

# NEW HORIZONS: NORTEP-NORPAC STORIES OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRANSFORMATION SINCE 1977

By Dr. Michael Tymchak, Carmen Pauls Orthner, and Shuana Niessen

NORTEP-NORPAC

40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION



NORTHERN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM—NORTHERN PROFESSIONAL ACCESS COLLEGE  
40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION



Cover Photo by Sharon Feschuk

Other Photography credits: Herman Michell, Carmen Pauls Orthner, and Sharon Feschuk

Layout and Design: Shuana Niessen

Note: Some interviews for this document were conducted in 2006. Since then, some of the circumstances of those interviewed may have changed.

## SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND ACADEMIC STAFF



**DR. HERMAN MICHELL—PRESIDENT/CEO**

Herman has been with NORTEP-NORPAC since the fall of 2010. He is originally from the small fishing and trapping community of Kinoosao on the eastern shores of Reindeer Lake. He speaks fluent Cree ('th' dialect) and also has Inuit, Dene, and Swedish ancestry. Herman has been involved in Aboriginal education in different capacities since the early 1990's, first as a post-secondary counselor and then eventually working his way to a tenured Associate Professor at First Nations University of Canada. He has over 10 years of post-secondary administration experience. He was formally a Department Head of Science and Vice President Academic in charge of 3 campus locations in Saskatchewan.

Herman studied at four universities in Canada. In 2008, he completed a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Regina in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on the inclusion of Cree culture in science education. He graduated with a M.Ed. degree from the University of British Columbia in 1998 specializing in Curriculum & Instruction. He also completed graduate course work in Education Psychology and Special Education from UBC and a post-baccalaureate in the same area from the University of Manitoba. Herman initially obtained a B.A. degree majoring in Sociology from the University of Winnipeg in 1990. He is an author of several books and numerous articles that are focused on northern-based materials for professors, K-12 teachers, and university students. Herman has an academic passion for bridging Western Science with Indigenous ways of knowing.



**JENNIFER MALMSTEN—VICE PRESIDENT OF ADMINISTRATION**

Jennifer joined NORTEP-NORPAC in 1997 to become the Secretary Treasurer. More recently her position has evolved into that of Vice-President (Administration). Over the course of her nearly 20 year tenure with the organization, Jennifer has seen many changes. When she first came to NORTEP-NORPAC, the students still travelled back and forth between their home communities and NORTEP to take courses in La Ronge; now, students remain resident in La Ronge full-time.

To facilitate this change, Jennifer has spearheaded fundraising to provide suitable student resident space. The effort to meet the need for such facilities began with the renovation of the (former) McKay Apartments, and was followed by a series of other student residence construction projects, which have resulted in affordable family residences for NORTEP-NORPAC students. Where possible Jennifer tries to incorporate "green" features and specifications into her projects. Besides everything else she was doing, Jennifer also found time to join one of the Master's cohorts hosted by NORTEP: she completed her M.Ed. degree in Educational Administration from the University of Saskatchewan in 2012.



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**LAURA BURNOUF—FACULTY MEMBER**

When Laura began her work at NORTEP-NORPAC 20 years ago, her first appointment was to teach the non-fluent Cree class. Since then, Laura has engaged in many studies about how people acquire language. In 1999, Laura was supported in her desire to take graduate level courses at the University of Arizona. Her inspiration and dedication in this field continued, and she completed her M.Ed. in language and culture in 2005 from the University of Alberta.

In addition to teaching Cree courses at NORTEP-NORPAC, Laura also teaches classes in Indigenous studies and Social Studies. In the past, she has co-facilitated the Education Professional Studies and the Educational Foundations classes. For the past two years she has taught a spring class at SUNTEP in Prince Albert.

During the summer, Laura teaches at the Canadian Indigenous Literacy and Languages Institute (CILLDI) at the University of Alberta. This experience has been life changing as she has had opportunity to work with other indigenous language activists and, together, work to preserve Indigenous languages, create networking connections, and share opportunities.

Laura is originally from Beauval, a Métis village in Saskatchewan. She has three adult sons and three granddaughters, who are an inspiration to continue on with her language activism work. Laura grew up speaking Cree-Michif and did not learn English until she started first grade at the Beauval Indian Residential School. She was a teacher in many schools across northern Saskatchewan before coming to NORTEP-NORPAC. She also serves as the President of the Jim Brady Métis Local.



**APRIL CHIEFFALE—PROGRAM COORDINATOR/FACULTY MEMBER**

Originally from Regina, April has obtained degrees in Women's and Gender Studies, Anthropology, Indigenous Studies and Education. She has worked for Regina Public Library and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now First Nations University) and has worked for the NORTEP-NORPAC for 15 years. She is currently the Program Coordinator and a faculty member of NORTEP-NORPAC and teaches courses in Women's and Gender Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Educational Foundations. She is also currently working on her Ph.D. in Education through the University of Regina. In her spare time, April enjoys volunteering with the Piwapin Women's Centre as well as photography and crocheting. (See her graduate profile on page 72.)



**CAL CHIEFFALE—FACULTY MEMBER**

Cal is originally from the Treaty 7 area in Southern Alberta. He has worked in Northern Saskatchewan for around 14 years. Cal has a broad range of teaching experience, having worked as an elementary, middle years, high school, and university instructor for the communities of Far Reserve, Stanley Mission, Southend, Sucker River and Black Lake. Cal began working at NORTEP-NORPAC in 2014 teaching mostly TEP courses and some PAC, as well. He has a B.A. in Indigenous Studies from the University of Regina, a B.Ed. from the University of Saskatchewan, and an M.Ed. from the University of Calgary.



**EARL COOK—FACULTY MEMBER  
(SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT)**

Earl is a fluent Swampy Cree from Cumberland House. His early years were spent in the traditional lifestyle, spending time on the trap line and helping his father's commercial fishing, along with his brothers and sisters. He has one son, and one grand-daughter.

Earl has a B.Ed. degree and a Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) in Indian and Northern Education from the University of Saskatchewan. He has served the public since the early seventies, when he worked on community development for the Métis Society in his home town. He has taught elementary grades and university courses. He has served as faculty member and Director of NORTEP-NORPAC; as an Indian and Metis Education Consultant with Northern Lights School Division; as Director of Post-Secondary Education, Northern Region, Director of Health, Northern Region, and Director of Can-Sask Career and Employment Services, Northern Region, all with the province; he has served as Coordinator of the Northern Health Strategy and is currently a Special Advisor to the President/CEO of NORTEP-NORPAC, as well as Coordinator of Languages and Culture.

Earl has been a board member of the Gabriel Dumont Institute and is presently on the Kikinahk Friendship Centre Board in La Ronge. His role with Kikinahk enables him to participate in the Association of Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan and the National Association of Friendship Centres. He currently is a member of the Jim Brady Local #19 and the Interim Area Director of Northern Region 1 with the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan. This enables him to participate in the Métis National Council.



**NORTEP-NORPAC Graduating Class 2016 — 40th Anniversary year**

Front row (L-R): Christina Roberts, Stanley Mission; Debbie Fosseneuve, Cumberland House; Faron Toulejour, La Loche; Kato Carriere, Cumberland House; Pearl Gardiner, Green Lake; Chasity Clarke, Southend; Roseanne Dery, La Ronge; Lee Nelson, Montreal Lake. Back row (L-R): Ruby Laliberte, Ile à la Crosse; Taylor Natomagan, Pinehouse; Louise Apeis, Patuanak; Brenley Natomagan, Pinehouse; Tracy Bird, Southend; Tina Moise, La Loche; Christina Campbell, Turnor Lake; Roberta Tomkins, La Ronge; Verna Iron, Pinehouse Lake; Josie Favel, Ile à la Crosse; Heather Lariviere, Pinehouse Lake; Penelope Linklater, Pelican Narrows. Missing from photo: Valerie Natomagan, Pinehouse





**SHARON FESCHUK—FACULTY MEMBER**

Sharon joined the NORTEP-NORPAC faculty in 2006. She currently teaches Health 100 and Math 101, co-teaches EPS116 (first year communications/writing), and tutors Biology 108. Her favorite part of the job is working with students in the classroom.

Before joining NORTEP-NORPAC, Sharon worked for many years in health promotion in Northern Saskatchewan, meeting and working with people all over the North. She now enjoys working with their children in her classroom! Sharon's first degree is a Bachelor of Science in Home Economics (BSHEc) from the University of Saskatchewan. The BSHEc is a science-based discipline focused on family and community. Sharon also earned a M.Ed. from the University of Regina in 2015. Sharon was part of a Community-Based Master's cohort hosted by NORTEP. Her final action research project examined the attitudes of pre-intern education students towards incorporation of movement and physical activity in the classroom. Sharon's interests include photography, cross country skiing, La Ronge Arts Council, Association of Saskatchewan Home Economists, and curling.



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**DEBORAH GIBSON-DINGWALL—FACULTY MEMBER**

Deborah has been an instructor at NORTEP-NORPAC since 1988 and a faculty member since 1995. She holds a B.A. from Trent University, a B.Ed. from Nipissing University, a Post Graduate Diploma in Reading Education and Disabilities from the University of Regina, and an M.Ed. (C&I) from the first Community-Based M.Ed. Program held at NORTEP in partnership with the University of Regina. She received two international facilitator awards from the Council of Environmental Education in Texas for her initiatives in the Flying Wild and Growing-Up Wild environmental programs, and the Champion of Children Award from the Saskatoon Preschool Foundation for her work with teachers and preservice teacher education.

Prior to her role at NORTEP-NORPAC, Deborah taught students from preschool to university. Her experiences in regular and special education span provincial, federal and private school systems. As an educational psychologist and a language arts consultant, she lived in, and traveled extensively in, Northern Saskatchewan before coming to NORTEP-NORPAC. Deborah is a founding executive member for Keewatin Nene, which gave a northern voice to the Saskatchewan Reading Council, and is currently the president for 2015-2016.

Relationship building is vital to Deborah's teacher educator practice. As a participant and supporter of local physical activity initiatives, Deborah received the Physical Activity Champion Award from In-motion Saskatchewan for her work in volunteerism and promoting regular physical activity in the community and teacher education.



**MICHELLE HOPPER—FACULTY MEMBER**

When plans fell through for becoming a veterinarian, and after achieving her B.Sc. in biology, Michelle worked in various jobs until five years later, when she had the opportunity to teach for Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (S.I.I.T.). Before teaching for S.I.I.T., she had never seen a curriculum book and didn't know how to develop a lesson plan. She was learning as she taught. Through this experience, she realized that teaching was something she loved doing. It gave her the feeling that she was making a difference in peoples' lives. She discovered that teaching was what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. Thus, after teaching for S.I.I.T. for 10 years, Michelle applied to NORTEP-NORPAC and earned a B.Ed. degree with distinction.

A project for one of her classes connected Michelle with another passion that combined both her interest in teaching and her love of animals. The project explored teaching empathy to children through animals in the classroom. The project, created more questions than answers and Michelle decided to further explore the topic. She certified her dog as a St. John's Therapy Dog and now plans on pursuing her Master's in special education.

Michelle started working for NORTEP-NORPAC in August 2015, following her graduation. She teaches, co-teaches, and tutors a variety of classes at NORTEP-NORPAC, including EPS 116, EPS 199, EPS 198, Math 101, and soon ECUR 312. Her work at NORTEP-NORPAC has allowed Michelle the opportunity to broaden her teaching experiences.



**MINNIE MCKENZIE—FIELD COORDINATOR/  
FACULTY MEMBER**

Minnie is originally from Stanley Mission, Saskatchewan. She is a NORTEP graduate with B.Ed. from University of Saskatchewan and M.Ed. from the University of Regina. (See her graduate profile on page 40.)

In her current position, Minnie's main responsibility is to coordinate student placements at schools in the Northern region for pre-interns and interns. What makes Minnie especially happy with her job is meeting many people. Minnie also team teaches EPS classes with Deborah Gibson-Dingwall and Cal Chiefcalf. She works with many other faculty members who provide professional feedback to preservice teachers in the field.

Minnie's educational background began at home in Stanley Mission where she learned her first language, Woodland Cree. The foundation of her education and personal life stems from her family of Stanley Mission. Her parents John and Betsy McKenzie had eleven children, and she is the youngest female. Many sisters and brothers live in La Ronge. All of them have children, most with grandchildren and great grandchildren. Minnie has lost her grandparents, parents and four siblings to the spirit world. The names of her grandparents are Betsy and Daniel McKenzie. Her late brothers names are Jim and Ben McKenzie. She lost an infant brother and her late sister Doreen McKenzie.



**TAMMY ROBINSON—COORDINATOR OF STUDENT SERVICES/  
FACULTY MEMBER**

Tammy is originally from Cole Bay and proud of her Métis heritage. Her husband is from La Ronge and they have two beautiful children. She moved to La Ronge in 1994 to attend NORPAC, and completed 2 years of University courses. (See her graduate profile on page 84.)

From 1999 - 2004, Tammy worked as the Executive Secretary at NORTEP-NORPAC. From 2004 to 2010, she was the Registrar, while completing her B.A. in Native Studies (2005).

In 2010, Tammy became the Program Counsellor (job title has officially changed to the Coordinator of Student Services/Academic Advisor). In her current role she is responsible for integrating support services for students, academic and career advising, personal and professional counselling support. Tammy also co-instructs two courses in EPS 116 (University of Regina) and INCC 201.3 (University of Saskatchewan). She completed her B.Ed. degree with distinction in 2012, while also working full time.

Tammy is currently enrolled in the second year of the Masters of Northern Governance and Development program with the University of Saskatchewan. She is co-chair on the La Ronge Native Women's Council Inc. and she volunteers with Special Olympics in her leisure time.



**RAY SMITH—FACULTY MEMBER**

Originally from Pinehouse Lake, Ray is himself a graduate of NORTEP. He began teaching at NORTEP in 1995 and teaches classes in Cree language and Indigenous Studies. Ray also serves as a Field Advisor.





## Aboriginal Language Specialists (Sessional Instructors)



**ALLAN ADAM**

Originally from Fond du Lac, now living in La Ronge, Allan teaches courses at NORTEP-NORPAC as the Dene language specialist. (See Allan's graduate profile on page 103.)



**ELEANOR HEGLAND**

A graduate of SUNTEP (PA), Eleanor now lives in La Ronge and teaches courses at NORTEP-NORPAC as a Cree language specialist.



**Photo: Pelicans in Northern Saskatchewan by Kimberley Gowdy of Sherwood Park, Alberta**

## PAST DIRECTORS AND PRESIDENT\*



**MICHAEL TYMCHAK (1977 – 1985 AND 1988 – 92)**

Michael was the first Director of NORTEP, beginning in 1977, prior to the establishment of NORTEP as an academic program recognized by the provinces two Universities. He was responsible for developing proposals to be submitted to the Universities for formal academic approval. He worked with Keith Goulet in the early days to establish and oversee the program's development and evolution. Michael served as Director from 1979 – 1985, and then again from 1988 – 1992. The Northern Professional Access Program (NORPAC) was developed, and added to the program offerings during his second term as Director. Michael holds a B.A. (High Honours) from the University of Saskatchewan, and a Ph.D. (Philosophy) from the University of Manchester (England).

Prior to coming to NORTEP, Michael worked as an Ethnohistorian for the Academic Education Branch of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan. After leaving NORTEP he became Dean of Education, and later Director of SIDRU at the University of Regina. At his retirement in 2013 he was given the Distinguished Service Award by the Board of Governors of the University of Regina.



**EARL COOK (1985 – 88)**

Earl joined the NORTEP-NORPAC program as a faculty member in 1982, and served as Program Director from 1985–88. Earl is a Swampy Cree from Cumberland House, SK, and holds both a B.Ed. and a Post Graduate Diploma from the University of Saskatchewan where he majored in the area of Indian and Northern Education.

For more information see the entry for Earl under "Senior Administrative and Academic Staff" on pg. iv.



**HAROLD SCHULTZ (1992 – 94 AND 1995 – 96)**

After retiring as an Executive Assistant with the STF, Harold joined NORTEP-NORPAC in 1992 for a two-year period when he served as the "Acting Director"; he was invited once again to serve in that capacity for the year 1995-96. Harold had a full and rich career in teaching and school administration, prior to working with the STF. He and his wife, Ev, thoroughly enjoyed their two years living in La Ronge, and Harold cherishes many fond memories of the program, staff and students of NORTEP in those days.



**Photo: Wild Tiger Lily in Northern Saskatchewan  
by Herman Michell**

\*Note: originally the name for the position of program head at NORTEP (and later NORPAC as well) was simply called the "Director"; however, more recently the term "President and CEO" has been adopted by the Board of Governors, in conformity with the practice of northern colleges of similar standing.





**ALLAN DUCHARME (1994 – 96)**

A Manitoba Métis, Allan served as a teacher and principal at the school in Timber Bay with the Northern Lights School Division for many years prior to joining NORTEP-NORPAC as a member of faculty, and later as the Director (1994-96). Allan left NORTEP-NORPAC in 1996 to become the Executive Director of the Prince Albert Grand Council. Later he became the Vice-President (Administration) for the First Nations University of Canada. Allan holds a B.Ed. from the University of Brandon, and an M.Ed. from the University of Saskatchewan.



**ELIE FLEURY (1996 – 2010)**

Elie served as the Director of NORTEP from 1996 – 2010. Elie is a Cree and French Métis from Manitoba. He has a B.A. degree (major in Anthropology) and a B.Ed. degree (major in Native Studies) from the University of Manitoba. He also holds a Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) from the University of Saskatchewan.

Prior to coming to NORTEP-NORPAC, Elie taught and was a principal in Manitoba for 16 years. During those 16 years, he spent 3 years in the provincial system and 13 years in Indian Affairs and band controlled systems. In 1976, Elie moved on to work at Northern Lights School Division and spent 10 years as a consultant, a Superintendent of Education, and as the Director of Education. Elie then became the Director of Education for many different organizations, including the Cowessess Community Education Centre and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN). He has also worked for Montreal Lake First Nation. Elie accepted the position of Director with NORTEP and NORPAC in 1996, a position he held for some 14 years, until his retirement in 2010.

Although Elie retired in 2010, he still teaches a course at NORTEP-NORPAC, as well as doing contract work in education and substitute teaching. His remarkable career in Aboriginal education spans a full half-century (50 years)!



**HERMAN MICHELL (2010 – PRESENT)**

Herman became Director/President of NORTEP in 2010, after serving as a member of faculty at the First Nations University of Canada, as Head of the Science Department, and later as the Vice-President (Academic).

Originally from Kinoosao in Northern Saskatchewan (a small fishing village know previously as “Co-op Point”), Herman holds a B.A. (Sociology) and a Post-Bac Diploma in Education from the University of Manitoba as well as a M.Ed. from the University of British Columbia and a Ph.D. (Education) from the University of Regina.

For more information see the entry for Herman under “Senior Administrative and Academic Staff” p. iii



## BOARD MEMEBERS



**LORNA BLACK (GREEN LAKE: NLSO)**

Lorna Black has been a member of the NORTEP-NORPAC Board of Governors for 10 years. She is originally from the small northern community of Green Lake. Lorna was 34 years old when she decided to further her education. After graduating with a social work degree from the University of Regina, she has worked in the North most of her life in different capacities. Lorna is passionate about helping students succeed. She encourages young people to "follow their dream."



**CHIEF TAMMY COOK-SEARSON  
(LA RONGE: LAC LA RONGE INDIAN BAND)**

Proud of her First Nations heritage and a fluent Cree speaker, Tammy Cook-Searson was raised on the family trap line and continues to practice her outdoor skills as a competitor on the northern Queen Trapper circuit. In 2005, at the age of 33 Tammy was first elected Chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in La Ronge, Saskatchewan. Tammy combines many roles as community leader, politician, businessperson, wife, mother and a contemporary woman living a traditional life. She is the first woman to lead the Lac La Ronge Band.

Prior to becoming Chief, Tammy was a band councillor for eight years and was also a social worker. As Chief, Tammy is President of Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership, the band's economic development initiative.

Tammy received the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002 and the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal in 2006. In 2012, she was also presented with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for her contributions and committed leadership. She has strong cultural ties to the land, spending time with friends and family in the bush and on the lake. She holds a trapper's license, loves picking wild blueberries and cranberries, making jam, boating, and canoeing. She keeps in shape training year round for her passion, which is running in marathons.

When she talks to youth, Chief Tammy says, "...our relatives have made many sacrifices for us to be here. We must always be humble."



**BARB FLETT (ILE-A-LA CROSSE : ILE-A-LA CROSSE SD)**

Barb Flett is originally from Île-à-la-Croix, Saskatchewan. She is currently the Vice-chair of the Board of Governors. Barb also works as a Coordinator for the Prenatal Nutrition Program in her home community. She has been on the NORTEP-NORPAC board for over eight years.

One thing Barb enjoys about her role on the board is the group decisions and weighing the pros and cons on issues with other members. She says, "At the board table, we share, talk, and come to a consensus on decisions. I like the seriousness of it and also the friendships we form".

Barb is committed to making a difference in the North by promoting education, health, and wellness. She wants northern students to succeed, and finds it good when she sees NORTEP graduates in the community giving back. Many of whom now have their Master degrees.

NORTEP-NORPAC has been delivering university courses in the North for 40 years. Barb would like to see the more programs offered in the future.





**CLAIRE LA ROCQUE (CAMSELL PORTAGE: NLSO)**

Claire La Rocques is a northerner by heart and by birth. She was born in Camsell Portage and grew up with a strong sense of giving to the community. Because of her dedication to the local children and her volunteer work, Claire was recruited by a local teacher to run for the Northern Lights School Division board. Twenty-one years later she still dedicates her life to northerners.

Watching students grow up and graduate from the public school system, then observing them enter and graduate from NORTEP-NORPAC, and finally seeing them return to northern schools as teachers, to mentor and encourage the next generation of students, is rewarding for Claire. Her experience, educational contacts in government, and knowledge of the influential, local people are her strongest asset. As a board member, ensuring adequate policies and procedures are in place to efficiently and effectively operate the programs is important.

Claire's advice to students attending the program is to work hard. Students should not be afraid to ask for help when they need it. There are always people who are willing to provide support.

Claire is the Chairperson (Mayor) of her hamlet, a recreation worker, a trustee of the Northern Lights School Board, and the Chair of the Athabasca Health Region and NORTEP-NORPAC Board Chair. In her spare time, she and her husband operate a small fishing camp in Camsell Portage, where they provide northern hospitality to the visitors from Alberta and the United States.



**JOEY MCCALLUM (PINEHOUSE: NLSO)**

The most important attribute of a board member is a passion for the North. As a lifetime northerner, Joey McCallum believes that being a NORTEP-NORPAC board member provides him with the opportunity to assist people to overcome the challenges that are prevalent in the North. Northerners cannot depend on the environment to provide in same way as in the past. As a result, education is the "New Buffalo," which is symbolic of a sacred life and abundance.

Joey respects the vision of the previous board members. No one could envision the impact that NORTEP-NORPAC would have on the northern economy and on social issues. Students, in Kindergarten to Grade 12 look to graduates to provide leadership and direction for their lives.

For 13 years, Joey has advocated to preserve and enhance Indigenous languages. In his view, the most important aspect of a university education at NORTEP-NORPAC is the connection to Indigenous languages and culture. Joey states, "Keep the language; speak the language; teach the language," then language and culture will be integrated into the education system.

As a small organization, Board members are required to be strong financial stewards. In particular, it is important to provide the government with current statistical information. When Joey is not working on the board, he is a Process Operator at Key Lake.



**LAWRENCE MCINTYRE (ENGLISH RIVER BAND: MEADOW LAKE TRIBAL COUNCIL)**

Lawrence is a relatively new member of the NORTEP-NORPAC Board of Governors, who represents the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. Because Lawrence was the most northern member of the tribal council and because of his interest in northern education, he was asked to sit on the Board. The program's success in graduating many teachers and other professionals, such as, mine managers, also positively influenced his decision to be on the NORTEP-NORPAC Board.

For over 20 years, Lawrence was the Band Manager of English River First Nation. For the last six months, he has been the Chief of the same band. This is a challenging job because of the amount of economic development, social issues, and educational partnerships that occur.

In the future, he hopes NORTEP will establish a doctorate program. Graduates would be able to establish their own curriculum resulting in First Nation controlled education through a First Nations education act. Improving the wellness of his community is Lawrence's number one goal. As a recovering alcoholic of 33 years, Lawrence understands how wellness impacted his success. In order to work with people, the strength and encouragement of traditional wellness values from Elders, which was passed down for generations, needs to be put into practice.

Lawrence's wife and daughter are graduates of the NORTEP program, which helped both family members to become self-directed and confident decision makers. Lawrence has his level three coaching certification and enjoys organizing sporting events, especially hockey tournaments.





**CLIFFORD RAY (SANDY BAY: NLSO)**

Clifford is a board member from the Northern Lights School Division. He was previously on the board in the 1990s and is now serving a second term. Clifford is a member of the Northern Trappers Association and brings a strong land-based perspective on issues.

Clifford says faculty and staff at NORTEP-NOPAC really take the time to listen to the needs of communities and students. There have been many good changes within the organization. Clifford states, "young people were falling through the cracks before. We push them hard to get an education. Many are stepping up to the plate and making a difference in the North and that is encouraging."



**JOAN STRONG (STONY RAPIDS/PA: PRINCE ALBERT GRAND COUNCIL)**

Joan is originally from the northern community of Stony Rapids and has worked with Prince Albert Grand Council for 14 years. She has three daughters and a husband who are all musically talented. Joan brings strong northern perspectives to the strategic direction of the organization. She enjoys working with people who want to make a difference in their lives. Joan believes "there is a need to go beyond negative stereotypes and begin to showcase just how talented and gifted young people are in the North."



**RAY BEIBERDORF (CREIGHTON: CREIGHTON SD)**

Ray has been with the Board of Governors for 3 years. He currently lives in Creighton, Saskatchewan and has 3 sons and 7 grandchildren. Ray was a high school teacher for 15 years before retiring. He has always been passionate about education and still works on a casual basis as a substitute teacher.

Ray states, "I strongly believe that NORTEP-NORPAC is going in the right direction; we have staff that go beyond the scope of their duties to help northern students succeed."



**BOARD MEMBERS GROUP PHOTO**

**BACK ROW (L-R): JOEY MCCALLUM, LAWRENCE MCINTYRE, CLIFFORD RAY. FRONT ROW (L-R): CLAIRE LA ROCQUE, JOAN STRONG, BARB FLETT**

## PROGRAM AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF



**JACLYN ANGUS, REGISTRATION CLERK**



**DALE APESIS, RECRUITER/ACADEMIC SUPPORT OFFICER**



**JENNIE BAGINSKI, LIBRARIAN**



**LINDA DEBRUIN, REGISTRAR**



**ALAN GARDINER, FACILITIES MANAGER**



**JOHN RATT, ASSISTANT FACILITIES MANAGER**



**BRUCE ROBERTSON, NETWORK/SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR**



**SHELBEY SAVOIE, ACCOUNTING CLERK**



**CHRIS SCHAFER, EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANT**



**TINA SHAW, ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANT**



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## SESSIONALS



**BRENDA KELLY**



**BRUCE RUSSELL**



**DIONNE TATLOW**



**ELIE FLEURY**



**JO SZOSTAK**



**JOHANNA BIRD**



**KEN GRAY**



**KIM CROSS**



**LARRY WILKE**



**MEAGAN GILBERT**



**MIRIAM KORNER**



**PENNY CARRIERE**





**RAKESH ARAYANGAD**



**REBECCA MAJOR**



**ROB ROY**



**RODOLFO PINO-ROBLES**



**SCOTT HALPIN**



**SHARON MITCHELL**



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**Dr. Herman Michell**  
**President, NORTEP-NORPAC**

On behalf of the Board of Governors, staff, and faculty, it is my pleasure to introduce the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP)-Northern Professional Access College (NORPAC) and its impacts in the lives of students, alumni, their families and communities. This document highlights the stories of graduates and in many ways represents the success of the organization since it began operations in 1976. Many thanks to the alumni who participated in the interviews for this report. The last study (2008) and the current study were done by Dr. Michael Tymchak, Carmen Pauls Orthner, and Shuana Niessen.

The contents of the document showcases the continued importance of accessible university education in the North. Much has changed in the aftermath of residential schools. Teachers of Aboriginal heritage were unheard of prior to the 1970s. Today, they play a pivotal in the development of the region. Many thanks to past directors who worked closely with northern stakeholders in response to academic needs in

communities. The inclusion of Cree, Dene, and Métis cultures, languages, and place-based knowledge is important in an era of reconciliation. NORTEP-NORPAC has built 4 decades of credibility with both the University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan. In 2016, the organization is celebrating its 40th anniversary year.

In the past several years NORTEP-NORPAC has delivered three M.Ed. degree programs in education, offered in cooperation with the University of Regina (2 programs) and the University of Saskatchewan (1 program). As a result, about 60 people in the North hold graduate credentials, which will surely change the academic landscape. Aboriginal communities are taking over their own programs and services, requiring a diversity of professionals with a university background. There is an overall need for a variety of programs and delivery models that will meet the career interests of all northern people regardless of cultural background.

Teachers in the NORTEP-NORPAC program, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are in big demand as earlier graduates begin to retire. They are not only teachers; many take on different roles. More young people are applying directly from the high school system, which is a switch from earlier times when there was a focus on mature students who had been out of school for some time. Multiple student supports and face-to-face instruction are important in the North as there are many challenges. This fact becomes clear when you read the graduate profiles contained in this document. Many thanks to the visiting professors from both universities who have worked with our core faculty and staff to ensure our students are receiving the best of modern education.

## DEDICATION



Keith Goulet

This publication is dedicated to Keith Goulet in acknowledgement of his past and continuing contributions to education in northern Saskatchewan. His contribution consists not only of the work he has done, but also the role model that he has provided. Keith has made highly significant contributions to K – 12 education, post-secondary education, educational administration, and to research in both education and Cree Language. It is well known that in addition to all of this Keith has had a remarkable career in the field of provincial politics, as an MLA and a Cabinet Minister. While acknowledging his political career—it is to his life in education that we dedicate this book.

Keith was born and raised “on the land” in a hunting, fishing and trapping lifestyle at Cumberland House where the family also operated a hunting business and a café confectionary. He attended the local school for Grades 1 to 10, while Grades 11 to 12 were completed in Prince Albert. After high school he took his teacher’s college in Ontario where his sister Josie and her husband George, along with his younger siblings, had located. Keith began his teaching career in Aroland, ON, an Anishnabe community, and then Moose Factory, a James Bay Cree community. Later he returned to Saskatchewan to complete his B.Ed. from the University of Saskatchewan in 1974. In the fall of that same year, he was hired as a Cree Language Consultant by the Northern School Board, based in La Ronge. He taught a Cree language class for the University in the summer of 1975. He was then hired as a Teacher Education Program Developer in February, 1976, and also taught the first NORTEP class that Fall.

Keith became the first NORTEP faculty member, as well as the Coordinator of Field Experiences. His students will never forget the courses he taught in Cree Language and the Foundations of Education. Keith’s vision was essential to shaping the program’s structure in the early, most formative years. He went on, of course, to assume other important positions in education: he was Principal of the La Ronge Region Community College for a number of years before becoming Executive Director of the Dumont Technical Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research in Regina.

Throughout his career, however, Keith has always maintained a keen interest in educational research. Having already done a B.Ed. (University of Saskatchewan), and an M.Ed. (University of Regina), Keith is currently working on a Ph.D. in History, again with the University of Regina. His doctoral research on the issue of land focuses on the broader historic and worldview implications of some of the important distinctions embedded in Cree Language. Keith’s research findings already show promise of being ground-breaking in their significance for the field. Recently, together with his wife Linda Goulet, Keith has also co-authored an exciting new book on *Aboriginal Education - Teaching Each Other: Nehinuw and Indigenous Pedagogies* (UBC Press, 2014).

It will be plainly evident that the “New Horizons” that are documented and celebrated in this book owe a great deal to a northern Cree educator who pursued new horizons for himself, his family and his people. Keith Goulet’s life in education has embodied and continues to exemplify new horizons. The personal stories included in this book illustrate very well how new horizons have the power to transform—personal lives and society too. We dedicate these stories and this book to you, Keith, with pride and with great gratitude.



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## 1. NEW HORIZONS—STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION

Travelers from southern Saskatchewan are not prepared for the dramatic change of scenery that unfolds as they journey north. Just beyond Prince Albert the landscape transforms; new sights and vistas begin to emerge—grain fields, prairie grasses and the familiar, trembling aspen yield to vast forests of spruce, pine and birch, along with lakes, hills and outcroppings of Pre Cambrian rock; they now become our visual companions. Travelers do not expect change on this scale; it catches us by surprise. Lives can be like that too: A new journey can make all the difference—old patterns and routines, expectations and opportunities can be transformed into something that is quite surprising; familiar landscapes can yield to altogether new horizons. The stories and information documented in this book represent for many northern people just such a journey: a journey into the unknown and the unexpected; a journey that transformed their personal and professional horizons.

