



# Hurst Legacy Award 2024: Seanice Dennis

The Hurst Legacy Award was founded in 2019 to honour the incredible work of our founder, Jim “Hurst” Hayhurst. While he passed away in early 2020, his legacy lives on in the Trails Alumni who are benefiting from his creation of Trails over 30 years ago. The Hurst Legacy Award is presented annually to a Trails Alumni who consistently lives the Trails mission. This award proves that we all have the capacity and the responsibility to give back, regardless of our age, background, or abilities.

## Seanice Dennis

Group: Midnight Mafia - 2005-2009

Facilitator with the Timberwolves | Trails Bursary

Recipient | AIM Mentor | RPN | Currently enrolled in BScN program



“Not another program!” was the first thing I thought when my mom came home and told me about Trails. She had seen the Trails van driving down the street and took down the number. My mom – always looking to widen our village and find positive opportunities for my siblings and me – chased this prospect. The next thing I knew, my mom was taking me to my Trails interview, which I intentionally tried to sabotage because I didn’t want to go. A few days later we got the call – my attempt to bomb the interview failed – I was in.

I grew up in Toronto as the middle child of a single-parent, first-generation-Canadian family. My mom worked hard to provide for us and was a strong advocate for me and my two siblings. Still, with a Learning Disability in a lower-income home, I can see why I would have been deemed “at-risk”. Although I was outspoken, it was easy for me to fall through the cracks and get left behind at school without the support I needed to succeed. I also felt a lot of undirected anger and struggled with self-expression at home and school.

One of the early challenges I needed to overcome upon arriving at Trails was feeling excluded because I came a year late and was from a different neighbourhood in Toronto. Still, by the end of my first summer, the same staff who interviewed me said, “I knew you would fit in perfectly.”

At Trails I experienced Facilitators who believed in me, wanted me to be successful and taught me things I would never learn anywhere else. The connections with staff, going on canoe trips, gliding across the snow on cross-country skis, being able to push myself and excelling in the wilderness gave me confidence that I lacked after years of struggling in the traditional school setting. One of my core memories is my overnight solo in Year 4, where I had to spend an entire night in the woods alone. Coming from the inner city where there were always lights, noise and people around, it was so scary and uncomfortable to be in absolute quietness and solitude. Being able to find peace and overcome my fears, showing that ultimately I could complete this difficult challenge was a huge boost to my confidence.

*“I am my own childhood dream. I am successful.”*

As I came to the end of my four years, I realized that a big chunk of my life would be gone soon, and so I applied to be a Leader-in-Training, my first step to growing wings and giving back. A few years later, I returned to Trails as a paid staff facilitator with the Timberwolves group. I loved being able to apply and teach the skills I had learned at Trails and connect with new participants. I wanted to help them appreciate their self-worth and be their authentic selves; the same way my facilitators had done for me.

Since then, my journey to spread my wings and become a contributing member of the community has included completing post-secondary school and working for seven years as a Registered Practical Nurse, mentoring three alumni through the AIM program and returning to school to complete my Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In the future, I would love to serve remote communities in Northern Ontario as a Registered Nurse.

I was also mentored by some incredible community members who saw something special in me and provided love and guidance. To anyone who has ever supported Trails as a donor or volunteer, I hope you know how much it means to participants and alumni to know that complete strangers believe in us and enable us to succeed.

Recently, I attended a Trails alumni event in an Executive Suite at a Blue Jays Game. As I stood there looking around, I realized... I am my own childhood dream. I am successful. I am something. I was often told that I would never amount to anything, but Trails believed in me and saw past the hurt child who showed up at age 12, and they have continued to believe in me which allows me to spread my wings and pay it forward.