

## CTV: Northern Ont. aboriginals 'job shadowing' CEOs

Contributed by Matthew Chung (Canadian Press)  
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TORONTO More than a dozen potential future role models from northern Ontario will be in Toronto this week "job shadowing" corporate CEOs as part of a project to empower the aboriginal community.

The budding entrepreneurs are to arrive Monday night armed with business plans and will follow the daily routines of executives at a number of organizations.

Stan Beardy, grand chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a political organization representing 49 First Nations communities, says his community needs such opportunities.

"Right now what I need is a small group of very dedicated young people as a role model to talk with other young people and say, 'This is possible, we can do it.'"

Now in its second year, the program, dubbed Project Beyshick, is the brainchild of Nepalese-born Aditya Jha, who made his fortune in Canada in 2001 when he sold his Toronto educational software company to Sun Microsystems for more than \$100 million US.

Wanting to give back, Jha teamed up with Beardy to create Project Beyshick, which is intended to give entrepreneurial aboriginals experience in the corporate world that they can bring back to their communities.

This year the program features a \$15,000 prize for the person with the best business plan.

"It's one thing to follow a dream, and then what we are telling these young people is, 'Now you have to put it into practice,'" Beardy said. "Because if you're going to be a role model, then other people -- our people -- have to see that this is workable."

Jha agrees.

"When a few of them become massively successful financially in the mainstream world, the mainstream world will see them differently," he said. "It will have a viral effect on their whole community. ... When a few members become very successful doing something, the other members want to follow them and beat them."

Devon Meekis, 31, is the CEO of Thunder Bay, Ont.-based FLI, an information technology company he started last year.

He says a person doesn't need a degree or diploma to work for him if they can get the job done.

Now Meekis hopes that when he shadows Sid Thomas of consulting company Verax, he'll get some tips on how to grow his small business.

"I see so much," he said. "I love the idea of going in and seeing a successful entrepreneur -- somebody who has taken that next step."

Janine Szczepanowski, vice-president of leadership and entrepreneurship development at construction company Ellis Don, says her company sees great potential for the aboriginal community.

"We do believe from a company perspective -- and I personally believe -- that they are perhaps one of our untapped resources," she said. "On a personal level, it's an opportunity to share some of the business experience I've gained."

Other companies taking part in the project include FedEx, TVOntario, HSBC and the Toronto Police Services Board.