



WALTER & DUNCAN  
GORDON FOUNDATION

RESOURCEFUL; RESILIENT; ROOTED; LEADERS

AUGUST 2012

# *Sapiliqtailimaniq* BECOMING

PRESENTED BY THE JANE GLASSCO ARCTIC FELLOWS

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RESOURCEFUL; RESILIENT;  
ROOTED; LEADERS**

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# *Sapiliqtailimaniq* BECOMING

PRESENTED BY THE JANE GLASSCO ARCTIC FELLOWS



The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation is a private, philanthropic foundation based in Toronto, Canada. The Foundation undertakes research, leadership development and public dialogue so that public policies in Canada and internationally reflect a commitment to collaborative stewardship of our freshwater resources and to a people-driven, equitable and evolving Arctic. The Gordon Foundation has invested over \$17 million in a wide variety of Northern community initiatives over the past quarter century.



The Jane Glassco Arctic Fellowship Program is aimed at young Northerners, especially Aboriginal Northerners, aged 25-35, who want to build a strong North guided by Northerners. It is for those who, at this stage in their lives, are looking for additional support, networks and guidance from mentors and peers across the North and throughout Canada as they deepen their understanding of important issues facing their region and develop policy ideas to help address them. The program was named in honour of Jane L. Glassco, Gordon Foundation trustee and daughter of founders Walter and Elizabeth Gordon. It was through Jane's direct leadership that the Foundation became deeply interested in Northern and Arctic issues, and in supporting young Northerners.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Google the word “leadership” and well over a million *results* are generated, offering page after page of links to definitions of leadership as well as descriptions of leadership qualities, skills, theories, traits, styles and more. Business schools, executive training programs, management gurus, think tanks, foundations and legions of social activists and consultants have explored and written about the concept of leadership from almost every angle. However, type in the term “Northern leadership” and what appears are links to scholarly articles or recent stories about national Aboriginal leaders in the news carried by various Canadian media outlets.

The dearth of information about Northern leaders prompted us as members of the Jane Glassco Arctic Fellowship Program to rectify this imbalance by undertaking research into the question: What does it take to be a leader? What makes a leader, in a Northern context? The twelve Jane Glassco Arctic Fellows who

have undertaken this study are from the North, reside in the North and have been educated, to some extent, in the North. Many of us have Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> heritage.

It is important to note that this was not intended to be a study focussed exclusively on Aboriginal leaders or Aboriginal education. Nor were the research participants uniformly of Aboriginal descent. However, given the North’s demographic composition and the ubiquitous presence of Indigenous culture, “Aboriginal” and “Northern” themes are intertwined. We did not attempt to delineate the two but rather focused on Northern leadership writ large.

It is well documented that Canada’s Aboriginal populations face numerous struggles when it comes to receiving an education, whether traditional or western, a challenge that is even more profound in

Canada’s North.<sup>2</sup> The obstacles have proven to be difficult and, in many cases, impossible for many Northerners to overcome. However, some individuals ‘schooled’ in Northern learning environments are breaking these barriers and not only leading healthy and productive lives, but also contributing to their communities in meaningful ways. Put simply, some learners become leaders. But why only some? This paper seeks out common factors in the learning environment that empowered such individuals.

<sup>1</sup> The word Aboriginal is used throughout the document as the umbrella term to describe all Indigenous groups in Canada’s North, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis

<sup>2</sup> Research by the Conference Board of Canada reveals that having a university degree makes a huge difference to the well-being of Aboriginal peoples, with employment outcomes being virtually identical *if a university degree is obtained*. Yet only 4% of First Nations people, 4% of Inuit, and 8% of Aboriginal people (including Métis), have a university degree, compared to 23% of the Canadian population. The ramifications of these results are explored in greater depth later in this document. (Conference Board of Canada. *Lessons Learned: Achieving Positive Educational Outcomes in Northern Communities*. Centre for the North Education and Learning series. February, 2012, p. 4.)

For answers, we turned to the real experts on this issue – current Northern leaders. We conducted interviews with a total of 20 recognized leaders from all across Canada's North who live and work in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut (Northern Quebec and Northern Labrador, respectively). Some leaders are household names, several having played high-profile roles on the national stage. Others are largely unsung heroes who quietly exert their leadership at the local level in low-key, but nonetheless powerful, ways that have profound, positive impacts on the people around them.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with Northern residents whom we deem to be successful for varied reasons. The leaders were asked about their personal educational experiences, both within the formal school system and informally within their individual environments, as well as the extent to which these experiences shaped and sharpened their leadership skills.

The goals and objectives of this research project were to:

1. Identify common factors associated with an individual's learning environment that have helped the individual break past the barriers to achieve relative success, success defined as continuing to give back to their community in a meaningful and beneficial way; and,
2. Promote the common factors identified in the study as foundations for success in Northern learning environments through public policy.

In an effort to go beyond formal education and explore the full suite of learning systems, we include traditional learning and land-based learning as a fundamental part of the study.

In addition to the lessons learned through these interviews, this report provides an overview of the current state of education across Canada's North. We wanted to gauge what, if anything, has changed in the Northern learning environment since our selected leaders' formative years in order to inform policy makers of ongoing challenges for North-

ern learners seeking to become Northern leaders and to offer constructive ideas for positive change.

Finally, our report benefits from the insights of participants in a Policy Forum, held during the week of June 25-29, 2012 in Iqaluit, Nunavut. The Gathering, entitled "*Knowledge is Within Us*", provided an opportunity for Fellows to showcase our group research project and to engage in dialogue with key Northern thinkers, influencers and decisions-makers around the education and cultural policies and programs that best nurture Northern leadership.<sup>3</sup> We also met with nation-builders: The three territorial Premiers, Iqaluit's Mayor, and Northern leaders from regional and international Inuit organizations, as well as the revered "fathers of Nunavut" – Tagak Curley and John Amagoalik.

This paper summarizes the research process, common themes, key findings and resulting policy recommendations of the Fellows who undertook this exploratory journey in partnership with

<sup>3</sup> See "Policy Forum participants list" in Annex D



their research subjects and Policy Forum participants.<sup>4</sup> Our research revealed that:

1. Similar learning challenges span the North; despite significant cultural differences across the five regions, individuals share similar challenges in attaining their education;
2. Dramatic disparities between Northern Canadians and Southern Canadians continue; the disparities are even greater between Northern Aboriginal Canadians and non-Aboriginal Canadians both in the North and South; and,
3. Many Aboriginal peoples continue to experience exclusion in the education system, in Northern and Southern schools alike, which can have lifelong repercussions for individuals and Northern communities

This has led us to recommend a total of 63 actions, to be undertaken individually and col-

lectively, by a broad range of actors with important roles to play – from governments to communities to individual families and students. Our joint task is to create inclusive learning environments in the North that prepare future generations with adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes to handle adversity and uncertainty, and to succeed in their personal and public lives. If we do, we will develop the next generations of leaders the North, and Canada, need.

The research findings are intended to provide the building blocks for Northern community leadership and support improvements to the overall state of education in Canada's North. It is hoped that this document will not only inform public policy makers but, equally important, it will stimulate discussion among Northerners about how best to nurture future leaders and inspire a new crop of Northerners to assume these vitally important roles.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the report's coverage of the Nunavik region is incomplete



# ABOUT OUR RESEARCH

**THE GOAL OF OUR RESEARCH AND THE SUBJECT OF THIS PAPER IS “TO UNDERSTAND AND OFFER POLICIES TO PROMOTE THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS WHICH FOSTER AN INDIVIDUAL’S POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR COMMUNITY AMONGST NORTHERNERS ACROSS CANADA.”**

**E**ducation, particularly higher education, is considered one of the greatest contributors to an individual’s social and economic success<sup>5</sup>. Despite its importance, the state of education in many Northern communities falls far short of what is needed to achieve these ends. Education in Northern Canada lags far behind the Canadian average in terms of literacy, high school completion and post-secondary graduation rates.<sup>6</sup> Even within the North, significant disparities in resources and learning opportunities between tiny rural communities and larger regional centres pose obstacles to accessing quality education.

Although the high school completion rate is about 10 per cent lower in the North than in the rest of Canada, university completion is barely half

that of Canadians as a whole.<sup>7</sup> This is an astonishing disparity, made worse by knowing that university attainment is the only level of education for which the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal standard of living is comparable.

The reasons for this discrepancy have been well documented, including euro-centric schooling that has undermined culturally rooted learning systems,<sup>8</sup> the damaging impacts of residential schools, the lack of learning system supports and the absence of a Northern university to put post-secondary education within physical and financial reach of more Northern youth.

Recent research has identified the significant effect of geographic proximity of post-secondary institutions on enrollment rates, particularly for socially disadvantaged groups who often opt to remain closer to home for familial, cultural or financial reasons.<sup>9</sup> Other studies have underscored that university-level language programming is critical to the survival of Aboriginal languages.<sup>10</sup>

The Gordon Foundation commissioned a discussion paper in 2009 that surveyed key institutional informants, particularly within government, and took stock of the array of initiatives already underway

9 Turley, Ruth N. Lopez. 2009. “College Proximity: Mapping Access to Opportunity.” *Sociology of Education* 82: 126-46.

10 “Education is a cornerstone of language revitalization efforts... Post-secondary language and cultural programs, including graduate studies programs, are part of this continuum of learning and support.” This is one of the insights gleaned by Greg Smith in his analysis of successful language revitalization strategies worldwide. From *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages IV: Making It Work* posted in *OurTimes*, the blog of the Consilium Consulting Group, Aarluk Consulting, and Stonecircle Consulting.

5 (Helvin and Snow, 2010)

6 (Poelzer, 2009)

7 Conference Board of Canada. *Lessons Learned: Achieving Positive Educational Outcomes in Northern Communities*. Centre for the North Education and Learning series. February, 2012, p. 4.)

8 (Antone, 2003)

relating to, or contemplating the idea of, a Northern university.<sup>11</sup>

A Northern Governance Policy Research Conference was convened in Yellowknife in late 2009 by five northern organizations – the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, Institute for Circumpolar Health Research, Dene Nation, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the Tłı̨chō Community Services Agency. The conference participants issued the following recommendation: “We would like to see the concept of an Arctic University take flight as soon as possible and call upon parties involved in existing discussions to engage with northern based researchers, knowledge holders, and policy makers, as well as existing non-government organizations and initiatives to start working with us to make an Arctic University a reality...”<sup>12</sup>

11 Stevenson, Blair. *Dialogue Towards a University in Canada's Far North: Environmental Scan*. Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation, Toronto: 2010.

12 *The Northern Governance Policy Research Conference* was spawned by the shared recognition that there is a severe lack of northern-driven policy research and dialogue. Recommendation 6 arising from the conference calls

The lack of access to a local post-secondary education is just one aspect of Northerners' difficult learning environment. A further factor is the tendency, which continues today, to “stream”<sup>13</sup> Aboriginal students into non-academic programs that make a university education inaccessible. Whether consciously or subliminally, educators often make assumptions about Northern learners' aptitudes and abilities and steer youth into the trades or gender-traditional occupations such as teaching and nursing. In part, this can be explained by the fact that such

for the establishment of an Arctic university: “We envision such an institution to take on the role of undergraduate and graduate education, but also be a site for policy development (i.e. “think tank”). As a conference group, we would like to make the collective call for increased funds and other support to coordinate different efforts that are already underway (i.e. ICHR, ARI, Dechinta) in pursuit of increase postsecondary and research infrastructure in the North.” The Conference is summarized well by David Brock in “By Northerners, for Northerners”, in *The Mark*, Nov. 6, 2009.

13 Government of the Northwest Territories, *Creating our Future Together, In search of a common vision for the Northwest Territories*, Education a Priority, page5 [http://www.daair.gov.nt.ca/\\_live/documents/content/Creating\\_our\\_Future.pdf](http://www.daair.gov.nt.ca/_live/documents/content/Creating_our_Future.pdf)

programming is more readily available in the North. Nursing, education and, in some regions social work, are the only post-secondary degree-track programs regularly on offer. While these vocations are vital to meeting the needs of the North, this trend also reflects a certain bias about what is “best” for Aboriginal learners, perhaps a carry-over from the paternalistic policies of the past which are only slowly disappearing.

Even given this differential treatment, and without the benefit of a regional university, many individuals ‘schooled’ in Northern learning environments overcame the daunting barriers that handicap so many others and have gone on to excel in their personal and professional lives. Despite the shortcomings of their educational opportunities, and frequent personal hardships, they lead healthy and productive lives, and inspire and support others around them as they contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

As a pan-Northern study undertaken by 12 researchers representing communities, spanning Yukon to Nunatsia-

vut, this study sought to understand the factors that made the difference and which made these positive results possible. We wanted to know whether learning environments, individual experiences, or some combination of these or other variables, motivated and empowered these individuals to achieve their potential. Through our research, we identified several factors common to all the individuals interviewed, which they credited for their success in spite of the many obstacles they encountered.

This paper summarizes our key findings and proposes policy alternatives that we expect can advance the state of education in the North for the benefit of Northerners, first and foremost, and, ultimately, all Canadians.

## OUR NORTHERN PERSPECTIVE

Instead of focusing, as so many studies have already, on the failings of the North's education systems, we wanted to look to those who have achieved success within these very systems. We wanted to

pinpoint common factors in the learning environment experienced by these individuals.

**"IN BIGGER PLACES, WE WOULD BE LIVING IN A LOG HOUSE OR WITH OTHER PEOPLE IN THEIR HOUSES. WE ALSO TRAVELED A LOT ON THE LAND SO WE WERE ALWAYS IN TENTS. WE ALWAYS HAD ONE DOG SLED THAT TOOK EVERYTHING THAT WE OWNED BECAUSE WE LIVED OFF THE LAND AND WE'RE MAKING CAMP FIRE AND COOK EVERYTHING OVER THE FIRE. WE NEVER TAKE PLATES SO WE USED SPRUCE NEEDLES AS PART OF OUR PLATE AND THE ONLY TOOL WE HAD WAS A KNIFE, AND THAT'S HOW WE EAT OUR FOOD. I STOPPED (LIVING THAT WAY) WHEN I WENT TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL AND I WAS A YOUNG TEEN BY THAT TIME."**

**— NWT INTERVIEWEE**

Their success, relative to their peers, and although facing the same barriers, suggests that additional factors within their learning environments have aided their growth and achievements.

Current understanding of learning within the field of educational psychology suggests the social context of learning – the preferences, values, attitudes, methods and approaches of the teachers and fellow learners – greatly impact the learner and what is being learned.<sup>14</sup>

As such, our study centred on understanding the social contexts of the learning environments in Northern communities that have shaped the successes of these individuals. In an effort to go beyond formal education and explore the full range of learning systems, we include traditional learning and land-based learning as an essential part of the study. We identified several common factors that have helped to nurture an individual's approach to learning and, most important, which have furthered their commitment to strengthen their communities.

## RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

We start from the premise that

if we understanding the learning environments experienced by the research participants, we can help improve educational policy so that it better reflects the unique educational needs of the North.

The goals and objectives of this project were to:

- Identify common factors associated with an individual's learning environment that have helped the individual break past the barriers to achieve relative success and continue to give back to his or her community in a meaningful and beneficial way; and,
- Promote, through public policy, the common factors identified in the study as foundations for success in Northern learning environments.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

To help us achieve our research goals and objectives, our primary research question focussed on understanding:

- What are the learning

environments experienced by these individuals that enabled him/her to succeed?

Further refining this question, we wanted to identify:

- The common factors within our research participants' learning environments that have helped lead to their success;
- The barriers they experienced along their learning paths; and,
- What helped them to overcome these barriers?

