



Verdann's tumultuous childhood—and the help she received from a United Way agency—put her on the path to helping others.

## How a pogo stick helped one woman find stability

A ball of energy with nowhere to go—that's how 25-year-old Verdann describes her younger self. Throughout her childhood, her unstable home life sent her bouncing from household to household, and city to city. By the time she was 17, Verdann had been couch surfing and sleeping on the street for years. "I was in a very confusing place at the time," she recalls.

Then a pogo stick changed her life.

Verdann signed up to be part of a recreational program offered by Red Fox Healthy Living Society. The agency, supported by United Way, works with vulnerable youth, many of whom are Indigenous just like her, to encourage active living—a vital building block for a healthy, strong start in life. "There was just something so awesome about jumping on that pogo stick," recalls Verdann. "It was really cool to do something physical and feel good; to learn a new skill and master it."

As her physical and emotional confidence increased, Verdann got involved as a youth leader at the agency. Today she works as a youth coordinator at the same place that jump-started her new life—and

her career. She believes her tumultuous upbringing helps her excel at her job, because she has deep empathy for the children and youth she works with. "I can understand where they're coming from and why they're acting the way they are," she says. "Many of these young people have nowhere to go during that crucial time after school and before dinner. They're often going to find something to do, and it may not be healthy or safe. I know this from experience."

Verdann is intensely proud to play a part in helping these young people try new things, hone their skills and gain confidence. She's also become a community role model—something she says she never had growing up. "I think it's positive for kids of all backgrounds to look up to an Indigenous person. Diverse role models are really important."

Today, Verdann has a stable job, money in her bank account and a comfortable home of her own in Vancouver's West End. Her future looks bright, thanks to United Way donors like you, who help local kids and youth put their best foot forward.

"My life is awesome," she says. "I'm still a ball of energy and I'm still figuring out where I want to go, but at least I have a sense of direction."



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