

HER STORY: Zhaagooji'iwe

(aka Marie-Adele Peterson aka Zhaboonigan)



Zhaagooji'iwe is a long-term and valued member of the Wasychigan Hill Indian Reserve. She was born on June 10, 1960 to Dawn and Frank Peterson, and was named Marie-Adele. She experienced tragedy early on when her parents were killed in a car crash on November 12, 1964. She was then adopted and raised by Veronique and Pierre St. Pierre who took on the challenge of raising this young girl who had a moderate developmental delay.

Life on the reserve came with risks. Despite the care and mindful watch of the elders in the community, Marie-Adele was raped and physically assaulted by two white youths and became known from that point on as Zhaboonigan, or "needle" or "going through thing." With the support of her family community and counselling from [Little Warriors](#) centre, she found methods for coping with the assault. The Little Warriors organization of Canada supports women and youth who have been sexually abused. When asked about the

recovery process, Zhaagooji'iwe' said, "I needed time. I healed with sweats and ceremony of my people. Veronique, she helped me. She is gentle. But, the pain never goes away altogether."

By taking the name, [Zhaagooji'iwe](#), or "she defeats or overcomes people" she no longer allows the assault or the perpetrators to define her identity. Encouraged by Veronique, she began to volunteer at the center. She giggles nervously when describing her role: "I just sit with the kids. They like to sit and tell stories. They are safe with me." Observing Zhaagooji'iwe at the centre, it is quickly apparent that the children are drawn to her. She is met by a little girl who calls her "Zha-zha" and immediately takes her by the hand to the drawing tables. Sometimes Zhaagooji'iwe shares parts of her story with the children, but mostly she gives them comfort by just being present.

Zhaagooji'iwe lives with her life partner, Raye Feathertail whom she met at Little Warriors. They live next to Veronique, have two tabby cats, and play bingo at the local hall.

By sharing her experiences and healing path, she has made a positive contribution to society and to future generations. Zhaagooji'iwe's journey shows us how healing can take place from receiving support from the community and giving it back. Together we are stronger.