

Olivia Beausoleil is an incoming Doctor of Medicine student at the Toronto Metropolitan University School of Medicine. A recent graduate from McMaster University's Bachelor of Science Kinesiology program and member of the school's women's football team, Olivia also co-founded McMaster's Indigenous Student-Athlete Council, served as an MNO Infinite Reach Facilitator for two years, and advocated for Indigenous health awareness through McMaster's Indigenous Health Movement club. For her hard work and commitment to her community, Olivia recently received the President's Award of Excellence in Student Leadership from McMaster University!

We recently had the chance to ask Olivia a few questions to introduce her to everyone and delve into her inspiring work with the McMaster community!

Q: Hi Olivia, tell me about yourself! What do you like to do for fun in your spare time?

A: I would say I enjoy exercising, spending time with family and friends, and being outside - going for walks with my dog and mom, going for runs, or spending time on Georgian Bay and swimming. I love going to concerts to see my favourite artists, so mostly country music. I'm also looking forward to doing some more travelling!

Q: You co-founded McMaster's Indigenous Student-Athlete Council with Emma Robertson, another student, to advocate for Indigenous student athletes and strengthen representation and visibility on campus. Why was this work so important for you?

A: I think for me, the biggest thing was balancing and navigating multiple identities within this space, as a Métis woman, athlete and student. Often times, it can feel like you have to fit a certain stereotype, but I have come to learn how to navigate these complexities. It has allowed me to create a network and support system of fellow Indigenous athletes who are experiencing similar things within their respective sports. It was also important to me to create representation of Indigenous athletes within these high-level environments and be that role model for others that might see themselves in me, especially in a space where Indigenous peoples did not historically belong. It was meaningful for me to uplift and empower others, drawing attention to relevant issues of Indigenous sport, as sport was historically used as a tool of assimilation. I wanted to use both my passion for sport and Métis identity as a means to create a source of empowerment in university athletics.

Q: You were a running back with McMaster's women's football team for four years. How did this experience change you?

A: My time at McMaster would have been completely different without football. Growing up, I was in love with the sport of basketball, competing in elite leagues (JUEL & AAU) with the hopes of pursuing it in university. However, I was faced with huge obstacles that came with covid and did not have the opportunity to play any longer at this level. This presented a new path of women's football. I knew I wanted to still compete at a

high-level in a team sport, and I was living in a single room during first-year feeling pretty lonely at the time with covid. This prompted me to make one of my best decisions to try-out. This sport has provided me with endless opportunities to represent women in sport, especially in a male-dominated sport, as well as create meaningful relationships and form leadership skills. My team was comprised of my now lifelong best friends. It provided an outlet from the high demands of school with its high level of commitment and pursuit of excellence. From starting as a rookie to my fourth year, I grew into a leader as offensive captain during the 5s season. I have learned so much about myself and developed a huge passion for this sport and being to share that with other female athletes is something indescribable. It has reaffirmed that sport will always be a part of my life even if I am not competing at this level again.

Q: You also served as the student field therapist with McMaster's women's varsity fast pitch team. How did this come about? What did the role teach you?

A: I was fortunate enough to be presented with the opportunity to translate my course-based knowledge of sport injuries into practice within the McMaster Sports Medicine program. This required me to attend and act as a first-responder to all of the team's practices and games. I supported high-level athletes alongside healthcare professionals, overseeing physical and psychological tasks, including athletic taping, manual therapy, injury assessments, and leading warm-ups/cooldowns. The role taught me how to be adaptable and be open to new opportunities, especially in fast paced environments that rely on me. The team I worked with made me feel so welcomed and that I was a part of the team, which truly made the experience so meaningful.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about the importance of sports in your life. What do they represent for you?

