

Łíídlíl Kúé’ First Nation

Community Wellness Plan
2024-2029



Łíídlíl Kúé’ First Nation
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Introduction¹

The Łíídlíí Kúé First Nation (LKFN) Community Wellness Plan represents a comprehensive, community-driven strategy designed to develop and implement culturally appropriate wellness programs that enhance the health and wellbeing of the members of Łíídlíí Kúé First Nation.

As a result of residential schools and ongoing settler colonization, Indigenous communities continue to face significant health disparities in comparison to the non-Indigenous population (2)(3)(4). 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 (5)(6). These disparities are even greater for Indigenous communities situated in Northern provinces (7). 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.” (8) Given the historical and ongoing context of these disparities, approaches to improving the health outcomes of Indigenous peoples in the North must come from communities themselves, as one Łíídlíí Kúé First Nation member asserts: “we should be in control of wellness in our own community.”

From a Łíídlíí Kúé First Nation perspective, wellness is understood as a holistic concept. As one community member states: “wellness is being physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually healthy.” Others similarly reflect that “wellness means a connection of the mind, body and spirit” and “a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual state of wholeness.” Many others said that to them, wellness means “balance.”

The land was consistently identified as one of the most important components of wellness to Łíídlı̨ Kúé First Nation. As one community member reflects, "wellness is 'time spent in nature every day, becoming connected with community, and forming healthy relationships on the land". Many survey respondents emphasized the profound connection between wellness, culture, land and community. Community perspectives also stress the importance of self-care and joy, as wellness means "taking care of yourself mentally and physically and doing things that bring you joy and fill your cup."

The Łíídlı̨ Kúé First Nation recognizes that community engagement is crucial to wellness, underpinned by a commonly identified belief that "it takes the whole community to make changes." As one person reflects, wellness means "coming together as a whole," while another person understands wellness as "feeling like our best selves and then helping others be their best self." Importantly, many people also identified wellness as synonymous with being sober. As one member writes, "wellness is making healthy choices and staying sober and drug free" while another person wrote that wellness means "no alcohol." At its core, wellness means "a healthy person, connected to their land, language and ancestry, living with the support of their family and friends."

In summary, the shared vision for wellness in the Łíídlı̨ Kúé First Nation is to work towards building "a community of culture, compassion, empathy, and spirit." Recognizing that while there may be challenges (as one person wrote: "we can veer off the road for a short while"), it is important to continue moving forward and stay focused on our collective wellness goals. As one respondent wrote: "we are at a new dawn, no looking backwards."

FOOTNOTES

- (1) The following is a summary of Łíídlı̨ Kúé First Nation perspectives around wellness, drawing from community members who responded to survey questionnaires. Any quotations used below are excerpts drawn directly from this survey data.
- (2) Dussault, R., & Erasmus, G. (1996). Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
- (3) Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015).
- (4) Greenwood, et al. (eds.). (2018). Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' health in Canada: Beyond the social.
- (5) King, M. (2011). Chronic diseases and mortality in Canadian Aboriginal peoples: Learning from the knowledge
- (6) McNally, M., & Martin, D. (2017). First Nations, Inuit and Métis health
- (7) Young TK, Chatwood S. Delivering more equitable primary health care in Northern Canada.
- (8) Gillespie J. (2023). Health Disparities for Canada's Remote and Northern Residents.

About Łíídlíł Kúé' First Nation

Łíídlíł Kúé (Fort Simpson), “the place where the rivers come together” is a village on the Dehcho Region of Canada’s Northwest Territories. The community is located on an island where the Dehcho (Mackenzie River) and the Nácháh Dehé (Liard River) meet.

We are the keepers of our traditional lands and peoples’ health. Łíídlíł Kúé First Nation is committed to celebrating our culture in a way that bridges the gap between generations. This is emphasized in all our activities. We are actively working towards gaining full control of our lands and programs. Our people are strong and they take pride in our rich heritage, as well as planning for what lies ahead.

