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THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

# KCI-NIVEESQ

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZIN

SPECIAL  
EDITION

ISSUE NO. 0024

BE THE DRUM  
SUPPORTS  
INDIGENOUS  
ENTREPRENEURS

N°24

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economic  
EMPOWER-  
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POETA  
Digispark

CREATING DIGITAL  
COMPETENCE THROUGH  
ONLINE TRAINING





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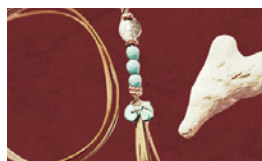
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### — INTRODUCTION —

It is time for Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender and gender-diverse people to shed the chains of dependence created by colonization. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls said economic marginalization is one of the pathways sustaining the violence. To end the genocide, and to foster economic independence, the Native Women's Association of Canada is running, or participating in, several skills-training and business development programs for the people we serve. We are helping them to get good-paying jobs, or to run profitable enterprises. This magazine is dedicated to those endeavours.

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



**LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D.**

CEO/Directrice Générale

Native Women's Association of Canada /

L'Association des Femmes Autochtones du Canada

In these pages we are celebrating the huge economic potential of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people as they obtain the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow, learn new trades, or bolster their own businesses as entrepreneurs.

Unlike previous issues in which we have tackled a wide range of subjects of importance to Indigenous women, this issue focuses on work being done by NWAC. More

specifically, it examines the ways the association is tackling the massive issue of economic marginalization.

Everyone needs a roof over their heads and food on their tables. There is a baseline standard of living to which all Canadians should have equal access. Sadly, we know that many Indigenous people in this country do not earn what is necessary to ensure that they, and their families, can lead happy and healthy lives.

The poverty in the communities is visible. As a grassroots organization, NWAC is listening to the wants of Indigenous women. Poverty reduction is always top of their list.

We also know that the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls said that to end the violence, we must end social and economic marginalization. Putting a stop to the genocide is a primary focus of our organization. This means that curtailing social and economic marginalization is also one of our key objectives.

As Indigenous Peoples, it is time to shed the chains of dependence created by colonization. We need self-sustainability and self-determination. Those are precursors to self-government.

If we are to have those things, we need economic resources as individuals, families, and communities. And we need to participate in Canada's economic growth and prosperity, not just in the poverty.

To that end, NWAC is running, or participating in, a number of programs aimed at increasing the prospects of those we serve. We are helping them to get good-paying jobs or run profitable businesses.



The ISET (Indigenous Skills and Employment Training) is the longest-running of these initiatives, and has been hugely successful. Funding from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is channelled through NWAC and its provincial and territorial affiliate organizations to provide financial supports to Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people who are going to school to obtain a certificate, diploma, or degree. It covers such things as tuition, living allowances, childcare, and other expenses that can be barriers to learning.

If you go to college and you get a degree or a diploma, then you get a better job. It's as easy as that.

For the past two years, we have also been running the National Apprenticeship Program, with funding from the Government of Canada. This program connects Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people with small and medium-sized businesses to build skills and explore new career opportunities across a wide range of trades.

More recently, we partnered with the Organization of American States and its affiliate, the Trust for the Americas, as well as Microsoft Philanthropies, to bring the POETA Digispark training program to Canada for the first time. POETA was established in 2013 to enhance the employment and entrepreneurship opportunities of vulnerable populations throughout the Americas. It offers free online training in digital, technical, and life skills through courses that focus on the Microsoft Office Suite. Those who graduate receive Microsoft and NWAC certification.

And then we have Be The Drum, which offers one-on-one outreach and navigation to Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people who want to build their skills as business managers and entrepreneurs. We help new business owners by brainstorming ideas and by providing business planning, research, branding, marketing, and mentorship. We hold support circles that build individual and

community strength and serve as a platform for sharing challenges and success. And we run workshops that teach the skills required of entrepreneurs.

We know that many Indigenous women have their own businesses. We see them at the powwows. We see them online. We know them through our own community networks. We know they need support. So, we developed the Be The Drum program, which is already in phase two, to help and encourage them to get started in business or to get to the next level.

NWAC began as an advocacy group. But I would call these economic and skills development initiatives 'advocacy in action'. Yes, we still advocate for changes in policy and legislation. But we know we must do more than that. These programs say Indigenous women are doing what they can to move the needle faster to reduce poverty among our ranks.

Recently, we have had discussions with Maria Tuyuc Velasquez, a leading activist in the Americas stationed in Guatemala who is now the President of the World Indigenous Business Network. When I asked her why she is so focused on economic development, she asked what is the point of ensuring that the human rights of Indigenous people are respected without ensuring that they have access to the resources required to enjoy them.

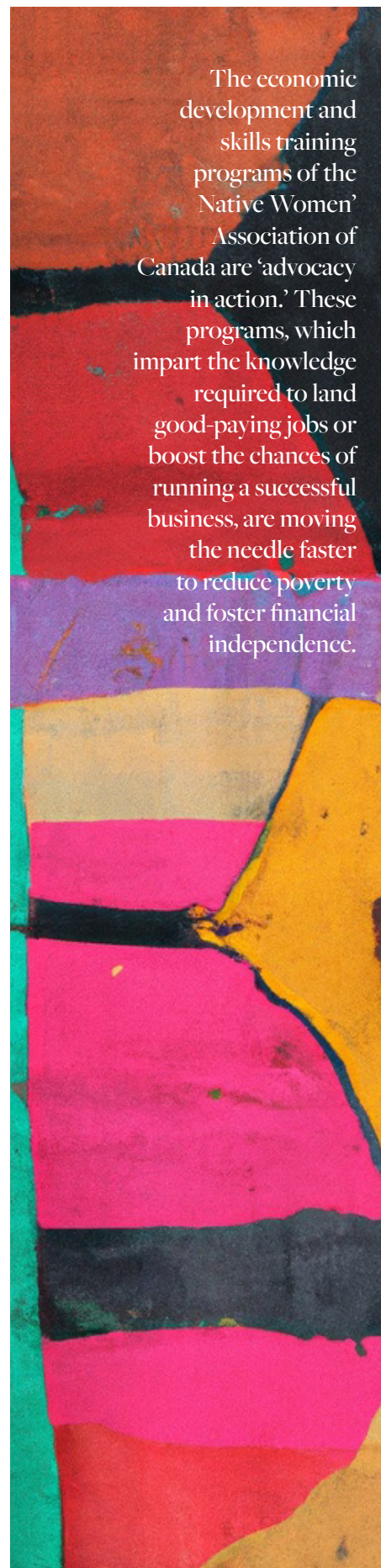
That is why economic empowerment is a top priority for NWAC. It can end the violence. It is a Call for Justice of the National Inquiry. And I think we're on track to meeting it.

So, thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the 24th edition of Kci-Niwesq. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at [reception@nwac.ca](mailto:reception@nwac.ca).

**Miigwetch.**



The economic development and skills training programs of the Native Women's Association of Canada are 'advocacy in action.' These programs, which impart the knowledge required to land good-paying jobs or boost the chances of running a successful business, are moving the needle faster to reduce poverty and foster financial independence.





# THE ROOFER GIRL

The National Apprenticeship Program is providing Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender and gender-diverse people with life-changing opportunities in the trades. It is about opening doors to meaningful employment that can make a generational impact on workers, their families and their communities.

**S**ammantha De Coteau was tired of living paycheck to paycheck. So she walked away from her job in the traditionally female world of hair and makeup, and found work on a construction team. She has never looked back.

"I got hired by a renovation company, just cleaning up garbage and doing whatever they told me to do. And then eventually I got hired by a drywall company. I did drywall and steel framing, insulation, ceiling tile, and T-bar. I did all that for two years, and then I got into roofing," says Ms. De Coteau, who is of Cree descent and from Alberta but now lives in the Niagara region of Southern Ontario.

"I came across this woman who had a company and who had other women working in trades," she says. "I sent a résumé to her, and I ended up getting hired. That's how I got into roofing. And eventually I met my husband on the roof."

Ms. De Coteau is known online as Roofer Girl and, through her company Summit Sisters, she has made it her mission to promote women in roofing and the skilled trades.

"It's about nine years that I have been roofing with my husband," she says. "I stayed with it, and it's been awesome. I make a lot of money. I have a nice house, three vehicles, and my kids are happy. Roofing has been really good to me."

Many Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people who are unemployed, or under-employed, may be apprehensive about starting a job in the skilled trades. That's why the Government of Canada created the Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy, which supports small and medium-sized businesses that hire apprentices in one of 39 trades in the construction and manufacturing sectors, with special emphasis on hiring women, Indigenous People, people with disabilities, and those who are likely to suffer racial discrimination.

The money is delivered through a network of intermediaries, including the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), which created its National Apprenticeship Program (NAP) to promote economic stability for the people it serves and their families.

The program, which ends in March 2024, had provided \$10,000 for each apprentice hired (up to a maximum of two) by companies with fewer than 500 employees. The money is used for training, equipment, wages, and anything else needed to impart the skills required of professional tradespeople, especially those hoping to enter a Red Seal Trade—one of the trades covered under a national system of standards.

"We got involved to make a difference, to provide this opportunity to our demographic, to change lives, to create

resilience, and to really provide the opportunity for an incredible experience," says Jeff Turner, NAP's executive director.

"We created the National Apprenticeship Program to be part of the strategy to provide this life-changing opportunity for our demographic, to get new entrants into trades through the apprenticeship program," says Mr. Turner. "This is about meaningful employment. Some of our participants are new to the workforce, and they're entering (an apprenticeship) in this frame of mind—it's leading to good, long-term, meaningful, life-changing work that has a generational impact."

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum has estimated that, in the five-year period between 2022 and 2026, Canada will



PHOTO: SAMMANTHA DE COTEAU  
ON THE ROOF



need 122,380 new journeypersons to sustain workforce certification across the Red Seal Trades. This will require the recruitment of 256,000 apprentices over that timeframe.

Poppy Nissen, President of Chinook Glass and Screen in Calgary, Alberta, has hired apprentices to glaze windows, do storefront window repairs, install showers and mirrors, and perform all the other tasks associated with her industry.

Apprentices have been advantageous for her company, says Ms. Nissen, because “they are generally willing to put in the time for their education and advancement.” Plus, they can be trained to do the work exactly as the company demands.

Women may have a hard time being commercial glazers, working on high-rise buildings where there is a lot of heavy lifting required, said Ms. Nissen. But her company focuses mainly on residential work where the tasks are not so dependent on brute strength. “So yeah,” she says. “I think we could have more women doing the stuff that we do.”

Ms. De Coteau says women who enter the construction trades are likely to encounter significant sexism and to be treated as if they are inferior. “That’s the hardest part about it,” she says. When sharing stories of her roofing career on Facebook, she says commentators have told her: “You don’t belong here.” “Get back in the kitchen.” “You’re not strong enough to do this.” I still get told that to this day.”

But she says the rewards far outweigh the verbal abuse. Ms. De Coteau says she tells women in the skilled trades: “Just be strong, just ignore them, and just keep doing what you’re doing.”

Some women give up, she says. “But then you have other woman who keep pushing through. And then, the next thing you know, you’re working in construction. You get so fit, you get strong, and you make good money. And then you feel proud of yourself. You’re like: ‘I did that.’

## ~ Jeff Turner

“We got involved to make a difference, to provide this opportunity to our demographic, to change lives, to create resilience, and to really provide the opportunity for an incredible experience.”



*“It’s about nine years that I have been roofing with my husband. I stayed with it, and it’s been awesome. I make a lot of money. I have a nice house, three vehicles, and my kids are happy. Roofing has been really good to me.”*

*~ Sammantha De Coteau*

PHOTO: FEMALE ROOFERS AT WORK



## JOINING THE THREADS OF MENTORSHIP and Personal and Professional Development

**T**he Be The Drum team helps new business owners by brainstorming ideas, and providing business planning, research, branding, marketing, and mentorship. It offers peer support circles that build individual and community strength and serve as a platform for sharing challenges and success.

Michelle Eagle Tail Feathers knows what it is like to live in two realms—the Indigenous realm of her family and her ancestors, and the business realm that has provided a reasonable standard of living for herself and her children.

Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers, a Blackfoot member from Kainai Nation in Treaty 7 Territory, is the interim manager of NWAC's Be The Drum program. She also has a bachelor's degree in management

with a major in First Nations governance. And she has run her own sales team for a private corporation.

