



OUTSTANDING ROLE MODEL

By Bryan Hansen

Indspire Youth Award recipient Josh Butcher shows what resilience, drive and a giving spirit can achieve

A key tool in fulfilling Indspire's vision is its Building Brighter Futures program, which distributes bursaries, scholarships and awards to Indigenous students from coast to coast to coast. Josh Butcher is an exemplar of how the program succeeds in supporting Indigenous learners; he is also one of Indspire's 2016 Youth Laureates.

Butcher, who is completing his medical degree at the University of Saskatchewan, is an outstanding role model for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth alike. He has studied hard throughout his student years while also actively participating in multiple extra-curricular activities and volunteer work. This has included



volunteering for Big Brothers, Big Sisters and the Edmonton Christmas Bureau, doing occasional shifts at a Student Wellness clinic that serves mostly Indigenous people, joining ABLED (Advocates for Bringing Light to and Education on Disabilities), and creating Athlete Allies, a group that promotes inclusivity for LGBTQ2 athletes.

Butcher also found time to play football for both the Edmonton Huskies and the U of S Huskies teams, and still succeeded in making the honour roll at the College of Kinesiology during his undergraduate years. While it wasn't always easy and there were competing demands he had to balance, a lot of good came from it, says Butcher. "Classes would end at 4:30 p.m., and practice started at 5:00 p.m. You would finish practice and then go straight home to eat and start studying again," he notes.

One of the most challenging times Butcher can recall was a football game against Winnipeg. "I had a mid-term on the Friday, but I was injured on the field and separated my shoulder," he explains. "I was back on the bus home studying from 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., laying on the floor of the bus with a separated shoulder. Then I got home, slept for two hours, and went to school to write the test."

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

Following his kinesiology studies, Butcher applied to the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine. Initially interested in orthopedic surgery, he quickly realized his interests would be better served in emergency medicine. "When I finished med school and applied for orthopedic surgery, I loved it. However, at the end of the year I really didn't love being in the operating room, so I applied for a transfer to emergency medicine," says Butcher.

Emergency medicine, continues Butcher, really resonated with him, allowing him to connect with people on a deeper level. "In Saskatoon there's a large inner-city population and on one of my rotations I remember this particular individual. He was an Indigenous man in a wheelchair who struggled with addiction and had come into the hospital for his 13th surgery in 14 months," says Butcher.

The purely orthopedic approach to this patient was a frustrating one.

"The orthopedic side of this is to take out hardware, clean it out, and eventually reinstall it. But we were doing nothing to help this man with substance use, and I felt we really needed to work with him to help address addiction," explains Butcher. "I spent a lot of time on that rotation trying to counsel that man and talk to him. This isn't something typically focused on by an orthopedic surgeon, but there are other areas that do, and I felt myself gravitating towards that."

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What also informed Butcher's decision to switch to emergency medicine was that it gave him the ability to try to address the root of a problem before it required surgery. "I started realizing I was missing a lot of medical experience you don't deal with in orthopedics when you're focused on fractures, dislocations and treatment management," he says.

Part of what Butcher loves most about emergency medicine is the trust that it builds between doctor and patient. "I feel fortunate that I am trusted to be able to manage my patients and see them when they're sometimes on the worst day of their life and often at their most vulnerable," he says. "I don't take this lightly. Because of this I not only manage the patient from a medical side, but I also do everything I can to alleviate their symptoms and also the systemic factors they may face in the ER department."

ROLE MODEL

In addition to being a success in his own right, Butcher is also a role model for Indigenous youth embarking on their own studies or career path. When asked what kind of message he would give to these young people, some of whom are uncertain of first steps, Butcher highlights the need to believe in yourself and your dreams, no matter how large or small they may be. Groups like Indspire, he adds, are there to offer support.

"One thing I'd love to pass along to Indigenous youth is always dream big," explains Butcher. "One of the really great things about Indspire is they're supporting people to achieve these big dreams and careers. There aren't always people who are Indigenous in certain careers, but we are slowly beginning to make a name for ourselves in these careers and to show our youth we can do these things.... But for it to happen we need to continue having those big dreams and supporting them."

Ultimately, Butcher wants to see more Indigenous people celebrating themselves and making a stronger mark on the fabric of their country. "I hope to see Indigenous youth continue to thrive and achieve their dreams, be significant contributing members of our society and make an impact on this country and leave their footprint," he says. "I would love to see Indigenous people continue to be celebrated not only by ourselves, but by the rest of our country as well."

To help achieve this, Butcher stresses the importance of mentors. He was lucky to have an important mentor and guiding figure in his own life who greatly assisted his personal and professional growth. That mentor was his Métis father. "From a young age I've always looked up to him as the standard of what makes a good human being," he says. "My dad is someone who has always

impressed upon me the importance of dedication, hard work, and commitment. Another thing that's always stuck with me growing up is there's never any shame in not being the best, just in not being *your* best. I always take this with me wherever I go. I tend to be more humble because of this."

Butcher is grateful for the support and help he has been given by Indspire to achieve his career goals. As he puts it, it has taken part of the worry out of the picture. "Receiving this award is such an incredible honour. When I was younger, I did not know what it meant to be Métis, and it wasn't until around high school that I started looking into it more. For the community to show me that they're proud of me and my accomplishments meant a lot, and the financial component is so helpful because you can then focus completely on your studies."

Butcher feels overwhelmingly positive about the educational opportunities available today to Indigenous youth and, more importantly, the expanding role they will one day play in the country's economy. He closes on a note of optimistic conviction: "I will enjoy watching Indigenous youth succeeding well into the future and thriving despite the significant systemic factors that have [existed] against Indigenous people for many generations." ●



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