We take pride in the beauty and vastness of our home. This land is full of breathtaking views of sunsets and the historic confluence of the waters of the Dehcho (Mackenzie River) and Nácháh Dehé (Liard River). Within our region is also the Nahanni National Park rich with the incredible landscape of the Mackenzie Mountains. Through the park also flows the South Nahanni River, a white-water paradise and one of the headwaters to the Nácháh Dehé (Liard River). Dene people have been traveling all of these river routes since time immemorial and it is our responsibility to preserve them and cherish them for future generations.

Source: Łíídlíł Kúé First Nation Website (<https://liidlilikue.ca/about/>)

Mission: We, the Łíídlíł Kúé Got’ine, guided by Dene principles and values, will be educated, proud, strong, unified, strong, self-sufficient, and self-governing people who respect our culture, language, youth, elders, and each others’ voices and spirituality as we are the keepers of our traditional lands and peoples’ health forever.

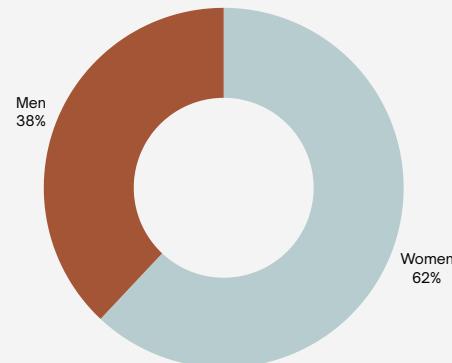
Vision: Many positive changes and accomplishments that include having full control of traditional lands and social programs, and a Łíídlíł Kúé First Nation that is strong, reliable, relevant, supportive, progressive, representative, results-oriented, and inclusive with engaged and educated members.

Data Collection

As part of our comprehensive approach to understanding the wellness needs of the community, we distributed 250 surveys targeting a diverse range of demographics. Out of these, 150 surveys were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 60%. This rate is indicative of a high level of engagement and interest in the community's wellness initiatives.

Demographic Breakdown of Survey Respondents:

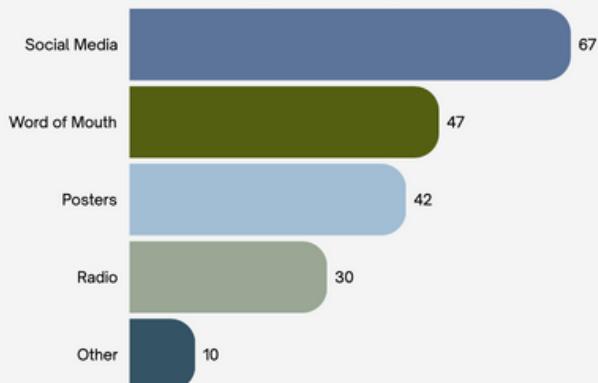
- Gender Distribution:** The respondents consisted of 62% women and 38% men, highlighting a slightly higher engagement among woman community members.
- Family Status:** A significant proportion of respondents have children, which suggests that family-oriented wellness programs could be particularly beneficial.



Preferred Communication Channels:

Community members were queried on how they typically receive information about LKFN wellness programming. The responses were as follows:

- Radio:** 30%
- Posters:** 42%
- Social Media:** 67%
- Word of Mouth:** 47%
- Other:** 10%



These findings indicate a diverse range of communication preferences among the community, with social media being the most popular. However, a considerable number of responses highlighted the effectiveness of more accessible methods like radio and posters. Many respondents recommended increasing the use of posters, bulletin boards, and radio advertising. This suggestion is especially pertinent considering not all community members have regular access to the internet and social media.

Youth Engagement:

In addition to the survey, specific consultations were held with the youth of the community to gather their input on the types of wellness programs they find appealing and relevant. This engagement is crucial as it helps tailor programs that not only meet the needs of our younger community members but also encourage their active participation in community wellness.

