



Lac Courte Oreilles
Child Support Services

Good Life Vision

Your Life | Your Culture | Your Child's Future



PROCESS BRIEF

Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting

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Project Description

The Good Life Vision is Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Child Support Services' implementation of the Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting Grant, sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Services. The Good Life Vision aims to provide Native youth with the opportunity to learn about culture, history, values, and practices by building a connection to culture, developing a positive sense of identity, and forming the assets needed to follow the Good Life.



Grant Purpose

Sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Services, the Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting Grant is intended to leverage the child support program's expertise on the legal and financial responsibilities of parenting to encourage teens and young adults to follow a path of events associated with favorable socio-economic outcomes known as the success sequence. It calls for parenting to occur following the completion of education, employment, and entering a committed relationship.

Good Life Vision Connects Youth to Culture

A strength-based approach based on increasing connection to culture has been shown to have positive impact on Native youth's resiliency, mental health, prevention of substance use, academic achievement, and other factors integral to living the Good Life. The Good Life Path is the Ojibwe "formula" for an integrated and healthy life, supporting positive parenting and a secure future for youth.



Planning Team and Community Partners

The overall planning for the Good Life Vision, a project of LCO Child Support Services, was facilitated by child support staff, led by Director Sue Smith. Grays Peak Strategies offers project-related supports, and programs are operated in partnership with community partners. Dr. Nell O'Donnell Weber develops and coordinates the project's curriculum. Cultural and language experts serve as teachers and facilitators in the programs. The Center for Policy Research evaluates the Good Life Vision programs. Child Support's Grandparent Circle, an advisory committee, elders, and students from the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University provide overall guidance to the project and ensure the Good Life Vision's cultural teachings align with Lac Courte Oreilles' Ojibwe customs and beliefs. Interns from the area have worked with Dr. O'Donnell Weber and Grays Peak Strategies to ensure that youth voice is integrated into all of the project's curricula and events.

Good Life Vision Community Partners are Integral to Success



Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe School
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University
Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Court
Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Governing Board (TGB)
The Boys and Girls Club of Lac Courte Oreilles
Camp Highlands
Indian Child Welfare
Family and Child Education Program (FACE)
Sevenwinds Casino

Good Life Vision Programs

Good Life Culture Camp

Good Life Vision's central program is its week-long summer culture camp for youth aged 11-14. The camp is housed at the beautiful Camp Highlands on the shores of Plum Lake in northern Wisconsin. Under the supervision of young adult camp counselors, campers engage in cultural activities like Ojibwe language lessons, dance, drumming, singing, and traditional crafts such as leather work and creating regalia.

Camp Highlands made its extensive facilities available to LCO for a week after the conclusion of its regular camp schedule. In addition, the camp provided food, lifeguards, and staff to support activities like archery, tubing, and canoeing. Camp Highlands made its facilities available to LCO at a lower cost as a public service, in recognition that Ojibwe once inhabited the camp land and to share its resources with youth who otherwise would not likely be able to participate. The Good Life Vision, with support from its partners, pays Camp Highlands staff for their time, with no additional charges from the camp.

The camp was first offered in 2022, with 31 youths attending. In 2023, through a partnership with the LCO Boys and Girls Club, the camp increased its capacity to 56 campers. Due to its growing popularity, the Culture Camp once again increased its capacity to accommodate 75 campers in 2024. The campers are encouraged to attend camp for multiple summers, and efforts are underway to secure funding to sustain the camp after the grant funding expires.

The Good Life Culture Camp was enriched by Becky Taylor's engagement. An Elder in the LCO community, Ms. Taylor led the dance instruction and shared experiences from her own life as cultural lessons for the campers.

“

Learning the language was actually pretty cool since I got to... know the words and then I can like speak to my family because a lot of my family knows it, but I barely do.

- Chassidy, Good Life Culture Camper

“

The Good Life Camp knows me as a grandmother, as a helper. I run the Woodland Song and Dance teachings for our camp. I have a strong Catholic side. I have a strong Midewiwin side. I have a strong Big Drum side. I have a strong pow-wow-way side. So I'm, like, surrounded, and I try to use the best out of each to walk a balance in my life with my own children. When you work with culture, you give back to the community. We do it for our children to have a better foundation of who they are, where they come from and where they're going. Pretty simple.

**- Becky Taylor,
Cultural Expert and Dance Instructor**



2022 Good Life Culture Camp

The camp launched in 2022 in a first-of-its-kind effort for Lac Courte Oreilles Child Support. The planning team spent months preparing for logistics, curriculum development, planning cultural activities, recruiting counselors, and performing outreach for youth participants.

