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Urban Circle Training Centre Inc.

Urban Circle Training Centre Inc. started in 1990 when Aboriginal women volunteering in a second hand clothing depot in Winnipeg's North End voiced their desire to take training that would lead to employment. These women wanted to gain employable skills to support their families and contribute to their neighbourhood's local economy.

With the support of Urban Circle's founder and a local Elder, these women were involved in the proposal writing process and program development. Funding was secured for a 6-month training program leading to employment in the retail and service industries. An Employer Advisory Committee was formed to connect the women directly with employment opportunities. All 12 women successfully completed the first program and secured employment afterwards.

Based on these women's success, other programs soon followed and training expanded to include the business and banking sector. In 1996, an opportunity

to work in partnership with Red River College and Health Sciences Centre led to the development of a certified Nursing Assistant Program leading to full-time employment in acute care hospitals, home care and personal care homes. The program became formally incorporated as Urban Circle Training Centre, a community-based, non-profit charitable organization, in 1996.

Urban Circle Training Centre Inc. now annually enrolls 150 Aboriginal women and men in certified training including a Mature Grade 12 Program; an Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program; Nursing Assistant Program; Teacher Assistant Program; Family Support Worker/FASD Certificate Program; and a 2-year Early Childhood Education Diploma Program. At the core of all of these programs is Urban Circle's Life Skills/Cultural component that is central to student's success focusing on Aboriginal cultural teachings with leadership from Aboriginal Elders. Students are able to examine the history of colonization and the residential school experience, to understand the impact this has had on their Nation, their family and community and to reclaim their identity as strong Aboriginal women and men. Graduates point to this component of the program as the key to their success in completing their →

→ studies and moving on to full-time employment and post-secondary education. In addition to full-time employment, Urban Circle graduates can ladder to post-secondary programs including a Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Social Work.

Urban Circle is also having a significant impact on local economic and community development in other ways. Not only are students supporting local businesses on a daily basis, many graduates are purchasing homes in Winnipeg's North End/inner city and contributing to the stabilization of their neighbourhoods through leadership in their children's schools, or volunteering to sit on the Board of their local community centre, health clinic or family centre.

In 2002 Urban Circle successfully raised \$1.4 million to reconstruct an existing building on Selkirk Avenue that has become the Centre's permanent home. Students, graduates, staff, Elders and Board members were directly involved in the design and construction was undertaken by a local non-profit community organization, Inner City Renovation, who trained and hired local residents. Urban Circle is currently in the midst of another capital project and is raising \$2.3 million to transform the existing vacant building immediately adjacent to their learning centre into the Makoonsag Child Care and Intergenerational Learning Centre. In addition to urgently needed childcare services, the Elder's vision is to incorporate intergenerational language and literacy programs, cultural teachings, traditional medicines and chronic disease prevention, community gardens, recycling, traditional games and recreational activities for families. Elders will be a

central part of all of the programming. The new building will recycle and re-use existing materials and will be built to LEED Gold specifications.

Urban Circle's publicly elected Board of Directors is 80% Aboriginal. Elders sit on the Board to provide guidance and direction. Past graduates come back to Urban Circle classrooms as guest speakers and role models. Over 150 volunteers are directly related with Urban Circle in a variety of capacities, and approximately 100 employers sit on Urban Circle's four Employer Advisory Committees.

Over 22 full and part-time positions have been created by Urban Circle in the fields of education, training, life skills facilitation, financial administration, human resources and office management. Project Makoonsag will create an additional 14 positions. Twelve leadership positions on the Board of Urban Circle and 10 on the Makoonsag Board have been created. All of Urban Circle's students are of Aboriginal ancestry and the vast majority of students are on income security when they enter the program and move off assistance within a year of graduation. A recent cost-benefit analysis conservatively projects a net savings to tax payers of \$53 million over Urban Circle's 20 years of operation and that number expands to \$114 million by the year 2015. This does not include the additional intangible benefits of graduates' contribution to their community and the local economy, graduates' children's retention in school and increased high school completion rates. It makes economic sense to invest in people in this way. Since Urban Circle's inception 20 years ago, they have graduated close to 2,000 students.