



# Indspire

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

## INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Fall 2024

### A message from Mike DeGagné

In this fall addition of Inspiring Change, I'm happy to share stories about students you've help in the trades and technology fields. Last year, Indspire supported 484 students in these fields thanks to donors like you.

As you may know, skilled workers in trades and technology are in high demand across Canada. Building a career in trades and technology opens many doors to high-paying and stable job opportunities. This financial security empowers Indspire bursary recipients, their families, and the community – and provides a solid foundation for a prosperous future.

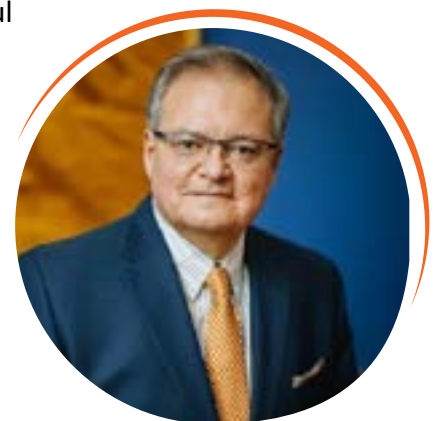
When Indigenous students have a chance to succeed in trades and technology careers, they become strong role models for younger generations. This representation can inspire even more Indigenous youth to follow similar paths, creating a bright and lasting cycle of positive impact. Thank you for being

part of this positive impact with your support to Indspire. I hope you enjoy reading the stories in these pages and know that these students are very grateful for your support, as am I.

Wishing you a wonderful fall.

Sincerely,

Mike DeGagné  
President & CEO





## Be a Trailblazer!

**Kristine Henderson**  
**Manitoba Métis Federation**  
**Construction Electrician,**  
**New Brunswick Community College**

**K**ristine's story is maybe a little bit different from what you might expect. "I decided to switch careers to trades, and away from being a high school math and science teacher. I wanted to try a more direct, hands-on style of work and to craft a better work-life balance for myself."

Trades and technology fields offer practical, hands-on learning experiences. This appealing approach can be more engaging and rewarding for many people, allowing students to see the immediate impact of their work and efforts. Kristine says that "with trades I also found that I love the constant change and challenge of being on a different job, sometimes every day."

"The rate of women in trades across Canada is low. And shockingly low for Indigenous women, in particular. I want Indigenous women to know that I have found excellent and supportive instructors and great co-workers at every step. On top of this, I really like the school approach of being able to both study and work through the process. This lessens the debt load at the end."

Kristine feels that "it is so important for Indigenous people to increase representation within the trades. There is sometimes big pressure to go to university, but many trades and technology programs require less time and financial investment compared to traditional four-year degrees. This makes it so much easier to work and study at the same time, and to start your career sooner and with fewer barriers."

"To Indigenous women and women in general, I say don't be afraid of going against the norm. Know your value in the world. Stand up and you will find good people to help you along the way. As people often say, you must be part of the change that you want to see in the world, both as an Indigenous person and as a woman."

Kristine is a natural and motivating leader when she says "be a trailblazer! Just find an introductory class, give it a try and you will be surprised how fast you can develop as a person. Try your best at whatever you choose to do. Go for it."

*She continues, "Inspire funds helped alleviate so much stress for me. I could focus and do my best in school. The extra support to Indigenous students helps open so many more new opportunities. Giving thanks is a huge thing to Indigenous people, and we are all so thankful for the help donors to Inspire provide. One by one, this generosity is how we create more role models and achieve better representation with every generation. I say, look what I've been able to do – and don't be afraid of career change at any age. Find something that will interest you, it might be scary, but it is always worth it to try."*

Kristine has a clear vision for the future, "once I complete all my certifications – I'm even considering using my previous career skills to teach trades to a new generation of people!" •

## Dedication and Hard Work Make Success

**Frank O'Soup**  
**The Key First Nation, SK**  
**Welding,**  
**Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology**



**P**ursuing education in trades and technology provides Indigenous students with practical, hands-on skills and problem-solving abilities that are valuable both professionally and personally. These in-demand skills can also foster innovation and entrepreneurship within Indigenous communities.

