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CAREERS and Aseniwuche Winewak are empowering Indigenous youth

Like many young people, Devon Moberly wasn't entirely sure what his future held. Growing up he knew he enjoyed working with his hands, but finding a clear career path seemed daunting. That all changed when he discovered welding through his high school's Elite Program. From the moment he picked up a welding torch, he was hooked.

Devon's journey took a significant step forward when he joined the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). CAREERS: The Next Generation played a key role in connecting him with the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation (AWN) and its group of companies, which offered him a paid apprenticeship and hands-on experience in the welding trade.

"Getting that first chance, it really struck my heart," said Devon.

A Community-Driven Approach to Success

The Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, a non-profit organization formed in 1994, was established to provide a political voice for the Indigenous peoples of Grande Cache. Over time, it expanded to create economic opportunities for its members. AWN's businesses now include a Development Corporation specializing in heavy equipment, welding, fabrication, and mechanical services, as well as an environmental corporation focused on land stewardship.

Aimee Couture, Environmental Health and Safety Manager and Head of Training and Development at AWN, sees firsthand the impact of investing in Indigenous youth. "We want to give community members opportunities they might not get anywhere else," she explained.

Through partnerships with programs like CAREERS, AWN has been able to offer youth like Devon the chance to gain valuable work experience while still in high school. The results speak for themselves.

"Devon's confidence has grown tremendously since he started," said Aimee. "He became an important part of our team, and it's exciting to see him take this next step in his career."

A Fast-Track to Success

Through RAP and his work with AWN, Devon gained not only technical skills but also his certification through the Canadian Welding Bureau (CWB), a critical milestone for his career. At just 18 years old, he is already studying at Red Deer Polytechnic, working towards becoming a certified journeyman welder. By the time he turns 20, he will be fully certified and ready to earn top wages in his field.

"I really impressed myself with this opportunity," Devon said. "A lot of my friends are just beginning their post-secondary education or working entry-level jobs. Meanwhile, I'll be fully qualified and making good money doing something I love."

Devon Moberly received an apprenticeship and hands-on welding experience.

Beyond personal success, Devon is passionate about using his skills to give back to Indigenous communities. His dream is to work for a First Nation-run welding shop and mentor the next generation of Indigenous apprentices.

"All Indigenous kids should do the RAP program if they want to get into trades because it's like a really big help, and it'll really help you understand what you want to do," he said. "And you guys [CAREERS] are just such great helps. And it was easy for me to get into it."

A Call to Action for Employers

AWN and CAREERS hope that more Alberta employers will recognize the value of hiring Indigenous youth. By providing mentorship and training, companies can not only help young people succeed but also build a stronger, more skilled workforce.

"Youth are our future. If we don't give them the opportunity, who will?" Aimee emphasized.

CAREERS President and CEO Stefan Rutkowski reiterated the impact of the organization's Indigenous Youth Internship Program:

"CAREERS' Indigenous Youth Internship Program has been one of the cornerstones of our organization since it began a quarter century ago. With help from our school and employer partners, we've helped provide over 620 internships in the last year alone, and we're on target to break that record this year."

Devon agrees, urging other employers to take the chance on young Indigenous workers.

"My employer told me to call him anytime if I needed help, even after I left for school," he said. "That kind of support makes a huge difference. I hope more companies step up and give Indigenous youth the same opportunity I had."

Get Involved

For over 20 years, CAREERS has partnered with leaders like Chief Raymond Powder of Fort MacKay First Nation to connect youth with businesses.

"The partnership has been so tremendously awesome," said Chief Powder. "The opportunities continue to grow and grow and grow. You're not only investing in one person, you are investing in a community, so for me I see it as a success and a win for all of us."

CAREERS makes it simple and affordable, with up to $7,500 in funding for qualified employers. Learn more at careersnextgen.ca.

The art and science of grant-writing to help fund Indigenous communities

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Growing up in Nova Scotia, Rolando Inzunza says he wasn't familiar with "plights, successes and all of the reality of Indigenous people and their communities."

That changed in 2006, when Inzunza moved to Fort McMurray to work for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

"It was a whole new role for me and a whole new opportunity to learn," he said.


Rolando Inzunza

By the end of 2012, Inzunza was working for Suncor Energy as the company's senior coordinator of Indigenous business development.

Now Inzunza, who arrived in Canada as a political refugee from Chile when he was an infant, owns Edmonton-based Axioma Business Consulting, which originally focused on marketing and PR, but a year ago he decided to shift his focus towards grant writing.

This transition happened as a result of work Inzunza had "been doing on the side of my desk" for Chard Métis Nation.

"I was having some continued and building success with Chard," he said. "I thought there's something here that I think I can help other communities with."

In 2024 alone, Inzunza said, he helped four Indigenous communities raise $3.5 million.

"It was a bit of a jump, a bit of a risk, and just to see it catch like wildfire was pretty cool," he said.

Inzunza's method consists of creating a database of grant opportunities, mainly government but also some corporate, and then meeting with clients to determine their needs and priorities before applying.

"A lot of the priority areas are very similar—housing, substance use, mental health, food security—but where they are and what they've been able to accomplish so far with them is all very unique," he explained.

Inzunza says his goal is to help communities with "the art and the science behind writing the grant."

"To me, each grant is a huge win, whether that's $5,000 or $500,000."

Justin Herman, CEO of Chard Métis Nation, recalled in an interview the first grant Inzunza helped his people with — the provincial Indigenous Housing Capacity Grant, which provided funding to support the development of 10 homes in their community.

Herman said he did his best to apply for the grant himself, but the government grant director told him the application was incomplete, so he reached out to Inzunza, whom he's known for years through "his background in helping Indigenous businesses."

