



First Nation
School Board

February 2024

newsletter

A picture-perfect start to the school day at Eliza Van Bibber in Pelly Crossing.

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Letter from the Executive Director



Drin Hozo team,

Winter is a time to cherish. I think of it as a time to hibernate, tell stories and hold our loved ones close. It's a time to tread lightly and softly as the land and animals also take a rest.

By slowing down, we have time to fall into deep thought. Whether it's planning ahead, reflecting on what's past, or just digging into a good book, hobby or practice. Take this time and protect it. This time is for connection, kindness and care. Sleep in a little longer on weekends, read a couple more pages, savour the snuggles. There is intention in this cycle – we can't always run with the speed and energy we take from the summer's sun or harvests' work. We need this time to restore in all aspects of our whole (mind, body, spirit and relations).

So far throughout this winter I have been both reflecting on how far we've come as a school board, and also look forward with great excitement about what is happening and will come. In this edition you will get a peek at the some of the immeasurable heights we are reaching by taking small steps, together. Thank you for stepping with us.

Mahsi' choo,

Melissa Flynn



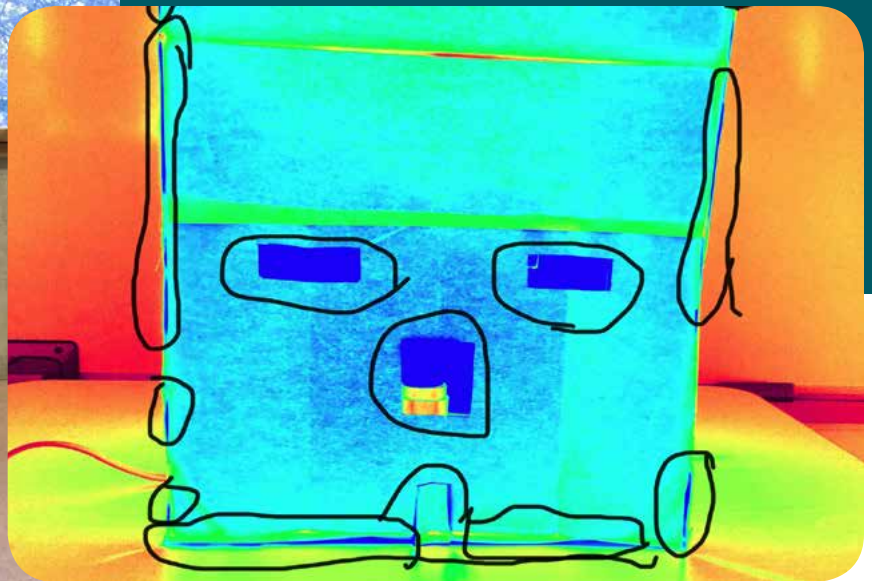
Global Issues, Takhini Elementary Solutions

The Grade 6/7 students in Mr. Brendan Morphet’s class weren’t given much instruction – just some sticks and paper, and they were asked to build a structure.

“I didn’t tell the kids what the purpose was,” said Mr. M. “I just said ‘here are some rough guidelines. You have to build a structure within these guidelines. It has to have x number of windows, it has to have a door.’ I left it really open because I wanted them to do a really bad job – I wanted them to have gaps in the roofline, I wanted them to not think about this as actually being a house.”

This was the latest project in the class’ exploration of big issues. Earlier this year, the class talked about fresh water supply and found out the majority of Whitehorse’s drinking water comes from underneath Riverdale. Next, they’re off to Yukon Energy to understand how and where the city’s energy and electricity comes from. The point of this project was to talk about climate change and fossil fuels. To help, Mr. M invited a few experts from the Energy Branch of Yukon government and rigged up a heat mapping camera.

“All these dark blue spots indicate where light – or heat – would be escaping. They had to identify all these spots of potential heat loss in their homes and then what I told them to do was to go back and add insulation,” explained Mr. M. “We talked about how heat escapes our homes and why its import to cover up these holes. We talked about fossil fuels and how every time heat is escaping its not so much ‘your parents tell you you’re born in a barn,’ it’s ‘we’re losing money.’ On a bigger scale, it’s contributing to global warming. Every time we loose heat from our house, that heat is now escaping into the atmosphere, contributing to global problems. On top of that, the more heat that escapes our house, the more fossil fuels we have to mine for and the more fossil fuels we’re burning, and that we are going through fossil fuels at an alarming rate.”



