



Celebrating 25 Years
of the
Esquao Awards





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Warning that this booklet may contain images of deceased peoples.



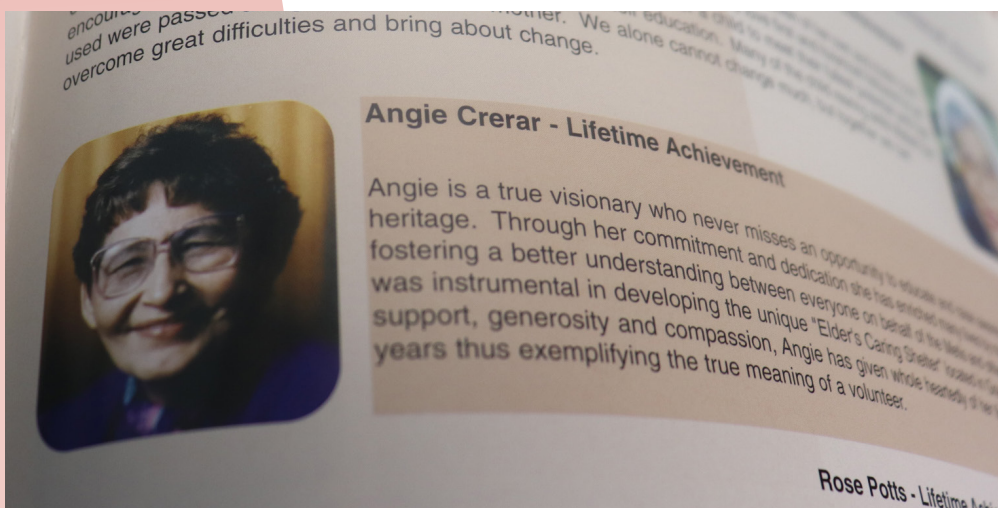
From top to bottom, Left to Right: 2017 Esquao Award Recipient Stephanie Harpe; Dancers at Esquao Awards Gala; 2015 Esquao Award Recipient Brbra-Dumigan-Jackson; Muriel Stanelly Venne and Marrgo Pariseau, two founders of the Esquao Awards; Author Maria Campbell being welcomed to the Circle of honour, 2015.



For nearly 25 years, the Esquao Awards has highlighted the amazing work of Indigenous women throughout Alberta and Canada. From its humble beginnings, the Esquao Awards have grown to be the single largest recognition event of Indigenous women in the country.

Four years ago, as the event continued to grow, the Government of Canada began conducting a National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Earlier in 2019, the Government of Canada published the Final Report, along with 231 Calls for Justice.

The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) wanted to mark the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Esquao Awards by looking back at past Award recipients, their stories, and how their work has been leading these Calls for Justice for decades.



About IAAW



IAAW founder and President Muriel Stanley Venne in her signature cowboy hat. Not only is she a fierce advocate for Indigenous rights, but she is also a hilarious and kind woman, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother! Photo credit Kevin Tuong.

Before we discuss the Esquao Awards, we want to share some information about us, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW). In 1995, our founder, Muriel Stanley Venne, had already been advocating for Indigenous rights in various roles for decades. One day, she received a call regarding a young woman in distress who needed assistance navigating the legal system. Wanting to help, Muriel called the courthouse and requested to know when the woman's hearing would be, which was public information. In response to her inquiry, Muriel received hostility, and questions like "Who are you?" "Where are you calling from?" "What organization are you with?"

Not to be put off, Muriel firmly responded, "The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women."

Muriel told this story at the 2019 Esquao Awards, smiling, stating, "And then, I had to form [the Institute]." Muriel's ingenuity, courage, and humour would go on to serve IAAW and its members well throughout the years.

Today, our mandate continues to be to promote and recognize the leadership of Indigenous women in Alberta. We have five main strategies to achieve this mandate:

1. Develop and deliver program and services;
2. Create opportunities to address to discrimination against Aboriginal women;
- 3 Identify and promote opportunities for Aboriginal women to participate in policy development and decision-making;
4. Celebrate the strengths and achievements of Aboriginal women; and
5. Establish networks for Aboriginal women to exchange information and experiences.



