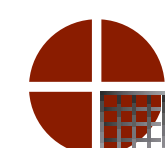


The
**ABORIGINAL
YOUTH
FINANCIAL
MANAGEMENT
CONFERENCE
AWARDS**

MANAGEMENT



AFOA
Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada

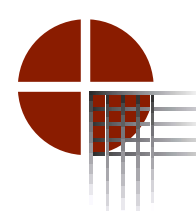
PROSPERITY



EDUCATION



FINANCE



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AFOA

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Grant Thornton 

Table of Contents

Introduction3

YOUTH AWARD WINNERS

Racine Johnson (17 yrs)4
Cornwall Collegiate Vocational School, Akwesasne, ON

Jordan Scott (18 yrs)6
Children of the Earth High School, Winnipeg, MB

Justin Stevens (16 yrs)8
Eskasoni High School, Eskasoni, NS

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Mary Denny (20 yrs)9
Holy Angels High School, Eskasoni, NS

Whitney Francis 10
Rankin Memorial High School, Eskasoni, NS

Valine Mitchell (17 yrs)12
Miramichi Valley High School, Burnt Church, NB

Rob Paterson (26 yrs)14
Swan River Adult Education Inc., Swan River, MB

Caeley Pitseolak16
Forest Heights Community School, Chester Basin, NS

Introduction

FIRST ANNUAL ABORIGINAL YOUTH FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE AWARDS

2007

Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada (AFOA)

Sponsored by Grant Thornton LLP

There is a great demand both within and outside of Aboriginal communities and organizations for Aboriginal financial management professionals. However, very few of our young people are pursuing an education in financial management after high school, and many communities have considerable difficulty attracting and keeping financial management staff.

That is why AFOA has launched the Aboriginal Youth Financial Management Conference Awards this year with the generous sponsorship support of Grant Thornton LLP.

The Awards were open to Aboriginal youth in grades 11 and 12 across the country. Applicants were asked to write a short essay on the topic: "If I were in charge of my community, what would I do to make a difference?" Teachers were asked to submit letters attesting to the student's performance and commitment. A selection committee reviewed the essays and submissions and selected three winners. These are:

Racine Johnson 17 years old, Cornwall Collegiate Vocational School, Akwesasne, Ontario

Jordan Scott 18 years old, Children of the Earth High School, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Justin Stevens 16 years old, Eskasoni High School, Eskasoni, Nova Scotia

Winners have been flown to Vancouver to participate in AFOA's National Conference program activities and a special youth session; they are being introduced to opportunities in financial management as a career; and, they are being provided information on how to go about pursuing education in financial management and what kind of help is available.

AFOA and Grant Thornton are very pleased to be able to honour and acknowledge these fine young people by reproducing their award winning essays in this booklet, along with the essays of those Award applicants who received Honourable Mentions.

It is often said that "*Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions.*" The winners of the Aboriginal Youth Financial Management Conference Awards have clearly demonstrated these attributes. Their potential is our future. AFOA and Grant Thornton are very pleased to be able to honour and acknowledge these fine young people by reproducing their award winning essays in this booklet, along with the essays of those Award applicants who received Honourable Mentions.

RACINE JOHNSON

Cornwall Collegiate Vocational School, Akwesasne, Ontario

“If I were in charge of my community, what would I do to make a difference?”

First of all, I would take a step back from my community and paint a positive vision in my mind, which will make a strong impact to my community of Akwesasne. I will take my magic paint brush to begin my adventure of creating a scene similar to Canada’s as well known aboriginal artist Roy Vickers painting. Sitting down in front of my easer, I begin my creation of all the positive differences I need to put in place.

Secondly, I will take my high school education and part time employment skills to move towards a post-secondary field of Bachelor of Management and Organizational Studies, specialization in Finance and Administration, through the University of Western Ontario.

Thirdly, I am now in charge of my community in making a difference, I have chosen to focus and create a strategic plan in the areas of Economic Development, Job Creations, Financial Contributions, Housing Development, and a Health & Wellness Youth Centre.

As the person in charge I will work on developing the Aboriginal Economic Development Team, made up of community businessmen and women to assist me in creating a successful Business Plan. Our main focus will be on recruiting new businesses and agencies to our community, opening doors to a world of opportunities for my community members. Mixing my paint colors of red and yellow together, I get a beautiful color of orange, which reflects positive energy on many employment creation projects.

My color orange begins to shine on my community members; it pulls their attention towards the creation and opportunities of employment. I will provide education career training to build confidence in my people. Jobs will be geared to assist our high school students participating in a Cooperative Education or Life Skills Programs, which will lead them into choices of post secondary careers beneficial to our community. Single parents of both female and male will be given childcare opportunities to return back to school or re-entry back into the workforce. I plan on developing a positive job skills development program that will create employment for our youth, disable individuals, adults and elders.

