



Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

477 Narrative Report

FY25

OCTOBER 1, 2024 TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

Aanjibimaadizing
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DEDICATED TO OUR MOST ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTER,
JOE NAYQUONABE, SR.



*“Aanjobimaadizing is the best thing that ever happened
to the Mille Lacs Band.”*



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MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE DISTRICT MAP



FY25 TOTAL NUMBER OF CLIENTS (ADULT AND YOUTH) BY DISTRICT

DISTRICT I	DISTRICT II	DISTRICT IIA	DISTRICT III	URBAN	TOTAL
437	123	91	250	183	1,084

INTRODUCTION

The Mille Lacs Band 477 Program provides services to Tribal members seeking to establish sufficiency for themselves and their families pursuant to this plan and in accordance with P.L. 102-477, as amended.

The program has adopted a culturally appropriate name, Aanjibimaadizing, which translates as “changing lives”. Aanjibimaadizing is operated as a division of the MLBO Department of Administration and helps to empower participants with an acquired purpose or occupation that will contribute to the well-being of their community and family.

The following funding streams from the sources listed are incorporated into this Plan and were utilized to achieve Band objectives:

Department of Health and Human Services

Native Employment Works (NEW) - \$61,723

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) - \$4,550,816

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)-FY 2016 - \$191,580

Department of Labor

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult Services - \$52,249

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Services - \$23,295

Department of the Interior

Job Placement and Training (JPT) - \$64,031

Welfare Assistance - \$155,003

The estimated annual allocation of the combined grant funds total is \$5,098,697.

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (MLBO) authorizes up to 10% of the total program funds to be utilized for economic development initiatives within the program which are used to enhance entrepreneurial opportunities for tribal membership.

PROGRAM GOALS

The program’s goals concentrate on empowering its participants to end dependency on government assistance with an acquired purpose, or an occupation that will contribute to the well-being of their community and family.

The goals of the program are centered on our mission statement which is:

To assist our fellow Anishinaabe with education, training, work experiences, cultural participation, and support services to be prosperous and change their life.



All program services support obtaining and retaining employment, improving or creating a position of job readiness, and addressing barriers that prevent our clients from leading their best life. Through this, we are able to offer services to a large percentage of our community and work closely with other organizations to help all ages overcome barriers to sustainability.

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe P.L. Law 102-477 Goals for 2022-2025 were:

- 1. Create youth mentorship/internship and training opportunities in all Mille Lacs Band districts that will synchronize with Anishinaabe values, for example, servant leadership to look at the well-being of people and community. This will ensure youth have a positive ongoing relationship with tribal government and promote healthy relationships with adults in the community. These opportunities will be measured by the number of youth placed in mentorships/internships and the number of youth who have completed these opportunities. The program anticipates that at least 50% of all youth placed will complete the internship successfully.*
- 2. Develop Ojibwe language resources, materials, and training to be used long term with Aanjibimaadizing clients and all Mille Lacs Band members to increase the use of language, number of speakers, and improve the health and education of the community holistically. This will be measured by the number of books, resources, and materials available at the end of this three-year plan in comparison to current resources.*
- 3. Build and strengthen our training program in the following areas: outreach to potential clients, emphasis on the importance of gaining new knowledge including digital literacy, which will help in job advancement. In addition, this will help clients see the importance in self-growth, by growing their skills. This will be measured by the number of clients attending trainings or the number of clients gaining employment, thus advancing their careers.*
- 4. Increase indigenous business development of individuals and companies by promoting skills to build human capital, business plans/development and problem solving. Measured by the number people attending small business classes and number of people obtaining a small business development grant.*

The program goals align with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe goals to stream-line policies and procedures, improve relationships with Band members with a focus on enhancing customer service skills, and create “youth mentorship and training opportunities” to develop workforce skills in the Mille Lacs Band youth.

Community surveys identified that Ojibwe language revitalization efforts are integral to sustaining our way of life and our inherent rights as a sovereign nation. Culturally relevant practices, teachings and trainings will be provided to clients. The elders have determined that language revitalization is the key to self-sufficiency and our well-being.

Other goals identified are to support the small business and economic development of the rural Tribal reservation lands and increase Anishinaabe self-sufficiency.



In July 2024, Chief Executive, Virgil Wind, was sworn in. During the ceremony he stated, “We have thousands of opportunities to become something tomorrow that you’re not today.” Aanjibimaadizing is working with Chief Wind to expand workforce related opportunities in our communities.

“We have thousands of opportunities to become something tomorrow that you’re not today.”

The Tribe is confident in their ability to self-determine needs.

Client Goals

Participant goals will be tracked in the electronic data system. Outcomes will be demonstrated and reviewed on a quarterly basis. The 477 Statistical Report and anecdotal data will be used to demonstrate program effectiveness. The program would like 75% of clients to have some measure of demonstrated success at completing an outcome.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Aanjibimaadizing falls under the Department of Administration in the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and provides Case Management, Child Care Assistance, Support Services, Subsidized Employment, Education and Training, Adult Basic Education, Youth Services, Re-Entry, SNAP, SNAP Education, TANF, and is a Basic Needs Drop-In Center.

To provide oversight for program operations, Aanjibimaadizing is led by Interim Executive Director Kristian Theisz. Mr. Theisz has been working for the Mille Lacs Band for several years and was Aanjibimaadizing’s Director of Community Services prior to his current position. There is also: a Director of Case Management who oversees all case managers working with clients and TANF; a Ge-Niigaanizijig Director who oversees youth programming and activities; and a Director of Community Services who oversees facilitated programming.

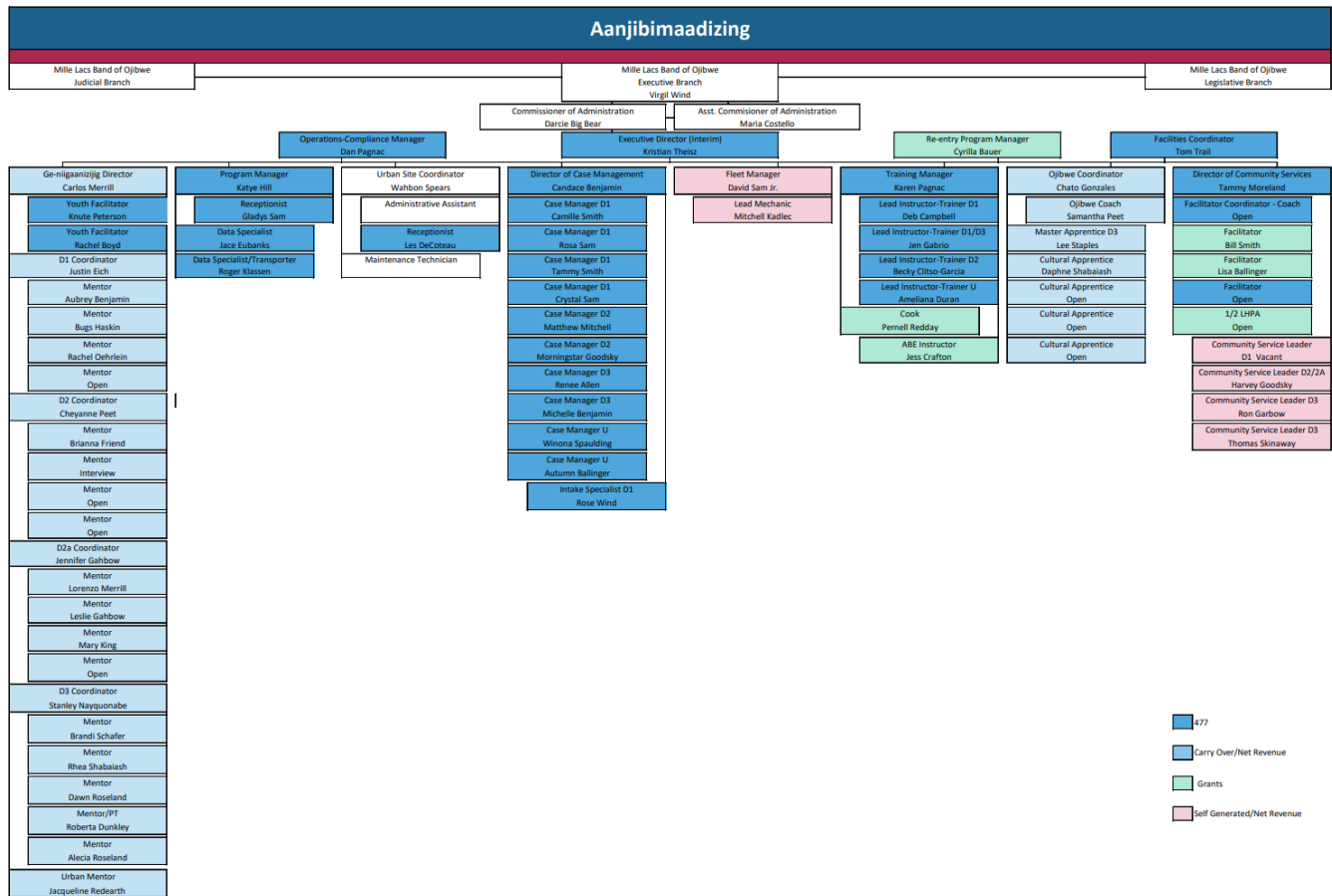


AANJIBIMAADIZING STAFF PHOTO

During FY19, the program began expanding services to ensure they were available at all office locations in District I (Onamia), District II (McGregor and East Lake), District III (Hinckley and Lake Lena) and the Urban area. Aanjibimaadizing currently has 62 staff. Only 16 of our employees are not native; 74% of our employees are American Indian.



AANJIBIMAADIZING ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



EXPANSION OF PROGRAMS

On the basis of the approved FY22-25 Plan, below are FY25 updates on program expansions:

Azhegiwe Re-Entry Program

Upon returning to the community, a lack of stable housing has been identified as a significant barrier to achieving an ultimate goal of self-sufficiency for returning Mille Lacs band members recently released from prison. Cultural differences can lead to difficulties in developing the rapport that is necessary to build good relationships. Compliance with community supervision plans, connection to culture and language, and communication with the Department of Corrections will increase the success of the individual in the program.