From top to bottom: MCs Chief Billy Morin and Marilyn Lizee; Marilyn Gladue with family; Mother and daughter Mackenzie and Matricia; Award recipient Sandra Lamouche; Award recipient Geraldine Carriere and friends.



Why Esquao Awards?

Though Muriel and others successfully began work at IAAW, they wanted more. Indigenous women were leading businesses, culture revitalization, education initiatives, community healing, and much more. Without Indigenous women, many programs, organizations, initiatives, and businesses would not run—yet no one was recognizing their work. Even more frustrating, media, governments, and universities often represent Indigenous women as victims, or worse, criminals.

The absence of recognition particularly angered IAAW's Vice-President, Marggo Pariseau, who would go on to co-found the Esquao Awards. She saw an important need—to celebrate Indigenous women.

One woman was especially close to Marggo's heart. At the 2019 Esquao Awards, Marggo described her friend Marge Johansen:

“She was a single mom and she raised 10 children. For 20 years, she worked by my side, helping homeless women. Never missed a shift. Never was late. She was calm and always treated everyone with respect.

I wanted to thank her. It needed to be more than a lunch. I wanted a celebration. I wanted to show her how much we all appreciated her.”



IAAW Vice President Marggo Pariseau and Debbie Coulter, long-time supporter of IAAW.



After seeing Marge receive a token handshake for her twenty years of service, Marggo had had enough. Marggo remembers venting daily to Muriel the day Muriel said, “Why don’t we honour our own?”

That is how Marge became the first recipient of an Esquao Award in 1996.

Marggo and Muriel’s resolve to recognize the fantastic women in their life has become the largest recognition of Indigenous women in the country. Now, no matter what program, event, or initiative IAAW is running, we always begin by honouring our women.

Nellie Carlson



Nellie Carlson at the official opening of Nellie Carlson school, part of Edmonton Public School System. Photo credit Infused Studios.

In addition to Marge Johansen, four other women received recognition during the Esquao Awards' inaugural gala of 1996. Among the recipients, was Nellie Carlson, Cree woman, life-long Indigenous rights advocate, and first president of Indian Rights for Indian Women.

In 1947, after 18 days of marriage to Métis man Elmer Carlson, Nellie was stripped her rights under the *Indian Act*, setting off a journey of nearly 40 years to have the rights and recognition restored. As many readers know, since its inception, the *Indian Act* discriminated against Indigenous women in many ways, including making it more difficult for them to retain their Indian status and pass it on to their children. According to the Act, a woman could not pass her Status to her children and would

lose her Status if she married a man without Indian Status. Essentially, the policies sought to erase the First Nation identities of countless women and their children.

The consequences of these policies were devastating. Many women were forced to move from their communities, not allowed to buy homes there, and among other exclusions, prevented from being buried there. For many women, this created tension, where they could not return to their communities, but often, were not welcome into Canadian culture.

As readers also know, however, Indigenous women are incredibly resilient and determined. In the late 1960s, Indigenous women began forming organizations across Canada to lobby to protect and reinstate the rights of First Nation women. In 1969, Nellie Carlson was a founding member, and President, of *Indian Rights for Indian Women*. Decades of lobbying and organized appeals led to the passing of Bill C-31 in 1985. Bill C-31 amended passages in the *Indian Act* that discriminated against the rights of First Nations women. Though concerns still exist regarding the *Indian Act* and Bill C-31, the determination of Nellie and the countless women who worked by her side, helped thousands of First Nation women reclaim their Indian Status and their rights, and those of their children.

In recognition for her work, Nellie has received numerous accolades, including having an Edmonton school named after her.



Nellie Carlson at the official opening of Nellie Carlson school, part of Edmonton Public School System. Nellie is sitting next to her husband, Elmer. Photo credit Infused Studios.

Bertha Clark-Jones



Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada (2005-2010) presented the insignia of Officer of the Order of Canada to Bertha Clark, on February 22, 2008.

“If I feel something, I just have to act on it.”

Those are the words of Bertha Clark-Jones, Métis, Veteran, and tireless Indigenous advocate, describing her sense of justice.

