



Indspire

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



Supporting Indigenous Caregivers Through Their Post-Secondary Experience

By Kayleigh Wiebe, MA

Supporting Indigenous Caregivers Through Their Post-Secondary Experience

By Kayleigh Wiebe, MA

Introduction

Indspire aims to see that “within a generation, every Indigenous student will graduate”, and since nearly one third of all Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards (BBF) applicants and recipients are caregivers responsible for at least two dependents (children, Elders, partners, etc.), it is critical for Indspire to understand our students who have dependents and their needs to ensure that we are effectively supporting them to succeed in their chosen fields. Indspire has a role to play in ensuring that all Indigenous students can have equitable support in achieving their post-secondary goals. To this end, this report will identify the needs of BBF applicants and recipients who are caregivers (who will be referred to as caregivers throughout the remainder of this report), which of their needs we are meeting, and ways we could better assist caregivers throughout their post-secondary journey.

The Research Process

To understand the scope of caregivers’ needs, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used to analyze the BBF application data and Indspire’s National Education Survey (NES) results. The data analyzed in this report focused on BBF applicants and recipients in the following academic years: 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020. Examining data from the last three years is useful in understanding trends in caregivers’ needs while still applying the newest data for the most applicable results.

Between 2017-2020, there were 14,509 BBF recipients and 1,110 unfunded applicants, for a total of 15,619 total applicants during this period. This count includes students who have applied for or received multiple BBF awards during this period. Out of these applications, 4,486 were submitted by caregivers, and 11,133 were from applicants who did not have dependents. These totals were collected from the BBF application data and are the populations who inform the findings contained in this report. Using this data, we can gain a more accurate understanding of the financial needs of caregivers.

The qualitative analysis in this report was informed by the NES, which was administered to all BBF award recipients between August 2013 and February 2020, totalling 14,185 students across Canada. Of the 14,185 students, 6,599 responded, resulting in a response rate of 46.5%. Refining the analysis of the NES data to caregivers between 2017-2020 resulted in 805 respondents. Using the data from the NES, we were better able to understand the intensity of caregivers’ needs, along with further details regarding areas in which they may require additional support.

Findings and Analysis

Caregivers Have Increased Financial Needs

In our most recent report, “[Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards Program Recipients’ Outcomes Report](#)” (2020), an imminent problem in Indigenous education in Canada was identified: while more and more Indigenous students are attending or want to attend post-secondary institutions, the funding is not available to adequately support them. The BBF application data shows that this is particularly the case for our BBF applicants who are caregivers; on average, they have \$3,913 in additional financial needs in comparison with non-caregivers.

Currently, we are meeting 23% of all applicants’ financial needs. However, there is a noticeable gap in the financial needs met of those with dependents and those without. While Indspire meets 25% of non-caregivers’ needs, we are only able to meet 18% of caregivers’ financial needs. An additional \$4,892,890 in funding for caregivers (\$1,091 per award) is needed to meet at least 25% of caregivers’ financial needs.