In cleaning off my paint brush I take a break to visualize and create my communities Financial Contributions established and funds to be generated back into community programs. My elders have taught me to seek out wise advice and not to get let our people get greedy over the all mighty dollar. I will be accountable to my community in providing and developing monthly financial reports to every household.

Our financial contributions will generate funds from areas such as a community owned grocery store and retail shopping centre, bank, arena, funeral home, hotel, restaurant, and hardware store. Other areas of generating funds will be to develop a highly skilled team of proposal writers seeking funds through North American governments, provincial, private corporations and personal contributions. The funds will help us to build our very own Aboriginal hospital with a diabetes center, dialysis clinic, cancer treatment floor, and psychiatric wing. I will also concentrate on developing a trades and apprenticeship school that offers skilled trades and professional services. Funds will also be used to provide low income families with assistance, community social services and activities.

Picking up my paint brush I continue painting with shades of sky blue, grassy green and sunshine yellow to see my true colors of my peoples hard work blossom. I will make changes on behalf of my community to create a Housings Development Program which will provide new homes for single parents/persons, married couples, disabled individuals and elders. In my creative imagination I stop to visualize the importance of well structured homes. To have a good healthy home one must have a solid foundation and work their way up to a good structure, which will last for generations to come. All homeowners will be educated on the Housing Development guidelines required to attend monthly home care seminars and home inspections. I will work with our Housing program to develop community apartment projects for emergency housing. My slogan for success in housing development will be “To dream it, you must build it.” Dipping and mixing my final colors of creating and imagining my Roy Vickers painting I put the finishing touches to my positive image of how I would make a difference to my community of Akwesasne. A final stroke of my paint brush has created a wonderful Health and Wellness Youth Centre to provide educational and medical services, to our youth. Our centre will test and treat health issues arising in my community, such as sexual diseases, teen pregnancy, obesity, drug and alcohol problems, and victims of child abuse. I will bring qualified medical staff such as doctors, nurses, psychiatrist, therapist, and counselors to work here at the center. Group presentations to educate the youth will be provided and developed into the goals and objectives of our centre. Included will be the traditional teachings of our elders in assisting in the youth healing process. To finalize my creative artwork, I paint a healthy smile on all the youth’s faces and with a loving touch of my brush I wipe away their tears.

Overall I will take my final painting to my community and tell not only my Mohawk people, but all aboriginals across North America my dream of what I would do if I were in charge of my community in making a difference.

Nia’wen

JORDAN SCOTT *Children of the Earth High School, Winnipeg, Manitoba*

The Point of Knowing

“Try to do something for your people - something difficult. Have pity on them and love them.” These are the opening words of a Winnebago lesson that teaches about leadership within a community. I take these words to heart as I contemplate writing this paper. Our ancestors, in the traditional ways, always thought and acted for the good of the community group first, and for themselves, last if at all. This is very contrary to how things are done in this modern age, when individuality and personal gain are foremost in people’s minds, rather than community development and the good of the whole. So it is to these words and others like them, that I turn when thinking what I would do to make a difference, not only in, but also for my community.

My name is Jordan Scott and I am eighteen years old, I live in Winnipeg’s North End; and low income, poverty, primarily urban Aboriginal community close to the heart of downtown Winnipeg. I am Grade eleven at Children of the Earth High School. My school is the first and only school of its kind in Manitoba, in that it is the only publicly funded Aboriginal high school in the province. Attending this school has taught me a great deal about my cultural background and has helped me to understand the importance of striving for academic success, as well as the importance of using my personal success to help my community succeed.

I have not made a final decision regarding my plans for the future, but I am very interested in a career in business because I believe that would provide me with both a secure future for myself and a strong opportunity to play a part in community development within Winnipeg’s North End. Though at this time I can only dream about things I may be able to accomplish in the future, I think that the ideas I have are practical and can be accomplished. If community leaders work in partnership with community members, many good things can happen for the North End and for the Aboriginal people who make the North End their home.

As I see it, Winnipeg’s North End has three significant issues that need to be addressed in order for the community to develop and improve its current socio-economic position. These issues are poverty, crime, and drug and alcohol abuse. This is not to say that all people in the area are drug-addicted, criminal alcoholics. For the most part, the residents of the North End are hard-working, upstanding citizens who, through not particular fault of their own, are marginalized because of race and ethnic background. Many of Winnipeg’s urban Aboriginal people have moved here from the Northern reserve communities, where unemployment reaches staggeringly high proportions in excess of 80%. Once here, they are unable to find jobs because of a lack of skills or education. Lack of work results in high poverty levels, which leads to frustration and despair. Often people turn to drugs and alcohol to escape the frustration in their lives. In turn, paying for these negative supports can and does lead some people to the criminal path, as the lack of work means a lack of financial resources to pay for the bad habits as they turn to as an escape. It is truly a vicious cycle, and once a person is caught up in it, it is very difficult to get out.

