



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUB**  
OF THE BEMIDJI AREA

**IGNITE: BELIEVE & BUILD GRANT**  
**EVALUATION**  
**REPORT**

**YEAR 2: SEPTEMBER '22 - MAY '23**



# WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE

---

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) tapped Ignite Afterschool to administer this grant program. The grants are part of federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, specifically the 1% dedicated to afterschool programs in the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III.)

Believe & Build Afterschool grants are designed to support comprehensive afterschool programs that meet the academic, social-emotional, and mental health needs of historically underserved students impacted by COVID-19.

Because Believe & Build Afterschool grants fund afterschool programs to increase positive outcomes for young people. Through Believe & Build Afterschool, we'll be disbursing approximately \$12.5 million to community-based organizations in Minnesota that provide comprehensive, evidence-based afterschool programs over a 30-month time period.

Ignite Afterschool has a great partner on board to help make this vision a reality — Youthprise. Both organizations share a commitment to closing the opportunity gaps experienced by many young people and are a leader in advancing racial equity and youth leadership.

"Together we **BELIEVE** we can **BUILD** the capacity for **AFTERSCHOOL** to make a positive impact in the lives of even more young people throughout Minnesota."



# Table of Contents

---

**01 — The Need**

**02 — The Goal**

**03 — Our Partners**

**04 — ZooU Data**

**05 — Family Feedback**

**09 — Pulse Checks**

**10 — Youth Interviews**

**12 — Continuous Improvement**



# THE NEED

---

The youth in the city of Bemidji and Beltrami County are up against some staggering statistics according to data available via United States Census, KidsCount, Minnesota Department of Education, local school district data and community needs assessment. All statistics come from these sources, unless otherwise cited below.

## **Academic Needs:**

1. ISD#31 graduates approximately 76% of its students annually (MN Department of Education) and only 46% of Native students (Bemidji Pioneer, March 6, 2020).
2. Lack of mentoring for struggling students is evidenced that 38.6% of 9th graders and 31.9% of 11th graders reported that they didn't have other adults in the community that care about them (answering "not at all", and only "a little").
3. Alcohol/Drugs: 25.5% of 11th grade students report tobacco product usage and 40.5% reported alcohol, marijuana or other drug use in the past year, higher than state averages.
4. 41.4% of 9th graders reported they have felt down, depressed or hopeless every day or several days a week; 57.3% have felt nervous, anxious or on edge every day or several days a week.

## **Social and Emotional Needs:**

1. Beltrami County ranks #2 in overall poverty and #4 in children/youth poverty (out of 87 Minnesota Counties), moved up from #5 2020.
2. 18.4% of Beltrami County lives in poverty, including over 25% of children (up 1%+ from last year) and more than double the state average at 9.6%. Within the city of Bemidji over 27% of the community lives in poverty, 3% greater than reported in prior years.
3. Nearly 57% of the school-aged children in Beltrami County qualified for the Free/Reduced lunch and breakfast program of which 48.1% attend ISD#31. This is 20% higher than the state average for Minnesota (29%) and 4th highest in the state of Minnesota. According to a 2019 report from the Bemidji Community Food Shelf, families visited over 11,611 times: this number represents 40,654 individual people, and nearly 41% were under the age of 17.

## **Mental Health Needs:**

1. The instances of child maltreatment is 50.9 (rate per 1,000) and far greater than the state average (30.7). There are also tragic levels of children who live in out-of-home care (96.8) which is nearly EIGHT times the state average (12.5), according to CHIP.
2. Given how childhood trauma damages the developing brain, one should not be surprised that survivors struggle with addiction. In the groundbreaking Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) study, people reporting multiple ACEs were up to five times more likely to abuse substances such as alcohol or heroin than were people who grew up in more nurturing environments. One recent study of alcoholic inpatients found that 55% had suffered childhood trauma exposure. Another put the figure higher, at 65%. Opioid addiction is comparable at about 66%. (Childhood Trauma and Addiction, 2018, Donna Bevan-Lee)
3. Foster Care Crisis in Beltrami County: Beltrami County finds itself in a dire financial position because the number of children in out-of-home placements has been steadily on the rise the past few years, driven mostly by the opioid crisis. In 2008, the number of children in out-of-home placement was 471. By 2014 the number was 919 and in 2017, there were 1,284 children in out-of-home placement. At the end of 2017, the total expense for out-of-home placements was \$11.9 million.



