

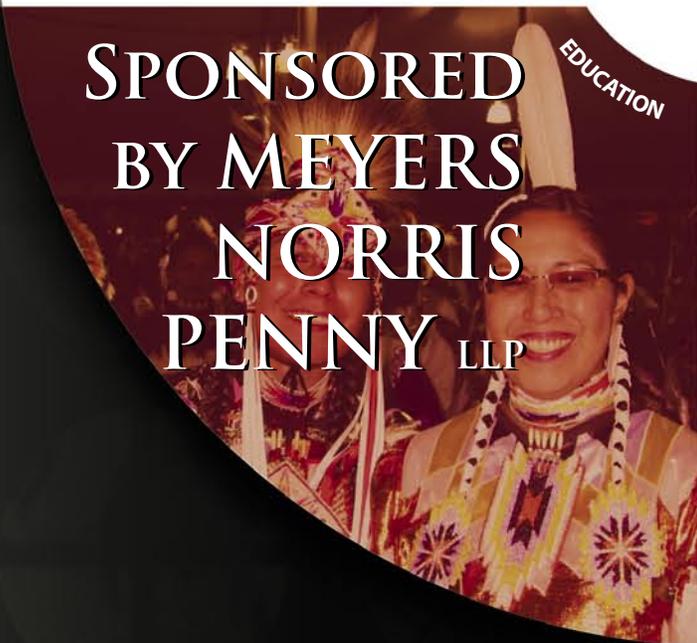
The
**ABORIGINAL
YOUTH
FINANCIAL
MANAGEMENT
CONFERENCE
AWARDS
2010**



2010

AFOA *Celebrating a Decade of Progress*
Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada

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Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada
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THE FOURTH ANNUAL ABORIGINAL YOUTH FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE AWARDS

2010

Sponsored by MEYERS NORRIS PENNY 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 launched the Aboriginal Youth Financial Management Conference Awards in 2007. With the generous sponsorship support of Meyers Norris Penny LLP, this is the Awards' fourth year.

The Awards are open to Aboriginal youth in grades 11 and 12 across the country. Applicants were asked to write a short essay on the topic: "*What are the success stories in my community, and if I was in a leadership role, what would be my plan of action to build on that success?*". 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:

Jarrelene Beaver – 17 years old, Canmore Collegiate High School, Canmore, Alberta

Bertram Bernard – 17 years old, Allison Bernard Memorial High School, Eskasoni, Nova Scotia

Pamela Kimewon – 17 years old, Wasse Abin High School, Wikwemikong, Ontario

Winners have been flown to Ottawa 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 Meyers Norris Penny are very pleased to be able to honour and acknowledge these fine young people by reproducing their award winning essays in this booklet.

Youth Award Winner

JARRELENE BEAVER

Grade 11, (Age 17), Canmore, AB

My Journey, My Life, My Home



Aba Wathtech. That is a greeting in my people's language. My name is Jarrelene Beaver and I am from the Stoney Nakoda First Nation (also known as Morley) in southern Alberta. We are located in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains 50 km west of Calgary, Alberta. We are members of the great Sioux Nation and we have been on this land for centuries. My people originated in the badlands of what is now South Dakota. Our community is vast and has a population of around 3000 people. We have three bands living on one First Nation. We have the Wesley, Chiniki and Bearspaw bands that make up our one nation. This is a fairly unique situation that leads to some issues when it comes to decision making as consensus is needed. Consensus can slow things but it can also be a very good thing because ideas are well thought out and debated.

When I was a little girl, I knew that I was going to be successful in my life. All around my community I saw horrible things happening. Even though alcohol is illegal by our nation's laws, people would still be drinking. This would often lead to violence. For instance, I love our Pow Wows. They are beautiful celebrations that make my spirit proud. I am a competitive jingle dress dancer but these beautiful events have begun to frighten and intimidate me because of the violence. I've seen five year olds carrying knives. Teenage gangs roam the parking lots and look for fights with other gang members. Their parents cannot control them. It has gotten worse since I was a little girl.

