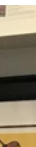


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WE CARE FOR EVERYONE

Looking after her community: meet Indigenous nurse practitioner Mino Cotter

RANJIT SUNDUR

Posted November 16, 2022

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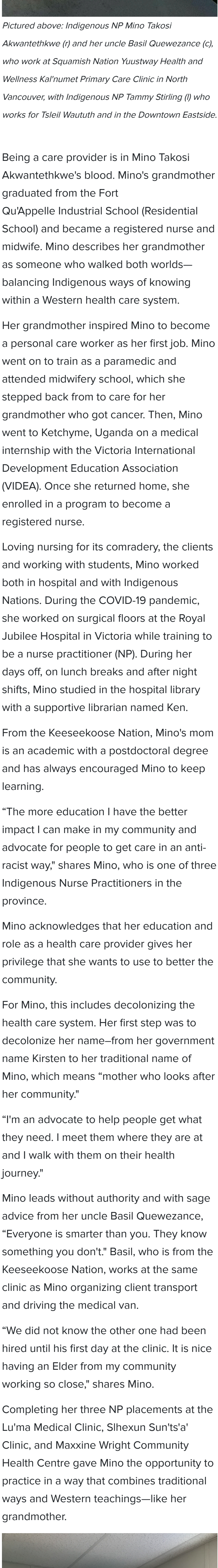
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Pictured above: Indigenous NP Mino Takosi Akwantethkwe (r) and her uncle Basil Quewezance (c), who work at Squamish Nation Yuustway Health and Wellness Kal'numet Primary Care Clinic in North Vancouver, with Indigenous NP Tammy Stirling (l) who works for Tsleil Waututh and in the Downtown Eastside.

Being a care provider is in Mino Takosi Akwantethkwe's blood. Mino's grandmother graduated from the Fort Qu'Appelle Industrial School (Residential School) and became a registered nurse and midwife. Mino describes her grandmother as someone who walked both worlds—balancing Indigenous ways of knowing within a Western health care system.

Her grandmother inspired Mino to become a personal care worker as her first job. Mino went on to train as a paramedic and attended midwifery school, which she stepped back from to care for her grandmother who got cancer. Then, Mino went to Ketchyme, Uganda on a medical internship with the Victoria International Development Education Association (VIDEA). Once she returned home, she enrolled in a program to become a registered nurse.

Loving nursing for its comradery, the clients and working with students, Mino worked both in hospital and with Indigenous Nations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she worked on surgical floors at the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria while training to be a nurse practitioner (NP). During her days off, on lunch breaks and after night shifts, Mino studied in the hospital library with a supportive librarian named Ken.

From the Keeseekoose Nation, Mino's mom is an academic with a postdoctoral degree and has always encouraged Mino to keep learning.

"The more education I have the better impact I can make in my community and advocate for people to get care in an anti-racist way," shares Mino, who is one of three Indigenous Nurse Practitioners in the province.

Mino acknowledges that her education and role as a health care provider gives her privilege that she wants to use to better the community.

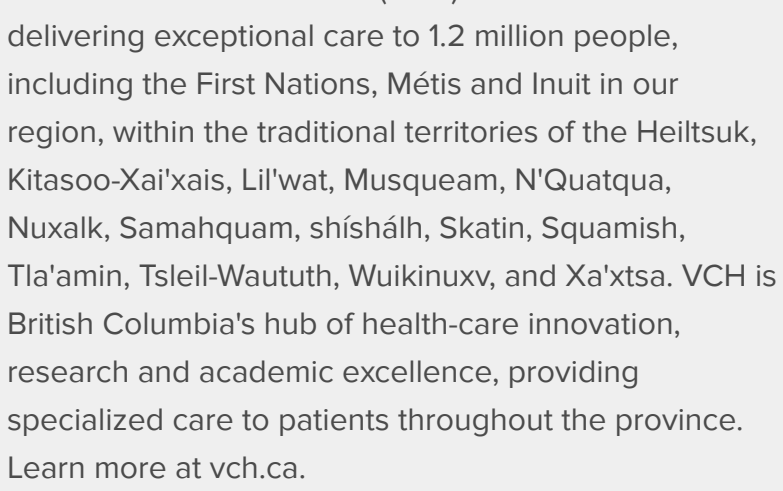
For Mino, this includes decolonizing the health care system. Her first step was to decolonize her name—from her government name Kirsten to her traditional name of Mino, which means "mother who looks after her community."

"I'm an advocate to help people get what they need. I meet them where they are at and I walk with them on their health journey."

Mino leads without authority and with sage advice from her uncle Basil Quewezance, "Everyone is smarter than you. They know something you don't." Basil, who is from the Keeseekoose Nation, works at the same clinic as Mino organizing client transport and driving the medical van.

"We did not know the other one had been hired until his first day at the clinic. It is nice having an Elder from my community working so close," shares Mino.

Completing her three NP placements at the Lu'ma Medical Clinic, Slhexun Sun'ts'a' Clinic, and Maxxine Wright Community Health Centre gave Mino the opportunity to practice in a way that combines traditional ways and Western teachings—like her grandmother.



At the Squamish Nation Yuustway Health and Wellness Kal'numet Primary Care Clinic in North Vancouver, Mino delivers primary care with a trauma-informed approach and in a culturally safe space. The walls of her visit room display both Indigenous and Western artwork as well as language translation for medical devices that are around.

Mino is Bear Clan. The Medicine Bear artwork by artist Norval Morrisseau means the most to Mino; it is placed right above her desk and is one of the first things seen when entering the room.

"I want people to feel safe when they walk in the door, that their traditional medicines and Indigenous ways of knowing will be respected by me."

She also makes an effort to source and share Indigenous resources, like the food guide, and traditional practices including smudging the office space every day.

Mino is finding satisfaction with her new career as a nurse practitioner. And when she is not caring for her community through her practice, one of the way she enjoys her community is paddle boarding with her partner.

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CHARLENE BROWN

November 18, 2022 11:14 am

i totally adore Indigenous women who show love for their people, keep rising Mino, your name is very fitting.

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FRANCES DOWNEY

November 18, 2022 09:05 am

Thank-you for breaking colonization and making medicine available. We all have a responsibility to make medicine accessible and to treat people with respect and honour. I also thank-you for educating me; you are correct "Everyone is smarter than you. They know something you don't."

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