

Featured Mental Health Initiative

GBOC Land Based Knowledge

Gordon Bell High School (Winnipeg, MB)

Background

Part of Gordon Bell High School, the Gordon Bell Senior Off Campus is an off-site program that works with students ages 16 to 21 years old in a non-traditional classroom setting. The program is currently located directly beside the Assiniboine River in Winnipeg. This initiative strives to establish a learning community using a holistic approach to developing young adults physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally. The goal is to prepare students both academically and socially, assisting them to build positive relationships with the world around them. The majority of students attending this program are Indigenous and are committed to deeper learning both independently and in groups.

Promising Practice

This initiative takes a holistic approach to wellness by incorporating Land-Based educational activities into programming. In the winter when the Assiniboine river freezes over, the staff will create a learning environment based on the [Circle of Courage](#). They will utilize outdoor equipment and offer students access to cultural teachings to support their mental. The program will offer traditional activities such as ice fishing and snowshoeing. Staff will invite Elders to the program to teach students about traditional Land-Based learning, and they will gift the guest speakers/storytellers with Ceremonial Tobacco.



Impact

Although this program is rooted in Indigenous teachings, the Land-Based activities are inclusive of all. The staff strives to create an environment that builds students' sense of *Belonging* in their community. It is from this place of safety that they can create *Mastery* in all areas of study and grow towards becoming *Independent Learners*. Bringing in Elders allows the students to develop *Generosity* by sharing their time and space with the Elder in a welcoming way, and also having the Elder model generosity by visiting them. This foundation of *Belonging*, *Mastery*, *Independence*, and *Generosity* come together to make the Circle of Courage.

Sustainability

All of the outdoor equipment purchased for ice fishing and snowshoeing is sustainable over time as they are reusable. Every year, the older students will work with the younger students, showing them how to fish,

snowshoe, or create culturally appropriate items. This transfer of knowledge continues year-to-year and contributes to the sustainability of the program.

Modifications

Here are suggestions to modify this approach for different learning environments.

- If ice fishing and snowshoeing are not accessible activities within your school community, try other Land-based learning activities such as hiking or gathering herbs and berries
- Incorporate the [Circle of Courage](#) into your instructional approach in the classroom
- Get to know your students and ask them what cultural learnings they would like to explore or be included in class activities

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