

# *Spirit*

SHARING FIRST NATIONS  
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

## THE **YOUTH** ISSUE

YOUTHCO YUUSNEWAS  
CUYSTWI DECOLONIZED  
KURA JACK AND THE WINTER CHALLENGE  
YOUTH REFLECTIONS ON CULTURE & WELLNESS

# How do you balance the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of wellness?



**Kiatlin Smith-Wallace,**  
Seabird Island Band

“As a junior powwow dancer, I balance health and spirituality by staying active. I dance, play sports and pay attention to everything I eat.”



**Kala Alexander,**  
Seabird Island Band

“I enjoy walks and talking with my mom every night at sunset, this is good for our health and spirituality. I also drum and sing. Eating healthy food is important to me also - I always try to eat home cooked, traditional foods.”



**Michael McNeil-Bobb,**  
Seabird Island Band

“Eating healthy foods combined with daily exercise makes me feel good! Sports like soccer, basketball and lacrosse keep me active and out of trouble.”



**Peyal Francis Laceese,**  
Ts’ilhqot’in Nation

Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have and still practice many different ways to keep ourselves purified. Our mind is very vulnerable and easy to be distracted, it’s hard to keep focus and stay on track of what’s truly a positive way of thinking. The body in many ways can effect your well being, your body may even control the way you think of yourself, as it’s all tied in with all four aspects of life. Our heart to keep positive sometimes may be the hardest, but maybe the easiest to understand. The spirit within, to most Indigenous peoples is held very high in sacredness. These four aspects/parts of our life define who we are as First Nations people, and help us understand how to better carry ourselves in a positive/healthy way. As our people did, thousands of years ago we pray and give thanks for all that we have and receive. The sacred Tšižel (sweat lodge) is one of many ways of practicing in our culture to purify ourselves, it gives us better understandings of our culture to better pass on to the next generations. Us as Ts’ilhqot’in people carry ourselves to not let the negative effect our everyday life, we move forward only to focus on the more strength we must build for our future, our language, our youth. We pray for everything that is most and least worthy, we give thanks for everything that is positive and negative. We as First Nations people have the understanding of “everything that happens is meant to be by our creator” I am

Ts’ilhqot’in, this is one of many ways I keep my mind, body, heart, and spirit purified. As it brings positive thinking, a healthy body, a purified heart, and cleansed spirit.



**Korin Humchitt,**  
Heiltsuk Nation

“During school I have to take care of myself in all aspects. In my first semester I did not take care of myself at all and I really felt it near the end. So during my second semester, one of my main goals was to take care of myself. Emotionally, I depended on my classmates for support when I was feeling down, they helped me feel welcome and at home in Victoria. Mentally, I made sure I took certain times out of the day to do things other than nursing homework, like watching TV, cleaning my apartment, or drawing. Physically, I would make sure that I had three days out of the week I would work out, and I would go for a run daily. And spiritually, I relied on my nursing Native circle at Camosun. We had weekly meetings where we would do ceremonies, talking about how we are doing, and had many visitors, Elders, people that helped us in school, and other health care professionals that were mentoring us.”



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

#### SPiRiT MAGAZiNE

A publication of the  
First Nations Health Authority  
501-100 Park Royal South V7T 1A2  
Coast Salish Territory (West Vancouver, BC)  
Phone: 604-693-6500  
Fax: 604-913-2081  
Spiritmagazine@fnha.ca  
www.fnha.ca

The content, opinions and views expressed in Spirit Magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views held by the FNHA, its employees or member organizations.

#### WE WANT TO PUBLISH YOUR CONTENT!

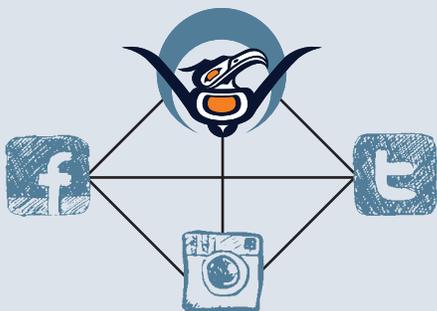
Please send story ideas, articles, and photographs to: Spiritmagazine@fnha.ca

#### CONTRIBUTORS:

Wenona James-Point, Jordie Johnson, Jenn Smith, Mishon Sutherland, Janelle Tom, Dr. Naomi Dove, Philip Hogan, Matthew Kinch, Brenna Latimer, Wesley Paul, John Pantherbone, Mildred Price, Peyman Sholeh, Dr. Isaac Sobol, Janine Stevenson, Jessica St. Jean, Tysun Tallman, Erralyn Thomas, Dr. Shannon Waters, William A. White, Dr. Sarah Williams, Odette Wilson, Michael Bell, and Trevor Kehoe.

**ON THE COVER:** FNHA Living Markers.

### Connect with us

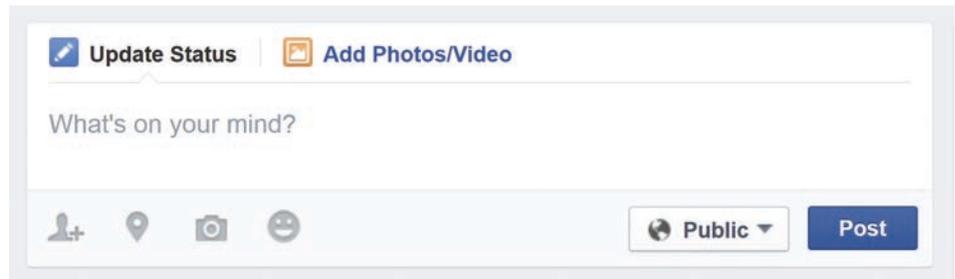


[facebook.com/  
firstnationshealthauthority](https://facebook.com/firstnationshealthauthority)  
[instagram.com/fnha](https://instagram.com/fnha)  
[twitter.com/fnha](https://twitter.com/fnha)

## TECH WELLNESS

# Social Media Tips: Think Twice Before You Post Online

JOHN PANTHERBONE



Imagine the following: your first job interview since graduating from school or finishing your trade school, internship or whatever you've gone to school for. Everything goes great. It seems like you're a shoe-in for the job, but then - nothing. You don't hear back. What happened? Well, it turns out they did a bit of research on you. Some interesting social media posts you made back in the day made it seem like you weren't the best candidate for the job. Maybe it was some out-of-context rap lyrics you posted, an inside joke you made, or an off-handed tongue-in-cheek comment. Really, it could have been a number of things that seemed harmless at the time, but when looking at your posts and comparing it to the job you were applying for, it made them want to choose the other candidate who wasn't posting the questionable content.

It's a scenario we hope doesn't happen, and that privacy laws and social media sites would work to prevent, but it in fact does happen more often than we think. According to a New York Times article, 31 per cent of college admission officers admitted to researching applicants social media posts. Oh, but you limited your posts to "friends only" and locked down your tweets? Well, nothing can break that impenetrable fortress of security now. Perhaps social media sites will change their policy years down the road and not even allow any level of privacy? Who knows?

So, now you're thinking about your own web posts and how it reflects upon you, and you're nervous. "Could something I've said reflect poorly and leave me completely un-hireable?" Am I saying you shouldn't post absolutely anything except the blandest, milquetoast content in your online presence? No. Social media can be a great tool for connecting experts and sharing ideas, research and discussion on so many different topics. It can connect people from many different backgrounds in ways we've never had before. Basically, what I'm trying to get across is: think twice before you post. Think about how your contribution could help the discussion or how your parents, teachers, friends or employers would think about seeing the content you're posting. Or think about how it may be viewed in the future - social media leaves a digital trail from now until the internet crashes. A good rule of thumb is to think: "Would I say or share this in-person with my friends, family or co-workers?" There are many things you need to think about before posting: are you giving out too much personal information, financial information, health information, workplace information, or are you subject to identity theft? It's quick and easy to hit "submit" on your web post, but you should always think twice before you post. You don't want to regret it in the future. ■

# What's Right With The Youth Of Today

**W**elcome to *The Youth Issue* of Spirit Magazine. In this issue we tell the stories of numerous positive young role models and leaders in First Nations communities. Young leaders who are modeling healthy lifestyles and taking hold of their wellness, their culture, their history, and their future. This issue is all about youth talking to youth, about the topics that matter to them.

Youth are the future. In some cultures youth can be considered anywhere between the ages of 12 and 35. As one of the youngest and fastest growing groups on this part of Turtle Island, First Nations youth hold a special place in the changing world we live in, within their home territories, urban centres, and the global community. Much has taken place on this land over the last several generations, and this factual history, not necessarily the one written in Canadian history books, is vitally important to learn and to share.

At Gathering Wisdom for a Shared Journey VI on Coast Salish Territory, First Nations in what is now known as BC marked a momentous milestone. On October 1, 2013 the first and only provincial First Nations Health Authority in Canada assumed full responsibility for health programs and services from Health Canada in BC.

In traditional Coast Salish protocol during the Commemorating the Transfer Ceremony, Living Markers and Corner Posts were chosen from each region of the province. Willie Charlie of Sts'ailes explains, "Our Elders here have said we don't usually put a name on something that is not alive, like a building. When there is something significant that has happened we would choose young people to be a Living Marker for that. The transfer of health responsibility at this time is a big thing in First Nations history.

So those young people would be the Living Markers. They would have to say how old they are. They tell all the people. Then we mark this event by their age, so if they are 25, and when they turn 50, we will know we have had health transfer for 25 years. There is responsibility that comes with being Corners Posts and Living Markers. They continue to be the ambassadors, they continue to be the stewards of the work, they would have these responsibilities.

(In choosing) Corner Posts, we usually call upon our Elders. People that have a lot of experience or a lot of investment, a really good understanding about the significance of the work in health. They are the ones that ground the work. They are the ones who are the pillars, they are the ones that will be the house posts if you will."

For this issue of Spirit Magazine we asked the FNHA Living Markers to be our

guest editors. Each Living Marker has a unique story and plays an important part in the transformational work of the FNHA. Read about them on the following page and watch the full Commemorating the Transfer Ceremony video on our Youtube Channel.

Too often it is asked 'what's wrong with the youth of today?' by those who helped build the world we bring our youth up in. We want to flip that question on its head and start looking at 'what's right with the youth of today', there are so many positive stories of youth taking leadership within their families, communities, Nations, cities, and regions. Youth who know themselves, know their culture, know what's right, and are standing up for it. These youth are proud and strong in their identities and are true role models for health, wellness, and balance.

Hlgu Ayeey Peter Mackay says it well in Youth Reflections on Culture & Wellness (pg 6), "When I sing a sacred cultural song, I am speaking an ancient voice of pure guidance...when I play my drum or allow my rattle to dance in my hands, it sends out healing vibrations that allows the true light of our sacred Aboriginal existence to flourish. Our sacred singing and dancing is medicine for the soul."

