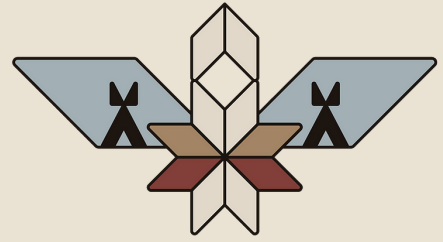


# MIGIZI INDIGENOUS YOUTH PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION



## MIGIZI



**Summer Water  
Sovereignty Program  
2024**

**[migizi.org](http://migizi.org)**



**Migizi Summer Water Program 2024 – Impact Report**  
**Prepared by Nicole MartinRogers, Advance Consulting LLC, December 2024**

**Acknowledgements**

Dr. Nicole MartinRogers (White Earth Nation descendant) is the primary author of this report. Migizi staff including Lisa Skjefte, Jenelle Crozier, Mishaila Bowman, and Ilsa Lee all assisted with the post-survey and focus group. Fellow evaluators Mary McEathron and Thorne Bourdeaux LaPoint also supported this work. We would like to thank the youth who participated in the summer water program and who participated in the evaluation.

# Overview .....

In summer 2024, Migizi hosted a water sovereignty summer program for 14 American Indian youth between the ages of 13 and 16. This is the third year that Migizi has provided programming for youth related to water sovereignty. The purpose of the program is to help youth build stronger peer relationships and relationships with caring adults and elders, learn about water and have new water experiences, and explore how water is related to culture and identity. Youth also had lots of opportunity to learn about water safety and water activities such as kayaking and canoeing, to help them prepare for a trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), which is the pinnacle event of the summer program. Although it was not as much of a focus this summer, in the future Migizi's summer water program will explore ecological concepts, water justice, and water-related career and advocacy opportunities.

To learn more about the impacts of the summer water program, Migizi contracted with Indigenous evaluators to help gather and synthesize information about the program. First, 13 youth participants completed a survey at the end of the summer program that asked about their experiences and the impacts of the program. Second, youth participants and Migizi staff also took lots of photos during the course of the program that Migizi staff and evaluators curated and used to facilitate a focus group with youth participants in December 2024 using a modified PhotoVoice approach. This report summarizes the results of these data gathering activities and provides suggestions and issues to consider for future rounds of Migizi's summer water program.

**"I would like to educate more youth about the environment. Personally, I want to learn how to respect it more and what I can do to protect the water."**

– Youth Participant



# Key Findings

## Youth had fun and made new friends during the summer water program.

When they were asked what they liked most about the summer water program, they offered a range of responses – see example quotes from the focus group below. Every youth was able to say something they enjoyed.

- Getting to know new kids and the field trips!
- Wilderness, seeing animals I never saw before.
- Mine was the Boundary Waters, it was so fun! Paddling the canoes, the air, the stars.
- All the lakes we went to.
- I knew how to play traditional [Lacrosse] but I learned how to cradle.
- Meeting elders. I like helping them and talking to them.
- Cooking!

When asked what could be improved about the program on the post-survey, most youth said “nothing.” Several youth mentioned wanting more or better food during the program.

## Youth had new experiences with water.

When they were asked about things they learned or new experiences they had, youth named a range of new experiences and learning, especially with a bit of prompting from Migizi staff to remind them about the different things they did. Lots of youth mentioned water skills and safety such as knowing how to steer a canoe or learning to swim. Others learned about cultural practices related to water such as offering tobacco to the water. Finally, some youth mentioned the importance of water to life. See quotes from the focus group below.

- I learned how to swim!
- I learned that I am the best canoer!
- Water is life, we use it for everything!
- Always wear a life jacket!
- T formation and crab sitting when you tip the boat to save yourself.
- We learned about stuff in the water, like insects.
- I am made of it [water].