I have seen the effects of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and poverty in my community and in my family. If I were in charge, I would look for solutions to address the underlying causes of these three significant issues that affect my community, and try to find ways to improve the lives of people through economic development that specifically target the needs of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg’s North End.

Firstly, I would look for ways to improve education for children within the community. In particular, I would advocate for more schools that are aware of and sympathetic to the special needs of Aboriginal children. Often children are from single parent families, and high mobility and attrition are a significant issue. Education programs that accommodate children by offering flexible start and end times, accelerated programs, and “portable” programs that can follow a student to any school he or she may attend would greatly improve the completion rate, thus providing people with a stronger educational background that potential employers are looking for.

Secondly, I would develop partnership programs with post-secondary institutions, and business and industry to target Aboriginal people specifically to provide education and training in job areas where there is a high demand. People from the community would be sponsored to attend these training programs and would have the opportunity to be “fast-tracked” into job placement upon completion of their studies.

Thirdly, I would work with community based programs to provide adequate facilities for drug and alcohol treatment and counseling. These programs would be run in conjunction with employment programs, so that people could get clean and get a job, and have the personal self-esteem to avoid falling back into negative and destructive habits.

Fourthly, I would petition and lobby the government to adopt a fairly hard line on criminal offences that are drug related. However, I would try something different for youth from unstable family conditions who turn to crime as a means of expressing their anger about situations they are in but have no control over. I would increase and adequately fund the number of youth drop-in centres where young people can go and talk to others who have been through the same sorts of problems and who can give them reassurances and hope that life can be different. Keeping young people off the streets by giving them a place to go will help to reduce crime and help the young people to make something of their lives.

These are some of the things that I would like to see happen in the community in order to help children, youth, and adults. Perhaps it is naïve to think that these things could be done. Perhaps it is naïve to think these things would make a significant difference. However, I believe that is exactly what would happen. People, generally speaking, want to be self-sufficient. They want to have purpose and meaning in their lives. People who have these things do not turn to negative coping mechanisms. Additionally, when the people in a particular community are functioning and contributing to the growth and development of that community, the community itself prospers. A prosperous community is attractive to business and industry, and a new cycle of growth and development replaces the former negative cycle of despair, abuses, and crime.

Joseph Brant said “no person among us desires any other reward for performing brave and worthy action, but the consciousness of having served his nation.” I believe that any action taken to help a community, or a nation, is rewarding in and of itself, for when the community prospers, all of us who are a part of that community, prosper. By helping others, we also help ourselves.

“When you see a new trail, or a footprint you do not know, follow it to the point of knowing” - Uncheedah, Grandmother of Ohiyesa

Youth Award Winner

JUSTIN STEVENS *Eskasoni High School, Eskasoni, Nova Scotia*

“If I were in charge of my community, what would I do to make a difference?”

I would first of all put more funding in our immersion program which is from only kindergarten to grade 3. I think our language is very important. It makes us who we are and that is aboriginal. A good leader should also be able to listen and get input from the people. I personally think our past leaders didn't do that. If I were in charge I would, I'd talk to our Elders and youth because the youth is our future and our Elders are the link to our past and heritage. I respect my Elders and listen to their advice and teachings. Going on, Education is the key if you want to succeed in life. I would support and try to get all the funding we need for anyone interested in going back to school and for students getting a post secondary education.

Politically I wouldn't make promises I can't keep. I'd try to make fair and good decisions for the community of Eskasoni. I wouldn't hide anything from the people, if there was something wrong; I'd inform the people and not hide it. Keeping them up to date in decisions we make as a community. I don't look down or up to people, I see us as equals. Being honest to the people is the only way I see us as a people and a community to grow. And if we are to grow as a community we need to be not so dependent on welfare, people not rather go school and become something because they're so dependent on the government taking care of them or spoiling them, well that's what I think of welfare maybe some people need it and others are just to lazy to get a job. As a leader I'd encourage people to come and talk to me and discuss things that are wrong in the community. There are many problems in first nation communities two main problems are alcohol and drug abuse. I think all departments in the community should have the fit to work program.

As leader I'd try to be more involved with the community socially. Which I think our past leaders didn't really do. I'd be at community events such as pow-wows, telethons, festivals, parades and community box social things like that. Being involved with things like that would help me connect with the people making them see me as they're equal. One thing I'd do which is really a big thing in our community is sponsoring girls and boy's who are taking part in the Princess pageants and Mr. Eskasoni pageant, also sponsoring student travel groups and field trips. Technology in our community can be used to our advantage, because we're so far from the city so we can't rely on tourism so using the internet we could reach outside of Eskasoni. People could start a e-business for selling native arts and crafts or anything really there is no limit with the internet and technology in today's age. Moving on us as first nations people are suppose to respect nature and help it. I think we should stop dumping things on our native land, and start recycling. We could also use our natural resources and renewable resource such as wind turbines to power the community. That would help a lot of people, because people wouldn't have to pay power bills and what we don't use goes back to the power grid.

