

# MIGIZI INDIGENOUS YOUTH PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION REPORT



## SUMMER WATER SOVEREIGNTY PROGRAM



PREPARED BY

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**Image caption:** MIGIZI youth fishing at the Boundary Waters (Adele Subola, August 2022).

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Greetings MIGIZI friends and supporters!

I am very pleased to introduce MIGIZI's first foray into Indigenous Youth Participatory Evaluation (IYPE). This project supports our organizational goal that is stated in our 2021-2023 strategic plan of engaging youth. IYPE projects also help us to work toward our mission of providing a strong circle of support that nurtures the educational, social, economic, and cultural development of American Indian youth.

MIGIZI tried something new and different with this IYPE project – youth participants led the evaluation of a program that is meant for them. And I think you'll see in this report that the project was quite successful, and a great learning experience for all involved!

I have worked with our IYPE partners, Wakinyan LaPointe and Thorne Bordeaux LaPointe from Mni Ki Wakan, and Dr. Nicole MartinRogers from Advance Consulting LLC, for many years to realize a dream of Indigenous youth being involved in and leading research and evaluation about topics that directly affect their lives. Eventually, work like this project may lead to the creation of an Indigenous Youth Research and Development Center (IYRDC). This would be a place where our community would incubate and facilitate projects like this all around our state and region.

Looking forward, this project is a stepping stone in a larger effort to build MIGIZI's evaluation capacity and to move us toward being more youth led. We are taking what we learned in this project and applying it to our fall 2022 programs and beyond. We are also continuing with another IYPE cohort this fall and winter. So you can expect to see more exciting reports about youth-led evaluation and other efforts from MIGIZI in the coming months and years! In the meantime, I hope you enjoy learning more about our youth's experiences and their recommendations from the Native Youth Water Sovereignty summer program.

With gratitude for your ongoing interest and support,

*Kelly Drummer*



**Kelly Drummer** “

"This project is a stepping stone in a larger effort to build MIGIZI's evaluation capacity and to move us toward being more youth led."

# INTRODUCTION

MIGIZI is an Indigenous youth-serving organization that was founded in 1977. MIGIZI's mission is to provide a strong circle of support that nurtures the educational, social, economic, and cultural development of American Indian youth. MIGIZI is known for its signature programs: First Person Productions, Green Jobs Pathways, and CLAW (Culture, Leadership, Academic Wellbeing).

In the summer of 2022, MIGIZI offered a new program: the Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program for Indigenous youth ages 13-18, which is an 8-week program that operates from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday. A core group of about 8-10 youths participated consistently throughout the 8 weeks.

During the program, the participating youth completed the following activities which were led by two MIGIZI program staff:

- Water-centered arts and painting activities
- Field trips to lakes, parks, and museums (Bell Museum and Science Museum of Minnesota)
- Group projects on topics of animals, pipelines, plants, water bodies, and lakes
- Water-based cultural programming, canoeing at the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA), and kayaking in various Twin Cities-area rivers and lakes
- Self-care and well-being activities

MIGIZI worked with Thorne Bordeaux-LaPointe (Sicangu Lakota) and Wakinyan LaPointe (Sicangu Lakota), both from Mni Ki Wakan (Water is Sacred), which is an Indigenous water rights program, along with independent consultant Dr. Nicole MartinRogers (White Earth Nation descendant) from Advance Consulting LLC. These Indigenous scholars are working to create the Indigenous Youth Research and Development Center (IYRDC). They were contracted to facilitate an Indigenous Youth Participatory Evaluation (IYPE) project with the Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program. During initial meetings with MIGIZI staff, Wakinyan also contributed to designing some of the programming. This IYPE project is part of MIGIZI's efforts to increase their organizational evaluation capacity and to integrate youth and staff participatory evaluation. Our goals for this IYPE project were:

- To increase Indigenous youths' exposure to, and interest in, research and evaluation
- To strengthen Indigenous youths' connection to culture, language, environment, and water
- To increase Indigenous youths' leadership of MIGIZI's programming
- To inform strengthened youth programming from MIGIZI, Mni Ki Wakan, and IYRDC
- To increase MIGIZI's, Mni Ki Wakan, and the IYRDC's capacity to support culturally-responsive, youth-led evaluation
- To share with MIGIZI and the community (funders, stakeholders, volunteers, board members, other youth development organizations, etc.) the impact of youth-led research and evaluation
- To inform the community and MIGIZI about youth needs and interests related to water programming, and youth programming in general
- To have a fun and engaging experience for youth that produces actionable recommendations

This report summarizes the process, key findings, and recommendations that arose from this IYPE project.

