





# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

## A Legacy of Growth, A Future of Possibility

Every OYEP season reminds me of what drives success: the basics. Hard work, integrity, dedication, dirty hands, and bright smiles. Focusing on the friendships that form when people come together with a shared purpose and shared challenges.

Tree planting taught me those lessons early in my career. It's tough work. It demands grit, teamwork, and the ability to keep going when conditions aren't easy. But it also gives you something rare: a sense of accomplishment, pride and the forever friendships that come from working side by side in the bush.

That's the foundation OYEP is built on. We focus on creating real opportunities rooted in community and learning by doing. Its through this framework – year after year - we've seen youth arrive quiet and unsure and leave with resilience, friendships, and a clear sense of what they're capable of.

Since joining OYEP in 2012, I've watched this program grow from a small camp into a national network rooted in trust and partnership. True impact shows up in the confidence built, the relationships formed, and the doors that open long after the season ends.

Today, through OYEP and Dexterra Community Initiatives, we're continuing that work: expanding opportunities, removing barriers, and supporting pathways that reflect Indigenous strength and collective responsibility.

This year's National Report celebrates that evolution. The stories, the milestones, and the people whose voices and vision continue to guide us forward.



**Sarah Ambroziak**  
Executive Director  
Dexterra Community Initiatives



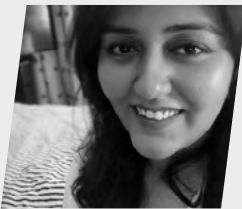
"It is such an amazing program if you have the right mindset. You learn while you make money! You get to connect with others, which helps with social interactions – and being able to live out in a camp for 6 weeks is not easy! We are given so many great opportunities and support that will make a difference on how we grow up. I will remember my time at OYEP for the rest of my life."

— Mary, Inuit

"I learned that all it takes is to open up, and that I'm a lot more hard-working and capable than I thought. I have a lot of determination and if I put my all into everything I do, the chances of it working out are almost 100%. I can't put into words how much OYEP really means to me. I'll be grateful for the rest of my life."

— Trevor, Opaskwayak Cree Nation

## DEXTERRA COMMUNITY INITIATIVES BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Ayesha Bahukhandi**  
Chair of the Board



**Tony McGuire**  
Director



**Hamish Black**  
Director



**Lee-Anne Lyon-Bartley**  
Director



**Alex Luengo**  
Director

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As we reflect on more than 26 years of collaboration, we acknowledge that the work of Dexterra Community Initiatives takes place on the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island. Our journey has been shaped by relationships built on respect, reciprocity, and shared learning. We are honoured and deeply inspired by the incredible contributions of the youth, who have been at the heart of this work, whose leadership, creativity, and resilience continue to guide us forward. As we expand our partnerships every day, we remain committed to creating opportunities that celebrate culture and strengthen vibrant futures together.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT – NOW MORE THAN EVER

For more than 26 years, OYEP has been closing the very gaps that are now making national headlines. While others are only beginning to design solutions for youth employment and education inequities, we've been quietly proving what works.

Canada faces its highest youth unemployment rate in decades at 14.7%, with teens hardest hit at over 20%. For Indigenous youth, systemic education barriers and geographic isolation compound the challenge, limiting access to stable, meaningful work. At the same time, employers report a growing skills mismatch as automation and green transitions reshape the labour market. Youth without early work experience risk long-term effects on earnings and career stability.

The solution has always been clear to us: education and on-the-job skills development must go hand in hand. Research shows that work-integrated learning is one of the safest, most effective ways to prepare youth for the workforce and achieving future life goals. It builds real-world competencies, fosters confidence, and creates pathways to sustainable careers.

OYEP isn't a funding gamble. It's a proven model ready to scale. The time to invest in what works is now. The future depends on it.

## THE \$27 BILLION OPPORTUNITY

Closing the Indigenous employment gap is an economic imperative. According to the Conference Board of Canada, eliminating barriers to Indigenous workforce participation could add up to \$27.7 billion annually to Canada's GDP, a figure that reflects critical untapped potential in every sector.



"Living amongst people I'd never met before brought me out of my comfort zone and showed me there was so much more to it than just the money. It was the experience and the connections I made along the way."

— Kaycee, Métis



"I learned that I love the construction area. I hope more opportunities like that come my way. I wanna go to university and get a good job and OYEP helped me see that."

