

## Nikki Fraser

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc  
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*"To me, Indigenous research means, methodical analysis conducted by, or engaged with Indigenous intellectuals to expand Indigenous wisdom, culture and knowledge."*

### TRUST YOUR JOURNEY: DISCOVERING THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE PATH WE WALK

***"We all know what needs to be done but we need to have the courage and the conviction to do it (Wilson-Raybould, 2019: 9)***

*Weyt-kp xwexwéytep, Nikki Fraser ren skwekwst. te Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc ren st'7é7kwen. Ren sqwse7 Trey re skwest.s, ren st'emkélt Aiyana re skwest.s*

*My name is Nikki Fraser, from Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (TteS). My son's name is Trey, and my daughter's name is Aiyana.*

*I am the great-granddaughter of the late Joe and Susan Fraser, the granddaughter to the late Ben Paul Sr, and Yvonne Paul (Fraser), daughter to Joyce Fraser (Dave Manuel) and Rob Spence.*

*My ancestry is traced back to time immemorial. I am proud to identify as Secwépemc, Anishinaabe woman.*

Interconnectedness is essential commonality. We know that everything in life is intertwined. This sense of connections has significant meaning for Indigenous peoples. As I reflect on my path in life I recognize how much I have grown: a new path would be there; a new opportunity to grow and to learn or unlearn. This gives me a great sense of interconnectedness in my own life. I know this connection to be true in my own self, and in

my research into what helps young Indigenous peoples to grow strong and become advocates for Indigenous advancement. I welcomed all these new opportunities as they challenged me in new ways to ask more questions. By understanding my journey on these paths, I hope to continue to clear a path forward for young Indigenous peoples like myself.

My research is focused on the question: What helps young Indigenous peoples to grow strong in identity and culture, and to become advocates for Indigenous advancement? To help expand understandings, I use an auto-ethnographic research method within a decolonised Indigenous research framework. This form of research method means I am able to use my self-reflection and writing to explore experiences and connect my story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Maréchal, 2010). Photographs feature in the story building and reflections. Consistent with Tuck and Yang (2012), and Datta (2017) I use the concept of decolonization from an Indigenous lens, with exceptional consideration for Secwépemc world views; a concept that centers Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous ways of thinking and being. Conducting decolonized research in this way means knowledge making with and within Indigenous communities in ways that places Indigenous voices and ways of knowing in the center of the research process (Smith 2019; Datta, 2017).

I never set out to be an advocate for Indigenous peoples. Rather, advocacy found me when as a young woman I was searching for meaning and for a purpose. As an advocate for justice, with a focus on Indigenous Women and girls. I know my role is to add to the path that was paved for me. I recognize my responsibility to do the same for others. I acknowledge all the Indigenous leaders, activists, advocates, and scholars of the past. They have opened doors for generations of young Indigenous peoples that will follow.

This paper is about the connected paths in life, one to the next, that in total lead us to join together in advocacy for young Indigenous peoples. There will be an exploration of three interconnected paths that help young Indigenous peoples to grow strong in identity and culture, and to become advocates for Indigenous advancement. The first is the 'path' of advocacy volunteer work. This is important because it is a response to a call to action. In my case my journey on this path began with an unexpected 'push' from my community to step forward. This was followed by the 'pull' of the national fight for Indigenous girls' and women's rights. The next experience in becoming an advocate for Indigenous advancement was and is on the global stage: at the United Nations. The second path to an advocacy role, which is described in this paper is Indigenous resiliency. This is a path of healing and growth and of being called to action. The final path in this research into growth as an advocate for Indigenous advancement is to honor the lives of advocates for Indigenous rights and advancement.

Throughout this paper I will call forward those with whom I have connected – personally, spiritually, in community, in academia. The

interconnectedness is vital to becoming an advocate for Indigenous young peoples. I am reflecting on the interconnectedness of my journey, my advocacy work, and the instruments I learned about during my advocacy work and how I could continue to give back. In total my intention is to encourage more to trust their interconnected journey, as advocates in a time of critical, historic, Indigeneity. Together we advocate so that young Indigenous peoples might grow strong spiritually & culturally, socially, economically and politically.