"I've always just had this feeling that I wanted to be in business. I really wanted to learn how to manage money and finances. I had all these creative ideas. I was also somebody who wanted to start something and then build it," says Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers. "But I'm also Indigenous and I live in Western society. So I always felt like I had to find this balance of two worlds. Part of me was the business world and the other part wanted to get back to my Indigenous community."

Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers joined the Be The Drum team in August 2023, realizing a long-time dream of mentoring other Indigenous entrepreneurs. That was a natural progression from the support she received in her own career, starting with summer jobs during university at a company called Vector Marketing, which sold Cutco cutlery and propelled her to success as a salesperson.

"I really grabbed on to my manager as a mentor," says Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers. "That was my first experience of having mentorship, training, and development, in a business and sales and marketing atmosphere. And, not even a month and a half later, I sold over 18,000 pieces of Cutco cutlery. It really paid the bills for the summer and brought me and my kids to the Calgary Stampede."

Today, she is paying that experience forward through Be The Drum, which offers one-on-one outreach and navigation to Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people who want to build their skills as business managers and entrepreneurs.

The Be The Drum team helps new business owners by brainstorming ideas and providing business planning, research, branding, marketing, and mentorship. It offers peer support circles that build individual and community strength and serve as a platform for sharing challenges and success. There are workshops that teach the skills required of entrepreneurs. And there are social media channels that are positive outlets for support as well as getting answers to questions and receiving feedback.

The businesses operated by Be The Drum participants run the gamut, from accounting to bead working, and from personal counselling to web design.

Lori Lamour, a member of Pikwakanagan Algonquin First Nation, is a navigator and mentor with Be The Drum. Her involvement with the program began after she successfully completed a diploma program in equestrian business studies before working in the industry and starting her own horse business. She was also a personal support worker for 25 years, and managed a store near Kingston, Ontario, where she now lives.







*"We are  
Indigenous  
women who  
understand the  
hardships."*

*~ Michelle Eagle Tail  
Feathers*

ALL PHOTOS: MICHELLE EAGLE TAIL FEATHERS PHOTO CREDIT: JAYA PARIS M

"I'm able to help entrepreneurs with their business endeavours, searching information, offering advice on how to go about starting a business, looking into whether they should get a trademark, building business proposals, and so forth," says Ms. Lamour.

"It's so nice to be able to assist people in their endeavours and their different areas of business," she says. "Sometimes they just need to vent, or they need to brainstorm different ideas. Maybe they've run their business for a few years and it's just not taking off. Or maybe they need to get some new fresh marketing ideas."

Ms. Lamour says it would have been extremely helpful to have had a resource like Be The Drum when she was starting out in the equestrian business. "I didn't realize there was so much help out there for people who are Indigenous—government grants, funding, and so forth—that could have kept my business going. And I would have loved to have someone just to go over very basic things."

One of the best things about her job at Be The Drum, says Ms. Lamour, is giving budding entrepreneurs the confidence to take the steps on their own that lead to success. "It's so great to end a call with

them being super pumped and excited to go look at the information I sent them to help further their business," she says. "That's my biggest thing. I love being able to help them."

Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers feels the same way.

"I want to motivate and inspire our members," she says. "I really want to share my story with them because I know what it's like to be confused. I know what it feels like to be lost and what it feels like to be successful. And I know how important it is to be prepared and to have those plans or those backups or those savings to fall back on."



Although the summer job at Vector turned into a full-time career, Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers had ups and downs.

In 2016, she established and ran her own branch of the company in Regina. But personal challenges, including a marriage breakdown, intervened and she had to step away. “I just fell back to square one, and maybe even worse,” says Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers. “As high as I rose to the top, just as fast I was back at the bottom. I had never dealt with a big fail like that in my life. And I was just devastated. It took a couple of years to recover.”

She took the opportunity to finish her degree. Then she found a job with a group that was helping Indigenous fathers be good co-parents—turning to the Seven Grandfather Teachings and the Medicine Wheel for guidance in developing the curriculum.

Through all of that, she says, she was hungry to get back into business. “I thought, if I could just go back, rewrite the story to have a better ending, I—d be happy with that.” So Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers returned to Vector Marketing, and became an award-winning district manager in southern Alberta.

Medical issues forced her to quit a couple of years later. When she recovered, she realized that the threads running through all of her work experiences were mentorship, professional development, and personal development. So she took a job with NWAC’s financial literacy team and then moved to Be The Drum, all while applying and eventually receiving her insurance licence.

As she was taking her first steps into the business world, says Ms. Eagle Tail Feathers, “I think what was missing was somebody who would say: ‘Is this realistic?’ Nobody cut my dream short or said, ‘you can’t do this.’ But, at the same time, I had to learn how to have a vision. You have to have goals and then know how to break them down into steps.”



That is a big part of Be The Drum.

“We are Indigenous women who understand the hardships. We’re trying to break generational cycles while trying to build businesses. We have all these things going on and, I feel, if I just had that connection at the time [I was starting out], it would have just really made a difference,” she says. At Be The Drum, “you get to meet all these inspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs who are doing amazing things, and it’s exciting for me. I get happy hearing about them. I want to support them. I want to promote them. I want to highlight them. I want to do what I can to help them succeed.”



## HOW TO CONTACT BE THE DRUM:

### [Programs](#)

[Apply to join \(English\)](#)

[Apply to join \(French\)](#)

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*“Sometimes  
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~ Lori Lamour

“We are Indigenous women who understand the hardships. We’re trying to break generational cycles while trying to build businesses. You get to meet all these inspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs who are doing amazing things. I want to promote them. I want to highlight them. I want to do what I can to help them succeed.”

~ Michelle Eagle Tail Feathers



THE WILL TO KEEP ON GOING,

# ONE HAIR AT A TIME

Agnese Escalona can be contacted at:

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**A**gnese Escalona has an idea that could change the hair-extension industry—one that could be the basis of a profitable business.

Ms. Escalona, a Toronto-based business analyst who is Ojibway from Garden River First Nation, has developed technology to attach strands of hair, one at a time, to a client's existing hairs. Under current hair-extension methods, such as a labour-intensive undertaking would require days, possibly weeks, of work. Her machine will accomplish the job in a couple of hours.

But Ms. Escalona has been working to get it built, and then brought to market, since 2016. Sometimes she has been discouraged. Sometimes she has been ready to give up. But the Be The Drum program offered by NWAC has been there to boost her morale and help her find the resources she needs to press on.

