

# CARING FOR OUR OWN CHILDREN

Voices of Our Communities



Wachiay Friendship Centre



## **To Wachiay Friendship Centre**

Gi'lakas'la for allowing us to visit Wachiay Friendship Centre 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**







## Sasamans Society Overview

Sasamans Society is charting new waters in providing 12 First Nations and 3 urban Aboriginal organizations on North Vancouver Island and the BC coast with the support they need to develop their respective cultural and traditional approaches with the goal of keeping children out of government care. Sasamans is committed to honouring a community-driven process to assist communities in creating their vision of a child and family wellness plan.

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 honour and listen to our children's voices and the voices of the communities we serve.



### 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
- Wachiyay Friendship Centre



## **OUR HISTORY**

In 2002, representatives from Aboriginal communities across British Columbia united to demand that control of the well-being of our children and families be returned to us. In response, the province pledged to create and eventually transfer responsibility for Aboriginal children to Aboriginal planning authorities.

At that time, Vancouver Island Aboriginal Transition Team (VIATT) was established as an interim Aboriginal planning authority for communities on and surrounding Vancouver Island. However, given the region's cultural diversity and geographical challenges, when the VIATT process ended in 2008, it was determined that smaller regions would be more manageable. Consequently, the North Island Wellness Society (NIWS) was established as one of five Vancouver Island regional authorities. We recognize both MCFD and VIATT for their successful work during the regionalization process.

Formed in 2009, NIWS focused on furthering community engagement to directly influence and engage in policy setting, governance, and management authority over services that currently remain within MCFD. NIWS experienced growth in membership, support, and direction. In June 2010, society management changed along with a strategic plan that moved the organization to a new name, Sasamans ("our children") Society, and a more developed identity and direction. Sasamans Society is governed by a board of directors appointed by member Nations and participating urban Aboriginal organizations.

With the development of Sasamans Society, we seek to move beyond the limitations imposed on our communities through the current MCFD system. Ours is a process of developing and implementing, within the context of our culture, our traditional laws and way of life. This effort is set within the context of moving progressively forward from the long history of government authority and control over the care and support of our children. The work of changing from a government-designed system to a system grounded in the cultural and traditional laws of our Nations will take time, effort, commitment, and a positive working relationship with MCFD.

## **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 the clients of Wachiay Friendship Centre in Courtenay.

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, and community committees will be formed consisting of four to eight volunteer members representing youth, adults, parents, Elders, frontline workers, council members, and Chiefs. The community committees will assess 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 Wachiy Friendship Centre community.



### **PART 3: WACHIAY FRIENDSHIP CENTRE**





## **Community Summary**

Wachiay Friendship Centre in Courtenay delivers a wide range of services and programs to the Comox Valley's urban Aboriginal community.

As part of our community engagement process, the Sasamans team met with:

- 4 children (ages 7–11) in a focus group
- 11 youth (ages 13–19) in individual conversations
- 4 parents
- 7 Elders in individual and group conversations

In addition to the conversations, three youth, five parents, and two Elders filled out surveys. The survey results indicate that the youth strongly agree that learning about culture, learning from Elders, and feeling safe are important. Drugs and alcohol do not frequently have an impact on the lives of these three youth. The parents also strongly agree that learning about culture is important, and they do not believe there are enough cultural activities available for families or enough activities for youth. Three out of five parents feel there is inadequate support available for youth. The two Elders surveyed often spend time with youth and want to support youth. Both speak their Native language frequently and know a lot about their culture.

## **Key Findings**

Through a process of reading, discussing, and reflecting on the information gathered from community members and presented in this report, the Sasamans team presents the following findings & service needs.

1. Preserving and strengthening Indigenous language and culture is seen as essential to the community's health and well-being. Wachiay Friendship Centre serves people of many different cultures, and this is seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage in terms of strengthening cultural identity.
2. 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.
3. The community's children and youth demonstrate a strong interest in their culture and an affinity and respect for the Elders that could be enhanced and supported for their mutual benefit and the benefit of the whole community.
4. The Nala'atsi program is effective and important in supporting Aboriginal youth who struggle in the mainstream educational system.
5. Drug and alcohol abuse are threatening the stability and health of individuals, families, and the community. Support is needed to assist people with their addictions and to explore healthier choices with the community's youth.
6. Isolation, stress, and trauma are recognized as underlying causes of drug and alcohol abuse in the community, and consistent support is needed to address their effects.

## **Service Gaps & Needs**

1. Cultural approach to Youth Mental Health & Addictions needed.
2. More cultural youth programs.
3. Parenting programs for expectant parents.
4. Healthy babies program.
5. Adult counseling.
6. More parenting programs.
7. More Elders programs.

## Community Profile

Wachiay Friendship Centre in Courtenay opened in 1994 with the goal of delivering programs and services to meet the needs of Aboriginal people who have moved to the city in search of opportunities that are not available in many remote on-reserve communities.

Wachiay is Cree for “welcome,” and the name reflects the welcome Wachiay Friendship Centre extends to everyone who walks through its doors. Its programs are based on the needs of urban Aboriginal children, youth, families, parents, and Elders living in Courtenay and the surrounding Comox Valley; however, its programs and services are available to all who request assistance. Since its incorporation, Wachiay has grown from two staff members to nineteen and has become a haven to the Comox Valley’s urban Aboriginal community.



The Comox Valley Regional District has an Aboriginal population of 2,280, with 1,115 Aboriginal people in Courtenay and 360 in Comox. Over 10,000 contacts are recorded at Wachiay Friendship Centre each year. Some are first-time visitors, while others are members and repeat visitors who access services and participate in various programs.

Wachiay’s mission is “to build a strong community rooted in the philosophy of our Peoples, to create bridges of friendship, and to provide a safe and supportive environment for the empowerment of all people.”

### PROGRAMS

Wachiay is a member of the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. Delivering a wide range of programs and services that improve the lives of urban Aboriginals, Wachiay’s partners include the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Lu’ma Native Housing, Legal Services Society of BC, Status of Women Canada, The Law Foundation of BC, Vancouver Island Health Authority, School District #71, BC Gaming, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, National and BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centre and many other government departments and agencies.



Programs that focus on children and youth include Out of the Shadows / Youth Legacy, Bears, FASD Key Worker, Wachiay Warriors Hockey, Wachiay First Nations Snowboard Team, and Raven Back Youth group. Specific information about these and Wachiay’s many other programs follows below.

#### *Early Childhood Development*

Wachiay offers a moms and tots 0 -6 program that incorporates aboriginal language and culture, traditional foods and baby food making, healthy living and childcare education.

### ***Out of the Shadows / Youth Legacy***

Providing activities, cultural programs, outreach, training, education, awareness, intervention and capacity building services to families living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE) youth ages 13 to 18. Focus on healthy life choices in a youth-friendly, safe environment in partnership with the Key Worker program. (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development)

### ***Bears***

Bears (ages 7-12) focuses on FAS awareness, education, prevention, and support. It offers less structured activities (games and crafts), free play, and youth mentors. (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development)

### ***Key Worker***

The Key Worker works with families parenting children and youth (0-18) living with FASD and Complex Developmental Behavioural Disorders (CDBC) throughout the Comox Valley. Working with SD71, families, and other service providers the Key Worker provides information, tools, and resources that contribute to successful rearing outcomes.

### ***Wachiay Warriors Hockey Program***

Aboriginal youth in the Comox Valley (ages 6–18) may apply to this program for equipment and support for league fees to participate in hockey. The equipment was donated to Wachiay Friendship Centre by the NHL Players Association four years ago and Wachiay has been delivering the program since. (Funded by Kids Sport and Wachiay Warriors players and their families)

### ***Wachiay First Nations Snowboard Team***

The Wachiay snowboard team has completed its sixth successful season, with 14 youth participants and 5 instructors (6 youth came from Campbell River).

