



brighter
futures
circle 


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



Introduction

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

Your donation to be part of the *Brighter Futures Circle* will mean the continued improvement of Grade 9 - 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 are 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.

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.¹

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.

¹Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, "Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada," 2016

"One of my biggest goals is to finish the Social Service Worker program and then enroll into the Bachelor of Social Work.

I am a Cultural Reintegration worker for an Indigenous child well-being organization in Ontario. In this role I need to have my SSW diploma and this will allow me to continue a path that will not only help me and my family but my community as well."

**Bobby Knott (First Nations)
a student in the Social
Services Worker program
at First Nations Technical &
an Indspire-supported
student**





"I think the support available for Indigenous students like myself has been extremely impactful in the growth of our communities. The recognition we have received from sponsors has given us the feeling that we are capable of anything we want to be."

Shayla Hathway (First Nation), who is in a one-year Health Aide course at Thompson Rivers University & an Indspire supported student.

Stemming from – and contributing to - 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

² Auditor General's Report to Parliament, 2018

³ C.D. Howe Institute, Students in Jeopardy: An Agenda for Improving Results in Band-Operated Schools, 2016

⁴ 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.⁶ 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.⁷ Indigenous youth are at a disadvantage because 46% of students live in rural areas, compared to only 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, there is no access to adequate resources or support.

⁵ AFN Fact Sheet on Post-Secondary Education

⁶ Frenette, M., *What Explains the Educational Attainment Gap Between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Youth?*, Pursuing Higher Education in Canada: Economic, Social and Policy Dimensions edited by Finnie R., Frenette M., Mueller R. & Sweetman A., Queen's Policy Studies Series, 175-189 (2010).

⁷ The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, *Trends in Higher Education*, Volume 1, 2011



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 Indigenous people were denied funding, representing approximately half of those who qualified.

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 Labour Force Survey, almost 21% of working age Indigenous people without a high school diploma were unemployed in 2021.

Unemployment levels decreased to 12.5% for those who have graduated high school or completed post-secondary. They lower again to 7.2% for those who have completed post-secondary. This is in line with the 5.2% unemployment rate for non-Indigenous people in Canada with a post-secondary education.⁸

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

⁸ Statistics Canada, 2018 Table 14-10-0359-01 Labour force characteristics by Indigenous group and educational attainment



Education creates role models.

Indigenous youth who graduate post-secondary 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.

“I spent most of my life growing up on our family farm and have always had a passion for working with animals. I have made new friendships, built core skills for my career, and strengthened my interpersonal skills and with awards like this my dream of furthering my education to become a Veterinarian is that much closer.

I would like to devote my time to starting on-reservation animal rescues, to help reduce the number of homeless/neglected animals in our northern communities. I would also like to show other young Indigenous women from my community and all over Canada that there is no dream too small, and where you grew up does not limit the possibilities life has in store for you.”

Braelyn Walker (Metis), a student in the Veterinary Technology program at Grand Prairie Regional College & an Indspire-supported student

“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 in their final year of a four-year Doctor of Chiropractic program at the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College & 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 people 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 \$401 billion by 2026. 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 wanted to understand the full cycle of addiction before entering a master's program. It was here I saw the pain and hurt of my people. It was also where many of my clients and I connected on our culture and would smudge together and attend talking circles. It showed me the resilience of my people.

I started my master's when I felt that I could no longer help my clients in the capacity I wanted. I was offering them support, but I wanted to help them heal. I am currently in my practicum during my second year and I am truly loving the work I am doing. After becoming a clinical counsellor I want to specialize in addiction and trauma and work with my community on helping to decolonize counselling.

Natasha Roop (First Nations) a Masters student at Adler University in the Counselling Psychology program & an Indspire-supported student.

⁹ Royal Bank of Canada, "The Cost of Doing Nothing," 1997

¹⁰ Centre for the Study of Living Standards, The Contribution of Aboriginal People to Future Labour Force Growth in Canada, October 2017

¹¹ Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Closing the Aboriginal Education Gap in Canada: Assessing Progress and Estimating the Economic Benefits, June 2015



“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



Indspire is taking action

Bursaries and scholarships

Through the *Building Brighter Futures* program and with the support of our donors, Indspire provides bursaries, scholarships and awards to eligible students to help them complete their education and training for careers in many growth sectors of the Canadian economy.

There are many Indigenous youth who want to change their lives and communities – but they lack the funding for post-secondary education. That's where you can make a world of difference.

Since 2004, Indspire has disbursed over \$174 million through more than 55,300 bursaries and scholarships to Indigenous students, making it the largest funder of Indigenous education outside the federal government.

However, we can only meet about 25% of the financial need demonstrated by qualified 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 and achieve their highest potential. 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 tradeshow 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.

Rivers to Success: Mentoring Indigenous Students

Through Rivers to Success, we aim to positively impact Indigenous students' academic and career success by offering access to Elders, Indigenous role models, connections to community and culture, and other supports customized for their unique needs. The program's success measurements are centered on cultural identity, sense of belonging and sense of resiliency.

Rivers to Success contains customized cultural resources and three streams of mentorship:



High School Stream



Post-Secondary Stream



Career Transition Stream

Through the Rivers to Success online portal we host virtual events on a variety of topics including traditional culture and language, art, physical and mental health, networking and career tips and program orientation. As of 2022 the portal hosts 83 customized resources for Indigenous students.

Approximately 90% of students who receive funding from Indspire graduate.

53% go on to pursue a second degree, Master's or PhD.

Nearly 90% of BBF graduates have obtained 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.



Rivers to Success: Indigenous Student Mentorship

Rivers to Success provides a supportive learning environment for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students at key stages of their educational journey, giving them the tools they need to complete their education and successfully pursue the career of their dreams.

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 that is focused on improving the education and economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

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

Our researchers 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 is helping to 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 bold purpose – to support the educational journey so that 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 Truth and Reconciliation
Commission (TRC)**

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





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