

Creating Futures

WINTER/SPRING 2023-24

Rising from the Ashes

Strengthening Community & Mental Health in the South Slave

Embracing Change

Navigating the Educational Shift from AB to BC

Three Feathers

A Journey Through Language, Culture, & Healing

Reconnecting with Roots

Cultural and Linguistic Rediscovery

Northern Spirit

School Sports and Community Resilience

Women in Leadership at the SSDEC

Breaking Barriers and Shaping Futures

Artistic Journeys

A Mural of Journeys at PWK

Navigating the Future

AI in Education

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A SOUTH SLAVE DIVISIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL MAGAZINE

- 04 Rising from the Ashes**
Strengthening Community & Mental Health in the South Slave
- 08 Embracing Change**
Navigating the Educational Shift from AB to BC
- 10 Three Feathers**
A Cinematic Journey Through Language, Culture, & Healing
- 14 Reconnecting with Roots**
A Journey of Cultural and Linguistic Rediscovery
- 16 Building a Future Beyond the Shadows**
Moving Beyond Its Historical Echoes
- 18 Unity Through Sports**
The Transformative Power of Athletic Programs in Our Schools
- 20 Building Resilience**
Chief Sunrise's Journey Through Adversity
- 22 Northern Spirit**
The Journey of School Sports and Community Resilience
- 24 Women in Leadership at the SSDEC**
Breaking Barriers and Shaping Futures
- 26 Artistic Journeys**
A Mural of Journeys at PWK
- 28 Navigating the Future**
AI in Education



Superintendent's Message

In the second iteration of the SSDEC's Creating Futures magazine, our welcome message has a duality of sobriety and optimism. In these uncertain times, the consistency schools offer our community is a welcomed relief for many. Schools are meant to be a haven for our students and their families - a place of care and support. We don't judge, we don't demand, we don't set limits, and we most certainly don't turn away kids.



We are a microcosm of the community, and as such, we reflect the values our families uphold and cherish. These values are kindness, compassion, empathy, and love. As we attempt for a second and third time a return to normalcy, I'm encouraged by the resilience of our communities in the face of adversity. During the multiple evacuations, our communities banded together, fought, and supported each other without conditions, expectations, or demands.

This carried on as the snow wandered and settled on our rooftops and our sidewalks, ushering in the holiday season. During the festive time, I was buoyed by the celebrations in our communities, from Holiday concerts to hockey games to gift exchanges to fundraisers. These were all evidence of the character of our communities. As we slowly thaw from the northern winter, I ask you to be kind to yourself, compassionate to others and tolerant of those who harm you as they are in the most need of your love. Winters can be hard on the body and the mind, but I am confident that together, we will emerge stronger to continue the work that we know makes a difference in the lives of our kids.

The unpredictability of the future can be a cause of concern and anxiety. We are far from being out of the woods. As someone much smarter than me said, this is not the beginning of the end but the end of the beginning. I urge you not to lose faith. Not to fear the unknown but to forge ahead with optimism and resolution. In order to overcome the inevitable obstacles given our new reality of decreasing budgets, new political and social transitions, and climate change, I know, for I have witnessed it, that the fibre of our communities is far stronger and more spirited than the curbs ahead. Rest assured that the SSDEC, DEA and our Schools will stand steadfast with you. We will do everything possible to buffer our communities from these turbulent waters.

Lastly, as always, the SSDEC is committed to indigenizing education until the term is no longer needed and will safeguard and protect our staff and students' social, emotional and mental well-being. These are our guiding lights for the future and our solemn oath that as long as we have the privilege of working for you, we will hold them as the standard for our brand and our commitment to you. Be safe, be well and always be happy.

Dr. Souhail Soujah, SSDEC Superintendent



Photos by Pierre Emmanuel Chaillon/Epéchile Productions/GNWT ENR

Rising from the Ashes

Strengthening Community and Mental Health in the South Slave

In times of strife and trauma, we often face two choices: to thrive or to wither. An individual's character is predicated on this decision, which, consciously or unconsciously, defines their moment. The character of the South Slave Region was tested this past summer. Hay River, Katlodeeche, Enterprise and Fort Smith were directly impacted by the catastrophic wildfires that tore through the region. It's no exaggeration to state that unequivocally, in every instance, the communities rose to the challenge and persevered despite the insurmountable odds against them. Some may be beaten but not broken, and without a doubt, they will rise again, of that I have no doubt.

No one can do it alone, no matter how big or strong. We all need help along the way. The communities in the South Slave are no exception to this irrefutable fact. The first responders at the scene worked tirelessly day and night to safeguard our homes and our pets. They slept little, fought long and continued to fight the menace that the wildfire continues to be. Our eternal gratitude goes to everyone who sacrificed their well-being for that of others.

It is in this spirit that I write this article. The toll catastrophic events take on us is often hidden and surfaces unpredictably, like wildfires. The root of our struggles is often not the preceding trigger but the trauma and suffering we endured long before. We are always susceptible to the pain these events have inflicted on us. This pain is not always physical but sometimes emotional and mental.





At SSDEC, we recognize the difficulties that life often brings unexpectedly. To this end, we have invested financially and morally in the wellbeing of our staff. In addition to policy changes and ongoing policy interpretation that supports those who need it, we have undertaken a divisional review of our organizational mental health. These latest initiatives will give us a profile of where we are and what we need to do to support our school communities better. This will serve as our springboard to programming that target specific deficiencies in our system, helping remove barriers that impede access to support.

In addition to our commitment to Mental health for our staff, we are also committed to supporting our students and their families in our schools. To this end, the SSDEC RISC, Carolyn Carroll, has undertaken the monumental task of redesigning the Mental Health support network that SSDEC will soon implement. This includes several regional therapeutic programs and on-site school support to meet the growing demand for mental health help.

Finally, as always, the work we do is the public expression of the countless hours behind the scenes from countless people in countless different places. This includes students, teachers, support staff, administrators, SAs, custodians, parents, elders, and the communities our schools serve. Without them, none of this would happen. Thank you to everyone who has chosen to invest in Education. I promise the returns will be plentiful.

- Souhail Soujah

The Importance of Mental Health Awareness

Mental health is crucial for overall well-being and involves how we feel, think, act, and interact with the world around us. It is about realizing our potential, coping with normal stresses, and making contributions to our communities. While each person's path to mental well-being is unique, good mental health is achievable for everyone.

- Building self-esteem, positive support networks, getting involved, building resiliency, recognizing emotions, and taking care of spiritual well-being.
- Building self-esteem means accepting all of our abilities and weaknesses and using confidence to pursue goals and interests without comparing ourselves to others.
- Positive support networks, which can come from family, friends, or other important supporters, offer emotional, practical, and alternate points of view.
- Being involved in things that matter provides a sense of purpose and satisfaction, connects us with others who share similar interests, and helps us learn new skills and build confidence.
- Developing resiliency skills like problem-solving, assertiveness, and developing support networks helps us cope well with problems, stress, and difficult situations.
- Recognizing emotions, expressing them in a way that respects everyone, and accepting all emotions, even difficult ones, is important for emotional well-being.

MENTAL HEALTH TEEN TIPS

As a parent, it's important to talk to your teen about mental health. Many mental illnesses start during the teen years, and seeking help early can make a big difference.