# INDIGENOUS YOUTH PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION (IYPE) METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

This Indigenous Youth Participatory Evaluation (IYPE) project was designed specifically for MIGIZI's Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program, although we did borrow from methods and activities that have been developed and used by others<sup>1</sup>.

Every week on Thursdays during the program, Wakinyan and Thorne facilitated the youth participants and MIGIZI program staff through a set of evaluation-related activities that were developed in partnership with Nicole:

- **Week 1:** Introduction to evaluation, Indigenized evaluation, youth participatory evaluation model, how to develop outcomes – we co-developed a theory of change with the youth
- **Week 2:** Defining the program theory (logic model), learning about data gathering methods, organizing into teams, develop a timeline of the IYPE project
- **Week 3:** Create plan for focus group and modified PhotoVoice and avoiding bias – the youth then participated in and facilitated a focus group about their experiences in the program to-date and they also made a plan for taking photos to represent their experiences in the program
- **Week 4:** Data analysis, coding data, and identifying themes
- **Week 5:** Brainstorm recommendations
- **Post-BWCA focus group and PhotoVoice session:** After their BWCA canoe trip, the youth facilitated and participated in another discussion about the program and the impact it had on them, and they discussed some of the photos they took while in the program

An important part of the framing of this IYPE project for MIGIZI staff and youth participants was reiterating that Indigenous peoples and youth have always been evaluators. A culturally appropriate IYPE approach is crucial for respecting the inherent, universal, and fundamental rights of sovereign and self-determining Indigenous peoples for full, equal, and effective participation in research about them. We look at our communities from an asset-based lens. Everything Indigenous youth needed to be strong and successful is already within our communities. For this IYPE project, we are practicing **Wopasi**:

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*“In the Lakota language, the term ‘Wopasi’ means to pursue inquiry, to push the limitations of one’s knowledge, and to seek greater understanding by looking for meaning and wisdom above, beneath, and all around.”*

