

My earliest memory of The Anti-Poverty Project (TAPP) was that I almost didn't show up to the interview because I had misjudged how long it would take me to get there, and I was running late. Although I did not have much experience with jobs, I knew that being late to an interview was probably one of the biggest "no-no's" but decided to give it a shot anyways.

Walking into the office, feeling forlorn and not entirely optimistic, I was greeted by Ron Kellestine, I apologized for being late and he responded that what mattered was that I was there. This was probably one of my first experiences with feeling compassion from a stranger, something that has stuck with me throughout my enriched career that has spanned a decade since my tenure with TAPP.

I come from what society would call a disadvantaged background – I prefer to call it the catalyst for success. What I lacked in economic and social status, I made up for in fierce determination and commitment to succeed. But that day back in 1999, I still had a long way to go.

From the beginning, Ron and Jeannette never let me doubt my potential and indeed taught me that all of my potential to succeed was locked away beneath a layer of tapestry that was fabricated throughout my life experiences. To this day, I believe that one of the greatest gifts that I learned from TAPP was to refuse to be a victim.

There were times where I dreaded going to work because I knew the probability of having to face my own demons, whether through the advanced work that Ron entrusted me with or the personal development sessions that Jeannette provided us with. Never before had I looked at myself in the mirror and seen the true reflection of what I was. Being a survivor of physical and mental abuse, coming from a background of extreme poverty, alcoholism and addiction was only a façade – who I *really* was is who I am today – a proud, successful and determined Aboriginal woman.

Today, I am a strong anti-poverty and First Nations rights advocate that participates in many speaking engagements across this country and oftentimes people ask me what inspired me to do the work that I do, and I always confidently reply that Ron and Jeannette are my true inspirations. Never before had anyone believed in me, or was willing to give me a chance.

Not only did they give me a chance, but they encouraged me to succeed. Before my time at TAPP, I was on a quick descent into becoming a statistic. It wasn't something that I had envisioned for myself, but I did not have the tools necessary to succeed in society. The TAPP program, not only gave the tools to me, but taught me how to use them.

To this day, I am in awe of Ron and Jeannette's devotion to equipping countless people with the tools necessary to succeed in all aspects of society. I offer many thanks and indebted gratitude to the Creator for putting them on my life's path – I don't know where I would have been without TAPP.

Geraldine