



Project Funded by LACDMH UsCC AI/AN* Subcommittee
American Indian/Alaskan Native



ROOTED & RISING

Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
**DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH**
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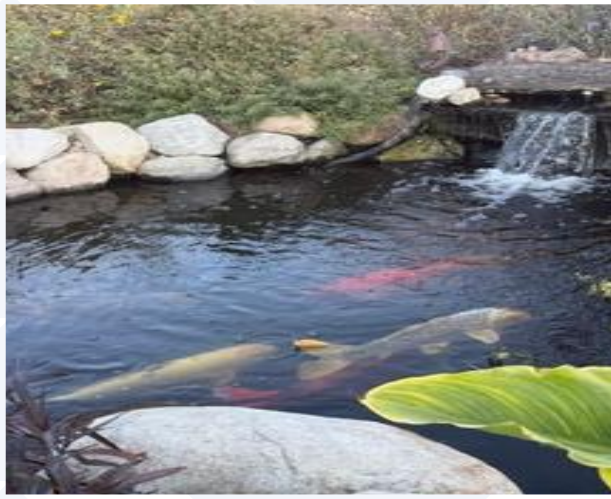
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ACCESS 24/7 SERVICES via 988 or LACDMH's Mental Health Help Line: (800) 854-7771

Help Line is available 24/7 to provide mental health support, resources & referrals



MICHAEL WHITEHORSE - AVILES
TONGVA ELDER

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that the land we gather on, known today as Los Angeles County, is the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Tongva, Tataviam, Chumash and Acjachemen peoples. These Indigenous Nations have stewarded this land since time immemorial and continue to maintain deep connections to it.

We honor their legacy, as well as the broader community of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples who now live, work, and thrive throughout Los Angeles—many of whom come from Tribal Nations across Turtle Island, and whose cultures, languages, and histories are rooted in resilience, sovereignty, and care for all living beings.

As we engage in collective healing, food sovereignty, and wellness work, we do so with gratitude for the original caretakers of this land. We commit to uplifting Indigenous knowledge systems, supporting Native self-determination, and acknowledging our shared responsibility to care for the Earth and each other.



Chumash Indians



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ABOUT US

We are an all AI/AN and Indigenous of Turtle Island collective group committed to Indigenizing wellness, education, and advocacy rooted in community transformation.

We create spaces that center healing, equity, and growth—uplifting the mental, physical, and environmental well-being of our people. Through culture care, and ‘injunity’—our unique blend of Indigenous ingenuity and justice—we work to restore balance, build resilience, and spark regeneration for generations before and after us.



OUR MISSION

Create a supportive community space that empowers individuals to center themselves through healing, advocacy, and growth.

We are dedicated to fostering environmental wellness—addressing both mental and physical well-being—while providing educational resources to inspire lifelong health, resilience, regeneration and positive change for individuals and communities.

WE ARE CHANGEMAKERS

www.Rising2Power.com

ROOTED & RISING

BIRTH TO FIVE PLAY & WELLNESS GROUP

Join a Welcoming, Culturally Grounded Playgroup to Support:
Early Child Development, Strengthens Families, and Connects Community
Through Indigenous Traditions and Nature-Based Learning

Join Our **FREE**

12 Week Hybrid Caregiver & Child Workshops

April 4 - June 20, 2026

Who Can Join?

Self-Identified American Indian/Alaskan Native Children
(Families with Children, 0-5 Years)

- Infants: 0-12 Months
- Toddlers: 12-36 Months
- Pre-K/T-K: 36-60 Months

Limited Spaces (15 Children Per Group)

- ALL Caregivers Welcome
(Parents, Guardians, 'Aunties', Uncles, Grandparents)
- Families Living in Los Angeles County

For EVENT Information Call: 323-448-0109

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Scan or See Link **BELOW** to Register:
<https://forms.gle/6eDXDSbnesx9F93V6>

Workshop Benefits

- ✓ Cultural & Emotional Growth
- ✓ Co-Regulation/Bonding
- ✓ Nature Sensory Learning
- ✓ Cultural Connections

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Rooted & Rising

Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group

METHODS OF OUTREACH

Outreach for Rooted & Rising took place through a mix of social media, community events, and strong local partnerships, all rooted in the Native American experience of community connection and trust. The team shared updates, cultural stories, and wellness guide resource(s) in our community and online, using social media as a modern tool to reach AI/AN resources both locally and beyond.

In Los Angeles, outreach methods were adapted to meet the needs of the urban Native community by partnering with organizations like the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission, Native American community centers, and local health clinics. The team also participated in cultural gatherings, such as powwows, community dinners, and Native wellness events, which served as trusted spaces for in-person engagement. Flyers and program information were shared through Native-serving pre/daycares schools, urban Indian organizations, DCFS, community groups and word-of-mouth networks led by elders and community leaders. These combined efforts helped ensure outreach was culturally grounded, community-led, and inclusive of the diverse Native population in Los Angeles

see Figure 1.0 flyer(s) is a single-page printed or digital advertisement

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Creating Community Centered Connection, Learning and Healing

PROJECT OVERVIEW

USCC American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN)

Project Funded by LACDMH USCC

Food Sustainability & Wellness Project: April–June 2026

The American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC) subcommittee was established under the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) to reduce disparities and increase mental health access for the AI/AN community in Los Angeles County. This project is part of a broader initiative to uplift Native families through culturally rooted practices that promote healing, food sovereignty, and sustainable wellness.

The 12 week (36 sessions) AI/AN Birth to Five Project focused on strengthening mental health and wellness by reconnecting families to the AI/AN culture, connection to our community and plant relatives; and regulation through community regulation, mirroring and mind/body exercise. The community came together to explore methods of self-discovery and healing both individually and collectively, using the land based learning as a central metaphor for growth, resilience, and transformation. This space allowed for authentic conversations between Native community members and allies, honoring intergenerational knowledge and shared experiences.



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Nature to Nurture: Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Playgroup was a 12-week, culturally grounded early childhood wellness program designed to strengthen caregiver-child relationships among American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) families with children from birth to five years of age. The program blended Indigenous child-rearing practices, early childhood development, infant and early childhood mental health principles, nature-based learning, and intergenerational cultural knowledge to create a nurturing environment where families could learn, play, and heal together.

The program served three developmental cohorts:

- ♦ Birth–12 Months
- ♦ 12–36 Months
- ♦ 36–60 Months

Families participated in 90-minute weekly sessions delivered through a hybrid model combining in-person/hybrid gatherings at the Torrance site with alternating virtual sessions to increase accessibility and maintain family engagement.

Throughout the twelve weeks, families explored themes including community building, identity and belonging, land and nature connection, cultural play, social-emotional development, parenting, nutrition and traditional foods, movement, storytelling, creative arts, family strengthening, and celebration. Each session followed a consistent structure of welcome circle, cultural teaching, caregiver-child play, reflection, resource sharing, and closing ritual.

