

Indspire

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

INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Fall 2026

A Message from Jocelyn Formsma

Wachay. This edition of *Inspiring Change* celebrates students who are pursuing remarkably different paths yet are united by a shared purpose: using education to strengthen Indigenous communities and create lasting change. Whether through teaching, research, public policy, language revitalization, law, or economic development, each student is building a future rooted in knowledge, culture, and service.

The students you will meet in these pages are driven by lived experience and a deep commitment to giving back. They are preserving Indigenous languages, advancing equitable public policy, strengthening Indigenous economies, expanding research grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, and inspiring the next generation to believe in what is possible. Their ambitions extend far beyond personal success—they are investing in the well-being of their families, communities, and Nations.

For many Indigenous students, pursuing post-secondary education is not a straightforward journey. Financial barriers, geographic distance, family responsibilities, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism continue to create challenges that can stand in the way of opportunity. This is where Indspire's support becomes transformational.

Financial assistance provides more than tuition or books—it provides confidence, stability, and the opportunity to focus on learning and leadership.

What inspires me most is that every student featured here speaks about creating opportunities for others. They want to teach, mentor, preserve culture, strengthen communities, and ensure future generations have greater opportunities than they did. Their education becomes an investment that reaches far beyond the individual.

As President and CEO of Indspire, I am honoured to share these stories with you and grateful for your partnership. Your generosity is helping students realize their potential while strengthening Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. Together, we are investing in leaders, educators, researchers, language keepers, and changemakers whose impact will be felt for generations to come.



Photo credit Tiffany Thomas of Taylre Media

Meegwetch,

Jocelyn W. Formsma, HBSocSci, JD
President and CEO



Reconciliation Starts with Education

Alexis Hodge
First Nations, Sagkeeng First Nation, MB
Bachelor's Degree, Indigenous Land Based Education
University of Manitoba

Alexis Hodge is a dedicated and energetic teacher of the youngest children. She is, "so grateful that Indspire helped me to become a teacher of Indigenous land-based education to children aged 6 and 7 in Winnipeg." This keeper of tradition says she "loves the privilege of teaching the next generation the fundamentals of how to be an Indigenous person on this land, how to meaningfully connect to nature."

"Children can understand that everything has a purpose and is a gift from the Creator. We form a foundation for this learning by going on field journeys with our magnifying glasses where we learn about plants, the earth, bugs — and we see the seasons of the world. I teach that everything has life. We learn to respect all on the land from the smallest up to human beings and our communities, and we learn positive life skills along the way."

She continues, "I'm a mother of 3 and an Indigenous educator in the Seven Oaks School division. I come from Sagkeeng First Nation in Manitoba. I want to be a positive role model for my own children and the children I teach. I believe getting children started learning about Indigenous culture is vital because our culture, ways of knowing, being and creating have been lost due to colonization. I can make a difference through my love for teaching."

The larger impact of this work can be critical. Alexis points out that, "people don't realize that in many school districts, Indigenous education can also touch students from newcomer families to Canada, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous students." She continues, "in parent teacher conferences I've had newcomer families tell me that their children come home to instruct the family with new learning. Together, they learn a richer understanding of a unique Indigenous worldview."

To ensure this legacy continues, she says that, "it's urgent to train more Indigenous educators. More young people need to be hired to transmit our unique teachings of the land and culture. And the work should be fun and engaging, especially for children. When you are 6 and 7 years old, school should be fun and a great adventure that you look forward to every day."

> "I think donors to Indspire show that the value of supporting Indigenous education is 'reconciliation'. This happens when we can fully educate future generations and ensure that our culture is alive. With this reconciliation, we will fully understand the world and strengthen our connections and relationships."

She sees a future where, "I can go to graduate school to learn more about Indigenous land-based learning and take more knowledge into the classroom to share with students as well as colleagues."

"I'm resolved to make a stronger impact by working to become a vice-principal or principal in the near future. There are not many Indigenous women in these roles today and so much work to be done!" •

Equality Trailblazer



Mason Dicker
Inuit, Nunatsiavut, Nain, NL
Bachelor's Degree, Political Science
Memorial University

"Indspire helped me get the tools I need to be successful at university. That means everything from the gas to get to school, to living expenses, and technology."

Mason Dicker, a Two-Spirit student studying Political Science tells us that, "receiving support is profoundly validating. It's hard to be seen in an academic situation. Indspire helped me a lot mentally to know that I could achieve my goals at school. I could feel comfortable in my space and the recognition helped me see my worth and deepen my motivation. Now I want to complete my master's."

Their drive and career plans are very clear. "I want to be a trailblazer for Indigenous policy to reflect and help make social change. I have been fortunate to have received an internship to study in Cambodia with the Indigenous people there. This helped me expand my environmental education focus into relocation policies, access to fresh water, and access to education, among other issues."

