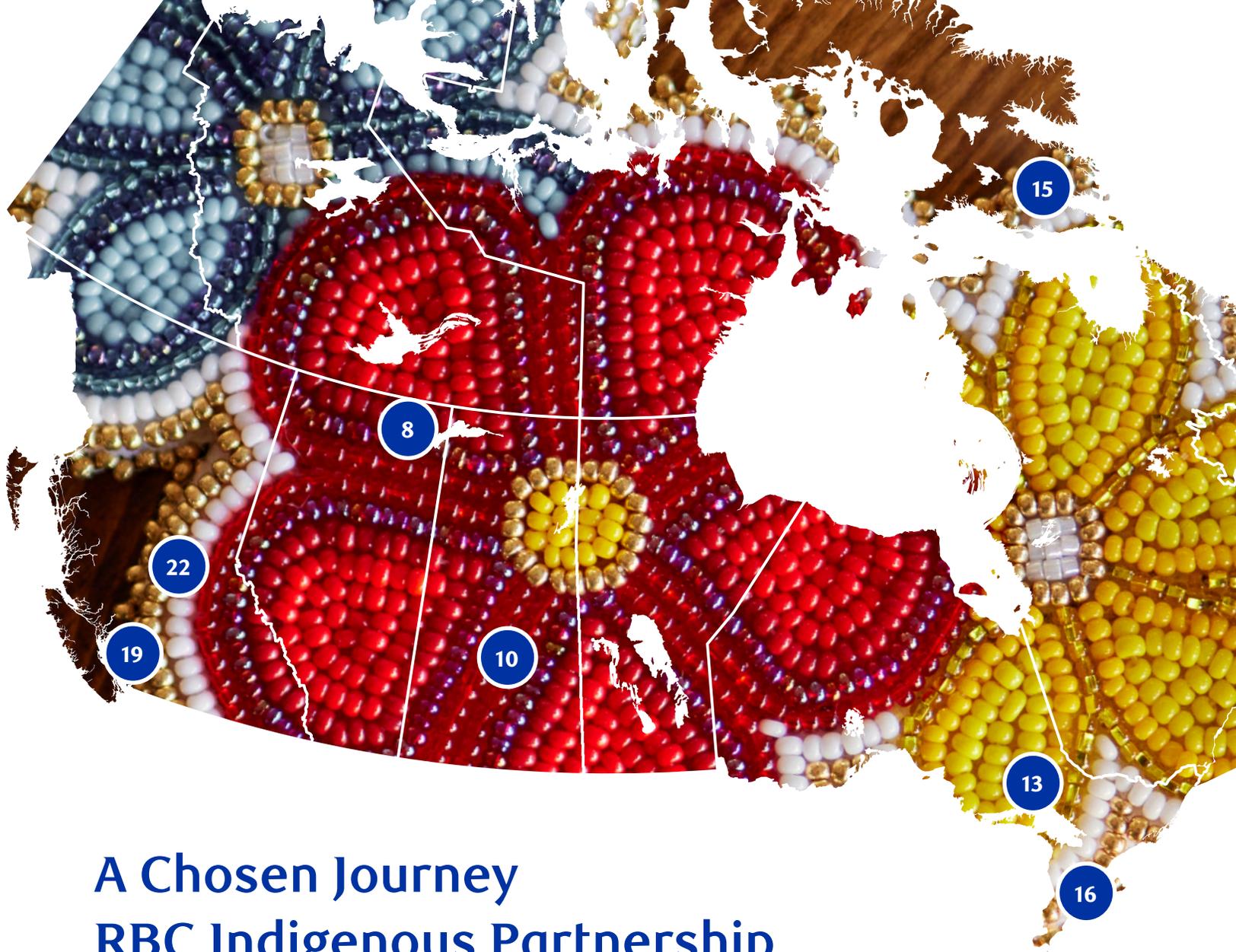


A Chosen Journey

RBC Indigenous Partnership
Report 2022





A Chosen Journey

RBC Indigenous Partnership

Report 2022

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

- | | |
|---|--|
| 8 Solar Powering Community | 16 Speaker Series |
| 10 Growing Food and Community | 19 Relationships Forged in Fire |
| 13 Dreams STEM from Educational Outreach | 20 Roots of Reconciliation |
| 15 Connected North | 22 Orange Shirt Day |



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.

This is a journey we are on together — to learn from each other and explore what we can do to create a better future. And that starts by celebrating Indigenous knowledge.

Ancestral knowledge has been preserved, despite all the harms inflicted on Indigenous societies, and remains at the core of Indigenous identity, language, heritage and livelihoods. Indigenous people have laboured to preserve and pass on ancient knowledge, and this gives critical perspective on innovative solutions to today's challenges.

The stories in this year's edition of *A Chosen Journey* show how Indigenous knowledge creates positive outcomes, tangible benefits, and fosters hope for future generations. RBC is proud to bring you these stories and to work with communities, organizations and businesses to make sure this knowledge is shared and celebrated — now and forever.



A Message from Dave McKay

President and CEO

Our Chosen Journey is one of learning from each other together, from the past, in the present, and for a more inclusive, sustainable future.