"Knowing him on a personal level, I just had so much confidence in him that not only was his heart in the right place, but I knew that he had the skill set to help us successfully write these grants," said Herman.

"Grant writing, what I've come to learn, is more of an art than it's just filling out a form with the information that's asked of you."

Since then, Inzunza has helped Chard Métis get additional grants for primary health care, culture camps and community events "just to name a few," said Herman.

He added that grant funding is "especially important for the Métis communities," because they don't typically receive capacity funding from Indigenous Services Canada."

"Our community, for instance, is 100 per cent self-funded, so [for] any programming or anything we want to develop, we have to find that money somewhere," Herman said.

"Without the grants, these programs would have never come into existence."

Chef Shane Chartrand: An understanding of protocol

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The relationship one has with food is intimate, it is a bond and an understanding of reciprocity—not only what food can do for us, but how these plants and animals - these living spirits - teach us to engage with the world that brings light and life to things we would have otherwise not known. Chef Shane Chartrand has built an intimate relationship with plants and animals, stemming from when he was a young child to present day. As a chef, he combines elements and richness of culture and history of stories from the land that have shaped communities, with togetherness and sustenance.

"I am a child in my brain when it comes to imagination and when it comes to dreams…I like to be inspired by people's cooking. I like to eat things people do that I would never have thought about…Sometimes I get blown away with people's artistry in culinary. ... I love being jealous. Jealousy is a good thing—it makes me want to get back in my kitchen and cook more, it gets my culinary heart beating a little faster."

The tenacity, focus, and discipline that came with Chartrand becoming a chef, is not just about cooking, instead it is a way of life—an understanding of protocol that takes many years of learning, observing, listening, respecting, engaging with and honouring practices of what it means for Shane to be an Indigenous chef.

"My first job was at a legitimate greasy spoon truck stop. I moved my way up to a short order cook. I got really enthralled being around a hot stove, being around big equipment. What really

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Survivors of forced and coerced sterilization gather in Gatineau

By Kinnukana, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The first annual national gathering of survivors of forced and coerced sterilization, *Weaving Threads of Healing: Embracing our strength and honouring our voices*, took place on the unceded traditional territory of Algonquin Anishinaabe Peoples in Gatineau, Quebec from March 7-9, 2025. The gathering brought together close to eight hundred First Nations, Inuit and Metis survivors to learn more about the work of the Survivors Circle, reproductive justice and addressing racism in the Canadian healthcare system. The conference also provided a platform for survivors to connect with each other and receive healing supports.

The forced or coerced sterilization of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit throughout Canada involves sterilization often without informed consent or under duress. The legacy of these practices continues to affect Indigenous communities today. The most recent sterilization took place in 2023. Many survivors were misled or coerced, sometimes while receiving medical care after childbirth. This practice deeply traumatized survivors, affecting their trust in medical institutions.

The Survivors Circle for Reproductive Justice (Circle), an Indigenous-led national not-for-profit organization in Canada, was officially registered on January 14, 2023, to advocate for reproductive justice for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. In 2024, it launched a national registry to document the experiences of Indigenous survivors of forced and coerced sterilization. To support survivors, the organization also introduced the Healing Support Fund for healing, assisted reproductive technologies, and community initiatives.

Harmony Redsky, Executive Director of the Survivors Circle for Reproductive Justice said, “What needs to be done now to stop this from recurring is absolutely more information getting out there to communities to remove the stigma that exists for women and men to feel safe to be able to talk about their reproductive justice, in a family setting, relationship setting, in a community setting and a health care setting. For decades and decades Indigenous women have been silent when it comes to topics such as reproductive justice and the issue of childbirth, sexuality and any of these topics that have not been discussed at family and community levels in the past.”

At the gathering many survivors said that they never spoke to anybody about what happened to them, including their spouses. Some survivors said that this was the first time they were sharing their stories. Many survivors felt alone. They didn’t realize this was a common issue. Because their situation happened a while ago, many had put the issue behind them and accepted it. They did not know that there was any recourse for them. Many are told that if they are unhappy with the health services, they can complete a customer satisfaction survey or file a complaint, which is not the type of justice that they may be seeking.

Historically, forced or coerced sterilization was rooted in government policies aimed at assimilating or controlling Indigenous populations. Government, in partnership with medical and social institutions, sought to eliminate what was viewed as “undesirable” aspects of Indigenous culture and identity. This is part of a broader pattern of colonial policies, including the residential school system, which aimed to erase Indigenous languages, traditions, and ways of life. Forced or coerced sterilization is sometimes justified through eugenics, aiming to reduce the Indigenous population or "improve" society.

The Senate of Canada's Standing Committee on Human Rights released two reports on forced and coerced sterilization in 2021 and 2022. The first report highlighted the ongoing nature of the practice, disproportionately affecting Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, persons with disabilities, and institutionalized individuals. The second report, *The Scars that We Carry*, reinforced these findings, calling for legal and policy reforms, criminalization of the practice, federal apologies, compensation for survivors, and improved healthcare oversight. Both reports stress the urgency of addressing this violation of reproductive rights in Canada.

Bill S-250, titled "An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sterilization procedures)," was introduced in the Senate of Canada on June 14, 2022, by Senator Yvonne Boyer. Bill S-250 seeks to amend the Criminal Code to criminalize forced or coerced sterilization, making it an indictable offence punishable by up to fourteen years in prison. The bill emphasizes the need for medical practitioners to obtain free, prior, and informed consent, aligning with international human rights standards. Having passed third reading in the Senate, Bill S-250 is now awaiting its first reading in the House of Commons as part of Canada's broader effort to protect reproductive rights and bodily autonomy.

The healing jingle dress.

At the gathering, a key session focused on assistive reproductive technology. The Circle is involved in a research project with the University of Ottawa around developing a resource centre for assistive reproductive technology for First Nations, Inuit and Métis survivors who can access new services to help them, such as reversal surgeries as part of their reproductive justice. The Circle has a new funding stream that helps survivors to access new technologies. If a survivor wants to access these resources, there are different options for verifying their situations, including signing a statutory declaration, providing updated medical charts, etc.

During the National gathering a jingle dress was created by all of the survivors in attendance. Each survivor added a cone onto the jingle dress. At the closing ceremony, the jingle dress was danced for the first time and a healing dance was performed for the survivors. Now, the jingle dress will travel to communities and help to build awareness and provide the healing for all survivors.

For more information visit reproductivejusticesurvivors.ca

Chiefs want collaboration in implementing Jordan's Principle

(Edmonton, Treaty 6 Territory) – The Treaty Chiefs of the First Nations Health Consortium (FNHC) met March 4-5, 2025, at the *2025 Partner Nations Leadership Meeting* on Jordan's Principle in Edmonton on the unceded territory of Treaty 6. The Nations included Bigstone Cree Nation, Loon River First Nation, Woodland Cree First Nation, Samson Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Montana First Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation and Siksika Nation, Peerless Trout First Nation, Whitefish Lake #459 First Nation and Lubicon Lake Band.

The Treaty Chiefs of the FNHC, are responding to the federal government's recent changes to Jordan's Principle with a call for meaningful collaboration. It is imperative that First Nations leadership be fully engaged in shaping the path forward.

Jordan's Principle was established to ensure that First Nations children receive the services they need, when they need them, without delay or jurisdictional disputes. Any modifications to its implementation must be developed in direct partnership with First Nations organizations and leadership.

"The well-being of our children cannot be determined in isolation. A true commitment to reconciliation requires that First Nations voices guide the evolution of Jordan's Principle," said FNHC Chairman Randy Littlechild, on behalf of the Treaty Chiefs.

"We urge the federal government to work with us in developing a collaborative action plan that prioritizes First Nations-led solutions and ensures equitable access to essential services for our children."

The FNHC emphasizes that collaboration is key to upholding the original spirit and intent of Jordan's Principle. Decisions regarding eligibility, service delivery, and long-term sustainability must be made in consultation with First Nations stakeholders to prevent unintended gaps and barriers.

In November 2018, the Government of Canada, the Alberta Government and Treaty Chiefs of the FNHC signed the Alberta Memorandum of Understanding on Jordan's Principle (MoU), which establishes a framework for working together to fully implement Jordan's Principle. This commitment underscores the necessity of shared responsibility and partnership between the signatories. The FNHC highlights that the principles of the Alberta MoU must be upheld and expanded upon to ensure that all changes to Jordan's Principle align with First Nations' needs and priorities.

Since its inception, the FNHC has been a trusted administrator of Jordan's Principle enhanced service coordination in Alberta, ensuring thousands of children receive the necessary services and supports they need, covering critical areas such as health, education, and social supports. Through its work, FNHC has facilitated access to essential services directly improving the lives of First Nations children and their families. This track record of accountability and effectiveness demonstrates the importance of First Nations-led administration of Jordan's Principle to ensure culturally appropriate and timely service delivery.

"We are committed to working alongside the provincial and federal governments to strengthen Jordan's Principle, but this must be done in a way that respects First Nations jurisdiction, self-determination, and the lived experiences of our families," added Chief Gilbert Okemow Grand Chief of Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council. "A collaborative approach will ensure that no child is left behind."

The FNHC calls on both Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the Alberta government to bring together the joint MoU working group to co-develop a sustainable and inclusive action plan for Jordan's Principle to truly meet the needs of First Nations children, families, and communities.

Cover artist: Rick Noname

Watching over you © by Rick Noname

Rick Noname is an Edmonton-based artist from the Piapot First Nation. He was raised with traditional values and represents them in his art. He puts an Eagle Feather in every painting as a reminder to younger generations to let your spirit soar. "Through imagery, I can offer some of what was lost in my culture." His prints are available for purchase at WakinaGallery.com.

Randy Littlechild broke barriers as Alberta's first certified First Nation medic

By Kinnukana, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Randy Littlechild, member of the Ermineskin First Nation, is a dedicated First Nations leader in the field of healthcare. He currently serves as the Executive Director of Maskwacis Health Services (MHS), an organization committed to providing holistic healthcare to the Maskwacis Cree Nations, which include the Samson, Ermineskin, Louis Bull, and Montana First Nations. In addition to his role at MHS, Randy Littlechild was elected as the Chair of the Board of Directors for the First Nations Health Consortium (FNHC) on October 1, 2024. A founding member of the FNHC, he has been an active board member since 2017, contributing to the organization's mission to enhance health services for First Nations children and families across Alberta.

Randy was born at the Charles Camsell Hospital in Edmonton and grew up in the city. He was impacted by the sixties scoop and lived in foster care throughout his childhood. When he left care, he joined the army reserves and chose to work in the medical field. While there he learned about medical first aid and providing medical assistance. He also had an opportunity to work as a registered Nursing Orderly.

While hitchhiking one evening, Randy was picked up by a guy who had a conversation with him about a new, one-of-a-kind program being developed at the University of Alberta. He encouraged Randy to apply. He did, was accepted, and became one of six students who graduated as the first cohort of the new Operating Room Technician Program (ORT). Randy worked as an ORT at the Alberta University Hospital for a few years and then realized that he really liked working in the ambulance area.

Randy then went to work for the City of Edmonton (City) as an employee of the Edmonton Ambulance Authority. At the time, there were no strict regulations and workers only required a class four driver's licence and first aid training. Individuals also had to be over the age of twenty-five to receive a class four license. While at the City, Randy made history as he became the first certified First Nations Emergency Paramedic in Alberta. Today, they are called Advanced Care Paramedics. The City assisted Randy to take the training at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. He studied from 1983 to 1985 and graduated from the program.