Community Findings

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is a crucial first step in understanding the specific challenges and needs that the Łíídlįį Kúé First Nation community is facing in terms of health and wellness. By doing this, we are able to identify the most urgent needs of our community and figure out how to best use available resources to meet these priorities effectively. In summary, the most important needs of Łíídlįį Kúé First Nation are: (1) mental health and addictions challenges; (2) Lack of Safe and Culturally-Relevant Infrastructure; (3) Language and Culture Loss; (4) Lack of Community Programming and Intergenerational Learning.

Any data used and quoted in the rest of this report was taken directly from the surveys that were submitted to the LKFN Community Wellness Coordinator.

1 Mental Health and Addictions Challenges

- High incidences of suicide, isolation, stigma, addiction, stress, and grief have been reported by community members. The community has expressed a strong need for comprehensive mental health services, in particular “programs for grieving, addictions and suicide.”
- Many people emphasized the importance of “less judgment and stigma, and more support for individuals seeking help” particularly in dealing with substance abuse and addictions.
- A significant concern is the lack of treatment facilities. The community stresses the importance of “not ignoring the problems and instead working towards solutions.” There is a call for the development of “before, during, and aftercare” programs that address the continuum of care needed for mental health and addiction services.
- A critical area of concern is addressing the causes of poor mental health among youth, which requires targeted interventions and support systems. As one respondent wrote, there is a need to focus on “addressing the root causes of poor mental health, especially among our youth”



2 Lack of Safe and Culturally-Relevant Infrastructure

- There is a need for “more services and people who are able to help those in need” This includes hiring more counselors, social workers, healthcare providers, and support staff trained in dealing with specific challenges such as addiction, mental health issues, and family support.
- A few respondents noted a “lack of safety in clinics and other places where people get help.” Ensuring community support workers are culturally competent and possibly members of the community themselves could enhance trust and effectiveness of these programs.
- The community has highlighted the need for “a local rehab or treatment center”. This facility would provide vital resources for individuals struggling with issues such as substance abuse, addiction, and other health-related challenges.

3 Language and Culture Loss

- There is a clear need for more on-land programs that allow community members to reconnect with their heritage while promoting healing and learning. As one respondent stated: “We do not have enough on-the-land land programs to give people time to recover and learn”
- There is a significant demand for more teachings that are specifically focused on the Liidlii Kue First Nation's language and cultural practices. As one person stated, “We need more on the land teachings, especially with our language” while many respondents echoed that “community connection to culture needs strengthening.”
- Some members of the community also expressed a desire for “more information on past trauma, colonization and residential schools, and improving language around these topics”

4 Lack of Family and Intergenerational Learning Spaces

- The community has expressed a strong desire for “an increase in both structured programs and informal community gatherings.” Many respondents also insisted that these types of community programs need to “include elders” and “involve youth.”
- Many respondents noted a lack of available activities, especially on weekends and evenings. There are “limited opportunities to learn or continue hobbies or pick up new skills. There are no weekly or weekend programs available, such as a ski club or walking group, for example.” The need for evening venues where community members can gather is clear. One respondent wrote “we need a place to go in the evenings” while another discussed the importance of “Having options for activities in the community, places to socialize in a healthy setting, preferably in the evening.”
- The community has expressed a desire for more opportunities to socialize in a healthy and supportive environment and build “better relationships” and “healthy communication skills” with each other. There is also a desire for more events that bring joy and laughter to the community. Many people stated they “need things to look forward to” and hoped for more events that prioritized “fun and laughter.”

Strategic Priorities



1 Mental Health and Addiction Services

Objective: To improve mental health and combat addictions within the Liidlii Kue First Nation by fostering healthy relationships, expanding support networks, and creating a variety of programs that promote sobriety, spread awareness and reduce stigma.