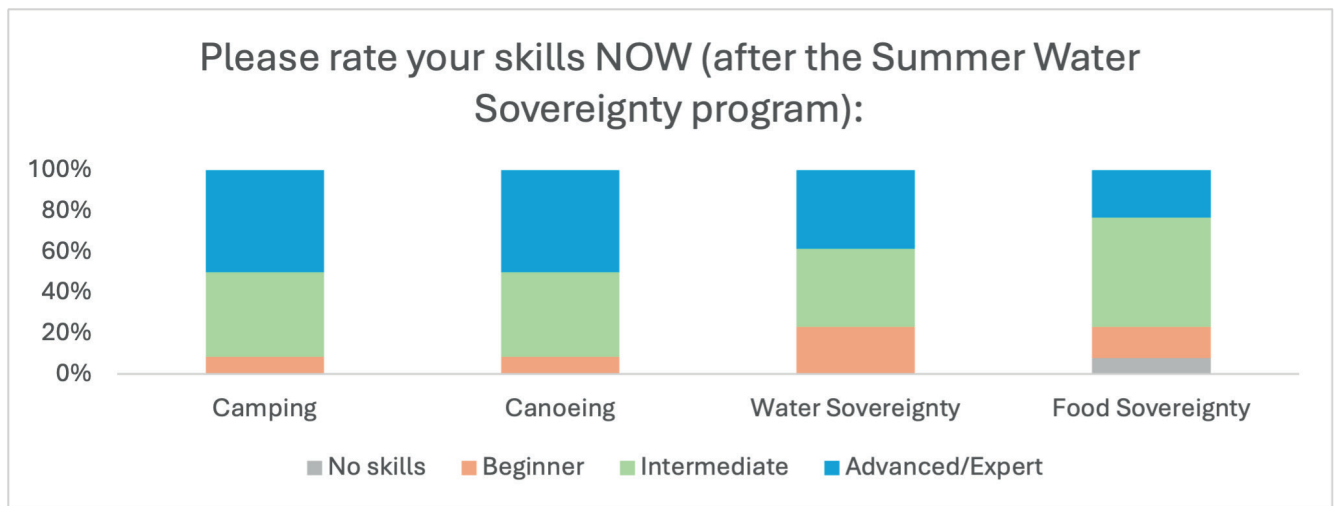
When they were asked in the focus group about the meaning of the term “water sovereignty,” many of the youth seemed unsure of that term although a few had ideas:

- Protect the water!
- To be in control of your own resources.
- It’s our traditional ancestral right.

**Youth participants reported high levels of confidence in their skills with many of the topics and activities that were covered in the summer water program, however, they also rated their skills highly at the beginning of the program so there was not much increase in skills.**



Half of the youth participants rated themselves as “advanced/expert” and 42% said they are at an “intermediate” level in canoeing and camping at the end of the summer program. Only 8% felt they were still “beginner” in these skills. See Figure 1.



When asked in the focus group what else they want to learn about or do with water, the youth had many ideas and appeared to be interested in future activities involving water. Here are some of their quotes:

- [I want to learn] about water and its environment.
- I like swimming. I want to go to that trampoline on the water again!
- Making paper with water.
- Traditional fishing.
- How to purify it.

## Youth identified many ways they are connected to water and why water is important to them.

When they were asked about their connections to water in the focus group, most youth referred to being made of water or how they need water to live. Many recognized that “water is essential to life.” Another youth said, “I put tobacco in the water when I pray.”



# Other Findings

Youth reported generally positive relationships with Migizi staff. All but one youth agreed or strongly agreed with the statements “Migizi staff care about me,” “Migizi staff encourage me to do my best,” “Migizi staff really listen to me,” and “I look up to Migizi staff for guidance.”

All agree or strongly agree they have friends at Migizi. **See Figure 2** in the Appendix.

Youth are confident in their ability to finish high school, but are less sure about their plans for postsecondary and entrepreneurship. **See Figure 3** in the Appendix.

Most youth are confident in their problem-solving abilities. Most felt that Migizi staff helped them learn how to stand up for themselves and others. **See Figure 4** in the Appendix.

