



Melanie Mark: engaged in community. JON MURRAY—THE PROVINCE

A cultural epicentre

NETWORK: B.C. men and women tell it the way it is

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Melanie Mark
Advocate and consultant on violence and child and youth sexual exploitation; board member, Urban Native Youth Association; fundraiser, proposed Native Youth Centre, nativeyouthcentre.ca

Native Youth Centre: why?
“It will be unique, developed and led by youth, youth-friendly. It will be a place to call home, a hub of activity and a model for delivering programs and services — cultural, recreational, educational, entrepreneurial. I was that kid who could have used that solid program. My daughter will benefit.”

What’s the need?
“Huge. Native youth are the

fastest growing demographic group in Canada. Suicide and violence plague many aboriginal communities across the country, mostly because of low self-esteem. We need to give them a reason to be hopeful.”

Huge project?

“Incredible. Without this centre, many more youths would fall through the cracks.”

You: survivor?

“All colonized people are survivors. I’ve experienced many struggles but they helped raise my awareness of social injustice — especially affecting children and youth.”

Native issues: in your blood?

“My parents are Nisga’a, Gitksan, Cree and Ojibway, French and Scottish. I am interested in aboriginal politics and the future of aboriginal people in Canada. I would prefer to see more youth engaged in their community, with an emphasis on their attributes and talents rather than negative labels and stereotypes.”

Perfect day off?

“Catching up with friends, enjoying food I didn’t have to cook myself, going dancing.”

Reward yourself?

“Retail therapy. Shopping is the reward. And, I’m turning 30 and I’ve made a point of planning to go on a cruise.”

Guilty pleasure?

“Trash TV: *The Contender*, *E.R.*, *America’s Top Model*, *Law and Order*.”

Worst habit?

“Snacking past midnight.”

Best trait?

“Being outspoken.”

Mom vs. student: what’s harder?

“Trying to do it all, volunteering in the community, spending time with family and friends and working on papers until the wee hours of the morning is certainly a balancing act. Also, sleep deprivation did not bring out the best in me. Thankfully, the endorphins helped me through. I have a beautiful, lively and healthy daughter, who is definitely an old soul.”

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