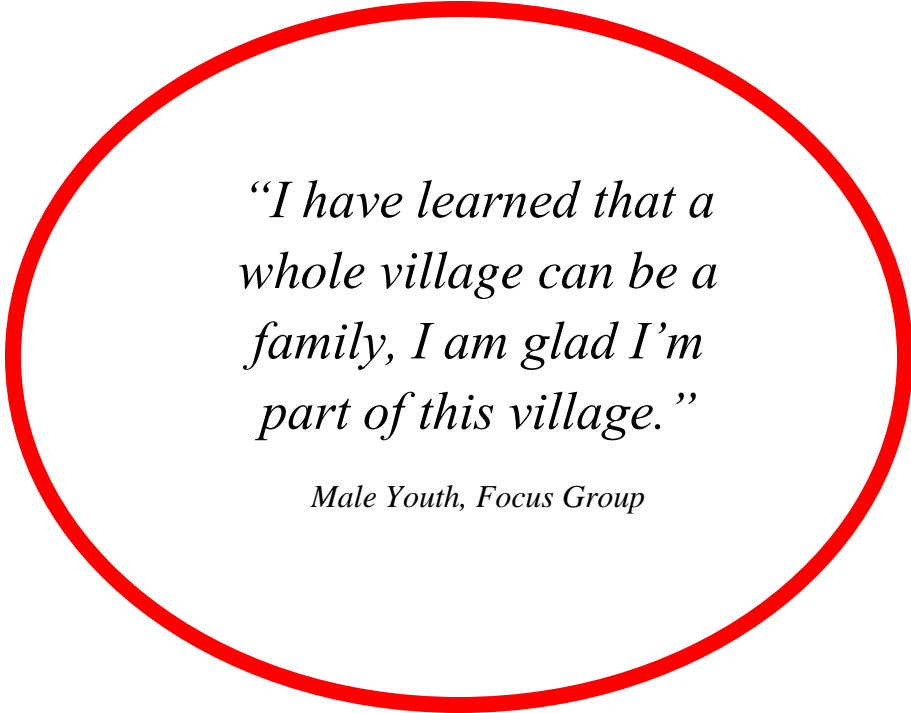


# Laichwiltach Family Life Society

## *Youth Program Evaluation*



*“I have learned that a  
whole village can be a  
family, I am glad I’m  
part of this village.”*

*Male Youth, Focus Group*

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## The Team at Little Drum Consulting

**Monique Gray Smith**, Psychiatric Nurse: Monique is a mixed heritage woman of Cree, Lakota, and Scottish descent. She comes from the Cardinal family and Peepeekisis First Nation and is the proud Mom of 7 year old twins. Her work experience has been in the areas of Aboriginal Education; with a focus on the Early Years; Stress and Trauma Recovery, and Staff Development. She is the owner of Little Drum Consulting and the author of the Aboriginal Infant Development Programs Policy & Procedure Manual and the Aboriginal Supported Child Development Handbook. For this project Monique was honoured to facilitate the Focus Groups, conduct one to one interviews and interviewed the Youth Group staff, she worked in partnership with Alison in the report writing.

**Alison Gerlach**, MSc. I am honored and privileged to bring both 'head and heart' to our work at Little Drum Consulting. My writing and research draws on 20 years of working with and learning from families and children as a community-based occupational therapist, and from collaborating with Aboriginal communities, colleagues, and organizations on projects related to promoting the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and youth. For this project Alison was responsible for the analysis of the information gathered from the youth and staff and worked in partnership with Monique in the report writing.

## Executive Summary

In early March 2011, Little Drum Consulting was contracted by Sasamans Society to conduct an evaluation of the Youth Program at Laichwiltach Family Life Society. The Youth Program has been operating since February 2010 and has quickly become a foundational program to the wellness of the youth who participate. The sharing and information provided by the youth and staff have been analyzed from a Social Determinants of Health Perspective. Throughout this report, quotes from the youth and staff have been provided that provide supportive testimonial of the strengths of the Laichwiltach Youth Program. It is clear through the feedback from the youth who participate, that this program is integral in supporting them in continuing to learn how to lead healthy lives and have healthy relationships. These two elements alone nurture the healing of intergenerational traumas and foster the resiliency of the youth who participate.

