

Meadow Lake First Nation News



Birch Narrows Dene Nation



Buffalo River Dene Nation



Canoe Narrows Cree First Nation



Clearwater River Dene Nation



English River First Nation



Flying Dust First Nation



Makwa Sahgaiehan First Nation



Ministikwan Lake Cree Nation



Waterhen Lake First Nation



March 2020

Volume 3 • Issue 3

YOUTH SPORT COORDINATOR Program profile: Terrance Sylvestre



Terrance Sylvestre (back row, second from far right) poses with Team MLTC athletes and leadership following their Tony Cote First Nation Summer Games victory in 2011.

"I had a six-month contract back in 1999."

Those are the words of Terrance Sylvestre as he recalls his first job with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council.

Now, more than 20 years later, he is one of the longest-serving employees of the Meadow Lake First Nations organization. Today, his title is Youth Development Co-ordinator and Supervisor in Prevention.

A member of the Birch Narrows Dene Nation, Sylvestre grew up close to the land.

"I went out with my dad and grandfather a lot – it was a big part of my education," he says. "This also lends a lot of foundation to the work I do now."

Sylvestre split his education between Birch Narrows and the Beauval Indian Education Centre (BIEC). After graduation in 1993, Sylvestre went on to study Integrated Resource Management, but eventually changed his mind.

"I couldn't see myself giving tickets to my own people for living off the land," says Sylvestre, adding he later returned home and began work as a youth wellness worker.

Wanting to do more for his community, Sylvestre ran for council at BNDN and won a seat as one of four councillors. He served for 18 months and then considered his time at local government a valuable learning tool and decided once again for something else. Sylvestre took with him the qualities of those in leadership

roles: creativity, communication and commitment.

In Sylvestre's new gig, he traveled to communities, interviewed Elders, and then was part of the team that organized and designed *The Elders Speak* website.

"I was working with a team of storytellers and artists and the Internet was still a new media we were tapping into," he adds. "This was all around the time when the government agreed to accept oral tradition concerning First Nations claim to the land."

In 2000, Sylvestre found his new role as a Child and Youth Program Assistant giving him the opportunity to help all the Meadow Lake First Nations. By 2005, Sylvestre was leading the MLTC youth sports program. Nine years later, in 2009 when MLTC revamped the child and youth program, it became the Youth Development Program. The youth development program is geared toward youth, with its main focus on 10 - 18 year olds.

"We found there were a lot of other programs like maternal health, early childhood, etc... but nothing dedicated for youth," says Sylvestre. "With the youth development program we also have land-based camps, one scheduled for this May and strictly for females. We'll have coming of age ceremonies, new moon ceremonies and empowerment. It will be a great camp attended and led by girls and women."

Sylvestre says there will also be a similar camp for boys. The camps, Sylvestre adds, will continue as long as there is a need, and as long as the communities continue to support them. Selections to attend these camps are done by CFS prevention workers in the nine First Nations communities and/or with school staff.

Sylvestre says working with youth requires partnerships to support the programming at the community level.

"One of the partnerships is with Saskatchewan Lotteries," he says. "They continue to support the Tribal Council coordinator program and communities grant program, which support local programs such as the Tony Cote First Nation Winter/Summer Games, local sport festivals, fitness clubs, and more."

Having a passion for sports, Sylvestre is proud of the MLTC Games program which always has good turnouts for MLTC's winter and summer games selection camps.

"Recently, we had close to 300 athletes trying out for volleyball alone," he says. "But we can only select a small number and the hardest part of this job is letting the youth know they weren't selected. But throughout the year the communities have skill camps for the youth to keep on trying and training to get better at their respective sport."

Sylvestre has learned, from his travels to different First Nations across North America, programming should

be for everybody.

"I learned from the Seminole Tribe in Fort Lauderdale (Florida) they were very proactive and worked together as a group. After seeing that I thought and could see we're on the right track here at MLTC," he recalls. "Also through my travels I've noticed tribes south of the border don't have the support like we have here with the provincial and federal governments. When Team Saskatchewan goes to the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), we traveled with more than 500 athletes. Meanwhile, some of the tribes in the U.S. only sent about 50 athletes."

Sylvestre never imagined he would be doing this kind of work for so long.

"When I think of those athletes I worked with in my early years here, and now their kids are starting to be part of the Games, it just makes you think, WOW, I've been doing this for a long time."

