



HAPPY CAMPER

At the age of five, Physiology student Alex Gray announced he would become a brain surgeon. Brain surgery turned into Medicine so he could help treat his stepfather's herniated discs, his mother's bad hip and his grandmother's diabetes. Gray, who is President, American Indian Science and Engineering Society—McGill Chapter, grew up on a Mi'gmaq reserve in Listuguj, on Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula, where his mother taught Pre-colonial Culture and his grandmother ran the local medical clinic. His high school did not have much to offer in terms of field trips or science equipment, but that did not stop him from integrating science into the everyday. From clinic pamphlets to forest artefacts, science was all around him. An avid basketball player, at 14 he and his teammates heard about an opportunity in Montreal: McGill's Eagle Spirit Camp, now administered by the Faculty of Medicine under the Indigenous Health Professions (IHP) Program, is an annual three-day health and science camp, which encourages Indigenous teenagers to consider post-secondary studies at McGill. While Gray's first camp visit took place a decade ago, that weekend remains vivid: Simulated medical procedures on manikins at the Steinberg Centre for Simulation and Interactive Learning; standardized patients yelling out symptoms; basketball scrimmages with Cree, Inuit and Algonquin kids; and stories from Indigenous McGill students, who talked of the loneliness they felt away from their communities. From 16, he returned each year as a counsellor. In spring 2017, Gray, 24, was hired, by the IHP Program in partnership with First Peoples' House, to serve as Coordinator of the camp. As for the future, he plans to pursue medicine or health research. "Alex is a true success story of the Eagle Spirit Camp model. We are so proud of his accomplishments and grateful to have his leadership to inspire more Indigenous youth," says Jessica Barudin, MSc(PT)'15, IHP Program Manager. (Philip Fine)