### ***Raven Back Youth / Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth***

Raven Back Youth provides a safe, youth-friendly, culturally sensitive environment for youth 12–24 to gather, share ideas, participate in activities and workshops, benefit from peer support, and receive mentoring from the coordinators, youth assistants, Elders, and community members. Raven Back participants learn about recreational and cultural activities in safe, supportive surroundings. Leadership skills are developed and youth have opportunities to attend youth conferences and gatherings, such as Traditional Foods of Vancouver Island where they learn about the gathering, preparation and preservation of traditional Aboriginal foods. Youth are presently making traditional regalia, with moccasins being their first project. (Funded through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada in partnership with NAFC and BCCAFC)



### ***Evening Program for Street Youth***

Wachiay provides an evening program/safe refuge/dinner for street youth aged 13-19.

### ***Roots***

The Roots program promotes and assists Aboriginal communities in reconnecting and reclaiming their children and youth; its purpose is to nurture a sense of identity and belonging for children and youth in care. The Roots worker creates a family tree to provide youth with information about their family and Nation. Many youth have reconnected with their family and community through this program. (Funded by the Ministry of Children and Families and restricted to MCFD referrals)

### ***Summer Student Employment***

Employment and training opportunities are provided to young people whenever possible. These positions equip youth with skills to succeed in the workforce, such as time management, personal financial management, responsibility to employers, reporting, and accountability. (Funded by North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society, National Association of Friendship Centres, HRSDC)

### ***Work BC Employment Services Centre***

WorkBC Employment Services Centres ensure British Columbians have access to supports and services that enable them to get back to work quickly. There are three categories of clients: Employment Insurance (EI) Clients; BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA) Clients; and, General Clients (those who are neither EI nor BCEA Clients).

WorkBC Employment Services Centres integrated services and supports include: job search resources; personal employment planning; workshops and training; and specialized services. Trained staff will work with you to determine the services and supports that will help you find success in your job search.

### ***Elder Support***

Support is provided to Elders in the Comox Valley, including home visits, transportation to WFC activities and programs, and homemaking support. (Funded by Lu'ma Native Housing)

### ***Weekly Seniors/Elders Lunch and Outreach***

Wachiay offers seniors/Elders a variety of support services, including help with shopping, paying bills, medical appointments, transportation, hospital visits, etc., as well as health-related programs and services (AIDS, diabetes, drugs and alcohol).



### ***Advocacy***

Advocacy addresses clients' needs and helps people navigate different systems such as filling out government forms and dealing with tenant disputes and other personal and

civil matters (no age restriction, open to community as a whole). (Funded by Law Foundation of British Columbia and BC Gaming)

### ***Community Computer Access***

Public access computers are available to the general public during hours of operation. Support is provided for learning basic computer and internet skills when funding is available (no restrictions, open to community as a whole).

### ***Dry Food Program***

The Dry Food Program is a volunteer-run program that provides non-perishable food items to 30 schools within SD71. Food is available to children who arrive at school hungry not having had breakfast or food for their lunch. The program feeds approximately 600 students daily. (Funded by School District 71 and BC Gaming)

### ***Helping Hands***

A program available to all community members, Helping Hands provides emergency support for families and individuals. Helping Hands assists with medical prescriptions and supplies, baby car seats, groceries from their on-site food bank, and other family crisis needs. The Helping Hands form provides details on eligible and non-eligible assistance. (Funded by BC Gaming)

### ***Homeless Outreach Program***

Support is offered to families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (food, clothing, medication, sleeping bags, tents, basic necessities). The program offers support to stabilize health, addictions, mental health, and family issues, and to find housing. Rent subsidies are available to qualified eligible applicants, as well as referrals to appropriate agencies. (Funded by BC Housing)

### ***Blueprint for Success Women in Business***

The Blueprint for Success Women in Business program is a series of workshops that cover all facets of entrepreneurship, how to start, operate and manage a business. Participants work with professionals to complete a business plan for their commercial idea. The program provides one-on-one mentoring and is open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women of all ages. (Funded by Status of Women Canada)



### ***National Aboriginal Day Activities***

On June 21<sup>st</sup> each year Wachiay Friendship Centre hosts a National Aboriginal Day celebration. (Funded by Heritage Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)

### ***Legal Aid***

Appointments may be made with the Legal Aid to determine your eligibility for assistance. Phone 250-897-1400 (Funded by Legal Services Society)



### ***Access Pro-bono***

Volunteer lawyers provide access to free legal advice for those who cannot afford a lawyer and who are not eligible for Legal Aid. Appointments can be made to discuss your situation with a lawyer on Tuesday afternoons from 1:00 to 3:00 by calling 1-877-762-6664. (Funded by Access Justice)

## **Community Engagement Process**

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

In November 2010, Sasamans Society's Executive Director conducted an information session and an update of the role of the Sasamans Society. Because of the small numbers of individuals WFC serves on and off reserve, an agreement was made to work collaboratively with the K'omoks First Nation,<sup>2</sup> who then hired a community-based facilitator. A memorandum of understanding between Sasamans Society and WFC was signed in January 2011.

The Sasamans team began work in both communities in November 2011. The process included:

- attending training sessions and meetings
- building relationships with WFC and community members at Wachiay's events and programs
- arranging and hosting an information session for community frontline workers
- helping to host the two-day Painting Our Way youth conference in Campbell River, which began the information-gathering process
- participating in strategic planning
- presenting the Society's role and work to date at the Kwakiutl District Council Assembly
- conducting individual and group conversations with youth, parents, and Elders

Starting in November 2011, digital recordings of the conversations were sent to be professionally transcribed. The Sasamans team then read the transcripts to determine key themes. From this work, the team was able to discover a great deal of rich information about the Wachiay community members to inform this report.

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

#### ***Youth***

The interviewers had individual conversations with 11 youth (5 female and 6 male) in the age range of 13 to 19 years old. A discussion group was also arranged with four 7- to 11-year-olds. A total of 15 youth discussed their thoughts on the community; their cultural

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<sup>2</sup> The community engagement process with K'omoks First Nation will be reported on in the 2012–2013 fiscal year.

activities and practices; Elders, parents, and family; the challenges the youth face; and their role models.

### *Parents*

Four mothers ranging in age from 36 to 48 were interviewed. These women shared their thoughts on community; culture; discrimination and other stressors; their children; the community's Elders; activities that are or would be beneficial to the community; challenges; and keeping children out of care.

### *Elders*

Seven Elders ranging in age from 60 to 74 shared their wisdom on community; cultural activities and teachings; their engagement with youth in the community; Wachiay Friendship Centre's programs; keeping children out of care; and the challenges they face, including discrimination, government relationships, and intergenerational trauma.

The Sasamans team was encouraged by the community's active participation in the information-gathering process and appreciated the open and heartfelt responses to our questions.

## Community Conversations

In this section we summarize our conversations with members of the Wachiay Friendship Centre community. We have organized the conversations under the following headings: *Challenges Faced By Community Members*, *Community Wisdom Regarding Wellness*, *Wachiay's Role in Addressing Community Needs*, and *Service Gaps*.

To maintain the integrity of the wisdom shared, 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 individual.

### CHALLENGES FACED BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Wachiay Friendship Centre is serving an urban community with many complex challenges, including poverty, homelessness, and addictions, among many others. In our conversations, some of the challenges people mentioned were more common among a particular group – that is, the youth, parents, or Elders. Others – like discrimination – are experienced by many people in the community regardless of their age and circumstances.

#### *Discrimination*

People in all of the different age groups Wachiay Friendship Centre serves are acutely aware of the effects of racism and discrimination.

*The world is really racist towards us. (a youth)*

*There's a lot of hate like going between Natives and white people and black people and Asians and everybody. (a youth)*

Some of the parents talked about discrimination their children face in school and in the community:

*I know my kids have experienced [discrimination] within the school.*

*I think there are still some barriers there where Aboriginal kids are ... not accepted.*



A parent described her children

*being picked on at school because of their clothing ... the way they were dressed ... racist comments ... my sons walking down the street getting bullied and picked on by the police because they look questionable.*

Parents and Elders talked about encountering racism in local business establishments.

