



EPS Officer Nathan Kennedy: On becoming the calm

By Dale Ladouceur, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

We are inundated with “against all odds” stories that fill our social media and cable channels. Usually sensationalized and dramatized, they are a far cry from reality.

Cst. Nathan Kennedy, however, has a real story about a self-professed “bad kid” who scaled a mountain range of odds to fulfill his dream of becoming *the calm* for others.

Now a six-year veteran with EPS, Kennedy was taken from his Cree/Chipewyan mom and, along with his younger brother, became a ward of the government and placed into foster care before the age of five.

The brothers jumped back and forth from foster home to foster home, (a package deal), finally landing with a family that “...is my family to this day, no question.” Kennedy recalls, “We came to their house and the first thing they said was ‘We’re gonna love you and we’re gonna keep you’ - that was huge.”

Having given the boys every opportunity to develop an interest in something, nothing seemed to hold Nathan’s interests except trouble. But the family was patient with Nathan’s conditions and supported him in every way.

“The meds were a sore spot for me when I was twelve. I held a lot of internal regret and resentment for having to take meds in order to function as a person. I would stop taking them because I told myself I don’t need help.” But the inconsistency with meds was problematic.

After ten years of destroying his foster parents’ property, skipping school and stealing, his parents sat him down and told him he had to go. “Even on the day I was moving out to the group home, mom was crying and I was crying and my dad was emotional, but mom knew I was going to be ok.”

At the group homes Nathan learned additional skills, scheduling, and soon moved to integrated living. “It was amazing,” enthused Kennedy. “During that time, I had to maintain check-ins, actively seek employment, it was perfect. Throughout all of this I was connected to my (foster) family.”

Kennedy describes wanting to be a cop from his earliest memories. “My biological mother, who is now deceased, was part of this community in Edmonton; the roads that I drive and the calls I go to, very often bring me to one of the houses we lived in.”

Kennedy describes being a victim of severe child abuse by his mom’s boyfriends. “One of my earliest memories as a toddler was being thrown down a flight of stairs because I was crying. I remember that image; looking up at this burly man standing at the top of the stairs as I’m crumpled at the bottom of the stairs.”

His biological mother was heavy into drug and alcohol use, as was her boyfriend. He describes often being left alone as a toddler with his baby brother crying in the bassinette.

“One time, we hadn’t eaten in so long, my brother is crying, his diaper is filled to the brim, daylight is turning into dusk, bottles strewn everywhere. So I remember using a chair, getting up and (at four) using the stove to make macaroni and cheese.”

Through those short years, his early memories involved copious amounts of police visits. “They were always at my house. And as a three- or four-year-old, the only thing that I could correlate the presence of police in uniform to was with calm. Any time they came to my house, I was able to breathe. It meant he couldn’t hurt me or her. It meant she was getting help.



Constable Nathan Kennedy has overcome great obstacles on his journey to becoming a member of the EPS.

The minute we heard the hard knock on the door, I didn’t have to take care of anybody.

“After being a ward of the government, it was not a straight path to being an officer. I was paying my bills and doing the right things but then after a few years I started gambling, which turned into a very serious problem. I was always playing catch-up and always trying to reacquire what I had spent. I soon became homeless and I stole to eat.

“It was shortly after I lost everything that I met

my wife. We had a mutual friend that introduced us. We moved into our own apartment soon after, and I became an industrial painter, became a foreman, I became an inspector and went to school to get my red seal journeyman, finally becoming a certified corrosion engineer/inspector.

One day, Kennedy met up with a friend who had just become a police officer. “I had a criminal record and thought I had lost any chance of ever being a police officer when my friend said: Why don’t you just apply because, you never know.”

Kennedy started the process of getting a pardon which, after a long year, ended in denial due to “...the gravity of my record.” He felt defeated until deciding to appeal; a challenging process that would take a few more years.

The day Nathan Kennedy’s dream was realized, he was walking around Home Depot. “So I get the call, ‘Hey, it’s your file manager Paul, you got a minute?’ I almost prepared myself for disappointment. He said ‘So after a review of your file I regret to inform you that you’re going to have to let your employer know you aren’t going to be working for them anymore.’ I remember holding that piece of moulding and just staring at it and all I could say is: That’s great news!”

There’s a difference between empathy training and having lived it and that’s why there is a big push for diversity in police forces across the country. “Every single person that knows one iota about me says this is something I was meant to do,” enthuses Kennedy. “Obviously I lost sight of it for a bit but the road to success is not a straight line, nor should it be. You never want to discount the work or the path anyone else has walked.”

“I’m completely appreciative of the inroads, (compassion and sensitivity training) that EPS is doing and they are making huge strides. In the six

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International Women’s Day is a call to action

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Alberta Assembly of First Nations regional chief Marlene Poitras says that International Women’s Day isn’t just a celebration of gender equality — it’s a call to action.

That was reflected in the 2021 IWD theme of “Choose to Challenge.”

“A challenged world is an alert world and from challenge comes change, so let’s all choose to challenge,” said Poitras on March 8.

“Think about ways you can help forge a gender-equal world. Let’s start today by taking the time to celebrate women’s achievements, raise awareness against bias and take action towards equality.”

Poitras highlighted the key role women play in Indigenous cultures.

“Today, we have many First Nations women who are taking the lead in the social, cultural, economic and political arenas. We need to encourage them and promote them, as well as those young girls and women who aspire to be like them, and seek to challenge and change the world,” she said.

Poitras, who is the first female regional chief of Alberta, says empowering women has been one of her major goals.

“I hope that soon women chiefs and leaders will be the norm across Turtle Island and not the exception,” she said.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially hard on Indigenous women, Poitras added.

“Many of them work on the front line and have been directly exposed to the virus. They have had to take great risk to keep our communities and families safe,” she said. “To all of you, I lift you up and thank you for all that you do.”