A: Sports are everything to me and have played a foundational role in my life. Sports are so much more than just athletic performance, but also have created lifelong relationships and transferrable skills into all aspects of my life. From as long as I can remember, I have been involved in sports. I owe my passion for sports to my father as he has provided me with endless opportunities to pursue the things I love from a young age. I'd say I play for myself but also for him. From driving me to practices as a child, to still attending my games in university, he is my biggest role model and support. In other words, sport acts as a means of connection and support. Sports have been a source of identity, community, and pursuit of a goal. Participating in sports has meant navigating spaces where I was the only Indigenous person on the team. Yet even in those moments, sports grounded me and gave me a sense of belonging and resilience. Ultimately, sports represent my drive, resilience, balance and passion for well-being, acting as a form of self-expression.

Q: You were also involved in McMaster's Indigenous Health Movement, a student-run club that educates students and community members on Indigenous health. What has your experience been like with this? Why are topics surrounding Indigenous health so important?

A: As an Indigenous student, being part of a student-run group that centers Indigenous health has allowed me to contribute to work that reflects my values of community, cultural safety, and holistic well-being to bring in my Métis perspective. Through IHM, I've engaged in initiatives that aim to educate peers, create inclusive learning spaces, and amplify Indigenous voices in healthcare conversations. Collaborating with other passionate students, elders, and community partners has strengthened my commitment to advocacy and shaped how I envision my role as a future doctor. Topics surrounding Indigenous health are crucial because they address the longstanding impacts of colonization and systemic inequities that continue to affect Indigenous communities. These conversations are about improving access to care, restoring trust, promoting self-determination, and integrating traditional knowledge with Western healthcare systems. Being part of IHM has deepened my understanding of these issues and reinforced my dedication to supporting culturally relevant health practices.

Q: A few years ago, you became an MNO Summer Youth Program Facilitator. What are your memories of this work?

A: Becoming an MNO Summer Youth Program Facilitator was a gateway for me to reclaim and reconnect with my Métis culture. It was one of the first opportunities where I could immerse myself in cultural teachings while also giving back to the community. Through this role, I developed and led Métis cultural activities, coordinated with MNO branches and citizens, and helped create welcoming spaces for youth to learn and engage. One of the most meaningful aspects was connecting with fellow Métis students across the province. We bonded over shared lived experiences, including the complexities of navigating our identities. Highlights include attending the Youth Leadership Conference, where I was inspired by the strength, wisdom, and determination of young Métis leaders. As I complete my final summer with as a SYP facilitator this summer, I am reminded how this experience prompted a deeper commitment to cultural advocacy and youth empowerment, which continues to guide my passions.

Q: You were also an MNO Infinite Reach Facilitator for two years. How did you first learn about the Infinite Reach Network, and what made you want to register for it?

A: I first learned about the Infinite Reach Network through my connection with the Métis Nation of Ontario while working as a Summer Youth Program Facilitator. Being part of the MNO community opened my eyes to the many opportunities available to connect with and support other Métis students across the province. I chose to register to build community and foster belonging within post-secondary spaces, where Indigenous representation and more specifically, Métis representation, can feel limited. I wanted to be part of a network that uplifts Métis students, celebrates the heritage, and provides a strong support system.

Q: What are the benefits of Infinite Reach for post-secondary Métis students? What is unique about what it offers students? How did it help you?

A: Infinite Reach offers Métis post-secondary students a sense of community, cultural connection, and mentorship that is often missing in mainstream academic spaces. One of its greatest benefits is the opportunity to connect with fellow Métis students through a province-wide solidarity network. As a facilitator at McMaster, I helped organize cultural events and connect incoming students with important resources and supports. It helped me build leadership skills and gave me the chance to give back, creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for Métis students on campus.

Q: What was a highlight from your time as an Infinite Reach Facilitator?

A: A highlight from my time as an Infinite Reach Facilitator was the opportunity to learn alongside fellow Métis students from across the province and then bring that knowledge back to my McMaster community. Sharing Métis culture with those who may not be familiar, including non-Indigenous students and even some of my First Nations peers, was incredibly meaningful in a way that sparked understanding and respect. I was also fortunate to have a co-facilitator at McMaster (shoutout Ethan) who shared similar goals and passions, and was from the Georgian Bay Métis community like me. This connection made the experience even more impactful as we were able to support one another and amplify each other's voices.

