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'They get to see us differently'

Indigenous students get acquainted with hospital staff through internship program



Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

By: [Maggie Macintosh](#)

Posted: 6:00 AM CST Monday, Feb. 12, 2024

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Indigenous high schoolers are shadowing employees at St. Boniface Hospital as part of a new pilot project that will bolster teenage participants' resumé's and expose them to different careers in medicine.

Over the next four months, a group of 12 students from the River East Transcona School Division is taking part in a special internship credit program.

The Grade 11 and 12 participants — all of whom are First Nations, Métis or Inuit — are being matched with mentors and rotating through different workstations, ranging from human resources to nutritional sciences, based on their individual interests.



'We felt it was our role to open up as many doors as possible,' says Clayton Sandy, a River East Transcona School Division knowledge keeper and St. Boniface Hospital board member. (Mikaela MacKenzie / Winnipeg Free Press)

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with patients and learning medical terms and all those kinds of things,” said Hailey Chubaty-Lathlin, a Grade 12 student from River East Collegiate.

The final-year student said she is eyeing a career in social work, but has yet to make a final decision about what she will do after graduating in the spring.

Chubaty-Lathlin, 18, noted she wants to know more about what an average day looks like for mental health specialists, ultrasound technicians and staff in the Winnipeg hospital’s labour and delivery unit.

Clayton Sandy, a knowledge keeper in RETSD who sits on the hospital’s board, pitched the idea to leaders at both organizations last year.

The retiree was inspired by a work practicum initiative he co-founded when he was a public servant in 1996. At the time, Sandy was a provincial consultant tasked with supporting Indigenous youth transitions from school to work.

“We felt it was our role to open up as many doors as possible to careers to young people,” he said. “So that’s what we did.”

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and obtain employment, be it as a bank teller, RCMP employee or otherwise, through the program.

He attributes the initiative's success to the linking of every student with an Indigenous role model.

Mentors shared their lived experiences growing up in foster care, living in households reliant upon social assistance and being survivors of residential schools and the '60s Scoop, as well as how they overcame related challenges, he said.

Similarly, the hospital-specific offshoot will focus heavily on relationship-building.

Sandy noted the partnership is as much about making students feel comfortable in workplaces where Indigenous people have long been underrepresented as it is about challenging stereotypes and preconceptions about the participants themselves.

"(Professionals) get to spend time with us. They get to see us differently and they get to know us for who we are, not for what they think we are — or the myths that they hear about Indigenous people," added the knowledge keeper

by the University of Saskatchewan.

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St. Boniface Hospital's inaugural truth and reconciliation specialist, Ryan Thomas, will support the initial cohort's stint between February and June.

Students will learn general employability skills, how to navigate systems, and gain experience working collaboratively and constructively with professionals in diverse fields, said Jason Drysdale, an assistant superintendent in the division.

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"We're teaching kids how to manage time and priorities because the students, over the 17 weeks they're involved, are away from school for one day a week," he said.

Drysdale described the partnership as a clear demonstration of "reconciliation in action."

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administrator who oversees educational services and planning — a portfolio that includes Indigenous education — in the district.

He added his hope is to expand the program into a broader partnership with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

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Maggie Macintosh

Reporter

Maggie Macintosh reports on education for the Winnipeg Free Press.

Funding for the Free Press education reporter comes from the Government of Canada through the [Local Journalism Initiative](#).

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