

# A Chosen Journey

RBC Indigenous Partnership Report 2020





Illustration by Patrick Hunter

# A Chosen Journey

## RBC Indigenous Partnership Report 2020

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

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**For more than 25 years**, RBC has been committed to the reconciliation journey, specifically in the last few years while honouring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 92 – to work with Indigenous Peoples to create long-term, sustainable economic development, employment, social impact and procurement opportunities.

We fully believe the decisions we make today, in creating a world of mutual respect, sustainability and shared values, has a direct impact not only for our generation, but for the generations to come.

Throughout the pages of this year's *A Chosen Journey* report are stories of Indigenous women and girls sharing their wisdom, strength and pride in their heritage and culture, as they reclaim their voices and become leaders of today and tomorrow.



**Translation of this publication into Inuktitut and Cree** is provided by Nations Translation Group Inc./Groupe de Traduction des Nations Inc. (NTG/GTN), a proud First Nation-owned corporation. NTG is a leader in the field of translation, with 28 years' experience in providing translation services in over 93 languages, 20 of which are Indigenous. We are proud to partner with NTG for the translation of this year's *A Chosen Journey*.

#### **The front cover of this report features**

a young Métis woman named Danitra Marchand from Duck Lake, Sask., photographed by Tenille K Campbell a Dene/Métis author and photographer from English River First Nation, Sask., the artist behind sweetmoon photography and the co-creator of tea & bannock.

“So often, one of the main narratives about us is our struggle, which is important, but there's also joy, strength, intelligence, and kinship. There's so many other aspects of being an Indigenous woman other than just surviving,” said Campbell.

The stories in this edition of *A Chosen Journey* celebrate the spirit of Indigenous women like Tenille, recognize their lived experiences and honour the many ways they are healing, helping and thriving.



**Cover photo by  
Tenille K Campbell**

@sweetmoonphotography

A letter  
from **Dave**  
**McKay**  
President and CEO



At RBC, we have a long history of partnering with Indigenous communities. For more than a decade, this publication, *A Chosen Journey*, has documented some of the incredible success stories resulting from this partnership.

The hardships and challenges Indigenous people face is an undeniable truth of our collective history in Canada. Now, more than ever, Indigenous people are boldly confronting these challenges with resilience and fortitude, leading to new, inspiring stories of hope and success.

In this year's edition, we're showcasing stories of proud, entrepreneurial Indigenous women. These inspiring leaders are helping foster sustainable communities, driving economic growth and innovation, and creating positive change on critical issues throughout the country, including mental health, gender-based violence and youth skills development.

These are such important stories to be told. Alongside thousands of RBC colleagues, I'm proud to share them with you. They remind us of the importance of continuing forward on our journey toward full and meaningful reconciliation.

This includes economic reconciliation.

Recent data from The National Indigenous Economic Development Board suggests that Canada's Indigenous economy has the potential to reach \$100 billion in the next five years – more than triple its current size. It's clear Indigenous economic development is not only an integral component of reconciliation, but also an important driver of Canada's future economic prosperity.

As Canada works toward economic recovery this year, it is critical we take an inclusive approach to how this is achieved. Indigenous business owners and entrepreneurs in Canada will be vital to this effort.

At a time when it's never been more important, we will continue to build a bank that supports the strength and prosperity of Indigenous nations. Please join me in this work and share the important stories in this report with your friends and colleagues.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave McKay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

 I've been advising and collaborating with RBC on its reconciliation commitment to honour the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action for the past 12 years. In my capacity as Special Advisor, I have worked to create the understanding that reconciliation is a journey we must choose to embark on together. We each have a part to play if we wish to make progress in creating the society to which we all aspire, to create prosperity, eliminate poverty and create a safe world not only for our generation, but for generations to come. I am proud to be associated with RBC because they are truly making a difference.

**“There is so much joy in Native culture,  
but so much poverty.”**

— Buffy St. Marie, singer-songwriter and musician

This year's edition of *A Chosen Journey* focuses on Indigenous women. Indigenous women and girls are, and always have been, the foundation of their communities. Their strength, their joy and their ability to lift up our society are described in this edition. Their stories offer healing and shine a light on what the cultural, social and economic fabric of this land could look like if we all work together to achieve the 94 Calls to Action.

With the release of The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, we read heartbreaking stories of violence and loss. Poverty forces many Indigenous women onto the streets, to remain in abusive relationships, and to forgo their own careers to protect their children from harm.

All of the inquiries – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Connie Jacobs Inquiry and the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – make it very clear that poverty is the underlying reason for the violence and abuse of Indigenous women.

So the powerful stories of resilience and solidarity in this edition show us a way forward and help us deal with grief. They are important for us to share because not only do they tell us of the many achievements of Indigenous women in the face of great adversity, they allow us to imagine what could be achieved if more Indigenous women had a better chance.

Now, more than ever, we must stand strong together, support our sisters, mothers and grandmothers, and be united in a singular message of hope and healing.

I am honoured to continue on as a Special Advisor to RBC, working together with a shared goal of making a positive difference not only for Indigenous women and girls, but for all Indigenous Peoples and for Canada as a whole.



# A letter from Phil Fontaine

Special Advisor, RBC Indigenous Financial Services



# Northern options

World-renowned for its beauty, fish and local artisans, one thing the Inuit community of Pangnirtung needed was access to basic banking services. Through local partnerships, Pang's new RBC Royal Bank agency empowers community members and businesses with more choice.



## Nancy Veevee loves fish – and fishing.

Arctic char is a favourite to fish for on her days off in the waters around Pangnirtung (nicknamed “Pang”), an Inuit hamlet in Nunavut.

Fish is also her livelihood. She began trimming arctic char and turbot at the local fish processing plant 23 years ago, and today is one of Pangnirtung Fisheries Ltd.’s supervisors.

It’s a good living that has enabled Veevee to raise a child and stay in her community of about 1,700 people. But when those Pang Fisheries paycheques come, she can only cash them at one of three places in town, usually for a flat fee or a percentage of the amount.



Like many, she is looking forward to trying the new option in Pang: an RBC banking outlet, called an agency. Unlike a regular bank branch, an agency is a partnership between RBC and a commercial client, who hosts the bank on the site of their business. Agency employees are hired from the community.

RBC’s history of bringing banking services to Inuit, Métis and First Nation communities began in 1910 when it opened a branch at the Hudson’s Bay trading post in Hazelton, B.C., now located on Hagwilget First Nation. More than a century later, there are numerous RBC commercial centres, branches and agency locations in Indigenous communities throughout Canada, with more being added every year.

For example, in addition to the three existing RBC branches in Nunavut, the bank committed to three new agency banks by 2021. The first opened its doors in Arviat, an Inuit hamlet in the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut.

RBC partnered with the Nunavut Development Corporation (NDC) and a local business, the Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts, to open the second RBC Royal Bank agency outlet (pictured at centre) on Baffin Island in Pang. Last October, Geetee Maniapik, a local Elder and secretary/treasurer of Uqqurmiut Centre’s board, offered a blessing at the opening celebration before cutting the hand-woven blue and yellow ribbon, while local children snacked on mikku (dried caribou).

Rony Gravelines, RBC regional director, north of 60°, commercial financial services also attended the opening ceremony and says the agency in Pang – and others like it – are critical to ensuring Inuit communities have local access to equal opportunities. “We’re becoming a cashless society in the south,” says Gravelines, “But up here in the North, cash is king and people still need a place to cash and deposit their cheques.”

Elena Akpalialuk, the general manager of the Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts & Crafts, where the agency is located, couldn’t agree more and says the relationship only creates choice for the community’s members. They can open a bank account, get a new bank card, apply for a loan and get financial advice

all in one place. Previously, to access such basic banking services, community members would need to take an hour-long flight to the nearest city at a cost of \$500-\$600 each way. Now, with the agency being open every day, members can get what they want and need right at home – and save money too.

Todd Johnson, the general manager of Pangnirtung Fisheries, an RBC business banking client that’s working on migrating the company’s payroll over to direct deposit with the agency, understands it’s still, for many, “a new concept” compared to what they’re used to.

However, Johnson’s confident his staff and partners will appreciate the convenience, and savings, once they get more familiar with all that the agency has to offer, and believes they’ll find that RBC is fair. “The agency is good for everybody,” he says. “We’ve been banking with RBC since our inception, and they’ve definitely supported our growth efforts.”

# Pow Wow Pitch



Sunshine Tenasco's visionary Dragons' Den-style competition empowers Indigenous entrepreneurs to effect positive changes in their communities, one business at a time.





### Sunshine Tenasco has dreams

– and the passion to realize them all – not unlike the character in her first children’s book, *Nibi’s Water Song*.

Its main character, Nibi, is an Anishinabeg girl who uses determination, teamwork and perseverance to bring clean water to her community.

Like Nibi, Tenasco’s concern about the lack of clean drinking water at home in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation in Quebec has fueled her own determination to make a difference; her community has gone without clean drinking water for 15 years.

This is why Tenasco founded HerBraids, a social enterprise that sells hand-crafted beaded pendant necklaces online and conducts workshops to advance conversations about Indigenous clean water issues.