Six months after the camp ended, follow-up feedback on the camp experience was solicited from campers and their caregivers. The campers ($n = 22$) shared that they enjoyed swimming, tubing, spending time with and making new friends, and the food provided at the camp. When asked about their least favorite parts of the camp, most campers who responded said it was mostly great. However, a few campers did not like the cabins without windows and disliked the time they were required to turn in at night.

Eighty-six percent of caregivers ($n = 16$) indicated their children enjoyed camp, and 91% believed their children would like to return to camp next year. The caregivers' perceptions about what aspects their children enjoyed mirrored the campers' responses, with swimming, tubing, and spending time with friends topping the list. Similarly, the most common responses to what campers did not like were that their children did not report anything negative or they "liked it all" and did not want to leave.

Although most camp activities occurred as planned, a few issues arose unexpectedly. Melinda (Mindy) McKeveitt-Isham, the camp coordinator, described it this way:

"We did 31 kids last year with seven staff members and it was a struggle. Last year was definitely a learning curve. We stayed up every night to probably 2:00 to 3:00 in the morning redoing the schedule. (But in the end) Nobody wanted to leave. It was so magical. It was so much fun. Everybody loved it. Now [2023] we have 56 kids instead of 31, so something worked."

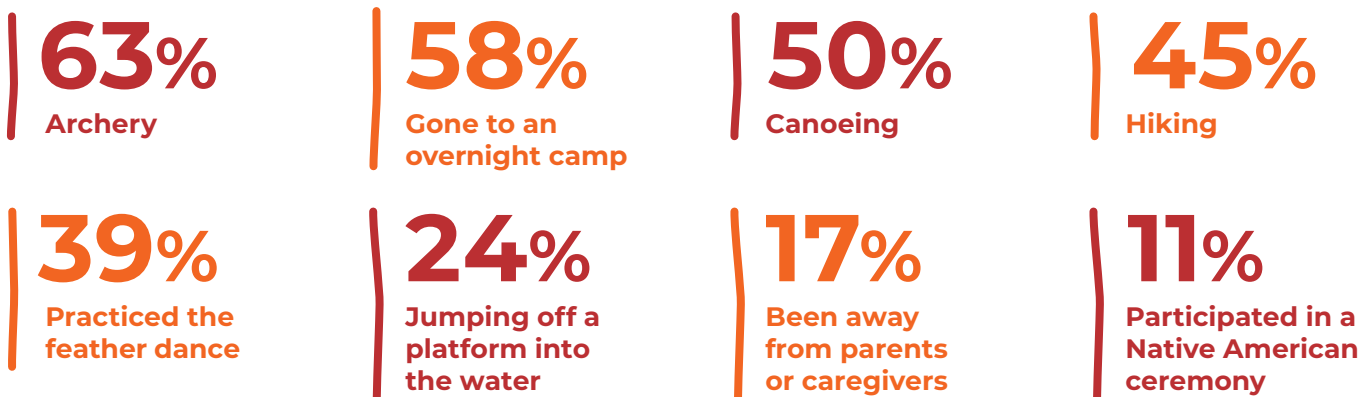
After the 2022 camp ended, the planning team engaged in extensive debriefing to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement for the 2023 camp.

Strengths

Campers successfully participated in a multiday, overnight, away-from-home experience, many for the first time. In a follow-up survey, many of the campers reported engaging in activities at camp they had never done before:

2022 Campers Report on Activities Never Done Before Camp ($n=20$)

Percentage of Surveyed Campers



Campers enthusiastically engaged in outdoor recreational and cultural activities at Camp Highland. The campers were in a safe environment and enjoyed three bountiful meals daily. Camp staff reported that many campers experienced homesickness and were unhappy at camp during the first part of the week. However, as the week progressed, they grew more comfortable and started to enjoy their time at the camp. All but one of the 2022 campers returned for a second year of camp in 2023, providing a strong endorsement from campers and illustrating caregivers' confidence in the camp management.



Opportunities for Improvement

The 2022 planned camp schedule included youth engaging in somewhat sedentary activities that did not take full advantage of Camp Highland's recreational activities. Observations by camp staff suggested campers needed more unstructured time in their daily schedule. Fortunately, the camp staff immediately responded and changed the schedule in real-time to better meet the campers' needs and interests. Organizers observed that responsibilities for all aspects of camp management were concentrated with too few people, leading to unnecessary stress and lack of clarity. Staff roles could be delineated by purpose, with different staff assigned to manage programming and personnel and respond to camper needs. Campers expressed more emotional and other needs than was anticipated. Additional staff, including adult and young adult counselors, a mental health expert, and further training would improve overall supervision and responsiveness to campers' needs.

