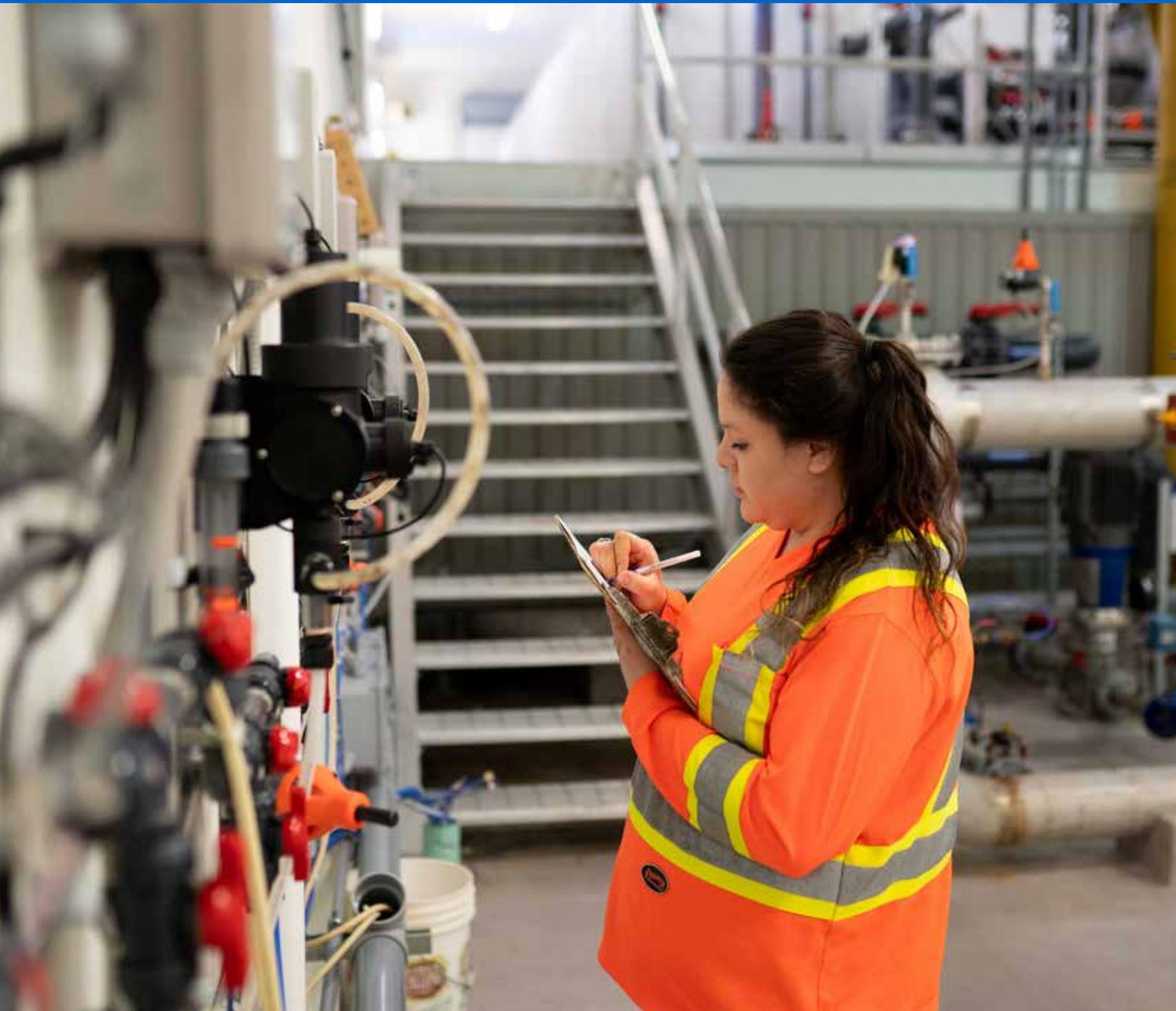


**W A T E R  
F I R S T**

# **INTERNSHIP PROGRAM DONOR UPDATE**

**SPRING 2019**

**NEXT GENERATION OF WATER PROFESSIONALS**



## PILOT SUCCESS

I can honestly say that the pilot of the Water First Internship Program completely blew expectations out of the water among all of the partners.

The success of the Internship Program comes down to meaningful collaboration: taking the time to learn, listen and weave community priorities together with western water science training. Along with hands-on technical training experience for the interns - in their local water plants, in-classrooms, and out on the land up to their knees in water - interns were also engaged by local Elders and reconnected with proud water traditions. Throughout the Internship Program we have created critical partnerships with local and regional Indigenous groups, communities and individuals, working

**Within six weeks of the interns graduating, 90% were employed or pursuing further education in the environmental field.**

together to tackle challenges. The results show this success.

Not only are the interns already giving back to their communities in a very tangible way — applying their skills to help provide

clean drinking water — but they're also committed to supporting future interns as trainers themselves. The

interns recognize what a powerful experience they had and they want to help the next group of interns succeed.

We are also proud of the gender balance achieved: in an almost exclusively male dominated field, 40% of the interns recruited and retained were female.