Keeping with the overall approach of the project, Mr. B didn't give too much direction, just a whole bunch of materials that they could use. Through trial, error and more heat mapping images and temperature recordings, the students began to refine their structures and their choice of insulation materials.

Some students realized two strips of tape – or double panes – and material for drapes or curtains over their windows was better at keeping the heat in. Some preferred thicker fabrics like denim and furs.

Omran, 11, and Marti, 10, were the one pair in the class who did things a little different from the start – they built an apartment building with chic architectural design instead of a classic house. When it came to insulation, they laced the entire structure with tin foil and then added in cotton between the foil and paper in places where light (heat) was still seeping out.

"It looks cooler," said Marti. "And we wanted it so more people can live in it," added Omran.

"We wanted it to be different," said Omran. "A normal apartment building is just a rectangle," explained Marti. But in their design, they pointed out the roof's pitch, which makes sure snow and rain has no trouble running off. They noted it was the heat/light reflecting properties of the tin foil that drew them to this material as an insulator.

While it didn't give them any extra points, they also boasted the extra features they included in their build including charging ports for electric vehicles, an emergency exit, and a garage.

"We like to build stuff," said Marti. "If you want to be an engineer, you have to design it perfectly." said Omran.

"Don't let heat out," said Marti. "Cause we don't want climate change," added Omran. "And you're wasting money," chimed Marti, who also pointed out that climate change is causing glacier melt.

After their trip to the dam, the kids will come back to their structures and look at building a source of renewable energy to add electricity to their structures. For Omran and Marti, they are excited to figure out what design changes it might lead to in their apartment building.

"We're going to install lights," said Marti, who was excited and open to the idea of redesigning aspects of their structure. Omran was less sure, as the two students started looking at potential areas of impact to its structural integrity.

"They're big concepts to understand or get their heads around," said Mr. M. "But as long as they can get little pieces of it – fossil fuels, housing, insulation... cause they're going to be homeowners one day and they need to understand how we maintain our heating bills."

More than homeowners, one day students like Omran and Marti may be architects or contractors, engineers or electricians, climate scientists, innovators. Projects like these cover a lot of different skills and require problem-solving abilities and independent thought. The focus on developing an interest in the trades and having students do more hands-on work seems to be helping keep them engaged in the academics, says Mr. M who adds that he picks projects he doesn't know – going through it himself first, through trial and error, prior to bringing it into the classroom.

"The whole point is to look at global problems and how they affect the Yukon," while leaving the students with real concepts for what they can do about it, he added.



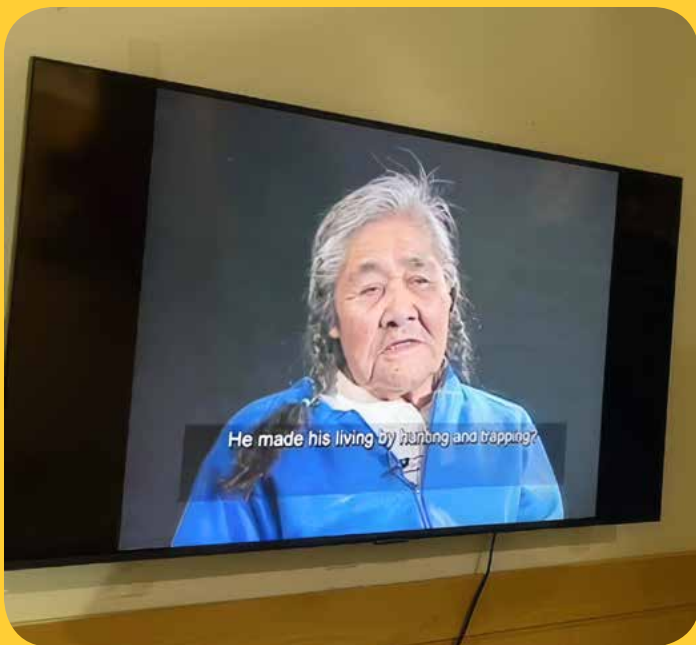
We Learn From Our Elders

Land and Language Connector, Charyl Charlie worked with Principal Steve Climie and others in Old Crow to do something truly magical. Together, they have brought Elders and Ancestors of Old Crow into the school thanks to historical recordings and modern technology.

