



# Chapter 1: Brigitte's Story

**What are the benefits of leading a healthy active lifestyle for you and your community?**

► **Brigitte Naganigwana** loves to dance. A member of the Wiiswamkong First Nation from Manitoulin Island, Brigitte is a graduate of the Outside Looking In dance program for Indigenous youth. The program empowers participants all across Canada to succeed academically, build life skills, form lasting friendships, and strengthen ties to their communities.

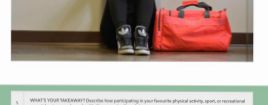
## Pursuing Health and Fitness Through Dance

Brigitte was drawn to the Outside Looking In dance program when she was in Grade 10. Despite her shyness, she first joined the OLI program because she loves dancing, and sports do not appeal to her. She "got hooked" on the experience after her first year. When she and some friends learned that the program was not going to be offered thereafter, they campaigned successfully and the principal and staff brought it back to their school.

Brigitte's goals related to dance have changed over the years. At first, she aimed to dance better and better each year. Eventually, her goals expanded to encouraging other students to join the program because of the many personal and community benefits it provides.

## Gains on Many Levels

Brigitte describes herself as "not big on sports." She has discovered, though, that dancing is a form of physical activity that truly fulfills her. It gives her a "great way to cope with stress and pressure." Challenging herself to get better and better in preparation for the OLI culminating performance on a big stage in Toronto each year has increased her self-confidence. Participating in OLI has also honed her leadership skills, communication skills, and capacity to collaborate with others.



1. WHAT'S YOUR TAKEAWAY? Describe how participating in your favourite physical activity, sport, or recreational pursuit has increased your health, fitness, and self-confidence.

Enter answer...

## The Benefits of Being Active

Brigitte values all the benefits—physical, mental, emotional, social, academic, and spiritual—that she and her friends have enjoyed by participating in the OLI program. The dance training is rigorous and demanding, but also lots of fun. She is grateful as well for the benefits to her Indigenous community, Wiiswamkong (collectively known as "Wiig"), located in northern Ontario.

Here's how Brigitte describes the many benefits of being active through dance:

**Physical benefits** include experiencing your body getting stronger and stronger.

**Mental benefits** include learning to cope with the stress of a tough training schedule while managing homework and other demands.

**Emotional benefits** include feeling better after dancing, and forgetting about what is causing sadness or distress while you are performing dance moves.

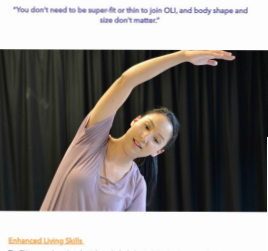
**Social benefits** include bonding closely with new friends at training camps as everyone prepares for the big culminating stage performance in Toronto. All the students share a common passion for dance and we form strong connections with one other as a result. Shy students change and begin talking to people. Our self-confidence grows.

**Academic benefits** result, too. Dancing makes students feel more alert and it strengthens our memory. We are motivated to keep up with our studies because participation in the program depends on maintaining specific grade levels in order to earn a high school credit.

**Spiritual benefits** include a sense of escaping into a different world, away from stress and pressure, and feeling our spirits uplifted."

All in all, participation in the OLI program is a fun, inclusive way to stay healthy and fit, both physically and mentally.

**"You don't need to be super-fit or thin to join OLI, and body shape and size don't matter."**



## Enhanced Living Skills

The OLI program is not just about dance. It also helps students develop personal and interpersonal living skills related to collaboration, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, and leadership. Participants learn about determination, perseverance, teamwork, and trust.

The more experienced dancers assist younger participants who are having trouble with the dance moves. Students overcome challenges they never dreamed they could surmount as they push themselves to reach their goals. They begin to realize, "I can do this!"

## The Benefits of Healthy, Active Living for Communities

Communities also benefit from the OLI program. At first, the Health and Physical Education teachers at Brigitte's school did not understand the relevance of the program. However, when students encouraged some teachers, their principal, and their chief to attend a big performance in Toronto, "a light bulb came on," says Brigitte.

It became clear to everyone that building connections between teachers and students is key to creating healthy learning environments. Additionally, participation in the program has helped students build stronger relationships with their families and their communities.

"When participants come home after the annual culminating performance in Toronto, they want to do more, they want to be better within their community by helping and volunteering wherever they can," says Brigitte. They stage performances for their families, friends, and neighbours to show them the results of all their hard work. This sharing strengthens community identity and social ties.

Participants in the OLI program are empowered to demonstrate and share with family, friends, and other community members the benefits of healthy, active living. "Dancing not only makes you healthy, it makes you feel better. Even walking for 30 minutes a day is beneficial. Not everyone enjoys sports, so it's important to find something that you enjoy doing and invite friends to join you to make it fun," says Brigitte. Students learn to combat the widespread inactivity crisis in important ways, both large and small.

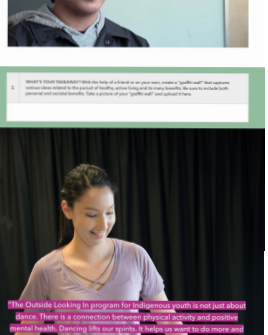
## A "Formula" for Healthy, Active Living

What is Brigitte's "formula" for healthy active living? "Keep active and eat right because when you eat junk food and don't do anything to be active, you don't feel good. Be good to yourself—eat good, healthy food and make sure that the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of your life are all balanced. Just get up and go for a walk or go to that dance class! It's hard to find a balance between being active and staying on top of grades, but planning and goal setting will help you fit it all in. Figure out what taking care of yourself looks like to you—and then take care of yourself!"



2. WHAT'S YOUR TAKEAWAY? With the help of a friend or on your own, create a "graffiti wall" that captures various ideas related to the pursuit of healthy, active living and its many benefits. Be sure to include both personal and societal benefits. Take a picture of your "graffiti wall" and upload it here.

Enter answer...



**"The Outside Looking In program for Indigenous youth is not just about dance. There is a connection between physical activity and positive mental health. Dancing lifts our spirits. It helps us want to do more and to be better in our communities."**

3. HEALING THROUGH DANCE: Now Write a promotional slogan to get people in your community excited about leading healthy active lives. Outline creative ways to share your slogan as widely as possible.

Enter answer...