



Indspire

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

INSPIRING CHANGE

HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

Spring 2023

A message from Mike DeGagné

I am pleased to share with you Indspire's Spring 2023 donor newsletter featuring stories about some incredible students that you've helped with your support.

I'm sure you or someone you know has a love of sports. This newsletter features athletes, an NHL scout, a potential broadcaster, and a singer who shares her love of music in many languages.

As I read these stories I can't help but be inspired by all that you've helped us accomplish. These stories demonstrate that with financial support First Nation, Inuit and Métis students are unstoppable.

James Lavallée said it best, "I can't quite put into words how deep your impact is on the individual or the people around them when you give to Indspire."

Thank you for your support of Indspire and students like James. I hope you enjoy reading the stories in these pages and knowing what a difference you are making with your gifts to Indspire.

Miigwech - thank you.

Sincerely,

Mike DeGagné
President & CEO





One of the Greatest Gifts You Can Give

James Lavallée, Youth – Métis (2019)
Métis Homeland (St. Vital, St. Boniface, Bissett), MB

Over the years, 2019 Indspire Youth Laureate James Lavallée has stood proudly atop national and international podiums and received many medals, awards, and distinctions in his chosen area of paddle sports. These honors include being named to Canada's national canoe kayak team in 2016 and receiving the highly prestigious Tom Longboat Award presented to the top Indigenous male and female athletes of the year in 2017.

Always an inspiring and outspoken advocate for Indigenous cultural heritage, during medal ceremonies, notably at the 2017 Canada Games, Lavallée would wear his ceinture fléchée (Métis sash) on the podium.

Yet he credits receiving an *Indspire Award* as one of the biggest transformative experiences in his life.

James says that “the experience of meeting other Laureates and understanding the larger impact of supporting Indigenous youth exposed me to new ideas of Indigenous leadership and the important role of non-profits, like Indspire. It changed my perception of what I might be capable of achieving. It was then that I decided to change my focus from environmental science and applied to Concordia University to the B.Comm Management program to grow my leadership skills.”

“I first received a bursary from the *Building Brighter Futures* program when I was an undergraduate at the University of Manitoba. I hadn't known anyone that had applied and when I was accepted it was an amazing feeling. I was a totally self-supporting student, and this

extra boost was both an immediate financial help and a huge step forward – it was the first time I didn't feel as if I had to worry so much.”

James continues, “the value of helping Indigenous students to have a chance for a post-secondary education is profound. Donor support for education transforms so many things for so many people – from learning more about how the world functions, to finding out what role we can play in our communities, or at large.”

Growing up, James struggled with dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and found school to be nearly impossible. At age 11, he discovered kayaking and for the first time, could see himself improving in something. “Why is sport so important to me? I struggled so much at school. Sport is a huge confidence booster. With sport, I learned resilience, to work hard, solve problems, and to see results. Sport helps youth find themselves through a different channel.”

James adds, “for me, paddle sports like canoe and kayak are much more than just being on the water. There was an instant connection for me to who I am as an Indigenous person. Yes, there is a release from stress, but canoe and kayak make a deep connection to my culture and identity.”

With the confidence of experience, he says that “I want donors to Indspire to know that when they support a student, you give someone an opportunity to change lives. You are helping a student to build a passion, to become successful.” He continues, “I can't quite put into words how deep your impact is on the individual or the people around them when you give to Indspire.” •

A Leader and Role Model for the Next Generation

Jana Headrick, Master of Arts in Sport and Recreation Studies, University of New Brunswick
Garden River First Nation, ON



Aanii, Ga-gay giishego kwe n'diznikaas, Ma'iingan dodem niinda'aw, Ketegaunseebee n'doo njibaa. ("Hello, my name is Ever-Lasting Sky, I am a part of the Wolf Clan and from Garden River First Nation.")

Jana Headrick starts, "Attending post secondary, as a student athlete, was always a dream of mine. Today, with the support of Indspire I'm at the University of New Brunswick in the Master of Arts in Sport and Recreation Studies program. Being a student athlete is a large time commitment, and I was so excited and grateful to be accepted by Indspire. Your support means a lot to me and has allowed me to focus and excel at both my academics and athletics."