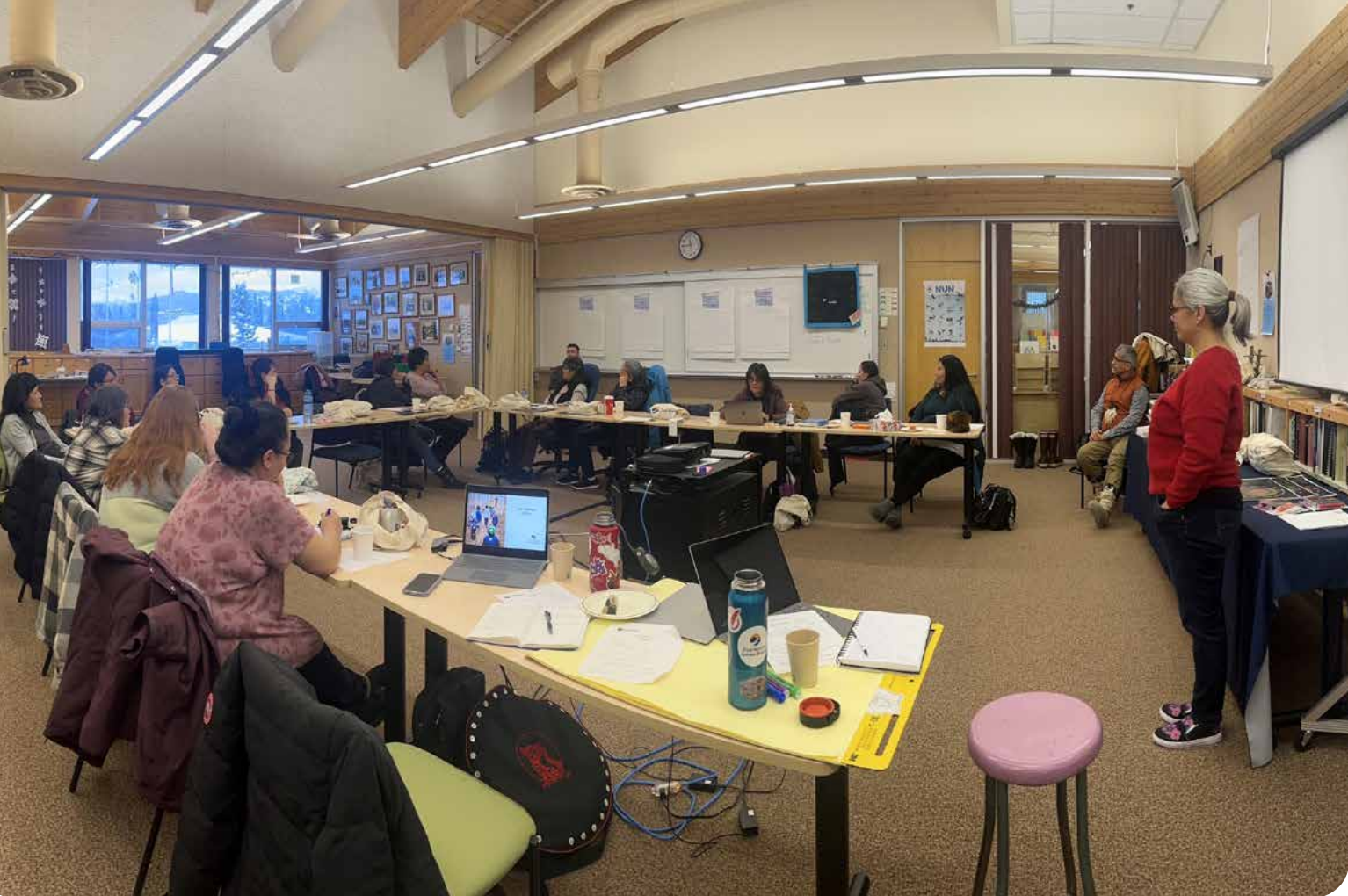
A TV has been installed in the school's front lobby and plays recordings of Gwich'in Elders from the former Haa Shagoon TV Program created under Northern Native Broadcasting. Since the TV has been installed, it's been really exceptional to see Learners, school staff, and even community members stop in their tracks to watch and listen. "Having their presence in the school sets the tone," says Charlie. "It's also very healing. It's encouraging to have them there."