The gender balance among campers was uneven, with boys outnumbering the girls. The camp staff observed conflicts and heightened emotions between boys and girls, especially later in the day, as the campers prepared for sleep. Future programming could balance the number of campers from both genders and include opportunities for separate and mixed-gender programming. Some camp staff also suggested the campers' use of cell phones seemed to aggravate feelings of homesickness and distract them from engagement with camp activities. Camper cell phones could be prohibited in future years. Some activities, like the bus transportation to and from the camp, needed additional logistical planning. To ensure the safety and smooth operation of these activities, clear protocols for arriving and leaving camp would be helpful.

2023 Good Life Culture Camp

Planning for the 2023 Good Life Culture Camp began almost immediately after the 2022 camp concluded. Based on the identified strengths and opportunities for improvement from the 2022 experience, planners made several updates and crafted a new plan for the 2023 camp. First, the number of campers served increased from 31 in 2022 to 56 in 2023. This significant growth was largely due to the youth's active promotion of the camp among their friends. Second, camp planners entered a partnership with the LCO Boys and Girls Club, which added financial resources and experienced staff to serve as cabin counselors and facilitate programming. The Boys and Girls Club, youth development professionals, brought invaluable skills that enhanced the camper experience.

Third, no camper cell phones were allowed during camp. While not a popular requirement for many campers, the policy eliminated issues related to cell phone use at the 2022 camp. Fourth, the boys and girls

were housed in different parts of the camp and participated in separate and combined programming. Fifth, dance instruction was enhanced by adding a drum and a drum circle, so the dancing sessions more closely resembled an actual powwow with a strong emphasis on dance. Everybody danced at the 2023 culture camp, including adults and youth, creating a meaningful multi-generational experience. The boys were even invited to drum, a very culturally meaningful activity.

Finally, camp crafts were enhanced to create ribbon shirts (boys) and ribbon skirts (girls). Ribbon skirts and shirts are symbols of identity for Native people and are worn at cultural events and elsewhere. Child Support staff created skirt packets with diverse fabrics, thread, ribbons, and accessories. Girls could select their fabric packets, and the camp staff helped the girls cut and sew the skirts. Boys were able to sew ribbons on ready-made shirts. Ten or so sewing machines were in constant use, and amazingly, every camper had new regalia of their own making (with a bit of help from the sewing grandmas) to wear during the dancing on the last two days of camp.

“

“I think the best part of this year was them being able to make...her ribbon skirt ..and he made his ribbon shirt. And first thing ...when I talked to them on the phone, when they got back was, they showed me their ribbon shirt and her ribbon skirt. I think it gave them a sense of pride and, you know, a sense of culture and being able to know that they made ... that and they can wear it to any kind of gathering.”

– Angelica Pacheco, Parent



Feedback was solicited from campers and counselors on their camp experiences. Both the campers and counselors had overall positive experiences of the camp.

	Campers (n = 44)		Counselors (n = 10)	
	<i>It was great!</i>	<i>It was okay</i>	<i>It was great!</i>	<i>It was okay</i>
The Good Life Camp	52%	41%	90%	10%
Sleeping in cabins (campers) or supervising campers (counselors)	14%	82%	70%	30%
Food	34%	59%	70%	30%

Meaningful Observations:

- **Fifty-nine percent of campers reported that not having their phones was hard, and 32% said being away from home was hard.**
- **Seventy-nine percent of campers** indicated that the counselors help make camp great or okay for them.
- **Swimming, free time, games, canoeing, and tubing** were some of the favorite activities for campers.
- **Ninety percent of camp counselors felt like camp organizers somewhat or well prepared them for the counselor role.** Counselors suggested that obtaining additional training on responding to campers' emotional needs and receiving more resources to reward campers' good behavior would be helpful.
- **All the counselors reported that the best part of being a counselor was interacting with and observing the campers.** Several counselors reported meaningful interactions with the campers and how proud the campers were of their ribbon shirts and skirts.

Learn more about the Good Life Culture Camp in this feature film produced by nDigiDreams.