"They've helped me with mentorship and have given me ideas, but mostly it's the encouragement," says Ms. Escalona. "There's been so many times where I've said: 'Maybe this is a stupid idea, I'm just gonna stop.' But with Be The Drum, there has been encouragement to keep going, and to believe in yourself, and to have people say 'wow, this is incredible.'"

Ms. Escalona has thin hair, and has been getting hair extensions since she was in Grade nine. Over time, they damaged her skull.

"Everyone's different," she says. "But for people who have thin hair, it doesn't matter

what method you use, according to my humble research, it will destroy your scalp by the pulling. And I noticed that I started to get baldness in some areas. I got tired of waiting for somebody to create something that is appropriate for thin hair. So that's what inspired me to look into this, and to try to work it out."

Her hair-extension method does not cause the problems associated with the existing technology. The extensions stay permanently attached and fall out when the real hairs fall out.

"You can comb your hair, you can dye it, you can do everything to the hair extension as if it was your normal hair," says Ms. Escalona. "Every other method out on the market currently uses glue, they use string, they use metal. You have to have them removed and then put in again. And you can't die or straighten over them, or put heat on them, or anything like that."

*"There's been so many times where I've said: 'Maybe this is a stupid idea, I'm just gonna stop.' But with Be The Drum, there has been encouragement to keep going, and to believe in yourself, and to have people say 'wow, this is incredible.'"*

~ Agnese Escalona



PHOTO: AGNESE ESCALONA





THE BE THE DRUM PROGRAM OFFERED BY THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION CANADA HAS BEEN THERE TO BOOST AGNESE ESCALONA'S MORALE, AND TO HELP HER FIND THE RESOURCES SHE NEEDS TO PRESS ON.

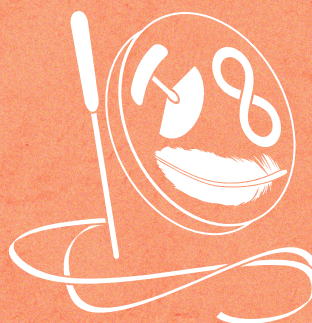


PHOTO: AGNESE ESCALONA

She has reached out to an American company that helps inventors bring their designs to life and find potential purchasers or licensors.

Meanwhile, Be The Drum put her in touch with another potential funder. He could not give her money but suggested that she build one device that potential investors could see in action. "If I can get one device, I can film the videos of the device being used and get people to purchase it on consignment. So he gave me that idea," says Ms. Escalona. She is currently pursuing this avenue with the help of an industrial engineer.

Ms. Escalona says she reached out to the Be The Drum to find resources that could help her "and they've been pretty instrumental in keeping me going."



**#BeThe  
DRUM**  
Your Business, Our Focus



# — THE REALTOR

## Turned Mentor

**A**lexi Hamilton loves the challenges that come with being a self-employed entrepreneur. She also loves helping people find the right home. That's why she has been a realtor for the past six years.

But the timing of her entry into the profession meant Ms. Hamilton, who is Plains Cree and Métis in descent and works in Whistler, B.C., was selling homes throughout the pandemic. That posed a completely unexpected set of issues. So she reached out to connect with NWAC's Be The Drum program.

"My challenge right now is trying to figure out how to make (my business) a really streamlined machine for my own success," says Ms. Hamilton. "I try to utilize all the tools that I possibly can, especially having access to Métis and First Nation status resources. The financial tools that Be The Drum has been promoting, and the educating, that's really what I'm excited about right now."

Be The Drum gave Ms. Hamilton a sounding board. It was important, she says, to find someone who wanted to understand the inside workings of her business—someone who could help her make decisions. That's what she got with the NWAC program.

Now she is looking forward to becoming a mentor and navigator for other aspiring Indigenous businesswomen.

"I think it's really, really important to be educating people on how to make the right decisions, and am so honoured to be an educator for that," says Ms. Hamilton. That's a philosophy that also applies to house sales.

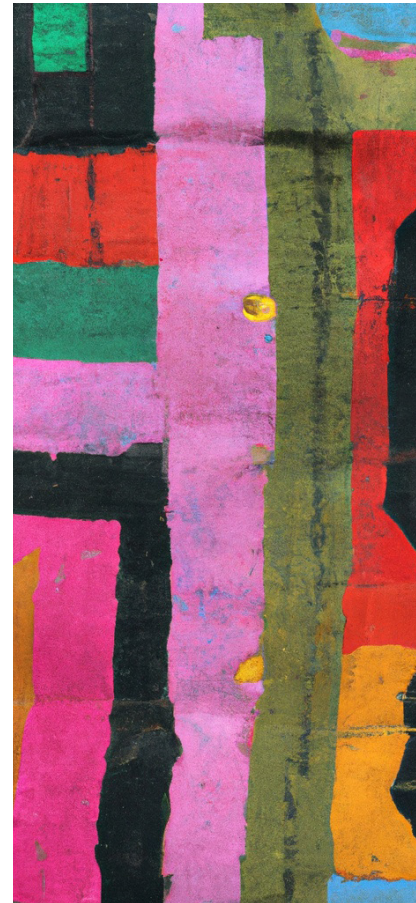
Work in real estate came naturally, says Ms. Hamilton.

"My uncle was a realtor in Calgary and I guess, for me, it's the personal challenge of being a self-determined entrepreneur, and how rewarding it can be to be continuously learning, continuously challenging yourself," she says. "In my family, nearly everybody has been self-employed. I always joke that we're unemployable. And, I love talking to people. They give you so much trust. And you're continuously educating yourself to give the best service to everyone in such a personal, important, impactful decision in their lives."

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“The financial tools that Be The Drum has been promoting, and the educating, that’s really what I’m excited about right now. I think it’s really, really important to be educating people on how to make the right decisions, and am so honoured to be an educator for that.”

~ Alexi Hamilton



PHOTO: ALEXI HAMILTON

Alexi Hamilton is using the financial tools and the promotional ideas she obtained through Be The Drum to streamline her success.



**#BeThe  
DRUM**  
Your Business, Our Focus





PHOTO: LEATHER AND  
BEADWORK BY CORRINE  
RIEDEL PINNOCK



## 5

## MAKING JEWELLERY,

Building Connections

**C**orinne Riedel Pinnock has taken a laid-back approach to her jewellery business but Be The Drum helps to keep her on track.

