

# Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children & Family Services Society



## Annual Report 2020-2021



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## Message from the Board of Directors President



On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to tell you about the fiscal year 2020-21. It was definitely a strange year for everyone, as we were challenged by the pandemic and forced to find new ways to serve our communities and families. It was also challenging for many of us personally, as we grappled with isolation and fear of the disease, especially the fear of it affecting our elders.


We were forced to cancel many of the cultural events we usually have, including our summer camps, and the ceremony where we honour the youth who are aging out of care. We were also forced to delay our 2019-20 Annual General Meeting and eventually held it virtually in August, 2021.

We were very excited to see Bill C92 come into effect in early 2020. The *Act Representing First Nations, Inuit and Metis Children, Youth and Families* represents an opportunity for us to transform programs and services. To learn more about the opportunities and to educate ourselves, our Board of Directors arranged for Dr. Sarah Morales to attend a two day socially distanced board meeting at the gymnasium in Squiala First Nation. From this relationship Dr Morales had two students assigned to complete their full-time hours with the agency. The law students focused on research, putting tangible tools together and did a presentation for our Designated Representatives on the new legislation. We are hopeful that this new legislation, along with the terrible discovery of the missing children from residential schools this past spring, will lead to long-lasting and meaningful change.

As we entered the 2020-21 fiscal year, it was the first time the Agency had a complete Executive Leadership Team. This meant we were able to distribute the considerable work load equitably with the team of Kyla Darby, Rod Spitzig and Penny Trites leading the agency as a team of equals. It also meant that, under Penny’s leadership, we were able to strengthen our relationships with the communities we serve and with our stakeholders and partners.

We are so grateful for the support we receive from Chief David Jimmie in his role as President Chief of the Stó:lō Nation Chiefs Council and Grand Chief Doug Kelly who retired during this fiscal in his role of President of Stó:lō Tribal Council and are grateful for the support of Tribal Chief Tyrone McNeil who was elected into this role. I also want to thank our wonderful staff, our beautiful elders and our amazing caregivers. Thank you for your dedication and everything you do.

Éy té mót, Éy té thále, Éy té sqwálawel.



Marion Mussell

## Message from the Executive Director of Programs



Since my arrival at Xyólheméylh in April 2019 I have had the pleasure to work with staff who show heart and passion no matter what their role is within our agency. Having been a front line social worker and team leader for over 20 years I know personally the time, energy and commitment it takes to make a difference to the children, families and communities.

As an agency we are so proud to have our Elders Advisory Council whom our staff call upon for family meetings, healing circles, and debriefings. Having our Elders sharing their cultural teachings as our knowledge keepers has helped overall with supporting staff who are committed and determined to “work in a good way.”

Our staff at Xyólheméylh work with our Stó:lō communities and many communities across Canada. As an agency, over one fifth of our files are serve the Métis Community. We have established a strong working relationship with the Métis Commission and Métis Nation BC. The inclusion of Métis and Cree elders on our Advisory council helps ensure that we are doing things in a good way. As a Director group, we are strategizing on how to best meet the needs of our Métis families. Our agency Directors each have their program responsibility and we continue to adjust as needed with our agency restructure. We have goals to continue to prioritize prevention and support services to families, increase the use of family placements, which supports children not having to come into the care system, returning children to family and extended family, and ensuring supportive transition processes for our youth, all while ensuring culture is part of their day to day lives.

I cannot believe two years have gone by since I joined the agency, I’m so proud of all of our staff and how practice is continuing to move forward. During the COVID-19 crisis practice continued as required as we provide essential services. I had the privilege of being on many Provincial working groups and was able to help establish interim practice guidelines with the province so our agency had a voice in providing services to children, families and communities. We reduced staff in office to 25-35 per cent and the remaining staff worked remotely from home. During the COVID-19 crisis our caregiver support parents went above and beyond in their support and we are so grateful. Support to our families was increased as needed. For my own family during COVID-19 the resiliency of my children is something that has been a highlight for me.

We are currently on a recovery plan for our agency and more meetings and visits are happening in our office locations. Our staff have done an amazing job at keeping our buildings sites safe and have done risk assessments so as an agency we are complying with Work BC and the Provincial Health Officer orders and recommendations in the delivery of services. During the COVID-19 crisis, we continued to ensure children were placed and connected with family through virtual visits until in person visits were safe once again. As we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and work within the “new normal” our goal is to continue to ensure that prevention is our top priority when working with our families and culture is at the forefront of our work with our children, youth and families and the communities we support. I’m proud and excited to see the work continue in a good way.



Kyla Darby



## Message from the Executive Director of Administrative Services



2020-21 was a trying year for everyone as we dealt with the pandemic. I would like to thank and acknowledge all the great and hard work that our staff did during these trying times. I would especially like to thank our Administration and Occupational Health & Safety staff for all their dedication and hard work ensuring that our working environment was safe for our clients and staff, so that we could continue to operate without interruption. They had the difficulty of having to continuously react to the changing Provincial Health Orders.

