

A Chosen Journey

RBC Indigenous Partnership Report 2021





The map above represents the stories from across Canada in this year's report.

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More than 25 years ago, RBC embarked on a journey.

We chose to take this journey because we understood then, as we do today, that we have both the ability and an obligation to act in meaningful, important ways on reconciliation.

When the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada were made public in 2015, we undertook ways to honour the calls to action, specifically Call to Action 92 — to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples in creating long-term, sustainable economic development, employment, social impact and procurement opportunities.

The stories told throughout the pages of this year's *A Chosen Journey* celebrate the long-held tradition of innovation that has profoundly shaped Indigenous societies for millennia. Ancient knowledge has been preserved and passed from one generation to the next, helping build a more prosperous, peaceful and sustainable future for all.

With this year's report, we honour the past and look to the future, reaffirming our commitment to listen, take action and continue the reconciliation journey. We will always stand for Indigenous inclusion and prosperity — now and for all generations to come.



A message from Dave McKay

President and CEO

A truly prosperous Canada hinges on the full and equal participation of Indigenous people in the economy.

This consensus is shared by a diverse segment of community, business and government leaders. And I believe this should be a top priority for Canada as we move forward with greater purpose and urgency in creating a more inclusive, fairer and sustainable post-pandemic future for all.

I share and support a vision where we close the gap in employment and participation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, where Indigenous entrepreneurs are driving more innovation and growth across many sectors of our economy, and where we provide access to opportunity for Canada's youngest and fastest growing cohort – Indigenous youth.

As you will see in this year's edition of *A Chosen Journey*, we are making progress on this collective mission. These stories of innovation reveal how Indigenous traditions are fostering sustainable communities, driving economic growth and creating positive change on critical issues as Canada moves beyond the pandemic and reimagines its future.

Collectively, we can keep making progress by supplying more capital to Indigenous entrepreneurs, closing the digital gap in rural and remote communities and reimagining our education systems to better set up future generations for success.

At RBC, we have a long history of partnership with Indigenous nations, and we will continue to be the bank that acts on reconciliation in genuine and meaningful ways.

A Chosen Journey is our way of showing Canada how we do this, and why reconciliation can help fuel the discovery of new and innovative solutions that Canada can offer the world to address our most pressing challenges.

Alongside thousands of RBC employees, I am proud of the progress on this important journey – one that must see Indigenous innovation and excellence acknowledged, included and celebrated.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave McKay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Dave McKay



A message from Phil Fontaine

Special Advisor, RBC Indigenous Financial Services

The profound global challenges that lie before us have never been more daunting. And, as the past year taught us, the need for innovative solutions to these challenges has never been more pressing.

Innovative solutions are not always a function of new ways of thinking and doing. From an Indigenous perspective, innovation emerges when old ways — traditional knowledge and practices — are applied in a modern context.

From the beginning, Indigenous people have always drawn on ancestral knowledge shaped by a profound relationship with land, community and spirit. It is this relationship that inspires innovative ideas.

Innovation based on traditional knowledge is increasingly contributing to conventional knowledge in a variety of ways. For example, traditional Indigenous knowledge gleaned from millennia of close relationships to the land is helping scientists to develop adaptive strategies to climate change and impacts on biodiversity.

We also see examples of traditional knowledge contributing to the healing of broken relationships and the building of new ones. Traditional Indigenous values such as trust, forgiveness, balance, respect, generosity and understanding help resolve old conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities by fostering new, responsible, reciprocal and respectful relationships that lead to social change.

RBC continues to be a dedicated partner in helping Indigenous innovation flourish so that, together, we can find sustainable solutions. This is reconciliation in action. To me, reconciliation means not only putting the events of the past behind us. It means making a profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect. Reconciliation must look forward in terms of rebuilding and renewing Indigenous relationships and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. It requires commitment from all those affected by the travesties of the past including First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, communities, religious entities, Residential School Survivors, governments and the people of Canada.

Although the path forward continues to feel uncertain at times, one thing has never been clearer: our future depends on our collective ability to innovate and to collaborate in partnership. This year's collection of stories in *A Chosen Journey* shows us this is, indeed, possible. All these stories aim to illustrate the Indigenous tradition of innovation, and to celebrate Indigenous achievement during National Indigenous History Month.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Fontaine". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Phil Fontaine

Pitching for success

Pow Wow Pitch goes national to nurture Indigenous entrepreneurs, like Skwálwen Botanicals' Leigh Joseph, and support local economic development for stronger, healthier communities.



Leigh Joseph, founder of Skwálwen (pronounced squall-win) Botanicals, learned about plants the way her people always have, from the Elders.

Growing up, she spent time with her great aunt and uncle in Snuneymuxw territory smoking salmon and harvesting garden vegetables. As an adult, she harvested wild plants with Squamish family members, soaking up the traditional *Skwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) plant knowledge they shared.

Such a love of plants did not go unnoticed. As her Auntie Joy noted, everyone in the community has a gift, and the Elders look for those gifts to develop and show themselves. “She’s spoken to me about how plants and plant knowledge is that for me,” says Joseph.

Later, Joseph naturally bent towards plants again, pursuing a Master’s of Science degree from the University of Victoria and a career as an ethnobotanist: someone who studies the cultural inter-relationships between people and plants.

For fun, back in 2017 she began transforming the wild plants she enjoyed harvesting into ingredients for homemade teas, salves and infused oils. Encouraged by the positive response, the ethnobotanist followed her heart-root into entrepreneurship with \$2,000 in savings to start Skwálwen Botanicals, an Indigenous skincare company.

“To be honest, I got into making skincare products as a creative outlet because I really love making the formulations,” she recalls from Skwálwen’s headquarters in Squamish, B.C. “Between then and now, I’ve been on an immensely steep learning curve of understanding what it means to be an entrepreneur and all the hats you need to wear.”

Last year, in need of capital to buy equipment to enable Skwálwen to grow, Joseph stepped out of her comfort zone to enter Pow Wow Pitch — a *Dragons’ Den*-style competition supporting and empowering Indigenous entrepreneurs. The pitch competition went national in 2020 with RBC as a co-presenting sponsor.

“RBC shares our values of supporting reconciliation through entrepreneurship,” says the competition’s founder, Sunshine Tenasco in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation in Que. “By investing in Pow Wow Pitch and the entrepreneurs we support, RBC has demonstrated that it means business for Indigenous business owners. With the support from RBC, Pow Wow Pitch was also able to leverage digital technology to increase its reach and level of support for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Pow Wow Pitch is proud to work hand-in-hand with RBC in backing Indigenous business owners across Canada.”

In addition to marketing and financial support, including \$25,000 in prize money, RBC encouraged its commercial banking employees to volunteer.

As a first-time Pow Wow Pitch judge, Harry Willmot was challenged by the task of selecting a winner from the cadre of high-calibre participants. “It is clear to me that Indigenous entrepreneurship is not just alive and well, it’s flourishing,” says the RBC regional vice-president, Indigenous markets — East in Ajax, Ont.

An additional 17 RBC employees gave their time to serve as one-on-one mentors, helping the budding entrepreneurs prepare and refine their pitches for the intense competition.

The pitch was Joseph’s first ever — not to mention an opportunity to stretch. “I definitely had nerves, and just practiced a ton and had some really great guidance from my mentor,” she says.

“With the support from RBC, Pow Wow Pitch was also able to leverage digital technology to increase its reach and level of support for Indigenous entrepreneurs.”

— Sunshine Tenasco, Pow Wow Pitch founder & CEO

Darryl Duncan, a VP of relationship management in RBC’s technology and innovation banking practice in Ottawa, Ont., was paired with Joseph as her mentor. He provided her with support and a different lens on Skwálwen’s operations. Ultimately, Joseph’s hard work paid off: she earned a second-place finish, along with a \$5,000 cheque to grow her business.

“What inspired me most about Leigh [Joseph] and, really, all the entrepreneurs, was just how passionate they were about *why* they were doing what they were doing,” says Duncan. “They were looking for knowledge that would help them advance their businesses because their businesses support their broader mission of giving back to their communities.”

Indeed, Skwálwen Botanicals may be considered a social enterprise. She already employs five women (and counting) in her community, with a portion of Skwálwen’s net proceeds going to organizations that benefit Indigenous peoples.

This holistic approach is simply another step on a long continuum of Indigenous innovation, rooted in the core values of reciprocity and responsibility. “For me and my Squamish culture,” says Joseph, “the fact that we are where we are today is a testament to the ability of my ancestors to adapt, collaborate and innovate.”

Pow Wow Pitch’s Tenasco agrees that Indigenous business innovation is nothing new, for Indigenous people have long known that “good trade means good business, and that good business creates strong and healthy communities.”

A man wearing a green rain jacket and a grey hat is shown from the chest up, leaning over a wooden structure. He is holding a large, flat, yellowish-brown object, likely a herring egg, in his hands. The structure he is working on is made of wood and has a large, cylindrical pipe or tube extending from it. The background shows a lush green forest with tall trees and a body of water in the foreground. The overall scene is outdoors and appears to be a traditional harvesting activity.

Stewards of sustainability

Heiltsuk man harvesting herring eggs
Photo credit: Ian McAllister

In the wake of a landmark Supreme Court of Canada decision to protect Heiltsuk Nation's rights to respectfully harvest and trade herring spawn on kelp, a team of RBC experts supported community leaders through their community engagement process to help Heiltsuk members decide how best to use the resulting settlement.

The people of Heiltsuk Nation have always been innovators. For at least 14,000 years, they have been sustainably harvesting Pacific herring (*wá'nái*) eggs from the watery kelp forests surrounding Bella Bella, B.C. Their way, the fish thrive and continue to sustain their Central Coast community, only accessible by plane or boat.

This constitutionally protected Indigenous right was challenged in 1988 when the Gladstone brothers of Heiltsuk Nation were arrested by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) for commercially harvesting and selling herring spawn on kelp.

The brothers, with the support of Heiltsuk Nation, stood up for their rights in court, and in a landmark decision eight years later, won. The Supreme Court ruled the harvest and trade of herring spawn on kelp forms an integral part of the distinct Heiltsuk culture and is an Indigenous right protected under the Canadian Constitution.

The Heiltsuk Nation sought compensation for Canada's infringement on this right, and received a significant settlement offer from DFO. In 2019, the Heiltsuk Tribal Council (HTC) and its legal advisors reached out to RBC Royal Bank and RBC Royal Trust to help plan for the receipt of the settlement funds and set up two trusts: a minors' trust to protect the funds for the young members who had not yet reached the age of majority and a second contingency trust.

HTC is part of a leadership structure that includes a system of hereditary chiefs as an essential component of the Nation's governance structure. As with many Indigenous communities, this system has survived, despite years of oppressive colonialism.



