

# PERSPECTIVE

## Voices of Indigenous-Led Philanthropy

For members of the Potlotek First Nation in Cape Breton, finding fresh fruit and vegetables on the reserve is difficult. There's a small grocery store about ten minutes away, but its produce section is nothing to write home about. Finding decent fresh produce means travelling 55 kms from home.

However, food security for the community is about to change, thanks to Ulnooweg. (See inset.)

The word Ulnooweg, pronounced ["Ul-noo-wegg"], is a Mi'kmaq word which broadly translated means: "To make indigenous or to adapt beliefs, and customs of the Mi'kmaq".

Tahirih Paul, Economic Development Officer for Potlotek First Nation, was looking for solutions to their food security challenges when she was approached by staff of Ulnooweg Development Group's *Digital Mi'kmaq* project, who are now leading a Community Garden and Food Security project, featuring a geothermal greenhouse.

Funding is provided to qualified donee communities via the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation (see inset) and United Way Halifax

Once complete, the project will include a field garden, large-scale potting shed and a food centre.

The objectives of the Community Garden and Food Security project are:

- To celebrate the principles of Netukulimk, ecological sustainability and sustainable livelihoods for food providers. Netukulimk is "the

use of the natural bounty provided by the Creator for the self-support and well-being of the individual and the community. Netukulimk is achieving adequate standards of community nutrition and economic well-being without jeopardizing the integrity, diversity, or productivity of our environment."

- Create and provide additional means and opportunities for community members to actively engage in all aspects of the food system.
- Increase the quality and availability of healthy, locally grown foods.
- Provide more opportunity for food to be celebrated as central to both culture and community.

The greenhouse project is a way to begin addressing years of difficulties for the region's Indigenous peoples.

The long-term vision of Ulnooweg is to expand the initiative to Indigenous communities across the country.

**Ulnooweg Education Centre** (see inset) - Digital Mi'kmaq, originally a project of the Ulnooweg Development Corporation, is now housed at the Ulnooweg Education Centre, founded in 2013, whose goal is "to create lasting foundational change for a new generation through the interplay of science, culture, education and digital skills."

**Ulnooweg Development Group** (see inset) - Unlocking the Potential of Indigenous Communities

Both the Education Centre and Digital



*Natasha van Bentum*  
Legacy & Outreach Advisor

Mi'kmaq are offspring of the Ulnooweg Development Group Inc., a remarkable non-profit organization providing loans and business services to Indigenous entrepreneurs since 1986.

### **Ulnooweg Indigenous Community Foundation** (inset on following page)

At the initiative of the Development Corporation, this unique organization was created in 2018. The Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation has made possible some of the most inspirational examples of Indigenous-led philanthropy.

The Foundation is working to strengthen the relationship between Canada's philanthropic sector and the Indigenous Communities of Atlantic Canada. Its members and directors are chiefs and leaders from the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet communities of the Atlantic region.

Executive Director of the Foundation, Christopher Googoo, says "The Foundation is taking a leadership role in closing the gap between the philanthropic sector and Indigenous communities. As an indigenous-led foundation, it is our goal to create new funds, pursue investment opportunities and increase public understanding of the opportunities for Indigenous communities and philanthropy to come together in an era of reconciliation."

The Foundation works to harness the potential of youth leaders, promote opportunities to access culture and language, build meaningful educa-

tional pathways, and support the transition to employment and entrepreneurship.

Kris Archie, CEO of The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (“The Circle”), calls the Ulnooweg Indigenous Community Foundation “a pre-eminent example of Indigenous-led philanthropy, an organization working under its own sovereignty.”

### **Qualified Donee Status – Opportunities to build the relationships between Indigenous communities and the philanthropic sector**

An analysis by The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in 2017 showed only a tiny percentage (1%) of Canada’s registered charities are “Indigenous-focused”.

A miniscule amount of charitable dollars go to Indigenous groups annually, less than two cents of every dollar donated.

Charity lawyer Richard Bridge has helped Atlantic First Nations to secure Qualified Donee status. (An essay by Richard on the origins of Ulnooweg innovation can be found in the October 2015 edition of “The Philanthropist”.) Twenty-eight Mi’kmaq and Maliseet communities and two tribal council organizations are now registered.

I spoke with charity lawyer Richard Bridge, who says:

“Securing qualified donee status is the easiest way for Indigenous-governing organizations to connect with the philanthropic sector.

- Qualified donees are able to issue tax receipts for donations and to receive grants from registered charities. First Nations governments are eligible for this status as ‘public bodies performing a function of government in Canada’.
- To secure Qualified Donee status, First Nations must register with Canada Revenue Agency. There are 634 First Nations in Canada and at the moment approximately 400 have registered.
- Generally speaking, a First Nation that is a qualified donee has greater latitude than do registered charities when it comes to the use of resources

it receives through donations and grants.

- Like a municipal or provincial government, a First Nation can use its resources for activities it deems in the community’s best interest. They are not bound by all of the limitations that apply to charities. This is subject to any conditions imposed on specific donations or grants by donors or grant makers.”

### **Impact**

In Richard Bridge’s words, “For leaders in the philanthropic sector who want to have impact, there are immediate opportunities for co-operation with Indigenous communities and organizations to advance virtually every field of charitable endeavor, through:

- grant-making to First Nations that are qualified donees and Indigenous charities,
- investments in Indigenous projects or enterprises,
- building philanthropic relationships and community infrastructure.”

Richard continues, “This, in turn, will reduce the intolerable gaps documented elsewhere regarding poverty, health, income, employment, and other indicators of well-being.

In my view, it is essential for the philanthropic sector to turn more energy, experience, and resources to building new constructive relationships with Indigenous communities across the country.