— Lylah, Louis Bull First Nation

## Investing in the Future

With strong partnerships across industry, education, and Indigenous communities, OYEP is a strategic investment in Canada's future. Every dollar supports youth in achieving their potential and alumni are leading the charge in climate adaptation and sustainable resource management.



"After completing the program, I feel more confident in the workplace."

— Renee, Lax Kw'alaams First Nation



"It put such a huge impact on me and how I view the world now."

— Rebecca, Inuit



# INNOVATION & SKILLS – PREPARING TOMORROW’S WORKFORCE

OYEP brings together two ways of learning and understanding the world: Indigenous knowledge and Western science. Both have value, and both shape how youth see their futures. Youth build practical skills in trades, construction, forestry, and environmental science, while also learning from traditional teachings about land, stewardship, and community. This approach highlights how knowledge systems can complement one another. When youth see how traditional knowledge connects with science and technology, they discover new ways to solve problems and innovate. Respect for the land and cultural understanding strengthen technical learning, creating a more holistic perspective.

**Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math** and **Trades Week** exemplifies this balance, bridging Western science with Indigenous knowledge. Through partnerships with post-secondary institutions, youth explore science and trades programs, while engaging in cultural teachings led by Elders, peers, and Indigenous support centres. Living and learning on campus creates a grounded, identity-driven experience that connects culture, education, and career exploration.



The impact of this integration is evident in the experience of Amelia, a first-year participant from McLeod Lake Indian Band. Amelia completed wildfire certification training delivered by the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council (NIFSC), a new OYEP partner in 2025, and was subsequently invited to the 2025 Indigenous Public Safety Conference in Calgary. Her mother, Andrea, reflected on the experience:

“This summer helped my daughter grow and come out of her shell. She is now a striving young lady with a voice! Amelia was struggling last year with identity and mental health. This experience was a game changer for her.”





# LEGACY OF IMPACT UP CLOSE – A YEAR IN REVIEW

## From Seed to System

For over two decades, OYEP has grown from a bold idea into a national movement. One rooted in community, culture, and climate. Every summer, youth step into leadership opportunities, and every season adds new chapters to a story of transformation. These numbers reflect more than metrics, they represent milestones, memories, and momentum.

## Certificates & Tickets Earned

682

## Hours Worked

30,525

## Trees Planted

82,060

## Youth Graduates

138

## High School Credits Earned

387

## Beginner Driver's Licenses

5

## Indigenous Management

22

## Milestones That Matter: Celebrating Youth Achievements Since 2000

1,000+

Indigenous youth have stepped into their futures with confidence earning credentials, paychecks, and high school credits, and sparking change wherever they go.

500,000+

of hands-on work have been logged, each moment filled with learning, teamwork, and tenacity.

2.82 m+

trees have been planted, restoring landscapes and contributing to national climate goals.

190+

communities have been reached, creating ripple effects of empowerment and inclusion.



# THEORY OF CHANGE – OYEP’S HOLISTIC MODEL

OYEP supports young people in building skills, earning credentials, and gaining confidence through hands-on work integrated learning. The program connects youth with mentors, employers, community leaders, and peers, creating pathways to good jobs, further education, and brighter futures. By meeting basic needs and offering tailored support, OYEP removes barriers and creates a space to support youth to succeed in school, work, and life.



## THE CHALLENGE?

OYEP recognizes that Indigenous youth often face unique barriers to mainstream education and employment, resulting in gaps compared to national standards. By providing hands-on work integrated learning, mentorship, and tailored support, OYEP helps bridge these disparities and opens pathways for youth to achieve their full potential.



## THE ACTION

OYEP provides youth with opportunities to learn new skills and earn industry-recognized certificates, gain real work experience through a paid summer job, connect with mentors and community and industry leaders, participate in cultural activities and learn from Elders, and earn high school credits while exploring post-secondary pathways.



## ENVIRONMENT SETTING

OYEP makes sure youth have everything they need including food, a safe place to stay, transportation, and tailored supports. The program meets youth where they are, listens to their needs, and supports them in finding their own path to success.



## THE RESULT

Youth feel more confident and prepared for work, more young people finish high school and continue into further education, and participants build strong relationships and a national network. They develop lasting friendships and leadership skills, while employers benefit from talented, motivated, and safety-minded young workers.



## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

At OYEP, Indigenous youth take the lead in shaping their own futures. Youth actively participate in hands-on work experiences, skills training, and cultural activities that expose them to all kinds of possibilities for their future. Supported by a network of peers, mentors, and community partners, youth drive the program, close education and employment gaps, and create lasting change. OYEP provides the opportunity for young people to develop the tools, confidence, and connections they need to become leaders, building a stronger, more sustainable, and inclusive Canada for all.





# YOUNG INDIGENOUS LEADERS – GROWING FROM WITHIN

## Real Voices, Real Impact: Alumni Stories that Spark Change

More than half of OYEP's management team are program alumni, a testament to the pathways OYEP creates for ambitious youth. Many start as youth, develop leadership skills as crew leaders, and rise to senior roles guided by mentorship and personalized coaching. This progression helps young people build confidence, career-ready skills, and a strong sense of purpose. Graduates often launch into meaningful careers after their time at OYEP, showcasing the program's lasting impact on youth achievement.

### Indigenous Management Stream

- **More than 50% of OYEP's management team are alumni**
- **Leadership progression from participant → CIT → Crew Leader → Supervisor**
- **Wrap around supports ensure youth are ready for career transitions**
- **Strong partnerships with industry leaders create real-world opportunities**

**Neepin Cook's** journey with OYEP exemplifies the program's commitment to capacity building and Indigenous leadership development. Beginning as a participant in 2020, Neepin advanced from Junior Staff in 2021 to Crew Leader in 2023 and now serves as an OYEP Program Supervisor in 2025. Her leadership growth reflects both her dedication and the supportive, skills-based environment OYEP provides. Reflecting on her experience as a Crew Leader, Neepin shared, "Working with so many individuals from different communities, and learning their stories, has really honed my goal of advocating for Indigenous communities and given me motivation to do what I want to do." This statement highlights the confidence and leadership capacity she gained through experience, mentorship, and trust. Currently completing her third year in Indigenous and Environmental Studies at the University of Winnipeg, and lasting impact of OYEP's approach to youth empowerment and leadership development.

**Timothy Twoyoungmen** joined OYEP in 2022 as a participant in Alberta, returning for two summers before stepping into a Crew Leader in Training leadership role in 2024. Through his time with OYEP, he developed strong leadership, and teamwork skills that prepared him for the next step in his career. In spring 2025, OYEP's partnership network created a new opportunity when Jason Mogilefski of West Fraser Cochrane reached out about a research assistant position on a joint water research project between West Fraser and the University of Waterloo. OYEP staff connected Tim with the hiring team, and he was successfully selected for the internship. Following its completion in the fall, West Fraser offered Tim full-time employment. This success story demonstrates how OYEP's leadership progression pathway and wrap around supports help youth transition from early intervention skills development into meaningful, long-term careers in the natural resource sector, supported by industry partnerships that remove barriers and champion inclusive employment.





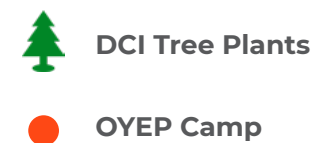
# NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS – YOUTH PLANTING FOR PROSPERITY

## Plant it Forward

Through OYEP, youth led real environmental change, planting 82,000 trees with forestry partners, and building and maintaining 20+ km of trails with Trans Canada Trail in 2025.

From wildfire mitigation and reforestation to pioneering green technologies like solar and hydroponics, youth gain certifications and insight into available career paths, while restoring the land. Guided by Elders, every project blends stewardship with modern science, forging climate resilience and opportunity.

Since 2000, 2.82 million trees have been planted by youth.





# PURPOSE-DRIVEN PARTNERSHIPS

## Collective Impact for Indigenous Youth

Long-term funding turns OYEP from a seasonal program into a sustained pathway for Indigenous youth. Multi-year commitments provide stability, support program growth, and allow for innovation without interruption. We are deeply grateful to partners, who invest in long-term impact and set a standard for public good. Their commitment strengthens communities and helps build a more equitable Canada. OYEP honours these leaders and invites governments, businesses, and communities to join in shaping a strong future for Indigenous youth.