Bertha cites growing up as one of 14 children as the reason why she became a sensitive and caring person. Her family and her community of Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement grew her sense justice throughout childhood and at the age of 18, she joined the Royal Canadian Air Force to help fight World War II. During her service, Bertha earned the rank of corporal and trained squads all over Canada.

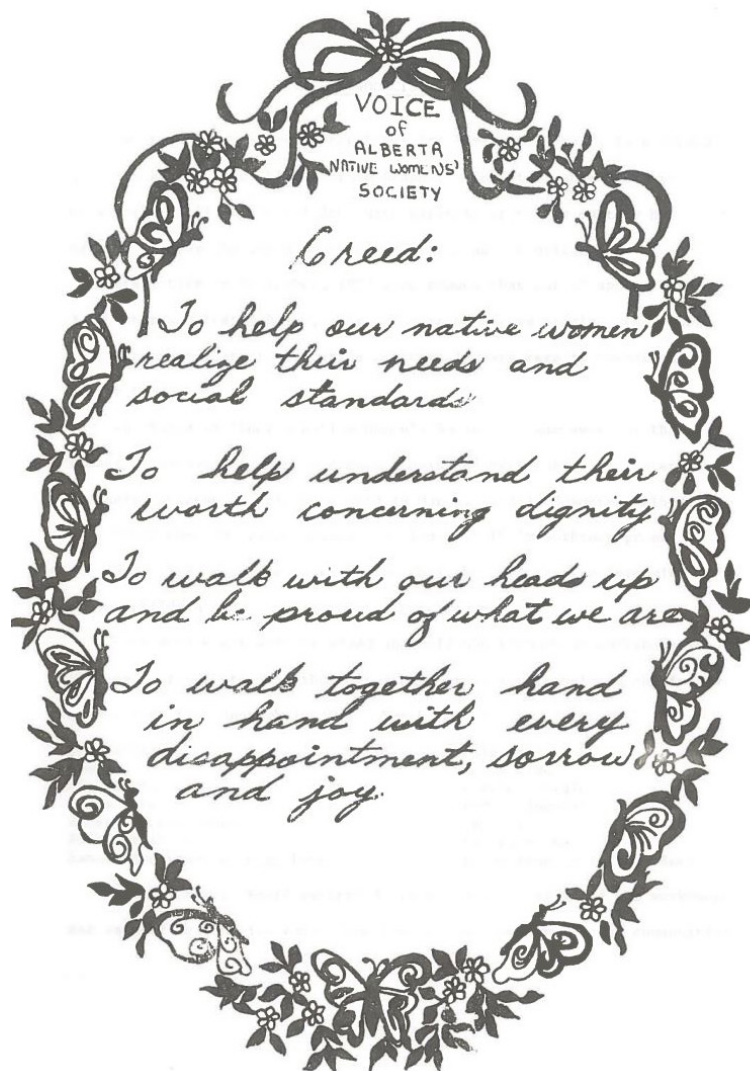
After the war, Bertha was far from finished fighting for justice. She, and many other Indigenous Veterans, faced discrimination. Though non-Indigenous Veterans were given grants to help pay for home/land ownership, Bertha was strictly forbidden from buying land in her home community because she was a woman. Furthermore, Bertha learned that First Nation Veterans could not buy homes in their reserves altogether, due to a provision in the *Indian Act* that stated First Nations lose their Indian Status if they leave their reserve for more than four years. The discrimination sparked Bertha to advocate for the rights of Indigenous veterans and women.

Years of advocacy work would eventually lead Bertha to co-found the *Voice of Alberta Native Women's Society* in 1968, which would later become the *Native Women's Association of Canada* (NWAC). To the right, you can see the Creed of the Voice of Alberta Native Women's Society in 1975. Bertha served as NWAC's first president and set the organization on a powerful path that continues.

Today, NWAC works like a "Grandmother's Lodge" as they promote Indigenous ancestral laws by advocating for the equality of Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples. NWAC's campaigns and successes are too numerous to list and their impact too great to measure. Among their many victories, NWAC was crucial in getting Canada's federal government to conduct a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

Though Bertha passed away in 2014, her legacy lives on in her work and the countless number of women she inspired.

In addition to her advocacy, Bertha was a mother to six children and wife to George Clark.