## ADVOCACY VOLUNTEER WORK THE 'PUSH'

My advocacy volunteer work has led me on a journey of learning, unlearning, growing and sharing. It was in May 2015 that my life changed and my journey began at a BC Native Women's Association (BCNWA) General Meeting held in small boardroom in Kamloops BC with approximately forty local Indigenous Elders, women, and young women. I was at the meeting to support my friend, who was putting her name forward for the position of the Secretary for the Executive Board of BCNWA. I knew she could really shine, and contribute fully to this position. She was the successful candidate by acclamation. What I did not expect was to contemplate stepping up for one of the positions myself. At the bottom of the list of positions we were voting on there was "Youth Representative" written in a black sharpie. It took about two hours to get to the final nomination and the vote for the Youth Representative. During that time, I went back and forth with myself wondering whether to put my name forward. I looked to my right and I saw a well-respected Elder from my community. She gave a look that

**Images: Left: National Youth Council for NWAC. Nikki Fraser, Mya Abotossaway, Chenisse Lynn, 2015. Right: Roberta Moses, Francyne Joe, Nikki Fraser, 2017.**



said, “Do you want to?” Looking to my left, I saw another respected Elder I have known since I was age 12 years. Next thing I know, the Elder on my right said “I nominate Nikki Fraser for the Youth Representative Position”, with the Elder to my left immediately following saying “I second that”. Although surprised with the turn of events, I accepted the nomination proudly and humbly. With a shaky, nervous voice, I gave my nomination speech, and I shared a personal but important story of what my family had endured and their strength and resilience.

This section begins with two photos. The first on the left of Chenisse, Mya and myself reminds me of the beginning of my path to advocacy. At home I got elected to our local Board thinking it was a very local and grassroots commitment. Within weeks I was on the plane for the first time and on the way to Montreal to the General Assembly of Native Women Association of Canada. I put my name forward to be the regional representative for the Board. This experience elevated me to a learning experience within a group of women across Canada – learning from Indigenous women. That is where I started learning about the inequalities and advocating for indigenous women and girls. I had a sense there wasn’t much room for young voices to be heard, but I was not alone.

The second photo is of Roberta Moses, Francyne Joe and myself at the 2017 NWAC AGA, my last day as National youth representative. I was fortunate that Francyne and Roberta had made the spaces for young Indigenous women’s voice to be heard. This was the beginning of my expanded sense of who I am as Secwépemc and as an advocate for Indigenous people.

The experiential journey towards identity is vital to understanding how we grow strong in identity and culture, and become advocates for Indigenous advancement. Sunseri describes a dynamic learning process: “[I]ndigenous identity is not something frozen in the past but is loved daily by...women and is tied to shared experiences and knowledge of cultural practices” (Sunseri, p.109)

The experience of the path of advocacy volunteer work is known by so many strong Indigenous women. I had the opportunity to sit with TRU Elder Margaret Vickers Hyslop

(Tsimshian, Heiltsuk). She shared the ‘push’ she had known at age 19. Her hereditary chief and elected chief offer her the Band Admin position. Her, elected chief had a Chief and Council meeting and went to her grandma’s house, where they spoke in the language. He talked to the grandma and poppa Henry Vickers. Her Poppa saw her nervousness and took her out for a walk. “You will read everything and find out” he said. The push to grow as a leader within her community kept going for years, honoring cultural elders, trusting their vision, tapping emotional intelligence They just know and they ask us to stand in our strengths. This is a story of interconnectedness from beginnings to leadership in advocacy for Indigenous advancement. Through Elder Margaret’s story I hear encouragement to trust our journey, and the interconnectedness of the path we walk.