This belief has guided RBC's path toward Reconciliation for decades, and it's a journey we're engaged in with a full heart.

This past year, our communities were devastated by the uncovering of thousands of unmarked graves at former residential schools for Indigenous children in Canada. These events serve as tragic reminders of the trauma and multi-generational impact of the residential school system, and the painful truth of our country's history. RBC continues to stand in solidarity with Indigenous people across Canada, and remains deeply committed to building meaningful and lasting Reconciliation with Indigenous communities across Canada.

Our commitment to Reconciliation

In 2007, we put action into Reconciliation by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations, pledging to work in partnership on three priorities — Indigenous economies, people and communities. Each year since then, we've released *A Chosen Journey* to document progress on this important action plan, celebrate Indigenous successes and share the many collaborations that flourish between Indigenous Peoples and RBC.

At RBC, Reconciliation is guided by a deep respect for the unique social, cultural and historic contributions of Indigenous communities, as well as a desire to foster genuine and meaningful relationships with Indigenous nations in order to drive economic growth and create positive social change. We are determined to progress as a bank that champions Indigenous inclusion and prosperity — now, and for the generations to come. This includes working collaboratively to tackle one of the greatest challenges of our time: climate change.

Partnering with Indigenous communities to tackle climate change

The extreme weather events of recent years has placed climate change front and centre in the hearts and minds of Canadians. Too often, Indigenous communities pay the highest price of the devastating impacts of climate disaster — on their lives and livelihoods. At RBC, we know Indigenous leadership and knowledge is critical to addressing climate change, and meaningful consultation with Indigenous Peoples is fundamental to our country's successful transition to a net-zero future.

RBC is working more closely and engaging with traditional and elected Indigenous leaders, youth, entrepreneurs and investors to help communities build financial capacity for economic Reconciliation. I have made it a priority to commit members of my senior executive team to listen and learn more about how we can do better on projects and development, and will have this dialogue with RBC's Board of Directors.

In the pages of this report, you'll read important stories that demonstrate our commitment in action. Whether it's working together to provide assistance for evacuees in the aftermath of the Lytton, BC fires, or partnering with Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) on a new solar energy project supporting the clean energy transition, RBC is committed to working with Indigenous people across our economy and society.

A Chosen Journey

The stories in this year's report also celebrate the resilience of traditional Indigenous knowledge, and highlight the initiatives and partnerships led by Indigenous communities that ensure this knowledge is protected, respected and passed from one generation to the next. From intergenerational agriculture projects to innovative remote learning programs, we hear how these initiatives and ancient knowledge are helping build a better and greener Canada for the future.

I am tremendously inspired by this report, and we will continue to support the strength and prosperity of Indigenous nations, and do our part to create a more inclusive, sustainable, prosperous future — one we can all be proud of.



A Message from Phil Fontaine

Special Advisor, RBC Indigenous Financial Services

I think we would be remiss if we didn't recognize the turbulent times we all are experiencing in the world, between the pandemic, conflict around the world and the uncovering of unmarked graves on the grounds of former residential schools. At the same time, we are witness to a resurgence of our languages and cultures. We are reclaiming our traditional lands.

This resurgence has given so many of our people real hope and determination to ensure our languages are never jeopardized the way they were through the residential school experience and prohibition of our cultural practices.

It gives hope that we will be able to enjoy our songs and dances and celebrate our culture in a way that will inspire young people and the older generation that bore the brunt of the devastation.

Canada is viewed in many parts of the world as a place where people can feel safe and secure, where people can express themselves in a very positive way. We all remember when that wasn't so for our people. Even that is changing for us and for the country.

When we speak about knowledge keepers and how we transfer those life experiences in an inclusive way to the younger generation, it is a significant part of our recent history where we seemed to be alone in seeking justice. The difference now is that we have a significant number of partners: institutions and people that believe in the sanctity and relevance of our languages and cultures.

RBC is one of those institutions that have demonstrated their commitment to doing right. The stories we are sharing in this report demonstrate the way they are partnering in the transfer of Indigenous knowledge within our communities.

Now that we've learned what is absolutely essential to our communities and to the country, the path forward is much clearer these days than in the past. We are headed in the right direction with allies, partners, communities and people that believe as we do that there are better days ahead for all of us.



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



Economy

Financial Services

Solar Powering Community: Indigenous Economic Development Shines Brightly

Financing from RBC is helping Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) enjoy the bright side of economic development through a recent investment in solar energy, their second sustainable energy project.

“We know how important access to capital is for First Nations in order to pursue economic opportunity,” says Dale Sturges, national managing director of Indigenous Financial Services at RBC. “Economic Reconciliation is about partnering with Indigenous communities in ways that meet their unique needs — we can and must work together to support these opportunities and generate community prosperity.”

ACFN is building on the momentum created by their Three Nations Energy Fort Chipewyan Solar Farm and starting something new. Three Nations Energy came to be when ACFN and ATCO Ltd. as project leads applied for and secured funding from Natural Resources Canada (under the CERRC funding stream) and the Government of Alberta.

To access these funds, ownership of the solar farm was extended to include Mikisew Cree First Nation and the Fort Chipewyan Métis Association.