The Reentry Program was designed to provide services to assist individuals on supervised probation in becoming self-sufficient, obtain a job, retain a job, and/or get education with the goal of reaching sustainability in those areas. This goal requires an even broader range of supportive services in conjunction with program staff, cultural/language coordinators, and probation agents to connect to services.

It was critical to establish programming and housing that allows an individual to focus on developing consistent health life choices to achieve core objectives by engaging and enhancing educational and employment opportunities; establishing permanent housing; addressing core



issues that led to original incarceration; and reestablishing community and cultural identity. Case plans focus on the twelve (12) domains, including: safety, legal, cultural identity, health and development, behavior, emotions, self-care, education, vocational, social, financial, and spiritual/cultural. It will also help agents recognize and respect the customs, traditions, beliefs, and values of Mille Lacs Band members. The plans will strengthen a culturally-based, solution focused planning and problem-solving process that is individualized.

The goal is that the released individual will have increased participation in the community, sincere connection to cultural activities, housing stability, long-term life changes, and employment opportunities – all important steps toward a productive and healthy life. While this model of success will prepare the individual towards a successful outcome, the starting point is when the individual has a place to call home, it will give them the determination to stay compliant.

SNAP Education

A division of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP Ed is an evidence-based program that helps people make their SNAP dollars stretch, teaches them how to shop for and cook healthy meals, and lead physically active lifestyles.

In August 2024, MLBO SNAP Ed was moved under Aanjibimaadizing. The FY25 plan was written and approved. We ran into difficulties getting the signatures in place to allow staff to perform the additional duties due to there not being a quorum within the Band’s Administration Policies Board. In July 2025 funding was cut for the program. In September 2025, we were able to obtain approval for staffing. Programs in Minnesota could use any unspent FY 2025 grants until September 30, 2026 by submitting a state plan. Within this plan, our unspent funds from the previous year were able to be moved to FY26. We have been working closely with the state Tribal SNAP Education team throughout this entire process.

SNAP Ed initiatives include nutrition education classes, social marketing campaigns, and efforts to improve policies, systems, and the environment of communities. SNAP Ed strengthens SNAP’s public health impact by addressing food and nutrition security to improve nutrition and prevent or reduce diet-related chronic diseases, including obesity, among SNAP recipients.



Ventura Project

In May 2024 Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures (MLCV), who manages the business affairs of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, began the Ventura project at 2224 Bloomington Avenue, in Minneapolis near the current Urban office. Seen as a milestone for urban native housing, the project features 3 floors of high efficiency living units with underground parking. When complete, the first floor will house a community gathering space and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

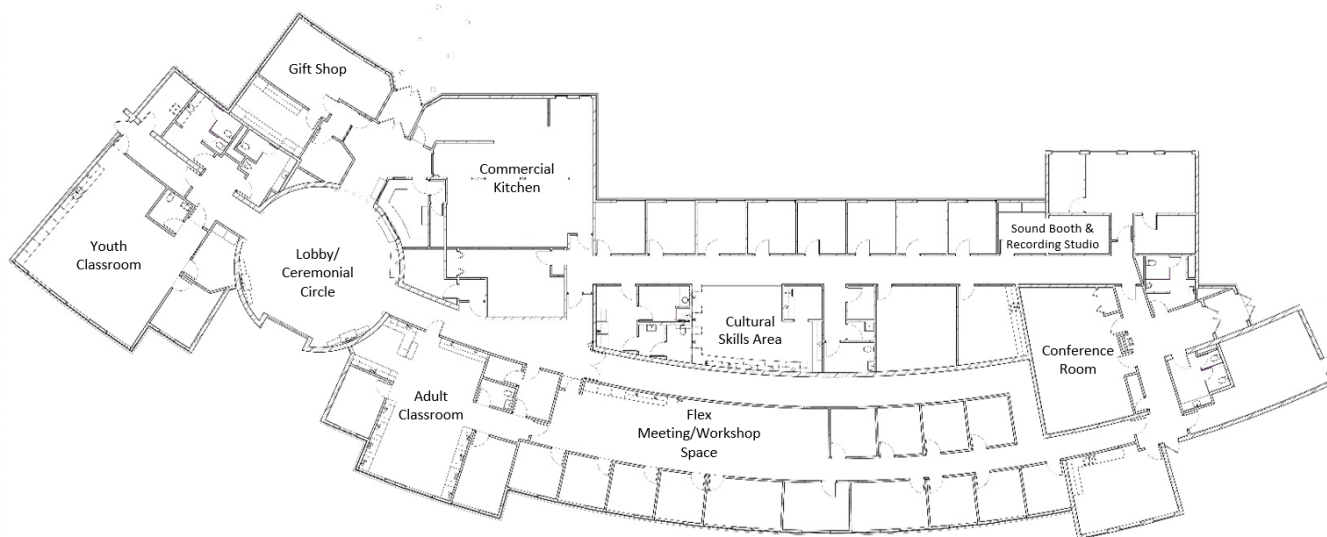
Urban Office - which includes our Urban Aanjibimaadizing staff. The project is nearing completion and move in is expected to be soon. In addition to the excitement of having a new, larger, more efficient space, a major advantage of this space includes improved maintenance, which is expected to limit the number of closures due to leaks and other mechanical issues. Parking will also be improved significantly and should reduce the amount of vehicle damage sustained.



Previous FY22-25 Plan Expansions Prior to FY25

NEW FACILITY

In FY20, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe built a new state-of-the-art clinic in District 1. The former clinic building on Migizi Drive was gifted to Aanjibimaadizing. The program moved into this building in October of 2020. All District 1 staff and services are located within this building except for a facilitator who has an office near the housing units on Ookwemin Loop. This allowed us to provide more services in the community that build client self-sufficiency. The renovation was completed in May 2023.



CHILD CARE

When CCDF was pulled under the umbrella of P.L. 102-477, this allowed the program to expand child care into District 2 and District 3. The child care services are provided as ‘before’ and ‘after’ care to the Tribal Head Start/Early Head Start services. Child care is a barrier for many participants obtaining and retaining work. This helps pay for child care so clients can retain their employment. Child care assistance is available for licensed and legal non-licensed child care provided by a friend or relative outside of the home. Child care assistance is available for families who are employed or enrolled in educational programs and meet eligibility requirements. Clients must apply with the county for child care assistance first. In the Urban area (Ramsey, Hennepin, and Anoka counties), child care assistance is only offered to Mille Lacs Band members and first-generation descendants.

AANJI GARAGE

Fleet Services for light mechanic work is another area of expansion for the program. Job descriptions were created for a Fleet Manager and a Mechanic. Both positions were filled as of October 2021. Renovation of an MLB-owned space into a light mechanic garage with one (1) lift was completed in February 2022. This has become a training program for clients to learn mechanical skills that lead to employment.





Automotive Technician employment is a high demand field in our service area. This work experience can be done in conjunction with taking Auto Technician classes from Pine Technical and Community College (PTCC). Aanjibimaadizing has had a successful four-year partnership with PTCC. The department is also providing a service for MLBO department vehicles and can charge for those services. The garage also provides training opportunities for Auto Technician, Small Engine, and Marine Power Sports Engine Repair classes. In FY25, 255 service orders were completed in the Aanji Garage.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

Aanjibimaadizing received Merit Status and is now able to administer SNAP for Mille Lacs Band Members and First-Generation descendant households who meet eligibility guidelines in Aitkin, Benton, Chisago, Crow Wing, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, and Pine counties. In the Urban area (Anoka, Hennepin, and Ramsey County) the Aanjibimaadizing office can assist with a courtesy application, but final eligibility will be determined by the county of residence.

The primary goal of SNAP is to provide low-income households with additional resources for buying food. SNAP, along with other support services, also serves as an automatic stabilizer for the economy. This impact “multiplies” throughout the economy. For example, the businesses supplying the food and other goods—and their employees—have additional funds to make purchases and hire more staff. This multiplier effect on the economy may extend well beyond the initial money provided to SNAP participants. It is estimated that on the Mille Lacs Reservation, for every \$1 of SNAP support issued, it adds \$9 to the local economy. (*Quantifying the Impact of SNAP Benefits on the U.S. Economy and Jobs, 2019*) The program assisted 22 people with SNAP in the last year.

QUEST GRANT

The QUEST grant supported a case manager, an instructor and a transporter to assist clients with training, transportation and 477 services. Through support from the QUEST grant Aanjibimaadizing continued its partnership with Pine Technical and Community College. One example of how this helped people become employed is a client who took the Auto Technician class, worked at the Aanjibimaadizing garage to gain experience through WEX, and then was hired by a local garage. QUEST was pulled into 477. The funding has since ended.

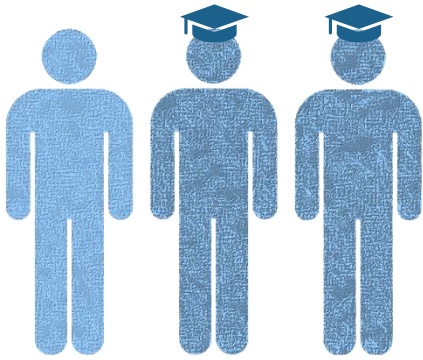
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

In June 2023, Aanjibimaadizing completed the process to start the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Adult Basic Education (ABE) Consortium. Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a state-wide system that serves adults who are working towards a high school credential, learning English, improving basic skills such as literacy and math, and/or preparing for post-secondary education or employment. The mission of ABE in Minnesota is to provide adults with educational opportunities to acquire and improve the literacy skills needed to become self-sufficient and to participate effectively as productive workers, family members, and citizens. There are two other Tribal ABE Consortiums in the state - Red Lake and White Earth.

With this project, our main goals are to offer a consistent, viable ABE process, increase opportunities for our clients and make it easier for clients to complete the General Educational



Development (GED) tests, obtain their diploma, and gain “lost” funding that we are not able to access because we were not a consortium. Classroom instructors are very familiar with the entire ABE process - having the required trainings and a vast amount of experience offering these services. The services we provide are individualized and offered in a culturally appropriate way.



