

Northern Youth Abroad

NUNAVUT • NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Final Report on the Exercise and Wellness Access Program Delivered by Camosun College

Photo Credit: Thorsten Gohl

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CATAPULTE

Background

Northern Youth Abroad in collaboration with Camosun College and Northern Loco worked to develop a 16 week pilot that would be made available to youth living in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon. This “first of its kind” initiative would include a cohort of students completing all 16 weeks of class remotely, and a cohort who would spend the first eight weeks in a satellite hub hosted in Deh Gáh Got’îê First Nation (Fort Providence) Northwest Territories, and then transition to remote learning in their home community. This project was created as an initiative under Northern Compass, a project that brings together partners from across Nunavut, the NWT, and beyond with the vision of “dramatically increasing achievement among Northerners pursuing their education and career goals after high school”.

The Camosun College pilot project was initiated as an innovative way to connect prospective students from the North with the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education in the North while testing community based supports and wrap-around support designed to increase student access, participation and ultimately success. With this in mind, the intention of this work and pilot was to;

1. Create cohorts of Indigenous students from across the NWT, Nunavut and potentially Yukon. Cohorts would emphasize community and relationship building, and greatly decrease the feeling of isolation and alienation that many students from the North feel when entering post-secondary education.
2. Provide a holistic approach that supports academic, social, emotional and individual success.
3. Prepare students to make informed choices on next steps and then transition to these steps with confidence. This will include matching options with their skills and interests, and navigating the many steps and systems.
4. Increase representation by under-represented groups (males, those out of school, etc)
5. Develop innovative partnerships where those with common interest can work together to meet the needs that exist.
6. Serve as a test of this model and inform future projects that could address the potential that exists to create community-based partnerships that provide instruction opportunities in the North.
7. Reflect the opportunity to work with institutions offering access and bridging programs that least to longer term studies supporting in-demand careers in the North.

Through this, we wanted to contribute to or achieve the following;

1. Selected students would complete academic and supplementary programming including additional certifications, cultural activities, and transition support.
2. Recommendations and best practices that would inform community-based, supported post-secondary transition programs.
3. Students who are ready to transition to next steps with increase skill and confidence.
4. A significant increase in each student’s capacity to continue with their education, and the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate this transition.

Summary of Results

In Summary:

- 20 students aged 18-29 took part in the Access Program. Students represented 14 communities across Nunavut the Northwest Territories.
- Five courses were offered through Camosun in two “semesters”. Instruction took place over 17 weeks (March 15-July 8). Beyond the course curriculum, youth were provided with the support of two fulltime staff, tutoring, cultural activities, social activities, and a number of sessions and opportunities to build additional skill and competency.
- Each youth took part in transition planning and coaching and developed a strategy for their next steps.
- The pilot provided great learning and has already informed the launch of two subsequent initiatives, with additional activities planned.

Activities and Progress During the Project Period

Activities

Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment began in February 2021 and a framework for the pilot was put in place. The aim was for a cohort of 12 youth, with a cap of 24 students. To start, NYA Staff identified youth who had previously been engaged in an NYA offering who fit the pilot's criteria; a high school graduate, under 25 years old, and who might benefit from a post-secondary transition program vs direct entry. Approximately 100 youth were contacted and 9 ultimately enrolled. Additionally, NYA contacts at regional Inuit and First Nation's organizations across the NWT and Nunavut were asked to share the opportunity with their members/beneficiaries. The other 11 students who participated were recruited this way or by word or mouth or social media. A total of 20 students were registered in the program and began class on March 15.

Program Delivery and Content

Over 17 weeks, participants took five classes taught remotely by instructors from Camosun College. The courses were separated into two 8 week terms with a week of recovery at week 9, that we added in response to student fatigue. Classes included: two English courses, Biology, Math, and an Exercise and Wellness course - all at levels appropriate to access post-secondary. Class instruction took place Monday through Thursday for 22.5 hours per week. These courses provided the chance for participants to upgrade their high school marks and/or earn credits that are most commonly required for acceptance into many post-secondary programs.

