

Caring For Our Own Children

Voices of Our Communities



K'omoks First Nation

To the People of the K'omoks First Nation

Gi'lakas'la for allowing us to visit your community and speak with your youth, adults, and Elders. This document attempts to reflect your community's wisdom.



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PART 1: SASAMANS SOCIETY



Sasamans Society Overview

Sasamans Society's vision is to strengthen our children and families in a community-driven and culturally appropriate manner. In the Kwak'waka language, Sasamans means "our children"; the society's name reflects our intention to listen, acknowledge and honour the voices of the communities that we serve. Sasamans is supported and guided by the Board of Directors (BOD), comprised of 16 community representatives from our partnering communities and organizations.

Sasamans was funded through Ministry of Child & Family Development under the Indigenous Approach to co-develop creative traditional service delivery models that meets the needs of our communities.

The work undertaken by Sasamans is designed to identify the gaps in service and complement the Aboriginal Urban agencies and/or First Nations Bands.

We measure our accomplishments by the success we achieve in balancing our limited resources with the needs of the communities we serve. We do this by identifying high priority COMMON needs across our various communities.

Member Nations

- Kwakiutl Band
- Da'naxda'xw Awaetlala First Nation
- Dzawada'enuxw First Nation
- Kwikwasut'inuxw/Haxwa'mis Tribe
- Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw First Nation
- Quatsino First Nation
- We Wai Kai First Nation
- Wei Wai Kum First Nation
- K'omoks Band
- Tlatlasikwala First Nation
- Mamalilikulla-Qwe'Qwa'Sot'Em Band
- Whe-la-la-U Area Council

Urban Aboriginal Organizations

- Laichwiltach Family Life Society
- Sacred Wolf Friendship Centre
- Wachiay Friendship Centre
- Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry



OUR MISSION

In pursuit of our vision to strengthen our children and families in a community-driven and culturally appropriate manner, the Sasamans Society will respectfully:

- **A**ppreciate and nurture the strengths and capacities of our people.
- **C**ommunicate and engage, openly and on an ongoing basis.
- **H**onour our traditions, customs, and beliefs.
- **I**nvolve the voices of our children and the wisdom of our Elders.
- **L**earning from one another.
- **D**edicate ourselves to achieving our short- and long-term goals.

OUR VALUES

We strive to openly demonstrate Trust, Honesty, Respect, Integrity, Values, and Empathy in achieving our goals.

We believe in practicing compassion, transparency, honesty, and accountability.

We will respect and practice equality for all.

We believe that we are all one and we strive to be inclusive at all levels as we walk and talk with honour.

We embrace and nurture the strengths and abilities of our people.



PART 2: VOICES OF OUR COMMUNITIES

Our children and our families are the cornerstone of our Nations' futures.



The Process and The Reports

This report is one in a series that presents key findings from information gathered through a community engagement process with the First Nations and Aboriginal organizations served by Sasamans Society. This particular report presents findings from information gathered from members of the K'omoks First Nation.

The purpose of these reports is to provide each community and/or agency with information that reflects the views expressed by community members through individual conversations, group discussions, and surveys. These reports will inform community committees as they engage in a dialogue with Sasamans Society to identify and design services to support family wellness and keep children out of government care.

The first focus of our community engagement process was to gather information from the youth. The following topics were developed from data collected from youth at the “Painting Our Way” and “Maya’xala” youth gatherings in March 2011:

- Community
- Culture
- Family
- Challenges
- Strengths
- Activities
- Keeping children out of care
- Other

These themes are providing the foundation for community engagement sessions with children, youth, parents, and Elders. First, the Sasamans team developed guiding questions about these topics to pose in individual conversations and group discussions. Next we developed work plans to guide the collection of information from our 15 member communities (twelve First Nations and three urban Aboriginal organizations).

In July 2011, due to internal changes in the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the work of Sasamans Society was suspended until a new work plan and budget could be developed. This resulted in a reduction in the number of communities taking part in the process,¹ a downsizing of Society staff and contractors, and a change to our community engagement process. Where initially one person was hired for each community as a community-based collaborator (CBC), the new budget and work plan necessitated a shift to a team approach with one team member (facilitator) focusing on one of three groups (children and youth, parents, and Elders) in all of the selected communities.

¹ Dzawada’enuxw First Nation, Quatsino First Nation, We Wai Kai First Nation, and Wachiay Friendship Centre were selected for completion during the 2011-2012 fiscal year. Funds were sufficient to gather information from two additional communities (Whe-la-la-U Area Council and Laichwiltach Family Life Society).

Beginning in August 2011, Sasamans staff and the facilitators (hereafter called the Sasamans team) participated in a three-part training which included community outreach and recruitment, ethical guidelines and procedures, culturally grounded facilitation and data collection methods, individual and group interviewing techniques, field and observation notes, and analysis and evaluation of findings.

After the training, the Sasamans team visited the six communities to build relationships and invite community members to participate in providing information. In some situations, community frontline workers were engaged to coordinate events designed to connect the team with the community so that the team could provide information on the process and arrange meetings with potential participants.

One of the lessons we learned early on was about the use of language. When we began our search for participants, our flyers and presentations often used the terms individual interviews and focus groups. We received feedback that some community members felt intimidated by these terms or were tired of being analyzed by researchers, with the result that some people would not participate in providing information. This feedback allowed us to change our language to use less formal words such as chat, discussions, or conversations. We also decided to offer an anonymous survey as another option for individuals to participate in providing information.

With the participants' permission, the individual and group conversations were recorded and later transcribed. All participants received gifts of appreciation from Sasamans Society. The Sasamans team carefully read the transcripts looking for trends and important information regarding the communities' views on the topics identified above.

The final stage of the process, Sasamans will present the key findings to each of the participating communities at a community event as per request.

In the following section of the report, we present our conversations with members of the Komoks First Nation.

PART 3: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Community Engagement Process for K'omoks First Nation

What Steps Were Taken?

In September 2010, the Executive Director of Sasamans Society, in accordance with First Nations protocol and tradition, asked permission from the K'omoks First Nation Chief and Council to work with their community. Then in November 2010, Sasamans Society signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the K'omoks First Nation. Another MOU was created between Wachiay Friendship Centre and the Band to work with urban Aboriginal peoples who access the Friendship Centre services.

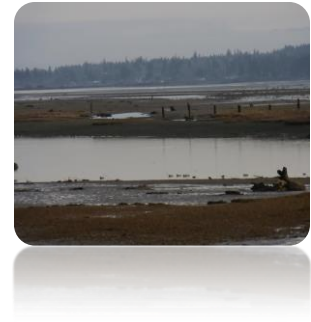


In June 2011, plans for community involvement were delayed when changes within the Ministry of Child and Family Development required Sasamans to complete a review of the community engagement process and make changes to the work plan and budget. K'omoks First Nation was one of several communities that were put on hold until the next fiscal year.

After the changes were made, a cohesive team approach was implemented through the creation of a team of facilitators, rather than individual community-based collaborators within each community. The team completed a two-day training session in 2011 to enhance their facilitation skills for individual conversations and group discussions. Follow-up training was provided in May 2012, after three new members were added to the team. Sasamans posted these positions with the colleges and universities on Vancouver Island to allow for maximum recruitment of Aboriginal students to enhance their community work experience. The team spent time in the community getting to know the people prior to conducting interviews and focus groups.

Meeting the People

A Meet and Greet with K'omoks First Nation was held late November 2011. The Executive Director and two support staff at Sasamans then met with Councilor, Barb Mitchell on April 25, 2012 to further plan the community engagement process for the community. Contact was made through KDC Health to attend the Elders lunch on June 19, 2012 and present an overview of Sasamans Society. The lunch was attended by eight Elders along with KDC staff and Sasamans team members.



On August 21, 2012, two team members attended an Elders and Youth Picnic and Fishing Derby at the point on the Puntledge River on traditional K'omoks territory. There were 24 community members with nine Elders included in the group. A Sasamans team member also attended an Elders lunch on September 11, 2012 at the KDC Health Centre to share the Sasamans' Elders Report and make further contact with Elders. Conversations with K'omoks Elders in their homes took place from June, 2012 to September, 2012.

Digital recordings of the interviews and discussion groups were transcribed in November and December 2012 and the draft report was written in February 2013. Once the first draft was complete, the Sasamans team read and provided feedback to the writer and the report was edited accordingly. After this process, the draft report was passed on to the social development worker for input and comments and then printed and delivered to the community.

The Report

As part of the community engagement process, the Sasamans team met with a representative sample of community members, who were self-selected on a volunteer basis. Conversations took place with a number of youth, parents and Elders, who represented a wide age-range:

- Three parents, ranging in age from 29 to 41; and
- Nine Elders, ranging in age from 60 to 75.

The Elders and parents shared their views and wisdom on a range of topics including programs that are needed for youth, mental wellness and substance use, family and community events, the importance of outdoor activities, the positive and negative impacts of technology, Traditional Family Laws, knowledge transfer, traditional foods, story-telling, cultural practices, language revitalization, traditional parenting, the intergenerational impacts of residential schools, the needs of children in care and their families, the importance of raising family members, and the need for cultural competency and advocacy in building relationships between professionals and community members.

Conversations are summarized in the report and the information presented comes from the Elders' words and direct quotes are used to maintain the voices of the Elders. Some quotes have been changed slightly to make them more readable or to avoid identifying the speaker. References to 'the Ministry' throughout the report refer to the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

K'omoks First Nation: Community Profile

For thousands of years, Sathloot, Sasitla, Ieeksun, Puntledge, Cha'chae, and Tat'poos, the ancestors of the K'omoks people, lived on their lands along eastern Vancouver Island. In their language they called their home 'land of plenty'; a good name for an area that had plenty of fish, seafood, sea animals, wild game, birds, berries and natural medicines. Today, evidence of their ancestors' work can be seen in Comox Harbour where hundreds of wooden stakes used for tying fishing weirs protrude out of the mud along Dyke Road. These wooden stakes have stood the test of time and are evidence of the ingenuity of the people who harvested these waters for food and made their livelihood from the land and sea. These traditional territories continue to nurture and feed the K'omoks First Nation.