*I am discriminated against just walking into Walmart or walking into Winners. Just as a First Nations based person who looks Native.... Just people following you ... for example, my daughter and I were in Superstore and there was a lady following her around 'cause it looked like [my daughter] was putting something in her pocket. And she was very blatant about how much she followed us, and I was right in there saying, 'It's not fair, you don't get to do this to my daughter.' ... She didn't know what to say to me.... I was just like, I am not backing down. And, it has happened more than just that ... happens very frequently. (a parent)*

*We were in a restaurant one day and the lady threw my menu at me. Gave everybody else theirs and she threw it at me and then she says to my friend, 'What does she want?' And I said, 'Well, I can speak for myself. (an Elder)*

As recently as 1989, an Elder was told, “*We don’t allow Indians in here.*” Another Elder recalled someone saying, “*You people never listen. I told you to go to the back of the line.*”

An Elder recalled her mother’s fear of the government taking her children away and how she resorted to desperate measures to protect them – she advised her children never to admit to being Aboriginal.

*My family and a lot of families around the area where I was from, they hid to be an Aboriginal because of the way the government took their children away from them.... And the reason she was hiding us was so they wouldn’t come and take us away from her. And at that time during my growing up years, they were taking a lot of children away. And not only that, but if the white people thought you were Native, they would start calling you down.*

Another Elder said she had prepared her children for discrimination by telling them to expect it.

*That’s the sad thing – that I always taught my kids that they’re going to come across the odd person like that, you know? They know it, they know it’s going to happen ’cause I always told them it’s going to happen.*

Being subjected to racist attitudes often leads people to feel shame about themselves and their culture. A parent reflected, for example:

*I have a girlfriend, and her daughter, for whatever reason, doesn’t want to have any part of being First Nations [because] she’s ... ashamed.*

While the Wachiay community members clearly encounter racism often, one parent believes that the Comox Valley is less racist than other places she has lived:

*When we lived in Alberta ... you didn’t say you were Aboriginal unless you wanted to get beaten up. Here, I find ... there’s no shame and it’s almost like non-Aboriginals want to be Aboriginals because it such a wonderful thing.*

Another parent agreed:

*I haven’t found shame within my children, or myself, or even their friends. I think it’s been most inviting to be Aboriginal.*

This parent attributed racist attitudes to “misunderstandings” and stereotypes that

*[go] back to the cowboy and Indian attitude ... the almighty white and the filthy Indian.*



## Challenges Faced By Elders

Among the challenges Elders face are isolation and loneliness, especially for those without transportation. One person commented that Elders need

*someone to keep in contact with them, mostly. Like this one lady down here, she doesn't get out that much. And it must be really hard for her because they took her driver's license away, for one thing. So she can't drive anymore. And she—we picked her up the other day and took her for ... lunch. She thought that was the greatest thing because nobody ever thinks of picking her up or phoning to see how she's doing. (an Elder)*

Two of the Elders talked about residential school and how it ruptured their connections to family and community:

*I guess towards the end I got used to it. At first, it used to really bother me, you know? Like why couldn't we see her? She was our mother, but we were never allowed. When we did sneak, we would get caught and get a strapping for it.*

*The kids on the reserve – in the summertime, we all played together. And then as soon as I've been back into the residential school, there was ... there was a wall. Because then I was a residential school kid. I wasn't a village kid anymore.*

The comments of an Elder whose parents were spared from attending residential school underscore the schools' detrimental effects:

*I really thank the Creator that both my parents didn't go to the residential school. They were very, very strong in our culture, and I know that's where my strength comes from, is knowing my culture, and knowing who I am.*



Two Elders expressed concerns about losing their “Indian” status and their health benefits.

*Our dental, our eyes.... You know, it's just been completely going downhill since our district council started.*

*The government's just gradually taking more and more away every year. And if we get our land claims, we'll even lose our status.*

Other Elders worry about the community:

*I think there's a lot of stress in Elders because of the way things are today. Like they're stressed about suicides, and these children getting into drugs and alcohol.*

## Challenges Faced By Parents

For the parents we talked to, challenges included “day to day things – managing money, house, kids, and work.”

One parent commented that “transportation ... is an issue for [some] people in our centre.”

The parents didn't talk a great deal about the challenges they face; their conversations focused more on their concerns for the children and youth.

*"Lack of education"* is seen as a barrier to the youths' success in life. And, as noted above, parents are concerned that their children encounter discrimination at school and in the wider community.

A parent was disturbed that youth still feel alone in today's world:

*[It] shouldn't be happening in today's age.... Definitely there are enough resources and money and programs out there that there should be – not that there should be any reason – there should be less of a reason ... as to why they are feeling alone. There has to be a reason to figure out how to fix that and focus on why that is.*

The parents feel that the community has to work together to create an extended family.

*I think, once again, we go back to doing the support for families.*

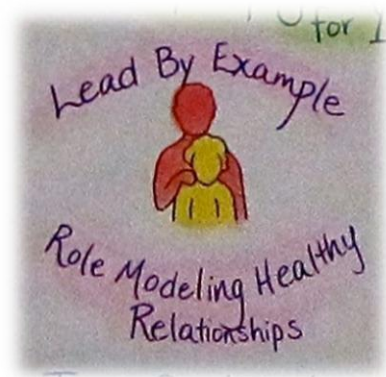
### **Challenges Faced By Youth**

The Wachiay youth are dealing with all of the typical challenges and stresses of adolescence, including school, peer conflicts and pressures, and relationships with parents and siblings.

*I know a couple people who are in a lot of stress because of their little brothers and sisters ... they're always babysitting.*

*[I'd like] to be more free to do stuff .... like going out with friends and go a lot further than your boundaries.*

*Living with my dad... He started bickering. I just walked out of the house, went for a walk, came back, he still bickered. I left for the night and didn't come back for the night.*



In addition to stresses like these, many of the youth who are served by Wachiay Friendship Centre are coping with complex and serious issues, including depression, sexual abuse, suicidal feelings, loss of loved ones, living away from home, being bullied, and both resisting and experimenting with drugs and alcohol. One youth said that having to deal with issues like these

*makes me feel sad and angry at times.*

### **Living Away From Home**

Seven of the older youth had lived away from home during at least one point in their lives, and all but one had found it difficult. One youth described it as *"hell"*; another said simply: *"I didn't like that at all."*



Even the one youth who preferred to live away from home explained that it was because there was “less drama, less pain in the ass, people like figuring that you’d do something and you just don’t want to do it.”

One youth currently lives away from home by choice in order to attend school in Courtenay:

*I’ve never had to not be with my parents. It’s my choice to be here [with my grandma] right now.... My mom does not like it that I’ve left; she wants me back.... For me, I feel I need to – there’s some things I need to get done. I have a few things to get done if I’m going to get very far in this life. I’d like to make something good in my life. I want to be able to help other people. And so I feel I need to get my schooling, and right now ... here is the best schooling that I can see right now, my best schooling options.*



### *School*

The youth quoted above is one of five youth we talked with who attend Nala’atsi, a program that assists Aboriginal students in the Comox Valley to meet secondary school completion requirements through an individualized program of studies or facilitates their reentry into the regular secondary system. Nala’atsi partners with Wachiay Friendship Centre to allow students to access training and certifications that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

One youth described his motivation for leaving home to complete his secondary education through Nala’atsi:

*My main reason to move here was to get my schooling ... done, because I hadn’t really done schooling before this. Yeah, so I feel good about that. I’ve been working ... they started me on a modified grade eight and I quickly moved onto grade nine working in modified grade nine and ten and parts of eleven. So I’m catching up really quickly.*

This particular youth sees a lack of support in mainstream schools for students who need additional help:

*In the other schools, if somebody needs help, they might get stuck. There’s a big class, they don’t want to be the only one asking this question, so then they’ll just sit there. Just maybe draw a little picture, and then where are they getting? Not very far. And no one wants to be that one person that maybe doesn’t know this question or know that.*

Another advantage to attending a small alternative school that the Nala’atsi youth noted is that bullying is much less of a problem than in mainstream schools:

*There’s a lot of [bullying] at other high schools but ... there’s obviously none here ... ’cause we’re an alternative school. There’s like max twenty kids in a day if you’re lucky.... But in high school there is definitely a lot of conflict because there’s cliques like where there’s the popular kids, there’s the geeks, there’s the emos, there’s the jocks. Everyone just has huge fights with each other.*

*I do see it. Not in this school. Not here, not at all. In other schools I see it. I find when they have more of a concentration of people it happens more. Bigger schools.*

For others of the youth, conflicts with peers at school are a common occurrence:

*For the first little bit ... certain places I didn't feel so accepted.... Got into my first few fights here, which ... I did not enjoy.*

One youth feels “not very happy” when dealing with conflict and would like “to find ways earlier to stop it.” Another youth will “avoid it at all costs, but when I’m put in a conflicting area where I can’t get ... like I can’t stop it, like I will definitely stick up for myself.”

