



A Chosen Journey



RBC Indigenous Partnership
Report 2023





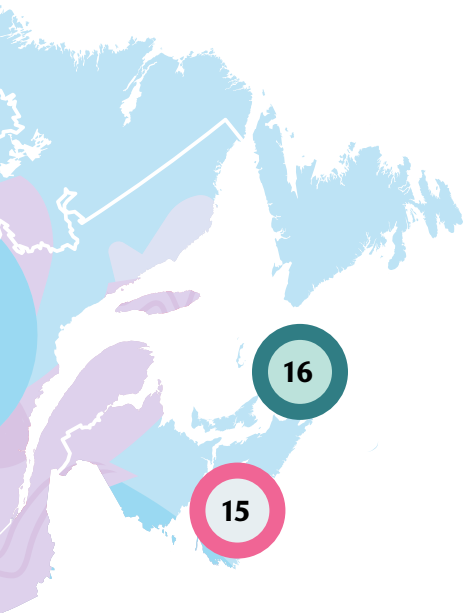
A Chosen Journey

RBC Indigenous Partnership Report 2023

The map above shows how the stories in this year's report represent Indigenous communities from across Canada.

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Reconciliation is a journey, and it's a path we're committed to.



In this year's *A Chosen Journey — RBC Indigenous Partnership Report*, the stories we share show how the future is being shaped by Indigenous excellence, wisdom and opportunity. Through the community work we are contributing to, we are joining with our Indigenous partners because this is the way of the future, and the way we have been doing things for more than 30 years.

Creating opportunity and long-term, sustainable benefits is the focus of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 92nd Call-to-Action. It's what's guiding us as we find new ways to work together by collaborating on initiatives that revitalize language and culture and create opportunities to learn and grow through education and economic development, and by realizing meaningful social impact that makes a difference on a daily basis.

The stories in this year's edition of *A Chosen Journey* demonstrate that Indigenous cultures, languages and communities are resilient, vibrant and rich in wisdom that everyone can learn from. New challenges need innovative approaches, and innovation has been alive and well in Indigenous ways of knowing and being since time immemorial.

RBC is proud to bring you these stories and to work with these communities, organizations and businesses towards a brighter tomorrow — moving forward together with hope.





A Message from Dave McKay

President and CEO

Our *chosen journey* is one rooted in partnership, humility and hope for our shared future.

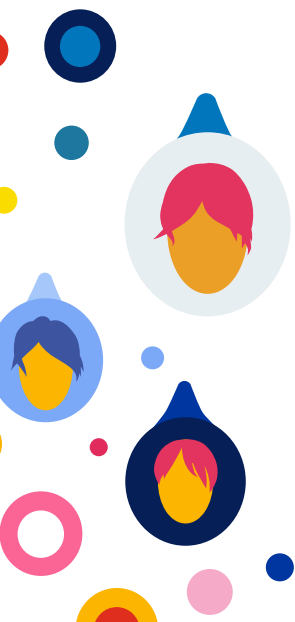
In my recent travels, I had the opportunity to connect with an inspiring group of Indigenous students in Saskatchewan, a conversation that left me both humbled and inspired.

I was humbled to learn more about their concerns for the planet, and the challenges of social injustice, racism, and inter-generational trauma many of these young people have faced, and inspired to hear about their hopes and dreams for the future — not just their own futures, but those of many generations to come.

Our conversation inevitably turned to the challenges and opportunities of our time—their magnitude, complexity and convergence across every aspect of our lives. From the economy to the environment, to the geopolitical sphere, the uncertainty we've experienced over the last few years can be destabilizing, and the magnitude of the tasks ahead of us can feel daunting. Finding and navigating solutions for these complex challenges will require unprecedented collaboration across every aspect of society in order to end divisions, and find common ground.

Much of my hope and optimism for the future comes from our chosen journey—one that's centred around reconciliation, inclusion and bringing generations together to build a future we can all be proud of.

In Canada, our country's reconciliation journey is interlinked with our ability to solve the many challenges of our time, which is why RBC's commitment to reconciliation is important.



Our Commitment to Reconciliation

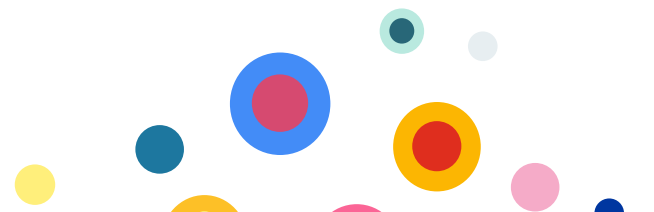
For decades, RBC has partnered with Indigenous nations to drive economic growth and create positive social change, and we will continue to act on reconciliation in genuine and meaningful ways.

Since signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations in 2007, and pledging to honour the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call-to-Action 92 in 2015, we've been working in partnership with Indigenous nations on three important priorities: economy, people and community.

We also know Indigenous leadership and knowledge is a critical part of protecting our planet, and meaningful consultation with Indigenous Peoples is fundamental to our country's successful transition to a net-zero future. As a leading Canadian company, we take seriously the responsibility to support and partner with Indigenous communities as we cultivate a more inclusive path forward — one that protects the land, water and sky for generations to come.

You'll see many examples of RBC's commitments in the pages of this report. Whether it's support for young filmmakers through the RBC Emerging Indigenous Filmmaker Award, advancing economic reconciliation through client relationships like we have with the We Wai Kai First Nation, or creating opportunities for the next generation through the RBC Future Launch Indigenous Youth Scholarship. I'm very proud of the ways we're continuing to support Indigenous clients and communities.

As we move forward together, RBC is determined to build a bank that supports the strength and prosperity of Indigenous nations, and to play a part in creating a society we can all be proud of. As our chosen journey progresses, you have my commitment that RBC will be there, in partnership with Indigenous people and communities.





A Message from Phil Fontaine

Special Advisor, RBC Indigenous Financial Services

The future is Indigenous. When I think of these words, I think about the recent progress in so many areas—economic development, education, private sector relationships, resolving past wrongs—all indicating that the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, more than ever before, have an increasingly important voice, and it is being heard in all of the right places.