# THE GOAL

---

Given the staggering statistics facing Bemidji youth, the Club is positioned to play a **critical role** in meeting those needs.

The Club expanded its current program to help 75 youth **re-engage and reconnect**— focusing on health, wellness and learning— after this time of extended challenges and isolation.

The Club will build and implement additional partnership programs, and provide mental health support and mentoring. The Club offers opportunities for youth to develop strong, trusting relationships that research shows can help **buffer the impact** of adverse childhood experiences and trauma.

Research shows that indicators in student engagement such as attendance, behavior, and classroom performance rise when students participate regularly in quality afterschool programs **like the Boys & Girls Club**.



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUB**  
OF THE BEMIDJI AREA



# OUR PARTNERS

## Bemidji Area Schools - ISD#31

75

students  
identified

Social workers, teachers, and district leadership identify students who need more support to be referred in as Club members to access Club programs, caring staff, and partner organization offerings.



## Headwaters Science Center

Provides STEM lessons during 4 weekly field trips to the center. Additionally, constructed a Junior Docent program for students to help teach and engage other youth and families in STEM through volunteer opportunities.



HEADWATERS  
SCIENCE CENTER

103

field trips for  
STEM lessons

142

youth  
participated

4

JR Docents  
(Club teens)

128

youth participated  
in SEL lessons

3

Family Nights  
hosted

## Peacemaker Resources

Provides expertise on social-emotional learning by hosting weekly onsite youth activities, a multi-generational approach with 3 family events, and multiple professional development trainings to develop staff skills.



63

onsite SEL lessons  
implemented

11

field trips  
to the library

50

members attended  
a field trip

## Bemidji Public Library

Hosts weekly fields trips to give tours, guides youth through library card application process, and provides hands-on approach to understanding what the library has to offer.



23

days of  
lessons

142

members participated  
in Scouts lessons

## Scouts of America

Club members are enrolled as Scouts to access onsite lessons hosted by Scouts leaders. Youth participate in an array of activities, including games, projects, skits, stunts, songs, out



BOY SCOUTS  
OF AMERICA

# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

---

## Ignite Advisory Team (IAT)

The team is made up of key partners that meet on a quarterly basis. This team is responsible for planning and oversight of the implementation of the grant objectives, as well as interpreting data and making data-informed decisions about program adjustments. The Club administers a survey prior to each meeting to gather strengths/challenges that are reviewed by grant evaluation specialist for themes. This team provides oversight to ensure Ignite partners are included and engaged to best serve our young people.

## M3 Huddle

M3: Making Meaning with Multiple Data Sets is a continuous program improvement method for youth programs. It focuses on four types of data that research shows are closely linked to program excellence: Quality Practices, Attendance & Participation, Participant Outcomes, and Program Experiences. As a grant recipient we had the opportunity to send a team of 4 to participate in a M3 Huddle to better understand and utilize our data for improvement for our young people.

Key Take-Aways/Action Steps (no particular order):

1. Adapt Club's Pulse Check system into partner programs
2. Cross-reference Clubs & HSC curriculums for overlap and shared resources
3. Adopt a formal observation tool for evaluation
4. Create and adopt a shared data agreement between all ignite partners
5. Intentional reflection process to build an improvement plan
6. Develop a shared access platform for partners

## Evaluation Specialist

Dr. Sarah Cronin's PhD is in counseling psychology. Her passion is helping students gain knowledge and experience that will help them reach their professional goals. Clinically, her specialty is in college counseling and emerging adulthood. Her research endeavors focus on equitable access to mental health services in education settings

She uses hierarchical linear modeling to account for individual, school, and community factors that impact student success and qualitative approaches to gain further understanding of student perspectives.



