



Indspire

Indigenous education, | L'éducation des autochtones.
Canada's future. | L'avenir du Canada.

INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Spring 2021

A message from Mike DeGagné

It gives me great pleasure to be sending you my first donor newsletter as the President and CEO of Indspire. I'm honoured to be leading the life-changing work Indspire does across Canada.

I want to thank Roberta Jamieson for her time leading up to this transition. The first few months of 2021 have been busy. In February I was fortunate to speak with my good friend Shelagh Rogers where we discussed the importance of education in reconciliation. Our February 1st deadline for *Building Brighter Futures* bursaries, scholarships, and awards attracted 1200 more applications for post-secondary support.

In this newsletter, you will hear from students like Cayley and Priscilla who've been able to pursue their education, thanks to your generous support. We've also outlined for you all of the virtual events we've held over the last year through our thought-provoking **Indspiring Change @ Home** virtual event series, where we speak with innovative Indigenous leaders about their vitally important work. Lastly, make sure to enter online for an opportunity to win one of six Indigenous Peoples Atlas' of Canada.

As I reflect on my short time as President and CEO I have been impressed by the commitment of staff, effective programming, connection and care for students, and donors like you. With the generous support of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast I know our life-changing impact will continue.

I have spent much of my career working to Indigenize the post-secondary education sector, and I am honoured to continue this path at Indspire. There are great things on the horizon, and I look forward to walking the path with you by our side.

Miigwech - thank you - for all that you help make possible.

Sincerely,

Mike DeGagné
President & CEO





You are Giving Someone their Dreams

Cayley Lawrence,
Métis Nation of Alberta, Medicine Hat, Alberta

We know that women are massively underrepresented in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields across North America.

And Indigenous women?

They are even more rare as working STEM professionals and community role models.

What can be done?

Donors committed to Indspire believe that we also need diverse people in STEM so that we can identify the problems we need to solve, create solutions, and tackle the barriers that have historically kept many students out.

Cayley Lawrence is quietly leading the change in the field of health care.

She's a First Nation student with a degree in chemistry and biology and is working towards her Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD 2024) at the University of British Columbia. "I'm the first generation in my family to attend university. And I don't know of any other Indigenous students in the Pharmacy program at UBC," she says.

With the help of Indspire, a dedicated Cayley Lawrence wants to provide the best possible care for people. This means that after graduation she will help her patients understand and use their medications safely, work in collaboration with other health care professionals, and translate the latest in clinical evidence for patient benefit and health.

In particular, she plans to work in an underrepresented Indigenous community after receiving her certification:

"As someone who grew up in a less privileged community, I've always dreamed of becoming one of the professionals who treated my younger self with compassion and empathy. I looked up to these people and I want to be like them.

I'm also very interested in healthcare programs that ensure cultural safety and that take in to consideration the Indigenous person's perspective. Why is tailoring care to overcome the lack of trust in healthcare so important? Because many people in our communities don't seek out care, many times until it is very late – and this is the biggest barrier to health."

Cayley Lawrence says that her success is attributed to awards like the ones Indspire provides.

Receiving the support of donors to the program means that, "I feel the encouragement of other people. I can focus on working hard and making their investment pay off."

She continues, "when you give to Indspire you make opportunities for Indigenous people who wouldn't otherwise have a chance. You are giving someone their dreams. Donors help to overcome barriers and create a better life than what many students had before."

In sum, Cayley says that, "we see that disparities are one of the realities of colonization – but to support the education of Indigenous students is a very big step forward in reconciliation." •

What Mentorship Means to Me

Taylor Behn-Tsakoza, Fort Nelson First Nation, British Columbia

Casey Caines, Fort Nelson First Nation, British Columbia



During these challenging times where many are feeling isolated and alone, Indspire's *Rivers to Success: Mentoring Indigenous Students* program continues to connect Indigenous youth with relatable and supportive mentors. The *Rivers to Success* program provides a supportive learning environment for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students at key stages of their academic journey, giving them the tools they need to complete their education and successfully pursue the career of their dreams.

