



ITHINTO MECHISOWIN: FOOD FROM THE LAND

LOCATION: South Indian Lake, Manitoba

OBJECTIVE: Achieve food sovereignty by strengthening and expanding the country foods service to community members in need and “re-skilling” community members.

O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN), commonly known as South Indian Lake (SIL), has a population of 1200 made up almost exclusively of Aboriginal, mainly Cree, peoples. Historically, people lived well and had sufficient resources. A drastic shift in OPCN’s socioeconomic situation came in the 1970s when Manitoba Hydro supported by the Manitoba government developed the Churchill River Diversion (CRD), a hydroelectric dam.

Successes

- There were good opportunities to train youth, including rabbit hunting, snaring and trapping, and moose hunting, berry picking and medicine picking at inland lake camps (Almond Lake and Gawar Lake). A planned survival skills course was delayed due to weather.
- A partnership with Big Sand Lake Lodge, a community owned hunting lodge, donated meat from thier hunt, providing over one thousand pounds. Many people volunteered up to four days of their time to cut meat; this was an opportunity for community members to learn about the program.
- Nineteen boxes of surplus meat were delivered to Elders; winter deliveries to Elders continue in 2015.
- Many members living outside the community asked about the program.
- On Thursdays, people came for food; including Elders, single parents, those with a doctor’s note or a special request for help. Lots of new people continue to come.
- More people seemed inspired to harvest their own wild meat.
- Health Center clients were grateful for the program, and shared stories about increasing their control over diabetes, their weight and hypertension.

Next steps

- Big Sand Lake Lodge may change over the next few years due to declining interest from American hunters. OPCN may use the lodge more for the community.
- Add three greenhouses (at food center, at school, at health complex).
- Add stove to the Food Program office.
- Partner with the new youth worker and support local volunteers for on the land activities.
- Improve policies and training for volunteers.
- Decrease committee size.
- Invite more of the funders to attend 2015 Kiwikapawetan summer gathering.

Challenges

- Boat safety, hunter safety and firearms training are needed to harvest or lead workshops. Criminal record checks and child abuse records checks are required to take children and youth out on the land; many are not able or willing to get these trainings or checks.
- Youth do not have appropriate winter gear for some activities.
- People are not accustomed to keeping receipts which makes reimbursement difficult.
- Weather has been challenging.
- Not everyone is eligible for food. Those who can hunt, trap, or gather are encouraged to do so, or to volunteer.
- Some people on social assistance use the program to offset their costs, but might use the money for other interests (gambling, alcohol).
- The youth worker was not given support and could not continue.
- Working with Manitoba Hydro is a challenge. Historically they have funded fishers to travel to inland lakes but this has recently been discontinued.
- There are waiting lists for the youth training sessions.