



SUCCESS THROUGH OUR EYES

INDIGENOUS YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

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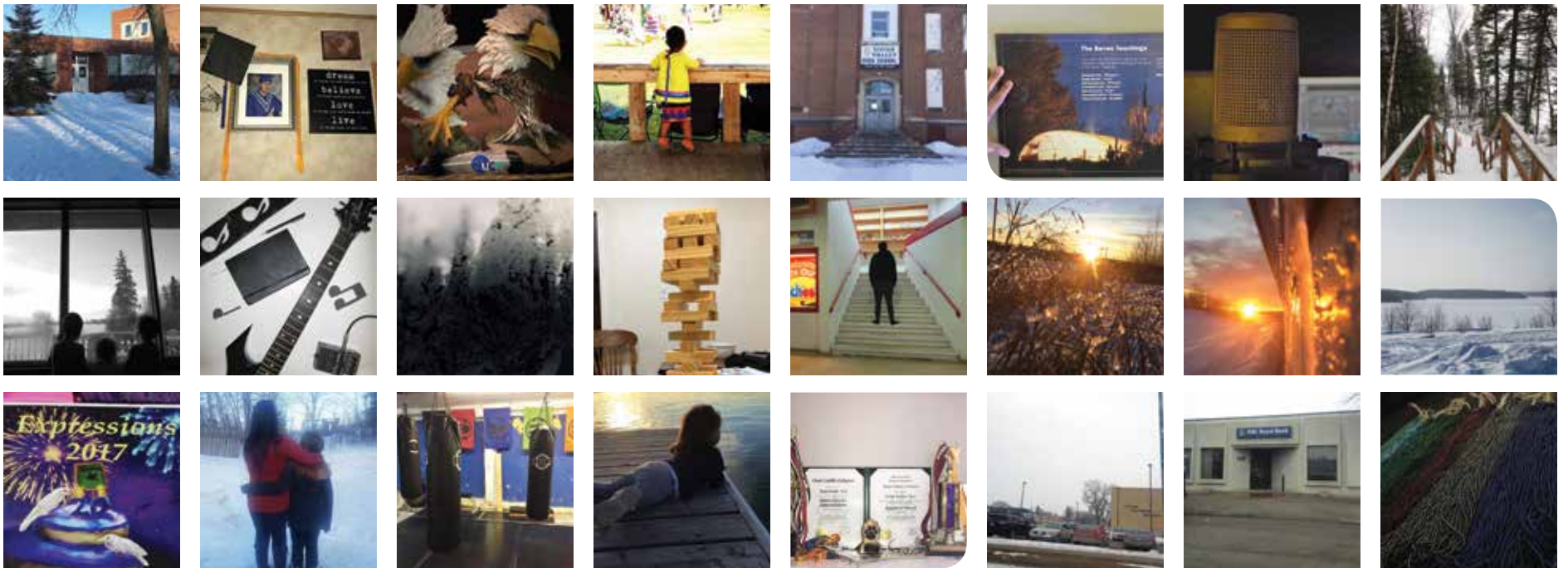
Success Through Our Eyes: Indigenous Youth Perspectives

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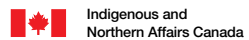


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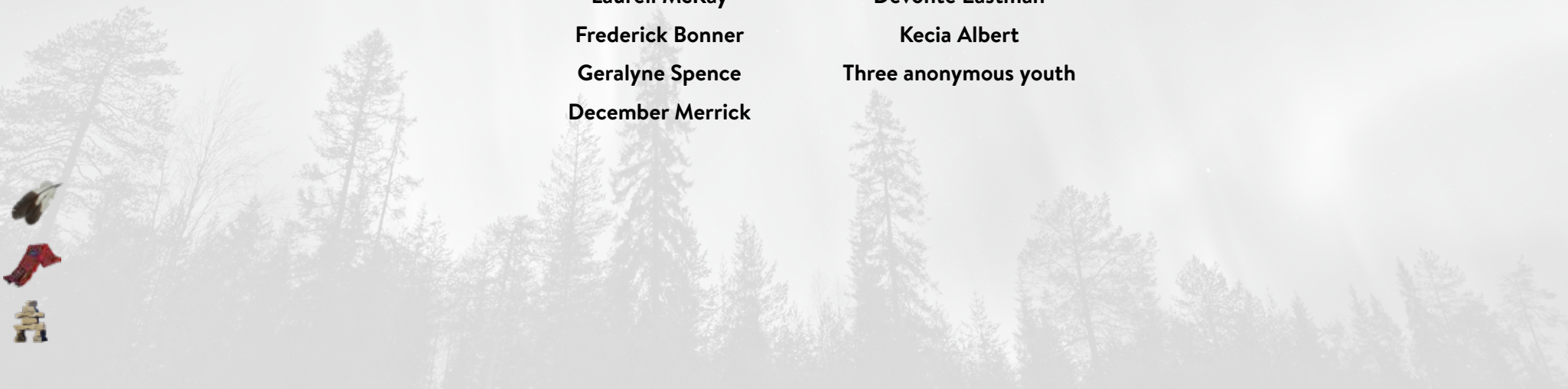
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MEET THE YOUTH COMMUNITY CIRCLE

BRANDEE ALBERT



Tansi, my spirit name is Autumn Thunder Bear Woman, and I am from the Fish Clan. I was born and raised in Norway House Cree Nation. I have been blessed with a wonderful daughter whose spirit name is Autumn Rain and is also known as Kecia. I completed my studies in the Bachelor of Social Work Northern Program with the University of Manitoba. I am currently employed as a school counsellor in northern Manitoba. My journey has always revolved around working for Indigenous youth. I have a passion for helping our youth create positive changes in their lives and communities. I am honoured to be a part of the Success Through Our Eyes Project as it provided the opportunity for youth engagement and insight. My hope is that this project will evolve into social action and educational change that will be instrumental for our Indigenous youth to thrive and overcome the obstacles that continue to impact Indigenous youth in our modern society.

JESSICA MURRAY



Tansi! I am originally from Thompson, Manitoba, and a proud member of Norway House Cree Nation. I attended Brandon University where I obtained an honours undergraduate degree in Psychology, with a double minor in Gender and Women Studies and Native Studies. I continued to pursue my dreams at Minot State University where I received a graduate degree in School Psychology. I currently work as a School Psychologist in a school system, as well as a researcher at Brandon University. I am extremely passionate about supporting First Nation communities, schools, families, and students. As a member of the Youth Community Circle, I hope to amplify Indigenous youth voices and promote change.



ERIN PAUPANEKIS



Tansi! My name is Erin Paupanekis. I am the mother to my beautiful daughter, Autumn, and a proud member of Norway House Cree Nation. I attended Brandon University where I obtained an honours undergraduate degree in Psychology, with a minor in Native Studies. I furthered my studies at Minot State University where I obtained a graduate degree in School Psychology.

Currently, I work as a School Psychologist in the school system, as well as a researcher at Brandon University since 2013. I am passionate about working and exchanging knowledge with Indigenous youth. Furthermore, I am a strong advocate for supporting the mental health of youth. My main goal as a Youth Community Circle member is to empower other Indigenous youth and support them as they share their voice.

JULIA STONEMAN-SINCLAIR



Tansi, my name is Julia Stoneman-Sinclair. I grew up in the northern town of Lynn Lake, Mb and I am a proud member of Misipawistik Cree Nation. My family consists of my two girls, Shaynen and Naira, my partner, Kasey, and our house full of dogs. I moved to Brandon at the age of 18 to attend Brandon University where I graduated with a four-year honours degree in Native Studies and minor in Sociology.

I went on to pursue a master's degree where I advocate for community healing through Indigenous Governance. My plan is to complete my thesis this year with hopes to continue onto obtaining my Ph.D. in Indigenous Governance. For the last four years, I have worked at Brandon University in the Indigenous Peoples Centre as an Indigenous Student Success Officer where I focus on helping Indigenous students achieve their goals and dreams through education. During my time as a student, I became actively involved in the Indigenous groups on campus and this eventually spread into the community of Brandon. My passion for Indigenous activism has grown throughout the years. I have become an active part of the Indigenous community with my main passions concentrating on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and the voices of Indigenous youth. I believe in the voices of our youth and know that I need to do my part in helping them to be heard as they are going to be our leaders for my children and our communities. I also enjoy photography and believe that so much can be said and felt through pictures. This project is a great way to bring Indigenous youth together while inspiring change and I feel privileged to be a part of it. Kinanaskomitin!

OPENING REMARKS

Success has many different meanings for each of us. For one person it could be a general sense of happiness; to another, it might mean being financially stable. We as the Youth Community Circle want to bring to light the diverse meanings of educational success from Indigenous youth across Manitoba. *The Success Through Our Eyes: Indigenous Youth Perspectives* project is funded and supported by INAC's New Paths for Education Program. With help from our supportive and generous partners, Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, and Brandon University, the Youth Community Circle traveled to nine First Nation communities across Manitoba to collaborate with Indigenous youth and listen to their unique perspectives of what educational success means to them.

The Youth Community Circle was created in 2014 when five Indigenous youth came together with the aim of amplifying the Indigenous youth voice. Together we completed a previous *Success Through Our Eyes* project on a smaller scale. With this current project, we wanted to widen the perspective. The Youth Community Circle felt that photos and narratives would be the optimal way to capture the true meaning of success from Indigenous youth. Throughout our travels we were fortunate to meet wonderful, inspiring Indigenous youth and share our knowledge of photovoice as a research methodology. The youth had the opportunity to share their voice on the topic of success through photos and narratives, which were then compiled into this booklet. From the very beginning, we knew that we wanted to involve youth in this project as equal partners and co-researchers. We believe this instilled a sense of empowerment in these youth, something they deserve to feel every day.