Extracurricular Activities

Participants were provided the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities and sessions outside of classes. Those on site in Fort Providence participated in: two on the land trips, Aboriginal Sports Circle delivered northern games, hand games, community coaching certification programs, cross country skiing and ringette lessons as well as recreational activities such as skating. A physical fitness leadership program, led virtually, was also offered to both the remote and on site group. Additionally, online social events were held for bonding between remote and on site participants. Each Participant also had access to tutoring, and student support through two dedicated project staff hired by NYA.

Transition Support

Throughout the program, participants developed post-secondary readiness skills and the opportunity to explore different schools, programs, and pathways. One of the reasons the Exercise and Wellness Access Program was selected was because the level of the English, Math, and Biology courses would satisfy entry requirements to many post-secondary programs across Canada. Successfully completing the access program would also guarantee entry into the Kinesiology program at Camosun. This allowed each student to further decide if they wanted to pursue the Kinesiology program or apply to a different program altogether. Each student worked with support staff to identify a pathway that aligned with potential career aspirations. Support was also provided to students to guide them through the process of applying to post-secondary and navigating funding programs. By the end of the program each student developed a transition plan that outlined their next steps and what they needed to achieve to reach their goals. Supports will continue as students prepare for any programs they have been accepted to and will include things like tips on finding housing, booking travel, navigating campus, and managing workload.



Students took part in extra curricular activities such as Hand Games in Fort Providence.

Photo credit: Thorsten Gohl

Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Home Community	Territory	Remote/ Onsite
Chase Yakeleya	19	M	Tulita	NT	Onsite
Ethan Tutcho	19	M	Norman Wells	NT	Onsite
Garrett Bonnetrouge	26	M	Deh Gáh Got'îê First Nation (Fort Providence)	NT	Onsite
James Evaluarjuk	20	M	Igloodik	NU	Onsite
Kenneth Illuitok	26	M	Kugaaruk	NU	Onsite > remote after week 2
Nathan Maniapik	19	M	Pangnirtung	NU	Onsite
Neilson Vandell	20	M	Deh Gáh Got'îê First Nation	NT	Onsite
Shannel Landry	21	F	Deh Gáh Got'îê First Nation	NT	Onsite
Sheldon Minoza	30	M	Deh Gáh Got'îê First Nation	NT	Onsite
William Sassie	21	M	Fort Liard	NT	Onsite
Breyze Blake	21	F	Whitehorse	YT	Remote
Brandon Iyyiraq	19	M	Naujaat	NU	Remote
Dalton Takazo	22	M	Déłıne	NT	Remote
Dre Neyando	21	M	Fort McPherson	NT	Remote
Ethan Baton	22	M	Déłıne	NT	Remote
Kristen Yakeleya	29	F	Łutselk'e	NT	Remote
Naomi Yukon	19	F	Déłıne	NT	Remote
Renee Okalik	18	F	Arviat	NU	Remote
Shannon Kayaitok Ittimangnak	23	F	Kugaaruk	NU	Remote
Victoria Apples	24	F	Behchokò	NT	Remote

Observations, Highlights, and Learning

- There was a lot of interest in the program. We easily exceeded the target of 12 youth.
- Two full time coordinators were hired and provided a range of supports to both onsite and remote cohorts, but beyond this often the group required significant additional staff support.
- Connection and technology issues were present, but less of an issue than anticipated. Generally speaking, Participants would benefit from skill building around online tools.



On site and remote students met each other and program staff virtually at the beginning of the program. They continued to have social and extra curricular activities together throughout the program.

- The timeline to recruit, select and orientate students was quick, but proved appropriate to have everyone enrolled. That said we would recommend a stronger orientation for students. This was compounded by Camosun College doing a software update the week before class began and left most students without access to the learning platform until classes began.

- 65% of Participants were male. Traditionally the breakdown of students attending post-secondary programs skews to be 80% or more female. The inclusion of male students was intentional, but even with this considered we believe the ratio to be high.

- There were strong team cohesion in both the hybrid and remote cohorts. Youth were eager to help and support each other.

- The structure, pace and expectations of the Biology course was the best fit for the learners needs. It was intimidating, but created both good results and a sense of pride and achievement in the learners. Conversely the

approach in both english and math was much more self-paced and fluid.