This is one way to help our Learners see themselves – their families and grounding – in their schools everyday. We are working to make all FNSB schools a safe place of belonging and this is one step at Chief Zzeh Gitlitt to help the school feel more like a cabin or living room where you can cozy up and listen to teachings and stories from your elders.

Danny Kassi watches his mom, the late Mary Kassi, speak on the Gwich'in Haa Shagoon TV Program that is now running on the screen set up in the lobby of Chief Zzeh Gitlitt School.



As a recording of Lydia Thomas plays on the new Gwich'in Haa Shagoon TV at Chief Zzeh Gitlitt. Her greatgranddaughter Sadie Charlie – a Grade 6 student – "met" her for the first time in this way, and listened to her wise words.



Our Trail, Our Way

On January 23 and 24, FNSB hosted a workshop for all First Nation Language Educators working at our schools. The two-day event took place at the Yukon Native Language Centre. This opportunity allowed staff to hear about successes and challenges in First Nation language classrooms across Yukon. Teachers were able to meet FNSB staff, hear about how the Language Coaches will be able to provide on-going support, and how Land and Language Connectors can support programming at the school.

The theme “Our Trail, Our Way” was chosen because we wanted something that reflects a new, positive, and fun direction for our language educators. As well, language educators will help to direct their own path or ‘trail’ for language teaching in their schools. FNSB can support this momentum to ensure that the languages can thrive in the schools and through on-the-land experiences.

Upper Tanana
Néetay, Nèek’èh

Dan k’e
Dátān, Dádān k’è

Dān k’i
Nátān, Nak’í

Kaska
Gutene Guk’éh
Gutene guk’ey gus’ān

Tlingit
Haa dei haa kusteeyi

Gwich’in (Van Tat)
Diitaii, Dinjii Zhuh
k’yūu’ gwitr’it
t’agwaa’in

*Our trail, we do it the
Dinjii Zhuh way*



Language Coaches

FNSB is honoured to have Lëjit (Georgette McLeod) and Sha'ala (Luke Campbell) on the team as Language Coaches. They will be working with First Nation Language Teachers at all 11 schools with the First Nation School Board. They will be visiting each school in the upcoming months to connect with staff and support language programming.



More than music

Dorothy Williams, violinist and music teacher for more than 15 years, appreciates that performance and excellence in music is important, however now – more than ever – she sees how much more music education can be.

“So much of what I do in my class is showing the students how music is regulating, and music regulates our bodies and our brains and helps us come to a place where we can learn,” she says. “It’s the core of what I do in my music class – everything else flows out from that.”

This past summer, the FNSB supported Williams to attend a professional development course in San Francisco with world-renowned music educator Doug Goodkin. The course was an advanced lesson in the Carl Orff approach to music education, which is based on the theory that “music begins with the breath and with the heartbeat.”

“It was an extremely powerful course for a number of reasons,” said Williams. The first being that the Orff approach is so interconnected with the neurosequential model and developmentally responsive education that we do at Takhini. It was very powerful to see how this approach that I love fits so well with this model of education, the brain, and self regulation.

“The other thing that was really powerful,” adds Williams after noting that this course specifically focused on jazz and blues music. “Is that it wasn’t just about learning the music and learning how to teach it – a huge important part of it was the social justice and history.”



Williams spoke of one instance during the course where one African-American participant shared a slave field call song, leaving the whole class speechless and in tears. In that moment, the instructor began teaching them an old, African-American playground song called “Little Sally Walker.”