“As the Elders say, women are going to take the lead in healing our communities and then healing the rest of the world.”

Native Women’s Association of Canada president Lorraine Whitman says it’s necessary “to pause and

consider the special circumstances of Indigenous women here and abroad as we assess whether there has been progress made on human rights, justice, economic stability, and basic security.”

“Looking back at the past year under the shadow of COVID-19, I believe there have been few strides forward in any of these areas, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women alike,” said Whitman.

“In fact, we know the pandemic made things worse for the First Nations, Métis and Inuit women of Canada.”

She says this occurred in two ways — women who are victims of abuse have been cut off from their

supports and forced to stay with abusive relatives, and progress has stalled on the government’s action plan to implement the 231 calls to action in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women report.

Whitman ended her statement with a call for international solidarity among Indigenous women.

“The problem of violence is, at last, well recognized in Canada thanks to the advocacy of NWAC and other Indigenous groups. Now our sisters abroad need us to stand up for them and to find ways to keep them safe, just as we are looking for ways to keep Indigenous women safe in Canada,” she said.

The first International Women’s Day was held March 19, 1911 in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. That day, more than one million women and men showed up to public events in support. Other countries followed after.

The United Nations recognized 1975 as International Women’s Year and began celebrating IWD on March 8.

Becoming the calm *cont. from p 2*

years since becoming a cop there’s been more diversity in race, identity and sexuality, but it takes time.”

When asked what message he would offer to Indigenous and other marginalized communities that may fear police, Kennedy’s tone softens. “What’s the only way you can get over a fear? By confronting it. That’s hard for people to fathom especially for those that have gone through serious trauma. I could have gone the way of a complete criminal, but I learned that I am the only one that is going to change my outcome.”

Kennedy urges would-be applicants – especially within the Indigenous community - to not be afraid of applying. “Reach out to me and I will do everything in my power to help facilitate that. I want to see all races of people applying because we need to continue to see that diversity in the EPS and that positivity in the community.”



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Canada still fails to provide clean drinking water

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

While the federal Liberal government vowed in its 2015 election campaign to end water advisories in Indigenous communities by the end of March 2021, a recent report from the auditor general says they haven’t taken action to make this happen.

Auditor General Karen Hogan says 100 water advisories have been lifted since the Liberals came to power, but 60 remain across 41 communities.

“I am very concerned and honestly disheartened that this longstanding issue is still not resolved,” said Hogan, who presented her report to parliament in late-February. “Access to safe drinking water is a basic human necessity. I don’t believe anyone would say that this is in any way an acceptable situation in Canada in 2021.”

She attributes this situation in part to an outdated funding model that hasn’t been changed in 30 years, as well as the lack of a regulatory regime similar to those in settler communities.

“Until these solutions are implemented, First Nations communities will continue to experience challenges in accessing safe drinking water,” Hogan’s report reads.

Indigenous Services Minister Marc Miller, whose government has contributed \$3 billion to address the issue, acknowledged in December that the government would not meet its target. He says he accepts the report’s findings and that the government is committed to fully funding operating and maintenance costs.

Although COVID-19 is to blame for some of the delays, Hogan’s report says that delays were apparent in early-March 2020.

Miller didn’t provide a concrete date by which the AG’s recommendations will be fully implemented.

“While there are some plans in place or under development, those solutions won’t be in place until at least 2025; that’s a very long time for a community to go without safe drinking water,” said Hogan.

In a statement, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde called on the government to make ending water advisories an urgent priority.

“Access to safe, clean water is more important now than ever to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep us all safe,” said Bellegarde.

“I want to see significant and sustained investments in water treatment and water distribution for First Nations, a renewed commitment by the federal government to end boil water advisories within realistic timelines and real investments in First Nations infrastructure to close the infrastructure gap by 2030.”

Chief Bellegarde highlighted the importance of water to Indigenous people, not only as a source of sustenance but spiritually.

“Water is sacred to First Nations and key to the health and well-being of all living things,” he said.

“We must see the human right to safe drinking water prioritized by our government partners. Sustained funding, including investments in operations and maintenance that reflect the true costs, not formula-driven numbers, is the only way to address long-standing issues and ensure safe drinking water for our people and nations.”

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh says the AG’s findings demonstrate the Liberals’ flakiness when it comes to upholding Indigenous rights.

“There is no excuse that anyone in our country doesn’t have access to clean drinking water, particularly the first people of this land,” he said.

This sentiment was also expressed by Conservative Indigenous Services critic Gary Vidal.

“Government success isn’t measured by funding announcements, it’s measured by outcomes, and it is unacceptable that any Canadian is without clean drinking water,” said Vidal.

“The Liberals like to make eye-catching promises in order to win elections but their consistent failure to deliver on these promises is undermining trust and hurting reconciliation.”

The water advisories are based on quality tests and fall into three categories — boil water advisories, which require the water to be boiled for consumption, and use

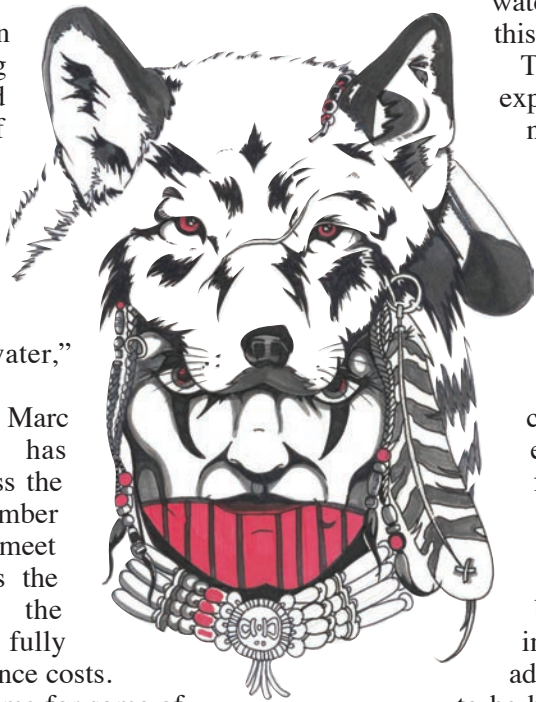
in cooking and cleaning; do not consume advisories, which means the water can only be used for adult bathing; and do not use. Most advisories fall into the boil category, according to Hogan’s audit.