Most youth feel good about their leadership skills and their ability to get along and make friends with their peers. **See Figures 5 and 6** in the Appendix.

Youth also feel good about their cultural identity and knowledge of Native American culture. (There were only minor changes from before to after the program on these questions, indicating that most participants had strong cultural identity coming into the program.) Youth also mostly agree that they have a strong connection to the local Native American community, although most youth marked “agree” instead of “strongly agree” to these statements, indicating some room for growth in this area. **See Figures 7 and 8** in the Appendix.

## Suggestions and issues to consider

Overall, the summer water program at Migizi appears to be achieving many of the outcomes that have been previously identified as important, including that youth have fun, make new friends, build relationships with caring adults, have new experiences, learn about water, and increase their understanding of their cultural identity and the importance of water in their culture.

This past summer, Migizi was experiencing many staff transitions which resulted in some ideas about the overall program mission and goals not being fully implemented into programming. Going forward, Migizi should consider how to increase the focus on water sovereignty, Indigenous water rights and current events/issues, water-related careers and advocacy, water quality and ecosystems, water management and infrastructure, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and water and culture, with age-appropriate content and activities for 13 and 14 year olds. Currently, this program is fully staffed, and Migizi is working with a curriculum developer to build the water sovereignty program for next summer to include more of these content areas. Migizi will also continue to work with its contracted evaluators to build out the learning goals/outcomes for the program (e.g., update the logic model) and to work with program staff to ensure the activities are necessary and sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes for youth.

For the summer water program and all of its programming, Migizi should work with its contracted evaluators to use Indigenous Youth Participatory Evaluation (IYPE), which will reflect Migizi’s goals related to youth leadership and will help to improve the program in ways that reflect the interests and preferences of the youth who Migizi serves.