I also would like to talk about someday having a drug and alcohol free community. We could build a recreational centre to keep kids and teens from drinking alcohol and doing drugs. The centre could have a lot of activities like native arts and crafts, native dancing classes for people who want to learn how to dance traditionally, and have day camps where kids will learn about their culture, business and how to be an entrepreneur. It would also include a swimming pool, fitness room and gym and also a basketball court. The kids right now have nothing to do so they start drinking and doing drugs at a young age. This is really sad for the mikmaq people. There are a lot of problems in my community, but I'd try to solve all the problems I can by getting the whole community to work together and build a better stronger future for us all. It will be tough but I think will be able to do. I believe in my community. There is no other place like Eskasoni, everybody is a family, and everybody knows each other. They say you can never go hungry here because your family, friends and neighbors will feed and take care of you. Everybody's door is open and they greet you with a warm heart and warm meal. So if I were in charge of Eskasoni, I'd make it a better and more positive community.

Honourable Mention

MARY DENNY *Holy Angels High School, Eskasoni, Nova Scotia*

“The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow; Do good anyway”

— Mother Teresa

If everyone in my community cooperated I would Love to see these changes.

There is a lot of individualism throughout Eskasoni, I would like to see our community out of dept. I would ask the store owners to sell their V.L.T. machines to the band, so the money made would get spread evenly throughout the community. I realize this would cause some conflict to certain people, but community members think of this we will own a mini casino.

I don't like having to drive all the way to Sydney at night just to get some gas, we should open a 24-hour gas station with a convenience store, and it would make things a lot easier.

We can bottle our own water form our water well, and sell it in local convenience stores throughout Cape Breton, because our water well has fresh water and it's just going to waste. We should make good use of the water our creator gave us. This would help our community climb its way out of dept.

Today education is very important in order to get a good job, there are a lot of single parents who have no choice but to stay home and care for their children. I would provide home schooling for those unable to attend classes outside homes. I would provide teachers who would visit students once a week to see how well each individual is doing.

Our community should have a library with a peer helper program to help students young and old with their studies.

We are losing our Mi'kmaq language, and if we don't speak Mi'kmaq the government might take away our native status there would be nobody in our community who would be able to speak the gift that God gave us, our language. Think of this Our Children Are Our Future, we cannot lose such an important thing. It would be nice if our community opened an Aboriginal Museum, the museum would include Mi'kmaq rituals, beliefs, songs, poems and prayers spoken in Mi'kmaq. The museum would honor all the elders who have accomplished many aboriginal matters, it would also honor all the Mi'kmaq Smakinis (soldiers), young and old who have been to war.

The youth in Eskasoni are all running around like wild animals. It would be nice if our community had a recreation facility a (youth center) to occupy the youth with sports and recreation. I strongly believe that if we had a youth center there wouldn't be as much under age drinking throughout the community.

We shouldn't have to worry about our children after school. If we had an after-school program for children, we would always know that they would be safe. The program would provide children with a healthy snack and help with their homework.

There is a lot of obesity and diabetes in our community. If we had an up-to-date fitness center then maybe there wouldn't be so many sick people in our community.

There are so many things I would like too see changed in my community, and if we all pitched in then this dream can come to reality. If I ever win a lot of money I would donate my money to the band, so they would be able to build some of the things I have mentioned.

“Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough; Give the world the best you've got anyway.” — Mother Teresa

WHITNEY FRANCIS *Rankin Memorial High School, Eskasoni, Nova Scotia*

“If I were in charge of my community, what would I do to make a difference?”

If I were in charge of my community there would be a few concerns and changes that I would like to make, such as; more youth programs, education/career planning, the housing department, eldercare, culture, language, tradition, job opportunities and the band council.

I would truly like to see more active youth programs ranging in options and benefits around the reservation. There used to be a few youth programs when I was in elementary and junior high but they stopped them. I was in an after school club called “peer helping”. We had workshops to teach us how to be a good peer helper, like if anybody needed to talk or if we thought something was wrong with something then we would know what to do, people knew we were peer helpers and a lot of students from school always asked for our advice. We had presentation on everything from drug/alcohol abuse to STD’s, bullying, suicide prevention, abuse and everything else in between. It was educational, I learned a lot about that stuff and it kept me out of trouble. We went on trips, camp and did volunteer work. It was really fun because all my friends joined in it and we met new friends and learned about other cultures. If we had more programs like this it would really decrease the percentage of alcohol/drug abuse, teen pregnancy, dropping out of school and suicide. But also, the youth are very important. I would say adding more gyms with basketball nets, baseball fields, a place to work out, a place to swim, adding a 24-7 Rec. Center with guidance counselors there, and priests, someone always to talk to, like a home away from home. We need to help the youth of today if we want a better future for all of us.