Taylor Behn-Tsakoza is a Dene woman currently working as a Yúusnewas Provincial Educator living in Fort Nelson, BC. She joined Indspire's *Rivers to Success* mentorship program as a mentee because after graduation, she was looking for support with career transition.

"I feel like I had a lot of questions about what to do after I graduate. Being a first-generation university graduate, I didn't really have many experiences or stories I could turn to for guidance. So I thought hey, this program connects Indigenous students together to help in situations like mine. I would love to have someone to talk to who has been through what I have been through and navigating higher education."

Taylor has been learning a lot from her mentor, Casey but more than anything she feels so much less alone because of this new friendship.

"I just got off a call with one of my mentors, and I have such a high feeling after speaking with her. This mentorship has been life changing and really keeping my spirits up. The meetings are always really positive, motivating, and uplifting!"



Casey Caines, a Cree and Dene woman currently studying law and living in Sexsmith, AB is Taylor's mentor. She also wanted to share with you what this program means to her.

"I decided to become a mentor with Indspire because I truly feel that community is an essential part of living life to the fullest. I wanted to not only make connections that could help ground me in my own work but to provide that connection to others."

Casey is very determined to make a difference in Indigenous communities. Her goals right now are to complete her JD of Law with a focus on Indigenous and Criminal Law in order to work in restorative justice programs in northern Indigenous communities.

Casey also shared how Indspire's support motivates her to do more:

"Indspire is constantly finding new and innovative ways to uplift Indigenous peoples and particularly young professionals. It inspires me to continue that work in my own capacity."

Mahsi, thank you. You help build community and empower Indigenous peoples to share their gifts and seek out knowledge. It's really a blessing to be part of this." •



Building a Better Life Thanks to Donors Like You

Priscilla Kuksuk,
Arviat, Nunavut

Are you ready for a serious conversation about the drive to create new opportunities and a positive future for the Indigenous community?

Then Priscilla Kuksuk is the right person to talk to.

Priscilla Kuksuk is an Inuk, in her mid-40's and a single mother to a preschool child.

Currently in her second year of a two-year Early Childhood Education program at Algonquin College, in Ottawa – she knew she wouldn't be able to complete the second year without some help. "I surprised myself," Priscilla Kuksuk says, "a full course load and great marks, but I really needed help to complete the second year and get the certificate."

She says, "It was very hard as a single mom to keep up with expenses. I was really struggling and finding it hard to keep my focus on studying and grades."

When she received help from Indspire, she "felt ecstatic, privileged as an Inuk woman to have the chance to further my education. I want to thank the donors who made it possible to complete my final year. I truly believe that with an education the possibilities are endless."

Why did she choose this program in particular?

"Being an older mother, the birth of my child inspired me. And there is an urgent demand for Indigenous Registered Early Childhood Educators.

I saw the need and decided to pursue my education in this field. I knew I could use my skills to teach our Indigenous children and support them in their learning and healthy development."

She continues, "being Indigenous, I also want to create awareness that when you work on your education – doors open for you that you would never have seen. People like the donors to Indspire are there, and so ready and willing to help you open those doors."

What gave Priscilla Kutsuk the motivation to start this process?

"I have lived in poverty and struggled every day. I wanted a better life. Yes, my daughter was the inspiration to pursue education further. Yes, poverty has played a role in my life. But today, my achievements are also being looked at, and I know that there are good people out there who are watching me."

She continues, "that's also why I'm working hard – for the people watching. For the children of my community – and for Indspire, so that they will all know that I'm using the chance that they have given me. Indspire doesn't just talk about giving you help. They take action and watch you grow."

What will be the impact of her work?

Priscilla states, "early childhood education is not about training to be a childminder. It is so much more than that. Indigenous educators are a big key to the successful early years of our children. And I want to take my skills and give back to families, to help my community. And the next generation."

Priscilla Kutsuk reminds donors that, "Indspire cares about our success and they want us to thrive. These awards are the strongest encouragement to increase our knowledge, and to try even more!" •

How your Legacy can create Brighter Futures

Susan Gingell,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Monthly and Legacy Donor



One of the most profound experiences you can have in life is to invest in the life of a young student.

