

For Immediate Release  
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## **RRC Polytech Expands Respectful College Program to Students**

Initial phase to focus on learners in certificate programs offered through the School of Skilled Trades and Technology

A 2016 human rights complaint filed by T Knight, a transgender student in Red River College Polytechnic's ("RRC Polytech") Welding Certificate Program at the time, revealed areas of improvement for RRC Polytech in providing a safe, respectful and inclusive working and learning environment, sparking a community-wide effort to strengthen student, staff, and faculty awareness and understanding around harassment, discrimination, and gender equality.

In 2021, RRC Polytech implemented a strengthened Respectful Workplace and Learning Environment Policy and associated Procedures in order to enhance its ability to respond to concerns and complaints related to discrimination and harassment in a timely manner. RRC Polytech then made the completion of its Respectful College course mandatory for faculty and staff and expanded access to the course for students. As part of its settlement with T and to ensure early training on these important issues, RRC Polytech is now making Respectful College training a requirement during orientation for students enrolled in certificate programs offered through the School of Skilled Trades and Technology.

This initiative builds on the many resources, supports, and services offered by RRC Polytech and aims to equip students with a greater understanding of bias recognition and how behaviours can impact on others. The intention of the training is to ensure that students will recognize and avoid engaging in harassment, discrimination, and bullying in the classroom, as well as in the workplace, including harassment, discrimination, and bullying on the basis of an individual's gender identity. Planning is underway on this upcoming expansion of the existing Respectful College training. The project will launch during the September 2023 intake and will be evaluated and enhanced before becoming campus-wide training within two years.

"RRC Polytech recognizes that we have a responsibility to provide a safe, supportive, and healthy working and learning environment across the College, for all students, including transgender students" says Dr. Christine Watson, Vice-President, Academic, RRC Polytech. "We must live up to these commitments throughout our College community every day. In addition to our existing staff and faculty training, this student-focused initiative is essential. Not only will it enrich our working and learning environment, but it will also provide a foundation our students need to succeed in the workplace."

While RRC Polytech's initial response to the circumstances that led to the 2016 human rights complaint included the suspension of those involved in unacceptable behaviour, as identified by T, RRC Polytech recognizes that additional steps should have been taken in a timely manner.

"In this specific instance that occurred in 2016, we recognize that we did not meet our commitments to create a learning and working environment that was respectful and supportive for individuals of all gender identities," says Dr. Watson. "This unfortunate situation is not a reflection of our culture, and we need to continually learn and strengthen the many programs, resources and supports that we have in place. We look forward to delivering this important training to students through this new initiative."

"Transgender and other 2sLGBTQIA+ students deserve a safe and respectful learning environment. It is our fundamental human right," stated T Knight. "Although my experience at RRC Polytech in 2016 was very harmful, and continues to impact my daily life, I am proud that I have worked with RRC to make investments and changes for the 2sLGBTQIA+ community, ensuring access to education, especially in the skilled trades, without harassment or discrimination. While many spaces still continue to be hostile to transgender and 2sLGBTQIA+ communities, this is a small step in the right direction for accountable behaviour and action."

"All educational providers in Manitoba have a responsibility to provide learning environments that are free from harassment and discrimination," said Karen Sharma, A/Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. "The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is proud to work alongside T Knight and RRC Polytech to take the necessary steps to ensure students of all gender identities can learn in an environment that respects their fundamental human rights."

During the last six years, RRC Polytech has made significant investments in training and resources to strengthen its working and learning environment. For example, RRC Polytech now has dedicated positions for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and a Resource Resolution Advisor that serves as the main point of contact for all human rights-based complaints. RRC Polytech also created and filled the position of Early Assist Case Manager, which position further enhances RRC Polytech's responses to concerns regarding inappropriate student behaviours.

Since establishing these positions, RRC Polytech has also identified dedicated Diversity and Culture Champions throughout the Institution who help cultivate a safe and supportive working and learning environment. This initiative is open to any staff and is supported by comprehensive mandatory training for all staff and faculty that focuses on harassment, discrimination, and reconciliation.

RRC Polytech is also one of the first post-secondary institutions in Manitoba to partner with EVA (Ending Violence Across) Manitoba and adopt the REES (Respect Educate

Empower Survivors) sexual violence reporting tool to bolster its resources and supports for staff, faculty, and students.

"Our students and staff have the right to learn and work in an environment that is free from harassment and discrimination, and we have a responsibility to address it immediately and consistently," says Dr. Watson. "The addition of this new initiative is the right thing to do. While the circumstances that brought it to fruition were unacceptable, it's an opportunity to demonstrate the values we espouse as a learning institute and campus community."

Learn more about RRC Polytech's Respectful College course training at <https://www.rrc.ca/nowrongdoor/education>.

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