Totem pole raising at the Heiltsuk Big House opening
Photo credit: Tavis Campbell



Photo credit: Tavis Campbell



Chief Councillor Marilyn Slett inside the Big House during the opening celebration
Photo credit: Tavis Campbell

Working with the hereditary chiefs, HTC led a *Wáláqv!a* (“to talk together” in Heiltsuk) — a community engagement process to ensure everyone who wants a say has one, no matter where they live. “That’s one of the things, and it’s shared by many of our Elders and Knowledge Keepers, is that we’re Heiltsuk, no matter where we are,” says HTC Chief Councillor Marilyn Slett in Bella Bella. The engagement included door-to-door and online surveys, videos and webinars to gather community sentiment about the settlement.

Early on RBC Royal Bank commercial banking supported Heiltsuk Nation by opening an account for the settlement funds to generate interest. RBC personal banking also stepped in to help with individual member account openings (see *Bringing everyday banking to Bella Bella*, at right).

HTC also invited RBC Royal Trust to participate in more than a dozen packed community meetings in Bella Bella, Vancouver, Nanaimo and Prince Rupert to provide information on how a trust could be used to incorporate the long-term vision of members. RBC Global Asset Management Inc. participated in two meetings in July informing members about the settlement agreement on behalf of the Heiltsuk Nation.

Throughout the process, experts from RBC’s trust team helped Heiltsuk members understand what a trust is, how it functions, how the monies can be invested and, importantly, how good governance and transparent reporting can assure the community their money is in safe hands. “Our engagement really was to help Heiltsuk leadership build capacity, and to engage with their members to explain their options and how their monies could be sustainably invested,” says Anthony Wright, regional vice-president of Indigenous wealth, RBC Wealth Management in Vancouver.

In keeping with Heiltsuk values, RBC Royal Trust worked with HTC to develop an investment strategy for the trusts that incorporated environmentally and socially responsible guidelines consistent with the values of the Heiltsuk Nation. For example, having already experienced a fuel tanker spill in Heiltsuk territory, leaders wanted to avoid investments in companies that do not share the community's commitment to protecting the sensitive land and marine habitats their people rely on.

“Wálaqv̓la was a big process, nothing like I've ever experienced before,” says Chief Councillor Slett. “The interest was enormous from our community, so we wanted to do it as efficiently as we could. And I think, with the help that we had with people that we brought on board, including RBC, we were able to do that quite effectively.”

Having the opportunity to witness Wálaqv̓la was something Wright will not soon forget. “It's a very patient approach to how the Heiltsuk government operates and makes decisions,” he says. “And what Heiltsuk asks for in their partners is a willingness to be present and to listen, and to have that dialogue and relationship.”

Going forward, Heiltsuk will continue to fiercely stand up for the well-being of its people, culture, and the waters and lands of its territory, just as they have since time immemorial, all while knowing they have a strong partner in RBC.

“Our relationship with RBC is positive,” says Chief Councillor Slett. “It's been positive for our leadership, and their interactions with our community have been respectful. And so, we just really appreciate that. As Indigenous people have dealt with racism for too long. We've had some of our own members go through some pretty trying times with financial institutions, in general. So being able to work with RBC, in this really respectful way, does mean a lot to us.”

Bringing everyday banking to Bella Bella



RBC employees (from left to right) Chris Hunt, Ruwan Kanaththage and Shallice Macauley on their trip to Bella Bella

On July 16, 2019, Heiltsuk leadership signed an agreement with Canada settling many years of disagreement about Heiltsuk's proven commercial right to harvest herring spawn on kelp (SOK). The community worked hard to achieve the agreement, and its leaders wanted to ensure community members had easy access to personal banking and investment services. Knowing how important this landmark settlement was to the community, RBC happily served its members in the heart of their Nation in Bella Bella, B.C.

Shallice Macauley, a financial advisor for RBC Royal Bank in Campbell River, flew into the coastal location on a Sunday in December with her colleagues Chris Hunt and Ruwan Kanaththage. They quickly set up a virtual bank branch with their tablets at a closed restaurant in Brown's Plaza. For the next two days, she and Kanaththage opened bank accounts and answered members' questions.

“I would like to think we made it as easy as possible for the community,” says Macauley. “When you are remote, you never know what may happen, so we adapted and shifted how we normally do things, and it all went smoothly. It was a privilege to be able to go there and have these one-on-one experiences.”

While in Bella Bella, Hunt, a commercial account manager for Indigenous markets, hosted an advice event for eight Heiltsuk students enrolled in the University of Victoria's Aboriginal Canadian Entrepreneurship program. He also met with Heiltsuk Tribal Council officials and Heiltsuk Economic Development Corporation staff to listen to their needs and identify other ways RBC could partner with the community to support their short- and long-term goals.

At the end of their visit, the RBC team had a private tour of Heiltsuk's spectacular new Big House, the first community building of its kind on the reserve in 120 years. “It was amazing. I feel like I can still smell the cedar,” recalls Macauley. “I don't know how to put that into words, actually. It was a very humbling experience.”

Protecting the community

From using cutting-edge tech to fight COVID-19 to standing up for the wrongs imposed on his ancestors, Chief Murray Clearsky has always put the health and well-being of Waywayseecappo First Nation first.

With COVID-19, Waywayseecappo First Nation has taken no chances. Early into the pandemic, the Treaty 4 Ojibway community in Western Manitoba imposed a mandatory at-home quarantine for anyone testing positive. “That is how we’ve been trying to keep it under control,” says Chief Murray Clearsky, who has been the community’s trusted leader for the better part of 30 years.

The Chief and leader of the community’s COVID-19 response knows the risks of doing less, not more. The rate of reported COVID-19 cases in First Nations Peoples living on reserve was, at the time of writing this, 40% higher than the rate in the general Canadian population. The reason, say researchers, is systemic health, racial and social inequalities in Indigenous communities.

Looking for more ways to protect people during the pandemic, the community agreed to participate in a COVID-19 tech pilot project with Facedrive Health, in partnership with a group of researchers from the University of Waterloo.

The wearable system, called TraceSCAN, uses Bluetooth-enabled wristbands and necklaces to record events where people are in too-close proximity to one another, making contact tracing easier. The wearable tech also provides real-time reminders of safety protocols by beeping when users are less than six feet apart.

Should a positive case of COVID-19 emerge, it then becomes quite easy to alert those potentially at risk, helping stop the spread in its tracks.

“We have received positive feedback and exceptional results following our pilot project with TraceSCAN. Our community feels confident and optimistic about successfully navigating this pandemic with help of this pioneering, yet easy-to-use contact tracing technology,” says Clearsky. “Upon careful consideration, we have made the decision to move forward with this solution and provide all our people with the TraceSCAN devices. The Waywayseecappo members are supportive of the idea and looking forward to receiving training and equipment.”

This green light makes Waywayseecappo the first Indigenous community in Canada to adopt the use of such smart

Ribbon cutting at the grand opening of the Waywayseecappo First Nation Brandon Gas Bar



technology to protect its people from COVID-19. This innovative use of technology is just one example of how progressive and forward-thinking this community is when it comes to protecting the health and well-being of its people.

In fact, standing up for the community is nothing new for Chief Clearsky and Council, as further evidenced by its ongoing battle for justice. For decades, the community has fought to right the wrongs caused by their ancestors' forced removal from nearly 7,700 hectares of land in 1881. The community persevered, securing and approving a close to \$288-million settlement agreement with the federal government in July 2019.

“There was a lot of different people that came to our table from RBC to help us out, which I’m happy about. The presentations were good. Everything was explained and it was all transparent. They showed us how our money can work for us.”

– Chief Murray Clearsky, Waywayseecappo First Nation

Determining how best to manage an upcoming settlement is a massive responsibility for any leadership team, let alone one that is worth more than a quarter billion dollars. Finding the right partner to help prepare, plan and protect this large sum was critical — and this started well ahead of the actual receipt of monies.

“It all started with a conversation,” says Brendan Rogers, vice-president, investment and wealth advisor, for RBC Dominion Securities, on how the bank came to the community’s planning table. RBC DS and RBC Royal Trust met with Chief and Council many times, listening carefully to Waywayseecappo’s needs and aspirations before curating an extensive team of experts from its specialized Indigenous banking, wealth management and trust businesses.

“When you get into this process of settlements, it can take years before a final number is agreed upon,” says Rogers. Having all the community’s partners at the table early in the process — as Waywayseecappo did with RBC — enabled leadership to adequately inform and educate its membership and, ultimately, create a more connected plan for the use and wise investment of the funds.

“There was a lot of back and forth, but it was always Chief and Council that were driving the process, conveying what they wanted to see going to the community now and for the future,” says Rogers. “We were simply there to provide advice and insight into what they could expect in terms of returns on their investments, and on the banking side, actionable ideas for how they could turn this into money in their bank accounts today for members who really needed it.”

Under the settlement agreement, each band member received an initial \$2,500 payment, followed by three additional \$2,500 payments. The remainder of the funds were set aside in a trust fund, and the investment income generated by the trust flows annually to the First Nation for initiatives that will improve the community.

Top among the priorities for the investment income was keeping the community safe from COVID-19, and building urgently needed housing. This community’s comprehensive and strategic financial plan also included establishing a fund for children in care, to access when they become of age. “No one was left behind,” says the Chief with pride.

The RBC Royal Trust Indigenous Wealth team, led by Sangita Bhalla, associate director, conducted many information sessions with Chief and Council and their consultants on what a trust is, what trusts can do and what the responsibilities of the trustee and fiduciary and the long-term benefits to the community are.

Likewise, experts from RBC Dominion Securities worked on the investment side, helping everyone at the table understand how the funds could be invested to generate income for immediate needs such as housing, while protecting assets for future generations. They did this through scenario modelling and projections.

When it became clear the community also required some bridge financing while the details of the final agreement were being finalized, RBC brought its Indigenous banking experts to the table. “Chief and Council are very forward thinking and innovative,” says Tom Thordarson, senior Indigenous commercial account manager, Manitoba Indigenous markets, for RBC. The bridge financing that was put in place, almost a full year before Waywayseecappo ever received any funds, was key because of the urgent need in the community for the distributions.

“Chief and Council are very forward thinking and innovative.”

– Tom Thordarson, senior Indigenous commercial account manager, RBC

Bhalla says it came down to the RBC team working together and being flexible and creative to structure a plan that would help the community achieve its goals.

“RBC showed us, and proved to us, this is what you can do for this amount and this is what your return should be, which was very good,” says Chief Clearsky. “There was a lot of different people that came to our table from RBC to help us out, which I’m happy about. The presentations were good. Everything was explained and it was all transparent. They showed us how our money can work for us.”

“We’re taking our Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and blending it with modern ways of thinking to come up with something that’s completely new. That in itself, is innovative.”

— Michael Polak, commercial account manager, media and entertainment, for RBC Royal Bank in Halifax, N.S.



Unlocking Indigenous innovation at RBC

Whether they were women in leadership, storytellers that inspired or entrepreneurs pursuing environmentally and socially responsible business, Indigenous people have been innovators since time immemorial. Last year the RBC Royal Eagles designed a retreat to empower colleagues to combine their innate skills with new tools to spark more Indigenous innovation at RBC and beyond.

For the leaders of Canada's biggest bank, diversity is not just a box to check — it is an inseparable engine for innovation and economic prosperity that includes the unique ways we think and solve problems, and how we perceive the world around us. Diversity of thought contributes to insights and innovation, which fuel smarter growth. And encouraging employees to stay true to who they really are is at the core of a successful approach.

