



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Matawa First Nations Officially Opens the Matawa Learning Centre First graduate of the new Centre is recognized during opening ceremony.

February 10th, 2010, Thunder Bay, ON- Matawa First Nations is teaching its students to “**Learn to Dream**”. This is the motto of the new Matawa Learning Centre which was officially introduced to the rest of the world today, during a special Grand Opening Ceremony. The new facility located in the Matawa First Nations Management office in Thunder Bay Ontario, is a student-focused learning environment that has been specifically designed to help First Nations students successfully complete their secondary education.

The secondary school graduation rate for Aboriginal students is far below that of non-aboriginal students and according to Matawa Learning Centre Principal, Denise Baxter, this is because the mainstream education system does not provide for the specific needs of some First Nation students.

Says Baxter; “The statistics show that the traditional high school learning environment is failing our First Nation students. High schools are too large and very intimidating for First Nations students, many of whom come from small, remote communities. The Matawa Learning Centre offers students a holistic education- one that considers their learning needs but also the personal and social issues that they may be facing. We ensure that our students don’t fall through the cracks and we are all accountable to each other to ensure that our students succeed.”

The Matawa Learning Centre is approximately 3000 square-feet and features classrooms, a computer lab, boardroom, and office space for staff.

Today, the Matawa Learning Centre celebrated its very first graduate. Eighteen year old Curtis Sugarhead of Eabametoong First Nation was presented with a plaque acknowledging his student success. Sugarhead says; “I was finally able to complete high school thanks to the Matawa Learning Centre. With the support of the staff, students and my family- I did it.” Sugarhead hopes to get a job within his community and dreams of one day running his own business.



Continues Baxter; “At the Matawa Learning Centre, we ask our students to dream big and realize their potential beyond the basic entry-level jobs. We want to help our students learn that they can achieve anything they want if they are motivated and work hard. With a secondary education they can pursue the career or business opportunity of their choice.”

A total of 25 students between the ages of 15 and 21 years are currently enrolled at the Matawa Learning Centre. Student Danielle Yellowhead admits; “It’s never too late to come back, there is always something out there. For me it was the Matawa Learning Centre.”

Yellowhead lost her best friend at the young age of thirteen which caused her to drop out of school and fall into a depression. Yellowhead says; “My siblings motivated me to come back to school. I want to be a better role model for them. I want them to look up to me and be proud. At the Matawa Learning Centre I get a lot of support from the teachers and Principal and it is a very friendly environment. Now when I look back it just makes me a stronger person.”

Yellowhead is expected to graduate by September 2011. She dreams of becoming a Social Worker in her home community of Eabametoong First Nation.

In July of 2009, the Matawa Chiefs in Assembly passed a resolution supporting the development of a Matawa Learning Centre.

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