



This story originally ran in the Flin Flon Reminder.

What is your name and occupation?

My name is Sylvia Harris and right now I am a student and career advisor for a college in the North. My passion in life is promoting apprenticeship skills throughout the North.

You recently received a master's degree. In what?

My master's degree is in northern governance and development from the University of Saskatchewan. The International Centre for Northern Governance and Development (ICNGD) was launched in 2009 to enhance the capacity of Saskatchewan's northern communities. ICNGD focuses on northern governance, health and social development, innovation, entrepreneurship and economic development, capacity building, resource development and environmental management in the North.

Why did you choose this area of study?

I live and work in the North, where there is a need for courageous female role models. It seemed fitting to utilize the opportunity. The ICNGD program offers scholarships to help with tuition costs and living expenses. I welcomed the opportunity to be part of a new concept for the North. Also, the program included a paid trip to Norway for 10 days, which was too good to be true! We went to Kirkeness, Norway, in the Arctic Circle, in the middle of March. The trip is something I will always treasure and the people I went with will always be in my heart.

I am a Red Seal Industrial Millwright Mechanic, and I have been since 1986. For years now I have seen a decline in post-secondary educational institutions promoting apprenticeship, at least until the past few years. I have been saying to myself for decades: How many women have written academic papers on apprenticeship?

I knew I needed to do further education to prove my seriousness about promoting apprenticeship. As part of that education, I finished two research projects pertaining to apprenticeship in the North.

My internship paper is called Recommendations on Best Practices in Apprenticeship Programming with Canadian Mining. It compared Cameco's apprenticeship program with those offered by AREV in northern Saskatchewan and the Rio Tinto Diamond mine in the Northwest Territories. My approach provided insights into the three companies' practices, while also looking at the best practices from other organizations' apprenticeship systems.

My final paper, Employee Development in Northern Communities: Corporate Investments in Northern Skills and Training, reviewed how employee development in northern communities needs corporate investment to improve. It covered educational issues, opportunities for employee development, collaborative agreements and how skill and training agreements have changed the dynamics of northern communities.

Why she does it

What I am proving is, any woman can do anything she wants in life as long as she has strength and courage. When I do presentations I speak from the heart. I say, 'Yes, it has been a long road, but it has all been worth it.'

When I was a mechanic it felt good to see a machine repaired and working again. Now, when I see a woman with coveralls on and working in a skilled trade, it makes me feel proud. As a service provider over the years I have assisted people in making the transition into skilled employment, and I feel good afterwards, knowing that I have made a difference.

My long term goal is to assist Aboriginal communities through my consulting company, to enhance local training development from the extraction of natural resources of their land. Impact Benefit Agreements are valuable for northern communities to ensure employment for community members.

As part of her studies for her master's degree in northern governance and development, Harris, fourth from right, travelled to Kirkeness, Norway, in the Arctic Circle.