



Indspire

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

INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Fall 2023

A message from Mike DeGagné

It's hard to believe that 2023 is nearing a close; I hope you're enjoying the Fall. I'm honoured to be able to share a new edition of Indspire's donor newsletter with you, featuring incredible students that have big hopes for their future and some that have already accomplished so much.

Did you know that there are more than 60,000 Indigenous-owned businesses in Canada that contributed almost \$50 billion to the economy in 2020? That number is expected to grow rapidly in the years to come and some Indspire supported students are contributing to that now thanks to past generous support of people like you.

You'll read about Mallory Yawngwhwe, an Indspire supported student who created the Indigenous Box and who through that is working with a growing list of over 300 Indigenous suppliers.

Also featured is Kylik Kisoun Taylor, a 2023 *Indspire Award* Laureate immersed in his Inuvialuit and Gwich'in background, who channeled the skills he learned along with his passion for community development into a thriving tourism business - Okpik Arctic Village, which

provides national and international visitors with an authentic experience of Inuit culture in the unique environment of Canada's North.

These are just a few of the incredible students and future entrepreneurs you are helping when you support Indspire. Thank you for walking alongside these impressive students (and graduates) as they strive for their dream of a brighter future for themselves, their families, communities and Canada.

Miigwech - (thank you) for your support.

Sincerely,
Mike DeGagné
President & CEO





Reclaiming Indigenous History as Creators of a Global Supply Chain

Mallory Yawngwe
Saddle Lake Cree Nation, AB



Indigenous Box

Mallory Yawngwe starts her story by saying "I struggled, never thinking that I could even get a high school diploma. I left high school and moved to Edmonton to find a job and I only dreamed of going back to school to graduate and build a future." She continues, "support from Indspire was very meaningful to me, beyond the money. It gave me permission to be in this space. Someone out there believed in me, and believed I could succeed. I graduated and was even chosen as my class Valedictorian!"

10 years later, after working at many entry-level jobs Mallory found the courage to try again. "I never thought that university could even be an option for me. As Indigenous people we so often doubt ourselves, and we have so many challenges to overcome that life just seems impossible. But I also think that we sometimes create our own limitations to success."

"I didn't have any funding from my band, so when I received an acceptance letter from MacEwan University, I had no idea how it could possibly work out. Indspire was there to help with donor supported funds. My dream was to complete a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Supply Chain Management."

She continues, "I loved the challenge of supply chain studies. I also realized that Indigenous people have worked for thousands of years as architects of vast supply chains across the continent. Yet, of the over 400 graduates in my cohort, I was the only Indigenous person."

After working for the Government of Alberta, the next step for this young entrepreneur was to create a unique Indigenous-focused business model. Mallory

says, "Indigenous Box is a socially impactful company with a big vision, and huge results." Founded during the pandemic in March of 2021 by Mallory and her husband Kham Yawngwe, Indigenous Box has quickly emerged as a big player in the Canadian gift market. To date, Indigenous Box has shipped over 50,000 gift boxes across North America, and worldwide from their Edmonton International Airport fulfillment centre.

Mallory is committed to fostering entrepreneurs. "A success for one is a success for all those who come after." Indigenous Box is a lot more than just a gift box. It is a movement made up of thousands of Canadians coming together to create the future that they want to see," she says. What makes her most excited about their growth? She says it is "seeing Indigenous suppliers scale up to meet the demand that we have worked to create together."

"I was inspired to start this company because I love our people and I'm proud to inherit and carry on our legacy of greatness. I believe in the importance of building bridges and collaborating to elevate Indigenous business."

"I help to create community impact with a non-traditional business model and mentor so many Indigenous makers who never thought of this kind of opportunity. I am also especially interested in mentoring young people and telling them that university is within reach. We belong here too."

Mallory concludes by saying, "donors to Indspire have made a deep impact on my life. Supporting our people creates change for the future, and Indspire allows people to buy into this vision. My story shows the impact your gift can make." •

It all Started with YouTube!

**Egian Metallic, Business Marketing,
St. Francis Xavier University
Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation, QC**



Egian Metallic was 17 and living on the reserve. “One afternoon, I was just scrolling through YouTube when I found a video on how to detail cars. It looked very interesting to me – and the guy listed a kit of supplies that you’d need to start a business.” Spotting a potential opportunity, Egian was inspired to search online to price all the products and equipment mentioned. The value of an auto detailing starter kit came to about \$2,000. “I saved and saved to buy all the stuff I needed, and a local auto detailing business was born, launched in my grandmother’s driveway!”