To start the conversation, remind your teen that mental health is just as important as physical health, and that it's okay to have bad days or to ask for help.

Be aware of warning signs, and take your teen's concerns seriously. If they need additional support, offer alternatives like talking to a school counsellor or seeking outside help from a doctor or mental health professional.

Remember, you don't need to have all the answers, just be open, curious, and compassionate.

DON'T HESITATE TO SEEK HELP!

If you are experiencing a crisis or extreme distress, don't hesitate to seek help! There are crisis lines available 24/7 that can provide immediate support.

Government of Canada's Mental Health Services

Youth Helpline at 1-888-668-6810 or text *WELLNESS* to 686868
Adults Helpline at 1-866-585-0445 or text *WELLNESS* to 741741

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority

Youth Helpline at 1-800-668-6868 or text the word *TALK* to 686868
Adults Helpline at 1-800-661-0844





Embracing Change

Navigating the Educational Shift from AB to BC

The journey from the Alberta curriculum to its British Columbia counterpart marks a significant shift in educational paradigms for students and their families. British Columbia's curriculum, celebrated for its flexibility and learner-centric approach, diverges from Alberta's more traditional, content-focused model. This transition offers an exciting opportunity for students to engage with learning in new, dynamic ways, emphasizing core competencies, literacy, numeracy, and the interconnectedness of knowledge domains.

Alberta's education system utilizes formative assessments to guide teaching strategies and provide student feedback. British Columbia mirrors this type of cornerstones of learning, but intensifies the focus on self and peer assessments. This shift empowers BC students to take an active role in their learning journey, promoting self-reflection and peer feedback as tools for personal growth.

While Alberta's summative assessments often culminate in standardized testing, BC is steering away from this tradition, save for systemwide provincial assessments in the secondary years. These assessments aim to better reflect BC's curriculum goals by focusing on critical thinking and practical application of knowledge rather than rote memorization.

Alberta's thrice-yearly report cards contrast with BC's more fluid reporting system, which emphasizes continual teacher-parent communication. BC schools deliver at least five progress reports annually, blending formal evaluations with informal updates to keep families engaged and informed.

Alberta's report cards traditionally rely on letter grades and percentages to quantify student performance. In contrast, BC's approach favors descriptive feedback that outlines students' strengths, challenges, and paths forward, marking a shift towards narrative-based evaluations that provide a fuller picture of student achievement.

Transitioning from Alberta's to BC's educational system represents a profound shift in learning and assessment philosophies. However, this change offers a breadth of opportunities for growth and development. By staying informed, encouraging active participation in the learning process, and maintaining open communication, families can facilitate a seamless and enriching transition for their students. Together, these strategies ensure that the journey into BC's educational landscape is not just a change, but a chance to thrive in a system that values flexibility, critical thinking, and holistic development.

- Dan Kearley



Tips to help your child

Understanding the nuances of the BC curriculum and its assessment methods is crucial. The SSDEC endeavours to engage with educational policies and seek clarifications from educators to navigate this change effectively. Foster a culture of self-assessment in your child, helping them recognize their achievements and areas for improvement. This practice aligns with BC's educational philosophy and builds lifelong learning skills, inside and outside the classroom.

Regular dialogue with teachers ensures you are up-to-date on your child's progress and understand how to support their educational journey at home. The BC curriculum's adaptability can be a boon to students accustomed to a more rigid structure. Support your child in adapting to this environment, which prizes critical engagement and practical knowledge application.



THREE FEATHERS



Three Feathers

A Cinematic Journey Through Language, Culture, and Healing

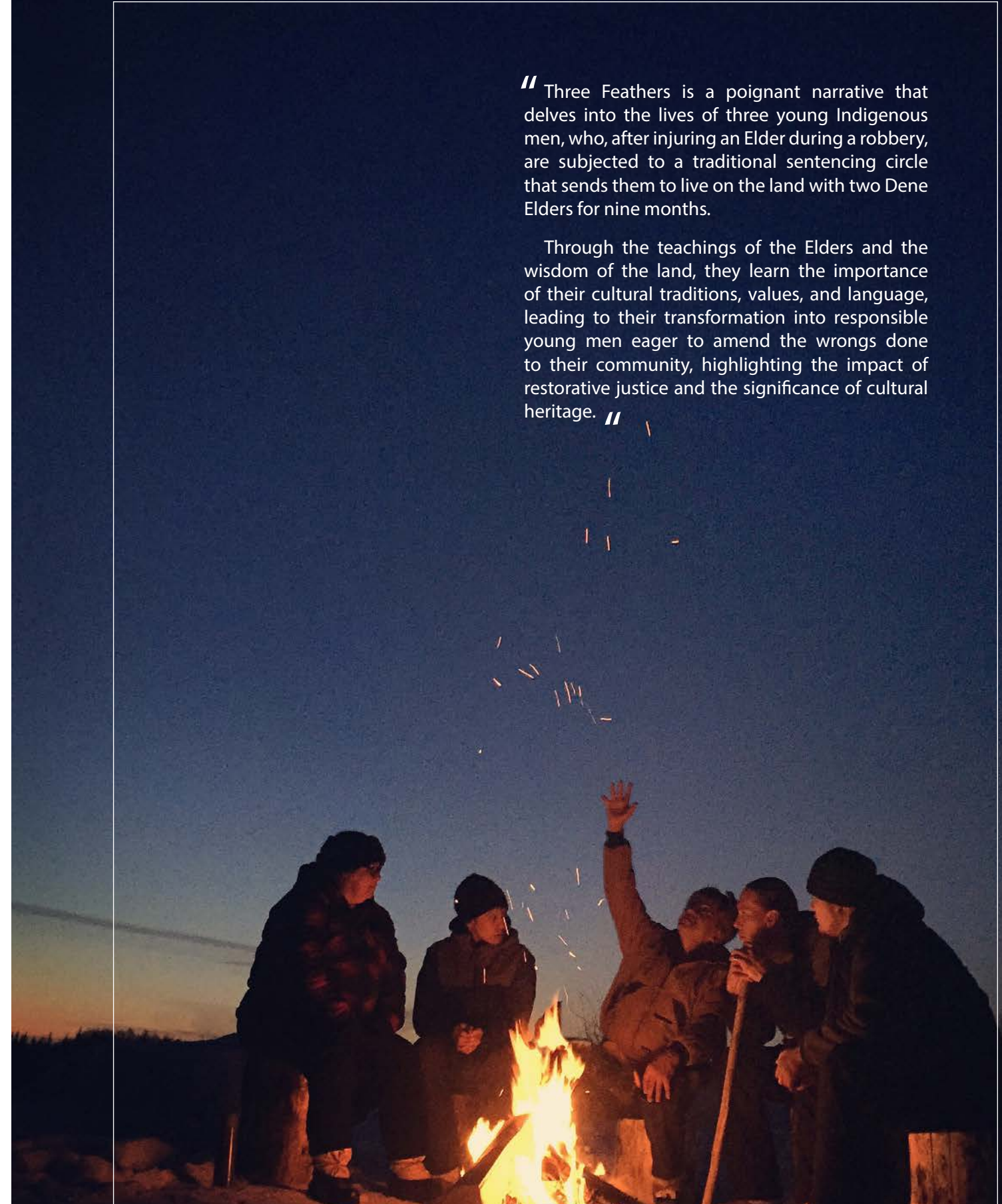
Lights! Camera! Action! These three words are traditionally synonymous with the wonderful world of movie making a small independent film production that was filmed and produced in Fort Smith NWT may have used many different words to signal the start of a film sequence. It may have been *wâsaskotenamawew* (Cree), *bet'á denéni ʔerehtł náłtsi* (Dene Dékliné - Chipewyan) and *náts'edah* (Dene Yatié). These were the languages heard around the set of a film titled *Three Feathers*.

