



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG

# **Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre**

Annual Report 2021

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# Letter from the Director of Community Learning & Engagement



**Angeline Nelson**  
*Director of Community  
Learning & Engagement*

Mino-Giizhigad (Good day),

As we reflect on the 2021 year, we recognize our community has continued to face the many added challenges of the pandemic. We hope that folks have stayed connected with one another and were able to access some of the programs and support out there from the many incredible community organizations.

We hope that you enjoy this look back at the work of our centre and the great connections we have been fortunate to make with you and many others. While our team is small, I am proud of the growth of our programs delivered over the years in ensuring there are meaningful opportunities for Indigenous youth to see themselves in their program facilitators and volunteers. And I look forward to engaging even more youth in the years to come.

We are grateful that the University of Winnipeg has been supportive of our efforts to meaningfully engage the community in the move from online to a few in-person programs, beginning in the summer with our Indigenous STEAM camp. It has been a balance of ensuring safety precautions are in place, reducing capacity, and building partnerships to safely host children, youth, and families on campus.

As we look ahead to 2022, we remain optimistic that our programming and services will be back in full swing to once again provide the needed programs and services for children, youth, and families. Please continue to check our website and social media pages for all of the latest program updates.

– Angeline Nelson

# Letter from the Program Coordinator



**Julie Hiebert**  
*Program Coordinator*

Boozhoo,

As the program coordinator at the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre for the last 4 years I feel fortunate to connect with so many children, youth and families in the community and on campus. Looking back at this last year, it has been a mix of online and in-person programming. We did our best to meet the needs of families and to keep people safe by delivering online programming and delivering weekly program kits. We also recognized that online programming wasn't the most accessible for some families and started hosting in-person programming once it was deemed safe to do so, ensuring restrictions and safety guidelines were followed.

As always the programs we provide and the events we host aim to be as low-barrier as possible, reaching a mostly underserved demographic. It is with the support of many community partners and funders that we are able to do the work we do. That said, I would like to acknowledge the families and parents who have been so understanding as we navigated within the ever changing guidelines throughout the year. I would also like to acknowledge the many program facilitators, students, summer leaders, volunteers, and online instructors for coming together to ensure all of our programs ran smoothly each week, and for being such great mentors.

We are looking forward to 2022 as we plan to open our computer lab once again and to deliver programming for even more children, youth and families. Please continue to check [www.uwinnipeg.ca/wiichii](http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/wiichii) or our facebook page for program launches and registrations.

– Julie Hiebert

# Year In Review

For the first half of the year, our centre continued to remain closed with most programs being delivered either online or sustained through weekly at-home program kit deliveries. Taking our learnings from 2020, we improved our online program formats, and increased our support for community members and families to have their own computer access. The following is a look back at our responses to COVID-19, how we operated online and a quick overview of how programs went as we started to host in-person programs.

## Supporting Online Learning: COVID-19 Responses

- › 28 new Chromebooks were purchased with support from the Kingfisher Foundation then distributed to assist families with the transition to online learning in May 2021. These laptops went on to assist 28 households, ultimately providing access for the 34 youth in the Building Belonging program.
- › 15 Windows 7 desktops were recycled and donated to families; 10 went to The Winnipeg Boldness Project's Parent Guide Group, and 5 went to regular computer lab users of Wii Chiiwaakanak. With the upgrade of all of the computers in our lab in late 2020, the desktops - thought to be e-wasted - were revived and donated in a partnership between our centre, The Winnipeg Boldness Project and Mother Earth Recycling.
- › 8 new laptops were also purchased with support from the Kingfisher Foundation for our laptop loan program for students in online learning.

## Youth Supports: STEAM Activities and Workshops

- › Continuing from 2020, Science Explorers at Home ran from January to June with 45 STEM-based learning kits being developed, assembled and delivered every week. Over 1000 kit deliveries were made during this time and were very well-received for the creative, hands-on approach to science for kids.