### Youth Program Information:

The group currently runs Monday to Thursday from 3pm to 5pm and the Youth expressed a desire for the group to also run on Friday evenings and weekends. This will be one key area for Sasamans and Laichwiltach to explore with potential funders and what how this will impact current staffing arrangements. The group has grown significantly over the last year and there are currently 38 youth registered with the group.

*“Last year we had 4 to 8 youth come steady. This year we have 38 registered and it is uncommon if we have less than 15. About 10 of our youth come every day. They have told us that if there was not this group they would be out there using alcohol or drugs.”*

*Staff Interview*

### Evaluation Process:

The program evaluation included 3 elements:

- 19 youth participated in 2 focus groups.
- 5 youth participated in individual interviews.
- Individual interviews with the two Youth Program staff.

\*2 Youth also provided hand written personal stories sharing how the group has impacted them.

### Ministry of Children and Family Development:

While the information under The Unique Circumstances of Aboriginal Youth may initially read as deficit based, it has been designed to provide Sasamans and Laichwiltach with potential wording that can be used to provide context for the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). This context is often required in order for MCFD to fully understand the

complexities and challenges of Aboriginal Youth and thus, the requirement for adequate and respectful funding.

The Youth Program at Laichwiltach falls directly under Pillar 1 (Prevention) of the Ministry of Children and Family Development's, Strong, Safe and Supported Action Plan [6]. The values of early intervention and prevention within 'Strong, Safe & Supported' [6] are clearly visible in the Youth Program, which supports and strengthens the youth to be able to cope effectively with challenges and barriers, thereby increasing their resiliency and their chances of wellbeing and healthy development. Programs such as this help youth and families and help prevent vulnerability. In addition, the Youth Program aligns with Pillar 4 (The Aboriginal Approach) of Strong, Safe and Supported Action Plan. Aboriginal people will be supported to exercise jurisdiction in delivering child and family services.

### **Program Strengths:**

As a result of the focus groups and individual interviews with the youth, key themes became apparent that reflect the strength and impact of the program in the lives of the young people participating in the Youth Program. The section Protective Factors: Learning How to Live a Good Life provides information on each of the identified factors and a diagram that reflects the interrelatedness of each of these factors. The key Protective factors that are being fostered with the youth are:

- Sense of Belonging and Family
- Positive Relationships and Someone to Talk to
- School Connectedness
- Cultural Identity and Knowledge
- Holistic Health and Wellbeing

### **Recommendations:**

The following recommendations come from feedback from the youth and staff and the Little Drum project team's experience. These recommendations are not listed in order of priority.

- Have the youth collectively decide on a name for their group, have a logo created that reflects the name and strengths of the group.
- Increase the cultural programming for the youth.
- When you submit a proposal to MCFD or potential funders, include photos of the youth engaged in program activities and quotes from this report. This enhances the human connection they have with the request for funding.

- Access alternative funding to support the hopes and wishes of the youth. This includes offering the group on Friday evenings, and weekends. See pg. 17 for the full list of their wishes.
- In early June, host a workshop that would prepare the youth in applying for and seeking summer employment. For example, resume writing, strategies for dropping off resume and asking for applications, filling out job application forms, preparing for a job interviews, job skills, etc.
- Hold culture camps this summer to get the youth out on the land, immersed in culture and technology free.
- Hold a celebration for these youth at the end of June to acknowledge their accomplishments, contribution to the community and to formally mark the completion of the school year. Invite funders to this celebration and publicly acknowledge them.
- Create a way or ways for the youth to contribute to the community. This can be a regular commitment or one time opportunity. One example would be for the youth group to find a way to support or connect with the Elders group. Perhaps they could do a car wash with the proceeds going to support the Elders to attend the annual Elders Gathering.
- Provide more structure for the youth; identify certain days for workshops, certain days as cultural days and identify which days are activity based days and which days might be free days that the youth decide what they would like to do.
- Provide increase support for homework and learning.

## The Unique Circumstances of Aboriginal Youth

The young people attending the Laichwiltach program, like many Aboriginal youth across Canada, are descendants from at least two generations of Indian Residential School attendees, and collectively impacted in the ongoing and intergenerational effects of enforced residential schools [4]. Due to historic and current discrimination, Aboriginal youth face additional and unique challenges to achieving healthy development [5]. They face more health risks, experience less success in school and are over-represented in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems [2].



### Challenges & Risks Faced by Aboriginal Youth In our Community\*

**Drugs & alcohol** - *it is very easy for our youth to get these and they see it everywhere so it is part of what they are used to*

**Violence** - *all kinds of violence these youth have and continue to experience and witness-with each other, from family to family, and Nation to Nation*

**Bullying at school** - *this is very big issue for our youth*

**Suicide, grief & loss** - *loss of family and friends to suicide as well as their own thinking of suicide*

**Family challenges** - *drugs and alcohol, abuse, family violence, separation and divorce of parents. These family challenges are part of what comes up every day in group with at least one of the youth.*

[\*From the staff at the Laichwiltach Youth Program]

Several of the young people attending the Laichwiltach program are or have been in government care. Aboriginal youth are six times more likely to be admitted into government care than non-Aboriginal youth, and rates on Vancouver Island are twice as high compared to the Fraser region[2]. Youth who have been in the care of the government experience more health risks, are much less likely to experience academic success or graduate from high school, and are more likely to use tobacco, alcohol and drugs. They are three times as likely to have attempted suicide and more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant. They often go to bed hungry, and they are half as likely to have a caring adult to talk to about a serious issue[2].

## The Laichwiltach Youth Program: Prevention and Intervention

Early adolescence is a critical period of transition, and experimentation with adult lifestyles may begin in early adolescence, especially for young people growing up in adverse conditions. The beginning of adolescence offers a window of opportunity for prevention and early intervention, rather than waiting until the middle or late teen years when problems have already developed and patterns of behaviour have become more firmly entrenched [3].

### **RISKS to Young Aboriginal People Unable to Access the Laichwiltach Youth Program**

- *Develop attitudes that are not going to get them very far in life*
- *Lack of cultural knowledge*
- *Lack of a sense of belonging, isolation and all the risks this brings on for youth*
- *Extra free time to get into trouble or try things that aren't good for them or their future*
- *Drop out of high school*
- *Drug and alcohol use*
- *Violent or a victim of violence*
- *In unhealthy or abusive relationships*
- *In trouble with the law*
- *Unemployment*