In my role as Executive Director of Administrative Services I oversee Finance, Administration, Human Resources and Training departments. Our goals are to have sound financial management and reporting, sound human resources policies and procedures, and help create an environment where employees are engaged, make a difference, and are accountable. In 2020 - 21:

- 1) We reviewed HR policies and procedures to ensure we were up to date. We also revised our on-boarding process to ensure cultural protocols and teachings were included. We also implemented a new Human Resource Information System with a company called ADP. This system streamlines payroll, training, benefits, attendance, performance management and employee self-service and brings us up to date with current best practices for HR. We also developed an Annual Performance Review Process for all staff.
- 2) We developed and implemented a new training plan, integrated with our Learning Management System, as well as developed a Cultural Competency program.
- 3) The Finance Committee reviewed the Finance Policies and made changes to address any outdated policies.
- 4) We updated the facilities plan to meet growing staff numbers. In 2020, we moved the Abbotsford office to accommodate increased staffing. We worked with both Tzeachten and Leq:amel First Nation and have office space within the communities.

I would like to thank the Board of Directors for their continued support and leadership during the last year, helping keep the Agency focused on the goals of doing the necessary work to ensure that we are serving our children, families, and communities is the best way. While also ensuring that we take care of our staff as well. I want to thank the Finance Committee members for their expertise, guidance, and support to ensure are financial management of resources continues to be according to accounting standards. To all of our Elders, Staff, Supervisors, Team Leaders, Directors, and ELT members I want to thank you for your dedication and commitment to Xyólheméylh especially during this last year. This year showed that you're not just considered essential workers by name, you showed by the work you performed during the pandemic, that you are all essential to the Agency, Communities and mostly to the children & families we serve. My hands go up to you all and I'm blessed to be able to work beside you all.

Rod Spitzig

## Message from the Executive Director of Staff & Community Relations



I began in the portfolio of ED of Staff and Community Relations with Xyólheméylh just weeks before the 2021-2022 fiscal year began and a few weeks before the pandemic changed everything. Reflecting back on my first year with the agency gives me a great sense of pride seeing many positive outcomes and accomplishments. We have been through some challenges and have experienced many highlights and incredible blessings.

One of my greatest blessings in the role I'm proud to hold is the time I get to spend with our Elders in the Elders Advisory Committee. We expanded their role this past year and are all richer for their teachings, guidance and generosity of spirit. We have cultural training videos underway for staff and caregiver support parents, as we all continue to learn and grow from the wisdom of our "knowledge keepers" ensuring culture is at the center of all we do.

Much of my work involves building relationships with various stakeholders, including the delivery of presentations about our agency vision, mission and our core values. Chairing a number of community based meetings including the Opening Doors Task Force, with a focus on relationship-building and collaboration between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous communities is something I thoroughly enjoy. Along with ED Kyla Darby, we are part of Partnership meetings every two weeks with the Executive Directors of the Delegated Aboriginal Agencies across the province, Indigenous Services Canada and MCFD Provincial Office. We have had conversations virtually with our new Minister Mitzi Dean, and the Representative for Children and Youth Jennifer Charlesworth, advocating the need and inherent right for "Equity of culturally safe prevention services regardless of where an indigenous person resides" in service delivery.

Communications and events in the agency falls under my responsibility and we, like many other organizations shifted to a lot of virtual events. We reached out to Indigenous children and youth in our agency as well as provincially through several art and writing contests held throughout the year. The contests generated positive media attention for the agency and that artwork is now proudly displayed in our offices and you can see some of it in this annual report. Our quarterly newsletters have increased to over 1500 subscribers and the addition of more content highlighting the wisdom of our Elders has received great feedback.

For many who know me, they will know my position at Xyólheméylh is more than a job. I was a birth adoptee and learned later in life that I am an Indigenous Métis Woman. I give thanks to the love and support of Chiefs and Matriarchs from Stó:lō and Nlaka'pamux territories who supported my journey three years ago this summer. That was when I visited my family roots in Cumberland House Cree Nation (an island in Northern Saskatchewan) and where I met the Cook family I am part of, and walked the land. That experience reinforces my belief that it is every child's inherent right to know who they are and what they belong to. That is my prayer for every child in our Agency's care.

I would like to acknowledge all our partners with a special thank you to the Stó:lō Nation Chiefs Council, Stó:lō Tribal Council and MNBC for your continued support. I want to extend my sincere appreciation our Board of Directors for their support, the Elders for their wisdom, the Visions and Voices Youth Advisory Council for your guidance, the staff and caregiver support parents for your tireless dedication and passion, and to thank all of you for being on this journey with us and part of our Xyólheméylh work family.

Penny Trites



## Our Vision, Mission & Core Values



### Vision

“We advance our inherent right to provide a healthy, safe and nurturing environment for all our Indigenous children and families living within our xáxá témexw té Stó:lō.”

### Mission

“We endeavor to ensure the safety and well-being of children by working with and supporting all Indigenous families while respecting their cultural diversity.”

## Core Values

### **H**onour

We honour generations of diverse traditions and cultures.

### **E**ngage

We engage and foster safe family ties and cultural connections in the best interests of the child.

### **A**ccountable

We are accountable to children, families, communities, stakeholders and each other.

### **R**espect

We respect our roots in xáxá témexw té Stó:lō and endeavor to provide services and programs that meet the unique cultural needs of all Indigenous people.

### **T**rust

We trust in the ability of our children and families to grow and develop in a healthy way.

## Our Elders



L-R: Julie George, Amy Victor, Rosemary Treherne, Louise Silver-Kaarsmaker, Gil Poitras. Elders Portraits by Dan Ludeman.

FVACFSS has an Elders Advisory Committee of Elders representing various First Nations Communities in Stó:lō territory as well some away from home Elders. They ensure we are delivering services in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way.

They meet with social workers and their clients to give recommendations on how the social workers and families can support the children and families in a culturally sensitive way. In 2019 -2020 the Agency reviewed the role of the Elders and made some changes aimed at giving the Elders a more prominent role in the Agency.

In 2020-21 the Agency continued expanding their role, as well as recruited Elders representing Indigenous groups across Canada, including Cree, Ojibway and Métis. As an agency we serve children and youth from over 130 communities across Canada and into the United States, with over one fifth of our files from the Métis Community. Having Elders on our

Advisory council from a variety of Indigenous communities helps ensure that we are doing things in a good way.

In 2020 a new Elders Terms of Reference was approved by the Board of Directors. The Elders were given laptops and they learned how to work remotely so we were able to keep them safe and meet online.

This included providing healing circles for staff and families, expanding their participation in collaborative meetings and leading cultural protocols.

Our Elder advisory members are an integral part of how we, as an organization, are continuing to move forward in a good way. Our “knowledge keepers” have been an amazing support to our staff and families throughout this year offering healing circles, one on one support, and team support.



Our Elders (cont'd)



L-R: Maria Reed, Laurie Backman

We also did video messages from our Elders, including a video message to commemorate Orange Shirt Day, a video message to caregiver support parents, and several cultural teachings including the importance of ancestral names, a video on smudging, and several videos on how to get through the fear and isolation of Covid-19.

Having our Elders sharing their cultural teachings as our knowledge keepers has helped overall with supporting staff who are committed and determined to do “the work” in a good way.

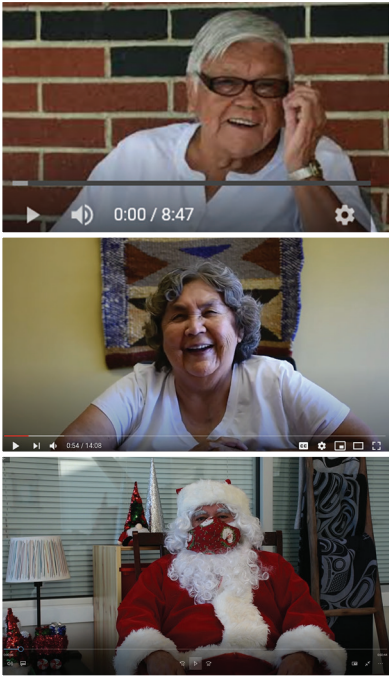
We also launched a Youth/Elder pilot project with a handful of youth. Our goal is to eventually have an Elder attached to every child and youth in care.

The Elders teach us that for us to do the very best to serve others, that it starts with each of us reflecting inwardly and taking care of ourselves. They teach about the importance of living and working in Létsé mót té sqwálewel, with an

good mind, a good heart, and good feelings. They also teach us about taking time to pause and reflect, about the importance of understanding and using our gifts of kindness, sharing, loving, that are within each of us. These gifts are useful, even necessary, to those who are called to the service in helping others.

Thank you to all our 2020-21 Elders Advisory: Laurie Backman, Jeanette Diablo, Julie George, Violet George, Mary Malloway, Gil Poitras, Maria Reed, Louise Silver-Kaarsmaker; Donna Simon, Rosemary Treherne and Amy Victor.

Also thanks to our other Elders: Roger Andrews, Charles Ayotte, Arlene Heese, Yvonne Joe, Betty Paul, Arnold Ritchie, Mona Sepass, and Yvonne Tumangday.



Elder Mary Malloway, Orange Shirt Day video; Elders welcome video, Amy Victor; Santa video with Gil Poitras.

