



BC COLLEGES

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# Indigenous Student Success Stories From Across BC's Colleges



February 2020

Colleges in British Columbia have well established partnerships with Indigenous communities across the province and have built a foundation for successfully supporting Indigenous learners.

At the 10 colleges represented by BC Colleges, there were 10,720 learners enrolled with Aboriginal identity during the 2017/18 academic year, according to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training Central Data Warehouse. Further, Indigenous students represent about 10 per cent of the total number of students registered in the college system. In comparison to non-Indigenous learners, Indigenous learners are more likely to attend colleges (38.2% vs. 23.2%). Indeed, Indigenous learners are more likely to transition to colleges within five years of graduation than non-Indigenous learners (31% vs. 24%).

Three of our colleges, Okanagan College, College of New Caledonia and Coast Mountain College, each had more than 1,700 Indigenous students in 2017-18, with Coast Mountain College having the largest proportion of Indigenous learners, representing 49 per cent of its total enrolment.

Our approach to enhanced access, innovation, applied research, and new learning spaces at our colleges will increasingly be informed by the needs of Indigenous learners.



# CAMOSUN COLLEGE

## Nuxalk First Nation 4th Year Carpentry Students Celebrate Success

**T**welve Camosun College carpentry students from the Nuxalk First Nation recently celebrated the completion of their fourth-year apprenticeship level, at a special celebration in their home territory in Bella Coola, B.C. All students who completed all of their apprenticeship requirements were acknowledged, including five of whom who passed their Interprovincial Carpentry Red Seal exam.

Over the last five years, Camosun College's School of Trades and Technology, the Industry Training Authority (ITA) and the Nuxalk First Nation have been working together to develop and deliver an innovative on-site four-year carpentry training program to Indigenous learners in Bella Coola.

In 2015, the Nuxalk First Nation identified a challenge in accessing skilled trades training in the region. They were seeking ways to utilize their own resources and people to build capacity to redefine homebuilding in their own territory. Sending community members away for skills training was expensive and meant time away from families. The Nuxalk First Nation soon partnered with the ITA and

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*Building a relationship and a successful on-site skills training program takes years of collaboration, relationship, trust and dedication. We are extremely proud of these apprentices who have worked incredibly hard both in the classroom and on the job."*



Camosun College to bring instructors to the Community's school instead.

"Congratulations to the women and men from Bella Coola who've worked hard to pass their fourth-year apprenticeship levels and those receiving their Red Seals. We need your skills to continue building the best B.C.," said Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. "Our government is proud to see Indigenous communities like the Nuxalk Nation, working together with Camosun



College and the Industry Training Authority to improve access to in-community training that supports economic prosperity. Strong partnerships that provide access to education closer to home are true examples of reconciliation in action.”

By the time learners reach their level four in carpentry, they have demonstrated skills and experience in performing site layouts, using survey instruments, building concrete forms, framing residential housing, building roof systems and applying finishing materials.

“I’m grateful to Camosun College, ITA, Nuxalk Education Authority, the Nuxalk First Nation and, most importantly, the Nuxalk journeymen carpenters who have shared their knowledge and made apprenticeship within Nuxalk Territory accessible and achievable,” says student Tommy Walkus. “Stutwiniitsap!”

“To be able to bring the technical trades training to the Community, and for the Community to be able to provide the opportunity for their apprentices to cover the scope of trade and work experience in all levels of their apprenticeship, is truly remarkable” says Michael Cameron, Director of Indigenous Initiatives at ITA. “The collaborative effort of the Nuxalk First Nation, Camosun College, and the ITA demonstrates a true commitment to reconciliation and the innovation in removing barriers to Indigenous peoples success in trades training.”

To date, the Nuxalk First Nation’s new carpenter apprentices have completed several much needed buildings for the Community including a new restaurant, expanded hotel facilities, a youth centre, a day care centre, two multiplex units, as well as several mini-houses and residential renovation projects.

Looking ahead, the Nuxalk First Nation plans to build up to 50 – 60 homes over the next five years along with a Big House, a cultural centre and a museum.

“The impact has been amazing,” say Camosun College Indigenous Peoples Trades Training Coordinators Susan Wilson and Larry Underwood who have been working on the project since the beginning. “To see so much growth and success in each learner. This program has not only benefitted Community, it has positively impacted each student’s health, their way of life and their personal pride in themselves.”