I have not seen any resources or assistance from teachers or guidance counsellors in the community school for future planning intended for post-secondary education or careers. I see students graduating high school with excellent marks in addition to a lot of potential, not knowing what to do after graduation. With no sense of direction they turn out to be a welfare recipient and constantly looking for part-time jobs and trying to get by, which is common on the reserve. MY community is the biggest reservations in Canada, consisting with about almost 4000 people. 55 percent of the population would be between the ages of 18-24. Less than half of that percent are moving on to further education that have goals set and a plan to accomplish them. The number of people that actually go on to post secondary school is fairly poor. If there were programs or presentations given in class I am sure that something will grab hold of their interest seeking high education and hopefully find a career path while coming back to the reservation to share their knowledge. The technology around here is gradually increasing every few years, creating job opportunities for well-educated aboriginals coming back to the reservation. I would directly get involved personally to meet the education standards. Aboriginals are more likely to commit suicide than go to post-secondary school, I think I could change the statistics for the reservation.

I am very concerned regarding the housing department. People on the reservation need their houses repaired and the housing department does not help them as much as they should be helping them. Some live in beaten down old trailers, crowded houses and half built homes. The housing department says they cannot help because there “isn’t enough money in the budget” to help them. In my opinion I think; as every person notices; that it’s obvious that the people working in the housing department are bias. They personally spend the budget money to meet their needs first, building themselves new homes and adding on to their houses. If I were in charge of the housing department I would personally see to that every person would get their houses repaired who need their house repaired and those who need their houses to get new houses. I would find a way to get more money for the housing department for the reason that I think that is our biggest concern in the reservation. I have lived on a reservation all my life and I am familiar with how these systems work. It took my mother 18 years to finally convince them that we need a house. It is not all daisies and roses living on a reservation. There are crooked people stealing money from underneath us leaving us with very little welfare go get by on, I am not trying to start slander but it is the truth, and I do not like how this is going and I want to change that.

Elder care or what some people might call it “adult care” is a good job opportunity around here because there is a large amount of elders who need adult care workers at home while others are at work. Few concerns of adult care are that the elders don’t get the attention they are supposed to receive, they get neglected or witness abused. People who get hired aren’t even trained or a certified as a nurse. I would like the way people get hired; they would have to obtain health care training and a clean record on violence or anything like that. I would like to see professional, trained, permanent health care workers in elders homes, someone they can trust and get along with.

I think we mainly have to focus on our language, culture and traditions in order to keep them alive. I am scared that we might lose our culture because of the rapid growth in on the reservation and people are not taking interest. I would like to introduce more of the Mi’kmaq culture to the community, especially to the youth since we are the future generation. I don’t want our language to die. We as the youth have to pass down our ancestor’s traditions, stories, language and not let our past be forgotten because it is who we are and we are the first nation people.

Economy is a huge issue around the reserve. I would like to get a call center here or some sort opened. A mini mall and a bank would be great also; people wouldn’t have to travel far to go shopping anymore or pay bills. We need to expand the job market to produce more job opportunities and mostly likely bring that money in to the community. More people would be employed and off welfare and that’s just the start of a growing community.

Than band council of Eskasoni has to definitely change if we want what is best for our community. The community has been changing dramatically over the years and no one has done anything about it. If I was in charge of the community all these promises would be fulfilled as best as I possibly can. But for that to happen all of us have to work together as a group of people to seek change, acceptance of other people even towards other communities and we need to be open minded. So if I were in charge, every one would matter. Equality is very important to me, treating every person equal no greater or less. Everyone’s voices would be heard. I would not close my ears or door to any suggestions. But that does not just come about over night. We all have to pitch in and lend a hand each other, listen to everybody’s opinions; that is what a community is all about in order for us to make a difference. I would absolutely love to be the chief of my reservation one day, that would be a dream come true. I would stand for the first nation reservation across Canada and make it recognized that we have made a difference in our community, and give hope to those communities that do not have the same options that we do. There are some reservations in Canada that don’t get as much funding as we do for the community, they have to protest every day just to even get a little bit of funding for schooling, housing and welfare. They’re funding as been caught for a few aboriginal programs. We have to fight for what is right and what we are in control of, if we do not and we take this for granted we could lose a lot of privilege that was promised in the 1752 treaty. I think it would be overwhelming to finally see leadership from a woman and I would like to be of assistance to create a better reservation for the future generation of our people.

