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## Sports program trains and mentors Aboriginal youth

Alberta Sweetgrass

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Aboriginal youth from Edmonton were among those benefitting this summer from a decade-old program called Sport-in-a-Box.



Developed in 2005 by the United Nations Association in Canada, SPOX is an education program that encourages youth to think globally, act locally and share what they know about the values of social skills, fair play and respect for rules.

SPOX was created as a legacy of UN's International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

This year the program has received funding to train and mentor Aboriginal and vulnerable youth, in both Edmonton and Ottawa. They will acquire coaching and leadership skills that can be used in everyday life.

Montreal-based Saputo Inc., a dairy company, and FIFA's Football for Hope program provided funds to deliver the program to the two cities, both of which have a large number of urban Aboriginal youth.

The program is geared to those ages 14-20. Forty youth participated in workshops run by eight to 10 mentors. Many of the peer mentors to be chosen from Edmonton will be ones that do similar work with the iHuman Youth Society.

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Sarah Gambites, who designed and manages the SPOX program, said 2015 is a special sports year in Canada.

Edmonton played host to both the women's World Cup of soccer and the Junior Pan Am Games, a track and field competition. SPOX participants received tickets to a World Cup soccer game as well as attending the Canadian track and field championships, held in Edmonton in early July.

"We used this opportunity to look at bringing in the urban Aboriginal youth," said Gambites, who is UNA-Canada's director of education and community initiatives.

Vivian Giang, UNA-Canada's project officer in Edmonton, believes Edmonton is an ideal city to take part in SPOX.

"A lot of it has to do with the community support here," she said. "There's a big rally around sports."

KidSport Edmonton, which provides grants for youth, who otherwise cannot afford to play sports, and TrackTown Canada, organizers of the national track and field meet and the Junior Pan Am Games, came on board as community partners of the SPOX program in their city.

*Photo Caption:* The United Nations Association in Canada teamed up with local partner KidSport Edmonton to officially launch Sport-in-a-Box in Edmonton at Thorncliffe Elementary, which boasts an Aboriginal student population of 35 per cent.

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