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COMMUNITY FEEDBACK/RESPONSES

- ♦ “The fact that we are hands on gardening. Getting our hands dirty in the soil is so satisfying. And more importantly it's a Career Choice my daughter...”.
- ♦ “Overall handling of this project was great. Interactions with community, and the care to explain everything well”.
- ♦ “In person workshops were we get together with common interests”
- ♦ “The parts of the workshop that helped me feel more connected were the stories that were shared both by the speakers and the other community members. I also felt connected by seeing other community members!”



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Hands-on activities encouraged families to learn through shared experiences. Children and caregivers participated in nature exploration, gardening, pollinator education, Three Sisters teachings, gourd art, pine nut necklace making, storytelling, music, movement, painting, community art, and sensory play. Infants participated in activities such as the Little Voices, Little Rattles Circle, supporting attachment, sensory development, and early communication through rhythm, song, and caregiver connection.

The curriculum emphasized:

- ♦ Strengthening caregiver-child attachment and co-regulation
- ♦ Supporting infant and early childhood mental health
- ♦ Building emotional regulation and resilience
- ♦ Encouraging developmental learning through play
- ♦ Increasing cultural identity and belonging
- ♦ Connecting families with community resources and behavioral health supports

Nature served as both teacher and classroom. Cultural teachings centered on the symbolism of acorns (patience and nourishment), pine nuts (effort and persistence), water (emotional regulation and adaptability), pollinators (interdependence and community), and the Three Sisters (relationship, balance, and mutual support). These teachings were woven into developmentally appropriate activities that honored Indigenous ways of knowing while supporting California Early Learning Foundations.



based sensory regulation, and relationship-based learning. Facilitators modeled reflective parenting practices and reinforced caregivers as their child's first and most important teacher.

By the conclusion of the program, families celebrated their collective journey through a community graduation and cultural celebration, recognizing the relationships, skills, confidence, and resilience developed throughout the twelve weeks. Participants left with strengthened family connections, increased knowledge of child development and mental wellness, greater cultural engagement, expanded social support, and practical strategies for nurturing healthy child development within the context of family, culture, community, and nature.

Overall, Nature to Nurture: Rooted & Rising demonstrated that culturally responsive, relationship-centered early childhood programming can strengthen protective factors, support healthy development, and promote wellness for AI/AN children and families by reconnecting them to culture, community, and the natural world.



PROJECT OVERVIEW - CON'T

Sharing stories of growth and healing

Community commitment activities, including pledge walls and seed exchanges.

Throughout the series, participants engaged in AI/AN dances (Jingle and Hoop Dance), composting, grounding, and mindfulness practices that reflected Native values of interdependence, reciprocity, and reverence for all living beings.

Special emphasis was placed on engaging children and families in interactive, multisensory activities that promoted learning, emotional bonding, and cultural connection:

Hands-On Gardening and Sensory Exploration: Families planted and created garden spaces together. Sensory activities engaged children's developmental milestones by exploring soil textures, smelling native plants, and observing growth stages. Activities were adapted for toddlers and preschoolers to safely participate.

Emotional and Developmental Support Through Co-Regulation: Parents practiced co-regulation by modeling calm behavior during gardening, helping children manage emotions in a soothing outdoor setting. Mindfulness exercises were incorporated for families to use together.

Cultural Storytelling and Movement: Age-appropriate stories about plants and land were shared in story circles. AI/AN dances like Jingle and Hoop provided joyful cultural engagement and physical connection.

Parent-Child Collaborative Projects: Families painted plant pots, created garden markers, and wrote affirmations, fostering creativity and shared goal-setting. They co-designed garden plans reflecting Native foodways with indigenous languages.

Reflection and Sharing: Sessions included time for families to share experiences and intentions, reinforcing community bonds. Children expressed feelings through drawing, journaling, or storytelling, supported by parents and facilitators. These activities not only taught gardening skills but deepened emotional connections, cultural identity, and resilience within Native families.

Growth and Healing Activities Based on Plant Cycles

The project incorporated culturally grounded activities that used natural plant cycles—growth, dormancy, decay, and renewal—as metaphors to support healing while developing. These activities helped participants connect emotional experiences plants and animal relatives, fostering understanding and resilience.

Plant Life Cycle Reflection: Observing seed germination to harvest stages, relating to human life cycles including birth, growth and renewal.

Seasonal Metaphors: Exploring how plants' dormant phases mirror human needs for rest and reflection during sleep.

Butterfly and plants Transformation: to symbolize how rest leads to change and nourishes new life, and can foster growth over time.

Ritual Planting and Harvesting: Planting strawberries with healing intentions and harvesting as acts of honoring selves and future generations.

Art and Journaling: Creative expression reflecting inspiration, acceptance, healing inspired by life.

Reciprocity Activities: Cultivating Respect and Balance with the Land

Reciprocity—mutual respect and balance between humans and nature—was woven throughout the workshops to deepen cultural connection and responsibility.

Giving Back to the Land: Ritual offerings such as water, tobacco, or native seeds to honor the land as a living relative.

Harvest and Share Practices: Learning to harvest sustainably, taking only what is needed to ensure abundance for future generations and wildlife.



PROJECT OVERVIEW - CON'T

Program Successes and Outcomes

The Nature to Nurture: Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Playgroup successfully supported the healthy development of young children while strengthening caregiver confidence, cultural identity, and community connectedness. Families demonstrated meaningful growth across several key areas aligned with early childhood development and Indigenous wellness practices.

Language and Communication Growth

Children increased opportunities to develop language and communication skills through storytelling, songs, conversations, cultural teachings, shared reading, and caregiver-child interactions. Caregivers also reported greater confidence in engaging their children through daily communication, play, and responsive interactions that support early literacy and developmental milestones.

Social-Emotional Development and Emotional Regulation

Families strengthened their understanding of early childhood mental health by learning to recognize emotions in themselves and their children. Through co-regulation strategies, mindfulness, sensory play, movement, creative expression, and caregiver reflection, participants developed practical tools to:

- Identify and name emotions.
- Recognize children's emotional cues and developmental needs.
- Respond to challenging behaviors with calm, connection, and consistency.
- Support emotional regulation through nurturing relationships rather than punishment.
- Foster resilience, self-confidence, and secure attachment.

Caregivers frequently shared that they felt more prepared to respond to their children's emotions while also becoming more aware of their own emotional wellness and regulation.

Strengthened Cultural Identity

Children and caregivers deepened their connection to Indigenous teachings through land-based learning, storytelling, traditional foods, songs, art, pollinator education, Three Sisters teachings, and seasonal cultural activities. These experiences reinforced a sense of belonging, pride, and cultural continuity across generations.

Expanded Community Support Networks

One of the most meaningful outcomes was the development of lasting relationships among participating families. Caregivers described feeling less isolated and more connected to one another, creating an informal support system rooted in Indigenous values of collective care.