#### THE ‘PULL’

In 2019, the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls published the report that shocked the nation. This was not a shock to Indigenous communities. Many of us have first-hand experience of what is revealed in the findings of the Inquiry. My family’s experience clearly demonstrated a lack of knowledge in the justice system of on how to provide support in community. Something had to change.

My cousin, Samantha Jane Paul’s was reported missing September 2013. Later in June 2014 she was found on the outskirts of Kamloops in a rural area. Her story and her case still remains unsolved. During this experience, the lack of support created in me questions: “Why is Sam’s case not urgent like other cases?”, “Why is it so difficult to navigate to find support systems?”, “Who can my family contact to get advice?”. The questions inspired me to get involved and to be proactive. I wanted to see change, I had to learn and to be a part of it.

The ‘push’ from the Elders had opened a pathway to a newfound passion and purpose. The ‘pull’ to take action came from the need to help my family receive better supports.

As the new 2015 BCNWA Youth Representative, I knew I had to use this and other platforms to fight for our women. From 2015 – 2017, in my roles as BCNWA and Native

Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) National Youth Representative, and one of seventeen United Nations Young Leader for the Sustainable Development Goals, I had opportunities to engage in National and International in advisory and decision-making capacities. During these engagements, I noted the explicit connection and overlap of national and international documents relevant to Indigenous advancement. The United Nations Declarations of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (2015), Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (2015), the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015), and most recently *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2019), include cross-references to one another. This interconnectedness created an inner desire for me to learn how these national and international calls and commitments were connected, how they supported each other and how Indigenous advocates can use these interconnections to support their causes, the fights, and their voices. The desire was not an intellectual one. This was about that profound, fierce love for Indigenous peoples and for being Indigenous that author Richard Wagamese best-described:

*Something that most do not understand about my people: when we stand up in acts of resistance to things that threaten our spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual well-being, it's not because we hate what's in front of us – it's because we love what's behind us. We love our homes, our families, our communities, our nations our ceremonies, our teachings, our cultural ways, our histories and the land that those things spring from. In that, we are like anyone anywhere throughout the course of human history who has ever stood up to injustice. Stay Brown! (Wagamese, R., 2016).*

As a Young Indigenous Leader, it was my responsibility to participate and attend meetings like Native Women's Association of Canada Annual General Assembly, 2015 VII Continental Meeting of Indigenous Women of the Americas, and 2016 National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Outcomes and Priorities

for Action to Prevent and Address Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls. During these meeting I continuously heard Indigenous Elders, women, youth, and leadership refer to "UNDRIP". I was new to the political environment, but when I heard Indigenous People using their voices to bring their community, and Nation concerns to the forefront citing an UNDRIP article, it was impactful and powerful hearing their voices and witnessing this interconnectivity in action. I knew it was important to not only cite UNDRIP but to be very familiar with key national and international reports and agreements for Indigenous advancement.

We have to trust that we are on the journey where we can best serve. It is often later on that we discover the interconnections that made the path ahead of us. Little did I know that in 2007 when I was a 16 year-old Indigenous teenager that big things were happening at an International Level that would eventually influence reports and agreements that would have an impact on my life as an Indigenous woman today. My life in 2007 seemed to be about experiencing transitions in a complex family system, needing family support, and finding instability; and barely passing through high school. My life seemed to be about the difficulties before me. I was trying to find my way, and discover my potential. Yet elsewhere deliberations were happening that would lay a path for me to later discover. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September 2007 at the United Nations 107<sup>th</sup> Preliminary Meeting, resolution 61/295 the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was passed. This would one day be a document of vital importance to my life, my activism, and my community. This declaration is the first of its kind, recognizing Indigenous peoples rights, diverse cultures, languages, traditions, customs, trauma and intergenerational trauma from historical injustices, colonization and in the face of dispossession of lands and resources, the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and more (UNDRIP 2007).

For me the 'pull' to take action came from the need to help my family receive better supports. What I came to later know was that action at this local level was also about action at the global level.