But it was a moment on *Dragons’ Den*, the reality TV show where everyday people pitch their business ideas to potential investors, that solidified her passion for Indigenous-led entrepreneurialism. She took a chance in the Den with another business idea (baby moccasins) and signed up two investors, who also became valuable mentors. “What *Dragons’ Den* did for me,” she says. “I wanted to do for other people because it’s so freaking empowering.”

Being a doer, not a dreamer, Tenasco created Pow Wow Pitch, a *Dragons’ Den*-style competition for Indigenous entrepreneurs held each year during the Summer Solstice Festival in Ottawa, Ont.

It works like this: 30 entrepreneurs each get one minute to pitch their business idea to a panel of judges, who select 10 finalists to continue to the final round.

Before facing the judging panel again, finalists work one-on-one with a business mentor to refine their business proposition in the hopes of being one of three entrepreneurs to win a \$5,000 prize donated by RBC.

“It sounds so cliché,” says the Pow Wow Pitch CEO, “but without the support of RBC, people wouldn’t have prizes, and therefore Pow Wow Pitch wouldn’t exist, so their support is super appreciated and important.” Now in its fifth year, the event, which started in Ottawa, is inspiring a movement to host more Pow Wow Pitches across Canada.

But RBC’s support goes beyond funds with many volunteers from the bank, including Carrie Batt, vice-president, business markets for RBC, who serves as one of the judges. “I put up my hand because over my 30 years with RBC, I’ve always worked with small businesses or commercial clients,” says Batt. “I’m very experienced in listening to, and supporting, entrepreneurs.”

Batt’s grandmother was a member of what is now called the Animakee Wa Zhing 37 First Nation in Northwestern Ontario. She proudly serves as executive champion for the RBC Royal Eagles, an Indigenous-focused employee resource group.

Once the finalists are selected, they have just mere hours to work with their chosen business mentors, who include volunteers from RBC, to refine their final pitches. “The impact this mentorship has on the participants is incredible,” says Batt.

The volunteer judge finds it inspiring to meet the entrepreneurs, who want nothing more than to be successful so they can give back to their First Nation and Métis communities through job creation and more. “That’s something that’s really resonated with me over time,” the RBC executive says. “They’re not waiting for someone else to do it for them.”

Dakota Brant and her twin sister, Jesse, from Six Nations of the Grand River in southwestern Ontario are another great example of impact entrepreneurialism. Working on their jewelry and accessories-manufacturing business, Sapling & Flint, the Mohawk twins entered the Pow Wow Pitch in 2016 and didn’t win. Undeterred, they refined their pitch and entered again in 2018 – this time earning a finalist spot, which enabled them to work with their chosen mentor, an RBC commercial account manager, to refine their final pitch, which won.

The Six Nations twins (pictured above left) deposited the \$5,000 cheque into their small business account at the RBC branch in the town of Ohsweken. The funds enabled the entrepreneurs to invest in better photography equipment and a crisper, cleaner, more functional website that is attracting global attention – and orders. Sapling & Flint sales are blowing up, and they are working on plans to enter the wholesale market.

Furthermore, they are on track to creating dozens of new jobs in their Mohawk community. “I don’t want to make myself wealthy by creating opportunities on another continent,” Brant explains from her retail store in Ohsweken. “I want to be successful and wealthy because I made jobs for my people. I also don’t want to have to move to a city to be an entrepreneur. I want to live here, and for my children to be raised here, and to be fluent in Mohawk and attend our ceremonies. E-commerce is making that happen.”

Brant especially values the support she has received from the founder of Pow Wow Pitch. “Sunshine [Tenasco] has been incredibly supportive of me as an entrepreneur, even before I won it,” she explains. “It seems like entrepreneurship is a real passion for her, and it’s inspiring. She’s very much become the face supporting Indigenous women entrepreneurs in this country. She saw a void in entrepreneurship for Indigenous people and she decided to fill it. That’s what Pow Wow Pitch is.”

# A girl can be a leader

With support from RBC Future Launch, Minerva BC is expanding its innovative Learning to Lead program to support grade 11 girls in becoming the leaders of tomorrow.



**Many told Devan Williams straight to her face she would never make it.**

But one woman pushed her buttons hard when she said that statistically, as an Indigenous person, Williams would not graduate from high school, never mind college; words that didn't define her. "I was like, 'Well, I'm about to prove you wrong lady,'" says Williams – and she did.

A proud member of the Squamish Nation in BC, she not only graduated from high school, she is finishing her second diploma and working toward a degree in business administration from Capilano University. The full-time client intake administration coordinator for the Stitsma Career Centre on Squamish Nation sits on several boards including one organization focused on suicide prevention.

A passionate soccer coach, Williams also plays on a soccer team with two world tours under its belt and just joined the board of the Native Indian Football Association (NIFA).

Oh, and did we mention she was one of eight Squamish Nation members participating in the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver Games?

"Don't ever let anybody tell you, you can't do something or try and take your dreams away from you," she says. "Just use that as encouragement, and then just smile back, wave and say, 'Hi. Look at what I did. I'm here.'"

Besides her own determination and hard work, Williams is grateful to the female leaders who believed in her. "I've been very lucky to have amazing mentors in my life," she says. This is why Williams has mentored grade 11 girls taking part in the three-day Learning to Lead program – not once, but twice.

While there is an upcoming generation of young women who have the ambition, optimism and desire to change the world, research reveals gender biases, stereotyping and inequality



**“I’d like to be going into schools and showing these Indigenous students they are worthy of doing something greater for this world ... not just thinking they’re not good enough.”**

– Danica Dixon, 20,  
Sechelt First Nation member & Learning to Lead alumni

will continue to be a challenge for them for generations to come. Minerva BC, a non-profit with a vision of women helping women, created Learning to Lead in 2015 to help girls prepare to close this gap.

Each year, a new group of 50 girls in grade 11 from every corner of B.C. gather at the University of British Columbia for a weekend, all expenses paid, alongside 40 volunteer mentors. While not Indigenous focused, Learning to Lead places a priority on the inclusion of Métis and First Nation teens.

“We work hard to try to find young women who maybe don’t see themselves as a leader, maybe don’t even like the word ‘leadership,’” says Tina Strehlke, Minerva’s CEO. “Young women who are maybe just flying under the radar and don’t necessarily have as many of these types of opportunities.”

Four years ago, Danica Dixon, a member of the Sechelt First Nation who lives in North Vancouver was nominated to attend. “Probably one of the biggest takeaways of the weekend for me was that I can be a leader, even if I don’t believe in myself, and that a girl can do it,” she says. “A girl can become a leader.”

Dixon is now 20 years old, and is just about to graduate from Capilano University with an education assistant degree. “I absolutely love it,” she says. “I actually can’t wait to get out of bed in the morning.”

In a few years, she hopes to hit the books again, going back to school to become an Aboriginal support worker. “I’d like to be

going into schools and showing these Indigenous students they are worthy of doing something greater for this world,” she hesitates before speaking her truth, “not just thinking they’re not good enough.”

Such outcomes are why RBC made a \$225,000 commitment to Minerva BC over three years starting in 2019. “It’s a multi-year gift because they’re expanding the Learning to Lead program beyond the Lower Mainland, which we’re happy about,” says Carmen Ryujin, manager, citizenship and social impact, B.C. region, RBC. “They’ve actually started with Prince George already, and now they’re moving to Kamloops and on to North Vancouver Island.”

In fact, with RBC’s gift, within the span of two years, the program will be able to triple the number of girls impacted annually – from 50 to 150.

In addition to funding, RBC also provides volunteers. “We have a wait list of staff who want to be one of the three mentors from RBC that get to go on that weekend,” says Ryujin.

Strehlke says that RBC’s funding programs for Indigenous girls, as part of RBC Future Launch, a \$500 million commitment over 10 years to empower the youth of today for the jobs of tomorrow, is valuable. “It’s remarkable for a corporation to be stepping into that space in that way because it has such a ripple effect on how we think about education and investing in our youth,” she says.

For Tamara Gregg, Learning to Lead is bigger than employment; it is about realizing your full potential as a human being. The member of the Lusilyoo Clan of Nak’azdli Whut’en volunteered as a speaker and mentor at Learning to Lead in Prince George, B.C. last year.

Gregg remembers one girl at Learning to Lead who broke through her fear of public speaking during the event to ask a question in front of everyone. “I think a lot of us are unable to find our voice for a long time,” Gregg says. “But our worst fears are often minor once we’re given the opportunity to speak about them and I think that’s what is so wonderful about Minerva.”



**RBC Future Launch**

**MINERVA**

# Spirit of the drum

An outdoor drum circle hosted by an RBC branch in Sudbury, Ont. is but one example of how RBC employees like Faith Salmaso are demonstrating their commitment to reconciliation by co-creating safe spaces for their community, colleagues and clients to share and learn.

 Last year, RBC commissioned Patrick Hunter, a Two-Spirit, Ojibwe, Woodland artist from Red Lake, Ont., to create a piece of art for the cover of the 2019 edition of *A Chosen Journey*. His striking painting of a moose in water near a forest was blown up for select RBC branches in advance of National Indigenous People’s Day (NIPD).