Project proceeds educate the community about renewable energy and energy efficiency, while the remainder is split among the owners to support their own strategic priorities. It was showcased in Dubai at the Canadian Pavilion as part of Expo 2020, has received an Alberta Emerald Award and is a Canada Clean50 recipient.

Clean energy is important to ACFN. Chief Allan Adam says, “ACFN wants to be a leader in helping Alberta and Canada protect climate. Solar is now one of the cheapest and best choices for power, and this business venture lines up with our environmental responsibilities and values.”

The Nation takes those environmental responsibilities and values seriously, and created their Community Energy Plan in 2018. This document has been crucial in implementing short, medium and long term initiatives to increase their energy efficiency.



Chief Allan Adam of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation.
Photo by David Dodge, GreenEnergyFutures.ca

From community biking and skiing to reducing dependence on gas-powered vehicles, improving local housing for more efficiency, implementing sustainable local food production and food sovereignty, and developing a remote cabin solar program to reduce generator dependence, ACFN is addressing energy issues at every opportunity.

The new project is a renewable energy venture with Concord Pacific/Concord Green Energy, and includes three solar farms southeast of Calgary. These “merchant power” plants will generate about 140,000 MWh of clean, renewable, low carbon electricity that can be sold annually. RBC provided a \$32 million loan to ACFN to pursue this partnership, given they needed to contribute 25% of the capital costs for equal ownership.

“One of the wishes of ACFN leadership was to use Indigenous labour to the greatest extent possible. For the construction of the solar farms, over 50% of the labour on site during construction was Indigenous,” Jason Schulz, executive director, Strategic Advisory Services, ACFN, explains. This commitment is creating economic opportunities for other Nations, as the project is too far from ACFN territory to employ its own members.

“This is an opportunity for ACFN to continue demonstrating leadership in terms of economic development, diversification, environmental stewardship, and it also takes us outside of our traditional territory,” he continues. The funds generated by the project will allow the Nation to undertake activities that don’t fit neatly into the narrow parameters of grant funding.

Diversification is key because ACFN owns Acden Environment, an energy service company. While some believe it should be either/or, Schulz has a different perspective.

“I don’t think our need for oil or conventional carbon-based fuels is disappearing anytime soon. But likewise, I think we have another opportunity in front of us to continue to venture down this path of environmental stewardship, carbon reduction and this journey to net-zero,” he clarifies.

He compares the diversification to the rebalancing of financial and insurance industries to go beyond traditional markets. “It’s necessary to have conventional energy sources, but also a lot of the renewable technology. I think there’s more to come in terms of hydrogen, electric vehicles and developing infrastructure around that carbon capture storage. Although it may be new, it’s an exciting opportunity. I think we’re just in the beginning now,” he elaborates.

Ultimately, Schulz says the project “opens up a whole new world of possibilities based on long-stream, dependable revenue flows in terms of economic development, strategic priorities for the Nation, both here and now, but also for generations to come. I think it’s always important to look out for the longer term interests of the community and its membership. This is yet another example of how we are accomplishing that.”



Jason Schulz, Executive Director, Strategic Advisory Services, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta. Photo by David Dodge, GreenEnergyFutures.ca

With the revenue from a project life of 35 years, there are opportunities to reinvest funds in more economic development, fund educational or environmental initiatives or even support the needs of elders. What being able to finance and participate in a project like this does is create options for the 1,300 members of ACFN and their descendants. In partnership and collaboration, and with the power of solar energy, opportunity is flowing from Three Nations Energy, now to three new solar farms, and onto additional future opportunities. When it comes to looking on the bright side, it doesn’t get much brighter than that. ■



Chief Allan Adam, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta. Photo by David Dodge, GreenEnergyFutures.ca



Greenhouse build at Muskoday First Nation — Muskoday First Nation members and Enactus Lambton College students building together. Photo by Jon Milos

Growing Food and Community: Planting Seeds of Reconciliation

“We’re so dependent on many things. At one time, we never were, so we want to get back to that self-sufficiency,” Herman Crain, former chief of Muskoday First Nation, says wistfully. Through the Growing Together program, the Nation is addressing its food security with a greenhouse, aquaponics program and garden beds.

The program is in partnership with Enactus Lambton College and made possible through funding from RBC. Enactus Lambton College is an international non-profit organization that brings together student leaders to create a better, more sustainable world through the positive power of business.

The Nation intends to take the knowledge and experience they gain and expand it to bigger greenhouses, creating future economic and employment benefits. Together they plan to keep growing food, relationships and self-sufficiency, all the while planting seeds of Reconciliation.

Growing Together connects community members inter-generationally to strengthen community through meaningful agriculture projects. This land-based learning grows a sense of belonging and worth for youth who don’t get a lot of opportunities, empowering them to participate in agriculture, even in uncertain times.

The pandemic shifted timelines, but the Nation persevered. “No matter what was thrown their way, the community kept

that passion and drive. That drives our team to keep going, keep pushing, and keep things moving along,” Megan Rizzo, a student with Enactus Lambton College, shares.

The Nation is enjoying growing and eating their food. The greenhouse is by the local school to include students in the future. Beyond growing food, they’re also growing relationships with the Enactus Lambton College team. Student leaders are helping implement the project the community envisioned; they’ve also attended ceremonies with Muskoday’s members and have been adopted into the community.

