

21 SUCCESS STORIES

ABORIGINAL LEARNERS USING
ONLINE LEARNING TO GET THEIR
DEGREES, DIPLOMAS, CERTIFICATES
OR UPGRADE THEIR SKILLS

Supporting 600 small, rural, remote, Aboriginal and Francophone communities across Ontario through 112 local online learning centres, including 27 centres in Aboriginal communities.

INTRODUCTION

These 21 stories about Aboriginal learners, all of whom completed their programs and courses through online learning supported by Contact North | Contact Nord, celebrate their determination and commitment to their goals.

For a variety of reasons, attending classes on a face-to-face campus was not an option for these learners. Instead, they found online learning and recognized the opportunity it offers to study in their communities. Online learning was not always the easy option: the learners had to be disciplined and dedicated. They had to adapt to new ways of learning, of communicating with teachers, finding information, and completing assignments.

The stories highlight the success of the learners. Each achieved their initial educational goal, and many went on to enrol in additional post-secondary education.

Contact North | Contact Nord, Ontario's Distance Education & Training Network, provides 112 online learning centres where Ontario residents can access courses to get a degree, diploma or certificate or upgrade their skills through online learning with personalized support in their community. Through partnerships with Ontario's 24 public colleges, 22 public universities and 250 literacy and basic skills and training providers, students are offered the choice of 1,000 programs and 18,000 courses they can complete at a distance. Aboriginal learners have the opportunity to connect to programs and courses in online learning centres in 27 First Nations communities across Ontario.

Importance of family and community

Many young people who leave their community to attend post-secondary educational institutions often return home before the first semester is completed. The learners we met talked about missing family, friends and culture. Others were reluctant to leave in the first place for the same reason. Having the option of online learning in their own or nearby communities meant they could live at home without sacrificing their educational goals.

Need for literacy and upgrading courses

The gap between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal high school graduates is substantial. However, we heard stories of how Aboriginal learners are completing their high school diploma due to the flexibility of online learning. With academic support provided by the educational institution and the additional support offered by the staff in the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centres, success is achieved. Access to academic upgrading online has helped learners find the pathways to post-secondary education.

Impact of remoteness

The remoteness of some communities limits their capacity to connect to the Internet and the educational resources available. Whether it is acquiring Internet access or even computers, building capacity within the community to ensure access to the available online programs and

“Contact North provides the opportunity for community members to get the education they need in order to apply for positions that support the local economy.”

*Wayne Turner, Band Manager,
Attawapiskat First Nation*

“Contact North distance education centre provides quality distance education that makes the completion of college diplomas, university degrees and high school diplomas possible for residents of small, rural and remote communities across the province. The riding of Brant benefits greatly from this education centre.”

Dave Levac, Brant MPP

online courses is important. Many of the remote fly-in communities are now preparing for mining developments and subsequent jobs. Access to education and training is critical for communities to take advantage of emerging economic development opportunities. The Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centres, whether in Aboriginal or adjacent communities, provide access to online audio, video, and web conferencing courses, with technological support.

Importance of access to Aboriginal programs

More and more aboriginal learners are seeking and choosing Aboriginal educational institutions for their programs and courses. With the limited number of programs and courses available across the province, Contact North | Contact Nord ensures students can connect to their preferred online programs and online courses.

Importance of Community Support Services

As learners navigate thousands of potential education and training options, they are also faced with traversing all the steps required after they have made the initial decision to pursue a program or course. Some learners identified challenges such as understanding the registration process, identifying funding options, and having access to day care centres. Contact North | Contact Nord is able to assist students with navigating through this process, providing referrals to relevant community supports, and connecting students to the educational institution.

The following 21 stories tell how Aboriginal learners across Ontario have recognized their need for further education and training to achieve goals linked to their personal, family, and community lives.



James Crittenden
Online Learning Centre: Georgina
Community: Chippewas of Georgina Island
First Nation
Program: High School Diploma
Educational Institution: Quinte Adult Education

James Crittenden grew up in Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, a community outside of Keswick and only accessible by ferry. He moved away from his home community in 2014, and started on the road to higher education. His first step was to complete his high school diploma, which could be attained by completing four credits.