### *Isolation, Depression, and Suicide*

For many of these youth, feeling alone is:

*common – very, very, very common. Like I can understand that.*

*You can never really get that alone feeling down.... Sometimes no matter how much people you have around you just always feel alone.*

*Yes, I do feel alone sometimes.... I feel like I’m not understood properly. At the same time, I feel okay with that. Other [people], some people, will not understand how I feel.*



One youth talked about feeling “sadness” but said, “I tried not to think about it.”

Another youth expressed the opinion that kids become depressed when they feel lonely and have nothing to do:

*There’s a lot of kids ... becoming depressed because they’re ... just don’t know what to do when they have spare time, so they just think of ... ‘I’m bored. I might go to try and harm myself or have fun and do something else.’ But I always get bored of that and just sit in my room ... listen to music.*

Some of the youth have witnessed friends and family struggling with serious challenges.

*I know people who are like having really bad times with ... I don’t know all the details and their life but I think that makes them depressive.... And I know a couple of people that are on antidepressants and they don’t really think they need to be on them, but they should be because it helps them.... And then the suicides...*

*Youth nowadays are put, getting put on so many pressures.... Like they just keep adding and adding on. And there’s ... the people out there are getting meaner, like each generation is like horrible.... And everything is just getting so much worse in general.... So many*





*tainted souls out there.*

*Some people are hurting themselves.... Like some people cut their wrists, some people go suicide.*

One young person feels overwhelmed by trying to support a friend who is struggling, and doesn't know who to contact for professional support:

*I don't know. They just cry... This person I talk to just cries and cries and cries.... I don't really pay attention to her, I just kind of tell her where to go.... I just don't want to listen because it's just all the time.*

Other youth talked about suicidal feelings:

*My friend became my mini counsellor ... and has convinced me a many a time not to kill myself.... My mom got me into counselling and my counsellor got me on antidepressants. Which I've stayed on. They've been slowly upped once in a while but I've stayed on them.*

*For me I've never felt suicidal. I've never even thought of it. And as I was saying, depression, like in the last few days I have felt more depressed than I have in a while, in ever before probably 'cause my friend died.... Like my friend died not too long ago, committed suicide.... She was bullied, but at the same time how are we supposed to change that? How can we change that?... You can't..... It happens everywhere.*



One young woman is trying to heal from sexual abuse.

*Since I was very little until I was about eight and a half I had to go through the stress of being sexually assaulted by my grandfather.... And watching my mother slowly go down a drug-infested and alcohol hill. And having boyfriend after boyfriend that was complete assholes and having me raised by my brother, and sometimes I was shipped off to my grandparents. And when I was eight and a half I finally told everyone, so that was definitely a stressor.*

When asked how she copes, the youth replied,

*I'm still dealing with it and it's been way longer, like I was eight and a half when I told everyone and I'm like fifteen now and I'm still dealing with it.... It makes you just fatigued, just tired, just wanting to sleep every day. Makes you just annoyed with everyone. You're annoyed with*

*everyone so it affects your socializing with others. It can make you lose friends.... Like, everything just seems horrible.... Everything seems ... just like looking through like a dark mirror.*

### *Alcohol and Drugs*

An Elder, when asked about the community's biggest challenges, replied:

*[Drugs and alcohol] and a lot of suicide that's happening lately. And the kids with their drugs and their alcohol problems.*

In the words of a parent, the use of drugs and alcohol in the community “can be quite extreme.” Another parent noted that, “for five bucks, anyone will bootleg for you.”

A youth also reported that some adults will bootleg for teenagers:

*There's a lot of drugs and alcohol going around. Like even the nerd kids, they can have connections to drugs. A lot of people in this town can have a connection to alcohol because you literally just go to the liquor store and they can see like a hobo at the corner and you'd be like 'Hey, would you boot for me?' And then they'd be like 'Yeah sure, as long as you give me a little bit of change.' Then they just go in, get your booze, walk out, give him a little bit of change and then he just goes off and drinks.*



One youth feels that kids are experimenting with alcohol and drugs at a younger age:

*Younger ones and older ones now are definitely getting more into the drugs.... Definitely. Younger, younger kids are doing it, like elementary kids, which was not heard of in my school when I was in elementary school.*

Another youth talked about their own experimentation with drugs:

*When I first came here, a lot of people do drugs and I don't think that's good.... I think that if you use them maybe once, twice, to understand what – for me, I've used them. I've used them a few times, but not much, because I was wanting to understand. But for me, I want to understand what's in front of me. I'm always searching for a greater understanding. So I tried it out. I understand what they're going for. That feeling where you don't need to worry about anything, that fuzzy feeling, that good feeling. But it's fake. So ... if you're trying to cover up a problem here, you're making another problem over here.*

When asked why some youth start drinking, one youth talked about the influence of peers and parents:

*I think it's because they're [with the] wrong people they hang out with. Start to hang out with not necessarily bad people, but people*



*who do it.... Again, their parents. [They] see all these – they think whatever their parents do is okay.*

Youth partying is seen as a significant problem in the community. One parent said that partying is “big, I think.” When asked how much of an issue partying is, one youth responded, “I hear a lot of parties going on. Sometimes I can see them.”

Several youth provided examples of what can go wrong when people party:

*They could die, they could get hurt.*

*A while ago a kid got into a fight while he was intoxicated and he was put in the hospital for I think it was a month or something like that ‘cause he was beaten that bad. And a while ago a female was intoxicated, and she was behind – not sure what school – but she was raped by two guys.*

*Some people fight.*

*Some people OD on alcohol and drugs ... just get hurt.*

To be safe, one youth thought that people should “have somebody there that’s always gonna watch out for you”; another suggested “the buddy buddy plan.”

One of the youth pointed out that parties are “not always with ... First Nations ... because it’s out there for everybody.... But the danger’s always there if you drink or do drugs.”

Another youth talked about parents who party and use drugs and alcohol:

*Parents should become more responsible if they have kids around. Like kids are out and they want to have a small party or get together, they should be entitled to that, but if their kids are home, they shouldn’t be doing that type of stuff ... ‘cause that’s just so irresponsible parenting.*

When asked about adults partying with youth, one young person replied,

*I think it’s kind of disturbing.... It’s never really going to change that much ... drugs and alcohol are always going to be there [and] people always turn to them when they’re having a hard time.*

All of the parents we talked to are aware of the dangers that youth can encounter when they party too much: “Unwanted pregnancies, STDs, unnecessary fighting, police records, jail time, juvie time, lots of stuff.”

To ensure that youth are safe even when they choose to party, a parent recommended making sure the youth know that they can call on a parent anytime, anywhere:

*Ensure that they know to call mom and dad at any time, doesn’t matter what time, or have someone they know they can call at any time for help. Just making sure they are 100% percent aware that there is always someone there.*

A parent believes:

*If [youth] were given a different path or shown a different way, they wouldn’t need to go down that path.*

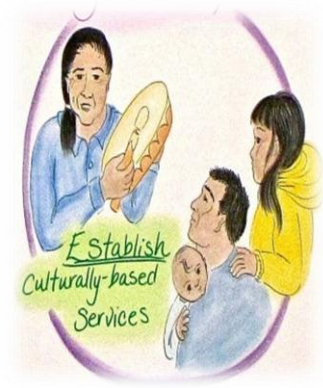
## COMMUNITY WISDOM REGARDING WELLNESS

### *Strengthening Cultural Identity and Pride*

In contrast to an on-reserve community with a cohesive culture, the Wachiay community is made up of people from many different cultures. This fact was noted as both an advantage and a disadvantage in the conversations with community members.