“A lot of people talk about Reconciliation, but you don’t see action. Instead of just talking about Reconciliation, the Enactus Lambton College students actually go out and practice it. We’re 100% grateful they have come into our lives, and I believe they feel the same way about us. We’ve never had a relationship with a group like that,” Crain recounts.

Jon Milos, senior director of community engagement at Enactus Lambton College, explains,

“We’re trying really hard to live up to the treaties that have been signed; we are all treaty holders, and we need to live up to those responsibilities. A lot of that is making sure that we do what we said we would do. That’s what our team is trying to do.”



Economy

Goal: Advance the growth and sustainability of Indigenous economies by providing comprehensive financial services to community members, governments, organizations and businesses. Selected examples of how RBC met this goal as of April 30, 2022, include:

Access to Essential Financial Services

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

Home Financing

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

Access to Capital - Specific Programs

- Land Claim Financing Program
- Infrastructure Financing Program

Support for Entrepreneurs and Financial Literacy

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

A photograph of an older man with grey hair and a young girl with long dark hair. They are both smiling and looking at each other while working on a craft project at a wooden table. The man is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and has a gold ring on his left hand. The girl is wearing a white floral patterned top. The background is filled with various green plants and flowers, creating a warm and natural atmosphere.

People

Employment and
Education

Dreams STEM from Educational Outreach: NOSM Inspires the Next Generation of Indigenous Health Practitioners

“As a student, I lived in a northern community that did not have a high school,” recounts Yolanda Wanakamik, director of Indigenous Affairs at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM). “I had to leave home at the age of 13 and be billeted out with families.” She knows firsthand the challenges Indigenous learners experience. Now she’s giving back.

Wanakamik is part of a team helping Indigenous youth in northern Ontario get excited about science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and becoming a doctor. With investment, innovation and a little inspiration, NOSM is carving out a new way forward for rural medicine and Indigenous wellness.

This innovative outreach is supported by funding from partners like RBC. As an RBC Future Launch partner, NOSM received \$195,000 in 2020 to support the Indigenous Health Practitioner Pathway Program over three years. It’s a new evidence-based program, developed in consultation with Indigenous stakeholders.

Since 2006, NOSM has brought youth together each summer for a week-long health sciences camp called CampMed as part of their pathway to medicine. Gathering wasn’t possible with the pandemic, so NOSM rose to the occasion and found partners to help them engage virtually with a younger audience.

Working with Science North, NOSM delivered Science Day opportunities to 15 schools and 350 students. They also put together STEM kits for 22 First Nations communities and more than 1,300 youth.

To bridge internet connectivity gaps, NOSM medical students created videos to explain the kits. More youth were reached at a lower cost, and travel expenses were avoided while protecting vulnerable communities from infection risk.

The kits weren’t just full of STEM teachings — they also came packed with hope and piqued curiosity according to one participant. “I think the kits are providing more opportunities for Indigenous students to eliminate some of the psychological barriers from systemic racism in their early education and the lack of representation in the field. If they see other Indigenous students in medical school, they might think, ‘Hey, you know what? I could do that!’ And that’s really what we want,” Claire Hyatt, a second-year NOSM medical student, explains.

NOSM’s Indigenous Affairs team helped Hyatt prepare for her medical school interview. Now, she’s mentoring aspiring students on social media and answering their questions. She says as more Indigenous youth become doctors, there are more mentors to support Indigenous youth to pursue medical education. “If we can get people from those communities coming to medical school, they can go back and they can serve their populations,” she offers.

“Outreach to youth in grades seven and eight is relatively unheard of when recruiting to medical school. Our work reaching back to youth has been tremendous, we’ve had great impact,” Wanakamik explains, reflecting on their innovative approach. To recruit more Indigenous doctors, they realized they had to start a lot earlier.

The Indigenous Health Practitioner Pathway Program provides access for Indigenous youth in rural and remote communities across northern Ontario to attend educational programming focused on health, life and human sciences in their home communities and larger city centres in the region. NOSM believes educating learners who live in the north will result in more practitioners providing services there and being successfully retained to keep doing so.

It’s more than a hunch on their part. NOSM alumni — family physicians, specialists and registered dietitians, to name a few — are practicing in northern Ontario. But to get more Indigenous doctors in communities, more Indigenous students need to apply. That means fine tuning the recruitment process, starting in elementary school.



Yolanda Wanakamik, director of Indigenous Affairs, NOSM



Claire Hyatt, second-year NOSM medical student

“Systemic racism at the elementary and secondary school levels has disproportionately disadvantaged Indigenous youth, making it even more difficult to get into university and medical school. This pathway is another tool that NOSM is using to address those barriers,” says Dr. Sarita Verma, dean, president and CEO of NOSM. “We want Indigenous youth to be encouraged by this program and to know that we, at NOSM, care about their future.”

“This contribution from RBC really helps us to experiment with some pilot projects and to see the uptake. It is a part of a longer-term initiative to systematically build these engagement opportunities into the medical school application process,” Wanakamik elaborates.

