2026 - 2027



TURTLE ISLAND CHARITY

Impact Report

Turtle Island Charity works to uplift indigenous individuals through listening to community voices, respecting traditional knowledge, and addressing long-standing inequities through a people-first and trauma-informed approach.





Play is the Doorway. Culture, confidence, education, relationships and belonging are what we build through it.

Turtle Island Charity helps trusted Canadian companies build meaningful presence in Indigenous communities — creating connection, awareness, and trust that lasts.

2026 - 2027



ABOUT US

Who We Are

Turtle Island Charity is an indigenous-led registered-charity that seeks to lead indigenous communities to success through its people-first approach. We strive to play an active role in reversing damage done by the residential school system and give the tools our people need to create success in their own lives. Our three biggest iniatives are adressing mental health, promoting education and pushing for reconciliation.

Our Mission

At Turtle Island Charity, our mission is to uplift Indigenous youth, families, and communities by creating safe, culturally grounded spaces for learning, healing, and connection. Through land-based education, mental wellness initiatives, and programs shaped by community voices, we empower young people to strengthen their identity, build confidence, and envision a future rooted in both tradition and opportunity. We believe that meaningful change begins with people listening to their needs, honouring their lived experiences, and supporting their growth with dignity and care.

Our Vision

We envision a future where every Indigenous child grows up confident in who they are, connected to their culture, and supported by a strong, thriving community. A future where Indigenous youth have access to education, mentorship, and leadership opportunities that reflect their strengths and honour their heritage. A future where Indigenous communities lead their own healing, rebuild their connections to land and language, and create systems shaped by resilience, pride, and self-determination.









OUR VALUES

Community First

We serve with communities, not for them. Community voices guide our programs, decisions, and long-term goals.

Cultural Integrity

We honour traditional teachings, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and land-based practices in everything we do. Culture is not an element of our work it is the foundation.

People Before Programs

Every child, youth, and family matters. We focus on relationships, trust, and creating safe, welcoming spaces where people feel seen, valued, and supported.

Healing Centred

We acknowledge the impacts of the residential school system and intergenerational trauma. Our approach prioritizes compassion, understanding, safety, and empowerment.

Accountability & Representation

As an Indigenous-led organization, we remain accountable to our communities and committed to representation that reflects the people we serve.

Strength Through Connection

Healing happens together. We promote collaboration between youth, families, mentors, Elders, and partner organizations to build strong, resilient communities.

TURTLE ISLAND CHARITY

OUR PROGRAMS

THRIVE Program

Tradition • Health & Healing • Resilience • Identity • Voice • Education

THRIVE connects our FUN and LEARN programs into one youth-development pathway, supporting Indigenous children and youth from community-based learning to post-secondary exploration.

FUN Program

Mobile Community Camps

FUN brings free, play-based programming directly into Indigenous communities. Working alongside Elders, Knowledge Keepers, community members, and trained facilitators, youth take part in culture, recreation, arts, STEM, environmental education, land-based learning, sports, and team-building.

LEARN Program

Campus-Based Education Experience

LEARN introduces Indigenous youth to post-secondary education through immersive campus experiences. Youth explore programs and careers, tour campus spaces, and connect with Indigenous students, Elders, professionals and support staff in culturally supportive environments.

Together, FUN & LEARN create a pathway rooted in culture, community, education, and opportunity.









OUR STORIES

"Lessons That Stay"
~Jason Johnson, Founder

On our first day visiting a northern community, we began the week with simple games like dodgeball. During one break, a 10-year-old quietly asked if I could tie his shoe. At first, it seemed like a joke, until he explained that he genuinely didn't know how. That small moment reminded us that sometimes what children need most isn't a program, but patience, attention, and care.



During another visit, our small team faced the challenge of teaching nearly 50 children how to fish. Rather than doing it all ourselves, we invited local youth to learn alongside us. The next day, those same youth became teachers and guided the younger kids with confidence and care. This is what we believe in: community care through community care and building strength that continues after we leave.





