

# CHILDREN AT THE CENTRE OF THE CIRCLE OF COMMUNITY

By Margaret Wanlin  
Thunder Bay Ventures

A "Can Do" attitude is evident in any conversation with Claudia LeGarde. Claudia credits her parents with helping her to develop that spirit and the belief that families need to pull together. She has fond memories of commercial fishing with her Dad throughout her teenage years. He also taught her to hunt and trap.

Since 1999 Claudia has worked at the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre as a combined Criminal/Family Court Worker. She advocates for Aboriginal people in conflict with the law. She makes recommendations regarding diversion programs and helps people to recognize their responsibilities for staying on the right path. Claudia sits on the Validation Group for the Diversity in Policing Project currently under way in the city.

Claudia has a strong commitment to building healthy communities and healthy families. Her own children Amber, 21; Harley, 16; and Tanner, 9 are a key focus in her life. She actively creates opportunities for them to have a strong sense of who they are as Aboriginal people and to know and celebrate their culture. At a recent Lake Superior Place Annual Meeting, Harley, an accomplished singer joined a group of Aboriginal young people in a program of singing and dancing. Harley's experience and ability as a singer was evident when he was able to continue with his song when the accompanying sound track faltered.

Community work began for Claudia with her involvement in Fort William Ojibway Nation Anishnawbeqwek, the women's group affiliated with the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA). As a young adult she saw that women could help themselves and their families by working together. Claudia has recently taken a seat on ONWA's provincial board representing the western region. In the past she has been involved with the Elizabeth Fry Society locally, provincially and nationally.

Claudia has been involved in Anishnawbe Mushkiki (AM) since the original steering committee was formed to develop the concept and has been president throughout AM's eight-year life. AM, Thunder Bay's Aboriginal Community



Claudia LeGarde

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Health Centre, provides holistic health care for Aboriginal people throughout their life cycles and combines primary, traditional and alternative forms of care. For Claudia, AM's values fit with her own working for and being a voice for the grassroots people, and providing support to women and children to build healthy communities.

In Claudia's picture of a healthy community children are at the centre and it is the role of all other community members to nurture those children during their formative years. Knowledge of their culture and being proud of who they are is important, and so is positive healthy activity like playing hockey and other sports.

Claudia is a person who speaks her mind and encourages others to do the same. She believes in organizations and governments that are open and accountable to the people. And she values and enjoys learning. She is a graduate of Confederation College's Native Child and Family Worker program and Aboriginal Law and Advocacy, which led to her current job. As one of her teachers in that program, I know that Claudia is always ready to debate and discuss ideas.

As she looks to the future Claudia envisions a time when people are all equal regardless of their colour and everyone is proud of their heritage.

It is Claudia's "Can Do" attitude, commitment and hard work that make her one of our community's 'Everyday Heroes'.

*Everyday Heroes is a community initiative by Thunder Bay Ventures. Everywhere there are people living, working, playing and contributing to the fabric of our city. Nominate a hero-heroes@thunderbayventures.com. Read about past heroes at [www.thunderbayventures.com](http://www.thunderbayventures.com)*