## The World



**Image: Nikki Fraser, 18th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), at the UN Headquarters, UN General Assembly Hall, New York, USA, 2019.**

Indigenous advocates work across boundaries that are political, cultural and geographical. Common factors include leading by example, helping people, listening, communicating clearly (Stewart and Warn, 2016). We understand that as a call to help our family. For me that was the key – to be there advocating at times of darkness. As Stewart and Warn suggest, helping one’s family is a way of helping one’s community. I can see that now: my focus began with my family, knowing this was helpful too for Secepwemc. It later happened that this work connected to the global stage as well, contributing in areas such as the UNSDGs. I have learned that our work at home is work for all. The United Nations reminds us of this. The UNSDGs message is: Global goals, local action (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/>).

I first started noticing this interconnection between global and local during my time spent at the UN Headquarters. As a Young Leader for the UNSDGs I recognized familiarities, like reducing inequalities

& gender inequalities, calling for climate action and justice, and addressing poverty, health and well-being. Their calls to action at that global stage would refer to the UNDRIP (2007) and the UNSDGs.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (also known as the 2030 Agenda), is made of 17 global goals, with 169 targets<sup>1</sup> with one main principle: ‘Leave no one behind’. According to the 2017 briefing note for the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights and the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (based within the Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), 73 of the SDG targets coincide with the UNDRIP articles (p. 2).

Examples of this interconnection include:

- › SDG Goal 5, targets 5.1 - 5.3.2 coincide with UNDRIP article 22.2: Goal 5 addresses Gender inequalities, and UNDRIP Article 22.2 indicates, “States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination”.
- › SDG Goal 10, targets 10.1 – 10.7.2 intersect with UNDRIP Articles 3,5,7.1, 15.2,17.2,17.3, 20.1, 20.2, 21.1, 21.2<sup>2</sup>. Goal 10 addresses Reducing Inequalities, UNDRIP Article 3 states “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” (UNDRIP, p. 8). Article 21 states “Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.” (UNDRIP, p. 17)

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015

<sup>2</sup> Danish Institute for Human Rights (2016) – <http://sdg.humanrights.dk>

In July 2018, I attended the UN High Level Political Forum, where the Government of Canada presented a *Voluntary National Review: Canada's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. I was honoured to be invited to speak at the forum's symposium: *Resilient women, resilient societies: Advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to accelerate transformative change for the Sustainable Development Goals*, a collaboration between the governments of Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, France and Iceland.

Canada's *Voluntary National Review* noted the importance of reconciliation, and that Indigenous People in Canada have a critical role in the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in Canada, stating "For the Government of Canada, the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development cannot be achieved without collective action that recognizes and includes the diverse voices and participation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis" (p. 11). That statement echoed the SDGs main principle to "Leave no one behind". Goal one in the *Voluntary National Review* "Canada's Poverty Reduction" (p. 23), overlaps with UNDRIP Article 21.1 by stating that Indigenous peoples have the right to improve their economic status, in areas like education, employment, housing and social security (UNDRIP, p. 17). Canada's *Voluntary National Review* also interconnected with Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), stating that the Government of Canada wants to review and ensure that they are meeting their constitutional obligations, and implement the 94 calls to action, also referencing the implementation of UNDRIP, and the Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) (p.11-12). The interconnections were explicit and intentional. Would the words of Canada's *Voluntary National Review* be converted into actions?

The Truth and Reconciliation 94 Calls to Action call on the Federal Government, Provincial Government, Canadians, and Indigenous people to work towards a Nation to Nation relationship (TRC 2015). Over ten of the 94 Calls to Action reference UNDRIP, in particular Call to Action 46.3 states "Full adoption and implementation of the *United Nations*

*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation" (p 5). Call to Action 41.1 references an inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, stating "We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations, to appoint a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls. The inquiry's mandate would include: Investigation into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls" (p 4). The Federal Government promised to implement the Calls to Action. In the five years since the Commission, to what extent has government been effective in converting intent into outcomes for Indigenous advancement? How will we advocate for full implementation?

