

**Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch
Corporate Services
Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development**

**Evaluation of the DIAND Youth Strategy
Case Study of Onion Lake First Nations**

Appendix 4

96/26

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It has been just over a year since DIAND announced its Youth Strategy. As part of the initial program funding, the department is required to undertake an interim evaluation of the strategy's three programs: the Summer Student Career Placement Program, the Science and Technology Summer Camp Program, and the Cooperative Education Program. The evaluation, which includes a case study component, presents short term impacts and lessons learned to date.

Purpose of the Case Study

The case study provides an understanding of how the DIAND Youth Strategy programs were implemented at the regional and local levels. The purpose of the case study is to provide an overview of how the DIAND programs function in Saskatchewan First Nations, in particular the community of Onion Lake. The case study also identifies lessons learned and suggestions for program improvement that can be taken from the experience so far.

PRA worked with Aboriginal consultant Larry Morrissette who conducted the on-site visit of Onion Lake.

Methodology

The Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch (DAEB), the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), and a representative of Prairie Research Associates (PRA) discussed the evaluation study in March 1997 at a meeting of Saskatchewan Cooperative Education coordinators. The participating communities selected Onion Lake as a case study and the on-site visit occurred the week of April 21, 1997 during a coordinators' meeting.

During the on-site visit we interviewed the following representatives from Onion Lake:

- the Chief;
- the Cooperative Education coordinator;
- an employer;
- an elder; and
- a student who worked at the Onion Lake Learning Centre through a placement with the Summer Student Career Placement Program.

In addition, we also:

- interviewed two representatives from the FSIN, one respondent during the on-site visit to Onion Lake and the other on the telephone;

- had a group discussion with 10 participating site coordinators from throughout Saskatchewan which was chaired by the FSIN Area Coordinator;
- conducted two focus groups with 15 students from Onion Lake. One group consisted of grade 8 Science and Technology Camp students and the other comprised grade 9 students in the Cooperative Education Program; and
- reviewed documentation provided by DAEB and proposal reports prepared by Onion Lake.¹

Structure of the Report

Section 2 provides an overview of First Nations in Saskatchewan, the role of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and the Cooperative Education Program. Section 3 describes how the youth programs operate in the community of Onion Lake. Section 4 presents some short term impacts while Section 5 identifies suggestions for improvements. Section 6 discusses lessons learned and best practices. Section 7 presents concluding remarks.

¹ DAEB conducted a file review at the DIAND regional office and those results are provided in a separate report.

Overview of Saskatchewan First Nations

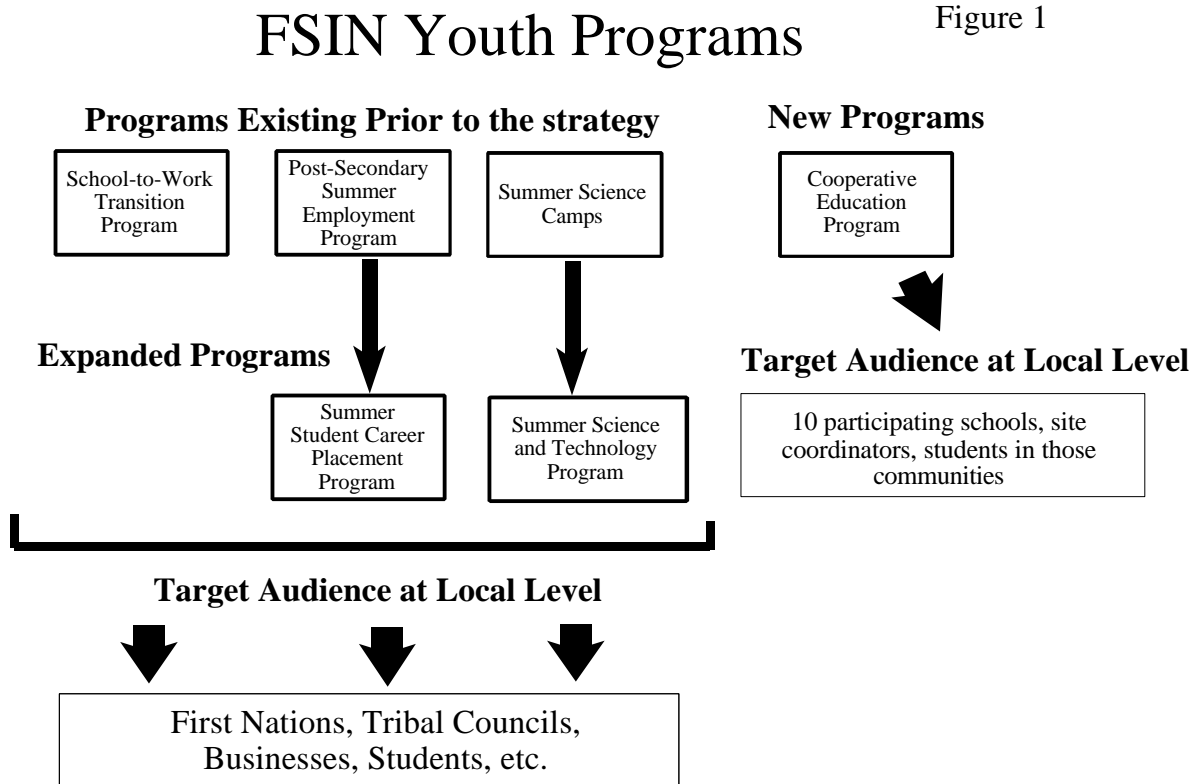
The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) is the umbrella political organization for treaty status Indians in Saskatchewan. As such, they are involved in sponsoring and supporting a range of initiatives for member communities. The FSIN plays a strong coordinating role in program development and implementation.

The FSIN manages the DIAND Youth programs and is responsible for professional development, administrative support, and the budget allocations. Local communities and schools are responsible for the actual program planning, within a framework, structure, and technical support supplied by FSIN.

Overview of Youth Programs

The FSIN expanded its existing programs after the DIAND Youth Strategy was announced. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the pre and post strategy programs.



With the new programs, the 1996-1997 program funding levels administered by the FSIN are:

- Summer Student Career Placement Program \$703,000
- Summer Science and Technology Program \$104,000
- Cooperative Education Program \$608,000
- Post Secondary Summer Employment \$275,000
- Summer Science Camp (discretionary pool) \$ 35,000

The new Summer Student Career Placement Program and the Post Secondary Summer Employment programs provide a total of \$978,000 for summer students. Funding for the Post Secondary Summer Employment Program comes from the Saskatchewan Region which previously funded the program.

Summer Student Career Placement Program

Role of the FSIN

The FSIN is responsible for the delivery and reporting of the program throughout the province. The role of the FSIN includes:

- preparing information booklets;
- processing applications;
- distributing information to schools, First Nation / Tribal Councils, governments, institutions, and employers participating in the program (i.e., mail out to 350-400 organizations);
- financial management of the program;
- database development on employers and student participants; and
- reporting to DIAND.

The FSIN has just recently hired a separate coordinator to work with the Director of Higher Education who oversees the program. The coordinator works with the 72 First Nations, Tribal Councils, and businesses in the province.

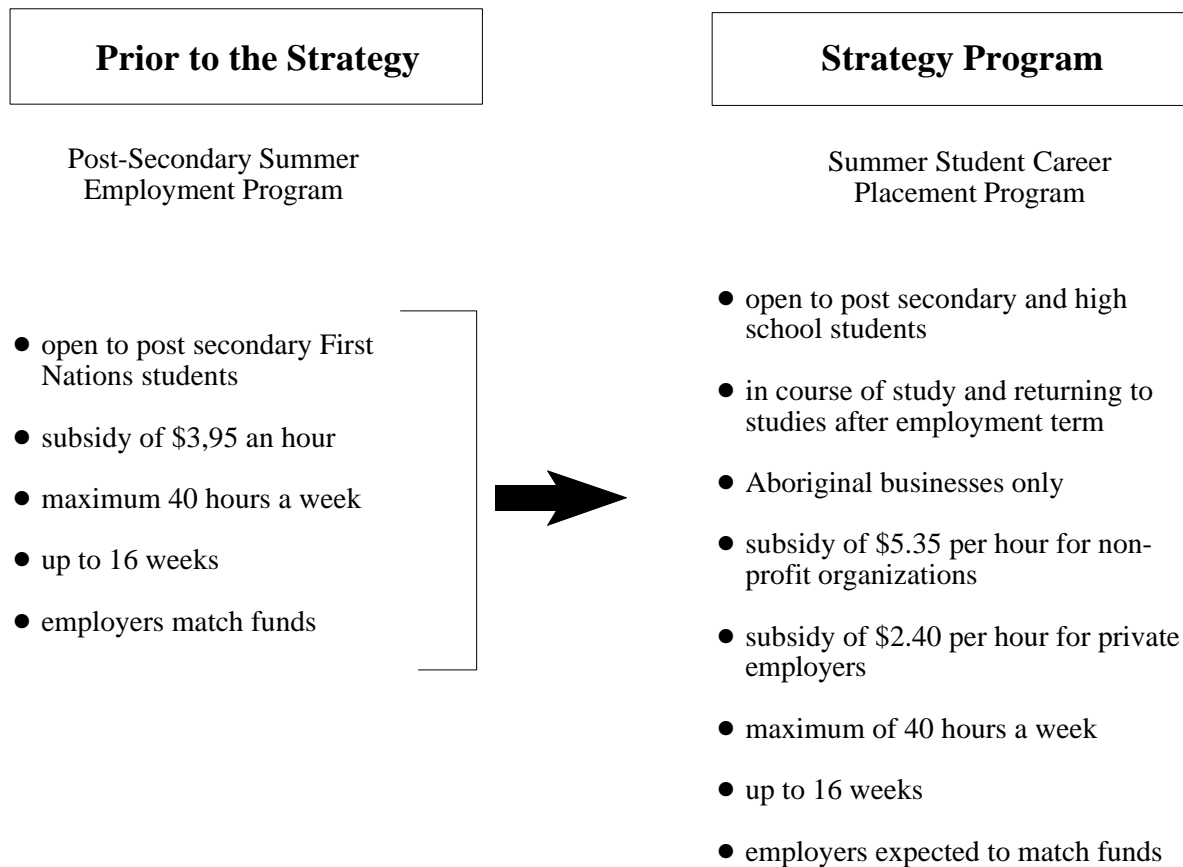
The FSIN is not actively involved in recruiting employers which occurs at the local level. One respondent noted that there is not a great need for the FSIN to be involved in recruitment as the program has been around since 1991 and employers are well aware of it. Furthermore, FSIN respondents state that there are more applications than available dollars which is an indicator that businesses are out there and willing to hire students.

