

2024-2025 Natural Helper Program Fidelity Report



Developed in partnership with The Keya Foundation Inc.,
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte Schools and Sacred Heart Center



Cheyenne - Eagle Butte School

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Executive Summary

The Natural Helpers program, a pilot peer-support initiative at Cheyenne-Eagle Butte Schools, was implemented with high fidelity during the 2024-2025 school year in partnership with The Keya Foundation and Sacred Heart Center. The program successfully met its objectives, exceeding goals for sessions held and quality of delivery. Despite a smaller cohort of nine students, the pilot's success warrants its continuation and expansion.

The program's impact, evaluated through quantitative and qualitative data from both Natural Helper students and the wider 6th-grade peer group, demonstrates significant positive outcomes:

- **Natural Helper Students** showed a marked increase in confidence, empathy, and leadership skills. They reported a strong shift toward feeling more equipped to support their peers, a deeper connection to Lakota culture, and high satisfaction with the program.
- **The Wider 6th Grade Peer Group** experienced a successful, positive shift in school belonging and cultural pride, along with increased awareness of substance use prevention.

A key recommendation for future programming is to address the gap between students' sense of belonging and their comfort in seeking individual help from adults. Future efforts should focus on building trust and strengthening confidential support systems to ensure students not only feel included but are also empowered to seek assistance when needed.

Program Overview

The Natural Helpers Program was implemented during the 2025–2026 school year at Cheyenne-Eagle Butte Schools as a pilot program in partnership with The Keya Foundation, Inc., and Sacred Heart Center. This peer-support initiative builds on natural support networks already present in schools. Students often turn to trusted friends and adults when facing challenges, and the program equips these peer leaders with tools to recognize signs of distress, offer meaningful support, and connect others with appropriate resources.

Through training, students develop leadership, empathy, and resilience while helping to create a more supportive school environment that actively addresses mental health needs through school-based activities and events. Implementation fidelity results are based on facilitator checklists completed by lead advisor, Carleyn Petersen. Impact data come from pre- and post-surveys with students, 6th-grade peer surveys, and qualitative feedback from participants. The pilot demonstrated successful adherence to program objectives, dosage, participant attendance, and quality of delivery.

Benefits of Involvement

Partnership

The collaborative alliance between Keya Foundation, C-EB schools and Sacred Heart Center yields numerous benefits for all entities. Through the utilization of the Natural Helpers program, we enhance positive student and peer engagement, lower substance use risk, and increase protective factors that shield youth from risky behavior. Simultaneously, partners derive advantages by community collaboration, shared mission, stakeholder momentum, and more, all cultivating an environment that promotes the holistic development and well-being of the community as a whole. This symbiotic relationship not only fortifies the foundation of all organizations but also contributes to the overall enhancement of the social fabric within the community.

Evaluation of Programs

Evaluating programming with students benefits everyone involved. Not all proven to work programs benefit the individual school environment, and community culture. By evaluating the program, we can determine if needs are being met for families, community, and school.

Goal Tracking

Evaluating a proven program is integral to effective goal tracking in schools. It provides a structured approach to measure progress, make informed decisions, allocate resources strategically, and continuously enhance the overall educational experience for students. Benefit to community programs is...

Potential Funding Opportunities




The acquisition of valuable student data opens doors to increased funding prospects. Many funding entities seek more than just a promising idea; they require compelling data that demonstrates the identification of gaps and the effective implementation of proven frameworks and curricula to address those gaps. This prevention science approach not only strengthens proposals but also aligns with the expectations of funders looking to make a meaningful impact through targeted and well-supported initiatives.

Implementation Fidelity Results

Piloted in Cheyenne-Eagle Butte Schools grade 6 | Prepared by The Keya Foundation Inc

Disclaimer: The attendance percentage was adjusted because the last five students joined in January; any absences recorded before they started are not included. For program saturation, the initial goal was 15 students, but nine applied and completed the program. This is reflected below, though there is potential for a full program in future years.

Implementation Fidelity Results

Fidelity Component	Goal	Overall Results for 2024-2025	Achieved Goal
Adherence (i.e. how much of the content was covered and major modifications to the curriculum)			
Content Covered	70-100% of the objectives met	70-100% of the objectives were met	
Modifications	No and/or few major modifications to the program objectives	Changes in activities due to student input, but objectives were still met	
Dosage (i.e. the number, length, and frequency of sessions)			
Sessions Held	7 - 1.5 hour monthly regular meetings 2 - Half or all day field trips, community events or trainings	11 – 1.5 hour bi weekly regular meetings 3 - 3 hour Saturday School meetings 6 - Half or all day field	