According to reporting from APTN, 15 percent of First Nations homes depend on water delivered to them in trucks, while thousands rely on cisterns attached to their homes.

That’s because the government’s \$1.74 billion dedicated to water infrastructure in First Nations communities doesn’t include enough funds for the pipelines needed to bring water from the treatment plants directly to people’s homes.

Perry Mcleod, a water treatment plant operator in Peepeekisis First Nation in Saskatchewan, said he’s found dead mice, snakes and a car battery in water cisterns he’s cleaned.

“They’re always testing positive for E. coli and bacterias and whatever,” said Mcleod. “There’s standing boil water advisories on all the cisterns and we’re never going to lift it, until we get water trucked, or our water piped to every household.”



Ottawa refutes Jordan’s Principle eligibility

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Indigenous children’s advocates are outraged that on March 12, the Government of Canada filed its written submissions before the Federal Court in support of two applications for judicial review of Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) rulings which relate to compensation and the definition of a First Nations child for the purposes of Jordan's Principle eligibility.

“While much progress has been made to respond to the CHRT rulings, on the issue of compensation, the September 2019 ruling demonstrates an overreach of jurisdiction which fails to adequately advance fair, equitable and comprehensive compensation,” stated Indigenous Services Canada in a press release. “That is why we are actively seeking alternative avenues to comprehensive compensation for those affected.”

The principle was named after Jordan Anderson, a First Nations boy who died in the hospital in 2005 while the Manitoba government and the federal government argued over who would pay for his home care. It obligates the government first contact by a child or their family to cover the cost of required expenses — with the payment issues resolved later.

The CHRT’s order affirms that Jordan’s Principle can apply to children registered or eligible to be registered under the Indian Act; children who have a guardian who is registered or eligible to be registered under the Indian Act; children recognized as citizens by their First Nation; and children who live on reserve.

The Federal Government’s complaint/request for review happened because they believe the tribunal imposed a definition on what it means to be a First Nations Child. “The Tribunal’s decision was made without broad participation of First Nations communities and is a clear overreach of the Tribunal’s jurisdiction,” Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) said in a statement.

“The legal issues around the scope of the Tribunal’s authority to issue these decisions are important ones on which we seek further guidance from the Federal Court.”

However, regardless of the judicial review’s outcome, Jordan’s Principle will apply for children recognized by their First Nation because ISC believes that First Nations are best equipped to decide which children qualify.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, said that, “every step of the way, we’ve had to take Canada to court to get them to comply with Jordan’s Principle.”

She also believes that the Federal Government is using the Indian act in order to restrict eligibility. “No other group of people in Canadian society have to get their racial or cultural identity affirmed by the government of Canada in order to get public services.”

“They want to control, through the Indian Act, who is a First Nations person and they want to try to limit that to the smallest group possible,” Blackstock said.

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Vice Chief David Pratt believes that the CHRT ruling should be followed fully. “We’re encouraging Canada to do what’s right and... to stop the nonsense,” Pratt said in an interview. “(They’re) embarrassing themselves.”

He also believes that a First Nation deciding who belongs is not a burden as “a lot of our chiefs believe that it’s their nation’s right to determine who can and who cannot be a member,” said Vice Chief Pratt.

Cadmus Delorme, chief for Cowessess First Nation in east-southern Saskatchewan said, “The way that First Nations are identified in this country is based on the Indian Act.”

“The less status Indians they have in this country, the less fiduciary obligation.”

“Adding up the score is not helping the real issue of what Jordan’s Principle is supposed to do,” he said, “and that is to close any gap in this country to make sure that it doesn’t matter what background you have, that you’re going to succeed.”

Vaccination roll-out continues as Covid rates rise

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

It’s been over a year since the COVID-19 pandemic started and the world is still navigating through these chaotic times — however, as of March 17, 2021, more than 4.7 million COVID-19 vaccines have been distributed across the country. Things seem to be on the up and up.

As for the Indigenous population in the country, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) is aware of 200,560 administered doses. Additionally, 586 First Nations communities have vaccinations underway.

These figures represent 54 doses administered per 100 adults in First Nations and Inuit communities. This is over five times that of the overall Canadian adult population.

Indigenous adults and communities are being prioritized for access to vaccines because they face higher risks for infection and serious illness, rooted in the history of colonialization and resulting systemic barriers, such as higher rates of chronic disease, reduced access to health care, and a lack of infrastructure (such as housing, water infrastructure, and medical services).

“With the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic behind us, we look ahead with optimism and hope as vaccine roll-outs ramp up across the country,” said ISC in an update.

“Even after being vaccinated, everyone must continue to follow public health measures, including minimizing in-person interactions with people from outside your immediate household, avoiding closed spaces and crowded places, wearing a mask, and washing your hands frequently.”

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EPS aims to improve relations with Indigenous communities

By Dale Ladouceur, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Andrea Levey is an eight-year veteran of Edmonton Police Services as the Indigenous Relations Coordinator and current Indigenous Equity Advisor. *Alberta Native News* asked her to provide details on some of the initiatives EPS has recently implemented to improve relations with Edmonton's many Indigenous and minority communities.

EPS has a number of recent initiatives aimed at improving community relations, explained Levey.