- › So You Want To Be A YouTuber? ran a beginner and intermediate 6-week online class early in the year. All youth in the program were loaned laptops and equipment to create their own videos from storyboarding to video production and editing.
- › As a longstanding partner of WASAC's Adventure Kids Camp, our team delivered coding lessons to 680 youth in person at 6 different school sites throughout July and August. Two teams were trained and used our 45 programming laptops to lead each session.
- › Our first in-person program of the year was the Indigenous STEAM Camp that hosted 56 children over two 2-week camps in our Centre and the Aabijijiwaan New Media Lab.
- › Science Kids on Campus ran from October 6 to November 17, hosting a grade 5 & 6 classroom from Niji Mahkwa School for seven weekly STEAM-focused activities on campus.
- › Science Explorers moved back to in-person on October 7 hosting youth weekly at the centre. Program facilitators include Indigenous science students at UWinnipeg and a first year Indigenous medical student from UManitoba's community service learning program.
- › Adventures in Stop-Motion hosted an in-person program at the centre over 8 weekly sessions in October and November with 15-20 kids attending each week.



a)



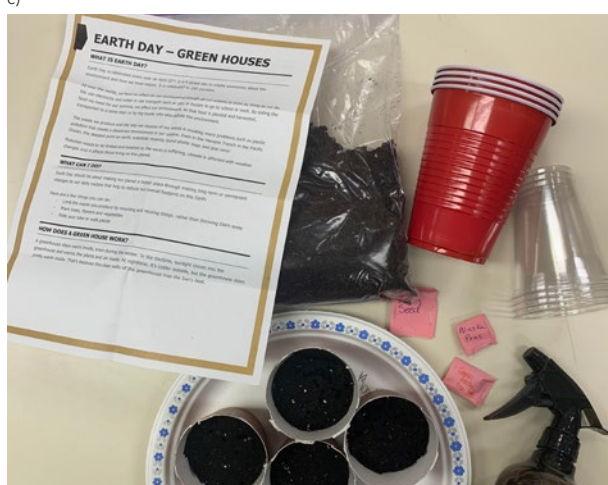
b)



c)



d)



e)



f)

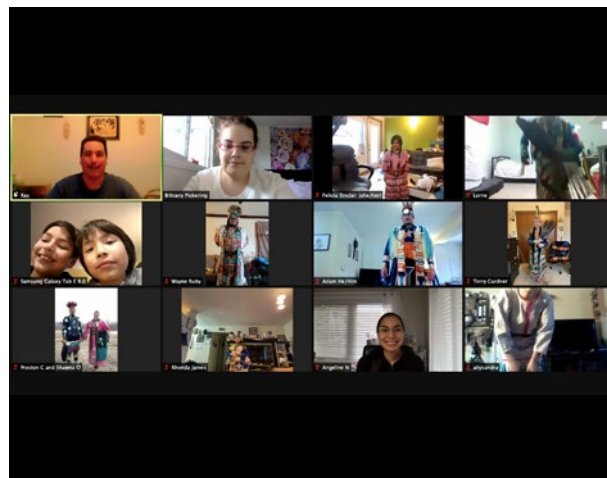
- a) Desktop computer donations.
- c) Adventure Kids Coding.
- e) Earth Day kit.

- b) Laptop donations.
- d) Science explorers with SNA.
- f) Stop motion animation.





a)



b)



c)



d)



e)



f)

- a) Pow Wow Club online.
- c) Pow Wow Club in person.
- e) Indigenous Peoples Day at Sunshine House.

- b) Pow Wow Club on Zoom.
- d) Tikinaagan making video.
- f) Holiday dinner gifts.