# Appendix

Figure 2

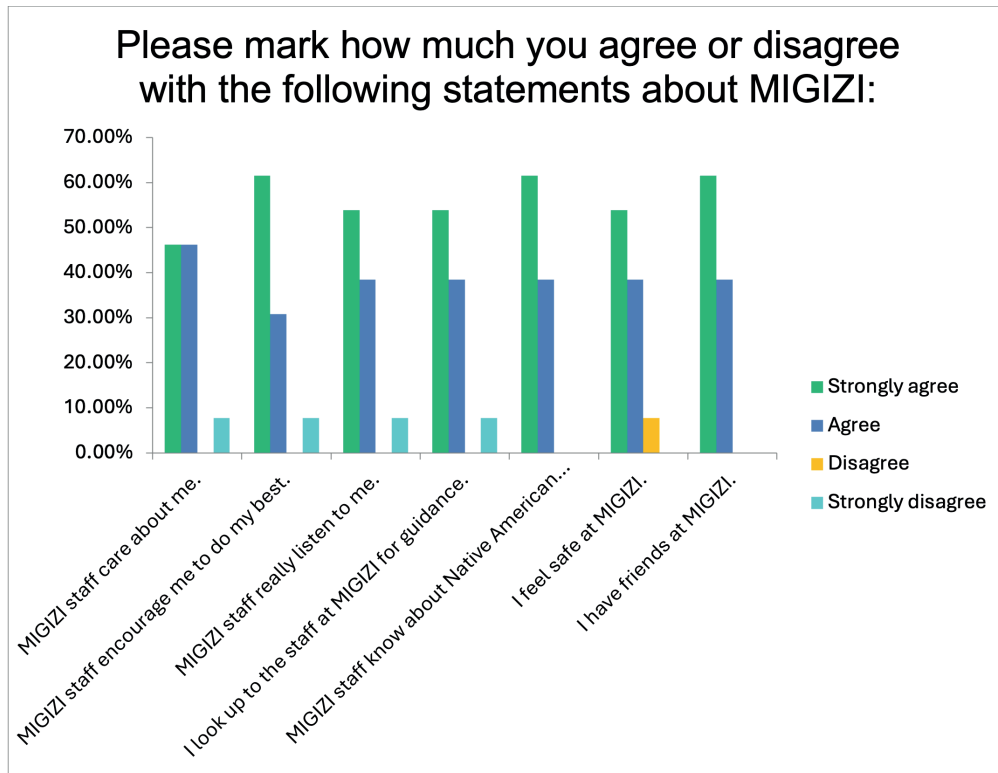


Figure 3

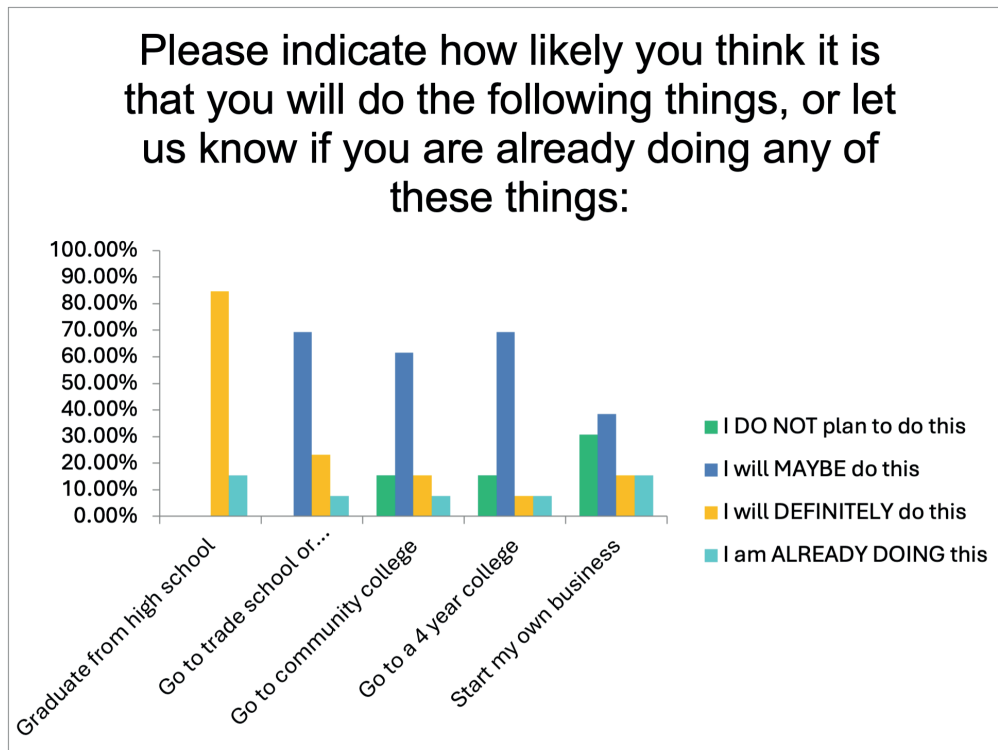


