

W A T E R
F I R S T

DRINKING WATER INTERNSHIP

The water crisis in Indigenous communities

Sustainable access to safe, clean water in Indigenous communities continues to be an issue in Canada. Nobody understands the evolving challenges and needs more than the people who live there. Understanding what community members have to say about their priorities has been the catalyst for building lasting solutions.

Technology alone does not provide clean and reliable drinking water; the [people who run the systems are critical](#). Many Indigenous communities in Canada have identified the need for more young, qualified, and local personnel to support solving water issues, independently and for the long term. However, there is a lack of locally available opportunities for young adults to gain the relevant skills and experiences.

The Drinking Water Internship Program directly addresses this by supporting young Indigenous adults to become certified water treatment plant operators.

The Internship is welcomed by Indigenous communities that view training and skill development as a key part of the solution to drinking water challenges. This approach ensures sustainable access to safe drinking water in Indigenous communities for the long term.

To the best of our knowledge, Water First is the only charitable organization in Canada focused on addressing water challenges faced by Indigenous communities through education and training.





A solution to critical drinking water challenges

In 15 months, interns receive over 2,000 hours of training and experience in the classroom, at local water treatment facilities, and out on the land. The program is a paid internship that provides hands-on skills training and supports interns to obtain three provincially recognized certifications. The Internship also looks beyond technical skills, providing interns with support in areas such as resume writing, employment coaching and networking opportunities. Wrap-around supports are provided, like transportation and access to childcare services, to ensure the program works for a diverse set of participants.

35 interns from 25 Indigenous communities certified as Operators-in-Training

50,000 hours of hands-on training in water treatment plants to date

More than just a water science training program

Designed to engage young Indigenous adults, the program meets them where they are at and builds from there. Along with skills and experience, interns feel an increase in confidence, and a deeper connection to the land and their community. They flourish in being part of a program that leads to not only a job, but a career. They become part of a long term, sustainable solution - providing safe drinking water in their communities.

The learning doesn't stop when the program finishes. Many of our graduates have continued to pursue further certifications after completing the program. Through the Water First Alumni Network, they can remain engaged, build local networks and access opportunities for on-going professional development and peer support.

“Just knowing that there're going to be a lot more Indigenous water operators helping out at their own communities makes me proud to be part of the program.”

**Nathan Copenace, Water First Graduate
Washagamis Bay First Nation**



Indigenous skills training with partnership at heart

The Internship program was originally developed in partnership with the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnising, Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory, and the Anishinabek Nation, representing 39 First Nations in northern Ontario. Piloted in 2017-2018 with seven First Nations communities on Manitoulin Island, the program was incredibly successful and significantly exceeded expectations among the project partners. Following the success of the pilot, we have since launched two more Internships.



Internship 1

Manitoulin Island

2017-2018

Partners:

- United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnising
- Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory
- Anishinabek Nation
- 7 participating communities

Number of Graduates: 10



Internship 2

Kenora Area

2020-2021

Partners:

- Bimose Tribal Council
- 10 participating communities

Number of Graduates: 11



Internship 3

Georgian Bay Area

2021-2022

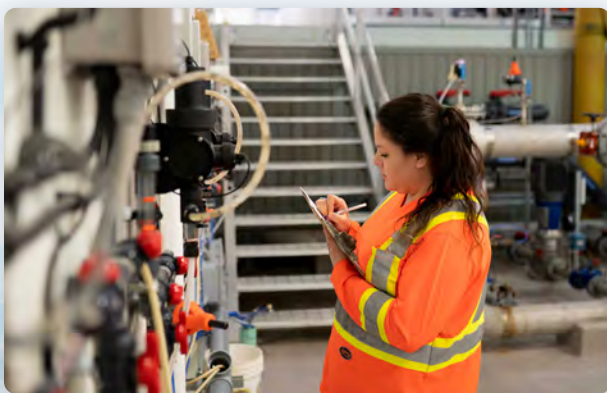
Partners:

- Waabnoong Bemjiwang Association of First Nations
- Gezhtoojig Employment & Training
- Anishinabek Nation
- 8 participating communities

Number of Interns: 15

The Internship represents a profound shift for the community and their members. As Chris Wemigwans, a graduate of the pilot internship expressed, “Being a part of the Water First Internship has lifted my spirit, in knowing that clean sustainable water for our future generations is possible.”

The results of your investment in this program can be seen in the individuals we train and support, and their increased capacity to provide critical services to communities. Graduates like Chris and Nathan, will create a lasting impact over the course of their careers and throughout their entire lives.



In June of 2021, the Internship Program was featured in the National Post. [In the article](#), Amy Waboose, a graduate of the pilot Internship, and Adam Peacock, a community partner with Bimose Tribal Council, share how building trust and meaningful relationships are helping our partners overcome critical water challenges.



It is clear that the water crisis in Indigenous communities requires effective and ambitious community-based solutions.

The Internship Program was recently featured in an article in the [Toronto Star](#). In the article, graduates Jamie Lee Parenteau from Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation and Nathan Copenace from Washagamis Bay First Nation share their experience of participating in the program. They shed light on what being part of the next generation of young adults providing clean drinking water to their communities mean to them, their families and their communities.



“The importance of the water treatment operator role is critical, and it’s often overlooked. It isn’t as glamorous as being a paramedic or police officer, but without it, communities would be in crisis just the same. They are truly heroes without capes.”

Jon Kocis, HUB Services Manager,
Bimose Tribal Council

Expanding to meet pressing community demand

We know that given the opportunity, knowledge and skills - young Indigenous adults will take the lead in providing safe, clean drinking water, sustainably, to their families and communities. They are committed. To their community. To the water.

Water First has been in discussions with Indigenous communities across the country interested in hosting the program. The next Drinking Water internship will be launched in 2022.

Join us. Be part of the solution. **Donate today.**



For more information, contact Ami Gopal, Director of Development at ami.gopal@waterfirst.ngo or 1-800-970-8467 ext. 106



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