# COAST MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

## Young Student Shows Tenacity over Health and Learning Challenges to Achieve Dreams

**W**hen Coast Mountain College student Danielle Middleton was born, she came into the world three months early and was so small that she could nearly fit into the palm of a hand. Like many premature babies, Danielle started life with the odds stacked against her. Those early days were perilous, with her life teetering in the balance as she fought against the odds to survive.

Danielle suffered complications from numerous health issues and doctors warned she would have significant cognitive challenges. As she grew up, Danielle's tenacity would be tested time and again, whether it be with health issues, developmental delays or learning disabilities that made it difficult for her to keep up in school.

But with the support of the family she joined through adoption, Danielle persevered and proved that tenacity can go a long way in overcoming obstacles. In the fall of 2018, she made a big move away from the support of her parents in Iskut, BC and moved in with her sister's family in Terrace to attend Coast Mountain College.

*"Courage comes accompanied by vulnerability. You can overcome that vulnerability and rise above it to achieve your dreams. You can do anything if you put your mind to it."*



"I never dreamed that I would go to college," says Danielle. "I didn't think it was a possibility, but here I am."

Danielle spent the 2018-19 academic year in the Workplace Skills program that gives students with multiple barriers the opportunity to learn critical skills to help prepare them for work. Certifications such as WHMIS and Serving it Right, give students the practical tools they need for employability.

"I was so proud of myself when I got that piece of paper – I proved I could do it," she says. In June of 2019 she donned a cap and gown during Coast Mountain College's convocation ceremony to mark her achievement. With family members and friends cheering her on, she crossed the stage having accomplished something she never thought she'd be able to do.

"I still have learning problems, but that hasn't slowed me down," Danielle says.

Danielle returned to Coast Mountain College in the fall of 2019, registered in the Retail Sales program which builds on the skills she's gained to date. It gives students experiential learning opportunities where they can put their new skills to work in practical situations. The real-life opportunities to complete practicums at the Campus Store and campus print shop added a component that brought her theoretical learning to life.

Attending college has also given Danielle the opportunity to learn more about her Indigenous heritage through the many programs that allow Indigenous students to experience and learn about cultural activities. She has attended feasts in Waap Galts'ap – the CMTN Community longhouse, drum making workshops and talking circles.

"Like any Indigenous youth, Identity can be a hard thing to grasp," says First Nations Access Coordinator, Jillian Stephens. "Danielle has persevered through finding herself by coming to quite a few of our cultural events where she has been open and vulnerable to our elders."

Attending Coast Mountain College has had a life-changing impact on Danielle. In an essay she wrote for a contest last year, she talks about how hard her journey has been and how proud she is to have overcome so many obstacles.

"I believe having courage comes accompanied by vulnerability. You can overcome that vulnerability and rise above it to achieve your dreams. You can do anything if you put your mind to it," she says.





Though she continued on to pursue a Bachelor of Commerce majoring in accounting 'up the hill' at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), Holly attributes her overall success to the strong foundation she gained at CNC.

"I got a lot of my accounting groundwork at CNC," she said. "The instructors really help you understand the concepts. I'm glad I started here."

Much of her time at CNC was spent studying at the College's Aboriginal Resource Centre (ARC).

This habit continued past graduation as Holly could often be found at the ARC studying for her UNBC classes.

"Everyone at the ARC is very welcoming, which is why I always went back," she said.

Holly is a member of the Takla Lake First Nation but is not fluent in the language of her people.

The ARC brought a cultural element to her education, which she embraced by volunteering at every event and potluck she possibly could.

This opportunity extended to her children who were able to speak and learn from elders fluent in the Carrier language. Her oldest daughter was inspired to learn her traditional language and is even developing an app for the Carrier language.

"I'm really proud of her," Holly said. "She'll help a lot of people who don't have many interactions with elders."

Before graduating from UNBC in 2018, she already had three places offering her a position. Ultimately, she decided to take a job as an accountant for the Takla Lake First Nation in Prince George.

Holly has remained a strong advocate for education. The education of our youth, she said, is essential to our future. With her eyes now set on becoming a Chartered Professional Accountant, Holly encourages people of all ages to let education be the catalyst for change in one's life.

