

*SOURCE: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS, MAY 2002*

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## **KIDS LEARN ABORIGINAL CULTURE AT POW WOW CLUB**

Two nights a week, the children meet to dance and sing. They are part of the Pow-Wow Club, and while they are having fun, something much more important is happening with each rhythmic stomp of their feet.

They are learning about their culture. They are learning to take pride in who they are.

“The Pow-Wow Club provides a chance for Aboriginal children to reconnect with their heritage,” said Michelle Boivin, director of communications for the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. “They learn to dance, sing and smudge. There’s a real thirst for information out there. More children are really interested in learning about their culture.”

This program is part of the Rising Sun: Sons and Daughters of the Four Directions initiative, which also includes the Aboriginal Scouts and community sweat lodge projects.

Originally started as a way for Aboriginal children in foster care to reconnect with their roots, the Pow Wow Club has grown steadily during the past nine months.

“This is one of our biggest success stories. We still have foster parents bringing in children, but now we also have families from the community bringing their kids,” Boivin said. “Even former gang members are coming out and learning to dance.”

The children are picked up and driven home by volunteers. After two hours of dancing, they are given a nutritious snack.

The Pow Wow Club now sees an average of 80 kids per night – a total of over 160 kids a week, said Boivin.

“Some kids come to both days,” she said. “They get a sense of belonging and identity from taking part in the activities. They seem so happy to be there. You can see it on their faces.”

Children from the club will be performing during the opening and closing ceremonies of the North American Indigenous Games this summer.

“Before the Pow Wow Club, many of these children hadn’t had the chance to learn the great things about their community,” said Boivin. “If all they see about their community is negative, how can they not feel bad about themselves?”

The club is open to youth from ages five to 18.

“The older ones end up being a mentor to the little ones,” Boivin explained. “This empowers them, and gives them a chance to develop leadership skills.”

Because of the huge demand, Ma Mawi desperately needs more volunteers to help out with the driving and snack making. They are also looking for more storytellers, drummers and dancers from the Aboriginal community.

“The demand is definitely there for this type of activity. It’s crazy!” laughed Boivin. “But unless we get more volunteers to help out, we’ll be struggling.”

The club is free for all participants. It is funded by Child and Family Services and Neighbourhoods Alive.

It is held on Tuesdays at the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre on 45 Robinson from 6 to 8 p.m., and on Wednesdays at the West Broadway Community Centre on Young Street from 6 to 8 p.m.

If you would like to volunteer, please call Ma Mawi @ 925-0326.

Ma Mawi has been a force in the community for 17 years. They have four locations in the inner city and North End.

In addition to the Pow Wow Club, the centre also has a number of other programs. Their Aboriginal Scouts program is closely related to the Boy Scout Program, but with aboriginal culture incorporated. The centre also runs adolescent parent support projects to help young mothers and fathers learn to be good parents.

For more information on Ma Mawi or its various programs, you can contact them by calling 925-0300 or visit their website at [www.mamawi.com](http://www.mamawi.com)

They are located at 743 Ellice Ave., 318 Anderson St., 330 Blake St., and 94 McGregor St.