"We are working more on systemic changes to our operations. One of the big initiatives is the Nisohkamâkewin Council (the Act of Helping), which is a community-based council of Indigenous community members that essentially aid in the implementation of specific recommendations from the TRC, National Inquiry, Broken Trust Report and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples."

Levey said that it is a really exciting time for EPS because they are in the midst of the selection process of new applicants for involvement in the Council. There were over 80 applicants, she said, "and they've all been really amazing. It's such a challenge to narrow it down to only eight people."

The road map has already begun to be created, added Levey.

From the major reports, EPS has identified 21 somatic recommendations; within those 21 there are additional sub-recommendations.

The Council will work on each recommendation in alignment with the affected areas of EPS. For example, if it's a Missing Person's recommendation, they will work directly within that area to learn the current practices in place to understand the policies, the programs that are currently there.

"Then we start to look at the recommendations and the Council will let us know the best way forward – what is going to actually be meaningful for our community," noted Levey.

"The council is going to be instrumental in making sure these recommendations are successful, valuable and done in a culturally safe perspective: a trauma informed perspective, an anti-racist perspective to make sure we have [as much information from our Indigenous community members] and are making things safe."

EPS has moved away from a cultural sensitivity standpoint to more of a cultural safety standpoint, said Levey. "So recognizing it's not appropriate to pinpoint specific cultures and say 'this is what you do in this situation and this situation etc.' because we have a very diverse community and need to be respectful of all communities."

Levey helped develop the EPS historical trauma training for recruit members.

"We have an Indigenous police officer that facilitates it, and we talk about everything from 1500 BC colonization and the impacts," she explained. "We look at legislation that has really impacted us as Indigenous peoples. We look at how those impacts have affected people in relation to police today. We have 500 years of history [to go through] but it's a start."

Levey thinks the service has moved into a lot of different ways to try to incorporate refunding – particularly through the HELP model (*Human-Centered Engagement and Liaison Partnership*)

"The EPS has seen the lack of change that our

typical arrest-remand-release cycle has had on our vulnerable populations," she noted. "This cycle is also a strain on our frontline officers, who simply do not have the vast skill set to treat each community member's specific needs. In response, EPS developed the HELP Unit – composed of police officers, civilian navigators from Boyle Street Community Services, and analysts with diverse experiences, along with the ability to create and maintain strong partnerships.

"It's about accessing the system in a way that works for the persons you are working for and making sure they get the assistance they need. It's a new off-ramping approach instead of going right to the criminal justice system."

With cultural safety and equity, EPS is also implementing eagle feathers into the service for affirmation swearing. Last year the Alberta court system implemented eagle feathers as an option to swearing in on a bible.

"We've amended this to be more of an equitable policy, so it refers to *sacred objects* instead of the *bible* specifically for any of our communities," said Levey.

"EPS also unveiled acknowledgement of Treaty 6 plaques in all of our divisions. The plaque also acknowledges Métis people as well as other peoples that have been



Elders Betty Letendre and Francis Whiskeyjack with EPS Chief Dale McFee at a March 5 smudging ceremony and plaque unveiling prior to opening the northwest Edmonton Police campus.

here for centuries. The teaching is really important because we acknowledge but also have that understanding that we are here today because of that treaty."

EPS has approximately 18 to 19 hundred officers.

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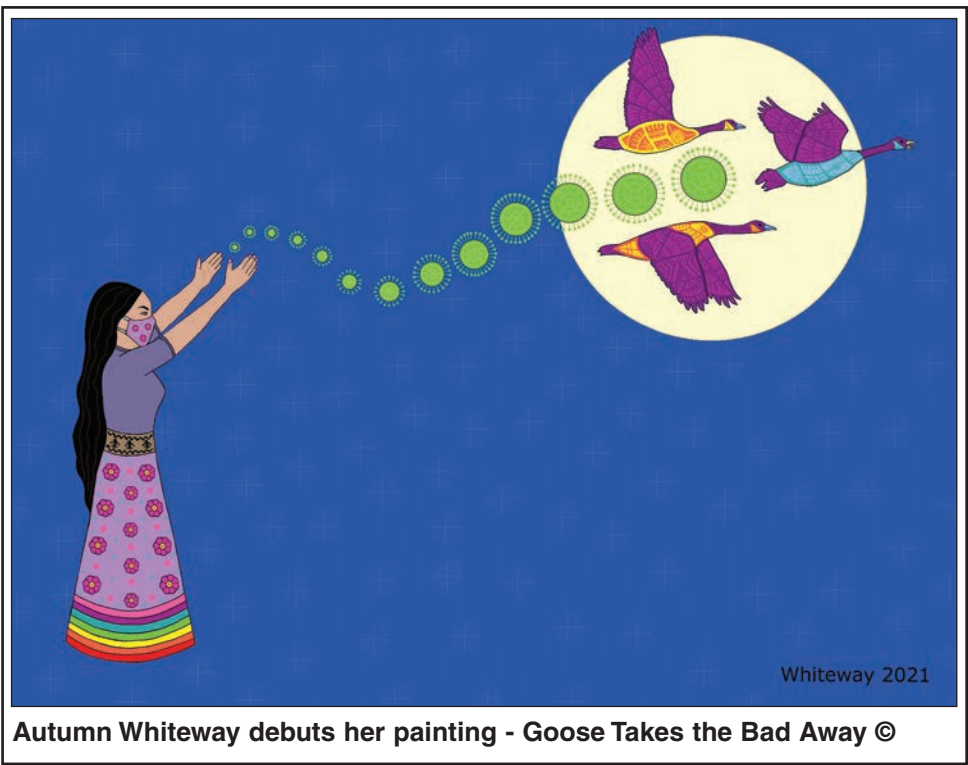
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Autumn Whiteway: Art, Ancestry and Anthropology

