Indspire

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



Land & Water: The Role of Relocation

2026 | DENDEWICZ, D., AYSON, G., & DEHGHANSAI, N.

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Chief Lady Bird is a Chippewa and Potawatomi artist from Rama First Nation and Moosedeer Point First Nation, who is currently based in Rama. She graduated from OCAD University in 2015 with a BFA in Drawing and Painting and a minor in Indigenous Visual Culture. Chief Lady Bird's art practice is continuously shapeshifting but always influenced by her passion for empowering and uplifting Indigenous folks through the subversion of colonial narratives. She is currently in her first term as a councillor for Rama First Nation and continues her work as an artist while using visual language to understand Anishinaabek Law within her role as a leader. She is also the illustrator for three childrens books *Nibi's Water Song*, *Smile So Big*, and *Together We Drum Our Hearts Beat As One*. Her work can be viewed on social media @chiefladybird.

ABOUT INDSPIRE

Indspire is a national Indigenous registered charity that invests in the education of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families, and communities. In partnership with Indigenous and private- and public-sector stakeholders, Indspire educates, connects, and invests in Indigenous people to help them achieve their highest potential. Indspire provides resources to students, educators, communities, and other stakeholders who are committed to improving success in education for Indigenous youth. Since 1996, Indspire has awarded over $313 million through more than 93,000 bursaries and scholarships to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth, making it the largest funder of Indigenous post-secondary education outside of the Canadian federal government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking our previous Building Brighter Futures program recipients who shared their experiences and provided valuable insight into the experiences of Indigenous students across Canada. Through the support of Indspire staff, funding partners, and other stakeholders, we are able to provide thousands of bursaries, scholarships, and awards each year to students pursuing post-secondary education and training.

At Indspire, it is important for us to provide space for Indigenous communities to feel seen, represented, and celebrated. The success experienced by Indigenous students, and the ways they use their education to demonstrate reciprocity and to give back to community, are truly inspiring and tells the story of how brighter futures can be built when we work in partnership.

Chi-Miigwetch for the hope and encouragement that you all bring.

RESEARCH SUPPORTERS

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This project explores the role of relocation and ocean access on Indigenous post-secondary students' ratings of **Cultural Connectedness (CC)**, **Mental Wellness (MW)**, and **Sense of Belonging (SB)**.

Literature Review Context:

Previous research suggests positive physical and mental impacts of access to ocean space. Blue spaces (coasts, salt marshes, beaches, and the ocean itself) promote physical health, mental health, and social wellbeing from infancy to old age. Moreover, relocating for school and living away from friends and family can lead to isolation and added stress.

Research Questions:

1. Does relocation lead to significant differences in cultural connectedness, social belonging, & mental wellness?
2. Is there a significant difference between "ocean- adjacent" provinces/territories (i.e., BC, NB, PEI, NF, NS) in CC, SB and MW compared to landlocked provinces (AB, ON, SK, MB, QC)?

Method:

2,989 Indigenous post-secondary students completed a Mental Wellness Survey in 2023 self-evaluating their MW, SB, and CC during their program.

OCEAN-ADJACENT

BC, NB, PEI, NF, NS



LANDLOCKED

AB, ON, SK, MB, QC

- **Cultural Connectedness (CC):** Connection, understanding and engagement with one's culture
- **Sense of belonging (SB):** Connection to one's community and their place within it
- **Mental Wellness (MW):** Holistic state of well-being

Key Insights

Students who relocated to another province reported higher MW and SB than those that did not.

Students who relocated to land based provinces (AB, ON), had higher SB compared to those in land-based provinces that did not relocate.

No significant difference in MW, SB, CC between students living in an ocean-adjacent province or territory and those living in a land-locked province.

Main Takeaway

Further research is required to better understand the factors why relocation positively contributes to higher ratings of mental wellness and sense of belonging.

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