Sylvestre states the programming offered, and the support to the Meadow Lake First Nations communities, is to help our youth make better choices.

"It's not about winning, but the friendships, connections and networking," Sylvestre adds. "This work has been great to me, it's been very supportive. I always meet parents and their kids in other facets of life, and this is not so much a job to me – if you enjoy what you are doing, then it's who you are."

Vision for Change 2020



Organizers and attendees honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Males with a walk through Meadow Lake during the conference.

Conference highlights hope for the future

March 3-5, the Vision for Change 2020 Conference held at the Flying Dust First Nation Gym, was an opportunity to remember and honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Males (MMIWM) and speak about the Indian Residential School (IRS) residual effects.

The Resolution Health Support Program (RHSW) at MLTC brought together speakers, both local and international.

"We are here to share our story," said emcee Lawrence McIntyre. "To help us reconcile our own collective history and to heal our own personal histories."

MLTC Tribal Chief Richard Ben opened the conference and called those in attendance to action.

"We have to focus on not being hostage to the impacts of residential schools, but to move forward, to work toward prosperity," he said.

Each year the RHSW plans an annual gathering for IRS survivors and

MMIWM victims.

"We try to focus on addressing topics relating to pain and trauma issues," said RHS worker Robert Fiddler. "Our goal with the conference is to show there are people out there we can trust."

The three-day Vision for Change gathering touched daily on topics of hope for the future, overcoming fear and resiliency. These topics were matched with specific resource persons to present and talk about them.

Victor Tsessaze, a Dene artist originally from Reindeer Lake, SK, was one of three speakers to share a personal story about what it's like to have a murdered and missing family member.

"There are a lot of moments of hope, and maybe my brother is alive," he said. "And then there's the time when you realize he's really gone. There's a confusion – it's a different type of grief, when your

family member goes missing."

During his talk, Tsessaze said Indigenous people are seeking the truth of how their women and men were murdered.

"This is what we're dealing with," added Tsessaze.

Fiddler noted all the presenters did a good job.

"The topics they addressed, and their personal stories will help anyone going through similar experiences," he confirmed.

Attendee Celine McIntyre, from English River First Nation, said, "Even though our families are feeling pain, the person who hurt you or my family is also feeling pain."

Fiddler noted a person's issues and how they were affected and impacted is a very important element to finding peace.

They share what happened to their emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well-being," he said.

Celine McIntyre responded by

adding people deal with grief in different ways.

"Even if it means we have to tell the same story over and over again, it's OK. We will eventually be able to say our loved one's name without crying," she said. "We will be able to be strong and remember our loved one without breaking down."

Tribal Chief Ben said concrete changes in society can be made.

"To build ourselves back to being strong caregivers is what that change will be," he said. "Let's commit to these key themes and let's look for solutions. I have hope for the future – overcoming fear, and resiliency."

Fiddler concluded by saying this gathering was a time to socialize, laugh and also an opportunity to encourage healing journeys.

"We try to expose these issues and begin to advance the participants' healing journeys on to the next steps," he said.



At left, Dene artist Victor Tsessaze, along with his wife, Lisa St. Martin-Tsessaze, perform a song for MMIWM during the conference. Below, keynote speaker Dr. Don Bartlette, centre, is surrounded by the Resolution Health Support Workers who organized the Vision for Change gathering.



Canoe Lake fills need with new van

A new mobility accessible van for the Canoe Lake Cree First Nation is now roaming the local roads and will improve the lives of local families ensuring them they are part of the community.

“One example is the quality of life for Garry Iron’s grandson is so much easier to manage now that there’s a van in the community,” said Ryan Smith, MLTC’s Jordan Principle coordinator. “He (Garry) reached out to us as he was seeking better opportunities for not only his grandson, but other youth from Canoe Lake with mobility issues.

The families and the leadership of Canoe Lake were dedicated and successful in their application.

“About four months ago a family reached out to us for this specialized van,” Smith said. “We recognized there were other youth who also have some mobility challenges, so our team, which includes myself, Ruth Iron and Abdul Araga, approached council to see what could be done. We applied to Health Canada for funding through Jordan’s Principle and with the blessing of the leadership of Canoe Lake Cree First Nation, chief and council, the health director and the principal of Miksiw School, a group application was made for this mobility accessible van.”

Jordan’s Principle is child-first initiative that helps youth access services they wouldn’t normally be able to receive.

