



# Indspire

Indigenous education, | L'éducation des autochtones.  
Canada's future. | L'avenir du Canada.

## INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Fall 2022

### A message from Mike DeGagné

Another school year has just begun, and we are heading into the Fall. A time of year where we traditionally celebrate the bountiful harvest by feasting, prayer, dance and other ceremonies.

We just marked the second annual National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and are pleased to see so many Canadians recognizing this important day in many meaningful ways.

I hope you enjoy Indspire's Fall donor newsletter, with stories about some incredible students including Jennifer Meness who completed her PhD at York University focusing on the place of spirit in pow wow and Dani Nowosad who is completing her PhD in Integrative Biology at the University of Guelph.

Did you know that Indspire supported 123 students pursuing their PhDs last year? Amazing students who will go on to make such a difference for their communities and Canada.

None of this would be possible without the support of donors like you. I hope as you read these pages you feel a part of something remarkable – the opportunity to help Indigenous students achieve their dream of a post-secondary education and the ripple effect that will have for generations to come.

Miigwech - thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

Mike DeGagné  
President & CEO





## Indigenous Students are More Successful When They See Themselves Represented in Indigenous Faculty

**Jennifer Meness, PhD, Communication and Culture, York University, Migizi Dodem (Eagle Clan), Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation**

**A** pow wow dancer for over 25 years, Dr. Jennifer Meness understands very well the responsibility of becoming a role model when she says, “I pursued my PhD so that I can also help the future success of Indigenous university students.”

Through her research on pow wow, she uncovered a gap in contemporary cultural narratives because of language loss, gradual assimilation, and cultural erosion. She explains, “my Anishinaabe inquiry explores the place of Spirit in pow wow and provides a way to access, think, and reflect on Spirit in pow wow.”

She continues, “my study is important as mainstream society seeks to enter into discussions about Reconciliation while we are still struggling on a personal level with healing, identity, and cultural reclamation. My hope is to contribute knowledge and greater thoughts about Indigenous peoples and our struggles through education, publications, and conferences.”

Indspire made this important work possible.

“I extend a heartfelt thank you to Indspire and I am grateful for their belief in me with financial support through the Indigenous Post-Secondary Education Award, and awards from their donor partners.” Jennifer continues, “As a mature, returning student, there were very few funding opportunities available. For example, my community does not fund graduate studies and many of the entrance bursaries at universities are for undergraduate students. Also, because the academy, in general is still relatively new to Indigenous research, it

was a big challenge to find support to pursue this method of research. That's where Indspire came in!”

She continues, “Indspire meant that I had money for healthy, nourishing foods like vegetables and produce instead of depending on the preserved and processed food at food banks. I could stop worrying so much about the realities of life. I could buy books. I could go to conferences to present my work and bring the spiritual aspect of pow wow and jingle dance to mainstream scholars, where it received a lot of attention from high-profile academics in arts and performance studies. Donors to Indspire made this all possible.”

*“I want donors to know how important they are. Their gifts show us a positive future. You can make a lasting difference in the world when you help a student. By helping people to study, and teach, and change thoughts, you are also helping entire communities to think differently.”*

“Attitudes toward education have been changing in the last ten years as slowly, young people can see models of successful Indigenous achievement. Teaching from an Indigenous perspective is a great benefit to non-Indigenous students too, because through me, they will encounter an alternative view to the dominant, western, patriarchal mainstream paradigm. We can show a new path.”

Jennifer concludes, “a gift to Indspire makes such a big difference. Especially after the set-backs of the pandemic it is now more important than ever for students to know that they will still have a chance to study with help from the donors to Indspire.” •



## Bad Mental Health Leads to Bad Grades. We Want this Cycle to Stop!

Nicholas St. Germaine  
BSc (Trent)  
Chippewas of Rama First Nation



**N**ick St. Germaine works as a Research Assistant in Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest.

Nick developed an early interest in psychology "because I grew up around many people with mental health issues. I saw how damaging mental illnesses can be, and I initially wanted to dedicate my life to becoming a psychotherapist.

"Today, I am also becoming very interested to know more about what motivates people, particularly students, to succeed. And I want to understand more about why Indigenous students tend to suffer more from mental health issues. Research is showing that it's also because of historical trauma and racism – and that these issues then impact Indigenous educational success."

At Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest, Nick conducts research to "understand more about the barriers Indigenous students face in finding out about culturally relevant support. Specifically, we are looking at how students access available mental health services. We are also looking at the issues of stigma and mental health services – and trying to understand more about the training and capacity of counsellors to serve Indigenous students. Basically, bad mental health leads to bad grades. We want this cycle to stop!"

Nick stresses that the overarching goal of Indspire is to "get Indigenous students into higher education, keep them there, and help them succeed in their careers – all of which is essential to keeping communities strong and growing."

He continues, "Indigenous students are already working uphill. That means they tend to struggle a great deal, so Indspire wants to do more to account for all the barriers that prevent success. Having culturally relevant support for students means there is someone available who understands that there are unique psychological and environmental issues at work. In addition, there needs to be a better understanding of the impact of both self stigma and public stigma – and how these experiences prevent people from accessing help. That's why increasing the number of Indigenous mental health workers is extremely important and provides that special understanding that comes from a shared background."

As for his own future, Nick says, "the Inspire Research Knowledge Nest has a very strong success rate in preparing interns to pursue later graduate studies. The benefits of receiving a hands-on experience delivering a research project are tremendous." He continues, "after my time at Indspire, I have increased my choices. I could possibly continue my path to becoming a psychotherapist by attaining a master's degree in psychotherapy, or now I'm considering the possibility of taking a holistic community psychology direction."

Either way, because Nick has seen the impact of mental health issues firsthand, he is steadfast in wanting to, "dedicate my life to making these issues go away." •



## Your Support Means Success!

**Dani Nowosad**  
**PhD, Integrative Biology (in progress), University of Guelph**  
**Manitoba Métis Federation**

*Dani in the Collections Lab at the Centre for Biodiversity Genomics at the University of Guelph, photo by Ashley Street (UoG Comms Team)*

“I’m passionate about polar regions, the people who live there, and engaging in public awareness regarding environmental and socio-political issues. My work includes research and documentation of the changes resulting from human-induced climate change,” says PhD student Dani Nowosad.

Dani says that “I’m the first in my family to get to the graduate studies level. Indspire’s *Building Brighter Futures* made it possible for me to be here. I want donors to know that graduate student stipends are great, but they are below the poverty line. I was struggling with my rent, with groceries; the help from Indspire let me focus on school.”

Dani knows that she is a strong role model for other Indigenous students, “I recognize that Indigenous representation at the PhD level in science, especially at my institution, is low – and I want to help change that. Many underprivileged students think an undergraduate degree is unattainable. And few Indigenous students ever get to graduate studies. That’s why I try to give back to other students whenever I can, to be a mentor, and help motivate students to not give up.

At the higher levels, academia can be quite uncomfortable. The cost is a huge burden. We all know that university can be tough, and when you are under so much pressure it takes away from all the opportunities you could be finding. I was working three to five jobs as an undergraduate to make ends almost meet. Support from Indspire helped me engage with the university, participate more, and meet more students and teachers.”

There are large cultural impacts from the work of Indspire. Dani points out that having more Indigenous students with access to a full range of educational opportunities will also help to address the embedded colonial biases throughout the system.

*She says, “my education has been almost exclusively colonial. Indigenous post graduate degrees add so much richness and new facts to our understanding of the world. They add deeper ways of knowing or unexpected perspectives. I work with Inuit and their traditional knowledge of Arctic freshwater ecology represents many thousands of years of experience.*

Non-Indigenous people are not experts in that kind of knowing. Traditional ecological knowledge is vital to the biological sciences. To solve the problems ahead we need all the help we can get to create a better understanding for our shared world.

In the future, I hope to continue working in Arctic science, with a special focus on Indigenous community driven research projects. My time in the North has changed my life, and I want to continue giving back for the rest of my career.”

Dani wants to remind donors, “your support means success!” •

# Reconciliation in Action Through Giving

Daina Green and Barry Lipton  
Planned Giving Donors



**D**aina Green and Barry Lipton know that Truth and Reconciliation can't happen without action.

Barry Lipton believes that, "to start any real kind of Reconciliation, we need to first recognize that we all live on the traditional lands of a community or nation." The next step is to take whatever action that is possible. "We are very interested in doing whatever we can to develop stronger Indigenous communities in Canada."