**1 IN 3 ADULT
PARTICIPANTS DON'T
HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL
DIPLOMA OR GED**

Approximately 35% of our 744 adult clients (FY22) didn't have a diploma or GED and worked with us to obtain it. Most (possibly all) clients that are working on their GED go through Aanji or not at all. When the process wasn't tied into the state ABE system, it was inefficient, ineffective, and created additional barriers for our clients. Without the Mille Lacs Band Adult Basic Education Consortia, getting their GED unnecessarily became one of the most difficult things that a Mille Lacs Band Member would accomplish during their lifetime. We were unable to administer GED testing in house and needed to rely on area consortia to complete the process and provide testing. Our service area overlaps with twelve other consortia. Different consortia needed to be used so that the contact hours and funding went to the correct entity based on the school district of the person's

residence. This generated increased costs, but the biggest burden from this often falls on the client as they need to work with multiple agencies who each have similar, but different, processes and applications. Other consortia aren't able address their barriers as well as we do.

Transportation support is often needed for each of the 4 GED practice tests and 4 GED tests. The distance to the nearest testing center from our districts is between 26 and 64 miles each way. We could not receive the funding available to other ABE programs for the contact hours provided because we were not a consortium. The contact hours for our clients were either counted by one of the above consortiums, or not counted at all if services were provided in-house.

OEO EMERGENCY SERVICES/DROP IN CENTER

In the fall of 2023, the D1 Aanjibimaadizing Training Center became a Basic Needs Drop-In Center through funding offered from the Minnesota Office of Economic Opportunity. Defined as a service agency for the either the mentally ill, homeless people, teenagers, or other community members, it is a safe haven for clients in need of support, advocacy and self-empowerment services. It offers a place where people can go to obtain food or other services. As opposed to a homeless shelter, a drop-in center does not provide temporary residence.

In D1, Aanjibimaadizing provides immediate direct assistance for basic care needs including a shower and laundry and one nutritional meal per weekday. Funding also provides one full time and two part time cooks. Personal care supplies in a backpack that includes clothing are provided with the shower. Access to phone, computers, wi-fi and charging stations is also offered in all districts. Assistance can be provided to help fill out support services applications.

FAIM

The Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) Program is a matched savings project through the Minnesota Department of Human Services - Office of Economic Opportunity that



assists low-income working state residents with building assets through 24-month program enrollment in one of the following asset goals: First Home Purchase, Small Business Startup/Expansion, Personal Vehicle Purchase, or Post-Secondary Education.

FAIM helps participants change their saving and spending habits, including consumer debt reduction. The program provides financial counseling and requires clients to complete financial management and asset-specific training.

A program participant reaches their goal by making monthly deposits from wages (earned income) into a Family Asset Account (Old National Bank specialty savings account). Deposits made to the account within 24 months may be matched 3:1 by the program if requirements are met. Before accessing FAIM funds, the participant must successfully complete a minimum enrollment period (6 months and 1 day) and participate in a minimum 12 hours of financial management training, and 10 additional hours of asset-specific education.

Aanjibimaadizing currently maintains 6 of the 250 slots available. One participant has met their goal, another is waiting on the funding to transfer. The remaining slots have been distributed and participants are meeting requirements.



RECRUITMENT

Aanjibimaadizing has offices in the Urban area, District I, District II and District III. Youth Services are provided in District I, District II, District IIa, District III and Urban.

The offices are open to walk-in clients. Clients can also call or email. Aanjibimaadizing has information on the MLBO website and an informational Facebook account. Other MLBO departments make referrals to the program on a daily basis.

Eligibility

To be eligible for 477 services, an applicant must meet at minimum the five (5) eligibility criteria:

1. A signed and dated application
2. Proof of residency in the service area
3. Tribal Membership
4. Selective Service Registration for males over the age of 18
5. Employability Development Plan (EDP) that is signed and dated

Other components of the program may need additional documentation, including income. Those requirements will be spelled out in the policies and procedures. Aanjibimaadizing will serve a majority of low-income participants.

Service area

Currently, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe has just over 5,000 Band members. Approximately 46% of band members live off the reservation, while the remaining 54% live on the reservation in the various Mille Lacs Band districts.



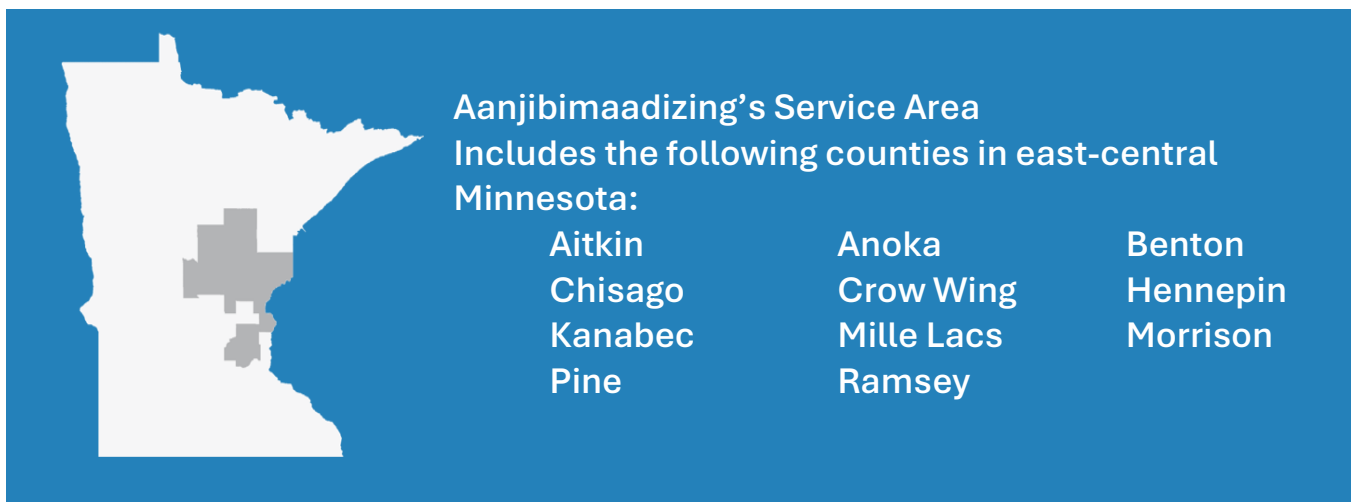
The Mille Lacs Band is one of six members of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, which was formed in 1934, during the Indian Reorganization Act. The other Bands that make up the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe are White Earth, Leech Lake, Bois Forte, Fond du Lac and Grand Portage.

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Reservation is comprised of four small communities in central Minnesota:

- **District I** – Nay Ah Shing/Mille Lacs (Mille Lacs County), which is 12 miles North of Onamia.
- **District II** – Minisinaakwaang/East Lake (Aitkin County), which is located 3 miles South of McGregor.
- **District Ila** – Chiminising (Mille Lacs County), which is located just outside of Isle.
- **District III** – Aazhoomog/Lake Lena (Pine County), which is located 30 miles East of Hinckley.

There are also significant numbers of MLBO members living in Meshakwad/Hinckley and Gaakaabikaang /Minneapolis & St. Paul metro area.

SERVICE AREA FOR THE MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE 477 PLAN



Online presence

Aanjibimaadizing continues to provide services to all clients utilizing a variety of virtual platforms including Zoom and online applications developed with Laserfiche, which is also used for digital billing and payments.

WEBSITE

To better disseminate program information and trainings to our clients, Aanjibimaadizing has developed a training and resource website at <https://aanji.org/>. Continually a work in progress, this website maintained by the Instructional Team, allows clients to easily information, resources, and online learning tools. Online applications for Aanjibimaadizing and the programs it offers can be found there as well.

Since the website was developed in 2020, over 60,000 people have used the website. During FY25, there were 15,677 active users. The top pages visited are the Ojibwe Rosetta Stone homepage, the Aanji homepage, the Aanji Services page, the Aanji Application page, and the Ojibwe Rosetta Stone Groups page - a resource page for schools and other large organizations.



While the website is created as a resource for our clients, targeting our service area, it is also used by many Anishinaabe in the US and Canada.

FACEBOOK

Aanibimaadizing uses Facebook to communicate with clients and the community regarding our services, trainings, and activities, as well as those of other departments within the Mille Lacs Band and our partners. We also post content that supports Ojibwe culture, family stability, education, and health such as family activities, recipes, language resources, and inspirational materials that assist with sobriety and mental health. Our Facebook currently has 2,534 followers. During FY25, it had 208,446 organic (without paid promotions) views. It ranks in the top 25% of government agency Facebook pages.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The Mille Lacs Reservation unemployment rate is 9.7% based on US census data from 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. This data includes all Reservation land areas in all districts.

The 2015 Amherst H. Wilder Foundation’s Minnesota Early Childhood Risk and Reach Report examined economic risks, health risks, and family stability risks in all Minnesota counties. Each county was assigned an overall risk status. The MLBO has land in three counties: Mille Lacs, Aitkin, and Pine. Mille Lacs and Pine counties are considered high risk. Aitkin County is considered moderate to high risk.

Demographics

DISTRICT I AND DISTRICT IIA

Aanibimaadizing’s main office is located on the reservation, north of Onamia in Mille Lacs County. The recruitment area is a 60-mile radius from the District I reservation including the counties of Aitkin, Benton, Crow Wing, Mille Lacs, and Morrison counties. This area includes District Iia (Isle).

According to July 1 census data, Mille Lacs County has a total population of 27,577. Out of the total population, 5.8% are under the age of five (5) and 5.8% are American Indian. 15% of the total population is living in poverty. The median income is \$71, 455. The high school graduation rate is 90.5% (2018-2022). According to the Minnesota Employment and Economic Development statistics the Mille Lacs County unemployment rate was 4.7%, which had higher unemployment rate than the state. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics lists the national unemployment rate as 4.2% and the Minnesota unemployment rate as 3.6%.

DISTRICT II

Aanibimaadizing has another location in the town of McGregor in Aitkin County. The recruitment area is a 30- mile radius, including most of Aitkin County.

