

# Caring For Our Own Children



Voices of Our Communities

Quatsino First Nation

## **To the People of Quatsino First Nation**

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

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## **PART 1: SASAMANS SOCIETY**



*Strengthening our children and families in a community-driven and culturally appropriate manner.*

## 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'wala 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
- Wachiy 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:

- Appreciate and nurture the strengths and capacities of our people.
- Communicate and engage, openly and on an ongoing basis.
- Honour our traditions, customs, and beliefs.
- Involve the voices of our children and the wisdom of our Elders.
- Commit to learning from one another.
- Dedicate 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 Quatsino 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 (12 First Nations and 3 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,<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

In the next stages of the process, Sasamans will present the key findings to each of the participating communities at a community event. The community will provide feedback on the draft reports and work with the Sasamans team to identify their specific community needs. Ultimately, this work will result in community-owned child and family wellness plans aimed at supporting the development of healthy families and keeping children out of government care.

In the following section of the report, we present our conversations with the Quatsino First Nation community.

## **PART 3: QUATSINO FIRST NATION**



## **Community Summary**

The Quatsino First Nation was amalgamated from five tribes: T'latsinuxw, Huyalas, Gusgimukw, Gob'inuxw, and Qwat'sinuxw. In 1972, the Quatsino people relocated to Quattishe Indian Reserve #18 to be closer to education, employment, and medical services. The community is 18 km southwest of Port Hardy and adjacent to the town of Coal Harbour. The band population is 448 people, of which 182 live on reserve and 266 live off reserve.

### **Key Findings**

- Drug and alcohol abuse are a concern in the community. Support is needed to assist people with their addictions and to explore healthier choices with the community's youth.
- Community members already have many strategies for keeping children out of care, including education and support for parents and coming together as a community to care for children whose parents are struggling.
- Many of the community members expressed a need for increased cultural knowledge transmission; the Elders possess knowledge and wisdom that they want to contribute to the community, and the community's younger members value and want their knowledge. Elders, youth, and parents alike would appreciate more opportunities to learn about and share their language and traditions, as well as to participate in cultural activities and events.
- There is an overwhelming need for improved communication between the MCFD and community members.

### **Service Gaps**

- Support programs for parents, such as childcare services and a peer support program.
- Addictions counselling, support systems, and prevention programs to advocate healthy living and positive family development.
- Mental health workers and counselling services for youth and adults.
- Parenting skills workshops and education programs.
- In-family adoption programs and cultural training for all foster parents.

## Community Profile

The Quatsino First Nation was amalgamated from five tribes: T'latsinuxw, Huyalas, Gusgimukw, Gob'inuxw, and Qwat'sinuxw. In 1972, the Quatsino people relocated to Quattishe Indian Reserve #18 to be closer to education, employment, and medical services. The community is 18 km southwest of Port Hardy and adjacent to the town of Coal Harbour.

### POPULATION

The band population is 442 people, of which 176 live on reserve and 266 live off reserve.

<b>Quatsino First Nation's Total On-Reserve Population</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
0–6	21	14	7
7–11	24	10	14
12–18	20	12	8
19–54	85	43	42
55–64	14	8	6
65+	12	6	6

### COMMUNITY

Quatsino First Nation has a logging company and fishing company that operate out of the treaty office; they provide food and natural resources to the community as well as employment opportunities for community members. The Quatsino Nation also gets a chance to get tags to hunt for elk and deer; the meat is then given to the community.

While Sasamans Society was in the process of community engagement in Quatsino, the Quatsino community was also involved in providing information and feedback for each department within the band. This information was collected to aid in the development of a comprehensive community plan (CCP). These two processes can complement one another through identifying the common findings, as expressed by various community members, and using this knowledge to create positive change in addressing service gaps within the community.



## PROGRAMS

The Quatsino First Nation has a school called K'ak'otlats'i, which means "house of learning." The school has three teachers, three assistant teachers, one cultural teacher, one speech and language teacher, and a principal. Extracurricular programs include boys and girls groups and hockey nights.



Quatsino has a health clinic that has a social worker, health director, community health representative, community health nurse, diabetic/foot care worker, Elders' coordinator, infant development program (IDP) worker, and National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) worker. In addition to working from Monday through Friday, many of these workers also provide afternoon workshops. The health clinic also provides a doctor, dentist, optometrist, and hygienist on a monthly basis.

Quatsino has a community hall which, with the assistance of the youth worker, is open three times a week for recreation, fundraising, and games. There is also a games room above the hall that is opened once a week for families to get together and play pool, foosball, and board games, while also having the option to participate in arts and crafts. The hall also includes a room for Sunday school, which also serves as the location for blanket making activities, held by the Elders' coordinator once a week.

