



Partnership Update

May 2021

I would not have thought that, one year later, we would still be reporting on the activities of the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no question that the pandemic has substantially slowed our work together with communities. Between the inability for students and researchers to travel, to communities being first in preparation mode, then organizing vaccinations, and then addressing the influx of positive cases particularly during this apparent third wave, the IYFP agenda has taken a back seat. Fortunately, the SSHRC has recognized such impacts, and has automatically extended the timelines for all projects by a year, and has been responsive to providing some reimbursements for 'pandemic costs'. While our work in partnership with communities has slowed, all are on the threshold of some really positive initiatives. And so hopefully with our next newsletter, we will be able to share with you the launch and implementation of some of these exciting plans.

In the meantime, we're happy to share some recent and up-coming...

IYFP Partner Research Highlights!

In 2020, IYFP investigators Robert Shepherd and Katherine Graham edited and contributed to a special edition of the **Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation** entitled, [Evaluation in Indigenous Contexts](#). The issue includes seven papers that focus on Indigenous evaluation theory, practice, and implementation in various policy contexts including energy, northern community policy contexts, and community health.

Included in this edition are two articles written by IYFP team members, including one published by the editors entitled: [Identifying Key Epistemological Challenges Evaluating in Indigenous Contexts: Achieving Bimaadiziwin through Youth Futures](#). This article draws from the authors' experiences collaborating with First Nations community partners through the IYFP, and identifies practical challenges that exist in research and evaluation when seeking to bridge Western and Indigenous approaches to meet both community and government needs.

The second, written by Gerald McKinley is entitled: [Reflections on Being a Learner: The Value of Relationship-based Community Evaluations in Indigenous Communities](#). The author uses a transformative paradigm and draws from his own experiences working and learning how to conduct evaluation with FN in Ontario, to consider the relationships between power, discourse, and paradigms in the relationship between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and being. He asks what steps an evaluator can take to ensure that local epistemological and ontological perspectives are respected and captured.

Also of interest, Kim Matheson and Janet Gordon collaborated with others on a book chapter entitled **Youth Resilience** that will be imminently published. This chapter shares their understanding of the factors that contribute to the resilience of Indigenous youth living in northern regions, and is grounded in the work that they have been doing in partnership with communities. Although not yet available, the reference is: Matheson, K., Asokumar, A., Anisman, H., & Gordon, J. (2021). Youth resilience. In H. Moller & R. Schiff (Eds). *Health and healthcare in the Northern Canada*. University of Toronto Press, forthcoming.





Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA)

As one can only imagine, the Covid-19 pandemic has placed an unprecedented strain on the Health Authority capacity. In order to support SLFNHA's ability to respond quickly to new priorities brought on by the pandemic, IYFP Youth Resiliency Coordinator Monica Pishew was seconded last April to the Covid-19 Response Unit (but has since left SLFNHA). As the health agency responsible for community wellness, SLFNHA has been extremely occupied with supporting its 33 First Nation communities in the preparation, planning, vaccination, and response process.

One exciting new development at SLFNHA however, is the hiring of Ariel Root (a PhD student that has been involved in the IYFP activities since inception) into the inaugural research position, Anishiniw Nanadowi'kikendamowin Program Manager. *Anishiniw Nanadowi'kikendamowin* loosely translates as 'seeking the understandings of/about the people', a term that tries to capture the concept of Indigenous research practice in the region. In her new role, Ariel will work closely with COO (and IYFP partner) Janet Gordon and other SLFNHA leadership, as well as the Chiefs Committee on Health, Chiefs of SLFNHA communities, Tribal Councils, and other stakeholders, to develop a purposeful research program at SLFNHA. This will include the development of locally relevant research protocols to facilitate community-based research capacity and cooperation with other research bodies. This new position will enhance SLFNHA's research and collaboration capacity in support of its regional wellness goals now and in the future.

Kasabonika First Nation



Throughout the pandemic, the IYFP has maintained connection with the Kasabonika Youth Apprentices (YAs), Youth Council, and other key community leaders, continuing to advocate for youth priorities during this very challenging time. The youth continue to reach out to academic team leads when they have ideas, questions, or require support, which speaks to the positive relationship that has been built.

Despite being employed in other roles within the community, the YAs continue to collaborate with each other and Youth Council members to organize activities to keep youth engaged and to plan for the future. For example, stemming from these discussions, Kasabonika YAs requested IYFP funds to purchase ribbons and shirts that they used to create and distribute ribbon shirt-making kits to interested young people, and for a new dance company in the community. Pictures were posted on Facebook, and given the success of the project, the youth are considering reviving dance in the community. As well, plans to develop a community library for transitional-aged youth continue to move forward, and several boxes of books were shipped.

Establishing a youth centre remains a top priority. Youth expressed a need for a space in community where they can feel safe, obtain support and plan and host youth activities. To date, a central plot of land has been designated for the youth centre and portable trailers have been transported to the site. Youth are developing plans for the use of the space, as well as advocating for the funding and support they need to implement their plans in a sustainable way.

As in all of the communities, it has been all-hands-on-deck, which has meant that youth have been asked to assume many responsibilities until such time that the COVID crisis is in the past. Recent news that a COVID-19 vaccine clinic will be moving to Kasabonika brings some optimism among youth that community-based activities may resume in the near future.

Michikan Lake FN



In order to support the community's historic right to manage (and name) their territorial lands in Northwestern Ontario, IYFP has followed suit with the community by referring to Bearskin Lake FN as Michikan Lake FN. Although the community has not formally changed its name, school and education authorities are using Michikan Lake, as is the community Facebook page.

