Seeding

We partnered with the Experimental Lakes Area to seed wild rice at the pond on site and support land-based learning and stewardship

Wiike Harvesting

Three generations of a family joined us to harvest wiike from our land - used for medicine and healing.

Full Moon Ceremonies

We hosted monthly ceremonies guided by Nelly Mesengeeshik, creating consistent space for reflection, healing, and community connection.

National Diabetes Awareness Day

We hosted local community partners in recognition of National Diabetes Awareness Day.

Volleyball Tournaments

Right to Play held their end of year volleyball tournaments as part of a partnership with Jumpstart.

3,639 participant visits carried the spirit of
Camp into the Fall season

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SEASON

Biboon Odaminowin: Winter Celebration

We welcomed over 500 community members across two days of gathering, activities, and connection.

University of Manitoba Partnership

We gathered fireside with students from University of Manitoba to advance plans for a new space on site.

Kitchen P.R.E.P. & Wiisinidaa:

We launched our first Kitchen P.R.E.P program and Wiisinidaa Grab and Go, building skills and increasing access to food.

Community Engagement

We visited 7 of our 8 member nations to host family nights and gather input to guide our strategic planning process.

Gikinoo'maaditaa Youth Leadership Conference

We hosted the Gikinoo'maaditaa Youth leadership Conference, bringing youth together for immersive overnight experiences focused on confidence-building, teamwork, and growth.

B.O.L.D Program Launch

We brought 40 youth together for our inaugural B.O.L.D. program, where they were inspired by Olympic bronze medalist Abby Dent to believe in their potential.

BIBOON

Winter 2026: Resilience, leadership, and new beginnings.

Winter transformed the camp into a space of resilience and connection. Through heavy snowfall, programming continued—welcoming community members onto the land for snowshoeing, winter skills, fireside teachings, and overnight leadership experiences. Leadership remained central.

Youth retreats, the launch of our inaugural B.O.L.D. program, and our first Youth Leadership Conference, created opportunities for young people to build confidence, deepen relationships, and grow as leaders. We also introduced the Kitchen P.R.E.P. program, offering hands-on training to support pathways into the workforce.

Community continued to gather in meaningful ways. Our Winter Celebration welcomed more than 500 people, while engagement sessions across member nations created space for listening, learning, and connection—laying the foundation for our first strategic plan, led by youth and guided by community voices.

Winter showed what's possible when programming continues year-round: stronger relationships, deeper leadership, and a community that continues to grow—no matter the season.

“I cannot say enough good things...
our youngest was quiet and reserved,
and her confidence grew so much.
She felt safe.”

PARENT

2,787 participants brought warmth and
connection to winter at Camp

PROGRAMS & OPERATIONS

THE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND SYSTEMS THAT MAKE CAMP POSSIBLE.

Across all seasons, our work is grounded in connection—to land, culture, community, and one another. These pillars shape daily experiences and create the conditions for youth and families to grow, belong and lead.

Land Based Learning: Learning rooted in relationship with the land.

Hands-on experiences across the seasons—planting, harvesting, trail work, snowshoeing, and outdoor skills—build practical skills while deepening understanding of stewardship, guided by the land itself.

Cultural Learning: Grounding youth in identity, story, and connection.

Drumming, storytelling, language, sharing circles, and ceremony are woven throughout camp life, often guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. These experiences foster confidence, connection and a strong sense of identity.

Wellness, Family & Community: Strengthening connection across generations.

Camp extends beyond youth to include families and communities. Feasts, gatherings, and events create space for shared learning, while culturally grounded practices support mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Sports & Recreation: Building confidence through play & teamwork.

Through sport, youth build confidence, connection, and a sense of belonging. This year, in partnership with Right To Play and Jays Care Foundation's Indigenous Rookie League, we supported 3,821 youth connections across 587 games, events and programming days.

Youth Leadership: Youth shaping the experience and stepping into leadership.

Youth leadership is a cornerstone of camp. Across the year, 105 youth took on leadership roles—supporting programs, mentoring younger participants, and helping shape camp life. through hands-on experience and mentorship.

Equine Programming: Building connection, trust, and emotional growth

Equine experiences offer meaningful opportunities to connect and grow. Blending therapeutic approaches with cultural teachings, you develop trust, self-awareness, and emotional regulation through time with horses. Across the year, we supported 4425 participant engagements across 618 sessions.

Grounds, Property & Maintenance: Caring for the land so it can care for others.

Our grounds and maintenance team ensures the camp remains safe, welcoming, and ready year-round. Their work—maintaining trails, cabins, and shared spaces—creates the foundation for every program and experience.

15,020 participants



1,324 sessions

WHAT THIS ADDS UP TO



Across all four seasons, the impact is clear - and growing.



15,020 participant experiences annually, with many children returning again and again.



\$265 per child provides access to camp programming and experiences.



98% of families plan to return.

Demand is increasing. Communities are asking for more access. More children are ready to come. More youth are ready to lead. This is no longer a pilot.

It is a proven, community-rooted model—one that is working, and one that is ready to grow.





WHAT WE BUILT THIS YEAR

THIS PLACE IS TAKING SHAPE.

This year, the camp didn't just run programs—it grew.