The Quatsino youth were given a 15-passenger van for their trips; the youth got to bless it and add a logo of their own. The CCP worker helps coordinate the youth and Elders' councils.

In spring and summer, the Love Core bible group comes to Quatsino and stays at the hall. They organize games and activities and sing songs with community members, all of which particularly engage the children. A spring break coordinator and summer day camp coordinator organize games, activities, songs, crafts, all of which increase in frequency when the children are out of school; Quatsino youth are usually hired for these positions.



## **Community Engagement Process**

### **WHAT STEPS WERE TAKEN?**

In September 2010, the Executive Director of the Sasamans Society, in accordance with First Nations protocol and tradition, asked permission of the Quatsino First Nation Chief and council to work with the community. Then in November 2010, Sasamans Society signed a memorandum of understanding with Quatsino First Nation.

In the early stages of Sasamans there were to be community-based collaborators (CBC) in each community. One was hired for Quatsino in November 2010 and in mid-spring 2011 a new person was hired. This person left in the fall of 2011. In the meantime, training was provided, a community profile was created, and a frontline workers information session was held. Youth pizza nights were hosted along with other summer activities to recruit for interviews and/or focus groups.

However, plans for community involvement were delayed when MCFD changes required Sasamans to complete a review of the community engagement process and make changes to the work plan and budget. After the changes were made, Sasamans moved away from the approach of having a community-based collaborator in each community and a team approach was implemented instead. A team of facilitators was created and they completed a two-day training session in mid-August 2011 to develop facilitation skills for individual and group discussions.

Once the training was completed, the community engagement process began. The Elders facilitator began focus groups and interviews in September 2011; this process was on and off due to the road floods and ended in January 2012. The parent and youth facilitators began their work in November 2011 and ended in April 2012.

Digital recordings of the interviews and discussion groups were transcribed between January and April. In April 2012, the Sasamans team met and began the process of reading the transcripts to identify key themes and write the first draft of this report.

### **WHO DID WE TALK TO?**

A total of 5 Elders, 8 parents, and 4 youth participated in individual conversations.

Additionally, 4 focus groups were conducted:

- An Elders focus group with 4 participants
- A youth focus group with 3 female participants (age 12-15)
- A youth focus group with 2 male participants (age 12-15)
- A youth focus groups with 5 male and female participants (age 9-11)

## Community Conversations

In this section we summarize our conversations with members of the Quatsino community. To maintain the integrity of the wisdom shared by community members, direct quotes are used as much as possible. In a few cases, quotes have been slightly changed to make them more readable or to avoid identifying any of the individuals.

In building on the themes identified in the data collected from youth at the Painting Our Way and Maya'xala youth gatherings in March 2011, we have organized the community conversations under the following headings: *community, culture, family, challenges faced by community members, and keeping children out of government care.*

Woven through the conversations are the four key messages that emerged from our Elders' gathering in March 2012. These relate to traditional family laws, traditional parenting, the needs of children and families in government care, and keeping children out of government care.

### COMMUNITY

The Quatsino community moved from their original village in 1972. Most of the Elders were either born or raised in Old Quatsino, and many expressed the sense of loss they feel for their old village:

*In Old Quatsino, everybody ... was close, everybody got along, everybody helped each other. And all those people have passed on now. And we don't have that anymore.*

*Everybody was sort of one group. Everybody pulled for each other.... Here, they seem to be drifted apart.*



After the relocation, the houses and church in the old village were burned down, and the Big House was dismantled and taken to Vancouver for public display. Not surprisingly, many people feel resentful about these past events.

The Elders say that effects of the relocation can still be seen in Quatsino today in the form of community divisions and a lack of community spirit. While this may be true for some, many of the younger community members appreciate their community and find it to be a close-knit, peaceful, and caring environment.

*It is so quiet.*

*I like ... pretty much everything.*

*Being around family.*

*The people are loving. They always ask how you're doing. You know, communicating and stuff like that.*

## CULTURE

For First Nations, culture is a cornerstone of health and well-being. For this and other reasons, the Quatsino Elders would like to see more cultural activities and events in their community:

*The most important thing I'd like to have going here is ... [to] teach kids how to learn how to sing and dancing.... 'Cause we're losing it all.*

*We need a long house to teach our younger children of our cultures 'cause we're drifting away from all that.... And it's very sad to see that our younger generations are not understanding our language or learning about our cultures. That's very, very sad to see, and we're going to end up losing it completely if we don't start from somewhere.*

Cultural activities, an Elder believes, teach people "to be proud of who they are and not to think less of themselves regardless of what other people say ... about their culture."