In resource development, significant transactions have been concluded from coast to coast, demonstrating that Indigenous Peoples are very much in the game of wealth creation.

In education, I see Indigenous Peoples, in unprecedented numbers, pursuing higher education in community colleges and universities. They are enrolled in all fields of study, including in law, medicine, health sciences, education, fine arts, engineering and humanities, and they are excelling. Murray Sinclair, Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, said it best, “Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it.” And that’s the truth. Every day our people are proving that when given the opportunities that are so often taken for granted in Canada, they succeed.

Private sector relationships are changing in profoundly positive ways. Businesses now understand it is much more to their benefit to form critical alliances with First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners than to operate in isolation from us, and RBC is doing this. Their outreach to Indigenous Peoples in recruitment, forming partnerships and changing past policies is making a difference.

In resolving past wrongs, we, the Indigenous Peoples, have taken extraordinary steps to empower our communities to deal with their trauma and healing. From the historic Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report and 94 Calls-to-Action, the Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Sixties Scoop and Day School Settlements, the Child Welfare Human Rights Settlement and the work identifying unmarked graves across the country — impediments to reconciliation and healing are being dismantled. Pope Francis' pilgrimage to Canada, and his visits to our communities in 2022 seeking forgiveness for the wrongs committed in residential schools, was of immense significance to our forward progress. His statement that the treatment of our people was genocide went beyond the description offered by the Canadian government, the courts and the TRC, and it has considerable implications in ensuring our future participation in all aspects of Canadian life while preserving and maintaining our languages and cultures.

The path is much clearer now. We're moving only one way, and that's forward, with hope and determination. *The future is Indigenous.*



Economy

Financial Services



Siksika's Settlement: Truth, Justice and Education in Action

“The future is Siksika.” That’s what Chief Ouray Crowfoot (The Chief) says reflecting on the outcome of the land claim agreement Siksika signed last June. The signing ceremony occurred at Blackfoot Treaty Flats, the place where Blackfoot Treaty 7 (the Treaty) was signed in 1877. In 1910, the Government of Canada broke the Treaty when they permitted the illegal sale of half of Siksika Nation’s reserve lands. Back then it was illegal for Siksika to hire a lawyer and file a claim, a barrier that persisted for 50 years, until 1960, when Siksika filed their claim. At the end of the very long 62-year process, Siksika secured a \$1.3 billion settlement.

“My focus is Siksika and I focus on how I make my people and our Nation better,” Chief Crowfoot continues. “A happy story isn’t necessarily the true story. I think if we’re going to move forward with Canada in partnerships, we’ve got to move forward and tell the complete truth,” he concludes. While he is focused on advancing the interests of his people, the way his Nation negotiated their claim has served to advance the interests of all First Nations in Canada by way of a precedent-setting settlement, not just in size but in structure, that has increased the benchmark.

What came from the skilled negotiation was the largest one-time payment in Canadian history. While Siksika negotiated that, it was not mandatory to put the funds into trust. They still chose to do that and to set out four main “buckets” that align with the priorities of the Nation: a legacy, community development, distributions to community members and a land fund.

The team at RBC, led by RBC Royal Trust’s Anthony Wright and RBC Philips, Hager & North’s Gord Keesic, are proud of the relationship with Siksika. Aside from being a financial partner, last year, RBC donated \$50,000 and created The RBC Indigenous Nursing Student Support Fund, which will help Siksika students participating in the Bachelor of Nursing — Indigenous Community Route (Iiyikinaami — Spirit Helper) collaborative program between Old Sun Community College and the University of Calgary.

“This settlement for Siksika Nation acknowledges that just 33 years after signing the Blackfoot Treaty, Canada illegally breached its obligations causing immeasurable harm for the next 112 years,” says Wright, Regional Vice-President of Indigenous Wealth, adding, “As RBC Royal Trust accepts appointment as trustee for the settlement funds, I hope the settlement and this article serve as a reminder that agreements with Indigenous people must be honoured and respected, and hope that by showing up authentically and to listen, RBC Royal Trust can connect our clients with the resources and teams to make opportunities into realities.”



Chief Ouray Crowfoot and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau signed the agreement settling the Siksika land claim in June of 2022.



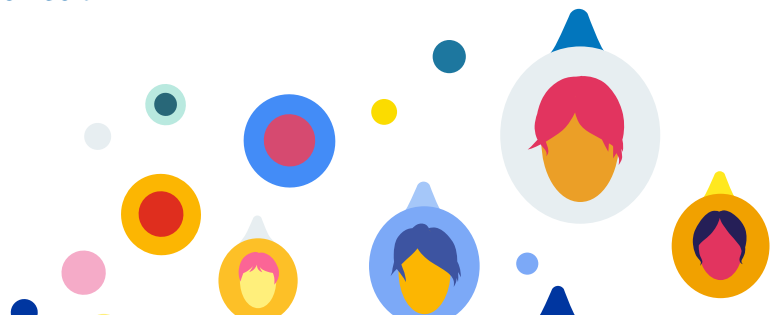
RBC's Regional President was joined by members of the Indigenous Wealth Management and Commercial Financial Services teams at the historic signing ceremony for Siksika's land claim settlement agreement.

The Chief himself earned a CPA (Certified Public Accountant) designation with an MBA and a MACC master's degree in accounting, and his fellow councillors also have impressive credentials, holding graduate degrees in law and other disciplines. His mother would often say, "Education is our modern day buffalo. We need to have a computer in one hand and a drum in the other hand." The Chief agrees, sharing, "It's not enough to be educated and forget about the traditional ways, or to be so traditional that you don't have education. You've got to marry the two together. I think that's the future and the direction that Siksika is going."

Looking back on how life has changed since the settlement, Chief Crowfoot says, "The priorities haven't changed. It's just now, some of those priorities are attainable." A Siksika that looks like infrastructure upgrades, expanded funding for community services, a new college so that the residential school the current college operates in can be turned into a museum and the addition of a new elders' lodge and health centre, to name a few.