## Language and Cultural Programs and Initiatives:

- › Powwow Club and Sacred Seven - our Indigenous girls group - ran online from January to May 2021. Then from October to December both ran in person at our centre and in the Axworthy Health and RecPlex .
- › Beginner Learning Anishinaabemowin ran online in partnership with ILM hosting over 120 participants online in 3 sections of the class run by 4 teachers. The class was hosted from January to March.
- › Another beginner Learning Anishinaabemowin ran from October to December hosting 40 participants weekly that will continue learning at the Intermediate level in the new year.
- › The final instructional videos on craft and regalia making in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe language) were released. In addition to the ribbon skirts, moccasins, and applique videos there are now 2-part videos on creating jingle dresses and 2-part videos on making a tikinaagan - a traditional cradleboard. The full collection of 12 language videos are on our YouTube channel and on our website.
- › Regalia workshops were hosted online in March 2021. Every weekend a new online zoom workshop was hosted including jingle dress making, grass dance outfit making, leather belt making, and a quilling workshop with over 40 people registered for the workshops. Supplies were provided and equipment/tools were loaned.
- › The online radio program, Aakoziiwigamig continued with our partners ILM, NCI, the Academic Lead, UM, and Mazinaate Publishing. In addition to the 12 episodes created in 2020, 4 more episodes will be created for 2021-2022 to finish the series.

## Community Support/Events:

- › Sporting equipment was donated to us by Recreation Services and were handed out to over 50 families. Equipment included basketballs, soccer balls, footballs, skipping ropes, and yoga mats.
- › For National Indigenous Peoples day, on June 21st, Wii Chii partnered with Sunshine House to sponsor a feast on behalf of Indigenous Engagement. Our team also helped prepare 150 meals served to people in the community. Sunshine House were the hosts and provided the entertainment as part of the event.
- › Indigenous Star Stories with Rocky McKay was hosted by our Centre as an online public event to also acknowledge National Indigenous People's Day.
- › UWinnipeg Indigenous staff and faculty were invited to participate in a cultural activity on June 11 as part of our annual team building exercises. Ten faculty and nine staff participated in the event sponsored by Indigenous Engagement and coordinated by the team at Wii Chiiwaakanak.

## Community Holiday Dinner

- › Continuing in the same at-home style, the Community Holiday Dinner was a great success once again thanks to the many who donated and volunteered their time. 240 meals were provided, 143 toys, and 58 family activities were delivered to families, students, and individuals to help with the holidays. The meals were traditional turkey meals with all the fixings, and with the many donations, each family received gifts for youth 17 & under as well as family activities.
- › As in years past, Diversity Food Services, Les Marmiton, and UWinnipeg staff and faculty were all very generous in their support of this event. New this year, Urban Systems, the department of Indigenous Engagement, and the Kingfisher Foundation have been just as incredible, ensuring there were enough gifts, supporting a portion of the cost of meals for this event, and providing family activities like board games, baking ingredients, and gingerbread houses.



# Program Overview

In addition to our core programs listed below, we also offer a variety of programs in partnership with other community organizations and workshops throughout the year. All of our programs are meant to be as low-barrier as possible; thus, they are completely free, food or snacks are provided, and transportation needs are met with bus tickets or safe rides being provided for our girls program.

## Sacred Seven

A strength building project that focuses on empowering young women, girls, and two-spirit youth, physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally through cultural knowledge, practices, and mentorship. The goal is to provide meaningful athletic, cultural and recreational experiences for youth that will build on their capacity to become role models, leaders and valuable contributors of the community.

Throughout the program, participants have an opportunity to engage with mentors while also developing new skills such as regalia making, self-defense, beading, Indigenous wellness, and much more. Thanks to the community service learning program for the past 3 years we have had female Indigenous medical students involved as mentors.

## Women's Self-Defence

A self-defense class for female identifying participants aged 12+ and led by Professor Jason Parenteau Behring Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Blackbelt. This class uses Jiu-Jitsu techniques to teach participants valuable self-defense skills, covering common escapes and movements effectively to help individuals have a stronger sense of personal safety. A guest instructor also assists in understanding the current laws in Manitoba. This program is usually offered twice a year.

## Learning Anishinaabemowin

This weekly cultural program provides parents, children, and individuals of all ages with a chance to learn the Ojibwe language. Language resources are provided to participants. For this program 40 people either in-person or online are usually accommodated to allow the participants more interaction with the instructor.

## Pow Wow Club

Pow Wow Club is an intergenerational program to learn about pow wow dancing, songs, and the history and teachings behind them. There are six dance instructors who each dance different styles along with a singing instructor. Families are encouraged to participate together. This past year it was hosted online from Jan-May and in person from Oct-Dec. The program hosts regalia nights for the participants and celebration feasts at the end of each year.