International study included being part of a six-month exchange program in Indigenous studies to New Zealand. "I was the first Indigenous student from Memorial University to go on this exchange program. It was overwhelming to see how colonialism has affected everyone in all corners of the world."

Closer to home, this extraordinary young student continued their fact-finding missions by being accepted in an Indigenous mentorship program at McGill University. "I had the privilege of having my work supervised by a professor. My project explored access to health care for Inuit elders and my final paper is accepted for publication."

Why did Mason choose Indigenous health care for study? "It was a personal connection for me. My grandfather was diagnosed with cancer. The whole experience of his treatment led to an awareness of this issue for me."

> "I believe it all comes down to equality. It is only right that everyone gets a fair chance to live and grow. Indigenous people have a further track to run compared to many others, in terms of opportunity and access. This is essential work!"

Mason says that, "it was hard growing up as both of my grandparents went to residential school, so I had to deal with the pain of that. I want to create a better future for all Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond."

Among their many goals, "I also want to be fluent in my Indigenous language of Inuktitut, so I can keep it alive and teach the younger generation as well. Along with this I would like to teach other youth the importance of education and even travel, as you get to experience and learn so many new things from different perspectives."

They finish by saying that, "when you help increase education levels, we become stronger. People often want to go back home and help to grow something bigger and better. Children can be so much more in the future. They can change the world. Donors give hope that the things we do will matter in the future – thank you for supporting my education." •



A Dynamic Catalyst for Positive Change

Hunter Clemons
Métis, Manitoba Métis Federation
Bachelor's Degree, Indigenous Studies
University of Manitoba

"I've been on my own since I was 18. Post secondary education is never something I thought I would pursue. It's been a long struggle of personal challenges to be a student — receiving support from the donors to Indspire has given me a huge uplift."

She says that "to have the surprise of an acceptance letter gave me such a relief. Your support makes education accessible for Indigenous people like me."

"Seeing how life was on one side has pushed me to walk a different path. People sometimes hold expectations for you when you are a certain way. I find purpose in knowing that our pasts do not have to define our future. As Indigenous people, we have a completely different worldview. We can bring so much benefit to society including fresh perspectives on the environment and on social relationships. Our knowledge can help everyone — especially the many people who feel alone today. Indigenous people emphasize community as a foundation and we know how to integrate that perspective into everything in life."

Hunter has found a transformative career focus, "once I understood the huge potential of Indigenous economic development, everything changed. I am committed to this vision because I have seen the transformative impact of Indigenous economic success. My goal is to support Indigenous economic development in any way possible and help foster the strengths that have always defined our Nations."

Indigenous populations are one of the fastest-growing demographics in Canada. It's been said that bridging Indigenous educational and employment gaps could add tens of billions of dollars annually to Canadian prosperity. Hunter says:

"My desire is to show how Indigenous economic development and entrepreneurship can build healthy communities and grow economies. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have always possessed strong economic traditions and systems. My dream is to help revitalize those strengths and foster growth for future generations. I've seen firsthand the strength of Indigenous nations. Their success comes from reconnecting with the qualities that have always defined us as Indigenous peoples: being hardworking, resilient, entrepreneurial, adaptable, tenacious, and willing to forge new paths."

She shares a perfect example of how this works. "In Manitoba, the development of Naawi-Oodena represents a transformative Indigenous-led economic initiative. Led by the Treaty One Nations, the project is creating an inclusive urban reserve in the heart of Winnipeg that will feature housing, commercial and business developments, community spaces, and cultural amenities. As one of the largest Indigenous economic development projects in Canada, Naawi-Oodena is designed to generate economic opportunity while creating a vibrant and welcoming community for future generations. "This area has significant potential to serve Indigenous peoples for generations to come and to become a welcoming hub and safe gathering space for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities within Winnipeg and across Manitoba."

Hunter concludes, "I am now in my final year at the U of M and am looking forward to working more with Indigenous economic development in the future. I believe this is the best future for me — to help change the story and increase positive Indigenous representation. Reconciliation takes two sides. Both sides need to be open to build strong relationships. We all play a part. The value is huge, and creating success has a ripple effect of positive change for not only us, but non-Indigenous communities as well." •

Language is a Treasure to Carry into the Future



Archie Manuel
First Nations, N'Quatqua, BC
Bachelor's Degree, Indigenous Language and Culture
University of British Columbia

Archie Manuel is an emerging leader in transmitting language and using culture to grow and strengthen communities.

He starts by saying, "I am of mostly Interior Salishian descent, my bloodlines are Sťáťimc on my mother's side and Syilx, Sécwepmec and Nłkapmec on my father's side. I live in Líl'wat - Mount Currie, BC and I work here as a Language Resource Worker at Xeťólacw Community School."