“When individuals feel they can bring their whole and authentic selves to work and contribute their ideas, experiences and talents to the fullest, everyone wins,” says Gopal Bansal, RBC's vice-president of diversity and inclusion.

This is why the bank empowers RBCers with diversity opportunities and groups, like the RBC Royal Eagles for Indigenous and ally employees.

Michael Polak, who is part Polish and part Mohawk, says the RBC Royal Eagles have been an important part of his journey since joining RBC through its National Indigenous Student Internship Program. As co-chair of the Ontario chapter, he was responsible for developing the group's biannual retreat in 2020.

Having studied innovation skills in a post-graduate program at Queen's University, Polak believed unlocking Indigenous innovation could be a good theme for the retreat. But would RBC be receptive?

“We have a lot of innovation happening at RBC, innovation labs, innovation programs, etc. and so I wondered if we as Indigenous people are being invited into these spaces. Or are we being maybe forgotten about?” recalls Polak, now commercial account manager, media and entertainment for RBC Royal Bank in Halifax, N.S. “I looked around and we didn't have any Indigenous people participating in any of those programs, or through any of the innovation efforts within business lines or departments.”

So he felt compelled to lead and change by co-creating an opportunity for his fellow Royal Eagles to learn what innovation is, how RBC is doing it, and then build on their skills and unlock their innate powers of Indigenous innovation.

“Sometimes we call it ‘two-eyed seeing,’” says Polak of the approach, referring to a phrase first created by Unama'ki Cape Breton Elder, Albert Marshall. “We're taking our Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and blending it with modern ways of thinking to come up with something that's completely new. That in itself, is innovative. That is where I think we'll see huge opportunities for productivity growth, social growth, and economic growth in our communities.”

With enthusiastic support from RBC leadership, Polak and his fellow Eagles curated a jam-packed program entitled “Indigenous Pathways to Solving Enterprise Problems,” held at Six Nations of the Grand River in Ohsweken, Ont.



Chanel Stojanovic, RBC Royal Eagle & RBC Indigenous Peoples Development Program participant

They kicked off the two-day retreat in the gorgeous Six Nations Longhouse by learning about the history of the Haudenosaunee peoples and their innovative culture. They then met with members of various internal innovation teams at RBC to hear about the bank's approach to innovation. Experiential workshops provided hands-on opportunities to try out new tools including design thinking and agile problem framing.

"I wanted to make sure that our interns and associates coming in, and also just our broader Indigenous community, got the exposure to this because we have plenty of problems to solve," says Polak. "We need to empower our people to have the understanding and the tool set in their toolbox to be able to say, 'Here's an opportunity. I can identify it. I can frame it.' And to know they can start to find a solution and build a team with the skills to solve it. They don't have to wait for anyone else to get started."

Chanel Stojanovic was one of the Eagles who attended the ground-breaking retreat. Like Polak, she discovered the Royal Eagles early in her career through the RBC Indigenous Internship Program. Today, she is an associate with the RBC Indigenous Peoples Development Program, rotating through several roles including a four-month secondment to a community non-profit (Journalists for Human Rights) and a rotation in compliance. She is already applying what she learned.

"I think the workshops, especially the design thinking one, helped me learn to think about the different ways that I could approach the problem, especially when I was part of a global team," says Stojanovic. "It was a pilot project and we were deciding on the best approach, which took a while, but I saw how helpful it was to work with colleagues in different regions that could provide their own personal insights, helping come to a mutual agreement and move forward together."

For Amanda Alexander, a community manager for RBC Royal Bank in Timmins, Ont., the retreat was a chance to better understand how she could leverage her Indigenous mindset to fully contribute to innovation at RBC.

"Indigenous people like to put a thoughtful think into everything that we do," says Alexander, a member of Beausoleil First Nation on the southern tip of Georgian Bay. However, in the workplace, this desire to reflect can be misunderstood as shyness, or worse, not having anything valuable to say. "In business, people tend to want an answer right away," she explains. "While we may not be the first person to raise our hands, we definitely have unique perspectives to share. So, we're always trying to do our best to mould ourselves into the cookie-cutter of what business looks like while still staying true to ourselves."

For her, the design thinking workshop resonated loudest, and she soon had the opportunity to put what she learned into action in the early days of the pandemic. "Ordinarily, this question of how to solve such a big and urgent problem would be something I would have wanted to reflect on for some time, but design thinking allowed me to be quite agile," she explains.

She and fellow Eagle Drew Mitchell launched a First Nation PPE drive, working to connect Indigenous communities to local organizations willing to donate or sell safety gear at reasonable negotiated prices. By July 2020, the team, which now included several Royal Eagles, had sourced and donated 109 L of sanitizer, 3,000 washable masks, 3,000 disposable masks, 1,000 pairs of gloves and 260 medical plastic shields. For her exemplary service, Alexander won the 2020 ONE RBC Global Citizen Award.

"With reconciliation, we're trying to grow and bring ourselves into that 21st century," says Alexander. "For me growing up, everything was very traditional, and we only learned from our Elders. And so, I love that we're continually growing in these new ways because we have so much to offer. We look at things in a different light than most, but it was almost discouraged before. It was like, 'Keep your ideas to yourself.' And now it's like, 'Get out there. Get your ideas out.'"

Colour of understanding

Volunteers with the B.C. Chapter of the RBC Royal Eagles worked ahead of Orange Shirt Day to ensure every employee – and the communities they serve – know why “Every Child Matters.”



RBC employees from the Kingsway & Joyce Branch in Burnaby, B.C. wearing orange t-shirts to support and amplify the message that “Every Child Matters”



Phyllis Webstad

If you visited RBC on September 30, 2020, you likely saw many employees wearing orange t-shirts, some 4,000 in B.C. alone. Not as obvious, however, was the role the bank's many Indigenous employees and allies played in building understanding of Orange Shirt Day, helping to amplify the message nationally that "Every Child Matters."

The Orange Shirt Day movement was inspired by an eager six-year-old Phyllis Webstad, who left her community of Stswecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe Creek/Dog Creek) First Nation in B.C. for her first day of school at St. Joseph's Mission Residential School (the Mission) wearing a bright new orange shirt. But on arrival, the first thing the white missionaries did was strip her of clothes and give her a uniform to wear. She never saw that orange shirt again. "Nobody cared that we had feelings," she explains. "So, to me, that's what orange meant."

Wearing an orange top for the first time in four decades, Webstad shared her story in 2013 during an event to acknowledge what happened at the Mission. As Webstad hoped, her speaking out was not the end of her story but, rather, the beginning of an ongoing conversation about the devastating impacts of Residential Schools, facilitated by the Orange Shirt Day movement. The first Orange Shirt Day was held on September 30, 2013, and continues as a positive way to spread the message that "Every Child Matters," as Fred Robbins of the Esk'etemic First Nation in B.C. first said.

Webstad was one of an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children who attended government-sponsored Residential Schools in Canada over several decades. At least 6,000 of them died, and Survivors (there are about 80,000 still living today) have reported horrific discrimination: physical, sexual and mental abuse. Yet, for too long, this cultural genocide was rarely spoken about, let alone part of the school curriculum.

In support of reconciliation with Indigenous communities, RBC partnered with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to present, on Orange Shirt Day 2020, *Every Child Matters: Reconciliation through Education*, a free online film event designed for Canadian students in grades 5 to 12.

The two-part video tells the story of how the settlers came to Turtle Island (North America), bringing with them disease and their own style of education. Canada's first Residential School was established in Brantford, Ont. in 1831, in what would become a network of more than 130 schools across Canada up until 1997. In the video, First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders, Residential School Survivors, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers from communities across Canada spoke about the multi-generational impacts the schools have had. The video also included performances from Indigenous musicians and dancers.

For Tara Brown, RBC community manager in Vancouver, seeing that sea of orange at RBC branches in her province on September 30, 2020 was more than inspiring. It was the

result of months of hard work by 15 members of the steering committee of the B.C. chapter of the RBC Royal Eagles, an employee resource group.

In 2019, fewer than 500 RBC employees wore the shirts. As co-chair of the B.C. chapter and a proud member of the Gitksan Nation, Brown knew the Eagles could do more to help support the understanding of and education on the Orange Shirt movement.

While the Residential School legacy is now being taught in most schools, the majority of adult Canadians today did not learn about it growing up. They also recognized that newcomers to Canada are unlikely to be aware of this tragedy. "It was important for us to help support and bring awareness [to] Orange Shirt Day," says Cici Sterritt, also Gitksan and involved with B.C.'s Royal Eagles.

Sterritt, an RBC commercial account manager for Indigenous markets based in Williams Lake, B.C., used to work with Webstad and has been friends with her since 2006. She knows it was a courageous act for her friend to have shared her story for the first time in 2013 and, therefore, feels a responsibility to help build understanding about Orange Shirt Day. "I was taught to never speak for another and to hold people up who share their stories, as it is not an easy step to take," she says.

Martin Thibodeau, regional president, British Columbia, RBC, asked the B.C. Royal Eagles to be "big and bold" in their planning to ensure employees in all lines of business understand the story behind Orange Shirt Day. Despite COVID-19 safety precautions, most events went forward in one way or another to great success, including the publishing of a video interview of Webstad, conducted by Thibodeau.

"We were helping people get comfortable being uncomfortable with a topic and a conversation that we just don't talk about as Canadians," says Brown. "So, it was really important for us to share, not only Phyllis' story, but the ugly truth behind the Residential School system and its legacy. The last Residential School closed in 1997, but the trauma didn't stop with those who attended. It's their kids, and their kid's kids, and so it continues to affect generations. I felt that seeing the sea of orange across all of RBC was a step forward with truth and reconciliation. It was just very heartwarming."

For Sterritt, seeing Orange Shirt Day 2020 unfold in B.C., and nationally, was phenomenal. "It was a vast difference from 2019, people wore orange and understood the history, it created a place where stories and experiences can be shared," she says. "We managed to bring awareness and a connection amongst our branches, RBC partners and our clients."

Kendal Netmaker

Story power

Storytelling has always been a way for Indigenous people to teach. But for Kendal Netmaker, story is all that, and more. The speaker, coach and entrepreneur from Sweetgrass First Nation shared his own story with RBC employees, along with an inspiring message: we always have the ability to choose a different story for ourselves to create a more fulfilling life.



For Cari-Lynne Pine, the transition from the not-for-profit world to banking was exciting — yet daunting. She signed up as a mentee in an Indigenous mentorship program facilitated, in part, by the RBC Royal Eagles, a long-standing employee resource group for Indigenous employees and their allies. “That really made a difference in helping me to navigate a new world that I had been unfamiliar with,” says the executive assistant in wealth management at RBC, from her base in Toronto.

Whenever possible, she takes advantage of other opportunities created by the Royal Eagles — and recently had a chance to listen to Kendal Netmaker, a motivational Indigenous entrepreneur, speaker and coach. The online event, co-hosted by the Royal Eagles and RBC’s National Office and Diversity & Inclusion teams, kicked off RBC’s National Indigenous History Month celebrations to honour the heritage, contributions and cultures of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The organizers wanted to highlight the value of self-awareness, resilience and diversity of thought and experience to create innovative pathways forward.