*- LeMoine LaPointe, personal communication, July 26, 2018*



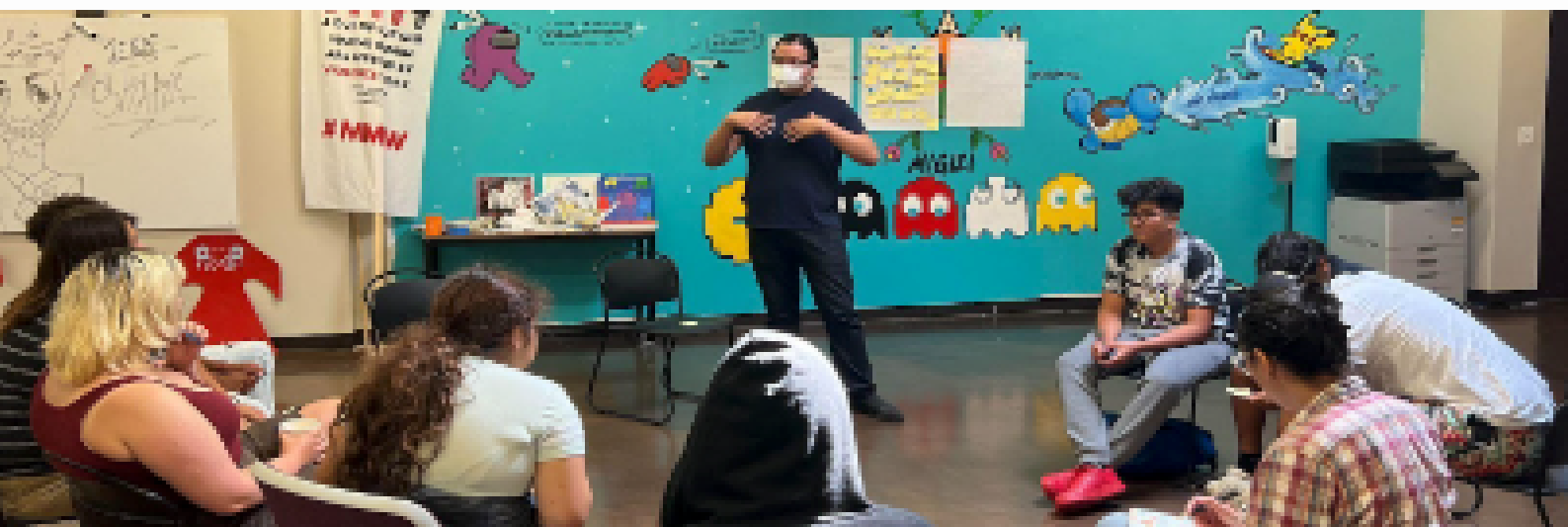
# LIMITATIONS

There are two primary limitations of this IYPE project. The first limitation is the small amount of time we had with the youth participants and staff in order to plan and carry out the activities we designed. We tried to manage this limitation by doing some of the work in between our weekly sessions with the youth to move aspects of the project forward. This means that the youth participants did not have as much leadership and ownership of the work as what they would ideally have in a youth participatory evaluation. We did check in with the youth and staff about the work we completed between sessions to ensure we did not miss or mis-represent anything.

The second limitation was our struggle to effectively engage the youth in the IYPE project. We (the contracted evaluation team of Nicole, Wakinyan, and Thorne) believe this challenge is just one more side effect of the global pandemic, when youth became more isolated and socially insecure, which may make them uncomfortable and unwilling to engage in group activities like participatory evaluation. The program had more boys than girls participating, and more students who were on the younger end of the age range that we had invited to the program. This gender and age makeup of the students impacts the accessibility and appropriateness of the programming, and in this case required staff to modify activities in some cases to meet students' needs and behavioral and developmental levels.

Youth engagement in the programming itself was a related challenge. We observed a need for additional program planning to engage the youth in the IYPE process as well as the programming overall. We recommend that in the future MIGIZI should diversify youth engagement strategies to recruit and retain the expected number of youth for the program, establish clear program start times and guidance for behavior and participation in all activities, and continue to build rapport with youth to minimize some of these limitations. We modified our IYPE content and approach to working with the youth based on our experiences over the first few sessions, and MIGIZI staff did more outreach which improved youth participation and engagement in later sessions.

These limitations resulted in the contracted evaluation consultants (Thorne, Wakinyan, and Nicole) doing more of the conceptualization and framing of the evaluation, and the youth participants engaged more in the implementation of the plans in addition to outlining some evaluation tools for the IYPE project, than what is ideal in a youth participatory evaluation project. We intend to work with MIGIZI going forward under a new contract to continue to build MIGIZI's capacity to conduct and use evaluation and to involve youth and staff deeply in the evaluation process.