VALINE MITCHELL *Miramachi Valley High School, Burnt Church, New Brunswick*

My name is Valine Mitchell, a young micmac native youth from Esgenoopetitj, that was changed to a different name by the Europeans to Burnt Church.

I come from a Micmac native community with a population of about 1200 to 1300 members. Presently, my community is experiencing some serious problems like drug abuse, prescription drug abuse, and political wars between clans. There are still people who still live in poverty and there's very poor housing for our people. Since the fishing dispute a few years back, our people appeared to have given up on life and resort to drugs, alcohol and prescription drug abuse. I believe that even the youth have turned to gas sniffing and drinking at a very young age. The problems are becoming worse and the leadership has done nothing to help our community and people to have hope for the future. The most important asset in our community is our elders, as they are the ones who have all the knowledge to bring hope and worthy in our people. Our own leadership also promotes drugs and alcohol and it's keeping our people in a sick state so they can't control their lives.

If I were given a chance to be in charge of my community, I would first of all have elders guide me as a leader and would have them sit in on each and every meeting to discuss existing problems and how to work towards solutions.

Presently our community is in a bad financial state where we have outsiders called "co-managers" controlling and managing our affairs. I don't believe that if a person doesn't have to live in a community to face the real problems that we do, and will never understand truly how we feel. These co-managers come in once or twice a week to sign checks and get paid large amounts of money.

Second of all, I would manage all financial agencies for each program to make sure that nobody could mismanage any kind of funds that belong to our people. I would take care the people's basic needs in regard to providing social assistance and to eventually try to promote training of which kind of trades my people would like to pursue, ie.; wilding, engineering, landscaping, carpentry, health care workers etc.

I would also make sure that I have committees for each program to help make fair and honest decisions for our people so nobody gets left behind or forgotten. I would make a major investment to help youth by promoting what they are interested in like hockey, gymnastics, politics, leaders, or any sport or even dance training to keep them occupied. Our youth are our future leaders and we have to treat them with love and respect so they will do the same to others they will be working with.

I believe that there should be a program specifically for the community elders where they would get together on a regular basis to do things that they would enjoy doing like playing cards, quilting together, having tours and enjoy socializing with their peers. They need to be made important while they are able to get around. The elders are the key to saving our native language, which needs to be passed down to the little babies, children, and youth at teen years, because we are slowly losing our survival, which is our native tongue.

It is a sad state in many native communities because drugs have taken over the lives of our people and many people are so lost and distraught. It's a pitiful sight to see our women degrading themselves to soliciting their bodies to support their drug habit, where the men take advantage of their native sisters. I would have the RCMP's come in my community to target the alcohol and drug dealers and clean up my community, so we could have a safer place for our children and future generations to come that will be a healthy community. It is appalling what drugs could do a nation in such a short period of time and I have witnessed some of its effects and what it's doing to my community.

The most important thing in our community that's really needed is to keep our language strong, teach it to even babies because that's how it was used before. Our people have been stripped of so much including our native culture and dignity. I would promote the languages program in the school system to keep it strong and to be continuously used on a daily basis, so we don't lose it.

Presently, the working staff are goofing off and not working so I would make sure that would change and make sure our staff are healthy and well to serve the people according. Right now the unemployment list is high because the leadership don't prioritize work for our people.

There is so much money being channeled to our community and it's in the millions and people are not informed of where it all goes in regards to programs. Monies that are not being managed by the co-managers are being stolen and misused by our own leaders.

I would make sure that if at all possible, I would create jobs for my people so they will feel proud to earn some honest money through their jobs. It would be for men, women, and youth that are able to work.

Our community is located at such a beautiful place; we could make millions of dollars through tourism if we had the right person running the programs. We also have our fishing and forestry rights to implement and create jobs and even built our own homes by making our own lumber and make new homes for everyone that would be eligible for one. The other idea I would really push for is to have community businesses so everyone in my community would benefit to better their lives. At this point we only have leaders that have private businesses with non-native workers. It's wonder why my people are so lost in drugs and alcohol. I wish to have an opportunity in the future to become a leader and be part of a changing community to the better. There is so much to recover and repair in my community. Our roads are in such terrible condition, (it's a joke, and it's pathetic).

I will keep my hope strong and continue to reach my goals in my life to become someone important to make positive changes for my people.

I am sure there are several other native youth who are in the same predicament wanting better lives for their people in our community.

ROB PATERSON *Swan River Adult Education Inc., Swan River, Manitoba*

My name is Rob Paterson, and I am presently attending Swan River Adult Education.