Last, based on the common factors identified by our research and the interviewees' collective experiences, we wanted to know how best to support other learners (both children and adults) along their learning paths:

- What factors can be promoted – both in formal and traditional learning environments – within our communities to assist learners in developing the necessary skills to adapt to a dynamic

Northern environment?

## RESEARCH APPROACH

Both primary and secondary research methods were applied. Qualitative interviews were conducted to understand research participants' learning experiences. These were supplemented with a review of current educational policy in Canada's North as well as peer-reviewed articles relating to the conditions that support individuals in overcoming adversity and enable them to contribute to their communities. The Policy Forum helped calibrate and add detail to the findings and recommendations.

## METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach, which examines an issue from the personal perspective and interpretation of the individual, was selected as the methodology because we feel it is important to understand the research participants' own experiences. This approach "attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation...By looking at mul-



multiple perspectives on the same situation, the researcher can then make some generalizations of what something is like from an insider's perspective"<sup>15</sup> and the reader of the report may better understand what it is like for someone to have that experience.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these semi-structured interviews with the official research subjects, Fellows had an opportunity to informally interview and learn from invited guests from Labrador to the Yukon at the Policy Forum in Nunavut, as well as people who shared their experiences in a more private setting with us during the Nunavut journey. They included representatives from key Inuit organizations, public governments (Aboriginal, territorial and municipal) as well as respected Elders, an Inuit artist and several Fellows' mentors from all three Northern territories.

## RESEARCH METHODS

We used semi-structured in-

terviews with research participants in order to encourage interviewees to speak freely and comfortably about the learning environments that supported them in attaining their education (see Appendix B for interview script). Semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to centre on questions more suited to the individual experiences of the research participant and further allows the research participant to guide the interview with information most relevant to the study.<sup>17</sup> Interviews were transcribed and then divided into regional groups to identify common themes.

## SELECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

We selected one or two research participants from each of our respective regions who inspire us. We then conducted one-on-one interviews with these individuals, either in person or by phone. In all, 20 interviews were completed for this study. While not all of the research participants are Aboriginal, the interviewees had

to be raised and/or educated in one of the five Northern regions (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut).<sup>18</sup> Their education may have included traditional or land-based learning, formal education (primary, secondary, post-secondary) or a combination. Furthermore, they are perceived by us as having attained some degree of success and have demonstrated a strong commitment to their community through some form of public or community service.

## POTENTIAL FOR BIAS IN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT SELECTION, INTERVIEWS AND RESPONSES

While we acknowledge the potential for bias in this study, we also hope to challenge eurocentric research conventions of attempting to remove the researcher from the researched.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, we were not able to include interviews from Nunavik.

<sup>19</sup> Potential biases for this study include *omission bias*, *interviewer bias* and *response bias*. We have attempted to limit *omission bias* by broadly defining criteria for participant selection and not limiting the study to the northern Aboriginal experience. While we have tried to be as objective as possible performing the interviews,

<sup>15</sup> (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 141)

<sup>16</sup> (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46)

<sup>17</sup> (Stringer, 2007)

Our experience tells us this is impractical. This paper is not intended as a comprehensive review of educational experiences in the north. Nor do we provide an exhaustive review of all the educational and leadership programs and services available to northern learners. Quite simply, this is a paper about learning what we can about the educational experiences from those who have inspired us in the hopes that we may inspire change.

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES

Each of the individuals selected as interviewees is as unique as the story he or she had to tell. Our research participants vary in age from early 20s to 80, and

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*interviewer bias* is difficult to avoid in any qualitative study. As northern researchers, our personal experiences in northern learning environments are extensive and may have coloured our research design and results. Further, in responding to our interview questions, our research participants may have adapted their responses to what they thought we wanted to hear – *response bias*. Again, this can be difficult to avoid for this type of study. We maintain that these potential biases do not unduly detract from our findings.

are engaged in occupations ranging from hairdressers to teachers, advocates, lawyers and politicians, to trappers and chiefs. Their educations were attained on the land, in the classroom and in life's school of hard knocks.

**"LEARNING FROM—AND ABOUT—CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND TRADITION IS CRITICAL TO THE WELL-BEING OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. . . SUCH ACTIVITIES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE DAILY LIVES OF MANY ABORIGINAL LEARNERS AND ARE COMMONPLACE IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS CANADA."**

**– CANADIAN COUNCIL ON LEARNING THE STATE OF ABORIGINAL LEARNING IN CANADA: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MEASURING SUCCESS, (OTTAWA: 2009)**

While, on the surface, the research participants appear to have little in common, they all share something remarkable: Their passionate commitment to the North. Summarized below are some of the most notable reasons for choosing our research participants and the universal characteristics they shared:

### EDUCATION

Research participants varied greatly in types of educational attainment, ranging from

learning based solely on the land to technical, professional and other advanced degrees.

### KEY TRAITS

The majority of the participants received some land-based or cultural learning combined

with a formal education. Another significant trait identified among the participants was the desire to learn and pursue an education in spite of the obstacles encountered. In fact, this **willingness to embrace adversity, rather than shy away from it**, may have been a significant contributing factor in achieving their successes.

### SUCCESS

Collectively, we were reluctant to define success. Yet, we recognize it instantly and our

interviewee choices clearly reflect the qualities we most admire and perhaps even aspire to ourselves.

## KEY TRAITS

The most common qualities when describing the research participants included **passionate, driven, hard-working** and **charismatic**. Some researchers held their interview candidate in high esteem for their **ability to forgive** and **show compassion**, while others respected the interviewees' emphasis on **the importance of listening** and **leading by example**.

**Leadership** was the single-most common characteristic describing the research participants. While some of the interviewees occupy, or occupied, an elected leadership position, most were noted for their quiet leadership out of the limelight. Many Northerners have expressed discomfort with the concept of "leadership" as lacking in humility.<sup>20</sup> In our view, many true leaders do not identify themselves as such.

**Resilience** was another shared

trait among our research participants: **Persisting in the face of adversity**. This trait is captured in the paper's title, in the Inuit word "*Sapiliqtailimaniq*." Several Arctic Fellows noted that the interviewees' resilience was truly remarkable given the extent of the challenges some faced – from violent home environments to suicide and murder in their small communities. Further to overcoming adversity, some researchers noted that participants' success was often achieved at **great personal sacrifice** for the benefit of the community.

Arguably the chief factor in defining a successful Northerner, for us, is their **commitment to community** – their determination to "**give back**." This was demonstrated through volunteering at the local level, working with youth, advocating for cultural values and advocacy for Northern issues in general.

Less obvious, but no less essential, in advancing communities' goals are the individuals who pass on their culture to their families through storytelling, language or sharing of specialized traditional knowledge.

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20 Price, Jackie. *Northern Policy Fellowship: Background, Potential and Models for Consideration*. Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation, 2009.



## LESSONS FROM THE PAST

**W**hat follows are highlights from the qualitative interviews conducted with Northerners who we believe exemplify leadership qualities. The findings shed light on problems encountered by our research participants during their formative years as well as potential solutions to educational challenges within each of the Northern regions, offering insight into the keys ways in which we can nurture Northern leaders.

### YUKON

Many of the interviewees from the Yukon Territory are residential school survivors. They were taken from their homes generally around the age of five and sent to church-run schools in the larger communities. The primary result of the residential school experience was the loss of culture and language. For the majority, this loss has continued to permeate their families' lives, through to their grandchildren. The generations that followed them cannot speak their native language and have minimal traditional

knowledge.

**"THERE NEEDS TO BE A STRONG FOCUS EARLY ON IN LIFE. YOUNG KIDS SHOULD BE TAUGHT ABOUT THEIR LANGUAGE, TRAPPING, HUNTING, FISHING, EARLY ON IN LIFE."**  
**— NWT INTERVIEWEE**

The repercussions of this experience are profound for most, having had detrimental impacts on their lives. Almost all of the interviewees expressed shame over their separation from their culture and felt embarrassed by their inability to speak the language or participate in traditional activities. The opportunity to learn traditional skills is typically through the community. Parents play a key role in passing on traditional teachings and skills, with the Father figure a definitive role model. Likewise, Grandmothers are considered to be vital to children's and adolescents' development. As residential school students were removed from this envi-

ronment, they were deprived of these learning opportunities.

Despite the decades-long attempts to assimilate Gwich'in, Tlingit, Han, Tutchone, Kaska Dena and other cultures into the mainstream, interviewees spoke with pride when asked to describe the type of traditional activities they practice. They are eager, indeed determined, to continue acquiring new skills, with one Elder stating, *"I think if I stop learning, it's probably time to go!"*

**"WHEN I LOOK BACK, I'M A BIT AMAZED AT HOW MANY RESPONSIBILITIES THEY GAVE US AT SUCH YOUNG AGES. AND THE FACT THAT [THE ELDERS] WOULD TELL STORIES AND TALK TO US LIKE ADULTS, AND NOT REALLY SPEAK DOWN TO US AS CHILDREN."**  
**—YUKON INTERVIEWEE**

Several interviewees learned their skills by watching others and teaching themselves. Historically, this was the natural

way of learning. Youth 'job shadowed' Elders by following and watching. Eventually, they were expected to complete the task with little hands-on direction.

Those interviewees who completed post-secondary education all did so because of an influential person, such as a teacher, family member, or an event that gave them the drive to pursue their goals. They also had an initial passion for their chosen career that was reflective of their upbringing and influences. While they excelled, it was difficult for those who had to move back and forth between the Yukon and the South to complete their education. It was very challenging for students to leave their support systems in the Yukon and live independently to pursue higher education.

Though funding is relatively accessible now, when it was previously limited, completion of post-secondary programs was financially prohibitive for many.

Money wasn't the only difficulty some faced. A number of interviewees talked about racist attitudes and practices that

they encountered during these formative years.

**"THERE WAS A LOT OF RACISM AT THE TIME. AS YOU WORKED YOUR WAY UP THROUGH THE GRADES, THERE WERE FEWER AND FEWER INDIANS AS YOU WENT THROUGH SCHOOL. IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FEEL LIKE YOU BELONGED ANYWHERE. IT WAS VERY MUCH A WHITE ENVIRONMENT. THERE WAS NO CULTURAL EDUCATION WHATSOEVER. YOU WEREN'T EXPECTED TO THRIVE. YOU WEREN'T EXPECTED TO BE PURSUING ANY ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING. IT WAS NOT A GREAT TIME GROWING UP AND GOING TO SCHOOL IN WHITEHORSE BACK THEN."**

**—YUKON INTERVIEWEE**

When asked for their impressions and ideas about the education system today, one interviewee voiced the view that the current system is failing Yukon First Nations youth, noting that 40 percent of students do not graduate from Grade 12.

There was a consensus that traditional knowledge and language should be taught early, be hands-on and communicated in the traditional style of storytelling and observation.

The culture camps that many First Nations host throughout

the year have been successful in teaching and passing on skills and promoting cultural pride. These initiatives recognize the value and wealth of First Nations culture and language.

Interviewees believe these traditional teachings need to be integrated into the formal

**"IF OUR NATIVE KIDS IN WHITEHORSE JUST WATCH TV AND PLAY THE GAMES THAT EVERYONE ELSE PLAYS, THEY WON'T HAVE ANY UNDERSTANDING OF WHO THEY ARE OR SENSE OF IDENTITY. THEY WON'T HAVE A SENSE OF PRIDE OF A FIRST NATION PERSON WITH THE DISTINCTIVENESS OR THAT UNIQUENESS OF WHO THEY ARE, WHICH JUST DEVELOPS A MORE CONFIDENT INDIVIDUAL."**

**—YUKON INTERVIEWEE**

public education system. Participants commented that this might help to instil pride, a sense of self-worth and drive for those young First Nations students who struggle in the western-based system.

However, others mentioned the value of the western system in today's society and discussed the need to find a balance between the two styles of learning.

Several recommended utilizing mechanisms such as modern technology to enable adaptive and evolved learning opportunities for contempo-

**I WANT TO SHOW YOUTH THAT, NO MATTER HOW YOU GROW UP, YOU CAN GET OVER THOSE PROBLEMS AND BECOME SOMETHING. I KNOW THE HISTORY OF OUR FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE AND I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN OVERCOME (OUR CHALLENGES). I WANT TO BE FINANCIALLY STABLE AND I WANT TO SHOW MY SON THAT, IN ORDER TO SUCCEED IN LIFE, YOU NEED AN EDUCATION."**

**—YUKON INTERVIEWEE**

rary students.

**"WE LIVED IN A TWO-ROOM LOG HOUSE IN BEHCHOKO. WE WERE A BIG FAMILY; MY GRANDMOTHER WAS LIVING WITH US. I HAD FOUR SISTERS AND TWO BROTHERS ALL IN THAT HOUSE. MY DAD WAS A FISHERMAN IN THE SUMMER AND A TRAPPER IN THE WINTER TIME, AND A HUNTER IN THE SPRING TIME. WE ALWAYS HAD ENOUGH FOOD."**

**— NWT INTERVIEWEE**

## NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

As in the Yukon Territory, many interview subjects in the NWT attended residential schools as children. Prior to being removed from their homes and communities, most of the participants were raised by their parents, whom they considered to be "traditional people."

In other words, their parents were raised on the land, could live off the land, practiced Ab-

original traditions and spoke their Aboriginal languages.

Most of the participants described having positive up-bringsings, growing up happy and comfortable in a loving environment. For three interviewees, in particular, they correlated their happiness growing up with being on the land and practicing their culture.

Not all homes were happy ones, and traditional knowledge and teachings were not always passed on to project participants. This disconnect was explained, in part, as the consequence of having been separated from their parents when they were obliged to attend residential schools, or their own parents' continuing struggles coping with the aftermath of the residential school experience.

**"MY MOM WAS IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FROM AGE 3 ½ TO 17, SO THE LACK OF (ABORIGINAL) LANGUAGE USE AT HOME, ONCE OFFICIAL SCHOOL BEGAN, IS PERHAPS NOT SURPRISING. THE FOCUS WAS ON SCHOOL SUCCESS RATHER THAN EDUCATING IN THE HOME."**

**— NWT INTERVIEWEE**

Other factors included being raised in troubled home environments, characterized by alcohol and domestic abuse, and the challenge of “living in two worlds” – living in a “modern society way” as an Aboriginal person.

Once joining the world of formal education, much changed for many of the interview subjects. Half of participants attended residential school. Two participants spoke of the residential learning environment as being strict and abusive,

**“THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND THE EXPECTATION TO DO WELL CAME FROM MY PARENT. AND A HANDFUL OF INFLUENTIAL TEACHERS ENCOURAGED ME TO PICK UP MY SKILLS, LIKE IN ENGLISH. MY TEACHER SAW THAT I COULD WRITE AND SO HE ENCOURAGED ME TO READ DIFFERENT THINGS AND EXPAND MY KNOWLEDGE. I HAD AN EXCELLENT SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER AND STARTED LEARNING ABOUT WORLD LEADERS AND CURRENT EVENTS, AND CANADIAN HISTORY.”**

**– NWT INTERVIEWEE**

with two participants speaking specifically to being afraid. One interviewee remembers

*“one schoolteacher who was very nice, but our principal, he was very mean. We could not even turn our heads or look back. We had to sit very straight or else we got a ruler over our heads.”*

Interviewees who experienced difficulty in residential school credited having friends at the school, family love and encouragement, and, sometimes, teachers with helping them through the challenges.