2 Land-Based Programming and Physical Wellbeing

Objective: To enhance the physical and mental well-being of the Liidlii Kue First Nation community through expanded on-the-land programming, physical activities, and educational initiatives that reconnect members with the land, cultural practices and traditional knowledge.

3 Cultural Activities and Appropriate Services

Objective: To enhance the cultural well-being of the Liidlii Kue First Nation by integrating traditional teachings, promoting culturally relevant practices, and ensuring that services are culturally appropriate and/or led by Indigenous professionals.

5 Intergenerational Events and Spaces

Objective: To improve mental health and combat addictions within the Liidlii Kue First Nation by fostering healthy relationships, expanding support networks, and creating a variety of programs that promote sobriety, spread awareness and reduce stigma.

4 Supporting and Empowering Youth

Objective: To improve mental health and combat addictions within the Liidlii Kue First Nation by fostering healthy relationships, expanding support networks, and creating a variety of programs that promote sobriety, spread awareness and reduce stigma.

Possible Approaches

Members of the Łídlíj Ké First Nation offered many suggestions for how the community can approach implementing wellness initiatives and programs over the next five years. The majority of respondents emphasized the need for consistent, predictable and collaborative programming in the community. The following is a summary of the community's suggestions:

- **Regular and Inclusive Programming:** There was a strong call from community members for more consistent wellness programming that is accessible during evenings and weekends. A number of people stated the importance of having predictable, well-advertised, and routine programming on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis. As discussed in the survey results, establishing a community event schedule that is regular and predictable will hopefully encourage more routine participation and engagement in wellness activities.
- **Proactive Event Organization and Promotion:** Community members suggest organizing events that are well-promoted throughout the town, featuring incentives such as prizes, food, and volunteer acknowledgements to boost participation. The inclusion of swag or giveaways can also enhance engagement. These events should be tailored to accommodate all age groups and preferences, as noted by a community member who emphasized the need for "a variety of options for all age groups within our community." Elders and youth should be encouraged to attend.
- **Collaborative and Community-Led Initiatives:** The importance of "working with each other" to create a "healthier, happier community" is a central theme. This involves community-led processes that empower members to take initiative, rather than waiting for external entities like the government to implement programs. For instance, the culture camps organized by local schools have been highlighted as a successful example that connected youth with their cultural roots and should serve as a model for future programs.
- **Utilizing Local Resources and Partnerships:** The community recognizes its rich resources—"dreams, ideas, history, the land, the mountains, and the trees"—as fundamental elements in promoting community wellness. The land was identified in almost every survey as a key resource for improving wellbeing. There was also a significant emphasis on "working with other organizations in the community" to maximize resources, share expertise, and enhance the impact of wellness programs.



Community Wellness Plan



The Łíídlíj Kúé First Nation has embarked on a comprehensive journey to enhance community wellness through a well-rounded and culturally-informed wellness plan. 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 (9). Further, this plan also fulfills Articles 23 and 24 of 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 (10).

This plan is the culmination of a thorough needs assessment identifying the needs and priorities of the community, and reflects the voices, ideas and experiences of LKFN community members. This wellness plan represents a proactive and holistic approach to fostering a healthier, more vibrant community where every member feels supported and valued.



(9) Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Calls to action.

(10) United Nations. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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