Representation in the trades can inspire more Indigenous youth to follow similar paths. With the help of donors to Indspire, this creates a cycle of positive impact and increases the presence of Indigenous professionals in these fields.

Ambitious and hardworking Indspire bursary recipient Frank O'Soup is one of these students. He researched training opportunities and chose to build a career in the trades and technology. Frank tells us that, "I'm a student taking the Welding Certificate program at the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology in Saskatoon. Welding is the perfect trade for me, and I take pride in my work. This is my chance to prove to myself that I can do it!"

Donor support was essential to launching his career. He continues, "I am truly grateful and honored to be able to receive award support from Indspire. With the help of donors, I am now able to fully focus on my studies and not have to worry about the financial hardships while being a student. This is a huge weight off my shoulders."

Frank is working and studying to advance his own opportunities, but also keeps an eye on helping his colleagues. "I'm a person who admires hard work, loyalty, and accountability in others. I'm dedicated to

my craft, as well as to furthering my education and I try to make myself available to my classmates every day. I take pride in leadership. I see my class as a team, and to me, success would be for us all to graduate together."

His plans for a bright future are clear and ambitious: "Once I complete this welding program, I'd like to work on pipelines as a welder's helper and work my way up to become a journeyman welder. After all my certifications are complete, I'm interested in one day studying welding engineering. Eventually, my goal is to own my own welding and fabrication company – and I want to hold multiple journeyman tickets."

His desire to achieve big things in life have grown because of his dedication to education and training. Frank says that "I come from a small reserve, a community in a healing process due to seemingly constant crises.

*When I grew up, I always imagined myself doing big things. That includes being a role model for my community. In the past, I struggled with accountability. It didn't matter to me if I failed or not. But I have matured. I'm ready to take this next big step in my life and I am always working on my flaws to be a stronger, more confident person. I believe dedication and hard work will make me successful. And I keep building confidence."*

Frank concludes by saying, "to the donors of Indspire, thank you for your support. You are helping to make my dreams come true." •



## It All Started with Help From Indspire

**Caleb Langlois**  
**Nipissing First Nation, ON**  
**Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning (HVAC),**  
**Cambrian College**

**C**aleb started his training in the trades at Cambrian College, but there was a big problem stopping him. “I really needed tuition support. When Indspire said yes, it was such a big relief. I was in the first year of my college program in HVAC and immediately, my worry went down, and I was able to put all my energy and focus into doing the work of learning.”

What attracted him to the trades?

“I did research and discovered that HVAC combined training in many trades. For example, you need training as an electrician, in plumbing, carpentry, and sheet metal. I wanted as much knowledge as I could get because there is a big need where I live.”

Caleb found that, “people are scrambling to hire well trained younger people to work because many professionals in the trades are getting older and starting to retire. Once I graduated, I got a job right away. I am so happy to be working with a family-owned company that has been in operation for three generations.”

“I’m taking more education all the time and am currently working on my refrigeration apprenticeship, and gas and oil technician training. It will take me four or five more years to progress through all the specialities that make up my trade. And it all started with the help I received from Indspire!”

Caleb wants others to know that “for Indigenous students, the trades can be an awesome decision. It

really is the best career path. There are so many options available, and even more options become available with time and experience.”

Careers in trades provide students with valuable skills and problem-solving abilities. These skills not only enhance a professional life but also contribute to personal growth and resilience. Caleb found that “you can work while you develop skills like good personal and work habits, learning to work with others and by yourself. It’s like being in sports – you are on a team in most cases with trades and technology careers. You learn big things about how things move and fit together in the world.”

He continues, “once certified, you get regular raises, employers will even buy you the tools to help your long-term success. They make sure you have everything you need to work through the process of starting as a student, to journeyman, to fully licenced trades person.”

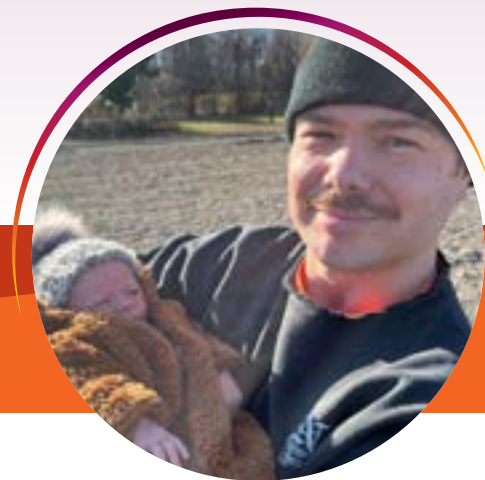
“The help from Indspire was a great investment in me, 100%!”