Randy also worked part-time in Maskwacis. While there, he helped the late Ernest Leclair set up an ambulance service in Samson Cree Nation in 1985. It was the first Advanced Life Support Ambulance Service on a reserve in Alberta. Randy said "The beginning of the Maskwacis Ambulance Service is what I am most proud about. We got it going as the first ALS service on a First Nations reserve."

Nation members are more receptive to First Nation Responders. Today, trained First Nations members are now driving the ambulance and are part of the team. Randy says that there are many benefits to this, "If you are a Cree speaker, and you are talking to an Elder that you are picking up, you can talk to them in Cree and get a better understanding of their immediate needs." There are lab technicians, x-ray technicians, a lot of people that work in hospitals now but unfortunately not enough First Nations people are occupying those roles.

Randy dedicated thirty-five years at the City in a variety of roles. He even became the first President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) for the City and led workers through two strikes. In Edmonton, CUPE represents workers employed by the city and other public institutions, such as those in public schools, healthcare facilities, and municipal services. Randy said that "we went on strike twice for wages and other things. We got a lot of gains: better wages, ballistic vests, protective gloves, and a lot of stuff for safety, including better hours and better working conditions."

Randy said that when he started working there was a lot of racism towards First Nations people, even amongst the co-workers he worked with. Some workers would make fun of the First Nations accents. It took a long time for change, but Randy says the newer generation is better. It was hard for Randy to accept, but he let it go over his head and worked through it. Randy cared more about the people he picked up on the street and focused on helping them. He said it also took a while for hospitals to accept the paramedics. They didn't understand what the paramedics could do, but now they are realizing how important they are to the health team.

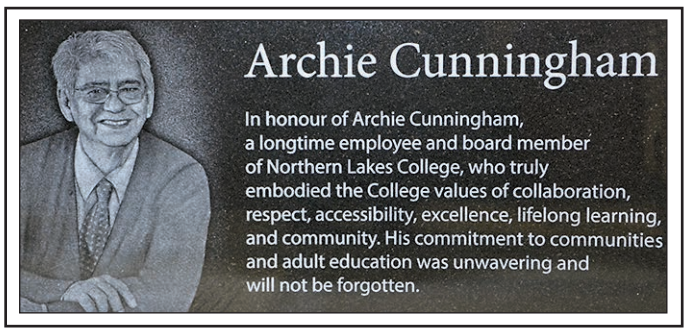
Randy Littlechild is Executive Director of Maskwacis Health Services and Chairman of the Board at FNHC.

Today, over forty years later, Randy continues to create positive change. As the Executive Director of MHS, Randy has helped to create a health system that integrates modern healthcare with Indigenous traditions. Under his leadership, MHS provides holistic care that addresses the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health needs of the Maskwacis Cree Nations.

Randy encourages First Nations youth to get involved in the health field and said, "Don't be scared. Go ahead and take the nursing program, the licenced practical nurse, go become an emergency medical technician ambulance worker or advanced care paramedic. It only takes a few years of study to begin. Also, Nursing is up to four years of study and you can go on to take a Masters degree as well. You have to have a strong stomach; you have to have a strong heart."

Randy obviously has both a strong stomach and a strong heart. His extensive involvement in both frontline work and healthcare administration underscores his commitment to improving the health outcomes of First Nations and promoting cultural values within the broader health field. Randy's journey is more than just about treating physical ailments – it's been about empowering First Nation's to take control of their own health while honouring their cultural heritage.

The Archie Cunningham Family Legacy at Northern Lakes College



It was an honour for Northern Lakes College to memorialize the efforts of long-time employee, Archie Cunningham, with a commemorative plaque unveiling at the High Prairie Campus in August 2022. Archie began his career at NLC in 1972, when he was hired as an instructor. Through the years of his employment, Archie moved into more administrative positions, and played an instrumental role in bringing College services to Indigenous and Métis communities.

A proud member of the Peavine Métis Settlement, Archie believed education was the key to supporting Indigenous success and cultural preservation in a colonial society. Even after his passing in 2021, his values regarding post-secondary education continue to live on in the lives of his children, children-in-law, and grandchildren.

"Archie was adamant in his family values," his daughter-in-law, Candace Cunningham, reminisces. "He wanted all his children and grandchildren to be educated. That was a big thing – he was a strong advocate for post-secondary education."

Candace was one of many people who found encouragement in Archie's supportive nature. She remembers making the decision to pursue her own education while visiting her parents-in-law as a young woman, in the months after both of her children had started school.

"I was visiting with him and Yvonne (Candace's mother-in-law), and just discussing how, since the kids had started school, my days were just not as fulfilling as I'd hoped they'd be. And he said to me, 'You know, my girl, there is a [Northern Lakes College] campus across from the school, right?' I said, 'Yeah?' and he just said, 'Well, what are you going to do about it?'"

Candace would go on to register in the Health Care Aide program, realizing a dream she'd put aside since high school. She thrived in her field, and it wasn't long before her supervisors encouraged her to return to studies in order to become a Licensed Practical Nurse. Again, Candace found encouragement in the words of her father-in-law.

"I was kind of on the fence about how long it would take me to get my Practical Nurse Diploma after just completing my Health Care Aide Certificate. And Archie just said, 'Well, why wouldn't you? You're bright, you know. You're a smart girl. You have a lot of potential. What's stopping you?' And I thought to myself, 'yeah – nothing is stopping me! Just my own fears.' So, I registered in the Practical Nurse program in 2019."

