

ARCTIC
INSPIRATION PRIZE



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PIRURVIK

PRESCHOOL

2018 \$1 MILLION WINNER

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: Adriana Kusugak
Executive Director, Nunavut Literacy Council

Team: Tessa Lochhead and Karen Nutarak (Team Leaders), Raymee Angnetsiak, Ilisapi Haulli, Celina Kalluk, Leah Kippomee, Samantha Koonoo, Ceporah Mearns, Denica Nahogaloak, Julian Oyukuluk, Pauline Pauloosie, Noodloo Peter, Tannikie Peterloosie, Sandi Vincent-Connelly

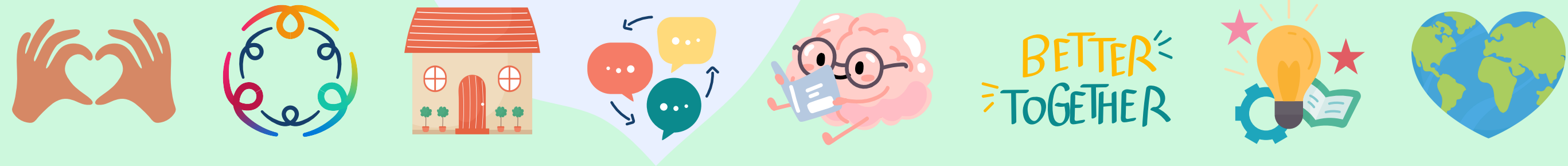
This report was compiled and created by the **Qatalyst Research Group**, with the help of **Ilitaqsiniq**, the project team, and AIP.



INUIT QAUJIMAJATUQANGIT

The Pirurvik Preschool Program is grounded in Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) translated as “Inuit traditional knowledge” and embodies eight principles:

Inuuqatigiitsiarniq	Respecting others, relationships, and caring for people.	Pilimmaksarniq or Pijariuqsarniq	Development of skills through practice, effort, and action.
Tunnganarniq	Fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming, and inclusive.	Piliriqatigiinni or Ikajuqtiigiinni	Working together for a common cause.
Pijitsirniq	Serving and providing for family and community.	Qanuqtuurniq	Being innovative and resourceful.
Aajiqatigiinni	Decision-making through discussion and consensus.	Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq	Respect and care for the land, animals, and the environment.



MONTESSORI

The second pedagogical foundation of the Pirurvik Preschool derives from the Montessori Method which incorporates a self directed, individualized approach to learning for children.

Respect for the Child

Freedom of Movement and Choice

Absorbent Mind

Prepared Environment

Sensitive Periods
(windows of opportunity for learning)

Intrinsic Motivation

Educating the Whole Child

Independence

Individualized Learning

Auto Education

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM



- Develop and deliver IQ-Montessori training and early childhood education programming tailored to the needs of communities;
- Create environments that speak to the communities' needs and values in the first educational experience for children and their families;
- Promote and enrich Inuktitut literacy through activities that correspond with the use of locally crafted and Montessori materials; and
- Develop Nunavut's capacity to train and retain early childhood educators and leaders across the Territory.



DECOLONIZING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Pirurvik Preschool is a transformational early childhood education (ECE) initiative that combines Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Inungnuinniq (traditional Inuit child-rearing) with Montessori methods. Serving children aged 6 months to 5 years in communities across Nunavut, the program supports holistic skill development through observation, mentorship, hands-on learning, and meaningful efforts to complete tasks.

The approach allows children to learn at their own pace, embedding culturally relevant education and supporting language revitalization through the active use of Inuktitut in the ECE environment.

Piruvik received a Governor General's Innovation Award in 2022.



We are used to seeing a certain kind of education with one person being in charge and everyone listening to that. So when you reverse that and actually put the power of education into each individual child's hands... that is decolonizing education at the heart of it.

- Tessa Lochhead, Co-Founder



INCREASING ACCESS THE PIRUVIK PRESCHOOL EDUCATION ACROSS THE NORTH



AIP funding in 2018 and with the support of the Early Learning and Child Care Innovation Program funding in 2022, helped to keep the preschool open and free of charge for community members so that it could remain as accessible as possible to all children in the community. Equity and accessibility are foundational characteristics of Piruvik Preschool program.

85 educators have been trained across many communities: Ilisaqsivik (Clyde River), Tumikuluit Saipaaqivik Daycare (Iqaluit), Tundra Buddies Daycare (Iqaluit), Naurainnuk Daycare (Pond Inlet), Piruqsiaq Daycare (Igloolik), Siqiniq Daycare (Chesterfield Inlet), Ivavik Daycare (Rakin Inlet), Kataqjuaq Daycare (Rankin Inlet), Shared Care Society (Arviat), Aqqiumavik Society (Arviat), Innitait Daycare (Taloyoak), Saipaaqivik Daycare (Kinngait), Cambridge Bay Daycare, Arctic Bay Daycare, and the Baker Lake Daycare.

As of October 2024, a total of between **255** (lower estimate) to **306** (upper estimate) children have completed the Piruvik Preschool Program since it opened in 2016.



INUUQATIGIITSARNIQ: RESPECTING OTHERS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND CARING FOR PEOPLE.

BUILDING CAPACITY AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Pirurvik Preschool staff developed new and innovative training, programming, and approaches in order to meet community needs. They also acquired materials and developed learning resources by adapting Montessori materials to specific community needs and different child-rearing practices that vary from a family to family and across communities. There are approximately 100 materials in the Preschool listed in the IQ-Montessori Training Modules. The “heart connection” to the content and among learners is fostered through conversations, sharing, caring, and laughter. Language keepers, Elders, and older women not only teach but actively participate in the training, and their presence helps create a peaceful, supportive learning environment where relationships can thrive.