“School has made a big difference with my peers, as well. I have become more patient working with people. I’ve gained so much experience working with people, that I now supervise. I always remember that I was ‘that kid’ once, I am so much better in my people skills as a result.”

“To the donors to Indspire, I say, please keep doing what you are doing. People supported by Indspire are good people who want to work and make a good life.” •

# The Trades Build a Strong Character

Joe Biancaniello  
Nunavut Tunngavik, NU  
Carpenter,  
Mohawk College



Indspire recipient Joe Biancaniello tells us that support for higher education has been a long time coming for Indigenous communities. He believes that Indigenous people, especially in the North, have been shortchanged in the Western school system. But now, Joe says that “today brings a new opportunity to build back trust.”

Joe has seen first-hand that education in the trades and technology brings much more than economic opportunity to students.

“I’ve seen how working in the trades builds character.” He continues, “you must learn perspective, work hard, be on a schedule, feel better about yourself, and take care of your physical and mental health. With your good work you quickly become valued by other people, and you also learn how to pass knowledge on. Building character also means that you take a lot of pride in working in the trades. There is a sense of personal power when you build good and sound things – stairs that you can stand on, a roof that works, projects that create solid value for people. This is also what I mean by building character. In the trades, you learn so much from your mentors, and from being part of a team. Your peers really can help shape your future.”

Joe says that trades, “provide Indigenous people with a job with a strong future. Limitations can be left behind. We are paid very well, and everything works together to form a side of life that you didn’t even know existed before. Trades also train people in a very disciplined way of thinking.”

Joe is proud to say that “my job feels more and more secure every day. We learn skills that will not be taken over by a computer. On top of that, I wanted to build my own house and I now know that I can do it all myself. That means I have the confidence and experience to upgrade an old house for my family, and to build something great that will last.”

The idea of building a strong character keeps coming back in Joe’s story. “Trades teach you a different perspective on life. You develop skills in organization that applies to how you run your day-to-day life. You increase social skills, communication skills, you meet challenges head on and solve problems. You can develop confidence in handling sometimes intimidating environments. It’s all confidence, awareness, and focus.”

He adds, “in the future I want to help train other young Indigenous apprentices in the construction industry. Especially I want to see an increase in the number of Inuit carpenters. I haven’t really met a lot of Indigenous tradespeople. And they are needed to help build sound, modern housing and useful infrastructure for Indigenous people across Canada.”

“Sadly, so many Indigenous people cannot accept the offer of attending school because they don’t have the money.”

“Indspire’s help to fund my training brought me so much peace of mind. It was a comfort for me and my young family to know that we would be okay financially, and that someone cared to help us get started. Thank you!” •



## More Indigenous Women Needed in Trades

**Rebekka Sauve**  
**Métis Nation of Alberta**  
**Plumbing, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology**

**R**ebekka says “I found Indspire while doing online research. At the time I was working in retail and felt that for me, this wasn’t the way to live. I looked into the future job potential of the trades and found a course introduction to encourage women to apply. I quickly found out that this new skill of fixing things was something that I was really good at, and I quickly became passionate about seeing more women choose the trades.”

She points out that Indigenous students should, “just look out at all the service trucks on the road. There is endless opportunity. Do research and get started. There are endless opportunities to build knowledge and gain experience.”

“The resilience of Indigenous people is historic. I think I speak for us all when I say we have been through our share of fires. I think it’s really important to be our most authentic selves, that’s where you will find what you’re looking for. I found my pre-trades program for women by going back to my roots. Indigenous people are hard working, dedicated, and strong workers and will surprise you if you give them the chance.”

“I’m still learning about Indigenous issues. I feel like Indigenous people get hurt by so many negative stereotypes that prevent us from being successful. The answer to this is to be successful anyway! My dream is to become a one-woman contractor, to start small and to grow a company.”

