



Aboriginal Training for Employment Program

2010–2011 Highlights





ATEP: An Overview

April 2010 marked the kick-off of the Aboriginal Training for Employment Program (ATEP). Seventeen service providers throughout B.C. began their employment training programs for unemployed or underemployed Aboriginal individuals seeking to enhance their job prospects. Since then, more than 500 people have completed ATEP programs.

Employment training for Aboriginal people, a young, quickly growing demographic that is currently underutilized in the labour market, is timely. Between 2010 and 2020, there are expected to be over one million job openings in B.C. as workers retire and the economy grows. Of these, it is estimated that more than three-quarters will require some post-secondary education or training. Starting in 2016, WorkBC predicts that there will be more job openings available in the province than there will be qualified workers to fill them.¹

ATEP, funded by the Canada-B.C. Labour Market Agreement, seeks to connect unemployed or underemployed Aboriginal individuals with growing occupations in B.C.

¹ WorkBC. British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2010-2020. <http://www.workbc.ca/docs/BCLMOutlook.pdf>

ATEP programs are located throughout the province, ensuring that more Aboriginal people have access to employment training. Aboriginal organizations, friendship centres, and First Nations offer programs in urban areas such as Vancouver, Victoria, and Prince George, and in more rural areas, like Sliammon and Yekooche.

Classroom-based instruction is coupled with hands-on, culturally relevant training in workshops, practicums and volunteer experience. Job coaches are available to help students in résumé preparation, interview skills, job search strategies and career planning. Coaching support is provided to students for up to six months after they have graduated from their program.

To be eligible, individuals must be of Aboriginal heritage, 18 years or older, unemployed and not receiving EI benefits, or employed but without a high school diploma.

ATEP has paid dividends to its students: graduates are obtaining meaningful employment, gaining life skills, learning about paths to further education, starting their own businesses, developing a stronger sense of community and cultural pride, and leading healthier and happier lives.

Since April 2010, ATEP has enjoyed many successes. As ATEP is set to continue up to June 2013, the program is certain to provide more people with education, employment opportunities, and life achievements in the years to come.

The following is a collection of stories from ATEP training programs offered around B.C. to date.

Aboriginal Training for Employment Program: At A Glance

Program enrolments by service provider, April 2010-September 2011

Service Provider	Number of participants trained
Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society Trades	15
British Columbia First Nations Forestry Council	61
KUU-US Crisis Line Society	16
Métis Skills and Education Centre	21
Musqueam Indian Band	29
Native Education College	35
North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society	12
Port Alberni Friendship Center	20
Prince George Native Friendship Centre	36
Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association	64
Shuswap Nation Tribal Council	71
Tla'Amin Community Health Services	29
Takla Lake First Nation	18
Tsleil-Waututh Nation and Turtle Island Indigenous Education	15
Victoria Native Friendship Centre	46
Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government	66
Yekooche First Nation	13
Total	567

"When students leave, they're so much stronger. They become aware that they can accomplish things."

*Colleen Hodgson
General Manager for the
Métis Skills and Education
Centre*

"I gained a better understanding about myself and this has made me a more outgoing person."

*Graduate of Port Alberni
Friendship Center's program*



"I looked forward to every day. I really liked working with communication and speaking. I was actually heard when I talked."

Joyce
graduate of the Job
Readiness Training
Program



(Top left): A student of the Métis Skills and Education Centre's Culinary Arts Program prepares lunch. (Top right): The class of the Culinary Arts Program gain hands-on training in Métis Skills and Education Centre's restaurant-quality training kitchen. (Bottom right): The "Connected Through Our Roots" totem pole, carved by participants and Master Carver Carey Newman, is raised outside the Victoria Native Friendship Centre. (Bottom left): Participants of Tla'Amin Community Health Services' Aboriginal Training for Employment Program, Yik Meh Towtlh, participate in class discussions as they upgrade their essential and employability skills.

ACCESS Trades: Sheet Metal Fabrication Program

"Every day is a learning experience." These are the words of David, a graduate of the Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society Trades' Sheet Metal Fabrication Program. David, a 36-year-old man from the Kaska Dene and Taku River Tlingit First Nations of northern B.C., is in his first year of an apprenticeship with Evergreen Sheet Metal, where he is currently installing air duct ventilation in a condominium complex in Richmond. Starting in January 2012, David will be returning to school for further training in sheet metal fabrication, and in roughly three years' time, will be a Red Seal certified journeyman.