I am a grade 11 student at Canmore Collegiate High School in Canmore, Alberta. I am on the road to achieving my dreams. Some of the success stories in my community are in terms of education. We have a community school but my family and I have decided that I should attend school off reserve. I am doing this because even though Morley Community School offers a full high school program and is getting to be a better school every year, I feel I can get a better education in Canmore Collegiate High School. I have to take the bus up to three hours a day. I get on the bus at 7:30 and I get home at 4:00. I feel that I can get a better understanding of mainstream Canada if go to school off reserve. I can gain confidence in both cultures and I believe this is a key to success. It is important to learn the ways of mainstream Canada to be a full participant in this country. It is very challenging and difficult but I have good friends and good family to support me. This year, I have entered an Aboriginal business plan competition called E Spirit hosted by the Business Development Bank of Canada. My business partner, Kiana and I have created a mock business called "JK Styles". It will be a design and clothing sales company with a mix of Native and contemporary design. Working with our teachers in our school, we have learned the basics of creating a business. We have identified the skills needed to be an entrepreneur and what it takes to be a success. We have looked at markets, finances, and even how to create a vision statement.

This year it was announced that the Federal government through the department of Indian and Northern Affairs is providing money for a new school on the reserve. This is good because it will help our community get educated. The school now, is over crowded. We have little kids going to school with young adults. It would be good a thing to have two schools to give more room and more places to learn. They will have smaller class sizes and this will allow teachers to help out more.

In regard to teachers, we must have good teachers. It would be great to have more teachers from our community or at least have half of our teachers teaching our kids while the rest can be recruited from outside our community. Right now, there are only two certified teachers from Morley in Morley Community School.

It is so important for our students to graduate from high school. We had the biggest graduation class last year. We had over 30 grads from our nation. There were grads in Morley Community School, my school of Canmore Collegiate and also Bow Valley High School in Cochrane, Alberta. Graduation is the key to a better life. With a diploma you can get better jobs or you can go on to university or college. This gives you even more opportunities.

We have to support our students to graduate by inviting good healthy elders to help as well as get more of the community involved. We have to keep our Stoney language alive and strong. We need our elders and families to teach us our history and our place. If some of our young mothers need to know how to parent the community should offer programs to teach them. And if the programs are running, we need to support the mothers to get there. Have a transportation system that picks them up and provide day care for their children. We have so many young kids who are not being raised properly. These kids don't stand a chance when they get older. These young mothers need classes and support.

I hope to one day be Chief. I believe in a healthy lifestyle in a physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual way. Being in a leadership position, I can help people become healthy. There is a lot of sickness in my community. Diabetes is out of control. Young girls are getting pregnant. People are drinking too much and we need to get better. To become Chief will be very difficult road but I am willing to try my hardest to get there. Before I do this, I firmly believe I must get the best education I can. I want to attend the University of Calgary and receive a business degree. Leaders must have an education to lead their communities in the right direction. This is the key to achieving self sufficiency and self determination.

Since I believe that education is the key to improving the health of my community I would want to build on the success of our young people in education. We have had more high school graduates in the nation now than we have ever had. But it is still low graduation rates. My teachers tell me around 20% of our young people graduate from high school. We want to aim in the next few years to get to 50% and then we eventually want to climb to the Canadian average of 70%.

We would do this by investing in our schools. We need to heal the damage caused by Residential Schools on our grandparents and the legacy of the colonization of our land. We need good counsellors in the schools and in the community. As I mentioned previously it is so important to have good teachers. Teachers who understand where we come from and who we are. We need teachers that care about us and who work really hard for us. They have to be patient because there are a lot of troubles that our young people have to deal with.