He continues with enthusiasm, “I did all my advertising by word of mouth and on social media. Gradually the business started to grow. It was then that I learned the larger detailing market was valued at over \$1 billion dollars annually in Canada. My mindset suddenly changed when I realized that I had my foot in the door of a potentially successful business. But I had no idea how to do market research, create a business strategy, or to create a plan to grow my business beyond a local market.”

A common challenge for all entrepreneurs is how to scale-up a successful idea beyond the start phase. “I was highly motivated to do whatever it takes to succeed, and I heard about the Commerce Program at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish; but I didn’t have enough money to make it happen. A co-worker told me about the *Building Brighter Futures* program at Indspire. Receiving support from Indspire completely changed my mental outlook on school and gave me a chance to take my business experience beyond the reserve.”

Egian continues, “donor funds from Indspire meant that I could buy more groceries and have a little more for my living expenses while I studied. For the first time, I really felt that there might be hope for my future. To know that there were good people in the world who were looking out for people like me – well, that changed everything.”

Egian strongly believes that for any Indigenous entrepreneur, further education in business is essential, “to understand strategy, business writing, the importance of working in teams, and to reinforce a strong work ethic. Since getting into this commerce program, I’ve now seen many other examples of growing Indigenous businesses, and I’ve seen what success can look like.”

“I want to tell donors to Indspire about my journey – from growing up on the reserve to being a student at St. Francis Xavier. The reserve is obviously not a suburban environment that helps people get to university. But with help from Indspire, donors can make it possible for everyone to be considered equally for school.”

He concludes with, “the biggest thing I want people to know is that we should help as many First Nation students as possible to pursue more opportunities in life. When that happens, the culture back on the reserve changes. Your help can grow a much more diverse viewpoint in our communities. You can bring new ideas – and so many new possibilities can open.” •



Breaking Barriers

Karli Crowshoe, Master of Management,
University of Calgary
Piikani First Nation, Brocket, AB

Indigenous entrepreneurs like Karli Crowshoe challenge people's understanding of what is possible.

Karli is an artist, dancer, ceremonialist, and the founder of The Chief's Daughter – an artist's practice that revives traditional stories and oral culture of the Blackfoot people through precise beadwork. Each piece is a unique creation to last for generations, marrying traditional ways of knowing with the modern Indigenous lifestyle.

She creates and beads one-of-a-kind regalia and hats for sale to pow wow performers and collectors. Her works are also part of the permanent collections of museums such as the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton. Her work is used in industry partnerships, including being selected as one of only four Indigenous artists in the world chosen by leading outdoor clothing and accessories manufacturer Arc'teryx.

Karli is now a Master of Management candidate at the Haskayne School of Business at the University of Calgary. "I was a single mom with a one-year-old son when I got into the undergraduate economics program at the University of Calgary. I had absolutely no resources to better my life, nothing. Yet I was determined to somehow find a way to continue. Then, Indspire said yes to me, and the award covered my first-year tuition and books. It was incredible! The support allowed stability for me and my son and touched every aspect of my life, I could actually go to the grocery store without worrying. Today, I am in graduate school and Indspire has granted me an award once again."

"My goal is to enable Indigenous people to start and grow their own businesses. So many people don't know how to begin, and I can bring the knowledge that I have

gained plus respect for Indigenous identity and history." Karli continues, "My lineage is rooted deep in leadership and carries with it a family legacy of resiliency, achievement, and survival. My grandparents raised me and my sister and did it all while navigating their own traumas endured while surviving residential school."

"Statistically, I am not supposed to be where I am today in my life. I am a single mother who dropped out of high school at the age of fourteen. I am excited to be able to break these barriers and obtain an education and overcome the generational traumas my family members and ancestors have endured. My life is now so full of opportunity because of that small bit of assistance that I received from Indspire."

"The push from Indspire started one good thing after another for me. Today, I speak at conferences, and I help to guide other Indigenous people to start their journeys. And I tell everyone about the importance of education. Whoever it was that made the gift to Indspire for my award – to go from where I started to where I am now, well...words cannot fully describe how I feel."

Karli has also become a strong advocate for working mothers and for creating spaces for Indigenous women in the job market. In addition, she is currently working with others to create an elder's business called the Elders Knowledge Circle. As well she is a member of the Blackfoot Entrepreneurs Steering Committee.