According to July 1, 2023 census data, Aitkin County has a total population of 16,335. Out of the total population, 3.7% are under the age of five (5) and 1.6% are American Indian. 20.8% of the total population is living in poverty. The median income is \$59,498. The high school graduation



rate is 92.8% (2018-2022). According to the Minnesota Employment and Economic Development statistics, the Aitkin County unemployment rate was 5.2%.

DISTRICT III

Aanibimaadizing also operates out of the Aazhoomog area, east of Hinckley in Pine County. The recruitment area is a 30-mile radius from the reservation and includes Pine County. Services for youth are provided in Hinckley at the Meshakwad Community Center. Services are not provided for Wisconsin residents.

According to July 1, 2023 census data, Pine County has a total population of 30,319. Out of the total population, 4.6% are under the age of five (5) and 2.2% are American Indian. 16% of the total population is living in poverty. The median income is \$69,666. The high school graduation rate is 90.5%. According to the Minnesota Employment and Economic Development statistics the Pine County unemployment rate was 5.5%.

URBAN OFFICE

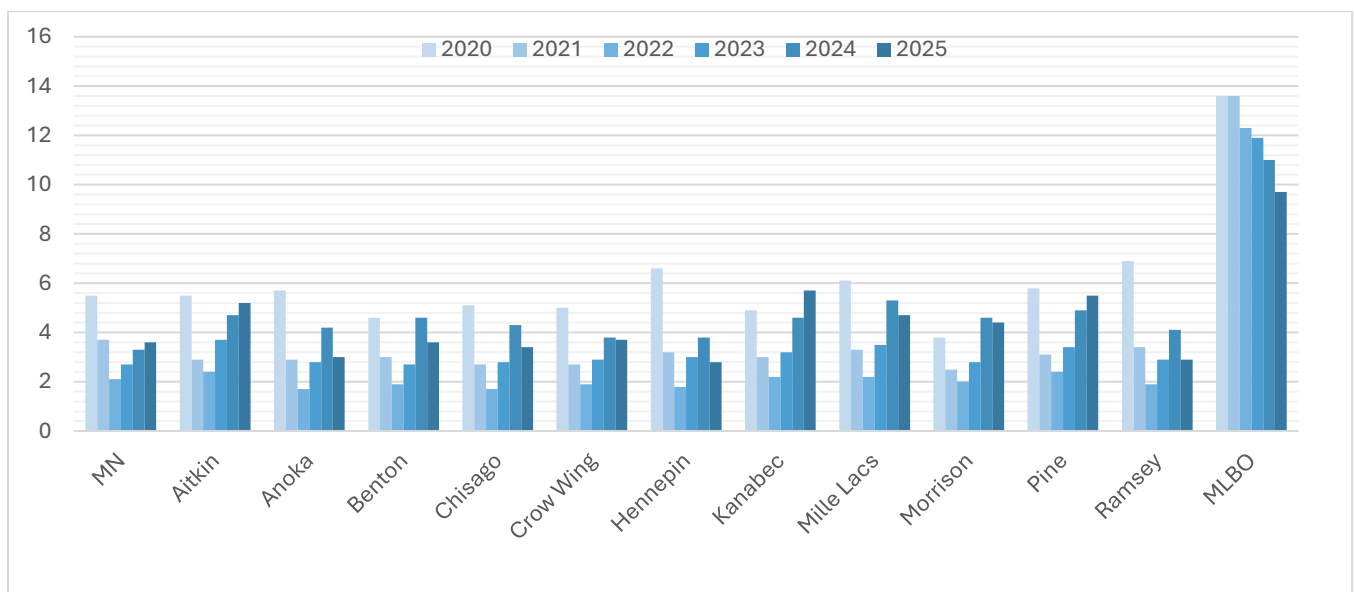
Aanibimaadizing has a site office in downtown Minneapolis to service the Mille Lacs Band members and American Indian population in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, or Urban area. This includes the counties of Anoka, Hennepin, and Ramsey. The office is located on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis in the neighborhood that focuses on American Indian services.

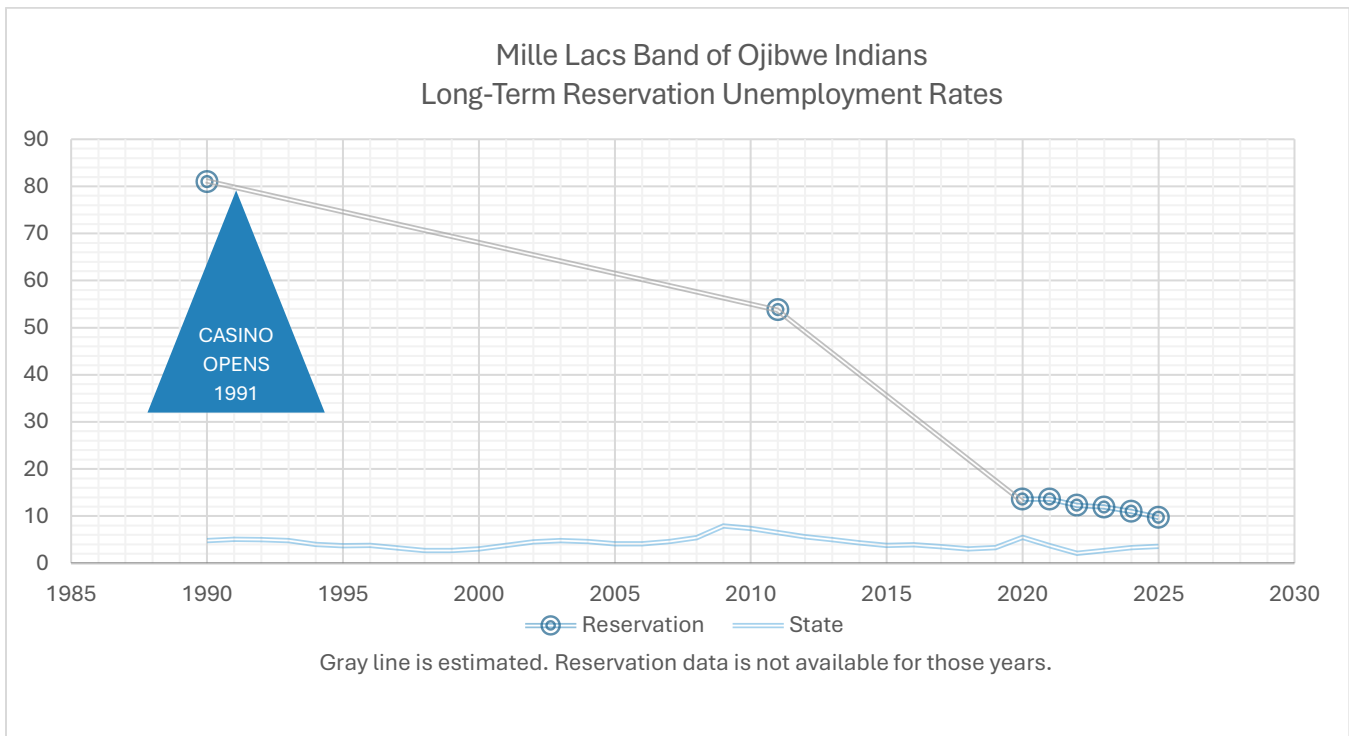
Unemployment Rates

Much of the Mille Lacs Band Reservation lies within Mille Lacs County, and the foregoing chart indicates the disparity in employment opportunities that exist between the Reservation economy and the surrounding regional economy in our service area. As soon as one crosses the boundary on the Reservation, it is common to have unemployment rates double.

From 2020 to 2025, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe unemployment rates have steadily decreased from 13.6% to 9.7%. Before this time frame, the unemployment rate from the Mille Lacs Band was many times the rate of the surrounding counties.

SERVICE AREA UNEMPLOYMENT RATES





This data suggests 1) that the hard work we put into ensuring that we provide an effective 477 program is working; and 2) our tribal economy may be more stable than other regional economies. As Aanjibimaadizing provides programs and services, we continue to keep these opportunities in mind and build our work around it.

Economic Activities

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and its businesses are a major employer in Mille Lacs and Pine counties. There are several small businesses, educational jobs, medical field positions, county jobs, and seasonal tourist positions in all northern service counties. The Urban office has small businesses, large corporations, educational jobs, medical field positions, county jobs and several service companies focused on the American Indian community.

In the past year, the program has been promoting small business development. An online class has been held every Tuesday to assist people in developing a small business plan based on Small Business Administration Guidelines. Clients who are able to demonstrate a 25% match and have created a successful small business plan are eligible for a \$1,000 grant. Aanjibimaadizing awarded 9 grants which led to employment opportunities for at least 12 people.

For employment opportunities internally and with employers working on MLBO projects, our TERO laws provide hiring preference to our membership. Being registered with our Program provides clients with an avenue to be job-ready and registered with our TERO Job Skills Bank.

Barriers to Employment and Unmet Needs

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation continues to be a barrier to employment. There is no public transportation in the outstate, or rural Reservation areas. The rural reservation areas are geographically distant from employment, colleges, and many services. The urban area has a busing system, but people need



to be able to afford to ride. Many Band members have less than reliable cars and/or cannot afford the expense of gas money to drive the distances to jobs or other services.

In FY25, Aanjibimaadizing assisted families with car repair and auto insurance for employment purposes. Other transportation services included gas cards and limited mileage reimbursement to get to work when first employed, or to attend training. A metro bus card was provided to clients in the urban area to ride the bus. The program also assists with Driver's license testing and paying reinstatement fees for those working to get their license back. These services have allowed clients to travel to their jobs and to train so they can obtain and retain employment.

HOUSING

Lack of housing, or affordable housing, is an issue for families and clients living on the rural reservation areas and in the Urban area. The lack of housing limits the ability to maintain stability. Homelessness on the reservation is often unreported, but a majority of clients report some type of housing insecurity. The Mille Lacs Band has continued to expand housing options, but they are not adequate for the number of tribal members living on the reservation. Many families are doubled up or living with other family members. The Mille Lacs Band has a hotel option with staggered rates in District 1, but it is at capacity and there is often a waiting list to stay there. Clients who lack stability in a place to stay often struggle to remain employed. The lack of housing close to places of employment limits the client's abilities to retain a job, or even obtain employment.

