

Dylan Adam

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Princeton, BC
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

As the Youth Representative for the Vermillion Forks Métis Chartered community in Princeton, BC, I have been granted a unique opportunity for continuous learning and growth. This role has allowed me to not only deepen my understanding of my own Métis culture but also to actively promote it within my community.

Throughout my educational journey, I have faced numerous barriers that have challenged my path to success. I have come to learn, access to one's culture and the support it provides is vital to achieving educational success. Unfortunately, during the early years of my education, I was disconnected from my Métis culture and was not exposed to its richness and significance. This lack of connection led to my struggle with social anxiety, which, despite my efforts, the public education system was ill-equipped to address. It was not until I was reconnected with my Métis culture and given opportunities to be more involved in my community that I experienced a turning point in my educational trajectory. Through this reconnection, I was able to expand my knowledge and take on challenges that once seemed impossible. Today, as a proud leader in my community, I have the privilege of educating other youth about our important culture.

I am currently pursuing a Political Science degree at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. My goal is to continue promoting Métis culture and taking an active leadership role in our community's and Métis Nation's path forward. My experiences have taught me the value of cultural connection and the importance of providing support to those who face barriers to educational success.

It is often said that the youth are our future, and I believe that we cannot have true leadership without education. As someone who has personally benefited from access to resources at the community level, I feel strongly about the need to ensure that all Indigenous communities can reach out to youth and provide them with opportunities to connect with their culture.

Disconnected from one's culture, as I once was, can have a devastating impact on educational development. That's why I believe it's crucial to ensure that no Indigenous youth is left without a platform to be heard. As someone who has found their voice through such a platform, I know firsthand how essential it is for all aspiring Indigenous youth leaders to have the necessary tools and resources as early as possible. For our youth to be successful, they must be given the support and the opportunity to experience their culture in tandem with the established public

education system. This requires a coordinated effort to ensure that Indigenous communities have access to the resources and support necessary to provide this critical connection.

In summary, I believe that providing Indigenous youth with access to their culture and the support they need to succeed is essential to building strong, resilient communities and developing future leaders. By investing in the next generation, we can help ensure a brighter future for all. A strong community is essential.

Kassidy Augustine

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Sipekne'katik First Nation
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

My whole life has been shaped and molded through education. As a 19 year old Indigenous woman, my mother had made it clear throughout my whole life that education was a priority. I excelled in my academic studies all throughout school, but the social aspect was hard as I attended school off reserve for middle school and high school. I faced a lot of racism which was really hard on me, I was called many things that I can never forget, so I transferred out of school in the 10th grade to attend school on reserve. The school on reserve was a traditional school with all native kids and mostly native teachers, it was so good for me to be taught in a decolonial setting and really helped me heal from the trauma of being racially bullied. I then graduated a year early and I am now a second year student at Dalhousie University studying Political Science and Law, justice and Society. I now face a whole new set of problems. I often find I struggle with fitting in, as there are not many Indigenous students who attend, and I also struggle with articulation and spelling because my dad cannot read and write. My family doesn't use big words like professors use in university, we speak a lot of Mikmaq or "rez slang" so it's hard for me to understand or use big words. But, despite these barriers, I continue to keep going and try to succeed in a colonial institution that wasn't built for me. I am almost done my second year.

Throughout my life I have been apart of many organizations and opportunities to help foster leadership skills. When I was 15 years old I was invited to go on an Arctic expedition called Students On Ice, there I went up to Greenland for 3 weeks with other indigenous peoples from all over the world. I meet new people, learned about Arctic ecosystems and indigenous ways of living, and learned how to meet new people. It made me open up and realize what I was capable of and gave me confidence. That same year, I was invited to partake in an initiative and job opportunity called The Red Road Project, which was a weeklong camp held by elders to teach about traditional ways of living along with sobriety. Afterwards as apart of our jobs we had to take our knowledge and hold community events for the youth and be a role model. I did that job for two years, and connected with so many young people. Currently I am involved with a youth council for my federal riding of Kings Hants, held by member of parliament Kody Blois, there we discuss political issues that are important to us and I raise issues about my indigenous community. I have also volunteered him for the last two years. In addition to this, right now I am apart of an 8 week volunteer program that is in my community that mentors young

indigenous kids from 12-15. I have been teaching them about my experiences in university to encourage them to attend higher education.

Naokah Bailes

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Deline
Province: Northwest Territories

Submission:

I am Sahtu Got'ine (Great Bear Lake First Nations). I was born and raised in a small sub-arctic community in the Northwest Territories, where my parents were stewards in creating opportunities for me to grow as a strong leader through education and outdoor leadership. Growing up in a small northern community has had its challenges, especially when it came to leaving to pursue a better education, but my connection to culture and the land is what kept me motivated.

I have experienced two opposite ends of the education system in Canada, from being an overall academic honour role student at a small northern community, to being 2-3 years behind mentally at a prestigious private boarding school on Vancouver Island. I was 13 years old when I entered the gates of Shawnigan Lake School, uniforms, a chapel, dorms, and strict rules are the first things I noticed. Ironically, the expensive tuition was partially being paid for by my indigenous grandparent's residential school money, just for me to be sent to a different type of residential school. I transitioned from traditional to non-traditional, public to private, north to south, Slavey classes to French classes, I was afraid this was a more modern institution to 'kill the Indian' in me. To start, I was faced with a tremendous culture-shock that almost had me on the next flight north, it took me 3 months to stop being overwhelmed with shock and homesickness. Eventually I found my grounding, understood Shawnigan's around the clock routine, made lifelong friends, and overcame many academic challenges that I couldn't do without Shawnigan's support. This institute didn't 'kill the Indian in me', it grew and challenged the 'Indian in me' to become a strong indigenous leader.

Spending time in a new environment lead me to realize how unique my life in the north was and how special my culture and the land truly is. Initially I thought my time there would slowly break my connection to the north, however, this life changing opportunity only made my connection to my culture stronger. Essentially, I didn't know what I had until it was gone. Shawnigan made me appreciate education in a way I wish the north could. It pushed me out of my comfort zone so many times and challenged me in a way my hometown could never. It is absolutely essential to leave your hometown and leave your comfort zone, to experience new challenges to create growth. Without making this change, I would have no drive or confidence to try new things and chase my dreams.

My first educational path at Shawnigan led me to pursuing a career in the tourism industry in the Northwest Territories. I began working for Hunting Outfitters at the age of 13 in the Mackenzie Mountains, across the river from my hometown. Being an indigenous woman was the most challenging part since it's a white male dominated industry. However, I always told myself to keep hanging on, even though many people told me I did not belong. I understood the challenges that came with paving a path for minorities, I was proud to let the hunting industry know that indigenous women can be outdoor leaders too, there just aren't enough indigenous leaders in the tourism industry. I wanted to make my ancestors proud, and to spark passion in local youth to pursue leadership opportunities in outdoor settings.

Today, I'm now in a career path that reflects my values in creating young indigenous leaders through outdoor expeditions in our homeland (Sahtu). I guide/facilitate trips to challenge youth and learn the in's and out's of being an outdoor leader. I am also two years into my Bachelor's Degree in Nature-Based Tourism Management at the University of Northern British Columbia. I hope I am able to return to the north full-time when I graduate, and help create tourism and land stewardship opportunities. I also hope that indigenous youth can pursue new environments like I did, without degrading barriers but with support systems from familiar faces.

Talia Baptiste

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Tsideldel First Nation
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

Since I was 8, I always have wanted to be part of the positive change within my community, nation and family. My ?inkwel (mom) was an education coordinator for my community for 13 years and I saw a lot of the barriers placed in front of young indigenous students.

What I have learned in my upbringing is that education is so important and vital to survival. Education is the key to a lot of doors/opportunities. My vision is to empower youth in reaching their goals. To have modern and traditional practices interwoven into the school systems for youth to step into and to feel culturally safe. To reduce culture shock to the kids. To teach those in power that everything is deeply interconnected. From Education to Governance, Healing, Housing, Lands, Justice, Culture & Language are all interconnected and have a big impact on one another. Healing options and support must be readily available to youth while in school. Going to school can be triggering and difficult to navigate if there are things going on at home. I am a residential school intergenerational survivor. I have a strong ?inkwel but she battles her trauma & addictions and it impacted me while I was going to school. I have also had my own experience in battling addictions and had the opportunity to learn ways to heal through Tsow-Tun-Le-Lum on Vancouver Island. I was in the child welfare system for a bit as well after my dad passed. I worked three jobs while in high school to keep my mind busy and to help provide. I didn't reach out because I didn't want my family taken apart – again. Ever since I was 11, I was always student and an employee. My grandparents taught me to always be working and going to school. They weren't given the same opportunities as me and they are so proud of me and inspired me to always work hard. I worked for my community as proposal writer, lands manager and a community researcher to create implementation plans. Now I am the Recreation & Events coordinator to assist my department in preventing youth going into care by providing healthy opportunities for them. I am also a Council member for my community of Tsideldel since 2018. I am part of boards and committee tables as well for my Nation to advocate and promote positive change. I went to three different universities through online and in person while I was working for my community. I am grateful to have; The Professional Indigenous Lands Management Certificate from Vancouver Island University; UBC Certificate in Indigenous Health Administration and Leadership; and a Certificate in general studies from Thompson Rivers University. I have had the opportunity to work with PG Division of Family Practice as a Clinical Community Manager to work with Doctors of BC and an Operations Manager for Focus Forward for Indigenous Youth which I learned a lot from, even if it was a

short time. It is a great learning experience to attend conferences and meet people across turtle island to share and listen to stories, best practices, barriers and how other have overcome them. I hope that for all indigenous youth to be brave to go out into the world to challenge themselves and to ask questions and to be part of the change that Canada needs.

Asha Bear

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Neqotkuk (Tobique) First Nation
Province: New Brunswick

Submission:

In one way or another, I have been immersed in education for most of my life. I attended post-secondary at Dalhousie University and completed a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Theatre and a minor in Indigenous Studies in 2018. After finishing university, I returned to my community Neqotkuk (Tobique First Nation), to begin my career. I started a job at the local high school. I worked there for two years with Indigenous students from my community. I fostered and created relationships with many youths from the community. I learned there was little support for Indigenous students to succeed in a space that was not created for them. I worked with staff to incorporate two-eyed seeing methodologies into the classroom by working to create a space for the students that was safe and culturally appropriate. However, it was more challenging than I expected. Due to burnout, I decided to leave and continue to pursue my education at UNB for a graduate certificate in Indigenous Counseling. While at UNB, I have been immersed in an Indigenous culturally rich program with holistic practices and teachings. This program has encouraged me to seek more cultural exposure, and I am now learning my language and drumming. I am also pursuing a Certificate in Film Production, which has been challenging. I am eager to tell my stories, but this program is done in a colonial context. It feels like I'm living in two worlds, being in university for the second time—one world that's culturally rich and the other that is westernized.

I have advocated helping Indigenous people succeed during my studies. Firstly, by incorporating two-eyed seeing in my work. At my organization, we do workshops with youth around healthy relationships and employment readiness. I have been working during my studies to incorporate culturally rich programming for our students for when we go into schools. They must have a safe space to grow with supporters that understand them. I have used my experiences in various forms of education systems to create engaging workshops to encourage and support students. In addition, I have recently got approved for a grant to incorporate beading workshops to support Indigenous post-secondary students during their studies. These workshops will help create a community to support students while they're away from home. Through my advocacy, I am helping future Indigenous students by assisting them in their educational journey in more ways than one.

Bertram Bernard

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Eskasoni First Nation
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

My name is Bertram Bernard Jr, but my traditional name is Muij Ji'j [moo-in geeg], which means “little bear” in my language, Mi'kmaq. I'm a Two-Spirit business researcher and professional that resides in Eskasoni First Nation in Nova Scotia. Living in Eskasoni First Nation has allowed me to understand the importance of the Mi'kmaq culture and traditions while allowing me to give back to my community. The discussion of this brief essay will describe my experience in the education system as a First Nation individual—also, how I broke the glass ceiling and negative stereotypes by achieving higher education.

From 2019 to the present, I'm currently employed with the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq as their Information Governance & Data Projects team Project Manager. We work with many data from the First Nations Regional Health Surveys and other related projects to assist First Nations communities in comprehending the importance of data and research. Most of my volunteering time is with Pride Eskasoni, where I am their Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer; my responsibilities are overseeing all aspects of operation within the organization and mentoring the 2SLGBTQ+ community members with business and education knowledge by assisting them in reaching potential opportunities. In addition, I was selected to serve as the first Mi'kmaq Vice President of Finance and Operations for a student society group at Cape Breton University. I believe these achievements wouldn't have happened without my educational background.

During my education journey, I've encountered many racist and stereotypical comments as a First Nation student in university. I've gained a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree and a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree from Cape Breton University. While acquiring my Master's degree from Cape Breton University, I experienced many racist, biased and stereotypical comments about being an Indigenous student. There were comments such as: “I didn't know Natives were smart,” “Do you still live in a teepee?” and “You're lucky to get free education as a First Nation student.” These comments can harm Indigenous students both physically and mentally. Although my experiences came from the lack of knowledge about Indigenous people, educating those who don't know our history needs to address these issues. In my community of Eskasoni First Nation, I am the second person to be accepted into Harvard Business School. In 2019, I received a full scholarship to attend in-person classes. I've graduated and completed the Certificate in Leading People and Investing to Build Sustainable Communities at Harvard Business School.

My vision is to assist my Mi'kmaq communities with the education I've received and be a mentor to those who would like to continue the same journey as me. My subsequent education goal is to apply for the Executive Doctorate of Business Administration (EDBA) and become the first Mi'kmaw person in history to graduate from the EDBA program. I would also like to thank the committee for their time, and I hope my educational background will earn me the spotlight for the Voice of Youth Indigenous Leaders 2023.

Timothy Bernard

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Summerside
Province: Prince Edward Island

Submission:

By the time that i made it Grade 12 (2012), my grades were at a level where i had no problem getting accepted into a post-secondary program at the University of PEI. I did not finish the program at the time (2012-2014), due to multiple factors, a few of those factors i would say had to do with barriers I and many indigenous students face. I originally got accepted to UPEI in their engineering program as i also thought i had what it takes to be an engineer. I quick found out that the Engineering program was very difficult and accelerated, which was not a good choice of program for a fresh post-secondary student with no knowledge of what the program entailed. At the time i started studying more topics in science and business, still not sure of what i wanted to do in the future. I dropped out of UPEI with no degree and a few courses i did okay in. It wasn't until 2018 that i decided to give university another try. I applied to the University of New Brunswick in their science program and finished with a Degree in Science with a major in Biology. My second attempt at University was much more successful as i was a mature student that understood the process and i was more confident to ask the questions i needed to know the answers to.

I can only speak to my experience and i was not well informed of the post secondary process (my first attempt), so when i had to moved an hour and a half by car to a city i hardly visited, to attend a university that i did not know, i was panicked to say the least. My experience is likely similar to a lot of students not just Indigenous students but i noticed over the years, people making comments about how Indigenous peoples should all be educated since its "free" and that Indigenous people are lazy because they have all these opportunities given to them but do not make anything of themselves. I unfortunately heard these comments from people i respected. My understanding of these comments is a lot more clear nowadays as i can look back at my experience with education being Indigenous. I call it a "free" education because nothing about it is free. Sure tuition is covered but Indigenous students receive pennies for a living allowance, and it has not gotten better from the first time i attended University in 2012 to the second time i attended University in 2018-2022. Luckily there were programs in place to supplement that but it requires subscribing to a provincial/federal program on top of all the other assistances you have to apply for. On top of being financially stressful, attending post-

secondary required me to travel and live away from my family, my community, and my support system. This was a barrier at first until i became more independent and became easier to navigate on my second attempt at post-secondary. The way I overcame any barriers while in school was to work hard and always strive to do my best. I was a "mature" student so i had my priorities were set on the very first day of class. It was a hard four years but i ended my final semester before graduation with a 3.6 GPA.

With my education, I was able to work with the Department of Fisheries & Oceans as a Science Research Technician for about two years before applying for a position with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI as their Environmental Specialist under their Integrated Resource Management Division. This position allows me to develop various programs/initiatives that I and the First Nation Communities feel are needed, as well as implement such programs/initiatives. My goal is to gain more knowledge to hopefully someday be able to take on more leadership roles in my Organization. My supervisor has been instrumental in giving me opportunities to learn and grow.

Makadae-Makoons Boissoneau

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Sault ste marie
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I have experience in the education system is systematic racism based due to I am an indigenous, also I have faced a lot of racial issues in the classroom even till this day meanwhile I still continue to stay on course to what I want to achieve for Indigenous communities. I can see if that if we stick to the traditional roots of teaching as it is today, we may lose even more indigenous youth, and I believe if we have of a more "indigenous" based teachings more so of not seating behind a desk and learning, and by actually doing the lessons or course "hands"-on instead of "head"-on that we may see an increase of indigenous youth in classes / programs. I enhance my "leadership" from sports always been a team-player and learned to step back sometimes and let someone else lead from time to time but always remembered that will that "leadership" role is based of experience and confidence from within yourself.

Robyn Boulanger

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Winnipeg
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

My name is Robyn Boulanger, my spirit name is Memengwaa Ikwe, which means Swirling Butterfly Woman. I am a member of the sturgeon clan and I am from Berens River First Nation. I graduate with a Bachelors in Education at the end of April. I wanted to become a physical education teacher because I believe in the power of education as it creates knowledge, builds confidence, and breaks down barriers to opportunity. My mission as a teacher is to provide a classroom environment where all cultures and traditions are celebrated. I want to make school a positive experience for all students especially Indigenous youth. I recently applied to a masters degree in Indigenous Education at UBC. I hope to be accepted in this amazing program and learn more about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

I became interested in pursuing an Indigenous Education master's degree because I want to learn more about my cultural heritage. I have seen the effects of intergenerational trauma on my family and have been fortunate enough to break this cycle. I was able to do this through the support of my loved ones and using sport as a positive outlet. However, due to the high demands of a student-athlete, I did not have the time to deepen my understanding of my Ojibway culture. In my third year of University, I became devoted to learning about my Indigenous background. I believe a masters program will help me become professionally equipped to educate others to effectively teach Indigenous world views and knowledge.

My background in Indigenous Education has been through sport and coaching opportunities. I have collaborated with a variety of Indigenous owned organizations. The Anishinaabe Pride Basketball Club that my family developed was my first experience coaching. Our main goal was to give Indigenous and inner-city youth the opportunity to play at a competitive level. The program taught fundamental basketball skills while also incorporating Indigenous teachings into the game. Pride values were based on the seven sacred teachings which encouraged athletes to use sport as an outlet to connect to their culture. I also had the opportunity to travel to remote Indigenous communities in Manitoba to run sport camps for youth and young adults. During this time, I facilitated drills and activities, while cooking nutritious meals for the community. I was also invited to participate in ceremony such as a community smudge and sweat. This was an eye-opening experience and confirmed my passion for teaching our young Indigenous people the benefit of physical activity. I believe by incorporating sport, traditional knowledge and values in my profession as a physical education teacher will benefit the learning

experiences of all students. Furthermore, I will prioritize creating a culturally inclusive environment where my Indigenous students can grasp a sense of belonging.

I believe I could bring a unique perspective and can contribute to the future conversations on the theme of education. Additionally, I look forward to hearing from Indigenous leaders to increase my knowledge from other's experiences throughout Canada. My goal as an educator is to promote Indigenous health and wellness through education. I strongly believe school is where we can make the greatest change in promoting reconciliation and optimizing opportunities for Indigenous youth. As Senator Murray Sinclair said in the TRC 94 calls to action "education is what got us in this mess, education is what will get us out."

Julianna Brinston

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: St. John's
Province: Newfoundland and Labrador

Submission:

Opportunities for traditional learning are markedly sparse for Indigenous Youth looking to connect with their culture. From the time we enter the public school system, we are inundated by colonist structures and ways of knowing. My greatest experience in education has been the lack of opportunities to learn about what it truly means to be Indigenous. As a result of this absence, the path to truth and reconciliation is not clear. Canadians continue to live in an idealist fantasy where we proudly hold our noses up at the American rejection of critical race theory, but our hands are not clean. Ultimately, the path to rectification for the atrocities that continue to haunt our Indigenous communities must be rooted in acknowledgement, and education. Until we can acknowledge historic abuses, we cannot address the prevailing systems that heighten inequalities faced by our First Nation Peoples.

Growing up, I had always felt a separation from myself and my identity as an Indigenous person. I did not feel a connection with the horrors that my teachers spoke of in my history classes, because that is what I believed that it was: History. A bygone piece of the past that can do no harm any longer. This toxic, Eurocentric ideology is pushed in schools as a means to cover our tracks, to claim that “we know better now”, but the truth is not as simple as that. I have made an effort as I continue on with my post-secondary education however, to embark on my own path of self-discovery, and decolonize my frames of reference. I have done this by making connections and getting to know my Indigenous communities and background through a number of volunteer and executive efforts.

As a member of the Indigenous Leaders of Tomorrow, I participated actively in weekly webinars, where topics such as Indigenous leadership, activism, and cultural awareness were discussed with various guest speakers. These speakers came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, sharing their own unique perspectives and practices. This program has given me a deeper value and regard for my heritage, and allowed me to connect with other Indigenous youth, who like myself yearned for a closeness with their ancestors. I have been further inspired to connect with youth in my community on a cultural level at the First Light Friendship Centre, where I engaged in child-led play with children in my community, and guided them on their own journeys of cultural enrichment.

My efforts in my community have served me greatly on my quest of cultural endowment, but my time in the post-secondary system as a woman studying STEM and planning a career in

Medicine has further highlighted educational gaps. I struggled greatly to find my place among my peers, who believed I had not earned a spot in their ranks. My accomplishments, to them, was a facade; a “benefit” that had been given to me by my heritage. This sentiment is shared by many Indigenous students, who feel tokenized and struggle to not feel the cruel grips of Imposter Syndrome.

The empowerment of Indigenous students in the education system is vital to the path to reconciliation. The public and secondary school systems are long colonized spaces, but it is invaluable in the fight for justice to Indigenize them by facilitating connection and collaboration amongst students. The historic abuse that occurred in residential schools has inextricably intertwined Indigenous identity and loss of culture, through colonialist imperialism. Residential schools represent one of many pervasive legacies of European pillaging. The most critical step in overcoming the legacy is acknowledgement, only then can we forge a path to reconciliation.

Jordan Brown

Primary Identification: Inuit (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut)
Community: Happy Valley-Goose Bay
Province: Newfoundland and Labrador

Submission:

The best education I ever received was from those around me who experienced distinct hardships. People who had stories to tell - except they weren't stories, they were real life. Sometimes we don't want to know the stories, and in our culture - they can often be hard to tell. Growing up, I entered school with an open mind and eagerness to learn. As the years passed, I wondered when we would ever get to learn about all of the amazing things I grew up seeing in pictures and learning about while spending time at my grandmother's house. I never realized why everything about my life was so unknown to the rest of the world.

It was only my last year of high school I was able to enroll into a Labrador Inuit Society and Culture class, and in my last few years of high school when my mother told me about residential schools. People were ashamed. I didn't have to wonder any longer why people weren't running and screaming from the mountain tops about their indigenous identity. That is like painting a target on your back. For so long we were instructed to be quiet, to not speak our language, to cut our hair, to conform to something we were never meant to and never wanted to be. In my experience of education I struggled with speaking my truth in the spaces I was in. I was always the quietest, shyest kid in the classroom but as I got older I couldn't let expressing my indigenous identity be something that painted a target on my back.

In my life I couldn't quite picture myself in any type of leadership. I also could not let my life pass me by without ever trying. Whenever I am in a difficult situation in my life I think of my grandmother, who is the strongest, smartest, wisest woman I have ever met. She endured and experienced so much because she knew that she could survive. If I am able to accomplish even half of what she has done I will be forever proud. I had the opportunity to teach sports and dance while growing up and this past summer I got to coordinate a summer program after being a counselor for a few summers.

I enjoy working with youth and being in a position that is so impactful on even a season of their lives means a lot to me. It is really important to me to incorporate culture into a program for the youth in the summer in Labrador. Seeing as this was something I wished was provided in my childhood, I really like to take the time to ensure the youth have a well-rounded, inclusive experience learning about the main cultures in Labrador but also that we can accept that part of ourselves regardless of any trauma or hurt that may be lingering. I hope that our education

system can incorporate the courses and resources for students to access the main culture of their area.

