

Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band

Community Wellness Plan 2024-2029



Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band
1A, 1 Nahanni Mountainview Street
Nahanni Butte, NT X0E 2N0

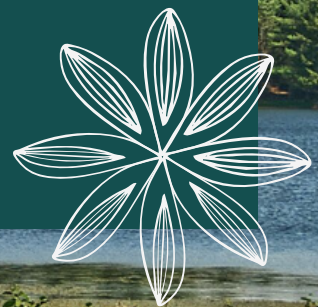


Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. About Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band
3. Project Background
4. Data Collection
5. Needs and Priorities
 - a. Land
 - b. Youth
 - c. Mental Health
 - d. Language
 - e. Elders
 - f. Other
6. Community Wellness Plan
 - a. Recreational Issues
 - b. Language/Culture Issues
 - c. Mental Health Issues
 - d. Physical Exercise and Activities
 - e. Fresh produce/Greenhouse Project
 - f. Clean Community
7. References



Introduction

The Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band Community Wellness Plan is a holistic, community-based approach to creating and delivering culturally-relevant initiatives that improve the health and well-being of Nahʔą Dehé community members.

Indigenous community wellness has always been holistic – encompassing physical, mental, emotional, social, cultural, spiritual and environmental dimensions (1)(2). The determinants of Indigenous health are interconnected – this includes the relationships between: individual health behaviors; community infrastructure, kinship networks, languages, ceremony, knowledge sharing, and relationships to land; and larger historical, political, economic, and social systems, such as Indigenous worldviews and self-determination (3). This approach to wellness recognizes the interconnectedness of individuals within a community, and the impact of the community's environment, resources, social structures, and cultural practices on the overall health and well-being of its members.

As a result of residential schools and ongoing settler colonization, this approach to health and wellness has been undermined, resulting in Indigenous communities facing significant health disparities in comparison to the non-Indigenous population (4)(5)(6). This includes higher rates of chronic disease and substance abuse, limited access to quality and culturally appropriate healthcare, and a lack of clean water, adequate housing, and food security in communities (7)(8). These disparities are even greater for Indigenous communities situated in Northern provinces (9). Northern and remote communities face a greater “loss of basic healthcare services, increased unemployment and poverty, lack of internet access, lack of economic opportunity, and lack of transportation that disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples.” (10)

All of this is compounded by cultural disconnection, intergenerational trauma, weakened family structures, and economic dependency as a result of colonization. Given the historical and ongoing context of these disparities, approaches to improving the health outcomes of Indigenous peoples in the North must be trauma-informed and center community, culture, land and self-determination.

This community wellness plan presents a shared vision of health and sustainability by and for the residents of Nahᓂᓂ Dehé Dene Band. It provides an outline of programs and initiatives that recognize and nurture all aspects of health and well-being from a Dene perspective, enabling Nahᓂᓂ Dehé Dene Band individuals and community to flourish together. This initiative is a core part of reconciliation, as it works to fulfill a number of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada's Calls to Action. In particular, Calls to Action #18-24 advocate for community-based approaches and programs that address the health and wellness inequities experienced by Indigenous communities, while Calls to Action #13-17 emphasize the significance of language and culture as foundational to Indigenous identity and wellness (11). Further, this plan also fulfills Articles 23 and 24 the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which respectively state that Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for their own community development, and use traditional medicines, health practices, and all social and health services without discrimination (12).

Community wellness is vital to building healthy and self-determining Indigenous communities in the North. When individuals are supported in a holistic way, communities are in a better position to develop and enhance their economic, political and social dimensions, while maintaining strong cultural practices and values. In the following report Nahᓂᓂ Dehé Dene Band outlines their main health and wellness concerns, objectives, and priorities, laying out a practical foundation for delivering wellness programs in the community over the next five years.