Netmaker began his talk by speaking about the power we always have to choose our thoughts. “If you don’t like the way things are in your life right now, you can change it,” he told RBC employees who participated. “But it starts with one decision. That decision starts up here [taps his head]. If you don’t like the ways things are right now, change the input to something more positive.”

As an example, Netmaker shared the circumstances of the life he was first dealt. It’s a story of fear and feeling insecure; growing up in extreme poverty, and living in women’s shelters before moving with his single mom back to Sweetgrass First Nation in Saskatchewan until grade 12. “Back then, reserve life for me was a struggle, always struggling to do things because there was no economic development, no entrepreneurs, no prosperity,” he says from his home office in Saskatoon. “It was just hopelessness.”

But this story motivated him to design something better. “It forced me to tap into something that most people don’t get a chance to,” he explains. “When you don’t have a lot growing up and you’re always struggling and then one day maybe something works out for you ... you appreciate that more than someone else who’s more privileged. It’s gratitude.”

He was grateful when the family of his best friend, Johann, from South Africa enabled him to play soccer in grade 5 by paying for his soccer fees and driving him to games and practices. Two years later, when Johann’s family was moving away, they gave the Netmakers their family car — a gift that touched him deeply. But it wasn’t until he created his first business, a sportswear company called Neechie Gear[‡], that he realized the true value of Johann’s gift.

Seeking start-up funding, Netmaker forced himself to enter pitch competitions despite feeling terrified. “I didn’t know how



“I think for me, the big takeaway of listening to Kendal’s story was that anything is possible, especially when you come from circumstances such as he did, where things are stacked against you. He is so motivated, and motivating, so I found his story really inspiring.”

— Cari-Lynne Pine, wealth management, RBC

to do this stuff,” he says. But then he focused on what he did know — and that was how to tell a story, having listened to many Elders’ tales growing up. So, he took a chance and shared his own story, along with his big vision for Neechie Gear: to help Indigenous youth play sports by donating a percentage of the company’s annual profits to a non-profit he created called IndigiFund. “And a lot of them would be like, ‘Holy man, that’s a powerful story, we want to hear more,’” he remembers.

With this insight, he began sharing his story with Neechie Gear customers too. “It became bigger than the brand,” he says. “And that’s how we kind of got our momentum.”

Soon, people were paying the award-winning entrepreneur to tell his story — and his new business as a motivational speaker was born. This in turn led the author of *Driven to Succeed* to his third business, Netmaker Coaching, helping individuals become world-class leaders. “I used to believe I was too young to do these things,” says the 33-year-old, “but that was a limiting belief for myself. I stopped listening to that voice because for a long time it used to hold me back. I eventually got over that because the results speak for themselves.”

At one point during his talk at RBC, he asked employees to stop and reflect on whether they are okay with the status quo, if they think that all they have now is all they will ever have or deserve — and if so, he challenged them to choose to design a different future. “I want you to replace that mindset with being open to what’s next, to being innovative,” he says. “Replace it with a mindset that allows you to keep progressing.” Making yourself uncomfortable is also key, he told them, for it is only when the stakes are high that we truly wake up to the creative genius that we all have inside.

As an Indigenous person, Pine says she was excited to hear not just a story about a successful Indigenous person, but another perspective from the Prairies. Netmaker’s message about the value of networking and reaching out to others for support and mentorship also stuck with her; a strategy she has already put into action.

“I think for me, the big takeaway of listening to Kendal’s story was that anything is possible, especially when you come from circumstances such as he did, where things are stacked against you,” says Pine. “He is so motivated, and motivating, so I found his story really inspiring.”

Herb ZoBell, vice-president, commercial financial services, Indigenous markets and North of 60, and member of the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation, also attended the event and says stories like Netmaker’s can ultimately remind us of our limitless potential.

“Stories can provide the blueprint of lives well lived — lives rich in purpose and humility,” says the Royal Eagles executive advisor in La Salle, Manitoba. “When we learn to lean into diverse voices across our communities, voices who include Kendal Netmaker, we find our role models in the accomplishments and experiences of others.”

“When you don’t have a lot growing up and you’re always struggling and then one day maybe something works out for you ... you appreciate that more than someone else who’s more privileged. It’s gratitude.”

— Kendal Netmaker, Indigenous entrepreneur, speaker, coach



‘It is bright, it is lit’

With INUA, the stunning inaugural Inuit art exhibit at Qaumajuq, Inuit artists help the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) illuminate a new way forward together, in reconciliation.



Sealskin space suit by Jesse Tungilik, Iqaluit artist
Qilak, Main Inuit Gallery, Qaumajuq,
the Inuit Art Centre at the Winnipeg Art Gallery
Photo credit: Lindsay Reid



Heather Igloliorte was overcome with joy when she first glimpsed the caribou-hide beaded purse made by her grandmother's hands installed as part of INUA, the inaugural exhibition at Qaumajuq, WAG's reimagined Inuit art centre.

"I burst into tears when I first saw it, honestly," says Igloliorte. "It's beautiful. Her name was Suzannah, but she went by Susie."

Inuktitut for "It is bright, it is lit," *Qaumajuq* (pronounced kow-may-yourq) is a stunning 40,000-square-foot space that lights up downtown Winnipeg, a representation of WAG's new transparent and more respectful relationship with communities.

Susie's purse came back to her granddaughter via Twitter; a tweet from a stranger who said his grandmother (Grace Arnold) had been given the purse by Igloliorte's grandmother half a century ago when they were in hospital together.

"It's changed how we see ourselves as a museum today, it has changed how we think about what a museum should be in a community. And I believe it's become a beacon of hope and a template for change ..."

— Stephen Borys,
WAG director & CEO, Winnipeg

As one of four Inuit curators of INUA, Igloliorte was able to give Susie's purse — a gorgeous example of traditional beadwork — the spotlight it deserves. It is also a nod to INUA's intergenerational theme. "That's what's coming through all the work, a respect for where we're coming from and thinking about where we're going as a people and our relationship to our ancestors and descendants," says the curator. The theme is encapsulated in the exhibit's name, INUA, which means "life force" in Inuktitut and is also an acronym for *Inuit Nunangat Ungammuktut Atautikkut* ("Inuit moving forward together").

Igloliorte, an associate professor and research chair at Concordia University, and her co-curators (Krista Ulujuk Zawadski, Asinnajaq and Kablusiak) began their preparations for INUA more than two years ago. The result is approximately 100 artworks from 91 Inuit artists from across Inuit Nunangat and other circumpolar regions, including Alaska and Greenland and the urban south. Works from emerging artists, such as Nunatsiavummiut painter Bronson Jacque and Nunavut fashion designer Martha Kyak, sit alongside those of more established artists.

What visitors will experience at INUA may be different than imagined. Yes, there are stone carvings in the exhibition: Qaumajuq houses nearly 5,000 soapstone sculptures within a glass-walled vault, called *Ilavut* ("our relatives"), visible from the street outside. These are part of WAG's permanent collection of close to 14,000 Inuit artworks and the Government of Nunavut's 7,400-piece Fine Arts Collection

(Continued on page 27)



The art "vault" at Qaumajuq,
the Inuit Art Centre at the Winnipeg Art Gallery
Photo credit: Lindsay Reid

Urban Inuit

Julie Grenier,
Montreal, Que.
(Kuujuaq, Nunavik)

To make their sealskin *arnauti*, a parka worn by Inuit women, Julie Grenier collaborated for a second time with Beatrice Deer, a well-known musician and artist. (Their first co-creation ended up at the Museum of Man in Paris.)

Grenier grew up in Kuujuaq, a community in the Nunavik region of Quebec, only accessible by plane. With the pandemic in full boil, the artists had to get extra creative with their materials back home in Montreal. “We brought our Rubbermaid bins of sealskins together and just started drawing, using what we had,” she says.

From the beginning, they sought to create a piece that wove traditional with modern, a reflection of themselves as urban Inuit; raised in the North, finding their way in the city. Such adaptation has always been an Inuit strength. Just look at the ingenious *amauti*, similar to the *arnauti* but with a built-in baby pouch on the back. It is where the baby Inuk spent their first two years, coming to the front to feed, with zero exposure to wind and cold.

“We come from a place where you have the harshest climates in the world.

And the only way we have been able to survive is through innovation,” says

Grenier. “It’s through creating all of these amazing tools, objects, clothes and everything else that we are here.

And that translates into today’s world.

We find a way to keep our traditions and language alive in everything that we do, while adapting to the modern-day society. We’re not stuck in the past.

We’re still moving forward.”



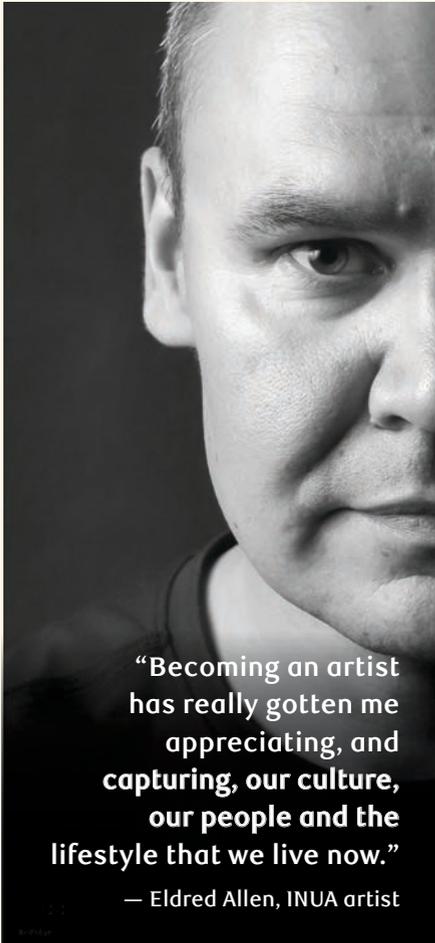
Sealskin *arnauti* by Beatrice Deer and Julie Grenier
Photo credit: Stephan Ballard

“We find a way to keep our traditions and language alive in everything that we do, while adapting to the modern-day society. We’re not stuck in the past. We’re still moving forward.”

— Julie Grenier, INUA artist



INUA's all-Inuit curatorial team, from left to right, Kablusiak, Krista Ulujuk Zawadski, Asinnajaq and Dr. Heather Igloliorte



“Becoming an artist has really gotten me appreciating, and capturing, our culture, our people and the lifestyle that we live now.”

— Eldred Allen, INUA artist

The accidental artist

Eldred Allen,
Rigolet, Nunatsiavut,
Newfoundland and Labrador



3D drone photograph of Hebrom Mission Buildings by Eldred Allen, featured in INUA

Eldred Allen has spent most of his life in Rigolet, a remote Inuit community on the coast of Labrador, save for a dip down south to earn his bachelor’s degree at St. John’s Memorial University. Degree in hand, he worked as an environmental monitor in Voisey’s Bay before he decided he needed a change and went back to college to pursue geographic information systems (GIS).