Figure 4

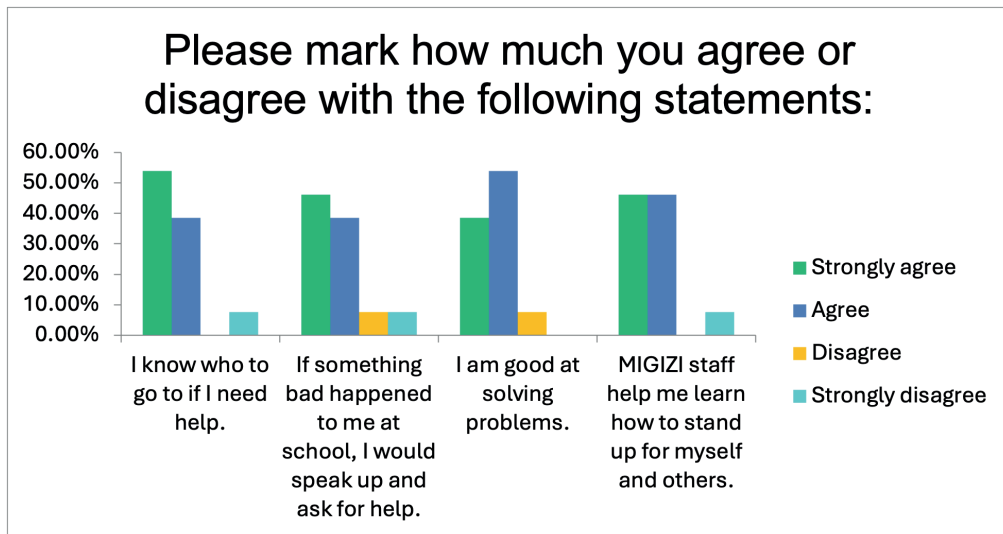


Figure 5

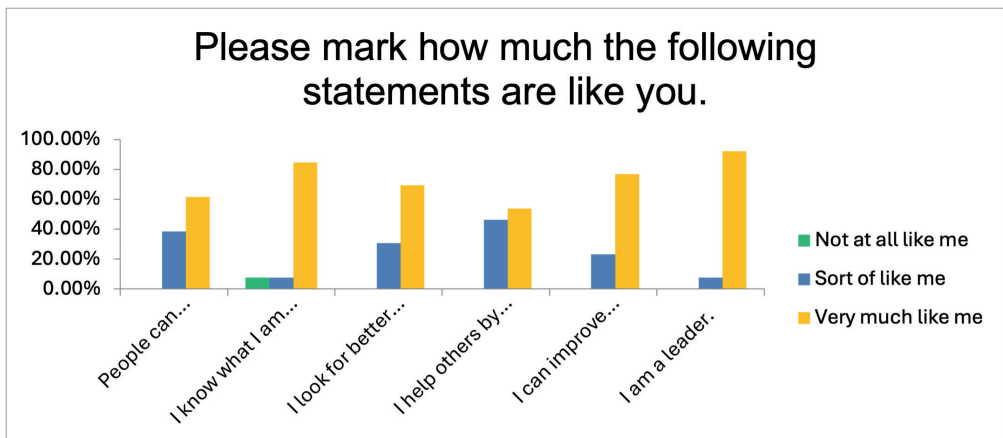