At the beginning of this section is a photo of me at the United Nations headquarters in the General Assembly, as a selected Young Leader for the UNSDG. This reminds me of the growing voice of Indigenous peoples, and the right to have high expectations of Nation members of the UN including Canada. In the photo I am attending for the second time the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In other meetings at the UN and internationally I find that usually the Indigenous voice is small. When they have this forum in my photo at the UN, it is all Indigenous voices. To sit there and see Indigenous people fill these spaces, dressed in their cultural regalia is so powerful. To listen to their passion for their people back at home makes me like a sponge, absorbing from their experiences, and learning from the changes they are making and their struggles. I am able to connect to these and to them. I have the same struggles and desires. To be able to build relationships with Indigenous peoples around the world is powerful. Now when I go to the UN I recognise people and they recognise me. To be able to do this makes me realise how small the world is and how many people are doing what I am doing. I am not alone. We are connected.

## THEIR (OUR) INDIGENOUS RESILIENCY

During 2015, my first year in my role as the UN Youth Representative, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released their report and Calls to Action. I was 24 years

old at the time. I can remember watching the news and seeing my relatives from coast-to-coast-to-coast in ceremony due to the release of the Calls to Action. Here was a formal acknowledgement of their (our) past trauma, and intergenerational trauma. Here too was recognition of their (our) Indigenous resiliency. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Federal Government funded Church-run Indian Residential Schools, the last Residential School closed in 1996, approximately 150,000 Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) Children (students) attended and went through Canada's Indian Residential School System (Eisenburg, 2018).

In 2018 I applied to be a part of the Canadian Roots Exchange 2018/2019 Youth Reconciliation Initiative (YRI). This program brings Indigenous youth and non-Indigenous youth together to develop processes of reconciliation and decolonization. During my time with CRE YRI program I was asked, "What does reconciliation mean to you, and what does it look like?". My first thought as a survivor of the ripple effects from the consequences of Canada's Residential School System was: "Intergenerational trauma." Like so many my generational belief system became distorted from this ripple effect. When I answered that question, I did so with that in mind. My answer continued, "I believe reconciliation starts within, with self, then with family, extended family, community, Nation, and then with other Nation groups including Canada. What that looks like for me is healing, growing, furthering my education to gain more knowledge so that I can uplift Indigenous people and their voices, continuing to learning my language, practicing my traditions, and breaking intergenerational cycles for my children".

What I learned during that discussion was that 'reconciliation' looks and means something different to every individual. The one common thread connecting all the different meanings, is that healing and growth are essential for meaningful reconciliation and restoration of good relations with one another. This is real, transformational, and work.

The photo for this section reminds me of what I learned about interconnections from reading *The Winter We Dance*. This book is about the Idle No More movement. I got the book in 2015. I read it at that time but

didn't realise the importance of it until I went back to school. I realised then how this book and its words could strengthen my work at a university level and beyond. I realised that the INM movement was spearheaded by women. They felt a responsibility to create a space for Indigenous people to stand up and have a voice, and use their voice as a powerful instrument that they have to share their truths. INM was advocating for environmental issues and political factors. What inspired me was that these women inspired one another. When I was pushed into my role, I too had a group that supported me and each other in our advocacy work. I was honored to meet Silvia McAdam, lawyer and co-founder of INM. She inspires me to take action.

## TO HONOUR THEIR LIVES

My family was doubly impacted by tragedy. Many years before losing my cousin Samantha, my aunty Dorothy Ann Spence was reported missing. She was last seen in Vancouver B.C in August 1995. I was 4 years-old. I remember my aunty and the time we spent together. As that four year I could not conceive that she was not coming back, I remember asking the question "But why?" I have always done my advocacy work in their name, to honour their lives, to share their stories, so they are not forgotten or left behind.

I walk a path of honoring all the Indigenous Elders, women, young people, youth, and children who fought for over three decades for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.