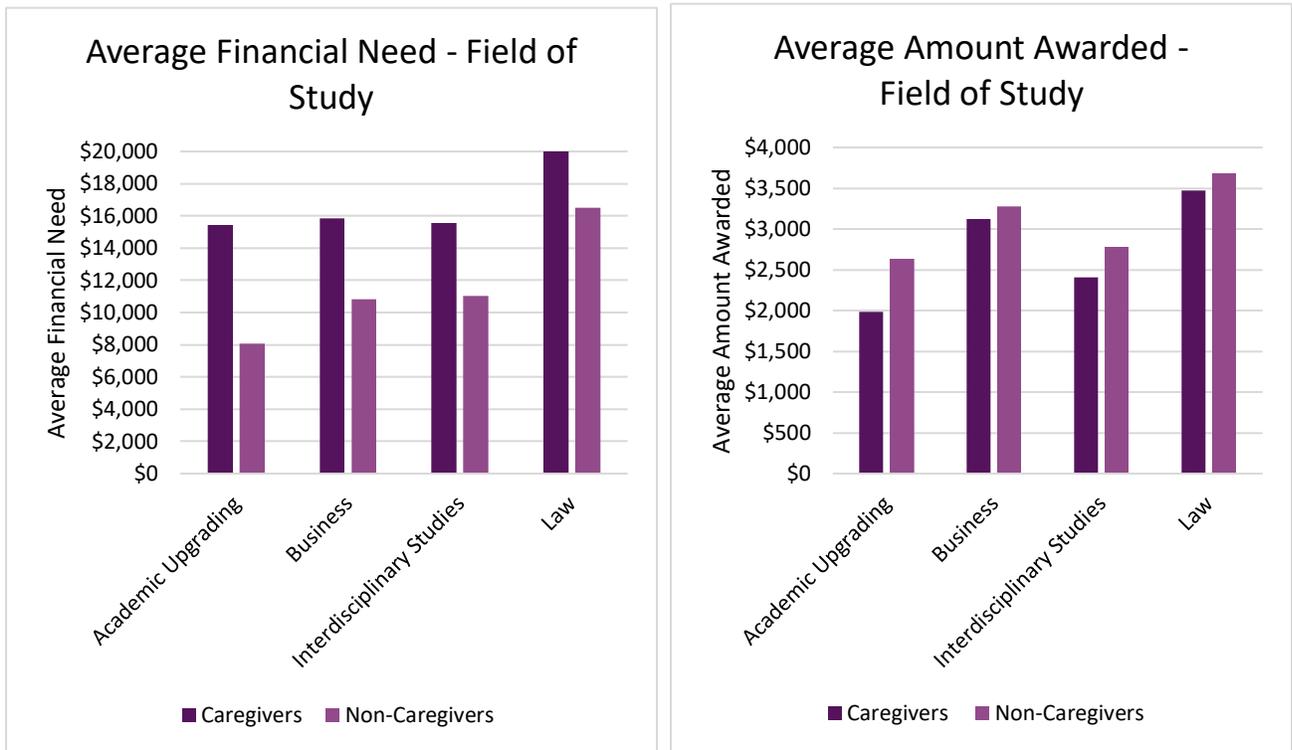
Table 1: Financial Need Assessment of BBF Recipients and Applicants who are Caregivers and Non-Caregivers from 2017-2020 (n = 15,619)

Type of Recipient	Number of Applicants	Financial Need	Average Financial Need	Amount Awarded	Average Amount Awarded	Percent Need Met
Caregiver	4,486	\$73,232,918	\$16,325	\$13,415,339	\$2,990	18%
Non-caregiver	11,133	\$138,180,016	\$12,412	\$34,865,764	\$3,132	25%
Total	15,619	\$211,412,934	\$13,536	\$48,281,103	\$3,091	23%

Increased Funding Especially Needed in Four Fields of Study

Through an analysis of award allocations between 2017-2020 for BBF recipients who are caregivers, there is a trend in the following four fields of study in which increased funding for caregivers is urgently needed: Academic Upgrading, Business, Interdisciplinary Studies (e.g. Conflict Studies and Community Development), and Law. Across the span of three academic years, these fields of study have fewer awards allocated for BBF recipients who are caregivers – and these caregivers have an increased financial need on average of \$5,194 in comparison to their counterparts in these fields of study who do not have dependents (Figure 1).