Eldred realized GIS mapping technology could benefit from drones and soared into business starting Bird’s Eye Inc., co-owned with his wife, Kristy Sheppard. More than a business, drones and photography became a hobby. “I decided to get a camera for my business to expand our services but found out pretty quickly that photography is something that I really enjoy doing,” says the self-taught shutter bug.

Flying his drone camera all over Labrador, he captures images of large areas of land and then uses photogrammetry software, used for his business, to stitch hundreds of aerial images together, creating a 3D model. At INUA, his large-scale 3D works of an old missionary and a salmon processing factory provide a new bird’s eye view of Inuit history and lands. Allen also digitally freezes the moment, valuable given the North’s face-off with climate change that is causing some historic structures to crumble far too fast.

In many ways, he still cannot believe his artwork is in INUA. “I’m out capturing pictures because I enjoy doing it. Now I’m starting to realize that I am producing artwork, but to be ...,” he takes a breath, “to be recognized and included in such a diverse group of very, very talented Inuit artists, I’m humbled because I’ve never even identified myself as an artist.”

Photography is giving him a fresh view of his community too. “Now when I see one of my friends who’s just come back from hunting and he’s down skinning and cleaning seal skin on the shore, I’m down there with my camera,” he says. “Before I started photography, I would probably just wave at him and drive on. So, becoming an artist has really gotten me appreciating, and capturing, our culture, our people and the lifestyle that we live now.”

(Continued from page 22)

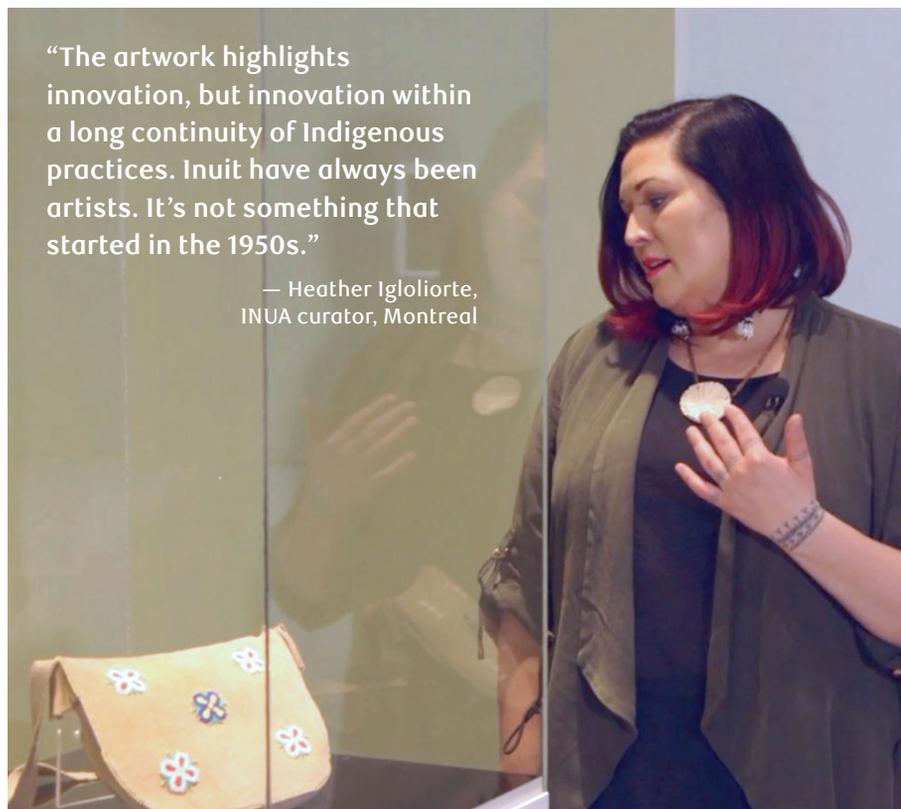
held on loan at the WAG. Yet the sheer scale and wide mix of media in INUA — everything from textiles to sound, video and drone photography — challenges preconceptions of Inuit art.

“The artwork highlights innovation, but innovation within a long continuity of Indigenous practices,” says Igloliorte. “Inuit have always been artists. It’s not something that started in the 1950s. Inuit art has always been. And so, the artists are working out of that long tradition of being creative and resourceful and making something of what’s available to them. It was important to us, as curators, to show Inuit art as art made by Inuit and not a particular kind of medium or material.”

Inuit art is also critical to telling the story of Inuit, says Stephen Borys, WAG director & CEO in Winnipeg. “Their land, their relocations, their resettlements, Residential Schools, the loss of mineral, natural mineral resources, issues of sovereignty, climate change, all of those stories are told through art,” Borys says. “This is one way that Qaumajuq can broaden, deepen our understanding of the North. When Inuit art is accessed in this innovative way, as an exercise of reconciliation really, it goes beyond the sector that we know as arts and culture.”

RBC support for Qaumajuq began in 2016 with a \$500,000 donation from the RBC Foundation’s Emerging Artists Project. In support of its commitment to reconciliation, emerging artists and education, RBC also sponsored RBCxWAG, a bi-weekly series to connect visitors with the artists and curators through virtual meet-ups, panel discussions, storytelling, art-making workshops and more.

“At Qaumajuq, the tales of Inuit peoples spanning past, and present, takes us on a journey of continuous discovery, remembrance and re-emergence,” says Kim Ulmer, regional president, RBC in Winnipeg. “The creative expression of these artists both informs and inspires this journey, giving rise to a modern renaissance in Inuit storytelling.”



“The artwork highlights innovation, but innovation within a long continuity of Indigenous practices. Inuit have always been artists. It’s not something that started in the 1950s.”

— Heather Igloliorte,
INUA curator, Montreal

Ultimately, Qaumajuq is the result of a 10-year dialogue of how the gallery has presented Inuit art up until now. The conversations began in earnest alongside important national events including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action. The WAG’s chosen journey was further guided by its new Indigenous Advisory Circle, co-chaired by Igloliorte and Métis scholar Julie Nagam, and its relationship with partners like RBC.

“On our side, it was really a shift in the decolonization of the WAG,” says Borys. “With the largest Inuit art collection in the world, 200 exhibitions and the publishing of 60 books, you might think we are the voice, or the arbitrators, or the ones leading. But in fact, the majority of what we’ve done prior has been done through a non-Indigenous lens. In other words, it’s been largely presented, published through a white voice from a colonial institution on Treaty 1 Territory.”

As such, Borys invites everyone to take ownership of the WAG, “especially the tens of thousands of Indigenous people who have walked by, driven by, biked by our doors and never felt comfortable, never felt welcome, never felt any sense of seeing themselves here or any ownership.” Words that mean something for Indigenous people, who can visit Qaumajuq at no charge, forever.

“Working with RBC helped me to better understand that when you’re building an Inuit art centre, what does that really mean for community? Who are the stakeholders? And I guess for me, what I’d love to share is that Qaumajuq has actually changed the WAG,” he says. “It’s changed how we see ourselves as a museum today, it has changed how we think about what a museum should be in a community. And I believe it’s become a beacon of hope and a template for change that other museums and galleries can look at and say, ‘You know what, it’s possible to engage in a meaningful way with reconciliation and it’s possible to change. It is possible to make a difference in the community.’”

The space between

Glenn Gear,
Montreal, Que.

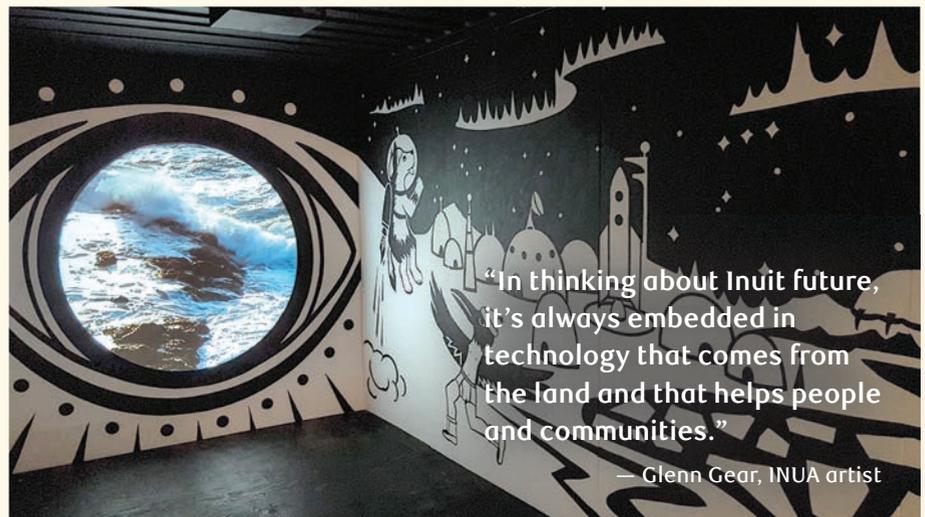
(Nunatsiavut, Newfoundland and Labrador)



For his artwork at INUA, multidisciplinary artist Glenn Gear wanted to create an experience — inside a sea-can.

“You see them all over the North,” he says. “Everything gets shipped in the sea-can, so, there’s something almost pedestrian about them. They’re part of the landscape because everyone has one.”

Stepping into Gear’s INUA installation, called *Iluani/Silami* (meaning “Inside/ Outside — it’s full of stars”), you experience two murals: one, an Inuit origin story particular to Nunatsiavut of how the Northern Lights came to be; the other, an imagined future. But first, you may be drawn to the brightness in the middle; a looping video projected into a large oculus or eye set to a drumbeat — the space between, the thing that lights everything else up. “For me, it’s very much an opening into another world,” says the artist. “There really is another dimension ... so for me, it’s very much a window of reflection, but also a portal to this other place.”



“In thinking about Inuit future, it’s always embedded in technology that comes from the land and that helps people and communities.”

— Glenn Gear, INUA artist

His proposed future speaks to his past as a modern Inuk. “It was probably inspired by the Jetsons,” he laughs. “That’s my Saturday morning couching childhood because I have a husky and a jet pack that’s kind of ridiculous, but it’s also really fun. A sense of humour is kind of important to me.”

In all seriousness, Gear says his installation at INUA illuminates Inuit resiliency and innovation through the ages. “People have this idea of the great white North and these traditional ways of hunting and living, but technology has always been embedded in what we do,” he explains. “I think about the technology of building kayaks or the technology of building igloos. I went to Alaska last year and I saw these beautiful, sort of, crampons for boots like snow grippers, and they were thousands of years old but looked so new and cool. And I love that ... it’s using everything at hand to make something better or something that you need in that moment. So, in thinking about Inuit future, it’s always embedded in technology that comes from the land and that helps people and communities.”

Soar like an eagle



Chris Googoo of UICF (far left) and Bruce Young, VP of commercial financial services, RBC (2nd from right) present a cheque to (left to right) Dru Paul-Marin, Isabella Martin and Jillisa Nickerson in Millbrook, N.S.

An Indigenized approach to philanthropy enables the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation to activate youth leading change across Atlantic Canada.