Read on in this issue about youth balancing their wellness wheel, reflections on culture and wellness, resources for youth, the Gathering Our Voices youth conference, and much more. We have an interview with Penelakut's Kura Jack, who sparked the national grassroots Winter Challenge campaign with her brother Cordell from their own backyard. We feature youth who are spearheading the decolonization movement within sexual health through YouthCo, and the Cuystwi Youth Wellness project.

In creating this *Youth Issue* of Spirit, we were moved and inspired to see so many healthy, self-determining, and vibrant emerging leaders, who have a strong connection to who they are, and a sense of pride, heart, and Spirit. These are the leaders in their own right today, and tomorrow. The future is in good hands. We hope you enjoy this issue. ■

**Too often it is asked 'what's wrong with the youth of today?' by those who helped build the world we bring our youth up in. We want to flip that question on its head and start looking at 'what's right with the youth of today', there are so many positive stories of youth taking leadership within their families, communities, Nations, cities, and regions. Youth who know themselves, know their culture, know what's right, and are standing up for it. These youth are proud and strong in their identities and are true role models for health, wellness, and balance.**

# FNHA Living Markers

## **Jordie Johnson - Interior**

Jordie is from the Esketemc te Secwepemc, also known as Alkali Lake, BC. At 32 years old, Jordie works as an Administrative Assistant for the Communications team at the FNHA. Prior to the FNHA, Jordie was achieving his education at Thompson Rivers University (Kamloops BC) graduating in both Tourism and Business sectors, with a primary focus on Sports Management. Since being appointed the honour as a Living Marker for the Interior Region, Jordie has enjoyed learning various First Nations ritual, ceremony and history teachings of the many tribes of BC. Jordie looks forward to learning more about the Interior people and becoming a storyteller for the FNHA in the future.

## **Wenona James-Point - Fraser Salish**

Wenona James-Point, raised in Sts'ailes, proudly represents the Fraser-Salish region. It took a lot of time and soul searching for Wenona to come to the realization that she can make the biggest difference and contribution within the FNHA in the Human Resources department. Through her journey in finding her own career and life path, Wenona encourages all First Nations Youth to discover and nurture their own career and life passions while being conscious of our areas of personal wellness. If you are not taking care of yourself, how can you help anyone else?

## **Jenn Smith - Vancouver Island**

Jenn is a member of the Tlowitsis Tribe and was born and raised in Campbell River on beautiful Vancouver Island. She moved to Vancouver in 2009 to attend Blanche Macdonald make-up, fashion, and esthetics school. Over the years, Jenn has worked for several First Nations communities and companies in many different capacities, such as medical office assistant, nurse's clerk, administrative support, event



**First Nations Health Authority Living Markers (l-r) Jordie Johnson, Wenona James-Point, Jenn Smith, Mishon Sutherland, and Janelle Tom.**

planner, and transcriptionist to name a few. Jenn is 35-years-old and the mother of two beautiful daughters, Janet (15) and Aaliyah (12). She enjoys spending time with her family, as well as freelancing her professional makeup and nail skills. Jenn proudly represents the Vancouver Island Region as a Living Marker for the FNHA and is looking forward to the exciting opportunities this will bring.

## **Mishon Sutherland - Northern Region**

Raised in the Fraser-Salish with roots in the Nakazdli Nation in the North, Mishon works in the FNHA's Chief Executive Office. Having transitioned from a career path without ties to personal value and belief systems, she is truly grateful for the responsibilities and opportunities that come with her work each day. The FNHA's approach, "Health through wellness", has also been a philosophy she has personally embraced this past year. Imagination is absolutely crucial to developing meaningful roots both professionally and personally, and maintaining a healthy resistance to limitations others attempt to project keep her focused and driven. There is brilliance in resilience. Looking to the future, she does

not take her role as a witness to this work lightly and looks forward to our history as it unfolds.

## **Janelle Tom - Vancouver Coastal**

Janelle is the oldest of three siblings and grew up in small town Merritt in the Nicola Valley, Interior Region. She is a member of the Squamish Nation and moved to Vancouver when she was 15 where she completed high school and began working. Janelle has worked in a number of industries including health, youth mentorship, retail, service, and accommodation. She was a casual employee at the FNHA for a number of years before finally becoming full-time, and is currently an Administrative Assistant to one of the Executive Directors. After a number of years of searching for the right job, she is very happy to be with the FNHA family - she is very proud of what the organization is working towards and knows that there is a lot of room to grow within this organization. Janelle represents Vancouver Coastal as a Living Marker for the FNHA and is honoured to be given this role and the exciting responsibilities included, and looks forward to what the future may bring. ■

# Youth Reflections on Culture & Wellness

How can practicing culture contribute to a young person’s wellness? What do they learn from cultural teaching and practices that they apply to other parts of their lives?

BRENNA LATIMER

**T**o find out the answers to these questions, the FNHA interviewed four emerging First Nations leaders from throughout BC. These inspirational youth candidly shared with us what they have learned from their cultures that has impacted their health and wellness.

	<p><b>Denni Clement,</b> Ktunaxa Nation</p> <p>Traditional Name ?inismin palkiy - Rainbow woman. Lives: Victoria, BC</p>			<p><b>Lauren Smith,</b> Kwakwaka'wakw Nation</p> <p>Traditional Name Gwanti'lakw - Born heavy with rights. Lives: Alert Bay, BC</p>	
	<p><b>Sadie Rose Johnson,</b> Esketemc te Secwepemc</p> <p>Traditional Name Kumkwimetkew. Lives: Alkali Lake, BC</p>			<p><b>Peter Mackay,</b> Nisga'a Nation</p> <p>Traditional Name Hlgu Ayee - Quick to assist. Lives: Iskut, BC</p>	

## 1. HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED PRACTICING YOUR CULTURE?

**Denni:** For as long as I can remember my family immersed me in Ktunaxa culture, spirituality and language. I adored the many pink fancy dance regalia that ka titi (grandma) would sew for me. From a young age I attended sweat lodge ceremonies with my mom, grandma and great grandma. I remember the day that I received my Ktunaxa name from my great grandfather. I was wearing a bright rainbow shirt. When I asked ka titi what my name was, she pointed to my shirt. I responded with, “my name is shirt?”, “Waha”, she said and kept

pointing. It took me a while, but finally I realized that my name was Rainbow.

**Lauren:** I was as young as two to three years old when I started practicing my culture. I loved everything about it. I would practice our songs, language, and dancing at school every single day. I remember attending potlatches at a very young age. Culture has always been a huge part of my life and I still love it!

**Sadie:** I started practicing my culture when

I started day care, and they would always take us on field trips to go berry picking and medicine picking. We would always have Elders with us to tell us stories on what it means and why they pick them.

**Peter:** I remember not knowing that I was an Indian. I was ten-years-old when my maternal grandmother, our matriarch had passed into the spirit realm. That’s when I witnessed the foundation of our culture in action. I learned about my lineage and clan identity at her funeral feast. I have been

captured and learning my culture deeper ever since.

## 2. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM PRACTICING YOUR CULTURE THAT YOU APPLY TO OTHER PARTS OF YOUR LIFE?

**Denni:** I realize that I need to have dance, song, and gratitude for my overall wellbeing in other parts of my life. My cultural teachings have shaped the core of who I am today, mainly teachings of matriarchal leadership. I was blessed to be born into a strong lineage and large community of strong women leaders. They taught me to work hard and to develop my knowledge and talents around leadership. I am exploring matriarchal leadership at UVic through Women's Studies and Indigenous Studies. Hard work is a beneficial teaching, and part of my journey is to find balance, to look at wellness holistically such as diet, exercise and stress management. My main focus right now is to remember to pull my head out of text books so that I can live life, celebrate accomplishments, and feel good about myself. My community is good at this. We gather throughout the year to celebrate through song, dance, and ceremony. It is through these celebrations that we express love and kindness towards one another.

My community has also taught me about interconnection and unity. These values mean lifting one another up to reach individual and collective goals and visions. Celebrating and honouring one another is one way to do this. We need to work together to protect our sacred sites, languages and cultures.

**Lauren:** I am very proud of where I come from! I come from a very traditional family who always teaches and does their best to live in our traditional ways, so with that, I always do my best to be proud of where I come from, our culture, and to always show respect, to myself and others. I love being a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw woman.

**Sadie:** What I have learned from practicing my culture that I apply to other parts of my life, is respect the things you make or were given - for example my regalia and feathers.

**Peter:** Our culture is steeped in tradition, ceremony and virtue. I apply the sacred teachings of humbleness that I remember learning from my maternal grandmother

**"Through my culture, I have been shown how to live in the moment, be patient, loving and caring to all of my surroundings."**

before her passing. Through my culture, I have been shown how to live in the moment, be patient, loving and caring to all of my surroundings.

## 3. HOW DOES YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR CULTURE AFFECT YOUR PERSONAL WELLNESS?

**Denni:** I have struggled with depression throughout my life and anemia more recently. I am learning how important Ktunaxa cultural teachings are to healing. I always understood the importance of prayer, ceremony, and smudging in healing, however now I truly value dancing, singing, speaking our language and participating in gatherings as an integral part of my holistic health.

**Lauren:** Culture is very healing for me because it brings out the spirit inside of me that isn't always shown. When I dance, everything in the real world doesn't matter anymore. When I turn left to enter the dance floor, I am turning into the spirit world, and gracefully dance and show what the song means, and then when I leave the floor, I am returning to our everyday life - but I will be back! Practicing culture and seeing our young children take part in it makes me very proud and hopeful for our future!

**Sadie:** My involvement in my culture affects my wellness very much. I dance fancy and jingle, I try to sing here and there. I would have to say it's amazing for my health and wellness to be practicing and doing a lot that involves my culture.

**Peter:** When I sing a sacred cultural song, I am speaking an ancient voice of pure guidance; I become a transmitter of regal energy intended to bring light upon the winding pathways of those who are ready to listen. When I play my drum or allow my rattle to dance in my hands, it sends out healing vibrations that allows the true light of our sacred Aboriginal existence to flourish. Our sacred singing and dancing is medicine for the soul. When I sit in a mode of reverence while harvesting and weaving with cedar bark, I am humbled into the lessons that nature and time have to offer, I begin to see through my ancestors' eyes and it brings my heart into its proper pathway.

## 4. WHO ARE THE GREATEST CULTURAL TEACHERS IN YOUR LIFE? WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT THING THEY HAVE TAUGHT YOU?