Youth Award Winner

Our schools have to be in proper working order. The school must be maintained and kept at a minimum standard. We need our new schools to be built and the schools have to be comfortable and welcoming. The schools also need to be properly funded as the higher needs a community has, the more resources that should be available provided by government. For instance, more money is needed for good life-altering educational excursions. The more our young people see of the world, the more inspired they'll be to reach their goals. The schools should take people to other places across the world. To see what others have done to be healthy. To see what great opportunities there are in this world. We also need some help for kids that don't do well in a school because I know that a typical school setting is not for everyone. We need better alternative programs for these young people. Like a community program that can teach work skills and life skills so that we don't leave anyone behind. The young people will need to know how hard life can be without health and education. These are often the youth that find their sense of belonging in gangs. We can set up culture camps where troubled young people can spend time with healthy elders who can teach them and guide them to a healthy life. People can then feel safe at our pow wows.

But it is also important for our nation's young people and families to have a choice. Some students, like me, will still want to go off reserve to attend school in nearby towns. We can still get a good education as well as get more familiar to Canadian mainstream society.

When I graduate from university, I can work in our local government to gain experience using my business degree. Perhaps I could begin as a band manager or financial controller. Eventually I would like to become Chief in my community and help make decisions for my people that will heal us and make us strong as we were in my grandparents' grandparents time. Good leadership means to do the right thing for the right reasons. We need leaders who work for the people's best interests and that takes steps to improve the lives of everyone. I want to be this leader one day. I want my people to heal and have a good life. I want the violence to stop. I want the young people to have success and hope.

Ish Nish (Thank you in Stoney)

Youth Award Winner

BERTRAM BERNARD

Grade 11, (Age 17), Eskasoni, NS



Hello, my name is Bertram Bernard. I am seventeen years old. I attend at Allison Bernard Memorial High School here in Eskasoni, NS. Eskasoni is the largest concentration of Mi'kmaq people's in the world with a population of around 4200 band members living on and off the reserve... The community is located on the approximately 28 kilometres from the city of Sydney, Cape Breton, NS and spans out along the shoreline of bras`dor lakes.

The topic of this essay ; Identify some successes in my community and how I would go about expanding on them really gave me the opportunity to really evaluate and appreciate who I am as a Mi'kmaq youth living on a first nations reserve. My essay will attempt to give the reader a real sense of who we are as a first nation's community living in today's world and how I feel we need to change our focus in order to both survive and grow as a first nations peoples. I will first give you a sense of who we are in my community of Eskasoni and then I will share with you some of the success stories that have been happening along with an action plan that I will recommend for improvement.

Our Community- I believe that we do not take advantage of one of the most important assets that we have in our community today, namely our elders. We need to begin to utilize our elder's knowledge and skills. Unfortunately many of our communities continue to depend on the Indian Act for financial support and guidance. Our community has begun to start looking at ways of moving out of the cycle of dependency by looking to our traditional ways and traditional knowledge. Many communities have proven to be successful according to the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic development which states that the approach that works the best is one based on factors such as Cultural Match. With cultural match it means that the governing system in place matches the traditional practices, values and beliefs of the community.

In the context of Mi'kmaq, our community traditionally based its law on what was called the Mi'kmaq Order or *Netukulimk*. In its most simplest explanation it means that when you are born Mi'kmaq you are born with rights and responsibilities. These responsibilities are to your family, your community, your nation, and lastly your environment. Many of our Mi'kmaq today are informed of their rights but not their responsibilities. If our community starts acting in accordance with this traditional law it would mean a community that is looking out for one another and helping each other, at the same time ensuring that our environment are around for generations to come. This I believe needs to be a focus of our community leadership through our chief and council. Through true leadership guided by sound Mi'kmaq principles, I believe could be a remedy for our future successes.

Youth Award Winner

Our Youth- Eskasoni has the largest population of Mi'kmaq people located within the reserve in Eastern Canada today, at the same time we have a median age of just twenty five years old. That means that we have a tremendous opportunity to be not only the future leaders in Cape Breton, but also have the potential to make up a large portion of the workforce. There is a tremendous need for focus on training youth and development particularly in the area of trades. Today, we have many students completing teachers training and coming back home to work in the education field, but there is need for a concentration on trades both within the reserve and in the industrial Cape Breton area. I believe that by working with and in conjunction with established mentors in our local area who are willing to help young apprentice there is a large ability for our youth in our community to get over the cycle of dependency that exists in most First Nations.

