

SMALL START, BIG DREAMS: CREATING YOUNG ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURS

MTCBC News - June 3, 2009

In just four short months, 15-year-old Eric Gladue has come to see the world a little differently thanks to an entrepreneurial program at Edmonton's Amiskwaciy Academy.

"I never thought of business before this class," he said. "I had no idea about business. But now, I got, like, a way better insight on it. I can now say I am now qualified to run my own business."

Gladue, whose family comes from the Frog Lake First Nation outside Edmonton, is one of 10 aboriginal high school students enrolled in a pilot project to teach them how to plan and open their own businesses.

Right now, Gladue is putting the final touches on his business plan. He is teaming up with another classmate to import and sell MP3 and MP4 players. This fall, they will actually get to launch their small start-up with the help of a \$500 grant.

"I can't wait," he said. "I'm really excited about it."

The program at Amiskwaciy Academy, a public school that focuses on teaching First Nations culture and values, is one of four youth entrepreneurial pilot projects in Canada funded by the Martin Aboriginal Initiative. The initiative was founded by former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin to encourage aboriginal students to finish high school and enrol in college or university.

Students are in the first of the program's two semesters. Along with developing a business plan, they have also learned about banking, marketing and business practices.

"Hopefully, with this type of program, we now create an interest in these students where they'll look at post-secondary and say 'Look, business is something that I do want to be a part of, something that we can actually grow, and there's potential there for me to be successful,'" said course instructor and assistant principal Chris Heard.

As for Gladue, he's looking forward to the launch of his business this fall.

"A lot of my friends think the business thing is cool," he said. "A lot of them are saying they are willing to purchase some of my products already, and it's not even started up yet."