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Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership
Ice Road Newsletter for Feb./Mar. 2020

Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership on COVID-19

Praying for you and your family's health and the health of all the Indigenous communities at risk from the COVID-19 storm. COVID-19 is, particularly, a threat to the remote and rural First Nation communities, due to both the severe underfunding of First Nation infrastructure (e.g., housing, water piping, hospitals, shelters and food system) but also their isolation making access to Canada's health care system limited. Manitoba First Nations have the worst housing conditions in Canada due to overcrowding, lack of piped water and mould. People are at risk when as many as 23 people live in a two-bedroom home where "they had to take turns sleeping" (Puxley, 2016). With overcrowding, isolation is not possible at home to protect Elders and immune-compromised people. The overcrowded housing situation is a "ticking time bomb" and we pray that COVID-19 is not the detonator.

The short film called 'Wasagamack' Housing Crisis shows that homes are not only overcrowded, but many homes lack running water or have cisterns, which frequently run out of water. Water is important to prevent COVID-19 and people are being told to wash their hands often, but without sufficient water that is not possible. This film also shows why First Nation communities are overcrowded due to CMHC or any bank providing funding for housing on reserves in third party. This policy of not funding housing in Garden Hill and Wasagamack for many years has created dire housing conditions of overcrowding.

Overcrowded housing on reserves is linked to adverse health impacts. Overcrowding results in higher incidence rates for: hepatitis (Jin and Martin, 2003), acute rheumatic fever (Gordon et al., 2015), asthma (IHC, 2003) and 9 times higher prevalence of tuberculosis on-reserve than off-reserve (Lancombe et al., 2011). Overcrowding poses much higher risks for contracting COVID-19 too.



Photo 1: Proud Garden Hill Homebuilding students finishing flooring (Daryl Wastesicoot, Feb. 25/20)

Although school and research have been cancelled for now to ensure physical distancing, the Mino-Bimaadiziwin Partnership continues to provide the training allowance to the Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders and graduate students. So, no layoffs will occur as we want to maximize the learning, the well-being of students and ensure the homes are finished. The final steps of making the homes ready to live in with plumbing, woodstoves, and beautiful finishes will provide important teachings post-COVID-19. The plan is that all the students in the Homebuilders program will graduate from this 2-year program and hold the celebration in the beautiful homes they build with local wood. We will weather this storm together and then find a way to build enough homes to reduce future risks.



Photo 2: Garden Hill Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilder students build in the snow (Daryl Wastesicoot, Feb. 25/20)



Video 1: Wasagamack Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders (Photo: Daryl Wastesicoot, Feb. 25, 2020)

Speaking at the First Nation Housing Conference

The First Nation Housing Conference, located in Anishinaabe Territory of Thunder Bay, Ontario, and hosted by the Fort William First Nation, occurred on February 11-13. I, Reanna Merasty, Master of Architecture student, with the Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership, presented alongside Shirley Thompson, Daryl Wastesicoot, and Larry Harper, on housing in Wasagamack First Nation, who are both Mino Bimaadiziwin Students and teachers.

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Aski, Kisik, Nipi, Inniwak, Ekwa Ka Ati Kweskikhikikh

Garden Hill First Nation homebuilding students, as well as other students, and faculty from the Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership at the University of Manitoba spoke at the Land, Air, Water, People, Climate Change Conference (Aski, Kisik, Nipi, Inniwak, Ekwa Ka Ati Kweskikhikikh). This conference was organized by the University College North (UCN) on Feb 12th and 13th, 2020 in Thompson, Manitoba. At this conference, we learned about how everything is connected from Elders as well as about the importance of minimizing disturbance on Mother Earth. Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq, an Inuit-Kalaallit Elder, Shaman, traditional Healer and Carrier of the Qilaut (Wind drum), and the keynote speaker of the conference, shared how Thompson had transformed into a city that was a beautiful village in 1979 when he visited for the first time. This Shaman became known as Uncle to all of us from the Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership. Uncle explained that "Carbon is not the cause of climate change. You (we humans) are the cause of climate change" was the take-away message from this conference.



Photo 1: The Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders team with Elder Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq, keynote speaker after the presentation.

