



**UNLEASH PRODUCTIVITY IN INDIGENOUS STUDENTS
BY BUILDING RESILIENCE AND CREATING HOPE**

2017 Federal Pre-Budget Submission

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“I decided to give OLI a chance, not knowing what the outcome will be, but little did I know, it changed me in every way.”

-Alexander Quill, age 26; OLI Alumnus and Economic Development Officer for
Pikangikum First Nation

Executive Summary

Indigenous communities seek the Outside Looking In (OLI) program as a solution to improve high school drop-out rates and mental health status among their youth. Most communities who have received OLI's program continue purchasing it year-after-year. This helps to build capacity within the community as cohorts of high school students benefit from the OLI experience, creating mentorships between older and young students, and re-engaging parents in their child's education. In some communities, previous OLI students are now facilitating the OLI program. All alumni of OLI's *Future Leaders* program are employed or pursuing post-secondary education. This is the kind of lasting community impact OLI provides.

In the last 6 months, OLI has received interest from 20-30 Indigenous communities. To better meet demand for our program, OLI would like to triple the number of communities it engages with per year from 5 to 15 across Canada and allow for OLI's programs to reach more youth. In order to do this, OLI would like to request federal government support to lower the cost-barrier for interested communities to participate in our program, and to provide OLI with a temporary infusion in order to scale up our organization.

Outside Looking In respectfully requests \$1 million/year for 5 years from the Government of Canada to support OLI's controlled growth strategy, which will allow OLI to triple the size of the organization to operate in 15 Indigenous communities annually by 2020-21.

Since the organization's establishment in 2007, OLI has grown without government funding as a result of sound financial management and the generous support of corporate sponsors. OLI is now seeking federal funding to provide OLI with a temporary infusion that will allow the organization to respond immediately to community demand, to maintain the quality of our program, and to grow the organization's capacity to secure more corporate sponsors, with the goal of becoming financially self-sufficient once again by the end of 5 years.

OLI's request is aligned with the federal government's commitments related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action to provide Indigenous community-based youth organizations with multi-year funding to deliver programs on reconciliation. OLI promotes physical activity as a fundamental element to nurture positive mental health, and improves education and employment outcomes for Indigenous people. Mental and physical wellbeing, access to mentors, and the readiness to pursue education and meaningful employment, are the pre-requisites to unleash the potential in any student.



Introduction

Outside Looking In (OLI) is pleased to share its recommendation for the 2018 federal budget in response to the Standing Committee of Finance's question "*What federal measures would help Canadians to be more productive?*" Based on OLI's experience collaborating with Indigenous communities from across Canada, we recognize the tremendous potential of the youth. Indeed, Statistics Canada recognizes that almost half of the Indigenous population in Canada is under 25 years of age. OLI recommends that the federal government invests in tools that will serve to develop capacity in Indigenous youth, to enable them to find the resilience and hope to overcome the exceptional barriers to complete high school, and go on to become productive contributors to their families and communities.

In order for the federal government to support Indigenous youth to be more productive, from OLI's perspective, it is essential to provide the youth with tools to nurture mental and physical well-being, mentorships, academic achievement, and hope for the future. OLI's grassroots model serves to motivate Indigenous youth to stay in high school by giving them a reason to come back through the doors each day. OLI provides the framework for personal achievement - structure, very clear academic, attendance and behaviour expectations, regular communication, and individualized mentorship and support – while engaging students through the expressive power of dance. Students' hard work and dedication to OLI result in strong personal management skills, especially in the areas of self-discipline, self-confidence, punctuality, persistence, and self-reliance. Youth discover that they can not only take pride and responsibility for their own learning, but they can also have fun and enjoy striving to develop new skills. These skills are the foundation of productivity and are easily transferred to other academic classes and future pursuits. The OLI experience begins a cycle of productive fulfillment. Once students internalize the feeling of achieving something monumental through their own efforts, youth are empowered and motivated to seek out greater challenges. More often than not, they will encourage their peers to join them in the pursuit of excellence. Through the OLI program, disengaged youth have transformed to become leaders and advocates in their communities.

OLI is preparing to receive an independent evaluation in September, and would be delighted to share with the Committee metrics of the program's success nurturing mental and physical well-being, academic achievement and workplace readiness in Indigenous youth.