I have English and Math to finish for my Grade 12 Diploma. I am also a band member of the Sapotaweyak Cree Nation. The closest town is Swan River, MB which is one hour and thirty minutes away from the reserve. If I were in charge of my community, I know that I could be a positive influence and make many changes to help better my community. I would like to be the Chief and offer support, guidance, and leadership in an honest and caring way. Good financial planning would be a priority. I would see to it that I was part of a team of knowledgeable financial planners. I would look for the best financial planners regardless of race, so members of my community could learn from them.

I recognize the importance of youth in the community knowing that they will be our next leaders. I would ensure that they are nurtured in the most positive way. It would be extremely important to me to hire highly qualified educators who would be able to educate the youth in appreciating their own culture while understanding that life is about being a team player with people from all cultures. Regular teacher meeting would be held with parents and members from the Department of Education to make sure that everyone was in agreement with the quality of education being offered. The children would also be taught the value of giving and would be encouraged so students would gain an appreciation of geography, arts, crafts, live theatre, museums, and other historic places that they may not of had exposure to. I would encourage the youth to become young entrepreneurs and realize that they must develop a work ethic to pay for the field trips. Students could have community fund raisers such as bake sales, car washes, sell tickets, and have yard sales. They would be responsible for learning about floats, making change, and keeping good financial records.

Having great counselors in the school would be one of my special mandates. Children would start to explore possible career opportunities at a young age to see short-term and long-term goals developing. Self esteem issues would be carefully monitored and each and every child would be made to feel special through continual positive reinforcement. Conflict resolution would be part of everyday teaching.

Nutrition and health issues would be part of the curriculum at all grade levels. This is very important to address many issues such as the overwhelming number of cases of Diabetes Two on a number of reserves. As well as theory, I believe that the students would benefit from a practical approach where they would have the opportunity to practice new found skills in the kitchen through foods, nutrition, and cooking programs.

I recognize that many of the parents on my reserve were not able to receive a proper education. As a result, many of them have not gained any meaningful employment; in fact, many receive social assistance. My emphasis would be on providing several educational opportunities under the guidance of an educational counselor. A feasibility study would have to be done in collaboration with the financial planners to see what business opportunities could be developed locally where many of the people could be employed after getting their proper education.

Many of the parents have not had an opportunity to learn proper parenting skills. I would see to it that parenting classes would be offered by trained professionals. As a part of a literacy program, opportunities would be available for parent and tot sessions to encourage educational time for reading books, basic math, games, and crafts. Punishment should suit the crime, and parents and children would learn that if their children are involved in negative behavior such as writing graffiti or smashing windows, the parents would be responsible in seeing that their children fix what they damaged. In some cases, parents may be required to pay for damages. Qualified speakers would be brought in on a regular basis to the youth understand many issues that confront them today and coping strategies.

The Elders in the community are held in high regard. They would be encouraged to continue talking to the youth about respecting the environment. They would be encouraged to teach the youth many of their traditional ways. Some of these would including picking herbs and berries and showing the youth many of the medicinal uses of these. Efficient hunting and fishing practices could be demonstrated so the young people recognize the value in taking just what is needed. Tanning of hides, beadwork and other crafts could be demonstrated both at school and in evening workshops. Of course, oral short story telling will always remain a big part of communicational efforts between Elders and youth.

Community safety would be a major concern to me as the leader of my community. The reserve would be safe, structured, and have orderly laws to keep peace for all residents. Presently, there is one constable on duty all the time and I would like to see it increased to two. A community of interested people, as well as those versed in legal issues should meet once a week to address problems before they arise. They committee would also inform residents of any changes which are taking place to benefit the community. These messages could be communicated by signs, flyers at school, and public announcements on the local aboriginal radio station. As the community is quite isolated, I would continue to address fire issues. We presently have a fire truck; however, it is very important to provide on going education to the fire fighters and to keep equipment current. All reserve houses should have checks to make sure all homes are equipped with working smoke detectors and meet safety regulations. Also, the homes would be checked to make sure fire extinguishers are working properly. I would work towards getting a ambulance for the reserve residents, plus having an on site nurse.

In collaboration wit the financial team, I would work wholeheartedly to build a care home for the Elders of the community. It would be designed for optimum comfort and safety and would have a fully trained staff. All facilities would have to have safe water, regular repairs, and adequate heating. New homes would have to be built as required.

A new arena has been built recently and this allows residents opportunities to play hockey and to public skate. I would see to it that the arena is kept up to standards and is well supervised. A new school is being built. I see it as very important to give the students exposure to a wide range of academic subjects facilitated by highly qualified instructors. I firmly believe students should have access to trades if the yare so inclined. This could be accomplished by offering subjects such as cosmetology, power mechanics, commercial foods and carpentry. It is very important to have trained counselors in the school to deal with issues such as drug prevention programs, gang prevention, conflict resolution, and bullying.

