

Good Health  
and Wellness in  
Indian Country

# GHWIC Success Story

## Catawba Indian Nation: Kids Fired Up With Culture

In the third year of Good Health and Wellness in Indian Country (GHWIC), the Catawba Nation's Wellness department and the Boys and Girls Club of Catawba Nation (BGC) strengthened their partnership to provide a safe, fun, positive environment where youth found support, learned skills and healthy behaviors. Attending Catawba youth grew more connected to their culture and history, were mentored in understanding healthy food intake, received tobacco free lifestyle messaging, and increased their physical activity.

Known as Suuk Yap, meaning "Tree House" in Catawba, the Catawba Nation Boys and Girls Club Teen Center was established in 2017. The

club's staff works to strengthen cultural identity through program work that focuses on positive growth and development in youth ages 11 to 17. A wide variety of services and activities are offered to help promote healthy behaviors and prevent chronic disease.

After planning some programs for BGC, Wellness was excited to find that the youth were especially receptive and engaged with all that was offered, and eager to explore their culture as it relates to food and activity.

The Wellness Department partnered with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) to fund a class called Cooking Matters. Students learned about healthy food choices, safety and hygiene, and skills for independence. This class was found to be valuable by students; however, DHEC were no longer able to financially support the program. Despite this setback, Wellness and Boys & Girls club will continue and even expand the program over the next year to include kayaking, foraging, and more! The program also partnered with Catawba's Clinic and Community Planner to offer tobacco prevention classes including referral resources. In the summer, Wellness did kayaking activities with the kids on the river and encouraged forming teams for Wellness' 3 on 3 basketball tournament. Finally, the program provided service projects with the two community gardens where youth planted crops in the summer and fall. Youth have expressed an interest to staff in volunteering or having their own greenhouses at the farm in the future.

Many of the youth who frequent the Boys and Girls Club programs also participate in the Tribal youth running program, the Spirit Sprinters, utilizing safe local walking/running routes. Spirit Sprinters is an 11-week running program that prepares students for a 5k trail race. Youth are given healthy snacks, some of which are provided by Black Snake Farm (Catawba Nation's 22-acre farm) before and after running. The Spirit Sprinters program occurs once in the spring and again in the fall. Some "seasoned" Spirit Sprinters are now junior coaches. They help assist with warm-ups, stretches, and encourage the newer and younger runners.



Spirit Sprinters on the trail



'Gather' Volunteers

The Spirit Sprinters students do not just learn about healthy physical activities. Youth are also educated on healthy food choices, healthy food access, culture, language, and traditional foods. As a service project, the Spirit Sprinters provided assistance at a traditional foods dinner and movie event - a community viewing event of the food sovereignty movie Gather.

Wellness staff observed that the Teen Center programs have had a notable impact on the youth. Some of the children taking part in the group experienced difficulties with caregiving, food insecurity, and a lack of regular physical activity. Staff also noted a shift in the teens as they have excelled at drumming and dancing there has also been a growing passion and excitement for tradition. Staff report seeing youth in the Spirit Sprinters program grow in confidence.

An example of the impact this program has had on youth can be found in a shy young man in his early teens who joined the Spirit Sprinters and was initially not as involved with his culture and would spend much of the time on his cell phone. By the time the program had completed, this teen had become more open, was no longer on his phone, and during the Gather event had set up a Spirit Plate, unprompted, to honor his ancestors. Staff was touched by this action and recognizes the influence GHWIC efforts have on the next generation.

This passion has been seen not only in the community, but also on social media as youth have been posting and sharing videos about what it means to be Catawba, showing their regalia, and sharing their culture. Further, students have been bringing what they learn into the public school system by joining gardening programs, combating the public-school system's history of Thanksgiving, and by bringing the Catawba culture into school. Staff shared seeing a fire lit in the students, and that their involvement with the program has caused a love of learning, a strong sense of identity, and a knowledge of their culture and history. The Catawba Nation GHWIC program is able to support a wide variety of efforts to support Catawba youth's health, mental wellbeing, and passion for their culture to promote health and reduce the incidence of chronic disease and these efforts will continue.



**Spirit Plate**



**Community Garden planting service project**



**From Cooking Matters Pizza class using garden ingredients**



**Video: Day on the River**

<https://vimeo.com/732222735/08e611ec68>

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