*Because it's such a diverse background of where people come from.... We're lucky in the aspect that the Elders and the people that do come and help teach, the kids get a wide variety of it. (a parent)*

*We should have more things like teaching our children our language. And culture, dancing.... I can see that some – like, I have family that the kids go to the sweat lodge. And I don't want to tell them that it's not our ways. It's not really our ways, sweat lodge and stuff. It's different.... Well, it's okay, but they should learn our culture. (an Elder)*



The youth we talked to showed various degrees of cultural awareness. One youth said,

*The way I see it is [being First Nation is] not much different, that I can see, [from other cultures].*

Another youth did not know what to think about being First Nation, but thought that attending cultural gatherings was “really fun.”

A youth who participates in “family feasts” said they like being a part of the First Nations community because “there’s a lot of resources ... potlatches and stuff like that.”

A fourth youth is aware that his cultural heritage is different from the local Indigenous culture:

*I believe very much in the way my Native band believes in things. which is different than here.... For me it's good to have all the Native bands come together, and that's the strongest. At the same time, you have to own up to yours.*

Many of the youth expressed an interest in cultural activities, and most have attended activities like potlatches and pow wows.

*I've been to a lot of the ones in [the community], but ever since I started going into foster care that's been dropping. I've only been ... to one when I've been in foster care.*

*I hear of a lot of cultural events ... yeah ... I haven't been too much.*



*I've wanted to learn [my language] for a while.*

*I would like to know more about the musical stuff about it. I'd like to know different stories and just kind of get-togethers and whatnot.*

Some youth find that participating in cultural activities is time consuming, and one youth expressed concern that continuing to belong to a traditional dance group, although she enjoyed it, might interfere with her homework.

A parent talked about the importance of cultural teachings for youth:

*I think they teach them who we are.*

One of the youth felt that cultural programming is important because it helps youth:

*know where their family originated from ... and [provides] connections to their land and their people.*

A young person talked about cultural teachings as a powerful tool for well-being:

*I know that when it comes to, when I feel like I'm in a really bad place or I'm feeling low, I often find a place – I have a place in the woods and I'll have a fire, I will sit there and I will often pray. And try to find condolence in myself. I use tobacco ... I don't smoke tobacco, only for ... where I'm from it's always, it's the centering, it's what brings you back. It's always the centering thing. If you're feeling sad, use the tobacco. It brings you back. If you're feeling really happy, bring you back to center, you keep your center.... It can be a very powerful tool.... And cedar is a very clearing.... I do not know any other person my age that does those kind of things.*



The same youth expressed the opinion that traditional activities should be done in cultural settings rather than in a school classroom:

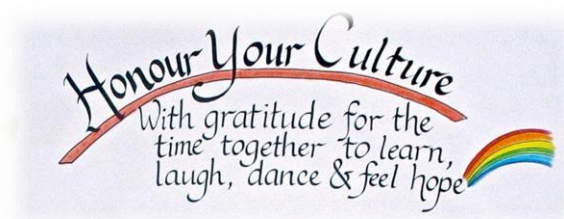
*Native culture cannot be put into a course.... I think if one wants to know about it they have to learn about it themselves. Putting it into a course very much I find a white person's thing.... And so I believe if one wants teachings they have to find an Elder, and for me I'm going to – my brother and my father are my teachers.*



The Elders have all had different life experiences, but they agree that identity and culture go hand in hand with health and wellness. They also agree that it's important to know family roots and history.

*Knowing your – who you are, four generations back, is a sign of being healthy. Because you know who you are.... It was very much instilled in us – our connections to everybody.*

*Healthy people know who they are.*





For these Elders, the most important teachings and stories come from their female ancestors –grandmother, mother, and aunts who passed down their wisdom and knowledge and taught the skills of preparing and preserving food and sewing clothing. By listening, observing, and doing, the Elders learned family history, culture, language, and how to behave in their respective communities.

*The teachings from my grandmother, and my mother and my aunt – I think it's ... brought me a long ways.*

#### *A Return to Traditional Ways*

Both youth and Elders talked about traditional ways. Having healthy families and children, the Elders expressed, requires

*returning to our culture.*

One of the youth wants to participate in a program that teaches cultural survival skills; they talked about wanting to learn

*how to survive without this technology.... It does seem like we're all really dependent on it now.... I kinda wish it went back to what it was when we first got here. Building our houses and hunting for our food.... I want to learn that.*

The Elders talked about how families lived and worked together in earlier days:

*Every family ... long time ago, we all stuck together. We did things together. We worked together. Do the laundry together, get wood together. Just laughing together. And that's my goal, is for the parents and their children to get together and love one another. Do things together.*

*We have to relearn the ways of our own people when they were so caring, when our children were the center of our lives, you know, so. So it's been – you know, it's systemic. It goes on generation after generation unless the families have stopped it.*

*We started to bring back how we looked after our children. The ceremonies that we had for the children. And I know that these ceremonies helped our children to be balanced, well, and healthy.*

*The ten-month ceremony ... meaning the path is set for that child. The good, balanced road that the child will walk. It's very much like a baptism because the parents choose a ... role model – positive role models to help that child grow up, you know, to make sure that they guide that child as it grows up.*



A return to traditional ways also entails a resurgence of traditional foods, and these Elders talked about the traditional foods conference that had recently taken place in Campbell River and Cape Mudge. The conference was an opportunity to eat traditional foods such as elk, salmon, herring eggs, oolichans, grease, crabs, prawns, and more rare delicacies like cockles. It also provided a chance to visit and catch up with relatives. The Elders received information about health concerns like diabetes, and they learned some history related to traditional food gathering and production, such as information about the fishing weirs that were used thousands of years ago.

*I really enjoyed it, 'cause they were talking about diabetes – a lot of diabetes is happening and that's why we got to have our food instead of buying meat from the store and all that. We could be having salmon, salmon of different kinds, seaweed and halibut....*

*[I learned] a lot of good history, I would say. You know, the kids should learn more about that.*

Elders who attended the conference agreed it was important that community gatherings like these continue, and more often.

#### *Learning from the Elders*

All of the parents talked about their sheer enjoyment of being around the Elders at Wachiay Friendship Centre. They have learned many things from the Elders at the Centre, including:

- history
- storytelling
- “calmness, kindness ... strength ... sense of humour”
- “our family tree”
- “learned to be patient ... to listen to them and listen to their words that they do have valuable things to say”



One of the youth described a feeling of ease and acceptance with the Elders:

*They come to our school and just sit around, have tea, talk to each other, and if we want to we just like walk in and just like start bugging them and they don't care 'cause they start bugging back and it's like a huge family here.*

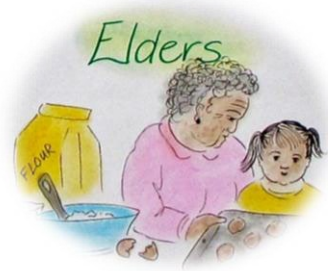
Many of the youth described doing crafts and cultural activities with the Elders, and one youth said:

*Some people, like, say that [the Elders are] boring, but when you actually start listening to them and start listening to their stories that they tell, it can ... actually teach a lot of things.*

A parent said she spends as much time as she can with the Elders – “when I can, and as often as I can when I come here.”