David's career opportunities have grown enormously since he began the sheet metal training program offered through the Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society in Vancouver. The program provides students with four weeks of Essential Skills upgrading and life skills training, 20 weeks of hands-on instruction in the sheet metal shop at the British Columbia Institute of Technology's Burnaby campus, and a week of employment preparation.

David is not alone. The Sheet Metal Fabrication Program has "tremendously changed" the lives of many of its students, according to Helen Boyce, the Director of the Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society. Fifteen students have completed the program so far and are registered as first year Sheet Metal apprentices, the majority of whom quickly secured employment. But the true effects of the program extend beyond just these numbers.

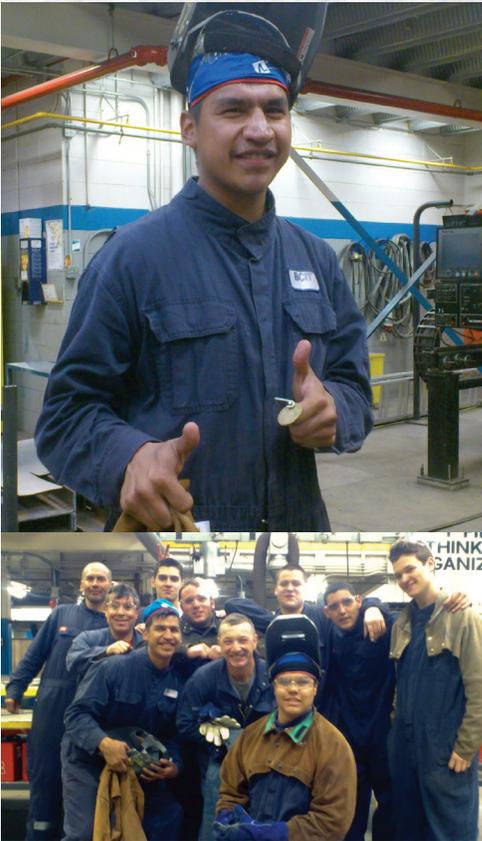
At one graduation ceremony, a cousin of one of the graduates was in attendance.

Seeing what the students of the program had achieved, the cousin was inspired to enrol in a Welding Level C program, which he successfully completed and subsequently gained employment from. This, Boyce says, is an example of how Aboriginal Training for Employment Programs raises the bar for an entire generation.

Participation in the trades program has changed the lives of students in other ways, too. Some of the students had personal challenges when they entered the program. These students particularly benefitted from the life skills training and ongoing support of the job coach. With these supports, many students were able to work through their challenges and now look forward to the prospect of a more promising future.

David found similar personal growth during his time in the program. Once he began his training in sheet metal fabrication, David experienced a renewed awareness of the strong math skills he had in high school. These skills came in especially handy for the training he received in drafting, which he enjoyed immensely. In his first year of training, David graduated with top honours in the class, and is very enthusiastic about returning to school to become Red Seal-certified. For him, the support he received from the job coach and in-class instructors made a huge impact on the success he had in the program. The training he has received, he adds, has not just led to a job, but a career—and a very promising one.

David has been a "shining star," Boyce proudly says, but he isn't and won't be the only student to turn their life around through the course of this invaluable employment training program.



ATEP participants in the Boilermakers Program at BCIT

"Some students have just come alive during their training."

Helen Boyce
Director of the Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society Trades

Métis Skills and Education Centre: Culinary Arts Program

In the culinary world, chefs are revered as royalty. The Métis Skills and Education Centre's Culinary Arts students got their share of the limelight when they were featured in an international culinary magazine after wowing a crowd of hundreds with their unique, blended menu of traditional and modern Aboriginal foods at the recent Canadian Culinary Federation annual conference in Vancouver. Under the guidance of Red Seal Chefs at the Métis Skills and Education Centre, students cooked up a delectable lunch of wild game charcuterie, braised rabbit wraps, juniper duck canapé, clam fritters, pacific grilled sardines, bannock, venison stir-fry, and field berry cobblers, along with a traditional Pacific Northwest potlatch feast. The prestigious five-day conference also allowed students to meet internationally acclaimed chefs from all across Canada as they shared their experiences and stories about the culinary industry.