Through a referral, he learned about the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre located in Georgina. With the assistance of centre staff, he registered with Quinte Adult Education to get his final four high school credits online.

James lives on his own in a small apartment not far from the ferry that takes him back to his home community. “It is easier to live here and do the schooling. The Internet is hard to get on the Island and it’s more expensive too,” he explained.

“In the beginning, not having a teacher to ask questions was difficult,” he said. “But it forces you to find the information yourself and you learn more.”

Having experienced the consequences of addiction in his community, it motivated James to pursue higher education. He hopes to return to his community and make a difference. “I feel like, if I didn’t go to school I’d be working at a meaningless job for the rest of my life or until my back is broken from labour.”

James successfully completed his high school diploma, reaching his first educational goal. He is now enrolled in a post-secondary program at Georgian College campus in Orillia.



“Students are more comfortable in the Contact North | Contact Nord centre than learning in a large room with lots of people, important for them to have this option.”

*Jeannette Dupasquier,
Employment Counsellor, Apatisiwin
Employment Unit, Red Lake Indian
Friendship Centre*



Tammy Delorme
Online Learning Centre: Red Lake
Community: Métis
Program: Native Child and Family Services Diploma
Educational Institution: Confederation College

Tammy Delorme, a Métis mother of three sons, lives in Red Lake, a small remote community in Northwestern Ontario. Living in a remote community did not, however, stand in the way of pursuing her educational goals.

“I was working as a child care worker, without credentials, and it was overwhelming,” said Tammy. She stepped down from the position and took the Office Administration – General Certificate Program at the local Confederation College campus, which helped her in an office administration position. Her employer, Tikinagan Child and Family Services, encouraged her to go further and enrol in the Native Child and Family Services Diploma Program offered at a distance by Confederation College.

With the help of the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in Red Lake, she was able to remain in her community, continue working and complete her diploma. With her employer’s support, she took classes during the day, allowing her to manage her busy family schedule.

“I had my own room with the video screen and headset,” described Tammy. “When I went to the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre, the computer was ready, my class was ready, and my audio was all hooked up. I just showed up. It was just like arriving on campus.”

Having previously taken classes on a college campus, she was familiar with the routine and time required to get assignments completed. She also knew what she was missing without the teachers and students present. The imperfections of the technology, and being the only student in Red Lake, were not a serious impediment to Tammy; she was simply grateful to find a way to attend school while working and raising her children.

Tammy successfully completed the diploma in 2013 and was offered a new position as a Child and Youth Worker.



Jennifer Drolet
Online Learning Centre: Kapuskasing
Community: Moose Cree First Nation
Program: Social Service Worker Diploma
Educational Institution: Northern College

Getting her Social Service Worker diploma with Northern College all through online learning was a significant achievement for Jennifer Drolet. It came after a long and hard journey through grief.

In 2000, Jennifer's first child died at the age of two weeks. The tragedy catapulted her into deep grief until she found a traditional healer at the Kapuskasing Friendship Centre.

Jennifer healed from the traumatic loss and in that process decided to pursue an educational goal. Her long-term goal was to get the Social Service Worker diploma and help other mothers dealing with similar grief.

As a member of the Moose Cree First Nation, she was able to access educational funds to attend a post-secondary program.

Jennifer was relieved to discover that she could remain in her community and attend classes at a distance from the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in Kapuskasing. At the time, she was still battling the grief and appreciated not having to leave her family and friends.

"The drawback in the first semester was my motivation. It was hard to get motivated to do my homework," says Jennifer. However, when she received a warning letter from the college due to her failing marks, it was the wake-up call she needed. Jennifer refocused, keeping her long-term goal in mind, and dug deep to bring her grade point average up. "If I needed help, I could turn to the other students taking classes at the centre with me. Peer support was important," she said.

When Jennifer graduated in 2006, she obtained a job at the Kapuskasing Friendship Centre to implement the Akwe:go children's program. Today, she is also the happy mother of two children, aged four and six.