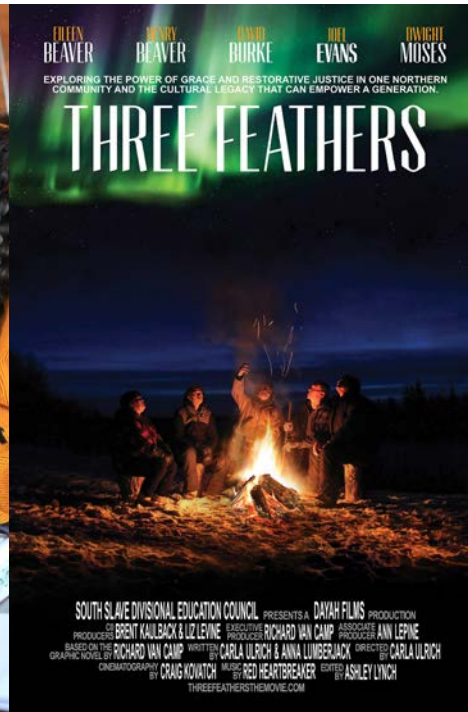
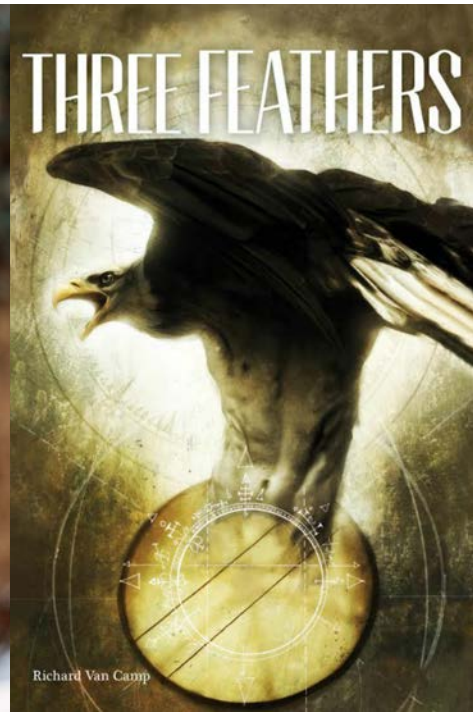
Three Feathers is story about three youth, Flinch, Bryce and Rupert who commit a shocking crime that devastates the innocence of a small community. Caught and convicted, the youth are sent to live on the land for nine months to explore the power of restorative justice. The Elders they live with help them reconnect to a life that was taken from them long ago. They come to embrace the values of responsibility, integrity, caring and sharing - traditional values which are the bedrock of healthy and vibrant communities, but it is up to the boys to also acquire the humility needed to return home to face their past.

Surprisingly, the roots of this story are intertwined with school programming in the South Slave. Years ago, both Łutsel K'e Dene School and Chief Sunrise Education Centre on the K'at'odeeche First Nations Reserve offered live-in bush school programs where students had the opportunity to learn traditional skills and reconnect with their cultural heritage. These programs blended the students' academic studies with traditional on-the-land experiences such as hunting, trapping, fishing and harvesting enriched with evenings of storytelling and opportunities to learn traditional arts and crafts from Dene artists.

“ *Three Feathers* is a poignant narrative that delves into the lives of three young Indigenous men, who, after injuring an Elder during a robbery, are subjected to a traditional sentencing circle that sends them to live on the land with two Dene Elders for nine months.

Through the teachings of the Elders and the wisdom of the land, they learn the importance of their cultural traditions, values, and language, leading to their transformation into responsible young men eager to amend the wrongs done to their community, highlighting the impact of restorative justice and the significance of cultural heritage. ”





Richard Van Camp, while on an author tour through the South Slave, was challenged to write a story which captured the many advantages that these bush school experiences offered but to intertwine it with a compelling and engaging storyline. The result was the graphic novel *Three Feathers*, beautifully illustrated by a former South Slave Divisional Education Council (SSDEC) student, Krystal Mateus. *Three Feathers* was published in English and the three Indigenous Languages taught and spoken in the South Slave region of the NWT, Cree, Chipewyan and Dene Yatié.

The novel was an instant hit and found its audience particularly among youth looking to explore their cultural heritage and identity. Others drawn to the tapestry of themes woven throughout the story included those interested in the topic of restorative justice, the principles of environmental integrity and the therapeutic value that a connection to the land can provide.

It wasn't long before Richard, accompanied by a talented Indigenous director, Carla Ulrich and representatives from the SSDEC and the NWT Metis Nation Cree Language Program, met to discuss ways to share the story of *Three Feathers* with an even wider audience. To meet the mandates of the various funding partners, the film was shot in Fort Smith using northern, Indigenous talent. Despite the logistical challenges and the six-year production timeline, the community's commitment was unwavering.

The film required a backdrop of four different seasons. Mother Nature wasn't forgiving, and the crew carried on through temperatures ranging from a frigid -40 C to a sweltering 30 C. To add to this, each scene was filmed four different times with the actors saying their lines in each of the languages. Not only did this four-language approach demonstrate their commitment to our local Indigenous Languages but it made cinematic history. *Three Feathers* is believed to be the first movie ever filmed simultaneously in four different languages.

A significant scene in the film features a community feast, symbolizing the youths' reintegration and the potential for forgiveness. This scene, requiring many extras, highlighted the community's engagement with the film's production and themes. To everyone's delight almost 200 residents - young and old - showed up and became the backdrop for the climax of the film and were first to witness the heart-warming meeting between the three youth and their victim. Was forgiveness given? Watch the film to find out!

The English version of the film was completed in 2019 and it had its debut in the very competitive world of film festivals at the Alternate Light Film Festival in Whitehorse, Yukon. *Three Feathers* was featured at several film festivals with screenings throughout Canada, the United States and Europe. The film was voted best film (short category) at two film festivals and won a People's Choice award at a third.

Educators have been drawn to the complex themes of the film it serves as a valuable resource with its positive and culturally affirming messaging. It is now part of the curriculum in a number of university courses throughout Canada and the United States and has been viewed in schools throughout Canada.

But all films are in search of an audience and the producers sought ways to share the message of the film with the general public. Both Northwestel and APTN jumped at the opportunity to add the film to their catalogue of films. Subscribers to NWTel TV Plus service or APTN's Lumi app can now stream *Three Feathers* in any of the four languages, into their home TV or streaming device.

Three Feathers has now found its audience. To those who seek an uplifting story that explores the theme of restorative justice or a search for cultural identity... *Three Feathers* can help. To those who would like to view a film that honours and celebrates our Indigenous Languages and watch a film, perhaps for the first time in your ancestral language... *Three Feathers* can speak to you... And for those who just seek the warm embrace of a thoughtfully affirming, feel-good story with stunningly beautiful visuals - filmed in Fort Smith and starring many of your friends and neighbours.... *Three Feathers* is the film for you. Happy viewing!