Williams notes the parallels she could see between the work she is able to do with local First Nations artists and Knowledge Keepers here in Yukon, and what she learned about jazz and blues music giving a way for an oppressed people to tell their stories in the United States.

“In telling those stories, we can bring justice,” she said. “For me in my job, to bring reconciliation through continuing to tell the stories, share music where I can and share language where I can and bring justice to First Nations people who were oppressed for so long – and still are in so many ways. Through music we can tell these stories and bring justice in the classroom.”

The most magical aspect, says Williams, is how music can help guide us through emotion. Whether its stories of oppression, or simple dysregulation, music has the ability to help us work through life’s emotion and find community along the way.

“Cry, Sally, cry – wipe the tears from your eyes,” Williams recited. “Then you ‘Rise, Sally, rise,’ and we sang and did that song together and we moved through the grief with that song. Showing the power of music to help us move through some of life’s challenging times in life. Music is part of the way to help us heal from those experiences. It was quite remarkable. There was nothing to say after you hear this woman sing that incredible song. The instructor gave space for us to share these stories and grieve together and out of that grief of the stories that were shared, he tied it all back together to music education.”

After returning from San Francisco, Williams started a singing time at Takhini Elementary. Twice a week, about 70 students get together to just sing. They experience the music together – all kinds of different songs – just for the pleasure of singing and to explore the benefits that flow from it – regulation and breath, literacy and stories, math and rhythm, movement and play, and community.



Localizing Literacy

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The FNSB Literacy Team has been working with Julia Joe, Selkirk First Nation Education Support Worker, to localize stories that are used during literacy lessons. These stories are decodable text which means readers can sound out the words using their phonics knowledge. The localization of these stories, will allow students to read about topics that are relevant to their own community. The stories will also create opportunities to relate to topics in meaningful

ways. Topics included in this set of stories are fish camp, potlatch, story time with family, and being on the trapline through a Selkirk First Nation lens. Eliza Van Bibber high school students are creating illustrations to accompany the stories. Our team is looking forward to the completion of this project and sharing the decodable stories with Eliza Van Bibber students, staff, and the community of Pelly Crossing!

In the future, the literacy team looks forward to working with other First Nations and communities. FNSB honours our First Nations as unique and are committed to localizing resources to reflect each community.

At a holiday event in Pelly Crossing this winter, Selkirk First Nation Education Support Worker Julia Joe, Literacy Coaches Lauren Murphy and Megan Norris, and contractor Krista Trimble spoke with the community about how to feature local stories in the school's literacy materials. They are now developing literacy material relevant to students in Pelly Crossing.





Resilient Resistance

The North has some of the highest rates of gendered violence in Canada, and Watson Lake carries its fair share of those statistics. It's a topic that is sometimes difficult to talk about, and even harder to change, but that hasn't stopped multiple generations of community members in Watson Lake from trying.



The idea is fairly simple: provide a space for youth, adults and Elders to gather and talk about the tough stuff. What comes from these conversations, however, is anything but simple.

Youth for Dignity, a partnership between the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) and Watson Lake Secondary School, started in 2015 to help the community develop the skills to respond to violence in a good way, based in Kaska culture. Now, nearly a decade later, the program is only getting stronger.

Currently, the group includes Elder Mary Charlie – who has been with the program for about 6 years, Hannah – a 15-year-old Grade 9 student who joined the group this year after both of her older brothers participated throughout their high school years, Avery, who is 18, in grade 12 and has been with the group for 5 years, Grade 9 students Liam and Ian who are both 14 and have been in the program for 1 and 2 years, respectively, and Eric Lewis, an alumni to the program who was involved from grades 8 to 12 and is now assisting in running the program.

Julie Laliberte, current co-facilitator from LAWS, says they meet about once per month during the school year. The facilitators find ways to cover tough topics with experiential exercises, videos supports, team building activities and, of course, discussion. From these meetings, the youth decide whether they want to plan or participate in other activities, like the December 6 vigil they organized to recognize the national day of remembrance and action on violence against women.

