

Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Reservation Business Committee

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Fond du Lac Awarded for Caring for Caregivers During the Pandemic

Fond du Lac Lake Superior Chippewa, MN, May 20th, 2021 – Fond du Lac's (FDL) Social Services program has stepped up its efforts to offer resources to caregivers looking after children during the pandemic. Cultural aspects of parenting have been highlighted for families through innovative approaches.

The Band's commitment to grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and any other community member helping to care for a child was recently recognized with a Pinwheels for Prevention Award by FamilyWise Services (formerly Minnesota Communities Caring for Children), a Minnesota nonprofit working to create safe, healthy, and supportive environments for children and families. The pinwheel is a nationally recognized symbol for child abuse and neglect prevention awareness.

"Parents and caregivers are protecting our community's most valuable resource when they acknowledge that children deserve our love and respect," says Tawny Smith-Savage, social services coordinator at FDL. "Children can't stand up for themselves and so we need to stand with them so they can thrive."

Although FDL has been providing resources to caregivers since long before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 the Social Services program had to adapt to the new conditions of living under quarantine. Classes teaching culturally relevant parenting skills were reworked to be taught online.

"The biggest loss in doing the classes online instead of in-person is that food is normally a big part of our gatherings and that traditionally facilitates people mingling and networking with each other, which is important so that caregivers do not feel isolated," says Smith-Savage.

While online classes have drawbacks, Smith-Savage emphasizes that there were also unexpected benefits to moving the classes online. For example, more introverted caregivers have said it is less intimidating to take classes online, especially since cameras are not required during the virtual sessions. Also, participants have said it is much more convenient to not have to worry about finding a babysitter or transportation to class.

The courses lean heavily on the Circles of Security Parenting Group and Positive Indian Parenting curriculums. Both learning paths center on understanding child development and utilizing inherent parental strengths, such as cultural wisdom passed on from previous generations.

The Pinwheel for Prevention Award validates a lot of the sacrifices made by FDL staff during the pandemic. Smith-Savage says, "This type of work is hard, emotional work and on top of the regular duties, our staff has gone above and beyond, so this award has us on cloud nine." She is happy to hear that staff are asking her to find a showcase to display the program's awards along with a recent letter from Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan commending the Band for its work in helping address food insecurity during the pandemic.

As pandemic restrictions begin to ease in the future, many online offerings will remain in place because they have become so popular. However, next spring, Smith-Savage hopes that the annual Child Abuse Prevention Walk organized by the Social Services program will be filled with many smiling people standing together for children, sharing their traditional pancake brunch with their bright colored t-shirts and caps. FDL has provided this walk for 20+ years and look forward to continuing this tradition.

To learn more about the social services programs offered by FDL Human Services and eligibility and program guidelines please call 218-878-2145 and also visit the FDL Human Services Facebook page as well as the fdlrez.com website.

<Pictures attached: FDL Social Services employees gather for a photo with the award and FDL Social Worker Abigail Otis facilitating an online class.>

About Fond du Lac Lake Superior Chippewa

The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Nagaajiwanaang; where the water stops) is one of six Chippewa Indian Bands that make up the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. The Fond du Lac Reservation was established by the La Pointe Treaty of 1854. Archaeologists, however, maintain that ancestors of the present-day Chippewa (Ojibwe) have resided in the Great Lakes areas since 800 A.D. The Band includes 4,200 members.

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