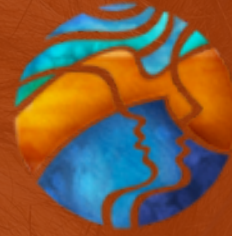
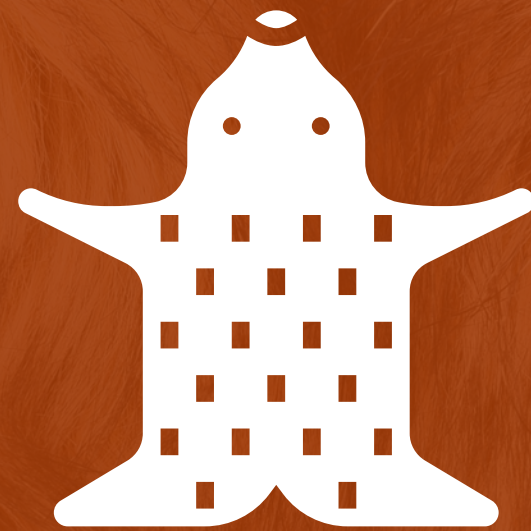


ARCTIC  
INSPIRATION PRIZE

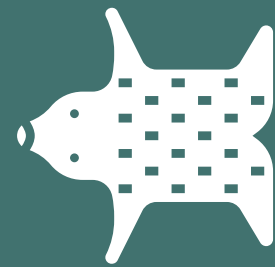


PRIX INSPIRATION  
ARCTIQUE



# N̄tsǎw Chù Kets'edän Kù Traditional Camp





**N̓tsāw Chù  
Kets'edän Kù  
Traditional  
Camp won  
the Youth  
\$100,000 prize  
in 2022.**

**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:** Kluane Adamek

*Regional Chief, Assembly of First Nations, Yukon region*

**Team:** Olive Morland (team lead), Nicole Cross, Candice Deo, Kim Harper, Marcus Heron, Jasmine Burns-Loblaw, Mehkayla Fred, Anthony Johns, Kiana Loots, Brayden Gleason, Georgia McInnis, Tyson Hinds, Isaiah Devilliers, Roger Ellis

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

**WELCOME**

## **Ground Breaking Ceremony**

The N̓tsāw Chù Kets'edän Kù Traditional Camp broke ground on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, with approximately 100 students, 20 Elders, 50 other community members in attendance.

“Today's ground-breaking ceremony for the N̓tsāw Chù Kets'edän Kù Traditional Camp represents a significant milestone in cultural education, particularly in Whitehorse. This transformative initiative empowers not only Porter Creek Secondary School but also the wider community, fostering a deep embrace of meaningful cultural programming. Initiatives like this, which enhance connection between students, land and culture, play a crucial role in building a strong, resilient and inclusive Yukon for generations to come.”

**Premier Ranj Pillai**





## Building a Space for Sacred Fire

After winning the AIP prize in February 2022, construction began at the N̓tsāw Chù Kets'edän Kù at Porter Creek Secondary School. The construction of the camp started with building of the covered fire pit.

A dedicated space with the sacred fire has created opportunities for students, educators and local organizations to gather, participate in on-the-land cultural activities and play together.



***“FIRE IS HEALING TO OUR  
SPIRITUAL BEING”  
(ELDER ANNIE BERNARD)***



## Gathering Around the Fire

Having a covered fire pit allows students and teachers to spend more time outside.

Students are increasingly more engaged in on-the-land programming centered around the fire pit. Teachers and students are spending more time outside, searing moose noses, making bannock, and skinning fish and other traditional activities.

School assemblies, ceremonies and workshops are all held in space when weather permits. The relational fire is key to help build students connection to land and space.



"...the smoke, the sounds, the light of it...helps me so much. the fire can help you think. It would make me want to come to school much more if there was a fire pit at school" (Student)





# Traditional and Hands-On Learning

The camp serves as a gathering place where students, educators, and elders can engage in land-based learning, traditional knowledge sharing, and cultural activities.

The camp ensures that Indigenous knowledge is passed down to future generations in a meaningful and accessible way with activities such as their Annual Hide Camp, and the high school handgames tournament.