How to the Program Works

In the past, the FSIN ran a summer employment program that subsidized First Nations and non-First Nations organizations that hired First Nations youth. The program was limited to post secondary students. Since the strategy, the program has been expanded to include high school students. Figure 2 provides details of the evolved program.

Figure 2

Evolution of FSIN Summer Student Programs



The FSIN reimburses employers once they submit a copy of their payroll. Employers are given a rebate based on the hours students worked. A respondent from the FSIN also stated that 10% of the program funding is set aside for FSIN institutions and First Nation businesses to hire students while 90% goes directly to First Nations who are allocated funds based on their applications and the number of eligible students in their communities. The respondent also stated that there is some sharing of funding amongst communities. For example, if a community cannot hire all the students it wants another community with less need may share its unused share of funds.

The FSIN data reveal that employers pay salaries between \$5.35 an hour and \$12.50 hour. On average, the program pays between 70% to 100% of students wages.

Table 1, provides some details of the program's progress to date.

Table 1

Progress to Date on the Summer Student Career Placement Program		
Applications		
Number of applications received	128	
Total number of positions under applications		602 (total requests)
Breakdown of Employers and Student Numbers	Applications Approved	Number of Positions Created
First Nations businesses	9	16
FSIN	16	19
Tribal/Grand Council/Agency	6	44
First Nation institutions (i.e., education, etc)		15
First Nations	<u>50</u>	<u>306</u>
	96	448
34 applications and 133 positions put on a waitlist.		
<i>Source: FSIN Saskatchewan Indian Education Commission briefing paper, February 6, 1997.</i>		

The FSIN considers the number of applications received an indicator of the need for the program, the interest in providing summer employment opportunities and the program's success. The FSIN states that the total funding required in order to fulfil all the applications would be \$1,356,632.

Science and Technology Summer Camp Program

The FSIN also manages the Science and Technology Summer Camp Program which is directed to middle year students. The FSIN has been involved with science camps for several years. The first camp was held during the summer of 1991 at the University of Saskatchewan, but demand grew and by the next summer it had created its own camp devoted solely to First Nations students. In 1993, the camps continued to evolve and the FSIN found agencies to co-sponsor the event to offset costs. In May 1996, the FSIN hired a program coordinator to develop curriculum for the camps and the program became mobile, travelling to school sites that requested a camp. The camps also offer professional development and training for school staff.

The camps begin at the end of September with advertisements to communities on a monthly basis. The camps can be booked for 1, 2 or 3 day presentations and offer the following themes:

- science fair pot pourie;
- ecosystems;
- chemistry;
- astronomy; and
- physics.

The program received \$104,000 from DIAND and \$10,992 from students who pay to attend the camps, as well as \$6,158 from sponsors such as Saskatchewan utilities companies.

Cooperative Education in Saskatchewan

The FSIN received \$608,000 from DIAND to implement the Cooperative Education Program which serves 4,811 eligible students in the province². The FSIN Office of Education coordinates the program with 10 on-site coordinators who oversee local programs.

Initial Development and Communication of the Program

The FSIN decided to focus its program on grade 9 students. The decision was influenced in part by the fact that the School-to-Work program (described later in this section) was already working with this age group.

Site coordinators reported that the Cooperative Education Program was initiated through a proposal to DIAND through the auspices of FSIN. Following proposal approval, each community was required to do program planning, coordinate with the area school, recruit local business resource lists, and select participants in conjunction with the schools. The coordinators reported using word of mouth, radio, school newsletters to parents, caregivers, students and band members to orientate students into the program.

The Role of the FSIN

The FSIN plays a leadership role in managing the Cooperative Education Program. The organization is responsible for providing the vision behind the program and communicating it to communities. The role of the FSIN coordinator includes:

- communicating with local education authorities;
- developing training materials for site coordinators and others in the schools such as teachers, principals, guidance counsellors and students;

² FSIN Cooperative Education Work Plan, May 1996.

- assisting site coordinator with the training of teachers;
- responding to government policies/questions and First Nations agencies;
- recruiting employers such as large corporations and banks;
- providing corporate employers with information about the program and ensure their training manuals or requirements are met; and
- coordinating and implementing the Cultural Camp for cooperative education students.

The FSIN also facilitates networking and information sharing among site coordinators through periodic conference calls.

The Role of the Site Coordinators

The Cooperative Education site coordinators are the “front line” workers who implement the program in each participating community. The role of the site coordinators includes:

- recruiting employers and community agencies to participate in the program;
- matching students with employers;
- providing technical assistance to students and teachers;
- training teachers to mentor students;
- working with apprenticeship agencies and colleges to provide students with opportunities in those fields;
- providing students with assistance in planning their careers;
- helping students access further training; and
- monitoring and evaluating the School-to-Work curriculum.

How The Program Works

The schools qualified for the program based on the number of students enrolled in school. The FSIN recommended that due to limited funds, only schools with at least 30 students would be considered for participation in the program.