Similarly, one parent described how cultural teachings have contributed to making good decisions, both on an individual and family level:

*The knowledge that I get from my grandma – they tell me the stories and I try to turn them into teachings to where my kids can understand them. So they can get the same knowledge that I got when I was growing up so they use it in every day [to know] from right and wrong.*



Even some of the youth recognize that learning about culture is linked to making healthy choices:

*I think my culture actually keeps me away from the trouble.*

Unfortunately, as one Elder observed, there is a lack of knowledge being passed down to younger generations:

*Even the young parents, they don't really know much about our culture, about potlatches, about what even dances is for or anything.*

At the same time, however, many of the Elders have a strong desire to share their knowledge and increase opportunities for youth and families to participate in cultural activities:

*It's beautiful to get our culture back for the kids to understand it, 'cause they're the ones that are going to take over in the near future and they can teach their children.*

*It would be good for our community, get someone here to teach our young ones how to carve ... and silverwork too.*





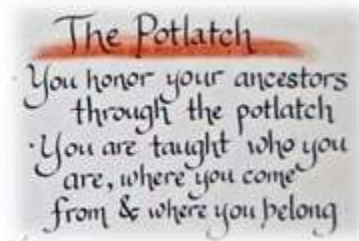
*In a similar nature, many of the youth expressed their eagerness to learn about their culture and participate in activities. They talked about wanting to sit and listen to the Elders' stories about the history of the old village and who they are as a people. They would love to see a Big House in their community and they want to spend as much time as they can on cultural activities:*



*I make sure I go to potlatches as much as I can. I want to know more dances ... and to get together more as a community.*

At the same time, some of the youth noted their appreciation of their current involvement in cultural activities. When asked what they like most about being First Nation, one youth replied:

*The potlatches, the dancing ... feasts ... and the language.*



### *Language*

Many community members talked about difficulties in learning their language. Specifically, one parent described the cultural disconnect that resulted from enforced residential schooling and the challenge it poses to her as a parent:

*I really wish I had that part of my life as I grew up ... because now it's really hard to get my son into it because I'm kind of having the attitude, like, 'Okay well, if you don't want to do it, then don't do it.' But I shouldn't be doing that because he goes to school here and they do the ... dancing ... and singing. So I need to change my attitude about that ... but it's just really hard because I don't understand it.*

An Elder, who also discussed the impact of residential school on culture, noted the importance of having opportunities to speak the language:

*Once you spoke the language, even as a young child, you still remembered after so many years. 'Cause it was hard for me – just a month and everything started coming back.... I can speak our language now.*

In terms of teaching the language to children in school, one person emphasized consistency:

*We've gone through how many teachers over here at this school? And now they're switching it from Kwak'wala to Gutsala and that's really confusing the kids. So if they can just stick to one ... then I think it would be a really good thing.*

Some of the youth figured that teaching culture is important for the “younger kids to learn to carry on” the traditions. One youth reflected:

*It's good for ... kids to learn and ... also good for the younger ones who are at the perfect age to learn.*

While it's certainly important for young children to learn their language and culture, participants also noted the importance of ongoing exposure. One youth observed that once they get into high school, cultural activities stop, and the youth tend to lose what they have been taught:

*There's not a whole lot. The only culture ... the only way I learn my culture is going to the school, and that's where I learned all the dances and everything, and then I went to the high school and there wasn't really anything there. So then I kind of ... forgot some of it.*



## **FAMILY**

For First Nations people, family means much more than the typical nuclear family. According to traditional family laws, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and community members raised a child together. Children's family members were important role models who taught them the ways of life – including their language, culture, and traditions – through leading by example. Colonization disrupted the natural cycles of family life and devastated our families and communities. Many of our people have not had access to our language, culture, and parenting traditions. However, the Elders possess important knowledge about the old ways, and in Quatsino, the whole community recognizes that the Elders have a vital role to play in keeping language, culture, and traditions alive.



### *Elders*

Many people spoke about the community's Elders with reverence. They talked about the lessons and values that they have learned from Elders, like how to cut fish, make oolichan grease, speak the language, and practice the culture. Numerous people described the importance of Elders as teachers who link the past with the present:

*They got so much knowledge that's just sitting there and waiting to come out. You know, it would be nice to ... get some of that knowledge from them, to share stories even from their past of how they grew up. That's still knowledge that would be good for us for our future.*

*They always have lots of stories to tell and like their history and everything. It's pretty cool.*

*The things I like about them is that you can go to them and ask them questions that they can answer for you... Ask them about when they were younger and why is it the way it is now.*

A parent reflected on the important teachings passed down by a grandfather:

*What I've learned from my grandfather is ... always share with somebody else what you've learned that they might ... not have learned yet.... And ... show them where you come from, and who your family is.... Always ... always be there for someone that's in need.*



Parents and youth would like to spend more time with the Elders. One youth said they would like to “walk around, ask questions about the old days when we weren't there ... talk about their past lives when they lived in Old Quatsino.”