For Bree Menge, asking how she can be of service is a value she learned early on as a Mi'kmaq and member of Eskasoni First Nation on Cape Breton Island.

While working for Mi'kmaq Family and Children's Services, she saw lots of need, and the poverty still haunts her. Forced to make choices between food and other life necessities, personal care products became a luxury for too many. "It was a very heart-wrenching, but yet humbling, piece of information to see, hear, feel," says the 31-year-old.

In a heartbeat, Menge created Our Eskasoni Cares and applied for funding for a \$15,000 RBC Future Launch Community Challenge grant through the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation (UICF), a charitable foundation that serves Indigenous communities in all four Atlantic provinces. Her goal was to assemble and distribute personal care packages, making the daily lives of Eskasoni families a little easier.

With the funding, Menge purchased basic personal care necessities, such as shampoos, conditioners, toothbrushes and body wash. She then connected with the principal of Allison Bernard Memorial High School. Within days, an army of volunteering teens assembled 250 care packages, exceeding her expectations. They were about to give them away when COVID-19 hit hard, forcing everyone home.

"That's where our care packages just blew up," she says.

She partnered with Eskasoni Mental Health Services, who agreed to make the packages available to anyone who showed up at their clinic, no questions asked. "We didn't want to make anyone feel as if they were taking from us," says Menge. "We wanted them to know that we were giving to them." As a result, the Eskasoni care packages, which now included hand sanitizer and wipes, went to hundreds of grateful single moms, as well as Elders and families impacted by COVID-19.

Chris Googoo, executive director of the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation, says Our Eskasoni Cares and the other youth-driven projects funded by UICF demonstrate the exact type of leadership the foundation hopes to inspire.



Photo of, from left to right, Odelle Pike, Jeff Young, Emma Dollimount, Sabrina Muise, recipients of the Future Launch Community Challenge grant, and Danielle Green, RBC branch manager in Stephenville, N.L.

“We bring the Indigenous perspective to everything we do, and I think this is innovative,” says Googoo, who is also chief operating officer of Ulnooweg Development Group. “We’re really focused on this way of ‘two-eyed seeing,’” says Googoo. The term, created by Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, refers to using Indigenous ways of knowing, on one hand, with the strengths of “Western” ways, on the other, to create innovative, Indigenous solutions. In fact, the word “ulnoowegg” is Mi’kmaq for expressing Indigenousization.

“Of all the billions of dollars being spent in philanthropy in Canada, only one per cent are Indigenous focused. We want to help communities access these funds.”

— Chris Googoo, executive director,
Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation

The Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation was inspired by this one fact: just 1% of registered charities in Canada are Indigenous focused, according to a 2017 report by the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Googoo recognized the opportunity to Indigenousize philanthropy for the betterment of Indigenous communities across Atlantic Canada. “Of all the billions of dollars being spent in philanthropy in Canada, only one per cent are Indigenous focused,” he says. “We want to help communities access these funds.”

In 2018, Googoo led the creation of UICF, a registered charity with a goal of strengthening the relationships between Canada’s philanthropic sector and the Indigenous communities of Atlantic Canada. In doing so, they discovered a systemic barrier. “Municipalities and schools, they can automatically get registered as a qualified donee, but First

Nation communities don’t get that same consideration because they fall under the Indian Act,” he explains.

UICF hired a lawyer to help First Nations in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador register as donees, enabling the organization to flow philanthropic dollars — such as social impact funding from the RBC Future Launch Community Challenge — into Atlantic Indigenous communities. “RBC was our first real relationship as the foundation,” he says. “The infrastructure and relationship provided us with the ability to move this Challenge grant money to eight different youth-led projects.”

The Community Challenge is part of RBC Future Launch, a \$500 million,

10-year commitment by the bank to empower Canadian youth ages 15-29 for the jobs of tomorrow by supporting programming that creates opportunities for youth to build new skills, get real-world experience, grow their networks and enhance their mental well-being.

“RBC wants to help Indigenous youth in Atlantic Canada prepare for the future of work, and the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation is helping us accomplish these goals in a meaningful way,” says Kellie Sauriol, RBC’s regional vice-president, business financial services, Atlantic Canada. “Ulnooweg’s innovative approach responds to the grassroots needs of the community. Because the projects are youth-led, they’re also helping young people develop important leadership and problem-solving skills.”

Empowering Indigenous youth to lead change in their communities is deeply embedded in everything UICF does, and is expressed in their logo of an eagle flying above a nest. “We as Indigenous people always talk about the eagle and the feather, but we never talk about what’s in the nest — the eaglets,” says Googoo. “It is also our responsibility to nurture our youth and for them to eventually come out and soar as high as the eagle. But more so, in the fact that when they are born, that they begin to actually see themselves as eagles. Right now, a lot of the aspirations of children are not necessarily those that are like any other child, because their parents and their grandparents went to Residential Schools and they have intergenerational trauma. So, we are trying to break that cycle.”

For Menge, seeing the determination of youth in her community to help others was more than inspiring. “It reminded me that our youth are capable of so much more than we think,” she says. “They’re very bright, determined, vocal, and they’re strong. So, we’ve got to keep showing them that they have that opportunity to lead change in their communities.”

Translating success

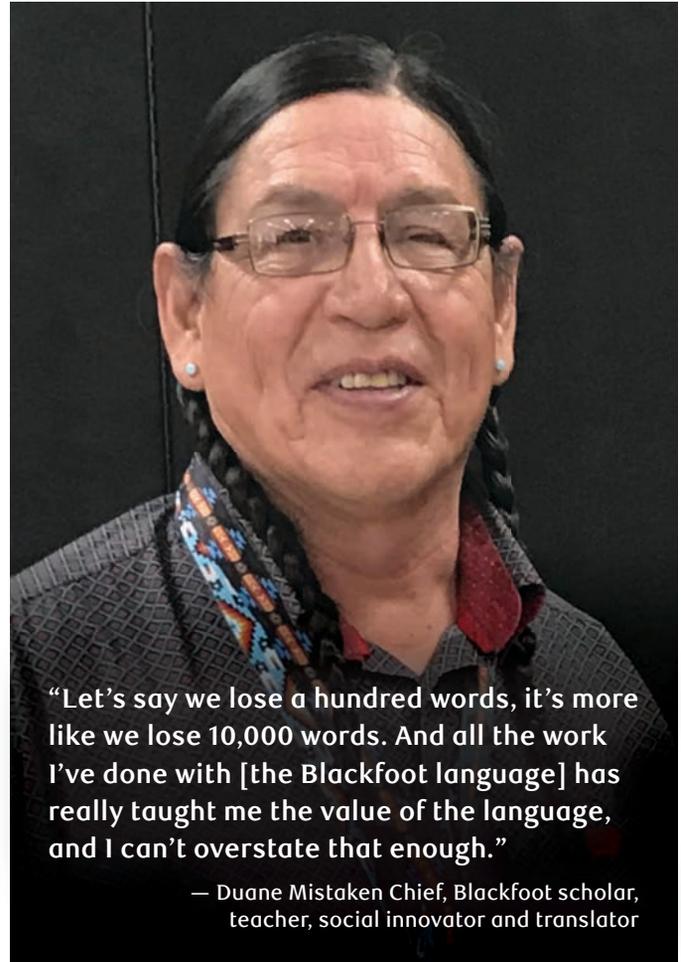
With over a billion words already translated, Indigenous-owned Nations Translation Group Inc. uses its innovative business platform to support reconciliation through economic development and bolstering the health of the many living languages of Canada's first peoples.

When he was 12 years old, Duane Mistaken Chief was placed in a Residential School, forbidden from speaking Blackfoot and cut off from the ways of his people. Two years later, something deep inside told him to run. He did, and never returned. "I was one of the lucky ones," he says. "I never understood this because everybody was brought back."

Back home in the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe) in Southern Alberta, he finally had the opportunity to speak Blackfoot and learn the traditional ways of his people. But that early experience of being forcefully cut off from his language had an impact. While he doesn't know the exact number of fluent Blackfoot speakers today, he is certain about this: "We're in trouble and that's why I'm working so hard to try and help my people learn the Blackfoot language."

As an accomplished Blackfoot scholar, teacher and social innovator (he helped develop the Indigenous Social Work degree program for the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium), Mistaken Chief is busier than ever.

But he always finds time to answer the many questions he receives about the Blackfoot language, and is even working on a dictionary.



"Let's say we lose a hundred words, it's more like we lose 10,000 words. And all the work I've done with [the Blackfoot language] has really taught me the value of the language, and I can't overstate that enough."

— Duane Mistaken Chief, Blackfoot scholar, teacher, social innovator and translator

Understanding how critical language is in ensuring culture, knowledge and identity are preserved and endure, RBC is committed to using its procurement power to support such efforts by choosing to work with Nations Translation Group Inc. (NTG) to translate this report into Blackfoot, by none other than Mistaken Chief.

"Inclusion of and respect for the Indigenous experience starts with recognizing that language is how this experience is conveyed, how history and perspective are shared and understood across generations," says Dale Sturges, national director, Indigenous financial services at RBC in Toronto. "We chose to work with NTG because we support Indigenous-owned businesses as part of our procurement commitment to reconciliation and honouring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 92. But NTG is more than a translation company. They are helping to ensure Indigenous languages are living languages that not only belong, but thrive, in the world today."

Scott Patles-Richardson, chair and majority shareholder of NTG, has seen first-hand the impacts of losing a language. "Indigenous languages don't have [those] same legislative

protections as say French or English,” he says. “So many of them are dying, including on my own reserve, which has only a handful of speakers left, all over the age of 65. In one blink of an eye, in one generation, the Mi’gmaq language could be extinguished in my home, Pabineau First Nation. That gave me a sense of purpose and urgency as we scaled up our operations to make space for Indigenous knowledge keepers of our languages.”

Today, NTG competes against the biggest publicly traded translation companies in the world. Staff work on some of the largest high-volume government contracts; they even translate Canada’s budget. “Yes, we happen to be Indigenous-owned, but firstly we are best-in-class,” says Patles. “We do translation 24/7 and translate millions of words every month, with dozens of experienced long-term staff, all of which give us a competitive edge.”

While the majority of NTG’s work is in official languages, they continue to build their Indigenous languages capabilities. “We translate into 95 different languages, with a network of over 25 Indigenous language speakers currently translating into over 15 Indigenous languages across Canada.” NTG is also translating this report into Inuktitut.

By running a successful Indigenized company, Patles believes he can also support economic development to work towards economic reconciliation and the health of Indigenous living languages. It’s why he restructured the company last year to include the Little Red River Cree Nation as a 49% equity partner. Proud to be fully First Nation owned and operated, the board includes Patles as chair and Jean La Rose, former Aboriginal Peoples Television Network CEO, and Murray Hales, former MNP LLP partner, as directors.

“Nobody’s going to wave a wand and go back to the way we were before,” he explains. “Rather, it’s important to figure out how to operate within the existing framework



“In one blink of an eye, in one generation, the Mi’gmaq language could be extinguished in my home, Pabineau First Nation. That gave me a sense of purpose and urgency as we scaled up our operations to make space for Indigenous knowledge keepers of our languages.”