Corinne Riedel-Pinnock has been curating semi-precious stone beads and other natural elements into earrings, bracelets, necklaces, and other wearables for over 20 years. She loves combining multiple materials into unique pieces, and she created her company Prairie Moon Beads to both market her wares and connect with her relatives and ancestors.

Her sales have not yet grown to the point where she can leave her role at the University of Alberta where she is engaged in Indigenous language revitalization projects. Ms. Riedel-Pinnock, who is Métis and lives in Edmonton, admits she has taken a very “laid-back” approach to running her business. In the beginning, she says, she did not always ensure that the amount of money she was spending on the materials was less than the amount she was taking in.

That changed after Ms. Riedel-Pinnock reached out to the Be The Drum program of the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC). She was looking to make



PHOTO: CORRINE RIEDEL PINNOCK



a connection with other Indigenous women entrepreneurs.

"I'm a casual maker and seller in the sense that I'm not one who keeps close track of what money goes out and what is coming in," says Ms. Riedel-Pinnock. "It began as an exploration, as wanting to create and people wanted to buy what I was creating. NWAC has workshops on bookkeeping, and I would to join in anything that I think that I can grow with. Especially during the pandemic, all of the online workshops helped to keep me going and gave me an opportunity to exchange that energy with like-minded Indigenous women."

It was her cousin who suggested that she reach out to Be The Drum for support, and she has been a participant in the program for a few years now. The most important things for her have been "the encouragement and empowerment of community, and the momentum that comes with that," says Ms. Riedel-Pinnock.

"I was attending NWAC workshops bi-weekly or monthly, especially if I felt that the topics were something I needed to learn about," she says. "Gathering in this way can really boost your confidence. We need to empower ourselves and one another—we are built for connection."

Ms. Riedel-Pinnock's passion for beading began a couple of decades ago when she started working with silver wire. Today, her designs incorporate natural and traditional elements, including semi-precious stone beads, wood, glass, feathers, and shells.

"I also like to have a portion of my work come from upcycled jewellery," she says. "So many of us have piles of outdated or forgotten jewellery sitting somewhere not being worn that has some life left in it. It's so satisfying to take something apart, clean it up, and use whatever parts

are worth reusing and weave them into a new pattern."

Ms. Riedel-Pinnock says she especially enjoys creating statement pieces as in big, distinct earrings and necklaces. Her necklaces fashioned out of suede or leather with feathers and beads have proven to be extremely popular with all genders.

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*"The Be The Drum online workshops became really important to me during the pandemic. They helped to keep me going and gave me an opportunity to exchange that energy with like-minded Indigenous women. Gathering in this way can really boost your confidence. We need to empower ourselves and one another—we are built for connection."*

~ Corinne Riedel-Pinnock



**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN VIEWING AND PURCHASING MS. RIEDEL-PINNOCK'S UNIQUE WORK, SHE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU.**

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Check out her online gallery and contact her through Instagram

[@prairiemoonbeads](https://www.instagram.com/prairiemoonbeads)

or by email at  
[corinne.riedel@gmail.com](mailto:corinne.riedel@gmail.com)



## **PUSHING ON,** One Bead at a Time

Through the Be The Drum Program, Cynthia Pavlovich is able to share beading skills inspired by her ancestors, and she has found healing and community among other Indigenous female entrepreneurs who are walking similar paths.

Cynthia Pavlovich says the best way to treat intergenerational wounds is with culture. She is restored through the creation of beautiful, beaded gloves, mittens, slippers, and other fashion items like those once made by her grandmother.

Through the Be The Drum program, she has been able to share those beading skills, and in turn has found healing and community among other Indigenous female entrepreneurs who are walking similar paths.

"The biggest thing that I got out of Be The Drum was a sense of community," says Ms. Pavlovich. "Also, all the little tips and tricks and support pieces that were shared with us along the way really gave me the confidence to believe that I could start and run my own business."

Ms. Pavlovich, who lives in Yellowknife, grew up in the small village of Mayo in Yukon Territory. The school in her community offered the students a half hour a day of lessons in both French and Northern Tutchone. In the Northern Tutchone class, she was taught not only the love of her language and culture, but also how to bead. "And that is where it kind of began for me."

Her grandmother Annie had always made colourful beaded gloves and mittens as gifts for family members. "I always felt, growing up, that the best gifts were the homemade ones. They were the ones that I always cherished the most," says Ms. Pavlovich.

She works for the government and beads as a sideline. But, in 2018, a friend asked her to make a custom pair of slippers with sugar skulls beaded on them. "And I realized, wow, maybe I do have a skill that I can actually use to make a living."

The goal is to eventually turn the beading and the teaching into a full-time business. "That really would be a dream come true for sure," says Ms. Pavlovich.

She taught herself how to make slippers, grad stoles, and dresses. She has drawn and beaded a book, and is making a version of the creation story in beads.

Today, she works with high-quality materials like 24-karat gold beads, diamonds, and emeralds, which sets her work apart from that of many other traditional jewellery craftspeople. She has also taught herself how to make drums, and she shares that knowledge with others who want to learn.



Ms. Pavlovich was aware of NWAC and the Be the Drum Program for some time before she joined it. "I was a stay-at-home mom for quite a number of years. My world was at home, not so much out and about during those times," she says. "So, when I found out that there was this whole online community that I could jump in and out of from home, well that really made me happy and I started taking those courses."





As someone who identifies as a bisexual Indigenous person, it was a place she felt accepted and safe. “I always felt okay to share my successes or my struggles as a bead artist,” says Ms. Pavlovich. “It’s been therapy. I have since realized that the best way to heal those intergenerational wounds is with culture. It’s with learning the language. It’s taking back the culture in meaningful ways.”

Today, she teaches Be The Drum workshops.

“It’s about having goals, and investing in yourself when you don’t see the reason to push on,” she says. “I can’t even explain what a beautiful, amazing experience it is to be able to share what I know, but also feel that my story might be able to help other people in their business journey.”



