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GDI (1980-2017)

Proud Past, Bright Future



# GDI Communicator

The GDI Communicator is an internal newsletter intended to increase communication between management and staff of the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research

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## Ms. Madiratta: SUNTEP Grads Making a Difference

By James Oloo

At Gabriel Dumont Institute, we are always very proud of our graduates. This month we caught up with Jessica Madiratta, a Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) grad and current Grade 3 teacher at Regina Public School Division. She graduated from SUNTEP-Regina in 2010 as Jessica Wesaquate. "My maiden name, Wesaquate, connects me to my home community of Piapot First Nation." Wesaquate means "sharp like a whistle; it represents intelligence." The daughter of Lorna Wesaquate and George Bladyko, Jessica is part Polish from her father's side. She grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Jessica heard about SUNTEP when she was in high school. As she reminisces, "It was Marilyn Totten, an amazing guidance counsellor at Robert Usher Collegiate, who told me about SUNTEP." Jessica noted that, until then, she did not know anybody who had gone through SUNTEP and was "very excited about the possibility to attend a program that specialized in Indigenous Education versus the mainstream university programs."

Jessica proudly noted that her mother and Auntie Leona both have university degrees and that this may

have influenced her own decision to pursue a university degree. She describes her mother as one of her "role models and biggest supporters." Jessica was the first in her generation to graduate with a university degree, and the first to have attended SUNTEP. Since then, her brother has graduated with a degree in Human Justice from the University of Regina.

Jessica pointed out that "It might sound cliché, but I wanted to be a teacher since I was a little girl. I remember playing 'school' with my brothers and the neighborhood kids." She continued, "In high school, the majority of my friends were Indigenous. Out of all of my Indigenous friends only one of them graduated with me." It bothered Jessica that too many Indigenous students were not completing high school. "As a teenager, I recognized that there was something wrong with that picture. I faced a lot of racism growing up. I never really learned anything about my culture in school and when I did it was very stereotypical." From her teenage years, Jessica had decided that she would what she can to change things for the better. "I wanted children, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous to know about the people who have been here since time immemorial. I only

had one Indigenous teacher in my kindergarten through grade 12 education. I wanted to become a teacher so children could see there are Indigenous educators too."

We asked Jessica about her personal philosophy of teaching. "My teaching philosophy is based on relationships," she said. "It is crucial you build strong relationships with your students based on mutual respect and trust and ensure that this sets the tone for a classroom community." She asserted that "Students feel safe when they have a relationship with their teacher. I believe in having high expectations for students. In my classroom we have regular talking circles so I am in touch with how students are feeling and if they have had a good sleep." Jessica continued, "I believe in a holistic education where students' needs are met in the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel. I regularly include Indigenous perspectives into my lesson planning."

Amidst media reports such as *Overwhelmed Canadian Teachers May Be Quitting in Droves* ([https://www.theepochtimes.com/overwhelmed-canadian-teachers-quitting-in-droves\\_1477305.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/overwhelmed-canadian-teachers-quitting-in-droves_1477305.html)), we asked Jessica about her experience as a teacher.

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Dumont Technical  
Institute

## Making Spirits Bright

By Lisa Lenkart



Practical Nursing Regina  
Photo by Darcie DeBruyne

Dumont Technical Institute students in Regina were recently treated to an afternoon of special events. With the stress of program demands and the holiday season looming, it was time for the students to be empowered, inspired and pleasantly surprised by an afternoon that brought many smiles and even a few tears.

The event took place on November 28 and began with representatives from the Regina branch of Dress for Success highlighting the services they provide for women going out into the workforce. Each year, Dress for Success supports Dumont Technical Institute students who are transitioning from graduation to employment with more than just interview and work attire. Dress for

Success seeks to empower women with the confidence they need to be successful in the workplace.

Mona Hill from IGNITE introduced the guest speaker for the afternoon, Chasity Benjoe. Chasity began her journey with IGNITE and acknowledged this organization and Dress for Success for their support in helping her to achieve her goals and to set new ones. Chasity is currently a student at the First Nations University of Canada. She shared a powerful and inspiring story about her journey. Embedded in her story were lessons about positive choices, learning to love who you are, and looking to the future with an unrelenting focus on what you want to accomplish. The interactive Q&A that followed

was indicative of the impact her story had on those present.

