



CPRA ACPL

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Success Story

The Teen Drop-in Space, adjacent to the Youth Centre

Local teen working to engage his peers in rewarding recreational programming

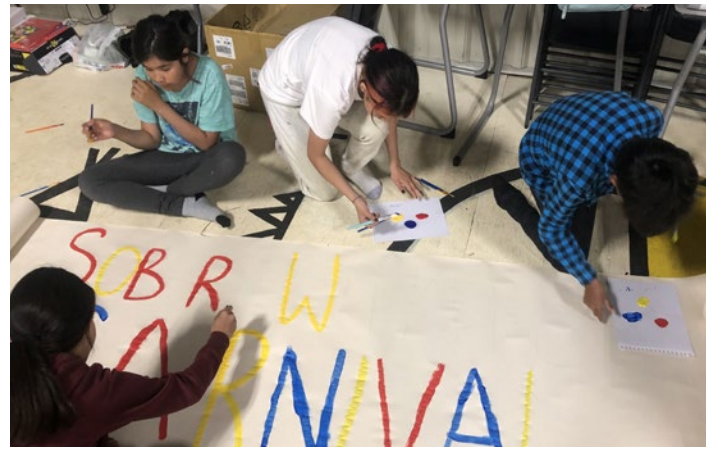
NORTHERN LOCO HAS A BROAD mandate to support sustainable growth and success for the community of Fort Providence in the Northwest Territories. It pursues its goals in numerous ways: It brings together partners for community projects to build economic and social capacity and creates job opportunities by supporting local businesses. And a key component of its mission is youth recreational programming – developing activities that support the social, mental and emotional well-being of the young people who will be tomorrow’s community leaders.



NORTHERN LOCO, FORT PROVIDENCE,
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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Teens preparing for Sober Weekend Carnival

The majority of the 700 residents of Fort Providence are Indigenous, with many of them members of the Deh Gáh Got'ıę First Nation, and Northern LOCO's youth programs honour and celebrate Indigenous knowledge and traditional ways of being.

Since 2019, Northern Loco has operated a Youth Centre that serves children from ages six to 13. More recently, the organization recognized it needed to find new ways to engage older youth in recreational activities.

"Before COVID-19, a lot of our focus was on our student exchange program involving Indigenous high-school and middle-school students from Fort Providence and non-Indigenous students from Ontario, in the spirit of reconciliation," says Niroja Thiru, Youth Engagement Coordinator for Northern Loco.

"When the pandemic put a pause on the exchange program, we realized it was important to have dedicated space for older youth and to run programming tailored to their interests. We needed a youth to be the face of this program – to create that peer-to-peer relationship."

With a plan to create a Teen Drop-in Space adjacent to the Youth Centre, Northern Loco received funding under the CPRA Youth Employment Experience program to hire a young person for the new position of Teen Space Facilitator. The funding supported the creation of new teen-focused programming for Northern Loco and the creation of a job for a local youth, 15-year-old Jeffrey Simba.

Niroja had encouraged Jeffrey to apply for the position, after he had asked her to help him create a resume and find a job. "We were exploring the possibility of him working in the coffee shop or general store. Through that process, I saw how dedicated and hard-working he was, and I knew he would do well as Teen Space Facilitator," she says.

"Jeffrey's role involved setting up and maintaining the space, ensuring behavioural expectations are met for those using it, and coming up with fun programming ideas that youth actually want to do," Niroja explains.

"I ask my friends what they would like to do, and we've come up with different activities – like game night and movie night – and playing chess has become big," Jeffrey says. He has also coordinated special events with the help of his friends, including a weekend camping trip for younger kids, with the older youth acting as chaperones and helpers with activities such as fishing and traditional crafts.

Another event was a Sober Weekend Carnival, which he and his friends organized in response to young people's concerns that drinking in the community was posing a challenge.

As Jeffrey's mentor, Niroja says she has worked to help him develop skills that are important when working in parks and recreation and the non-profit sector more broadly. This includes the fundamentals of project planning, she says.

"I've been helping him to get comfortable with using our proposal template, which covers the basics of developing a project idea and applying for funding. He's learning how to come up with an idea, discuss it with community members, create a budget and determine how to evaluate its success," she says.

"I've also encouraged him to be creative and think outside the box," adds Niroja. "And I've done my best to help him feel empowered in his abilities and understand that when he thinks of something he'd like to do, he can make it happen."

It wasn't part of his original job description, but Jeffrey has also taken on major responsibilities related to maintaining Northern Loco's community garden and greenhouse, located adjacent to the Youth Centre and Teen Drop-in Space.

At the age of 15 and still in high school, Jeffrey has some time to plan for his future; however, this job experience has definitely led him to consider similar work for the longer term. "I am thinking about the possibility of working on food security projects for the community or working in recreational programming at an organization like Northern Loco." 🍁