

Indigenous Student Leadership Forum Goes Virtual: UCDSB's First Digital iLead Day a Success

October 13, 2020 (Upper Canada) - Inspiration was ignited at the Upper Canada District School Board's Indigenous Student Leadership Forum, even though it was presented in a different way: virtually.

The Indigenous Student Leadership Forum for Staff and Students involves First Nations, Métis and Inuit high school students and allies from across the Upper Canada District School Board and together, they take part in Indigenous Leadership (iLead) days.

Like many annual events and workshops that normally take place in person, the Forum's annual iLead Days series had to be re-structured and be offered digitally in order to continue for this academic year.

The five-day series spanning the school year launched virtually on Oct. 13, 2020 and students and staff from across the UCDSB logged into the iLead Microsoft Teams channel for a day of inspiration, learning and guidance from Dakelh storyteller, Francois Prince.

"Over the years, the iLead Days have been offered face-to-face and have given self-identified Indigenous students and their allies the opportunity to increase their knowledge and connection with Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives through engaging with elders, knowledge keepers, cultural advisors and peers, making it an engaging learning opportunity for our school community," explains UCDSB Principal of Teaching & Learning, Indigenous Education, Gail Brant-Terry. "The pandemic and associated limitations meant we had to get creative with how we could continue to offer iLead Days to our students this year."

Francois Prince is Nak'azdli Whut'en, which is part of the Dakelhne tribe Dakelh from British Columbia. Francois has a strong desire to bridge the gaps between historical and modern cultures to promote mental health and wellness through the cultural practices. Through storytelling and an art project, Prince explored concepts related to the past, present and future with the students and asked them to reflect: where do you come from, where are you at, and where are you going? Students created and shared artwork to showcase their story, reflecting on their own past and how they look forward to the future using Prince's guidance.

With staff and students from across the board logged in throughout the day-long event, Prince provided an engaging and inspiring message that connected to the iLead Days mission.

"Francois weaved together traditional stories, lived experiences and reflective questions that inspired our students," says Brant-Terry.

More iLead Days will take place virtually this year in November, December, February and April, 2020, as the UCDSB remains committed to Truth and Reconciliation.

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iLead Day Paddle Photo Caption: Students participating in the iLead Day created art by telling their story using a paddle outline for inspiration. Photo submitted by UCDSB.

iLead Day CPHS: Staff and students at Carleton Place High School participating in the iLead Day gathered together in a classroom where they connected with other UCDSB students virtually for the day-long event. Photo submitted by UCDSB

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