

## **Backgrounder – Confederation College Class of 2021**

**This backgrounder includes information about the Class of 2021 Award Recipients and Student Success Stories.**

### **CLASS OF 2021 AWARD RECIPIENTS**

The below graduates are recipients of Confederation College's top leadership and academic awards.

#### **Governor General's Academic Medal**

The Governor General's Academic Medal is one of the most prestigious awards that a student in a Canadian educational institution can receive and is granted to the graduate who has achieved the highest academic standing with a minimum grade point average of 3.50 in a diploma level program. The recipient is chosen from among the President's Award of Excellence recipients.

**SHAUN MARTIN, Business – Accounting**

#### **Derek and Joan Burney Award of Excellence**

The Derek and Joan Burney Award of Excellence is awarded to the graduating student who achieves the highest academic standing in a diploma level program and displays leadership potential.

**SHAUN MARTIN, Business – Accounting**

#### **SUCCI/OASA Student Leadership Award**

The SUCCI/OASA Student Leadership Award is presented to a student who demonstrates exceptional leadership skills, is a positive role model and has affected change with integrity, compassion and understanding.

**LUISA DI BIAGIO, Developmental Services Worker**

### Board of Governors' Achievement Award

The Board of Governors' Achievement Award is granted to one graduate from each academic school. Recipients are selected based on outstanding academic achievement and contribution made to student life, community affairs and/or citizenship.

School of Business, Hospitality & Media Arts	<b>STELLA IDOGHO</b>	International Business Management
School of Engineering Technology, Trades & Aviation	<b>MATTHEW YASCHUK</b>	Welding Techniques
School of Health, Negahneewin & Community Services	<b>NGYEN NU PHUONG (FIONA) VO</b>	Developmental Services Worker

### President's Award of Excellence

The President's Award of Excellence is granted to the graduate who has achieved the highest academic standing in each academic school, enrolled in a two- or three-year postsecondary program. A minimum grade point average of 3.50 is required. Recipients are chosen from among the Academic Award of Excellence Recipients.

School of Business, Hospitality & Media Arts	<b>SHAUN MARTIN</b>	Business Administration – Accounting
School of Engineering Technology, Trades & Aviation	<b>MONIKA MAKINEN</b>	Forestry Technician: Ecosystem Management
School of Health, Negahneewin & Community Services	<b>KATIE ROBINSON</b>	Early Childhood Education

### Campus Award of Excellence

The Campus Award of Excellence is granted to the graduate from each campus who has achieved the highest academic standing with a minimum grade point average of 3.50 in a diploma level program.

Dryden	<b>AMANDA NISULA</b>
Greenstone	<b>KARA TROTTIER</b>
Lake of the Woods (Kenora)	<b>STACIE ALCOCK</b>
Northshore (Marathon)	<b>ROBYN GUINCHARD</b>
Rainy River District (Fort Frances)	<b>SARAH STRAIN</b>
Red Lake	<b>SILEAN COOK</b>
Sioux Lookout	<b>KATHRYN SCHROCK</b>
Distance Education	<b>GINA YOUNG</b>
Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute	<b>JONI SMITH</b>

## STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Featured below are special interest stories about successful graduates from the Confederation College Class of 2021. Graduates are listed alphabetically by last name as follows:

Graduate Name	Campus	Program
<a href="#">Candace Burns</a>	Thunder Bay	Carpentry and Renovation Techniques
<a href="#">Silean Cook</a>	Red Lake	Native Child and Family Services
<a href="#">Luisa Di Biagio</a>	Thunder Bay	Developmental Services Worker
<a href="#">Abigail Gardner-Shaw</a>	Dryden	Practical Nursing
<a href="#">Jacqueline Heinrich</a>	Thunder Bay	Medical Radiation Technology
<a href="#">Stella Idogho</a>	Thunder Bay	International Business Management
<a href="#">Kimberly Levesque</a>	Distance Education	Business – Accounting
<a href="#">Kiara Michano</a>	Northshore (Marathon)	Early Childhood Education
<a href="#">Tyrell Monias</a>	Thunder Bay	Aboriginal Community Advocacy
<a href="#">Tanya Necan</a>	Sioux Lookout	Native Child and Family Services
<a href="#">Olivia Peloquin</a>	Lake of the Woods (Kenora)	Native Child and Family Services
<a href="#">Dale Scott</a>	Rainy River District (Fort Frances)	Business – Accounting
<a href="#">Kasey Scott</a>	Greenstone	Early Childhood Education
<a href="#">Gagandeep Singh</a>	Thunder Bay	Digital Media Production

**Candace Burns – Thunder Bay Campus**  
**Graduate of the Carpentry and Renovation Techniques program**

Candace Burns decided that at 35, it was time for a career shift. She had worked for years as a child and youth worker and wanted to do something completely different. Candace graduates this June from the Carpentry and Renovation Techniques program at Confederation College's Thunder Bay Campus.

Carpentry and renovation wasn't the most obvious choice, even to Candace. Before taking the program, she hadn't so much as renovated a closet.

"Not a thing. I went into this program from scratch," Candace said. "I wanted to do something that was hands-on. I looked through a bunch of courses, and that was one that stood out."

Going back to school was a challenge – not least of all because Candace had three young children at home. "It was a very exhausting year," she said.

But Candace was very impressed with the program itself.

"The program coordinator, Shaun Daniels, was amazing. We couldn't have had a better person running the program," she said. "He spent extra time with us whenever we needed it to help us with coursework or to answer any questions."

COVID-19 presented some challenges. Some courses had to be taken online including math, English and blueprint reading. Obviously though, carpentry requires a lot of hands-on learning. Confederation College was able to keep the shops open by restricting the classes to smaller group sizes.

The challenges and hard work paid off. Candace is now working with DRD Construction in Thunder Bay.

"I'm painting outside right now," Candace said. "I like it – it's great working outside when it's nice."

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**Silean Cook** – Red Lake Campus  
**Graduate of the Native Child and Family Services program**  
*Recipient of the Red Lake Campus Award of Excellence*

Silean Cook was taking psychology at university when a plane accident interrupted her plans. She recovered physically, but felt she needed to take a break. Silean got a job at Tikinagan Child and Family Services in Red Lake, then took the Native Child and Family Services program at Confederation College to improve her knowledge.

“I still wanted to learn, so when I found this program, I thought it would really help me with providing services to those who I work with,” Silean said.

What she learned about colonization shocked her.

“I didn’t have a lot of knowledge about Residential Schools and the history of the Indigenous population,” she said. “I learned a lot in this program, and I’m very grateful for it. We don’t talk about this in high school, and we should.”

Silean said she now has a better understanding of the holistic approach that’s needed for services. It also made her more aware of the inequalities in the system she is part of.

“We had to read a book called April Raintree about how some children are treated in the welfare system. We are supposed to be helping these children, but to hear what goes on in some homes – that was really eye-opening.”

It changed the way she personally provides services. “I want to say that I’ve always listened to the families I work with. But now I’m taking a step back and analyzing everything from a holistic approach.”

Silean continues to work at Tikinagan and plans to go back to university to eventually earn her Master’s degree in counselling.

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**Luisa Di Biagio** – Thunder Bay Campus  
**Graduate of the Developmental Services Worker program**  
*Recipient of the SUCCI/OASA Student Leadership Award*

Luisa Di Biagio only recently received her calling in life. After going to university in the United States on a soccer scholarship and then attending Seneca College in Toronto, it took coming home to Thunder Bay to find what she was looking for. This June, Luisa graduates from the Developmental Services Worker (DSW) program with a plan, and the experience to make it happen.

“I had a broken spirit,” she said. “But I met two women with developmental disabilities while renewing my outlook on life, and they helped me find hope again. That’s what made we want to go into the DSW program. I cannot imagine what I would have done otherwise.”

