



## Employment placement boosts wellness programming and helps a young professional develop clarity on her future career

**T**HE HAY RIVER COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS with Disabilities (HRCPD) is a non-profit organization that serves clients in the Northwest Territories (NWT) community of Hay River, on the south shore of Great Slave Lake. The organization supports and advocates for individuals with disabilities and their families, helping them access services, adequate housing and employment. It also delivers employment, life skills, literacy and recreational programs.

Most of the clients are Indigenous and the organization is committed to being inclusive – if people seek support, they receive it, says Executive Director, Pravina Bartlett. “We don’t ask anybody to prove their disability, as we have found it’s difficult for them to just walk through the door and ask for help,” she says.



HAY RIVER,  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**Canada**

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Jada Beck, Wellness Coordinator

While enhancing personal well-being is an objective inherent in all the programming, HRCPD felt it would be beneficial to create a new position, a Wellness Coordinator with a direct mandate to address clients' wellness needs.

"Our vision for this position came into even sharper focus when we received funding from the NWT Housing Corporation to open up a 15-bed emergency homeless shelter," says Pravina. "Given the high needs of these clients, we felt this was the logical place to begin the wellness programming."

HRCPD received funding from the CPRA Youth Employment Experience program to hire an employee to fill the new position. The CPRA program allows organizations to offer placements to young people and to pair them with a mentor to help them gain skills, knowledge and experience in the community parks and recreation sector.

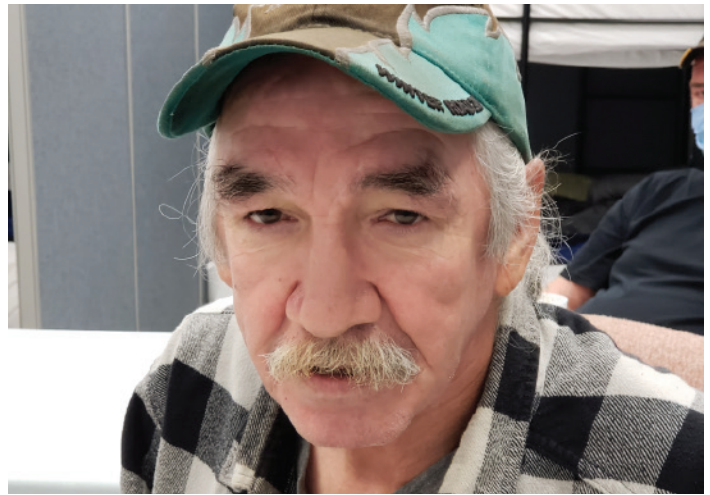
The funding led to the hiring of Jada Beck, a 24-year-old woman originally from Hay River, who is Chipewyan Métis. One component of her job was working one-on-one with clients to develop personalized movement and exercise plans suited to their unique needs and abilities. Most of those using the shelter were in their fifties or older.

Jada's work there not only bolstered HRCPD's capacity for the long term but also helped her develop clarity about her professional purpose and future career.

Jada and her family left Hay River when she was in her early teens – eventually settling in Peace River, Alberta. Throughout high school, she was very sports oriented, involved in competitive swimming and volleyball.

Jada went on to earn a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology at the University of Lethbridge. During her undergrad years, she continued to develop her own physical fitness and was a student trainer for the university's women's basketball team and teams in other sports.

After graduating, Jada felt drawn to return home to the North, where she re-immersed herself in her Indigenous culture, including by attending a culture camp where she took part in



DC - a client that Jada worked with.

traditional on-the-land activities. She first came to HRCPD as a volunteer.

When she became Wellness Coordinator, Jada found herself applying her experience as a trainer of athletes in new ways. "I was shifting my knowledge to helping elders and people with disabilities. I adapted the exercise programs to each individual and helped them learn about different ways of staying fit. For example, for people with joint pain, I encouraged them to try swimming and using a hot tub."

For each client, Jada developed a booklet detailing their personal plan – allowing them to continue the fitness work on their own or with the help of other staff.

The positive impacts of Jada's work with the clients were great to see, says Pravina. "After she left work for the day, they would continue to talk about what they were working on and how they felt so much better thanks to Jada's guidance. And she provided them with other types of support, including listening when they wanted to share their personal challenges."

"Physical activity wasn't their only need. They needed someone to talk to, someone to connect with, and their connections with Jada were very strong."

Jada's relationship with HRCPD is going to continue for the long term. After spending time with family elsewhere in Canada, she is scheduled to return to Hay River in March 2022, to provide more program support and work on other initiatives.

Meanwhile, her experience back in the North has given her clarity of purpose and a desired career path. "I can see what we need as Northern Indigenous people when it comes to health," she says. "My plan is to go to medical school, learn about traditional medicine as well, and practise family medicine in an Indigenous community in the North."

"We want to support Jada throughout her career," adds Pravina. "If we are able to amend our programs to support one of her goals in Indigenous health, that's definitely something we want to facilitate." 🍁