"I believe that we were born with the instincts to provide and to consistently find resources to establish community. It is in our blood. We have both Indigenous knowledge and western knowledge and together, this combination can transform the way we provide for all of our families." •

Gratitude is Medicine – Fuel for Spiritual Nourishment

Brendan Hamilton, Bachelor of Fine Arts,
Alberta College of Art and Design
Métis Nation of Alberta



Young art and design industry entrepreneurs are trained to use their skills to problem solve, navigate whatever opportunities life may hold – and to create better futures for us all.

Indspire recipients understand that in life, nobody starts and lands where they begin. This means that many choose to use their arts training as a springboard for career success in the many worlds of entrepreneurship, business, and community service. Brendan Hamilton is just such an entrepreneur.

Each *Building Brighter Futures* recipient has a unique story and perspective to share. Artist, graphic designer, and mental health educator Brendan has a powerful and poetic way of thinking about the value of Indspire scholarships:

“I like to use the metaphor of scholarships as buffalo,” he says.

“After the buffalo hunt, there was abundance that alleviated any sense of scarcity. It provided food, clothing, tools and helped to not only sustain but allow people's lives to flourish.”

“That’s the way I would describe Indspire and the financial support they give to students. It removed so much pressure off me as a student to be able to focus on studies and community, and to know that I have resources to help provide for everything I need. It's an immense blessing and I am deeply grateful.”

What is the role of a design entrepreneur? “I’m a student at the Alberta University of the Arts majoring in advertising design. My vision is to be a leader in organizational design, and to work with groups who are committed to healing, connecting, and progressing

humankind. Designers literally create the world around us; they are a direct extension of the Creator and become the storytellers, the ones who influence and shape culture. I want to be able to apply the skills I learn to projects that are conscious about making a positive impact on our world, for generations to come.”

Indspire’s scholarship support came at a crucial time for Brendan. “In my mid-twenties I went through a series of events that led me to seek intensive trauma counselling. I began to lean into my heart to notice the things in life that really brought me alive, and the arts were one of the first places I was drawn to. By following the tracks of curiosity, I was led to architecture and design school. My aim as a designer is to always move the world towards beauty. The Creator made us in a beautiful way, and to work towards design on a foundation of beauty is not just an aesthetic practice, but also a practice of compassion.”

Brendan suggests that donors can visualize that their “money is energy, and it is very wise to choose where you invest your energy. Investing your money into Indspire is an invaluable transfer of energy to Indigenous students who are seeking to create a positive impact in their communities and in our country.”

He continues, “your financial support helps to alleviate stress and sustains students as they work through an education system and way of life that can be very challenging. Gratitude is medicine – fuel for spiritual nourishment. Your support is a blessing and I extend my gratitude for your choosing to give to Indspire.” •



Social Justice Donors Put Indigenous Youth in the Driver's Seat

Tyler Ward and Romizah Walter
Legacy donors to Indspire, Toronto, ON

Legacy donors Tyler Ward and his wife Romizah Walter first heard about Indspire through an ad in Walrus Magazine. Tyler, an educator and health policy consultant says that “as a third generation Anglo-Saxon in Canada, I’m aware of our colonial past and believe it is important to give back time, money and professional expertise. For Romi and I this is the least we can do.” In an extraordinary gesture to build a more equitable future, Tyler and Romizah have arranged to leave most of their estate to charities in Canada, including Indspire.

Tyler says that “I chose Indspire over other potential charities because I believe that we have a moral imperative to actively provide financial resources to Indigenous youth to help them thrive, and to remediate past colonial harms.”

Tyler’s awareness of Indigenous communities started early. His parents, a high school teacher and public health nurse, worked in high-need neighbourhoods and they talked to him frequently about the inequities that they witnessed. Tyler says, “they helped shape my understanding of poverty and social justice in Canada and the importance of contributing what one can to help alleviate the situation. That is why I was motivated to include charitable giving in my estate to ensure future generations benefit from our legacy gift.”

Tyler Ward is comfortable with the term ‘social justice’ to describe his approach to giving. “Life has deepened my understanding of inequality and how social, political, and economic conditions intersect to create these circumstances.” He continues, “my experiences working with marginalized communities and developing friendships with people from all walks of life expanded my knowledge of colonization’s role in creating injustice.”

“I am motivated by the decolonization of education, and I acknowledge the role that people like me, of Euro Canadian origin, played in creating a society that did not recognize the rights and cultures of Indigenous people, and actively oppressed them.” He states, “all together, these experiences encouraged me to take clear action to create opportunity for Indigenous people to become change-makers in Canada.”

