

Boozhoo,

My name is Alexandera Houchin; I am an enrolled citizen of the Fond du Lac Band. My mother is Christine Houchin, a child adopted out of our band in the early 1970s. Our return home is still new; I finally found my way home just a few years ago. My mother has been home for more than a decade. My grandmother is Faye Ann Greensky. I have been selected as a Fellow with an organization called Lead For Minnesota (LFMN). A fellowship is often a program in which graduates perform research, work on solutions to a problem, create community-focused organizations, and/or participate in training to support the growth of the fellow. Through a rigorous application process, I continued to make it through each round and have found a home in the Planning Division, working with Jason Holliday.

I recently graduated from the University of Minnesota, Duluth after studying chemistry, American Indian Studies, and Tribal Administration and Governance. One of my main career goals is to carry on with education and become a dentist. Covid-19 has changed the timeline of this endeavor, though it is still my ultimate goal.

I write to you with a full heart. Bicycles have saved my life. I've lost more than 100 pounds, developed self-confidence, I learned how to endure, I learned about the natural world, I learned how to navigate, I've pushed myself to do things I never believed that I could have and ultimately, I came to understand love, *Zaagi'idiwin*, for myself and for others. **I believe that every single person who wants to have a bicycle should have a bicycle.** Further, that there is a bicycle out there for everyone. I've been incredibly fortunate to have been able to spend the last 10 years traveling, in some capacity, all over this country, upon my bicycle. I've been a bike mechanic, bike salesperson, bike messenger, bike food delivery gal, welder, machinist, and most recently have settled into the role of an ultra-endurance bike racer. I've raced my bike from Alberta, Canada to the Mexican border and in shorter races across multiple states, earning sponsorships from multiple small business owners across the industry that now supply me with everything I need to be a better bike racer. Much of what drives me in racing is my connection to Nahgahchiwanong, my identity as an Anishinaabe woman, and the legacy of endurance that precedes me. I saw first hand the ways in which my mother and auntie endured and later learned how their mother and hers before did the same thing. I am connected to all those who came before me and to those who will come after. I want to bring my relationships with the outdoor industry to Nahgahchiwanong so that the world may see more indigenous people lining up at all types of starting lines.

I am much more an observer than a leader and still a student of those wiser than myself. Perhaps, if we are all humble enough to see ourselves as students, we can then all evolve into teachers alongside each other. As someone who hasn't always had access to the equipment necessary to participate in outdoor adventure, I wonder who else hasn't, what you think it would take to provide that access, and what you wish to see in your community. I have created a survey and am asking for anyone who is interested to please fill out the Google Form.

I wish to be fully transparent in this endeavor. I do not want to do this *for* my community, but *with* my community. I have a vision; I would like to see a place rooted in Anishinaabe values where we can learn from and support each other on our journeys to becoming our best selves, to leading The Good Life. One of the ways to travel this path can be by bicycle. A bicycle collective serves as a hub for this process. DitiBise Bicycle Collective would offer education on bicycle repair, safe routes, local trails and skill-building for various types of riding. We would discover and create pathways towards other education opportunities, a safe space for all to be connected with people who are invested in their education, space where fitness and wellbeing can be shared together, and a place where we can become empowered to chase our dreams. This would also be a space for cultural education. The collective would accept donations, repair those donations, and sell those bicycles. There would be work-trade opportunities to earn a bicycle and/or bicycle parts. These ideas are no way all-encompassing; I want your input. I am but one person, with one experience.

I am looking to hear as many Indigenous voices as possible; I don't know how to reach everyone. Though the collective is for everyone, regardless of citizenship to a tribal nation; I currently seek Indigenous voices from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. I am looking to spread the word and seek any advice, guidance, input, interest, etc. I am available in person, telephone, text message, email, mail, or internet video platform for further follow up. Following community input, I look to use the voices of our community to reach out to the outdoor industry to build bridges.

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