By Dale Ladouceur, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

One of the most important qualities of any artist is patience: patience with your skill, with the muse, with yourself. Autumn Whiteway practiced infinite patience, waiting until she finished her third university degree in 2018 to focus on her artistic self. Whiteway’s father is a Saulteaux Metis whose family of fishermen are from Berens River First Nation. “I’ve been [in Alberta] all my life,” begins Autumn, “but moved to Winnipeg for a couple years to do my Master’s degree at U of Manitoba.” Autumn enjoyed Winnipeg only after coming back to Alberta, “There’s so much culture and history there but I was dealing with some racism from one particular professor so it wasn’t a happy time for me.” So many emerging artists had little cultural practice while growing up, with some having no acknowledgment of their heritage. This was only partially relatable to Autumn’s experience. “From the time I was a child, I’ve known as long as I can remember that I’m Indigenous. My mom is a settler and apparently has Mi k’maq ancestry but she was always very open and quite proud for me. So I learned right from the time I learned to talk that I was Indigenous.” Autumn’s family were proud of their heritage but did not actively practice cultural teachings. Even as a young girl, however, this did not stop Autumn from being focussed on her heritage. “I would wear my beaded thunderbird necklace everywhere and my beaded barrette,” she enthuses. “I was so proud. I did deal with some racism from some kids when I was growing up but my Dad’s father was a residential school survivor and I know some of my dad’s siblings were not proud of their heritage because I think they got harassed growing up. Some of them liked to hide that they were indigenous. I was always very proud but I also never received a lot of cultural teachings at home so that’s something I was searching for my whole life.” Since 2018 Whiteway has been making up for lost time. “Once I finished ten years of university, I started focussing as much as possible on as many cultural teachings and crafts as I could,” Whiteway explains. “It has really snowballed, I’ve done well in that short time as an artist, with artist residencies and attention for my artwork and getting different projects.” Aside from her powerful digital and traditional paintings, she also does digital photography, makes drums, rattles, hair tufting, fish scale art, porcupine quillwork, dreamcatchers and multimedia work, all highlighting indigenous culture and issues. When asked how the creative spark reveals itself, Autumn confesses a higher purpose is her inspiration.

“Often I am thinking about Indigenous issues and it usually sparks from that. How can I highlight certain Indigenous issues in an artistic way?” Whiteway describes having two styles. “I do the woodland style of art which is really common among Ojibwe and Cree people and that was grandfathered by Norval Morrisseau and I also do more digital type art and photography which really focusses on Indigenous issues.” Autumn’s art can create a dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. “Currently, I’m working on something now on cultural appropriation and just need to build some props for them. Also I’m working on [a piece] on the diabetes epidemic among Indigenous people.” The vibrant image on the cover of this month’s *Alberta Native News* is “Deeper Roots” - one of Autumn’s creations. Whiteway explains that the image was a stream of consciousness for her, intended to depict bears and their connection to the eco-system in a vibrant way. The berries in the image are symbolic of any berry “but since around here saskatoons are so important for bears, the berries in the image are saskatoons.” A digital version of the image is featured as a greeting card for the Solstice Boxes produced by the Indigenous Colouring books - Colouring it Forward. Another of her images is being debuted in *Alberta Native News* titled “Goose Takes the Bad Away.” “It’s based on my conversation with an Elder who told me that his mother and grandmother use to run outside every time they heard the geese honking and they would pray for the geese to take the bad away. This piece is a response to the pandemic in which she is sending the Covid away, especially to keep the Elders safe.” Having travelled extensively through her academic career, Whiteway has found her travels influencing her art in subtle ways. Aside from encouraging emerging artists to travel, Autumn feels there are



Autumn Whiteway debuts her painting - Goose Takes the Bad Away ©

many opportunities emanating from grass roots community initiatives throughout Alberta. “Particularly in Alberta there are a lot of opportunities for emerging Indigenous artists. For artists that can put their work online it’s a great opportunity now, especially during Covid; you can quickly gain a lot of momentum for your artwork, especially if you take advantage of social media platforms.” Whiteway also suggests learning when there are calls for artist initiatives. “When the pandemic slows down there are a lot of Indigenous markets in Calgary and Edmonton. In Calgary there is a very supportive little art scene, like a little family. I know from a lot of artists in Edmonton, that it really does feel like a community [with] a lot of opportunities to grow your business.” One of Whiteway’s upcoming initiatives is a second showing of the Indigenous Motherhood and Matriarchy Exhibitions at Calgary’s C Space the entire month of March. This show will include 23 artists and 41 pieces, including representation from two-spirit artists. Whether she’s in the Middle East studying the Bedouin people, curating art shows or getting her young son through teething, it is clear Autumn Whiteway is a force of and for nature, community and justice and we are stronger for it.

Improving relations

cont. from p 7

Alberta Native News asked: When an EPS officer shows insensitivity to culture or racism or bias, has the consequence changed at all in the last few years? Levey explained that EPS is bound by the *Police Act* for police members which is under review right now - but this is controlled by the Alberta government. Currently, in order to make a complaint against a police officer, you go through the *Professional Standards Branch* who are

bound by the *Police Act* in terms of how they conduct the investigation. The challenging part is that the claim can only be made by the direct person involved, who experienced the incident. That can be a huge barrier that needs to be addressed and possibly amended. EPS also conducts restorative justice circles - community circles to bring all the people involved in an incident, together. The goal is to try and understand the impact and learn all sides of the story, then come up with concrete actions that make everyone feel safe. Levey urges people to advocate for changes to the

Police Act in order to make change easier. Alberta Justice has done community engagement on changes and, according to Levey, one of the additional recommendations is more accountability in police conduct, like the addition of body and dash cams. Jason van Rassel, Communications advisor to Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, stated that an update of where the *Police Act* review currently stands is in the works. In February 2021, Alberta Justice appointed a special adviser, Temitope Oriola, associate professor of criminology at the U of A, to assist in the review process.

