

# ENGAGING PEOPLE AND GROUPS THROUGHOUT THE BOW VALLEY THROUGH ARTS AND CREATIVITY.



Photos by Kristy Wolfe Photography

## Community Profile

### THE SMALLEYES FAMILY

If you ever have the pleasure of meeting members of the Smalleyes family, you're sure to come away with a strong sense of what "home" means to them.

This extended family of performers, artists and community leaders bring along their Stoney culture wherever they go, and that's both enlightening and deeply compelling—not just given their diverse talents and abilities, but because they share it with such courage and generosity of spirit.

This is what makes the Smalleyes such an integral part of the big artsPlace family, and why the Stoney Christmas performances they've held since 2017 have been so incredibly successful. Whenever the Smalleyes perform, artsPlace is completely transformed; it becomes their space for the evening, and all who attend get to experience that same intimate welcome from the family, and a window into Stoney community and culture.

The shows capture the joy of the holidays through Indigenous music, dance and storytelling, and celebrates the Christmas story from a Stoney perspective. With mom, dad and all eight children coming together, along with aunts, uncles and cousins, to help with the performance, it's truly a full family affair—everyone plays a part!

The Smalleyes' mother, Samantha, designs and hand-makes beadwork for the show, as well as all the beautiful and colourful regalia worn by dancers. Samantha also teaches her beading skills through classes. "At first I was a little secretive about sharing that cultural knowledge," she admits, "but not so much anymore; that's how we tell our story."

artPlace is proud to play a role in helping to create a safe and respectful space for this cultural sharing. By telling their story, the Smalleyes family help others develop understanding for Indigenous ways of being and knowing and support a shared respect for Indigenous traditions. Through this cross-cultural exchange, the Stoney culture stays vibrant and vital; passed down from generation to generation.

The youngest son Hardy (pictured on this report's cover) is a top-notch performer already and brings a wealth of experience and confidence far beyond his years, gained through dancing at powwows across the country.

Asked why they were so keen to produce the show, Jeanesa, the eldest daughter and the group's artistic director, says it's all about bringing their culture to the wider community. "We need to share our culture more," she says, adding that she was recently accepted into the Indigenous 150+ National Youth Ambassador Programme and plans to complete an 8-week leadership course this year.

She hopes those new skills will help her bring more culture to her own community, especially young people. "I'd love to run a full youth camp, where we could teach our culture to Stoney youth," she says, noting it is important for Indigenous youth to have a deep understanding of their own culture.

As for young Hardy, he says he especially likes the shows at artsPlace because he gets to perform with everyone he loves—all his family and friends. "It feels like home," he says.

## Indigenous Connections

Since the program launched in 2017, Indigenous Connections has led to a surge of First Nations programming at artsPlace – from captivating Indigenous works in film, theatre, visual arts, dancing and drumming, to cross-cultural learning programs in Stoney culture, to youth outreach in Morley through the Youth Arts Collective, to artist mentorship through the RISE Emerging Artist Program.

*Indigenous Connections Program is generously supported by Rogers Communications, Robert and Priscilla Janes, The Banff Canmore Community Foundation, The Rozsa Foundation, and an anonymous donor.*