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Monthly Message: Brave Canoe?s journey empowering Indigenous voices

In the heart of Dufferin County, The Brave Canoe stands as a testament to the power and resilience of women working together. Led by co-founders Sharon Rigby, an Indigenous knowledge holder, and Julie Elsdon-Height, a dedicated non-Indigenous ally, this organization weaves a tapestry of support and education. Their mission reflects the serene yet determined strokes described in Emily Pauline Johnson's ?The Song My Paddle Sings,? guiding them through both calm and turbulent waters.

Origins and mission

The seeds of The Brave Canoe were planted in 2022 when Julie and Sharon shared a vision to fill the stark void of Indigenous-focused resources in their community. ?We didn't just want to start something; we wanted to ignite a change,? Sharon explains. Together, they crafted a vision for a place that would bridge cultures and generations. Central to this vision is their Indigenous-majority board and the wisdom of an advising elder, ensuring governance and direction that resonate deeply with Indigenous perspectives and female wisdom.

Key programs andtheir impact

?The impact of gender-based violence on Indigenous women and girls cannot be overstated,? Julie notes. ?It's a crisis that calls for not only awareness but active engagement and support.? In response, The Brave Canoe's programs empower participants through educational workshops and cultural ceremonies that celebrate Indigenous heritage and foster safety and resilience. The ?All My Relations' program is especially close to their hearts, offering a space for healing and strength. ?Seeing the transformation in our participants, how they stand a little taller each time, reminds us why we do what we do,? Sharon adds. This transformative impact is a tribute to the powerful women leading and advising the organization, each bringing a diverse perspective and deep commitment to their roles.

Challenges andtriumphs

Establishing The Brave Canoe involved navigating numerous challenges, from securing funding to engaging the community. However, the shared resolve of the co-founders and their board turned obstacles into stepping stones. ?Every program we launch, every story we hear, fuels our commitment to keep pushing forward,? reflects Julie. Their perseverance has nurtured a thriving women-led organization that is a reflection of empowerment and resilience.

Future goals and calls to action

Looking forward, The Brave Canoe is poised to expand its reach, particularly in integrating mental health support with its cultural programming. ?Our vision is expansive: to create a brave space where healing is intertwined with learning, where every woman, every child feels seen and supported,? says Sharon. This vision is actively supported by the diverse expertise and passionate dedication of their board and elder advisor, guiding The Brave Canoe toward a future where it continues to serve as a model of collaboration.

Julie and Sharon invite the community to join them in this movement. ?Together, we are not just navigating currents?we are changing the flow. We are all part of this river, and every paddle stroke counts, because we are The Brave Canoe,? Sharon concludes, echoing the poetic spirit of Emily Pauline Johnson that inspires their journey.

By Sharon Rigby and Julie Elsdon Height