



Lifeline:

Creating a Community Service Hub
for Aboriginal Children and Families



By Jessica Ball

Laichwiltach Family Life Society

The logo for Laichwiltach Family Life Society depicts Family, shown here by a mother figure, father figure, and a small child. Values – the unification of the family in itself is indicative of values, through Sharing, Healing, and the family’s sense of Community. The Copper, held here by the mother figure, further symbolizes the family’s sense of Sharing, Healing, and Values – both in terms of social order within the potlatch community and in terms of spirituality on an individual level as well as the family, extended family and community levels. Life – represented here by the continuum of the “Tree of Life.” The roots of the tree delicately traverse the design to connect each person, displaying its many branches and the strength of the trunk from which each branch originates, and then carrying on to join once again the outer circle which is representative of all life. Finally, the artist has encapsulated the design in circular form to signify the holistic approach to family life – which is the Laichwiltach Family Life Program.



The logo was created by Kevin Cranmer, who is a member of Kwakwaka’wakw Nation on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Acknowledgements



Vitality by artist
Andy Everson

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This booklet is dedicated to the Peoples of Laichwiltach, who have always supported the work of the Laichwiltach Family Life Society.

Lifeline:

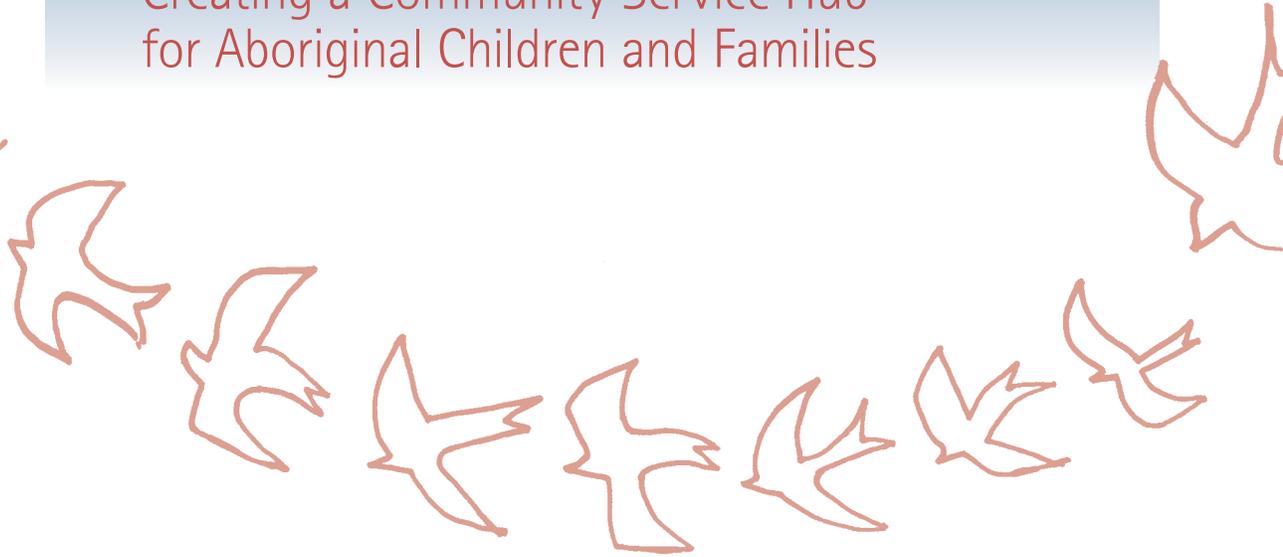
Creating a Community Service Hub for Aboriginal Children and Families

By Jessica Ball

“Some of the young parents around here are lifers! You see them bringing their small children for the same programs at Laichwiltach that they enjoyed when they were little. It’s like a lifeline for so many of the First Nations people in the area. Probably its most important work is supporting grandparents raising grandchildren. So you see it reaching people from young to old, birth to Elders, coming full circle.”



Lifeline: Creating a Community Service Hub for Aboriginal Children and Families



The story of Laichwiltach Family Life Society is one of inspiration, collaboration, and commitment. This booklet tells the story in these five sections:

Beginning the Journey recounts how this non-profit society, located in a small town on northern Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada, gradually built a thriving service hub founded on a deep understanding of Aboriginal ways of strengthening family life. 1

Walking Beside Families on Their Life Journeys describes the setting, the approach, the staff and clients, and the way the Society operates to hook families into the multi-service hub and provide them with services that many have described as a lifeline. 5

Programs and Services highlights what Laichwiltach offers to community members of all ages. 11

Keys to Success describes five essential elements of creating and sustaining a grassroots culturally based community service organization that responds to local needs and goals of First Nations and Métis children and families. 19

Challenges and Lessons Learned describes recurring challenges Laichwiltach has faced. It also offers recommendations for communities that want to establish their own service hub, and for government and other agencies that want to support community-based service organizations to respond to the needs of First Nations and Métis children and families. 31

This booklet is the result of a community-university partnership project between Laichwiltach¹ Family Life Society's executive director, Audrey Wilson, and Jessica Ball, a professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The booklet celebrates Laichwiltach's 20th anniversary as the only agency on northern Vancouver Island, British Columbia, that serves both on-reserve and non-status urban First Nations and Métis people. The booklet recounts how Laichwiltach's founders engaged local First Nations and other service organizations in the region to grow the range and reach of services to children and families. Excerpts from interviews conducted in 2010 and 2011 with over 50 program staff, parents, youth, Elders, and service professionals illustrate how Laichwiltach Family Life Society is experienced as a lifeline by the communities it serves.



Partners Audrey Wilson, Executive Director, and Jessica Ball, Research, pictured here with Co-Founder Pauline Janyst



¹ Laichwiltach (pronounced Lek'wil'tok) Peoples are part of the Nation now commonly referred to as the Kwakwaka'wakw ("Kwak'wala speaking people"). The Kwakwaka'wakw Nation's territory on Vancouver Island extends from Cape Mudge to the mouth of Bute Inlet in the south to Smith Inlet in the north and around the northern part of the island to Quatsino Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The Laichwiltach are the southernmost of the Kwak'wala speaking people.

IN HONOUR of the Laichwiltach territory where our organization is located, we named the Society after the people of this land, with thanks for allowing those who are visitors to live on their traditional lands.

Laichwiltach Family Life Society strives to make services accessible, adaptable, culturally appropriate, and respectful for Aboriginal community members living on and off reserve. A team of over 30 skilled staff – many of them Aboriginal – provide these services. Our programs and services cover the entire life cycle and include baby groups, parent-tot, preschool, parenting programs, youth outreach and support, counselling and addiction recovery, employment skills training, an Elders activity group, research projects, referrals, supervised visitation, and community-wide events.

The Society prides itself on collaborating with many partners on northern Vancouver Island. We currently have partnerships with Kwakiutl District Council Health Office, K'omoks First Nation, and Mamalilikulla Qwe' Qwa' Sot'em Band for addictions funding; Ann Elmore Transition House and Campbell River Family Services on a Stopping the Violence initiative that also serves Gold River; Campbell River Parks & Recreation for summer recreational activities for children in grades 3 to 6 and a Youth to Youth program that is open to the community at large; the BC Success by Six program for coordinating services for young children and holding a children's health fair and other community gatherings; and the BC Ministry for Children and Family Development for an Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health program.

Throughout all of these programs, Laichwiltach Family Life Society strives to return to the source of our cultural traditions, doing what Aboriginal people have done since time immemorial – centering families, respecting Elders, and engaging in talking circles. We are enriched by the many First Nations and Métis cultures that community members bring to the programs and that come alive for children and youth as a source of pride and strength.



Audrey Wilson, Executive Director

OVER MANY YEARS of working in partnership with Audrey Wilson and Laichwiltach Family Life Society, I have been privileged to join in events that bring First Nations and Métis families together to celebrate their rich cultural traditions, including the traditions of working together to meet needs, supporting one another in difficult times, and adapting to changing circumstances with flexibility and perseverance. While Laichwiltach has a remarkable history of successes, it faces formidable pressures: to reduce the size of programs due to funding cuts; to do more with less; to meet almost overwhelming demands for proposal writing to secure year-to-year funding for programs; and to carve up the work of supporting whole families into separate program areas. Perhaps its greatest challenge is explaining to government and mainstream service agencies why culturally based programs are critical to promoting a sense of safety, groundedness, and positive self-regard among First Nations and Métis clients, especially youth.

Andy Everson's "Vitality" artwork, which he generously gifted to this project, captures Laichwiltach's journey as it struggles against the mainstream current of top-down organization and fragmented services to manifest its vision for the holistic well-being of First Nations and Métis families and communities.



Jessica Ball, Research Partner

Beginning the Journey



LAICHWILTACH FAMILY LIFE SOCIETY in Campbell River, British Columbia, was created 20 years ago to provide respectful, culturally based programs for First Nations and Métis families living in urban and on-reserve communities on northern Vancouver Island. Many people describe the non-profit society as a lifeline.

The Society started with family violence prevention groups and individual counseling, but its programs have steadily grown in scope, scale, and geographic reach. They now serve anyone of Aboriginal ancestry, with or without Indian or Métis status, living on or off reserves, as well as non-Aboriginal partners living with an Aboriginal person. The client base includes many Aboriginal people who have moved to the region from other parts of Canada, and many children who move from the west coast of Vancouver Island to spend the winter months with family in Campbell River. Laichwiltach fills persisting gaps in services and cultural safety² in the mainstream service system. It promotes cultural learning and positive identity by providing culturally based, community-driven programming.

The Laichwiltach story begins in 1991, when four First Nations women on northern Vancouver Island broke the silence around domestic violence. Audrey Wilson of We Wai Kai First Nation (Cape Mudge), Pauline Janyst of Da'naxd'xw First Nation (Harbledown Island), Barb Mitchell of K'omoks First Nation (Comox), and Lorna Quatell of Wei Wai Kum First Nation (Campbell River) wanted to provide a safe place where Aboriginal women who were experiencing domestic violence could get help and support. The need for such



² Cultural safety refers to the experience of having one's cultural identity and way of being respected (or, at least, not challenged or harmed) during an interaction with others or with institutions. For more information, see <http://www.ecdip.org/culturalsafety/>

“One of the first groups of people we pulled together was Elders. They wanted to create a program for Elders so they could continue to meet together. That’s how the Rekindling the Spirits of Our Elders program got started. It took a community to create it.”

Pauline Janyst,
Co-Founder

a nurturing place was desperate in an area where pervasive racism created huge barriers to services for First Nations people.

For Pauline, the Society’s founding administrator and program coordinator, establishing the Laichwiltach Family Life Program was a dream come true. Pauline realized that she really wanted to dedicate her time and energy to her own people. As a First Nations woman who volunteered as a victim services worker, she was all too familiar with the denial that existed in mainstream community agencies – denial about the needs of family members living from crisis to crisis and denial about the lack of culturally safe counselling and family intervention services for First Nations women seeking help. In 1991, Pauline approached three women from other First Nations in the region who shared her concerns and goals. These four women went on to become the founders of the Laichwiltach Family Life Society. In those early months, the women met around a kitchen table or at office space loaned to them by the Kwakiutl³ Territorial Fisheries Commission (now A-Tlegay). They shared their dreams for supporting families in their communities and discussed how to make them a reality.



Pauline Janyst outside the A-Tlegay Fisheries Society Office

The first year, the women worked to develop themselves and their relationships with each other through talking circles and healing workshops. This enabled them to be grounded within themselves so that they could support the women they worked with. The women also wrote a mission statement: *“To empower and promote healing in our communities from a First Nations perspective for all people of Native ancestry in unity.”*

Before they could develop a plan to address the high rate of family violence in their First Nations communities, the group needed to get a true picture of the problem. They applied for and got \$13,000 from the British Columbia Ministry of Women’s Equality to conduct a needs assessment. After analyzing the results, they developed programs and a family-centered service delivery model.

At first the women focused on creating a women’s support group and raising community awareness about family violence. From the beginning, the support groups were based on returning to the Source – finding inspiration and resilience in their cultures of origin, each with its own traditions for how to do things “in a good way.”

The women had successfully embarked on the long journey of confronting the silence and stigma associated with family violence. They began offering individual and group counselling services for both women and men, and soon more family members came to share and get support. In addition to a support group for women struggling in difficult relationships,⁴ they offered an anger management support group for men that also provided individual counselling. Their hope was that counselling, education, awareness, and social support would help to stop the violence and promote family wellness. Soon after, they added an activity group for Elders.

³ In some current contexts, Kwagiulth is preferred over Kwakiutl. First Nations languages adapt and change over time, and spelling and vocabulary may vary from one community to another.

⁴ The founders chose the term “women struggling in difficult relationships” because they wanted women to feel safe and comfortable rather than being labelled “women in abusive relationships.”

The women realized that if they wanted to reach more members of the First Nations communities in the area – and access family support funds from the provincial government – they needed to incorporate as a non-profit society. In 1994, with the solid backing of seven Vancouver Island First Nations – the original three plus Klahoose, Mamalilikulla Qwe' Qwa' Sot'em Band, Homalco, and Kwikwaka'wakw – the organization was registered as the Laichwiltach Family Life Society, named for the Laichwiltach traditional territory where the programs are located. Having many community partners made it possible to establish the Society, raise funds from the partners, and reach a large number of Aboriginal families in the region. Soon new programs were added to meet a broad range of needs that community members identified.



Becoming a registered society brought the group credibility and funding. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada recommended Laichwiltach to Health Canada as a possible site for a new Aboriginal Head Start preschool program. Initially, Health Canada offered them \$400,000 to run a program serving children from Campbell River, Comox, and Courtenay. However, because the Society wanted children to be able to attend a Head Start program close to home, they recommended dividing the funding between them and another local organization – the Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry – so that two Aboriginal Head Start programs could be opened.

From the earliest days, the founders of Laichwiltach Family Life Society knew that fundraising and managing finances would be a key to success. It was important to establish trust with both the local First Nations and the mainstream funding bodies. As a strategic move to enable program growth, in 2003 Laichwiltach Family Life Society became a



charitable organization. We Wai Kai First Nation Chief Ralph Dick attributes much of the Society's success to the founders' keen business sense and ability to budget, plan, and invest in capacity building. Another factor contributing to their success, as Chief Dick explains, is that although the First Nations in the area contribute funds, goods, and services, they stay out of the organization's day-to-day business. All of the programs operate at arm's length from First Nations in a neutral off-reserve space that is not identified with any one Nation.

The founders, along with staff who joined the organization over time, have a clear vision of supporting all family members, not just the one who comes to a particular program. In contrast to governments, which tend to take a fragmented approach to promoting well-being through services that target particular age groups (e.g., young children, youth, parents) and particular issues (e.g., substance abuse or suicide prevention), the Society's family development model is holistic: the wellness of

one individual depends on the wellness of family members and the quality of life available to the family and their community as a whole. This family systems approach to supporting individual healing and optimal development has always guided the Society's programs.

Laichwiltach has steadily expanded its programs, community events, and staff. Audrey Wilson, the executive director, attributes the evolution of a multi-service hub to two factors: the tremendous support the Society has received for its work, and the many gaps that persist in the mainstream service system, especially for non-status⁵ and urban Aboriginal families. First Nations and

Métis families in the region rely on Laichwiltach as a culturally safe place to find the supports they need.

According to Audrey, good decisions about where to invest in new and expanded programs depend on staying closely connected to the communities in the region and listening to what people say about what they need and want. As a client of the counselling services puts it: "The staff see what the people need even if it's not spoken, and they work hard to get something happening to meet that need. It's that respect and responding to needs that makes this organization great."



⁵ 'Status' is a legal category created by the federal government of Canada recognizing that an individual is a registered member of a First Nation. The federal government acknowledges that it has certain unique obligations to people with 'Registered Indian Status' but not to Aboriginal people without Status.

Walking Beside Families on Their Life Journeys

“My kids and I don’t really know life without Laichwiltach. We love everybody that’s here, and without the programs and services they offer, I don’t think we could have accessed these kinds of supports in such a family-like, supportive way.”

Lisa Johnson



The setting

When you walk through the doorway of Laichwiltach Family Life Society, it is obvious you are entering a First Nations space. The hallways are covered with First Nations art. There are comfortable chairs, hot drinks, and shelves of food and clothing for anyone who needs it. This is a place where basic needs are recognized and all are welcome. The people who come to the centre range from homeless single men to low-income families to dual-income parents – all seeking services based on Aboriginal values and delivered in a non-judgmental atmosphere.

Parents and children can count on a smile at Laichwiltach. Staff walk beside families, accompanying them on life’s often difficult journeys. A former staff member, Kathi Camilleri, explains: *“It’s just a comfortable place to be. The coffee’s on, there’s food out. If someone is in crisis, they know they can go sit in the hallway and somebody will come see them and offer some help. That’s not the way it is in most other places.”*

Laichwiltach has outgrown three buildings over the years and is now located in a leased former elementary school and two smaller buildings with a total of 13,000 square feet of indoor space. The service hub sits on an acre of park-like space for outdoor play, sports, and family recreation. The Society also runs programs in an additional 1000-square-foot space it leases from BC Housing for a minimal fee. A number of other service organizations are co-located at the second site, making it easy for families to access a range of services there.



The clients

The Society provides programs, services, and community events to 800–1000 people per year. First Nations and Métis clients come from all over northern Vancouver Island, but most reside on and off reserves in and around Campbell River, Gold River, Quadra Island, Cortes Island, and Tahsis. Some clients come on their own and some are referred from a variety of sources, including preschools, schools, physicians, nurses, social workers, and child and youth care workers. The centre welcomes people to drop by for coffee and to



say hello. For community members who wish to participate in programs or receive counselling or other services, there is an intake process handled by one of the staff. The Society accepts anyone with Aboriginal ancestry and their non-Aboriginal partners.



The staff

Laichwiltach employs 35 full-time and part-time staff of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent. In addition to staff who deliver group programs and counselling, clients often receive support and practical help from the receptionist, janitor, bus driver, or cook, who are very much a part of the team that walks beside families who come to the centre. As parent Lisa Johnson remarks: *“After six kids attending the programs there, the bus driver Yves knows me very well and he always tries to make the bus schedule work for whatever is going on with my kids or me on different days. He’s become almost like a family member to all of us.”*



Laichwiltach’s setting, staff, and programs promote respect for Elders. One Elder said that walking through the halls at Laichwiltach and being greeted with warmth and respect makes her feel important and cherished.



John Frishholz

District Administrator
for Aboriginal Education,
BC School District #72
(retired)

“The right people in the right place at the right time” is how John accounts for the positive relationship Laichwiltach enjoys with the local school district. He was the first district administrator of Aboriginal education. Having been involved in several province-wide initiatives to promote understanding of Aboriginal history and issues, John knows how complicated it is to foster connections between schools and the Aboriginal people they serve – many of whom experienced the Indian residential schools that wounded so many people. “They are working against a life time of misinformation and misunderstanding. They need people in the mainstream to become allies in creating change.”

John learned to appreciate the tremendous diversity that exists among First Nations and Métis people by working with the Society, and especially with Corrine Sagmeister, team leader for early childhood programs and Success by Six coordinator. John knows that a “one size fits all” approach doesn’t work; programs need to be tailored to specific needs. He mentions the pivotal role the Society plays with children who arrive in Campbell River from the west coast of Vancouver Island to spend the winter with relatives: *“The schools didn’t know how to respond to them, but Laichwiltach works with them and grounds them within the community.”* This is one example, John says, of how Laichwiltach brings people and programs together. ●



Supporting families

“Walking beside” is how many of the staff at Laichwiltach characterise their approach to supporting families. As Corrine Sagmeister remarks: *“We are really here to walk beside people as they go through their lives, rather than to deliver a program and focus only on what we’re doing in that one program. The staff are collaborative and we often come together to figure out how to address a need that is affecting all members of a family.”*

Their goal is to help family members get their needs met and feel supported in their journey towards healing, wellness, and success in life. The staff see all of the core program areas as important and complementary, and family members are encouraged to move from one program to another as their needs and goals change.

“When a family comes to the centre, they don’t usually just come for one thing. They may have a child needing an ECE program, another child needing an after-school program, and a family member needing an addictions program. It’s all here and the staff help to get everyone in the family connected.”

Laichwiltach staff have accompanied some community members through several stages of their life journey, like two of the young people in the Youth Outreach and Support Group, who are graduates of the baby group, Aboriginal Head Start, the after-school program, and summer camps. A young parent remarks: *“The programs at Laichwiltach create a lifeline for people from childhood to Elderhood. I came to Laichwiltach as a kid, and now I’m a parent with a child in the Little Fry program.”*

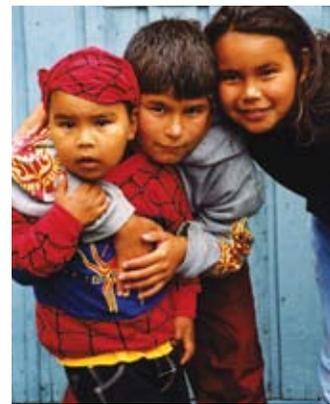


“Our child care is a holistic model, and it feels natural to us as Aboriginal people, where we have always seen children and the community as one.”



Family development model

All of the programs offered by Laichwiltach Family Life Society are based on a family development model developed in 1995. The Society created this model when it received federal funding to develop a proposal for Aboriginal Head Start. The proposal identified hiring a community outreach worker to promote Elders’ participation and family and community involvement. The federal government responded that they would only fund a preschool program for young children and not the components that addressed whole families. Almost a decade later when the government called for a proposal for family outreach and involvement, the Society drew on their original vision of a holistic, family-centered approach. In the meantime, the Society worked hard to implement the family development model by piecing together funding from various sources and introducing programs that support Elders, parents, youth, and children so that Laichwiltach embraces the whole family.





A multi-service centre

Laichwiltach Family Life Society has evolved over time into a multi-service centre that operates as both hook and hub.

Hook

Programs for infants and young children are like a hook that attaches a family to Laichwiltach. When a child attends Little Fry or Aboriginal Head Start, family members learn about the many other services the Society offers, all housed together on the premises of a former elementary school.

Hub

Laichwiltach brings people together through programs, cultural events, and health fairs. Parents can come in, have a quick chat with the receptionist or other staff, pick up some used clothing or a loaf of bread, or get a ride to the food bank if need be. There is a community kitchen, parents and tots group, parents' workshops, and an active parent advisory committee. What stands out for participants is that they never feel judged – the door is always open to them, and they feel comfortable and safe accessing services.

“As the staff see needs, they answer needs.”

“The programs are like streams that all connect and flow together to make up a big river.”



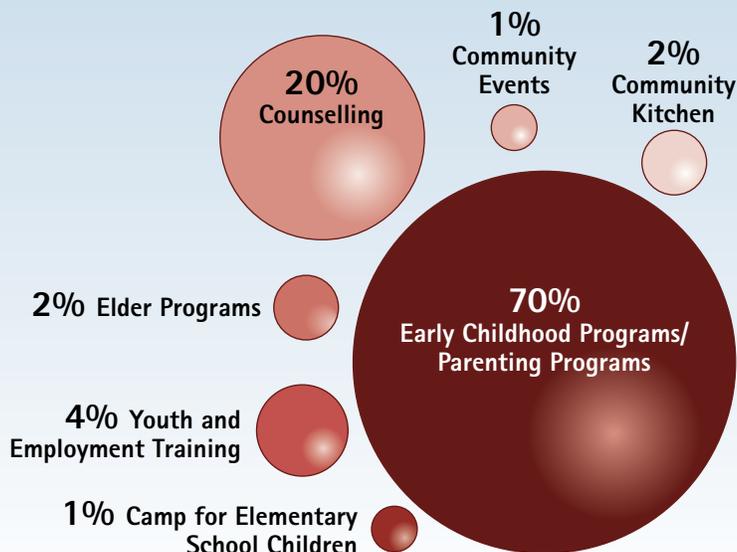
Early childhood program team leader Corrine Sagmeister comments:

“When a child comes through the door of the Little Fry program, they have access to a preschool program for 3-year-olds. And in that program we can refer the child to speech and language assessment or therapy, to infant development or supportive childcare, or to services in the community. We’re the point of contact for people to get the services they need. We used to have a pediatrician involved here, and a dental hygienist comes in to do fluoride treatments 3 times a year. We have public health come in to do immunizations if children need to get caught up on that, and we do flu clinics. Parents can come to support groups or just talk with the staff about any concerns they have or information they need. These are just some of the wide range of services that families can access here.”

Laichwiltach works with non-Aboriginal agencies and specialists to make the centre a meeting place for specialists funded by the Society or by external agencies to work with children. Families can access a speech language therapist, physical therapist, learning remediation specialist, dental hygienist, First Nations patient liaison worker, child welfare and family support workers, and community nurse. The Society also helps families navigate child protection and acute health care services.

Staff members can learn from visiting specialists and provide continuity in prevention and intervention work, such as speech-language routines and remedial exercises, occupational

A Community Service Hub



therapy exercises, and dental hygiene. Staff can monitor services, explain services to children and parents, and ensure follow-up with referrals.

Professional service providers who rotate among many small communities can build relationships with a stable core of staff, become culturally literate, and efficiently follow up with large numbers of people attending regular programs.

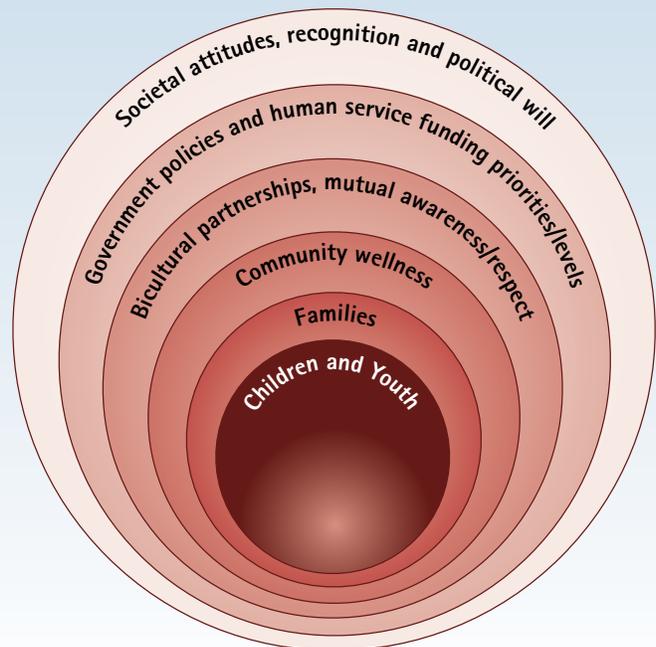


“We’re the point of contact for people to get the services they need.”

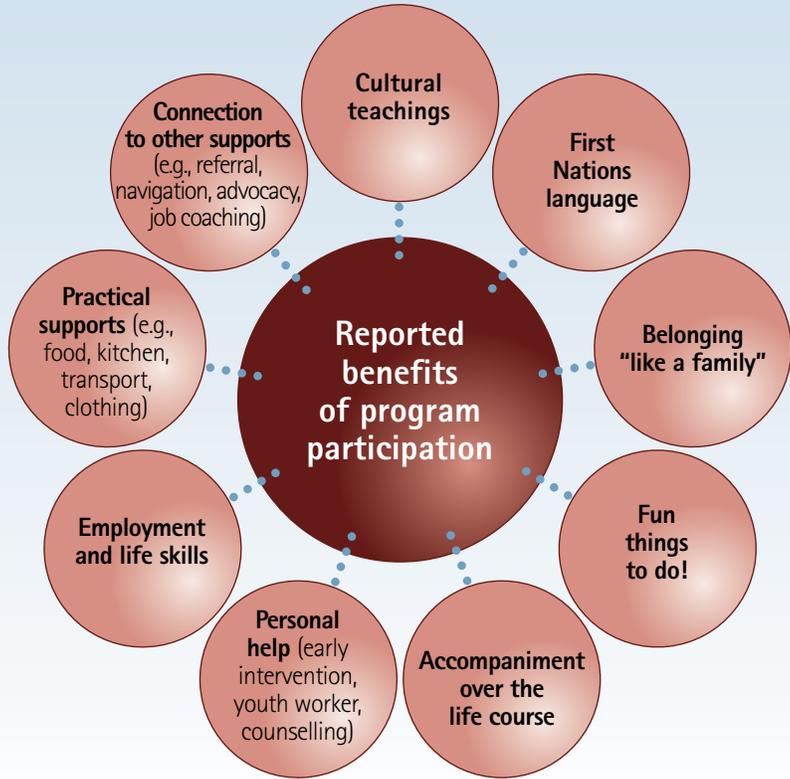
Staff feel the hub model works well because it “goes with the flow of how people access services.” Clients have “fluid contact with a variety of staff” and the team “works like a well-oiled unit.”

Dr. Russell, a pediatrician, spent two afternoons a month at Laichwiltach before funding for his involvement was cut. In his view, “without the services offered by the Society, people would fall through the cracks.”

The ecology of Aboriginal children's and families' quality of life



What children, youth, parents, and Elders say about how they benefit from participation in Laichwiltach's programs and services



Several external service providers who collaborate with or rely on Laichwiltach for assistance in locating clients and delivering their services agreed that the Society works effectively as a multi-service hub for First Nations and Métis community members.



Programs and Services



CORE PROGRAM AREAS that have been lifelines to community members include:

- Early childhood programs (0-5 yrs)
- Programs for school-aged children and youth (6-18 yrs)
- Youth employment skills training (18-30 yrs)
- Life skills training (adults)
- Elder activities
- Individual and family counselling
- Child welfare, including guardianship, family support, and resources
- Referrals
- Community-wide events

All of the programs are grounded in First Nations values and worldviews, which center children in circles of care that extend out to all family and clan members and beyond to the local community. Typical First Nation ways of working include:

- recognizing the ongoing impacts of colonial policies on First Nations and Métis individuals and families that may be contributing to problems
- being ready to engage in healing work as needed
- using a partnership approach to suit the needs, goals, and circumstances of individuals and families
- supporting holistic development of individuals within the context of the whole family
- using flexible avenues for walking beside individuals and families, with no pre-commitment to one approach



- offering a broad range of supports, from driving a family to the food bank or appointments, to assisting with paperwork for drivers' licenses, to peer group support, individual counselling or family therapy, to crisis intervention
- meeting clients where it is most convenient and comfortable for them (e.g., through programs at the centre, office appointments, or home visits)
- persevering with clients; not striking them from the client list if they disappear for a while; welcoming them back each time they are ready to re-engage



Early childhood programs



- Aboriginal infant development, including parent-infant program (or baby group)
- Daycare (18–36 months)
- Early childhood development (“Little Fry”)
- Aboriginal Head Start (“Qwallayuw Head Start”)
- Speech and language development program for children with communication problems
- Supported child development for children with special needs
- Success by Six (inter-agency coordination)

The Aboriginal infant development and supported child development programs specifically serve young children who are developmentally vulnerable.

“Many parents emphasize how important it is that their children are learning some First Nations language and cultural traditions...”



Wait lists

Nearly three-quarters of the Society’s operating budget is spent on early childhood programs. Even so, there are wait lists for all programs.

Responding to family needs

Recently, community members expressed a need for daycare. The Society listens and works hard to meet expressed community needs; its newest service will be a daycare program for eight young children of parents who are engaged full time during the day at a job or treatment program.



Qwaya Sam

Aboriginal Head Start Graduate

“Brave.” That’s how Qwaya’s father describes his 5-year-old son after Qwaya offered to sing a traditional Kwak’wala song at his sister’s graduation out on the west coast of Vancouver Island in their home community of Ahousat First Nation. Originally from a First Nation with Nuu-chah-nulth language and culture, Qwaya has helped his family to cross cultures, bringing home songs and the language from the Laichwiltach Peoples. “He loves to sing the songs at home, and seeing how he has been given the chance to learn the traditions and language from where we live now, it’s a beautiful thing,” remarks his dad. “It shows how the cultures can come together somehow, which was important for us then and is important now that we are all mixing in this modern world.”

On the day of his graduation from Aboriginal Head Start, Qwaya admitted to feeling sad because he won’t be able to continue learning the traditional songs, drumming, and dancing that he did at Laichwiltach. He’s hoping that when he starts public school, he’ll at least see some of the friends he got to see every day at Head Start. But learning Kwak’wala language and songs was really the best thing about it, Qwaya says. ●



Lorraine Kok

(front, centre)

Aboriginal
Head Start
Coordinator

One of the highlights of Lorraine's work as coordinator of the Qwallayuw Head Start Program was arranging dental surgery for a young sister and brother. Lorraine appreciates how working within the Society's multi-service hub gave her the flexibility to "go above and beyond" for this family.

Lorraine is responsible for hiring all of her staff. She manages 7 employees who have certificates or diplomas in early childhood education, special needs, or as teacher's aides. Recently Lorraine used training and betterment funds from the Aboriginal Head Start budget to hire a facilitator to design a new code of conduct, which has been a useful tool in staff training. Lorraine believes Laichwiltach's success is due in part to the way the executive director supports staff training and further education.

Lorraine emphasizes the cultural components of Qwallayuw Head Start: *"Our children experience culture, language and Elders on a daily basis for the three years they are with us in the early childhood programs. Two Elders work with us and teach language, culture, dance, and traditional story telling."* She loves watching the kids change over the course of the year she spends with them: *"They leave here calmer and mellow, more social and more ready for kindergarten. The program also gives kids a sense of pride, and keeps the culture rich and alive for them."*

Lorraine is concerned about her children as they enter kindergarten because she doesn't know what the cultural component or program quality will be. She worries about the uncertain year-to-year funding for Aboriginal Head Start and the prospect that full-day kindergarten offered in the public schools will reduce enrollment in the Head Start program, leading to funding problems that could make it difficult to retain staff, including Elders. ●

Cultural and language components

All of the programs have a strong cultural component, teaching children First Nations language, songs, dances, drumming, and crafts and role modeling respect for Elders who work with the children at least once a week.

Many parents emphasize how important it is that their children are learning some First Nations language and cultural traditions, such as songs, dancing, drumming, and making button blankets. They worry that their children will lose the language skills and the cultural knowledge and pride they have developed through Aboriginal Head Start when they move into the public school system, where their cultures and languages are not taught.

Parents believe that Laichwiltach's early childhood programs prepare their children well for grade 1, but they also want programs for their school-age children. They've requested an after-school tutoring program and a First Nations language program. One parent even suggested a kindergarten to grade 12 school run by Laichwiltach Family Life Society, so their children can learn their culture and language throughout their school years and become highly proficient.



Programs for parents of young children

- **Parents and babies group (Aboriginal Infant Development Program)**
- **Parents and tots group (Community Action Plan for Children)**
- **Parent education, health literacy and promotion**
- **Employment and life skills**
- **Special events and community dinners**

Parents feel well supported by the staff and the programs. Even little things make them feel supported, like being able to pick up a second-hand stroller at the centre's clothing and equipment exchange or get vouchers for baby supplies. Almost all of the parents interviewed said that they mostly access services at Laichwiltach and prefer not to go to other agencies. When asked why, one mother replied, "Because they're not racist here."



Programs for children in grades 1 to 6

- Summer camps
- After-school program

"The youth in the after-school program look out for one another and help each other work through stuff through activities like drama and story telling."



"At camp, I learned things I thought I'd never get to try, and I made the best friends of my life. It was awesome! "



Parent involvement and parent advisory committee

A volunteer parent advisory committee (PAC) provides guidance to the Aboriginal Head Start, Community Action Plan for Children, and other early childhood programs. It has a chair, vice chair, and treasurer, and an unlimited number of other interested parents.



Lisa Johnson

Parent,
Parent Advisory
Committee
Member

Six of Lisa's children have taken part in the programs at Laichwiltach. They say they love the Society, and they often ask to go to the centre to take part in events. Taking her children to the baby group enabled Lisa to get together with other parents, to chat, vent, and gain information about child rearing. As a First Nations woman whose parents are Cape Mudge and Haida, Lisa values the cultural education and opportunity that her children have to learn Kwak'wala in Aboriginal Head Start, unlike what they would receive in a mainstream kindergarten.

Parents of children in Aboriginal Head Start are asked to volunteer for one hour per month, and this is how Lisa became involved in the PAC, which provides input on all the early childhood programs operated by the Society. Lisa has represented the PAC in province-wide cultural retreats and planning meetings. At PAC meetings, parents organize activities and make suggestions. Lisa explains that the Society has grown and developed over the years because programs like the baby group adapt to parents' needs and suggestions. For example, it was at the request of parents that a nutritionist, a pediatrician, and a drum maker were brought in to work with parents of young children in the early childhood programs.

The Society gives parents opportunities to become involved and get paid for their work. For example, Lisa bakes bread and sells it at the Society to earn up to \$500 per month in extra income for her family, and she has also been paid for teaching beading to some Society participants. ●



Programs for youth

- After school program (12 – 18 years)
- Aboriginal Youth Outreach and Support (youth in school)
- BladeRunner (youth out of school)

Aboriginal Youth Outreach and Support

All of the youth interviewed said Laichwiltach is like a family; they trust the two youth workers and feel they could go to them about anything. Some of the youth mentioned that the Society has turned them around and changed their behaviour for the better. All of the youth value the cultural education and would like more of it to help them develop positive self-esteem and skills as First Nations and Métis individuals. One young man said that learning about his culture has helped him through dark times of loneliness and depression. He appreciates having the youth worker, Shawn, as a role model because he knows Shawn has struggled and dealt with his own issues. Another youth appreciates that the youth workers spoke to them about suicide. Youth attending programs advocated for more cultural teaching, and stated that “if the Society won the lottery” their first priorities would be to provide more opportunities for Elders to teach them traditional skills and go on more culturally focused field trips.



**Alexandra
Roberta Rose
Harry**

Youth Program
Participant

“It’s kind of like a second family. If I’m having troubles and if I’m upset, I can talk to anybody and they’ll be there for me.” That’s one of the reasons Alexandra gives for loving the Youth Outreach and Support Program so much. She says the staff *“can really lift your spirits up, like Shawn, because he can make anyone smile.”* Alexandra says that participating in activities like basketball has helped her to cut down on smoking. She went with the youth group to a youth conference at Kingcome Inlet⁶ and *“it was really amazing! We camped, did stuff at the Big House, played on the playground, met other youth, learned how to gut, cut, and smoke fish, and created a claymation movie.”*

Alexandra wishes the program had more funding for field trips, like the one she went on to the Campbell River Museum, where she watched old videos of how her ancestors lived, traded, and did potlatches. As a young person who has lived in many different foster homes, Alexandra loves coming to the program to be with her family, including her chosen family of peers and staff, and her cousin who is also in government care and comes to Laichwiltach for supervised visits with his relatives. ●

“One young man said that learning about his culture has helped him through dark times of loneliness and depression.”

⁶ Kingcome Inlet refers to a First Nation village and fjord located on the BC mainland approximately 125 kilometres across the Georgia Strait from Campbell River.



Shawn Decaire

Aboriginal Youth
Outreach and
Support Worker

"Being able to walk through the door and there's always a smile when you get there" – this is the attraction of Laichwiltach for youth and for Shawn as well, in his role with youth. Contracted in 2002 as a traditional singer and drummer, Shawn continues to drum and sing with preschoolers while his primary role now is with youth who are in school. The youth group is a place to gather with peers without pressure to do drugs and alcohol. Shawn sees its value as a safe place to develop emotional, social, and practical skills and to learn to support others. He shares his own healing journey with the youth and encourages them to have fun. For Shawn, Laichwiltach's success can be explained by looking back to the old villages in the region, where people always worked together to support others in matters they couldn't handle on their own. He says this principle applies to staff as well as to youth.

Taking a group of youth to Kingcome Inlet was a highlight for Shawn; he especially enjoyed seeing the youth participate in a Ya'yama (a play potlatch), experience traditional stories, learn to navigate the waters, and enjoy meeting youth from other Nations. Shawn believes it is important to teach youth that their ancestors all worked together at one time. There has been a huge loss of culture and knowledge in their territory, so members of their community sometimes offer to trade songs and knowledge with members of other Nations. As well, an economic depression in the region affects many First Nations and Métis families, and Shawn notes that the Society needs to work hard to help families with their changing needs. This may include arranging transportation to job interviews or helping youth obtain skills and certificates such as Food Safe. From Shawn's perspective, another top priority for increased funding is to expand the parent-tot program, because many teens are becoming parents. ●



BladeRunner

BladeRunner is an award-winning 12-week program that provides unemployed marginalized youth aged 18 to 30 with job readiness skills, workplace training, and employment coaching. The program helps youth to overcome barriers to employment and to find and hold onto jobs.



Jackie Sinclair

BladeRunner
Program
Coordinator

Jackie has played a number of roles at Laichwiltach, starting out as the women's life skills facilitator in 1995 and then as the Aboriginal Head Start coordinator in 1996. She pioneered and ran an employment readiness program for 15 years until she became coordinator of the BladeRunner program introduced in 2010. Jackie notes that all of the Society's programs are complementary and cover the life span; she knows a number of the youth in the BladeRunner program from their childhood days in Aboriginal Head Start. She sees the introduction of Aboriginal Head Start as a pivotal event in Laichwiltach's evolution because it enabled staff to work with families holistically.

Laichwiltach feels like home to Jackie. The staff rely on each other to find solutions for families and to debrief after working with clients who have experienced trauma. Staff are deeply moved by witnessing clients' successes: many of them have managed to *"get rid of their demons,"* get their children back, and help their children to grow into healthy young adults and parents themselves. Jackie explains that the staff see people through difficulties, helping them to choose life and learn to thrive. ●



Counselling and addiction recovery services

- Individual and family counselling/intervention
- Healing circles
- Recovery support for drug and alcohol addictions
- Mental health promotion
- Referrals

“ At Laichwiltach, we don't write off people who stop coming for counselling or who have a slide backwards. It's understood that there are different stresses and strains that can create blocks for people sometimes, and there needs to be a readiness and a right time for people to move forward with their healing and wellness. We are still there for them, ready to engage when they are ready to come back. We don't see this as failure or see them as less deserving of the help we can offer. ”



Ronda MacKenzie-Cooper

Family Therapist,
Counselling Program
Team Leader

Ronda became a family therapist at Laichwiltach after years of collaborating with the counselling team through her work with other agencies in the region. Her husband John was part of the counselling team for 10 years, and he often told Ronda what a positive experience it was. When he left the team, she applied for his position. The philosophy at Laichwiltach is a good fit for her; it centers children, promotes collaboration with other organizations, and provides an inclusive environment that emphasizes equality – among staff and between helpers and clients.

The counselling staff use a team approach. Staff check in with one another and have weekly team meetings. They have the flexibility to respond to families in a holistic way that takes their life circumstances into account. Clients are supported to access whatever staff and program best meets their needs at any given time. For Ronda, this reflects the Society's vision of working in unity to support families at various points in their healing and wellness journeys.

Because of Laichwiltach's supportive environment, Ronda greatly enjoys her job. She appreciates that the executive director offers little perks for staff, like a self-care day including massage, and other expressions of appreciation and caring. ●





Programs for Elders

- Rekindling the Spirit of Our Elders program
- Monthly luncheon for Elders
- Support for Elders to participate in Elder gatherings and annual provincial Elders' conference
- Elder participation in programs on paid and volunteer basis

Programs for Elders provide an opportunity for Elders to get together, meet new people in the community, share their stories and knowledge, and remain active.

Honourable Stephen Point at the 2008 Elder's Gathering in Prince Rupert



Sophia Hansen

Elder Language and Culture Guide for Children's Programs

One of Aboriginal Head Start's goals is for children to interact with Elders to learn their culture(s) and be exposed to First Nations language(s). At Laichwiltach, Elders are involved in many programs, and no one more so than Sophia Hansen. As one of only 10 people in her community who speak Kwak'wala fluently, Sophia really values her visits twice a week to teach her language to the children in the early childhood programs. She is a much-loved story teller, and she makes sure to share stories from the children's different First Nations cultures, often with the help of puppets. She has written 15 stories and 12 poems. With the help of the early childhood coordinator, Corrine, Sophia recently published a book, *The Crow and the Raven*. (see www.lfls.ca)

Sophia joyfully reports that at Laichwiltach she has many "big and little friends." She emphasizes that the staff and Audrey are soft-spoken and never utter an unkind word. She says that Elders who come to programs at Laichwiltach are treated with respect and affection, and she is happy that the children and youth see this. ●



Groups

- Parent and tot groups
- Infant massage group
- Community kitchens



Community-wide events organized by Laichwiltach

- Aboriginal Day (June 21) celebrations
- Paddling Together for our Sacred Gifts (hosted by Aboriginal Infant Development Program Networking Group and focused on identifying needs in the community for children and families)
- Health fair
- Monthly cultural events for everyone
- Community dinners



Child welfare programs

Laichwiltach is expanding into areas of delegated child welfare through a program called "Many Nations" that will be housed in a separate building on the property. While the terms of the contract delegating services from the provincial government to the Society are still being finalized, the Society's goal is to open the doors in Spring 2012 in Campbell River and Comox Valley to follow. The Many Nations program will be offering a comprehensive family support service, with the goal of reducing the time children spend in government care. According to Audrey, this represents a blended child welfare service delivery model for the region, where a community-operated society and the government are delivering different services along the child welfare service continuum. Laichwiltach intends to play expanded roles in child welfare in the future.



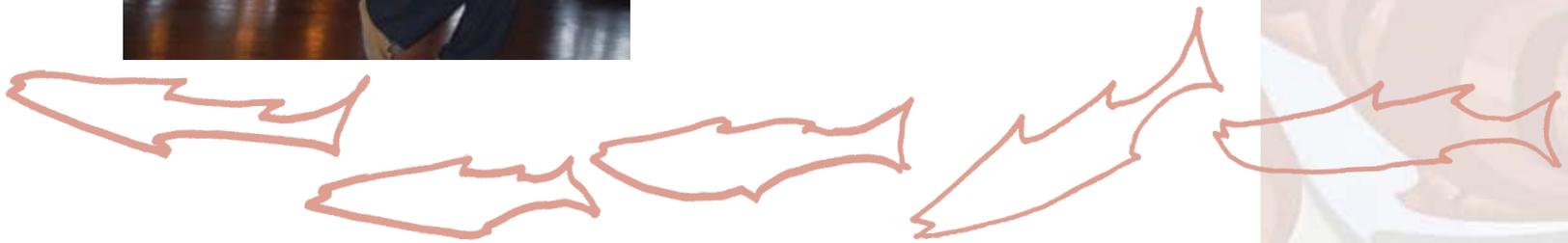
Keys to Success



THE SECTIONS ABOVE have described what Laichwiltach does, including its holistic, family-centered approach and the programs that embody this approach.

The next section identifies how the Society has become an effective, multi-service hub, meeting the challenges that typically face community-initiated and -operated culturally based programs.

Keys to Success for a Community Services Hub





Key 1: Continuous Community Engagement

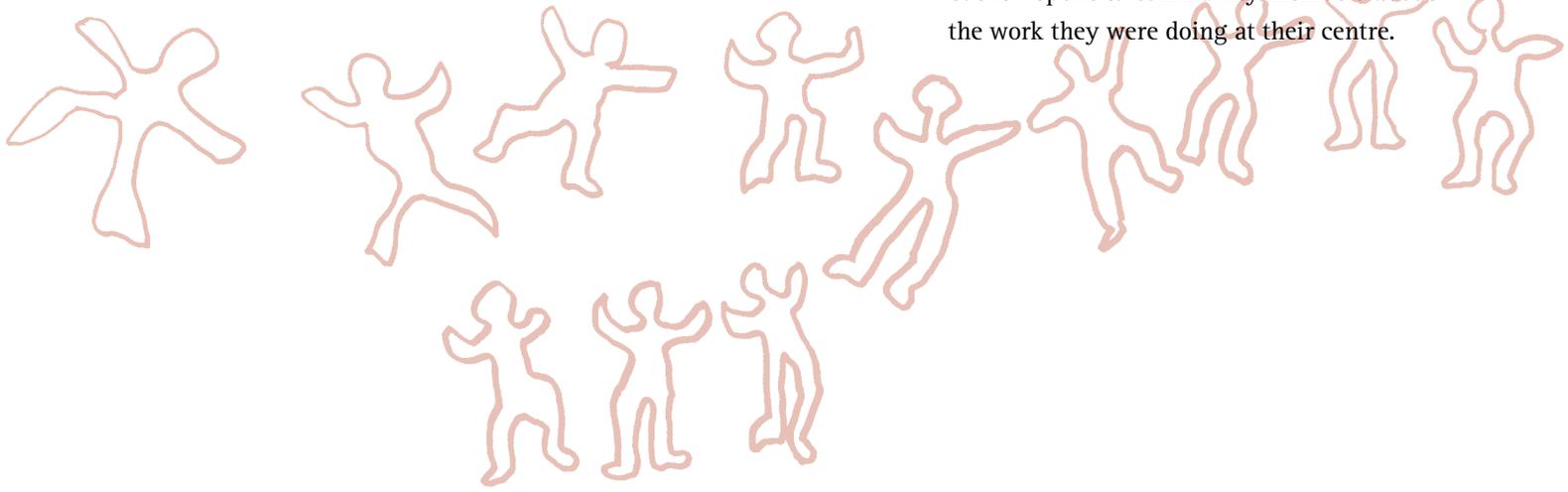
“It was really a grassroots community development process. We didn’t look at any other models. We relied on our own cultural traditions, which means that we were always going back to the communities who were going to be involved, asking what they wanted and showing them how they were instrumental in creating the plan or design for each program we started. Dialogue, that’s the key.”

Pauline Janyst, Co-Founder

If the founders have one piece of advice for other groups aiming to form a community-driven service organization, it is to engage with the key stakeholders as much, and as often, as possible in order to keep them interested and informed about how the group wants to evolve and to ask for input regarding their needs and how to meet them.



The Chiefs of the region’s First Nations say they appreciate that their communities have always known what the Society is doing and why; they have never felt that something was being done without their knowledge or input. Laichwiltach has always looked for creative ways to keep the community informed about its work. For example, co-founder Pauline Janyst recalls a fashion show where staff of the newly emerging society modeled traditional First Nations clothing – and, at the same event – spoke to community members about the work they were doing at their centre.



Laichwiltach Family Life Society is governed by a volunteer board of eight directors, including representatives of key contributing First Nations, the urban Aboriginal community, and non-Aboriginal members. When a position opens on the board, a notice is sent out to the community asking persons interested in serving on the board to submit a letter and résumé. The current board reviews applicants against a set of board-specified criteria and selects new members. A board member sums up executive director Audrey Wilson's approach as "Feed the community and create interest." Another board member notes: "When Laichwiltach hosts community dinners and other events, families are asked to have a say in the Society's direction."



Co-founder Pauline recounts: "We always acknowledge the continual support of our local First Nations for the Society's beginning and becoming what it is today. We were permitted to stay in the Kwakiutl District Council/ Kwakiutl Territories Fisheries building owned by Wei Wai Kum First Nation for two and a half years rent free. Then We Wai Kai First Nation loaned us a vacant trailer to renovate and use until we outgrew it. Without this kind of support, we could not exist, since we didn't receive any overhead money to operate in the early days."



“While program funding is less secure now than in the past, long-term partnerships with other agencies and donors help to sustain the Society’s core staff and services...”

Cultural protocols are always followed in the process of partnering with other agencies and drawing in more and more First Nations and Métis groups to support and help govern the Society’s work. Pauline sums up these protocols as *“asking permission and always being inclusive. Each time a new program was added, we went to the community and sought out different people to dialogue with so that we were well rounded in representation.”*

Executive director and co-founder Audrey Wilson explains: *“We don’t just do. We discuss with the communities. And we don’t assume that when we’ve dialogued with one First Nation, we’ve heard from the whole community. We develop understandings with each individual Nation based on their input, our collaboration, and a working relationship. Our decision making is not just a ‘protocol’ agreement. It is a real working partnership. That’s how it has always been done between our Nations. As well, we are careful to think about who to invite from which Nations to offer blessings and who to have present at ceremonies such as openings of new buildings and new programs. This recognizes and respects their contributions and continues our working relationships.”*



Key 2: Partnerships, Networking, and Collaboration

Executive director Audrey Wilson strongly believes in the value of sitting at the table with other service providers in the region and working together to make things happen in a good way for families. According to Audrey, it is Campbell River’s relatively small size, the spirit of cooperation among the people there, and having the right people in the right places at the right time. This means ensuring that Laichwiltach staff serve on various community boards and steering committees to allow for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal collaboration as well as cross-cultural collaboration between various First Nations in the area.

As an early example of collaboration, Pauline describes a “forced marriage” between Laichwiltach Family Life Society, Tillicum House Friendship Centre, Comox Valley Family Services, Campbell River Family Services, and Port McNeil Family Services. Among other outcomes, this coalition building in the Society’s early years resulted in it receiving Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) funding from the federal government. Pauline recounts: *“As a group, we were not happy at first with the government’s decision. But we had fun with it and made it work for each of our agencies and developed a strategic plan for how we would work collaboratively to implement the program in the best interests of our children.”*



Audrey recounts that it was initially hard “getting a foot in the door” with non-Aboriginal service agencies and community groups. But they persisted. Over time, by playing roles on local committees, partnerships gradually developed. While program funding is less secure now than in the past, long-term partnerships with other agencies and donors help to sustain the Society’s core staff and services, making this insecurity less stressful than it otherwise might be.

Networking with mainstream service agencies is an important way the Society helps First Nations families meet their needs. As part of Laichwiltach’s ongoing effort to improve conditions for First Nations and Métis families, the staff participate in several networking meetings, consults with local school districts, and delivers conference presentations. They organize events that are open to the whole community. They offer workshops in middle schools and high schools on topics including cultural traditions and activities, sexual exploitation, dating violence, and healthy relationships. The Society has also partnered in several provincial and national research studies addressing child and youth development.

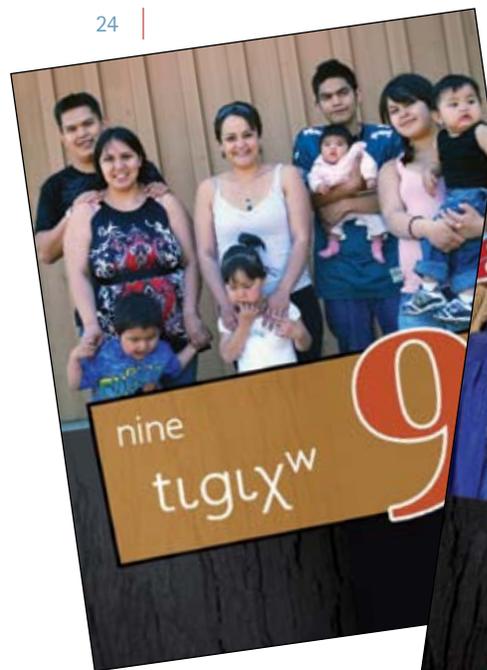


Examples of current collaborations also include the following:

- The youth outreach program partners with Campbell River Parks & Recreation to run combined activities once a week, enabling both groups to plan bigger events and outings.
- Corrine Sagmeister, manager of early childhood programs, represents the Society at a community roundtable where representatives of various agencies work to identify service gaps and ways to fill them to meet the needs of young children and their families.
- The Society organizes and hosts an annual leadership forum called “Paddling Together for our Sacred Gifts.” The forum brings together human service professionals and community members to identify needs of local children and families, and builds bridges with non-Aboriginal service providers working in the region.
- Laichwiltach is partnering with a new organization in the area, Sasamans Society, which is working on a Nation to Nation approach for building capacity and programs to support family-based care and stem the tide of First Nations children going into government care.

“We develop understandings with each individual Nation based on their input, our collaboration, and a working relationship.”





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Key 3: Multi-Aboriginal Cultural Base

Starting from a single program 20 years ago, the Society has grown continuously in scope, scale, and geographic reach. It now serves a population of about 6,000 First Nations and Métis people, including 3,500 urban Aboriginal children and adults, many of whom have moved to Campbell River from other parts of Canada. The communities it serves include:

- Wei Wai Kum First Nation (formerly Campbell River Band)
- We Wai Kai First Nation (formerly Cape Mudge Band)
- K'omoks Band (formerly Comox Band)
- Homalco Band
- Klahoose First Nation
- Mamalilikulla – Qwe' Qwa' Sot'em First Nation
- Kwiakah First Nation
- Tlowitsis First Nation
- Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council
- North Island Métis Association

With so many different First Nations, Métis community members, and off-reserve families accessing programs and services, the Society's staff are always working cross-culturally. All the programs are grounded in First Nations concepts of wellness and include multiple First Nations and Métis cultures. In the words of the pediatrician who delivered services at Laichwiltach: *"It's like a garden where cultural seeds are planted, from birth to Elderhood. Cultural programming helps bring people home to who they really are."*

Staff try to incorporate the different cultural traditions, knowledges, and languages that are represented by program participants. For example, although the Aboriginal Head Start program teaches Kwak'wala language and culture, the staff recognize that many of the children are Nuu-chah-nulth, and they try to incorporate this culture into their

programming. The Society has produced children's booklets in four languages and recently launched two early childhood books on "School Routines" and "Body Parts" in both Kwak'wala and Nuuchahnulth dialects.⁷

Children, youth, and adults who attend Laichwiltach programs describe how the programs and events – even the art work and information – help them to learn more about their heritage and connect to their First Nations or Métis identity. Many community members experienced colonial government policies that restricted cultural practices; as a result, few people know the formal cultural traditions or the language of their grandparents. The Society offers opportunities to learn a heritage language, traditional songs, dances, and harvesting and preparing foods, as well as the tradition of caring and respect, especially for young children and Elders, that is central to all First Nations and Métis cultures. Many parents emphasize the importance of cultural teachings in the early childhood programs, pointing out that once their children attend public kindergarten and grade school, they will only hear about their histories and cultures at school once or twice a year, often in a distorted and over-generalized way.



Key 4: Leadership, Strong Staff, and Community Capacity Building

Leadership

Laichwiltach has benefited from the diverse talents of two executive directors to date. Pauline Janyst led the Society for the first few years and her sister, Audrey Wilson, has been executive director since 1997. With two of the founders at the helm, the Society's commitment to its original vision and mission has remained strong.



“With two of the founders at the helm, the Society's commitment to its original vision and mission has remained strong.”

The Society has steadily invested in developing its capacity to meet an increasingly broad scope of needs and goals. Audrey describes the development process as striking a careful balance between community needs and available resources:

“Growing an organization is about taking on only what you can do at the time. We started out small around family violence and anger management, and then went into addictions, then sexual abuse and trauma. Those were really clear areas of need. After discussions

⁷ These language books were created by Aboriginal Success by Six in British Columbia, under the direction of Corrine Sagmeister.

Recovering and strengthening cultural and language roots and forms of mutual support and community leadership are primary goals for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. See for example: Norris, M.J. (2011). Aboriginal languages in Canada: Generational perspectives on language maintenance, loss, and revitalization. In D. Long & O. P. Dickason (Eds.). *Visions of the heart: Canadian Aboriginal issues*. (3rd Edition). Toronto: Oxford University Press.)

with people who could use the programs and people who could support the programs, we developed those components. By continuously involving people who use or are seeking specific kinds of support programs and getting feedback from them, we identified new areas to work on. For us as a society, taking on one new area at a time is ideal, but it doesn't always work out that way, depending on the balance of needs and opportunities. One year I actually had three programs come on board at the same time, and that's a lot of work, but you always have to consider what your organization and your staff can handle and then make it work."



Being located in a small urban centre in a largely rural region, Audrey knows how important it is to retain staff. The following comments by staff capture some of the most frequently identified contributors to staff retention and capacity building:

"Audrey doesn't micro-manage. Staff are encouraged to be creative, take responsibility, share knowledge, work together, support one another, and engage in mutual knowledge sharing, collaboration, and support."

"She makes sure that program budgets include professional development and self care opportunities for staff."

"She sends out regular emails letting us know about training opportunities, and when one of us sees a workshop or course that could develop skills we can use in our work, she makes every effort to make it possible for us to attend, financially, and with time off."

Audrey ensures that different staff members serve on various community boards and steering committees, in part so that they can network, but also so they can gain the support of non-Aboriginal agencies for their initiatives. Audrey explains: *"It is important that the First Nations give input and support, but it's also essential to generate the support of non-Aboriginal agencies and funders, so that they understand the need for programs that are tailored to Aboriginal families and why there needs to be a strong cultural component to what the service offers."* Part of Laichwiltach's effort to educate mainstream service providers stems from their refusal to look at families merely as case files.



The central role of staff

Laichwiltach has worked hard from the start to get funding to send local people – including some of its former clients – for education and training to prepare them for jobs in the Society’s programs. In this way, the Society has always contributed to job creation. The staff are ethnically diverse, but Laichwiltach hires Aboriginal staff whenever possible to support its goal of reflecting the cultures of the people it serves.

Each program area has a team leader who ensures that information is distributed to the team, convenes team meetings, and responds to external requests for partnership, consultation, or crisis intervention. The team leader is not elevated above other team members in terms of decision-making authority or supervisory duties. Members of each team engage in peer supervision. As well, teams from different program areas often work together to help all of the members of a family.

Both clients and staff believe the staff’s ability to communicate and work together is a key to the Society’s success. Staff support one another; many remark that they are *“like a family, sticking together through professional and personal challenges.”* And, when the staff work well together, families feel supported.

Community capacity building

As described in Key 2 on networking, the Society plays an important role in the surrounding community and school districts, and with the provincial government, to raise awareness and provide guidance on reaching out and effectively supporting First Nations and Métis families. Engaging in partnerships, networking, collaborating, and generally being receptive to requests to work with other groups are keys to strengthening the capacity of Canadian society as a whole to walk beside First Nations and Métis families.





Key 5: Continuous Fund-Raising

Laichwiltach Family Life Society has operated on 1.8 million dollars annually over the past five years.

From 2000–2005 the annual budget averaged 1 million dollars.

Approximately 70% of funds raised are for early childhood programs and related parent-involvement programs.

The property where the Society operates is leased from the local school district (SD# 72) for \$65,000 per year, including external maintenance and repairs.

The Society's funds are carefully allocated to programs and equipment. Because Laichwiltach is a non-profit organization and not a Friendship Centre, there is no source of funds for internal maintenance and repairs or for operations, including reception and transportation. Operating funds are written into various program budgets where possible (most program funders limit operating funds to 10-25% of total budgets).

In the early days, programs operated by the Society were funded by:

- The Aboriginal Health Council Region of Vancouver Island
- British Columbia Ministry for Women's Equality
- First Nations Task Group (Federal Department for Indian Affairs)

Over the years, the Society has obtained sustained funding for some of their core programs, including funding from:

- Contributing First Nations: Wei Wai Kum First Nation, Mamalilikulla Qwe' Qwa' Sot'em First Nation, and K'omoks First Nation for Addictions and Family Violence Programs (through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) which continues today.
- Health Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada) for Aboriginal Head Start and Community Action Program for Children.
- John Howard Society for after-school program and Super Saturday program.
- Public Health Agency of Canada for Aboriginal Head Start.



- BC Ministry for Children and Family Development for Aboriginal Infant Development, Supported Child Development, Little Fry Preschool, Family Support Program, Family Group Counselling, Youth Counsellor (under Family Support), Community Kitchen.
- BC Council for Families for Community Kitchen.
- BC Child Care Operating Fund for early childhood programs.
- BC Gaming Commission for Direct Access.



- Ministries of Community Services and Employment and Income Assistance; Service Canada; and Aboriginal Resources Development Agreement holders for management of the BladeRunners program (Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society) (ACCESS).
- Society-operated Bingo Gaming Fund for family development – family therapist position, youth counsellor, family violence counselling, and to offset rent.
- North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society for Employment Readiness Program.

Additional funds are provided by various foundations, including:

- Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children (for Family Support Program)
- Vancouver Foundation
- Coast Capital Savings Foundation
- Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation
- United Way (for Success by Six and Speech and Language Program)
- RBC Foundation (for Elders Program and After School Program)

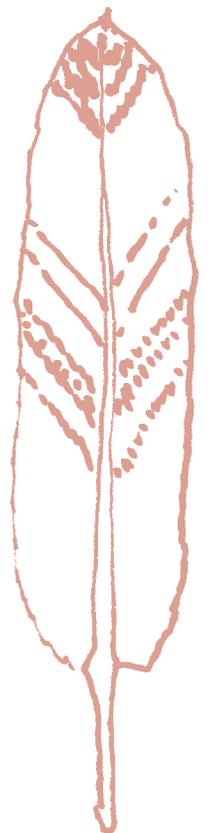


Fund-raising challenges

Being able to respond to community needs requires funding – a perennial challenge for any non-profit organization. At Laichwiltach, 20% of the annual budget for programs and services is proposal driven, which creates uncertainty and places a tremendous burden on the executive director to write proposals and reports to many different funders every year.

Challenges include the following:

- Budgets for core programs such as the Aboriginal Infant Development Program are allocated on an annual basis, creating insecurities for employees, uncertainties for parents, and obstacles to long-range planning.
- The whole human service sector is fragmented, making it difficult to combine programs with different focuses or serving different age groups.
- Grant and report writing require a great deal of time.
- Funding is inadequate for staff development, community outreach, networking, and developing partnerships with other agencies and institutions.
- The priorities, approach, and accountability demands of provincial and federal government ministries constantly shift.
- The Society cannot compete with unionized or government service agencies in the rate of pay for employees.
- Without drawing much-needed funds from program budgets, the Society cannot afford to offer staff a pension plan.
- No specific source of funds exists for Elder involvement in programs for children and youth.
- There is no ongoing funding for Youth Outreach and Support programs.





Challenges and Lessons Learned



LAICHWILTACH'S JOURNEY has not been an easy swim in a gentle stream.

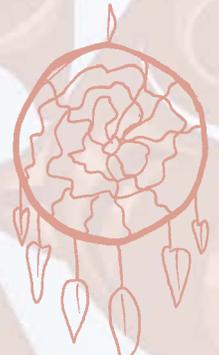
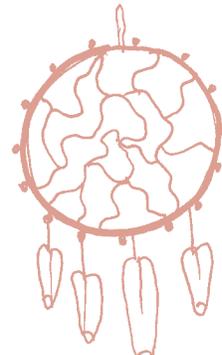
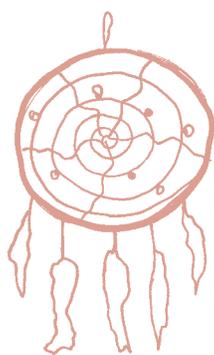
There have been turbulent times and obstacles along the way, and unstable conditions and changing political tides create continuous tensions. Recurring challenges include the following:

- There are long wait lists for counselling and children's programs and no consistent funding for after-school programs, summer programs, or the youth program.



- It is difficult to recruit credentialed staff who have Aboriginal ancestry.
- The First Nations and Métis families served by the Society, and their cultures and languages, are diverse; this diversity is both a strength and a challenge.
- Other service agencies and institutions tend to tap the Society's resources. For example, Laichwiltach staff are often asked to help in crisis situations or with families who are new to the area, but they don't get additional financial support to provide this help.
- Some mainstream service practitioners encourage First Nations and Métis families to participate in mainstream programs instead of the Society's programs.

- Mainstream programs can eclipse the Society's culturally based, community-involving programs (e.g., full-day public kindergarten is eclipsing Aboriginal Head Start).
- Government service agencies still believe that expanding mainstream programs will be sufficient to meet needs of First Nations and Métis people, while undervaluing the role of Aboriginal-run programs that increase cultural safety, social belonging, self-esteem, transmission of traditional knowledge and skills, and overall wellness.





Recommendations for communities aiming to establish their own service hub

Based on what the Society has learned over 20 years, it makes the following recommendations for communities aiming to establish their own service hub:

- 1 Engage the community at every decision-making point.
- 2 Use time-honoured cultural protocols to guide community engagement.
- 3 Infuse programs with cultural knowledge and practices. Draw on the different cultures of program participants as much as possible to promote positive cultural identity and make programs meaningful to diverse families.
- 4 Design a comprehensive plan for continuous fundraising to create, sustain, and expand services.
- 5 Coordinate services with each other and with other child- and family-serving agencies in the community to better serve everyone: children, Elders, youth, families, staff, and funders.
- 6 Network with other agencies in the region that serve children and families. Forming partnerships, hosting multi-sectoral events, sitting on boards of other agencies in the region, and participating in community-wide events are some of the ways to develop relationships with key people in the broader service system and to create opportunities to inform people about your agency's priorities, needs, programs, and approaches.



Of course, funding agencies need to respond with sustained support for community-operated, multi-service hubs that demonstrate positive impacts. And, funders should support culturally based programs even when the mainstream service system is expanding into similar program areas. For example, support for Aboriginal Head Start should be sustained even though mainstream kindergarten is expanding.

Mainstream systems and organizations that promote child and family wellness can support community-operated, culturally safe multi-service agencies by recognizing that many Aboriginal people find culturally based programs more comfortable and personally meaningful than mainstream services. They can partner with First Nations and Métis community groups, provide renewable operating funding – not just proposal-driven funding – and publicly celebrate the successes of grassroots organizations in supporting children, youth, and families to get their needs met and pursue their goals.



Hook, Hub, Lifeline

From its beginnings around a kitchen table 20 years ago, Laichwiltach Family Life Society has evolved into a highly respected partner in the region's mix of community service agencies. Today the Society operates to hook families into a multi-service hub and provide them with services that many have described as a lifeline. Its effectiveness in outreach and service to First Nations and Métis families has enabled it to grow, earned it credibility with funders, community leaders, and families, and fostered its vision *“to empower and promote healing in our communities from a First Nations perspective for all people of Native ancestry in unity.”*





Laichwiltach Family Life Society is a non-profit society and independent charity registered with Canada Revenue Agency. It is a multi-service hub for Aboriginal people and their family members, located at:

441-4th Avenue
Campbell River, BC V9W 3W7
Tel: 250-286-3430 Fax: 250-286-3483

For more information about Laichwiltach Family Life Society, visit www.lfls.ca



www.lfls.ca

Early Childhood Development Intercultural Partnerships is an ongoing, grant funded program of community-university research led by Dr. Jessica Ball at the University of Victoria, Canada. Collaborative projects contribute knowledge about conditions affecting the health and development of Indigenous and minoritized children in Canada and around the world.

For more information about the project that led to this and other publications about child and family development and programs, visit www.ecdip.org



www.ecdip.org