"I am fortunate enough to have taught my daughter our language. Our Sťáťimcets language was almost lost in my home community and has fallen into disuse, I want to change that for future generations. Language revitalization and learning Indigenous culture connects us to our lands. That means that when you go out into nature to walk, to observe the environment, to harvest — you feel more connected to the world. Even knowing the names of land helps to bring these names back into a living full circle. I believe that the ancestors can feel you. The elders can feel you. They are very happy when you can teach children about our language and culture."

Land, water, spirit animals, and humanity are all deeply connected. He says that, "it's a great feeling to tell a bear to go away in our language. I know — because I've done it."

"I was surprised and very grateful to receive support from Indspire. At first it was hard for me to take the step and ask for help. Getting an education is so important to have a chance to thrive in society. I can now look at the world with different views and understandings."

Photo of Archie at the NVIT graduation ceremony at the Chief Joe Mathias Centre in North Vancouver. "I was honoured to speak to the graduates as an NVIT alumni." A beautiful full circle moment.

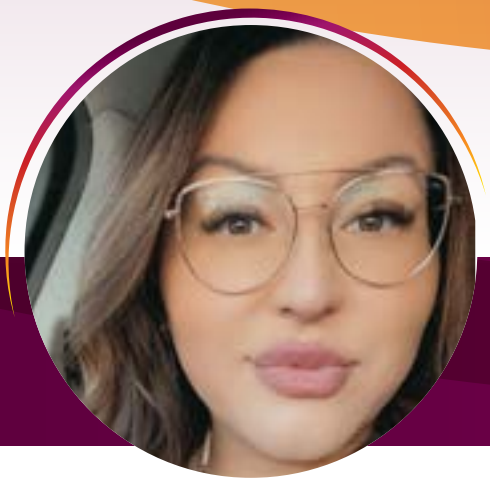
Support from donors to Indspire means that Archie can "help teach in our school's Ucwalmícwts Immersion Program and help teach some high school classes."

"We do immersion programs, field trips — trying to get outside the classroom is key. The children catch on quickly. We remind them of the importance of connecting to our ancestors, the land, and to all the things that were taken away."

> He continues, "I tell young people that language is a treasure to carry into the future. It is a strong way of saying that we are still here. We are still thriving and surviving."
>
> "This treasure is everything. It connects us to everything. It has been said that you are not just learning a word, you are learning a whole world."

He says, "growing up there was, and still is, a sort of stigma associated with our people's language and culture because of residential schools. I hope my language sharing methods will dissolve any feelings of shame and fear towards our ancestral ways."

Archie concludes by saying to donors, "you are helping youth to find goals, pursue passions, follow their dreams, help families, by growing the group of first-generation people to finish schooling. They will see the world, learn different worldviews, and provide a way forward for our people." •



Open Your Eyes to What Truly Matters

Ashley Thompson
First Nations, Mohawks of Akwesasne, ON
PhD, Indigenous Studies, Trent University

"I am a proud member of the Bear Clan from the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory. Indspire donors might not fully realize how their kindness opens doors for so many of us. The limitations, the hurdles can seem so huge. Your support means we can dream big. Every dollar counts! Big or small it all counts and helps us push limits and reach for the stars."

This young Indigenous leader in training says, "I first received Indspire support during my undergraduate at Trent University. I am so grateful for the help that has continued now into the second year of my PhD. Indspire truly understands my situation and goals as an Indigenous student."

Ashley elaborates: "the moment I decided to go back to academia I felt a powerful draw. As I get closer to completing my journey I understand better now that with the way the world is going it is so important to prioritize education, to prioritize research, and to help Indigenous youth reach their highest potential."

The return on investment is profound:

> "We can achieve anything we put our minds to — there is so much talent. There are future cardiac surgeons, leaders, performers on the world stage, and researchers like me, and so very many others just waiting for their chance to make dreams come true. Don't stop the encouragement!"

"My home community of Akwesasne is a vibrant, community-centered territory uniquely situated at the intersection of New York State, Ontario, and Quebec. We are actively engaged in healing from generational trauma, prioritizing language continuance, and reclaiming land-based teachings. Yet, much work remains as we continue striving toward true sovereignty — free from dependency on the Canadian and U.S. governments."

"I am pursuing my PhD to deepen my commitment to the continuance of Indigenous knowledge, language, and cultural practices — work that is essential to the healing and future well-being of my community. I am especially interested in land-based knowledge and teaching through experiential learning. This hands-on learning takes place out of the classroom. Connecting to the natural world can lead to a rediscovery of the self. We rely so much on technology that we forget the power of the natural world." She tells us to, "open your eyes to what truly matters. A deeper understanding and a gratitude for what has always helped us to survive is waiting."

"I plan to teach at the university level to help the continuance of our language and reclaim our voices within academic spaces. I also intend to teach through beadwork, ensuring this ancestral practice is passed down with integrity and a strong connection to the land. Beadwork is powerful medicine. It offers a rooted connection to our ancestors and allows us to tell our stories while creating heirloom pieces for future generations."