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Barriers

- ♦ Recruiting families during shorter time frame.
- ♦ Families that had larger family unit wanted to stay and enjoy all workshops.
- ♦ Initially provided gardening mater
- ♦ Some families faced practical barriers such as lack of gas for transportation and childcare responsibilities, limiting in-person attendance.
- ♦ The project's designation as a "series" caused confusion—some participants thought missing one class meant they couldn't join subsequent sessions, though all workshops were open to join independently.
- ♦ The compressed project timeline limited the depth of engagement and program implementation.



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Workshop Benefits

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- ✓ Nature Sensory Learning
- ✓ Cultural Connections

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0-5 Child and Family Resources Los Angeles County

Mental Health & Family Wellness

- Indigenous Circle of Wellness (ICO) | (626)-782-5570 | icowellness.com
- American Indian Counselling Center (AICC) | (213)-202-3970
- Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services | (888)-807-7250 | didihirsch.org
- Child and Family Guidance Center | (818)-739-5250 | childguidance.org

Early Childhood & Family Programs

- Headstart/Early Headstart | eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov
- First 5 LA | first5la.org
- Home Visiting LA | homevisitingla.org

Child Development & Special Needs

- LAUSD Early Childhood Special Education | sped.lausd.org
- EarlyStartProgram | (800)-515-2229 | dds.ca.gov/services/early-start

Food, Health & Basic Needs

- Los Angeles Regional Food Bank | (323)-234-3030 | lafoodbank.org
- WIC | (888)-942-9675 | myfamily.wic.ca.gov
- CalFresh | getcalfresh.org
- CalWORKs | dpss.lacounty.gov
- Medi-Cal | coveredca.com/medi-cal



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0-5 Child and Family Resources Los Angeles County

Getting Connected & Crisis Support (24/7)

- 211 LACounty | Dial 2-1-1 | <https://211la.org>
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline | Dial/Text 988 | 988lifeline.org LA County
- Department of Mental Health Help Line | (800)854-7771 | dmh.lacounty.gov
- Help Me Grow LA | (833)903-3972 | helpmegrowla.org

American Indian/Alaska Native Community Programs

- P.O.W.E.R (Pathways of Wellness, Empowerment & Resilience) (310)-944-2609
- RISING2POWER.ORG (Seeds of Resilience/Strengthening Sustainability Program)
- So'oh-Shinali Sister Project (SSSP) | (323)-916-6415 ssisterproject.org
- United American Indian Involvement (UAI) | (213)-202-3970
- uaii.org Southern California American Indian Resource Center (SCAIR) | (562)-388-8118 scair-inc.org
- Chapter House LA | (213)-798-4108 | thechapterhouse.org
- Comunidades Indigenas en Liderazgo (CIELO) | (213)-534-1800 | cielola.org

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0-5 Child and Family Resources Los Angeles County

Free Legal & Family Law Services

- California Indian Legal Services | calindian.org | Escondido (800)-743-8941 | Sacramento (800)-829-0284 | Bishop (800)-736-3582 | Eureka (800)-347-2402
- Neighborhood Legal Services | (800)-433-6251 | nlsa.org
- Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) | (800)-399-4529 | lafla.org
- Public Counsel | (213)-385-2977 | publiccounsel.org
- Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law | (213)-388-7515 | buhaicenter.org

Additional Cultural & Community Resources

- American Indian Chamber of Commerce of CA | (213)-448-2330 | aicccal.org
- American Indian Changing Spirits | (562)-388-8118 | americanindianchangingspirits.com
- American Indian Resource Center (AIRC) | (323)-583-2794 | colapublib.org/resourcecenters/airc
- Antelope Valley Indian Museum | (661)-946-3055 | avim/parks.ca.gov
- Barcid Foundation | (323)-466-7400 | laskinsfest.com
- Gabrieleno/Tongva Native American Services | (626)-286-1632 | gabrielenotongva.org/programs/services.htm
- Haramokngna American Indian Cultural Center | (626)-449-8975 | haramokngna.org
- The Chapter House | 3007 W Temple St, Los Angeles, CA 90026
Mailing | PO Box 261027, Los Angeles, CA 90026 | 213-798-4108



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IMPACT & TAKEWAYS

The project created a safe and interactive (hybrid - online via zoom platform and in person), nurturing space for Native families and allies to connect, heal, and grow. Practical skills in gardening, composting, and seed starting were paired with emotional wellness tools and cultural knowledge, creating a holistic experience rooted in Native values.

Stronger community connections were built through shared healing and traditional practices. Hybrid model allowed for increased engagement.

Parents learned how to co-regulate and care for their children through gardening, storytelling, and daily rituals.

The program reinforced the importance of community and village support for youth. Healing was supported through land-based metaphors and collective storytelling.

This Project served not just as a series of workshops, but as a return to core AI/AN values and ways of knowing—offering a model for how youth, family/community, land, food, culture, and mental health are deeply interconnected.



PROJECT KEY BENEFITS

- Strengthened caregiver-child attachment through consistent play, shared experiences, and responsive interactions.
- Improved language and communication skills through storytelling, songs, conversation, books, and culturally grounded learning experiences.
- Increased emotional awareness by helping caregivers and children identify emotions in themselves and others.
- Enhanced co-regulation and emotional regulation through calming strategies, sensory play, movement, mindfulness, and caregiver coaching.
- Promoted healthy social-emotional development by supporting empathy, confidence, resilience, and secure attachment.
- Increased caregiver confidence in understanding child development, responding to developmental milestones, supporting positive behavior, and promoting children's mental health.
- Strengthened cultural identity and belonging through Indigenous teachings, storytelling, traditional parenting practices, nature-based learning, pollinator education, Three Sisters teachings, traditional foods, art, music, and seasonal cultural activities.
- Expanded community support networks, with families developing meaningful relationships and referring to one another as trusted "Aunties" and "Uncles," reflecting the Indigenous value that children are raised within a caring community. Built broader parent support systems by creating opportunities for caregivers to connect, share experiences, exchange parenting strategies, and develop lasting peer relationships that continue beyond the program.
- Provided child-centered support by creating safe, nurturing spaces where children could build friendships, practice social skills, develop confidence, explore emotions, and experience positive interactions with caring adults and peers.



PROJECT KEY BENEFITS

- ♦ Created safe, trauma-informed environments where families experienced consistency, belonging, emotional safety, and healing through culture, relationships, and nature.
- ♦ Fostered intergenerational learning by honoring Elders, traditional knowledge, and caregivers as children's first and most influential teachers.
- ♦ Promoted protective factors for families, including parental resilience, social connections, concrete supports, knowledge of child development, and children's social and emotional competence.

Overall Impact

- ♦ In today's increasingly urban and disconnected environment, many American Indian and Alaska Native families experience separation from extended family networks, traditional lands, and cultural teachings. Rooted & Rising: Nature to Nurture helped bridge that gap by creating a culturally grounded community where children and caregivers could reconnect with one another, their traditions, and a network of trusted support.
- ♦ The program strengthened caregiver-child relationships while surrounding families with a broader circle of parents, Aunties, Uncles, Elders, and community members who shared responsibility for nurturing young children. Children gained safe opportunities to build friendships, express emotions, develop communication skills, and experience culturally affirming relationships. Caregivers received guidance, encouragement, and practical parenting tools rooted in both Indigenous knowledge and early childhood dended by strong relationships.

PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY - 163 RESPONSES

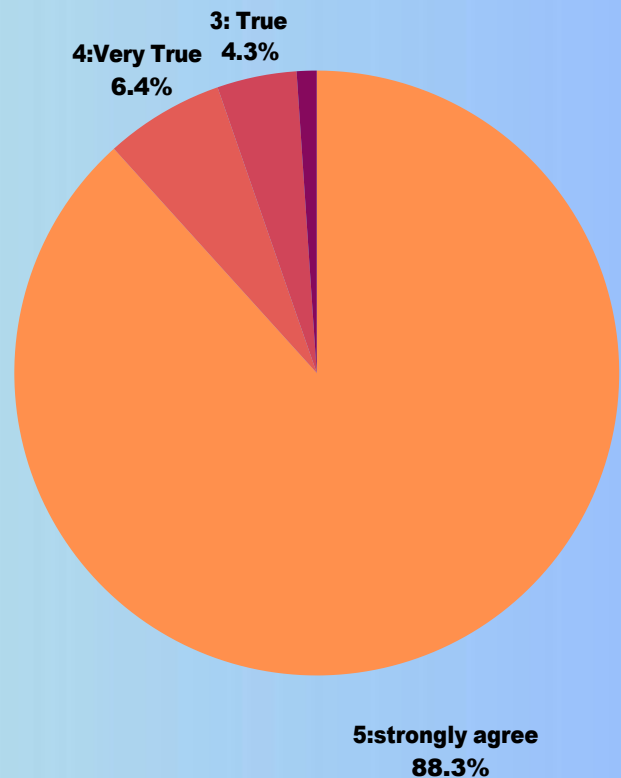
0–12 months, 5 children and 5 Caregivers

12–36 months 25 children and 17 Caregivers

36–60 months 12 children; 31 Caregivers

Survey Question 1

The program felt
welcoming and respectful
of my culture and identity.



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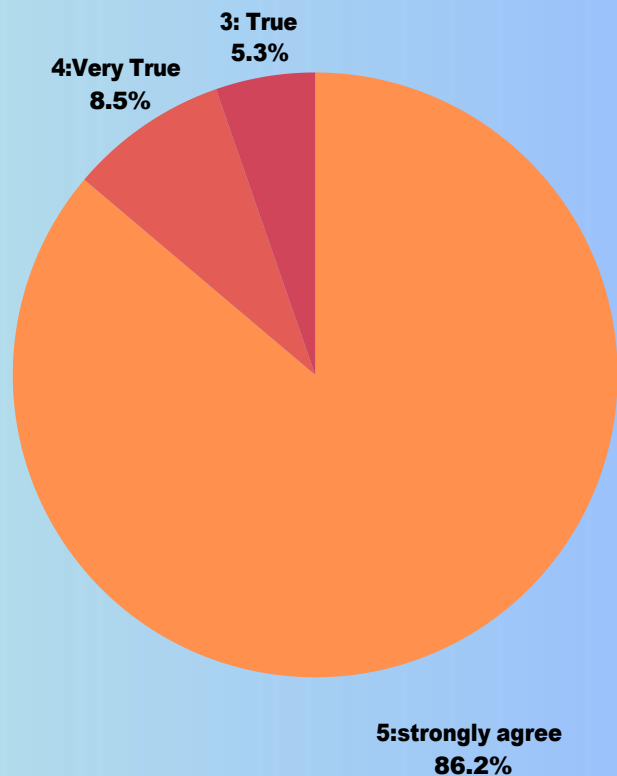
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The evaluation approach prioritized culturally responsive engagement by honoring participant choice regarding evaluation participation and recognizing that trust-building is an integral component of Indigenous family-centered programming. Consequently, response rates should be interpreted within the context of culturally grounded service delivery rather than solely through conventional survey completion metrics."

PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY - 163 RESPONSES

Survey Question 2

The program strengthen
my connection to culture.



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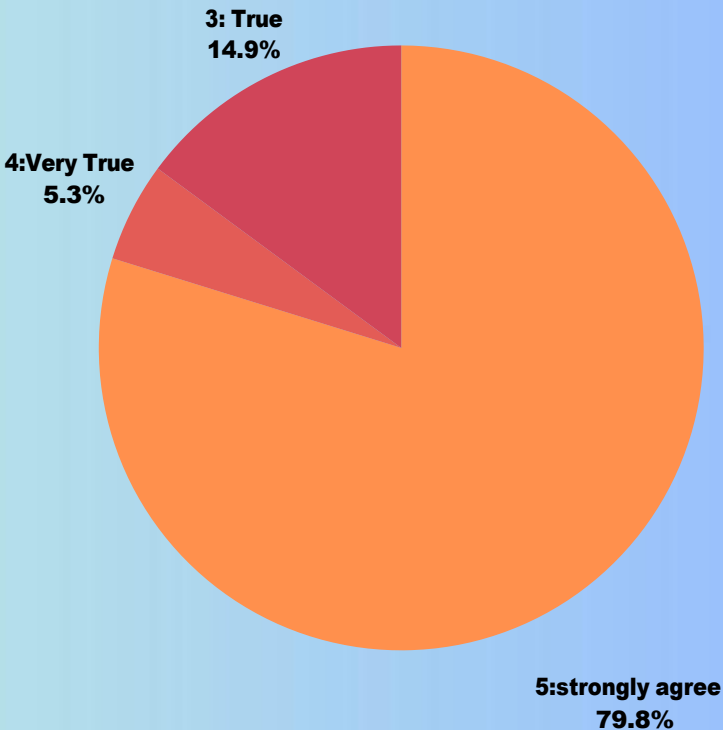
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PROJECT EVALAUTION SURVEY - 163 RESPONSES

Survey Question 3

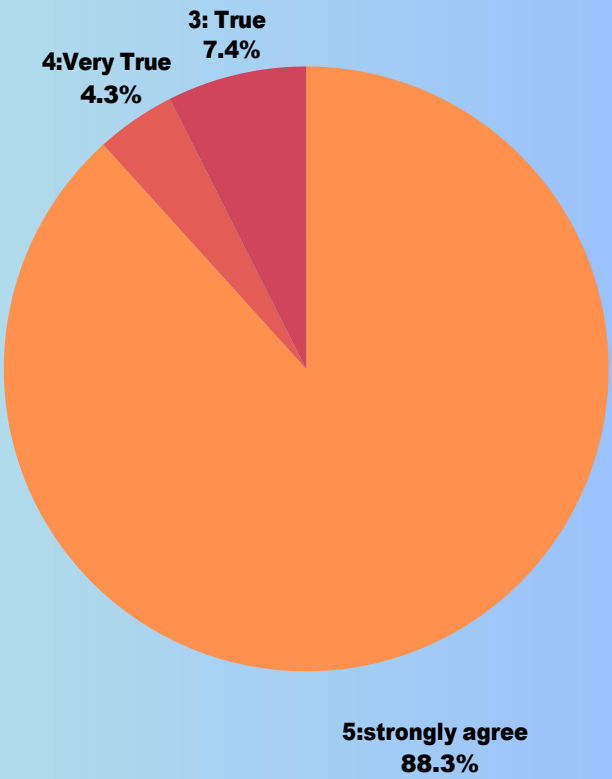
The schedule and
locations worked well for
my family.



PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY - 163 RESPONSES

Survey Question 3

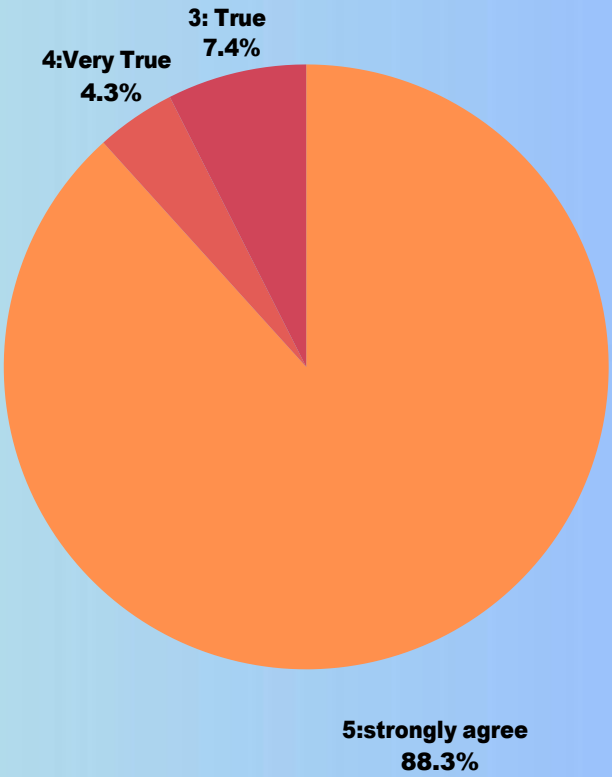
The activities were helpful
and engaging for me and
my child



PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY - 163 RESPONSES

Survey Question 4

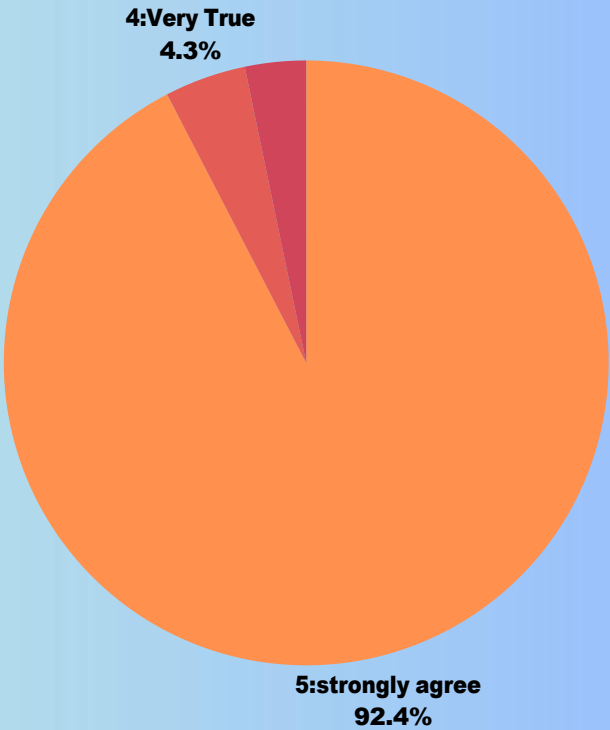
The activities were helpful
and engaging for me and
my child



PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY - 163 RESPONSES

Survey Question 5

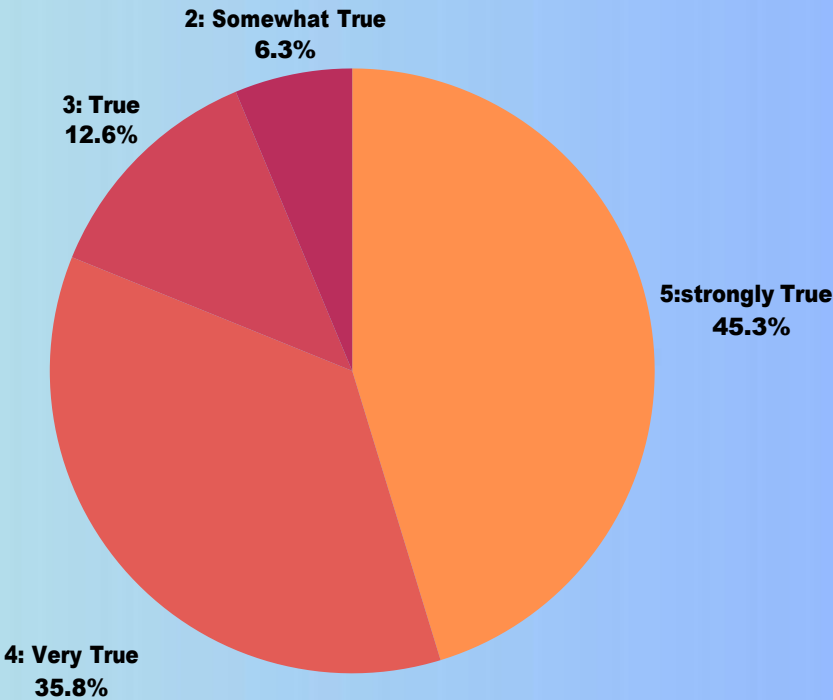
I would recommend this
program to other families.



RETROSPECTIVE SURVEY OUTCOMES - 163 RESPONSES

Survey Question

Do you self identify as
AI/AN or Indigenous?