And, as it turns out, Luisa has a knack for it – and she’s left her own legacy already. Luisa helped launch Virtual A.G.E.! (currently being renamed as “The wRECK Crew”) to help connect and empower people with disabilities while disrupting social norms. All programming is hosted by leaders with developmental disabilities themselves. Luisa is one of the people who provide support to those leaders.

“It started as a project in our last semester in our Community Development course. Our program coordinator gave us the focus of loneliness and isolation. And it just took off from there.”

Launched in February, the initiative already has 228 members. It provides Arts, Games and Exercise (A.G.E.), including music recitals, recreational games and live sport shows via Zoom. The next step is to advertise for more members and take the program to various agencies in Thunder Bay. Luisa credits her instructors for their support during her program.

“My coordinators are the most intelligent women I’ve ever met. When the program ended, I wasn’t ready to stop learning from them.”

Luisa hopes to find a summer job and has applied to Lakehead University to continue on to a Social Work degree.

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**Abigail Gardner-Shaw – Dryden Campus  
Graduate of the Practical Nursing program**

Abigail Gardner-Shaw took some time off between high school and college to start her family. Once she was ready to go back, Abigail enrolled in the Pre-Health program at Confederation College's Dryden Campus to upgrade her skills before entering in the Practical Nursing program. She graduates this June.

"I talked with my great-grandmother, and she told me about all these women in my family who were nurses, so I decided to try it," Abigail said. "I ended up loving it."

Abigail has family in Thunder Bay, so moving there for school would have been an option. However, being able to stay at home with all her supports was so much easier.

"My family was a big help – I couldn't have done it without them," she said. Abigail said the other students in her class were a big help, too. "We grew into this little family and helped each other."

She enjoyed online learning, even though it became more challenging during COVID-19 when the campus closed. "There were a lot more distractions learning at home. It's harder to pay attention and learn when your children are doing online learning too."

COVID-19 also disrupted placements. Abigail and her class weren't able to train in the hospital after the pandemic hit in March 2020. That meant a "clinical boot camp" last summer when things opened up again.

Although the program involved a lot of hard work, it paid off. Abigail graduates this June and already got a job offer from Dryden Regional Health Centre. She starts orientation on June 15.

"I'm very proud of myself for doing it," she said.

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**Jacqueline Heinrich – Thunder Bay Campus**  
**Graduate of the Medical Radiation Technology program**

Jacqueline Heinrich didn't have the easiest time getting into Confederation College. She had a difficult home life, dropped out of high school in Grade 9 to work full time, and lost an eye during a horrific fireworks accident that took years of physical and mental recovery. So for Jacqueline, Convocation is more than simply graduating from the Medical Radiation Technology (MRT) program. It's a watershed moment in her life – the moment she proved to herself she could overcome anything.

"I am a perfectionist, and I am extremely hard on myself," Jacqueline said. "I have a difficult time dealing with change, so going to college was a huge step for me. I am extremely proud of myself for graduating with a 4.0, passing my national, and being hired as a Medical Radiation Technologist."

Jacqueline worked at Value Village and loved the job. But she wanted to do something different than work retail her whole life. She went to Confederation College's Academic & Career Entrance (ACE) program to get her high school equivalency. There, Jacqueline first heard about the MRT program and thought that after her own experiences in the healthcare system, she could make a difference for patients. It wasn't easy, though.

"I was very overwhelmed in the beginning," she said. "I reached out to my professors the first week and they gave me suggestions. I took advantage of any resources I could to ensure that I would be successful."

The program also helped Jacqueline grow as a person. She went from getting a tutor in the first semester to becoming a tutor herself in the second semester.

"We all became a little X-ray family. Our professors were amazing and took time to help us when we needed it."

Jacqueline recently accepted a position at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, and is training students herself.

