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On track toward No. 1 in corporate world

First nations youth converge on Toronto to learn business

BY JOYCE HUNTER, TORONTO

A self-made millionaire is helping others achieve professional independence.

Toronto's Aditya Jha, through Project Beyschick, has welcomed 16 ambitious aboriginal youth to the city and matched them with highly placed executives of major corporations located in and around the city.

Organizations like Globe and Mail, TV Ontario, HSBC and FedEx have generously opened their doors to the youth who range in age from 17 to 34.

Joyce Hunter, who did her placement at Globe and Mail, was amazed at the innovative ways that staff at the 162-year-old national newspaper have come together to address issues and challenges facing the industry at large.

"What they have is a well-oiled machine," she said after having shadowed editorial and advertising leaders over three days learning how they've updated their business practices to keep up with the times.

The goal of the exercise was to show youth they can aspire to be the executives who perform well in the upper echelon of the business world, Mr. Jha said.

"This project is about nurturing entrepreneurship," said the chief operating officer of Toronto-based software development company Osellus Inc. about the job-shadowing project he launched last year to benefit northern First Nations.

International conference calls with multiple participants over multiple time zones, the brokering of major business deals and co-ordinating business at the world-wide level were among the things participants were exposed to.

"It's a high-flying, fast-paced environment and it's fascinating," Ms. Hunter said at the conclusion of her stay at the Globe.

Born in a remote village in Nepal — the 10th poorest country in the world — Jha understands the significance of exposure like this to opportunity.

"I wanted to join the police when I was a child because I saw that they had power and because it was something I could relate to in my experience of the world," he said. "My parents were supportive and were determined to make sure I would lead a more successful life than I could expect in my village, so they brought me out of the community to get educated and to see what opportunities were available out there."

His parents' support led to an education and then a lucrative career in the field of computer engineering.

"You have to nurture it to make it happen," he said.

Jha, who immigrated to Canada 11 years ago seeking his fortune, opened the job-shadowing opportunity to Nishnawbe Aski (Treaty 9 area located in northern Ontario) youth after he heard the provincial territorial organization's grand chief Stan Beardy speak at a black tie affair in Toronto.

"We only came out of the bush in the 60s," said the Muskrat Dam band member. "By that time, man-kind was already on the moon. We had missed the industrial revolution and the arrival of the wage economy."

He also said the federal government's Indian Act has had a role in preventing First Nation peoples from participating in the global economy.



FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Project Beyschick participant Joyce Hunter meets Sylvia Stead, deputy editor of The Globe and Mail, to begin two days of job shadowing.



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Grand Chief Stan Beardy

"It wasn't until the 60's that we got the right to vote," he said. "Prior to that, we were non-beings."

In the 1940's, first nations peoples were not allowed to retain legal counsel, Beardy added.

"We also were required to have a pass to leave our reservation if we wanted to visit another community," he said. "We were also not allowed to congregate more than three people at a time. We had no property rights. We still don't."

Residential schools, however, have probably had the most impact, Beardy said.

"There were some students who aligned themselves with teachers as pets and they would arrange to have other students targeted for various abuses," he said.

"Today, when chiefs try to strategize with either government or industry, they get lumped in with behaviours exhibited at residential schools — such as the power and legacy of those institutions."

Today, Beardy declared, first nations peoples must participate in dominant society of run the risk of getting left behind.

"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 get involved in larger society, they will. We don't need hand-outs. We need people who can get the job done from amongst our ranks as well as the expertise and resource and capacity building."

Beardy also said Project Beyschick's structure is ingenious.

"In our culture, people believe and learn from things they can see and touch while the larger society is learned through books and theory," he said. "This program is structured in such a way that it gives maximum learning to our youth as well as the belief that they can do it too."

Jha was motivated to help after he heard Beardy speak about how his people are suffering.

"I think it is a tragedy that Canada, which is a major player of eliminating poverty in the world, has in its own backyard a situation with poverty which is fixable," he said.

In his own way, Jha feels he can help the people of NAN become self sufficient and confident by making this opportunity available.

"People need role models to look up to," he said.

When translated from Oji-Cree, Beyschick means one.

"And that is what I want the project's participants to become," Jha said. "I want them to become number one."

Joyce Hunter, a recently appointed editor of First Nations weekly newspaper Wawatay News is looking forward to taking what she learned at the Globe and applying it to her work upon her return to the job.

"These past few days have been a whirlwind of adventure," she said.

Jha is convinced the project can only mean good things in the future.

"There is a tremendous amount of goodwill in the mainstream to make this project work," Jha said. "The business community I've talked to about it is very supportive

and very encouraging of it. I think the people should explore it."

After getting feedback from participants of last summer's inaugural edition of Project Beyschick, Jha knows he's started the ball rolling in a slew of good things to come.

"I had a girl email me saying she was so confused about what she wanted to do later in life after having followed Elizabeth Bassett, the CEO of TVO around," Jha said. "The girl came to me saying 'now that I've been here, this kind of thing seems within reach. Now I just have to figure out what I want to do with my life.'"

Sweeter words could not have been relayed to Jha that day.

"The CEO also came to me later and said 'I was not as mature as this girl at her age,'" he added. "It was reassuring and heartening to hear that."

This year Jha is expanding Project Beyschick to include applications from students, to fledgling entrepreneurs, working professionals and community leaders as well.

"Many leaders in the northern communities, I understand, spend most of their time dealing with bureaucrats," he said, using an example about why he decided to expand the program.

"If we match community leaders with successful leaders in large centres, they could get a sense of different leadership styles that could be helpful to them in their own communities."

The same, Jha said, goes for working professionals and entrepreneurs already doing business in their chosen fields.

Project Beyschick's goals

'It is our goal that members of First Nations will become equal partners in the economic prosperity of Canada and Canadian life.'

Based on the focus areas of the POA Foundation, the primary goals of Beyschick are:

- To encourage Canadian aboriginal to take an active interest in the corporate world and entrepreneurship.
- To provide participants with first-hand experience in a business environment through a job shadow engagement with a senior-level executive or business mentor.
- To demonstrate how members of different ethnic groups have participated in the success stories of corporate Canada.
- To provide inside into how Toronto's

dynamic marketplace can support as well as challenge business leaders and entrepreneurs from all cultural backgrounds.

- To help Canadian aboriginal communities to build a network of friends with corporate Canada. POA Foundation plans to continue nurturing entrepreneurs from First Nations communities through the establishment of a social venture capital fund. This project will receive its seed funding from the POA Education Foundation and other contributors who share the goal of nurturing entrepreneurship among Canadian aboriginal communities

Organization's founder sees revolution in unusual tree

The tree in our logo is the Banyan tree, it spreads by sending out aerial branches that reach down to the earth and become rooted as additional trunks. The roots then give rise to more trunks and branches. Because of this characteristic and its longevity, this tree is considered immortal.

Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Laureate in Literature in 1913 once said, in a letter to his friend C.F. Andrews: "To study a banyan tree, you not only must know its main stem in its own soil, but also must trace the growth of its greatness in the further soil, for then you can know the true nature of its vitality."

Just what Tagore said, POA Educational Foundation aims to "shed its beneficent shade away from its own birthplace" and expects the beneficiaries to do the same.



Aditya Jha, founder of Project Beyschick, designed the program in close partnership with Nishnawbe Aski Nation.