There are four reserves, which make up the K'omoks First Nation. Comox Indian reserve, number 1 is located next to the town of Comox and Puntledge reserve number 2 runs along the Puntledge River next to the city of Courtenay and reserve number 3 is located on Goose Spit by Comox Harbour and reserve number 4 is located near Sayward.

Today there are 315 members and 112 live on-reserve. This includes 21 children and youth, aged 18 and younger, 21 Elders who are 65+ and 14 Elders who are 64 to 55 who live on-reserve.

Age group	Totals	Age group	Totals
0 – 6	4	19-54	56
7-11	5	55-64	14
12-18	12	65+	21
Total		112	

K'omoks First Nation promotes partnerships with the greater community in the Comox Valley. They play an active role by hosting events, partnerships and business ventures; some of which



are I-Hos gallery, Pentlatch Seafoods, Queneesh Developments, K'omoks Forestry Co. and Puntledge R.V. and Campground. K'omoks First Nation welcomes their families, friends and visitors when hosting I-Hos Arts Festival, National Aboriginal Day and the Multicultural Festival, which are events that take place every year on-reserve.

I-Hos Gallery and the K'omoks First Nation administration building overlook the Comox harbor. Facilities include a hall for community gatherings, recreational and educational activities. KDC Health is also located in the back of this building. The band offers tutoring for students as well as summer employment and programs for youth that teach a variety of

skills like hunting, fishing, preparing and preserving traditional foods. Fresh produce from the community garden and food fish is distributed to community members. The Health Centre offers K'omoks members a variety of services that focus on addiction, health education, disease and illness prevention, and promotion of health. A good example is the 10K training, which will bring together community members and train them for a 10K walk/run to promote healthy life-styles. Other services include Elders' lunch, foot and hand care, treadmill and exercise bike facilities, weekly exercise classes, and creative activities like scrapbooking. There are also education workshops that focus on topics ranging from HIV to head lice and Glo Germ hand-washing techniques. There is a CHR on staff and the mental health team and nurse visit the clinic on a regular basis. There is also a Big House for potlatch and ceremonial purposes located on reserve.



Governance and administration tasks are carried out by the chief and four council members, who are elected every two years, and supported by four full time staff and two part-time staff for education and social development. There are four hereditary head chiefs who continue to lead the potlatch system of witnessing and validating the personal and collective history of the K'omoks First Nation, through songs, dances, giving of names and the distribution of gifts to ensure the continuation of their culture and relationship to the traditional lands and waters of the K'omoks First Nation. (Source: K'omoks First Nation)



Key Messages

Traditionally, families and communities took care of the children and raised them to be confident, with the opportunities to learn about their culture and gain a sense of belonging in their community. In moving back towards strong forms of parenting that benefit the children as well as the community as a whole, many of the Elders and parents discussed changes that they would like to see in their community, and highlighted best practices and positive programs that they currently have access to.

Community Programs and Events

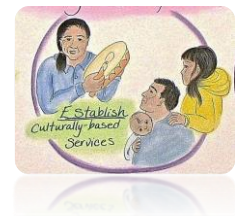
There is a need for the community to work together with guidance from the Elders to have culturally-appropriate and accessible programs and services that:

- Promote health and wellness for children and families,
- Encourage family togetherness;
- Inspire active life-styles; and
- Enhance self-esteem and cultural pride.



Support is needed for education around addictions and to help end addictions in the community. Elders would also like to see more culturally-based residential drug and alcohol treatment programs designed and run by Aboriginal staff.

Community members have thoroughly enjoyed the outdoor activities that have been available and would love to have more opportunities for canoe and camping trips for youth and families to learn more about their traditional territory.



Traditional Knowledge

Reclaiming the traditional ways is the key to rebuilding language, culture, healthy children, families and community. Elders believe children, youth and parents are interested in learning from them about language, history, culture, traditional ways, foods, medicines, hunting and fishing.

Many of the parents are also eager to speak with the Elders and learn about the local history, the language, and oral traditions. They feel that Elders should be given more opportunities to share their knowledge and teach the youth in the community.

Raising Children in the Community

There is a need for a new relationship with the Ministry; a relationship that promotes understanding, openness, communication, and respect for all parties. Elders and parents would like the Ministry to:

- Work in co-operation with the community and Elders to acknowledge that extended family members are the preferred care-givers
- Ensure that children will be placed in safe homes and will have connection to their identity, culture, and community.

Parents and Elders would also like to see a role for advocacy for children and families in the community. An advocate is needed to help families navigate the child protection system, understand their rights, access information, and ensure the safety and well-being of children in care.

Community Needs List

The Elders and parents have identified many of the service gaps and potential solutions for children and youth, parents, Elders, community members, and the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD).

Identified Needs	Suggested programs or services
<i>For Children and Youth</i>	
Connections to culture, land, and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children and youth are raised in safe, stable homes, either with family or with appropriate, local foster homes ▪ Connections to home are maintained whenever possible
Opportunities to support balance and wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support and encouragement for sports and other healthy activities ▪ Access to a gymnasium on-reserve ▪ Create a position for a Youth Worker in the community ▪ Build a youth centre, on-reserve to provide a safe place for youth to gather and participate in activities ▪ Form a youth group, such as a Youth Council, to allow the youth to voice their personal opinions
Centering decisions around the best interests of the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a position for a child, youth, and family advocate to practice within the community, to ensure that all interests of the child and their families are met ▪ Have discussions with Elders in decision-making processes

Identified Needs	Community-Driven Changes
<i>For Parents</i>	
Moving back towards traditional parenting practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to traditional parenting programs to develop positive skills and live healthy lives
Elders talking with parents and offering non-judgmental help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide opportunities for Elders, parents to come together and share knowledge, stories, and information
<i>For Elders</i>	
Opportunities to gather and talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build an Elders' Centre to provide a place to gather, hold activities, and share conversation ▪ Create a position for an Elders Worker, who could help to organize and facilitate events in the community
Opportunities to share knowledge, teach the language and talk about their history with children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More gatherings and events to provide opportunities for knowledge and culture sharing ▪ There have been multiple requests for annual Elders and Youth gatherings
<i>For the Whole Community</i>	
Increased access to culturally appropriate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to First Nations healing programs that are staffed by First Nations workers ▪ Access to culturally-appropriate drug and alcohol treatment programs ▪ Create a position for a Health and Wellness Coordinator on-reserve
Programs that promote family unity and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizing canoe journeys to Tree Island and

Identified Needs	Community-Driven Changes
active life-styles	<p>other camping trips for children, Elders, and families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More workshops on-reserve to promote healthy living
<i>For Ministry Workers and Other Professionals</i>	
Development of a respectful, meaningful relationship with the MCFD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuous participation in workshops, celebrations and other events to bring awareness of Aboriginal culture, values and traditions and to promote cross-cultural respect ▪ Provide training to outside parties to help them learn to communicate with Aboriginal families in a respectful way
Ensuring that children are connected to their community and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Priority for placements in care should reside with family members. ▪ Increase the number of safe, Aboriginal foster homes
Community involvement in decision making with MCFD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a strong and meaningful consultation process between the Ministry and the community is required.

Community Programs and Events

All of the Elders shared many stories about their community. They shared their thoughts about young people, culture, language, jobs, sports, outdoor activities, addictions, traditional and healthy food, social media, technology, and family celebrations.

Programs and Activities for Youth

The parents and Elders spoke of the programs that are available to the youth in the community, as well as the activities and events they would like to see in the future. Outdoor activities, such as fishing, camping, sports and traditional activities like canoe pulling and cedar barking, that the community youth are able to participate in. These activities can help to build good foundation for youth, which can help to prepare them for when they become parents:

You learn to blend and get along; you learn other people's ways as well as you learn your own. A lot of times you grow up feeling there's an identity crisis because you haven't been taught a lot so you're picking it up late in life and you'd like to see the kids start out with that so that they have that as a base. (Elder)



It's a good solid base to learn that, that old traditional ways of looking after yourself and feeding yourself and taking care of the land. (Elder)

It gives them a foundation, something solid to work with cause they've learned all that stuff now it will be up to them to pass it on to their boys and the girls... (Elder)

Specifically, many of the participants talked about the effectiveness of the outdoor programs that are available to the youth, including the 'Learn to Hunt' program and the 'Elders and Youth Fishing Derby' events:

[There is] a youth learn how to hunt program every fall now... for youth between 6 and 28... [they] go and camp in Sayward for three days and teach kids... how to set up a camp and how to identify plants and animal tracks and everything else and you know there's incentive for them to get out and do that stuff... little pamphlets for them when they find all the different tracks, they tick 'em off in their book and when they come back they get to go through a little bag with sorta.... And then you know when [they] get an animal, [they] show 'em how to field dress it and everything and bring it back to the camp and show 'em how to break it down, quarter it up and how to care for the animal and everything. (Parent)

The most recent I think we just did was I put on a fishing derby last week... the kids came out, their fishing rods and it was tailed onto the Elders lunch, so that was good. (Parent)

Another Elder noted the importance of holding organized summer events for the youth in the community. An event happened in the past summer and she described it: *“You know that’s the best thing that ever happened to the kids.”*

Yeah, that’s especially during the summer not much going on, that’s the first time I really seen the kids really enjoying themselves. (Elder)

Many of the Elders talked about the role that Friendship Centres have played in helping youth and families stay connected to their culture. The Centres have provided opportunities for Elders to meet with youth through activities, lunches, and programs to help youth learn more about their heritage. Friendship Centres also provide an excellent space for hosting workshops and allow for families to gather for celebrations and other public events:

Friendship Centres are open to letting urban families have feasts and I think the friendship centre that’s a public place, that’s for everyone.... And even doing workshops like that, I think more of these societies should be doing more things like this, holding workshops for young families. (Elder)

One of the parents also noted that she would like to see Aboriginal role models visit the community to help to inspire the youth. Particularly, there is a need for more information around education programs and opportunities that are available to First Nations youth after they graduate from highschool:

An Aboriginal Advisor [could talk] about the most trending careers and stuff... that everybody's going into, where all the jobs are opening up and stuff like that and giving them an idea of what they can do and how to go to school... how to find bursaries and scholarships... if there's funding available, we take advantage of it. If there's not we'll find it somewhere. (Parent)



There is also untapped potential for a Youth Council, or some other forum, to allow for the young people to gather and voice their opinions on various topics that impact the community. These gatherings would help to foster unity among the youth, while enhancing their independence and confidence:

I'd like to see things like youth councils and youth groups that you know do their own fundraising and kind of run themselves as their own thing, they can fundraise for different conferences come back and report back to the community on things they've learned, and what they'd like to see as for their future. I'd like to see youth council who can make recommendations to the Chief and council on what's... good for the community... (Parent)

Many of the participants also described that they would like to see more options for recreational activities for the youth, to draw the young people outside and to promote active lifestyles:

I'd like to see some recreation, some sort of recreation programs for them. I think sports is really important to kids. It teaches them all kinds of stuff and kids in general aren't that healthy anymore, a lot of computers and gaming and yeah and not enough - I watched my own son when we got a computer go from this you know skinny little active kid that was outside all day to just battling with weight, yeah, not wanting to do much activity... (Parent)



The parents and Elders feel that the youth have are eager to learn about their culture as well as the many opportunities they may have as adults and would like to see more resources available to them to build on this potential.

Mental Wellness and Substance Use

Many of the community members feel that substance use has become a problem in the community. Some of the Elders feel that problems can often root in financial difficulties; parents may be struggling with employment and dealing with money problems, worrying about how to pay the daily expenses of living. Another issue is centered around problems with addictions. Often substances are seen as a way of coping with deeper issues:

So I think when people are messed up on drugs or alcohol there's a reason and until you can find that... what they're dealing with, help them heal that and they can move forward. (Elder)

I think that a lot of people who have children, have families; many children and stuff have had some real, bad traumatic things happen. Whether it was in childhood, teenage or adult hood, there's some trauma in there... (Elder)

In this sense, many of the parents noted that they would like to see more services that address substance use issues. Suggestions around needed services ranged from “Counselling in general,” to supports that deal with “anger management..., depression and postpartum.”



In addition to increasing access to these services, it is also important to promote mental wellness. Encouraging healthy lifestyles, through education and workshops to promote self-respect and awareness about taking care of yourself, are believed to be effective ways of preventing drug and alcohol abuse:

I know people need help but... the start of help is being able to help yourself, and you know maybe groups to you know like self-esteem type groups to help those people along with the self-esteem so they know that they have the power to be able to change right? (Parent)

If we taught people to have a healthy lifestyle and to have more respect for themselves, [it] would encourage them to make healthier choices for themselves. Education always helps people to be a better person. (Elder)

Overall, the Elders and parents have illustrated the deep importance of learning the past to move forward into a positive future; as one parent stated, “*we can't undo history but we can try and break the cycle...*”

Many of the Elders are making efforts to live healthy lifestyles, but it can be difficult due to their circumstances; they may be living in unhealthy areas, they may be staying alone and they may need a safe person to talk with in a positive environment.

Community Events and Family Activities

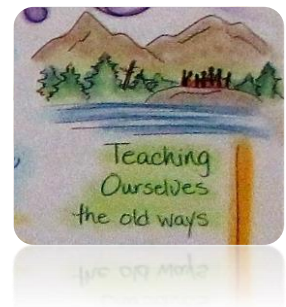
Many of the community members noted that they really enjoy family and community events that bring people together. Although the community currently holds a number of these events, the parents and Elders noted that they would love to see more opportunities to gather:

[W]hen we get together it's a really fun event usually... [there are] not as many as there could be I think. (Parent)

[Y]ou know, you have your events... community events where you get allot of people together but it would be nice to see more. (Parent)

Specifically, many of the parents and Elders would also like to see the Elders and youth come together on a regular basis:

[It would] be nice to see them get together and then implement a you know adding the youth in there with them to, so you get both sides. Like the lunch we had down at the river, that's what we were trying to do there was, it was an Elders lunch and then somebody talked to me about doing a fishing derby with kids down at the river and I thought, 'Well hey, bring 'em down the same day all the Elders are there.' (Parent)

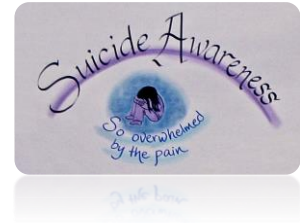


In addition to being a lot of fun, these gatherings also promote unity between families within the community, as one parent noted:

I think it just brings people together and reminds us that you know yeah we're neighbors and we don't talk allot you know but we could you know. (Parent)

Increasing Communication and Participation

Although there are many groups working on common issues on-reserve and in the larger community, one of the Elders mentioned that there is little communication and very few connections between these groups. For example, suicide prevention strategies are carried on by multiple services and programs in the community; it would be strategic to connect these groups, to come together so that their work can be beneficial to all. A positive example from communication is through the community newsletters, which allow community members to be informed of important news and upcoming events.



The Elders also feel that it can be difficult, at times, to get community members to come out to events and meetings. However, gathering around food is often a good way to draw people to events and food is always offered at gatherings. Many of the participants noted that there is a need for more volunteers to help plan events, make phone calls and work the community garden. One of the parents illustrated the importance of volunteering and supporting the youth in the community:

Between myself and a couple of other of the younger people that work around the community and, you know, don't mind doing some volunteer work here and there we try and do things for the youth.... I know [one girl] likes... to plan things in the summer for the kids, it's not part of her... she just does it because it's important to do. And she goes around and she gets donations from the different consultants and different people that work around the Band, and contractors and stuff to put those things on... we've raised money to take them to conferences and things like that when we can. (Parent)



It's important to have Elders Worker and a Youth Worker as part of a support system; these roles could help to plan and facilitate activities, and help Elders to share their knowledge with the youth:

[H]aving your Elder, your healthy Elder that wants to be there, to be a support system, to have that person in place. To have a Youth worker.... To have the people in place and connecting with one another in the community is important. I see now that people are working in different areas, but people aren't connecting. (Elder)

I think it can be encouraged by somebody organizing things for people to share, to come down and share. At the band hall or at our health centre. (Elder)

There should be workers out there, we have no youth workers, we have no Elders' worker. If we had a youth worker, then the kids would know each other better and get together and do like they used to do. They used to do drum-making, they use to do lots of different activities and you just don't see it as much now. (Elder)



Similarly, one of the parents noted that she would really like to see a youth centre in the community:

[A] youth centre... a safe place for them to go, and they have all kinds of activities and stuff and sports and even just board games and stuff where they can just go, be safe but have fun, and my son was like 'wow that's what we need!' and he really like that idea. (Parent)



Many of the community members are eager to have opportunities to come together as a whole. In looking toward opportunities for increased unity in the community, event coordinators, such as youth workers and Elders workers, would help to bring people together to participate in group activities and community events.

Uses of Technology for Community Activities and Programs

Social media and texting have had an impact on youth behavior, in both a positive and negative sense. These forms of communication help to keep families informed about the activities and happenings amongst the youth and in the schools. Many of the Elders discussed the pros and cons of social media, texting, and other internet websites.

One of the Elders feels that social media can be a way of finding out about some of the important issues that occur within the community and in the schools, such as bullying amongst youth:

[I] thank God for Facebook sometimes, you read in their Facebook... where you read between the lines there.... Bullying still goes on in the schools no matter what... you can read that, some of their things on Facebook, young kids on your Facebook page. I said at least it's giving you a warning. (Elder)



While some events can benefit through online announcements, it is not always appropriate to publicize ceremonies and gatherings within online forums. As one Elder noted:

[T]he many potlatches that I have gone through even in the recent years, the family will announce right away, no pictures and I don't want it on Facebook because that's been the big tragedy of this new technology. (Elder)

People are out there with their phones, taking pictures of things that are happening in the Big House and dances, sacred dances are being performed and... out there in the world right away and even not respecting families that are asking not to do that. (Elder)

Cellphones can also serve as a distraction during these ceremonies, and should not be used:

Sometimes you hear a phone ringing in the Big House when there's things going on in there and you're there as a witness, that's your sole job to witness, that's all you're there for. (Elder)

In this sense, it is important to know when it is appropriate to use technology. Although many new and innovative websites have been created for the purpose of cultural revitalization, such as First Voices, technology can also serve to take away from cultural activities and events that take place in the present:

I think with technology in some ways it's good and many ways, it's not. With the technology, with those phones that people text on, I find that they're very rude people... some ways it is good because nowadays kids can connect now with language on First Voices. They access... people post dances that they put on, people as well... now on Facebook. (Elder)

The Elders agree that kids need to get outside, get fresh air, be active and run around. This Elder never stayed in the house when he was a kid. It is okay to learn about computers and technology, but it's important for children to be active and outdoors:

[S]ure, it's nice to learn about computers, play games and TV and that, that's no good, you got to get outside, fresh air, forest, running around.... Sitting around home is no good. When I grew up, I never hardly stayed in the house. (Elder)



Some of the Elders also feel that the parents have to be involved with their children in their sports activities, taking them to events and staying to watch and cheer them on otherwise kids won't be interested in sports:



You have to be there with them, you can't just drop them off and walk away. They lose their interest; you're not there watching them. If you're not going to watch your child then they just kind of go, "Oh well". (Elder)

The kids would play a much better game when the parents were cheering them on. It was an amazing difference. (Elder)

The Elders acknowledged that there are two sides to modern technology, but request that community members use these devices with respect for their culture and for the community as a whole.