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**Stella Idogho** – Thunder Bay Campus

**Graduate of the International Business Management program**

*Recipient of the Board of Governors' Achievement Award for the School of Business, Hospitality & Media Arts*

Stella Idogho showed a commitment to her school work like few others. Originally from Nigeria, she travelled with her family to Thunder Bay specifically to go to Confederation College. This June, she graduates from the International Business Management (IBM) program with a 3.84 GPA. The high grade is even more remarkable given that she took many of her first semester tests online lying in a bed in Labour and Delivery before the birth of their third child.

“I had to tell my instructor, ‘I’m in the hospital, so can you give me a couple of minutes before I start the test?’” Stella said with a laugh. “He said I could take it up later, but I wanted to do it at the same time as the rest of the class.”

That also shows her level of commitment to her fellow students. Stella was known to help everyone at the drop of a hat whether it was leading group assignments, being supportive to the other mothers in the class, or helping arrange accommodations for other arriving international students.

“It doesn’t take anything from me – I just want to help,” she said.

Stella enjoyed the IBM program, and was relieved that it was more about running a business than working with numbers.

“It was awesome! I had no idea how interesting it was going to be. The lecturers were really understanding, and the program help me build my communication skills.”

Stella is putting her diploma to work already, and she’s putting down roots in Thunder Bay. Stella recently accepted an HR assistant position at Sovereign Dental.

“My husband Jeffrey was my motivator throughout college.”

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**Kimberly Levesque – Distance Education  
Graduate of the Business – Accounting program**

Kimberly Levesque has never set foot in northwestern Ontario. Even so, she graduates from Confederation College's Business – Accounting program this June. Kimberly, who lives in the country 40 minutes outside of Saint John, New Brunswick, found the course online through Distance Education.

"I was trying to find something fully online but also full time," Kimberly said. "Confederation College had the only program I could find in Canada where you are taught live by a teacher (in a virtual classroom) rather than just online coursework."

That made a world of difference, Kimberly said. "Being able to ask questions in class, and even hearing other students' questions was really helpful. Plus, you get to know the other students. It's not quite the same as face-to-face meetings. But you get to know their quirks and joke around with them."

Accounting runs in the family, and Kimberly herself owned her own business for a decade, so the Business – Accounting program was an obvious choice for her. But for Kimberly, coming back to school after so much time was a challenge in itself. She was kicked out of the house at 14 and dropped out of school in Grade 9 to work. In 2017, she suffered a stroke that left her paralyzed. Getting back into the swing of school was difficult.

"I had to upgrade my GED and math skills, but I couldn't get around very well. I needed to find something fully online," she said.

Kimberly has almost completely recovered, and now works under contract bookkeeping for a non-profit organization. She hopes to start her own firm in the future.

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**Kiara Michano – Northshore Campus (Marathon)**  
**Graduate of the Early Childhood Education program**

Kiara Michano knew all about the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program at Confederation College. Many of her family work in education, and now Kiara does too after graduating this June from the Northshore Campus in Marathon.

“When I graduated high school, I took a Junior Educational Assistant program,” Kiara said. “I really like it, so I decided to go take the full program at Confederation College.”

Originally, Kiara had planned to go to Thunder Bay to take the program. But she didn’t want to leave her partner and family in Pic River First Nation. So, she decided to do the program through the nearby Northshore Campus. She was able to take all her classes online, only needing to go to the Campus for exams.

“It worked out really well for me. After my first year I got pregnant, so I can’t even imagine being in Thunder Bay with a newborn and taking classes. I probably wouldn’t have been able to do it,” she said.

She took all her classes during her second year, but had to wait a year to do her placements. By that time COVID-19 had hit, which brought its own challenges, too. Although Kiara worked at the daycare already – conveniently located right across the street from her house – it was only open half-days during the pandemic, limiting placement hours.

Today, Kiara is working with many of her family members, following in their footsteps.

“My grandma is in the daycare working with me, and my mom and other family are working over at the elementary school. I really like it.”