Another said:

*I would like to see more gatherings with Elders and children, and doing cultural pieces, because the history and culture of the Aboriginal ancestry I think has gone by the wayside and our kids don't understand.... I would love to see classes for families and getting a little bit of cultural background ... getting back to the basics ... and the respect of Elders.*



Another parent wants

*to know and listen to Elders talk about their life, what they did in life, what was special [so] that maybe I might be able to incorporate [that] into my life with my children.*

Another parent mentioned language, storytelling, “and things passed down like canning.... That sort of thing is becoming lost.... It is important.” Still another said:

*The Elders are critical.... We did a Big House event – a two-day event in November with Elders and youth and other support people from the community, teachers with the high school kids. And the Elders [were] able to offer their wisdom and tell stories. And at the end of the two days, the most common comment when kids checked in at the end was a thank-you to the Elders.*



### *Learning from the Youth*

At Wachiay, learning isn't perceived as a one-way street where only the Elders pass on their knowledge to the younger generations; parents and Elders noted that they also learn from the youth. One parent said she has learned acceptance:

*[The youth] are very accepting of each other.*

An Elder said “there is a need” to listen to the youth:

*And some Elders are not going to listen, but some will. The Elders that don't want to hear it are the ones that need help themselves. But for the youth to tell their stories to Elders who will listen and who will help them and be there for them.... And some of the youth can share what they know. Amazing what some youth can come out with. Very knowledgeable young people. They can teach us some things, too.*

For their part, the youth are eager to show the Elders what they know and can do. For example, one young person wants the community to

*host big events – like you can have fun, like meet new people. Like some kids like skateboards – have a big skateboarding event where everyone can go, even the Elders can watch kids wipe out.*



## Coping With Stress

Stress, as one of the parents we talked to noted, affects not only the physical body, but other areas of life:

*Stress impacts ... health, and hugely education and success.*

One young person suggested that if youth feel alone,

*they should ... go to the community and try and find friends if they don't have any friends out in the community, go to school ... walk up to a bunch of kids and just see if they're somewhat like you. And if they are, just hang out with them.*



One of the youth talked about the role that Wachiay plays in connecting youth:

*Well, I see it here. I know lots of people like who've like come here and totally opened up and there were the quietest kids.... I'm happy for them. 'Cause I used to be like super quiet and I always [kept] to myself.*

Several of the youth shared their strategies for coping with loneliness and stress:

*[I have] a lot of stresses, but at the same time, it's part of life.... The first thing I like to do is find the cause of why I'm feeling stressed.... I like to understand this cause of me feeling. And then I work from there. Do I find the cause, understand why I'm stressed. Then I try to find what I can do to change that.*

*Sometimes no matter how much people you have around, you just always feel alone.... But what I did was I think about what I have ... and appreciate everything.*

*When I have a hard time I usually try to figure it out myself.... I will meditate.*

At least one of the youth is clear that alcohol and drugs are not the way to deal with stress:

*Everybody is different. Everybody has different stresses in life.... Everybody has a path. It's a matter of if they're really wanting to do it. If they have that life force in them, if they're not numbing themselves with drugs, if they're not being stupid.... I believe if you have a good head ... on your shoulders ... you'll get far. If you do not ... if you are wanting to cause problems, you don't think a huge amount, you just act more on your instinct ... you won't get too far.*

## Role Models

Many of the youth did not have a role model, and one did not want one:

*I feel very certain that I'm on a journey of my own. I'm very clear about that.... And I feel I do not want to be somebody else. I'm not going to try to be somebody else. I want to be myself. I want to be the ... biggest potential of myself.*



The youth who did have role models looked up to certain family members. One youth explained why his brothers were his role models:

*They're both in the military.... They followed their dreams and they are doing what they want to do ... [and] if certain people start to bug them then they confront them about it but they don't do anything unless the person provokes them even more, then they just deal with it.*

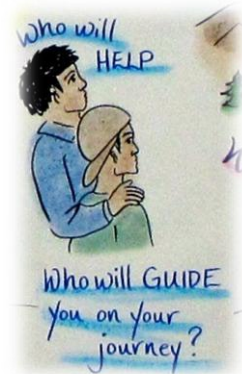
Another youth commented:

*As soon as I hear role model, I think my older brother.... 'Cause he practically raised me.... He's eight years older than me. He thinks of me as his child type of thing.... He's my role model.*

### *Support for Youth*

All of the parents we talked with are saddened that the youth feel alone. They believe the community has to work together to create an extended family, and involving the Elders is seen as key:

*[The Elders] should be mentoring the youth. I know that my relationship with both my grandmothers had a big impact on me. And there should be Elders in their lives, in the youths' lives. And I know that people who've been raised by their grandparents are much more sensitive and seem to be more with it than the ones that have no contact with their grandparents or any Elders. So I believe that Elders should be a big part, providing the Elders are healthy. We have to remember that – old people are not all Elders. To me, an Elder is someone who is wise and a good teacher. (an Elder)*



For their part, the Elders would like to support the youth and pass on their cultural knowledge. One Elder suggested that youth experience stress when they don't know enough about their Aboriginal culture and identity.

*I think a lot of youths ... are trying to find themselves, for one thing. Sometimes it's stressful when you don't know who you are or where you came from. And then they've got the pressure of the schools.... So a lot of the children in the cities don't know who they are. I really believe it's really important for them to know who they are. Know their identities ... know where they came from. Because they just didn't happen. They have a history, roots. They have a beginning somewhere. It's very difficult to find a way to ground yourself and feel okay in the world if you're not connected.*

An Elder who teaches youth noted the feeling of pride a young person feels when they complete a project.

*It's a connection, I think, for them. Basically to say that they've made something and it's for themselves. [They] are so proud of what they've got.*

One parent discussed the value of mentoring programs, especially for girls:

*The different roles that people play, like in youth ... mentorship.... I think better mentorship ... not better but more, because there's quite a bit of good mentorship, just different avenues ... more mentorship for girls would be really important I think. Different programs.... I think just keeping the girls interested.*

When the youth were asked who they would go to if they needed someone to talk to, they were divided in their answers. A few said they did not trust counsellors or adults and would go to friends for support, while others said they would use professional support but thought that available resources might be lacking.

*I really wouldn't want to talk to an Elder or anything like that.... Some people really don't want to talk about things because they think people are actually going to judge them for what they've done or what they do.*

*I do not like counsellors...I don't like counselling...it's just I don't really want to talk to some stranger about my problems.... I'm okay with my friends and my mom.*

*I do not like talking with counsellors and stuff.... They are helpful sometimes, but at the same time they're very good at working with your head. And one thing that I do not enjoy is people ... messing things up in my head.*

One youth figured what makes a person easy to talk to is

*how much I know them.... How much they know me.*

Another youth said they do not have someone they can talk to about personal matters, but that they would find that helpful.

When the parents were asked, "How do we get youth to make healthier choices?" one replied:

*By being better examples.*

One parent is optimistic that today's education system will benefit the youth:

*[The] new 20th century of learning that is coming out in the schools and their individual likes and wants and interested in are able to shine. And if we are able to hone in on those aspects of those kids on what they like and what they want, they are just going to fly.*

This parent added:

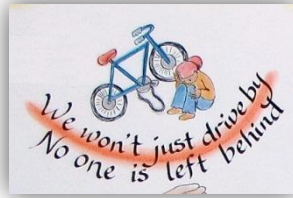
*If they are able to get to their whole potential ... but they are so squashed by these stigmatism of 'you're a bad kid because you've been to jail or you've stolen something.' These stay with them, which isn't fair for them.*

One parent suggested focusing on what's good in young people:

*Their humour – if you were to follow my boys and their friends and their group of people they hang out with, you would have a whole comedy show, like seriously ... rolling on the floor laughing, your stomach, your face hurts from laughing so much. Their goodness, and the humour and their kindness.... I think the focus is a lot on the bad, and their good isn't found enough.*

Another parent stated:

*We can't, as a community, let these kids slip through the cracks – we just can't.*



Support for Family Wellness

Several youth shared their ideas on what a healthy family looks like:

*Being together and there for each other.*

*Loving each other ... never fighting.... Well, I can't say never fighting because that's impossible ... so only fighting like every so often.*

*A nice house with a dad and mom, a dog I guess, brother and sister, something like that ... and have food in the ... kitchen and have clothing to wear and a bed to sleep in.*

*[A] father figure who's present and accounted for ... and a mother who is present and accounted for and listens to their child and gives advice. A child who's happy with themselves, really. Safe home environment, food on the table, education definitely, clothes on their back. Happy, really.*

The youth talked about what their families have taught them:

*Trying to be someone who you want to be, stand up for what you believe in. If you get into a fight don't swing first ... and how to cook.*

*How to listen. And then put my two bits in.*

*Just to be respectful of others.*

One youth who had an especially difficult childhood said:

*[I] learned from experiences. And I've lived a hard life when I was younger, before everything got better, so I learned by watching other's mistakes.*

Learning from family members has made this young person

*avoid wanting to do drugs 'cause I know how bad it can get ... [and] It makes me able to know if somebody is a bad person. Like I can tell the difference between a good person and a bad person right off the bat.*

The youth were asked their thoughts on what the community could do to help build healthier families.