Due to this being a significant barrier, Aanjibimaadizing worked with MLBO Housing to create Zakab Biinjina. Zakab is supportive temporary housing for clients to help them get on a path to self-sufficiency. Housing is provided at limited or no cost to allow families to catch up on bills and save for a permanent housing solution. Clients living at Zakab must take financial literacy classes and we refer them to Community Development for home maintenance courses. We also distribute homeless prevention assistance funded from other sources to assist with shelter and utility costs.

ADDICTION

Drug overdose continues to affect the lives of many Minnesotans. In 2021, American Indian Minnesotans were ten times as likely to die from a drug overdose than white Minnesotans. Moreover, for every drug overdose death, there were 10 nonfatal drug overdoses. The number of drug overdose deaths in 2022 was the highest annual number ever recorded in the state. While there has been a 3 percent decrease in deaths in 2023, this was primarily for the white population. Native American Minnesotans are dying at over nine times the rate as white Minnesotans, and Black Minnesotans at over three times the rate.

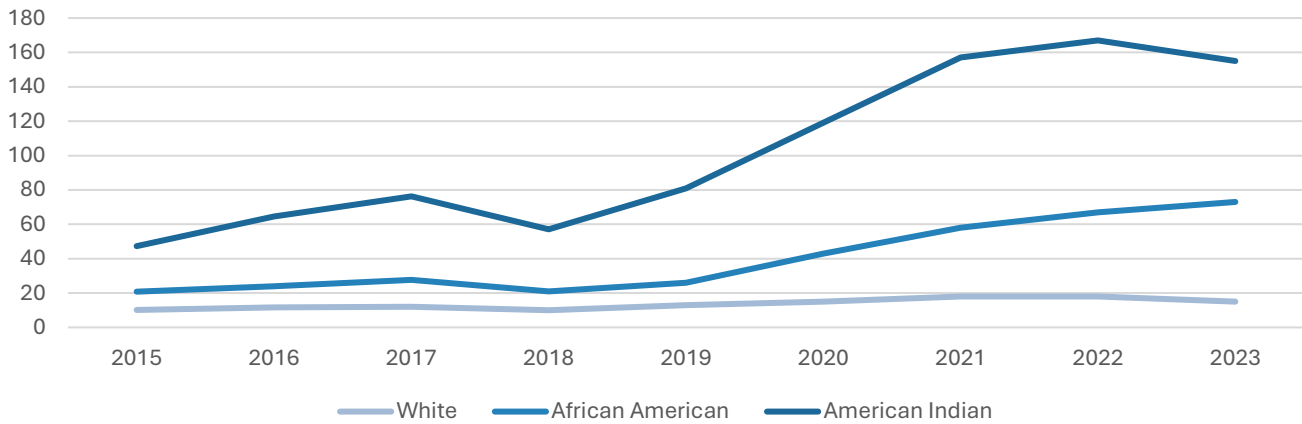
Alcohol and Chemical Dependency is a significant barrier on the Reservation. Many clients are struggling with addiction themselves or in their family. Chemical dependency affects their ability to obtain a job because many employers require a drug test prior to employment. Employment is affected by poor attendance, being late, high turnover rate, poor decision making, increased difficulty in completing tasks and increased disagreements.

Aanjibimaadizing offers specialized intensive services to help connect clients to other support services within the community. Part of Aanjibimaadizing's requirements for Work Experience



(WEX) training include not testing positive for illegal drug use. The Healthy Circles curriculum used in our youth programs promotes a traditions-based lifestyle free of chemicals. We maintain a zero-tolerance policy for drug use and promote our offices as safe and supportive spaces for those in recovery.

Minnesota Drug Overdose Mortality Rates by Race (per 100,000)



The data shown in the chart above represents the most current information.

JOB MARKET

The unemployment rate on the reservation lands is higher than what it is for the rest of the counties where the reservation land is located. Barriers to employment include transportation, housing, addiction, re-entry, and child care. All of these barriers combine to further limit people's ability to obtain and retain employment in a scarce job market in rural Minnesota. For any job you get in rural Minnesota, you will need to drive and the lack of transportation for clients limits their ability to get any job that is available. All of the barriers and unmet needs affect employment on the reservation and with the MLBO population.

The job market in rural Minnesota is limited, with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe's casinos and businesses being some of the biggest employers. Aanjibimaadizing strives to help clients overcome these barriers and gain meaningful employment.

MENTAL HEALTH

Clients often have mental health issues that affect their ability to retain a job. These issues are frequently unidentified. A 2025 survey found that 75% of workers experienced at least one mental health challenge. Younger employees (ages 18-29) are experiencing higher rates of work-related mental health challenges compared to the overall workforce. Happy employees are 13% more productive, on average. Globally, around 12 billion working days — or 50 million years of work — are lost every year to depression and anxiety.

Clients need support to maintain overall health, including mental health. Staff need support in working with clients with mental health issues. MLBO has a limited number of therapists available. Aanjibimaadizing offers facilitated services to help connect clients to other support services within the community.



RE-ENTRY AND BACKGROUND CHECK

Jobs with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe often require a background check. Even other businesses in the rural area also require a background check. For MLBO members with any criminal record, it is a challenge to obtain employment. A significant number of clients are working with the program as part of probation or re-entry requirements. Of our Facilitated Services clients, 75% were involved with corrections. Clients in re-entry need a different approach and have additional needs including finding mentors, developing community, serving others, reuniting families, and finding help.

Aanjibimaadizing works with probation officers to ensure clients can work on their re-entry plans. We also work with MLBO departments to assist people with background check issues that may affect employment. Aanjibimaadizing has created a re-entry team to better assist clients who need multiple supports when leaving jail or prison.

CHILD CARE

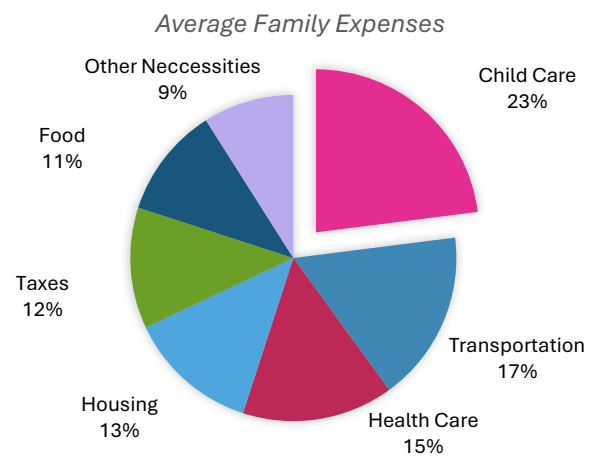
Child care all over the state of Minnesota is limited. In recent years, many family child care and child care centers have gone out of business. In a 2024 survey, 87% of the states child care centers reported that the industry is in crisis. The lack of child care in rural areas makes it almost impossible for working families to find care for their children and maintain employment.

With area schools and other partners, Aanjibimaadizing conducted a study in July 2022 regarding child care needs for the Mille Lacs Band Community. It concluded that there were 3,603 children, ages 5 and younger, living within the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe 3-county service area who are eligible for child care services. This 3-county service area only had about 800 licensed child care slots for these 3,603 children. This includes the 180 slots at the three Head Start/Early Head Start/Child Care sites licensed by the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe focusing on children enrolled in Federally recognized tribes.

Child care is a significant financial burden. The average cost for an infant in Family Child Care was \$150/week totaling \$7,800 each year. The average cost for an infant in a Child Care Center is \$250/week totaling \$13,000 each year. The expense of child care in the urban area makes it a challenge for people with young families to retain a job, with child care for an infant costing up to \$17,000 a year. It is very expensive for both the provider and the family and can easily amount to more than 25% of a family's income - more than any of their other expenses.

STAFF

Over the last year, the documentation for client services has continued to improve due to additional internal auditing measures.



The organizational stability of Aanji has remained consistent and the department will keep this as a key focus. It is critical that clients have reliability in knowing the staff have historical knowledge of programming and carry that forward into the plans of individual families.

PROGRAMS

Program data including historical data is shown below to give a clear picture of Aanjibimaadizing’s progress in meeting goals and supporting clients, both youth and adults in the program.

Fiscal Year Comparison Data

	Cash Assistance	Total Adults	Total Youth	Families Receiving Child Care Assistance	Children Receiving Child Care	Adult Earnings Gain	Businesses Assisted
FY25	42	574	510	34	56	\$21.02	105
FY24	47	1038	580	58	100	\$21.65	91
FY23	42	831	505	60	102	\$18.14	104
FY22	53	825	567	51	98	\$16.55	116
FY21	56	736	406	39	72	\$12.75	126
FY20	70	600	350	47	79	\$11.36	71
FY19	85	668	258	19	32	\$7.14	64
FY18*	42	307	180	2	2	\$6.63	24
FY17	33	182	111	28	43	\$2.00	134
FY16*	18	352	379	28	56	No data	No data

*Data cannot be confirmed by the signed and submitted report. Draft reports were available for data.

Budget Spent

Year	Amount
FY25	\$5,052,509.50
FY24	\$6,148,754.06
FY23	\$10,663,946.24
FY22	\$10,776,979.22
FY21	\$7,113,052.34
FY20	\$7,116,103.50
FY19	\$6,472,031.00

Job Creation

A minimum of 85 jobs were created by Aanjibimaadizing related to Small Business Development. Seventy-three jobs were created by Rosetta Stone to develop materials for Level 4.



SERVICES

Facilitated Services

Aanjibimaadizing offers facilitated services to help connect clients to other support services within the community. Tammy Moreland is the Interim Director of Community Services who oversees Facilitated Services. Case Managers may refer clients to Facilitators to assist them in meeting their goals to obtain and retain employment. Often these services support client needs that are social, health, and mental health related. Facilitated services offer a more targeted support for employment, training, housing stability, and self-sufficiency and address barriers.

HOUSING

Zakab Biinjina

During FY21, Aanjibimaadizing began working with Community Development and Mille Lacs Band Housing Department (MLBHD) to have Aanjibimaadizing oversee housing units in Wahkon, Hinckley and District 1 on Ookwemin Loop. This housing would be provided to clients experiencing homelessness.