"It's basically taking all of those things that we had, that we were 'getting by' with, and changing from a 'getting by' status to a 'thriving' status," he explains. Reflecting on the history of land theft, the pass system, residential schools, the banning of ceremonies, the Chief offers, "You beat somebody down for decades, their self esteem is going to go down and their self worth goes down. I think a lot of Indigenous people across Canada, they're used to living in not pristine conditions."

That's something he hopes will change, but not through charity. "I'm all for hand ups, not handouts," he clarifies. In the end, Chief Crowfoot firmly believes the future is Siksika, and that it starts with both truth and reconciliation, with the empowerment of education and with the wisdom of tradition. It took 112 years from the breach and 62 years for their claim to make its way through the courts to a landmark settlement, and now that his community can get what it needs with those funds, he believes they will never have to settle for "just getting by" again. ■



Building Futures and Commercial Real Estate: We Wai Kai First Nation is Open for Business

They say, “If you build it, they will come,” and that’s something We Wai Kai First Nation leadership firmly believed. They had their band-owned buildings and a BC Hydro building on their reserve, but there was a perception that reserve land was only for First Nations businesses, and nobody was inquiring about leasing the land that was just waiting for commercial development. That was something they wanted to change.

To get the ball rolling, they felt they just needed one tenant. When Finning, a construction equipment dealer that had been in their previous location for 35 years, wanted to move onto their reserve, the community saw it as a tremendous opportunity. Finning needed a build-to-suit location to replace their aging building, which became feasible with financing from RBC.

“When the Finning building financing request came to us, We Wai Kai staff made it easy by having everything in place and in line, which made it a pleasure to work through this deal. Then at the end of it all, to be present at the Grand Opening, that is always the final reward,” says Malte Juergensen, Senior Relationship Manager, Indigenous Financial Services with RBC.

“RBC has been very, very great for us. Not only on First Nation land that we owned, but also property that we own off reserve. They’ve helped us with the ability to acquire businesses, and this build-to-suit location with Finning was just the perfect opportunity, as it was our first build for a company on reserve,” Chief Ronnie Chickite explains.



The new Finning location is on We Wai Kai Nation lands, the first of many businesses the Nation hopes to welcome.

What happened next was exciting, just as they predicted. “We started putting the building up and our phone was ringing off the hook with people that wanted to lease property. I think it really helped us to open up that economic development area that was pretty much vacant for 13 years,” he recounts. It turned out that the start of construction was the start of a new chapter for We Wai Kai First Nation.

“It just felt like we were stuck in a rut when nobody came to lease off us and we had all this available cleared land. Finning and RBC helped set us up for the future, to get more clients knowing that we are open for business,” he remembers.

With growing membership, economic development dollars are resources to build not just commercial facilities but also the future of their community’s youth who aspire to higher education. “A lot of it is self-funded, from our own source of revenue. Having more and more businesses coming in, creating revenue, once everything’s paid off, it really helps to put our students through post secondary,” Chief Chickite shares. More revenue means more capacity to fund those educational opportunities, and financing the build-to-suit location was one step on the journey towards the community’s future plans.

“If you build it, they will come” turned out to be true for commercial real estate and also community capacity. It took one customer to get the ball rolling, and that momentum is building brighter futures through this build-to-suit opportunity. ■

EPLS Home Hardware Store Gets a New Home

50 years and 26 additions later, it was time for EPLS Home Hardware Building Centre to build a new store. From building supplies and groceries to hunting and fishing gear and more, EPLS has so much in store. But this family-owned hardware store in Arviat, Nunavut was in need of an upgrade — because it's so much more than a hardware store; it's a community hub serving diverse community needs.

Arviat is a remote, northern community with no road access, serving a mainly Inuit client base. Before EPLS existed, the logistics of getting building supplies to such a remote area was challenging. For CEO Ryan St. John, the upgrade was something he wanted to do for his customers. “Without community support, we wouldn't be in retail,” he explains, reflecting on the bigger, brighter space they created to bring in more products the community needs.

EPLS needed financing to make the new store happen, so St. John approached the team at RBC. “RBC is proud to partner with EPLS and invest in a project that benefits so many in the community,” says Rony Gravelines, RBC's Regional Director for the North of 60 and Manitoba Indigenous markets. Inside EPLS's beautiful new building is an RBC agency and an agency for Northwestel, making sure the community is well connected and can take care of their banking.

“In terms of financing this project and many projects over the years, RBC has been a really good partner for us. Each time we've pitched an idea, whether it was to expand or improve facilities or any growth opportunities where we required financing, they've been at the table every time. We've been with them for over 30 years. We've quadrupled in size in the last 10 years and they've been side by side with us all the way along, supporting us and providing us with advice. Financing for growth and expansion is a big challenge in the north and they've been there,” St. John recounts.

Another voice of encouragement, advice and support over the years comes from Don St. John, his father, who founded the store. “I worked alongside my dad for over 20 years. I've really enjoyed learning from him. He's my closest adviser and somebody that built a solid foundation with our family business, and he gave me the reins to be able to build on it,” he shares.

Thankful for the history of his business, St. John is focused on the future, saying, “At EPLS, we're about serving our community. We're serving our customers. We run an honest business. We offer fair pricing, and we give back as much as we can to our communities through our success. We look forward to the next 50 years.”

What started as a family business became so much more, growing into a company with over 250 employees. “It's really been one of our keys to our success: our people,” St. John beams. “We are very fortunate to have so many great people that are committed and work hard every day!” Now the store staff have a new place to work that still feels like home. ■



EPLS's President & CFO, Mark Colley, and Founder, Don St. John, were joined by Councillor Peter Alareak and Joe Savikataaq Sr, MLA of Arviat, at the new store's grand opening.



