



# Media Release

December 11, 2020

## JobQuest Pilot Program uses Gaming Platform to help Indigenous Youth 'Level Up'

**MAKWA SAHGAIEHCAN FIRST NATION** – At a time of physical isolation away from family and friends, many young people turn to online gaming as an important source of community and connection. It is with this in mind that SIIT has created an essential skills program built on a quest-style gaming platform. Piloted this fall with Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation, *JobQuest* is a 12-week program targeted to young adults who want to establish move-forward strategies that will help them cope with stress, grief and anxiety while preparing for education and employment success. Participants develop characters based on whom they want to become and work through challenges and problems to make that dream a reality.

Although the program has an online platform, it is the community-based grounding which has proven a key ingredient in the program's success. Partnering with Makwa Saigaiehcan, participants began meeting in person in September to develop their characters and discuss the community-based project they planned to tackle together. While much of the training takes place online, this culture of togetherness and the support of a community-based coordinator has made a significant difference. "This supportive environment within community has had a huge impact on program retention", explains Lisa Shingoose, VP – Employment Development and Career Services at SIIT. "11 of the 12 participants are on track to complete the program next week. This is much higher than most traditionally formatted employment readiness programs."

Designed to emulate a video game, participants are introduced to levels of difficulty, character development, roadblocks, and badges, all intended to build skills, foster resiliency, and reward commitment. "All the modules from 'Walking in Someone's Shoes' to 'Making a Difference' really helped me get by and learn about new ideas for my future," states JobQuest participant Evan Fineblanket. "Honestly, I don't know where I would be if this program didn't exist. It changed my life."

Riel Bellegarde, President and CEO of SIIT, further explains, "Beyond personal growth and development, this program is designed to equip participants with the Mental Health First Aid tools necessary to navigate this time of uncertainty. Indigenous leaders throughout the province asked for a community-based approach to engaging youth. The program has proven one strategy to meet this request. On behalf of SIIT, I would like to thank Makwa Sahgaiehcan and the Meadow



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Lake Tribal Council for partnering on this pilot.” Thanks to this successful pilot, SIIT already has five more offerings planned to start at other Saskatchewan First Nations in the new year.

Pilot Video Link: [https://youtu.be/Lk\\_NpjfHo9g](https://youtu.be/Lk_NpjfHo9g)

## **Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT)**

SIIT was established in 1976 by Saskatchewan First Nations leaders representing all Treaty areas. Today, SIIT remains a First Nation-governed educational institution, one of only four credit-granting post-secondary institutions in the province and the only accredited Indigenous institution. SIIT provides adult learners with academic, vocational and technical training as well as services and supports for employment and career growth. Indigenous learners are at the core of SIIT, representing over 95% of the student body.

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