



CIF FEATURE STORY:

Growing Young Movers Urban Indigenous Youth After-School Wellness Program



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Growing Young Movers Urban Indigenous Youth After-School Wellness Program; Growing Young Movers Youth Development Inc.

Growing Young Movers Youth Development Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of children and youth. **“Our GYM after-school programs support the holistic wellbeing of Indigenous youth ages 6-12 years old through an intergenerational, multi-sport model which employs Indigenous youth mentors ages 16-18 years old,”** shared Brian Lewis, Executive Director of Growing Young Movers. This after-school programming provides educational, developmentally appropriate, inclusive wellness opportunities for youth within North Central Regina on a consistent and on-going basis.

GYM programs run 4 days a week for the duration of the school year. Youth are engaged in a variety of activities within the gymnasium space that provide a quality, planned, and purposeful learning experience. **“The program also offers a First Nation/Metis component offering traditional arts, dance, and storytelling - enhancing our existing wellness approach and focusing on the importance of healthy identity development among Indigenous youth,”** highlighted Brian.

These experiences are grounded in developmentally appropriate activities that focus on not only the physical literacy and health of the youth, but also the social and emotional aspects of wellbeing. **“Participants gain valuable skills that not only enhance physical abilities in sport but also skills that contribute to social development and positive self-identity,”** shared Brian. **“The programming also engages in strategies to encourage dialogue that takes aim at topics of contextual interest such as wellbeing, nutrition, bullying and Indigenous identity.”**

“Evolving from modest beginnings six years ago, with one day of programming, GYM is now offering youth within North Central multiple experiences located at the māmawêyatitân centre,” Brian said. **“Out of 5 schools, the average percentage of self-identifying Indigenous peoples is approximately 85%. Very few youth from this community are involved in any sport or physical activity opportunity outside of school hours. This is where we feel we are fulfilling a need of the community and providing a safe space after school for youth to gain valuable skills. Our GYM programming is designed to bring Indigenous youth of various ages together on a consistent basis to learn from each other and to feel part of a team.”**

The youth need a consistent, safe, positive experience outside of school. GYM programs help to accomplish this. **“Our unique approach is designed to support youth by employing Indigenous youth mentors to work alongside the younger generation,”** said Brian. The youth mentors receive hands on training alongside experienced coaches/educators and are employed in a leadership role which enhances their skill set for future employment and allows them to feel empowered and valued within their community.

“Any time people from a community can come together to play, we feel quality of life is impacted. Our GYM programming is a consistent place for youth to connect,” expressed Brian. **“Our intergenerational approach impacts not only the younger youth but all ages that attend. Older youth and young adults can learn a great deal from the younger generations of what it means to belong and be part of something inclusive like GYM. GYM programs go beyond just getting youth physically active. Together alongside the youth, we work to enhance the holistic wellbeing of all participants.”**