Similarly, several parents expressed a desire for “more getting together and gatherings” with Elders in the community to hear their stories and “learn more about their backgrounds.” One parent suggested that it is important to “be there to help them.”

### *Traditional Family Laws*

According to traditional family laws, children are sacred gifts who are made to feel precious right from birth. The values of respect, equality, humility, and hospitality inform how family law is embodied and practiced. One of the most important things in life is to know who you are and where you come from.

Many of these laws were reflected in the conversations with Quatsino community members. Many of the parents described their love for their children:

*I just put everything down when it comes to them.... I don't worry about me – I worry about what their needs are.... You know, they wake up happy.... I just keep them focused on [the] positive.... I'm just hoping for the best for them.*

*My kids come first.*

In the same way, some of the youth expressed appreciation for their families as well. One youth said he appreciates his family “cause of the laughs and everything and also how we ... just how we communicate and how we get along and all that.... ‘Cause they've always been there for me.”

Families have taught the Quatsino youth a variety of values, including and the importance of making healthy choices and “helping out with the community.” The youth shared some ideas about what they think a healthy family looks like:

*A family that gets along ... and eats healthy meals.*

*Don't drink [or] do drugs, always playing games, walking around, watching movies.*



Alternatively, some community members also discussed some of the challenges that other families are facing:

*Because of the alcoholism the parents don't watch their young kids, there's no one to take care of them. Right? And they run around and they vandalize all of our property around here. And it's sad because there is so much of that around here. Just too much addiction here.*

*A lot of [youth] are angry. They want more attention from their family.*

The reasons for these troubles are complex. We explore some of them in the following section on the challenges faced by community members.

## **CHALLENGES FACED BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Many of the difficulties First Nations people are experiencing with personal and family health can be linked to systemic factors, like poverty and racism, and the intergenerational effects of forced residential schooling. Quatsino community members talked about a number of challenges they face in their day-to-day lives, many of which can be seen as contributing factors to the issue of children in government care. These topics, which we outline below, relate to *barriers to employment; discrimination; stress; drug and alcohol use; and the apprehension of children by the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD).*

### *Barriers to Employment*

Several of the Elders mentioned unemployment and the lack of job opportunities as a challenge for the community:

*The only job that's available for anybody here is young people down on the wharf.*

A couple of the Elders mentioned a proposed gas station that might add some economic and business development to the area by creating jobs. However, for the community to be its best, they feel that more job opportunities are needed.

Several of the parents talked about their dreams of going back to school, enhancing their skills, and finding employment. However, they also mentioned some barriers to education and employment. One parent said that her request for funding to go back to school had been denied because she was living off reserve at the time of her application. Another parent explained that the lack of reliable childcare keeps people out of work:

*They want a lot of people to work, but with a lot of people having kids, there's just a lack of it. They've been promising a daycare ... and that has not even started. So what's really hard ... people who are on, like, social assistance, they're pushing them out there to get a job, but then they can't because they have to get a sitter.*

## *Stress*

For members of the Quatsino community, both the causes and effects of stress are multifaceted and far-reaching. In identifying concerns around stress and mental health, community discussions can help to illustrate possible solutions for alleviating stress for youth, parents and Elders in Quatsino.

For the Elders we talked to in Quatsino, stress is mainly caused by their worries about the health of the people in their community, particularly in relation to social issues for the youth.

Concerns around the well-being of family members generally served as a source of stress for some people. At times, parents have found that their responsibilities are overwhelming, as one parent noted that stress was caused by *“just doing too much ... and not knowing how to juggle all the stuff properly.”*

Specifically, some parents spoke about being stressed about the issues their children face, such as drugs and alcohol, racism, and bullying.