The journey we are talking about is connected with the creation of a new teacher education program known as NORTEP (the Northern Teacher Education Program). Prior to 1976 almost all teachers in northern Saskatchewan came from outside what was then known as the “NAD” (the Northern Administrative District); that is, roughly, the area of the province north of the line from Green Lake to Cumberland House—more than half the geographical area of the province. NORTEP was a gateway for the journey; it represented an opportunity for a university education and a professional career that, previously, was almost unheard of for northerners. Most of the first generation of NORTEP students were also the first generation of family members to pursue a university degree. In most cases, they would also be the first members of their community to become certified teachers. Their lives embodied the personal and professional transformation that was about to occur in northern education.

Ironically, in 1976, NORTEP began its life in the attic of a school in La Ronge that was affectionately known as “Old Gateway.” Members of that first class, some whose stories are chronicled in this book, could hardly imagine how their studies and hard work were creating an altogether new beginning—not only for themselves, but also for northern education. Some years later, NORTEP birthed another program known as “NORPAC” (Northern Professional Access College); this program has created numerous opportunities for northerners in many other fields besides teaching. Though disguised by its humble appearance - the modest white-and-green clapboard of its exterior - “Old Gateway” school thus became the threshold for an exciting journey; it opened a pathway that would ultimately lead to new horizons, personal and professional, for countless northern people and successive generations.

Seven students graduated in that first graduation ceremony in 1979.<sup>1</sup> These members of NORTEP’s class of 1979 were the first group of northern university graduates in the province; their example established a high standard and template for subsequent classes; their success signaled what would become a profound change in northern attitudes towards post-secondary education.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Jane Kasyon, Stony Rapids; Bev Cheechoo (Fosseneuve), Cumberland House; Vicky Caisse, Ile-a-la Crosse; Bella Sander-son, La Ronge; Claire Corrigan, Jans Bay; Marie Moberly, Turnor Lake; Clara Nelson, Weyakwin



**NORTEP first graduating class of 1979**

The first TEP students were women who had previously worked for the Northern School Board as “native instructors”—teacher aides who had completed a 6-month training course, then returned to their home communities to work alongside experienced but non-local teachers. The NORTEP program was uniquely tailored to meet the needs of these students, and others facing similar economic, social, and geographic challenges. For example, tuition, books, and a living allowance were provided free of charge, initially for all students and in later years for those

who met specific academic and geographic criteria. University classes were structured in 1-week blocks, with visiting or local professors teaching one subject to one group of students from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. every day for 5 days, and then returning several weeks later to teach another block of the same subject. Students completed course work in the interim and also returned to their home communities for a full week, once a month, to work as teachers. This field-experience approach was later used in the NORPAC program as well, as a way to give the first- and second-year arts and science students an opportunity to work in their chosen field even before they moved on to more specialized training.

Following graduation, all the graduates took up teaching positions. In the year 2007 (when this book was written), more than 30 years after the inception of the program, five of the seven first graduates were still teaching! Of the five still teaching, some have taken on other responsibilities over the years: One has served as a Vice-Principal, and another has had a varied career as a Director of Education (for a northern First Nation), as a professor with a TEP program (YNTEP in Whitehorse, Yukon Territories), and as a university Dene Language Instructor.<sup>2</sup> All of the graduates taught for many years subsequent to graduation. Today, well over 300 graduates have become certified teachers; 90% are still teaching in the North.

NORTEP-NORPAC’s breadth of impact, its profound impact on education and schools, language and culture, careers and leadership, governance and program authority, and socio-economic conditions in the North are examined in detail in a 2006 report, *NORTEP-NORPAC Innovation, Determination, Impact: Since 1977*.<sup>3</sup> However, the focus of this report is to explore the depth of its impact. NORTEP and NORPAC are located deep in the hearts of the people whose lives these opportunities have transformed. NORTEP-NORPAC’s impact is felt first and most keenly by its graduates—both those who earn a Bachelor of Education degree, and those who receive recognition for completing first- or second-year arts and science, or, in recent years, a 3-year Bachelor of Arts degree.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Jane Kasyon, originally from Stony Rapids

<sup>3</sup> Tymchak, M., (2015). *Innovation, determination, impact: Since 1977*. Regina, SK: SIDRU for the Centre for Northern Research and Graduate Studies Education (CeNRGe)

This report records inspirational stories of personal and professional transformations beginning with some of the earlier graduates of NORTEP, followed by the next generation, then early NORPAC graduates, again, followed by the next generation. These stories are interwoven with the perceptions of other northerners who have also felt the depth of NORTEP-NORPAC's impact as it flowed out into the lives of others: the educational, cultural, political, and socio-economic effects of NORTEP-NORPAC graduates in their communities. As well, commentary and current demographic statistics are included regarding issues such as the value and importance of education in meeting the current and future educational and socio-economic needs, of not only northern and Aboriginal people, but also all of Saskatchewan in the context, challenges, and opportunities of a global knowledge economy. Another issue raised is the importance and urgency of redressing northern and Aboriginal educational and economic barriers to participation and access, both systemic and personal, while, at the same time, valuing, preserving, and maintaining language and culture. Northern and Aboriginal participation is essential to surmount the demographic threat to future socio-economic prosperity for all citizens of Saskatchewan. NORTEP-NORPAC's history, its depth and breadth of impact, demonstrate that it is well positioned to meet both the growing needs of northern and Aboriginal people, as well as Saskatchewan as a whole. It has demonstrated principles that are essential to successful educational and economic participation. NORTEP-NORPAC is prepared to continue to be responsive to the growing needs of northern and Aboriginal peoples, to persist in making accessible the beneficial aspects of post-secondary education and employment, to remain flexible in programming and governance, and, to uphold a learner centred emphasis of reflecting and continuing cultural values, ways of knowing, and the preservation of language through self-governance and collaboration; thereby, redressing institutional and personal barriers to northern and Aboriginal participation.

Through their stories, the graduates reveal their struggle to gain an education—despite obstacles such as the necessity of relocation, temporarily leaving loved ones behind, learning difficulties, heavy academic demands, and many other challenges due to juggling adult responsibilities of raising families and earning a living in the North—with the demands of their studies. Their stories also express how NORTEP-NORPAC's organization, culture, faculty, and staff support and expectations helped to lower the barriers to participation and success. Through their struggle, students discover strengths, increase their knowledge and skills, come to terms with sorrows from their pasts, fulfill childhood hopes and dreams, explore new possibilities, and begin to feel and demonstrate a confidence and wisdom that flows through them into the lives of those around them, and successive generations. The graduates demonstrate an understanding of their own significance as role models to their children, extended families, students, as well as the surrounding community of parents. They have a keen desire to give back to others—to their families and communities—all that has been given to them. Their example transforms northern attitudes regarding the importance and value of education, demonstrates the possibilities of professional careers for northern people, and raises expectations and awareness of the benefits of education and employment. Next-generation graduates highlight the power and change that these role models have effected in their lives in setting new expectations and standards, and of a willingness to explore other horizons that include moving to urban locations. Post-secondary education has become part of family traditions, raising hopes, and transforming expectations of success.



**Graduate Profile: Bev Cheechoo (nee Fosseneuve)**  
**Cumberland House**  
**NORTEP, class of 1979**

The birth of NORTEP may have deprived the Canadian Armed Forces of a fine soldier, but Bev Cheechoo has no regrets—except maybe the disappointment of learning that being a teacher doesn't just mean having summer and Christmas vacations off.

Cheechoo's father, Charlie Fosseneuve—well respected in the North for his long service as an RCMP special constable—taught her to pursue her educational dreams and “not to be stuck at a mediocre level” professionally. Cheechoo always saw herself pursuing a career. Cheechoo recalls, when she filled out a career questionnaire in Grade 9, “They told me I'd make a wonderful staff-sergeant in the army.”

However, after completing high school and working for a year as a native instructor at her alma mater, Charlebois School in Cumberland House, Cheechoo learned about a new teacher education program being offered in the North. Forsaking any thoughts of the military, she enrolled. “I thought it was a good career, because you'd get summers off and you'd still get your holidays,” she says with a smile. “I didn't realize how much work it was.”

Despite the effort involved, Cheechoo finished the program in 1979, as part of NORTEP's first graduating class. She returned to Charlebois, and aside from 3 ½ years off with her children, has taught there ever since, taking on every class from Kindergarten to Grade 6, plus Grade 8. She has also worked as a materials developer for the school's Cree language program.

Comparing her NORTEP experience to later summer school classes in Saskatoon, where she completed her Bachelor of Education degree, Cheechoo most remembers the close relationships she had with her TEP peers and professors.

“When you went down south, you didn't have that kinship, that sense of connection,” she says. “When you took NORTEP in the North, it was automatic—you had that support around you. The other people that were in the program had the same obstacles, more or less, that you had, so if you had a problem it was easy to discuss it with somebody that was in the same situation.”



**Bev Cheechoo, a member of NORTEP's first graduating class, has brought a keen sense of humour and a passion for helping others to Charlebois School for nearly 30 years.**

When you went down south, you didn't have that kinship, that sense of connection,” she says. “When you took NORTEP in the North, it was automatic—you had that support around you. The other people that were in the program had the same obstacles, more or less, that you had, so if you had a problem it was easy to discuss it with somebody that was in the same situation.

She also appreciated the sense that she was more than “just a student number” to the staff and faculty at NORTEP, and while she sometimes felt overwhelmed by the workload and the professors’ expectations, she still felt that they cared.

As a teacher herself, Cheechoo has helped inspire others to prove their own potential—and from her first class at Charlebois, she proudly counts four who are now her professional colleagues at the same school. Thanks to NORTEP, she says, “people have seen the possibilities that are there and (decided) to give it a try.”

## **2. NORTEP-NORPAC: A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY**

While northern communities are geographically isolated from the south—and, as the region is sparsely populated, northerners have little opportunity for contact with one another. However, within the NORTEP-NORPAC environment, northerners find a support system and a sense of familiarity and comfort that stand in sharp contrast to the isolation they often find on-campus in larger mainstream universities and within their isolated northern communities.

### **2.1 Observations of Marion Hemingway**

Marion Hemingway sees the internal support system, the family atmosphere so often mentioned by the school’s graduates—and its impact on graduates’ self-esteem and self-respect—as NORTEP’s greatest asset. When she decided to go back to school in 1979-80, she was on welfare because she could not teach with the single year of training she had. “I credit my going back to school to Linda and Keith Goulet. If they hadn’t been there to support me, both financially and emotionally, I don’t know where I’d be today,” she says. “And it’s often like that with families, and I think northerners are very strong that way—that kind of supporting each other.”

By the time Hemingway retired in 2006, her associations with NORTEP-NORPAC had run a wide gamut: co-operating teacher, vice-principal, principal, Saskatchewan Department of Learning employee and Northern Lights School Division superintendent. But her first encounter with the school was not professional; it was personal.

As a single mom back in the mid-1970s, Hemingway enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Regina, and she and her children moved in with her sister, Linda, and Linda’s husband, Keith Goulet, who were both working for NORTEP and completing their master’s degrees at the time. From conversations with the Goulets—which included Linda’s research work on the development of the teacher from Years 1 through 4—Hemingway became fascinated with northern education, and when she graduated with her BEd in 1980, she successfully applied for a teaching job in La Loche. The question of childcare was quickly resolved when NLSD board member Toni Lemaigre offered to babysit during the school days. “People in the North are like that—it’s like business and work and personal life, everything is integrated. That’s one of the things that I love about the North, and one of the reasons why I wanted to come north,” Hemingway says. Through interactions with NORTEP faculty and her

co-op students, Hemingway discovered that the support system she was offered—first as a university student living with her sister and brother-in-law, and then immediately when she started her first job in the North—was something built into the tightly woven, family-oriented northern mindset, and reflected at NORTEP.

The learning environment was not only emotionally and financially supportive, but also students received encouragement and mentoring to pursue further opportunities, such as graduate studies. For example, Rosalie Tsannie—Director of Education for the Hatchet Lake Band near Wollaston until mid-2007 when she was elected as Wollaston Lake Chief—completed her degree at NORTEP, interned with Nancy McKay at Pre-Cam School in La Ronge, and went on to pursue a master's in education, graduating at the same time as Hemingway. Tsannie is also working on a doctorate with a specialty in languages, about which she has many conversations with Keith Goulet, a fellow doctoral candidate. "I see something like that (Tsannie's career path) as having far-reaching and long-term effects," both on her and on her community, Hemingway says. ***NORTEP "really brings out people who have a natural inclination towards leadership and academics."***

To create and sustain this supportive school culture, NORTEP has had to make a judgment call—to negotiate—the criteria for its student body. Given the historic exclusion of Aboriginals from the design of mainstream university programs, it is doubtful that a program that was distinctively Aboriginal could have been created if the emphasis, and student selection, in the first decade had not been Aboriginal by conscious design. NORTEP's policy has been a study in patient determination and focus, rather than ideological rhetoric. By selecting northerners, with preference to Cree and Dene speakers, NORTEP has created a graduate population of whom more than 90% are of Aboriginal ancestry. This proportion represents an affirmative action direction for the North, without being very exclusive.

By adopting 'northern' as a key criterion for admission, rather than ancestry, and by preferring speakers of Aboriginal languages, NORTEP has steered a course that is weighted towards change. It has been developmental in that the 'northern' and 'language' criteria yielded a student body that for many years consisted exclusively of First Nation and Métis persons.

In time, however, other northerners were admitted (without changing the criteria). By waiting until the early 1990s before non-Aboriginals were admitted, NORTEP was able to establish an academic learning culture that honoured, and was distinctively centered, upon the languages, culture, and history of First Nation and Métis peoples. Once this identity was strong and clear, NORTEP's admission of non-Aboriginal northerners became a statement of confidence and strength, reflecting the traditional values of generosity and sharing that are so conspicuous amongst northern Aboriginal peoples. The fact that 91% of the NORTEP graduates are of Aboriginal ancestry—a higher proportion than the northern population in general—reflects both a determination to effect change and, at the same time, the recognition that northerners are all "working together" towards common goals. Ultimately, non-Aboriginals, by sharing in the distinctive NORTEP program, themselves became part of the change process.



**Graduate Profile: Josie Searson**  
**La Ronge (originally Cumberland House)**  
**NORTEP, class of 1980**

The second oldest of nine children, Josie Goulet was just 21 when her mother died, leaving the family orphaned. Her older sister was already married, so the responsibility for raising their siblings—the youngest of whom was only three—fell to Josie, and her dream of becoming a teacher had to be put aside.

Some years later, she married George Searson and had three children of her own, so going away to university was no longer an option. Still, she says, “the hope was always there—‘someday.’”

In the meantime, however, one of those younger siblings—her brother Keith—grew up and went away to school, and by the time his sister’s youngest child was a toddler, he was a professor at the University of Saskatchewan and a key player in the development of what was to become NORTEP.

In 1977, Josie finally began her teacher training, with her little brother as one of her professors. “I (was) nothing special to him,” she says modestly. “I had to work just as hard as anyone else!” Still, it’s hard not to see in this ***the principle that has guided much of Josie Searson’s life: you receive, and so, you give.***

Considering Josie’s influence in their lives, it is no surprise that five of the nine Goulet siblings chose a career in teaching, with Keith later going into politics as the MLA for Cumberland and then later becoming the province’s first Aboriginal cabinet minister. Her daughter also chose a career in teaching. Josie also served as a mentor for her daughter-in-law, Tammy, working alongside her through late-night essay writing sessions—a gift of which Tammy, now chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, speaks with gratitude and admiration. “I saw the effort that she (Tammy) was making, so I thought, of course I’m going to help her,” she says. Searson vividly remembers how important family support was during her own university days, with her husband George pitching in on everything from household chores to the kids’ homework. “As a mother you come home from classes or from work—the work is never-ending,” she says. “Every step of the way, he was there.”

Josie began her career as a classroom teacher, working for 10 years at Pre-Cam and then transferring to Gordon Denny for another 2 years. In 1992, she was seconded to central office for what was to be 1 year, but in fact, lasted until her retirement 13 years later. As a fluent Cree speaker who had proved herself as a “pilot teacher,” testing out new language arts materials and then introducing them to other teachers, Josie was seen as a natural fit for the Northern Lights School Division’s new Aboriginal language materials development unit, and so, she



**Josie Searson has approached each twist and turn of her career in education as an opportunity.**

became a consultant for the division. “Whatever position that you have, you always have your tools with you...and in those days the (native language) teachers really didn’t have anything,” Josie says of her reasons for joining the language development unit “So this was a way of... attempting to help the situation within Northern Lights.”

You got to know people and you helped one another... They (the NORTEP faculty) were very supportive too of the program, and very approachable.

As a consultant, Josie both assisted with materials development and with introducing the new materials to teachers across the North, through school visits. The team also held annual in-services, where NLSD teachers could meet and discuss ideas for language instruction in their classrooms.

Such a collaborative approach was instilled in Searson during her NORTEP years. “You got to know people and you helped one another... They

(the faculty) were very supportive too of the program, and very approachable,” Searson recalls.

**Working together for a common goal** was also behind the formation of the Cree and Dene language-retention committees and efforts such as the Four Directions Project, which brought in speakers from other countries to local schools and NORTEP. “You look at everything around you as an opportunity,” Josie says. “From time to time (at conferences or meetings) I’d say, ‘This is like going to university. It’s a learning experience, and so it is an opportunity.’”

She has passed that same attitude on to her children and grandchildren, encouraging them to pursue their education and to keep a clear mind and strong heart even when things aren’t going perfectly. She recalls a time when her grandson Damien was competing in a ski race and broke a pole mid-way through, yet brushed himself off and kept going with one pole—not only completing but winning the race. “I congratulated him when he came in,” she says. “I said, ‘Good for you. That’s exactly what you do.’”

Back when NORTEP first started, it had its detractors. “Initially there was a fear that when the program started, that all the people (already working in northern schools) would lose their jobs, and Aboriginal teachers would take over. That hasn’t transpired,” Josie says. Instead, **“the schools have benefited from much-reduced teacher turnover rates.”**

Plus, she says, “It has impacted on families. That whole area of getting an education has been directed toward a higher level—not only of learning, but also an awareness of the importance of education. For the first time, (a Saskatchewan university program) was designed for Aboriginal people, and then role modelling began to develop.”

It has impacted on families. That whole area of getting an education has been directed toward a higher level—not only of learning, but an awareness of the importance of education. For the first time, (a Saskatchewan university program) was designed for Aboriginal people, and then role modelling began to develop.

The sheer survival of the program is proof enough of its impact, she says. “If it wasn’t that important, it would have disappeared into the wind.”

Regarding NORTEP’s impact on her own life, Josie compares it to being handed a silver platter heaped with the choicest morsels, and being told all of it is free for the taking. ***“It’s like, ‘Here’s what we have to offer you. Now how do you fit in? What are you going to do to be part of this?’ It’s like an offering.”***

### 3. NORTEP: MEETING CRITICAL NEEDS IN TEACHER SUPPLY

◆ **NORTEP is a solution to the low Aboriginal teacher-representation and high teacher-turnover rates.**

To the best of our knowledge, when NORTEP began in 1976, only one classroom teacher with the Northern School Board was of Aboriginal ancestry and born in northern Saskatchewan. In addition, one other northern-born Aboriginal teacher, Keith Goulet, worked as a Cree Language Consultant with the Academic Education Branch of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan. Amongst the ranks of school administrators, no northern-born Aboriginal people served as a principal or vice-principal; none were directors or assistant directors of education; no Cree or Dene language teachers were certified teachers and, with the exception of Keith Goulet (from Cumberland House), there were no Aboriginal curriculum developers working for the Department’s Academic Education Branch.

There were committed teachers and educators in northern Saskatchewan; many of them attempted to adapt curriculum material to the cultural milieu of the North as best they could. But their efforts were constrained and bound to be limited. The teacher turnover rate of the day was very high (typically 25 – 33%); no matter how well intentioned, many teachers’ tenure in a community was simply too brief to permit the kind of adaptations that were needed. In any case, even longer tenures in a community were unlikely to bring fluency in the local language or in-depth understandings of traditional cultures. And there were other factors over-and-above curricular implications; put in the simplest possible terms, the population of educators simply did not mirror, or reflect, the pupil population of the northern communities.

***Given that in 1976 at the inception of NORTEP, First Nation and Métis peoples constituted 75% of the northern populations, it is remarkable to note that less than 1% of the certified classroom teaching staff was of Aboriginal ancestry, and only one such individual had been born in northern Saskatchewan.*** Obviously, for the children in northern schools there were generally no Aboriginal role models on the school staff. Typically, there were also no Cree and Dene speakers within the ranks of the certified teachers or educational administrators, whether in the local school or at head office.

Through the NORTEP-NORPAC program, northerners have come to believe there is value both in mainstream ideas and in traditional ways. This in a region where just 40 years ago there were virtually no local teachers, and where local reactions to this reality caused non-local

teachers to fear that they would be pushed out of their jobs. A comfortable balance seems to have been achieved. Now, some schools have nearly all local teachers, some a handful. “In a Native-run school like ours...I don’t think I want all NORTEP or all Aboriginal teachers,” says Roy Cheechum, Chief of the Clearwater River Dene Nation, and a brother and uncle to several NORTEP graduates. “It’s good to have a mix of standards and a mix of backgrounds...which I think lends to the standards of our schools.”

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### 3.1 Observations of Elie Fleury, Former NORTEP Director

When former NORTEP Director, Elie Fleury, moved to Saskatchewan in 1976, the year the Northern School Board established TEP, he thought, “What a good idea, training kids from northern Saskatchewan, because at the time...there were very, very few Aboriginal teachers in the schools,” he recalls. “I liked the (TEP) environment.... It was a family-type environment.” So, 20 years later when the opportunity came around to work as the school’s new director, Fleury was happy to let his name stand. Fleury—from a Métis background—completed his teacher training in 1960 and spent the next 3 years in a one-room school, teaching Grades 1 through 8. He then decided to get some experience in more isolated locations, working in Indian Affairs-run schools in northern Manitoba.



**Elie Fleury, Former NORTEP Director**

In 1976, Fleury saw an ad placed by the Northern School Board—the predecessor to the Northern Lights School Division (NLSD)—for distance education consultants. After 10 years with NLSD, he worked for the Yorkton Tribal Council, then the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, before being recruited back to the North by NORTEP-NORPAC as its new Director.

Fleury’s passion for improving northern and Aboriginal education began back in 1963, when he first went to work in Little Grand Rapids, Manitoba. The federal Department of, “Indian Affairs put me on a plane; I flew in there, went to the school, went in the school, looked for books—there was very little in terms of resources, and I hadn’t received any kind of orientation, and I felt that there was something missing, and there was.” Along with educators from the other schools on the reserve, Fleury began developing curriculum materials that would be relevant to the local children, as well as a reading program. He was told not to allow any language other than English to be used in the school—a rule he refused to enforce.

Over the years, Fleury has seen the number of Aboriginal educators in the North increase dramatically, facilitating teacher recruitment for the schools and helping to set high school students and adults on a career path. “If their goal is to become an educator, they feel, ‘I can do it. NORTEP is there,’” Fleury says.

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By 2005, the northern teacher situation had changed dramatically. Of the 308 graduates of NORTEP (from 1979 – 2005), 298 taught subsequent to graduation, and two went directly into administration. Sixty-five of the graduates became school administrators or consultants. Most graduates have remained in the North.

As far as retention and overall stability within northern areas is concerned, it is worth noting that 91% of NORTEP graduates have elected to stay in northern Saskatchewan. The fact that 9% have found opportunities elsewhere is, surely, also a positive indicator—so much the better for Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba! But the fact that by far the majority of graduates remain in northern Saskatchewan subsequent to graduation completely refutes those who, in 1976, predicted that most NORTEP students would leave the North after they had graduated. Quite the opposite has occurred. For northern boards who were concerned about a high teacher turnover rate, the investment of time, energy, and resources in NORTEP has had a very positive impact on stability.



## 4. SASKATCHEWAN DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE DEMANDS OF A GLOBAL ECONOMY

### ◆ Saskatchewan's overall demographics do not meet the demands of a global economy.

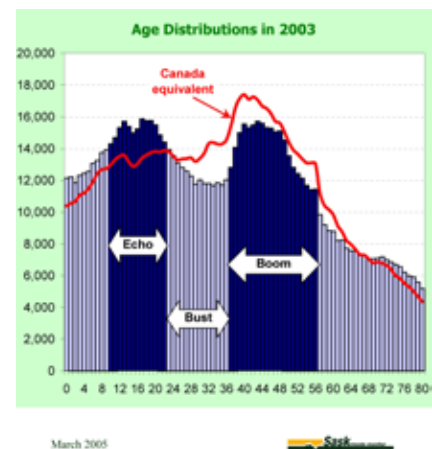
Increased retention and participation rates are good news for the North. However, with the demands of a global economy, Saskatchewan as a whole is now looking to increase labour market participation and retention rates of post-secondary educated people. The knowledge economy calls for diversification and development of knowledge-based economic sectors. Consequently, there is a need to develop a growing, highly skilled, educated, and technologically proficient workforce. However, the demographic trends in Saskatchewan pose a threat to the province's ability to develop such a workforce, and, therefore, to future socio-economic sustainability and prosperity for all its citizens.

### ◆ Saskatchewan's overall population is aging, decreasing, and does not fill the demand for a future labour market.

Compared to other provinces, Saskatchewan has a low population density. An aging, decreasing population places heavy demands on the tax base and negatively impacts the ability to grow and develop a labour workforce that can meet the pressures of a global economy and secure future prosperity. **However, it is largely the non-Aboriginal segment of the population that is in decline.**

This decline in the non-Aboriginal population is caused by several factors:

- A lower number of births than deaths
- A higher number of out-of-province migrations than immigrations
- An increasingly aging population due to:
  1. An increase in life expectancy.
  2. The number of baby boomers moving into the 35-54 age-group categories Saskatchewan's "baby boom" and "bust" populations is smaller than other provinces because of out-migration. But the "echo" is larger because the growth in the Aboriginal population coincides with the "echo"<sup>4</sup> (See chart to the right).
  3. The number of young people migrating out of the province to find employment. Over half of those who leave have completed post-secondary education.



<sup>4</sup> Elliot, D. (2005). The demographics of the Saskatchewan labour market. *SaskTrends Monitor*. Retrieve from [www.sasktrends.ca](http://www.sasktrends.ca)

4. Saskatchewan has both the largest population of seniors and the largest population under 15 years of age.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, “the senior population in Saskatchewan is overwhelmingly (96 per cent) non-Aboriginal”.<sup>6</sup> The province of Saskatchewan has the largest percentage of seniors.

Not only is this aging, decreasing non-Aboriginal segment of the population unable to fill the needs of the growing labour market, but also even more jobs will open up due to retirements, and many of these jobs will require post-secondary education.

## 5. HOPE EMERGES IN ABORIGINAL POPULATION TRENDS

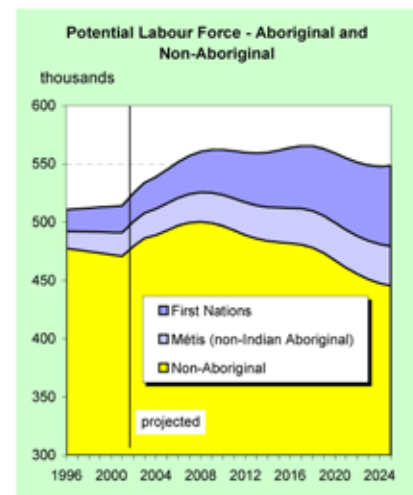
Hope emerges, however, when one considers the opposite demographic trends for the Aboriginal population.

### 5.1 First Nations and Métis Populations are Growing Dramatically

- According to the 2001 Census, the total Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan increased 17 % between 1996 and 2001, and represented approximately 14 % of the total provincial population.

**Continued growth** in the Aboriginal population is expected.

- The Aboriginal population of 2001 is expected to increase to 21% by 2025,<sup>7</sup> and is further expected to grow to be one-third of the provincial population by 2050<sup>8</sup> (See chart to the right).
- “Saskatchewan Health projects 38% growth in the next 15 years.”<sup>9</sup>



<sup>5</sup> SaskTrends

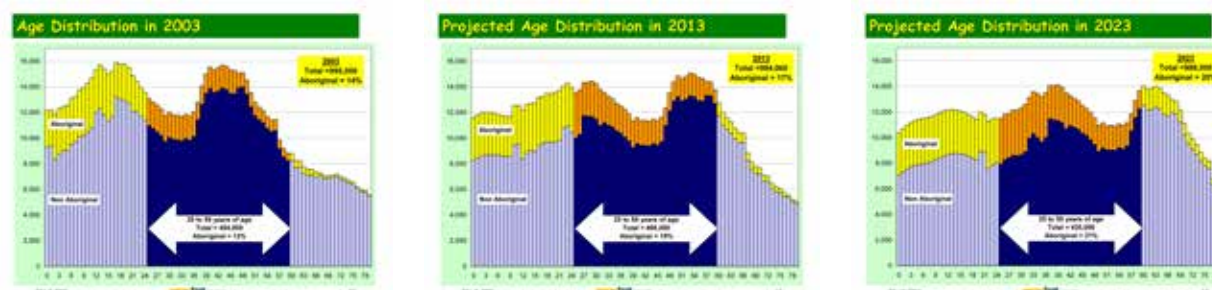
<sup>6</sup> Stokes, J. (2003, October). Demographic trends and socio-economic sustainability in Saskatchewan: Some policy considerations. *The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy (SIPP) Public Policy, Paper 19*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Saskatchewan Learning (2005). *Final Report of the 2005 Training System Review Panel: A New Training Model for Saskatchewan (NTM)*, p. 35. Retrieved from <http://www.saskapprenticeship.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/TrainingSystemReviewFinalReport2.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> SIPP, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Northern Saskatchewan Regional Training Needs Assessment Report (NSTNAR). (2006). The Northern Labour Market Committee & Saskatchewan, p. 13.

The following charts graphically illustrate the projected growth of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations from 2003 to 2023.



Source <sup>10</sup>

The dark blue center in each graph represents the non-Aboriginal population; the orange part represents the Aboriginal population, both between the ages of 25-59. These are typically the labour force participants. The light blue portion, to the right of the dark blue, represents the senior population—predominantly non-Aboriginal. Note the growth in the Aboriginal population in the working age group from 2003 to 2023.

To distinguish the importance of focusing on education in the North, it is important to extract the northern and Aboriginal demographics from this larger picture.

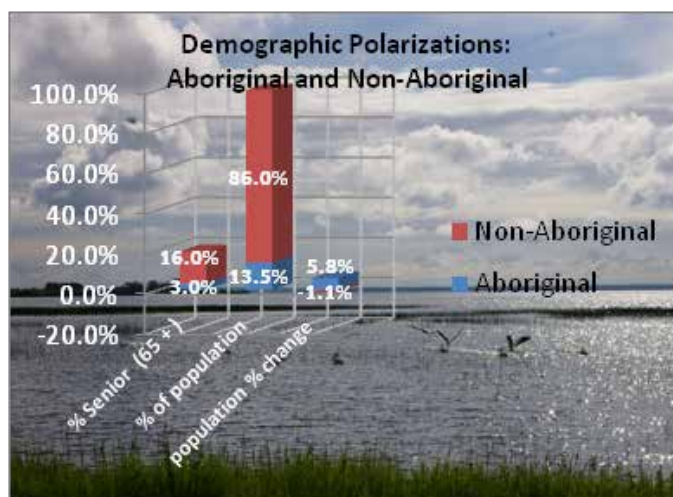
## 5.2 Northern Demographics

### ◆ The majority of northerners are of Aboriginal heritage.

- 23% of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal people reside in the North, and make up 83.6% of northern Saskatchewan's population.<sup>11</sup>

### ◆ The northern population is growing quickly.

- "Between the years 1998 and 2005 the northern region population grew by 5.8% compared to a provincial decline of 1.1%."<sup>12</sup>



<sup>10</sup> SaskTrends

<sup>11</sup> NSTNAR, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> NSTNAR, p. 12.



The increased population in the North is due to several factors:

- A large portion of the population in the northern region is young: 44% of the population in the northern region is under age 20 as compared to 27% under age 20 in the whole of Saskatchewan.<sup>13</sup>
  - Higher birth rates than death rates.
  - A lower propensity for northern Aboriginal people to migrate to other locations.<sup>14</sup>
- The projected population “increases in northern populations are [partially] due to Aboriginal peoples, who make up the majority of the northern population, being not nearly as likely to leave the North and the province, as others in the population.”<sup>15</sup> This trend, also seen through NORTEP-NORPAC graduate statistics, shows that Saskatchewan’s hope for a prosperous future rests in the people of the North, where the population is young, increasing, and where the chance of retaining graduates with completed post-secondary education is high.