Economy

Goal: Advance the growth and sustainability of Indigenous economies by providing comprehensive financial services to community members, governments, organizations and businesses. Selected examples of how RBC met this goal as of April 30, 2023, include:

Access to Essential Financial Services

- Remote Banking Program
- Agency Banking Program (6 locations)
- On-reserve branches (8 locations)
- On-reserve Commercial Banking Centres (3 locations)
- Specialized national Indigenous Commercial Banking team
- Specialized national Indigenous Trust and Investments team

Home Financing

- RBC On-Reserve Housing Loan Program
- Ministerial Loan Guarantee Housing Program

Access to Capital — Specific Programs

- Land Claim Financing Program
- Infrastructure Financing Program
- Indigenous Trust Financing Program

Support for Entrepreneurs and Financial Literacy

- Pow Wow Pitch — presenting sponsor for this national Indigenous business-owner competition
- Project One Circle — multi-year donation to support financial literacy and entrepreneurship training in communities
- RBC Financial Literacy for Indigenous Peoples Program — free access to online resources

People

Employment and
Education



Royal Eagles Stories

RBC's Indigenous employee resource group is called the Royal Eagles, and over the last year there have been so many great stories of how they have soared together. Giving back to community, learning together and exploring their identities, the Indigenous employees of RBC have found ways to grow personally, professionally and in relationship with the world around them. Here are some of the exciting things that the Royal Eagles have been up to since our last report:

Into the Woods and Under the Trees: Finding Climate Wisdom

It had to start somewhere, and they started in the woods. In an effort to facilitate RBC employees rekindling their relationships with the land, Michael Polak, Co-Chair of the Royal Eagles, brought a group of 20 RBC employees to Windhorse Farms, an old growth forest owned by community partner Ulnooweg Education Centre.

The outing was part of the Sacred Seeds initiative, which focuses on land-based learning as a component of a climate literacy strategy at RBC. The participants sat around a firepit, under a 500-year-old white pine, learning traditional teachings about the earth.

From there, they were sent off to walk wherever they felt led for 28 minutes. "What's been said is that after 20 minutes, when you're out in nature, things reset. After that 20 minutes, for the next eight minutes after that, you're actually literally a part of the forest," Polak explains.

"We're connected to the environment. The walk is a way to spark the reminder. We're creating an environment where people can be reminded of this connection. ... My perspective would be anybody that has anything to do with designing anything related to climate should be engaging with activities like this very early on in their work," Polak continues.

That time spent in nature helps people see the impact people have on the earth and the role they can play in protecting it. "The reason why all this ancient knowledge and wisdom exists in our communities is because our ancestors used to go and do this activity all the time," he observes. Returning to that knowledge and wisdom has to start somewhere, and with the Royal Eagles, it started in the woods.



RBC employees spent time on the land together to learn about climate, culture and each other.





RBC Royal Eagles members enjoyed the chance to spend time together face to face once more.



The Royal Eagles gathering provided an opportunity for Indigenous employees of RBC to learn and connect together.

Finding a Name in Our Communities

At every biannual conference of the Royal Eagles, RBC's Indigenous employee resource group, there is a cultural component. At the most recent gathering, Associate Branch Director & Investment Advisor Karen Bird invited her brother, an Ojibwe traditional healer, to participate.



The Royal Eagles gathering was a time of compelling conversation and deep connection for Indigenous employees.

So many of her fellow employees have been disconnected from their community and culture due to the generational effects of residential school, and because of this they don't know their traditional name. Everyone has the option to bring tobacco to an elder to get their name and clan, but she decided to help things along by bringing the elder to them, knowing how transformative it would be.

Her brother, Jay, sat one on one with employees for hours, giving 26 names and clans that night. "It was a very emotional evening because people just felt this enormous sense of connection and belonging and pride and emotion ... just pure, raw joy of knowing who they were," Bird recalls. She remembers the smiles on their faces as employees introduced themselves with their new names the next day, in English and Ojibwe.

"Having your name and your clan shapes your identity and how you view the world. When someone is not clear and firm in who they are, they're going to have a difficult time finding their space at work," she explains. With their names and clans and now understanding the gifts they have, Indigenous employees can start their journey to see where they fit in the community of our people as well as in their Royal Eagles community. For those who have not yet received their name, we will hold a place for them and journey with them until they do.

Basecamp for Belonging: Royal Eagles and RBC Pride Support Safe (Outdoor) Spaces

They started as strangers and left as connected kin. That's how OUTSaskatoon's Indigenous and Cultural Projects Coordinator, Dakota Adams-Beavereye, describes the sixth annual OUT on the Land Campout.

For one weekend, an intergenerational group of Two Spirit, IndigiQueer, Trans and Queer Indigenous people spent time with traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, on the land, in community and in ceremony with each other.

"Not only did I feel connected to my identity, but I felt connected to the land and to my late grandmother who lived on a trapline. I can't wait for the next one," says one camper. "It's so important that Two Spirit youth have these opportunities to connect with Mother Earth and have access to inclusive ceremony," agreed another camper.

Among RBC's employee resource groups are RBC Pride and the Royal Eagles, which provide fellowship and community support to members as part of RBC's commitment to diversity and inclusion. For the last two years, these groups have sponsored four campers to participate as part of an employee-led and -fueled show of solidarity. "It is a privilege to support OUTSaskatoon and help create space for youth in our community where they can connect with culture and be their fully authentic selves," shares RBC Pride Regional Co-Chair Nazaire Babych.

"Our two employee resource groups continue to come together each year to help fund young campers because we know the importance of belonging in each of us bringing the best of us to our communities," shares Matt McGregor, Royal Eagles Regional Co-Chair. These two groups, in collaboration, brought people together at this cultural camp.

"The power we felt at the camp, the kinship and connection to the land, I don't think I've ever felt that before," Adams-Beavereye remembers. They started as strangers and left as connected kin, with memories of their time together. Having arrived alone, they found new relationships in their safe space outdoors, OUT on the Land. ■



Participants at this cultural camp experience had the opportunity to spend time in nature together.



OUTSaskatoon campers spend time connecting together around the fire during their weekend away.

