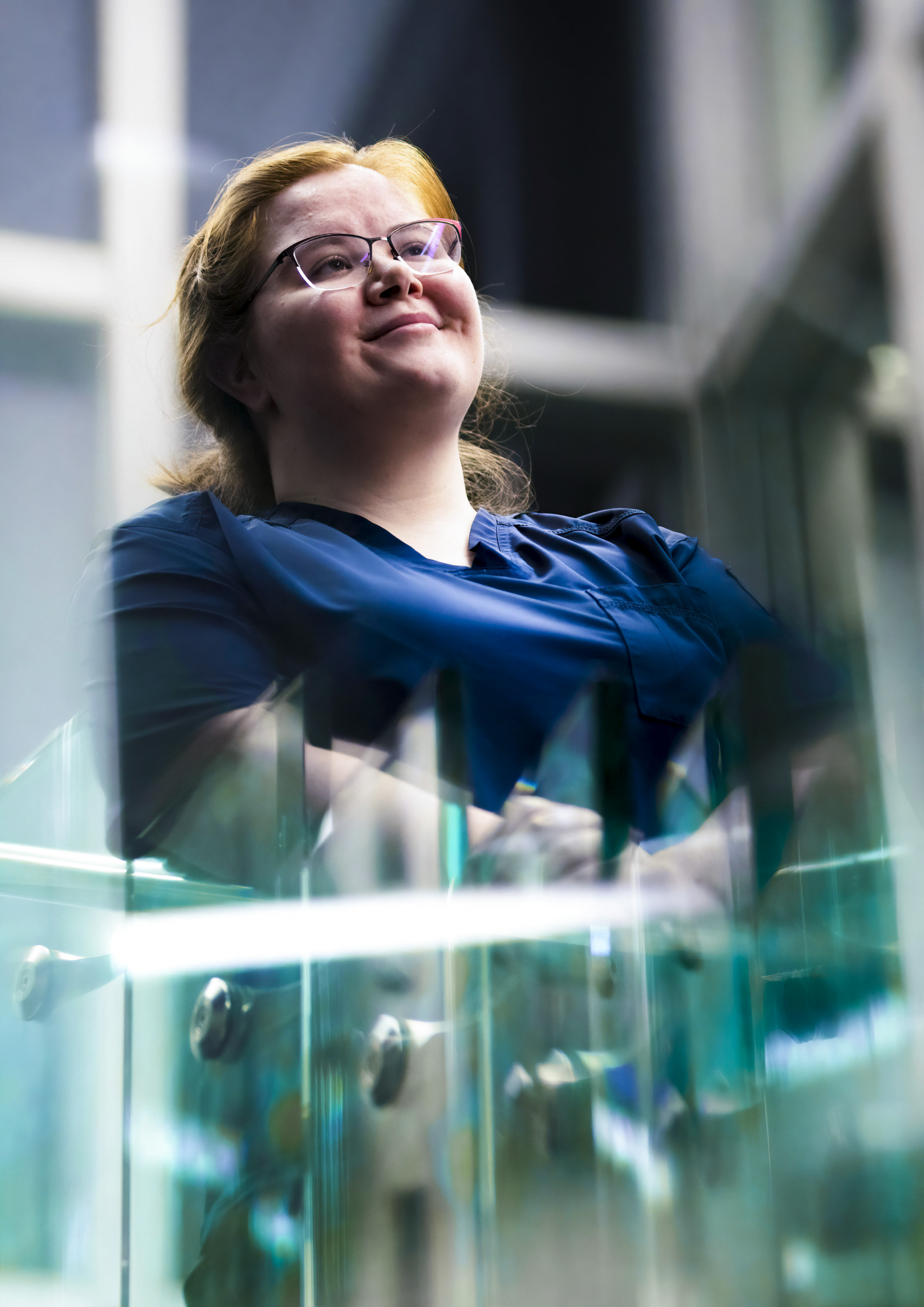




**Rupert's Land
Institute**
Métis Centre of Excellence

Impact Story 2: Jade Bruce

Region 6:
Training to Employment



When it comes to impact on one's quality of life, access to post secondary education is paramount. According to Stats Canada, during an individual's working life, a college graduate will earn nearly \$400,000 more than a high school graduate and are three times less likely to become unemployed. Métis participation in post-secondary education remains a vital aspect of increasing quality of life to the community.

In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the Rupertsland Institute Métis Training to Employment (MTE) program supported 1249 Métis across Alberta to find employment and return to school. When Métis individuals are given the opportunity to access to education through financial support, the ripple effect on their lives are drastic. The impact of education goes far beyond financial implications, as it enables individuals in achieving self-sufficiency, meaningful careers, fulfilling lives, and impactful change in their families and communities.