Instead of tying his shoes for him once, we turned it into a game throughout the week; practicing, laughing, trying again. On the last day, he rode his bike up to me and had the biggest smile on his face. He told me that he tied his shoes all by himself, and he put his foot out so I could see. This experience shows that we do more than just play games in the community, we also try to leave lessons.



On a different day, we gathered children to make bannock together. We measured and mixed ingredients, then walked into the forest, naming trees, animals, and sharing Indigenous values along the way. At the firepit, we showed the kids how to safely make a fire and find sticks to cook the bread. Once the bannock was ready, we shared the bread, finished with maple syrup donated by a community member. These moments show what our visits are truly about: **blending joy, culture, learning, and connection into everyday experiences.**

TURTLE ISLAND CHARITY

Reconciliation in Action







Turtle Island Charity's reconciliation mandate begins with Truth *Before* Reconciliation: real partnership requires understanding history, sovereignty, and the ongoing effects of colonial systems — not just claiming the word. From there, our mandate is to work alongside Indigenous communities, not on their behalf, building culturally grounded pathways that let youth stay rooted in their culture, land, and identity while rising into education, wellness, and leadership. This means resourcing what communities already carry — their knowledge, resilience, and direction — rather than centering our own organization, and choosing allyship over saviourism at every step. Guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, we measure reconciliation not by the places we visit, but by the trust we build and the pathways that remain long after we do.

Our programs are designed to close the gap in education, wellbeing, and mental health between indigenous people and the rest of Canada.

We support mental wellness without defining children by hardship.

Before our summer programs began, we prepared volunteers for an important reality: the children they were about to meet would be funny, curious, creative and incredibly fun to work with; but some would also be carrying experiences that no child should have to carry alone.

Our philosophy is simple:
Address the issues, but don't highlight them.

We do not want children defined by trauma.

We want them defined by their strengths, humour, interests, culture and potential.

That means creating environments where difficult conversations can happen without making hardship the centre of the program.

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There Is No One Way to Play

Turtle Island Charity was built around a simple idea:
Not every child connects in the same way.

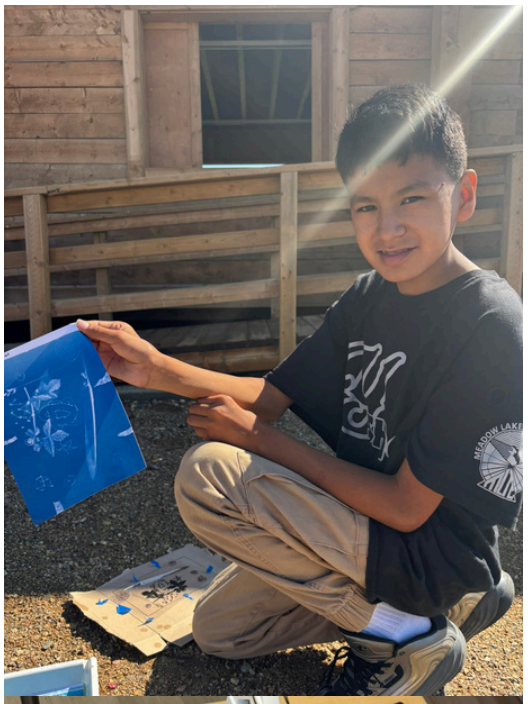
Some children will immediately run toward a soccer ball.
Another child might sit at an art table for an hour.
Another wants to catch bugs.
Another wants to look through a microscope.
Another wants to build something with their hands.
Another wants to learn about their culture.
And sometimes a teenager simply wants to sit around, joke with us and talk.

We don't believe children should have to fit themselves into our program.

We design programs flexible enough to fit them.

That's why our summer programming included sport and active play, arts and creativity, free play, environmental exploration, STEM and science, Indigenous cultural learning, land-based activities, traditional food, mentorship, future-oriented conversations, community meals and local leadership.
The variety is intentional.

Every activity becomes another doorway through which a young person might enter.







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Play Is More Than Recreation

We take play seriously.

That does not mean making play serious.
It means recognizing that children learn naturally when they are moving, experimenting, creating, laughing, exploring and making choices.