We hope you enjoy the *Success Through Our Eyes: Indigenous Youth Perspectives* booklet. As you read the stories and look at the photos, we encourage you to do your own self-reflection on what success means to you. You will notice the beautiful uniqueness within the meanings of educational success from the youth. There are stories of the strength one gets from their family and community, the courage to take chances to achieve your goals, and perseverance through difficult times to find success.

We would like to thank our partners, all the communities and leadership who invited us in, and our community contacts. We would especially like to thank the courageous Indigenous youth who shared their perspectives of success. Taking part in a project that would have so many eyes viewing it took courage and bravery. The youth opened themselves up on a personal level to share their perspectives and facilitate positive change, and for this, the Youth Community Circle thanks you.



SUCCESS THROUGH OUR EYES PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

The Success Through Our Eyes Photovoice Project was a multi-step project. First, we contacted all of the communities we hoped would be involved. We wanted representation from all the Indigenous groups (i.e., Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, Ojibway, Dakota). This was not an easy task. We were able to get nine communities to agree to work with us on this project: Misipawastik Cree Nation, Rolling River First Nation, Sioux Valley High School, Norway House Cree Nation, Pimicikamak Cree Nation, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Northlands Denesuline Nation, Long Plain First Nation, and Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. Once we had the community's permission, we recruited a community contact person to help us recruit youth and plan the photovoice workshops. After

we had youth from each of the communities sign up, we traveled to their community to facilitate a photovoice workshop and fully explain the project. The youth were then asked to take photos and write narratives depicting what success means to them. Over the following weeks, we collected the photos and stories, helped edit, and made sure to include the youth in this process. The final step was to compile all the photos and narratives into this booklet, so we could share the youths' wonderful photos and stories. It was important to the Youth Community Circle to try and build relationships with the community and with the youth. We wanted to complete this project with the Indigenous youth involved in every step.



MESSAGE FROM ELDER BARBARA BLIND

I hope others who read this booklet will be as inspired as I am. These young people have taken the time to think, define, and take pictures of their definition of success. Success is different for each person, so each person's journey to success is different. For some, it includes family, community, education, and tradition.

A very powerful message is given.

Read. Enjoy. Be inspired.

Barbara Blind



MESSAGE FROM MANITOBA KEEWATINOWI OKIMAKANAK GRAND CHIEF SHEILA NORTH WILSON

SUCCESS IS FOUND WITHIN OUR HEARTS

It is always an honour to address our First Nation youth. As I travel across the province and Canada, I see First Nation youth stepping up and making sure their voices and concerns are heard. They are the builders of our tomorrows. I am filled with confidence of a good future when I see the young people who will be the leaders of our communities in years to come.

When we think of leadership, we often think of political leaders, but we need those who break new trails in many areas that touch First Nation lives. There is a need for leadership in the areas of health, economic development, entrepreneurship, education, cultural, spirituality, community health, and family support—just to name a few. It is so encouraging to see young First Nation people look inside themselves, figure out what area they want to go into, and then committing to learning all they can about that subject so that they can use their vision, talent, education, and experience for the good of their community and/or family.

To me, that is what makes a successful person. They are someone who has found a way to link their desire in life, and how they want to contribute to their community, with the work that they do day-to-day. If you like being outside, then find a job that is outside. If you like to travel, find a job where someone pays you to go places. If you have your own ideas for how to make your community a better place, then maybe being a business-owner is the job for you. I encourage all young people to reflect on themselves, learn more about who they are and



what they like as a person, and then go find a career that fulfills some of those desires but also helps you create the world that you want. In this way, you can build a career that will give you more than just a paycheck. We are peoples and cultures that look at the world in a holistic fashion, so we should be looking at our entire selves—our place in the community and our family—when we choose our career.

I hope all the young First Nation people look into their own hearts when planning for their future. I am positive that all those individual goals, when added to the collective vision of all First Nation youth, will lead to a better world for everyone.

MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH COMMUNITY CIRCLE

Congratulations to you, the Youth Community Circle, on the completion of your third photovoice research project and another booklet! You have also organized an Indigenous youth forum and developed a policy framework document aimed at strategies for Indigenous youth success.

Each one of these efforts has been exceptionally well done. Especially when I look at all of your work, I become truly excited and amazed. For the past four years, you have worked very hard on behalf of Indigenous youth. I have watched you encourage Indigenous youth to be courageous and share their stories, particularly their stories of success.

While the outcomes of your efforts speak for themselves, please take a moment to celebrate yourselves as amazing Indigenous youth. You have brilliantly and consistently demonstrated the pride you have in your Indigenous culture, your communities, and your families. You have taught me to look at success through an Indigenous worldview and to appreciate mino-pimatisiwin. I know I speak for many people when I say, 'Thank you. You are amazing!'

– Karen Rempel



KECIA ALBERT –
Norway House Cree Nation
A WALK IN MY
GRANDMOTHER'S PATH

Tansi!

Success is an accomplishment. It is being able to finish what you start on your journey. It includes the opportunity to do what you love in life that brings you the happiness and excitement while achieving your goals and dreams.

I took this photo because it reflects the traditions and culture that my late Nanny Marion showed me growing up. It was my late great grandmother who taught her. This photo represents the success I have found in my culture and traditions. The moccasins were made for me by my late Nanny which makes them very special to me. The earrings show my own progress at beading and represent how far I have come in my own journey.



GERALYNE SPENCE –
Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation
RISE

The meaning of the photo is ‘Indigenous people rising from the shadows.’ As you may be aware, the roots run deep into the roots of residential schools. It affects us a lot more than the public eye knows. How this represents the meaning of educational success to me is that our Indigenous youth are rising from the shadows. But, it is not just youth, but through our mentors who are really trying their best to guide and make a clear path for us. Even in small communities like the one I live in, I see a lot of potential in myself and my peers. I will not deny the sights I have set before me. I will acknowledge all the effort being made today and into the future.

I took this photo because of the fog on the window of the vehicle I was in caught my eye. I was on my way to meet family for the first time, and I was feeling emotional. They are my family, but they have not lived in my community, and they were coming to visit for a special occasion. It was an occasion that could bring healing and instill cherished memories within my heart and the heart of my family members.



JESSICA MURRAY – Norway House Cree Nation THE LITTLE THINGS

Sometimes we forget to enjoy the journey and only worry about the destination. As I get older, I have come to realize that reaching your goals and being successful is significant, but taking time to appreciate the little things you experience and learn along the way is just as important. It's about the laughs, the lessons, the fun times, and even the struggles that make your life journey so beautiful. I think people get too caught up in making money and working all the time and should learn how to slow down and recognize that there is so much more to life. That is what success means to me, it means appreciating the little things along your journey of life.

I took this picture during a trip with one of my best friends and colleagues. We were there to present at our first national conference, and it was super exciting. We took some time to see the sights and this was one of the places we chose. It was a hike that led you to a waterfall. We made it to the waterfall, and it was beautiful, but what I liked the most about it was the climb up to it. We had time to appreciate the scenery, laugh and have fun together which made the destination that much more wonderful.



NADIA SINCLAIR – Misipawastik Cree Nation MY JOURNEY

One of my favourite things about Grand Rapids, Manitoba, is the scenery. I spent most of my life living in The Pas, Manitoba, where the river freezes every winter. I obtained my Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education two years ago while living in The Pas. Having these degrees allows me the opportunity to teach in Grand Rapids where my dad grew up. I am only in my second year as an educator, but being here in Grand Rapids, I have learned a lot. I am grateful that I have the chance to teach here and do what I love to do in the place that my family comes from. My whole journey, starting from my educational journey in The Pas to teaching in my home community of Grand Rapids, has been a learning experience and has built me into the person I am today. This journey represents my meaning of success.

This photo was taken at the Manitoba Hydro dam in Grand Rapids, Manitoba as I was outside enjoying the beautiful weather. I was feeling a sense of happiness and content. My educational journey and years of never giving up on school brought me to where I am today in my professional career.



LORI DETTANIKKEAZE – Northlands Denesuline Nation MY HOME

This photo represents a welcoming feeling for me. No matter where you are from, everyone is welcome here. I love walking in this room because there is so much love and everyone is so caring. Mess or not, all I hear is laughter and jokes in this room. I want my daughter to know that there is good and love out there. No matter the distance, love is everywhere. Success is the warm feeling I get when I am around friends and family, no matter where we are. Success is the happiness I feel knowing that my daughter and I have loved ones in our life who care for us.

This photo was taken in my cousin's living room. I took this photo because my daughter and I love coming here. I miss this place when I am away from it. When my cousin and I are here with our family, we joke, laugh, and listen to the kids play together. I have a feeling of blissfulness when I am here.



SHIRLEENA SPENCE TAIT – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation

LIFE IS A HIGHWAY

You must travel on different highways to get to where you want to be in life. Some highways are rough, while others are smooth. No matter how long it takes to get to your destination, don't ever give up along your

journey! Finding the right road to travel on while being unafraid is the first step to take to be successful. Success means traveling with no limits to where you want to go. It means finding that place that is meant for

you. Success is a journey that we have to take in order to reach our full potential, despite the obstacles.