"I always tell people to write down what they want for their own life," Holly said. "In the end, you have to ask yourself, 'what you want to change and what you want to get out of that.' I found many answers to those questions at CNC."

# COLLEGE OF THE ROCKIES

## Supporting Indigenous Learners by Creating a Welcoming and Diverse Environment

**G**rowing up, Seamus Damstrom was aware of his First Nation heritage, but it was not a significant part of his family's life. It wasn't until he enrolled at College of the Rockies that he really began to learn about his Indigenous history.

"I didn't talk much to my grandmother, a member of the Turtle Clan of the Oneida Nation of Thames in Ontario, about it," he said. "I was exposed to Indigenous culture in so many ways at the College – it really piqued my curiosity."

In 2018, Seamus completed his third year of university arts and science courses at College of the Rockies and transferred into the University of British Columbia's Dietetic program. However, he still remembers his first day at the College when his instructor began his lecture with an acknowledgment of the College's location in the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Nation.

"It was a small thing, but very respectful," Seamus said. "The educational supports in place for Indigenous learners at the College are important, but it's the way that the campus integrated and celebrated Indigenous culture that I found most supportive."

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Seamus points to the strong relationship between College of the Rockies and the Ktunaxa Nation in creating a welcoming and diverse environment.

In 2014, the College worked with the Ktunaxa Nation to build an Aboriginal Gathering Place (AGP) on campus. The AGP is considered a safe haven where students, staff, faculty, and community members feel welcome, respected, and engaged. The building is open for faculty, staff and community members to schedule classes and host meetings and events. Respect is the underlying principle of the AGP and all scheduled activities celebrate diversity, inclusiveness, and Indigenous knowledge. The College's Indigenous team including the Indigenous Student Navigator and Indigenous Student Mentors hold events at the AGP on a regular basis.

"The AGP is one of the best things on campus," Seamus said. "It's a comfortable, safe space that all students can access. I have friends from the Ktunaxa Nation who chose to go to the College because of the support they know they will get, both from the College and their Nation."

The College's programming also reflects its commitment to building partnerships with Indigenous peoples and communities. In addition to offering First Nations Studies and Indigenous language courses, the College also offers Ktunaxa 100: Introduction to the Ktunaxa People. This unique course, developed in partnership with Ktunaxa elders and scholars, offers a comprehensive introduction to the Ktunaxa Nation. Much of the content of the course is delivered through streaming video clips of Elders relaying their stories and their history. The College encourages staff to enroll in Ktunaxa 100 by offering it, tuition-free, to all College employees.

While a student at the College, Seamus saw the institution from a number of perspectives. He worked as an Indigenous Student Mentor, was a member of the Students' Association, and was a student representative on the College's Board of Governors. Though he acknowledged that there is work to be done to indigenize academia and support Indigenous learning, he's excited and hopeful about the potential for Indigenous success in such a supportive environment.

"Being a student there helped me strengthen my connection with my Indigenous heritage. When students are out there, engaged, talking with one another and sharing their stories, it can be pretty amazing."



# LANGARA COLLEGE

## Langara's Aboriginal Transfer Program Provides Accessible Pathways to New Opportunities

**C**arving pathways and connections between her experiences seems to come naturally to Langara alum, Laura Beaudry.

Utilising the UBC-Langara College Aboriginal Transfer Program, Laura, Métis-Cree originally from Grouard, Alberta, moved into third-year studies after leaving Langara. Laura participated in Langara's VOLT program, and found an opportunity to volunteer with Corrections Services Canada thanks to a career fair in the Criminal Justice department.

Laura was awarded the Centennial Scholars Leaders Award, which offers comprehensive support to successful applicants who engage in community service. The award supports academically qualified students who would not otherwise be able to attend UBC without significant financial assistance.

While attending Langara, Laura was involved with both the VOLT Volunteer Program and helped revitalize the Langara Aboriginal Students Association (LASA).

Laura was integral in organizing events for

National

Indigenous Peoples Day in 2016. This gave her an opportunity to build connections with the Elder in Residence and mutually support her fellow students, leaving her better prepared for student life on the Point Grey campus.

Laura learned about the UBC-Langara Aboriginal Transfer Partnership during one of UBC's visits to the Langara campus. The partnership gives students access to awards and scholarships, personalized faculty and advisor guidance, along with personal and academic preparation that assists students in a smooth transition from Langara College to UBC's Vancouver campus.



*The knowledge that I learned at Langara motivates me to become a lawyer and fight for Indigenous rights, human rights, and environmental law. Real action is needed to protect our land, air, and water and I want to be a part of that fight."*



"I am really thankful for the Aboriginal Transfer Program. Getting to know admissions staff at UBC on a first-name basis was really helpful in facilitating my comfort level once I got there," she said. Recognizing people on campus definitely made the campus feel more accessible, and from there Laura made more connections.

Now at UBC, Laura is a member of the CiTR 101.9 Student Executive, which makes station decisions and plans events. As Indigenous Liaison, she assists with a show, Unceded Airwaves, and coordinates support for projects, special programming, and other duties with the CiTR team.

She plans to enroll in law school following completion of her undergrad degree. The connection between law and her major, Anthropology, might not seem apparent, but Laura explains it this way, "I was referred to anthropology by a friend of mine and it turned out to be life-changing. Anthropology class is where I learned of the truths and motivations behind the processes of colonization, such as the Residential Schools, Indian Act, and other discriminatory laws that are still in place today that divide Indigenous peoples from the rest of society. The knowledge that I learned at Langara motivates me to become a lawyer and fight for Indigenous rights, human rights, and environmental law. We are at such a turning point in human history; real action is needed to protect our land, air, and water and I want to be a part of that fight."

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Langara.

THE COLLEGE OF HIGHER LEARNING.

# NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE

## Inspired By the Medicine Wheel, Aboriginal Scholars Program Encourages Students to Find Balance in Life and Learning

**N**orth Island College is marking a successful first term of a newly expanded program to provide support to Indigenous learners at all four college campuses.

The Aboriginal Scholars program is a culturally relevant, holistic program that began as a pilot project at the Comox Valley campus. Based on the concept of the medicine wheel, the Aboriginal Scholars program aims to help students find balance in all aspects of their lives.

The program was expanded to all campuses this fall, thanks to a \$50,000 donation from RBC and the RBC Foundation. The expanded program saw a huge response from students.

"It was incredible to see the number of students wanting to be part of the program," said Sarah Lawrence, NIC Aboriginal education advisor and program coordinator. "It's been an inspiring first term and we're hoping to continue that into the winter semester."

*"Success is... really about helping students succeed now and setting them up for success in the future, both academically and throughout their lives."*



Students work with an Aboriginal educational advisor to create an achievement plan, based on their individual needs. The goals can be academic, spiritual, emotional and physical.

The students work with their advisor throughout the term to keep on track and also access services and supports that will help them achieve their goals.

“It’s about helping students gain the skills they need to be successful,” said Lawrence.

NIC Business Administration student Chris Scarlatti is one of the students taking part in the Aboriginal Scholars program this year.

“NIC’s Aboriginal Scholar program has provided me with connections to a wide variety of supports and services that I would not have known existed,” said Scarlatti. “Sarah has pushed me to take on new challenges, both on campus and off. Having made these new connections, I am now a student leader and honing my business skills on the Education Council, Planning and Standards Committee and Curriculum Committee. Without NIC’s Aboriginal Scholar program, none of this would have been possible.”

The program will run again through the winter term at NIC campuses in Campbell River, Comox Valley, Port Alberni and Port Hardy. Students can apply for one term or the entire year. At the end of each term, successful students will earn a \$250 scholarship.

“Success is defined very broadly, since the goals are specific to each student,” said Lawrence. “It’s really about helping students succeed now and setting them up for success in the future, both academically and throughout their lives.”

NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE



# NORTHERN LIGHTS COLLEGE

## Proud Alumnus Credits Success to Supportive Faculty and Close-to-Home Training

**F**ort St. John resident Kory Wood knows first-hand the importance of education to create opportunity and growth, and of giving back to the community.

A long time Peace region resident and proud member of the Saulteau First Nation, Kory decided to pursue post-secondary education because of his mother's support and encouragement, and a friend who got him interested in trades.

The accessibility of Northern Lights College allowed Kory to start his career by completing the electrical foundations program. This close-to-home training allowed Kory to continue working as a youth coordinator for the Blueberry River First Nation to supplement his income.