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MSGC criticizes UCP legislation

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The UCP government has proposed a bill that will alter how eight Metis Settlements across Alberta will be governed, which is being criticized by the Metis Settlements General Council – even though it supports some aspects of the legislation.

If passed, Bill 57 – the Metis Settlements Amendment Act – will cut the size of the MSGC executive in half to two officers.

The bill would also eliminate the decision-making powers of the minister over the general council’s financial policies and permit the settlement councils to determine how many elected councillors they needed, but it must be between three and five.

MSGC president Herb Lehr says this legislation is an assault on democracy for Metis people.

“This document takes away our right to democratically decide how we want to be governed,” said Lehr at a March 10 NDP news conference shortly after the bill was introduced in the legislature. He says Metis settlements have been asking the government for enhanced election transparency laws, but they never asked for this.

“Why is it that the Métis people have to have a non-Indigenous person in charge of any accountability measure? True governance would be the empowering of our organization or make another subsequent party to take on that responsibility so that you’re policing yourself,” Lehr said.

Indigenous Relations Minister Rick Wilson said these changes are a necessary first step before October’s council elections. He said the legislation has support from Metis councillors but couldn’t say whom.

Wilson insinuated that dissent was coming from those who fear losing a powerful position.

“There may be people who might feel threatened by this legislation. They might lose a position in this upcoming election,” he said.

Jesse Cardinal, a concerned community member, says the proposed changes are proof that the colonial relationship between Metis people and the Crown still exists. “We have inherent rights to this land, so there needs to be a shared relationship. We’re not settlers, we’re not visitors to this land, where we need to make our own way. Canada and Alberta have massively extracted resources from our land that need to be shared with us. We’re not interested in moving towards a municipal model,” says Cardinal.

The government is offering Indigenous communities \$1 billion in grants to invest in energy projects through the Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, but Cardinal says there’s an overemphasis on non-renewable energy projects, like the Trans Mountain Pipeline.

“We want to become self-sufficient, but we need to talk about that as communities. That goes back to decolonization. What’s a sustainable economy?” she said. “We’re not interested in investing in oil and gas, which is a dying economy.”

Cardinal said she’d like to see genuine consultation with community members, from the government, as well as the eight settlement councils. She suggests this could take multiple days if the government is serious about consulting at a grassroots level and hearing feedback from Metis people, not just council members who already agree with them.

The council leaderships could then get together and come to the province with a unified proposal based on

popular feedback.

This comes as a long-term funding and governance agreement with the settlements is due to expire in a year, which the minister has previously said will not be renewed. “I’ve heard that it’s time to modernize that act to better meet the wishes of the settlement residents for more sustainable and self-governing communities, with more transparent finances and government administration and less involvement from Alberta’s government,” Wilson said.



Back in December, Wilson said the anticipated changes are a cost-cutting measure.

“Alberta’s in a tough fiscal situation right now and we have to look at being a little more creative. I think the Metis settlements, if we can get them set up into operating a little more efficient, they’ve got some great ability to succeed,” Wilson told Windspeaker.com Dec. 21.

Lehr says the minister simply didn’t consult with the settlements themselves.

“He went around me, and he had individual meetings with settlement chairmen. And now, he calls that consultation,” Lehr said.

The NDP opposition is calling on the government to meet with Metis councils immediately.

“This government is making decisions without consulting the people who are being affected by them, and the effects right now are dramatic,” said Indigenous Relations critic Richard Feehan.

Alberta is the lone province with a land-based Metis population, consisting of eight settlements with varying populations that are spread throughout the northern part of the province and are governed by the 40-member General Council.

Vaccination roll-out *cont. from p 5*

In Calgary, Alberta’s first ever Indigenous-only urban COVID-19 clinic will be launched on March 22. The clinic is located in the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary and is accessible to any First Nations person born in 1971 and earlier.

Elder Earnie Poundmaker, who works at the centre, believes that an Indigenous run vaccination clinic will ease tensions for people who are wary of the healthcare system. “I think it goes a long way because first of all, they’re coming into an Indigenous setting,” he said. “That’s going to present a sense of security, a sense of welcome for them.”

The Metis Nation of Alberta has also announced its first ever Metis COVID-19 clinic held in Edmonton. If you are a Metis Albertan born in 1971 or earlier (50 years and older), you can book an appointment to receive your first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine completely free. Visit albertametis.com for a link to a booking tool.

Appointments are available March 27 through March 30.

In First Nations communities, as of March 18, ISC is aware of:

- 23,589 confirmed positive COVID-19
- 1,151 active cases
- 22,172 recovered cases - 266 deaths

As for Alberta, the province could see restrictions loosened as their Cabinet COVID Committee will be coming together to discuss re-opening, more specifically, to see if it’s time begin Phase 3 of Alberta’s relaunch plan.

Phase 3 would see restrictions eased on some team sports, casinos, bingo halls, places of worship, and indoor spaces such as theatres and museums.

Alberta has been using hospitalizations as their criteria for relaunching. Phase 3 requires that fewer than 300 Albertans need to be in hospital – on Friday, 264 people were receiving treatment.

However, the possibility of re-opening has not been without controversy. On March 20, 696 cases were reported, which marks the largest one-day increase since mid-January. Furthermore, 189 cases of the B.1.1.7 variant have also been identified recently. It should also be noted that the current vaccines Alberta has are effective against this strain.

The Federal Government has urged provinces to slow down on re-opening plans and Alberta doctors believe it is too early to open up. Dr. Deena Hinshaw,

Alberta’s Chief Medical Officer of Health said that the next few weeks will be critical to prevent a third wave.



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Calgary arts community pays tribute to Amy Willier

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Early this year, Amy Willier — a Cree artisan and entrepreneur in Calgary — passed away at the age of 38.

