



# FRONTIER CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Profile Series

*Profile of:*

## JOSIE ALEC

***"People are doing it without even realising it.  
We're going to change a generation."***

For Indigenous Australian entrepreneur Josie Alec, the Indigenous community of Australia should not stew in victimhood due to disadvantaged backgrounds but should seize business opportunities when they see them.

"We don't have the luxury of despair, it's time to rise up and create value within ourselves and do what we do best," said Alec, an Indigenous Australian entrepreneur (and passionate teacher, artist, and singer-songwriter) who founded her own business The Jummi Factory, a homegrown cosmetic business, earlier last year. Alec said these words in a March 2018 news interview with the West Australian newspaper.



The business is based on utilizing the Indigenous Pilbara plant, which is widely seen by Indigenous Australian peoples as possessing healing properties. The factory manufactures Pilbara plant-based cosmetics and products, including a lip gloss and the insect bite-resistant bush rub for which Alec has become popular. Prior to the addition of the factory, her business was known as Indijiarts Cultural Creativeness and it focused on the Pilbara plant.

"The whole story behind the bush remedies is about putting that ancient practice into people's hands," said Alex, in an Australian blog post called Fingerprint for Success that focuses on studies of entrepreneurs.

Alec's entrepreneurial prowess has certainly been recognized in Australia and internationally. Accepted into Investible's Business Accelerator program (in partnership with Indigenous Business Australia), she won second place and was chosen to represent Australia at the Overseas Talent Entrepreneurship Program in Beijing.

Alec – like many Indigenous Australians – is no stranger to a troubled background, although she has not allowed that to hold her back, but instead she has leveraged it to act as a motivator. Alec was taken from her family at a very early age as part of the Australia's so-called "Stolen Generation." (like Canada's so-called "Sixties Scoop"). She was raised by a non-Indigenous family but was eventually reunited with her Indigenous mother many years later. Alec said her mother was a traditional healer in her community. Her mother was known as a spiritual healer as well.

"My passion and desire to heal comes from the long line of healers I come from," she believes, in an interview with Australian media. Like many Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs, she maintains strong connection to her cultural identity and it has infused her business approach and philosophies. Her calling as a spiritual healer became more intense when her mother passed away in 2011.

"We need to honour our elders, we need to honour the place we live, the plants, the animals and the ecology of how the land is sustainable, our culture revolves around that," she said in an interview with the West Australian newspaper. "It is about sustainability, it is about having a social impact business to give back to the community."

Creating opportunity and professional development among Indigenous youth is also central to her business mission, she said. "We want to teach kids how to become professional botanists, formulators, chemists, anything. Lots of things can happen from here. "Instead of sending them away,

we need to make our products in the Pilbara.”

Having returned to the community as a school teacher, she quit her job in 2016 and started The Jummi Factory after realizing there was a gap in the market for natural skin care remedies, which she had already been making for seven years with her existing business. The next step was to build a manufacturing facility, which she did in 2018. Her next goal is to exploit additional export opportunities in China. One year prior to when she established her factory-based business, Alec was honing her business skills and knowledge. She was one of 15 business owners across Australia selected to take part in an intensive two-month Indigenous Business Australia business accelerator boot camp.

In a May 2017 West Australian news story, Alec recalled her journey to her current business.

“It has been a rollercoaster ride so far and now I’ve got a really huge opportunity to go over to Sydney, take my cultural wisdom over and work with experts to bring my business together and bringing it back to the Pilbara,” she said.

The news story also identified that for Alec Indijiarts (her first business just prior to the factory-based one) is more than just a business, it is a future that she intends to pass on to her immediate family. She already has announced plans to have her daughter and granddaughter take over the business one day when she retires.

In a January 2018 news story in the Australian Financial Review publication, Alec said the following about start-up business accelerator programs she was involved in.

“Entrepreneur and indigenous Australian Josie Alec has a message for policymakers and business groups - stop viewing Indigenous business owners as “ticker boxes”.

What Alec meant by the comment was that

she said that when she started attending business seminars run by local established companies to support the indigenous population, she felt like her attendance simply ticked a box, without receiving any ongoing business training support. Alec started her business by selling her products through her Facebook page, but confessed she did not know much about running a professional business at that time. She needed mentorship and guidance.

Business groups, she felt, were condescending to Indigenous peoples by simply “ticking off a box” for affirmative action-type purposes and not offering real meaningful support. She expressed in the Australian Financial Review that she felt that was the case for other areas involving Indigenous peoples in business.

“They take your ideas, and then you get nothing back. Accountability is an issue. There is often a lot of funding poured in, but sometimes there is no accountability, someone it is just ticking a box. That’s how it feels,” she said, in the interview.



To spur Indigenous Australian entrepreneurship, Alec supports meaningful accelerator programs designed for Indigenous entrepreneurs that includes real and virtual mentorship opportunities (the latter given new technologies and the remote locations of many Indigenous entrepreneurs). She has already supported an eight-week pilot program in which select entrepreneurs move to Sydney.

Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) estimates that Alec’s business is one among 12,000 Indigenous-owned businesses in



Australia and that number is growing. In her interview with the Australian Financial Review, Alex said that the number will continue to grow as more Australian Indigenous peoples seek self-sufficiency and opportunities.

“There is a big shift in indigenous businesses nationally and in how we’re going to keep ourselves economically sustainable and people are coming out of the woodwork and starting businesses,” she said, in the interview.

“People are doing it without even realising it. We’re going to change a generation.”



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from northeastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations. For over two years, he covered House standing committees as well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.

