

Resilience Training and Healing Program

**The
Resilience
Training
and Healing
Program
won the AIP
\$410,000
prize
in 2019**

The Arctic Inspiration Prize is the largest annual prize in Canada. It inspires, enables, and celebrates the achievements of the people of the North, recognizing diverse teams with innovative projects in the fields of education; health and wellbeing; culture, arts and language; science and traditional knowledge; climate change; food security; and the economy.

Nominator: Grand Chief Peter Johnston
Council of Yukon First Nations

Team: Chad Thomas (Team Leader), Shirley Adamson, Ben Asquith, Colin Asselstine, Andrijana Djokic, Angela Drainville, Marge Kormendy, Nelson Lepine, Jordan Profeit, Wayne Risby, Lee Vincent

This report was compiled and created by the **Qatalyst Research Group**, with the help of Bobbi Rose Koe, the project team, and AIP.





Yukon First Nations Wildfire

Yukon First Nations Wildfire (YFNW) is a partnership of eight Yukon First Nations stakeholders, providing emergency management training services. It incorporates innovative strategies and traditional knowledge into top-tier Canadian wildland firefighting and emergency response, and fosters community resilience and facilitates financial reconciliation for the First Nations partners.

PROTECT THE YUKON. PROTECT OUR LAND.

Yukon First Nations Wildfire received more than \$1 million in new funding — \$410,000 from the AIP, plus an additional \$622,000 from the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.





The project was born out of recognition for a need to address emotional and psychological trauma that may resurface during YFNW training or while on the land fighting fires.

The Beat the Heat training bootcamp was established in 2017 to train and certify top-tier forest firefighters. Recruits receive emergency and safety training, and instruction on equipment which includes the use of hand-tools, pumps-and-hoses, and water application. This high-stress, physically demanding Beat the Heat training can result in intense emotions and past traumas to resurface for some participants, and may not always provide the best learning environment.

Resilience Training and Healing Program employs a holistic approach to wellness that can be tailored to each participant and will be positioned within the unique experience of being a wildland firefighter.

A photograph of a forest with tall, slender trees. Sunlight is streaming through the canopy in the upper right, creating a bright lens flare and illuminating the forest floor with dappled light. The ground is covered in green moss and small plants. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

“Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about survival. The goal of resilience is to survive.”

Fred Koe, CEO

Building knowledge and resilience through four pillars of knowledge



**Traditional
Land Management**



**Traditional
Land-Based
Healing**



Mentorship



**Financial
Literacy**

Within the YFNW Unit Crews, two mentorship positions were created. In addition to the mentors, YFNW found an Indigenous counselling service that agreed to work with them and supported the training.