Stephanie Cameron-Johnson

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Victoria
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

My leadership experience involves working from the age of 16 with my first job at McDonalds in the city. Since age 5, I am the eldest in two different foster homes. The family I landed with at the age of 13 (2nd foster home) showed me what love, care and support in community looks like. I am the first in my immediate family to attend post-secondary. I grew up in a European home and navigated the world through a western lens and want to gain my culture back and teachings as my cultural development to my identity is still on the horizon but my western and institutional knowledge is strong. I know my strength as an Indigenous woman is to show people who are also navigating the western system that they too can reclaim Indigenous education and teachings back into their life to improve their own quality and communities wellness.

Education systems are placed in communities to exchange a particular type of knowledge to a group of people to think a similar way to work and function together. I will discuss the variation of education systems.

Traditional Western (public or private schools)

I will group the public and private schools as they are based on westernized worldviews. In the western traditional school system in 2011, that was the first time I heard of Indigenous people in my history class. The western worldview exists because the colonial mindset teaches people communicate in one way, and have transactional relationships – it is the opposite of Indigenous education. Transactional relationships occur for something in return. Reciprocal relationships are connected and based on respect and on-going relations. The western education did not think about the people who lived here before and did not care to acknowledge them. As a result, I did not know Indigenous people existed or many nations existed in BC or across Canada – the syllabus was focused on westernized expansion only and how great it was for our country. The western education system actively removed Indigenous history and education and continues to depreciate Indigenous people and Indigenous culture. There is a massive disconnect between Indigenous education and Western Education.

Traditional Indigenous Education

Traditional education systems vary across Canada because each culture is different. For example, cultural teachings vary and sources from elders, youth and community members vary

based on their unique history and life lessons. Indigenous worldviews are known to be connected to the land and harvest from the land only for what they need. It is about balance and taking care of the land and the people. When it is out of balance, the system fails and Indigenous people across Turtle Island have been saying this for the past 7 generations.

Post-Secondary Western and Indigenous Education

I was privileged to attend post-secondary. At the time my first introduction in 2011 to Indigenous studies; I felt a sense of relief and confusion about my identity as this was the first time I heard of why Indigenous people continue to struggle due to residential schools, 60's scoop and missing women and children. It was necessary to hear the truth of our history but it was not easy because it was a culture shock and I was upset that we have been fooled to mislead the injustices and due to the overall lack of necessary education of "Canada's History".

Tiana Cappo

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Saskatoon
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

I am currently finishing my degree in Education through the Indian Teacher's Education Program (ITEP). Throughout my schooling, I have felt like I didn't belong because of my ethnicity as a young Indigenous girl. When the time came to learn about the two topics of Indigenous history or culture that was in the Saskatchewan curriculum at the time, I was slightly embarrassed because I could feel the other kids staring at me and the one other visibly First Nations student in the class.

In present time, I have reconnected with my rich culture and history as an anishinaabe woman from the Muscowpetung First Nation. However, in the past I was noticing that in the classroom I was having a hard time implementing First Nations, Métis and Inuit content because I was never shown that while I was in school. There was a gap of knowledge that I could never get back.

I began doing professional research for my practice, and began engaging in difficult discussions about how I am able to bridge that gap of knowing and doing for myself. This all lead to the conclusion that education in and out of the classroom for all students of any race or ethnicity is helpful in the development of reconciliation. The knowledge base students will gain and possess to become an ally for Indigenous knowledge and resource will come from learning in the school and at home. For our Indigenous children, the knowledge to possess and gain will start a fire in is to begin to help ourselves and our communities grow, develop and ultimately, succeed in this colonized civilization.

The education system itself is a social construct that was made by the colonial government, there is no way to "decolonize" it, and that's not what is going to happen. However, there are ways in which we can change instructional methods, ways of knowing and ways that will be able to engage our youth in becoming more involved in issues of Indigenous subjectivity whether they are Indigenous themselves or not.

Education needs to become a safe space for the Indigenous youth as well as changing the narrative for the older Indigenous population. It was not long ago where these institutions were meant to take away our language, culture and ways of knowing. We cannot have our Indigenous children be consistently absent because there is an underlying fear that their parents/guardians or grandparents are fearful they won't see them again.

Education is never a youth focus. We are all constantly learning, the world is always changing, social constructs change and so do people. We must keep up, and how we will do that is by listening to our youth.

miigwech

Kenton Cardinal

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Saddle Lake Cree Nation
Province: Alberta

Submission:

My name is Kenton Cardinal, a member of the Saddle Lake Cree Nation. Currently I'm a Post-Secondary Student at the University of Alberta studying political science with a minor in native studies – focusing on First Nations Governance and Partnership. Growing up – I always attended schooling off Reserve in a nearby town located in rural Alberta. Like many Indigenous families, my family thought it was best I attend a white school for better opportunities i.e., Field Trips, Quality of Education, Technological Exposure, and Access to Adequate Infrastructure. Naturally like many rural communities in Alberta, there were issues of discrimination and racism – scars of trauma, shame, and hurt riddled within our communities – because of the nearby former residential school.

I never had much exposure to my community until my dad passed away and I became lost – I eventually dropped out of university and returned home to my Reserve. In my grief I found ceremony, confiding in culture and community. My worldview immediately shifted, walking the path of my ancestors. I became more knowledgeable and aware of communal affairs, level of poverty in my community, and fundamentals of Cree governance. My passion and interest grew and so did my knowledge base. In June 2022 I decided to run for Chief and Council – Unfortunately I didn't make it, but I found a sense of belonging and identity. So-much-so I decided to enroll back into university.

Though I skimmed over my journey, I gained a lot of essential experiences and opportunities. I had the opportunity to shadow a Chief (Eric Shirt) and sit-in at a lot of Chiefs meetings and community gatherings. I learned about funding agreements and networked with many Alberta region Chiefs, visiting other Nations. All-in-all there are funding shortfalls on Reserves everywhere, there are also issues of lack of infrastructure and connectivity, we also see shortfalls in technology usage and opportunity. When we think of education we think K-12 and University, but we tend to leave behind our young ones in daycare. In First Nations belief, education starts from the point of birth up until death – education is lifelong – daycares are always least priority and have the worst level of funding compared to upper year levels, especially in my community.

Today, in Saddle Lake Cree Nation we are developing our own laws – particularly education. We find the system developed to educate us; failed us. So, we are taking initiative to address funding and policy, while developing a curriculum that encompasses First Nations philosophy, culture, language, and autonomy. If I'm chosen to have this opportunity, I would want to address these issues but also show pictures and figures to highlight and emphasize these topics. We must support our youth and their visions; my generations need to step-up and speak - This is my opportunity to speak.

William Chilton-Petiquay

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Wemotaci
Province: Quebec

Submission:

<https://1drv.ms/w/s!AvmUSHWzyswigTbe6COEhSjE790S?e=lqzXWj>

ceci est un lien Word, où j'ai mis mon mémoire de 500 mots.

Si le lien ne marche pas, je l'ai copié-collé ci-bas:

Kwei! Tout d'abord, j'aimerais me présenter et vous donner mon cheminement académique. Je m'appelle William Chilton-Petiquay, j'ai 18 ans, originaire de la communauté de Wemotaci, donc je suis un Atikamekw. Je parle aisément le français, l'anglais ainsi que ma langue d'origine, qui est l'atikamekw. J'ai fait mes études primaire et secondaire dans cette communauté autochtone. Maintenant, je suis aux études supérieures, c'est-à-dire postsecondaire. Plus précisément, je suis étudiant au cégep de Trois-Rivières depuis la session automne 2022. Depuis longtemps, j'ai à cœur le désir de changement dans plusieurs domaines tels que la politique ou la santé, mais surtout l'éducation. J'ai pour but de changer le système actuel des écoles primaire de quelques manières. Avant de commencer à vous partager ma vision des choses, je tiens à vous mentionner que j'avais assisté au Sommet Jeunesse 2022 à Trois-Rivières dans la branche « éducation ». Nous avons abordé, avec d'autres personnes ayant choisi préalablement ce domaine, plusieurs aspects négatives quant au fonctionnement du système des écoles secondaire en milieu autochtone. Plusieurs des sujets qu'on a parlé m'ont interpellé et j'aimerais les mentionner ici :

Préserver la (les) cultures autochtone(s) :

À ce sujet, nous avons donné des stratégies à atteindre afin de préserver les cultures autochtones tels que d'impliquer la jeunesse dans la promotion de la culture, organiser des activités dans un thème culturelle et traditionnel ou favoriser des sorties scolaires dans la nature. Pour la dernière stratégie, j'aimerais vous parler d'un de mes souvenir d'enfance en lien avec celui-ci. Quand j'étais plus jeune, il y'avait un programme appelé « Camp Notcimik » ou « Camp Kice Amiskw » dans lequel, le but était de partir quelques jours dans la nature afin que nous, les enfants, puissions découvrir l'art de la trappe, pêche, cuisine traditionnelle ainsi que d'autres activités propres aux premières nations. C'était le moyen que l'éducation de ma communauté avait trouvé afin de préserver l'identité culturelle et cela avait bien marché.

Promouvoir la réussite scolaire :

Nous avons effleuré ce sujet et j'aimerais l'y approfondir. Nous savons que la réussite scolaire dans les communautés autochtone n'est pas totalement la plus merveilleuse. Je veux dire, le taux de décrochage scolaire est élevé ainsi que le taux de personnes n'ayant pas le DES est élevé et il faut essayer de trouver des moyens afin de promouvoir la réussite scolaire. En y pensant bien, on pourrait donner aux jeunes étudiants du secondaire une rencontre avec un ou des personnes modèles (avec une certaine expérience scolaire) qui vont leur parler de leur cheminement académique dans le but de les encourager à ne pas abandonner les études.

Bref, d'autres moyens sont bon tels que d'organiser des soirées de reconnaissances aux étudiants. J'aimerais aussi ajouter que les sports dans les communautés sont très présent, les JAIB (Jeux Autochtones Interbandes) peut en témoigner, donc j'aimerais que le sport étude puisse y avoir lieu dans les écoles (RSEQ), cela augmenterais le désir de continuer les études chez les jeunes, puisqu'ils auront la possibilité d'exercer leur sport favoris tout en allant à l'école.

Adrien Clarke

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Saskatoon
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

Hello Tansi, My name is Adrien Clarke. My pronouns are she/her. I am Woodland Cree from Treaty 6 territory from northern Saskatchewan. I would like to acknowledge my ancestors who came before me, because of them I am able to be where I am today. I am able to use my voice, I am able to be a mother and watch my kids grow up, for that I am eternally grateful. I am able to take up space within systems that are meant to oppress me. I have been a student at the University of Saskatchewan since 2019, I have recently transferred from the College of Nursing to Arts and Science with a Major in Health Studies, and a Minor in Psychology.

I have graduated with a grade 12 diploma from my home community, Southend. Moving from my home community and overcoming culture shock lead to some anxieties but I was grateful to have the opportunity to become more. I graduated from College with my Primary Care Paramedics in 2017. I then went on to advance my education. I was in my third year of Nursing when I had transferred colleges due to ongoing racism, discrimination, and marginalization. My experience with the College of Nursing was like no other.

Taking up space and walking in two worlds are a battle we all face as Indigenous students in colonial systems. For many of us, it is scary to speak up and years of colonization blocks our voice, we are silenced. Many times we believe what they think of us, we become victims to that mentality. As someone who has been to afraid to use my voice due to generations of colonization and oppression, it is time for me to speak my truth. Not for me, but for my children and their children, for Indigenous students everywhere. I have overcome many barriers as an Indigenous Student and accused of several things while in clinical which held me back. For them it was a Tuesday but for me it was my life and my children's life that were affected. I experienced my first death in the field, and my instructor said, "it's not your fault", she then proceeded to investigate the death to make sure it was in fact not my fault. I knew it was not my fault, but I wish I was showed compassion in that moment. This is one example of many. I met with the deans of the three colleges, the student support president, counsellors that advocate for Indigenous Students. I had several meetings while I was doing my Clinical while being a single mom of 2, while being a full time student and working. But at the end of the day, all that was done, was me. I was done with fighting. They held no accountability, they denied the racism and discrimination I had endured. I was the issue because I was emotional, stressed, and could not handle "nursing". I was gaslit and manipulated to believe I was the problem. Microaggression and incivility was practice within classes amongst students and

instructors. I remember feeling unsafe, unwanted and a burden. Although, I was successfully passing, I felt it wasn't worth continuing when I considered the impact of my mental health and overall wellness. I am speaking up because I don't want my kids or other Indigenous youth to ever feel this way when they pursue higher education.

Autumn Cooper

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Nanaimo
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

Uy skweyul. Enthu sit'quwiliye, i xwunitum snat Autumn Cooper. Tun ni cun utl Stz'uminus. I cun tatulut tu hul'qumi'num'.

Good day. My traditional name is sit'quwiliye and my English name is Autumn Cooper. I come from Stz'uminus First Nations which is located on Vancouver Island. I am currently learning our traditional hul'q'umi'num' language. The past 2 years I have been learning through a mentor apprentice with First Peoples Cultural Council. This has allowed me to start my journey of learning my traditional language in a one on one experience with a fluent speaker. I am very passionate about learning, teaching and sharing our language to all in hopes to build up more speakers. Currently I work with Indigenous daycares/headstarts within the hul'qumi'num' speaking territories to help create resources, produce training for staff and visit once a week to provide a hul'q'umi'num' circle time for the children. My job has allowed me to practice language every day and find new ways of incorporating hul'q'umi'num' into our daycares and schools.

As of June 2022 I graduated from Vancouver Island University with a Bachelor of Education and I am currently in my Master of Education through Indigenous Education at the University of British Columbia. For my capstone project I am currently creating a resource of all hul'q'umi'num' resources that have publicly been produced. The resources are being categorized from grades/ages, games, songs, ect. I also have made sure to categorize between the two dialects of hul'q'umi'num' here on Vancouver Island as many people don't know the differences between the two. My hope is that instead of recreating the same resources people can use and continue building new ones. This resource will make it easy for anyone at any level of their language learning journey to find suitable sites, videos and games for their use. We currently have around 30 fluent speakers left in our 9 Hul'qumi'num speaking nations. Unfortunately we are losing more fluent speakers than we are gaining. Our language is taught at a base level of colours, counting and animals. With my goal of incorporating more languages into all of our schools we can bring up the level of fluency to start teaching students higher levels of hul'qumi'num'. Other goals I would like to continue to work on are to incorporate more language into our education systems and to create lessons that any teacher can use to teach their students Hul'qumi'num. For a long term goal I would like to continue to build my fluency and create a year plan in order to have a full immersion classroom and or language nest within our daycares.

In the past I have worked at my Nations school as well as the public schools to incorporate more language but noticed the lack of support and resources. By leaving the education system I have been able to work with language more through an early years stream but I would like to come back to our schools with more experience as a language teacher. I would like there to be more offered with language and culture within our schools as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are missing this learning opportunity.

Huy ch qu. Thank you.

Benjamin Cooper-Janvier

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Calgary
Province: Alberta

Submission:

My name is Benjamin Cooper-Janvier, and I am a 26-year-old Indigenous professional. A 2020 graduate of a Bachelor of Commerce with Distinction, a 2022 graduate of a Master of Professional Accounting, and a current CPA Candidate (successful 2022 CFE writer). I was born in Edmonton, and briefly lived on the Cold Lake First Nations reserve with my Dene Father (residential school survivor) before moving to Calgary where I have grown up with my Mother (English background, born in Canada, however, also a Sun Dancer for many decades). I grew up knowing many Indigenous communities from Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 while being raised around many sweat lodges, sun dances, and traditional knowledge keepers. Therefore, I was raised into life through Indigenous Ways of Knowing, despite growing up largely in the City of Calgary.

As this essay does not have the word count available to detail the full WHY behind it, please understand it comes from a place of healing (having experienced and recovered from a family suicide due to intergenerational trauma), resilience (moving past a lifetime of facing cruel, overt, and subtle racism), and a care for Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike (my friends and family). After all, my blood is reconciliation (Indigenous and non).

My community leadership has involved speaking engagements, conversations building empathy around reconciliation, and mentorship. I have had the privilege of speaking on reconciliation during formal and informal panels (once having the honour of speaking with Dr. Reg Crowshoe), class presentations, and a graduation speech. I have volunteered in my community teaching business to children at Tsuu-Tina. I was the CPA Ambassador for the University of Calgary in which I mentored dozens of students in how to move through recruitment effectively. And lastly, I have courageously shared my raw story to friends, professors, and classmates to spread empathy for the true nature of Indigenous struggles and to further breakdown broader systemic beliefs.

My Vision for Education

I believe education is one of the keys for indigenous people to unlock further independence as a people, however, it needs to be traditional and non-traditional in nature. Ignoring traditional ways of knowing will leave a community barren of its history, its stories, its knowledge, and further damage its ability to heal and move forward.

On the other hand, I believe that non-traditional knowledge such as post-secondary education is essential in the world we live in today. From my perspective, understanding economic reconciliation through my education has given me the ability to understand and frame some issues facing Indigenous people today. For example, my business/accounting background allows me to understand the complexity around Indigenous peoples struggle to raise capital and furthermore to understand a creditors position.

In summary, education needs to incorporate traditional and non-traditional ways of knowing if it is to be used to support Indigenous leadership. This combination of knowledge will empower Indigenous Leaders with the tools they will need to solve the traditional and non-traditional issues they will ultimately encounter in their lives and communities.

alexandre daigle paquette

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: ottawa
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I created a 3d printing program here's a description.

We are planning a hands-on workshop series for youth around the topic of 3D design and 3D printing. The programming structure hinges on two key aspects: cultural pride and social innovation.

Goal: Provide opportunities to modernize Indigenous art and knowledge through the use of digital technologies, valuing culture and Indigenous knowledge.

Mission: Help Indigenous youth develop digital skills and personal soft skills, contributing to their development and improve their employability with a workshop.

The 3D printing program will benefit the youth community in helping them achieve a better life by working on themselves by developing new technology skills. The reason for combining technology training and social work groups is to create a modern program that will help participants find or create work. The goal of the program is to teach participants about the power they have over their own life and the opportunities waiting for them in the present future of technology.

We want to reach a group of 6 to 10 youth ages 12 to 18 years old and help them increase their skills, their self-esteem and their self-determination to improve their life's quality by reducing bad habits and increasing good habits. By providing mentoring and counselling regarding mental health and self-determination through 3D printer training, graphic design, entrepreneurship and holding support groups in person or online for the training sessions, as well as mentoring and counseling groups and one-on-one sessions if needed. The in-person sessions will consist of 1h of social work, 1h of training/lessons and some work from home to do weekly. On the day of their graduation participants will receive a certificate and a gift made by Wabano. At the end of the program we aim for participants to have a higher self-esteem as well as a better understanding of who they are and what they want to do next.

Kaelei Daniels

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Winnipeg
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

My experience with the education system is one that is unique. I got to experience what it was like to be in the education system on reserve, in western society, and post secondary as a student athlete and as a young, single mother. Everything that I have faced during my education journey has shaped me into who I am today, and what I stand for when it comes to education for the Indigenous population.

My family moved around a lot, so I attended many different schools growing up. I was always considered the “new girl.” Being the “new girl” at the schools on reserve was far easier than being the new girl in a predominantly white school. A big part of that reason is because I was in a space where my peers, teachers, and everyone else looked and talked like me.

One thing I struggled with was feeling like I didn’t belong because I didn’t get to learn Cree like everyone else who went to school in OCN. I felt like a big part of my identity was missing because I didn’t know the basics of my own language, but I knew the basics of French. I felt like a traitor, or a fraud.

What helped me find my belonging was sports. Being apart of various sports teams is what helped me find my way through the education system, and it also kept me out of a lot of trouble. As a kid in middle school, I practiced with the Jr. High and High School basketball teams as my grandma was the coach. Honestly, there were times where I wanted to quit and stop going to these practices to do “normal kid” things. I was allowed to stop going, but I ultimately realized that I wasn’t missing out on anything. I’m glad I made the decision to keep playing because playing sports gave me an opportunity to further my education.

My high school years were spent at a school in the south end of Winnipeg. I was in a school filled with wealthy or well-off families, while I was living in a two-bedroom apartment with my single mom and my 3 other siblings. I stuck out like a sore thumb. I felt it especially during our minimal lessons about Indigenous history – all eyes looking at me like I was supposed to speak for my whole nation. It was difficult being one of the few visibly indigenous kids in a school of over 1000 people. Again though, playing sports is what kept me from feeling completely isolated.

Moving onto post secondary as an indigenous student-athlete was not only nerve-wracking, but empowering as well. I was able to be in a position where not many indigenous people get to be

in, especially coming from living on a reserve. Growing up, I saw almost nobody who looked like me playing sports so it was very special to me to be able to be that person for anyone who needed it. My time at post secondary school was short lived, as I went through a lot of trauma during the two years in my program. There wasn't many supports for me, or people who I could confidently reach out to. I tried the counselling the school offered, however I felt so disconnected it didn't help.

A few years later, I decided to try school again. I was a new mother, trying to better my life for my son and I. Again, I was left with little to no support. School was online, childcare was next to impossible to find, and professors were not very understanding about the situations that I was in. In the end, I decided to wait another year or two to finish my education. When I go back, I will advocate for myself and others for better support for people coming from reserves and better support for young mothers wanting to get an education as well.

Now, I work for Manitoba Aboriginal Sports and Recreation Council (MASRC) as an Indigenous Sports Consultant. I get to help break barriers Indigenous communities face when it comes to sports and recreation. I advocate as best I can to help grow sports and recreation because I know it helps keep youth in school and out of trouble.

Mackenzie Deleary

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
Province: Ontario

Submission:

My name is Mackenzie Deleary; I am from Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, a small, rural community outside London, ON. My educational background includes a Bachelor of Health Sciences from the University of Western Ontario, and I am currently a Master of Public Health candidate at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry. While I was raised primarily in my home community, my education was exclusively off-reserve, predominantly being a part of classes with very few or none Indigenous students.

However, one of the critical positive drivers in my academic journey was community engagement. Having grown up playing sports and being a student-athlete in university, I was honoured to have received many leadership opportunities with Western University, Indigenous Sport & Wellness Ontario, and Special Olympics to help promote sports participation and physical activity. Moreover, most of my research interest has been shaped by my lived experience of accessing sports and balancing academic duties as a First Nations youth and has led me to speak at research symposiums and panels.

Throughout my studies, education and its significant role in shaping health outcomes have heavily impacted my perspective on community development. Given that Indigenous people represent a relatively young demographic, education presents an opportunity to develop personal skills, have a greater sense of self-efficacy, and have control over one's life. Additionally, education can allow Indigenous youth to reduce experiences of social, economic and political inequalities. In order to effectively bring about the benefits of education to Indigenous communities, support interventions should first be developed on a solid foundation. Further, this strong foundation should be strength-based, evidence-informed, and based on Indigenous values (i.e. worldviews, self-determination, holistic approach). From my experience growing up in a rural First Nations community, I remember the struggle of preparing for the long drives into the city for school each morning and often having to organize other transportation methods as my extracurriculars took place exclusively before and after the school day. While I had the support of my family and reimbursement from my community, one particularly challenging area was the feeling of burnout, having to overcome the same obstacles every day, all while often being the only First Nations student involved in extracurriculars.

Thus, having support interventions (e.g. support groups, school wellness space, community learning hub) that are strength-based can ensure that solutions developed are actively looking

towards building on community strengths and moving beyond deficit-based thinking. Additionally, evidence-informed means looking towards the literature for programs/interventions that have shown success and further developing the program to be more culturally safe and relevant for Indigenous communities. Lastly, self-determination may be illustrated as enhancing data collection systems housed by Indigenous communities to inform future decisions for their benefit.

Cody Demerais

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Prince Albert
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

Author Cody Demerais is a 28-year-old Award winning Métis Entrepreneur Born and raised in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. He will be the first one to tell you he has not always been on the path he lives currently...

As Cody was growing up, he was raised by his single mother and a mixture of different babysitters, when he reached age 11, he had a dilemma that arrived that turned him onto the start of his own independent self where he started working for the extras in life including helping pay for his own sports and the clothes that he would wear on his back. One thing Cody has always been grateful for the Work Ethic it ingrained in him!

