



For Immediate Release — Wednesday, December 18, 2019

New partnership to tackle education barriers for Indigenous youth and support economic opportunities

A unique and innovative partnership between the Blackfoot Confederacy, the University of Lethbridge and the Mastercard Foundation will support and enable Indigenous youth to achieve their goals and become leaders in their communities.

This transformational initiative will create new opportunities for Indigenous, primarily Blackfoot, youth to access education, and the needed supports to be successful resulting in employment, economic inclusion and economic development opportunities within their communities.

This initiative will also support the U of L in deepening its commitment to reconciliation, providing an inclusive campus environment, and working in partnership with the Blackfoot Confederacy.



The Mastercard Foundation is investing \$15 million over the next five years to improve transitions to post-secondary and increase student success, increase work integrated learning opportunities (co-op placements for example) and entrepreneurship supports, and create partnerships and programs that lead to employment opportunities for Blackfoot youth, as well as supporting Blackfoot Nations in realizing their economic development aspirations.

“This partnership joins our EleV initiative and builds on existing strong partnerships between the University of Lethbridge and the Blackfoot Nations. Our work together will support new pathways for Indigenous youth through education and onto employment, strengthening their communities and generating lasting change. The partnership underscores our commitment to support Indigenous youth and communities leading innovation reflective of their values and aspirations,” says Jennifer Brennan, head, Canada Programs at Mastercard Foundation.

Beginning in Fall 2020, the program will launch new initiatives for children and youth to see post-secondary education as a real possibility for them by delivering programs in

Blackfoot communities, as well as creating opportunities for students to participate in activities at the University. In addition, the Indigenous Student Success Program at the University will receive funding to enable an additional 30 Blackfoot and Indigenous students to attend the U of L.

“Indigenous students face significant barriers in accessing post-secondary education, including transportation, housing and childcare, among others,” says Dr. Leroy Little Bear, Distinguished Niitsitapi Scholar and advisor to President Mike Mahon. “This partnership will empower Indigenous youth by removing these kinds of barriers, creating new educational pathways and growing the supports needed by Indigenous students to be successful in their post-secondary studies. In turn, this will enhance employment and economic inclusion and drive economic development opportunities in our Blackfoot communities.”

For recent U of L graduate Sarah Russell (BFA '19), the holistic approach of the EleV program creates a pathway for success.

“Our youth need to know from when they begin their education that there is a place for them here at the University,” she says. “The earlier they are exposed to the opportunities a post-secondary education provides, the greater the chance they will set that as an achievable goal. If this program can do that, our communities will prosper as a result.”

Blackfoot Nations and the U of L will work collaboratively to ensure the program is structured to meet the unique needs of Blackfoot youth and communities. Relationships will be at the heart of the project, and its activities will be focused on the Blackfoot values of kindness, respect, honesty and strength. The Mastercard Foundation’s values of humility, listening, co-creation and impact will further guide the design of program activities.

“We are excited about this partnership and look forward in working collectively with the MasterCard Foundation and the University of Lethbridge to build programs that benefit our youth and communities,” says Stanley Grier, Chief of the Piikani Nation. “We look to our Blackfoot youth to be our future leaders and this program will be instrumental for their journey.”

Funding from the program will also be directed toward enhancing Indigenous student services with the hiring of a program director as well as a number of support roles. These positions include both education and economic development navigators in each of the Blackfoot communities, mental health support, instructors and program development and funding to increase Elder support, among others. As the program continues through future years, funds will be allocated to support access to post-secondary education, student success and financial supports, education and training

aligned with Blackfoot community needs, employment and economic development opportunities, work integrated learning and more.

“At every turn, we will focus our attention on what the needs of the individual communities are and, through a collaborative approach, create partnerships and programs that lead to employability and employment opportunities for Blackfoot youth, as well as economic development initiatives for Blackfoot communities,” says Mahon. “We will only achieve success by involving all of our partners and truly understanding the challenges they face.”

<https://www.ulethbridge.ca/first-nations-metis-inuit/elev>

To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/new-partnership-tackle-education-barriers-indigenous-youth-and-support-economic#.Xfpvhut7l0A>

-- 30 --

Contact:

Trevor Kenney, News & Information Manager
403-329-2710
403-360-7639 (cell)
trevor.kenney@uleth.ca
@ULethbridgeNews