During her practicum, and before even graduating from her Practical Nurse program, Candace was presented with an offer of two different positions: one in Health Management and one in Community Health. After being provided additional months of training upon her hire, Candace now works as the Health Manager of Kapawe'no First Nation, and currently serves on the Indigenous Panel for the Alberta Ministry of Health. She continues to draw encouragement from her father-in-law's words and plans to achieve her Registered Nurse degree within the next ten years.

Archie's daughter, Emily Reynolds, a graduate of the University Studies program at Northern Lakes College, and now a grade six teacher, echoes the similar role her father played in her life, and the lives of her siblings. "Dad always told me I should pursue my master's degree. It was a goal that he and I both had for me, when I graduated from my teaching program in 2008. When I graduated, it felt full circle. One moment we were celebrating my graduation from my teaching program, the next we were celebrating dad's retirement from the College. I was an older grad, and I had started a family, so there were many reasons not to pursue a master's degree. Still, he'd always say, 'You should really apply for your master's degree.' But I put it on the backburner. There were always other priorities: family, teaching, kids' sports. Then he died in April 2021. The following November, it was his first 'heavenly birthday,' and I wanted to honor my dad the best way I knew how. So, I applied for my master's degree. Because of my dad, and his consistent encouragement for furthering my educational journey, every day I feel that I have the best job in the world. I just do. I love what I do, I love the kids, and love spending time with my students. I was meant to be a teacher, and my dad saw that. For a while, I think he saw that more than I even did."

The value Archie placed on education reached each person in his life, and the effects continue to ripple into the future. It was an honour for Northern Lakes College to memorialize his efforts with a commemorative plaque unveiling at the High Prairie Campus in August 2022. "When NLC unveiled the plaque," Emily remembers, "it just reminded all of us of his values, his perseverance, and his dedication to ongoing education. It's a reminder of the values he instilled in the College that he loved. He was so proud of NLC."

Northern Lakes College offers many programs through Supported Distance Learning. Get more information at northernlakescollege.ca/programs-courses

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From gov't negotiator to representing First Nations in court

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

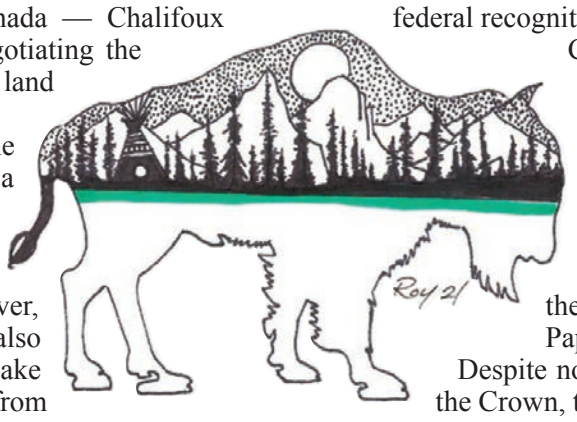
Métis lawyer Troy Chalifoux used to work for the Government of Canada negotiating with First Nations. Now he directly represents First Nations in private practice as senior counsel for Maurice Law, Canada's first and only Indigenous-owned national law firm.

Although he was technically switching sides in court from defendant to plaintiff, Chalifoux never took an "adversarial approach to negotiations" with First Nations, preferring to treat them as partners instead.

"Making the transition from working for the government to working for First Nations is pretty easy, because working for the government, I always felt I was working for First Nations," he explained.

"The difference is now I'm not working for them with one hand tied behind my back."

During his career in government — working first for the Ministry of Justice and then for Indigenous Services Canada — Chalifoux played a key role in negotiating the 2018 Lubicon Cree land claims settlement.



The agreement was the culmination of more than a century from the First Nation to obtain its Treaty rights.

Located near Peace River, the Lubicon Cree, also known as the Lubicon Lake Band, were excluded from the original Treaty 8 agreement in 1899.

In 1933, the First Nation's members initiated a land claim. By the end of the decade, the federal government recognized the Lubicon Cree as a distinct nation and promised its members a reserve, but the government didn't keep its word, owing to the vast oil and gas reserves discovered on the band's land.

Chalifoux credited the First Nation with running a successful campaign coinciding with the 1988 Olympics in Calgary to bring international attention to its plight, which impacted him as a government lawyer.

"I just woke up. Their perspective was that Canada and Alberta were oppressing them, exploiting their lands and refusing to negotiate," Chalifoux told *Alberta Native News*.

The agreement between the Lubicon Lake Band, federal government and provincial government gave the First Nation 95 square miles of land, as well as $95 million compensation from the federal government and $18 million from the provincial government.

"I think I stayed in government as long as I did because I just wanted to see that deal done and I was confident that a different approach would be successful."

But Chalifoux wasn't just responsible for the Lubicon file. "I had a hand in almost every treaty land entitlement in Alberta," he said.

While Chalifoux eventually grew tired of working for the government, he wasn't done fighting for Treaty rights. "I just felt I had too much experience to let it go to waste and went to the other side," he explained.

Picking up where he left off in government, Chalifoux works with Michel Band and the Papaschase Band — two First Nations engaged in efforts to obtain their Treaty rights.

"The two files are different, but similar," he explained. "Michel is on a path negotiating with Canada to regain their status as a band. Papaschase has been and continues to try to get Canada to recognize them as a band as well, but is not as far along the process as Michel is."

The Michel Band, which was a Treaty 6 signatory, was disbanded in 1958 by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker through enfranchisement. This process culminated in stripping all its members except for four women and a child of Treaty First Nation status and having its reserve, which was located near St. Albert, surrendered.

Descendants of Michel Band, as previously reported by this outlet, have formed the Michel Callihoo Nation Society in an effort to obtain federal recognition for a new band, Michel Callihoo Nation.