## Community Based Support

OYEP is strengthened by deep partnerships with Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations across the country. Partners such as Aptipi Anicinapek Nation, Anishinabek Employment and Training Services (AETS), Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO), and other community organizations ensure the program is guided by local direction and community-identified priorities. They provide financial support, coordinate recruitment, explore and advocate for alternative systems, and help facilitate in community work experiences. Elders and community leaders offer mentorship and guidance that connect youth learning to community well-being. Together, these collaborations make OYEP a pathway for self-determination, two-way capacity building, and systems innovation to support the development of future Indigenous leaders.



## Alberta’s Forestry Sector: Investing in the Future

FRIAA: The Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta (FRIAA) approved a multi-year funding proposal through the Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP), securing millions in support until 2032. This long-term investment ensures program stability and growth across Alberta.

Partnerships at OYEP extend far beyond financial support. Through collaboration with West Fraser, we connected with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology to access their Kidney Lake Field School as OYEP’s home for the summer, an example of how strategic partnerships amplify opportunity, enhance learning environments, and demonstrate the value of shared commitment to Indigenous youth success.



## Bioenergy & Climate Solutions

Drax: As OYEP’s largest bioenergy partner, Drax contributed \$100,000 and hosted a youth engagement event in BC. Their support ensured continuity for the 2025 season and reflects a deep commitment to community and climate action.



Iron & Earth: Focused on community-driven climate solutions, Iron & Earth partnered with OYEP for the second year, delivering three days of renewable energy programming at Alberta South. Their mission to embed Truth and Reconciliation into every aspect of their work aligns seamlessly with OYEP’s values.



## Energy Sector Engagement

Keyera: A New Partner in 2025, Keyera contributed \$100,000 to support OYEP. Their partnership included a youth tour of the Alberta Energy Foundation facility and participation in closing ceremonies. Keyera’s commitment to Indigenous communities is reflected in their support for education, training, and capacity building.



## Mining and Critical Minerals

OYEP’s strong relationships with Canada’s mining sector continue to create meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities for youth. This summer, youth explored the world of mineral exploration through prospecting activities, geological mapping, and underground mine tours hosted by industry partners. These immersive experiences connected classroom learning to real world applications, showcased diverse career paths in mining and natural resources, and reinforced the importance of industry collaboration in building future ready Indigenous leaders.



**TRANS CANADA TRAIL**  
**SENTIER TRANSCANADIEN**

## Hands-On Skill Building

Partnerships with organizations like Iron & Earth and Trans Canada Trail (TCT) bring real-world experiences to camp. Youth build trails, restore landscapes, learn about the renewable power of the wind and the sun, gaining pride in their work.

“Our partnership with OYEP highlights the incredible passion and leadership of Indigenous youth across the country. The dedication they bring to Trail Week and their connection to the land embody the future of trail stewardship in Canada.”