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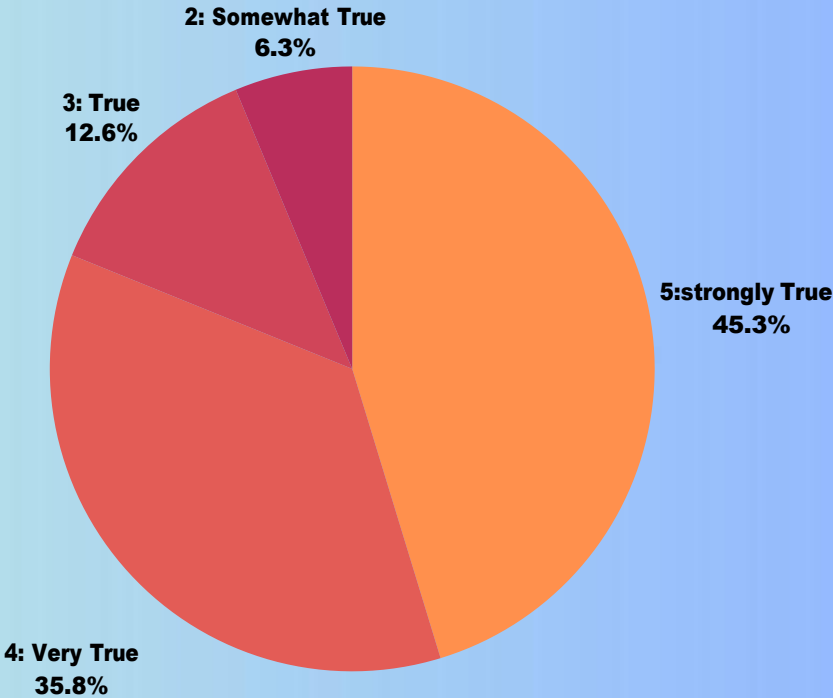


WELLNESS EMPOWERMENT & RESILIENCE

RETROSPECTIVE SURVEY OUTCOMES - 163 RESPONSES

Survey Question

**I am comfortable
speaking about my
mental health needs.**



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EVALUATION SURVEY SUMMARY

Project Evaluation Summary – Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group

Participant feedback from the Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the program and its impact on children and families. Overall, caregivers reported feeling welcomed, respected, and culturally connected through the program, with nearly all evaluation responses indicating "Very True" or "Strongly True" across measures of cultural responsiveness, family engagement, activity quality, and willingness to recommend the program to others.

Qualitative feedback highlighted the welcoming environment, culturally meaningful activities, engaging play experiences, and the variety of hands-on learning opportunities provided each week. Families appreciated the supportive atmosphere, different activities at each session, the location, community resources, giveaways, and opportunities to strengthen family togetherness. One participant noted observing a child who was initially quiet become actively engaged and joyful by the final session, reflecting the program's positive impact on children's confidence and social-emotional development.

Across surveys, participants identified few, if any, recommendations for improvement, with most responding that no changes were needed. Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that the Rooted & Rising program successfully fostered cultural connection, caregiver-child engagement, developmental learning, and a welcoming community environment for Native families with young children.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

The Rooted and Rising Birth to Five Play and Wellness Group demonstrated meaningful progress in strengthening the well-being of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Indigenous families through a culturally grounded approach that integrated early childhood development, mental health promotion, parenting education, cultural teachings, and community connection.

Retrospective post-questionnaire findings indicate that participants experienced growth across multiple protective factors that contribute to healthy child and family outcomes. Caregivers reported increased confidence in supporting both their own mental wellness and their children's social-emotional development, while gaining practical strategies for co-regulation, emotional expression, and positive parenting. Participants also demonstrated greater awareness of Native community resources and felt more comfortable discussing mental health, reflecting a reduction in stigma and increased willingness to seek support when needed.

Families reported stronger connections to Native culture by incorporating traditional teachings, storytelling, land-based learning, language, and cultural activities into everyday interactions with their children. Nature-based experiences further reinforced the importance of outdoor exploration, environmental stewardship, and cultural relationships with the land as protective factors for healthy child development.

The program also strengthened caregivers' sense of belonging and community. Participants described feeling more connected to other Native families, creating an expanded network of support that fostered relationships with trusted "aunties," "uncles," and peers. These relationships helped reduce isolation while promoting family resilience within an urban environment where many Native families experience disconnection from traditional community supports.

Overall, findings suggest that the Rooted and Rising program successfully increased caregiver confidence, strengthened cultural identity, expanded knowledge of available Native mental health resources, enhanced parenting skills related to emotional regulation, and promoted stronger family relationships. By integrating culture, wellness, play, and community, the program built protective factors that support healthy early childhood development while reinforcing resilience among Native children, caregivers, and families.

The evaluation demonstrates that Rooted and Rising serves as an effective culturally responsive prevention and early intervention model that promotes family wellness, strengthens cultural identity, and supports long-term social-emotional health for Native children and their caregivers.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Participant Outcomes

A total of 163 retrospective post-program evaluations were completed by participants enrolled in the Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group. The evaluation utilized a retrospective post-then assessment design consisting of nine Likert-scale outcome measures (1 = Not True to 5 = Strongly True) assessing caregiver knowledge, confidence, behavioral intentions, cultural engagement, parenting practices, and perceived community connectedness.

Descriptive Statistics

Across all nine outcome domains, participants demonstrated consistently positive response patterns.

<u>Outcome Measure</u>	<u>Mean Score (1–5)</u>
Caregiver mental health confidence	3.33
Confidence supporting child's mental health	3.22
Knowledge of Native mental health resources	3.12
Comfort discussing mental health	3.30
Incorporation of cultural practices	3.36
Understanding nature-based child development	3.48
Knowledge of child emotional regulation strategies	3.33
Feeling valued within family	3.69
Sense of community belonging	3.61

The overall composite mean across all outcome variables was 3.38, indicating that participants generally endorsed improvements across multiple domains associated with caregiver protective factors and early childhood wellness.

Distribution of Responses

Response distributions demonstrated a clear positive skew toward favorable outcomes.

Across the nine evaluation domains:

- Approximately 80–92% of participants selected True, Very True, or Strongly
- ♦ True.
- Approximately 8–20% selected Somewhat True or Not True, depending on
- ♦ the outcome domain.
- The highest response concentrations occurred in the Very True and Strongly
- ♦ True categories for family belonging and community connectedness.

The pattern of responses suggests broad consistency across participants rather than improvements attributable to a small subset of respondents.

Outcome Domain Analysis

Mental Health Self-Efficacy

Perceived caregiver self-efficacy increased across both caregiver and child mental health domains.

Participants reported:

- increased confidence managing their own emotional well-being;
- increased confidence recognizing children's emotional needs;
- ♦ increased comfort discussing behavioral health; and
- ♦ increased awareness of available Native behavioral health resources.

The highest frequencies were observed for caregiver confidence and child emotional support, while knowledge of community behavioral health resources demonstrated comparatively greater variability, suggesting continued opportunity for resource navigation and systems education.

Parenting Capacity

Caregiver reports indicated increased confidence implementing developmentally appropriate emotional regulation strategies with children.

Participants endorsed learning practical approaches including:

- ♦ co-regulation;
- ♦ emotional coaching;
- ♦ sensory regulation;
- ♦ play-based interaction;
- ♦ storytelling;
- ♦ art-based expression; and
- ♦ relationship-centered caregiving.

Approximately 92% of respondents endorsed positive improvement in their ability to help children regulate emotions.

These findings are consistent with protective factors associated with positive early childhood social-emotional development.

Cultural Protective Factors

Cultural engagement represented one of the strongest implementation domains.

Participants reported increased incorporation of Indigenous cultural practices into everyday interactions with children.

