

*Celebrating True Self as a*  
***"Place of Helpers"***





*"She was very quiet at first  
and now you can see that  
change in her confidence. She  
says hello and shares, she  
is finding her voice."*

True Self staff speaking  
about a participant

We want to tell you a story about **True Self –  
Debwewendizwin** and why many people think of  
it as a **"Place of Helpers."**

Delivered by Nipissing First Nation and its community  
partners, **True Self** strives to promote the safety, self-  
sufficiency and well-being of individuals that have suffered  
trauma and abuse and other hardships such as poverty and  
addictions.

Using a wholistic and trauma-informed approach to healing,  
and offering employment and training supports, **True Self**  
supports individuals and their families living in the Nipissing  
district to *debwewendizin*—"reconnect with your true self,  
your spirit fire."

**True Self** does this by providing a warm and welcoming place  
and offering a range of flexible supports, from workshops that  
teach skills and knowledge, to talking circles and one-to-one  
support. Throughout, staff encourage participants in their  
pursuit of education, training, employment and holistic  
mental wellness.



How does **True Self** make a difference in the  
lives of its participants and in the surrounding  
community?

### *Here's what we learned*

In 2018, **True Self** received three-year funding from the  
Women's Economic Security Program of the Government of  
Ontario to deliver two core program elements plus additional  
supports and to conduct an evaluation. Using an Indigenous  
evaluation framework, an independent researcher conducted  
interviews and online surveys with participants and staff, and  
gathered and analyzed data regarding costs, participation and  
graduation, and post-program follow-up.

### *What the numbers show*

Over the last three years, **231 women** participated in the ABC's  
to Healing your Life Workshops and/or Computer Workshops  
and received additional supports.

- Of these, **111 women earned certificates** for completing  
the workshops
- Within 6 months, **79 women** had gone on to  
post-secondary education and/or employment.



*Defeat Depression Walk 2019*





## *What makes True Self successful in its work*

**“Visionary leadership”** and a consistent, experienced, supportive staff team that reflects the participant population. Together, they:

- maximize organizational strengths, foster deeper, authentic connections with participants, and help **True Self** navigate challenges, plan for the future

**Stable funding** is critical to staffing, programming strength and predictability for participants and staff:

- recent three-year funding supported forward thinking, program development and expansion, and reassured participants, staff
- working to secure permanent or multi-year funding is critical to maintaining these gains.

**Right supports, at the right time, in the right ways** – a range of supports, flexibility, voluntary participation and choice are key. Other organizations (funders, community/justice organizations) would also benefit from understanding that:

- “additional” supports (e.g. healthy snacks, childcare, transportation) actually help meet participant “basic needs” and enable them to participate in workshops, circles
- participants are at different levels of readiness for full time or intensive programming, or even for certain topics, and participant expectations and “success” criteria need to be adjusted accordingly
- participants experience **True Self** as a “steppingstone” on their pathways to education, employment, holistic mental health
- more participant-driven programming and more flexible expectations are two ways staff would like **True Self** to be even more responsive to participants
- routinely seeking feedback from participants will continue to help organizations tune in to participant needs, preferences.

**Encouragement** – participants spoke often about how staff encouraged them. Many of the staff know how important encouragement is because they “have been there” – they know through lived experience what the participants are going through and what they are up against.

**“Power of the group”** – when participants talk together in groups and listen to one another, staff see the “shame starting to fall away” as new participants begin to feel more comfortable talking about their own experiences, connecting with others and reconnecting with their true selves, their spirit fires.

**“Healing is a journey”** – many participants said they benefitted from participating in multiple programs, describing their healing as a journey and the importance of being able to use the many programs and supports at various points, along the way.

**“Pathways” to education, employment** – many participants shared that **True Self** positively impacted their educational pathways, including supporting them to return to school for upgrading or to start in new post-secondary programs. They also said:

- participating in programming directly increased their confidence which led them to find new educational pathways
- that staff support throughout, including walking with them through overwhelming administrative processes and applications, was extraordinarily helpful.

**Program alumni are “champions” for True Self** – they raise its profile, extend its reach, help form new connections, especially with younger generations, to share important violence against women information, education and support.

**Outreach to Indigenous, rural and francophone communities** has a positive impact on referrals, participation, program design and delivery.

**Outreach to community members, organizations** – staff reach out to people who are homeless or in jail to provide support. They also reach out to community services and educational and justice settings to promote referrals, improve communication and service flow.

- Going forward, staff would like to increase their focus on strengthening partnerships with post-secondary partners to create a more seamless path and with justice-related services and agencies, because they want to offer more peer support throughout the process.





*At a point of crisis, a smiling face greets you at the door and asks what you need, in that moment. 'Would you like a hot tea or coffee while you describe what you're looking for?' It is a no-judgment space that welcomes people.*

*It also helped me identify my own strengths and abilities.*

*I always knew my own qualities but needed the guidance and continued encouragement from staff whom I consider a great influence in my accomplishments to date.*

*I really appreciated the ABC program. It was an in-depth program that covered a number of topics that really helped me discover my strengths.*

*I'm still on my path of healing and unemployed while I recover. I am, however, in university studying psychology. I accredit my confidence to go to university to the True Self staff and the ABC program. Thank you.*

*I have returned to school and am enrolled in university. It is my plan to create a new career with this new level of education.*

*It has given me the strength and courage to go out of my comfort zone and to face my fears head on and that I am capable of more than I initially believed I could do.*

*True Self gave me the confidence to return to school and I am proud of my involvement with True Self. I would like to work for True Self when I am done studying.*

*They allowed me to re-introduce myself into the workforce by improving my inner and outer self.*

*I know how and where to get grants for my new business!*

*The ability to drop in for mental health support is incredibly valuable to me. I'm not overly comfortable with talking to just anyone and there are a couple of staff members that I feel comfortable opening up to. Thank you.*

*I will be debt free in 4 years because True Self helped give me direction and connections with other agencies.*

*I have confidence in myself and should I slide off track a little I can call on them to help guide me back again.*

*I am well on my way to becoming my own boss!*

*Before True Self I would not have had the confidence to create my business.*

*The life timeline was the hardest assignment to do. But I don't cry anymore when I talk about my life now.*

*I find what I learned at True Self I am trying to follow what I learned in everyday life, with Covid 19 it's hard to do the groups like we used to do but I could call anytime and talk to someone if I needed to.*

*I have found my self-esteem which was missing for a long time... I have come to learn how to change my behaviours, thinking to realize I am worthwhile and most importantly to love myself first.*

*Love our Thursday night group at True Self. The openness and friendships are very important, especially when you can feel so alone. Being able to speak with someone, without judgement, is calming and has really helped me, understand me.*

*It is not so much what piece of paper I achieved but rather the building of my self-esteem and self-empowerment to re-enter life and community and that I still had something to offer this world.*



*They allowed me to re-introduce myself into the workforce by improving my inner and outer self.*

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