**Image: Silvia McAdam, lawyer and co-founder of Idle No More, with Nikki Fraser. June 5, 2019**



**Image: Nikki Fraser, United Nations Garden of Roses, UN Headquarters, New York, USA. Photo by Luca Marfé, 2016.**

Their efforts, their commitments, activism, and advocacy are why we now have from 2019 the *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* with 231 Calls to Justice.

In my local, national and global advocacy work, there are interconnections in which I honor the lives of advocates before me. Some of the 231 calls to actions refer to and reference, UNDRIP and TRC 94 Calls to action, Call to Justice 1.2.v states; “UNDRIP, including recognition, protection, and support of Indigenous self-governance and self-determination, as defined by UNDRIP and by Indigenous Peoples ...” (p 177), and Call to Justice 5.21 “We call upon the federal government to fully implement the recommendations in the reports of... the *Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015)*...” (p 186). In the *Reclaiming Power and Place* report, it reflects back on The National Inquiry’s 10 Calls for Immediate Action from the *Interim Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG s*. The first call for immediate action was:

*Implementation of all the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, particularly those that impact Indigenous women and children, including the immediate implementation of Jordan’s Principle and the immediate and full implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation, and including a federal action plan, strategies and other concrete measures to achieve the goals. (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019, 1: 66)*

The photo is of me walking in the rose garden of the United Nations at their headquarters in New York. The garden is immense with hundreds of rose bushes from across the world. This was a year after the global launch of the SDGs. It was 2016 and I was at the UN General Assembly as one of the 17 UN Young Leaders about to be officially recognised. The UN General Assembly is when all the Heads of States gather. In 2016, I had seen whole blocks of traffic were shut down so the Heads could get to the UN.

The photo was taken by a world-renowned photographer. The United Nations commissioned the photo session because they wanted to record my being in the first ever ‘class’ of the UN Young Leaders. I was shy about the focus being on me. Even so, I saw myself as connecting to something far bigger. Being at the UN and in the rose garden, was documenting that young Indigenous women’s voices have made it this far. It was a documented record of fact. It was a proud moment, and also surreal. To be in that space, to hold that space, and to be on those grounds as a young Indigenous woman was bigger than me. In reflecting on my interconnected paths to advocacy, it’s clear that the work that I do is always bigger than me. This is so for all those in advocacy roles for Indigenous advancement. I feel like I am one piece of this larger picture. For that picture to be taken in the UN rose garden was a way of showing we have made it this far – Secwépemc, Indigenous young women. A path has been cleared to the United Nations. Our voices are here and they know our voices are important.

I recall that in the photo session I connected my presence at the UN with the people who have advocated for my right to vote as an indigenous woman. I walked that garden path and my own life path because women advocated for my right to further my education. They advocated for safety for myself. I remembered that the National Inquiry wasn’t just something that happened overnight. That took decades of Indigenous women advocating for their safety then and the safety of Indigenous women and girls in the future. I thought about how my path in advocacy was for my kids, and for me. I look now at the picture and I can see that I understood then what I understand now: I carry a sense of responsibility. Much was done for me and I have to ensure that it is done for the next generation. A path was cleared and I walked onto it. It is my role to continue to clear that path. I do that by acknowledging what has already been done, and by whom, and advocating for what needs to continue to be done. It is not about me. It is about the collective. We all have gifts to contribute We all are leaders and advocates.



I look at the picture and I remember how when I was talking to the young people in my cohort of UN Young Leaders some didn't know what the word 'Indigenous' meant or the importance of Indigenous peoples in Canada. That showed me that more work had to be done and more voices heard. My picture in that garden at that time was an honor to my role models and a call to be that next advocate so more Indigenous people step into spaces like the UN. I knew then and still do so now that this work can be intimidating yet less so when I help the focus to be not on Nikki Fraser, but on action by and for Indigenous representation. That is how I have been able to say, "I am here and I am going to tell you my voice is not enough. We need more indigenous voices here."