Visions & Voices Youth Advisory Group



L-R: Raven Little, Earl Lambert, Elder Gil Poitras

The Visions and Voices Youth Mentorship Program was established eight years ago for youth ages 13 and older who have been in care or previously in care with our Agency. In pre-Covid times the youth travel from across the Fraser Valley to meet monthly. During these meetings they share a meal and plan and organize events. By doing this they build leadership skills as well as connect with their Indigenous culture. The group also acts as an advisory committee for the Agency, ensuring our programs are responsive to their needs. Their feedback and ideas help the agency develop plans on how to improve services that impact them.

Every year the group organizes a number of activities, including a two day Visions and Voices Forum for youth to discuss how the agency can improve how it serves children and youth. However, in 2020, the group had to cancel the event and instead held a virtual event for children, youth and caregivers. Over 30 caregiver support parents, youth and staff participated.

This year the event featured Earl Lambert as a

guest speaker and was facilitated by Xyólheméylh staff member Raven Little. Earl is Cree and Metis, a successful motivational speaker, presenter and entrepreneur.

Earl spoke to the youth on Friday evening about his difficult childhood, which was spent in and out of foster care, and eventually in juvenile detention for three years. He talked about the bullying and racism he experienced, as well as the legacy of the residential schools and his family’s pain which led to him being placed in care.

On Saturday morning Earl spoke to the caregiver support parents about what he learned from being a child in care, and the emotional needs of children that caregivers need to understand. On Saturday afternoon, we brought the two groups together to talk about the importance of rules and boundaries, respect, and communication. Earl stressed the importance of children and youth being connected to their culture. He urged the youth to use their voice, to break the cycle, and to be the change they wish to see. “Your voice matters, your feelings matter, your thoughts matter. You are important and valued,” Earl told the youth.



## Our Agency

Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (FVACFSS) is a fully delegated Aboriginal child welfare agency providing culturally appropriate and holistic services through prevention, community development and child welfare programs to Aboriginal (Status, Non-Status, On Reserve, Off Reserve, Stó:lō and other First Nation, Inuit, and Métis) children, youth and their families residing throughout the Fraser Valley.

Our programs and services are created and executed with a special attention on strengthening culture and identity. We focus on keeping families together, reintegrating children back with their families, and discovering and strengthening cultural connections.

We work with 18 First Nations Bands – Atchelitz, Chawathil, Cheam, Kwantlen, Leq’amel, Matsqui, Popkum, Shxwhá:y, Shxw’ow’hamel, Skawahlook, Skowkale, Skwah, Soowahlie, Squiala, Sumas Tzeachten,

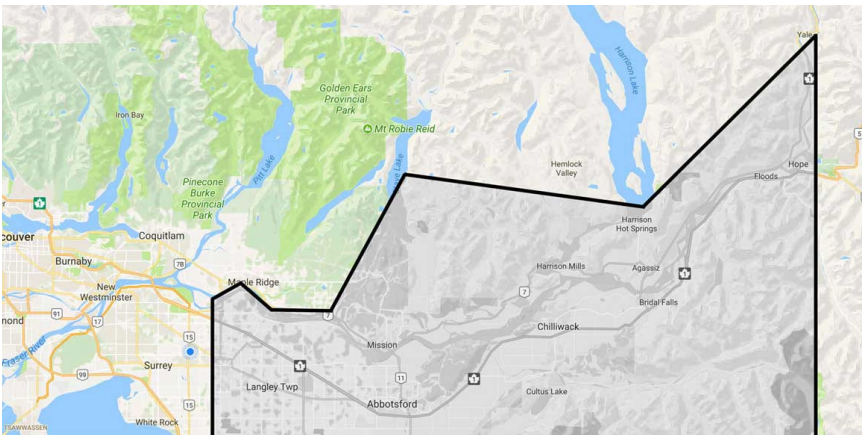
Yakweakwioose, and Yale First Nations. We also work with urban (away from home) families. In fact, urban families account for 90 per cent of our clients.

FVACFSS operates with offices located in Agassiz, Chilliwack (our head office), Mission, Abbotsford, Langley and Surrey. In 2020 -21 we opened offices in Chawathil, Cheam, Squiala and Tzeachten First Nations.

In 2020-2021 we had 230 staff located throughout the Fraser Valley. While the vast majority of the staff are social workers, we also employ professionals in the areas of finance, human resources, communications and events, as well as traditional mentors, cultural connections, youth transition workers.

We meet monthly (virtually in 2020-21 with Designated Representatives for those communities signed on to be serviced by our agency. And we have Information sharing agreements being signed with communities, our agency and the Province.