This photo was taken outside of my community heading to Thompson, Manitoba. It is one of my favourite sceneries when I travel. It shows the beauty outside of the community and that the world has a lot more to offer. I took this photo because I believe that no matter where the highway leads you in life, it is meant to be. In other words, everything happens for a reason. To me, success is achieved when people have the opportunity to travel places and to be able to explore what the real world has to offer, instead of being isolated in their communities. Through these explorations, people have the chance to experience and choose for themselves what they want to achieve on their journey.



FREDERICK BONNER – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation MUSIC IS LIFE

Music is and always has been an important part of my life growing up. I put these objects together and photographed them because they symbolize the type of person I am. Not only does music bring people together, but it also helps with many types of emotions whether they may be happy or sad. I think in many ways this is a very good example of success in education. It is musical understanding that helps with language and learning development. This form of understanding also brings people together, young and old from all over the world in a creative way. Being a musician, is also a way of building relationships because you share thoughts, ideas, and creativity with one another.

I took this photo because music is a part of everyone's life and it provides a sense of what it is like to work together. Musicians are very successful in teaching people the meaning of life through their own perspective, experience, and understanding. Success is a soulful understanding of one's self that allows a person to be led to their dreams and aspirations. As a musician, I feel this soulful understanding.





ERIN PAUPANEKIS – Norway House Cree Nation GOING HOME

I live a very busy life in Southern Manitoba, juggling my time between trying to excel in my career while being a good mother, girlfriend, daughter, sister, auntie, and friend. I have been blessed in my life with a loving family and amazing career, and while these things certainly represent success for me, they are not the only pieces of the puzzle. Success means having a place to call home where I can relax and just be with loved ones that I don't always get to see. It involves spending quality time doing the things I don't always get to do living in the south. I get so caught up in the craziness of life that sometimes I forget to take a step back and take in the goodness that is around me.

I took this photo outside of my dad's home in Norway House. This same property is where my grandparents raised their family. I grew up in the north, but these days I rarely have the chance to visit my Paupanekis family that live in Norway House. The weather was beautiful and calm on this day. As I walked towards the entrance of the house, I stopped to take in the scenery, and for a little while, I didn't think of anything else except how much I love it here. The island across the water holds a special place in my heart for personal reasons. The boat makes me think about my late uncle as this was his fishing boat. The rocks make me think of the days when I would climb them as a kid. In this moment, I forgot about how chaotic life can be. Put simply; success means being able to go home to take in this beautiful view.





SHIRLEENA SPENCE TAIT –
Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation
SAVE THE BEES

Sometimes we do not notice the important aspects involved in the cycle of life. I believe that working together to help the bees would be very beneficial to everyone. The bee is a very important creature for the sustainability of our earth because they pollinate all the plants. In turn, plants provide many uses for us human beings. Beautifying our community with flowers would be a fun way to do our part in helping the bees. Not only would it protect the bees, but it would create an opportunity for our community to work together towards a common goal. The bees are important to everyone and everything in life. It is a scary thought that their population is decreasing because of our actions around the world. It is important to work together as a nation to alleviate this problem. Success is achieved through the teamwork between humans and the earth's creatures.

I took this photo because I am infatuated with planting flowers and how the bees work together to pollinate all plants. Bees have one goal in life, and they do not give up until it is done. Everyone has their own goal in life, and it is important never to give up until you are finished, just like the bees. There is one Elder in my community that does a lot of planting and gardening, and he also has a bee farm. I was inspired by what he does to better the community and bees.



LEANDRA SPENCE – Rolling River First Nation

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

You must keep moving forward to get to your destination. You choose your own path, and even if the road you are on has bumps and curves, just keep going. The Creator gave us those obstacles for a reason. He knows how strong we are to persevere through these obstacles. Through this determination and perseverance, we can achieve any kind of success.

I took this photo from my living room window shortly after a snow storm. Under the heavy snow is the road I take to get to school. At this moment, I was looking out the window thinking about how I am supposed to get to school. I had no other choice but to forge my own path through the snow, and so I did. I shoveled my way out, arriving late to school. At least I made it to where I was going



LAURELL MCKAY – Pimicikamak Cree Nation IT'S A NEW DAY

Walking down the road and seeing how beautiful it looks, I feel at peace. I walked down the road and noticed that life, nature, and things will take its course. Just because one day is a bad day, does not mean it is a bad life. There is always another day to start new just as the sun goes to sleep and rises for another beautiful day. If the sun goes down and comes back up for a brand new day, so could I. I could start fresh and be positive. That is what success means; it means persevering through the hardships and difficult times because what we will find on the other side may be so beautiful.

I took this photo because I have felt sorrow inside of me, a feeling like I was not doing things right in my life. I was feeling lonely for no reason walking home from uptown. I looked at the sun as I stood there, and saw how beautiful the trees looked with the sun glaring at them. It made me think that nature can be beautiful in any season; I thought to myself, tomorrow is a brand-new day.



DEVONTE EASTMAN – Sioux Valley Dakota Nation EDUCATION FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

The meaning behind this photo is that school is a big part of life. Without school, there would not be any education to go forward to have a better future. How it represents success is that you will be able to get a job or go for more schooling to get a better job for a better future. Yes, it does represent academic success because you can go to university after high-school to get a university degree or degrees.

I took this photo because everybody must go to school if they want to be a successful person because without education you would not be able to do what you want that will make you successful in life. Finish school, so you can succeed in life and succeed in your dreams.



DAYLAN HYSLOP – Northlands Denesuline Nation

NETWORKING

An important factor that goes into success is networking with other people. Company representatives are always on the phone making sure their customers are happy. Working together and meeting other people

helps to build our own knowledge. Being a responsible contributor to your company will help you succeed as well. It shows that you are willing to put in the work that is required to make that company successful. The small

tasks, like keeping up with paperwork or keeping your work environment clean, organized, and accessible, all demonstrate this responsibility, too.

I took this photo because it shows a person doing their research and putting in the time and effort at their place of work. This photo shows me a person wanting to be successful and willing to learn new things. The person in this photo is at a training workshop on a topic that is new to him. He is focused and ready to learn from his fellow peers. He is ready to share his knowledge with others and willing to learn as much as he can in return.



DILLON SHANNACAPPO – Rolling River First Nation SENSES OF SUCCESS

Success can be felt, and it can be heard.
Success for me is performing for a crowd and seeing satisfied people enjoying my music. It is the feeling I get from my passion for music. Success means finding your passion in life and sharing your gift with others.

I took this picture in a local recording studio in Brandon, Manitoba during one of my recording sessions. When I am recording music, I feel a sense of creativity and accomplishment. I wanted to capture the view that I have when I am doing something I love.



SCOTT LINKLATER – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation THE BEAUTY IN THE STRUGGLE

I see the beauty in the struggles of achieving success. Although the obstacles in life are difficult, that is how we learn. The way the sun is glaring through the icicles and the beauty of

mother nature remind me that we must admire the small things in life. This photo represents the struggle of my own loneliness, but Mother Nature was there to keep me happy.

I took this photo because it represents the journey through life. The part of this photo that first catches the eye are the branches with the icicles attached to them. To me, these branches represent the struggles in life, but at the same time, these struggles can be beautiful just like the glistening icicles. Looking further into the photo, the sun eventually catches the eye, and that is the light at the end of the tunnel when we find what we are looking for.



MARNI HART – Sioux Valley Dakota Nation PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Educational success has different meanings through time. Success in the past is represented by past students who have graduated. Success in the present is represented by students who are currently working hard to achieve their goals. Success in the future is the motivation of the up-and-coming students in our community to begin their journey towards reaching their goals.

I took this picture as I walked through our community elementary school. These pictures are posted proudly in the hallway and I feel that when the younger generation sees these pictures it motivates them toward their future educational success and to one day have their picture posted for everyone to see their accomplishment.