Primary Objectives of Zakab Biinjina are to: promote the development of families and improve access to supportive services, thereby benefiting the members of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe; promote self-sufficiency of the members of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe; promote an environment of zero tolerance for the use or possession of controlled substances without a prescription; promote an environment of zero tolerance for the use or possession of alcohol and/or drugs (unless being used as prescribed); and develop, operate and maintain a short term place to live.

All housing would be considered safe and sober. Priority would be given to families. Clients are required to work their case plan successfully for three (3) months prior to moving into their unit. This became operational in FY21. There are 36 units being used for Zakab. Two units are offices.

Housing Grants

As available, the program may use housing grants to assist clients and community members. This aligns with Aanjibimaadizing’s holistic approach to client services. Lack of housing impacts client ability to maintain employment.

CURRENT HOUSING GRANT SUMMARY – DIRECT CLIENT ASSISTANCE

	FHPAP	LHPA	HAF
Amount Spent to Date:	\$698,877	\$138,813	\$59,890

Long Term Homeless Grant (LTHSSF)

The purpose of this grant is to support people who have experienced “Long Term Homelessness” or a lack of a permanent place to live continuous for one year or more, or at least four times in the last three years. This funding allows the Mille Lacs Band to pay for a full time Long Term Homeless Specialist and has allowed the Mille Lacs Band to integrate services to enhance



housing stability for band members experiencing long term homelessness by establishing consistent resources and case management.

Family Homeless Prevention Assistance Program (FHPAP)

The Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP) was established in 1993 by the Minnesota Legislature to assist families with children, single adults and youth who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. In 2016, the Minnesota Legislature amended FHPAP statute to include tribal governments as eligible FHPAP grantees. Minnesota Housing is the agency administrator of FHPAP funds, and funding is contingent upon approval by the Minnesota Legislature. Funds are awarded through a competitive RFP process, and current funding reaches all 87 Minnesota counties and eleven tribal nations.

Local Homeless Prevention Aid (LHPA)

Aanibimaadizing received funding to provide assistance to help families cover a portion of past due rent or rental utilities. This funding also connects families with the social services necessary to maintain stability to stay in their homes, such as housing navigation, or referral to legal representation.

Homeowner’s Assistance Fund (HAF)

The Homeowner’s Assistance Fund (HAF) is federal funding that can provide full or partial payment assistance to eligible homeowners unable to make full delinquent mortgage payments and provide funds to resolve delinquent payments for utility services, excluding phone and internet, due to a continuing financial hardship associated with the Coronavirus pandemic.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Aanibimaadizing has Community Service Crews in all reservation districts that provide lawn mowing, yard maintenance, limited outdoor home maintenance and walkway snow removal for all Elders living in one of the Reservation Districts. The crew leaders supervise WEX workers and support work readiness skills for clients.

	District I	District II	District IIa	District III
Elder Homes Served	224	30	38	137

Support Services

Candace Benjamin is the Director of Case Management, which oversees adult support services. Adult Support Service payments are single payments to vendors to assist participants in overcoming specific, immediate and essential family stabilization or employment-related barriers. Aanibimaadizing offers supportive services for clients that include:

1. Documents needed for employment, such as a birth certificate or social security card
2. Interview clothing
3. New employment support such as clothes, gas or food
4. Car repairs, tires or insurance
5. Some mileage reimbursement, gas assistance, or mass transit costs
6. Driver’s license testing and reinstatement fees

7. Training costs
8. Certificate fees, licensures and dues
9. Specialized clothing, incidental work or education expenses
10. Employment related moving and relocation costs

477 Clients can apply for Support Services for education and employment (full or part-time), and Auto Assistance (insurance/repairs). The expenses MUST be directly related to education or employment. Any support service that assists a client in obtaining or retaining employment may be considered. There are limits on the amount of support services that can be received.

The following is FY25 data on our most commonly used support services:

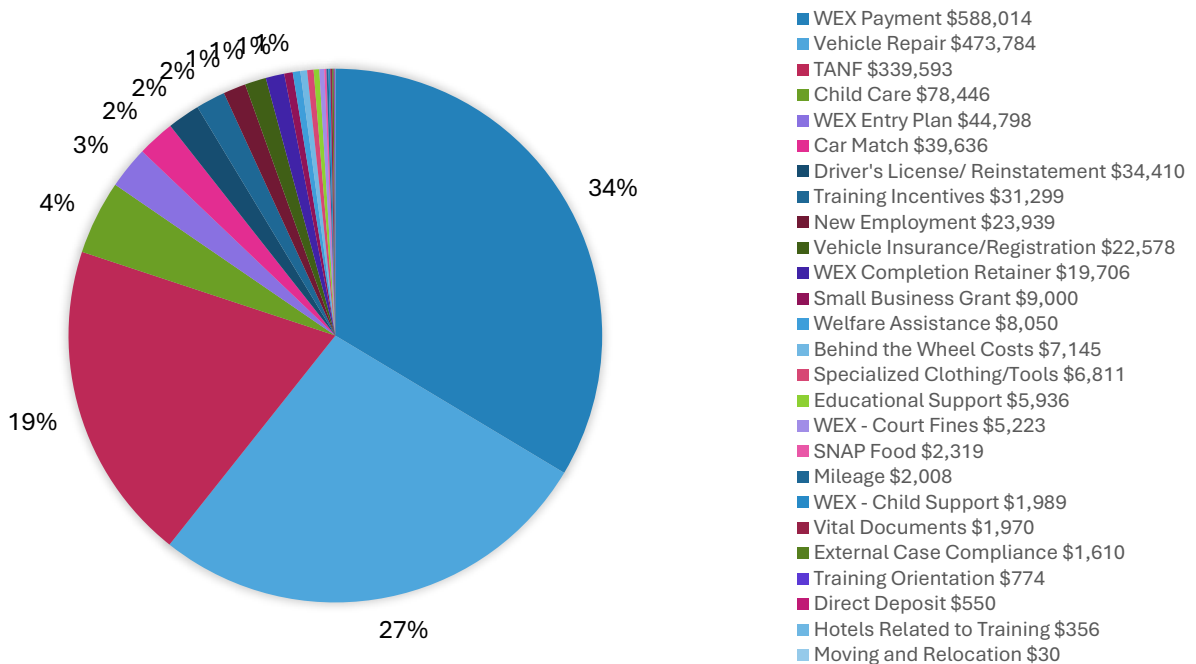
Service	Number Who Received	Total Amount
Training Incentives	509	\$ 79,820.68
Vehicle Repair	344	\$ 514,929.09
New Employment Support	294	\$ 24,717.66
Driver's License Obtainment/Reinstatement	86	\$ 38,414.20
Vehicle Insurance	67	\$ 31,017.88
Specialized Clothing/Tools	62	\$ 12,668.31
Educational Support	41	\$ 14,465.88

Vehicle Savings Match

The program may match a minimum of \$500 and a maximum up to \$1500 of client savings for a vehicle down payment or purchase. Between October 2024 and September 2025, 28 people used car match funds to purchase vehicles.

The program also provides support for training that will help people obtain or retain employment. Support Services are a large part of the total services provided. In FY25, the program distributed \$1,749,971 in support services to ensure people become or stay employed.

FY25 ADULT SUPPORT SERVICES SUMMARY



To avoid overlapping, data labels less than 1% are not displayed.

TANF

TANF provides monetary support for families with children under 18. To receive TANF support, families must provide documentation that they are working, looking for work, getting training or education, or completing other activities that lead to self-sufficiency. This documentation is compiled into a yearly Work Participation Rate (WPR). TANF has a 60-month lifetime limit, meaning that a client cannot receive TANF funds for longer than 60 months in their lifetime. Many families in the Reservation service area use the full 60 months. The TANF client rate has been stable and fairly low in the last three years. There are currently 41 TANF participants. Clients may choose to receive TANF from the Tribe or from the County.

The Program has worked hard to increase work participation hours and reporting for all clients. This is evidenced in the data listed below. Recent rates are expected to meet/exceed current goal rates.

WORK PARTICIPATION RATE

FY25	77.75%
FY24	Goal Rate 35%
FY23	Tentative Rate was 69%
FY22	Tentative Rate was 35%
FY21	Tentative Rate was 60%
FY20	59%
FY19	35%
FY18	7.6%
FY17	26.1%
FY16	22.7%

We have participated with ACF in a pilot project as ACF is using new software and have ensured that our Tribal Liaison is in party to the continued development of that software and its effectiveness in reporting Work Participation Rates.

WELFARE ASSISTANCE

Aanjobimaadizing received Welfare Assistance funding from the CARES Act. Program policies were put into place for the funding. Welfare Assistance has three (3) approved categories for the program to provide assistance to families who are post-60 months in TANF or are single adults. Welfare Assistance can be General Assistance which is a cash support, burial Assistance for families who receive no other burial support, or Emergency Assistance for families who experience an emergency or disaster. In FY25, \$8,050 in Welfare Assistance was distributed.

WORK EXPERIENCE (WEX)

WEX is considered employment training to learn job skills related to current job opportunities. WEX also assists clients in gaining the soft skills needed for employment, such as attendance, being on time, getting along with co-workers, and timekeeping. WEX is training and participants are not employed by Aanjobimaadizing or their placement host. Workers who complete 720 hours in the program are eligible for a completion retainer.



The Aanjibimaadizing WEX offerings are designed to give participants the opportunity to test and demonstrate work readiness that supports their career plans. Each participant should have a current resume on file which they are developing through training and work experience placements. These placements are within the Band, when possible, which adds to its capacity. During FY25, 252 WEX Participants worked a total of 84,349 hours. This assisted local businesses by providing WEX participants \$558,716.89 in stipends.

TOTAL WEX PARTICIPANTS

	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
District I	15	31	57	40	59	49	62
District II	18	22	53	28	36	20	26
District Ila	4	7	11	5	8	3	14
DIII	21	39	43	17	28	35	42
Urban	36	49	77	37	92	82	108
Total	94	148	241	127	223	189	252

Child Care Assistance

Aanjibimaadizing provides child care assistance to TANF clients and other clients to help pay for child care to retain their jobs. Child care assistance has recently been approved with the new 477 plan for Urban area Band members.