This means there will be a larger population in the child-bearing age group, resulting in even greater potential increases to population in the North. ***It is important to note that this projected growth in the Aboriginal and northern population will place a greater demand on both K-12 and post-secondary education and training programs.***<sup>16</sup>

Thus, while southern Saskatchewan is characterized by high out-migration patterns in the younger population and an aging non-Aboriginal population, the northern portion of the province is experiencing a young, rapidly increasing Aboriginal population.

◆ **Northern Aboriginal people are the fastest growing, youngest, most-likely-to-stay segment of Saskatchewan’s population.**

Therefore, it is increasingly clear that,

◆ **Saskatchewan must look to its full human resource capabilities in order to overcome the threat to socio-economic sustainability, with special focus given to the growing Aboriginal population in the North.**

Labour force participation by Aboriginal people is now widely seen as essential to the economic future of Saskatchewan, but it is also essential to the political viability of Saskatchewan as a modern democratic province embracing values of inclusion, prosperity and social development.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> NSTNAR, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> NTM, p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> NTM, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> NSTNAR, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2006, October). *Policing the future: The changing demographics of Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy Public Policy, Paper 16*, p. 2. Retrieved from [http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/\\_documents/outreach\\_event\\_announcements/SIPP\\_archived\\_publications/SIPP\\_briefing\\_notes/BN16.pdf](http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/_documents/outreach_event_announcements/SIPP_archived_publications/SIPP_briefing_notes/BN16.pdf)

The search for new, innovative, and profitable ideas, so essential to success in a knowledge-based economy, must extend to the historical and ongoing problem of marginalization, exclusion, inequity, and the inaccessibility of educational and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and northern people. The marked underrepresentation of northern Aboriginal peoples in the ranks of certified teachers in 1976 was, in fact, symptomatic of the limited participation of northerners in the larger economic system. And, while NORTEP-NORPAC has done much to improve the situation in the North, a salaried income is much less common for northern Aboriginal people than for society at large. Income levels continue to be lower. Poverty is more common, so health indicators related to poverty are also more frequent and severe. "In 2001, only a third of First Nation residents in Saskatchewan were employed. This compares with 59% of Métis and 78% of the non-Aboriginal population."<sup>18</sup> There is still so much to be done.

## 6. NORTEP-NORPAC INTENDED TO BRING FULL PARTICIPATION TO NORTHERN ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

In the minds of its originators, NORTEP-NORPAC was intended to be a movement of northern Aboriginal peoples towards full participation in the economic and social life of the North, and beyond. There is, of course, more than one doorway to this participation, but few would question the fact that education and careers are crucial to an effective change process.

### Graduate Profile: Maria Fiddler Cumberland House NORTEP, class of 1981

Maria Fiddler shaped the lives of well over 600 children at the time of her retirement in June 2007.

Fiddler's career at Cumberland House's Charlebois School has spanned six grade levels, from Kindergarten through to Grade 5, and 33 years. She is proud of her years of service and of the two schools that made it possible: Charlebois and NORTEP.

"I always loved kids, and it's been rewarding to see so many of them...graduate Grade 12, kids I taught in the school," she says. "Even some of my nieces and nephews that had quit school a long time ago, they came back to school to finish their Grade 12, and many of them have gone (to university). ***I believe that education is the only way for them to do something with their lives, to go on with their lives.***"



Maria Fiddler is proud to have seen many of her elementary school students go on to pursue a university education.

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<sup>18</sup> SaskTrends, p. 20.

Fiddler started work at Charlebois in 1971, as one of the Northern Lights School Division's "native instructors," and in 1976, the school's principal suggested Fiddler apply for the new teacher training program in La Ronge. She was accepted, and in 1981, she graduated and resumed full-time work at Charlebois, this time as a classroom teacher. "To me it (NORTEP) was very exciting. It was a time to go out and learn about education," Fiddler says. "I was always happy to be back (from field work) at NORTEP, because over the years I met a lot of friends, and we'd work together as a team."

Fiddler doubts she would ever have gone to university without NORTEP. While many of her nieces and nephews have attended southern universities, it was the existence of NORTEP—and role models like their Aunt Maria—that showed them a university education was possible for northerners, and that kids from the North could be taught by people from their own communities.

After not having been a student herself for many years, Fiddler sometimes found the schoolwork tough, but the instructors offered her a great deal of support. "They were really always there for us, to help us when we ran into problems with our work. They were very patient with us," she says with a laugh. "I really liked that....And, we helped each other too, as students. We were there for each other."

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Since she was already married and "tied down," as it were, to her life in Cumberland House,

"I've never seen anything like that happen (before) in our communities, where there are so many (local) teachers, and students going back to learn about education," Fiddler says. "It is very important."



**Graduate Profile: Mary Ruelling**  
**La Loche**  
**NORTEP, class of 1982**

Two images are burned into Mary Ruelling's mind, standing in stark contrast with one another. In the first, there is a line of silent, brown-skinned children, no one daring to make a peep lest the whole group be forced to stand for another hour or two—then, finally admitted into the dining hall where, if you had been unwise enough not to empty your plate the mealtime before, the cold, rejected food awaited you. In the second image, the children's skin is the same warm brown colour, but that is the only thing those faces have in common with the silent ones. These faces are relaxed, the children's bodies animated, and their voices heard loud and clear. They are already in the kitchen area, doing the cooking as per instructions posted by their teacher, and they joke around with one another—and with the teacher. "They walk into the Home Ec room—they figure this is like coming home for lunch," says Ruelling, both the teacher in question and, once upon a time, one of those who stood in line.

"They feel good about themselves. I never would have imagined myself in that type of environment, way back in residential school, where you're so verbally abused that you feel like nothing. ... That's the type of behaviour I would never inflict on another human being, especially a child."



**Mary Ruelling's image of what education can be for northerners has been dramatically altered by her experiences at NORTEP.**

Without NORTEP's lessons in psychology, Native studies, and classroom management, she says, "I wouldn't know how to deal with difficult behaviour. I probably would get angry. ... If I'd walked into a classroom without those skills, I wouldn't have survived."

Even so, Ruelling isn't sure how she might have handled the kids she encounters daily as a home economics, art, and Dene language teacher at Clearwater River Dene Nation School, had she not attended NORTEP back in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Without NORTEP's lessons in psychology, Native studies, and classroom management, she says, "I wouldn't know how to deal with difficult behaviour. I probably would get angry. ... If I'd walked into a classroom without those skills, I wouldn't have survived."

Born and raised in La Loche as one of the 10 children of a trapper-turned-store owner, Ruelling was taught from an early age to value hard work. Despite La Loche's reputation for high unemployment, all of Ruelling's siblings are in the workforce, including her brother Roy Cheechum, now chief of the Clearwater River Band. She herself started out as a school bus driver, and then was recruited to become a "native instructor"—teacher assistant for the non-



Dene-speaking teachers at La Loche's schools—before enrolling as a student at NORTEP. She graduated in 1982, and taught kindergarten for 20 years before moving over to the Band's high school.

She vividly remembers the family atmosphere—especially strong in the early years, when the students ate, slept and took classes in the same building—and the helpful instructors. Practice teaching back in La Loche made her nervous at first, but she quickly adjusted, and her co-operating teachers told her they learned a lot from watching the TEP students at work. “We knew the children very well, and that helped. We could interact with the children,” she says. “When the teacher was reading them a story, they would fidget and move about, but when I started telling the story in our language, they would sit perfectly still.”

The introduction of local teachers affected the parents of La Loche's students as well, Ruelling says. “Before, you'd hardly see them for parent-teacher interviews, but now they come in because they know that you're there (as a local), and they can be more comfortable.” Back in 1982, “it was very rare to see someone graduate and become a teacher in this community,” Ruelling recalls. “It got a lot of people thinking, especially the kids. You're a role model to them.... A lot of young people realize now that they don't have to be stuck here in La Loche on welfare. They can become something if they put their minds to it.”

Though La Loche has some success stories out of the southern universities—Jack Janvier became a doctor, and Ruelling's niece, Dawn Cheechum, is a lawyer—there are still obstacles to overcome. Ruelling recalls feeling like “just a number” during her own time at the University of Saskatchewan, and, she says, “a lot of kids (from La Loche) have the ambition to go out... to different universities, but they're kind of lost (at those schools), they don't fit in. But usually the ones that go to NORTEP are the ones that are successful.”

In many ways, the atmosphere in schools like Clearwater now reflects the attitudes fostered at NORTEP: respect for northern culture and languages (including classroom instruction) and a comfortable relationship between instructors and students.

Ruelling has come to value the approach so much that when her son David suggested he would like to become a teacher, Ruelling was eager to recommend her alma mater. “I told him how terrific it was—that you'll feel at home, that you'll get lots of help,” she says. “So that's where he decided to go.”

In many ways, the atmosphere in schools like Clearwater now reflect the attitudes fostered at NORTEP: respect for northern culture and languages (including classroom instruction) and a comfortable relationship between instructors and students.

NORTEP has also shaped Ruelling's philosophy of what it takes to be a teacher: Walk into the classroom with confidence; take the time to get to know each individual child's capabilities, likes/dislikes and needs; adjust to their pace, have patience; be strong (even when you want to give up). Above all, she says, “put yourself in this child's mind—if I was this child, what would I want? **Kids always look up to the teachers, because they are the role models,**” she adds. “When I step out of line, they will let me know.”

## 7. THE VALUE OF LOCAL TEACHERS: OBSERVATIONS OF NORTHERNERS

In the North, local schools—and its local teachers—play a key role in their communities; so much so, in fact, that former Cumberland House Mayor, Dale McAuley, calls his local school, Charlebois, “the backbone of the community.” “It’s mind-boggling at times when you see schools shutting down,” McAuley says. “If you shut down a school, you’re shutting down a community.” In fact, in many ways schools and the educational system become placeholders and symbols of the whole of northern life, including its economy.

### 7.1 Accessibility

◆ **Local teachers make the schools more accessible to parents and community members.**

***Over the 30 years of NORTEP’s existence, northerners have discovered that not only can local people become teachers, but also they—as parents, community people, and municipal and First Nations leaders—can become part of the educational system.***

At one time, teachers were viewed with reverence and awe, as though they were the holders of holy mysteries of knowledge. Today, while graduates of the NORTEP program are still viewed with respect, their presence in the community has made the schools seem more accessible to parents and community members—just as university education itself has become accessible to northerners through NORTEP-NORPAC.

“Years back, the practice was, well, let (the school) educate the child. They know what they’re doing, we don’t, we’re not educated, so you let them educate the child....There wasn’t a connection between the staff and the community—there was some interacting, but not really going into the school,” says Buffalo Narrows School trustee, Frank Durocher. “With the NORTEP students, because they have that community connection, it’s a lot easier for the parents to go and speak to them. The saying that it takes a whole community to educate a child; it’s true,” Durocher adds. “With everything happening nowadays...the computers, TV, everything, all the negative stuff—the schools can’t educate a child by themselves any more...You’re trying (as a teacher) to be everything, but you can’t be. You tend to get so busy with everything else (that the children need socially), you’re starting to slide back on the education, I feel. And that’s why it’s so important to get these parents involved and the community involved. They have to help out in those areas so we can get back to basics....You need the wisdom that comes from a lot of different people.”

## 7.2 Community Development

### ◆ Local teachers are valued for their expertise, wisdom, and contributions to community growth and development.

Community leaders look to teachers for ideas, seeing their education as a valuable source of insight into directions for community development. Buffalo Narrows' Mayor, Bobby Woods, looks to the schools for help in what he calls "encouraging our young people to go on a positive path," while Max Morin of Ile-a-la-Crosse, a long-time northern leader, appreciates that educated people have the confidence to express their opinions when asked for advice. "They're good listeners, and...they try to help out as much as they can at the community level," Morin says.

At the school level, the notion of what expertise or knowledge is important has been turned somewhat on its head, with the "mainstream" no longer taking precedence over northern ideas. Although Charlebois School Principal, John Dombowsky, has worked in northern education for 18 years (6 in Deschambault Lake and now 12 in Cumberland House), he still turns to the locals for advice. "They are a link to the past, and they are a conduit to the community for the people that come on (to the staff)," Dombowsky says. "I certainly use some of my people as sounding boards.... Somebody from outside would have been no good in terms of getting information or a decision as to how something should be handled."

The local teachers also contribute to community life in ways that teachers coming in from the outside for a year or two rarely do, says Dombowsky's Vice-Principal, Lily McKay-Carriere. "Why? I think it would probably be personal commitment, that you would like to see your community involved in this (activity) or your school involved in this because it means growth in all areas, and it means community growth, it means community building."

Tina Rasmussen, the Green Lake village Administrator, former councillor and a 9-year member of the NLSD and NORTEP-NORPAC boards, concurs that local teachers make a big impact. In Green Lake, where all but one of the local teachers are originally from that community, "the kids know the teachers before they even get to school. The teachers know the parents. They know the kids' home situations. These teachers have grown up in this community, so they have a good working knowledge of this community—of the fabric of the community, what are issues, what are not issues, what's important, what's not important," says Rasmussen.

Growing up in the village, Rasmussen felt a "disconnect" between herself and her teachers, none of whom at the time were from Green Lake. "It seemed like they were here for a year or two and then they were gone, so they didn't really have a vested interest in the community," she says. "So I think a lot of the students felt like, well, they don't really have a vested interest in me either."

Greg Hatch, Principal of La Loche School, describes the creation of northern teachers as "a step toward community development." Although La Loche still struggles economically, with

unemployment sitting around 85 per cent, the presence of local teachers and other working professionals is helping local people realize that there are options for them.

“What you see is that working families have kids who understand the concept of work,” says Hatch. “People that have their education are now self-sufficient. They’re earning a salary. They’re not depending on any other system.... It’s community development through development of one person at a time.”

“I see education as a key element to independence,” says Max Morin. “We always talk about people that are caught in the system, caught in the welfare cycle.... Once a person gets education and gets a degree or even a technical trade, they’re independent, they’re mobile, they can go wherever they want. They don’t have to depend on anyone.”

By choosing to live, shop, interact, and work in the North, graduates of NORTEP-NORPAC not only contribute financially but also use their new-found expertise to better the community in which they’re living. “We can’t expect someone from Regina or Ottawa to come and solve our problems for us. We have to do it ourselves,” says Morin. “It’s sort of self-government. We’re running our own affairs in our community.... We’re trying to pull away from that dependency.”

### **7.3 Turnover Rate**

#### **◆ Local teachers lower turnover rate, offering consistency to students.**

In many small northern communities, teaching is one of the few professions of which everyone is aware. NORTEP makes it an accessible career option. “It helps our young people that are now going to school to be able to look up to...people that they know in the community,” says Bobby Woods, Mayor of Buffalo Narrows. “(Before TEP) there’d be a large turnaround every year of teachers, because they couldn’t cope with the culture, with the environment, and these people from our community that go through the program and get education are staying now, because this is their home community. They’re working with their families; they’re working with their friends and with people in their own community.”

Woods, who grew up in Buffalo Narrows but spent several years in foster care because of problems at home, says he’s seen the struggles that kids in his community face, as they confront temptations such as drugs and alcohol. In speaking with these young people, he often points to the working people as role models, and shares how educational opportunities have changed the face of northern Saskatchewan.

“I look back and I tell them, ‘I wish I had had an opportunity like you young people have today, because you’ve got a chance.... We had to go down south to graduate or to go to school, and you left your families behind, and it was a very lonely time,’” Woods says. “Because they (NORTEP graduates) are from northern Saskatchewan, they can relate to the culture... and they know what they’ve been through themselves in order to achieve their careers and they know what it takes, so they can pass it on to these students. They know what they were



missing when they were going to school.” Add that to the fact that these teachers are living in the community, sharing the local lifestyle, “and (kids) see that they’re no different than they are,” Woods says.

Trust relationships between parents, teachers, and students are strengthened not only through personal connections, but also through a teacher’s willingness to stay in the community. “The more consistency there is, the better it is for the students,” says Ken Gray, Principal of La Ronge’s Churchill Community High School, who has worked at the school for 28 years. “As much as students would like us to believe that they’re in such a change mode, they do like routine. They do like to know at the end of the day there’s someone who’s going to be there for them consistently. And it’s so much easier to run a program if there are people there that have information from previous years, so you don’t have to start all over again.... The northern graduates already have a network of relationships here to rely upon, so the communication with parents is much easier, and their supports are there to help them.”

Furthermore, when teachers are consistently there year after year, kids begin to feel they are valued—that the teacher wants to be with them. That has an impact on their self-image, and the impact is even greater when that teacher is someone in whom they can see themselves: a northern-raised, most often Aboriginal, person.

“If you do see someone from your own community in a position of influence, then all the better.... The perception that the south is better is not always intensified,” Gray says. “I see more and more of our (high school) students interested in the TEP and PAC programs.... The visibility of success is increased with the program, and the opportunities and possibilities are greater.”

## 7.4 Role Models

### ◆ Local teachers are role models.

Ralph Pilz recognizes the value of local teachers, too. An import, trained in Pennsylvania, he started teaching in the North more than 25 years ago, with stints in Garson Lake, Turnor Lake and La Loche, before taking on the responsibilities of Superintendent, then Deputy Director, and finally his current job as Director of Education for the Northern Lights School Division. As someone who plays a key role in the recruitment of teachers, he is a big fan of NORTEP-NORPAC.

“When you start looking at where the school division was prior to NORTEP and the number of northern teachers that were teaching in the system, it was very minimal—maybe 2 or 3 per cent.... I can just speak to Northern Lights’ (post-TEP) numbers, but we’re up to close to 30 per cent of our teaching staff who are northern people,” Pilz says.

One of the strengths of the program over the years has been the role modelling, not only for the students but also for the teaching staff who come from outside the North. “There’s a

high percentage (of NLSB teachers) that are moving into a cross-cultural setting, and having northern teachers there that understand the culture...is very helpful."

As for the impact the local teachers have on their students, Pilz says it's very strong. Not only does teaching become seen as a viable career path, "the self-esteem, self-concept enhancement (is there)—seeing northerners in those positions and knowing that if they put their minds to it and work hard in school, they can move into similar positions," he says. "It's very much a motivational thing for our students, to see that they have those capabilities, too, if they just hang in there and work hard. I'd like to see other programs similar to NORTEP in... other areas where there's more need for northerners to be employed and involved."

As a recruiter, Pilz says, "I think there are opportunities for even further growth (for NORTEP)." I know that there's limited seats...and in past years there's been some talk about how with additional seats there could be even more development. As you know, we're still at times finding it difficult to staff some of our communities, and recruitment and retention of staff have always been, and continue to be, a challenge for us. So I think there's still room for the program to grow, and if there were additional resources that were directed toward more seats, they certainly would be utilized."

It isn't always easy being that local teacher and role model—Jackie Durocher, a 13-year teaching veteran, has faced the burden of community expectations that a local teacher can accomplish things faster (and more to their liking) than a non-local, and both she and Celia Deschambeault, Vice-Principal at Nihithow Awasis School on the Cumberland House Cree Nation, know that their behaviour is watched closely for any signs of moral failing.

"In a sense, it's harder for a teacher from here to teach here, because they know everything about you, but it's that (pressure) that makes them stronger," Deschambeault says. "Being from this community, I know first-hand exactly what kind of problems we have here.... It's harder for a person from the outside coming in, because parents don't know that person."

An early adopter of the value of local teachers was Vital Morin, father to Max Morin. Vital was raised at the Beauval Residential School and completed Grade 9—then a high level of education for northerners—before serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. When Morin returned home to Ile-a-la-Crosse from England, where he had been recuperating after being in a prisoner-of-war camp, he quickly moved into local politics and later became chair of the newly formed Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division board. "He was always encouraging people that education is the key for somebody to become independent, and also to find the employment opportunities," recalls Max Morin, who later followed his father into northern leadership, including a stretch as Mayor of Ile-a-la-Crosse and as Chair of the Northern Development Board. "He became an advocate for education, making sure people get educated, and he was really supportive of NORTEP...The NORTEP program was something that he really fought for."

## 8. RAISING EDUCATION LEVELS IS ESSENTIAL FOR RAISING EMPLOYMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Studies show that raising education levels is essential for raising employment and participation rates. Those with completed post-secondary education have significantly higher employment and participation rates than those who have not completed post-secondary education. Post-secondary education leads to employment, which leads to individual, community, and provincial prosperity.

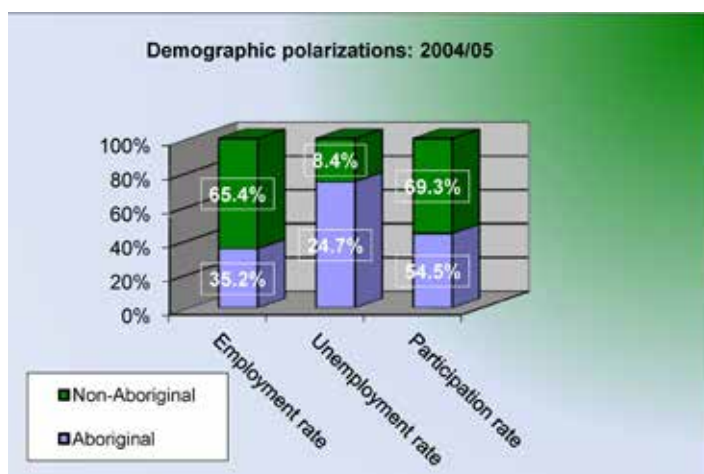
### 8.1 Aboriginal Employment and Participation Rates

#### ◆ Aboriginal populations in Saskatchewan experience much lower employment and participation rates

Disturbingly, however, Aboriginal populations in Saskatchewan, especially First Nation people, experience much lower employment and participation rates than non-Aboriginal populations.

- The employment rate of Aboriginal people, which includes both First Nation and Métis people, was 30.2 per cent lower than non-Aboriginal people in 2004/2005.
- The unemployment rate of Aboriginal people was 24.7%, 16.3 per cent higher than non-Aboriginals. Also, "First Nations people experience unemployment rates of 25% and higher."<sup>19</sup>
- The 2004/05 labour market participation rate for Aboriginal people is 24.7 per cent lower than non-Aboriginals.

"The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce and SaskTrends Monitor notes that labour force participation issues may work against the opportunity that the young Aboriginal population holds for the Saskatchewan workforce."<sup>20</sup>



<sup>19</sup> NTM, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> SIPP, p. 9.

In 2001, First Nations people living on reserves had the lowest labour force participation rates, 43.1%, while non-Aboriginal participation rate was 69.3%, a gap of 26.2%.<sup>21</sup> Over half (55.8%) the people registered to a northern Saskatchewan First Nation live on reserves.

***“The employment and income status of reserve residents is so unacceptable as to call for unprecedented action.”***<sup>22</sup>

**The long-term unemployment rate in northern Saskatchewan is more than 4 times that of the province.**<sup>23</sup>

The First Nation population’s average employment income is less than 50% of average income of non-Aboriginals, an extreme inequity. 55.7 % of First Nation people live below the poverty line. 42.6% of all Aboriginal people live below poverty. Only 9.1% of non-Aboriginal people fall below poverty.<sup>24</sup>

Average Income- Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, Non-Aboriginal				
	Aboriginal	First Nations	Métis	Non-Aboriginal
Average Income	\$15,961	\$13,247	\$20,372	\$26,914

Source<sup>25</sup>

Because Aboriginal employment and labour market participation rates are so low, the growth in population increases pressure on the labour market and tax base, as well as raising social costs associated with poverty, further threatening future sustainability. This fact, while raising concerns for future sustainability, must also be considered in terms of the personal costs to individuals and families facing the negative health, social, and economic impacts that exclusion from education and employment generates.

Thus, while this growing, young segment of the population offers hope for future socio-economic prosperity, extraordinary efforts must be given to including Aboriginal populations and making accessible employment opportunities for them, particularly in the North where there is a job and skills/education shortage, rather than a labour market shortage.

***Hope lies in increasing the employment and participation rates of First Nations and Métis people.***

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<sup>21</sup> NTM. p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> NTM. p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> Northern Saskatchewan Health Indicators Report (2004), p. iii.

<sup>24</sup> NTM, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> NTM, p. 45.



## 8.2 Post-Secondary Education and Employment

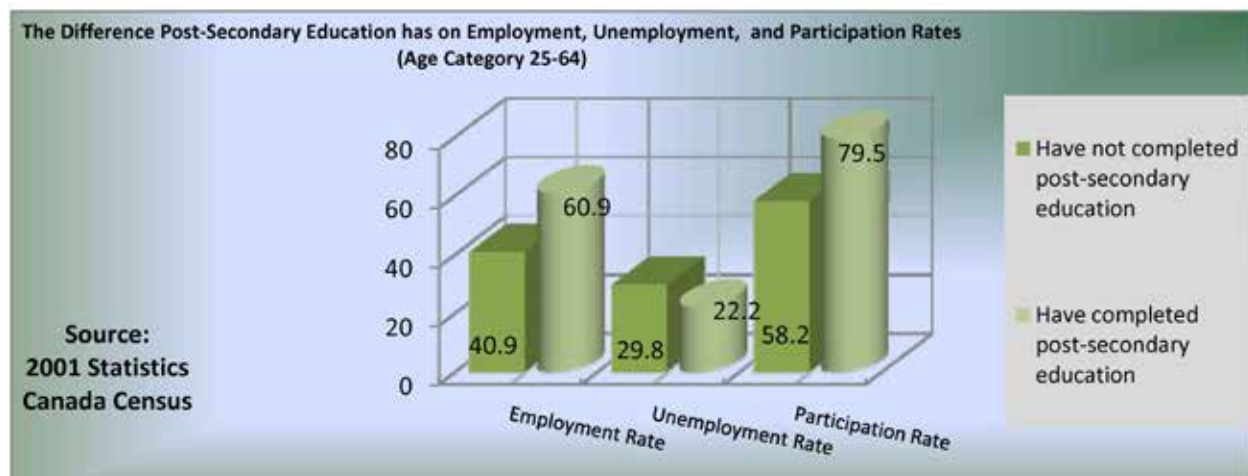
### ◆ Lower employment and participation rates associated with lower levels of education

The lower rates of employment and participation in the labour market in the Aboriginal population are, in part, associated with lower levels of completed education. To create future socio-economic sustainability, Saskatchewan must “raise education levels in the population generally and the Aboriginal population specifically to enable an increase in participation rates.”<sup>26</sup>

### ◆ Increased education means increased employment for First Nations and Métis people.

Increased employment will bridge the gaps in the distributions of income and prosperity. One study demonstrates that ***“persons with some post-secondary education or less, as well as those with completed post-secondary education, have experienced improved labour market outcomes since 2001.”***<sup>27</sup>

The following chart demonstrates the difference that post-secondary education has on employment, unemployment, and participation rates in the labour market:



- **Employment rate** among this Aboriginal cohort is **20% higher** for those with completed post-secondary education.
- **Unemployment rate** is **7.6 % lower** for those with completed post-secondary education.
- **Participation rates** in the labour market are **21.3 % higher** for those with completed post-secondary education.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> SaskTrends, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey data, NTM, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> NTM, p. 45.

These data clearly indicate the positive impact of post-secondary education on labour market outcomes. Note, for example, how the Aboriginal population with completed post-secondary education more closely resembles the labour market outcomes of the non-Aboriginal population whose employment rate in 2001 was 63.3%, unemployment rate was 23.7, and participation rate was 71%.<sup>29</sup>

Education and employment are linked inextricably; thus, education must be seen as a major part of the solution to the problems of developing and growing a labour market that can prosper in the competitive knowledge economy, and of the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal labour market outcomes.

## 9. EMPOWERMENT AND FULL PARTICIPATION

### ◆ Old training model unsuccessful at removing institutional and personal barriers.

However, overall, the education system has been unsuccessful in meeting the learning needs of the northern Aboriginal population, and post-secondary institutions continue to cater to professional and higher income families in urban locations. ***As the demand for post-secondary education increases, so does the need to mobilize, to make opportunities accessible to those who are educationally and economically marginalized.***

Despite many renovations and improvements, the education system struggles to deconstruct its industrial, colonial model, and efforts to eliminate institutional barriers—such as exclusion, unresponsiveness, inflexibility, inaccessibility, standardization, and uniformity—have been insufficient in addressing the inequities and marginalization of Aboriginal and northern populations. University education, located in urban locations, “disproportionately serves young people from professional and higher income families.”<sup>30</sup> Studies show that “distance from a post-secondary institution influences rural and northern participation. Research shows that individuals living beyond a commuting distance from a university, especially those from lower and middle income backgrounds, were much less likely to attend an institution close to home.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, institutions like NORTEP-NORPAC provide accessibility, removing barriers related to location.

It is worth acknowledging, however, that some tension exists—perhaps a healthy tension—between NORTEP-NORPAC’s goals related to education, traditional language(s) and culture, and its goal of empowering northerners to become full participants in the social and economic life of the North (and beyond). If the economy is seen as a creature of the “dominant” society, then participation in the economy, in the form of salary and wage employment, can be seen as non-traditional; it may even be regarded as threatening to traditional language(s) and culture. The dominant economy may, in other words, simply be construed as a “colonizing” influence.

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<sup>29</sup> NTM, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> NTM, p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> NTM, p. 205.

At the root of the dilemma between culture and employment, however, lies the vital issue of self-determination. Although well-intentioned, attempts to preserve “culture” at the cost of perpetual poverty and unemployment amount to a regime that may be more oppressive and more egregious than the so-called colonizing influences of the economy. The answer to the colonial impact of the economy is, surely, not to prefer unemployment, but rather to create empowerment for self-determination. The right balance between culture and economic participation—if this stark binary contrast is permitted—should be one struck by the primary participants. Northern First Nations and Métis people need to be allowed to shape and fashion the available economic tools to their own ends, in their own way, and for their own purposes.

Is a career in teaching a less traditional occupation than hunting, fishing, and trapping? Possibly, but not entirely. The education of the young into the life of the community has always been highly important for northern peoples. In the era of schooling, the drive to full participation in education, via the teaching profession, reflects the determination of northern Aboriginal peoples to take charge of this aspect of their lives and their futures. Such a determination is fully consistent with traditional values.

Clearly, from a global perspective, both education and salaried employment carry an imperative for cultural change, but they may also be consistent with the traditional life and worldview. Traditional peoples have always addressed the emergent needs of their context; when the context changes so, too, will the adaptation. The adaptation can only be construed as alien and non-traditional when the people themselves are excluded from decision-making. Moreover, traditional values and practices are most likely to be preserved when the people themselves—with their language(s) and culture—are empowered to become full participants in the life of their community and their society. In such a scenario, there will be changes; but there will also be continuity.

## **10. NORTEP-NORPAC BRINGING DOWN BARRIERS**

The founders of NORTEP-NORPAC made no apologies about their involvement in a process that would ultimately see northern Aboriginal peoples become full participants in the economic life of their society, including contract bargaining and salaried employment. The process would begin with teaching, but it would not end in schools. The lives of NORTEP students and graduates would, of course, consist of much more than salaried employment; but they should not consist of less.

In the mind of the original architect of the program, Keith Goulet, participation in the economy was simply part of “drawing upon the best of both worlds and both cultures.” This kind of participation also meant engagement in social practice, rather than being content with theoretical critique alone. The aim was to change the world, not just understand it. Change without an economic aspect—and impact—would not be change at all.

**Graduate Profile: Beatrice (Sally) Lemaigre**  
**La Loche**  
**NORTEP, class of 1983**

From puppies to children, Beatrice (Sally) Lemaigre's love for teaching remains as strong as ever. "Ever since I was a young girl, I always wanted to teach children," says Lemaigre, a member of NORTEP's class of 1983. "I remember one time when I had a bunch of little puppies, and I lined them up and said they were my students.... (Children) are very fun, all the time. Well—tiring, but they make your day. They have all bright ideas, and they're just fun to work with.... It just makes me happy."



**Beatrice (Sally) Lemaigre calls the opportunity to train at NORTEP "a gift." "I'm really glad for those people (who started NORTEP), for what they've done for us.... It was a gift."**

Despite initial struggles, juggling personal and academic demands—especially the separation from her own young children, and the rigors of travelling back and forth between La Ronge and her home community of La Loche—Lemaigre persevered. After working as a native instructor and then enrolling for NORTEP's first year in 1976, Lemaigre ended up dropping out to take care of her family, but she re-enrolled a few years later and completed the program. During her NORTEP years, Lemaigre found that despite the lack of blood ties, she still had a family to lean on in La Ronge: her instructors and fellow students. "If one has a problem, they'll come and help us, and we'll help each other with homework," she says. "It was just like a big family."