The FSIN also required schools to meet other criteria, such as:

- proximity to a major centre allowing students diversity of opportunity;
- the school must offer courses at the grades 9 to 12 level;
- facilities, information, personnel and requisite resources must be available for adequate assessment of students’ interests and programming; and
- the school must have a list of a wide range of employers.

The school board also needed a resolution approved by the governing body in the community supporting the program.

The program is mandatory for all grade 9 students in the participating schools and students are paid 2-3 weeks practicum allowance for their placement.

Status of the Community Programs

An FSIN progress report dated February 3, 1997 reported that 280 grade 9 students had participated in the program during its first year.

Coordinators expressed strong support from the schools and business placements on and off-reserve. Table 2 (next page), provides an overview of the ten schools participating in the program.

The type of job placements in communities included both small and large businesses and band administration. Job placements generally involved:

- work preparation skills;
- workplace safety;
- resume writing;
- mock interviews;
- job shadowing; and
- career research.

Respondents in the group discussion generally felt that the program established important linkages between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members, including local small business owners. Parents were attracted to the programs, and consequently to the schools, as they became interested in the type of work their children were engaged in. The consensus of the coordinators was that there is a marked improvement in both attendance and attitude toward school. Participants in the group discussion suggested that the most effective barometer of success was to observe the behaviour of the youth which was not easy to transcribe in a written format.

Table 2

Overview Of Saskatchewan FSIN Coop Site Coordinator Programs								
School	First Nation	Program Start Date	# of Students	# of Coop Placements	Any Participants Quit? (Yes or No)	Comments or Reason for Quitting	On-Reserve Partners (Yes or No)	Off-Reserve Partners (Yes or No)
Eagleview Comprehensive School	Onion Lake	September 23, 1996	67	32	Yes	Relocation of family	Yes	No
Kinistin School	Kinistin	September 1996	18	12	No	Moved off reserve with parents	Yes	Yes
St. Philip's School	Keeseekoose	October 1996	12	50	No	Some have moved	Yes	Yes
Se-Se-Wa-Hum	Big River Band	October 1996	47	150	Yes	Transferred to other schools	Yes	Yes
Kawacatoose	Kawacatoose	September 1996	27	12	No	None during the program	Yes	Yes
Ahtahkakoop School	Ahtahkakoop	August 26, 1996	25	20	Yes	Relocation of family	Yes	Yes
Bernard Community	James Smith Cree Nation	September 6, 1996	32	24	Yes	Family problems and attendance problems	Yes	Yes
Chief Poundmaker School	Poundmaker Nation	August 28, 1996	15	10	No	None	Yes	Yes
Cowessess Community Education Centre	Cowessess	August 1996	12	12	Yes	Transferred to other schools	Yes	Yes
Chief Little Pine School	Little Pine	August 26, 1996	10	10	No	None	Yes	Yes

Cooperative Education Program Strengths and Weaknesses

The some of strengths and weaknesses listed below may also apply to other strategy programs.

Strengths

Respondents reported that the major strength of the program is that it is seen as a community and youth-driven initiative that provides concrete and immediate positive exposure to new experiences and learning activities by students.

Respondents believe the program increases students' self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.

The Cooperative Education Program is based on partnerships and collaborative education approach that involves Directors of Education, the community, coordinators, business and students.

Weaknesses

The major weakness identified was the need for greater funding and resources. Most respondents indicated that DIAND funding was the only source of money available for cooperative education.

Respondents at the FSIN expressed two concerns with resources levels.

A recent policy amendment to the Cooperative Education Program states that program costs should be directed to salaries, travel, insurance and transportation. The policy states that funds are not to be used to pay students' wages. The FSIN currently offers 3 weeks wages. There is a concern that without these resources, the incentive for students to actively participate in a mandatory program will be gone.

Respondents believe that funding to purchase workbooks and training materials is limited. One respondent stated that "*it is hard to do innovative stuff*". Also, as more people (teachers, guidance counsellors, principals, etc) become involved, training is needed to educate them about the Cooperative Education Program but there are no funds to do it.

Coordinators also expressed concern over the issue of insurance and worker's compensation coverage for students which is a barrier to getting job placements off-reserve. On-reserve, First Nations people are under federal jurisdiction and the band makes arrangements for insurance to cover employees against injury. However, off-reserve workers compensation is a provincial responsibility and First Nations people are not covered against injury. Coordinators state that the current agreement with DIAND on the Youth Strategy assumes the school system will insure students and does not include the extra cost of having a third party insurance requirement.

Program Guidelines

The majority of the site coordinators use the guidelines to develop a resource base of possible and potential employment placements. The general feeling was that the guidelines could be adapted to better reflect community needs and students' realities. Several coordinators recommended the guidelines include life skills and statements to address racism.

School-to-Work Program

The School-to-Work program is a 4 year funded project that focuses on curriculum related to various employment sectors and jobs. Figure 3 provides a summary of program modules.

The program is targeted to grade 9 students who learn about what is involved in performing a particular job. Skills are identified mainly through job shadowing. One example might be learning about what skills are required to be a cashier. Students also learn about careers open to them in different sectors. For example, in the field of fine arts exist jobs such as a journalist, lighting technician or actor.