FY25 CHILD CARE NUMBERS

	District 1	District 2	District 2a	District 3	Urban
Number of Children	31	7	3	13	2
Number of Families	20	4	2	7	1

During Fiscal Year 2025, child care assistance in the amount of \$78,445 was provided to 56 children from 34 families. Our department will continue to look for ways to support programming and the provision of child care.

CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT FUND (CCDF) QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) provides quality support for training and in support of child care expansion. Multiple free trainings opportunities were offered to child care providers including First Aid/CPR in all districts; (SUID/AHT) Sudden Unexpected Infant Death/Abusive Head Trauma, Supervising For Safety For Family Child Care, Health And Safety I & II, Children And Restraint Systems (C.A.R.S.) online, as well as the Fatherhood and Motherhood is Sacred and Parenting Piece-by-Piece parenting classes.

Aanjibimaadizing works in partnership with MLBO Education Department to administer child care support by providing funding to support staff for child care in all districts and coordinates with Mille Lacs Early Education to help with child care assistance applications for services. Through child care assistance, Aanjibimaadizing staff has assisted Mille Lacs Early Education throughout FY25.

Training and Development

A variety of educational and training services are available to participants. These services include, but are not limited to, remedial education, instructional workshops, tutoring, skill enhancement, occupational training and/or certification, and assistance with higher education. Training continues to be focused on client needs identified in their Employability Development Plan (EDP) and individualized for each client. Training completion incentives may be available, as well as support services (hotel, transportation, special equipment, etc.) if needed.

Most people use the classroom multiple times and the support our instructors offer often requires multiple contacts on their behalf. This included Adult Basic Education, GED assistance, resume writing, driver's license assistance, and educational testing as well as a variety of trainings related to job security, overcoming barriers and family stability. Many services and courses are offered online when possible.

Over 2081 people have used classroom services during the past year, Aanji Instructors have worked with them 8,588 times – providing assistance over 35 times a day, on average. This includes helping with earning high school graduation credentials, resume writing, driver's license assistance, and educational testing, as well as a variety of trainings related to job security, overcoming barriers, and family stability.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION (ABE)

After noticing that a large segment of the client population working on their GED began the process with elementary-level reading and math scores, Aanjibimaadizing pursued a partnership to provide Adult Basic Education. During FY23 Aanjibimaadizing received approval from the State of Minnesota to become a new ABE Consortium site - the first new Minnesota ABE Consortium in 20 years. This allows Aanjibimaadizing to collect funds from the state for qualifying services provided.

All Education and Training staff have been trained as ABE tutors. ABE can be used to assist people in advancing their literacy and math skills as well as helping them with credit recovery or earning their GED or Adult Diploma. In FY25, 77 students were enrolled to work on their GED and 222 students spent 4,869 hours improving educational skills. GED students passed 18 of the GED tests and 4 have gotten their GED.

EMPLOYMENT ENTRY ASSESSMENTS

Clients that are participating in WEX, SNAP, or Educational Trainings are required to complete Employment Entry Assessments that assist with developing employment goals.

DRIVER'S LICENSE ASSISTANCE

Aanjibimaadizing can assist with obtaining a driver's license and navigating the reinstatement process.



During FY25, 222 clients also received help obtaining their MN driver's license: 86 received support services to get their license, 72 of those received Behind the Wheel training.

CAREER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Aanjibimaadizing regularly provides work and family related trainings and tutoring. These include courses such as, GED Preparation, Driver's License Exams, Budgeting, Parenting, Food Handling, Communications, and CPR/First Aid. Job training classes such Automotive Technician, PCA, and CNA Classes are offered annually. Other area training opportunities are promoted as well. In FY25, Aanjibimaadizing had 610 people attend 63 different courses. Six of these were facilitated by Aanjibimaadizing throughout all of the districts and online, with nearly 1000 weekly sessions offered.

Pine Technical and Community College

Aanjibimaadizing has partnered with Pine Technical and Community College to offer the Career Exploration & Small Business Series, Computer Basics, Business Computer Applications, QuickBooks, Parenting Piece-by-Piece, and ServSafe. Our clients were excited and eager for this opportunity, and it showed in their dedication. In FY25, 30 people received certificates through Pine Tech. It should be noted that due to a delay in contract approval, we were unable to offer PTCC courses until September, the last month of the fiscal year.



Through the 5 years we've been working with PTCC, 365 people have completed their courses. The students that attended these classes brought forth their best self, worked hard, persisted, showed up every day, and successfully completed the course work no matter how challenging it was.

Child Care Provider Training

Aanjibimaadizing also assists with required training (Pediatric First Aid/CPR, Preventing Abusive Head Trauma (AHT), Preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SUIDS) and AHT for Child Care providers in the area.

LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES

We believe all people are empowered when the opportunity to read is not limited by time, space, or privilege. To be a catalyst for building community, inspiring readers, and expanding book access classroom staff maintain Little Free Libraries in our D1 and D2 Aanji offices. The selection is a variety based on what is donated. Everyone should feel free to stop by and check them out.

CLOTHING DRIVES

Instructional staff has held winter clothing drives for over 5 years, collecting clean new and gently used clothing to help keep everyone warm and safe. We also try to keep clothing on hand throughout the year for interviews, work, or those without.



Small Business Development

A small business development program was started and has become very successful. Participants who complete a business plan that meets SBA standards can receive up to \$1,000 in funding with a 25% match. A weekly networking group, Endazhi-maawanji'idiing, was started to assist clients with creating a business plan and help meet business goals. Through this, \$9,000 has been distributed. Nine new businesses have been started which have employed no less than 12 people.

Ojibwe Language and Culture

Aanjibimaadizing supports the advancement and retention of Ojibwe language and culture. A language and culture focus serve as the nucleus of greater cohesion within family units, as both financial stability and a sense of cultural belonging are essential to the ongoing stability and health of MLBO families. We are committed to Ojibwe language proficiency and creating access to the language for the benefit of all our people. In FY25 staff provided Ojibwe language tables in all Districts.



MILLE LACS BAND FIRST LANGUAGE SPEAKERS 2019

We are blessed to still have 5 of the first language speakers in this photo still sharing their knowledge with us today. Some tribes have no living fluent speakers. The MLBO is working to see that we create another generation of speakers and that our most respected population of Band members, our Elders, get to see that their work has not gone undervalued. They will soon be able to hear children speaking Ojibwe again.

ROSETTA STONE

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe has partnered with Rosetta Stone to create a language learning platform for our Ojibwe Language to empower our community, to maintain our identity, and to help us be successful.

The first level of Rosetta Stone was released in March 2022. As of October 1, 2025, users have spent over 36,500 hours learning Ojibwe. The people using the Ojibwe Rosetta Stone are predominantly native. To date, more than 9052 licenses have been assigned from over 131 tribes across the nation (see image, below) and Canada. It is being offered in numerous Tribal and public schools across the Great Lakes region.

Clients who are eligible may receive incentives for completion of each unit.

Rosetta Stone contracted and provided work to 73 individuals over the last year, including knowledgeable and technically trained Band members with audio and video backgrounds. Work



on Rosetta Stone continues. There are currently 3 levels available. Level 4 is currently in production. When complete, there will be a total of 6 levels available.

TRIBAL NATIONS WHERE THE OJIBWE ROSETTA STONE HAS BEEN PURCHASED



OJIBWE CULTURE RESOURCE WEBSITE

A website was created by the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Aanjibimaadizing Program to preserve, protect, and share the history of their people, culture, traditions and language. To date, 117 audio files, 12 video files, 66 images, and 48 documents have been archived on it.

Youth Services/Ge-Niigaanizijig

Ge-niigaanizijig (in the Ojibwe language means our *potential leaders*) provides programming that helps children make healthy choices that lead to self-sufficiency as adults. Services are provided to Youth ages six (6), or who have entered kindergarten, up to age twenty (20). There are currently 510 youth enrolled in the program, with 371 teens and 139 K-6 participating daily. Over the past year, there has been a total count of 1,841 teen group attendance. Ge-Niigaanizijig continues to enroll students. The Director of Ge-Niigaanizijig is Carlos Merrill.

Ge-Niigaanizijig provides programming that helps children make healthy choices that lead to self-sufficiency as adults. The program has worked to streamline services with a unified approach to services. The curriculum is designed around four themes: Culture, Community, Career, and Education. The staff have been trained in a model of intervention and prevention called, *Check and Connect*. This training has helped staff be empowered in their role as mentors/role models to youth and gives them insight in ways to positively intervene and support children in their education, physical activity, and social emotional development.



FY25 YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

	District I	District II	District IIA	District III	Urban
Youth Participants	78	18	10	32	1
Teen Participants	146	57	42	102	24
Current Total	224	75	52	134	25

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Elementary Youth Mentors support youth grades Kindergarten to Grade 6. Children must have started kindergarten to attend programming. Youth Mentors will focus on fostering healthy relationships, supporting the student academically, community projects, and Anishinaabe culture.

TEEN ACTIVITIES

Teen youth will be supported by two (2) separate programs: ‘Healthy Circles’ and ‘Career Exploration’ in all districts. Youth participate in ‘Healthy Circles’ to learn about financial literacy, healthy life choices, support education and high school graduation, and build self-sufficiency.

EDUCATION

We have placed a high value target for our youth in regards to education. Youth who attend Ge-niigaanizijig programming must also be attending school or classes. This would include alternative learning centers, GED, or local schools; unless they have graduated. Students must attend school for a full day, or the scheduled class time on the same day they attend Ge-niigaanizijig or Career Exploration. Passing grades are required components of the Ge-niigaanizijig Program. Youth who do not have a minimum of a 2.0 GPA, or who are failing any of their classes will meet with their youth mentor to set goals to help them pass classes.

We value the accomplishments of our members during their time in school and incentivize any awards, honor rolls, and letter grade improvement that our members earn. All students in Kindergarten through 4-year College graduation may earn these incentives. Teens who graduate high school, college, or a technical school may also receive an incentive.