I want to thank you. Your financial support helped provide a life-changing experience to 10 interns; is helping to deliver clean drinking water to 7 First Nations communities for a generation; and has provided increased water skills at the community level. Without your support this wouldn't have been possible.

I invite you to read more about our interns, their successes, and the future of the Water First Internship program. And I hope you'll take pride in the important role you've played in addressing a long-standing problem in Canada: the lack of clean drinking water in many First Nations communities.

Sincerely,



John Millar  
Executive Director and Founder

*The Honourable Patricia A. Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development & Labour, speaking with Cassidy Beaudin, program intern, and John Millar, Executive Director of Water First, during a tour of the M'Chigeeng Water Treatment Plant.*



# GRADUATION

## HONOURING OUR GRADUATES

On a sunny day at the end of August 2018, we celebrated the 10 interns who successfully completed the inaugural Water First Internship Program. The graduation ceremony, held by the seven First Nations communities on Manitoulin Island, began with a prayer and smudge by Alma Jean, an Elder from M’Chigeeng First Nation.

The feeling of pride and accomplishment was intense – by the interns, their families, local community members and leadership – all of whom gathered to recognize and proudly celebrate the interns’ achievements.

“These young women and men have shown incredible passion and commitment to building sustainable water systems in our communities, and today we honour that passion and commitment,” shared Kevin Debassige, representing the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnising (UCCMM).

Each of the interns were presented with an eagle feather by Elder Joe Jones from Garden River First Nation. Receiving an eagle feather is a very significant honour, and symbolizes the interns’ accomplishments and responsibilities to their communities.

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The pilot Water First Internship was developed in collaboration with the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnising (UCCMM), Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory and the Union of Ontario Indians, and was delivered in seven First Nation communities on Manitoulin Island.



*The interns surround the High Eagle Singers, traditional powwow musicians, during their graduation ceremony on August 30th, 2018.*

Water First acknowledges the significant contributions to the program by our partners, our First Nations Advisory Council and the many community members, Elders and experts involved.

Water First also acknowledges generous contributions from the Government of Canada and our donors, who have invested in the Water First Internship to improve access to clean drinking water in First Nations communities.



## THE PROGRAM

The Internship Program is an elegant solution to what has been a long-standing challenge: access to clean drinking water. In many communities, the culprit is the shortage of certified people to work in water treatment plants. Water First's Internship Program addresses this by training primarily young, local Indigenous adults to become certified water treatment plant operators and work in the environmental water field. During the 15 month paid internship opportunity, participants receive customized skills training and tutoring to obtain certifications in drinking water treatment and environmental water quality monitoring.

The ten 2018 Water First Internship graduates completed the program with many accomplishments and are already giving back to their communities:

- Eight are working locally in water treatment plants or environmental roles;
- One intern is still looking for employment in the water field; and
- One intern has gone back to college to pursue further training in the environmental water field.

Collectively, they have:

- Ten Entry Level (Operator) course completions;
- Eight Water Quality Analyst Certifications;
- Eight Operator-in-Training Certifications;
- Five Source Water Protection Plan Training completions; and
- Over 1,800 hours individually of hands-on experience in their local water treatment plants.

Many of the interns have continued to pursue certifications after completing the program as well. Moreover, in an almost exclusively male-dominated field, 40% of the graduating Water First Interns were women. In addition, 70% of the interns were youth under the age of 30.

At the end of the program, interns came away with strong water quality knowledge they now apply in their communities, were proud of the confidence they acquired in field skills, and were surprised and pleased to report they gained broader professional skills such as public speaking and office software competencies. They also spoke of their



### CHELSEA ANTOINE DEBASSIGE Zhiibaahaasing First Nation

When Chelsea Antoine Debassige first heard about the Water First Internship and the training it provides, she thought, "What on earth is a water quality analyst?"

The Water First Internship has given Chelsea a chance to work in her home community (the most remote on Manitoulin Island). Chelsea currently works full time conducting water quality testing, both environmentally and at the water treatment plant, at Zhiibaahaasing First Nation. For that reason, she believes the Water First Internship model will transfer well to other First Nations communities, especially those even more remote than Zhiibaahaasing.

increased cultural connection with the land, water and traditions. “I have noticed I talk a lot [about] water now and I like to teach others on how important water is, and how we treat it and just the qualities of it,” shared one Intern.

The interns have become a network of support for each other, and role models to other young people in First Nations’ communities. And with their new skills, they can deliver safe, clean drinking water for their communities for generations to come. They are an inspiring part of the solution to an issue faced by far too many First Nations communities.

## NEXT GENERATION WATER KEEPERS

This is just the beginning. As our 10 Interns transition into the water science field, they will continue to stay engaged and provide support to future cohorts of interns through the Water First Alumni Network. This group meets monthly to discuss their careers, provide feedback to improve the program for future interns, and identify further professional development opportunities. Ultimately, they will act as mentors to the next generation of interns.

The Water First Internship Program has been identified as a valuable training initiative in other communities focused on removing and reducing Boil Water Advisories and developing further water and wastewater operational capacity locally.