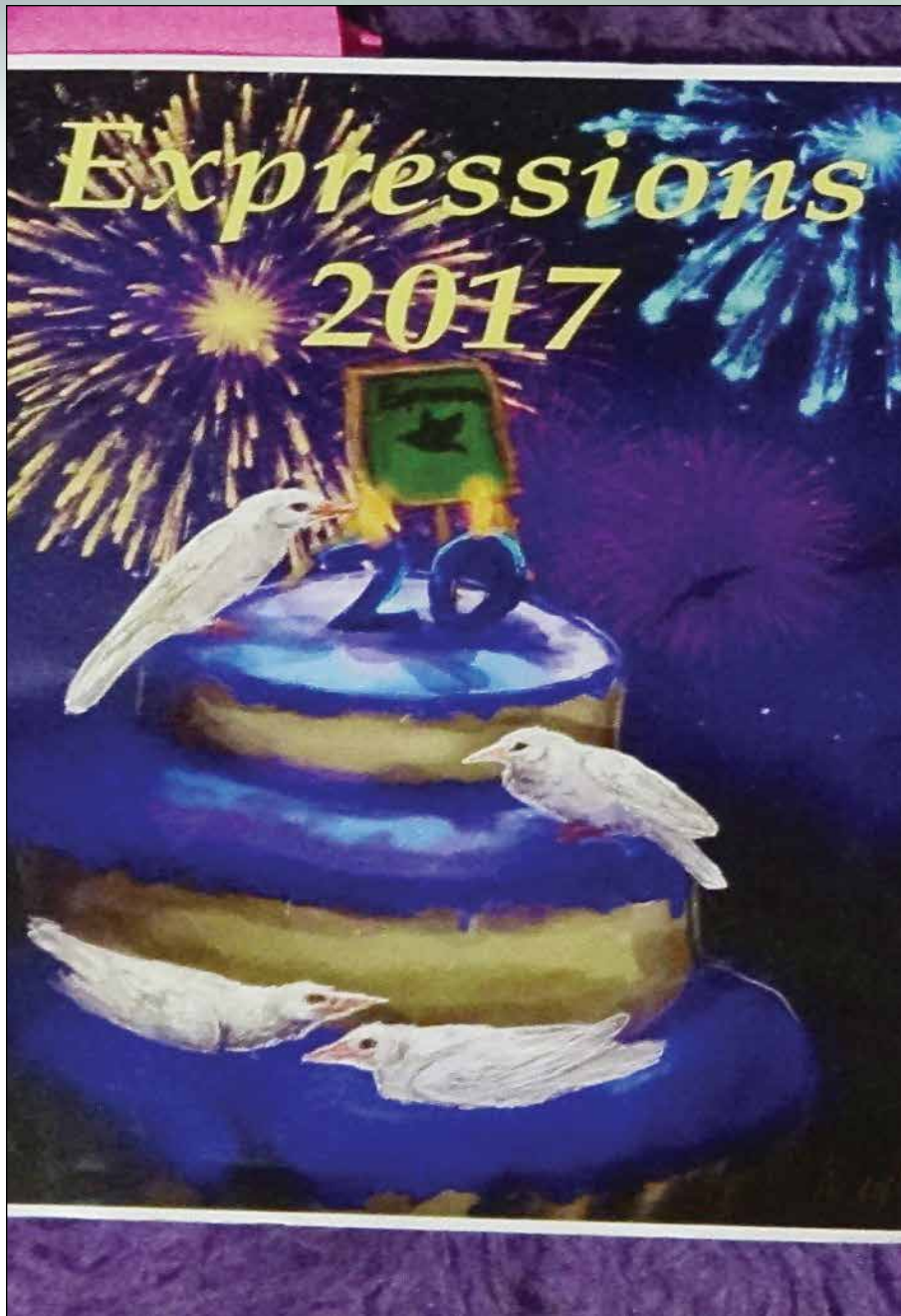


KURT QUESKEKAPOW – Norway House Cree Nation REACHING YOUR GOALS

I believe many of us doubt our capabilities in terms of finishing high school, post-secondary studies, or other things we want to accomplish in our lives because we are not confident enough to do so. I am here to tell you that you can accomplish anything when you set your mind towards your goals and can make your life goals a reality. I know at times the task is not an easy one. You will face many challenges, obstacles, failures, but that is the whole process of learning and reaching your goals. Never give up. Never allow negative self-talk to stop you from accomplishing the goals you set out for yourself because you can make those goals a reality and reach your success.

I chose this picture because it represents the dedication of finishing high school at the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre and receiving my diploma in 2010. During high school, I made many friends through sports, student leadership, school courses, creative writing, and other after-school activities. There are quite a few friends from high school who I keep in touch with; some went on to further their education, and some became parents and are now supporting their own family. This just means that whatever your goal of success is, it matters, and you should try your best to achieve it.





BREANNA GARDENER – Sioux Valley Dakota Nation FINALLY ACCOMPLISHED

This picture represents success for me because it reminds me of the people I have had the opportunity to help through mental illness already, and the people I hope to help one day. This is success because one of the things I wanted to accomplish out of my illness, was to share my story in hope that it would help at least one person, and the expressions book allowed me to do that.

This photo is of a mental health book called “Expressions,” and it is a collection of many different people’s stories who have struggled with mental illness and/or addiction. I was thankfully given a chance to contribute to the 2017 edition and share a poem and sketch I had created. The sketch and poem were inspired by my struggles with depression and anxiety.



BREANNA GARDENER – Sioux Valley Dakota Nation THE ROAD FROM ANXIETY

This photo holds significant meaning to me. At the age of twelve, I developed severe anxiety and depression. For several years I could not go outside without feeling immense fear and panic. My symptoms got so severe that I dropped out of school because I could not walk down our driveway. Now I am about to graduate high school, and I can go almost anywhere with little fear. That is what I call success.

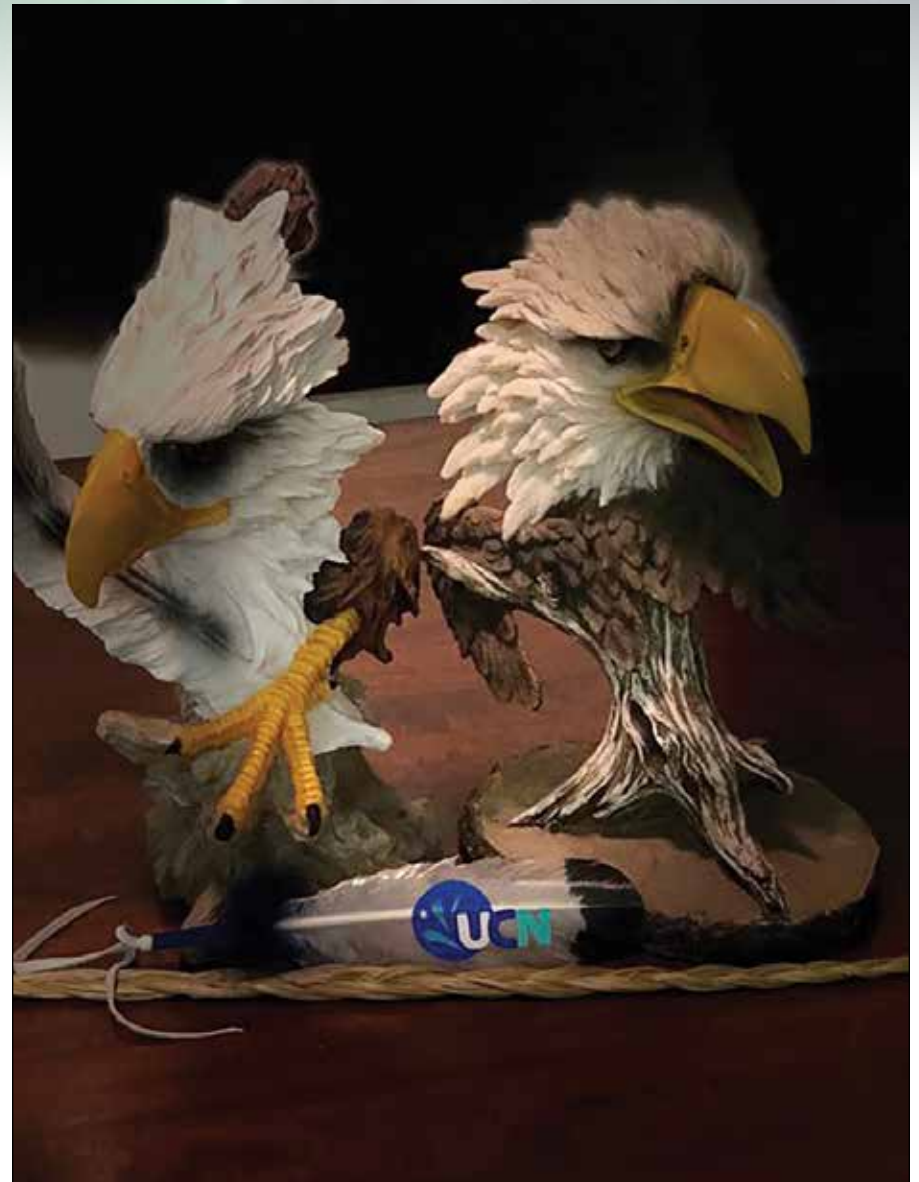
I took this photo because I am proud of what I have survived. There was a time when I never thought I would make it to this point in my life. This photo represents how far I have made it, how far I can and will go on my journey with anxiety. The blurriness of the photo symbolizes how the road to healing is still a little unclear, but I continue to move forward. This is success because I have gone past what I expected for myself.



KURT QUESKEKAPOW – Norway House Cree Nation BRAIDED SWEETGRASS

I believe we need to show each other love regardless if someone hurts us. We need to learn to forgive, forget, and move on with our lives. We need to stop fighting, learn to work together and support each other in everything we do because the reality is, we are the strongest when we work together. That is what success means, working together for the best possible outcome.

I took this picture because the two eagles represent love and strength to me. The sacred sweetgrass you see in the picture represents the hair of our Mother, the Earth. Each sweetgrass strand alone is not as strong as when it is braided together. When the strands of the sacred sweetgrass are braided together, each strand supports and strengthens one another to ensure boldness, teamwork, unity, and counting on one another for support. The braided sweetgrass represents how we should be as leaders, guiders, teachers, and as First Nation people.



DECEMBER MERRICK – Long Plain First Nation MY EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY

I have worked hard in school to get to where I am today. Throughout my educational journey, I have also experienced downfalls. Despite these setbacks, I always got back up. Success is not only about achieving my educational goals. It is also about the journey and persevering through life's obstacles along the way. Not many people can reach their life goals without some setbacks and downfalls. Remaining positive and optimistic that the result will be worth the struggle is what success means to me.

I took this photo because one of the first things that come to mind when I hear the word “success” is finishing school. I am almost to the finish line as I will be graduating from Portage Collegiate Institute next year. This was not an easy journey for me, but I stuck with it and I'm glad I did.