Outdoor Activities

Elders are concerned about the affect of television and games on youth and they would like to see more sports and outdoor activities, as well as building basic skills through education:

[T]he kids, they don't know what they're missing so spending all the time with the computer and the games, I know it's technology and I know it's advancement, but they need to learn basics first. They can't count, they can't add, they can't do anything, no computer to do it for them.... And it's not through any fault of their own cause they don't know any.... They haven't been taught. (Elder)

[Technology has] ruined a lot of kids' lives. Obesity has taken over, all they do is lay down.

We try to teach our kids how to hunt and do all that stuff because the computer ain't everything. Teach the kids to look out for each other. (Elder)

Elders want youth to use the gym for activities like floor hockey and volleyball and they believe it should be free of charge for youth. They would like to see more activities for community members:

A group that doesn't have enough money to rent the hall so that the kids can go in and play volleyball or something like that. We shouldn't have to pay for that. (Elder)

Community and connection to culture are important. An important activity that takes place in the community is the canoe journey; the Elders see these trips as a way of bringing people together

to learn more about their culture and traditions. The canoe journey is a soothing, respectful, healing experience:

I think identity is important we found that out when we were very involved with... felt a really strong connection with the canoe... I think because we live in such close proximity to Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland, other towns, that community sort of gets lost, when we have a death or loss in the community then everyone comes together quite well. (Elder)

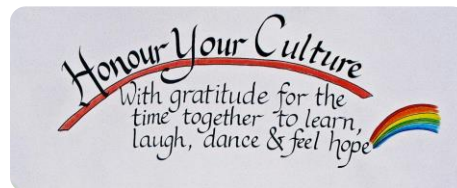
Some people it helps them because they've lost family and getting in the canoe does wonders for them. You feel more relaxed when you're with a bunch of family. (Elder)

When we go anywhere we have paddles and we have our traditional paddles that go with the canoe so when we go in anywhere, everybody has the same paddle, we go in as a community not as an individual... (Elder)

In the future, the Elders would like to have a canoe journey for youth and families to Tree Island:

[I]f we could get the canoe out and go to Tree Island and around maybe the people in the community could get their own connection to their traditional lands... (Elder)

Longer journeys, such as Tribal Journey, are a good way for youth to learn about their culture, make new friends and keep in contact with their relatives who live along the route. Tribal Journeys help to build pride in culture and bring about peace and relaxation for those involved.



Traditional Knowledge

Elders recall what life was like when they were young. An Elder had fond memories about families that would come out at night to play softball and a lot of time was spent picking berries, swimming, digging clams and oysters on the beach by their community:

We used to play softball. We'd hurry up with our dinners in the evenings, all of us went out to play, the whole reserve went, all of our uncles and aunts they'd be out there playing softball with us kids 'til dark or soccer, the boys would play soccer. Then we'd go down, all summer long we'd be down the beach and all our, the young aunts, our aunts and uncles used to be down there swimming too. That was our pastime, all day. Then we'd go out down by the

hospital to get clams... we did a lot of berry picking, picking fruit all around the back road here, used to be a lot of farms. (Elder)

Another Elder remembers cooking and singing with her mother and grandmother:

[T]he good times we had you know, with my mother and that and her cooking, we were talking about that the other day. How we thought about your mother and grandmother's cooking.... She would sing, she was happy. (Elder)

One of the Elders said people helped each other and shared what they had:

I guess it meant helping, it didn't matter whose family you were, if somebody were in need, you helped that family. (Elder)

In looking back to the ways that families used to live and the ways that communities would come together in celebration and in solving problems, much can be drawn upon when facing challenges today. Many of the Elders and parents have drawn on this knowledge in looking to suggestions for moving forward.

Traditional Family Laws

For K'omoks Elders, the term 'Traditional Family Laws' meant different things; some described it as a part of their everyday lives, with laws that included the importance of culture and belonging, learning how to be independent and responsible for behaviour and decisions, as well as giving back to their community.

One Elder talked about having a strong "sense of belonging" and the importance of knowing who you are, and where you come from:

Because for a child growing up it was always a sense of belonging, I always had that sense of belonging, I knew who I belonged to, I always knew who I was and I knew. (Elder)



Traditional laws were not written down like western laws; they were inherent knowledge, passed on through generations and practiced in their everyday lives. As one Elder noted:

[T]he traditional family laws were unspoken. It was more of a practice; they weren't written down, they're weren't repeated, it was more of your general life. (Elder)

Many of these teachings had a strong focus on learning the language and cultural knowledge, as one Elder noted:

I had a unique experience where my parents were a lot older and were grounded, my mother was so grounded in her culture and I learned my mother's language and my mother's culture and traditions and that was what was placed on me... (Elder)



One elder described Traditional Laws as ways of knowing and being respectful:

I guess for me... we just grew up knowing we were just expected to know and when we were doing something wrong, our grandmother or our grandpa would just give us a look and that was enough for us. We knew we were doing something... something not appropriate, whatever... whenever we left the house, all of us kids, we were always told we represented our grandmother when we went out so behave ourselves... (Elder)

Another Elder explained that Traditional Laws were represented through a strict upbringing, teaching children and youth to be responsible for their decisions and behavior:

Of the traditional family laws to me was the way I was brought up. I spoke our language that was my first language and English is my second language.... The differences was the fact that my upbringing was very, very strict, strict in comparison to what kids have today or even other kids at that time. (Elder)



Another Elder described the “influence of environment” as a teaching; if children and youth become familiar with activities like drinking and using drugs as a young person, it can become the ‘normal’ activity as they grow up. Another teaching is that bad behavior cannot be condoned. If a person saw someone doing something wrong, it was important that the person be corrected of their bad behavior:

[T]he old way of thinking is: if you were exposed to it and you become friendly with the environment it becomes influential on you when you grow up and it becomes alright, norm, average, whatever you want to call it. And it was not acceptable... (Elder)

These teachings were “just part of the laws, it was the way I was raised” and these teachings were of great importance in the balance of everyday life.

Watching and Learning from the Elders

Elders talked about learning from their aunties, uncles and grandparents and parents. They watched their Elders and learned about appropriate behavior, making good decisions, cutting and preparing fish, planting a garden and keeping a home.

[T]hey'll show me and it's just like things... I don't know how to explain, it's like when we clean fish too, we were observers and we watched.... Everything was you did it, you watched then you learned. (Elder)

In terms of discipline, children were taught to be responsible through working; they were corrected through talking with their families and were never spanked:

We were never spanked... we were just talked to and shown. More shown and respect, we had a lot of respect for people, our older people. (Elder)

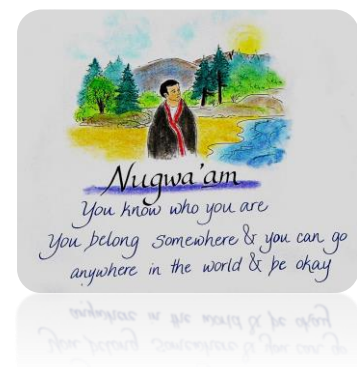
This Elder was tempted to quit school to work in the cannery and earn money. It was through talking with her family members that she decided to continue with her education:

They would just talk to us about... like I wanted to quit high school. I didn't see any point in going to school. I wanted to quit and work in the canneries. There was a lot of canneries and laundries in those days and they'd talked me into staying in school, which I did. They were very stern, but they were fun loving. (Elder)

When she was a child, another Elder recalled her housekeeping jobs. She said this was in preparation for when she was ready to marry:

I had the responsibilities of washing floors, cleaning bathrooms when I was six, started when I was five. It's not something you learned when you were older. Because as soon as you start your menstrual cycle, you were a young lady, you're not a child anymore. (Elder)

These values, protocols, and forms of knowledge were passed down through generations and were traditionally very effective in raising strong, intelligent, and independent children. Many of the Elders have expressed the need to move back to forms of traditional parenting to promote wellness for individuals, families, and the community.



Traditional Food

Several Elders discussed traditional foods and the connection to health and wellness in the community. Traditional and live foods are healthier, and community members are teaching children and youth how to hunt, prepare and eat traditional food. They are also teaching children where food comes from, through planting gardens, shopping and participating in cooking classes, on-reserve. These activities encourage children and youth to take information and recipes back to their home to share with their families, motivating parents to try new, healthy meals. As one Elder explained:

They got to see from where all the vegetables came from, made a salad that was really, really healthy. They blanched all the beans and everything that were to go in it, washed all the lettuce, everything and cut everything up and then they poached sockeye salmon and put that on top of the salad and that's what we had for lunch that the kids had prepared for us and the kids were just elated. (Elder)

One of the Elders explained the connection that hunting meat has had on his health; he is proud that he has not bought meat from the grocery store for a long time. Many of the Elders shared their views about traditional foods and staying healthy:

For one thing [traditional foods are] a lot healthier than the food they're feeding you today. So we try to, the boys, we can our own fish, they all know how to barbeque, they all know how to smoke their own fish, the boys, all the little ones are learning now too. (Elder)



[I]t took all these many years in life that we weren't healthy at all, all these years now we're getting back into that... Getting away from the beef. Getting away from the salt, sugar, white flour. I found out that stuff is terrible for you, but having the grandchildren around when you're doing that, going hunting, cutting the meat... How to preserve it. (Elder)

The Elders appreciate the community garden and share in the harvest of the garden. Some of the Elders also maintain personal gardens and feel that there is a positive movement towards growing healthy foods and maintaining wellness:

In my garden I have raspberries, black cat berries, I have potatoes, I have my herbs, my domestic herbs, my oregano, and onions, chives and those kinds of things, my garnishes, my sage and those kinds of things and then I have peas, and beans and lettuce and spinach, my salad things. (Elder)