"I believe that the knowledge we carry is not solely ours — it is meant to be shared, passed on, and preserved for those who come after us." •

Walking the Red Road, Creating Paths to Healing



Albert "South Wind" Dumont
Culture, Heritage, & Spirituality Laureate (2026)

For Albert "South Wind" Dumont, healing has never been about one person. It is about restoring relationships—with ourselves, with one another, and with the teachings that have guided Indigenous Peoples for generations.

Named the Indspire Laureate for Culture, Heritage & Spirituality in 2026, Albert has devoted his life to sharing Indigenous knowledge as an Elder, spiritual advisor, poet, author and human rights advocate. His work has helped bring Indigenous teachings into Canada's healthcare, education and justice systems, creating spaces where healing and understanding can flourish.

Albert's own path began with healing himself.

"When my sobriety began, I got involved with human rights activism," he reflects. "To me, it's unnatural and abnormal not to care about human beings."

That simple but powerful belief has guided decades of service.

After overcoming early hardship, addiction and a life-changing injury, Albert chose to walk the Red Road in 1988. Since then, he has become one of Canada's most respected Indigenous cultural leaders, publishing nine books of poetry and short stories, two trilingual children's books, and serving as Ottawa's Poet Laureate, where he launched the I Am a Human Being poetry contest to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices together through storytelling.

Some of his most profound work, however, took place behind prison walls.

As a spiritual advisor at Millhaven Institution—once known as Canada's most violent prison—Albert was warned that Elders rarely remained longer than a few weeks. Rather than be discouraged, he focused on building relationships.

"I said, 'You guys don't trust me now, but there's going to come a day where you will trust me, because I intend to earn that trust.'"

That trust was tested just months later when an Indigenous inmate was fatally shot and tensions threatened to erupt into violence. "There was going to be a riot," Albert recalls. "There was going to be bloodshed."

Instead of allowing anger to divide the prison community, Albert proposed something unprecedented: holding a traditional Feast for the Dead within the prison walls to honour the young man's life. "They agreed," he says. "So there was no riot, and we did a feast for the dead. We had moose meat and beaver meat and traditional foods."

The ceremony became a powerful demonstration of the strength of Indigenous teachings. "They saw how strong, and how beautiful, and how effective Indigenous spiritual beliefs were."

Throughout his career, Albert has carried those teachings into countless institutions and communities, advising the Parole Board of Canada, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, and St. Michael's Hospital's Well Living House. He has also helped shape national conversations on reconciliation, including speaking at the National Commemorative Service for Queen Elizabeth II in 2022 and the Coronation Celebration for King Charles III in 2023.

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Despite these remarkable achievements, Albert measures success not by titles or recognition, but by the impact he leaves on others. Reflecting on the brevity of life, he recalls the words of Chief Crowfoot:

"Life is the flash of a firefly in the night. It's the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It's that little shadow that races across the grass and loses itself in the sunlight."

Then he quietly shares the legacy he hopes to leave behind: **"At the end of my life, I hope that it is said that Albert Dumont was a good human rights activist."**

As an Indspire Laureate, Albert "South Wind" Dumont reminds us that true leadership begins with compassion, is strengthened through trust, and leaves a legacy of healing that extends far beyond a single lifetime.

If you haven't had the chance to watch the 2026 Indspire Awards, you can do so now at the QR code below. •

Why I Chose to Support Indspire

By Betty-Anne Howard



Education changed my life.

My father couldn't read or write, and we grew up with very little. As a child, I didn't think of us as poor—I just knew my parents worked hard and believed that education could open doors.

When I went on to post-secondary school, I was fortunate to receive financial support that made it possible. I've never forgotten what that meant. It wasn't just about the money. It was knowing that someone believed in me and my future.

That experience stayed with me throughout my life. It taught me that talent and potential are everywhere, but opportunity is not.

That's why I chose to leave a gift in my Will to Indspire.

I believe every young person deserves the chance to pursue their education and their dreams. I also believe Indigenous youth bring incredible strength, knowledge, and leadership to our communities, yet many still face barriers to accessing education.

Supporting Indspire is my way of helping create opportunities for future generations. It's a way of paying forward the support I once received and saying to another young person, "I believe in you."

If my legacy can help open a door for someone else, then it will be one of the most meaningful gifts I leave behind. •

November is **Make a Will Month**, a reminder that your Will is more than a legal document—it's an opportunity to reflect your values and the legacy you want to leave. If you're considering creating or updating your Will, you can also make a lasting difference by including a gift to Indspire.

To learn more about leaving a legacy gift, please contact: Fiona Ghosh Bedlington fbedlington@indspire.ca or Margaret Purcell mpurcell@indspire.ca