



***mitho waskawīwin* – pakosêyih tamowin: Moving Well Together to Foster Hopeful Expectations**

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Abstract

Background: *“I feel like [the programs] can be a safe space for kids who don’t have a good place to call home... It can be an escape for them and somewhere they feel good.”* These words from a First Nations (FN) youth participant highlight the impact of physical activity (PA) and sport programs delivered through the *mitho waskawīwin* – Moving Well Together Partnership (MWTP). This community-university collaboration is grounded in the *nehiyaw* (Cree) concept of *mitho waskawīwin* (“moving well”) and was developed to address systemic racism and barriers Indigenous youth face in sport and PA (Hopper & McHugh, 2020; Mason et al., 2019). Previous research shows that Indigenous youth encounter challenges such as racism, limited access to resources, and transportation barriers, which restrict participation in PA (Mason & Koehli, 2012). The MWTP aims to address these systemic inequities while shifting toward a strength-based approach through inclusive PA programming at Montreal Lake Cree Nation.

Methodology: This study employed an interpretive case study design (Stake, 1995), grounded within a *nehiyaw* ontology to explore the impact of the MWTP programs from the perspectives of youth and community members. Data was collected through engagement with a diverse range of participants, including youth, chefs, teachers, and program organizers. Researchers were also immersed in program activities, contributing to organization and relationship building within the community. This participatory approach allowed for rich, contextual insights into program experiences.

Results & Conclusion: Findings indicated that the MWTP programs fostered a strong sense of belonging, safety, and purpose among FN youth, alongside perceived improvements in physical health and well-being. Participants emphasized the importance of the culturally grounded, inclusive environment the program created in the community. By centering the voices and experiences of participants, this study not only highlighted the holistic benefits of the programs but also underscored the importance of community-driven, sustainable physical activity programming for FN youth in Northern communities.

Keywords: Indigenous youth, First Nations youth, physical activity, strength-based



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