LAURELL MCKAY – Pimicikamak Cree Nation
CHERISH, LIVE, TRUST

Success means living life to the fullest, cherishing everything you have in life and everything else you do not have, because you must have faith in everything you do and keep pushing through and trust in God with everything you have.

I took this photo because as I stood there waiting for something to do while I was at work, I was thinking about what else I could do in life and what else I could be successful at. This piece of art spoke to me; it told me

to live, to cherish, and especially to trust in myself and in God as I continue to work towards my future, whatever it may hold.



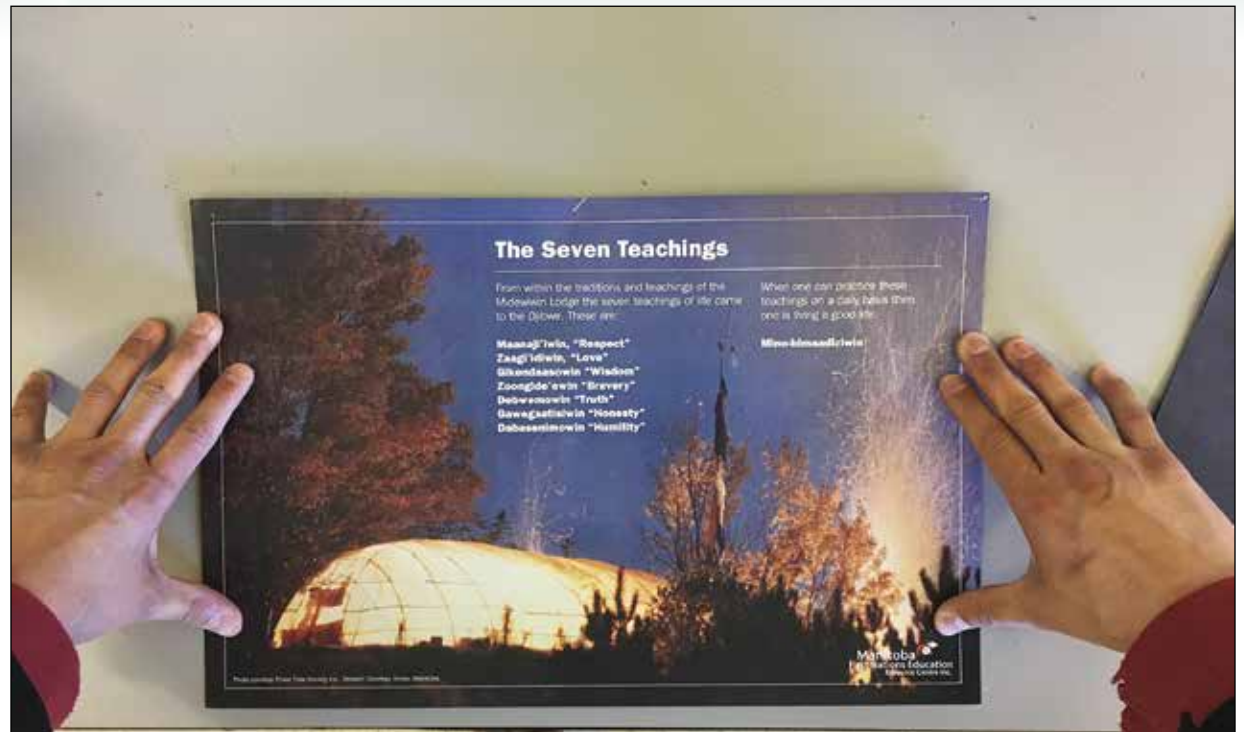
TROY ST. PAUL – Rolling River First Nation

THE SEVEN TEACHINGS

Being successful means following The Seven Teachings. The way I display the teaching of respect is through self-care and caring for Mother Earth. I love my family and community.

I gain wisdom through the knowledge I get from education, experience, and good judgement. Bravery is having the courage to do what needs to be done. Truth is the strength I carry within myself. I am honest when I honour myself, and I am humble when I show forgiveness.

I took this picture because it displays The Seven Teachings. I believe that anyone can lead a successful life if they have something to believe in and guide their way of life. For me, The Seven Teachings help me lead a successful life.



DAYLAN HYSLOP – Northlands Denesuline Nation

THE IMPORTANCE OF HARD WORK

This photo represents how important hard work is, especially in my northern community where the winters can get harsh. The gathering of wood is a vital job in my community, and we often stock up for winters when we can. However, some days, like in this photo, we face the storm for the good of the community. What's more important is that we work together during this process as we must depend on one another. We depend on this wood to keep us warm at night. The Elders in the community depend on this wood as well as they often cannot collect it for themselves. This type of work also keeps us all in good health. This pile of wood represents success because it illustrates how much learning I still must do, and how much work and effort I must put forward each day for the good of my community.

I took this photo of a stack of wood placed on a sled. This photo shows the process that we go through in my community to survive and keep warm. Sometimes we have no choice but to keep working through the harsh conditions. You can see the snow on



the ground and the snowflakes falling in this photo. Knowing that we depend on this wood

makes me even more motivated to work. This type of work shows my journey to success.



KAYLEA AMYOTTE –
Rolling River First Nation

THE OUTCOME IS WORTH THE STRUGGLE

In life, your caregivers create the stairs for you and help you climb and grow. Once you hit a certain point in your life, your caregivers stop helping you climb and it is up to you to create your own way. It is through this personal growth that we learn what we want in life and strive for it. When things get hard, do not give up. The outcome is well worth the struggles.

I took this photo as I walked down to the lake. The stairs were so much easier to take, but there came a point where the stairs ended, and I had to make my own path to get to my destination, and it was so much harder. Once I made it to the lake, the view was amazing! The outcome was well worth the struggle.



JULIA STONEMAN-SINCLAIR – Misipawistik Cree Nation NIKIWAK – MY HOME

This might just look like an old abandoned house, but it is the first home that I lived in with my mother and father as a family. I moved out of this house at a young age and lived in many others growing up, but none ever felt like home the way that this one did. My father passed away when I was a teenager and a few years after I moved south to gain an education. It was during this time more than ever, that I thought about this house and being in my home community. Moving away from family, friends, and the North has always been a struggle but I knew that I needed to be where I was for the betterment of myself. I knew that someday I could take what I have learned and use this to help better my community. One of the biggest lessons that I have learned while being away from home is the importance of never forgetting who I am and where I come from, which can be difficult to do while living in this Western society. To me, this house represents success because I moved away from home and survived, never forgetting who I am. I got my education and I have always used it to better my community and my people while never forgetting where

I come from. This house is my home and I can share memories of this home with my children. This photo gives me a constant reminder of who I am. It reminds me that if I continue working on myself and this home, it can only create a better world for the generations to come.

I took this photo during a visit to my

community. It was a beautiful winter day while I was going for a walk with my family. I loved how still it was outside and that even though this house has become run down and old it still brings me beautiful memories. This house represents where I come from and it excites me to think of the changes that will come to this house in the next year.



NADIA SINCLAIR – Misipawastik Cree Nation FAMILY BONDS

This photo represents a few different meanings of success for me. It represents family and community. I am fortunate to have a family that supports me and to live in a community that keeps me grounded. I didn't always live in this community, but now that I am back here, I feel like I am going back to my family roots. I used to feel disconnected from family members when I lived outside of the community. I strongly believe that having ties to my community contributed to my success. This photo also represents the success I have had with school and my career. After obtaining my teaching degree, I am now teaching in my home community. For me, it is a way of giving back to my community after they supported me through school. Through teaching, I can help create supportive families for our youth. I can show my daughter that our dreams are achievable if we work hard and have support from family and others.

I took this photo of my daughter when I first moved to Grand Rapids. We were exploring the outdoors. I loved the view and the fact that my daughter is now able to build a relationship with my family residing in this community. Her relationship with our other family members would not be as strong if we did not move here this year. It is the best of both worlds for me, to live in my dad's home community and have a career that I am passionate about.



MIHKWAN GAYWISH – Rolling River First Nation CURIOUS MINDS

This photo represents the start of success for these little ones. It illustrates how they start to learn new things just by observing and how each day is a new adventure.

When I was younger, I was always curious about everything. To this day I am still a curious person.

I took this photo because it shows that the beginning of the learning journey for youth is to experience the outside world and have their siblings right there with them. This is the start of their lifelong friendship. Kids will always learn from sharing, playing, and asking questions.



MELISSA BALLANTYNE – Opaskwayak Cree Nation YOUNG PERFECTION

Success is doing your best in any kind of situation you may have got into and to live with the decision and outcome. It is up to you, and only you, to make a change and put it into success. Although you may be faced with difficult decisions and situations, if you have support around you and if you start to think positively, you can do anything and achieve anything. When you keep trying every day, you can be successful.

When I was 17, going into my graduating year with all my friends who I grew up with, I had plans to move away for school, experience living in a city, and learn how to live on my own. This should have been an exciting time for me, but this was the year I found out I was pregnant. My mind and emotions were all over the place with a thousand questions. But after I talked to my mom and realizing how much support I would have, I felt better. As I progressed through my pregnancy, I began to feel better and wondered about all the good things that come with having a baby. I knew then that I had to finish school. I was very lucky that I got support from the school and my family to accomplish what I wanted. I took this photo of my daughter and I because she is my pride and joy. She has taught me so much, and I feel truly blessed. I would do anything for her, and she will forever be by my side.





