



Report on Long-Term Services and Supports
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe 2013

About Mille Lacs Band Ojibwe

STATISTICS

The Mille Lacs Band has 4,302 members. The Mille Lacs Reservation consists of three districts, the most populous of which is District I. This area is made up of the four northern most townships in Mille Lacs County with the exception of the Isle community. District I is where the Mille Lacs Band Government Center and Grand Casino Mille Lacs are located. More than 1,400 Band members live in District I. Districts II and IIa are near the cities of McGregor and Isle with a total population of 359 members. District III is near the city of Hinckley, where Grand Casino Hinckley is located, and has 555 members. Most of the remaining Band members live throughout Minnesota and the United States.¹

The Mille Lacs Band is one of six members of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe; the other members are the White Earth Band, Leech Lake Band, Grand Portage Band, Bois Forte Band, and Fond du Lac Band. “Chippewa,” is another word used to refer to Ojibwe people; the Mille Lacs Band prefers the term “Ojibwe” when referring to its members.

Focus group participants were recruited from District I by Mille Lacs tribal staff in coordination with the Improve Group. As such, the information in this report may not be reflective of the other Districts of the Band.

Only 14% of Minnesota lead agencies surveyed report that their providers are “very prepared” to deliver care that is culturally competent to racial and ethnic minority communities.

Source: DHS Gaps Analysis Survey conducted for older adult population, 2009

WHAT'S THE COMMUNITY LIKE?

Situated in East Central Minnesota, the Mille Lacs Band has had a significant economic impact on the region. More than 35 businesses that are located both on and off the reservation are owned by the Band including casinos, hotels, restaurants, and a resort. They are the largest taxpayer in Pine County and one of the largest in Mille Lacs County. In addition to significant financial resources, the Band has a strong tribal government presence and sense of identity. The Language and Cultural Program is part of the curriculum for all K-12 students who attend the Band's schools. A center offers Ojibwe language classes and cultural activities, and assisted living units are available for Band Elders to remain in the community. From 1990-1999, the Mille Lacs Band brought a legal case to the U.S. Supreme Court to exercise their rights under the treaty of 1837 and regain traditional hunting, fishing and gathering practices. The Supreme Court upheld the treaty which was seen as a significant victory for American Indian sovereignty.

Input from focus group participants consistently painted a picture of services that are built on a strong foundation of community; people feel connected. Improve Group facilitators were received warmly in the community. Focus group participants readily understood the connection between their input and the hope that it would make a difference. They were engaged and demonstrated a willingness to share. Facilitators were impressed with the way Elders play such a strong role in the community as those who embody strength and wisdom. Tribal members uphold the role of Elders, showing their support, deference, and acknowledgement.

1 <http://www.millelacsband.com/>



What do people say?

KEY STRENGTHS

Many Elders², persons with disabilities, and persons with mental health conditions are able to exercise their independence and feel grateful for this. All of the participants in the Elders group have had their own vehicle and this greatly enables their ability to feel independent without having to rely on family members for rides. For persons with disabilities as well as Elders, participants who feel independent describe having a strong sense of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

Relationships, especially family relationships, are strong for Elders and persons with disabilities. Many participants described close friendships with their children and siblings. They spoke in detail about how important these people are to them. One participant said, “I have a son and a grandchild; that’s all that matters to me.” Another shared how much her relationships with her close relatives means to her: “I can trust and I can tell them anything.”

After school care for children and grandchildren is an important resource for families.

The Boys and Girls Club is mentioned by several caregivers as providing much needed care and opportunities for the youth in the community.

Several caregivers feel very positively about their own employment situation in terms of benefits they receive, enjoying the work that they do, and feeling that their employment is a positive aspect in their family life.

KEY CHALLENGES

Issues related to health and wellness are common themes for Elders and persons with disabilities. There are well known health disparities in child welfare and chemical dependency in the Mille Lacs Band, as is true in other Native American communities. The Mille Lacs Commissioner of Health reports that while the tribe provides hospital and human services that are comparable to the rest of the state, lack of funding has caused the community to be far behind in their ability to provide home and community-based services. Access to specialist providers is a common challenge, as is continuity of care as the turnover rate among providers is high. Service providers also agree that members must travel to Onamia, St. Cloud, or Brainerd to see most specialists. More physicians as well as enough staff to be able to do home care, especially in Districts II and III, are needed. A lack of cultural competency among some providers is another important issue raised by participants.