That's really important to our bodies because the natural way to maintain our bodies and to help to solve problems before they become the critical stage, helps to maintain our bodies in a good way, it's easy access to it, the price is... it just takes a little bit of energy to go get it so the price isn't expensive and the food is always fresh... fresher than buying it from the store, from the health food store.... And the herbs and the plants that are available in our area are the most complimentary ones to our bodies to keep us healthy. (Elder)



I think this knowledge, there's a desire to have it come back. People are interested in learning how to maintain a healthy body and prevent diseases, people are becoming more interested in that, there's a big trend that's happening. So there is a trend happening that way, for healthy foods. (Elder)

Another Elder said that there was always plenty of food and people were careful to ensure that it was never wasted:

Well, we were... I was saying we were...there was never food wasted or anything like that. And... there was always lots of food, none was ever wasted. We get together and talk the old times sometimes... (Elder)

This Elder also remembered working on canning fish and how it had to be done all at once and nowadays you can throw it in the freezer for another day:

[A] lot of them just freeze it now, can it down the road or something like that, you don't have to do it all at once now. I remember staying up, 1 or 2 in the morning cleaning fish. Then you have to get up early with kids the next morning so it's a lot easier now. Everybody's got freezers; you can freeze your fish and smoke it down the road... (Elder)

One of the Elders stressed that fast food is a problem because it's easy for children and families to run to a fast-food restaurant instead of cooking and enjoying live food:

Actually fast food is a huge problem. It gives us all the bad things that we don't need in our bodies and... it's not live food, we need to grow up knowing that we have to nurture our bodies with live food. (Elder)

Many of the youth are learning about hunting, fishing and eating traditional foods through workshops in the community like 'How to use a rifle'. However, one Elder noted that, in smaller communities that are not close to cities and towns, the children and youth seem to be learning more about cutting, cleaning, preparing and smoking fish with their parents. Alternatively, it is challenging for young people to learn about culture and traditional ways because K'omoks First Nation is located right in the middle of Comox and Courtenay, as one Elder pointed out:

[A]round here it's pretty hard cause it's more like urban, it's an urban, city reserve... it's pretty hard to get back to the traditional ways... (Elder)

Another Elder talked about offering workshops for families to learn parenting skills and to create interest and awareness in children and families so they become more interested in their own health and wellness by preparing food with new recipes and working in the community garden:

Offer workshops, offer cooking classes, offer canning classes offer ways and show them how to prepare their traditional food and teach them how to do these things that they've lost, teach them how to make jam, teach them how to make clam fritters and where they come from. Show them where they come from, go out and clam dig with them, and show them where their food comes from and how to get it. (Elder)



The community has a garden and it's a step towards promoting healthy lifestyles. In looking toward ways to encourage people to choose healthy foods, the Elders suggested that people come to the garden and to plant and harvest good food; to make up bags of groceries for Elders; to create a coupon program with local farmer's markets; and to offer community cooking classes:

[W]e purchased from the farmers, good quality food and created a bag of groceries for each Elder family once a week... (Elder)

[For] low income and single families with young children... each person was given a \$15.00 coupon to go to the farmer's market and they could only buy live food. (Elder)

[W]e had cooking classes once a week from the different people that were in the farmer's market, [they] came and showed us how to prepare the food that they were growing so the people got to learn the different recipes they normally wouldn't eat because of the opportunity that was provided for them... it would just take a willing advocate to try to obtain the resources and create a program. (Elder)

The Elders also believes good, healthy food is another important part of preventing children from going into government care. Some of the children and youth have attended workshops on reserve and they were very enthusiastic about what they were learning about their food. One of the Elders noted that having a garden is better than going to a store, what you grow is fresh and good for you and you can use herbs for seasoning and staying healthy.

Food is so important to the health and wellness of the community and Aboriginal Elders always knew this because they shared a relationship with their environment and the other living things on the land and in the waters. Elders understood how important it was to protect the resources that provided them with food and shelter. All the stories that are passed from generation to generation tell us about how to live in harmony with our environment and the animals, birds and fish. In this sense, traditional foods are an integral part of cultural identity:

It is who we are, that's our identity and that's what nurtures us to the very core of our being is our traditional food. (Elder)

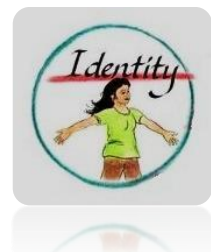
Knowledge Through Story-telling

Many of the Elders talked about the importance of storytelling and the information and knowledge gained from the stories. When one Elder was a child, he listened to his Elders telling stories and learned a lot about the history of his people through stories from his grandfather and uncle. He used to sit beside his grandfather who told him stories about digging clams and cockles on the beaches in Comox harbor and how that cannot be done anymore because of pollution from logging and other industrial activities along the water. Nowadays clam digging is done away from town on small islands.

His grandfather told him stories about high tides coming in and he said if you dig down there will be clam and oyster shells. He says it won't happen in his life time, but the area will flood again. He talked about the whale in the mountain and the people moving from the Puntledge area.

One Elder mentioned the challenge of conveying their knowledge when their stories are translated into English. Sometimes the true meaning is lost in the translation of the story:

[A] lot of the stuff said in our languages no matter where you're from, it is far beyond what the English translation says. It goes further then what can be said as direct translation. There's feelings in it... there's attachments to the land, to the air and your whole life, your ancestry and what is expected in your future. (Elder)



The Elders said that stories and teachings must be told and retold over and over. This is the traditional way of learning.

Story telling is very important to aboriginal people. Stories are important not just for entertaining the listeners but also to give information about family, history, behaviour, values, traditional knowledge about the area and its resources. Stories were told over and over again to generations so the stories would not be forgotten. As one Elder said:

[A] picture is worth a million words for us as First Nations because we're talking they walked up that mountain, that mountain has a name, that mountain has life; we used it for certain things, it had bigger connotations, everything that was within that story has a meaning to us not just the path so you can get there and so a lot of people just don't understand that.
(Elder)



Storytelling is a way of teaching the Ministry about aboriginal people and can be a way of preventing children from going into care. If Ministry workers were taught about stories and come to understand the significance of the information from the stories, they would have a greater appreciation for aboriginal people, probably be more open to listen, develop patience and find out the reasons 'why' than be too quick to pass judgment.

Cultural Teachings and Practices

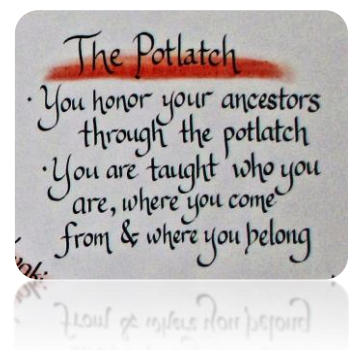
Many of the Elders shared stories about marriage and potlatch. They talked about traditional marriage laws and expectations. In earlier times, marriages were arranged by families and one Elder recalled her experience:

[T]hey brought this boy in and I'm really small and I'm sitting on this chair and he stood, they told him to stand in front of me and they said "This is who you're going to marry."
(Elder)

Potlatch has played a significant role in culture, and continues to be very important to many of the Elders:

[W]e were born into a system of potlatching, it's been in our families for thousands of years, potlatching, I don't know how long, a long time I assume. (Elder)

Potlatch is important in our family for respect it was important to our grandmother. We were always taught our positions in the Big House. (Elder)



In fact, it is also seen as a way to help community members find balance in life, between blending traditional ways and new ways:

I was gone and I lived in the white world and I functioned very well in that white world, but it's always keeping that balance for me, keeping that balance from the technical world of working and staying in balance with my potlatch.



Many of the parents expressed a desire to continue to learn more of the cultural protocols, stories, and histories, from the Elders in their community:

I'd like to learn more [from] the Elders... you know, time is of the essence. If you don't take advantage, and learn from them, then it's gone. (Parent)

Culture and Language Revitalization

Many of the Elders feel that youth are also interested in learning their language and history. Elder says it's most important for youth to learn the language by talking to Elders and they need to teach the language to the youth:

[It is] most important [to] talk Native and learn your language, most important. (Elder)

The Elders are concerned that the community is running out of Elders that know the language, history, cultural ways and traditional family ways. At times, this traditional knowledge has been threatened through academics and professionals who try to study Aboriginal lives and customs, through the lenses of their own cultural backgrounds. One of the stories is about a grandmother telling her grandson:

'I want you to go and straighten out all the books because the books don't say it right.' And then when you think back, anthropologists, people who thought they were anthropologists, historians, the influence of their own life made the interpretation wrong. (Elder)

One Elder noted that, "it's not going to be the same" when the Elders who hold knowledge of the community's traditions, language, and culture are gone. There is a need to pass this knowledge on to the younger generations and to mentor others to become knowledge keepers:

I think there's room for change, but I don't know how they're going to change it without enough knowledgeable Elders cause we're at the tail end of true cultural influences... (Elder)

To me, an Elder is someone who knows their traditions and is grown up in it, matured in it, you can't become it overnight... one knowing good choices, good wisdom... (Elder)

Community members would also like for Elders and youth to meet at least once a year to share stories and knowledge, with the possibility of ongoing cultural mentorship.

Both the Elders and parents expressed the desire to continue on a path of culture and language revitalization through passing on knowledge, through songs, stories, dances, and histories, on to the younger generations. In addition to learning about the culture, however, community members also stressed the importance of living their ways:

I just believe that you know, the kids and the adults should you know start looking back at more the old ways and stuff like that and tryin' to live your life, you know more as part of the earth not as something that's just taking something from it all the time. (Parent)



Raising Children in the Community

Traditional Parenting

Amongst aboriginal people, traditional parenting skills were passed from generation to generation. Children grew up knowing how to be parents because they had received the training from their parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Long ago the whole community helped to raise each child; all children were loved and made to feel like valuable members of the community. Children thrived in these communities. Devastating changes took place when the family was broken up and the children were taken away from their parents and community because of government policies, which placed them in residential schools.