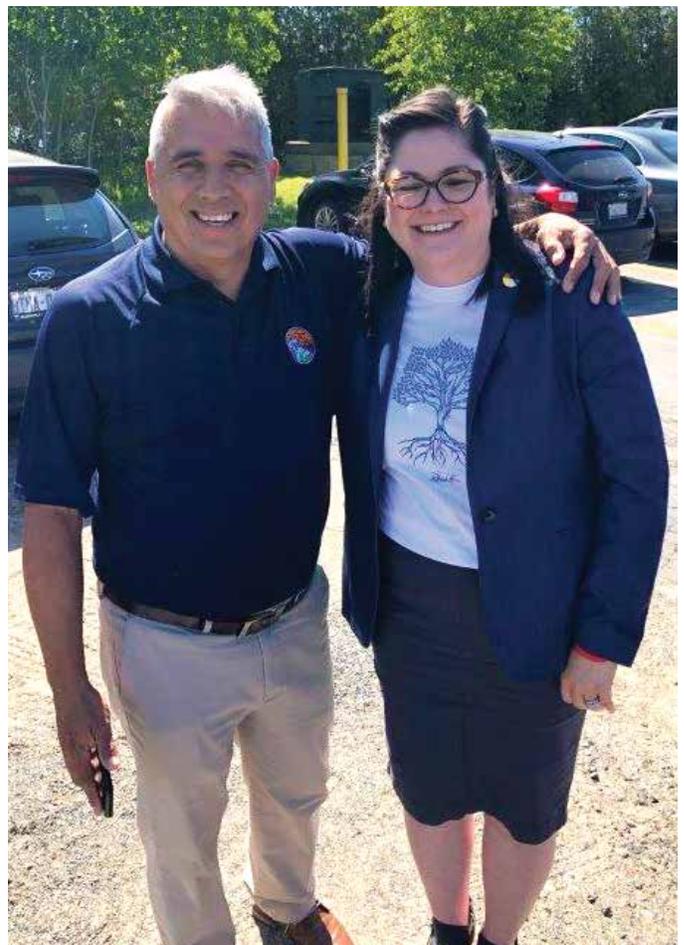
Seeing Hunter’s giant moose on the outside windows of the Sudbury branch where she works sparked joy in Faith Salmaso, who is co-chair of the Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Western Ontario chapter of the RBC Royal Eagles, an Indigenous-focused employee resource group.

The moose also ignited an idea for how the RBC Royal Eagles could use the artwork as an even bigger canvas of opportunity to support RBC’s commitment to reconciliation.

**“The event was designed to honour the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation with a vision to create a safe space for dialogue and discussion between both Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees and community partners. It turned out to be that and so much more.”**

– Faith Salmaso, co-chair of the Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Western Ontario RBC Royal Eagles

Alongside her colleagues, Salmaso planned an event infused with experiential learning and sharing to celebrate NIPD. On June 21, 2019, more than 80 employees from all lines of RBC businesses joined in a traditional drum circle welcome alongside RBC clients visiting the branch that day.



Matthew McGregor, vice chair of the RBC Royal Eagles MSNWO and an associate advisor with RBC Wealth Management in Sudbury, assisted by inviting a leader from his community, Chief Shining Turtle of Whitefish River First Nation on Birch Island in Ontario, to lead a sharing circle outdoors at the branch.

During the celebration, Chief Shining Turtle shared ways his fast-growing community are using strategic government partnerships and how Whitefish River uses education to further support their youth.



A second special guest, Ghislaine Goudreau, professor of Indigenous Studies at Cambrian College in Northern Ontario led an all-women drumming group in a welcoming song, as well as a travelling song to close the sharing circle, which included smudging.

The professor, and member of the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation near Ottawa, Ont., knows a thing or two about drumming having earned her Master of Science degree from the University of Alberta on the subject. Using principles of Indigenous research methodology, she examined the connection between Indigenous women's hand-drumming and health promotion, earning the Distinguished Master's Thesis Award from the Western Association of Graduate Studies.

Drumming, she says, is a very powerful, and positive aspect of Indigenous culture – and one of the ways her people promote health and healing. “We always drummed if someone was going through a hard time ... and if

you couldn't verbally say how you were feeling, you could release that through the drum,” she explains from Sudbury.

Knowledge including the learning of language is also exchanged through the drum circle, with spiritual connections strengthened. “From the moment you arrive at the circle and you smudge your drum, and yourself, you connect to your drum on a spiritual level,” she explains.

“A lot of people have a hard time understanding our spiritual connection to the land, but we connect to the animal that gave its life for that drum. We connect with the tree that you made your drum out of, and that's what we're smudging. That is a spiritual tool that can help you with your healing,” she adds. “So, there's a birthing ceremony that you do when you make your own drum.”

Singing and drumming with other women helped her to reclaim her voice as an Indigenous woman. “And that's what it's really all about,” she says. “A lot of us have lost that voice and drumming is about finding that voice. It comes through that spirit, that heartbeat of Mother Earth.”

During the event, Goudreau shared her own journey through the drum with RBC employees and clients, along with insights into celebrating her heritage, raising young Indigenous males, and her family's own healing journey from the residential school experience.



“The event was designed to honour the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation with a vision to create a safe space for dialogue and discussion between both Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees and community partners,” Salmaso explains. “It turned out to be that and so much more. It served as a catalyst for many of my colleagues to get involved, to stretch themselves and continue a learning path aligned with reconciliation.”

Since the event, Salmaso continues to engage with partners to advance conversations around important issues facing Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario including residential schools, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, safe-water issues; and to try and support Indigenous youth through mentorship, guidance and support.

“The learning and growth continue to this day,” she says. “I'm so proud to work with our RBC Royal Eagles and so appreciative of RBC for its commitment to Indigenous communities, colleagues and clients.”

# Building a brighter future



Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services uses traditional values and social innovation to empower Métis and other Indigenous youth in Kamloops, B.C., including developing a new housing complex where the young people will live with Elders.

Stepping inside the doors of the Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services, it's hard to believe you've entered a child protection agency for the Métis population in Kamloops, B.C. – but technically, that is exactly what Lii Michif is.

“Here, there's coffee always on, and goodies baked by the Elders and happy people,” says Lea Becker, a Métis Elder who volunteers alongside the social workers and other staff who serve Lii Michif's clients. “When you go into a ministry building, the secretaries are up front, and you sit and wait. This is not the way it is here. There's always a welcoming feeling here.”

It is precisely this desire to create a place of belonging for the Métis in Kamloops that compelled Lii Michif's executive director, Colleen Lucier, and her team to pursue a bold vision: to eliminate the need for the region's Métis children and youth to enter foster care in the first place.

It is no secret Indigenous children have been over-represented in the child welfare protection systems of Canada. These children often fail to thrive upon leaving care, often aging out of the system into homelessness, incarceration and mental health challenges such as addiction. “That's the pattern we're trying to disrupt,” says Lucier.



This is why Lii Michif is creating its own housing. “We're not a housing agency, but we really saw a need to change the outcomes for our youth by creating a culturally safe housing unit where our youth can receive culturally appropriate supports and transition into independence,” says Lucier.

That place is Kikékyelc: A Place of Belonging. Conceived and led by Lii Michif, this historic housing complex in Kamloops is supported by \$3.9 million from BC Housing and will house 31 units. Of those, five will be dedicated to Elders who will live there and help support the Métis, First Nation and Inuit youth residing in the remaining units. Onsite staff will be available 24-hours a day, and youth will have the opportunity to participate in other life-skills programming such as cooking classes, budgeting and career development.



In a twist, Lii Michif designed the building project itself as a work-experience program for youth, some of whom are homeless. Those on the Indigenous youth construction crew are getting paid to work and gain valuable hands-on experience and connections leading to jobs in the construction industry – but they’re also building future housing for themselves and their peers. Once completed in the summer of 2020, many of these youth workers will move into Kikékyelc to live, continuing their transition to full independence.

The Kikékyelc work-training program was supported by a \$40,000 gift through RBC Future Launch, a \$500 million commitment over 10 years to invest in helping young Canadians prepare for a drastically changing workforce. The funds from RBC supported 15 Métis and First Nations youth in obtaining on-the-job training, housing for the youth working on the site and a crew supervisor, who also served as a mentor to the youth who participated. Already, two of those youth have landed full-time job offers with local construction companies.

“RBC strongly believes in the power and potential of youth – and the influence they can have in their communities,” says Carmen Ryujin, manager, citizenship and social impact, B.C. region, RBC. “In addition to the long-lasting impact Kikékyelc will have for the Kamloops community, we are thrilled to know

the project will also support local youth in developing the skills they need to prepare for the future of work.”

Another unexpected outcome of the project is the pride that is being built within Lii Michif with each board nailed. Kikékyelc is on track to being the only project in Kamloops that has been completely developed, implemented and managed by an Indigenous organization.