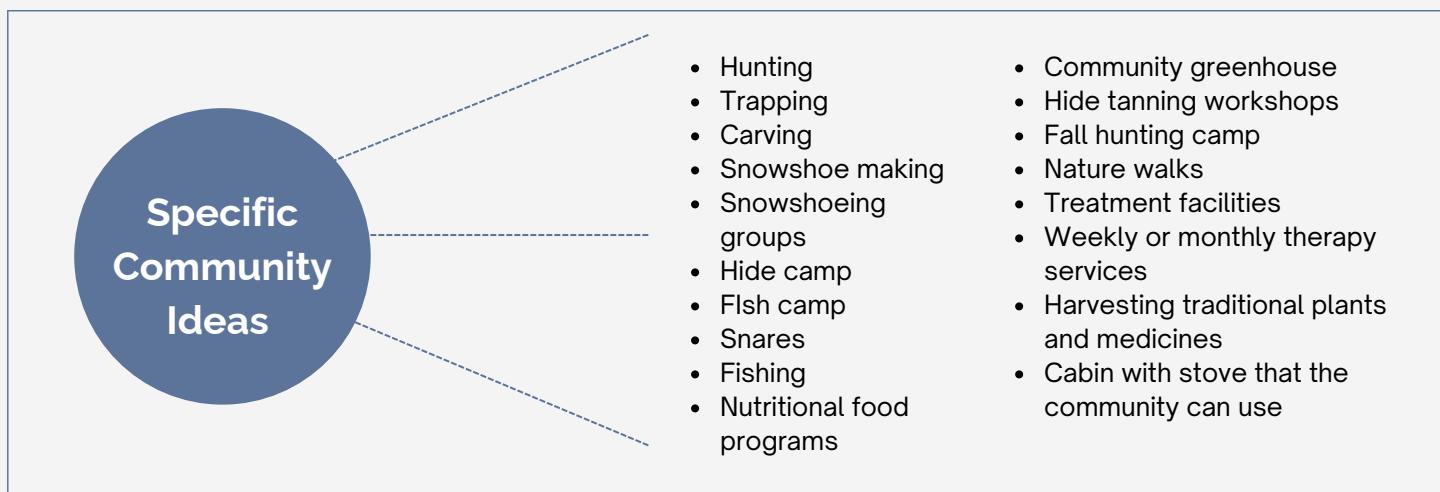
Mental Health and Addiction Programs

- **Supporting Healthy Conversations and Safe Spaces:** Boost "addiction awareness" among community members through ongoing educational campaigns, school programs, and community workshops. These efforts should focus on the risks associated with substance abuse, the benefits of sobriety, and the available support for those seeking help. Develop initiatives that focus on "having healthy relationships and conversations about mental health, and creating a safe place for all." This might involve training community leaders and health workers in mental health first aid and creating regular community forums where mental health topics are openly discussed in a stigma-free environment.
- **Enhancing Mentorship and Support Networks:** Establish a mentorship program with "more mentors for mental health issues." These mentors would be trained to provide guidance and support to individuals struggling with mental health challenges, fostering a network of peer support that can be accessed by community members on a regular, scheduled basis.
- **Reducing Substance Dependency:** Implement targeted programs aimed at "less dependency on alcohol and drugs." This might include workshops on substance abuse prevention, life skills development, and the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices. Engaging local healthcare providers to offer regular screenings and interventions can also be part of this initiative.
- **Expanding Grief and Trauma Support:** Increase the availability of "more grieving and trauma programs" by collaborating with experts to offer specialized therapeutic sessions that cater to individuals and families dealing with loss and trauma.
- **Strengthening Addiction Support Services:** Provide "more assistance for those that have addictions" through the establishment or enhancement of local treatment facilities, support groups, and aftercare programs. These resources should be culturally sensitive and accessible to all community members.
- **Promoting a Substance-Free Environment:** Align community aspirations with the vision of "living in a drug-free community." This could be supported by increasing public awareness campaigns, enforcing community-led regulations on substance use, and providing alternative social activities. Regularly schedule "more sober events" and ensure there are "sober alternatives for young people and adults." These could range from sports leagues and cultural nights to family-oriented festivals and educational workshops, all designed to be engaging and free from alcohol and drugs.