On reflection it is apparent that while the purpose for advocacy work may be very local at first, the example of others, and the scope of the work ahead that they have made possible means that the point of my voice as an advocate is that it should not be the only one. More should experience what I am experiencing. More should share these opportunities. More should advocate on behalf of us all.

The honoring of lives is a reminder of our sustained, respectful connections to one another. In exploring Indigenous leadership development, Stewart and Warn (2016) describe this kind of connection in terms of the collective identity: "Leadership was seen as emerging from a sense of connectedness in that at a deep level, one's self identity was defined in relation to a collective Aboriginal identity" (Stewart and Warn, 2016:11). When I stepped into advocacy, I was able to find myself. I found my purpose and what I wanted to do: uplifting our people in any way that I can. That is why I went back to school so I was able to walk in both worlds. At the end of the day I wanted to be able to give back more than I was given. I feel a sense of responsibility to be successful in my career endeavours so that when I am successful those who I honor for uplifting me are also successful. Just as those who came before me, I will work to leave paths open for those who come after me, especially my children.

## THE PATH WE WALK: FINAL WORDS

*"...Let us take the opportunities that lie before us and seek to empower – individual by individual, community by community, Nation by Nation – so that no single person, no single community and no single Nation is left out or behind" (Wilson-Raybould, 2019: 28)*



**Image: Nikki Fraser with her children, Trey Fraser-Hance and Aiyana Fraser-Hance, 2019. Photo by Derek Rodgers.**

The reason why I continue to do this advocacy work is that I want young indigenous children like my son and daughter to grow up appreciated and loved as themselves as Indigenous people. This photo is of me with my children. It is also about the beginnings of the lifepaths they each now walk. They and we walk individually, yet also, always, together.

My own journey has led me to become the first in my family to attend university. It's 2020, and I'm 28 years old in my second year of my Bachelor of Arts Program studying Sociology, and Political Science. I decided to face my fear and apply for post-secondary, so that I can learn more about the interconnectedness of national and international reports and commitments (like UNDRIP, SDG's, TRC, and Reclaiming Power and Place), and my life of connections that have opened doors to advocacy for my people.

In my research, I have touched on the surface of what helps young Indigenous peoples to grow strong in identity and culture, and to become advocates for Indigenous advancement. I remain motivated to walk further to explore the overlap of each Goal, Target, Article, Call to Action and Call to Justice, and what I am called to do. We are bound together with the common thread: "Leave no one behind" (SDG 2015).

My research shows the reality and potential of interconnectedness; of how intertwined are the paths of advocacy for Indigenous advancement. From almost five years of learning about the interconnectedness of the reports and commitments, the research, community gatherings, national and international assemblies, the people and myself, I see how together we have been provided with ways to support healing and that I have been provided with the support and strength to develop as an Indigenous woman leader. Three interconnected paths are illuminated in this research that help young Indigenous peoples to grow strong in identity and culture, and to become advocates for Indigenous advancement: advocacy volunteer work, Indigenous resiliency, and honor the lives.

I know I need to continue my own research and lived experience along these three paths. This will deepen my understanding and my ability to mentor others to advocacy and leadership. I also want to understand when there is a complexity of the interconnections, It is not an easy endeavour to take advocacy roles on by myself. I question the process of young indigenous peoples' leadership development. When will we as Indigenous peoples at the grassroots community level have conversations with our own elected leadership, (Chief and Council, or Representative of Member of Parliament) about how to help young Indigenous peoples to grow strong in identity and culture, and to become advocates for Indigenous advancement? Why does the information of commitments at national and international levels to Indigenous advancement goals and actions stop at government level?" At the local level through my education and my advocacy work I share the international pledges with my peers, young people, and youth. Through my life ,I am see and walk through the doors to advocacy for the rights within these documents, for my Nation, my family, and all my relations.

I never set out to be an advocate, advocacy found me. I know my role is to walk on the path that was paved for me, and to clear the way so more Indigenous people can join this journey. I believe we are called to trust our journey. This is how we discover the interconnectedness of the path we walk.

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