- Brent Kaulback



Reconnecting with Roots

A Journey of Cultural and Linguistic Rediscovery

Reflecting on my childhood in a small northern town during the 80s brings back vivid memories of a simpler, carefree time. Children played freely outside until the glow of the streetlights signalled it was time to head home. The community was tightly knit, with parents collectively watching over the neighbourhood kids, ensuring a safe environment for all. However, this idyllic childhood was marked by a notable absence: we were largely disconnected from our cultural heritage and Indigenous languages. Schools at the time prioritized French and Euro-Canadian history, leaving little room for us to connect with our ancestral roots.

I was fortunate to grow up in a supportive two-parent household, with the additional guidance of my grandparents. My parents, both working, entrusted my care to my grandparents during the day. It was there, under my grandmother's watchful eye, that my cousin and I were immersed in the Chipewyan language. Fluent in English as well, she chose to communicate with us in her native tongue, keenly aware of its dwindling use and determined to pass it on to us. From a young age until I was about five, I became proficient in Dene, thanks to her dedication.

My grandfather, a fluent speaker of Cree and English, took a different approach. Believing in the importance of mastering English and French for success in the modern world, he never shared his Indigenous language with us. Instead, he imparted lessons on community and family history through activities like hunting, while my grandmother focused on teaching us about berry picking and her own familial stories. They both saw in me a future bearer of our family's heritage.

There were periods in my life when the importance of these languages eluded me, especially after my grandfather passed away when I was around 15. My grandmother then became more insistent on teaching

me Dene, urging me to record her stories and language. But as a teenager, my priorities lay elsewhere—with friends, work, and school. And when I became a young father, time became even scarcer.

Reflecting on these moments years after my grandmother's death, I recognized the profound mistake of not seizing the opportunity to learn from her. There are still days when I regret not dedicating time to learn for my sake and for my children's.

Opportunity knocked once more when I was offered a position as a Cree language teacher at the school I worked at. Despite only having a basic understanding of Cree, learned from my wife and her family, I couldn't help but wish for the chance to have learned from my grandfather.

Diving deeper into the language, I began to uncover the intrinsic lessons embedded within. Daily engagement with Cree opened up a new perspective on how my ancestors viewed the world, the land, and its creatures. It was not just a new worldview I was adopting but a connection to my ancestors, strengthening with each word I learned.

This journey made me realize what my grandmother had always known: Indigenous languages are more than mere tools for communication. They are vessels of history, connectors to our ancestors, and teachers of life lessons meant to be preserved and passed on.

Today, despite still feeling the sting of not learning Chipewyan or hearing my grandfather's Cree, I am proud to have continued their legacy through teaching my children about our history, culture, and, most importantly, our languages.

- Justin Heron

// This journey made me realize what my grandmother had always known: Indigenous languages are more than mere tools for communication. They are vessels of history, connectors to our ancestors, and teachers of life lessons meant to be preserved and passed on. //





Building a Future Beyond the Shadows

Moving Beyond Its Historical Echoes

Joseph Burr Tyrrell Elementary School, a fixture in Fort Smith, NT since 1958, stands as a poignant reminder of a complex past. Originally built as a Federal Day School, this chartreuse stucco-covered edifice has, for decades, been a hub of youthful energy and learning. The sounds of children playing and the sight of their artwork adorning the hallways are testaments to the vibrant community it serves.

Despite efforts to modernize through renovations and upgrades, the essence of the building remains unchanged, evoking memories of a former era, particularly for Elders who recall its days as a Federal Day School. While physical improvements have been made, including repainting walls to soften the echoes of its history, the structure's very foundation brings forth memories for many in our community.

The technical upgrades undertaken since 1999 - ranging from window replacements to security enhancements—have addressed functional aspects, but not all issues have been resolved.

As the first principal of Dene/Inuk heritage in my family to lead this school and one whose family history intersects with the legacy of residential schools - I am continually reminded of the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. Our efforts to infuse cultural elements and recognize our shared history, including monthly orange shirt days and an expanded cultural area, are steps toward healing and understanding.

However, the question remains: How long must our community continue to educate our children in a building that serves as a relic of the residential school era? The need for a new facility is not just about improving physical structures but about acknowledging and addressing the lingering impact of history on our community's psyche.

Our school, with its "good bones," does indeed stand strong. Yet, it's imperative to recognize that the foundation of a community's future cannot be built on the remnants of past traumas. A new facility would not only provide the necessary modern amenities and a safe learning environment but also represent a meaningful step forward in healing and reconciliation.

We call on decision-makers and the broader community to recognize the urgency of replacing Joseph Burr Tyrrell Elementary School. It's time to provide our students, staff, and families with a space that reflects our commitment to moving beyond the shadows of history, towards a brighter, more inclusive future. As we strive to offer the best educational experience, let us also work together to create a facility that embodies our hopes for healing, unity, and progress.

- Tiffany Kelly

“

JBT was originally constructed in 1958. Subsequent additions were made in 1962 and 1974, with renovations taking place intermittently from 2007 to 2012.

There is a dearth of observable markers that recount the buildings' history and alert the public to their dark past. A mere meagre plate on the exterior of JBT, labelled with the words "Fort Smith Federal Day School" attests to the buildings' history.

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Unity Through Sports

The Transformative Power of Athletic Programs in South Slave Schools

In the heart of the South Slave region, the spirit of school sports is igniting communities, fostering resilience, and promoting engagement among students. From the emerging teams of Chief Sunrise Education Centre (CSEC) to the spirited pep rallies at Diamond Jenness Secondary School (DJSS), and the remarkable achievements of Princess Alexandra School (PA), the impact of athletic programs is profound and far-reaching.



The stories from CSEC, DJSS, and PA highlight the transformative power of school sports. Beyond the physical benefits, sports offer students the opportunity to develop essential life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and perseverance. They provide a platform for students to engage with their community, build self-esteem, and create lasting memories. As these schools continue to foster athletic programs, they are not just training the next generation of athletes; they are nurturing well-rounded individuals ready to face the challenges of the future with confidence and grace.

In the South Slave region, sports have become a unifying force, bringing together students, teachers, and communities. The journey of each school—CSEC’s rise to team participation, DJSS’s vibrant pep rallies, and PA’s athletic success—reflects the shared belief in the potential of sports to inspire, heal, and unite. As we celebrate these achievements, we look forward to the continued growth and impact of school sports in shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

Chief Sunrise Education Centre (CSEC)

At CSEC, the introduction of team sports marks a significant milestone. Historically, the school’s engagement in athletics was limited to individual events due to constraints in team participation. However, the recent formation of the CSEC Wolves has unleashed a newfound energy among students. Overcoming challenges such as the devastating flood of 2022 and fires during the summer of 2023, CSEC students have found solace and strength in sports. The creation of mixed teams with students from neighbouring schools has not only facilitated participation in tournaments but also sown the seeds of long-lasting friendships and community bonds. This initiative serves as a beacon of hope, demonstrating how sports can transcend boundaries and heal communities.

