

Caring For Our Own Children

Voices of Our Communities



Wei Wai Kum First Nation

To the People of the Wei Wai Kum First Nation

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



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PART 1: SASAMANS SOCIETY



Sasamans Society Overview

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

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

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

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

Member Nations

- Kwakiutl Band
- Da'naxda'xw Awaetlala First Nation
- Dzawada'enuxw First Nation
- Kwikwasut'inuxw/Haxwa'mis Tribe
- Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw First Nation
- Quatsino First Nation
- We Wai Kai First Nation
- Wei Wai Kum First Nation
- K'omoks Band
- Tlatlasikwala First Nation

- Mamalilikulla-Qwe'Qwa'Sot'Em Band
- Whe-la-la-U Area Council

Urban Aboriginal Organizations

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



OUR MISSION

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

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

OUR VALUES

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

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

We will respect and practice equality for all.

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

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



PART 2: VOICES OF OUR COMMUNITIES

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



The Process and The Reports

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Dzawada’enuxw First Nation, Quatsino First Nation, We Wai Kai First Nation, and 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).

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 if requested. 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 members of the Wei Wai Kum First Nation.

PART 3: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Community Profile

The Wei Wai Kum First Nation is located in the heart of Campbell River, BC, which can be found on the mid-eastern coast of Vancouver Island. The nation currently numbers 729, with 358 members living on reserve. There are 112 children and youth, aged 18 and younger, among the 65 families living on reserve.

Wei Wai Kum First Nation population stats					
Age Category	Totals	Age Category	Totals	Age Category	Totals
Up to 6	48	19 - 54	173	Families with children	65
7 - 11	19	Elders 65+	31	Total	358
12 - 18	45	Elders 55 - 64	42		

Facilities located on the Wei Wai Kum First Nation reserve include Thunderbird Hall, Administration office, House of Treasures, Computer Lab, Thunderbird Campground, Discovery Harbour Marina, Kwawatsi Big House, Kwanwatsi preschool and Kwakiutl District Council (KDC) Health Centre (Laich-kwil-tach Health Centre). The newly renovated Thunderbird Hall is the site for numerous gatherings, as well as a recreational facility for the community.



In 1997 the Kwawatsi Big House was built for potlatch and ceremonial purposes. Kwawatsi translates to “House of Thunder” in the Kwak’waka language.

The band offers programs and services to parents, Elders, caregivers, youth and children. A youth worker co-ordinates activities and programs, such as after school activities, trips, fundraisers, awareness training, and outings, and also provides transportation for the children and youth to access the city’s many facilities. An Elder worker hosts and organizes fundraisers, home care visits, ‘meals on wheels’, and various outings and gatherings.

The Kwanwatsi pre-school, “recognizes that children are our most valuable resource and works to ensure that the family and the community are grounded in traditional language and culture, literacy, health, nutrition, and education”



The KDC Health Centre provides community members with access to a variety of community health care services and mental health and addictions services. The Home and Community Care program offers home support to on-reserve Elders and individuals with disabilities, to allow for them to live independently and with dignity; an assessment is required to assess the level of care required for the individual and or family. The Mental Health and Addictions Services provide counselling, prevention, and awareness to address a number of issues, including suicide, drugs and alcohol abuse, trauma, grief and loss. There is also a support and mentoring program, called Precious Beginnings, in dealing with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).



Additionally, the KDC Health Centre offers weekly programs, such as Elder Wellness Days, Girls in the Kitchen and the Yoga Program. There are also HIV/AIDS Family Games Night held each month and a Healthy Babies Group every second week. In addition to the community activities, listed above, the Centre also provides a variety of services and workshops, covering topics such as communicable disease control, arthritis management, dental varnishing for children, pre and post-natal health, patient transport assistance, health information sessions, and nutritional services.

Community Engagement Summary

The Wei Wai Kum First Nation, located in Campbell River, BC has 729 registered band members, about 50% of whom live on reserve.

As part of the community engagement process, the Sasamans team met with a number of community members, including:

- 13 youth ranging in age from 12 to 19
- 14 parents ranging in age from 24 to 57
- 16 Elders ranging in age from 55 to 85

In addition to these conversations, 16 youth, 17 parents, and 2 Elders filled out surveys. The complete survey results are included in the appendices.

Key Findings

- 1) Elders are cherished members of the community and vital links to language, culture and history. People would like more opportunities to learn about cultural practices, language and traditional foods from Elders, and Elders would like to share what they know.
- 2) Community members expressed a strong desire for a culturally-based residential drug and alcohol treatment program designed and run by Aboriginal staff.
- 3) Elders, youth and parents would like to see a community-run receiving home/safe house opened in the community where families involved with the ministry can access live-in support.
- 4) An advocate is needed to help families navigate the child protection system, understand their rights, access information, and ensure the safety and well-being of children in care.
- 5) It is crucial that children in government care are able to nurture and maintain connections to culture, community and family.
- 6) Protocols have to be established to ensure that the ministry reaches out to a child's entire family before that child is taken into care.
- 7) There is a deep desire for more Aboriginal foster homes, and community members believe that expanding training and resources for foster parents will facilitate this.

Suggested Programs and Services

- 1) Community run, culturally safe residential programs, including:
 - Safe house / receiving home
 - Drug and alcohol treatment center
 - Assisted-living Elder center
- 2) More resources, programs and services reaching people in need of mental and emotional support:
 - Mental health outreach
 - Emergency mental health services (24 hour crisis line / emergency counselling)
- 3) A support program for people who were involved with the criminal justice system.
- 4) More resources, programs and services supporting parent and family wellness:
 - Parenting workshops and peer support groups
 - Baby groups
 - Daycare services
 - Respite care
- 5) An intensification of existing support services for Elders, including transportation, house cleaning, home maintenance, meals on wheels, and home visits.
- 6) Expanded resources and services for youth:
 - Youth counsellor
 - Drug and alcohol support
 - Job training
- 7) Community members would like to see an advocate who works to support parents and families involved with the ministry.
- 8) More resources aimed strategically at keeping children out of government care, and in the community:
 - Working with family members before children are taken into care
 - Timely referrals and access to needed services
 - More training and support for foster parents
- 9) Community members would also like to see more resources dedicated to keeping children in care connected with their families, community and culture.

Community Engagement Process

What Steps Were Taken?

In August 2010, the Executive Director of the Sasamans Society, in accordance with First Nations protocol and tradition, asked permission of the Wei Wai Kum First Nation Chief and council to work with the community. Then in September 2010, Sasamans Society received a letter of support to begin the work in their community and hire a CBC.

In the early stages of Sasamans there were to be Community-based Collaborators (CBC) in each community, one was hired in October 2010. Training was provided, frontline workers information session was held in November 2011. Youth pizza nights were hosted along with other activities to recruit for interviews and/or focus groups in the community. The CBC left position in December 2011 and another one was hired in January 2012.

However in June 2011, plans for community involvement were delayed when MCFD changes required Sasamans to complete a review of the community engagement process and make changes to the work plan and budget. Wei Wai Kum First Nation was one of several communities that were put on hold until the next fiscal year.

After the changes were made, a team approach was implemented and moved away from the community-based collaborator in each community. A team of facilitators was created and they completed a two-day training session in mid-August 2011 to develop facilitation skills for individual and group discussions. A follow up refresher training was coordinated for May 2012 as there were 3 new members added to the team. Two additional team members were the Community Liaison Worker/Facilitator, one for the north and south and a youth facilitator. The society posted with the college and universities on the island for these positions so that we could recruit First Nations in school and enhance their community work experience. Community Liaison Worker/Facilitator role was to organize with the communities/agencies frontline worker information sessions, connect with frontline workers in each community to tag onto existing activities and introduce the Sasamans team. The team would spend a week in the community getting to know the people prior to conducting interviews and/or focus groups. It was important to have a key person known to the north and south to be part of this team. Once the refresher training was completed, the community engagement process began.

Digital recordings of the interviews and discussion groups were transcribed and analyzed between September December 2012, and the final draft was completed Jan 31st. The Sasamans team reviewed the first draft of this report and then presented to the band.

Structure of the Report

Our conversations with members of the Wei Wai Kum First Nation made it clear that the community knows what needs to happen in order to keep children out of government care, and what supports are needed by families currently dealing with the Ministry of Child and family Development. Our conversations in the community highlighted the wealth of traditional knowledge and wisdom that is alive and well. Many people shared that they would like to see this wisdom integrated into programs and services that will support strong families and keep children out of government care. This report will therefore begin by summarizing this rich traditional knowledge in sections entitled

Conversations with Community Members

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

During the individual and group conversations held with members of the Wei Wai Kum Nation, participants shared their important knowledge on a range of topics. In this section, these dynamic conversations will be summarized. To maintain the integrity of the wisdom shared by community members, all of the information presented here is drawn from the words of participants. Direct quotes are also used, and in some instances, quotes have been changed slightly to make them readable or to avoid identifying individual participants.

This section of the report occasionally references the wisdom shared by Elders at a gathering organized by Sasamans Society in March, 2012. At this gathering, Elders generously shared their knowledge about how parents, families, and communities can care for children in a traditional, community-driven way. This knowledge will be referenced here where it connects to some of the key messages expressed by Wei Wai Kum community members.

PART 4: COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS



Our Community

“I think we live in a strong community; a very strong supporting community”
(Parent participant)

Members of the Wei Wai Kum Nation spoke about their community with pride, and feel that a strong sense of community *“is coming back”* (Parent participant). Another parent proudly explained how this sense of community is being passed down from one generation to the next:

... seems like we are creating what our parents once had. Where they had ... their little community and group ... we've got the same thing happening ... right before our eyes. (Parent participant)



A youth stated, *“there is a lot of supporting people around in this community”*, and several people said that they feel supported and cared for. Elders and parents mentioned that people in the community know how to pull together and take care of one another. And parents believe that the community is a safe place for them to raise their children, and in the words one parent, *“we all watch out for each others’ children”*.

Community members feel fortunate to have access to a variety of services for families, Elders, parents, children and youth. Among the many things that people appreciate, the Kwanwatsi preschool was described as “excellent”, as were the services provided by KDC Health and the many activities offered at Thunderbird Hall.

Several people mentioned that the community would be more complete and *“as great as it could be”* (Parent participant) if all Band members lived on the reserve. One youth suggested that more houses be built so that all Band members could move into the community. This youth states that some people off reserve may be struggling, and so *“being on the res would probably help a lot”*.



While one young person shared that they would like to see less litter in the community, several parents appreciate the way that the band makes sure that the community is clean and orderly.

Traditional Family Laws

"It was just their way of doing things"
(Elder participant)

In this section about traditional family laws it is important to mention that several Elders pointed out that our people did not traditionally use the word "law". An Elder clarified:

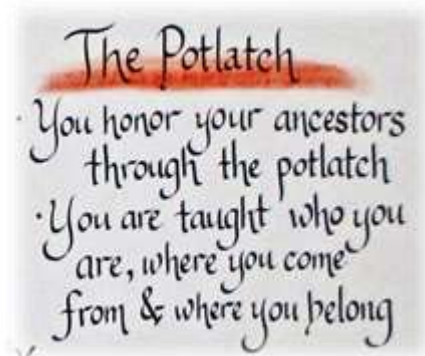
All these rules and regulations and laws its not ... really in our language ... we didn't call them rules, or laws or regulations. It was just their way of doing things. (Elder participant)

Wei Wai Kum community members shared what traditional laws mean to them. An Elder explained that traditional laws are at the root of, "[the]ways you bring up your family, [the]caring of your children, the rearing of who you are ... and what you are and how you exist in your family and in your community".



Several Elders recalled that in the old way, your parents "picked your husbands, picked your wives". An Elder explained that many people accepted arranged marriage because it fit into a system of knowing which family, tribe and social class you were from. An Elder remembered how people interacted up and down the coast as far as Port Hardy, Alert Bay and Bella Bella. They would bring their families to potlatches "so you had different intermarriages with all the bands". Another Elder described what intermarriage between members of two different bands looked like, remembering the marriage ceremony of his aunt and uncle:

... they were married the Indian way in the potlatch and he was adopted by this Band. So what is marriage in the Indian way? ... it's like a potlatch: you have your meal, your dinner and you're clothed with the Native blankets and because it's intermarriage it's two different Bands, they cloak you and whatever is your partner's becomes yours. You becomes one. You able to use the others' cultures together. (Elder participant)



Within the web of relationships created through intermarriage, it was very important to know who your relatives were. An Elder remembered that there was a custom where families would visit one another to make sure that everyone knew who they were related to. Another Elder described how being in the Big House was an important part of learning about lineage:

[Y]our family lines come together in there ... the different families that get up to have their feasts, then you find out their family lineage and how it goes back, cause we're just so related to everybody out there. (Elder participant)

Another Elder offered a vivid description of how families and villages used to be organized by color. She remembered:

We used to be color coded years ago. We knew who was Campbell River, who was Cape Mudge, who was Alert Bay. And you have standing in ... what you call our sacred shrine, we don't call it a Big House, or a Long House. We knew by your colors who you were. ... only the hereditary families had button regalia. And there were youth blankets, certain crests used by certain tribes. (Elder participant)

Traditional adoption was also practiced in the community. An Elder recalled being taught by her parents that if the parents of a child were to die, people in the village became responsible for that child. She explained, “*There was no such thing as going into care. They just raised them like they were their own*”. Another Elder remembered her own big family, and her parents taking in cousins whose parents could not raise them. When this Elder’s mother got sick, her grandmother looked after all of the children. Without any financial support, this Elder shared memories of helping her grandmother raise 15 children.

Elders at the gathering last March discussed how colonization and forced residential schooling caused a rupture with many of the traditional ways. As an Elder in the community explained, open communication about important issues had been practiced traditionally. For example, Elders would teach young girls about their bodies without embarrassment and the entire community would be involved in raising a child. But colonization changed that. He explained:

The part that happens now is that ... [w]e live in our own shell. That's the only way I looked at it. ... what was I taught? Don't talk about it. “You don't talk about that in public. You don't talk about that outside of your home”. So where do you talk about it then? (Elder participant)

While several Elders in the community mentioned that the practice of traditional laws was weakened due to residential school, many people see the old ways coming back. According to one Elder participant, although it might take a while, members of the community are learning about culture, language and the ways that guided our people for thousands of years.

Traditional Values

I can go back to it. They're not here now, but they've left something. So that's what I have a right to do. I can go back to it... by connecting myself to those values that were there, and that were always there. (Elder participant)

Members of the community spoke about the traditional values that have been passed down from one generation to the next. A parent stated clearly, “*Respect is number one*”, and Elders, parents and youth all emphasized its importance. Respect was discussed as a value that starts with respecting yourself, which is taught from a very young age. An Elder shared:

*... that's how we've always told our kids, you know.
“You respect yourself and others, they'll respect
you right back”. (Elder participant)*



Many parents in the community said that they have been taught to respect their Elders, and are passing this teaching down to their children. Elders and parents spoke about children and youth as embodying this value, and being very respectful in their ways. Several Elders described how respect involves treating people well, even if someone treats you badly. An Elder shared that her grandmother taught her to “*be respectful and if somebody says anything, not to react*”.

Community members also explained the enormous value of family. “*Family is the number one thing – the key that keeps things going,*” said one parent. As an Elder explained, when family ties “*stay strong*”, so do connections to identity, culture and community. Various people mentioned that getting together often as a family allows everyone to know how members of the family are doing, and means that you can jump in and talk to a relative who might be struggling. A parent described the feeling of togetherness that existed in her family growing up:



... there were so many of us in our family that we more or less kind of just huddled together as one ...everybody used to go to the carving shed and come to our house for breakfast whatever. Cause ... my mum used to just make great big meals, not just little meals, there was so many of us. Everybody just went there and ate. ... There was lots of togetherness. (Parent participant)

Many people in the community described their families as “close-knit”, and spoke with great love and respect about their relatives. An Elder described the “*joy of being together*” with her family, and shared that just like her father before her, she gets a twinkle in her eye whenever she spends time with her grandchildren. “*Make sure you tell them you love them,*” this Elder said.

Grandparents hold a special place in the family, and play an important role in connecting people to traditional values and knowledge. As one parent explained, thanks to grandparents, *“kids can grow up ... knowing where they come from, how they got here, how their grandparents were here and you continue to talk about it. Then it stays with them and they feel proud of themselves”*. An Elder explained that grandparents also offer crucial support to parents at times when they might feel overwhelmed.



Community members also articulated the value of hard work. An Elder described that the value of hard work was reinforced through the old way of living. She remembered working hard to gather and prepare food, *“...when we were working, it was long and hard picking the blue berries, we never whined or crowed about it, we just did what we were told to do”*.



Many people in the community shared stories of generosity and caring for others. As one parent put it, *“We need to have a purpose and contribute ... I believe in giving back”*. A parent described the amazing work that her grandmother did in Vancouver, like clothing and feeding people who needed it, and opening a home for unwed mothers. She recalled,

There were a number of young ladies that come into her home to have the baby. No monies to her. Just the goodness of her heart. And she would let them stay up to a year to learn how to care for that baby. To teach them all about that baby - the beauty. (Parent participant)

Traditional Parenting

“We all have roles ... it's not all on the parents”
(Parent participant)

Elders at the gathering held last March explained that traditionally, parenting started before the baby was even born. Elders in the community also spoke about this, and described how the community traditionally prepared expecting parents for parenthood. An Elder described pregnancy as a time when *“you start working with them, talking with them, giving them all the teachings that were supposed to have been preserved by the wisdom of our Elders.”* Another Elder explained how families, including distant relatives, would get together and begin to prepare the expecting couple:

... they would gather and sit with that person and start to feed that baby before that baby became a part of this world ... the aunties, the mothers, and all of that [would] talk specifically with the female. Then the men would talk with the male. What his responsibility – not law – responsibility [is]. (Elder participant)



Another Elder recalled her mother passing down the important teaching that every child is a precious gift. This Elder described:

Every child you study and you learn what they're good at. And then I started understanding our forefathers, maybe they were a good hunter. Maybe they were a good cook. Maybe they knew how to sew. But there was always a gift there you knew how to watch these children. And you – you even see it today if you study children. (Elder participant)



Several Elders discussed how important chores and family responsibilities were when they were growing up. Whether it was looking after children, taking care of grandparents, preparing fish, cleaning or cooking, Elders remembered the things that were expected of them. One Elder shared, “I’ve been looking after kids since I was five.” According to an Elder, doing chores was a crucial part of learning how to be a contributing member of a family and community:

... having chores is important because it gives the structures, and they have to learn about boundaries and what is acceptable and what is expected from them as people and children. (Elder participant)

Traditional parenting involved the whole family, and the whole community. Several people affirmed that *“it takes a community to raise a child”*. An Elder described what he remembers happening in his day if a child in the community got into trouble:

“the Council or the Chief went over and said, “you know what, we thought about it, we met about it, and we need to talk to that person, boy or girl ... and this is what should have been done”. (Elder participant)



Community members described the love and respect that they have for their children. A parent spoke about her son as her *“pride and joy every day”*. An Elder shared that he often tells his young grandson, *“You’re proud and you make me proud. I just love you”*. Another Elder highlighted that open communication and listening are so important in raising children. Talking about his own experience as a parent, he shared that when he saw one of his own children struggling he would tell them, *“Talk to us. We’re your parents. We’ll listen”*.

Role Models

“We should have [children] at our side as we are doing things and then they learn.”
(Elder participant)

At the Elders gathering held last spring, one of the strongest messages Elders shared was the idea that family and community members serve as role models for children and youth, and teach them by example. Community members shared stories about the people in their lives who have modeled strength, hard work generosity, respect, care and the value of traditional, cultural knowledge.

A parent shared that her mother’s strength taught her, *“you need to keep going forward ... to get through life”*. An Elder talked about his father, who taught him about the value of hard work. And another Elder spoke about her granny, who was her role model because she knew how to speak seven Native languages. One Elder traces her values back to what she learned from her mother in law:



I think that's where I got my generosity to give to some people that really unfortunate. And so she'd have a sandwich for them if they'd come to the door knocking hungry ... (Elder participant)

Parents and Elders described a desire to be role models in the community. An Elder remembered the teaching that he received from his father to “always be proud of who you are” and his wish to model that for young people around him. A parent wants to promote wellness in her community, saying:

I want to ... promote health, promote wellness and I just think that's important ... I do believe ... that is our role in our community ... teaching our children but also our grandchildren and any other people that want to follow that same path.
(Parent participant)

Culture

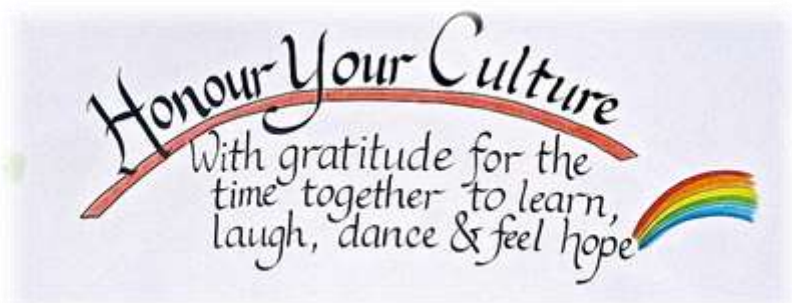
“[C]ulture is really important to me but it doesn't just mean language and drawing ... it's so much more... it's our whole way of being”
(Parent participant)

Culture is a way of life. Wei Wai Kum community members spoke about their culture with pride, and shared stories about the healing power of cultural ways. One young person described how their grandpa taught them to pray in their Native language, and how praying really helps “*if I'm feeling like I'm having a sad day or just need a little boost.*” An Elder described how the Big House was traditionally the place where people would go to resolve conflicts, and believes that this could be practiced today. She explained:



I think it's just a really great place to do all your healing and anything you have to... there is just something about being in there, it gives you really good feelings and good thought. (Elder participant)

Culture is linked to a strong sense of identity and as one parent remarked, it makes people “*prouder to be First Nations*”. When asked what they liked best about being First Nations, a group of young people responded, “*Our culture*”. An Elder, explaining the importance of cultural identity in his life, stated, “*... if I didn't have an identity, then I had no existence in my community and I [had] no existence even in this world that I lived in.*”



The cultural traditions and ceremonies that are practiced today are alive and well because of the courage of generations passed. An Elder remembered her family putting blankets on the windows so that they could practice their culture during a time when Aboriginal ceremonies were outlawed. This Elder recalled, *“My dad’s grandpa and ... my mum’s dad, they all went to jail so that we could perform our sacred ceremonies.”* Many people stressed how vital it is for language and culture to be passed down to the younger generations. Youth stated powerfully that they want the cultural practices that have been *“going on for centuries”* to be passed down *“for our grandkids and their grandkids”* (Youth participant).

A parent explained that at one time, residential school caused a stigma that prevented openness about language and culture. Today, Wei Wai Kum community members see culture coming back and people expressed a deep desire to learn more. Many participants articulated a need for more cultural programming in schools from K to 12. An Elder shared that she would like to see, *“a school just for the children to ... learn [culture]”*. Another Elder pointed out that there should be culture and language courses available for youth after grade 12, and suggested that colleges could offer accredited courses. That way youth from the community could also become trained culture and language teachers. Throughout our community conversations, Elders were described as cherished members of the community and vital links to language and culture. *“I believe in the wisdom and respect of the Elders”* said one parent. Young people and parents said that they would like to spend more time with Elders. As one young person put it, *“They know a lot about the past”*. There is a desire for more opportunities to just sit and listen to Elders share their stories. Elders also expressed that they would like more chances to sit and talk with youth in the community. Several people emphasized that because many Elders have passed on already, creating more opportunities to be with Elders is a priority.



Traditional Foods

“What our young parents need to know is that its healthier for you, and it is way, way more cost efficient” (Parent participant)

Aside from being very healthy and more affordable, traditional foods were described as connecting people to land, culture and community. Many Elders in the community remembered a time when families only bought flour and sugar at the store. Everything else came from harvesting, growing, fishing, hunting, and preparing traditional foods. A parent shared her memories of all the foods her grandparents prepared:

I remember growing up with my grandparents, everything you needed to feed your family came from the land. I mean, my grandmother baked everything from scratch. She had a garden out back, she preserved what you could put in jars ... she jarred everything from bear meat to ... you name it was in a jar and it was preserved for the off season. And that's besides just your ... regular traditional foods within the seasons ... everything we needed was around us. There was no worry about money ... money had no value, really ... my grandpa would carve an item, go to sell it then straight to the grocery store and that consisted of your basics: a sack of flour, a sack of rice, a sack of sugar. (Parent participant)

People told stories about jarring, canning and smoking food with their family and community. One Elder recalled that her backyard was used to prepare food in a variety of ways. They had a cannery out back when they needed one, a smoke house, and they had a barbeque. Another Elder remembered how her grandmother prepared ice cream and taught her how to eat it:

... she used a big handful of shalal [sp?] leaves. There was no electrical to plug in like they do today. She used to whip with her arm ... Great big bowl, and then she'd give us a tablespoon each. And we'd sit there and she'd tell us how we had to ... get it on the tip of the taste buds to get that beautiful flavour. Cause if you just fill your mouth and swallow it, its kind of a yucky flavour. But in the end, I realized that ... it was almost medicinal. Cause it was purifying your body at the same time cause it was good. (Elder participant)

With the convenience of modern-day grocery stores, several Elders expressed concern that some community members may not be learning how to prepare traditional foods. Youth, parents, and Elders all emphasized the importance of learning these skills and would like to ensure that they are passed down. A parent emphasized that Elders are vital to passing down this knowledge, and suggested that perhaps they could be partnered up with children, youth and young parents to teach them.

An Elder suggested a community smoke house and a community garden be built so that people can come together to grow and prepare food. Another Elder believes that a course on canning fish for young people should start out on the boat. This Elder affirmed:

I think they should see how it's all done ...hire a boat and get them out there and see, you know, all the work you got to go through to get this. ... I mean, it's a lot of work into it. (Elder participant)

Young people in the community said that they would like more opportunities to learn how to prepare traditional foods, bake and cook with Elders.

Challenges

Community members discussed the challenges that they face, and offered descriptions of some of the issues being experienced in the community. Throughout the conversations with participants, three main challenges were highlighted: drugs and alcohol, suicide, and frustration with the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Drugs and Alcohol

Elders, parents and young participants described issues with drugs and alcohol as one of the reasons that the Ministry gets involved in the lives of families. An Elder stated bluntly about keeping children out of care, *“You have to start at the grass roots with the drugs and the alcohol.”* Another Elder stressed that in order to help others, people need to get healthy themselves. And one Elder mentioned Alkali Lake and stated, *“I believe we all have to go in that direction.”*

Reflecting on how to support people in dealing with drug and alcohol issues, an Elder believes that these issues stem from loneliness and uncertainty about identity. Another Elder said that he advises young people struggling with substance issues:

If you're stressed out, go for a walk on the beach ... if you see somebody needing help, go and help them. (Elder participant)



Young people expressed concern about drugs and alcohol. *“We should break the cycle”*, a young person asserted. Another youth suggested that if adults want to drink, they should not do it around the kids. Another youth echoed this saying, *“We need some good role models”*.

Suicide

Several people named suicide as an issue in the community that troubles them, and discussed how it might be addressed. A parent explained suicide as “hopelessness ... the absence of hope”. An Elder recalled a year when there were several suicides in the community, and stated clearly, “*we should be helping*”. A parent shared her belief that the important thing is to always be able to talk about suicide with young people, and to be aware and open about the other issues faced by some youth. She explained:

I think just always talking about it is important ... Just making sure people are comfortable talking about it, because ... [some] subjects are scary to talk about you know - sexual abuse ... women abuse. There's lots of things that people just don't want to talk about. I think having a lot of awareness around those activities just helps our youth. (Parent participant)



Several youth shared their thoughts on what can be supportive to young people who might be struggling with thoughts of suicide. One young person said that having friends that you can trust when you feel alone is very important – someone you can talk about anything with. “*Like you just gotta have somebody like that'll have your back*” this youth insisted. Several young people shared that journal writing can be really helpful when they're feeling down and depressed.

Frustration with MCFD

Some community members shared stories of pain and frustration regarding their experiences with the Ministry. The point that was stressed most strongly was that the Ministry should not hide children in the system and keep family members from visiting their relatives in care. As one parent stated, the result of this policy is that “*it feels your kids gone - somebody kidnapped them*”. A parent described the grieving period that came after the Ministry cut off visits with her grandchildren. An Elder made it clear that separating families is the law, but “*not the Native law, to take away the love I have for my grandson*”.



A foster parent in the community told the story about two children who after over 10 years in care, have still never met their families. This parent asserted:

That should have been the Ministry's obligation to make sure ... that they were connected some way. You can't just write letters and cards – that's ridiculous ... I just think it's just really, really sad they've never had the opportunity. And the oldest one says, “My grandma didn't want me”. And I said, “You know your grandma didn't even know you were born. ... the Ministry never let them know you were in care”. (Parent participant)

Several people shared stories of parents who have jumped through hoops to prove that they are ready to parent but they have yet to get their children back. An Elder

summarized, *“You got a file on that person and that’s what it is. You maintain that. But how long is that gonna be? How long are they under your system there?”* As another Elder emphasized, every year that a child is without their family there is grief and loss, so the priority has to be to bring families together as soon as possible.

Community members also voiced frustration with high social worker turnover, the lack of accurate, up to date information, and the practice of apprehending children in school. A group of Elders do not think that the Ministry should be allowed to take children away from school, with one Elder emphasizing that it is a “traumatic” experience for children. Finally, some community members expressed that they feel that the Ministry does not listen to them. One Elder shared the story that she was not taken seriously when she tried to warn a social worker that a grandchild was being abused in a foster home. An Elder believes that abuse and neglect in non-Aboriginal foster homes is tied to racism. A group of youth also addressed this, and spoke about how discrimination and negative stereotyping impact the decisions made by the ministry. Our Elders and parents strongly communicated that they want children in government care to be safe, and Aboriginal families to be treated fairly.

Community Wish List

Community members spoke about the programs, services and activities that they believe will support strong families and communities. This section summarizes what participants shared about their desire for expanded services and programs and more community activities.

Aboriginal need to have access to Aboriginal services that are offered within their culture. Many people said that they would like the community to begin caring for people in traditional ways. An Elder stated, *“I think if things were done the way they should be in our culture, our people would be better off ... I wish we had a really good treatment center that was full of culture and ... things that would help them get through life”*. The wish for an on-reserve treatment center was echoed by many people. People would also like to see a solid follow-up program for people after they leave treatment.

Several participants noted the importance of offering specific services for people involved in the criminal justice system. An Elder in the community offered insight into the needs of people who have spent time in jail. She described a cycle in which people become trapped without adequate support:

“ ... put them in jail, then they come out and then they go back in, and it's always the same thing. they are in and out and in and out and they don't get any help at all. ... and when they come out on the streets to get into treatment center, for the ones who are drug and alcohol, they have to be clean for thirty days before they can go into a treatment center, and that's too long.” (Elder participant)

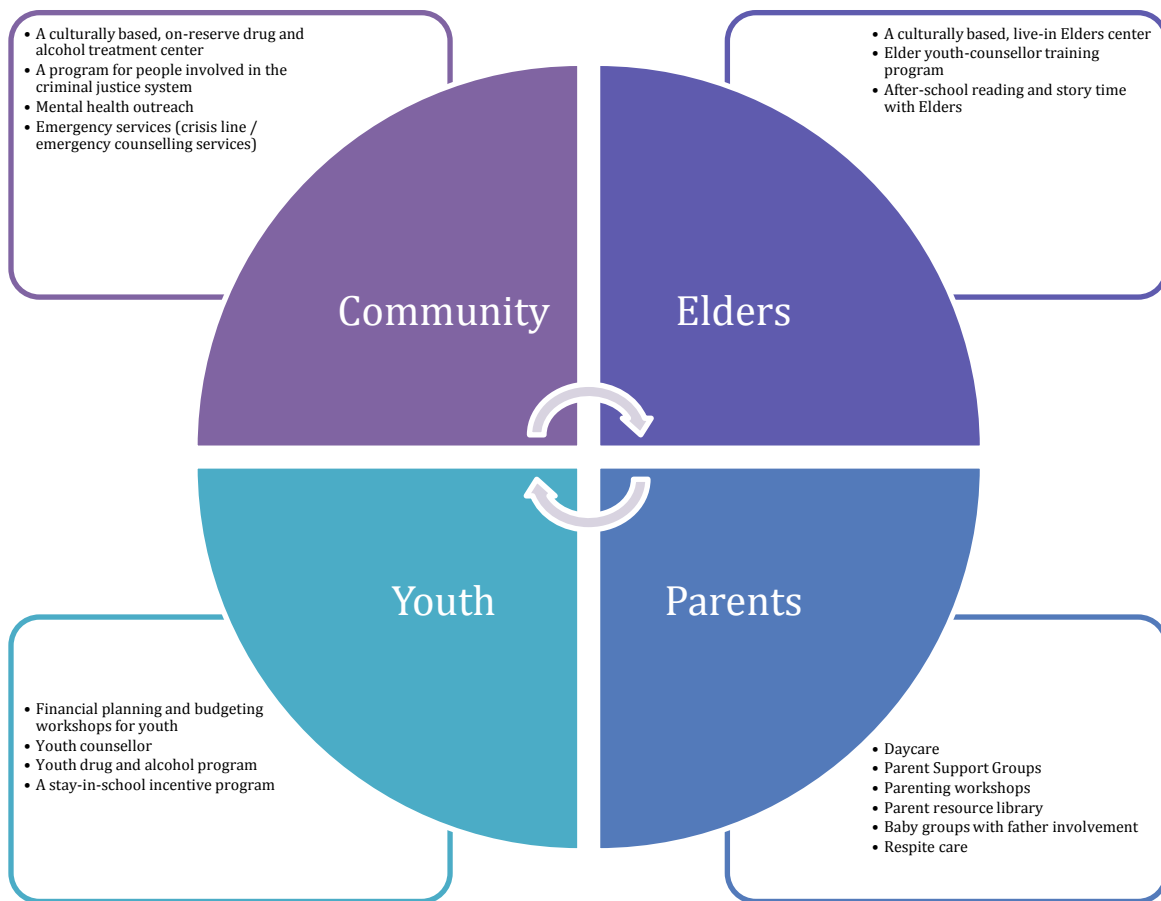


Figure 1. Community Wish List as express by the Wei Wai Kum community.

This Elder shared that this cycle can lead people to feel helpless and hopeless, and emphasized the need for programs that make them feel useful and hopeful.

In regards to expanded services for Elders, suggestions included increased support with home cleaning, transportation and more meals and wheels. A parent suggested a live-in Elders center where Elders could receive culturally safe assisted living and medical care. This parent envisioned youth being extremely involved in the life of the center, and believes that it could serve as a sort of hub for culture and language learning in the community. Another parent suggested a program where Elders receive training to become youth counsellors. This parent explained:

I think they would feel more comfortable talking to an Elder because they're just like a grandma. And I know they would feel intimidated about going to a counsellor ... if they had an Elder program where Elders do have the training ... they're the ones that have the wisdom. (Parent participant)

Numerous suggestions were also made about expanded services and programming for parents. Many people mentioned that young parents in particular could benefit from parenting workshops and peer support groups. One parent said that she would like to see health and nutrition information offered to young parents. Another parent suggested that creating a sense of open group parenting, where parents can discuss the difficulties they face, would be very helpful. In the words of another parent, *“I think that it helps when people know that they’re not alone and other people have* Participants also had many ideas about programs and services for youth. Young people communicated that they feel that their generation is different because of the *“advance of technology and ... the mixture of violence”*. They spoke about the problems faced by today’s young people as complex. Young people articulated that they would like more support with drugs and alcohol, and would like workshops on health, addiction and family trauma. Youth also said they would like increased support in finding a job. They would like access to information about employment, help with their resume, more funding to pursue training and education, and access to workshops like Food Safe and First Aid. One youth stated *“we should probably have more like opportunities, even for our age”* and that these could include *“odd jobs”* like cleaning. Many young people shared their aspirations to continue schooling after high school, and to this end, one youth stated that there should be more help offered with school work.



Several community members mentioned that older youth don’t have many programs geared towards them, and that this age is particularly important. One parent thinks more needs to be done to engage older teens, saying that we need to:

... focus on some different ... services or supports to keep them busy or to learn and gain better skills so that they can either stick with schooling and give it a little more effort ... it is a target age where instead of losing them, hopefully you can engage them a little bit more too.
(Parent participant)

Participants suggested that programs for youth could focus on budgeting, financial planning, life skills training, and awareness activities around social issues. Several parents also emphasized that youth need more places where they feel comfortable seeking out emotional and other support.



There was a sense expressed by several parents in the community that new, expanded services can be integrated efficiently into existing services so that funding structures are not overwhelmed. One parent described this as “piggy backing” on what is already in place. For example, having a cook from one of the programs in the community teach young parent how to cook and then working together to prepare food for the Elders luncheon. Another parent stated that we should *“try and connect everything together ... that would be really awesome.”*

Suggested Activities and Public Spaces

Elders, parents, and youth highly value activities that bring the whole community together. A parent explained:

I think it brings them out to connect socially with each other, gives them a place to meet and gather and a reason to get together ... so I think it helps with isolation and I think it's just good for them to be around other people and you know keep up on what's going on. (Parent participant)



A group of youth said that because “everyone’s so busy with their own lives”, activities that facilitate “family connection” where “the whole community gets together” would be fantastic. They suggested movie nights and board game nights. One young person proposed that the community could organize a big cultural event where a speaker from every family in the band gets up and tells stories about their history. A few people mentioned that bringing back the weekly breakfast club would also be a great way for people to come together, particularly youth and Elders. A parent pointed out that the community breakfasts also gave teachers an opportunity to be connected to families, and that this helped bring families into the school.



Figure 2. Suggestions Activities & Public Places as expressed by the Wei Wai Kum community.

Youth expressed a strong desire to “chill” with Elders, and learn from them. A group of young people said that they would like to learn about traditional medicines, traditional foods, learn how to cook, how to make button blankets and how to “*speake that old tongue*”. Community members agreed that offering youth activities and programs that they are interested in would keep them busy and “out of trouble”. One parent mentioned that young men would benefit from more male youth workers and a boys group. As an Elder emphasized, “*we have the young girls group. But ... we need something for the boys.*” Several Elders feel that the RCMP should set up a program with youth in the community, perhaps where an officer visits with youth to come and talk. One Elder believes that this would “*take the fear away*” and would foster more open mindedness on the part of the RCMP and the youth.



Keeping Children Out of Government Care

“There is no magic word, no magic formula. We have to get to the source of the problem and help as much as we can. (Elder participant)

During the Elders first conference it was stated that it is a sacred duty and a blessing to work with and for our children. It was pointed out that for thousands and thousands of years, Aboriginal peoples created ways to care for their children. Community members shared important knowledge about how to keep families together. While approaches and ideas varied, the main message from Wei Wai Kai Nation members was clear: the community knows what needs to be done to keep children out of government care. This section will summarize their knowledge in three areas: support for parents and families, family healing, and reaching out to family.

Support for Parents and Families

Elders, parents and youth had suggestions on what types of supports would assist families in staying together. A parent wants to see Elders, grandparents, parents – the whole community – band together to support parents. She suggested that big meetings could be held at Laichwiltach Family Life or elsewhere when a family becomes involved with the ministry. A group of young people also discussed the importance of prevention. One youth stated that there should be someone to talk with parents and try to solve problems before children get taken into care. Several youth believe that more material support like food stamps, gift cards, and better homes that create safer environments for families would support parents.

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

Many community members emphasized that parents at risk of having their children taken into care need access to programs for the whole family. A youth mentioned the White Crow program, *“where they get like these the family members together and they do all these activities like family activities with no TV and phone and whatever”*. Another youth added that families would benefit from doing things like canoeing together. And another young person believes that counselling programs should offer the option for kids and parents to receive support together.

Several community members also mentioned that parenting workshops and education are extremely important. As one youth stated, *“The parents sometimes aren’t ready for kids”*. A parent agreed that having supports in place where parents can talk and learn from other parents is crucial because *“kids don’t come with instruction books”*. This parent outlined that parenting peer support groups and workshops could be organized once every 1-2 months.

Some people highlighted that supporting parents involves making sure that they have the right information. As one parent explained, *“I don’t think that there is enough information about government care and reasons why it actually happens and you know, what really happens once a kid is put into government care.”* Another parent had the experience where she was told to *“quit drinking”* but was not referred to any services. She stressed that this has to change. *“Just letting the parents know that there’s lots of services out there”* is crucial according to this parent. People believe that an advocate is needed to offer families these important services.



Parental support can also take the form of respite care, as some community members pointed out. One parent affirmed, *“so if parents are going through a crisis or a stressful time in their lives, where they’re having difficulty dealing with something that they would have a safe place for their child to be if they needed to have a bit of time”*. It would also be supportive for parents to have daycare provided to them so that they could access group therapy or other programs and services.

Family Healing

Community members emphasized that parents struggling with drugs and alcohol issues need to be able to enter treatment when they are ready, without having to wait. Several people discussed the potential of a culturally-based, on-reserve treatment center designed and run by Aboriginal staff. An Elder stressed that people may need a year or two in treatment to heal - *“somewhere you just stay there and get all the counselling and care you need.”*



Many community members expressed their desire for a place on reserve that provided a safe and nurturing environment for families to heal and learn. A parent explained that this could be a shelter, where families could go in time of crisis. An Elder explained, “*maybe we could have a home on the reserve for them, that they can feel safe and still function or learn how to function*”. Another Elder described what this place would look like:

“... the monitoring of it would be ... under the supervision of your own people. Not by taking them away, separating them ... But this way here ... monitoring, watching ... where you’re looking at the community raising a child. ... You know. [A] safe place.” (Elder participant)

Reaching Out to Family

As previously mentioned, not providing important information about the whereabouts and well-being of children in care causes a lot of frustration. Several community members emphasized that the first step, before the ministry actually removes a child from their home, should be to reach out to all family members to determine whether someone in the family could take them in. An Elder explained that 9 times out of 10, the family does not know that children have been taken away. According to this Elder, starting with the family would save the ministry a lot of headaches. She explained:

“...the way they’re doing it - just coming in and taking them without the rest of the family knowing - that causes a lot of bitterness ... Give the First Nations people a chance to do something with their First Nations kids instead of just pulling them right out, putting them somewhere else, even for the weekend. It traumatizes them. And that doesn’t help them in their life as things go on. Whereas this way, the family knows what’s going on, and they’ll take the kids, and they’ll go up to the – their parents and try to talk some sense into them.” (Elder participant)



Support for Children and Families in Care

“Have them sit in a circle with us and understand and listen ... this is how we govern our people - this is how we govern our children” (Elder participant)

Community members voiced their suggestions on how to better support children in care and families who are involved with the ministry. This section will summarize the suggestions of community members in four areas: advocacy, more supports for parents and families, nurturing connections, and more support for foster parent.

Advocacy

In discussions with community members, the need for a child and family advocate was highlighted consistently. This advocate was described as someone who would be First Nations, who would understand the child protection system, the legal system, the child and family service act, and who would offer consistent support and get to know the families. A parent summarized the advocate's role in this way:

I think having an advocate that really can walk you through that process or even so that you know your rights as a parent, what you can do ... by seeking out the right supports around and doing the work you can fight and get your child back ... to know your rights on how you can have a voice on where that child will be rather than with a stranger ... (Parent participant)



The need for an advocate was highlighted by several community members who shared stories of not being heard, or being intimidated in their interactions with the Ministry. An Elder shared, *“I’ve been to courts and stuff and I just sit there and let them rule me because I don’t know how to speak out for myself”*.

More Supports for Parents and Families

Several community members emphasized that when a child is taken into care, parents need to be supported in understanding why and have immediate access to the services and resources that will support them in reuniting with their children. A parent emphasized that for people with physical and mental health issues, addiction issues, and issues that have come about because they themselves were abused, they need adequate professional help *right away*. Several people mentioned that counselling, both individual and family, would be good. And one parent would like to see support services offered that meet the specific needs of individual parents and families. For example, parents might want help working on the relationship with their spouse as well as on their parenting.

The suggestion to open a holistic ‘safe house’ or receiving home where families at risk of having their children taken by the government could go to receive live-in support with their children was proposed by many people. An Elder described what this program could look like:

I always envisioned, and I think it should be tried, a place, an island somewhere, where they build a bunch of little homes. They all have little gardens, little normal family kind of situation. They take the mum and the dad and the children. They have a place where they teach the parents parenting skills, they have places for the children to go to do some learning as well. (Elder participant)

Several people also asserted parents should be able to get away from their kids for a little while and unwind. An Elder proposed that during this time, parents could get together in groups and chat. She stated, *“[when] you’re hurting, you need to get it out right?”* (Elder participant)

Members of the community would also like to see more Aboriginal social workers. In the words of one Elder, *“we don't have enough workers that can look at both sides and have the feelings that we have for our own kids”*.

Nurturing Connections

Participants in the community want children's connections to culture, community and family to be nurtured while they are in government care. An Elder emphasized that non-Aboriginal foster parents need to be educated about Aboriginal culture so that they can understand how to keep children connected. She contributed:

“... it's very important whoever fosters those children ... to bring them to anything that is going on culturally ... and teach them how important it is for them not to lose what is rightfully theirs. ... So teaching the foster parents well with First Nations child is very important. So they never lose their identity.” (Elder participant)



Several participants stressed the importance of substantial, regular contact between children, parents, grandparents and other relatives. Many Elders expressed concern that there is a lack of consistency in contact between parents and children, and as one Elder stressed, even if parents are not allowed to see their children, they have a right to know what is going on in the life of their child. Updates every one to two weeks are extremely important.

An Elder from the community who fosters children described how he and his wife have made every effort to include the parents of their foster children in their family life so that children and parents stay connected. This Elder explained that by including parents, you can *“spark something”* in them:

“...you gotta try to get to them and get them involved with you [and] with their kids and do things with them that they can see what you're doing to learn themselves what to do with them.” (Elder participant)

More Support for Foster Parents

Several people in the community mentioned that a lack of support and a shortage of resources could be preventing some people from becoming foster parents. A parent believes that more training should be offered to foster parents on how to care for children and youth with special needs and behavioral issues. This parent explained that more training would reduce some of the fear: *“That's why they fret to take kids, because they don't have the training for it. None. And you're scared, definitely, you know, you're scared to take that kid”*.

An Elder explained that grandparents might find out a relative is in foster care and want to look after that child or youth, but might think that they are too old and do not have the strength. This Elder explained that without adequate supports, foster families in the community can be *“spread too thin”*, and this can prevent more Aboriginal foster families from stepping forward. An Elder mentioned that there is a Grandparents Society in Vancouver that offers support to grandparents who are dealing with the ministry. This Elder would like to see the same type of group come together on Vancouver Island.

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. As the community conversations have illustrated, discussions about keeping children out of government care need to extend beyond consideration of individual children and parents towards an inclusive, holistic, community-based approach. Our Elders emphasize that our children can only be understood as part of a whole that includes their family, community, culture, and the natural environment.

Members of the Wei Wai Kum Nation know what needs to be done to support children and families, build a strong community, and keep children out of government care. Participants recognize Elders as powerful links to traditional knowledge and want this knowledge to guide program design and delivery in the future. They believe that by taking control of their own services, they will be able to offer community members more accessible, impactful, relevant and culturally-safe support.

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 our 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 grounded in traditional cultural knowledge.



APPENDICES

Youth Survey

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learning my culture is important	9	5			
I am able to do lots of activities on my reserve	7	7	1		
I feel accepted by others.	8	6		1	
I am learning from the Elders	7	4	3	1	
I get enough support in order to succeed at school	12	1	1		
I feel safe in the community	10	4		1	
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	4	5	4	1	

QUESTIONS	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I participate in cultural activities.	5	5	3	2	
I am learning my Native language.	5	4	2	4	
I am learning about my culture	7	3	5	1	
I participate in activities on my reserve	7	1	5	1	
I feel safe on my reserve	9	5	1	1	
I worry about life	5	1	5	1	3
I feel successful	3	3	4		
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life	1		3	2	9

Survey Analysis

A total of sixteen youth, ranging in age from 12 to 19 years old, completed the written survey. The vast majority of youth noted that they feel safe in their community and accepted by others. All of the youth stated that learning their culture is important to them, and many shared that they are learning from the Elders. While youth largely reported that they participate in cultural activities and are learning about their culture and language, about one third of youth shared that they only sometimes or rarely participate in cultural activities. Many youth stated that they receive enough support in order to succeed in school, and almost half of young respondents noted that they feel successful. Many youth stated that drugs and alcohol are not having an impact on their life, however over half shared that they worry about life. The results also show that a number of youth feel that children in foster care are a concern for their community.

Parent Survey

QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Learning my culture is important	14	3			
There are enough cultural activities for families in my community		10	2	2	1
There are enough activities for youth in my community	2	9	1	5	
I would like to spend time supporting the youth of my community	8	7	1		
I feel accepted by others	4	9	2		
Adequate support is available for adults/parents		8	2	6	
I have adequate, safe housing	5	8	3	1	
Adequate support is available for youth	2	8	4	3	1
Children in foster care are a concern for your community	11	4	3		

QUESTIONS	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I participate in cultural activities	1	5	6	5	1
I am learning my Native language	1	1	7	4	4
I participate in activities in my community	1	7	6	3	
I spend time supporting the youth in my community	1	4	5	4	1
I feel safe in the community	7	3	10		
I worry about life	2	6	3	3	
Drugs and alcohol are having an impact on my life	2		6	6	6

Survey Analysis

Seventeen parents, ranging in age from 24 to 57, completed the written survey. Parents' responses to questions varied, but distinctive trends emerged. While all parents noted that learning their culture is important to them, there seems to be room to create more opportunities for parents to participate in cultural activities, particularly in regards to learning language. Many parents shared that both parents and youth would benefit from increased support, with almost all parents stating that they would like to be involved in supporting youth in their community. While the majority of parents reported that drugs and alcohol rarely or never have an impact on their life, almost half of parents noted that they worry about life. Many parents also stated that children in foster care are a concern for the community.

Elder Survey

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

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

Survey Analysis

This report was compiled in collaboration with Sasamans Society



SASAMANS SOCIETY

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