After completing the program, Lemaigre returned home to the Clearwater River Dene Nation, and continued to teach both the regular elementary school curriculum and Dene language classes. She has been heavily involved in the Dene language-retention committee, working with other First Nations and provincial schools to develop materials such as a Dene dictionary and core instructional programs for Grades 11 and 12—a co-operative approach fostered by her experiences at NORTEP.

She is proud to be working for her own Band and setting a good example for other Band members—including the many students who continue to stop by and thank her for her help over the years.

"It (NORTEP) put me in a good situation. ...I have a degree; I'm teaching on my reserve; I'm teaching my own people. I really enjoy it," Lemaigre says. "It was a struggle, but I'm glad I completed the program, that I have a good job now, that I'm helping our family, and also being a role model for the community."

It (NORTEP) put me in a good situation....I have a degree, I'm teaching on my reserve, I'm teaching my own people. I really enjoy it," .... "It was a struggle, but I'm glad I completed the program, that I have a good job now, that I'm helping our family, and also being a role model for the community."



## 10.1 Reflecting Values of Northerners

### ◆ NORTEP has an educational culture that reflects the values of the people it serves.

That NORTEP-NORPAC has created a culture of its own, building on the strengths of northern Saskatchewan—values such as being loyal to your family and supporting and relying on one another, forming partnerships, being adaptable and even taking a few risks when the “usual way of doing things” just isn’t working—and compensating for years of being browbeaten, deprived of services, and racially and geographically divided, is reiterated in many of the stories of its graduates.

“When you put a bunch of northern people together in one room, there’s a difference in the expectations and the behaviours...as opposed to being one northern person in a room full of southern people. It lends to support systems,” says Chief Roy Cheechum, of Clearwater River Dene Nation, “You have the Cree-speaking and the Dene-speaking people working together and learning together, and that helps with cultural exchange and cultural awareness—maybe a (level of) awareness that wouldn’t otherwise happen in a different setting.”

“You’re able to interact with people from all over the North, something that I never had a chance to do (growing up) here,” agrees Cumberland House Cree Nation Vice-Principal and native studies teacher, Celia Deschambeault. “When I went there (NORPAC), I felt that I belonged there—and if you feel that you’re a part of something like that, you’ll do well.”

Ray McKay, former Director of Continuing Education, agrees that over the years NORTEP has developed its own culture, which is very evident at the annual graduation ceremonies. “If you haven’t attended a NORTEP graduation, you should. It’s really something to experience,” McKay says. “The culture is, you know, we all have a challenge, we all work together, help each other, and that goes right down to the grandmothers that babysit, the mothers and dads that support.... It’s like a whole community is graduating.”

This culture is very important in addressing institutional and personal barriers. Prior to 1979 few, if any, pupils in northern Saskatchewan could identify a certified teacher, a principal or a vice-principal, a director of education or assistant director, who had grown up in their northern community. The impact on northern children’s career aspirations was obvious: How could a child believe that he/she could enter the teaching profession when no one from their community had ever done such a thing?

Patterns of non-participation of this kind created a “systemic” barrier for First Nations and Métis children in northern Saskatchewan. With so few First Nation and Métis teachers to identify with, it is hardly surprising that the children would have difficulty seeing themselves in a professional career such as teaching. Doubtless, the barrier extended beyond career aspiration to the whole experience of school: How could the school be understood as “for me” if children could not see themselves in either the curriculum or in the ranks of teachers?

**Graduate Profile: Hilma Clarke**  
**Kinoosao**  
**NORTEP, class of 1984**

Hilma Clarke worked as a classroom assistant before she entered NORTEP, so she was exposed to a variety of teachers that worked in the community. "Being in the classroom, learning practical day-to-day skills under the mentorship of experienced teachers was a big part of my training," says Clarke.

As a teacher trainee, Clarke remembers when the government and NORTEP field staff would fly into the community to review her work. She says, "It pays to be prepared. You develop materials as you go along. My classroom was always stimulating, bright, colorful, and full of academic props that I used in my lessons. Many Aboriginal children are visual learners. You have to make learning exciting. Showcase their work on the walls of your classroom." For Clarke, field experience was a good way for her own children and close family members to be involved in the school. They would often help her in the evenings, preparing and assembling materials. NORTEP teacher trainees learn the importance of allowing students different avenues to express themselves through hands-on activities.

After graduating from NORTEP, Clarke went on to teach K-12 in the North. She was employed with the Northern Lights School Division for 16 years, and then in 1991, she began working with the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (PBCN). In the 22 years she has been employed with PBCN, Clarke has taught high school in various subject

areas. She enjoys teaching Cree language and culture, being out on the lake and in nature and doing what her ancestors have taught her: picking berries, collecting medicines, fishing, and preparing dried moose meat. "That's where you get your Cree content," says Clarke.

As a teacher, Clarke engages students in outdoor activities. "Something happens to students when you take them out on the land: They are more observant; they ask lots of questions; their minds become open for learning; and they are physically active," says Clarke.

"It is important that northern children know who they are and where they come from. Many of our northern Elders are passing on, taking with them valuable



**"It helps if you are part of the community and you have a routine," says Hilma Clarke, who has over 30 years of teaching experience in the North. I am happy to be up here. I have taught all my life in the north. The land and lakes are perfect for teaching and learning."**

It is important that northern children know who they are and where they come from. So many of our northern Elders are beginning to pass on, taking with them valuable knowledge of the land and sustainable ways of living. There are underlying Cree teachings and life lessons in the practical activities people did to survive long ago. You cannot learn this from a book.

knowledge of the land and sustainable ways of living. There are underlying Cree teachings and life lessons in the practical activities people did to survive long ago. You cannot learn this from a book," says Clarke.

One of the challenges that northern students face is having to relocate from their communities, even for field experience it is difficult, especially for those who have several children. Clarke remembers having to take a three-hour boat from Kinoosao and then two hours of gravel road to La Ronge to attend classes. There were times when it was treacherous to travel. Still, "I was determined to get my degree," says Clarke. She encourages teacher trainees to gain exposure to different school contexts and teacher mentors. "With NORTEP placements, you are never too far away from your own community," says Clarke. She remembers the difficulty of uprooting her children from their peers. At the same time, it was good for them to experience a new school, learn social skills, and make connections with new friends.

"I always loved being in a classroom as far as I can remember. NORTEP training provided me with the knowledge and skills I needed in order to practice in the North. It is important to learn the background history of northern communities at a deeper level. Taking university courses opens your eyes to different ways of looking at things and from there you slowly develop your own teaching style in order to meet the needs of your students."

Reflecting back on her overall teaching career, she states, "I always loved being in a classroom as far as I can remember. NORTEP training provided me with the knowledge and skills I needed in order to practice in the North. It is important to learn the background history of northern communities at a deeper level. Taking university courses opens your eyes to different ways of looking at things and from there you slowly develop your own teaching style in order to meet the needs of your students."

## 11. NORTEP-NORPAC IN LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

◆ **NORTEP-NORPAC is designed to include northern Aboriginal people in leadership and governance.**

NORTEP has modeled the importance of creating a school culture that reflects the culture of the home. Its programs are designed to address the institutional and personal barriers to Aboriginal participation in not only education and employment, but also in leadership and governance. NORTEP-NORPAC's leadership has given space for Aboriginal involvement in the decision-making process. NORTEP leadership has created a space and a capacity within the Aboriginal community for northerners to take part in the conversation; to make decisions about its core funding, appointments of faculty and employment of staff, amongst other challenges; and to exercise self-determination. In this environment, both instructional and educational policy formation are strongly influenced by First Nation and Métis people themselves, and importantly, in a timely fashion.

**Graduate Profile: Barb Morin**  
**Ile-a-la Crosse**  
**NORTEP, class of 1985**

***She started out by encouraging care for their teeth, but Barb Morin discovered that what she truly wanted to preserve was healthy and strong young minds.***

Born and raised in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Morin graduated from the village's Rossignol School in 1977. She moved to La Ronge to train as a dental therapist, and then worked with a dentist who travelled to communities up and down the west side. She soon realized, however, that the career satisfaction she was looking for was not to be found amongst northern children's molars and gumlines. "I thought, is there some other way I could help them, instead of just seeing mouths open? I need to give something back to the community. ...I know there is something more that I want to give back, and speaking the language, I thought, well, this is where I can help with the kids," Morin says. "And they would always say that when you're teaching, you have to be strict and a disciplinarian, so I thought, well, maybe this is the field for me!"



***"I thank NORTEP for making me who I am," says Ile-a-la-Crosse principal, Barb Morin.***

So, in 1981, Morin—then a young mom—enrolled in NORTEP. Her husband, Vince Morin, followed her into the program a year later, and with the combination of regular stints working in a classroom back in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Morin's sister willing to serve as caregiver for their children, the couple both graduated. While Vince has worked in various schools, Morin has spent the majority of her career at Rossignol, where she is now Principal of the K-7 program—and her husband's boss.

***Asked what she remembers best about NORTEP, Morin doesn't hesitate: "The family, the unity there. ...If you were from the east side, the west side—it didn't matter. We became one big family."*** Unlike when she moved south to get her "Standard A" certificate, "in NORTEP, you were 24/7," Morin says. "You know, when you were sick, people were there to help you. When you had to get (classroom) materials done, people were there to help you—making sure you succeeded along with them. So nobody was left out."

With both herself and Vince in school, the couple faced financial burdens, Morin says. "That was where we learned to drink black coffee, because we couldn't afford sugar or cream," she recalls. "But still, there would be people there (at TEP) that would say, 'Here's the sugar.' ...We shared. That made you a stronger person, (knowing) that you're not alone."

During her field assignments, Morin and her co-operating teacher both benefited—she from the older woman's experience, her mentor from the new techniques that Morin was picking up at TEP. Both the Ile-a-la-Crosse School Division and community residents were supportive



of the influence that TEP students like Morin were having on their school, especially since it gibed with the school board's own emphasis on promoting native language skills, Morin says. That is still the case today, and Rossignol School honours that desire with a daily broadcast of the "Michif phrase of the day" on the intercom system, celebrations of both Métis Week and First Nations Week, and elders assisting in school classrooms. The Grade 1 class has their classroom windows plastered with homemade flags proclaiming, "Proud to be Métis."

These days, Morin says, "the parents really want their kids to be educated...because of the way that the workplaces are nowadays. You need to have your Grade 12 in order to be in the workforce. Back then, if you didn't get your Grade 12, you could go out fishing, you could go out doing log hauling, log cutting. You could live off the land. But it's just not the way of life any more.... You're not so isolated any more (in northern Saskatchewan). You have to get your kids ready for that real world."

"They (the Ile-a-la-Crosse school board) were building the bridges to see where the gaps were in education for northern kids," she says. "They understood we needed to teach the (provincial) curriculum, but they wanted the language and the culture to be part of the learning for the students."

That attitude has obviously rubbed off on the Morin's children. Of the four, one is a licensed practical nurse, currently pursuing her registered nursing (RN) degree; one is going to SUNTEP; and a third is training to be a paramedic. Morin also reminds her students that they have career options too. "I always tell them, 'There are careers out there for you. Whatever you have your mindset on, you can fail at one of (your goals), but you have other options to go to. And you keep encouraging them to stay in school.'"



## 11.1 Self-Governance and Timely Access to Northern Secondary Education

In the early 1970s, residents of the village of Ile-a-la-Crosse first staged a sit-in and then took over the operation of Rossignol School, holding a plebiscite in which approximately 85 per cent voted in favour of a locally run education system, and forming their own independent school division. A major reason for the push was to ensure that kids could complete their education at home, instead of re-locating to cities such as Saskatoon, Prince Albert, or North Battleford. Many northern community leaders and education officials still remember a time when getting even a high school education in the North was impossible. “Once you hit Grade 8, you were out,” recalls J. J. Janvier, past Mayor of La Loche. “You could be 12 years old and finished school.” “We wanted the younger generation to have access to high school in the community,” says Max Morin, the long-serving, past Mayor of Ile-a-la-Crosse and former Chair of the Northern Development Board.

When NORTEP first took shape, First Nations such as the Lac La Ronge Indian Band were starting to take control of their own education system, first running the federal schools on behalf of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and later building and operating their own on-reserve schools. The NORTEP program fit neatly into this new mindset of local control of education, and TEP graduates now play key leadership roles in many Band-run education systems, as well as both the Northern Lights School Division (NLSD No. 113) and the local school divisions in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Creighton.

### Graduate Profile: Vince Ahenakew

#### Ile-a-la-Crosse

#### NORTEP, class of 1987

They don’t take the idea of locally run education lightly in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Not only is the village’s only school, Rossignol, run by its own school division, but also school staff and administrators, such as high school Principal Vince Ahenakew, still vividly remember the day, more than 30 years ago, when a group of village residents marched into the school and told the staff they were taking over. Two years later, NORTEP was formed.

Growing up in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Ahenakew doesn’t recall any formal introduction to the Michif language or culture in the school setting. That has changed since the 1970s, first with the newly formed school division’s emphasis on teaching their kids about their culture, and then with the attitude amongst the newly-fledged NORTEP trainees that such things were important.

Today, Ahenakew worries about the eroding away of Métis culture in Ile-a-la-Crosse, but he believes the cause to be the influence of outside media and the tendency of parents to rely too heavily on the school to pass on traditional knowledge to their youth.



**Local educational leadership is alive and well in Ile-a-la-Crosse, thanks to NORTEP-trained administrators like Vince Ahenakew.**

"I don't think it's enough, (to believe) that the school one day will save it," Ahenakew says. "It has to be the whole community; the home and the parents. They need to make a decision that they want to do it, and then go for it. The same way that they took over the school division, it's the same approach (that's needed) for the language, and they better do it quick."

Language and culture are still important parts of the curriculum at Rossignol. In the 2006-2007 term, Ahenakew introduced a Michif 30 class, and there are native studies classes offered as well, touching on both historical and contemporary experiences for First Nations and Métis people. Ahenakew takes things like language preservation and the value of a good education seriously these days—perhaps more seriously than he did as a high schooler. Standards for student performance are high at Rossignol, both in terms of marks and attendance, Ahenakew says. "I feel guilty when...we ask some of these kids to withdraw, because I don't know how it would have worked when I was going to school, but I was one of the worst ones!"

For Ahenakew, the attraction of NORTEP was the opportunity to get a post-secondary education without any student debt—the same thing that attracted his son Kenyon, a current TEP student. While Ahenakew had no one to show him the value of a university education, his own kids—and his students—have grown up in a very different environment. "These kids here, they surprise me sometimes...Some of them already know what to do, they know where to apply, as opposed to us,—we didn't know how to get to university, Ahenakew says. "These kids are a lot faster, a lot smarter than before, but sometimes their marks don't show that."

Although Rossignol, with its own school division, is not always closely tied into what's happening at other northern schools, Ahenakew feels that with help from NORTEP, "nowadays, people (in northern Saskatchewan) know more about each other. Basically, we're not as isolated. I know people here and right across to the other end of the province."

## **11.2 Self-Governance and Timely Access to Northern Teacher Education**

The Northern School Board procured responsibility for NORTEP in a similar fashion to Ile-a-la-Crosse. This was done to ensure that community-based access to teacher education was embraced in a timely way—the need for northern teachers was immediate. The notion of "Indian control of Indian education" was a vital aspect of the call for decolonization by Aboriginal peoples of the day (in 1976-77). But even this notion carried with it complexities for governance. The northern population itself consists of deep political and racial divisions: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, First nations, Métis, and non-Status. All have a distinctive place, and often with a distinct legal framework within the larger northern umbrella. In a northern context, even the terms Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal have their limits. The term Aboriginal, for example, embraces a broad spectrum of people and languages. Beyond the customary differences between Cree and Dene, First Nation and Métis, there are differences such as persons who understand but do not speak their traditional languages, and those who have only a very limited understanding of the language at all.

NORTEP's role, even with students with differences such as these, can be seen in terms of strengthening traditional culture, without marking those whose language and culture is weaker as "lesser than" those whose language and culture is strong. In terms of program

design, for example, NORTEP offers several levels of Cree and Dene classes to accommodate the various levels of competence. But everyone takes these classes, so Cree and Dene are honoured and their role is enhanced.

The political environment of self-governance and the diversity of the northern populations contributed to an unusual arrangement for leadership and governance of NORTEP. What developed between the Northern School Board and the College of Education was, most decidedly, an administrative and organizational reflection of this movement. Later, with the development of a Board of Governors, NORTEP-NORPAC became reflective of a broader group of northerners.

### **11.3 NORTEP-NORPAC: An Innovative Model for Governance and Programming**

With its unique governance model—a university program started by a K-12 board of education, and led by a group of northerners elected to represent their own municipalities and later First Nations as well—NORTEP was part of a wave that was sweeping across Canada, over northern and First Nations education, in the late 1960s and the 1970s. NORTEP was an unusual creation: Its infrastructure belonged to a school board, while its academic program belonged to the participating universities (the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina). The hybrid nature was a signal of the deep forces that were at work and came into play as the program unfolded. The dominant social and educational structures of the day did not respond quickly enough to the educational needs and exigency recognized by northerners. The dominant society structure was colonial; the new initiative (NORTEP) was an exercise in self-determination and decolonization. The novel solutions that were ultimately adopted have had an enduring impact on the world of post-secondary education in the province of Saskatchewan. From a holistic point of view, the necessary complexities that exist in its organization can be seen as the price of self-determination and decolonization, and used as a measure of the underlying forces and tensions.

The NORTEP-NORPAC model of having elected officials—both school board members and First Nations leaders—serve as the board of governors has also given a stronger voice to northerners in shaping the direction of northern post-secondary education. Northern leaders use words like “being accountable back to their own people” to describe the difference between a board made up of elected representatives and one selected by a government official or other outside agencies. “You’re more autonomous when you’re elected. You’re representing the people (from your community) then, you’re not representing the people that appoint you,” says trustee Frank Durocher.

“He has family in La Loche. This is his home, and he understands the issues that we face, and education is important to him,” La Loche Mayor, Georgina Jolibois, says of her local School Board Rep, Bruce Ruelling. “The difference would be the freedom and the flexibility that comes with an elected position as opposed to an appointed position.”

“Northern people have said for a long time, ‘We can do this ourselves. We don’t need somebody from southern Saskatchewan or from the government telling us how to run



something that's important to us," says Green Lake Administrator, Tina Rasmussen, a former TEP trustee. "The fact that NORTEP is (run by) a representative body that's able to run a successful program...proves itself to government, to departments and agencies, to any number of groups anywhere else that might think, well, geez, we need to go and do it for them. (I say) you don't need to come in and do it for us—we have the skills and knowledge, we can do it ourselves."

**Graduate Profile: Lionel McKenzie**  
**Cumberland House**  
**NORTEP, class of 1987**

Lionel McKenzie went to NORTEP looking for job skills; he came away with a passion.

Although he had been accepted into university in the south, the then-17-year-old found he was reluctant to leave northern Saskatchewan. That was why in 1983, several months after graduating from Charlebois School, McKenzie was still hanging around Cumberland House, working part-time jobs. At that time, several of his former teachers approached him and suggested he try the NORTEP program in La Ronge. The idea of becoming a teacher initially didn't excite him, he explains, but "I was young, and it was something to try."



**NORTEP showed Lionel McKenzie that he was born to be teacher—even if it didn't seem obvious at first.**

Within a few weeks, however, McKenzie's non-committal attitude toward teaching had done a 180-degree turnaround. Instead of wishing he had followed his friends who had gone off to work in the northern uranium mines, he discovered that teaching truly was what he wanted to do—and his hometown was where he wanted to be.

"I not only enjoy teaching, but I enjoy being here (in Cumberland House)," he says. "I've tried other places for a couple of months, or go visit, but it's not the same." As for his career path, which currently has him working at the Cumberland House Cree Nation's Nisto Awasisak Memorial School (NAMS) as both a high school math teacher and as a coach for cross-country running and skiing, McKenzie says he simply enjoys watching kids learn. "Without NORTEP, I wouldn't have found out that I enjoy teaching," he says. "One of the reasons I came back to teaching (after a 5-year break to pursue a carpentry business) is I do enjoy being with kids and seeing them learn, not just for myself but for them...To have kids come back and say, 'Thank you,' is a good thing. There's a consistency now with the teachers, instead of the high turnover (rate). So (students) they know that the same teacher is there every year, and the same teacher is helping them through the system."

***"I really enjoy...being able to say, 'Hey, I've done this, you can do it,'" McKenzie says.***

When he started in his current job at NAMS, McKenzie says, some of the kids tried very hard to get rid of him, because they were so used to teachers lasting only a year or two. “It was almost like a mission for them,” he says. “And now it’s like, ‘He’s going to be teaching here; we better start doing our work.’”

Having educated northerners living and working in their own communities has several benefits, says McKenzie. First, having completed a post-secondary education gives a person the confidence that they can succeed in other ventures, such as his own carpentry business, and this sets a good example for others. It also proves that education isn’t just for an elite group—that is, only for those who got the highest marks in high school.

## 12. TEACHER EDUCATION BUILDS SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

Although TEP’s focus is on training teachers, “you see these people in all kinds of positions, so it’s not just classroom teachers, other jobs require the kind of confidence and skills that you get from graduating with a degree,” Marion Hemingway says. “Plus it’s also raising the bar for families.... It becomes something they can aspire to. It is different, me being in a classroom, this white woman.... I have to work twice as hard to encourage the kids to aspire to something than someone from their own community would. They see local people as concrete examples.”

### **Graduate Profile: Minnie McKenzie** **Stanley Mission** **NORTEP, class of 1993**

Some ambitions never truly die—they just re-appear in a different guise—and some lessons never let go. Minnie McKenzie has learned both these truths in her professional life because of her studies at NORTEP-NORPAC.

Although employed since the age of 13, when she began working as a labourer at her brother Jim McKenzie’s fishing camp, “I wanted to get out of the rut of not finding employment other than what was offered in Stanley Mission. I always wanted to look for more,” McKenzie says.

That quest for “more” initially led her to NORPAC, then a brand-new extension of the NORTEP program. Having a vague idea that she might like administration, McKenzie enrolled in PAC’s arts program, and for her field placement, she was assigned to work with Gladys Christiansen, then the Lac La Ronge Indian Band’s assistant director of education. She sat in on job interviews for prospective teachers, did administrative work with the department secretaries, and worked as an assistant to Kitsaki School Principal, Larry Ahenakew, which took



**Minnie McKenzie has found a career that enables her to juggle interests in teaching, Cree language development, and administration.**

her occasionally into the classroom. As she watched teachers singing Cree songs with the children, something clicked, and that fall, McKenzie transferred to NORTEP.

After graduating from NORTEP in 1993, McKenzie got a job at La Ronge's Pre-Cam School as a Cree language teacher, working with up to 300 students in K-6. She moved over to the Northern Lights School Division head office to work as a curriculum developer, then to the LLRIB's Sally Ross School in Sucker River as a teacher. And then, when her former mentor, Gladys Christiansen—now the Band's Director of Education—decided it was time to revive the Band's Cree curriculum unit, McKenzie got the call.

The staff's high expectations pushed McKenzie to perform at her peak, in terms of completing assignments on time and being fully prepared for every class—whether she was a student or a teacher. Those learned attributes have served her well professionally, and she passes the same expectations on to her staff.

In 2007, when she was interviewed, Minnie was supervising a full-time staff as Site Co-ordinator for the Gift of Language and Culture Project, a multi-faceted project aimed at developing core Cree language materials (including audio-visual resources) for use in schools across the country. She continues in her role as an Educational Administrator, developing resources for teachers in her own specialty area, and, at the same time, teaching her staff how to think like teachers. She is following in the footsteps of her own instructors—and she couldn't be happier.

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McKenzie's most vivid memories of NORTEP are of the faculty and staff. "They had high expectations, and they were there to help us as much as they could," she says. "If we were doing presentations or micro-teaching, they'd give us immediate feedback and they'd be honest with you and tell you where you needed to work on your communication skills.... They're very supportive, and they led you in the right direction."

By providing that level of support, while at the same time pushing their students into the classroom at a very early stage in their professional development, the TEP staff quickly honed McKenzie's skills and, essentially, killed her stage fright. "I was a very shy person when I went into NORTEP.... I'd freeze, and then I'd blush, and then my voice would quiver. So I've come a long way," she says now, with a hearty laugh.

"I want to make sure that it (the material her staff develops) is quality," she says. If she's not satisfied, "I'll give it back to them and tell them, 'This is where you need to improve.'"

As someone fluent in her first language—her grandparents taught her to read and write Cree syllabics when she was very young, and all through school she loved taking Cree classes—

McKenzie is grateful for NORTEP's impact on the preservation and promotion of Aboriginal languages. The majority of her curriculum development staff members are TEP graduates, and when she was working on setting up Cree language-retention committees, it was mostly TEP students who she contacted.

She also vividly remembers both the native studies and language classes offered at NORTEP and the respect shown toward Aboriginal heritage by all the staff. One of her instructors, Dene specialist, Lynda Holland, noticed McKenzie's strength in Cree, and strongly encouraged her to pursue work as a Cree educator. "Even in the (teaching) methods classes, we were always encouraged to be proud of our language and our culture, and taught how to integrate those into the subject areas," McKenzie says.

Looking at the impact of TEP-trained teachers on northern schools, McKenzie is also pleased with what she sees. "A lot of my nephews and nieces that have graduated still have their first language, and they were encouraged to use their language, and to be proud of being a Woodland Cree person."

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For McKenzie, attending both TEP and PAC was a way to get a clear sense of direction, affirm her identity, and become stronger as a whole person. "I give them a lot of credit, because they...helped me build on

my strengths, and correct some of my weaknesses," she says. "They not only worked on your academic skills, but they worked on your personal life (as well)."

Students were required to journal about and reflect on what they ate and when and how they exercised, their learning styles, challenging life experiences, and anything else that might help them better understand both themselves and their future students. They learned about biology, psychology, and sociology—all the aspects of the body and mind, and both individual and group behaviour—as well as how to teach core skills and motivate students to want to learn. They even learned how to both listen and observe well and how to determine whether an argument makes sense—skills that serve McKenzie well in the many meetings she attends. ***"When I'm doing curriculum development, that's what I think about," McKenzie says. "All that training that I got from NORTEP."***





### 13. NORTEP-NORPAC: PRESERVING AND PROMOTING ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

NORTEP-NORPAC has had an impact on the preservation and promotion of northern Saskatchewan's languages and traditional cultures. When NORTEP was formed, the children entering northern schools were Cree- or Dene-speaking, but the teachers who greeted them spoke neither language. The emergence of teacher candidates who were speakers has helped to stem the tide of acculturation that threatens Aboriginal languages. NORTEP has attempted to enable access to the beneficial aspects of the "dominant" society, while preserving and affirming Aboriginal language and culture. Keith Goulet describes this "bi-cultural" philosophy best when he described NORTEP's attempt to "draw on the best from both cultures." This entails preserving the language and culture in the context of envisioning and creating a new North.

Now, Cree and Dene language classes are offered both at NORTEP-NORPAC and in local schools; cultural days and elder visits are commonplace, and educational partnerships have been developed to pass on traditional land-based skills and create new language curriculum materials. Some communities have even developed Cree and Dene immersion programs. "We do offer Division 4 Cree language classes for one semester, and more and more students are taking advantage of that," says La Ronge Principal, Ken Gray.

In the past, northern kids struggled with ridicule or even punishment as non-English speakers in school settings where English was the language of instruction. "I didn't want my kids to go through (that), so instead of teaching them the (Michif) language, I was teaching them English," recalls Max Morin, a northern Métis leader.

Today, many northern schools are attempting to counteract the effects of that language loss. La Loche is one of the few communities where Dene is still the first language of both the children coming into school and their parents and, even there, reading and writing skills may be weak or slang may creep in to speech patterns. "The main thing is working with the students so they don't lose parts of it," says La Loche's School Board Rep, Bruce Ruelling.

"The language is used to reinforce the concepts," says La Loche Principal, Greg Hatch. "It's good because the kids will have a better understanding of what's being said (in English). Just because kids smile and shake their head, that doesn't mean they understand what's going on."

"Some of these kids are so strong in their first language that they have a hard time with English," agrees Clearwater River Dene Nation Chief, Roy Cheechum, whose Band is situated just outside La Loche. "While I think that there's been a very, very gradual, minimal erosion of our language (through adoption of slang)...we're fortunate that we have retained a good portion of our language. When the teachers come back (to the community) using the same language and the same dialect, that just reinforces the language factor."

In other northern communities, where there has been more language erosion, northern teachers struggle with other issues, such as how to effectively re-introduce the local language into the classroom when there isn't a strong foundation to build on.

"One of the few places that a lot of the kids are getting exposure to the Cree language is through the school system," says Green Lake Administrator, Tina Rasmussen. "A lot of the parents are happy that the kids are getting exposure to it, and they wish that we would have had that kind of opportunity."

"A lot of them (northern children) are shy to speak their language...(but) for the ones who do want to speak their language, there's no boundaries," says Buffalo Narrows Mayor, Bobby Woods, who vividly remembers being unable to speak to his Cree-speaking grandmother because he had been taught only English in school. "Now those (language restrictions) are gone, and they're allowed to speak whatever they want. Freedom of speech is certainly exercised."

In addition to day-to-day use of traditional northern languages in the classroom, TEP graduates are helping to develop language curriculum materials, including audio-visual tools, pictures and storybooks, which make it easier to introduce or reinforce both the languages and the traditional lifestyles out of which those languages grew. "It's all about identity, and that's what they help people to understand—what our identity is," says Mayor Woods.

Marion Hemingway also sees value in the TEP-encouraged emphasis on language and culture. "You develop more of your brainpower from knowing two languages," she says. "If you know your first language really well, it's much easier to learn a second language." Plus, languages reflect the culture in which they grew, so knowing one well helps reinforce the other. "If you have NORTEP graduates...who are speaking the language to the kids, then everybody's better off. As a community, they may be better able to retain the language, because a lot of them are losing it."

"Without the NORTEP (trained) teachers that are in place now, we couldn't have carried out a Cree immersion program. That's for sure," says Charlebois Community School Vice-Principal, Lily McKay-Carriere. "With teachers from the TEP program that are involved in the school, you have no doubt a stronger cultural component in our schools."

"Being proud of your Aboriginal ancestry and Aboriginal identity, and your cultural background...and being true to their identity. That's what I see a lot in my community from those who've gone through the NORTEP program," says La Loche Mayor, Georgina Jolibois.



**Graduate Profile: Ronelda McCallum (nee Petit)**  
**Buffalo Narrows**  
**NORTEP, class of 1993**

After 13 years as a teacher, what Ronelda McCallum most values about her profession is that it allows her to never stop being a student, eagerly seeking out new ways to improve herself both professionally and personally. And as a graduate of of NORTEP-NORPAC, she has seen that same openness to change in the staff and governors of her alma mater.

“The thing I like about teaching is that it’s forever changing. You’re forever learning,” McCallum says.

McCallum’s first year at TEP was in 1989, the year the PAC program started, so she was there to witness the beginnings of that major change in the way the school was run. She is now looking forward to pursuing graduate education through TEP as well.

At the time of her interview, McCallum held two positions in one: In the mornings, she taught math, language arts, health and science to a class of Grade 8 students at Buffalo Narrows’ Twin Lakes School, the same school she graduated from; in the afternoons, she moved into administration, as Vice-Principal in charge of Twin Lakes’ high school staff and disciplinarian for the entire K-12 student body.

It’s a far cry from her original, pre-NORTEP experience as an early childhood educator, working in a local daycare and tutoring at Twin Lakes, but it’s the career she wants—and she knows that without TEP, she would never have had the chance to pursue it.



**Ronelda McCallum thrived on hitting the books—both as a student and as a teacher.**

Looking back, McCallum says that what she most appreciated about TEP was the way she was challenged to push herself academically, within an atmosphere that was neither highly competitive nor condescendingly “watered down.”

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As many former students, McCallum felt like part of a family at NORTEP, and she vividly recalls “the continued reinforcement to help us move on,” despite the stress

inherent in taking highly condensed classes for a full week, followed by the immediate shift from students to trainee teachers working in their home schools for a week or two, and then back again. That support—both academic and personal—from the TEP staff and her fellow students was key, she says.

"It seemed like every year it (the workload) was harder and harder and harder, but we could do it," McCallum says. As well, during her 6 months on the University of Saskatchewan campus, she found she could easily compete with the non-TEP education students, which boosted her confidence, just as TEP had worn the shyness out of her.

Even with that exposure, however, McCallum is convinced that getting her university education in the North was the right way to go. Not only did the unusual format of working in the classroom from the very first semester give her a chance to learn from co-operating teachers and practice her techniques (in fact, gaining a full year of teaching experience before she even graduated), she also deeply appreciated the support system she had from TEP, even while she was at the University of Saskatchewan.