# FAMILY FEEDBACK

On the evening of Tuesday, March 14th, the Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area hosted a family night encouraging fun and interaction together while completing evaluation activities.

A total of 17 families attended, 8 of which have Club memberships thanks to the Ignite grant. In total, 59 people participated; 23 were adults and 36 were youth.

Families were invited to complete worksheets together that involved drawing and talking together. After dinner was provided, attendees could then go to the gym to complete an activity together. All worksheet responses and activity results provide evaluation data. The next few pages are a summary of these results.



The data support the notion that the Club is a fun, safe, and supportive environment for youth. The evaluation results from this family night highlight and will help guide ways the Club could improve such as continuing to find ways to help kids feel like they belong, addressing and preventing bullying, and increasing ways to represent the cultures of Club families.



Hand-Drawing



Conversation Starters



Four Corners



Word Association



Staff Worksheet



# FAMILY FEEDBACK



## Hand-Drawing

All attendees at family night (youth and adults) were invited to complete a worksheet about the Club. They traced their hand and then wrote responses to five prompts on the fingers of their hand drawing. The prompts they responded to were as follows:

<b>Pinky</b>	<b>Where does the Club “come up short”?</b>	Many respondents indicated there is nothing the Club could do better. Other common responses indicated more new games would be nice.
<b>Ring</b>	<b>If the Club could promise you one thing, what would you want it to be?</b>	Most responses described that the Club is safe and that youth safety should stay a priority.
<b>Middle</b>	<b>What has the Club done that helped you learn and grow?</b>	Two themes from these answers indicated that projects/games helped youth learn and grow but also that the Club’s attention towards social and emotional skills are also helpful.
<b>Pointer</b>	<b>What would you tell a family member or friend about the Club?</b>	Most responses reported they would recommend the Club to others and that it is safe and fun with great staff.
<b>Thumb</b>	<b>What does the Club do that deserves a thumbs up?</b>	Most answers indicated the Club is an inclusive, supportive space where kids have fun and learn.

Eighteen people submitted a worksheet; 13 were fully complete and the remaining 5 included some but not all answers. All responses were used regardless of whether there were responses to each prompt.



## Conversation Starters

Each family unit was given a sheet with questions to talk about as a family and to write responses that represent their collective answers. They answered these questions:

- What is a good memory you have of the Club?
- What can you do to take care of yourself when feeling big feelings?
- Adult family members, do you see your child(ren) use any of the answers above when they are feeling big feelings?
- What have you learned at the Science Center Family Nights or Headwaters Science Center during Club field trips?
- What sort of books would you be interested in checking out from the library?
- My children could use more help with...?

Eight families submitted a Conversation Starter worksheet. Themes are discussed in the table below:

<b>Fun at the Club</b>	Most good memories are from playing at the Club both during regular program hours and during Family Nights
<b>Calming Big Feelings</b>	Families reported that their youth sometimes or always use strategies such as breathing, talking to someone, or having quiet time when feeling big feelings
<b>Learning Science</b>	Youth reported learning about animals (especially tarantulas and reptiles) and gravity
<b>Library Books</b>	A wide variety of books were mentioned with no apparent theme. Titles ranged from graphic novels, fantasy, and nonfiction.
<b>Continued Growth</b>	There was also a wide range of topics for which youth could use more help including handwriting, math, reading, coping skills, getting schoolwork done, drawing, sports skills, and online/app skills such as how to use the library app.

