

May 26, 2021

Dear Ms. Vaddapalli and Members of the Board of the Nunavut Law Foundation

Please consider our nomination of Joyce Tunnillie of Kinngait NU for the Upinnaqtuq Award for 2020-2021.

Joyce is a young woman who has faced many varied challenges in her short life, and in the past, there were times when she felt anger and resentment about the difficulties confronting her, and about the way she was treated by school mates and other community members. On a few occasions, those emotions boiled over, but most often, they seethed just below the surface.

Why did Joyce feel that way?

First, she grew up with a great deal of responsibility for younger siblings in a home where she witnessed and experienced frequent domestic violence, especially when alcohol was involved.

A second issue for Joyce was confronting the growing awareness that she is lesbian, and coming out in a very traditional community, where there is little acceptance of the LGBTQ+ citizens in their midst, especially when it concerns Inuit youth.

A couple of years ago, Joyce found herself in a very toxic relationship with a much older controlling woman. When she tried to break it off, she was forced to defend herself physically, a situation which ended with a short (less than 2 weeks) confinement at the Young Offenders Facility.

As a result of this incident, Joyce took a very hard look at herself and her relationships. One thing she realized was the correlation between alcohol and violence in her experience and observation. Joyce has not touched alcohol in fourteen months.

Early this school year, Joyce was thrust into a very demanding situation, when her father was incarcerated for assaulting her mother so violently that she was sent to Ottawa for extended treatment. Social Services determined that the younger children in the family were better off staying together in their own home with Joyce in charge, than being split up among relatives or the available foster parents in the community.

This is the kind of challenge that tests an adult to the extreme, never mind a girl just turned 17!

Joyce, however, discovered her capacity not just to cope, but to learn about herself, and to grow in character, maturity, and self-confidence.

She has become a regularly attending, attentive and hard-working student, determined to achieve graduation and earn the right to choose her own path into the future.

Joyce used to live her life always expecting to meet with disapproval, negative comments, gossip and criticism. She protected herself by shutting out the world and wearing a scowl.

Now, after proving to herself and others that she was more than equal to the challenges thrust upon her, Joyce has emerged as a young woman who faces the world with a smile and a quiet dignity. She has gained confidence that she can be the person she wants to be, and that she not only has people she can count on for support, but that she can be that support system for others.

The new Joyce exudes peace. She has resolved the conflicts within herself, and by accepting herself she no longer feels the need to be in conflict with her environment. Joyce's characteristic facial expression and carriage now invite conversation and relationship, instead of shutting the door on them.

We believe that Joyce Tunnillie exemplifies your criteria of a young person who has made strong effort through many challenges to become a quiet leader, one who demonstrates through her everyday actions and attitudes that conflicts can be resolved peacefully, and that the victim of ongoing bullying can earn the acceptance, respect, and even the admiration of her former tormentors.

With respect and sincerity,

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Mitchell Mac Donald

Teacher (Peter Pitseolak School)

Kinngait NU

Pamela Jarrett

Vice Principal (Peter Pitseolak School)

Kinngait NU