## Our Geographic Service Area



*Our Geographic Service Area (GSA) covers Yale to the East, Langley/Surrey Ministry Fraser Region boundary on the West (196th Street), Maple Ridge/Mission Ministry Fraser Region boundary on the North (Wilson Street) and the Canadian/US border to the South, including the Reserves of Member First Nations, and does not include the Reserves of non-Member First Nations, as set out in the map.*

## COVID-19

During the COVID-19 crisis, practice continued as we are considered an essential service. In collaboration with a Provincial Working group, we were able to establish practice guidelines with the province so our agency could continue providing service to children, families and communities. We reduced the number of staff in the office to 25 per cent with the remaining staff working from home. The staff continued to support their families from home and through an office rotation into offices. We also developed strict guidelines for cleaning of offices, meeting rooms and vehicles.

Our staff did an amazing job at keeping our buildings sites safe, and doing risk assessments so we were in compliance with WorkSafe BC and the Provincial Health Officer recommendations and orders.

During COVID we flowed funds to communities to support COVID relief and prevention funding for what communities identified as their needs.

## Goals

Xyólheméylh has four goals related to internal operations. They are:

- ensuring a culturally vibrant workplace;
- establishing sound human resources processes and procedures;
- creating a workplace where employees are engaged, make a difference and are accountable; and
- ensuring sound financial management and reporting.

## A Culturally Vibrant Workplace

In terms of ensuring a culturally vibrant workplace, we established a Board Cultural Advisory Committee to provide guidance and we increased the role of Elders with the agency, both expanding their numbers and enhancing their role. They are available to meet with staff one-on-one or in teams to provide advice, guidance and healing from workplace trauma.

The agency also made improvements to the office spaces, increasing the amount of Indigenous art, artwork created by children, and music in the reception areas. We felt it important to distinguish ourselves as an Indigenous agency as well as to provide culturally safe places for Indigenous families to visit.





Our Agency (Continued)



Pink Shirt Day, Admin Team, February 2020

Human Resources

Xyólheméylh’s Human Resources team has gone through a lot of changes in the past few years.

The changes were necessary and in response to several factors – the restructuring and growth of the agency; the collective agreement with staff that came into effect two years ago; and the need to increase the Agency’s compliance with legislation and HR best practices.

The Human Resources team has been busy building a solid infrastructure for the last two years that includes new training processes, a performance management review program; new grievance procedures; a first aid program; an incident investigation and hazard reporting program; a progressive discipline program; and a disability management program. This has also included the technology infrastructure to support these programs, such as a Learning Management System to track and encourage training, and a new payroll system that will be rolled out shortly.

Engagement, Making a Difference and Accountability

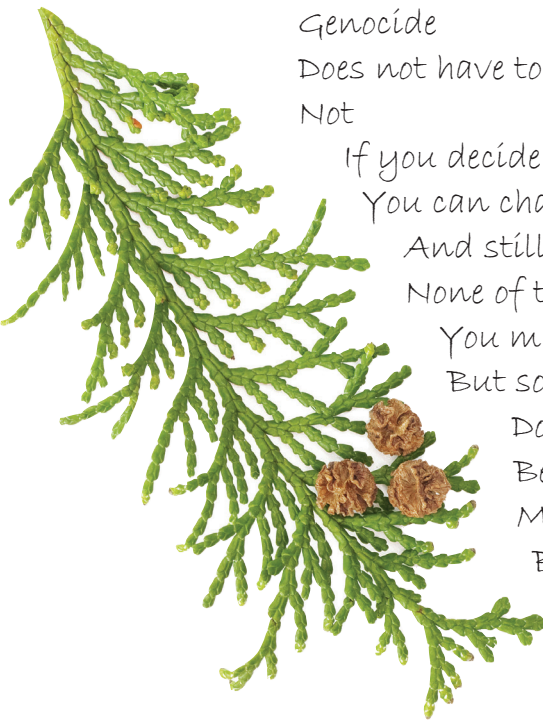
The Agency developed a new performance review process, and an annual training plan that included cultural competencies and the development of a video which interviews Chiefs for staff to learn how and what is expected when servicing their communities. We also developed a facilities strategic plan which saw the relocation of our Abbotsford office and the soft opening of a youth hub in downtown Chilliwack.



Child and Youth Mentor Justin Williams, National Indigenous Peoples Day video

Voices of Children & Youth

To celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day June 21, 2020 we asked Indigenous youth in BC to express what being Indigenous means to them. Here are just a few of the submissions we received.



Genocide  
Does not have to involve killing  
Not  
If you decide  
You can change a child’s race  
And still to this day  
None of those children are the same  
You may have said sorry  
But sorry  
Does not alleviate the pain  
Being Indigenous  
Means taking a stand  
Being part of a community Stronger united  
But strongest when hand in hand

Bella, 13

Being Indigenous means pride, confidence, sacrifice, care, love, strength, daring, kindness, and discipline. These mean more to me than being the first people to live on this land. In my heart, the meaning of Indigenous means giving to the community, loving your friends, family, and even your enemies. It means having the bravery and perseverance to overcome the worst.

