

## Creating Leaders Through Mentorship and Partnership

### *GEN7 program supports the health and learning of Aboriginal communities*

The [GEN7 Aboriginal Role Model](#) program was established in the spring of 2002 when the World Bank provided seed funding to undertake research to determine how the existing [ESTEEM Team](#) athlete role model program might be adapted and expanded to serve the needs of Aboriginal youth in communities throughout Canada. The program was launched as a role model program specifically designed for Aboriginal youth and the unique challenges they face. After many months of development and discussion, the pilot of the program, named *GEN7* by the Aboriginal role models themselves, began in July 2006 with a call for communities and training of Aboriginal role models (GEN7 Messengers).

The name, GEN7, comes from a traditional prophecy, across all indigenous cultures in North America, which says that the seventh generation will be the one to begin the healing process and re-connect the Elders and the youth to become a powerful nation once again.

GEN7 Messengers are Aboriginal athletes and role models who are also trained by Motivate Canada in public speaking and facilitation. After successfully completing the training, the GEN 7 Messenger is paired with an Aboriginal community to act as a role model and motivator for the youth of that community. GEN7 Messengers visit a community repeatedly, and during this process they listen and learn to identify areas of interest for community development and develop connections with the community's youth, Elders, and other leaders.

"My involvement in this program has shaped my everyday life and the way I choose to live my life in a good way, with good intentions, a good heart, and realizing just how many eyes are on me every single day," says GEN7 Messenger Richelle Williams who has been part of the program since 2009 after participating in Motivate Canada's ACTIVATE National Youth Leadership Forum. "I've been able to plant seeds of success with a lot of young people by sharing my story. In all endeavours, I have a belief that I have the ability to change someone's life by speaking about overcoming adversity and hurt, healing, self-care, our teachings, language, connections between Elders and the spirit we walk with as First Nations people."

The GEN7 program has worked in more than 20 Aboriginal communities in BC and has supported more than 400 Aboriginal youth in the province in the development of their leadership skills. Nine GEN7 Messengers in BC are currently working in communities such as Cowichan Tribes and T'sawout First Nation on Vancouver Island, several member bands of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, and five inner-city community centres in Vancouver. Motivate Canada has also had a strong presence attending and facilitating workshops at the Gathering Our Voices Aboriginal Youth Conference for several years. Future plans for the GEN7 program in BC include involvement in the Okanagan Indian Band's Youth Dragon Boat program and expansion of the program to all 24 community centres in Vancouver.

For more information about Motivate Canada and the GEN7 program, please visit them [online](#) or contact GEN7 Program Coordinator Rebekah Wilson at 1-866-378-3361 ext. 228, or by e-mail at [rebekah@motivatecanada.ca](mailto:rebekah@motivatecanada.ca).