Introduction

Join the Brighter Futures Circle, Indspire’s nationwide Leadership Giving program, and help support Indigenous students and educators of Indigenous students.

Your donation to be part of the Brighter Futures Circle will mean the continued improvement of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Indigenous student success, and allow post-secondary Indigenous students to realize their education dreams through scholarships and bursaries.

Education is a determinant of social and economic health, offering tremendous returns beyond higher employment rates and wages. Education reduces poverty, improves health care outcomes, and contributes to the prosperity of our country. Through your generous support, thousands of Indigenous students will be able to soar to new heights and open doors they never knew existed.

By joining the Brighter Futures Circle, you will be investing in the education of Indigenous people for their long-term benefit – and for their families, communities, and Canada. Your support will inspire youth to achieve, celebrate Indigenous culture and identity, and deliver much-needed programs and essential resources to educators, all with the goal of closing the gap in Indigenous education so that Indigenous youth and adults will reach their highest potential.
“Every human being should have fair access to housing, education, clean drinking water, and a health-care system that is accessible regardless of location or race. As a nurse, I hope to be able to provide some of these services to help better the lives and health of the Aboriginal population, and to help empower and educate all women who experience racial oppression so that both they and their children have the potential to experience a healthy life.”

Jodi-Lyn Rask (Métis), a student in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at Grant MacEwan University & an Indspire-supported student

Why there is a gap in Indigenous education

The experience of Indigenous peoples in Canada is fraught with tragic and complex difficulties. Broken treaties, the legacy of the residential schools, and ongoing structural inequalities all contribute to systemic problems that hold Indigenous peoples back from realizing their full potential.

*Today, 60% of First Nation children on reserve live in poverty, and are more than three times as likely to live in poverty than non-Indigenous children.*

Many of the children on reserves do not even have the basic necessities of life, such as clean water, safe buildings or a school. Where there is a school, often it has no heat or is full of mould. Many schools are closed for weeks each year because there is no drinking water.

It hasn’t always been this way. Before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous peoples in Canada had strong networks of trade and knowledge of the land and waters. They were free and self-sustaining. Today’s reality is the tragic result of more than one hundred years of government control.

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“I chose to study teaching because I want to help build my community and be a great leader. I have always worked around children and knew it was a career for me. There is a high rate of dropouts in our high school, and I believe introducing new programs and activities can enhance the child’s possibilities for the future.”

Lynn Kilabuk (Innu), who is completing a Bachelor of Education program at Nunavut Arctic College & an Indspire-supported student

Stemming from – and contributing to – this poverty is a lack of education among Indigenous youth.

A vicious circle is in play. The poverty and social ills experienced by many Indigenous children means they are not prepared for or can’t afford post-secondary education. This lack of education – and correlated lack of employment – then contributes to the cycle of poverty and dependency.

There is a vast and growing gap in education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals.

Only 24%\(^2\) of on-reserve Indigenous youth finish high school – compared to 90% of non-Indigenous youth.\(^3\) And only 10.9% of Indigenous students go on to receive a university degree, compared to 26.5% of non-Indigenous students.\(^4\)

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1. Auditor General’s Report to Parliament, 2018
2. C.D. Howe Institute, Students in Jeopardy: An Agenda for Improving Results in Band-Operated Schools, 2016
3. Statistics Canada, 2017
Why the gap?
Indigenous students face complex barriers that include social, cultural, linguistic, economic and geographical factors.

- **Funding:** For Indigenous youth who finish high school, the lack of access to financial aid is the most significant barrier to further education. For example, funding limits for on-reserve First Nations students have been frozen from 1996 to 2017 - more than 20 years - with the exception of a budgeted 13% increase to occur in each of the next two years, while the cost of education has risen by an average of 5% per year over that time, an increase of almost 200% to 300% depending on the province. Meanwhile, the number of students supported declined by 20% between 1999 and 2009, even though the number of Indigenous youth has grown nearly seven times faster than the non-Indigenous population.

- **Lack of role models:** Post-secondary education for youth is strongly correlated with the education of their parents. Indigenous youth are strongly motivated by their own role models – those who have achieved success and yet remain secure in their own identities and confident in their cultures and historic roots. Today’s Indigenous youth are lacking the positive role models all children need in order to succeed.