But with all his independence at a young age left Cody with a sense of not feeling as if he belonged for many years in his life he lived, that left him trying to find ways to "FIT IN" with this mentality and of course his own financial independence left Cody very vulnerable with drugs and alcohol being experimented often... As the years progressed growing up with his addictive personality leading to more intense substance abuse issues as well with many anger issues with Depression at an alarming rate.

This lifestyle led to a night that was very life altering, a Car Crash with him and his best friend. That shortly after the impact of the crash led him to trying to take his own life as he dealt with PTSD, guilt and anger towards himself for the results of the crash...

To where Cody is now a Successful leader, with his Inspirational/Motivational Speaking on his past so others don't have to learn the hard way as he did.

He was the recipient of "Young Entrepreneur Of The Year" for 2021 ABEX awards through the Saskatchewan Chambers. He now sits on the Prince Albert Chambers Board of Directors, as well a Board of Director for the Saskatchewan Chambers. And the Youth Representative for Western Regional 2 Métis Nation Saskatchewan.

An entrepreneur, Change Maker, Community Advocate. Cody Demerais aims to make a difference in this world!

The story of Cody has come a full 180 in life, one he is proud that he was able to get back up from and dust himself off not only to better his own life, but as well make sure to add value for the ones he reaches through his speeches, workshops, or his brand...

“Once you believe you have the ability and capacity to do great things, that’s when life becomes limitless” – Cody Demerais.

Stevie-Rae DeMerchant

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Woodstock First Nation
Province: New Brunswick

Submission:

Throughout my years of education, I have experienced public schooling and post-secondary institutions as an Indigenous student. While in my early years of education, I found peace in concealing my identity as a two spirited Indigenous person, since public school was NEVER the space to find acceptance. In high school, if you did not fall into the category of wealthy, white person, you were not treated the same, especially when they found out you were native. This created a lot of barriers not only for myself but my friends and loved ones; when I would attempt to speak out about my culture or express interest in learning about the history of my people, I would be met with unresponsive educators that would make it VERY clear that residential schools were irrelevant and not a genocide. Feeling accepted in an institution that clearly doesn't want you sets a lot of people up for failure, but I made it out and became the first person in my family to attend post-secondary. Unfortunately, I can count on one hand the number of times I was taught about Indigenous people in public school; this drove me to create spaces where my people can find acceptance and stability. I began organizing intramural hours on my reserve, planning pageants, worked to establish a summer program for indigenous students in high school that would help them gain skills along with employment and assisted in coordinating youth events (holiday parties, end of school year events, serving at elders' dinners). The summer program was constructed to offer our students job advancing certifications, including, First Aid, Teen Emotions & Anger Management, Canoeing Safety, Naloxone administration, Career Counseling and ending with resume building & career planning. The students of Woodstock First Nation completed these job advancing workshops and gave back to their community by fundraising for the Carleton County Animal Shelter.

In post-secondary I found a new home that would accept me for me, but this does not mean the barriers were gone. I have spent my years at St. Thomas University advocating for Indigenous students by being their Indigenous representative on the St. Thomas Students Union, lobbying in parliament with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, advocating on the provincial level and spreading awareness on the issues that continue to effect Indigenous people and more specifically students. This year, I have focused my advocacy on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program. This program comprised 93% of all federal funding to Indigenous students but funds less than half (42.2%) of First Nations students enrolled in post-secondary, the indigenous population is the fastest growing and youngest segment of Canadas population and within this demography, 70% of First Nations youth have expressed interest in

attending post-secondary. Without PSSSP meeting demand, we will continue to have Indigenous students unable to fulfill their dreams and universities will not have representation. Advocating for my people is something I am very passionate about, and it will be something I will do until I am held by the creator.

Jazmyn-Rae Desjarlais

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Brokenhead Ojibway Nation
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

To Whom It May Concern,

My Names Jazmyn-Rae Desjarlais, I have lived in community my entire life but due to the reduced level of curriculum offered on my reserve, my parents thought it would be better to send me to a French immersion school in the neighboring town. I was 1 of 3 indigenous students in the whole school. They never taught about my peoples and my cultures, but I used that to my advantage to learn and teach my peers. Every presentation I've made, or paper I have written was on the Ojibwe Peoples and the history of Canada, in full French. Instead of accepting the position of being the minority, I chose to pave the way in bringing that type of education to the school.

Following elementary, I continued middle school in Selkirk Manitoba. I struggled making friends because my speech, humor, and the way I carried myself was different- until I found belonging in sport. I began playing hockey, volleyball, basketball, and ball hockey for extra curriculars. Living in community and going to school in Selkirk made me really miss having the sense of community that I feel when I am on my home lands. Sport brought team work, which brought friendships and made that sense of community I was missing. Sport encouraged me to honor and value myself more which only made me more courageous with who I AM.

As the years went on, my dedication to my studies and sports remained important. It became more important than me having friends. In high school I completed all my mandatory courses early, meaning all my sciences and math's for grade 12 was completed second semester of grade 11. I had the opportunity to graduate early, but chose to take extra classes to ensure I stay disciplined as a student to make the transition from high school to university easier.

I enrolled at the University Of Manitoba in the Uni 1 program, but only lasted a semester. It was my first time living off of the community, and consistently being in western society. I quickly learned that university was not the style of learning. To my advantage, my community was starting a food sustainability initiative which allowed me to enroll in the agriculture program at the UofM and still live in community. Unfortunately, after the change of leadership the initiative was pushed to the side.

Today I carry that knowledge of having feet in both ways of life, both on reserve and in the western lifestyle. Today I AM courageous with who I AM and chose to share the knowledge of

my journey. I now travel to isolated communities to teach the power of sport for social development. I use my experiences to motivate and encourage the next generation- and this is only the beginning.

Miigwetch/ Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to meet you in person soon.

Blessings,

Jaz

Brady Doucette

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Potlotek Mi'kmaq Nation
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

As an Indigenous individual who has been in the education system for nearly twenty years, I have experienced immersion education, education in and off reserve and have completed my undergraduate degree in environmental studies and am now enrolled in my masters of education in sustainability at Cape Breton University. Within the four walls of a classroom I have always struggled, but upon finding an interdisciplinary degree with a focus on the environment, I got to learn more outside of the classroom; which is what inspired me to become an educator, and I hope to one day teach outdoors with a decolonized approach. I focus a lot on Two Eyed Seeing, the concept of using both indigenous knowledge and western knowledge together with equal respect for each and in doing so gained confidence in my identity as an Indigenous. It would be a great honour to represent myself and my people, the Mi'kmaq, at this event and share my ideas on how the education system should look moving forward and the importance of the knowledge of our elders and the energy of our youth.

Augatnaaq Eccles

Primary Identification: Inuit (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut)
Community: Ottawa
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I grew up in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut where I did all of my secondary schooling, following my high-school graduation, I attended Nunavut Sivuniksavut in Ottawa, a post-secondary program for Inuit Students, and following that I attended Carleton University where I just completed my Bachelor's of Arts Honours degree in History and English. I have a range of education from Nunavut schooling, to an Inuit-specific program, to a university program in Southern Canada. As a high-school student in Nunavut, I experienced the problems with the high turnover rate of teachers, the lack of academic programming that was available which limited the university programs I was eligible to apply for, and I have witnessed the struggles many of my classmates who were English Secondary speakers faced, as well as the discrimination and discouragement my classmates and I endured from teachers who were from Southern Canada. As someone who excelled in my studies but is bilingual in English and Inuktitut and raised in the Inuit culture, I worked to encourage and help my friends and classmates who struggled, by having the patience and ability to communicate in a way Southern Teachers did not.

During my time at Nunavut Sivuniksavut, I witnessed the ways in which having culturally specific support helped students from Nunavut adapt to life in the south, while attending post-secondary. One of the biggest struggles for Nunavut students is that we must often leave our home communities to further our education. Thus, Inuit students struggle with homesickness and culture-shock, on top of their course loads. Furthermore, during this program, the disparities between the education students from across Nunavut faced was strongly apparent. Despite my classmates being bright and knowledgeable, the lack of reliable and dedicated teachers in their home communities, and positions as English-Second language speakers meant that they had to work twice as hard. During my time at Nunavut Sivuniksavut, much as I did in high-school, I often helped my classmates, although Nunavut Sivuniksavut was better equipped to aid my classmates because their teaching methods and materials were intended for Nunavut Inuit students.

My time as a university student at Carleton University was a different experience. Unlike Nunavut Sivuniksavut, I did not have many or any Inuit peers around me and I often felt alone. I had to deal with some professors, TA's and classmates who were ignorant and occasionally made comments that were disparaging towards Indigenous peoples, or I felt I had to correct professors who were teaching information about Inuit that was inaccurate because of their lack of knowledge. Despite succeeding academically, I also felt as though I was inadequate because

of my Nunavut education, as high-school teachers often told us that we were not as smart as students down south. Only at the end of my degree did I feel that I deserved to be there as well.

Because of my experiences with post-secondary education, I now give students in my hometown advice about post-secondary education and help Nunavut students adapt to living in the South.

Twyla Etchinelle

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Fort Smith
Province: Northwest Territories

Submission:

I believe education can be used in many different ways and/or forms to learn from, and adapt to the challenges and needs of every youth to overcome these obstacles. There are many ways to help these individual people with their needs as we are not all facing the same issues, for some it can be spirituality, mentality, physicality, or emotionality which can stem from deep rooted and unresolved issues, which may be happening, at home, in the classroom, with family, or close friends, not everyone will speak up or out about their issues, so creating safe spaces for youth is highly important, and being identified as indigenous, I have faced issues of my own, and I'd like to break those barriers for the younger generations, in many areas of my life whether it be at work, school, or just shopping, at a shopping mall;

Claudia Flynn

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Montreal
Province: Quebec

Submission:

When I initially stumbled upon the youth indigenous leadership application, I didn't think I met the criteria. I then noticed that this year's theme was Indigenous education; a current driving force for my life and my work, and I realized I had to apply. It is not barriers within my own educational background I would like to share with you in this brief, but how I continue to pass indigenous knowledge, teachings, and ways of knowing, onto indigenous students and the generations to come.

I am a teacher, and knew early on that this would be my calling. A few years ago, I was in charge of an indigenous internship for students across Canada and realized that though all the students I worked with had different goals, life ambitions, etc., we were all connected through one native thread. There was an immeasurable sense of power in a community full of indigenous students. Being the foundation of a program like that and supporting the growth and development of each and every student that I worked with was something that brought me so much pride as I realized how much could be accomplished both on an individual and societal level.

Now, I am working within the faculty of engineering at McGill University with an initiative called E-IDEA (Engineering, Inclusivity, Diversity and Equity Advancement), where I teach undergraduate and graduate students alike, the value of diversity and collaboration as it relates to their everyday life. I use my own perspectives as an indigenous woman to drive difficult conversations and encourage my students to be open to other ways of knowing. This position has allowed me to act as a cultural facilitator both within the university and outside via our indigenous outreach programs where we encourage indigenous youth to consider Engineering as a path for their education.

Along with this, I am concurrently studying to become a high school science teacher, where I intricately weave indigenous teachings and ways of knowing into the science curriculum. I am conducting a capstone research project as part of my degree (Masters of Teaching and Learning), detailing how we can increase indigenous engagement in STEM. I incorporate perspectives of two-eyed seeing; using both the western and indigenous sciences in my lesson plans and have been uncovering ways to use these principles in the science classroom.

Indigenous education has become a passion of mine, both learning for myself, and for the benefit of others. I enjoy finding new ways to make an impact on students, and through cultural

practices I feel I instigate change within the academic community, paving the way for others to follow.

Tyndall Fontaine

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Sagkeeng First Nation
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

Hello,

My name is Tyndall Fontaine, and I'm from Sagkeeng First Nation, which is located in Manitoba. Sagkeeng is a signatory of Treaty No. 1.

I currently work for the Treaty One Nation as the Economic Development Officer. Our focus is on the development of Naawi -Oodena, which is the largest urban reserve in Canada, located in the heart of Winnipeg, Manitoba. I also coach Team Manitoba U17 Lacrosse, NAIG U17 Team Manitoba Lacrosse, and Selkirk Fishermen Jr B Hockey.

During my early years of education, I went to school on-reserve in Sagkeeng First Nation. I excelled at Math and Sciences. When I got to High School, my school didn't offer the high-level courses that are needed to be accepted into a university, because of these barriers, I transferred to a school an hour away from home. During my first year in the new school, I would get on a Bus at 6:45 AM and wouldn't get home till 6:30 PM. These long days made it difficult to do sports and extracurricular activities. In my last year of High School, I moved closer to my school and was able to play hockey in the city the school was located. I graduated from the Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School in 2012 with courses that would allow me to be accepted into the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg.

I waited until 2014 to enter university as I wasn't sure of the school I wanted to go to. I was lucky enough to get invited to 5 different schools in the US, to play for their lacrosse teams. I ultimately made the decision to stay home in Manitoba and go to the University of Winnipeg.

I graduated from the University of Winnipeg in February 2021 with a Bachelor of Business Admin. From 2014 to 2021, I ended up taking a total of 2 years from school, as I was juggling, hockey, lacrosse, work, and school. University wasn't much easier for me, as I would travel an hour and a half each way to school. The uncertainty of my course schedule and hockey schedule made it difficult to work and attend school at the same time.

After graduating from University, I entered into an entry-level job at Treaty One. Over my two years at Treaty One, I was able to be a part of some historic moments for the Treaty One First Nations. The signing of the Municipal Developmental Services Agreement with the City of Winnipeg, and the Reserve Creation of the former Kapyong Barracks, which is now known as Naawi – Oodena.

With the need of a Taxation Authority at our Urban Economic Development site, I am currently enrolled in First Nation Taxation Administration, which is offered through a partnership between the First Nations Tax Commission, Tulo Centre of Indigenous Economics, and the Thompson River University. 1 week of each Month, I travel to Kamloops, BC to attend classes at the Thompson River University.

Thank you,

Tyndall Fontaine.

Amelia Fox

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Thunder Bay
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I was referred to this program by Deputy Minister Gina Wilson, and Gianni (John) de Francesco Chief Operating Officer at the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages.

I am a First Nation young person that grew up in Thunder Bay, ON. My communities are Bearskin Lake First Nation and Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. I grew up in the Catholic school system in Thunder Bay, and rose beyond the glass ceiling by completing my Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, and an additional Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. After completing my Bachelor of Arts degrees, I continued my education and attained a Post-Graduate Diploma in Business Administration at Smith School of Business at Queen's University. I completed my education while facing distinct barriers and struggling with my mental health.

I am also part of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community and have a strong tie to my line of work. I created and lead a grassroots youth organization called Niizhaayek Alliance. I recently presented a resolution to Chiefs of Ontario to support 2SLGBTQQIA+ People and Youth through the creation of a regional 2SLGBTQQIA+ entity and proposed my grassroots youth organization fulfill that role. I have done this while also working with the 2SLGBTQI+ Secretariat at Women and Gender Equality Canada where I am a research analyst at present.

I strongly believe that education has both hindered my growth while also accelerated my growth at various points in my life. Growing up in the Catholic school system, I was unable to connect to my culture and teachings as thoroughly as I needed. This caused my connection to my identity as a Two-Spirit Indigenous person to really suffer. There was an added lack of education around 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities, and I had a difficult time normalizing my own identity. I only overcame this by pushing through and with the support of my mom. My post-secondary education has accelerated my success and attaining my degrees has been able to provide me more opportunities as a young adult that I hadn't dreamt possible when I was a teenager. I struggled to complete my undergraduate degrees as I was still struggling with my self-worth; however I pushed through to complete those as well.

Completing what I have thus far has shown me my value, what I am capable of, and has changed the trajectory of my life.

Education can certainly foster leadership for Indigenous youth both on and off-reserve. Connection to culture is an important aspect when considering education for Indigenous youth,

in addition to ensuring that the content in various lessons applies to their lives. I also believe that many 2SLGBTQQIA+ Indigenous youth are facing a particularly difficult time and want to ascertain the importance of including 2SLGBTQQIA+ content in our education systems.

I would love to expand on this more and I am thankful for your consideration.

Miigwetch!

Joey Giguere-Yapput

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Haileybury
Province: Ontario

Submission:

As an Indigenous youth who grew up as a crown ward in the foster care system within a predominantly non-Indigenous community, my journey through education has been unique. Both Indigenous students and foster youth face barriers in education. While the gap is consistently closing, Approximately 52% of Indigenous youth attain post-secondary qualifications, compared to 65% of non-Indigenous youth. Foster children face even more challenges, with only about 10 in 1,000 completing post-secondary education. These issues compound with challenges specific to Indigenous students, such as underfunding, transportation issues, language barriers, and inadequate representation within the education system and society. The combination of these barriers can result in disconnection and marginalization.

In 11th grade, I attended the Rotary Club's RYLA youth leadership camp, which was transformative and highlighted the importance of supporting leadership development in all youth, including Indigenous students. I then worked as a motivational speaker with Turtle Concepts, an Indigenous company, traveling as a role model to northern communities. This experience showed me the potential of Indigenous-led initiatives to empower and inspire Indigenous youth, emphasizing the importance of amplifying their voices, addressing their unique barriers, and providing positive and visible role models to support their development.

I received two scholarships in college, which allowed me to overcome some of the challenges I faced and complete the Instrumentation Technician - Process Control and Automation program at Confederation College. The first was Indspire's Building Better Futures scholarship, which supports Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education and emphasizes the importance of community involvement and academic achievement. The second scholarship was Hydro One's Leonard S. Mandamin Award, which recognizes Indigenous students studying in engineering-related fields, aiming to promote Indigenous representation in the industry. These scholarships provided much-needed financial assistance, mentorship, and networking opportunities, empowering me to succeed academically and professionally.

Now a Process Control Specialist in the mining industry functioning in a role that isn't well represented by indigenous people, I work to be a visible leader to break stereotypes and support Indigenous youth in seeking opportunities to "break their own cycle". I believe I'm uniquely positioned compared to others as I understand, have experienced and empathize with

some of the unique challenges many face breaking into the industry. I believe it is essential to recognize the significance of training and education, and opportunities for advancement as a tool for empowerment and the potential for education to create positive change within Indigenous communities. This includes opportunities to pursue trades and other certifications.

My unique perspective as an Indigenous individual within the foster care system, non-Indigenous community, and mining industry provides valuable insight into the intersection of Indigenous education and industry. Diverse perspectives and collaborations are necessary to support Indigenous education and leadership development, addressing the unique barriers faced by Indigenous youth, and working towards a brighter future for Indigenous communities through education and the presence of positive, visible role models. The barriers should be seen as speed bumps, not roadblocks and with collaboration we can promote a significant amount of positive change.

Joannie Gill

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Mashteuiatsh
Province: Québec

Submission:

I went to public school in my community (Mashteuiatsh). A school steeped in our culture under the curriculum of the province of Quebec... I also went to a private high school (Séminaire Marie-Reine du Clergé), a school where I never heard anyone speak about Indigenous Peoples. I went to CEGEP (Alma) and the local university (in Saguenay). There, I was asked to host a booth on my culture because I was an Innu woman... the other students did not have to do that. I thought it was what had to be done, and that it was normal. It was later that I knew better.

It was during my three-year stay in western Canada (British Columbia, (2019–2021) with preschool and elementary school-age girls that I realized that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission could be used to improve equity for First Peoples in education. In fact, there, Indigenous perspectives have been included from kindergarten to Grade 12 in all academic subjects, since 2015, as recommended by the TRC, all part of our youth's education. So, I created my business, which is called Utapi Consultants. Its mission is to promote the emergence of allies for Indigenous causes in French-speaking Canada. The two components are: Decolonization of education and cultural safety in care settings. I am a nurse clinician.

How would I describe my leadership experience? I began my community involvement at the age of 16, in an organization that enhances health through medicinal plants. I was quiet, and I listened a lot. I then sat on various committees, all of which focused on the health and wellness of the person, of the Pekuakamiulnu. Thanks to those experiences, I was able to travel and meet other leaders of Indigenous nations around the world (Mexico, Cameroon, Ecuador, Costa Rica).

I had the honour of being elected Chief of the Pekuakamiulnuatsh Youth Council within my community. I want to do everything so that youth may have confidence in themselves, express themselves freely, educate themselves on our rights and take their rightful place in society, all while respecting the other generations and the other cultures. Here are a few ideas we are working on with the Youth Council: improvisation league, reflection and discussion circle, group of activists, training, etc.

A leader is someone who brings people together toward a compassionate goal of social change to restore the balance between marginalized people of society. It is a compassionate person who, without violence, successfully decolonizes thinking and the world one action at a time.

Kevin Good

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Port Coquitlam
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

My educational experience is that I started off slower than I hoped for. I graduated from highschool not knowing what I wanted to do and 5 years later attended Vancouver Island University still not sure where my path was leading me. I took a variety of classes to see what I would like such as First Nation Studies, Social studies English etc. I enjoyed all of them but still felt no spark of passion. I then took the opportunity to do the Blade Runners training, which provides a variety of certificates to help with work opportunities. After Blade Runners, I received an opportunity to work for the BC Ferries where I accumulated various other certificates. I worked for BC ferries for 2 years, but it felt repetitive, and I felt stagnant. It was time for change.

Going forward, I met my partner who is my biggest inspiration and who inspired me to grow. She introduced me to Squamish Nation Trades Center where I received a Craft Worker Level 1 Certificate (jack of all trades) through Kwantlen Polytechnic University and other youth opportunities. Afterwards, I went on to work various construction jobs for 2 years, only to learn how badly construction can wear on the body. During my construction jobs I started attending climate action opportunities through BCAFN (which my partner informed me of). One of them took me to Quebec City for the Environmental Youth Climate Summit. The BCAFN opportunities is where my leadership, climate advocacy and social justice passion started. Moreover, after quite a few BCAFN opportunities I applied for the Indigenous Youth Internship Program (IYIP) which is a year long internship where you do 9 months in a ministry position and then 3 months in a indigenous community or organization. I worked with British Columbia Wildfires Service (BCWS) where I created my own project, where I sent a FireSmart education package to all 204 indigenous communities across BC. The education package idea came from the We Matter program which was another opportunity prior to IYIP. Furthermore, after working in the government I was selected 1 out 3000 youth from across the world to attend CAMP 2030 on behalf of

United Nations to address Sustainable development goals (SDGs) I was selected for SDG 6 which is clean water and sanitation. After CAMP 2030 I worked with FNHA on the WATCH project, which aims to help Indigenous communities address seafood safety, security and sovereignty in the context of climate change. I currently work with Fraser Basin Council, as the program coordinator for climate and energy resilience. Some of the programs I will be helping with include: Plug in BC, Energy Peers in Indigenous Communities (EPIC) Network, First Nations

Home EnergySave Program, Renewable Energy for Remote Communities, Regional Climate Change Adaptation (BC RAC), Northeast Climate Resilience Network. My passion is only growing and becoming stronger to help indigenous peoples!

Brennan Googoo

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Millbrook First Nation
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

I grew up having a lot of family members working in education with many working in Eskasoni First Nation, NS which notably now takes care of their education along with a Mi'kmaq immersion school so I always had a high hope for my journey with education. Once I got to post-secondary I experienced some culture shock being away from home and the cultural & spiritual supports I would normally access in crises throughout my life. This took a negative toll on me resulting in my absence from formal education since 2017; I decided to take my time to work and gain life experience as well as explore my cultural teachings deeper, at home where I had full access and a support system. I have since become a healthy and confident person, although I still struggle in my relationship with formal education regardless of my desire to return. I now work with communities to assist youth in bridging this gap, among other focuses, through grants and consultation for youth programming specifically for indigenous youth in Mikmaki (Atlantic Canada). My work does not focus on education but it is one of the focus points in my work.

Storm Gould

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: We'koqma'q
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

Throughout my life, I had mistakenly seen education as something to achieve, your grades and where you went to school told me all I needed to know. This paradigm impacted me deeply when I was shamed for attending school in my own community. I was often told or made to believe that my school made it easy, that I couldn't possibly be deserving of the grades I received or that they weren't as valuable because I attended school on reserve. These sort of comments and thoughts influenced my own self-esteem and self-confidence as I looked forward toward post-secondary education. I had aspirations for myself, however, this lack of confidence that I had developed made me cautious as I entered post secondary institutions, it made me timid, reserved, and feel as though I did not belong, not only because I was Mi'kmaw, but because I was Mi'kmaw, I was "less than".