**“[Métis] are very communal, family-oriented people. But we’ve been disconnected over the last generations, and that’s what we need to heal and change. That’s the gift we need to give our youth.”**

– Colleen Lucier, executive director, Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services, Kamloops, B.C.

The story of the Métis people is one of unity, sharing and caring for each other – a story that is sometimes forgotten. “We’re here because of the strength of our ancestors, that’s why having Elders present is so important,” says Lucier. “They’re just a constant reminder of who we are. We’re a very communal, family-oriented people. But we’ve been disconnected over the last generations, and that’s what we need to heal and change. That’s the gift we need to give our youth.”

# Standing tall & proud

Three Indigenous women – each in very different roles – share their personal experiences of working for RBC.

“What I like about my role in Indigenous Wealth is that I’m dealing with community leaders and Indigenous governments. I value working in Indigenous communities at such a professional level, and I enjoy my co-workers.”

– Brittane Laverdure  
Trust advisor, Indigenous Wealth,  
Calgary, Alta.



## Q: Tell us a little about your journey?

**Rachael:** “Sure. So, I’m proud Algonquin from Pikwàkanagàn First Nation in the Ottawa Valley. I grew up with a very spiritual Shaman father who taught me everything I know about our culture. I have an Irish mother, so there’s this balance and beauty of having a foot in both worlds. My dad said, to fully understand the culture, I needed to learn the language, and learning Ojibway in university was that last piece of the puzzle that really connected everything for me.”

**Brittane:** “I’m a member of the Wolf Clan of the Kaska Nation. I grew up in the Yukon where my mother’s family is from and relocated to Calgary because I was a high-level athlete. I was fortunate to grow up around my community and am connected to it even though I live away. Going back to my childhood, we didn’t have cable television or a phone till I was in grade 5. My mother was born on a trapline and finished high school, and my father only went to school until grade 8, so I am the first generation in my family to attend post-secondary. My mother went back to school when we were younger, after having five

children, to enter the workforce. She now works for my Nation in the finance department. I was fortunate to have access to my community and cultural activities from an early age, and today I can be involved as much as I want because my family still lives in the North.”

**Tracy:** “I was born and raised in Stu’xtews, a community in the central interior of B.C. I was fortunate to have heard my native tongue (Secwepemctsin) until I went to kindergarten. I was also raised with some cultural practices, but because my parents were residential school survivors, they hesitated to share their language fluency. My late father left residential school at 16 and became a farmer, so I consider myself a proud farmer’s daughter that possesses strong work ethics due to this lifestyle. We grew hay and raised horses and cattle. My mom graduated from Kamloops Indian Residential Secondary School and later trained to be a certified Secwepemc language teacher. She is now retired and enjoys teaching and mentoring her grandchildren, whom I am learning alongside.”

**“I stand tall, I stand proud of who I am, where I come from. And really my goal as an Indigenous woman is to leave that legacy for my sisters so they stand strong and tall and proud as well. That’s all I would really want.”**

– Rachael Crawford-Rendine  
(spirit name, Ozawaashgiwi Kigizhiiba N’moniikwe or Blue Morning Dancer)  
Regional enablement coach,  
RBC, Barrie & Area, and Muskoka North Central, Ont.



**Q: Rachael, what brought you to RBC? Did you always know you wanted to work for a financial institution?**

**Rachael:** “Oh goodness, no! I was at an Aboriginal festival in the late 1990s – a recent graduate, not sure what I wanted to do. Law was something I was interested in, but then almost like a beacon flashing, calling out to me, I came upon the RBC booth and met Charlie Coffey [a long-time RBC executive and Indigenous ally]. And he said to me, ‘We need people like you.’

And I said, ‘People like me? What does that mean?’ I had no idea what he was talking about.

‘We need people like yourself who will help make the changes that we need to.’ Then he gave his card, I’ll never forget the gold lettering on it, and said, ‘Call me.’ And the rest is history.

He grew to be a mentor for me for many years. Charlie helped me through so many touch points in my career with respect to mentorship, being supportive, being an advocate for me, listening to me. It was incredible. But that’s how it all started. I still keep in touch with him to this day.”

**“Right now, as an Indigenous woman working for RBC, I’m very proud to sit across the table and support leadership in their business initiatives. I feel like I’m part of the movement of all Indigenous Peoples creating wealth for their communities and becoming financially self-sustaining.”**

– Tracy Antoine  
Vice-president, commercial financial services,  
Indigenous markets, B.C. region



### **Q: *How have you grown professionally at RBC?***

**Rachael:** “I think RBC has done a great job in really looking at its values, and I can see myself within them. By pushing myself, continuing to find my voice in each new role – that was when I really began to feel that I was making more of an impact here at RBC. I stand tall, I stand proud of who I am, where I come from. And really my goal as an Indigenous woman is to leave that legacy for my sisters so they stand strong and tall and proud as well. That’s all I would really want.”

**Brittane:** “I joined Royal Trust in August 2017, and what I like about my role in Indigenous Wealth at RBC is that I’m dealing with community leaders and Indigenous governments. I value

working in Indigenous communities at such a professional level, and I enjoy my co-workers. I volunteer for various causes and value that RBC recognizes this. I also really appreciate the company’s commitment to the communities in which we live.”

**Tracy:** “Well, I came into RBC with the mindset that I was going to start at the bottom and work my way up. Through all the teachings and work experience in addition to managerial excellence training, I gained stronger leadership skills. I believe this served to hone the leadership skills I already possess as an Indigenous woman.”

### **Q: *Has there been a moment when you’ve been especially proud to be an Indigenous woman working for RBC?***

**Rachael:** “As Indigenous people, from very early on, we are taught the importance of giving back to the community. So, I value being a part of the RBC Royal Eagles, our employee resource group, since its inception. I’ve sort of graduated to Elder status now, but for that younger generation of Indigenous employees, it’s a great place to reach out for support, for mentorship and guidance, culturally and career wise.

And my hope is for the next generation to have that voice, because we have a lot to share. Not all of our people are the loudest in the room. And again, back to our values, we’re taught to listen and we’re taught what respect means.”

**Brittane:** “Yes! Recently, I went to an Indigenous women dialogue event and there was a Chief describing her journey in leadership. She discussed the legacy trust her community has and I knew it was work we’d done at RBC. She was using it as

an illustration of building a legacy! I am encouraged by RBC’s commitment to hiring Indigenous people because with each individual we can make a difference for them and their families, and create a larger network of financial literacy that reaches into communities by including them in the RBC umbrella.”

**Tracy:** “I’d say right now, Indigenous women are the matriarchs of their communities. Historically, men negotiated and met with government officials, largely carrying the message of the matriarchs from their community in their travels. Therefore, right now, as an Indigenous woman working for RBC, I’m very proud to sit across the table and support leadership in their business initiatives. I feel like I’m part of the movement of all Indigenous Peoples creating wealth for their communities and becoming financially self-sustaining.”

### **Q: *What advice would you give young Indigenous women who are embarking on a career?***

**Rachael:** “Reiterating my earlier point of being proud, don’t ignore opportunities. Challenge yourself. Put your hand up and lean in. Engage in mentorship. The power and spirit of those opportunities will be empowering for you and others.”

**Brittane:** “If you are a young Indigenous woman, reach out to other Indigenous women you want to talk to. I guarantee you, if you need a mentor, they won’t say no. Just phone them. It’s a lonely world as a woman, let alone being Indigenous. People will be giving, and building those networks can help ground you in various communities, creating a community for you outside of your home.”

**Tracy:** “Approach it as a lifelong learner by remaining curious. Stay strong based on your culture and language teachings, and always respect that matriarchal pride. Regardless of career choice, stand proud, let your voice be heard. Seek healthy relationships that support personal growth. Accept challenges, build your confidence, and have the courage to strive at reaching your potential.”

# Two-eyed seeing

Mount Allison University's Dr. Jesse Popp's vision for inclusive scientific research that values and prioritizes traditional Indigenous knowledge as much as Western knowledge has earned her a FutureReadyNB Faculty Excellence Award in Moncton, N.B.

 **There is a saying that when an Elder dies, a library burns down.**

"Indigenous people harbour this immense knowledge about the environment passed down through generations," says Dr. Jesse Popp (pictured at right), a wildlife scientist and member of Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory, a First Nation on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario.

This traditional knowledge is important to everyone because the way we understand and perceive the world can have a major impact on the way we interpret it – so all the better to view the world as one whole through two lenses. "One's an Indigenous lens and the other is a Western lens because these viewpoints and ways of knowing are complementary to one another," she says. "This is what Unama'ki Cape Breton Elder Albert Marshall called 'two-eyed seeing.'"

But this is not the way the scientific community approaches research today; a scenario Dr. Popp is determined to help change. In fact, it was what enticed her to leave Ontario and take her seat as Canada research chair in Indigenous environmental science in the Department of Geography & Environment at Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B. With a two-eyed seeing approach, she hopes to advance our collective ecological understanding to tackle the many major environmental issues facing us today including climate change.

Last November, Dr. Popp was recognized at the inaugural gala held in Moncton for FutureReadyNB, a partnership between New Brunswick employers, universities, Indigenous students and the Government of New Brunswick.