Celebrating Excellence: This Year Marks RBC's 30th Year of Supporting Indigenous Students Through Scholarships to Post-Secondary Education

"Since moving to a new city and starting a new chapter of my life, I've learned so many things about myself. I have grown far more than I expected to in this amount of time," shares Sparrow Couchie. She was born in North Bay, grew up in Moosonee, Ontario and served as Student Trustee for the James Bay Lowlands Secondary School Board in her senior year. Now with the support of the RBC Future Launch Scholarship for Indigenous Youth (previously known as the RBC Indigenous Student Award), she's hard at work studying business administration at Laurentian University in Sudbury.

RBC has been providing scholarships in recognition of Indigenous student academic excellence and community involvement through this scholarship program for 30 years. "This scholarship is designed specifically to serve the needs of Indigenous youth. Helping the leaders of tomorrow have equal opportunity today is critical to building more inclusive companies and communities that can achieve their greatest potential," says Mark Beckles, Vice-President, Social Impact and Innovation, RBC. To date, more than \$1.9 million has been awarded to 218 Indigenous youth from First Nations, Inuit and Métis backgrounds.



Sparrow Couchie, Laurentian University student.



Mairi Denny, Cape Breton University student.

With a scholarship worth up to \$10,000 a year for up to four years, Couchie is thriving in her program with one less thing to worry about as she strives towards making her dreams come true. "Having this scholarship relieved a lot of financial stress. I don't have to be concerned about whether I can continue affording this education. I won't take that for granted," she confides.

Mairi Denny, who is Mi'kmaq and a member of Eskasoni First Nation, from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, shares her Future Launch experience. "This scholarship has made a huge difference in my life because I am able to purchase things that help in my schooling. It will also help me in the future when I move away for law school. I will not have to worry about income and jobs, and instead I can prioritize my time towards my studies and pursuing a career in Indigenous law," she explains.

Denny is pursuing a three-year bachelor of arts (BA) with a focus on Mi'kmaq studies and political science at Cape Breton University. When she's not studying, she's working on her new online small business, Kmu'jeweye'l Designs, which sells handmade Indigenous beaded earrings and wooden laser-engraved cabochons for other beaders to use. "I am excited for what the future holds for me. My community has been so supportive since I have started just a year ago. Without my community, family and opportunities, I wouldn't be where I am today," she smiles.

Couchie and Denny are exemplary students and community members, and as they explore this new chapter of post-secondary education, they have RBC Future Launch Scholarships to help them turn the page. ■

Logging onto a New Career: Wallace Peterson Completes the Indigenous Peoples Development Program

Wallace Peterson went on a learning journey, and he didn't even have to leave home. From 2020–2022, Peterson participated in the Technology & Operations stream of the Indigenous Peoples Development Program (IPDP), completing the program remotely from his community of Kahnawake, Quebec. He now works in data analytics with RBC from his reserve, a half hour outside of Montreal.

The program is designed to help recent graduates develop the skills and network they need to build their professional experience. “Since 2018, the RBC Indigenous Peoples Development Program (IPDP) has offered a unique work-integrated learning experience designed to accelerate the development of Indigenous youth who have recently graduated from university or college. The world of work is changing and RBC is committed to empowering the youth of today for the jobs of tomorrow,” says Lisa Melo, Vice-President, Learning & Performance.

Like many Canadians over the pandemic, Peterson adjusted to working and maintaining social relationships online. He'd considered the RBC IPDP before but was reluctant to move to Toronto given his family commitments. When the program moved online, he was able to continue being there for his family, manage a job from Toronto without having to incur the area's housing costs and keep the money he earned in his community.

Every day, Peterson gets to be a part of the field of data science instead of just reading or watching videos about it online. “I really enjoy it and it's expanded my toolset as a data scientist,” he smiles. Peterson has been able to professionalize his amateur technical curiosity and level up his technical and people skills.



Wallace Peterson, Indigenous Peoples Development Program (IPDP) graduate.

Before the program, he worked in his community's economic development and skills training program, which provided grants and funded learning opportunities for aspiring business owners. He was a junior business developer, learning entrepreneurial skills, and he helped launch a cafe with his cohort.

The program integrated a Mohawk perspective in its business building, and he even learned how to make his own cold brew, barista skills he still uses at home.

Ever since graduating from Concordia University with his bachelor of science in physics, he's worked close to home, something he's been able to continue to do with RBC. He's appreciated being able to maintain a healthy work-life balance. The organization and time management skills he learned in the IPDP have even helped him as a guitarist and drummer in two different bands.

At the end of the day, Peterson says, “It feels good to be representing Kahnawake outside of the community and to be able to make my family and relatives and friends here proud of me getting work off the reserve.” The Indigenous Peoples Development Program took him on a learning journey without his ever having to leave home, but now that he's with RBC working as a data scientist, he's proud of how far he's come. ■

Education, Employment, Career Development and Mentorship Opportunities for Indigenous Employees at RBC

- Indigenous Peoples Development Program — career rotation for Indigenous employees at RBC
- RBC Indigenous Mentorship Experience — mentorship program for Indigenous employees
- Royal Eagles — national employee resource group (ERG) that provides fellowship, community linkages and cultural supports

Education and Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples in Canada

- Future Launch — a program supported by RBC Foundation focused on creating meaningful and transformative pathways to prosperity for youth, including Indigenous youth
- Emerging Artists Project — a program supported by RBC Foundation to advance careers in visual arts, music, theatre, performance, literature and film, including Indigenous artists
- Tech for Nature — a program supported by RBC Foundation to support organizations, including Indigenous organizations, that are leveraging technology and innovation capabilities to solve pressing environmental challenges
- FirstUp with RBCxMusic — a platform for emerging musicians, including Indigenous musicians, to showcase their music, share their story and reach new fans
- RBC Future Launch Scholarship for Indigenous Youth — a scholarship program of up to \$10,000 for 20 Indigenous students each year
- RBC Capital Markets Pathways Diversity Award Program

