BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES:

Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards (BBF) Program Recipients' Outcomes Report

Indspire

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CEO MESSAGE

Roberta Jamieson

PRESIDENT AND CEO
INDSPIRE

GREETINGS,

We acknowledge the Creator and all our relations for providing strength and guidance in our work each and every day.

This is the first report of Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest – an exciting new program at Indspire. It is our hope that the insights we share through our research initiatives and the work of Indigenous scholars will enrich and inform policy decisions by our stakeholders, Indigenous leadership, educational institutions and public and private sector supporters.

The Research Nest is the first of its kind, allowing emerging Indigenous researchers to leverage their experience to amplify the voices of Indigenous post-secondary students. In this program, we utilize Indspire's data and connection to Indigenous learners and graduates to provide insights into their experiences while supporting emerging Indigenous researchers and assisting them to reach their goals.

Indspire extends recognition and a sincere appreciation to Building Brighter Futures recipients, First Nations, Inuit and Metis students, who participated in this survey and shared with us their personal experiences regarding their post-secondary education. Reading your responses and hearing your stories reminds us how important it is that you are supported.

We also are grateful to the Founding Supporter of Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest, Suncor Energy Foundation, and for support from Employment and Social Development Canada.

Nia:wen,

ROBERTA JAMIESON
PRESIDENT AND CEO
INDSPIRE

About Indspire

ABOUT THE INDSPIRE RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE NEST

Indspire is an Indigenous registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people.

Outside the Canadian federal government, Indspire provides the largest post-secondary education funding through the Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards program. In 2019-2020, Indspire provided over $17.8 million through more than 5,100 bursaries and scholarships to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students across Canada.

The Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards program has been in existence since 1985. Inds =pire originally provided funds primarily to students studying fine arts. Today, through the BBF program, Indspire provides financial support to students in diverse areas of study, including trades, apprenticeships, science, technology, engineering, arts and math.

ABOUT THE INDSPIRE RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE NEST

The Indspire Research Knowledge Nest is the first Indigenous research program of its kind developed in Canada. Indigenous students and recent graduates interested in research careers are chosen to work with Indspire to produce unique research products. The work of Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest provides decision-makers with key insights into the educational attainment of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada, fostering a new understanding of how education supports the overall wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.

This report was produced through the valuable contribution of the Research Nest's Research Assistant Joshua Thomas, member of Snuneymuxw First Nation.

Executive Summary

Since 2004, Indspire has distributed over 42,500 scholarships and bursaries, valued at over $132 million, to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners through our Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards (BBF) program. Indspire understands that the needs and outcomes of Indigenous learners are exceptional and often go unheard and underfunded. Indspire is in the unique position to celebrate Indigenous learners' success and share their challenges with broader audiences, many of whom are able to create change. To support this aim, in 2020, Indspire launched the National Education Survey (NES).

The NES was developed to better understand BBF recipients' post-secondary and labour market outcomes and provided an opportunity for BBF recipients to share their story, speak to the impact of the BBF program, and identify key areas where they require additional support. The survey was administered to the more than 14,000 individuals who received funding from BBF in the past six years. Over 6,500 individuals responded. This report summarizes findings from the NES and explores BBF recipients' educational and labour market success, the roles BBF recipients play in their community, as well as providing insights into Indigenous post-secondary students' challenges and needs.

With respect to educational and labour market accomplishments, BBF recipients continue to have impressive achievements. Nearly 85 percent of all BBF recipients graduate within two years of their expected graduation timeline. Of BBF recipients who are no longer in school, nearly 60 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and almost 90 percent are employed. BBF recipients are engaged in and often giving back to Indigenous communities. Over 40 percent are working in Indigenous communities or for Indigenous governments, businesses and organizations. In many cases, BBF recipients' achievements exceed those of comparable Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations alike. While these individuals have accomplished a great deal, they still identify a number of areas where they could have used additional support during their post-secondary experience and journey to employment. BBF recipients most frequently identified financial constraints as a challenge to their education. Indspire was able to alleviate some financial stress, and the majority of BBF recipients agreed or strongly agreed that the BBF award allowed them to spend more time on their studies.

Even with Indspire's support, over 60 percent of respondents worked on average approximately 17 hours per week while in school, making their graduation rates even more impressive. More than 80 percent of those who worked during their post-secondary education (PSE) reported that they worked in order to pay for their necessary expenses during their studies.

As past Building Brighter Futures recipients continue their education and begin to transition into the workforce, we look forward to seeing their contributions and positive influence on themselves, their families and communities, and Canada. Indspire additionally looks forward to supporting the next wave of Indigenous people setting out on their educational journeys as we follow our North Star vision: that, within a generation, every Indigenous student will graduate.