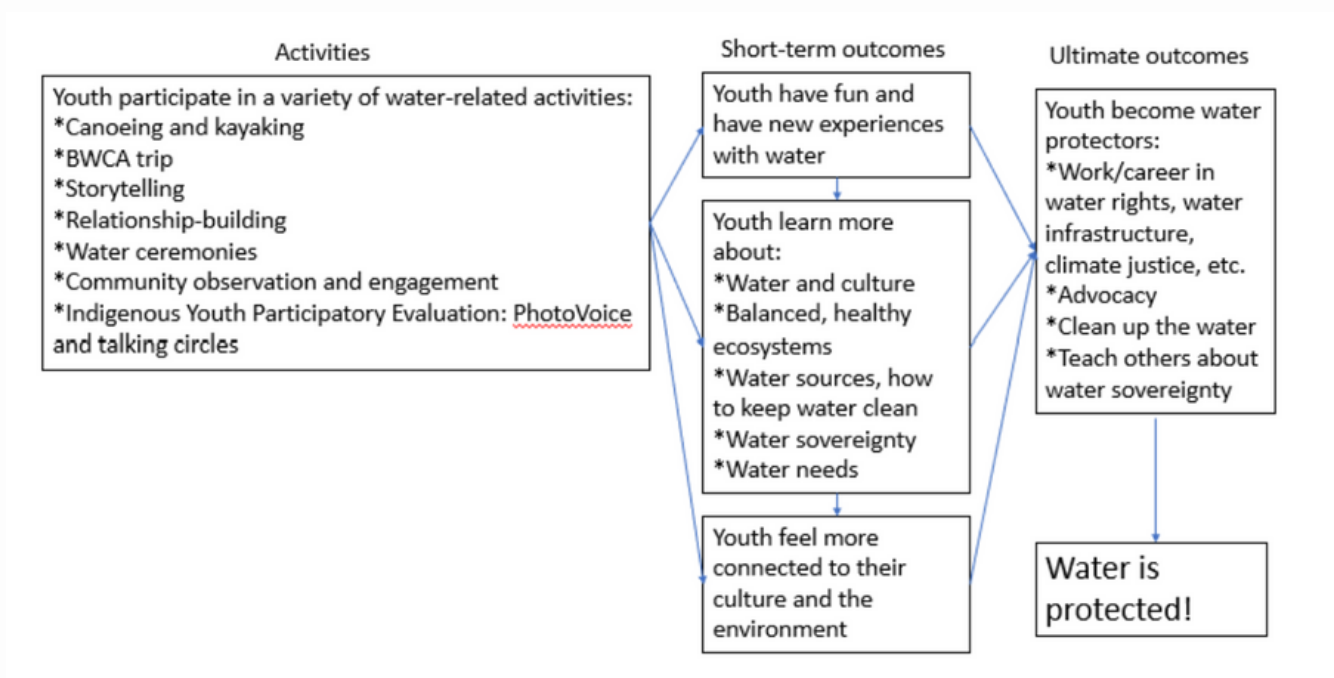


**Image caption:** Thorne Bordeaux-LaPointe facilitates an IYPE session with youth and staff (Wakinyan LaPointe, July 2022).

# OUR THEORY OF CHANGE AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Working with the youth participants and staff, we developed a theory of change to show all of the activities that are part of the Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program and what impacts the youth and staff hope those activities will have.

## THEORY OF CHANGE – NATIVE YOUTH WATER SOVEREIGNTY PROGRAM



We used this logic model to develop the following evaluation questions:

### Activities

Did MIGIZI do the activities they planned around water?

How well were those activities implemented?

### Short-term outcomes

Did youth have fun?

Did youth have new water-related experiences?

Did youth learn about: water and culture; balanced, healthy ecosystems; water sources, and how to keep water clean; water sovereignty; and water needs?

Do youth feel more connected to water and the environment?

### Ultimate outcomes

Are youth interested in becoming water protectors, including having a job or career in water rights, water infrastructure, climate justice, etc.; water advocacy; cleaning up water; and teaching others about water and water sovereignty?

What are youth's future plans and goals related to water?

How did youth's relationship to Indigenous culture and identity change?

## KEY FINDINGS

Based on the youth focus groups and PhotoVoice activities, we worked with the youth to identify the following key themes from their evaluation of MIGIZI's Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program:

### *Youth had new experiences with water.*



**Image caption:** MIGIZI youth getting ready to go on the water in their kayaks (Bree Green, July 2022)

As a part of the program, the youth and staff participated in many water-related activities including kayaking, canoeing, and visiting and learning about local bodies of water and the wildlife in the area. They also participated in clean-up activities around water. Finally, the youth and staff participated in traditional ceremony and prayer associated with the water that were supported by the LaPointe family. For many of these youth, this was their first time doing some of these activities.



“I feel that in general youth feel more connected to the water and environment because they are spending more time outside and near water and places they haven’t been before.” – a youth participant



## *Youth learned about Indigenous culture and connections to water, and they wanted to learn more.*

During the 5th IYPE Session, Migizi staff and Wakinyan and Thorne took youth participants to Bdote. At Bdote, a sacred Dakota ancestral site of origin and creation, LeMoine LaPointe (Sicangu Lakota) shared traditional stories and practices around water, then showed the youth a map of waterways throughout Minnesota in Lakota, Dakota, and Anishinaabe languages. Then, the youth took turns saying some of the names. Afterward, Thorne and Wakinyan shared about how the waterways were the original maps of Indigenous peoples, and how our traditional canoes placed us into a relationship with water. In the end, Thorne and Wakinyan shared about the relationship between water and Dakota/Lakota nations, how water helps shape the national identities of Indigenous Nations like the Dakota. They also spoke at the Dakota 38+2 Wokiksuye na Woyuonihan (Commemoration & Honoring) site where youth offered cansasa (tobacco) to remember and give thanks for the day.

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“It’s important to respect the source of life and creation in order to really connect and understand our lives and environments, and where we belong in all of that.”

– a youth participant

“I feel like we have begun to learn about water and ecosystems, and a little about culture. I want us to dive deeper in on culture and ecosystems a lot more.”

