

Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians Waabshki-Miigwan Program Petoskey, Michigan

The Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians (LTBB), located in the north-western part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, has over 5,000 enrolled members with a large number living within Charlevoix and Emmet Counties. The historically delineated reservation area encompasses approximately 336 square miles of land within the two counties. The largest communities within the reservation boundaries are Petoskey, Harbor Springs, and Charlevoix. The Tribal Court is located in Petoskey, Michigan (see map below).

Established in 2009, The Waabshki-Miigwan (White Feather) Program is the Tribe's Adult Healing to Wellness Court which is a collaborative partnership among the community, service providers, court and adults with substance abuse challenges in order to restore holistic balance using Odawa values and teachings in order to ignite healing and rehabilitation. Using the Tribal Ten Key Components as a guide, Waabshki-Miigwan has incorporated LTBB culture, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, Medicine Wheel Teachings and the White Feather Story into the structure and organization of the Program. The most recent enhancement to the cultural aspect of the Program has been the hiring of two Cultural Resource Advisors whose roles are funding by the Tribe's BJA Drug Court Enhancement grant as well as partial funding from the Child Welfare Program. The Cultural Resource Advisors play an integral role in participant engagement allowing the Program to pivot this role away from the court advocate model to one based on community allyship and cultural understanding. Cultural Resource Advisors, who have a recovery background, use Talking Circles and community elders to connect with participants to find purpose in the community and understand their traditional roles within their culture. The utilization of the Cultural Resource Advisors has also allowed the Waabshki-Miigwan Program to expand its cultural activity calendar as well as provide more one-on-one participant engagement with participants during the pandemic.

In 2017, the Waabshki-Miigwan Program saw great change with its Program as well as with its relationship with the State of Michigan. Prior to 2017, the Tribal Court had difficulty connecting and collaborating with the local circuit courts in neighboring counties, which only have lower level substance abuse treatment programs leaving felony defendants without treatment services. The Program was aware of a young Native male in one of the local county jails who had a long history of institutionalization but was interested in the cultural aspects of the Program as he had never received cultural services in the past. The Program Coordinator attended his court hearing and advocated that he receive culturally appropriate programming from Waabshki-Miigwan. The prosecutor's office was initially hesitant to transfer the case to the Tribal Court but the county circuit court Judge was convinced to transfer the case over to Waabshki-Miigwan to provide culturally appropriate programming and treatment. The participant responded extremely well and was able to successfully complete the Program. This first participant's success laid the groundwork for future collaboration between the Program and local Michigan Department of Corrections

(MDOC) offices for the transfer of felony cases to the Tribal Court where the Waabshki-Miigwan Program is responsible for supervision, treatment, and reporting of these felony-level cases.

The agreement with MDOC allows Waabshki-Miigwan to identify potential participants using jail rosters. The Program administers a risk assessment to determine eligibility if they are interested. Once eligibility has been determined, the Program petitions the jail to allow them to enter the Waabshki-Miigwan Program. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the program was serving 12-14 participants but have since seen their program participation decrease to 9 current participants due to a decreased jail population. This Tribal-State collaboration has allowed the Waabshki-Miigwan Program to transition from a misdemeanor program to a felony program which enables them to provide services to participants that were previously unreachable. It has also helped to improve the Tribe's relationship with the neighboring counties, built trust between the jurisdictions, and fills a gap in services and resources in the community.



Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians Reservation and Trust Lands

