

Our Voices

WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRE

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Three Generations: The Past, Present and Future of Indigenous Leadership

Three generations of Iskwew (women) are working closely with the Native Ambassador Post-Secondary Initiative (N.A.P.I.) to reframe leadership and reconciliation. Through exploration of healing, love and strength in community, grandmother Christine Catt, daughter Shauna Bellerose and granddaughter Kayla Simpson have sights set on reclamation and finding a place for Indigenous perspectives in mainstream ideas of leadership.

Christine Catt's journey is foundational in the matriarchal leadership and community legacy her family continues to build on - something her daughter, Shauna Bellerose, noted as being an important part of their culture. Catt was born to medicine people and grew up on the trap line in Treaty 8 territory. However, as a young girl she was taken to residential school.

"We didn't hear about residential school when we were small - we only saw the patterns of it," explained Bellerose about her mother's experience. "We saw the alcoholism, the relationship issues and the self-worth issues. When she left residential school, she was still illiterate - she was made to be a workhorse."

Bellerose explained that despite having attended residential school for many years, her mother left

illiterate - unwilling to trust others and unable to trust herself. Indoctrination of "don't talk, don't trust, don't feel" was deeply rooted - and Catt joined an entire generation of Indigenous people integrating into society with that mindset.

After leaving residential school, she gravitated to urban centers - eventually settling in Edmonton and having a family of her own. It wasn't until Shauna was a teenager that her mother's experiences from residential school came to the forefront - she was ill-equipped to cope.

"At 19 I thought to myself, there is a better way. I became an addictions counselor and then began really looking at our communities," she said.

"In working with our community, I think the biggest thing is acknowledgement [of residential schools] - you can't change what you don't acknowledge. Dividing people isn't our goal, but we do need to talk about residential schools to break behaviors and begin the healing journey."

"My mom says it is part of her life, it is part of a lot of our lives and there is a blessing in the end. We survived it and we are resilient and we are stronger than the outcome that they wanted. We carried our culture through."



Bellerose noted that following the birth of her son, her mother made a decision to get sober; her journey of healing began. Now, she is the family's matriarch leading younger generations with teachings of kindness, love and

strength in self and sustaining the family's legacy of strong Cree women.

Kayla Simpson was born to be a helper; in fact, she was born in the very same room her mother, Shauna Bellerose, was born in - something they cite as coming full circle.

It was no surprise when she opted to pursue post-secondary education at Alberta College of Art and Design. Kayla knew that her calling had always been to be expressive and creative. However, after some time working as a teaching assistant in Tsuut'ina Nation, Kayla began to think about her role in inspiring younger generations. And so, she began her pursuit of a BA with a major in Visual Studies and a minor in Indigenous Studies at the University of Calgary - in hopes of becoming a teacher.

"My intention is to help others by expressing my light through creativity and helping others to see their own potential - and doing it all in kindness," she added. "I really understood my role

and how I could be a [leader] working with younger generations."

"Bringing my teachings from my family and bringing our legacy here to Treaty 7, into this space here has really changed my life."

"When we talk about past, present and future, I think about what we can learn from the past, to apply to the present so that the future is going to have it better than we do; so we can sustain ourselves longer, live happier and the next generation will be able to show their light easier than we do."

Since becoming a N.A.P.I. ambassador two years ago, Kayla has honed qualities from her two biggest role models to motivate and empower the next generation through art.

"I've been exposed to the work my mom has been doing with our communities since I was young - I've known her as my mom, but also as a leader and entrepreneur," she continued.

"My grandma has taught me since

I was young to be kind and to be a leader through kindness. She would tell me stories about times she would carry so much anger from the things that had happened to her and I would learn from that by carrying a different approach... love."

"We are moving from darkness to light - this has been our generational transition of that."

The N.A.P.I. program is dedicated to leadership training through capacity building within school systems and is designed to empower aboriginal youth, ages 13-24, to find the leader within through workshops focused on self-awareness, self-development and cultural knowledge. The leadership training is facilitated by the N.A.P.I. Ambassador team, comprised of aboriginal students from the University of Calgary, Mount Royal University, SAIT and Bow Valley College. The program offers leadership training to aboriginal youth across Alberta, B.C., the Yukon and the N.W.T.