This feeling of being lessor did not go away on its own nor through my own will, this lack of confidence and self-assurance went away every time I saw another indigenous person succeed academically or professionally, furthermore, my self-belief seemed to grow exponentially when I saw my people from my region and community succeed. Those who went before me, those who were the trailblazers even when they may have not known it, showed me it is possible to achieve great things, and that my being Mi'kmaw was not some deficiency or disadvantage, on the contrary, it was and is an amazing gift and opportunity. There is opportunity in being an indigenous person in traditionally western academic institutions, where we can help make these spaces more inclusive for other indigenous students, normalizing success for people from our backgrounds, and fostering a new era where we are actively demonstrating that we are not the "stereotypical Indian, looking for a quick handout", that we are much more than that. We have the power to change the world, particularly our peoples' worlds.

Among me, are many youth who wish to learn, not just for the sake of learning, but for the sake of advancing our communities, helping them grow, and ultimately, to prosper. Education is and will continue to be the bedrock of leadership, those who lead must be willing to learn, and those who learn, must be willing to sacrifice. The prosperity of our future generations require those willing to take the hard path, the one less travelled. The path forward for our people will require blending the best of both the knowledge and tools from these western institutions and preserving our traditional knowledge as a compass/guide for decision making. As I once heard it said, "Education is the new buffalo, through it we will prosper".

Patrick Guno

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: New Aiyansh
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

One barrier I found in my education journey was my high school didn't fully help me with setting a path for my future. Until the eleventh grade, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life, and I felt heavily discouraged through my high school years. Once I found a hobby that interested me and wanted to take an elective relative to that hobby, I would be put into a different class because all of the seats were already filled. Similar situations occurred through my tenth and eleventh grade years. Growing up I was always amazed by my cultures traditional art and wanted to gain more knowledge on First Nations art and carving. My school offered art electives, but I never got the chance to join those classes. While I haven't drawn much First Nation art lately, the thought of art still sits in my mind and my heart. Eventually I found a passion in culinary arts and did everything I could to take part in the foods elective class for my remaining two years of school. In the eleventh grade I was faced with another barrier of not being allowed entry into the foods class. To overcome this, I had to express the depth of passion I had for culinary arts to the principal and teacher of the class. I was granted a seat in the class and that was my first step in learning more about cooking. As I approached my final year of high school, culinary arts was the set path I chose to take for post secondary. Luckily, I had the opportunity to take part in the foods class through the first semester of the school year, before the pandemic swept the world. I wasn't discouraged by the quarantine and absence of in class learning, and kept searching and learning new information about cooking and baking. Those two semesters of foods classes then assisted me in completing a culinary arts certificate in university.

Shirley Harper

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: St. Theresa point
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

In a remote community education is all that we really have to show the youth of other opportunities out there then in just the reservations.

Ashton Harry

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Tl'etinqox Government
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

As an Indigenous child I was sent to a day school in my community run by the church. It was a horrible experience, which laid the foundation for how I would feel about the Western educational system for the rest of my life. During my formative years I was quiet, and shy. I did everything possible to not stand out for fear of repercussions, which led me to being an underachieving highschool student who did not see the value in good grades or being distinguished.

I entered college and university where I was painfully shy, and somewhere along the journey I found my voice, found my passion, and started to educate others on Indigenous ways of being. I became a high achiever when it came to grades. I encountered many forms of racism while in these institutions, but many times I spoke up because I realized that when I did not speak up, that regret always weighed heavily on me. I recently completed my Masters of Executive Leadership at Royal Roads University. I had chosen the school because their website talked about how they were a university that cared about Indigenous communities and aimed to implement the calls to action on reconciliation. I thought it would be refreshing to attend a school where I wouldn't encounter racism. When it was time to do my research in my community, I experienced a lack of Indigenous community understanding from the research ethics board that almost made me quit the school. The REB did not think it was ethical for my community to keep my research. It was a long and hard fight to get them to understand that community knowledge belongs in my community but they finally agreed. The long fight however left me with 1 month to do a research project that other students had to do in 6 months. My project was about empowering women in my community, and it was a huge undertaking that was stressful beyond comparison, but thankfully I was able to complete it and passed. I did this masters while I worked full time in a very demanding and stressful role in my own community. I was the band manager at the time, and the irony of the project was that women in my community talked about feeling like they were not empowered, not respected, and that their voices did not matter, soon after I completed my masters I was fired from my job for no cause.

I now sit at a crossroads in my life where I need to decide where to take my education. I believe it is important for communities to commit to not only educating their members (traditionally and western) but also commit to providing meaningful community work for those members who dedicate themselves to getting an education. We will never move forward as

communities and nations if we are not utilizing the members who choose to become educated.
No one knows more or cares more about Indigenous communities than its own members.

Jorden Hendry

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Vancouver
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

My name is Jorden Hendry, and I am Tsimshian from my mother's side and a member of Lax Kw'alaams band. I have been away from my home community for 8 years now, in pursuit of higher education. I am currently pursuing a PhD in Population and Public Health within the School of Population and Public Health at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

What I have learnt since being at a colonial academic institution, is how to use my voice. I speak my truths, I advocate, and I push for a better and safer place, for all the Indigenous Peoples that will come after me. Colonial academic institutions were not created to support Indigenous wellness and learning – every person in this space must be actively taking steps to de-centre white processes and norms, and re-centre inherent Indigenous rights. I have and will continue to challenge, educate, and support all people who are in positions of power - we need to keep all levels of leadership accountable for prioritizing this work.

My goal is to make the school a safer place for future Indigenous students by challenging the status quo of western ways of doing. As the previous Master of Public Health (MPH) student representative, I worked with MPH leadership to implement Indigenous rights-based policies and practices that best support Indigenous students. In this role, I spearheaded the following: 1) MPH curriculum change to include an Indigenous health class as a mandatory requirement, with the option of either an introductory or advanced Indigenous Health class; 2) development of an Indigenous student mentorship program; 3) identified shortcomings in the schools Strategic Plan with regards to Reconciliation, which led to improvements of the plan and commitments to aligning with UBC's Indigenous Strategic Plan; and 4) the implementation of a series of three professional development sessions featuring Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training, with one being a focus on Indigenous wellness and Reconciliation.

During my PhD I started an "Unlearning Club" - a monthly club to learn from and discuss resources created by Black, Brown, and Indigenous experts. I wanted to create a space for dialogue and unlearning related to Indigenous rights, anti-racism, anti-white supremacy, and cultural safety. Many of the students at our school have encountered racist or harmful interactions within the educational system, this space provides an opportunity to discuss and break down the occurrences in a safe environment. I push for a safer system through multiple levels of governance at UBC, by being the graduate student representative on the UBC senate. What has become apparent, is that this learning and unlearning about Indigenous rights,

cultural safety, and Indigenous anti-racism is needed at all levels of our education system - faculty, staff, and students. It is no longer about benevolence - our obligation to uphold inherent Indigenous rights, anti-racist approaches, and Truth and Reconciliation is articulated in provincial, federal, and international laws. Indigenous rights, anti-racism, anti-white supremacy, and cultural safety education need to be embedded throughout the education system.

Katelynne Herchak

Primary Identification: Inuit (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut)
Community: Victoria
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

My educational journey has not been a linear. Often, I was the only Inuk in my school growing up and even in post-secondary, this made it difficult for me when I was younger to understand and create my cultural identity. I started college in 2018 and failed a lot of classes and risked being placed on academic probation, so I took an internship with Canada World Youth where I lived and worked in Colombia for 3 months. I returned to school and completed a certificate in Indigenous Family Support, took another year off graduated with my Bachelor in Justice Studies from Royal Roads and now completing my Masters in Geography from the University of Victoria. During my educational journey I've sat on many boards and committees, I was the Indigenous Student Rep on our Student Society, I've been on the Canadian Commission for UNESCO's Youth Advisory for 4 years where I've had the opportunity to be apart of the UNESCO Youth Forum and speak in Barcelona at the World Higher Education Forum about Indigenous education and participation in Higher Ed. Currently, I work in international and community development supporting Indigenous & Inuit women and gender diverse people in identifying and creating policy that enables a more gender just society within their respected communities.

Audrey-Lise Rock-Hervieux

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Pessamit
Province: Québec

Submission:

Everything begins with an idea, with an experience that we want to share. After working in the field of education for six years, I wanted to take this opportunity to share my experience with you in order to show everyone that you should never give up no matter what happens.

For as long as I can remember, as a young person I always struggled academically in both elementary and high school. In elementary school, I was average, not to say weak. In high school, I was this little rebel who wanted to do what everyone else was doing, and I let myself be dragged along. I had to repeat my first and last years of high school because I had let myself go. I was able to complete it in Wendake at the CDFM Huron-Wendat in 2008, where I received outstanding support and coaching. I'll always remember those who helped me so much to get my high school diploma. Thanks to them, I had this little piece of paper in my pocket that would open doors for me.

We won't talk about college, which was a complete catastrophe. Perhaps this move to the college level was just not for me. For a long time, I searched for what I wanted to do with my life. At first, my dream was to become a policewoman. I'd been accepted in this program in Quebec City and I also obtained my promise of employment in my community. But I took a wrong path that led me to a wrong decision, but I think I had to go through that to understand a few things today.

I had to go back to my community to try and battle my demons in order to get through it. I attempted a session in Humanities and Psychology at the Baie-Comeau CEGEP in 2009. I passed my first session. Wow! I wasn't so bad after all. Second session, failure! I began to brood again, I skipped classes, and I'd go sleep in the "Innuatz" room specially set up for the Indigenous students attending the CEGEP. While my friends went to class, I let my parents think I was going to school when actually I was doing anything but. I don't know how I managed to fake it for a full session, but I did.

I decided to go back to Quebec City and enrol in the Limoilou CEGEP in the fall of the same year. Once again, failure and I was drowning in debt! I finally came to terms with the fact that college was just not for me and I'd never amount to anything. What'll I do with myself? I asked myself this question from 2009 to 2012. Fall 2012, I came across a classified ad looking for substitute teachers in my village school. If it could help me earn a little money and pay off my debts, why not?

I had no idea that I'd find a field that fit with what I was doing, and in 2014 I decided to enrol at UQAC to do a part-time certificate in teacher assistant training in an Indigenous environment. It was perfect as I could continue to do substitute teaching. And I was officially hired in the fall of 2016. I became pregnant with my first child in the meantime and still managed to complete my program in 2017. The stars were

aligned for me. But I felt that this certificate was not enough. I had to do something else, I had to deepen my knowledge. I had finally acquired a taste for school!

2018, a certificate in psychoeducation was offered by UQAR, 30 minutes from home, on a part-time basis. Wonderful! Another opportunity to study and work at the same time. Although I found out that this program was not really what I expected, I had to finish it even though

Samantha Jack

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Surrey
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

I honestly never believed I would ever be able to graduate from university. It was something I thought of when I started at my institution. I questioned my capacity and strength to continue on, all while trying to reconnect to my identity and culture. I was a simple student attending my public University and I had realized that our Indigenous students weren't connected to our leadership, to the decision-making processes, or even to each other.

I took it upon myself to create my University's first ever Indigenous Student Council and we had many members join.

I even received a 'Contribution to Campus Life' student award from my institution.

The award was lovely but the connections that I gained from creating a small community were more valuable than anything else I had taken from my time at University. I was also the first in my immediate family to have graduated with a degree. I am very proud of how my advocacy work began with my institution and that it has only grown from there. I am involved with the Friendship Centre movement for Urban Indigenous youth, and I continue to use my voice for reconciliation and with all my Relations across Turtle Island.

I am currently the co-chair of the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (a coalition with the City of Surrey and other stakeholders), and a member of the Surrey Indigenous Youth Advisory Council.

It would be an honour to share more about my success and journey with other like-minded youth leaders!

Kleco kleco, thank you!

Sarah Jacknife

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Home community Elizabeth Metis Settlement, currently live in Calgary
Province: Alberta

Submission:

My unique educational background includes attending school in my Metis community, homeschooling for several years, attending grade 12 in a nearby town, and completing my Master of Public Policy virtually during COVID. Along with five years of experience supporting Indigenous students in higher education and speaking to several thousand Indigenous students as a recruiter, my personal and professional experiences have revealed gaps in K-12 and higher education.

To address these gaps, I believe Indigenous students should be supported in staying in their communities rather than having to transition to urban schools for high school. Currently, most Indigenous communities lack high schools and those that do offer limited courses. To address this, long-term investments should be made to build high schools in communities, and in the short to medium term, digital educational hubs could be established in existing community buildings or K-9 schools. These hubs would allow students to participate in virtual classes taught by teachers from across the country, with local community members providing daily support.

While face-to-face learning cannot be replaced entirely, these digital hubs offer a way for Indigenous students to stay in their communities throughout high school, take the same courses as most Canadian students, build digital skills, and employ Indigenous people from the community to support students. With the rapid advancement of 5G technologies, there is an opportunity to integrate digital education within Indigenous communities, and planning and development should occur alongside efforts to bring connectivity to these communities.

Shanelle Jadis

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Abegweit First Nation
Province: Prince Edward Island

Submission:

The importance of education has always been instilled from my mother and grandmother (Juju). My mother went to school to become a Registered nurse and my juju has a honorary PhD in Law. Throughout my educational experiences I have been on honor roll, student council and played sports. I believe this helped developed leadership skills, like teamwork, effective communication and problem solving.

I worked in a supervisor role at Robins donuts and summer months worked as a health assistant. As a health assistant I facilitated and planned traditional events like medicine picking and working with my community's elders advisory. I have also attended traditional knowledge camps with my juju. These experiences helped me gain traditional knowledge and keep me connected to culture and community.

Some of the barriers I experienced is lack of cultural knowledge being taught in schools. Especially Mi'kmaq language. I have found myself and peers struggled with English classes, it is a perquisite to graduate. I believe this is because English is not our first language. I think it would be beneficial to have knowledge keepers more incorporated into our school systems, as well more cultural awareness for teachers and public school boards.

Kyle James

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Winnipeg
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

My name is Kyle James, and I am proud to be Métis, a member of the Manitoba Metis Federation, and a member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). I am currently in my second year of studies at the University of Manitoba, where I am pursuing a degree in computer science with a minor in statistics. I would like to share my unique journey through education with the Senate Committee to hopefully provide insight to Indigenous education in Manitoba.

In the summer of 2021, I was fortunate enough to be employed as a Credit Recovery and Services Representative for Manitoba Hydro. During this time, I gained valuable communication skills by listening and working with Manitobans to create payment plans that would work for their unique financial situations. Through these experiences, I feel that I developed a magnanimous and helpful personality, as I was able to assist others in finding solutions to their financial issues.

In the following summer of 2022, I was thrilled to be offered a co-op position with the National Research Council of Canada. During my tenure, I gained valuable technical coding skills and a greater understanding of professionalism. I was able to work on exciting projects that allowed me to contribute to cutting-edge research and development for issues that directly affected Canadians. This experience was truly transformative, as it showed me the vast potential that exists within the field of computer science.

One of the highlights of my educational journey thus far was attending the AISES Canada National Gathering in March of 2023. This professional event brought together Indigenous professionals from across North to mingle, share and educate others on their field. It was an incredible opportunity to expand my network and learn more about the vast array of opportunities that exist for Indigenous students. Through this event, I was able to connect with others who share my passion for computer science and see the incredible potential that exists for Indigenous youth in this field.

My background in industry has given me confidence, both communicatively and technically, which has allowed me to come out of my shell and become more of a leader in group projects and my community. I believe that education plays a crucial role in empowering Indigenous youth to become leaders in their communities, and I am committed to doing my part to help achieve this vision.

Looking ahead, I credit my success to my industry experiences, which came from a strong educational foundation. However, I understand that there is still a long way to go to ensure that Indigenous students have access to the same opportunities as their non-Indigenous peers. I hope to see more opportunities for Indigenous students to attend university, as well as more co-op and internship opportunities that allow them to gain valuable industry experience while still in school.

Overall, I am passionate about pursuing a career in STEM and helping to create a brighter future for Indigenous communities. Through my experiences, I have come to see the vast potential that exists within STEM fields, and I am committed to doing my part to empower Indigenous youth to reach their full potential.

Clardean Jerome

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Fort Smith
Province: Northwest Territories

Submission:

Hello, my name is Clairdean Jerome, I'm nineteen and I graduated from Chief Julius School in 2021. I grew up in the town of Fort McPherson in the Northwest Territories. My hometown has a population of approximately nine-hundred people. I grew up going on the land and learned a whole lot from my grandpa and the school. The school in my community provided me with a lot of activities and trips to better my understanding of leadership and about being an indigenous person. I've had the opportunity to participate in programs and conferences as an indigenous youth and I continue to do so as an adult. My high school experience mostly consisted of isolation and distance-learning due to both COVID-19 and the educational system. I was fortunate enough to be in an e-learning program which connected me to teachers that taught me university courses.

I've had some struggle with learning considering the fact that I can only talk to my teacher through a 30-inch monitor. Fortunately, every long-distance learning school has a mentor with them and they were a lot of help. Throughout my senior year of high school I've felt burnt out and hopeless because I couldn't find ways to talk to my teachers one-on-one. Emails are an option however I wanted a form of connection so I can understand better and not have to wait for an email that can leave me either fully understanding or perplexed. I believe that connection improves understanding and I couldn't really get that connection through a screen.

I believe that every school should be able to teach university courses and that every indigenous community should be funded so this can be possible. Every child should have the opportunity to seek higher education if they please, however not every community is not given that privilege.

Every indigenous youth should be given the opportunity to participate in programs that revolve around leadership. Every school should encourage students into participating in conferences, programs, or discussions that involve youth leaders. In my experience, school staff were able to find opportunities for me to participate in and I believe that every indigenous student should be informed about opportunities that circle around Indigenous youth.

Adults play an important role in a child's life, children look up to adults to support and help guide them to be the best versions of themselves. Confidence plays a huge part in leadership and can only be taught by support by important people in your life. Schools should make sure

that every child is getting the support and to give support if needed. Indigenous children need a lot of support so they can be in control and take their futures into their own hands.

Taking everything into consideration, every indigenous child matters and should be given the same education as any other Canadian youth. School isn't all about learning math or science, it's about building confidence in the child and giving them all the support they need to be happy. Education is needed in a child's life so they can learn both social skills and leadership in their life. Every single child should be given the opportunity to seek higher education.

Kaila Johnston

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Winnipeg
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

Over the past 13 years, I've worked for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) in a variety of positions from statement gathering to education. In 2018, I stepped into the role of acting supervisor of education and, in 2020, I formally accepted an offer for the position.

I'm an Intergenerational Survivor of the residential school system with maternal relatives attending schools through the Qu'Appelle Valley and Alberta. Like a great number of Intergenerational Survivors who shared their experiences with the TRC, I've struggled with the questions: who am I, where do I come from, and where do I belong? I was greatly impacted by my inability to answer these questions and sought to better understand why my relatives have and continue to struggle.

Residential Schools, and other colonial systems, were affective in erasing Indigenous identities. All we have to do is glance at the lengthy list of Intergenerational impacts which have left many unable to live healthy, and prosperous lives, let alone answer those questions.

As the Honourable Murray Sinclair said, 'education got us into this mess and education will get us out.'

Education on colonial systems, their intent, and impacts will benefit Settler and Indigenous youth across the board. There are many Indigenous families impacted by these systems that have not yet shared their stories. Bringing the stories and experiences of Survivors, and those who did not survive, into our classrooms allows us to prepare our future leaders with the information they need to make informed decisions in relation to the ongoing impacts of colonialism.

As Scholar Amy Bombay has stated, the history of these systems provides us the context of present-day circumstances, and when it comes to Intergenerational healing, it's an essential part of the healing process. Knowledge of this history is integral and must go beyond a surface level of understanding in order to comprehend the connection of colonial systems to modern-day challenges with the child welfare, health care, and justice systems.

Working with historical materials, like those held by NCTR, is valuable and assists in imparting a more robust understanding of the manufactured obstacles colonial systems have created. It provides an opportunity to go beyond the statistics and connect with very real persons whose

lives were manipulated and shaped by the residential school system. Access and use of these materials in the classroom can provide a pathway for Indigenous youth searching for answers to the questions: who am I, where do I come from, and where do I belong...

When Indigenous youth have a clear sense of their identity, of what has impacted their families, and themselves, they are set on a firmer foundation to develop and implement solutions. They can turn their vision outward and focus on supporting others. My vision for education is one where Indigenous youth use the materials from the Centre to inform themselves and their decisions as they advance in life and advocate on behalf of and support the communities they represent.

Danita Johnstone

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Abegweit First Nation
Province: Prince Edward Island

Submission:

I've attended the University of Prince Edward Island and received my Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Studies and History. As an Indigenous woman, going through the post-secondary education system has opened many doors and given me experiences that I will never forget. I believe that education is key to our success as Indigenous peoples, it breaks down barriers and gives us experience that we can pass down to our younger youth and children. Personally, I want to show my children, cousins, and other family members that pursuing your dreams and furthering your education can enhance your life and create memorable experiences that can be passed down to inspire other children/youth to do the same.

Receiving your credentials fully, or working towards it, can be such a rewarding time in your life. Doing such a thing really fosters the feeling of leadership that you can give back and promote within your community. As time goes on, more Indigenous youth are taking up spaces that are meant for them in the education system whether it is elementary, high school and post-secondary education. The education of our Indigenous children and youth brings a positive light to our communities; it gives us the opportunity to relate and to celebrate the achievements that each individual after you receives. With educated Indigenous youth, as they get older, they can bring that education back into the community and use the education for every member.

My education has certainly given me the feeling of accomplishment ever since I have started, 10 years ago. For my future, I want to start using my time in post-secondary and the experience that it has given me, to foster my own leadership within my community and bring that knowledge back. Handing down knowledge has been a main source of spoken tradition with Mikmaq peoples, and I hope to utilize it in that way.

Shelbi Jonathan

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Six nations /Ohsweken
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I started kindergarten at OM Smith Kawennio school in 1996 at Six Nations reserve. I was enrolled in the Mohawk language immersion program where I was taught by some of the best Mohawk teachers in our community. I stayed there until grade one when my mom moved us to Alberta for her to finish her own education. I was put in a Cree speaking school then transferred to an English public school and had to learn quickly how different our languages and ways of knowing are. We eventually moved back to Six Nations when I was in grade 6 and remained here until this day. I have learned both Mohawk and Cayuga languages but the one I struggled most with was English. I slowly lost the teachings while attending school on reserve as the language was only offered as a class every other day and by high school, we have to go off reserve. It doesn't make sense why our children and students who are trying to relearn our languages are forced off reserve by the time they are in grade 9 and lose that connection to language and teachings. I went to a school 40 minutes away and was racially bullied by non Indigenous students. During this time in high school was when the Caledonia Reclamation Protest was happening and I was targeted for just being Indigenous. I managed to complete high school and also become a part of a statistic of being a young mother. I gave birth to my oldest daughter in Grade 12 and managed to finish high school along with my classmates with honours and received a perseverance award at graduation. One of my biggest supporters in high school was my grade 12 English teacher who listened to me for the first time acknowledging my struggle with the language and how different the western education system is to our Indigenous teachings. He encouraged me to not only graduate high-school but also go onto post secondary. I applied that year to the social

Service worker program at Niagara college through a program on reserve with Six Nations Polytechnic. It was close to home, which was important for me being a young mother. I was fortunate to have support from my mom and grandma to help me with childcare. I graduated with honours and went onto Wilfrid Laurier University to a Honours BA program. This was located in Brantford, ON. So it was still close to home and my daughter was just starting school and I wanted to make sure she knew the important of school while learning our languages. I specialized in Indigenous Studies and Criminology in my BA program and graduated in 2015. I was so motivated to keep going but had to find a full-time job to help myself gain more experience and I knew I wanted to give back. My goal is to teach Indigenous Studies courses in university because there are not enough Indigenous teachers and professors. I was not pleased

during my degree being taught by non Indigenous professors about Indigenous related topics. It didn't feel right and I felt like I was missing out on their personal and lived experiences. I applied to the master of social work program at Wilfrid Laurier university. A big part of the reason I applied as it was remote option. This motivated me to apply and I was accepted in September 2020. I struggled with being the only indigenous student in my program , especially when discussing issues like child welfare and MMIWG. I was able to remember the importance of why I wanted this degree. I want to make a difference and be able to support and motivate other indigenous students to go further in their educations. This is why indigenous presence in university is important. I will be graduating in June along with my classmates with my Master of Social Work and I am excited to see where this will bring me. I work full time as a Indigenous Justice Coordinator and help Indigenous women/girls in the Criminal Justice system. I hope I can continue on this path of healing and making a difference in my own community and others. I am second intergenerational survivor of residential school and day school survivor.