Introduction

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION REALITIES & METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY DETAILS

Indspire stewards its relationships with students and is deeply invested in understanding their experiences. Indspire launched the National Education Survey (Indspire, 2020) in order to better understand Indigenous students' needs in addition to identifying and celebrating their successes. Our hope is that in sharing the results of the survey, we will galvanize action across sectors to continue to enable Indigenous students' educational achievement.

More specifically, Indspire is interested in Building Brighter Futures recipients' academic experiences, their educational and labour market outcomes, and how best to support Indigenous students' success. While our previous report, *Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience* (Indspire, 2019) gave a voice to Indigenous students' experience at post-secondary institutions, this report focuses on examining their educational experiences, including graduation rates, highest level of educational attainment, career satisfaction, the impact the BBF award had on recipients' experiences, and how to better support positive outcomes.

Our monitoring and survey results show that BBF recipients have a lot to celebrate, but even with Indspire's support, financial stress constitutes a significant barrier for Indigenous students enrolling in or attending post-secondary education institutions. Frequently, BBF recipients report the notable impact of Indspire's financial support on their studies. Throughout this report, the analysis of the NES is substantiated by our recipients' own words.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION REALITIES

Beyond individual students' needs, Indspire understands the systemic issues impacting Indigenous peoples' access to education. Canada's Indigenous history includes a legacy of the Indian Act, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop of Indigenous children from their homes. These policies, along with others, have profoundly scarred Indigenous communities. While colonialism and its effects weigh heavily on many Indigenous communities, the successes of Indigenous students and their testimony reflect a legacy of resilience and survival.

Statistics Canada's 2016 Census of the Population gave insights into the quickly growing population of Indigenous peoples in Canada and their educational and labour market outcomes. On average, Indigenous people in Canada are younger than non-Indigenous, with nearly 60 percent under 30 years old (Statistics Canada, 2019). Indspire aims to support Indigenous people of all ages in achieving their educational goals. With the growing number of young people getting ready to enter post-secondary education, the financial need of Indigenous learners will only grow.

Related to this, we are seeing a marked increase in the number of Indigenous students attending or wanting to attend post-secondary education. We view this positively. However, there is insufficient funding to support this shift. In 2018-2019, Indspire only had enough funding to meet 22 percent of the actual financial need of the students that applied for financial support. Indspire continues to develop private and public partnerships and collaborates with many other organizations and individuals to increase Indspire's funding base to better support Indigenous educational achievements.

Understanding the needs of Indigenous students is a vital first step in understanding how Indspire, governments, and other stakeholders can answer the call and better support access to education for all Indigenous people.

METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY DETAILS

In order to explore the educational and employment experiences of BBF recipients, Indspire developed the National Education Survey. The survey was administered to anyone who had received BBF funding between 2013 and 2020, totaling 14,185 individuals. The survey response rate was 46.5 percent, with somewhat higher participation among recipients who had received an award in more recent years. The profile of students who responded to the survey can be found in the Appendix A.

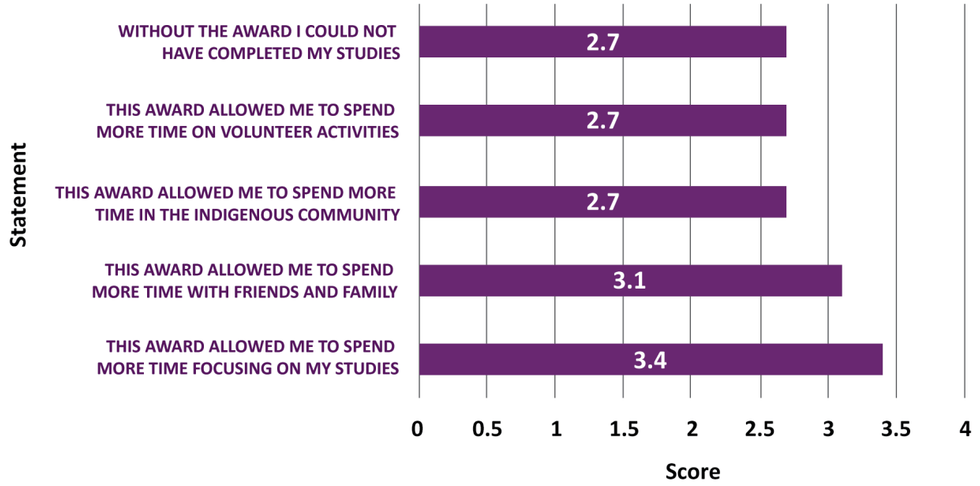
Insights into Indigenous Students' Needs

Indspire was interested in the effect of receiving Building Brighter Futures funding on a student. Past recipients were asked about the effect on their studies, relationship with family and friends, time spent with Indigenous communities, and volunteer activities, as well as an overall effect on completion of their program (Figure 1). While recipients reported slightly positive effects for each parameter, the strongest positive indication was in response to allowing students to spend more time focusing on their studies. This reflects what we heard from students. By reducing time working and stress related to financial concerns, Building Brighter Futures allows students to focus on their studies:

"My grades are higher than they would have been without the award. I would have been required to work throughout the full-time program and would not have had enough time to study to keep an A GPA."

