

# 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



June 2020

Volume 3 • Issue 5

## DENTAL THERAPY WORKER

# Program profile: Jolene Iron

Jolene Iron grew up on Canoe Lake Cree First Nation and has been a dental therapist with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council since 2005.

She received her diploma of dental therapy and applied to the MLTC dental program just prior to her graduation.



Jolene Iron

"My first two years I worked between Canoe Lake and English River," Iron recalls. "Then a position for Ministikwan and Waterhen Lake came open and I traveled between those two until 2017. I later transferred back to working in Canoe Lake and Waterhen."

Her main work in the communities is dental checkups, cleanings, X-rays, white/silver fillings, silver caps and extractions. Iron targets the ages of five, six and 12.

"This is when their adult teeth begin to develop and I put on a protective coating to prevent tooth decay," Iron says. "I love seeing a difference in a patient's confidence once all their teeth have been fixed."

What Iron loves the most, however, is the students' trust.

"There are some who are frightened, and that's understandable and I don't take it personally. Who loves visiting the dentist?" she asks.

One of Iron's favourite moments is walking down the hallway in a school and a student asks, "When are you taking me next?"

Iron began her adult working journey in 1997 when she moved to Meadow Lake to take business administration through distance learning as well as some in-class courses at Northwest College.

From 2000-2002 Iron was working as a secretary at Canoe Lake's Miksiw School. During this time she received a diploma in business administration through University of Regina and Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now First Nations University of



Canada).

Iron's life changed, however, when cleaning out filing cabinets she came across pamphlets for the dental therapy program in Prince Albert.

"It intrigued me," she says. "I read up on it and called the school and asked a few questions and started studying dental therapy soon after that."

In the fall of 2003 Iron attended SIAST Woodlands Campus full time. Life for her during the next two years was: go to school, go home, cook, clean, study, put the kids to bed; then study some more.

"Some mornings I would wake up early to study if I had an exam that day," she adds.

The first year of dental practice was on mannequin mouth models.

"Once I started doing that I knew this was what I wanted to do," Iron says. "We practiced on each other a lot. We gave needles to each other and on those days we would go home for lunch with frozen mouths."

During her second year of studies there was an eight-week practicum.

Iron interned at the fly-in community of Garden Hill (MB) First Nation.

"I graduated with my Diploma of Dental Therapy in 2005," Iron says proudly. "MLTC had a position open up just before I graduated so I applied and I got it."

Due to COVID-19, clinical services have been suspended until further notice.

"We work in mouths and sometimes people don't know if they are carrying the virus and it can be spread around the air by our drills, air/water syringe, etc.," she states.

There will be new precautions coming out dental therapists will need to learn; from wearing full-on surgical gear to making sure the dental exhaust system is up to standard.

"As we phase back in, dental therapy will not be the same," Iron says. "I know teeth are the last of most people's worries and my hope is to change that."

Iron's future plans is to find as many new and interesting ways to educate the First Nations community on oral health.

# Water testing continues despite COVID-19

For Meadow Lake Tribal Council environmental health officer (EHO), Hillary MacDonald, COVID-19 doesn't stop her team from working.

"All nine communities of the Meadow Lake First Nations get water testing done on a weekly basis," she says, noting there have been added challenges of wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) during their job tasks, navigating multiple road blocks daily and filling out worker health sheets to ensure they are in good health with no symptoms prior to working every day.

MLTC's four environmental health technicians currently work from home and in-office as needed. They have also been on conference calls with chiefs, staff of Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority, regional EHOs and provincial health officials.

"We are continuing to be part of project management team meet-

ings (by phone) for the communities providing support and expertise on capital infrastructure projects such as water treatment plant upgrades, lagoons and solid waste transfer stations," MacDonald adds.

MLTC has two traveling water quality technicians – Joyce Maurice and Tina Aubichon. Maurice takes care of water needs at Clearwater River Dene Nation, Birch Narrows Dene Nation, Canoe Lake Cree First Nation, LaPlonge and Waterhen Lake First Nation. Aubichon travels regularly to Makwa Sahgaiehan First Nation, Ministikwan Lake First Nation, Flying Dust First Nation, Mudie Lake and Eagles Lake. Meanwhile, English River First Nation and Buffalo River Dene Nation have their own on-site water technicians in Karen Laliberte and Roy Necroche respectively.