Nipawi Kakinoosit

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Victoria
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

I had to go back to school in order to get my high school diploma in 2012. I had moved to Vancouver and had been able to get a job at Klahowya Village in Stanley Park. My Supervisor and I were talking one day about issues going on in the Indigenous community in Canada and she asked "what is your alma mater?" and I replied, "Books. I haven't even graduated grade 12." she looked at me stunned and said "I am giving you the day off and I want you to go down to the Native Education College on Main and 5th, and go talk to Misty and enroll in the AABE Program. If you don't, you are going to be in trouble, sir." So, I went down the next day and enrolled, and it completely changed my life. I became part of student leadership, got my adult dogwood and also was part of Idle No More. The educational style and approach of NEC was what enabled me to learn as an Indigenous Learner with cultural supports and considerations. I am convinced that, had it not been for my time at the Native Education College, I might not be where I am today.

Bradley Knockwood

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Halifax
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

L'nu wetapegsi Epekwitewa'j – I am Mi'kmaq of Epekwitk First Nation, Prince Edward Island, the same community where The Honourable Saqamaw Brian Francis served as chief for several years. Currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts, Geography / Environmental Sciences (Honours Candidate) at Saint Mary's University, Kjiptuk / Halifax. Learning never stops, being given an opportunity to apply that knowledge is the challenge. After 20 years and counting of combined formal non-traditional education, my experience can be described with one word – persistence.

Being curious never made learning new concepts a challenge. Effectively conveying what I know into a manner that appeased an outdated system was the problem. I fell through the cracks of Charlottetown's public school system. Indigeneity was not the systemic fault case but rather general acceptance of a status quo. If it weren't an ability to easily build rapport, several grades that would have been repeated. No interventions after grade three were made.

Near the end of high school, I found my coping mechanism to achieve an assigned standard. Trades provided the outlet to prove what I'm capable of. Shortly after two years at The Culinary Institute of Canada in Charlottetown my professional standings skyrocketed. Performance standards were continuously improved which enabled me to observe real team leadership at some of Atlantic Canada's most prolific hospitality venues.

Entrusted responsibilities grew at the expense of personal fulfilment. Abegweit First Nation then gave me the chance to truly accomplish more by sponsoring my undergraduate degree. What I truly wanted was to have technical involvement in placement of renewable energy infrastructure. Saint Mary's was and is my ideal choice for post secondary institutions within the Halifax area in my desired line of research. Knowing very well how incompatible I am with traditional academia, the opportunity cost although steep is worth it.

It was clear how I fell through the cracks of an out of touch public school system before coasting through college. Come the end of my first year at Saint Mary's I was told to perform to their standards or be kicked out. Again, learning was never the problem. Communicating what I know effectively is. So began a nine-month fight to stay enrolled. Pleading a case to chief and council requesting the capital to undergo a psychoeducational evaluation, results came back with a very prominent attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnosis.

Other individuals are likely to be in similar positions where they want to contribute but aren't given a meaningful outlet. Throughout my efforts to understand how I learn, advocating for personal accommodations often evolves into how this story does not repeat itself with anyone else. Related works already relate to matters the Standing Committee will discuss. Experiences include environmental health and remediation research. Some traditional knowledge. Panel discussions participation on strengthening indigenous voices in academia. In addition to a board of directors' appointment for Saint Mary's Student Employment Initiative. Although specializing on the transition from high school to post secondary I am keen on advancing the system as a whole.

Angela Koe

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Tsiigehtchic
Province: Northwest Territories

Submission:

Leadership and education together are powerful. Throughout the years I have been involved in our Gwichin Leadership, I have always been eager to learn more about our land claims, treaty and self-governance. As a woman, it is challenging to feel included and feel welcomed because I feel like there's still barriers for woman to be in leadership. But, as a woman and continuing to educate myself it has become a powerful tool. Education is so important, the barriers is education is the limited access we have to the real history of indigenous studies. We are not being taught the real facts of our history that can help us govern our nations. In high-school that was one of my challenges and still today trying to educate my peers and help them understand the importance of keeping informed of our nations so that we can do our part as youth. One of my greatest gifts as a youth were the opportunities of learning about leadership, communication, connecting and trusting. I've always wanted the education system to adopt these exercises because once you learn the power within yourself and how leadership can help is in all shapes and forms instead of only education. I believe if leadership key terms were braided in with education, a lot of young people would have more potential in education and in leadership.

Dina Koonoo

Primary Identification: Inuit (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut)
Community: Pond Inlet
Province: Nunavut

Submission:

Dina's Story of Education

My name is Dina Koonoo. I am from Pond Inlet Nunavut, and I am 28 years old.

When I was in elementary school, I had great teachers who supported me in every way. I had great marks up to Grade 9. But right before I got to Grade 10, I lost my mother. She was the one that motivated me to go school, who helped me throughout school and who was there when I was down, especially when I got picked on.

My father told me right before school started that he didn't have the confidence that he would be able to help me in school as much as my mother did, like waking me up in the mornings. I told him I didn't want to quit school, so we made an agreement. We agreed that I wasn't going to get pregnant while I was still in school, and that when he tries to wake me up in the mornings, that I would get up and that he wouldn't need to force me to go to school.

I started my schooling again after a tough summer break. I was in Grade 10 and everything was really hard because I was still grieving for my mother. I couldn't concentrate on my work. I started seeing a therapist for my mental state. There were days where I wanted to quit, but I wanted to make my dad proud of me.

During that year 2009, is when I met two awesome teachers who listened to me and supported me with school. They became like my parents, Tessa and Jay.

Then in Grade 11, I met my husband Avery. I moved into his parent's place and he supported me in every way he could with my education. He would help me at times with my homework and give me space for me to finish my homework.

When I got to 12, I only had one last morning class but I almost failed because I got pregnant with my first child. It was hard to get up in the mornings with morning sickness but I did it with Avery's help. Then I finally graduated high school. I never thought I would go through what I went through, after losing my mother, but I made it.

After graduating high school, I had two handsome boys and stayed home with them for awhile, before starting an Early Childhood Education 2-year diploma, with practicums at the Pirurvik Preschool.

Over the past few years, I worked with the Pirurvik Preschool, the Health Centre, and now am a full-time manager with the Early Years-Inunnguivik program. I also had my two daughters, and we are now a family with four kids!

Childcare support has been one of the biggest struggles our community faces. More people want to attend school so they can attend and complete college, but most people have children and this is one of the biggest challenges for education. We also need more educational options in college too.

Sincerely, Dina Koonoo (Arreak)

Steve Kootenay-Jobin

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Calgary
Province: Alberta

Submission:

"Education got us into this mess, and Education will get us out" is a quote from Justice Murray Sinclair that I strongly believe in. Education offers an opportunity for Indigenous Peoples and Canadians to learn a history of colonization, assimilation and genocide that has been hidden from public knowledge, but it's legacy ripples through intergenerational trauma and severe social, political and economic inequities that negatively impacts Indigenous Peoples today and for generations to come. It's leaves Canadians filling in the gaps of misinformation with negative stereotypes and assumptions that contribute to systemic racism and oppression. Meanwhile, a sense of cultural disconnect and/or shame is experienced by Indigenous Peoples as many of us have never heard our own parents or grandparents stories. My post-secondary experience was a healing journey that empowered me with the knowledge and tools to develop pride, identity and the skills to lead in the community. It helped me break the cycle of poverty and smash through the glass ceilings that I once thought were indestructible. I walk in worlds that were not made for me, and am building bridges between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians. Education is my change making tool and I use it to lead and uplift the community.

Alicia Rae Kubrakovich

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Pine Creek First Nation
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

My Name is Alicia Rae Kubrakovich and I am proud Anishnaabekwe from Pine Creek First Nation. I am currently a student at the University of Manitoba and finishing up my Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Studies with a focus on Anishinaabemowin and a Minor in Family Social Sciences with the hopes to pursue an Indigenous Law degree next. During my university degree I have held numerous leadership positions throughout the Indigenous community on campus including, being the University of Manitoba Indigenous Students' Association Co President for over 4 years. Within this role I was able to help host numerous beading workshops, Indigenous language tables and speaker series where we as a council brought in a variety of different Indigenous leaders to speak on their own personal and lived experiences. Recently my biggest achievement while being on the University of Manitoba Indigenous Students' Association was planning and hosting the 6th Annual Misko Fest 2023. This event took place on the University of Manitoba campus where we celebrated the beauty of Indigenous cultures on campus. During this event we collaborated with numerous Indigenous student groups and organizations to help bring a vision to create a sense of belonging for Indigenous students who often feel isolated, alone or are experiencing systemic discrimination and culture shock due to having to relocate to the city. In 2019, I was then elected into the University of Manitoba Students Union as the Indigenous Community Representative, where I represented the Indigenous community and worked closely with UMSU Executives and the Indigenous Student Centre (Migizii Agamik) to help advocate for students and make sure Indigenous voices are being heard within the University of Manitoba campuses. During my time in this position I was the co-founder of Novembers Indigenous Students' Month which is a student-led event that focuses on promoting and celebrating the achievements of Indigenous students. Within being UMSU Indigenous Representative I was also able to push for an Indigenous course requirement for the Faculty of Arts. In 2021, I was also elected into the Southern Chiefs Organization Youth Council where I served as the West Region Tribal Council Representative, this position led me to numerous opportunities such as leading speaking panels that focused on Indigenous youth and organizing presentations to promote how important post secondary is for Indigenous youth. Throughout my education journey I have learned a lot about who I am as an Anishinaabekwe. I moved away from home at the age of 18 with little to none knowledge about city life. I always say that it takes courage for a young Indigenous person to pack up and move away from their own community and family. As Indigenous youth we face many barriers while pursuing an education, whether that is financial barriers or systemic racism that often comes from being the

only Indigenous student in a classroom. Community work is not easy when you're a full time student and often we are put in uncomfortable situations to help better our future.

Mary Ledoux

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Saskatoon
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

Through my experience in receiving education with both western and indigenous academia, I hold very strong values that connect and bring a stronger sense of belonging to the indigenous ways of knowing and being. Prior to being apart of First Nations university of Canada, I had taken a program through a college in Saskatchewan. Within the first semester of attending that college I was required to discontinue. I could not gasp onto the western way of teaching fast enough to move onto the next semester. It was evident that western ways of learning and philosophy did not work with me. That was a barrier to me attaining higher education. Fast forward 6 years later, I'm back in university that aligns with indigenous perspective and ways of being and doing. I am in my final semester for a bachelors in indigenous social work. I have reconnected to the cultural values and traditional knowledge. I have been immersed into indigenous knowledge systems, and I could not be more thankful to attend the First Nations university of Canada. I want to see other First Nation children and students thrive in education institutions that acknowledge and bring awareness to culture and our First Nations way of knowing.

Megan Legare

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: sherbrooke
Province: Quebec

Submission:

As an Indigenous graduate student, I have gone through all levels of education. I grew up through the colonial system in a white community where I was often one of the few minorities in my school. I have sat in class for 23 years being taught Indigenous history by white professors who told me that Indigenous people were conquered. We move from the tepees, the hunting and gathering, onto Indigenous people being uncivilized, to Louis Riel, to quickly wrap up with reservation systems, alcoholism, drug addiction and poverty. We never talk about the bad things Canada did, or why our communities have these issues. I have been taught that my values and my people's ways of knowing are inferior, superstitious and have no place in our education system. I had teachers tell my entire class that they were proud of Indigenous people who left the reserves and renounce their Indigenous status and "benefits". Then, I went to Cegep and University where I could not use Indigenous knowledge as it was not academic/scientific enough. I could of course talk about Indigenous people and issue but through the western lens. I had teachers tell me that if I wanted an Indigenous scholar or author I would have to bring up the Indigenous perspective because they only knew white authors/scholars. I am now a graduate student doing research in Psychology on Indigenous ways of knowing and youth engagement/generativity. My Ethic Boards are still asking me to justify my Indigenous methodologies with White methodologies. I barely have any access to Indigenous scholars or research papers through my library database or if I do, it is often research that focuses on the issues in Indigenous community by a White scholar. I have to go through a master's which is already hard and mentally draining, but I also have to live on a day-to-day basis through colonial violence and systemic racism. According to Schnarch (2004), "Indigenous students working in Academia may have to work twice as hard to meet and bridge academic and community expectations. They are sometimes forced to make difficult situations between their values and advancing their careers as they walk a two-culture tight-rope". I should not have to choose between my community, my values or my career. I should not at 23 years old feel the pressure of representing my whole community on my shoulders. I am still learning and growing as a researcher. So, we need more accurate Indigenous history at all levels of education, we need more access to Indigenous scholars in school databases, more Indigenous teachers, more opportunities for Indigenous students to work with Indigenous teachers or scholars, we need Indigenous people on Ethics Board. We need to accept Indigenous ways of knowing in Academia. I hope that my contribution with my research will

create space for us, Indigenous graduate students. I want more opportunities for us to thrive because I am not thriving, I am drowning in this colonized space, or is it too much to ask?

Crystal Lewis

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Traditional territory of the Squamish Nation, Vancouver
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

My name is Crystal Lewis and I come from Vancouver and the (S.wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw) Squamish Nation. I am an actively involved community member, and I live by the sayings, "Be the change you want to see, lead by example, and take action." Before the age of 2, I was moved from several different foster homes before being placed into permanent foster care. As a child I remember feeling unloved, abandoned and confused, and I couldn't understand why my parents didn't want me. At the age of six (intuitively) I knew that change had to start with me and based on my own pain and lived experiences, I knew that I never wanted my future children to go through the same painful experiences that I went through, and so, I decided to dedicate my life to being a leader and living drug and alcohol free.

Throughout my educational journey and experience, like many, I have had to overcome various challenges and adversities. In high school, I was always placed in simpler classes due to systemic racism. In addition (and still being addressed), I had faced humiliation and power dynamics at a former institution, where the professor thought it was okay to touch my body, BY slapping my hand. The professor told us not to be late for his class, and due to traffic, weather and road conditions, and not knowing where the classroom was, I arrived a few minutes late. The professor decided to raise my hand in the air, hold it up for everyone to see and slap it (the only seat available was in the middle of the classroom). From this experience, I felt ashamed, embarrassed and traumatized; coming to the conclusion that this was an Anthropology teacher whose very practice was around cultural safety and knowledge.

Regardless of my trauma and lived experiences, I am grateful for it shaping me into who I am today. My passion to learn and grow (and with thanks to the people who believed in me and supported me) brought me to many places I never believed possible. In 2019, I was selected as 1 out of 5 (across Canada) to participate in GreenPACs Environmental Parliamentary Internship as the first Indigenous youth on Parliament Hill. I also ran in two Squamish Nation Chief and Council elections, at ages 19 (2013) and 24 (2018); focusing my campaign on sustainability, wellness, transparency and sustainable housing.

The following year, I was selected to the UBC's Future Legislators Program, being recognized as one of the most influential speakers in the House of Commons. The following year, I received a full scholarship to St. Francis Xavier University and was asked by the North Vancouver NDP to run in the 2019 Federal Election; respectfully declining, due to the recent passing of my mother,

sister, and uncle, all within the same year. I then went on to help create Canada's First Ever Youth Policy, and policy recommendations for the UNSCR 2250 for international peace and security, and more.

Carolene Lucas

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Mayo
Province: Yukon

Submission:

Hi, i think education is important in our world today specially having that experience going out to school meeting new people, and gaining the responsibility. When i moved from my hometown to Vancouver for upgrading & nursing everyday was busy, studying became a big part and what i learned from it is books, research, history is what i encourage us to do. After being in the city for a year i attended workshops, forums and connected with others i worked with youth in Vancouver and shared my experiences in the Yukon, education and family i met so many youth from different tribes, sat on youth council there and worked with indigenous youth/women in East Vancouver. Well i was working at the time i was attending school 3x a week passed all my classes and graduated, i loved my job so i continued my journey working with youth and also learning from them and Coast Salish culture after working for 2 years i decided to move back home to Mayo to be home with family and continue my career working with our youth and sharing my experiences, helping them through education and applying for colleges, universities and i'm happy i have that knowledge to share and to continue to share with our youth and that you have a voice and to always tell yourself your voice matters.

Richard Lush

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Lennox Island
Province: Prince Edward Island

Submission:

Kwe' N'in Teluisi Kitpu Amalkewinu, Hello my name is Eagle Dancer or Richard Lush. I am from Lennox Island First Nation and I am thankful for the opportunity to apply for this! I have been gifted the ability to be a natural leader since I was a young boy. Through Athletics, Academics, Culturally knowledge, or being a mentor/role model for the Youth, I have always used my voice to help in anyway I am able to.

I am a firm believer in investing into our Youth through their education, cultural teachings, athletics, and skills training to create a successful path the Youth can follow! I have had barriers within my own Education path over the years, which has caused me to leave University and pursue other opportunities outside of Academics. These new opportunities did create many successful paths for me to continue to use my voice to help support the Youth, my community, and the Mi'kmaq Nation! Though I do wish I had the support and opportunity to finish my Degree, I did find ways to make my voice heard! I will always push Academics to our Youth and communities, as investing into Education will help shape and create paths for the Youth to become successful in their fields, career path, and become future leaders for our communities!

I am applying for this with my partner Kelly Sark, in hopes we both could have an opportunity to speak and present our views and ideas!

Wela'liq - Thank you to all!

Amy Lynch

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: whitney
Province: Ontario

Submission:

Tanishi, Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders Committee:

First of all, I would like to say *chi miigwetch* for organizing this project. I believe it is extremely important to discuss barriers that Indigenous students face in the education system since education does foster leadership in Indigenous communities as well as health and wellness of individuals and communities at large. I am a Métis woman and have experienced many barriers during my academic career. I started my undergraduate degree in 2008 and was unable to finish until 2018 because of traumas and lack of support in my journey. It was difficult to be in a new city, away from my community, and without space or resources to participate in cultural practices that maintain my wellness. I found the Indigenous Student Association at McMaster when I returned to finish which helped me gain strength to complete my undergraduate degree. I had a similar experience when I moved to Waterloo to start my Master Music Therapy. I was, at that time, not associated with the Métis Nation of Ontario and had just been displaced from another Indigenous community because of improper paperwork; I lost citizenship after having it for many years already. I felt alone which exacerbated the intergenerational trauma of my ancestors being forgotten and silenced. The Indigenous Student Association at Laurier didn't seem to fill the void because I was hurt and lost. It was not until I discovered my true lineage and found a welcoming community that I belonged to, received support from that I gained the strength to apply for Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology (MCAP) through Yorkville University online. I still do not feel ready to go back to the city to finish the Master Music Therapy. I am finding myself and my purpose being at home with my family and reconnecting with myself and Creator through Mother Nature. I will be starting the MCAP on May 8.

Now that I have found myself, my strength, and my calling again, I am able to assist and help my peers, family, and community in finding their voice and strength as well. I have people who come to me for advice and guidance concerning school and healing. I am excited for future opportunities to expand on this now that I am back on the Red Road and walking the way I was intended to.

I am so grateful for the Métis Nation of Ontario for helping me to heal and find my way back to the life I want for myself. I appreciate you taking the time to read my story and I will be happy

to help in anyway that is needed to raise awareness of the importance of education for Indigenous leaders and the barriers that students can face in pursuing their dreams.

Paula MacDonald

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Ottawa
Province: Ontario

Submission:

Hello, I am Paula, and I am communicating today using American Sign Language (ASL). I would like to address the issue of indigenous education, and the importance of indigenous Deaf and hard of hearing youth across Canada becoming involved in advocating for the advancement of their education. I have participated in several circles, focus groups, and advisory panels, with the intent of empowering Deaf and hard of hearing indigenous youth to be more proactive in the advocacy of obtaining the best possible education. Unfortunately, these youths often encounter significant barriers, particularly if they live in remote areas. Within larger cities, most people have easier access to sign language interpreters, Deaf educators and other resources. These resources are not available to those who live far from urban centres or on a reservation.

One example of a barrier is the question of jurisdiction. It is often unclear if access is a responsibility of Provincial or Federal authority. Another barrier is the use of technology. More time is spent online these days. Internet access and platforms such as Zoom are crucial for group work and education online. Deaf children and youth cannot participate when faced with these barriers. Let us use the example of Zoom: sometimes the video does not work well, and the presenter turns off their camera. Hearing people are still able to listen to the meeting content, or dial in by phone, but a Deaf person cannot. Ideally, there is a sign language interpreter to provide access to the content, but sometimes the image freezes or is pixelated and we can no longer understand what is being said. Or the meeting has an interpreter, but the Deaf person does not have Wi-Fi at home. These issues prevent Deaf people from being able to join the meeting. I could give many more examples of the challenges technology can create.

Another barrier that is encountered is the shortage of qualified Deaf educators in the North. Deaf and hard of hearing youth need access to the best education they can get, from the most qualified teachers. There is a shortage of skilled Deaf educators, and many of them live in the cities in the southern areas of Canada. It is difficult to entice them to move north or onto reserves, where the need is the greatest. This is a very real and ongoing problem, but again, it is not the only barrier. There is a critical need to provide the best resources and access possible, and the list of issues is endless. We need to encourage further discussion about it, and to prioritize both indigenous education and accessibility.

ASL curriculum has already been developed, and we need to determine how to integrate Deaf education with indigenous education in order to provide an experience which addresses the intersectionality of needs. This is just the tip of the iceberg, and I would love to continue the discussion with youth. We look forward to collaborating with you, and incorporating the ideas of indigenous children and youth on how to improve indigenous education and advocate for those who most need the support.

Thank you.

Noah MacDonald

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Toronto
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I am a proud Anishinaabe individual belonging to Michipicoten First Nation and Canon Lawyer beginning Doctoral Studies in Theology at Regis College in September. I am an Indigenous Catholic, this identity may appear as an oxymoron, though my existence is of paradoxical harmony, one filled with suffering and pain but ultimately beauty and grace. There are many others like me who find themselves with a foot in both worlds, working towards recognition of our unique spirituality, though facing the barriers to enact reform as we are without representation. I have tried to develop programs that empower Indigenous Catholics but have been faced with dismissal and indifference by leadership. This is what has led me towards further education, as the reforms I wish to see for my community cannot take place when the systemic issues rooted in the same colonial ideologies that gave way to residential schools still exists, academics offers me the freedom to explore how to dismantle these structures. As excited as I am to continue theological studies, I have come to realize yet another barrier, that is, the complete absence of Indigenous faculty at Catholic universities in Canada. This is even more troubling when taking into consideration call #60 of the TRC that tasks institutes of religious education "...to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy... on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities, and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence." The TRC recognized the power education has to authentically progress true reconciliation, and nearly eight years after publishing these calls, the aforementioned institutions in the Catholic context have yet to adequately respond. Many institutions provide no reconciliatory education, others offer courses but remain as electives, and for the select few who have worked to develop programming, they rarely have Indigenous participation in the instruction. These institutions may be Catholic, though the vast majority are public entities federated through provincial parliamentary acts and receive tax payer funding. There exists only two Indigenous Catholics in Canada who have the educational criteria to hold a faculty of theology position, this is because the Church has never encouraged us to pursue higher theological education and positions of leadership, in fact, we have continuously been discouraged from doing so. I hope that through my studies, I can encourage other Indigenous Catholics to do the same, pursuing scholarship to push forward reform and give our community a voice where it has been absent since colonization. The key to ensuring what the TRC envisioned in call #60 is Indigenous Theologians, we are needed to shape and decolonize the

next generation of our Church through education, so that our value is known, the atrocities of the past are never forgotten, and that we can begin to walk together as the Creator intended. Miigwetch.

Jessica Madiratta

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Regina
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

I work as an Indigenous Advocate teacher in the North Central community in Regina, Saskatchewan. In this leadership role, I have the opportunity to advocate for Indigenous students in their elementary school years. Our school has an over 85% Indigenous student population, yet our staff is over 85% non-Indigenous. One way I see how our education system can foster leadership in Indigenous communities is to ensure we have proper representation of Indigenous staff in our elementary schools. Students deserve to have staff in their schools that understand their lived experiences and background as Indigenous peoples. Having Indigenous advocate teachers in both elementary and high schools is one way to ensure representation for Indigenous youth.

