

Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program continues to grow across the province

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they go back to the communities and develop their own training.”

As the program coordinator, Beardy regularly speaks to the adult health leaders—and community leads like education directors and superintendents—and visits every site twice a year to continue to build and strengthen relationships with the people on the ground.

“We’ve become a family—and that’s how it’s always felt, right from the beginning,” she says. “Our end goal is to be in every school in Manitoba, which was [program founder and

now-retired UM kinesiology and recreation management professor] Joannie Halas’ original vision. I want to see it flourish all over, and transition from research to a not-for-profit so we can have even more opportunities. It’s exciting work and it’s beautiful.”

Since 2006, thousands of high school and elementary students, and hundreds of university students and community mentors, have participated in the program. Though the COVID-19 pandemic put a temporary pause on activities, two new communities—Mathias

Colomb and Norway House—are preparing to deliver the program.

Beardy sees its benefits first-hand as she visits the communities in which it’s offered, and hopes to see it continue to grow as it receives support from UM’s partnership with the Mastercard Foundation’s EleV Program.

“It has brought such life to the communities. I’m sure happy and proud that we’re able to provide something like this in community and give our kids a place to grow. It’s just amazing and I’m so proud of our program.”

ID Fusion delivering training with SERDC First Nations In Manitoba

A new program to train information technology workers on three Manitoba First Nations is creating excitement as a way to start addressing the underrepresentation of Indigenous workers in the IT sector.

“The IT sector is one of the fastest growing in Canada, but Indigenous people are extremely underrepresented,” said Christian Dandeneau, CEO and founder of ID Fusion. Indigenous people represent five per cent of the Canadian population, but only 1.2 per cent of the country’s IT professionals. “The world is being driven by technological advancements, but rural and remote First Nation communities are being left behind. We’re aiming to start changing that.”

Funded by the Federal Future Skills Centre, the program offers paid training to students on three Manitoba First Nations. Developed and led by ID Fusion, an Indigenous-owned Winnipeg IT company, it is delivered in partnership with the Southeast Resource Development Council (SERDC), which serves eight First Nation communities delivering various services including economic development.

“I am excited to collaborate with this program because it is an innovative and practical way for young professionals to develop their skills through hands-on experience,” said Brenda Greyeyes, Employment, Training and Economic Development Manager with

Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. “In speaking with our two students, I know that this program has given them a sense of responsibility and empowerment to be working within their community. I see the need and value in having an IT professional serving our businesses and offering solutions closer to home.”

The training is offered in person by ID Fusion personnel who have adapted existing training curriculum to fit an Indigenous learning style. Students shadow their mentor trainer to see them fix real world problems, then they return to the office where they learn the theory behind what they just saw before proceeding to learn how to do it themselves.

ID Fusion is also incorporating cutting edge technologies to support with the students including augmented reality (AR) which will help bridge the gap with remote First Nations. The technology allows students to use a headset to connect with a mentor in real-time and show them the problem they’re trying to solve even though the mentor is hundreds of kilometres away.

“This training is market driven. There are plenty of job opportunities waiting in IT. So this opens up opportunities for the students and their families,” said Doug Mercer, Executive Director of SERDC, which works with eight First Nations. “One of our main focuses is to help

our people become more self-sufficient and we see this as a great way to do that. If we can also encourage better fiber connections into our communities, then we might be able to leverage this kind of training into a real long-term advantage.”

Students completing the program will earn their A+ certification, an industry standard for entry-level computer service technicians. ID Fusion says that once employed, students will have the opportunity to add to their training and skills development.

For Dandeneau, the program seemed like a perfect way to live the core purpose of ID Fusion: to be a tool for positive change for Indigenous peoples. He and his team selected and hired six for the inaugural program which offers paid outcome-based work experience and training for 12 months. There are two students from each of three different communities: Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Black River First Nation and Hollow Water First Nation.

“There’s a great demand for these skills in the communities already. Today, they have to call in support from outside the community,” said Dandeneau. “Having these skills close to home is vitally important because every kind of business and government office relies on IT today just to function.”