



Government of Yukon

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NEWSrelease

FOR RELEASE #10-201
November 3, 2010

First Nations Language Proficiency program celebrates its first graduates

WHITEHORSE – Eight graduates recently celebrated their graduation from the First Nations Language Proficiency Program, delivered in partnership by the Department of Education and Simon Fraser University (SFU).

"The Department of Education is committed to supporting First Nations language programming in our public schools," Education Minister Patrick Rouble said. "First Nations Language Proficiency Programs are important to ensure we have educators with the language proficiency required to be able to teach our students."

Two learners, Colleen Joe-Titus (Southern Tutchone) and Sharon Shadow (Southern Tutchone), received post-baccalaureate diplomas in Arts and Sciences. Six learners, Nancy Sterriah (Kaska), Georgina Stone (Southern Tutchone), Connie Jules (Tlingit), Bess Cooley, (Tlingit), Kathy Magun (Kaska), and Melissa Hawkins (Han), received Certificates in First Nations Language Proficiency.

"SFU is very proud of its long-standing history of engagement, collaboration, and partnership with First Nations peoples and communities," Marianne Ignace, an associate professor of Anthropology and First Nations Studies said. "SFU is committed to working with First Nations communities to enable their members to learn and re-learn their languages, most of which are in a precarious state. Through a new Centre for First Nations Languages, in partnership with communities, we hope to develop collaborative research that will advance First Nations language learning and teaching."

The programs are delivered remotely in Whitehorse and Yukon communities through a combination of coursework and master-apprentice immersion complemented by fluent speaking mentors in the communities. Emma Sam (Tlingit), Josephine Acklack (Kaska), Mabel Henry (Han), Bess Cooley (Tlingit), Lorraine Allen (Southern Tutchone), and Hazel Bunbury (Southern Tutchone) served as student mentors.

"I commend the learners and the mentors for their dedication and commitment to keeping our First Nations languages and cultures alive," Rouble added. "Their efforts will benefit future generations."

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See backgrounder below.

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First Nations Language Proficiency Program Celebrates its First Graduates

Graduates and Mentors

Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Arts

Graduates:	Mentors:
Colleen Joe-Titus	Lorraine Allen and Hazel Bunbury - Southern Tutchone
Sharon Shadow	Lorraine Allen and Hazel Bunbury - Southern Tutchone

Certificate in First Nations Language Proficiency

Graduates:	Mentors:
Bess Cooley	Emma Sam - Tlingit
Nancy Sterriah	Josephine Acklack - Kaska
Georgina Stone	Lorraine Allen and Hazel Bunbury - Southern Tutchone
Connie Jules	Bess Cooley - Tlingit
Kathy Magun	Josephine Acklack - Kaska
Melissa Hawkins	Mabel Henry - Hän

What are the graduates doing now?

- Colleen Joe-Titus: FH Collins language teacher, seconded to Department of Education for the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' bicultural schools program
- Sharon Shadow: Department of Education employee - cultural inclusion consultant
- Bess Cooley: Recently retired Tlingit language teacher from Teslin School
- Nancy Sterriah: First Nation language teacher at Ross River School
- Georgina Stone: Southern Tutchone language teacher at Whitehorse Elementary School
- Connie Jules: Former Tlingit language trainee at Teslin School, currently working for the Tlingit Tribal Council
- Kathy Magun: First Nation language trainee at Johnson Elementary School in Watson Lake
- Melissa Hawkins: Completing a professional year for a teaching degree at SFU