The Elders shared many stories about how they were raised as children and what they learned about parenting skills from their Elders. They also share their advice on traditional parenting:

So when we talk about parenting, it goes back to the grandparents not just the parents. I think you need to look at the parents and the grandparents as one because those parents are product of those grandparents and on and on and on. (Elder)

The teachings this Elder received from her grandmother prepared her for adult life:

Grandmother, I spent almost every day with her from [a] few minutes to hours... so I spent a lot of time with her a lot of her philosophies and stuff she told me and how to handle things right from the time I was four, five years old. Talking about childbirth, talking about children; when you have children and... They got to learn how to get along and they don't need you to settle their issues or problems. (Elder)



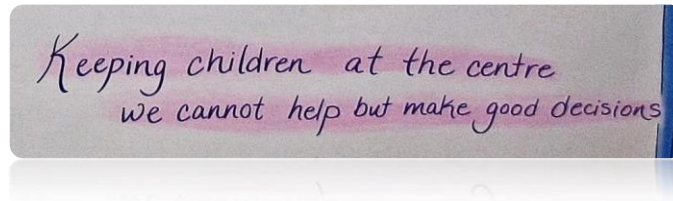
She said that young people have to be conscious of their bodies, to understand how their bodies work, and they are learning this from other youth. Parents and grandparents are not talking and teaching kids like they once did:

In our culture, it's the grandmas' and the aunties' job to tell, it wasn't the moms... (Elder)

I think the outlook of menstrual cycle is too simplified and it's not given the importance of why we have it every month. I think the thing is in a lot of our peoples, no matter what tribe they're from or what area they're from, doesn't explain to the child at the time, it's a privilege to have a period. When you go to school, it's the curse. It was the curse and it was considered horrible. And yet it's the most cleansing thing that a woman goes through every month. And it cleans and prepares you for child-bearing and that is the most sacred thing that a woman has; is the ability to carry a child. (Elder)

These teaching are incredibly important hold values of self-respect, discipline, and self-worth. However, the underlying value within all of these is love:

[M]y mom made sure when we grew up, above all in anything we always felt safe and loved and that no matter what, we've done, any trouble we've ever been in, she will always still love us. And... we've always grown up knowing that no matter what, we can always be there. (Parent)



Cultural Values Through Parenting: Teaching Responsibility, Awareness, and Empowerment

One of the Elders explained that her grandmother taught her that children must be given responsibility so they can become mature adults and she was expected to mature. Her grandmother told her about a baby and having to teach children responsibility and to help them to learn life lessons as they grow:

When you are going to have a baby the baby is going to grow inside you, that's the only time that baby belongs to you. After it's born, it belongs to the earth and you have to let it go a little bit every day because it's not yours. I think what has happened is society especially non-native society has developed this hanging on to children long after they really need to be hung on to and a lot of it because they haven't been given responsibilities as a child to carry through. (Elder)



Many of the Elders also feel that children should be taught boundaries and should learn what is expected of them:

I think that a lot of kids are given so much freedom and there is so much accessibility to things that you don't want them to have access to until they can make a good choice for themselves. And the thing is to make sure that they grow up knowing what is expected of them and who they are as a person and how they fit in the family dynamics and the importance of their position no matter where, they're the oldest, the middle of ten kids or the youngest, there is positions that need to be upheld. (Elder)



One Elder also explained that her grandmother's teachings around building independence and responsibility in children was carried on in her parenting:

I carried on expecting my kids to mature.... They are not kids they're quite capable of making up their own minds about what they want and if you haven't prepared them, they never will. (Elder)

In this sense, maturity has nothing to do with age, but with the ability to take responsibility for decisions and actions:

[M]aturity was accepting the decisions you made in your life whether they were good or bad and being responsible for them. That's maturity... (Elder)

Another Elder stated that, as a mother, it is important to teach your children and encourage responsible behaviours:

[T]o see that you have to let your children grow up and take responsibility that your role as a mother changes as your children get to a certain stage in life to encourage those kinds of responsibilities and... (Elder)

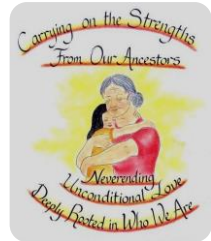


Chores and jobs are also important to develop responsibility. Elder said, “kids are the ones that are sponges” and it is important to include kids in all activities:

[I]t gives the kids when they're learning as a small child responsibility and accomplishment. We always wanna be praised for doing something right, kids are no different... does something, the baby does something and I go, “Good job,” and she says, “Oh, thank you.” And that's part of reassuring her she's doing something that is right, number one, and it's accomplishing something whether it's just putting her crayons away or papers away and picking it all up.... It starts at two, three years old, it doesn't start when you get older. (Elder)

Traditional parenting has focused on building self-confidence through positive reinforcement with children, to ensure that they have the strength and capacity to accomplish their goals and dreams:

[I]t was more of a positive teaching and not a negative, you can't do this, you can't do that. I can remember my parents saying, "That was really good, you did that," and feeling confident; I could do anything. (Elder)



One Elder learned about traditional parenting from her role models:

I think what I learned was always, always being there for your kids and grandchildren... to empower them and so that they are good leaders and good parents and good grandparents and good great grandparents. (Elder)

It is important that children and youth are given the opportunity to learn about their family roots, as well as to be nourished with unconditional love and teachings around self-respect and responsibility:

[My adopted children] each know who they are and where their family's from.... As part of attaching to their family cause I want to give them the roots and the good base to know what it's like to be loved unconditionally, to have honour for themselves and the people that are important in their life whether it's me and dad and these are things that are the most important in raising children and maturing. (Elder)



One of the Elders learned about the value of respect and teaching this value, she passes the teachings to her grandchildren just as her Elders passed it to her:

[A]s grandparents we instill that into our grandkids. When [an] Elder comes, we always teach them, you go and make sure if there's no chair we make sure you give that chair to that person, you go see if they want water, tea or whatever. A lot of the kids I watch them now, it's funny now I'm watching the kids and I'm not saying anything, but I'm just watching what they're doing and that and that's what our grandparents did and our great grandparents did, they just watched us. (Elder)

Another Elder talked about the importance of guiding children through the four stages of life, to bring about self-awareness and responsibility as they grow, and prepare them as they move into adulthood and become parents:

The four stages of life are: children, adolescents and mid-life and then your elder life and how you go through different responsibilities in each of those four stages. I think those kind of teachings would be a good thing to have, shared amongst our young people and all the stages, to bring the teachings back that way. Like for children, when they're in their young stage, how they're curious and that's their learning stage and learning about who they are and learning about their environment and learning about respect for themselves and their environment and nature and food and learning about those kinds of things. And then for the young teenager when you're change from a child and you go through puberty, what does that mean? What's happening in your body? To be able to have an awareness about those kinds of things and then when you become a mom, how do you nurture your child as a mom after you've made that decision to have children. (Elder)

I think if people learned, had more, had more respect for their culture, more awareness, had their parenting skills, just were able to help one another more and there be a partnership, to be healthier, to be healthier beings in the community. (Elder)

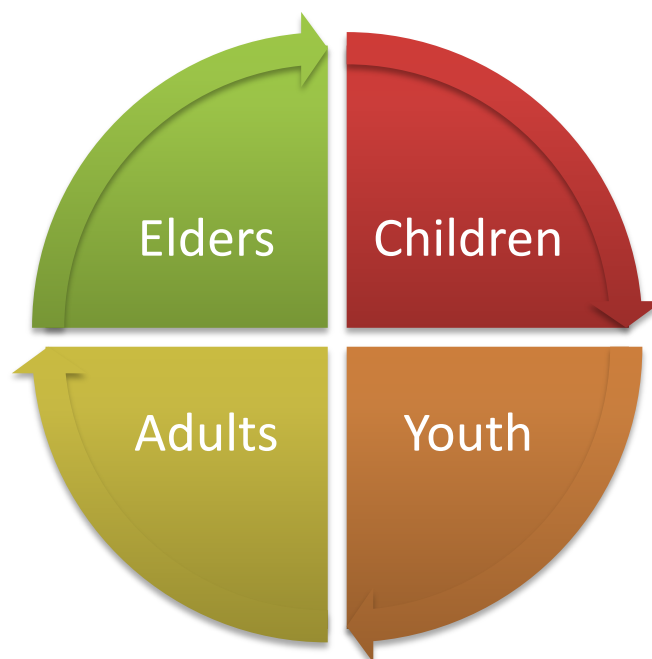


Figure 1. The four stages of life.

Children also need to know they belong and are an important part of the family and community:

[K]ids were always around no matter what we did in our villages. Kids were always there and parents were the ones not looking after them. The grannies and the aunties, older aunties and the great aunties would look after them. That's where they got their knowledge from, parents were busy gathering, making sure everything was right whether it was making baskets to give away or to use or whatever, for getting fish, smoking fish, getting meat and in some areas, drying the meat. (Elder)



When children come of age, it's important to acknowledge and honour them and set out the rules for proper behavior. Young men need to be included so they know what is expected of them:

[M]y granddaughter when she's going to have her womanly cycle for her, we're going to have a feast for her. (Elder)

[W]e talk to all our young men and say "protect her, keep her safe, teach her to value her body" and I think a lot of that is gone away. (Elder)

I think that's laxed and you have to have more programs teaching them that. You got to treasure your body and not just getting pregnant early, children having children. (Elder)

One of the Elders talked about the importance of raising children in a healthy community:

I think a healthy community is the best for raising children.... That's where I think the community needs to come together more and to be able to acknowledge those that are able to provide that for us, can we organize ourselves in such a way that we support one another that way. (Elder)



Residential Schools

For Aboriginal people, it was against their will for their children to be taken and sent to residential schools. The residential school system was designed to assimilate Aboriginal people and destroy their language, culture and independence. Here Elders talk about threats of jail, abuse, children dying and the ongoing impacts of residential school on their lives.