# FAMILY FEEDBACK

## Four Corners

After dinner the families went to the gym for one final activity. There were four corners with big signs saying, “Very True”, “True”, “Not Very True”, and “Not True at All.” Questions were read and people ran to the corner of the gym by the sign that represented their answer. The questions included fun, goofy questions alongside questions specific to this evaluation. The first half of the questions were for individuals (youth and adults) to answer then the second half of the questions were for families to answer as a collective unit.

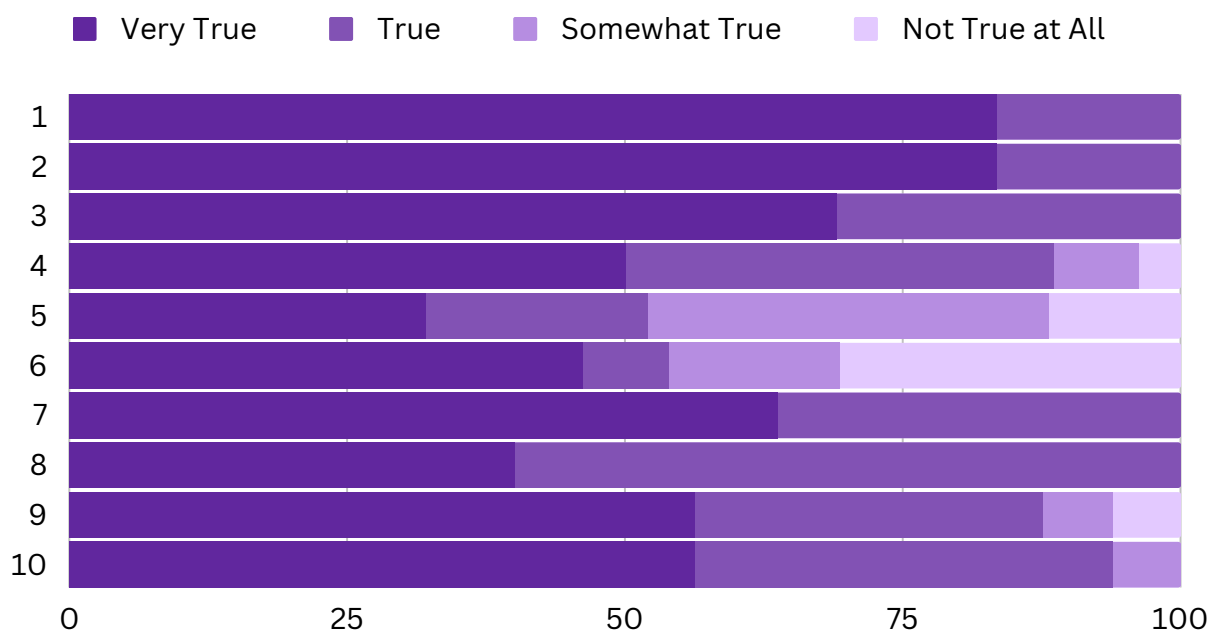
Questions participants answered as individuals (n=29)

1. I feel like I belong at the Club
2. I have fun at the Club
3. I feel safe at the Club
4. Staff help Club members solve conflicts with each other
5. I feel like bullying is a problem at the Club

Questions participants answered as families (n=16)

6. The Club helped us get connected to the library
7. My family has a science center membership through the Club
8. My culture is represented at the Club
9. I would like more representation of my culture at the Club
10. Family nights are fun

The table below displays the percentage of responses per corner for each question:

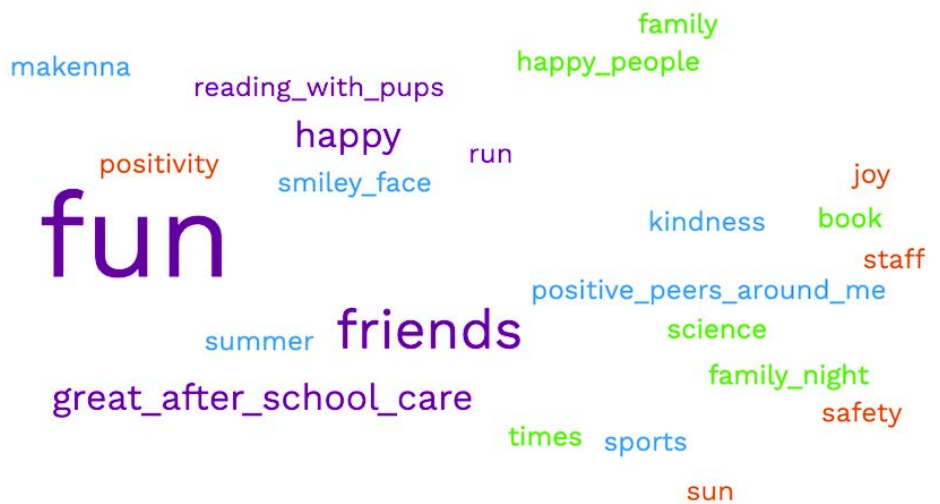


# FAMILY FEEDBACK



## Word Association

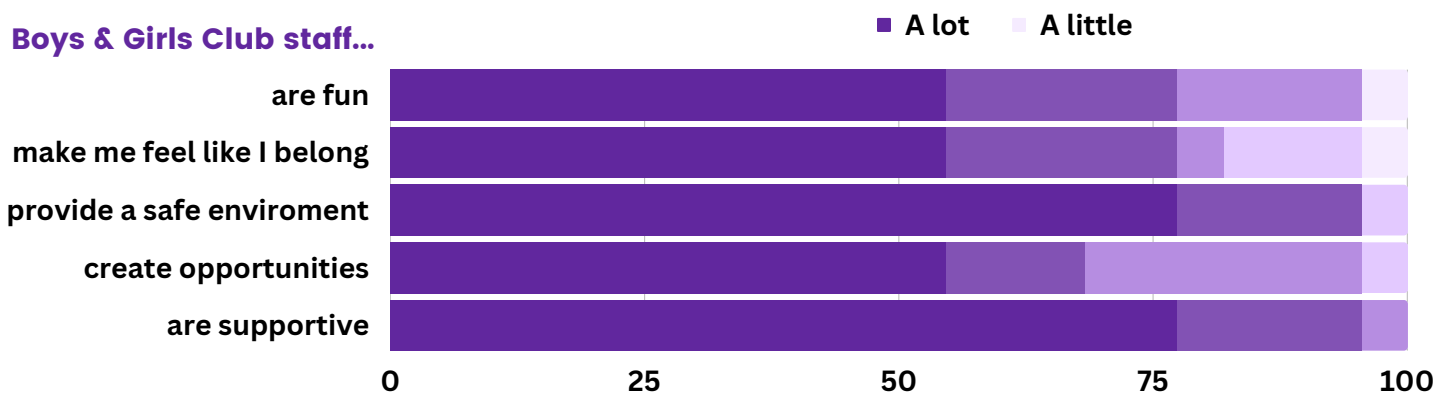
Large pieces of paper were on each table during the family night for any attendees to draw or write on. The center of the paper said, "When I think of the Club...." There were 35 responses to this prompt. The word cloud (right) represents the themes of the responses. The size of the word represents the proportion of the answers. In other words, larger words were mentioned more often.



## Staff Worksheet

All attendees at the family night (youth and adults) were invited to complete a worksheet about staff. They rated staff on a 5-point scale ranging from "A little" to "A lot." Twenty-two people submitted a completed worksheet. Most responses indicated staff are fun, make youth feel like they belong, provide a safe environment, create opportunities and are supportive (n=22). See the chart below for the results. Adults were also invited to respond to the prompt "write a few comments about how you think the staff are doing." Responses indicated the staff are kind, amazing, and that they care about the Club kids.