**Denni:** My grandparents have always played a great role in my life, especially as a child. Although I learned a lot from them all, ka titi Kay Shottanana is my greatest cultural teacher and answered my endless questions with patience. She would give

**"I am continually inspired by the youth in our community who are so full of curiosity and are learning the language and culture so quickly. I learn from them all the time."**

me Ktunaxa medicine when I was sick and share with me honestly about her life. She taught me the power of spirituality and that sobriety is important for living a healthy life that is connected with the magical world she showed me. This probably saved my life.

I am continually inspired by the youth in our community who are so full of curiosity and are learning the language and culture so quickly. I learn from them all the time.

**Lauren:** My greatest teachers are my granny Pauline Alfred, my grandpa Pat Alfred, my

*Con't on page 8*

## Youth Reflections on Culture & Wellness *Con't from page 7*

sister Pewi Alfred, my aunty Trish, William Wasden Jr., K'odi Nelson and many others. Culture is still to this day a huge topic in our house and family dinners. We always learn something new when we are there. I appreciate everything they have taught me and the importance of our culture because now I truly understand the love they had for me and our culture, as I teach my own two daughters our culture and to live and practice respect.

**"I was taught more on the meaning of medicines and the signs of what to do and what not to do when it comes to spiritual matters as I grew up."**

**Sadie:** My greatest cultural teachers had to be both of my grandmothers Cathy Johnson and Juliana Johnson. They have taught me a lot in life. I was taught more on the meaning of medicines and the signs of what to do and what not to do when it comes to spiritual matters as I have grown up.

**Peter:** My late paternal uncle, Rev. Percy

Tait, for his regal nature, who made room for me to walk alongside him and instructed me in cultural singing and dancing leadership. I admire my late grandfather and Chief of our house and clan, Sidney Eli, for his gentleness. During family potlatches he'd whisper to me what was taking place and who people were. I also acknowledge my dad, Lauren, who took me on his many outings to visit and assist the Elders of our community with their daily tasks where I would hear our language and stories of our Nation - it was planted in my heart. He also taught me to be patient, understanding and generous with my gifts. I will always cherish the noble guidance of the great women of my clan, they taught me to be gentle in all that I set out to do.

### 5. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED THROUGH PRACTICING YOUR CULTURE THAT YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH OTHER YOUTH?

**Denni:** It is important to have a clear mind: to not abuse drugs or alcohol so that you can experience your life fully, to build your story and protect your brain. It is okay to be exactly who you are, to not know the answers and to find your unique connection to culture and spirituality. Asking for help is a healthy

**"Always do your absolute best to learn and cherish it! Learn it, live it, love it because it is who you are forever! Culture is such a positive and healing way of living!"**

thing to do and it takes courage. Dream big!

**Lauren:** Be proud of where you come from and your culture! Always practice respect! Always do your absolute best to learn and cherish it! Learn it, live it, love it because it is who you are forever! Culture is such a positive and healing way of living!

**Sadie:** Stay put in your culture and its teachings or you will miss out on a lot!

**Peter:** May the youth of today and tomorrow embrace the virtues that our deep rooted cultures are founded upon. Our culture is alive and well. Our culture is alive in the land and all of the sacred elements of our sacred earth realm. Pause for a moment and listen and embrace what our great lands and all of its treasures are wanting you to embrace and recognize. ■

## FNHC Step Up Challenge - Eligibility Expanded!



The 2nd Annual First Nations Health Leadership Challenge - Beefy Chiefs 2.0 - Step Up is a ten month, province-wide initiative sponsored by the First Nations Health Council and supported by the First Nations Health Authority, running from June 24, 2014 to April 30, 2015. This wellness initiative is a steps-based challenge utilizing Fitbit technology (a wireless fitness tracker). Participants will compete in three categories for individual and community prizes: most steps, farthest distance and most active minutes. Grand prizes will be awarded at Gathering Wisdom for a Shared Journey VII May 2015.

Eligibility has been expanded for citizens to participate alongside our leadership. Don't know what a Fitbit is? Looking for more info? Email us: [active@fnha.ca](mailto:active@fnha.ca)

**Registration:** [www.regonline.ca/HealthLeadershipChallenge](http://www.regonline.ca/HealthLeadershipChallenge)



First Nations Health Directors Association  
Sharing experience for community wellness

# When Youth Run

## Resources for Vulnerable Youth

JORDIE JOHNSON

**"T**oo many of our children and youth were reported missing at a very young age, and we cannot and we will not lose another generation. It is our time to step up and together ensure that our children are supported in ways that they can be safe and confident to lead the way for this and future generations," Former National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, Nuuchahnulth.

Many prayers or hopes are made for the return of a child or youth who may have run away. Whether it is lighting a candle or prayers by sage, thoughts of safety are offered by those that care most - parents, caregivers, grandparents and friends. Runaways are complex, but can sometimes be attributed to family dynamics, personal issues, and youth in care. Unfortunately, First Nations youth are disproportionately represented in this regard.

To help bring awareness to missing children, the Assembly of First Nations teamed up with the RCMP and Canadian Centre for Child Protection. The initiative included the development of the website [www.missingkids.ca](http://www.missingkids.ca), which provides bulletins for missing children, support for families and case workers, and tools for developing community response plans.

Preventing youth from running away can be challenging and complex, and not every teen experiencing difficult or tough times is at risk. Amongst the greatest preventative measures that can be taken is communication between the parents and youth. Having a conversation that includes all involved to listen and empathize with any worries, feelings or concerns is helpful, and if needed, seek professional help from a therapist or counsellor if you're unsure or overwhelmed.

Running away significantly increases ones vulnerability to exploitation, physical, sexual, and emotional assault, theft, substance abuse issues, homelessness

and gang involvement. Youth become more vulnerable to all the risks listed and without help can spiral into dangerous situations.

### What to do if a child runs away

Remain calm. You may be fearful, distraught and unnerved, but you must do your best to remain calm. Try to do everything possible to confirm a runaway: if the child has told friends, left a note, or threatened prior. Contact friends and family for more information. If they have a cell, texting rather than calling can be less invasive.

### In Canada, it is not necessary to wait to call the police

It is however important to know police response will vary depending on their resources, internal policy, current workload and risk assessment. If you are having difficulty making a report to police, please call [Missingkids.ca](http://Missingkids.ca) at 1-866-KIDS-TIPS. They can assist you with the legal system, as well as help you through the emotional trauma. When calling the police, take notes on the following information:

**Incident number, name of the officer, phone number for follow-ups.**

When a child returns home, regardless of how or when, the process may be difficult for everyone. Make sure you show concern and care for their well-being and safety, and make them feel safe and welcome, unconditionally. Feelings may not be reciprocated immediately. Also notify the police, friends and family and any other resources used that the missing child has returned. Depending on the length of time or any dangerous behaviour experienced, seek medical attention if necessary. Lastly, contact a traditional healer, family friend, mediator, counsellor, or third party to help with the healing process for the entire family and to find solutions as soon as possible.

Remember that these situations come with a range of emotions. Loved ones may be embarrassed, sad, fearful, angry and relieved. Remember that healing takes time. Take a positive approach - a person-first approach that focuses on healing.

If you or someone you know is thinking of running away, please know there are healthier and safer options available. There are resources to help, people you know, or confidential and discreet phone lines. If you are experiencing a runaway event, there are resources for youth to return or transition back to safety. ■

## Resources

<p><b>Emergency</b> 9-1-1</p> <p><b>BC Nurse Line</b> 8-1-1</p> <p><b>Missingkids.ca</b> 1-866-543-8477</p>	<p><b>Kidshelpphone.ca</b> 1-800-668-6868</p> <p><b>Victim Link</b> 1-800-563-0808</p> <p><b>Pride Line</b> 1-800-566-1170</p>
---	--

# Gathering Our Voices

## Wellness Champions



Participants at the Gathering Our Voices talent show wowed the crowd on Coast Salish Territory in March 2014.

**A**t the Gathering Our Voices youth conference held in March of 2014, youth were invited to complete the First Nations Health Authority Wellness Challenge. Participants were invited to attend workshops in each of the four FNHA wellness streams: Being Active, Healthy Eating, Nurturing Spirit, and Respecting Tobacco. At the conclusion of the conference, a handful of successful Wellness Champions were chosen. We asked them to share their stories of wellness. Congratulations to each of the youth wellness champions! Your contributions to personal and community wellness are an inspiration to many, and supports our collective understanding of wellness.



**Odette  
Wilson**  
24 years old

**What is one thing that youth can teach older generations about wellness?**

A work and life balance. I find that with older generations it was a priority to work and work and work. I think that our generation have tried to balance work and life a bit more.

**What is wellness to you? What is the one activity that you do that sums up wellness?**

For me that would be physical activity. When I am physically active, the benefits trickle down to all of my other wellness avenues. When I'm physically active, I eat better and my mental state is better. It's all inter-connected with the physical. This is something that I only learned recently.

**How do you celebrate your culture?**

A big one for my family is traditional foods. With my dad being a fisherman as well as a hunter, I feel very fortunate that I get traditional foods and to experience that part of my culture. I get a freezer full of Salmon, my Moose meat, my Deer meat and my Elk meat. Growing up, I didn't realise that was a cultural and traditional thing. I thought that was normal but now that I talk to people I realise how lucky I am.

**If money was no object, what would you do for your wellness?**

I would eat really, really well! Being a student and an intern means that I have to cut corners and not buy the food that I need but the food that I can afford. I would do so many physical activities, whereas now I have to be resourceful with my money and choose activities appropriately. If money was no object I would buy me a Vita-Mix!



**Brandon Laye**  
15 years old

**What is wellness to you? What is the one activity that you do that sums up wellness?**

Being organized, I bought myself a binder to organise myself, that helped with my wellness. I also feel good about myself when I go to the cemetery to add paint to all of the faded headstones so that the writing is more visible. Personal hygiene too - being clean, feeling good and looking like Jamie Foxx!

**How do you celebrate your culture?**

I play two-ball, stick games and grass dancing. I'm also thinking about volunteering during National Aboriginal Day.

**If money was no object, what would you do for your wellness?**

I would donate to the SPCA and to the Band Office. I would also invest in something.



**Tori Watson**  
18 years old

**What is wellness to you? What is the one activity that you do that sums up wellness?**

Walking. After a busy day where I am stressed out it's nice to be able to walk, talk and relax with my family, outside, in the fresh air. My family helps me to reduce stress.

**How do you celebrate your culture?**

I always want to learn from my Elders. Since Grade 5 I have had a very big interest in my family's Métis history. I always like to teach others about my culture too. Gabrielle Dumont was my great, great, great Uncle and in Grade 5 I did a speech on how he led the Métis people. I want people to be proud of their culture, to learn as much as they can and have fun with it. These days, people don't cherish it and if this continues it could be lost.