People

Goal: Create access to employment and education opportunities for Indigenous people both within RBC and across various other industry sectors. Selected examples of how RBC met this goal as of April 30, 2023, include:

Reconciliation Education for Canadians

- Reconciliation Week programming — partnership with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
- 4 Seasons of Reconciliation — partnership with the First Nations University to make this learning program publicly available
- The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund — ongoing support for programs that build cultural understanding and create a path toward reconciliation

Indigenous History and Cultural Awareness Programs for RBC Employees

- 4 Seasons of Reconciliation — online learning program for RBC employees
- National Indigenous History Month employee events
- National Day for Truth and Reconciliation programming and events
- Certified RBC facilitators for the KAIROS Blanket Exercise
- Reconciliation and cultural informational panels and presentations led by Royal Eagles
- Sacred Seeds — an Indigenous employee-led program to create opportunities for RBC employees to spend time on the land with Indigenous people

Community

Social Impact and
Procurement





The “Uusdaadaouw: Let’s Build” Project Fosters Resilience with Youth-Led Creative Interventions

Cree singer-songwriter Siibii Petawabano witnessed firsthand how art and creative design can help build strong, healthy and resilient communities. As the first graduate of the Mik^w Chiyâm arts program at Voyageur Memorial School in Mistissini, Quebec in 2017, Siibii channeled their positive engagements and relationship-building with other young people into a new role as Youth Project Lead with Uusdaadaouw: Let’s Build Project.

Uusdaadaouw (pronounced OOSH-da-dow) is a youth-led, art-driven initiative in six Cree communities across the Eeyou Istchee territory of northern Quebec. The project looked to identify and respond to community needs. Creative interventions were developed in collaboration with youth leaders, students and community organizations to provide support in areas such as health, wellness, resilience, land, environment and Miyupimaatisiun — a Cree term for “living life well.”

“A lot of the youth identified problem spots, whether it was lateral violence, alcoholism, the need for recycling programs in their communities, sexual education ... These kids, they’re not blind. They see what they’re lacking,” says Siibii. “They were talking about the importance of the youth voice and that they want to be heard.”

Bringing Communities Together

The Uusdaadaouw: Let’s Build Project is supported by the RBC Foundation through the RBC Future Launch Community Challenge. It is implemented in partnership with the Eenou-Eeyou Community Foundation, Community Foundations of Canada, the Cree Nation Government, the Cree School Board, the Mik^w Chiyâm Program, the inPath Project and the Cree Nation Youth Council.

The Uusdaadaouw project took place in the Mistissini, Nemaska, Waskaganish, Eastmain, Chisasibi and Whapmagoostui communities with student participants who were enrolled through the Mik^w Chiyâm arts program at their respective schools.

In November 2019, youth representatives from each community worked alongside mentors from the Cree Nation Youth Council to dream up and map out the ways in which art and creativity could bring their communities together and foster resilience. After the project was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it restarted, continuing to the end of the 2020–21 school year.

Siibii, alongside one young leader per community, called Youth Artist Assistants, hosted a series of “Vital Conversations” throughout the year. These conversations connected community organizations with more than 150 students in 11 school classrooms. The participants designed and delivered collaborative art projects in songwriting and music production, photography, painting and installation, poetry, spoken word, creative writing, and screen printing. Many of the creative projects were derived from the Miyupimaatisiun theme and highlighted the beauty in each community as opposed to just the challenges.

“I was really inspired by all of the projects,” says Siibii. “One of my favourites was in Chisasibi at the youth clinic. This was a brand new facility and it was kind of sterile. [The clinic] wanted youth to create art to feel like they belong. They ended up making canvas pieces that were put up throughout the clinic. I loved that principle of the organization wanting youth artwork for their youth.”



Cree singer-songwriter Siibii Petawabano is the Youth Project Lead with the *Uusdaadaouw: Let's Build Project*.



Youth representatives and mentors from the Cree Nation Youth Council.

Learning Through the Arts with Cree Schools

The Mik[®] Chiyâm interdisciplinary arts program was launched in 2015 by the Cree School Board to inspire youth with alternative spaces for creative learning and through collaborations with professional Canadian Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. Given the challenges students are facing in accessing education and connecting with their peers throughout the pandemic, and given the specific mental health challenges facing Indigenous youth across Canada, Siibii says arts-based programming remains more important than ever.

“It’s been proven that art can be used as therapy and as a means of expression. And I myself know that it saves lives. Arts programming has been very quick to be cut in federal funding. But they’re so incredibly important, especially when we’re talking about relations between First Nations people and non-First Nations peoples ... there’s something universal in creating art.”

Accessing and Supporting Arts-Related Programming

As the project comes to a close, Siibii would like to see more funding directed to arts programming in schools at the community, provincial and federal levels.

“I would like to see a world where we can provide programming not necessarily depending on whether a community can afford it,” Siibii says.

“Every community — especially every First Nations community — should have access to this kind of programming.”

At just 21 years old, Siibii also has a musical career and hopes to continue making music and working with Indigenous youth to design more arts-related programming.

“While I’m young, I want to focus on my music career and on creating content that brings a lot more awareness to conditions for First Nations people in Canada,” Siibii says. “We are resilient, we are strong ... we are still here.” ■



Desiree Brightnose, first recipient of the RBC Emerging Indigenous Filmmaker Award and Founder of Tilted Teepee Productions.

Big Screen, Big Dreams: Desiree Brightnose Wins RBC's Emerging Indigenous Filmmaker Award

“For so long, the relationship between Indigenous people and the camera was that we were the subject. We never got a choice. But now that we’re behind the camera, we control the story. As people, we’ve told stories for thousands of years; we still carry those stories with us today. It’s just an amazing experience to be here, able to express myself and help tell the story,” explains Desiree Brightnose.

A member of Chemawawin Cree Nation and Founder of Tilted Teepee Productions, Brightnose was born and raised in Brandon, Manitoba. As the first recipient of the RBC Emerging Indigenous Filmmaker Award, she’s received mentorship from filmmaker Sonya Ballantyne and a prize of \$7,500. She bought business cards and a second camera, launched her website and paid off her laptop with the funds.