It was also noted that stress can escalate for those people who lack an outlet, or someone that they can talk to:

*Stress is caused by just holding it in and not ... saying what you wanna say or talk to someone about it. And then it just gets the best of you.*

In speaking about the effects of stress, many of the parents said that it *“drags you down,” “tires you out,”* can make you *“depressed”* and *“want to cry a lot.”* Another parent linked stress with anger and fear:

*The stress, the anger – the anger comes from fear ‘cause you’re scared so you get angry. So that’s like a friend. It’s like a poster on the wall. It’s ... you can’t see the real you so you put that picture there to show the front.*

In some cases, these feelings can also lead to negative behaviours, as one Elder noted. Youth often *“turn to drinking”* to deal with stress, *“and if that doesn’t release tension [they turn] to committing suicide.”*

In discussing the causes and impacts of stress for community members in Quatsino, there was much talk of working towards relieving these problems. As noted by one of the Elders, *“Something should be done.”*

## *Drug and Alcohol Abuse*

In discussions with community members in Quatsino, issues around drug and alcohol use and abuse were a common concern. When asked why they think alcohol and drug abuse occurs, the youth replied:

*It helps us with problems but makes it worse.... We think it’s cool.*

Several parents also cited drug and alcohol abuse as the community’s biggest challenge:

*Alcoholism is just going through the generation after generation ... and we need to stop it ‘cause it’s getting really bad.*



Many of the Elders and parents believe that drinking, drugs, and partying are major issues for young people in the community. An Elder said that partying is a “big problem every weekend here,” while a parent commented:

*[Youth] hurt themselves by drinking. Doing drugs. And not finding somebody to talk to about it.*



Some of the Elders remember that alcohol was not allowed in Old Quatsino, and some wish that the community was alcohol free today:

*We used to have a rule in Old Quatsino: No drinking on the reserve. No drinking. That was very strict in Old Quatsino.*

While having a dry community may not be an option now, several parents outlined harm reduction strategies to involve the wider community in reducing the risks to youth that stem from partying:

*Have more people go out, more sober people walking around and guide them to go home ... like tour maybe on Fridays and Saturday and Sunday nights. Just to make sure that somebody will be there, sober, to watch them ... to make sure that they don't get out of control.*

*Let them know where they can come if anything does happen.... Tell them the door's open. Tell them the phone number.*

#### *Apprehension of Children by the Ministry of Child and Family Development*

For many First Nations parents, apprehension of their children by child welfare authorities is a very real threat. In Quatsino, numerous parents described intervention by the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) into their lives as unjust, stressful, and discriminatory:

*'Cause I was Native that they just – they literally ripped – ripped open my arms and then they were gone.*

*The teachers or principal ... they contact MCFD before they contact the parents, and I think that's how it is everywhere.... And I think that should come to a stop for the schools ... some people should get their facts straight and parents should just fight it ... because, in my point of view, MCFD is the new residential [school].*



Parents' experiences with MCFD have had serious impacts like prolonged stress, depression, anxiety, and addiction. One parent shared:

*The social worker told me when they first got my kids ... 'Your daughter will forget you within 24 hours.' .... I didn't know you could fight for them ... I wasn't shown the right way how to fight for them right away, until I came up here.... Now my kids ... they don't look up to me like they should.*

Several people touched on the importance of having the right information and access to an advocate to help to reduce the number of parents who children are being apprehended:

*A lot of them don't understand a whole lot ... like these little kids that are having kids are not knowing.... And when the Ministry's called, they're more than willing to let the people in, not knowing that tomorrow you might not have your kids ... in an hour you might not have your kids.*

*I think [the social workers need] to clarify their stories before they act on them.*

Furthermore, there is a great need for improved communication between the MCFD and the communities. Alleviating barriers to communication would not only help to reduce stress and anxiety for parents and families, but would also help to reduce the cost of unwarranted travel for the Ministry:

*I've only had the Ministry call on me once ...and it was for the most ridiculous reason, and then it was like six months later they came out to talk to me, so I was like, 'Okay, it was a long time ago, what are you here for?'*

## **KEEPING CHILDREN OUT OF GOVERNMENT CARE**

When we talked to Quatsino community members, many people linked a strong cultural identity with keeping children out of care. Many people talked about the need for community activities and cultural programming as ways to improve health and well-being. Others talked about supporting youth. The various strategies people mentioned to keep children out of care are outlined below; they include *increased support for parents, classes to teach parenting skills, extended-family adoptions, counselling "for the whole family," and drug and alcohol prevention programs.*

### *Strengthen Cultural Identity*

An Elder captured the link between culture and health:

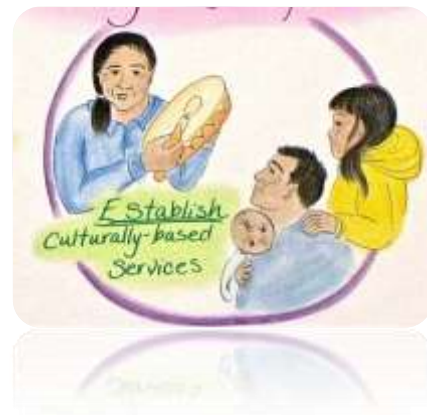
*Culture is what keeps me going.... They always say that going into the Big House, it revives your spirit and your strength. And it does work ... you know, the feeling is really strong.*

In a similar way, another person noted:

*A lot of people are thriving just knowing their culture.... They really need that here.*

### *Activities and Programs*

Community members talked about activities and programs of various kinds that they would like to participate in and that would benefit the community, especially the youth. There is strong support for sports and other physical activities, teaching traditional skills to children and youth, community get-togethers, and cultural programming.