Jade Bruce is one of those individuals.



A cold snap blew through Edmonton that week with a north wind bringing temperatures to -30. The sun was still at least an hour away from rising when 24-year-old Jade Bruce walked through darkened streets to the nearby train station at 6am. Despite the bitter cold, Jade showed little sign of discomfort rather an eager anticipation. After days of excitedly talking about her career she was finally going to show it off in person.

The walk to the train platform was mercifully short, and Jade joined the dozen half-asleep early morning commuters into downtown Edmonton. After a 10-minute ride on the train,

she got off at one of the several downtown stations. Her commute ended with a brief dash from the station to a back door of the central Dynalite downtown lab where she works as a Medical Laboratory Assistant in the microbiology lab, her dream job.

The path to a microbiology lab assistant started over ten years ago in the small town of Grimshaw. A path she had the support and mentorship from Rupertsland Institute from day one.



“Staf. Lots of Staf.”

“She was focused on what she wants out of life and determined to work hard to obtain her dream.”

Marlene Klassen recalled of her time assisting Jade as her Rupertsland Institute Employment Counsellor. She had known Jade since she was a 14-year-old student in Grimshaw. While Jade was in grade 7 or 8, Jade couldn’t quite recall, she was part of a pilot program that taught students basic first aid and were asked to assist in minor injuries around the school. A career in health care was inevitable, although no clear plan was laid out for her at that time.

With guidance from Marlene, Jade attended Grande Prairie Regional College and began a program in nursing where she found the microbiology component most compelling. One of the labs had students in her class go out in the campus and collect samples from commonly used surfaces.

“I tested a handrail at school and grew the bacteria we found from there. We only found staf.” Jade seemed to take particular glee at discovery of the pervasive bacterial infection. A dramatic pause and grin implying it wasn’t the first time she’s told the story.

“Lots of staf,” Jade said with a laugh that filled her face. There was a passion and excitement for the field that was contagious.

It was the staph that sealed the deal for her and from that point on microbiology was her dream. As the program was not offered in Grand Prairie, Jade’s path took her to the capital.

In 2018, Jade moved to Edmonton to attend the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology’s (NAIT) two-semester Medical Laboratory Assistant program. While the drive and passion for her education were present, the finances were not. The two-year program, which cost at the time thousands of dollars, was financially inaccessible to Jade at the time.

She applied for the Rupertsland Institute Métis Training to Employment Post-Secondary funding support and Marlene worked with her to qualify for full funding. Jade repeatedly sang Marlene’s praises.

“She worked hard to get my funding approved. Even though there were some challenges, she made it work,” Jade said.

With her funding secured, Jade began her Medical Laboratory Assistant courses in the winter of 2022, now able to access the higher education that would transform her ambitions into reality.

“Jade was polite, driven, and ready to take on the world,” Marlene recalled, “She was very easy to work with and needed little guidance.”





“I know nothing about who I am as Métis”

boy I had a crush on in grade school and he was Métis. He knew how to jig, and I wanted to learn the dances.” She paused, the smile fading from her face. She approached her mom and asked if she could learn more about being Métis and perhaps take a jigging class. She was quite young but the response that her parents gave her still stuck with her.

“Your grandfather would be rolling over in his grave, Jade.”

The topic was never brought up again.

“You never get over that as a kid,” Jade said about the shameful dismissal of her desires to know more about her past. “I know nothing about who I am as a Métis, I’ve only been shamed for asking, so after a while I stopped asking.”

For the foreseeable future, the only encouraging connection Jade would have to her Métis heritage would be through Rupertsland Institute.



Jade assumed an introspective look on her face when asked about her experience and identity as a Métis woman. Long pauses, and subtle sighs preceded any mention of her understanding and history of her Métis heritage. She shuffled uncomfortably before she spoke, growing more reserved.

“I grew up being told I was Scottish,” she said. Her last name, Bruce, comes from her father’s side. “It wasn’t until I was 14 when found my moms Métis Nation card in the laundry.”

She then recalled bringing it up with her mom and being brushed off. The only encouragement she ever received to get her Métis citizenship

was so she could benefit from the hunting rights that came with it. Her father being an avid hunter and saw it as an advantage. According to Jade, one that her father held resentment towards.

“It’s just not fair, you know to the other hunters,” he once remarked. Jade interpreted his comments as a product of ignorance of what has been lost over the hundreds of years of colonial control and oppression. Despite this, Jade had tried to find connections to her culture in her childhood.