Ashley Fitzpatrick
Online Learning Centre: Pic River First Nation
Community: Pic River First Nation
Program: College Access Certificate
Educational Institution: Confederation College

Ashley Fitzpatrick is a busy single mother of three children with sights set on getting a college diploma. Her first step was to take the College Access Certificate offered by Confederation College. Being able to take her classes online at the local online learning centre located in her First Nation community made it all possible.

Ashley lives in Pic River First Nation, a remote First Nation community of 300 residents, situated along the north shore of Lake Superior at the mouth of the Pic River, and 20 km outside of Marathon.

Ashley was working at one of the gold mines close to her community. However, there was significant downsizing and many of the workers, including Ashley, lost good paying jobs. Facing the uncertainty of her future and ability to support her family, Ashley decided to get her College Access Certificate and prepare for post-secondary studies.

Successfully juggling parenting and schoolwork responsibilities was only possible because of the unique features of online learning, such as flexibility and class recordings.

“It was different from being in a classroom; you need to be more independent,” explained Ashley. She found the audioconferencing platform to attend her classes easy to use. However, she found the need to be more disciplined with her time to be a challenge. “It can be done. No matter how much you think there are roadblocks, you just get through them,” she said.

Completing the certificate was a significant accomplishment, not only for her educational career, but also as a positive role model for her children.





Loretta Fitzpatrick
Online Learning Centre: Marathon
Community: Pic River First Nation
Program: Business Administration Diploma
Educational Institution: Northern College

It was a major life decision for Loretta Fitzpatrick to leave her job and pursue the Business Administration Diploma Program from Northern College. “I was working for the Anishinabek Police Service for 13 years, and I knew that if I was not going to become a police officer, then I had to find another career,” she said.

Loretta is a member of Pic River First Nation and lives in Marathon, a small town of 3,300 people just 10 kilometres away, with her husband and three children.

“Contact North was the only option to take the program I had chosen,” said Loretta. She had decided to start her career transition by taking the Business Administration

Diploma Program from Northern College at a distance. Attending her classes meant using web conferencing. She could connect to her classes either at the local online learning centre in Marathon or from her home computer. She was the only student attending the program from Marathon and found it challenging to not have other classmates close by to brainstorm and work alongside. “Working independently is challenging,” she admitted. “I was the only one sitting with the computer. It would have been nice to have other classmates to study and brainstorm with.”

However, she also admitted she prefers to attend her classes from the online learning centre to avoid the distractions of phone calls and laundry when at home. The benefit of web conferencing was that when she was unable to attend a class due to family priorities, she knew it would be recorded and she could play it back at her convenience.

Loretta completed the Business Administration Diploma Program and increased her confidence to switch over to the Business Management Diploma– Human Resources offered by Confederation College at their Marathon campus.





Jordan General
Online Learning Centre: Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation
Community: Six Nations of the Grand River
Program: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course
Educational Institution: Quinte Adult Education

In Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, learners like Jordan General, needing to complete a high school diploma, can do so through online learning.

Jordan found Contact North | Contact Nord after his mother insisted he get his high school diploma. Receiving the assistance from Contact North | Contact Nord staff to get registered in the Quinte Adult Education Program and to having a place to work within the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in his community made it easier.

“I come in every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.,” explained Jordan. “These are the hours I can get a ride back and forth to the centre.”

He will be getting a laptop so he can also work at home. Studying online is ideal for him because of the flexibility to work anywhere.

Once in the routine of his studies and receiving encouragement with good marks, he said other possibilities began to emerge for his future plans.

Jordan realized that if he wants a career he will need to complete his high school diploma as the first step.

“I would like to take the Graphic Design Program at Mohawk College so I can work in video game design,” Jordan said.



“Community members know they have a place to go, word is going around. We are encouraging even those with jobs to study in the evening.”

Irvine Taylor, Community Liaison, Constance Lake First Nation



“Mining companies are coming onto the scene and we need to make sure our community is prepared.”

