

# Caring For Our Own Children

Voices of Our Communities



We Wai Kai First Nation

## **To the People of We Wai Kai Nation**

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



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## **PART 1: SASAMANS SOCIETY**



**Strengthening “Our Children” and families in a  
community-driven, culturally appropriate manner.**

## 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 members of the We Wai Kai Nation.

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

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

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

These themes are providing the foundation for community engagement sessions with children, youth, parents, and Elders. First, the Sasamans team developed guiding questions about these topics to pose in individual conversations and group discussions. Next we developed work plans to guide the collection of information from our 15 member communities (12 First Nations and 3 urban Aboriginal organizations).

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

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<sup>1</sup> Dzawada'enuxw First Nation, Quatsino First Nation, We Wai Kai First Nation, and Wachaiy 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).

one of three groups (children and youth, parents, and Elders) in all of the selected communities.

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 the community 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 We Wai Kai community.

### **PART 3: WE WAI KAI NATION**



## **Community Summary**

The We Wai Kai Nation, located in Cape Mudge Village on Quadra Island and on Quinsam Reserve in Campbell River, has about 1,000 members, about half of whom live off reserve.

As part of the community engagement process, the Sasamans team met with a significant representational sample of the community, including:

- Sixteen youth (nine females and seven males) ranging in age from 11 through 19.
- Nine parents (all female) ranging in age from 30 to 56.
- Ten younger Elders (six males and four females) ranging in age from 58 to 63.
- Fourteen older Elders (three male and eleven female) aged 65 to 88.

In addition to the conversations, 11 youth, 25 parents, and 21 Elders filled out surveys. The complete survey results are included in the appendices. Please note that the youth and Elder surveys were modified partway through the community engagement process, so two summaries are included for each of those groups.

## **Key Findings**

- 1) Keeping youth engaged in positive activities is considered key in supporting them to be safe and healthy. The community would like to see more activities, and more opportunities for the whole community to come together.
- 2) Elders, parents and youth clearly articulated the desire to learn more about their culture in the context of: language, storytelling, drumming, singing, artwork and making regalia.
- 3) Elders spoke of the need to utilize the old band office in the village for Elders and youth programs separately or combined.
- 4) Parents, family, and community members serve as important role models for children and youth.
- 5) The community offers services to youth, parents and Elders, however it was found that not all members are aware of these services and/or don't utilize these services.
- 6) Many community members communicated that keeping children out of government care requires a focus on cultural identity and traditional knowledge, and advocacy for parents and Elders.
- 7) For children and families in government care, they must keep children connected to their families, communities, and culture while they are in care.

## **Service Gaps**

- 1) Community-run, community-driven safe house for children and families:
  - Identify safe homes
  - Aboriginal staff
  - Based on Aboriginal cultural values and medicines
- 2) A daycare in the summer months.
- 3) Advocacy for parents and Elders on Child Protection rights.
- 4) Traditional Healing programs for community and families.
  - Residential school impacts
  - Mental health and addictions
- 5) Youth restorative justice program to address some of the youth mischiefs ie: break-ins

## Community Profile

The people of We Wai Kai Nation live in two communities: Cape Mudge Village on southwestern Quadra Island and Quinsam Reserve in northwestern Campbell River.



### CAPE MUDGE VILLAGE

Located in Cape Mudge village is the original band administration office for the We Wai Kai Nation, as well as a number of community buildings and amenities, including: a preschool/daycare, recreation hall, wharf, cemetery, church, park, community garden, swimming pool and the Cape Mudge Boat Works. Points of interest include the Nuyumbalees Cultural Center, TsaKwaLuten Lodge, and the ancient petroglyphs found on the shores of the waterfront village.

### QUINSAM RESERVE

There are approximately 85 homes located on Quinsam Reserve, with plans for a 42-home residential subdivision currently under development. Both Cape Mudge and Quinsam reserves have their band administration offices in Quinsam, with this reserve also serving as the location of the Cape Mudge Band Learning Centre, Aboriginal Head Start Program, the Quinsam Crossing Economical Development Area, and Quinsam Crossing gas station. The Quinsam Centre, also on Quinsam Reserve, houses Kwakiutl District Council (KDC) Health, Aboriginal Aquaculture, Nanwakolas, and Musgamagw Tribal Council Office (MTC). The Centre also contains a gymnasium, kitchen, board room, and office spaces, and thus provides a central location for community activities.

In the Salish language, Quinsam means "resting place."





## POPULATION

The We Wai Kai First Nation has an on-reserve member population of approximately 128 people at Cape Mudge Reserve and another 205 at the Quinsam Reserve.

Breakdown of on-reserve population totals for We Wai Kai First Nation							
	Cape Mudge total	Male	Female		Quinsam Reserve total	Male	Female
0-6 yrs	4	3	1	0-6 yrs	15	9	5
7-11 yrs	4	2	2	7-11 yrs	10	7	3
12-17 yrs	6	3	3	12-17 yrs	18	9	9
18-24 yrs	10	4	6	18-24 yrs	23	16	7
25-34 yrs	21	14	7	25-34 yrs	31	19	12
35-55 yrs	37	21	16	35-55 yrs	58	33	25
55-64 yrs	24	12	12	55-64 yrs	25	16	9
65+ plus	22	11	11	65+ plus	25	9	16
	128				205		

## SERVICES

The We Wai Kai First Nation provides a number of services, including social development and education programs, adult in-home care, membership registration, and youth and Elders programs. The We Wai Kai First Nation also liaises with the Ministry of Children and Family Development on behalf of its community members.

In recognition that children are a precious resource, the Cape Mudge Band Head Start preschool program is provided in both communities. The program has six components: culture and language, education, health, nutrition, parent and family involvement, and social development.

The Head Start program offers a warm, accepting, and caring environment for both children and their families. Morning, afternoon, and full-day programs are available. One of the priorities of Head Start is to connect young children to their community's language and culture while reaching families with important services. These services include home visits, a prenatal and parent resource library, and resources and activity bins.



In both the Cape Mudge and Quinsam Reserves, a variety of KDC Health workers deliver services to community members. This team of workers includes: the community health representative (CHR), the community health and homecare nurse (CHHN), the home and community care coordinator, the arthritis coordinator, the critical incident stress response coordinator, and the community wellness worker. In addition to offices for health staff, KDC Health houses an exercise room, infrared sauna, and kitchen for community meals.

### **MCFD Services to the community**

The only service that the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) currently supports in the Cape Mudge and Quinsam communities is the Aboriginal infant Development Program (AIDP). The AIDP is offered through the Laichwiltach Family Life Society, a community organization located off-reserve in Campbell River.

## **Community Engagement Process**

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

Beginning in July 2010, Sasamans Society met with key members of the We Wai Kai to provide an overview of the Society's vision, goals, and work plan and to discuss the hiring process for the community engagement team. In October 2010, a memorandum of understanding was signed between We Wai Kai and Sasamans Society, and a We Wai Kai member was appointed to sit on the Sasamans board.

The Sasamans team began a process of community engagement in October 2011, which included:

- Attending training sessions and meetings;
- Building relationships with community members on Quinsam and Cape Mudge reserves;
- Planning and participating in a local youth conference in Campbell River;
- Contributing to a strategic planning process;
- Presenting Sasamans Society's work to the We Wai Kai community at the Kwakiutl District Council Assembly; and
- Conducting individual and group conversations with youth, parents, and Elders.

In the late fall of 2011, digital recordings of conversations with community members were rendered anonymous so as to protect confidentiality, and sent to a third-party professional for transcription. The Sasamans team then reviewed the transcripts to identify key themes. From this work, the team was able to analyse the rich information provided by We Wai Kai community members. This information serves as the foundation of this report.

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

#### *Youth*

Sixteen youth (nine female and seven male) from We Wai Kai participated; ten in individual conversations and six through a group format. The youth ranged in age from 11 to 19.

#### *Parents*

Nine We Wai Kai parents took part in individual conversations with the Sasamans team. All of the parents were female and ranged in age from 30 to 56.

#### *Elders*

The Sasamans team interviewed 24 Elders, nine male and fifteen female, ranging in age from 58 to 88.

## Community Conversations

The Sasamans team appreciates the community's active participation in this process, and the open and heartfelt responses offered by participants.

During the rich individual and group conversations held with members of the We Wai Kai, participants shared their knowledge of cultural teachings and traditional knowledge, the impacts of colonization and forced residential schooling, current challenges faced by community members, as well as suggestions for how to build strong families and communities and keep children out of government care.

In this section, conversations with participating We Wai Kai community members are summarized. To maintain the integrity of the wisdom shared by community members, direct quotes are used as much as possible. In a few cases, quotes have been slightly changed to make them more readable or to avoid identifying individual participants.

Community conversations built on the themes identified in the data collected from youth at the Painting Our Way and Maya'xala youth gatherings in March 2011.

### THE WE WAI KAI COMMUNITY

Participants shared their diverse thoughts and feelings about their community. Many people described their connection to their community as rooted in land, culture or family. One of the younger Elders described having a sense of place in the community:

*We belong here, and it's easy to see that and it's easy to ... understand....  
That's the best way I could describe it. You know, you walk out the door,  
you look around, and we've always been here.*

Elders described how living close to family and with their own people brings a sense of belonging:

*Most people here I'm related to.... We're a big  
family. And I like to be near my family and my  
people....*

*I grew up with people that were close, people that  
really care for each other and what happens to each.  
There's anybody sick, we all care.*



Another parent articulated that a sense of belonging allows for “a good sense of community and a togetherness”. Other parents stated:

*We all know each other and I think we're pretty comfortable with each  
other. Like, if problems arise and stuff, you can talk to other people in the  
community.*

*When we get together ... it's a togetherness thing.... I wish that we ... got  
together more often. Like with things like this ... even if ... people just  
come to eat and go.... I wish that would happen more, that people would  
come more.*

*To me it's a good community and it always has been.*

One Elder in the community spoke about the sense of security she feels in the community saying:

*We don't lock our door at night ... a real sense of security, safety, and trust.*

When We Wai Kai youth were asked what they like about their community, some commented that residents are “friendly here” and “everyone’s just nice.” A few older youth mentioned how “we all know each other” or have “grown up with each other.” Younger youth talked about playing with friends and doing activities together, such as soccer, tag, bike riding, or being involved with the youth group.