2018 WRC Award Recipients

WRC Distinguished Graduate Student

Suzanna Crawford



Suzanna Crawford hopes one day the University of Calgary will name a classroom after her. It is no wonder, considering she has been enrolled for more than a decade. After completing a BSc, Zoology ('10) and BN ('13), Suzanna began her pursuit of a rewarding nursing career demonstrating empathy and a deep-rooted commitment to vulnerable populations. Now, as fourth-year Master of Nursing student studying the narrative experience of disability, she works tirelessly to achieve academic excellence, professional distinction and community leadership.

Over the past five years as a Registered Nurse, Suzanna has demonstrated integrity, empathy and commitment to optimizing care for vulnerable populations. She was the charge nurse

with the Adolescent Addictions & Mental Health inpatient unit before moving into a more autonomous position with the Psychiatric Emergency Services team at the Alberta Children's Hospital. More recently, she became the Nurse Clinician with the Child Development Centre, responsible to interface patient care and process optimization for children newly diagnosed with complex developmental disabilities.

Early in her career, Suzanna noticed the negative impact that inequitable community supports has on child and family health and well-being. She answered this call-to-action by intersecting two fields that rarely mix - nursing and entrepreneurship. With support from the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation,

Suzanna co-founded Enable, a social enterprise that creates meaningful partnerships between people with disabilities and post-secondary student support workers. Since its inception in 2016, Enable is rapidly expanding - currently employing 40 support workers who invest up to 1000 community hours each month.

The entrepreneurship space is male-dominated, but the tech-entrepreneurship space has even fewer women involved. Nevertheless, she persisted and trail blazed for other women looking to pursue their ideas. When her male co-founder left within the first year of Enable's inception, she was further challenged to continue into the male-dominated technology

start-up space. Suzanna built a strong relationship within the entrepreneurship community in Calgary and on campus. Suzanne is recognized as a key entrepreneurial figure in nursing province-wide. Dr. Elizabeth Cannon appointed her as a representative at the US-Canada Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders and as a selection committee member to advise her on the hiring of the inaugural Executive Director of the Hunter Hub for Entrepreneurial Thinking.

As a leader, Suzanna is innovative and a change agent. She has served in a number of advisory and board activities, including her current roles as director of Between Friends and the youngest

member on the Board of Directors for Calgary Quest School. Suzanna is committed to activating the passion and imaginations of other students and nurses. She currently works as a graduate teaching assistant in the Faculty of Nursing and as a nursing instructor at Bow Valley College.

Last year, Suzanna and her fiancé reiterated their personal commitment to supporting those with disabilities by welcoming a young man with an intellectual disability and autism into their home. Her ability to balance the competing demands of her academic, professional and personal life truly exemplify her commitment to community activism, innovation and connecting people in compassion.

WRC Distinguished Undergraduate Student

Clare Hickie



Clare Hickie is an accomplished, hardworking and strong student leader in her final semester of a BA (Honours) in Psychology with a minor in Development Studies. In addition to demonstrated academic excellence, Clare's contributions have proven instrumental in implementing initiatives that encourage resiliency and stigma reduction on campus, as well as promoting greater inclusivity and justice through critical evaluation.

As a strong spokesperson and advocate for mental health, Clare shares her knowledge and lived experiences to support others and influence change. These qualities combined with her extensive leadership experience on campus have given her the experience and the foresight to better understand and be compassionate to the needs of others. As an executive member of the Mental Health Awareness Club, she was committed to changing the culture of mental health on campus by organizing events and initiatives that raised the profile of student mental health. After being diagnosed with major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder, Clare decided to publically share her experiences with mental illness and mental health challenges.