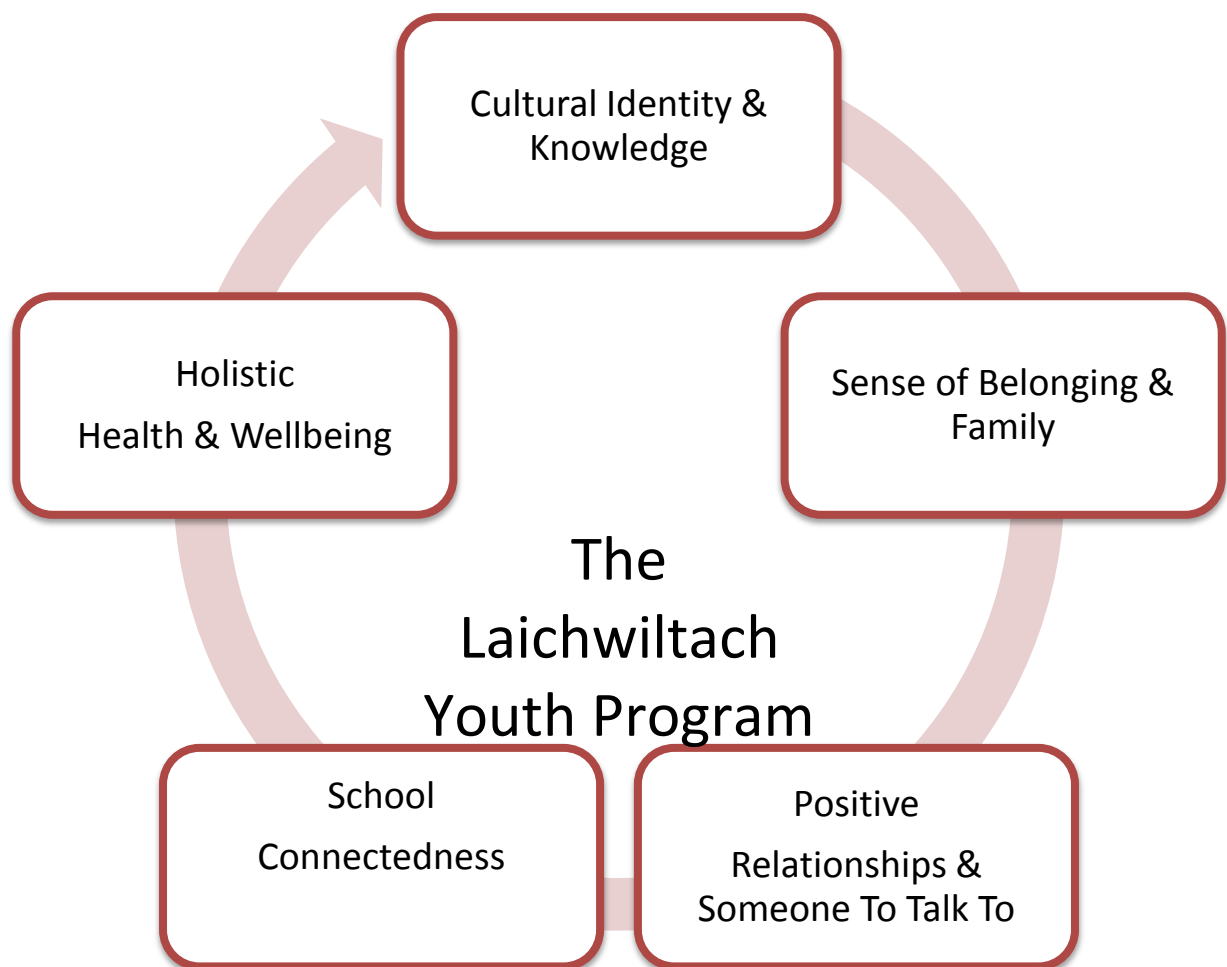
[\*From the staff at the Laichwiltach Youth Program]



To support young people in making a healthy transition through adolescence, prevention and intervention strategies must occur early and provide opportunities for positive growth [3]. The values of early intervention and prevention within ‘Strong, Safe & Supported’ [6] are clearly visible in the Laichwiltach Youth Program, which supports and strengthens the youth to be able to cope effectively with challenges and barriers, thereby increasing their resiliency and their chances of wellbeing and healthy development.

### **Protective Factors** ***‘Learning how to live a good life’***

Community consultation with the Aboriginal youth attending the Laichwiltach Youth Program revealed the following protective factors that are closely inter-related and embedded strengths in the Program that foster healthy relationships, overcome negative experiences, and contribute to more positive futures for these youth.



## Sense of Belonging & Family

The Laichwiltach Youth Program is more than a youth program. Both the staff and Aboriginal youth experience it as an extended and inclusive family that nurtures a strong sense of belonging. Attachment and belonging are basic and universal needs of children and youth, and a pillar for improved emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive health, and increased resiliency [6].

*“Our youth group we’re like a family. Sometimes we don’t get along, but we always work it out. We need to make sure we can keep having this chance for youth to come together, to build a family and to learn about what it feels like to belong, feel safe and have people need you and depend on you.” Female Youth, Focus Group*

A sense of belonging and ‘family’ is an important strength of the Laichwiltach Youth Program as it lessens young peoples’ vulnerability from the intergenerational impact of the residential school system, and/or from living in foster care.

*“From the beginning we have been a growing family, not just a youth group. This is important to the youth who many of them come from broken homes or are youth who are living in foster care or who have lived in foster care. For those youth in foster care we are teaching them how to be respectful and be part of a family, so they are moving around less in the system and learning how to be part of a family within that foster home.”*  
Staff member

Evidence suggests that groups that are subject to racial and other forms of discrimination have more negative health outcomes because of the stress of living in a racially charged environment [1]. When Aboriginal youth experience social exclusion, research indicates that this has a strong effect on their level of self-esteem, and alcohol and drug use increases [1].

