



Debra Alivisatos

Lives in Ottawa, Ontario

Aboriginal Heritage: Kahnawake Mohawk

RBC Award Winner: 1994-1995

Education: Bachelor of Education and Masters, Adult Education from University of New Brunswick

When Debra Alivisatos returned to university to pursue her Masters' degree, her goal was clear: "I wanted to work with or support Aboriginal people." While financial challenges could have dashed her aspirations, the RBC Award helped. "I had been working full time and it was difficult to give up that salary. Also, there was the added expense of day care for my daughter. The Award enabled me to do my Masters' degree and provided great financial relief," she recalls. "And I was very impressed with RBC for taking this initiative to support Aboriginal students. It showed their commitment to the advancement of Aboriginal people."

Debra grew up near the Kahnawake First Nation with an Anglophone father and a Kahnawake Mohawk mother who was a residential school survivor. After her undergraduate degree, she taught at the University of New Brunswick in their Aboriginal program. "Having a teaching background helped me communicate better and as an Aboriginal teacher I could understand my students' wishes and dreams. My university education helped prepare me to take on new challenges." Though she loved teaching, she knew that a post-graduate degree would enable her to do even more.

Debra is currently a Senior Negotiator at Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. "Negotiating self-government agreements is a way to move beyond the Indian Act," she believes, "to enable Aboriginal people to take greater control of their future."

As an outstanding example of someone who has taken control of her own future Debra's clear goals, strong commitment and openness to challenges have paved her way. She encourages others to use education as the foundation to build their own dreams.