About Outside Looking In (OLI)

Outside Looking In (OLI) is a grassroots, Indigenous-led organization that was founded 11 years ago with a mission to motivate Indigenous youth to stay in high school by giving them a reason to come back through the doors each day. Too many Indigenous youth struggle with identity, socio-economic barriers, and sometimes, a reason to live. OLI creates hope and resilience in youth, by providing them with an outlet to express themselves physically, mentally and emotionally through the transformative power of dance, while providing them with intensive, ongoing mentorship and support to achieve academic goals and discover who they are as Indigenous young people today.

The students understand that they must meet academic, attendance, choreographic, and behavior requirements in order to remain in the program. Students who remain in the program are awarded with a trip to Toronto to perform in front of 6,000 Southerners alongside all the other OLI dancers from Indigenous communities across the country. Along the way, the students' school performance, physical and mental health improves.

We are proud to say that our approach is working. Not only are OLI youth working steadily toward and achieving high school graduation, but they are developing self-confidence, resilience, and proactive strategies that are informing a positive, hopeful look to the future. OLI's impact aligns with the federal government's commitment to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, by improving education and employment attainment levels for Indigenous people, improving mental and physical well-being, and is a community-based youth organization dedicated to moving forward on reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

OLI High School Credit Dance Program, Grades 7 – 12

OLI's program is offered as a high school credit dance program. OLI staff go to the participating communities for at least one week per month for the entire school year in order to mentor and coach the youth directly, and provide guidance and support to school staff and community volunteers on how to facilitate the OLI program for the remainder of the month. The students understand that they must meet academic, attendance, choreographic, and behavior requirements in order to remain in the OLI program. Progress is tracked and each participant receives feedback on a regular basis. If the youth come consistently to dance practice, maintain good grades, and behave well for the whole school year, the students' hard work is acknowledged with a two week trip to the Tim Hortons Foundation Camp outside of Toronto. There they meet other Indigenous OLI participants from across Canada and engage in an intense rehearsal and camp experience. OLI youth perform their dance routines and share their story to 6,000 audience members at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto. Two culminating multi-media performances celebrate the students' personal and academic achievements while sharing stories about their communities and culture. During the performances, the mostly non-Indigenous audiences are introduced to the emerging generation of Indigenous leaders.

OLI *Future Leaders* High School Credit Program, Grades 10 - 12

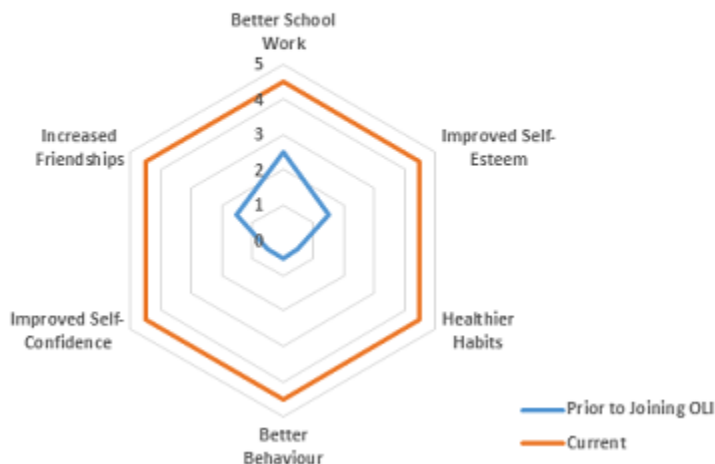
OLI offers *Future Leaders*, a high school credit leadership program to returning OLI youth in Grades 10-12 who want to challenge themselves to reach above and beyond the requirements of the OLI dance program. Youth engage with a mentor regularly over the course of the school year to help set goals, determine the steps necessary to reach these goals, and to help youth follow through on regular tasks and credit course work. Youth are rewarded for their hard work with a second dance routine in the annual performances, and are introduced to colleges, universities, community groups, and role models. These youth are viewed as positive role models and mentors among their classmates.

