

EMILIE McKINNEY



ANISHINAABE BIMISHIMO - SOMERSET, MB

In a world where entrepreneurship is often dominated by large corporations, Emilie McKinney, an Anishinaabe entrepreneur hailing from Swan Lake First Nation, stands out with her company dedicated to preserving and innovating within her cultural heritage. With a captivating blend of tradition and modernity, Emilie's journey is not only about building a business but also about nurturing community and empowering future generations of Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Anishinaabe Bimishimo is a jingle cone manufacturing company, which may sound niche, but its impact reverberates across North America and beyond. "We supply, distribute, manufacture jingle cones to over 109 stores across North America, providing jingle cones to jingle dress dancers all the way from Nova Scotia to B.C., all the way up to Northwest Territories and all the way down to Mexico." Her customer base extends further to countries like France, Sweden, and South Korea, showcasing the global demand for her authentic products.

The journey of Anishinaabe Bimishimo started in Somerset, a small town near Emilie's home community. From these modest beginnings her enterprise has expanded globally, transitioning out of the startup phase, and beginning to scale up. Emilie has remained dedicated as she has meticulously planned and researched to make 2024 the most successful year, which includes plans to attend 40 events and expand her e-commerce platform.

What sets Anishinaabe Bimishimo apart is its deep roots in the community. "It's a community brand," she emphasizes. "It takes a village to raise a child, which is very similar to a community raising a business."

Central to Emilie's mission is authenticity. It took 7 months of research to find the exact formula for her jingle cone metal to mirror the original craftsmanship. As the sole jingle cone manufacturing company in North America, her dedication to preserving heritage is evident.

Emilie's inspiration stems from her grandparents, whose resilience and adherence to Anishinaabe values continue to guide her. Entrepreneurship is an extension of her familial legacy, deeply ingrained across generations. "I come from a long bloodline of entrepreneurship," she reflects, underscoring her intimate familiarity with the entrepreneurial spirit. "Growing up with my dad being one, and my grandpa, and so forth, I've really grasped their lifestyle and then I've implemented it with my own ideas and creativity."

Despite her successes, Emilie remains aware of the challenges Indigenous female entrepreneurs face. Reflecting on her own journey, she acknowledges the resilience and strength inherent in Indigenous women.

One of the biggest challenges Emilie faced was in 2018 when the cost to produce jingle cones tripled. She lobbied governments at various levels, and from this learned what it takes to fight for your rights as an entrepreneur. McKinney's ongoing partnership with

the Dakota Ojibway Community Futures Development Corporation provided instrumental support in navigating the challenges of the startup phase and has continued unlocking unforeseen opportunities. Emilie continues to pave the way for Indigenous entrepreneurs and her story serves as an inspiration to all who aspire to blend heritage with innovation on the path to success.

Her advice to young girls is this, "Listen to your matriarchs, look up to your matriarchs, and essentially grasp whatever advice that your matriarchs from back home are telling you." Words and wisdom from elders are given from a place of love and encouragement and should be embraced with gratitude. "There's no better love out there than the love that comes from your own mother."



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