I am pleased to once more share, on behalf of Indspire’s Board of Directors, an exciting report about Indspire’s many notable achievements over the past twelve months.

Despite the numerous challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Indspire continued to be a steadfast support for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, awarding over $20 million in scholarships, bursaries and awards to 6,245 Indigenous students through the Building Brighter Futures (BBF) program in 2020-21.

None of this would have been possible without the generous support of government and Indigenous leadership, sponsors, and individual donors from across Canada who believe that now, more than ever, investing in Indigenous students is critical to both the process of reconciliation and to Canada as a whole.

Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards Program Recipients’ Outcomes Report, a report by Indspire’s Research Knowledge Nest, revealed that 89% of Indigenous graduates supported by Indspire find employment following graduation – and 45% of them go on to work within the Indigenous community or with an Indigenous owned business, indicating that reciprocity is very important to Indspire-funded students. Not only are they building brighter futures for themselves, they are also creating change for Indigenous people across Canada.

Although we are proud of the many ways in which Indspire has managed to support Indigenous students through this challenging year, the fact remains that Indigenous people have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our students are still struggling with education-related costs, and unless we continue to support them in effective and innovative ways, they will continue to disproportionately feel the pandemic’s impact.

On behalf of the Board, I would also like to thank Dr. Mike DeGagné, our new President & CEO, who joined us in November 2020 in the middle of this momentous fiscal year, and Roberta Jamieson, our outgoing President & CEO, whose prescient and courageous leadership has been an inspiration. With his extensive background in public service and his longstanding commitment to Indigenizing education across Canada, Mike has gone above and beyond to strengthen Indspire’s voice as an authoritative source of information and support for Indigenous education.

Under his insightful guidance, Indspire has not only continued to be a key support for Indigenous students during this time, it has also expanded its mandate to successfully assist both Indigenous students and educators in the face of unprecedented challenges, re-envisioning events like our National Gathering for Indigenous Education and Soaring, our Indigenous Youth Empowerment Gathering.

Although he has only been with us for a relatively short time, the impact of his actions has already been profound.

Chi-miigwech (thank you),
David Tuccaro
CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS
This past year has been a time of unprecedented change on a global scale — change which has revealed much about what we as a society collectively need, what we have, and where we are ultimately going. Here at Indspire, we quickly realized that there has never been a more critical time to support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students. With Indigenous communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous students found themselves facing a myriad of pandemic-related challenges.

We endeavoured to respond swiftly to these challenges. Not only did Indspire manage to support over 6,200 Indigenous students with over $20 million in financial assistance through our Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards program, we also provided the connection and mentorship that Indigenous students have continually told us they need. Our Rivers to Success Indigenous Mentorship program created a wide variety of innovative resources and hosted numerous events for Indigenous students to keep them grounded with good mentorship and to enhance their educational experience, even in the face of multiple disruptions.

We also continued to provide the kind of effective, ground-breaking programming for both Indigenous educators and Indigenous students that our supporters have come to expect, executing highly successful virtual events for both our National Gathering for Indigenous Education and Soaring, our Indigenous Youth Empowerment Gathering. Both multi-day events drew a wide array of attendees and featured popular virtual tradeshows as well as thought-provoking workshops.

Indspire’s Research Knowledge Nest also continued to successfully execute its mandate, with the first cohort of Research Assistants completing incisive research about Indigenous post-secondary students and their educational outcomes. With over 3,000 students responding to the Following the Path survey, they were able to garner new insights — not only about how Indigenous students are weathering the pandemic, but also how they are experiencing reconciliation at post-secondary institutions.