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- (1) Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2014). Social determinants of Inuit health in Canada.
- (2) Thiessen et al. (2020). Indigenous perspectives on wellness and health in Canada: study protocol for a scoping review.
- (3) Public Health Agency of Canada. (2018). Key health inequalities in Canada: A national portrait – Executive summary.
- (4) Dussault, R., & Erasmus, G. (1996). Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
- (5) Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015).
- (6) Greenwood, et al. (eds.). (2018). Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' health in Canada: Beyond the social.
- (7) King, M. (2011). Chronic diseases and mortality in Canadian Aboriginal peoples: Learning from the knowledge
- (8) McNally, M., & Martin, D. (2017). First Nations, Inuit and Métis health
- (9) Young TK, Chatwood S. Delivering more equitable primary health care in Northern Canada.
- (10) Gillespie J. (2023). Health Disparities for Canada's Remote and Northern Residents.
- (11) Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Calls to action.
- (12) United Nations. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

About Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band

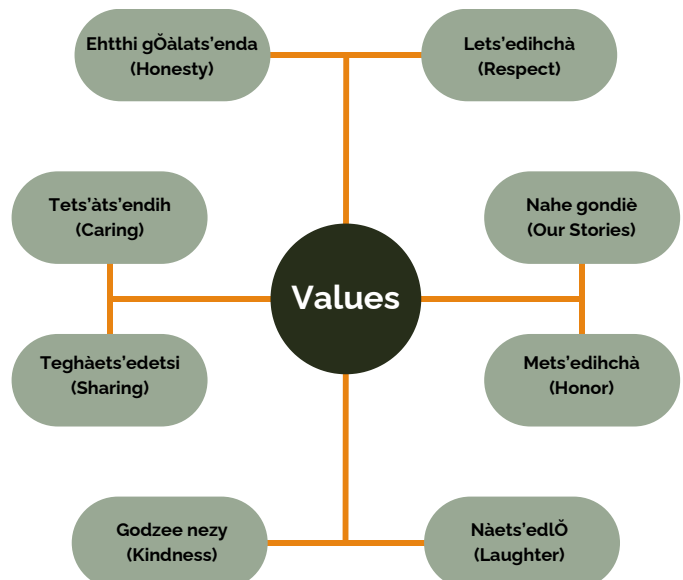
In the heart of Denendeh Northwest Territories, charming mountains make for astounding views and hold important stories in their traditional names, like Tthenáágó – meaning “strong rock” in Dene Zhatié. The land and water of the area was used and traveled on by the Naha Dene people for centuries. Located 500 km southwest of Yellowknife, families from surrounding camps gathered together to form what is now known as the permanent settlement of Nahanni Butte in 1940.

The community sits along the picturesque banks of the South Nahanni River, 1 km upriver from where the Liard River and South Nahanni River meet. Nahanni Butte has a small population of around 100 people, and for each of them, this community is their home, filled with deep rooted family ties and a place that is difficult to leave. The community members are proud of their rich cultural heritage, tradition and are well-connected to their land.

Source: <https://www.nahannibuttedene.com/mission-vision/>

Mission: The Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band will develop strong individual, family and community self-sufficiency by balancing economic activities with cultural values and progressive social and community enhancement to continue to endure and prosper.

Vision: To preserve our culture, to empower our people, and to leave the world better than we found it



Project Background

This community wellness plan is part of a larger initiative run by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), and will provide five years of funding to Northwest Territories (NWT) communities to implement wellness programming. The GNWT states:

Community wellness is a shared vision for healthier communities. It results in a healthier population and greater involvement by communities. The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is committed to providing support to NWT communities so that they can improve the wellness and health of their residents. The GNWT is preparing for a new Funding Agreement with Indigenous Affairs Canada to deliver federally funded community-based wellness programs. The federal funding is used by the communities to develop and implement their own wellness plans (13)

In the past, the Nahᓃą Dehé Dene Band wellness program has been funded through a 5-year multi-block funding agreement through Community, Culture and Innovation which is a division within the GNWT Department of Health and Social Service. Our previous CWP was created in 2017, and was funded through a yearly contribution agreement within the 5-year multi-block funding agreement from April 2018 to March 2023. The goal with this new wellness plan is to use a flexible, multi-year funding arrangement that will allow our community to develop sustainable, long-term initiatives that address larger, foundational concerns within the community. Moving away from a yearly funding model will ensure our health and wellness programs can succeed, grow and adapt over the next five years.



(13) GNWT. (n.d.) Community Wellness Plans. *Health and Social Services*.