Having a sense of ‘family connectedness’ with parents and family members is an important protective factor for young people [3]. Positive experiences in feeling a sense of belonging and family, and what is involved in being part of a family in the Laichwiltach Youth Program increases the youths’ capacities to have positive relationships with their own family members.

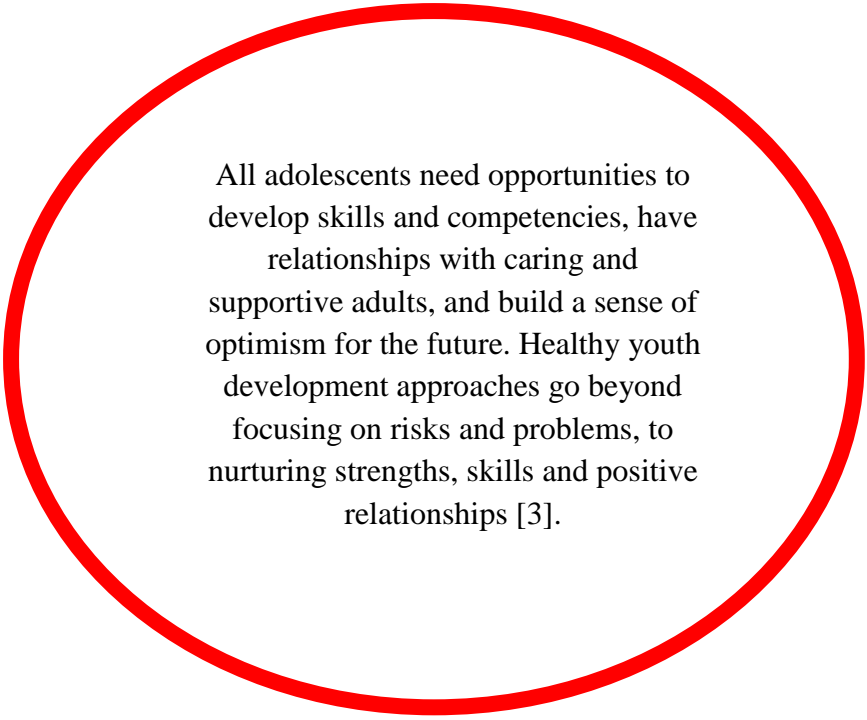
*“The group is teaching me how to be part of a family and what that really means, it isn’t always easy.” Female Youth,*  
Individual Interview

*“They are learning what it takes to really be a family and community; through the good times and the hard times.”*  
Staff Member

*“I spend a lot of time with my Grandma and she helps me a lot and this group has taught me how to help her too. I also don’t fight with my Mom as much on days I come to group, I seem less angry when I go home from here. I think I would have had to move out of my house because my mom and I fought so much, now we still fight, but not as bad. It is like some of the anger that was in me is gone. My family is proud of me.” Female Youth, Individual Interview*

A sense of belonging and ‘social inclusion’ for this population is also an important factor in their resiliency against the racism that many described as experiencing at school.

*“School is still hard because there is so much racism and some people are bullies, but at least I have this to come to every day.” Male Youth Focus Group*



All adolescents need opportunities to develop skills and competencies, have relationships with caring and supportive adults, and build a sense of optimism for the future. Healthy youth development approaches go beyond focusing on risks and problems, to nurturing strengths, skills and positive relationships [3].

## Positive Relationships & Someone to Talk To

The staff and youth who participated in the focus group and interviews described the important role that the Laichwiltach Youth Program plays in teaching young people how to have positive interpersonal relationships with trusted staff and peers at the program, and outside the program with members of their families and home communities.