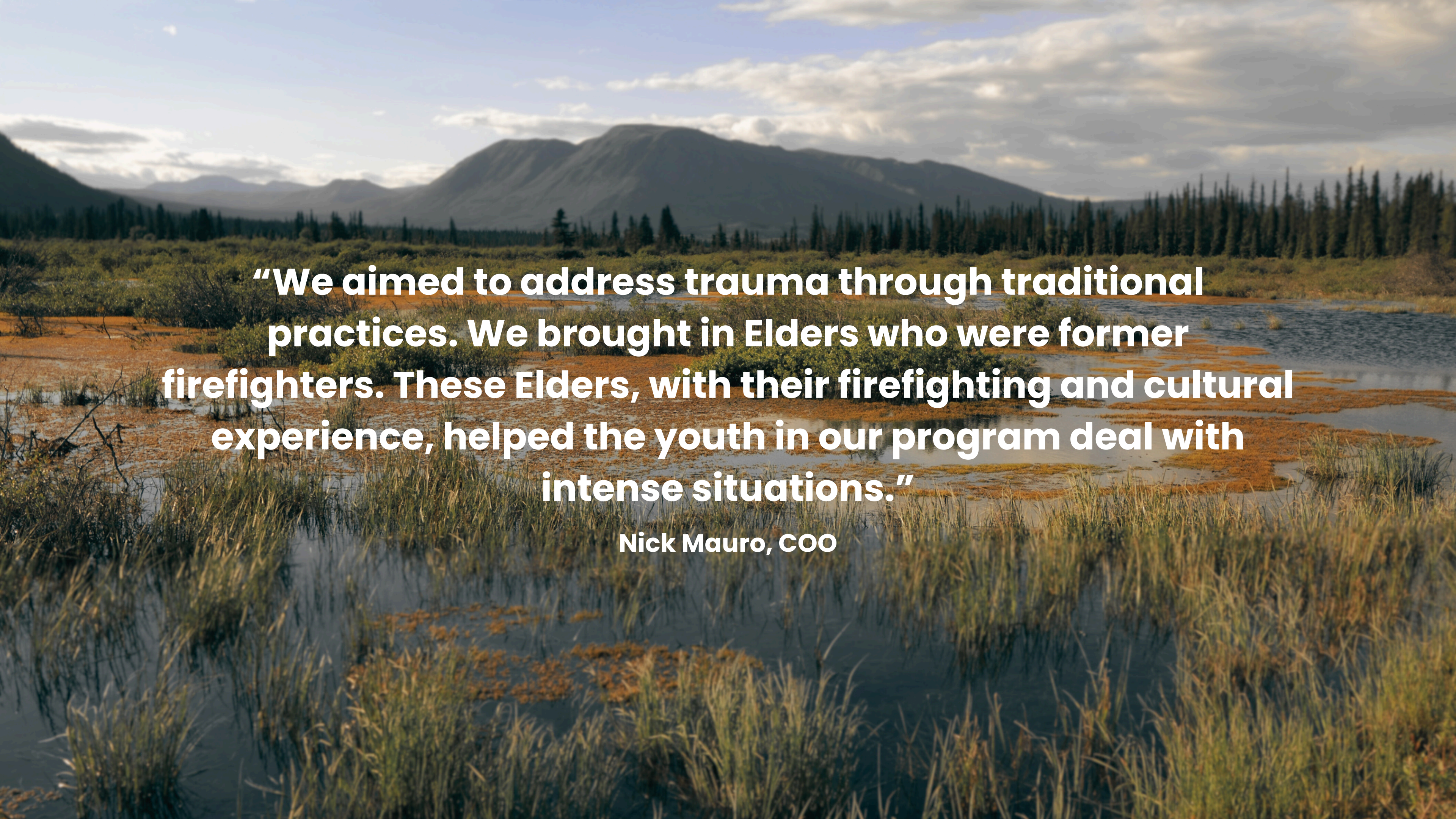
Traditional Land Management & Land Healing

The Yukon First Nations have taken care of the land for thousands of years, protecting wildlife, controlling hunting grounds, and mitigating large-scale fires. Prescribed fire helps control wildfires before they become an emergency.

As part of the training program, youth learn what prescribed fire is intended to achieve and how to safely apply fire under controlled conditions. The program teaches youth about other management techniques and aspects of the industry, such as silviculture, including tree planting and fuel management.

Various on the land and cultural activities are incorporated in the training. For example, youth learn how to build drums and approach healing by incorporating various on-the-land activities. Elders who were former firefighters bring their cultural experience and reinforce the connection to the land.





“We aimed to address trauma through traditional practices. We brought in Elders who were former firefighters. These Elders, with their firefighting and cultural experience, helped the youth in our program deal with intense situations.”

Nick Mauro, COO

Mentorship and Peer Support

The training emphasized one-on-one mentorship and the importance of teamwork and peer support, while fostering an understanding that each individual comes from a unique background. Participants were taught practical skills such as how to work well with others, the value of being dependable, and how to build strong team and family-like connections.

In the April 2022 Beat the Heat course, 20 individuals were in attendance. They represented various cultural backgrounds, including First Nations, Métis, and international students. The program fostered a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that equipped students with vital skills and played a crucial role in cultivating a strong and diverse firefighting force.

**More than 300
youth have
been trained
since 2019.**



"Elders and Knowledge Keepers shared stories which helped open my eyes to how things were done back then."

(Ethan LaVallee, Trainee)



"YFNW are interested in teaching First Nation youth first responders' work and things that they could either take into this job or into their own personal lives and other careers they find themselves more interested in. I think they just want to teach that integrity, and honesty, and more importantly good work ethic."

Duran Simon, Crew Leader

Yukon First Nations Wildfire | Behind the Badge mini
documentary by Brendan Preston.