### Boys & Girls Club staff...



# PULSE CHECKS

Each year as part of our National Youth Outcomes Initiative (NYOI), Boys & Girls Clubs of the Bemidji Area surveys Club members about our priority outcome areas of Academic Success, Good Character & Leadership, and Healthy Lifestyles. We also ask them about their Club Experience, which provides important data to determine ways we can improve program quality and staff practices. These data are submitted to Boys & Girls Club of America and returned to our Club as an aggregate each July. This allows us to benchmark our program across others in our state, region, and country.

Valuable as this data is, to impact kids right now, we need to be continuously learning what is and isn't working inside the Club so we can make improvements and adjustments to better meet our goal of a high-quality Club Experience. That's why we implement Pulse Checks.

As the name implies, Pulse Checks are intended to help our staff keep a finger on the pulse of Club members. Pulse Checks are a fun way to gain timely insights to the Club Experience by quickly and easily collecting data.

Pulse Checks are also an effective youth development strategy: they promote a culture of openness and learning, conveying to our youth that we do care about our members' experiences and we want their input.

Pulse Check questions focus area include: Sense of Belonging, Emotional Safety, Physical Safety, Fun, Adult Connections, Staff Expectations, Recognition, and Peer Interactions. Each day our Club polls 1 question within one of the focus areas. Below are two examples of the positive impact from implementing, evaluating, and adapting Club Experience from the ongoing Pulse Checks.



## **Do you have friends at the Club you can talk to if you have a problem?**

Fall 2022: 28% never, 48% sometimes, 24% always  
Spring 2023: 7% never, 22% sometimes, 71% always

## **Do staff try to get to know you?**

Fall 2022: 15% never, 33% sometimes, 52% always  
Spring 2023: 4% never, 30% sometimes, 66% always



# ZOOU DATA



A strengths-based social-emotional learning (SEL) assessment tool, ZooU is used to assess social-emotional outcomes, for grades 1-5. It assesses six SEL competencies (Communication, Cooperation, Emotion Regulation, Empathy, Impulse Control, and Social Initiation). Through the platform, youth are offered the opportunity to play games that assess their SEL skills. Performance scores are captured. Norm-referenced scores are reported at individual and aggregate levels. Scores are provided by each sub-category and calculated together for an overall SEL competence score. ZooU scores have a significant positive association with teacher/staff ratings of social skills, and this tool has evidence of high internal consistency, reliability, and validity in the prediction of school-based outcomes, including externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. Scores are used to evaluate which SEL categories youth are strong in and which ones need improvement. Club staff evaluate areas of improvement to implement additional activities and exercises to build and strengthen these skills.

	Impulse Control	Communication	Cooperation	Social Initiation	Empathy	Emotion Regulation
<b>Grades 1-3 (n = 21)</b>	36.3% (32.7)	80.3% (19.6)	49.6% (31.5)	30.3% (22.3)	61.7% (24.3)	37.4% (25.7)
<b>Grades 4-5 (n = 10)</b>	45.5% (32.4)	75% (30.5)	36.5% (30.7)	35.2% (35.2)	59.5% (28.5)	60.2% (18.5)
<b>All Students (n = 61)</b>	<b>39.3% (32.3)</b>	<b>78.6% (23.3)</b>	<b>45.4% (31.4)</b>	<b>31.9% (26.6)</b>	<b>61% (25.3)</b>	<b>44.8% (25.7)</b>

The mean standard deviation for each average is in parentheses. This gives you an idea of the variability of the scores. The majority of youth score within the range from one standard deviation below and above the mean. For example, the average Impulse Control score for all youth was 39.3%, and the standard deviation was 32.3. That means that approximately 68% of the youth scored between 7% and 71.6%.