**Where do you want to be in 5 years' time?**

I want to go to the Okanagan School of Business and specialize in something to do with business or in human resources. I really like working with people.



**Lindy Alec**  
17 years old

**What is wellness to you? What is the one activity that you do that sums up wellness?**

Being happy with where you are in life and doing the best to achieve your goals. To know that you're able to accomplish anything that you want to make your life healthier. Believe and be active!

**How do you celebrate your culture?**

We do Pow Wows and get family together. We don't really see each other a lot so we try to get to know one another. Our culture is being lost so I, along with other youth, like to learn our language to stop that happening.

**If money was no object, what would you do for your wellness?**

I would create a program for youth in Quesnel to do physical activity and fun activities that I would be leading.



**Justin Peters**  
19 years old

**What is one thing that youth can teach older generations about wellness?**

Our generation has so much to offer in terms of technology and information. We can teach them about nutrition, health and eating habits. This could then be a sharing experience where the Elders would teach us about work ethics. The biggest thing that youth could give Elders is their time, time for youth to ask Elders about things like medicine and other aspects of their culture.

**If money was no object, what would you do for your wellness?**

I've always had a dream about living in a close knit community and I would spend

it all on making modern-day pit houses and community gardens. Oh, and if I had all the money in the world I would travel everywhere!

**What is wellness to you? What is the one activity that you do that sums up wellness?**

For me, it's praying and being clear minded. A good thought process that keeps your self-esteem up. Being mentally stable is important and it's best not to get caught up in unhealthy behaviours. That's the biggest thing for me, not listening to the trickster in my mind telling me to do things when I don't need to.

**How do you celebrate your culture?**

I celebrate it by praying, smudging, learning my language and doing the best for myself and for my community.



**Jesse Lecoy**  
22 years old

**What is wellness to you? What is the one activity that you do that sums up wellness?**

To me, running is the activity that says wellness. First of all, it's a great physical activity. Running is also something that my family does together and it allows us to connect. For this reason, it is significant and really means a lot. I also like running individually. It allows me to clear my mind. I've seen the changes and am inspired by what running can do for me, my family and communities.

**If money was no object, what would you do for your wellness?**

I would make time for everything. I would make time for myself on a daily basis. I would make time to exercise, prepare food properly, have good conversations with family and time to spend alone, by myself to reflect on everything that I do.

**How do you celebrate your culture?**

I celebrate my culture by spending time with my parents and being able to learn about my culture and history (Okanagan, Squamish, Lkwungen, and Sauteaux). ■

# Winter Challenge 2014

## Kura Jack on Creating a Grassroots Wellness Movement with her Brother Cordell

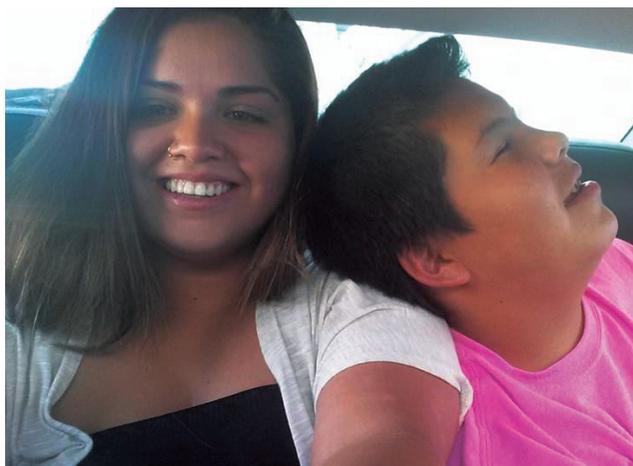
PHILIP HOGAN

**A** social media-fueled phenomenon swept BC First Nations and others over the winter months in early 2014. The 'Winter Challenge 2014' as it was known, was an unexpected variation on a traditional First Nations practice that would not have been possible without the advent of social media. Media stories and videos appeared on the internet and social media of people in bathing suits and shorts dunking into icy water and snow during late winter.

Started by Penelakut teen siblings Kura and Cordell Jack as a way to encourage friends and family to get out during the winter, the challenge was not intended to go beyond their immediate community. Kura was noted as the creator when her brother Cordell was unavailable for the initial interview with the media. They posted a video of themselves making snow angels – Kura in just a sports bra and shorts in February – intending to encourage family and friends to get active. Kura said of the phenomena, "I thought it would stay within my family, or at most our reserve."

Initially the challenge was a fun way to get people outside and active but it quickly evolved with its association with cold-water bathing – a tradition practiced by many First Nations in BC, particularly on the coast. "It started with a good spirit and fun, and became healing for people," Kura said. "It progressed to people going in the water and uplifting them. It's what the people wanted to do and happened by itself." Cold water bathing is to coastal First Nations what sweet grass smudging is to people from the Interior, so it was a natural association to make.

The Winter Challenge took off quickly with the use of social media. As Kura said, "Because it's on the computer it formed a community that never would have happened otherwise." Videos appeared all over Facebook, YouTube, the news, and in discussions within many communities.



Siblings Kura and Cordell Jack started the Winter Challenge with friends and family.

**"It started with a good spirit and fun and became healing for people."**

The challenge spread quickly, forming a viral trend where people videotaped their Winter Challenge - bathing in cold water or snow, posting it and nominating friends and family to take the challenge. With lakes frozen over or where no water was available some instead did snow angels. Mobile phones with video capability and social media helped people to activate their personal networks, crossing communities and spreading widely, especially in BC.

The Winter Challenge also had some similarities to polar bear swims witnessed on New Year's Day annually which non-Aboriginal people may be more familiar with. Though the Winter Challenge 2014 deviated from strictly traditional practices, it tapped into a growing strength and assertiveness that is as much cultural as directly political. It is not affiliated with any organization, but a grassroots development that happened without any plan or expectations.

Traditional ceremonies among First Nations vary but is widely practiced as a means of purification and healing. "I wouldn't video-record actual traditional bathing - that wouldn't be appropriate," said Kura speaking of traditional cold-water bathing ceremonies. The Winter Challenge 2014 exposed people widely to a tradition that they may not otherwise be familiar with, or not necessarily practice regularly. It also provided a way for people to encourage their families and build and maintain connections across distance using social media.

In the end, thousands of people and many of them First Nations, participated in what could be considered a self-strengthening movement that was fun, social and can be understood with reference to traditional practices. Public figures including former Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson, Union of BC Indian Chiefs Vice-president Chief Bob Chamberlin, actors Dr. Evan Adams, Lorne Cardinal and Adam Beach, and thousands of First Nations and non-Aboriginal people participated.

*Con't on page 25*

# Youth Living Well With Disabilities

BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society

PEYMAN SHOLEH

**BC** Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS) is an award winning organization that provides BC's First Nations and Aboriginal population with disability and health services to address the gaps of community members accessing disability related services. BCANDS is a unique organization in Canada which offers a wide variety of services to First Nations and Aboriginal Persons living with disabilities who reside in urban centres in BC or at home (on-reserve), as well as to organizations requiring resources and support services.

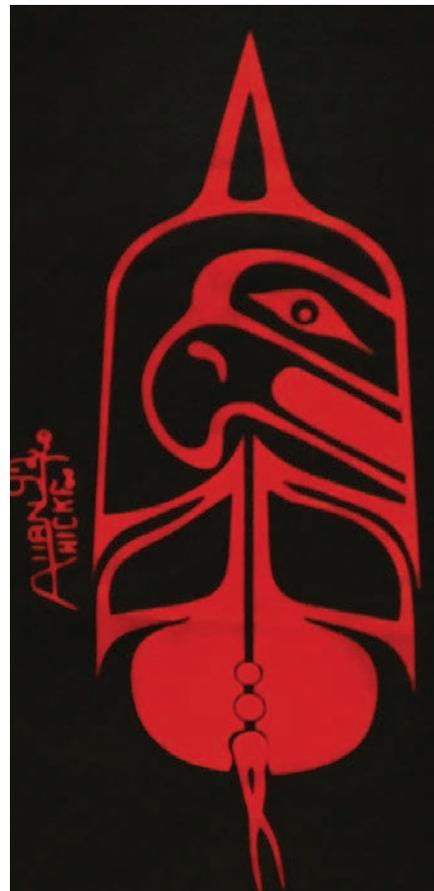
**Some of the services offered by BCANDS include:**

- Provision of mobility equipment
- Adaptive technology
- Assistance with Disability Tax Credits
- Accessing CPP Disability benefits and appeals
- Persons With Disabilities applications
- Housing issues
- Travel assistance including travel arrangements which are not covered through other means.

**Areas covered include transition planning, housing, education, income, transportation and day to day living.**

BCANDS is currently in the process of creating a guide to support disabled youth living at home (on-reserve) and who are transitioning into adulthood. This initiative is in partnership with the Seabird Island Band, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. BCANDS is currently finalizing the transition guide for distribution through the BCANDS website. First Nations communities are encouraged to look at the guide and to modify or adapt it to meet their own unique needs. The guide is not considered a finished product because the needs of communities are specific to their membership. Some of the content includes information on major areas of a youth's life, as he or she transitions to adulthood. Areas covered include transition planning, housing, education, income, transportation and day to day living. The guide provides helpful information about available resources and supports, as well as funding options. The Youth Guide will be available on the BCANDS website in the near future. ■

Contact the BCANDS office at: [www.bcands.bc.ca](http://www.bcands.bc.ca)  
**Toll Free:** 1.888.815.5511 (TTY Accessible)



# Cuystwi ("Let's Go!" in Stl'atl'imx)

Indigenous Youth Wellness Project

TYSUN TALLMAN



Cuystwi facilitators from the nine community partners of Nisga'a, Gitsegukla, Lake Babine, Nak'azdli, Okanagan, Squiala, Cowichan Tribes, Carrier Sekani Family Services, and Urban Native Youth Association pose in the Cuystwi 'decolonized' toques at the first facilitators gathering in November.

**T**he Indigenous Youth Wellness project, now known as Cuystwi (kwee-stwee), began as a conversation between First Nations communities in Northern BC who were working with Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) Aboriginal Health on a chronic disease prevention program highlighting the importance of traditional food. The idea was to create an online resource specifically for Indigenous youth to promote wellness and prevent suicide. A reduction in the First Nations youth suicide rate is one of the seven key performance indicators identified in the Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan. Therefore, developing a resource for upstream suicide prevention relevant to Aboriginal and First Nations youth would meet a need identified by the community.

Indigenous youth were engaged on the idea of an online resource for wellness and what this might look like for them. World café style workshops were held in communities in 2011 followed by a think tank in Vancouver in early 2012 bringing together 65 youth representatives from 20 communities. These conversations made it clear - more youth wanted to learn about their culture!