Santino, 15

To me being Indigenous means beautiful regalia, art, language, dancing and singing, celebrations, ceremonies and potlaches. It’s important to keep the language going so I can learn more of it - I love hearing my language! It makes me feel at home - where I’m supposed to be - in my heart and soul.

Nevaeh, 12



## Community Profile: Tzeachten First Nation



"My Goal is to lessen barriers to help people succeed and get to where we will no longer see the impacts of Colonization." - Chief Derek Epp (Weli'leq)

Chief Epp's parents are Bruce and

Sheree Epp; Grandparents are Georgina Pall and the late Lorne Robinson; Great Grandparents are the late Duncan and Dorothy Wealick. Chief Derek has a BSW in Social Work and used his education to serve his community by working with Xyólheméylh prior to becoming an elected Chief for his community.

Chief Epp is proud the community broke ground on two major capital projects, which directly benefit our membership. "The first is our Social Development building located by the new Tzeachten Turf Field. The second completed is our Tzeachten Longhouse, that due to the Covid-19 pandemic we have had to postpone our opening ceremony for the Tzeachten Longhouse and Social Development building. Both projects are a clear investment into social development, health, programs, and culture. I am looking forward to the positive impact these projects will have for our community and membership."

## Voices of Children & Youth

### BC Child & Youth in Care Contest



In May 2020 we held a BCCYIC Week contest. We shared submissions from the art contest with our colleagues at the Provincial Office at the BC Ministry for Children and Family Development. They loved them so much that Minister Katrine Conroy chose one submission to be featured on a graduation card that

she will be sending to all Children in Care in the province.

### Christmas Card Contest



Xyólheméylh held a Christmas card contest. A panel of our Board Members and Elders Advisory Council chose the winners in two categories. They commented on what a tough decision it was because there were so many wonderful entries. The entries were judged in two categories - ages four to 12 and ages 13 to 19. In the end the panel chose first place winners Hunter, age 7 and Ceda, age 16, as first place winners, and turned them into our Christmas cards this year.

## Voices of Children & Youth



First Place (Age 3 to 12 Category): Summer-Quill, 12

### BC Indigenous Youth Express Their Gratitude Through Art

In March of 2021, we asked Indigenous children and youth in British Columbia what they were grateful for.

The Agency received over 90 submissions in two age categories – ages 3 to 12: and ages 13 to 19. Common themes were family, Indigenous culture, friends, pets, nature, school, home, art, sports, and ice cream. The winning entries were voted by a panel of Elder advisors and Board of Directors members.

"The art of the children and youth is inspiring and reminds us there is much to be grateful for, and we are grateful for their gifts of artistry," said Marion Mussell, Board of Directors President.

"We could feel the heart and spirit that went into the many submissions we received" said Penny



First Place (Age 13 to 19 Category): Miranda, 18



Third Place (Age 3 to 12 Category): Taya, 12

Trites, Executive Director Staff and Community Relations. "The art the children and youth produced was so uplifting."

One youth said she was "Grateful for mother nature and the land we live on." Another sketched a portrait of her great grandmother. The winner's artwork were made into Thank You Cards and they received cash prizes.



Third Place (Age 13 to 19 Category): Sebastien, 14



## Our Programs

In early 2020 we completed the restructuring we began in 2019 and were excited to see our vision come to fruition. Our major goals for practice were to:

- strengthen delegated programs to ensure a cultural practice that is compliant with standards;
- enhance family strengthening programs that are culturally relevant and promote community involvement; and
- build and strengthen relationships with communities.

### Stó:lō Services Team

Our newly created Stó:lō Services Team now have staff in Tzeachten, Squiala, Chawathil, Leq'a mel and Cheam. We are pleased to report that it is producing the results we hoped for with less children leaving parental homes, and more out-of-care agreements.

The number of children that left their parental home in Stó:lō communities dropped significantly. In 2019, 27 children left parental homes; in 2020 there were seven and so far in 2021 there are three who are out of their parental home and are with family in community. That is a significant improvement, but we still have more work to do to get the number down to zero.

Also, our out-of-care numbers have increased by 40 per cent which is also significant. That means 40 per cent of children and youth are not in stranger care and are with family.

Family Strengthening and prevention programs

were a challenge in 2020-21 because of Covid-19 restrictions and communities being closed. However, we managed to offer and support several programs. There were canoe building programs at Sumas, Cheam, Yale and Yakwekwioose First Nations. There were separate virtual online groups for women and men, there were traditional medicine walks for youth and we held virtual monthly meetings for designated band representatives.