There are currently 3 pilot projects, one in Regina focussing on urban needs and 2 on-reserve. A respondent from the FSIN indicated that program is still developing and it may take longer than 4 years as curriculum is constantly being adapted to fit First Nations needs.

Summary of School-to-Work Program Modules

Each module deals with para-professional job positions, training, background on the sectors, salaries, and required skills.

1. First Nations (i.e., historical and contemporary situation);
2. Education;
3. Health;
4. Business;
5. Government (i.e., justice agencies);
6. Industry and Manufacturing (i.e., First Nations, environmental manufacturing, etc);
7. Agriculture/Farming;
8. Natural Resources (i.e., oil);
9. Transportation (i.e., airlines);
10. Communication (i.e., newspapers, computers);
11. Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation;
12. Hospitality (i.e., restaurants, tourism);
13. Other Careers;
14. Review of Health and Safety Issues; and
15. Career Fair (invite representatives, students).

FIGURE 3

Provincial Partnerships

Respondents commented that partnerships exist in relation to all youth programs as programs must report to FSIN for support and direction, the Band Council and education authorities make decisions at the local level.

At the local level, coordinators reported little involvement with Human Resources Development (HRD) and that few resources exist or match what this program does. Respondents also reported being involved with Industry Canada through the SchoolNet Program. They also stated that there are a wide range of jobs with the private sector and some with provincial ministries such as in the area of health and justice.

Respondents with the FSIN stated that they actively work with large corporations in the field of banking and natural resources. Presently there is little interaction with provincial departments and agencies but it is still early in the strategy's development and the FSIN is open to pursuing the potential partners at this level.

Performance Measurement

The FSIN currently collect data on each of the strategy's programs, including: number of students participating, age and grade of students, applications received, employers participating, and wages paid. This is the information requested by DIAND in its evaluation forms for each strategy program. In addition, coop sites have students and employers evaluate job placements.

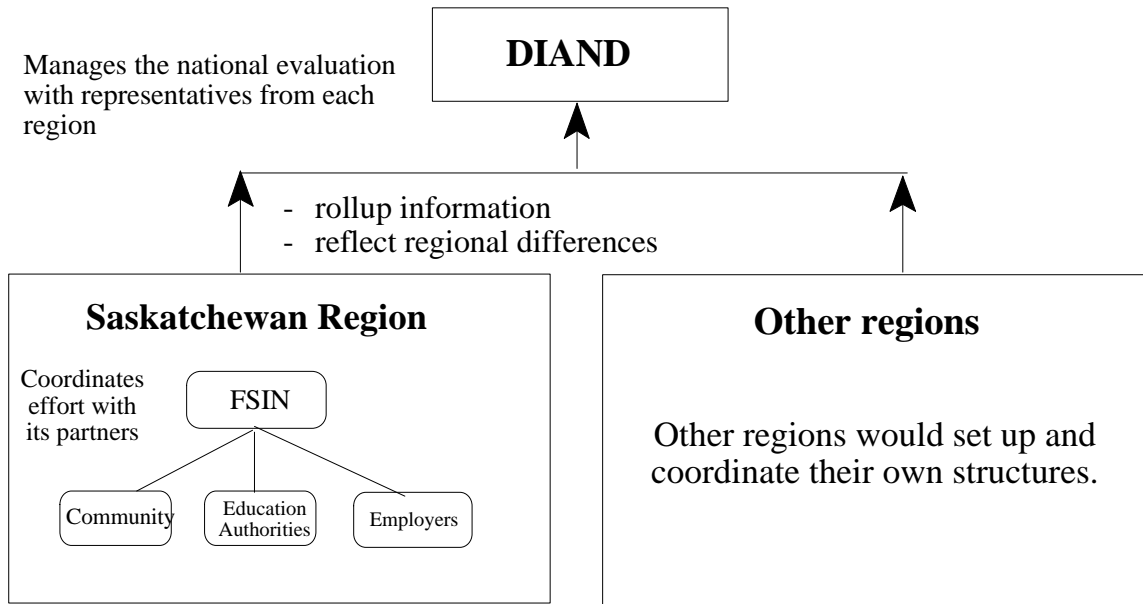
A representative with the FSIN stated that the organization would like to go further in the next few years to measure the programs' impacts and affects on program design. However, at this early stage it is not clear what type of information they should collect nor what DIAND's future needs will be. A few suggestions for indicators included:

- drop-out / graduation rates;
- absentee rates; and
- progressive or fail grades.

The FSIN representative cautioned that it would be difficult to attribute changes in the indicators to the strategy as they are also influenced by other factors such as social problems and lack of opportunities.

Respondents also stated that they want to have the FSIN actively participate in any future evaluation of the DIAND Youth Strategy. Respondents referred to a "regional approach" that is also "time sensitive". Figure 4 illustrates this proposed approach.

Proposed Regional Approach for Future DIAND Youth Strategy Evaluations



Onion Lake was selected as the case study community to be reviewed. The community is one of the largest First Nations in Saskatchewan with almost 800 students attending its Chief Taylor School and provincial schools in the area.³

Onion Lake First Nation has a population of 2,836 people with 1,766 members living on-reserve⁴ and occupies the reserves of Keekaskootch and Makaoo reserves. The community is located about 4 hours north of Regina and 45 minutes from the town of Lloydminster. The main economic activity for the First Nation is agriculture⁵. However, there are other facilities and businesses on-reserve, including: the band hall, an arena, the fire hall, a rehabilitation centre, water treatment centre, maintenance garage, and the school.