From top to bottom: Creed of the Voice of Alberta Native Women's Society in 1975; Bertha left in her military uniform, standing next to siblings; Bertha Clark Jones. To learn more about Indigenous women's stories in service, get a copy of "Our Women in Uniform," available on Amazon <https://amzn.to/34uqTS1>.

Mackenzie Brown

Not only does the Esquao Awards recognize women across the province, but also across generations. Mackenzie Brown was honoured in 2019 and is one many amazing youth IAAW has recognized.

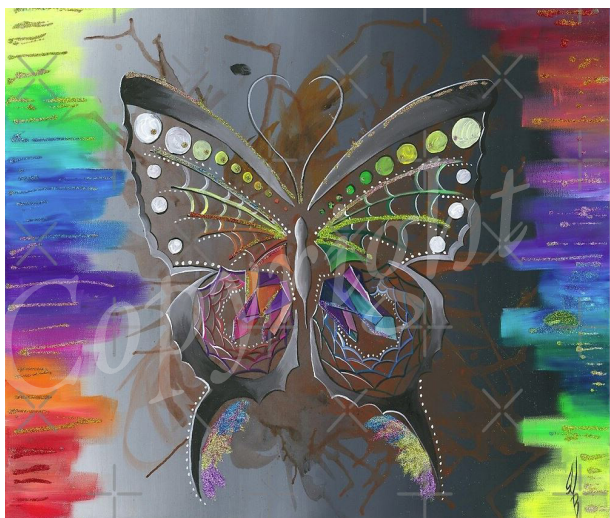
Proud member of Sturgeon Cree Nation, Mackenzie learned the beautiful parts of her culture from her amazing mother Matricia growing up. Though her life has not been without struggle, drumming, traditional songs, dance, and other art forms all helped fill Mackenzie with pride and confidence. To Mackenzie, these art forms were more than beauty, they were a way to protect herself and her culture. Growing up, Matricia would tell Mackenzie “Show people the beautiful parts of your culture, and they will learn to love you and want to protect you.”

With this message in mind, the two women went on to form a band, “Warrior Women,” when Mackenzie was a teenager. Together, the two perform original and traditional Indigenous songs while representing the beauty of their traditions.

After high-school, Mackenzie had a desire to protect children and began pursuing a degree in Child and Youth Care. The program allowed her the opportunity to complete placements with various non-profit organizations that serve youth. One such organization was Crystal Kids, which, among other services, provides programming for youth at risk. During her time at there, Mackenzie noticed that there was no specific Indigenous programming despite the high demand. Though she saw a need, Mackenzie knew that the organization lacked funds to develop and deliver an Indigenous programming.

Below: Mackenzie Brown (right) drumming with her mother, Matricia Brown.





From top to bottom: Mackenzie's kamâmak (the butterfly) that was used to raise funds. You can find on-line version at Redbubble at <https://rdbl.co/2YUrCKZ>; Mackenzie receiving an Esquao Awards in 2019.

Once again, Mackenzie turned to her art. Creative to her last cell, Mackenzie knew there must be an innovative way to get funding. Performing with her mother gave her a unique opportunity in front of many crowds and her artwork provided an income. To raise funds, Mackenzie decided a percentage of her funds from her kamâmak (the butterfly) card sales would go towards Indigenous programming at Crystal Kids. Furthermore, in front of crowds, she had the opportunity to encourage people to donate to Crystal Kids or similar organizations. At the 2019 Esquao Awards, Mackenzie described her goal, stating “it became my mission to be in the kids’ corner and let them grow and find their Indigeniety the way I did.”

Just two short years of fundraising provided Crystal Kids with enough resources to develop Indigenous programming. Mackenzie helped deliver drumming classes and was humbled by the impact she saw the music have. Like her own journey, she couldn’t deny the power of art. The classes provided a space for 12 youth the opportunity to be in the moment and immerse themselves in their culture. Mackenzie makes the point that drumming is particularly healing because it reminds us of a heartbeat and a time when we felt completely safe and cared for.

Today Mackenzie is a traditional drum keeper, actor, signer, artist, advocate, and much more. Though Mackenzie has used her art for many great causes, she knows much of what she’s accomplished would not have been possible without her mother rediscovering and teaching her the beautiful parts of their culture.