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Cynthia Pavlovich through her  
website:

[www.gwichinluxury.ca](http://www.gwichinluxury.ca)





PHOTO PAGE 19: CYNTHIA PAVLOVICH;  
PHOTO PAGE 20: SUEDE DRESS BY CYNTHIA  
PAVLOVICH; PHOTO PAGE 21: BEADWORK BY  
CYNTHIA PAVLOVICH

## BE THE DRUM PROGRAM

*"It's about having goals, and investing in yourself when you don't see the reason to push on. I can't even explain what a beautiful, amazing experience it is to be able to share what I know, but also feel that my story might be able to help other people in their business journey."*

~ Cynthia Pavlovich





WHEN A DOOR OPENS,

7

# WALK THROUGH

Amanda Pierce's art is inspired by the natural environment of the places she has lived. But when the remains of Indigenous children started turning up on the grounds of former residential schools, Ms. Pierce, who is of Cree and Métis ancestry along with some Ukrainian, wanted to honour those children through her work.

She wanted to know the stories of the residential schools and feel the emotions that will allow her to appropriately depict the lives and the losses in her visual compositions. So, she reached out to NWAC's Be The Drum program, through which she was already helping other Indigenous entrepreneurs as a mentor and presenter.

In a recent interview, Ms. Pierce expressed her gratitude, saying, "I will be honest, they really helped me a lot." Lori Lamour, a full-time navigator with the program, assisted her by researching the tragic history of the schools.

Informed with this knowledge, she says, "I plan to visit several of these sites across Canada and engage with individuals knowledgeable about the grave sites. Drawing from the emotional energy I gather from these experiences. I will create art pieces, each conveying a unique narrative."

Ms. Pierce, who also teaches workshops in her preferred medium of encaustic, has been working as an artist for two decades. Her artwork has been described as hauntingly beautiful and moody, often

capturing delicate wisps of plant life within natural landscapes.

"I incorporate natural elements such as twigs, leaves, and feathers into my artwork, along with various recycled materials," says Ms. Pierce, who is also one of the resident artists and instructors at the La Fab Cultural Centre in Chelsea, Quebec.

"Born in Saskatchewan, I find inspiration in the vast skies and prairies," she reflects, "There's a profound sense of peace in those landscapes, and in other places I have lived, such as Europe. I aim to capture that essence of home in my paintings."

She learned about Be The Drum a few years ago when she received an electronic notice outlining how it was supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs. "I thought, 'well, I'll always take all the help I can get. If a door opens, I'll just walk through it,'" says Ms. Pierce. It wasn't long before she was asked to be one of the Be The Drum speakers.

"It's valuable to hear fellow entrepreneurs in the same field who are experiencing similar challenges," she says. "Being able to connect with them and learn from their experiences, or even explore collaboration opportunities, is truly rewarding."

*"I'll always take all the help I can get. If a door opens, I'll just walk through it."*

~ Cynthia Pavlovich

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN  
UPCOMING WORKSHOPS OR HER  
ART, PLEASE CONTACT AMANDA  
PIERCE

through her website:

[www.amandapierceart.com](http://www.amandapierceart.com)

Her art pieces are also available  
for viewing at [Santini Gallery](#) in  
Ottawa and Galerie Old Chelsea  
in Chelsea, Quebec.

instagram [@amanda.pierce.art](#)  
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BE THE DRUM  
PROGRAM



*“It’s valuable to hear fellow entrepreneurs in the same field who are experiencing similar challenges. Being able to connect with them and learn from their experiences, or even explore collaboration opportunities, is truly rewarding.”*

~ Amanda Pierce



ALL PHOTOS: AMANDA PIERCE AND HER ART



# FINDING HER VOICE

As she worked with NWAC's Be The Drum program to find ways to enhance her traditional arts business, Michelle Soto realized she had a gift for sharing traditional knowledge.



**M**ichelle Soto is studying for a degree in indigenous social work. But her affiliation with the Be The Drum program has helped her to find her voice and her confidence as a presenter. Those abilities may take her down a different and even more rewarding career path.

Ms. Soto, whose given name is Mihkwâ Osâwâw Kihew Iskew (Red Yellow Eagle Woman), is from Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation in Alberta, and her maternal community is the Dene Tha' First Nation. She is a Two-Spirited traditional artist and a Knowledge Keeper living in Alberta. Her ancestors on both sides were healers, leaders, medicine people, and warriors. She is the Two-Spirited child of residential-school survivors.

Ms. Soto says she grew up in simpler times. Much of her childhood was spent on the land, and she learned how to hunt fish and trap from her Kokom (grandmother), Evelyn Soto, who passed away in 2010, as well as her parents and other family members. She was also taught food harvesting and medicine picking. "It was a whole collective of people who gave me the basic knowledge," says Ms. Soto, who did not identify as being Two-Spirited until 2022.

A couple of years ago, she took part in NWAC's ribbon skirt competition. Her

entry—a shimmery organza skirt embossed with mythological beings—marked her first real contact with an organization that has made a big difference in her life.

Although creating ribbon skirts is culturally satisfying, it takes five months of hard work to complete each one. That makes it difficult to find buyers who are willing to pay the real price of the time and effort required.

This experience echoes the experiences of her Kokum, who was a highly respected traditional artist for the Hudson's Bay Company in northern Alberta. "She was really favoured. But they would pay her a very tiny fraction of what she should have been paid even though she would half kill herself for her work," says Ms. Soto.

So, although Ms. Soto says she loves the knowledge gained by making traditional ceremonial clothing and footwear, she accepts that it is more of a hobby than a means of earning a living.

As she worked with NWAC's Be The Drum program to find ways to enhance her traditional arts business, she realized she had a gift for sharing traditional knowledge. It started when one of the sharing circles had no





PHOTO: MICHELLE SOTO'S RIBBON SKIRT

Knowledge Keeper; and she was asked to step in. "I grew up in ceremony, I actually opened up in my own language, and I did the prayer. So, they saw this in me. And I started getting the momentum."

Ms. Soto is able to share the experiences she had growing up with groups of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. And, at Be The Drum, she learned "I'm really good at presentation."

One of her recent presentations was about reconciliation. It incorporated some of the colonial history teachings she has learned at university. "I also amplified my experience as an Indigenous person," says Ms. Soto. "Professionals really like my insight, being a 42-year-old indigenous woman growing up in ceremony."

Ms. Soto says she will finish her social work degree. But she plans to take a second degree in management and then, hopefully, she will transition to doing the presentations full-time. "I'm interested in creating my own consulting business," she says. "And, eventually, I want to create my own conferencing because I find it's something that is lacking, and I really have that perspective."