		trips, community events or trainings	
Participant Involvement (<i>i.e. attendance and saturation, the total number of families your community plans to serve</i>)			
Attendance	70-100% of Natural Helpers participate in sessions held	70%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Saturation	15 students enrolled	9 students enrolled	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of Delivery (<i>i.e. location and special circumstances, etc.</i>)			
Room Set-up	Good set-up (3.0 or higher on a 4-point scale) Central Location Materials and supplies ready	4 points in overall set-up	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Based on these results, the Natural Helpers program in C-EB Schools was implemented with very high fidelity, and only a few challenges and problems arose during the sessions. We thank you for your commitment to providing a high quality program in your community. Based on the positive response, we highly recommend continuing and expanding the program into the upcoming school year.

Program Impact Data

Natural Helper Students

The survey data from participating Natural Helper students indicates a highly successful program with a significant positive impact on their skills, confidence, and personal development. Across nearly all measured metrics, there was a clear shift from general agreement (Somewhat Agree) in the pre-survey to strong agreement (Strongly Agree) in the post-survey. This demonstrates that the program not only met but exceeded its goals for the participating students.

Key Findings:

- **Significant Skill Development:** Students showed a marked increase in their confidence and knowledge of core Natural Helper skills. While they had a strong foundation beforehand, the program solidified their abilities to work cooperatively, recognize warning signs for mental health issues, and identify appropriate professional resources within their school and community. In the post-survey, responses to these questions were almost universally "Strongly Agree."
- **Enhanced Personal Well-being and Self-Help:** The program had a positive effect on students' personal growth. Post-survey results show a stronger belief in the importance of making healthy choices and using self-help skills to manage personal stress, with negative responses ("Somewhat Disagree") disappearing entirely.
- **Strengthened Cultural Connection:** The program was successful in reinforcing the seven Lakota values. Students' understanding of the values was consistently high, and their self-reported practice of these values both in their personal lives and with peers showed a noticeable positive shift.

- **High Program Satisfaction and Future Interest:** The students overwhelmingly rated the program as effective and engaging, with strong support from advisors and trainers. A key indicator of success is the high interest in joining again and the strong willingness to recommend the program to friends.
- **Increased Confidence and Impact:** Students reported a substantial increase in their confidence to deal with peer issues and their ability to provide emotional support. They also strongly believe the skills they learned will be useful in the future and that their participation had a positive impact on their peers.

The survey data provides compelling evidence that the Natural Helpers program was exceptionally effective for its participants. The students left the program feeling more confident, knowledgeable, and connected to their school community. The consistent shift towards "Strongly Agree" responses across all categories highlights that the training and activities successfully equipped them with practical skills while also fostering their personal and cultural growth.

Wider 6th Grade Peer Group Impact

This report summarizes the impact of a program based on a pre- and post-intervention survey of 71 students, with 61 completing the post-survey. The program's results indicate a successful approach to building a more positive and culturally-affirming school environment, particularly for students' collective well-being. The program's core components, focusing on Lakota culture, community, and health education, were effective in fostering a sense of belonging and significantly improving student awareness of substance abuse risks. These successes validate the program's fundamental design and its relevance to the student population.

However, the report also reveals a critical distinction between the program's positive influence on group-level belonging and its challenges in addressing individual, emotional vulnerability. While students feel more connected to their school community, there is a concerning and contradictory trend where they feel less comfortable seeking help when they are struggling. This suggests a potential gap: the program successfully created a supportive community atmosphere, but it may not have adequately built the one-on-one trust and psychological safety needed for students to ask for personal support.

Key Areas of Success

- **Substance Use Prevention:** The program was highly effective in this area. There was a notable increase in students' knowledge of the harms of alcohol and tobacco, as well as a strong gain in their belief that it is important to avoid these substances.
- **Cultural Pride:** A significant highlight of the program was the increase in Lakota cultural pride, with a 4.41% increase in students who felt "very much like me" regarding this statement. This demonstrates the program's success in fostering a stronger sense of identity.
- **Belonging and Inclusion:** Students showed a greater sense of belonging at school. The number of students who felt completely excluded decreased by over 9%, while the number who felt "somewhat" included increased by nearly 20%.

Areas for Improvement

- **Emotional Support and Seeking Help:** A concerning trend was observed in students' comfort level with asking for help. The percentage of students who felt "not like me at all" on this measure increased by nearly 16%. This suggests that while students might know who to talk to, a barrier exists in their willingness to seek assistance. Similarly, students' confidence in their self-help skills declined slightly.
- **Adult and Peer Connections:** The report indicates a decrease in students' strong feelings of connection to adults at school. The number of students who felt "very much" connected to at least one adult dropped by over 10%. Additionally, a slight decrease was noted in the number of students who felt they had friends to talk to for support.
- **Natural Helper Program:** While more students reported talking to a Natural Helper after the program, their overall comfort level approaching a helper slightly declined. This suggests a

need to better understand and address any hesitations students have with the program.

