

# Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

## SUPPORTING SUCCESS

### Summary

Wabanaki Public Health “Wetameyi” Tobacco prevention program participated in a Backpack Initiative within Aroostook Band of Micmac (ABM) and Houlton Band of Maliseet Indian (HBMI) tribal communities, an initiative to make sure tribal youth are going back to school prepared. With all the collaborative efforts from Tribes, Boys and Girls club of Bordertowns and partners, backpacks and food boxes were distributed to tribal youth before the school year began.

### Need/ Issue (or “Challenge”)

Keeping tribal youth engaged in their communities and culture can be tough during this COVID-19 pandemic and the CDC guidance to social distance. The Backpack Initiative happens every year before the school year starts, having community partners help with this initiative has made it a success this year for our tribal youth! An article/fact sheet from the National Indian Child Welfare Association titled “Cultural Connectedness and Indigenous Youth Wellbeing Fact Sheet” states: “Recently, more researchers are looking at a concept called “cultural connectedness.” We found that across many studies, even when they defined “culture” or “identity” differently, **positive mental health outcomes for Indigenous youth are consistently related to feelings of being connected to culture.** This concept is known as *cultural connectedness*. It is different from participation in cultural events like powwows, ceremonies, drumming, and other traditional activities. This does not mean that participation in cultural events or practices is not helpful. It means that fostering feelings of being connected to culture is important for youth well-being even if participation in specific practices may not be possible or of interest to an Indigenous youth.”



### Intervention/ Program Description



With the support and collaboration of ABM and HBMI tribes, Boys & Girls Club of Bordertowns, tribal community partners, and county programs, we were able to plan the backpack initiative and food box distribution to help Tribal families with a balanced meal and a backpack full of supportive items for tribal youth and their return to school! Traditional tobacco teachings are foundational and knowing the distinction between commercial tobacco and ceremonial tobacco, our WPH Wetamaweyi Tobacco program helped to provide each backpack with a culturally competent Smoke Free Home Pledge, and in partnership with Aroostook County Action Program, fifty of the backpacks had material for Commercial Tobacco Resources. Tribal community families and youth were able to pick up materials at the Backpack Initiative “drive thru”.

*“I greatly appreciate all community events supporting our youth, and I wish we had more that supported with food, supplies, and resource materials!”* Carolyn Joseph (Tribal Community Member)



### Results/ Success

Wabanaki Public Health and partners came together to coordinate a community response and support over one hundred Tribal children in Aroostook county returning to school with backpacks full of school supplies and resources including Commercial and Ceremonial Tobacco specific material; over 50 families received food boxes consisting of a balanced meal to get Tribal Youth, set up for success on their first day of school!

### Sustainability

According to the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs*, “The best available science indicates that traditional mass media is the best way to encourage— and sustain—behavior change.”

By collaborating, responding, and supporting our Tribal community needs, we are increasing our traditional mass media efforts, and supporting these behavior changes!



### For More Information Contact Us At:

Wabanaki Public Health

[alondon@wabanakipublichealth.org](mailto:alondon@wabanakipublichealth.org)

[emitchell@wabanakipublichealth.org](mailto:emitchell@wabanakipublichealth.org)

[www.wabanakipublichealth.org](http://www.wabanakipublichealth.org)



Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention  
Department of Health and Human Services