Their journey to success began just a few months before, when roughly a dozen students enrolled in the Culinary Arts Program, designed to give Métis and First Nations students of all ages a new beginning in life by providing them with four weeks of essential skills training and twelve weeks of hands-on culinary instruction, along with regular support from an on-site counselor. The program is specifically designed to ladder into Professional Cook Level One training, which students can enrol in at a number of local institutions. Colleen Hodgson, General Manager for the Métis Skills and Education Centre (which is operated by the Métis Nation of B.C.) says that the Culinary Arts Program is

just the beginning for these students— she expects many will continue their culinary training and will eventually become Red Seal certified chefs.

Charlotte, a First Nations mother of two young children and a recent Culinary Arts graduate, warns that the program is intensive, but that in the end, the hard work she invested paid off — Charlotte says she began her two-week practicum at Sandpiper Golf Club in Harrison Mills with the skills, experience and confidence to succeed. In fact, during her practicum, Charlotte impressed her supervisors so much that they offered her a permanent position in the golf club's restaurant. She now works there full-time with a fellow student from the program. Charlotte says the biggest highlight of the program, in her mind, was getting to know all her classmates and instructors— everybody had the same mindset, as they were all focused on learning as much about the culinary arts as they could, and the entire class helped each other. Months after graduating, Charlotte still keeps in touch with all her classmates. Hodgson notes that graduation ceremonies can often be marked with hints of sadness, as students are reluctant to leave each other: "The class becomes their family."

Hodgson says that overall, the most significant differences she sees in students before and after the program is that the values of their lives alter. Students leave the Culinary Arts Program feeling inspired—but importantly, they are inspired because of themselves, Hodgson reflects. "Their motivation comes from within."



ATEP participants receive instruction from Chef Nathan Hyam (right) in the MSEC Culinary Arts Program

"My greatest satisfaction comes from seeing the transformation of our students after just a few months. They often arrive with many barriers, low self esteem, poor work experience and very little in their lives that they can consider to be a success. With a supportive environment and the input of the entire team they develop self esteem and the skills they need to succeed in the workplace as well as their community. To see them beaming with pride on graduation day is the inspiration that keeps us motivated."

**Chef Nathan Hyam,
Head Chef**

*Instructor for Métis Skills
and Education Centre's
Culinary Arts Program*

Musqueam Indian Band: Trades Training and Tourism Employment Programs

In Aboriginal culture of the North West Coast, from the coast of California north to Alaska, it is said that one's soul travels in a canoe on a spiritual journey. Along the way, the soul canoe may encounter perils such as turbulent waters or fog. In these cases, one's soul must listen to the voices and songs of the ancestors, so that the soul canoe may be guided by one's people.

The soul canoe is a metaphor for the course of one's life. Turbulent waters indicate troubled times, fog represents the confusion that a person may feel as they try to navigate their life, and the ancestors' songs connect the individual with family members, friends, and community members who give advice and help to guide that person through their career and their personal life.

Tourism Employment and Trades Training preparation programs offered by the Musqueam Indian Band are, metaphorically speaking, paddles to propel the client on their life journey. These are eight-week full-time employment training programs operated by the Employment and Training Department, preparing clients for careers in tourism and the trades.

Since April 2010, Musqueam has enrolled 29 students into its programs, exceeding its original target of 20 students. Of those 29, two-thirds are now either working or attending further employment training at post-secondary institutions. Program graduates have found jobs on and off reserve in a wide variety of fields, such as landscapers, security guards, daycare workers, tourism guides, surveyors, and self-employed positions as silver jewellers, hair stylists, and building maintenance workers. Other graduates have decided to return to school, to pursue certification in fields such as health care assistants and trades professions.

In the Trades Training program, students explore a variety of trades, including electrical, millwright, piping, and welding. They are taught employment readiness with a focus on trades, as well as writing skills and introductory algebra. Having completed the English and Math courses, students satisfy the requirements necessary for entry into college. Furthermore, students also receive training in Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) and in Occupational First Aid Level 1.

In the Tourism Employment program, participants study customer service skills, the economic cycles that affect the tourism and hospitality industry, the hiring needs and opportunities of the industry, business planning and small business opportunities, human resources, marketing, and accounting practices. They receive training and certification in FoodSafe Level 1, First Host, Serving It Right, and First Aid Level 1. Students also receive instruction in writing cover letters and résumés, interview strategies and tips, and the interpersonal skills necessary for job searches. Additionally, participants develop skills essential to everyday life, such as digital and financial literacy.

