

Students Gain Skilled Trades Experience with Kahkewistahaw First Nation Tiny Home Project



Charles Buffalocalf, Grade 11 student at Chief Kahkewistahaw Community School, sets down his tools to take a short break from working on a tiny home build on Kahkewistahaw First Nation. "This is my first time working in [the skilled trades]. I enjoy it," he says. Buffalocalf adds that he joined the project to gain experience and get a sense of what working in construction is like.

Buffalocalf is one of nine students who participated in building the tiny home. Led by Journeyperson Carpenter Dwayne Unick from Bald Eagle Construction, the students gained hands-on skilled trades experience by learning to pour concrete, frame walls and lay flooring. Construction on the tiny home began in October 2022 and finished mid-March 2023.

For Unick, the most rewarding part of working with the students is seeing them become more confident in themselves as the build progressed. "They take more initiative. If I say 'go and do this,' they go and do it. They're not just sitting back, too timid to do anything," says Unick.

The tiny home project on Kahkewistahaw First Nation is part of the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission's (SATCC) Indigenous Apprenticeship Initiative (IAI) program. IAI funds initiatives that supports Indigenous peoples interested in pursuing a career in the skilled trades. Each year, the SATCC accepts proposals for a variety of projects with Indigenous partners, including apprenticeship programs, mentoring projects, career exploration and other opportunities.

In addition to the tiny home project on Kahkewistahaw First Nation, other initiatives this year included an Automotive Service Technician program with Cote First Nation, a Try-A-Trade program with Pasqua First Nation, and a Residential Housing Maintenance Worker program in conjunction with the Métis Urban Housing Association of Saskatchewan.

On March 2, 2023, the Government of Saskatchewan announced one-time additional funding of \$500,000 for the IAI program. This will allow the SATCC to fund existing proposals that were received last spring.

"We're excited for the opportunities this additional funding can bring," says SATCC Director of Innovation and Inclusion Chris Stubbs. "We can reach more Indigenous communities and provide more initiatives for Indigenous peoples, which will support their pursuit of future careers in the skilled trades."

For the tiny home build project, Kahkewistahaw First Nation, along with Yorkton Tribal Council, partnered with Parkland College and Southeast College to coordinate multiple aspects of the build.

Before construction on the tiny home began, the students spent two weeks in the classroom learning essential skills, such as trades math and workplace employability skills, and earning safety certifications, such as first-aid and WHMIS, at Parkland College. Ben Swanson, Coordinator of Community and Employment Programs with Parkland College, says the team at Parkland helps provide the tools for the students to succeed.

“We took the students to Yorkton to [purchase tools and clothing] and got them kitted up so they were able to work outside and in a construction setting,” says Swanson. In addition to learning trades skills on the job site, he adds that the classroom essential skills training is also an important component. “It’s to help people have an advantage getting into the industry. If you have two weeks of training on responsibility, time management, and accountability, you’re going to have an edge up on everyone else applying to the same role.”

Unick enjoyed working on this tiny home project with the students and hopes to see more projects like it in the future. “The community itself, the band, and everybody around here has been fantastic. I cannot express enough how much support they have for this project. They’re excited to see the final project, that’s for sure,” he says.