Dr. Margaret (Maggie) Hodgson

Starting 2001, IAAW Board Members began nominating women in leadership positions for the Dorothy McDonald Leadership Award “Circle of Honour.” Recipients of the Circle of Honour are women who, among their many duties, advocate for other Indigenous women. Below is a list of the Circle of Honour, who have all changed the lives of Indigenous women in countless ways.

Circle of Honour

- 2019 Lisa Weber, lawyer
- 2018 Chief Brenda Kehewin-Vanguard
- 2017 Chief Bernadette Sharpe
- 2016 Ashley Callingbull-Burnham
- 2015 Maria Campbell, trailblazer who inspired countless to heal and share their story
- 2014 Dr. Marie Smallface-Marule, advocate for traditional Indigenous knowledge
- 2013 Marilyn Buffalo, advocate for Indigenous education
- 2012 Melissa Blake
- 2011 Dr. Maggie Hodgson, mental health and addictions advocate
- 2010 Beverly Jacobs
- 2009 Dr. Cora Voyageur
- 2008 Kathleen McHugh
- 2007 Audrey Poitras, President of Métis Nation of Alberta for over 20 years
- 2006 Grand Chief Rose Laboucan
- 2004 Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrews
- 2003 Hon. Senator Thelma Chalifoux, first Indigenous female Senator of Canada
- 2002 Hon. Pearl Calahasen
- 2001 Dr. Colleen Klein



Dr. Maggie Hodgson has achieved much in her life. Inspired by her own family’s struggle with addictions, Maggie spearheaded addiction centers, conferences, and awareness campaigns that have reached around the globe. Margaret has fostered destigmatization and healing worldwide, improving the lives of countless people.

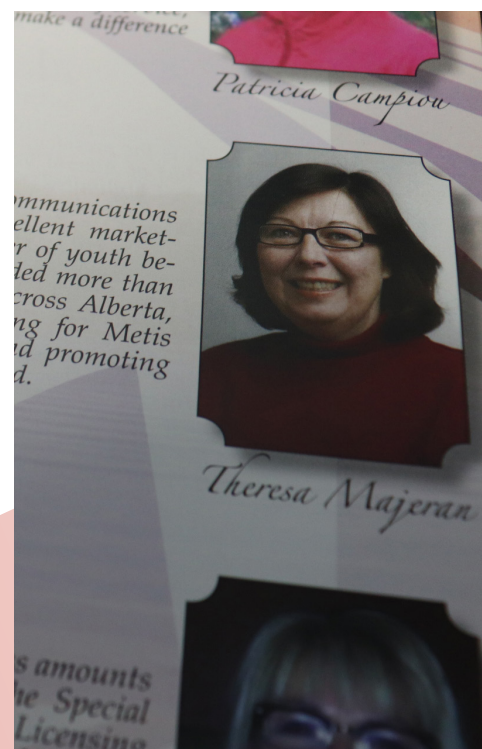
For her contributions to mental health and addictions research, Maggie has received recognition in numerous countries, including having a tree planted in her honour in the Peace Park in Israel. The daughter of residential school survivors, she took her most painful experiences and turned them into opportunities to help others. During all her work, Margaret maintains the most important thing is to be kind to others; this will make the work easier, inspire others to care about your causes, and make the world a better place.

Theresa Majeran

Theresa is approachable, compassionate and reliable. As the communications Coordinator for the Belcourt Brousseau Métis Awards, her excellent marketing efforts and ability to multitask has helped increase the number of youth being sponsored from 200 to more than 1,300 Métis students studying in Alberta.

More than just promoting the Belcourt Brousseau Métis Awards, Theresa creates a feeling of family with past and current winners. The Gala celebrating award recipients is one of the most anticipated events for Métis students, as it gives them a chance to connect with fellow winners and build community with new students. Thanks to the warm and welcoming nature of Theresa, Métis students

throughout Alberta have been able to meet each other, support each other, and create lasting relationships. Theresa's dedication demonstrates why Indigenous people should lead Indigenous programs. Her journey to connect with her Métis roots and culture has allowed her to understand that the Belcourt Brousseau Métis Awards represents much more than scholarships to students, but a way to find community.





2019 Esquao Awards Gala



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