Our community successes- One of five major successes in Eskasoni that I have identified for my essay has been our Education system that teaches bicultural and bilingual education. This means that our community encourages our youth to speak their language and think in an aboriginal way. This approach is not based in linear way of thinking. This means that our education approach is based on what elders refer to as **"a two eyed seeing"** concept that means with one view there is the traditional Mi'kmaq view, and on the other what may be considered a Eurocentric understanding of why things are the way they are. In our education we are taught of our treaties, our historic relationship with other cultures and what set us apart as Mi'kmaq.

A second major project is the renovation at the community's rink. Dan K. Stevens arena here in Eskasoni was a bad rink, people mistreated it and it was falling apart. Each every year the rink was getting less and less people coming to Eskasoni to watch the games due to lack of improvement. The NDP budget 1.1 million dollars to 74 rinks that was in need of general improvement. Dan K. Stevens arena here in Eskasoni was 1 out of 74 that was going to get renovation such as structural repairs, zamboni maintenance, and upgrades to wash-rooms, air quality systems and parking areas. With the arena's renovation, the Community would get a sum of money from people renting it during the summers for Pow-wows, birthdays, and summer activities and more people in Eskasoni would get jobs.

The upcoming gaming center in Eskasoni is a third success that I believe would help the community to gain our loss of money. The Project is about 1.1 million dollars; this building is going to be located at the Eskasoni Mini Mall next to the Eskasoni Supermarket. This project would be the gaming machine, such as Poker, Line/Reel/ Keno. The machine that we would get would come from the stores around Eskasoni. Every store owner would have to give the gaming center at least 6 gaming machine. With the gaming center coming up, Eskasoni wouldn't lose any money because of the money in the community would stay in community.

A fourth project to represent a success would be the Goat Island project which includes a walking trail. The future I believe in this island would be great for tourists and it would help the community with the money. The island now is only a walking trail, but the plan is that we would love to put a RV sites, Water/sewage line, Boardwalk, Campgrounds, and Gift shop/restaurant. These plans would help Eskasoni gain money, and the community would be a tourist's site for people coming from around the world to see the biggest native community. It would be great to put a Marina which it would be managed by the fishery.

Lastly there is a new nine unit apartment building being erected that will be up by the end of March of this year. This building will help our the housing needs of our reserve. I would suggest that we expand this by having a plan in place each each to construct another 9 - 12 units. If we have identified housing as a priority it should be a part of overall plan to affect change.

Our Challenges- With all of our successes, they are without it's challenges. As I see it, the major challenge today in my community is one of a political nature and that is trusting our leaders and forgiving each other for past problems. Indian Act Elections happen every two years and this election causes great disharmony in our community. The fact that we have such a large unemployed population creates a large number of people all trying to get elected because they feel that the money is good and that there is always an outside chance that they may win; however this system is not a system developed by Mi'kmaq and because of that there is a lot of infighting and our politicians make promises that it is impossible to keep. Many of our community members have gotten tired of this system and see a need for change. I would suggest that councillors who want to represent the people have minimal qualifications in terms of education and experience in order to be on the voting ballad. I would also suggest that the candidates pay a nominal fee to run a campaign to help eliminate those who are running for the sake of popularity. Candidates for chief and council should also hold public forums to debate the issues of the day on the reserve and to show publically why they are running for council. Using this approach again will only attract those that are truly interested in the position of helping others. I also believe that council two year terms should be extended to at least three years to give those in power an opportunity to make a difference. For a new council member getting elected, their first year is just learning and then half way through the second year, they are again preparing for another election.

