

# PENTICTON WESTERN NEWS



Knowledge Keeper Richard Armstrong laughs with students and staff from the Penticton Indian Band Outma Sqilx'w Cultural School Thursday with a sign he helped translate for the Nickel Plate Nordic Centre trails. The federal government said Thursday it is funding the Spirit North cross country ski and culture program again this year. Mark Brett/Western News

## Great news for Indigenous youth program in BC

The federal government came through with over \$1 million in funding for Indigenous youth program

Spirit North CEO Beckie Scott got the news she feared would never come.

During a stopover at the airport in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Thursday, her cell phone rang and it was an official from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).

The caller told her Spirit North was going to receive the \$1.7 million grant it had applied for.

A week ago Scott told the Western News there were indications the money would not be forthcoming to continue the Indigenous youth pilot project that began last year in Penticton and two other B.C. centres, the Na Aksa Gyilak'you Learning Centre in Kitsumkalum, just west of Terrace and at Moricetown Elementary Band School near Smithers.

“This has been the craziest day of my life,” said Scott who was between flights on her way home to Calgary from the island nation of Seychelles as part of her work with the World Anti-doping Agency Committee. “I was coming into the lounge in Addis and I had a call from ISC saying ‘we’re going to give you the full amount.’”

“We had kind of given up on this and were moving ahead. This is amazing. Amazing. It’s unbelievable. I’m in shock.”

Related: [Spirit North funding announcement now expected any day](#)

The land-based recreation and cultural program last year touched over 1,500 Indigenous youth and their families in B.C. and another 3,000 in Alberta where it is based.

Scott was initially worried the program in B.C. would have to be cancelled however it was decided to go ahead anyway without funding only in a modified format.

“We just decided we couldn’t pull out altogether, it was just too important,” said Scott. “We realized we would have to cut back and make some hard decisions, decisions contrary to our mandate and our way of approaching work; the long term investments, building capacity and relationships.”

“We just couldn’t live with giving up after one year and now we’re back to full operational capacity in B.C., I’m just so happy.”

The funding also means expansion of the program into other communities in this province including with the West Bank First Nations school out of the Telemark Nordic Club, as well as Saskatchewan and Manitoba

Related: [Indigenous youth program offered in Penticton is in jeopardy](#)

Indigenous children at two schools locally, the Penticton Indian Band Outma Sqilx’w Cultural School and West Bench Elementary School and their families took part in the inaugural program.

“I’m really passionate about it, the program itself helped form the identity of who we are at this school,” said West Bench principal Darryl Tenisci. “Especially for our students from the Penticton Indian Band that experience was huge. Our kids proved to the adults ‘hey look what we can do if we knock down all the barriers and get outdoors,’ the benefits are endless.”

“Also for students who might not succeed in the classroom, out there they’re able to shine and we’re excited to see what the benefits are going to be long term.”

Outma principal Steve Bentley agreed: “I can tell you from experience these programs present children with a totally different perspective on what’s available to them in the world,” said Bentley. “You see kids grow and become different people when you see them outside of the classroom.”

“A kid sitting in the classroom maybe not succeeding, maybe not reaching their full potential may suddenly surprise you and just explode with enthusiasm. It’s character building.”

Spirit North leaders go to the schools starting in September which then transitions to Nickel Plate Nordic Centre for cross country skiing and snowshoeing.

Scott, an Olympic gold and silver medalist in cross country skiing, said catch up work will now begin in earnest to get the program up and running full speed.

Friday morning ISC media relations officer William Olscamp confirmed the full amount of the application had been approved, adding that all other organizations that had applied for funding through the New Paths to Education program had also been notified.

---

***MarkBrett***