



Northern Corridor Initiative

Final Report 2018-2020

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

There are **25** Friendship Centres in BC, with **1,203** employees, **597** partnerships, and over **one million** points of service (client interactions) each year.

Many Friendship Centre staff are long-serving employees dedicated to serving our Indigenous communities.

The goal for our Friendship Centres is to support the urban Indigenous community in their towns and cities and be a welcoming place to whomever walks through the door.





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Program History

Approximately 80% of BC's Indigenous population lives off-reserve. As the largest service delivery infrastructure for BC's urban Indigenous community, the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres has long recognized the gaps in representation and opportunities for Indigenous people in the BC labour market. To address these challenges, and help improve the lives of Indigenous people in BC, the BCAAFC's 5x5 Aboriginal Jobs Plan was initiated in 2014, based on five pillars of Social & Economic Innovation, Education, Employment Services, Partnerships, and Operational Capacity & Measurement.

Indigenous people in northern communities face unique barriers to employment, education, and economic opportunities. Seven Northern Corridor Employment and Training Centres (Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, Fort St. John, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Terrace, and Smithers) were established in 2017, in partnership with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation as one of the initiatives of the 5x5 Plan. In 2018, the Northern Corridor Initiative became a partnership with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills, and Training through the Indigenous Skills, Training and Development Fund.

Due to the success and effectiveness of the Northern Corridor Initiative, the 2018-2019 program contract received extension through to March 2020.





“The Friendship Centre is seen as a friendly and safe space to come for help and with this funding we can give clients the ability to help themselves.”

Prince George Native Friendship Centre Employment and Training
Team Leader



Ministry AEST and Northern Corridor Team Meeting, Prince George 2018

Barriers, Challenges, and Opportunities in the North

Urban Indigenous people in northern BC face many barriers to sustainable employment, despite fluctuating economics. Lack of reliable transportation is a major challenge in the north. Forty-four percent of First Nations people in BC were more likely to say that “not having the means of transportation to get to available jobs” caused them difficulty in finding work (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In addition, Indigenous people in the north face community shortages of child/elder care, housing, and boom/bust economic cycles which result in a lack of sustainable employment opportunities. The Northern Corridor Initiative seeks to reduce these barriers by providing programs unique to each centre in order to maximize resources, partnerships and opportunities available in each community. Changes in funding, and the resulting inconsistencies lead to difficulties in community-building, optimizing resources, and retaining trained Employment Coordinators. Statistically, “within the core working-age, off-reserve First Nations population, there are noticeable differences in the employment characteristics of women and men based on educational attainment, with impacts on their income and food security as well as health status. Employed First Nations women were less likely to live in food secure households and less likely to report being able to cover common or unexpected expenses” (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Friendship Centres are the most accessible places for Indigenous people to access employment services in each community, and clients who come to a Northern Corridor Centre have access to an Employment Coordinator.

Employment Coordinators are able to provide:

- Pre-employment and life skills programming
- Referrals to in-house supports, and external services as needed, for example addictions counseling, housing supports, cultural supports, literacy programs, etc.
- Training, re-training and critical certifications for sustainable employment
- Resume building, job interview skills, and networking with employers and industry partners
- Wrap-around services and supports, such as financial literacy, assistance with child/elder care, and transportation
- ID and driver’s license attainment assistance

The seven Employment Coordinators meet clients where they are at in their lives and employment journeys. Coordinators organize training courses and certifications, network and build partnerships with community and industry employers, develop unique wrap-around life skills programs, and create an Employment Advancement Placement Plan (EAPP) for each client. These Plans help the client to identify barriers, highlight current skills, goals, identify training and certification opportunities, and record achievements as they move along their journey to employment.

The BCAAFC Employment Programs Coordinator supports each Employment Coordinator, provides training opportunities, and administers contracts and reporting.



Fort St. John Friendship Centre Staff, Orange Shirt Day, Sept 30th 2019

Outcomes of the Northern Corridor Program Initiative

NCPP Achievements:



1,150 +
EAPPs Created



680 +
Job Placements



1,250 +
Certifications Completed



20,000 +
Points of Service (client interactions)

*Data from September 2019 to present date.