Across every season, the land evolved. New buildings rose, trails were carved, and spaces were created with intention—each one expanding what is possible for the children, youth, and families who come here.

What began with the essentials: a mess hall, barn, volleyball court, one baseball diamond, and early-stage cabins—has become a year-round outdoor campus designed for learning, connection, and belonging.

BUILDING SPACE CREATES OPPORTUNITY

Each structure, trail, and gathering space is more than infrastructure—it is access. These investments make it possible to:

- Serve more children, more often
- Offer consistent, year-round programming
- Create spaces where children feel safe, seen, and supported

NEW SPACES: COMPLETED AND UNDERWAY

Overnight Cabins

Completed August 2025

Five winterized cabins now support year-round overnight programming welcoming 8–10 campers each and making first time overnight experiences possible for hundreds of youth.



Arts & Welcome Centre

Opened March 2026

Now the heart of the camp, this space hosts workshops, and gatherings, welcoming over 200 participants in its first month.



Indoor Riding Arena

(In Progress)

Construction continued on the 15,467 sq. ft. Krawczyk Family Equine Centre, opening summer 2026. This new space will enable year-round equine programming and expand access to therapeutic and cultural experiences.



Cultural Learning Spaces

(Expanded – Ongoing)

Fire circles and teaching areas—designed with community—create space for ceremony, storytelling, language, and cultural learning to be lived and shared.



Hiking Trails

More than 5 km of trails now supporting land-based learning, leadership development and connection to the land.



Outdoor Education Hub

(Launched – Summer 2025)

A central space for hands-on learning in environmental stewardship, food systems, and outdoor skills. At its heart is the Honey Bear Garden, named in honor of a generous donor and supporting youth to connect with the land through growing and harvesting.



LOOKING AHEAD

This next chapter is being shaped by the people we serve.

Over the past year, youth and families have been clear about what matters most: connection, culture, fun, and a place where they feel they belong. They want more opportunities to be on the land, to be with animals, to learn, to play, and to spend time together as families.

Just as importantly, they want to see Camp show up—building relationships in community as a pathway to feeling comfortable and connected on-site.

We are listening—and building in that direction.

In the year ahead, we will strengthen connections with communities while continuing to grow Camp as a year-round, culturally grounded hub for wellness, connection, and joy.

We will launch family retreats and expand the programs youth and families already love—creating more opportunities for recreation, cultural learning, and time on the land.

Camp will remain a place to come together—hosting seasonal gatherings like Fall Harvest, Winter Celebration, and National Indigenous Peoples Day, while introducing new opportunities for connection through community tournaments and shared experiences.

As participation grows, so does the need for infrastructure. This year, we are focused on completing the riding arena, advancing sustainable water solutions, and planning future spaces—including office and maintenance facilities—as funding allows.

At the same time, we are investing in Camp's future through a 3–5 year strategic plan shaped by community voices, including a Youth and Family Advisory Council and youth-led visioning. We will also implement a stronger evaluation framework to guide and measure our impact.

This is more than growth—it's belonging. A place that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive; rooted in culture and connection; and filled with joy, play, and possibility—a true home away from home. This work is growing. And so is the opportunity to be part of it.

JOIN US IN BUILDING WHAT COMES NEXT.



WITH GRATITUDE

This work is made possible by a community of partners, funders, and donors who believe deeply in what this place can be. Some have supported the Camp directly through Ogimaawabiitong – Kenora Chiefs Advisory. Others have given through our charitable partner, the Ma'mo'we Wii'soo'ka'tiwin Foundation. Together, your support creates a space where children, youth, and families can gather, grow, and lead. We are deeply grateful.

DONORS

(Through the Ma'mo'we Wii'soo'ka'tiwin Foundation)

- Krawczyk Family Foundation
- Barry & Laurie Green Family Trust
- Paul Cohen
- Cohen Kay Family Foundation
- 5D World
- Larry and Judy Tanenbaum Foundation
- VisFuture
- Kenora & Lake of the Woods Community Foundation
- Lawson Foundation
- Ennis Foundation

ADDITIONAL FUNDERS & PROGRAM PARTNERS

(Through Kenora Chiefs Advisory)

- Canadian Heritage
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Jays Care Foundation
- Jumpstart
- Medavie Foundation
- Ministry of Indigenous Affairs & First Nations Economic Reconciliation
- MLSE Foundation
- ParticipACTION
- Right To Play
- Shooniyaa Wa-Biitong
- Seven Generations Education Institute
- Save the Children
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Government of Ontario
- Food Banks Canada
- Department of Justice Canada
- Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC)
- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

EVENT & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Bimose Tribal Council
- BrokerLink Insurance
- City of Kenora
- Dingwall Ford
- Experimental Lakes Area
- Grand Council Treaty 3
- Janel Contracting
- Kinder Joy of Moving
- Lake of the Woods Electrical
- MNP
- Ne-Chee Friendship Centre
- Nelson Architecture
- Rotary Club of Kenora
- Seven Generations Education Institute
- Spirit North
- Standard Insurance
- Treaty 3 Police Service



WITH APPRECIATION

Throughout the year, many additional partners and community members contributed time, resources, and in-kind support to make this work possible.

While not all are listed here, their generosity and care are deeply valued and felt across the Camp.

CHI-MIIGWECH



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