At Indspire, we are encouraged to see how the resilience, ingenuity, and strength of Indigenous students is enabling them to succeed despite the obstacles placed in their way by both the pandemic and by the systematic inequalities they faced before 2020. In my very first year as President and CEO of Indspire — a decidedly unconventional year — I am proud to have the opportunity to lead an Indigenous organization that is creating real, systemic change for not only Indigenous students, but also for their communities.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO (CONTINUED)

All of this work would not have been possible without a wide variety of friends and partners who are also committed to the success of Indigenous students. On a personal note, I would like to say chi miigwech (thank you) to the Indspire staff who are resolutely committed to our work, to David Tuccaro, the chair of our board, to all the board of directors who continue to provide expert guidance to our endeavours, and to Roberta Jamieson, whose expert guidance benefited both Indspire and Indigenous students for sixteen years. I would also like to share my gratitude with the governments, corporations, foundations, First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders, and individual Canadians who have supported and continue to support Indspire. Without the circle of community that all of these stakeholders represent, we would not be able to support Indigenous students in the many ways that we do.

Check out our impact here.

Dr. Mike DeGagné
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF INDSPIRE

BY THE NUMBERS

MORE THAN $153,000,000 PROVIDED TO STUDENTS SINCE 2004

OVER 49,000
AWARDS DISTRIBUTED SINCE 2004

APPROXIMATELY 90%
OF BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES RECIPIENTS GRADUATE

APPROXIMATELY 45%
OF EMPLOYED BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES RECIPIENTS WORK IN FIELDS THAT SUPPORT INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

APPROXIMATELY 89%
OF BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES GRADUATES HAVE OBTAINED EMPLOYMENT

911
ATTENDED THE NATIONAL GATHERING FOR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION FROM NOVEMBER 25 - 26, 2020 THROUGH THE VFAIRS PLATFORM

MORE THAN $20 Million
DISBURSED IN THE 2020-2021 ACADEMIC YEAR TO 6,245 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS
In times of profound change, it is vital to chart sustainable paths for the future: paths that are informed by facts and which allow people to walk forward in good, healthy, sustainable ways. And Indspire’s Research Knowledge Nest is doing just that – even in the face of an unprecedented global pandemic.

The Research Knowledge Nest is the first Indigenous research incubator of its kind in Canada. By simultaneously training the next generation of Indigenous analysts through its Research Assistant program and producing revelatory, data-driven insights about the real state of Indigenous education in Canada, the Research Nest’s work is critical to understanding the needs of Indigenous students – and to effecting meaningful change in institutions across the country.

Both aspects of the Research Nest’s mandate dovetailed perfectly this year when the first cohort of Research Assistants produced seven key reports, all of which explored the Indigenous post-secondary educational experience as well as the post-graduation outcomes for Indigenous students in Canada.

The first of these reports, Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards Recipients’ Outcomes Report, was synthesized from the responses of over 6,500 recipients of Indspire’s Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards program. Not only did it reveal that receiving financial assistance has a positive intergenerational and community “ripple” effect on Indigenous students, it also revealed that these students were more likely to seek out opportunities to give back to their communities when financial constraints were removed or alleviated.

Another key report, Insights into Indigenous Post-Secondary Graduates’ Experiences in the Canadian Workforce, was prepared in conjunction with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB), with the Building Brighter Futures responses being augmented by Statistics Canada data about Indigenous post-graduation employment. From this, we learned that Building Brighter Futures recipients are more likely than other Indigenous respondents to be self-employed – and that they feel high job satisfaction if they are working for Indigenous employers, stating that they were satisfied with their current career, felt valued at work, had a good work-life balance and that their work affects the Indigenous community.

By centring the voices of student respondents in each report, Indspire’s Research Nest ensures that the research taking place is Indigenized, covering both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. It also ensures that this work is ultimately enabling institutions and individuals alike to create a healthier, more sustainable future for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

All of the reports can be found on indspire.ca.
This past year has seen an unconventional beginning to Indspire’s newly revitalized Rivers to Success: Indigenous Mentorship program... but it’s been a remarkable journey! 2020-21 saw over 1,000 participants join this initiative.

With its roots in revelations from Indspire’s 2018 Truth & Reconciliation in Education: Student Experience report, Rivers to Success was heavily shaped by feedback from Indigenous students across the country, who told Indspire that receiving support from Indigenous mentors was essential for them to succeed as they pursued their education. Mentorship is at the heart of many groundbreaking educational initiatives and has particular resonance for Indigenous communities. Indigenous mentors are a valuable source of wisdom, insight, and lessons from life experience.