— **Raquel Healey**, Coordinator, Education & Inclusion Initiatives, TCT



# FINANCIALS

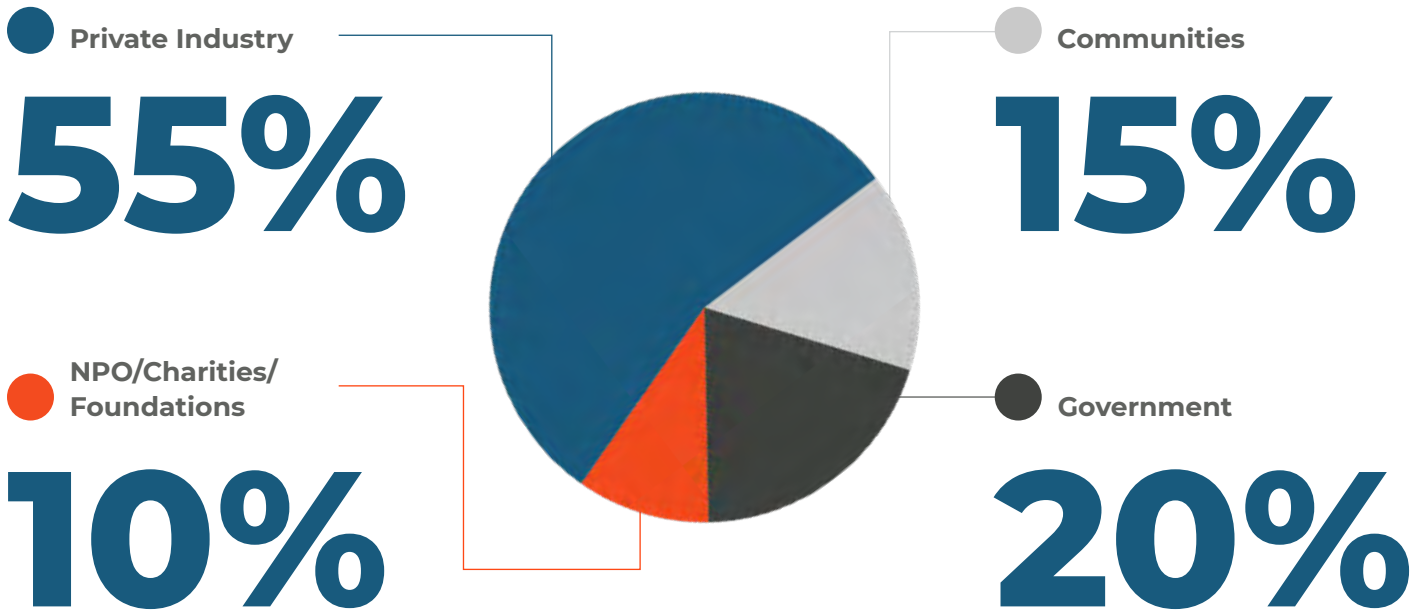
## – FUNDING THE FUTURE

### Movement for Change

In 2025, over 150 partners contributed to OYEP's mission. Their united investment fuels stronger communities, a greener future, and countless stories of transformation.

Running a national program across remote sites is complex, but we are committed to using funds efficiently and transparently to maximize impact.

OYEP's annual budget is supported through a balanced mix of community, public, and private partners. We deliberately diversify our funding base to ensure long-term stability, shared accountability, and broad engagement across sectors.



### What does a youth get?

- At no cost to participate, each youth has the opportunity to gain a whole load more than a summer job.
- All meals, accommodations, and transportation are covered.
- Industry-recognized training and certifications that youth receive support real career paths.
- A chance to earn high school credits, take part in cultural activities, and build confidence through hands-on experience.
- Being part of a national network of peers, mentors, and industry leaders, who are shaping the future of Canada's natural resource sector.

Use of Funds – 100% of spend goes toward running our summer programs and supporting the youth throughout the year:

Youth Wages & MERCs

~60%

Living and Travel

10%

Education, Workshops, and Safety Supplies

5%

Community Engagement

5%

Training & Programming

~10%

Overhead and Administration

10%



# CALL TO ACTION & GRATITUDE

## Thank You for Growing With Us

We wrap up this National Report brimming with gratitude and with an invitation to reflect on the fact that everything that's been built over the past 26 years exists because of the energy and heart of the OYEP community.

Indigenous communities and Elders: you've welcomed us, trusted us with your youth, and shaped OYEP's journey. Your wisdom lights our path, and we look forward to walking it further, side by side.

To our government and industry partners: you believed in the potential of Indigenous youth, fueling dreams with every dollar and opportunity; let's amplify this movement and unlock untapped talent, especially in emerging sectors.

Educators, families, and allies: your encouragement sparks new journeys one referral, one cheer, and one shared story can launch a life-changing adventure.

OYEP youth and alumni: Chi Miigwetch, Hiy Hiy, Marsii, Mąsi chok, Ishniish! You inspire us with your courage and drive, reminding everyone that your success is our proudest legacy and the future belongs to you.

OYEP has shown that when we unite for young people, we create legacies, nurture leaders, and plant seeds that grow into mighty forests of hope.

Our rallying cry: be a champion for impact whether you're a policymaker, business leader, community member, or alum, there's a role for you in making sure Indigenous youth have the opportunity to soar.

Thank you for your time, your belief, and your partnership. Here's to the next 25 years, led by the brilliant faces you've seen on these pages; let's keep pushing forward, together.





# PARTNERSHIPS

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS



## DIAMOND



## PLATINUM



## GOLD



## SILVER



## BRONZE



## ADDITIONAL PARTNERS





# OYEP

**“RECONCILIATION MEANS  
RESILIENCE TO ME, AND OYEP  
HELPS YOUTH FEEL MORE  
CONFIDENT IN THEMSELVES  
AND GIVES US A SENSE OF  
BELONGING DESPITE BEING  
AWAY FROM HOME.”**

Melissa, Sachigo Lake

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