I believe that innovative approaches to all aspects of community development and health that help Indigenous communities achieve greater self-reliance and prosperity should be priorities.”

### **The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada – Reframing the Narrative of Being ‘Charitable’**

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is an extraordinary organization that connects with and supports the empowerment of First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations, communities, and individuals, in building a stronger, healthier future.

### **Ulnooweg Development Group Incorporated (a non-profit organization)**

Purposes are to promote the economic and social welfare of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities primarily in Atlantic Canada by providing financial services which can include loans and related business support services, and training and education, to Aboriginal businesses, entrepreneurs, First Nation Governments and community organizations.

### **Ulnooweg Education Centre (a charitable organization)**

Purposes are to advance education in First Nations communities in Canada and Indigenous communities outside Canada by:

- teaching financial, accounting, economic, governance, business and strategic planning principles, practices and skills through courses, training, workshops, presentations and counseling sessions;
- developing and delivering courses, programs, training, workshops, presentations and counselling sessions that help children, youth and adults develop knowledge and skills relating to
- fostering employment and career opportunities, ecology, health and Indigenous culture and language; and
- conducting research into the social, financial, economic, demographic, and development conditions, needs and opportunities of these communities.

### **The Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation (a charitable foundation)**

Purposes of the Corporation are:

- To receive and maintain a fund or funds and to apply all or part of the principal and income therefrom, from time to time, to qualified donees, as defined in subsection 149.1(1) of the Income Tax Act (Canada); and
- To advance education by providing publicly available scholarships and bursaries to Indigenous students to be used for post-secondary education.

CEO Kris Archie is a leading voice in Canada on Indigenous-led philanthropy. An impassioned and articulate woman from the Ts'qescen First Nation in BC, Kris speaks directly to the issues while painting a picture of the situation today in the charitable sector.

In Kris Archie's words, "White settler-created philanthropy is often characterized as traditional, Eurocentric, or Western, involving intentions of goodwill – an act or gift done or made for humanitarian purposes.

Missing from the narrative of settler philanthropy are the stories and practices behind wealth accumulation generated on taken land and on the backs of Indigenous peoples.

It is important to acknowledge the legacy of harm and entitlement attached to philanthropic dollars in order to build relationships of transparency and trust."

Kris says "When white settlers hear the words "Indigenous Philanthropy", they are thinking of donations that go to Indigenous organizations. I am speaking about Indigenous-led philanthropy. Indigenous-led philanthropy is much broader than white settler philanthropy.

Indigenous-led philanthropy embodies many generations of laws, it's about ethical use of resources, about being in deep relation to Nature, it's about knowledge transfer.

Indigenous-led philanthropy is all-embracing, a set of behaviours related to how we walk in this world. And these behaviours not only support the immediate community but has a ripple effect to other communities.

"We are trying to re-frame the narrative of being 'charitable' and work with people who recognize the need to do the work differently. Indigenous philanthropy has more to do with reciprocity, time and cultural context." – Kris Archie, The Circle

Roberta Jamieson, a renowned Canadian lawyer and Indigenous advocate, is also eloquent on this subject:

"The traditional philanthropic paradigm is a transaction: one gives, the other receives. This concept is alien to most Indigenous communities whose giving stresses reciprocity, where givers become receivers who become givers.

If we want to change outcomes in Indigenous communities, the first step for donors is self-reflection. Philanthropic organizations need to understand that cash cannot buy relationships – nor can it be a substitute or human involvement – and they need to see that transparency, trust, and compliance are natural components of good relationships".

For the philanthropic sector and Indigenous communities to work together more constructively, there is a need to build new relationships, understanding, co-operation, and infrastructure.

### **Reciprocal Philanthropy**

Roberta Jamieson shares her insights. "One of the changes that is required, if philanthropic organizations want a constructive relationship with Indigenous communities, is to recognize and embrace reciprocity.

Reciprocity is the foundation that underpins all our relationships; it is the lens through which we look at all relationships, both human and non-human. Reciprocity is the essence of how we give and receive. It maintains the cycle of life and the sustainability of our people."

"I honour you by giving, you honour me by receiving." – Rebecca Anderson, Indigenous rights advocate.

There are several examples of Indigenous-led initiatives taking place across the country from which we can learn. Here are just two quick examples:

Coast Funds, based in the Great Bear

Rainforest - Coast Funds was created in 2007 "out of mutual recognition by conservationists, First Nations, industry, and government that a sustainable economy is vital to conservation efforts in the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii areas of British Columbia."

Another Indigenous-led organization, this one run by youth, is the Ontario Youth Indigenous Partnership Project (OYIPP), which supports Indigenous youth living in Ontario to engage in their communities through projects that promote environmental, social, spiritual, and physical well-being. In addition to access to grants, youth have opportunities be mentored – or be mentors – to participate in skills training, and to connect with other youth, partners, and funders.

### **In closing**

We hope sharing part of the Ulnooweg story, and hearing from these other leading voices, has opened a door for us to explore the pioneering work being done in this area.

There is a wealth of research, articles and other documents about Indigenous Philanthropy.

It is my hope we in the mainstream charitable sector will explore more deeply the tremendous potential for building relationships while learning from practitioners of Indigenous-Led Philanthropy.

*Natasha van Bentum, CFRE (Ret.), is a white settler based in Victoria, BC on the unceded territory of the Lekwungen People. She is a long-time Outreach and Legacy advisor to environmental organizations, land conservation groups and, more recently, foodland trusts. Natasha is publisher of "Green Legacies: A Donor's Guide" and can be followed on Twitter @GiveGreenCanada.*