A partnership was formed between the Nisga'a Nation, the community of Gitsegukla, Nak'azdli First Nation, Lake Babine Nation, Urban Native Youth Association, BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services and PHSA Aboriginal Health. By early 2013, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Okanagan Nation Alliance, Squiala First Nation and Cowichan Tribes also joined the project.

What makes Cuystwi unique and significant is that it gives Indigenous youth an opportunity to participate in the creation of an online wellness tool made specifically for them. Cuystwi continues to evolve in the scope of activities offered and the team is committed to building capacity with youth from First Nation and Aboriginal communities. Indigenous youth have had involvement since the creation of Cuystwi, in the design, implementation, and review process. The Youth Advisory was led by 'Namgis youth Gabriella Emery and Stl'atl'imx Elder Gerry Oleman. The youth on the committee received training in leadership, public speaking, facilitation,

data gathering, and filmmaking, utilizing Telehealth technology to connect from across the province. Youth Advisory members vetted the curriculum for the online program with youth in their communities and at the Gathering Our Voices 2013 conference in Penticton, BC. Youth from all over the province were asked to provide feedback on the project videos and activities to ensure relevance and suggest modifications if it did not meet their approval.

The Cuystwi quest is designed for youth (ages 10 to 12) to be led through the training by a community facilitator. In the pilot phase, youth and youth workers were provided training, and were given the skills and knowledge to facilitate and provide evaluation documentation for the program. Some of the facilitators were originally members of the Cuystwi Youth Advisory committee. These youth have been with the program since the beginning, and are now facilitating, teaching, and helping youth navigate through the program and understand the material. This is truly inspiring to witness!

The Cuystwi quest guides youth through a series of online activities and videos that are meant to be paired with activities in their existing community-based youth groups. The modules include:

- **Identity:** Building on the interconnections of family, community and the land.
- **Culture:** Introduction of the concept with videos sharing cultural activities from different Nations across the province. Culture is food, art, song, respecting the land, and living in balance.
- **Colonization:** Introduction to the concept, historical context, major elements and the ongoing cumulative effects on Aboriginal people. Youth become aware of how it affects them.
- **Racism:** Addressing racism experienced by Aboriginal people, youth learn skills and tools to deal with racism.

**Cuystwi opened up my eyes to new and old challenges of First Nations youth. I was able to picture what they were seeing online and feel better about youth learning about a history that affects our people in many negative ways, but how knowing where we came from is going to help us see where we need to go and how we can help each other to get there.**

- **We are all Warriors:** Emphasizing personal and collective strengths and values with themes of culture, interconnection and community, including inspiring video stories of youth who have overcome challenges. The youth are then invited to become Cuystwi Warriors.

Cuystwi is currently developing phase 2 for youth ages 13-15, including topics such as: enhancing cultural identity, self-regulation and healthy relationships. In addition, Cuystwi now has a sister program, *Ask Auntie*, that is currently being developed by BC Women's Aboriginal program. It is an upstream suicide and violence prevention program for girls ages 10 to 18 delivered in a similar online and community partner format.

Cuystwi opened up my eyes to new and old challenges of First Nations youth. I was able to picture what they were seeing online and feel better about youth learning about a history that affects our people in many negative ways, but how knowing where we came from is going to help us see where we need to go and how we can help each other to get there. ■

For more information on Cuystwi please check out our website [www.cuystwi.ca](http://www.cuystwi.ca).

**Cuystwi offers an introduction to the concept, historical context, major elements and the ongoing cumulative effects of colonization on Aboriginal people. Youth become aware of how it affects them.**



Young alchemists learn the scientific method at the KDC Youth Engagement Science Fair.

# Kwakiutl District Council Youth Science Fair

“Gawalla xa hamattalla” - Helping our People

SUBMITTED BY MILDRED PRICE

**T**he Kwakiutl District Council (KDC) Health provides preventative and health promotion services for six member Nations on northern Vancouver Island. There are approximately 2,100 persons eligible to access the KDC Health services, which cover a broad range of health activities and interventions.

The Member Nations include:

- Mamalilikulla Qwe’Qwa’Sot’Em Band
- Da’naxda’xw First Nation
- Campbell River Band
- Cape Mudge Band
- K’omoks Band
- Kwakwaka’wakw Band

On June 7, 2014 KDC Health hosted a Youth Engagement Science Fair. The goal was to have meaningful participation and sustained involvement from our youth. With more than 33 children in attendance, and just about as many parents, we met our goal of inspiring Kwakiutl youth to explore the field of science. The engagement between the children and parents was outstanding and a great sight to see. The age of attendees was very diverse, as were their interests.

The youth were definitely wowed and amazed by the various

tables set up. There was information on how to work with traditional plants and medicines, the importance of rocks and minerals and many more tables to keep them intrigued in the wonderful world of science.

Traditional medicine has played an integral role within our First Nations communities - to pass this knowledge onto our youth who are seeking it is very important today. The youth engaged in making traditional teas (dandelion, plantain, stinging nettle and horse tail) citronella body bars (cedar citronella) and cedar peppermint lip balms.

Various experiments included forces and motion; the importance of composting and how to build a worm farm; activities involving sound, water and structures; comparing the density of vinegar and water; demonstrating osmosis; and describing how air pressure works and how it effects our daily lives.

KDC Health’s focus was to spend time with youth to engage them in the wonderful world of science, with the intention of spreading the word of how important science is and how we use it every day! Early exposure to science for youth makes it more accessible for them in the future and also open new doors to health education as a related field. We wanted to get the youth to actively engage and initiate the activities with others in the community. Education is a lifelong journey and learning never ends! ■

# Digital Wellness For Youth

COMPILED BY ODETTIE WILSON AND TYSUN TALLMAN



## Spirit Runner

[www.spiritrannerapp.com](http://www.spiritrannerapp.com)

Spirit Runner is an App tool to engage Aboriginal youth and encourage regular activity in their daily lives. The goal is to keep youth healthy and occupied in positive ways through their teen years.

## HealthyMinds

[www.theroyal.ca/mental-health-centre/apps/healthy-mindsapp](http://www.theroyal.ca/mental-health-centre/apps/healthy-mindsapp)

An app to help students cope with stress and manage emotional and mental wellness. HealthyMinds is a problem-solving tool to help deal with emotions and cope with the stresses you encounter both on and off campus.

## MindShift

[www.anxietybc.com/mobileapp](http://www.anxietybc.com/mobileapp)

An app designed to help teens and young adults cope with anxiety.

## Mind Check

[www.mindcheck.ca](http://www.mindcheck.ca)

This website is designed to help youth and young adults in BC check out how they're feeling and quickly connect to mental health resources and support. Support includes education, self-care tools, website links, and assistance in connecting to local professional resources. On this site, you can take quizzes to find out how you're doing mentally. These quizzes are designed to help identify changes in feelings, thoughts and behaviour that are associated with mental health challenges and do not provide a clinical diagnosis. After taking a quiz, you will get feedback with recommendations for actions you can take. It offers information and links to self-help resources and how to find services in your community, should you feel the need for help from a professional.

## Fooducate

Chosen as a 2011 best iPhone Health & Fitness app, Fooducate turns smartphones into scanners. Superman's got nothing on this technology: Pick a food product and scan the bar code to get all the details on the nutrients inside. Users can even compare different items to find the healthiest, tastiest, most affordable choice. Available

for free on the iPhone, iPod touch, iPad, and Android.

## Relax & Sleep

Profound relaxation through self-hypnosis will lead you into a world of restorative rest. Glenn Harrold narrates your journey to inner peace. His soothing voice is laid over subtle, calming background tones to create an effect that will have you falling asleep naturally in no time.



## First Voices

[www.firstvoices.com](http://www.firstvoices.com)

FirstVoices is a group of web-based tools and services designed to support First Nations and Aboriginal people engaged in language archiving, language teaching & culture revitalization. Check out their interactive website and app!

## Headspace Meditation App

You can now get your headspace on the move thanks to our new Meditation App. Working on both Apple iOS and Android devices, this mobile meditation app makes practicing simple meditation and mindfulness

techniques easy, ideal for those on-the-go.

## Khan Academy

[www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org)

Khan Academy is a not-for-profit with the goal of changing education for the better by providing a free world-class education for anyone anywhere. All of the site's resources are available to anyone. Khan Academy's materials and resources are available to you completely free of charge.

## Youth Against Violence Line

1-800-680-4264 talk one-on-one 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or e-mail: [info@youthagainst-violenceline.com](mailto:info@youthagainst-violenceline.com)

## Anxiety BC Youth

<http://youth.anxietybc.com>  
Resources for healthy habits and common problems.

## Drugcocktails.ca

"Get the facts" about the effects and risks of mixing medications with substances like cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana and other street drugs.

## Urban Native Youth Association Vancouver

[www.unya.bc.ca](http://www.unya.bc.ca) ■

# “It would be good if we all could learn to bend before we break” - Xpey/Cedar as a sacred tool.

WILLIAM A. WHITE



**T**he cedar basket is a visible reminder of our peoples’ relationship with the land and all living things – consistent with the belief that all things are sacred. A basket once owned by Katherine George from Cowichan depicts mountains, oceans, trees, and perhaps the weave itself speaks about balance and supporting each other. Our ancestors believed in the strength of our relations with the natural and supernatural worlds, our families, and created tools and containers which echoed that understanding. The Creator also provided songs, ceremonies, and prayers to protect and to surround – tools meant to protect children.

Our ancestors believed children are gifts of the Creator and had to be treated with love and great respect. My mother Katherine is gone now, however today whenever I see any of her grand-children, I always remember how much she loved them. To this day I can see her, very much like your Elders, kiss and hug her grand-children and tell them how much she loved them. She lives on through them, and this is one of the important reasons the old people said to young people, “you need to take care of yourself”. This thought is one of the oldest teachings of our people

**Amongst the Coast Salish the use of xpey as a cleansing and protective instrument is clearly connected to rites and ceremonies associated with life transitions like birth, naming, marriage, first hunt, first basket/sweater, end of life.**

– taking the energy of grief and loss, like the many twists of the cedar to make a design, and change it to love for those that in her words “meant the world to her”. Not always an easy task but important. Our traditions and values are, like the basket interwoven with the many and varied ways through ritual and ceremony, have been here since the beginning of time. The old people believed that each day was another time to provide teachings to the young people. Our old people lived through much more hardship, discrimination and the

beginnings of poverty, than we will ever know. Most decided to use the teachings more and more.