### **Traditional Knowledge**

The community generously shared their collective knowledge of culture and language, hospitality, respect, family, and traditional parenting with the Sasamans team. The following sections attempt to summarize this important knowledge, which was cited by many participants as being central to building strong communities and families.

#### *The Importance of Culture and Language*

Although many people spoke about a need for more opportunities for cultural learning around art, singing, dancing and drumming, a variety of participants described the rich traditional knowledge and cultural practices that continue to guide their people. At the *Voices of Our Elders* gathering organized by Sasamans in March, 2012, participating Elders described how traditional culture and knowledge is not a list of protocols or skills, but rather a set of practices that guide day-to-day living. A We Wai Kai parent emphasized this:

*We're very culture wise in day-to-day kind of living. Like we really take care of each other. Like that way. Day-to-day living culturally more so than the dancing and the singing and that kind of stuff.*

Similarly, a youth described the day-to-day practices learned through traditional cultural teachings:

*Reflect[ing] on things from the past.... They teach you to share.... Others are important first, 'cause like potlatches ... get good people skills ... getting along for the people. Cooperating.*

Language and culture were mentioned by several people as being deeply connected to the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from. This was also a central message relayed at the Elders gathering. As one We Wai Kai Elder stated:

*You have to know who you are. My grandfather used to tell me, 'You take yourself wherever you go.'*

Describing the positive impact that participating in cultural activities has on youth, another Elder asserted:

*I believe that the kids can learn who they are and where they're from and have a better feeling about themselves. And this is where a lot of our youth go wrong ... they don't know where they belong.*

Echoing this, a younger Elder shared that being connected to culture has had a positive impact on their life:

*[It] settled me down. Like, early years, like from 21 up to, like 30s and early 40s, I wasn't worried about culture and that. Yeah. And I seen where people are coming back and going into it, and I started thinking about ... that's the right way to do. Instead of going on through my life the way it was going.*

### *Hospitality*

Hospitality was mentioned as an important aspect of living in the We Wai Kai community. One of the younger Elders remembered how it used to be in his grandparents' house:

*Their house was always open to everyone. And if you came to visit, you ate. If you didn't eat, it was like an insult. The table was open, the house was open. And I think that one aspect of the Native culture is something that I really appreciate. I just think that, you know, what's mine is yours.*

This Elder went on to describe how traditional notions and practices of hospitality have changed:

*This has changed over the years. Yeah, it has. More people are starting to buy into capitalism. You know, I have more than you. Comparisons between people. Ah, what they don't understand is life's not about possessions, it's about character. It's not what you have, it's who you are.*

### *Respect*

Respect was mentioned as central to the practice of cultural values. One Elder carries on his grandparents' teachings about respect by sharing how to treat others with his children:

*We show that person respect by giving them our time.... You keep that in mind for the rest of your life.*





Another Elder clearly remembers the teachings about respect offered to him by his mother. This Elder recalls his mother telling him:

*You are to treat them [community members] with respect. Because we all have to get along, we all live in the same village, but we always help each other ... We all chip in to help that family, or that person. And if there are some families, people, that need a little bit of help, we will all give them that little bit of help. And there are some families that don't need any help at all. They get along quite well without anyone. But we don't ignore them. We always respect their achievements, we talk to them. We don't just abandon, exclude them from our daily life.*



Respect was also practiced towards all living creatures and the natural environment. As one Elder stated:

*[In] celebrating the salmon – putting the salmon back into the ocean when we get our first feed of fish. They had a ceremony for that. They didn't just take, take, take – they had to give back. Those are all the things we were taught. You don't just take everything, you take care of that berry patch, you take care of that clam bed. You take care of this river. You take care of this, you take care of that. You take care of everything.*

### *Family*

Community members described the importance of family, and what their families have taught them:

*To be proud of yourself, to work hard ... to help people .... I think mostly just to be proud of yourself, and be proud of your family. And do your best.... I mean, our family has all the problems every family has, but ... just stick together. Right? And that's probably the best thing. Keep close and always talk about things, and don't try to hide, and if you have a problem, come and talk to somebody about it. (Parent)*

*Family is important; family should come first before all else. (Youth)*

As a youth, one Elder's role models were his parents. This Elder's parents and family taught him how to treat people, and their teachings nurtured self-confidence in him.

Another parent explained how she encourages her children to communicate openly:

*I've always told my kids, you know, you can talk to me, and that's why I'm here. I'm here to guide you and answer any questions or try to help you solve problems.... So just for my kids, they shouldn't feel alone 'cause we've told them, you know, were always here for you. Friends come and go. Family is always there.*



### *Traditional Parenting*

The traditional, culturally-rooted approach to parenting was described by several Elders as one that involves not only parents, but whole families and communities. One Elder explained that in the past, children belonged to the entire community:

*My granny told me that in the Big House, long before my time, but certainly in her time, families lived in Big Houses and they all took care of each other. One child didn't belong to a certain family just because they were blood related. That child belonged to the whole community. And everyone took care of that child. If a family was to go out fishing, they didn't go and say, 'Could you look after my kids?' They just knew that their children would be taken care of by the members of that community, that house.*

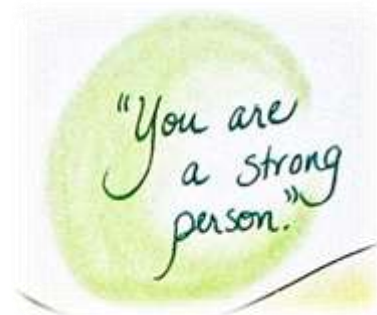


One of the We Wai Kai Elders described a First Nations approach to raising children:

*The community is a base of whatever happens in a life of a person. When a baby is born, we all take care of that infant. We nurture that child. We become models for that child.... We make sure that child is brought up in a right manner of everything that's gonna affect how that child becomes as a grown person. We nurture the outcome of how that child makes decisions, the right choices. Everybody needs to be part of that child's upbringing to make sure that child becomes healthy and happy. But above all, safe and strong.*

As Elders explained at the Sasamans gathering in March, children were valued as sacred gifts from the Creator. Traditional names and naming feasts were some of the ways that children were honoured and welcomed into the world:

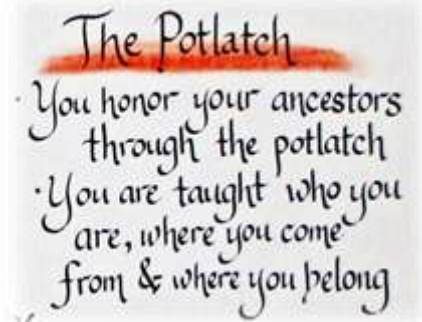
*That's another thing we used to do, was have feasts and celebrations to give names to our children. The names were important because they meant something. The names were chosen very carefully for a certain child. For instance, one child's name could be given as 'Big Mountain' because that's powerful and strong. And you'd tell that child, 'You live up to your name. Mountains are powerful, they're strong, and they have purpose.'*



Many of the Elders also talked about the important role that they play in the lives of their grandchildren:

*So that they know they're loved and that they can pass it onto theirs. Like my grandson who's 21. He was telling me about something and he says, 'You know Nanny, I was raised a bit different than them. I was raised with morals.' He spent time with me every weekend from the time he was about 9 years old and it rubs off.*

*When they have drumming in the hall in Quinsam, I used to bring my grandson.... Just to show him how – how it's done.... And if there's a potlatch, he gets mad if I don't bring him. So I usually bring him. And he knows that you don't run around in the Big House.*



One of the younger Elders reflected on the important role that his grandmother played in teaching him about the traditional ways:

*Well, as a medicine wise, doing it when – when I used to go walk with my grandparent down – down in the back and get some Indian medicine with her. So I tried to get hold of that stuff instead of using the medication from the pharmacies and that. I try to get rid of some uh rheumatism, what do you call it, the pain and all that, and arthritis and that stuff.*

### **Impacts of Colonization**

Colonization targeted traditional Aboriginal laws, cultural practices, land, and family and community structures. We Wai Kai Elders talked about the cultural bans placed on their community, and recalled some of the old people going to jail for practicing potlatch. They described that the revival of the potlatch only started in the 1980's. This section will attempt to provide a summary of how We Wai Kai community members described the direct and intergenerational impacts of colonization, including enforced residential schooling.