2024 Good Life Culture Camp

After several months of intensive planning by the implementation team, the third iteration of the culture camp occurred in August of 2024. Following the same pattern, the number of campers in the summer of 2024 increased to 75 youths from 56 in the previous year. Of the campers who completed a survey at the end of the camp:

12 YEARS
OF AGE (ON AVERAGE)

40%
FEMALE

60%
MALE



65%
ATTENDED THE
CAMP BEFORE

11 YOUTH *attended all three camps*

13 YOUTH *attended two previous camps*

Building on the feedback from campers in previous years, the camp continued to offer a diverse range of recreational and cultural activities. Campers had the opportunity to engage in activities such as hiking, swimming, canoeing, tubing, and archery. To deepen their cultural connection, campers also participated in Ojibwe language lessons, dance, drumming, singing, and traditional crafts, including the creation of ribbon skirts and shirts.

Overall, the 2024 camp did follow the same basic formula used in the previous iterations of the camp. However, camp facilitators did implement two changes that appeared to have a large impact:

1ST Camp facilitators added an all-camp activity based on the seven grandfather teachings. As part of this activity, camp staff created seven stations, with the campers divided into seven groups as they rotated around each station. Each station focused on a lesson from the grandfather teachings but also required cooperation and teamwork. The lessons focused on the core cultural values of truth, humility, respect, bravery, honesty, love, and wisdom that comprise the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Each station was led by a camp staffer trained on the teaching associated with that activity.

2ND Camp facilitators implemented a junior camp counselor program. For this program, five youths aged 14 were paired with a camp counselor and were able to help with leading the other youth, as well as other duties around camp.

While the new all-camp activity and the junior camp counselor program were successful, there are still areas for improvement in the next camp. In particular, the training provided to counselors could be enhanced to transition them into more of a mentoring role and strengthen their connection to the campers. The camp facilitators noted that Blackfeet has a very successful mentor training program they would like to adapt for the LCO camp counselors. These potential improvements could be incorporated into future iterations of the camp.



Other Good Life Vision Programs

In addition to the Good Life Culture Camp, the Good Life Vision includes four projects that are aimed at augmenting and extending the Culture Camp's programming.

Digital Storytelling

In partnership with nDigiDreams, a Native film-making company, the Good Life Vision included the creation of storytelling videos that share the lived experiences of LCO's parents and grandparents on the journey of the Good Life. The stories premiered at a unique film festival event in July 2022, with approximately 50 family members and other community members in attendance. The nDigiDreams filmmakers shared information about the process used, and each of the storytellers described their experiences in creating their stories.

Attendees were asked to complete a feedback survey about the event, and 100% of respondents ($n = 19$) expressed the opinion that the storytelling messages will effectively encourage youth to create promising futures for themselves. Despite the sensitive nature of some of the subject matter, 89% of respondents indicated they believed the stories would be appropriate for youth aged 11 and up. Attendees at the event expressed great appreciation for the storytellers and their bravery in sharing their life challenges:

“

Thank you for your incredible bravery. Most of us don't want to admit we have made serious mistakes.

- Film Festival Attendee

“

Beautiful project! You helped me personally with all stories shared. Miigewech!

- Film Festival Attendee



The video stories were shared after the event through the LCO Child Support Facebook page, and one of the videos was used as part of the middle school program. The original intent was to integrate the stories into the programming for youth. However, the sensitive nature of the subject matters discussed and the family relationships between the storytellers and youth served complicated this plan and prevented the full incorporation of the stories into another programming. To view the full video stories, please refer to the Overview Brief.

Middle School Program

Partnering with the LCO Ojibwe School, Good Life Vision implemented a multi-session program on parenting and the Good Life for middle school students. Six sessions were planned, with an additional one added to refresh the participants' engagement with previous lessons. The sessions were held over seven weeks during school hours and included discussions, activities, and homework assignments on family, emotions, kindness, respect for elders, and staying healthy. One assignment was creating a family tree, which generated lively conversation as many youths shared family lineages. The program ended with participants making plans to support their physical, mental, and spiritual health on the path to the Good Life.

Eighteen youths participated in the Middle School program in May 2023 and offered feedback on their experiences:

- All the youth reported thinking the overall program was okay (56%) or great (44%).
- Youth were given assignments on each topic, and the highest-rated group spent 30 minutes outside absorbing nature (100%), saying yes to healthy activities (94%), and creating a good life plan (82%).
- Even though most youth reported liking the out-of-school activities, homework assignments were the least popular part of the program, with 28% describing them as “not great.”
- Looking ahead to the next implementation, 94% of youth would like to see the same presenters return, and a majority would like to see different subjects and activities included.