And we listened.

The new Rivers to Success program emphasizes mentorship, building on the strong foundations of the previous program to bring even more support to Indigenous students at several different stages of their educational journey. The revitalized program features three streams: High School, Post-Secondary and Career Transition.

Using an online Portal through the MentorCity platform, Rivers to Success delivers a wide variety of virtual supports for Indigenous students. At the heart of the program is mentorship, with one-on-one opportunities available for participants in the Post-Secondary and Career Transition streams. Although the program had initially been designed to support both in-person and virtual mentoring, the COVID-19 pandemic saw Rivers to Success operating with an all-virtual focus. After being matched, mentors and mentees have the ability to meet up online, building their mentoring relationship in a supportive, safe place.

Students not only have access to online resources in a wide variety of media on an equally wide array of student-focused topics, they also have access to exclusive event programming, from health & fitness to career-starting strategies to traditional cultural workshops (e.g., ribbon skirt making and harvesting traditional medicines). This blend of customized and cultural resources ensures that they can remain grounded in their own cultures even if they’ve had to leave their communities to study.

In 2020-21, Rivers to Success is planning on creating an Elders Circle to provide even more support and guidance to Indigenous students whenever they need it—a move which will be especially timely as the program gradually transitions to a blend of virtual and in-person events as the pandemic recedes.
Indspire’s annual National Gathering for Indigenous Education got a new look for 2020: an all-virtual platform which delivered the same ground-breaking, thought-provoking content that educators have come to expect. For the very first time, this important forum for Indigenous educators and partners took place virtually over two days from November 26 – 27, 2020. Featuring 8 workshops and over 40 tradeshow booths, the National Gathering attracted 911 attendees who gathered to discuss emerging trends affecting Indigenous students today.

Participants joined the Gathering from multiple venues across the country – and, in fact, many expressed delight that they were able to attend the Gathering for the very first time thanks to its virtual format:

“It was very worthwhile attending. I learned so much from every session and all left me feeling encouraged, empowered, and more confident in my knowledge base. I’m sure the live/in-person events are just amazing (this was my first National Gathering) but I don’t think the Virtual version was lacking at all – it was amazing!”

The 2021 National Gathering for Indigenous Education will also take place virtually from November 24 – 26, 2021.
Guiding the Journey recognizes and celebrates outstanding educators for their achievement and innovation in Indigenous education. These educators work hard to transform Indigenous education across Canada by advocating for updated resources and more cultural teachings in the curriculum; having innovative teaching practices; and helping First Nations, Inuit and Métis students reach their full potential.

Six educators and one organization were honoured at the National Gathering virtually from November 26 - 27, 2020.

2020 Guiding the Journey Recipients:

- Jo-Ann Lindahl
  Community Service
  Mission, BC

- Michelle Ranger
  Innovative Practice
  Calgary, AB

- Celeste Tootoosis
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- Therese Anderson
  Role Model
  Winnipeg, MB

- Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia
  Organization
  Saskatoon, SK
With unprecedented times come unprecedented challenges. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising number of cases throughout the country, Indspire made the decision to postpone the 2020 Soaring: Indigenous Youth Empowerment Gathering to a later date as we took time to reimagine these events.

Soaring is a dynamic event for Indigenous high school students and their educators from across the country. Featuring career information and workshops, dynamic speakers and performers, and a tradeshow with post-secondary institutions and corporate partners from across the country, it allows students to explore their post-graduation options and make plans for the future.

After the resounding success of Soaring in March 2020, Indspire wanted to ensure that the standard for Soaring 2021 was similarly high. Despite the obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Indspire worked with a variety of stakeholders, both internal and external, to prepare an immersive, engaging virtual event for Indigenous high school students and the educators who support them.

Soaring took place in May of 2021 during the 2021-2022 fiscal year — and we look forward to sharing key moments from this important event with you next year!

Here’s how important Soaring is to Indigenous students in their own words:

“The best part of the Soaring event was the Spotlight Sessions and each of the panels, on both days. These panels were very informative, and I was able to take away a lot of important information in regards to achieving my goals as a person, connecting culturally, and getting some great advice through these panels.”