A parent linked family activities with community health:

*A healthy community to me would be no alcohol, no drugs, and more family-orientated programs for children and families.*

The vast majority of the parents agreed that consistent activities are critical in helping youth stay “out of trouble.” Many parents discussed the importance of offering youth more opportunities to interact with people their own age in a healthy environment:

*Passes by time and by the end they don't have nothing to think about except for, you know, they don't have to do bad things. It keeps them busy on the good things.*

*If anybody's stressed or angry, they can go out and be active ... start goofing around, yelling around, let it all out of them. ... Release [stress].*

One parent suggested having different activities going on for the youth every night:

*Especially on the weekends – that way they won't be around people that are drinking, they'll have something to do.*



Parents suggested a range of possible activities for youth, including more indoor sports in the wintertime; more outdoor sports like hiking, biking, and canoeing in the summertime; cleaning up the reserve; building a basketball court; camping; and going to youth conferences.

One parent described how the youth could raise funds for their own activities:

*Teach the youth how to bake, how to cook ... teach the kids how to do a pizza night and then sell pizzas in the community for ... fundraising to get them to go down to Campbell River and watch a movie or go to a hockey game in Vancouver.... Sky's the limit.*

Additional parents noted that youth need their own space:

*I was thinking of that, like maybe playing pool or having a little room where they can just hang out ... play cards, play crib, play whatever.*

*They need somewhere where they can go just drop in.*

Several parents spoke about the financial barriers many youth face to participating in organized sports:

*I've seen some kids, they're upset because their friends get to do, like, ice hockey. Ice hockey can be pretty expensive ... I think the money is the biggest issue ... sports-wise.*

A parent explained that although the band funds part of the cost for sports, it is still hard for families to afford the extra costs of participating in these activities.



In addition to the many youth recreation activities people suggested, many people identified the need for a Big House for cultural activities, not only for youth but for all community members.

*It'd be nice if we had more cultural stuff happening here. Like ... getting people to teach us how to speak our language better. Get our culture back.... We haven't had our culture here in god knows how long.... There's been talk to put up a Big House here, but people are unsure about it. But it would be good. It'd be really good. It would bring our community together, and it would bring our youth together ... and show them a different path, a better life.*

### Supporting Youth

Among the parent and Elder participants, there was a clear recognition of the importance of community support for youth. Common suggestions in relation to community resources included a youth drop-in centre, anonymous counselling services, and youth partnerships with positive role models:

*I think there needs to be like an all-call, like, free, youth counselors or something... Not during the day, because they're in school during the day ...*

*Setting up role models to do more meetings with children... If we had gatherings, like first with Elders and the young parents and maybe the Elders and the youth to teach them to turn to somebody if they're stressed out or ... to turn to somebody whenever they need to.*

In acknowledging the positive measures that are currently in place for the youth, one parent expressed appreciation for the current role models in Quatsino:

*I'm glad we have a youth worker.... It's really helpful and I think he's a great guy. He's a good example. They're enjoying it.*

There was also discussion around the importance of education:

*Education is very important.... Keep reminding [youth] that they can do it, and don't give up on them. Make sure they don't give up on themselves.*

An Elder encouraged parents to spend time talking with youth:

*It doesn't take long just to talk to them – even to listen to them talk. Listen to the kids. That's the most important thing, I think, is when your child talks, you listen.... Because there will come a time when they don't even want to talk to you anymore ... and then you're going to wonder why.... 'Cause if you don't listen to them, they won't walk to you again. And when they find out ... you were busy when they tried to talk to you, you didn't even hear.*



Parents also recognized the importance of encouraging youth through communication:

*Just talk to them. Teach them.*

*It doesn't take long just to talk to them-even to listen to them talk. Listen to the kids. That's the most important thing I think is when your child talks, you listen ... because there will come a time when they don't even want to talk to you anymore.*

### *Supporting Parents*

In the face of the challenges described by various members of the Quatsino community, parents spoke about various people that they receive support from, including their partners, children, Elders, parents, grandparents, and AA sponsors. Conversations effectively highlighted the importance of family and community support:

*That's the first step in life, your family.*

*It doesn't take one person to raise a child, it takes the whole community.*



Some people also feel that the community requires more services, such as a daycare, to help alleviate some of the pressure that parents feel on a daily basis:

*Mothers sometimes they want to go out shopping, we need a daycare here constantly.*

### *Parent Education*

Several people suggested more community classes to teach and discuss parenting skills. An Elder noted that the Elders have a lot that they would be able to teach the young parents:

*I think the first step would be for the Elders to get together with the young parents and fill them in on what it should be like.... Then the young parents would be able to teach their kids.*

Several parents and Elders expressed a desire for the community to offer parenting workshops or courses:

*I'm trying to get into a parenting program where I know how to interact with them ... and talk to them – deal with their issues and stuff like that. 'Cause it's all different from when we were kids.... They're going through way different issues.*

### *Custom Adoptions and Other Community-Based Options*

Several Elders discussed adoption by extended family and some have experienced it themselves by adopting their grandchildren. One Elder discussed custom adoptions:

*Rather than putting them in a foster home they should ask the grandparents or a family member to take them in. Like in the olden days there was no such things as getting the kids taken away. If the parents*

*couldn't bring them up themselves then it automatically went to the grandparents. There was no government involved at all.*

An Elder made the point that, if parents are drinking, sometimes “*it can't be helped*” and in cases like that, it's necessary to “*leave the children to another relative.*” However, decisions about where the children should go would have to be “*agreeable*” to all concerned.

In ensuring cultural continuity for children who live with foster parents, there was much talk around gaining community control of the foster care system:

*[It should be] run by the Indians... to me, the government people who take away the kids, they're just like the RCMP – what they do is written down, and they have to go by that.*

In this same way, another Elder believes that foster parents should receive better training:

*I think that they should have some classes and teach people or tell them what's going on.... Most of the time I think foster parents just take in kids just for the money that they will get. It's a sad thing, but that's what happens.*

Several people described the need for a community-based alternative for children at risk of being apprehended:

*I think they should have their own home care for our kids – it's called a receiving home.... It would be nice for all villages. And have them to place them there and not take them out of here.*

*They should have a home ... assign two or three homes that ... take the children in. Maybe get something worked out that they'll get money for whatever food they need to give to the children.*

*They should have a place for the social worker to bring 'em to until whatever the parents, whatever. They should have a backup for the ... families that do a lot of drinking.... Have a home ready for them to go to instead of going with the social workers.*

### *Family Counselling*

Several parents described the need for more counselling support in the community:

*I learned that they need more counselling out here, because a lot of them came to me and told me, like, very personal stuff, and I can't ... I don't know what to say to them.*

*Have more of the parents who are having that problem have somewhere where they can go to get the help.*

While some people identified a specific need for counselling services for either youth or parents, there were also comments that counselling “*for the whole family*” is needed.

### *Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs*

When asked how the community can keep kids out of government care, a youth reflected:

*I don't know, a lot of the parents lose their kids for drinking. So maybe if the parents didn't drink the kids wouldn't be in care.... I think that's what most of the reasons why they're in care.*

A parent suggested educating parents about the impact that drugs and alcohol can have on their children:

*Teaching them what alcoholism is doing to their life, you know. You can't stop them from drinking, but maybe you can teach them how to do it in a more proper way ... educate them to where ... 'maybe you shouldn't drink with your kids at home ... otherwise, this is what's going to happen.' Try and teach them stuff and put up a whole thing showing them what happens to kids in foster care.... There's so many children that get abused by their foster parents.*

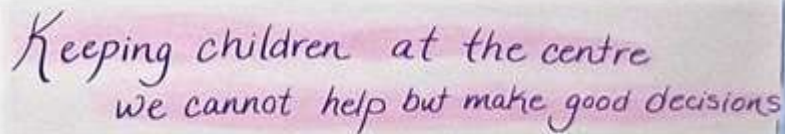
A parent's comment emphasizes the importance of a cultural approach to drug and alcohol programs:

*[Culture] taught me a lot... I used to drink a lot, everyday, and now it's down to basically nothing ... it's just really changed my life.*

### *Love*

Of all the many thoughts and ideas that Quatsino community members shared for keeping children out of government care, an Elder offered the simplest strategy – love:

*I think love has a lot to do with what you do in life.... If you love someone, you try your best. 'Cause we all have something ... that we can do. If you really want to and you put your heart into it, nothing's impossible.*



*Keeping children at the centre  
we cannot help but make good decisions*

## **PART 4: CLOSING REMARKS**

## Closing Remarks

It is clear from our conversations that many of the challenges our children and communities face are rooted in ongoing colonial impacts that have caused immeasurable harm to our people and disrupted our traditional way of life – a way of life that we view as key to rebuilding healthy families and communities. This broader content must be considered in moving the discussion of keeping children out of government care beyond the individual child and parent and toward an inclusive, community approach. As our Elders emphasize, our children can only be understood as part of a whole that includes their family, community, culture, and the natural environment.