Willier ran Moonstone Creation art gallery in Inglewood with her mother, Yvonne Jobin, for over a decade. The gallery provides cultural learning sessions and represents over 75 local Indigenous artists with a worldwide customer base.

Melrene Saloy-Eaglespeaker, a close friend of Willier’s, said that the Moonstone Gallery is “internationally known, award-winning... they’re one of those stops you make when you come to Calgary.”

“Amy was so knowledgeable on every item, every

artist, where it came from. She just took so much pride in the store, of being able to represent over 75 local Indigenous artists and to be able to talk about each one so passionately.”

The loss of Amy is being felt in Calgary and throughout the art community she was a part of, with many different dedications, tributes, and awards being established in her honour.

Quickdraw Animation Society published a release which mourned the passing of Willier that said, “We are absolutely heartbroken to learn of Amy Willier’s passing. Amy was a vital part of so many communities, and Quickdraw was fortunate enough to



Amy Willier and her mom Yvonne Jobin.

be one of them. From the joyful animations she created with her son Colton, to the masks our staff have been wearing since the start of the pandemic, to the friendship and inspiration she gave, her contributions will be felt for a long time to come.”

“Our most heartfelt condolences go out to Amy’s friends and family, and to the many, many others who are coming to terms with her loss.”

Quickdraw also posted two animations that Willier made to their website.

In honour of Willier, Festival Hall in Inglewood is hosting an augmented reality mural. The mural features art from local artist Tank Standing Buffalo accompanied by works from local music group Ghostkeeper, both of whom collaborated with Willier in the past.

It is available for interaction from Feb. 20 – Mar. 31.

Kerry Clarke, artistic director for Calgary Folk Music Festival said, “She was what’s called a knowledge keeper, she also was a mentor and an artist herself. A really central person in this community.”

“A festival neighbour and Inglewood neighbour.”

Also, in honour of Willier, Indigenous Tourism Alberta created the Amy Willier Memorial Artisan grant, which awarded \$8000 to support artisan businesses 51% Indigenously owned that sell locally produced Indigenous artist’s work. It was open from Feb. 22 — to Mar. 10.

Now *Avenue Magazine’s* annual Made in Alberta Awards have also added a permanent category to their awards called the Amy Willier Award for Indigenous Artists. This category is open to all Indigenous makers and Indigenous-owned businesses and is free to enter.

The overall grand prize winner of the Made in Alberta awards will receive \$5,000 in cash, but the winner of each category will be featured in *Avenue Magazine* and the *Made in Alberta* magazine in October of each year. They will also receive a \$1,000 advertising credit with *Avenue*.

Amy was described as a vivacious, kind, and loving Cree Knowledge Keeper, educator, artist, and entrepreneur. “She shone her light far in the world,” said the *Calgary Herald’s* obituary for Willier. “A member of Sucker Creek First Nation, she loved living off the land in her traditional ways, hunting and picking medicine, all while sporting her signature bright red lipstick and mischievous grin.”

Amy is survived by her Mom Yvonne Jobin, son Colton, niece Mya, nephew AJ, siblings Aaron, Joe, Leah, Russell Jr. and numerous beloved aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews.



Suncor Base Mine Extension Project Public Comments Invited

What is happening?

February 26, 2021 — The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (the Agency) has decided an impact assessment is required for the proposed Suncor Base Mine Extension Project, located near Fort McMurray, Alberta. The project’s impact assessment has been referred to an independent review panel that will be appointed at a later date.

As part of the planning phase in the impact assessment, the Agency invites the public and Indigenous groups to review and provide feedback on the draft Tailored Impact Statement Guidelines (Guidelines) and the draft Public Participation Plan.

The draft Guidelines outline the project-specific factors that will be considered in the assessment and provide direction to the proponent, Suncor Energy Inc., on the information and studies required in its Impact Statement. The draft Public Participation Plan explains how the public will be engaged throughout the review process. The Plan provides details on how and when public participation opportunities will take place for each phase of the impact assessment.

The Agency recognizes it is more challenging to undertake meaningful public engagement and Indigenous consultation in light of the circumstances arising from COVID-19. The Agency continues to assess the situation, adjust consultation activities and provide flexibility as needed in order to prioritize the health and safety of all Canadians and conduct meaningful engagement with interested groups.

How can I participate?

Written comments in either official language will be accepted **until April 7, 2021**.

Comments can be submitted online by visiting the project home page on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry (reference number 80521). All comments received will be published online as part of the project file.

To view the draft Guidelines and the draft Public Participation Plan, visit the Agency’s website at canada.ca/iaac. More information on the project, the review process and alternative means of submitting comments is also available on the Agency’s website.

Virtual Information Sessions

The Agency invites the public and Indigenous groups to attend one of the virtual information sessions on the project that will be held during the comment period. These sessions will provide additional information about the project and the impact assessment process, and help participants learn how to effectively review and formulate comments on the draft documents.

March 16, 2021 from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. MST (Session 1) and 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. MST (Session 2)
March 18, 2021 from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. MST (Session 3) and 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. MST (Session 4)

More information on how to attend the virtual information sessions is available by contacting the Agency at IAAC.BaseMine-MineBase.AEIC@canada.ca or 343-549-5813.

Will there be more opportunities to participate?

This is the second federal comment period for the project. There will be other opportunities for the public and Indigenous groups to participate throughout the impact assessment process.

Follow us on Twitter: @IAAC_AEIC #SuncorBaseMine

What is the proposed project?

Suncor Energy Inc. is proposing to develop the Base Mine Extension Project to sustain the supply of bitumen to the existing upgraders at Suncor’s Oil Sands Base Plant operation (Base Plant). The project includes an open-pit mining operation and associated infrastructure to supply bitumen to new froth production facilities and various other production facilities at the existing Base Plant. The project is located adjacent to existing Base Plant operations approximately three kilometres north of Fort McMurray, Alberta, within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Project construction is expected to start in 2026 and its footprint is anticipated to be approximately 30 000 hectares.

