

SchoolBOX Brings Educational Empowerment Home to Canada

As celebrations get underway for Canada's 150th anniversary this year, the local charity SchoolBOX is bringing its model of educational empowerment in Nicaragua home to Canada. Working in partnership with Indigenous youth leaders, SchoolBOX has big plans to install its first library in a reserve community in Northern Ontario in 2017. The new program is simply called "SchoolBOX Canada".

SchoolBOX was founded in Almonte ten years ago with the desire to empower some of the world's most vulnerable children through education. With the help of an amazing network of volunteers and friends in Canada and beyond, SchoolBOX has built 83 classrooms, 54 libraries, and supports more than 17,000 children in 96 communities in Nicaragua annually with school supplies.

The Vision

SchoolBOX's Executive Director Sarah Kerr created the IYES (Indigenous Youth Empowering Students) program in 2009 in collaboration with Danielle Ogen, a young Wet'suwet'en woman from British Columbia who had volunteered with SchoolBOX the previous year. The IYES program was based on SchoolBOX's existing volunteer model, but specifically brought together a team of First Nations and Inuit youth from across Canada to help build a school in Nicaragua and share their culture with the kids.

"Both Danielle and I had experienced how transformative SchoolBOX builds could be," explains Sarah. "For this group of Indigenous youth, it was the first

time they had the opportunity to really delve into aspects of their own culture, and share it with others in an empowering way." Many of these IYES alumni are now incredible leaders in their home communities and are deeply committed to learning and sharing their cultures and languages. Inspired by these amazing IYES volunteers, and recognizing the barriers that Indigenous children still face to access education in their own communities, Kerr dreamed of expanding this program to include an initiative on Canadian soil.

After an IYES trip in 2012, an Anishinaabe volunteer named Terri Meekis shared that her own community on Wabauskang First Nations Reserve in Northern Ontario lacked a library and primary school. Her children were forced to travel outside of their community to access education. According to Kerr, "we saw the power of education to transform lives and re-shape communities in Nicaragua, and couldn't help but ask, why can't we use SchoolBOX's model to empower our own communities here in Canada?" With Terri's story in mind, the idea for SchoolBOX Canada was born.

Building Libraries and Empowering Indigenous Leaders

The first project for SchoolBOX Canada will be to install a library in Treaty 3 territory, where Wabauskang First Nations Reserve is located. The community, which is about 500 kilometres northwest of Thunder Bay, reported that 30% of its schools do not have libraries and that 70% of its libraries suffer from outdated



The new SchoolBOX Canada initiative grew out of their Indigenous Youth Empowering Students program, where Canadian students like Terri Meekis (above) and Alex Terbasket (left) volunteered in Nicaragua



books and lack of trained personnel. With guidance from IYES alumni and in partnership with the Chief and Grand Council of Treaty 3, SchoolBOX will deliver a library consisting of culturally relevant books for primary school grades 1 to 6.

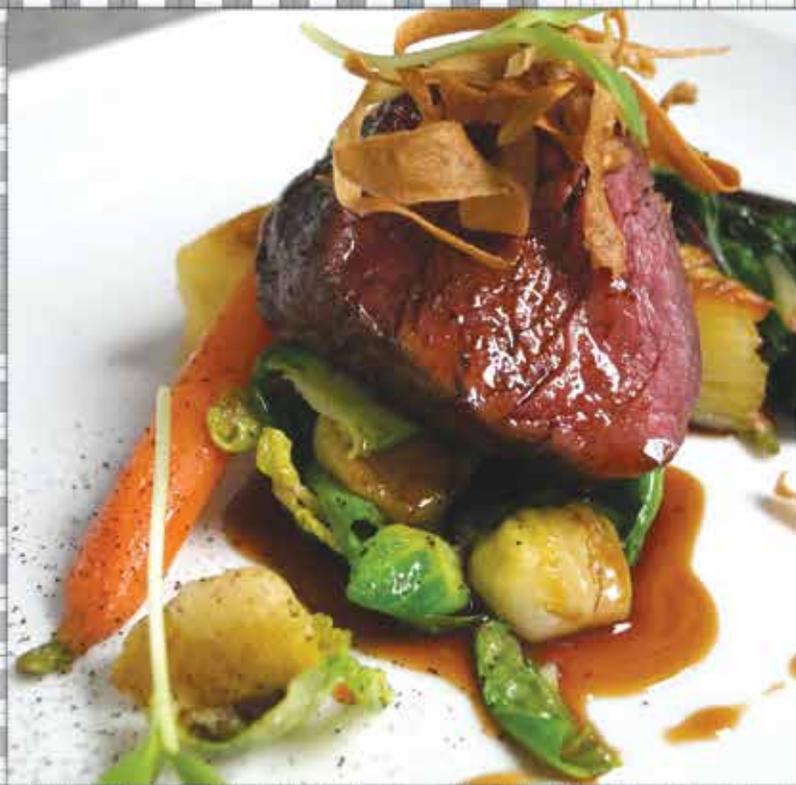
"Investing in local leadership is the key," says Kerr. Having Indigenous youth leaders on the ground to identify needs in their home communities is paving the way for SchoolBOX Canada's first project to be a success. "In the same way that Ronald and Jazmin (SchoolBOX Director and Programs Manager in Nicaragua) have taken over leadership of SchoolBOX in Nicaragua," she adds, "we are creating a model that can be led by Indigenous youth here at home into the future."

Get Involved!

New or gently used books for grade 1 to 6 reading levels, as well as financial donations, are greatly appreciated to kickstart the first SchoolBOX Canada library project. As donations of books are received, volunteers will also be needed in order to sort and catalogue books by genre and grade level. Help is also appreciated to recruit Indigenous youth volunteers for the upcoming IYES trip to Nicaragua in summer 2017. This is an opportunity for self-identified First Nations, Metis and Inuit young people to empower Nicaraguan children by building a new classroom and participating in a cultural exchange.

Prospective volunteers are kindly invited to contact <Stephanie@schoolbox.ca> for information on how to get involved. — Stephanie Rudyk Toepfer

black tartan



At Black Tartan Kitchen
in Carleton Place, ON

Food is an Art Form

Join us for
Brunch, Lunch, and Dinner
Tuesday - Sunday
at Carleton Place's
newest restaurant

Now offering:

Thursday Date Night
3 Course Table d'Hôte

Shared Appetizer, Two Main
Courses, Shared Dessert

70\$ / couple

www.blacktartankitchen.com

Black Tartan Kitchen
132 Bridge St.
Carleton Place, ON
K7C 2V5

Tuesday - Saturday
11am - 3pm, 5pm - close
Sunday Brunch
11am - 3pm

www.blacktartankitchen.com
info@blacktartankitchen.com
(613) 492-0860

Follow Us On:

