

Funding renewed for northern programs

When Ray Smith was a young man, his mother and grandparents encouraged him to complete his Grade 12 and further his education. Originally from Pinehouse, Smith moved to La Ronge for grades 7 to 12, and then on to the University of Saskatchewan, where he earned an Arts and Science degree in Sociology, but where he found it difficult to make the transition from northern life to life in the big city.

Adjusting to city life, as well as to the language barriers and cultural isolation he encountered as one of the few Aboriginal students enrolled at the university in the 1970s, presented Smith with obstacles that eroded his sense of self worth and accomplishment. It wasn't until he participated in the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) in La Ronge that he received the support and encouragement he needed to feel confident in his abilities.

Through the program, northern students can take university credit classes in La Ronge, rather than having to relocate to a large urban centre.

The NORTEP staff and faculty provided a welcoming environment where Smith was able to achieve greater academic success and gain the confidence to make oral presentations, skills that have served him well in his role as an educator and as assistant director of NORTEP/NORPAC, a position he had held for the past 10 years. Now Smith's education and life experiences make him a valuable resource for northern students who are pursuing a post-secondary education and allow him to share his passion for revitalizing and maintaining the Cree language through the classes that he teaches.

Since the program began in 1977, NORTEP has graduated 307 teachers with degrees from the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina. The program was created to improve teacher recruitment and retention in the North. About 85 per cent of graduates have found employment, many as teachers

Scholarship launched

Innovation Place has committed \$100,000 to help encourage more Aboriginal people to enter post-secondary studies in the fields of science and technology.

Starting this year and continuing until 2015, Innovation Place will award a \$5,000 scholarship to one Aboriginal student attending the University of Saskatchewan and one attending the University of Regina.

To be eligible to receive the scholarship, students must be of Aboriginal descent and must be in their second or subsequent year of studies in science or

and senior administrators in the K-12 education system in the North.

The impact NORTEP has made is reflected in the number of Aboriginal teachers now working in northern Saskatchewan. Twenty-five years ago, Aboriginal teachers made up only three per cent of the northern teachers. Now, they account for 33 per cent.

Having teachers from the north teaching in the north has also had an impact on teacher retention rates. In the Northern Lights School Division alone, teacher turnover has declined from 75 per cent to 20 per cent, providing more stability for students and schools.

The success of NORTEP spanned a new program in 1989, the Northern Professional Access College (NORPAC) program that provides northern students with up to three years of arts and science classes. Since its inception, NORPAC has served as a bridge for more than 350 northern students who go on to continue their studies at southern post-secondary institutions.

According to Elie Fleury, director of NORTEP/NORPAC, the programs allow students to obtain post-secondary education and are a great asset for northern communities, where the majority of graduates have secured employment. Smith agrees.

"Students thank me for the encouragement and education I provided them while they attended the program. And I have witnessed and experienced how the program gives northern students such as me and my students the tools they need to succeed as teachers in schools and education related employment in the North."

The province recently renewed its funding for the programs for the next five years. Learning Minister Andrew Thomson visited the program's head office in La Ronge in September to sign the agreement, which states that Saskatchewan Learning will provide annual operating grants and funding for student accommodation.

engineering fields Applicants must have a minimum average of 70 per cent and can't have received scholarships or bursaries from other donors within the year in which they are applying.

"We are sponsoring these scholarships to encourage Aboriginal students to look at a field they have not been traditionally involved in," said Doug Tastaad, president of the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation, which manages Innovation Place. "Our clients are looking for highly skilled young people and we want to support those students that choose a science education."

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