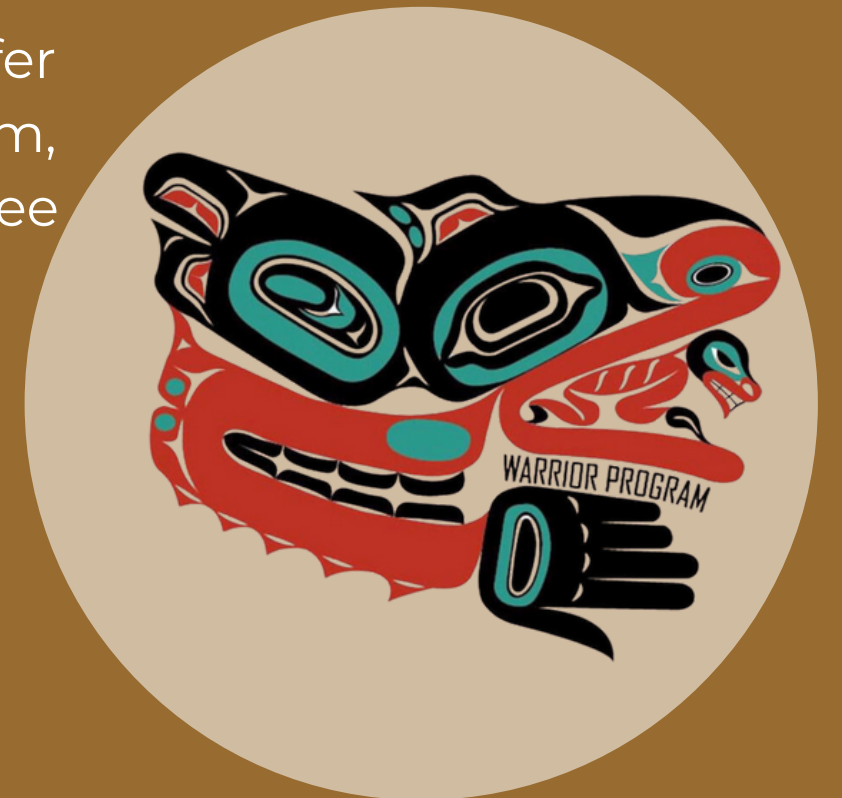
[Click here to Watch the Video](#)

Evolving Training and Support Programs for Youth

The Resilience Training and Healing Program is incorporated into the Warrior Program, which bridges the gap between Yukon youth (ages 16-30) and local businesses by facilitating connections and providing employment skills training.

Youth are prepared for the workforce by learning about financial literacy, gaining certifications such as First Aid, participating in mock interviews, meeting with employers, touring worksites, and listening to speakers, Elders, and ministers. At the end of the program, participants are taken to purchase interview clothing, and on the last day do interviews with participating agencies that have the potential to offer employment. Not only are youth supported throughout the program, YFNW also offers ongoing support from a dedicated YFNW employee once their job has begun.