"It's a lot of community events to try and get others to learn what we've been learning about – to inform others than just this group. A lot of the topics that we cover involve the social response – like how to respond to people in a positive way instead of a negative way," said Avery. "How to support the victims, and we talk a lot about victim blaming because that happens a lot and we don't want it to happen."

Recently, they began establishing a Youth for Dignity drum group.

"Three or four of us really like to do it and we can inspire other people in the community to be a part of it," said Eric about the drum group. So far, they have drummed at recent community potlatches, the Mothers of the Land conference which took place in the community in October.

They've also done quite a few community-scale art projects to help raise awareness. This has included a beaded shall and a red dress for MMIWG2S+, and a very important addition to the town's famous signpost forest.

"We put up a "stop rape" sign in the sight post forest," said Avery. "Then the town thought it was a negative thing and they didn't want us talking about it even though you're supposed to talk about these things that are happening. So they took the sign down, so in response to that – our way of resisting – we put up a whole bunch more of them."

This act of resistance led to conversations with the Town administrators, agreement that this was a good thing, and the addition of three new signpost poles just for the Youth for Dignity group.

"It took a bit of work, but then we were heard," added Avery.





Being heard is such an important part of these discussions.

“We’ve learned about how to support people and help them through their experiences,” said Liam. “[Gendered violence] affects a lot of people in really negative ways – especially women, where they have to be a lot more careful about what they’re doing and where they are.”

“One of my family members was assaulted and they didn’t get their justice,” said Eric. “This group has been helping me with trying to figure out ways to help her and be to on her side, and make her feel better, like she’s a person,” said Eric.

For Elder Mary Charlie, the experience of listening and learning will never get old.

“We learn from them and we teach them,” she said of Elder participation in the group. “We’re helping each other out. I used to be a foster parent for years and now kids that I raised are parents now. You try to help youth get to where they are. When I was growing up we never had help like this or opportunities to sit together like this. We want to teach them our culture and teach them who they are, who

are their parents, and where they come from. I learn from the students too. Growing up in residential school I was always in the back, never talked. It took me a long time to get to where I am now.”

Perhaps even more meaningful than the important conversations or head-turning acts of community resistance, are the small actions that Laliberte says are becoming more common place.

For example, there have been a few parties in town where Youth for Dignity participants have stood up to perpetrators – whether it was calling out sexist jokes and rape culture, and even escorting women to and from the bathroom.

“A big part of those oppressive, violent things that are happening, is the reliance on silence,” adds Laliberte.

“Our active resistance towards it all is actually speaking about it because for so long people used to not have things like this and it wasn’t talked about, so we’re starting to talk about it and bring it up because then it will not be a thing,” said Avery. “We want to change it.”

Robotics Redesign in Ross River

Yukoners have a reputation for resourcefulness – especially those living in remote communities – but what’s happening in Ross River School’s STEM room is taking this standard to a whole new level.

Principal Pierce Butler and Grade 11 student Seth Wilk, 17, are redefining the way the school delivers intermediate and high school sciences, like robotics, electronics and other ADST classes.

“Early in the year I identified the need for potentially more options for our high school and junior high school students,” said Butler. “As we were already two positions

short here in Ross River, I thought I would step up and apply my background and my passion and my love as a teacher and get back in the classroom and offer some of those alternative options that generally we haven’t had here at the school. I thought, as a way to engage them, if I gave some of these alternative offerings it might get them interested in showing up to school, potentially, and make it a little more hands-on.”



Prior to taking on the role as Principal, Butler taught a “tech arts” course and ran an electronics club at the school before the pandemic hit. The STEM room is equipped with a number of hands-on stations for robotics, electronics – including assembly and disassembly, simulations, 3D printing, art and textiles. What’s made the major difference with this renewed space and course offerings now, is Seth.

Seth’s skills in robotics and passion for technology has been clear in the community for sometime – for example, he competed in Skills Canada competitions last year for robotics. Now, Seth is entering the classroom as both a student and an unofficial teacher’s assistant.

With Seth ‘on staff’ (Seth is earning 30-hours of workplace experience for his Grade 12 course requirements) the duo are able to offer a number of classes for Grades 7-11 three

times a week, and now Grades 4, 5 and 6 two days a week as well. Together they plan out the lessons ahead of time and lay out the room. They each deliver the same lesson twice a week which, they say, allows them to collaborate and really hone and improve the lessons.