Elder Angaangaq also emphasized that the "World needs ceremonies" to change our mind and body to act responsibly. The significance of ceremonies was also reinforced by Katherine Morrisseau-Sinclair, the keynote speaker on the second day of the conference. Elder Katherine said, "Ceremonies makes us feel who you belong to [your culture]." The presence of Elders and their guidance made the conference very special and heart-warming.

Dr. Shirley Thompson and Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders students facilitated a session on 'Building sustainable homes and building capacity on First Nation reserves' on the first day of the conference. Nathan Harper, a community member and student of the program, shared his personal story to explain why the program is important for him and his community. The session concluded that post-secondary education that builds students' capacity and culturally appropriate homes can solve the housing crisis on reserve. Presentations by UCN, Indigenous community members, and Senator Murray Sinclair provided further guidance on how the educational programs, and programs with Indigenous communities, should be designed and implemented to contribute to ensuring Indigenous self-determination.



Photo 2: The Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders team during their presentation on the home building program.

Garden Hill students and community members, who left Garden Hill at the same time we left Winnipeg, reached Thompson three hours after us. The longer duration of travel time from Island Lake to Thompson than from Winnipeg to Thompson is due to the ice-road travel, which requires slow travel over ice. Enhancing access to Island Lake communities throughout the year via all-weather road has yet to be achieved in Manitoba, although promised. In the spirit of reconciliation, much has to be done to remove the colonial policies that create barriers to Indigenous self-determination in Manitoba.

By: [Keshab Thapa](#), PhD Student, Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba & [A.M.Rezwanul Hogue](#), Project Coordinator, Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership

Celebrating the Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders Many Accomplishments

Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders (MB Homebuilders) are earning many certificates while they learn in the classroom and on the job to log, forest, saw, and build housing. Two hundred ninety-nine (299) certificates were successfully completed by all the students involved in the program. So even if a student did not remain in the program they did gain new credentials and had success.

Wasagamack and Garden Hill MinoB Builders Student Certificates

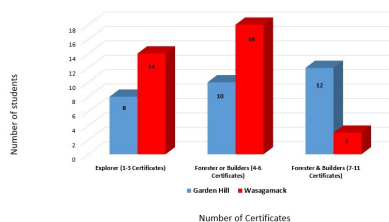


Figure 1: Garden Hill and Wasagamack First Nation Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders Students Certificates.

Overall, 74 students, 34 students from GH, 35 students from WAS, and 5 students from other programs earned one or more certificates as part of the Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders program. Three students from Garden Hill earned 11 certificates.

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Picture 1: Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership team facilitating a session. Working as a research assistant, I assist with the development of the curriculum and process of a fourth-year undergraduate architecture studio, focused on the area of housing in remote communities. This conference was the first opportunity for me to have a voice as an Indigenous woman in the field of Architecture and design. My presentation began with my homelands – I am from a remote community in Northern Manitoba, Barren Lands First Nation. My upbringing consisted of land-based living and assisting with log-cabin construction with my grandfather/father on the islands of Reindeer Lake. The teachings that were instilled in me were holistic: that everything has one thing in common, and that's the land. Indigenous design includes the incorporation of Indigenous values, and emphasis on sustaining and living for seven generations. The design process has to be community and relationships, which requires a humble approach, and showing the right intentions for the community to see to listen to their voice, passion and experience. The message I hope will be considered in housing design, is that as Indigenous people, our traditional building has always been a reflection of our stewardship to the land. Land stewardship is ingrained in our being and our bodies.



Picture 2: My picture with Elder, Becky Big Canoe

Kinanaskomitin,

Reanna Merasty, Master of Architecture student, University of Manitoba.

Reanna Merasty receives Student Trailblazer Indigenous Award of Excellence



Picture 1 & 2: Recipients of Indigenous Awards of Excellence, University of Manitoba and Reanna Merasty wrapped in her star blanket.

Reanna Merasty, Master of Architecture student, and student of the Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership received the Trailblazer award from the Indigenous Awards of Excellence. Reanna expressed her gratitude and honour in receiving this award from the Office of Vice President (Indigenous), and Indigenous community at the University of Manitoba. Reanna expressed her appreciation stating: "The award and star blanket hold much value to me. My true name is siphko anaskani iskwe, Blue Blanket Woman, the name is a symbol of the morning star, which is presented on all-star blankets. To have the honour to be wrapped in a star blanket, is beyond anything that I will ever receive."