For example, this couple's personal mission includes a decision to create change in their community by supporting Indigenous education through a planned gift from their estate.

Daina Green and Barry Lipton feel strongly that empowering Indigenous students to pursue their educational dreams is a key step toward Reconciliation — and that Indspire is the right organization to carry out that work. Barry says, "I looked for an organization that is valued by Indigenous people, one that helps with Reconciliation and helps Indigenous people to better advocate on their own behalf and for their communities. Indspire gets the support directly into the hands of Indigenous students. That's exactly what we wanted."

Barry continues, "for me, the motivation to give is partly a result of shame about what I did not do when I went to school in the late 60's and 70's. I knew a few Indigenous students. But there were only about six in a student population of over 2,000. I had absolutely no information and I knew nothing about residential schools at that time in my life. The decision to support Indspire is part of my own personal Reconciliation

process. Daina and I really want to change the story of what we have done for the past 400 to 500 years."

Daina strongly agrees. "Yes, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a big push for us. And we also knew the great work former Indspire CEO Roberta Jamieson has done. She gave me the confidence that we could do something important to help." Barry adds, "As a settler, I want to do something strong in response to the TRC."

*Daina continues, "we are strong social justice people, and we know our legacy will represent who we are. This is something that is within our power to do and there is nothing easier to do than writing a cheque. It is like including someone in your prayers, but more practical."*

Daina continues, "we've heard many Indspire recipients speak in the most powerful ways. Their stories mean everything. These students are making a difference in our world."

"We want donors to know that to support Indspire and make your contribution is a good first step to helping to heal a very broken country. It is so easy to just say yes, and to help make a difference. And now, it is easy to designate Indspire as one of the organizations that will benefit from our estate, through a planned gift."

**To learn more about legacy giving, please contact  
Kate Espina – [kespina@indspire.ca](mailto:kespina@indspire.ca) or  
1-855-463-7747 Ext. 0262 •**



## From the Heart, a Powerful Advocate for Human Rights



**Sangeeta Bhatnagar**  
**Board Chair, Women in Leadership Association**

**T**o speak with the dynamic Sangeeta Bhatnagar is to have your faith in kindness and the power of strong human values restored.

A personal donor to Indspire's *Building Brighter Futures* program for many years, Sangeeta says she first encountered Indspire after searching for an Indigenous charity that supported educational opportunities. "We were looking for a solid charity that produced clear outcomes," Sangeeta says, "We did our research and asked people that we knew in the Indigenous community for advice. They all said, Indspire!"

Once she saw firsthand that Indspire had a strong impact, Indspire was chosen as one of the recipients for the fundraising efforts of GTACC's Women In Leadership event.

*"We saw the valuable work they do, and GTACC wanted to help and make an impact." Sangeeta says GTACC came onboard because "we didn't just want impact conversation, we want to see real, tangible outcomes. What's not to like about Indspire, if you have a heart?" Sangeeta says with conviction.*

The 2022 Women in Leadership Conference was titled: Women Overcoming Barriers and Biases, and their long-time and generous event sponsor was Air Miles. "Everyone involved in the Conference believes in fairness, and access to Indigenous education is a great cause," Sangeeta says, "if you love humanity, how can you oppose this? I think we can always do more to help, and why not be unconditional in our support of all young people."

Sangeeta continues, "if we don't invest in education, we are missing the fact that a child is a child, and it doesn't matter who they are or where they come from. How can we say no to having equality for every single person?" Sangeeta says, "at the 2022 Conference we were so happy to have as our keynote speaker Susan Aglukark, the multiple Juno award-winning Inuk singer-songwriter."

Sangeeta says that at the Conference, "Susan fully engaged our audience. She talked about her story and her heritage. It was a fantastic event and so emotional to have our awareness raised. She even treated us by singing some of her songs!" As a result, the 2022 Women in Leadership event raised \$17,425.00 for Indspire from over 300 enthusiastic attendees.