*[Have] more family events. Like just have huge meetings for sports teams and then kids can go and the family cheers on the kids to make them feel that much better about themselves.*

*Be there to listen if they need to talk ... or help them out if they struggle.*

*[Get] to know your family more ... what they like to do.*

The Elders we talked to believe that parents need family and community support, and that those who are struggling may need additional help in the form of programs that address family well-being.

*More involvement I think ... with the parents and well, the grandparents, too.*

*Like if they could have the parents and the kids sometimes together when they're going through the treatment ... like a family program.... That way they can talk.*

The parents we talked to envision healthy families as being part of a supportive community, as these comments indicate:

*[It] has to include Elders, youth, children, mothers, fathers and bringing more ... of the family together, doing activities together. Showing that you don't have to have the drugs and alcohol to have a really good time. You can still have a good time with grandma and grandpa. You know, and have that sense of belonging. So, yeah, I think that's part of being a healthy community.*

*I think that we have to connect our youth more with the Elders.... I don't see a lot of that here.*

*I think once again, we go back to doing the support for families: encouragement from families, from the centre here; be involved; be a part; be a larger family. It's not only the unity of mom, dad, or whomever else in the family. It's connecting with other people, the Elders, the children, the babies, from top to bottom, getting people to work together, getting our youth to feel a part of something very important.*





To create a stronger community, one youth suggested:

*Get more resources for people in trouble.*

One of the youth thought that programs might help youth lead healthier lives, while another suggested:

*more connections to like Elders like we have at my school. Maybe more connections with people who've already had their experiences.*

An Elder dreams of a community healing lodge:

*My dream was always that we had our own lodge. In that we had a place for Native people to go if they were not well, and a place for them to go and rest and get all ... of this other holistic stuff that would make them feel good. And, you know, if they were ill, they would come away from there feeling better.... It would be a place where we could have a rest and be nurtured and give our knowledge.*

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

#### *Activities*

The parents we talked to are satisfied with the activities that are available for families, but thought that more advertising and outreach could be done to involve more families.

*We don't need more because we are a big part of the centre, so I can't say we need more because we are here a lot. My kids are here 3 nights a week.*

*Maybe more advertisements of ... better outreach of activities.*

*Encourage people to participate in more cultural activities ... better advertisement, more consistent, more consistent follow-up.... One email just doesn't do it ... one phone call to the school. An example is one of the Elders I go to coffee with would appreciate a phone call the day of because she doesn't always remember ... but if she got that phone call in the morning, then she would remember that the dinner is at 5:00. So, more consistency with follow-up would be important.*



A parent said that having a place to gather and share meals is a start to getting people involved more:

*I think having the centre ... having like a great place to gather and share meals and ideas ... especially for teenagers.... They tend to pull away. And to show them that it's not the most horrible thing in the world to hang out with your family and other families.... You can have fun and you don't need alcohol and drugs... It's leading by example.... I think if that is instilled, the younger we can do it in the younger kids, that will just be part of what it is as they get older.... And just making other good community connections to other families and stuff, too.*

Regarding youth activities, a parent who spends at least two nights a week at Wachiy said,

*I think more outdoorsy stuff, crafty stuff [is needed].*

To encourage more youth, parents, and Elders to be involved in activities, one parent said:

*Having more community stuff, and that would entice people to come out and just see and think, 'Well, maybe this isn't so bad.'*

This parent relates activities to a sense of belonging to the community:

*It's about, I guess, having a sense of community.... I think on some level everybody, no matter how old or young you are, we all want to feel like we belong to something.*

One parent explained why she feels activities are important for youth:

*Gives them a different avenue.... It keeps them busy, keeps them out of trouble.*

Another parent mentioned that consistency with programs and staffing is important:

*I think consistency on behalf of the people who are running them. As a parent I feel the best consistency is the best way to keep things going and moving. I think pretty much everything the programs are doing ... skating, horseback riding, dog sledding...*

Parents would like to keep activities going through all seasons. One parent talked about affordable activities for winter and summer:

*I think more family ... for families that can get out there and do it.... More family-oriented camps in the summertime.... Keep our kids busy. More affordable ... either free or affordable. 'Cause a lot of things aren't affordable.*

Another parent described traditional activities her children participate in at the Centre:

*Just recently my kids did "The Good Hunt" that was here at the Centre.... So my kids learned how to go hunting. This next step they are going out to kill something ... kill a deer.... They can choose to be a part of the kill. My kids chose to be a part of the kill, the skinning and the whole process ... learning everything, like respect and the mourning song.*

The same parent suggested programs specifically for girls:

*Like a girls' weekend. I think if we catch our girls young enough and we instill self-worth and all that kinds of stuff ... then they have a better chance.... I don't want to say they aren't going to succeed, but just that little more seed in them to empower them with self-worth.*

Most of the youth wanted to encourage others to participate in cultural programs and activities, and, like the parents we talked to, suggested that advertising would help to get others involved.



### *Keeping Children out of Care*

When the parents were asked how to keep children out of care, their replies conveyed one important need:

*A stronger support system.*

One parent said that parents need to be aware that Ministry involvement is not something that will “stay with you forever”:

*There is this misconception that if you have been dealing with MCFD that it is always going to be there.*

The same parent talked about how some parents fear asking for help and the stigma that is linked with needing help:

*There has to be a fine line where, if you need help, you need it ... and you shouldn't be afraid to ask for help. And that if you do ask for help it doesn't mean you are weak and it doesn't mean that you are a poor parent or any of that.*

*There shouldn't be any shaming for a parent that is asking for help. Because we are already as a First Nations people are shamed for asking for help.*

An Elder's suggestion for keeping kids out of care was to “work with parents”:

*When I was working ... they would apprehend the children and return the children without ... trying to work with the parents. So that the parents can be more prepared to be parents, see where their ... weaknesses were, and build up – build them up so that when they got their children back, they would be better equipped to look after them. But they would never do that. Parenting skills are a must.*



Parents offered suggestions on how parents and families can be supported:

*Parent burnout ... is one thing that happens quite regularly with our FASD kids and therefore they go up for fostering, which is just not acceptable anymore.*

*We need respite care for some of our families. That's something that should just be mandatory.*

*We need to support our families more with healthier lifestyles, healthier living kind of classes. We need to have ... maybe a health nurse on site. We need to have someone for the kids to talk to, the parents to talk to in confidence.... We need to get back to the community support of Elders, youth, children, and parents ... the sense of belonging, the sense of ... something that's so important.*

### **WACHIAY'S KEY ROLE IN ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS**

Everyone from youth to Elders feels a sense of belonging at Wachiay Friendship Centre. All four of the parents expressed that they feel it as soon as they enter the building, and one also noted:

*The friendship centre gives the youth here a good place to belong. And the programs are inviting for them to come in and be a part of. And I think that's so important, before we lose our youth.*

An Elder remarked:

*What I really appreciate is the connection with other Aboriginal people. I love going to the Elders' lunch and events at the Big House and just – I think what that offers me is a sense of belonging.*

A youth described Wachiay this way:

*They're always there when you need help.... It's just like if you needed a hand you could come in.*

Parents find that Wachiay provides a multitude of community supports:

*[They are] supportive of the youth anyway, for sure.... There are a great amount of supports ... different workshops, suicide prevention, drug and alcohol prevention.*



The four parents who were interviewed access the friendship centre weekly – and sometimes a few times a week, depending on the activities being provided.