In First Nations culture, it is said that when someone goes through change in their life, even if it is positive change, they are spiritually vulnerable, because they do not have conscious control over their transitional period. Patterns laid by that person's sub-conscious will form patterns for the rest of their lives. The Tourism Employment and Trades Training programs represent the positive input and guidance needed to develop constructive patterns in the sub-conscious of many members of the Musqueam Indian Band.

"Our programs specifically target clients who have problems with individual skill sets. After helping clients to upgrade these essential skills, the programs will link individuals to an appropriate career or further training in a field they are interested in."

*Wanona Scott
Employment and
Training Coordinator for
Musqueam Indian Band*

"Whenever a new program is created by the Employment and Training Department, there is excitement in the community. Collectively, these programs encourage and inspire community members to engage in higher learning."

*Jim Kew
Employment Liaison
Coordinator for
Musqueam Indian Band*

Native Education College: Health Care Assistant Program

Some Aboriginal Training for Employment Programs don't just benefit students, but their families and, in fact, entire communities. Such is the case with the Health Care Assistant Program offered at the Native Education College in Vancouver.

After eight months of full-time study and practical experience, graduates of the program will be fully prepared to work as Health Care Assistants, providing culturally sensitive care to Aboriginal people in settings such as community home support agencies, adult day care, assisting living, complex care and residential care facilities. Through the course of the program, students receive training and certification in Standard First Aid, CPR Level C, WHMIS, and FoodSafe Level 1. Graduates will receive Health Care Assistant Certificates and also become registered with the British Columbia Care Aide and Community Health Worker Registry.

Though the program is still relatively young, the results are already evident: graduates are in demand and gaining employment in the health care sector. The program ladders into the Licensed Practical Nurse program at the nearby Vancouver Community College, but graduates are also choosing to further their education elsewhere, to become registered nurses or early childhood educators, among other careers. Diana Trifonova, the program coordinator, estimates that 80 percent of Health Care Assistant students go on to further education after completing the program—many of these would not have chosen to do so had they not first attended the Native Education College.

Christine, a current student, says that being made aware of what options are available

to students after completing the program was inspiring for her. After her son was born, Christine quickly returned to work so that she could support herself and her child, never considering going back to school. But one day her uncle suggested to her that she should continue her education, and her parents agreed. After learning about the program from her aunt, Christine moved to Vancouver to improve her education. Overall, the training has made a tremendous difference in her life, Christine says, and has served as “an encouragement to go further,” making her think about what she can do for herself, her family, and her community. After graduation, Christine plans to upgrade some high school courses, and then hopes to complete training either as an Licensed Practical Nurse or a nutritionist.

Aside from expanding her career prospects, the Health Care Assistant program has taught Christine valuable lessons about health care issues, and she is already connecting them with her family and community. Her grandmother recently had triple bypass surgery, so Christine, now familiar with various health care procedures and medications, is satisfied that the program is “a really good experience to learn these things so I can do stuff for my granny.” Program staff and students all agree that this program has the capacity to make an impact on all Aboriginal people by increasing health education and awareness. In British Columbia, the need for culturally accepted health care workers is significant, making the Native Education College's program all the more important, says Trifonova.

“The effect is profound. Without the HCA program, I wouldn't be able to get a job that could support myself and my family.”

Louise

July 2011 graduate of the Native Education College's Health Care Assistant Program

“The students are a joy to teach and work with.”

Sharlet Weating

instructor for the Health Care Assistant Program

“The HCA program has served as an encouragement to go further.”

Christine

current student of the Health Care Assistant Program

Port Alberni Friendship Center

At the Port Alberni Friendship Center, 18 participants have taken life-changing courses towards essential skills training and certifications for employment, while also updating their education and exploring the careers of their choice. This training has not proven easy, but has certainly been worthwhile: nine participants have already gained employment, some of whom managed to do so before even fully completing the program. "Their smiles say it all when they experience that sense of accomplishment that only comes from putting in the hard work," says Duane Burke, Coordinator for the Friendship Center's Aboriginal Training for Employment Program.

"Their smiles say it all when they experience that sense of accomplishment that only comes from putting in the hard work."

*Duane Burke
Coordinator for Port Alberni Friendship Center's
Aboriginal Training for
Employment Program*

"I gained a better understanding about myself and this has made me a more outgoing person."