"When I received the award(s) I was able to stay close to the university and study and I became a role model for several of the younger students...I had at least three young people come up to me and tell me that seeing me every day at the Aboriginal Student Lounge studying made them feel positive and that if I could do it then they too could do it. That made me feel really good. You never know how deeply your mere presence can affect someone."

Figure 1: Effects of Receiving a Building Brighter Futures Award



Strongly disagree = 0, disagree = 1, neither agree nor disagree = 2, agree = 3, strongly agree = 4. Reference: NES (2020)

Students also have shared stories of the effect receiving Indspire's BBF funding had on their relationship with families:

"My son was inspired and is now working towards a career as a social worker/community worker to help our Indigenous community. My mother who is a Residential School Survivor takes pride in knowing that the inter-generational cycle is being broken and we are healing as a family and inspiring our youth to achieve greater things in life."

"By completing the program, it has demonstrated to my two children that education is a priority, especially for First Nations people as it gives us more opportunity to occupy spaces that our ancestors were not allowed to hold."

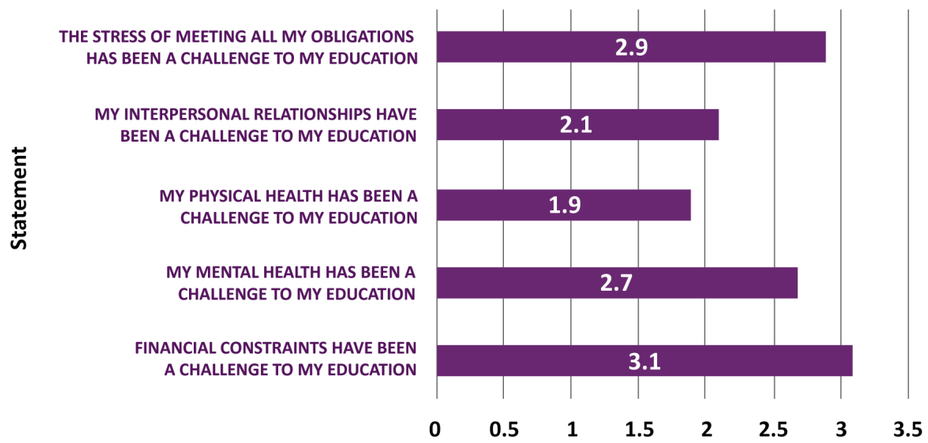
"I have a lot of family responsibility including caring for parents who are ill and can't work and supporting my grandmother. This scholarship meant that I could spend less time doing paid work, and more time with my family. It reduced the stress of finding balance between school success and family responsibilities. I was also able to ensure that I stay connected to community cultural and social events."

"After I completed university, my mother, after 10 years out of school went back and completed a diploma. This would never had happened if she hadn't seen me in the spaces first."

The intergenerational effects of BBF funding and impact on individuals' families and communities is made clear.

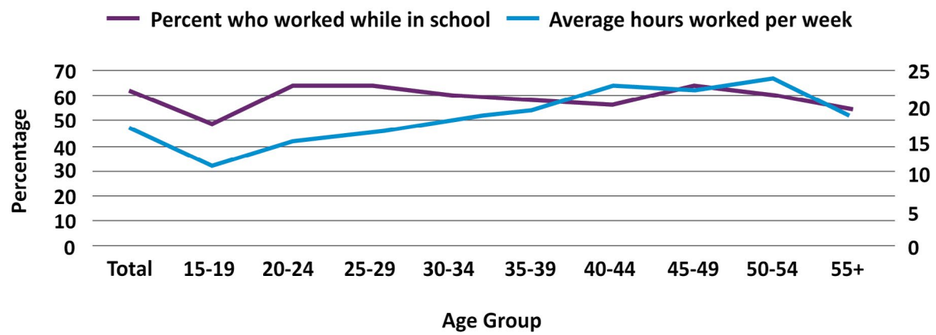
When we ask recipients what factors have been the greatest challenge to their academic success, we again find a common story (Figure 2). Financial constraints remain a barrier for students. As Building Brighter Futures historically has able to meet approximately 20 percent of students' financial need, this is no surprise. The importance of BBF remains clear: students need funding to remain successful in their programs.

