



# Indspire

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

## INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Spring 2022

### A message from Mike DeGagné

Spring is just around the corner and with it comes the promise of new beginnings. Many of Indspire supported students know what it means to start over again – with hopes and dreams for a brighter future.

Our February 1st deadline just passed for our *Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards* program and we saw an incredible 851 applications. This reminds me that students are eager to get back to the classroom to keep working towards their dream of a post-secondary education.

In this newsletter, you will read stories about students like Keaton Goossen – a Chemical Engineering student working hard at his studies but also finding time to give back. Also, Grady Coutu who was once a mentee in our *Rivers to Success Mentorship* program and is now a mentor helping a student. All of these students, and many more keep us working hard to ensure we can fund as many bursaries, scholarships and awards as possible.

I hope that the stories in these pages remind you of the difference you make in the lives of Indigenous students and make you proud to be part of our community.

Miigwech - thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Mike DeGagné  
President & CEO





## Change the Future for Generations

Keaton Goossen,  
Métis Nation of Alberta, Vancouver, BC

**K**eaton Goossen is a Chemical Engineering student at the University of British Columbia. He had placement offers from both the University of Alberta and University of Calgary, but he saw the UBC co-op program as his best opportunity for the future.

The high cost of living in Vancouver plus a full course load meant that he had barely any time to work. “I know it’s a recipe for financial disaster, but I worked hard in the summers and saved my money, along with some help from my parents. This last year my parents were in a tough situation from the pandemic, and I needed to secure external funding.”

Indspire’s donor-supported *Building Brighter Futures* program gave Keaton the help he needed to stay in school. He says, “I am very thankful for this opportunity and see it as a very rare situation for someone of my background. It is very hard to get support. Any amount of help takes the stress and anxiety down and there are tangible results – my grades went up!”

Once he graduates from UBC, Keaton wants to increase his technical and managerial skills until he can secure his Professional Engineer designation. Then, he says, “eventually owning my own business has been a dream of mine since a young age.”

Where does his drive come from? “My high school football coach was the one who inspired me to take school seriously and to consider going on to university. I would not be here without his positive influence in my life, and I want the opportunity to pass that forward to the next generation,” he says.

“In grade 10, I had a very emotional conversation with my coach. My family was not able to cover my sport fees for the year and so I

was very upset thinking I would not be able to play the sport I love.

The coach gave me a plan to get it paid and then dropped a piece of advice that I have always remembered. He told me, ‘education breaks the cycle of poverty.’ And that is why I am here today, at university.”

At UBC, Keaton works to give back to the community through his fraternity service and philanthropic endeavours. He says, “over \$75K was raised this year for a local start-up called HeadsUpGuys, a depression resource that helps men manage and prevent depression.” He has also worked as part of a project with the Palestine Children Relief Fund to raise awareness of the events in Gaza, raising \$7K in donations to support lifesaving services for children.

“I am also at UBC First Nations House of Learning, to offer support to incoming Indigenous students dealing with the stress of first year. Indigenous people are underrepresented in education. There are so many barriers, a lack of funds, or infrastructure to help people succeed. When donors to Indspire reach out a hand, that gift allows students to feel connected to a group of people who believe in us, and that we really can break the cycle of poverty.”

Keaton says, “I want to sincerely thank donors for their generous support of Indspire and *Building Brighter Futures*. What you make possible is bigger than money to me. It represents freedom. Freedom to study, to get better grades, and to focus on sharpening my engineering skills to become a better candidate for jobs when I graduate.”

“Donors need to know how big the impact of their giving is – they can change the future for generations!” •

# Building a New Future

**Mackenzie Pitawanakwat,  
Anishnawbek First Nation - Sudbury, ON**



**A**n Anishinaabekwe from Anishnawbek First Nation, Mackenzie Pitawanakwat is a third year Architectural Studies student at Laurentian University McEwen School of Architecture.

When she discovered Indspire and received support, she felt, “honoured that somebody took the time to know about me. Somebody took the time to listen and was willing to help through Indspire’s *Building Brighter Futures* program. It was very exciting to know that I could move ahead into the next year of my studies and a big thing to know that I could now afford the materials and the specialty software that I need to be an architecture student.”