*Graduate of Port Alberni
Friendship Center's
Aboriginal Training for
Employment Program*

During the program, participants earn certification in a wide variety of employment training courses, such as FoodSafe, First Aid, CPR, World Host, and Retail Sales Training. They also attend workshops for topics such as Strategies for Navigating Life, Understanding Fear and Anxiety, Adventures in Living Our Best Lives, and Drivers' Education. These courses and workshops have had incredible impacts on participants.

One of Port Alberni's participants was a young Aboriginal man. Being very shy by nature, he began the program trying to blend into the background, avoiding drawing attention to himself. Gradually, this young man built up his confidence through a combination of life skills training and class discussions, in which he was gently encouraged to push beyond his comfort zone. After completing the program, he gained full-time work in Nanaimo as a tradesperson. Having made a very good impression on his boss, this young man is now receiving additional training through his job, including being the only employee chosen to be trained in a new method of roofing.

Of the program, he says, "I gained a better understanding about myself and this has made me a more outgoing person."

Burke has found that one of the most important supports the Center can provide to participants is to encourage and empower them to overcome their barriers to learning and employment. Once participants can be assured they have this support, they will be inspired with the confidence and perseverance to fulfill their goals, Burke says.

This is perhaps nowhere more pronounced than in the story of one man, who was unemployed but looking for work. According to Burke, once this man entered the program, he "worked extremely hard to get as much value out of the training portion as he could." Unfortunately, during the program he sustained a severe knee injury in a freak accident. "Some participants would have shut it down at this point, but this young man kept in touch," Burke says, and followed along with the remainder of the program's training even as he endured a lengthy, difficult rehab for his knee. Then, disaster struck again when the man's house flooded and much of his personal property was destroyed. Burke notes that these stresses would overwhelm most people, but he courageously persevered. He attended meetings regularly, stuck to his career plans developed in the program, and maintained his sobriety. After graduation, the man's hard work and dedication paid off: he was awarded a position as a crew supervisor for a local seafood company. Now, he is working with an academic advisor to develop a plan for his transition into a post secondary program. Burke reflects, "My hat goes off to this young man for his tireless perseverance and hard work."

Prince George Native Friendship Centre

Ask Marvene Layte, Coordinator for the Aboriginal Training for Employment Program at the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, what difference the program has made for students, and she will list off one story after another, about students who have found meaningful jobs after being unemployed for years, students who have decided to return to school to get their diploma or degree, students who have committed to leading healthier lives, and students who have gained valuable insight into their own lives and their roles in the community.

The Prince George Native Friendship Centre's program is a twelve-week program that uses a culturally relevant, holistic approach to teach students important life skills for their day-to-day living, and to prepare them for meaningful employment and careers. The program focuses on sales and service training, but also allows participants to explore other fields. The program emphasizes communication skills and techniques, including effective communication in the workplace and listening skills. Students attend workshops on problem-solving and conflict resolution for the home and the workplace. Students also spend a considerable amount of time learning how to apply for jobs, from studying effective cover letters and résumés to participating in mock-interviews.

With the program focusing not just on employability skills, but also on life skills and personal health and wellbeing, a number of students have achieved things beyond employment: one student has now found stable housing for himself and his child. One woman was inspired to return to school to complete her social work degree, which

she started a few years before but had to withdraw from after encountering personal issues. Furthermore, several participants have been reunited with their children in foster care, as these parents made significant progress in their lives and found employment.

The determination and spirit that some students have demonstrated is truly remarkable. Quite regularly, the Centre's students leave the program before completing the entire course because they successfully find employment and are eager to begin work immediately. In these cases, other applicants will be given their places in the program. In one instance, a man in his forties entered the program three weeks late. On his first day in the program, Marvene informed him that he was going to have to work especially hard in order to catch up with the rest of the class. The new student replied that returning to doing homework might be a challenge for him, since he had not been in school for many years, but that he wanted to prove that he deserved to be in the program. After just two nights, the man had completed all three weeks' worth of homework, and to a very high standard. Marvene reflects, "I knew right then that he was going to find success in the program, and he did."

Marvene notes that many students have told her that they couldn't have achieved what they have without the program's help. Her belief, however, is that every student already has the abilities within them to accomplish whatever they dream of—they simply need assistance to learn how to use their skills effectively and to recognize their own strengths.