# YOUTH INTERVIEWS

---

The last week of the 2022-2023 academic year (in May 2023), the Ignite evaluation consultant, Dr. Sarah Cronin, completed 8 interviews with Ignite youth at the Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area. Ignite Director, Talaya Kautz, also participated in interviews to ensure youth felt safe and comfortable given her strong relationships with Club members. The grades of the youth ranged from 1st to 9th grade, with two people from each Club age group represented: Mightys (grades 1-3), Juniors (grades 4-5), Tweens (grades 6-7) and Teens (grades 8-12). Three of the interviewees appeared female and five appeared male. The youth were asked questions about their experience at the Club, how they like to spend their time at the Club, and how they have changed as a result of the Club. For example, “How is it at the Club?”, “What activities do you do at the Club?”, and “In what way has the Club helped you change?” The wording of questions was adjusted so each interview could be developmentally appropriate for comprehension. Follow up questions were asked to deepen understanding of each interviewee’s responses.

Overall, every youth interviewed described having fun at the Club. They all said they enjoyed physical activity in the gym, spending time with friends, and that they experience positive emotions when at the Club. Every youth was able to identify multiple staff they trust and could go to for help if they needed it. Example quotes from the interviews are below:

- “[The Club] makes me like myself” – Might Ignite youth (2nd grade)
- “Just being here makes me happy” – Junior Ignite youth (4th grade)
- “I feel better about myself” – Junior Ignite youth (4th grade)
- “[The Club is] where I can like hang out with friends and not feel not like uncomfortable” – Tween Ignite youth (6th grade)
- “The people are all nice and kind” – Teen Ignite youth (9th grade)

The interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. Those themes were then organized to fit the Boys & Girls Club’s key program areas of academic success, healthy lifestyles, and character & leadership. See the table on page 11 for a description of themes along with quotes that exemplify the data for each theme.



# YOUTH INTERVIEWS

Theme	Exemplary Core Idea	Frequency*
<b>Academic Success</b>		
Science Center learning	"I have fun and learn things at the Science Center"	typical
Animals at the science center	"I like the animals at the science center, especially the snakes."	typical
Staff help with homework	"I don't do my homework at the Club often, but when I do, staff are helpful."	typical
Computers are fun	"I like games on the computers."	typical
Reading Time	"Quiet reading time is nice."	variant
Math Activities	"Even if I don't have homework, there are math activity options."	variant
<b>Healthy Lifestyles</b>		
Club members have fun	"I have fun at the Club."	general
Gym is a favorite location	"I like to do fun activities in the gym."	general
Positive emotions	"Being at the Club makes me feel happy."	general
Time with friends	"I get to spend time with my friends at the Club."	general
New friends at the Club	"I have made new friends at the Club."	typical
Games	"I like to play games at the Club."	typical
Outside	"I like to play outside at the Club"	variant
<b>Character &amp; Leadership</b>		
Self-Confidence	"The Club makes me feel better about myself."	typical
Independence	"I have freedom while at the Club."	typical
Great staff	"The staff are kind. They talk to and play games with me. They make me feel safe."	typical
Improved social skills	"I probably have improved social skills because I go to the Club."	variant

\*General = every interviewee had at least one statement supporting the theme

Typical = more than half but not every interviewee had a statement supporting the theme

Variant = less than half but multiple interviewees had a statement supporting the theme

The data from the end of the year interviews gives evidence that some of the program outcomes of the Ignite Building Better Communities program are being met. Specifically, there is evidence that youth are learning content that could benefit their academic performance, feel good about themselves, feel safe at the Club, are connected to adult mentors, and have improving social and emotional skills.

The Ignite Believe & Build grant will continue through June 2024. During that time we will continue to strengthen our partnerships and collaboration to serve those who need us most.



## **BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF THE BEMIDJI AREA**

**We thank you for your  
continued support to help  
young people succeed.**

The youth displayed in this report are Club members who may or may not be youth identified through the Ignite grant. At the Club we do not identify or separate Ignite youth from other youth; to us they are all Club members. Offerings and opportunities are the same for all Club youth and families.