

# SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS YOUTH

## *Why On-The-Land and On-The-Water Programming is Important*

### How to Use This Resource

This resource is a high-level summary of the value and importance of providing and supporting on-the-land/water programming for Indigenous youth. It can be used to share the impact of on-the-land/water programming for Indigenous youth and/or as evidence to support funding applications. For more information, including references, please see the full report titled Supporting Indigenous Youth: Why On-The-Land and On-The-Water Programming is Important by Dionne Paul, MAA (XIMI) and Holly Gunn, MPH of Changemark Research + Evaluation.

### What is On-The-Land or On-The-Water Learning?

Indigenous Peoples have varying and intimate connections with the natural world. What on-the-land/water programs look like is unique to each nation and community. While it can be challenging to provide one definition, some common elements that help define on-the-land/water programs are programs that are informed by Indigenous knowledge and teachings; use the land or water as the main source of knowledge and teaching; and involve cultural teachings and intergenerational knowledge transfer in a rural or nature-based remote location.

### Why Is On The Land/Water Programming Important?

Being connected to the lands and waters is central to Indigenous health, well-being, and knowledge systems. Indigenous communities historically, and presently, learned and taught through the lands and waters. Indigenous knowledge does not exist without the land. There are many benefits of on-the-land/water programs for Indigenous youth. While the specific outcomes may vary from program to program and participant to participant, the report by Changemark Research + Evaluation found nine key positive outcomes which are described on the next page.

### Why is it Important to Support On-The-Land/Water Programs for Indigenous Youth?

Supporting on-the-land/water programs for Indigenous youth demonstrates a commitment to decolonization and allows Indigenous youth to deepen connections to their cultures, traditional ways of being, and homes. For the last 150 years, ongoing harmful colonial practices have attempted to dismantle the traditional Indigenous ways of being through systems of purposeful oppression and the removal of many people from their homelands. To work towards decolonization, Indigenous knowledge systems must be supported and valued, and colonial systems dismantled. On-the-land/water programs for Indigenous youth are one way to do this. As outlined in the full report, there are challenges involved in delivering these programs including access to funding, the colonial disruption of knowledge transmission resulting in a smaller group of individuals available to lead these programs, and the often emotionally-taxing nature of running these programs. Despite these challenges, on-the-land/water programs have many positive influences on Indigenous youth and with adequate support, they can help youth and communities thrive.

**“On-the-land/water learning is more than the physical act of being on the land and in the water. It is a transformational journey to connect with the essence of what it means to be Indigenous by mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually experiencing the inherent magic and wisdom the land and water offer Indigenous people and all people.”**

- Dionne Paul, MAA (XIMI) and  
Report Co-author (page 3)

To read the full report visit: [https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/EmergingLeaders\\_NatureUnited.pdf](https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/EmergingLeaders_NatureUnited.pdf)

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## WHY ARE THESE PROGRAMS IMPORTANT?

There are many benefits of on-the-land/water programs for Indigenous youth. While the specific outcomes may vary from program to program and participant to participant, a recent report by Changemark Research + Evaluation found nine key positive outcomes including:



**Leadership:** On-the-land/water programs support peer-to-peer and multi-generation knowledge exchange while promoting character building among participants, and helping youth develop the tools needed to succeed as community leaders.



**Stewardship:** On-the-land/water programs give Indigenous youth an opportunity to understand the land and how to take care of it. Indigenous youth who participate in these programs have reported an increased sense of responsibility in caring for the land, highlighting that it was the connection to the land that sparked the shift.



**Climate Change:** On-the-land/water programs often educate youth on environmentally-friendly practices and provide opportunities to do research designed with Indigenous teachings in mind. This can foster a greater understanding of what the land can provide, how to care for it, and in turn, inspire youth to address climate change.



**Food Security:** On-the-land/water programs can teach youth skills in locating and harvesting local foods, reducing the need to rely on expensive and limited imported foods. These programs can also connect youth with equipment and training that support them in accessing traditional foods.



**Health and Wellness:** On-the-land/water programs can impact many parts of the health and wellness of Indigenous youth, including physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional. They can also contribute to healing from intergenerational trauma, reducing violence against girls, and creating safe spaces for two-spirit, non-binary, and LGBTQIA+ youth.



**Language:** Many Indigenous words that describe experiences, beings, and parts of the land are best communicated when on the land. On-the-land/water programs can provide opportunities for Indigenous youth to share the experience of connecting to language with both their peers and program facilitators in a supportive environment.



**Culture:** Many on-the-land/water programs include opportunities for traditional Indigenous ceremonies and practices (e.g., Potlatch and canoe travel) to be shared between different generations.



**Education:** On-the-land/water programs help educate youth on important life skills through Indigenous knowledge systems and teachings. These programs can help foster a sense of belonging and confidence in Indigenous youth.



**Employment:** On-the-land/water programs provide an opportunity for Indigenous youth to learn valuable employment skills and explore potential future careers. These programs also teach youth other transferable skills that may lead to employment in areas that aren't being taught in their local educational systems.