Laliberte, like the other three technicians, take samples from the water

treatment plant and public buildings in the community she is responsible for and has done so throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

"When we had positive cases of COVID-19 in English River it was strange to work during this time because our public buildings were all closed and everyone was staying inside," Laliberte says. "It felt like our community was so desolate, empty and quiet."

The technicians check chlorine residuals onsite (to ensure proper disinfection of the water) and take samples back to the labs. After an incubation time, the samples are checked for bacteria.

"After the 24-hour incubation period we look for 'indicator bacteria,' something that will tell us if there is E.Coli," adds MacDonald.

So far there have been two cases – Beauval General Store and ERFN's Gas Bar – where MLTC's environ-

mental health staff were called upon because of COVID-19. The store was closed for a few days for cleaning and disinfection. Following that, MacDonald led the inspection to ensure they had proper items in place to reopen.

"We worked closely with the manager of the store to ensure things like hand sanitizer, barriers at the cash registers, posters and information posted regarding social distancing, proper disinfection products and procedures, limiting customers in the store, etc., etc.," she says.

MacDonald says safe drinking water continues to be a priority for all of nine First Nations communities.

"Without our technicians' ability to test during the pandemic, communities would have had to be placed on a precautionary drinking water advisory which would add to the chaos and concern during this time," she concludes.



# A new sense of community togetherness

“One of the first things we did was start purchasing food, and stocking up on supplies.”

Those are the words of Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation Chief Ronald Mitsuing as he recalls his community’s reaction at the start of COVID-19 as they didn’t know what to do or what to expect.

MSFN went into lockdown, had security keep control on who was allowed to enter, which was limited to band membership who lived on-reserve.

“We also enforced a curfew from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.,” adds Mitsuing.

MSFN health also made Facebook posts to membership informing them to stay home and not go around visiting outside or inside the community.

The chief spent a few nights taking a regular shift with the security team.

“It was good to see the reserve from a new perspective,” he says. “To be a part of looking for suspicious behaviour and just the general monitoring was insightful and we did have to escort a few vehicles off the reserve.”

Mitsuing says the lockdown exposed a lot of partying, but everyone was watching out for each other.

“I didn’t want any of us breaking any provincial rules about gatherings, so we kept an eye out on possible risks and risky behaviours,” he added. “I’m proud of this community for being a part of removing gang members trying to settle on the reserve as well. We dealt with them as a community – the people and the security members were on alert and we all worked together with Sgt. Ryan How of the local RCMP.”

There appears to be a new sense of community togetherness.

“The health team and pandemic committee was getting everything

ready with sanitization and isolation rooms,” adds Mitsuing. “We have a good health team and pandemic team, but there are so many unknowns about this COVID-19.”

Mitsuing is glad this virus is being kept at bay for now and looks forward to things getting back to normal. He wants to get back to his community accessing suicide prevention workshops and train the trainer workshops.

“Basically, for us to get back to business,” Mitsuing confirms. “We operated our offices for a while, waiting to see what was going to happen. If anything does flare up, we’ll set up our security gates immediately. It’s a funny thing, now that the security gates are gone, some of the band members are feeling a little less secure.”

The MSFN resort did open up, but signs are well posted for tourists to follow the rules.

“I think we all need to be following the news and communicating with each other about any new cases of COVID-19,” adds Mitsuing. “We should also share with each other any projects that have worked to keep our communities occupied because we really need to keep tabs on our mental health.”

There was a community yard cleanup weekend where the whole community was cleaned up.

“Our store is open with regular hours, but they have had to implement safety precautions like plexiglass, hand sanitizer and only allowing a limited number of customers in the store at one time,” Mitsuing adds.

He also does have good news for a re-open of Makwa Sahgaiehcan.

“Now, we can look forward to the arrival of the environmental assessment workers who are part of the process for the new homes we’ll be building for our community,” he says.



Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation elder Joyce Cantre waits for groceries being distributed by prevention worker Eleanor Fineblanket.

## SAFETY FIRST



Canoe Lake Cree First Nation security members stop a vehicle prior to entering the reserve.

## COVID-19, a learning opportunity for CLCFN

“Even for us who are on the Canoe Lake pandemic committee, coming together took a lot of examining the situation and deciding what could be done for our community. The first thing we did was start a sacred community fire, and it has been continuously lit since the beginning,” says Arliss Coulineur.