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**Tyrell Monias – Thunder Bay Campus**  
**Graduate of the Aboriginal Community Advocacy program**

Tyrell Monias came to Thunder Bay to take the Aboriginal Community Advocacy program at Confederation College. He graduates this June.

Involved with student politics, Tyrell joined the Oshki Anishnawbeg Student Association (OASA) and served as their Treasurer in his first year. He also sat on the College's Aboriginal Community Advocacy Program Advisory Committee and Decolonization Committee.

"I wanted to give my voice and provide insights into what Confederation College can do to decolonize," he said. Tyrell worked out new ideas to make the campus more inclusive such as creating outdoor spaces for Indigenous students and providing extra supports during their educational journey.

Tyrell said that his instructors were already very good at giving those supports within the classroom.

"They connected with you on a level that wasn't common compared to what I've experienced in different programs before."

Because the topics often hit on a personal level, the teachers had to approach the subject matter from a place of care and understanding, too. "They support you in learning as they are telling you how it is. They build a belief in us that we can all become leaders."

Not only did the Aboriginal Community Advocacy program give him knowledge and experience, it helped shape his career goals. In the short term, Tyrell wants to become a policy adviser. Eventually he'd like to earn his PhD in social work.

"I came to the realization that this is what I always wanted to do with my life," he said.

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**Tanya Necan – Sioux Lookout Campus**  
**Graduate of the Native Child and Family Services program**

Tanya Necan decided that after a cooking for a living, she wanted to start a career helping people. Despite facing several struggles along the way, Tanya graduates from the Native Child and Family Services this June.

“I was always a rebel,” Tanya said. “Then I had my son, and I realized I can’t be displaying these behaviours if I don’t want him to follow the same path. So I needed to change my ways.”

For Tanya, that meant going to back to school. The Native Child and Family Services program seemed like a natural fit for her.

“I’m Indigenous myself, so I started to learn more about myself and my history.” Tanya said that she was surprised at how much she didn’t know. “Growing up, the only things I knew about Residential Schools were from what my Kokum told me. It was shocking, learning about everything. Now, I try to advocate as much as I can.”

Today, Tanya is a casual tenant support worker in Sioux Lookout. She works with people who are dealing with housing issues and who may be on the verge of homelessness due to the housing shortage in Sioux Lookout.

“The program helped me a lot – I really liked it. I’m more aware of my own biases and I put myself into other people’s shoes.”

It’s a big accomplishment for Tanya on a personal level, too. “I learned how to overcome things and see them through to the end. This program is like the first thing I’ve ever finished. It’s been a crazy ride.”

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**Olivia Peloquin – Lake of the Woods Campus (Kenora)**  
**Graduate of the Native Child and Family Services program**

Olivia Peloquin, who graduates from the Native Child and Family Services program at Confederation College's Lake of the Woods Campus in Kenora this June, was drawn to the specialized nature of the program. It offered background context and knowledge that other social work programs didn't.

"I really wanted to go into a helping profession," Olivia said. "I was drawn to this program by the fact that it gave you a deeper understanding about Indigenous issues. My Dad was Indigenous, and I'm Indigenous as well. The program taught me a lot about myself – and a lot about my Dad."

Sadly, Olivia's father passed away before she graduated. But she was grateful she could connect with him because of this program.

"It helped me get that relationship with him before he passed on that I probably wouldn't have had otherwise."

Olivia would have travelled for school, though she appreciated and took full advantage of the campus in Kenora during her first year. When the campus was shut down due to COVID-19, she had no problem transitioning to online learning from home.

"Online learning encourages you to be more independent and problem-solve on your own," she said. "If you need help, there's nobody looking over your shoulder to check on you. You have send an email or reach out to the instructors in some way."

Olivia is currently looking for a job in her field, though she isn't quite sure what that job might be yet.

"I want to work with youth and families, but I don't have any specific job in mind at the moment."