Data Collection

Community wellness is best achieved through collaborative efforts among individuals, organizations, and government entities to create policies and environments that support health and well-being. The residents of Nahᓵą Dehé Dene Band met with representatives from the GNWT department of Health and Social Services on July 5th, 2022, to discuss the health and wellness needs and priorities of the community. The purpose of the meeting was to hear directly from residents about their concerns and ideas for improving community wellbeing over the next five years.

First, participants were asked to share their top concerns – what problems are they seeing in the community? What issues are impacting them and their family most? How does health and wellness impact their daily life? Next, participants discussed possible solutions to these concerns – what are our needs and priorities? What visions do we have for our community? How do we work towards this? The whole group discussed their answers together and negotiated changes, such as combining themes or concerns together, or removing redundant ideas. The next step involved organizing all of the suggestions into key themes, followed by small self-directed groups to further a more detailed discussion of each priority.

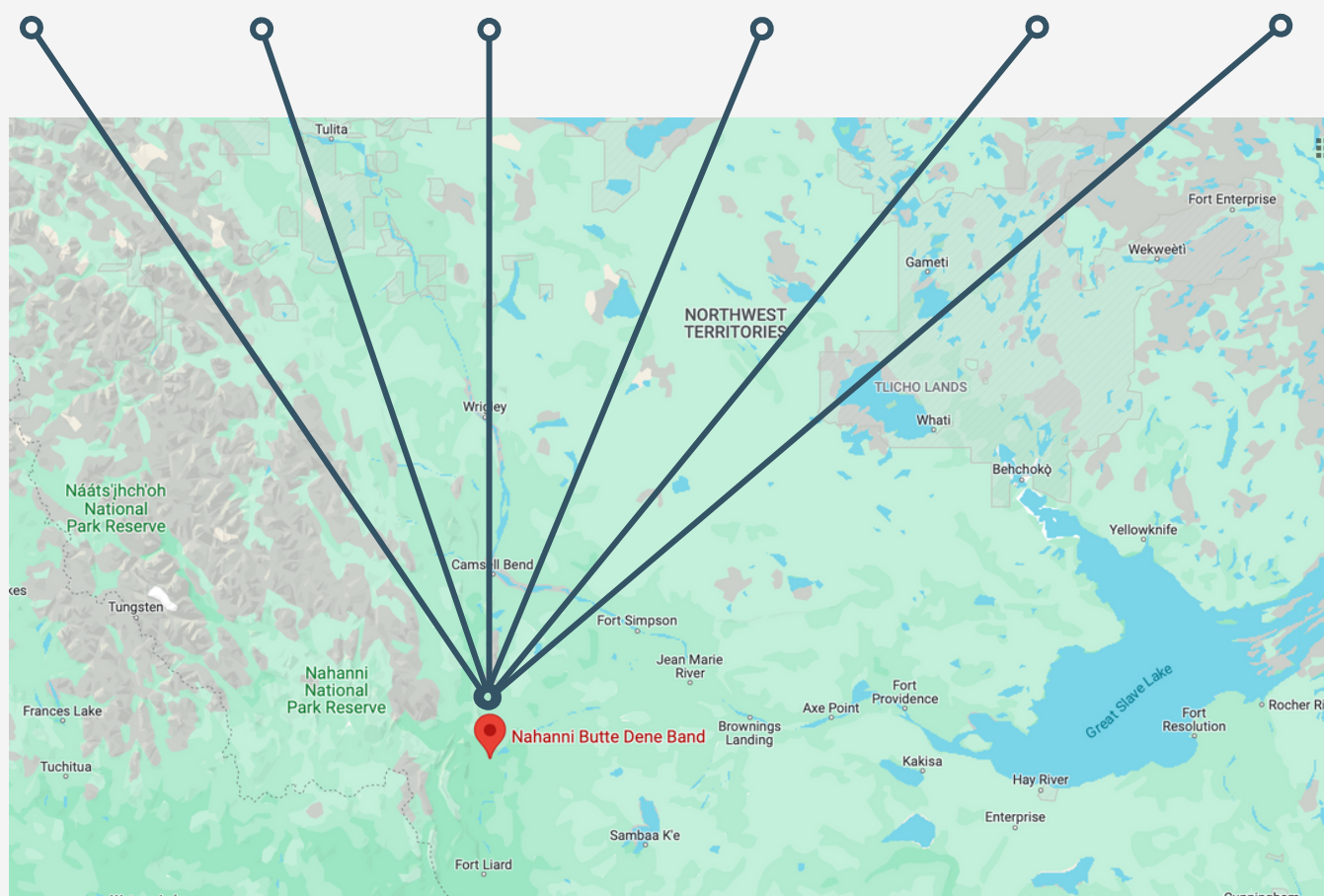
In addition to this in-person consultation, a community questionnaire was distributed to residents of Nahᓵą Dehé Dene Band. The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine the most common health and wellness concerns in the community, as identified by residents. The resulting list of needs and priorities identified by the questionnaire and the community consultation is summarized below.