Children were taken to residential school against the wills of their family members. If families tried to prevent their children from being taken, they were threatened with being sent to prison:

[Grandparents] tried to keep her out of residential school but, they told my grandparents they would put them in jail if they didn't send her and so she had to go. (Elder)

Residential schools were terribly harmful to the children that were forced to attend; children who were sent to these schools often died there:

They were put into residential school all their lives and it was... those days it was pretty sad for the families being in the Indian residential schools the way they were brought up in those schools. It was really bad in those days. Like my mother went there and my dad, that's where they went to school together and they married at such a young age. They didn't know too much about parenting... so it was, mom was to tell us that the sisters and the priests would get mad at a classroom, the children, they would lock them in the basement of the residential schools and they would forget about the children... (Elder)

Many of the residential school survivors have chosen not to speak of their experiences; one Elder noted that her parents would not speak of their past experiences:

I asked, my mom and dad wouldn't tell me. They never shared anything with me. I asked and I wouldn't get answers. When Dad was dying, he knew he was dying and I so I asked him 'Were you and Mom in residential school?' And he said 'Yes'... (Elder)

At residential school, academic education was inferior and children learned about household work, labour, and agriculture:

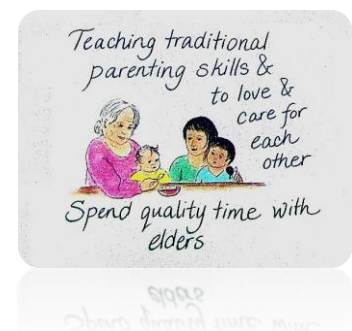
[T]hey didn't teach the boys. They farmed them out and he could grow a really good garden, he was really good at that. (Elder)

One of the impacts of residential school was intergenerational abuse. Because parents were taken away from their families and didn't have their aunties, uncles, parents and grandparents to teach them as they grew up, they lacked many traditional skills so their children grew up to have little or no parenting skills:

I wasn't taught any household, or cleaning or baking or anything... I just remembered being hollered at lots. I couldn't do anything right. (Elder)

This elder went to treatment to understand what happened at residential school to her parents and so she could learn to be a good parent.

Not once did my parents tell me they loved me... I learned to tell my kids I loved them.... now I make sure I tell them all the time. I was 46 I think when I first said that. (Elder)



The Elders have noticed that youth want to know more about residential school. Some of the Elders would like to see more gatherings to allow for Elders and youth to come together and share knowledge about residential school and its impact on the children:

I did a work with Elders and youth that was such a nice group, the youth have such a, they have a vast knowledge, they contributed so much because I never even thought of some of the things they said. And I thought that's such a neat way of thinking and then the Elders would say more of the traditional or more of the effects from residential school and then you hear the youth and how some of it has affected them and in an area where you never even thought how it affected them and you go "Holy cow" and I would like to see youth and elders at a yearly gathering and just listen to one another that would be... (Elder)

One of the impacts from residential school is how it has influenced Aboriginal people's ways of thinking of themselves and seeing things. This has largely resulted in a loss of self-respect and the lack of respect for others. Many of the Elders would like to revitalize their cultural teachings and ways:

[W]e were taught that we weren't good people, we were taught that we didn't need our families, we were taught we were being taught to break down our family structures and our belief systems weren't good so we need to bring all of those teachings back and I respect that with them. (Elder)

And now we just don't have respect for one another and for ourselves so we treat each other in the same way as we look upon ourselves and that wasn't a healthy way and residential school put that imprint on people so we need to recondition people to think differently about themselves. (Elder)



By bringing back our cultural, traditional stories, our cultural ways and teaching us how to respect each other in our cultural, traditional ways and to bringing up that awareness about the different stages of life and how to be able to go through life knowing that we do change, our needs do change as we go through the different stages in life. (Elder)

The Needs of Children in Care and their Families

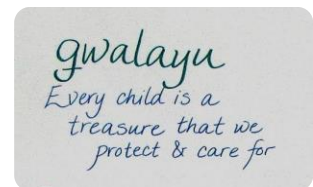
Aboriginal people have been taking care of their children for thousands of years and their children have thrived under the care of the family and community. After European contact, Aboriginal communities were plagued with deception, land seizures, disease and external forms of government. Harmful policies were put in place that banned cultural practices, created reserves, and put children into residential schools. These policies have caused a breakdown in many Aboriginal families and continue to impact communities today. Traditional family laws, traditional parenting and togetherness of community were disrupted by sickness, poverty and

separation. Despite these challenges, however, Aboriginal people have persevered and remain strong, resilient and determined to continue taking care of their children, just as they always have.

Aboriginal children going into government care have been described as a continuation of residential school; children are taken away and families are left behind. There were many concerns expressed about how long children stay in care and about how the Ministry carries out their duties and interacts with aboriginal people; one Elder described government workers just walking in and taking children without proper communication with the parents and family. In fact, all of the Elders agreed that the Ministry needs to make changes around why and how they apprehend Aboriginal children.

There is a lack of trust for government workers and others who may come to the reserve. Elders want supports and resources from the greater community to be encouraged by working with different organizations, as well as professionals, including nurses and healthcare providers, social workers and police. There is a need for advocates and liaison workers from the aboriginal community and more culturally appropriate treatment for addictions.

There is also a need for children to maintain a connection to their families and communities; in this sense placements within home communities are the preference, as expressed by the Elders. They also feel that the safety of children is most important, whether it is with parents or with foster parents.



The Importance of Talking

Aboriginal people come from an oral history tradition and are great ‘talkers;’ having conversations was a way to solve problems. A traditional way of solving problems in the community was to talk about and deal with problems in the Big House. One Elder said once it is spoken about by the people and resolved, the problem is gone and not to be spoken about again:

It's done and over with. It's like water running downstream, you can't find that water you put in there.... That's how we dealt with it in the Big House. Everybody gathered together... and you have both the parties there in front of everybody. And so you explained what's happened so everything was done publicly. And you paid everyone that witnessed. (Elder)



Another Elder said it's important to talk with the Elders and for people to get together to talk. If there's a problem, he said it has to be talked about.

[T]he community get together and talk to them in a group, whose got problems, get a group and start talking to them. (Elder)



Helping Parents

Many of the Elders discussed the way that they can support parents in their community. Suggestions were centered around 'teaching through action,' including role-modeling and providing gentle guidance. By being a role model, one of the Elders tries to show parents and lets them know there are programs and they don't have to worry that they'll be cut off from welfare benefits or financial help and lose their place to live:

[I]t's really tough to try and show somebody that doesn't want to be shown other than to be a role model yourself... (Elder)

Another Elder said that parents should be educated in a gentle and non-judgmental way with First Nations counselors providing the help to them, that is both sensitive and culturally-appropriate:

A safe place to talk, I think instead of non-Native counselors... I'd like to see First Nations there. Even some First Nations that I worked with when I was working didn't want any cleansing of any kind, didn't want any traditional Native cleansing happening because they were with a certain religion now so it had to be that non-native religion, they didn't want anything traditional. When somebody is hired, First Nations hired, it needs to be stipulated that this is a First Nations cultural place so practice our culture. (Elder)

One of the Elders noted the importance of providing support to parents through providing classes and workshops to help them build skills; there are concerns that some of the current parenting classes that are being run are not meaningful or effective for parents that are trying to regain custody of their children:

[T]he parents need the help not the kid... [it's] got to start with the parents.... I know people who've been to parenting classes... I said there's guys been going to class for a year and still haven't got to see their kids or have joint custody and just going to this course. It's just like Government pays someone to put these courses on and that's it. (Elder)



A couple of the participants suggested that parents have the opportunity to attend informal gatherings with other parents, in an informal setting that allows participants to share stories and learn about new information, without feeling pressured or uncomfortable:

I think it's more about... the sharing, instead of having a parenting class or a group where you go when and talk about these things, maybe just have a like small events that are open and you know well if anybody feels, there's information table over here if anyone want to come ask some questions and find out some information and how we can you know deal with some of this stuff, come on and talk to us, but leave it open, and the people who want help will come to you... and small events and that's what I find with my community, not for things like this, but if I want them to just come together and start talking... don't put an agenda to things... (Parent)

[S]ome sort of a social Monday night coffee or something would be kinda cool, you know.... I mean I know they have like a sewing group. I think one night a week or something, and I'm sure all the moms get together. But yeah, some sort of a social Monday night coffee or something would be kinda cool you know. (Parent)

However, as some of the parents Elders noted, for programs to be successful, parents must have the desire to learn and to change, through having an open mind and an open heart:

I think you can do all the services you want... but they have to want it, they have to want it. And I've seen many, many families, they've gone and done all the lip service, 'Oh yeah, I've gone through the program,' they go back and they're doing the same thing. (Elder)

I know people need help but I mean really the start of help is being able to help yourself, and you know maybe groups to you know like self esteem type groups to help those people along with the self-esteem, so they know that they have the power to be able to change right? (Parent)

I guess it's got to be the parents, it points to the parents, it's up to them, clean themselves up, clean their act, clean their act up if you don't want your kids to be taken away, it's up to you, clean your act up. Whatever you're doing wrong, reason why you're doing that, it's the only way to do it... sit down and if you need help we're here to help you. (Elder)

Some of the Elders feel that parents have to take responsibility for their children's care and seek help from their Elders, along with professional counselors and counseling should take place in town and not on the reserve for privacy. He wants the community to get together and talk about community problems. Community members do not want to see children taken far away from home; they need support from their families and they need to be connected to their home

community. Talk is the most important way to deal with problems and recommends counseling be available for those who want it.