“I’ve always been interested in the culture.” She blushed slightly and smiled. “There was a





The hallways of Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) were quiet, not surprising as it was past 7 PM. The odd student could be seen at the end of hallway arms full of books or carrying duffle bags. Late night study sessions are something that Jade was all too familiar with.

As she toured her old stomping grounds, the stories she shared of her two semesters at NAIT left an impression of her appreciation of her time there.

"I loved my time here. I had great instructors." Jade gestured to a now empty commons area next to one of her old classrooms describing fond times spent with classmates. Further down the hall, she peered into an empty classroom, barely visible in the darkness were medical dummies arrayed in an unnerving mockery of students. This wing of NAIT is dedicated to a variety of medical labs.

Jade described her old school with an appreciative nostalgia. Memories of labs, study halls, and the introduction into her dream career. She even suggested she missed going to school, despite graduating this year. The school left a noticeable positive impact on her life, and she was eager to share.

The two-semester program consisted of a first year of classroom and on-campus laboratory work, while the second year was a practicum at a working lab. Alongside half of her class, Jade was placed at Dynalife labs for her practicum. NAIT's success rate for employment from the Medical Laboratory Assistant program is impressive, with 95% employment in her field in the first 6 months since graduating; Jade had her job secured with Dynalife even before graduating.

Jade graduated in 2022.

"With honours," Jade said, beaming with pride. "Top of my class."



"It's chaos, but my kind of chaos."

The first thing one notices is the smell. A clinical sting of ammonia to the nose rapidly followed by a sickly-sweet smell that's hard to place but hard to forget -- a mix between an old bologna sandwich a few days past its safely consumable date and the sterile smell of a vaccination centre. For the uncultured nose it provoked an involuntary response, and a chuckle out of Jade.

"You get used to the smell."

A quiet hum filled the downtown Dynalife lab. Two women sat on either side of the conveyer system, quietly working away at samples delivered automatically to their stations.

Jade pointed out one of the locations that she would sit when assigned to the conveyor belt system where she would test samples. This would entail a careful swab of the sample using yellow plastic sticks of sorts with a flattened end across a section of Petri dish. She does this twice per sample for different tests and once finished, another sample makes its way along the tracks to her station for the process to begin again. On average, Jade tests over sixty samples every single shift.

The downtown Edmonton Dynalife lab is responsible for testing not just all Northern Alberta, but all the Northwest Territories as well. Processing, testing, examining, and storing thousands upon thousands of samples from

across the region. The scale of the operation is daunting, yet Jade found her home right away. Thousands of people rely on this one lab and on Jade, for potentially lifesaving tests.

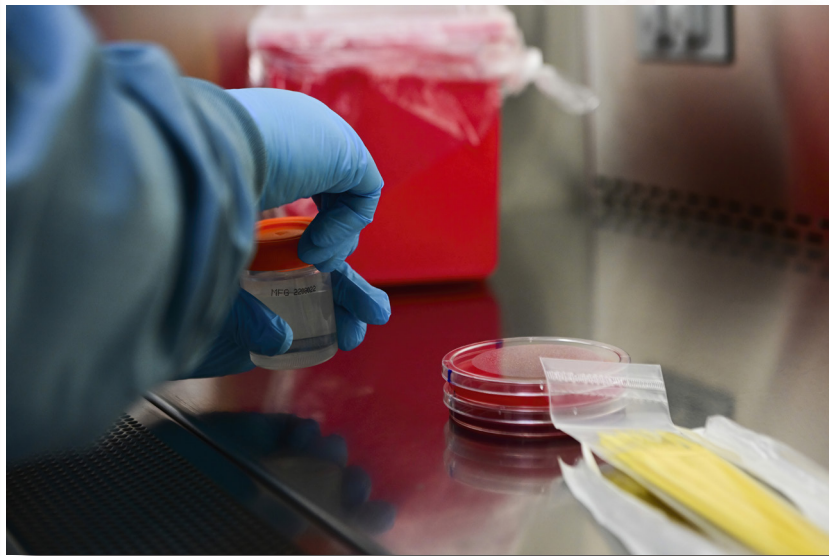
When asked about how she felt about the responsibility that her job asked of her, Jade shrugged her shoulders. She never thought of her job as something worthy of such praise, despite the gravity, scale, and importance of the lab.