The middle school program was repeated at the LCO Ojibwe School in the spring of 2024. For this implementation of the curriculum, 24 youths completed a pre-test survey, and 21 completed the post-test. Of the youth who provided demographic information in the pre-survey, participants were almost evenly split between those who identified as female ($n = 11$) and those who identified as male ($n = 12$). The average age of the youth who participated in this implementation of the middle school curriculum was 11.46 years.

High School Financial Literacy Simulation

The Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe School hosted an immersive simulation in which students learned about the impacts of their financial decisions on their lives after high school. The simulation was centered on the students' finances, including their home, family, education and career, future planning, and other unexpected expenses. The simulation was composed of the Good Life Game, which served as an interactive way for the students to plan their spending and income based on the Howah Fate Cards, each with a financial cost or gain described. The Good Life Game also allowed the students to learn about the resources and other services available to them within their community and gain further knowledge about the



Seven Grandfather Teachings. Lastly, the simulation had a budget worksheet, facilitating the notation of each student’s financial state throughout the game.

Overall, 51 students participated in the financial literacy simulation, ranging from freshmen to seniors in high school, with an average age of 17. Of these students, most identified as male (51.02 %) or female (44.90%), with a smaller percentage identifying as female and non-binary (2.04%) or genderfluid (2.04%). Although both pre-and post-test surveys were designed for this event, only the pre-test was administered to participants in May of 2024 due to time limitations.

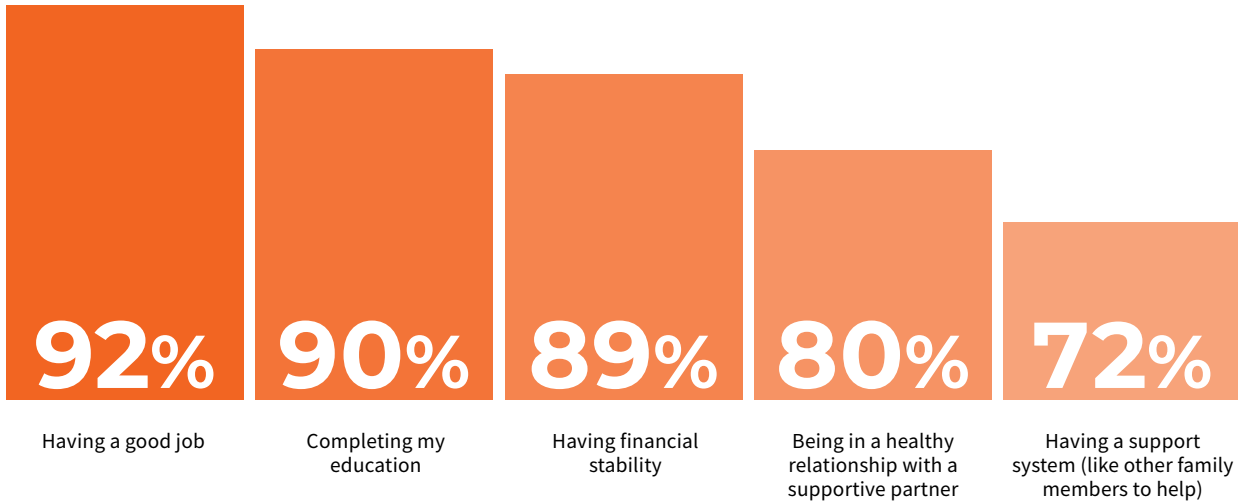
As part of this survey, the youth were asked about what living the Good Life meant to them, about general financial knowledge, and about which factors will have the greatest influence on when they decide to have children. When asked what living the Good Life meant to them in an open-ended question, common themes included being happy, healthy, and financially stable. For example, when asked what the Good Life means to them, one female student reported it as “being happy and healthy and making money.” Similarly, another female student said living a Good Life means being “happy, stable, living, [having] friends and healthy.”

Other important findings related to general financial knowledge among these youth include:

- Over 60% of the sample ($n = 31$) reported that they agree somewhat or very much with the statement “I know the advantages and disadvantages of credit.” Meanwhile, nearly 40% of the sample ($n = 20$) indicated that they disagreed somewhat or very much with this statement.
- Approximately 84% of this sample ($n = 43$) also reported that they agree somewhat or very much with the statement, “I know how to create and follow a budget.” Most importantly, the remaining 16% of youths ($n = 8$) disagree somewhat with this statement.
- Overall, 70% ($n = 35$) of the sample said that their financial well-being will be “very important” to them as they age.