Because the community is isolated, I would see a positive opportunity to open a small bank. Details of this would be worked out with the financial team. This bank would allow residents to have better access to conduct financial business. Financial planners would be available to help all members of the community to set up personal accounts. They would also teach the children money responsibilities by encouraging them to open small bank accounts and to appreciate saving for something important.

As I am coming to the end of my high school, I look forward to continuing on at a post secondary level in Aboriginal Financial Management. I have stated some of the ambitions that I have for my community, and after sufficient financial training, I would be privileged to lead my reserve on a positive and financially prosperous, but realistic journey.

CAELEY PITSEOLAK Forest Heights Community School, Chester Basin, Nova Scotia

If I Could Change My Town, Chester, Nova Scotia

If I could change my community, I don't think I'd make it any fancier or fill it with more franchises. In fact if I could change my community I'd remove some of the things that have been added over the years to make it more tourist beautiful.

I live in the village of Chester, Nova Scotia. Over the past 6 or so years Chester has been changed it seems to suit the wants of tourists, such as adding a Tim Hortons and a Subway. It's only two franchises yes, but I'm sure over the years more will be added, it only opens the gates for other franchises to put their name on our map. It's not to say that I don't like eating a sub or grabbing a coffee and I'm sure not many would complain. Where I find the problem is that it's helping to take away the beautiful seaside village look we once had.

In Chester we have our basic front harbour, it's a beautiful little inlet where we hold our Government wharf where the Tancook Island ferry docks its boat. Before it used to be a little dirt/pavement road that went around the outlines of the harbour, since then there has been random parts that have been landscaped with grass and then a sidewalk with beautiful black, Victorian looking lamps and benches. I'm sure in the city of Halifax or Dartmouth it may look appropriate, but for me I find that in Chester it just doesn't fit in with what we've accomplished as an already nice village.

Yet to come is a skate park also. Now this I find is one change coming to Chester I would welcome. Ironically enough though, some would find it's a bad investment. What most don't understand even the adults in Chester is that the youth here in this village have no place they can really hang out as a group. We're having to find places in Chester to 'loiter' and then getting in trouble by the police for it, such as the lido, where the public outdoor pool is. If we follow through with this skate park idea then us the youth have a place to be and its also an encouragement for people to try out something new and they'd have a place to practice. Many people around here have started skateboarding and enjoy it quite a bit but some are afraid because there really is no place to practice. Those who do practice are having to build their own little ramps or find the prime locations around Chester then get yelled at by the police, not to say that the police are in the wrong, they aren't but when we can't find the proper place to do it, we improvise.

In Chester we have a road called 'Pig Loop Road', a nice little road that winds around and around. It's a nice little drive and branching off from it is the Golf Course Rd. which is aptly named since it's where you can find out nice waterfront golf course. The problem now is that when you turn off onto the Golf Course Rd. is that we now have this little 'community' I guess you could call it which is meant for people retiring. I won't call it ugly it's a nice looking area, the only thing is that when people come to Chester to retire they come to a place that has some nice property around it and maybe a little view of the ocean. The idea to have this was great but each house is attached, with the look of maybe a more glamour motel. The location I find was a poor choice also, and maybe the choice of location was picked since it may have been the only place to do this but in that case I don't think they should have bothered to go through with it. In Chester most of the people who have lived here their whole lives also find it as pointless as having an umbrella on a sunny day.

Chester if you were to now visit would see people who have had their properties landscaped on the waterfronts so that they all look beautiful and ready for some top name magazine. The only problem is Chester never looked ugly before they did it and it seemed like it was just all for the tourism industry that people chose to do it because as soon as one person had done it, it was like the races had begun to see who could show off the nicest property to all the newcomers.

Chester has changed too much over the recent years and it looks as beautiful I guess as it ever could to someone visiting it for the first time, but the real beauty in Chester isn't as in your face as it used to be which is really unfortunate because that is when Chester really stood out and had its place on the map. Chester's popularity has recently decreased from where it once was and some people seem to think it's because of the vandalism that's apparently always going on. Truth is it doesn't happen as often as they say and the truth really is that even tourists who are coming are realizing that it's become too much of a touristy attraction rather than a nice seaside village.

In all I guess there's not much one can do with the outlook I have on Chester considering that time travel has yet to be invented and no business would just shut down for no reason. I won't try to say it's even a sensible idea or maybe even a smart one. But what Chester became known for; its beauty, simplicity and originality has been degraded. Chester is still beautiful no doubt, it's definitely not just a mound of nothing on the map but what once was is much nicer in my mind then what now is and I know that even many don't say it I'm not the only one who thinks it. It's a comforting thought that me only 'young un' in my town isn't alone in thinking that my town that I grew up in as a child is missed and that all this new stuff is ok but definitely not the same.

