

First Nations youth job shadow: Let's be unafraid of taking on the world as tomorrow's leaders.

Contributed by Joyce Hunter / Editor, Wawatay News
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Over the course of a week, we learned how small the world really is and how caring and supportive its residents are if we just reach out to them.

"Our thoughts possess powers to create," said Nishnawbe Aski Grand Chief Stan Beardy as this year's program got underway.

Unfortunately, added Beardy, when people talk about business plans, in many cases, First Nations people are not even at the starting line yet.

When First Nations peoples finally came out of the bush in the 60's after eons spent as hunter/gatherers, mankind was already on the moon, Beardy said.

"(We came out of the bush to find) we had missed the industrial revolution and the wage economy," he said.

About \$20 billion in commodities is extracted from the Nishnawbe Aski territory annually. Of that, our people get less than two per cent back in transfer payments, Beardy said.

Beardy also said residential schools were a major setback to First Nations people - some residential school students aligned themselves as pets with staff members.

“Those pets would arrange the beatings and abuses of other students,” Beardy said. “Now, when chiefs try and strategize with government or with industry, they get lumped in as being abusers in much the same way by residential school survivors - most of whom happen to also be today’s leaders.”

Beardy leaned forward as he spoke to our group and was careful to make eye contact with each and every one of us.

“The world is knocking on our door wanting our fresh water, trees and minerals,” he said. “The sooner our young people can convince themselves they can thrive in larger society; they will.

“And I have every confidence that you can do that.”

It was, without a doubt, very heartening to hear.

Possibly the most startling realization I came to after he made his revelation to us was: “After all those kicks while we were down, we are still here.”

It’s obvious we as a people are shaken and a little bit bruised, but I think the worst is behind us.

Coming from a tiny Cree reserve of 250 people, which is located along the Polar Bear Provincial Park in a land that may seem cold and desolate at first glance, I commiserate with today’s youth who say there are no opportunities in their communities.

There wasn’t much to do in Peawanuck and very little opportunity that I could see, but it shaped how I would go on to have a relationship with the world at large.

And like many of our youth, I left home at 13 and moved 450 kilometres south to the City of Timmins for high school. Our world is different from the mainstream for this reason. It is something we can shudder about - letting a child that young leave home - or we can recognize the incredible amount of strength and faith both child and parent place in each other when parting ways.

While I recognize our history and tragedies, I think we also have a lot to celebrate as a people.

Beardy also told us there is one crucial defining characteristic that separate First Nations learners from mainstream learners.

“We are concrete learners who learn by example rather than by conceptualizing through books and theory,” he said. “That is why I think Project Beyshick will be an enormous benefit to you.”

Over the course of seven days, we were introduced to high-powered executives who were brokering multi-million dollar deals, providing a range of services to multi-ethnic groups while dealing with the language challenges that go with those or hosting tele-conferences with different branches located in different countries around the world in different time zones.

When you come from a community of 250, that is such a huge departure from what you are used to.

Now that we’ve been amongst these people I can say this: these are ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things with their time.

Do we have to be exceptionally smart? No.

As Aditya Jha, Project Beyshick’s founder says, all it takes is a simple decision.

We just have to set ourselves a goal and stick with it.

And why can’t we make our world better? The Jewish community did it.

After years of persecution and being attacked in a holocaust, they have picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and kept on going.

Geoff Hoy a high-ranking executive at HSBC, one of the world’s leading banks that netted an estimated \$20 billion in profits last year had a lot to say about his experience as one of the hosts to Project Beyshick’s participants. He started talking about Darcy Keejick, a small business owner from North Spirit Lake, who shadowed him.

“He touched and impressed more people here at our company than he knows,” Hoy said. “He talked about how he runs a small business in a remote community of 300.

“He brought an interesting insight to us that we otherwise wouldn’t have had.”

Hoy also said he was impressed by the level of talent, ambition and drive in participants — a group of NAN youth.

“These are the type of people we are looking to hire,” he said.

This proves it. We all have it in each of us to get it done.

Joyce Hunter — joyceh@wawatay.on.ca

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