

Featured Mental Health Initiative

Juniper Land Base

Juniper School (Mystery Lake, MB)

Background

Juniper School is a K-8 school with 273 students in the District of Mystery Lake in Northern Manitoba. Some students are in foster care, while many others have family members who were forced to attend residential schools or were part of the [Sixties Scoop](#). Juniper School is an inclusive site to children with special needs. Many students have experienced or witnessed traumatic events and have lost classmates to suicide in recent years.

Promising Practice

Juniper Land Base began three years ago, as a meaningful way to introduce and restore traditional Indigenous teachings through Truth and Reconciliation. The program started as a way to address various difficulties students were experiencing including a lack of empathy and compassion towards others, no sense of belonging, and loss of culture, language, and identity.

The objective of Juniper Land Base is to support students' mental, social, and emotional well-being. Three teachers at the school take the time outside of the classroom to learn teachings from Indigenous consultants and community members and then share the knowledge



with students in an inclusive space. The program includes teachings about the medicine wheel, the 7 teachings, Truth and Reconciliation, Calls for Justice and Calls to Action, Orange Shirt Day, Jordan's Principle, Bear Witness Day, and many other important traditional teachings. Special yearly events occur, depending on grants and donations, and have included cultural days, winter camps (introduction to the fur tables), Winter Fest, and Indigenous days. Juniper Land Base helps staff and students heal, learn, and grow together as a whole.

All teachings are approved and shared through Indigenous consultants and the district Indigenous committee. The program requires a lot of individuals to make it successful including teachers, multiple levels of district consultants, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, community members, students, parents, family members, and volunteers.

Impact

Juniper School has started to share their story and journey through professional development with the other elementary and high school teachers in their district, and with the staff and students at the University College of the North. Their students have exhibited a restored sense of pride in their heritage, school, and community. Students feel safe, that the teachers are inclusive, and that they have a voice that is both respected and heard.

As a result of the program, students are continuously learning about Truth and Reconciliation, the 7 teachings, the medicine wheel, language, and traditional stories, art, music, drumming, cooking, land connections, medicines, beading, and ceremonies. They have listened to people's truth, Calls to Action, and Calls for Justice. Additionally, students created an award winning video, [Imagine a Canada](#), and were gifted a Spirit Bear which they use to advocate for Truth and Reconciliation for all. The impact of the programs has led to the establishment of strong relationships and kinships locally, and with outline communities as well. Thanks to Juniper Land Base, the students at Juniper School have learned empathy, compassion, patience, coping strategies, resiliency, and self-worth.

Sustainability

Juniper School has a team that is dedicated and passionate about building students' self-worth and pride. Grants support the program for funding as they need money to compensate Elders and Knowledge Keepers. The Knowledge Keepers and Elders are utilized as an on-going resource for the program and the dedicated team of organizers is committed to securing grants to maintain the programming.

Modifications

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

- Conduct an environmental scan at your school to identify the various cultural heritages that exist, and find ways to incorporate those cultures within the school
- Utilize cultural resources that exist in your community such as people, museums, displays, or programs and take your students on a field trip to learn more
- Introduce Truth and Reconciliation to students using reputable resources such as EdCan Network's [Truth and Reconciliation in YOUR Classroom](#)

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