In Papaschase's case, the Treaty 6 First Nation was absorbed into nearby nations in 1888 after three of its 249 members decided to do so. According to Chalifoux, there are more than 1,000 Papaschase descendants.

Despite not having recognition from the Crown, the band has had an elected chief and council since 1999.

Chalifoux called Papaschase's story "profoundly sad, bordering on tragic, because Canada used all of its tools available to them to basically strip Papaschase of their status, of their lands, essentially their right to exist, and now uses their own rules to prevent reconciliation."

Papaschase was "making some headway" with the former prime minister Justin Trudeau's government, he added, but there's a lack of clarity with a new prime minister and impending federal election.

Papaschase and Michel both had their original reserves on some of the "most valuable and fertile agricultural land in the West," Chalifoux said, but were robbed of their lands due to "a series of questionable transactions, orchestrated by Frank Oliver."

Oliver, publisher of the *Edmonton Bulletin* newspaper and a Liberal MP, was a staunch proponent of dispossessing Indigenous Peoples.

Edmonton's largest neighbourhood, now known as Wîhkwêntôwin, used to be named after him.

Chalifoux said he wants to obtain justice for the "tragedies that were perpetrated on these weak nations by Canada."

"Canada stripped them of their right to exist, which is the Treaty right, but to now have to jump through the very hoops that Canada creates in order for there to be reconciliation, to me, is the ultimate insult to the injury," he said.

Reconciliation and a flourishing future with Jaime Fiddler

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Take your left hand and place it at the back of your head and now take your right hand and place it on top of your tailbone — the distance between your two hands is the longest running nerve in your body, the vagus nerve. The lower end of this nerve is where your nervous system allows you to feel safe and connected — whole. And when we feel like ourselves, that is what being grounded and connected to our spirit is.

It takes an incredible amount of courage and leaning into doing things that feed our spirit — despite feelings of uncertainty, doubt or fear this was the course of action our Métis sister Jaime Fiddler walked with that eventually grounded her and allowed her to share her gifts with the world.

"Reconciliation is about building a different future. Right now, we are kind of stuck by our past, we could repeat those harmful patterns."

Bringing wholeness into space, reconciliation — Fiddler came to this understanding of being in a state of wholeness when one of her mentors during her master's program shared with her, "I am seeking to be whole." This sparked Jaime's curiosity, what being whole meant, that lead to walking with the etymology of to be whole. "It comes from the sense of safety, to be safe, to be your whole self and to tell your whole story. I thought 'yes, that is what I am trying to be,' those are the spaces where I feel most at home, where I can be my whole self."

Fiddler grew up in a fractured way, "I knew I was different. Out of love, I was told to hide being Métis about myself. It also wasn't okay to be queer. I learned to hide and really swallow parts of myself… and in my adulthood, a big part of my journey was bringing those parts of myself back together."

Being Métis and wanting to find identity and go about it in a good way, Fiddler was not open about who she was. "I would tell people I was Métis if they asked, but I wasn't sure how I fit into the Métis story unless it was in a reciprocal way." When Jaime was eleven years old, she obtained her Métis card, fondly remembering her father sharing insight, that "having a Métis card also supports the community. It supports them to know that there's a lot of Métis people here, and what am I doing to help if I am also benefitting?"

"Maybe I carried that lesson forward," Fiddler said.

Eventually what Fiddler carried forward landed into her research within academia, about how people navigate identity in spaces. "I pursued in my graduate work, the experiences of teachers who left the classroom early, and in my PhD teachers who stayed. It is not always possible to be the type of teacher you want to be in certain circumstances. I was curious about how people navigate that space — how do you navigate your identity if you don't feel like you can have integrity in a space?"

As Fiddler found wholeness in her own life, things started to shift within her professional world that aligned with her personal life, now being married to her wife Evelyne. "When I started teaching at the University of Calgary I started teaching Indigenous education classes, and diversity in education. I was starting to feel more settled in my identity… where I could enter into this space."

This led Fiddler into understanding reconciliation and how to walk with this understanding, deriving from finding her own identity and how to go about things in a good way. "I also started teaching in the Call-to-Action Indigenous Education program — which is all about people who want to contribute to reconciliation. They want to bring that work into their work — whatever that work is — people who just want to know where to start."

Fiddler is currently the learning design consultant for curriculum Indigenization and decolonization at Bow Valley College, where she combines her understanding and knowing of Indigenous history by bringing stories into teaching. How she approaches teaching is rooted in humility, understanding that reconciliation is building a different future — a way of walking in the world and operating from a perspective of abundance, harmony, and reciprocity.

"I think that is really challenging work because we don't really know what that looks like… what does a reconciled future look like? What does it feel like? How is it different? … We are so used to operating from principles of scarcity and competition — what would it actually be like to operate from a perspective of abundance, harmony, and reciprocity? Our First Nations cousins carry this knowledge, and historically Métis communities learned these ways of relating, but since colonization this has not been the mainstream way of being. So today, we don't really know what this might look like, we need to each learn and imagine that in our own way.

Jaime Fiddler is a learning design consultant at Bow Valley College.

We need to think about what the next action is and move towards that — to move away from these colonial patterns into something new."

Within the understanding of reconciliation — where this is not something simple that can be defined, it is a matter of working towards something different by building a cycle of learning and acting. "Everyone needs to find their own way to contribute to reconciliation. You do need to understand the truth of our shared history, where we are — lots of people don't know where we are, and I am definitely always learning more about where we are and how we got here. Then I think about what I am called to do in this story to shift towards something new." These understandings are parallel with what Fiddler walked with when finding wholeness in her own life, ways she came to understand how to find a sense of safety in her own identity.

