

## INNOVATIVE CULINARY ARTS PROGRAM GIVES INDIGENOUS YOUTH A LINK TO THE PAST AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

**WINNIPEG, June 19, 2018**—When 16-year-old Colton, a member of Waywayseecappo First Nation, enters the kitchen, his love for cooking comes alive. He proudly dons a white double-breasted chef’s jacket, employs advanced knife-cutting and cooking techniques, and helps to manage the line. “I dream of starting a restaurant,” says Colton. “Or to get a chef’s degree— that’s what I want to pursue.”

Studying to be a chef provides hope for the future and a link to the past for Colton and his classmates, participants in an innovative skills-building program under the leadership of teacher Drew Van Landeghem at Waywayseecappo Off-Campus (in partnership with Park West School Division). The program creates a welcoming, flexible environment that enables students to earn a nutrition credit, gain valuable vocational skills, and connect with traditional practices around food. They are then taking that knowledge home to contribute to healthy food preparation and consumption in their families and greater food security in their communities.

Colton’s story is just one example of the work supported by NGO Canadian Feed The Children (CFTC) in Indigenous communities across Canada, recently featured in the award-winning photojournalism exhibit *Transformations: Stories of Partnership, Resilience and Positive Change* produced by the Ontario Council of International Cooperation and photographer Allan Lissner. The exhibit explores exciting new community-led school nutrition, agriculture, land-based education and social enterprise initiatives that are helping to address food sovereignty and community health challenges in Eel Ground, Neyaashiinigiing, and Garden Hill First Nations.

One of these is Meechim Farm, a social enterprise operating through a partnership between Garden Hill First Nation – a fly-in community in the Island Lake region of northeast Manitoba – and Aki Foods, with funding from CFTC. The partnership has re-introduced traditional methods to grow produce such as carrots, potatoes, peas and beans, and experimented with different varieties of seeds and new methods, managing to harvest unexpected crops such as asparagus and raspberries despite the area’s harsh climate.

Zach Flett, Garden Hill’s community outreach coordinator, says, “This idea of growing your own food — being in control of what you eat and how you produce your food — gives back the independence that First Nations people have lacked for so many years ... this [farm] is a stepping stone towards regaining knowledge-based practices and towards independence, going back to our traditional practices of gardening for ourselves.”



Colton (at back) and his classmates have learned valuable vocational skills through an innovative off-campus program at Waywayseecappo First Nation, funded in part by CFTC.



Community outreach coordinator Zach Flett at the Meechim Farm in Garden Hill First Nation. *Photo © Allan Lissner / OCIC. Available for use with credit.*

Rodney Contois, Aki Foods director, reinforces the potential of these types of programs as models to address the significant and growing problem of food insecurity in First Nations communities, especially those in the north: “There’s a food security issue that we have here in Canada and around the world, and we will just have to come up with solutions that help us in the long run. People have this misconception that you can’t grow food in the North, but that’s not entirely true, it’s just that people have never experienced it. Until they come to see places like this [Garden Hill], they don’t know what’s possible.”

To learn more, please visit [National Indigenous Day 2018: Create a better Canada for everyone](#).

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Zach Flett and Rodney Contois will be participating in the *Transformations* photo exhibit at APTN’s *Indigenous Day Live 2018* at The Forks in Winnipeg on Saturday, June 23 in celebration of National Indigenous Day. They will be available between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. to speak with members of the public and the media at the CFTC booth located at the corner of North and East Gates.

For more information or to organize interviews with Zach Flett or Rodney Contois, please contact Canadian Feed The Children:

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