The awards were provided by Dr. Catherine Cook (Vice President Indigenous), and elders Wanda Murdock and Leslie Spillett. The ceremony gifted the recipients with a star blanket, a symbol of respect, honour, and admiration. Following, Elder Carl Stone, provided an honour song for all the recipients. The award was to recognize the efforts in paving a way for Indigenous students in the Faculty of Architecture, and the field of Architecture, Design, and Planning. Reanna co-founded the Indigenous Design & Planning Students Association (IDPSA), to further implement Indigenous initiatives into the Faculty and is the first Indigenous student-led organization within the Faculty. The goals of IDPSA is to provide sufficient Indigenous representation within the Faculty, seek partnerships with Indigenous communities across Manitoba, incorporate Indigenous values within the Architecture community through advocating for culturally formed Indigenous initiatives, programs, and curriculum. Also, IDPSA seeks to inspire and expose Indigenous youth to pursue the fields of Architecture, Design and Planning.

The Mino Bimaadiziwin partnership provides Island Lake students with a training allowance of approximately \$1000/month from October 2018 until the training program ends, which is uncertain with COVID-19. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the partnership grant money, to date, has invested in Island lake students and other graduate students. For the Homebuilders, \$754,548 to date has been invested in providing their training allowance, with an additional \$93,200 spent on safety equipment, conferences and other expenses for a total of \$1,019,799.

Total training allowance including perfect attendance bonus in both communities= \$ 754,548

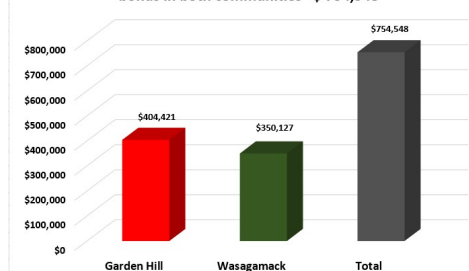


Figure 2: Training Allowance Summary

This year of 2020 so far, five MB Homebuilder students and two other Island Lake community members presented in various conferences namely- 7th Annual Indigenous Health Research Symposium, National Housing Conference in Thunder Bay; Land, Air, Water, People, Climate Change Conference in Thompson and 2020 National Housing and Infrastructure Forum and Trade show.

Total \$ for Students \$1,019,799 (86% of the total grant)

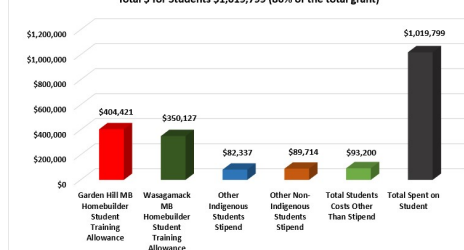


Figure 3: Total Money Invested to date in Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership Students (mid-March 2020).

Thanks to all the students and partners for their dedication and excellent work towards solving the housing crisis and building capacity with the Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders program.



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Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership seeks students interested in pursuing a Master of Natural Resources Management in the areas of community-led housing, food, or education.

A Stipend of \$17500/year for two years.

Check: <http://ecohealthcircle.com/>

Contact Shirley Thompson at S.Thompson@umanitoba.ca or phone 204-291-8413.

Apply before: May 1, 2020

Winter Road Journey to Wasagamack First Nation

Driving up by ice road from Winnipeg, I arrived at Wasagamack. My role in the Mino Bimaadiziwin Homebuilders Program (MBHB) was two-fold. I was helping aid students to learn math from February 17th to March 15th and as a graduate student was researching health and well-being impacts students perceived from participating in the MBHB. So many talented and capable young people were taking part in the MBHB, each with many goals and ambitions. These community-based education programs clearly bolster the talent of young people. I am looking forward to seeing how each of the participants and projects, such as the MBHB, continue to progress.

One of the initial feelings upon arriving in Wasagamack was the rich sense of community. In particular, mornings spent within the band office kitchen and the familiar faces that became friends and acquaintances. I am thankful for the members of the band council and students who let me experience and take part in community life. We shared in many stories, discussed our respective cultures and cuisines. I was fortunate to try both bannock and moose-meat; as well as unexpected topics such as COVID-19. I was also given the opportunity to try a traditional medicinal tea meant for preventing coughs and clearing the respiratory tract of phlegm.

By: Mandeep Sidhu, Master of Health Sciences Candidate, Lakehead University with Mino Bimaadiziwin Partnership.

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