For more information on the Agency’s privacy policies, consult the Privacy Notice on its website at canada.ca/iaac.



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NorQuest removing barriers to access for Indigenous learners

As a leading post-secondary institution in Alberta, NorQuest College remains deeply committed to respectfully representing Indigenous learners and addressing the challenges they face today.

For NorQuest to truly respect the processes of reconciliation and to assure that education – one of the most basic human rights – is available to everyone, we must learn to provide that education wisely and appropriately. Enrolment data at the college suggests that while Indigenous learner applications have remained constant over the last five years, so too has the matriculation rate (around 60%). While these numbers are good, there is much opportunity for improvement.

“Our matriculation rates suggest some barriers exist and are delimiting access to post-secondary education for Indigenous learners,” says Tibetha Kemble, Senior Manager, Indigenous Relations and Supports. “It was important that we took a closer look at our policies, processes, and procedures – both internal and external – to develop a greater understanding of what and where those barriers exist.”

Reconciliation meets admissions

College data points to both internal and external forces impacting Indigenous learner enrolment. The most common reasons for non-matriculation include failure to pay a tuition deposit, waitlisting for admission when qualified, or no further contact from the college after applying.

The tuition deposit requirement was the first barrier to be addressed. While there are a number of complex factors as to why an Indigenous learner would not pay a tuition deposit, we understand from lived and shared experience that some Indigenous learners who apply and qualify for admission may not have the financial resources to immediately pay the deposit that will

secure a seat in their program of choice, noted Kemble. As a result, an Indigenous learner may lose their seat, be waitlisted, and/or abandon the admissions process altogether.

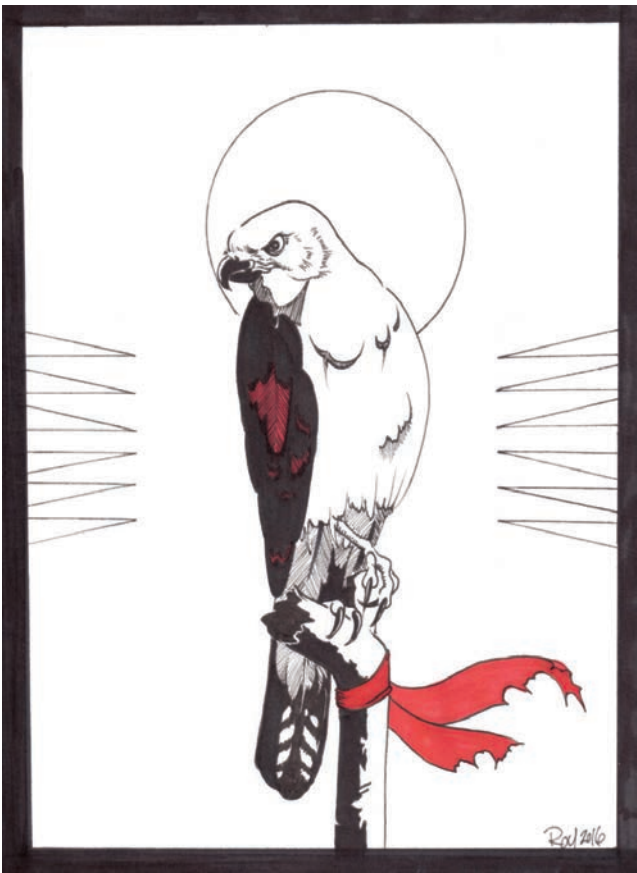
“By providing Indigenous learners the option to waive the tuition deposit, we are able to increase the speed of entry into programs of choice and secure a seat,” says Kemble.

Another key factor was for NorQuest to set admission floors (or minimums) in high-demand programs, which attempts to reduce waitlisting and to address the under-representation of Indigenous learners. By setting admission floors, the college signals to Indigenous peoples and communities that it understands, and is responsive to, the under-representation of Indigenous peoples across all sectors and professions.

“Floors are distinct from quotas,” explains Kemble. “An Admissions Floor is the minimum number of seats held for a particular group in an academic program. The Indigenous Admissions Floors initiative applies to Indigenous learners only, to support and advance the process of reconciliation and to redress the impacts of colonization that are distinct to Indigenous peoples in Canada.”

A third crucial step was to develop an Indigenous Admissions Model that is responsive to the lived-realities and potential of Indigenous learners and that honours their rich lived-experience.


“We see a significant number of Indigenous learners who may not meet admissions requirements of their programs of choice,” says Kemble. “We recognize the strength and resilience of Indigenous learners who apply to the college and want to ensure our Admissions model is responsive to their lived-realities. Over the coming months, we’ll be



working on a holistic admissions model that may consider the history, cultural knowledge, work experience, educational goals, and other achievements in determining an Indigenous learner’s admissibility. NorQuest is also reviewing and adapting existing programs to better meet the needs of Indigenous peoples and communities. Ultimately, the college’s goal is to help build a critical mass of highly-skilled Indigenous peoples in post-secondary education in Alberta.

“We’re very excited to advance these important changes,” says Kemble. “We like to think we’re re-drawing the blueprint for post-secondary Indigenous education for our community.”

For more information visit www.norquest.ca.



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The program is expected to take place from April to October 2021. Visit www.cn.ca/vegetation to see the list of cities as well as the updated schedule.

For more information, contact the CN Public Inquiry Line at contact@cn.ca or 1-888-888-5909.

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As part of our commitment to Indigenous learners, NorQuest provides an extensive network of services and supports, and has developed initiatives to remove barriers to education.

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- Tuition deposit waiver for self-identifying students
- Open Admissions Pathway for Business Legacy Access Bursary
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- and more

Learn more norquest.ca/Indigenous



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