She knows that gifts to Indspire, “really help to create a career for an Indigenous student. It makes it possible to continue with our education, gives us an important confidence push, and lets the students work toward enhancing their abilities with much less financial worry.”

The support of donors means that Mackenzie is also one big step closer toward her ambitious goals, “I want to work towards my Masters of Architectural Studies at the University of British Columbia. From there I plan to pursue a career in First Nations Architecture — and someday run my own architecture firm.”

Mackenzie has a bold vision for her professional life, “I also minor in Indigenous studies, and I’m interested in working to bridge the gap between a holistic emphasis and the technical relationship within architecture itself. I am interested in a more Indigenous-based training, and in building networks with other Indigenous students, architects, and professors. I want to create a practice guided by elders, community respect, and the issues around building on traditional lands.”

“I knew what I wanted to study at a young age.” She says her dream came very early, “I knew that I wanted to become an architect since grade eight. That is when I began planning out my high school career to reach my final goal of getting accepted into one of my top three architecture programs.”

“Architecture school has been such an accomplishment for me because growing up I have experienced the lack of support in education institutions for Indigenous youth. However, this has pushed me to become more resilient and hardworking.”

Mackenzie says that throughout her educational career, “my successes have come from my academic excellence, which has allowed me to become recognized by my university and community.”

She adds, “my past challenges and successes have made me become a stronger individual and have taught me to be confident in myself and resilient when faced with a problem.” With this solid foundation of drive and skills, she simply says that “I plan to build a future for myself.”

Mackenzie emphasizes that, “Indspire’s support enhances my ability to serve my community as a professional architect. Through my identity as an Indigenous woman, I give back to my community by representing my heritage with the plan of making a difference in First Nations Architecture and representation.”

She wants to emphasize this message to the *Building Brighter Futures* donors of Indspire, “in the end, I want to give back to my community where my educational journey began. Thank you so much for your generous support!” •



## Teaching Indigenous History to Empower Youth

Julian Stonechild,  
Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, SK

**J**ulian Stonechild has a strong vision to create a better future through education for everyone in the community.

He speaks with the voice of deep experience and kindness, “In my life, I had only met one Indigenous man that was a schoolteacher. My dream is to connect traditional teachings to university life, and then to tell our story to the next generation. I want to empower young Indigenous people to have pride in traditional ways. Indigenous people are not represented in the telling of our own history, and we should be.”

Of the support he received from Indspire, “I want donors to know that when I received this award, I burst into tears. It took away so much pressure and I will always be grateful for that. I might have stopped my education before completing, without the support from Indspire. In an incredibly difficult year on top of the pandemic, this award will help to keep us afloat—for that my family and I are genuinely grateful.”

Julian continues, “I will graduate next spring from Vancouver Island University with a double-major in History and Indigenous Peoples Studies. I hope to continue to graduate school to become an educator. I know that the skills I have obtained through university can help Indigenous people in a number of ways.”

He says with conviction, “the *Building Brighter Futures* award is about giving people chances. Chances to build success. We have so many struggles as Indigenous peoples. Sometimes it takes a lot to show up for education, this support makes it possible.”

“Teaching was a calling when I was young, but I did not believe in myself. I want to be able to help the next generation understand

Indigenous history—from an Indigenous perspective. There needs to be more positive male role models for the youth to be able to turn to when they need help, and I plan on continuing to be one for years to come.”

Julian continues, “I want to show my community that it's possible to succeed after enduring trauma and suffering at the hand of substance abuse and to move forward through my healing and academic journey.”

While at university, Julian tutors first year students in the Indigenous studies program, provides an orientation to starting university life, and reinforces their motivation to succeed. “If a student is struggling at the Gathering Place (Aboriginal Students building), I help them in any way I can so they can succeed — even if it means I am cutting into my own study time.”

“I stay in touch with the youth, talking to them and giving them guidance on a range of things; how to play a certain sport, how to observe and respect Mother Earth, how to respect one another, and countless other lessons.”

Julian continues, “giving back helps me to feel whole again. I've also worked on-call at a treatment centre to help Indigenous people find a better life in recovery. Recently, I'm stepping into larger roles that bring me to other Indigenous communities to share culture and my story and teaching the youth how to walk this path in an honorable way.”

