



## **CNA, Nunatsiavut Government celebrate first graduates of indigenized program**

*Early Child Education program has successful outcome in Nain*

**NAIN, NUNATSIAVUT** – A group of students in Nain, a community of approximately 1,200 people on the north coast of Labrador, are about to make academic history.

On Friday, Dec. 11, six students, who have been enrolled since June 2019, will be the first to graduate from College of the North Atlantic's (CNA) indigenized Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate program. The ground-breaking initiative was funded by the federal government, under a post-secondary partnership with Indigenous Services Canada, and was fully supported by the long-standing partnership between CNA and the Nunatsiavut Government.

Brenda Tobin, Dean of Academics, Applied Arts & Tourism, says the indigenized ECE program, which is a separate and more specialized offering via the college's Customized and Continuous Learning division than CNA's existing program, is yet another example of how positive partnerships between CNA and various levels of government, particularly Nunatsiavut, enable the college to provide unique opportunities for students, while at the same time, helping boost the local community's early learning and child care needs.

Nunatsiavut's Minister of Education and Economic Development, Carlene Palliser, acknowledges CNA's role in developing and implementing the ECE program in Nain, and thanks the graduates for the sacrifices they've made over the past two years.

"CNA has been a true partner, providing guidance and encouragement right from the start," said Minister Palliser. "Our children will reap the benefits of this partnership for years to come. They are lucky to have these fine graduates guide them through their early years and to provide them with compassion, care and kindness, while also instilling in them the love of learning that is so important."

There was an invaluable team of people supporting this program from the beginning, notes Tobin, and every decision made was with the students and their success at the forefront. Behind the scenes, she says the groundwork was "amazing, extensive, and innovative." Focus groups were formed and meetings were held with the community, including the elders, to explain the project and incorporate their vital feedback into the program. There was also extensive research conducted to learn about the culture and develop the curriculum. In addition, CNA worked with the provincial government to offer this as a special project. As part of the initial proposal, measures were put in place so that students would not only learn at the facility in Nain with the indigenized curriculum, but they would also experience first-hand CNA's demonstration child care centre at its Happy Valley-Goose Bay campus.

Post-secondary quality standards were maintained, and the examples used in the curriculum were tailored so that it was significant for the students in the Labrador Inuit culture when discussing and

learning various topics. They could apply these aspects to their own culture and enjoy meaningful creative experiences. This is ground-breaking as indigenous cultural aspects were incorporated into the curriculum, and the ECE's will now be qualified to apply for their Level I Child Care Services provincial certification.

The program was also designed for these students to be in the classroom with the instructor in Nain. However, the COVID-19 pandemic halted all in-person delivery this past March, this meant the instructor had to work with the students off-site so they could continue learning remotely – something they had not been prepared for. However, Tobin credits Melissa Mercer, who is also a CNA ECE program graduate, as being instrumental in keeping the program going and helping these students to the finish line.

“We were so fortunate to have Melissa with us – the timing couldn’t have been better,” said Tobin. “She was never in Nain before and was a recent graduate of our ECE diploma program. No matter how hard we worked in the background to support her, without her on the front lines being so energetic and positive, we know this program wouldn’t have gotten to where we are today. This is such a huge success story all around for the graduates, the community, and the invaluable partnerships we have, particularly with the Nunatsiavut Government. The graduates were resilient and showed such support for each other while also keeping their eye on the goal – graduation. It wasn’t easy for them, but they did it! We are so very proud of them.”

For more information about CNA’s programs, visit: [www.cna.nl.ca](http://www.cna.nl.ca).

For more information about the Nunatsiavut Government, visit: [www.nunatsiavut.com](http://www.nunatsiavut.com).

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**Caption:**

**Participants in College of the North Atlantic’s (CNA) first indigenized Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate program include: Joyce Merkuratsuk, Elizabeth Tuglavina, Althaya Solomon, Michelle Ittulak, Melissa Mercer (instructor), Elizabeth Dicker, Lillian Angnatok and Jane Angnatok.**

**Media contacts:**

Michelle Barry  
Communications Manager  
College of the North Atlantic  
1-709-643-7721  
[michelle.barry@cna.nl.ca](mailto:michelle.barry@cna.nl.ca)

Bert Pomeroy  
Director of Communications  
Nunatsiavut Government  
1-709-896-8582  
[bert.pomeroy@nunatsiavut.com](mailto:bert.pomeroy@nunatsiavut.com)