Need and Priorities

The following is a summary of the discussions and findings that emerged from the community consultation held in 2022, where participants discussed how to work towards their top health and wellness priorities and best utilize their five years of GNWT wellness funding.

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| LAND | YOUTH | HEALTH | LANGUAGE | ELDERS | OTHER |
| The consensus among community participants was the necessity for increased engagement of youth in traditional land-based programs. | Offering more youth programs in the community will young people will cultivate deeper respect for their peers, elders, parents, the natural environment, wildlife, and the broader community. | The participants reached a consensus on the necessity of expanding mental health education, with an emphasis on stress management and anti-bullying workshops. | Organize regular meetings focused on language preservation within the community and the broader Dehcho region. This involves Elders engaging with the youth through trapping activities and conducting one-on-one sessions to teach Dene Zhaté. | A key aspect of community wellness is the involvement of Elders in these programs and initiatives. Especially interactions between youth and elders through land-based activities. | Community participants recognized the importance of establishing continuous workshops aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of community challenges. |



1 ON-THE-LAND PROGRAMMING

The consensus among community participants was the necessity for increased engagement of youth in traditional land-based programs. There is a strong motivation among community harvesters to guide children and youth in experiential learning opportunities on the land. Furthermore, there is a call to instill a sense of pride in our language within the community and a willingness to share knowledge through teaching. To prioritize this initiative, it will be essential to secure support from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the Dene First Nation (DFN).

From previous experience, participants identified significant challenges to this priority, including inadequate funding, insufficient communication, and a general disinterest in land-based programs. This initiative aims to increase youth participation in these programs, collaborating with the Community Recreation team to plan, organize, and implement these valuable cultural and educational experiences.

2 YOUTH

Participants anticipate that offering more youth programs in the community will significantly diminish the apprehension youth have in asking for help, due to a fear of judgment. Through community programs, young people will cultivate deeper respect for their peers, elders, parents, the natural environment, wildlife, and the broader community. The envisioned outcomes include an improvement in youth who demonstrate positive behavior and attitudes, possess high levels of confidence and self-esteem, and exhibit problem-solving skills and effective communication amongst themselves. The community hopes that through structured initiatives, youth will also learn to take responsibility for their actions, understand the consequences, and refrain from attributing blame to others.

To achieve these improvements, this plan includes enhancing parenting skills, improving communication, setting positive examples, and providing consistent access to sports and physical activities. There is a recognized need to equip the community gymnasium with adequate exercise equipment. The strategy also involves organizing workshops targeted at youth and increasing engagement in land-based activities, alongside rewarding and acknowledging positive youth behaviors.

The successful execution of these plans requires collaboration with frontline workers, family members, teachers, parents, and grandparents. Identified potential challenges include: insufficient funding for youth programs, a lack of interest, insufficient engagement from community members, and a scarcity of resources. Participants identified that the community is committed to initiating these plans as soon as possible and intend to hold regular meetings to monitor progress and ensure the continuity of these efforts.

3 MENTAL HEALTH

The participants outlined a strategy to collaborate with the Dehcho First Nations (DFN) to secure necessary funding for this priority initiative. One key aspect of this plan involves Elders engaging with the youth through trapping activities and conducting one-on-one sessions to teach Dene Zhatié. Additionally, Elders are eager to partake in language training sessions during the Spring Camp. The goal is to organize regular meetings focused on language preservation within the community and the broader Dehcho region. To this end, the participants are keen on enlisting the support of community members who are fluent in the language, alongside the Dehcho First Nations and the Band Council.

