



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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First of its kind in B.C. trades training pilot program gives new opportunities to people living with brain injuries

Prince George, B.C. – Before experiencing a brain injury in 2005, Pat Weir lived a life on the go. Though he wanted to maintain that lifestyle after his injury, Weir understood his brain wasn't functioning as it once had.

This realization left him depressed and directionless in life. However, thanks to an innovative new pilot program in Prince George, Weir is now looking at a promising career in trades.

"I wasn't given the tools I needed at the beginning of life," says Weir. "It's never too late to go back to school. I didn't think it was possible. I thought I was helpless. This program has given me purpose and direction in life."

A first in B.C., the Trades Exploration Program in Prince George was developed to help underemployed and unemployed individuals with brain injuries explore trades occupations as a carpenter, automotive service technician, and professional cook as well as gain the skills needed to obtain entry into those industries.

Industry Training Authority (ITA) and Prince George Brain Injured Group (PGBIG) partnered with the Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association (PGNAETA) and College of New Caledonia (CNC) to fund and deliver this innovative 12-week pilot program.

Eight individuals from the northern interior are participating in the program at CNC. The program started in March, and by the end of June, students will have completed 60 hours in each of carpentry, automotive service technician, and professional cook as well as first aid and food safe certifications.

"This is an amazing and exciting partnership that's opening doors for people," says Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. "There are tremendous job opportunities in the trades throughout our province. When we work together, people of all abilities will succeed as we build the best B.C."

"The concept and development of this program has been the result of genuine partnership among organizations who care about the needs of people in their community," says Rod Bianchini, Interim Chief Operating Officer, ITA. "We're excited that participants have moved through the program with enthusiasm. They're optimistic about their future in trades, and that makes this an investment in individuals and the economy."

Individuals in the program had to overcome many barriers. Following the acute stage of recovery from the medical effects of an injury, survivors of brain injury are often left to pick up the pieces of their lives by themselves. Participants in the program found the help they needed at PGBIG. Each were involved in individual recovery plans, which included one-to-one case management, brain injury education classes and programs, and participation in employment related programming. The timeline for these recovery programs is individual and range from months to years.

The Trades Exploration Program was designed as a part-time program to tailor the pace of learning and work to the needs of the students, to best ensure their success. The program provides free tuition, books, and work clothing and personal protective equipment and includes additional supports, such as an in-class coordinator, daily meals, and transit to and from school.

“PGNAETA has committed to fund innovative skills training programs that will advance the Aboriginal workforce in trades and technology careers,” says Karin Hunt, Executive Director, PGNAETA. “This training program ensures that everyone discovers skills and talents through which to benefit from and contribute to the abundant economic opportunities available in our region.”

“CNC exists to bring people and potential together,” says Henry Reiser, CNC President. “This innovative program not only helps students realize their own potential but also shows employers the value individuals who have experienced brain injuries bring to the workforce.”

Once the program finishes later this month, PGBIG will follow up with participants and support them as they seek work in the community.

“Brain injury often strikes adults in the prime of their lives. The ‘me’ whom they once knew no longer exists,” says Alison Hagreen, Executive Director, PGBIG. “This program brings people to a place where they can regain competency and look forward to resuming a role as a contributing member of the community. In today’s economy, employers are struggling to hire reliable and competent workers. Retraining people who have survived a brain injury is a smart investment for our community and for the province as a whole.”

Quick Facts

- June is Brain Injury Awareness Month, an opportunity to bring attention to the effects of brain injuries in Canada and prevention measures that you can take.
- There are approximately 60 new cases of brain injury per day in British Columbia.
- The Prince George Brain Injured Group serves an average of 400 people with brain injury annually. In 2018, PGBIG accepted 108 new individuals to receive services.
- Approximately 1.5 million Canadians live with the effects of an acquired brain injury, and every year another 160,000 people experience an acquired brain injury.
- Acquired brain injury refers to any damage to the brain that occurs after birth and is not related to a congenital or a degenerative disease.
- There are two types of acquired brain injury:
 - Non-traumatic brain injury—caused by something that happens inside the body or a substance introduced into the body that damages brain tissues. Examples include strokes, aneurysms, seizures, brain tumours, poisoning, and opioid overdose;

- Traumatic brain injury—caused by something that comes from outside the body that can result in temporary injury or more serious, long-term damage to brain cells. Examples include motor vehicle accidents, falls, assaults, gunshot wounds, and sport injuries.
- The social impact directly and indirectly affects the lives of hundreds of thousands of British Columbians.

About the Program Partners

The **College of New Caledonia** has served the needs of students in B.C.'s Central Interior since 1969—and with the inclusion of the B.C. Vocational School, since 1962. The College region is approximately 117,500 sq. km, or 12 per cent of the province, with a population today exceeding 145,000. For more information, visit cnc.bc.ca.

The **Industry Training Authority (ITA)** leads and coordinates British Columbia's skilled trades system. ITA works with apprentices, employers, industry, labour, training providers and government to fund training, issue credentials, support apprenticeships, set program standards and increase opportunities in the trades. For more information, visit itabc.ca.

The **Prince George Brain Injured Group** is a charitable non-profit organization with the mission of providing education, prevention, community rehabilitation, and employment supports to enhance the lives of persons living with the effects of acquired brain injury, and their families, in and around Prince George. For more information, visit pgbig.ca.

The **Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association (PGNAETA)** has been delivering industry and trades training and certification specifically designed to meet the unique labour market needs of Aboriginal communities and urban Aboriginal people for 25 years. PGNAETA's approach to workforce development involves collaborative partnerships between PGNAETA, First Nations communities, public post-secondary institutions, and industry. Our aim is for Aboriginal citizens to derive benefit from economic opportunities taking place in north-central BC. We are a visionary team, dedicated to promoting the self-sufficiency of Aboriginal people. For more information, visit pgnaeta.bc.ca.

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