

## Mohawk program helps students transition from school to the workforce

'It gives us an opportunity to have someone in an important job while they're gaining experience'

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Jen Deer (right) and Raven Beauvais both graduated from a secretarial studies program and had the opportunity to apply their newfound skills at the First Nations Regional Adult Education Centre. (Jessica Deer/CBC)

Finding a job after graduation can be a daunting task for many students, which is why one First Nations community is helping make it a little easier.

Tewatohnni'saktha, an economic development commission in the Kanien'kehá:ka community of Kahnawake, started Transitions in April 2016 with the goal to offer vocational and post-secondary graduates the opportunity to gain valuable work experience, and maybe even a full-time position in their respective fields of study.

"We noticed a trend where we put students through vocational training programs and they were coming back to us a few months after completing their programs, explaining that they were having some challenges with finding full-time employment," said Kara Paul, career programming co-ordinator.

The program allows recent grads a six-month work experience with the employer of their choice. The benefit for the employer, said Paul, is the subsidized minimum wage salary.

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She regularly checks in on both the participants and employers for additional support services — addressing barriers such as transportation or child care needs.

"I really sit down with the students to do case management to identify those barriers and really try to rectify them so they can be successful," said Paul.

"I think it's quite unique because I don't think that there are many student placement programs where the organization is subsidizing the placement of students, especially graduates."

Thirty-four students have had work placements through the program since 2016.

## Putting new skills to work

For Diane Labelle, the director of the First Nations Regional Adult Education Centre's (FNRAEC) Kahnawake campus, the program is one of a kind in her history working with Quebec's First Nations Adult Education School Council.

"I've not heard of it elsewhere," she said. "I'd like to see it in all other communities because it's beneficial for our trainees to actually gain a job within the community."

The centre has had three employees through the program, including 35-year-old Jen Deer who was hired as a full-time administrative assistant following her six-month contract.

"It gives us an opportunity to have someone in an important job while they're gaining experience, also get a chance to see how they're working with the possibility that we might be able to take them on full-time afterwards," said Labelle.

"You also get a chance to sort of help them fit or mould into the job, which was the case for Jen."



Diane Labelle, the director of the First Nations Regional Adult Education Centre, said the transitions program has been helpful to a new and growing organisation like themselves. (Jessica Deer/CBC)

Deer, a mother of four, said the program helped her find stable work to help support her growing family, and apply skills she learned in secretarial studies at a vocational institution.

"I like that this program leads to an opportunity to get a job because interviews and searching for a job on your own — it's a challenge," said Deer. "This gives us an opportunity to actually prove who we are and what we can do."

Raven Beauvais, 22, is another recent graduate working at the centre. She's nearing the end of her contract in the school's administrative department. Although she won't be offered a position, she said the experience has been worthwhile as she prepares to apply for other jobs.

"It has helped a lot," said Beauvais. "I have learned a lot of new tricks and work ethics. It has really helped me with time management."

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