Communication is also a big challenge for our community. The need for council to have a communication strategy is vital, that way we can be accountable and transparent for our community. In our current state there is no communication going to the community through website, through video, through newsletters. It is important that as a community we are informed and that information is easily accessible. Our communications must be a two way communication as well we must give community the ability to voice their concerns at open forums and help give the strategy moving forward.

Another key focus should be to establish more businesses within our community. Today, our community has provided for a minimal amount of jobs and as a result many are on social assistance. The majority of our communities' disposable income goes into the city of Sydney which is 40 minutes away from our community. Very little money stays in our community despite the fact we have our own supermarket. It is important that we teach our community the value of spending money locally and that by supporting small business in our community we are supporting the future of our community. In many ways our community is like a leaky basket, but instead of fixing the leaks our answer is throw more water in the basket. I think this is the wrong approach we need to find a way to ensure our money stays within the community. This is where the future direction and leadership of our community needs to be in order to grow and prosper as a first nation's people.

The only way to bring success to our community is through the establishment of projects to Eskasoni that highlight our strengths as a community. A major part of this would be to take advantage of the vast beauty and location of our community on the Bras' dor lakes. We need to look into ecotourism and showcase our natural beautiful environments, at the same time teach tourist about the beauty of the Mi'kmaq culture in our arts and crafts and history. We also must make these tours exciting and interesting and truly an experience that someone may be interested. Over the past few months such a project has been initiated called Goat Island Walking Trail. This is a little island boarding our community that has been identified as the naturalistic walking track/ trial that residents can participate in. I believe this trail can be the beginning of an attractive tourist site

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which could evolve into a Mi'kmaq information center, seasonal village scene with tradition arts and crafts. The island can house accommodations and eating establishments of a traditional and present menu. The economic opportunities are endless for this project, but it needs the leadership and management skills to guide its path. Who knows maybe this can be our new "basket" of wealth that represent a new economic promise of jobs and opportunity at the same time an avenue to show case our Mi'kmaq tradition and culture.

In closing, I would like to thank the AFOA for giving me an opportunity to participate in this essay contest. It initiated in me an opportunity to really look deep inside on my community as a whole in terms of whom we are as a Mi'kmaq people and where we need focus our attention in order to grow. I have always been taught to be a proud Mi'kmaq and I believe that we are the makers of our own future; a future that I believe can be bright with proper guidance and reflection of who we really are.

Thanks

Youth Award Winner

PAMELA KIMEWON

Grade 12, (Age 17), Wikwemikong, ON

The Success Stories in My Community



Some of the stereotypes given to Anishnawbek people are that we are lazy and uneducated. However this is not the case, seeing that there are many success stories. In my community, there are many success stories, but there can be more that portray a positive lifestyle. In order for that success to build up, there is a need for role models who can be examples of this. To ensure a role models success there is a need for more employment opportunities, and the simplicity of encouragement towards the students to finish school. Throughout the years, it seemed to be a rarity for an Anishnawbek person to be successful in school, there were only a handful of people with a college diploma or university degree under their belt, now the times are different, it is a different age. There are much more people attending school and completing their programs successfully. There needs to be more of a reason or an incentive for the students to complete school, and posters are a great example to do so. However their needs to be more, all the students attending my high school should be completing their secondary education as quickly as they can.

In my community, with a population of approximately 7000 people, 3000 people on reserve and 4000 people off reserve, there has been many successful people. They have broken the stereotype known to Anishnawbek people of being uneducated. My community does very well in showing off the success of their fellow community members. There are four, former graduates from my high school located in the community that have been very successful after they have graduated from our schools. They were put onto posters as examples in the community to show that our school is high-quality. It also shows that the students are willing and able to learn, and to achieve greatness by reaching their personal goals. Each of the students has graduated from various programs, one of which was Police Foundations, Nursing, Teaching and another took a Military program. The Canadian Armed Forces Graduated and went on to serve his country in Afghanistan for about 7 months. He then came back to train other recruits in California and from there he will once again take a tour of duty in Afghanistan. The student, who graduated from teachers college with a Bachelor of Physical and Health Education, is currently teaching the physical education class at my high school. The graduate from the police foundation presently works at the Wikwemikong Tribal Police Services in my community. The Nursing Graduate has now gone on to Medical school to obtain her Doctorate PhD.