— Scott Patles-Richardson, chair,
Nations Translation Group Inc.

to preserve and promote Indigenous languages while also participating as true partners in Canada’s economy. The backbone of this company is the volume of translation to French, and we aren’t going to stray far from those roots apart from supporting Indigenous language speakers by presenting a platform for them to have a voice.”

Back in Calgary, Mistaken Chief shares what he finds beautiful about the Blackfoot language: “It just contains so much.” He once co-developed a three-hour class focused on a single Blackfoot word. “I’d write the word on the board and pick it apart, what does this piece mean? That piece? And then I’d compare it to some other words, and then all of a sudden, things are revealed,” he adds. “Oh, so that really means this.”

For example, growing up he heard his father tell a story about going to a party when he was younger and never being asked to dance. He’d always end the story with “then we became pine trees.” Mistaken Chief never really understood what that meant until he began to study the phrase in Blackfoot and discovered its connection to another traditional teaching about a Blackfoot trickster. Too fussy in picking a partner, the trickster ends up alone and turns himself into a pine tree.

“So that’s just that one phrase, and there are many others. They often contain another story that tells us about the values that we have,” says Mistaken Chief. “So, let’s say we lose a hundred words, it’s more like we lose 10,000 words. And all the work I’ve done with it has really taught me the value of the language, and I can’t overstate that enough.”

Even the Elders are amazed once he shares his work with them because they were affected by the Residential Schools too. “We never knew what our potential was because of that huge gap from contact to 1940,” he says. “Working with the language helps me fill in that blank spot.”

There's an app for that



Mick Appaqaq
Photo credit: Arctic Eider Society

SIKU, an Inuit-created social media platform, keeps hunters safe and helps preserve language and culture. But unlike others, this app puts the control of traditional knowledge and valuable Arctic data in Inuit hands.

Mick Appaqaq's father used to take him out on the sea ice to hunt, but stopped when he was about five or six, concerned about unsafe ice. "From then on, I didn't really grow up out on the land," says the 28-year-old in Sanikiluaq, Nunavut.

In the last two years, he has seen the impacts of the climate crisis only accelerate as the Arctic is now the fastest warming place on Earth. "It's even harder now to tell where it's safe or unsafe to go on," he says.

The instability of the sea ice is even more worrisome given his job as an environmental technician for the Arctic Eider Society, an Inuit-driven non-profit that works to build capacity and self-determination in communities across Inuit Nunangat. In this role, he's on the ice, collecting data about it and water salinity,

while also monitoring wildlife. It's a job that's made a little easier — and safer — with an Inuit-created app called SIKU.

To keep safe, Inuit hunters have long relied on harpoons and hunting stories of the day. Stories were traditionally shared by word-of-mouth, then on the radio and TV and, more recently, on various social media platforms. But now there's SIKU, a single mobile app and web platform launched in December 2019 by the Arctic Eider Society. "Over the past two years, I've been able to follow some Elders with traditional knowledge of hunting and sea ice on the SIKU app," says Appaqaq.

SIKU was co-developed with Inuit youth from communities across the North. Just like any other social media platform, SIKU users first create profiles on the free app. From there, depending on their privacy settings, they can post hunting and fishing stories, publish their routes, upload images and videos along with observations in real-time, or when they return home.

These stories and observations are supported with weather and safety services, including tide and marine forecasts and satellite imagery, enabling hunters to share up-to-the-minute changing and dangerous conditions. SIKU also provides taggable profiles for Arctic wildlife, sea ice and traditional place names in multiple dialects of Inuktitut, helping to preserve and transfer Indigenous knowledge and language to future generations.

Most important, SIKU is designed to be a safe space to share. With the advent of climate change, the real-time observations being posted by Inuit are more valuable than ever to scientists everywhere. However, scientists have long conducted research on Inuit, wildlife and the environment without the involvement, or consideration, of the local people and communities. "This type of exploitive relationship must end," Natan Obed of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami wrote in his introduction to the pivotal National Inuit Strategy on Research (NISR) in 2018.

Joel Heath, executive director of the Arctic Eider Society, says SIKU was designed to provide a tool for Inuit hunters, for communities seeking to run projects as well as for researchers to better implement the NISR's guidelines around

Inuit engagement in all aspects of research by, and for, the North. With SIKU, Inuit users retain full ownership, access and control over what they post including how that information is shared. This is how SIKU helps carve new pathways for how Inuit and science can work together, by putting Indigenous rights first.

He also emphasizes the distinction between SIKU and citizen science. "That implies it's a platform that is about giving your data to scientists," says Heath, who previously worked in academics and holds a PhD in interdisciplinary biology. "SIKU is about Inuit owning their own data and about facilitating self-determination in research. And then they can choose to share it with scientists, or not."

“SIKU is about Inuit owning their own data and about facilitating self-determination in research. And then they can choose to share it with scientists, or not.”

— Joel Heath, executive director,
Arctic Eider Society

Many Inuit are eager to play a leading role in research. With the pandemic travel restrictions, scientists in the South have been unable to come to the North, creating opportunities for Inuit-led research. One Inuit-led protected-areas project used SIKU to crowdsource wildlife images and observations from Elders, other adults and youth documenting their hunting trips and the fish they were catching, and where.

RBC supports SIKU through a two-year, \$500,000 impact gift through the RBC Tech for Nature program. "We're thrilled to be working alongside Arctic Eider Society on SIKU, the first social media app and web platform by and for Inuit," said Karine Bélanger-Beaudry, regional director, marketing and citizenship, RBC Royal Bank in Montreal. "We recognize and appreciate the power of combining traditional knowledge of Elders with Indigenous innovation to create a unique, effective and scalable technological solution to some of the most pressing environmental issues of our time."

While focused on Canada now, the app is designed to scale. Already, there are more than 6,000 users in the SIKU community, with more experienced hunters proving to be popular, especially with younger hunters like Appaqaq.

"As someone who grew up speaking Inuktitut, I'm very proud that the app was named SIKU, which means 'sea ice,'" he says. SIKU is just one of the many words passed down by the Elders since time immemorial. "This is how we learn this, through that kind of transferring of knowledge; it has been around for generations. And that is the kind of thing that I enjoy, to see other young people taking part on SIKU."



Sharing in the excitement of the gifted shirts by Erin Brillion (who is part of the LIFT Circle) from Totem Design House

Uplifting one another

At a crucial time during the pandemic, RBC supported the LIFT Circle, a group that provides a safe, supportive space for Indigenous women to build their own businesses while helping other Indigenous entrepreneurs survive and thrive across Canada.

Melissa Hardy-Giles founded her innovation company, ORIGIN, 14 years ago with the vision to help Indigenous people embrace their talents and secure their rightful seat at the economic table.

Given her mission, it was easy for her to say yes to the opportunity to be one of the first business owners to join the LIFT Circle, a supportive space for Indigenous women entrepreneurs to learn from each other, supported by RBC.

Hardy-Giles' own chosen journey as an Indigenous woman entrepreneur began with the development of a life-skills workshop for Indigenous youth to discover their true gifts so there would be no more “putting our people into square holes when we’re circles,” says the member of Red Rock Indian Band near Nipigon, Ont. From there, Hardy-Giles equipped a trailer with heavy-machinery simulators, connecting youth with an aptitude for the machines to good jobs.

ORIGIN's next pivot was to virtual reality (VR), trading the simulator for an Oculus headset loaded with an ever-growing library of immersive career and Indigenous cultural

experiences, now used in over 1,100 schools. Seeing the benefits of a virtual world — and ORIGIN's mission of economic reconciliation — the entrepreneur created an Indigenous cultural library that allows viewers to build their understanding of Indigenous cultures through self-directed immersive experiences, such as exploring water teachings from a canoe with a Knowledge Keeper.

As more companies seek diversity and inclusivity tools, demand for the cultural library for employees is also taking off. “My goal is to have every Indigenous community across Canada spotlighted in one way, shape or form, just to show the diversity within Indigenous culture,” says Hardy-Giles from Thunder Bay, Ont.

With all this business experience, Hardy-Giles knew she could be a valuable mentor to others. So, when Teara Fraser, Métis pilot and Iskeww Air's founder and lead executive officer, called to invite her to participate in LIFT Circle (Circle), a group Fraser started as part of the not-for-profit Indigenous LIFT Collective, she jumped at the opportunity. The Circle was launched specifically to support Indigenous women building businesses during COVID-19 and beyond.

However, with so much already on her own plate, Fraser knew she needed assistance to run the Circle. Knowing how supportive RBC is of Indigenous entrepreneurs, she asked if the bank could help. “At a very, very critical time for the LIFT Circle, RBC stepped up with a financial gift,” she says. “We are super grateful and are very much in more conversation about how we deepen this relationship and co-create the conditions for Indigenous women entrepreneurs to thrive.”

To Tracy Antoine, vice-president, commercial financial services, Indigenous markets, B.C. region, the decision to support the LIFT Circle, especially during the challenging pandemic, just made sense. “The LIFT Circle embodies how, now more than ever, it’s about we and not just me,” she says. “This incredible collective is empowering female entrepreneurs to challenge the status quo of business through the creation of a united front, and we at RBC could not be prouder to support this remarkable group of such impactful individuals.”

“As Indigenous women, we just naturally come together and work well together as a collective. We know that when we work together, we can all do better together.”

— Vanessa Lesperance, LIFT Circle lead

For Hardy-Giles, who has been running a business for more than a decade, the Circle has been an extraordinary experience. “I invite every Indigenous woman entrepreneur I come across to join the LIFT Circle,” she says. “It’s just this huge support.”

Fueled by the isolation many have felt during the pandemic, the Circle expanded rapidly and now holds two virtual meetings per week with women from across Canada. Membership is free for any Indigenous entrepreneur who identifies as a woman. Monthly learning sessions on topics such as procurement and media further build skills. Plus, members are included in a public directory that already features more than 250 Indigenous women-owned businesses.

The power of the collective came into full force again when an emerging clothing designer’s sewing machine broke down. Her Circle peers stepped up, thanks to the Three Sisters Garden Fund, with enough funds to repair the sewing machine, and purchase a second for backup and expansion.

Indeed, the Circle is not just about doing business together, but supporting the well-being of the whole person running the business too. A year into the pandemic,

Hardy-Giles began feeling way off and did not understand why. “My company is booming, my family’s great. Everyone’s safe. But I was in a slump. I told my husband who was worried that I just felt numb,” she says. “I didn’t want to do anything.” Worse, she felt “really silly,” knowing the ways other entrepreneurs were suffering due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Taking a chance, Hardy-Giles shared what was going on with her during a weekly Circle meeting, and was surprised when so many others, in turn, gave voice to their own stories of pandemic-related mental health challenges. “It was such validation and really helped me through it,” she says. “I now know I can message the LIFT Circle anytime and say, ‘Okay, I need to talk to someone right now,’ and someone will listen. It’s amazing.”