She also likes what TEP and PAC have done for northern Saskatchewan. First, it gives the kids role models—university-educated professionals working in their home communities, both as teachers and in other fields as well. And secondly, local teachers have both personal knowledge of their students (and their parents) and a vested interest in their success.

"Being from the community, we would work harder to try and get the kids excelling," she says. Unlike teachers who come in for a 1- or 2-year stint, "we are still here; we are still trying to find a solution, and we will all work to bend over backwards to try and help these kids."

## **14. RAISING EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS**

That willingness to invest both time and energy into students is an important factor in both NORTEP-NORPAC's success, and its students' successes—the attitude is modelled by the school, then repeated when the teacher trainees go out into the field and later become teachers themselves. "If you don't connect with the kids, you don't get the respect," says Frank Durocher, a NORTEP-NORPAC board member and father of three NORTEP graduates. "I really firmly believe that the NORTEP program pushes that (approach) on their graduates, to get connected to the kids. So a lot of them have no trouble with their classroom management and all that, because of that connection."

When completing his undergraduate studies, Ray Smith, Assistant Director of NORTEP, discovered an odd fact: You can actually earn a university degree without ever saying a word—unless you are studying at NORTEP. Originally from Pinehouse, Smith relocated to La Ronge in order to complete high school (as the school in his community then only went to Grade 6), worked for a year, then did a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Saskatchewan, where he managed to avoid all classes that required oral presentations. His student funding required him to work for a year with the province's Advanced Education and Manpower department, and that job required him to interact both with students in northern schools and with students at NORTEP.

"I realized...when I started visiting schools and talking to students that it was very hard for me, and I figured, if there's anything I need to do, I need more and more of this type of practice, in terms of getting up in front of students, and that's why I came to the NORTEP program," Smith says. "Right away, within that first week, they started making me talk!"

Today, nearly 20 years after completing his teaching degree, Smith still feels a little flutter of fear—a remnant, he says, of being mocked and laughed at by fellow students and teachers during the time when his voice was changing as a young teen—when he stands up in front of a classroom. But the confidence that he had as a child is back, and Smith—now both Assistant Director and a Cree language instructor at NORTEP-NORPAC—is silent no longer.

Thanks to NORTEP, Aboriginal teachers are busy working on what Smith calls “the front lines of education,” combating the kind of racial prejudice he encountered as a child and proving that northerners can be successful not only in teaching but also in a wide range of professions.

“The students (now) are more confident in their abilities. They have more skills, it seems, and I would attribute that to some of the graduates that have gone through this (TEP) program that are out there in all these schools.... They’re more or less on the front lines of education, and our students, they see that, and they want to be part of that educational process.”

Thanks to NORTEP, Aboriginal teachers are busy working on what Smith calls “the front lines of education,” combating the kind of racial prejudice he encountered as a child and proving that northerners can be successful not only in teaching but also in a wide range of professions.

Smith sees both dramatic changes in the way native languages and culture are treated in northern schools, and the need that still exists for better materials and better training for language instructors. “As a teacher of Cree classes here (at NORTEP-NORPAC), I try to give the students some knowledge, some basic skills in terms of what they have to face when they go out into the field. That’s only one class they take. If you’re a fluent speaker and you have that class, usually you’re the one that’s going to be teaching the Cree class (in the local school). Is that (training) enough? I don’t think so. ... We’re doing things to try and save our language here, and I believe some of the onus falls on the university, but they don’t really listen.”

In the area of leadership, NORTEP has made many in-roads, but it can be tough to take on a position of authority in your hometown, Smith says. “Even as a teacher, there’s a higher expectation (of you) when you go into your community.... They know you, so if you do one little thing wrong, then you’re going to hear about it from just about everybody that you meet on the street.”

Still, he has seen numerous TEP graduates move into administrative roles in their schools and even serve as directors of education. “One day it might come full circle in terms of the NORTEP program...where a NORTEP grad like me has gone through the program and taken on the directorship,” Smith says—noting quickly that he’s not after the job, at least for the moment. “I have more holidays (this way),” he jokes.

Although he has concerns about the ongoing social problems in northern communities—including his own hometown—Smith feels that NORTEP has played a major role in effecting



change over the last 30 years. “If NORTEP wasn’t here, then I think we would be about 20 years back from where we are now. Education is power, and when you educate a person it tends to spread,” he says.

“At one time you had people coming in and they’d get whatever they want. You had welfare workers, social services—they’d come in and they would take kids away. Nobody said anything. You had the police coming in and taking people away, and nobody would say anything. ... Since NORTEP came about, there will always be somebody that has concerns and people who will now call provincial reps and so on,” Smith says.

It’s made people more aware and more confident, and everything else that goes along with being educated. You have better self-esteem.

“It’s made people more aware and more confident, and everything else that goes along with being educated. You have better self-esteem,” he says.

“Even if you look at some of our (TEP) students now, they’re very confident in terms of what they’re doing.... When students see this kind of people coming into their schools, (and it’s) their own people, it rubs off on them.”

## 14.1 Impacting Successive Generations

Previously, teachers for northern schools had come almost exclusively from the outside: With the advent of NORTEP, a whole new generation of teacher professionals graduated who had been born and raised right in northern Saskatchewan; they were familiar with its languages and culture, and they would make it their home. NORTEP was an avenue for putting this new generation of professionals in northern classrooms, where their ideas and values could shape the very youngest of northerners, and where parents and community people could come in and find a familiar face or, at the very least, a familiar perspective. NORTEP—and later NORPAC—began changing long-held attitudes about who could become educated, who could be listened to, and what concepts should be valued and taught.

Over time, evidence of a dramatic domino effect began to emerge and become visible: Once the graduates moved out into the workforce, and took their place in northern classrooms, their impact on future generations was assured. Many of the early graduates, especially those from more isolated communities, noted that they were the first members of their immediate families to attend university or any post-secondary training; today, it is difficult to find a born-and-bred northerner who doesn’t have a relative who has attended either NORTEP or NORPAC.

Even when they were not playing an explicit advocacy role for the school, TEP graduates—by virtue of their new status, both as some of the first “homegrown” professionals in a community and as teachers—became mentors and role models.

"People that come through the education system...have had a domino effect on the rest of the people in the community, on their children, on nephews, on nieces," says Charlebois School Vice Principal, Lily McKay-Carriere, who grew up in Cumberland House and had already been accepted into the University of Regina Education program when the first TEP classes were starting. "Because we went out to get an education and we came back, in one sense it's like being a role model without you really knowing about it." Plus, says McKay-Carriere, "being in the schools, you have an influence on other people in the community.... There's always that information-sharing that's going on. Once you're in a position where you can get that information (about opportunities) and share it with other people, then it's to their benefit.... You become a player then in community development."

**Graduate Profile: Jackie Durocher**  
**Buffalo Narrows**  
**NORTEP, class of 1993**

There's nothing quite like a hug to say to someone, "I want you. I accept you. I care. You belong here." And for Jackie Durocher, that's exactly what going to NORTEP felt like: being held in a firm, loving hug.

It's also how she feels about teaching in the same school where she herself completed kindergarten through Grade 12: Twin Lakes Community School, in her hometown of Buffalo Narrows.

The daughter of a long-serving NORTEP board member, sister of two recent graduates, and niece of one of the school's first graduates, Durocher grew up well aware of NORTEP and its ability to produce skilled local teachers.



**Jackie Durocher found a "second home" at NORTEP.**  
**"Right from my first year, I knew this is what I wanted to be, this is where I belonged."**

"When I was younger—because I've always been here—I thought it was so neat to see local people working in the school," she says. "I just thought, 'These are such wonderful people,' because we always treated teachers with such respect, and that (attitude) was taught to us by our family. ...Just to see those local people in our school, it really made you feel good, and it felt like, 'You know, I could be there some day too.'"

"In our family, kids are very important and we treat every one of our children as special, and I thought, well, that's something I could do with other kids too." So, after graduating from Twin Lakes in 1988, Durocher headed straight to NORTEP, determined to complete her studies within 4 years. Mid-way through, she faced a potential stumbling block—pregnancy—but through perseverance and summer courses, she finished her studies by the end of 1992. After 6 months of work in La Loche (filling in for a kindergarten teacher on maternity leave), Durocher graduated with the class of 1993.

Both her baby and her first job had a profound effect on Durocher. Her daughter was just 4 months old when she returned to NORTEP, leaving the baby behind in Buffalo Narrows during her 2-week stints in La Ronge. “That was one of the hardest things that I faced in my life,” she says. “It was tough and (yet) also it gave me something to work towards...[realizing] I’m a parent and I need to do this for myself and for my girl.” She has since passed her beliefs about the value of education on to her daughter Marlee, a Grade 11 student at the time of her interview. “When she talks, it’s ‘when I go to university,’ it’s not ‘if I go,’” Durocher says.

Although all her field placements at Twin Lakes and her internship in Ile-a-la-Crosse were in elementary-level classes, Durocher says she never pictured herself as a kindergarten teacher; it was the position in La Loche that sent her in that direction. Despite her initial doubts about the job, she says, “I fell in love with kindergarten. They love school so much. Every day is so important to them. Their teacher is so important to them. It makes you a better person working with smaller kids, because they look up to you so much, and if there’s anything in your life that you need to change, these little kids will make you change what needs to be changed because they love you so much. If you’re having a bad day, there’s always one of them with a hug and ‘Teacher, I love you,’ and you don’t find that in middle years!”

As a teacher who grew up in Buffalo Narrows, Durocher finds that the community has higher expectations of her than they do for those teachers who come from somewhere else, and so does she. “If something isn’t done right or they want something done, we [local teachers] are the first ones they’ll come to,” she says. “It just always makes me look at myself [more closely] because I’m a role model in the community. How do I want the kids to see me? It’s changed my social life.... When I was a student, it was alright to go and sit in the bar after class and have a drink, but when you’re a teacher from your own community, it’s not alright,” she says. “It’s sad, but some of the kids, that’s what they see [their] parents do. Do they need to see the teacher do that?”

Local teachers create consistency for the kids, in terms of reducing teacher turnover rates, and they also work hard to bring the community into the school, from arranging visits by elders to introducing cultural activities. They are also more sensitive toward family dynamics and community history, “and being out there all the time—when you’re a local person, you shop at all the little stores, you go to the post office,” Durocher says. “You’re in the community all the time, whereas the non-local teachers, a lot of them leave on weekends...and all summer. And then they don’t know what’s going on,” she says.

“If they’re not involved in our community, people see it right away” and, as a result, those teachers are trusted and respected less by the community and, by extension, the students.

For Durocher, this emphasis on community was reinforced by her experience at NORTEP, which she fondly calls “my second home,” and some negative experiences at the University of Saskatchewan, where she first encountered prejudice and ignorance about the North and its education system. Her graduation was a chance to celebrate with her loved ones: both her own relatives and her “second family,” her classmates and the TEP staff and faculty.

"We just adopted each other and looked after each other, and the faculty was like our parents, that reprimand us if we got out of line and, you know, they'd be there to celebrate with us," she says.

NORTEP "cherished the kids in the North, because they're the ones who brought people from the northern communities together to educate them, to mould them into teachers, and they taught us to love our kids, that we're there for our kids. ... They were there to guide us and support us and help us in any way they could, and they did," Durocher says.

NORTEP "cherished the kids in the North, because they're the ones who brought people from the northern communities together to educate them, to mould them into teachers, and they taught us to love our kids, that we're there for our kids. ... They were there to guide us and support us and help us in any way they could, and they did," Durocher says.

## 15. NORTEP-NORPAC: A SUCCESSFUL MODEL FOR NORTHERN CAREER PREPARATION

### 15.1 Observations of Steve Innes

Steve Innes readily admits that in his first encounter with the NORTEP program, he wasn't overly impressed—and frankly, he was a bit jealous. As a teacher in Green Lake during the first intake of TEP students in 1977, Innes, an outsider, a recent import from Ontario, "resented the fact that they (TEP students) didn't seem to do a lot of work around the school, and I was teaching everything, coaching everything, sleeping in the gym some nights...and in those years they actually took a higher take-home pay than me." He also questioned whether some of the TEP students' early academic struggles would prevent them from becoming good teachers.

Over the next few years, however, as he taught, coached, and later served as an administrator in several northern schools, Innes, by working with TEP students in those schools, became a convert to the "NORTEP way." "I grew up a bit, perhaps, and saw a need for that sort of thing. I became a northerner to an extent," Innes says. "When I first moved to Northern Lights (School Division), the (teacher) turnover rate was absolutely horrendous, and immediately I didn't really care that much because I had a job, a decent job. But as I grew in the North, I started to realize that kids in the North are not going to receive an adequate education if folks like me come from Ontario...and stay for a year or two, and then they're gone, while Northern Lights is losing 180 to 200 teachers a year. I realized there had to be some sort of stability and this looked like a plan to bring some sort of stability into the school system."

"Growing up...if I had had different teachers every year for every subject who were brand new to the system and had come from somewhere else, I don't believe I would have had an adequate education. You need teachers who understood the curriculum of (in his case) northern Ontario, understood the dynamics.... So, for a bunch of outsiders to come into

something that's totally foreign to them, like northern Saskatchewan...and impose our values and thoughts on everybody and (assume that) somehow they'd be better people—that's the old missionary approach. Obviously it didn't work then."

After 19 years working in northern schools, Innes moved into a role he likely would never have considered back in his Green Lake days: field co-ordinator for NORTEP-NORPAC, placing and supervising students in their classroom or other field placements. He spent 9 years in that job before moving to his current position as Superintendent for Advanced Education and Employment for the northern region of Saskatchewan. He continues to be a fan of the original field placement program, as it showed students early on in their training whether they would enjoy their chosen career.

Innes feels that one of NORTEP-NORPAC's major contributions has been to teach northern young people that there is nothing wrong with being a northerner and that it is possible to succeed in your own community. "There have to be those folks around so the folks growing up can say, 'Hey, I can make it,'" he says. "If you lose everybody with ambition out of the community, there will be little development." He does see a risk of over stability, with no one choosing to pursue a career away from their community of origin and thus causing the idea pool to stagnate, and he thus stresses the importance of achieving a "healthy balance" of those who stay and those who move on. Overall, however, he sees TEP's impact on northern communities' financial situation and teacher turnover rates as positive.

Innes also sees a value in the cultural knowledge that TEP graduates bring to the classroom, recalling his own ignorance as a new teacher about northern Aboriginal lifestyles, and he appreciates the leadership development as well. "Leaders in the North have to have a nice balance of 'northern-ness' with education to make appropriate decisions...and NORTEP has provided the people to fit into that (leadership role) and move them along the road," he says.

Overall, "NORTEP has had a greater positive impact on the North than almost anything," Innes says. "I don't think there's a better model, a more successful model (for career preparation) in any stream in the North."





**Graduate Profile: Joe Daigneault**  
**Beauval**  
**NORTEP, class of 1995**

When retiree Joe Daigneault says he is "taking it easy," he means that other than chairing, directing, or sitting on several boards including the Northern Lights School Division, NORTEP-NORPAC, the Northern Sport Culture Recreation District, and Northwest Community Shareholders board, he now has time to put his feet up and watch a favorite TV show every morning.

After a rewarding and successful 30-year career, he is retired from his position as Regional Director of Northlands College Western Region. Daigneault is well-known in the North for his leadership in a number of organizations and he can look back and feel proud of his accomplishments.



**NORTEP provided supports for Joe Daigneault that helped him to overcome the obstacles.**

Daigneault has been at the forefront of important changes occurring in the North. "I consider myself a motivator and I take pride in seeing northerners succeeding," says Daigneault. "We managed to put so many people through post-secondary programs in northern Saskatchewan...Some people still approach me to say 'thank you for helping me,'" he says.

In the late 70s and early 80s, Daigneault served as Recreational Director for 7 years and later volunteered as Mayor in Beauval for 5 terms (15 years) in office. During that time and under his leadership, Daigneault says, "We managed to build a covered arena with artificial ice, a track, and four ball diamonds. Before that, we only had an outdoor skating rink."

In 1983, Daigneault began working short-term contracts with the Westside Community College now known as Northlands College. "I was asked to do programing for the college, assisting with setting up training programs for the region." When the director was able to see what I was capable of doing he hired me full-time.

In 1992, encouraged by the regional director, Daigneault applied to the NORTEP program and was accepted. He was granted educational leave from work at the College and he began his 4-year program at NORTEP.

Success in formal education was a challenge for Daigneault, who grew up at Fort Black located 5 km across the lake from Ile-a-La Crosse where the first language spoken is Michif, a mix of Cree and French. Being raised in a home where no English was spoken meant struggling throughout his grade school and post-secondary years due to a language barrier. However, NORTEP provided supports for Daigneault that helped him to overcome the obstacles. "If it wasn't for the one-on-one instructor support from 9 to 4, I probably would not have succeeded," says Daigneault. "English as a second language is very confusing, so many exceptions and rules."

Daigneault is thankful to his wife, who looked after everything, including their four children, while he attended the program. When Daigneault graduated NORTEP in 1995 with his B.Ed. degree, he became the first university graduate in his family of 14. But he isn't the last to graduate. Two of Daigneault's children have now graduated from NORTEP-NORPAC, and one has recently graduated with her master's degree. Daigneault believes that post-secondary

education isn't only an option in this day and age. "Before you didn't need to get a formal education because you could live off the land. Since that way of life has dwindled to nothing, people started to see that they had better get post-secondary education," he says.

"After I got my degree, I gained a new respect from folks," says Daigneault.

After graduating from NORTEP, Daigneault was able to move forward in his career: "Once I got my degree, the position of regional director came open I applied and I got the position," he says. As director, Daigneault worked at bringing specialized training to the North, such as university degrees, and trades and health sector training. "Now," he says, "it is much easier to access training in the North."

"My NORTEP degree helped me," says Daigneault. Without credentials, it was hard to be heard. For instance, "when I was at public meetings where people were gathering information on how to deliver programing, my ideas weren't given credibility; I was not heard. After I got my degree, I gained a new respect from those individuals," says Daigneault. Going to NORTEP also helped him develop more connections as well as getting involved with committees at the provincial level.

"An Elder-in-Residence would have been very helpful for me," says Daigneault.

Despite his own school experiences, Daigneault feels optimistic about formal education. "I'm feeling optimistic about Aboriginal history/content being integrated into K-12 and post-secondary schooling. Indigenization of programming is happening, and I'm optimistic about seeing an institution like NORTEP leading the way," he says. As a struggling student, Daigneault says he personally would have benefited from Indigenization of schooling. "An Elder-in-residence would have been very helpful for me," says Daigneault. As a trustee with Northern Lights School Division, he continues to work towards the realization of an Elder's program. "We talk about an Elder's program; we budget for it; we provide resources, but when I ask about the curriculum or something an Elder can use that can guide him or her when coming into a classroom, there is no consistent plan. Communities need it, especially where the culture is strong," says Daigneault. He believes NORTEP can play a valuable leadership role in the development of a consistent Elder's program. "It is a daunting task to get changes made to a Eurocentric curriculum to include the true history from the Aboriginal perspective. It will slowly happen as long as people such as me continue to advocate and promote change." Daigneault is not only looking back on a successful career, but he is also looking forward at

what still needs to be done. He is working towards removing geographic, cultural, and socio-economic barriers to education and employment. He especially values NORTEP-NORPAC for the impact it has on removing such barriers. "NORTEP-NORPAC truly brings quality post-secondary training to northern Saskatchewan, and has a positive socio-economic impact to the development of northern communities... The program is excellent, with good financial supports for students it will continue to train excellent professionals. NORTEP is a program with so little financial investment from the provincial government with major returns on the investment." Daigneault continues to offer leadership in addressing local and northern issues toward the betterment of the communities throughout the North.

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**Graduate Profile: Sue Carriere**  
**La Ronge**  
**NORTEP, class of 1996**

Going to NORTEP is just what Sue Carriere's family does. "NORTEP has a long list of my family (in its alumni records)," says Carriere. "More and more of my family are going through the education system and becoming educated, and it's just expected of them to go.... I was always going to university, no matter what."

Unlike TEP's earliest graduates, Carriere grew up in a northern school system where having local teachers was the norm—at first just one or two, such as Edna Durocher, a TEP student while Carriere's parents, Franklin and Penny Carriere, were living in Green Lake, and gradually more and more. These days, with a few exceptions such as at La Ronge's Pre-Cam School, where Carriere was teaching Grades K- 4 until January 2014, after stints in Sandy Bay, Pinehouse and Stony Rapids, the largest percentage of staff are northerners.

"That's good," says Carriere. "We want 'lifers.' The whole goal is to have lifers in the schools.... If they don't hire their own, who are they going to have?"



**Going to NORTEP is just what Sue Carriere's family does.**

TEP staff quickly diagnosed the reason for Carriere's previous academic problems: severe exam anxiety. She was placed in a class to learn how to write an exam, among other academic skills, "and that turned my whole education around," she says.

Even with family tradition backing her up, however, Carriere might not have made it either to or through NORTEP without some intervention. After struggling through high school, Carriere took a handful of arts and science classes. Then in 1991, at a friend's urging, she decided to try NORTEP.

She did not have the marks to be admitted to the fall semester, but the admission requirements changed that December, and she came in for the following semester as an extension student. TEP staff quickly diagnosed the reason for Carriere's previous academic problems: severe exam anxiety. She was placed in a class to learn how to write an exam, among other academic skills, "and that turned my whole education around," she says.

Without NORTEP's assistance, the perseverance of a group of older women—including her mother Penny and other TEP staff, and several of the students—who were determined to see her succeed, and several late-night study groups, Carriere is sure she would not have completed the program.

Carriere credits NORTEP with helping her to build both a career and a strong sense of her identity, especially as a northern Aboriginal person. "We (as students) were so close with each other...and we had each other to rely on, and I really became very proud of who I was and what I was doing, and I think that has helped me a lot," she says. "As a Métis person, you can fight a battle on both lines—the White and the Aboriginal, the treaty people. (At NORTEP) there was a group of us there, and we were accepted, and we were happy."

As a teacher, Carriere ensured that the same confidence in the value of an Aboriginal identity, modeled at NORTEP, echoed in her classroom. She found that her students loved to hear Cree spoken, and at one point, the father of two of her students who are of Dene heritage decided his kids' teacher should learn their language too, so he made a list of vocabulary words for her. "That says something right there—he felt comfortable enough to send me this list...so that I could practice using it, and the little girl that brought it to me was so excited, and bringing it to a Cree teacher, too. That says something right there."

With the support she received at NORTEP and the funding through the Northern Lights School Division, Carriere went on to graduate from the community-based master's program, offered locally through NORTEP in partnership with the University of Regina. Carriere found the program "pretty exciting...with lots of projects. Definitely worth the work and effort that attending every weekend for two years involved." While doing her masters, Carriere was seconded from Pre-cam Community School by the Ministry of Education to her current position as Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction.

Carriere says, "I am enjoying this side of the education field." In this capacity, she feels she is able to influence the system and represent the North. The connections she has made through her time at NORTEP assist her in her work: "NORTEP is very empowering" she says, "We all come from the North, and therefore, we have connections with people from all over the North, people who are not necessarily well represented. These NORTEP connections help with collaborations, building relationships, and developing First Nations and Métis strategies so that they are incorporated with authentic engagement." Carriere appreciates that she can "be the voice" for northern colleagues and communities who have become part of her professional learning community through NORTEP.

"The biggest impact (of NORTEP-NORPAC) of course is human resource development for northern people," Ray McKay, former Director of Continuing Education says. "Without the funding, without the supports built into the program, it would have been very difficult." NORTEP helped people to become professionals, "and then go back and use their expertise to help their own people," says McKay.

For his sister, Rita Lowenburg, a TEP graduate, "It was a wonderful stepping stone...because she was a single parent raising two kids," McKay says. "She got a degree through NORTEP, and then went on to get a master's degree, from being a secretary. Without a program like NORTEP, she would have had a very difficult time."

Living in a region that is geographically isolated from the larger population centres, northerners face socio-economic challenges that are foreign to people in those centres. Distance also makes it easier for governments to ignore northern needs, which is why McKay feels it is so important that the NORTEP-NORPAC board of governors be made up of northern elected officials who can negotiate with their counterparts in the provincial and federal governments. "You're out of sight, out of mind, and they (government) always want to treat you like they do everyone else in the country" when it comes to budgets, McKay says.

NORTEP-NORPAC has also brought a wage economy to the North, in that instead of northerners paying people from the south to provide services and then having them leave; the wages now stay in the North. "That should be true of all professions," McKay says. "NORTEP has made the biggest inroads into that, in the education area (by supplying teachers)."

With salaries staying in the community, "it helps (local) families raise their standard of living," agrees Chief, Roy Cheechum, whose Band, Clearwater River Dene Nation, is located just south of La Loche, a community with a high rate of unemployment. "(Teachers) bring a paycheque to their family, (and) their community, that they wouldn't otherwise have had," Cheechum explains.

Clearly, one of the most effective means of addressing poverty is through human resource development that creates access to wage and salaried careers. Moreover, given the recognized tendency for large urban populations to drain resources from rural, less populous, and more remote areas,<sup>32</sup> an intervention strategy worthy of consideration must be aimed not merely at economic development, but at development that is likely to be retained by the remote area (i.e., northern Saskatchewan). In this regard, nothing is more likely to have a beneficial impact than human resource development, especially when it can be demonstrated that the human resource has a distinct tendency to remain in the North. NORTEP-NORPAC represents precisely this sort of intervention strategy!

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<sup>32</sup>The well-known 'heartland—hinterland' thesis of economic analysis.



**Graduate Profile: Edith Kadachuk**  
**Cumberland House**  
**NORTEP, class of 1997**

NORTEP pushed Edith Kadachuk out of the nest and taught her how to fly.

Growing up, Kadachuk rarely (if ever) left her hometown of Cumberland House—although she and her siblings were always well looked after; her parents didn't have the money for travel. So moving away for post-secondary studies—first to Northlands College, to be trained as a counsellor (she worked in the school system for seven years), and then to NORTEP—was a stretch.

Once at NORTEP, Kadachuk found herself tested even further. She found a strong support system amongst her peers, and received a great deal of guidance and encouragement from the faculty, despite the fact that “they really made us really work hard. They gave us double the amount of work than was given at the University of Saskatchewan,” she recalls. “Even when I did my internship...they (fellow interns from the university) weren't required to do as much as I was required to do, in terms of workload in the classroom—assessments, programming, and just preparing.”

“Even though they were pushing us really hard, it was very beneficial for us in our professional growth,” Kadachuk says. “You don't think of it at the time, when they're giving you all this work, but when it's time to apply the practical experience and the knowledge, it comes.”

Kadachuk has had plenty of time to apply those skills—both academic and practical—in the last several years. After graduating in 1997, she returned to Cumberland House, where she taught both Grade 2 and middle years classes at the local First Nation's Nisto Awasisak School. Over the summer months, she took classes in special education, and more recently returned fulltime to her own studies, completing her MEd degree in early 2006. That fall, she re-located to Prince Albert to take on a contract as the Prince Albert Grand Council's special education consultant, travelling across the North on a regular basis, and meeting with administrators, teachers and students.

Aside from the workload, Kadachuk specifically remembers the help she received with honing her writing ability in her first year. “Even though I was frustrated a lot of the time, and I was a little annoyed by them...being hard on my written work, in the end I really appreciated it, and I've grown so much from that, and I'm still going to school because of it.” The combination of being pushed and supported at the same time allowed Kadachuk to thrive, building up her self-confidence and skills. She particularly remembers staff member, Rose Hegland, as someone to whom she could speak without reservation and know her outpourings would be kept private. “Just having her there (to talk to) gave me the strength to keep going,” Kadachuk says.



**NORTEP stretched and tested Edith Kadachuk, building both her professional skills and her self-confidence.**

Although northern students now have other educational options—her daughter is completing a nursing degree, after two years at PAC, and her son is going into electrical work—It (NORTEP-NORPAC) is a really good place for northern children to go,” Kadachuk says. She particularly appreciated the opportunity to study with other Cree speakers, and is also grateful for TEP and PAC’s impact on motivating northern kids to look at university education—in the North or outside—as a viable option.

“It’s made a positive impact on everything, in regards to the future for our children,” she says. “The modelling is so important. You can talk and talk, but if people are doing it, more and more people are going to do it, and follow through.”

“It’s made a positive impact on everything, in regards to the future for our children... The modelling is so important. You can talk and talk, but if people are doing it, more and more people are going to do it, and follow through.”

Plus, she says, “people (in the North) have become more knowledgeable. More education brings more knowledge—not only economic, but inter- and intra-personal especially. And then, that impacts the economics of the community.... Kids are starting to see more of the world than they used to, than what there is in Cumberland. So when kids are finishing (high) school, they’re not afraid to go somewhere else for school.”

## 15.2 “School is Do-able and Relevant”

NORTEP’s greatest impact on the education system has been to convince northern kids that school is both do-able and relevant to their lives, Ray McKay, former Director of Continuing Education, says. “Kids in their formative years have been allowed to learn at their own pace, and also take pride in their own culture.... It’s improved the system in that it allows kids to like school, and want to go to school in their formative years, and that’s where it starts, in primary. If you can motivate kids, if you can provide a program that they like, make it exciting and (be) enthusiastic, the rest they’ll do on their own, when they get into middle years and high school.”

In the TEP-influenced schooling environment, not only do kids learn to appreciate the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but they also are immersed in northern cultural appreciation. “NORTEP has created these (educational) leaders, and with the native studies and tailoring the program to the North, this (the local school) is where it just really comes back,” Ray McKay says. “And once you evaluate it, it has such a broad application to human resource development.... If you don’t have pride in your culture or your own language, your self-concept isn’t there, and then it becomes pretty easy to say, ‘Look, I’m worth nothing, it’s no use for me to go to school, I’m no good,’ and on and on.”

“At the community level, we’re producing more and more educated people, and we’re... taking ownership of our own community, and it’s very good for the kids, because they

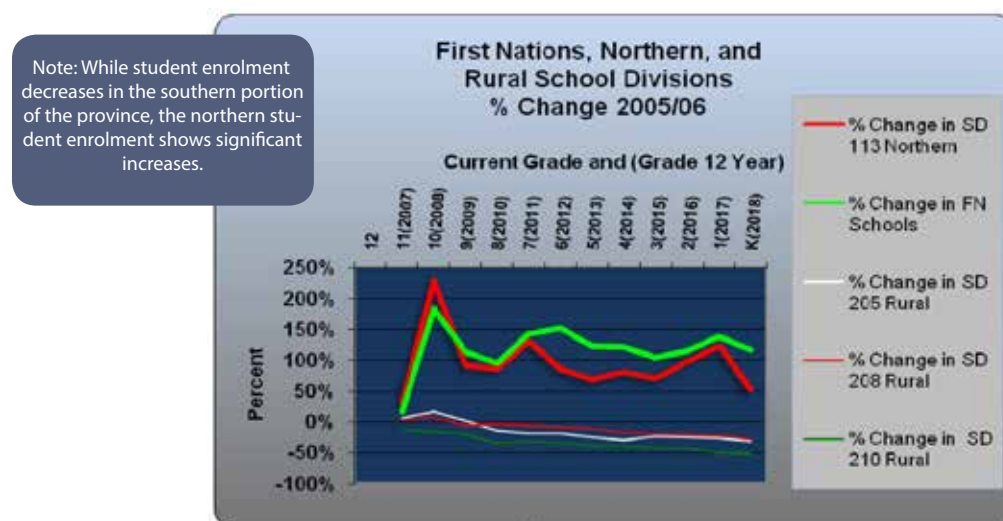
have their own Aboriginal role models,” says La Loche Mayor, Georgina Jolibois, who is also an instructor at the Dumont Technical Institute and the sister of a TEP graduate. “We’re developing capacity for everyone (through northern post-secondary education)... What education has done for me and other people is (create) that sense of ownership and having confidence about your own life and your family.”

## 16. ENCOURAGING EDUCATION INDICATORS IN THE NORTH

In terms of K-12 education, there are encouraging trends in the northern segment of the population. While school enrolments are slowly declining in the south, the northern school enrolments show dramatic increases. Increased school enrolments create increased demand for post-secondary education and training programs.

“Since 1998/99, total enrolments increased by 3% across the North. Most of the growth has been in middle years and high school enrolments and in First Nations schools.”<sup>33</sup>

The following chart illustrates the percent of change in student enrolments using a best-case scenario of 100% retention rate. The First Nations schools and schools of the Northern Region show significant increases, unlike the steady decline in the southern region. The enrolment increases in the North reveal the need to act now, to ensure that when secondary students graduate, there will be educational opportunities that link to the labour market.



See footnote for sources used to create graph<sup>34</sup>

- Declining numbers of southern Grade 12 students put pressure on the labour market.
- The falling off in enrolment for students who will graduate in 2018 shows a province-wide trend of a decrease in the number of children enrolled in Kindergarten in Saskatchewan.