*The centre as a whole has been totally wonderful.*

*One of the things that brings me in here is ... the FASD support group... We have an awesome group of people that are in need of the extra support and knowing that they're not alone.*

One parent feels that Wachiay has done a lot to help with her goals for her family:

*Just having a great support system to come here to the centre, having [the children] come here and having that sense of belonging and community. Because we don't have family here, so this is that family for them.*

Elders talked about meeting “us, Natives” through the friendship centre’s activities, like Wednesday luncheons, swimming, and trips to other island communities.

A parent shared her perception of how Wachiay has supported youth in their education:

*We've been honoured to be at a lot of graduations and seeing more kids graduate, which is like incredible... [It's] due to the people and leadership that's here.... It's nice that [the youth] have a sense of self ... and hopefully they will go on to more education and better things for themselves ... and show them ... you have the power to be what you want to be.... If we encourage that in them, to go farther ... and believe in themselves.*

Wachiay Friendship Centre is meeting community needs in other ways, too, including important collaborations with community partners. For example, Wachiay was instrumental in getting an in-house Aboriginal nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital.



## SERVICE GAPS

While Wachiay Friendship Centre meets many community needs, some service gaps were identified by the clients.

### *Increased Outreach*

Many of the people we talked to, from youth to Elders, identified a need for more advertising and greater outreach to get more people involved in Wachiay's programs.

### *On-Site Support for Health and Well-Being*

Several people talked about the need for health professionals on site for those who need services:

*I always think about people's health and where they're at in their own lives and I would love to see a nurse on site here. I would love to see a counsellor on site here for youth and for adults. Even for mothers like myself that just need to vent after a bad day of parenting. (a parent)*

*Can we not have [an Aboriginal nurse] here like one day a week or something? And if [people are] not feeling really comfortable or not know what to do they could kind of have an appointment with the nurse and discuss that and they could say 'Okay, well, you really do need to see a doctor' or, you know, get some health advice. I think that would be good ... get an eye doctor to come and do eye exams [and have someone to] check their feet, especially for Elders and diabetes and things.*

*More resources, for sure.... I wouldn't say more programming, just more resources, as in more people, manpower. So instead of one outreach worker with John Howard, you need to have two or you might need to have three ... or you might need a male or a female.*

*Some motivational speakers [could] come in and lift the parents up, lift the children up.*

### *Support for Crises*

A parent identified a need for more staffing to meet the immediate crises of families:

*Things to change about community: lack of accessibility.... Say, when you're in crisis and to find somebody that is there when you need them, not two weeks after or tomorrow afternoon. I've seen that myself, that when you need something quick, there isn't all that availability of people or resources.*

### *More Parenting Programs*

A parent suggested that a parent support group would be helpful where parents could encourage each other and brainstorm on childrearing issues. Other suggestions included:

*Maybe having educational pieces for parents and programs for expected mothers and things that are healthy and stuff like that.*

*Healthy baby programs ... and the Centre could start some of that kind of programming ... go over good nutrition ... 'cause really people tend to parent the way they were parented ... you only do as good as you can with the information that you have.*

### *Support for Youth*

While parents feel that Wachiay Friendship Centre provides some great programs for the youth, two parents noted a service gap:

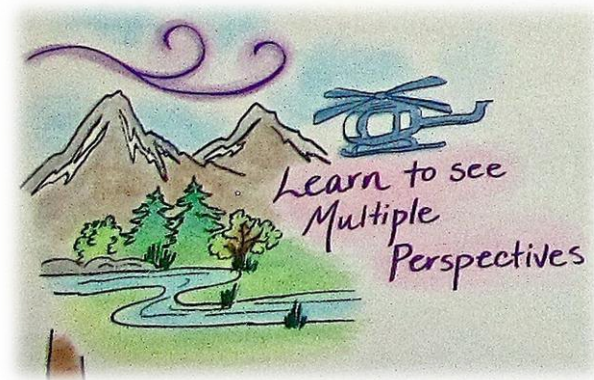
*I think that is what we're lacking in this centre. We have ... supports like going out and doing the gym class or whatever, but who's actually talking to the kids about their lives and what's going on? Who's teaching them how to live within our community? You know, we need those classes. We need to make [the youth] feel good. We need to go back to making them proud of who they are.*

*We need to have more outreach for our kids ... not a clinical person ... but someone like, you know, that's in a pair of jeans or a t-shirt that can sit and talk to youth. Be available on their time and on their space. I think that'd be wonderful. Maybe then [the youth] can find some release.... Have an open door policy.*

### *More Programs for Families*

Some people identified a need for family programs. One parent, for example, said:

*The centre doesn't meet certain age groups. You know, like, there's no mother group here. We used to at one time, a very long time ago, which I really, really enjoyed was family meal night. It was absolutely fantastic. And we had classes afterwards.... It was great ... absolutely wonderful. My kids looked forward to it.... It was just a good social night to meet up with everybody and kind of relax for the night. So, that's something I'd like to have come back [to create a healthy community].*



### More Programs for Elders

Some of the Elders said they would like the friendship centre to do more for Elders; one Elder wants more daytime activities because she doesn't like to go out when it's dark.

*'Cause there's nothing for me to go in there for. You know, there's no program, nothing. And everything's done at night. And I don't like walking in dark.*

Elders want someone to keep in contact with them and to answer their questions (e.g., they have concerns about their health benefits). In particular, they want other people to understand what they have gone through and they hope for a genuine helping relationship to emerge between diverse groups.

### *More Cultural Programming, Especially for Youth*

The Elders identified a need for more West Coast language and culture in all programs for First Nations individuals and groups.

They also talked about a circle with the youth, with programs that focus on harvesting and preparing food, to teach youth about traditional foods.

Two Elders said they would like to do more activities with K'omoks First Nation, and they stressed the importance of cultural activities for the community's youth.

*There's a [Big] House in Comox but we don't seem to get invited. You know what I mean? We don't know what they're doing. You know, they've got a [Big] House [and] they should get together with us over here and talk, talk about it. You know, to teach kids about our cultural dance and stuff.... It would be good for the kids, you know, once a month or something.*

*You know ... children were the heart of our people. I can remember my mom and dad and all my older people calling us [words in Aboriginal language]. Meaning 'you are the reason' – our children are our reason for being. They are an extension of who we are.*

## **PART 4: 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 publically 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	3				
I am able to do lots of activities on my reserve	1	2			
I feel accepted by others.	1	2			
I am learning from the Elders	2	1			
I get enough support in order to succeed at school		2	1		
I feel safe in the community	2	1			
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	1	1	1		

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

### *Survey Analysis*

Three youth were surveyed. The surveys indicate that they strongly agree that learning about culture is important. The next strongest agreement was in the areas of learning from Elders and feeling safe. The youth also indicated that they are always or often learning about their culture. Drugs and alcohol do not frequently have an impact on the lives of these three youth.

## Parent Survey Summary

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learning my culture is important	5				
There are enough cultural activities for families in my community		1		4	
There are enough activities for youth in my community		1		4	
I would like to spend time supporting the youth of my community	4	1			
I feel accepted by others	3			1	1
Adequate support is available for adults/parents		1	1	3	1
I have adequate, safe housing	3		1	1	
Adequate support is available for youth		2		3	
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	2	1	1	1	

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

### *Survey Analysis*

Five parents were surveyed. The surveys indicate that they strongly agree that learning about culture is important; however, they disagree that there are enough cultural activities for families and activities for youth. Parents agreed that they would like to spend time supporting the community's youth. Three out of five parents disagree that there is adequate support available for youth.

## Elder Survey Summary

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

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

### *Survey Analysis*

Two Elders in the 55–64 age range were surveyed. Both Elders would like to support youth and often spend time with youth. Both Elders speak their Native language frequently and know a lot about their culture.



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