SCOTT LINKLATER – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation LIVE YOUR DREAMS

In my perspective, success means finishing your short- and long-term goals. It is not always about wealth or reputation. It is about living your dreams and having high self-esteem because that will help you in life. Success is being proud and feeling accomplished.

I chose this photo because there are two different paths in life. One of them is to be happy. The other path is wealth, but sadness. Some people may use you for money. I choose to take the path that leads to happiness, instead of wealth.



KEATON PRATT – Sioux Valley Dakota Nation
TEACHINGS ARE VALUABLE FOR SUCCESS IN LIFE

The Dakota Seven Teachings are important for students to follow as it helps them include learning their language, culture, and their traditions. The prophets have said that in order for people to be successful they

need to start learning and following these teachings before they are gone. Learning the language, culture, and traditions can be both significant for family and education. I believe that if traditions are followed, our values are

then kept alive and strong which makes an essential difference in our success.

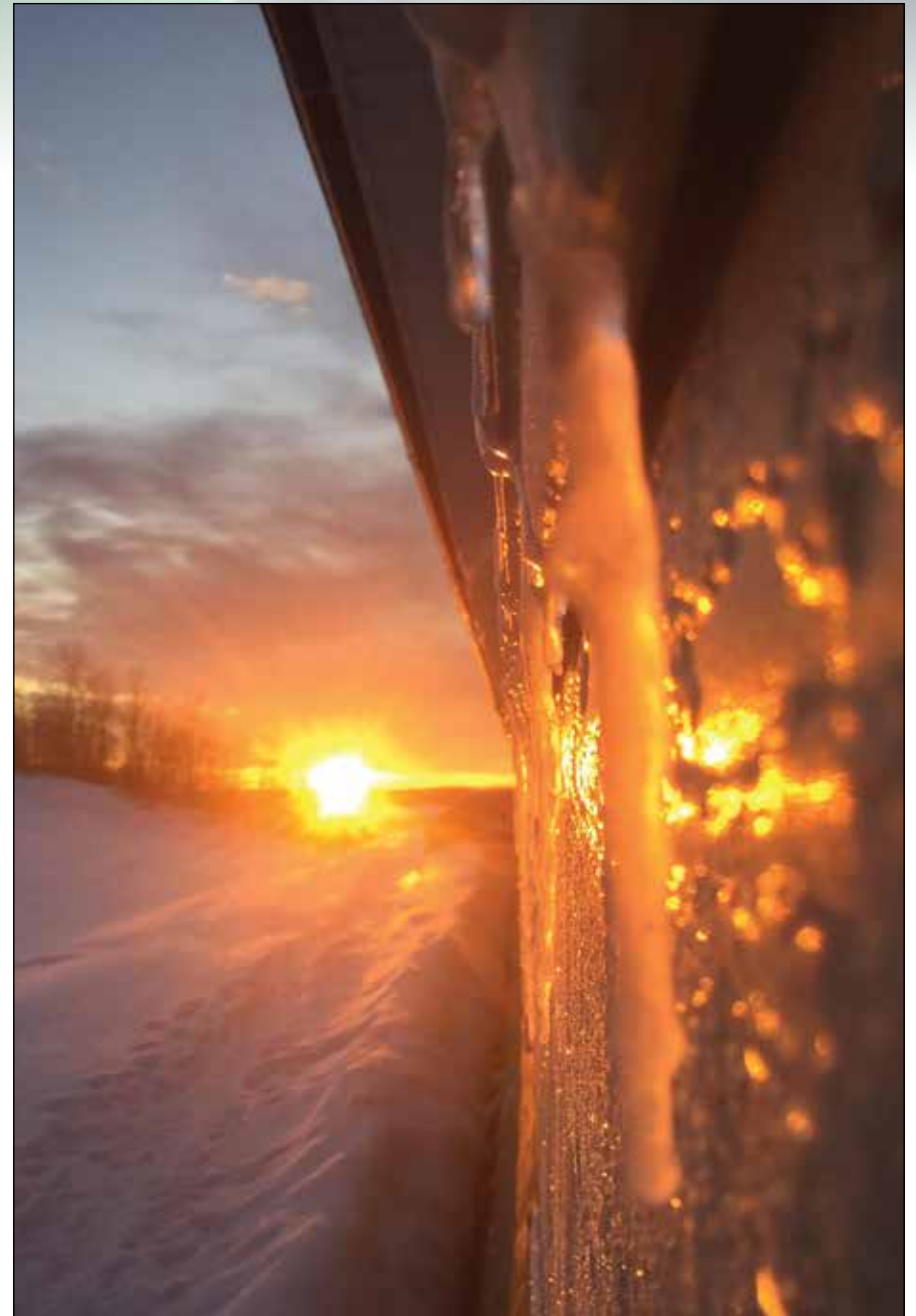
I felt it was important to share this picture because in our generation it is difficult to find someone to teach us the traditions of the Seven Teachings: Wisdom, Honesty, Respect, Courage, Truth, Humility, and Love. I believe following these teachings and learning our traditions, culture, and language gives us meaning in our lives. Meaning that can guide us and help us move forward into degree programs both at universities or community colleges.



SCOTT LINKLATER – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation LIGHT OVER DARKNESS

Success means being enthusiastic and ambitious; to dream, accomplish your dreams, and being happy is success. Being a small little light can make a difference if you are in the darkness. Success is being bright in the darkness, living up to your potential. Success is having the support of those in your life. The support you have in your environment is what will help you succeed in completing your studies or your lifelong dreams. Everyone can achieve success in their own way.

I chose this photo because the sunlight was glaring with the icicles and it shows the beauty that the Earth gives us. The sun is shining bright through the darkness as portrayed by this photograph. It is that natural support that allows the beauty of life flow each day; as human beings we need that support around us for us to achieve and flourish in our own success.

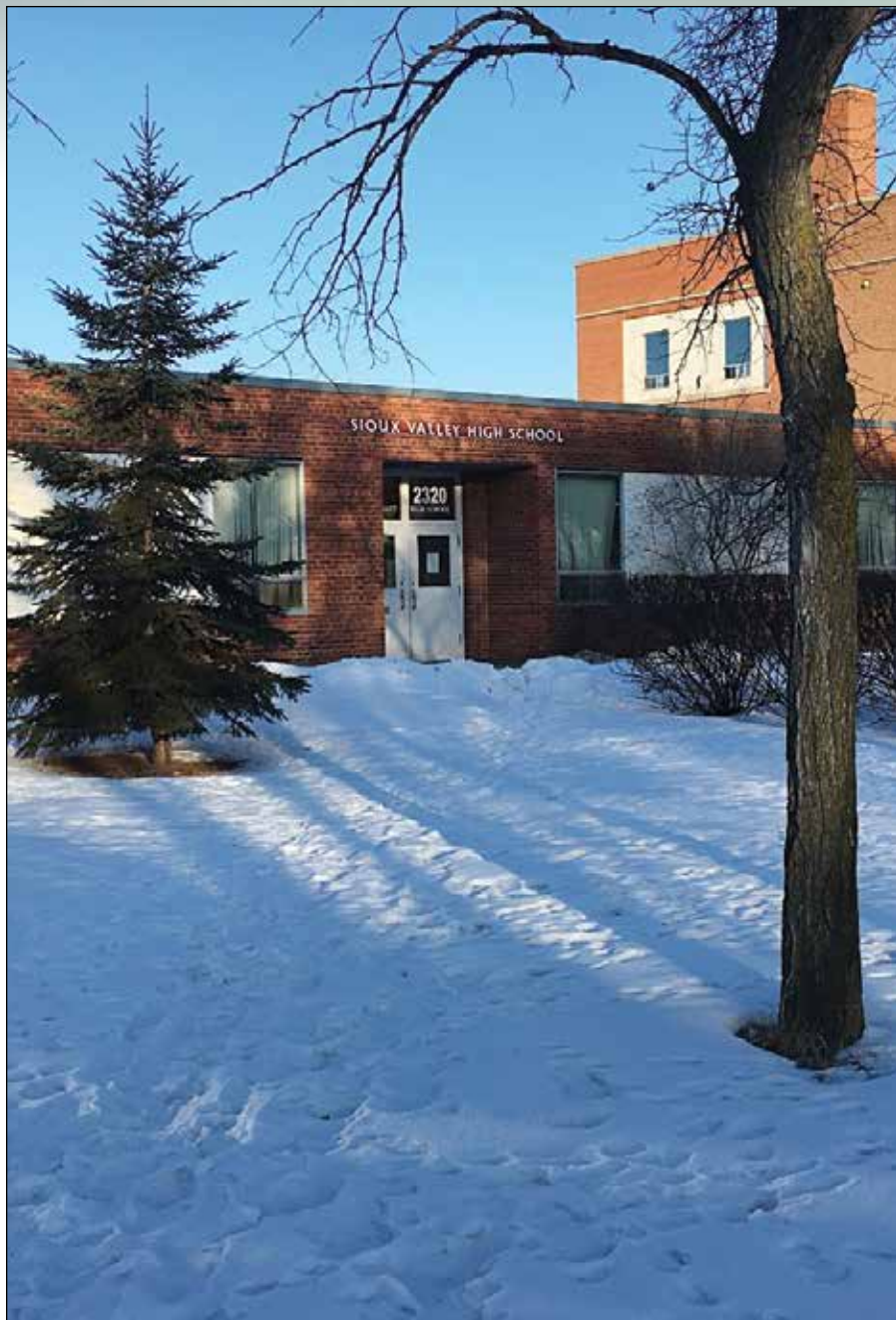


ANONYMOUS – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation WHERE THE THREE RIVERS MEET

This picture reflects success to me because I am still in the same place as I always have been. I am surviving, and even better these days, thriving. Now that I am a little bit older, I have gained understanding. I am still here, looking into the future and making my way to my success, and no one can stop me. I never thought I would leave my community; the positive aspect of living my life here is that it has kept me away from the negative influences outside my Cree Nation. Creating my life in my community has allowed me to build a good life. I am achieving success by continuing my education with the goal of completion. The local educational opportunities, like the Atoskiiwen Training and Employment Center (ATEC), help lead me to my success.