To build a healthier northern Ontario, these partners are confronting the systemic racism that leads to health inequities. In uncertain times, it takes investment, innovation and a little inspiration to overcome barriers Indigenous youth face. This STEM project will inspire youth to dream about becoming doctors, change makers and innovators. That’s why programs like NOSM’s Indigenous Health Practitioner Pathway Program matter so much. ■



Claire Hyatt, a NOSM student, demonstrates a STEM kit about smells.



Circulation STEM kit

Connected North: Learning and Growing Together from Afar

A politician, a chef, a children’s author and a boxing instructor walk into a remote northern classroom. This is not a joke with a punchline, it’s just a sampling of the learning opportunities available through Connected North, a program of TakingITGlobal, an RBC Future Launch partner.

Connected North is one of only two Canadian innovations to be recognized as one of 2022’s top 100 education innovations in the world (hundrED 2022). The program fosters student engagement and enhanced education outcomes in remote Indigenous communities. Beyond enhancing academics, it’s also a part of Reconciliation.

“Connected North contributes to Reconciliation through ensuring strong representation of Indigenous role models as part of session facilitation and educational experience delivery. In addition, the program sessions focus on supporting well-being outcomes and exposure to hands-on activities that build upon the interests, curiosities and capabilities of students,” shares Jennifer Corriero, co-founder and executive director of TakingITGlobal.

Cisco’s high-definition, two-way TelePresence video technology makes the magic happen, delivering immersive and interactive educational services. The goal is to give students and teachers access to innovative, engaging content to empower them in their school and home lives. These engagements offer participants the opportunity to imagine what could be possible, what life could be like, and to learn from the lives of others.

Students at participating schools enjoy live sessions with Indigenous role models and public figures and get exposure to experiences they wouldn’t normally have access to in the North. In 2021 there were 5,019 sessions reaching over 24,000 kindergarten to grade 12 students. Nearly a third of the sessions were delivered by Indigenous content providers and role models, with just over 100 First Nations, Inuit and Métis content providers actively participating in live sessions. Additionally, 228 live Future Pathways sessions took place over the year.

The Connected North program also offers a video series of interviews, called “Future Pathways Fireside Chats,” featuring Indigenous adults sharing stories about their lives. “The Future Pathways Fireside Chats are a way of giving people a voice. Many do not realize how inspiring their stories are, and just by telling their story, they can help pave the way for youth who are on the verge of leaving high school and might be looking for some guidance to help them decide which direction they would like to take in post-secondary school,” explains Magdalena Kelly, Indigenous content partnerships and schools coordinator. 175 Fireside Chats were recorded in 2021, and these conversations also became beautifully illustrated blogs.

The proof of the impact comes from the testimonials of the educators who have been involved with the program. “One of the largest impacts I have seen that the Connected North program has had on my kids is that it has delivered Indigenous content from Indigenous people. This alone is huge, but for my student population who is largely Indigenous, it gives them positive role models that look like them and have similar stories to them. For them to be able to see people who look like them, with similar life stories to them, succeed in a field that they may also enjoy is powerful,” a Connected North teacher shares.



Indigenous role model at Mine Centre School in Ontario



Interactive cooking demonstration



Nakasuk Elementary School in Iqaluit, Nunavut

That impact is only growing over time. “It has been incredible to support the growth of the Connected North program from five schools to over 100 schools involved and accessing the program over recent years. We are proud to know that 91.8% of teachers feel that Connected North sessions help to engage their students, contributing to their attendance in class and motivation for learning,” Corriero recounts.

The principles of the program include relationship building, empowerment through role models, customized content, thinking beyond the classroom, adapting expectations and incorporating a diversity of voices, admirable and important goals in developing responsive and culturally appropriate programming for youth.

The impact and innovation of the program are reasons why, when we talk about a politician, a chef, a children’s author and a boxing instructor walking into a remote northern classroom, there’s no punchline. These are opportunities to create hope and trust, to enjoy relevant and engaging learning opportunities, to receive services that recognize the challenges and social history of the young audience and to listen to unique stories and experiences. It’s not a joke, but it’s definitely something to smile about. ■

Speaker Series: Skills, Connections and Storytelling for Reconciliation

“We all need to be comfortable in having these uncomfortable conversations,” Chad Garlow explains. After his father’s passing, Garlow, an RBC community manager, dreamed of having an impact. He wanted to showcase Indigenous talent and create opportunities to network and build skills at RBC.

What he created was a speaker series to help empower his fellow RBC employees.

“Something that I want to pass on to people that are just coming in: you can have influence once you find your voice,” Garlow shares. The first event was with the Lean In employee resource group, a discussion called “Cultural Perspectives of Indigenous Women in Leadership,” featuring RBC leaders in Reconciliation, Karen Bird, Rachael Crawford-Rendine and Amanda Alexander, and hosted by Erica Maness.

The speakers created awareness needed for RBC employees to find where they start on their own Reconciliation journey. “Reconciliation means everybody starts from the same beginning point, and when you’re able to talk about what happened, as horrible as it can be, that’s when you learn from each other,” Garlow offers.