She won the 2019 FutureReadyNB Faculty Excellence Award for her work in creating an experiential learning opportunity for a student last summer through the building of three Indigenous Wabanaki gardens on campus.

The Gala was presented by RBC as part of the RBC Future Launch initiative, a 10-year \$500 million investment to help Canadian youth prepare for the changing world of work. "We've funded a number of excellent Future Launch programs in the Atlantic region through organizations like FutureReadyNB, Canadian Roots Exchange, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and Boys & Girls Clubs that are aimed at empowering New Brunswick youth to be ready for the jobs of tomorrow," says Lori Smith, regional director, community marketing, communications and corporate citizenship. "The fact that FutureReadyNB Wabanaki was a big part of FutureReadyNB really appealed to us given its specific focus on supporting Indigenous youth."

With RBC funding, Dr. Popp was able to add a summer intern, 21-year-old Raven Elwell, an environmental sciences Mount Allison University student, to the garden-building team. Over the summer of 2019, the pair also worked closely with local Elders to have traditional knowledge inform the final garden designs.

"As I said, when an Elder passes, a library burns down, right?" she says. "So, if that knowledge is not transferred to our youth, it disappears. That's why it's so important, especially with my research, to involve youth in everything we do."

The campus vegetable garden uses the traditional "three sisters" method of growing beans, squash and corn together; three plants that help each other grow. "And it's a good example of how people can work together," says Dr. Popp. "Yes, one person can be productive, but if we work together and lift each other up, we can do so much more."

Elwell is from the Millbrook First Nation, but moved to Eskasoni First Nation, another Mi'kmaq community in Nova Scotia, when she was eight. She was thrilled to have the opportunity to work on the gardens located on Mount Allison's campus in Sackville, which strengthened her time-management and budgeting skills. "I've always been super in love with the environment," she explains. "I want to be the person who saves it."

The chance to work with Dr. Popp was a bonus. "I just wanted to be able to have her mentor me because I've never really had an Indigenous mentor that I could study stuff with and figure out a project with," she says. "So, it was a really cool opportunity."

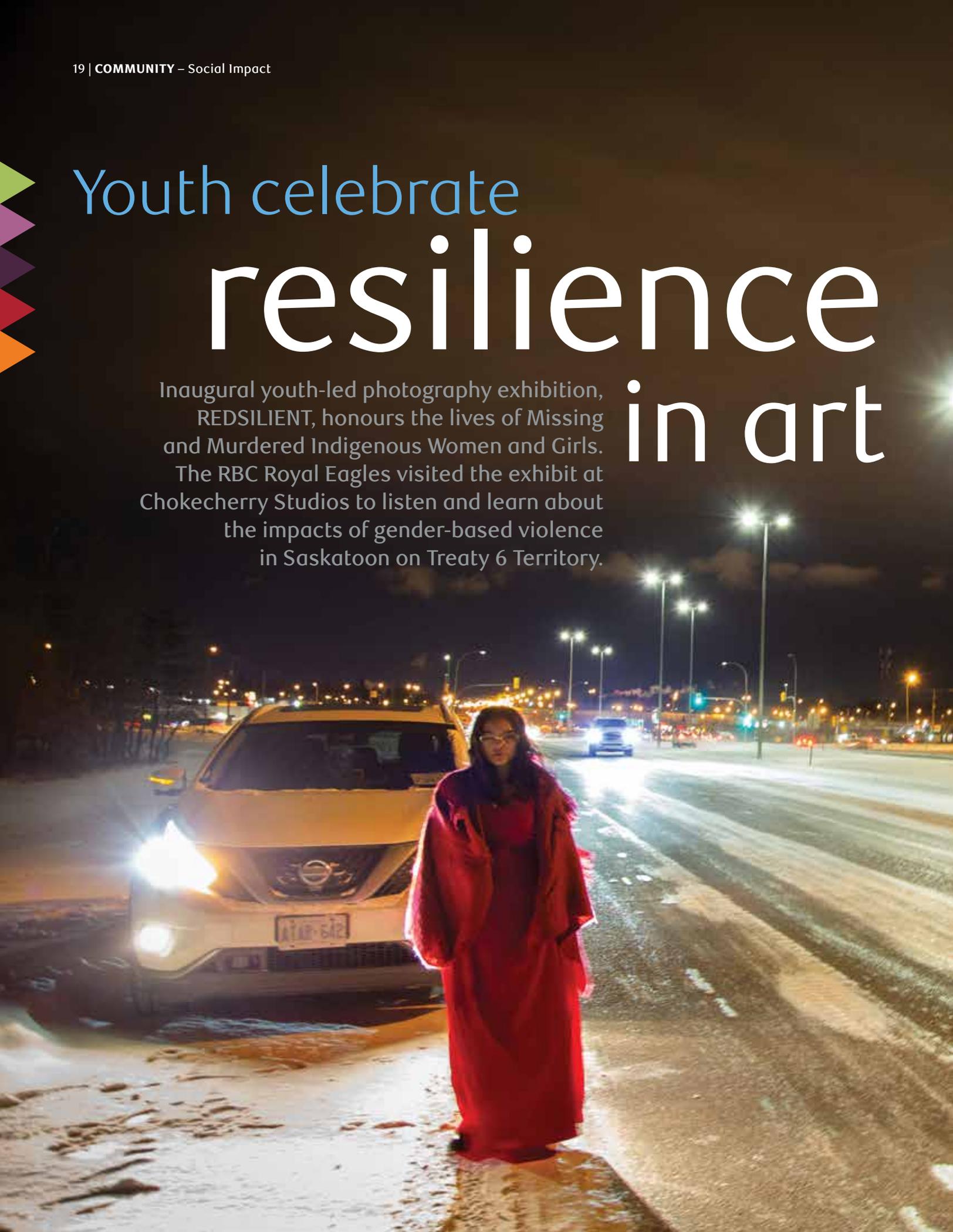


Youth celebrate

# resilience

# in art

Inaugural youth-led photography exhibition, REDSILIENT, honours the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The RBC Royal Eagles visited the exhibit at Chokecherry Studios to listen and learn about the impacts of gender-based violence in Saskatoon on Treaty 6 Territory.





**It is the empty industrial spaces** in and around Saskatoon that resonate with Kiyari McNab the most, places where too many Indigenous women and girls have been harmed and have disappeared. This is why the 19-year-old chose such bleak locations for her haunting photographs of an Indigenous mother and child cloaked in red.

“I mainly focused on the industrial background because a lot of women experienced sexual and physical violence within those kinds of areas, where it’s very quiet,” the young artist says. “There’s a lot in the industrial spaces, the train yards, through my own personal experience, so it’s really big for me.”

McNab, who is from the George Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan, grew up in foster care and knows too many girls who were abused while in the system. The mother and daughter in her photographs also represent the mother-child bond as survivors of such abuse.

Her photographs were part of REDSILIENT, an exhibit honouring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which she co-facilitated with photographer Vicky Laforge at Chokecherry Studios in Saskatoon, Sask.

In March 2019, the RBC Royal Eagles, an Indigenous-focused employee resource group, organized an exclusive tour of REDSILIENT to help their colleagues better understand the impacts of violence against Indigenous women and girls in their community.

The tour is one of many ways RBC affirms its commitment to reconciliation and honouring Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action 92, by taking steps to generate genuine and meaningful change that benefits Indigenous people and communities, particularly Indigenous youth.

During the RBC Royal Eagles’ visit to Chokecherry Studios, employees listened to McNab and other youth participants share reflections and stories connected to their photographs in a deeply intimate experience.

Two-Spirit Ambassador for Saskatchewan Brett Little also participated with his dancing partner, Olivia Eyahpaise. “We were able to spend time with the dancers and learn about how they create their regalia and what it means to be Two-Spirit,” says Sarah Gennrich, assistant branch manager and RBC Royal Eagles MSNWO vice-chair, one of the organizers of the RBC visit.

Gennrich met Andrea Cessna, a Saskatoon-based filmmaker who wanted to create a non-profit to deliver art-based programming for inner-city youth in Saskatoon. Inspired by Cessna’s vision, she supported Chokecherry Studios alongside collaborators McNab, 21-year-old Kendra Pochay and 19-year-old Morning Thompson.

REDSILIENT was inspired by Jamie Black’s RedDress Project, which saw the Winnipeg-based Métis artist hang 600 red dresses in public spaces to draw attention to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.



Photo by Kiyari McNab



Photo by Kendra Pochay

“What I learned from REDSILIENT is how Indigenous women need to have resilience, empower each other and change the cycle. As well, how critically important it is to put a face to these missing and murdered women and girls that we hear about too often. REDSILIENT made me further realize that there is much more to be done.”

– Annette Sabourin, regional vice-president for Northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, RBC



Photo by Vicky Laforge

For Gennrich, all the images were incredible, but one photograph by Thompson was especially memorable. “It’s of a beautiful Indigenous woman, and she’s in a red coat on a street, and there’s a car behind her,” she says. “The way the young man who took the photograph described it, it just gave us chills, we were all crying.”