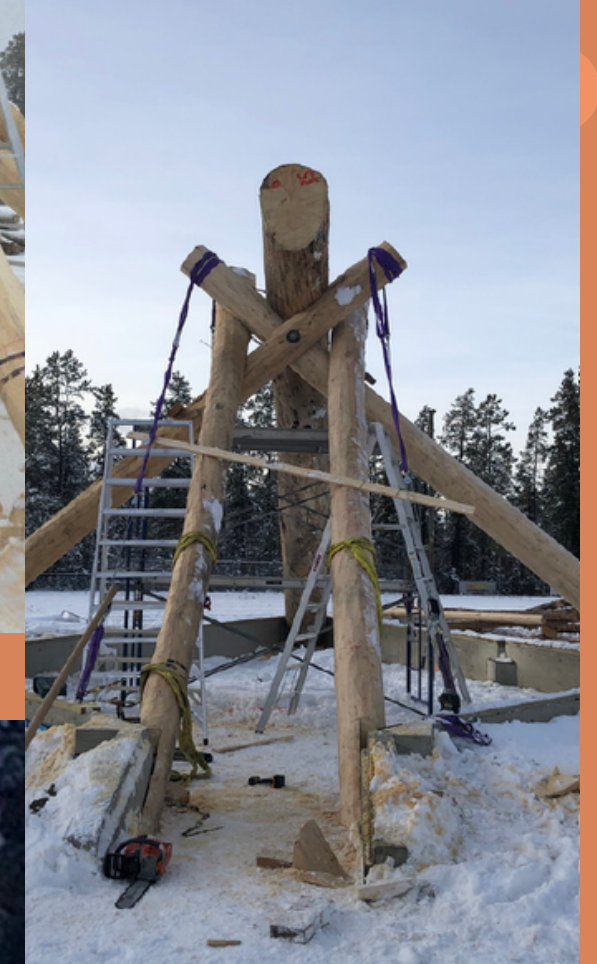




# The Construction of the Modern Njel

The school is currently working with Elders, students, architects and other partners to build the first prototype of a Southern Tutchone traditional building called an Njel.

The new building will significantly increase the opportunities for youth and the broader community to engage in various activities. it will serve as a hub for cultural events, educational programming, and community engagement, creating lasting opportunities for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to deepen their understanding of First Nations traditions.





## A Student Driven Project

The youth-led AIP team played an active role in planning, designing, and constructing the Njel and have gained hands-on experience in project management, cultural preservation, and collaboration with professionals.

Students actively participated in building the structure by peeling logs and learning about the cultural significance of traditional First Nations dwellings.

9 youth were part of the AIP team and took an active role in the project.





## Youth Leaders



**Anthony Johns,  
Leading Youth**

*"I wanted to help out  
my school, make it a  
more comfortable  
learning space."*

*"I learned to speak in  
front of large crowds  
and I improved my  
leadership skills."*



The significance of this camp is that it is inclusive towards the intersectional community. It is so beneficial to all students who get to attend Porter Creek Secondary. It is a great example of a space that will be open and bring people together. We know it will be a safe, sacred and healing place where lots of kids will feel welcome.

(PCSS Student and AIP Team Member Mehkayla Fred)



## Strengthening Intergenerational and Cross-Cultural Connections

Four Elders are regularly engaged in programming at the N̓tsāw Chù Kets'edän Kù Traditional Camp.

Some activities include:

- Education Inclusion Workshops
- Community Healing Fires
- Elder-directed student construction of the Njel

"We're blessed to have such amazing youth and Elders helping us achieve this goal for the students and the community. The students have been peeling smaller logs, and next week we'll be tacking them up. In the spring, Harold will show us how to seal it with clay."

Nicole Cross, Vice Principal



Elder Harold Johnson, photo by [LongAgoPeoplesPlace](#)



Elder Roger Ellis, photo from [Yukon First Nation Education Directorate](#)





## Connecting With the Broader Community

The N̓tsāw Chù Kets'edän Kù Traditional Camp enables Porter Creek Secondary School and the greater community to engage in authentic cultural programming. The camp has fostered collaboration between youth, educators, and local organizations, such as the Kwanlin Dün First Nation Community Genealogy Program.

The camp has also strengthened partnerships between organizations such as the Yukon First Nations Education Directorate Advocates, Copper Caribou, and Long Ago Peoples Place.

“[The traditional camp is] not only for [PCSS], but other schools to utilize that area. If they want to use it, they can [go] and bring their students there and teach them too, and even out of towners in the communities, they can [go] there too.”

**Elder Roger Ellis**



## **The Grand Opening Of The N̓tsāw Chù Kets'edän Kù Traditional Camp at Porter Creek Secondary School**

Hundreds attended an opening ceremony hosted by the school on May 27, 2025 with speakers saying the Njel deepens and solidifies cultural connections — both at the school and the community at large.

The Njel provides a space for cultural teachings and ceremony while making place-based learning accessible to everyone.



**The traditional Southern Tutchone Njel  
on the grounds of Porter Creek  
Secondary School in Whitehorse.**



**The interior of the Njel**



## Future Plans

The goal is to first complete the traditional building and then add the kitchen and smoke shack so that students can hunt and process the meat on campus. Through this camp the school plans to continue to build cultural programming capacity, relational capacity, connection with communities and wellness capacity.

There are also plans to have a ongoing traditional programming and teaching happening with Elders and community knowledge keepers.

“

*“We want more people in our community to feel comfortable coming to our school space. The goal is to keep building on this project until we can fully immerse students in a variety of cultural teachings. This is only the beginning...”*

Nicole Cross, Vice Principal



## Other Funders & Supporters

Porter Creek Secondary Students, Teachers & Administration

Champagne Aishihik First Nations

Kwanlin Dün First Nations

Long Ago Peoples Place – Elder Harold Johnson

Yukon First Nations Education Directorate (YFNED)

Porter Creek Substance-Free Grad Society

Yukon University Innovation and Entrepreneurship Division

Yukon Education

The Government of Yukon

Copper Caribou

Tuya Construction

Hampton Construction

Walker Home Construction

s.no Architecture

Makeway Foundation

Yukon Historic Resources Fund