

by Heidi Hackman & Colleen McNamee, District Career Coordinators, SD 63
photo by Kathryn Alvarez Photography

LANCE NORRIS: Helping Children Thrive

Time for a change! It is always exciting to highlight one of our amazing trades students in this space, and there have been many over the last few months that we could have chosen. We decided instead to update readers on one of our new programs: the Educational Assistant and Community Support Program. This is Saanich School District's first academic career program in partnership with Vancouver Island University. The district recognized the need for qualified educational assistants and responded; this program is the result of two years of planning and organizing, with cooperation and collaboration being key.

We are delighted with the results of the first cohort which started in February and finished in August. In September we were able to celebrate these students and all their achievements, and today we are excited to report that all of the students who completed the program have secured employment! This has been a 100% success story for a first-time, "out of the gate" program. We feel it demonstrates the quality of this initiative, the partnership relationships and the students' commitment and hard work.

Lance Norris took the program in the second semester of his grade 12 year as a dual credit student. This allowed Lance to earn high school credit as well as his VIU – Educational Assistant and Community Support Certificate for free. When he was asked why he wanted to become an EA he had this to say, "Growing up and throughout my schooling I saw that there was a shortage of Indigenous EAs so that is what encouraged me to become an EA. I can be there to help support the kids and help them thrive in their educational journey." His mom Helena was supportive of him taking this path and particularly liked that he would have a steady job right out of high school. She also liked that Lance learned a lot while working towards his certificate.

The program went a long way in preparing Lance for his job at Brentwood Elementary. It provided him with lots of classroom discussions where they talked about situations that could happen on the job. The best and safest way to handle tough situations gave him the tools he needed to succeed. Lance also felt that "having a good mentor on my practicum at Bayside Middle School (Emma Timmins) who had lots of experience on the job, helped a lot."

Lance recommends this program as "it opens a lot of other doors and you learn a lot of great things and meet a lot of great people."

Lance loves being able to share a bit of his culture with the kids at Brentwood Elementary through drumming and singing. In his words: "the kids are amazing and are loving the drumming and singing and



the staff are really nice and very welcoming, so it has been nothing but amazing for me at Brentwood." It is a win-win program for the district and the community.

There are a few seats left for the next intake, which starts January 30. If you would like more information please contact Colleen McNamee at cmcnamee@saanichschools.ca or Heidi Hackman at hhackman@saanichschools.ca