"Ultimately the actions you take are yours — a lot of people are fearful — but once we start acting, then we can grow in this cycle of learning and acting, and then we can collectively move towards something else... It is a future where we can all flourish — that is the end goal…It is not possible for anyone to flourish unless everyone does. There is always this sense of when I am doing well but people around me are suffering—that is also a kind of suffering. All flourishing is mutual… when I feel really frustrated, that is what I come back to, we are working towards something different and it involves people learning how they can contribute."

Treaty 6 students play hooky for hockey at Oil Kings game

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Playing Hockey Hooky was a wonderful experience for the students!

Community members from three Treaty 6 First Nations were able to travel down to Rogers Place to see the Canadian Hockey League in action as part of this year's Hockey Hooky event, which brings thousands of students and educators from schools across northern Alberta to an afternoon Edmonton Oil Kings game.

Accounting firm KRP Group sponsored 150 tickets so that Alexis School on Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Onchaminahos School and Kihew Asiniy Education Centre on Saddle Lake Cree Nation and the Kipohtakaw Education Center on Alexander First Nation could send kids to the March 12 event.

The Oil Kings have two Indigenous players — Treycen Wuttunee of Red Pheasant Cree Nation and Alexander Andre, who is Métis — according to Hockey Indigenous.

While the hometown Oil Kings lost 3-2 to the visiting Calgary Hitmen, many of the students were happy to just attend a hockey game in Edmonton, according to Onchaminahos principal Penella Cardinal.

"A lot of our students may have never been to Rogers Place or they've never seen a real hockey game on ice," Cardinal told *Alberta Native News*. "Any new experience like that is fantastic."

Her K-5 school sent 20 students, a teacher and four educational assistants to the game, with the other 25 tickets going to the local school, Kihew Asiniy.

"They always enjoy it," said Cardinal. "The kids always love going to see the hockey game."

In addition to the game, there's a "built-in educational component," according to the Hockey Hooky website. Each student receives a workbook when they enter the arena, in which they can answer questions that appear on the scoreboard during each break in the game.

Cardinal noted that teachers select which students come to Hockey Hooky — some boys and some girls, some who are hockey players and some who have never stepped foot on ice.

"It gives them a chance to see how many other schools and how many other students there are, because they're almost all in the same grades, and they get to meet other people too," Cardinal said.

It's also a positive experience for the educators, who are able to take the students' enjoyment of the game and incorporate it into their teaching.

Grade 5 students, for example, have a unit on biography and are assigned research on a specific public figure, which can include hockey players.

"It's a day where all the kids are happy, the staff are happy. It's just a good day all around," said Cardinal.

Rob Picton, a partner at KRP, said that his firm is "privileged" to have sent more than 1,200 students to Hockey Hooky in recent years.

"It's an honour to know that for many of these Treaty 6 students, it is their first time being inside Rogers Place, seeing where their heroes play, and we hope this day inspires them!"

Chef Shane cont. from p 3

made me stick through it was when I decided I was going to be the best chef I could ever be—the best chef in the world. I remember people telling me, 'Why are you going to be a chef?' ... People kept saying 'no you won't be,' thinking it was a joke. The more they pissed me off, [the more] I wanted to prove them wrong."

Cooking is one thing. Practicing as a chef, the lifestyle of a chef, is an entirely different way a person walks in the world. It takes a rigorous amount of grit and self-determination to immerse several perspectives into the artistry of becoming a chef. Learning about the plants and animals and how they interact with each other, bringing creations that share a story of land and place onto the plate—and all while bringing people together—the one thing that has brought all relations to an understanding over breaking bread with one another. For Chartrand, it is not just about cooking, this is his heart's work.

"I did this all on my own—I didn't have anyone tell me, show me; I didn't have a mentor. I did it on my own because I wanted to, and I worked really hard at it. … that's how it started, by people telling me no."

As an Indigenous chef, Chartrand has paved the way for the next generations and what it means to bring being an Indigenous person into the culinary world. One thing that he has come to know differently—the advice he would gift his younger self is "make sure you think about you first—always ... focus, focus, focus. The world is full of such excitement, there is so much to see, don't let anyone get in your way. The biggest thing is getting up—it is a very simple thing, but get up, no matter how tired you are. Once you are up, you are back on track and your mind is there. Keep smiling and get up."

Visit Paperbirch by Chartrand on Saturdays at the Old Strathcona Farmers' Market in Edmonton.

Life-long learning for a person's well-being with Normie Carlson

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

If you are being challenged with certain aspects of your life — remember that even though it may be heavy, this is teaching you how to sustain yourself emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. That it is okay to feel uncertain and uncomfortable because you have not experienced this part of your life, yet. This understanding is part of what Indigenous people call 'life-long learning' — we are learning all the time, in different ways that shape the depths of our understanding and how we perceive the world around us as we continue with our learning journey called life.

"Education is extremely important for a person's well-being. Whether that is both types of education — western and Indigenous education — I am not just talking about learning in English and writing in English but speaking Cree and knowing how to communicate in your first language. All that helps support a better community, a better person — education is everything, it is your life. Whether it is life-long learning in the sense of getting a degree or if it is at the community — having skills, it is still education... You are learning to sustain yourself and learning to be a person who can take care of themselves but also take care of others."

One of our aunties who always wanted to be a teacher, Normie Carlson, is now fulfilling that role at Yellowhead Tribal College, and with her she brings years of understanding the importance of education, as well as the understanding of education as everything we do in life.

"I wanted to be a teacher before I went to school. I remember pretending [to be a teacher] to my younger siblings. It's kind of a life-long dream, but it took me a really long time to get there. I went different paths first, [eventually] facilitating and being able to teach lead me to this job — it was almost like a building block... You are building yourself as a person: emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually to take on a role. I think all those experiences I had brought me to this place and what I am currently doing today."

