

The Chronicle Journal : Mentor program develops aboriginal business skills

Contributed by CHEN CHEKKI
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Joyce Hunter says that if you really care about achieving something, you're going to get there.

And the 27-year-old is on her way, along with 15 other business-minded members of Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), to be matched with bigwig business mentors in Toronto to sharpen their spirit of entrepreneurship.

(The mentors) are the cream of the crop, Hunter said.

Hunter, who edits the Northern Ontario weekly aboriginal newspaper Wawatay News, is being matched with officials at the Globe and Mail starting Monday in the business mentoring program for aboriginals.

In its second year, the program is arranged by NAN, which represents 49 First Nations in Northern Ontario, as well as Toronto-based POA Educational Foundation, a charity group that supports entrepreneurship, and the Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund.

The participants, who are in their 20s and 30s, will each be paired with a successful business person in Toronto starting Monday. They will work for the rest of the week in their respective fields, which include the energy sector and software industry.

The goal is to match aboriginal participants with mentors in areas of their interest to help build up their business savvy.

After the week is over and the participants return home, one lucky participant will have the option of developing a business plan or advancing in the corporate world with the help of at least \$15,000 from the mentorship program.

Hunter will ask her mentors at the Globe and Mail about how long it took for them to make it to where they are and how she can advance into her career as quickly as possible. But she expects she will trip and fall along the way, as a fact of life.

Her skills and knowledge learned from the program will be used to help start Hoof Beat, a planned new weekly newspaper run as a branch of Wawatay News.

Im not afraid to learn, said Hunter, a Thunder Bay resident who originates from the NAN territory of Peawanuck First Nation on the Hudson Bay coast. I believe if you are afraid and let yourself be intimidated, you wont absorb the information.