One of the best examples from this summer began with something incredibly simple: a bug net.

We included bug nets in children's welcome kits.
We thought the kids would enjoy them.
We underestimated just how much.

As soon as the nets came out, children were running around looking for insects, leaves and anything else they could discover.
Instead of saying, "Okay, playtime is over. Now we're doing science," we followed their interest.

We brought out handheld digital microscopes.
Suddenly children were examining what they had found.

Then we brought out full microscopes.
Without realizing it, children had moved from play into biology and environmental science.

A toy had become a learning tool.
Curiosity had become education.
That is the power of play.







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The Land Became Our Classroom

The same approach followed us to lakes in Saskatchewan.
Children and youth wanted to swim.
They wanted to fish.
So that is what we did.

But we also brought science equipment.

Youth collected lake water, measured its temperature, tested its pH and examined samples under digital and full microscopes.
They discovered that water that appeared completely ordinary contained a microscopic world they could not see with their own eyes.

The swimming continued.
The fishing continued.
The laughter continued.

But now questions were being asked too.
What is in this water?
What does pH mean?
Why is the lake healthy?
What lives here that we can't normally see?

We didn't have to choose between fun and education.
We made them the same experience.







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Culture Is Not an Add-On

Indigenous culture is not a special activity that we schedule for one hour and then move on from. It is woven throughout what we do.



At Magnetawan First Nation, a Knowledge Keeper opened our programming with the drum and spoke to children about respecting the natural world, learning Indigenous languages, respecting culture and never forgetting who they are.

Later, children helped gather materials from the land and participated in constructing traditional wigwam structures.
They helped move branches.
They helped build.
They painted artwork onto the covering.
And eventually they stood beside something tangible that they had helped create.

By the end of the program, two wigwams had been built.
Culture was no longer just something children had been told about.
They had participated in it.



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When Children Learn Culture, Families Can Reconnect Too

One of our most memorable moments happened when a grandmother arrived to pick up her grandchildren.
She asked what they had done that day.
We told her they had built a wigwam.

Her face changed. Nostalgia washed over her face, and her eyes lit up with excitement.

She began talking about how long it had been since she had seen one and how it reminded her of her childhood.
Then she asked whether we might someday build one near her home so that she could use it to help facilitate moon ceremonies for women in the community.

That moment stayed with us.
It reminded us that cultural revitalization doesn't move in only one direction.

We often talk about Elders and Knowledge Keepers passing culture down to children.

But sometimes a child learning about culture can awaken something in a parent or grandparent too.
Reconnection can move across generations.







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Culture Can Also Taste Like Home

At Ministikwan First Nation, the local youth worker told us that she had already planned to take the youth Saskatoon berry picking.

So we joined her.

The young people harvested berries from the land.
The following day, the berries were cleaned and turned into jam.
Bannock was prepared to eat alongside it.

In another community, children enjoyed Indian tacos made with bannock.

These activities created opportunities to talk about culture in the most natural way possible:
while doing it.
Picking.
Cooking.
Eating.
Sharing.
Learning.

Culture becomes strongest when it is lived.







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Sport Is Play. Art Is Play. Science Is Play.

Some of our favourite moments this summer had no complicated lesson plan behind them.

Children wanted soccer.
So we played soccer.

They wanted tag.
So we played tag.

They painted.
They experimented with cyanotype art.
They made origami.
They went fishing.
They swam.
They made s'mores.
And sometimes they simply hung out.

That diversity matters.

A child who struggles to connect during one activity may thrive during another.

Our job is not to decide which form of play is more valuable.

Our job is to provide enough opportunities that every child can find somewhere they feel successful.







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Sometimes Free Play Is Where the Most Important Work Happens

Especially with teenagers, we discovered that the activity itself was not always the most important thing.
Sometimes they just wanted us around.



They wanted to joke.
They wanted to talk.
They wanted to play sports.
They wanted to show us things.
They wanted to know about us.
And eventually, they let us know more about them.

We began to understand that these moments were not gaps between programming; *They were programming*.