Elders throughout the Coast Salish region and others too, believe there is strength, cleansing and healing associated with xpey (cedar). Kenny Moses, Snoqualmie of Washington State saw the cedar tree “as a great gift from the Creator.” Of its qualities he added, “cedar bends before it breaks.” Of this value he said, “it would be good if we all could learn to bend before we break.” This is consistent Sul’eluhwst/ Elders knowledge about being strong, taking care of one another and being kind. Over time all of these things translate to inner strength. It is the aspect of working with teachings and history, that will cut across the fears associated with grieving. There are very strong, consistent teachings associated with not speaking about death, or speaking in public about these issues. When it does happen at community meetings the topic is lead with an opening prayer and then Elders/speakers/traditional leaders provide words, prayers and songs to protect and surround the audience.

Amongst the Coast Salish the use of xpey as a cleansing and protective instrument is clearly connected to rites and ceremonies associated with life transitions like birth, naming, marriage, first hunt, first basket/sweater, end of life. Elders understand these rites as essential for healing and are as old as time itself. The connection and application of teachings of reverence for cedar is also a reflection of the Elders’ understanding that ‘we are connected to all living things’. The Elders and our ancestors believe that working with these teachings, talking about these teachings, and using the teachings with others will protect the individual and the community, and that it is derived from supernatural contact with plants, animals and the Creator. For the Coast Salish, ritual and supernatural life is accelerated within the

Coast Salish complex and “Shaker Churches” throughout the region. You might ask yourself what are the ceremonies in my territory that provides strength and balance? For balance our ancestors required moving and singing songs in pairs. Four verses, four days, repeated teachings to help with remembering. It is for this reason the ancestors believed that talk too was sacred. They also said that we should be careful with what we say. They also believed to help a child grow strong, and to feel loved and protected, they should be talked to kindly.

Sharing teachings and living teachings, provides another moment to visibly show young people a significant part of our life cycles. This too is a part of healing, as the ancestors believed that moving with the ‘good words, good actions’ carries powerful teachings from another time and place. They believed and trusted that the old becomes the new and we prepare young people for their time. The use of cedar for ritual and ceremonial use, with rattles, drums, or through songs or prayer, is associated with focus, and the use of words. The use of words as a fundamental expression of the sacred carries power. It is for these reasons that there is a common understanding that when the Elders speak no one else should be speaking, and everyone should be listening. The old people always said, “listen and when it comes time you will know what to say to help others.” I yas eye un Suli (may you be happy and in good spirits!)

**Endnote:** This article was drawn from content prepared for the Kw'am Kw'um Sulitst HIV/AIDS project, Ts'ewulhtun Health Centre, Cowichan Tribes in order to develop new materials to strengthen Sul'eluhwst/ Elders community education using language and teachings. Fairlie Mendoza, Community Health Nurse began the project. William White, BA History and Anthropology is the lead researcher and collaborates with Andrew Cienski, MA Linguistics. With thanks to CIHR, Catalyst Grant for funding the project. Administrative support provided by Royal Roads University and with academic support of Dr. Virginia McKendry, faculty member in the School of Communication and Culture at RRU. ■

## Healthy Tips for Youth

**Drink water.** If you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated. Carry a small water bottle in your bag to stay hydrated throughout the day.

**Eat breakfast.** And while you're at it, eat lunch and dinner too. Skipping meals will cause your metabolism to slow down and you'll be much less productive. It will also force your brain and body to go in to survival mode, leading you to overeat when you finally fuel yourself.

**Small changes can make a big impact on your health!** Take the stairs, swap out pop for water or salad instead of fries. It all adds up!

**Find a friend who shares your health and wellness ideals.** Encourage each other to stay on track and check-in regularly for motivation.

**Identify your self-care tools to de-stress.** Make a list of healthy and pampering activities you do to nurture your spirit. Revisit this list as often as you need, especially when you are busy. Learning how to manage your stress early will keep you in optimal mental and physical health for your whole lifetime.

**Make time for meaningful reflection.** Before bed, list three things about your day that you are grateful for. Practice balanced thinking by challenging your negative thoughts. Problem solve by evaluating the outcomes: the good, the bad, and the neutral.

**Find a creative outlet, even if you aren't 'artsy'.** Learn to play an instrument, create an art journal, collage, take photos, dance, draw or paint!

**Sleep 8.5 - 10 hours a night.** You'll be happier and feel better overall after a good night's rest.

**Spend time on the land.** Get active or just hang out – but get outside!

**Take breaks from electronics and social media.** During meals, ignore your phone. Shut down your computer and TV an hour before you go to sleep.

**Exercise and sweat daily!** Choose activities that are fun so that it is easier to maintain an active lifestyle. That could be skateboarding, dance classes, rock climbing, team sports, yoga, or walking your dog.

**Learn to cook.** It is the easiest way to ensure your meals are healthy. If you are on a tight budget, get creative with ingredients and search the internet for affordable recipes.

**Make sex a choice** – not something you 'have to do'. Practice safe sex by ensuring contraception is used.

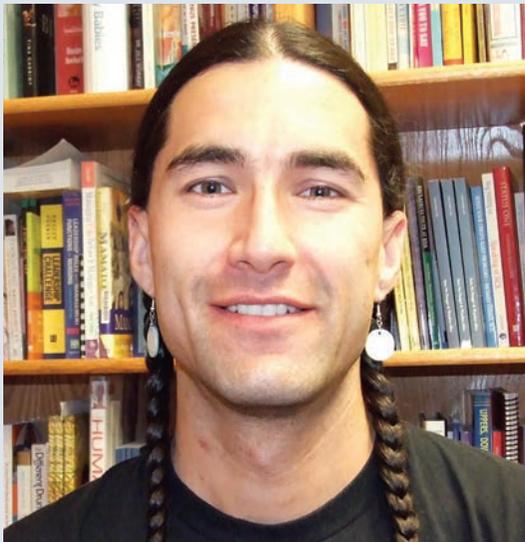
**Learn about traditional foods.** Minimize or eliminate processed foods.

**Spend time with Elders!** Listen to their stories and share some laughs. You will never regret it. ■

**Trevor Mack - Ts'ilhqot'in - [trevormack.ca](http://trevormack.ca)**

**What is the best beginner camera to use for filmmaking and photography?**

**A:** There are SO many different types of cameras out there for beginners. When I was starting out with filmmaking I was using my mom's \$50 digital camera. Beginner artists have to realize it's not necessarily what kind of equipment you have, it's HOW you use it. Some of the successful photographers and filmmakers I personally know use cameras that are 3-5 years old! However, I do suggest Canon and Nikon's Digital SLR cameras which have an immense amount of settings and features that will be very helpful for beginner artists. As for getting into visual arts: just create things! There's too much white noise and generic stuff out there! As Indigenous artists we have an obligation to tackle social, culture and economical problems with new ways of expression. Create something original that people want to see more of. If you fail at it you will learn about more about yourself and tackle that same problem with a new outlook. In other words, don't be afraid to push the boundaries of everything you do!



**Ryan Day - St'uxwtéws**

**Why do you run?**

**A:** I first took up running at age 12 because I was good at it and realized that success depended directly on how hard you worked. For many years I then ran for competition until I went to World Half-marathon Championships in 2005, then reevaluated the individual nature of being a competitive athlete. In 2006 I participated in a spiritual run that began in Vancouver and ended in Anchorage, Alaska where I learned the spiritual aspect of running. I now do a balance of all three: to feel good physically, mentally and emotionally; compete to be a visibly healthy role model living a principled life; and spiritually by carrying myself across my people's lands in prayer.

**Elle-Maija Tailfeathers - [elle-maija-tailfeathers.com](http://elle-maija-tailfeathers.com)**

**Blackfoot Kainai and Sámi**

**What Indigenous artists do you most admire?**

**A:** It's difficult to choose just a few names of Indigenous artists whom I admire because the truth is there is an entire global community of Indigenous artists from whose work I continually draw inspiration. However, as a filmmaker, I know that I would not have the freedom to create the kind of films I do if it wasn't for the work of trailblazing Indigenous filmmakers like Alanis Obomsawin, Merata Mita, and Tracey Moffatt.



# Safe Sex Questions From Youth

## Questions & Answers

With FNHA Doctors Shannon Waters, Naomi Dove, Isaac Sobol, and Sarah Williams with support from Janine Stevenson

**Q** "I've recently heard of STI and PAP tests, what are these?"

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) tests are the ways you get yourself checked for these types of infections. One of the most common STIs in youth is Chlamydia. It is tested with a pee sample or a swab from the vagina. Gonorrhea is also tested this way. Other STIs like HIV, Hepatitis and syphilis are checked with a blood test. A Pap test looks for changes on the cells of the cervix that can turn into cervical cancer. The cervix is the end part of the uterus (womb). The doctor or nurse will look inside the vagina and take a swab from the cervix. With this exam, the woman might feel some pressure, but it should not be painful.

**Q** What should I know beforehand?

When you go for STI testing, you will be asked some questions about any symptoms, when you last had sex and a bit about your partners. You don't have to answer questions you are not comfortable with, but the information you give will help the doctor or nurse figure out what are the best tests for you. You might want to make a note of any questions you might have for your doctor or nurse. You can ask questions so you know what is being done. If you are not comfortable with testing, you can change your mind at any time.

Check out this page:  
<http://smartsexresource.com/get-tested/tests-and-exams>  
for more info about what to expect when you go for STI testing.

**Q** Should my boyfriend get them?

It is always a good idea for all sex partners to get checked out at the same time, so you might want to talk to your boyfriend about getting tested together.

**Q** Where do I get these done?

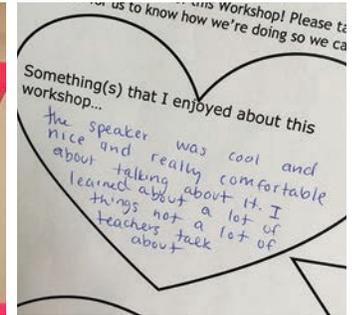
You can go to your local public health unit or a community health centre to have an STI/PAP test or for help finding a place to get tested. The nurse that works in the First Nations health centre will be able to provide the tests or discuss where else to go. Some drop-in centers have an outreach nurse who does STI and Pap testing. You can also check out the Clinic Finder on Smart Sex: <http://smartsexresource.com/get-tested/clinic-finder>. ■

Have a question for Doc' Talk? Email us: [spiritmagazine@fnha.ca](mailto:spiritmagazine@fnha.ca)

# Youth-Driven YouthCO

Yuusnewas (taking care of each other)

JESSICA ST. JEAN, YÚUSNEWAS PROGRAM MANAGER



YouthCO has hosted numerous successful events in urban and rural settings throughout the province by and for youth.

**Y**outhCO HIV and Hep C Society is located in downtown Vancouver on the unceded traditional territory of the x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7m̱esh (Squamish) and Tsleil-Waututh. We are a community-driven organization by and for youth that seeks to engage, educate and empower young people living with or vulnerable to HIV and Hepatitis C. We are proud to say that we are a training ground for future leaders in the health services world. We are a hub where young people can come for education and leadership opportunities that they might not have access to within non-youth organizations. We have a number of exciting programs YouthCO uses to reach young people 'where they're at' to share relevant information about HIV and sexual health.