The Northern Corridor Program (NCP) Initiative has greatly exceeded all expected outcomes to date. Deliverables include Employment Advancement Placement Plans (EAPP) created, certifications obtained, and job placements made.

Certifications offered through NCP include (but are not limited to) a vast array of industrial tickets and certifications to maximize Indigenous participation in local economic opportunities, such as the resource and industrial sectors. Service industry tickets, skills certifications, Excel and Word courses are also available. Individuals can also receive assistance with skills and educational upgrades in other occupations such as health care, as priorities are identified in each community.

Much of the success of the NCP Initiative is due to the capacity of the Friendship Centres to provide in-house supports and services unique to the needs of each community, as well as the ability to leverage community and industry partnerships. This capacity has resulted in the delivery of unique wrap-around employment/pre-employment & life skills programs through the NCP Initiative.

These programs incorporate traditional supports (i.e. childcare, bus passes) and life skills (i.e. confidence-building, financial literacy, dressing professionally) with unique cultural and community supports.

Outcomes of the Northern Corridor Program Initiative

Each Friendship Centre applies their members' collective knowledge and connection to community to build programs that are invaluable to the people they serve. The employment and life skills services that the seven NCP centres presently offer make a true difference in the lives of hundreds of individuals and their families.

There is a need to refine the client intakes, tracking systems, and data collection for the growing NCP programs that was identified early in the process. To this end, a custom database has been built, which incorporates the Employment Advancement Placement Plans, all certifications and supports offered/obtained, and the progress of each individual. This database is launching in February 2020, and currently has the capacity to include up to 25 Friendship Centres in future.



Smokehouse Kitchen Program at the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, 2019

Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society

After identifying a need for Indigenous Health Care Assistants at home and in surrounding communities, the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre in Smithers ran a successful Enhanced Healthcare Assistant program in partnership with Coast Mountain College, which assisted eight Indigenous students (with transportation, upgrading, childcare, and Elder supports) in obtaining the requirements necessary to complete the program.

“A Client attended and successfully completed the Traffic Control and First Aid courses, and was able to secure a permanent flagging job with a company in town. She was also helped to get the required work gear as required by the company. The client’s self-esteem went up immensely, as she was scared and unsure about the courses at first, but she persevered, did amazingly well at the courses and was proud of herself. Her husband, all her fellow-students and the instructor were very pleased and proud of her too.”

Dze L K'ant Employment Coordinator



Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society



In Fort Nelson, there is a focus on re-training and certifications for individuals who are struggling to find employment with their current skillsets due to local economic conditions. The Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society provides a building for Work BC next door, and also a food bank on the same property. “I get a lot of people who aren’t able to jump through the hoops required by other service providers. ID, Driver’s Licenses, bank statements, post office boxes, phone numbers, email addresses – I can help them with these to prepare for next steps” - Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society Employment Coordinator.

“Thank you from the newest and only qualified Taxidermist and Tanner in Fort Nelson. Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society’s contribution helped immensely in working toward my goal of opening my own shop and studio. Your Job Placement Program is a valuable asset to this community. I am ever-grateful for your help and encouragement- Massi Cho!”

Fort Nelson Program Participant

Fort St. John Friendship Society

At the Fort St. John Friendship Society, the RO.A.R (Reach Out React Respond) 5-day program combines life skills, financial literacy, budgeting, food prep, and resiliency training for stressful times. Fort St. John also has high needs for pre-employment tickets, driver's licenses, housing assistance, and personal protective equipment/work gear.

“I had a client come in with a tentative-status letter from an oil field service company, listing nine ordinations and seven safety tickets that had to be completed in order to obtain employment, which could result in a long-term opportunity. We started on November 29, and had gotten through all of his ordinations and tickets that he needed by December 16. John told me when we got back from our break that he had gotten a few days of work in before Christmas and was excited for things to pick back up in 2020.”*

Fort St. John Employment Coordinator



Friendship House Association of Prince Rupert



At Friendship House Association Prince Rupert, the Dudes Club is a drop-in men's group focusing on financial literacy, mental health, homelessness outreach, life skills, and resume writing. Strong relationships with Industry and community employers allow the Prince Rupert Employment Coordinator to direct clients towards diverse employment opportunities in the area.