#### *Impacts of Enforced Residential Schooling*

One Elder powerfully described what enforced residential schooling has done to Aboriginal families and communities:

*They took the family structure away, and by doing that, they took away the children. We held our children as very sacred. They were the future. They were our ... reason for living. And our governments made sure that all the laws ... around our ... life, which was the potlatch ... was to take care of our communities but especially our children. To make sure that they were safe. That we grew up healthy and strong. Because it worked so well, the government took it away. It's not enough to apologize; governments must listen to their stories.*

While one Elder said she was glad she had gone to residential school because she “*met a lot of friends there and [she] learned a lot,*” most of the people interviewed described the experience as devastating. One parent spoke about the sense of shame that residential schools instilled:

*My mother was so ashamed to be an Indian because she was taught to be ashamed of who she was because she was in residential school ... And if she didn't speak English or she spoke her own language she was beaten ... Because she couldn't speak English. She was made to be ashamed – ‘You dirty Indian.’ They were scrubbed with lye and whatever else they did to those kids.*

Several people shared stories about how the impacts of enforced residential schooling, including shame, were sometimes passed down through the generations:

*You know, even this day it is affecting probably my grandchildren without them even knowing that it affects them.... It's devastating, the effect that it's had on all of the generations. (Parent)*

*When I first ... started getting back into the culture I was so torn, you know? Like, I felt almost guilty?... Because it was drilled into to me so ... bad when I was a kid. And then once I got past that thinking ... ‘It's not my fault’ ... that it's ok ... my parents are gone now.... But I still had that guilt that my dad wouldn't want me to be doing this. (Parent)*

This last parent went on to explain the importance of finding a way back to culture for the sake of future generations:

*But, then I think about it and think ... I have grandkids now that need to be involved in the culture of ... their ancestors, so I'm doing all right with it now.*

### *Preservation of Culture*

Processes of colonization aimed at disconnecting people from language and the cultural practices that had guided them for thousands of years. One Elder remembered:

*They took all their totem poles and all their masks away from people. They weren't allowed to do any of those potlatches and dances and that. So we didn't see too much of that. We heard of it, but we didn't see that.*

One of the younger Elders described how instilling shame was a way to detach people from their language and culture and assimilate them into “the white man's way”:

*That's what they were taught ... the people that went through residential school were taught that your language was no good and you shouldn't do that anymore and you have to learn the white man's way ... it's handed down, it's affected generations ... it's not gonna turn around unless somebody helps ... them get things going and turn them around.*

Another Elder reflected how schooling served as a tool to detach First Nations peoples from cultural teachings:

*Well, I really think that it's really sad that we never learned ... the Native stories ... that we never learned really the Native culture ... and why there was such things as potlatches and stuff like that.... We never learned anything about that in school. You think they were going to teach us that? No. No way. They wouldn't teach you ... 'cause they were trying to get you away from all that.*

One Elder described the ongoing pain caused by being separated from cultural identity:

*Like our generation, like this old lady about 85, she said she never learned to dance ... I never learned to dance. And I've talked to a few that are sitting at the potlatch that are my age and they said they never learned to dance. Like, it makes me want to cry. Because we never had it. They never had potlatches.*

People also explained how being disconnected from culture can make it hard for people to know who they are and where they come from:

*It made me feel in a lot of ways lost ... lost. Not knowing really where I came from. Not where I really belonged. (Elder)*

*A lot of the kids are lost. They're roaming around because they don't know who they are, they don't have that connection to their parents, to their grandparents ... to the ancestors ... that lived here and ... we were taught as a way of living, that way of life is almost gone. (Parent)*

A younger Elder described that efforts to erase the traditional ways have impacted the community's ability to sustain itself:

*We're so removed from the way our great-grandfathers lived. Like the whole culture of ... in great-grandfather's time, even on my dad's side and my mom's sides ... we're so removed from ... a community that was self-sustaining and that ... like, we had hereditary Chiefs in the way the system worked in that Big House, everybody knew everybody's position in the Big House, and there's no person living today who knows all the families' histories.*

Describing the change in community functioning one Elder remarked:

*When I was growing up, we didn't depend on welfare, and certainly not on Indian Affairs. We're self-sufficient people.*

Despite the impacts of colonization, We Wai Kai community members expressed a strong desire to reconnect with language, culture and traditional practices. This will be explored later on in the “Living Community Wisdom” and “Recentring Language and Culture” sections.

## Living Community Wisdom

Community members shared a lot of wisdom rooted in traditional knowledge. This section attempts to summarize the main messages communicated by participants regarding healing and wellness, Elders, respect, community connectedness, raising healthy children, and education.

### *Healing and Wellness*

Many Elders shared their wisdom about healing, and told powerful stories of strength and resilience. One Elder recalled being made to understand that a person needs to look within to make steps towards healing:

*You know, when I started, when I came to my time, my journey, you know, I was told, 'It's up to you. You're the one – you're the only person that could say yes and no, what you want to do.... You need to stop and take a look at yourself and see where you're going.' And after that it took me a year or two, and I just stopped what I was doing. Went on that safe journey after that.... It's all how the way you take [the Elders'] advice and what you do with it.*



Similarly, another Elder emphasized that people decide for themselves whether or not to seek out support:

*There's help out there. It's the point of getting it across to them to go and get the help. And it's their responsibility in their life to want to have that help. You can't force none of them.*

Many community members linked wellbeing to emotional health, and emphasized the need for emotional healing. One Elder would like to see more healing programs in the community, and encourages community members to share their story as a way of healing:

*Sharing is healing.... I wish people would come to the office and just have a big sit down and talk about, you know, what happened in their past. It ... makes it a lot better. Every time I share my story I feel better.*

An important part of healing, according to one Elder, is having the Canadian government move beyond its' official apology and really listen to the actual stories of residential school survivors:

*Not only apologize, but start the healing process right away by listening to the stories. Some children didn't even understand why they were angry at their parents for allowing strangers to take them away to a place that was not good.*

Another Elder made a powerful observation about the inadequacy of non-Aboriginal healing programs and funding models. This Elder emphasized that healing takes time, and explained:

*They think we're supposed to heal in five years or so. Everything is designated to be allotted this time frame. You're working in a time frame. Sasamans has to work in a time frame. That's ridiculous! We need to work*



*in our own frame.... Who says allot the time for this and that and everything else? That's how ... that's what ruins everything. We need to go back to our own structure. Time didn't matter 'til the work got done. Time was the most valuable lesson we had to learn.*

Community members also described how wellness is tied to an ability to manage stress. Stress was identified as a major factor affecting health, and many participants shared stress-reduction strategies. Youth displayed an awareness and wealth of ideas in this regard. Some of the youth talked about connecting with people to “*talk about things*” and to “*help them, guide them.*” Others said that they turn to the gym, music, outdoor sports like soccer, social activities, going for walks, gaming, and even crying to reduce the impact of stress on the body, mind, and spirit.

One of the Elders described a stress-relieving strategy that she calls “*a healthy revenge*”:

*The best revenge is a healthy revenge in that you make yourself healthy and all of a sudden things are not so stressful. You're not angry, you're healthy. And healthy can be ... looking after yourself. You know, exercising and all of those. Exercise is a big thing. To get that stress out. But, you know, changing what's not working. So you need to change it to make it work and then you've problem solved. You've gotten healthy. And now you've got different eyes on about yourself.*



One young person explained a unique stress reducer learned in school:

*[W]e all like passed around a sheet, like you write your name on it. You can see it. You just like, go around the whole class and someone writes something nice to you.... [Teacher] said whenever you're having a bad day, just look at it.*

When it comes to physical wellness, the importance of traditional medicines was emphasized:

*Our forest is always our pharmacy ... Before contact there were all these things available. All the material was there. There was no such thing as an aspirin, or a Tylenol, or, whatever type of pill your doctor gives you today. There were naturally grown herbs and medicines in the forest and on the land that our people used for tea and poultice.... The natural medicines were always available. And I think we need to at that aspect of healing again. There are people today who are trying to teach about the natural medicines, and we need to involve them in our communities. (Elder)*



### *The Important Role of Elders*

Elders were described by community members as holding a central role in the heart of the community. They are seen as the storytellers, the carriers of wisdom and knowledge on culture, and how to be in the world. When the youth were asked what they learned from the Elders, they answered: *“they try to teach us things from the past, more about our culture and our language”*; they teach *“about residential school”*; and *“...explain that treaty stuff to us”*.

One young person said, *“They told us stories and we just sit there and listen and ask them more about it”* and another shared that Elders had taught, *“... sharing ... being here for other people”*.

Youth described how Elders teach with respect and care:

*They don't yell at you; they're understanding; they're nice ... really kind.... They use soft words.*

*They're really supportive, and if you ever had to ask any questions they'd tell you or find a way.*



The majority of parents who spoke with the Sasamans team expressed a heartfelt desire in getting to know Elders and *“hearing their stories.”* Parents commented on how spending time with Elders in the community creates important links to the past that provides a sense of comfort:

*They're funny.... I just like having them around.... There's just a sense of comfort, and there's wisdom, and talking with them. And they just always make you feel good when you see them. They're really good for your spirit to be around.*

*I think it's so important. Where does our memories come from if we don't have the stories?*

One parent described Elders as welcoming and *“willing to share stories and knowledge with you if you have time to spend with them”*.