Tyler and Romizah want other potential donors to know that they can make a big impact in the world by supporting Indspire. “My wife and I have peace knowing that, upon our deaths, our money is going to a good cause. There will be people whose quality of life will improve, and while we cannot change the past, we can ensure past injustices do not reoccur – and that current injustice is addressed and changed.”

“I am confident that Indspire is the right choice. Providing educational opportunities for Indigenous youth will set them on the path to making social change. They will become significant decision-makers who can address today's pressing issues like climate change and reducing social inequality.”

Tyler and Romizah have a heartfelt wish that a “contribution to Indspire will help lead to a Canada where Indigenous people have equal representation in all aspects of the economy, education, social, and political sectors. We hope our giving will encourage more people to contribute towards addressing and implementing all the calls to action for Truth and Reconciliation, and to create a more just society.”

If you would like to learn more about leaving a legacy gift to Indspire, please contact Margaret Purcell at mpurcell@indspire.ca or 416-637-3562. •

Sharing Indigenous Culture Through Immersive Experiences

Kylik Kisoun Taylor, *Indspire Award* Laureate
Inuvik, NT



Kylik Kisoun Taylor's entrepreneurial dreams began out on the land, learning traditional ways and stories from his father, uncles and grandparents. Immersed in his Inuvialuit and Gwich'in background, he channeled the skills he learned along with his passion for community development into a thriving tourism business, serving as both owner and guide. Created when Kylik was just 19 years old, Okpik Arctic Village provides national and international visitors with an authentic experience of Inuit culture and the unique atmosphere of the North.

"It's quite nice to get recognized because it's been a very long, hard journey. It's been 18 years of trying to make this happen and talking and working towards this goal of reconciliation within business. I feel tourism is the best avenue for that. It spreads the message, it educates others, I feel like that was the best avenue for what I wanted to accomplish and what I felt was missing in our community.

Our strength has always been our culture. That's what kept us alive. I am proud to be able to create jobs that are culturally based where our people can feel like they can be Indigenous and make a living. I always wanted to build a very immersive experience where people can really understand how we live."

His continual focus is social innovation, sustainable development, and community development, placing Indigenous values at the heart of everything he does. Employing Indigenous people and assisting them with skills development, Kylik also funnels revenue back into the community wherever possible. Kylik has won

several awards for his socially responsible entrepreneurship and regularly contributes his knowledge to organizations such as the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC). He is an in-demand public speaker, lobbying to have traditional Indigenous activities such as hunting, harvesting, and foraging recognized as eco-tourism activities.

"For me, one of the most important things is to portray that message and really tell people and show them, we're important. How we live, our culture, our way of sustainability, our way of community. This is something that is very powerful and really really important and it's missing in your life too. It's not just missing in my life as an Indigenous person that's been taken from me over the last 300-400 years, it's also missing in your life and been systematically taken away from you.

I dream of a day when our communities aren't recovering and fighting and surviving and hurting each other and I just dream of a time when we live up to the potential that we've created in this world right now. I dream of a future where the things I needed as a child exist, where it's not a struggle to reclaim who I am, to reclaim who my people are."

Kylik Kisoun Taylor received an *Indspire Award* this year in the Business & Commerce category. •

Online Viewing



Watch the *Indspire Awards* online

The 2023 Indspire Awards celebrates 30 years of honouring First Nations, Inuit and Métis achievers who exemplify Indigenous excellence and whose stories inspire, uplift, and educate Canadians about the tremendous contributions Indigenous people make to our country. You can watch the *Indspire Awards* online at:

<https://gem.cbc.ca/indspire-awards-2023>

Watch the latest virtual event

In May, Indspire's CEO Mike DeGagné had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Evan Adams - an Indigenous actor, playwright, and physician. A Coast Salish from the Sliammon First Nation BC, he was the first-ever Aboriginal Health Physician Advisor in the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, BC Ministry of Health (2007-2012). He has held such positions as the Deputy Provincial Health Officer for the province of BC, and is currently the Chief Medical Officer of the First Nations Health Authority. Dr. Adams was the 2014 recipient of the *Indspire Award* for Health.



You can watch the interview online at:

<https://indspire.ca/events/virtual-events/>

Check out the 2022-2023 *Building Brighter Futures* Impact Report



We are so pleased to be able to share with you the impact you helped make possible last year with your support for Indigenous post-secondary students.

Visit: <https://indspire.ca/brighterfutures> or scan the QR code to see the incredible difference you made in the lives of more than 7,500 Indigenous students. Thank you!