I took this photograph because this picture says a thousand words for me. It is where I grew up, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. It is what I know. It is where we all met a long time ago, in an era that I do not know but it is the place that I call home. This has many personal meanings and traditions that live within me.





ANONYMOUS – Sioux Valley Dakota Nation MOTIVATION FOR EDUCATION

This photo was taken right after I was just finished work. When I took this photo, I was thinking to myself what it means to be educationally successful in life. One of the many things I thought is very important for everybody to be successful in, is of course education! Not just education, but to have that motivation to push yourself to go every day and give it your all and to go through and finish it to get that degree.

The reason I took the photo is because when I was growing up and going to high school, I ended up taking it for granted. I thought that I do not need it and that I can still do well without it. I know you can still be successful without that much education, the education just makes it a bit easier to get your foot in the door for the opportunities you want. I thought I did not need education and got myself into a different school where you could work from home. My plan was just to go there, so my parents thought I was going to school, but my plan was to skip. I ended up actually going there, and I was a little surprised at how much people actually came for the entire day and were all motivated to get it done. I am still learning that in order to be successful I have to further continue my education.



ANONYMOUS – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation TUMBLING TOWER

I am sensitive, and it often does not take much for me to fall apart. I am the wooden blocks: people continue to take pieces away from me and add weight to my pre-existing weak base. But, I am also strong. No matter how many times I may fall apart and break, I always get back up. Even when I am at my lowest, or when I feel all hope is lost, I pick up the pieces and build a stronger base. To me, that is success.

I took this photo because it portrays success to me in many ways. Out of all the times I have played Jenga, I could never make it this far in the game without tumbling the tower of blocks. This photo shows how far I was able to get in this game. Just like the game of Jenga, no matter how many times I may fall, I can always build myself up again. I see myself in this tumbling tower.



BRIDGET YOUNG –
Opaskwayak Cree Nation
SWEAT IT OUT



The Sweatshop in The Pas, Manitoba, is a place where I come to relax my mind. As a parent, student, daughter, friend, and girlfriend, times get tough. There are times when the challenges of life feel like the weight of the world is on my shoulders, and it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. When I come to the Sweatshop, I feel like I can let all frustrations out, and all my thoughts and worries are able to disappear. This is a place where I come to cleanse my mind and leave feeling like I can take on anything. Keeping your mind healthy and your body active gives you the courage and motivation you need to get through your challenges to be successful. When you get through, the feeling of success is just like getting through the workouts here. You are exhausted, tired but leave with a euphoric feeling; a feeling of success.

I chose this photo because it shows that we do not need to work in the biggest or fanciest environments to create success for ourselves. All we need is hard work, determination, and commitment to create success which relates to every aspect we have going on in our lives.



BRITTANY DORION – Opaskwayak Cree Nation

SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

I believe that success is a journey, not a destination. What this means, is I do not stop at setting and achieving one goal but constantly work towards new goals, allowing myself to learn from everything along the way. This mindset helps me practice patience, determination, and perseverance while looking into the future.

As a mom, I experience all the ups and downs of motherhood. There will always be different approaches to raising children, and everyone will always have different perspectives and opinions. It is always hard to find balance between being a mother along with having a career, being a girlfriend, being active, and having a social life. Sometimes, I find myself wondering if I spend enough time with my daughter.

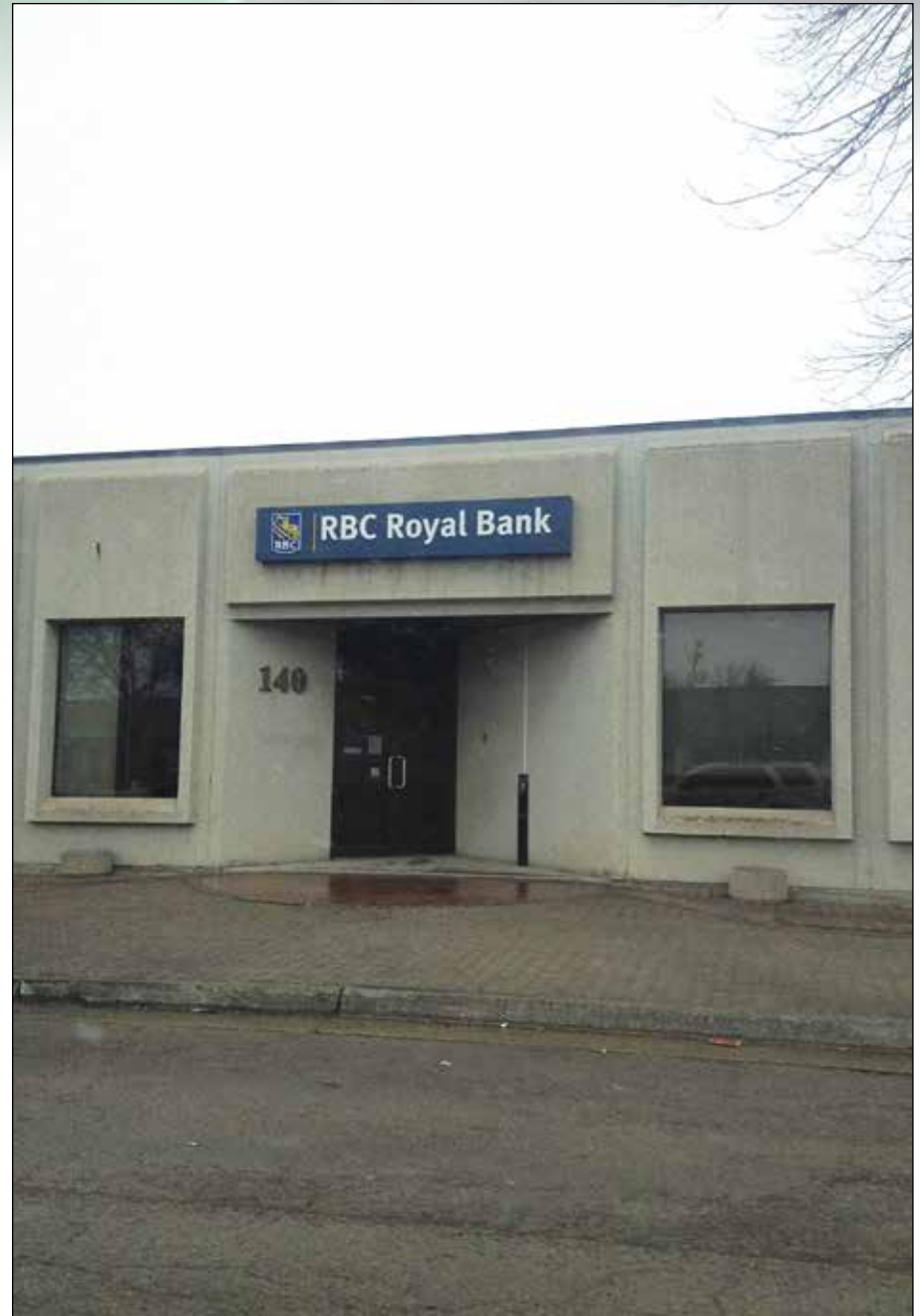
I chose this photo of my daughter staring off into the distance at Clearwater Lake in The Pas, Manitoba, because it shows that I have been successful in raising a little girl that can acknowledge beauty, show happiness, and appreciate patience and timing. I can rise above the opinions of others and raise her in a way that I want—with a roof over our heads, clothes, family, friends, and by helping her appreciate the journey as well. We still have a long way to go, but I am looking forward to staring off into the distance with her.



DECEMBER MERRICK – Long Plain First Nation MONEY MANAGEMENT

Although it's not the most important thing in life, being financially stable is important to me. In my community, having the financial means to live comfortably can be a struggle. Success does not necessarily mean having large amounts of money. It is more about being smart with money. Success involves having an open mind and a desire to learn about budgeting and cost effectiveness and then implementing these concepts into my everyday life.

I took this photo because one of my goals in life is to be financially stable. From the moment I realized how much my family and I struggled financially growing up, being successful in this goal means that much more to me. I chose this photo of my banking institution because the knowledgeable individuals inside of this building help me realize the importance of money management. The bank provides a place for me to save any money that I can. Looking at this building is a reminder to me that I can be financially stable, I just have to work at it.