The community became involved with the DIAND youth programs through its close linkages with the FSIN. Regular communication regarding programming opportunities allowed Onion Lake to express an interest in participating within the framework provided by FSIN. Onion Lake is involved with all three of the DIAND Youth Strategy programs.

Community Priorities

Respondents stated that Onion Lake faces challenges in developing the physical infrastructure of the community and creating local economic development. The Chief and local leadership are said to play a strong role in the success of community initiatives. The Chief of Onion Lake has identified the importance of a focussed educational, training, and employment strategy for Onion Lake. Strategic planning to ensure development by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people has already begun, with a particular emphasis on creating youth opportunities.

Onion Lake First Nation has a wide range of economic initiatives that focus on both present business development and plans for future infrastructure that can characterize a self-sustainable community. This includes pursuing the feasibility of establishing on-reserve companies for the provision of utilities and what are traditionally municipal services. The Onion Lake Chief has a clear and structured plan for the community, and he feels that school and community should be actively planning to prepare youth for emerging roles in a self-governing community.

³ Saskatchewan DIAND Regional Band Profile, August 18, 1995.

⁴ 1991 Statistics Canada Census, Aboriginal Peoples Survey.

⁵ Saskatchewan DIAND Regional Band Profile, August 18, 1995.

Consequently, Onion Lake has developed an integrated approach to linking education with both real life experiences and impending models for self-government. This approach combines the school, the training centre, band administration and service businesses.

This integration allows for training, education, and economic opportunities to be specifically tailored to the needs of the community. An example would be where the local elders were brought in to discuss traditional child-rearing practices. This led to the development of a local child care worker training curriculum.

Onion Lake First Nation has a unique system in place to deal with school drop out rates. Earlier, the only option was to remove a non-functioning student from school rolls. Now, students who are not succeeding within the school program are referred to the Learning Centre. The Learning Centre allows the student to develop a career plan, undertake upgrading, or be linked with available training or job experience programs. The Learning Centre coordinates its function with the Cooperative Education Program and the Summer Student Career Placement Program, which are also inter-connected. Although not all youth issues can be addressed by these programs, the Onion Lake site coordinator feels that practical skill development at any level is positive and constructive for First Nations youth.

Science at Eagle View School

The Summer Camp Program is open to mid-range students, rather than simply those students with the highest grades. The curriculum for the science program focussed upon local environmental issues and assessments, the province-wide science program, and computer skills.

Two general views about the program were expressed:

- the program has limited resources; and
- because of its popularity, the Summer Science Camp program should be expanded to include all interested students.

Opening the program to all students is important because it was found that confidence levels of students who participated in the summer science camp increased in class; they became more comfortable with the science-based curriculum.

Cooperative Education Program

The development of learning plans have been incorporated on an on-going basis with the existing Saskatchewan Education Curriculum. The program has enhanced the career goals of students at the Grade 9 level. Respondents report that participating employers have expressed the value of job related exposure/experience(s) this age level.

Students that attend grade 9 regularly are eligible to participate in the programs, as are the upcoming grade 8 students. Teachers promote the program with a brochure for the parents of the grade 9 students. The coordinator also visits parents to explain the program and the benefits to their children.

Students and employers are matched on the student's assessment of preferred jobs and the availability of placements.

Other Partners Involved with the Community

There are many on-reserve employers and programs hiring students through the Summer Student Career Placement Program or providing placements through the Cooperative Education Program. Figure 5 lists these employers.

Off reserve partners include: Husky Oil, Imperial Oil, Esso, the Rotary Club of Lloydminster (the businesses in Lloydminster), Junior Achievement (Saskatoon Chapter).

Partnerships were developed by band program directors, and the Chief and Council during Rotary Club meetings, conferences and career fairs for youth.

The only difficulties with off-reserve employers is the issue of the Workers Compensation Board, on-reserve contributions, and insuring for students during job placements.

The local Band and on-reserve businesses and programs have a long term commitment. At the urban level, Husky Oil has a term contract with the community who is also working on ongoing relationships with other organizations such as the school divisions within the City of Lloydminster. Onion Lake respondents are confident that they will be able to secure long term placements especially with businesses and other organizations that deal with the Onion Lake Band, such as the hospital, and surveyor's office.

On-Reserve Employers at Onion Lake

Dillon's Service
Makoa Mall
Cree House Cafe
Onion Lake Housing
Onion Lake Gas. Co.
Tribal Justice Program
Court Worker Program
Onion Lake Health Services
Onion Lake Day Care Program
Onion Lake Communiplex
Ekwesket Rehab Centre
Economic Development
Lands Department (Treaty Land Entitlement)

FIGURE 5

Information About Students

Respondents reported that they provide monthly reports to the FSIN. The following information on students is collected:

- overall student assessments from September to October;
- the number of students per trimester⁶;
- an increase in class/school attendance; and
- new skills of on site student placements.

The community does not yet collect information about whether there has been an increase in graduation rates.

