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Indigenous Youth Leadership Programs

The Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC) recently connected individually with 9 groups that deliver Indigenous youth leadership programs. Programs included summer camps, mentorship programs, and volunteer abroad opportunities. The scope of these programs ranged from national to community based. The groups connected with were:

- Northern Youth Abroad (NT & NU)
- NWT Youth Ambassador Program (NT)
- Get Happy Summer Camp Program (NU)
- Recreation North (NT, NU, & YK)
- Awakening Our Leadership Spirit (ON)
- Social Youth Outreach Program (NS)
- Youth Eagle Program (NS)
- Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (National)
- MNO Infinite Reach Network (ON)

The intent of these conversations was to discover best practices, challenges, and successes within each program, and to understand if any support ASC could offer. The information learned is also valuable to the Design Team as the Sport for Social Development initiative is created.

Key Findings

Common Themes

- Programs integrate cultural teaching and activities into their leadership curriculum. Culture as the foundation of a youth's identity is seen a key priority around the development of the individual and their leadership capacity. This was apparent no matter the delivery type of the youth leadership program.

- Programs invite Elders and knowledge holders to work with youth and deliver various sessions to the participants.
- There is a wide range of activities and teachings offered. Programs offered activities such as bead work, skinning of a beaver, snowshoeing, to more mainstream sport and games. Programs offered teaching of traditional language, lessons about the medicine wheel to modern leadership principals. No matter the activity of teaching provided, the emphasis remained on the individual finding identity and leadership through their culture.
- Programs that are successful have their own sense of community and are youth driven.

Common Challenges

- Programs find it difficult to reach youth. A variety of reasons were suggested, such as limited home support, and youth's initial distrust in an unfamiliar program.
- Programs find it difficult to measure results of a leadership program and do not have a process of measurement in place.
- Programs are either limited in funding, or if programs receive funding from outside agencies, they are limited by funding in what programming they can offer. For example, one program must service Indigenous youth aged 16-19, but there is a need to provide programming for youth under the age of 16.

Findings of Interest

- One program, who works primarily with children, noted that they met with a PTASB, however could not formalize a partnership because a program could not be arranged for children under the age of 6.
- Many programs offer sport, recreation, and physical activity opportunities for youth, to help develop leadership skills. There was an assumption that these activities had impact on social development, and was often the sole purpose of the activity being offered.
- Generally, programs who did not deliver physical activity programming felt confident they had the human resource capacity to deliver sport, recreation, and physical activity programming, but did not have the available resources (funding, equipment, training) to develop and deliver a plan.

Potential Support

- It was often expressed that ASC and its membership could connect youth with these program opportunities.
- ASC could educate programs of professional development opportunities and current trends.
- ASC and its membership could support programs through resource sharing, networking, and program delivery. For example, many of the youth involved in leadership programs are active in sport, so ASC could provide opportunities for these youth to further develop their leadership skills within a sport context.
- ASC could facilitate sessions and workshops in partnership with its membership and these programs. Many programs bring outside facilitators in to deliver programs. Where there is a high emphasis on sport and physical education, ASC and its membership could connect programs with Indigenous leaders that would share and facilitate sessions through these programs.

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