After years of answering the same questions, he wants to go deeper and take the conversation from remembrance to prevention — how do we make sure this doesn’t happen to any other community? Given the revelations of unmarked graves on the grounds of former residential schools

in 2021 through ground-penetrating radar at residential schools, he argues we can’t consider residential schools as just a piece of history. Its impacts are being felt today with each investigation.

South London community manager Laura Hilton speaks on the impact of the speaker series, sharing, “He really created an environment where people felt safe to ask the questions that were on their mind to seek out education, resources and develop further.”

Financial advisor Ashley Phillips, a speaker and organizer, says, “It’s bringing everyone together. For people to listen to Indigenous people tell them their experience and their stories, it’s starting them on their journey of Reconciliation.” Another participant, client advisor Erica Maness, elaborates, “The speaker series has connected Indigenous women and men across Canada.”

With the speaker series Garlow envisioned during a time of grief, RBC employees are getting comfortable with having uncomfortable conversations. They’re connecting beyond traditional networking, learning new ways to share their experiences and learning to listen. Indigenous talent is being showcased, and the impact he longed for is being carried on by new organizers continuing the work. The speaker series provides a venue for the Reconciliation journey to begin. ■



Chad Garlow

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

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

Education and Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples in Canada

- Future Launch — a program supported by RBC Foundation focused on preparing youth, including Indigenous youth, with the skills and training needed for the future of work
- Emerging Artists Project — a program supported by RBC Foundation to advance careers in visual arts, music, theatre, performance, literature and film, including Indigenous artists
- Tech For Nature — a program supported by RBC Foundation to develop new ideas, technologies and partnerships, including Indigenous partnerships, to solve environmental challenges and food security
- RBCxMusic: First Up — a platform for emerging musicians, including Indigenous musicians, to showcase their music, share their story and reach new fans
- RBC Future Launch Scholarship for Indigenous Youth — a scholarship program of \$10,000 for 20 Indigenous students each year



People

Goal: Create access to employment and education opportunities for Indigenous people both within RBC and across various other industry sectors. Selected examples of how RBC met this goal as of April 30, 2022, include:

Reconciliation Education for Canadians

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

Indigenous History and Cultural Awareness Programs for RBC Employees

- 4 Seasons of Reconciliation — online learning program for RBC employees
- National Indigenous History Month employee events
- Orange Shirt Day programming and events
- Certified RBC facilitators for Kiros Blanket Exercises
- Reconciliation information panels and presentations
- Sacred Seeds — an Indigenous employee-led program to create opportunities for RBC employees to spend time on the land with Indigenous people



Community

Social Impact and
Procurement

Relationships Forged in Fire: Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation Hosts Lytton Evacuees

“It was about everyone everywhere coming together to support,” Chief Rosanne Casimir recalls. During the devastating wildfire season in British Columbia in 2021, the town of Lytton burned. People needed to be evacuated and many made their way to Kamloops. When they arrived, they found Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation had opened the gates to their grounds to host evacuees, providing a safe refuge for those in need and a place to temporarily call home.

“Knowing what happened with our previous wildfires, we opened up those gates and even though we were still in the midst of second vaccinations (COVID-19), without hesitation. It was unanimous with the council to open the gates and that’s exactly what we did. People were flooding in,” Chief Casimir recounts.

Donations poured in and trucks showed up overflowing with donations and food. One of them belonged to RBC. Ready to help people charge their phones and

devices and access the internet, the RBC truck was there for the residents of Lytton. Tracy Antoine, vice president, Commercial Financial Services, Indigenous Markets for the BC region, was on the ground as a volunteer helping evacuees and witnessing the outpouring of support coming into the area.

RBC donated \$10,000 to Lytton First Nation for the immediate assistance of their members for expenses like fuel to help people drive to their families. RBC also gave \$5,000 to Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation to offset the costs of accommodating evacuees, including upgrades to the electrical systems.

At the same time as the fire, there was a heatwave and the pandemic continued to be a concern. Despite those worries, there were no outbreaks of COVID-19 on the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation pow wow grounds. The host community was not yet fully vaccinated, but they knew it was time for them to act, regardless.

Reflecting on the arrival of the Lytton community members, Chief Casimir remembers, “It was just really somber

because they lost everything. It was sad and it was so emotional. We embraced them and did whatever we could to help support and provide service to make them feel a little bit better.”

“When it comes to times of crisis, the biggest thing that you can do as an individual or a community is to just be there to support and be compassionate. Little acts of kindness really do go a long way,” she continues.

First Nations Health Authority was on site with cultural support and there were ceremonies to comfort people, with the sacred fire burning for four days so people could make offerings, pray and sing in their own way.

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation welcomed all Lytton residents and firefighters from afar at a time that was difficult for them as well. Not long after the revelation of 215 unmarked graves, they were a community in mourning themselves. “We were going through all our grief and loss at the same time... so we grieved with them as well,” Chief Casimir shares.



Chief Rosanne Casimir, Kamloops



Chief Casimir, Councillors Thomas Blank and Justin Gottfriedson and RBC staff

She reflects on what it felt like when so many people showed up for her community when the announcement was made about the gravesites. Semi-trucks, motorcyclists, people who walked to Kamloops from the Yukon, politicians and the media all came to town. “It was overwhelming, it was that nurturing and that support and just being there in that understanding,” she remembers.