"Every student already has the abilities within them to accomplish whatever they dream of; they simply need assistance to learn how to use their skills effectively and to recognize their own strengths."

Marvene Layte
*Coordinator for the
Aboriginal Training for
Employment Program at
the Prince George Native
Friendship Centre*

Shuswap Nation Tribal Council: Job Readiness Training Program

When the global economy experienced a downturn in 2008, the Shuswap Nation and surrounding areas were particularly affected. With the region's heavy reliance on industries sensitive to economic fluctuations, such as construction, manufacturing, and retail trade, many community members found themselves unemployed and struggling to find new jobs in a labour market that was suddenly much more competitive. However, that was quickly changed for some when the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council launched its Aboriginal Training for Employment Program.

Since April 2010, the Aboriginal Training & Employment Centre of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council has trained an impressive 71 participants through its Job Readiness Training Program. The Centre delivers its program in Kamloops and works in partnership with other Aboriginal organizations to offer the program in 30 other communities throughout the Interior region. During the eight-week program, participants are trained in self-esteem building, job maintenance skills, career exploration, and employability and life skills, and complete certificate courses such as First Aid, Transportation Endorsement, WHMIS, and other training.

Joyce, a mother of four, joined the program after being unemployed for three years, during which time she became very unhappy with her life. When she saw the program advertised locally, she knew it was the right thing for her to do. Reflecting on her early days in the program, she says, "Right from the beginning I knew this was a safe place—I was comfortable." Instructors in the program say that Joyce put a lot of effort into building up her skills in the classroom. Joyce reflects, "My confidence was improving and grew each day. I looked forward to every day. I really liked working with communication and speaking.

I was actually heard when I talked." Within days of graduating from the program, Joyce got a job at a nursery, allowing her to fulfill her passion for gardening. She is now working full-time in a job that she loves, and plans to apply to the horticulturalist program at Thompson Rivers University.

Not only has the program helped Aboriginal individuals and families, but it has also provided assistance to employers, too. Just as the Centre was beginning their program, Northern Trailer, a local employer with a manufacturing plant located on T'kemplups Band territory, was awarded a sizeable camp contract in Fort McMurray, Alberta. When the Centre contacted Northern Trailer, it was immediately clear that this would be a valuable employer partnership: Northern Trailer was looking to revise its Aboriginal recruiting strategy, and the Centre would be the perfect partner for this.

Representatives from Northern Trailer visit the classroom to give a presentation about their company and recruitment process. In return, the program trains participants to meet the human resources needs of Northern Trailer. Furthermore, the Centre hosts cultural awareness sessions so that Northern Trailer may get a better sense of Aboriginal cultural practices, in order to better recruit and retain Aboriginal individuals from all over the province. So far, nine graduates of the Job Readiness Training Program have been hired by Northern Trailer.

Courteney Adolph-Jones, Manager of the Aboriginal Training & Employment Centre, emphasizes to all participants, "We're here to work with you, encouraging you to succeed on your chosen career path, or assist you with identifying a path to success." Indeed, many participants of Shuswap Nation's program have found that path to success.



Shuswap Nation Tribal Council recognizes Northern Trailer as an outstanding employer partner, presenting them with an employer bonus cheque of \$9,000 at the Aboriginal Trades Forum in Kamloops, September 2011. (From left to right): Bob McCuaig, Workplace Liaison for the Aboriginal Training & Employment Centre, Liz Labby, Human Resources Assistant for Northern Trailer, Martha Matthew, Director of Aboriginal Skills Employment & Training Services, Shuswap Nation Tribal Council.

"Our experience in employing students from the Aboriginal Training for Employment Program has proven to be very rewarding. Those hired have become successful employees within our company."

*Liz Labby
Human Resources
Assistant for Northern
Trailer, an employer of
Job Readiness Training
Program graduates*

Tla'Amin Community Health Services: Yik Meh Towtlh

Countless rural communities dot the province of British Columbia. These small towns are usually quite isolated, and almost always have limited employment opportunities for their community members. In such areas, where trends of unemployment and underemployment prevail, many families can find themselves in restrictive jobs and bleak economic situations.

In these settings, the Aboriginal Training for Employment Program can make a profound difference.

