

Métis Settlement Life Skills Update: Response to COVID-19



Background

The University of Alberta and participating Métis Settlements have been working together since 2009 to develop and deliver youth life skills programming through the Métis Settlements Life Skills Journey (MSLSJ) program. The MSLSJ program aims to increase life skills awareness in a culturally appropriate manner, building internal strengths and community support with the purpose of addressing substance abuse, violence, and bullying. COVID-19 emerged while the program was in the midst of transitioning youth facilitator training from in-person to virtual, presenting new challenges and opportunities.

Métis Settlements Face Many Challenges

Métis Settlements are often mistakenly assumed to receive the same benefits as Métis Nation of Alberta and First Nations people. Despite reports of support for Indigenous people during the pandemic, through several conversations with Metis Settlement partners we learned that: 1) a shortage of funding forced a decision between the provision of food and security, leaving youth vulnerable to criminal activity, 2) PPE was not being delivered despite requests, and 3) inadequate internet access prevents youth from participating in online learning, raising concerns about social and emotional health.

Partnerships Flourish and Expand

Years of relationship building meant that a rapid response was possible through our connections in the network of Settlement leaders, administrators, members and youth. A crisis exposes society's most vulnerable while also bringing out the best in people and communities, and we experienced this as we shared responsibility to find solutions. Métis Settlement General Council showed great appreciation and support for the work of the MSLSJ project.

COVID-19 Response

Within days, we were able to connect with Settlement administrators and front line workers, including Youth Life Skills Coordinators from the MSLSJ program to open online training to all 8 Settlements, virtual programming and non-contact programming for youth lacking internet access and delivery of much needed PPE including masks, gloves, and sanitizer.



Food



Security



PPE



Internet access



Distribution
through
contacts



Gathering
and sharing
responsibility

¹ The MNA is governed by a Provincial Council, comprised of a Provincial President and Vice-President, and six (6) regional Presidents and Vice-Presidents, all democratically elected. As per the Métis National Council, 'Métis means a person who self-identifies as a Métis, is distinct from other aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation.' Historic Métis Nation 'means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or half-breeds who resided in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland.' Retrieved June 1, 2020 from <http://albertametis.com/about/mission-statement/>.

² Across 1.25 million acres are eight communities, populated by the women and men of the Fathers of Federation and those before them, each connected by the vision for self-government and self-determination. The first and only Metis self-government in Canada, recognized constitutionally as a distinct and protected people, the Metis Settlements are a vital and rich part of our Canadian cultural identity. Retrieved June 1, 2020 from <https://msgc.ca/>

Mental Health

- Considerations
 - Strength-based
 - Confidentiality
 - Within the context of Métis Settlements
- Resources
 - [Mental Health Resources - COVID19](#)

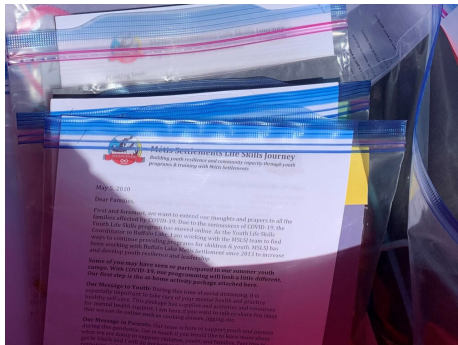
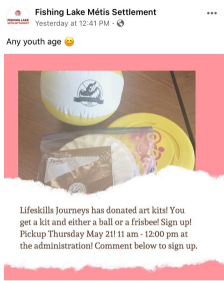


Hiring Youth Life Skills Coordinators (YLSC) Amidst COVID-19

Recognizing the importance of online training and virtual programming as well as work restrictions, employment of YLSC proceeded through UofA human resources.

Online Training

The UofA team hosts weekly 2-hour virtual Life Skills program training open to interested program staff from all 8 Alberta Métis Settlements. Training provides a space for participants to learn how to deliver the Life Skills programming, identify opportunities to respond to the needs of community youth, and brainstorm strategies for remote delivery. Recordings offer future access to training.



Non-contact Programming; Activity kits

Life Skills Activity Kits are being delivered to all 8 Settlements for Settlement youth who have limited access to online programs/ internet. The activity kits include customized life skills activities to support youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.



PPE

MSLSJ's Edmonton community connections were leveraged to secure and deliver emergency PPE (masks, gloves, hand sanitizer) to all 8 Settlements' front line staff.

Next Steps

With current funding set to end March 31, 2021, we are focused on sustaining the benefits of our collaboration. As the only Métis Settlement-based research project in Alberta, we would like to continue building the impactful work established in long-term relationships, and exploring ways in which community-based research and service delivery can respond to ongoing and emergent Métis Settlement priorities for community health and wellness.

The Métis Youth Life Skills Team

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