One participant spoke of residential school as being “good.” Two others appreciated the education they acquired while there, stating that it enables them to now live in “two worlds.” This sentiment was echoed at the Policy Forum, *Knowledge is Within Us*, where a residential school survivor told Fellows that the experience has enabled him to “be strong in both worlds.”

Racism in the learning environment was raised by several participants, a topic the researchers felt it important to include. Some encountered racism from other students, most often non-Aboriginal students, and, in some instances, from teachers both in the South and within a Northern community.

These and other challenging experiences prompted some of the interviewees to drop out of school, although many have returned to their studies in the years since. One research participant explained that she “grew up with so many people who had dropped out of school, a lot of my older brothers and sisters dropped out, so it kinda just seemed like the thing you were supposed to do. But I ended up going back to school two years after, it wasn’t that long, I had to go back to do upgrading.”

The majority – six of eight NWT leaders – went on to attend post-secondary institutions where they gained credentials ranging from college diplomas to PhDs. Most were the first in their families to pursue higher education. It is noteworthy that, for half of these participants, their reasons for attending post-sec-



**"I DON'T THINK IT WAS BLATANT RACISM, BUT FOR SURE, SOME TEACHERS WOULD GIVE THE WHITE KIDS BETTER GRADES, OFFER THEM TUTORING, GIVE THEM TASKS TO DO IN THE CLASS; YOU KNOW, MONITOR THE CLASS WHILE THE TEACHERS OUT; THOSE TYPES OF THINGS WERE WHERE YOU WOULD SENSE THE DIFFERENCES."**

**– NWT INTERVIEWEE**

ondary school were associated with negative aspects in their lives at that time, such as terrible home situations, partying too much and wanting to "get out" of their Northern communities.

All participants in this category had to relocate to attend post-secondary school. Five of the six participants attended Southern academic institutions. Two spoke of the difficulties of being Aboriginal and feeling alone. All interviewees identified having support during their scholarship as contributing to their success.

Support came in several forms. On the monetary side, support

included financial aid from bands, student loans and the NWT's Student Financial Assistance program. Funding, or the lack thereof, was a constant problem for many. Financial support was inconsistent and from multiple sources, varying from year to year. Basic economic needs were met with financial aid from programs like the GNWT's student financial assistance, band funding, federal financial assistance for post-secondary education and funding from the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation.

Another participant described a lack of Aboriginal support services in Northern communities as problematic. It was remarked that the education system needs to be culturally relevant in the North to avoid stereotypes and racism, pointing out that it was, and remains, common to encourage young women to become nurses or teachers, as one example, or for young men to enter the trades.<sup>21</sup> Few other options

were or are promoted. All interviewees said it was crucial that families and parents play a part in raising their children's awareness, understanding options for the future, and preparing them for life in the adult world - understanding finances, setting goals, etc.

On the personal front, family support, fellow student support, colleague support, Aboriginal faculty support and Aboriginal student lounges were all viewed as valuable assets that gave them strength. Having Aboriginal lounges/associations/programs in university played a significant role for two participants in terms of transitioning to university, providing a comfortable environment and a sense of belonging.

A recurring theme expressed by all interviewees is the importance of traditional skills, which are passed on by parents, grandparents, extended families and communities. Of these, Aboriginal languages, cultural practices and being respectful are considered to be the most important skills which should be handed down

<sup>21</sup> *Creating our Future Together, A Report to the People of the NWT on the Results of the Premier's Public Engagement Process*, (Education a Priority, p. 5), Government of the Northwest Territories, 2011 [http://www.daair.gov.nt.ca/\\_live/documents/](http://www.daair.gov.nt.ca/_live/documents/)

through the generations.

Participants spoke of “traditional ways of teachings” such as observing, to be calm and patient. There was near universal agreement that these skills should be taught from birth. Participants linked knowing these skills with an individu-

**“MY DAD WAS DOING THE TEACHINGS AND MY ELDERS WERE DOING THE TEACHINGS. THEY TOLD ME THAT WHAT THEY TEACH ME DOESN'T BELONG TO ME. I HAVE TO PASS IT ON, AND WHOEVER I TEACH IT TO HAS TO PASS IT ON, AND IT GOES LIKE THAT OVER AND OVER. THAT'S WHY IT'S IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE THAT HAVE THAT KNOWLEDGE GOTTA KEEP TEACHING IT FOREVER UNTIL THE DAY THEY DIE.”**

**– NWT INTERVIEWEE**

al's sense of identity, pride and healing.

- Nunatsiut, the Northern region of Labrador.<sup>22</sup>



**FIGURE 1: MAP OF INUIT NUNANGAT**  
SOURCE: CANADA, I. A. (2009)\*

## INUIT NUNANGAT

*Inuit Nunangat* refers to the geographic regions in Canada where 80 percent of all Inuit people in Canada live:

- Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories;
- Nunavut Territory;
- the Nunavik region of the province of Quebec; and,

Throughout interviews conducted in Nunatsiut and various regions in Nunavut, it was clear that family support and encouragement were enduring and vitally important to students' and eventual leaders' success.

Parents and grandparents, in particular, were pivotal to each interviewee's intentions to attend college or university.

<sup>22</sup> (INAC 2009, p.34).

\* Canada, I. a. (2009). A Demographic and Socio-Economic Portrait of Aboriginal Populations in Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs.

## NUNAVUT SIVUNIKSAVUT PROGRAM

The NS program is a support system similar to that offered by the Kativik Regional School Board, but with an innovative and widely admired training component. The not-for-profit organization was created by the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut (now known as Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated) to train field workers to keep people in communities informed about the Nunavut Land Claim negotiation process. NS is now an eight-month college program based in Ottawa. It is for Inuit youth from Nunavut who want to get ready for the educational, training, and career opportunities that are being created by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and the new Government of Nunavut.

Students in the NS program learn about Inuit history, organizations, land claims and other issues relevant to their future careers in Nunavut. They also gain valuable life experience by spending eight months in the South and learning to live on their own as independent adults.

The program is open to youth from Nunavut who are beneficiaries of the NLCA. It runs from September until May. Approximately 22 students are chosen each year for the 1st year of the program.

Some families were large and unable to provide financial support. Others had substance abuse problems and were unable to contribute, while still other interviewees came from stable homes with financial security as well as the moral support of their families.

While such encouragement was critical to interviewees' success, all project participants stated that there was insufficient financial support in their pursuit of post-secondary education. This proved to be a major obstacle in achieving their academic and career goals. In addition, the majority of the interviewees felt

that they did not have adequate information about potential funding available from Inuit organizations.

This lack of awareness reflected, to some degree, a lack of effort on the part of interviewees to delve into funding options available from Inuit Organizations. At the same time, the outreach activities of the Inuit organizations to raise

**"WHEN YOU ARE DOWN SOUTH, EVERYONE ASKS 'WHAT ARE YOU?', AND THEY ARE NOT ASKING ME ASKING ME WHERE I CAME FROM. THEY ARE ASKING MY ETHNICITY. 'WHY DO I LOOK THE WAY I DO?' AND SO YOU HAVE TO COME FACE TO FACE WITH WHO YOU ARE TO ANSWER THAT KIND OF QUESTION."**

**— NU INTERVIEWEE**

awareness among students of the various funding options seemed to be insufficient.

A majority of the participants were also not aware of any Aboriginal specific programming within the post-secondary institution they attended.



Inuit students who did access funding from an Inuit organization stated that the funding was easily accessible; a simple application form had to be filled out and an average grade had to be kept up to remain eligible for the funding.

Most interviewees, particularly those from Nunavut, were faced with culture shock and linguistic barriers when they uprooted from small Northern communities and moved to southern Canadian cities, whether for high school or post-secondary studies. Interviewees described feeling alienated and overwhelmed with navigating the large, unfamiliar institutional settings, problems made worse by language barriers. Inuktitut is the first language of the Nunavut interviewees.

Southern food was also foreign. Getting a package of dried caribou meat in the mail was considered “manna from heaven” that helped sustain students physically and spiritually while far from home.

While leaving remote Northern communities to attend school in a big city was described as a challenge by many

participants, for some, paradoxically, the home environment provided the impetus to make the move. Several described difficult home situations as a major determinant in their decision to attend school outside their region. Substance abuse and unstable environments were noted as a decisive factor which influenced several interviewees’ desire to go south to attend college or university. Some said they saw higher education as a ticket to a better future.

Another prevalent theme raised, specifically in eastern Nunavut and Nunatsiavut, was racism. Interviewees revealed that they encountered racism in both Northern and Southern Canadian schools, such as making assumptions about the academic capabilities of Inuit students based on racial stereotypes. For example, while providing material to other students, high school guidance counselors deliber-

ately would not hand out university calendars and information to Inuit students on the grounds that they would not get into the university anyway.

One interviewee, who currently holds a director level position, along with a double honors degree from a prestigious university, had been encouraged by a guidance counselor to go into the trades. Interview-

**“I MOSTLY GOT ALONG WITH THE PEOPLE THAT WERE INTERESTED IN INUIT CULTURE, WHO HAD A LOT OF QUESTIONS FOR US. IT SEEMED LIKE THEY MADE TIME FOR US AND WERE MORE PATIENT IN HELPING US UNDERSTAND THE SUBJECTS WE WERE TAKING.”**

**– NU INTERVIEWEE**

ees described feeling discouraged and angry about the differential treatment at school. Even some family members attempted to discourage the interviewee from

going into a university, doubting their ability to complete their studies.

Not all educators, and certainly few family members, adopted this attitude. Many participants credited their parents and extended family with providing emotional support and encouragement. Others noted that the teachers with whom

## SUPPORT FOR INUIT STUDENTS

Of all jurisdictions, Nunavik region provides what is often considered to be the best overall support for Inuit students, with financial and other aid unavailable elsewhere in Canada.

The Post-Secondary Education Sponsorship Program is designed to encourage Inuit Beneficiaries of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, to acquire college, university and professional qualifications. The support is administered by the Kativik Regional School Board (KSB) and provides different kinds of support, from financial assistance to logistical support in the form of housing and transportation, medical support and counselling, and academic and career guidance, including tutoring.

they connected, and learned the most, were invariably those teachers who cared and showed a real interest in Inuit culture.

Some simply were driven by a desire to learn, for learning's sake.

As a Nunavut research subject, who undertook her studies via distance education, stated, *"I wanted to know about things, I wanted to know about the*

**"IN HIGH SCHOOL, WHEN I WAS INTERESTED IN APPLYING FOR (POST-SECONDARY) SCHOOL, I FACED A FEW BARRIERS. I WAS ONE OF TWO INUIT STUDENTS IN THE ACADEMIC STREAM FOR GRADE 12. THE SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR DIDN'T GIVE ME THE UNIVERSITY CALENDARS BECAUSE SHE SAID I WOULDN'T GET IN".**

**– NUNAVUT INTERVIEWEE**

*world, I wanted to see other places and a lot of that came from reading. I love to read, I can read anything."*

Despite personal, financial and other hurdles most had to overcome, the various interviewees are living proof that Inuit students, like other Aboriginal Northerners interviewed for this project, can and do achieve academic success – and become important

leaders within their communities, their regions and the country as a whole.

Like interview subjects in other parts of the North, Inuit participants stressed the importance of passing on traditional skills and knowledge, as well. Most thought that the best way

to pass on this knowledge is through teaching by example.

Inuit interviewees, like those in

other regions, also promoted the idea that support needs to start at home in order to foster individuals' success. Familial relationships need to include both immediate and extended family members.

# YOU CAN'T MAKE NEW TRAILS WITHOUT LEARNING HOW TO BLAZE: THEMES THAT CUT ACROSS THE NORTH

One of the great revelations for Arctic Fellows participating in this initiative is the degree to which their interview subjects share common Northern perspectives and experiences. Despite the great differences in ages, occupations, interests, territory of residence and connections with various Aboriginal groups and, in spite of the vast physical distances separating them from each other, the individuals who agreed to be interviewed identified Northern-specific realities and ways of life that are distinct from anything they found in the mainstream literature. Equally noteworthy, even though residential schools attended by some of the interviewees no longer exist, their residual impacts at the community level continue to colour the way younger Northerners view the world. This collective experience goes a long way to uncovering what it is that distinguishes Northern leaders, at least to some degree, from other people in Canada.

The following is an overview of the nine recurring themes that emerged from all three regions' interviews.

## LIVING IN TWO WORLDS

Living in two worlds is the reality many Aboriginal peoples face as they celebrate their culture and practice their traditions, while simultaneously participating in Canadian society. This is true of Aboriginal populations North and South of the 60<sup>th</sup> Parallel. There was strong consensus that culture provides the foundation for a healthy educational experience.

Language was seen by interviewees as the most significant contributor to success both in community relationships and post-secondary institution(s), followed by land skills, learning from mistakes, and sharing knowledge with everyone – within one's culture and without. At the same time, par-

ticipants expressed their appreciation for, and the value of, a Western education and the importance of striking a balance between the two ways of learning and living.

## POSITIVE UPBRINGING

A positive upbringing during the formative years played a crucial role in the development and life achievements for the majority of participants. Positive upbringing came from parents, grandparents, elders, extended family and community in the form of nurturing care such as love and support, as well as cultural teachings. Some participants noted that, at times, the quality of their care was sporadic as a result of their residential school experience or, for others, because of dysfunction within their immediate families often associated with substance abuse. Whether continually or sporadic, there was a positive level of nurturing directly from par-

ents and family.

## ATTENDANCE AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Many of the participants went to residential school for at least some of their primary and/or secondary education. This was generally a difficult time in their lives, as they were separated from their families, their culture and all they knew, and transplanted into a foreign environment.

## RELOCATING TO ATTEND POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL

In order to pursue post-secondary school, the vast majority of participants had to relocate to a larger community or city, most often in the South. This proved to be a challenge for participants in terms of adapting to cultural differences, dealing with racism, as well as having to leave their support systems. For Inuit students, culture shock was compounded by having to cope with what was, to most, a foreign lan-

guage in the South. The experience of students experiencing support from the Kativik School Board is documented thoroughly in Arctic Fellow Joseph Flowers' individual paper.<sup>23</sup> There is also a need for data on the experience of students who have participated in the degree-granting programs currently available in the north.

**WE HAD EASY ACCESS TO SCHOOL. WE WERE CONSIDERED I GUESS MORE OR LESS FORTUNATE BECAUSE MY FATHER WAS A GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE. WE'RE NOT FIRST NATIONS OR INUIT SO WE HAD DIFFERENT ALLOWANCES. BUT RACISM WAS A PROBLEM—NOT SO MUCH AMONGST THE FIRST NATIONS OR INUVIALUIT, BUT AMONG THE WHITE YOUTH TOWARD THE ABORIGINAL STUDENTS.**

— NWT INTERVIEWEE

## SUPPORT

Participants identified various forms of support to overcome the challenges faced during their scholarship (secondary,

post-secondary, residential school). Support came in the form of friends, parents and extended family, occasionally educators' encouragement as well as financial assistance.

**"MANY TIMES WE'RE GOING TO GO TO SO MANY DIFFERENT PLACES IN THIS WORLD THAT WE'RE NOT GOING TO BELONG. AND SO, WHEN WE'RE STRONG IN OUR CULTURE, WHEN WE HAVE PRIDE IN WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE COME FROM, AND IN THE PEOPLE THAT WE WERE BORN FROM, WE HAVE A PRIDE THAT WE BELONG—NO MATTER WHERE WE GO. IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT. IF THERE'S ONE THING THAT I'M GOING TO INSTILL IN MY KIDS, IT'S THAT PRIDE IN WHO THEY ARE FROM TEACHINGS ON THE LAND AND TEACHINGS WITH ANIMALS AND THE SPIRITS AND THE ANCESTORS."**

— NWT INTERVIEWEE

## FUNDING

For those participants who attended post-secondary school,

issues of funding were a persistent theme. Most participants were able to access funds through various sources but, with few exceptions, it was not enough to cover all their expenses.

## ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN PASSING ON TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS AND SKILLS

No one person is responsible for teaching lessons to children and teens. Instead, parents, extended family and community members all participate in instructing youth and others who wish to learn. Participants noted the important parts played by Elders, Grandmothers and Fathers – all indispensable and highly-valued role models.

Most important skills are cultural

Culture, traditional knowledge, land skills and language were identified by participants as being the most important skills to be passed on to current and future generations. These skills need to be taught

as early as birth, as they are the foundation of the wellbeing of individuals.

The education system needs to better include culture and local knowledge-holders

Ultimately, the situation will not improve for Northern learners until significant improvements are made to the current education system.

The needed changes include:

- Incorporating local Aboriginal culture, language and teachings in school systems to ensure the longevity of Aboriginal culture. Participants emphasized a link between knowing one's culture and the self-worth and pride that occurs as a result.
- The education system should expand to include support for parents and caregivers to understand their roles in preparing their children for future successes in terms of teaching important life skills like budgeting for personal finances and setting goals.
- Many participants spoke of a traditional way of learning for Aboriginal peoples

such as quietly observing their elder/teacher, not asking questions and using a “hands on” approach to learning. The education system needs to be inclusive of other forms of teachings, to learn about local history, language and practices (including community governance, parenting, diet, survival skills, etc.)– especially in regions where the proportion of Aboriginal peoples is high or the majority.



## WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

**A**lthough relatively little research into Northern leadership exists, much can be learned from studies that have examined the influences and behaviours of other people whose experiences have been, in some ways, comparable to those of our interviewees. Some of what our research participants have lived through is not exclusive to the North.

Starting with the research question in reverse, we want to look at the notion of “people contributing positively to their community.” We have taken a leap of faith, equating this with the concept of “leadership.” What factors nurture community-focused leadership, not only in the North but elsewhere?

The first step in this process is to define what is meant by the term “leadership.” There are many different definitions of leadership, and far more grey literature than academic on the subject.

One simple yet useful definition is that leadership is “a process of social influence in

which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.”<sup>24</sup> The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development includes leadership, in addition to sovereignty, institution-building and culture, as essential in building strong Aboriginal nations and communities: “Leadership Matters: Nation building requires leaders who introduce new knowledge and experiences, challenge assumptions, and propose change. Such leaders, whether elected, community or spiritual, convince people that things can be different and inspire them to take action.”<sup>25</sup>

It was once assumed that leadership was a trait – you were either born with it, or you weren’t. But, over the last century, it became much more acceptable to see leadership as learnable, and teachable.<sup>26</sup> We

recognize that there are many variables in an individual’s learning journey that can determine his or her success in achieving personal goals and which motivate and facilitate a person’s commitment to community.

We reviewed some literature that shines a light on these qualities and have discovered something unique: These qualities transcend race, class, religion, language. In other words, these are universal qualities. We sought to understand how the Northern leaders we admire acquired these attributes and developed their appetite for community service. What was special about them, or particular to their environments, that enabled them to overcome the seemingly impossible odds stacked against them during their formative years, both inside and outside the education system?

We focused our literature in

24 Chemers, Martin. *An Integrative Theory of Leadership*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997.

25 From the website <http://hpaied.org/> The Harvard Project is led by co led by Manley A. Begay, Jr. (Diné) and Stephen Cornell, includes Canadian case studies.

26 Herbert Spencer, among the

“Fathers” of sociology, argued that when it came to leadership, the times produce the person. Leaders are not born as such, but rather they are formed by the circumstances and necessities of the world around them.

three main areas<sup>27</sup>, which can also be seen as three pillars upholding this ideal of leadership:

(a) Resilience in the face of adversity;

(b) An individual's commitment to serve in the community, or service leadership; and,

(c) Learning applications that can help to enhance these qualities within a Northern context.

## (A) TRANSCENDING ADVERSITY

Several studies show that our attitudes about life, the world around us and our abilities can increase our ability to overcome adversity.<sup>28</sup> In a ground-breaking longitudinal study follow-

ing 700 infants born in 1955 in Kauai, Hawaii until they turned forty, researchers found that not all children experiencing poverty, domestic conflict and parental drug abuse were destined to continue along the same negative path to the same outcome.<sup>29</sup> In fact, by the time

**"IT WAS A VERY TOUGH, TOUGH, TOUGH LIFE TO LIVE IN [RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL]. BUT ONE THING THAT I REALLY WALKED OUT OF THERE WITH WAS ENGLISH, BECAUSE OF THE FEAR THAT I HAD TO LEARN ENGLISH. I COULDN'T SPEAK MY OWN LANGUAGE BUT I LEARNED FROM THAT FOCUS ON ENGLISH HOW TO READ, WRITE, DO MATH, SCIENCE—ALL THESE THINGS TODAY THAT I UNDERSTAND. NOW I FEEL THAT I HAVE THE TWO WORLDS—THE CULTURAL WORLD AND THE MODERN WORLD. EVEN THOUGH I WAS SUFFERING THROUGH IT, I STILL CAME OUT OF IT WITH SOMETHING GOOD."**

**— NWT INTERVIEWEE**

they turned 40, only one in six had substance abuse, mental health issues or criminal records, indicating that most had somehow managed to bounce back from their difficult childhoods and form healthy rela-

tionships and enjoy successful careers as adults. These findings have since been substantiated by several other longitudinal studies with similar results.<sup>30</sup>

## LOCUS OF CONTROL

To help explain this phenomenon of children transcending difficult childhoods, one study by a team of British researchers builds on the work of the psychologist Julian Rotter and his theory of a "locus of control", defined as an individual's sense of control over their lives. Rotter suggested that individuals who confront adversity and rise above it exhibit high internal locus of control. That is, they take responsibility for the outcome of events in their life instead of feeling that what happens is entirely beyond their control.<sup>31</sup>

Applying this theory of locus of control, the team of researchers surveyed over 10,000

27 While many traits may, in fact, be inherent, we limited our research review to the realm of behaviourism and social learning – those factors that are shaped by the external factors, and which can be developed through optimizing the learning environment.

28 (Brafman, 2011).

29 (Werner & Smith, 1992)

30 (Bolger & Patterson, 2003; Fergusson & Horwood, 2003).

31 (Rotter, 1966)



10-year-olds on various personality traits along with questions about their locus of control. Follow up surveys with the same research participants twenty years later found that those with a high internal locus of control were significantly less likely to experience psychological problems (e.g. depression or anxiety), had a reduced propensity for being overweight and were more likely to report being in good overall health.<sup>32</sup> Psychologists consider a high internal locus of control to be important in empowering individuals to overcome adversity, as it enables them to focus on what they can do to change their circumstances rather than succumbing to the stress of the situation.<sup>33</sup>

## DEVELOPING POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES

In a study on resilience and Aboriginal peoples, the authors identify additional protective factors that can help to counteract risk and decrease individual vulnerability to adverse conditions.<sup>34</sup>

Adopting mature defences (i.e. humour, altruism, sublimation and anticipation) can help an individual to triumph over a lifetime of adversity.<sup>35</sup> In fact, several studies suggest a sense of humour may help to reduce anxiety and facilitate coping and adjustment.<sup>36</sup> In research by Rutter (2001), individuals able to overcome adverse conditions are more likely to have a repertoire of different responses to problems rather than relying on only one. For instance, they may develop interests in other activities such as competitive sports and faith based beliefs. Continuing education has been shown to help to offset the effects of risk, as well.<sup>37</sup> This finding is repeated in a study of 70 African American survivors of childhood violence. Their coping strategies included spirituality, community support, activism, creativity, confrontation, introspection, humour, therapy, safety precautions, desensitization, racial reframing/racial attribution, transcendence and temporal framing, and escapism.<sup>38</sup>

35 Ibid.

36 (Kuiper, Martin & Olinger, 1993).

37 (Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003, Werner & Smith, 1992, Rutter, 1988).

38 (Bryant-Davis, 2005).

## ROLE OF CULTURE IN BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Culture plays a central role in shaping traditions, beliefs and human relationships and can greatly influence feelings of self-worth which affect an individual's approach to learning.<sup>39</sup> In a paper by Kirmayer et al. (2011), the authors argue that resilience extends beyond individual characteristics and may also have systemic, collective or communal dimensions. They contend that models of resilience must be updated to include cultural concepts as, "People may make sense of their own predicaments and map possibilities for adaptation and a positive vision of their identity and future prospects by drawing on collective history, myths, and sacred teachings."<sup>40</sup> These collective narratives provide a form of communal resilience by ensuring the continuity and vitality of the community and of a people.<sup>41</sup> Further, revitalizing language, culture and spirituality, especially in Indigenous communities, helps develop both individual and collective

39 (Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003).

40 (Kirmayer et al., 2011, pp. 2-3)

41 (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

32 (Gale, Batty, and Deary, 2008).

33 (Brafman, 2011).

34 (Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003).

resilience.<sup>42</sup>

## POSITIVE SUPPORT

Clearly, developing resilience is not an individual activity but requires support from others, including the nuclear and extended family, friends, community members and teachers. Supportive figures, described as providing unconditional positive regard, or giving support and acceptance with no strings attached, are considered significant in helping an individual to overcome adversity. Several studies report on the beneficial impact mentors can have on youth at-risk.<sup>43</sup>

Psychologist Rom Brafman (2011) describes these mentors as 'satellites'; people situated outside the usual sphere of influence that an individual can look up to for guidance and to be challenged. Just knowing someone is 'on our side' when confronting adversity can significantly influence how well we cope with problems.<sup>44</sup>

## (B) COMMITMENT TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

In *Wasase: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*, author Taiaiake Alfred (2009) asserts that the third element, after strength and courage, needed for the regeneration of Aboriginal peoples, both collectively and individually, is commitment. We know that Aboriginal societies in Canada have a rich history of giving, sharing and generosity.<sup>45</sup> For example, there is the tradition of the potlatch, a Tlingit practise (among other nations). We also know that many of these traditions continue – for example, the sharing of a whale, seal or caribou harvest, or the phenomenal mobilization of volunteer energy and generosity when there is a death in the community. But what sets certain individuals apart? Why do some go above and beyond the norm in demonstrating these qualities in support of their communities? Why do some do the 'heavy lifting' to

make things better, while others play either a passive or a self-absorbed role?

In a conversation with an Aboriginal woman committed to advancing Indigenous sovereignty, Taiaiake asks about leadership. According to the woman, **leadership centres on four sacred trusts: "looking after the land, looking after the people, looking after the spirituality, and looking after the culture, which includes the language."**<sup>46</sup> In other words, service is considered the core of leadership in Aboriginal communities.

While little empirical evidence exists to help us understand how or why an individual dedicates so much to serve his or her community, one model of leadership – servant leadership – aligns with many of the cultural values of the North, in general, and with Aboriginal people specifically.

Elders tell Aboriginal youth that we are to help our fellow human if we are able to, not because we can get credit for it. It is seen as a necessary part of our lives, not merely as a civic or moral duty. Elders teach us

42 Ibid.

43 Fagenson, 1989; Baldwin Grossman & Tierny, 1998).

44 (Brafman, 2011).

45 Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. *Aboriginal Philanthropy in Canada: A Foundation for Understanding*. Winnipeg, 2011.

46 (Alfred, 2009, p.181)

to care with kindness, for example sharing good fortune, such as meat that is caught, and to do it out of generosity – not because we will receive a tax receipt or because we are obliged for reasons of faith. Proponents of servant leadership consider qualities exhibited by servant leaders not inherent, like many other leadership theories, but rather these qualities can and should be nurtured. Servant leadership is characterized as personal service to society regardless of position or title.<sup>47</sup> Servant leaders are motivated by:

- Serving, empowering and developing people;
- Expressing humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance and stewardship; and,
- Providing direction.<sup>48</sup>

Typically, ten characteristics are associated with servant leadership: Listening; empathy; healing; awareness; persuasion; conceptualization; foresight or anticipation; stewardship; commitment to the growth of others; and, building

communities.<sup>49</sup> While some are considered to be inherent, to some extent, most of these qualities can be nurtured in an individual.<sup>50</sup>

Some studies have documented the efforts and effects of applying servant leadership principles in various organizations, including finance,<sup>51</sup> healthcare,<sup>52</sup> and education.<sup>53</sup>

The studies report mixed levels of success with applying servant leadership as the core model, but all of the research indicate benefits including enhanced work relationships, greater focus on quality of client care in service professions, and increased work standards and professional integrity.<sup>54</sup> According to Crippen, servant-leadership offers a promising, effective educational leadership and management model.

To further our understanding of how learning environments can support learners, we look to other studies that corroborate some of our observations. A common thread linking our research participants – as we

have already explored – was their ability to rise above adversity in their achievements. Another shared characteristic is their ongoing commitment to serve their community, which may take many forms, including what some might call – especially in the south – ‘civic engagement’, ‘voluntarism’ or ‘philanthropy’.

The questions of self-reliance and self-government are dominant themes in the North. Socrates held that philanthropic humans are more reliably capable of self-government, because the impulses to give to one’s community are similar to those that wish to participate in its democratic governance.<sup>55</sup> As one observer of community-building practices states, “The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts, rather than one of problem solving, fear, and retribution. This context allows a new conversation to take place. It requires its citizens to act authentic by choosing to own and exercise their power rather than delegating to others what is in the best in-

47 (Block, 1996).

48 (van Dierendonck, 2011).

49 (Greenleaf, 1998)

50 (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007)

51 Chappel, 2000),

52 (Waterman, 2011)

53 (Crippen, n.d).

54 (Waterman, 2011)

55 McCully, George. *Philanthropy Reconsidered: Private Initiative-Public Good-Quality of Life*. Authorhouse, 2008.

terest of that community.”<sup>56</sup>

There are many different views on the notion of “voluntarism” in the North, at least as it is understood in the South. The Government of the Northwest Territories’ Department of Municipal and Community Affairs supports volunteerism, as does the Yukon Government. However, in most communities there is no apparent formal structure to support and promote civil society voluntarism. More investigation needs to be done into the extent and nature of how school systems in the north promote and nurture voluntarism.

The question of the health of “civic engagement” in the North is still more difficult to understand. On the one hand, people in the North are far more likely to know their MLA or MP, and to have a richer understanding of the many institutions of public and/or Aboriginal government that touch their lives and livelihoods in many different ways. But, on the other hand, there is relatively little space for “civil

society”, in particular organizations and public “spaces” that serve as means to research, critique and discuss policy, or to advance new ideas. Although there is increased focus on the North by some of the country’s leading business organizations, including the Conference Board of Canada’s new Centre for the North, as well as academic research such as the Northern Public Review, published by Carleton University, there are precious few “made in the North” civil society institutions. There is no university North of Prince George, B.C., there are no Northern think tanks, and few grassroots citizens groups.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> This phenomenon is well covered, for example, in: Abele, Frances, Thierry Rodon, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox and Stephen Mills. *Policy Research in the North: A Discussion Paper*. Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, 2007. Although grassroots groups may be few in number, there are some remarkable initiatives that manage to buck the trend. Examples include the youth-driven Embrace Life Council in Nunavut, Alternatives North,

## (C) NURTURING KEY QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS AND LEADERSHIP

Just as many factors are at play in enabling an individual to succeed at learning, applying new knowledge depends on multiple variables. Knowledge acquisition and application does not take place in a vacuum. Simply teaching facts – a didactic approach – does not automatically lead to expected actions or anticipated attitudes.<sup>58</sup> As noted earlier, our attitudes can increase our ability to overcome adversity and change how we view our role in our community. For example, the negative attitudes that many Aboriginal families bear toward schools today are grounded in their own experiences at residential schools.<sup>59</sup> However, by better understanding how attitudes are developed, we can combine appropriate learning methods to nurture the learner’s attitudes toward themselves and their communities. In this paper, we focus only on literature around how attitudes are formed.