- **Geography:** Research demonstrates that distance from post-secondary education is a factor that influences participation rates. Indigenous youth are at a disadvantage because 46% of them live in rural areas, compared to only 17% 17% of non-Indigenous youth. In order to attend post-secondary school, rural students must leave their family, community, and social support networks behind. They also must face substantial moving and living costs, all of which serve as a deterrent.

- **In the classroom:** Educators of First Nation, Inuit and Métis students face a unique set of challenges that adversely affect their teaching success and the success of their students. Most teachers are educated with limited or non-existent Indigenous centred curriculum. Non-Indigenous educators are ill prepared for teaching in Indigenous communities, particularly in northern and fly-in communities. If they encounter learning or instructional problems with students, and many have, there is no access to adequate resources or support.

According to the 2016 census, the employment rate for working age Indigenous peoples without a high school diploma is 26%. Unemployment rates lower even more to 10% for those who have a college degree and 7% for those with a bachelor's degree.

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5 AFN Fact Sheet on Post-Secondary Education
Indigenous education: the key to the future of Canada

Education is the key to social change, and to changing the story of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

It goes without saying that more education means better employment rates and higher wages. These benefits then contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty, establishing role models within Indigenous communities, and helping dismantle the current state of dependency that is not only unsustainably costly, but also destructive to the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

According to the 2016 census, only 29% of working age Indigenous people in Canada without a high school diploma are employed. Employment levels rise to 57% or those who have graduated high school. They rise again to 69% for those who have a college degree and to 78% for those with a bachelor’s degree. This is in line with the 74% employment rate for non-Indigenous individuals in Canada with a bachelor’s degree.8

When Indigenous people have the same education as non-Indigenous individuals, their employment rate is the same.

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THE EDUCATION MYTH:

Indigenous students receive free post-secondary education.

**TRUTH:**

The reality is much more complex. Some students receive some support, but far too many willing and qualified students receive no support at all, and are left behind their non-Indigenous counterparts.

As more and more Indigenous youth qualify for funding, communities must decide whether to fund fewer students or give less to each student, decreasing the likelihood that they will be able to finish their degree. Either decision results in fewer students being able to start or complete their education.

Student loans are not easily available to Indigenous students, leaving qualified students with few or no options to access funding for tuition and other education costs. According to the Canadian Federation of Students, from 2006 to 2011 more than 18,000 Aboriginal people were denied funding, representing approximately half of those who qualified.

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8Statistics Canada, 2018
“With the support I have been given from Indspire, as well as my family, friends and community, it is my dream to open a wellness centre and offer affordable health care to everyone. It is my lifelong goal to give back to the community that has helped me every step of the way.”

Adam Russell (First Nation), who is halfway through a four-year Doctor of Chiropractic program at the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College & an Indspire-supported student

Education creates role models.
Indigenous youth who complete post-secondary or graduate education want to share their success and skills with their communities. As a result, many of these graduates return to their communities to work, creating positive role models for the next generation, who will then aspire to the same level of success, creating a chain-reaction of positive change that will spread throughout the community.

“My dream is to become either a Crown prosecutor or a criminal defense lawyer. In becoming a lawyer, I hope to serve as an example to other young Métis and Aboriginal people that higher education and academic achievement is possible. This past year was the hardest I’d ever worked at anything. All my life I have been so afraid of failure that I’d never really tried to do anything challenging. I know it sounds cliché, but this year I discovered that if I put in the effort, I can do better than I ever dreamed possible.”

Tyson Bull (First Nation), a student in the Juris Doctor program at the University of Saskatchewan & an Indspire-supported student

We must take action to ensure that educational achievement rates for Indigenous children climb to at least the level currently enjoyed by other Canadian youth – because it benefits all Canadians.
The economy – and the entire country – benefits

The Brighter Futures Circle isn’t just about making the moral choice and righting decades of wrong. There is a strong economic argument for educating Indigenous youth. First, increased education will help break the expensive cycle of dependency on programs that don’t address the real issues that these youth face. The up-front costs of providing education and training to Indigenous youth are far less than the cost of doing nothing.9

In addition, Canada is facing a looming labour shortage. Canadian employers already rely on immigration to fill this gap – but the answer to Canada’s labour shortage is right here at home. The number of First Nations youth is growing more rapidly than any other group in our country. It is essential to Canada’s economic health that an educated, trained Indigenous labour force be available to fill this labour shortage.