4 LANGUAGE PRESERVATION

The participants outlined a strategy to collaborate with the Dehcho First Nations (DFN) to secure necessary funding for this priority initiative. One key aspect of this plan involves Elders engaging with the youth through trapping activities and conducting one-on-one sessions to teach Dene Zhatié. Additionally, Elders are eager to partake in language training sessions during the Spring Camp. The goal is to organize regular meetings focused on language preservation within the community and the broader Dehcho region. To this end, the participants are keen on enlisting the support of community members who are fluent in the language, alongside the Dehcho First Nations and the Band Council.

A recognized challenge is the dwindling motivation among the youth to learn Dene Zhatié, largely attributed to their preoccupation with social media and technology. Despite these obstacles, Nahᓂ Dehé Dene Band has been actively collaborating with DFN to implement language programs within the community. The intention is to continue building on the existing momentum, fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of Dene Zhatié among the younger generation.

5 ELDERS

Another key aspect of wellness is the involvement of Elders in these programs. An engaged and physically active elder population serves as a prime indicator of progress in addressing this priority. Community participants proposed ways to facilitate increased interactions between the community's youth and elders through various land-based activities. To achieve these objectives, they intend to garner support from the community. Recognizing the significance of this priority, there is a consensus on the need for the community to reconvene and delineate the subsequent phases of development.

6 OTHER

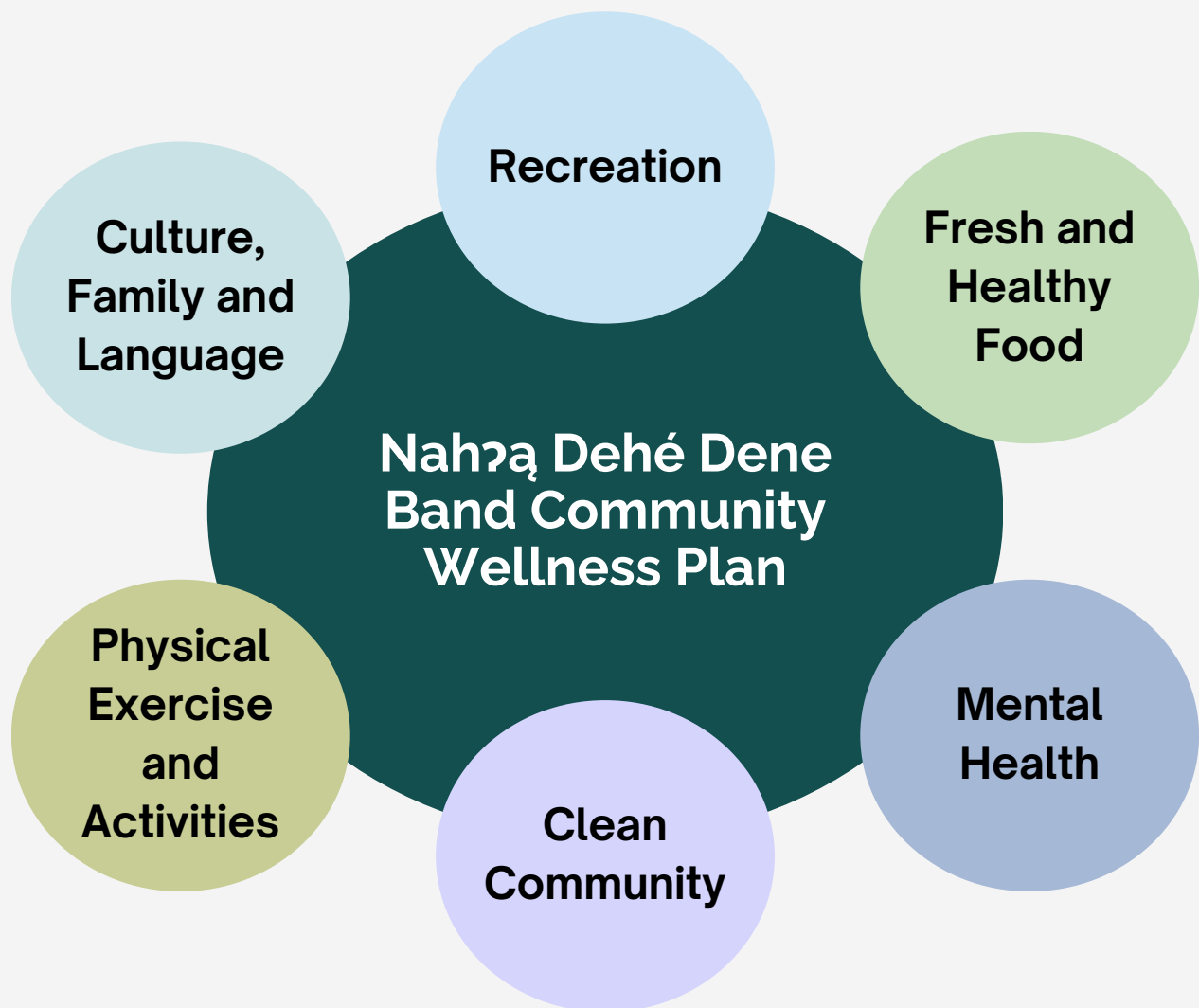
Community participants recognized the importance of establishing continuous workshops aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of community challenges. They believe it is crucial for community members to embrace and express their truths openly and from the heart. Essential steps to achieve this include the education and utilization of workshop tools designed for community engagement, fostering skills for a positive and healthy lifestyle, and overcoming detrimental habits. To facilitate these goals, the participants seek the assistance of professional facilitators, spiritual healers, and counselors.