<sup>56</sup> Block, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2008.

<sup>58</sup> (Brown, 1999)

<sup>59</sup> (Hare & Bowman, 2000)



Research by Baron and Byrne (1994) describe three forms of social learning in the development of attitudes: *classical conditioning* is learning associated with emotions, both positive and negative, and therefore attitudes developed in this way can become impervious to rational argument later;<sup>60</sup> *instrumental conditioning* is learning associated with positive reinforcement for displaying desired attitudes; and, *modelling*, which is learning from the examples set by others.

Some psychologists<sup>61</sup> note that people are better able to manage their knowledge, to transfer ideas to new contexts, and to identify and solve problems if they learn within a group participating in realistic projects. Research shows that an individual's direct experience with something is more likely to develop strong attitudes as compared to indirect experience, such as hearing or reading about the subject.<sup>62</sup> While applying these techniques in a more formal learning environment may help to nurture desired attitudes towards handling adversity and/or serv-

ing our community, research shows that attitudes, knowledge and skills learned in a specific setting do not always transfer beyond that context.<sup>63</sup> Teaching, whether in a formal or informal setting, requires additional efforts to help learners transfer the knowledge acquired beyond the context under which it was learned. Several of these empirically validated principles to enhance learning include:<sup>64</sup>

- Making the learner an active participant instead of a passive observer.
- Practice retrieval of new teachings. For example, learners can practice what they have learned by teaching new concepts and skills to other students.
- Varying the conditions under which learning initially occurs.
- Having the learner take the information presented in one format (i.e. auditory-verbal) and present it in an alternative format (i.e. visuospatial).
- Assessing the learner for prior knowledge or experience with concept(s) to be learned.

60 (Brown, 1999)

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 (Halpern & Hakel, 2003).

64 Ibid.



# THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN CANADA'S NORTH

So how do the findings from these studies – both our own research results, noted in this report, as well as those gleaned from our literature review – translate in the real world of Northern learning systems? Are these lessons being applied in Northern Canada today?

Three of the Jane Glassco Arctic Fellows' solo research projects focused on aspects of Northern education, all of which turn out to be important factors in creating the right learning environment for community-focused leadership to thrive.

Navarana Beveridge, in looking at Inuktitut-immersion daycare within Nunavut, made the case for strong and consistent **Indigenous language and cultural exposure** at the pre-school level, and more broadly demonstrated the connection and importance of early learning to the efficacy of learning at later stages.

Kyla Kakfwi-Scott looked at the **implementation of**

**Northern-focused curriculum** at the high-school level within the NWT.

The Northern Studies high school-level program includes a very well-researched and highly appropriate curriculum. The problem, however, is that the program is not implemented with sufficient rigour, seriousness and consistency.

Joseph Flowers evaluated the importance of **student support** in reviewing the system of support provided by the Kativik School Board to Inuit post-secondary students from Nunavik living and going to school in the South.

Flowers found that, at an instrumental level, this support was both valued and significant but, at the level of emotional and cultural support, major reforms are needed.

For this joint research project, we examined current educational initiatives, supports available to learners and academic results within our respective jurisdictions. The fol-

lowing provides a contextual analysis of the key policies and programs in each region, moving from west to east.

## YUKON TERRITORY

The Yukon Department of Education is operated under the *Education Act (2002)* and the ***Umbrella Final Agreement (1993)*** with the Governments of Canada and Yukon, which devolved numerous responsibilities to First Nations. Self-governing First Nations have the right to deliver education programs themselves. To date, no First Nations has taken on this responsibility, although one is currently in discussions.

This presents an ideal opportunity to develop culturally relevant and appropriate learning initiatives that are responsive to local community conditions and aspirations.

## K-12

Approximately 5,000 students are educated across the territory through 14 schools in Whitehorse and 14 in the com-

## HIGHER EDUCATION AT YUKON COLLEGE

- Three full degrees on campus through U of Alberta and U of Regina as well as Masters in Education and Public Administration through UNBC and UAlaska;
- 34 certificates and diplomas in trades, technology, health, social services, resource management;
- Continuing education courses including public health and safety, leadership and business, information technology, general interest;
- Yukon Research Centre, including the Cold Climate Innovation Centre and Climate Change Adaptation Program;
- Northern Institute of Social Justice;
- School of Visual Arts - full foundation year transfer to all four Art and Design Universities in Canada and a two-year transfer in arts and northern science; and a
- Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining (coming soon)

munities. K-12 programs are offered in larger centres but students living in smaller communities complete grade 12 in Whitehorse, where they live in

residence, away from their families.

### CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON CLASSROOM LEARNING

Through the Yukon Education Strategy, several initiatives promote First Nation's traditions and values in the curriculum. First Nations languages are offered in a majority of public schools, there are programs such as Elders in the classroom, as well as bi-cultural programs and on the land experiential learning programs. An example is the grade 9 and 10 Community: Heritage: Adventure: Outdoor: Skills (CHAOS) program which removes students from the classroom and allows them to earn credits by learning traditional skills, beliefs, leadership and spiritual balance on the land.

Yukon schools register lower than average scores

from Alberta curriculum and B.C. Provincial Exams through all grades K-12.

First Nations graduation and attendance rates are lower than those of non-Aboriginal students. Absentee rates are markedly higher for First Nations students in rural schools.

The 2010-2011 Education Report outlined the Department's Integrated Risk Management plan, which identified several health behaviour concerns: 50% of students report bullying; cannabis use is significant in Grade 9 and 10; rural girls are identified as an at-risk population in terms of mental health and well-being, and; rural boys had the lowest levels of engagement in and appreciation for school.

### HIGHER EDUCATION

Yukon College is the only post-secondary institution in the territory and the most robust such institution north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel. It primarily offers trades programs and several degree programs in partnership with other universities such as the University of Alberta and of the Arctic. The College is a full member of both the Alberta Council of

Admission and Transfers and the B.C. Council of Admission and Transfers, enabling students to transfer to universities and colleges in both provinces.

One program of note is the Yukon Native Teacher Bachelor of Education degree. This degree, offered in partnership with the University of Regina, promotes teaching from a Northern perspective and incorporates First Nations values and lessons into the curriculum. Several programs are also offered in conjunction with the Umbrella Final Agreement to increase First Nations' governance capacity.

Yukon Native Language programs, offered through the Yukon Native Language Centre at Yukon College, are open to all who want to learn.

The Government of Yukon provides several post-secondary training programs such as the Student Training and Employment Program (STEP), GradCorp and First Nations GradCorp for students either

working towards a post-secondary degree or who have already graduated. Students work in a position relative to their education to further their career training and longer-term employment prospects.

**"I ENDED UP QUITTING IN GRADE 11 BECAUSE I HAD DIFFERENT PRIORITIES AND SCHOOL JUST WASN'T A PRIORITY. AND I GREW UP WITH SO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAD DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL, A LOT OF MY OLDER BROTHERS AND SISTERS DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL SO IT KINDA JUST SEEMED LIKE THE THING YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO DO. BUT I ENDED UP GOING BACK TO SCHOOL TWO YEARS AFTER, IT WASN'T THAT LONG, I HAD TO GO BACK TO DO UP-GRADING."**

**— NWT INTERVIEWEE**

Internships and skills training opportunities are also available as a result of partnerships between First Nations and mining companies affiliated with the Yukon Mine Training Association.

## NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Public education in the NWT is the responsibility of the Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT) Department

of Education, Culture, and Employment, and is governed by the *Education Act*. There are over 40 schools in the NWT, and eight education councils and school boards.

### K-12

Most K-9 curriculum is developed in the NWT. Students at those grade levels participate in Alberta-based standardized assessments, the Alberta Achievement Tests, every three years to measure school and student success compared to other jurisdictions.

High school curricula are based on Alberta's education program: In order to graduate, a student must complete the requisite courses and pass Alberta-set exams. In addition, students are required to complete a Northern Studies course, which has been designed in the NWT, not Alberta.

There are encouraging signs that student performance in the NWT is improving, but there is still a sizeable gap between NWT students and the

average student elsewhere in Canada. Like Yukon Territory, there are measurable differences in the performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, as well as between small communities and larger regional centres (e.g. Yellowknife). In 2006-07, graduation rates in the NWT were 55 percent versus the national graduation rate of 71 percent.

Although Aboriginal children and youth comprise almost two-thirds of all K-12 students in the NWT, in the 2008-09 school year, only 44 percent of Aboriginal students in the NWT completed high school while 70 per cent of other students graduated.

Standardized testing and functional grade level analysis show that grades one to nine students in small communities generally do not perform at the same academic levels as students in larger regional centres.

The majority of students in smaller centres perform below their grade level in English language arts and mathematics. For example, 43 percent of grade nine students in small communities perform at, or above, their grade level in

mathematics compared to eighty-three percent in NWT regional centres.

By 2010, graduation rates had increased since the 2004-05 school year, but indicators of student performance in grades one through nine had not.

The Education Department has not undertaken a formal, detailed analysis of the causes for the lack of improvement in performance indicators, nor has it developed any detailed action plans to improve student performance indicators

Many complex factors result in lower academic performance for Aboriginal students, especially those in small communities, such as the fact that they miss, on average, twice as much school as their non-Aboriginal peers (totalling an average of two years absence by the end of grade nine).

Other factors that impact student success include the geographic isolation of many communities, low literacy rates, housing shortages, continued reliance on a traditional economy leading to more student absences, the effects of substance abuse and foetal alcohol syndrome, and the legacy of

the residential school system.

## CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON CLASSROOM LEARNING

Policy makers in the NWT are sensitive to the importance of the inclusion of Aboriginal culture and language. The Education Department has referred to culture, language, and heritage as “the foundations for all learning,” and states that learning outcomes are the responsibility of “the community as a whole.”

An Aboriginal Student Achievement Education Plan was drafted by the department and tabled in the legislature in Fall of 2011, which focuses on four priority areas: Early childhood and childcare, student and family support, Aboriginal language curriculum and resource development, and literacy. The department has also developed the *Dene Kede* curriculum for Kindergarten to Grade 9, which presents academic subjects in a way that is relevant to Dene students. The curriculum expects students to work on the relationships they have with themselves, with other people, with the land and with the spiritual world.



Culturally relevant programming is provided, in part, to improve indicators of student performance, as well as to involve entire communities in the students' education, rather than relying on teachers and parents alone. This goal of equipping students with both the academic skills required to "function confidently" in modern society, as well as a sense of pride in their heritage, is also supported by Aurora College's Teacher Education Program. The program hopes to reach an enrolment rate of seventy percent Aboriginal students from across the NWT to help support the goal of culture-based education.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

Aurora College is the only post-secondary institution in the NWT. It reports to the Minister of Education, and is independent of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. However, the two bodies work together on educational initiatives. The college operates three campuses - in Yellowknife, Fort Smith, and Inuvik - and has twenty-three satellite community learning centres through-

out the Territory. The college offers high-school upgrading courses and a range of other programs, including trade apprenticeship programs, various vocational and business certifications and diplomas, as well as bachelor degrees in nursing and education. It also offers an Aboriginal Language and Cultural Instructor Program.

Aurora College's Teacher Education Program (TEP) has had 269 graduates since 1968, with twenty-eight percent of them Aboriginal. The percentage of Aboriginal teachers in the NWT is declining, as is the percentage of Aboriginal graduates from the program. In light of the imminent retirement of many early TEP graduates, there is "an urgent need to increase the numbers of Aboriginal educators across the NWT."

## INUIT NUNANGAT

One simple statistic dominates the education discussion in Inuit Nunangat: Only 25 percent of Inuit youth graduate from high school.

Many factors have been identified to explain and understand this phenomenon, but

little sincere action has been taken to address this dismal statistic. Illiteracy, either in different dialects of the Inuit language as well as English or French, along with the lack of traditional skills have left many youth caught between two worlds and unable to positively contribute to society.

If mandates, mission statements and good intentions translated into meaningful results, the statistics would tell a very different story. The belief that education is the key to developing contributing members of society and, thus, improving the quality of life throughout Inuit Nunangat, is prevalent across the Inuit regions. Effective education is considered paramount, with primary and secondary schooling focused on developing the learning capacity of Northern youth.

The necessity of quality education is also a high priority at the national level, highlighted by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's Education Strategy, and recognized as such at the federal level. The Strategic Investment in Northern Economic Development (SINED) initiative has targeted 56 percent of the



program's investments into developing knowledge-based resources in Nunavut.

In Nunavik, an emphasis is placed on ensuring youth "acquire the knowledge and

**"I WANT MY KIDS TO BE THE BEST THEY POSSIBLE CAN BE. THE BEST I CAN DO AS A PARENT IS GIVE THEM A PLATFORM TO SUCCEED IN LIFE. IT IS TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO TEACH THEM ORGANICALLY, IN THE WAY OUR ANCESTORS DID, BUT BRING INTO THE TEACHING NEW WAYS OF LEARNING TOO. SO I'M NOT REJECTING ANY OF THE SOUTHERN BASED LEARNING MECHANISMS. I'M USING BOTH SYSTEMS TO THE BETTERMENT OF MY CHILDREN, BECAUSE I KNOW THAT THE WORLD ISN'T BLACK AND WHITE AND THEY ARE GONNA NEED BOTH OF THOSE LEARNING SYSTEMS TO SUCCEED IN THE NORTH AND IN INUIT SOCIETY."**

**— NUNAVUT INTERVIEWEE,  
ORIGINALLY FROM NUNATSIAVUT**

develop the essential skills and attitudes to become self-sufficient, valued contributing members of society.<sup>65</sup>

In Nunatsiavut, there is a dichotomy between the K-12

regime, which is administered by the Labrador District School Board, and the post-secondary system, which is administered by the Nunatsiavut Government.<sup>66</sup> The mission of the Labrador Dis-

trict School Board, which oversees K-12, is to "increase graduation rates...in underachieving areas in English Language Arts...while maintaining existing areas of acceptable achievement."<sup>67</sup> Steps are being taken to fulfill the Labrador

*Inuit Land Claim Agreement,*

in which the Nunatsiavut Government will take over responsibility of the primary education system as well.<sup>68</sup>

In Nunavut, the Government of Nunavut oversees the primary education system as well as funding for post-secondary. The Department of Education's mandate is to "build a seamless learning environment that is acceptable to learners of all ages, inspires excellence among learners and educators, and promotes personal and community well-being."<sup>69</sup>

Each of the foundational educational policy regimes of the government bodies overseeing the four regions share these common objectives, yet the resounding implications of low academic achievement levels mean lives filled with challenges, rather than individuals' potential realized, for far too many Inuit people.

