

Cultural Restoration Projects

May 2018



Akwesasne Cultural Restoration Program

The Akwesasne Cultural Restoration Program was established in 2013 through funds received from the Natural Resource Damages Assessment (NRDA) settlement with Alcoa, which identified the cultural impacts injured by the contamination from the industry. It was determined by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Trustees that two main components of restoration was necessary: an Apprenticeship program and Institutional Funding.



Garden at the cannery

Apprenticeship Program

Also known as “Á:se Tsi Tewá:ton”, which means “make it new again,” this Cultural Apprenticeship Program focused on four traditional, land-based, cultural practices:

- Water, Fishing and the use of the river;
- Horticulture and traditional foods;
- Medicine plants and healing;
- Hunting and trapping.

Throughout the 4 years in this intensive immersion program, the Apprentices worked directly with the Master full-time to specialize and become future masters in one of these areas. The language was integrated into their daily schedule beginning in the morning with language class and continuing on into the afternoon into their group activities.

The Apprentices acquired hands on experience in their cultural practices, whether it was the Horticulture & Traditional foods group learning the traditional and modern techniques of gardening together with the ceremonies within each season or the Medicines & Healing group becoming skilled at harvesting and preparing medicines and healing physically, mentally and spiritually. The Hunting & Trapping crew became knowledgeable and skilled in trapping, harvesting, preserving and cooking wild game while the Fishing group mastered the various fishing techniques, boat construction, and making nets, among other activities.



Horticulture /Traditional Foods group planting at the Cannery



Medicinal Plans /Healing group harvesting medicinal plants.

The apprentices were exposed to all the ceremonies with each new season. Whether a new beginning or end, it is an integral component that binds cultural significance to the practices.

The ACR has hosted 2 main events every year, the “Á:se Tsi Tewá:ton” Experience and the Elders’ Dinner. The “Á:se Tsi Tewá:ton”, held in the fall, provided the Masters and Apprentices the opportunity to share their knowledge and skills with the community. The Elders’ Dinner, hosted in December out of appreciation to the elders’ and to others who provided support, has become very popular since most haven’t had that opportunity to eat our traditional foods in a very long time. A traditional meal is prepared utilizing all the food that was grown, gathered, hunted, trapped or fished.



Hunting/ Trapping Apprentices stretching a hide



Fishing crew bringing back Walleye and perch in preparation for the Elders’ Dinner



Hunting/ Trapping crew constructing a deer blind

In December 2017, after four intense years, the Apprenticeship program was successful in graduating 13 Apprentices that have mastered their cultural practices and demonstrated their desire and dedication to transfer this knowledge and continue the learning process as well.



ACR Apprenticeship Program Graduates and Master of the Fishing and Water Use



ACR Apprenticeship Program Graduates and Masters of Medicinal Plants & Healing



ACR Apprenticeship Program Graduates and Master of Hunting & Trapping

Cultural Institutional Funding

In addition to the Apprenticeship Program, financial resources were provided to a number of existing Akwesasne-based institutions and programs that have already begun the work of responding to the cultural harm caused by contamination. A total of 7 organizations/ programs were funded between 2013- 2018. They are listed below:



ACR Apprenticeship Program Graduates and Master of Horticulture & Traditional Foods.

1. Akwesasne Ionkwa'nikonri:io Cultural Camp-- A cultural youth camp situated on Thompson Island that has proved beneficial to the community. Medicine walks, socials, and basketmaking are some of the activities included in their agenda.
2. Akwesasne Freedom School Tsi Niiohahò:ten--Full Immersion school with grades Pre-k to Grade 8. With the funding provided, they expanded the grades to include high school.
3. Kanahtsiohareke—small Kanienkehaka community whose mission is “to preserve traditional values, culture, language and lifestyles in the guidance of the Kaienarekowa.” With the funding received, they hosted several cultural workshops, language workshops and an annual Strawberry Festival.
4. Raised Bed Garden Project—Implemented by the “Let’s Get Healthy” program of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, the Raised Bed Garden Project provided raised beds to the seniors and later to the youth in Akwesasne. They were also able to provide gardening and healthy eating workshops.
5. Akwesasne Museum and Cultural Center—Assistance was provided to the Museum in their support of language and transmission of knowledge to future generations. Their plan includes implementation of Kanienkeha signage throughout Akwesasne.
6. Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment (ATFE)—The ATFE is a community based organization formed in 1987 whose mission is “to conserve, preserve, protect and restore the environment, natural and cultural resources within Akwesasne to promote the health and survival of the sacred web of life for future generations.” With the funding provided, the ATFE will continue to implement projects such as the Maple project, Traditional Seed production, Blash Ash/ alternative basketmaking workshops, fruit production and developing agricultural curriculum in the Kanienkeha language.
7. Owira’neha Tsi Rotinonhsote (Language Nest)—Implemented by the Akwesasne Freedom School, the language nest provides a full immersion daycare for children 10 months to 3 years old. Their mission statement is “to restore Kanienkeha as a first language in our babies, who will grow into natural speaking young people while learning the cultural and traditional teaching of our people.” With ACR support, they were able to secure caregivers/ staff fluent in Kanienkeha.

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