Julian feels that, “Indspire shows that there are people who believe in me. I'm not going to let these people down and I feel obligated to the donors and want to continue to do well. And to better support my community.”

“Chi-Miigwech (Big Thank You) for your generous support and consideration.” •



# A Future Legacy Changing Lives

Naomi McCormack,  
Toronto, ON - Legacy Donor



**N**aomi McCormack knows just how challenging it can be to pursue your dreams – and just how affirming it can be to get the help you need to keep going. A member of Indspire’s *Seven Generations Legacy Circle*, Naomi remembered her own educational experience and used it as Indspiration to create her own legacy of powerful, positive change through a gift to Indspire in her will.

As she says, “As a young person I worked my way through school, and I remember how stressful and exhausting it was. A huge turning point came when I received my first bursary; it wasn't just the funding, it was how validated and supported I felt for the first time - as if a door was opening to my future. Giving to Indspire means that I can give that experience to another student who is on the cusp of a bright future and that is so exciting. I've seen how my contributions to Indspire help play a pivotal role in ensuring that Indigenous students get the education that enables them to shine and become future leaders.”


Just like Naomi, you have the power to make your personal legacy part of a reconciled future: helping Indigenous students realize their post-secondary dreams and create a powerful future for themselves, their communities, and for Canada as a whole.

Naomi continues, “Working with Indspire has been an enlightening and joyful experience for me – I've learned so much and I'm so thrilled when I see the students graduate and go on to achieve their dreams. I know that many Canadians want to be a part of redressing the negative legacy of the residential school system and I think that giving to Indspire, be it an annual donation, a legacy gift, or both, is an excellent way to begin.”

**To learn more about leaving a legacy gift to Indspire, visit: [www.indspire.ca/ways-to-give/include-indspire-in-your-will/](http://www.indspire.ca/ways-to-give/include-indspire-in-your-will/) or contact Ashley Boucher at [aboucher@indspire.ca](mailto:aboucher@indspire.ca) •**

## Pay it Forward

Grady Coutu,  
Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, Prince Albert, SK



**G**rady Coutu is an extraordinary example of the world of possibilities that can be unlocked for a young student with support from Indspire's *Building Brighter Futures* program.

Grady says, "Indspire is what helped me get through university. I came from a not-privileged upbringing. Having Indspire on your side is an amazing thing to have in your life. The benefits are even greater than the important financial support – everyone there and all their supporters want so much to help Indigenous youth to continue in education, and to achieve their dreams. They all know that it is education that helps to break the cycle of trauma – and education that makes a big contribution to the path of Truth and Reconciliation."

After receiving financial support as an undergraduate in the Commerce program at the University of Saskatchewan – this up-and-coming young student then went on to benefit in his final year as a mentee in the *Rivers to Success Mentorship* program. "Before mentorship, I had no personal connections to the places where I wanted to work." Grady says, "very soon, I had big opportunities to build my network and take advantage of a wealth of knowledge, even internationally."

He says that "the *Rivers to Success Mentorship* program taught me a lot and helped me to navigate the new world of finance and banking. My mentor was such a tremendous benefit to me. To have the chance to be paired with someone in my field was a powerful boost and helped me to get to where I am today."

This calm and confident emerging young leader is well on his way to building an exciting career. What's more, today Grady is now a mentor himself in the very same

program, starting to give back to other Indigenous students in this new role.

He feels "being a mentor is a strong opportunity to 'pay it forward' for another Indigenous student."

"More than giving someone a career opportunity, Grady continues, "I can bring a cultural perspective and understanding to the challenges Indigenous students face. I know what it means to need targeted support to overcome a lack of access. Many people come from isolated communities and that makes everything so much tougher. I know about the generational trauma of residential schools, and I can bring ideas and observations to help someone build their network and encourage them to take a chance to go out and meet someone new."

*Grady points out donors should know that "there is an incredible psychological dimension to being encouraged by Indspire. To know that someone recognizes you and sees your achievements – that means everything. Mentorship is the next step beyond money, it is the investment of time into growing a relationship."*

The world of new possibilities that opened from the initial support from Indspire have – in a very few years – led to an impressive national role for Grady.

