

Diversity!

June 2006

IN THE WORKPLACE

Except from the June 2006 issue (page 4 of 6).

WHO iSisters Technology Mentoring Inc. www.isisters.org

WHAT iSisters is a charitable organization that creates technology learning opportunities through partnerships with non-profits that support women in need. One of those partnerships is with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit (TI) Community Centre.

WHERE Ottawa, Ontario

WHEN iSisters was founded in 2001 by a group of former teachers. The TI program got underway in 2004.

WHY There are over 1,000 Inuit in the Ottawa area, many of whom are either under- or unemployed and on social assistance.

HOW As with all its partnerships, iSisters provides the hardware – thanks to donors such as IBM–and secures the funding. TI provides the software, marketing, location and all other overhead elements. The 12-week course is delivered on site and at no charge. Students are screened for literary and ESL skills. For most of them, Inuktitut is their first language. The first six weeks of the program concentrate on overall technology awareness: how the internet works, word processing, online searches, etc. The second six weeks are dedicated – with the help of iSisters' mentors and career coaches – to finding employment: how to navigate job boards, write resumes, use proper netiquette. Each graduate leaves with an actionable career plan and a letter of reference.

STATS 80% of its 100 graduates have found employment. Cathy Reid, iSisters' executive director, says “the extreme detail in planning, the small class sizes...really breeds the success of the program.”

WIN-WIN In 2004 iSisters won the Conference Board of Canada's Community-based Learning Opportunities for Aboriginals award which recognizes innovative programs that use technology to increase inclusiveness in society.

WHAT'S NEXT iSisters is translating the TI model into an e-learning course which, although still in a classroom setting, is, according to Reid, delivered in a more “robust and engaging way.” Partnership agreements have also just been signed with Immigrant Women Services Ottawa to implement the TI model online for women who are new to Canada and victims of violence and need economic independence and earning potential.

BOTTOM LINE Reid has nothing but praise for TI's graduates. “They go on to do amazing things. They go on to get employed. Which I feel makes them more independent mothers (and) community members. And that shift from being dependent (and) on social assistance, is profound.”

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