Diamond Jenness Secondary School (DJSS)

DJSS in Hay River celebrates its athletes with dynamic pep rallies that encapsulate the essence of school spirit. These rallies, characterized by friendly teacher vs. student games, have become a beloved tradition, fostering a sense of unity and competitive spirit within the school. Despite the teachers’ reigning victories, the students’ enthusiasm remains undeterred, proving that the true victory lies in the joy of participation and the collective support for their teams. These events symbolize the school’s commitment to uplifting athletes and creating an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and supported.

Princess Alexandra School (PA)

PA’s sports year was nothing short of historic, with the school’s teams excelling in every tournament they entered. The dedication of the Grade 6/7 students to a wide range of sports, from volleyball to basketball, has been exemplary. After two years of restrictions that confined students to classroom bubbles, the return to sports provided a much-needed outlet for physical and emotional expression. The victory at the Jr Cager basketball tournament stands as a testament to the students’ hard work, perseverance, and team spirit. The challenges faced in preparing for the tournament, including fundraising and logistical hurdles, only added to the sweetness of their triumph, illustrating the resilience and determination of the students, coaches, and community.





Building Resilience

Chief Sunrise Education Centre's Journey Through Adversity

In the heart of the K'at'l'odeeche First Nation (KFN) reserve, the Chief Sunrise Education Centre (CSEC) stands as a beacon of resilience and hope. Following the devastating wildfires that swept through the community, the school, led by its principal and staff, has embarked on a journey to not only recover but to thrive amidst adversity. The wildfires, following closely on the heels of a catastrophic flood and the global pandemic, have tested the community's strength. Yet, the spirit of the KFN people and the ethos of CSEC have remained unbroken, driven by a commitment to indigenizing education and supporting students through principles of self-regulation and trauma-informed care.

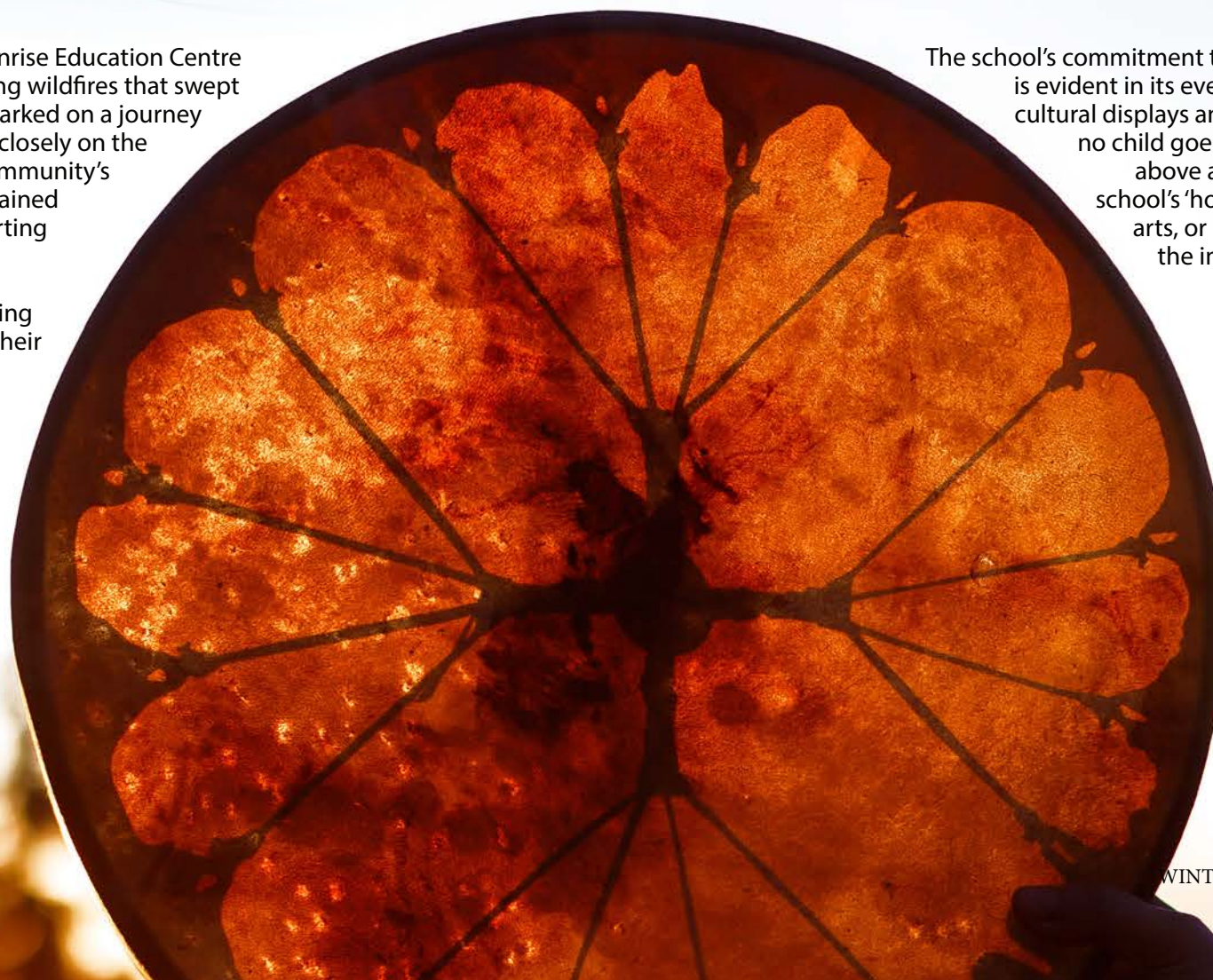
The school's response to these challenges has been multifaceted, focusing on supporting the physical and emotional well-being of its students and their families. Initiatives supported by Jordan's Principle funding have ensured that families affected by the evacuation received essential resources, demonstrating CSEC's role as more than just an educational institution but a cornerstone of community support. The reopening of the school saw efforts to allow students to process their experiences through storytelling, highlighting their resilience in the face of terrifying evacuation experiences.

Central to CSEC's approach is the integration of Indigenous culture and identity into the educational experience. This is vividly illustrated by the increased time students spend at Sandy Creek Camp, engaging in traditional activities that connect them with their cultural roots and the land. Such experiences not only offer educational enrichment but also emotional healing and a sense of belonging.

The school's commitment to creating a nurturing and inclusive environment is evident in its everyday operations. From welcoming students with cultural displays and providing essential winter clothing to ensuring no child goes hungry with its robust food program, CSEC goes above and beyond to meet the needs of its students. The school's 'hooks' to engage students, whether through sports, arts, or cultural activities, reflect a deep understanding of the importance of positive relationships and a sense of belonging in fostering resilience and success.

CSEC's journey through the past few years showcases the power of community, culture, and education in overcoming adversity. The school's efforts to provide a supportive and culturally rich learning environment, while addressing the immediate needs of its students and families, underscore the resilience of the KFN community. As CSEC continues to navigate the challenges ahead, its slogan "The Future Looks Good" remains a guiding light, reflecting a steadfast belief in the potential of its students and the strength of its community.