Today he is mobilizing his vision and commitment to ensure change in the workplace for others. Grady has stepped up at his work and has taken his commitment to diversity and inclusion with a volunteer role as the new National Chair of Indigenous Canadian Employee Resource Groups with his employer, HSBC.

In this position Grady will help ensure the success of Indigenous workers at the bank and grow his 'pay it forward' philosophy on a much larger scale. •

# Are you on Facebook?

## Create a Fundraiser for Indspire!

**Helen Poizner** wanted to do something special and meaningful for her 85th birthday last year, so she decided to create a Facebook fundraiser to support Indspire.

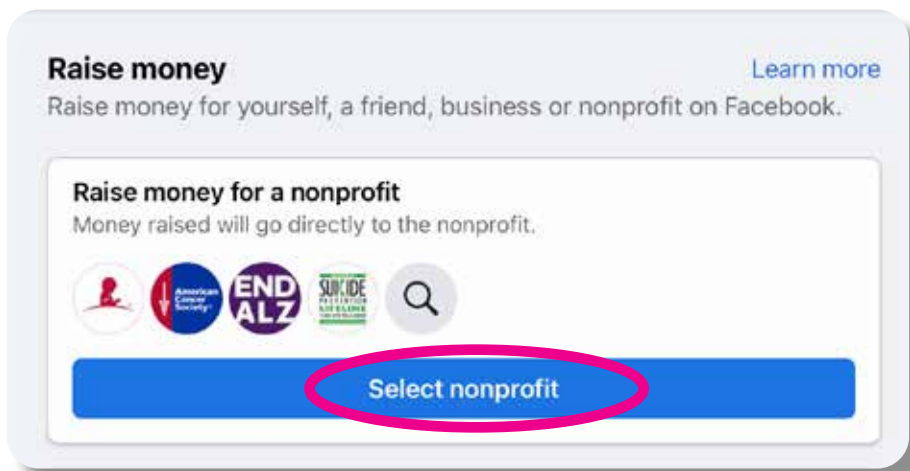
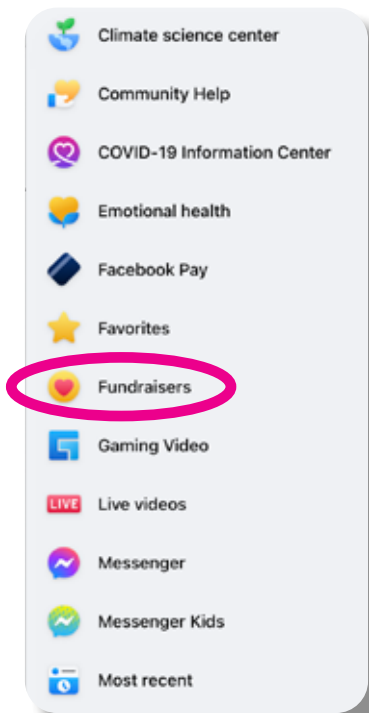
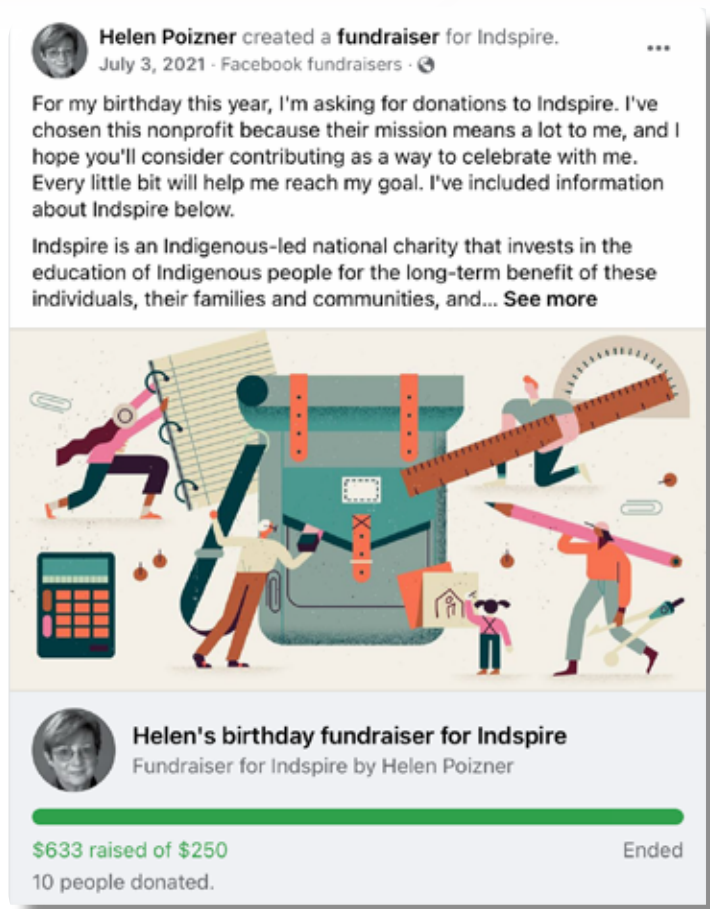
"For my birthday I'm asking for donations to Indspire. I've chosen this nonprofit because their mission means a lot to me, and I hope you'll consider contributing as a way to celebrate with me. Every little bit will help me reach my goal."

