

Train station - Project Beyshick

Contributed by Carl Clutchey, The Chronical Journal
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As soon as Damien Bouchard set foot in TVO's production headquarters last week in downtown Toronto, he knew he had arrived. He could feel it in his bones.

"When I got there, I felt like I was already working there," the 23-year-old Aroland First Nation resident enthused this week.

Bouchard was among eight young aboriginal people who took part in the latest version of Project Beyshick, the job-shadowing program developed by Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the Toronto-based POA Educational Foundation.

The program, in its fifth year, allows would-be aboriginal entrepreneurs to get up close with experienced professionals in their fields of choice.

One of the participants has a chance of being awarded \$15,000 for presenting the best business plan following their week-long experience.

Bouchard, a Confederation College filmmaking student who sees himself heading up his own documentary production company, said the "fast-paced" week he spent in Toronto rubbing shoulders with TVO executives and hands-on crew members was invaluable.

He left the provincial capital with a bunch of business cards.

The experience "made me believe that I can go out there and meet the people I need to start my own company," said Bouchard, who is off to complete a year of film studies at North Vancouver's Capilano University.

Before, "I always felt my options were kind of limited."

POA Foundation spokesman Ashutosh Jha said he'd like to expand the program so it can host up to 20 participants at a time.

This year's corporate participants, in addition to TVO, included business heavyweights like BMO Financial and Laura Secord.

The main point of the program "is to have (the participants) see normal people who are just like them doing extraordinary things," Jha said Friday.

Beyshick, a Cree word meaning oneness, was started following a chance meeting between NAN Grand Chief Stan Beardy and Toronto businessman and philanthropist Aditya Jha.

"We live well and have gone to good schools, and yet many First Nation people live in Third World conditions," said Ashutosh Jha. "So (the foundation) is our way of giving back to Canada."

Ironically, said Bouchard, he had been thinking of taking a pass on the job shadowing until his father insisted it was an opportunity not to miss.

"I've been thanking him for that every day since," said Bouchard.