There were many things to think about and Coulineur addressed some of the issues to COVID-19 including: the virus is very contagious; it attacks the respiratory system; we can wear home-made masks; then there’s the news on the worldwide transmission of COVID-19 and it’s evolving nature. “And then it came here,” says Coulineur flatly.

Coulineur adds he had to take off his regular hat and title, adding the pandemic committee began to look around at the community and started doing what they could for the elders, the vulnerable and the surrounding communities. The neighbouring villages also collect their mail on the Canoe Lake First Nation.

“There were things like that to think about,” says Coulineur. “The community has really come together to accept everything that happened. And everyone on the pandemic committee agreed we need to protect our community.”

Coulineur has found working closely with community members who don’t usually work with one another, has been a highlight.

“I have nothing but heartfelt appreciation for our band members for their willingness to understand and accept the restrictions that were put in place. This has allowed us to grow – it’s been a learning opportunity,” he said. “This is all new for all of us.”

The use of the local fire suppression crew was utilized. They assisted in the distribution of care kits and food supplies for the community. They were a valuable asset in yard and community cleanup as they were given privileges to access the security gate to the local dump.

Coulineur said they had to talk about putting away politics, dol-



Arliss Coulineur

lars and cents because this disease doesn’t care about those things.

“This virus attacks all people, everyone,” he states.

If needed, Canoe Lake has two isolation units for six people and one RV unit ready that was sent to them by the Northwest Incident Command Centre. As well, Miksiw School has been designated an isolation building in the event of an outbreak.

“We are very thankful for the partnership we have had with the Northwest Incident Command Centre since March 28,” Coulineur added.

“Our Chief, Francis Xavier Iron, and a member of the pandemic committee, Norman Opekokew, regularly announce what will be the order of the day on our local radio station – 103.9 CFCK,” he noted. “It’s done especially for our elders as it’s read out in English and in Cree.” The announcements can also be found on the Canoe Lake social media page.

At some point, the youth began assisting at home. The message was to ‘stay home and stay safe.’ Then the youth stepped up and took some personal responsibility assisting their older family members in their homes.

“It was really encouraging to see,” Coulineur says proudly. “If anything we’re laying the foundation for our youth, for our kids and for our grandchildren. We are doing this for them.”

As the coordinator of the pandemic committee, Coulineur celebrates the coming together of the community, and the leadership of chief and council.

“We became stronger together,” he concluded.



# RAISED BEDS/MARKET GARDEN PLANTING

## Flying Dust members staying active

Before the pandemic happened, most people were living fast-paced lives and had a lot going on. The best thing to come out of this, says Flying Dust First Nation band manager Will Main, is people have been able to slow down, phone one another, talk and build a spirit of unity.

“Through this pandemic the community has been able to get to know one another again,” he adds.

Thus far, during this COVID-19 pandemic, FDFN core services have remained in place and leadership and key personnel still go into the office.

“We’re business as usual, just with less staff,” says Main.

Core services, including health, finance and payroll have all remained functional during the pandemic. Since a majority of the public has been on lockdown since mid-March, a budding interest in gardening has revealed as a public interest on the First Nation. Within a week-and-a-half of purchasing the raised bed gardening material, Main notes supplies were completely gone.

“Now there’s a waiting list for more material,” he confirms.

Main said gardening is a great opportunity for Flying Dust membership to be practising food security by planting their own food and vegetables – some have also planted flowers. Leadership were taken aback at how popular gardening became with the band members appreciating the chance to beautify their yards

and community.

“The raised garden beds represent hope,” says Main. “There’s something to do and there is something to tend to. This initiative was also much appreciated by our elders.”

The FDFN Market Garden crop has been planted and there are also a number of chickens being raised. Recently, FDFN was able to share extra potatoes with some Alberta First Nations who were looking to stock up.

Chief and council frequently ask themselves, “How can we make the best use of the time we have and to see growth, not regress?” The idea was as simple as a beautification project.

“If you look far enough, and dig deep, you can see good coming from this,” Main states. “Our health department has been doing a fantastic job. They haven’t missed a beat.”

When the pandemic first began, he says the air was thick.

“All we could think of was best practises,” Main says. “There were some who didn’t take this seriously, but we had to keep telling everyone, we need to be take this serious now so we don’t have any problems later in the game.”

Throughout the pandemic, business opportunities arose where FDFN security had been hired to watch businesses in Meadow Lake.