However, they anticipate potential challenges such as a lack of motivation among community members to attend the workshops, insufficient participant numbers, and a lack of engagement from the youth. To address these issues, participants were eager to implement their action plans as soon as possible, with an emphasis on hosting workshops throughout the year, particularly in the spring season, to maintain momentum and participation.

Community Wellness Plan



The following Community Wellness plan emerges directly from the community consultation with Nahᓂᓴ Dehé Dene Band and the GNWT, as well as the common concerns identified in the community wellness questionnaire. The wellness plan outlines six spheres that will guide community programming and initiatives over the next five years. The goal of this plan is to build on already established programming in Nahanni Butte, create new programs when needed, and to integrate culture, land, youth and healing into all spheres of health and wellness programming.



The following offers a practical roadmap for working towards this health and wellness plan, as identified and suggested by community members and residents:

Enhancing Recreation Programs: Enhancing the recreational offerings in the Nahᓃą Dehé Dene Band community will foster a more engaged, healthy, and culturally enriched environment for all community members.

- **Facility Upgrades:** The community is in need of enhanced infrastructure to support recreational activities effectively. This includes the construction of a new Arbor and an all-weather performance stage, along with the acquisition of modern exercise equipment. Furthermore, there's a necessity for either a designated section within the existing Gymnasium/Recreation Center dedicated to physical exercises or the establishment of a new facility to cater to these needs.
- **Program Consistency:** It is imperative for the Recreation team to guarantee the continuous, year-round provision of a variety of recreational programs. These should encompass activities such as bingo, volleyball tournaments, youth hand games tournaments, spring carnivals, and dances for special events. Such programs must cater to all community members, spanning different age groups including elders, youth, children, parents with toddlers, and adults. Moreover, enhanced coordination and cooperation with local and regional organizations serving these demographics are crucial.
- **Recreation Team Development:** The Recreation team requires training in budget planning and program delivery to improve their efficiency and effectiveness in serving the community's needs.
- **Diversification of Programs:** There is a call for an expansion in the variety of recreational offerings, particularly in the arts and music, to cater to a broader range of interests within the community.
- **Elders and Youth Engagement:** The elders in our community, who are deeply rooted in tradition and culture, possess a keen desire to impart knowledge on living a traditional, healthy lifestyle to the younger generations. However, facilitating these intergenerational interactions presents challenges, particularly in aligning their schedules for effective knowledge transfer.

Regular Language, Cultural, and Family Activities: Enhancing facilities, engaging youth, increasing volunteer support, and encouraging elder participation will be critical to the success of regular, ongoing language, cultural, and family activities within the community.

- **Facility Shortages:** The community faces a notable deficiency in the facilities required to host language, cultural, and family-oriented activities effectively. Addressing this gap is essential for the successful implementation of these programs.