The Sliammon First Nation is a Coast Salish community located just north of Powell River, on the Sunshine Coast. Here, over one thousand community members share a sense of pride for their history of more than 2,000 years in the region. However, as is the case in many small towns, the job market in Sliammon is limited. One of the main industries is tourism, which typically provides only short-term, seasonal employment.

In Sliammon, Tla'Amin Community Health Services offers Yik Meh Towtlh, an employment training program that helps community members find jobs and prepare themselves for brighter, more promising careers in a variety of industries expected to grow in the future in Sliammon, including retail and administration, health care and social services, tourism and hospitality, and construction.

The program starts with life skills and wellness. Participants focus on team-building and goal-setting, and discuss health topics chosen specifically for common issues facing the Sliammon community. Participants go on to develop their skills in communication and public speaking. Afterwards, they study how to develop and improve their cover letters and

résumés, how to succeed at interviews, and how to excel on the job. They also complete training and receive certification in FoodSafe, First Aid, and other employment preparation courses.

A distinguishing feature of Yik Meh Towtlh—which means “Taking Care of Each Other” in the Sliammon language—is its cultural components: all the work that participants do is strengthened with cultural teachings and metaphors. Students graduate from the program with a heightened knowledge and awareness of their culture and history, and with a strong sense of pride for being of First Nations heritage.

Student success in Yik Meh Towtlh has come in many forms. Some graduates of the program are now working in retail, others in hospitality, and some at the local Sliammon Salmon Hatchery. For others, success came in improving social and interpersonal skills or developing digital literacy.

Word-of-mouth has turned Yik Meh Towtlh into a very popular program: Tla'Amin Community Health Services originally set a target to train 18 individuals—they have actually trained 29, with more intakes scheduled.

There is no quick fix to address the limited job market in Sliammon and its neighbouring communities, but graduates of Yik Meh Towtlh now have additional job training and certification to give them a competitive edge in industries that are expected to expand locally over the next several years. But more than that, this program provides participants with stronger life skills, enhanced cultural knowledge, and a tremendous sense of pride for First Nations culture and history.



Two participants learn how to make Native roses as part of the program's cultural component, while Cyndi Pallen, program coordinator (left), looks on.

“The personal growth of participants as they develop more self-confidence during the program has been amazing to watch.”

*Cyndi Pallen
program coordinator for
Yik Meh Towtlh*



Participants in Yik Meh Towtlh's classroom

Tsleil-Waututh Nation and Turtle Island Indigenous Education: *Reawakening Our Entrepreneurial Spirit Aboriginal Self-Employment Program*

If someone believes they can do it, then they can do it.” This is what Aboriginal Training for Employment Program participants have demonstrated to Riva Nelson, Contract Manager for the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, about achieving their dreams.

In partnership with the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, Turtle Island Indigenous Education offers the Reawakening Our Entrepreneurial Spirit Aboriginal Self-Employment Program, delivered on Tsleil-Waututh territory in North Vancouver and at Simon Fraser University. First, participants spend 12 weeks studying Aboriginal economic histories, business and market research, business plan writing, and relating Aboriginal cultural values to successful business practices, among other topics. Then, students spend six months in employment, gaining valuable work experience while initiating their businesses.

One participant took a unique path into the program, but her results are not at all uncommon for Turtle Island’s program. This is her story: one of her sons decided to withdraw from high school. As a caring mother, she encouraged her son to continue his education—she was concerned for his future. Her son argued that he did not need a high school diploma because she herself had not completed high school and her life had turned out satisfactorily. She, however, disagreed. At the time, she was a single mother relying on income assistance as a means of providing for her family. For the sake of her sons, she took a huge step forward in her life and returned to high school in her mid-thirties. In her Nation, she attended Adult Education classes. It was while she was completing these classes that she shared the same classroom in which Turtle Island was hosting its program. As she worked on her homework, she listened to the class discussions. She became more and more involved in the class, answering the instructors’ questions and even helping other students. Impressed, Turtle Island instructors mentioned to her that she could consider enrolling in their program. She has now graduated from the program, works full-time, and has also started up her own arts company. Since deciding to continue her education, she has served not only as an inspiration for her sons, but for her entire community.