"I want donors to know their support for fairness cannot just be a news bite. We must step up and really make things better. My parents are from India, I was born in Canada, and a good education was given to me. This means that I strongly believe 'to whom much is given, much is expected'. I want everyone to know that they can use their blessings in life to serve others."

She continues, "I really want people to consider hosting their own event to support Indspire! It is so easy for businesses or associations to get involved, and to make a big difference."

**To learn more about hosting your own event for Indspire, please contact [Carley Gallant – cgallant@indspire.ca](mailto:cgallant@indspire.ca) or 905 765 1563 •**



# Melissa Attagutsiak – Indspire Award Inuit Youth Laureate 2022

Melissa Attagutsiak - Iqaluit, NU



“I’ve always known my whole life that I wanted to work for myself, but it took a little while.”

Melissa Attagutsiak’s career exemplifies the importance of realizing and then following your dreams. While following another path, she realized that her true passion was design – and so she embarked on her current career as an acclaimed multimedia artist and fashion designer.

She is the artist behind the brand Nuvuja9, creating Inuit-inspired garments and wearable artwork with sealskin, fox fur, leather, caribou antler, baleen, beads, and ivory. “Nuvuja” means “cloud” in Inuktitut, and when her clients wear her brand she wants them to feel as though they’re on Cloud 9.

Melissa is vocal about the traditional materials she uses and explains the vital importance it has to Inuit culture. Melissa has been featured in *Fashion Canada*, *Inuit Art Quarterly* and *Up Here* magazines. Her work has been displayed at fashion and trade shows across Canada and internationally.

A graduate of EntrepreNorth’s Circumpolar Fashion Cohort, Melissa is currently enrolled in Nunavut Arctic College’s Fur Production and Design program learning traditional Inuit skills and contemporary design. Melissa felt it was important to go back to school to build onto her existing proficiency. Through her work, she feels connected to her roots in Nunavut, and hopes to instill a sense of confidence in those who wear her designs.

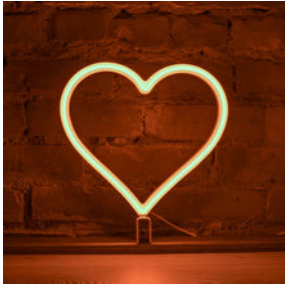
The 2022 *Indspire Awards* honours 12 First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals who exemplify Indigenous excellence and whose stories inspire, uplift, and educate Canadians about the tremendous contributions Indigenous people make to our country.

If you haven’t had the chance to watch the 2022 Indspire Awards, you can online: <https://indspire.ca/events/indspire-awards/> •



## Glowing Hearts support Indigenous Education

Have you seen one of these beautiful glowing hearts in a neighbour's window?



If not, let me tell you more about them. Jeffrey Moss created this wonderful initiative to support front line workers during the pandemic and chose the Orange Heart to support Indspire.

"I'm very happy to say I first came to learn about

Indspire as I used to work with the lighting teams on the Indspire Awards event held in various cities across the country and also provide equipment to the events. When it came time to dedicate the Orange Heart to a deserving Indigenous organization, Indspire was an easy choice. Working on the annual

Awards I've been so lucky to witness firsthand some of the amazing work that Indspire does and the opportunities that it creates for deserving individuals across the country. I couldn't think of a better charity to be donating a portion of the proceeds from the Orange Heart for and I hope when people see the Orange Hearts it brings further awareness to Indspire."

Our Glowing Hearts has donated a portion of every Orange Heart sale to Indspire. So far, more than \$2,000 has been donated! Thank you Jeffrey for your generosity and support.

To learn more and get your own Glowing Heart visit:

[www.ourglowinghearts.ca/collections/frontpage/products/neon-hero-heart-orange](http://www.ourglowinghearts.ca/collections/frontpage/products/neon-hero-heart-orange)

## E-cards now available for your special occasion

Are you looking for a meaningful way to celebrate an upcoming event or pay tribute to someone special in your life? Indspire now has a beautiful assortment of e-cards available for purchase that you can customize and send to your loved one. All of the artworks featured were created by Indspire supported students.

Check out the assortment of e-cards by visiting: [www.indspire.ca/ecards](http://www.indspire.ca/ecards)