When you invest in Indspire, you give an Indigenous student with talent and a strong work ethic the opportunity to thrive, express their human potential – and create a ripple effect of positive change that can reach across communities and into the future.

Susan Gingell is just such a monthly donor. She is also planning to leave a portion of her estate to Indspire.

Professor of English Emerita at the University of Saskatchewan, Susan Gingell says that:

"I am grateful for the opportunity immediate past-CEO of Indspire Roberta Jamieson has provided for me to channel some of my money to support Indigenous education. This wouldn't be happening if it wasn't for Roberta and her work."

Susan Gingell continues, "I received scholarships, and without that help and encouragement I wouldn't be where I am today. For Indigenous people I have seen that education is a key way out of poverty and difficulty. With donor investment, Indspire makes all the difference for the people who need help the most. Even a modest gift can go a long way to liberate students from financial pressures and energize them to help themselves and others."

She continues, "More Indigenous students and increased valuing of Indigenous ways of being will put us all in a better position. More will be equipped to contribute richly to and become leaders across Canada. When you believe in these students, you are making a positive change for us all."

How did this commitment to social justice begin for Susan Gingell?

She says, "when I grew up, I had experiences that gave me a sense of what it feels like to be at a disadvantage. Later, in my career as a university teacher in Saskatchewan, I became acutely aware of the advantages and disadvantages at work in the community. You don't have to give a lot of money to start making brighter futures."

She continues, "Even a small gift to Indspire can make a big difference. You help create the kind of leadership at the local and national level that, over time, will equalize our society and help everyone move from opportunity to positive outcomes."

To learn more about leaving a legacy gift to Indspire, visit: www.indspire.ca/ways-to-give/include-indspire-in-your-will/ •

**"When you believe in these students,
you are making a positive change for us all."**

Indspire Goes Global: a Métis Student Finds Inspiration and Support Over 12,000 Kilometres Away

Amy Smith,
Métis Nation of Alberta, Canberra, Australia

“It's with deep gratitude that I extend my warmest wishes and thanks. I appreciate your contribution to Indspire and hope that you will continue supporting this organization.”

Amy Smith is a young Métis woman who just completed a graduate degree in Australia at the University of Queensland. She has always had a long-term game-plan: “I dream of working for organizations that support the rights of and empower Indigenous peoples. I hope to complete university with good grades as well as have a secure job right out of graduate school.” Her dreams are all coming true, partly due to her resilience and drive to succeed but also because of the encouragement and inspiration she drew from her family (particularly her grandmother), her mentor, and YOU, the Indspire donors who helped fund her tuition.

“Whenever I feel discouraged, I think about my grandma who is taking Cree lessons to reclaim her language, which her parents spoke, and how determined she is even at her age and life circumstances. This resilience in my family reminds me to be strong and brave in my education endeavours.”

Amy has always been driven by an altruistic view of the world – she has been an avid volunteer since she was only 15 years old, giving her time to a local foodbank and a community garden, in addition to three international community development projects she organized and led in 2016-2017. “I hope to help others the way in which others have helped me.”

Last year Amy completed an internship in Australia through the highly competitive Aurora Internship Program. Amy worked with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation in researching and providing international examples of treaties and recommendations

on how to establish a treaty/agreement with local government. There are currently no treaties between governments and Indigenous people in Australia, something Amy hopes will change in the near future. “I feel honoured to be working with the Dja Dja Wurrung and supporting their dream to establish a treaty in the future!”

“Indspire's Building Brighter Futures program was the only bursary available for Indigenous graduate students studying abroad I could find. Most other Indigenous (especially Métis) scholarships/bursaries require you to study in your home province or in Canada in order to even be eligible for funding.”

Amy has just graduated with a Master of Development Practice (MDP) degree at the University of Queensland, specializing in Social and Cultural Dynamics of Development. She also received a Rotary Global Grant Scholarship.

“My Master's has been an incredible personal and educational journey. Most of my peers in my program are international students and have come from varied backgrounds and experiences. I have learned as much from their stories and experiences as I have from my textbooks and professors and feel incredibly privileged to learn alongside them.”