65 Kativik School Board. (unknown). *Mission Statement*. Retrieved 05 29, 2011, from [http://www.kativik.qc.ca/sites/kativik.qc.ca/files/documents/11/mission\\_statement\\_e.pdf](http://www.kativik.qc.ca/sites/kativik.qc.ca/files/documents/11/mission_statement_e.pdf)

66 Nunatsiavut Government. (2009). *EED Overview*. Retrieved 05 29, 2012, from <http://www.nunatsiavut.com/index.php/en/education-and-economic-development/departement-overview>

67 Labrador District School Board. (2005, June 20). *Governance Policy*. Retrieved 05 29, 2012, from <http://www.lsb.ca/FRAME/FPOLICES.html>

68 Nunatsiavut Government. (2009). *EED Overview*. Retrieved 05 29, 2012, from <http://www.nunatsiavut.com/index.php/en/education-and-economic-development/departement-overview>

69 Government of Nunavut. (2009). *Mission Statement*. Retrieved 05 29, 2012, from Department of Education: <http://www.edu.gov.nu.ca/apps/authoring/dspPage.aspx?page=2>

To appreciate why some individuals fulfill their potential and contribute positively to society, whereas others in similar environments do not, it is important to recognize the value placed on social engagement, rather than solely on educational attainment. Community, family and individual health are key aspects in understanding the development of Northern youth – or, in economic terms – human capital.<sup>70</sup>

The cultural and linguistic relevancy of educational programs offered in Inuit regions is an equally critical factor. Instruction in Inuktitut is considered to be particularly crucial to students' success.

What follows is a brief overview of the educational offerings in several Inuit regions.

Nunatsiavut

## K-12

All communities throughout Nunatsiavut operate under the Labrador School Board. Each community has one school that provides classes from

kindergarten through to grade 12. The only exception is the largest Nunatsiavut community of Nain, which has a K-Grade 3 primary school (that offers Inuttitut<sup>71</sup> immersion) and an additional school that provides Grades 4-12.<sup>72</sup>

## CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON CLASSROOM LEARNING

All schools offer courses in English only, with the exception of Nain, which offers the option of Inuttitut immersion up to Grade 3.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

There are no colleges or universities in Nunatsiavut so most students wanting to pursue a post-secondary education travel to central Labrador, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, or the island of Newfoundland, most to attend the College of the North Atlantic. It is physically the closest campus to Nunatsiavut and, arguably, the most popular first stop for Nunatsiavummiut continuing

their education. The college has several locations throughout the province. The Goose Bay campus offers an array of courses in the trades such as welding, millwright, heavy duty equipment technician and so on,<sup>73</sup> as well as office administration and community studies courses. The Goose Bay Campus also offers an Aboriginal Bridging Program.<sup>74</sup>

Many Nunatsiavummiut<sup>75</sup> also attend Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) whose main campus is located in St. John's. MUN offers many different degree programs such as Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Science and the list goes on. MUN also offers post-graduate programs.<sup>76</sup>

Student financial support to attend post-secondary institutions is provided by several groups which receive their funding from the Government of Canada's Post-Secondary

70 Saunders, R. (2006). Skills and Knowledge for Canada's Future. *Canadian Policy Research Networks*.

71 There are different ways of spelling this word, more commonly known as Inuktitut, dependent on the local dialect; Inuttitut is the Nunatsiavut spelling of the word.

72 (<http://www.k12.nf.ca/jen-shaven/jhms-loc.html>).

73 (<http://www.cna.nl.ca/campus/hvgb/>)

74 ([http://www.cna.nl.ca/programs-courses/current\\_programs/CNA\\_Aboriginal\\_Bridging.pdf](http://www.cna.nl.ca/programs-courses/current_programs/CNA_Aboriginal_Bridging.pdf)).

75 The term to describe residents of Nunavut

76 (<http://www.mun.ca/>).

Student Support Program.<sup>77</sup> Some programs have conditions which can limit students' opportunities to study outside the Atlantic region. The Inuit Pathways program, also funded by the federal government under its Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy, supports labour market training and business development for Labrador Inuit.<sup>78</sup> The initiative provides financial aid for many of the trades programs as well as other economic development initiatives

and training.

## NUNAVUT

Unlike the two territories to its west, whose schools in larger regional centres may have both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student bodies, 96 percent of the 9,163 students in Nunavut are Inuit.<sup>79</sup> Nunavut is also the only jurisdiction in Canada that does not have school boards, with the exception of the French Divisional School Board in Nunavut (Commission scolaire francophone du Nunavut). Although the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* does not contain education-specific articles, arguably a major oversight, the Government of Nunavut resources the education system through its federal transfer payments. As elsewhere in Inuit Nunangat regions, graduation rates in Nunavut are at 29.6 percent<sup>80</sup>, just one-third the completion rate (71.3 percent) in the rest of Canada<sup>81</sup>.

### K-12

The education system is managed through the *Nunavut*

*Education Act*, which provides bilingual (Inuktitut and English) education for all students. Inuit culture is considered the foundation for every aspect of the education system. The Act also defines the level of local control with direct roles and responsibilities for District Education Authorities (DEA), and more support for students to stay engaged and succeed in their education.

Despite the commitment to promoting Inuit culture, the majority (60%) of K-6 courses currently taught in Nunavut use the NWT curriculum (which, in turn, is based on the Alberta curriculum) and all math courses from K-12 use the Western Canadian Protocol, which is based on British Columbia's curriculum. Eighty percent of the Grades 10-12 curriculum is drawn either from Alberta's or B.C.'s curriculum.

## CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON CLASSROOM LEARNING

The new *Education Act* commits to support Inuit language and culture by making the Minister of Education, DEAs and school staff responsible for

77 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) has two funding programs that could provide financial assistance for eligible Status Indian and Inuit students to help offset tuition, travel or living expenses. ( *Post-Secondary Education*, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/100100033679/1100100033680>. The department's post-secondary education programming is primarily funded through two authorities: *Grants to Indians and Inuit to support their post-secondary educational advancement*, and *Payments to support Indians, Inuit and Innu for the purpose of supplying public services in education – Contributions to support the post-secondary educational advancement of registered Indian and Inuit students*. ( *Formative Evaluation of the Post-Secondary Education Program*, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/aiarch/arp/aev/pubs/ev/psep/pse-eng.asp>

78 (<http://www.nunatsiavut.com/index.php/en/education-and-economic-development/inuit-pathways>).

79 Government of Nunavut, Department of Education, 2002 figure.

80 Statistics Canada 2006/2007

81 Statistics Canada 2006/2007

ensuring culturally appropriate school programs, curriculum and resources based on Inuit Societal Values and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (traditional knowledge), with an increased focus on language and culture programs for young children. The Act requires at least one community counsellor and student support teacher in every school as well as legislated professional development and orientation and mentorship programs for teachers. It also provides policy control of local delivery of education for Nunavummiut through *Inuuqatigiitsiarniq* (safe and caring) and registration and attendance policies.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

Nunavut Arctic College provides a variety of programs at three campuses, including the capital, Iqaluit, and 24 Community Learning Centres. It offers programs ranging from adult basic education (upgrading) to trades apprenticeships. Programs include mental health studies, fur design and production, hairstyling, Inuit studies, interpreting, management studies, jewelry and metal work, nursing and teacher education. The college

has partnerships with the University of Regina and Dalhousie University, enabling it to deliver Bachelor and Masters programs, respectively, such as the Nunavut Teacher Education Program and the Nunavut Nursing program. As with the other northern colleges and many southern universities, there is also a partnership with the University of the Arctic.<sup>82</sup> As well, the Government of Nunavut offers apprenticeship programs through agreements with the private sector which provide a combination of on-the-job and technical training.

To encourage and support Nunavut youth wishing to pursue post-secondary studies, Nunavut Sivuniksavut was started by Nunavut Tunngavik to enable Inuit beneficiaries from Nunavut to attend post-secondary institutions in Ottawa. In addition, the Nunavut Government Department of Education provides student loans and grants to Nunavut residents through FANS, the *Financial Assistance for Nunavut Students* program. The program's intent is to ensure that financial need is not a bar-

rier to higher education. It covers things such as tuition costs, to a specified limit and airfare. A Supplementary Grant is provided, over and above the basic grant, which helps to pay for books as well as a monthly living allowance to help cover daily living costs. The grants are calculated based on a formula which factors in whether the student is married, employed/unemployed and the number of dependants the individual may have.

Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated has an established Jose Amaujaq Kusugak scholarship program. The Kitikmeot Inuit Association and the Kivalliq Inuit Association in Nunavut provides scholarships for their beneficiaries established through Inuit Impact Benefits Agreements made with mining companies. As well, the Kakiwak Association, Kivalliq Partners in Development and the Kitikmeot Inuit Association administer financial aid programs for beneficiary students. However, students cannot access FANS and Inuit organizations' financial support at the same time.<sup>83</sup>

82 Accessed on [www.nac.nu.ca](http://www.nac.nu.ca)  
June 11, 2012

83 Accessed on [www.kakivak.ca](http://www.kakivak.ca)  
on June 11, 2012



In recognition of those who study online to take advantage of distance education offerings, qualified students who have successfully completed post-secondary distance education or correspondence courses can be reimbursed up to \$250 per course. For some, this is the only practical and affordable way to participate in higher education.

## PAN-NORTHERN PROGRAMS

Apart from programs and funding sources provided by individual regional organizations and federal and territorial governments, there are several pan-Northern initiatives. They are designed to expose Northern students to potential career options and, in turn, inspire them to go on to post-secondary education to gain the necessary qualifications to pursue these professional opportunities.

### NORTHERN YOUTH ABROAD

The Northern Youth Abroad (NYA) program enables youth aged 15 to 22 living in Nunavut and the Northwest Terri-

tories to acquire professional skills and training, hands on work experience, and high school credits through a cross cultural work and learning experience in Southern Canada and overseas. The program seeks to foster cross-cultural awareness, individual career goals and international citizenship among Northern youth by promoting leadership development, healthy self-confidence and self-esteem through life-changing experiences. NYA is committed not only to the personal development of Northern youth, but also to the development of strong and vital Northern communities.

NYA was developed to meet the unique needs of young people in the North and has already solidly demonstrated its ability to profoundly influence Nunavut youth in a positive way, most notably through a 93% high school graduation rate among its alumni. NYA is also unique in its commitment to sustained involvement in the lives of its participants and alumni

### STUDENTS ON ICE

This initiative runs educational expeditions to the Arctic and

Antarctic. It brings high school students, educators, leaders and scientists from around the globe, providing inspiring learning opportunities to help foster understanding of and respect for the planet. The program's Arctic expeditions always include a contingent of Northern (typically Inuit) students.

### DECHINTA

Dechinta: Bush University Centre for Research and Learning is a relatively new, northern-led initiative delivering land-based, University of Alberta-credited educational experiences led by northern leaders, experts, elders and professors to engage northern and southern youth in a transformative curricula based on the unique needs and opportunities of Canada's North. It is located off the grid in a remote eco-lodge north of Great Slave Lake accessible only by bush plane, snowmobile or dog team. Learning from the land while living in community is central to the Dechinta experience. Hunting, fishing and wild harvesting are integrated into the curriculum, led by a diverse faculty with direct experience in research and lead-



ership in the subject areas.

### **DREAMCATCHER MENTORING**

DreamCatcher Mentoring is an e-mentoring program designed to empower students to realize the rewards of staying in school. They bridge the education, cultural, communication, and geographic gaps by connecting Yukon and Nunavut high school students with Canadian mentors who work in their aspired “dream careers”.

All four of these programs have been recognized as innovative and life-changing for participants. Dreamcatcher and

## WHAT OUR RESEARCH TELLS US

**"I DON'T THINK THAT OUR CHILDREN ARE BEING GIVEN A PROPER EDUCATION AND I DON'T THINK OUR GOVERNMENTS ARE BEING REALISTIC WITH OUR CHILDREN ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE ACTUALLY TEACHING THEM. I WOULD LOVE TO SEE STANDARDIZED TESTS THAT ARE INUIT SPECIFIC THAT ALLOW FOR INUIT PARENTS TO UNDERSTAND WHERE THEIR CHILDREN STACK UP AGAINST OTHER INUIT CHILDREN AND THEN AGAINST OTHER CANADIANS. THAT'S THE FIRST STEP. THE OTHER CHALLENGE IS TO IMPROVE THE SYSTEM - TO CHANGE THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY ABOUT WHY WE ARE DOING THIS. WE ARE NOT DOING THIS BECAUSE WE HAVE TO, WE ARE NOT EDUCATING OUR CHILDREN BECAUSE THERE IS SOME NATIONAL STANDARD THAT WE HAVE TO LIVE UP TO. WE ARE DOING THIS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF OUR SOCIETY."**

### – NUNAVUT INTERVIEWEE

Dechinta both received awards through Ashoka Canada's competition *Inspiring Approaches to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learning*.

**T**he current dismal performance indicators across all five regions underscore that today's students continue to encounter many of the same roadblocks to academic, personal and professional success that our research subjects did in earlier times.

There has been a marked im-

provement in financial support for students. Also encouraging, regional school authorities are increasingly espousing the right 'language', recognizing that traditional learning and Aboriginal culture are crucial to learners' success.

For all this progress, however, it appears that relatively little has changed in the North's education systems in the years since our interviewees participated in them. What is clear from our review is that the current education system is not

working for many Northern children and youth – particularly Aboriginal students. The hurdles to becoming a Northern leader remain great.

The facts speak for themselves:

- Northern schools register lower than average grade scores
- Absenteeism rates across the North are markedly higher than elsewhere in the country
- Levels of engagement and appreciation for school are low
- Drop-out rates are significantly higher than for other Canadian students
- Behavioural problems are more widespread than for other populations
- Health behaviour concerns are considerable
- Students in rural communities perform much more poorly than their urban peers
- Aboriginal students are more likely to experience

these challenges than non-Aboriginal students, even within Northern schools

- Educational programs provided in many communities falls short academically of what is required to succeed when students go to Southern Canada to study at the secondary or post-secondary levels, setting students up for failure
- Availability of university-level post-secondary opportunities in the north is abysmal
- Access to funding, or lack thereof, is a major factor in students' post-secondary education decisions and ability to pursue higher learning
- Financial stability is positively correlated to student success and well-being
- There are funding disparities between Status and non-Status Indians, and land claim beneficiaries versus others, which create inequities among Aboriginal peoples

Other notable difficulties encountered in Northern educa-

tion systems include:

- Some Northerners continue to harbour ill feelings toward formal education based on their own, or their families', negative experiences as a result of the residential school system
- Family circumstances weigh heavily on the learning environment for the student. Parental guidance is integral to youth succeeding at learning; if parents do not strongly encourage their children to attend school, whether it be in English or an Aboriginal language, many youth will not complete any schooling
- Many students do not receive the nurturing and attention they need in their home environment, sometimes due to substance abuse and family violence
- Curriculum taught in the North is almost exclusively based on curriculum developed in the South
- Current educational models, in the North and elsewhere, do not adopt best teaching practices for learning transfer and retention

- Aboriginal students tend to be streamed into non-professional streams, such as the trades, and are often not encouraged to consider or supported in pursuing advanced studies
- While financial support is available, information about it is not widely known by students who might potentially benefit from it
- Students leaving the North to attend school in the South are ill-prepared for the culture shock, language barriers and racism they often encounter and lack sufficient personal support networks

In spite of these shortcomings, there is reason for optimism. Some of our findings point to potential solutions to the challenges that continue to plague Northern communities.

These include:

- Knowledge of one's native language and culture plays a profound role in instilling pride, and a sense of self-worth and self-respect, giving people the strength to cope with adversity

- Efforts to revitalize language, culture and spirituality, especially in Aboriginal communities, help to develop both individual and collective resilience
- “Servant-leadership” offers a promising, effective educational leadership model which is consistent with Aboriginal culture and teachings
- Learning in non-traditional ways, such as on the land and by quiet observation, empowers learners in a way that traditional academic learning does not
- Changing the overall educational philosophy from institutions of learning to learning institutions, where youth learn how to learn, instils confidence
- Individuals who have a developed repertoire of different responses to problems rather than relying on only one response are more likely to overcome adversity encountered
- Developing resilience is not an individual activity but requires support from others, including the nuclear and extended family, friends, community members and teachers – inherent strengths in most Northern, particularly Aboriginal, communities

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

The following recommendations represent our collective assessment of what must happen if the next generation of Northern leaders are to take their rightful place within our communities and Canadian society. In accordance with the key themes espoused by our research participants, we propose the following:

### LIVING IN TWO WORLDS

Living in two worlds symbolizes the reality many Aboriginal peoples face of both living and practicing their culture and traditions, while also participating in mainstream Canadian society.