During the 2024-2025 school year, 101 youth were on the A honor roll and 121 on the B honor roll. We also had 60 youth whose grades improved this year. Four (4) had perfect attendance in school. Twenty (20) of our participants graduated from high school. Six (6) of our youth started college this year.

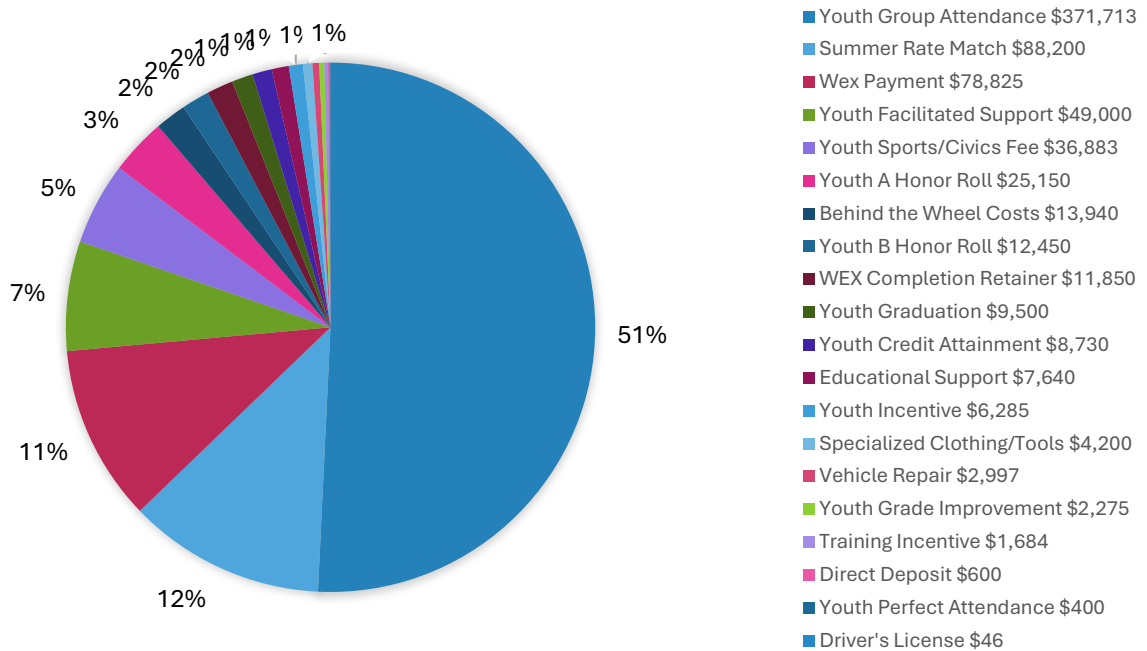
YOUTH FACILITATORS

Ge-Niigaanizijig youth-facilitated services are designed for young people who benefit from a more specialized approach and may need extra assistance overcoming barriers. Youth facilitated services offers a more targeted support for youth who need assistance with meeting education goals, or social, health, and mental health supports. This is done in coordination with parents and their youth mentor. Youth Facilitators work closely with youth who are experiencing academic,



financial, or emotional challenges. Through their support, participants have been able to recover 74.75 high school credits, improve attendance, graduate, and connect with mental health professionals for continued care and success.

YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES



To avoid overlapping, data labels less than 1% are not displayed.

Ge-niigaanizijig provides a variety of support services that help youth to reach the goals that they have set with their mentors. This includes support for driver’s education, support related to employment, musical instruments, and academic enrichment. Aanjibimaadizing provides technology to students as a support if it is not provided by their school. Through our program in FY25, 16 members completed driver’s education, and 26 received their driving permit. In FY25, a total of \$732,367 in support services was distributed to our youth.

CAREER EXPLORATIONS

Career Explorations is available for youth ages 16 – 24. This program functions similar to WEX (on the job work experience) and serves as a job training program for youth. Over the past year, there have been 14 youth that have participated in this option.

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

This summer Aanjibimaadizing held a Summer Internship that allowed teens ages 16 – 19 years old the opportunity to work along-side a career mentor currently working in a position that piqued their interest choosing from a variety of career positions within the Mille Lacs Band. The internship included career training and a community service project. In FY25, 24 teens took part in this program.

MCLV YOUTH AMBASSADORS

The Ge-Niigaanizijig program has partnered with the Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures (MLCV) program again this year to offer internships at the casinos. A total of 23 youth participated in the program, marking down another great year for this partnership. Youth were exposed to the inner

workings of the casino, learned business strategy, leadership skills, and made network connections that will help them succeed in the many different business and school environments.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

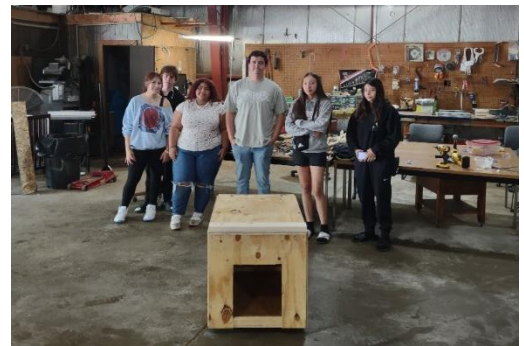
Ge-Niigaanizijig Teens participate in Youth Council, Water Over Nickle events, and Community Meeting panels. They hold many events with the community elders, including talking circles, Bingo, and meals.

CAMPS

Youth had the opportunities to attend the Unity Camp, Youth Empowerment Camp, a 3 day Culture Camp in Rutledge, MN, and Fond Du Lac healthcare camp. In addition to this, they also participated in other classes on healthy living including diabetes prevention, food making, Ojibwe grief and coping skills, and teen pregnancy prevention.

DOG HOUSE BUILDING

As a community service project, the youth regularly met in the program workshop to build dog houses for community members. In addition to helping the community and caring for pets, the project also teaches basic carpentry and team building skills. While attending area Pet Clinics, band members can register to receive one dog house. To date, 76 dog houses have been built and are keeping pets warm this winter.



YOUTH SPORTS

The Ge-Niigaanizijig program supports youth in sports through camps, clinics, and other related activities and encourages them to participate in school sponsored sports. We had 21 athletes that participate in AAU sports and many more in school football, basketball, baseball, volleyball, track, golf, and hockey. We also have youth participating in lacrosse and dance and promote ATV and Firearm Safety courses. Many fun activities are planned around physical activities such as skating, sledding, tubing and bowling. Ge-Niigaanizijig also hosted football camp partnering with University of Minnesota-Duluth coaching staff in which 12 Ge-Niigaanizijig youth, and a total of 35 youth participated. Golf days were held every Monday at Grand National Golf Course throughout the summer with golfing instruction offered by Tim Taggart.



Timberwolves/Lynx Partnership

Aanjibimaadizing has continued a partnership with the Minnesota Timberwolves and Lynx basketball teams. In this partnership, life and basketball skill clinics are offered, with the youth attending a Timberwolves game afterward and two large basketball clinics on the Reservation at the Community Centers in DI and DIII. 109 youth participated in this activity.



Noah Dahlman Camp (ND42)

Noah Dahlman's mental toughness for basketball camp was offered and held at Meshakwad community center in summer 2025. Noah Dahlman is a former professional basketball player for the Lithuanian basketball team. He played his high school career at nearby Braham High School and brings great insight to youth attending.

OJIBWEMOWIN AND TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS



FUTURE OJIBWE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

One of Ge-Niigaanizijig's goals is to include Ojibwe Language and Culture teachings into our lessons and activities. Samantha Peet, from DII, has led the instruction of Ojibwemowin along with assistance from Vince Merrill. There have been 128 youth participating in these classes and they have been learning more each lesson. We also encourage and incentivize traditional teaching participation. Our members can choose to participate in a traditional activity and receive a higher incentive pay. Most youth took part in traditional activities that included storytelling, indigenous games, sewing ribbon skirts, drum making, quilting, beading, creating regalia, sugar bushing, ice fishing, spearing, tanning, hunting, kinnikinic making, and attending pow wows and ceremonial dances.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Current Challenges for Adult Program

- Meeting the needs of our clients with multiple barriers (addiction, mental health and limited job skills) to become self-sufficient.
- Housing for many participants is critical to stability. We have focused on providing support in multiple ways including Zakab, but this continues to be a challenge and the department has taken steps to focus on targeted demographic areas. In doing so, the department is simultaneously securing external funds to be used as supplemental support for those who are "hard to house" with more challenging housing barriers.
- Access to other services needed is a challenge due to the remote, rural location of the majority of our offices.
- Many of the people learning the Ojibwe language are returning to the community from incarceration and addiction and using language learning as a tool to reconnect with the community. The barriers include employment necessities, such as working during prime



language exposure times; the lack of employment, with the effects of poverty outweighing the time to focus on learning a language; their children’s responsibilities at home; and their personal recovery work that is also time-consuming to maintain sobriety and prevent recidivism.

Current Challenges for Youth Program

Many of our youth members face various challenges in their everyday life. These challenges include:

- Rates of mental health have gone up from previous years and continues to be a major challenge for our program.
- The loss of loved ones by suicide in the counties we serve, being higher than surrounding counties, have affected youth in our program in one way or another.
- Substance abuse, nicotine and vape use, poverty, and the need for foster care appear to be increasing.
- It is also recognized that the loss of a loved one or the incarceration of a parent has significant impact on the youth that often goes unaddressed. This includes: increased risk of illness, poor mental health, substance abuse, and poor academic outcomes.
- Homelessness is another challenge. Youth that are “couch hopping” don’t meet the Federal definition of homelessness according to HUD, but is recognized by the state.
- Broadband/internet services still need to be expanded in the reservation areas, which would help access to educational and cultural services.
- It takes around 2000 hours of input to become conversational in Ojibwe. We need access to Ojibwe Language Speakers to increase the amount of rich input.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Aanjibimaadizing program is committed to community member success in every unique case. We have focused on what Elders have said are the most important aspects of our lives — our language and our culture. We are devoted to the work of guiding *gidinawemaaganinaanig* (our relatives) to a place of wellness, self-sufficiency, and an anchored identity as Anishinaabe.