Elders recognize the central role that they play in their community, and articulated a strong sense of responsibility. Strength comes from *“the old people's knowledge,”* one Elder said, and she believes that it is her responsibility to pass it on:

*I think they all have the same beliefs – all Aboriginal people: looking after our land, looking after our children. They're all knowledge keepers of what has happened in the past. And I always look to my Elders because they are our knowledge keepers and they would know ... I would pass that knowledge on. I nurture my children and my grandchildren, and now my great-grandson. And whoever will listen.*



As a grandparent, one Elder described the joy that comes from this role:

*... how important it is for us to play with him [grandson], to be with him, to watch him grow, to teach him things. When you're a parent it's probably the hardest thing – the hardest job you've ever taken on. But as a grandparents, it's almost a second chance.*

Another Elder emphasized the need for members of the community to spend time with Elders because these inter-generational relationships lead to stronger family and community ties:

*You're hanging around with the old people – it's really important. It makes ... your obligation to your community a lot more ... important. Or it makes it easier. You know, even understanding differences between right and wrong. 'Cause if you respect the old people ... you're party to their discussions and their humour ... their feeling for each other and their families and all that type of stuff. That kind of bond between everybody that lives here, that you know, that have a solid feeling for the community. And ... an understanding that they do have a role in society.... Then it kind of passes down automatically to ... the people in ... your world.*

A younger Elder believes that his generation has an responsibility to do a good job in helping youth by developing a rapport with them:

*You know. I don't know all the kids on the reserve but ... when you see 'em in groups and you got somebody there that's – that's, you know like, part of your extended family or whatever that you have a rapport with well ... what's the problem stopping them, shootin' the breeze and saying hello?*

One parent reflected on the importance of learning from Elders:

*Some of the language and ... they love telling stories about the way things used to be. And I learned a lot from that. Their experiences and just talking about Cape and what it used to look like and who lived where. And kind of taught me the ... family connections.*

In recognition of the important role that Elders play in the community, several people expressed a desire for more opportunities for youth to get together with Elders. One parent stated that they would like to see:

*[m]ore involvement with Elders and youth, like together. When we grew up ... we always spent time with our Elders. Like my granny and all the other Elders. I think the Elders had a lot more say back then. Like, they weren't afraid to come and speak out if someone was doing something wrong, or to help people.... Now I find a lot of people ... feel it's like butting into their lives.*

## *Respect*

Numerous community members expressed that respect is extremely important. One youth learned from an Elder:

*To listen to others ... so then you can hear others' perspectives; no bullying and just be nice to each other.*

A parent explained that learning from Elders has led her to strive to respect herself:

*I think that a lot of the teachings teach you self-awareness and it also teaches you to be a better person.... Like a lot of the Elders that I've been exposed to have a great ... respect for themselves ... I want to be like that.... I say I'm an Elder in training.*

When asked about something that would support the development of a healthier community, one parent stated:

*[A]ccepting one another. We don't have to all be the same. We don't have to have all the same views.... But be respectful of each other and what ... people do.*



## *Knowing Who You Are and Where You Come From*

As previously mentioned, knowing who you are and where you come from were described at the *Voices of Our Elders* gathering in March as one of the most important things in life. A younger We Wai Kai Elder asserted that getting to know your background is “paramount among First Nations people”.

Someone else described the importance of knowing who you are:

*But I think in the end they just need to learn who they are and just be that in spite of everybody else. (Younger Elder)*

For several of the Elders, strengthening the cultural identity of First Nations youth should be an important aspect of their education. One person expressed certainty that this new generation will be proud:

*I think for our kids' sake I think they need to know where they came from, what used to happen and just feel proud. [I] think the generation growing up now is going to be different. I think they're going to be more surer of themselves and feel proud of who they are, and they're getting educated and still feeling good about their culture. (Younger Elder)*

One parent recalled being taught about cultural pride:

*[W]e've always really been taught to be really proud of who we are. And to stand tall even if people say stuff about you, pick on you...*



### *Community Connectedness*

Many people expressed a strong desire to foster strong community unity with one parent affirming, *“I think we need to bring our whole band together”*. Community members had insightful and creative ideas regarding how to foster unity. One parent emphasized that more communication is the key, stating:

*I think we just have to have more input with the community, with the Elders. And with the Elders, the youth, and with the council and that.*

Another parent brought the idea of community unity back to culture and traditional knowledge. This parent shared that community cohesion can be strengthened by going back to:

*[c]ultural potlatch law of living in a circle. They need to know that they're not better than this person, this person's not less than they are, that we're all equal valued people in the community and that everybody should have a place in the community.*



Many people said that the key to a strong community is *“more social interaction”*, including more cultural activities. Recalling the past, one parent offered feedback on what is needed for a stronger community:

*I think even, just community gatherings. I remember a long time ago when I was young, a long time ago with my grandparents, we used to all get together and play different games – Indian games. We'd all get together and have dinner and we'd play like Indian games. Just fun things just to bring you together.*

One Elder recalled a time when Elders used to gather on the beach:

*Without any, you know, planned activity ... They said on nice summer days sometime they used to just take their chairs and go down towards the beach. And they'd just sit there, and just talk. You know, spontaneously. I guess we've gotten away from that.*

One parent noted that a strong community can act as a huge support for individuals and families who are struggling:

*That's when I was young. I knew my dad drank, and there was problems in the village, but it always seemed to work out 'cause they were all down the beach pulling up boats and working together.*

Several people voiced their desire for a more connected community:

*Acceptance [of everyone, with] the youth and the Elders get[ting] together more often. I'd like to see more of that come about ... just more openness too, between them. (Parent)*

*Just work ... together instead of apart ... be one family again like it used to be, everyone worked together to keep the village going. (Younger Elder)*



### *Raising Healthy Children*

Community members shared their wisdom about parenting healthy children. One of the main messages that emerged is that children and youth learn from parents, family and community members who serve as role models:

*[Children are] the mirror of what you are. That's what I always tell my daughter. So whatever you do, they're gonna do it. (Elder)*

*But it's like that with the youth in every aspect, they need somebody to help them get them there. Somebody who can work alongside them for a while to ensure they understand, get them there. (Younger Elder)*



Others described the importance of supportive parenting:

*It's hard. It is so hard to be a parent and really, really know the right thing. But to know that what you do affects the child no matter what it is. If it's violence, that kid's going to be violent. [If] it's loving, that kid's going to be loving no matter what. (Elder)*

*[Kids need] more of ... the parents being around them and showing them, guiding them what they need to do ... each day.... Maybe the kids can actually get ... through ... whatever troubles they're having at school or friends or ... being picked on or ... choosing the wrong things to do. (Parent)*

When the youth were asked about their role models, many said they are inspired by family members, and the values and behaviours that these individuals embody. For youth, attributes of courage, kindness, respect, stability, generosity, and compassion reflect a healthy way of being in the world. Youth described their role models as people who:

- Act responsibly
- Are respected
- “Never let anyone ... bring them down”
- Like helping other people
- Are always there

One youth explained how spending time with family creates opportunities for sharing, learning, and building on family values:

*I like being with them and making things ... talking to each other and figuring ways to do it.... Just being together and making memories...*

An Elder echoed this sentiment, saying that families, “*should have family activities and stuff where the families ... kids love that, you know, when the whole family's doing stuff*”.



Another Elder described feeling proud of the young parents in the community who support their kids in activities, and believes all parents need to “*be more involved*”:

*Not just the kids, but the parents have to be more involved, too. And like I said before, I think you're seeing that with these young parents that are having young children. Because I'm so proud of the way they're involved with them in sports. 'Cause that's a big thing – if you can keep your kids involved in school and sports you're not going to have too many problems. And if you throw culture in, that'll be even better for them. And they'll be proud of ... who they are.*

One Elder described the benefits of talking to children and youth rather than doling out discipline:

*It's one thing to be upset with kids; it's another thing to sit and say, 'Look, what you're doing is not acceptable. But here's why.' So they can understand rather than just saying 'You're not supposed to do that.' You explain why and then tell them the alternative. Well, now they've got an option.*



Several of the Elders articulated what they understand to be the needs of youth:

*They need strong parents, especially the father.... They need communication with their parents. They need – if they can't find it from their parents, then they have to find somebody else. They need to talk to somebody ... that can help, you know, sort their little brain out ... to the correct way of thinking.*

*They have to have the self-esteem.... Give them a sense of purpose or something, you know. Instead of just watching video games and TV. You know, they need to be active, doing something.*

*They need somebody to help them get them there. Somebody who can work alongside them for a while to ensure they understand, get them there.*

A younger Elder explained that, “*In earlier times, people learned from their ancestors.... Each generation teaches the next generation, right?*” Because traditional knowledge about parenting is not passed down like it used to be, this person suggested more parenting courses or workshops.

### *Education*

Following the thread of teaching and learning, many community members emphasized the importance of education. One Elder asserted:

*An education is a good thing. The more you know ... the more you are able to be more compassionate because you have a fuller understanding of the situation. People are just people. They didn't choose to be who they are; they were born who they are. They can't change their background, but they sure can do something about their future.*

Another Elder noted that education is an ongoing process:

*Education is always a lifelong thing. It never stops when you finish grade 10, 12, whatever it is.*

Elders endorse programs like Head Start because they feel that they contribute to community wellness. One Elder said that teaching “the little ones” will work to achieve balance and restore family structure:

*I see the difference in our children who go to Head Start. They complete school. They graduate. As compared to 30 years ago.... I think that was one of the best things to happen was having Head Start for all First Nations kids, not just reserve kids.*

People also spoke about the potential for education to make partying safer for youth. In describing a harm reduction approach, one youth wisely stated:

*Educate them what could happen. They're gonna want to do it anyway, so why not just teach them about it and make sure they make good decisions and be safe when they're doing it.*

A parent thinks that youth should be made aware, “of everything around [partying].... What are the repercussions?”

## **Challenges**

We Wai Kai community members talked about a number of challenges they face in their daily lives. An Elder observed the interrelated nature of these challenges:

*There's not one problem that's not tied to another problem. You know, we're talking about ... pieces of the whole. Any problem that exists within the band exists [for all First Nations] in Canada. Everything's tied together for First Nations and that's a huge issue.*



This section will attempt to summarize what community members had to say about challenges facing certain groups of people like Elders and youth, and challenges facing the community as a whole.

## **Technology**

Some people spoke about the potential of technology to disrupt interpersonal connection and community life.