Helen's fundraiser was very successful and she raised more than \$600 for Indspire – just amazing!

If you've thought about creating your own fundraiser on Facebook it's very easy.

On the left-hand side of your Facebook home screen page where you see your name, Friends, Groups, Marketplace, etc. click "see more" and "Fundraisers" will appear on the expanded list. Click on that and then search for "Indspire" and follow the steps to activate your fundraiser. It's as simple as that.

If you have any questions about setting up a Facebook fundraiser or hosting an event for Indspire, please reach out to Helena Kyriakou ([hkyriakou@indspire.ca](mailto:hkyriakou@indspire.ca)) and she would be happy to help you!



## Zacharias Kunuk, Indspire Inuk Laureate shares his new film

Zacharias Kunuk was recognized with an Indspire Award in 2001 for Media and Communications. At that time, he was the co-founder of Isuma Productions, the first Inuit independent film production company in Canada. His 2001 debut feature film *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* was the first Canadian feature film completely in Inuktitut, and he was the first Inuk to direct a film with an entire Inuit cast. The screenplay he co-wrote was inspired by a folk tale with contributions from eight elders.

Roger Ebert gave *Atanarjuat* four stars, saying the film tells a universal story: “*The Fast Runner* is passion, filtered through ritual and memory.” Mr. Kunuk became the talk of film critics worldwide, as *Atanarjuat* won the *Caméra d’Or* for best first feature at the Cannes Film Festival, was ranked the greatest Canadian film of all time by TIFF filmmakers and critics and received six Genie Awards.

Mr. Kunuk has a new film out called *Angakusajaujuq: The Shaman’s Apprentice*. It had its North American premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, winning the 2021 IMDbPro Short Cuts Award for Best Canadian Film along with a \$10,000 bursary. The film was also

honoured this past June with the FIPRESCI Award at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival in France.

“A hundred years from now, when we’re long gone, people will study these films. We’re trying to get the history correct to show what happened to us.”

—Zacharias Kunuk



His films have been screened from Tokyo to Copenhagen and New York to Madrid. Though he’s been honoured around the world, Mr. Kunuk still fixes his own snowmobile at home in Igloodik, hunts seals at breathing holes, and remains true to an ancient past.

Thanks to Zacharias Kunuk, the Inuit can turn on their televisions and see productions that truly reflect who and what they are.

To read more of Zacharias Kunuk’s interview in Nuvo magazine: <https://nuvomagazine.com/magazine/winter-2021/zacharias-kunuk>

## More Indspiring virtual events - just for you!

As we continue to be apart to protect one another, we’ve held a few more virtual events through Indspire’s Indspiring Change @ Home virtual event series and hope you’ll take some time to watch them.

You won’t want to miss this fascinating conversation between Mike DeGagné, President and CEO of Indspire, and award-winning author, Thomas King.



There is also a wonderful interview between Mike and award-winning writer Waubgeshig Rice. They discussed some of Waub’s most recent work, including his national bestseller, *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, and talked about the power of storytelling and the road ahead for Indigenous people in Canada.



For these and other virtual events, visit: <https://indspire.ca/events/virtual-events/>