

ILSA raises \$14,000 for Indigenous Youth

By Robert Belardi

The Indigenous Life Sport Academy raised \$14,000 in support of Indigenous youth this year.

The Whistler, BC not-for-profit organization sold Indigenous art to raise funds to purchase skateboards.

"These skateboards go right back into those artists communities. We're networking and directly helping the artists' communities by sharing their time," said Executive Director at ILSA Court Larabee.

"We have more opportunity next year and looking forward to doing this again. We have so many more artists knocking on our door."

Since the organization's inception in 2003, they were known as the First Nations Snowboard team. Competitors travelled all over Canada to the Yukon, Nova Scotia and even Thunder Bay.

But what spoke larger volumes was not raising number one talents. It was helping those who needed help and to change lives that might not have been able to be changed before.

"We changed in July of last year. The biggest difference was we said no more competition. It isn't a healthy vibe for the division that we have not only for our communities but for sports in general," Larabee said.

"Now we're focusing on creating role models for social change. It's really sports that are unstructured that youth can do when they don't need a team or need a practice date to wait for. Any unstructured sport that they can basically do in their discretionary time. We're basing this off of research studies that we pulled from New Zealand and Australia."

These studies have shown the immense effects a skateboard or a set of golf clubs can do for a youth.

ILSA currently offers snowboarding, skiing, rock climbing, mountain biking, alpine hiking, golfing and surfing in their programs.

With recent news stories that have emerged regarding the discoveries of unmarked graves across the country, Larabee said his elders continue to think positively.

"There is a lot of sadness. But there are moments of positivity. We reflect on something positive of it. My elder in particular told me that she was happy and she has closure because the stories she used to tell and people didn't believe are finally coming out as true," Larabee said.

"Coming to the end of her days she can rest easy knowing she doesn't have to feel like a liar. That, not only as a connection to the younger generation but also hearing the stories from the people who live through these moments, is going to be a stark reality and really set the pace for the future because this is not going to happen again."

The children are surrounded by excellent individuals. Larabee said ILSA offers training for local government and for business associations. When it comes to stereotypes and the actual reality, ILSA aims to break the barrier and the stigma surrounding the indigenous community.

In 2020, ILSA provided north of 11,000 hours, trained 12 new instructors and produced six indigenous coaching events. The aim is to do even better next year.