Being an HIV organization is not just about prevention, it's about people coming together in safe spaces to create health and social changes - whether they may

**YouthCO has many paths to involvement. Whether you're interested in facilitation, party planning or community outreach - we have a place for you!**

have a positive or negative HIV status. Health looks different for everyone and can include the way we eat, how active we are, and even what medications we choose to take or not take for our health conditions. We strive to create a community where youth can learn new information, give back to their communities and have some fun or meet new friends.

We have a set of values that are used

to drive our programs and organizational activities. All of our work is peer-driven. This means that it's created and reviewed by youth, and also delivered to youth by youth. This is beneficial because many young people get awkward when adults try to talk to them about sexuality and drugs. Peers that are comfortable with the subject matter help to break down these barriers so that we can have open and honest learning experiences. *Harm reduction* means that we don't judge people for the decisions they make in their lives; instead we share prevention information so that people can make what they do safer. In regards to HIV and Hep C, this means teaching about safer sex and safer drug use. Most of our workshops include a condom demonstration, and safer drug use workshops are available upon request.

**Peer Education**

The program coordinator along with volunteers deliver workshops in high schools

and at youth groups. Volunteers meet once a month to practice their facilitation skills for the classroom. This is a great program to gain more sexual health knowledge, practice public speaking and build up your resume.

### **Mpowerment**

A program for young gay, bisexual and transgendered men. This is a place to meet other guys outside of the club scene and work together to create positive change in the LGBT community. This group meets several times a month to socialize, create parties and put on workshops.

### **Youth Worker**

This position provides guidance and support to youth that may need help navigating the health care system or creating their harm-reduction plans.

### **Board of Directors**

For youth interested in taking on more of a leadership and decision-making role at YouthCO, consider joining our board. This group meets monthly and is formed of sub-committees that gather throughout the month, in areas such as fundraising, community engagement, and marketing.

### **Yúusnewas**

Our Indigenous youth program, Yúusnewas, means 'taking care of each other' in the Squamish language. We love this name because we think that one of the ways that we can take care of each other is by talking about sexual health. The program works to decolonize the way that we talk about sexual health amongst ourselves and to our young people through workshops and volunteer engagement.

In Yúusnewas we consider decolonization to be a never-ending process. Some of the effects of colonization we know about include loss of language, culture, land, and education of our people. Decolonization also includes the way we think about and experience sexuality. Our sexuality is an integral part of who we are and can have ripple effects on the other areas of our lives. Some areas it can affect include access to education, experiences of poverty, and how challenging it will be for us to realize our full potential.

The damaging long-term effects of the colonizer's abuse of the land seem to be ever-looming in our imaginations. In order to heal we need to discuss the colonizer's effect on our sexuality. If we were sitting in a room together and had never met before, we could still talk about the damaging effect colonization has had on the land for hours as we got to know each other. What if we were sitting in that same room and the issue of HIV or unplanned pregnancies came up? Indigenous peoples have much higher rates of negative health effects as a byproduct of historical and ongoing colonization. It's an important issue that is affecting our communities, including our youth, and should be discussed without shame or judgement. We should be asking the question of how we became so disconnected from our own bodies. We are connected to everything in the circle of life. If mother earth isn't healthy she can't take care of us, and if we aren't healthy we can't take care of her.

**Harm reduction means that we don't judge people for the decisions they make in their lives; instead we share prevention information so that people can make what they do safer.**

One obvious answer to this disconnection are the values that were imposed on our people by colonizing missionaries of various religious sects. These values of patriarchy, bodily shame, and purity have no place in education of our youth. These values have undermined our culture and traditions and have led to abuse, fear, and shame which have had detrimental effects on our youth. For example, in the Squamish culture it was normal for women to go topless; showing 'too much' of our bodies was not considered to be 'bad' or an invitation for sexual violence. In order to counter the violent and oppressive history of coloniza-

tion on our people, and reverse the legacy of negative health outcomes, we need to support our youth in frank, honest, and respectful conversations around sex rather than default to the imposed cultural values of the colonizers.

We can see the devastating effects that our colonized sexuality is causing and we need to start talking about it. It's our responsibility to stand up so youth start getting what they need. Youth need information, control over their bodies and the tools to make safer decisions in their lives. This includes everything from supporting them when they choose not to be sexually active to supplying them with condoms and birth control when they need it.

"We didn't learn about sex from Christopher Columbus," Jessica Danforth from the Native Youth Sexual Health Network has been known to famously say. Indigenous people had a long history of autonomy over their bodies and ways of teaching each other about sex and sexuality. We've lost quite a few of our good sex stories and jokes from colonization. Isn't that a shame, as we all love a good joke! In many of our cultures, sex was viewed as a normal and natural part of life. It was important that the salmon, moose and deer reproduced so that we could survive. It was also important that we reproduced and added new little family members to our communities.

Let's teach our youth that sexuality can be a positive part of their lives. It can be pleasurable, help us feel closer to our partners and allow us to become parents when the time is right. Let's also teach them that sex comes with responsibilities. It involves being respectful of our bodies and health as well as that of our partners. It also involves choosing a birth control that suits our lifestyle. It is up to us to teach these balances to the next generations. If we don't feel comfortable talking about sexuality, we need to find someone who does and bring them to our youth. Consider booking a workshop with Yúusnewas because we do a great job of teaching youth about prevention strategies and learning to decolonize sexuality in their own lives. ■

To get involved in Yúusnewas or book a workshop email [yuusnewas@youthco.org](mailto:yuusnewas@youthco.org) or [info@youthco.org](mailto:info@youthco.org).

# Simpcw Youth

## Healthy Sexual Decision-Making and Interactional Education

ODETTE WILSON



Louise Chursinoff, the Community Health Nurse for the Simpcw First Nation, reading out a scenario to local youth for her Healthy Sexual Decision Making workshop.

Louise Chursinoff takes a unique approach when delivering health programs to the youth of the Simpcw First Nation. She has been the Community Health Nurse for the Nation since May 2012, and has done an extensive variety of youth programming in these past two years. The Simpcw have a membership of close to 700, with many youth living on-reserve while attending school in the nearby town of Barriere. “[The youth] may come to me with questions or concerns that are really personal, and they have to be vulnerable and be able to trust me, so I have a bit of a different approach,” Chursinoff says of her work in the Nation. She strives to connect with the community on a personal level, to build relationships rooted in trust and understanding. “When it comes to me interacting with our youth, I come from an approach that I’m on their level with them. I am pretty close in age to them. I am only 24, so I really try to come from a non-authoritative approach.”

Chursinoff works closely with the Simpcw Youth Worker who is active in the community, doubling as the Family Development Worker while also coordinating a mix of programming for the Nation’s youth group, including health presentations. “The work I’ve been doing with our youth fluctuates depending on the needs of the youth, and I actually go a lot by what the Youth Worker requests,” Chursinoff says of how her workshops emerge. The Youth Worker will identify a health issue that needs to be addressed among the group, either by the youth bringing it up or by seeing a gap in their collective knowledge on a topic. Louise is then invited in to speak about the topic with the youth. She has a choice to either do a traditional lecture-style presentation, typical of how the youth would be learning at school, or relate the information directly to the youth’s lives by interacting with them and challenging their perceptions on common health topics. When possible, she will always

opt for the latter approach to ensure meaningful engagement from the youth and a lasting impact.

### Healthy Sexual Decision-Making

When the Simpcw Youth Worker came to Chursinoff asking for a ‘healthy sexuality’ presentation for the youth, Chursinoff put together one of her favourite workshops to date. She called it Healthy Sexual Decision-Making, and it was not your typical sex-education. “I wanted to surprise them a little bit, and not say ‘OK, we’re doing a birth control workshop’. I wanted to challenge their thinking.”

What she developed was a workshop that capitalized on the knowledge that the youth already have about sexual intercourse. “I am pretty confident that all of our youth know how to be safe and healthy when it comes to sex,” Chursinoff said. “They know the facts. They’ve learned sex-ed in school. They know their stuff, just like I grew up knowing my stuff.” She knew that, to

remain engaging and thought-provoking, she had to get the youth thinking about how sexual decisions can impact their own lives. "We talked about a couple of different sexual scenarios, and then had different corners of the room be different consequences [to each scenario]. We didn't look at one of the consequences as being worse than the other, or bad, it was just different and it would result in different things that could potentially change your life in a different way than the other one could."

Simply put, Chursinoff discussed the real-life outcomes of very typical sexual decisions, outcomes that wouldn't have hit home for the youth until they happened to them or someone they know. The workshop covered the basics of safe sex as well, but it was a consequence driven workshop that had the youth examining the physical, emotional and financial results of their sexual choices. Chursinoff said this approach was really effective and garnered interesting results from the youth. "It made them think, and after they warmed up to the idea, they got more outgoing with their sharing and their ideas of what they really thought would happen. It wasn't just 'yes'

or 'no' or the obvious answers. They really dug in to it and had to think about [the consequences]."

### Connecting with the youth

Chursinoff has also been invited into the local secondary school to host health presentations for their Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. During National Addictions Awareness Week her and other health staff from the Simpcw First Nation joined the local youth in a Sober Walk. The entire high school walked through town together as recognition of living a sober life or working towards a sober lifestyle.

Louise says it's events like this, along with the workshops she hosts, that have allowed the youth to feel comfortable with her in a variety of community settings. Chursinoff acknowledges that all Community Health Nurses have a different style, and that the nurse that eventually replaces her might have a different approach with the youth. For now though, her professional belief rests on the importance of having a nurse in the community who is interested in spending time with youth, can easily relate to them and offer the health support that many of them need. ■

### WINTER CHALLENGE - Con't from page 11

A wide range of ages took part, from toddlers to an Elder in her 80's that had to use a walker during her bath.

First Nations Health Authority CEO Joe Gallagher accepted the winter challenge and challenged all staff at the FNHA, "the FNHA raise our hands to Kura (and Cordell) for their efforts in getting others active and showing us how far-reaching our individual ideas have in influencing our families, communities and Nations to lead healthy, active lifestyles, leading as wellness champions."

Several people commented on the similarities between the IdleNoMore movement and the Winter Challenge 2014. Doctor and actor Evan Adams described the Winter Challenge phenomenon as "reawakening the Indigenous Spirit." Both IdleNoMore and the Winter Challenge 2014 were largely but not exclusively First Nations people asserting political and cultural revitalization and awareness. Winter Challenge 2014 happened, as Kura Jack said, of its own accord because people wanted it.