In summary, the program has established a strong foundation of community and awareness. The next step is to leverage this foundation to address the specific, interpersonal hurdles that prevent students from seeking help. Future efforts should focus on strengthening confidential support systems and building trust between students and available resources, transforming general feelings of belonging into confident, individual action when help is needed.

Qualitative Evidence

Beyond the statistical data and survey results, the personal experiences and direct feedback from participants and their families offer a powerful look into the program's transformative impact. The following qualitative evidence, collected from students, a parent, and a teacher advisor, provides a human voice to the numbers. These quotes collectively highlight how the Natural Helpers program successfully fostered personal growth, built confidence, strengthened cultural identity, and created a more supportive and proactive school environment. They underscore the program's ability to turn abstract concepts like empathy and leadership into tangible actions and profound personal discoveries.

"One of my favorites so far is when we took a field trip to the Dupree school for Dupree's Lakota Club and prepared the Choke Cherries and meat." - Natural Helper student

"The best thing that I learned about is the Cansasa Harvest because we got to learn about traditional tobacco." - Natural Helper student

"I loved talking and letting the people know they are seen and they can talk to one of the natural helpers." - Natural Helper student

"I like being apart of natural helpers, it's something fun to do. It also teaches you things about empathy and our culture." - Natural Helper student

"Natural Helpers helped me figure out that I enjoy helping people." - Natural Helper student

"I like being a Natural Helper because being a Natural Helper is about us helping people with feelings and emotions." - Natural Helper student

"Participating in the different activities helped boost my confidence in myself." - Natural Helper Student

"He said that he can be the support to others that went through what he did and make sure that they feel supported and listened to and will help them in any way that he can to make sure that they are heard." - Parent of Natural Helper student

"I've seen my student grow in her cultural identity and be more confident in herself, helping peers, as well as her leadership skills." - Parent of Natural Helper Student

"As a teacher, the Natural Helpers brought things to our attention before an incident occurred, allowing us to intervene, meet as a team and discuss potential education opportunities at a grade level." - Teacher Advisor

Overall Summary and Recommendations

The Natural Helpers pilot program at Cheyenne-Eagle Butte Schools was a significant success, demonstrating high fidelity and a powerful positive impact on student participants and the wider 6th-grade student body.

The report details strong implementation fidelity, with the program exceeding its goals for curriculum coverage and number of sessions. Despite a smaller-than-expected enrollment (9 students instead of 15), the pilot program was executed with a high level of quality, and its success warrants continuation and expansion.

Key Findings

The program's impact was evaluated through both quantitative and qualitative data, revealing a clear positive effect:

- **Natural Helper Students:** Participating students showed a clear and powerful shift toward strong agreement across nearly all metrics. They reported significant increases in their skills, confidence, and personal growth. They felt more prepared to help peers, were more connected to their cultural identity, and had a stronger belief in their own self-help skills. The qualitative feedback from students, parents, and a teacher advisor confirms this, highlighting a newfound passion for helping others and a noticeable boost in confidence.
- **Wider 6th Grade Peer Group:** A pre- and post-survey of the broader 6th-grade class showed positive trends in school belonging and cultural pride, as well as a strong increase in substance abuse prevention awareness. However, the report identifies a critical area for improvement: students expressed feeling less comfortable seeking help from adults, suggesting a need to focus on building trust and promoting confidential support systems in future program years.

In conclusion, the Natural Helpers program effectively created a supportive and culturally-affirming environment and successfully developed student leaders. The data strongly supports its continuation, with a recommendation to focus future efforts on bridging the gap between students' sense of belonging and their comfort in seeking individual, personal support.

Acknowledgements and Thank You

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of the Natural Helpers pilot program during the 2024-2025 school year. This program's achievements are a direct result of the dedicated efforts and collaborative spirit of our core partners at Cheyenne-Eagle Butte Schools, Sacred Heart Center, and the Keya Foundation.

We would like to give special recognition to our invaluable volunteer advisors: Joan Upell, Stancee Moran, and Sianna Moran. Their passion, time, and mentorship were essential to this pilot. We also celebrate our nine amazing student participants, their families for their support, and the many community partners who helped shape and support this initiative.

The success of this inaugural cohort has surpassed our expectations for implementation. The experiences and memories from this pilot year will serve as a cherished foundation for the program's future. We are confident that these efforts will lead to stronger youth development and a more positive school environment for years to come.