***The Warrior Program is about second chances, respect,
and opportunity.***



The Warrior Program: Youth Today, Leaders Tomorrow

**60
Warrior
Program
Grads**

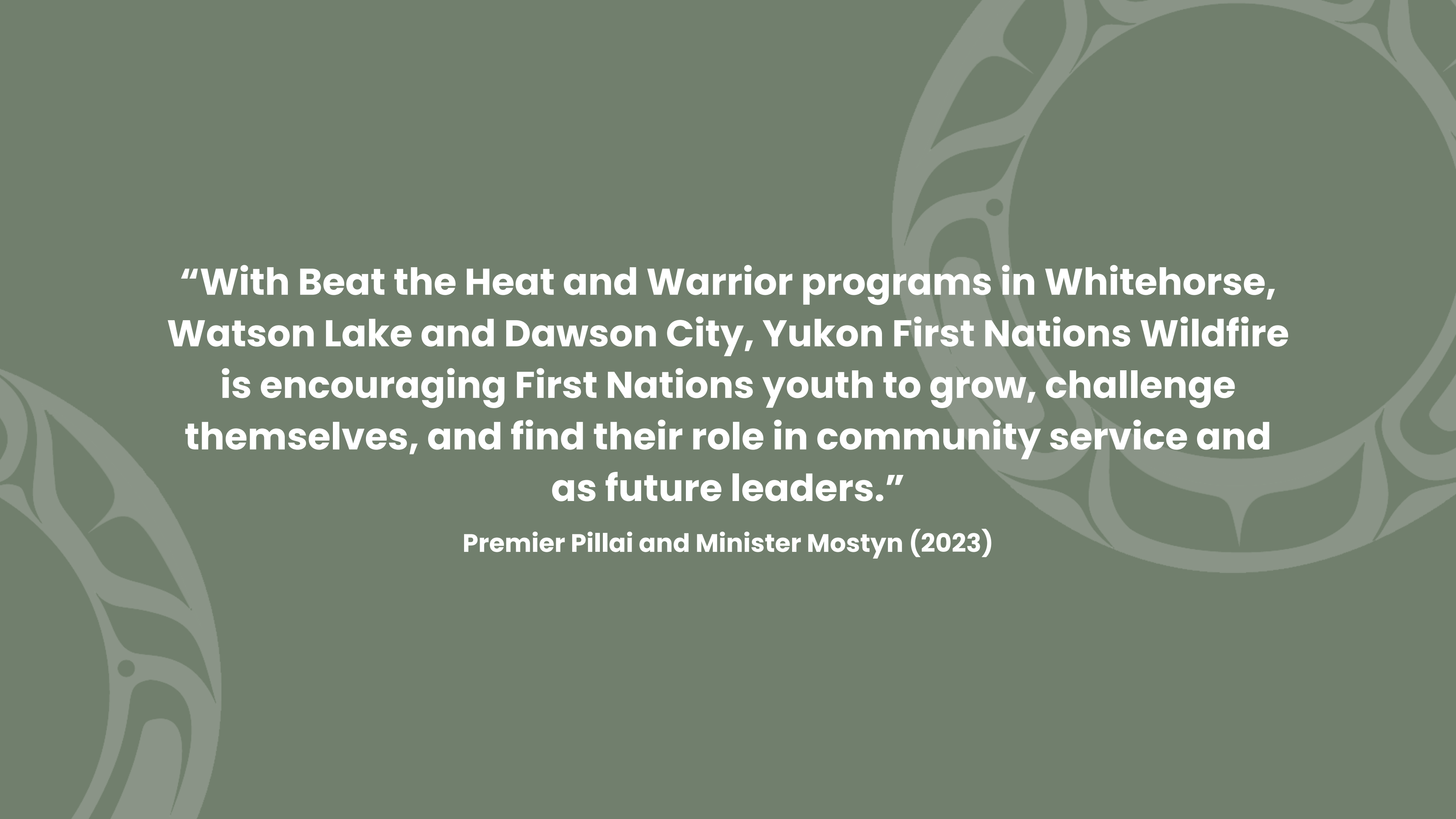
**300
Beat the Heat
Trainees**

Incorporating a more wholistic approach to training has helped YFNW to recruit and support young people and community members interested in firefighting and other careers.

**80%
Youth YFNW
Employees**

**8
Initial Attack
Teams Deployed
in 7 FNs**

**75%
Indigenous
Warrior Program
Instructors**



“With Beat the Heat and Warrior programs in Whitehorse, Watson Lake and Dawson City, Yukon First Nations Wildfire is encouraging First Nations youth to grow, challenge themselves, and find their role in community service and as future leaders.”

Premier Pillai and Minister Mostyn (2023)

Financial Literacy and Other Supports

The financial literacy training modules range from understanding credit, budgeting techniques, opening a bank account or savings account. The financial literacy training also included lessons on Guaranteed Investment Certificates (GICs) and the advantages of making smaller investments over longer periods of time.

Financial literacy is taught through sessions led by banking professionals who explain how to open accounts, manage savings and credit, and avoid financial pitfalls.

YFNW supports participants by treating training as a job—offering a daily stipend, free meals, transportation, and counselling services. Participants also receive a free laptop to build practical skills like resume writing. These supports aim to reduce barriers and help participants build stability and confidence.

“Support can come in many different ways, but getting people to a class or program is the biggest first step.”
Nick Mauro, COO



Continued Growth

YFNW continues to grow, expanding their Beat the Heat Training Program in communities across the Yukon and North West Territories. With a fleet of trucks for emergency management, they are able to quickly respond to the needs of communities.



Partners



Kluane Community
Development
Limited Partnership



CARMACKS
DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION



Na-Cho Nyäk Dun
Development Corporation



FIRST KASKA



Copper Niisüü
Limited Partnership



Funders

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