

Guiding Circles Plays Valuable Role in Summer Camp

For many northern communities, mineral exploration and mining is the largest employer of Aboriginal workers. Although not all employees actually work in a mine (some act as accountants, lawyers, electricians, etc.), everyone has the opportunity for a prosperous future, thanks to this expanding industry.

“One of the big advantages of a mining career is that, for Aboriginal workers, they can stay near their home communities and it’s a good paying job,” says Barbara Green Parker, Aboriginal education specialist with the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (PDAC).

“Ultimately, these are careers that can help provide a prosperous future without having to move south.”

To help bring awareness to the mining industry’s 120 possible career choices, PDAC’s Mining Matters personnel attended the 2008 First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program (FNNRYEP), held in partnership with Outland Reforestation Inc. and Confederation College. It’s a summer youth program that’s been running for the past nine years, with many success stories.

The FNNRYEP, also known as the Ranger Camp, is a seven week live-in program of professional and personal development designed to promote future employment in the natural resource sector. Participants live in camps and report to work daily.

Recruitment for these positions is facilitated through Thunder Bay’s Confederation College in the spring, in partnership with participating First Nation communities. This year, 26 youth, ages 15 to 19 years, traveled from 15 northern Ontario Aboriginal communities to participate.

As part of that seven-week program, Mining Matters provided six days of thematic educational programming that covered the subjects of geoscience, environmental science, career planning and mining – including a visit to North American Palladium’s Lac Des Iles mine operation.

The Mining Matters contribution to the Ranger camp was guided by the realization that many educational and networking opportunities are not readily available in small Aboriginal communities (300–400 people) spread over a large geographic area. The youth in these communities are all considered at-risk by the Northern Chiefs’ Council due to their high suicide rate and few local opportunities for employment and advancement.

“The Rangers camp is not a typical classroom and there’s no academic threat but it allows so many learning opportunities,” notes Parker.

“The students love it and they’re paid for their work and attendance.”

For the first time ever, the 2008 camp saw the use of the *Guiding Circles* career planning program – with a full day dedicated to exploring and verbalizing each participant’s life stories.

By combining traditional Aboriginal teachings with contemporary career exercises, the *Guiding Circles* program awakens a participant’s sense of self-esteem. Through activities, students are able to tell their own story and relate their life experiences to career planning – allowing them to

make choices based on natural talents and interests. These story-telling activities also promote self-confidence, restore hope and create vision where, perhaps, none existed before.

“The importance of the traditional role of Aboriginal peoples in land and resource management is gaining recognition and this role is becoming increasingly important as a new generation of northern youth reaches the workforce,” says Parker.

“These youth may be future leaders and, in the short time we have them, we can see the leadership skills developing in them.”

The 2008 summer Ranger camp concluded with a closing ceremony where participating youth gathered with their families and friends to celebrate their achievements. Many program partners, who had generously contributed their time, funds and equipment, also attended the ceremony.

Of the 26 “graduates” of the program, 18 will be returning for a second year of training – a resounding success story for all involved.

To learn more about how you or organization can get involved with *Guiding Circles* visit aboriginalhr.ca or call 1.866.711.5091.

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