The award, established in 2022, is presented by the National Screen Institute and the RBC Foundation, with support from the RBC Emerging Artists program. “This award gives Indigenous storytellers a kickstart to lay the groundwork for advancing their creative expression and culture through film, and to help emerging filmmakers reach new audiences and build their careers,” says Kim Ulmer, RBC Regional President, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut & Western Ontario. The RBC Emerging Artists program has been contributing to organizations that provide opportunities for artists’ career advancement since 2007.



“The National Screen Institute’s longstanding partnership with RBC Emerging Artists has helped provide training to Indigenous creators from across the country as they share their voices and stories with the world,” says Joy Loewen, CEO of the National Screen Institute. “This award extends beyond our training programs to provide funding for Indigenous creators looking to invest in themselves, their companies or their projects. We’re delighted to be a part of Desiree’s journey as she takes her next steps and grows as a filmmaker and entrepreneur.”

Brightnose is honoured to be recognized in this way. “It’s an amazing experience. It still feels like it’s not real, even though it’s already happened. I’m very happy, very grateful and honoured to be chosen for this amazing award,” she exclaims.

Brightnose loves learning from Ballantyne, who comes from a neighbouring reserve, and they affectionately refer to themselves as “two Crees in a pod”. She hopes she will learn to believe in herself more through mentorship, but she has no reason to doubt herself. Ballantyne saw something special in her during the selection process.

“With Desiree, I saw this passion in her that would be her guiding light when she had to go through those moments where it takes forever to get anything done,” she smiles reflecting on how long and arduous filmmaking can be. Choosing wasn’t easy with the pool of talented applicants, and Ballantyne fought imposter syndrome of her own around being selected as a mentor.

Her advice to Brightnose has been, “There’s always going to be people who doubt us. There’s always going to be people throwing obstacles in our path. We should try as much as we can not to be the person who does that to ourselves.” Like Brightnose, she got into film hoping to change the narrative about what it’s like to be an Indigenous woman in the world, and like her mentee she is behind the camera shifting perspectives to tell the stories she carries with her today. Watch for the next call for applications to the RBC Emerging Indigenous Filmmaker Award program. ■



Desiree Brightnose and her mentor, Sonya Ballantyne, spending time together, “two Crees in a pod.”



UNYA's Aboriginal Youth First Sport & Recreation program participants paddling as part of Pulling Together, a 10-day canoe journey.

Standing Up to Bullying Together: Pink Shirts for the Urban Native Youth Association

Bullying is an issue many youth continue to face, and the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA) knows all too well the challenges for (and potential of) today's Indigenous youth, having served them since 1988.

This year, RBC collaborated with an Indigenous artist to provide employees the opportunity to purchase a special pink shirt and raise funds for UNYA ahead of International Day of Pink, an annual anti-bullying event held in April.

“It’s all about procurement for good. We make every effort to include Indigenous businesses with a view to economic inclusion,” says Jessica Grey, Associate Director, RBC Global Procurement Supplier Diversity. The shirts featured a design by Patrick Hunter, a Two-Spirited artist who won the RBC Youth Entrepreneurial Award. The shirts also integrated the crest of RBC Royal Eagles, the bank’s employee resource group for Indigenous employees and allies, and “RBC Speak up for Inclusion” on the other side. Shirts made their way as far as Europe and the U.S.



“Over its 35 year history, UNYA has developed and implemented programs that directly respond to the needs of Indigenous youth. The traumatic history of colonization and residential schools has taken so much away from our youth and families, language, culture and community, just to name a few. UNYA’s goal is to provide a safe place for youth to be empowered and supported on their journeys,” says UNYA CEO Cheryl Robinson. UNYA’s offerings include health care, education, arts and cultural activities, after-school drop-ins, counselling, sports and recreation, employment readiness training, snacks, and a safe place to get out of the cold so youth between the ages of 11 and 30 can access wrap-around services for free.

Whether it’s warm coats, groceries, backpacks, school supplies, clothing or gift cards, local corporate sponsors have donated to UNYA’s youth clientele at special events. Not all of UNYA’s youth visitors are in need of support; some just need opportunities, empowerment and connection. Staff do their best to meet them where they are and respond to their individual needs.

UNYA is a place where youth have a seat at the table and a voice in their programming. Several past clients have gone on to become staff themselves and UNYA’s board includes youth members. Looking to the future, UNYA will have a new location to expand its services in a bigger, brighter, more beautiful space. There will be more staff office space, a bigger kitchen, a gymnasium, cultural spaces and a more inviting facade.

The new location will integrate Indigenous design and maybe even a rooftop garden for traditional plants and medicines. The building will incorporate housing and facilities for the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, with classrooms, shared boardrooms and new opportunities to lead important youth work in the area. The location will even be able to host some basketball tournaments.

Youth might face bullying, but with organizations like Urban Native Youth Association, they don’t have to face it alone. RBC is proud to support UNYA’s important work through its pink shirt fundraising initiative. ■



Cedar weaving is just one cultural activity that happens at UNYA.



UNYA client connects with culture by gathering medicine and picking sage.

Donations, Grants and Other Financial Support

- RBC Foundation — donations to support organizations that deliver programs for Indigenous youth, arts and culture, the environment, and health, among others

Indigenous Advisory and Governance at RBC

- Phil Fontaine appointed Senior Advisor to RBC in 2009
- Roberta Jamieson, Indigenous Director, RBC Board of Directors, since 2021

Economic and Thought Leadership

- Key Reports such as *92 to Zero: How economic reconciliation can power Canada's climate goals*, *Building Bandwidth: Preparing Indigenous youth for a digital future*, *The Cost of Doing Nothing*
- The Disruptors podcast — amplifying voices of Indigenous leaders and forward-looking solutions

Indigenous and Partner Organization Memberships

- AFOA Canada
- Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council
- Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business
- Centre for the North and Corporate-Indigenous Relations Council (The Conference Board of Canada)
- National Aboriginal Trust Officers Association

Recurring Sponsorships for National Events with Indigenous Organizations

- Indigenomics Institute
- Pow Wow Pitch
- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
- Assembly of First Nations

Procurement Opportunities for Indigenous Businesses at RBC

- RBC Supplier Diversity Program

Community

Goal: Promote the prosperity and well-being of Indigenous communities through philanthropic efforts as well as create procurement opportunities for Indigenous-owned businesses. Selected examples of how RBC met this goal as of April 30, 2023, include:



RBC Timeline



1947

Royal Bank issues a dedicated national Royal Bank letter focused on Indigenous Peoples.