Why has hockey been important? Jana says, "it was just a natural thing. Growing up in Garden River, hockey is a big part of our community life. The game was really motivating because I had to keep my grades up to play at school. In fact, hockey became the vehicle that helped me to continue my education."

She continues, "for Indigenous students, sport is highly valued for many reasons. Not only does sport help you to stay healthy and learn about a healthy lifestyle, but teamwork reinforces a sense of community for the players and for the audience. The game is a happy and welcoming space for fans to rally around the people they love, and a chance to cheer them on."

Why is Indspire's support so essential to Indigenous students? Jana says from her experience, "education creates endless opportunities and helps you to grow

as a person and find out who you are. I believe that Indspire's help also leads to increasing a sense of autonomy in learning for students. By this I mean the ability to choose, to explore, to find a passion – all of this is super important, and it leads to increased success."

A member of the University's women's hockey team she has managed to successfully juggle both academic life and hockey. Jana says, "my graduate studies examine increasing the involvement of Indigenous peoples in a coaching context in sport, as well as leadership development of Indigenous youth in sport. I am studying this because I believe that representation matters, it's important for youth to have role models to look up to in settings such as sport."

Indspire helped to make this extraordinary journey possible. She wants donors to know that "no matter if your support is big or small, you are creating so many opportunities for students."

What does the future hold for Jana? "I want to help back home. I want to use what I have learned and apply it back to my community. I think that when we support Indigenous youth, there is nothing else quite like it." •



Music and Sharing My Culture are a Blessing

Mary Bryton Nahwegahbow, Bachelor of Music and Concurrent Education, Queen's University
Whitefish River First Nation of Birch Island, ON

“Boozhoo! I have always dreamt of becoming a singer, songwriter, and musician. I’m a double major, studying advanced music theory and vocal performance in the Bachelor of Music and Concurrent Education programs at the Queen's University DAN School of Drama and Music.

With gratitude for the *Building Brighter Futures* program, Mary says, “I didn’t think I would get help. The day I was accepted, I was performing at the 1st National Day for Truth and Reconciliation where I sang the Canadian national anthem in English, French, and Ojibwe at the Toronto Blue Jays game. I received the news about my Indspire bursary right before I sang, and I felt truly empowered!”

She makes it clear that, “thanks to the donors, I work that much harder because I know not everyone has this opportunity to get funding.”

Mary’s mom, Amy joins our call to say that she was also a recipient of help from Indspire. She went back to school and finished an MA in Public Health at the University of Waterloo. “I knew first-hand the work that Indspire does, and I made sure to tell Mary to think about applying for help when she was accepted into Queen’s University.” Amy continues, “I know how daunting going to university can be, especially for Indigenous students. As a parent, I tell young people to reach out to the Indigenous Centre at their schools and find out what supports might be available.”

In an amazing example of the ongoing impact of donor support across generations and the spirit of giving back to Indigenous students – Amy is now a new donor to Indspire, and

Mary makes a point of asking that her singing performance fees or honorariums be donated back to an Indigenous charity, including Indspire.

Why is music important to Mary? She says, “music is different for everyone. For me, music is a passion, a form of healing, and a way of relating to other people and to other artists. Especially with self-expression like song writing, I can put my feelings on a page and make something to share with other people.”

Mary continues, “donors to Indspire should know that they make a huge difference in someone’s life. Having support for school means the world to a young student. Your gift changes the energy and helps so much. I just want to say a giant thank you for your generous support!”

In the years ahead, Mary says that “I would like to pass on the skills and knowledge that I have gained to other aspiring First Nations musicians. In the future, I plan to teach Indigenous youth who are aspiring musicians and singers to help them achieve their dreams.”

She adds, “During the school year and in the summer, I perform the national anthem in English, French, and Anishnaabemowin to promote First Nations language, culture, and reconciliation at various events. I really appreciate hearing the positive responses from the audience, it makes everything worthwhile. Gchi-miigwetch!” •

Hockey Brings Everyone Together!

Davina McLeod, Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration
Management, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology
Gwich'in and Inuvialuit Aklavik, NT



Blending success in sport, a growing national profile as a spokesperson, and bright prospects on the possibilities of training at a business school – emerging leader Davina McLeod is showing the way for a new generation.

