



Towards Truth and Reconciliation: The Story Behind LJ Turtle’s Acorns

LJ Turtle’s unique aromatherapy diffuser is raising funds to support Indigenous causes—and advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the process.

Lisa Byers still gets chills remembering that day in May 2021 when the discovery of a mass, unmarked grave at the Kamloops Indian Residential School first made headlines.

Like many Canadians, Lisa was heartbroken for the 215 dead Indigenous schoolchildren and their families—but being of Ojibwe heritage herself, the ache was like nothing they’d ever experienced before. As Lisa sat with the grief and attempted to process it, they felt a strong drive to take meaningful action—something beyond their typical annual cash donations and small-scale fundraising efforts to support Indigenous causes.

It was at this point that the Certified Aromatherapy Health Professional (CAHP) and owner of Guelph-based [LJ Turtle Aromatherapy and Accessories](#) (an online shop offering aromatherapy-related gifts and jewelry) took a long, hard look at their product offerings—trying to find one item they could sell to raise substantial funds for Indigenous causes. They wanted something that would both speak to people, but also symbolize a sense of hope—inspiring themselves, and others, to relentlessly push forward on this journey toward Truth and Reconciliation.

As Lisa scanned their workspace, in between the skincare products and lip savers, they spotted it—a colourful felt acorn.

About the Acorns

The homemade wool felt acorns double as aromatherapy diffusers and cute home décor items. Since Lisa started making and selling them as a fundraiser in 2021, they’ve been a hit with value-led customers and retailers.

Lisa felt this little item was perfect for their fundraising endeavours.

Just as an acorn is the seed of a future oak tree, the diffusers represent the idea that the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report of 2015 will one day come to fruition, and begin the healing process for all Indigenous people across Turtle Island.

Impact



\$25,000

Raised and donated to support Indigenous language programs

Since starting their fundraising efforts in 2021, Lisa has raised approximately \$25,000 for the WCC—a far cry from their original goal of \$1500. But the phenomenal financial success is only part of the project's impact.

Every acorn sold—every pitch asking retailers to carry the acorns—is an opportunity for Lisa to talk about Truth and Reconciliation, bring Indigenous causes to the foreground, and invite more people to support Indigenous education and equality. The interactions also offer supporters an opportunity to really think about what Truth and Reconciliation means to them as settlers on Turtle Island.

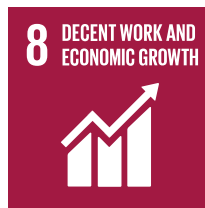
Advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Profits from acorn sales go toward the Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC)—a non-profit organization that serves to “preserve, promote and strengthen Indigenous language, culture, art and history”. Through innovative exhibits and programs, it aims to share the story of the Hodinohsho:ni people of the Eastern Woodlands. Money from LJ Turtle’s acorn sales have gone towards the organization’s Save the Evidence campaign (which contributed the restoration of the former Mohawk Institute Residential School in Brantford, Ontario) as well as the Cycle of Ceremonies language program.

Through Lisa’s fundraising efforts, they support four SDGs:



Support for Dwaḡeḡnada:da:t Language Centre at the Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC): Through an array of resources—including audio recordings of language excerpts, stories, speeches and songs—as well as community language events and preservation work, the centre works to educate others and preserve endangered languages through methods that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge.



Supporting Indigenous business, employment and decent work: As Lisa’s felt acorns have grown in popularity, Lisa has not only had an opportunity to pay herself a small salary, but they were even able to employ youth heading into the holiday season. As the social enterprise grows, and Lisa requires more help making the felt diffusers, they also plan to provide other Indigenous individuals with decent work.



Raising Awareness about Truth and Reconciliation: According to the UN, “in order for nations to flourish, equality and prosperity must be available to everyone.” This sentiment is echoed in Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Report, as well as its 94 calls to action. By supporting organizations like the WCC and talking about Truth and Reconciliation through each acorn sale, Lisa is raising awareness about Indigenous issues and reducing inequalities.



Using sustainable and natural materials and packaging: From the outset, Lisa has gone to great lengths to follow sustainable consumption and production practices. Because the acorns are made of all natural materials—wool and organic acorn tops—they are compostable. Additionally, from the outset, Lisa has sought to minimize all packaging waste by using cardboard envelopes, biodegradable tape and compostable packaging.

Moving Forward

Lisa's dream is to see their acorn fundraiser grow into a standalone social enterprise that can support a range of Indigenous organizations and causes, and even provide Indigenous people and youth with decent, meaningful and fair work.

For that to happen, Lisa must grow their list of value-led retail partners—which currently includes organizations like the Guelph Civic Museum, Guelph-based Kinsfolk Shop, and the Brantford, Ontario-based WCC gift shop. Lisa would love to see more university gift shops and other SDG-conscious organizations support the fundraiser by carrying the acorns. Lisa will also require additional funding to grow their social enterprise. Right now, they have their sights set on winning the Pow Wow Pitch—a North American pitch competition for Indigenous entrepreneurs that offers a grand prize of \$25,000. Lisa's acorns already made it to the semi-finals in 2022 and 2023, and were featured in the Pow Wow Pitch subscription box in 2022. With a bit of experience under their belt, Lisa plans to hone their pitching skills in 2024 and bring home the \$25,000 winnings, which Lisa will use to get their fundraiser in front of a larger audience.



Impact



Helping people connect with and learn about nature.

Even the act of making the acorns offers a host of benefits. When sales started to pick up, Lisa asked for help in finding acorn tops. Many people, including children from a Girl Guide group, stepped up to fulfill Lisa's request—which not only helped people reconnect with nature but, through video, Lisa was able to provide them with a bit of nature education as well.

For instance, not all acorn tops are the same—certain types of oak trees produce thin-topped caps, while others are thicker (Lisa's acorns require the thicker tops). At the same time, it's very important to only take the tops, as the "berry" of the acorn is a critical food source for squirrels, chipmunks and other woodland animals.