⁶ The Onion Lake School Board introduced the trimester system in September 1996, at the same time as the Cooperative Education Program (Trimester 1-September to December, Trimester 2-January to March, Trimester 3-April to July). The system has a slower pace than the other 9 sites but is intended to elevate the stress of high enrollment.

Regional Level

The site coordinators all expressed a definite improvement in school attendance, and the self esteem of students as a result of the strategy. The site coordinators also conveyed a wide range of placement options available to students ranging from conventional business sectors, health, law, justice and local community placements. Coordinators thought the general quality of the available coop positions was excellent in terms of skill development, labour market knowledge, relevance to future education, job and career goals.

The nine site coordinators and representatives of the FSIN reported that the strategic objectives of the Cooperative Education Program were not only met but were exceeded. Respondents identified the following short term impacts:

- an increase in attendance;
- drop-outs encouraged to return to school;
- greater focus on career objectives;
- students relate school experience to employment potential more directly;
- teachers and site coordinators are able to engage in more direct career planning with students;
- greater identification of students with professional career aspirations;
- diminished behaviour problems;
- students have increased sense of responsibility; and
- students have enhanced interest in school.

In addition, respondents at the FSIN noted that students tend to think more about jobs and generally are more hopeful about their entering professional fields. In response to this interest teachers and site coordinators tend to work more closely in career planning for students.

Observed Impacts in Onion Lake

Respondents in Onion Lake also stated that the strategy has had positive impacts, and added the following to the above mentioned impacts:

- the programs entice students to stay in school;
- exposure to new technologies; and
- increased student's perception of importance of education.

The grade 9 students in the focus group discussed what they had learned in the program through placements at the day care centre, recreation complex, the on-reserve mall, and health services. Students reported learning about time management, office procedures, customer service, fire safety, first-aid, and safety in the use of equipment. Most importantly, the students learned that these facilities belonged to them; that is, the program was not simply a “make-work” project, since it provided students with an introduction to the infrastructure in the community. The general theme of the discussion was that the program created a new interest in attending school, and in some cases, helped the young people begin to consider their future and career options.

Participants in the Summer Science program found the program very beneficial. For one participant, her experience in the program has resulted in an intention to pursue a career in medicine or veterinary science. The other students in the school-based Science program, all indicated an interest in attending the Summer Science Camp. They expressed the view that this program should be available for all students who are interested in participating.

A student at the Onion Lake Learning Centre, discussed at length his positive experience and how the program was beneficial to his career. The respondent explained that he had been placed with the Alberta RCMP at the Meadow Lake Detachment. He found the placement to be a very positive experience. In his view, he was now perceived as a role model in the community. The Onion Lake Band provided pre-training in first aid, conflict resolution, basic computer skills, and public speaking. Training as an emergency medical technician, as well as a six week program in Aboriginal Cadet Development, were provided by off-reserve agencies supported by the FSIN. The respondent reported being approached by other students in the community who were interested in what he was doing and wanted to become involved in the program.

We also conducted an interview with an employer involved with the Summer Student Career Placement Program, in particular a program called the “job shadowing program”. The respondent interviewed prospective students from the Cooperative Education Program, four of which were selected for job placements providing assistance to child care workers. The respondent noted that the students performed well in their placements and was pleased with their attendance, punctuality, and their commitment to the job. The students were provided with pre-training in the areas of activity planning, safety, emergency measures, office procedures, etc and they experienced no difficulties in working with program staff and the young children at the centre.

The program provided students with exposure to the operation of day care centres and provided a means of introducing students to the concept of service delivery planning at the local level.

One of the Elders talked described his role providing the cultural component to programming. As a joint effort of the Elders and the Learning Centre staff and students, a culture-based curriculum was designed for the day care centre linking the schools, employer, students, and community. The main focus of this curriculum is on traditional values, beliefs, and practices. The Elder found that the program provided an opportunity to identify and utilize community resources to meet the current and future needs of students.

Suggestions for Improvements

Respondents generally thought it was too early in the process to make definitive recommendations on the program design, but stated that the evaluative process has been useful. It has encouraged the groups to do some self-examination, and work more closely together. The opportunity to make adjustments will improve the program in the future.

Respondents identified the following improvements:

- community representatives suggested that First Nations models of cooperative education and science programs be discussed at a national meeting to facilitate sharing of ideas on alternatives for administering the programs;
- some respondents would like to see more resources and time allocated to cooperative education program orientation for teachers in schools;
- respondents suggested that the government provide additional funds to cover the extra cost of insuring students in job placements off-reserve;
- some respondents suggested including the development of an anti-racism strategy for the workplace into First Nations communities programs. Respondents believe this would build upon the observed improvement in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations flowing from job placement involvement in some sites; and
- respondents also stated that there is a need for hard data to support curriculum as well as tracking systems for job placement sites. The FSIN currently collects information on students, their job placements, and wages but there is a need to go further.

Respondents in the community of Onion Lake also had a few suggestions for improvements to the strategy:

- it was suggested that a better orientation structure for local coordinators and teachers working with cooperative education was needed. Orientation activities should be similar to those prepared for site coordinators who implement the program; and
- this year the programs should start earlier and the school, principal and teachers are ready in May so placements can start promptly in September.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Provincial coordinators and respondents in Onion Lake identified many lessons learned and best practices.