*Way back a long time ago in the 40s and 50s, and even in the early 60s, people used to visit house to house.... It's not happening anymore. I think it's because of the idiot box – television.... It's been around in our communities for some 60 years, I guess. Anyway, combined with the television are these videogames. Little kids ... they shut out everything.*

Some of the younger Elders described how the changes brought about by technology are visible in the day-to-day:

*[W]hen I had my kids there was kids running around playing outside. Now we don't see any kids outside. They're probably watching TV and playing video games. Everybody's got a computer.... People just don't do things with their families anymore.*



*Kids are distracted so much by the information age now that, you know, just computers and iPhones and iPads and everything, right? So there's not necessarily any real communication going on across the table, you know?*

On the other hand, other people spoke about the benefits of technology. One of the younger Elders sees technology as a useful tool for teaching culture:

*My vision someday is having all that stuff transcribed and put on a website.*

And another believes that technology keeps people in the logging and fishing industries safer:

*[I]t makes life a lot easier. It takes the stress out of their ... lives 'cause it keeps them out of danger.*

### *Youth*

Many parents spoke fondly of the community's youth:

*[They] are pretty good kids and ... seem to be open to learning and ... experiencing new things. They seem to be a good group.*

*I think they're pretty enthusiastic.... I think they've got lots of good ideas.... They seem very open and proud and they're not really shy kind of youth. They're ... go-getters.*

*[They] all band together, play together.*

One parent remarked that they hadn't heard of any problems with youth:

*I don't hear of a lot of kids getting into trouble as much as before.... I haven't heard of no partying, or drugs or stealing.... It's pretty good up here. We haven't had any problems.*

Some Elders worry that youth are isolated. One Elder noted that being alone is not healthy, and advises youth to “ask for help” when they're in trouble. This person contributed:

*I see a lot of it and I think a lot of it has to do with home life. It also has to do with peer pressure. And a lot of them not knowing where they belong.... Because we don't know what goes on. Because some of the children you know haven't eaten or – either that or there's things going on at home. You can see the stress in a lot of the teenagers. And I'm sure a lot of it has to do with drugs.*



Two of the Elders shared their concern about the tendency of children and youth towards a fast food diet. One Elder believes young people should learn about traditional foods when they are young, and would like to see them eat more fish instead of MacDonald's.

In conversations with youth, they shared that their main sources of stress are school, family relationships, their social lives, and the future. Younger youth find the youth group stressful at times because everyone "*wants to do different things.*" Some older youth talked about "*an illness in the family*" and "*paying stuff, 'cause I break a lot of stuff.*" For others, worrying about "*what am I going to do when I am older?*" creates stress. One youth talked about the challenge of losing loved ones:

*Loss of family, that happens a lot if you are First Nation 'cause ... usually you're from a big family and you see a lot of your family members pass away. And it's really hard.*

Some We Wai Kai youth expressed that education can be challenging:

*Homework, school – that's what I stress about.*

*I kind of get overschooled ... [and] ... get overwhelmed and don't do well.*



Older youth in particular described school as a challenge. A couple of them find it difficult just "*going to school*" for financial or personal reasons.

Similarly, one parent cited education as the biggest obstacle that youth face in their lives, and said:

*I see a lot of teenagers dropping out of school. I'm not sure if they're having troubles.*

Several parents talked about the pressures kids face at school:

*I can just say, in my daughter's experience, when her friends are saying they hate her and don't want to talk to her right now ... I think that, yes, that gives her anxiety.*

*My son is very worried about bullying.... He was very worried about going to middle school ...*



Several parents noted that youth need support to complete their education, and one related this to personal experience:

*I just felt like if they were actually not at the bingo hall more, then ... they could have actually done more with us like helping us with our school...*

One younger Elder explained that some of the challenges experienced by First Nations youth in public schools are caused by a culture gap between worldviews:

*Well, it's cultural. You're asking them to come from viewing life ... having a world view in one perspective to having a world view in another perspective in a moment's notice, and you want them to change.*

Several younger Elders also mentioned that drugs and alcohol are stressors for youth in the community:

*Learning about the badness that's going on in the reserves. The drinking and the new drugs that are out there for them is stressing them out. And seeing their parents not together, and stuff like that. It's all connected.*

*The kids get ... hooked on drugs or go down that wrong road. Once they go down that road or once that ... those drugs get 'em, sometimes they just don't come back. It's sometimes impossible to get off.*

### *Elders*

Elders taking care of their grandchildren also experience a great deal of stress. One Elder would like to see “*respite for us Elders that are raising our grandchildren ... without the Ministry.*”

Some of the Elders also worry about their adult children:

*It's a lot of worrying, you know, even after they're grown up. If it's they're diabetic, or alcohol, or on drugs and stuff like that. You worry about things like that.*

Furthermore, health issues like diabetes cause worry for many people, particularly Elders. One of the younger Elders stated that some Elders have trouble accessing traditional foods. Rules limit how much fish people can take and Elders may not always get fish.

Housing may also be an issue for Elders. One Elder stated, “*I've seen Elders that have needed help with housing*”.

One Elder worries about what will happen to her family after she passes:

*And this is my biggest worry. What's going to happen to them when I'm gone? Because I'm the ... hub.*

### *Parents*

Some parents recounted dealing with a lot of stress, and shared that much of it stems from household issues, including:

*Bills and money.*

*Time management ... just trying to get all the kids ... together and playing nicely. Getting them on time to everything.*

One Elder described that the current economic situation is very difficult for some families, saying:

*Oh that there's so many needy kids.... around, hungry kids, you know? They talk about other countries and yet we've got that at home ... that didn't have enough food. Heat turned off and everything ... they need more help.*

Worrying about children and youth was mentioned as a source of stress for parents:

*When your children get up to teenage age, what they do at that stage, you worry about them. Stress you out. (Younger Elder)*

### *Impacts of Stress*

We Wai Kai youth spoke about how stress can affect a person's life and relationships. One youth summarized the stress experience this way:

*You're not going to be like your normal happy self. Well, if you are a normal happy self. So it's probably gonna affect your mood and your relationships with other people. And if it's gonna affect your workplace, you're probably ... not going to want to do anything.*

Parents described the various ways that stress can affect children and youth:

*My [child] has ... troubles really concentrating at school, actually.*

*My son could be some kind of angry some days and he just can't explain why he is.... He just sits there and mopes.*

Other parents described the long-term effects of stress, and the importance of managing it:

*[Stress] ... hinders their growth as a person and could definitely affect them in the long run and the adult they become. And like stop them from succeeding as much as they could.*

*If it's not dealt with, it's bad. I've dealt with lots of stress as well. I mean ... it can definitely get you down. You think there's no hope or no out, but I hope they can talk to somebody or figure out better ways to deal with their stress.*

*We do counselling, we do tutoring, we do all that to keep them[children] out of getting into a depression.*



Another parent figures that the impact of stress “depends on how balanced you are at ... home.... What is your support system at home?... How are you dealing with it as a family?”

### *Drugs and Alcohol*

Community members communicated that the reasons people use alcohol and drugs are complex:

*Well, the reason the people are drinking is because they had something happen to them. And if we get to the reason they were ... they started drinking, we'll get to the booze and drug problem, right? And it's ... just kinda sad, it all stems down to abuse of some kind. It could be verbal, it could be physical, or it ... could be sexual. So you don't know. It's all abuse no matter how you look at it, and the young kids gonna deal with it one way or another. Right? So, the easiest way for them to deal with it is booze and drugs. (Elder)*



*I abused drugs and alcohol before I had any respect for myself because I didn't know any better.... I mean, people that have a drinking and a drugging problem have a problem in their heart where it's not fully connected.... Alcohol and ... drugs hide all of that when they don't realize that it just makes it worse, and I think if ... at a younger age if our kids were given self-worth and that they were given value – that they were valued as a person – that we wouldn't have so many people that were lost.*  
(Parent)

Some Elders expressed concern about the use of drugs and alcohol:

*Only part I don't like [is] the boozing business, the drinking...*

*There's too much drugs and alcohol now. They should have a better program for it.*

Several people described the particular challenges that drugs and alcohol pose to families and the wider community:

*My upbringing was like that.... There was a lot of drinking and stuff.... All my brothers are alcoholics because that's all they did ... back then.*  
(Parent)

*And I think that drugs and stuff in our community are a big stress.... I think that puts a lot of stress on the community 'cause I think that it sort of separates people. It doesn't bring people together, you know? It just pushes them apart.* (Parent)

One person recalled how the community was incredibly supportive when they struggled with their family's drug and alcohol issues:

*When I was younger, I would go and talk to people about it and I attended youth groups that focused on that topic. And got help that way ...*

This person further explained what they have learned since that time:

*Now I ... focus on making myself a stronger person and not focusing on the alcohol – people with alcohol and drug problems. Don't take it on personally. Just recognize their struggles, but don't try to take it on myself.* (Parent)



### *Drugs, Alcohol, and the Community's Youth*

While some We Wai Kai youth described drugs and alcohol as a non-issue in their community, other youth described the serious impacts of drugs and alcohol:

*Drugs and alcohol take people's lives away – that's something definitely we learned.*

*[I would change] the drugs and alcohol. So it would be safer.... Just everyone to be happy and no more drugs.*

Many parents interviewed would like to see “*less alcohol and drugs*” in the community, and some worry about the risks for their children and grandchildren:

*They're finding the wrong groups of people to be out with. I find that the kids are getting younger and younger each time.... They are going out and it's kinda sad to see. Like, there are so many people that are dying at a young age right now ... and the dealers that are dealing to them, they don't even care, they don't even care what age they are.... And it's sad [because] they're killing them younger and younger each time.*

*That is one of my biggest worries – my grandchildren doing drugs.*

Regarding the issue of youth partying, one parent said, “[Partying is] a big issue for ... not just Native youth”. Another parent believes that partying has “mellowed” over the past few years and another reported that the community has been cracking down on parties. Similarly, another parent stated:

*I think overall, like our youth are not crazy partiers, I don't think.... And the adult community ... I wouldn't say it's any worse than anywhere else.*

Other parents articulated their concerns about youth attending parties. They stated some of the dangers include:

*... death, obviously ... suicide ... depression.*

*... either stabbing someone or punching them out and knocking them unconscious, and then they're actually in jail for the rest of their life.... Not making it alive the next day.... Like they could be overdosing or else they'd choose to do that one drug and then they become addicted for the rest of their life.... It's just a sad, sad life ... a sad cycle ... people ... are selling it to young youth ... and they need to be stopped.*

Several of the younger youth see partying as both a problem and a safety issue in the community:

*They don't realize they'll be destructive, and after they realize what they've done and they just regret it.*

*Some of them will either stay home ... throw parties where it's super loud music ... and they'll walk around the streets a lot in the dark.... I think that it is very dangerous in the dark 'cause you can get hit by a car.*

One of the older youth sees a connection between what people experience growing up in their families, and their relationship to drugs and alcohol:

*You just have to look at their home lives and what they're seeing, they think is normal.... It's normal for their parents to drink or do drugs, or swear ... so that's what they are going to do.... Well, just like what I said ... it has to start in our own families.*



In fact, many people mentioned that the behaviour of family members and other adults impacts children and youth:

*I definitely think we're role models for our kids.... I don't think a glass of wine with dinner or whatever is an issue. As long as you ... have it in moderation and explain to your kids that it's ... not acceptable to ... over exceed your limits. Not let it take over your life. (Parent)*

*Like I try to get ... my spouse not to smoke around the kids.... Just 'cause my little one picks out the ... cigarette and he's like 'I like daddy' .... And it's not really funny at all.... Like you often wonder, is he actually going to become a smoker? (Parent)*

*Have to get away from all this drinking and all that. 'Cause kids see that and it's just what they follow. (Elder)*

And several youth explained how adult alcohol and drug misuse affects them:

*[Adults can] definitely start problems ... make their families unhappy. It's not like [youth] like to see their parents getting drunk every night or smoking cigarettes. Like they tell you not to drink and do drugs and smoke cigarettes, but at the same time, they're doin' – they're all doin' it.*

*... I think they definitely imitate their parents and think if it's acceptable, you know, for their parents, it's acceptable for them. I think it's definitely a problem.*

*... if adults are doin' that then it's also going to be a problem for the kids, too.*

#### *Isolation, Depression, and Suicide*

One parent explained that feelings of isolation can take hold “if you don't ... have the right support group or knowledge of where you could reach out and get help.”

Several parents shared that they can relate to youth who might feel alone:

*I feel alone quite a few times.... For a while there, like, it didn't matter how many, much people I had around me I still felt alone. I felt like I just didn't belong.... It was just actually not too long ago. I had like all my family around and it just didn't matter that they were there; I just didn't feel like I belonged.*

*My anxiety led to depression. 'Cause you do get sick and tired of feeling like that. So I know that with depression, you don't want to be here. It does get hard to get up every day...*



For those who do not have the right support, feeling alone can escalate into feelings of depression and thoughts of suicide. Several community members mentioned a need for resources that reach out to people in need of mental and emotional support:

*You know we've lost a lot of ... people on both reserves for, you know, suicides. You know, that ... that shouldn't be. There should be a place for them to go to talk to someone. (Elder)*

*... I wish that they could reach out and ... find that person that they can actually rely on and trust. (Parent)*



### *Housing*

Several people noted a shortage of housing in the community.

One of the younger Elders believes that parents are more involved with their children nowadays, and may even be helping to raise their relatives' children. This can mean that some people live with extended family members in crowded conditions. This Elder went on to say that community members who live off reserve should be encouraged to come home. However, housing would be needed for them:

*I'd like to see the whole community pull together and bring all our off-reserve people back home and have housing for them.*

Another Elder observed that some houses are overcrowded, and some young adults have difficulty finding homes:

*Housing and jobs. Housing, like rentals or something. I mean, if kids can't afford their own home, if they had rental units that would be nice. Get them out of the house.*

## KEEPING CHILDREN OUT OF CARE

One youth provided a clear summary of what keeping children out of care requires:

*... a loving family and, like, stable relationships and probably stable jobs.... Not lots of drinking and all that stuff with the parents being like depressed or stressed.... Just ... like when you're at home, you feel safe at home, basically.*

### *Cultural Identity and Traditional Knowledge*

Several Elders reinforced that keeping children out of government care means going back to the traditional ways “you have to know who you are” - children must know their identity and family background:

*It's who you are. It's how you're connected. It's where you come from. It's where you belong.... You would have to know your mother's lineage, your father's. Way back to great-great-great-grandfather and great-great-great-grandmothers. As far back as you can go. That's your identity. That's who you are, and no one can take that away from you.*

*What is Needed  
to Keep Children  
out of Care?*

Another Elder asserted that change can be enabled by insisting on a return to a culturally-based, culturally-driven model of service delivery within the community:

*The way we bring about change is the people need to make their voice heard. You have to ... break rules. You gotta change policies. We can't always listen to some white person telling us what to do and how to live because we already know how to do that. We don't belong in their structure. We need to come back to a way of life that we had where we governed ourselves. And that's through the Big House, the potlatch system again.*

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

If children are taken into government care, several people noted the importance of maintaining ties to family, community, and culture:

*...if you ever look at a foster child, the foster child grows up not feeling whole because they don't know who their parents were. Where their parents came from, so they feel lost. And I feel that a lot of that is happening to our kids, not that they don't know who their parents are or their grandparents are but they can't identify themselves with that person, with that culture because they haven't been taught what's right, what's wrong... (Parent)*

*[Kids need to] be able to come back and ... do stuff with their community so they're not feeling ... left out. (Youth)*

One Elder emphasized that governments need to understand the significance of passages, rituals, and celebrations for First Nations communities:

*It's like breathing. If we didn't have that celebration or passage, it would most likely harm than heal. And the way we make them understand is by telling them, 'This is who I am. Look at me. I'm not like you and I don't want to be like you. I am who I am and you need to understand that.'*

### *Supporting Strong Parents and Families*

In conversations about keeping children out of care, We Wai Kai community members repeated that parents should not be alone in raising their children because “*It takes a community to raise a child.*” This message is voiced clearly in the below statements:

*There's a lot of issues that have to be addressed ... in the home, and I think it's important for a community to raise a child. Basically, you know, everybody's looking over everybody's kids. (Parent)*

*It takes a whole village to raise a child. So that's where they get their stability from. It's being together and reaching out and saying, 'Yes, we'll be behind you raising that child. And we will not let the welfare people come into the village and take that child.' That's what it takes. (Elder)*



The We Wai Kai Elders believe that it is up to Aboriginal communities to keep children out of government care. One youth commented that family members could provide an alternative to government care:

*Maybe put them with ... their aunties and uncles for a while to give them a break if there's something wrong.*

One Elder emphasized that parents and families thinking of taking children in need to be healthy:

*It's really up to the Aboriginal communities to do this, and they've been doing it lately, I noticed. You know, by stories I hear that they're trying to have their own programs for their Aboriginal kids.... But I don't know if they're trained enough to know how to do it ... because you have to put these children in families that are ... well themselves.... It's a matter of doing like Alkali Lake.*

Another Elder suggested a community-run crisis response service for children at risk of being taken from their families and communities:

*All the kids are being taken away. I see them in the grocery stores all with white people. I think all the bands should have Elders ... on call. When the police come, when they have apprehension, they should have some*

*Elders that will take these kids, even if it's just for two or three days 'til they get them either brought back to their parents or to Native people that will take them.*

Elders expressed the need for more Aboriginal foster families:

*Give other Native people an opportunity to take them in, rather than ship them off reserve.... They're not treated the same when the white people take them off the reserve. And they're taken outta their communities. It's not a ... good thing; it's like going to jail. And the kids, I'm sure they're not happy, and [they don't] feel the same as other Native people.*

*Yeah out of foster home, we need more people here that can be trusted with kids and...and to be able to take them into their house ...have pride in our reserve, that it's our kids. Right? You know, they...it...they're from the reserve, they're our kids. We're supposed to look after them. You know ...that's what happened back in the... way back. My granny used to say ... the kids were the most important things.*

### *Education*

Community members cited education as a significant part of keeping children in the community. Participants mentioned that sex education would be beneficial for youth:

*It's an educational thing ... not just [for] parents but for ... teenagers.... You know, a kid in their late teens or something like that ... they're out and they're goofin' around and next thing you know somebody ... gets pregnant or whatever. And ... they don't have the capacity to look after the ... situation. (Younger Elder)*

*I think education is power.... We educate our children. Why ... is a young girl getting pregnant? Why is a young girl having sex when they're 11, 12 years old? Why is that? 'Cause they're missing something in their life. What are they missing? Let's figure that out. (Parent)*

One of the Elders also suggested parenting classes:

*I think a lot of single moms need to be educated on how to look after your child, how to shop and how to get an education. That's one thing they need is education. Otherwise they're just going to stay in the same rut forever.*

We Wai Kai Elders also articulated a need to educate parents about the Ministry, and how hard it is to get children back once they have entered the system:

*Bring somebody in that's lost their children through ... the Ministry, and talk to them about it and let them know that it takes a long time to get your children back. You have to jump through hoops to get them back.*

*Once they get ahold of them in a ministry, you gotta be good as God to get them back. You will not get them back again. I know lots of people, years and years and years it takes them to get them back. And some of them don't even get them back, which is really, really not good.*

An Elder advised that children be taught what to do if they find themselves in a crisis situation so that relatives can assist in providing an alternative:

*The kids themselves, they're not dumb. They know right from wrong. I think they should learn, from real little, when they can talk, how to run the telephone, and they could phone for help ... from a relative or neighbour when they know they're not in a good, safe situation, they don't wanna be in, where their parents took them. They could phone home or they could 'Somebody come and get me, I don't like it here.'*

## **CONTINUING TO BUILD STRONG FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY**

We Wai Kai community members offered rich suggestions about how to build the strength of families and community. This section separates their feedback into four broad sections: *centering language and culture*, getting involved, activities, and new spaces and expanded services.