Clare has worked to evaluate the Campus Mental Health Strategy, organize grassroots events like Outrun the Stigma and serve in varying roles in the development and implementation of the Campus Mental Health Strategy (CMHS); she has served on multiple boards and committees and currently works as research assistant with the strategy. In her role as a research assistant, she has worked with peers to create a program evaluation toolkit to assist university of Calgary staff, faculty, students and community members with program evaluation.

In addition to her work with mental health, Clare has been involved in feminist activism and organizing through the Women's Studies and Feminist Club. As the current VP Education and Activism, she has worked to organize feminist and pro-choice activism on campus, as well as educational and training opportunities for campus and community members.

This breadth of activity has resulted in the development of an extraordinary student leader, committed to making the world a better place. Clare is dedicated to cultivating a sense of kindness and inclusivity on campus. Her work is largely informed by her experiences living with mental illness, and the barriers and struggles she has had to overcome as a result. These experiences have encouraged her to value openness and vulnerability, and to create spaces where everyone can feel safe, included and welcome. These experiences have also impacted her world perspective and encourage her to take a proactive stance against discrimination and oppression on campus and in the wider community. She values the importance of taking a stand against injustice and speaking out against intolerance.

Sheila O'Brien Award for Excellence in Leadership

Sue-Shane Tsomondo



Sue-Shane Tsomondo is in her final year of her BA in International Relations, with a minor in English. Over the course of her studies, she has been working as a

research assistant on the Journey Home Project in the Faculty of Social Work, which focuses on refugee resilience. Her research supports the decolonization of academic research. As a person of colour from a third world country, Sue-Shane believes postcolonial theory is vital to the integrity of research on marginalized groups. Her research reflects her long-term goals - Sue-Shane hopes to use her interest in and knowledge of African politics to get more experience in justice and reconciliation, with aspirations of obtaining her Master of Social Work. But all above all else, she would like to return to her home country of Zimbabwe and facilitate national reconciliation programs on a state level.

In addition to her academic pursuits, Sue-Shane has been a dedicated volunteer and a key member of the

Women's Resource Centre community since 2016. She joined the Events and Education team with hopes of organizing events that honed in on diverse experiences and filling gaps in course offerings. Sue-Shane created invaluable learning by putting on events - perhaps most notably were her presentation on Feminism in Africa and Black History Month exhibition.

Being a part of the Events and Education team helped Sue-Shane explore her passion for advocacy, both as a presenter and in a leadership capacity by helping other volunteers achieve their goals. Sue-Shane was selected by her WRC volunteer peers to be recognized for outstanding contributions to the WRC and her commitment to fostering an inclusive, compassionate and supportive space for the campus community.

University of Calgary Address

Director, Indigenous Strategy

Shawna Cunningham

Shawna Cunningham, Director, Indigenous Strategy, works tirelessly to promote cross-cultural learning and understanding between traditionally Western academia and Indigenous Knowledge and Aboriginal Ways of Knowing. Prior to stepping into her current role in October 2017, Cunningham was the Director of the Native Centre for 17 years and the co-chair of the working group for the Indigenous Strategy Task Force. Under her guidance, the Native Centre became a hub for programming and student supports, including advising and retention, as well as programs such as the Aboriginal Student Access Program, the N.A.P.I. Ambassador Youth Leadership program, Indigenous Relations Leadership Program and the

LYNX: Aboriginal Student Career and Employment Program. She has been a conduit for community engagement with Indigenous communities, as well as a leader for cultural event programming, Indigenous-based policy development and fund development.

Shawna is Métis from Alberta - she was born and raised in Pincher Creek. Shawna holds an MA from the University of Alberta ('95), and a BA from the University of Lethbridge ('87) and is enrolled in the EdD program in the Werklund School of Education. Prior to joining UCalgary, she was a program administrator for the Aboriginal Education Program at Mount Royal University, and a Community Liaison Officer and Recruiter for Native Student Services at the University of

Alberta. Cunningham was awarded the Chief David Crowchild Award in 2016, in recognition of bridging cultural understanding through community partnerships in program development.



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For more information about the WRC Awards visit
ucalgary.ca/women/awards

