



**FIRST VOICE**  
Urban Indigenous Coalition

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## Jennie Williams Named Recipient of 2022 Indigenous Advocate Award

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**St. John's, NL** — First Voice today named Inuk photographer and filmmaker Jennie Williams as the recipient of the 2022 Indigenous Advocate Award. In rendering its decision, the Selection Committee cited Jennie's outstanding artwork documenting and sharing the unique cultural traditions of Inuit communities in Labrador. The Selection Committee also issued honourable mentions for Bethany Jacobs, a student volunteer and MMIWG activist in St. John's, as well as Dean Simon, a Mi'kmaw Language Facilitator with Qalipu First Nation based in St. George's.

Jennie Williams was born in Happy Valley–Goose Bay in 1981. After moving to St. John's at the age of 21, Jennie became an active member of what was then called the St. John's Native Friendship Centre, now known as First Light. Learning about other Indigenous cultures sparked an interest in – and a desire to reconnect with – her own Inuit identity. “The Friendship Centre inspired me to engage more deeply with Inuit culture,” says Jennie. Embracing the Inuit traditions of throat singing and drum dancing, Jennie began organizing a community of urban Inuit through First Light.

At around the same time, Jennie began saving money. “I always knew that I wanted to be a photographer,” she says. At the age of 25 she bought her first professional camera from a shop in St. John's. “I started by taking photos of everything. But over time what really caught my attention were scenes of everyday life.” Jennie moved with her partner, Jamie, to the Inuit community of Nain, in Nunatsiavut, in 2008. Having brought from St. John's both her camera and a renewed connection to her own cultural identity, Jennie began documenting the lived traditions of Inuit in Nain. She began taking photos full-time and launched her career as a professional photographer.

Over the course of 12 years, Jennie meticulously researched and documented the unique cultural traditions of the Nalujuit (“Nah-loo-you-wheat”). Her work resulted in a series of masterful photographs called *Nalujuk Night*, which have since been exhibited across North America. For many people not from Labrador, the photographic series is likely to be their first exposure to an eerie tradition shared by Inuit across Nunatsiavut every January 6. The photos prompted so many questions from viewers that Jennie felt there was still more to be taught about it. “I wanted to bring my pictures to life,” she says, in order better to explain the nature and traditions of the Nalujuit.

With that idea percolating in her mind, Jennie began imagining how she might transform her photographic stills into a film version. With support from the National Film Board, Jennie brought to life the short documentary film that shares its name with her original series of photographs. Premiering just last year to widespread acclaim, *Nalujuk Night* has already won awards and accolades, including at the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, the Vancouver International Film Festival, the Yorkton Film Festival, the FIN Atlantic international film festival, the Canadian Screen Awards, and DOC NYC.

Now once again living in St. John's, Jennie is the mother of six children ranging in age from 4 to 25. In addition to continuing her work as a photographer and filmmaker, she also serves as an arts and culture facilitator with First Light, teaching throat singing and drum dancing as once she was taught by others. "The Friendship Centre always has given me space to practice my culture and to share it with the next generation of urban Inuit," she says.

The Indigenous Advocate Award was created in 2020 to recognize outstanding efforts to advance the human rights of Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador. Nominations are accepted through a competitive public process, with recipients chosen by a Selection Committee whose members are appointed by the First Voice Partnership Table. Previous recipients include Charlotte Winters-Fost (2020), one of the founders of First Light Friendship Centre in St. John's, and Diem Saunders (2021), an MMIWG activist from Labrador. A formal award ceremony celebrating Jennie Williams as this year's recipient will take place in August.

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