“Something that I would say to someone who is interested in attending a future Soaring event is to visit as many booths as possible, and that it is an excellent experience that is both informative and very enjoyable.”

“My favourite part of Soaring was being able to listen to the stories and advice of those on the panels. Being able to learn the stories and struggles of others and how they got through them is incredible and really helped me reflect on myself.”
Indspire’s longest running and most well-known program is undoubtedly our Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards program, through which hundreds of scholarships, bursaries and awards are disbursed to thousands of Indigenous students every year. Indspire has always recognized that First Nations, Inuit and Métis students may encounter additional barriers to completing their education – a truth that’s borne out by recent research completed by the Indspire Research Knowledge Nest.

Through Indspire’s Building Brighter Futures program, students can receive financial assistance to help pay for school as well as any study-related costs – for example, relocation or transportation expenses, rent, groceries, childcare, or any other expenditures.

Since 2004, in partnership with Indigenous, private, and public sector supporters, Indspire has distributed more than 49,000 scholarships and bursaries, valued at over $153 million, to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students through its Building Brighter Futures program. In 2020-21, Indspire disbursed more than $20 million to 6,245 Indigenous students.

90 per cent of students who have received Building Brighter Futures funding have graduated from a post-secondary institution, and approximately 45 per cent of employed recipients work in fields that support Indigenous people.

Here’s a snapshot of what the students whom we support are studying:
Since 1993, the Indspire Awards have honoured 384 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis professionals and youth who demonstrate outstanding career achievement on a national level. Recipients are chosen from a variety of fields including the arts, business, culture, education, health, law, public service, sports, lifetime achievement, and three Youth Awards. Each year, recipients are selected by a national jury of past Laureates. These role models are a source of inspiration for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people across the country – especially for Indigenous youth.

Just as with Soaring, Indspire made the decision to postpone the 2021 Indspire Awards to June of 2021 due to the swift spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. We’re eagerly anticipating this re-imagined celebration of Indigenous excellence next fiscal year.

In Fall 2020, small media crews went out to the home communities of the twelve 2021 Awards recipients from coast to coast to film short vignettes about the recipients’ work and talk to the people who know them best. The results were insightful, enlightening, and inspirational – and helped us to share the stories of these exemplary Indigenous leaders in our national Indspire Awards broadcast on APTN and CBC in June 2021.

Here’s how Indigenous students feel about the Indspire Awards in their own words:

“To show appreciation and to inspire people to follow their dreams and that they can have a future.”

“Meeting other indigenous students and learning new opportunities that will build my future.”

“Seeing and getting to know the people that inspire others, including myself, to find our voice.”

Alicia Aragutak
2020 Indspire Award Recipient
For Youth - Inuit
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Orange Shirt Day 2020
EVERY CHILD MATTERS
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Indspire thanks the following organizations and individuals for their generous support in 2020-2021.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >
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FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Indspire’s financial statements for the year ending March 31, 2021 were audited by MNP LLP and can be found here: https://indspire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Indspire-Mar-21-Financial-Statements-EN.pdf
The financial support received for the National Gathering helps bring educators from across the country together to learn from eight workshops and presentations over two days. It allows these educators to explore Canada’s rich Indigenous cultures, traditions, and histories and bring them back to their classrooms from coast-to-coast-to-coast and engages educators in activities that will support success for their Indigenous K-12 students. The Guiding the Journey: Indigenous Educator Awards, which recognize Indigenous educators who have made valuable contributions to community-based education and honour the principles of Indigenous knowledge, are also given out at the National Gathering.

2020 NATIONAL GATHERING FOR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

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We know that investing in one Indigenous student benefits their immediate family for generations to come. Your generous donation helps Indigenous students to achieve their dreams of academic success. Indspire’s Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards are distributed annually to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students who are attending approved post-secondary institutions.

In 2020-2021, Indspire provided over $20 million through 6,245 bursaries and scholarships to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students across Canada. Your financial support means they can complete their education, become self-sufficient, and give back to their communities.
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