“As an Indigenous woman in the trades, customers don’t expect to see me show up at their door. One of

my proudest moments was being a role model for the next generation. I was on a residential job when the customer asked me if she could bring her very young daughter in to watch me work. She wanted to show her daughter that women could also be in the trades. The young girl and I chatted, and she asked me lots of questions. This is how lives can be changed and how young women come to realize that they can do anything they put their minds to.”

“The donor support that I’m receiving means more than I can even put into words. I am so eternally grateful and thankful for this kindness. It’s not an easy task to get an education without going into a mountain of debt. The stress of debt takes focus away from being able to fully absorb what I’m learning – and this award has helped with this tremendously.”

She continues, “my big plan is to go for my Red Seal ticket, once I’ve reached journeyperson. And my big audacious goal is to one day go for my full carpentry ticket and then one day be a one-woman service contractor. I want to have my own business, service truck, and everything!”

By succeeding in trades, Rebekka is becoming a role model for other Indigenous youth and women. Her success can inspire others to follow in her footsteps, increasing Indigenous representation in these fields and creating a cycle of positive change.

To Indspire donors, Rebekka says, “thank you so much for your generous support, you’ve really inspired me, and I hope to be able to give back to my community as generously as you have. Miigwech!” •

# Donor's Corner: Life Works Better When You Can Help Lift Others

Roy Ellis  
Calgary, AB



**R**oy Ellis is a genuine and deeply thoughtful person. This generous role model has made a habit of doing extraordinary yet simple things to show others the way to overcome their fears, and to give back to others, like the students supported by Indspire.

His epic journey to bike across Canada and raise money for Indspire began with a desire to make big personal changes.

Roy starts, "I think I'm a typical Canadian, my family had grown, the kids are out and working. Wanting to get into better shape, I started in a basic running club. In time I graduated up to more and more difficult challenges, even entering gruelling Ultramarathon of 135 KM."

Why do all this at a time of life when so many decide to kick back and relax?

He continues, "I wanted to push my boundaries and find out if I could truly achieve whatever I set my mind to. I think we all have a fear of failure sometimes, but I wanted to create big challenges for myself and see if it was possible to 'get comfortable with being uncomfortable'. I wanted more out of my life. After talking to my wife, I quit my job, we sold the house, and my wife and I started the adventure of making long distance bike excursions around the world."

One of Roy's biggest and unexpected learnings? "I realized that I needed to also do something positive for someone that I didn't know. But I didn't know where to start."

On one long bike ride he happened to be listening to the audiobook of *True Reconciliation*, by Jody Wilson-Raybould. "Her message resonated with me.

Especially when she said to not just agree to reconciliation in principle – but to go out and really make a difference. I know very little about the realities and challenges facing Indigenous people, but know they are very real and want to make a difference. When I heard Jody Wilson-Raybould talk, I felt so connected."

Roy tells us, "My father's passion for education was passed down to me and I knew that I wanted my support of reconciliation to include education. But I didn't know how to begin. I researched many possibilities and one name that kept coming up again and again, was Indspire."

"Indspire is the kind of impressive grassroots charity that really changes lives! I wanted to connect with Indspire as a donor and do this fundraising event. This is my effort to raise awareness to everyone I talk to across Canada and support opportunities for young Indigenous people. I have the same messages for everyone – learn to think about fear differently! Keep pushing forward no matter what and support each other along the way."

Roy's final message to donors is simple. "Just give. Feel good. And read Jody's book! It is a win/win situation. If you can help lift others, you will also help yourself in so many ways. Just give yourself the space to try. You will be amazed at all the good things that will happen."

You can read more about Roy's journey here: <https://www.bikepackadventurecanada.com/about-3>

If you are interested in creating a fundraiser for Indspire, please connect with Angel Miller at [amiller@inspire.ca](mailto:amiller@inspire.ca). •

## Watch the Indspire Awards online

The 2024 Indspire Awards celebrates 31 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://indspire.ca/events/indspire-awards/>



## Check out the 2023-2024 *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 [www.indspire.ca/brighterfutures](http://www.indspire.ca/brighterfutures) or scan the QR code to see the incredible difference you made in the lives of more than 8,300 Indigenous students. Thank you!

