

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.