– a youth participant



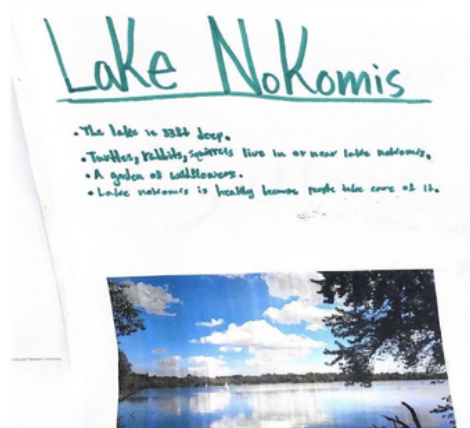
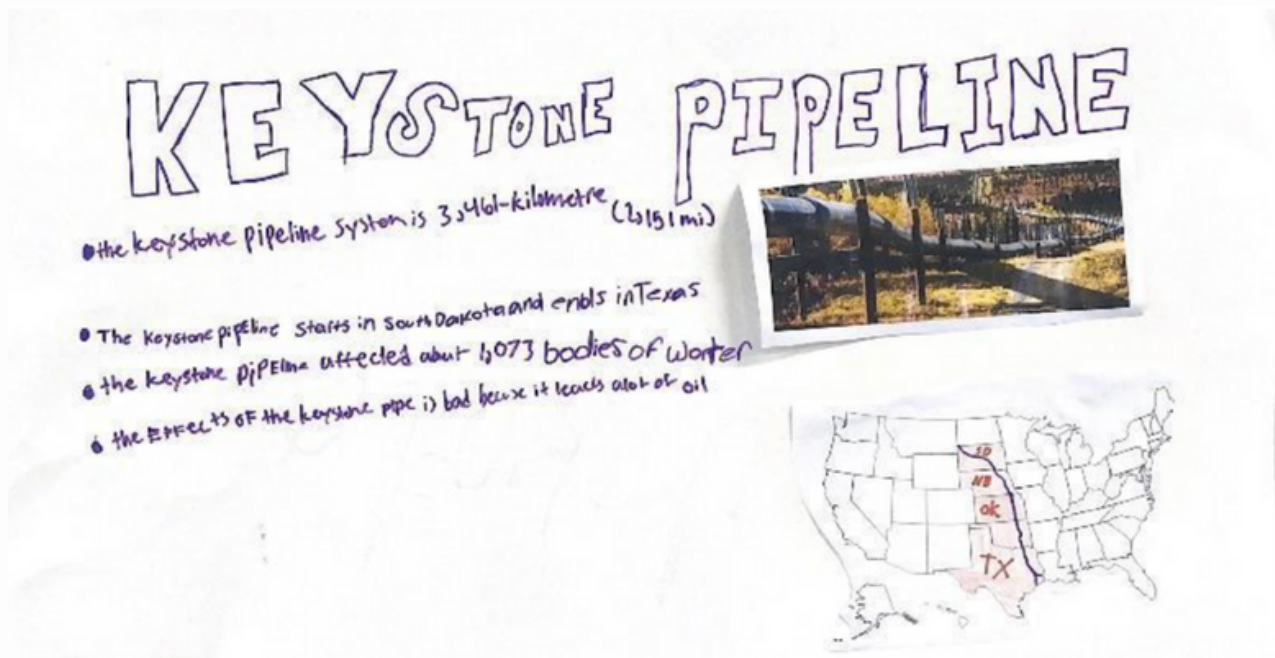
**Image caption:** LeMoine LaPointe shows youth a map of waterways in Dakota, Lakota, and Anishinaabe languages (Wakinyan LaPointe, July 2022).

## Some youth became interested in water protection.

Some of the activities in the Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program involved learning about and discussing various current events that impact Indigenous peoples and water, for example, oil pipelines and other extractive industries. The youth also learned about and visited local bodies of water that are important to Indigenous peoples and that face imminent threat from pollution, drought, and other man-made hazards. The youth created poster board projects to demonstrate their learnings and to share with each other.

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*“A career in holistic healing will allow me to spread the message that water is the core of all life and healthy living for all things.” – a youth participant*



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*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.”  
– a youth participant*

**Image caption:** Two examples of youth poster board projects (Adele Subola, July 2022).



## *Youth had fun and formed new friendships.*

Many of the youth provided feedback during the focus group that they were having fun and enjoying the activities and getting to know the other kids in the program. They liked the water activities and many of them made new friends. Although the BWCA canoe trip may have been challenging for some of the youth and outside of their comfort zone, they ultimately agreed it was a good experience that helped them learn new skills, increase their confidence, and deepen their connection to water.