In our last newsletter we reported on the priorities identified in Michikan Lake that focussed on creating opportunities to enhance physical health and wellness, including healthy eating and food security within the community, as well as working with youth to enhance self-esteem and well-being through sports and physical activities. Since the pandemic began, IYFP has worked to adapt and advance these community priorities. One such adaptation included co-planning a virtual speaker series to promote connections between youth living in community and First Nations role models, while exploring topics such as bullying and racism, mental resilience, and coping with adversity when moving off reserve.

The first inspirational guest speaker event, held March 12th, featured Olympic hockey silver medalist Brigitte Lacquette, whose thoughtful presentation touched on many of these topics. Among other accomplishments, Lacquette was the first First Nations hockey player to be named to Canada's National Women's Team and offers a great role model for First Nations athletes.

To make this virtual session personal and engaging, community partners organized youth to participate at the community Youth Centre. Youth were introduced to Lacquette and heard her stories about her life and family, as well as her struggles and victories as she carved her path to the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics. Through guided discussion, youth were able to consider how Lacquette's stories resonated for them, and the sources of resilience and strength they could draw from during times of struggle. Youth were provided opportunities to ask questions.

In addition to the speaker series, the IYFP team has continued to help to enhance the programming available at the newly established community fitness centre. This includes a school-based weightlifting program that is being implemented in partnership with community-based Choose Life staff.

The program is multi-phased in order to serve the diverse fitness goals of youth, and will include: (1) General exercise and safe use; (2) Powerlifting; and (3) Olympic Weightlifting for those who want to take their passion to the next level. In order to facilitate the instruction of these more complicated weightlifting techniques, IYFP team members Kieran Peltier and Mark Bruner are recording virtual sessions at the Nipissing University **Group for Youth Development (G4YD)** lab, and sharing these instructional tutorial videos with community-based Choose Life staff and youth so they can be used as teaching references.



CHOOSE LIFE WHOLISTIC WELLNESS WEEK
SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER



BRIGETTE LACQUETTE

OLYMPIAN
3-TIME IIHF WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MEDALIST
2-TIME IIHF WOMEN'S WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP MEDALIST
2-TIME CANADIAN WOMEN'S HOCKEY LEAGUE CHAMPION
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA-DULUTH WOMEN'S HOCKEY ALUMNI

Bearskin Lake Choose Life is proud to bring you a special guest speaker in partnership with the Indigenous Youth Futures Program.

Friday March 12th, 2021 @ 5:00pm CST on Zoom
20 Youth VIP Spots at Youth Centre
20 Youth VIP Spots at School (Location TBD)

To register for the event please contact Samuel Mekanak or Kieran Peltier for Zoom and VIP info:

Samuel Mekanak Choose Life Coordinator, Michikan Lake Tel: (807) 363-0333 Email: bilnchooselife@gmail.com	Kieran Peltier G4YD Research Team, Nipissing University Tel: (705) 471-9244 Email: kieran.peltier@hotmail.com
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*Free refreshments will be available for VIP attendees. VIP registration spots will be given out on a first come, first serve basis as space is limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. Additionally, the VIP spots will be reserved for youth in the community. However, adult community members are both welcome and encouraged to attend by tuning into the talk online using the secure Zoom link that will be provided on the day of the event.

G4YD GROUPS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT | **CHOOSE LIFE** | Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership



Fort Severn

Plans with Fort Severn First Nation have also been substantially affected by the COVID pandemic. While the community appears to be taking advantage of local resources (especially at the moment, as it is on the goose migration path, a food staple for the community), our plans last summer to launch a land-based research summer institute for youth were put on hold, and will be again this summer.

This said there continues to be considerable collaborative interest in working with Fort Severn to establish a land research hub grounded in a Two-Eyed Seeing approach. We have recently received an investment from **Environment and Climate Change Canada** to work with the community to move such an initiative forward. At the moment, the best we can do is continue to work with the Fort Severn youth in Thunder Bay (in conjunction with the RMYC and doctoral candidate, Nathan Wilson) to encourage youths' ideas for how to meet their interests and aspirations through such an initiative.



Thunder Bay – Regional Multicultural Youth Centre (RMYC)

The RMYC has continued to create opportunities for youth in Thunder Bay, as well as those who have returned to their communities, to stay connected with their friends, communities and culture. It has been a challenging time for many youth, with the lack of structure and technical resources to focus on their education. RMYC has instigated many activities to support them, including setting up peer mentoring, delivering free meals to youth in boarding homes, and providing study space and internet access at the youth centre.

Last summer/fall, the RMYC supported two Fort Severn students to produce a [video](#) advocating the experiences of Two Spirit/LGBTQ+ Indigenous youth. In addition they continue to offer a 'Voices of Youth' online space every Friday to share stories, and provide mentoring and 'coping with Covid' advice and information. They collaborated with Youth X Canada to host the *Mind & Music Concert Series*. This initiative livestreamed performances by local musicians and provided a space for youth to ask performers questions, while also provided mental health information and resources.



In short, the RMYC continues to do an amazing job of supporting Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay and beyond through a very challenging time.

IYFP Administration and Staffing Updates

As we reported to you last year, the IYFP Administrator and Community Liaison, Christine May, has been on a one-year maternity-leave absence, and will be returning in July. Throughout this past year Maria Pranschke, as well as Betty Zahalan, have been a huge support to the team by taking on many of Christine's responsibilities. While Maria will continue working with us at Carleton in other capacities, Betty is a much sought after casual administrator at Carleton, and will likely move on to work with other administrative units at the university. Sadly, IYFP Knowledge Mobilization support, Andrée Germain will also be moving on at the end of this month in order to pursue front-line work with the Oasis Program at the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre in Ottawa. I want to thank her for her contribution to the IYFP partnership (not the least of which was amalgamating the activities for children and youth during COVID that are on our [homepage](#)), and wish her the very best in her new capacity!