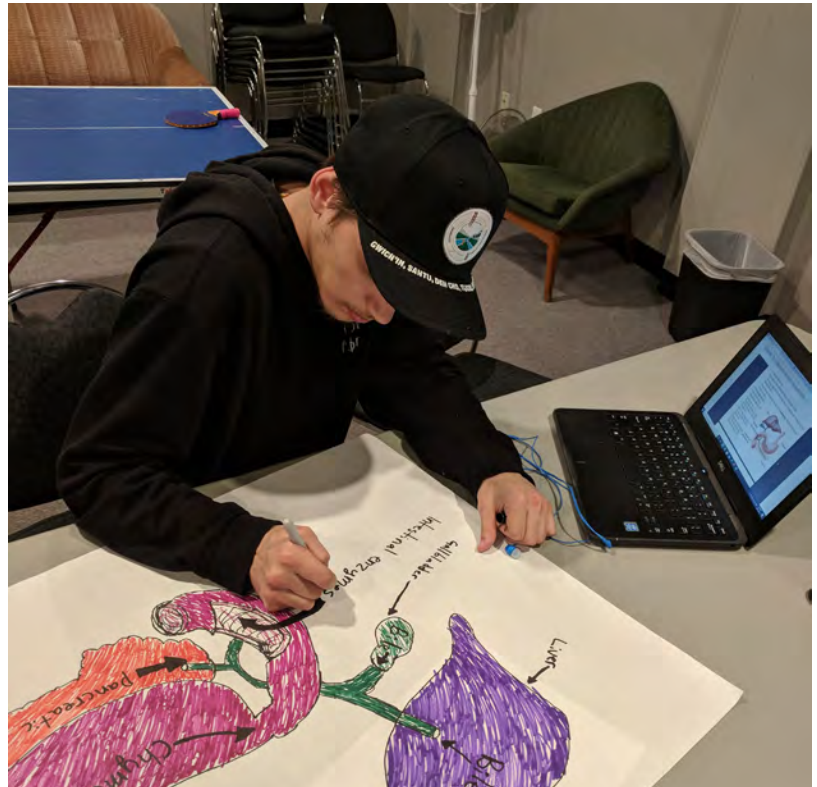
- Our accommodations and classroom in Fort Providence were a good fit for the Participants who traveled to the community to attend.
- In the future having specific resources to balance remote and in person learning would be helpful.
- The hybrid cohort had a harder time with the remote portion than those who were remote the entire time.

"I was out of school for about 3 years before this program, and in that time I always wanted to go back but was not sure if i could handle it. Since I was gone so long but I decided to challenge myself on something new, online courses. It was the best thing I've ever done and turns out, I still got it."
- Kristen Kodakin-Yakeleya, Program Participant



Observations, Highlights, and Learning

- Attendance was very strong for the initial 8 weeks, and then an ongoing challenge during the second term. The break week was necessary we felt, but the midpoint shift hurt momentum, team cohesion and it seemed that a lot of students felt deflated at the start of the second term, and never recovered.
- The Exercise Science course was challenging, even though this was the attraction for many to sign up for the program. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact that they were familiar with english, math and science, but not the type of course material that this course offered and required.
- It is important to build in conversations around the expectations of post-secondary.
- Fear, uncertainty and changing protocols due to Covid 19 had a significant impact on the appetite for planning to attend school in the fall. We believe a more realistic timeline to track transition outcomes will be 1-2 years.



James Evaluarjuk from Igloolik, NU working on his Biology homework



"The program was an eye opener to what we should expect when attending college/University. Now I'm an active leader within my community and striving for more and change, mahsi"
- Sheldon Minoza, Program Participant

Summary of Key Recommendations

- In the future we would augment the process a student goes through as part of their application and orientation to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the expectations of the program, receive onboarding that makes sure all elements are clear and accessible, and links students with the full range of supports available. One significant area where we feel this will increase success is in talking about the differences in high school to college.
- Each student and course needs a clear schedule, list of assignments and other activities, firm deadlines and timely feedback.
- Tutors that we provided were an underutilized resource. In the future we would match students ahead of class start and support better use of the resource.
- It would be valuable to explore what enticed such a high number of male participants and to see how these elements could be replicated or used in other scenarios.
- Youth should each have a set living allowance that is given each week of participation.
- In the future we would recommend a hybrid structure, but in reverse order. We see merit having the following project format; orientation week, term one remote, term two onsite on a post-secondary campus. This would allow for youth to experience both remote learning and campus living. The orientation and remote components would focus on course completion, team building, using community based resources and adapting to an online learning environment. The campus based segment would focus on course completion, city and independent living, accessing campus services etc.
- We strongly recommend that all future partnerships be with schools that have residence or accessible housing.