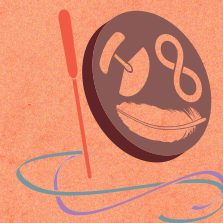
One of her aims is to shatter preconceived notions about Indigenous women and Two-Spirited people. "A lot of people assume that Indigenous women are meek, very sacred beings who are quiet. But, oh, my God, I wasn't raised that way," says Ms. Soto. "My Kokum would always tell me that women were raised to be vocal. We were the ones who were the pillars of the community. We had the power to create the leadership, and if they didn't listen to us, they could easily be demoted."

NWAC's Be The Drum program has helped Ms. Soto "grow and really develop my voice in a way where I

was unapologetic, but respectful with my viewpoints." She says, "I will find where I'm gonna go eventually—where people really appreciate my objectives, my perspective, and my work ethic, and they're going to really honour it and pay me what I am worth."

*"Be The Drum helped me grow and really develop my voice. I will find where I'm gonna go eventually—where people really appreciate my objectives, my perspective, and my work ethic, and they're going to really honour it and pay me what I am worth."*

~ Michelle Soto





# HELP TO FLOURISH IN NEW DIRECTIONS

Through the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program run by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the Native Women's Association of Canada is helping Indigenous women and others to achieve their educational and skills training goals.



**A**lanna Mitchell, who was born and raised on Kómoks First Nation on Vancouver Island, began her post-secondary education at North Island College on her Nation's traditional territory.

But "my band funding got cut and they weren't willing to support me anymore," she said in a recent interview. That left her struggling to complete her university studies.

Ms. Mitchell was able to pick up where she left off and finish her Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology with Concordia University, thanks to funding provided by the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program run

by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) in partnership with NWAC.

Through NWAC and the ESDC, the ISET program provides financial supports such as tuition, living allowance, childcare, job starts, and other resources to help Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people reach their employment and skills-training goals.

Funding is available for those who are studying for a certificate or diploma program of up to two years, or who are in the final two years of a degree program.

ISET funding is actually delivered by NWAC's member associations in the provinces and territories. In Ontario, that association is called Keepers of the Circle, and Kelly Hyde is responsible for administering the program. Right now, there are between 45 and 50 ISET recipients in Canada's largest province.

"We make it our mission to say yes," says Ms. Hyde. "We help Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals achieve their employment goals. It could be as simple as helping someone in a rural community get a driver's licence to go and look for a job, all the way up to needing full-time childcare, or maybe dependent care because some of our seniors live with us. We pay for that."

To qualify for ISET funding, applicants must be an Indigenous woman or a gender-diverse person who is unemployed, underemployed, or precariously employed. They must be 15 years of age or older. And they must provide documentation to show they have applied for additional funding from their First Nation but have been refused.

"We've helped a couple of doctors. We've helped a couple of lawyers and some teachers. We've even helped a helicopter pilot get a night rating," says Ms. Hyde. "But it's not always for college and university students. It could be just for someone who is training or upskilling themselves because they are in danger of losing their job. We do a lot of professional development training to upgrade their skills."





Michelle Soto, a Two-Spirited traditional artist and a Knowledge Keeper of Woodland Cree and Dene Tha descent, is in her third year of an Indigenous social work program. She is able to go to school thanks to ISET funding.

"I literally heard a voice saying 'we work for Creator ... And we need you to go to university; the cutoff date for applications is right away. So you have to do it right away,' says Ms. Soto. "I said, 'I don't know how I'm gonna pay for all this stuff, for living expenses, for everything.' And then I heard him say, 'we will take care of everything.' And sure enough, everything was taken care of."

She successfully applied for two scholarships, and then obtained the ISET money. "It just really helped me to flourish in a direction," says Ms. Soto.

As for Ms. Mitchell, she had lost her job in British Columbia when the funding for it ended. Then her husband got work in Saskatchewan so they moved to Regina. After a few months, his project transferred to Montreal and she went with him.

"I had to find work in a new province (Quebec) and language played a big challenge with that. So, I bounced around for a bit," says Ms. Mitchell. She still wanted to finish her degree, so she transferred to Concordia. But she was struggling to make ends meet, as she worked part-time and paid for her courses out of pocket. That's when she found out about the ISET program at a previous job.

"I reached out to NWAC, and they helped me with funding for school," says Ms. Mitchell. "Because there were only a few courses left to be completed, I knew it would be great if I could get funding to go full time."

As a full-time student, she could also apply for the FSWEPISEO (Federal Student Work Experience Program-Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity) program, and she obtained a student position as a Transformation Officer with the Federal Programs team.

Through FSWEPISEO, she was able to share her lived experience, learn new skills, and network. The program also helped her to bridge with another government department, the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, after successfully completing her studies.

"I always had all the work experience, but I didn't have that colonial piece of paper saying I know what I know," she says. "ISET helped me finish school a lot faster. It really changed my life. It wouldn't have been possible to finish school and find secure work without the support of NWAC's ISET program."

*"We've helped a couple of doctors. We've helped a couple of lawyers and some teachers. We've even helped a helicopter pilot get a night rating."*

*~ Kelly Hyde*



PHOTO: ALANNA MITCHELL

*"ISET helped me to flourish in a direction."*

*~ Michelle Soto*



## CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

THROUGH  
POETA

The partnership of NWAC, Microsoft Philanthropies, and the Trust for the Americas, a non-profit organization affiliated with the Organization of American States (OAS), is bringing the POETA program to Canada for the first time, providing Indigenous women and gender-diverse people with enhanced employment and entrepreneurship opportunities through free online training in digital, technical, and life skills.

**D** Sonia Macaluso had the basic knowledge of Microsoft's Office Suite that is gleaned by most people who spend at least part of their days working on a laptop.

But when Ms. Macaluso, who is part Métis, created her own business to bring French programming to children and families in Hamilton, Ontario, she needed a deeper understanding of Office software—especially Word, Excel, and PowerPoint—to make her work run more efficiently.

Ms. Macaluso was already part of the Be The Drum program for Indigenous entrepreneurs run by NWAC. That's how she learned about the POETA (Partnership for Economic Opportunities through Technology in the Americas) Digispark digital training that is being offered through a unique partnership between NWAC, Microsoft Philanthropies, and the Trust for the Americas, a non-profit organization affiliated with the Organization of American States (OAS).

POETA was established in 2013 to enhance the employment and entrepreneurship opportunities of vulnerable populations through free online training in digital, technical, and life skills. It has been operating successfully for many years in countries across the Americas,

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including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay. Now it is available in Canada to Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people.