<sup>33</sup>NSTNAR, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup>Sask Learning, Sask Learning Northern Region Office, Stats provided by INAC, Funding Services, Saskatchewan Regional Office.

***With increased school enrolments, there is a demand on both post-secondary education and training programs and services.***

- Saskatchewan Education Indicators 2004 show that northern students are taking more Grade 12 credits than a decade ago. Northern students also increased the average number of Grade 12 credits earned by almost two credits.<sup>35</sup>
- Further, there are more students from the northern region going on to university and technical schools than before. “An informal survey found that 33% of the 290 graduates of northern high schools in 2005 went on to university or technical training programs in the autumn—and most attended southern institutes.”<sup>36</sup>
- Another hopeful trend exists in the northern population. While the problem of an aging workforce is associated with a propensity for post-secondary-educated youth to leave the province (about 50 % of youth that are out-migrating have post-secondary education), the North tends to retain its post-secondary educated and growing youth population.
- “The projected increases in northern populations are [partially] due to Aboriginal peoples, who make up the majority of the northern population, being not nearly as likely to leave the North and the province, as others in the population.”<sup>37</sup>

These trends show there is increased interest in, and valuing of, education among northern Aboriginal people. They also speak to the necessity and urgency of action, of developing and building upon the successful and accessible foundations of NORTEP-NORPAC in order to meet the growing demand for post-secondary education.



<sup>35</sup> NSTNAR, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> NSTNAR.

<sup>37</sup> NTM, p. 37.



**Graduate Profile: Gail Gardiner-Lafleur**  
**Beauval**  
**NORPAC, class of 1994; NORTEP, class of 2002**

It's all about relationship, for Gail Gardiner-Lafleur. "If you are going to lead, your relationships with people are very important."

Gardiner-Lafleur is currently enjoying her seventh year as vice principal and teacher in Beauval, the small northern community in which she grew up. Her journey to this place in her career has meant losses and gains when it comes to relationships. Still, Gardiner-Lafleur wouldn't change a thing. "I learned so much [at NORTEP-NORPAC]," she says.

After finishing her NORPAC program in 1994, Gardiner-Lafleur began taking courses through Northlands College, but with a two-year-old child she needed more support and decided to move back home to Beauval where she found work as a teacher assistant at Valley View School (the same school in which she currently works). Through working with students who weren't fitting into the "normal" classroom, she developed a vision for herself as a teacher. After three years working as a TA, she decided to go to NORTEP. She says, "I needed to do this. I didn't want to feel stuck in Beauval; I knew I could contribute more by going to NORTEP." Gardiner-Lafleur felt empowered with her decision to go. "Choosing on my own, what I wanted to do; this was one of the first steps of freedom," says Gardiner-Lafleur.



**For Gail Gardiner-Lafleur,  
life, education, leadership...  
it is all about relationship**

**"If I didn't have the support of classmates at NORTEP, I would have returned home. The staff was also supportive, offering assistance and resources... We became a family!"**

At NORTEP, Gardiner-Lafleur found the support of friends and staff enough to help her get through the program and the life difficulties that came her way while a student. "If I didn't have the support of classmates at NORTEP, I would have returned home. The staff was also supportive, offering assistance and resources... We became a family!" Gardiner-Lafleur's immediate family was also a great support. She knows the importance of family relationships in life. She had learned from her mother that "family is the glue that keeps you together through hard times."

After graduating from NORTEP, Gardiner-Lafleur worked for the Churchill Learning Centre for a couple of years. However, she didn't feel that she was finished with her education. She decided to go to university, this time in the South. Again, this wasn't easy, as a single mom with children, but Gardiner-Lafleur knew she would regret it if she didn't. Gardiner-Lafleur says, "I needed to know what university was like, how to be in a bigger building and drink coffee." Her experience in the South was "way different," she says. "You could get lost in the



crowd." However, her determination and foundation from NORTEP saw her through. She says, "For me it was good [to go to the U of S] because I had a good basis from NORTEP and my parents. If I went there my first year I might not have."

When she finished her Arts degree, Gardiner-Lafleur was hired with the Northern Lights School Division as a teacher. In her classroom, she works hard to establish a safe learning environment, which means she helps her students deal with relational issues when they arise. "I try not to let problems fester in the classroom; I help the students repair and work on relationships. I say, 'instead of being upset about it, how can we make it better.' I help them engage in difficult conversations."

Gardiner-Lafleur's philosophy of education has been shaped by the authentic learning in her own life. "When we were growing up," she says, "my family was in to fishing, snaring, blueberry picking, and small game hunting. I got very excited about these [activities]. Now, I take the kids out of the school building for walks in nature and around the community, and they talk and engage with me." Gardiner-Lafleur began to use these outdoor experiences to teach her lessons. She would call her parents and tell them what the lesson would be, and ask them where she should go with the lesson. They would tell her to look for it in specific locations. In this way, learning became authentic and practical, and relationships grew. "I'm still in contact with these kids; they still remember the lessons. They will say, 'remember the bugs?'" Gardiner-Lafleur says, "That's real learning, and that was the way I learned with my parents and family members. When I went to NORTEP, that was how NORTEP was, too, very practical, more engaging. Real."

In 2007, Gardiner-Lafleur decided, yet again, to go back to school. She took on the challenge of completing her Master's of Education in Curriculum Development through the community-based program offered at NORTEP in partnership with the University of Regina. "I was going to La Ronge on weekends, working full-time during the week, a single parent again, with a newborn baby." Again her family helped her through. "My auntie stayed with me in La Ronge and Beauval, to help with my kids," Gardiner-Lafleur explains.

When she completed her Masters in 2009, Gardiner-Lafleur began a new career in administration, taking on a principal's position in Cold Bay. But this meant she was away from her own children too much. She then applied to transfer to Beauval, also applying for an administrative position that opened up in Beauval at the same time. She returned to Beauval as a half time vice principal and half time teacher. Now she feels she has the perfect mix, "I like that I get to engage with students and be a leader, demonstrating leadership skills for students. I hear both sides, staff and students, and try to figure out how we can improve," she says.

With so much experience in life and in education, Gardiner-Lafleur has a lot of wisdom to offer her students. "I've been in school all my life," Gardiner-Lafleur says. "I use my personal narratives to help teach and lead. My stories become teaching opportunities." She tells students, "If I can make a difference, you can make a difference."

**Graduate Profile: Barry Kimbley**  
**Beauval**  
**NORTEP, class of 2003**

Barry Kimbley didn't start out with the desire to become a teacher. He went to NORPAC to do an arts degree after he graduated, but left the program early to work in the mines. However, after beginning a family, Kimbley decided he needed another path. "I was away from family for half the month. I had a young son at the time." Further, "I needed something more meaningful," he says. Thus, Kimbley applied and was hired for an Educational Assistant (EA) position at Valley View School in Beauval.



While an EA, Kimbley was responsible for sitting with the students in the time out room. He recalls, "I would sit and talk with the kids. I had lots of success with that; eventually they didn't need to leave the classroom." Kimbley attributes his success with students to his own educational experiences: "I enjoyed working with students, getting that connection with them, knowing that 'yeah, I know where you are coming from. I've been there; I've had my ups and downs in education.' They actually used to put me into the time out room," he says. Kimbley believes, "Relationship is critical to keeping kids in school," and that is what he works towards with the students in his care.

**Barry Kimbley says, "NORTEP is like winning a lottery, ...You gain so much; the rewards are bountiful. It's an extended family, and you walk away with something life-changing."**

Kimbley's experiences as an EA inspired him to go to NORTEP to become a teacher. At NORTEP, he found a new family. Kimbley still speaks of his NORTEP family in the present tense. "We consider ourselves a family, supporting one another... We are a group, and if we want to continue to be in the group, we need to support each other." This ideal "was instilled by NORTEP," Kimbley says. "NORTEP is like winning a lottery... You gain so much; the rewards are bountiful. It's an extended family, and you walk away with something life-changing."

After graduating in 2003, Kimbley taught in Pinehouse for two years, but then got a position in his home community of Beauval. In 2009, he decided to do his Masters of Educational Administration through a partnership between NORTEP and the University of Saskatchewan. His superintendent Betty Ann Thunderchild was influential in this decision. "She always believed in me; she 'smacked me in the head' and told me to get my masters," Kimbley says.

That Kimbley chose a career in education is a surprise to some of his former teachers. As a student, he had been, in his words, "constantly thrown out of school... I needed a few teachers that actually knew about kids... Relationships with teachers were critical to my experience." Last year, Kimbley called a former teacher who had demonstrated her belief in him, "I said that I have my master's now and I'm a principal. The phone dropped."

Now the principal at Jans Bay School in northern Saskatchewan, Kimbley has many ideas about what makes a good administrator based on his own experiences. "Now I'm an

administrator, I use what I remember," he says. Kimbley recalls how many ideas he had as a student to make the school better, and he now tries to ensure students and teachers have a voice through distributed leadership. "It's the buy in; everybody needs that," he says. One improvement that Kimbley is excited about is a multi-purpose cement pad project in the community. "There wasn't a facility for students to enjoy so we got together as a community and did fund-raising, [we are] starting construction in spring."

As for the future, Kimbley plans to stay in the North, "It's not heaven, but on clear days, you can see it," Kimbley jokes. "The work up here isn't done. No matter what, I'd love to be a superintendent...As an administrator, I'm still a teacher, still in the trenches, so I can still relate to what teachers are concerned about. As a superintendent, I would work on policy, bringing the voice of teachers to the policy-making level."

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**Graduate Profile: David Ruelling**  
**La Loche**  
**NORTEP, class of 2004**

While most northern kids his age found their professional role models at the front of the classroom, David Ruelling had only to look across the dinner table. His mother Mary, one of NORTEP's first graduates, continues to inspire young people in the La Loche area as an arts educator at Clearwater River Dene School, where David now teaches as well. "She showed what the teaching life can be like," Ruelling says of his mother. "It's not easy, but it's worthwhile."



**David Ruelling is a proud second-generation NORTEP student. (Photo from archives)**

Despite his mother's influence—and that of his father Bruce, a long-time Northern Lights School Division NORTEP-NORPAC board member—it took the younger Ruelling a while to discover that he, too, had a passion for education. He did a year at PAC because that was where his friends were heading after high school, then came back home to La Loche for a few years before deciding to enrol again, this time in the TEP program. As with his experience at PAC, he found the professors to be friendly, respectful, helpful, and willing to answer all of the then-shy, yet eager, student's questions.

NORTEP allowed Ruelling to experiment with classroom teaching while gradually building up his knowledge of professional methodologies. His experience fortified his self-confidence, and facilitated the development of strong friendships with his peers and professors.

He also found a new sense of direction. "What really stood out was how much I enjoyed teaching. I didn't really realize it until I got into it," Ruelling says. "Without (TEP) I would probably still be in the community, without a degree and without something to be proud of. It made quite a significant change in my life."

Like many northerners, Ruelling wasn't keen on the idea of moving to a city the size of Saskatoon to pursue post-secondary education, but La Ronge seemed like a workable alternative. "I'm the type of person who enjoys a little adventure, taking on a challenge," he says. He's carried that attitude with him after his graduation as well; in the first three years of his career, he taught a modified Grade 6 class, physical education and a split classroom between special education and nursery/preschool students.

He has also worked hard at enhancing Dene language education at Clearwater. Despite the fact that Dene is commonly spoken in the La Loche area, many people—including Ruelling himself, prior to his TEP studies—can neither read nor write Dene. "That's the last piece of our culture that we're holding onto," Ruelling says. "Through reading and writing, we transfer that knowledge to the children."

***TEP-trained teachers are also transferring something else to their students: a belief in their potential for great accomplishment.***

"I'm glad I came back to my community, because it shows that you can leave and come back with a degree, and still remain in the community," Ruelling says. "They see community members with their (professional) successes, and they see them working in the community. It's building pride."

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**Graduate Profile: Morris Cook**  
**La Ronge**  
**NORTEP, class of 2004**

Morris Cook's educational journey has given him a unique perspective. From age 7 until 13, Cook spent most of his time on the trap line with his family. When his father started working for a local housing authority, Cook was then able to stay in school. However, with his first language being Cree, and no English spoken at home, and with many years of living on the trap line, Cook had some catching up to do. "I had to learn everything in a very short period of time. I was blessed with a good group of people who understood where I came from," he says.



**With three degrees, Morris Cook has journeyed far from his educational beginnings.**

Cook attended a band school and there found the support he needed to succeed despite gaps. "I had a teacher named Robert Nickerson who made the difference. He was charged with educating the "remedial" students (trap line kids). He believed in me, and told me I could do anything and that I could catch up. And, I did, with great diligence." What mattered, believes Cook, was that he himself believed he could do it. "I did eventually excel, graduating with a Grade 12." Cook also had a work ethic instilled

by his parents: "My parents worked hard each and every day. The paradigms for formalized education were already there, giving me skills for learning in a different way."

When he graduated from high school, Cook headed south for his education, receiving a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Regina. He was able to overcome the obstacle of relocating because he had friends going to university in the South. It was a big change for Cook, but he enjoyed his experience with what was then called the Saskatchewan Federated Indian College (SFIC). "SFIC was a huge piece of cultural fabric of the U of R. There I met First Nations people from across Canada."

With a B.A. achieved, Cook headed back home to the North. He then decided to go to NORTEP, to get a B.Ed. degree. "I was starting a family at the time, working for my dad, but I knew I needed to do something more for my child and wife. I decided to become a teacher. NORTEP was so close." With his experiences in the North and the South, Cook is able to compare his experiences: "At Regina, it was an individual struggle. I managed to build small communities, but the supports were not always there. I had to source them out. NORTEP had everything. It is a collegial-minded institution. Teachers are on real time and the classes are not so large. At the U of R, professors didn't know you. At NORTEP, we were on a first name basis. If you weren't doing well, they would pull you aside to see how you could become successful." One aspect of NORTEP that Cook most values is the field experiences. "I can't put a value on them," he says. "We did a lot of time in the field, right from the beginning." Cook also values the quality of research in the NORTEP program. "It is a library-driven program. Now we can get most journals on the internet, and a lot through ERIC; still, the library is well resourced," he says.

Immediately following graduation, Cook started teaching, and because of his university experience, he served as a post-secondary counsellor. It wasn't long before Cook decided to take his Master's degree from the University of Saskatchewan. This meant he was travelling every second weekend and spending his summer in Saskatoon. After finishing his master's degree, Cook became a vice principal and then a principal at the band school in which he spent his elementary years. Cook then became the Director of Education for Lac La Ronge Indian Band. However, he soon decided to go back to being a principal because he felt he was more effective as an instruction leader, and could bring about change that is more meaningful.

Cook is passionate about education: "I got into education to help children the way teachers had helped me. I wanted to give back. We have a debt not only to the future, but also to the past. We can only give what we have to offer. As we go along the path of life, we acquire skills and knowledge. We are able to transfer that into the younger generation. That is education. Education is about life: We live by example, lead by example, treating youth with kindness and respect. Some see education as only happening in schools, but it happens everywhere."

A major concern for Cook is the alarming rate of Indigenous languages being lost. Cook is grateful for a Cree-speaking home that allowed him to be a Cree speaker, but many have lost their Indigenous languages. Cook believes there is need for more certified teachers who are



"By having the NORTEP program here, it gives me hope that the language will be considered a priority. We will always need the teachers provided by the NORTEP program," he says.

fluent in Cree. "By having the NORTEP program here, it gives me hope that the language will be considered a priority. We will always need the teachers provided by the NORTEP program," he says. Cook would like to see the language program broaden. "The NORTEP program is truly unique; it is not replaceable. It has to stay—to

turn lives around, to transform the lives of northerners, and to pass on knowledge and love for education. We do it differently because we have been through the same struggles and experiences. No one else can provide that education for the North," says Cook.

With three degrees, Cook has journeyed far from his educational beginnings. And yet, his journey has kept him close to home. Being from the community allows Cook to inspire hope in the youth of his community. "Being a northerner, being right from the community, means they know my family, where I come from. They believe 'if this guy can do it, then I can do it.' ...I tell my story to kids all the time. Cook has seen students go on to succeed and later approach him, "some are journeymen mechanics and plumbers, some have gone to university...Those are the evidence of impact," he says.

Cook isn't finished his educational journey: He plans to do his PhD. "My long term plan is to teach in a college, to do some more teaching and research, and to pass on my experiences of growing as a scholar," he says. Education for Cook is about life and about passing the knowledge, skills and values on to future generations.

"The NORTEP program is truly unique; it is not replaceable. It has to stay—to turn lives around, to transform the lives of northerners, and to pass on knowledge and love for education. We do it differently because we have been through the same struggles and experiences. No one else can provide that education for the North," says Cook.



**Graduate Profile: Aaron Fosseneuve**  
**Cumberland House**  
**NORTEP, class of 2006**

Being a 21st century learner is just one of many educational experiences and contexts in Aaron Fosseneuve's journey.

NORTEP proved to be a financially feasible option for Fosseneuve to pursue his post-secondary education, so he applied and was accepted. He values his experience at NORTEP, especially the family he found there. "I gained a family that I would have never had if I hadn't gone, a northern family...lifelong friends...NORTEP gave me an appreciation for different cultures within northern Saskatchewan," he says. Further, Fosseneuve appreciated the cultural sensitivity and learning supports offered to northerners and he enjoyed the focus of NORTEP. "The program was focused; you knew you were becoming a teacher. Everything was geared towards becoming an effective teacher in northern Saskatchewan," he says.



**Aaron Fosseneuve says, "I want to make a difference in Aboriginal education—where, when, and how is to be determined."**

Immediately after graduating with his B.Ed., Fosseneuve was hired as a teacher at Charlebois Community School, where he has been teaching for the past 10 years. He is now the vice principal, and is taking his master's degree through Queen's University. While Fosseneuve finds online learning a challenge, he also sees that it is helping him become a more sensitive teacher of today's students: "Online [learning] is more intense...you need self-regulating skills. You do a lot of your own teaching, reading, and watching videos. That is the way of a 21st century learner. It gives me a better understanding of students who are taking online classes," says Fosseneuve.

Fosseneuve is passionate about his work with students; he is a strong believer in experiential learning as a motivator for success. "I love working with students, love igniting that fire of going somewhere. I love building more capacity in our students through experiences," he says. His own experiences while living in the South taught him about the value of learning to adapt to different locations. "My time in Saskatoon was challenging. I had to adjust socially, mostly, but this experience developed my philosophy of education...I am trying to build confidence in more contexts in students...I've taken students to multiple places in Canada, but also to Europe, Hollywood, and New York...I tell them 'you might be the next Broadway star, or the next sports star.' I never know what I might ignite in my students."

As for his plans, Fosseneuve has found his life "hard to predict." He says, "If you had asked me 10 years ago if I would be living in Cumberland, I would have said 'no way.'" Now, he sees living in the North as an opportunity to engage with his passion: Aboriginal education. "I want to make a difference in Aboriginal education—where, when, and how is to be determined." For

now, his work in Charlebois Community School is going in exciting directions with a bilingual Cree program and a pilot model called Finding Their Voice, which has been transformational with Maori people in New Zealand. Fosseneuve is hopeful that this program will bring about success for northern Aboriginal students. "I want to see student success," he says, "Aboriginal doctors, lawyers, electricians, actors, dancers, football players...I want to see success all around!"

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**Graduate Profile: Ashley Petite**  
**Buffalo Narrows**  
**NORTEP, class of 2007**

Even though a self-described "overachiever" with exceptional grades in high school, Ashley Petite never thought that teaching was for her. Her guidance counselor, however, thought teaching was a good option: "My guidance counselor was persistent with my application to NORTEP, even after I expressed that I had no desire to become a teacher." The counselor's persistence paid off. "I applied because of the persistence of my guidance counselor and a few teachers in my high school in Buffalo Narrows; the teachers were graduates of the program and believed I would be successful as well," says Petite.



**As a young mother, Ashley Petite knew that education was the way to a better life for her and her children.**

As a young mother of two children, both under the age of two, "I knew that education would be the way to a better life for us," says Petite. The financial supports would allow her to get a degree in the North, without needing to find money for tuition and living expenses. Petite applied, and was accepted, to the NORTEP program.

Once at NORTEP, Petite says, "I had the greatest experience...the learning environment and support system of the professional team there is phenomenal." This environment proved necessary for Petite's successful transition to post-secondary education. Even after graduating high school with a 98% average, Petite found university studies challenging. "University is an entirely different realm than high school courses. I was so accustomed to getting 90s that when I was receiving marks that were in the 70s and 60s, a feeling of defeat and doubt started to creep in," she says. However, the supports and human resources available at NORTEP enabled Petite to strive for academic success and to reach her full potential. She now holds a double major in English and Native Studies (now Indigenous Studies), and has gone on to complete her Master's of Education through a community-based program offered at NORTEP in partnership with the University of Regina.

Petite attributes her educational success to the learning foundations developed while at NORTEP-NORPAC, "I never would have held the confidence in my own capabilities had it not been for my firm foundation created by the faculty and staff of NORTEP-NORPAC," she

says. Later, when Petite took classes at the U of S, she found she was competitive in that environment as well, receiving the same marks as at NORTEP. She also found that she had courage to speak out in class during discussions. "I would not have had the courage to do this without my NORTEP training," she says.

Petite has now been teaching for six years. Despite her initial lack of desire to be a teacher, she has developed a passion for her work as an educator. "It is an amazing, yet humbling feeling when you, as an educator, are the difference in a student's life. As a teacher, an educator in Northern Saskatchewan, I make the difference. That is the most powerful tool as a teacher, there are many extraordinary teachers that go unrecognized and without public acknowledgement. They go above and beyond because they genuinely care and want the very best for those individuals that grace their classrooms every day," she says.

What Petite enjoys most is helping struggling learners to persevere with the support of resources. She teaches, "opportunities arise as a result of a positive attitude and strong work ethic." She passes on the confidence she gained at NORTEP to her students: "I especially enjoy providing students with different opportunities where they self-actualize, in regard to their learning and growth. With English specifically, I want students to see the beauty and power of words. Education is the path to success and the more experience they have with the written and spoken word, the better their chances for success in their chosen career paths," she says. After achieving her master's degree, Petite applied for her dream job, a senior English position with the Ile-a-la Crosse School Division, and was successful. "I now have a Grade 12 homeroom, teaching high school English and other humanities courses—my dream job!" Petite still has many dreams for her future. "I would absolutely love to be a First Nations/Métis Education consultant. This would be my ultimate 'dream' job," she says. Petite would also like to broaden her education by taking courses in youth counselling services. Then there is her love of writing. "I would like to begin working on writing projects and become published within the next five years," she says.

Petite is now a strong advocate for NORTEP: "Post-secondary education is not simply an option anymore or a farfetched pipe dream for northern students. It is attainable and is the plan for post graduation life for many students. The great thing is they can now study and obtain university degrees in the North. They no longer have to leave home or uproot their families. This is an important aspect regarding the success of Northerners, their families and prosperity of Aboriginal peoples in the province."

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## **Graduate Profile: April Chiefcalf**

**Regina**

**NORTEP, class of 2010**

April Chiefcalf's educational path has been a bit like an odyssey, with lots of twists and turns. When she graduated high school, Chiefcalf went east to Toronto, to complete a BA in anthropology and women's studies. However, she was disappointed by the lack of content on Aboriginal people in the program. So in 1991, Chiefcalf travelled west to Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) in Saskatoon to achieve yet another BA in Indigenous studies.



**April Chiefcalf's educational path has been a bit like an odyssey, with lots of twists and turns.**

After graduating with her second BA, Chiefcalf worked with SIFC in Saskatoon, and she began her master's degree at the University of Saskatchewan in educational foundations. While a student, she received a teaching fellowship, which led her into teaching Indigenous studies. What eventually brought her north, was teaching a course in La Ronge for SIFC through an extension program. While there, Chiefcalf dropped off her resume at NORTEP, and they responded with an offer.

Chiefcalf started out as a full-time instructor at NORTEP, teaching Native studies and women's studies. Living and teaching in the North was a challenge at first. "I was disadvantaged in terms of my biases and prejudices when I went to the North. I had to learn quickly to change my perspective, to adapt," Chiefcalf says. However, diverse perspectives are something Chiefcalf appreciates, especially in the North: "I like the North; I like the people. There is diversity in the North—there is no such thing as a northern perspective--there are diverse perspectives."

When she completed her master's program, Chiefcalf decided to go backwards, and do her B.Ed. at NORTEP. This experience gave her another new perspective: "Because I came from the South and studied in southern universities, I had a different way of doing things. I was used to doing a lot of reading and writing, a lot of theory, fifteen hours per week of class... It was difficult to adjust, but made me a better instructor, because when you are on the other side of things, and a student sitting there all day, you realize what can and can't be done. As an instructor on the other side, I didn't realize things like how much information a person can take in. Since then, I've incorporated more interacting in my courses--students can't just be sitting all day." With the B.Ed. completed, Chiefcalf began teaching education courses at NORTEP.

Chiefcalf likes to emphasize diverse perspectives as she teaches her courses at NORTEP: "In my classes, I really encourage students to look at things from different perspectives. I invite them to see things in ways contrary to the dominant discourse," she says. One of the



metrics Chiefcalf uses to determine her own impact has to do with one of the experiences she promotes in her classes: "I have been encouraging my students to attend the Sisters in Spirit Walks every year. While some students don't enjoy the experience, the majority say, 'thank you for exposing me to these issues,'" says Chiefcalf. "What is rewarding for me is when our graduates who are teaching in the community come back to these walks with their elementary students. Then I know I've made a difference."

In 2012, Chiefcalf began a Ph.D. program through the University of Regina. In her dissertation, she is looking at racialized and gendered subjectivities from a feminist post structural perspective in a northern high school. Her career took yet another turn when in 2014, she took on the role of Program Coordinator. While this wasn't the direction she had planned, it was a direction that she felt necessary for NORTEP. Chiefcalf is concerned about the erosion of programs such as NORTEP. The neoliberal audit culture is a concern: "It values the economy more than people and looks the other way for business, when people are harmed," she says. "If NORTEP were to disappear, what would be the impact? We wouldn't have northern people teaching in northern communities. Very few people would leave the North to get their B.Ed. It would undo years and years of work if NORTEP were to disappear."

Chiefcalf understands that northerners who become teachers are a great advantage: "They have an interest in maintaining northern perspectives, languages, and cultures; they tend to stay, forming relationships with students and the community."

"We get lots of teacher from the South who have graduated and it's their first year of teaching, and they can't get a job. They come and stay one to three years, and experience terrible culture shock." This high turnover impacts students. "Ultimately, that child in the northern community is what NORTEP-NORPAC is about: What kind of education experience are they getting?"

For now, Chiefcalf's odyssey seems to have brought her home to the North. She plans to stay while she completes her PhD, and then she hopes to do research and to publish her work.



**Graduate Profile: Thomas Sierzycki**  
**La Ronge**  
**NORTEP, class of 2010**

His Worship Thomas Sierzycki may be young but that doesn't mean he lacks in experience. At age 18, Sierzycki was elected to Municipal Council for the Town of La Ronge, and at age 21, while a NORTEP student, he was elected mayor of La Ronge. He was re-elected for another 4-year term as mayor in 2012. In 2014, at age 26, Sierzycki squeezed in a few more accomplishments: He was nominated as the Saskatchewan Party candidate for Cumberland; he finished his Masters' degree in Northern Governance and Development from the University of Saskatchewan; and he even found time to get married. Sierzycki's achievements have been so remarkable that in 2011 he was identified in Maclean's June 5 issue as one of 11 promising young Canadians, in 2012 he was awarded the Queen's Jubilee medal for Youth Achievement, and in 2013 was named one of CBC Saskatchewan's Top 40 Under 40.



**Thomas Sierzycki believes that education the key for constructing a stronger North, and programs like NORTEP are moving the North in that direction.**

However, Sierzycki's life has not been without difficulty. He was born and raised in La Ronge, but his parents had emigrated from Poland, so his first language is Polish. Learning in a second language has its own challenges, but Sierzycki found "a great community-based approach to education" in the North. His education experiences, including NORTEP, were positive and he was "motivated to become a good teacher and to be there for students" like his teachers had been. His experience being raised in a northern minority culture has made Sierzycki sensitive to the issues of culture and language in education. "Every culture needs to practice its culture, values, and beliefs," he says.

Sierzycki lost both parents at an early age, his mother first in 2009, while he was a student at NORTEP, and his father in 2014. These losses deepened Sierzycki's commitment to the North: "I received tremendous support at NORTEP. They even found a teacher who would take me into the classroom [for internship] while my mom was sick." NORTEP made concessions to support him through this difficult time. The support he received from the community and NORTEP moved Sierzycki: "When I decided to stay in La Ronge, I wanted to give back to our community, to make a difference...The North has assisted me personally and professional in becoming who I am today," he says.

Immediately after graduating from NORTEP with his B.Ed., Sierzycki was hired to teach in a First Nations Band school. He taught one semester and he was offered continuation, but his workload as Mayor was a priority for him. Even though Sierzycki is not teaching in a classroom, he still considers his role as mayor as educational: "I consider myself a teacher, but not a teacher, not directly in the classroom. My B.Ed. taught me the ability to see things holistically, not just through one lens. It also proved to me that I liked university, enough to pursue my master's."

As mayor, Sierzycki lobbies for educational supports, especially for funding and opportunities for Pre-K children. "We need to do better in early childhood development. There are staggering statistics in the North—overcrowding, addictions, social issues—we need to ensure there is more funding for more Pre-K opportunities," he says. Sierzycki credits NORTEP for inspiring this passion: "After NORTEP, I really started to consider this important, listening to people of various communities, I really saw the strong connection between what we were learning and reading about and the issues people were experiencing in the North."

Sierzycki has a heart for education and believes his work in politics can support education. "We as leaders have to work together to ensure that opportunities for learning are there for all kids, no matter what challenges they are facing." Sierzycki's goal is to build strong and healthy communities and he believes education is critical. "I plan on building a strong and healthy community whether that includes provincial politics or not...I'm going to keep on building strength in the North," he says. "Education is the key to constructing a stronger northern Saskatchewan future. Programs like NORTEP are assisting and moving us in that direction. The more trained and education people with skills to live healthy and constructive lives, the better."

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### **Graduate Profile: Roxanne McKenzie** **Stanley Mission** **NORTEP, class of 2012**

Though Roxanne McKenzie grew up in the North, and chose to go to NORTEP to complete her B.Ed. because it was "convenient and close to home," her career, however, has taken her south, to Saskatoon.

McKenzie teaches in a uniquely designed Cree bilingual school with Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, where she teaches Cree language and culture.

While McKenzie doesn't identify as a fluent Cree speaker (which to her means "speaking Cree all day"), she was raised speaking Cree, and attended a band school where Cree language and culture components were offered daily. She also received Cree language and culture education at NORTEP. "Instructors [at NORTEP] are northern-based; they interact with a large population of Cree students and are sensitive to residential school experiences, encouraging us to use our language, and to match outcomes to our culture," says McKenzie. Development and affirmation of language and culture has become McKenzie's passion.

When McKenzie discovered that there was a school in Saskatoon in which the philosophy and mission statement was for students to have a foundation with language and culture while



**Roxanne McKenzie has a passion for developing and affirming Cree language and culture.**



learning mainstream curriculum her interest was piqued and she called the principal to find out more. She liked what she heard, applied for a position, and was hired.

Being from the North doesn't disadvantage McKenzie at all. She says, "I offer a different perspective, offer it to our own teaching staff and students...My traditional upbringing is very different from Plains Cree culture, but the values and teachings are the same." McKenzie believes her NORTEP education prepared her for teaching in all kinds of locations. "My training, at NORTEP has helped prepare me in my teaching career by gaining teaching experiences, during our pre-internship and internship. These experiences allowed for engagements within the classroom and interactions with students. The program offered new and innovative teaching strategies that we had opportunity to implement in our classes. The NORTEP schedule design is ideal for preservice teachers because the course content coincided with required learning targets, and there was direct correlation between teachings we gained from our instructors and those teaching we carried into our own classrooms. I felt very comfortable in my own classroom, because of the training I had received at NORTEP," she says.

As a teacher, McKenzie loves "how students love to learn, and when they acquire a new skill, how proud they are of themselves." She enjoys seeing the success of the school, as more parents from a mix of cultures send their children to the school. "Last year, we had primary years mapped out to see where our students come from...They came from 53 different neighbourhoods!" she says.

Her NORTEP degree was only the beginning as McKenzie has now enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan for a Master's in Educational Administration. She hopes to expand her horizons across Canada. "I want to move from coast to coast, to know what is going on with Indigenous cultures." She dreams of improving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit educational outcomes as an administrator, eventually perhaps becoming involved with policy-making. "I would like to investigate and explore how other provinces retain and nourish their Indigenous peoples language and culture, and also how those Indigenous ways of knowing are implemented throughout their curricula."