“We just extend our deep appreciation for everyone who stood in solidarity, not only for us, but for all those that were impacted from residential school and all the different traumatic things that were happening throughout our whole nation area,” Chief Casimir continues. Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation was able to pay forward that love and caring to the people of Lytton in their time of need.

“No one can do everything and you’ve got to rely on partnerships, and support to be able to address needs that you can’t meet yourself. It’s about that solidarity and that unity,” Chief Casimir recalls. The Nation wasn’t alone in providing support, with partners like RBC on site to assist, so that the people of Lytton didn’t have to be alone.

The gates were opened and Lytton residents were welcomed, given space to grieve, heal, reconnect and rest. Standing in solidarity and unity, everyone everywhere came together when it mattered most, First Nations people and non-First Nations people alike. With no homes to come home to, the people of Lytton found a temporary home in the hearts of the community of Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation. ■



Chief Casimir with RBC staff



Chief Casimir and Tracy Antoine

Roots of Reconciliation: Curriculum That Grows Understanding

“I feel like the voices and the strength of my ancestors helped me throughout this resource creation,” explains Melody Martin-Googoo, one of the writers involved in the Roots of Reconciliation (ROR) program with Mi’kmawey Debert Cultural Centre (MDCC). The program, in partnership with RBC, is being funded with \$225,000 in multi-year support to empower MDCC and its partners, Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey and Treaty Education Nova Scotia, to reach 120,000 students across Atlantic Canada over the next four years.

Vinita Savani, RBC regional president for Atlantic Canada, expresses why this project is so important: “Education plays a critical role in the journey toward truth and Reconciliation, but to be effective, any educational initiative must be accessible. It is a privilege for us to share in this partnership that aligns with our organizational goals on Reconciliation, is available to so many students across this region, and provides an opportunity for us to work collaboratively to honour the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action.”

The goal is to share a free, accurate, engaging and meaningful program that draws on Mi’kmaw culture and experience in terms of foundations, treaties, and renewal and Reconciliation. The program holds promise that excites and inspires the MDCC team.



RBC and Mi'kmawey Debert teams, artist Gerald Gloade and the chief of Millbrook First Nation

MDCC is a charitable, not-for-profit First Nations organization administered through The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kma'q, a First Nation tribal council.

Thinking of the students and educators who will learn from the curriculum, Martin-Googoo is full of hope. "I hope it enhances their understanding of what it means to be a treaty person, that it enhances their understanding of what it means to be an ally, that it enhances their understanding of their role within Mi'kma'ki in advancing things in regard to the inequities in social justice of our people," she shares.

Creating the resource was challenging, but worth it. Martin-Googoo describes what it was like: "Every time I tried to create a learning experience in the colonized way, I had a really challenging success rate. Every time I approached the Elders, I shared my frustration with them. They would just tell me, 'Write a story.' The answer was always in storytelling," she recounts. That's how Roots of Reconciliation came to contain skits and stories instead of just lists of dates and facts.

The resource isn't just to help non-Mi'kmaw people learn about the Mi'kmaw; it's also to help Mi'kmaw people learn about their own culture. Martin-Googoo recalls going through the public education system never learning about who she was and how that experience was shared among her peers.

Teachers in the region want to overcome that barrier and offer meaningful instruction. "The ROR program and the MDCC digital portal will empower our students by giving them access to Mi'kmaw voices and perspectives, lived experiences and contextualized history details necessary to move all of us toward becoming culturally competent treaty people. As we come to recognize, understand and more fully engage with our relationships with the ongoing history and future of Mi'kma'ki and its people, we can begin to reconcile

our understandings of the past," says Matt Arsenault, teacher at Redcliff Middle School.

Roots of Reconciliation content has built-in flexibility with links to language records, historical documents and resources teachers can combine with content to approach instruction with confidence.

Eight learning experiences are being piloted through the program, and the online portal will let learners build their own pathways through inquiry-based education.

Ultimately, this resource is about bringing people together. MDCC staff member Ramona Morris elaborates, "We're trying to reconnect with everybody here. Learning about my people and other First Nations people across Canada would start to help build that relationship and create that relationship with other people."

Morris recalls her own experience of being a child playing hockey and having another player ask, "Do you guys still live in teepees?" That's why she wants to reach children, so they become educated and informed adults.

While the project intends to bring the Mi'kmaw voice to life, doing so together has taken teamwork. "It felt like creator was bringing all of these voices and lived experiences together to ensure that this resource was created. The words were written so that our voice could be told," Martin-Googoo recalls. Roots of Reconciliation is rooted in partnership, a collective effort to create a way forward together based on common understanding. 120,000 students will benefit from these efforts and be able to draw from the lessons of the past and present to build a future with Reconciliation. ■



Dokis Photography

Orange Shirt Day: Clothed in Reconciliation

“The awareness helps our families to heal a bit before we leave this earth. We all knew the missing children and unmarked burials were coming. But of course, just because we knew, there is no way to prepare for that,” shares Phyllis Webstad, founder of Orange Shirt Day and member of Canoe Creek/Dog Creek First Nation, reflecting on a year that saw Nations rocked by the news of unmarked graves and what they represented — the confirmation of survivors’ stories.