## Digital Literacy Programs (including YouTuber and Adventures in Stop Motion)

Geared towards kids aged 9-12, these programs equip youth with basic digital media skills including the basics of storyboarding, video production, and editing. Each participant develops and creates their own digital media from idea to video premiere with help every step of the way. A laptop with the needed software was loaned to make this program accessible to kids to participate in the program from home. In person programming also provides all equipment to use in house.

## Science Kids on Campus

In partnership with inner city and north end schools this program hosts grades 5 and 6 classrooms over 6-8 weekly STEAM sessions. Youth participate in activities such as building and programming lego robotics, aerospace workshops, engineering activities, and 3D computer graphics to name a few.

## Adventure Kids Summer Camp

In partnership with the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre the team from Wii Chiiwaakanak designs and delivers new coding activities to all of the camp attendees. Our team brings our 45 programming laptops to 6 different school sites across the city to deliver the sessions to over 600 youth.

## Indigenous STEAM Camp (Science Technology Engineering Art Math)

In 2021, this summer day camp hosted 56 children and youth going into grades 1-6 on campus over two 2-week camps. Activities include hands-on experiments in labs on campus, math lessons, 3D design, multiple levels of coding, dissections, animation workshops, and more. In addition to STEAM learning, youth participate in activities that combine Indigenous knowledge with other departments at the University of Winnipeg such as Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science and Biology. Indigenous knowledge keepers share traditional knowledge about many topics such as traditional medicines, star teachings, creation stories, traditional games, feasting ceremonies, water storage and more.



# Instructor Profile

Wii Chiiwaakanak is proud to have such a knowledgeable team of Indigenous program facilitators leading our community programs to reflect the community they serve. Here is a spotlight on one of our longtime facilitators.



## Rhonda James

Rhonda James has been a program facilitator of the Sacred Seven program and co-facilitator of Powwow Club with her husband Ray Coco Stevenson at Wii Chiiwaakanak since 2013. Rhonda has been a powwow dancer and singer for 25 years and taught others about powwow for 20 years. For her work in the community she has earned the Women of Distinction Award for Culture in 2013 and the Community Award at UWinnipeg's Spring Feast in 2018.

Her role as the lead facilitator for Sacred Seven has meant more than being a mentor to some of the participants in Sacred Seven, she feels like they end up becoming family. In that sense, she always puts their well-being at the forefront, is committed to addressing challenges as they arise, and shows an immense amount of compassion and kindness to everyone that attends. She teams up with the program coordinator to bring in guests to share

about traditional rites of passage, guests to talk about gender, two-spirit, and reclaiming Indigenous ways of being through crafting and language. As someone who has remained deeply connected and reconnecting to traditional Anishinaabe ways, Rhonda's role in this program is central to its success.

Understanding how Indigenous youth and family structures have been impacted, she feels this program is an important part of ensuring connections and support are available for youth that will ultimately help them as young adults. Over the years Rhonda has seen firsthand how helping young people develop skills, provide leadership opportunities, and building cultural connections is to their overall well-being. She is proud to play a role in helping young people see their own potential.

# Program Participants Voices

Wii Chiiwaakanak is a community of engaged learners of all ages. Here is one of our longtime participant's reflections on their connection to Wii Chii.



## Cheryl James

Cheryl has been signing her children up to participate in the Centre's programs for a few years now. Starting off with the language and cultural programs, more recently she began enrolling her older children in the STEAM outreach programs as well. Cheryl has four children ages 2-11 who enjoy participating in Sacred Seven, Pow Wow Club, Indigenous STEAM Camp and Regalia Making every time the programs are offered online or in person.

In 2019, she and her family started attending the weekly Pow Wow Club sessions when they lived down the street from UWinnipeg. They really enjoyed dancing together with others and the sense of community. But just before the pandemic hit MB, they moved to the North End, far from the Centre, and it became more difficult to attend every session.

When the pandemic hit in early 2020, the Centre switched to online programming which was more accessible to them, and became a great opportunity to stay connected in a moment when many were feeling isolated at home. In particular, she appreciated that facilitators and staff running the online sessions knew how to keep all participants engaged and make them feel welcome at any time, to the point of making sure

everyone had everything required for the activities, either by providing supplies or by offering equipment loans when necessary.