“This is why, when I say this was one of the most humbling and powerful experiences for the RBC Royal Eagles in Saskatoon, I really, really mean it,” adds Gennrich. “That’s what reconciliation is all about and why we all need to work together.”

RBC Royal Eagles executive champion, Annette Sabourin, a Dene-Cree woman whose own mother spent time in a residential school in the Northwest Territories, says hearing the youth talk about healing through photography inspired her.

“What I learned from REDSILIENT is how Indigenous women need to have resilience, empower each other and change the cycle,” says Sabourin, regional vice-president RBC for Northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. “As well, how critically important it is to put a face to these missing and murdered women and girls that we hear about too often. REDSILIENT made me further realize that there is much more to be done.”

Sabourin, Gennrich and the other RBC Royal Eagles in Saskatoon and across Canada are seeking similar ways to enable their colleagues to learn more about Indigenous culture and the impacts of residential schools and other colonial policies and practices.

REDSILIENT was more than an exhibit – in fact, it quickly became a safe space for community members to come and

heal. Many wrote letters to their missing or murdered loved ones and/or pinned tobacco ties, representing leaves, on a tree installation created by Chokecherry co-founders Poochay and Thompson. Each leaf represented a prayer to a woman, girl or family affected by gender-based violence.

**“Most organizations and agencies I have been to haven’t really accepted troubled youth. But we aren’t really ‘troubled.’ We are just trying to look for a way to connect with ourselves and our community. Art helps us do that and to heal.”**

– Kiyari McNab, 19, artist & co-facilitator, REDSILIENT, Saskatoon

These young artists and leaders incorporated Chokecherry Studios as a non-profit entity in February 2019 and continue to run programming that uses art and storytelling to help inner-city youth in Saskatoon heal. The four co-founders intend to host REDSILIENT annually. In doing so, they hope to create more awareness around Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Transgender and Two-Spirit persons (MMIWGT2S) along with other issues affecting communities in Saskatchewan and across Canada.

“Most organizations and agencies I have been to haven’t really accepted troubled youth,” says McNab. “But we aren’t really ‘troubled.’ We are just trying to look for a way to connect with ourselves and our community. Art helps us do that and to heal.”

Photo by Shania Thompson



# Breaking the chain

For Manitoba Singer-Songwriter Desiree Dorion, healing the impacts of intergenerational trauma from residential school abuses starts with speaking – and singing – her truth as Legacy Schools High School Artist Ambassador with the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund.



**Desiree Dorion graduated from high school at 17**

and got a law degree before becoming a JUNO-nominated country music star with five albums to her name.

“I’m always busy, touring and working really hard,” she says before adding, “but I’m not saying that’s a positive thing.”

The daughter of a Métis mother and Cree father from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Dorion (pictured at right) grew up in Dauphin, Man. hearing her dad’s stories of residential and day schools.

Years later the memories are still fresh and painful to recall, despite their not actually having happened to her.

This is one reason she is certain the impacts of these traumatic experiences have affected future generations – including her own – and why her being a “doer” isn’t necessarily a good thing.

“As part of the intergenerational trauma, I’ve always been an overachiever,” the singer-songwriter says. “I have an innate need to prove ... I don’t really know how to explain it. I’m really, really, really driven ... and that’s part of what this intergenerational trauma thing looks like for some people.

For me, it’s keeping busy.”

A desire to heal and stop her own daughters – ages eight and five – from suffering too is what her latest song *Break the Chain* is all about. She co-wrote the song, released on an album of the same name in February 2020, with her producer, Chris Burke-Gaffney.



Available on iTunes, *Break the Chain* is becoming an anthem for a new generation of indirect residential school survivors, and other Canadians, especially the many youth who are learning about these abuses for the first time through the Legacy Schools High School Artist Ambassador program created by the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund (DWF).

Gord Downie, the legendary front man of The Tragically Hip band, was inspired to “do something” after being deeply touched by the story of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old boy who died on the railway tracks in 1966 after trying to escape from Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School. The families of Chanie Wenjack and Gord Downie want their legacies to live on through DWF by connecting, educating and encouraging people throughout Canada to “do something” too.

As a DWF Artist Ambassador, Dorion will visit classrooms in Western Canada and perform and share her own family’s healing journey after being in residential schools. “I see my role as really just being a truth speaker, just speaking from my own experience,” she says. “I’m hoping to use my art and my music as a way to connect that truth because everyone learns in a different way.”

It is exciting and innovative programming such as the Artist Ambassador program that inspires RBC to continue to be a passionate supporter of DWF programs.

RBC Future Launch funding of \$25,000 also enabled students from five different First Nation communities throughout Canada to attend the Secret Path Live concert. Held at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto on October 19, 2019, it was an afternoon of connections and live music. A buy one, give one (BOGO) promotion enabled more than 100 students and educators to attend the event, with some groups travelling more than 1,300 kilometres to participate.

“Secret Path Live was a re-creation of Gord Downie’s original concert in 2016, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists coming together to honour the legacy of Gord and Chanie,” says Sarah Midanik, president & CEO of DWF. “With RBC’s support, we are working with artists across Canada to use their voices to inspire change. Gord called on all Canadians to ‘do something’ to forward our journey toward reconciliation. We are grateful that RBC, the artists and students who participate in the Artist Ambassador program are answering that call.”

As Dorion embarks on this exciting new part of her career, the singer says she is grateful for Downie’s courage. “He was fearless,” she says. “You talk to anybody at a major record label and they don’t want artists to be political, because it can sink a career very, very quickly. So, I think for Gord Downie to have used his platform and to have used his voice to do this work, and to get this ball rolling, is amazing.”

**“With RBC’s support, we are working with artists across Canada to use their voices to inspire change. Gord [Downie] called on all Canadians to ‘do something’ to forward our journey toward reconciliation. We are grateful that RBC, the artists and students who participate in the Artist Ambassador program are answering that call.”**

– Sarah Midanik, president & CEO,  
Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund



# New Northern Voices

A new program from the National Screen Institute – Canada (NSI) breaks down barriers for aspiring filmmakers by bringing the classroom and mentors closer to home.

## **Kaya Wheeler is no stranger to screens.**

Her Cree father, whose family hails from the George Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan, is a screenwriter with credits that include the hit TV show *North of 60°*. “I was lucky enough to grow up on the outskirts of the film and television industry, around all of these people and hearing their stories,” she says.

**“Indigenous filmmakers already have a voice, but NSI New Northern Voices helps amplify it.”**

– Kaya Wheeler, associate manager, programs & development, NSI, Winnipeg

Despite this unique pedigree, Wheeler is the first to admit she is no storyteller. “I’m a much more linear thinker,” she explains. “I like spreadsheets. That’s just how my brain works. But I really love being around film people, seeing the passion they have and their creativity.”

It is fitting then that after graduating from the University of Winnipeg and a few years working on youth homelessness, Wheeler landed a dream job at the National Screen Institute (NSI), a national leader in developing award-winning content creators.

Based in Winnipeg, Wheeler, whose mother is Ojibway, is now part of the team running two Indigenous-focused filmmaker development programs that receive support from RBC. “NSI really offered me a unique opportunity where I could help manage the program, do logistical things for the filmmakers, and watch them create these wonderful films,” she says. “I just love that.”

In fact, Wheeler took part in a 2017 tour to help NSI better understand what filmmakers in the Northwest Territories, Northern Ontario and Northern Manitoba need.

The filmmakers they visited expressed challenges with insufficient Internet access, bandwidth and connectivity. They also spoke of the difficulty of having to uproot their lives in the North to move to big cities for training and mentorship opportunities.



These insights were used to design a new initiative called NSI New Northern Voices, funded in part by RBC. RBC gave a one-year \$40,000 gift to NSI in 2019 for this program and another that RBC has long supported through the RBC Emerging Artist Project called NSI IndigiDocs. Every year the RBC Foundation donates millions of dollars to hundreds of arts organizations globally to support emerging artists in the visual arts, music, theatre, performance, literature and film.

“It’s a really great partnership we have with RBC because it’s not just a cheque that’s signed and deposited,” says Chris Vajcner, director, partner support for NSI in Winnipeg. “They always come to our events, regardless if they’re partners or not, and take a great interest in the careers of emerging filmmakers. They’re community-centred and want to see these amazing storytellers succeed.”

NSI New Northern Voices, in association with University College of the North (UCN), introduced students to media-based storytelling and employment opportunities. Students created short films based on stories developed in the course. While not an exclusively Indigenous program, 88% of participants and 100% of faculty were Indigenous.

The first cohort of emerging filmmakers in the four-week NSI New Northern Voices program gathered on the UCN campus in The Pas, Man. in September 2019. “A huge barrier to media arts training for people in Northern and rural areas is access,” says Vajcner. “It was important for us to go north instead of the filmmakers having to come south, so the participants could learn in their region and build an arts community. As the program grows, the graduates will become the trainers, mentors and film crew.”

Wheeler is excited to see what the emerging filmmakers will create next. “Indigenous filmmakers already have a voice, but NSI New Northern Voices helps amplify it,” she says. “Their stories are unique to where they are from – only people from there can tell those stories. And it’s just a wonderful thing to say, ‘Here’s another way to do that, and something that you guys can do at home, right here where you are.’”