POETA's 10-hour courses, in five different subjects related to Microsoft's Office Suite, will run in Canada this

year. Three hundred and fifty people will gain an enhanced understanding of digital technology and graduates will receive a certification from Microsoft and NWAC.

Ms. Macaluso was a member of the small, preliminary cohort of students who took part in the first session, which began in December 2023.



PHOTO: PIERINA NEPOTE



Among the most important takeaways from the course, she says, is an understanding of the less obvious functions of the software. “You think you know Word,” says Ms. Macaluso. “But when I went through the workshops, they walk you through all of Word’s different tools and applications and add-ons, all the cheats and quickies and things to that effect. It was just really amazing.”

Nadine Letson, the head of Corporate, External and Legal Affairs for Microsoft Canada, says the company became a partner in POETA Digispark because Microsoft is committed to expanding economic opportunity and growth for all.

“ I’m very passionate about the work that I do in just changing the narrative for the next generation coming up behind us and giving them more control, more power. Let’s just recreate the village and make it stronger.”

~ Sonia Macaluso





“We believe this starts with ensuring that everyone has the skills to thrive in an AI-enabled economy. We recognize that Indigenous communities are under-represented in the Canadian tech workforce, with only 2.2 per cent of them working in this sector,” says Ms. Letson. “To empower everyone, we believe it is our responsibility to help people build digital skills for jobs and livelihoods for a whole new way of working. We believe that technology tools can play a central role in fostering a more inclusive skills-based labour market in Canada.”

Pierina Nepote, a senior program manager and international development specialist with the Trust for the Americas, says she has seen POETA in action over the years and has witnessed the changes it is making in the lives of people who are economically marginalized.

“It’s really been an opportunity for them to feel empowered, in many cases for the first time in their lives,” says Ms. Nepote. “Our training is not the ultimate solution to all the challenges faced on a daily basis around the world. But, we are convinced that by developing key digital, technical, and life skills, we can better equip, we can better strengthen, the profiles of our beneficiaries, for them to be able to more effectively compete in a very competitive labour market in a very competitive economy. That labour market, that economy, is increasingly digitalized. It is, therefore, important to develop and strengthen these skills.”

The idea of bringing POETA to the Indigenous women and gender-diverse people of Canada was first raised by OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro after he visited this country at the invitation of NWAC in 2019. Microsoft quickly agreed.

“There was finally the opportunity to work in a developed country like Canada,” says Ms. Nepote. “It is a country that has far fewer challenges than most of the rest of the Americas. But still, there are specific, historically marginalized, under-served

populations, just like there are in many other developed countries.”

Participants learn about project management, data content management, digital and financial literacy, entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability, and workforce readiness. POETA aspires to equip them with the ability to contribute to both their Indigenous heritage and the contemporary digital landscape, ensuring they can effectively walk in two worlds.

Fifty facilitators in Canada, who will be chosen from among community leaders and Elders, will be taught how to replicate the training within their communities. By empowering these local leaders, the project will create a sustainable ripple of skills development and knowledge transfer. POETA also assists participants as they search for employment, and supports the development of entrepreneurship and businesses within Indigenous communities.

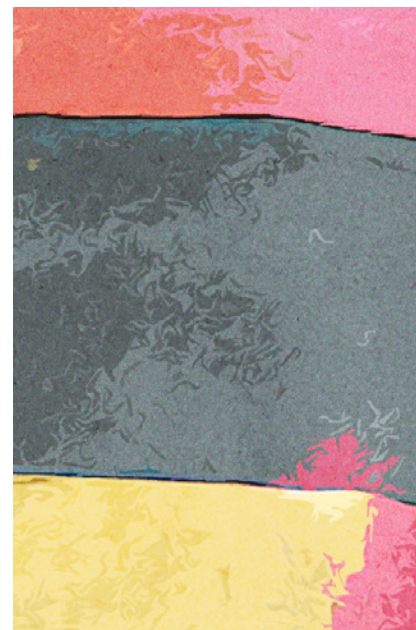
Ms. Macaluso, who was raised as a francophone, spent years working in schools with kindergarten-aged children. She started her business when she realized that the students in English-language schools in her community were offered many more opportunities, services, and resources than those provided to students in French-language schools.

“My mindset was like, OK, somebody has to advocate, somebody has to do something, somebody has to change the narrative,” she says.

She obtained training in High Five, a program that equips people working with children between the ages of 4 and 12 with tools to enhance recreation and leisure programs. “There was one High Five trainer in Canada who was French. Now we have two,” says Ms. Macaluso. In addition, she became the first French first-aid representative in Hamilton. And she is working with the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre to share her knowledge.

“Our training is not the ultimate solution to all the challenges faced on a daily basis around the world. But, we are convinced that by developing key digital, technical, and life skills, we can better equip our beneficiaries to more effectively compete in a very competitive labour market that is increasingly digitalized.”

~ Pierina Nepote





"I'm very passionate about the work that I do in just changing the narrative for the next generation coming up behind us and giving them more control, more power," says Ms. Macaluso. "My motto is 'let's just recreate the village and make it stronger.'"

The new skills she acquired through POETA are being put to use every day.

"Because of the line of work that I do presenting and training and facilitating, I am constantly in PowerPoint or in an Excel sheet ... keeping track of my budget, my kilometres, my client database lists and creating documents, letters, introductions," says Ms. Macaluso. "The program was designed to give you a business mindset. Whether you are a business person or not, there is still so much that you can take away from that."



*"Technology tools can play a central role in fostering a more inclusive skills-based labour market in Canada."*

*~ Nadine Letson*

PHOTO: PIERINA NEPOTE



*IT IS TIME FOR  
INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN, TWO-SPIRIT,  
TRANSGENDER AND  
GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE  
TO SHED THE CHAINS OF  
DEPENDENCE CREATED  
BY COLONIZATION.*

## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

NATIVE WOMEN'S  
ASSOCIATION  
OF CANADA



## KCI-NIWESQ

is the magazine of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). Its objective is to highlight the work of the organization and to tell the stories of the Indigenous women of Canada.

NWAC, which was founded in 1974, is a national Indigenous organization representing First Nations (on and off reserve, with status and without), Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Its goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian society.

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WOMEN OF CANADA.

**2024**  
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