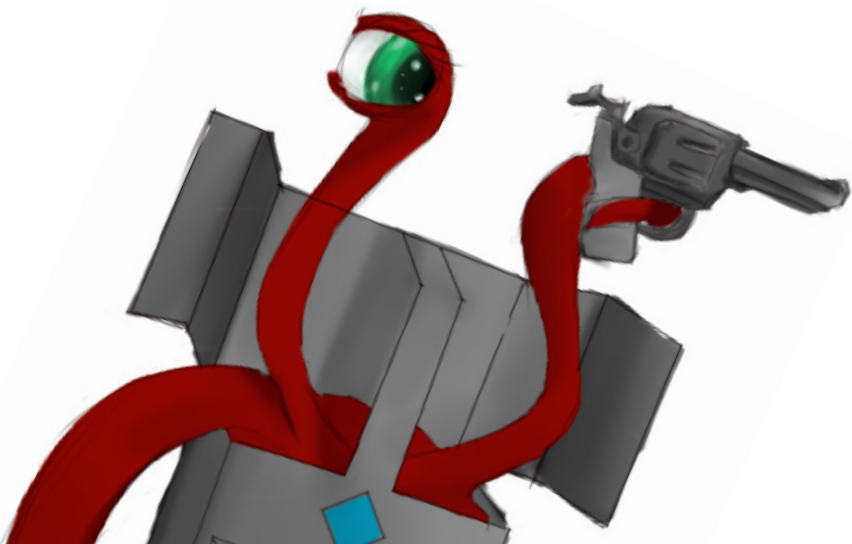
"I'm just a small cog in a giant machine," she said with a hint of pride. "It's chaos but my kind of chaos."

Since joining Dynalife, a career path has been set for her and one that she is eager to journey down. While only starting in her role as a Lab Assistant this year, there are many paths within the company open to her.

"The current game plan is at least two to three years of working where I am now in my position, and then maybe move into another role."

Dynalife offers inhouse training to obtain the skills that are required to be trained on the deep wound bench, where she wishes to progress her career towards. She now has all the tools she needs for a fulfilling and long-term career





Jade and her partner Drew share a two-bedroom apartment just north of downtown Edmonton. Their passion for anime, gaming, pop culture and fantasy was proudly displayed across her house, from small figures, posters, and books filling their apartment with playful and vibrant art. In the corner of her living room sat a basket with colourful yarn and half-finished crochet projects. It was a warm and welcoming home with two cats: Ronan and Cain.

In the second bedroom turned gaming room, Jade leaned back on her computer chair, her knees up to her chest. Headphones hung on stands and between the two desks a cat tower where Ronin kept a watchful eye on the two. Their computer monitors more resembled wide screen TVs than a computer.

"Well, he's kind of like a sentient jellyfish, but he sits in a backpack." Jade nonchalantly pointed to the amorphous blob on her screen. "He sometimes can shoot a gun with one of his tentacles if he wants."

The thought of a sentient backpack jellyfish wielding space firearms evoked quite a mental image and boisterous laughter from the two. Jade and Drew happily recalled their other adventures with friends online. Space crabs, warlocks, dark

elves, and all manner of fantasy and science fiction. Between the two of them had no shortage of imagination. Jade flipped through impressive drawings that she and her friends made of their characters. If she hadn't found her passion in microbiology, perhaps art could have been another avenue for her.

Her job with Dynalife provided means for independence and comfort. Her apartment is her and Drew's small slice of safety where they could spend their days with each other and cats.

"I finally have a well-paying job. Something I can support my household with." Jade reflected. Drew has a medical condition that restricts his ability to find work, something that Jade lovingly supports him through. "It's just not something I am too focused on; I want to spend as much time with him as I can."

While currently renting, they have begun to talk about buying a place together. She shared that not only is she in a place now that she can support the two of them and look at a down payment for a house, but for the first time ever she has her own RRSP's. Since moving to Edmonton, Jade has it all. An education, a partner, a job, a future.

“You have Cree in you, honey!”

In a community hall next to the St Michaels Church in south Edmonton, the “Very Merry Indigenous Christmas Market” hosted dozens of indigenous arts, crafts, clothing, and other product from Indigenous artisans across Central Alberta. Jade walked through rows of vivid shawls, beadwork, dreamcatchers, and paintings, hoping to find something that caught her eyes for a last-minute Christmas gift.

Jade had limited exposure to aspects of her culture, and even fewer physical reminders of it at home, save for a single dreamcatcher in her living room. The craft fair seemed like a gentle and appropriate introduction to the diverse world to the Indigenous community. Jade’s own passion for art and crocheting made it a natural fit.