One Elder noted that “*a lot of communication*” is needed to help families with children living away from home. If you take the child from the family, the child may not be able to take part in activities and events that are important. Community members can help by offering rides and it's important to be respectful when approaching families on reserve:

Communication, there [needs to be] a lot of communication to the point where the person understands you without getting defensive and stuff like that. That's the kind of thing I say works the best. (Elder)



Family Members Raising Children

Many Elders noted that they Elder wants decisions made in a timely manner and wants extended family members to be the preferred foster parents:

[Children should] not to be taken from the home and put right into care and gone, there should be... another family member take the child for a little while even something like that. And if it's not feasible within the immediate family then within somebody in the community. (Elder)

I really believe that the system got to be moving a little faster and not let children linger in a foster home or any kind of system for years and years until that person is ready to look after them. I think they should look into another family members and going and asking them if they would be interested in taking them because that child deserves to have that love. (Elder)

That's what I said, the system... they should have another set up of talking to family members of this child, the close relations to this child and saying, 'Would you be interested in looking after your niece or nephew?' Rather than putting them in the system, into a foster system where sometimes they're removed from the reserve or removed totally from the family... (Elder)

One of the parents discussed her personal upbringing, as she was very grateful to have had a community member raise her when her parents were experiencing difficulties:

I know when I was young I didn't have a great upbringing... not so much alcohol, but drugs played a really big part in my growing up, and I could've ended up easily in foster care but I had community member that took me in actually. (Parent)

Cultural Safety Inside Myself, My Home & Society

However, some people have also experienced resistance when trying to raise their family members. As a young woman, an Elder wanted to adopt her sister's children, but social services said she already had her children and couldn't raise her sister's children. She said family should be able to step-in to raise kids when needed. This Elder felt that this judgment was unfair and judgmental without considering what she had to offer her sister's children:

I think they should change because there's a lot times when you should have your own family's children if something arises... (Elder)

In this sense, more communication is needed between communities and the Ministry to ensure that the best needs of the child are met; when possible, many of the parents and Elders feel that family members can raise children in a way that is healthy and allows for the child to remain connected to the culture and their community.

Keeping the Connection to Home

It is important for children to know who they are and where they come from, regardless of their living situation:

I think it would be nice if they knew where they their families are from. I think that's important because if they don't, a lot of them come back looking for their ancestors that if they've been put out for adoption when they're babies, two or three years of age and when they get older, they come looking for you just to see where they're from. And they still come back, if they find you, they come back. (Elder)

Through building and maintaining a connection to home, the community can help children to gain a sense of belonging:

[F]or a child growing up it was always a sense of belonging, I always had that sense of belonging, I knew who I belonged to, I always knew who I was and I knew. I think a child loses that, through all that shuffling thing I think, unfortunately bringing a child back once a week, whatever it's really hard for a child. (Elder)



The community has an innate connection to the land, as well as the people that make up their nation. It is very important to foster that connection for the children and ensure that they remain in their home communities whenever possible. As one parent stated, "it's home, and I know it's been home forever and it always will be, that's my favorite thing about my community."

Cultural Competency and Advocacy

Many of the Elders and parents discussed the need to increase the understanding of the diverse needs of Aboriginal communities, among Ministry employees and other professionals that work with the K'omoks First Nation. It is important to increase education and enhance cultural competent, sensitive practice that honours traditional ways of parenting within the community:

If I could make changes with the Ministry, [it would] treat each child differently according to their needs. (Elder)

[I]t has to be individual because each child has a different story and a different root from where these things come from, the reason they were apprehended in the first place. And for the child, apprehension is the best thing until everything is looked at. (Elder)

I think that they are so un-sensitive to the differences in the way we look at children and raise children in the traditional way. (Elder)

For two parents, communication, education, and increased awareness needs to happen on both the government and community levels, in order to ensure that meaningful relationships are built:

I think there needs to be more understanding, understanding on the part of the governments and the ministries also understanding on the part of our First Nations people. A lot of 'em don't understand that - what these ministries are doing and why - and if they understood that, you know maybe they wouldn't do some of the things that they do... so there's is understanding on both sides, more public education about it... (Parent)

Like there's a lot of different issues when it comes to that but I think education and understanding and sharing is the major key... the more you talk to people, the more you understand and share knowledge on both ends, the more you're going to be able to find some common ground and move from there. (Parent)

It would also be very useful to encourage education among Ministry employees. Continuous workshops are needed to increase the understanding of the cultural diversity of Aboriginal people, for those workers that may not be familiar with the diverse cultures and histories of Aboriginal communities, and the way that they can adapt their practice to ensure that it is culturally-appropriate:

I think a lot of it is education in that, there needs to be more continuous not just one, not once a year every four months, there should be something for them to understand the cultural diversity that each... we talking about the diversity of all the peoples, the First Nations people who are in that area... because culture is always based on your environment. That's why our

territories are so important for First Nations people because that's our base, that's who were from. (Elder)

[E]specially for the ministries, hold some workshops on First Nations culture and life and what it means, and why. And the history and why people are the way they are, they need to understand what brought the First Nations people here today and why we are the in some of the situations we're in. If they can wrap their mind around that, open their heart a little bit and see, instead of just government, you know, then maybe they'd be more open to working with the parent, rather than just, 'Here's your checklist, do these things and you can have your kids back.' You know, a lot of them some people, don't even - can't even read what's on the paper... (Parent)

In addition to increasing education and awareness, many of the Elders feel that communication between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal workers could be facilitated through Aboriginal advocates, based in the community:

I think if you have an advocate it should be one that's witnessed or seen or been through or experienced a lot of, they know first-hand the feelings so they could understand. You need somebody... that has the education, knowledge... somebody that has the empathy... [to] stand side by side and work with that person and be there for them. (Elder)



Healthy community to me means that you're able to bring out the responsible people that can help with the teachings. And the liaison, that's why we need a liaison in most areas. (Elder)

These suggestions for a community-based advocate were largely rooted within positive and effective forms of advocacy that are currently happening at the local hospital. Aboriginal advocates and liaisons work within the healthcare system to help patients to feel comfortable in the hospital environment, while also supporting them to voice their needs and concerns. Aboriginal advocates are also working to “bring culture into practice” through educating hospital staff and helping to host cultural events:

[N]ursing staff being able to come to the Big House events and being able to hear the stories, to hear the stories about residential school situations that they probably wouldn't... never be able to have the opportunity to hear otherwise. I think that's all part of what we need to do to bring people together and to be able to educate one another. (Elder)

The Aboriginal nurses are a really good example as well about the changes that are happening about the way people are received in the hospital and the safety, knowing that there's a native person there to help them. (Elder)

The Elders would also like to see a cultural and traditional wellness advocate for the community and a liaison worker in terms of victims services working with the RCMP. A great example of the effectiveness of facilitating connections between communities and external systems is through the Aboriginal Liaison Nurse at the hospital.

Processes for building strong relationships and fostering meaningful communication need to continue between Aboriginal people and care-givers. The Elders believe that this can happen through continuous opportunities for coming together and sharing knowledge:

To have the Elders come in and teach and to have those teachings keep on coming back, coming back and being retold year after year. (Elders)

I think we need to get over those fears and be able to encourage people to, there has to be a meeting, both sides have to step forward to want to take the changes on. It can't just be done by one side. (Elder)



Many of the parents would also like to see more opportunities to build capacity within the community, through training band members to fill jobs and roles that will directly impact the community, such as training community advocates, foster parents, and Ministry liaisons.

There is also a need to share the decision-making process between the Ministry and the community, to allow for the community to have a voice and ensure that the best needs of the child are met. The Ministry needs to communicate with families in a meaningful, respectful way and not just walk into a situation, make arbitrary decisions and take the children without talking about it.

[There needs to be] more communication with family... there was actual out and out, not really lies, but misleading suggestions like if you did this, we won't come and take your kids, but they do anyway. There's no warning.... So how can they really understand what's going on and in some cases, there's no call for them to come and take the children. And yet you see other cases and you wonder why they haven't done something. (Elder)

[B]eing able to include everybody in taking control and governing ourselves... and making our own decisions because if we had the power to make out own decision right now, we could do even better then what we're doing. (Parent)

While acknowledging the past, it is also important to draw on the many meaningful suggestions that the K'omoks community members have offered in working to ensure that children are raised in their home communities. To ensure that children are fully supported as they grow into youth, adults, and Elders, meaningful partnerships must be made between community members and the Ministry. As one Elder said, *“we’d be much stronger if we’d all connect.”*

Closing Remarks

K'omoks First Nation has thrived for thousands of years on their ancestral lands, taking care of their children and families. Everyone in the community helped to raise the children, who were loved and cared for by aunties, uncles, parents and grandparents. They were most important and made to feel that way as the teachings show us; children were held in high regard and were valuable members of the community. The grandmothers and grandfathers have always said this and it was practiced in their culture by the way parents and relatives cared for and taught their children. As one Elder said *"I always had that sense of belonging, I knew who I belonged to, I always knew who I was and I knew."* Children grew up confident in their abilities to accomplish things. This was the traditional way of raising children.

There have been many injustices done to Aboriginal people, which have disrupted their traditional ways of live; however, the Elders believe that reclaiming the traditional ways can be a catalyst for rebuilding healthy families and communities. The Elders agree that the way to keep children out of government care has always been the community, as a whole, working together and finding solutions that acknowledge traditional values and cultural ways. The voices of the Elders and parents all highlight the ways that change can be made to work toward a stronger community, with programs that support children as they are raised at home.

The community needs programs and services that are easy to get to, builds confidence, self-esteem, and pride in one's heritage and are culturally sound as well as promote family togetherness, active life-styles and gets children and families outside in the fresh air. Such programs will help children and families live good, healthy, happy lives. The Tribal Journey is an example of how culture is carried through a canoe journey along the coast and how this canoe journey brings peace and harmony to the people and the community as a whole.

It is important that the Ministry of Children and Family Development learn how to connect and communicate; if governments want to have a sincere and good relationship with Aboriginal people, they have to listen and learn. Elders feel that the Ministry must make changes; they must acknowledge that the preferred care-givers for Aboriginal children have always been the extended family. Elders agree that children must be loved and cared for in a safe home whether it is in their community or in foster care.

Elders look to the future through their children and they are working to ensure that their grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be fully supported in reaching their full potential.



This report was compiled in collaboration with Sasamans Society



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