A *Building Brighter Futures* recipient, she says that “when Indspire said yes, it was an incredible feeling! I know firsthand that Indspire motivates Indigenous youth, opens doors that wouldn’t be open otherwise and gives us opportunities to discover new paths.”

Davina is working on her BA in Business Administration – Management, at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. COVID interrupted her classes, so with online lectures she is currently based in Whitehorse, Yukon. She adds, “my parents run a business up north, so it’s definitely been a natural path for me. In recent years, I’ve felt a pull towards Indigenous affairs, and I want to pursue that further. I think a business degree is a great foundation for that.”

What has her experience in hockey taught her? Davina laughs and points out that, “it’s what brings everyone together! Hockey at Indigenous gatherings gives a sense of purpose for so many people. And it is great fun. I’m from a small town near the arctic ocean with a population of 600 people. We’re big hockey fans and players. I grew up playing hockey against my older brother, and I’ve had the privilege of playing hockey at a collegiate level.” She continues, “sport provides a solid structure, emphasizes teamwork, and helps students learn to focus and stay motivated.”

Davina has used her championship winning experience of sport to shape her academic life, “I have also worked for the last three years as a research assistant at the Indigenous Hockey Research Network at Queen’s University. I help to examine experiences, both positive and negative and discover what policies can better help elite hockey players. For Indigenous youth our race plays into our experiences, and we are faced with many hardships.”

In addition to publishing and presenting findings at international conferences, Davina is in touch with The Sports Network (TSN) and is exploring broadcasting possibilities in the future. “I think that platform can be incredibly beneficial, and I would love to use it to improve the lives of Indigenous people. I’ve gained somewhat of a following in the past year, and I want to continue to reach as many people as I can with it.”

Davina McLeod knows how difficult it can be for Indigenous youth to succeed. “My race has obviously always been a challenge in my life, and it continues to be one. This past year during a league game in Alberta, I got called a racial slur that was supposed to make me feel inferior. I took it to my coach, the league, and even news channels. There’s no room for that in our society and I want to be a part of shifting that narrative. It was tough to go through, but it’s also opened many opportunities for me and I’m glad for the voice I got out of it and the people I’ve been able to help since.” •



There is No Blueprint for What She's Managing to Juggle

Brigette Lacquette

Mallard, Manitoba and Cote First Nation, SK

Indspire Award Laureate Brigette Lacquette 2019, is the first Indigenous woman to play for the Canadian women's Olympic hockey team at the 2018 Winter Games in PyeongChang, South Korea. She also became the first Indigenous woman to scout for an NHL team, when the Chicago Blackhawks brought her on board.

Sportsnet referred to the extraordinary Brigette Lacquette as “a modern-day hockey renaissance woman. She seamlessly slips back and forth from NHL scout, to Team Canada hockey player, to grassroots ambassador for the sport. What makes the duelling roles so remarkable is that there was no blueprint for what she's managing to juggle.”

Brigette's connection to Indspire started long before being chosen as a Laureate. Indspire was there to offer bursary support to a member of her family with the *Building Brighter Futures* program.

She says that from her years of experience, Indspire is, “full of amazing people and they have done so much for Indigenous people. I really like the message to youth that they can lead from where they are from. Yes, there will be hard times—but pushing through with education means that you can achieve. I make sure to tell the kids, it doesn't matter what you pick, what your passion is, like my passion with hockey. If you want to be literally anything, a teacher, a doctor, anything, pick something that you are passionate about, that you have fun doing and do everything you can to achieve it.”

Throughout her extraordinary career, her values are crystal clear, “I do a lot of work for the youth across Canada and I'm very passionate about diversity inclusion, and equality. And I know what it's like.” She continues, “historically, hockey is pretty much a white sport, right? So, showing them that you don't have to be a white male to play hockey. Hockey is for everyone.”

That's why Brigette is keen on giving back to communities—she knows how important it is for youth to see a role model in action, “It's truly an honour to be able to be that person for so many Indigenous kids across Canada. I didn't have that person that looked like me in my sport that went through the same things, same obstacles, racism, coming from an isolated community, knowing how uncomfortable it is to leave your norm and then have to leave to play hockey to pursue your dreams.”

