Editorial – Opasquia Times

Submitted by Denise Duncan

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“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.” Franklin D. Roosevelt

Politicians play an important role in our community. They have the power to create and establish policy and laws on how a government is run. It can be on a local, provincial or federal level. Politicians can be elected into office or appointed by someone who is currently in a position of power. The main role of a politician is to listen to and address public concerns. A politician is a very public figure who is extremely comfortable being in the spotlight and has time available to make public appearances. A politician is a figure head much like the Queen of England, who represents a group of people. Politicians are also responsible for the finances of a community, presenting budgets and allocating funds based on available dollars and monies available. They are held accountable for decisions, especially financial decisions. They attend meetings to discuss political issues and serve on various committees, meet with constituents and lobbyists and campaign for election or re-election.

With all these responsibilities who decides that they want to be a politician. Well, this was the question that I asked myself and this is the answer that I received when I connected with OCN. I had heard about the Onekanew mena Onuschekewuk youth council. Cree language translated into English is called Jr. Chief and Council.

When I met with Nicole Tornquist to discuss her draw to politics, she indicated that she is interested in the challenge of the work and wants to ensure that the youth voice is heard and represented. She is also building her own voice by being more vocal and vocalizing what others are thinking but find hard to verbalize. She is building confidence throughout the challenging experience on Jr. Council. She reflected several times on the different ways that people communicate, think, learn, and adapt. She is in the process of teaching other youth members how to function within the framework, encourages other youth to get involved and bring about positive outcomes for the community. She discussed the many different personalities that she encounters in the political world. It is allowing me to grow personally and professionally.

Nicole has a full-time job with the OCN Call Center and is extremely professional and helpful when directing and/or answering calls. She has a business Administration diploma majoring in management earned from UCN and always thought that she wanted to work Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Her dream was to have the evenings and weekends off. Since she has been involved with the Jr. Chief and Council, she has realized that she is happier working without a specific timeframe, and she is perfectly okay with working weekends. The work she is doing is meaningful to her life today. She is doing exactly the opposite of what she thought she would do a few years ago and has never been happier. Nicole is highly respected by the leaders of OCN. Recently Chief Christian Sinclair dropped in unannounced to one of the Jr. Chief and Council meetings. He was incredibly supportive of their work and let the group know that he appreciates their involvement.

The intent of Jr. Chief and Council is to bridge a place for youth to experience the work involved in politics. OCN is mentoring their youth to become the leaders of tomorrow. Currently there are 7 positions on the Jr. Council. Nicole Tournquist, a young and successfully was elected to the position of Jr. Chief. Six other youth sit at the table as councilors. They are Bronson Spence, Lee Genaille, Jayden Wilson, Elyse Lathlin, Steven Frith, and Airianna Bignell Beardy. Nicole and the youth council members mentioned sitting in OCN Council Chambers 2 times a month to discuss political matters that these seven feel are important and relevant representing OCN youth. In collaboration with the youth council members, Nicole spearheads many events and fundraisers, as well as sits on committees that are deemed necessary for youth involvement and input. Youth need to be listened to and their opinion and thoughts respected. This group of political youth leaders have created a wish list. They revisit the wish list each meeting and action each item to ensure that they continue to work towards it, have completed it or need more time to complete it. It is always a work in progress with room for evolution.

Nicole has other dreams that I am sure will come to be. She is interested in serving her two-year term position as Jr. Chief and then being reelected for another term. She is also interested in taking the Youth Care Worker offered in Saskatchewan Polytech through distance. She continues to be a National Ambassador for the Hope for We Matter. She is involved in the exchange champion planning program for next summer as well as is know for Safe Rides as a designated driver. She lost her teenage brother to drunken driving and does not drink as a result. She wants to ensure that others make it home safely and families do not have to experience the huge loss that she has experienced in her life because of one night of drinking and driving.

My final question to Nicole was…. Do you see yourself someday being Chief? Her answer was clear and concise. Yes, I do. She is learning from the experience, building confidence, making connections, and is determined to make her dreams come true. So now, I know who wants to be a politician. It is Nicole Tornquist, making a difference by becoming involved at grass roots. You are an inspiration to us all.

“If young people are not too young to get married, to serve in the military or to choose the parliamentarians who will represent them, they are not too young to run.” Martin Chungogn

Keep Making Shift Happen