Q: Who would you recommend Infinite Reach to?

A: I would recommend Infinite Reach to any Métis student who is passionate about sharing their culture or even just beginning to explore and reconnect with it. Whether they're deeply rooted in their identity or just starting to learn more, Infinite Reach offers a supportive community and a space to grow. It acts as a gateway to meaningful opportunities, cultural learning, and strong connections. Being part of the network can open doors to leadership, mentorship, and the chance to make a real impact on campus.

Q: How has embracing your Métis background had an impact on your life and how you think of yourself?

A: Embracing my Métis background has been foundational in learning more about myself and my identity, while simultaneously reclaiming my culture and shaping my path toward a career in medicine. It has connected me more deeply to my family, my Métis community, and beyond, specifically grounding me in relationships that reflect values of care and reciprocity. It has allowed me the opportunity to greater appreciate how much a strong support network contributes to one's success. Understanding my heritage has helped me connect with community, land, and culture in meaningful ways. It's also given me clarity and confidence as I navigate spaces where Métis voices are underrepresented. Rather than seeing my identity as something I carry alone, I see it as a source of strength that informs my values, actions, and aspirations, more importantly as I work toward becoming a community-driven physician to serve the communities that raised me, including those that are underserved like rural and Indigenous. Overall, my Métis background affirms my commitment to advocating for Indigenous health.

Q: How have you overcome adversity? What advice would you offer to a younger version of yourself or younger students currently battling through adversity?

A: Overcoming adversity has meant learning how to stand strong in who I am, even in spaces where I've felt misunderstood or underrepresented. As a Métis woman in sport, academia, and healthcare, I've often had to navigate systems that weren't built with people like me in mind. Rather than letting that discourage me, I've used those moments to fuel a sense of empowerment and be that role model for others. Adversity has taught me resilience, but more importantly, it's taught me to reach out and lean on mentors, family, and community.

A major turning point in my life was overcoming the hardship of the passing of my grandmother. I found strength in the memories I shared with her. I was never really someone who was emotional. The whole experience caused me to release my thoughts, feelings, and expressions more often. I leaned on friends and family for support, allowing myself to express my emotions openly and without judgment. It has allowed me to be in touch with who I am and create meaningful new values. One, in particular, is forming a solid bond with my grandfather. He has become one of the most important and closest people in my life as family is my greatest value, cherishing the current relationships I have and changing my perspective. While overcoming the adversity of losing a loved one is a deeply personal journey, I found strength in embracing the love and support of those around me. With this said, the advice I would offer is to let yourself feel and let yourself lean on others as healing isn't weakness.

Q: You've received the President's Award of Excellence in Student Leadership from McMaster University! Congratulations once again. What does this award mean to you?

A: Being established in 1993, the award acts as a prestigious honour as both a testament and a reflection that my advocacy and involvement within the McMaster community is recognized and meaningful. Through my work, I have built a strong support system and network in a community beyond my own, creating connections that foster belonging and empowerment. This award highlights the impact of my dedication to uplifting others through my extracurriculars, scholarly, and community efforts, especially in spaces where Indigenous voices have historically been underrepresented. It inspires me to continue advocating for positive change and meaningful relationships across diverse communities. It reaffirms that pursuing things I am passionate about creates a long-lasting impact on others than myself.

Q: You're gearing up to attend Toronto Metropolitan University School of Medicine for your Doctor of Medicine in the fall! What are you most excited for?

A: It's so hard to pick just one thing, but I'm especially excited about the opportunity to translate both my Kinesiology background and Métis identity into my medical education to help inform more inclusive and culturally grounded health practices. I'm looking forward to learning from others within TMU's diverse and collaborative environment,

which I know will support my growth as a culturally competent and compassionate physician. I'm also excited to build a strong network and community of fellow Indigenous medical students and current physicians, and to engage in the program's hands-on, practical learning opportunities that reflect real-world care. As part of its inaugural class and one of the few first Indigenous students, I am excited and honoured to represent the Métis community in being a trailblazer and contribute to the founding principles by paving the way.