Carlson came to understand through her own learning journey that learning is also about raising yourself as an individual, "being a part of a community, a part of a family — learning about your own history. All of it is educational." She has observed that no one stops learning, that "it is not just about post-secondary learning — you are learning in life, you are learning through your experiences, you are engaged in all kinds of cultural practices, ceremonies, language building — all of those. All of it is education, it is an everyday action. Every day you are learning something new about yourself, about people, about what you are doing and how best to optimize that experience."

Daily Catch © by Linus Woods is available at wakinagallery.com.

In the classroom, Carlson also shares with students the different ways to understand where they are at with information being shared — both emotionally and psychologically. It is not just having a sense of evaluating oneself or assessing oneself, it is much deeper rooted than that. It is about including oneself into the process of learning, "it is important and something that you are doing on a daily basis whether you acknowledge it or not." The learning aid she utilises is reflective writing, where in Indigenous education it is about taking time to reflect, introspect, and move forward with understanding new ways of knowing.

Another vital way to learn outside the classroom is being on the land. Carlson explained, "It is great to be in the classroom, great to have all these other abilities to access, but it is different when you are in nature. You learn to appreciate, acknowledge, recognize and honour all the different ancestors and the Creator and it brings you to be more grounded."

And while Carlson's ways of knowing have shifted over time, one piece of advice she would gift any learner is, "be patient with your own abilities to learn, it is a step-by-step process." This understanding and practice can help sustain us emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Marlee L'Hirondelle, White Fish Lake First Nation, Atikameg: Adrienne Bull, Sunchild First Nation; Normie Carlson, YTC Department Head, Indigenous Health; Carolyn Dankowich, Buffalo River Dene Nation, SK; and Pamela Gladue, Gift Lake Metis Settlement.

First Nations Bank of Canada approves first loans through Canada Infrastructure Bank first-of-its-kind loan product

FNBC and CIB financing package accelerating critical community development projects in communities across Canada

First Nations Bank of Canada (FNBC) is proud to announce the approval of its first loans under the *Indigenous Land Development Loan Program* in partnership with the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB).

This milestone marks a significant step in advancing critical infrastructure projects that will support economic growth and sustainability in Indigenous communities across Canada.

Many of the projects funded under the program had been delayed for years due to funding challenges, and this program has provided the necessary financial boost to move them ahead.

Through this initiative, FNBC is working alongside the CIB to provide financing solutions towards essential infrastructure projects, including new housing subdivisions, community centers, and economic development projects such as urban reserve development.

FNBC is lending approximately $3 of its own funds for every $1 of CIB financing. Since initiating the intake process only a few months ago, FNBC has obtained initial approval for approximately $140 million in Indigenous land infrastructure projects, requiring only $30 million in CIB loan proceeds. These initial CIB approvals are with five Indigenous communities in two provinces and one territory (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Yukon).

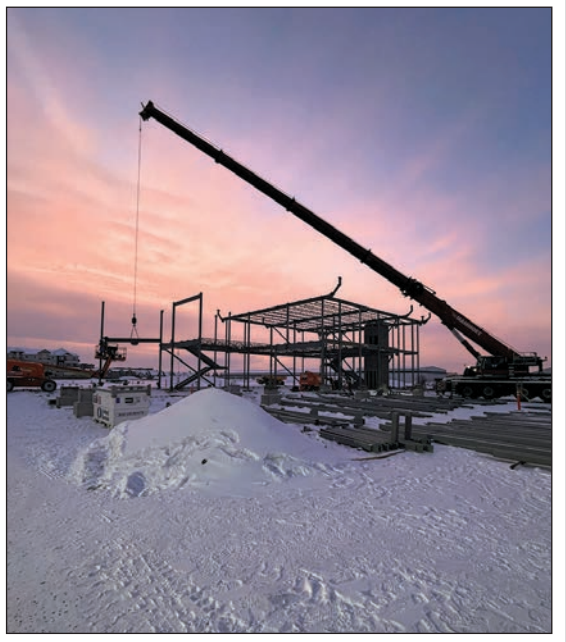
One of the projects funded in northern British Columbia is with Doig River First Nation's development corporation for the creation of a new 8-acre economic hub, called Naache Commons, on urban reserve land in Fort St. John. Chief Trevor Makadahay of Doig River First Nation said, "This project is part of our nation-building story as we return back to our ancestral Fort St. John Beaver Band lands and enhance our economic potential throughout northeastern British Columbia. The Indigenous Land Development Loan Program delivered by FNBC with CIB has been game-changing in making Naache Commons a reality."

Projects like Naache Commons, which plans to feature 61,000 square feet of commercial space, residential units and gas station, will help address long-standing infrastructure gaps while promoting sustainable development.

"The FNBC and CIB program is helping us stretch financing much further, supporting a broader scope of Indigenous infrastructure projects than traditional grants or government capital funding alone," said Bill Lomax, President and CEO of FNBC. "This partnership ensures that Indigenous-led projects receive the financial resources needed to succeed and thrive."

"Just a year after finalizing our $100M loan with FNBC, we are seeing it come to fruition. Our collaboration is accelerating investments in critical community infrastructure projects, many of which were previously delayed due to funding challenges," said Ehren Cory, CEO, Canada Infrastructure Bank. "Indigenous communities are accessing affordable financing towards their community development projects, resulting in enhanced living conditions, new economic opportunities and housing."

Indigenous communities interested in accessing this community development financing, can learn more on the FNBC site (https://www.fnbc.ca/) or emailing directly about the Land Development Loan Program at infrastructureloan@fnbc.ca.



Construction taking place at the Doig River First Nation urban reserve in Fort St. John.

FNBC and CIB Program Impact:

Number of Initial Approvals: 5
CIB Loan Portion: $30,500,000
FNBC Loan Portion: $74,000,000
Total Project Value: $140,000,000