“We had three vans to choose from and Health Canada picked the best one for us,” Smith added.



The new mobility accessible van arrived at the Canoe Lake Cree First Nation March 6. Here, band member Garry Iron (left) and Abdul Araga make sure all is in good working order. The van was made possible through Health Canada’s Jordan’s Principle funding initiative.

Students participate in Skills Canada competition

The seventh annual Northern Regional Skills Competition for high school students was held March 11 at Northwest College in Meadow Lake and hosted by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council.

MLTC’s Practical and Applied Arts consultant Kevin Chaisson says this event was an opportunity for students in the Northwest to come together and bring a competitive spirit.

“Historically, this idea of a skills competition stems from the post-Second World War era to essentially rebuild Europe,” he says. “At regionals

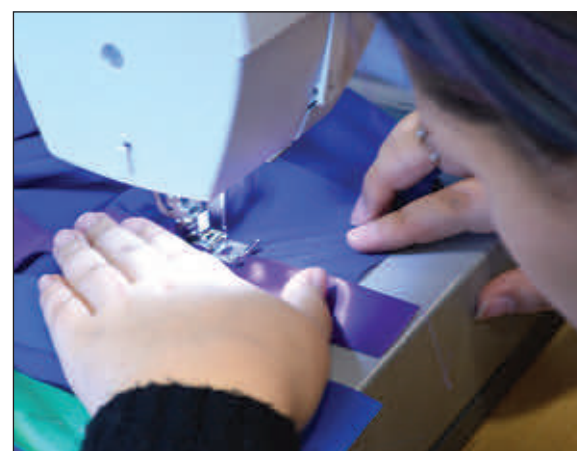
three of the trades are unique to the North – beadwork, aboriginal art and paddle making. The goal of this latest regional competition was to get beadwork as an event at the National level in the Skills Canada Competition.”

CHS teacher Jeff Vidal says more students should get involved in something like this.

“The paddle making competition was a good opportunity and this is really a great opportunity for the students overall,” he added.

Students came from the Meadow Lake First Na-

tions schools, Goodsoil Central School, Rossignol School in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Meadow Lake’s Carpenter High School. Organizers say a competition such as this brings communities together to build capacity – one youth and one skill at a time. It also creates opportunities and hope and it’s also a launching pad to a potential career in skilled trades and technologies. The long-term goal is to offer more skilled trades competitions that match community vision and demand for skilled workers in northern communities.



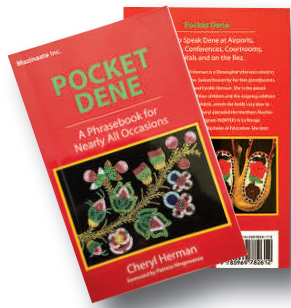
Students from the Northwest, displaying their skills in hairdressing, woodworking (paddle making), the art of sewing and crafting (ribbon skirt making) and modern Indigenous art.

Insight on MLTC education dept. staff

Cheryle Herman, Superintendent of Education – MLTC Cheryle Herman is one of our Superintendents of Education with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council.

She started at MLTC as a Dene Consultant and worked with four Meadow Lake First Nations schools offering support to the Dene language teachers. She then transitioned into the Language Curriculum Writing role for Land, Language, Relationships and Culture (LLRC). In this position, Herman developed a core language program guide.

The LLRC team work with language teachers and LLRC catalysts to assist with strategies in teaching an Indigenous language and advising on culture programming



initiatives. These strategies will support in delivering Indigenous language learning more effectively.

Herman has been involved in Indigenous language maintenance and survival work for several years and has had the opportunity to complete translation work for varying organizations.

“It is a lot of work to translate as the English language is not the same as the Dene language,” she says. “Many

times, I have to describe the word which then ends up being a phrase due to the descriptive nature of the Dene language. For example, the Dene word for computer is ts?tsané bin?e h?!?, which translates to metal with a brain.”

Cheryle also translated a Dene Phrasebook for Mazi-naate Inc. The phrase book contains everyday phrases for things such as, at the airport. The book is quite useful and most of the MLFN Dene schools utilize it in language learning/teaching.

John Cherian, HR Manager – MLTC Education

During university career fairs and networking sessions, one of John Cherian’s roles as Human Resources Manager includes being a

link for potential teacher candidates to learn about the exciting career opportunities within the nine Meadow Lake First Nations schools.