*“This group helped me when I moved here because I had somewhere to make friends and someplace to go after school.” Female Individual Interview*

*“We all help each other so this group is a safe place to come, for some of us there aren’t many safe places out there.” Male, Focus Group Participant*

*“I am making friends, real friends, not the kind I have at school.”  
Female, Focus Group Participant*

Staff describe that many of the youth have little to no communication with other young people, aside from their phone, video games or ‘Facebook’. Many are not having meaningful friendships or relationships with other young people. The Laichwiltach Youth Program is a safe place for learning about trust, how to have healthy and respectful friendships and relationships and how to communicate effectively.

*“They are learning how to respectfully interact with each other and are learning how to be brave and speak up for themselves. Relationships and what makes a healthy relationship. They do not know this and we spend a lot of time talking about this and helping them learn life skills that will support them in all of their relationships.” Staff Member*

An additional strength of this program is that it is a safe place for young people to be open and share their experiences in the large circle or one to one with the staff. A number of youth identified this is the first time they have been able to experience such safety and openness. The impact this experience has on their future relationships and in healing the intergenerational wounds is immeasurable and profound in fostering the health and wellness of these youth.

*“I can talk here about what is really going on in my life and I feel like everyone wants to help.”  
Female, Focus Group Participant*

*“Other groups don’t have the same help we get here and when I have gone to those other groups it doesn’t feel safe there.” Male, Focus Group Participant*

*“I can be myself here, and feel express my feelings openly.” Female, Focus Group Participant*

The youth shared that as a result of the positive relationships and interpersonal experiences of the program, they have learned:

- *what it means to be relied on for stuff*
- *to be reliable and helpful and that people need me*
- *to trust others and that I am trustworthy as well*
- *how to communicate positively and respectfully*
- *Honesty*
- *how to love one another*
- *Respect and kindness*

There is a strong association between a sense of community connection and the health and wellbeing of youth [2]. Yet many of the youth who participate in the Laichwiltach Youth Program are poorly connected with their home communities and have few to no relationships with adults or organizations that can help them in times of trouble. The Youth Program is therefore building relationships with other community members; including the police so that the youth have a better sense of the resources that are available to them. The Youth are also participating in community events at Laichwiltach, fostering their sense of community and belonging.

*“They do not know how to be in relationships - no matter what kind of relationship they struggle with people getting close and trusting people.” Staff Member*

## School Connectedness

Across Canada an estimated 50% of Aboriginal youth will drop out, or be pushed out, of high schools; resulting in diminished literacy and employment as well as increased poverty for future generations [1]. The completion rates for Aboriginal children with a continuing custody order are even lower [2]. As a protective factor, school connectedness includes relationships with teachers and students' sense of belonging at school.

An important protective factor for all young people is that they have a sense of connection with their school [5]. The Laichwiltach Youth Program has been successful in supporting five youth to return to school and the potential impact for these youth and their future is profound. The Youth Program actively supports the youth in being effective students and learners. This connectedness to school is a key protective factor for these young people.

*“I am back in school and want to graduate and go on to college. I don't know what I want to be yet.” Male, Focus Group*

*“My grades have gone up” Female, Individual Interview*

*“I am going to school again and learning how to do homework and study. It's hard!” Male, Focus Group*

**My Story** - I am not sure what to say about this group. I know I would be in lots of trouble and probably in trouble with the law if I wasn't coming to this group. Before I came here I was drinking lots and smoking up and hardly going to school. If I did go to school, it was just to hang out with my friend and cousins. I still go to hang out with everyone but now I actually go to classes and pay attention. My grades have gone way up and I want to go to university. I never thought I could do that before. Thought going to university was only for the white kids, but now it is for me too and even some of my friends are talking about it too. From this group, I am learning to be proud of my culture, to be respectful of all other nations and want to start to learn my language. Male, Individual Interview

## Cultural Identity ~ Knowledge

A strength of the Laichwiltach Youth Program has been its success in providing opportunities for the youth to learn about their culture, who they are, where they come from, their traditions and ways of being. These opportunities intimately foster the youth's cultural knowledge, their identity and their sense of pride.

*"I have learned a lot about my culture being part of this group, the trip to Kingcome was awesome and I learned so much that I had no idea about. I wish we could do more trips like that and that more of us could go so we could all learn." Male, Focus Group*

*Part of everything we do is suicide prevention with these youth." Staff Member*

A landmark study (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998) showed that suicide rates in First Nations in BC were lower in communities identified as having 'cultural continuity' – that is social and cultural cohesion within a community and traditional intergenerational connectedness [1].