Ernst Moore, Economic Development Officer, Constance Lake First Nation

Samarya Ineese

**Online Learning Centre: Constance Lake First Nation
Community: Constance Lake First Nation and Fort Albany First Nation
Program: Business Fundamentals Certificate
Educational Institution: Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute**

It was a challenge to balance school, work and family for Samarya Ineese, but it was well worth the effort. A member of Constance Lake First Nation, Samarya started the Business Fundamentals Certificate Program with Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute in the fall of 2013.

“I liked not having to be in the classroom and the flexibility to do the school work when I could,” said Samarya. After she had attended a two-week, on campus session, she moved to her husband’s home community of Fort Albany with their infant son. Since she was already taking the course online, it did not matter where she was located; she could connect to her classes from the James Bay Coast.

Samarya attended her classes twice a week through audioconferencing. She didn’t feel isolated, as there were other students up the coast who were also attending online. She appreciated the flexibility of online learning that allowed her to balance school and a new infant.

“You need to be dedicated though and because I enjoyed the program, it wasn’t a problem to get my work done,” she said.

Samarya and her family moved back to Constance Lake First Nation and she wants to continue taking more programs that would help when she and her husband open their own business sometime in the future.



Starleen Lajambe
Online Learning Centre: Mattawa
Community: Métis
Program: Occupational Health and
Safety Certificate
Educational Institution: Cambrian College

Starleen Lajambe of Mattawa transformed what should have been a major setback into a new career. She was working at a large hotel in North Bay when she injured herself, resulting in a broken vertebra and partial paralysis. Recovery took a long time and she was not able to return to her job.

Living in Mattawa, a small town situated along the Ottawa River, her options for retraining were minimal. When

she learned about the local Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre from a family member, she saw an opportunity. After spending some time with the Online Learning Recruitment Officer, she enrolled in Cambrian College's Occupational Health and Safety Certificate online.

As a Métis citizen, Starleen received funding from the Métis Nation of Ontario that allowed her to pursue her studies. The Occupational Health and Safety Certificate Program was available online anytime, which meant she could work at her own pace. It did, however, require her to be self-disciplined.

"I would arrive promptly at the centre from Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.," said Starleen. "I had the option to work at home, but preferred to be at the centre where I could focus on the work with no distractions. I am too easily distracted and will procrastinate."

Although the instructors were miles away, she still felt connected.

"The instructors would go above and beyond to support me, like with chemistry, where I had no background," she said. In the absence of a classroom teacher, she made use of the resources available in her community - such as seeking help from the chemistry teacher at the local high school.

Starleen completed the certificate in 2013.





Raven Martin
Online Learning Centre: Cochrane
Community: Moose Cree First Nation
Program: Developmental Service Worker Diploma
Educational Institution: Northern College

For Raven Martin, being able to work with children is her dream job. She returned to Cochrane from Southern Ontario to be close to family, and was able to find work at the District School Board Ontario North East working with special needs children. She became aware of the growing problem of developmental issues in children and wanted to help.

Raven decided to obtain the credentials to lead her into a more focused career. She learned about Northern College's Developmental Service Worker Diploma Program offered online. She had two young children and liked the flexibility of online learning. With the help of the Contact North |

Contact Nord online learning centre in Cochrane, she was able to attend classes at the centre or at home.

"I took my studies very seriously and worked at it like it was a full-time job," says Raven.

She said it was easy to connect with Northern College's instructors at a distance, as well as other students to work on projects together.

"We would Skype on our own time," says Raven. "I had classmates in Barrie, Parry Sound, really all across the province. We also used Facebook to communicate as well."

When she completed her diploma in April 2013, she landed a part-time job at the Ininew Friendship Centre in Cochrane working with pre-school children. Then another part-time position opened up to work with the Young Women Program. The diploma and job experience eventually lead to a promotion to a full-time position working with the Healthy Kids program.





Elisha Sidlar Monroe
Online Learning Centre: M'Chigeeng First Nation
Community: M'Chigeeng First Nation
Program: Native Early Childhood Education Diploma
Educational Institution: Anishinabek Educational Institute

Taking the Native Early Childhood Education diploma online was the perfect choice for Elisha Sidlar Monroe. As a single mother of a young son and caregiver for an elderly father, finding the support of the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in her home community of M'Chigeeng First Nation meant she could attend school.