Another graduate is using the Turtle Island program to make a positive impact in her community. This participant and her family moved over 150 kilometres so that she could attend the program. During the program, she gained many practical cross-cultural business and employment skills, and also confirmed the viability of her business idea. She says that the Reawakening Our Entrepreneurial Spirit program is the best thing she’s ever encountered: she believes that all Aboriginal people should have the chance to take it, even if they don’t intend to start their own business. Now, she is putting her words into action—she works for her Tribal Council, where she is responsible for providing education and training programs to other people within her communities. She is now working in conjunction with Turtle Island Indigenous Education to develop a similar program offered in her territory. With a renewed appreciation for the value of lifelong learning, she has now also completed another adult learning certificate, and is considering enrolling in the new Aboriginal Executive Master of Business Administration program at Simon Fraser University.

Program staff are pleased to say that each student has gained new self-understandings, acquired new skills and interests, increased self-awareness, and reaffirmed a perspective on their place in the world. All graduates are now either in permanent employment, attending school or other training, or developing their businesses.

“Our program encourages people to consider the possibilities in their lives and take action on their decisions for the well being of their families, their communities and themselves.”

*Sylvia Schmidt
Chief Executive Officer of
Turtle Island Indigenous
Education*

“The program’s goal is to work with Aboriginal individuals and communities to provide educational tools that equip them to work cross-culturally as business owners and employees, developing sustainable incomes for them and their families.”

Sylvia Schmidt

Victoria Native Friendship Centre: *EAGLE*

In July 2010, the Namgis First Nation of northern Vancouver Island donated a 1450-year-old red cedar log to the Victoria Native Friendship Centre. One year later, the results of their generosity can be seen not only in the 25-foot-tall totem pole that stands at the front of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre to welcome all who visit the building, but also in the lives of many people in Victoria.

Victoria Native Friendship Centre's *EAGLE* program—Exploring & Acknowledging Guidance & Leadership through Employment— provides twelve weeks of cultural and employment training to teach local Aboriginal people how to walk tall culturally and professionally. During their employment training, participants complete 10-12 certificate programs, such as WHMIS and Work Safe. One of the cultural components of the program was that participants worked collaboratively under the guidance of Kwagwiltz/Salish/British master carver Carey Newman to carve the Community's masterpiece.

In the last 18 months, 47 participants have graduated from *EAGLE*—well beyond the original target of 36. These participants have ranged from 18 to 55 years of age. Nineteen participants have subsequently obtained employment, two are self-employed, and another 13 are in additional employment training.

One of these successful participants started the program homeless, unemployed and with a Grade 10 education. After having some legal troubles, this young man's parole officer advised him that he needed to demonstrate positive changes in his life. The parole officer recommended *EAGLE*. The young man enrolled, and during the three-month program, demonstrated perfect

attendance. With the advice of *EAGLE* staff, he also completed the "Ready to Rent" program offered in Victoria by the Stepping Stones Steering Committee. This young man has succeeded in finding a residence in Victoria, and is now enrolled at Camosun College in a three-year training program to be a Residential Manager. In just three months, the *EAGLE* program helped this young man turn his life around.

From the perspective of Marek Tyler, Job Placement Coordinator for *EAGLE*, watching participants make positive changes in their lives has been one of the greatest highlights of the program so far, culminating in *EAGLE*'s graduation ceremonies. During these ceremonies, *EAGLE* participants are blanketed, and have the option of speaking to the audience at the ceremony about their journey to graduation. In front of roughly one hundred people, Tyler says, participants can bring the audience to tears as they speak about how the *EAGLE* program has brought about success in their lives.

After three intakes of the *EAGLE* program, ten months spent carving the totem pole with Carey Newman and nearly 50 *EAGLE* participants, 100 members of the Community raised the totem pole together, in front of an audience of roughly 500 people. The "Connected Through Our Roots" totem pole stands at the entrance of the Friendship Centre, honouring the local Coast Salish, Kwagwiltz and Nu-Ch-Nulth Nations, weaving together the many Aboriginal cultures that make up the Friendship Centre, and standing as a testament to the hard work, determination, teamwork, and success of *EAGLE* participants.



The raising of the "Connected Through Our Roots" totem pole, carved by EAGLE participants and Master Carver Carey Newman, at the Victoria Native Friendship Centre.

"We are an agency of change."

Marek Tyler
Job Placement
Coordinator for *EAGLE*

(Front cover): A drawing of the "Connected Through Our Roots" totem pole, carved by ATEP participants and Master Carver Carey Newman. The totem pole stands in welcome outside the Victoria Native Friendship Centre. Drawing by Carey Newman.

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