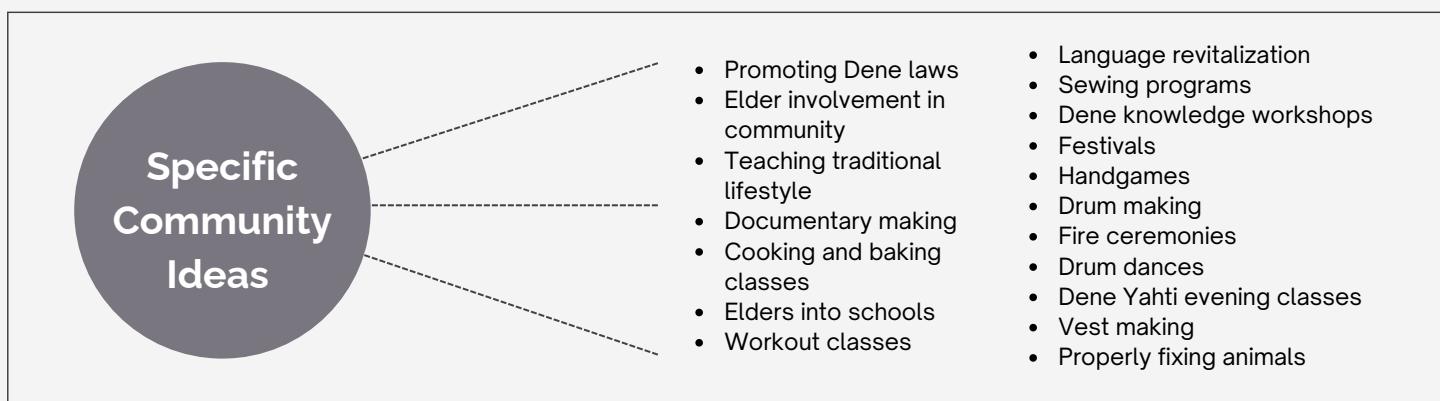
Land Based Programs and Healthy Lifestyle Initiatives

- **Land Based Programs and Skill Development:** Develop daily and weekly programs that encourage spending time on the land. Increase opportunities for learning "more bush skills" and provide "more on-the-land programming, even day-trips to start with," to gradually build engagement and comfort with longer and more involved land-based experiences. On a small-scale this might involve various activities such as walking, hiking, half-day land-based workshops, weekend culture camps, and community clean-ups. On a larger scale, this might involve implementing programs that teach traditional skills such as foraging, fishing, hunting, fire-making, and shelter-building.
- **Increased Cultural Healing Programs:** Align with the community's vision to be "reconnected with our people and the land." Offer regular cultural workshops and ceremonies that strengthen ties to the land. This also includes more "on-the-land healing programs" that utilize the therapeutic benefits of being on the land in community. These programs might include culture camps, healing retreats, and elder-led storytelling sessions.
- **Teaching Youth Land-Based Skills:** Address the community's desire to see "all families and children back on the land" by creating family-oriented land programs that include camping, plant identification, and traditional ecological knowledge. Specifically address the need for the "young generation to learn how to live on the land and to fix and set traps, and weave and set fishnets" by instituting mentorship programs with elders and skilled community members.
- **Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity:** Launch "healthy eating initiatives" that incorporate traditional foods and nutrition education. Simultaneously, "promote the importance of physical activity for all ages and how it relates to mental health" through things like community sports events, fitness challenges, and walking or activity groups.