"I shopped around for a program that could marry with the skills I have," said Elisha, who is an accomplished theatre artist. What she likes about taking the Native Early Childhood Education Diploma Program is how it also helps her to be a better mother to her son.

Elisha was homeschooled as a young girl and does not fit into the mainstream learning environment. Finding an opportunity to learn as an adult in an online learning environment is ideal.

"I wanted the program to be through an Indigenous institution, which led me to Anishinabek Educational Institute. The partnership with Contact North allows me to stay in my community. It is very, very important for me to stay home and take care of my son and elderly father," said Elisha.

She likes the option of working at the local Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre located in the Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute to get away from distractions at home. Yet, when she needs to be home, she has that choice as well. "I have never done online learning before and I am finding it very convenient," Elisha said.

Elisha has completed a good portion of her program. She is looking forward to graduating in 2016 and embarking on a new career.





Petula Neegan
Online Learning Centre: Constance Lake
First Nation and Hearst
Community: Constance Lake First Nation
Program: Native Early Childhood Education Diploma
Educational Institution: Anishinabek
Educational Institute

Working with children is a passion for Constance Lake First Nation resident Petula Neegan. When she started working at the daycare centre in her community, her employer stipulated that she would need to obtain her Early Childhood Education credentials. Her first choice was the Anishinabek Educational Institute in North Bay.



“I thought I would have to travel, but found out about Contact North and online learning,” said Petula. She wasn’t so sure about online learning, but soon discovered that it was not that much different than being in class. “At first, I thought I would have problems doing online courses, like what if the teacher doesn’t see us because we are not there and doesn’t give us attention?”

From her computer workstation, she genuinely feels herself to be part of the classroom. “The teachers were very supportive, and I could see everyone in the classroom and they could see me too,” she explained.

Having the support of her supervisor and colleagues at the daycare helps. She also has a co-worker who is taking classes through the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre.

Petula will complete her program in April 2016, and has her sights set on becoming a teacher someday. “I would like to be a teacher. They are always looking for teachers in the community.”



Shania Nelson
Online Learning Centre: Kenora
Community: Wabaseemoong (Whitedog)
First Nation
Program: Office Administration –
General Certificate
Educational Institution: Confederation College

Shania Nelson moved to Kenora from Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) First Nation, a remote community just over 90 kilometers northwest, to take Confederation College's General Arts and Sciences Certificate. Her long-term goal was to obtain a post-secondary education and return to her community to contribute to the quality of life for her family and friends.



Once she completed the General Arts and Sciences Certificate, she just kept going and enrolled in Confederation College's Office Administration Diploma Program. With the support of Contact North | Contact Nord, she attended videoconferencing classes at the Kenora online learning centre. Students taking Confederation College programs learn from instructors located at any of the college's eight campuses; courses are therefore offered face-to-face or at a distance, depending on the location of the instructor.

Shania said she would complete her office procedures and math courses at home, and the computer related coursework at the online learning centre. She liked the flexibility and freedom of her courses.

Shania was comfortable with the technology used for online learning and not having teachers close by. She found the support she needed from family, classmates, and staff at the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre.

"There were times where I found myself short on money and struggling, and that was stressful, but I kept pushing myself," she said.

"I am very aware of the consequences of not doing my work and slacking on assignments," she explained. "If my grades drop, then my funding gets cut off and no more school."

Shania did go on to take another program. She is now enrolled in Confederation College's Native Child and Family Services Worker Diploma Program with her brother Nelson. Shania's long-term goal is to work at Kenora Chiefs Advisory, a First Nations social service organization that provides culturally appropriate health and social services.



Jonathon Nelson
Online Learning Centre: Kenora
Community: Wabaseemoong (Whitedog)
First Nation
Program: College Access Certificate
Educational Institution: Confederation College

Jonathon Nelson followed his sister Shania to Kenora to pursue a college program. However, he needed to upgrade with the College Access Certificate first to prepare for taking a post-secondary diploma.