One of the many barriers I faced growing up as an Indigenous girl in Regina is being taught by educators that did not look like me or understand my culture. Today I am a PhD student at the University of Regina and my own experiences have led me to my research. I am going to be undertaking a research process that explores professional development for teachers in culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching challenges educators to use students' culture, perspectives, and experiences to create a better classroom environment for diverse student populations. I had difficulties navigating the public-school system in Regina because my culture and background was rarely acknowledged, recognized, or celebrated. I do not want to see another generation of Indigenous youth have to experience what I experienced. In my role as an Indigenous Advocate, I get to connect Indigenous youth with our elder-in-residence, and we regularly participate in smudging ceremonies. I am currently working alongside two other Iskwew (women) Indigenous advocate teachers to plan an Indigenous games day for our students to learn about traditional games that were played by their ancestors.

As an Indigenous graduate student, I face other barriers at my university. During all my courses, it was rare to see another Indigenous student in my class. When it came to learning about Indigenous research methodologies, it was included, however it came near the end of the syllabus. My vision for future Indigenous graduate students is to have the chance to be in classes with many other Indigenous students. Even better, to have Indigenous professors teaching the classes. I attended the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program for my undergraduate degree, and I would love to see more of this type of education program for

graduate studies. SUNTEP faculty is all Indigenous and Indigenous ways of knowing and being are integral to their program.

One of the ways I have stepped up as an Indigenous graduate student is to become a mentor for a new Indigenous graduate student in the PhD program. My mentorship allows me to pass down information to my mentee such as which classes are taught by Indigenous professors and sharing academic articles written by our people. I believe mentorship programs for Indigenous graduate students can be very powerful and another great way to foster leadership in Indigenous communities.

Hilary Maloney

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Sipeknekatik
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

I feel that the education system isnt properly taught to aboriginal people as best as it could be we are taught differently in our community and could use more supports im the school base. In my community we live 5 minutes to a former residential school so we have been highly effected losing our language and culture aspects

Tim Masso

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Ucluelet
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

I have been working to revitalize my traditional language, Nuu-chah-nulth. This journey started while I was public school, I noticed a lack of respect for my language. This lack of respect had a negative impact on indigenous students' well-being and mental health. At the time, indigenous languages were not taught within the public school system. While I was in grade eight, I began teaching my language within the school. This work gained the attention of the Canadian Minister of Indigenous Affairs, I felt it was my responsibility to advocate for change across Canada, to bring Indigenous languages into the forefront and public schools. During this time, I attended over seventy meetings across Canada and the USA discussing the importance of indigenous languages and the impact it has on all people. At the age of fourteen, I was honoured to be accepted into the University of Victoria's Indigenous Language Revitalization Program, while continuing my studies at high school. In the last six years, I have seen community language classes grow, from no classes to over twenty-two classes with each having fifteen-twenty students of all ages, but I have also seen our elders and language keepers pass away, six years ago there were thirty now there are only two. This loss can be seen in almost every indigenous community across Canada and USA. This loss in language, has a tremendous impact on indigenous cultures and connections to land. Working with indigenous elders has supported me to grow to who I am today, although many of my mentors and teachers have now passed away, I will carry forward their teachings for future generations.

While advocating I have realized that many public schools are cold and detached, students' voices are not being respected and neither is their individuality. Our schools have turned into cookie cutters, to make us all 'identical', this is something that leads students to a loss of self, as well as loss of self-respect. Another struggle that I have noticed with many students and even myself, is the disconnect between home/family and the public schools, family, such as parents and not included within their child's education. Even their attempts to include themselves are pushed away or looked down upon. This disconnect leads the teachers to build an artificial 'home' environment within the classroom. This causes a false sense of home, unlike home you cannot be who you are, you have to still fit into a 'box' of a student. Co-learning and respect both ways are not included within this artificial 'home'. The teacher has been given rights over parents to judge and assess the child, yet without respect and knowing the child's true wants and needs. We have to return that right back to the parent, whether that be more involvement from the parents for less time at school. Teaching is not reciprocal within the public school

system. I am finishing my B.Ed. this year, and I see we have a long way to go for equity and equality for all.

Deanna Matthews

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Canmore
Province: Alberta

Submission:

As the Director of Impact and Learning at Teach For Canada–Gakinaamaage, a SSHRC Doctoral Scholar studying First Nations education governance at Western University, and a 2022/23 Action Canada Fellow, I regularly witness the repercussions of underfunding social policy areas for First Nations across the country – dilapidated school buildings run on generators, children who are years behind in their education, and classrooms of students without teachers. While this story may be familiar to those within Indigenous education, I share it because it continues to keep me up at night; I ask, “How many more children must suffer in these conditions until things change?”. Delays due to provincial/territorial/federal/intergovernmental negotiations over jurisdiction to provide essential supports only make matters worse. I completed my Bachelor of Education because I have personally experienced how powerful education can be in simulating individual agency, and I hope to give back to my community. I would not be where I am today without my education, and through my doctoral work, I hope to further support First Nations Control of First Nations Education.

First Nations across Turtle Island are seeking education systems by, and for First Nations students. Through my work with Teach For Canada, we run education projects with First Nations partners; the education projects may include culture and language revitalization in the classroom, supporting students in building relationships with Elders, students learning about the land and the history of their communities, and many other areas identified by partners. Last year, four high school students from Nisichawayasihk Neyo Ohtinwak Collegiate in northern Manitoba gathered ideas on what improvements and changes the community wanted to see in their education system over the next 40 years. Data was collected from students, former students, teachers, educational assistants, Chief and Council, parents/guardians, Elders, and others in the community. The project culminated in a final report to the community, and will be used a guide for First Nations Control of First Nations Education going forward.

It is my honour to support projects such as this, which demonstrate the importance of community-led systems change for First Nations education. Often times this starts with ‘Why?’. Why is this work important? Because First Nations students not only deserve an on par education, but an education system that honours who they are, the gifts they bring, and their ability to thrive in this country. This vision seeks to actively provide, and advocate for, a platform for communities to undertake their own education projects, responding to the question: ‘What?’. What do First Nations, and First Nations youth in particular, hope to see for

their education, and what does First Nations Control of First Nations Education mean for individual Nations? Leadership through education is fostered each day in community, when youth are provided opportunities to share their ideas, to courageously envision what they hope to see for their schools, to seek input from their communities, and to develop concrete next steps to put plans into action; because support for community-led action within Indigenous education is desperately needed.

Em McFadyen

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Lennox islands
Province: Prince Edward Island

Submission:

I graduated with from: child and youth care with addictions support degree from college. What inspired me to do that was the struggle I faced in the public education system off reserve. I grew up in Riverview NB and every school I went into was a white school. I knew 1 other indigenous person throughout all my school years. When I was in middle school and high school I struggled, I got in trouble almost everyday. I had teachers and counsellors tell me to my face that I would go no where In life, I believed them. In high school I didn't make it very far, I was expelled from school halfway through grade 10. When I attempted to go back and ask for a second chance, I was greeted and told if I came back on the property they would call the cops.

I was young, couch hopping, so I accepted that and never enrolled in public school again, at 19 I got my GED and shortly after accepted in college. I believe a large reason that I struggled so much is because the education system is already broken but was not ready for a broken indigenous child who's family is battling intergenerational trauma to be in attendance. Many people wanted to me to fail but I remember the ones who believed in me. The way that I felt in the education system made me feel less than.

I was already yearning for a sense of community and belonging that stems from not know my culture but at the time I didn't know that. Instead of teachers and adults trying to help me succeed they did the opposite and tried to make me fail. It worked for the time, I went down a horrible path, filled with anger and hate, but I realized that there are so many youth right now, experiencing the same thing, and all they want is one adult, one person to make them feel safe, and believe in them and they could move mountains. Changing the whole educational system, is an uphill battle, the right way to change it is to inspire the youth of tomorrow and the adults of tomorrow to believe that all children deserve to feel good when they walk into school doors.

Riley McKenzie

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Hamilton
Province: Ontario

Submission:

Although an urban Indigenous woman who lives quite far from both of my home communities, I am lucky to have grown up surrounded by my culture thanks to the large and resilient Indigenous community in Ottawa. I think this life experience has given me lots of insight into the different ways Indigenous and non-Indigenous people welcome their teachings. I have noticed a very interesting difference in the way my community receives teachings versus how students in the formal education systems receive their education and how growing up in formal education systems has taken a lot of cultural ways of learning away.

As a performer and educator with a family dance group called Prairie Fire, I have had the pleasure of being a leader from a young age. I have been teaching Métis jigging to business professionals, government officials, etc. my whole life. The goal of my family's dance group has always been to teach through action, and lived experiences while everyone is able to listen and ask questions as they arise. I find that as I grew up in formal education systems, this was not an option. The end goal is never to enjoy learning, or learn to enjoy the failures as they teach you just as much, rather it is to perform well without failure on final evaluations. Although a necessary skill in our current society, it fails to appreciate the act of learning which Indigenous people understand to be one of the most important and exciting aspects of life. For Indigenous students to thrive this ideology needs to be incorporated into the spaces we learn in.

One of the best leadership opportunities I've had was with an organization called Students On Ice, where the majority of teachings were given to us by listening to people share what they've learned throughout their life about the topics they are passionate about. As educators, elders, and students alike spoke about their experiences, questions were encouraged and students were able to nurture their appreciation for learning. Similar to how my family and I teach culture and dance, we were able to go out into the field and practice what we learned through hands-on experience, learning in a way that fosters how I was taught by my community. This was the best way I have ever been taught and would have been even more useful in my formal education. Sitting in sharing circles and learning from other people's experiences is one of the best ways to teach and is especially better received by Indigenous students who grew up being taught this way.

I think the issue with how we learn now is that there isn't space for students to become leaders. The very structure of how we learn leaves no room for the growth of students' life

skills as we don't get a chance to put our skills to use from an early age and be happy to learn from mistakes. Instead we sit and take note of hands-on experience without ever getting to participate in it. The best way for Indigenous students to become leaders is to unlearn the way of teaching we are stuck with now and not be afraid to fail. Students need to be out in the world learning from other's experiences and allowing themselves to combine traditional ways of learning with our formal education.

Katherine Merrell-Anderson

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Edmonton
Province: Alberta

Submission:

Tân'si,

My name is Katherine Merrell-Anderson, I am Métis from Elizabeth Métis Settlement in Alberta.

In my journey through K-12, the biggest challenge I faced was a sense of “otherness” and feeling separate to my peers, not seeing myself reflected in the other students or my environment. In many years of my education, I was the only, or one of few, Indigenous students in my classes.

Although my school arranged cultural learning opportunities for Indigenous students, explanations were not provided as to why we were participating in these activities. Smudging, at the time, was not regularly practiced and was not allowed inside the building. As a 4th grader standing outside on a cool spring day, participating in a smudging ceremony, while my peers were inside and warm, it felt more like punishment than reward, and left me without the knowledge I should have received.

At my high school graduation, pride flooded through me as my Kokum presented me on stage with my own Métis Sash. At 17 years old, this was one of the only times I had experienced my culture publicly in a positive manner. While this was an uplifting moment, it was short-lived and followed by questions and resentment as my peers were unaware of why I was singled out and given gifts they were not. As a result, I quickly removed my sash out of embarrassment.

In university, I was frequently overwhelmed with feelings of imposter syndrome and questioned whether my acceptance was a result of checking the FNMI box on the application form or whether I had earned my place. I felt as though I battled constantly against instructors to acknowledge the simple truths I knew as an Indigenous person and not be called on to provide supplementary information due to my Indigeneity.

I am now a Transition Coordinator in the Braided Journeys program in Edmonton. Returning to my former school district as an employee feels like I have come full circle and can ensure my students have a better experience than my own.

Braided Journeys coaches offer guidance, support and create inclusive, welcoming, and caring spaces where Indigenous students see themselves reflected positively in a school-based setting. Our supports help to eliminate barriers faced by Indigenous students such as attendance,

economic status, language, or cultural differences. In this role, I make sure to engage students by explaining the significance of each opportunity offered and invite them to participate as leaders in their own cultural learning and programming. Programs such as these are incredibly important as students are more likely to graduate when there is at least one positive relationship with an adult in their school.

Educators can help foster leadership in Indigenous communities by demonstrating they believe in the inherent worth of the students they are teaching.

I love this role and hope the students I work with always know they have a safe place to be themselves in my classroom and envision possibilities where they are empowered to influence change for future generations.

Kanses Michell-Thompson

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Opaskwayak Cree Nation
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

My parents' responsibility as a child was to show me our traditional way of life. I was fortunate to be raised in a family that participated in powwows and other ceremonies. That was just the beginning of my education journey, which I was unaware of. We face a lot of challenges and obstacles as we grow into young adults, and some of these may hold us back if we don't figure out what's causing them. Going far as talking to an adult, or family member can help get over those obstacles. That's a thought because not all children, especially indigenous children have a safe place to talk. A simple topic or person can inspire our youth to do better. As a former youth, I recall thinking about my community, and what it would be like if it was involved more with its culture. Knowing our culture can open many doors and break cycles for our people, and our youth. Providing the youth with many resources, and activities can help them pursue and think about their future career. As a First Nation, I would like to provide a better future because our youth are our future. As for the youth, we want them to adopt the teachings we are carrying, in order to provide these teachings to our youth, it would be best to start telling them in classrooms, or youth camps. I think influencing our youth with the culture is very important, especially for indigenous people to stand up for themselves for what they believe in, without them our culture and language would die out. We need to provide community education services that will enable indigenous people to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities. We further need to promote anti-racism education, including strategies to empower young people to deal with racism in the compulsory schooling curriculum. Indigenous peoples should be resourced and supported to establish their own education systems, including schools, should they so choose but indigenous peoples do not come only with problems that need solving we come with our own answers and ask your assistance in ensuring these solutions are systematically and fully implemented. Quality in education is not an absolute and static concept, because education relates to the culture and community it is supposed to serve. These same themes and conversations are what guide Indigenous communities in their commitment to lifelong learning for their people. What matters to Indigenous peoples in education is that children, youth, adults, and elders can develop their gifts in a respectful space. It means that all community members are able to contribute to society (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and are physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually balanced.

Erin Miers

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Saskatoon
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

I am currently employed with Dumont Technical Institute as a Program Support Manager. In this position, I lead our team of four Administrative Assistants. I am also on the Youth Advisory Circle (YAC) with the Oyateki Partnership. With YAC, we are working on developing ways to include and grow Indigenous culture in post-secondary education and to one day hopefully have it throughout all levels of education.

Growing up I didn't have any educated and successful Indigenous people to look up to. It was basically graduate high school and get a job. Post-secondary wasn't discussed or an option due to cost. As I've gotten older, I've seen how far and how much further we can go as Indigenous people to break the negative stereotypes and give our youth strong, successful Indigenous people who they can look up to. I have continued to take my classes part time as I cannot afford to quit work to go back to school. As of now, I am still taking university classes part time to hopefully complete my Bachelor of Arts - Sociology Degree in a few years. I will be the second person in my family to graduate from a university program.

As a mom of a six year old son, I realize so much more now how important it is to have someone to look up to who is engaged with their culture. My son attends "Mii Taant Leur Plaas" - "My Auntie's Place" in Michif, where every day he gets to learn about our culture. He comes home excited to tell me what words he learned in Michif that day and what they did for the day. This is an amazing program and it would be wonderful to have options like these in schools all across North America. It's showing people from a young age how important it is to have your culture surrounding you in your every day life.

Shane Monague

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Beausoleil First Nation, Christian Island
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I began working within community development when I began my journey on my community's first Youth Council when I was 14 years old. I am 27 years old now and since then have served on various councils and advisory committees through both non-indigenous and indigenous organizations. I was a representative for the Anishinaabek Nation youth through the Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council where I focussed on educational outreach as well as policy analysis and development relevant to indigenous communities.

A decade ago, I first connected with Feathers of Hope, a phenomenal grassroots organization that is dedicated to empowering indigenous youth. During my time with FOH, I served on many committees. One of these committees was the advisory body for a forum that brought together over 150 Indigenous youth from Across Ontario to dialogue over the justice system in Canada. On this advisory board we developed the "Justice and Juries: A First Nations Youth Action Plan for Justice".

I am grateful for these opportunities I get to be a part of as it gives me the opportunity to work with my experiences and the knowledge I carry. To me, this is very important as they help to inform decisions that are important to me as an Anishinaabenini - an Ojibway young person. My culture and my peoples way of life is integral to my identity. My grandmother is a Residential School Survivor and I like to think I have done her and my ancestors proud by starting to relearn our ancestral way of living and being. This, and my upbringing on a rural Island on the southern shores of Georgian Bay are big parts of who I am. It's for all these reasons I have always had a passion to see great things for my community.

So at the present, I serve on 2 local committees and work for my community within Communications and Administration. In terms of Education, my time seeking education was unconventional - having spent time in alternative schools focussed on indigenous students stands in stark contrast to my time in college where I studied film production. I am the first of 5 siblings to graduate high school and move onto post-secondary and possess ample experience navigating education systems on my own. Some challenges I faced were culturally relevant and trauma-informed approaches to working with indigenous students. Education is integral for indigenous youth in and outside of an indigenous community for many reasons but most importantly: establishing a sense of identity and place within current day society. Seeing cultural practices and indigenous knowledge directly in curriculum is something many

indigenous bodies are working towards and is something that I push to see reflected here in my community. Integrating our current lived and historical experiences into not only indigenous education systems but the education systems for Canadians is integral to advance reconciliation in my opinion. Knowledge is power and I believe my insights, and my passion for community development, would be a valuable asset for this committee.

Martini Monkman

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Winnipeg
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

Hi my name is Martini monkman. I am currently apart of 3 youth councils. I am interested learning more leadership skills and more policy. I am an eager learner. My vision of how education can foster leadership in indigenous communities would be having youth programs with incentives about politics, policy, colonization and other key issues that educate youth. Once youth find out the what & why we experience the things we experience things will start making sense to them. I also feel like along the way during the education of these subjects some youth will find exactly what they are passionate about and become true advocates for their cause. I feel like indigneous youth are kept in the dark about these subjects. We need to seek the future Indigenous activists and land defenders. Barriers I have experienced in the education system lack of support for traditional indigenous knowledge available in schools. I would have loved if my indigenous studies program included teachings from an indigenous elder or knowledge keeper. Or if ceremony was available in a predominantly indigenous schools.

Another barrier would be the current education curriculum .. schools aren't allowed to teach politics , how to vote , or how to do your taxes . These things actually matter. I also learned them all on my own. I do know alot of other people my age that know nothing about these things. Also transportation is an issue. I wish schools provided transportation.

Helaina Moses

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Mayo, Yukon
Province: Yukon

Submission:

My name is Helaina Moses, and I describe myself as a land healer, a natural leader, traditional, and I have passion for my community roots and heritage. I am 27 years old, from the wolf clan and I grew up in Mayo, Yukon and I am a member of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun. I grew up learning my traditional values from my grandparents, and these memories about them I hold close to my heart. I grew up with my late grandfather Tommy's teachings, he always took me out to hunt, trap, and fish. He would always remind me that we didn't have grocery stores to get food while he was growing up and he had to learn to live off the land and use what was around him. The way of life, the way of the land, and the way of the water were my teachings. I was taught to be an environmentalist at a very young age and taught to harvest for myself and my family. These are the most valuable lessons. He taught me how important it is to take care of the land and the land will take care of you. That's where it all started for my career. I have travelled all over from Beaver River, Rackla and Red Mountain, monitoring and collecting data. I have 9 years of environmental experience and multiple certifications in this field. Our traditional Territory has many scars on the land from historic mining eras and current development. I have a passion to protect the environment and education is such a valuable tool to be successful in your life.

I grew up in small communities my entire life, I experienced schooling in a small community. I was in grade 6, doing grade 9 schoolwork while I was going to school in the community. I had friends in this school that didn't know how to read and write. I had to leave to get a proper education, my father sacrificed his career and his dwelling to move me away from this small community to the capital of the Yukon. Where I was very successful in school and got the education, I needed. This big step that my father took helped me a lot in my career and my education. I do lots of work with youth and providing paid training opportunities for our community. We need to target our young people and get them working or/and returning to school. We currently are in a wellness crisis since COVID, and our people are not returning to work. I want to be that person in our community to bring my concerns to the attention of others and get our young people back into the working realm. WE need to ensure we are accommodating the individuals that might have gaps in their education, in my mind this looks like providing training without any provisions or providing more support and resources to ensure these individuals are successful in going to school or getting employment. I have experienced lots of successful stories and unsuccessful stories. I am a young person who speaks

up and I want to bring awareness of what its like to be living in an isolated community. I want to be able to inspire others and our younger generations, to remind them that you can do anything in this life and don't let your self-doubt define you. I have always challenged myself into pursuing my goals and I have overcome many challenges and setbacks in my life. These are all tools to make me stronger, and I don't let the setbacks defeat me. I strive to better myself and our community. I want to make a difference in our community and in our governance. I look forward to speaking with you and bringing this awareness to the Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples.

Tamara Mullen

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Sept-Îles
Province: Québec

Submission:

First of all, I have had many challenges in school and in my personal life. In fact, I did not know what program I wanted to take because I never had a guidance counsellor in high school. I also did not have the prerequisites to apply to a program like natural science or nursing because my generation's high school had only basic courses to earn a diploma. Prerequisite courses were introduced shortly after. At the time, I wanted to be a nurse, but a short time later I realized that it is not the job I had dreamt about. So, I set out to find myself. It was in a consultation with the community I am from that I heard about the childhood education program and I said to myself, why not? I loved children so much. I entered the program, but because of a lack of motivation, I only finished a few courses. I decided to enrol in a prior learning recognition program while I worked. I enrolled in CEGEP, but again, I did not finish because I got sick. Specifically, I had a tumour in my left foot that was causing me pain; pain that I would not wish on anyone. I developed a sarcoma in my left foot. I could no longer work at the daycare centre because every time a child brushed up against my left foot, I would be in excruciating pain. I went to the Emergency Department several times with waits longer than 10 hours and was sent home. I was just given a prescription for Naproxen and was told to come back in two weeks and that repeated for more than six visits. It was summer when I decided to go to the Emergency Department again and I asked the young doctor if he was prepared to help me. He agreed; he even took on my case so I could have an MRI because he too found that it was not normal for to be in so much pain and he did not understand why I had not had more extensive tests sooner. He sent me to the Hôtel-Dieu hospital to see the oncologist in orthopedics. He operated on my foot; my left foot has been amputated. Everything was fine for two years, but then I had a relapse; the cancer was now in my lungs in the form of metastases. In fact, I had about 30 metastases in both my lungs. I googled the disease and I saw a life expectancy of 6 to 12 months. I saw death and that affected my mental health. I felt incredibly alone. I suffered several bouts of depression.

With the chemotherapy treatments, I put my life on pause. I started doing handicrafts with my mother. I really enjoyed learning handicrafts with her. She convinced me to continuing living despite the disease and to never give up. I have my mother's strength. At that time, I decided to continue my mineral technology course that I had enrolled in before my cancer relapse. I finished my chemotherapy treatments, but the treatments did not work with the type of sarcoma I had. So, I was put on a wait list to participate in clinical research and I agreed. While I waited, I was prescribed chemo pills. They strung me along for over one month. Health Canada did not want to pay for my chemo pills, but apparently they indicated the wrong program when they applied for the drug expenses.

Now, I am working with a firm and I completed my mineral technology program, specializing in mining. I am just missing the French test. I have already restarted three times. I thought it was too hard, but I

realized that I might have anxiety or a problem concentrating because every time I write the test, I can't stop looking at the time and that stresses me... (not enough space)

Mina Napartuk

Primary Identification: Inuit (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut)
Community: Umiujaq
Province: Quebec

Submission:

Voices of Young Indigenous Leaders.

Hi, my name is Mina Napartuk, I am from Umiujaq a small town between 600-700 people. I grew up there all my life and I'm here to talk about my experience in education.

So far in life I have learned so many things in so many ways. I have learned as a high school student, a Junior Canadian Ranger, a Canadian Ranger, a cook, a skier and being a traveller.

There isn't much to say about high school, but I will say that I loved learning when I was a kid, and I did well in middle school until towards the end of high school. I failed once and had to redo sec.4 but I pulled through and graduated. My mom, my older siblings and all my teachers were an inspiration and helped me get to my goal. I am very thankful for all of them.