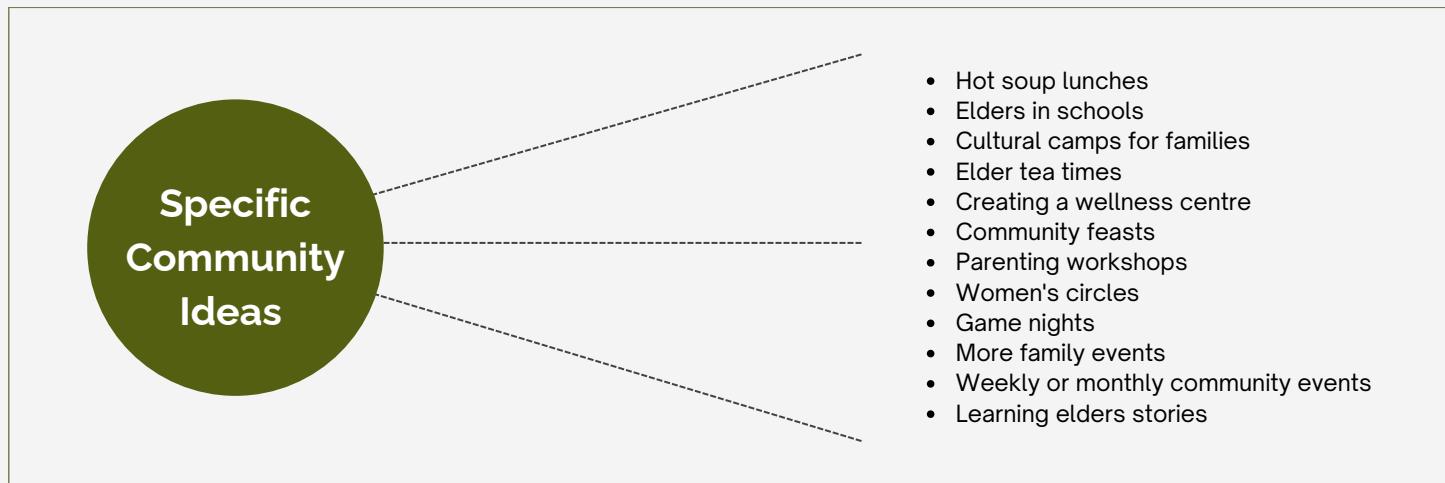
Cultural Activities and Culturally Appropriate Services

- **Improved Local Health Care:** Uphold the importance of “people accessing local care for their needs” by developing and/or expanding local clinics and health centers with culturally trained staff, ensuring that community members have prompt, respectful, and effective care available within their community. Provide specialized “healing programs for elders and parents” that address their unique needs and roles within the community.
- **Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Services:** A significant number of community members emphasized the need to develop and expand Indigenous counseling and mental health services. There is also a need to eliminate “judgment and prejudice among health workers.” This might involve continuous cultural competence training for all health service providers to ensure respect and understanding of addictions, mental health and Indigenous ways of healing and living.
- **Indigenous Leadership in Programs:** Many participants noted the importance of Indigenous-led programs to ensure that cultural activities and services are authentically representative and supportive of community values. This includes training and hiring Indigenous professionals to lead these initiatives, fostering empowerment and self-determination within the community. This also includes Implementing programs, trainings and initiatives that promote “respect, self-care, and purpose” among community members.
- **Cultural Events and Spaces:** Place “more emphasis on traditional teachings... culture is always a priority” through regular workshops, storytelling sessions, and elder-led teachings that pass down crucial cultural knowledge and practices to younger generations. Increase the availability of “more traditional activities” and ensure these are accessible to all age groups. This could include crafting workshops, traditional hunting and fishing expeditions, and seasonal cultural festivals. Organize “more drumming and handgames for all ages” as these activities are not only fun but also integral to cultural expression and community bonding. Regular events featuring drum circles and traditional games can provide meaningful engagement for community members.