Instruction in the local language is considered essential, most notably in Inuit speaking regions, and learning based on traditional teachings and 'hands-on' pedagogy were viewed as vital to improving Northern students' school outcomes by interviewees. While culture and traditional teachings are of utmost importance to the participants, research participants also expressed the

value of having a Western education and having a balance between the two.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Collaborative strategic plans among federal, territorial and Aboriginal governments should be developed to increase support and training for parents, school councillors/mentors and community funding agencies
- Territorial and Aboriginal governments should conduct regional research into existing Northern traditional/experiential learning programs to determine what is (or is not) working and to identify the best ways to foster effective programs, to be presented to all stakeholders in a Northern education forum
- Promote excellence in both traditional and academic pursuits, recognizing that they are not contradictory and can be mutually reinforcing
- Remove the stigma around definitions of cultural identity (e.g. someone is either "traditional", having learned on the land, or "academic", perceived as part of the white world) so that individuals do not have to be either/or but can be both

### "STRONG LIKE TWO PEOPLE" – CHIEF JIMMY BRUNEAU REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

Considered a model of bicultural and bilingual education, the school places equal emphasis on educating children in two cultures. Schools in Tlicho communities operated by the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education in the NWT provide this balanced approach to teaching and learning, which is founded on Tlicho values and which integrates the knowledge and skills of two worlds.



- Capitalize on the strong links between sports prowess and post-secondary opportunities
- Apply lessons learned from successful initiatives such as the Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School<sup>84</sup> in other Northern communities

## POSITIVE UPBRINGING

Positive upbringing during the formative years of the majority of participants played a crucial role in their development and achievements in life.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Northern governments and communities must ensure support systems are in place for family and community development and well-being, recognizing that parents, caregivers, family members and communities play a crucial role in child development. These support systems should be culturally appropriate.
- Where appropriate, efforts

should be made to support programs that address the holistic wellness of the child within the school system. Examples such as school breakfast and snack programs have been proven to improve student attendance and achievement levels. These should be expanded across the North and sustainably funded.

- Programs that promote life and parenting skills should be developed and delivered locally, bringing together parents, extended family members, communities and schools
- Emphasize Early Childhood Learning to prepare children to learn and to promote language and culture
- Engage parents in Early Childhood Learning programs to supplement at home what is being taught to their children at school

## ATTENDANCE AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Many research participants identified having to attend

residential school for some of their elementary or secondary education as a major challenge. This was generally a difficult time in their lives as they were separated from their families, their culture, and all they knew to a foreign environment. The negative effects of these experiences spill over into successive generations, often with adverse impacts on learners.

It is also worth noting that some of these issues persist for contemporary learners, as some Northern children and youth still must leave their communities to attend school in larger regional centres.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Northern governments should work with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to help ascertain what builds resilience. This initiative would lead to a strategic plan, developed with all stakeholders, identifying how best to work with communities and families to increase resilience in Northern students.
- Northern governments should increase their efforts to resolve lingering residen-

<sup>84</sup> Chief Jimmy Bruneau School  
<http://www.tlichoc.ca/tlichocommunity-services/aboutus>

tial school issues and work with communities to incorporate viable solutions within schools to address intergenerational impacts. A change in attitude among affected families would help to bring more value to education, which would strengthen the support provided to current and future students.

- Curriculum should be developed and implemented at all grade levels to teach the history of residential schools and their impacts in all schools throughout Canada

Other recent recommendations of the TRC (listed in their interim report) should be supported by this paper:

- Extend this same approach to educating Canadians about other Aboriginal atrocities, such as the dog slaughter in Nunavik and Nunavut, and ensure the historical context for these actions is explained (e.g. Canadian sovereignty claims, impacts of resource extraction in the North, etc.). The opportunity to transform the rich testimony from the recent TRC processes led by Qikiqtani Inuit Association and Makivik Corporation into curriculum should not be missed.
- Recognize that reconciliation cannot be achieved by one party alone; healing and renewal requires non-Aboriginal engagement as

it is a Canadian issue, not just an Aboriginal issue, which means that all Canadians have a role to play in making amends for the past

## RELOCATING TO ATTEND POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL

Research participants who attended post-secondary institutions outside their regions spoke of the many difficulties they encountered in adapting to the Southern environment and the tremendous financial challenges they faced, issues which continue to confront contemporary Northern students due to the lack of Northern learning alternatives.

**4) THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT EACH PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT UNDERTAKE A REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM MATERIALS CURRENTLY IN USE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO ASSESS WHAT, IF ANYTHING, THEY TEACH ABOUT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS**

**5) THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION WORK IN CONCERT WITH THE COMMISSION TO DEVELOP AGE-APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS ABOUT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS FOR USE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND ENSURE THE HISTORIC CONTEXT FOR THESE EVENTS IS EXAMINED (E.G. COLONIALISM, ASSIMILATION POLICIES, ETC.)**

**8) THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS THAT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT DEVELOP CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PARENTING PROGRAMS TO ASSIST YOUNG PARENTS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY THE IMPACT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND HISTORIC POLICIES OF CULTURAL OPPRESSION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARENTAL UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Students from the North need the option of studying in the North to prevent the disconnection from their culture and communities and the associated discomforts. Federal and Northern governments need to move quickly on establishing a Northern university to serve the Arctic region.
- Bridging programs can help support students who choose to relocate or must relocate for specialized programs only available at select schools (i.e.. Dentistry, Medicine, Law, etc.)
- Learn from and adapt lessons learned from other jurisdictions that provide strong support systems to students such as Nunavut Sivuniksavut and Nunavik's student assistance programs offered by the Kativik Regional School Board

**SUPPORT**

All participants identified having support during their scholarship which they identified as contributing to their success. Support included financial aid,

family support, peer support, Aboriginal faculty support and Aboriginal student lounges. Several interviewees remarked that caring individuals, such as teachers, made all the difference in empowering participants to become contributing adults. Others stressed the importance of high expectations of educators, parents or extended family members who demanded a certain standard of academic performance.

Parental support is essential, both financially and through encouragement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Federal and Northern governments need to continue to provide necessary financial aid
- Support for students should be greater than in just the financial sense: a public secretariat dedicated to providing mentoring, counselling, and coaching should be established to ensure support-starved students have a resource for assistance. Such a secretariat could address the loneliness and isolation many students experience by creating a “long

distance” community.

- Capitalize on technology to increase connectivity, such as establishing blogs and chat rooms where Northern students can meet and interact with each, extending emotional support to one another
- Individual communities and/or regions should establish peer support networks to help students while away from home, who often attend the same institutions in the South
- Teach Northern children to support each other through fellowship, establishing networks that can carry them throughout their lives
- Provide summer programs like those offered by Tlicho communities, which pay students to do community service work while learning about their self-government agreement, along with traditional, safety and financial skills<sup>85</sup>; the experience gives students a solid grounding in their identity before they leave the com-

85 Tlicho Government <http://www.tlicho.ca/tlichogovernment>

munity to go South to attend school

## FUNDING

Although funding is relatively accessible now, the high cost of post-secondary education outside the North continues to put it beyond the reach of some Northern students aspiring to study. Part of the challenge is making students aware of potential sources of financial support so they can avail themselves of the financial assistance available. A further challenge is the inconsistency in funding, with the amount of money varying from one year to another.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Undertake research into financial disparities and their impacts on student enrolment/success in higher education and identify remedies to challenges identified
- The federal government needs to accept that Aboriginal Peoples' definition of citizenship is not simply the official designation according to the *Indian Act* (ie. Status and non-Status) and should adjust financial

transfer agreements accordingly

- Federal and Northern governments need to work together ensure sustainable post-secondary funding for all students
- There should be better, and consistent, communications to students regarding any changes to funding sources, eligibility, etc.
- A list of all funding sources available to students should be created and widely disseminated (i.e. on a central website along the lines of the federal YouthLink<sup>86</sup> website that provides information about a range of programs and supports for youth, but tailored specifically to information about financial assistance available to Northern students); this would include funding at the federal and territorial level, as well as from private organizations and the local community/regional groups
- Federal and Northern governments need to re-eval-

<sup>86</sup> YouthLink <http://www.youthlink.ca/>

uate current funding available to students to reflect inflation and present day living costs, especially in Southern cities

- Students should have access to “back-up” funding. When this is not available from parents, there should be a fund to bridge students between payment cycles to cover shortfalls for food, rent, etc.

## FAMILIES AND PARENTS NEED TO BE PART OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education system needs to be culturally relevant in the north to avoid stereotypes and racism. It is also crucial that families and parents play a part in their children's awareness and understanding of options for the future and preparing them for the world in terms of finances and setting goals. Parents must be included in the learning environment. The “culture of learning” ethos has to change and reflect more of a “hands on” learning environment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Northern governments need to foster support for parents and other caregivers to help them understand their role and the pivotal part they play in their children's learning
- Federal and Northern governments need to address the broader issues of food security and housing crowding to create positive learning environments
- Parents and communities need to assume responsibility for providing nurturing, supportive environments that enable students to succeed
- The school environment, physically and socially, needs to reflect local culture and customs (e.g. architectural design, classroom decorations, etc.)
- Use schools as community centres to break down barriers for parents/families uncomfortable with or opposed to formal education by making them feel welcomed; remove red tape regarding liability concerns that preclude such activity

- Emphasize pride in language, culture and traditional teachings to value and validate parents' contributions to their children's education

## ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN PASSING ON TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS AND SKILLS

Traditional land skills and knowledge of culture and language are central to Aboriginal students' identity and sense of self-worth, and make education more relevant in the Northern context. The opportunity to learn traditional skill is typically through the community. No one person is responsible for teaching lessons; instead, parents, extended family and community members all participate in instructing youth and others who wish to learn.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Consult the community about what skills and knowledge they want their children to know

- Recognize and promote the intergenerational transfer of culture and the responsibility of all Aboriginal people of all ages to be strong in the skills they want the next generation to know
- Education systems need to expand to include support or educational classes for parents and caregivers to understand their responsibility to provide their children with important life skills like budgeting for finances, family planning and goal setting to prepare them for the future.
- Northern agencies (schools, Aboriginal governments and organizations, health care facilities) should cooperate in identifying youth at risk and providing appropriate supports
- Identify gaps in services for youth at risk
- Northern governments and communities should create youth councils that provide training to develop the leadership skills of local young people; or should otherwise continue and enhance funding for



youth leadership and mentorship programs

## MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS TO BE TRANSFERRED RELATE TO CULTURE

Culture, traditional knowledge, land skills and language were identified as being the most important skills to be passed on to current and future generations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- School curriculum should promote experience-based learning opportunities for students such as teachings from Elders and other Knowledge Holders, tanning hides, setting and checking trap-lines, sewing skills, etc.
- Traditional language programs should be available both inside and outside the school system for people of all ages
- Integrate on the land learning with language immersion programs that give

parents and community members the opportunity to share their knowledge

- Ensure design of a northern university includes culture at the core<sup>87</sup>

## THE EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS TO CHANGE

The single most frequently cited observation by interviewees is that the North's educational system must be strengthened, as it currently falls far short of Northerners' needs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop regionally and culturally appropriate key performance indicators of program success and design and implement best practices
- Discard inappropriate elements of the Southern-based curriculum and

<sup>87</sup> See summary of a visioning workshop hosted by the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation, including a conceptual model for a northern university with Elders, learners and the land at the centre of the concept: <http://gordonfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/images/Dialogue%20toward%20a%20university%20in%20Northern%20Canada.pdf>

replace them with academically equivalent but more relevant and culturally accessible Northern curriculum – that better reflects and responds to Northern learners' needs and interests – within the mainstream elementary and secondary school system

- Education systems in the North need to place value on culture based learning and be inclusive of other forms of teaching and learning. This can include giving students credit for experiential learning on the land in their first moose or caribou hunt or going on annual hunting trips.
- Involve Aboriginal scholars and traditional storytellers in the development of culturally relevant curriculum (as well as research priorities at the post-secondary level), clarifying that traditional does not mean “confined to the past” but remains relevant today
- Liberate and repackage existing archival materials (e.g. historical records, tapes and transcripts) that can be used in the develop-

ment of new curriculum

- Utilize new technologies to reach children, such as graphic novels, multimedia, videos, film, theatre arts, etc. to teach traditional knowledge
- Before teaching in the North, educators should learn about the community they will be in – the culture, the worldview, the values, the foods – and make an effort to expand their social interactions with local people in the community and learn the local language. In addition to increasing understanding and tolerance, this may improve teaching methods which will result in improved student performance. Absent a broader program, individual communities could take this responsibility on (as has been done in the past and still in some places), with communities conducting orientations at the beginning of the school year for new teachers.
- Services for Northern students studying in the South need to be improved to help them adjust to city life, nav-

igate the post-secondary institution and the southern city, and be better prepared for both academic and personal challenges. Counseling should be more readily available

- Learn from other jurisdictions that have implemented effective language/culture initiatives for their Indigenous populations, especially Greenland, New Zealand and Hawaii
- Uphold existing laws that protect language and culture (e.g. the NWT has 11 official languages, enshrined in law)
- Uphold existing requirements for school administrators to maintain relationships with parents
- Provide upgrading opportunities for Inuit students whose first language is neither English nor French prior to the start of their post-secondary education in Southern Canada
- Inuktitut in the Eastern Arctic needs to be at least on equal footing with English and French, irrespective of constitutional rami-

fications

- Identify and address systemic issues impacting northern students (racism, bullying, streaming, etc.)
- Conduct research into issues requiring further investigation (e.g. why, even among ‘successful’ students who graduate, extensive up-grading is required before entering mainstream post-secondary academic and trades/technical programs)

## THE LESSONS WE LEARNED

**A**s a group of young Northerners with varied backgrounds and diverse research interests, we shared one common experience: A significant amount of our own education came not from the time spent in classrooms, but within our communities and from learning on the land. Tied to these invaluable experiences, for some of us, is the ability to speak our parents' Mother tongues. Being able to speak our traditional languages has helped us to talk to, learn from and share experiences with our parents, grandparents and their/our ancestors.

This shared experience has had a profound impact on each of our lives and continues to guide our studies, work and research interests. Yet, even as we appreciate our good fortune in having had these experiences, we continue to see and, sometimes, experience ourselves the struggles that many Northerners face both in attaining and applying their education. Nor have we been able to block the intergenerational echoes of the residential school experience that still resonates deep within

the walls of our current institutions and, often, our own families and communities. We want to change this. As a result of our research, we have concluded that the barriers to education and, ultimately, to achieving strong and resilient communities in the North persist. These barriers need to be actively addressed if we are to ever achieve an equitable North that embraces the strength and diversity of all the peoples who call the North home.

Despite the litany of grievances we heard about childhood hardship and the tragic experiences of many in residential schools, and the long list of ongoing challenges within the current education system, we have at least twenty reasons to be optimistic. Our twenty research participants have shown us that it is possi-

ble to break away from outdated, and sometimes oppressive, educational models to achieve our individual potential and to better our communities.