These students are role models to the up and coming generations and are perfect examples of success. They show that it is possible and show the potential of a higher education if pursued, which could open many doors. If they work hard it will in turn all pay off in the end. These students' pictures are now on posters and being put up throughout the community for everyone to see and across Canada. The next poster can be composed of any one of the next for graduates who now have a college or university degree. Three of those students on

Youth Award Winner

the poster are three of my relations, two of which I am closely related to. This poster really stands out to me and shows me that I can do the same. I really look up to them as they inspire me to be better and to accomplish more. One could say that the students are being marketed, as well as the school. By distributing the posters they are marketing the school, and showing that the school is credible with accomplished graduates.

Although there are many accomplishments in a variety of programs, there is not as much business or financial graduates which is needed in my community. The community is in need of more auditors, financial managers, certified aboriginal financial manager, directors, board members, and tax administrators. There is always a need for these types of jobs for people with these certain degrees, within the community. More of my peers and the generation after me must take on this role and flourish in them.

Throughout the years there have been many successful graduates in the community, who are well known and are being distinguished for their achievements. There are various posters around the community that are dedicated to these positive role models. The posters consist of a picture of the person with a brief description of what they have graduated from, and a short quote from each person. The poster also had two graduates from the high school who were the valedictorians at the High School; they too had a short and inspiring message for students to follow. As far as I know there are 2 posters out each containing a different set of people, however I would like to make more of those, the same type, since there are currently additional band members, younger ones at that, who have accomplished many new things, and their success also needs to be known and recognized throughout.

If I were in a leadership role in my community, I would like to enhance many things to better the community and attain prominence. I would start by enhancing the school systems, by implementing an after school program at the high school, by hiring more teachers and resource people for the students so they have the ability to have tutorial sessions. There are many students who are in need of help, with their school work however, there are not enough people who can help them or have the time to help them during school hours. The teachers are only at the school for certain hours, nonetheless it would be great if the school were to be open, say after school hours, for tutoring sessions, it would greatly enhance the students' success. This would further the knowledge of the students and help them understand the material that they are being taught which would encourage them to stay in school and complete high school. It would also give them confidence in what they are doing, in that case they would desire to pursue a higher education.

Another, action I would take to build on the success in my community would be to create more jobs within the community, which will draw the successful people in, with their various degrees from different programs. The community is in need of those different people who can fulfill the diverse jobs in my community which we so desperately need. When this happens, the community will be stronger and more things would be accomplished as we will have the necessary resources in the community, who will have the ability to complete the essential jobs our community needs. For instance, the people with nursing degrees and know more and more students are going to school for their doctorate degree (PhD) we would need a larger clinic to be built, or even possibly a small hospital. It would not only attract successful band members, but it will create jobs and bring in some revenue for the community. People from other places on the Island would most likely utilize the hospital as well as creating small revenue. In turn, any successful university and college graduate would stay in the community as they would be employed here.

In closing I would like to say that my community does an excellent job in distinguishing the many successful members. The community is in need, though, of more diverse jobs containing people with various diplomas and degrees to get the job done and make it right. There are many success stories in my community however there can be more. In order for that success to build up, there is a need for more role models who can be examples of this. To ensure a role models success there is a strong need for more employment opportunities, and the simplicity of encouragement towards students to finish school. The community is in need of more people with business and financial backgrounds to enhance the rough financial situation that the community is in. There is a need for, auditors, financial managers, and chief financial officers and so on. I strongly encourage the success of my fellow peers and people younger than me to triumph in their studies, and go into different programs, especially business and financial programs as there is always a need.



The Fourth Annual Aboriginal Youth Financial Management Conference Awards



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