Relationships create trust.
Trust creates conversation.



And conversation can create opportunities to talk about school, passions, culture, mental wellness and the future.

You cannot always schedule the moment when a young person decides an adult is safe enough to talk to.

You can only keep showing up until the opportunity exists.

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Address the Issues. Don't Highlight Them.

Indigenous communities continue to live with the effects of colonization, family disruption, loss, substance use, suicide and unequal access to services.

Those realities matter.

But they are not how we want to define children.

Our volunteers were prepared to meet young people who might be carrying difficult experiences.

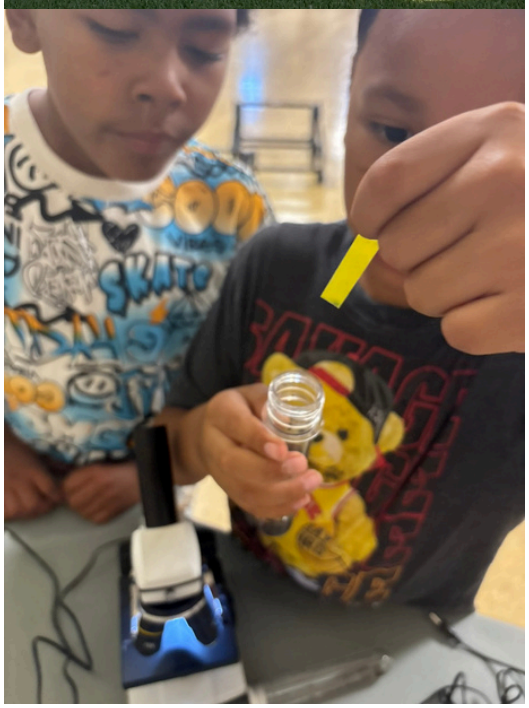
We also reminded them that they were about to meet some of the funniest, smartest, most creative and exciting kids they would ever work with.

Our philosophy is:
Address the issues, don't highlight them.

We do not build programs around what is "wrong" with children.
We build around what is *strong* within them.







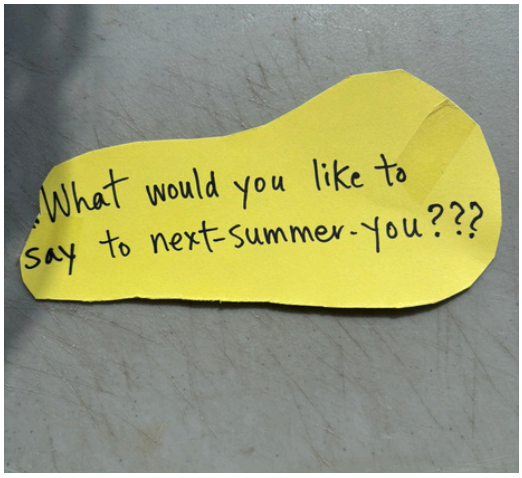
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Helping Young People Imagine Their Futures

Throughout the summer, we found different ways to start conversations about the future.
With younger children, we placed images of different future possibilities around the room and asked them what they might want to do when they grew up.
University.
A career.
Working within their home community.
Or simply:
I don't know yet.
All were valid answers.



With older youth, one volunteer developed a reflective art activity. Youth could write a letter to their future self—or imagine themselves five years in the future and write a message back to themselves today.

Some wrote jokes.
Others wrote deeply meaningful private messages.

We did not collect the letters.
They belonged to the youth.

The important part was asking them to imagine that future person.
Who might you become?
What would you want to tell yourself?
What are you capable of?



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Meeting Young People Where They Are

One of our best lessons in youth engagement happened when we attempted to conduct a traditional baseline/endline activity with teenagers.

They weren't interested.

They were, however, fascinated by the phone, microphone and gimbal our team was using.
So we changed the plan.

We gave them the equipment.
The teenagers began interviewing one another.

They asked about their favourite activities, their futures, culture, what they wanted to learn and what they thought of the program.
Suddenly an evaluation exercise became media production.

The youth owned it.