At the close of the event, Sparkle Ambassadors from Hillberg and Berk, a Saskatchewan-based jewellery company, surprised the students in Adult Basic Education, Office Administration, and Practical Nursing programs with two sets of their signature Sparkle Ball earrings; one pair to keep and one to give away. The message of their seasonal Sparkle campaign is to recognize the unique 'sparkle' in each student and to give them an opportunity to pass this message on to someone special in their lives. A symbolic and fitting close to an afternoon filled with affirmation and inspiration. 🌟

## Kimberley Laviolette: GDI Changed My Life

By James Oloo

Kimberley Laviolette is a medical administration assistant at a Saskatoon medical facility and a graduate of Dumont Technical Institute (DTI). We recently sat down with her to discuss her experience during and after her training at the Institute.

Kimberley started her medical office administration training at DTI about eight years ago, but left the program half way through due to family reasons. She then found herself moving from one minimum wage job to another.

With tears in her eyes, Kimberley described how three years ago she suffered serious physical injuries from a spousal abuse incident that was very traumatic. This, she noted, "strengthened my resolve to return to school, succeed, and

create a safe and secure life for my children."

She then contacted Dwayne Docken, then an employment counselor at the Gabriel Dumont Institute Training and Employment for advice. "DTI welcomed me back and said I could continue my studies in the medical administration assistant program. They gave me funding and Dwayne was my greatest cheerleader. He kept telling me that I had what it takes to complete the program and get a good job. At the time, life was hard as a single mother on welfare." But returning to school was not easy. "I struggled to regain confidence and to socialize with others. I was scared and didn't know anyone."

The DTI has long documented some of the common challenges experienced by students who

return to school as adults, including anxiety and balancing the demands of school, family, and employment. The Institute has strategies in place to help the students overcome such barriers.

Kimberley stated, "Balancing school and family was tough. I sacrificed a lot to finish school, but it was worth it. It was the best decision I ever made. GDI was my first stepping stone into life. It opened doors for me, changed my life, and I can today walk with confidence, holding my head up high. It has also enabled me to set appropriately high expectations for my children." Kimberley, who grew up in foster homes in Prince Albert, said "I know that high but realistic expectations are very important to raising successful children."

*Continued on Page 3*



Kimberley Laviolette and her children at Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatoon  
Photo by James Oloo



## Indigenous Teachers are Positive Role Models ... Continued from Page 1

Success Stories

Her response was reassuring: "My experiences as a teacher still match up with the reasons I wanted to become a teacher. I feel blessed to be an Indigenous woman in a teaching position. I work at a school with a high population of Indigenous students and I strive to be a positive role model." Jessica pointed out that "There is racism in Regina and when I teach my students I do so with a social justice lens. I want our Indigenous children to see how beautiful our cultures and Nations are and to have a strong sense of identity."

Jessica also discussed the importance of having Indigenous teachers in Saskatchewan schools. "Indigenous teachers not only come to the classroom with a special set of knowledge, but they are also great positive role models for students." She noted that "The media often portrays Indigenous people in negative, stereotypical ways and Indigenous teachers have the opportunity to disrupt those portrayals."

Jessica has fond memories from SUNTEP. "Some of my good friends to this day are my friends that I graduated SUNTEP with. I am so blessed to have these people in my support circle." Some of

the things she misses about SUNTEP are "monthly meals together, culture camps and a trip to Winnipeg to learn about your genealogy. SUNTEP prepared me to bring Indigenous perspectives, worldviews, and content into my teaching career. It also provided us with the opportunity to learn traditions such as Indigenous histories, jigging and Michif."

She talked about how her experience at SUNTEP continues to inform her practice today. "SUNTEP taught me the importance of building relationships. I continue to apply that lesson to build relationships in my own classroom. I now take practicum students into my classroom and I continue to be impressed with how the SUNTEP Regina staff prepares Indigenous educators for the classroom."

Jessica's influence goes beyond the school. "SUNTEP encouraged me to give back to my community," she stated. She serves as member of the board of the Albert Library Committee, North Central Regina, where she provides feedback to the library on Indigenous books and resources to order and the types of programs that would be of benefit to the community.

Jessica also co-teaches Métis dance with her colleague Marilyn Fazakas. They go out into the community and perform at events such as Treaty Days and National Aboriginal Day. "I am lucky to have learned these traditional dances and to share them with others," she said.

Jessica is optimistic about the future. "There are more opportunities for Indigenous students in the Saskatchewan school system today compared to when I was a young student. These include smudging protocols within schools, outcomes and indicators in the provincial curriculum that are inclusive of First Nations and Métis content, as well as field trip experiences for students to learn about Indigenous histories." Giving example of her school, Jessica lauded Elder-in-residence programs that "recognize the knowledge that our Elders have and are sharing with our children."