### Guardianship and Youth Services

This team's success is measured in many different ways; seeing siblings reconnected and developing positive relationships; seeing a child or youth reconnected with extended family, and/or with family they have never known; seeing a



child or youth touch their land and being welcomed into their home community; seeing youth newly embracing and taking pride in their culture and teachings and seeing a youth take ownership of their planning and creating their own lifetime networks. Some of the more impactful success stories were the return of a number of sibling groups to parents after years of living apart and disconnected from each other.

A priority for the basket staff is ensuring that the youth on their caseloads are being set up for success in transitioning out of care.

### Resources and Family Strengthening Team

The Resources and Family Strengthening Team at Xyólheméylh is responsible for providing services in a culturally holistic manner with the goal of ensuring the safety and well-being of children. This includes assessing, recruiting, training, supporting, and developing a range of resources to serve children in care. Since the restructuring, prioritizing kin placements to keep children connected to families has been a focus. This means providing more services and support to Out of Care families. Through Family Strengthening programs, they work collaboratively with families and communities to develop strategies in problem solving, life skills, conflict resolution and to develop or enhance parenting skills.

While Out of Care caregiver placements are the preferred direction of the Agency, sometimes it is not possible. Our priority is then to connect the child with a loving, caring support parent(s) where the child can be successful and still connected with the culture. Therefore, this team also recruits and trains support parents.

## Meet a Caregiver: August and Bernadette Williams



August and Bernadette Williams became parents to three boys, ages 13, five and four. Bernadette was herself in foster care as a youth and didn't want the three boys whose bio parents are members of their extended family, to go through what she did.

August and Bernadette became foster parents in 2010 and have adopted their now 13 year-old and are in the process of adopting their 4 year-old while taking care of another 5 year-old .

August who is from the Skwah First Nations, and Bernadette who is Squamish First Nations, have been together for 15 years. They believe it's important for the kids to know their Indigenous background and history.

"We keep culture strong in our family," says Bernadette "It's important they know where they come from."

Bernadette admits it's challenging to keep culture strong during the pandemic because of restrictions on gatherings and visiting family. "We do our best to keep our kids safe and happy," says Bernadette.



## Our Programs (Continued)



*Drummers at the drive-thru Caregivers Appreciation Event in October*

While the child may live with foster parents, the preferred route is that they are still connected to their bio parents and extended family when possible. As Deb Hill, a caregiver of several Indigenous children said, “I couldn’t do it without the extended family, in a way they have become my extended family.”

To show our appreciation for our caregivers, we held two drive-thru events and introduced monthly draws for gift baskets.

### Family Development Response

The Family Development Response basket is made up of 38 staff in four teams. When the information determines that a child protection response is needed, the reported information results in the creation of an incident, which is assigned to one of the FDR teams. The FDR social worker assesses the reported concerns while identifying family strengths/challenges and helps the family increase safety while decreasing risk.

The Family Strengthening team is made up of

Family Cultural Connection Workers, who facilitate Family Case Planning Circles in addition to researching a family’s community connections. The team also consists of Rapid Response Workers, who provide immediate, short-term, and intensive support to families.

The Family Development Response is an approach to child protection that focuses on keeping the children safe while the family stays together as they work through their challenges. In some cases, the family is unable to remain together; when this happens, the team works alongside the family to identify extended family and/or community members who can provide temporary care of the children. The philosophy guiding the Family Development Response emphasizes collaboration and strives to build on the family’s strengths. The team is committed to having the parents, children, Indigenous communities, and everyone naturally connected to the child at the center of the assessment, decision-making and planning process.

### Family Services

The Family Service Team works collaboratively with families and community partners to develop strategies so that children can remain safely with their families and to change the legacy of Indigenous children growing up in care, disconnected from family, culture and community.

The basket has responsibility for children 0 to 12 years of age, although they do not break up sibling groups so there are some youth that also fall under their responsibility. They are made up of approximately 37 staff who are Delegated Social Workers, Family Enhancement Workers,

Family Preservation Counsellors and Family Cultural Connections Workers.

They determine barriers to children remaining in homes and develop comprehensive and holistic plans to support children and families staying together. That can mean providing practical hands-on support for things such as conflict resolution, life and parenting skills. It can also mean healing circles with Elders, or intensive therapeutic help. At the heart of this is collaborative practice meetings where staff work collaboratively with the family to find solutions to problems.

Another goal of the team is to increase the use of out of care options to avoid stranger care and keep children with extended family. The team is also responsible for guardianship when all the avenues to out of care options are exhausted.

Some of the team’s successes involve working with fathers who have come forward when children are unable to remain with their mothers. The teams work hard to engage family (many in other provinces), supporting children to travel to visit paternal families in other provinces and supporting those families to travel to BC in order to develop relationships with their children. As a result, children who have been unable to remain with their mothers and who have been placed with foster families, have been able to leave foster care in order to live with their fathers and develop relationships with their paternal families and Indigenous communities.

