

Learning From the Land, Leading the Way

How Confederation College Is Helping Shape the Future of Northwestern Ontario

By Robin Moss

Across Northwestern Ontario, the future is taking shape through major infrastructure projects, resource development, healthcare expansion, skilled trades growth, and community-driven innovation. As industries evolve and workforce demands increase, one institution continues to play a central role in preparing the next generation for opportunity: Confederation College.

Confederation College serves communities spread across one of Canada's largest geographic regions. More than a postsecondary institution, the College acts as a conduit between education and employment, connecting students with practical skills, industry experience, and community partnerships needed to succeed in a rapidly changing economy.

What makes Confederation College distinct is its commitment to hands-on learning rooted in place, culture, and community. Through practical training, industry collaboration, and Indigenous-led education initiatives, the College is helping redefine what modern education can look like.

Central to this approach are the College's Indigenous Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and land-based learning initiatives. Integrated into nearly every program, the ILOs help students develop an understanding of Indigenous histories, worldviews, and relationships to land within the context of their chosen fields.

"The ILOs are woven throughout 96 per cent of our programs, but they are only a guide," explains Wendy Landry, Vice-President, Indigenous Relations. "The coordinators and faculty have the flexibility to tailor their programming and find ways of implementing the seven guidelines into their specific program."

For Landry, land-based learning is deeply personal.

"I spend my summers and fall in the bush, on the land," she says. "That's where I get my healing, where I get my teaching, and where I reconnect with the teachings from my upbringing."

At Confederation College, land-based learning moves education beyond the classroom and into real-world environments where students experience learning directly through community, culture, and the land itself. Rather than relying solely on lecture-based models, students engage with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing through experiential learning opportunities.

This approach is becoming increasingly important as Northwestern Ontario enters a period of significant economic growth. From mining and aviation to healthcare, environmental sciences, technology, and skilled trades, employers across the region are seeking a highly trained workforce.

Landry says growth in one sector often creates opportunities across many others.

"Take mining, for example," she explains. "Mining graduates have families. Families need childcare, healthcare, housing, education, and vehicle maintenance. It's a domino effect."

Many projects are also located on or near traditional Indigenous territories, making cultural awareness and respectful community engagement increasingly important skills within today's workforce. Confederation College believes graduates with a stronger understanding of Indigenous histories and relationships to land will be better prepared to work successfully throughout the North.

Importantly, land-based learning benefits all learners.

"You don't have to be Indigenous to benefit from land-based learning," says Landry. "It's beneficial for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike."

Confederation College is proud to offer students an education rooted in community, shaped by industry, and guided by Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. It's an opportunity to build a meaningful career while helping strengthen the future of Northwestern Ontario.

Take charge of your future with career-ready training that helps shape our region - Start your journey at Confederation College today.

One of the College's most transformative initiatives is *Anwebiiwining*, an outdoor educational space located on the Thunder Bay campus. Opened in 2024, the space supports Indigenous cultural learning and environmental stewardship through ceremonial gathering areas, fire pits, medicine gardens, tanning spaces, and digital connectivity that allows students across regional campuses to participate remotely in teachings and ceremonies.

The initiative reflects the College's broader commitment to reconciliation and educational transformation through the vision of *Negahneewin*, an Anishinaabemowin word meaning "leading the way." Guided by Indigenous leadership, community partnerships, and culturally grounded education, Confederation College continues to embed Indigenous knowledge systems throughout campus life, curriculum, and strategic planning.