Qualitative responses most frequently referenced:

- ♦ storytelling;
- ♦ Native plants;
- ♦ cultural foods;
- ♦ beading;
- ♦ painting;
- ♦ land-based learning;
- ♦ seasonal teachings;
- ♦ traditional ecological knowledge; and
- ♦ Native values.

Approximately 83% endorsed increased cultural integration following participation.

These findings suggest the intervention successfully operationalized culture as an active protective factor rather than an ancillary program component.

Nature-Based Development

Understanding of nature as a developmental support demonstrated one of the highest average scores.

Approximately 90% of respondents indicated increased understanding of relationships between outdoor environments and child development.

Frequently referenced activities included:

- ♦ gardening;
- ♦ pollinator education;
- ♦ Native plants;
- ♦ outdoor exploration;
- ♦ environmental observation; and
- ♦ community gardens.

These findings support the integration of land-based learning within culturally responsive early childhood interventions.

Family Functioning

Family functioning demonstrated the highest overall mean score (M = 3.69).

Participants reported:

- ♦ stronger caregiver-child relationships;
- ♦ increased family interaction;
- ♦ greater confidence within the caregiver role; and
- ♦ increased perception of value within the family system.

Shared family activities were consistently identified as mechanisms supporting these outcomes.

Participants described increased perceptions of:

- ♦ psychological safety;
- ♦ inclusion;
- ♦ cultural affirmation;
- ♦ peer support; and
- ♦ community engagement.

Qualitative comments consistently described the program environment as welcoming, respectful, family-centered, and nonjudgmental.

These findings suggest Rooted & Rising contributed to strengthening social connectedness, an established protective factor associated with caregiver well-being and resilience.

Qualitative Analysis

Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

Five dominant themes emerged.

Theme 1: Cultural Identity

Participants consistently described cultural teachings as central to the program experience.

Representative topics included:

- ♦ Indigenous values
- ♦ Native stories
- ♦ traditional foods
- ♦ Native plants
- ♦ seasonal teachings
- ♦ cultural continuity

Theme 2: Parent-Child Interaction

Participants frequently described opportunities for intentional caregiver-child interaction through:

- ♦ painting
- ♦ gardening
- ♦ storytelling
- ♦ reading
- ♦ collaborative art
- ♦ play

Theme 3: Nature-Based Learning

Participants consistently referenced outdoor learning experiences as promoting:

- ♦ curiosity
- ♦ emotional regulation
- ♦ family bonding
- ♦ environmental stewardship

Theme 4: Psychological Safety

Participants frequently described the program as:

- ♦ welcoming;
- ♦ inclusive;
- ♦ respectful;
- ♦ supportive; and
- ♦ culturally safe.

Theme 5: Community Building

Participants described developing stronger relationships with other Native families through shared learning experiences, resulting in increased perceptions of belonging and mutual support.

Participant Recommendations

Qualitative recommendations demonstrated substantial agreement.

Primary recommendations included:

- ♦ expansion of program frequency;
- ♦ continuation of hybrid participation options;
- ♦ increased opportunities for caregiver discussion;
- ♦ additional cultural workshops;
- ♦ more take-home learning materials; and
- ♦ reduction in repetitive evaluation survey administration.

Importantly, recommendations focused on program expansion rather than curriculum modification, suggesting high intervention acceptability.

Interpretation.

The retrospective post-program evaluation demonstrates consistently positive participant-reported outcomes across mental health confidence, parenting self-efficacy, cultural engagement, family functioning, and community connectedness.

The strongest observed outcomes were family functioning ($M = 3.69$), community belonging ($M = 3.61$), and nature-based child development ($M = 3.48$), indicating that participants perceived the greatest benefits in relational, cultural, and environmental domains.

Although the evaluation utilized self-reported retrospective measures without a comparison group, convergence between quantitative outcome measures and qualitative thematic findings strengthens confidence in the observed patterns. The consistency of responses across domains suggests that the Rooted & Rising model contributed to improvements in caregiver knowledge, confidence, cultural connectedness, and perceived protective factors associated with healthy early childhood development.

Collectively, these findings support Rooted & Rising as a culturally responsive prevention and early intervention model that integrates Indigenous cultural practices, land-based learning, caregiver education, and relationship-centered approaches to strengthen protective factors among American Indian, Alaska Native, and Indigenous families with children ages birth through five.

Baseline Evaluation Summary

A total of 62 caregivers completed the baseline (pre-workshop) evaluation prior to participating in the Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group. The pre-workshop questionnaire was administered to establish participant characteristics before exposure to the intervention and to identify existing strengths, knowledge, confidence, and support needs across key domains of caregiver and family wellness.

The baseline assessment consisted of 10 Likert-scale items (1 = Not True to 5 = Strongly True), including participant self-identification and nine outcome measures evaluating:

- ♦ **Caregiver mental health confidence**
- ♦ **Confidence supporting child mental health**
- ♦ **Knowledge of Native mental health resources**
- ♦ **Comfort discussing mental health**
- ♦ **Incorporation of cultural practices**
- ♦ **Understanding of nature-based child development**
- ♦ **Knowledge of child emotional regulation strategies**
- ♦ **Perceived value within the family**
- ♦ **Sense of belonging in community spaces**

Analysis of the 62 completed surveys demonstrated considerable variability across all domains, reflecting the diverse experiences of participating families prior to enrollment. Baseline responses were most frequently concentrated within the "Somewhat True" (2) and "True" (3) response categories, indicating moderate levels of confidence and knowledge while identifying opportunities for additional education, cultural connection, and family support.

The greatest variability was observed in:

Knowledge of Native mental health resources;

- ♦ **Comfort discussing mental health;**
- ♦ **Incorporation of cultural practices into daily parenting;**
- ♦ **Understanding of nature-based child development; and**
- ♦ **Confidence supporting children's emotional regulation.**
- ♦

Conversely, many caregivers entered the program reporting moderate to high levels of commitment to their families and an interest in strengthening their parenting skills. This variability confirms that participants represented a broad range of experiences and support needs, supporting the implementation of a culturally responsive, prevention-focused intervention designed to enhance protective factors among American Indian, Alaska Native, and Indigenous families with young children.

The baseline findings provide an important reference point for evaluating subsequent participant outcomes and documenting changes associated with participation in the Rooted & Rising program.

Below is a combined scientific evaluation summary integrating the baseline (Pre-Workshop; n = 62) and retrospective Post-Workshop (n = 163) findings.

Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group

Combined Evaluation Findings - PRE/POST

Evaluation Overview

The Rooted & Rising Birth to Five Play & Wellness Group was evaluated using a mixed-method outcome evaluation consisting of a baseline (pre-workshop) assessment (n = 62) and a retrospective post-workshop assessment (n = 163). The evaluation measured participant perceptions across nine domains associated with caregiver wellness, early childhood mental health, parenting capacity, cultural engagement, and community connectedness. Both assessments utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not True) to 5 (Strongly True).

The purpose of the baseline assessment was to establish participant characteristics prior to participation, while the retrospective post-workshop assessment measured perceived knowledge, confidence, and behavioral changes following completion of the program.

Participant Sample:

Evaluation Number of Surveys

Pre-Workshop Baseline: 62

Retrospective Post-Workshop: 163

Total Evaluations Completed: 225

The larger number of retrospective evaluations reflects participant completion across multiple cohorts and workshop sessions conducted during the project period.

Baseline Findings

Baseline findings demonstrated considerable variability in caregiver confidence, knowledge, and access to culturally relevant resources.

Participants most frequently reported moderate levels of confidence ("Somewhat True" and "True") across several domains, particularly:

- ♦ mental health self-efficacy;
- ♦ confidence supporting children's emotional wellness;
- ♦ knowledge of Native behavioral health resources;
- ♦ cultural integration into parenting;
- ♦ child emotional regulation strategies; and
- ♦ community belonging.

Several participants reported low baseline confidence in locating Native mental health resources and discussing mental health concerns, suggesting opportunities for culturally responsive behavioral health education and community resource navigation. Overall, the baseline findings indicated that families entered the program with diverse strengths and varying support needs.

Retrospective Post-Workshop Findings

Following participation, caregivers reported consistently positive outcomes across all evaluation domains.

The overall composite score across the nine outcome measures was 3.38 out of 5, indicating generally positive perceptions of growth in caregiver confidence, parenting knowledge, cultural engagement, and family wellness.

Mean scores by outcome domain included:

Outcome Measure	Mean Score
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Feeling valued within family	
------------------------------	--

3.69

Community belonging	
---------------------	--

3.61

Understanding nature-based child development	
--	--

3.48

Cultural practices with children	
----------------------------------	--

3.36

Mental health confidence	
--------------------------	--

3.33

Child emotional regulation strategies	
---------------------------------------	--

3.33

Comfort discussing mental health	
----------------------------------	--

3.30

Supporting child mental health	
--------------------------------	--

3.22

Knowledge of Native mental health resources	
---	--

3.12

Response distributions demonstrated consistently favorable ratings across all domains.

Retrospective PRE/Post-Workshop Findings

Approximately:

- ♦ 92% reported increased confidence supporting their own mental health.
- ♦ 92% reported learning strategies to help children regulate emotions.
- ♦ 91% reported feeling more valued within their family.
- ♦ 90% reported greater confidence supporting children's emotional well-being.
- ♦ 90% reported increased understanding of nature-based child development.
- ♦ 88% reported stronger community belonging.
- ♦ 87% reported greater comfort discussing mental health.
- ♦ 83% reported incorporating additional cultural practices into parenting.
- ♦ 80% reported improved awareness of Native behavioral health resources.

Qualitative Findings- Open-ended

Theme 6: Program Satisfaction

Participants most frequently reported enjoying:

- ♦ painting;
- ♦ books and story time;
- ♦ gardening;
- ♦ Native plants;
- ♦ outdoor learning;
- ♦ cultural teachings;
- ♦ family activities;
- ♦ take-home projects; and
- ♦ hybrid participation options.

Participant Recommendations

Although participant satisfaction was high, several recommendations emerged consistently across evaluations.

Participants recommended:

- ♦ expanding Rooted & Rising throughout the year;
- ♦ increasing opportunities for parent discussion groups;
- ♦ continuing hybrid and virtual participation options;
- ♦ offering additional cultural workshops;
- ♦ providing more books and take-home activities; and
- ♦ reducing repetitive evaluation survey administration.

Retrospective PRE/Post-Workshop Findings

Approximately:

Overall Interpretation

The combined evaluation findings indicate that participating families entered the program with diverse experiences and varying levels of confidence across domains related to behavioral health, parenting, cultural engagement, and community connectedness. Baseline findings demonstrated opportunities for growth in caregiver self-efficacy, mental health literacy, resource awareness, cultural engagement, and parenting practices.

The retrospective post-workshop findings demonstrated consistently favorable participant-reported outcomes across each measured domain. The highest post-program ratings were observed for family functioning, community belonging, and understanding of nature-based child development, while improvements were also reported in caregiver mental health confidence, parenting strategies, cultural practices, and knowledge of Native behavioral health resources.

Although the evaluation design was not intended to establish causal relationships or statistical significance between pre- and post-program responses, the convergence of baseline needs, retrospective participant ratings, and qualitative feedback provides evidence that participants perceived meaningful gains following program participation. Collectively, the findings support Rooted & Rising as a culturally responsive early childhood prevention model that strengthens protective factors associated with caregiver resilience, child social-emotional development, cultural identity, family functioning, and community connectedness among American Indian, Alaska Native, and Indigenous families.



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK/RESPONSES

- ♦ I appreciated the use of art and nature to gain a better understanding of AI/AN Indigenous culture.
- ♦ I loved the constant connection every lesson and activity had to cultural and traditional values/practices.
- ♦ My kids were all able to paint together on a big canvas. They have never done this before.
- ♦ Enjoyed connecting with like-minded people, earth and plants, learning from POWER team.
- ♦ Becoming a community together, learning, and exploring.
- ♦ The welcoming energy and the garden outside.
- ♦ Loved hearing and reflecting on the stories shared.
- ♦ The painting and planting involvement for families.
- ♦ Being in nature with my children and learning ways to support child development

PATHWAYS OF

POWER

WELLNESS EMPOWERMENT & RESILIENCE



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK/RESPONSES

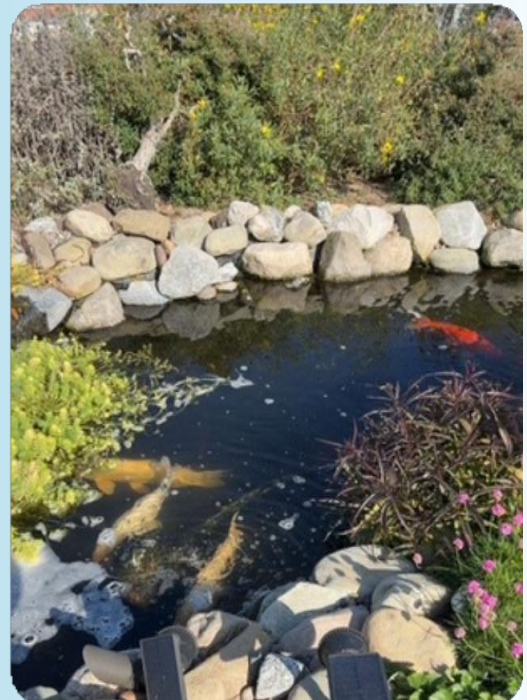
More activities with my child to LEARN

- ♦ MORE TIME AT WORKSHOPS
- ♦ Loved the story time, would like more
- ♦ LESS SURVEYS
- ♦

Future workshop topics

More activities with my child to LEARN

- ♦ Youth Leadership
- ♦ GROUPS FOR WOMEN/PARENTS
- ♦





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PATHWAYS OF

P  W E R

WELLNESS EMPOWERMENT & RESILIENCE

