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Frontiers Foundation

From standing trees to standing homes! The Frontiers Foundation is committed to developing homebuilding skills in communities where there is fine standing timber, people who need jobs, and a demonstrated need for sturdy and affordable housing.

Unfortunately, most lumber is purchased from the United States, which drains communities of potential economic resources. To address this "leaky economic bucket," the Frontiers Foundation advocates for a CED approach to housing where community members are trained to build and maintain homes using as much locally available materials as possible. The result is a home "built by the north for the north."

Frontiers Foundation is a non-profit Aboriginal volunteer service organization promoting the advancement of economically and socially disadvantaged communities in Canada's northern territories, Northern Ontario, as well as internationally with Indigenous communities in Haiti and Bolivia. This organization began in Manitoba over 40 years ago,

led by a United Church minister who was well aware of the poor housing conditions faced by Aboriginal people. With a play on words relating to the work of turning trees into homes, their original name in 1964 was "Operation Beaver." The project was later incorporated as a registered charity in 1968 as Frontiers Foundation Inc. Nearly all members of the Board of Directors are Aboriginal.

The work of Frontiers Foundation has involved far more than the raw work of turning trees into homes. From the earliest discussions, the group recognized the needed to create multi-sectoral partnership between the communities, govern- →



→ ment, corporations and the non-profit sector. Representatives from these many sectors sit on the Manitoba advisory committee, and over time a new head office was opened in Ontario. Meanwhile, relationships continue to be built with local suppliers, corporations, churches, and other potential sources of volunteer and financial support.

As a result of this broader partnership approach, Frontiers Foundations has expanded its work into most provinces and territories in Canada, as well as Haiti and Bolivia, and has built over 2,350 houses and public buildings for communities. Not losing sight of the original vision for housing and training in Manitoba, a group of individuals re-opened the Manitoba chapter of Frontiers Foundation in

2007. A major focus for the Manitoba chapter is the Forestry and Framing program, which is funded through the Aboriginal Skills Training Strategic Investment Fund. This program guides participants in the entire homebuilding process; trainees take standing timber, go through the milling process with Frontiers Foundation's portable bandsaw mill, and build a house from the ground up.

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Through the Forestry and Framing operation, volunteers and trainees have now built three houses and three demo log cabins in Manitoba. An annual Log Cabin Construction Course is also offered by Frontiers Foundation, and participants who have worked for 10 or more weeks can attend free of charge. Trainees completing this "Standing Tree to

Standing House" course can become registered students at Red River College, and receive a certificate upon completion of the program.

A positive ripple effect created by the training and skill development is starting to take effect. Three graduates of this course have now built their own log homes, a

father and son team bought a saw mill, and one First Nation opened up a development area for log homes. A the construction of a house at Sakgeeng First Nation was also recorded by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), which aired in the fall of 2010. This CED initiative is an excellent example of how creating local economic and training opportunities for communities can meet local needs at the same time. ^