- **Youth Engagement:** There is a marked lack of interest among the youth in participating in these activities. Strategies to enhance the appeal of language and cultural programs to younger demographics are crucial.
- **Volunteer Participation:** The community experiences a scarcity of volunteers to support the organization and execution of these activities. Increasing volunteer engagement is vital for the sustainability of these programs.
- **Elder Involvement:** Greater participation from Elders is necessary to enrich these activities with cultural depth and tradition. Efforts to encourage and facilitate their involvement are key.
- **Logistical Challenges:** Organizing trips and activities outside the community is often hindered by logistical issues, including limited availability of transport vehicles and adverse weather conditions. Addressing these logistical challenges is essential for the smooth execution of language, cultural, and family activities.

Expansion of Mental Wellness Programs within the Community: Addressing the absence of a dedicated mental health professional, enhancing training, increasing the availability of mental health sessions, and tackling the interconnected issues of alcohol addiction and mental health are crucial steps towards improving the community's mental wellness infrastructure.

- **Absence of a Dedicated Mental Health Professional:** Currently, our community lacks a dedicated mental health worker, which is a critical gap in providing consistent and **professional mental health support**.
- **Lack of Training:** There is an evident need for comprehensive training programs to equip our community members, especially those in supportive roles, with the necessary skills and knowledge to address mental health concerns effectively.
- **Insufficient Mental Health Sessions:** The community requires an increased number of mental health sessions to adequately meet the needs of its members. Expanding these sessions is essential for offering timely and effective support.
- **Association Between Alcohol Addiction and Mental Health Issues:** The prevalence of alcohol addiction within the community, often linked with underlying mental health issues, underscores the need for integrated mental wellness programs that address both concerns concurrently.

Enhancement of Physical Exercise and Activities: Implementing these measures — modernizing equipment, engaging professional trainers, and establishing a dedicated fitness space — are critical steps towards fostering a culture of physical wellness in the community.

- **Equipment Modernization:** There is a noticeable deficiency in suitable equipment for physical exercise within the community. Investment in modern, high-quality fitness gear is essential to facilitate effective workout sessions and promote overall health.

- **Professional Training Sessions:** To ensure the community benefits maximally from the available equipment and exercise programs, it is proposed to engage a professional trainer on a quarterly basis. This expert will offer guidance to fitness enthusiasts and participants on the proper use of equipment and the development of exercise routines tailored to their needs.
- **Establishment of a Dedicated Fitness Space:** The community requires a dedicated space for physical exercise. This could be achieved by designating a specific area within the existing recreation center solely for fitness activities, ensuring a conducive environment for exercise and health promotion.

Fresh Produce and Greenhouse Project: Implementing a greenhouse project, complete with a dedicated coordinator, represents a significant step towards promoting nutritional health and self-sufficiency in the community.

- **Greenhouse Construction:** The community recognizes the need for a new greenhouse, with minimum dimensions of 15 feet by 20 feet, to facilitate the cultivation of fresh vegetables, fruits, and other produce. Establishing this greenhouse is essential for enhancing local access to healthy food options.
- **Appointment of a Garden Coordinator:** To ensure the efficient operation and maintenance of the greenhouse throughout the year, there is a critical requirement for a dedicated garden coordinator or greenhouse worker. This role will be pivotal in overseeing the production of fresh produce and ensuring the greenhouse's success.

Clean Community Initiative: These actions aim to foster a sense of pride and communal responsibility towards maintaining a clean and healthy community environment for all residents.

- **Public Building Cleanliness:** It is imperative to maintain high standards of cleanliness within all community public buildings. Regular cleaning schedules and maintenance protocols will be established to ensure these environments are hygienic and welcoming for all users.
- **Street and Public Space Cleanliness:** Efforts will be intensified to ensure that streets and public spaces within the community remain clean and free of litter. Initiatives may include organized clean-up events, increased waste disposal options, and public awareness campaigns about the importance of a clean environment.
- **Support for Elders:** Special assistance will be provided to help Elders maintain clean and orderly living spaces. This support could come in the form of regular visits from community volunteers or services specifically tailored to meet the needs of Elders in keeping their homes clean.

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Images: Submitted by community participants and retrieved from Nahanni Butte website