Cheryl and her kids, far from being tired of online activities, looked forward to the Centre's weekly programming. She balanced their screen time spent in home-schooling, with positive learning activities - like workshops - and "free time," that were beneficial for their development. "They gained a lot of skills. My daughter Leanna, she's beading and sewing, still carrying on the things that she learned in the regalia making sessions. She took the lead on making her own jingle dress while I kind of helped more with my 7-year-old to make hers", commented Cheryl highlighting the long-term impacts of the programming.

More recently, in the summer of 2020, Leanna and Bryan attended the Indigenous STEAM camp for the first time. "They loved it! They had a lot of fun and came over showing their sister what they learned and talking about the good food they ate", says Cheryl laughing. As a parent, Cheryl appreciates the programming for the ways in which it adds to her children feeling proud to be Indigenous; learning more about the language, culture, and being a part of a community.



# Program Volunteer Voices

Wii Chiiwaakanak partners with multiple programs to host volunteers for work experience or service learning hours. Here is a bit about some of our volunteers and their invaluable contributions to the work of the centre.



## **Cassidy Lamirande, Melissa Anderson, and Gracie Grift** (Pictured left to right)

Melissa, Gracie, and Cassidy are all current and former members of the (.calSES) Canadian Indigenous Science and Engineering Society UWinnipeg chapter. This past year they have all worked with our team at Wii Chiiwaakanak helping to deliver coding workshops as part of the Adventure Kids Camp. They traveled to six different schools throughout the summer teaming up to deliver sessions to over 600 youth.

As Indigenous STEM students connecting with other youth - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - is an important part of their own journeys as they all recognize the many mentors they had that have helped them along the way. They also

recognize the importance of underserved communities being represented in their teachers and enjoyed having the opportunity to gain experience and connect with so many young people over the summer.

Melissa, is Cree from Fox Lake Cree Nation who earned her Bachelor of Science from UWinnipeg and is now a Masters student at the University of Manitoba studying biomedical engineering. Gracie, is a member of the MB Metis Nation and a second year biology student at UWinnipeg with the goal of applying to medical school. Cassidy, a proud Metis student and third year Biochemistry student also has goals of applying to medical school.



# Program Partnerships

Wii Chiiwaakanak partners with multiple community organizations each year to build leadership opportunities and to broaden our reach. Here is a spotlight of one we are so proud to have had this year.



In the summer, the Community Education Development Association became one of the Centre's newest community partners, specifically with the Indigenous STEAM Camp. Hosting nine students over the summer and seeking in-person community-based learning experiences for their students, their community organizer Alana Ollinger reached out. Moving on short-term notice to host the camp in-person, their team was able to join us for one week of leadership training followed by two weeks as mentors of the Indigenous STEAM Camp.

Collectively, their group of 10 - two of whom were joining as senior leaders - played an invaluable role proving to be instrumental in connecting with the 56 youth served in the camps. Split over two sites they worked with small groups of youth, helping them with each activity throughout the camps, helping to keep everyone safe on outings, and demonstrating leadership qualities by example despite being many of the student's first work experiences.

Alana shares that they had an amazing time learning from the two teachers, Mrs. Gail Lakatos and Mrs. Josie Hartin, and the many guests who brought STEAM programming from Indigenous perspectives to life. They also learned so much from the children they worked with in the program. She adds, "our students developed leadership and teamwork skills, learned how to work with young people, and had a ton of fun supporting the camp! They also learned a lot about themselves: their gifts and strengths, and about their own culture through the teachings of the many guests and the teachers."