- Deborah Reid



Northern Spirit

The Journey of School Sports and Community Resilience

Growing up in Hay River, I immersed myself in every sport available to me. During my elementary years, track and hockey were the primary sports. Track events were held annually on a dirt track adjacent to the secondary runway at the airport. At that time, elementary students had no opportunities to compete outside our community, and even junior high students rarely travelled for competitions in the late 1960s.

Physical Education classes offered a varied curriculum that included cooperative games, dodgeball, floor hockey, dance, and gymnastics with various apparatus. These classes excelled in imparting what is now recognized as physical literacy.

The structured school sports program began in grades 7 and 8. Upon entering the Federal Day School in Hay River in 1971, I encountered a remarkable group of senior high athletes, particularly in volleyball and track. The Vuckett brothers, with their exceptional skills in volleyball, left a significant impact on me; I later discovered one of them played for the University of Manitoba and the Canadian men's National team. The era also showcased talented female athletes, especially in track and field.

This sporting culture thrived on the availability of qualified coaches who possessed both technical and tactical knowledge. The success of school athletics has always depended heavily on teachers, especially physical education teachers, to manage and coach sports teams. In smaller

communities, the development of sports is even more closely linked to the availability and quality of teacher volunteers. A notable example is the Kugluktuk Grizzlies lacrosse team, which benefited from a professional lacrosse player who moved there to teach, a story so compelling it inspired a movie.

In 1973, the opening of DJSS introduced a new chapter in our region's sports history. Although hockey remained the predominant sport in Hay River, Fort Smith, and Pine Point, other sports began to gain popularity. Despite initial attempts to introduce new sports like lacrosse and soccer, which did not take root, basketball, volleyball, track, and cross-country running became dominant.

Several truths about sports became evident to me during this period:

- 1) Strong cohorts of athletes often emerge within specific birth years.
- 2) The quality and dedication of coaches are critical to developing strong programs.
- 3) In mixed teams, the skill level of female athletes often determines the match's outcome.
- 4) Athletes aiming to excel must explore other systems and coaching styles to understand the commitment required.
- 5) Improvement in our sporting system and the caliber of northern athletes and teams requires collaboration between Yellowknife and other communities.

Roger Vail and Shane Thompson are two empowering individuals who have hugely influenced, and shaped the lives of those around them and their daughters! Just as Roger and Shane coached alongside each other, Delanie, Jackie and Jenny are coaching together...

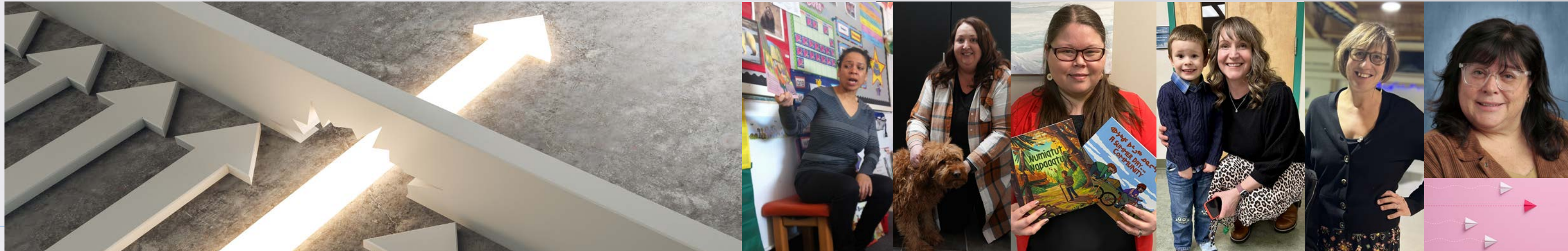
Individuals creating lasting legacies through their positive impact on others! A legacy comes from one's character, reputation and the life that one leads - setting an example for others and to guide their futures...

My journey into coaching began in high school, driven by a scarcity of skilled coaches as I aged. I was fortunate to be mentored by exceptional coaches early in my career, including Dave Grundy in basketball (Fort Smith) and Pat Bobinski in biathlon (Hay River), as well as Michael Botermans, Shane Thompson, and Huw Morris, who mainly contributed to soccer. The list of volunteer coaches and contributors to northern sports is extensive and continues to grow.

In closing, I extend my deepest appreciation to the countless athletes and coaches I've encountered over the years for their dedication and competitive spirit. Their contributions have not only strengthened our sports system but have also created lasting memories for all of us. It's heart-warming to see former athletes returning to the fold as coaches and event organizers, perpetuating the cycle of giving back to sports in the north.

- Roger Vail





Some of the many amazing women at SSDEC - Cora America, Vivian Harris, Tiffany Kelly, Tara Boudreau, Deborah Reid & Christy MacKay

Women in Leadership at the SSDEC

Breaking Barriers and Shaping Futures

In the evolving educational landscape of the South Slave Divisional Education Council (SSDEC), a significant transformation is led by visionary women who have climbed to leadership roles, challenging a history of limited opportunities. Their journey from the “bottom” of an imposed hierarchy to positions of influence and decision-making power is not just a story of personal achievement but a testament to the collective progress in fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Historically, women faced numerous challenges in ascending to leadership within the SSDEC. Initial roles often began with term contracts as teachers, sometimes starting as Support Assistants, at the bottom of a male-dominated hierarchy. Proving worth and value demanded dedication, hard work, and the contribution of extras beyond basic job requirements. Women’s resilience and perseverance, commitment to student learning and community engagement laid the foundation for their rise to leadership.

Women gradually moved from classroom teachers to lead teachers, coaches, and subject leaders, setting the stage for administrative roles. This journey was particularly challenging for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) women, who had to break barriers and confront complex challenges head-on. Today, women’s presence in administrative roles within

the SSDEC is impactful, with figures like Assistant Superintendent Cora America, a BIPOC female, serving as role models. Their leadership styles are inclusive, collaborative, and culturally competent.

The current SSDEC organizational chart shows significant strides towards gender equality, with 64% of board office positions and 6 out of 8 schools led by female principals. This shift highlights a broader narrative of breaking down barriers and reshaping the educational system to reflect inclusivity, collaboration, and cultural competence.

The achievements of women in the SSDEC underscore the importance of supporting women in leadership, not just for gender parity but to enrich the educational experience for the entire community. By valuing diversity, inclusivity, and collaboration, the SSDEC is setting a standard for educational leadership in the North and beyond.

Women at the SSDEC are not just filling roles; they are defining them, shaping a future where education is built on equality, respect, and opportunity for all. This progress and empowerment are evident with 78% of NWTTA, 90% of UNW, and an overall 82% of SSDEC staff being female, showcasing a leading edge in promoting women in educational and administrative capacities.

As we highlight the strides made towards gender equality within the SSDEC, it’s crucial to acknowledge that these numbers represent approximations and do not explicitly account for the diversity of gender identities, including LGBTQIA2S+ staff within the SSDEC, which have also increased, further enriching our educational community. By fostering a culture that embraces diversity in all its forms, the SSDEC not only enhances its educational landscape but also sets a powerful example of inclusivity and acceptance that extends far beyond the classroom walls.





Artistic Journeys

A Mural of Journeys at PWK

In the quiet town of Fort Smith, a new mural adorning the walls of Paul William Kaeser High School (PWK) captures the essence of student journeys, both literal and metaphorical. The artist behind this vibrant creation, Melanie Jewell, a PWK alumna, has woven a narrative of growth, culture, and the beauty of the North into the fabric of her hometown.