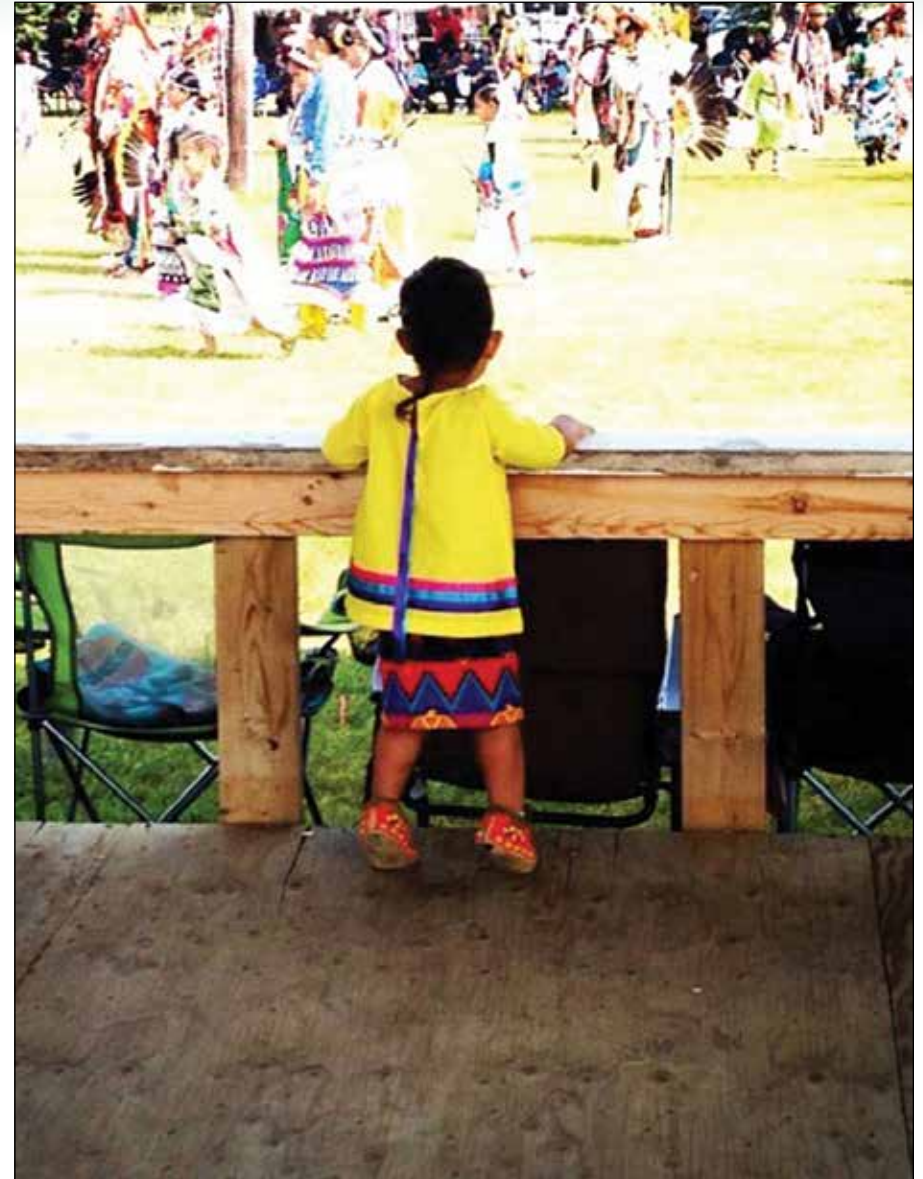
STACI ROSMUS – Sioux Valley Dakota Nation OUR CULTURE THROUGH YOUNG EYES

To be educationally successful, I believe it is very important to have a good understanding of where you come from as an Indigenous person. Knowing our culture and being proud of who we are should push us to better ourselves educationally, mentally, and spiritually.

I took this photo because it makes my heart happy to know that our younger generation is curious to know our celebrations and our ways of life. They watch us adults every day, and we need to be positive role models for them. Knowing and maintaining our culture and wanting to make positive changes for our community we will blossom into the amazing, educational people our ancestors wanted us to be.

“Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great, they can be that great generation.”

– Nelson Mandela



TAYLOR SINCLAIR-DICK – Opaskwayak Cree Nation CHALLENGES OF SUCCESS

To me, success means bridging together the space between fear and achievements. I have always been an anxious and insecure person. When it came to competing in physical competitions, sports that involved tons of physicality/contact, or even my education, I would second-guess myself and believe I would not achieve it because of the excuses I would make up in my head.

I have chosen this picture because when I look at this specific section in my bedroom, it reminds me of all the obstacles I overcame throughout the years to accomplish these things. One of the challenges I have encountered that lead to success was when I competed in the Northern Manitoba Trappers Festival in the Junior Queen Trapper events. I was only 15 when I entered in the competition for the first time with little to no practice. I thought “how hard can it be?” I placed seventh out of eight girls who were older and younger than me. I felt so



discouraged and didn't want to compete again. The following year I trained, practiced, and prepared as I was determined to do better than I did the last year. I was in various events such as Trap Setting, Leg Wrestling, 50 pounds Pack Race, and much more. All the training and patience paid off and I finished first out of ten girls—that is how

I earned the two trophies in the picture. I always reminded myself that there is always failure and adversity along the way; not only is it okay but it is necessary because it teaches essential lessons that will help find success. It will encourage patience, persistence, determination, perseverance—to me, these are the challenges of success.



CHELSEA SPENCE – Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE

Beading is and always has been a part of my life growing up. I have watched Elders do many amazing things with beading. They use all kinds of drawings, colours, and patterns to make beautiful craftwork. Elders do amazing work with beading which has inspired me to bead as well. It is the time, effort and work that is necessary to create such artistic beadwork. It is worthwhile to see the reaction of people when they see the completed product. Beadwork creates memories, happiness, and gratitude which is something I choose to have in my life. It is such a beautiful and creative hobby that makes me happy. It is something to do that helps develop my patience, time management, creativity, and interpersonal communication. I feel successful when I have completed my beadwork because I have put effort, hard work, and time into creating something beautiful. I think that is what success is, working hard for something wonderful you can share with the world.



I took this photo because of the beauty of the beads. This photo also brought back many beautiful memories of my grandmother.



Beading is also a part of my community learning and traditional teachings that flourish

my creativity. The representation of the beads helps lead me to my success in life.

CLOSING REMARKS

We hope you enjoyed all the beautiful pictures and stories. As you read through, I am sure you noticed the unique meanings of success from the eyes of Indigenous youth across Manitoba. We hope it opened your eyes and minds as well when you think about success and how one achieves it. We, the Youth Community Circle, were amazed by the inspiring youth we were able to meet and the narratives they chose to share with us. Reading the stories of resilience, dedication, and accomplishment gave us the motivation to want to continue with this project. We hope to travel back to the communities to share these wonderful photos with the youth and others to critically discuss the photos, narratives and what success means from an Indigenous

youth perspective. We, again, want to thank our generous supporters: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, and Brandon University. We would also like to thank the communities and leadership for inviting us in, our community contacts, and most importantly, the talented youth for sharing their stories. The Indigenous youth voices are incredibly important and deserve to be heard. This project was our first step to amplifying the Indigenous youth voice.

Sincerely,

The Youth Community Circle



INDIGENOUS YOUTH

A special thanks to the Indigenous youth who participated in the workshops:

NISICAWAYASIIHK CREE NATION

Shirleena Spence Tait
Scott Linklater
Frederick Bonner
Geralyne Spence
Chelsea Spence
Grace Moose
Jenine Hart
Tyreah Spence
Felicia McDonald

NORTHLANDS DENESULINE NATION

Daylan Hyslop
Lori Dettanikkeaze
Marlena Denechezhe
Katie Antsanen
Tamara Dettanikkeaze
Emerald Dettanikkeaze

SIOUX VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Keaton Pratt
Marni Hart
Breanna Gardener
Brayden Jenkins
Devonte Eastman
Hilary Sioux
Brock LaFlamme
Staci Rosmus
Laniel White

LONG PLAIN FIRST NATION

December Merrick
Derian Cameron
Kara Assiniboine
Blue Roulette
Pejuta Demarce
Renee Francis
Johnathan Longclaws Peters
Jayde Hobson

ROLLING RIVER FIRST NATION

Troy St. Paul
Kaylea Amyotte
Leandra Spence
Dillon Shannacappo
Mihkwan Gaywish
Karlee Amyotte
Sara Young
Zoltan Abraham

MISIPAWISTIK CREE NATION

Mindy Pelly
Dawson Twoheart
Cassidy Ferland
Nadia Sinclair

NORWAY HOUSE CREE NATION

Tyler McKay
Kurt Queskekapow
Lynn Osborne
Kecia Albert

PIMICIKAMAK CREE NATION

Laurell McKay
Clinton Muskego
Mary Ross
Jovian Marcus Frieling

OPASKWAYAK CREE NATION

Melissa Ballantyne
Bridget Young
Brittany Dorion
Taylor Sinclair-Dick

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A special thanks to our community contacts:

Bridget Young – OPASKWAYAK CREE NATION

Brittany Folster – NORWAY HOUSE CREE NATION

Noretta Miswaggon – PIMICIKAMAK CREE NATION

Nadia Sinclair – MISIPAWISTIK CREE NATION

Andrea St.Pierre – NORTHLANDS DENESULINE NATION

Jayde Hobson – LONG PLAIN FIRST NATION

Cheyenne Colomb – NISICHAWAYASIIHK CREE NATION

Barb Gilleshammer – ROLLING RIVER FIRST NATION

Corinne Pratt-Harper – SIOUX VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL





Misipawistik



Cree Nation



PLEASE USE THIS SPACE TO SELF-REFLECT
AND SHARE YOUR VOICE ON WHAT SUCCESS MEANS TO YOU.

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