### *Centering Language and Culture*

Community members conveyed a strong desire for more cultural programming. Numerous people mentioned the importance of bringing children and youth together with Elders to learn from them:

*I think that they should have evening sessions or whenever, of Elders from different families that can ... let kids know what went on, and how it all became ... because it's getting lost along the way. (Parent)*

*They need to start embracing our youth, so maybe they won't get into trouble, they won't go to drugs. They need to back our youth up and by giving funding to help getting cultural together and also embracing our Elders and starting to have respect for them. (Elder)*



For one parent, learning about culture provides, “a sense of where they come from and ... it teaches you a lot of values and things that make a person a better person...”.

One Elder stressed that language and culture are inseparable. This Elder would like to see a language revitalization program in the community:

*Your language and culture come hand in hand. It also comes hand in hand with – if we're trying to do treaty – it comes hand in hand. If our leaders don't know what our territories are called in our language, how are they going to know when they're fighting for treaty? And with the language – because everything is done in the language in the Big House and we're talking about the totem pole, it's in the language. So you need to have language to go with your culture, even with your dancing. It all just goes hand in hand together.*



Parents who did not have a lot of exposure to cultural activities while they were growing up are interested in learning about their culture:

*There's not that many people that know our language and I would like to have me to know it so I can teach my kids and my kids can teach their kids. And I just really need to get back into it ... 'cause I don't know anything about my culture at all.... My mom and dad didn't; my mom and dad barely even know anything about it.*

*Get the culture moving again ... just to see my kids carry on ... what I wasn't allowed to do as a child.*

One parent described their process of connecting with community Elders and culture:

*It was an honor to be with the Elders and all...of them have taught me a lot of different things and I do cleanses like river cleanse, ocean cleanse...I do the sweats....I go to Potlatches and...and learn as much as I can about dance and...and...listen to the...speakers. I have made and sang with the drums. I've learned how to make drums and moccasins and dream catchers ...*



Someone else mentioned a teaching that has helped them to make good decisions in life – a teaching which they are also passing down to their children:

*“So, just to pray to my higher power and all that...I keep that with my kids...they like to do it at night time before bed too ... I'm like pray for the things that you are grateful for each day.” (Parent)*

As expressed through numerous conversations with We Wai Kai Elders, youth, and parents, there is a lot of community support for more cultural activities, particularly those that focus on youth. Parents clearly communicated that they wanted their children to learn about culture. Parents mentioned that they would like to see more:

- Language programs
- Storytelling
- Lahal
- Drumming
- Singing
- Artwork
- Making regalia
- Potlatches



One parent contributed that activities could be held in Kwak'wala, which would help to immerse children in the language:

*[M]aybe if they heard stories in ... both tongues, they could grasp it more.... Or even full immersion where that's all they ... do is talk Kwak'wala.*



Similarly, some of the youth suggested that if the community provided opportunities to learn “drumming, singing, dancing, language, carving, drawing, art, history, basket weaving, and blanket making,” they would continue on a cultural path and learn the traditional ways. They suggested that Elders, or others interested in sharing their knowledge and wisdom, lead these activities.

Elders described how cultural learning benefits youth:

*It teaches them how to behave and everything. You sure notice the ones that go and take these cultural stuff, it's really good. Like go down and carve.... It keeps them out of trouble, keeps them off the streets and everything. Keeps them away from drug and alcohol and everything.*

*I have seen some kids that were, you know, involved and stuff, and they ... seem to be fairly well balanced. You know, we all have problems, but I mean, kids that ... got jobs and get on with their life instead of being stuck.*

*I think it'll ... teach [the youth] more about themselves and they'll be happy with themself.*

One of the younger Elders believes children should begin learning when they are young:

*I think it's easier for kids to learn when they're younger... 'Cause it's good for the kids to learn their culture, otherwise it's just gonna disappear. Like ... going to the Big House they're learning how to dance too.*



Another Elder would like to see projects that combine old and new technologies as a way of teaching youth about culture. And one young person strongly expressed the urgency of reconnecting with culture:

*We could lose [our culture] like that if we don't get a jump start, 'cause I try.... It's hard to comprehend, it's hard to do, but I try.... But if down the road we don't try, our culture will be gone.*

### *Getting Involved*

Several people expressed that community members need to be involved, both in finding solutions to community challenges, and in creating and supporting programs and activities:

*Involvement is the key word. You don't sit back and expect people to make the community work for you. You help that process. You become involved in that process. (Elder)*

*More culture activities, more people participating through the community, like actually doing everything that people ask for.... They wanna do it, but when it comes to it, where is everybody? (Parent)*

*People just have to be more involved. I think the Elders have to be more involved [in] the community. I mean I see a lot of ... people complaining they're interfering with people's lives, and ... I respect that, but.... If you're harming a child or putting them in danger, or putting yourself in*

*danger, I think people should realize that people are trying to help. They're not trying to tell you what to do. (Parent)*

*I would like to see kids be more involved in the community.... I mean start training your kids to be leaders, you know? (Elder)*

Some of the youth shared their concern for litter on the logging road or in the community, and proposed useful solutions. One young person suggested putting up posters to encourage people not to litter and placing cement garbage cans throughout the community.

Another Elder recommended tapping into the enthusiasm of the community's grandparents:

*You know, they're – all these guys are crazy about their grandchildren, eh?... There's a lot of good people up here that are willing to ... do what it takes.... Round 'em up and ... initiate their helping [with programs].*



### *Activities*

Many people spoke about the role of activities in keeping youth out of trouble. Some parents observed that:

*... kids that participate more are less likely to go to the wayside ... or experiment [with harmful behaviours].*

*We need to have more interaction with them, have more programs with them. Get them more involved in community, and things that make you feel good about yourself, not the things that give you a hangover in the morning. Just really get them engaged in the community and ... build their confidence and their self-esteem.*

Youth also expressed concern that without activities, they begin to make unhealthy choices. One young person asserted that activities, “Keeps us healthy and keeps us together.”

When it comes to partying, some of the youth agreed that education and activities would be a deterrent:

*[We need] more activities to keep them active so they don't have really time to party. (Youth)*

Parents gave a number of reasons why activities are important for youth:

- “team building”
- “structure for your children”
- “build[ing] their self-esteem and self-confidence”
- “doing something that they're proud of”



Youth offered important feedback on the existing youth group. As one young person in mid-adolescence explained, youth need “*more programs for kids my age 'cause the youth group [is geared for youth] like from 12 and under.*” While older youth support the younger kids in having their own activities, they would like to see some activities that include all youth from 13 to 19 years old. Youth have enjoyed snowboarding and cooking, and would like the opportunity to do more of this. They also suggested:

- “big board games”
- “an open hall night”
- “more family activities” like “family bingo”



A parent from Cape Mudge spoke about the difficulty of getting to and from activities in Campbell River:

*I tried to put [my kids] in sports and music, and different stuff like that, but it's always a hassle going to Campbell River. Like I had [one of my kids] in hockey and then when I had to catch like the 6:15 ferry over to play a game, and then he's got to go to school after.*

Another parent who lives in Cape Mudge cited transportation as a major obstacle to participating in cultural activities. This parent suggested that more activities be offered in Cape Mudge:

*One of my friends lives up there. They do actual culture classes ... on certain nights and they do ... languages and all that ... and teach the kids. I would like to do that ... So if there were classes over here I'd be able to make it 'cause I work over here. I live over here ... It's kinda hard for me to transport back and forth, plus with the ferry costs.... So, it'd be nice if we could get more things over here.*



An Elder suggested that the Cape Mudge children be given swim passes to the Campbell River pool and ferry passes in the winter to so that they can access healthy activities.

One parent came up with the innovative idea of “*food demonstrations*”, so that youth could learn about traditional food practices and be encouraged to stay away from junk food. Another parent was very pleased with the outcome of the traditional foods conference and would like to see programming like this:

*I think ... the food conference was one giant step in the right direction and ... they need to do not only a food conference but a cultural camp, a dance camp, a language camp. They need to do all of these things so that the kids can identify and be proud of who they are.*

Other suggestions also included outdoor walks and canoe trips:

*I mean there's gotta be something you could do to make it fun for them [youth] ... Outings and...stuff like that...My kids love to go in the canoe...And I mean they could do that or nature walks...looking at the plants that our ancestors lived on... (Parent)*

### *New Spaces and Expanded Services*

Numerous people said that they would like to see more programs and services for family wellness, including “parenting programs ... more drugs and alcohol programs” and “family counselling” in the community:

*It's just very hard to get things ... over here... but if parenting classes were available I would definitely go, for sure.*

One Elder believes that the community needs to have its own safe houses and detox centers, staffed by addiction workers who “have been there”. Treatment in these centres would ideally be based on Aboriginal values and traditional medicines. This Elder emphasized that Aboriginal people can be ‘professionals’ and still be connected to their identity and culture.

