

INDIGENOUS LEARNERS REPORT ONLINE PROGRAMS AND COURSES IMPROVE THEIR JOB PROSPECTS

A SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT OF CONTACT NORTH | CONTACT NORD'S SERVICES ON INDIGENOUS LEARNERS IN ONTARIO

During the period May - June 2019, 496 Indigenous learners, who used Contact North | Contact Nord's services to register in online programs and courses during the 2017-2018 academic year, were asked to participate in a survey to capture their experience and the impact of using Contact North | Contact Nord's services. A select group of the respondents participated in focus groups, conducted as online "chat" sessions. For most of the data that follows, sample size is 102 (20% of those invited to participate).

A growing number of Indigenous learners are enrolling in online learning programs and courses, and we need to better understand their experience of this form of learning and the outcomes of their enrollment. As part of our outcomes-focused research, we explore the experience of helping Indigenous learners search for and identify appropriate online programs or courses to meet their education and training needs, the assistance they require, and the challenges of being an Indigenous online learner (access to technology, technology skills, lack of finances, family obligations, reconciliation of the culture of learning online with Indigenous ways of knowing). We also focus on the success and failures of Indigenous online learners: what works for them, what is problematic, what motivates them, and how we can better support them.

As part of our mandate to help underserved Ontarians in small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities, we currently generate and support 4,555 student registrations annually in 27 Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Learners report online programs and courses helped them get a job, get a better job with their current employer and be more confident in their knowledge and skills.

88% of Indigenous learners, in survey conducted by Forum Research, report the use of Contact North | Contact Nord's services to complete their online programs and courses helped them achieve their goals.

Indigenous learners reported five primary reasons for registering in online programs and courses:

1. Create a better life for their family.
2. Be a good role model for their children.
3. Feel a sense of pride in having completed a certificate, diploma or degree.
4. Gain from learning / education to allow them to help their community.
5. Make a career change and/or better compete for the limited jobs available in their community are the five primary reasons cited by Indigenous learners for registering in online programs and courses.

Did the Indigenous online learners achieve their goals?

That's one of the questions answered in a survey conducted by Forum Research for Contact North | Contact Nord of Indigenous online learners using its services. The learners indicate:

- They got a job – for some, this was their first job in their chosen field of study, while others moved to a job they found more desirable.
- They are now more confident in their knowledge and skills.
- They could balance their commitment to education with the need to support and care for their family.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Indigenous online learners registered and completed a high number of courses

- 21% registered in 7 to 10 courses, suggesting they are pursuing a formal credential.
- 55% registered in 1 to 3 courses and 24% in 4 to 6 courses.
- 29% completed 1 to 3 courses, 15% completed 4 to 6 courses,
- 18% completed 7 to 10 courses and for 23% their courses are ongoing.
- Only 16% did not complete the courses they registered in.

Over one quarter of learners responding did not complete their program of study due to family issues (28%), with 12% reporting personal reasons (finance, health) and 14% suggesting that program difficulty prevented them from completing.

2. Time issues, family responsibilities, distance to an educational provider and finance are the four primary challenges

Respondents report the following four primary challenges to continuing their education:

- Time issues (33%)
- Family responsibilities (31%)
- Distance to their educational provider and travel times and costs (29%)
- Financial issues (18%)

The challenges varied by type of institution. For those enrolled in secondary education programs, time was the biggest challenge (36%) as it was for university students (55%). For learners enrolled in Indigenous institutes or colleges, family responsibilities (43% and 33% respectively) were dominant.

For those learners no longer registered in courses, those attending an Indigenous institute were less likely to enrol than those pursuing secondary education (21% compared to 64%).

Many of those who did not register in additional courses say they met their goals (36%), while 14% indicate time prevented them from additional study, 7% indicate financing their studies was a challenge and 8% report their ability to study and motivation as barriers.

3. Better life for their family, a sense of pride in completion of their study amongst the five primary goals for registering in online programs and courses

- To help create a better life for their family
- To be a good role model for their children
- To feel a sense of pride in having completed a certificate, diploma or degree
- To gain from learning / education to allow them to help their community
- To help them make a career change and/or better compete for the limited jobs available in their community (for some, this means having a career they can be more passionate about and some want to start their own business)

4. The majority of learners completed a high school diploma or equivalent, a college certificate or diploma, and apprenticeship certificate or a bachelor's degree

- 42% have a college, CGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma
- 37% have a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest qualification
- 6% have an apprenticeship certificate or diploma
- 3% have a bachelor's degree

5. Contact North | Contact Nord's services is a key factor in the success of the Indigenous online learners

The learners cite the following benefits of using Contact North | Contact Nord's services:

- Stay local and care for their children (without needing to pay for childcare) and family
- Save money because they do not need to travel
- Access online courses from a wide variety of institutions – allowing them to take courses of interest and, in some instances, needed fewer prerequisites
- Continue working while taking courses

6. 92% Satisfied with Contact North | Contact Nord Services

For each of the ten Contact North | Contact Nord services the learners rated, more than 92% rated them excellent, very good or good.

- 94% were satisfied with their experience of Contact North | Contact Nord, with 63% “very satisfied”
- 93% would recommend their colleagues, friends or family use Contact North | Contact Nord's services
- 72% completed their education because the courses were available online
- For each of the ten Contact North | Contact Nord services they were asked to rate, more than 92% rated them excellent, very good or good

7. The majority of the Indigenous online learners surveyed are employed or self-employed

- 43% employed full-time
- 23% employed part-time
- 2% self-employed
- 24% unemployed

8. The majority of Indigenous learners using Contact North | Contact Nord's services are female (82%).

9. The demographics of participating learners reflect the demographics of the adult learner student body:

- 25% between 18 and 24
- 33% between 25 and 34
- 15% between 35 and 44
- 25% between 45 and 64