Limited or non-existent services in the community cause secondary problems. Supports that would help people with disabilities, people with mental illnesses, and older people live independently are very limited. Despite service limitations, people with disabilities and people with mental illness that participated in this study shared they were able to remain in their community. However, participants shared that some Elders are moved to nursing homes far away to receive the services they need as there are no nursing facilities nearby that can meet the needs of Elders requiring a higher level of care. After



2 Culturally, an Elder is a person who has accumulated a great deal of wisdom and knowledge throughout his or her lifetime, especially in the tradition and customs of the group. Most tribes define Elders as those persons 55 years of age or older.

moving, according to the one tribal official, elders often decline quickly because of cultural and language differences with caregivers. Funding has not been available to help the Mille Lacs Band understand and track needs, nor to develop an infrastructure to provide a comprehensive system of care.

Transportation is an issue noted by participants in all three groups. For Elders and persons with disabilities, having transportation for medical appointments outside of the reservation is important. Though all of the Elders in the focus group have vehicles, some had previously been without transportation or currently only feel comfortable driving short distances. For Elders and persons with disabilities, transportation availability for social events and errands can be a challenge. Service providers note that there is now transit on the reservation for clinic appointments, but nothing to help Elders with errands and shopping. They identify this as a huge area of need. Several felt that some kind of regular shuttle with designated stops would work well and address this. In the caregiver group, it was noted that the Boys and Girls Club do not provide transportation outside the reservation which was a challenge for one caregiver.

Safety is a significant concern for participants. Some focus group participants themselves do not always feel safe – one member shared that her house has been broken into. Other participants shared that while they feel safe where they live, the lack of opportunities for youth and the negativity, violence, and drug use is a significant problem that causes concern for the safety of their children and grandchildren. Service providers echo this and feel that chemical dependency is an issue that affects many families in the community, has broken down trust, and damaged the sense of community.

Many participants in the caregiver group shared that they are raising grandchildren or their siblings' children in order to keep their family together. The impact financially and personally can be big – one participant discussed how he has to delay his retirement and continue working in order to provide benefits for several grandchildren. There is a lack of support for caregivers and the difficult work they are doing which affects their independence and ability to seek employment and school opportunities. Also, caregivers mentioned difficulty in navigating paperwork to receive services for their children and their frustration with the volume of paperwork required.

Many participants shared concerns about a loss of culture and maintaining relationships outside of family. They would like supports so they can continue to attend pow wows and other gatherings despite aging and health issues. They miss the connections they used to have like sharing a meal with neighbors and friends. This issue may be a stronger concern for some residents or families, over others. Some service providers shared that they see informal support and community cohesiveness as being much stronger in Districts II and III in part because they are smaller, more geographically isolated, and have fewer services available. Because the number of people involved in this study is very small and the sense of connectedness depends on so many variables, it is likely that there are highly varied experiences of connectedness in each of the districts.

Several participants noted that affordable child care resources, including summer care for all school aged children is especially challenging to find. One participant shared, “We can't afford daycare. \$2 per kid per hour, I'd be paying \$6 per hour, I'd need a second job just pay for it.” A service provider echoed that while the current Head Start program is much more affordable than childcare outside of the reservation, cost is still a barrier for many families. It is important to note that these focus group participants were referring to the subsidized child care available only in District I. Residents of Districts II and III do not have access to subsidized child care services in their communities. Consequently they are paying even higher prices for private child care, or choosing not to work because child care is not affordable.

How to use this information

THE STATE CAN DRAW IMPORTANT LESSONS FROM THIS STUDY

Like other communities we visited, independence and community membership are some of the most important values for the Mille Lacs Band members we spoke with. One tribal official shared that he hopes that his community's participation in this study will help state leaders and community members recognize the need for further study, regular data collection, funding and service development to help members maintain community membership and independence longer. Additionally, many of the participants have a strong sense of purpose and responsibility and feel happy with their lives despite challenges. Many are caring for extended family while having their own health issues. Greater support for caregivers who are caring for children and keeping their family together is especially needed; this community is an especially good example of this. Greater support is needed for each of the groups that were the subject of this study as tribal leaders fear that their needs get overshadowed by the larger health disparities in the community. Additionally, Elders in the community who have a high sense of independence and satisfaction were those with the best access to reliable transportation – a great strength.

LESSONS OTHER COMMUNITIES COULD TAKE FROM THIS INPUT

According to participants, affordable childcare and out of school care during the summer are needed, as well as other opportunities for youth. There was a perception that the lack of activities for youth is contributing to drug and alcohol use among youth in the community. Additionally, more training for service providers is needed to increase cultural competency. Continuity of care should be addressed – finding ways to increase retention for providers who serve this community with greater access to specialists.

One issue we heard from service providers is that the culture and availability of services differs drastically by each district. It was acknowledged this exists in part due to a breakdown in communication between clinics and staff and because of lack of resources in Districts II and III. One provider said, “I don't see any less Elders or disabled in that area, just less services being provided.”

Participants and providers deeply care about their community and many spoke about wanting more connection and strengthening of cultural values. Providers feel some of the services and ways they are administered cause an unhealthy dependency for community members. They have a desire to engage young people who are community members to become future service providers for the tribe.