“Recruitment initiatives are part of HR and it involves a bit of marketing,” he says, adding it’s a great opportunity to interact with graduating students to help them look at the possibilities of kick-starting their careers with our schools. “With us, teachers get the opportunity to learn about land, language, relationship and cultural way of life within the schools along with teaching the provincial curriculum.

New teachers get to be part of the community and student lives.

“During these career fairs and networking sessions, we talk about stories from our

community and people who have grown professionally within our organization,” says Cherian. “Usually we have staff from our schools and MLTC Education joining in to meet with the final-year students.”

Cherian has personally seen high school students graduating from MLTC schools, going to university and then coming back to their home communities to teach the next generation.

“The local teachers enjoy teaching their own extended family and friends,” he says. “It’s a great way to give back to the community. We have a vibrant and enjoyable working relationship with the First Nations – they are very involved with the education of their children.”

Teachers enjoying northern lifestyle



Originally from Toronto, Kyle Smith taught in Edmonton and in Indonesia before coming to Clearwater River Dene Nation School four years ago.

“Clearwater answered my résumé package and the interview went real well,” Smith recalls. “I heard lots of good things about this school and it felt great knowing some of the teachers had been here for 20 years or more. That gave me and my family a sense of stability, so I thought they must be doing something right.”

Smith continued, saying the CRDN staff and community is very collaborative.

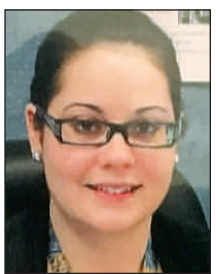
“As a city guy, I’ve been doing things I never thought I would be like ice fishing and hunting,” he said.

Because he participates in many of the Dene cultural activities, Smith feels he and the students have something special.

“I am able to talk to kids about going out to set nets and going hunting,” he adds. “Clearwater is a pretty cool community to work and live in. I think the closeness of the community lends itself to learning – like learning how to tan a hide.”

Smith loves being part of a school that teaches an Indigenous language from Pre-K to university.

“We have the Dene Teacher Education program (DTEP),” he said. “I am learning some Dene and it helps me to understand the process and it also helps me to teach with more empathy.”



Nikki Cerminara’s hometown is Niagara Falls, ON. She has a master’s degree in literacy and after post-secondary studies Cerminara decided to look outside the province realizing she wouldn’t find her chosen profession in Ontario.

“I looked online and the Birch Narrows Dene Nation School gave me a call Sept. 7, 2012 and I was hired shortly thereafter, she said. “I started as a Kindergarten teacher, but this year I am teaching Grade 7 students – they were actually my original Kindergarten class.”

At university, Cerminara’s focus was in math and language.

“After receiving my Bachelor of Arts degree, I then studied literacy,” she added. “Literacy is helping children close gaps with language and reading and these days I am learning some Dene. I know word phrases and am learning to put the phrases into sentences.”

Cerminara recalls how excited she was when she first came to Birch Narrows.

“I just fell in love with the place, the land and the people,” she remembers. “I called my parents and told them I was never coming back. Because of that they have since moved to Prince Albert. It soothes your soul being up here – it’s like cottage living here. I love boating, fishing, quadding and love the fall when all the leaves change colour.”

MLTC EMERGENCY NOTICE

COVID 19 – Being Prepared

The Meadow Lake Tribal Council has made a decision to temporarily suspend all Non-Essential operations within the organization effective immediately.

However, all Essential staff will continue to work (mostly at home) and be in contact with their supervisor or director.

It is important that the public calls ahead as the doors to our facilities will be locked. If you require further information, you may contact our office at (306) 236-5654.

The MLTC Executive Management Team is working with the federal and provincial governments to ensure the best possible outcome during this time of uncertainty.

The chiefs and councils of the Meadow Lake First Nations call for everyone to work toward keeping our communities safe and healthy.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and thank you for your continued patience and understanding.

As a reminder, please wash your hands frequently with soap and water as it is best prevention for transmitting the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Use hand sanitizer only in a public place and where soap and water are not accessible.

We also strongly encourage you to continue practicing ‘social distancing’ by limiting all forms of social interactions. This means avoiding all forms of social gatherings such as house parties, card games, home bingos, etc. The importance of social distancing cannot be emphasized enough and is a seriously urgent matter to adhere to.

We wish you and your families all safety at this time.
Respectfully,
MLTC Tribal Chief Richard Ben



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