With the need to increase the number of fully trained water treatment operators, to prepare for the projected retirement of many current Operators in the next five years, and to support more gender diversity in the field,

### ERIC VAUTOUR Sheguiandah First Nation



A young man with an activist’s heart, Eric Vautour has been involved with water and environmental issues since high school.

Now a graduate from the Water First program, Eric is working as the Environmental Technician / Operator-In-Training in his home community. He splits his time between the water plant and working on environmental projects like his community’s source water protection plan.

Eric explains, “This internship has taught me more about the situation of clean water in our province. I didn’t know how many First Nations communities were without clean water. I really want to change that in the next few years.”

the internship program has the opportunity to meaningfully shift the challenges of access to clean drinking water in many communities. Water First’s Internship Program, in collaboration with First Nations communities, is an effective solution, offering meaningful change to what was previously seen as an intractable challenge.

Over the next five years, Water First will be scaling up the Internship Program to many more Tribal Councils and First Nations communities. And we will continue to improve and adapt the program to best serve Indigenous communities across Canada.



*Program interns Chris Wemigwans and Dallas Goodfellow collecting water samples from a lake on Manitoulin Island.*



**PAIGE MANITOWABI**  
**Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory**

Paige Manitowabi is excited to take what she’s learned as a Water First intern and combine it with her growing interest in traditional Anishinaabe ways. That mix of knowledge, she thinks, could be the key to solving a lot of issues.

“It’s new knowledge — I’m learning a lot,” she said of the water quality training.

Paige is currently combining her passion for water and the environment as the environmental field technician at Wahnapiitae First Nation.



**CASSIDY BEAUDIN**  
**M’Chigeeng First Nation**

An avid outdoorsman, Cassidy Beaudin is keen to turn his Water First Internship experience into a job as a treatment plant operator.

“Water is the key to life, I’ve always known how important it is,” he said. “And I really like being part of making clean water.”

Cassidy obtained his Operator-In-Training certification for both water and wastewater treatment as well as his water quality analyst certification through the internship.

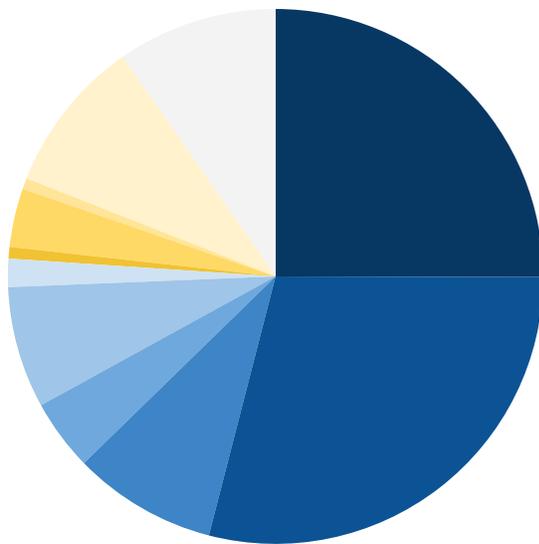
# FINANCIAL REPORT

Water First has demonstrated success in working with government to secure significant project funds. But there are some things institutional funding simply won't pay for, like the time it takes to get to know communities, establish relationships, build trust and develop ways of working together – in collaboration with communities. But with donations from people like you, we can take

the time needed to do the work of building relationships and trust.

Your investment was integral in the development of the Water First Internship. And continues to play a vital role in adapting the program to meet new and specific community needs.

## INTERNSHIP EXPENDITURES 2016-2019



- Paid internship salaries: 25%
- Staffing (Local First Nations community staff and Water First program staff & instructors) : 29%
- Expert / External Training Support: 9%
- Training Materials & Supplies: 4%
- Capital Expenditures (Field equipment, Intern laptops, vehicle, etc): 7%
- Professional Certification Costs (Course and exam fees, etc): 2%
- Intern Recruitment Costs (Adverstising, promotions in different)
- Intern Wrap-Around Supports (Childcare reimbursement): 4%
- First Nations Advisory Council: 1%
- Travel (Travel to communities, training, etc): 9%
- Administrative Costs: 10%

Total Internship Expenditures from 2016-2019 were \$1,830,000. These expenses reflect costs incurred by all program partners in developing and implementing the program.



Through education and training, the Water First program addresses a fundamental capacity issue related to water challenges in First Nations communities. With its focus on youth and young adults, Water First brings great opportunities to First Nations students while offering sustainability to future generations.

*IRVING LEBLANC, P. ENG.  
SPECIAL ADVISOR, ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS*

## ALUMNI UPDATE



Since graduating, the interns have been meeting regularly to improve the program and pave the way for future interns. Many have continued their training and are achieving further certifications. They proudly represent Water First at gatherings and conferences. And, most importantly, they are providing safe clean water for their communities.

Together we are all taking concrete steps towards our mission: collaboratively developing water solutions. Education, training and meaningful community partnerships set our work apart and are only possible because of donors like you who so passionately support our work.

**THANK YOU FOR BEING A PART OF A SOLUTION THAT IS WORKING – ONE PERSON AND ONE COMMUNITY AT A TIME.**

**STRONG COMMUNITIES. SAFE, CLEAN WATER.**

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