One Elder suggested more support for single parents, for example, in the form of gift certificates. Another parent suggested putting more supports and resources for youth into place:

*I would like to see more ... information given to our youth on that, and support. 'Cause when I was a teenager, like I said, we had a lot more youth gatherings where you focused on suicide, drugs and alcohol, depression. And just getting that information out to us I think made a big difference 'cause we ... realized we weren't alone. There were people who cared who we could go and talk to. But I don't see that as much anymore.*



One of the younger Elders thinks the community needs a friendship centre where youth can go to get to know one another, and noted that it wouldn't matter what reserves the youth come from. On the importance of offering open, safe spaces for youth, one parent stated:

*I do see that though, where a lot of kids are on their own. So maybe it would be nice to get somewhere where they could go. After school or something to hang out.*

Youth mentioned several things that would keep young people safe, including having “a safe place to go” or someone to call “if they don't feel safe.”

Youth also stated that they would like more spaces for activities, including:

- “a pool”
- “a better playground”
- “a Big House – big one”

Additionally, one Elder noted a need for daycare in the summer:

*They have a really good daycare here. The daycare should be open in the summer months. It's good for the seasonal workers.*

Some community Elders expressed a need for more support. For example, one Elder said that while there is a van service that takes them to town for shopping and other appointments, as well as home care and lawn mowing, these services are not always consistent. Regular help with home maintenance is important because *“a lot of them have their own little places”* pointed out one Elder. Another person stated that Elders *“... need programs and someone to call them on the phone to invite them to lunch or to do something”*. The significance of caring for the community’s Elders is summarized in the below statement:

*They’re not gonna be here forever, you know. ... because they’re ... our link to our past.* (Younger Elder)

Another person suggested an Elders talking group so that Elders can share their concerns and worries in a supportive environment.

Finally, one of the younger Elders made the important point that dedicated community workers need to be encouraged and appreciated, and emphasized that this is an important aspect of program continuity:

*When you have a good person that’s doing a good job for you in any of these types of educational processes it’s important to keep them, or try to keep them any way. Of course, there’s a lot of times when, you know, people try to better their lives through salaries and everything else, but you know, whatever the means are to keep a solid program together, it has to be done. You can’t just have a program pop up for a couple of years and be done with it. You need some continuity when it comes to dealing with these kinds of situations with those younger generations.*





## 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**



## Cape Mudge Parent Focus Group

A focus group took place with nine parents on the Cape Mudge Reserve to gather information on what they think is needed to keep children out of care. The findings support the opinions voiced in the individual interviews (see the section “Keeping Children Out of Care”).

These parents believe that drugs and alcohol and a lack of extended family support are two important factors that result in children being apprehended by government. The parents would like to see more drug and alcohol programs, quicker access to established treatment programs, more on-reserve Aboriginal foster families, programs that give parents tools to live a healthy lifestyle, and education for teenagers and young adults on the realities of parenting.

The Cape Mudge parents feel as though they have limited access to support services and employment opportunities because of their isolated location and the expensive ferry commute to town. Because the population is growing, with an increase in young families, parents would like to see capacity building and more infrastructure on Quadra Island, such as a new recreation centre with an indoor pool that would offer sports and leisure programs and employment opportunities for adults and youth. The parents want early child care support for children 0-3 years old and more after-school programs for young children and preteens. They would also like cultural programming such as language revitalization and community gatherings like potlatches so that they can share cultural practices and teachings with their youth. The parents firmly believe that by doing more cultural activities, youth will develop pride in their culture and gain the ability to share what they learn, creating balance in their young lives.



## Youth Survey #1

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am learning about my culture	2	2	2	1	
I like being a First Nations Person	6	1			
I am able to do lots of activities in my community	2	4	1		
I feel accepted by others	5	1	1		
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life					6
I am learning from the Elders	2	2	3		
I feel successful	3	3	1		
I get enough support in order to succeed at school	4	2	1		
I feel safe at school	6				
I feel safe in the community	7				
I feel safe at home. I am learning my Native language	2		6		

QUESTIONS	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I participate in cultural activities.	2	2		2	
I get enough help with my school work	4				2
I am learning my Native language	1	1	1	1	1
I am learning about my culture	3	1	1	1	
I do activities in my community	1	4	1	1	
I do activities with my family	3		3		
I feel safe at school	6				
I feel safe in my community	6				
I feel safe at home	4				2
I worry about life			2	1	1
I like being a First Nations person	5	1			
Drugs and alcohol have an impact on my life					6
I feel successful	5		1		

### *Analysis*

Eleven youth surveyed all together: seven in one format and four in another format. In the first format, the majority of the youth reported that they are learning about their culture and that they are able to do a lot of activities in their community. The majority of the youth report that they 'often' to 'always' participate in cultural activities. Most like being a First Nations Person and feel accepted by others and are learning from the Elders. Most of the youth strongly disagree that drugs and alcohol are having an impact on their lives. The majority of the youth feel successful and believe they get enough support in order to succeed at school, but two youth reported that they 'never' get enough help with their school work. In regard to safety, most youth report feeling safe at school as well as in the community, but two youth report that they 'never' feel safe at home. Some youth are currently learning their Native language, but the amount of time they spend learning is across the board from 'always' to 'never'. Most report that they 'sometimes' to 'always' do activities with their family and most report that they 'sometimes' to 'never' worry about life.

## Youth Survey #2

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

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

### *Analysis*

In the second format, the majority of youth believe learning their culture is important, but only half surveyed ‘often’ participate in cultural activities and two reported learning their culture ‘sometimes’ and ‘rarely’. Most youth felt that they are able to do a lot of activities on their reserve, but only half reported to participating in activities. Most feel accepted by others and feel safe in their community. Half of the youth believe they are learning from the Elders and one youth reported ‘always’ learning their Native language. Most believe that they get enough support in order to succeed at school. Most do not believe that children in foster care are a concern for their community. The majority of youth feel safe on reserve and most only ‘sometimes’ worry about life. Most feel successful and do not think that drugs and alcohol have an impact on their life.

## Parent Survey

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learning my culture is important	15	1			
There are enough cultural activities for families in my community		5	4	5	1
There are enough activities for youth in my community		5	5	5	1
I would like to spend time supporting the youth of my community	6	7	2	1	
I feel accepted by others	3	8	2		3
Adequate support is available for adults/parents	2	4	2	6	1
I have adequate, safe housing	5	4	3	3	2
Adequate support is available for youth		4	5	5	1
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	9	2	4		1

QUESTIONS	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I participate in cultural activities	2	6	6	3	
I am learning my Native language	3		4	6	4
I participate in activities in my community	2	7	3	4	1
I spend time supporting the youth in my community	2	3	5	2	3
I feel safe in the community	3	7	5	1	
I worry about life	3	4	6		2
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life	1		3	6	5

### *Analysis*

Twenty-four parents were surveyed. The majority of parents believe that learning their culture is important; however, they are split about there being enough cultural activities for families in the community. A slight majority believes there are not enough activities for youth in the community. Most would like to spend time supporting the youth and it looks like the majority of them do with ten of them reporting the amount of time spent with youth from 'sometimes' to always. Most parents feel accepted by others, but the numbers are across the board when discussing adequate support for adults/parents and youth as well as adequate safe housing. A slight majority believes there is not enough adequate support available for adults/parents or youth. A slight majority of parents believe they have adequate and safe housing. The majority of parents believe children in foster care are a concern for their community. In regard to cultural activities, most parents participate in cultural activities, but only three surveyed are actively learning their Native language. Most parents participate in community activities often when gatherings are held. Parents often feel safe in the community, but they still worry about life in general. Only one parent reported drugs and alcohol having a frequent impact on their life with the majority reporting sometimes to never.

## Elder Survey #1

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

### *Analysis*

Twenty Elders surveyed all together: fourteen in one format and six in another format. In the first format, the majority of the Elders believe they know a lot about their culture, but most also feel that there are not enough cultural activities for families in the community. The Elders' opinions are divided about whether there are enough activities for youth, but most would like to spend time supporting youth. A slight majority of Elders believe that there is not enough adequate support available for adults/parents while most believe there is not enough adequate support available for youth. The Elders are again divided about adequate, safe housing with half believing they do have safe housing while the other half believes they do not. The majority of the Elders are concerned about children in foster care in their community. In regard to cultural questions, the majority of the Elders sometimes participate in cultural activities, but few speak their Native language frequently. The majority of Elders surveyed said they sometimes participate in community activities, but few spend time supporting the youth in their community. Most of the Elders feel safe in the community, sometimes worry about life and rarely to never have drugs and alcohol impact their lives.

## Elder Survey #2

<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
I know a lot about my culture	2	4	4	3	
There are enough cultural activities for families in my community		1	4	6	1
There are enough activities for youth in my community	1	2	4	3	1
I would like to spend time supporting the youth of my community	2	4	5		
Adequate support is available for adults/parents		2	6	4	
I have adequate, safe housing	5	1	3	3	2
Adequate support is available for youth		2	4	4	2
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	5	2	2		2

<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
I participate in cultural activities		3	9	1	1
I speak my Native language frequently			3	7	4
I participate in activities in my community	2	2	8	1	1
I spend time supporting the youth of my community		2	6	3	1
I feel safe in the community	2	3	5	2	1
I worry about life	2	4	7	2	
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life			2	4	8

### *Analysis*

In the second format, the Elders are evenly divided about knowing a lot about their culture with half saying they somewhat agree and the other half saying they strongly disagree. Most believe that there are enough cultural activities for families in the community and that there are enough activities for youth available in the community. However, the Elders were split about the amount of adequate support available for youth, adults/parents and Elders themselves. They are also split about adequate, safe housing with half saying they do and the other half saying they do not. Most would like to spend time supporting the youth in the community and most feel safe in the community. The majority surveyed do not speak their native language.

*This report was compiled in collaboration with Sasamans Society*



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