Brigette is a role model for Indigenous youth and has used her platform to visit in person and on-line to many schools and communities to speak about the determination and resilience that led her through her hockey career. And for girls in particular—Brigette's success in hockey shows young Indigenous girls that they belong in sports, they can be successful in sports, and they can achieve greatness. She concludes by saying “to the people who step-up to become donors to Indspire—thank you! You help kids and youth to achieve. One person can make a difference, and that one person can be you!” •

Donors Help to Ensure Equity of Access

Valerie McDonald and Bruce Stratton
Annual Giving Donors to the *Brighter Futures Circle*



There is a group of dedicated Indspire donors who want to deepen their connection with Indspire and expand their support of Indigenous students. They believe that an investment in the future of a student is an investment in Canada's future.

In addition to a charitable receipt for their annual gift of \$1,000 or more, members of the *Brighter Futures Circle* play a vital role in helping more First Nation, Inuit and Métis students realize their dream of a post-secondary education. In addition, *Brighter Futures Circle* donations help provide mentor support to students, allow educators to share resources to improve outcomes, and so much more.

Valerie McDonald and Bruce Stratton are two such *Brighter Futures Circle* members.

Valerie starts by saying that, "I was trained as a social worker and worked for many years as an education advocate working to increase funding for all schools, including Indigenous schools that receive a much lower rate of support. I was deeply impacted by the Truth and Reconciliation Report. I know that education is the thing that can benefit Indigenous youth in so many ways and previously, Bruce and I had donated directly to a school in the Northwest Territories."

She continues, "we researched Indspire before making our decision and chose to support the organization because it is Indigenous-led and is well-positioned to help students across Canada and especially those in the North. The national reach and long experience of Indspire is very important to us as donors."

When you become a *Brighter Futures Circle* member, Valerie says, "you have the potential to give young people more than basic skills, you can help them to change ways of thinking about the world, and to help youth pursue very specific passions that lead to good jobs and careers. Education gives people options, and it prepares young people to give back to their communities." Bruce, a lawyer and law teacher joins in, "in the modern economy, it is absolutely essential that all people can have access to a post-secondary education – to help them compete for high value occupations."

Where did this understanding of the value of education and strong sense of dedication come from? Both Valerie and Bruce had parents who were teachers. Valerie says it was her father who credited education with giving him opportunities in life. She says, "we've had a privileged life because of education."

Bruce emphasizes, "the underfunding of Indigenous schools in comparison to provincial schools is something that must change. Indspire helps to rectify some of this imbalance – and donors are helping to ensure equity of access when they support students through Indspire. I had the opportunity to help, and I just said yes. Do it! Because it feels good to do something positive to make a difference."

If you would like to learn more about joining the *Brighter Futures Circle*, please connect with Emily Kerr at ekerr@indspire.ca or 416-987-7155 •

Students Share Their Thanks

Dylan Mablick

Bachelor in Human Rights & Social Justice,
Carleton University, Pond Inlet, NU

Thank you so much for the award! I am honoured. I started school at Carleton University this term. I am majoring in Human Rights & Social Justice and minoring in English literacy, specifically on the Long Civil Rights Movement. It is my very first year and it has been delightful. I know with what I am currently learning, I aspire to contribute back to my hometown, Pond Inlet. Learning about all subject matters of human rights falls into what my hometown is lacking. I highly wish to raise awareness and address what Pond Inlet needs to thrive as a beautiful community. That would just be the start. Thank you for your generous support.



Monica Rumbolt

Bachelor in Nursing, Memorial University
Happy Valley Goose Bay, NL

I will graduate from high school in 2022, and I am enrolled in Memorial University's new Labrador Institute to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Nursing. I work two part-time jobs to help pay for the expense of school on top of my rent, etc. Since this scholarship ensures that I may continue to work toward my future without experiencing as much financial hardship, receiving this scholarship makes me feel really honored and even makes me cry with delight. As there is a huge demand for nurses in the Labrador Grenfell Health District, I wish to stay there and eventually advance to the position of doctor. This was made possible by your generosity, for which I will always be thankful.



Virtual Events

Please visit <https://indspire.ca/events/virtual-events/> to view the recording of our most recent virtual events.

You'll see conversations with Duncan McCue and Susan Aglukark and many others!

