



HONORING COMMUNITY SUCCESS:

Finding Strength Through Community

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The Akwe:go Program at the Niagara Regional Native Centre provides a safe and nurturing environment for Indigenous children, ages 7-12, to grow through cultural teachings, educational support, and community connections.

Here's a story about Jahlesa Walcott, who has found strength and confidence through her experiences with Akwe:go.

At just 11 years old, Jahlesa Walcott has already overcome significant challenges in her young life. She spent part of her childhood in transition, living with her grandmother as she prepared to return to her mother's care. While the process was not without its difficulties, it was also filled with opportunities for growth and connection.

Reflecting on her experiences, Jahlesa shares, "It's really fun to make new friends and make connections in the community." For her, the Niagara Regional Native Centre's Akwe:go program plays a pivotal role in helping her adjust and thrive. She fondly recalls the trips and activities that have allowed her to build relationships and enjoy moments of joy and discovery.

But the program does more than just provide entertainment. It has become a source of strength during some of Jahlesa's toughest times, particularly when she was being bullied at school. With the support of Akwe:go Program Coordinator staff and mentor Wyller, Jahlesa is able to find the courage to confront her struggles. "Having the support of Wyller while being bullied at school really helps me overcome those struggles," she explains.

Through Akwe:go, Jahlesa has discovered her passion for drumming and singing. The program gives her not only the confidence to express herself creatively but also a sense of belonging and empowerment. "The group helps me find my voice to drum and sing. It gives me more confidence at school knowing I have the extra support," she adds.

Looking toward the future, Jahlesa is determined to continue her education with the goal of becoming an Indigenous social worker. Inspired by the help she's received; she now wants to give back to others in her community. "If you are considering joining Akwe:go, then you should because it is a safe place to learn, grow, and make healthy connections," Jahlesa advises.

For youth facing similar challenges, Jahlesa hopes her story will offer inspiration. She reflects on her own journey, saying, "I struggle with many different life challenges as a youth, but with the support of NRNC and Akwe:go, I am able to learn healthy ways to navigate through them." Her vision for the future includes one day running her own youth drum group, a goal rooted in her love of music and desire to make a difference.

Outside of her aspirations, Jahlesa's hobbies include singing, drumming, and spending time with her family at community events. She finds joy and connection through these experiences, and her journey stands as a testament to the power of community support and cultural connection.

Jahlesa's story reminds us of the importance of programs like Akwe:go, which provide a nurturing space for youth to find their voices, build confidence, and overcome life's challenges. With her heart set on becoming a social worker and a leader in her community, Jahlesa's future is undoubtedly bright, and her strength will continue to inspire others.

