

Josee Bourgeois is a fancy shawl pow wow dancer, registered member to her father's band of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nations, and proud mother to her teenage son, Little Thunder Bear Sylliboy. Josee was born in Ottawa, grew up in Toronto and raised by her French mother who was a devout Jehovah Witness. Since childhood, Josee worked very hard to escape poverty and systemic oppression. Josee has spent her life self producing her dreams and using movement to create opportunity and build a strong reputation as a professional Indigenous dance artist in Canada. As of today, Josee has completed two prestigious residencies, as visiting dance artist in residence at the National Arts Center, 2021- 2022, and as a student at The Banff Center for Arts and Creativity, Indigenous Theatres Dramaturgies program, 2023.

In 2013, Josee graduated as Valedictorian of the Nova Scotia Community College, Recreation Leadership program. It was through her studies that she made the connection of wellness and rehabilitation with Indigenous peoples. From 2013 to 2019 she was able to build strong relationships through dance, culture, and mentorship with a vast number of first peoples who were colleagues, elders, inmates, and clients in treatment. Josee had a front row seat to observing the severity of issues surrounding the Indigenous peoples of this country while she was employed with Corrections Canada at the Nova Women's Correctional Institution, and Health Canada funded, Wanaki Treatment Center. Josee became inspired to follow and advocate for a path to decolonizing access to wellness, be it through culture, art or what would soon become the sovereign cannabis industry.

In 2019 Josee transitioned to the sovereign cannabis industry as Brand Development Manager for topical A K I Wellness, an Indigenous-owned and manufactured topical wellness line. In addition, a position as the Community Engagement Manager for the grassroots wholesaler and distributor, Sweetgrass Trading. In 2021, Josee was included as a cannabis consultant and presenter in the Anishinabek Nation Cannabis Feasibility Study. Guest speaker at national cannabis conferences, O'cannabiz/ CannExpo, 2022/23. Two-time guest speaker on Sirius XM Radio, The Joint Venture with Ben Miner, and KIND Magazine feature, fall 2022. Co-author to the CWIC (Canadian Women in Cannabis, not-for-profit) submission of recommendations to the Cannabis Act revisions.

This year, Josee was named one of the top Indigenous cannabis activists to follow in 2023 by LeafWell Medical Cannabis Research Institution. Although Josee no longer works full time in the sovereign cannabis industry, she remains extremely connected to the network that she built between the regulated and sovereign industry. Today, Josee is a proud member of the Board of Directors as the Advocacy and Policy Advisor to non-for-profit certified cannabis education organization, Educannation, while working full time as an Indigenous Student Graduation Coach for the Renfrew County District School Board. Josee sees a possibility of combining all the networks, skills, experiences, and knowledge she has gathered to continue on this path to decolonizing policies, systems and institutions. In hopes that the intergenerational effects and traumas Indigenous peoples carry from systemic oppression can be reconciled within the efforts and work contributions she is passionate about.

*"Education is the key to wellness and sovereignty is an inherent right to be asserted". – All My Relations*