Program Effectiveness

- Because of the limited funding, the FSIN decided to focus the Cooperative Education Program on schools that can provide resources and employment opportunities for students thereby ensuring that all the participating schools would in a better position to succeed.
- Cooperative Education site coordinators are an integral part of the strategy's programming. The site coordinators are responsible for the administration, implementation and delivery of the program at the local level. Coordinators work closely with teachers to develop curriculum, with students to identify needs and skills, and to recruit employers. One respondent stated that coordinators are the "*front line workers that make things happen.*"
- The FSIN oversees the strategy at the regional level by constantly communicating with First Nations at the local level. In terms of the Cooperative Education Program, the FSIN has established regular biweekly communication with the site coordinators and facilitated the development of a network of coordinators that exchange information and share ideas. This approach provides support to communities to independently deliver programs while the FSIN is freed up to respond to policy matters and to develop regionally based partnerships with larger corporations and other agencies.
- Onion Lake has undertaken a strategic approach which is strongly rooted in the community, and they have demonstrated a high level of coordination and planning in implementing all three programs. In particular, the Summer Student Career Placement Program and the Cooperative Education Program are interconnected and provide students with support in a coordinated manner. Respondents believe this model may be useful to other communities, especially those that need to pool limited resources to be able to provide an effective service for students.

Expansion of Existing Programs

- The FSIN's mobile science camp program allows many communities across the province the opportunity to expose students to science. The program has developed a curriculum for First Nations students and also provides professional development and training opportunities for teachers in local schools;
- The FSIN used the DIAND Youth Strategy, in particular the Summer Student Career Placement Program, to build upon an existing program previously open only to post-secondary students. Expanding an old program has allowed communities to implement the strategy quickly and to use existing employers, networks and contacts to provide job placements; and
- The FSIN is planning a cultural camp for participants, parents, coordinators, teachers and Elders from all 10 sites planned for this summer. This building of common themes and goals, organized through FSIN could be identified as a "best practice".

Partnerships in the strategy

- Respondents state there are a number of partnerships within nearby communities, especially with the private sector. The existence of these partnerships both on and off reserve has been instrumental in providing students with employment opportunities.

Performance Measurement Indicators

The FSIN collects data on students, placements, and wages throughout the province. This information is useful to identify in which sectors students are hired to gain experience. There is an interest in creating hard data to track long-term program results that can be used to plan policies and programs. For example, the new Summer Student Career Placement coordinator will be responsible for evaluating employers and students experiences to help with future programming. However, respondents state that they have not yet begun to identify what information they should collect and what they need to coordinate with DIAND's future requirements.

Conclusions

The FSIN is instrumental in creating a network of Cooperative Education Program coordinators that share information and learn from each other. They believe this mechanism has helped make the program successful after only six months of implementation.

The FSIN has also used the strategy to expand the Summer Student Career Placement and the Science and Technology Summer Camp programs which have existed for several years.

The FSIN has taken what one respondent referred to as the “*collaborative education approach*” involving partners such as education authorities, communities, students and employers. One respondent stated that “*Although we still have a lot to learn we want to keep up with the paradigm shift towards collaborative relationships in youth programming, such as work-to-school activities and advancements being made internationally.*” Respondents are confident their approach will be key in developing the programs beyond the initial year of implementation. One respondent even offered to make presentations and discuss the FSIN programs with other First Nations communities.

At the community level, Onion Lake has also adopted a coordinated approach to delivering its programs. The strategy has become one component of the community’s overall strategy for economic development. The community has also sought partnerships with neighbouring communities and in doing so has expanded the opportunities available to its youth.

Report on Onion Lake Focus Group Interviews
April 22, 1997

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April 22, 1997

Two focus group interviews were conducted in Onion Lake at the Eagle View School. The participants had taken part in the Cooperative Education Program, Science Program, and the Summer Science Program. One discussion group was with Grade 8 Science and Summer Science Camp students, the other with Grade 9 students in the Cooperative Education Program.

Grade 8 Focus Group

Grade 8 focus group participants spoke extensively of their achievements through the Summer Science program, and the importance of the Science program in achieving their educational goals. Essentially, the programs expanded the students perspectives on science and technology as viable career options.

Generally, the participants in the focus group interviews did not participate fully in the discussions because of their discomfort with the interview process, although one student made a significant contribution to the discussion because of her positive experience with the program.

Grade 9 Focus Group

The grade nine students participated in the Cooperative Education Program, which focussed on skills development and job placement. Participants discussed what they had learned in the program through placements at the day care centre, recreation complex, the on-reserve mall, and health services. Students learned about time management, office procedures, customer service, fire safety, first-aid, and safety in the use of equipment. Most importantly, the students learned that these facilities belonged to them; that is, the program was not simply a “make-work” project, since it provided students with an introduction to the infrastructure in the community. The general theme is that the program created a new interest in attending school, and in some cases, have helped the young people begin considering their future and career options.

Impacts

Participants in the Summer Science program found the program very beneficial. For one participant, her experience in the program has resulted in an intention to pursue a career in medicine or veterinary science. Of the other students in the school-based Science program, all expressed an interest in attending the Summer Science Camp. They expressed the view that this program should be available for all students who are interested in participating.

Improvements

Participants in the focus group believe that the programs should be expanded to include all schools on the reserve, and all Grade 8 and 9 students with an interest in the programs.