Did you do the winter challenge yet? See you in the water next year! ■

**The one who protects persons in care.  
The one who has the specialized knowledge.  
The one who makes a difference.**



# Be the one

## ADVANCED SPECIALTY CERTIFICATE IN COMMUNITY CARE LICENSING

Protect the health and safety of our children, elders and the disabled within our communities

Apply now. [JIBC.ca/cclo](http://JIBC.ca/cclo) 604.528.5590 [register@jibc.ca](mailto:register@jibc.ca)



JUSTICE  
INSTITUTE  
of  
BRITISH  
COLUMBIA



Seabird Island's Registered Midwife Amelia Doran checks pregnant mom Georgette Leo while friends and family Holly Leo, Shelby August, Linden August, Brayden August and Tyrese Leo look on. The addition of a Midwife at Seabird has been a huge success for mothers in the area.

## Seabird Island's Carlyne Neufeld

Addition of a Midwife Supporting Wellness Health Services in Fraser-Salish

ODETTE WILSON

**F**or over a decade Seabird Island Band in the Fraser-Salish has been a leader in community wellness and self-determination by taking ownership of their localized regional health care operations. At the forefront of this undertaking is the community's Director of Health and Social Development, Carlyne Neufeld, who has been with the Nation for 17 years. She has seen Seabird Island's Health Services Department grow from a 3-person team

to a fully operational health services department that is creating its own healthy future. "Over the last 15 years we have grown now to have full physicians and dentists, and we have taken on our own ten-year transfer. We manage all of our own services," said Neufeld.

Neufeld started her career with Seabird Island as a Community Health Nurse, but took on new roles as the department continued to grow. With her leadership, the Health Services department has

developed into a self-reliant system that is continuously transforming. Neufeld is proud to say that the Nation has full control over who is hired to care for community members. "We have a full dental office that we run - it's not contracted. We hire the dentists and we run the office. We hire our doctors and run our own medical office," she says, noting approximately 70% of Seabird Island Health staff are First Nations with many recruited from within the community itself.

Seabird Island, which is located in the Fraser Valley three kilometers east of Agassiz, has a population of approximately 700 residents. Over time the Nation has not only taken on and expanded their health care operations, but also their education system. With a dream of offering formal education at home that is tailored to First Nations people, the Seabird College was created in 2009. This low-cost, culturally supportive school has seen great success, including in the area of health. "We have run two classes of LPNs (Licensed Practical Nurses), on reserve at our own College. Ten LPNs graduated in the first class and another eight are going to graduate in the second one. We have done the same with home support as well." These nurses are all First Nations, most local to the Fraser-Salish Region, and they have gone on to progress into

various roles within Seabird. "Some of them have gotten jobs in the local hospital, some have gotten jobs with us, and some of them have gone on to work in downtown Vancouver," Neufeld says who called them an "incredible resource" to the First Nations health system in BC.

Seabird Island Band is partnered with six other local Fraser-Salish First Nations in their Health Transfer Agreement, which is what has allowed them control of their own health services. Together with Chawathil, Scowlitz, Kwaw-Kwaw-Aplit, Shxw'owhamel, Squiala, and Union Bar, Seabird Island has been able to shape their own holistic view of health. They offer everything from a dental clinic, doctor's office and home support, to fitness programs, mobile diabetes checks and a mental health and wellness centre. They are also able to contract out their services

have upwards of 60 in our whole area. We knew that there was going to be quite a few people interested in that service," she said.

The hiring process began by collaborating with the Midwives Association of British Columbia to create a fitting job description. To attract suitable candidates, Neufeld wanted to ensure that the Nation would meet the requirements of a midwife practice and could honour the midwife's license. Over a 6-month period Seabird Island actively recruited and in January of this year a midwife came on board permanently in the community. "She has been a magnificent, wonderful addition to our staff," said Neufeld adding that she would without a doubt recommend other Nations look in to developing a midwife service in their community. "The care and treatment is really comprehensive, and in a lot of communities it's really needed." She emphasized that many communities don't have doctors close by and that expectant mothers are unable to get the pre-natal care they need. "Midwives can spend a lot more time with each client (than a doctor). If the midwife is working well with the physicians, they become part of the Maternal Child team and we break down the barriers of whose job is what. We just get good comprehensive care for everybody and the best outcomes."

Through Neufeld's work one of Seabird's strategies when developing health programming is to recruit community members to be local health champions. "Our best practice is looking at our own people to put through training, to empower, to develop capacity so that we have a community that is very rich in people resources. That has created jobs for them, it creates an economy, it creates a change in lifestyle and affordability of life. And I think in the end it really influences and changes families for the better, because you have a strong, capable work force." This strategy has paid off for Neufeld and her growing team, and she looks forward to seeing how else the department can improve. "I am just trying to empower people to head into health careers. We have had a lot of great success that way." ■

**"Our best practice is looking at our own people to put through training, to empower, to develop capacity so that we have a community that is very rich in people resources. That has created jobs for them, it creates an economy, it creates a change in lifestyle and affordability of life. And I think in the end it really influences and changes families for the better, because you have a strong, capable work force."**



**Health Director Carolyne Neufeld.**

to many other Nations in the area who need the assistance. "If the community needs nurses, we provide a nurse. We have quite a few nurses on staff, so they will go up to Lytton for a day to do community care when they need it," said Neufeld.

One of the newest and fruitful health services Neufeld helped coordinate for Seabird Island is a community midwife. "We have recently hired a midwife and she is now doing deliveries at the local hospital and will start doing home deliveries within the next year or so, as people want them and are ready for them," Neufeld says. The Nation was running a successful Maternal Child Health program, but the community continued to identify midwifery as a desired pre-natal support. "We have about 15-20 births a year, plus with the surrounding communities we

# First Nations Wellness and the R-word

## An Ugly Elephant in the Room

PHILIP HOGAN

**“R**acism and social exclusion have been a reality for Aboriginal peoples since first contact with British colonizers. The colonial system created social stratification along ethnic lines, with a consequent hierarchical distribution of resources, power, freedom and control, all of which ultimately influenced Aboriginal health,”  
Health Inequities and Social Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health

Racism and discrimination not only impacts ones physical, mental and emotional wellness, it fundamentally alters the way one participates in society.

“That’s an unwelcome word in any discussion I ever had,” said Chuuchkamalthnii (Ron Hamilton) speaking of racism. Hamilton, a renowned artist, writer and thinker from the Nuuchahnulth Nation, has a lot to say about racism in BC, “BC’s history included an attempt to create a white Christian country – complete with segregation and white race riots.” Hamilton objects to some

of the language used in today’s discussion of the issues. Colonization sounds too vague and neutral – “Who’s responsible? Not you or me.”

There is a great resistance to discussing racism in BC and significant resistance to the idea that it even exists. Racism affects people, particularly our children. Much of the discourse on First Nations health is centred on statistics and numbers. For non-Aboriginal people these discussions tend to be academic, but for First Nations it can be incredibly personal.

Hamilton goes on to talk about how racism gets ‘washed away’ by describing the schools as residential schools – which invoke ideas of upper class British schools. “Successive generations – sometimes up to five generations – were compelled to attend institutions that were intended to model them into useful, subservient, people who were the lowest on the social ladder.”

Despite efforts at reconciliation (for example the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) there remains a wide gulf between First Nations and other Canadians

---

**The 20-foot mural below “Reflections of the Indigenous Sprawl” was commissioned by the Urban Native Youth Association, took two years to create, and is part of the Claiming Space exhibition.**



over the history of the country and the impacts that it has for today's citizens. As Charlotte Reading and Fred Wien find in *Health Inequities and Social Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' Health*, "research is now establishing that groups that are subject to racial and other forms of discrimination may well have more negative health outcomes because of the stress of living in a racially charged environment."

Simliary, when two spirited (a First Nations concept applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people) youth were bullied online to the point of suicide, a major effort was made to speak to these youth to convince them that "It Gets Better." By bringing these issues out into the open, it is hoped that bullying can be reduced and the youth can be shown that it does get better - a life without bullying over sexual orientation is possible.

**"BC's history included an attempt to create a white Christian country - complete with segregation and white race riots."**

We know that First Nations peoples experience racism and that it has a negative effect on health. We know that this is harming our youth. The reluctance to speak about or recognize racism is a major factor in its survival. Right now there are limited efforts to address racism in Canada. In fact when I was researching the issue I failed to find a single book on the

topic at a major bookseller's outlet. When I raised the issue with my 17-year-old son he talked about it non-stop for an hour and a half.

If we don't talk about racism it will not change. It Gets Better? Not if you don't talk about it. We have a duty to First Nations youth to work to reduce racism in all its forms, and to talk about it. Doing so will give us the opportunity to speak directly to our youth about this difficult topic. With work, we can reduce racism and, as importantly, provide our young people and others with a discussion that addresses these difficult issues and provides them with some sort of protection against the nastiness they are forced to deal with just for being who they are.

Share your thoughts on this and any other Spirit content: [spiritmagazine@fnha.ca](mailto:spiritmagazine@fnha.ca) ■

The UBC Museum of Anthropology's *Claiming Space: Voices of Urban Aboriginal Youth* is curated in part by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers (see *Youth Role Models* pg 20) and runs to January 2015. "Unfiltered and unapologetic, over 20 young artists from across Canada, the US, and around the world define what it really means to be an urban Aboriginal youth today. In doing so they challenge centuries of stereotyping and assimilation policies."





# Spirit Photo Gallery

Gathering Our Voices 2014 PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GATHERING OUR VOICES





# spirit

SHARING CULTURALLY IMPORTANT  
KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICES



Erralyn Thomas,  
Snuneymuxw First Nation  
Female Youth Representative  
BC Assembly of First Nations



## Youth Wisdom

**"It is both an honour and a privilege** to represent First Nations young people whose citizenship spans 203 First Nations in BC. The role involves hard work, commitment and coordinating, and building relationships for the benefit of First Nations young people.

Our belief is that in order to represent interests, it is fundamentally necessary to create space in society for First Nations young people to come together to critically analyze the social, political and legal environments they are set to inherit. In doing so, First Nations youth leadership on all levels can come together and identify youth-led priorities and solutions to shared issues. It is those priorities and solutions I believe must be illuminated and advanced in political forums locally, provincially and nationally. You can view these priorities and solutions on our website at [www.bcafn.ca](http://www.bcafn.ca) titled "Summary Reports" following regional youth engagement sessions.

Together, First Nations youth leadership can create a collective path forward and paddle the canoe in one direction, with one heart and one mind, to strengthen our Nations in partnership with Chiefs or other First Nations Leadership."

Share Your Elders' or Youth Wisdom: [spiritmagazine@fnha.ca](mailto:spiritmagazine@fnha.ca)