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*“We got to go swimming and have fun with our friends.”  
– a youth participant*

*“Yes! I feel like I’ve been on the water more than any summer.  
Every week we’ve done a few big things with water!”  
– a youth participant*



**Image caption:** Youth took a field trip on a hot summer day to Minnehaha Falls to explore (Bree Green, July 2022).

## *Indigenous Youth Participatory Evaluation was a good thing to try at MIGIZI.*

Although we did not ask the youth directly about their experiences with the IYPE project, we observed their engagement and willingness to participate increase over the course of the five sessions. Staff have also anecdotally reported that they felt it was a good experience and that they were surprised about how engaged the youth were. Therefore, despite the limitations noted above, we believe that IYPE is a practice that is consistent with MIGIZI's values and approach to doing youth work and that it was a good initial foray into the practice of IYPE with the Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

After completing this IYPE project about MIGIZI's Native Youth Water Sovereignty Program, we worked with the youth participants and staff to develop the following recommendations and next steps for MIGIZI:

- **More Indigenous youth should be engaged in future programs.** This program was not full, and more youth could have benefitted from participating.
  - MIGIZI should consider the age and gender make-up of youth that will be the best fit for the program, and modify the programming as needed to match students' developmental and behavioral levels. MIGIZI staff will also consider how to design activities and programming to foster peer mentoring and encourage older youth to participate and act as role models for younger youth.
- **Future programming should be designed to increase youth's access to and knowledge of water-related careers and advocacy work, water quality and ecosystems, water management and infrastructure, water and culture, etc.** Future programming should also increase youth's access to and participation in water-related activities like kayaking/canoeing, fishing, traditional water practices and adventure-based programming. This would require more pre-planning of the activities; MIGIZI should ensure there is necessary and sufficient programming and activities to meet the stated objectives/outcomes of the program.
  - Starting in fall 2022, the evaluation team will begin to support MIGIZI staff to learn how to use project management tools to facilitate more pre-planning. We will also support the MIGIZI team to seek additional outside training as needed to help staff hone their project management and youth program design skills. Also, MIGIZI will continue to build out their organizational infrastructure and documentation needed to support program planning and implementation of programs and activities as designed.
- **Continue IYPE with this and other MIGIZI programs.**
  - In fall 2022, we are working with MIGIZI on a second IYPE group with youth participants which will focus on youth recruitment and engagement. MIGIZI staff will also start doing more follow-up with youth and families that participate in various activities to learn more about what they liked (and didn't like) about these activities. MIGIZI will incorporate these learnings into their approach to recruiting and engaging youth in spring 2023 and beyond.



*Image caption: Youth and staff on their trip at the Boundary Waters (Bree Green, August 2022).*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Nicole MartinRogers is the primary author of this report, with assistance from Wakinyan LaPointe and Thorne Bordeaux-LaPointe. We attempted to reflect the work and thoughts of the IYPE participants. Nicole and Wakinyan and Thorne developed the IYPE curriculum and activities, and Wakinyan and Thorne facilitated the IYPE sessions. For more information about Mni Ki Wakan, see [mnikiwakan.org](http://mnikiwakan.org).

Wakinyan, Thorne, and Nicole have also been working toward the creation of the Indigenous Youth Research and Development Center (IYRDC), and this project is a great addition to our portfolio of Indigenous youth-led action research about topics that impact them. For more information about the Indigenous Youth Research and Development Center, see the IYRDC Concept Paper.

We would like to thank Adele Subola (Hunkpapa Lakota), Academic Support Specialist, and Bree Green (Red Lake Band of Anishinabe), Youth Development Specialist, who supported and participated in this IYPE project.

Finally, and most importantly, the following youth participants were involved in one or more aspects of this IYPE project:

- Essence Benimon (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe)
- Leandro Burga Daniel (Ecuadorian)
- Solomon Drummer (Oglala Lakota & Poarch Creek)
- Jackson Genia (Cherokee)
- Nigozis Gonzalez (Lac Courte Oreilles & Red Lake Ojibwe)
- Aurora Lohnes (Red Lake Ojibwe)
- Beatrix Lowe (MOWA Choctaw)
- William Means (Oglala Lakota & White Earth Ojibwe)
- Carter York (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe)



**Image caption:** Youth and staff taking a group photo at the Boundary Waters (Daniel Ahrendt, August 2022).