And every participating youth told us they wanted Turtle Island Charity to return.

That experience captured our model perfectly.
We listened.
We adapted.
And engagement followed.

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Rez Dogs: Unofficial Members of the Team

No matter which community we visited, there always seemed to be a few extra participants wandering into the program on four paws.

The rez dogs became unofficial members of the Turtle Island Charity team. They followed us around the community, visited the kids during activities, relaxed nearby while we worked, and somehow always seemed to know when food was being served.

The children loved them, the volunteers loved them, and they quickly became part of the everyday rhythm of camp.

They were there beside soccer games, cultural activities, outdoor adventures and quiet moments between programming. Sometimes they wanted attention, sometimes they wanted snacks, and sometimes they were perfectly happy just lying nearby watching everything happen.

For us, they became another small reminder of what made these programs feel so special: we weren't simply running activities in a community — for a few days, we became part of the community's everyday life.

And apparently, that included making a few new furry friends too.

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Finding Confidence In Unexpected Ways

Not every meaningful intervention involved a curriculum.
One volunteer was a hairdresser and she joined us in Saskatchewan and offered free haircuts to children and youth before the school year.

The haircuts became one of the biggest successes of the trip. Children who initially arrived somewhat shy would finish their haircut and immediately want to look at themselves.

They smiled.
They showed friends.
They carried themselves differently.

And afterward, many became noticeably more engaged.

It reminded us that confidence can come from very ordinary things.

Feeling cared for matters.
Feeling good about yourself matters.
Feeling like somebody thought you were worth showing up for matters.







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Caring Relationships Matter

One grandmother told us about a child in her care who had experienced extraordinary grief.

We offered to personally introduce ourselves to him so he would know who we were and hopefully feel comfortable attending camp.

He came.
He played.
He laughed.
He connected with our team.

Over time, he opened up about some of what he was feeling.
And he told us he wanted us to come back.

We cannot undo what children have experienced.
But we can make sure difficult experiences are not the only experiences available to them.

A child can be grieving and still laugh.
They can be struggling and still become fascinated by a microscope.
They can carry something heavy and still score a goal.

Joy does not erase hardship. But children deserve access to joy, happiness, and opportunity.

2026 Impact Report

Reconciliation Requires Local Leadership

Turtle Island Charity is Indigenous-led, but we also recognize that being Indigenous does not mean we automatically know what another First Nation needs.

That knowledge belongs to the community.
Approximately nine local people supported our work this summer through communications, cultural knowledge, program leadership, logistics and advice.

Their involvement helped us adapt activities to each community rather than delivering the exact same program everywhere.
In Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation, for example, we invited a local community member with a strong background and love for sport to lead soccer with the children.

Afterward, he told us how meaningful it had been to reconnect with something he loved and expressed an interest in working with us again.

That is the direction we want Turtle Island Charity to keep moving.

Not:
We came. We delivered. We left.

But:
We came. We listened. We worked together. And next time, we build even more together.







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Indigenous Knowledge Has Value

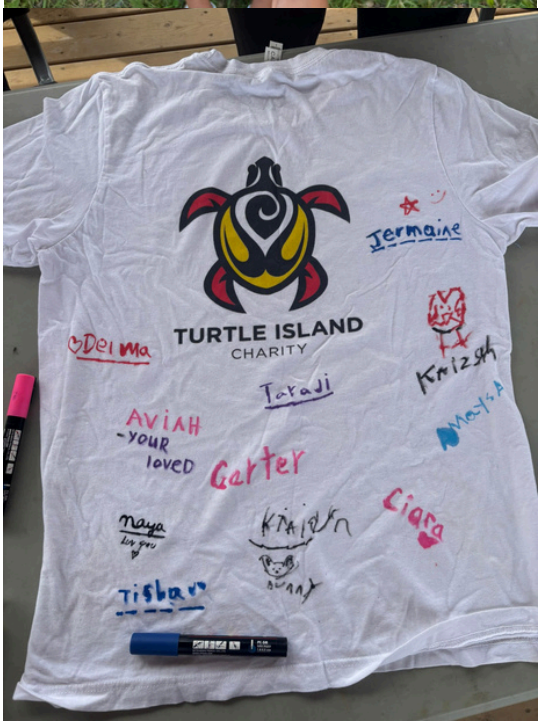
We also provided honorariums to local Knowledge Keepers, Elders and cultural contributors.
This is an important part of our approach to reconciliation.
Indigenous people have been asked for generations to provide cultural knowledge, teachings and emotional labour without appropriate recognition.
We believe knowledge has value.
Time has value.
Leadership has value.
When communities share those gifts with our programs, we believe they should be respected accordingly.