Figure 2: Challenges to Education



Strongly disagree = 0, disagree = 1, neither agree nor disagree = 2, agree = 3, strongly agree = 4. Reference: NES (2020)

Figure 3: Hour and Percentage of Individuals who Worked During Studies, by Age Group

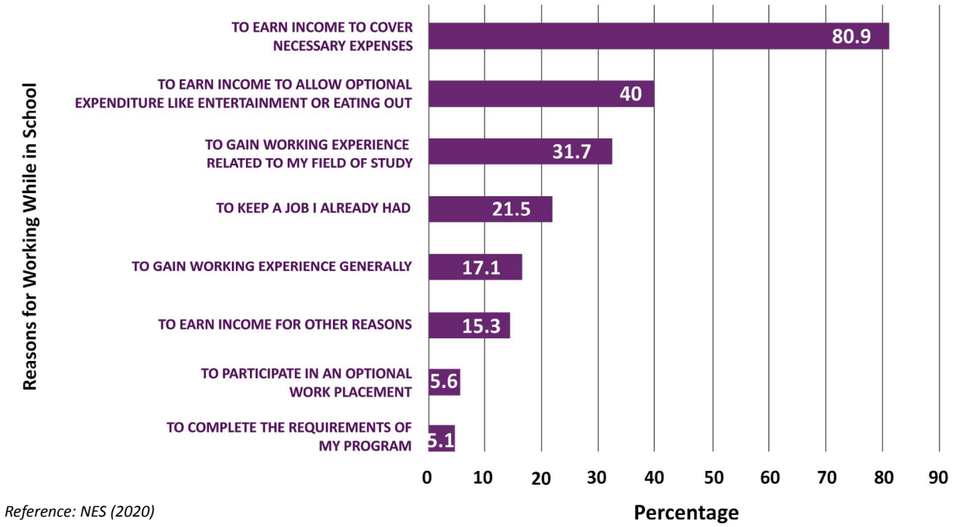


Reference: NES (2020)

Indspire wanted to shed light on how else students are meeting their financial needs. Respondents were asked if they worked while in school and the average amount of time they worked per week (Figure 3). Overall, nearly two-thirds of Building Brighter Futures recipients worked approximately 17 hours per week while they were studying. It appears the likelihood of working was similar across age groups, but mature students worked more hours on average.

Given that the majority of students are working part-time while attending school, the NES investigated why students were working (Figure 4). The majority (80.9 percent) of students worked to earn income to cover basic expenses.

Figure 4: Reasons for Working While Studying



Reference: NES (2020)

Educational Outcomes

PROGRAM COMPLETION & HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

Considering their educational outcomes, BBF recipients have a lot to celebrate. This section explores BBF recipients' educational outcomes, including program completion and graduation rates, and highest level of educational attainment. Indspire is interested in Building Brighter Futures recipients' academic experience and their educational outcomes, including their successful completion of PSE.

PROGRAM COMPLETION

The NES provided an opportunity for BBF recipients to report on their pathways through PSE and the completion of their programs. Given that the survey was distributed to recipients who were completing various levels of study over the past six years, Table A displays the percentage of total students who graduated on time or graduated within various timeframes from their expected graduation.

We observe that the percentage of recipients who graduate increases as we are further from their expected graduation dates. We can understand from this that, while 75.8 percent of recipients graduate on time, more will graduate within two (83.2 percent) or four years (88.4 percent) of their expected graduation. For those recipients who have not graduated from their programs, Indspire was interested in knowing why. Recipients were asked if they were still in their programs (in progress), had switched to a new program (adding length to the duration of their studies), had put their studies on hold, or did not complete their studies (Table A). Remarkably, 1 percent or fewer of BBF recipients have indicated they did not complete their program at all.

Table A: Building Brighter Futures Recipients and Program Completion

	Graduated	In progress	Switched programs	Put on hold	Did not complete
+ 1 years	75.8	19.4	1.8	2.3	0.7
+ 2 years	83.2	12.0	1.8	2.2	0.7
+ 3 years	85.4	10.0	1.9	1.7	1.0
+ 4 years	88.4	7.3	1.9	1.4	0.9

Reference: NES (2020)

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

Building Brighter Futures recipients have completed various levels of study, from college diplomas and doctorates to trades certificates and professional designations. In order to understand BBF recipients' achievements in the broader Canadian context, we leveraged Statistics Canada (2016) data to examine the highest educational attainment of non-Indigenous people in Canada and the Indigenous population of Canada. Only recipients over 25 years old were considered in the comparable Census statistics (Figure 5).