When Webstad went to residential school at the age of six, her shiny orange shirt given to her by her grandmother was taken away. Now people who live all across Canada wear their orange shirts on September 30 to remember what happened, raise awareness and show support for survivors.

RBC wanted to ensure their employees had orange shirts for Orange Shirt Day, but the size of the order was too large to be fulfilled by the Society itself. To ensure that the Orange Shirt Day Society received a contribution consistent with what they would have received had they filled the order, RBC worked with Staples to procure enough shirts for September 30 and give back to the Society.

Funds from Orange Shirt Day sales help the Society continue its work of educating Canadians about the legacy of residential schools and providing education on Reconciliation.

The Society makes presentations in schools and corporations to share about what happened and how survivors and Indigenous communities are impacted today. Ultimately, Webstad focuses on education as a means to make progress.

“I want Canadians to know what was lost, that this is not just Indigenous history. This is Canadian history. And it’s no longer valid for people to say that they don’t know about this. I want Canadians to know that the truth is not yet finished being told,” Webstad explains. When she presents, she’s often asked what people can do and she tells them to read, to educate themselves and “listen to your mind and to your heart. You’ll know what to do.”

It’s been a busy year for Webstad and the Orange Shirt Day Society. A documentary called “Returning Home” came out, in partnership with Canadian Geographic, and it shows the parallel between the salmon of the Fraser River fishery and her family’s stories around residential schools. A book called *Beyond the Orange Shirt Story* was also released, detailing six generations of her family’s story.

After so many announcements of unmarked graves and the trauma that comes from retelling such painful stories, Webstad still has ways she finds hope and does her best to take care of herself. She sees hope in her grandchildren, raised together because they haven’t been separated by residential schools.

She sees hope in other people’s children too. “The children learning what happened to us and having empathy all across Canada...I look forward to witnessing that,” she says. The Society has plans to celebrate the first graduating class that has had Orange Shirt Day education their whole school careers.

Webstad looks to the future and what it could hold for her family. “I look forward to my grandchildren having peers that know where they come from, what their history is and what their current challenges are and to be able to help them, to be in a system that is understanding and complimentary and not having to fight every day of their lives just to have things.”

“That’s my hope...that we don’t have to struggle as much to be alive every day. Maybe we could have a little bit of a breather and a little bit of a break and enjoy our families, enjoy the sunshine,” she reflects.

With the support of the Orange Shirt Day Society staff, and corporate partners like RBC, Webstad knows that she isn’t alone in the work of sharing this important story with Canadians.

“With Orange Shirt Day, I always say it has been divinely guided, things just happen and continue to happen. I believe the ancestors and the children are behind it,” she expresses.

Webstad draws inspiration from the Honourable Murray Sinclair’s words when he came to Williams Lake, which she paraphrases, “Nobody is going home. We’re all here. We need to learn to get along and we need to learn to get along respectfully.” The education from Orange Shirt Day is Reconciliation in action, sharing the truth and creating common ground for important conversations. It starts with a day, but it’s building towards a future, bringing awareness so families can heal. ■



Phyllis Webstad, founder of Orange Shirt Day



Community

Goal: Promote the prosperity and well-being of Indigenous communities through philanthropic efforts as well as create procurement opportunities for Indigenous-owned businesses. Selected examples of how RBC met this goal as of April 30, 2022, include:

Donations, Grants and Other Financial Support

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

Indigenous Advisory and Governance at RBC

- Phil Fontaine appointed senior advisor to RBC in 2009
- Roberta Jamieson, Indigenous director, RBC Board of Directors, since 2021

Thought Leadership: Indigenous Economic & Research Reports

- *Preparing Indigenous Youth for a Digital Future*

Indigenous and Partner Organization Memberships

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

Recurring Sponsorships for National Events with Indigenous Organizations

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

Procurement Opportunities for Indigenous Businesses at RBC

- RBC Supplier Diversity Program



RBC Timeline

Dokis Photography

1947

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

1969

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

1977

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

1991

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

1997

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

1957

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

1973

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

1990

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

1992

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

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.

2007

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

2009

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

2014

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

2018

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

2020

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

2008

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

2011

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

2015

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

2019

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

2021

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



Contributors

Dokis Photography

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

Beadwork was generously provided by Nokonanamis Designs and features the creations of Julia Taback, an Anishinaabe woman from Shawanaga First Nation. We wanted to integrate beading, an art in common among First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and an example of Indigenous knowledge passed down from generation to generation.

Francis Family

The Francis (Nanabush) Family of Manitoulin Island are members of Aundeck Omni Kaning, Beausoleil and Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation and are the kind-hearted people who grace the pages of *A Chosen Journey*. They were honoured and excited to be part of the publication and to contribute to a positive representation in media while representing the expressions of Indigenous ways of being and the importance of laughter, traditional medicines, storytelling, love and family. We are thankful to Justin, Karlee, Rilynn, Kayson, Debbie and Jeff Francis along with Joan Cranney for sharing their time, their strong family connections and their cultural teachings with us in these photos.

Design de Plume

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

Nations Translation Group

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

Dokis Photography

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

Alison Tedford

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

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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

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

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



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