There was some resistance at the beginning, Main states, but one positive was the checkpoints that were put in place to stop a lot of non-



Empowered Indigenous women (l-r) Jennifer Laliberte, Della Dequett and Nicole Laliberte construct a raised garden bed for FDFN food sovereignty.

essential travel into the reserve. At the checkpoints, everyone was asked the same questions: “Where have you been? What did you do?”

“Everyone was quite willing to say the truth because they know it’s for the safety of the community,” Main says.

On June 8, phase three of the Re-Open Saskatchewan Plan began and Main says chief and council, staff and membership we will be following provincial guidelines until it’s safe to

return to full strength.

“However, we don’t want to restart too soon as there is considerable concern about a second wave,” Main says.

“Chief Jeremy Norman said at the start, “This isn’t about us, it’s about how we can best serve our community,”” Main continues. “That stuck with me. I saw this downtime as a prep time. Also, in the fall, many of our households will be harvesting their own food.”

# WLFN councillor shares insight on keeping community safe

In an attempt to keep the coronavirus out of the Waterhen Lake First Nation, chief and council took it very seriously and locked down the community early on.

“We wanted to keep the virus out,” says band councillor Ableheza Ernest, adding it was stressful on leadership. “But, we needed to abide by the guidelines suggested by our local pandemic team and health director. They had a plan to keep us safe and we as leadership approved of it.”

A security gate was set up at the reserve’s entrance and a curfew was initiated.

“It was a little problematic at first,” Ernest says. “Some community members didn’t like their freedoms limited – they couldn’t leave the reserve as they wished. But, with the curfew, there was a lot less activity at night.”

Because a lot of information about COVID-19 was on social media – some of it true, some of it false – the band shared pertinent information through the local radio station, CIWL FM 97.7.

Besides the broadcasts, health pamphlets were distributed. The *Are You Prepared for a Communicable Disease* pamphlets were provided by Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA).

The WLFN health team knocked on doors, handing out and sharing the information. They focused on families with elders and those with chronic illnesses. COVID-19 information pamphlets were also given out to all who passed by the security gate.

“We just wanted to let everyone know the seriousness of this virus,” Ernest says.

Due to the quick action, he believes the risk became less in the area.

“As we went along everyone adapted and understood the importance of safety and security for our lockdown,” Ernest adds, noting those working the security gate were also helping out the night watch crew.

In regards to food security, the band received assistance from the federal government.

“Because of this, our people have

become more aware of food security,” says Ernest. “Especially when they saw the shelves running out at the stores in town.”

If the virus did enter the community, he says, the WLFN pandemic team was ready.

“If it (COVID-19) came to the reserve we were concerned about the resources we had and accommodating them,” says Ernest. “The pandemic team worked with our security, purchased extra food and cleaning supplies. Anything that we might need in case there was a complete shutdown of the local shopping.”

The community had a tough time following a suicide, but support was there for them.

“A big MLTC support that came to our help was the mental health teams because people had to stay at their home,” says Ernest. “No one could go out and visit the family. It was tough.”

Now, nine weeks after the outbreak, chief and council are working to fully reopen the band office and

get back to some sort of normalcy as things get more relaxed.

“We’ve kept working behind the scenes,” says Ernest. “We’ve planted our garden again, like we do every spring and we’ve also started to build a paintball course. The youth are very excited about the new paintball course.”

Ernest suggests community members keep themselves in a good headspace and stay occupied.

“Our priority has been the mental health aspect of this and helping people cope,” he says.



Ableheza Ernest





# Congratulations Graduates!

## Dene Teacher Education Program

Recently the 21 students enrolled in the Dene Teacher Education Program (DTEP) at Clearwater River Dene Nation graduated, however, no local convocation ceremony was held due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The program started in 2016 and all 21 received their bachelor’s degree last month,” says Mark Klein, principal of Clearwater River Dene School. “This graduating class are now all fluent in the Dene language – all can speak, read, and write the language.”

The DTEP was a four-year Bachelor of Education program with its focus on training teachers to be Dene language immersion teachers.”

The students attended classes on the Clearwater River Dene Nation throughout the program and their Internship and pre-internship placements were at La Loche Community

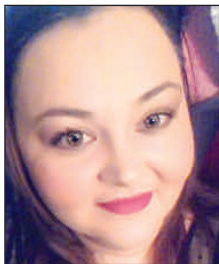
School and CRDN School.

Klein notes community leadership wanted the program to take place on their traditional Denesuline territory and shift the model of post-secondary education program delivery.