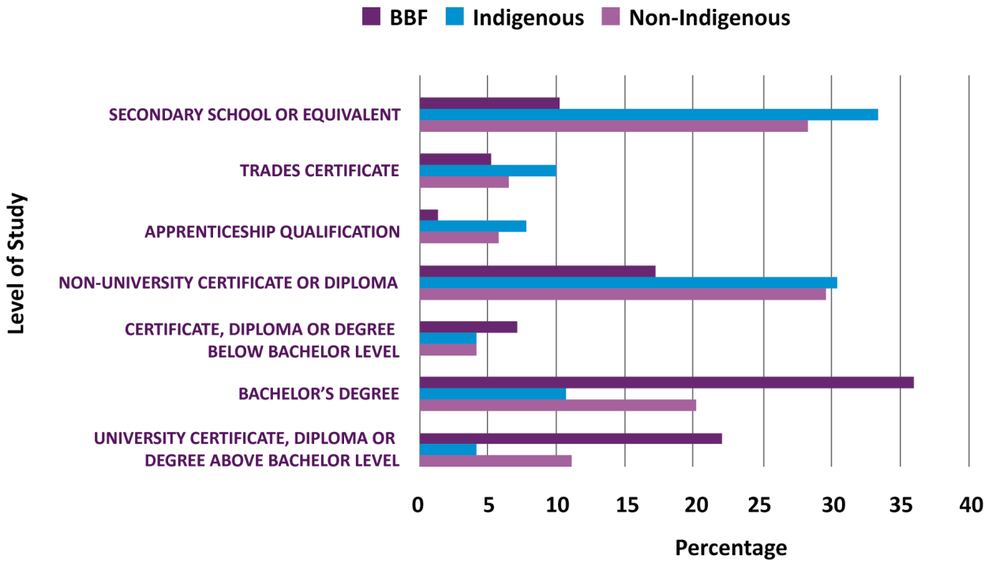
The achievements of Building Brighter Futures recipients cannot be overstated. Nearly 60 percent of recipients hold a bachelor's degree or above. More than 17 percent hold a non-university certificate or diploma and seven percent hold a trades certificate or apprenticeship qualification.

It is apparent that BBF recipients differ from the broader populations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada (Figure 5). BBF recipients are more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or above than the general non-Indigenous population, as well as the Indigenous population across Canada. They are less likely than the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population to hold a non-university certificate or diploma as their highest qualification.

While the financial support the Building Brighter Futures Program provides to Indigenous students is believed to contribute to their success, these rates of high educational attainment are likely due to a combination of factors, including the students' abilities and perseverance, Indigenous student support centres, and familial and community support. However, reflecting on the voices and testimony of the students is telling. BBF recipients shared how they felt Indspire and BBF have contributed to their academic achievement.

"[Receiving financial assistance from Indspire has] eased my financial burden and allowed me to spend more time focused on my studies. I have received this scholarship for the past two years, which allowed me to limit my shifts at work and spend more time studying. My grades have been better with this award than they would have been without."

Figure 5: Highest Level of Educational Attainment of Building Brighter Futures Recipients, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people in Canada



Reference: NES, 2020 and Statistics Canada: 98-400-X2016178

"The Building Brighter Futures Award helped me realize how lucky I was to be able to study in a field I wanted to grow in and gave me strength to continue my studies when I was almost ready to give up."

"… I beat the odds, and here I am still attending university, working towards my goal, and I truly believe that this award has given me the push that I needed to continue thriving. My performance in school was outstanding, and I worked hard to achieve even better grades than I had before, after receiving this award. It also helped relieve some of the stress I was focused on with finances."

Time and again, we hear from students that Indspire's influence on their education has allowed them to focus on their studies by alleviating financial strain and decreasing the burden of stress. It is common that students report receiving a Building Brighter Futures award has encouraged them to continue their studies, validating them as Indigenous students in post-secondary education.

Employment

The NES provided insights into the employment of those recipients who finished their education. It allows for the examination of the employment status of recipients, as well as their career satisfaction, including how well that work relates to their studies and goals.

In order to understand BBF employment outcomes, we examined the characteristics of Building Brighter Futures recipients who completed their BBF funded post-secondary degree and are 20 years or older and compared outcomes to those of similarly aged Indigenous people in Canada (Table B). Generally, 89.4 percent of this subset of BBF recipients are employed, a much higher employment rate than the Indigenous population in Canada (75.9 percent). BBF recipients report higher employment rates and lower rates of individuals not in the labour force relative to the Indigenous population 20 years or older regardless of highest level of educational attainment.