2026 Impact at a Glance

- Approximately 85 children and youth, ages 3–15
- Programming across 3 First Nations communities in Ontario and Saskatchewan
- Approximately 9 local community collaborators
- Activities spanning culture, sport, arts, STEM, environmental science, land-based learning, food, mentorship and free play
- Knowledge Keeper and local cultural involvement, supported through honorariums
- Two wigwam structures constructed with children at Magnetawan First Nation
- Water sampling, temperature testing, pH testing and microscopy delivered through lake-based environmental programming
- Child-friendly and full microscopes used to turn outdoor exploration into STEM learning
- Youth-led video evaluation used to adapt assessment to older participants
- Cultural food activities including Saskatoon berry harvesting, jam preparation and bannock
- Free haircuts provided as an additional confidence-building and back-to-school support
- Every community visited invited Turtle Island Charity to return, with discussions beginning around community cost-sharing for future programming







2026 Impact Report

Why Turtle Island Charity?

We believe one of Turtle Island Charity's greatest strengths is that we do not force reconciliation into a single category.

Indigenous children do not only need one thing.
Culture matters.
Education matters.
Mental wellness matters.
Physical activity matters.
Relationships matter.
Science matters.
Art matters.
Food matters.
Leadership matters.
And fun matters.

Our programming brings these things together.
We can spend the morning listening to a Knowledge Keeper.
Build a wigwam before lunch.
Look at lake water through a microscope in the afternoon.
Play soccer afterward.
Eat bannock together.
Sit around a bonfire.

And somewhere between all of those activities, a child may decide to tell us what they want to be when they grow up.

That is what makes the model powerful.







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What Reconciliation Looks Like to Us

Reconciliation is not one workshop.
It is not one donation.
And it is not one organization arriving in an Indigenous community and deciding what people need.

For us, reconciliation looks like listening first.

It looks like paying Indigenous people for their knowledge.
It looks like children learning cultural practices that colonial systems attempted to interrupt.
It looks like grandparents seeing those traditions return.
It looks like Indigenous children seeing science, education and future careers as things that belong to them too.
It looks like giving local community members opportunities to lead.
It looks like building relationships strong enough that communities ask you to return.

And perhaps most importantly, reconciliation should result in Indigenous children having more opportunities, more confidence, stronger cultural connections and more reasons to feel excited about their futures.







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Communities Want More

Every community we worked with this summer invited Turtle Island Charity back.

Some have begun discussing contributing financially toward future programming so that we can return and spend even more time with their children.

For us, there may be no stronger endorsement.

Our goal is not to create dependency on Turtle Island Charity.

Our goal is to build partnerships.

With additional support, we want future visits to become longer, deeper and increasingly community-led.

The relationships built this summer are only the beginning.

TURTLE ISLAND CHARITY

2026 Impact

Thank You

Turtle Island Charity sincerely thanks everyone who has donated their time, expertise, or money to help make these experiences possible.

You helped create far more than a summer camp.

You helped create spaces where Indigenous children could play, explore, learn, reconnect, laugh, build, create and belong.

You helped put microscopes into children's hands.

You helped build wigwams.

You helped local cultural leaders share knowledge.

You helped provide meals.

You helped children catch bugs, play soccer, make art and explore lakes. You helped young people think about their futures.

And you helped communities know that people outside their communities are willing to invest in their children while respecting their right to determine what that support should look like.

From the bottom of my heart, Thank you for everything,



-Jason Johnson, President & Founder