She stated that "a challenge for both Indigenous students and teachers is that we still remain a minority. Many of us come from generations of families that attended residential schools and continue to experience its effects. We are also the generation that has the opportunity to disrupt systemic racism and intergenerational trauma." 🌱



Jessica Madiratta, B.Ed, SUNTEP Regina Class of 2010, is a teacher at Regina Public School Division. Please see Page 1. Photo courtesy of J. W. Madiratta.

## GDI Changed My Life For the Better ... Continued from Page 2

"My education, career, and parenting will enable my children to aim higher."

Kimberley was motivated to complete her education by her family. "My children motivated me to stay in school. I wanted to show my children that no matter how hard life beats you down, you have to get back up."

She noted that her husband, friends and family were very encouraging.

Kimberley says it can be a tough world for women who are not economically empowered and are in abusive relationships. "If it were not for GDI I would still be depressed, anxious, and on welfare. However, today, I feel blessed,

I have a good job, I provide for my family and we are happy."

Kimberley turned to her teen son who accompanied her to GDI office and asked him what he thought about her story. His response was, "I am proud of you mom. I am motivated to finish high school and go to college just like you did." 🌱



Kimberley Laviolette and her sons. Please see Page 2. Photo by James Oloo.



## Making Spirits Sparkle

**SUNTEP Métis Studies Class Held in Winnipeg**

By Jed Huntley (with contributions by Brenna Pacholko, Russell Fayant, and Ashley Grimard)



Second year Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) students from Prince Albert and Regina went on the annual genealogical trip to the present day Red River settlement of Winnipeg, Manitoba in October 2017. It was the third year that students from the two SUNTEP Centres went on a research trip together as part of their Métis studies class. The four day, October 4 – 7, trip was full of information, culture and memories.

Both groups left their respective home base and rendezvoused at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, in time for the 7:00 pm guided tour. The staff provided us with an inspiring, passionate tour covering many highlights of the museum.

Day two was dedicated to archival research. The Regina crew began at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, while Prince Albert headed to the Saint Boniface Historical Society. The two groups met for lunch before swapping afternoon destinations. The research experience was very beneficial, as many students unearthed journals, pictures, memorable stories and ancestral ties.

With six hours of intense indoor research behind us, the evening consisted of visits to the two Riel statues – the statesman like statue at the legislative grounds and the initial “controversial” statue since moved to St. Boniface, complemented by an outing at the tranquil Forks. While travelling between the Riel statues, we learned of the

history and significance of the Forks. We then gathered back at the hotel for a debrief session to wrap up our day.

Day three started with each group headed off in slightly different directions with alternating destinations. The intent was to meet up for a late lunch at Neechie Commons, home to a unique Indigenous food and art cooperative. The destinations for the morning included the Manitoba Museum, Le Musée de Saint-Boniface and the Manitoba Metis Federation. At each stop, the students were treated to valuable history pertaining to the fur trade, the history of the Métis in Red River and an overview of our contemporary situation.

The afternoon consisted of whole group tours of Lower Fort Gary, the site of the Battle of Seven Oaks, St. Andrews Rectory and Church, Captain William Kennedy's House, Upper Fort Gary and Elzear Goulet Park. Russell Fayant (SUNTEP Regina Faculty) discussed the historical significance of the sites. The talks provided a concrete tie to the theory and history of Red River that is learned in the classroom.

On day four, both groups met up at Riel House National Historic Site, where we were treated to an informational talk by a SUNTEP Regina student, who passed on valuable historical and current information, acquired when she was stationed there as an interpreter. We left Riel House invigorated and ventured on to St. Norbert Church and Graveyard, to search for ancestors' gravestones. We then proceeded to the

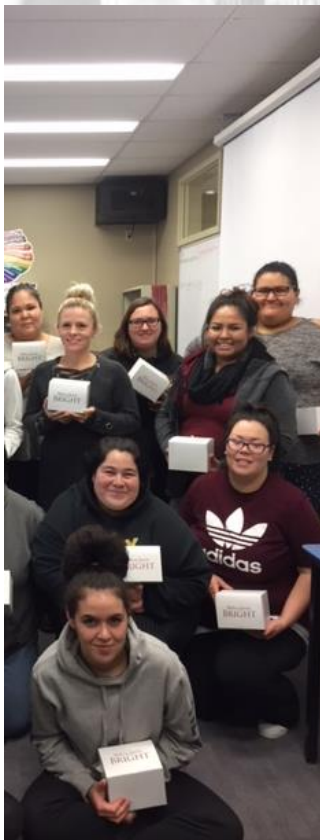
Provincial Heritage Park to learn of the aftermath of the 1869-70 Red River Resistance and to view some houses constructed in the Red River style.