*“Identity is healing so by teaching them and learning with them and watching them discover who they are; we are helping them to heal and some of them are teaching their families and younger siblings and cousins.” Staff Member*

*“Having respect for the culture and teachings is something we started teaching right at the beginning and continue to teach. The youth love the cultural parts we do and are always asking for more of it. They are learning that culture feels good and it makes them feel proud of who they are.” Staff Member*

Youth have a fundamental need and right to be rooted in their culture and traditions’ [6]. Youth who are highly connected to their culture are less likely to report poor health. Culturally relevant resources can promote resiliency and nurture coping mechanisms [2]. Throughout the Focus Groups, the Youth shared how the cultural programming and opportunities they experience are definite highlights and have been identified as a key area for expansion and continued growth. Many of the youth expressed their wish that they could have more experiential learning about their culture, land, and traditional knowledge. However, this is currently limited by funding.

*“We have had cultural workshops and those have been awesome and we need more cuz we don’t get it anywhere else.” Male, Focus Groups*

*“I am feeling proud of being native, this is new for me and it is all because of coming to this group.” Male, Focus Group*

*“I can now say out loud which Nation I am from and am proud to say it, not ashamed anymore.” Female, Individual Interview*

*“The cultural workshops or when we do anything cultural is my favorite time here, I wish we did more of it.” Female, Focus Group*

*“The culture we do is a big difference, we do things like have the Elders come, we do cedar making, drumming, we learned how to play lahal...all of these aren’t done at other groups and it is a big part of who we are and how important it is for us to know who we are and be able to share that with our younger brothers and sisters and cousins.” Male, Focus Group*

**My Story** - When I first came to this group I was really, really shy and the only word Shawn and the others could get out of me was a little ‘hi’ and that’s it. After a while I started talking more. Then in the summer Shawn took a few of us to Kingcome Inlet. It was so much fun and I learned a lot when we were there. I learned that we cook food in the ground, learned about medicines. We went to the Flats and learned what was edible and what was not. We also made a movie so I learned how to use the video camera and edit. I also love that in this group we do drumming, cedar weaving, drum making and lots of fun stuff too.

*Female participant (15 years)*



## Holistic Health & Wellbeing

*My Story - Well I am currently 16, growing up I got abused, it stopped when I was about 9. At the age of 12 I started drinking alcohol, smoking weed and smoking cigarettes. Then last February I realized my attitude changed and I quit drinking alcohol and smoking weed. I love being part of this youth group! It makes me feel safe and welcomed. I guess this youth group basically is the BEST thing that's ever happened to me. If this group hadn't started I probably would still be drinking alcohol and smoking weed. But so happy I got this group, Shawn and Laverne to talk to when I need someone to talk to. Love them!*

*Female participant (16 years)*

The Laichwiltach Youth Program plays an important role in youth health promotion, in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and being resilient. The youth describe health benefits that are holistic – that is physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual and that are closely related to the other protective factors of belonging, positive relationships, school connectedness and cultural identity. The active and positive lifestyle component of the Youth Program is also a form of suicide prevention and Mental Health wellness.

*"I had a lot of stress and by coming to this group, I got rid of a lot of it. Now I don't only come to group when I have stress, I come when I don't have it too because it helps me not to have it." Female, Individual Interview*

*"We play a lot of sports and are very active in this group so I am learning how to keep active and take care of myself." Male, Individual Interview*

Many of the youth involved in the Laichwiltach Youth Program started to use drugs and/or alcohol at a young age. A recurring positive outcome from the youth who attend the program is a reduction or elimination of substance abuse.

*"Before I came I was doing more drugs, now I don't do them as much and never do them before I go to school or come to group." Female, Focus Group*

Youth put suicide rates and physical activity rates in their top ten indicator list for measuring health. Aboriginal youth were particularly concerned about suicide. Youth see mental health as important as physical health, if not more so. However, youth also recognized that exercise is important and being physically active promotes mental and emotional well-being [2].