1969

Royal Bank launches *An Introduction to Banking*, an educational booklet for Inuit communities in what is now Nunavut.

1977

Royal Bank supports the 1978 Arctic Winter Games held in Hay River, NWT.

1991

With the opening of its branch on Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Royal Bank becomes the first major financial institution to have a full-service branch in a First Nation community in Canada.

1997

Royal Bank issues *The Cost of Doing Nothing — A Call-to-Action and Aboriginal Economic Development* report.

1957

Royal Bank opens the first bank branch in Canada's Arctic Islands in Frobisher Bay, NWT (now Iqaluit, Nunavut).

1973

A First Nations mural, the largest piece of Indigenous art in Canada, is unveiled at Vancouver's main branch.

1990

RBC Royal Eagles, an Indigenous-focused employee resource group, is established at Royal Bank to enhance cultural awareness and support.

1992

Royal Bank launches an annual educational awards program, RBC Indigenous Student Awards, for students attending university or college in Canada.



2007

RBC and the Assembly of First Nations sign a Memorandum of Understanding and commit to a two year action plan addressing access to capital, community and social development, employment, and procurement for First Nations people.

2009

RBC names Phil Fontaine, former three-time National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, as Special Advisor to RBC.

2014

RBC proudly sponsors the 2014 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) in Regina, SK, where over 4,000 athletes compete with the support of 2,000+ volunteers.

2018

RBC Foundation commits \$800,000 to TakingITGlobal's Connected North program, delivering live, interactive learning experiences to 32 remote northern Indigenous high schools.

2020

Putting action into reconciliation, RBC implements 4 Seasons of Reconciliation, a nine module online course providing a history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, as a fundamental part of employees' learning and development.

2022

A new Indigenous Trust Financing Program is introduced that enables communities to access capital while preserving financial assets held in sovereign trusts that are earning investment income.

1999

Royal Bank launches a new On-Reserve Housing Loan Program to assist First Nations members in constructing, purchasing and renovating homes located in their communities.

2008

RBC Blue Water Project Leadership Grants totalling more than \$1 million are awarded for use in Indigenous communities.

2011

RBC Foundation contributes \$300,000 to Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, a program aimed at helping Indigenous youth stay in school.

2015

RBC Foundation becomes signatory to The Circle on Philanthropy's Declaration of Action on reconciliation commitments.

2019

RBC opens an agency outlet on Baffin Island in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, extending the network in Indigenous communities to eight full-service branches, five agencies and three commercial banking centres.

2021

RBC commits \$250,000 to Indian Residential School Survivor Society (IRSSS) to help them scale their crisis line to provide 24 hour national support by hiring more traditional healers, assisting recipients in managing their well-being.

Contributors



A Chosen Journey was written, designed, translated, photographed and informed by Indigenous creators. From the cover illustration to the last word, it is an expression of the vast creativity and skill of First Peoples.

Aija Komangapik

Aija Komangapik is an Inuk artist who was born and raised in Iqaluit and works in many different types of visual and multimedia arts. She takes great pride in her culture and her work, which is inspired by the art she saw in children's books growing up, vibrant comic book and graphic art, and the sculptures created by her father, celebrated artist Ruben Komangapik. When she's not making art, she enjoys hunting with her father and her elders.

Aija Komangapik's *Drumdancer* (digital artwork featured on the cover) won Historica Canada's 2019 Indigenous Arts and Stories contest and depicts the "rubbery" movement of dancers in a way that conveys delight and expression over anatomical accuracy. It celebrates the human spirit with its bold, bright colours.

Design de Plume

This Indigenous-owned design firm, led by women, creates opportunities for staff to remain in their home communities while collaborating on inclusive, approachable and accessible communication solutions. They focus on Indigenous-specific work and translate ideas into visual media, integrating Indigenous complexity into their designs. As Knowledge Carriers, they listen to and preserve the stories of the communities they represent. Building bridges is a concept close to their hearts as well as diversity, equity and inclusion.

Nations Translation Group

Translators provide windows to the worldview of the communities their words come from. First-Nation-owned Nations Translation Group translates from over 90 languages, including many Indigenous languages and dialects. The translation process is an art that takes time, and translations are provided by Indigenous people, sometimes through dictation by one generation to the next. Nations Translation Group is skilled at navigating the logistical and technological challenges of providing this specialized service and incorporates the spiritual and cultural needs of their translators in project planning.

Dokis Photography

Craig Dokis is a member of Dokis First Nation. He is based in Sudbury, Ontario, and his photography business has been in operation for 10 years, having captured hundreds of thousands of special moments at hundreds of events. He created so many exceptional and stunning images for *A Chosen Journey*, it was nearly impossible to choose between them. His ability to make people laugh allowed him to photograph authentic moments of happiness. He has a unique ability to capture connection, emotion and humanity in an impactful way that brings this publication to life.

Alison Tedford Seaweed

A member of Kwakiutl First Nation, of 'Nakwaxda'xw lineage, Alison Tedford Seaweed is an author, writer and consultant who has worked on Indigenous issues in the public, private and non-profit sectors for 20 years. Her pride in her family, culture and home community inspires her advocacy and storytelling work. As the granddaughter of a survivor, reconciliation is a central focus of her efforts.

To speak with a member of the Indigenous Financial Services team, or to find an RBC location in an Indigenous community, visit

rbc.com/indigenous



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