Being a junior ranger had taught me teamwork, how to be safe in the outdoors, making friends and that an adult has an immense influence on younger people. Which is why I turned out to be a ranger. What's taught me in being a ranger is that travelling to other places is refreshing, to be more mature, that our leadership is important to the kids, that we all can't get along with each other and that its superior & healthy to surround yourself with other people that cares. And whenever I had troubles with some things as a Junior or a Ranger I'd always go to the instructors and talk about what's bothering me and they were all open to helping me. Wonderful experience overall.

Professional cooking in Inukjuak Adult Education/Pigiursavik. My experience in cooking taught me things like how you teach can change throughout the years and I saw that through my teacher, that everyone has their own taste in food. He also taught me other things besides cooking, like you can do anything you want in life, he has so much life experience and I really look up to him for that. What got me through the tough times was my friends and my teacher.

Well, that is enough about how I learned. Now about how it can encourage Indigenous communities. Learning is an important tool than can open many doors. Like my cooking diploma can take me to these big companies and work/cook for them or even making my own restaurant. And being a ranger is of course a big thing in the north, it influences the next generation, and they can also lead the next one. We can show people that getting educated is

powerful and is inspiring. So, I encourage everyone to learn a little more, even if its small or take in something bigger. Learning things is really meant to keep us happy and busy. And if you like what you do, you can always do more, don't be afraid to give it your all. I hope this was a good read, I wish everyone the best of luck. Also, here's a little poem I could come up with and it made me chuckle and I hope it makes you laugh a little.

Roses are red, violets are blue, life is hard, I learned a thing or two.

Zachery Naqvi

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Edmonton
Province: Alberta

Submission:

As a lifelong learner and lover of school, education has directly informed my life. I completed my Political Science and Philosophy undergraduate degree at the University of Alberta. However, I would like to emphasize my interdisciplinary educational background, which has made me appreciate education as an end for the sake of learning because it broadens my worldview, makes me a better citizen and strengthens my character. With a significant emphasis on the humanities and social sciences, it was fascinating to study at the Yale School of Public Health, earning a Climate Change and Public Health Policy certificate. Although policy-related, the scientific component of the course led me to appreciate other disciplines immensely. It gave me a more refined understanding of underlying factors that should be considered in crafting policy. I am 2 courses away from earning a Public Leadership Credential from the Harvard Kennedy School and accepted an offer for graduate school to study policy studies and a practicum at the University of Alberta. Over the last seven years, my Indigenous leadership experience has revolved around professionally running my small business, Verified Auto Leads. Here, I have worked to provide vehicle access, catering to Indigenous communities in remote areas often under-served in the automotive industry. Furthermore, my volunteering at the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation has revolved around implementing a grocery store pilot program to alleviate food insecurity in my hometown of Edmonton. Education is a critical reason for my development into the Métis leader, community member and agent for positive change that I am today. Something essential in fostering my ethical backbone, authenticity and independence as a young Métis adult was the ability to travel for over 100 days while studying abroad in Europe due to a global skills opportunity grant for which I am immensely grateful. The reason I got this opportunity was strictly a result of my education. Overseas I increased my French language fluency, studied the Italian political system and, most importantly, fostered leadership capacity by learning about myself, my values and my core beliefs during a Jungian Depth Psychology seminar. Because of the opportunities afforded to me due to higher education, I realized who I am and got given the tools to help mould myself into the person I want to be. Change is difficult. However, by identifying my authentic self, informed by my cultural heritage, family dynamics and societal considerations, I became more competent in being unwavering in my values, ultimately strengthening my leadership abilities and sense of self. What made this evident to me was during a presentation with Highlands Elementary, where I discussed my experience abroad, attempting to foster a sense of awe and wonder, instilling the importance of higher education to travel and see the world. Education is

so valuable for many of the reasons outlined already. However, this point of education as a means to broaden one's worldview through travelling stood out as one of the most significant benefits education has had on my life.

Jonathan Nayler

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Madoc
Province: Ontario

Submission:

My name is Jonathan Nayler (he/him), I am 20 years old and approaching my 21st birthday in April. I am in my third year of Indigenous Studies at Trent University. I identify as Huron and is a off reseve student who identifies as Urban Indigenous from the Wendake First Nation near Quebec City. I am here to talk about my educational experience in the K-12 system, especially my high school years at Centre Hastings Secondary School which is located in Madoc, Ontario which is located between Peterborough and Ottawa and which is located at least one hour east of Trent. The school that I attended consisted of students who came from low-middle income families struggling to make ends meet (which is very similar to Indigenous communities where families suffer from food insecurity and poverty making incomes way below the provincial average) and usually had multiple children of various ages trying to keep up an uphill battle. My family was above the average income range for the school which was upper-middle class and I was in the university pathway in all of my courses except math which was college level (which is the ideal situation that the provincial government wants students to be at - pick their strongest subjects (superpowers) at the highest level while their weakness are taught at a college level. In grade 8, my homeroom teacher streamered me to applied in all subjects because she could not decide where to place me - her head said applied while her heart said academic - she followed her head instead empathizing with my heart - the applied stream consisted of mainly special education students with an IEP like me and/or low income students were disengaged with their academics and needed an extra push in their learning (they needed to be in academic/streamed too just like me who thrived in the highest level Canadian and World Studies and English that the school offered - even got an award/bursary for that in Grade 12). Meanwhile my geography and phys ed teacher and the autism program coordinator believed in me as a strong and academically strong male student (who is also neurodiverse and identifies as Huron as well) and placed me in all academic courses except math. Also, there are students each year in Grade 8, who leave their rural communities to attend school in Belleville to attend the elite and high quality Catholic secondary schools in Belleville which have more academic programming which appeals to the high class students like sports, religious programs, the IB program and high quality tech programs. My teachers believed in me that I would struggle on the long bus ride and fail in the demanding academic programming at St Theresa's, so we collectively decided that I would attend my community school where I thrive we in the smaller and supportive setting which raised me up to be the mature, positive, kind, compassionate, and loving person that I am today at Trent, when I had the most personal growth (I am also growing

so much at Trent), was taught how to embrace lifelong learning, live a healthy life which involves eating wholesome food/walking each and every day to school, and was on the honor roll each and every year except Grade 9 - Indigenous students often sacrifice their lives just by leaving their communities after grade eight and winning the \$12,000 jackpot from the provincial government which allows them to attend provincially funded high schools. The solution is to allow Indigenous people to attend their local on-reserve high school which have a lot of course options (which leads to university, college or apprenticeship) and giving them a choice after grade 12 to make their own decision between attending an Indigenous Institute like FNTI or the Seven Generations Education Centre or attend a small university which supports Indigenous students to the fullest like Lakehead, Trent, or Laurentian which has full Indigenous services and supports to allow them to be the best leadership example that they can be and that allows t

Angell Olsen

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Kamloops
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

The main work I've done has been with A Way Home Kamloops, I started off as a volunteer transitioning out of hidden homelessness. I volunteered for two years then Katherine McParland hired me on as a youth advisor, to work towards ending youth homelessness. I was in a documentary with her, news articles, CFJC Kamloops, and I helped write a 90 plus page report. We were working on a conference then covid hit, and sadly after that the Executive Director Katherine McParland passed away. We did a preliminary summit report after she passed on a conference we were working on prior. We will now be finally hosting the conference in Richmond bc this September. After that I did a paid internship for VIDEA on international development. Myself, along with other indigenous youth across Canada worked with people from Zambia on similarities of colonization. I also did building greener futures with AHMA, on building climate friendly housing. I was on a podcast with the BCFN youth podcast. My vision is to put youth voices first and give a chance to speak on their lived expertise, and recommendations on helping end barriers. I believe if we listen to the future generations will be the key to successfully decolonizing Canada.

Jesse Osborne

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Ottawa
Province: Ontario

Submission:

The system really need to be worked on its out of date and their are no bilingual research on indigenous communities. Their are little to no researchers that study mental health and social issues. I am a indian token in all my courses because i bring a different prespective to what make social an essential services, how to approach indigenous communities. Our post secondary education must and needs to decolonize their ways to include members of the first nations on their boards of directors. We do not need mon indigenous people deciding what it is best for us, they must hear it from the communities.

Heather O'Watch

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Regina
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

My name is Heather O'Watch and I am a Nakoda and Cree woman from the Okanese First Nation located in Treaty 4 Territory. I hold a bachelors of arts in Indigenous Studies from the First Nations University of Canada and am currently enrolled in a master of public policy through the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. My thesis focuses on understanding the relationships with post-secondary institutions and Indigenous communities in co-creating policies particularly with self-governing Nations in the Yukon territory. Beyond my education, I am currently employed with Indigenous Peoples Rights International and am an official Canadian delegate to the Y7 summit on behalf of Young Diplomats of Canada.

While attending post-secondary, I have had the privilege to advocate for post-secondary rights and treaty rights at both a local, regional and national level through student associations, student unions and national student movements. My roles included being elected as the executive of external affairs with the University of Regina Students Union and the provincial representative on the national executive for the Canadian Federation of Students. During my time as representatives, I organized national campaigns, events and resources including the Fight the Fees campaign which had a national day of action in November 2016. In February 2017, I met with several members of parliament including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in advocating for sustainable funding amongst the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSP) whereas thousands of First Nation students and First Nation communities face barriers of inaccessibility and chronic underfunding. There is an outstanding backlog of thousands of First Nation students who are left out each year of opportunities to better their economic status and strengthen the Canadian economy as skilled and professional workers. PSSSP continues to be chronically underfunded despite decades long efforts and advocacy from Indigenous organizations, experts and students.

Although there have been adjustments to the funding cap and short term influx of funding, tuition rates and cost of living continues to rise. It is critical to find solutions for PSSSP and other programs for Indigenous students as professional degrees and graduate programs are not prioritized due to lack of sustainable funding causing risk for continued underrepresentation of Indigenous professionals amongst sectors. Access to education is critical for developing and amplifying leadership amongst Indigenous economies and communities.

As an Indigenous student who qualified for PSSSP in my undergraduate degree there were many barriers including rising costs of living that exceeded well over my living allowance which resulted in studying full-time and working 2-3 jobs to cover my basic costs of living. I have seen the retention of Indigenous students suffer due to rising costs of living, lack of mental health support and services and other detrimental factors that affect their success in their educational journey. Although I have come this far into my educational journey, there are risks and continued barriers I face that I am not immune to and I hope through continued advocacy that I can continue to help support other Indigenous students in succeeding together.

Audriana Paul

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Valley
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

Everything I needed to know, I have learned over steaming cups of red rose tea, with a splash of warm carnation milk poured delicately from the punched holes on the top of the can. My father would sing the names of the little porcelain animals found in the tea box as I rolled the figurines between my fingers, admiring how intricately etched they were while I waited for my tea to cool. There was something about miniature animals nestled away in boxes of tea, transforming into informal language lessons at the kitchen table that held so much magic for me.

When his friends visited, he instructed me to sit quietly at the table and to listen but not interrupt. If a family member were to stay for the night, I was asked to clean my room and share my space with our guests. Our doors opened routinely to new faces who knew Dad's or Mom's names, and shortly after their arrival, food and tea would be offered. Customs stitched into everyday interactions, accompanied by steeped tea leaves. Community building mixed with a splash of carnation milk.

The work I choose to engage with L'nu students involves helping them mix these delicate threads of community through their education journey, as I know that attending post-secondary as a first-generation academic comes at a cost. In conversations around tables positioned in dimly lit afforded spaces at post-secondary institutions, I hold space for students to unload. Their grief, fears, joy, and passions all come to the table.

A common concern mentioned in each conversation with L'nu students is the lack of community in their education journeys. Barriers of connection, enculturation, and familiar faces contribute to the resiliency and success of each student as they navigate the academic world for the first time. This vital missing piece leads to inflated drop-out rates and a lasting impact on students' mental wellness.

If community building was a core value of post-secondary institutions, who would L'nu students be when they left the system?

The hope is that they can navigate the institution effectively and leave relatively unscathed. They would have built relationships with their peers and found safety and comfort in their chosen community.

How does this process begin to take shape? Over cups of T.E.A. – transformation, empowerment, and assembly. Transformative change of the education system to incorporate community rather than the Euro-birther mentality of individualism. Empowerment of students navigating the system for the first time or struggling to find their way along the journey. Assembly of peers to build networks of safety and care so that when hard times come, there are people to seek healing with.

This work seems daunting and aspirational, but we should always consider the power of a good cup of tea and the learning that it can facilitate. So, join the circle and bring your cup; we have many lessons to share and community bonds to build.

Peter Paul

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Membertou First Nation
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

Our Talk - My Child, we've had this talk before and this talk will come again. This talk is not like the last talk, nor will it be like the next talk. My Child, listen closely, for the way that I talk to you, no one else will, this talk will grow with me and you. This is the same talk we had when you were younger, This is the same talk we have now, This will be the same talk when you're older. My Child, you don't have your language, you don't have your land based teachings, you don't have your ceremonies. I gave you what I have, just as my parents gave me what they had and I hope you pass on our way of teaching. You participated in your culture, you didn't know this then but now you do, I gave you the ability to learn and share the Mi'kmaq way, Our Talk.

A poem I wrote from the perspective of what I thought were to be the unsaid words of my parents through my journey of life learning and reconnecting to my culture.

Growing up there were more people to not be like than people that were role models. Development of leaders. Addiction and mental health should take a bigger priority than what it currently is in our country especially in First Nations communities. Not only correcting the after effect but also correcting the causes. A nationally led parent coaching / licensing program. In the grand scheme of things in this country, no one centre can fix the problems in all of our First Nations communities. We should aim to assist in strengthening the families within the homes to not only combat mental health and addiction in our communities but also combat the disproportionate representation of native kids in child protective services.

We are in a very critical time, regarding our environment. Sixty years of top soil is left as projected by today's scientists, Ocean acidification, rising sea levels projected 1m-30m within the next one hundred years which is not accounting for melting ice caps or glaciers and mass extinction. It may be time to take a hard look at educating the public on wilderness survival skills, farming and hunting. I don't want to be a doomer and say societal collapse is inevitable but I also don't want to turn a blind eye to the possibility. We are nothing but another species on Earth that the planet could go without. Earth has been here long before us and will be here long after us. We should not look at ourselves as exempt from the mass extinction event currently happening.

Peter Paul, 23 Male, Membertou

Lauren Petersen

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Surrey
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

Taanishi kiyawow, Lauren dishnishkashon aen Michif niiya. I am currently the K-12 education manager for Métis Nation BC, and a proud Métis citizen. Growing up I did not see myself represented in the school system but always had a love of learning. I was raised in my culture and have been privileged to have relationships with knowledge carriers and elders, and have allowed these relationships to guide my work from a youth mentor, to a support worker in schools, to a teacher, to provincial k-12 education manager for my nation in BC. Everyday I get to walk alongside extraordinary educators and education leaders to build equity within the school system from a distinctly Métis lens. Some of the work I am proud of is co-writing the first Métis tripartite education agreement between MNBC, a chartered community and a school district. I am in the process of writing many more, to ensure Métis communities have a voice at a district level - this is where the strongest relationships are born, in community. I so supported the writing of a federal K-12 sub accord funding proposal for the Métis national council, and created a learning recovery fund that saw hundreds of Métis learners gain access to technology, tutoring, and assessments in order to transition back to in person learning. Kaa wiichihitoyahk, we take care of each other. I am privileged to have my education and skills, and if I can help others to learn how we care for each other, how we understand each other, I will see my life's work as successful. I just want our children to be well.

Shayla Pine

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Garden River First Nation
Province: Ontario

Submission:

In my reserve we do not have a formal education system. However, we do offer something similar to acquiring a GED. Outside of city limits there are public, secondary and post secondary education. I went to East View Public School because it offered the Ojibway class. However, growing up as a Native woman in an Italian dominated city has been nowhere near easy. I've experienced many forms of racism, oppression, and corruption throughout my education years. Even at Algoma University I've experienced high rates of discrimination due to my culture and background. However, I've learned from it, as well as took it as an opportunity to lead others throughout their education journey. I've participated in multiple youth workshops on my reserve and outside and i believe that leadership can set the proper foundation.

Marie-Laura Pinette-Audette

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Maliotenam
Province: Québec

Submission:

I have been a craftswoman and seamstress in my community for more than eight years. I have attended several seminars on educational pathways and healing, as an artist exhibiting her work. I have attended events such as powwows and music festivals selling my work, as well as my materials that I use to promote my culture, but also so that the people from my community can work from home and tend to their families. At this time, I have been hired as an Innu art consultant at a Centre for Adult Studies. I also plan on going to France in June to hold beadwork workshops for schoolchildren because for me, art is a form of therapy, but it is also a way to keep my culture alive; because it is through their identity that people can find themselves and be fulfilled as a person. I work in these trades so that today's youth can have more modern creations and in their own colour. I feel the most useful with youth and I know that I also help many people in Quebec with my art because I have clients as far away as Val d'Or, Amos and Schefferville. People often ask me for advice on their method of creation and for me, teaching my craft is the next step I want to take. It is a difficult trade and does not pay very much, but despite it all, I keep at it because the impacts and the benefits are rewarding and I am known and respected by all.

Rachel Power

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Thompson
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

My education journey started when I left home to attend school at the age of 15 in Cranberry Portage MB. Unlike most high school this was a form of residential school. I lived at the residence throughout the school year and only went home for Christmas and spring break. It was a tough go attending school there as our community only went up to grade 10. Being away from my family for so long was tough. I was not able to finish school because it was hard to be away from home and family. Fast forward to 2013 I started a Mature student program at University college o the North in Thompson MB while raising 5 small children i attended school and graduated with my mature student, the following fall I was accepted into the BA program. I did one semester and i gave up working fulltime, going to school full time and trying to be a mother to my 5 children was taking its toll on me. so I withdrew from UCN to raise my children and work. In February 2020 I started my education journey in restorative justice with Assiniboine Community college. I would travel 8 hours south to attend classes every month until Covid hit and we took a few months break. we resumed back in August only to hit another lock down. we did resume classes through zoom which was very tough. seeing my marks go from the 90's to 70's was very discouraging, I almost threw in the towel again and I decided I need to push through while this time raising 6 kids and one on the way. The last month of virtual classes I gave birth to a healthy baby boy on a Friday and was back in class the following Monday. I graduated in July of 2021 with my 16 classmates from Restorative Justice. I know work for a political organization called Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) as an assistant program manger for our Justice Program. I work with our indigenous people who have court matters and provide programs and workshops to keep them out of the court system and not obtain a criminal record I also supervise our 13 community justice staff in the outlying communities. This education journey has not been an easy one. I had to overcome many obstacles to get to where I am, but I am grateful for all the opportunities that I have been given in my education journey and professional career in being a young mother of now 8 children working fulltime and providing the best future I can for my them.

Chenille Rich

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Natuashish
Province: Newfoundland and Labrador

Submission:

I graduated from high school in 2020, academically. though it was hard but i never gave up and being in an innu school with my first language Innu Aimun, it was tough to learn english although we moved in 2009 for my uncle to go to college. That's how we learned to speak english and moved back home in 2012, being glad that i can speak my language again. My school that i graduated in learn basic high school work, i asked to be put on an academic course. I graduated with 40 credits and we only needed 36, one thing I can change is having academic courses for my school.

Kelly Sark

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Lennox Island
Province: Prince Edward Island

Submission:

Kwe' N'in Teluisi Wejkapenikiaq E'pit, Hello my name is Woman of the Sunrise, or Kelly Sark from Lennox Island, PEI. I have been a cultural leader, and MMIW2S & MMIB advocator for many years now.

I strongly believe that investing into our Youth with Education is vital for the development of their paths in life. Investing into future leaders and strengthening our communities within. Creating opportunities for our Youth to learn their own cultures, traditions, ceremonies, but also learning their academics through the school system. Lennox Island First Nation does have it's own school from K - Grade 6, which they do have a lot of support for their students in academics and Mi'kmaq teachings. I would love to see this support (culturally & academics) be continued through their entire education career.

Leilani Sharp Chan

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Dawson City
Province: Yukon

Submission:

I have been in leadership roles throughout my life, whether that be by guiding a work group in school or more recently where I co-presented at a plenary during the 2023 Land Claims Agreements Coalition conference. I was a youth speaker at my local MMIWG2S+ October 4th Vigil which encouraged me to take an active approach with community engagement. I feel proud when public speaking or leading peers which is not attainable from anything else. Knowing that I am capable of captivating an audience with my words is incredible and a great honour. I intend on utilizing my voice to help others understand what youth are currently facing today and what could build a better future.

Growing up in Dawson City, I was able to access traditional teachings from elders and leaders. I participated in on the land culture camps because I was adopted into a non-indigenous household this was the only way for me to connect with my culture. My fondest memories from my childhood originate from those camps where I was able to hunt, harvest, and learn what the land has to offer. In terms of my community's local education system, I enjoyed school and always have. I was disappointed with the education in terms of Indigenous history. I felt as though it brushed the surface and I have since then learned much more in my post-secondary studies. I would like to see Indigenous history delved into further because I came out of high school believing that the most "important" part of it was residential school which is not so.

The barriers I faced throughout school were not having developed emotional capacity in some areas due to experiencing traumas as a child. As well as, having a skewed understanding of Indigenous capabilities. Growing up in the Yukon, I was subjected to substance abuse early on and believed that most Indigenous peoples were addicts. This led to disconnecting from my identity because I did not want to be lumped into the definition that I had come to understand. I have not fully overcome my past, but I made the decision in 2022 to attend therapy for the first time in my life which has been well overdue. I have immersed myself into my community and First Nations Government, so that I am able to redefine what Indigenous people are capable of. I am coming to learn that we are resilient, powerful, spiritual, connected to land, and knowledgeable. I am honoured to be of Indigenous descent and would like to change the narrative for future youth, so they do not feel the guilt I did.

Mariyah Snowshoe

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Fort McPherson, NT
Province: Northwest Territories

Submission:

I am currently in my second year of the Indigenous Governance program offered by Yukon University, and I work part-time for the Gwich'in Tribal Council as the Community Wellness Advisor in the health and wellness department. I am also involved in language revitalization and leadership in my workplace and attend meetings to gain experience and understanding of where we are at as Gwich'in people in these areas.

In my educational journey as a young Indigenous woman, I've encountered a lot of barriers in regards to mental health and adjusting and accommodating these colonial structures. I've recently been prescribed ADHD medication which in my opinion, would have saved me a lot of adversity I've overcome in my young adult life that has to do with addictions, depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem. I've also had to voice my concerns within my program for my institution to meet me halfway in dealing with the struggles of colonialism that I am navigating in my quest to unlearn to relearn. I've had instructors who are not of Indigenous descent teaching Indigenous content and not being accommodating to my struggles or offering leniency or understanding when they should because of their privileged positions. My institution has made promises to promote and reconstruct the structure of our learning around reconciliation, and they do have a long way to go, and I believe I have brought awareness to some issues that are affecting Indigenous students in attendance. I strongly believe that it is this westernized way of learning (in-class, lectures, grading) that needs to change in order for Indigenous youth to begin to thrive because this is not how we are meant to learn. There needs to be time and space allocated for the understanding of our short-comings that have stemmed from past colonialism and genocide that has left us with trauma that we are trying to heal from, and to navigate a quest like that as well as keeping up with the pressures of expectations from school to get good grades in order to continue being funded is over-whelming and definitely the root cause of our mental health, addiction, and suicide crisis among Indigenous people. We often learn about the process of two-eyed seeing as a way to adapt to our colonial world, but when will they take a step into our world and do things our way instead of us constantly having to try to fit this mold that cannot contain what we have to offer the world.

As far as cultural teachings go, I often visit with my Jijuu (grandmother), who helps me with small phrases, introductions, and words I'd like to learn. It is my greatest goal to one day speak my language fluently among my peers, and something I will always work towards. I am also striving to go on the land more, and am applying to Dechinta to attend their 3-week hide

tanning course offered in May. I believe that reconnecting to the land and living the life my ancestors did will strengthen my identity and provide me with the answers I need to move forward on my path to cultural and language revitalization and contributing to the success and wealth of my Gwich'in people.

One of our most strongest traits as Indigenous people is our ability to adapt, and I plan on practicing two-eyed seeing in my future leadership so that our foundation will depend on our own values and sovereignty by reconnection to land and culture, while using colonial tools such as money and education to get where we're going. Indigenous people are rising all over the world, and it is these barriers and struggles I've faced and overcome that help me to learn, and will pave the way for many who will come after me.