### Complaints Resolution Process

In the course of working together, disagreements may arise between the clients we

serve and our FVACFSS staff members. Most concerns are addressed directly by staff without a formal complaint being made, however, when this is not possible, the Complaints Resolution Process provides a mechanism for our clients to express their concerns and for the concerns to be responded to in a respectful, empowering and fair manner. The Complaints Resolution Process is available to all program areas and is open to any individual who receives services, or believes they should receive services from FVACFSS. FVACFSS is committed to ensuring that complaints are received in a positive manner so that our clients do not experience any negative consequences for making a complaint.

Clients who engage in the Complaints Resolution Process are supported by the Client Complaints Resolution Analyst throughout the process, and are actively involved with FVACFSS staff to address their concerns in a solution focused process, which encourages problem solving and flexibility. A robust complaints process acknowledges our clients strength of self-advocacy, encourages transparency, accountability and continuous quality improvement.

Our Client Complaint Resolution Analyst received 105 complaints over the last 12 months, of which 80 per cent were eligible for the Complaints Resolution Process. Youth made up four per cent of complainants and on average, the Complaint Resolution Process took 40 days to complete. 94 per cent of complaints were addressed and resolved at the local level of resolution and six per cent of complainants requested an Administrative Review by the MCFD provincial review authority.



Caseloads

On Reserve Files Count Team 1

First Nation		FS	CCO	YAG	FDR	SR	OOC-FS	OOC-CS	VCA	TCO	EFP	Total
Kwantlen		4	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Leq'a:mel		6	0	0	9	3	0	0	0	0	0	18
Matsqui		3	4	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	13
Sumas		4	0	0	6	0	0	3	0	3	0	16
Shxwha:y Village		5	12	0	7	2	0	1	0	4	0	31
Aitchelitz		0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Soowahlie		3	0	0	4	3	0	1	0	0	4	15
Squiala		1	0	0	1	3	0	3	0		3	11
Skowkale		0	4	1	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	14
Tzeachten		3	3	1	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	16
Yakweak-wioose		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Files		29	23	2	52	18	0	8	0	7	7	146

On Reserve Files Count Team 2  
includes family living on and off Stó:lō Territory

First Nation		FS	CCO	YAG	FDR	SR	OOC-FS	OOC-CS	VCA	TCO	EFP	Total
Skwah		7	3	1	7	3	0	0	0	1	2	24
Cheam		7	11	0	5	5	0	1	0	0	3	32
Chawathil		7	6	3	16	7	0	0	0	8	2	49
Skawahlook		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yale		1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Shxw'owhamel		0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Popkum		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Files		22	20	4	33	17	0	1	0	9	7	113

FS	Family Services files	OOC-FS	Out of Care Family Service
CCO	Continuing Custody children in Care	OOC-CS	Out of Care Child Services
YAG	Youth Agreement	VCA	Voluntary Care Agreement
FDR	Family Development Response	TCO	Temporary Custody Orders
SR	Voluntary Service Request	EFP	Extended Family Plan

Looking Ahead

Our goals for 2021 - 2022 are:

1) Ensuring a Culturally Vibrant Workplace

This includes initiatives to expand and strengthen the role of Elders, developing strategies for youth/Elder engagement, enriching cultural teachings internally, ensuring our offices physically reflect Indigenous culture, and increasing morale and a sense of belonging with staff.

2) Sound Human Resources process and procedures

This includes reviewing HR policies and procedures to ensure they are up to date, reviewing the on-boarding process and ensuring the process involves cultural protocols and teachings.

3) A Place where employees are engaged, make a difference and are accountable

This includes improving internal communication with staff, staff recognition, and appreciation, training, establishing Wellness Committees, and improving our performance management and evaluation procedures. It also includes developing a facilities strategic plan.

4) Sound Financial Management and Reporting

We will be reviewing our Finance Policies to ensure they are up to date and implementing a new ADP Payroll System

5) Building and Strengthening relationships with communities

We are implementing information sharing agreements with the communities we serve, partnering with community organizations to develop an urban strategy for away from home communities, and improving how we support and communicate with Caregiver Support Parents.

6) Strengthen Delegated Programs to ensure culturally relevant practice that is compliant with standards

This includes increased use of prevention services and family strengthening meetings; increased support to families for children to remain safely with their families; increased use of out of care options; ensuring permanency plans for CYIC are at the forefront of planning; increased support for youth transitioning out of care; increased support for caregivers; and increased focus on culture and accessing the knowledge of Elders.

7) Enhance Family Strengthening programs that are culturally relevant and promote family and community involvement

This includes ensuring that collaborative practices are embedded in all basket practice; ensuring cultural work is incorporated into the work of our teams with families; and that Elders and Youth voices are included in programming.





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*Létsé mót té sqwálewel ...*

*With a good mind, a good heart, and good feelings"*