TRAINING MATERIALS

60 training videos developed by the Pirurvik Preschool that will soon be available via private login.

DELIVERED IQ-MONTESSORI TRAINING

In April 2019, Pirurvik conducted their first training project with the Tumikuluit Saipaaqivik Daycare staff in Pond Inlet and Iqaluit.



A Montessori certificate is given to students who complete the training although the training has yet to be formally recognized



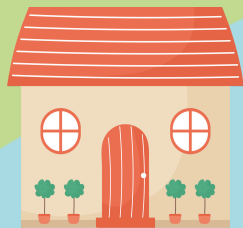
TUNNGANARNIQ: FOSTERING GOOD SPIRIT BY BEING OPEN, WELCOMING, AND INCLUSIVE.

IMPACT OF TRAINING ON COMMUNITY

To assist other communities in implementing IQ-Montessori early childhood training, Pirurvik has purchased computers for each of the facilities they work with and other materials needed for program implementation.

Upon completion of their early childhood education training, students immediately became instructors. These new instructors go out to other communities to train preschool or day care staff in IQ Montessori early childhood.

The impact of the training on the students has been profound as one instructor noted “ they are better Mothers because of ECE [training]”



PIJITSIRNIQ: SERVING AND PROVIDING FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY.

CREATING AN INSPIRING SPACE FOR LEARNERS

The preschool spaces typically have cultural and traditional items like wooden dolls (inujaaq), traditional clothing, and seal-skin-covered sleds, among others. Other resources include syllabic cue/flash cards contained in a hand-made bag made by a local Elder, song book, sealskin scraping and stretching, bone games.

The availability of other materials such as bowls, plates and cups; mats; water and snacks; cutting and pasting; cylinder blocks; sweeping (broom and dustpan); large beads; colour globes; and dressing frames, among others represent the creativity and input and direct work of community members

Children learn new skills, traditional words and new terminology and traditional ways of being while they play.



AAJIIQATIGIINNIQ: DECISION-MAKING THROUGH DISCUSSION AND
CONSENSUS.

CREATING AN INSPIRING SPACE FOR LEARNERS



INVOLVING PARENTS IN EARLY EDUCATION

The parent pamphlets have inspired many parents to incorporate certain tools and educational practices into their home settings, which has had a profound impact that Pirurvik did not anticipate. At graduation, parents are provided with questionnaires and the preschool always gets beautiful feedback from the parents.

To view pamphlets and other Pirurvik resources, visit their website: <https://www.pirurvikpreschool.com/>

We have been getting positive feedback from parents and the kindergarten teachers, watching children learning, improving. Seeing them happy makes me want to do more. Especially the positive feedback from the parents and teachers, it has impacted me to do more.

- Leah Kippomee

Manager of Pirurvik Preschool, Pond Inlet



PILIRIQATIGIINNIQ OR IKAJUQTIGIINNIQ: WORKING TOGETHER FOR A COMMON CAUSE.

INUNNGUINIQ - THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A WHOLE, CAPABLE PERSON

The hands-on approach of learning by doing and working with things found in the environment encourages children to learn through play. Children learn practical life skills, build motor skills, language acquisition. They also learn how to start and complete the task, interact with others, be patient as they wait for others to finish. Being able to freely interact with the materials around them by starting and completing the task, the children learn how to be methodical in mastering the skills. When they master the skills they can be more creative and feel good about themselves. These skills are a foundation for a healthy, engaged, confident and independent students.

[my child] is so confident now. She is like a totally different kid. She's trying new things, doing things and trying things all by herself. Before she came to preschool she was very scared all the time and very shy.

- Parent



<https://vimeo.com/545287524>



**PILIMMAKSARNIQ OR PIJARIUQSARNIQ: DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS
THROUGH PRACTICE, EFFORT, AND ACTION.**

SHARING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS NUNAVUT

Kindergarten teachers Neevee Wilkins and Asheley Tulugak, were trained by the Pirurvik Preschool staff and are now inspired to bring this knowledge learned into the Kindergarten classrooms across Nunavut.

We want culturally relevant, we want child-centred, we want student-led, we want parents, Elders, community involved. We want children to have a positive school experience, so all these things for years, for decades, the educators, the governments, the DEAs, the communities have been talking about and wanting. And trying to figure out ways to make it happen... here it is! For educators that want to offer those things to their students this is a great way to do it. It's a great way to achieve that.

- Asheley Tulugak

Elementary school teacher in Rankin Inlet



QANUQTUURNIQ: BEING INNOVATIVE AND RESOURCEFUL.

FUTURE

The long-term vision of Pirurvik is to demonstrate the importance of early childhood education and illustrate the positive impact that cultural integration has in ECE programming. The hope is that the Department of Education will integrate culturally relevant ECE programming into the public education system, or that a current or future Inuit organizations will take on a governing role in the delivery of early childhood education programming across the territory to serve the needs of Nunavummiut.



**AVATITTINNIK KAMATSIARNIQ: RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE LAND,
ANIMALS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.**

OTHER FUNDERS & SUPPORTERS

Save the Children Canada

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and RBC North Star Funding)

Dept of Education, Inuit language and Culture

Dept of Education, Healthy Children's Initiative

Government of Nunavut

Makigiaqta (NTI)

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)

Children's First Initiative

Arctic Council

Justice for Indigenous Women

Early Learning and Child Care Innovation Program

