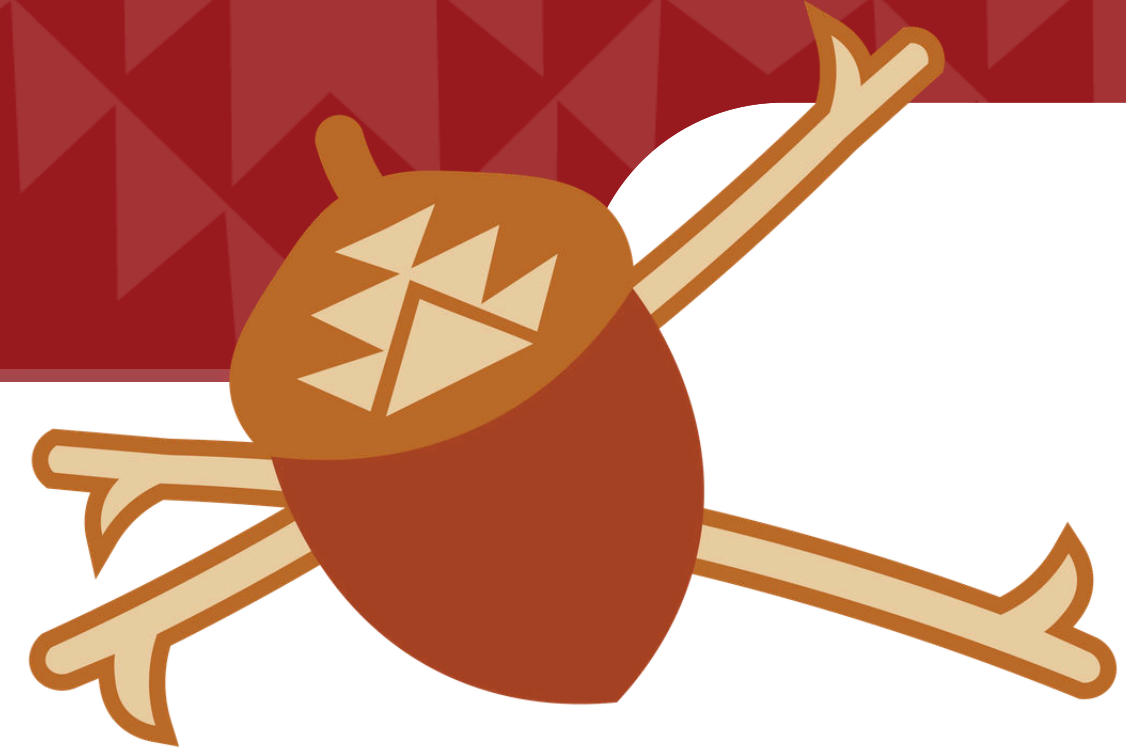


A.C.O.R.N Youth Wellness Program

Two Feathers Native American Family Services



CDEP Purpose, Description, and Implementation

The Two Feathers Native American Family Services Stick Game & Flower Dance project is an early intervention and prevention program designed to reduce mental health disparities among Native American youth by reconnecting young people to ancestral cultural practices that promote wellness, resilience, and community belonging. This culturally defined evidence practice (CDEP) strengthens youth mental health by fostering hope for the future; mitigating historical loss and grief; improving family relationships; and reinforcing individual, familial, and community connections. Through culturally grounded mentorship, intergenerational engagement, and ceremonial practice, the project supports mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

Make it Stronger

A five-session series focused on physical wellness, cultural teachings, food sovereignty, language, and identity. This program integrates Stick Game and Flower Dance values into fitness and personal development activities.

Stick Game Programming

Youth receive mentorship on Stick Game protocol, cultural expectations, physical conditioning, and intertribal tournament readiness. Phase 2 added structured mentorship lines, more collaborative practices, and expanded regional tournaments.

Flower Dance Programming

Youth receive mentorship on Stick Game protocol, cultural expectations, physical conditioning, and intertribal tournament readiness. Phase 2 added structured mentorship lines, more collaborative practices, and expanded regional tournaments.

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Evaluation Design and Methods

The Cultural Programming team worked collaboratively with the Internal Evaluator to design a culturally responsive evaluation plan, review findings, and develop interpretations and recommendations. Through this collaborative process, a mixed-methods evaluation design was selected. This design allowed the evaluation to document program reach through quantitative measures while also centering youth voice and individual stories through qualitative methods.

Quantitative Evaluation

Quantitative data were collected to describe program participation and demographic characteristics. Sign-in sheets were used at each program event and included youth age, gender, home location, guardian contact information, and transportation needs.

Qualitative Evaluation

Qualitative methods were used to explore youth experiences, cultural connection, and perceived program impact. Qualitative data were collected through focus groups and individual interviews using semi-structured discussion guides designed to promote consistency while allowing participants to share experiences in their own words.

Results

Evaluation findings from the ACORN Youth Wellness Program demonstrate strong evidence that culturally grounded programming positively impacts Native youth's sense of hope, belonging, cultural identity, and emotional wellness. Across all program components youth consistently reported meaningful increases in cultural connection, supportive relationships, leadership development, and engagement in community practices.



ACORN Participant 2019



Same Participant 2025

Next Steps and Key Takeaways

Culturally grounded interventions are not optional – they are essential to addressing the mental health disparities experienced by Native youth in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties.

Key Next Steps:

1. Sustain and expand funding to ensure long-term, year-round access to culturally based programming, especially for youth facing geographic or systemic barriers.
2. Formalize youth leadership pathways by creating structured roles such as youth ambassadors, peer mentors, and co-facilitators to strengthen long-term community capacity.
3. Invest in cultural material sovereignty and land-based learning by supporting gathering supplies, regalia-making, transportation, and access to cultural sites – core components tied to engagement and wellness outcomes.
4. Strengthen evaluation efforts through mixed-methods data collection, culturally grounded outcome measures, and youth involvement in evaluation to further validate and grow the evidence base for community-defined practices.

Acknowledgements

Two Feathers extends our deepest gratitude to the many hands and hearts who made this project possible. Throughout both phases of this work, our communities showed up in powerful and meaningful ways. We are especially grateful to our Community Advisory Committee, Cultural Consultants, dedicated staff – past and present – and the community leaders, Elders, and mentors who helped shape and uplift this program. This project reflects what is possible when we lead with collective care, shared vision, and an unwavering commitment to our youth and families.