She gravitated towards a rack of crocheted articles of clothing. As she flipped through the pieces, the woman who owned the stall approached her and struck up a conversation. Jade was all too happy to share her love of knitting with her. Soon, the two were deep in conversation.

The mention that Jade was Métis that piqued the interest of the woman, who introduced herself as Tina Goulet-Brett.

“Well, I’m Métis. Where is your family from? What’s your last name?” she asked.

A common question, judging by Jade’s response of her lack of any knowledge about her Métis side. Tina pressed.

“My last name is Bruce, but my Métis side is from my mom.” Jade replied. She shared her mother’s maiden name.

The woman took a small step back, her eyebrows raised in surprise.

“What’s your moms maiden name?”

Jade repeated herself. Tina’s surprise went quickly to elation and a massive smile formed on her face. “We’re related!” Tina exclaimed. She was related to Jade’s aunt, making her and Jade cousins.

Jade threw her head back in a laugh and an equally wide smile came across her face. Her eyes wide, perhaps as wide as her smile, it took a moment for her to even form a response in words.

“No way... no way...” She was elated. They embraced. The two then began sharing stories of their shared relatives and it was undeniable. Jade stumbled into her first confirmed Métis relative outside her immediate family that day. Tina all but finally solved two nagging questions that Jade had so far not been able to answer. “I’ve never known anything about my Indigenous side at all!” Jade exclaimed.

“You have Cree in you, honey.” Tina said with a smile and placed her hand gently on Jade’s shoulder. Tina went on to explain her links to settlements and family members who also were Métis. “Your family is part of the Red River Métis Settlement. You have cousins all around that area!”

Their laughter and exclamations were contagious, two family members meeting each other for the first time and talking about the family tree Jade had been denied for her entire life. The two got lost in 24-years worth of conversation about relatives, locations, memories. Amidst rows of symbols, paintings, clothing, and crafts of her culture and history, Jade began to unwrap her identity as a Métis woman.



Jade was uncharacteristically quiet on the drive back to her home. With gifts she had purchased for her home in the back seat, she sat in the passenger seat deep in thought. The afternoon had her deep in thought, and when asked how she was feeling it took her a while to reply. She shrugged slightly and said with a smile on her face.

“I guess I always figured there was Cree in my family, odds were good for that.” Referencing the large population of Cree in the region. “What I

find really neat though is knowing my family is part of the Red River Settlement. To be part of that.” She paused again, lost in thought. “That’s so cool.”

Jade didn’t say much more than that, no doubt lost in thought on the day’s revelations. However, the content look on her face and gentle smile said much more as she stared out of the window as a snowy Edmonton rushed past.

“So cool.”



“Rain on a tin roof is my favorite sound. My favourite. If I get seriously stressed out, that’s what I listen to.”

Jade Bruce leaned in close to tropical palm frond, admiring the intricate pattern of the dinner plate sized leaf. The air was fragrant and damp, a kaleidoscope of exotic flowers, and the occasional butterfly. The soft murmur of a nearby stream leading to a pond of golden fish was the only sound besides our conversation. Jade adjusted her glasses, that had only just become un-fogged from the warm humid air. The welcoming environment in which she talked it was just an island of warmth as a cold wind could be heard across the conservatory whipping a drift of snow across the glass ceiling of the Muttart Conservatory.

“I wouldn’t have been able to go to school. I just wouldn’t have been able to afford it.” Jade said in a matter-of-fact manner. Jade openly acknowledges that Rupertsland Institute played a vital role in getting her to where she is now.

Rupertsland Institute Métis Training to Employment gives Métis people across Alberta the chance to turn dreams into reality. Through the mentorship and guidance of Employment Counsellors like Marlene, Métis like Jade are

given the best possible shot at a fulfilling career.

Skilled and educated workers in the medical field today are highly sought after in today’s job market. Dynalife’s in-house training and education gives Jade only room to grow and succeed within the company in a potentially lifelong career with the company. However, as she had hinted there are many paths that her education could take her, some beyond Edmonton, and some a return to school in her future. If that journey is in her future, Rupertsland Institute will be by her side once again.

Jade is an ambitious, smart, and kind woman, eager to show her worth through hard and meaningful work. She doesn’t have all the answers to her heritage yet and doesn’t seem in a rush either. She’s just enjoying the process of reconnecting. Her career and life trajectory were given the right kind of assistance with funding support from RLI when she needed it the most. The link to her heritage as a Métis woman was also maintained by RLI until she was able to take that journey on her own as well. With the education that she received, Jade has a stable home, a fulfilling career, and a self-sufficient life.