After completing his final apprenticeship year and receiving a Red Seal electrician journeyman ticket, Kory started his first business.

*"The support I got from the College Trades department was an integral part of my professional development. There was a real sense of community."*



After coming back to NLC to take an electrical code course which earned him his Class B electrical field safety representative certification, he created Kikinaw Energy Services.

“Taking into consideration classroom sizes, interprovincial readiness, support services, lab and classroom resources, industry support, and instructors, I have no doubt that the Northern Lights College electrical apprenticeship program is the best in the province,” said Kory.

The training helped him to take his business from a one-man operation to a small business. As the president of Kikinaw Energy Services, he has built a business that has contracts throughout Canada and employs close to 50 people. Some of which graduates of the wind turbine maintenance program at NLC.

“The support I got from the Northern Lights College trades department was an integral part of my professional development,” said Kory. “There was a real sense of community; I couldn’t imagine completing my trade anywhere else in the province.”

A sense of community has been important throughout his life. Growing up, financial assistance from local programs allowed Kory to take part in athletic programs like minor league hockey, golf, and softball. “Being active in these programs gave me [the skills] that I still use in business today, like strong social skills, confidence, and healthy living.”

Understanding the importance of programs for youth, Kory sponsors community programs focusing on youth development activities throughout the Peace region. His company, in partnership with other donors, donated a decommissioned wind turbine to NLC.

Kory hasn’t stopped learning. He recently started working on his Master of Business Administration. “This will help me not only to develop and grow my business, but to help connect First Nations with industry and government.”



Northern Lights  
College

# OKANAGAN COLLEGE

## From the Okanagan to Okayama, Malahat First Nation Student Shares Aboriginal Culture on Visit to Japan

**I**t was Dawna Hearl's first time out of BC and only the second time she had flown on an airplane when she landed in Okayama, Japan in the summer of 2019.

Hearl, an Associate of Arts student from Okanagan College's Salmon Arm campus spent two weeks in Japan as part of the summer intensive program offered through the College's mobility grant.

During these two exciting and challenging weeks, Hearl attended courses, explored the city, discovered local culture and established networks with people from around the world.

"Going to Japan has been a lifelong dream of mine," says Hearl. "It was such an incredible experience. I learned a lot about the Japanese culture and even a bit of their language. What made it so special to me though, was being able to share my culture with them as well."

Hearl, a Malahat First Nation from the Cowichan Valley, wanted to take a piece of her culture with her

to Japan to share with the new people she was about to meet. Adrian Lewis, one of the cultural interpreters at the Quaaout Lodge where she works,

made her two handmade hand drums to take with her.

"Hand drums are sacred across all Nations and represent the heartbeat of Mother Earth," says Hearl. "They are considered to still contain the spirit of the animal and the wood they are made out of and represent the center of everything."



*"Going to Japan has been a lifelong dream of mine. I learned a lot about the Japanese culture and even a bit of their language. What made it so special to me though, was being able to share my culture with them."*

Hearl gave out the hand drums as gifts to her teachers in Japan on Aboriginal Day.

"It's so special to me because they can continue to share my culture with others, even after I've left," adds Hearl.

Three other OC students joined Hearl at Kibi International University, a private university located in the city of Takahashi. Rich in history and tradition, Takahashi is nestled on a sheltered hillside overlooking the Takahashi River and the Bicchu Matsuyama castle.

"Everything was so pretty," says Hearl. "We were so busy fitting everything we could into the two weeks that we were there. They took us to art museums and we got to dress up in kimonos. We were so spoiled - there was always so much food."

"It brings tears to my eyes speaking about it, and about Dawna and how much this trip changed her," says Caroline Chartier, Aboriginal Planner at the Salmon Arm campus.

"She has so much depth to her, so much respect to her culture and wanting to continue to share it with people. Her personality is much larger than it was, she was very quiet when she first came here. She's such a good student, one of the best, and has worked so hard to come out of her shell. This trip really added to that."

OC students can enrich their education with numerous study abroad opportunities at one of the College's 23 partner institutions in 16 countries around the world.

"It really was a trip of a lifetime," says Hearl. "I'm so grateful to OC for the opportunity to do this."

Hearl is one of more than 1,800 Aboriginal students who attend Okanagan College.