“The hardest part has been to leave my family and community,” he said. He grew up in Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) First Nation, an hour drive away from

Kenora. What he likes about taking his classes at a distance at the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre located on the Confederation College Kenora campus is the small group of classmates. “I like that it is a quiet place to study,” he said.

Jonathon, like his sister, is comfortable with the technology and being at a distance from teachers. When he needs support or extra help, he knows staff at the online learning centre is available; and of course, his sister is close by.

The challenge for Jonathon has been balancing school and work. He works part-time, which sometimes means a late night before a long day of classes and homework.

However, what he appreciates about online learning is the ability to playback a missed class as well as being able to attend classes at the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in Kenora, rather than moving to Thunder Bay or Southern Ontario to attend school.

“I didn’t think I would get this far in school,” he admitted. “But my good marks gave me confidence to keep going.”

Jonathon started the Native Child and Family Service Worker Diploma with Confederation College in September 2015.





Karen Oster
Online Learning Centre: Fort Frances
Program: Office Administration –
General Certificate
Educational Institution: Confederation College

Karen Oster found herself back in school after a work injury. After her initial recovery from the injury, she looked forward to the opportunity to learn new skills. Karen is a licensed carpenter, and held the position of Head of Maintenance at Ge-Da-Gi-Binez Youth Detention Centre in Fort Frances for six years.

Seeking alternative employment, Karen learned about the Office Administration – General Certificate Program in the local newspaper, and she headed over to the Confederation College campus in Fort Frances. Within a week, she was accepted and started her classes in January 2015.

“I didn’t realize that it was online classes through Contact North,” admitted Karen. “It was a strange adjustment, but I got used to online learning.”

It didn’t take long before she felt comfortable with her teachers at a distance. “I don’t even know what a few of my teachers look like,” Karen explained. “I didn’t think I would be doing as well as I am, but I’m getting really good grades.”

Karen was intimidated at first by not having an instructor in front of the class to whom she could ask questions, but discovered that the instructor was still accessible by typing a question into the text chat feature of the web conferencing program.

“It’s the same as being with a teacher,” she explained.

Now that she has completed her program, she is looking for work to allow her to use new acquired skills. This experience has exposed her to the ease of online learning, and she plans to keep learning and building her résumé.



This is a tool for a better life. Very empowering. There is a big role for Contact North.”

Micheal Mantha, Algoma-Manitoulin MPP



Fran Pine
Online Learning Centre: Serpent River First Nation
Community: Serpent River First Nation
Program: Social Services Worker Diploma
Educational Institution: Northern College

When Fran Pine needed to leave her on-campus studies at Cambrian College to return home to Serpent River First Nation, she was still committed to completing her diploma.

“I had obligations at home, and online learning makes it much easier to get your education. I started my diploma on campus a few years earlier, but needed to come back home. I always wanted to finish, and with the Contact North online learning centre near my home, I got to complete my diploma,” said Fran. She completed the Social Services Worker Diploma Program from Northern College through the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre located in Spanish in 2010.

“The teachers are there to help, just not right in front of you. You just need to ask for help by sending an e-mail, and you will get it. I also made friends with other students in my class who lived around the province, but actually met and worked on a project with students who lived in Chapleau,” she explained.

With two small children at home, she was grateful to be able to study at a distance. Fran also learned the skills she needed to be successful with distance education and feels confident to keep taking courses. After completing her Social Services Diploma, she went on to obtain the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Certificate from Anishinabek Educational Institute in 2014.

Fran started a new job as the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Coordinator at Noojmowin Teg Health Centre on Manitoulin Island in August 2015.



Rene Pitremont
Online Learning Centre: Fort Frances
Community: Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation
Program: Police Foundations Diploma
Educational Institution: Confederation College

Rene Pitremont, currently a police officer for Treaty Three Police Service, is grateful for the opportunity he had to study at a distance. His first college experience came after completing high school in his hometown of Kirkland Lake and then enrolling with Canadore College in North Bay.

“I took Law and Security. It was my first time away from home and it didn’t go so well,” he admitted. “I ended up going back to Kirkland Lake.”