Jewell, who honed her skills and passion for art from a young age, has always been deeply influenced by a blend of cartoons, comic books, anime, and the works of artists like James Jean, Yoshitomo Nara, and Christi Belcourt.

Her journey took her from doodling in elementary school to completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Victoria, where she explored various mediums and refined her contemporary illustration style. This journey, marked by her evolution as an artist, has culminated in the creation of “Ispiciwin”

(Cree for “journey”), a mural that encapsulates her artistic vision and cultural heritage.

The mural, measuring an impressive 60 foot by 14 foot, was crafted using Montana-brand spray paints, a new challenge for Jewell, who described the project as the largest she’s ever undertaken alone. Instead of depicting literal activities like sports or reading, Jewell chose to symbolize the journey of growth and learning with images reflective of the North and Indigenous culture. Central to the artwork is the school’s mascot, a husky adorned with a traditional dog blanket, positioned near a drum that doubles as the sun—both powerful symbols of cultural heritage and the community’s steps towards reconciliation.

Jewell’s creative process, from brainstorming during long walks to finalizing designs on her iPad, demonstrates her thoughtful approach to art. She blends traditional and modern techniques,

experimenting with acrylic gouache, inks, and spray paint to achieve her distinctive style. The mural’s themes draw from Denesuline First Nation cultural elements, landscapes, and familial histories, aiming to comfort and inspire viewers by connecting them with their culture and environment.

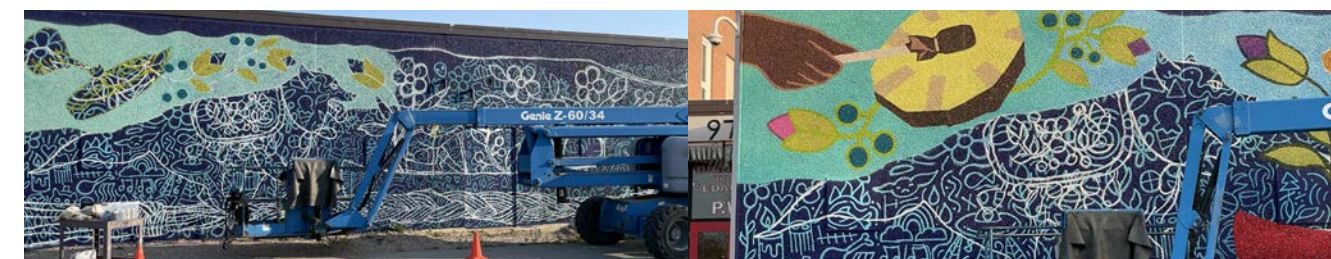
Creating “Ispiciwin” was not without its challenges, notably the town’s evacuation shortly after the project began. Yet, with community support and a determination to bring something positive to her hometown, Jewell overcame these hurdles, delivering a mural that not only brightens the space but also serves as a source of inspiration and pride for the students and residents of Fort Smith.

The reaction to the mural has been overwhelmingly positive, with residents unaccustomed to such public art expressions being particularly moved. A touching moment for Jewell was witnessing a young girl’s excitement and joy upon seeing the vibrant

colors and imagery, a testament to the mural’s impact on the community.

Looking ahead, Jewell hopes to create more murals and personal works, exploring new techniques and mediums while continuing to draw inspiration from her cultural heritage. As she reflects on her artistic journey and the memorable interactions with her audience, it’s clear that Jewell’s art is not just about sparking emotion; it’s about creating connections, fostering community, and embarking on a journey of discovery and expression.

Through “Ispiciwin,” Melanie Jewell has not only left a lasting mark on the walls of PWK High School but also on the hearts of those who experience her art. Her work stands as a vibrant testament to the power of art to reflect, inspire, and unite, encapsulating the journey of students and the broader community towards a brighter, more inclusive future.





Navigating the Future AI in Education

In the rapidly evolving landscape of education, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a beacon of transformative power, reshaping the contours of teaching and learning. As we stand at this juncture, it's imperative to recognize the dual-edged sword AI represents, yet the focus remains on harnessing its vast potential to enrich educational experiences. Programs like ChatGPT and its contemporaries are not just tools but partners in education, offering myriad benefits to both teachers and students.

The AI Revolution in Classrooms

The integration of AI into education heralds a new era of personalized learning. ChatGPT and similar platforms offer students tailored educational content, adapting to their learning pace and style. This bespoke approach ensures that no student is left behind, addressing individual needs with unprecedented precision. For teachers, AI acts as an invaluable assistant, automating administrative tasks and grading, thus freeing up time to focus on direct student interaction and pedagogical refinement.

Empowering Teachers and Students

AI technologies offer a wealth of resources for teachers, from generating creative lesson plans to providing insights into student performance through data analytics. These insights enable educators to identify areas where students may be struggling and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. Moreover, AI-driven platforms can simulate one-on-one tutoring sessions, offering additional support to students outside the classroom without the constraint of human tutors' availability.

Bridging Gaps and Expanding Horizons

One of the most profound benefits of AI in education is its capacity to democratize learning. Geographic and socioeconomic barriers that once hindered access to quality education are increasingly surmountable with AI-driven online learning platforms. Students in remote areas can now access the same quality of education as those in urban centres, bridging a crucial gap and fostering a more equitable educational landscape.

Critical Thinking & AI: A Symbiotic Relationship

While AI can provide information and assist with learning, it's also crucial in teaching critical thinking. Educators are leveraging AI to present students with complex problems, encouraging them to navigate through information critically and creatively. This symbiotic relationship between AI and critical thinking prepares students for the challenges of the future, emphasizing the importance of human judgment in concert with AI's capabilities.

Addressing Challenges and Ethical Considerations

The integration of AI in education is not without its challenges. Concerns regarding data privacy, the digital divide, and ensuring AI does not perpetuate biases are at the forefront. It's vital for educational institutions to implement AI with clear ethical guidelines and ensure equitable access to technology for all students.

Moreover, the fear that AI could replace teachers is unfounded. Instead, AI should be viewed as a tool that enhances the teacher's role, not diminishes it. The human element in education—empathy, understanding, and moral guidance—remains irreplaceable by machines.

Path Forward

As we navigate this AI-augmented educational landscape, the focus should be on collaboration between human intelligence and artificial intelligence. By leveraging AI's capabilities while addressing its challenges head-on, we can unlock a future where education is more accessible, personalized, and effective than ever before.

In conclusion, AI in education is not just a fleeting trend; it's a transformative force here to stay. Embracing AI means embracing a future where education transcends traditional limitations, offering unprecedented opportunities for growth and learning. Let's harness this potential together, paving the way for an enlightened, AI-empowered generation.