It is also true that unemployment is lower for BBF recipients than the general Indigenous population. It is important to note that both employment and unemployment can be higher because participation rates in the labour force is greater for Building Brighter Futures recipients. Overall, only 2.2 percent of past BBF recipients were not participating in the labour force at the time of the NES.

Of all education levels, the percentage of unemployed individuals is highest among Building Brighter Futures recipients who have completed trades certificates. Nearly one-quarter of BBF recipients with trades certificates are unemployed, relative to 13.8 percent in the broader Indigenous population. The unemployment rate generally decreases with higher levels of education. However, 9.2 percent of bachelor's degree holders are unemployed, well above the 6.2 percent for the broader Indigenous population. Overall, BBF recipients have much higher rates of employment and labour force participation than the broader Indigenous populations. Other factors that may be driving differences in outcomes by level of educational attainment present an area for further research and exploration.

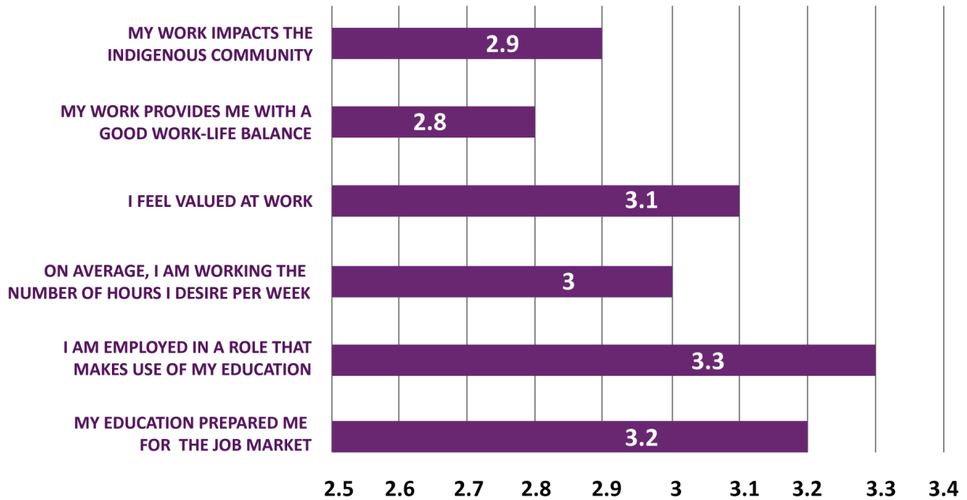
Table B: Labour Force Status by Highest Level of Educational Attainment for Building Brighter Futures Recipients and the Indigenous Population, Age 20 Years or Older

	Building Brighter Futures			Indigenous		
Highest Educational attainment	**Employed**	**Unemployed**	**Not in Labour Force**	**Employed**	**Unemployed**	**Not in Labour Force**
Total	89.4	8.4	2.2	75.9	9.2	14.9
Trades certificate	72.2	24.1	3.8	65.6	13.8	20.6
Apprentice-ship qualifi-cation	85.7	14.3	0.0	74.8	12.3	12.9
Non-university certificate or diploma	88.3	8.5	3.2	75.2	9.0	15.9
University certificate, diploma or degree be-low bache-lor level	85.2	8.6	6.2	75.1	8.0	16.9
Bachelor's degree	88.6	9.2	2.2	83.8	6.2	10.0
University certificate, diploma or degree above bach-elor level	95.2	4.0	0.8	85.3	4.7	10.0

Reference: NES, 2020 and Statistics Canada: 98-400-X2016287

In addition to being employed, it is important that the type and quality of work aligns with recipients' areas and level of study (Figure 6). Recipients who completed their program and were employed stated that they agreed that their education prepared them for the job market and that their current role utilizes their education. In their places of employment, the recipients felt valued. These individuals generally were working the number of hours per week that they desired to work. Overall, it does appear that past BBF recipients who have finished their programs and are employed are working in satisfying employment conditions.

Figure 6: Level of Agreement with Employment Satisfaction Questions for Survey Respondents who are Employed and Completed Program Score



Strongly disagree = 0, disagree = 1, neither agree nor disagree = 2, agree = 3, strongly agree = 4. Reference: NES (2020)

