Maggie MacDonnell grew up in rural Nova Scotia and after completing her Bachelor's degree, spent five years volunteering and working in Sub-Saharan Africa, largely in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention.

After completing her Master's degree she found her country was beginning to wake up to the decades of abuse that Canadian Indigenous people have lived through, including assaults on the environment and enormous economic and social inequality. As such, she sought out opportunities to teach indigenous communities in Canada and for the last six years has been a teacher in a fly-in Inuit village called Salluit, nestled in the Canadian Arctic. This is home to the second northernmost Inuit community in Quebec, with a population of just over 1300 - it cannot be reached by road, only by air. In winter temperatures are minus 25C. There were six suicides in 2015, all affecting young males between the ages of 18 and 25.

Due to the harsh conditions, there are very high rates of teacher turnover which is a significant barrier to education in the Arctic. Many teachers leave their post midway through the year, and many apply for stress leave. Her current school has no Principal as he left after six weeks on stress leave.

There are tremendous gender issues in the Inuit region of Nunavik where teenage pregnancies are common, high levels of sexual abuse exist, and gender roles often burden young girls with large domestic duties. Maggie therefore created a life skills programme specifically for girls which has seen a 500 per cent improvement in girls' registration in life skills programmes that were formerly dominated by boys. This includes securing over $30,000 in funding to prepare hot meals for the community. She also created a partnership with the daycare centre where her students would work in the classrooms with experienced day care workers. They would gain valuable on the job mentorship and improve their understanding of early childhood education. Maggie also secured over $20,000 for an in-school nutrition program where students prepare healthy snacks for their fellow students.

Also, in areas of high deprivation, isolation and limited resources, teenagers often turn to drinking and smoking, even drugs and self-harm, as forms of escape and release. She therefore quickly established a fitness centre which has become a hub for youth and adults in the local community who are embracing a healthier lifestyle. It is relieving stress, helping young people grow stronger physically and mentally.

Maggie's whole approach has been about turning students from "problems" to "solutions" through initiatives such as "acts of kindness" which has dramatically improved school attendance. Specific examples include: running a community kitchen, attending suicide prevention training and hiking through national parks to understand environmental stewardship. In addition, her students, despite their own challenges, have fundraised over $37,000 for Diabetes Prevention. Maggie has also been a temporary foster parent in the community, including to some of her own students.