Participants were also asked how much certain factors would influence their choice to have a child. The below bullets show which factors were rated as “will influence my decision a little bit” or “will influence my decision a lot” for each of the choices provided:

Financial Factors Influencing Participants (n=51)
Percentage of Participants



High School Parenting

Good Life Vision strengthened the health class elective, Early Childhood, and Parenting, offered by LCO Ojibwe School by providing 12 RealCare Baby Infant Simulators for parenting education. Students practiced responding to the baby dolls' needs and experienced the demanding realities of caring for an infant. Students cared for the baby simulator for a weekend. For the evaluation, a focus group was held with students who participated in the program, and an individual interview was held with the teacher of the health class elective.

Focus Group

Six students (freshmen and juniors) participated in the High School Parenting Program. As part of this focus group, we also asked the students about their overall opinion of the class, whether it should be taught again, and what changes should be made moving forward. The students generally held a very positive view of the course when asked about their overall opinion. As said by one student, "It was a really great learning experience." The students also vehemently agreed that the class should be required for all LCO Ojibwe School students. However, the students did feel that it would be helpful if they could carry the doll for longer than the weekend.

Interview

To gather information about the implementation of this program, CPR staff also completed an individual interview with Theresa Poole, the teacher of this health class. At the time of the interview, Theresa had been employed by the LCO school for six years and taught this course for all six years. Students in previous course iterations also used dolls for this parenting section. However, the old dolls were outdated and missing a lot of the electrical components. As a result, when the course was taught, students would sign a paper stating when they fed and changed the baby. The new dolls include computerized chips that register the care provided to the doll. Theresa credits these new dolls for the smoother implementation of the program this year. Overall, she felt the experience of carrying the doll for the weekend helped generate some critical conversations with students, especially around the responsibilities and financial impact of having a child, which had a meaningful impact on the girls.



It was a really great learning experience.

- Student participant

Conclusions

Feedback from Good Life Vision's program participants and caregivers was overall positive, expressing enjoyment and engagement with all the programs.

The effectiveness of program implementation was significantly enhanced by the strong partnerships with Camp Highlands, LCO Boys and Girls Club, LCO Ojibwe School, and nDigiDreams. Camp Highlands' commitment to LCO youth and its generosity in making its facility and staff available at a lower cost had a profound impact on the Good Life Culture Camp. The partnership with the Boys and Girls Club added valuable youth development expertise to the camp implementation and has laid a strong foundation for sustainability for the camp beyond the life of the funded grant.

Project management support from Grays Peak Strategies also facilitated program improvements. Careful attention to debriefing after the first camp implementation led to concrete improvements in the second and, consequently, the third implementation of culture camps. In addition, program coordinators were flexible and resourceful and responded in real-time when implementations did not go as planned.

The cultural activities in the Good Life Vision were diverse, educational, and engaging:

- The language lessons, crafts, dance instruction, and powwows at the Good Life Culture camps prompted direct engagement with traditional activities, which are crucial to cultural connectedness.
- The nDigiDreams storytelling videos captured the lived experiences of community members and offered unique guidance for connecting to culture as a resource for overcoming adversity. The middle school program offered an interpretation of guidance from the Seven Grandfather Teachings to prompt youth to create their own Good Life plans and the high school program provided participants with a glimpse of the day-to-day realities of caring for an infant, as well as the impact of future financial decisions.

Together, these activities facilitated robust engagement with Ojibwe culture for participants and encouraged them to follow the Good Life path now and in the future. The Seven Grandfather Teachings imparted consistent guidance to the cultural activities that comprised the Good Life Vision. These Seven Grandfather Teachings are essential to Ojibwe tribes across the United States and Canada. As such, abundant resources for engaging youth with the teachings have been developed. The implementation team worked hard to incorporate these cultural values into every Good Life Vision program with the core focus of building LCO youth's cultural connectedness as an effective strategy to promote positive mental health, reduce substance use and its accompanying risks while increasing the healthy, pro-social behavior needed to follow the Good Life path.



This evaluation brief is the second of three descriptions of the Good Life Vision programs and approach, process of implementation, and outcomes. The briefs summarize the Good Life Vision evaluation conducted by the Center for Policy Research. Quotes included here were solicited through feedback surveys or were extracted from the *It's a Good Life* film, produced by nDigiDreams. For more information, contact dstarcher@centerforpolicyresearch.org.