His second experience was a success, and he completed the First Nations Constable Program at Northern College in Timmins. He also met his wife, and they moved to Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation near Fort Frances. He struggled to find a job opening in policing so he decided to enrol in the Police Foundations Diploma Program with Confederation College. It was an online program.

“Not having an in-class teacher made no difference to me. The teacher is still there, still reachable, just in a different way,” he said. “They helped us just as much as any other teacher would have helped us.” The program was a combination of online learning and in-person instruction. Once a month they met instructors in Kenora for hands-on learning. “We had time in the gym to role play handling difficult situations as police officers,” he explained.

Rene and his wife have four children ranging in age from 10 to 17. Because of a busy home life, he was grateful for the opportunity to remain in his community and continue to pursue his dream of policing. Rene worked hard and graduated on the Dean’s List.

“Protecting my family, protecting my friends, and knowing that the people who live around me are safe, that’s what keeps me working for the Treaty Three Police Service,” he said.

“I really appreciate the service provided by Contact North | Contact Nord to the students in our community and use it often for those who are not able to attend on campus classes.”

Joanne Bruyere, Educational Councilor, Couchiching First Nations



John Solomon
Online Learning Centre: Moosonee
Community: Moose Cree First Nation
Program: Police Foundations Diploma
Educational Institution: Canadore College

Many young people from the James Bay Coastal communities venture out to larger urban centres in Northern Ontario to attend post-secondary institutions. John Solomon decided to attend the Police Foundations Diploma Program at Canadore College in North Bay. However, he returned home because he missed the support of his family.

Having the opportunity to return home and continue his studies at the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in Moosonee meant he could continue with his educational goals.

“Attending from home is much less stressful,” said John about the difference in his studies.

“I thought it would be difficult not having a teacher present, but I caught on quickly and it’s not so bad.”

John’s sister had completed a post-secondary program through Contact North | Contact Nord, demonstrating the possibilities of online learning to her brother and other family members. “I hope to find a job here, but I am also interested in doing an undergraduate degree, maybe science,” he said.

John plans to graduate at the end of 2015. He realized from his experience with Contact North | Contact Nord that there are numerous distance education options for him to further his education.





Jessica Taylor
Online Learning Centre: Longlac, Geraldton and
Ginoogaming First Nation
Community: Ginoogaming First Nation
Program: Early Childhood Education Diploma
Educational Institution: Confederation College

The northern community of Ginoogaming First Nation was happy to celebrate the college graduation of Jessica Taylor. Ginoogaming First Nation is on the outskirts of Longlac and 40 kilometres from Geraldton. Through the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in her community, Jessica completed her Early Childhood Education Diploma and graduated in June 2015.



After completing high school in her community, Jessica headed off to university in Thunder Bay, a four-hour drive away. Although she did well in school, she missed her family and community. She returned home and enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Diploma Program available online from Confederation College.

“I liked online learning. I can work at my own pace, not in a huge classroom with hundreds of people,” she said. She was already a good student and comfortable with technology, so setting herself up at a desk and computer in the online learning centre was easy.

Her mother is a certified Early Childhood Educator and helped Jessica with her studies. Jessica was also able to work at a daycare in Longlac for her placement.

Everything she needed to complete her studies was available, and there was no need to leave. Even when she spent a few months living in Geraldton, she was able to continue her classes at the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre located in that community.

Jessica graduated in June 2015 and is looking forward to working in her field close to home.

“The Contact North online learning centre is vital in our community, and with the First Steps program, participants are able to work on the barriers to completing their education.”

Elizabeth Ferris, Ontario Works Administrator, Ginoogaming First Nation



Jodie Vander Heide
Online Learning Centre: Mississaugas
of New Credit First Nation
Community: Six Nations of the Grand River
Program: Native Child and Family Services Diploma
Educational Institution: Confederation College

The right program for Jodie Vander Heide just happened to be located 1,495 kilometres away from home. “I wanted an Aboriginal program,” said Jodie. Confederation College, based in Thunder Bay, offered what she was looking for, the Native Child and Family Services Diploma Program. “I was not going to move, so I did all my classes and work at home.”