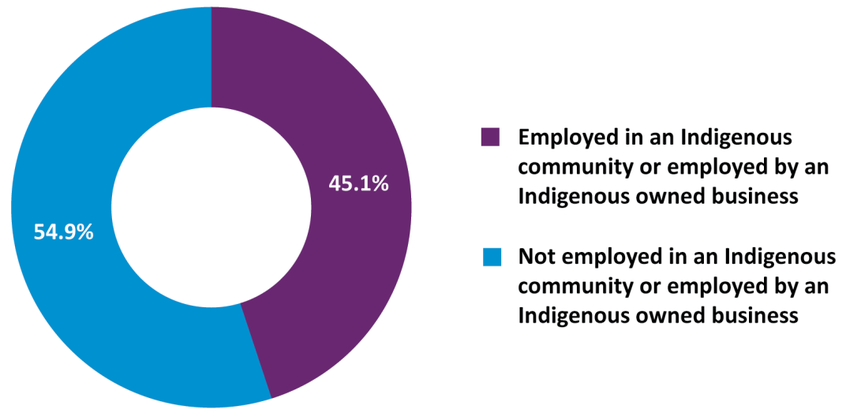
The relationship between employment satisfaction and receiving a Building Brighter Futures award was described by some survey respondents.

"This award allowed me to step back from some of my paid work and choose to only do work that directly related to my studies (internships and research positions), or that built specific skills that I wanted to bring into my future field. This meant that any of the paid work I did do enhanced, rather than deterred from, my studies."

"… Receiving this award meant that I could take a Research Assistant position at my school that paid very little and had very few hours but ultimately allowed me to gain experience relevant to my career. If I had not had this award, I would have had to miss out on all of the extra-curricular and volunteer activities I undertook within the school."

Reciprocity is a value Indspire shares with many Indigenous communities. We were interested in how many Building Brighter Futures recipients were able to directly work in Indigenous communities or for an Indigenous business. Many recipients consider their work as impacting Indigenous communities. When considering the type of employment, approximately nearly 50 percent of BBF recipients work directly in an Indigenous community or for an Indigenous-owned business, community or government.

Figure 7: Indigenous Employer and Community Relationship



Reference: NES (2020)

The commitment recipients have to their communities affects their academic and career choices. The initial investment in Building Brighter Futures recipients is amplified through their contributions to their communities.

"It felt good to be believed in. I worked hard– at my studies, in holding multiple jobs, and doing community service projects, and it felt like someone finally saw that and helped. The financial help also made it possible to go back to my community and work on a design project, something that totally impacted my life and career direction."

"I have been able to come back to my communities with the knowledge I have gained through travel and my courses here and contribute to teaching healthy lifestyles and the importance of education to youth on my home reserve."

"The financial support of Building Brighter Futures allowed me to pay off my student loan faster than expected. I now am able to open my own practice on my nearby reserve to better assist my local Indigenous community, with which I identify. I don't have to work for a local firm to pay off my student loan before I can open my own practice. I can now fulfill the promise I made to myself when I began this journey, which was to give back to my Indigenous community."

CONCLUSION

The analysis of NES data illustrates the successful graduation and employment outcomes that occur when Indigenous people are supported in their pursuit of post-secondary education.

This program is a testament to the importance of supporting Indigenous students so they can complete their education, become self-sufficient, enhance their ability to support their families and give back to their communities and to Canada.

Additionally, this report sheds light on the continued need for financial support for Indigenous students, and additional actions to remove the barriers and challenges Indigenous students face in accessing post-secondary education.

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Statistics Canada. (2019). Aboriginal Peoples Highlight Tables, 2016 Census: Aboriginal identity population by both sexes, total - age, 2016 counts, Canada, provinces and territories, 2016 Census – 25% Sample data.

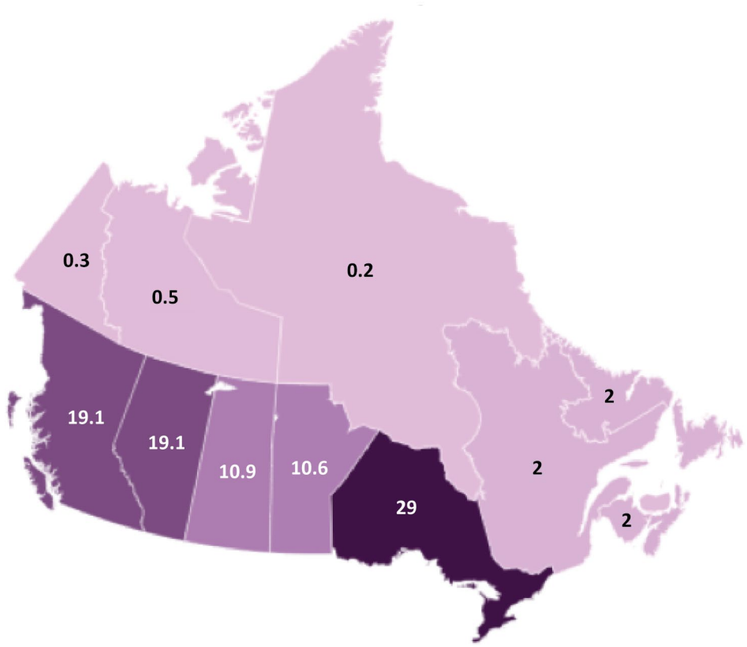
APPENDIX A

PROFILE OF STUDENTS SUPPORTED AND BBF PROGRAM

The National Education Survey was deployed to all individuals who received an award through the Building Brighter Futures program since 2013. Since 2013, recipients received over $79 million in scholarships and bursaries. Of these, over 40 percent responded to the National Education Survey. The following section provides a snapshot of who those respondents are.