A Note on Creation

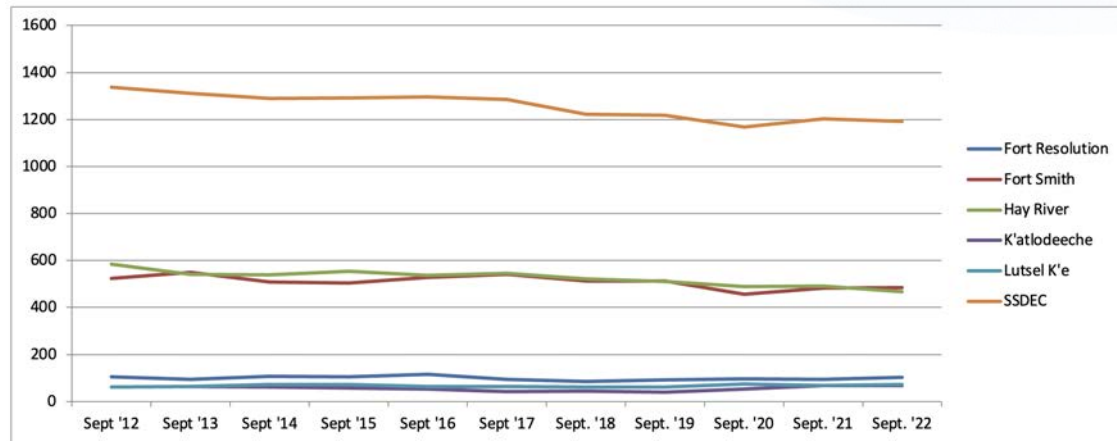
This entire article and all images have been crafted by an AI, underscoring the very essence of its subject. It serves as a testament to the capabilities of AI in generating informative, insightful, and engaging content, further illustrating the potential of AI as a tool for educational enhancement.



SSDEC 2022-2023 Year End Summary

Finances and Operations / Finances et opérations

Student Enrollment / Inscription des étudiants



	Sept '12	Sept '13	Sept '14	Sept '15	Sept '16	Sept '17	Sept '18	Sept '19	Sept '20	Sept '21	Sept '22
Fort Resolution	105.5	93.0	108.0	105.0	116.0	95.0	84.8	92.5	95.3	94.5	103.0
Fort Smith	524.5	549.0	509.0	503.3	528.5	541.3	512.5	513.0	455.5	483.0	484.0
Hay River	584.0	540.0	538.0	553.5	535.5	545.5	521	510.5	489.5	490.5	466.0
K'atloodeeche	62.0	64.0	62.0	57.5	52.5	41.0	44	40.0	52.0	66.8	66.8
Lutsel K'e	61.0	64.0	73.0	72.0	63.0	62.5	60.5	61.0	74.5	68.5	73.0
SSDEC	1337.0	1310.0	1290.0	1291.3	1295.5	1285.3	1222.8	1217.0	1167.0	1203.3	1192.8

Staffing Levels / Niveaux de dotation

	2023		2022	
	Allocation by ECE Formula PY's	\$	Expenditures by SSDEC PY's	\$
Staffing at the Divisional Level				
Leadership Team	3.00	\$627,573	3.25	\$598,557
Inclusive Schooling Consultant	1.00	\$165,891	1.00	\$175,844
School Support Consultants	2.75	\$489,069	2.50	\$439,810
Indigenous Language Consultants	1.00	\$165,891	1.00	\$175,844
Administrative Staff	3.75	\$373,757	3.75	\$355,472
Technology Staff	3.00	\$367,623	1.00	\$144,200
Sub-total	14.50	\$2,189,804	12.50	\$1,889,727
Staffing at the School Level				
Teachers	92.37	\$13,761,501	84.71	\$12,888,709
Program Support Teachers	11.20	\$1,667,962	12.60	\$2,019,905
Support Assistants	19.15	\$1,732,397	29.94	\$3,019,054
School Community Counsellors	0.00	\$0	3.75	\$385,622
Wellness Counsellors	1.80	\$240,060	1.25	\$131,506
Secretaries	3.44	\$337,748	3.77	\$352,933
Custodians	12.32	\$918,045	11.93	\$964,350
Sub-total	140.28	\$18,657,713	147.95	\$19,762,079
Divisional Total	154.78	\$20,847,517	160.45	\$21,651,806

Fund Balances / Soldes des fonds

	SSDEC	Fort Smith	Hay River	K'atloodeeche	Fort Resolution	Lutsel K'e
1	\$1,434,343	\$104,542	\$232,923	\$64,740	\$98,183	\$63,532
2	(\$913,880)	\$228,361	(\$110,588)	\$45,675	\$84,697	\$15,617
3	\$520,463	\$332,903	\$122,335	\$110,415	\$182,880	\$79,149
4		6.95%	7.38%	1.09%	7.00%	7.00%

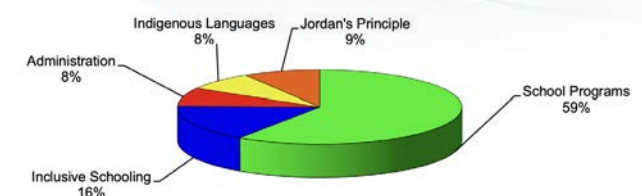
1 - Fund Balances (SSDEC and DEA surpluses) as per audited financial statements
 2 - Commitments against fund balances (school staffing surpluses and DEA spending plans)
 3 - Uncommitted fund balance
 4 - Fund balance percentages calculated as per SSDEC policy DFAA - Financial Surplus

Statement of Revenue & Expenses / État des revenus et des charges

	2023 Actual	2022 Actual
REVENUES		
ECE Contributions		
ECE Regular Contributions	\$25,402,554	\$24,914,033
Other ECE Contributions	676,724	1,017,921
Total ECE Contributions	\$26,079,278	\$25,931,954
Other GNWT Contributions		
Other GNWT Contributions	\$171,566	\$251,221
Total GNWT Contributions	\$171,566	\$251,221
Other Education Bodies		
	\$0	\$0
Government of Canada Contributions		
Jordan's Principle	\$2,964,735	\$2,204,639
Other Government of Canada	0	-1,000
Total Government of Canada Contributions	\$2,964,735	\$2,203,639
Generated Funds		
Investment Income	\$337,426	\$68,814
Non-GNWT Contributions	111,091	110,000
Donations	0	3,186
Other	250,365	593,865
Total Generated Funds	\$698,882	\$775,865
Total Revenues	\$29,914,461	\$29,162,679
EXPENSES		
Administration	\$2,414,122	2,476,832
School Programs	18,151,533	17,803,593
Inclusive Schooling	\$4,872,278	5,902,760
Indigenous Language and Education	\$2,414,720	2,433,774
Jordan's Principle	2,676,866	1,851,517
Total Expenses	\$30,529,519	\$30,468,476
OPERATING SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	(\$615,058)	(\$1,305,797)

Expenditures by Fuction / Dépenses par Fuction

School Programs	\$18,151,533
Inclusive Schooling	\$4,872,278
Administration	\$2,414,122
Indigenous Languages	\$2,414,720
Jordan's Principle	\$2,676,866
Total	\$30,529,519





SOUTH SLAVE DIVISIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

Mission

The South Slave Divisional Education Council strives to prepare students to create their futures by ensuring high levels of learning for ALL.

Vision

All individuals reach their educational potential.

Values

Respect, Integrity, Loyalty, Commitment to Growth, Advocacy.

SSDEC | PO Box 510, 202 McDougal Road, Fort Smith, NT X0E 0P0 | P (867) 872-5701 | F (867) 872-2150 | E info@ssdec.org

We respectfully acknowledge that we are working and learning on the traditional territory of the Dene and Metis people who for countless generations are the caretakers of the land.