Having the opportunity to attend her classes at a distance with the support of the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre was a relief. She gave birth to her son a week after classes started. Missing only two weeks of school, she quickly caught up and made her focus taking care of her

infant son and school.

“It took a lot of self-discipline to sit in front of the computer for three hours. That was especially hard,” she said.

Jodie lives in the small town of Dunnville, located on the shore of Lake Erie. She is a significant distance from Confederation College, and an hour drive from the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation. She relied on the e-mail contact with her teachers and fellow students, and the support of her family who lived close by.

“I thought I would quit, but I kept pushing through,” she said. Although she could record her classes and play them back, she always showed up on the computer to attend class.

She was able to appreciate her coursework as she faced the challenges of being a new mother. What she was learning also helped her feel more confident as a new mother. Jodie graduated in June 2015.

“Definitely adds to the community. The specific programs that are offered online, that is an advantage that we don’t have.”

*Deneen Montour, Native Advisor,
Grand Erie District School Board*



Samantha Wesley
Online Learning Centre: Moose Cree First Nation
and South Porcupine
Community: Moose Cree First Nation
Program: Office Administration - Executive Diploma
Educational Institution: Northern College

Samantha Wesley, one of the many young people in Moose Cree First Nation who would like to find work in the community, was encouraged to take advantage of the local Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre. She started the two-year Office Administration – Executive Diploma Program from the online learning centre located in the Moose Cree Education Authority building.

“I see that my community needs people with an education and they encouraged me to get some training,” said Samantha. She wasn’t alone; Marlena Koosesee also took the web conferencing classes with her. Without a teacher or other classmates onsite, they supported each other.

Later on, Marlena needed to take her classes from home and Samatha relocated to Timmins; both students had the flexibility to continue to attend classes wherever they were.

Samantha was able to continue her classes from the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre located on Northern College’s campus in South Porcupine. She had a new appreciation for the online learning experience after she attended classes with an instructor present or when more students were in the room with her. “I liked having the two experiences,” Samantha admitted.

Samantha returned to her community with a post-secondary diploma and is now qualified to apply for jobs.



“We like to be in familiar surroundings, with family. We need to have the online learning centre here to allow us to provide community based programs.”

*John Beck, Executive Director,
Moose Cree Education Authority*

“It is the level of accessibility for times when it is not practical or possible to leave for another larger centre. It also meets the needs of others farther north such as First Nation communities.”

Bill Mauro, Thunder Bay-Atikokan MPP



Jolene Wood
Online Learning Centre: Atikokan
Community: Rainy River First Nation
Program: Community Economic and Social Development
Diploma and Mining Engineering Program
Educational Institution: Northern College

When Jolene Wood, a member of Rainy River First Nation and a resident of Atikokan, discovered the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in her community, she was excited about the possibility of taking courses. Atikokan is a small town that is a two-hour drive from Thunder Bay to the east, and an hour drive to Fort Frances to the west.

Jolene was eager about distance learning because she had never had the opportunity to complete her university degree.

“After attending a community meeting at the Contact North online learning centre, I started thinking about going to school. A couple of months later, I was accepted into Northern College’s Community Economic and Social Development Diploma Program and it all fell into place,” explained Jolene.

Jolene has three daughters, and her husband works away from home for weeks at a time. She also works part-time at the Atikokan Chamber of Commerce. With a busy life, she was still able to fit schoolwork into her schedule because of the convenience of online learning.

She was able to attend the web conferencing classes either at the Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre or at home. Staff at the online learning centre was available to troubleshoot any technical problems when she attended classes at the online learning centre. When she needed to find quiet time for homework, she would often do her homework in the evening while her daughters did theirs.

“I really liked what I was learning because it brought out parts of me I thought I couldn’t achieve, like public speaking. Now, I can make PowerPoint presentations in my sleep!”

Jolene graduated in 2012. She was not done learning. Jolene went on to complete the Mining Engineering Technician Program through distance education from Northern College.