Many of the respondents came from one of five provinces: Ontario (29.0 percent); British Columbia (19.1 percent); Alberta (19.1 percent); Saskatchewan (10.9 percent); and Manitoba (10.6 percent) (Figure 8). This matches well with the broader recipient population.

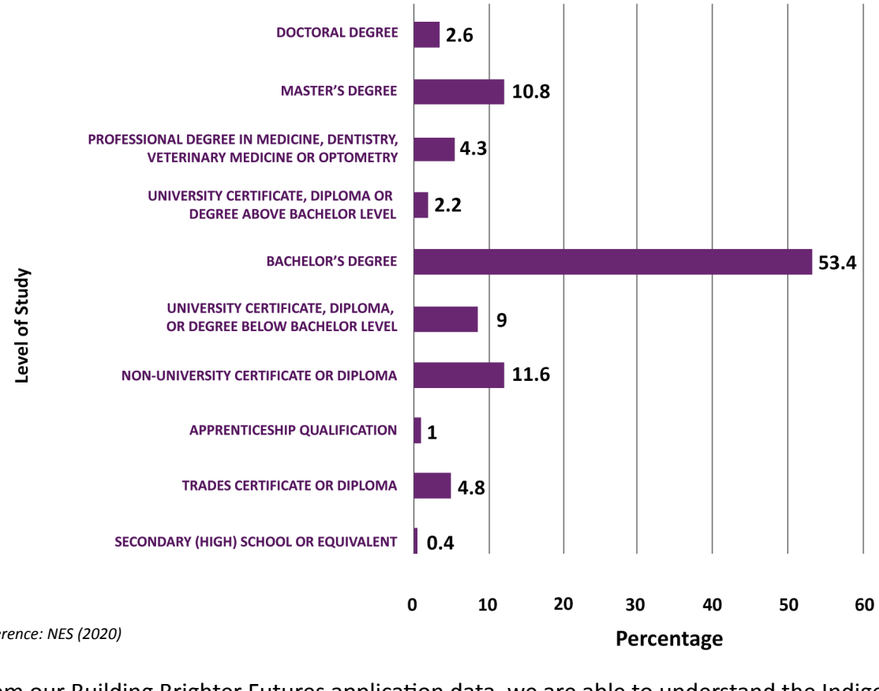
Figure 8: Geographic Distribution of National Education Survey Respondents



Reference: NES (2020)

More than half of the individuals who responded to the survey received that funding for a bachelor's degree. Non-university certificates (11.6 percent) and master's degree (10.8 percent) were also common levels of study (Figure 9).

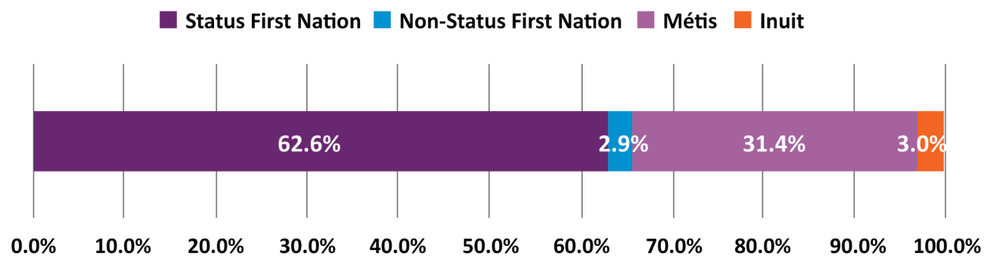
Figure 9: Level of Study of Respondents to the National Education Survey



Reference: NES (2020)

From our Building Brighter Futures application data, we are able to understand the Indigenous identity of recipients. The majority of recipients are Status First Nations (62.6 percent). Métis students make up about one-third of recipients. Inuit and Non-Status First Nations students make up approximately three percent of recipients.

Figure 10: Indigenous Identity of Building Brighter Futures Recipients



Reference: BBF application data (2013-2020)

BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES: BURSARIES, SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS PROGRAM RECIPIENTS' OUTCOME REPORT

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