# SELKIRK COLLEGE

## Alumnus Discovers a Voice that Helps Change Lives

**R**odney Noskiye arrived to the West Kootenay from his isolated Northern Alberta community in 2011 in search of new opportunity. When he enrolled at Selkirk College's Castlegar Campus as student, the vibrations of culture shock were fresh.

A graduate of the Social Service Worker Program in 2014, Noskiye is back in Alberta working in Cold Lake as a social worker by day and teaching Cree language classes at night. The journey to get to get this point of his life has been filled with hardship and struggle, but today the 36-year-old is proud to be making a difference in lives of others.

"Selkirk College has given me a voice," says Noskiye. "When I was a student, people would come up to me and ask for my input. Everybody was patient and I never felt judged, it gave me the confidence and made me feel like I belonged. That voice that I never had is important for me now, I make sure to tell everybody that it is Selkirk College that gave me that voice."

*"My language made me who I am as a person...We need to be confident in ourselves and who we are in order to be able to succeed outside of our culture."*



Growing up in the Little Red River Cree Nation northeast of High Level, Noskiye's family lived in Fox Lake and he was the youngest of nine children.



Both Noskiye's parents were placed in residential school and the multi-generational scars of the system played a continuous part in his early years. Even though Noskiye's parents emphasized the value of an education, by Grade 9 he had lost enthusiasm for formal learning.

"I never really thought I would get out of my community because I didn't see a future after adolescence," he says. "I was spiraling downwards and didn't really have to deal with my emotions because everybody was telling me that I had to bottle it up and not talk about anything."

He had still not earned his high school diploma by his early-20s, but was working in the Fox Lake school as an educational assistant. With the arrival of a newborn daughter, his young family made the difficult decision to leave his home for the first time and head west to British Columbia.

Noskiye started in the School of Academic Upgrading and transitioned into the Social Worker Program in 2013. By that time, confidence was building and he was becoming a valued part of the student body serving as an active member of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

"When I was in the Social Worker Program, we were taught that it is important to help teach people to be more confident in themselves," he says. "That is when I started to be more confident in myself, that was the point when I started to tell people that I was fluent in Cree. Up until that point, I was reluctant because I was made to believe that I shouldn't tell people who I am as a person. My language made me who I am as a person, we need to be confident in ourselves and who we are in order to be able to succeed outside of our culture."

After graduation in 2014, Noskiye's wife took a teaching job in Cold Lake and the family moved back to Alberta. He soon found employment as a family support worker where he primarily focuses on youth who face challenging obstacles. Connecting through his comforting brand of humour, Noskiye is combining his post-secondary education with his own upbringing on a daily basis.

"I grew up in a difficult environment and I had to figure out how to help myself get through everything," says Noskiye, who returned to Selkirk College in 2018-2019 to complete a Human Services Diploma. "There was a lot of trauma in my life growing up and I use that to help connect with the clients. I make them feel that they don't have to walk this road alone, the journey they are on is not one they take by themselves."



# VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## Healing History: Enhancing Indigenous Health Care at VCC

**A**s a child, Lawrence (Larry) Becker spent a lot of time in hospital. Even though he suffered from a rare metabolic disorder, he has only positive things to say about the care he received. It was this experience that motivated him to start a career as a medical office assistant. "I want to give back what was given to me," he says.

Good health care leaves a lasting impact, and it's quite common for students entering the field to be driven by past experience. As an Indigenous person in Canada, however, Larry's story stands out.

