



## **Ryan Clearsky**

### **Waywayseecappo First Nation**

Working out in the oil fields of Alberta was tough but enjoyable work for Ryan Clearsky. Then the recession of 2008 hit and suddenly the future wasn't so bright after he was laid off. Sitting on the bus one day he overheard some out-of-work oilers talking about a hospital that was being built and they were going to need skilled workers. He decided then to enrol in an Aboriginal program called Trade Winds to Success in Calgary; he was encouraged by the staff there to check with his home community of Waywayseecappo First Nation to find out if there was any funding opportunities. As it turned out, Ryan heard from the band office that the ASETS program was able to support community members seeking training.

Following his completion of an entrance exam, he successfully applied and was accepted to a 4-Year Plumbing and Gas Fitter Apprenticeship program through Aboriginal Futures and Careers in Calgary. The ASETS program from his community supported him for the full term of the program for living expenses, tuition, and books. It sure was a huge relief for him and a great boost of confidence to obtain this much-needed support from his home community.

Shortly after that, another one of Ryan's goals was achieved when he was awarded custody of his son. Fortunately, the ASETS program covered the extra costs for supporting his son as well. He was well on his way to a better life.

It was a difficult challenge for Ryan to go back to school in his mid-30's as he had to kick-start his brain to get used to learning all over again. The curriculum was particularly challenging for the gas fitter component of the program. But he stuck with it in spite of doubts along the way that he might never complete his training. "I hit those walls and felt like maybe I wasn't smart enough to finish," he said. "But I couldn't just take this lightly...I had to commit myself to wanting a better life for my family. I sat down and decided that I was going to study as hard and make it through." And make it through he did. Today, Ryan has a Journeyman Plumber / Gas-fitter B Inter-Provincial Red Seal designation and works for a major Plumbing & Heating Service company in Calgary that does residential and commercial projects as well as light construction and renovations. "It's sure great making over \$34/ hour and living in Calgary with my wife and children," he said.

Asked what he considers to be the most rewarding aspect of his training experience, Ryan shared, "As a Red Seal Plumber and Gas Fitter I have leadership qualities that were developed through the program and from life experiences and this means I have a lot of work on my hands...but most importantly, I have gained a lot of respect from the guys at work. There's no price tag you can put on that..."

His advice to others considering a trade or training is to "seek out what's available in your home community. The program leaders need to get the word out more that ASETS funding support is available in First Nation communities...more can be done to let the younger ones know what's there for them." His message to others seeking a career path is, "you can't stop if you fail a course or if something doesn't go your way. Keep going - get back up on that horse if you fall off and keep going. Don't be discouraged – stick to your goals!"

Way to go, Ryan!

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