Amy continues: “These classes have been instrumental in fueling my passion for Indigenous rights and social justice.” Amy is now working for Reconciliation Australia, a national non-profit organization in the Australian capital, Canberra. She is grateful for her chance to work towards their goal of a just, equitable and reconciled Australia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. •

Paying It Forward into the Four Directions

Nadya and Amira Gill,
Nunavut Tunngavik



It's not enough to imagine or advocate for a better future, somebody has to build it.

With the support of donors to Indspire, Indigenous students are quick to seize the opportunity to become the creators who turn ideas into reality.

For an inspiring example of this, just talk to two current Indigenous engineering and law students, past Indspire recipients, and early-career donors in action – the dynamic sisters Amira and Nadya Gill.

In a burst of innovation and the true spirit of giving, Amira, a second-year Master's Applied Science student studying civil and structural engineering at Queen's University – and her sister Nadya Gill, a second-year student at Queen's Law with an interest in criminal law – started a charitable online platform to sell face masks designed by Indigenous artists.

The sisters thought that selling face masks was “a logical opportunity, since, given COVID-19, everyone needs a face mask,” said Amira. “In addition, the Indigenous artists who design the face masks receive royalties every time a mask is purchased.”

The venture, called Kanata Masks, (kanatatrade.com) gives all of the profits back to Indspire for a student award.

As Nadya says, “We received help from Indspire when we needed it most. Now is the time to give back. Many Indigenous students struggle and they really need this help to study and grow.”

Amira adds, “we wanted to join other donors and work to remove barriers preventing young Indigenous students from attending college or university.

They need to experience first-hand that there are other options available. They need a chance at life.”

Nadya continues, “it might seem impossible to reach an entire community, but when you support education you can make so much happen.” She adds, “the most surprising thing about this work was seeing how many other Indigenous groups wanted to get involved and support us. And to help support Indspire as well.”

So far, the Gill sisters have donated over \$6,000 to Indspire!

Amira says that they also want to raise positive awareness, “we know the history of why Indspire exists to help Indigenous youth. We've seen the statistics about the number of students that have been supported over the years and we've seen the impact of donor gifts. We are the proof!”

Nadya adds, “we have both grown and changed with our education and that adds up to a great reason to give. We are very grateful for the help that we have been given. This is our chance to pay it forward into the Four Directions.”

She continues that, “we want others to understand how important it is to donate to Indspire. We also encourage others to consider hosting a third-party fundraising event for Indspire. Everything helps! You can create a new future for students, communities, and the world around us.”

If you are interested in hosting a third-party event for Indspire, visit www.indspire.ca/ways-to-give/donate/help-fundraise/ •

Indspiring Change @ Home virtual event series

During these challenging times, we wanted to ensure you had the opportunity to engage in Indspire's work, even though we can't get together in person. We hope you'll take some time to watch any of the wonderful virtual events we've held over the last year. <https://indspire.ca/events/virtual-events/>

Indspiring Change @ Home featuring Tanya Talaga

Roberta Jamieson, former President & CEO of Indspire, has a conversation with award-winning Anishinaabe journalist Tanya Talaga about her work and reconciliation through education.



A Talk with Kent Monkman

Roberta Jamieson, former President & CEO of Indspire and Jennifer Kramer, Curator, Pacific Northwest, Museum of Anthropology at UBC, chat with Kent Monkman about his powerful exhibition *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*.

Indspiring Change @ Home with Mike DeGagné and Shelagh Rogers

A conversation between Mike DeGagné, President and CEO of Indspire, and award-winning journalist, Chancellor of the University of Victoria and an Honorary Witness to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings, Shelagh Rogers.



Enter online for your chance to win an Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada

Want to stay updated on all that you make possible with your support of Indspire and have the opportunity to win one of six copies of Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada?



Enter online at: indspire.ca/atlas Contest closes May 31st, 2021 so make sure to get online today for your chance to win one of these ground-breaking, four-volume atlases that shares the experiences, perspectives, and histories of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Exploring themes of language, demographics, economy, environment, and culture, with in-depth coverage of treaties and residential schools, these are stories of Canada's Indigenous Peoples, told in detailed maps and rich narratives.

See website for full contest rules indspire.ca/atlas

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