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A danger foreseen is half-avoided.

– Native American Proverb (Cheyenne)

Fanshawe College grad wins provincial award for work with aboriginal students

Belinda Sayeau, a graduate of Fanshawe College in London, has won an Ontario provincial award for her work helping aboriginal students to get a postsecondary education.

Sayeau, an Anishinaabe woman who grew up in Red Lake, is the winner of the 2010 Colleges Ontario Award for student achievement.

“I feel it’s my place to work toward bringing the aboriginal and non-native communities at Fanshawe together,” says Sayeau, who was adopted as a child by a non-native family. “I’m the perfect person to do it because I’ve always walked both paths.”

Sayeau, who studied business at Fanshawe while raising her daughter and working part time, was active in the college’s First Nations Student Association. Recognizing the challenges facing aboriginal students from small communities when they move to a large college, she has helped mentor and tutor other aboriginal students.

Sayeau now works as a customer service representative at Fanshawe’s First Nations Centre, where she continues her work with indigenous students.

Sayeau has also spoken at conferences on the issues facing mature students who go to college, and has helped inspire others to enrol in higher education.

“Belinda has been an important part of our ‘home away from home’ here at the First Nations Centre at Fanshawe College and she is an excellent role model for all students,” says Donna Smith-Sutherland, the supervisor of the college’s First Nations Centre. “I know I’ll look back 10 years from now and will continue to see the impact that Belinda has had both within the centre and the college community.”

“Students like Belinda Sayeau make a real difference,” said Howard Rundle, the president of Fanshawe College. “Belinda’s warm and open personality, clear principles, and strong voice had an impact on the lives of many First Nations and non-native people at the college and beyond.”

Colleges Ontario is the organization that advocates on behalf of the province’s 24 publicly funded colleges. The Colleges Ontario awards were established in 2000 to recognize individuals, organizations and volunteers who have made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of Ontario’s college system.

This year’s awards were presented in four categories: student excellence, exemplary service, collaboration partnerships, and community volunteer.

“Belinda’s achievements are further proof of the excellent work being done at Ontario’s colleges,” said Linda Franklin, president and CEO of Colleges Ontario. “We congratulate her on winning this award and thank her for everything she has done to help students at her college.”

The awards were scheduled to be presented November 22 at a luncheon ceremony at the Higher Education Summit, the annual conference organized by Colleges Ontario. ♦