According to a recent study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, how the large Indigenous youth population fares economically will determine, to a very important extent, how the Canadian economy fares. Addressing Indigenous issues is a win-win for all Canadians.10

Another study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards notes that closing the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous could add more than $261 billion to our economy.11

Moreover, closing the educational attainment gap in concert with closing the employment gap and the employment income gap would have a total economic impact of $335 billion in less than 15 years. This enormous economic benefit does not include savings that would be expected from a decrease in health, incarceration, and foster-care costs – and all the other social costs which are a result of poverty.

“I have chosen to pursue my education in Business to better myself and my community. My upbringing has inspired me to rise above my circumstances and pursue a higher education while staying connected to my community. My own difficulties experienced in overcoming obstacles to achieve my dreams have naturally compelled me to assist others experiencing similar situations.”

Desiree Pachkowski (Métis), an honour student in the University of Manitoba’s Bachelor of Commerce program & an Indspire-supported student

10 Centre for the Study of Living Standards, The Contribution of Aboriginal People to Future Labour Force Growth in Canada, October 2017
“When I received funding from Indspire, I thought wow, there are really people out there who want to help Indigenous youth succeed. It’s powerful that it’s funded by individuals, many of them non-Indigenous, all making a choice to commit to an Indigenous cause. To me, this is the path to reconciliation.”

Alyssa Flaherty-Spence (Inuit), graduate of University of Ottawa's Doctor of Law program & an Indspire-supported student
Since 2004, Indspire has disbursed over $115 million through more than 37,500 scholarships and bursaries to Indigenous students, making it the largest funder of Indigenous education outside the federal government.

However, we can only meet 22% of the financial need of students applicants.

Our goal over the next five years is to raise $50 million for student scholarships, bursaries
and other programs to provide financial support for Indigenous students, so they can complete their education, become self-sufficient, support their families and give back to their communities. Thanks to matching funds from the Government of Canada and individual donors, support for post-secondary education can be doubled.

Your support, in concert with others, will help close the gap for Indigenous education, and help thousands more students realize their dream of a post-secondary education.

**Soaring: Indigenous Youth Empowerment Gathering**

At Soaring, Indigenous high school students learn about a myriad of career and post-secondary education options while being inspired by role models to stay in school and pursue further education.

At conferences held in various locations across Canada, hundreds of students join in local campus tours, participate in interactive career workshops, receive information about Indspire’s bursary and scholarship program, and meet Canada’s top employers at tradeshows designed just for them. Students also hear from recipients of the Indspire Awards, and have the opportunity to connect with other students from all regions of the country.

Our goal is to raise $800,000 annually to inspire and educate Indigenous youth through the Soaring gatherings. Support opportunities range from $10,000 to $100,000.

**Teach for Tomorrow**

Launched in 2019 and the first of its kind, Teach for Tomorrow supports First Nation, Inuit and Métis high school students to fulfill their ambition to become teachers. The program will create opportunities for Indigenous students to become education leaders within their communities, increasing the number of Indigenous teachers in elementary and high school classrooms.

The program creates a seamless approach for students to transition from high school to university by providing college level courses to become certified Education Assistants with eventual access to a Bachelor of Education.

The program also provides students with wrap-around supports – mentors, culturally appropriate programming, family engagement and more – to meet the unique social and academic needs of each student, increasing high school and post-secondary graduation rates for Indigenous people.

More than 90% of Indigenous students who receive funding from Indspire earn a post-secondary credential – 53% go on to pursue a second degree, Master’s or PhD, while 42% go on to employment.
Proven results

Our experience has shown that investing in one Indigenous student leads to benefits for their immediate family and generations to come, creating a path out of poverty for many. The results confirm that Indspire is helping thousands of Indigenous students complete their high school and post-secondary education and embark on a rewarding career.