Community, Family and Intergenerational Events and Spaces

- **Reliable and Routine Community Programming:** Develop reliable, predictable, and routine community programming that offers consistent opportunities for engagement. This programming should include regular events that cater to all age groups, focusing on creating a stable schedule that community members can depend on. Address the community's need for "more programs in the community on weekends and evenings" by organizing a variety of activities during these times. This can include cultural celebrations, sports events, movie nights, and educational workshops that accommodate the schedules of working family members and school-going children.
- **Intergenerational Teaching and Learning:** Facilitate intergenerational interactions with programs designed to "get youth/elders together to do teaching and educate the youth." These programs could involve traditional storytelling, skills workshops (like crafting or hunting), and knowledge-sharing sessions that emphasize the transfer of wisdom and traditions from elders to younger generations.
- **Community Groups:** Enhance the community spirit by creating more community groups, as "looking out for one another is a Dene value." These groups could be interest-based, such as gardening clubs, book clubs, or volunteer groups, and should promote cooperation, support, and communal responsibility. Build on traditional communal values to create a supportive network where community members feel a strong sense of belonging and mutual care. This could involve community support systems like parenting workshops, elder care networks, and youth mentorship programs.
- **Family Events:** Plan and implement family-centric events and spaces, reflecting the sentiment that wellness means "family being together." These events should be designed to strengthen family bonds and provide enjoyable and meaningful experiences for families to share, such as community picnics, cultural festivals, and family sports days.



Supporting and Empowering Youth

- **Life Skills Training:** Implement life skills training programs that equip community youth with essential skills for personal and professional development. These could include financial literacy, job readiness, sobriety awareness, sexual education, leadership development, and health and wellness education. Focus on “giving our kids a chance to be their best selves” by providing resources and support that help them achieve their potential. This includes counseling services, career guidance, and access to higher education opportunities.
- **Involving Youth in Community Planning:** Many participants identified the importance of “starting with the youth” when developing community initiatives, acknowledging the importance of prioritizing the needs and ideas of young people in community planning and decision-making processes. Embrace the philosophy that “The community raises kids, and kids raise the community” by encouraging intergenerational interactions and mentorship programs that connect youth with elders and community leaders to foster respect, knowledge transfer, and strong community ties.
- **Establishing Youth Spaces:** Some community members proposed the idea of “a center kids can go to with supervision, summer camps, programs throughout the year, and a year-round hangout place.” A youth center or program would serve as a safe and engaging space where youth can gather, learn, and participate in structured activities under the guidance of mentors and supervisors. Many people identified the need for “more outlets for youth” through diverse activities such as art programs, music classes, sports leagues, and tech hubs.
- **On-the-Land Activities for Youth:** Introduce “more activities for kids on the land,” such as camping trips, environmental stewardship projects, and cultural heritage explorations. Build “a community our youth want to return to, a community that’s proud of who we are, a community that is proud of ourselves.”



Program Ideas - Directly from Consultation with LKFN Youth

1	On the Land Programs	2	General Ideas	3	Sports and Activities	4	General Ideas
	<p>On the land programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trapping & snares • Hunting (how to hunt & harvest) • Learn to build shelters • Canoeing • Rock climbing • Boating – operator license • Fishing • Firearm safety • Boxing • Snowboarding • Sewing • Drum making • Boys on the land camp • Elder & youth programs (storytelling, etc) • On the land survival skills • Fishing derby (summer & winter) • Learning to fillet fish, set fish net summer & winter • Traditional tool making • Wilderness first aid • Moose hide tanning • Drum making and learning songs • Dog mushing • Morel Mushroom picking • Harvest traditional medicine • Girls hunting trips • Snowshoeing making • Chainsaw safety 		<p>General ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rock Climbing • Flying Planes • Story Telling • Educational Programs (Northern Youth Abroad, FOXY etc) • Cooking classes • Language lessons • Resume building • Computer programs (repairing, coding, etc) • Art (animate, acting, graphic design, etc) • Music programs and lessons • Canadian Junior Rangers program • Family activities • Jam & Bannock making • South Nahanni white water rafting • Sewing classes • Jigging lessons • Music program • Cultural exchange trips • Learn sign language • Photography & videography program • Square dance lessons 		<p>Sports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soccer • Net Ball • Basketball • Traditional Games (Inuit & Dene) • Boxing • Swimming • Sliding • Hockey • Archery • Gun target shooting 		<p>Trades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carpentry • Mechanics (small engine, automotive, airplane, etc) • Culinary



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

