

Nunavut Trades Training Centre changing lives

Training centre allows Northerners to learn in North

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The Nunavut Trades Training Centre in Rankin Inlet has only been open for less than a year, but it is already making a difference for people wanting to get into the trades in a territory with a high demand for skilled workers.

The 20,000-square-foot, \$23-million facility offers students the opportunity to become skilled tradespeople – including plumbers, oil burner mechanics, housing maintainers and electricians.

There are 22 students enrolled in trades access, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs at the centre, which has a capacity to hold up to 120 students.

For Cedric Autut, who is studying to become an electrician in the school's apprenticeship program, having the school in his home town of Rankin Inlet makes a real difference.

"If I had to travel south for the training I would miss my kids. There are times when I need to be around friends and family and be able to relax," he said.

Autut is wrapping up his first year of a three-year apprenticeship program that, when complete, will certify him as a red-seal electrician. He said he's been a stock keeper with the Nunavut Power Corporation for seven years and heard of the opportunity to enter the training program last summer.

"The opportunity knocked and I thought to myself 'I'm not going to get any younger,' so I took the entrance exam and was accepted," said Autut.

"It wasn't something I had really planned. But the opportunity came up and I took advantage of it. If it wasn't for this (trades) centre, I would probably be at the Power Corp. ordering parts."

Autut, who is 35, had not been in school for a while. "It's nice to be back in school sometimes.

"From what I had heard from people talking, there's not too many electricians and contractors in Nunavut," said Autut. "The great thing about this is if for some reason I leave Nunavut, I have my ticket and can always work anywhere else in Canada."

While he is confident he will do well on his exams,

the father of five said he has faced some challenges balancing family life and school.

"My big thing is it is difficult to study at home because of distractions. When you get home and your kids are hungry for dinner, homework isn't the first thing on your mind," said Autut. "The students who are coming in [from other communities] have no distractions and can focus on their homework."

Autut said the program includes a lot of theory, mathematics and science with the lab component having him hook up simulated wiring for light switches and things of that nature. When he eventually enters the third year of the program he will be working with live electricity.

In addition to being in a familiar environment near family and friends, Autut sees other benefits of having the trades centre in Rankin Inlet.

"There's the middle school and high school and this helps them promote the trades industry. High school students can ask apprentices what to expect and see if it is something they want to do," said Autut.

David Matoo is also studying at the centre. He is in the school's Pre-Apprenticeship Oil Burner Mechanic Program and wants to become a heating technician once he has his red seal. Like Autut, he faces the challenge of balancing family life with his studies.

"Balancing family time with school time can be hard. I'm up at five or six in the morning to do school work," said Matoo. "One of my biggest setbacks is I find it hard to support my family with student financial assistance alone, so I got a part-time job driving a cab. But you have to do what you have to do."

Matoo is originally from Coral Harbour, but has a lot of friends and family in Rankin Inlet. "When I don't understand some of the work I can have a friend over and ask them and we work through it. If I'm feeling a little down I have family here who I can talk to," said Matoo. "But right now I'm having to put my social life to the side and get work done at the trade school."

He said if he had to travel south to do his training, he would probably not do it.



photo courtesy of Government of Nunavut

David Matoo, left, and Cedric Autut were among the first crop of students to attend classes at the Nunavut Trades Training Centre in Rankin Inlet, which opened its doors last September.

"I probably would have 15 years ago, but with a family now I wouldn't want to. I have a 13-year-old daughter who is in junior high."

He said he found out about the program through the college.

"A fellow with the college came into the community and told us about the trades accreditation course in the community and I knew I

needed to apply for it."

"I had worked on a few job sites that required people with this training and I found there was a high demand for heating technicians, especially in smaller communities, to keep furnaces going. That's when my interest started."

He is in the pre-apprenticeship program – meaning he is not employed in the trades sector yet. When he is

done his training at the end of May the school will bring in contractors who may be interested in hiring him.

"I don't really have a preference for who I will work with, just as long as they are organized and have a good attitude," said Matoo. When asked where he sees himself when he's done the program, Matoo said he just wants to find a good company to work

with, "maybe with the government or somebody who pays well."

He has advice for others who are wanting to do training at the centre. "If anybody is thinking of taking such a course, they should prepare by catching up on reading and math. The tests have a lot of questions on combustion theory and the science of it," said Matoo.



Darrell Greer/NL photo

The Nunavut Trades Training Centre can accommodate up to 120 students. Twenty-two people are enrolled in programs there this semester.