# Behind the lens

## with Erica Daniels

Filmmaker, entrepreneur,  
NSI IndigiDocs student & filmmaker mentor  
– NSI New Northern Voices

∞ **At age 16, growing up in Winnipeg**, Erica Daniels (pictured right) was having a tough time and feeling disconnected from her Indigenous culture when she was introduced to *Just TV*, a multimedia program for youth in inner city Winnipeg, run by The Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, a non-profit organization.

“I was at a pretty bad point in my adolescent years and that program really saved my life,” says Daniels, a Cree-Ojibway from Peguis First Nation in Manitoba. “It was where I connected with the Indigenous community and Elders and started going to lodges and ceremonies.”

**“My passion is to tell Indigenous stories but also to uplift the next generation of storytellers to help them to use this medium to tell their own stories.”**

– Erica Daniels, filmmaker, Peguis First Nation, Man.

The skills she learned from these programs enabled her to start freelancing for others before taking the leap to start her own company, Kejic Productions, in 2017. Today, her video production business – which focuses on helping Indigenous communities and organizations share and communicate – is booming, along with her eminence as a documentary filmmaker.



Her most recent film, *Run as One – The Journey of the Front Runners*, a 19-minute documentary about the 10 Indigenous youth who ran the Pan American Games torch in 1967, has won numerous awards and has been screened internationally at film festivals.



Another legacy of *Just TV* for Daniels was experiencing the power of youth expressing themselves creatively through film and music. “It definitely helped me heal through a lot of my childhood stuff,” she says, “so I really want to be able to promote that to other young people.”

All the while, her interest in film and video production as a career grew and, by age 19, she was accepted into an Indigenous film program run by the National Screen Institute – Canada (NSI) in Winnipeg.

But there is always more to learn, a key reason she is thrilled to be one of eight participants in NSI’s intensive documentary-film training program, NSI IndigiDocs. The RBC Emerging Artists Project is now in its seventh year of supporting this program (see *New Northern Voices*, previous page).

“I’m super excited to be here,” she says during a break from NSI IndigiDocs in Winnipeg. “Everyone is so supportive and the amount of knowledge I’m gaining here about the film industry is amazing.”

Daniels loves to give back and was a film mentor for the NSI New Northern Voices program in 2019. In addition to hiring Indigenous talent for her own productions, she also teaches video skills workshops to women and youth.

“My passion is to tell Indigenous stories but also to uplift the next generation of storytellers to help them to use this medium to tell their own stories,” she says. “I really promote to our young the importance of becoming involved in our culture, taking them to ceremonies and connecting them with Elders so they can learn about who they are in hopes that it will help them heal from whatever traumas they may be carrying. So that’s a big thing that drives me.”

# Working Warriors

An innovative program created by the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society in Edmonton supports Indigenous youth and others on their journey to independence through education and employment.



**Carlesa Hill loves being a member of Onion Lake Cree Nation**, a community straddling the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. Just 20 years old, Hill struggled to find employment beyond the odd babysitting and cleaning jobs, not enough for her to remain in Onion Lake.

The community itself also struggles. Onion Lake's Chief and Council declared a state of emergency due to a spike in drug and gang-related activity. The leaders say it was a plea for outside help.

Closer to home, there was no soft place for Hill to land. She lost her mother 13 years ago and says her "broken" family – she is one of eight siblings and the only girl – does the best it can.

"Most of my family is into alcohol and drugs," she explains. "I didn't want to continue in that lifestyle because I grew up seeing it. I always tell myself not to fall into that path because I know I'm better than that. I want something better for myself."

Last September, she left for Edmonton, Alta. determined to do well and be a great role model for the next generation, including the nieces and nephews back in Onion Lake who she adores. Being in Edmonton was lonely at first – and hard. Hill put out resumes tirelessly and even landed interviews, but never got any call backs. Determined to make it, Hill (pictured at right) kept going.

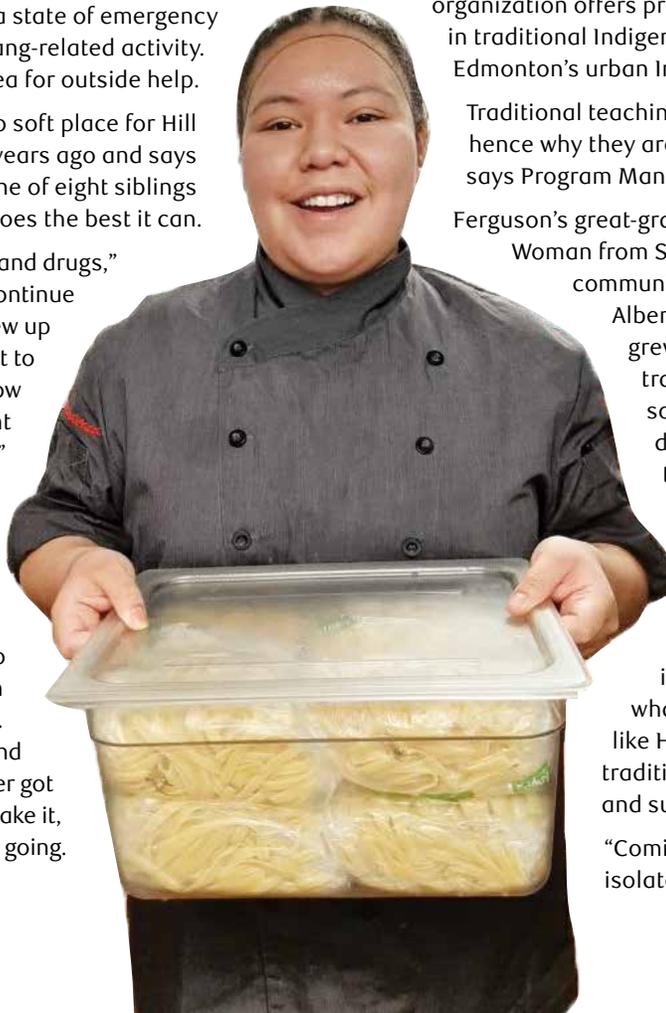
Income support from Alberta Supports – an agency that connects individuals to programs and community services – enabled her to pay for the basics like rent and food while looking for work so long as she entered a support program. That's how she ended up in the Working Warriors program at the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. This non-profit organization offers programs and services based in traditional Indigenous values and teachings to Edmonton's urban Indigenous population.

Traditional teachings make all the difference, hence why they are integral to Working Warriors, says Program Manager Lovette Ferguson.

Ferguson's great-grandmother was a Medicine Woman from Sucker Creek First Nation, a Cree community located along the shores of Alberta's Lesser Slave Lake, but she grew up Métis. "There was some traditional knowledge there," the social worker says, although she didn't realize this until she came to Bent Arrow and was exposed to ceremony and other cultural practices again.

The social worker left her own community in Jossard, Alta. seeking opportunities in Edmonton, so she knows what young Indigenous women like Hill are up against, and how traditions can support their healing and success.

"Coming to Edmonton, I felt so isolated and alone, but when I began



working for Bent Arrow, I started feeling familiar things,” she says. “It’s like your spirit recognizes some of the stuff that happens here like smudging and ceremony. You just feel so connected to your culture.”

Ferguson designed Working Warriors at the request of Edmonton Police Services to help high-risk youth, specifically Edmonton’s top 50 most violent, prolific young offenders. Now in its third year, the program is bigger, with a broader scope.

“From an Indigenous cultural perspective, we don’t discriminate,” says Program Co-ordinator Tristan Ironstar, a Nakoda Cree from Carry the Kettle First Nation. “As long as you are open to our culture, we’re open to working with you.”

For instance, when staff realized there was no place for Edmonton’s young immigrants who had spent some of their childhood in ethno-cleansing camps to get help, Bent Arrow opened its doors and added a psychologist to its staff.

With such deep traumas beginning to heal, these youth and others at Bent Arrow move forward with a lighter step – and a real shot at attaining their goals.

**“There were times where I felt like I’m doing all of this and nothing’s really turning around for me, but I never gave up. I’m glad I gave everything I had, and it all paid off because I’m now working.”**

– Carlesa Hill, 20, Onion Lake Cree Nation member and Working Warriors participant, Edmonton, Alta.

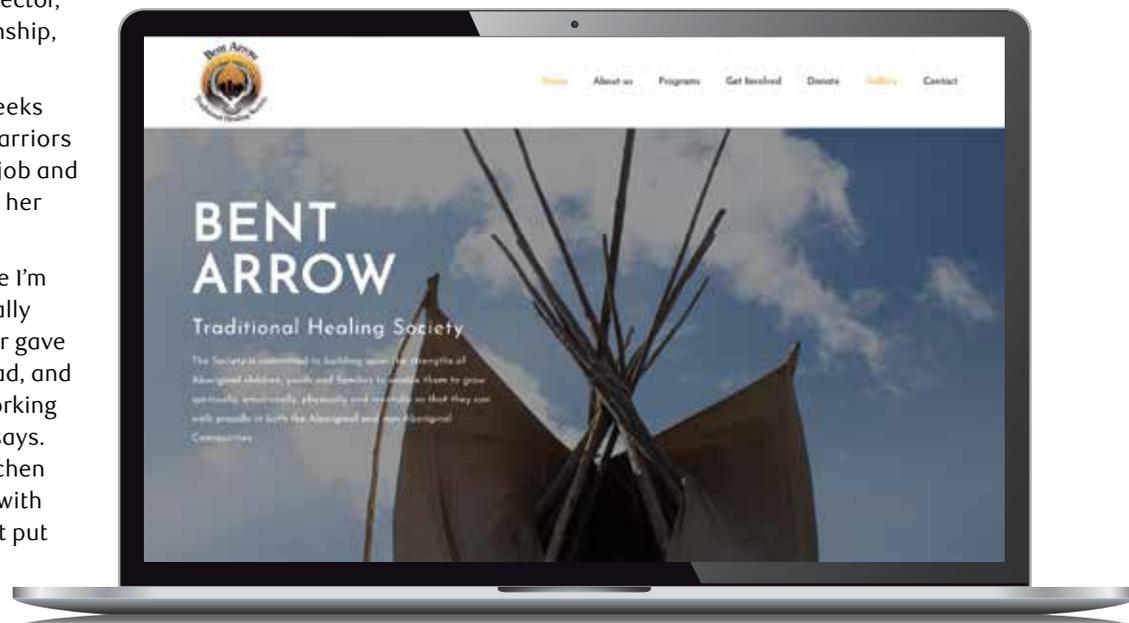
For the last two years, the RBC Foundation has gifted a total of \$100,000 to Bent Arrow, which is partially used to fund the program’s employment coordinator role. “That’s huge,” says Ferguson, “because without that position, we wouldn’t have the capacity to offer many of the employment and education opportunities that we do.”

The funding is part of RBC Future Launch, a 10-year, \$500 million commitment to help young people including Indigenous youth prepare for the future.

“At RBC, we’re committed to helping all youth reach their full potential, and Working Warriors aligns so well with what we want to achieve with RBC Future Launch,” says Jerilynn Daniels, RBC regional director, community marketing and citizenship, Alberta & Territories.

As for Hill, it has now been six weeks since she started the Working Warriors program, and she already has a job and is working on a plan to complete her grade 12 diploma.

“There were times where I felt like I’m doing all of this and nothing’s really turning around for me, but I never gave up. I’m glad I gave everything I had, and it all paid off because I’m now working and making my dad proud,” she says. “I work at Boston Pizza in the kitchen and I really enjoy it. I started off with dishwashing and just recently got put on the pizza station. So, it’s a really good sign.”



# Smart business

Finding more ways to support Indigenous-owned companies led by women like Staff Shop's Jennifer Menard is just one of the ways RBC creates an inclusive supply chain.



## Whenever a big storm swept through Wiikwemkoong First Nation

on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario, Jennifer Menard's grandmother leaned in, running outside to cut fresh cedar leaves from her trees, sacred Ojibwe medicine for protection.

"Annie Dympna Wilkin was her name and she was a gifted, loving soul," says Menard. "Her dream of becoming a registered nurse came true, and she spent the rest of her life healing and comforting people. She also spoke the language and believed in the magic of cedar. So, a lot of my childhood was spent there, learning traditional Indigenous teachings."

When she wasn't on the island with her grandparents, Menard was growing up in Sudbury, Ont., where her early years were humbling. "A part of my childhood was tormented by typical Indigenous suppression that runs in my family, like alcoholism," says Menard, whose spirit name is Blackfoot. "And so I worked really hard to not become a statistic."

Menard left home at age 18, and by 20, she was driving four hours south to Toronto to begin a new chapter in her life. Working in restaurants and hotels eventually landed her a job at

Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment in 2006. In 2008, she met Geoff Bagg, joined his firm and eventually created The Bagg Group's first hospitality and event staffing division.

Fast forward to 2018 when she bought that division and rebranded it as Staff Shop, which now provides hospitality and event staffing solutions across North America and the Caribbean.

"We're definitely on a mission to do something meaningful in our industry," she says. "We pride ourselves on paying our staff as legitimate employees, not contractors." While this business model costs more, it has paid off in attracting and retaining loyal, quality talent, and meeting all government standards and regulations.



Menard believes her company can make a difference by not only making a positive impact in the hospitality industry, but also helping move the needle in Indigenous people's lives by offering work that is flexible, fun and fair. "Now that I actually own what I created, I'm focused on giving back, especially concerning equal employment opportunities for all demographic groups, and tracking those statistics within Staff Shop," says the founder & CEO.

**"Now that I actually own what I created, I'm focused on giving back."**

– Jennifer Menard, founder & CEO, Staff Shop

Being certified by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) has opened additional doors – including to RBC.

Last year, Menard met Kiruba Sankar, global leader, corporate social responsibility (CSR) – global procurement for RBC at a CCAB event. Staff Shop is already an indirect supplier to RBC through a preferred supplier to the food services company Compass Group Canada, which in turn is a major RBC client. "We had a great conversation and he gave me some direction around how to approach RBC to uncover more procurement opportunities for Staff Shop. It's clear he's passionate about empowering Indigenous and women-led businesses," she says.



For Sankar, getting to know Menard and her business wasn't a one-off chance encounter, but rather, the result of RBC's chosen journey to strategically cultivate an inclusive supply chain that provides equal opportunities to qualified Indigenous businesses.

"Our global procurement team strives to build an inclusive supply chain and by influencing our large suppliers, we create more opportunities for certified Aboriginal suppliers," says Sankar. "It is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do."

RBC global procurement works with suppliers who share its values relating to diversity and seeks to influence the decisions of larger corporations to create more opportunities for qualified Indigenous-led businesses. Inclusive procurement enables Indigenous-led businesses to grow, create opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees and build stronger local economies. It is one piece of RBC's significant commitment to reconciliation and to continue to build stronger relationships with Indigenous communities across Canada.



## 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

**\$3,000,000**

Community centre project, Ontario

Roads, water and power generation

**\$490,000**

New generator for personal care home, Manitoba

Housing and administrative buildings

**\$13,000,000**

Housing project, Nunavut

Access to Capital and Financial Services

### People



Hiring programs

**349**

Indigenous interns hired as part of the Indigenous Student Internship Program

Internships and scholarships

**26**

Number of new undergraduates hired into the two-year Indigenous Peoples Development Program (IPDP) since 2017



Employment and Education

### Community



Youth

**\$3,461,000**

Arts and culture

**\$741,000**

Environment

**\$1,425,000**

Social Impact and Procurement

Total amount of grouped 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.

**Business, construction,  
infrastructure financing**

**\$5,000,000**

Infrastructure financing,  
New Brunswick



**Economic  
development**

**\$105,000**

Economic development project,  
British Columbia

**Sponsorships**

**\$25,000**

HELISET TFE SKÁL  
“Let the Languages Live”

**Youth engagement**

**\$1,700,000**

Funds awarded to 168 First Nations,  
Inuit and Métis youth as part of the  
RBC Indigenous Student Awards  
Program to date

**Employee engagement**

**87%**

Measure of engagement  
from Indigenous employees,  
exceeding Willis Towers  
Watson’s benchmark of 82%

**Education**

**\$100,000**

Amount donated to Yukon  
University Foundation  
(Institute of Indigenous  
Self-Determination)

**Mental health**

**\$538,000**



**Procurement**

**18**

Number of RBC indigenous  
suppliers – 7 certified  
Indigenous suppliers + 11  
self-declared to date

**\$3,700,000**

RBC spend with Indigenous  
suppliers to date

# RBC timeline



c. 1914: Trading post village of Hazelton, B.C. – Royal Bank branch relocated from the village to Hagwilget First Nation in 1997.

**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.

**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.

**1957**

Royal Bank opens the first bank branch in Canada's Arctic Islands in Frobisher Bay, N.W.T. (now Iqaluit, Nunavut).

**1973**

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

**1977**

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

**1991**

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

**1993**

Royal Bank launches the Aboriginal Stay in School Program, hiring grade 9-12 students to work in bank branches across Canada each summer.



1954: Investiture of Royal Bank CEO James Muir as Honorary Chief of the Blood Tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy.



1961: Nine new clients open Royal Bank accounts in Terrace, B.C.

**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.



1997: Investiture of Royal Bank executive Charlie Coffey (left) as Honorary Chief by Chief Phil Fontaine (right) – Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

**1997**

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

**2008**

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

**2014**

RBC proudly sponsors the 2014 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) in Regina, Sask. where over 4,000 athletes competed 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.

**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.

**2009**

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

**2011**

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

**2015**

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

**2019**

RBC opened 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.



1978: Arctic Winter Games, Hay River, N.W.T. – supported by RBC since 1977.



2014: NAIG, Regina, Sask. – opening ceremonies. Photo provided by Irina Popova Photography.

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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  
Eskimo Point Lumber, Arviat, Nunavut  
Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts & Crafts,  
Pangnirtung, Nunavut

This publication was developed in collaboration  
with Caroline Nolan, ThinkSustain® Consulting.