Entrepreneurship and leadership can be lonely at the best of times, but with LIFT, it does not have to be, says Vanessa Lesperance, LIFT Circle lead, from the LIFT office at Iskwew Air’s head office in Richmond, B.C. “These virtual circles are a beautiful place to be heard and seen, and to come and fill your cup and be in community with other Indigenous women,” she says.

It has been only a few months, but Lesperance loves how motivated the LIFT Circle entrepreneurs are to “decolonize” business by challenging existing models with their quadruple bottom-line focus of profits and people, planet and purpose. “As Indigenous women, we just naturally come together and work well together as a collective,” she adds. “We know that when we work together, we can all do better together.”

This focus on adaptation, together, is no surprise to the Circle’s founder. “Indigenous innovation is different than Silicon Valley innovation,” Fraser says. “This is about how do we innovate to create a better future for the next seven generations? How do we innovate for a better future? How do we create a better future for everyone?”



Exploring futures with ORIGIN's immersive VR career library



Youth ice fishing during a Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie session
Photo credit: Cougar Kirby

‘We learn together’

An innovative Mohawk language and culture learning program created for, and by, Kahnawá:ke youth in Quebec transforms intergenerational trauma into intergenerational healing.

Four years ago, Brooke Splicer moved to Kahnawá:ke (pronounced Gah-na-wa-gay), a Mohawk Nation on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence River in Quebec, after a lifetime stateside. “Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, I had identity issues that I didn’t understand, and then I realized it was because I carried this trauma with me — this shame and guilt,” says the 33-year-old Splicer. “We speak English. I don’t know my language, and I should, right? And you have to accept that it’s not your fault.”

Splicer joined her colleagues, Cougar Kirby, Ohontsakehte Montour and Jess Lazare, on a recent Zoom call to talk about why and how they are leading change in Kanien’kehá:ka with the creation of *Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie* [pronounced Skut-nay Yoon-gwa-weh-yum-dayh-da-oon-ha-jay], which means “we learn together.” The program provides opportunities for youth to come together to learn *Kanien’kehá:ka* (Mohawk people) language and culture in a safe and comfortable environment.

Together, they co-launched Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie in late 2019

with support from a \$15,000 RBC Future Launch Community Challenge grant through the Foundation of Greater Montreal, in partnership with Community Foundations of Canada. Supported by the RBC Foundation, the Challenge is a new social impact program to empower hundreds of inspiring initiatives led by youths in small- and mid-sized communities nationwide. It brings youth to the decision-making table to learn new skills, gain experience and build relationships — helping them prepare for the future of work.

“We are proud to be a partner of the Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie program,” says Stephanie D. Pinsonnault, manager, donations and community investment, RBC, Quebec. “The RBC Future Launch Community Challenge gave Kahnawá:ke youth the platform to express just how important preserving language and tradition is to their health and future. We commend them for this brilliant project that will help strengthen the communities of tomorrow.”

Back on Zoom, 24-year-old Kirby, who helps run Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie programming, shares his experience with cultural disconnection. The lacrosse player moved to Kahnawá:ke at age 13 after a lifetime in Victoria, B.C. “My father’s family is from Kahnawá:ke, so when I moved here, I had very little knowledge of the Kanien’kehá:ka lifestyle, which felt very ironic as a lacrosse player. I mean, lacrosse was created by the Haudenosaunee,” he says. “For me, I think that’s where the shame kind of came from. People would always ask me so many questions, like ‘How do you say lacrosse in your language?’ and ‘What does it mean to you?’ And there was so much guilt, I guess, in not understanding my own culture.”

For 25-year-old Montour, “it all comes down to intergenerational trauma.” His grandfather is fluent in Mohawk, but because of colonial interference, he was never taught the language growing up either. Wanting to be closer to his grandfather, Montour is now learning the language and is paying it forward by teaching Kahnawá:ke youth through Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie.

Lazare, 27, believes Kahnawá:ke’s history with missionaries, Indian agents and colonization in general has had a deep effect on identity and culture throughout Kahnawá:ke. “We were all supposed to be turned toward ‘the Church,’ and away from traditional ceremonies,” she says on the call. “It was a long time before we were actually allowed to conduct our ceremonies in our own community. People were conducting ceremonies in secret. This history definitely has had an intergenerational impact on our youth, leading to a complexity of social issues.”

While older generations seem to be okay with the status quo, the up-and-coming generation, not so much. “The youth are vocalizing, ‘No, it’s not fine. We can’t keep going like this.’ It’s about trying to break that mould that was set for us by colonization, and that then our parents kind of filled it, and attempted to step out of it, but then they got snapped right back in,” she adds. “And for us, we’re saying, ‘Nope, we’re breaking that mould. We’re cracking it in half, and it’s no longer going to define us. It’s no longer going to be how we fit into this world.’”

A key feature of Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie is that it was co-created by participating youth. “For me, it’s not about doing it for youth, it’s doing it with them,” says Lazare. “Youth are not just wanting to be heard, they want to lead.”

“Kanien’kehá:ka is a living language, so there’s always the possibility that the language could die ... [the youth] are starting to realize that they have the power to make language a priority in their community.”

— Ohontsakehte Montour, co-creator of Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie

Montour picks up here, saying young people are realizing that it is up to them to break the cycle of colonialism, by learning their language and culture, to carry it forward for the benefit of future generations. “Kanien’kehá:ka is a living language, so there’s always the possibility that the language could die,” he says. “But the reality is, a lot of the Elders are dying. The youth are seeing their grandparent pass. But they are starting to realize that they have the power to make language a priority in their community.”

This is one of the reasons Montour also chose to become fluent in Mohawk and is now teaching it to other youth through Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie. “In a lot of these language and culture spaces, the youth get left behind, whether it’s because it is not relatable content, or that they don’t feel like they can go to the longhouse or join a two-year program,” he explains. “So, I think what is unique and innovative about what we’re doing is that we’re learning through fun activities. This way, they can see how you could incorporate the language into your everyday life. It is not some detached thing. It’s who we are. It’s a living language.”

“[W]e’re breaking that mould. We’re cracking it in half, and it’s no longer going to define us. It’s no longer going to be how we fit into this world.”

— Jess Lazare, co-creator of Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie

Surprisingly, in a time of social everything, the youth who helped create Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie say they feel bored online. They want to get off their phones and learn language and traditional skills during fun activities on the land, such as ice fishing, tree tapping and winter medicine walks, alongside peers. These safe and comfortable environments are critical to success, and making the decision to start requires bravery.

“For young people who don’t know our language, they haven’t stepped foot into a longhouse, or know little about our ceremonies ... it’s a huge step to finally say, ‘Okay, I’m going to start learning,’” adds Splicer. “Because even if you don’t realize that you have that shame and that guilt, that is that rough or hard step that you need to overcome. But once you overcome it, it’s amazing.”

For Splicer, the innovation of Skátne lonkwawientehtaonhatie is a going back to the way her people used to do things. “We used to have this intergenerational collaboration, and we don’t see that often. But it is amazing how the courage of these young people is rubbing off on the adults,” she says. One older woman spoke of how her grandson’s newfound interest in learning the Kanien’kehá:ka ways has inspired her to learn the language too; now her grandson has begun teaching her.

“It’s really, really cool because our parents, sometimes they don’t understand that they’re holding that shame and guilt too,” says Splicer at the end of the call. “Like my mother, she’s trying to learn more Kanien’kehá:ka now because me and my four-year-old daughter speak so much. So, it’s amazing, it’s like intergenerational trauma but reversed with healing.”

Progress Report

RBC has pledged to create long-term, sustainable ways of supporting Indigenous economies, peoples and communities. Outlined below is a small selection of examples that illustrate how we upheld this commitment in the past year.

Economy



Schools, community and cultural centres

\$6,763,614

Access to Capital and Financial Services

Early childhood education complex, Manitoba

Roads, water and power generation

\$2,030,000

Water treatment centre, Saskatchewan

Housing

\$8,310,160

Housing project, British Columbia

People



Hiring programs

376

Employment and Education

Indigenous interns hired as part of the Indigenous Student Internship Program

Internships and scholarships

39

New undergraduates who have participated in the two-year Indigenous Peoples Development Program (IPDP) since 2017

Summer student internship program

48

Indigenous students who participated in the 2021 summer student internship program

Community



Youth

\$4,214,130

Social Impact and Procurement

Amount of donations provided by RBC Foundation to organizations that design, develop and implement programs to benefit Indigenous communities in four priority areas — youth, arts and culture, environment, and mental health.

Arts and culture

\$776,500

Environment

\$1,136,000

Administration buildings

\$4,000,000

Governance building, Manitoba

Business, construction, infrastructure financing

\$5,000,000

Gaming and retail construction, Nova Scotia

Economic development

\$22,000,000

Economic development, Alberta

Youth engagement

\$1,700,000

Awarded to date to First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth as part of the RBC Indigenous Student Awards Program

Employee engagement

87%

Measure of engagement from Indigenous employees, at the time of the last survey, exceeding Willis Towers Watson's benchmark of 82%

Education

\$100,000

Donated to Yukon University's mental health and wellness program

Mental health

\$280,000

Sponsorships

\$105,000

Spent to support "Every Child Matters" — RBC's partnership with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

Procurement

\$6,700,000

Spent on Indigenous suppliers in 2020

RBC Timeline



1910

Royal Bank's merger partner, the Union Bank of Canada, opens a branch in the Hudson's Bay trading post village of Hazelton, B.C. The branch is eventually relocated to Hagwilget First Nation in 1997.

1969

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

1990

RBC Royal Eagles, an Indigenous-focused employee resource group, is established at Royal Bank to enhance cultural awareness and support networking, mentoring, recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees.

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, N.W.T. (now Iqaluit, Nunavut).

1977

Royal Bank supports the 1978 Arctic Winter Games held in Hay River, N.W.T.

1992

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

1947

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

1973

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

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.



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.

2008

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

2009

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

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.

2014

RBC proudly sponsors the 2014 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) in Regina, Sask., 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.

2015

RBC Foundation becomes a signatory to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Declaration of Action.

2011

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



2020

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

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.



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First Nations RBC Royal Bank Commercial Banking Centre Locations

Fort William First Nation, Ontario
Muskeg Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan
Swan Lake First Nation, Manitoba

First Nations RBC Royal Bank Branch Locations

Hagwilget First Nation, British Columbia
Westbank First Nation, British Columbia
Tzeachten First Nation, British Columbia
Cross Lake First Nation, Manitoba
Norway House Cree Nation, Manitoba
Peguis First Nation, Manitoba
Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario
Nation Huronne-Wendat, Quebec

North of 60° RBC Royal Bank Branch Locations

Whitehorse, Yukon
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Hay River, Northwest Territories
Cambridge Bay, Nunavut
Rankin Inlet, Nunavut
Iqaluit, Nunavut

RBC Royal Bank Agency Banking Outlets

Whitefish Lake First Nation 128, Alberta
Wikwemikong First Nation, Ontario
Webequie First Nation, Ontario
EPLS Home Hardware Building Centre –
Arviat, Nunavut
Uqurmiut Centre for Arts & Crafts,
Pangnirtung, Nunavut
West Baffin Co-Operative – Kinngait,
Nunavut



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