We have learned there is something special about these individuals. Our research participants have some internal quality that we can't quite define, and may never fully understand, yet it is clear that these qualities have helped our interviewees to overcome a lifetime of challenges.

Their experiences and the

**"WE HAVE OUR OWN PROFESSORS—OUR ELDERS—HO HAVE MUCH TO TEACH US ABOUT TRUE LEADERSHIP, THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND STRENGTH OF CHARACTER. THEY HOLD THE LEGACY OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND WISDOM THAT IS INSEPARABLE FROM THE LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE THAT HAVE SUSTAINED OUR WAY OF LIFE."**

**— NUNAVUT PREMIER  
EVA AARIAK**

wisdom they shared with us showed us the limitations of academic research methods

which often do not adequately consider the richness and diversity of information acquired through oral histories and traditions.

They have demonstrated through their leadership that one of the greatest things a leader can provide to a people is hope – hope for a better life, hope for happiness, and hope for change to improve their community.

We have also come to appreciate the benefits of borrowing best practices, from each other and from other jurisdictions both within Canada and around the globe. Adopting and adapting approaches that have already been proven elsewhere can help to solve some of the challenges confronting our communities. This has underscored the value – and necessity – of continually learning and being open to new ideas, no matter what the source.

The Northern leaders we interviewed also taught us that,

while it is critical that we work to reduce the challenges that future generations of Northerners will face, we cannot eliminate them completely.

**"I KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO EXPERIENCE PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE. I KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO LOSE A LANGUAGE. I KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO FEEL LIKE A SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN—A SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE. I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE SO ANGRY THAT YOU WANT TO HIT SOMEONE OVER THE HEAD WITH A HOCKEY STICK. THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED ME WERE THE ELDERS. THEY TOLD ME, 'YOU ARE BETTER THAN THAT. I KNEW YOUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS. YOU WERE TAUGHT BETTER THAN THAT AND YOU KNOW BETTER.' THEY TOOK MY HAND, LIKE A SCARED LITTLE CHILD, AND LED THE WAY."**

**— NWT ELDER AND  
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVOR**

The next generation of leaders must be prepared both for the issues identified in this report, as well as the unforeseen but inevitable difficulties associated with a fast-changing world which will invariably arise.

Both the individuals we interviewed, and the leaders and mentors we invited to the

Nunavut Policy Forum, challenged us to ensure that the teachings of the Elders carry on with, and within, each of us and those with whom we come

into contact during our own journeys. Nunavut Premier Eva Aariak reminded us that, "As we lose our irreplaceable Elders it is up to you, a new generation, to keep this knowledge alive and relevant." Okalik Egeesiak, President of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, reassured us that "If you continue to utilize what you have learned and committed to doing, you will enable northern Aboriginal people to work together in unity."

Perhaps among the most valuable lessons we have learned is the power of partnerships and the strength that comes through fellowship. We have come to understand in a way that we maybe did not appreciate before that, together, we are strong – strong in two worlds – and the solutions we seek rest with us. As our Nunavut gath-

ering underlined, “Knowledge is Within Us.”

Thanks to this research project, and our own shared experiences, we can not only begin to identify common factors in nurturing caring and resilient individuals. We can also update our current learning environments to ensure our future Northern leaders develop the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to persist in the face of adversity.

As the inspirational leaders we encountered through this project have confirmed, it **can** be done.



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# APPENDIX A

## INTERVIEWEES

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NAME	RESIDENCE
Andrew Andersen	Nain Labrador
Anonymous interviewee	
Brandi Bailey	Lower Post BC
Paul Birckel	Whitehorse YK
B' esha Blondin	Yellowknife NT
Glen Coulthard	Vancouver BC
Amanda Dumont	Kugluktuk NU
Lila Erasmus	Yellowknife NT
Stephen Frost	Old Crow YK
Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox	Yellowknife NT
Lawrence Joe	Whitehorse YT
Yvonne Joe	Baker Lake/Iqaluit NU
Karen Kabloona	Whitehorse/ Haines Junction, YT
Pujuut Kusugak	Rankin Inlet NU
Bridget Larocque	Inuvik NT
Joe Linklater	Old Crow YK
Virginia Lloyd	Igloolik/Iqaluit NU
Christine Nochasak	Makkovik Labrador
Natan Obed	Nain, Nunatsiavut
Mary Siemens	Edzo NT
Charlie Snowshoe	Fort McPherson NT

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# APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

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### PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this paper is to understand the learning environments that foster an individual's positive contribution to their community, amongst Northerners across Canada.

INTERVIEWER: -----

INTERVIEWEE: -----

DATE: -----

### OBJECTIVE: ESTABLISH SIGNIFICANT FACTORS IN EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. What was the first language of your caregivers?
2. Can you list your primary caregivers? (i.e.: parents, grandparents, sister/brother, Aunt/Uncle)
3. Can you describe the conditions you grew up in at home? (Prompts: How many people did you live with, did you move around a lot, what did you eat, where did you get it from, etc.)?
4. How would you characterize how you felt at home? (Prompts: happy, lonely, scared, etc)?
5. How many children (or grandchildren) do you have? What are their ages? And how many are living with you?

### OBJECTIVE: IDENTIFY SIGNIFICANT FACTORS IN THE FORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS EXPERIENCED BY INDIVIDUAL

6. What were the biggest challenges that you faced to attend school? (Prompts: had to leave home, cost of attending, didn't speak the language, etc)
7. Can you describe your experience at school? (Prompts: was it enjoyable, did you understand the teachers, the subjects taught, etc)
8. Can you tell me what you feel helped you to learn the most? (Prompts: encouragement from caregivers, caring teachers, others around you -friends, classmates, relatives)

9. Did you graduate high school with your classmates?

## OBJECTIVE: IDENTIFY FACTORS IN QUALITY OF FORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

10. Can you describe your relationship with your school teachers? (Prompts: consistent communication, authoritative )
11. Can you describe the conditions of the school/classrooms? (Prompts: clean/dirty, organized, orderly, run down, lots of learning aides – books, maps, photos, etc)

## OBJECTIVE: POST-SECONDARY

12. What was your reason for attending University/ College?
13. Where did you attend postsecondary?
14. Does this institution offer support for Aboriginal students such as a common room, mentors, scholarships, etc?
15. What support system(s) did you have to help you in your studies? (family/community supports, postsecondary funding, tutoring, literacy programs, guidance counselors, mentorship, etc.)
16. What strategies did/do you use to help you cope with your family responsibilities (if applicable) while in school?
17. Do you have consistent communication with your professors at University/College?
18. Were you able to complete a program within the timeframe allotted on your first attempt? (i.e.: 1 year program within 1 year/ 2 year program within 2 years/ 4 year program within 4 years.)
19. What were your average grades in your secondary/postsecondary education?
20. Do you come from a family that is educated at a post-secondary level?
21. How supportive were your parents in your studies? Did/do they support your educational goals?

22. Were your parents/caregivers able to set aside funds or financial support for your higher education?
23. Were you able to access educational funding from your Aboriginal group? Was it easy to access? What were the barriers/limitations, if any?
24. Was the amount of funding reasonable to sustain your educational pursuits?
25. Overall, what challenges do you think affect our educational system in the North and what changes can be made to improve the system?

## OBJECTIVE: TRADITIONAL SKILLS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

26. Is there someone in your life that has passed on important traditional and cultural skills to you? Who is that person?
27. What are the most important skills they taught you? And how do you use them today?
28. What are the important ones you want to pass on?
29. How or what is the best way, in your opinion, to teach these skills?
30. How about new things? What is the best way for you to learn new things today?
31. What do you think is the best learning environments for someone to learn new skills, given that today is different than when you were being taught as a child?
32. Why should you pass on your knowledge and traditional and cultural skills?
33. At what age do you think early learners should be taught these skills and how much should be taught?
34. What are some personal activities or hobbies that you are involved in?
35. Has aboriginal traditional knowledge and skills affected your life? If so, how?
36. Are you involved in any volunteer organizations currently, or have you been in the past? If yes, please list:

**OBJECTIVE: COLLECT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION WHICH MAY HELP TO IDENTIFY AND CHARACTERIZE TRENDS**

- 37. Name, where raised
- 38. Gender
- 39. Age group
- 40. Marital status
- 41. Do you identify with an Aboriginal group? If yes, please specify
- 42. Which community do you identify with
- 43. What is your occupation
- 44. Highest level of education achieved
- 45. Where attended secondary school
- 46. Where attended post-secondary school



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# APPENDIX C

## POLICY FORUM PARTICIPANTS LIST

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- Eva Aariak, Nunavut, Premier, Government of Nunavut (speaker)
- Okalik Eegeesiak, Nunavut, President, Qikiqtani Inuit Association (speaker)
- Madeleine Redfern, Nunavut, Mayor of Iqaluit (speaker)
- Jackie Price, Nunavut, PhD candidate, Scott Polar Institute, Cambridge (facilitator)
- Nancy Karetek-Lindell, Nunavut, Director, Jane Glassco Arctic Fellowship Program, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation
- Frank Anderson, Labrador, Nunatsiavut Government
- Paul Andrew, NWT, retired CBC broadcaster
- Tina Jules, Yukon, cultural education consultant
- Denise Kurszewski, NWT, Assistant Superintendent of Education, Government of the Northwest Territories
- Puujjuut Kusugak, Nunavut, teacher, Director of Social Development for the Kivalliq Inuit Association, Mayor of Rankin Inlet
- Joe Linklater, Yukon, Chief Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
- Virginia Lloyd, Nunavut, Chief Operating Officer, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.
- Natan Obed, Nunavut/Nunatsiavut, Director, Social & Cultural Development, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.
- Briony Glassco, Board Member, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation and daughter of Jane Glassco, namesake of the Jane Glassco Arctic Fellowships
- Tom Axworthy, President and CEO, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation
- Naullaq Arnaquq, Assistant Deputy Minister, Culture, Language, Elders and Youth Government of Nunavut
- Mary-Ellen Thomas, Nunavut Research Institute
- James Stauch, Vice-President, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation
- Sara French, Program Director, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation

*Other members of the general public were welcome to attend this event. The names of those who attended were not recorded.*

# APPENDIX D

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# THE JANE GLASSCO ARCTIC FELLOWS

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## NAVARANA BEVERIDGE



Navarana Beveridge is currently the Director of Social Policy at the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. Prior to that, Navarana was the Education and Language Policy Analyst with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, where she played a key role in the development of the Inuit Language Protection Act, the Official Languages Act, and the Nunavut Education Act. Navarana is an Inuit language advocate and is one of the founders of the first Inuktitut daycare in Iqaluit. Her Fellowship paper focuses on the Inuit language in early childhood education in light of the recent passing of the Inuit Language Protection Act and the Nunavut Official Languages Act.

## CHRISTINE CREYKE



Christine Creyke works in her home community of Dease Lake, B.C. as the land stewardship coordinator. Through this job she has learned about her Tahltan people and their struggle with resource extraction, which is what lead her to pursue a master's in Natural Resource and Environmental Studies. She successfully defended her thesis in 2011. Christine's Fellowship paper is a comparative analysis of natural resource management decision-making by governments in the traditional territories of a First Nation with final land claim and self-government agreements and that of a First Nation without.

## JOSEPH FLOWERS



Joseph Flowers is an Inuk-Anglo Canadian who calls three places home: Labrador, Nunavik, and Montreal. Joseph moved to Montreal to study at John Abbott College, and he has lived in the South ever since. Following a six-year career as a professional cook in some of the city's top restaurants, he decided to continue higher education and earned a degree in linguistics and philosophy from McGill University. Given his experience in post-secondary education "down south", Joseph examined post-secondary sponsorship and support policies for Nunavimmiut for his Fellowship paper.

## DUSTIN FREDLUND



The significance that economic development and the environment play in the future for the North has been the catalyst that has seen Dustin Fredlund employed as a conservation officer, wildlife manager and currently as a director of economic development for the Nunavut Government. Through his Fellowship paper, Dustin examines the complexity surrounding the balancing of progress and preservation in regards to the environment and economic development.

## KAREN HALL



Karen Hall is a second year master's student at the University of Victoria in the studies in policy and practice in health and social services program. She completed her undergraduate studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, N.S., with a B.Sc. in health promotion. Karen's passion and the subject of her Fellowship paper is the search for ways to improve Aboriginal health, particularly through making health care services more culturally appropriate for Aboriginal peoples in the Northwest Territories.

## CYNTHIA JAMES



Cynthia James works as the Education Support Worker for the Ta'an Kwach'an Council in Whitehorse, Yukon. Ta'an Kwach'an is one of the two First Nation governments located in the Whitehorse area. Cynthia's role is to provide Ta'an Kwach'an citizens and kindergarten to grade 12 students with educational tools and resources for a successful journey through their elementary and high school careers. Cynthia's Fellowship paper focuses on developing increased youth engagement in the Carcross Tagish First Nation.

## NADIA JOE



Nadia Joe's story is only one strand woven into the tapestry of her family's story. She recently returned home to the Champagne & Aishihik First Nation in Haines Junction, Yukon to spend more time with her Elders on the land: listening, watching, learning. Nadia's Fellowship paper discusses sustainable management of water resources. It combines scientific and traditional knowledge and approaches to develop policy measures for water management that provide for water's sustainable use while maintaining its natural condition – a provision of the Champagne & Aishihik First Nations final agreement.

## JOCELYN JOE-STRACK



Jocelyn Joe-Strack is currently working on her M.Sc. with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). Her thesis project is investigating the methylation of mercury by bacteria in southern Yukon lake sediments. To utilize her education and experience with water, Jocelyn's project involves recommendations for the Yukon's Water Strategy. Her paper provides an in-depth look at how the Yukon's water is currently managed and gives insight to challenges and opportunities for the development of a Yukon Water Strategy.

### KYLA KAKFWI SCOTT



Kyla Kakfwi Scott believes in the importance of culture and the value of all forms of knowledge. The child of an aboriginal and non-aboriginal parent, it has been her constant goal to achieve balance between her two cultures, to learn as much as possible, and to carry that knowledge proudly. Kyla's Fellowship paper looks at the Northern Studies 15 curriculum, the only mandatory high school course developed in the NWT. She seeks to find ways the course can be improved to serve the needs of students, and meet the overarching goal of preparing northern youth for life beyond the school system.

### JANINE LIGHTFOOT



Janine Lightfoot was raised in Makkovik, Nunatsiavut, a small community in Northern Labrador, primarily by her grandparents who taught her to appreciate the land and how to use it. Janine credits her grandmother, Clara, for instilling knowledge in her to help with the struggles of Inuit in her region. Given this background, Janine's Fellowship paper focuses on resource development in Labrador and the adverse effect it has on the Inuit and Innu populations. She examines the consultation processes that uranium companies adhere to and outlines issues from a historical materialist understanding.

### HOLLY MACKENZIE-STRINGER



Holly Mackenzie-Stringer is a Dene from the Tlîchô Nation of the North Slave region of the Northwest Territories. Holly is an Intergovernmental Relations Analyst with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations, Government of the Northwest Territories. Holly's Fellowship paper examines the ways to develop and nurture Aboriginal women in leadership roles, and how to increase participation of women in all levels of decision making within Aboriginal governance. She also examines the barriers that exist for young women in taking on leadership roles as chiefs and in elected positions of governance.

### DANIEL T'SELEIE



Daniel T'seleie lives in Yellowknife and works as Director of Lands and Environment with the Dene Nation. His previous experience has included work on climate change mitigation and adaptation with territorial and national NGOs. Daniel's Fellowship focus includes how climate change is affecting the North, and how the territorial government can affect meaningful progress on this issue.