“It’s something I enjoy, it’s probably the best part of my day,” said Butler. “With Seth’s help it’s been wonderful. It’s a good experience. We’re both continuing to develop the course and the offerings, getting more equipment and more things that we can potentially offer the students. It’s fun.”

Butler says that students in Ross River are getting even more exposure to different technologies than they do in the set curriculum. For example, students have repaired their own computers and iPhones.



“So they’re saving themselves money and they’re gaining the skills to be able to do those things in the future maybe as a career,” said Butler who notes his intention to introduce entrepreneurship and business lessons in the future. “These are practical skills that could translate into means of making money ... and you don’t have to leave the community.”

For Seth, the draw to tech was initially through video games. He explains that robotics is similar because you have to find ways to “make a thing do a thing” and it’s fun and entertaining for him. As for the foray into teaching, it’s an experience he’s really enjoying.

“It’s pretty cool having this opportunity to do some cool teacher stuff,” said Seth. “It’s pretty fun. I get to do all the things I’ve learned throughout the year and see other people do it, which is pretty neat.”

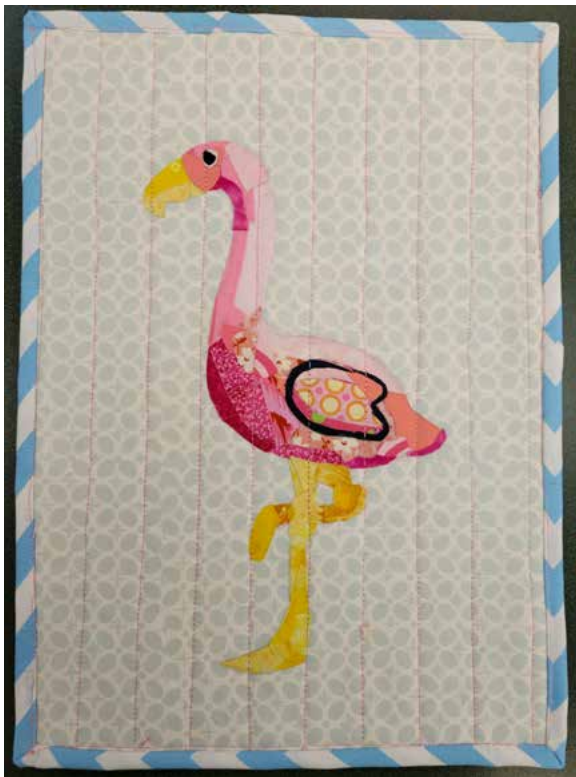
Whether it’s teaching code, showing off breadboard circuitry, or building robots, it is clear that this is something Seth is interested in doing and he feels pleased to be offered an opportunity that hasn’t been extended to any of his peers.

“I’m going to look into this teaching thing,” Seth notes. He says a career in IT was the original plan but thinking more seriously about teaching recently came up after speaking with his family. He said he realized he has a number of relatives who have taught in Ross River, and the prospect of getting the summers off sounds very enticing – he added with a smile.

“Being able to share both the coding experience that I have and educating younger grades about what I like, and what they might like, is pretty cool,” Seth said.

Quilting in Dakwakada

The Grade 8 ADST class at St. Elias Community School is showing off their sewing skills with these beautiful collage quilts. The students learned how to collage quilt, sandwich quilt, and bind a quilt, as well as some sewing basics (like use of a sewing machine, iron safety, and more) along with patience and perseverance. The results are incredible!







Hitting the Trail

Chief Zzeh Gittlit students from grades 7 to 12 have been working hard over the past four months to train and prepare for the Dagoo Taii (over the mountain people trail). The group, including guides, Elders and a cook, will set off from Old Crow on March 27th travelling all the way to Fort McPherson (Teet'it Zzeh) and back to Old Crow (Teechik) by April 4th.

This trip will offer intermediate and high school learners an exciting way to participate in CZG's Spring Camp. This year's theme for the camp is 'Traditions, History & Geography,' making the Dagoo T'aii a perfect compliment.