The Ministry has publicly stated that the child welfare system has failed to serve the best interests of Aboriginal children and families; in many ways the welfare system has also weakened the ability of families and communities to care for our own children. Many positive changes have been made in recent years; still, our communities must take the lead in developing holistic systems of care for our own children and families. As a first step, child welfare policies and procedures need to be changed to recognize grandparents and other relatives as the preferred caregivers for children at risk of being taken into government care. Further, our community leaders need to have a voice in any revision or development of culturally relevant policies and procedures that impact our children and families.

The conversations that took place through our community engagement process have made it abundantly clear what our people need to keep our children out of government care: stronger families, stronger communities, and stronger support networks.



## **APPENDICES**

## Youth Survey Summary

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learning my culture is important	2	2			
I am able to do lots of activities on my reserve		2	2		
I feel accepted by others.	3	1			
I am learning from the Elders		2	2		
I get enough support in order to succeed at school	2	2			
I feel safe in the community	3	1			
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	2			2	

QUESTIONS	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I participate in cultural activities.			4		
I am learning my Native language.		2	2		
I am learning about my culture			4		
I participate in activities on my reserve			4		
I feel safe on my reserve	3	1			
I worry about life		2	2		
I feel successful	2	2			
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life				1	3

### *Survey Analysis*

Four youth participated in the written survey to provide information about various aspects of their personal life and surrounding community. The survey results suggest that the youth feel that they live in a safe, accepting, and supportive community. There were mixed feelings about concerns around children in foster care, as two youth felt that this is a significant problem, while the other two do not believe it is an issue in the community. These participating youth also feel successful in their endeavours and feel that drugs and alcohol are not having an impact on their lives. These results also indicate that while all of these youth feel that learning about culture is important, more opportunities are needed for practicing cultural activities and learning traditional languages.



## Parent Survey Summary

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learning my culture is important	4				
There are enough cultural activities for families in my community		2			2
There are enough activities for youth in my community		2			2
I would like to spend time supporting the youth of my community	2	2			
I feel accepted by others	4				
Adequate support is available for adults/parents		2	2		
I have adequate, safe housing	3				1
Adequate support is available for youth	1	2	1		
Children in foster care are a concern for your community		1	1		2

QUESTIONS	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I participate in cultural activities	2			1	1
I am learning my Native language				1	3
I participate in activities in my community		2	1	1	
I spend time supporting the youth in my community	1	1	1	1	
I feel safe in the community	4				
I worry about life	1		2		2
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life	1			3	

### *Survey Analysis*

Four parents completed the written survey. The results of this survey suggest that while all of the parents strongly believe that cultural knowledge is important, there is a lack of opportunities for both families and youth to learn about and practice cultural teachings. Although some of these parents do find ways to participate in cultural and/or community activities, they are not learning their traditional language.

On a positive note, the survey results also indicate that there are few concerns about foster care, housing conditions, and substance abuse.

## Elder Survey Summary

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I know a lot about my culture	3	1			
There are enough cultural activities for families in my community		1	1	1	2
There are enough activities for youth in my community		3	1	1	
I would like to spend time supporting the youth of my community		5			
Adequate support is available for adults/parents	1	1			
I have adequate, safe housing		3			
Adequate support is available for youth	1	2		1	
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	2	1		1	

QUESTIONS	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I participate in cultural activities	2	2			
I speak my Native language frequently			2	1	
I participate in activities in my community	1	2		1	
I spend time supporting the youth of my community		2		1	1
I feel safe in the community		1	3		
I worry about life	1		3		
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life	1				2

### *Survey Analysis*

A total of five Elders participated in the written survey and expressed varied views on a number of broad topics related to their community. While the majority of these Elders feel that they have a great deal of cultural knowledge, many of them also feel that there are not enough cultural activities for families in the community. Although slightly more than half of the Elders feel that there is an adequate number of activities and support programs for youth in Quatsino, they also feel that they would like to spend time supporting the youth in their community. As the majority of the Elders only speak their traditional language either ‘sometimes’ or ‘rarely,’ more opportunities for language use may be needed in the community.

While the number of responses decreased for some of the survey questions, responses indicate that housing is not an issue in the community.

*This report was compiled in collaboration with Sasamans Society*



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