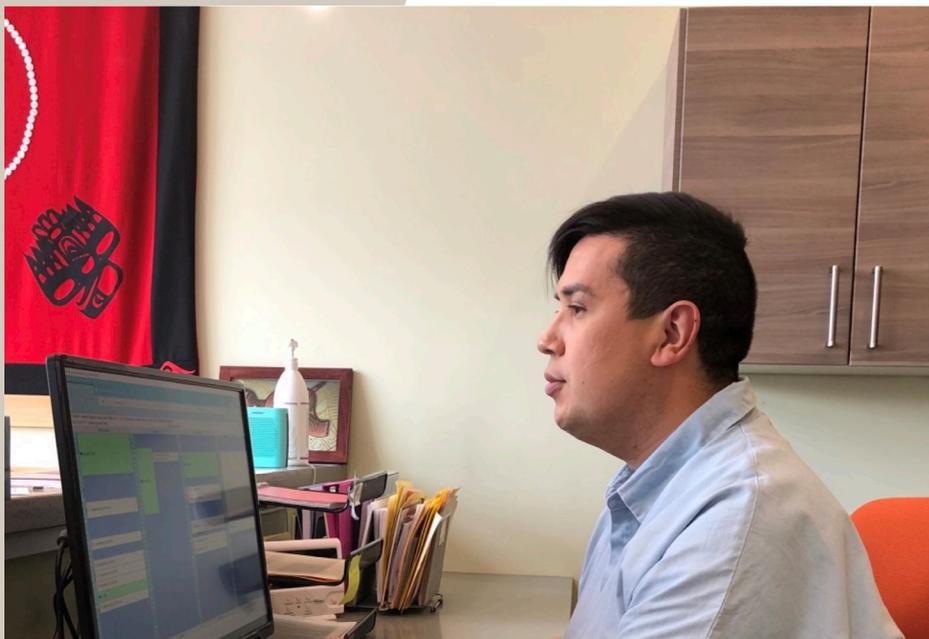
In October 2018, Larry enrolled in a pilot medical office skills program offered jointly by Vancouver Community College and the Musqueam Indian Band, his home community. As part of the program, Larry completed a three-week practicum at Lu'ma Medical Centre, an Indigenous family clinic in East Vancouver.

Here, he got to know first-hand the anxiety that many Indigenous patients

feel in a health care setting. "People had a lot of discomfort just going in for any type of medical service," he says. According to Larry, this often leads to avoidance of important treatments and is a major issue facing Indigenous health today.

As an empathetic person, Larry was intimidated at first, but he made it his job to create a welcoming environment. "It's really important to make sure people are taken care of rather than leave feeling ignored," he says.

*"With a difficult patient or an urgent situation, I use my customer service skills and keep calm. Not only for myself but to make sure their needs are actually met."*



For many Indigenous people in Canada, Western-style health care still represents more hurt than help. As epidemics of smallpox wiped out an estimated 90 per cent of the First Nations population from contact until 1890, the smallpox vaccine, developed in 1796, was rarely given to First Nations people. As First Nations children in residential schools underwent medical experiments and abuse, they were often sent home rather than treated. As tuberculosis spread in the early 20th century, First Nations people were forced to leave their families and travel long distances to access low-quality, segregated hospitals.

Today, much Indigenous medicine, food, and survival knowledge remains greatly diminished by 500 years of chaos and grief. Without it, many Indigenous communities have become dependent on market-supplied goods and processed foods. As a result, they face elevated rates of diabetes, obesity, cancer, mental illnesses, and more, yet still shy away from professional health care.

As Indigenous populations in Canada continue to rebound in the 21st century – now growing at higher rates than most – the need for culturally appropriate services is greater than ever.

In adapting the medical office skills curriculum for the Musqueam-based program, VCC's Partnership Development Office added basic skills training, an Indigenous health care-specific course, contracted Indigenous facilitators, and required that all instructors participate in a cultural safety program prior to teaching.

At the Lu'ma Medical Centre, the entire space has been deliberately designed using warm colours and traditional art to make patients feel at ease, while staff like Larry are specially trained to address the concerns of Indigenous patients.

"With a difficult patient or an urgent situation, I use my customer service skills and keep calm," says Larry. "Not only for myself but to make sure their needs are actually met."



## About the Artist

**Amanda Dionne Hugon** was born in Chilliwack, BC in 1982. She is a Northwest Coast Artist with ancestry of Métis and Stō;lo, Coast Salish People. She is a graduate of the First Nations Fine Arts program at the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art.

Hugon is studying the Coast Salish Style to connect with her roots and learn about her ancestors, she has worked very hard to earn spots for her permanent installations that she has made for Northern BC communities. Amanda has been living in Terrace since 1993, where she currently lives with her family in a small bungalow that sits parallel to the Skeena River. Amanda feels that art is truly meant to heal the soul.



### The Spindle Whorl

A Spindle Whorl is spun to create wool for weaving. When it's spinning it is said to put the weaver into a trance, which inspires the artist to create a blanket design.

This image is my version of the Spindle Whorl spinning and releasing the inspirational designs. It represents the symbol of life, motivation and the ability to follow your dreams.





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