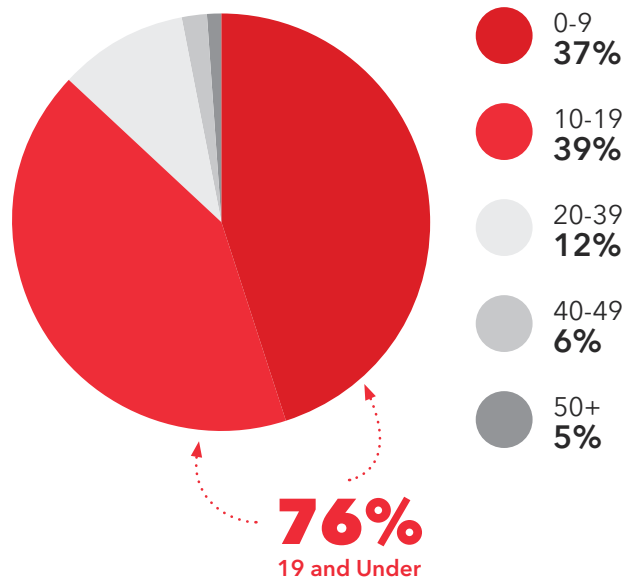
For one of the mentors, after her experience in the STEAM camp, she realized that she wanted to become a teacher. In October she applied to the Winnipeg School Division's Build From Within - Ozhitoon Onji Peenjiiee Program, a program that supports Indigenous High School Students to become teachers. She recently found out that she was accepted to the program and will begin her journey to become a teacher in fall 2022!

# Our Year In Review

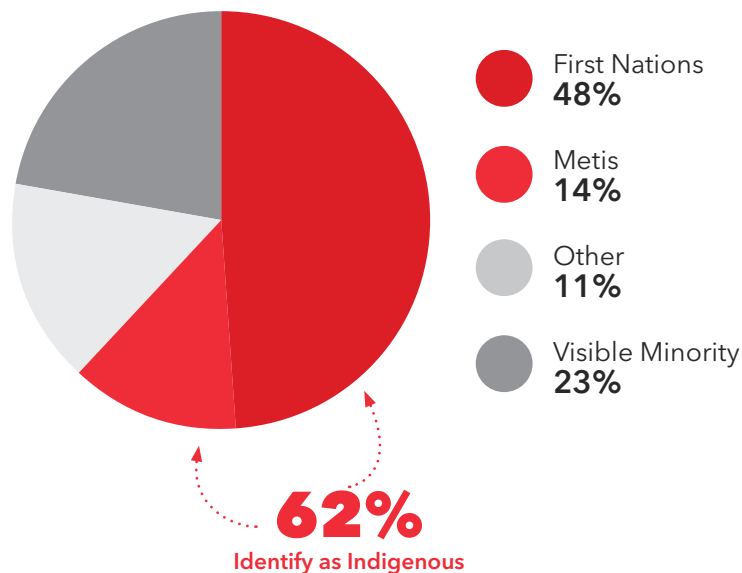
## Who uses Wii Chii?

(Total Users: 995)

### Age Range



### Ethnicity



**25**

Indigenous Program  
Facilitators

**13**

Different Programs

**2,867**

Visits to our STEAM Programs

**2,028**

Visits to Language and  
Cultural Programming

**650**

Visits to our Community  
Support Events and Programs

**55%**

of Visitors Identify  
as Female

## Our Funders

Kingfisher Foundation	Jennifer Roblin and Friends	 Youth · STEM · Innovation Jeunesse · STIM · Innovation
	Canada 	Dr. Pat and Sandy Campbell Fund - The Winnipeg Foundation
	Manitoba 	 ENGINEERS GEOSCIENTISTS MANITOBA
Urban Systems, Diversity and Les Marmiton and Indigenous Engagement	The University of Winnipeg Faculty and Staff	Dr. Jaime Cidro

## Our Partners

- › University of Winnipeg Foundation
- › Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre
- › SNA's Building Belonging Program
- › Aabijjiwaan New Media Lab
- › Community Education Development Association
- › Sunshine House
- › UM Max Rady College of Medicine Service Learning
- › Niji Mahkwa School
- › Canadian Indigenous Science and Engineering Society (.caISES) UWinnipeg chapter
- › Kani Kanichihk Heart Medicine Lodge Program
- › Indigenous Languages of Manitoba, NCI, Mazinaate Publishing, Oral History Centre, and Office of the Indigenous Academic Lead for the Ojibwe Radio Language Program Aakoziwigamig





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