The Dagoo Taii starts from Teechik, up the Cho' Deenjik (Porcupine River), through Chiitsiighe' (Salmon Cache), past Mason Hill, and through Zzeh Gwatstal (La Pierre House), towards Vihshraii Niivyaa (Curtain Mountain) which is the halfway point where a cabin is located, and hunting and camping is encouraged. The Dagoo Taii then continues through the Lachute River over the pass to Ddhan Zhithan (Stoney Creek) and eventually arriving in Teet'it Zzeh (Fort McPherson).



The Dagoo Taii is a crucial area linking the Gwich'in together for millennia. Traditionally the Teet'it and Dagoo Gwich'in lived in the upper Porcupine River area but with declining numbers due to disease, the remaining Gwich'in moved to live in surrounding areas, namely Teechik (Old Crow), Teet'it Zzeh (Ft. McPherson) and Tr'ondek (Dawson City). In 1991 the Dagoo Taii was re-opened to continue the traditions of gathering among family and community.

For our Learners at CZG, this snowmobile trip is about much more than just a week on the land. This is an opportunity to teach the up-and-coming youth about their heritage, culture, language, and traditional stories that will help them to be strong in their identity. Accomplishing this feat – including the preparations and challenges along the way – will help increase mental wellness and pride among these young adults.

To participate in the trip, all students have had to complete certifications in standard First-Aid/wilderness First-Aid, Hunter Education & Ethics Development, FAC/PAL, chainsaw safety, snowmobile safety and maintenance – all training that will help them become stronger versions of Gwich'in, supporting their success in their traditional activities in their traditional territory. Along the way, partnerships with Vuntut Gwitchin Government's Heritage Department will provide training in mapping and Gwich'in place names, family connections and stories. Once in Teet'it Zzeh, students will participate in activities with Chief Julius School students and take part in a community feast where they will meet shilak naii (relatives).

This trip would not be possible without support from CYFN and CIRNAC, Yukon government's Department of Environment, YFNED, YukonU, Vuntut Gwitchin Government's Heritage and Natural Resources Department, Chief Zzeh Gittlit and Chief Julius schools, and Air North.

Nidivee goozu! Good luck on your path!



Ngha tashanidhi



Welcome Mats'āsāna Mą – our new Trustee! From Däkwākāda (Haines Junction) Mats'āsāna Mą, is a member of the Agūnda (Wolf Clan), from Champagne and Aishihik First Nation. Her Great-grandma was the respected Chushrūa, Marge Jackson. Mats'āsāna Mą was named after her Great-Great-grandma Maggie Jim and her Grandma Margaret Primozic (nee Jackson). Mats'āsāna Mą is honoured to be the first woman in two generations to receive this powerful name, given to her by her Great-grandma Marge.

Mats'āsāna Mą is someone who thrives from the Language and Culture. She is a fluent speaker in her First Nation Language of Dän Kwänje (Southern Tutchone). She also has received her Certificate and Diploma in First Nation Language Proficiency from Simon Fraser University. During the course of this learning journey, she was very lucky to work alongside two amazing elders who offered their traditional knowledge and teachings throughout the program. These teachings often lined up with modern day science and research which allows for her to understand, comprehend and live in both worlds.

Mats'āsāna Mą is someone who truly values our youth and helps guide them toward their culture, language, and traditions. She believes their paths are crucial for the future and she has served as the Chairperson for CAFN's Youth Executive Council and CAFN's Language, Culture, Heritage Advisory committee. Mats'āsāna Mą also designed, created, and coordinated a full-time Youth Language Immersion Program, called Youth Today, Language Leaders Tomorrow at the Yukon Native Language Centre. This program allowed youth to be in full-time positions where they were paid to learn, speak, and comprehend their Yukon First Nation Languages while receiving their Diploma in First Nations Language Proficiency through Simon Fraser University. The program also included many on-the-land immersion camps, where her and the students and elders would not speak English. Mats'āsāna Mą is also involved in the Yukon Aboriginal Sport Circle Board, and is a Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellow alumni.