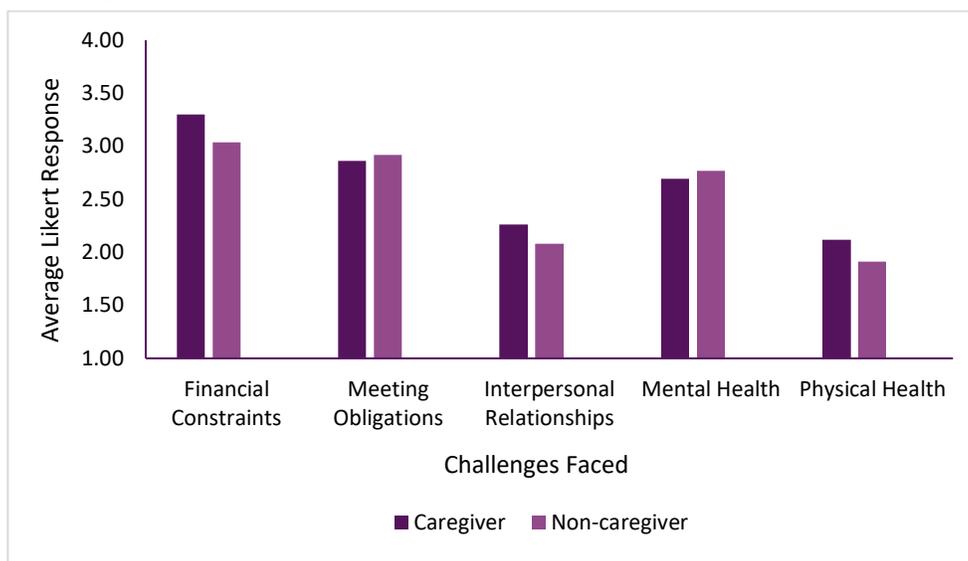
Figure 1: Caregivers' and Non-Caregivers' Average Financial Need Requested and Average Amount Awarded by Major Fields of Study (n = 2,947)



Caregivers Particularly Feel the Intensity of Financial Constraints

In Indspire’s most recent NES report, participants were asked about the biggest challenges in their post-secondary journey. Financial constraints were identified as the greatest challenge for both BBF recipients who are caregivers and those who are non-caregivers. However, the average responses of BBF recipients who are caregivers were closer to the “strongly agree” end of the scale when asked if financial constraints had been a challenge to their education (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Likert Response Rate for Challenges to Caregivers' and Non-Caregivers' Educational Experiences (n = 2,747)



Strongly disagree = 0, disagree = 1, neither agree nor disagree = 2, agree = 3, strongly agree = 4

While a complete qualitative analysis with peer review was not conducted, we reviewed the NES open-ended questions regarding impact and support and grouped the responses into themes. One major theme identified in this qualitative review corresponded with the Likert scale findings: financial constraints are the biggest challenges to BBF recipients who are caregivers.

When asked in the NES how the award impacted them, over half of the BBF recipients who are caregivers stated that this award helped to relieve their financial burdens, whether that was generally alleviating the stresses of trying to support a family as a student, or more specifically helping with rent or childcare.

...[T]he Building Brighter Futures Award has given me [the] opportunity to support my family and provide a roof over their head for the duration of a semester. Without the award, financially supporting my children ... would have been almost next to impossible. It provided a financial cushion throughout the academic year.

When asked what Indspire could do to improve the post-secondary experience for BBF recipients, many respondents who are caregivers stated that they would like to see Indspire continue to support Indigenous students and increase the amount of funding they are receiving, particularly for those who are caregivers. Sometimes the recommendations for more funding were specific – for example, more funding for those students who need to buy technology to complete their program – while others were more general requests for more awards to be made available to Indigenous students.

Provide more support for mothers trying to complete their studies for a better future for their children. Provide more opportunit[ies] for part-time students even though the belief is that they are able to work. I was not able to work at the time and even

now I shouldn't be working, it is causing me to fall behind in my studies but without the income I would not be able to feed my children as my partner works seasonal and is off all winter.

Additional Areas of Support

Our respondents also mentioned a craving for mentorship and community-building between BBF recipients and other Indigenous peoples in post-secondary education generally or specifically in their field of study. Indspire's Rivers to Success (R2S) program has been increasing their mentorship and community-building programming in response to Indspire's "[Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience Report](#)" (2018), in which students called for an increase in Indigenous teaching and mentorship resources to support them throughout their educational journey. The expansion of R2S should also address some of the requests from BBF recipients who are caregivers for additional mentorship support, and to be matched with mentors who are also caregivers.