The Farmers' Market provided us with many options for a quick lunch, before meeting our gracious hosts at Cuthbert Grant's Mill for a 1:00 tour. The staff and tour guides were hospitable, as always, and provided us with additional history of the Battle of Seven Oaks, the life of Cuthbert Grant and the construction and operation of Grant's Mill. Our final stop was Saint-Francois Xavier Church and graveyard and the White Horse Plains. We had one final communal debrief that highlighted each person's most notable memory and the benefits of the trip. Of significance, was the meeting of the two related yet unique centres and the sharing and potential networking opportunities this joint trip could provide, both as students and as future teachers.

Although there were a few minor hiccups along the way, the trip was a success. The weather was amazing, the comradery was that of distant relations, each place had its own special moments and the conversation on the drive home echoed the past couple of day's learnings. Below are a few brief yet poignant student thoughts:

“The trip was packed with valuable information that not only strengthened my pride and identity of being a Métis person, but gave me the knowledge and confidence I need as a teacher.”

*Continued on Page 5*



Office Administration students, Regina  
Please see story on Page 2  
Photos by Darcie DeBruyne



**SUNTEP Genealogical Trip** ... Continued from Page 4 **Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program**

“The Winnipeg Genealogical Research Trip stirred a new found appreciation for my Métis Identity, awakened my spirit and allowed me to create a respected and cherished connection to the history, land and place in which we travelled. I returned with a renewed outlook on my Métis roots.”

“The trip has awakened my love for history and made my heart excited for the future.”

“Researching my genealogy has helped to create space for conversations in my family which did not

happen before. My family is proud that I am learning this history.”

We extend special thanks to our Elders, Joe Welsh (Regina) and Vivian Meabry (Prince Albert) who took time away from their families to join us on this educational journey; and whose stories and valuable perspectives on the history presented, humbled even the tour guides. A big heartfelt thank you to staff and faculty Kim Kovacs (Regina), Brenna Pacholko (Regina) and Ashley Grimard (Prince Albert) for their invaluable help at the archives. Thank you to SUNTEP Regina for encouraging and

welcoming Prince Albert to join them on the trip; and to Russ Fayant for his eloquent informational talks that provided needed background information with a personalized Métis flavour. Also, a sincere thank you to GDI for seeing the value in experiential learning and for providing opportunities for the two centres to meet, network, share information on their respective programs, and to create and continue Métis ties – Maarsii. 🌐



SUNTEP Students from Regina and Saskatoon Together with faculty and Elders At the White Horse Monument, St. Francois Xavier, MB Please see Page 4. Photo by Jed Huntley

**Payroll Cutoff Calendar, January 2018**

By Carmala Thiessen and Veronica Verzonowski

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 New Year's Day Stat Holiday	2	3	4 Accounts Payable Cheque/EFT Run	5 Student Payday Cutoff @ 4:30 for Accounts Payable Invoices	6
7	8 Cutoff @ 4:30 for Jan 19 Student Payroll	9 Cutoff @ 4:30 for Timesheet & Payroll Revisions	10	11 Accounts Payable Cheque/EFT Run	12 Cutoff @ 4:30 for Accounts Payable Invoices	13
14	15 Staff Payday	16 Cutoff @ 3 pm for Stop Payments on Student Jan 19 Direct Deposits	17	18 Accounts Payable Cheque/EFT Run	19 Student Payday Cutoff @ 4:30 for Accounts Payable Invoices	20
21	22 Cutoff @ 4:30 for Feb 2 Student Payroll	23	24	25 A/P Cheque/EFT Run Cutoff @ 4:30 for Timesheets & Payroll Revisions for Jan 31 Payday	26 Cutoff @ 4:30 for Accounts Payable Invoices	27
28	29	30 Cutoff @ 3 pm for Stop Payments on Student Feb 2 Direct Deposits	31 Staff Payday			

Employee contracts due prior to payroll cutoff date.

MRTS due by the 15th of every month, and employee contracts are due prior to payroll cutoff date.

If received after the cutoff date, the employee will be paid on the following pay period.



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Back issues of this newsletter  
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[www.metismuseum.ca/browse/  
index.php/833](http://www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php/833)

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[https://gdins.org/student  
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#### GDI Mission:

*To promote the renewal and the development of Métis culture through research, materials development, collection and the distribution of those materials and the development and delivery of Métis-specific educational programs and services.*



**GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE**  
of Native Studies and Applied Research