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## Federal funding supports Laurier hands-on science programs for Indigenous youth, high school students

WATERLOO – Two Wilfrid Laurier University programs that engage youth with science are receiving federal funding so they can continue providing hands-on, purposeful learning experiences for teens.

The National Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada's (NSERC's) [PromoScience program](#) announced funding on May 2 for the [Mama Aki-Mother Earth Camp](#) for Indigenous youth and the [AquaSONG Project](#) for high school students.

The **Mama Aki-Mother Earth Camp** is offered by Laurier's [Office of Indigenous Initiatives](#) and [Faculty of Science](#). This year, the second year for the program, two overnight **summer camps for Indigenous youth** will be held at Laurier's Waterloo campus **July 1 to 5** and **Aug. 5 to 9**.

"We are very excited to have campers return to Laurier this summer," said Laurier Biology Professor [Frédérique Guinel](#), who co-led [the camp's pilot offering](#) last summer. "Last year's group was keen to learn and it was very rewarding to see. We hope to inspire Indigenous youth to take an interest in science at a post-secondary level."

The program is **available to participants at no charge**. Ten participant spaces are available in each week of camp.

"University outreach to Indigenous youth is critical to closing the gap in post-secondary education for Indigenous people," said **Jean Becker**, senior advisor of Indigenous Initiatives at Laurier. "Initiatives such as Mama Aki give us an opportunity to bring Indigenous children to the university and it helps them see themselves studying and succeeding in higher education."

**Week one of camp** is open to first-time participants who will enter Grade 7 in September 2019. Topics and activities include exploring water ecosystems of the Grand River, environmental protection and sustainability, and leading a healthy lifestyle. **Week two of camp** offers an advanced curriculum for returning participants and those entering Grade 8 in September. Topics covered include water ecosystems, paleoecology, and plants and pollinators.

All participants will experience **hands-on learning** in biology lab spaces, the medicine garden at Laurier's Indigenous Student Centre and Snyder's Flats Conservation Area in Waterloo. **Extracurricular activities** include campfires, swimming and Indigenous arts and crafts. Participants will stay at Laurier's King Street Residence.

To apply to Mama Aki-Mother Earth Camp, please submit an [application form](#) by **June 1**. Confirmation of camp admission will be communicated by June 7. For more information, please contact [Jessica Duke](#), Indigenous students recruitment and outreach officer at 519.884.0710 x4312.

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**Aquatic Science Outreach Network for the Grand (AquaSONG)** offers full-day, hands-on water science experiences to high school students. The program, run by Laurier's [Faculty of Science](#) and [Centre for Cold Regions and Water Science](#) (CCRWS), has received **three years of funding**. Between 2019 and 2021, about 500 students a year will participate at **no cost** to them.

"The PromoScience funding will make water science come alive for hundreds of students, regardless of their economic circumstances," said Professor [Scott Smith](#) of Laurier's Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. "Whether AquaSONG inspires a student to pursue a research career or just to use water more responsibly, it helps young people gain a better understanding of a resource crucial to us all."

AquaSONG, which introduces students to concepts such as water contamination, sampling, filtration and laboratory analysis, began in 2016 with Laurier support and expanded in 2018 thanks to a previous one-year round of NSERC PromoScience funding.

The morning portion of the program can include indoor or outdoor activities, depending on the weather and preference of the participating school. The outdoor option takes students to the Grand River, near a water treatment plant in the Preston area of Cambridge, where they don waders to get a real-world water sampling experience. The indoor option brings students to the CCRWS, where they build mini water filters using materials ranging from rice to ion-exchange resin, and try their hand at filtering water samples.

The afternoon portion of the program takes place on Laurier's Waterloo campus, where students visit the Department of Biology's invertebrate lab to examine aquatic invertebrates and CCRWS labs to study their water samples. A recent [video shows the AquaSONG program](#) in action.

"These activities allow students to experience hands-on science and demonstrate the application of what they are learning at school," said AquaSONG coordinator **Gena Braun**. "We make a point of linking to curriculum concepts in Grade 10 and 11 so students can see what they're learning actually applied in an active research laboratory. We also discuss water issues within our region and things we can do as individuals to improve water quality, given that some of our drinking water comes from the Grand."

The AquaSONG program operates in the spring and fall. Teachers interested in participating with their classes should contact [Gena Braun](#) at 519-496-9532.