Perhaps, Indspire can have a mentorship type program for those students who have successfully graduated in their programs - their experiences and their challenges can be shared with students going through similar situations. This may encourage more students who face various types of struggles or previously made commitments (financial, family, employment) and know that with in their time, they will be able to successfully complete their program as well. There are several times I've wanted to giv[e] up my education.

Limitations

The limitations of this research should be considered carefully when making comparisons to the broader population of Indigenous post-secondary students, since BBF applicants and recipients only represent a portion of Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education; thus, the results may not be representative. As well, the results from this report were informed by secondary data sources such as the NES and Indspire's administrative data, rather than using primary data collection methods such as surveys or interviews; the latter would have asked caregivers only about their experiences in post-secondary education, with more specific questions tailored to their particular journeys. A key disadvantage of using secondary data is that the conclusions drawn may not be as accurate or as detailed as they would have been if we had used a primary data collection method that directly asked about caregivers' experiences in post-secondary education.

The qualitative data was accrued from Indspire's NES, whose respondents were former BBF recipients who voluntarily responded to this survey. The sample was not random, and the data was not weighted to reflect the demographics of the BBF recipient population. This means that there may be experiences which were not captured in these results, and that the responses we did receive may not accurately reflect the intensity of BBF recipients' successes and challenges in their post-secondary education. Another limitation regarding the qualitative data in this study is that during the analysis process,

only one researcher was responsible for performing the content and thematic review of the successes, challenges, and comments of the NES respondents. Analysis from just one lens may miss other important aspects mentioned by the NES respondents, and there may be multiple interpretations of this type of qualitative data.

The results also do not take into consideration that our BBF applicants and recipients often apply year after year and receive multiple awards across the span of their degree(s). Therefore, some applicants' financial needs and awards allocated may be double-counted in these results and may account for some discrepancies in the areas analyzed. It is also possible that these results are impacted by award requirements outlined by funders – namely, field of study, GPA, geography, and other conditions.

Conclusion

While the number of Indigenous students who want to attend post-secondary institutions is increasing, the funding is often not available to adequately support them in achieving their educational goals. This scarcity of funding particularly impacts Indigenous students with dependents, who have greatly increased financial needs in comparison to their counterparts who do not have dependents. On average, caregivers have \$3,913 in additional financial needs compared with their non-caregiver counterparts. To equitably fund caregivers, an increase in funding for caregivers of \$1,091 per award on average is needed to at least match the percent of financial need met of non-caregivers. There are four fields of study in which increased funding for caregivers is urgently needed: Academic Upgrading, Business, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Law.

A further review of the qualitative NES responses from BBF recipients who are caregivers identifies that they particularly feel the intensity of financially supporting their family while meeting academic demands in comparison to their counterparts without dependents. As a result, increased financial support for BBF recipients who are caregivers has been identified by the NES respondents as a place where more resources are necessary to improve their post-secondary experience. Finally, caregivers identified that continued facilitation of mentorship programs for Indigenous students, with particular focus on being matched with mentors who are also caregivers, would enhance their experiences in post-secondary education.

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to provide an understanding of our BBF applicants and recipients who are caregivers. Based on this research, Indspire will be able to use this data to advocate for more funding specifically to support applicants who are caregivers and increase targeted mentorship programs between Indigenous students with dependents in post-secondary institutions. However, as BBF applicants only represent a portion of Indigenous students with dependents pursuing post-secondary education, the results may not be representative of all Indigenous students, and we would recommend a broader examination of these students' post-secondary experiences. As well, the COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating, wide-reaching impacts globally, and further research on how the pandemic is impacting caregivers in their post-secondary

experience would provide a more accurate lens on the contemporary strains they are feeling at this time.

References

1. Indspire (2020). "[Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards Program Recipients' Outcomes Report.](#)"
2. Indspire (2018). "[Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience.](#)"