Outcomes

The following outcomes were achieved over the pilot:

- 17 students applied to Camosun College and/or another post-secondary institution
- 6 students were accepted into their program of choice at either Camosun or another post-secondary school
- 4 participants will be attending school in the fall, while the majority of the others have plans for future studies
- 5 students achieved one or more of the prerequisites needed to be accepted into their programs
- 16 students obtained a new credit or upgraded one or more course marks from the grade they had achieved in high school
- 37 credits were cumulatively earned by the cohort
- 2 new projects are in development, building on the lessons and learning from this pilot

Projects Emerging from this Pilot

Vancouver Island Northern Teacher Education Program

Northern Compass is providing support to a unique project to a group of long-term Northern Indigenous Educators (with the exception of 1 non-indigenous) working with Vancouver Island University to co-adapt their direct entry into the third year of their Bachelor of Education Program. Based on a series of editorials in NewsNorth last spring it became apparent that we collectively need to support one another to create opportunities to address some of the systemic challenges in teacher recruitment and retention and these challenges are further highlighted as we live with the pandemic. Their task has been to work with VIU so that each course is designed for delivery with an experiential learning basis and challenge all participants to know what Trauma Informed instruction looks like as it relates to the Indian Residential School landscape that affects all of our communities. We need to give our teacher candidates the understanding of inter-generational trauma and a safe space to unpack their educational experience, so it informs their praxis in a culturally relevant delivery model. We are providing technical and financial support at the moment and are anticipating the need to provide academic support once the program begins. Northern Compass Lead Lois Philipp would be considered a co-lead on this project and is working on this project with this hat on.

Tłıchq-MacEwan Partnerships

Northern Youth Abroad has partnered with the Tłıchq Government since 2020 on a post-secondary education strategy with the aim of building a model that engages and supports the success in education of Tłıchq citizens. Through this process, we learned about the needs and priorities of Tłıchq learners and developed strategies to meet these needs.

From March-July 2021, Northern Youth Abroad, Northern Loco and Camosun College partnered to offer an Exercise and Wellness Access Program to 15 students studying online in their home communities across the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. This pilot project generated lots of learning and allowed for testing and development of best practices for tailor-made education initiatives that fit Northerners' needs rather than fitting Northerners to the status quo.

Building on this pilot project, Northern Youth Abroad has partnered with the Tłıchq Government and MacEwan University's School of Continuing Education in Edmonton, AB, to provide five different program options in professional development and preparation/foundational courses for learners in the Northwest Territories. Northern Youth Abroad will provide student support services such as assistance applying and registering for courses, navigating funding, workshops on the expectations of university, tutoring, weekly/monthly check-ins from staff, monthly social and cultural events to enhance a sense of community, and school supplies, etc.

This program addresses the following needs:

- Options to take post-secondary courses from one's home community.
- Need for upgrading courses to qualify for further learning, build a foundation for good study habits, and adjust to university expectations and academics.
- Opportunities for professional development.
- Need for student support services to enable students to successfully complete their programs.

Looking Ahead

We believe that the pilot was very successful as a tool to inform future models and delivery. We also feel confident that each youth came away with increased knowledge, confidence and preparedness and these will have a direct impact on their future direction, endeavors and success. We will continue to work with each youth to set and support their goals. We believe in the value of offering tailored opportunities and supports to northerners that takes into account the types of learning students have previously experienced to best enhance the likelihood of future success.

We greatly value your contribution to the project and believe in the value of partnerships like this. Investing in the educational success of beneficiaries today will help create the healthy and vibrant communities of tomorrow.