Mallory Solomon

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Thunder Bay
Province: Ontario

Submission:

I will be entering my 2nd year of my masters in clinical psychology at Lakehead University. I am very passionate about education and advocating for challenging the barriers for Indigenous youth to accessing post secondary education. One of my goals is to advocate for allocated spots for Indigenous students to enter clinical psychology programs. I see there is a lack of an Indigenous perspective with respects to psychology in general. I have went through quite a bit of barrier when trying to complete my undergrad and currently my masters. This includes housing and adequate supports within the community i resided in for post secondary. Luckily I was able to have support from the psychology faculty and Indigenous services from Algoma University and Lakehead University. But not a lot of programs support indigenous students. My friend who is in psychology at western university didn't have support when their brother passed away from suicide. The faculty weren't accommodating. I want to advocate for better supports for Indigenous students. I am also part of NAN Oshkaatisak council. I do a lot of work with regards to mental health and education. The school year for 2022-2023, the council was able to provide care packages for students who were going to post secondary and they are from Nishnawbe aski nation communities. This is one of many initiatives that I helped plan and develop as part of council.

Chante Speidel

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Saskatoon
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

I come from where the rivers combine as one also known as Sapotaweyak Cree Nation as well as the sacred seven fires of Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. My leadership experience started when I was fifteen years old and tasked with the role as youth ambassador of Manito Ahbee and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. From this experience I took with me public speaking and the importance of advocacy. I have always taken on leadership roles in school, in volunteer work and in the workplace. This grew into acting upon leadership myself and creating a youth led organization that hosted events and support Indigenous youth. In 2020, Techa Oaye youth led organization was founded and hosted its first virtual conference with 300 Indigenous youth attendees from all four directions of Canada. In 2021 we hosted our second virtual conference with 350 virtual Indigenous youth attendees. We have been slowed down lately but are working towards a in person national youth conference projected for 2024/25. My vision of leadership and education comes from being rooted in natural laws, culture, language and exposure to western education ideologies that coincide with Indigenous knowledge. I grew up culturally engaged and with my Lakota language, I noticed that my Indigenous peers did not have the same interest to be engaged in culture or did not have the access to be. I always encouraged and tried to be a mentor to bridge my peers into learning cultural values or their language. I see leadership being natural, voicing your opinion or providing the opportunities for others to grow into leadership through motivation or inspiration. This is what was incorporated into my journey as a young Indigenous woman. I lead a partnership as a youth advisor now, between the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and Gabriel Dumont Institute. I sit on national boards and speakers bureaus to continue on the advocacy and work I started at fifteen. As well always being connected and leading Techa Oaye to support Indigenous youth into leadership.

Andrew Starblanket

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Broadview
Province: Saskatchewan

Submission:

Hi, my name is Andrew Starblanket I am from the Starblanket Cree Nation. I was fostered to learn the cunning of the white man, to walk among them as a strong First Nation man. Knowing how to connect and reconcile with my ancestors every day. I am drug and alcohol free all my life, I was raised to be kind, I was raised to be helpful to anyone seeking it. At 18 I went straight into University of Regina to play two years of University Basketball. At the same time I was taking a full load of classes. I convoked in 2017 with a degree in Education. I then started my teaching career in Cowessess and currently still teach highschool and now in my first year as Vice Principal. I want to show that leaders don't need documents to be put into positions where how the western system values a person on how much knowledge you attained through their institutions. I am proud of what I accomplished thus far at the age of 29. I am a pipe carrier, medicine person that goes every year to pick for the elders that need them. Back home on my reserve I am respected by the way I live and view life around me. I believe everyone is a leader, I look at as braiding sweetgrass, you use 21 strands and there's 7 strands in each bundle to make a braid. Each bundle represents the 7 generations behind you, the 7 teachings of your kinship and the 7 generations to come. I believe if you think like there is no limit. I speak my language and teach what I know to the community I am working for. Spiritually in the future should be recognized in institutions because we see time and time again that the system is broken due to only purpose to get educated is for money and not look at the other aspects of life. As I write this I am holding my new born son in my arms, and I question myself if this is worth writing as he has my full attention. As I finish my lots and look at him sleeping in content I can't happen to smile and know I am lucky to share this time with him on this earth.

Thank you for taking the time to read my short and brief story on the skills and leadership experience I have. I would like to wish the other leaders well.

Dymond Stevens

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Oromocto
Province: New Brunswick

Submission:

I have experienced education as a First Nation girl in the public school systems as well as in post secondary at the University of New Brunswick. Since 2015 to present, I have worked as a call in and full time EA for indigenous youth at all grades of school. From pre-school to high school I have watched the First Nation learner experience the colonized forms of education. There is nothing I want more than to take a masters program and in curriculum development and instruction. First Nation pedagogy needs to be at the top of the list in education to ensure the best possible outcome for our children/students, to help pave the way to a brighter and safer future for our people. I am currently the youngest woman elected as council in my community (elected at 23, currently 25) and also the director of education for my band. I've always been passionate about education and our youth, this opportunity will allow me to speak on behalf of the experiences I have and also of those I have seen in my community. Woliwon

Kaylee Sullivan

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Irishtown- Summerside
Province: Newfoundland and Labrador

Submission:

Working a job, was often described to me as a chore.

Something we HAD to do to make a living.

But in my job, I do not view it that way. Because my job is special.

I am an Indigenous Education Outreach Officer, from Qalipu First Nation.

When I went to school, I was inspired.

My family even though they were Indigenous, Mi`kmaw people,

Knew nothing about their culture, language or traditions.

But when I was in Elementary school, I was first introduced to my culture.

And I have never looked back since.

I once dreamed to be an Indigenous leader.

When I began university, I had lost my way.

I turned my back to my culture and history out of fear of being judged.

I stopped smudging.

Stopped drumming.

and I lost my voice, my pride.

I once aspired to be a stronger Indigenous leader.

But then, a light came out of my depression.

A love for my culture that once inspired me.

Now was offered to me, in a singular job description.

Could I do it?

Could I teach youth in schools about Indigenous culture and history?

Could I be that Indigenous leader I had dreamed about?

I once prayed to have the opportunity to be an Indigenous leader.

My prayers rang true, and I was accepted into that job position.

I did not know a single thing about working a professional job.

But I tried anyway.

I knew about my culture, but wanted to learn more.

And so I did.

I wanted to become an Indigenous leader, someone who can go into a classroom and empower Indigenous students just like I was once empowered.

And so I did.

I once cried happiness that my job, would not be a chore, but would rather help me to be exactly what I needed to be.

I am an Indigenous Education Outreach Officer at Qalipu First Nation.

I am an Indigenous Leader.

And I am a Strong Indigenous Woman.

Daniell Sunshine

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Vancouver, BC
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

The Perspective of Someone Who Dropped Out: I was scrolling through TikTok and came across many videos about these women, starting from around my age or younger and moving off the screen saying "Hey Mom," and the other generation comes onto the screen for a brief moment and repeating, "Hey Mom," "Hey Mom," Until 5 or 6 generations have passed. 5 generations of a single family in a video. I look back into my life, and realized, it's only me. My mother passed away, my grandmother passed away, my great grandmother passed away. And then it hit me: this is what intergenerational trauma is, this is the impact of the colonialism and that cycle of trauma. I was 16, worried about graduating but also worried about finding a job and looking for a place to rent because I was 16 and in the foster care system and no one "wanted" me because I'm a teenager and no one wants to foster a teenager. 2020 was my graduation year, but it was also the year my mother took her own life due to the loneliness and drug/alcohol abuse she faced. I dropped out because I became too depressed, too stressed worrying about finding a home, too worried about finding a job. I'm now 20 years old and found my place in life; advocacy work and helping other young folks find a place they feel like they belong. I grew up in Saskatchewan and I now live in British Columbia. Here I am finding more opportunities and a city that I can finally feel happy. A place where I actually feel like I can do something. I am working to finish my high school and I want to get into university to work towards getting into Medical school. I want to become a Forensic Psychiatrist and I am ready to build a future and help other Indigenous folks find connections and their cultural ties again. A bridge to building a better future for those who may be lost to alcohol and drugs. I really believed if my mother had connections to family and cultural ties again, it would have saved her. It saved many other lives of the Indigenous motivational speakers I listened to and it can save many others. I am apart of the Saskatchewan's Advocates Office for Children and Youth, Youth Advisory Council, I MC'd a Youth Led Conference that was hosted by the Saskatoon Open Door Society, I have attended panel presentations with a program that was called Youth Speak Out, I am now being apart of the Youth in Care Network in British Columbia. And I am going to keep looking for an opportunity to share the experience and some realities people face, make my mother and grandmother proud.

Hannah Syrette

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Goulais River
Province: Ontario

Submission:

Aanii, boozho.

My name is Hannah and I am a proud Anishinaabekwe from Batchewana First Nation.

Growing up on the reserve, I was immediately surrounded by a community, friends, family & extended family. The sense of community was enormous but small geographically at the same time.

I grew up on reserve as a status Indian but that was the extent of knowledge in my culture. My family was not blessed with knowing and practicing our ancestors way of living or speaking the Anishinaabemowin language. I attended day care on reserve and my social circle was the people on my reserve.

When it was time to attend elementary school, I went off reserve to school. Yes my reserve was right beside a city, but it was still different. I honestly thought every single person had a status card, but I learned quickly that, that wasn't true.

At the young age of 8, I experienced racism in my school by a principal. The principal yelled at me and said the words "no wonder why you are the way that you are, it's because you come from that reserve with those indians". It was from that moment on, I realized I was different. I didn't trust people of authority in my schools. I can't even tell you who my grade 4 teacher was because I blocked a lot out in terms of my education.

Since that day, I've first hand experienced the differences in which indigenous and non-indigenous peoples are treated in education.

However, I used peoples doubts and rude comments, as fuel and motivation. I wanted to prove them wrong. Just because I was a status Indian, it doesn't mean I won't succeed. I will succeed. And I did.

I am now proud to say that I work in a school board that dedicates time and resources into funding indigenous education. I work to support indigenous students in their education, culture, and transitions into and out of elementary school.

I am even more proud to say that I currently have a Honours Bachelor of Social Work Degree & will be beginning a Bachelor of Education in the next few months. I am also a small business

owner in my community and I am one of the few female Indigenous business owners in a male dominated field. Lastly, I volunteer in my community on two local council sharing my voice and advocate for Indigenous peoples.

It is my goal that no indigenous student ever feels the way I felt and to create safe spaces for our students. Indigenous students are very often told they cannot and will not succeed, or fall through the gaps. However, that is absolutely not true and I encourage students to reach for the stars.

Miigwech for reading my submission.

Lilly Teare cunningham

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Pitt Meadows
Province: British Columbia

Submission:

As an light skin First Nations youth, I experienced a lot of bad mouth or mean words form my peers and teachers. A lot of the times I was told I wasn't native enough because I chose not to have my status. Then I got my status and people started to "accept" me. Which is so sad, because blood quantum is a colonial construct. As of today I am trying to fix this within the schools. I am involved with the aboriginal education department to help better this with the teachers and students.

A big part of my highschool life was the teachers relaying on me to educate the class about First Nations problems. At times I helped because I was young and naive, but as I got older I started to have a voice. The teachers would also censor the content they were teaching and I had to step up and tell them, this story needs to be heard and shared. It shouldn't be censored for everyone. I told them to imagine how I felt because this is what happened to my ancestors my grandparents, my great grandparents.

I could go on all day about my experiences within the schools and even my home communities. But I wanted to thank you for reading my application and look forward to hearing from you.

Ryan Teddy

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Sudbury
Province: Ontario

Submission:

Education is crucial for empowering Indigenous youth and communities to achieve their full potential and contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities. Education can also play a critical role in preserving Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions. To foster leadership in Indigenous communities, education must be culturally relevant and responsive to the unique needs and perspectives of Indigenous learners. Indigenous students should have access to education that incorporates traditional knowledge, values, and practices and respects their cultural identities. As an Indigenous University student myself, I have been granted the opportunity to take part in Indigenous courses within the school and have also been able to branch out to other schools and extend my knowledge. I am motivated to give back to my community and plan on doing so through a career in medicine. I am currently in my third year of studies for my undergraduate degree and spend my time away from school volunteering with continuing care programs and at a medical family clinic. Education has provided me with an opportunity to contribute to my community, and I would appreciate the opportunity to discover ways in which that can be passed along to those after me in an improved manner.

Chevaun Toulouse

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation
Province: Ontario

Submission:

Chevaun Toulouse nindizhinikaaz. Sagamok First Nation nindonjibaa. Ginoozhe nindoodem. Anishinaabe kwe ndow. My name is Chevaun Toulouse; I am a mother and a full-time biology and Indigenous environmental science student at Trent University. I am from Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation.

My nokomis (grandmother) was a farmer, residential school survivor, school bus driver, and business owner. My mishomis (grandfather) was a hunter, trapper, business owner, and chief of Sagamok Anishnawbek.

Growing up on Sagamok Anishnawbek gave me an interest in and respect for the natural environment. As a child, I was outside every day, catching snakes and turtles in the swamps. I was exploring my surroundings, becoming familiar with the plant and animal species that lived around me and in my community.

Sagamok Anishnawbek is situated between Lake Huron and the Spanish River. It is located across from Manitoulin Island, the largest freshwater island in the world. There are many lakes and wetlands in my community, home to many wetland species now at risk.

The colonial interference in my family and my environment, and the intergenerational trauma passed down, means I have had to seek out and rebuild cultural connections with people and the land. Although I have grown up in my community, I still do not know my language, and I am just starting to learn more about Anishinaabe culture. This is especially important now that I am a mother.

Regaining knowledge that was lost, I have grown to understand the inherent responsibility I feel to care for the land. The connection to the land is a foundation in Anishinaabe culture, and it is this connection that allows me to care deeply about biodiversity and the importance of healthy ecosystems.

Being out on the land every day was where it all started to make sense. While I was working on the Blanding's turtle project for the Toronto Zoo Turtle Island Conservation, I collaborated with other Indigenous women interested in conservation. This was the first time I got the chance to work with other Anishinaabe youth who had similar interests as me.

I recently held the position of researcher for an incredible TV series just released called Great Lakes Untamed. Bringing an Indigenous scientific perspective to this project was important to me while also highlighting the current struggles our Great Lakes face. There is an associated Biinaagami educational campaign which has involved many Indigenous people, and which aims to make sure that the wider community involves First Nations in the decision making about the Great Lakes. It is planned that this will go out to 25,000 teachers in Canada.

My son inspires me to be the best Anishinaabe kwe (mother) I can be. I want him to know his language and culture, which is why I am learning it with him. I want to conserve and protect our beautiful land for my little ginoozhe (pike).

I recently contributed to a Bilingual (Ojibwe/English) Reptile and amphibian species at risk colouring book for youth in partnership with Magnetawan First Nation

Ashley Viznaugh

Primary Identification: Métis
Community: Winnipeg
Province: Manitoba

Submission:

My name is Ashley Viznaugh, I'm a 23 year old Métis citizen who lives in Winnipeg, MB. I grew up in a small community called Pine Falls and attended a small school (K-12). Throughout primary school, I wasn't taught a lot about my heritage; there was a small portion in the curriculum dedicated to Canadian history (fur trade, etc.), but Métis heritage wasn't taught in-depth and wasn't encouraged as something to be proud of. Growing up, I knew that my father's side was quite immersed in traditional Métis culture - there was always music around the kitchen table (fiddles, guitars, jigging), berry picking in the warmer months, handmade/beaded moccasins and mitts in the colder months. My grandparents were also very active members on Métis councils, so I had opportunities to learn about my heritage through my family and also by volunteering with the Manitoba Métis Federation.

I attended the University of Winnipeg and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2021; I took Indigenous courses but to my knowledge, there weren't specific courses offered that were geared directly towards Métis culture. I now work for the federal government as a Policy Analyst and am able to dedicate my time towards Indigenous policy issues, which I love and am very proud to do.

Education is where knowledge begins and expands - knowledge is power. I think the more you know about your culture, the more empowered you become and the better of a leader you are because of it. My vision for future education is to continue to empower youth with knowledge of their culture, starting in primary school, teaching youth that they should be proud of who they are and where they come from - and why. My vision is to embrace a future society of Indigenous leader's who are informed and educated about their importance in this Country.

Kiishatay (Atlas) Waite

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Thunder Bay
Province: Ontario

Submission:

As an indigenous youth, who does appear white and I tell them that I'm from treaty 9 they act weary of me and often ask question if I'm actually trying to get into university and often don't think I can do anything. When talking to my very obvious indigenous friends and we talk about education, they often talk about how teachers automatically assume the worst of of them and they have to wrote ten times as hard as our white counterparts in schools. What I want to see in charge for the education system is that we as indigenous people are not just a small blurb in the history books and our issues are front and centre. And we do not have to fear about being judged for wanting a better education

Ryan Wallace

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Split between Montreal, QC and Madawaska Maliseet First Nation, NB
Province: Quebec

Submission:

I was the first person in my family to complete my undergraduate, I speak French as my first language however the closest university campuses that offer a full degree or courses above 1st-2nd year level is a solely English-speaking one. I failed my first term of university and was put on academic probation after obtaining 0.74 GPA in my first term, my grades went up and down and I tried to transfer programs and was rejected at a few universities before being admitted at UNB for a BA with a major in Psychology to which I completed and then went back to my community for contract work and decided to go back for a 2nd degree in Business Administration with honours in Accounting after seeing how my community was growing faster economically than the band finance and accounting department had the capacity to manage. Through working in my community I found out about the First Nation Financial Management Board and joined them as I pursue my CPA designation. Throughout my 2nd undergraduate studies, I was heavily involved on campus as a Peer Mentor, Indigenous Rep on Student Council, Resident Assistant, tutor, and teaching assistant, always willing to discuss and educate people on barriers and challenges that I experienced personally or learned about through my work experience and communicating with people from other Nations. I am a two-spirit person who has gone through a medical transition journey while living on campus and participated in a lot of events regarding the mental health of students. I took my role as resident assistant very seriously and would try to help and assist students of all backgrounds and point them in the right direction for the resources they were seeking or required at the time. I hope that obtaining my CPA and sharing the impact of having Indigenous professionals in those fields can help bridge the gap between the socio-economics and quality of life between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous ones in Canada by having people who are culturally aware, knows their unique communities barriers and challenges, and have the technical education and capacity to make changes at the community level.

Emilio Wawatie

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Montreal
Province: Quebec

Submission:

I've been engaged in the arts, activism and land-based education over the last 10 years. My experience as an Anishnabe from Barrier lake has always been politicized and that of many obstacles both in and out of my community. Since the desecration of my family's ancestral lands in 2011 and the surge of Idle no more, its been my mission to educate and bring awareness to the realities and struggles that we as Anishnabeg are facing; as well as the land and waters that are suffering the consequences of resource extraction. Through Anishnabe cultural leadership influences, I've been engaged on the ground and within institutions which has given experiences ranging from delivering a speech at the United Nations, to the front lines of the road blockades of the Moose moratorium in my communities territory.

Currently, I'm finishing my Undergraduate degree with a double major in Music and First Peoples studies, in which I've been developing my artistic/academic/life mandate to guide the work that I wish to fulfill. During my studies at Concordia, I engaged with the Concordia and Montreal Indigenous community through music, culture and land-based education. In 2021, I was hired to plan and teach Concordia's first accredited land-based class which was a real learning experience and tested my leadership skills.

An issue thats been recurring and that I've been having to navigate over the last several years, has been the false and fraudulent claims to Indigenous identity thats running rampant within the arts, academic and other fields of practice. The impacts of that I and many other Indigenous people have experienced from the harm caused by so called "pretendians", has led many of us on the forefronts of these situations to realize this is the next stage of colonization across Turtle Island.

This wave of neo-colonialism has began to severely impact Indigenous communities across Canada through the theft of culture, knowledge and lands through the appropriation of cultural identities based on false ancestry. Working within the realms of Indigenous community politics, arts and academia, I've come to realize the need for legislative action to be taken to not just protect Indigenous arts, culture and knowledge; but to also hold those that commit the fraudulent activities of claiming Indigenous identities for profit, be held to the same standard of criminal acts committed against the state.

Caleb Wesley

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Toronto
Province: Ontario

Submission:

In my current role, I am the coordinator of Indigenous Knowledge and Science Outreach for the Faculty of Science at Toronto Metropolitan University. Before coming to TMU, I attended York University where I obtained a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Bachelor of Education in science education. My teacher's college training was delivered through an Indigenous Teacher Education program, so much of my studies were dedicated to how to implement Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the classroom. My primary responsibility at TMU is to increase Indigenous elementary and secondary students' engagement with STEAM by researching, developing, and delivering Indigenous STEAM workshops. I do this work in collaboration with urban Indigenous schools in Toronto and my reserve community of Moose Factory. I also sit on several committees here at TMU dedicated to advancing Indigenization and decolonization efforts at the institutional level. The focal point of my work is to solve the problem of why Indigenous folks are underrepresented in STEM disciplines at all levels in our society, and I feel that I have a good understanding of why this is the case. I hope to be able to share these experiences and learnings with the Senate committee.

Sharing a little bit more about my personal experiences in education, I was born in Moose Factory and spent the first 6 years of my life in the community. I attended kindergarten and part of Grade 1 at our local on-reserve school. My family then moved to North Bay where I attended school in an urban setting where other Indigenous students were present. My time in North Bay was also the first time I ever experienced racism in education. Later I would return to Moose Factory for Grade 4 and 5. Being in school at this stage of childhood also allowed me to begin to witness and be impacted by some of the challenges Indigenous students face in reserve schools. From Grade 6 onwards, I attended school in Toronto where Indigenous presence was completely devoid. My entire experience in middle school and high school was devoid of other Indigenous students, and this came to impact how I felt about my Indigenous identity. At the time, I viewed my Indigenous identity as secondary to my identity as a scientist. It was only when I came to University and had a chance to connect with the urban Indigenous community in Toronto that I could begin to unpack my own internalized racism and my experiences as an Indigenous kid in Canada's education system. In doing so, it led me to pursuing a degree in education and working to make space for Indigenous students in STEM so that they would not go through similar experiences that I went through throughout my

education journey; this mentality is something that I bring to all my work at TMU and with Indigenous students.

Maggie White

Primary Identification: First Nations
Community: Halifax
Province: Nova Scotia

Submission:

You learn that when faced with daunting amounts of homework and nights you are deprived of sleep for the sake of studying, you need a reason for the stress and exhaustion. I am able to persevere with a vision I've created of providing healthcare in indigenous communities and war torn cities. Being in the most dangerous and poor locations ensures that there is a paramount need for aid that I can continue to fill. I traveled to Guatemala, June 2022 where I volunteered in medical facilities helping out nurses with medical care. I have volunteered in many other local hospitals in my own province Nova Scotia one being the Izaak Walton Killam Hospital for Children. While studying at University Of Ottawa I volunteered with several events at the Wabano Health center where I was a camp counselor to indigenous children who were recovering from childhood trauma. I also hold a job at Elizabeth Bruyere Hospital as a unit support worker part time while completing clinicals and studying during the week. Hurdles that I've needed to overcome in order to make it to university have been, for one, mental health issues with anxiety and depression. School was a suffocating environment to be with severe stress and lows that were undiagnosed. With my academic success and volunteering I was seen as the "golden child" of my family, a role that I was happy to fill. What this led to was my issues being overlooked and made smaller than my siblings and parents. My father suffers from anxiety and insomnia, my mother has highs and lows. My sister has severe depression and anxiety with a history of drug and alcohol abuse, and failed out of high school. Both of my younger brothers have depression and I've had to watch them live through what I already had. I can't compare my issues to my siblings but it's often that I'm not even acknowledged because while my brother slept through classes I went even if I was sick. While I was throwing up before exams at least I was going when my sister did not. I only wonder if I had got help earlier that school could have been easier and something that I didn't have to dread. I hope to make school a safe place for indigenous children that will be easier done by acknowledging and helping treat the mental health issues that exist in excess within reserves. School is less of a priority when the healthcare quality is so diminished, I will aid in raising awareness for the struggles indigenous children endure with mental health and how this can be helped while respecting the contributing intergenerational trauma. Through my experience I have learned independence and have accomplished all my club, volunteering and work hours through self sufficiency that was learned. I will be more than prepared when providing care in Indigenous communities because I have been relying on myself for a long time and no longer need reassurance from

others. I hope to be the support for others that I needed in the past while I travel as a nurse and am able to help any way I am able.