Update: Since conducting this interview in August 2015, McKenzie's circumstances have changed. She has now relocated back north, to be closer to family who are in need of her support. She has accepted a Grade 7 position in a school and she says she will continue to implement Cree language and culture throughout her learning outcomes.



## 17. NORTEP-NORPAC: EXPANDING NORTHERN WORLDVIEWS

### 17.1 Observations of Ray McKay

Ray McKay is a born-and-bred northerner. Descended from fur traders and trappers, he was born on a trap line on the Churchill River system. He completed most of his early education in La Ronge, and then began his career in the aviation industry. After several years in Alberta—and a nearly completed master's degree in education—McKay returned home to northern Saskatchewan in 1979 to work as Director of Continuing Education for the provincial government.

"To this day I haven't finished that master's thesis," McKay admits. "I always said, 'Well, I'll take a year off,' and it never worked out, because I got really busy with the work." That work included 17 years with Saskatchewan Education, three years as the first Deputy Minister of the Department of Northern Affairs, working with then-Cabinet Minister, Keith Goulet, and 7 years as CEO of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band's business arm, Kitsaki Management.

As Director of Continuing Education, McKay had numerous opportunities to interact with NORTEP, but he also saw its impact first-hand, both as a La Ronge school board member and as a brother, father and uncle to four TEP graduates. His sister, Rita Lowenberg, completed the program; her daughters, Sharon Ross and Anne Calladine, (the school's 2006 valedictorian) are both teaching in La Ronge schools. Ray's son, Nolan McKay, studied at PAC before deciding to follow his parents into the teaching profession.

Both as a member of the Northern Education Task Force and as the provincial government's top education official in the North, McKay was uniquely positioned to help when TEP's board of governors saw a need to expand their program offerings beyond the teaching profession.

"When you run a pilot program, you've got to be sure that there will be some clear benefits from that program before you invest a lot of public money into it. But we were so convinced that we already had a vehicle—NORTEP—and when the former Director, Mike Tymchak, decided to pilot NORPAC, I think it was around \$290,000...that I approved here for Mike to run this pilot," McKay recalls. "He was the expert, and he made it work....Some of the people at the universities didn't even realize we were running this (PAC program)—the different committees, the bureaucracy in the universities that we were supposed to have approval from before it would be sanctioned by the university. In the end, of course, northern people said, 'Yes, we want it, that's what we want. This enriches NORTEP. It was a clear need.... It was the right decision, but I was in the hot seat for a while. But if you don't take risks, you don't get anything done.'"

"We wanted richer offerings for the NORTEP student," he explains. "A liberal arts education program is important, and if you want to go out into the world, that's when you really notice it. Our world is huge now, with the explosion of knowledge, and the communication ability we have, and the travel and so on." As a child growing up in northern Saskatchewan, he says, he barely knew what a telephone was; today, his grandchildren are playing games on-line with kids on the other side of the world.



TEP and PAC have played a key role in expanding northerners' worldview, while also assisting them in keeping pace with the changes in their world. By educating northerners and then sending them back into the schools to teach, "it's accelerated educational development so much more in the North," McKay says. As Chief John Snow, of the Stony tribe in Alberta, used to say, 'We want the best of both worlds. We want the best of the White man's culture, mainstream culture, but we want to retain the best of our culture as well—we want to retain the language, we want to retain some of our customs, but in order to live in this world, we have to be educated, and get the benefits of the best that society has to offer to have a good life.' He was a visionary man." This is the same bi-cultural vision spoken of by Keith Goulet, the original architect of NORTEP.

## **17.2 NORPAC Broadening Career Options**

NORPAC was created in 1989 as part of an initiative called the "New NORTEP." The idea of a "Professional Access College" was certainly bold and visionary at the time, especially when very little new funding was made available to support the program expansion. The results speak for themselves. Between 1989 and 2003, there were 184 graduates; by 1998, 60 had completed degrees and another 52 had completed various certificate and diploma programs. The careers that have been accessed by NORPAC graduates are truly impressive: Dental Therapy, Social Work, Accounting, Law, Nursing, and Management (including Banks, Health Districts, and Early Childhood Centers) to name only a few.

The accomplishments of NORPAC graduates speak volumes about the need for the program to be formally recognized and fully funded. The creation of NORPAC not only expanded the range of career options for northerners, but it also strengthened the Board's main focus as well—teacher education. After almost 40 years of NORTEP and 27 years of NORPAC, the range of careers and examples of leadership that have emerged from amongst the NORTEP and NORPAC graduates is little short of astonishing.

The careers, made possible by NORPAC, together with those created by NORTEP, represent a world of salaried employment, responsibility, and leadership opportunities for northern Aboriginal people—in a wide variety of fields and vocations—unheard of in 1976 when NORTEP first began. "Now we're offering up to 3 years of arts and science, and enabling people to get their [professional] start here," Director, Elie Fleury says. "There's a greater opportunity to become more aware of what's out there and pursue those [career options]... They feel more at home in that environment."

Increased salaried employment means increased spending, increased demand for goods and services, and increased quality of life, for the students, professionals, and communities. Also, there are indirect benefits of increased quality of life, which in turn lower socio-economic costs.

**Graduate Profile: Don Bird**  
**La Ronge**  
**NORPAC, 1992-93**

Boat operator, fish plant worker, probation officer, mountie, mining office manager, crown prosecutor and now, provincial court judge—as northern Saskatchewan’s economic base has evolved, so has Don Bird’s career. And he credits his alma mater, NORTEP-NORPAC, with being both at the forefront of the changes to the North’s socio-economic climate, and at the same time deeply responsive to the impact of those changes.



**The opportunity to take university-level education in his hometown gave Don Bird the entry point into a legal career, which led to his becoming the judge for northwest Saskatchewan’s new Aboriginal court party.**

Growing up in the North in the 1960s—although he is a member of the Montreal Lake Cree Nation, Bird was born and raised in La Ronge—Bird quickly learned from his peers that an advanced level of education was not important. With employment in the region still focused on traditional, natural resource-based pursuits such as trapping, commercial fishing, line-cutting, prospecting, and firefighting, “book learning” was almost beside the point, and even a high school education was seen as a waste of time when there were important hands-on skills to be learned.

“What happened to me [over the course of my career] was that I was adapting to the changes in the North,” Bird says.

“As times changed, we began to realize...we’ve got to focus on post-secondary training, in the trades, and just (on) education in general.”

“As times changed, we began to realize...we’ve got to focus on post-secondary training, in the trades, and just [on] education in general.”

In the 1970s, when the provincial government created the Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS) and re-located many government services—and jobs—to the North, attitudes toward education began to change, and the expansion of the uranium industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s changed things even more. NORTEP had brought university education to the North, and northern elementary and high school students were being taught by local teachers.

In 1989, with the creation of NORPAC, suddenly northerners had the option to receive university-level training for a broader range of professional careers right in their own backyard. For Bird, by this point the manager for Cameco Corporation’s northern office, the opportunity to pursue a long-held dream of acquiring a university degree was too good to

resist. After considering his background as a probation officer and as an RCMP officer, Bird decided that becoming a lawyer was a logical step. The College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan was willing to accept him, as long as he proved he could successfully carry a full load of classes for a year, and for that he turned to NORPAC.

“What I appreciated so much about NORPAC was that I was able to take all my [first-year] classes right in my home community,” Bird says. “It made a huge impact, in the sense that had it not been for NORPAC, then I would have had to move to Saskatoon (right at the beginning of his university studies). It would have been much more difficult to achieve what I did, with the whole relocation aspect that the northern students would have had to do before NORPAC. Entering university is a nerve-wracking experience at best. So being that I was able to access that (education) in my home community made that transition so much easier.”

We were able to use our language in the (classroom and study) settings. There were lots of us who spoke Cree...and that's one of the big things about retaining a language, being able to use it.

As the first member of his immediate family to attend university, Bird had no experience to draw on in terms of what university is like and, as for many northern students, moving away to attend school would have

meant that all the support systems he relied on were suddenly miles and miles away. He had been through that once, having been schooled at the Timber Bay Children's Home for Grades 1 through 4, and knew too well the pain of dislocation and separation that happens during those many months away from friends, family members, and the familiar comforts of home.

He also had vivid recollections of another problem he encountered at Timber Bay: having to attend classes taught exclusively in English when he understood only Cree. “I remember how difficult and embarrassing that was. I had to get one of the older boys to interpret for me. And that stuck with me. It was a real struggle—not only can't I converse with anyone, when I'm handed a textbook, I can't read it. It was incredibly difficult.”

At NORPAC, Bird found the schooling environment radically different. Not only was he studying in his home community, but also he was surrounded by staff and visiting professors—who respected his cultural background and were genuinely interested in seeing him succeed—and by fellow students who spoke his first language.

“We were able to use our language in the (classroom and study) settings. There were lots of us who spoke Cree...and that's one of the big things about retaining a language, being able to use it. Otherwise it gets more and more difficult, the longer a person stays away from it.”

Bird has brought that respect for his own language and culture—fostered again at NORPAC, where Cree, Dene and Native Studies are all part of the curriculum—into his legal career. After his year at PAC in 1992-93, he enrolled in the 2-month Native Law program, and then started law school in the fall of 1993. After graduating, he worked for the provincial government, helping to negotiate policing agreements with Saskatchewan First Nations, before articling and moving into work as a Crown prosecutor. Since 200, Bird has worked as the prosecutor

with Judge Gerry Morin's Cree court party in northeastern Saskatchewan, and in the fall of 2006, as a newly appointed judge, Bird headed up the formation of an Aboriginal court party for the northwest.

"With the Aboriginal court, the people can come in and converse in the language of their choice, which I think is tremendous, because that's what they're comfortable in," he says.

For Bird, NORPAC was a chance to start the university education he wanted in an environment of support and respect, which is the same set of values he carries into the court settings in which he presides. His court offers the same level of professionalism as any other provincial court, just as NORPAC offers the same quality of education as any of the province's other universities. "When I got to the College of Law, it was a smooth transition," Bird says. "We (as PAC students) couldn't have asked for a better education."

"I am a tremendous supporter of NORTEP-NORPAC, just seeing the benefits that the North has had from their programs," he says. "I was born and raised in the North. I knew what it was like before, and I actually witnessed the advent of NORTEP-NORPAC and the tremendous impact it's had on the North. As an example, look at all the teachers we have that speak the language. Looking now at the court system—we have the Cree court, and now we have an Aboriginal court that's being set up. The next thing I'm sure would be a Dene court. It would be tremendous.... They say that when a people lose their language, they lose their culture with it. You don't want to do that."

## 18. NEW TRAINING MODEL

While NORTEP-NORPAC has been successful in decolonizing its structure, and in making education accessible to northerners, the education system as a whole has not been as successful. The old training model did little to make education accessible.

However, the pressures and challenges of competing in a global knowledge economy, while difficult and complex, can be seen as an opportunity to redress inequities that have existed in the education system and, consequently, in the labour market. Without the full participation of First Nation and Métis people, particularly the youth, the "Saskatchewan economy has little hope of realizing its potential."<sup>38</sup> To add to this, without the full and immediate financial support of both provincial and federal governments, there is little hope of Saskatchewan realizing its full potential.

Further, the labour market's efforts at generating and distributing income to include Aboriginal people, while showing minor increases, are inadequate. Raising educational attainment levels is necessary for Saskatchewan to be able to compete in the knowledge economy. Equally important is the need to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment and education opportunities, thereby, raising the income status of First Nation and Métis people.

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<sup>38</sup> NTM, p. 13.

In response to this problem, a training review panel has outlined recommendations in the *Final Report of the 2005 Training System Review Panel: A New Training Model for Saskatchewan*.<sup>39</sup> The new training model describes a blueprint for constructing a new and innovative educational system in a global economic and democratic climate. These priorities are essential to redress inequities in the system; increase education, employment, and participation rates among Aboriginal peoples; and meet the threat to Saskatchewan's future socio-economic prosperity.

Among other priorities, this framework suggests that education must become accessible, inclusive, learner centred, continuous and progressive, flexible, responsive, innovative, supported by technology, and linked to labour force needs and employment opportunities. NORTEP-NORPAC has been modelling many of these priorities for the past 30 years. And it is ready and well positioned to respond to the growing post-secondary needs of northern people.

## 19. ACCESSIBILITY AND MOBILITY

In applying the principles of the new training model, particular attention should be given to the northern portion of the province where the conditions—due to poverty and the unemployment and participation rates—are entirely unacceptable, and where the population increases and potential for future growth are most significant for meeting the future labour market needs.

Accessible post-secondary education opportunities are required for northern Aboriginal people to qualify for new jobs that will be opening up in the North. Job Forecasts in major northern industries include:

- **Mining:** Trades like power engineers, instrumentation technicians, mechanics. There is need of professional and management workers such as geologists, mine engineers, supervisors.
- **Oil and Gas:** There is a strong demand for workers with higher level training as engineers, project managers, geoscientists, trades, and mechanics at oil sands projects.
- **Health and Education:** Workers are needed for the health sector including licensed practical nurses, lab and X-ray technicians, special care aides, food-service workers, as well as professionals such as nurses, social workers, and physicians.
- **Secondary Teachers** with specialty qualifications in such areas as high school sciences and math, computer science, practical and applied arts, and French immersion are in demand.<sup>40</sup>

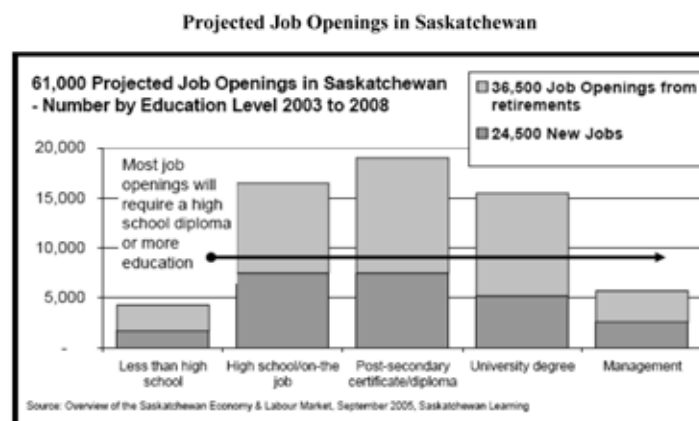
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<sup>39</sup> Saskatchewan Learning, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> NSTNAR, pp. 5-6.



Further, 61,000 job openings are projected for the whole of Saskatchewan, including 36,500 openings resulting from retirements and 24,500 new jobs due to diversification and development.



If Saskatchewan can increase the participation rates of Aboriginal peoples, then “the Aboriginal labour force could increase by 138%...with a notable 200% increase in the First Nations portion from an estimated 23,000 in 2001 to 68,500 by 2025.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Graduate Profile: Naomi Carriere** **Cumberland House** **NORPAC, class of 1995**

First, she was a NORPAC student, then a NORPAC instructor from 2006 to 2011. While an instructor, she also achieved her Master’s of Biology degree, studying the woodland caribou as a species at risk in North Central Saskatchewan. Now she is a Ph.D. student in the School of Environment and Sustainability & Indigenous Land Management Institute at the University of Saskatchewan as well as an instructor with the U of S.



Twelve years after she last sat in a desk at Mistasinik Place as a first-year NORPAC student, Naomi Carriere came back to NORTEP-NORPAC, teaching the very subject that she discovered a passion for that year, through a co-op work placement: biology.

**As a student-turned-instructor, Naomi Carriere hopes to inspire NORPAC students to pursue careers in the sciences.**

Although NORPAC wasn’t offering biology courses back in 1994-95, the co-op model—in which PAC students were matched up with an employer to do field work in the specialty

<sup>41</sup>NTM, p. 46.

of their choice—was still in place, and Carriere, then fresh out of high school, spent a week every month working with wildlife biologist, Tim Trottier, on a project in her hometown of Cumberland House.

“That was one of the best experiences that I’ve had, and one of the most critical in terms of really focusing me on the biology aspect (of her academic studies),” says Carriere. She then worked with Trottier, well-known for his work on preserving woodland caribou habitat, again, this time on the final project for her master’s degree. She spent the summer and early fall of 2006 in the La Ronge area, collecting local knowledge on woodland caribou population distribution within the Lac La Ronge Indian Band’s traditional territory, and completed the final analysis and writing in 2007.

“Because I respected Tim so much as a biologist and I knew he’s really respected in the community, by the people (whom she would be interviewing), that was the key thing why I contacted him. So that co-op that I had was really influential on me, and I don’t know how things would have worked if I didn’t have that contact,” Carriere says. “He’s been one of the key people that has helped me through this whole process with my master’s. It goes all the way around, back to when I was in NORPAC.... If they really want to get a good sense of where they’re going and what they want to do, a good co-op is one of the best things that any student can have.”

As a biology instructor at NORPAC, Carriere hopes that her course will inspire other young northerners to pursue a career in biology or another, natural science—an area where Aboriginal people are under-represented.

“The fact that I’m teaching there is a really positive experience for me, because the PAC program gave me a lot of opportunities, and so I’m hoping that through teaching biology, it gives someone that has the potential (to pursue a career in the sciences) that opportunity to succeed as well.”

"Being an Aboriginal, being a woman, and being in science—it's almost like you're a target....If they go through NORPAC and get a small inkling of that (being believed in), it helps.... Sometimes that's all you need, is just someone to say, 'You can do it,' to counteract the negatives."

During the research-gathering phase for her master’s degree, Carriere deliberately chose a pair of NORTEP students as her field assistants. She taught her assistants about the connections between northern Aboriginal cultures, about their reliance on and respect for the natural environment. She instructed them on the natural sciences, such as biology, and impressed upon them the unique privilege they have as teachers to pass what they have learned on to the next generation. “One of the best ways to do that (honour the elders’ knowledge) is to influence the youth,” she says. “It’s a huge responsibility.”

Over the course of her academic work, Carriere has faced some frustrations and setbacks, including disinterested, intimidating or even overtly hostile professors, high tuition and living

costs, and fellow students angling competitively for scholarship money at the expense of friendship or even a good study group. “When I was in the PAC program, I never had to deal with any of those experiences,” Carriere says. “None of them.”

She credits both her family—especially strong role models such as her mother, Freda Carriere, who completed a diploma in drafting, another traditionally male occupation, and her uncle, Franklin Carriere, a long-time provincial civil servant who is also a renowned King Trapper—and her experience at NORPAC in providing her with a reference point from which to draw strength.

“Being an Aboriginal, being a woman, and being in science—it’s almost like you’re a target,” she says. “If they go through NORPAC and get a small inkling of that (being believed in), it helps.... Sometimes that’s all you need, is just someone to say, ‘You can do it,’ to counteract the negatives.”

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**Graduate Profile: Tammy Robinson (nee Couillonneur)**  
**Cole Bay**  
**NORPAC, class of 2005**

Originally from the tiny hamlet of Cole Bay, 45 minutes west of Beauval, Robinson relocated to La Ronge in 1994 to take classes at NORPAC. Although she wanted to pursue a university education, the idea of moving to a city was intimidating, and NORPAC offered a model unlike any other post-secondary institution: Students would take 2 weeks of classes, “and then would have the week to go back to their home community to work in a field placement,” Robinson recalls.

From 1994 to 1996, Robinson took classes from NORPAC, which offered her two years of university classes that could lead into a wide range of professions.

In 1999, after floating a few trial balloons career-wise (including earning an Office Education diploma from Northlands College, a response to good experiences during her administration work placements through PAC), getting married and having her first child, Robinson saw an opening for an executive secretary position at NORTEP-NORPAC, and jumped at it. She got the call the next day.

But the siren call of education hadn’t let go of Robinson yet, and soon after starting work at the school—including a shift to the job of Registrar, she began taking credit classes through PAC, and in 2005 she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree. In 2006, she began work on her



**NORTEP-NORPAC gave Tammy Robinson not just an education, but also a career path.**

Bachelor of Education degree part-time while working full-time, this time through NORTEP. While getting her education through NORTEP-NORPAC has allowed Robinson to stay in familiar surroundings—one of the strengths of the program for northerners—it has also opened her eyes to new possibilities.

“It helped me realize there’s so much more out there,” Robinson says. “I wanted to be part of the workforce. That’s what drove me to come to NORPAC and to pursue post-secondary education.”

The PAC experience not only gave Robinson an education and an opportunity to pursue a career outside Cole Bay, but also it built up her communication skills and her self-confidence.

While getting her education through NORTEP-NORPAC has allowed Robinson to stay in familiar surroundings—one of the strengths of the program for northerners, she says—it has also opened her eyes to new possibilities.

As part of the Registrar’s position, she was able to take on a very public role, representing the school at career fairs and travelling across the North to promote TEP and PAC’s programs. “When I started recruiting for NORTEP-NORPAC, it made a huge difference to tell them where I’m actually from, because they are amazed by the progress. Students would approach me after my presentation, saying, ‘Wow, I think I can do that,’” Robinson adds. “[My experience shows them] there are more opportunities out there.”

In 2010, Robinson began serving as Coordinator of Student Services at NORTEP-NORPAC. In this role, she works closely with the Registrar to develop and oversee NORTEP-NORPAC programs. Since taking on this position, Robinson has worked to restructure Student Services, moving both the Recruitment/Academic Support Officer and the Bookstore/Registration Clerk positions to the Student Services area in order to integrate supports to serve students. Her role involves academic advising, program counseling, personal and professional counseling support, teaching courses, and participating in many internal and external committees.

In 2012, Robinson completed her Bachelor of Education degree with Distinction from the University of Saskatchewan. She now instructs the University of Regina course EPS 116 (Communication Skills). She began to co-instruct this course with Penny Carriere, who was her first instructor in this same course in 1994 when Robinson first began the NORPAC Program. Teaching alongside Penny is what she considers a marker of success. “It is one of my greatest accomplishments to date.

This is truly a goal that I have strived for personally,” she says. This accomplishment causes Robinson to believe “anything is possible and achieving your aspirations is closer than you think!” Robinson also co-instructs INCC 201.3 (Dynamics of Community Involvement) with Deborah Gibson-Dingwall, who was also instrumental in her life, helping her to persevere through her studies.

Robinson is now enrolled in the Master’s of Northern Governance of Development with the International Northern Governance Development Program, a project-based program offered

through a partnership between the University of Saskatchewan and Northlands College. The courses are offered through distance education, which allows her to study at home without excessive travel. However, the cohort did embark on a 10-day trip to Norway in March 2015, visiting Oslo, Kirkenes, and a few surrounding communities, learning about the economy, culture, and business developments.

With many new possibilities beginning to take shape, Robinson is aware that it was NORPAC that helped shaped her foundation.

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That NORPAC has created a culture of its own, building on the strengths of northern Saskatchewan—values such as being loyal to your family and supporting and relying on one another, forming partnerships, being adaptable and even taking a few risks when the “usual way of doing things” just isn’t working—and compensating for years of being browbeaten, deprived of services, and racially and geographically divided, is reiterated in many of the stories of its graduates.

“When you put a bunch of northern people together in one room, there’s a difference in the expectations and the behaviours...as opposed to being one northern person in a room full of southern people. It lends to support systems,” says Chief Roy Cheechum, of Clearwater River Dene Nation, “You have the Cree-speaking and the Dene-speaking people working together and learning together, and that helps with cultural exchange and cultural awareness—maybe a (level of) awareness that wouldn’t otherwise happen in a different setting.”

“You’re able to interact with people from all over the North, something that I never had a chance to do (growing up) here,” agrees Cumberland House Cree Nation Vice-Principal and native studies teacher, Celia Deschambeault. “When I went there (NORPAC), I felt that I belonged there—and if you feel that you’re a part of something like that, you’ll do well.”

This culture is very important in addressing institutional and personal barriers. Prior to 1979 few, if any, pupils in northern Saskatchewan could identify a certified teacher, a principal or a vice-principal, a director of education or assistant director, who had grown up in their northern community. The impact on northern children’s career aspirations was obvious: How could a child believe that he or she could enter the teaching profession when no one from their community had ever done such a thing?

Patterns of non-participation of this kind created a “systemic” barrier for First Nations and Métis children in northern Saskatchewan. With so few First Nation and Métis teachers to identify with, it is hardly surprising that the children would have difficulty seeing themselves in a professional career such as teaching. Doubtless, the barrier extended beyond career aspiration to the whole experience of school: How could the school be understood as “for me” if children could not see themselves in either the curriculum or in the ranks of teachers?



**Graduate Profile: Kylie Janvier**  
**La Loche**  
**NORPAC, class of 1998**

When Kylie Janvier enrolled as a NORPAC student in 1997, the health centre in her home community, La Loche, was long past overdue for renovation, and the staff were stressed and overworked. Even so, Janvier was convinced that someday, she would come back and help provide the level of medical care her hometown deserved.

The new La Loche Health Centre—a gleaming, beautifully equipped building—opened in the fall of 2001, with newly graduated licensed practical nurse (LPN) Kylie Janvier as part of the staff.

“To come back here and work was important for me, to do something for the community, because this is home,” Janvier says, her words occasionally interrupted by intercom calls for a doctor or another medical professional. “We always have a nursing shortage here, so that’s another thing that made me decide to come back. Plus I figured there would be good experience here.”

She’s certainly had plenty of experience—in her short career, Janvier has worked for La Loche’s medical clinic and the health centre’s acute, long-term and emergency units. Before she returned to her registered nurse (RN) studies at the University of Saskatchewan in the fall of 2006, her time was split between working as a home-care nurse and serving as an assessment clerk for the Kids First North pre- and post-natal intervention program—essentially, helping those least able to care for themselves, at both ends of the age spectrum.



**As a local nurse who speaks Dene, NORPAC grad Kylie Janvier, in her home community of La Loche, is able to offer patients a level of service they wouldn’t otherwise receive.**

“There’s a big language barrier here (between medical staff and clients), with elderly (people) especially, and as someone who speaks Dene, it’s been easy to do my job and communicate with them,” she says. “They like it a lot. They’ve told me they appreciate it.”

Since coming to work in La Loche, Janvier has been able to offer a unique service to her patients. “There’s a big language barrier here (between medical staff and clients), with elderly (people) especially, and as someone who speaks Dene, it’s been easy to do my job and communicate with them,” she says. “They like it a lot. They’ve told me they appreciate it.”

NORPAC gave Janvier her first formal exposure to the health-care field, through its field practicum program. One week a month, Janvier returned home to La Loche, where she worked alongside one of the local public health nurses, getting consents for immunizations, weighing and measuring babies, assisting with bike safety rodeos, and doing health presentations to school children.

At NORPAC, Janvier was able to complete her first year of arts and sciences courses, getting used to the university environment and meeting people from outside La Loche for the first time. She appreciated the smaller classes, which facilitated getting one-on-one time with her professors—“You get a better understanding of what you’re being taught,” she says—and the student funding she received, which lessened the financial burden when she went on to Prince Albert’s SIAST campus to complete her LPN diploma and, in 2004-05, the beginning of her RN studies in Saskatoon. In both cases, she has been able to apply her NORPAC credits toward the longer programs.

Although both are still very young, Janvier is already passing on the value of education to her 2-year-old daughter and her 7-year-old son. “I tell my son he has to go to school every day, and he has to continue on until he’s done something with himself,” she says. “He talks about having lots of stuff, so I tell him, well, you have to have a career!”

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### **Graduate Profile: Nick Daigneault Beauval NORPAC, class of 2001**

Nick Daigneault got it figured out early. He is a university graduate (NORPAC science program, 2001), a Saskatchewan Job Futures Aboriginal Role Model (2003), a gifted singer and keyboardist, and a proud Métis square dancer, and he’s spent 5 years working in the information technology (IT) industry—all this without leaving northern Saskatchewan, and he’s only in his 20s.



**PAC gave Nick Daigneault the skills—and the networking tools—to pursue his dream of working in the information technology field.**

A native of Beauval, Daigneault had a fair number of role models himself when it came to pursuing post-secondary education. His father, former Beauval Mayor, Joe Daigneault, graduated from NORTEP in 1995 and now serves as western regional director for Northlands College. Of his sisters, Rachel has taught in Lac La Ronge Indian Band schools in La Ronge and Sucker River since completing NORTEP training, Vicky pursued a career in social work after a year at PAC, and Mya is now a PAC student as well, hoping to go into dental therapy. Brother Valmore, now Daigneault’s colleague at Keewatin Career Development Corporation (KCDC)—the non-profit company that has pioneered northern Saskatchewan’s growth in the IT industry over the last 9 years—is the only “odd man out” when it comes to formal post-secondary education.

“I knew I wanted to get involved with computers, but I didn’t know how,” Daigneault says of the process that led him to PAC. “I could get involved in the engineering aspect, the software design, the gaming/graphic design. I pictured this (studying in La Ronge) more as an introduction, more of a way to see where my path is going to go.”

Through PAC courses in calculus and programming languages (such as Java), Daigneault gained the professional skills he would require, and he picked up on a common thread amongst NORTEP-NORPAC students: the sense of being in a familiar environment, amongst family. “You realize really quick (at NORTEP-NORPAC) that you have mutual friends. You’re like, ‘Hey, you’re so-and-so’s sister...Everybody just clicks,” he says. “You find out quickly, ‘Hey, we’re all cousins!’”

Those 2 years at PAC cracked Daigneault’s shell—he insists that he used to be terribly shy—and they were also critical in bringing him into contact with the people who would shape his professional life.

***Asked how PAC influenced him, Daigneault has a quick answer: “It has almost everything to do with where I am now.”***

Through a PAC assignment on establishing career goals, Daigneault was directed to teacher Ted Green, who was looking for someone to develop a website to educate teachers on the use of information technology. This became Daigneault’s PAC field assignment. After the volunteer work was done, KCDC hired him to finish the site—and after he graduated, he became one of KCDC’s first hires for their new \$4.5-million Headwaters Project, a federally funded initiative to bring technology infrastructure into northern Saskatchewan.

“It (NORPAC) is kind of a networking tool, because all those instructors have footholds (in the workforce)...and they know people who know people,” Daigneault says. “Sometimes it’s just that simple—getting you into contact with the right people...and then the ball gets rolling and all of a sudden you find yourself in your job that you’ve always wanted.”

In his first two years at KCDC, Daigneault advanced from a junior tech doing basic website design and setting up school computer labs, to doing more advanced website design both for in-house projects and outside clients. He also assisted Green and Debbie Mielke (his Grade 5 teacher in Beauval) with the technical side of creating Masinahikana School—an on-line high school program aimed at northern students who had either dropped out of traditional schools or had no access to high school classes in their home communities. Then, in 2003, Daigneault’s job began to shift again, toward becoming a trainer for young Aboriginal people interested in working as computer technicians. He is now KCDC’s lead instructor for the Cisco Information Technology Essentials program, which leads students to entry-level certifications in the computer industry. “It’s been a really long haul. We have to be jacks of all trades to really keep up with a technology company such as this one,” Daigneault says.

The irony of it all is that through pursuing his chosen field, he has ended up in an area he never expected: teaching. And it may just lead him right back to NORTEP-NORPAC, this time completing his Bachelor of Education with a focus on computer science—the same field but, as he puts it, “with an instructor flair to it.... That’s just how it all clicked together.”

“Clicking together” is also an excellent way to describe the TEP and PAC programs, which Daigneault describes as “strongly complementary,” giving students the option of a more rounded education.

While he was always confident with the academic side of things, “everything (else) intimidated me, and part of that was the city—I felt like this tiny, going to a city, and I knew I might be so in my shell that it would cause me to fail,” Daigneault says. I know I wouldn’t feel that way now—I know I would tackle it—but sometimes you need an in-between,” he adds. Within the strongly supportive environment at NORTEP-NORPAC, “you gain that confidence. You’re not shy to say, ‘I don’t understand.’”

“Clicking together” is also an excellent way to describe the TEP and PAC programs, which Daigneault describes as “strongly complementary,” giving students the option of a more rounded education.

Because of the funding provided for NORTEP-NORPAC students, Daigneault felt free to take courses that interested him, without the fear of wasting precious student loan money. It really gives you time to think,” he says. “And at the same time you’re getting educated.”

Daigneault says. “There are so many paths...(and) when you come to an institute like this, you actually become aware of all these different options. There are so many opportunities, especially here in the North—you’ve just got to be able to see them.”

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### **Graduate Profile: Barb Finlayson** **La Ronge** **NORPAC, class of 2004**

When Barb Finlayson’s son Jordan looks back on his junior high years, he won’t remember his mom calling from another part of the house to make sure he was doing his homework—he’ll remember them seated at the table, working on their studies together.

“[We] would be sitting around doing our homework, fighting over the computer,” laughs Finlayson. “Whoever’s assignment came due first, they would get first (dibs) on the computer.”