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**Dale Scott – Rainy River District Campus (Fort Frances)**  
**Graduate of the Business – Accounting program**

Dale Scott had a longer road than most on his way to his Business – Accounting diploma. Course changes, re-taking other courses, and then COVID-19 all challenged Dale. But that makes his graduation this June from the Confederation College Rainy River District Campus in Fort Frances all the sweeter.

“I liked the program and Confederation College a lot,” Dale said. “The staff who work there are really helpful with different aspects. They’ve provided plenty of support over the years.”

He chose the program after doing a search on the Confederation College website. The Accounting program jumped out at him.

“I’m good with numbers, so that made me gravitate towards something with numbers,” he said. “Accounting seemed like the logical choice for me.”

Dale particularly enjoyed campus life, even though most of his classes were still online. Of course, things changed when COVID-19 hit, forcing everyone away from campus.

“Our classes were already online, so that part of it wasn’t too much of a change for me. But I did miss interacting with students from other programs on campus,” he said.

Overall, Dale said that he enjoyed learning online. One huge advantage is that you can go back and review the classes, something you can’t always do when you attend a class live.

“You can go back to the recordings of the classes, so if you miss something, you can re-listen to it. I did that a lot – you get a better understanding.”

Dale is currently looking for a part-time placement in Fort Frances.

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**Kasey Scott – Greenstone Campus**

## **Graduate of the Early Childhood Education program**

Kasey Scott graduates this June from the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program at Confederation College's Greenstone Campus. She took a more circular route than many students take.

"I originally took ECE when I first got out of high school, but was given an opportunity to work as a phlebotomist instead," Kasey said. "When I moved from Terrace Bay to Greenstone, I started supply teaching."

That's when Kasey found it was the career for her.

"I fell in love with the kids. They were so bright and so honest, so innocent and sweet," she said. "I got the courage to go back to school again and finish getting my diploma." Online learning worked perfectly for her. Not only could she learn from home, but it meant she could be more flexible, working and going to school at the same time.

"It was a fantastic program – the instructors were great," Kasey said. "I could work in the morning and take classes in the evening."

COVID-19 disrupted her work placement a little, but she is thankful for her Cooperating Teacher Pamela, who accepted her in their day care program with little notice.

Kasey said she lucked out with the students in her class as well. "It was a great group of ladies," she said. "I'm happy to be graduating with them, I wish them all the best of luck in their future careers."

She hopes to find a full-time ECE job in Greenstone and perhaps enrol in a teaching degree down the road. "I'm looking forward to continuing to build on my knowledge and experience as an educator."

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**Gagandeep Singh – Thunder Bay Campus**  
**Graduate of the Digital Media Production program**



Gagandeep Singh, who graduates from Digital Media Production, was pretty confident when he came to Confederation College from India to take the program. Gagan already had a university degree and work experience as a graphic designer. It was a pleasant surprise though when he found out there was so much more to learn.

“I loved the program,” Gagan said. “Whatever I had learned was covered by the end of the first semester. I still had three more semesters to learn new things. The second semester is when it got exciting.”

What Gagan liked most about the program was that it was more comprehensive than most.

“We don’t just learn how to produce media, we also learn how to use it in marketing – it’s a mixture,” he said. “That’s what my background has been, so that’s what drew me to the program.”

Gagan learned on the job in several volunteer projects including as a camera operator at the Special Olympics Canada Winter Games in 2020 and for two seasons with the Lakehead University Thunderwolves. He also directed, filmed and edited a documentary about the Kam River Fighting Walleye hockey team. Gagan continually impressed his instructors and fellow students alike.

Currently Gagan has an internship with Ninesixty Group and is volunteering with Kasper Transportation to create marketing images and videos. He’s applying for a three-year work visa that will allow him to stay and put his talents to work in Thunder Bay.

“My plan is to get my work permit and then explore more of my media side so that I can add those projects to my portfolio,” Gagan.

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