“Thank you for all your help. I appreciate you going above and beyond the call of duty to help me find employment. Thanks to you, I am now on as the Project Administrator for Soletanche Bachy.”

Friendship House Client and Lax Kw'alaams Community Member

Kermode Friendship Society

At Kermode Friendship Centre in Terrace, the in-house driving school helps address transportation, which is a major barrier to employment in the area. Other wrap-around programming, including the Keys To Employment program, incorporate life skills and cultural supports to guide clients to employability.

“You guys at Kermode have helped me on my journey to healing and bettering myself. I can take the steps I need to help myself, as well as others who want to make changes in their lives. I struggled with a lot in my life and I don’t want to dwell on it any longer, I just want to be a good role model for myself and my kids. These services were the support I needed to walk this journey in a good way, giving me the life skills to be sustainable and give me purpose. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Kermode Program Participant



Nawican Friendship Centre



The WO.L.F. (Women Obtaining Lifelong Foundations) program at Nawican Friendship Centre in Dawson creek is a three-week program designed to empower marginalized Indigenous women by incorporating mental, physical, and emotional wellness strategies with personal development, life skills, job readiness, and basic certifications. Assistance with transportation, mental health referrals, education upgrades, ID, and other basic certifications are a focus in Dawson Creek, as the economy there lacks stability.

“We have come to realize that there has not been a program available that offers support and acknowledgement for Indigenous women in Dawson Creek, and we truly aim to support and empower these women with our W.O.L.F. (Women Obtaining Lifelong Foundations) program. I have noticed individuals believing in themselves once they have finished a small task. When there is a sense of accomplishment, with discussion and support around their goals, they believe they can achieve them.”

Nawican Friendship Centre Employment Coordinator

Prince George Native Friendship Centre Society

At the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, the Employment Coordinators see 22,031 clients a year. The Bladerunners program targets youth, and Starting Point assists clients in obtaining tech and industry certifications. The in-house Smokehouse Kitchen pre-employment program introduces students to the culinary arts and professional kitchen work with a cultural focus. Over four months, the cohorts gain work experience and obtain multiple service industry certifications.

“This Program is very needed in our community to help keep people working or being able to get people to work. The Friendship Centre is seen as a friendly and safe place to come for help and with this funding we can give clients the ability to help themselves. It also brings people to the centre and while they are here, they can access our other programs to make sure they get all the support that they require.”

Prince George Native Friendship Centre Employment and Training Team Leader



A Pathway to Meaningful Employment



Skills upgrading cohort in Fort Nelson, BC 2019



Personal Protective Equipment by the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre, Smithers, BC 2019

Into the Future

As the Northern Corridor Initiative nears the end of its current iteration, the tremendous success of the programming highlights a need for this initiative to continue, but to expand beyond the original seven centres. The results have shown that the services provided through the Northern Corridor Initiative are absolutely critical to reduce barriers and increase Indigenous participation in local economies.

A need to refine the client intakes, tracking systems, and data collection for the growing NCP programs was identified early in the NCP process. To this end, a custom database has been built, which incorporates the Employment Advancement Placement Plans, all certifications and supports offered/obtained, and the progress of each individual. This database is launching in February 2020, and has the capacity to include up to 25 Friendship Centres as required.

The BCAAFC and Northern Corridor centres are extremely grateful to be in partnership with the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. The continuing success of the Northern Corridor initiative is an indicator that consistent employment and skills training programs are a vital resource for all communities, and would be a logical choice for expansion into all BC Friendship Centres, especially those in communities with demonstrated gaps in such resources. Friendship Centres are essential because they provide the most inclusive access to services and cultural connections for Indigenous people regardless of status or proximity to member nation and home community.



Rachel Needlay and Jennifer Smith, Fort St. John Friendship Society, 2019



Northern Corridor Team from left - Nika Palmer, of Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre, Holly Harris of Kermode Friendship centre, Jennifer Smith of Fort St. John Friendship Centre, Will Gye of Friendship House Association Prince Rupert, Megan Boddy of BCAAFC, Sheryl Elgie of Prince George Native Friendship Centre, Lovey Behn of Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Dawn Soosay of Nawican Friendship Centre at the ASPECT BC (Association of Service Providers for Employability & Career Training) Conference, November 2019).



NORTHERN CORRIDOR

