



FIRST VOICE
Urban Indigenous Coalition

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Charlotte Winters-Fost Named Inaugural Recipient of Indigenous Advocate Award

Thursday, June 18, 2020

St. John's, NL — First Voice announced today that Charlotte Winters-Fost has been named the inaugural recipient of the coalition's new Indigenous Advocate Award. In rendering its decision, the Nominations and Selection Committee cited Charlotte's more than forty years of advocacy in promoting cross-cultural understanding, her efforts to build a strong urban Indigenous community in St. John's, and her work to advance truth and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Charlotte was born in Hopedale, Nunatsiavut, in 1954 and moved with her family to Happy Valley–Goose Bay at the age of 13. Although she initially left high school without graduating in order to travel throughout North America, she returned to Happy Valley–Goose Bay at the age of 20 and received her high school equivalency diploma. Two years later, in 1976, she earned a college diploma and was accepted into Memorial University. She moved to St. John's and, while raising two of her three children, completed a Bachelor of Arts in Education in 1981 and then a Bachelor of Special Education in 1982. She went on to become a special needs teacher with a career that spanned 27 years, retiring in 2009.

Looking back on her experience moving to St. John's in the 1970s, Charlotte reflected on the everyday racism she encountered as an Inuk woman. "I really loved living in St. John's," Charlotte says, "but I faced many challenges simply because of who I am and because of what my ancestry was. I was often called derogatory names, followed around in stores like a criminal, accosted by men on the street, and told to 'go home.'" But Charlotte was already home. She joined the Indian and Inuit Support Group as a student at Memorial University and found strength and resilience as a member of the city's growing urban Indigenous community.

Charlotte has been inspired by the lifelong vision of a vibrant community in St. John's where Indigenous cultures could be celebrated and where people of all identities, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, would be welcome. In 1983, she played a leading role in founding First Light, then known as the St. John's Native Friendship Centre. "Inclusivity was always the foundation of what we were trying to do," says Charlotte, a long-time board member and former President of the organization. "Our hope was that we would be able to bring diverse peoples together and bridge some of the cultural divides that might otherwise separate us from one another." The organization initially operated out of a single office at Memorial University, with no funding or

paid staff. Today, 37 years later, First Light has more than 70 staff members who deliver a wide range of culturally-oriented programs from four locations across the city.

The Indigenous Advocate Award was created earlier this year as a new initiative by First Voice to recognize outstanding efforts to advance the human rights of Indigenous Peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador. This year's award consists of a framed print by Jerry Evans, a local Indigenous artist. Because the original award ceremony was postponed and ultimately cancelled due to the ongoing public health emergency related to COVID-19, Charlotte will instead appear via Facebook Live ([@FirstLightNL](#)) this afternoon at 3pm. Members of the media and the general public are welcome to attend and ask questions.

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