## What Would Make This Program Even Better?

Successful programs for youth are those in which the young people have a voice in program development and delivery. The youth at the Laichwiltach Youth Program have lots of ideas for their program. Many of their suggestions are closely aligned with the protective factors that are important to increasing their resiliency and opportunities for the future. (They are not in any priority order).

- **Community**

- Do more charity work
- Go to more youth conferences that we can all go.
- More role models coming in from the community to talk to us
- Have more workshops and people to come in and talk to us
- Go to Victoria and Vancouver and go to the museums
- Go to the all Native BB tourney
- Have a fundraiser game (BB) against the cops
- All the group be able to go to the BCAAFC Youth Conference next year

- **Cultural**

- More travelling to other communities and learn from other Nations
- Do more native designs and learn more about how to do drawings and crafts
- More culture and what we used to do and how we can do it now
- Go hiking and do overnight camping
- Learn how to make button blankets and shawls
- Have group in summer and have a culture camp or go camping
- Culture camp on the land
- Do a youth gathering with local 1<sup>st</sup> Nations

- **School & Employment**

- More career workshops
- Go to career fairs
- More help with homework and learning, at least one day a week
- Go to Vancouver and see the universities
- Go to Vancouver, see Science world
- Do a 1<sup>st</sup> Aid workshop, level 1
- Do our Food Safe

- **Health & Wellbeing**

- Swimming in Nanaimo
- Do more sports activities and have more sports supplies.
- Go for hikes

The youth also have suggestions related to program delivery including having the program available on Fridays and weekends, summer camps. They clearly stated that increased programming times, especially at times when there is the potential to be involved in unhealthy and unsafe activities (alcohol, etc.), would immensely beneficial to them. The focus group participants clearly indicated a strong desire for summer camps and to be out on the land as much as possible for these camps. Other activities and ideas they shared include:

- Do different activities on different days; some days should be sports and some should be culture or workshops
- Make the group technology free; no phones while we are here
- Have our own youth centre and not have to share a room with everyone else so we can decorate it and put things in it that are ours
- Have a leadership workshop
- Have a van that is for us youth

## Potential Sources for Funding:

- Submit a Letter of Request for Cultural Funding for Youth through the Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health Attn: Kathi Camilleri
- Community Gaming Grants through the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. <http://www.bcaafc.com/initiatives/gaming>
- Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth (next application process Jan 2012) <http://www.bcaafc.com/programs/ccay-umayc>
- McCreary Foundation Phone: (604) 299-1609
- Vancouver Foundation <http://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/>
- Aboriginal Sport and Recreation is a provincial multi-sport organization which is responsible for sport and recreation programs and services for the Aboriginal people of British Columbia. [http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/sport/programs/aboriginal\\_programs.htm](http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/sport/programs/aboriginal_programs.htm)
- BC Aboriginal Youth Sport Legacy Fund [http://www.2010legaciesnow.com/aboriginalyouth\\_sport\\_fund/](http://www.2010legaciesnow.com/aboriginalyouth_sport_fund/)
- Canada Post for Mental Health deadline for submission of applications is April 15, 2011. Any registered charity providing front-line support to people directly affected by mental illness, or to their families, may be eligible for a grant of up to \$65,000. [www.canadapost.ca/hope](http://www.canadapost.ca/hope).
- The Aboriginal Health Initiative Program (AHIP) is an Aboriginal community funding program administered by the Aboriginal Health department of the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA). [http://www.viha.ca/aboriginal\\_health/about/ahip\\_community\\_funding.htm](http://www.viha.ca/aboriginal_health/about/ahip_community_funding.htm)

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## Appendix A:

### Focus Group Questions:

- How does this group foster your health and wellness: (Mentally, Emotionally, Spiritually, Physically and Culturally)
- What would make this program even better?
- What are some of the consequences for young people who can't be part of a program like this?
  - *These questions were also asked for the one to one interviews with the youth.*

### Staff Questions:

- What are some of the challenges and risks that young people face in your community?
- What are the strengths of your program that draws youth to want to participate? (compared to mainstream youth programs)
- What are the short and long term risks for young people in your community if they cannot participate in this program?