Amy’s story

Amy was born on a reserve in Ontario. At 15, she quit school. Over the next few years, she got married and had children. Then her spouse was tragically killed in a workplace accident.

Amy became a single mother with three young children, no job, and no money. But she didn’t give up.

“"I decided, “I’m not going to let this beat me. I’m going to get my kids out of this,”” she says. Her parents encouraged her to go back to school, which she did – while working three jobs. She passed her General Equivalency Diploma with flying colours.

Then she heard about Indspire. “"They gave me a $5,000 bursary to continue on in nursing college,”” she says. “"It made all the difference, because it meant I could cut down on my extra jobs and focus on my licensing exam.”

Not only did Amy pass her exam, she went on to complete her Masters in Nursing – and then enrolled in medical school. Now, she is working full-time as a doctor in the health clinic on her reserve.

Her children are also reaping the benefits of Amy’s education. “"My kids have set their goals high because they have seen me prove that anything they aspire to is possible with a lot of hard work and support. When I first went back to school, I felt so bad about leaving the kids. But one day I heard them playing downstairs. They were pretending to work in a hospital. They were each imagining that they were doctors and nurses. And I knew I was doing the right thing.”

More Indspire programs that support Indigenous youth

Guiding the Journey: Indigenous Educator Awards

Indigenous educators guide their students’ journey through leadership, innovative practice, and dedication to community. To celebrate K-12 educators for their achievement and innovation in Indigenous education, Guiding the Journey recognizes educators and organizations who have made valuable contributions to community-based education and honour the principles of Indigenous knowledge.

National Gathering for Indigenous Education

National Gathering for Indigenous Education is an annual conference that brings together educators and other stakeholders who work with Indigenous students from across the country. Held in a different city each year, attendees share innovations in Indigenous education, successful practices and collaborate to translate theory into workable strategies. It provides an opportunity to share and foster research in Indigenous education, and supports much-needed professional development for educators who work with Indigenous students.
Mentorship and Student Success

Indspire’s vision is to create a national mentorship program to support the academic and career success of Indigenous students from high school to their professional lives. On their journey from high school to a career, students will engage with Indigenous Elders, students and professional role models; have access to Indigenous community and culture; and be supported by resources specifically customized for Indigenous students.

Mentorship is provided in a variety of formats to meet the needs of each student: One-on-one mentorship, online and in-person groups, webinars and presentations. Through this specialized mentorship model, a range of student needs will be met, from financial literacy to mental health challenges.

Mentorship also generates opportunities for students to connect, reclaim and be part of the revitalization of their languages, medicines, ceremonies, and cultural teachings through inter-generational knowledge sharing. The program will foster cultural identity and resilience, reduce social isolation, and build a student’s sense of belonging that will positively effect retention and graduation rates.

Research and Impact

Indspire is the largest funder outside of the federal government of bursaries, scholarships and awards to First Nation, Inuit and Métis students thanks to support from its donors. With 25 years of knowledge about Indigenous education and students, Indspire is uniquely positioned to undertake Indigenous-led research focused on improving the education and economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Indspire’s research and impact activities will identify supports that are required in Indigenous education to improve opportunities for Indigenous students and their communities.

Our researchers will plan, manage and execute analysis and evaluation of current knowledge of educational practices and trends in the field of Indigenous education. In sharing this work, Indspire will be helping demonstrate impact and social return on investment from programs, inform policies, and share the impact of initiatives in powering the success of Indigenous students.
Conclusion

It is truly in our national interest to make sure all Indigenous students get a quality education. Education offers tremendous returns on investment, with the benefits extending far beyond finding employment. Education reduces poverty and social ills, helps children grow up in healthy communities, and improves health-care outcomes. And it will contribute to Canada’s economic well-being.

Your generosity is key to helping Indspire reach our north star – that within a generation, every Indigenous student will graduate – and to making a serious and sustained investment in Indigenous education, so we can start to reverse the shameful and tragic results of which we are all only too painfully aware.

“Education is what got us here, and education is what will get us out.”

Senator Murray Sinclair,
Chief Commissioner of the Trust and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

Act now, and we can change the future for Indigenous people in Canada – and our entire country as well.