Figure 6

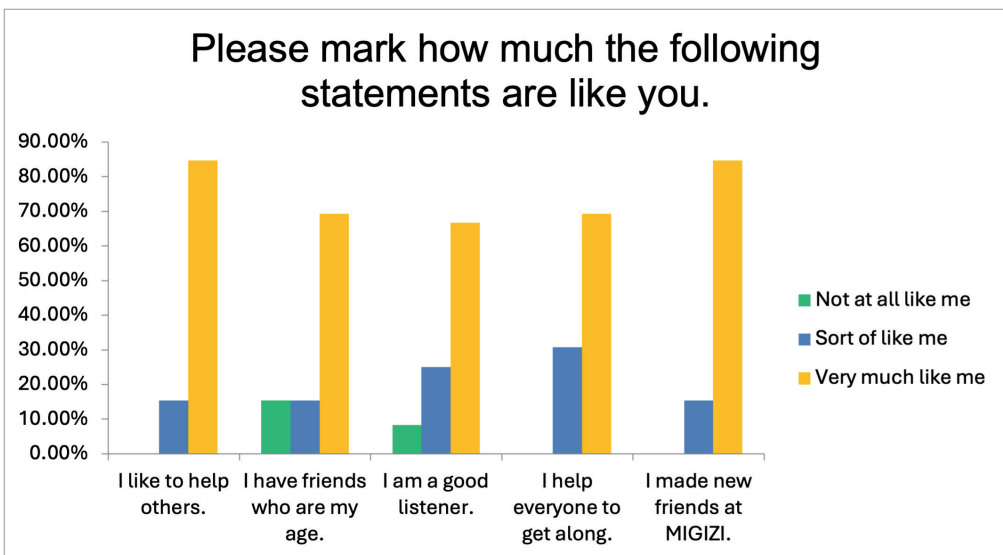




Figure 7

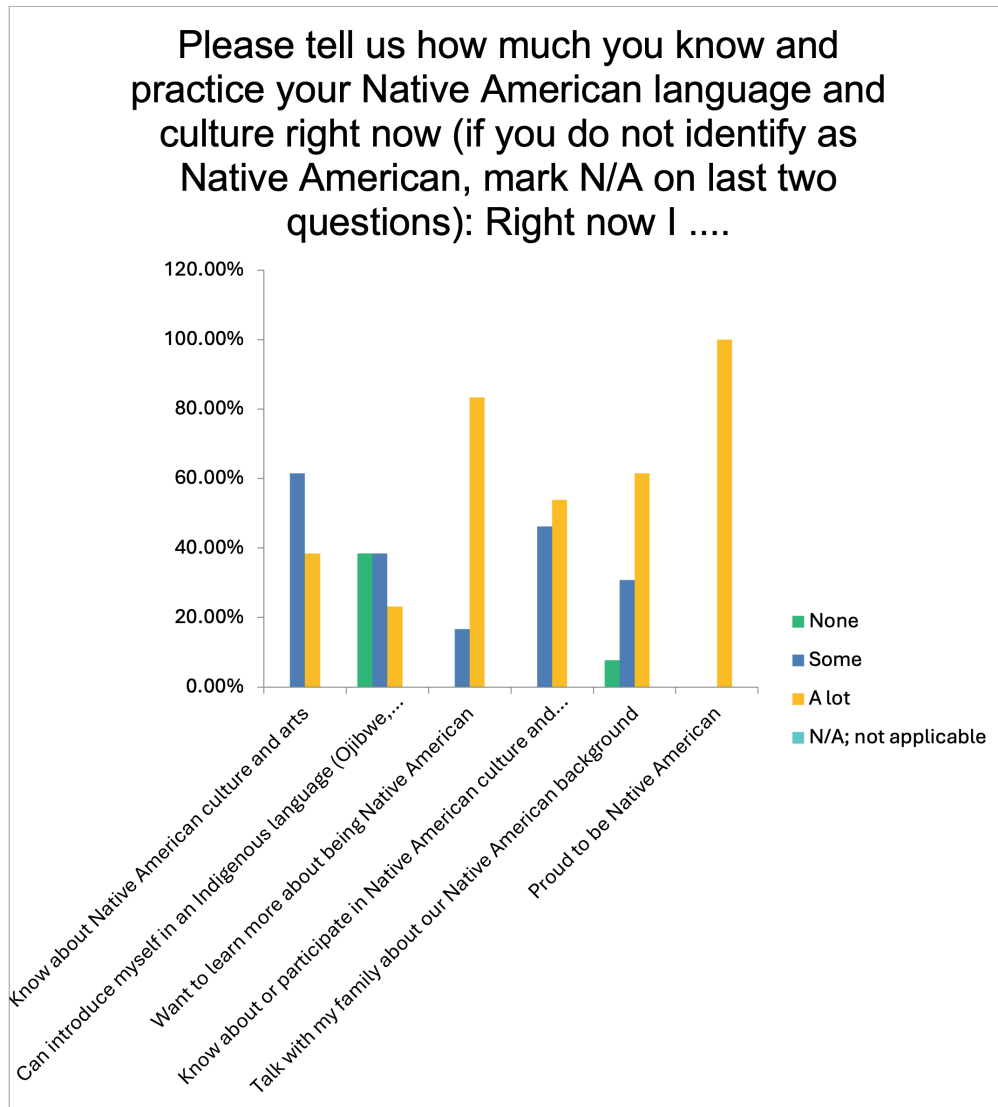


Figure 8