“That was really influential,” she adds in a more serious tone. “It helped him see that yes, he could go on to university. Yes, someone he knows can get their degree. It helped him to open his eyes and broadened the world a bit more for him.”



**Barb Finlayson feels she set a good example for her son when she pursued post-secondary education at NORPAC**

In 2006, Finlayson currently co-owned a home-based business. Her studies of First Nations and Métis experience have helped her to appreciate her own history,

Finlayson's experience with NORPAC began around 1993-94, when she was working for the school as a secretary. Watching students as they passed by her desk from September through April each year, Finlayson was intrigued by the changes she inevitably saw. "When they first come in there, they're shy and calm, and they're not really sure what they're doing," she says. "By the end of the fourth year, they're just full of confidence, and they can just take on the world. All the knowledge from the different courses—you can just see it in them. They're changed people."

Curious about the transformations, Finlayson enrolled in PAC in 1996, in hopes of seeing such a change in herself. "When I first started, I wasn't sure if I could do it," she admits. "I'm sure (other) people have those doubts that stop you from doing things." Over time, however, she began to notice "the change": "I felt more confident," she says. "It's made a big difference.... NORPAC has helped me a lot. It gave me the confidence that yes, I could do more."

Finlayson is glad that the option exists for their son to get his university training so close to home, just like they did. "It (NORPAC) broadened everyone's (educational) horizons, in that you didn't have to leave town—your home is here, your family's here—so you could get your education.... It's not something way out there that's unreachable."

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Through their training, NORTEP-NORPAC graduates emerge with a healthy self-image, fostered by a sense that they are right in thinking that their dreams have value, and so do they—and they pass that attitude on to others in their families, their schools and other workplaces, and their communities. "It's hard to measure (the school's) impact, but it's endless," says NORTEP-NORPAC Board Chair, Bruce Ruelling. "Education doesn't make you more intelligent, it makes you more aware.... The intelligence level has not gone up, but the abilities and the tools have increased—because education is a tool. It's a very valuable tool, and more and more people are seeing that."

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## **19.1 Observations of Gladys Christiansen**

Soon after graduating from NORTEP in 1985, Gladys Christiansen was appointed to the Northern Education Task Force, so she quickly gained an appreciation for the issues facing both Band-run and provincial schools across the region. For years, Christiansen was the Director of Education for the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, heading up a department that handles Aboriginal Head Start programs, preschool to Grade 12, adult training, post-secondary, employment programs, and recreation. She also served as an advisor for the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission on northern literacy issues, and as a board member for Northlands College.

Like fellow Lac La Ronge Indian Band member, Ray McKay, Christiansen began her career in another field altogether. After completing training as an accounting clerk at Northlands



College, she began working in the Band's education department at the central office in La Ronge, when, as she recalls, "they were just starting to talk about Indian control of Indian education." Intrigued, she decided to go back to school and began taking night classes, eventually studying at TEP while continuing to work for the Band at the same time.

She began her teaching career as principal, teacher, and bus driver for a two-room Lac La Ronge Indian Band school in Sucker River. "I don't think we would be at where we are now, in terms of community development and everything else, without NORTEP-NORPAC," Christiansen says. "When I first started here (with the Band), there were very few Aboriginal teachers in the (Band-run school) system...and the few Aboriginal teachers they had were not from here; they came from the south. Now if you look at our school population today, the majority of the teaching staff are TEP graduates, and the administrative positions are held by First Nations, and primarily La Ronge First Nations (people). It really makes a difference (to have the NORTEP-NORPAC option) because, for example, we have so many more students that are completing Grade 12, and therefore we have to try to provide more programming to accommodate those students, so they have a place to go, because we still have many students who don't want to move to the south for a university education," she says. "Those NORTEP graduates, they know the importance of education, and they encourage their children too, and they assist them to be successful in school, so of course it just keeps going from there, continuing to get better for everyone."

As a TEP grad herself, for example, Christiansen has been a self-described advocate for the program—and, in fact, her husband Gerry enrolled in TEP after witnessing her experience. "Once you have the education, you can have a good job and your family life gets better, and so you want that for everybody else. So first you try and get your immediate family to go back to school, and then the larger community," Christiansen says. "You never stop learning.... When I'm 65 years old, I'll still be learning, and I'll want to learn something. There's so much to learn."

Although she is pleased by the expansion of culture and language education in northern schools—including her department's own Cree curriculum development programs—Christiansen feels there is still a lot more to do, especially with specific training for language teachers. She has also seen a shift in face of northern leadership, with the candidate's level of education seen as more important by voters than it was in the past. "It doesn't necessarily mean they're better leaders, but at least they have more information that they can apply," she says.

The socio-economic picture of the North has also changed over the last 30 years, as Christiansen can attest. "Anything that happens in the North, primarily it starts off from education, and it's just bound to get better as long as we can create opportunities," she says.

The socio-economic picture of the North has also changed over the last 30 years, as Christiansen can attest. "Anything that happens in the North, primarily it starts off from education, and it's just bound to get better as long as we can create opportunities," she says.

"Say I never went on to post-secondary education and I was just at home, there's no job for me and

what else can I do? I can only live off the government, right? But if I go to school, I have to live off the government for a little while, because they have to give me a provincial training allowance, but eventually at least if I finish school and if I go on, then I can get employment and look after my family and feel good about who I am. My family feels proud that I'm working—you know, my children. And then they will also get the work (ethic). They'll want to get up every morning, go to school and go to work later on, because they see it. The modeling is there...whereas if you don't have that, how do kids know there's another way?"

"It's not that people don't want to work, it's just that the opportunities aren't there," she adds. "After not working for so many years, or even generations, you get stuck in that rut. It's not only that one individual student (whose attitude is affected), it's everybody that he or she comes into contact with at that home and in the community."

"NORTEP has been an excellent training institution for the North, and I just hope that it continues to grow, so that maybe five years from now, or at least 10 years from now, we have a northern campus here and that it's more than teacher training, more than PAC, and that we'll be able to get full degree programs here in the North, because people in the North deserve it," she says.

"We see what NORTEP has done in the last 30 years, the changes they've made. Just think of how many more changes they could do in the next 30 years, with allowing more people with more programs."

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### **Graduate Profile: Allen Morrow** **La Ronge** **NORPAC, class of 2004**

Much has changed for Allen Morrow since finishing his education at NORPAC. "Before going [to NORPAC], I was shy and had low self-esteem; I was unable to express myself," says Morrow.

Along with his confidence, Morrow had almost lost his first language when in his early school years he was disciplined for speaking Cree, and later, at the age of 13, placed in a non-Cree speaking foster home in Prince Albert. Morrow's confidence in his ability to learn was also shaken when he was put in a 'special' class at school. Morrow says, "Really, we weren't special. We had a different way of learning. We weren't stupid!"



**Allen Morrow's love for education was rekindled through his NORPAC experience**

With these negative experiences, Morrow quit high school in Grade 10. When he moved to La Ronge at 18, Morrow began speaking with Elders, who taught him to speak Cree again. As he began searching for a career path, Morrow also finished his General Education diploma.

Art was his hobby, but it didn't provide a consistent living. Morrow decided to apply for the university program at NORPAC.

As an artist, Morrow had learned to express himself through his art, but his education at NORPAC freed him to express himself in words. "Once I was in classes and with other students, I was able to open up, to the point that now in my current job, I am able to speak in front of a judge and other people. I was able to find myself and find a different world," says Morrow. Though Morrow found his studies at NORPAC, "overwhelming and intense," he was able to get through. He attributes his success to the "passion of the instructors and staff at NORTEP-NORPAC," to "taking the advice of instructors to conscientiously attend class," and to "the support of peers and study groups."

Morrow now works as a community justice worker and speaks before a judge and court on behalf of others. He is positioned to speak on behalf of others, something his education at NORPAC has done for him. "I love helping people, using my education to help those who can't necessarily speak for themselves in court," he says. Morrow's ability to speak Cree is a great advantage in his work because some of the clients are Cree speakers, and he is able to come to an understanding of their circumstance, and to explain their situation to a judge. Coming from the North is also an advantage because, in his words, "I've lived up in the North, and I understand the lifestyle and the hardships [clients] have gone through."

Though art remains his life passion, education and learning continue to be part of Morrow's plans. "Understanding life," says Morrow, "is about coming into understanding of who I am." This is why Morrow thinks that the residential school stories and history need to be written about and included in school curriculum, so that "people can understand more about themselves and why it happened, and why they are the way they are," says Morrow, whose own immediate family was impacted by residential schooling.

Morrow's love for education was rekindled through his NORPAC experience. "There is so much to learn," he says. He would like to take psychology and sociology courses to assist him in his work. He also still wants to finish the Bachelor of Education program through NORTEP and he has applied to return. He considers his current job an education, too: "It is like taking a class every day. I have to learn to listen, and learn when to speak and what to say in court. But if I didn't go to NORPAC, I wouldn't have been able to do this." And, if NORPAC hadn't been located in the North, Morrow says he wouldn't even have gone to university.



*Artwork by Allen Morrow*

**Graduate Profile: Shawna Laliberte**  
**Beauval**  
**NORPAC, class of 2007**

It's said that home is where the heart is, and that's very true for Shawna Laliberte. She knows where she belongs—once she has her education finished, that is.

"This is where I'm from, and I'm more comfortable with my people," says Laliberte, a 20-year-old aspiring social worker from Beauval. "I know the history here, so it will help (me) to understand better where they're coming from, because I know."

Just weeks after completing her second year at NORPAC, with her third year and pending graduation with her Bachelor of Arts degree still ahead for the fall, Laliberte was anxious to share her experiences. She had heard from others in her chosen field—Indian social work—that PAC offers a solid educational grounding for their profession. That, combined with the student funding option, convinced her to try the program in La Ronge. "I had other (educational) options; I just chose NORTEP-NORPAC because of the funding, but if it wasn't available, I probably still would have went on (to university)," she says.

Unlike some early graduates, Laliberte had strong support at home for pursuing a post-secondary education, with several older siblings having already gone to university. "My mother wanted me to go," Laliberte says.

Despite many changes to the program over the last 30 years, Laliberte found herself in much the same environment as students who started in 1976. "It's very comforting to go there," she says. "You don't feel like an outcast or anything—it makes you feel as if you were at home, and you kind of form your own family there.... It's more of a northern Aboriginal school, and because of that I can really relate to it."

The Aboriginal content at NORPAC—especially in the curriculum—has been important to Laliberte, as it has given her a much better understanding of her own people's history, native languages and culture. She has also appreciated the staff and faculty's respect for and understanding of northern Aboriginal people—something not always evident amongst non-northern teachers at her high school, some of whom seemed convinced that the "Indian princess" and other stereotypes seen in movies were, in fact, reality.

Even though those biases still exist, Laliberte knows that northern education today is far different from the experiences of earlier generations. "There's many teachers that I admire from NORTEP, because now they're educated and they're really teaching it (Aboriginal history and culture) now. I think that's really good," she says. "Aboriginals have a right to know those things."



**Even before graduating, Shawna Laliberte already knew that NORPAC was re-shaping how she would approach her professional career.**

Amongst her peers, post-secondary education is increasingly seen as the norm—either as a way to get out of the comfortable yet sometimes limiting “rut” of home, or, as in Laliberte’s case, as a way to give back to her home community. “More and more people are starting to realize they can’t just sit there forever. A lot of people are starting to move now—they want to graduate and get out,” she says. “There are not many jobs here, as compared to in a city...[and] they’re starting to see how many different options there are out there.”

For herself, though, Beauval will continue to be home—even with a university education. “I just found a love for the North and the people, and I know it—it’s just my home,” she says. “I want to help my own people out.”

## 19.2 Frustration of Southern Campuses for Northern Aboriginal Students

Celia Deschambeault—who teaches native studies classes in addition to her administrative duties at the Cumberland House Cree Nation’s Nisto Awasisak School—says that she struggled with having a non-native instructor teaching native studies classes during her time at the University of Saskatchewan. The instructor was essentially speaking from an outside perspective as opposed to someone from that culture teaching others who are also part of that culture more about who they are.

“With my experience here teaching native studies, whenever I bring up a topic that might be offensive toward them, I let them know that they might find it troubling, but to keep in mind that it’s somebody else’s view, it’s not our view,” she says. “I think if they have people teaching them [these subjects] who know the language and know the background, it’s a lot easier for the students to relate to.”

Despite the frustrations that Aboriginal university students such as Deschambeault and his own daughter Jackie have with their classes, NORTEP-NORPAC board member, Frank Durocher, feels that even the fact that native studies and other similar courses are now offered at southern universities is a sign of progress—and of NORTEP-NORPAC’s impact. “Everybody’s playing catch-up,” Durocher says. “All those programs are starting to fall in place now in the universities.”





**Graduate Profile: Sylvia Besskkaystare**  
**Wollaston Lake**  
**NORPAC, class of 2009**

One word that might best describe Sylvia Besskkaystare is "ambitious." A strong determination to succeed has helped Besskkaystare push past the obstacles that might otherwise have held her back. After Besskkaystare completed high school, and after three years working as a teacher's assistant, she knew she needed to do something beyond her home community. "I wanted to do something more for myself, and my child, something beyond Wollaston Lake." In order to do so, Besskkaystare knew she had to further her education. "I needed to make a better living and get an education. I knew I could do more...I didn't want to feel stuck."



**Sylvia Besskkaystare has a strong determination to succeed, which has helped her to push past the obstacles that might have held her back.**

Knowing education was the key to her success, Besskkaystare decided to move to La Ronge to do a degree through NORTEP-NORPAC. With the support and structure there, Besskkaystare was able to move past obstacles such as housing, finances, language and culture, childcare, and class size. NORPAC housing saved her from the expense of high southern rents. NORPAC faculty supported Besskkaystare with one-on-one instruction: "I especially valued the one-on-one time." This support was essential for learning to research and write essays in her second language. "My first language is Dene, which sometimes made it difficult for writing papers [in English]." NORTEP's structure with one week in classes and one week out to do assignments enabled Besskkaystare to keep up with her assignments, while taking care of her child. Besskkaystare was also able to place her infant in the local childcare centre. NORPAC's small class sizes were familiar because she had come from a small community. "I enjoyed taking classes at NORTEP. When you are in a class with say 100 students [comparing NORTEP to a southern university], you just sat in the theatre and listened,—there was no interaction," she says.

With all of this in place, "I got an education, gained more knowledge and experience, and met great people from different communities who were in the same boat, struggling to get past our obstacles to continue our education," says Besskkaystare.

As hoped, her studies at NORPAC opened up opportunities for other programs. After graduating, Besskkaystare decided to go to Brandon University, but there she realized the program was not suitable for her, so she returned home to Wollaston Lake. Now Besskkaystare is working as a Child Family Service Worker, and she is in her third year of a Social Work degree, which she is taking online through the University of Regina. In her work, she enjoys helping families to come up with strategies to work around their own obstacles. She feels especially suited to this work because she grew up in the North. "I always wanted to come back after I took my education, to work with the people here. I am familiar with the struggles;

I'm from this town." Besskkaystare has had many struggles of her own, having lost her parents early, and having struggled past many obstacles in her own life. She is now in the process of creating her own family, with three kids of her own.

More education is on the horizon for Besskkaystare as she concludes her social work degree. She is hoping to go further, to finish her master's degree in social work. Besskkaystare wants to demonstrate for her children the value of education. "I want to impact my own children, set an example for them to have a better life."

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**Graduate Profile: Jenny Wolverine**  
**Patuanak**  
**NORPAC, class of 2010**

When Jenny Wolverine graduated high school, she decided to move to Saskatoon to attend the University of Saskatchewan. However, she found living in Saskatoon a struggle, with the higher expenses and the effort and coordination it took to accomplish daily tasks. "It took more planning and organizing, like A to Z rather than A to B," she says.

Wolverine explains, "As a mom, it was already a challenging time." Beyond the financial strain and coordination of studies and home life, Wolverine found the cultural differences in the South overwhelming. Thus, after one semester, Wolverine returned home.

Attempting to find her path, Wolverine took a job worthiness program and achieved safety tickets. She started working in the mining industry. However, she found that the mining industry did not support a family life. "I didn't want to work in the mines all my life, with being away from home, plus I had started a family," says Wolverine.

Instead, Wolverine chose to go to NORPAC. She wanted a different experience than she had in the South. "I didn't want a culture clash...I wanted to be in a similar situation to home; NORPAC was closer to home," she says.

Home was her support system, her family. Wolverine comes from a large family. "Being away from family gets lonely. My family was quite supportive, especially my dad who pushed me through my grade schools years, making sure things were done." At NORPAC, she found that the new friends she met became extended family. "I remember how close everyone was. We weren't a number; everyone had a name," she says.



**Jenny Wolverine chose NORPAC because she didn't want a "culture clash."**

**"I didn't want a culture clash...I wanted to be in a similar situation to home; NORPAC was closer to home," Wolverine says.**

Attending NORPAC as a mom was challenging, “But I had the support of my spouse who took time off work and moved to La Ronge to care for our daughter,” she says. Wolverine appreciated the schedule of classes at NORPAC, which she says, “allowed me to do the work and catch up with family.” She explains that the schedule at NORPAC is unusual with one week of intensive study in one class followed by a reading week, in which students do the reading and work for the class. Then they take another one-week course, which is followed by another reading week, and so forth.

After graduating from NORPAC, Wolverine went back to work for Cameco. At first, she moved to the Saskatoon office as a post-secondary counsellor because there was no employment or housing for small families available in the North. But, she returned to the North in 2012, when a position as a community relations liaison opened up. Wolverine says, “This was always my plan [to go back home]. Basically, I wanted to give back to the community after they invested in my education.” Wolverine feels that being from the North is an advantage in her career. “I lived here all my life; I am familiar with the 'ins and outs' of living on a reserve, in a small community...I understand more. Being from the North makes me more approachable and gives me more connections.”

What Wolverine enjoys about her job is that she is helping the community. She is involved with employment and recruitment, and serves as a connection between community members and Cameco inquiries. Wolverine appreciates what her NORPAC education did for her: “It raised my level of confidence and qualified me for my current position.” Wolverine says she would definitely choose to go to NORPAC again if she had to do it over again, only she would go directly there rather than going south for her university education.

For now, Wolverine’s plans are focused on her current job. “I plan to move further in my work at the corporate office, climb up the ladder, to have more influence in what happens in my community,” she says. She considers the possibility of returning to NORTEP, as well. “I only have one and a half years to become a teacher,” she says. Wolverine also plans to send her daughter to NORTEP-NORPAC.



**Graduate Profile: Caitlin Lee**  
**La Ronge**  
**NORPAC, class of 2011**

Like many students, when Caitlin Lee graduated from high school, she didn't really know what she wanted to do. As a northern student, Lee had access to funding for a northern institution, and she wanted to remain close to home. She knew that with the NORPAC degree in Native studies she could "possibly go into social work or addictions counselling." With this in mind, she decided to go to NORPAC. Lee's uncertainty isn't unique; many students choose to go NORPAC or NORTEP as a stepping stone, to move them into post-secondary education while they are still unsure about what direction to take. "These programs," says Lee, "are good because they give hope to people who don't know what they can do outside of high school."



**NORPAC ended up being a necessary stepping stone for Caitlin Lee to figure out her direction.**

As a student at NORPAC, Lee enjoyed her classes. One in particular that she remembers was a Native Studies Literature course instructed by Markus Reiner. "I really liked that he gave us different books to read on Native cultures. We read certain chapters and analyzed every little thing. He got the entire class involved [in discussion]; everybody had their own opinions, and when you hear from someone else, you think, 'Oh, yeah! I never really thought of it that way before.'" Lee found the instructors at NORPAC "very helpful." She says, "I would rather go to NORPAC than [a large university]. The classes there are too big. I like to be personal with my teachers. I know they help on big campuses as well, but the smaller class helps me learn better." Lee also enjoyed the support of other students. "I got to know who they were, and we helped each other if we had issues with studies; if a teacher wasn't available, we could go to our classmates," says Lee.

NORPAC ended up being a necessary step for Lee to figure out her direction. After graduating from NORPAC, she remembered her interest in the environment and decided to go to Prince Albert to take a 2-year diploma in Resource and Environmental Law. "I grew up big into fishing, grew up around resources officers, and remember hearing their stories about how much they loved their jobs." Lee was able to use transfer credits from her NORPAC program to complete the diploma. She is now working seasonally as a conservation officer with the Ministry of Environment, and living in Saskatoon. "I went south because that is where the job took me. I will go wherever the work is available." Lee hopes, eventually, to get a full-time position as a conservation officer, which she feels is a good field to go into, but she says, "if that doesn't work out, I'll look into fisheries or mining, as a consultant." Either way, she feels she has found her career path.



**Graduate Profile: Danielle Debruyne**  
**La Ronge**  
**NORPAC, class of 2014**

For many women, pursuing an education during the childbearing years can be difficult with the interruptions and distractions that come with children. However, with appropriate supports, encouragement, and accessible education, these disruptions don't have to become obstacles to success.

Such was the case for Danielle Debruyne, who began her studies at NORPAC in 2005, but in her final year, with just one course left to complete, gave birth to her first child five weeks prematurely. Debruyne then turned her focus to the care of her child, and worked part-time, rather than completing her program.

"Education wasn't first as a young parent," she says. In 2013, Debruyne began her current full-time position as a Career Services Training Coordinator with Northern Career Quest. Her employer made finishing her degree a requirement of her employment, offering the funding for her to do so. With funding support, Debruyne was able to return to NORPAC in 2014 to finish her Bachelor of Arts degree while working to support herself and her two children.

Initially, Debruyne chose to attend NORPAC because it was located in the North. "I wanted to stay in the North," she says. "It's home! The lake is here and you can just step away from the chaos. Here I see the people I know and grew up with." Debruyne also felt "scared away" of the university environment. "If there wasn't a NORPAC program, I wouldn't have been able to overcome the barrier of going to a university," she says. At NORPAC, Debruyne says, "I enjoyed the small group [of students]. We became a family. There, I wasn't afraid to ask questions or elaborate on what I thought."

Life and work balance is important to Debruyne, and this value guided her as she chose her career path. "I had an older sister working in the mining industry, but I could see that though it was good money, with good time off, [that career] wouldn't work for me with a child." After leaving NORPAC, Debruyne says, "I fell into an employment counsellor position with Gabriel Dumont Institute, even though I didn't have a lot of training in the labour market." However, Debruyne's involvement on the board of the Kikinahk Friendship Centre allowed her to make some strong connections in the community, which helped her in her role.

This role as an employment counsellor was a first step in the career direction that Debruyne is now passionate about. Her current role with Northern Career Quest allows her to assist others with their career paths. "I love being able to assist individuals who live in northern Saskatchewan, helping them to overcome their barriers." Debruyne feels that being from



**Danielle Debruyne hasn't allowed the disruptions of parenting to hold her back from her career goals.**



the North helps her in her work as a training coordinator. "Growing up in the North, gives me a strong tie to the North, and I have an understanding of the financial barriers that say a single mother of three kids has," she says. "You don't want people to experience what you've experienced. As a single parent, I have a lot of compassion for people. Everybody wants to better their lives, and some have no other means of training."

As for her plans, Debruyne says, "I like the field I'm in now....Hopefully, I get to stick around and continue to assist Aboriginal individuals to gain long term employment. I don't have concrete plans, but I know [my future position] will be something like job coaching or assisting individuals in their career paths."

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### **Graduate Profile: Allan Adam** **Uranium City** **NORPAC, class of 2012**

"It's never too late!" says Allan Adam, who in his early 50s decided to go to university. "I thought I would be the oldest, but still there was one older than me," Adam says. He had already achieved much in his life, so his goal was, as he says, "basically [to get] letters behind my name."

Even though living in Regina, Adam decided to take his degree at NORPAC. Going back north for his education meant that the Band would help pay his tuition and textbooks. But there were other reasons Adam wanted to go to NORPAC. He is from Fond du Lac Denesuline First Nation and he grew up in Uranium City. His adult career took him to northern locations, including La Ronge, Yellowknife, and the North West Territories. Adam was missing "camping and fishing and the way northerners work together." NORPAC also appealed to Adam because of its competitive edge, which he says was combined with the support of the instructors there. Adam says, "I am competitive in nature. When I was young, I was an athlete...Competition helps me get better: That is what university is about! 'What can I do to catch up to others, and move past them?'" But NORPAC was also about helping others to improve: "I liked to help out other Dene students with their studies," he says.

At the stage Adam was at in his career as radio broadcaster-turned-politician, he was accustomed to a certain income, which becoming a full-time student wouldn't provide. Thus, he had to wait until his partner found a job in the North and then, once relocated, Adam worked as a sessional Dene language instructor at NORTEP-NORPAC. As well, he and his partner set up an online language service ([www.allanadam.com](http://www.allanadam.com)) called First Language Speaking Project Inc., which included language services for Dene, Cree, and other First Nations languages.



**"It's never too late!" says Allan Adam, who in his 50s, decided to go to university.**

Adam found that his work as a broadcaster gave him transferable skills for his studies at NORPAC. "Coming from media, everything is regimented. I put that frame of mind into my studies. If I had a paper due in May, I started it in January." In keeping with his competitive nature, Adam liked to take on challenging topics, such as one memorable paper in which he wrote about metaphysics combined with Indigenous knowledge, documenting Elders' testimonies and stories from his own life. His regimented routine allowed him to work as a sessional, help other students, develop and volunteer his time in language service, and still focus his attention on his studies.

NORPAC's value, says Allan, has to do with its attitude towards culture. Students are able to retain their cultures and languages while attending university.

NORPAC's value, says Adam, has to do with its attitude towards culture. Students are able to retain their cultures and languages while attending university. Adam recalls walking down the halls and hearing young people talking in their own languages about their fishing and hunting trips. "It is important that language be a part of our education, that history [be taught] from our perspective," says

Adam. NORPAC graduates, such as nurses and lawyers, go out into the community and are able to contribute to the northern economy, cultures, and languages. Adam, himself, has also thought about becoming a lawyer. "I wanted to get into law after I was done my degree, but I didn't--but maybe I still will," he says.

But for now, Adam has many projects on which he is working. He will continue his work as a sessional language instructor at NORTEP-NORPAC, and as a consultant for language and translation services. He is excited about his new business in which he is involved in project management. "I'm trying to get more of our people working in trades," he says. His new company has just developed a partnership with an Aboriginal company from Alberta, and he is looking at work with other companies who need help hiring qualified Aboriginal people. Adam's vision is broad, as he considers the possibilities across provinces. His recent election to the University of Saskatchewan senate will also help him to further his vision for Aboriginal languages and cultures, especially Dene, as the university develops curriculum and Indigenous knowledge into its programs. Adam says, "NORTEP-NORPAC also contributes to this goal because of its instructors and attitudes towards language and culture." Adam is also sitting on the Board of Directors with APTN for his second 3-year term. All of this keeps him busy doing what he loves.

As Adam looks back on his life, he does not attribute his success to luck: "I got married at 20, had kids right away, got a good job right away. People think it's luck, but it's not." Adam advises, "When opportunities arise, run with them."

**Graduate Profile: Jenna Johnson**  
**La Ronge**  
**NORPAC, class of 2012**

Jenna Johnson hasn't had a lot of time since graduating to develop her career, but she has still managed to complete her Social Work degree from the University of Regina since graduating from NORPAC in 2012.

While a student at NORPAC, Johnson secured a position with the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority, and this position has supported her through her education in both La Ronge and Regina. She is currently employed with SLGA in a new position as Customer Experience Analyst. And though social work is still her passion, Johnson enjoys her current position, "I enjoy having the opportunity to combine both my education as well as my years of experience with SLGA."



**Jenna Johnson recalls her time at NORPAC with a sense of fondness.**

Johnson recalls her time at NORPAC with a sense of fondness, "I had a good experience at NORPAC. I feel as though I got a well-rounded education from some really great instructors who truly cared about each individual student."

One aspect of NORPAC that Johnson found beneficial was the size of her classes. "The small class sizes were extremely beneficial as instructors were always readily available. ...The smaller class sizes helped me to gain some confidence in the classroom before moving on to larger classes in Regina," she says. Johnson says she wouldn't do anything differently, now that she has gone South to complete her social work degree. "I would still choose to attend NORPAC because it helped prepare me for what was to come while living and studying in Regina," she says.

Growing up in the North has given Johnson valuable exposure to Indigenous language and culture, which was something she valued highly in her K-12 experience. When her family moved east to Manitoba temporarily, she was disappointed that there wasn't the same emphasis. "Basic Indigenous history was included in parts of my education [there], but language and culture certainly were not." Cultural content at NORPAC was something Johnson valued in her education. "Had it not been for living in the North and attending NORPAC, I would not have had half of the knowledge and education I had regarding Indigenous peoples."

Returning to the North and beginning a career in social work are part of Johnson's plans. "I love living in the North because there are so many diverse people and places to explore," she says. I plan to work in the social work field in the near future, while raising a family. I would certainly like to live in the North again at some point in my life. However, until then, I will continue to visit and spend much of my free time up North, enjoying all that it has to offer!"

## 20. INSPIRATION: THE CALL FOR PARTNERSHIP

The student stories gathered together in this document offer eloquent testimony to the deep and profound changes brought to their lives by participation in the NORTEP and NORPAC programs. This transformation has extended to all of the northern communities in a ripple effect that has impacted the socio-economic and educational fabric of the north. In the stories we see innovation, self-determination and development—the very qualities that motivated the creation of NORTEP and NORPAC in the first instance [NORTEP in 1977 and NORPAC in 1989].

There can be little doubt that the existence of these programs has permitted entrance into post-secondary education for students who would otherwise have been excluded. The reasons for exclusion would have been many, including geographic reasons (distance from the large urban university centres), as well as the cultural and linguistic barriers represented by southern society. The child-friendly atmosphere of the programs has also been more supportive of students with families, and the proximity to home helps to ensure that a viable child support system is more readily available.

Success has meant that almost every northern community now has northern Aboriginal role models in the school, or in some other area of professional endeavour. These role models are an inspiration for local students as they consider the career options available to them. In doing so, they affirm the culture and languages of the north, Cree and Dene. Besides inspiration, however, the role models—graduates of NORTEP and NORPAC—also address vital northern labour market needs and stimulate the local economy.

Although much has been accomplished, much remains to be done. There are still frontiers - areas where further gains will require new program initiatives. The spirit of innovation will still be needed if these frontiers are to be overcome. Critical areas linked to the labour market are:

- teachers who specialize in mathematics and science<sup>42</sup>
- secondary teachers, and
- careers outside of the teaching profession.

In the face of these evident labour force needs NORTEP-NORPAC is expending considerable effort to respond. The building of a “joint-use” facility,<sup>43</sup> mounting a lobby for funding to support a secondary teacher education program, and the inclusion of a pre-nursing program all represent initiatives that have been accomplished, or are the process of being proposed.

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<sup>42</sup> “There is a critical shortage of Aboriginal teachers at the high school level who are qualified to teach mathematics and sciences.” NTM, p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> Tymchak, M., & Niessen, S. (2007). *Building the future today: Demographic, education, and socio-economic indicators towards a new NORTEP joint-use, shared facility*. Regina, SK: SIDRU for the Centre for Northern Research and Graduate Studies Education (CeNRGe).

Obviously they cannot be accomplished by NORTEP alone—governmental and also corporate partners must come alongside if they are to become realities.

Sadly, the very success of the NORTEP and NORPAC graduates also presents a serious challenge to policy makers today, and raises difficult questions. Why should a program that has demonstrated so much success continue to be housed in rented quarters, in a building intended for government departments and shared with them? Perhaps the time has come for a new Government building, leaving the Mistasinihk Building for the exclusive use of NORTEP-NORPAC—a true northern campus?

Similarly, why should the patent success of NORTEP's "Elementary" teacher education program not be bolstered by funding to support a Secondary Teacher Education Program? Moving forward does not appear to come easily; but the conversation about goals like this one—and many others—needs to be restarted.

The bold initiative represented by the first teacher education course offering in the "Old Gateway" School building (now long since demolished) represented a new beginning for northern Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan. Now, as we move steadily into the second decade of the 21st Century, new horizons beckon once more. We are inspired by the voices and stories of the graduates that are documented in this book, but our satisfaction is tempered by inspiration: in the spirit that motivated the program pioneers of the past, we are driven to press on to new frontiers and new horizons. We want to create educational conditions that will support more programs and a wider array of career options.

To move forward in this way will require immense determination and it will also require partnership—the partnership of government, universities and the corporate sector as well as northern communities.

We invite these stakeholders to celebrate the powerful and transformative stories contained in this book. We also invite you to collaborate with us as we move into the future because the story making has not ended. We are determined to create new horizons and inspire new stories.

But we will need your partnership and support. We will also need your willingness to take some risks. The stories that fill these pages inspire us to do no less than step boldly into the future as our graduates have done in the past. Distant horizons will become present realities only for those who take the risk of moving forward together.



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