Measurable Impact

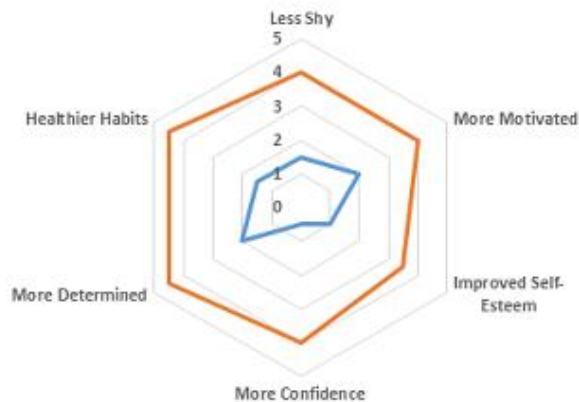
OLI is preparing to receive an independent program evaluation to be completed in September, which will measure OLI's impact in communities over the last 10 years. The graphs below are an excerpt of the initial results, which illustrate the self-assessment of OLI returning

participants and OLI alumni of how the OLI program has impacted them, i.e. - Improved academic performance, healthier lifestyle, increased confidence, improved self-esteem and more friendships.

Degree of Change in OLI Youth in 6 Areas
(self-assessment by 17 returning OLIers)

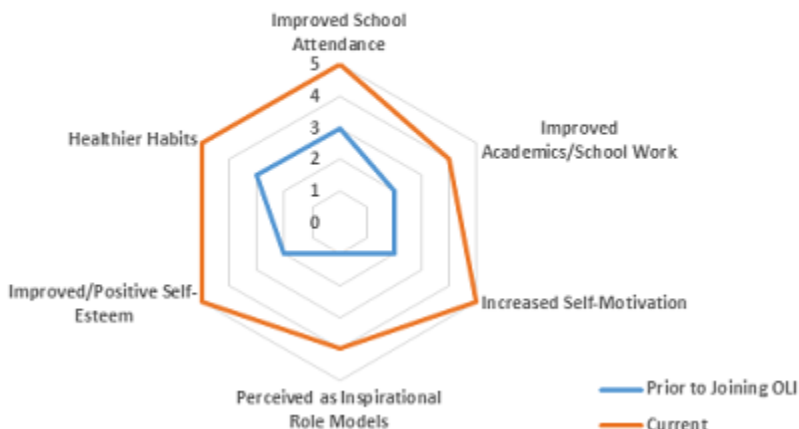


Degree of Change in OLI Alumni in 6 Areas
(self-assessment by 8 OLI alumni)



It is also noteworthy that volunteers/teachers observed improved school attendance, increased motivation and role model behaviour among participants in the OLI program.

Degree of Change in OLI Youth in 6 Areas
(as assessed by 8 community volunteers/chaperones)



Our Vision: Meet communities' demand for OLI

OLI has received interest from 20-30 Indigenous communities in the past 6 months alone to receive the OLI program. However, OLI regularly receives feedback that OLI's \$40,000 annual participation fee can be a cost barrier for some interested communities to participate in our program, and communities' funding requests to federal regional offices are not always successful. Thanks to support for OLI from the Department of Indigenous & Northern Affairs' *New Paths to Education* program, OLI was able to lower the participation fee to \$25,000 in

2017-2018, and as a result, OLI's program will be offered in 3 additional communities this school year; 8 communities in total. However, given the high demand for the program, OLI is still not impacting as many Indigenous youth as we know we could. To better meet demand, OLI respectfully requests \$1 million/year for 5 years from the Government of Canada to support OLI's controlled growth strategy, which will allow OLI to triple the size of the organization to operate in 15 Indigenous communities annually by 2020-21. This funding will help to eliminate the cost-barrier for interested communities to participate in our program, and will provide OLI with the capacity to engage with more communities while protecting the quality of our program.

The Big Picture

Over the last 10 years, OLI has evolved to become a proven and financially sustainable model. The OLI program provides many benefits for Indigenous youth, not least of all a stronger sense of self, a sense of belonging, resilience, pride, and hope, which results in their improved academic performance and mental and physical well-being. Families, and entire communities, come together to support OLI youth.

Based on OLI's experience collaborating with Indigenous communities from across Canada, we recognize the tremendous potential of the youth. OLI recommends that the federal government invests in tools that will serve to develop resilience and hope in Indigenous youth, which will enable them to become productive contributors to their families and communities. OLI is a strong strategic partner in this regard.

Thank you for your consideration. OLI Founder/CEO Tracee Smith would be honoured to appear before the Committee to provide additional information about the program's impact. Ms. Smith is willing to travel to Toronto, Ottawa, or another location in Ontario, to appear before the committee.

Submitted by:

Tracee Smith, MBA MFin
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
Outside Looking In