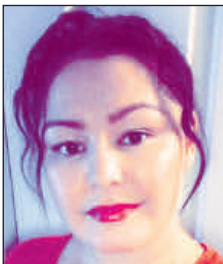
“It’s much easier for one instructor to come to the community for three weeks than it is for 21 students to uproot their families and move to a bigger centre,” explains Klein.

Both communities are extremely proud of this graduating class and currently over half the graduates have accepted positions for the upcoming academic year.

The DTEP program was based on a partnership between Clearwater River Dene Nation, Northern Lights School Division, Meadow Lake Tribal Council, First Nations University of Canada, the University of Regina, Province of Saskatchewan and Government of Canada.



Deidre Herman



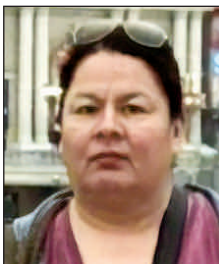
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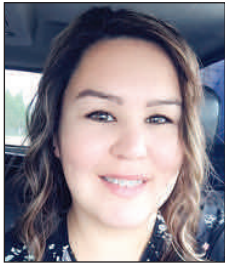
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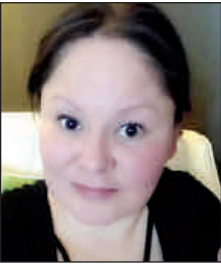
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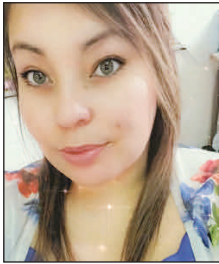
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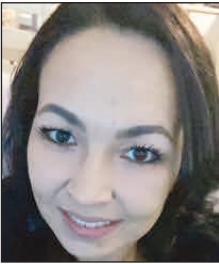
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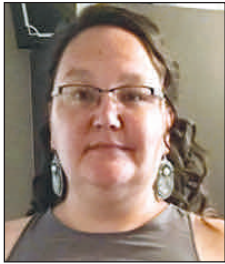
Rena Lemaigre



Viola Herman



Frana Moise



Andrea Janvier



Ashton Janvier



Dawn Herman



Cora Lemaigre



Dawn Gailey



Gabrielle Fontaine

## Message from Richard Derocher, MLTC vice-chief

As we live through this difficult time with the COVID-19 pandemic, I reflect on the traditional education my parents taught me on the importance of looking after our family.

My father taught me by example and through story. The story we are living through right now requires us to take serious action in protecting our families and our communities, and yet congratulate each other for being strong.

Education is the reason we First Nations have been so resilient and have survived many obstacles to be where we are today – leaders in the local and national economy.

The greatest resource in our communities is our educators.

On behalf of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, and the other chiefs of the MLTC, I would like to congratulate the graduates of the Dene Teacher Education Program (DTEP) held at the Clearwater River Dene Nation School.

This is a huge step in retaining our mother language as well as in some cases renewing our mother language.

With this additional badge to your collection, and very prestigious degree, may you continue testing the limits and achieve all you want in life.

My advice to you as a graduate is to be a life-long learner.

I do wish the DTEP graduates all the success and as you move on to the next phase in life, keep adding positive vibes to the world. Grow through whatever you will go through.

Also, congratulations to the DTEP faculty and to the DTEP families for standing beside their graduates and for supporting your student.

On this important day, I want you to know how proud I am to be associated with you. You have done so well.

~ Congratulations, may the Creator Bless you all!



CORONAVIRUS ON RESERVE

# CRDN chief Teddy Clark warns against letting your guard down

With COVID-19 there are so many unknowns, but Clearwater River Dene Nation chief Teddy Clark says his recent experience with the virus is, and continues to be, a challenge.

“Here in the North we decided to work together with the health professionals, government, village of La Loche, the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan and local business owners,” says Clark. “We created an alliance with these groups and put a plan together to be consistent in best practice messaging.”

One of the first things we did was open an emergency operational centre (EOC).

“This served as a place where we could deal with the everyday challenges of all our people which included providing cleaning supplies to responding to any questions that needed to be answered,” he adds.

The EOC asked itself questions like: Where do we house the homeless? Where do we put people who have COVID-19?

“First of all, on the reserve, we converted our treatment centre and staffing units for those people affected as isolation units,” Clark says. “The group also secured several empty

housing units from Northern Lights School Division and used them until some RV trailers came in that were sent to us by the MN-S. There was a lot of hustling in a very short time.”

Clark says the EOC was the arms and legs of the people who couldn’t be mobile, and the command centre worked well communicating with the local people.

“Mostly people wanted to know what are we doing, and how are we doing this? What are the plans?” notes Clark. “People asked about food safety, their medical trips and medical needs. EOC took care of a lot of that.”

When liquor was unavailable in the immediate area, Clark believes the community now knows they hold the key to a healthy community when these establishments reopen.

“I saw a lot of changes when the liquor outlets were closed,” he says. “This definitely contributed to the well-being and health of our people and calls to the RCMP related to alcohol went down almost immediately.”

He hopes his people will use their best judgement and think about how good they felt, and the life they

enjoyed, when the liquor outlets were closed down.

For the month of May, the two communities of Clearwater and La Loche had the highest numbers of COVID-19 in the province and Clark says those statistics came with a lot of anxiety and confusion.

“The virus is still not completely gone from this area, it’s just contained,” states Clark. “One wrong move could spark everything: all the fear and all the restrictions; and bring us back to square one.”

COVID-19 has taught Chief Clark patience and focus.

“In line with that, you can’t be distracted,” he says. “You have one goal in front of you and that’s what you work toward.”

Leadership in the North have been fighting this virus for a while and Clark’s advice is simply, “don’t let your guard down regardless if things start to look better.”

He maintains working in alliance with other organizations has made his community stronger. He hopes they can all continue working together to battle any challenges they might face in the future.

“The people have been molded



Chief Teddy Clark

and reshaped,” he says. “When times got tough, they rallied. They worked together and they supported each other. The CRDN community realized they can do certain things to make their lives a little bit better and I hope that trend continues.”

Until a vaccine is developed, Clark says they have to live with a new normal.

“No large gatherings, a continued social distance lifestyle, and always practise extra good hygiene,” he states.

# Vice-principal is role model for youth

“I kept this quiet for a few months,” says Kirsten Catarat, a Cree/Dene woman from Buffalo River Dene Nation.

What Catarat is referring to is being selected this spring by the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations as a role model. The campaign is of several Saskatchewan First Nations youth who are featured annually on calendars and posters.

The quote Catarat chose for her poster is based on her Dene belief that youth are the future.

“If we help our youth grow into strong Indigenous people who are grounded in their identity, and have a strong relationship with the land, they can create powerful, impactful change that our people need,” she explains. “I’m not going to lie. I felt intimidated and I felt like I didn’t deserve to be part of the project because they had judges, politicians, NHL players, dentists and filmmakers.”

Catarat realizes all who were chosen have their own unique journeys and stories to share.

“At the end of the day this project was to inspire our First Nations youth, which was the most important part of it all,” she says. “The youth have been my drive and passion for pursuing my



Kirsten Catarat

career in education.”

Catarat still has an overwhelming sense of humility.

“I’m grateful to everyone who has helped me along my journey in life to get where I am today.”

She has had many teachers in her life.

“I am especially grateful to all the youth who make my life and career worthwhile. I wouldn’t be who I am today without any of you,” she acknowledges.

Coming from a family from Poundmaker Cree Nation and Buffalo River Dene Nation, Catarat grew up in Buffalo River with parents Collin and Tracy Catarat and three siblings.

After high school, Catarat enrolled in the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) and attributes her parents for instilling in her the importance of education.

“I’ve always tried my best in school, in athlet-

ics and academics,” she explains. I played a lot of sports throughout my schooling years and maintained good grades.”

Catarat says she is now in a position to help the youth and strengthen their identities as First Nation peoples in Saskatchewan.

She completed her bachelor’s degree, worked for about five years, then applied to the Indigenous Land Based Master’s program through the University of Saskatchewan.

“I took this program because I felt like there had to be more to education than the colonial system I was teaching in,” she says. “The program had such a positive impact on my life.”

Currently Catarat is vice-principal/land based teacher at Buffalo River Dene Nation School.

When asked about home-schooling tips during this COVID-19 pandemic, Catarat said she is more concerned about the children’s mental well-being, so she doesn’t push academics all the time.

“Learning takes place in many different ways, such as making puzzles together, singing songs, dancing, and storytelling,” she concludes.



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The Meadow Lake Tribal Council  
wish you and your families  
all safety at this time.