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SCO CELEBRATES INAUGURAL RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CLASS

Restorative Justice Grows with ACC Graduation

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is paying tribute to a history-making class in 2021. This week, Assiniboine Community College (ACC) graduated the first ever cohort of the Restorative Justice Certificate Program.

“This momentous occasion touches on two very key areas for me,” stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “Not only do I want to continue to see enhanced educational opportunities that benefit our people and communities, I also want to see a marked increase in restorative justice and mediation services for First Nations. I am confident this graduating class will help make that a reality.”

The Restorative Justice Certificate Program was developed in partnership with SCO's Justice Program and ACC in 2020. It was designed for individuals from SCO communities who are already working within the justice system or who are interested in pursuing a career in justice. There are 18 graduates in the inaugural class of what was an 18 month program.

“When we entered into partnership with SCO, we knew this would be an ideal opportunity to help First Nations advance their visions for increased access to restorative justice,” said ACC President and CEO Mark Frison. “The college believes in the importance of a holistic and proactive approach to community safety. I am so proud that we have been able to complete this first intake of the program, especially given the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Restorative justice is an approach that focuses on addressing the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for their actions. It also provides an opportunity for the parties directly affected by the crime to identify and address their needs in the aftermath of an offence.

The Restorative Justice Certificate Program incorporated a number of vital initiatives as part of the learning process, including a class on Gladue Reports, which give judges discretion to use sanctions outside of mainstream prisons for Indigenous peoples. The program also focused on aspects of restorative justice community development.

“I cannot express my gratitude enough as a student of this amazing Restorative Justice Program through Assiniboine Community College. It is a training program that helped me personally and also professionally. I will apply the training I received to help my own people in our First Nation. I want to

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thank SCO for taking the initiative to train our front line staff,” said Lilliane Houle, who is a graduate of the program from Ebb and Flow First Nation and is the Health Director at Ebb and Flow First Nation Health Authority.

SCO sees restorative justice as a critical piece when it comes to delivering justice in our communities, especially given the disproportionate representation of First Nation people involved in the current system. Statistics show in Manitoba that 75 per cent of adults admitted into custody are Indigenous, and in the last ten years there has been a 60 per cent increase in the incarceration of Indigenous men, and a 139 per cent increase in the incarceration of Indigenous women. Manitoba has the highest number of incarcerated Indigenous women and the highest youth incarceration rates in Canada.

“It’s blatantly obvious, the colonial justice systems that have been forced upon us do not work,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “The graduates of the Restorative Justice Program need to know they now offer a beacon of hope for our people. They now can provide our community members with alternative measures for care that revolve around accountability and personal growth, rather than the current punitive measures of the colonial state.”

Details of SCO’s justice and rights initiatives can be found [on the justice section of our website.](#)

-30-

The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 Anishinaabe and Dakota Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples’ inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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