

Fraser Valley Aboriginal  
Children & Family Services Society



Annual Report 2019-2020



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## Message from the Board of Directors President



On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to tell you that 2019-2020 was a productive and transformative year for Xyólheméylh.

We took significant steps in restructuring the organization and laying new foundations. This included the restructure of our agency into Baskets to be able to have consistent practice throughout our region for children, youth, and families. The Stó:lō Services Team was created with staff walking alongside the Indigenous communities we serve.

We filled the position of Executive Director of Staff and Community Relations and in doing so completed the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

The ELT is a “trio” inclusive of Kyla Darby, ED of Programs, Rod Spitzig, ED of Administrative Services, and the third member, Penny Trites, ED of Staff and Community Relations. The ELT reports regularly to the Board and participates in some of our working groups. This has been a positive result for our agency with the workload distributed more equitably and provides us with a collaborative approach to a heavy workload. This model honors the traditions of the Stó:lō peoples who valued individual strengths and skills as well as collaboration and teamwork.

From a practice standpoint, we are seeing an increase in prevention supports, case compliance, and expertise in each basket area. Another goal was to strengthen delegated programs to ensure culturally relevant practice that is compliant with standards. This included regularized consultation meetings with Elders and staff and a comprehensive approach to caregiver training. Enhancing family strengthening programs that are culturally relevant and promote family and community involvement of youth and Elders was another goal. This also included establishing a youth service delivery team.

When we began the fiscal year 2019-20, who knew what strange twists and turns were in store for us when the pandemic hit in early 2020? As an essential service, we continued to provide services but with most of our staff working remotely. We also had to cancel all in-person events and gatherings which was difficult but necessary.

On behalf of all the Directors, I want to thank our staff for their dedication, flexibility, and creativity during this time. We also want to thank our community partners and support parents. We could not do what we do without your dedication.

Év té mót, Év té thále, Év té sqwálawel.



MARION MUSSEAU

## Message from the Executive Director of Programs



2019 - 2020 was an exciting and challenging year as we restructured in order to implement a new service delivery model. The new vision and framework was developed after gathering extensive community and staff input.

We created 40 new positions for the Agency, which in turn created movement opportunities for staff. We were excited to see the quality of new staff that we have been able to recruit and promote. With the new hires now on board, we are back to a typical vacancy rate for an agency this size.

The Stó:lō teams are in place, our communities now have their own workers, and team members are located into some of the communities. Community feedback has been positive about this new way of supporting our Stó:lō communities.

In addition to the Stó:lō teams, the agency now has a screening team and four baskets of functional teams for our away from home families. The new model involved transferring files, implementing new workflows and tracking tools. These tracking tools will enable us to look at the overall numbers and make adjustments to caseload sizes to ensure quality service, ensure compliance to standards and policy, and to better align with the vision of our new service model. We all look forward to continuously improving the quality of service that our children and families receive. Change can be exciting but also difficult, so I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone for their dedication, hard work, and flexibility.

During the Covid-19 crisis, practice continued as required as we provide essential services. I had the benefit of being on Provincial Working group committees and was able to help establish interim practice guidelines with the province so our agency had a voice in providing service to children, families and communities. We reduced staff in office to 25-35 per cent and the remaining staff worked remotely from home. The staff continued to support their families from home and through an office rotation into the offices. During the Covid-19 crisis our caregiver support parents went above and beyond in their support and we are so grateful. Support to our families was increased as needed.

I'm proud and excited to see the work continue in a good way.



Kyla Darby



## Message from the Executive Director of Administrative Services



As the Executive Director of Administrative Services I oversee the Finance, Administration, Human Resources and Training departments. The overarching goal is to create an environment where employees are engaged, make a difference and are accountable. Priorities this year included:

- 1) Developing new performance review tools for employees, including reviewing and improving the on-boarding process for new employees to involve an increased focus on cultural protocols and teachings.
- 2) Restructuring the administrative team to support Service Delivery Revitalization.
- 3) Reviewing finance policies to ensure they are up to date and meet changing needs, including the payroll system.
- 4) Reviewing training priorities which included the hiring of a dedicated Training Coordinator and development of online resources which will be rolling out in 2020.
- 5) Updating the facilities plan to meet growing staff numbers. In 2019-20 we arranged for new office space for staff in Abbotsford to accommodate increased staffing.

I would like to thank the Board of Directors for all their support and leadership in continuing to move Xyólhemeylh forward in the best interest of our children, families and communities we serve. I want to thank all of our staff, supervisors, team leaders, managers, Directors and ELT members for their dedication, commitment and hard work in serving our children, families and communities.

Rod Spitzig



### Hazel Street Opening

We celebrated the official opening of the Hazel Street office, Lalem ye Steqóye (House of Wolves), in Chilliwack on Friday, June 28, 2019.

The highlight of the opening was the unveiling a beautiful red cedar carving by Peter Prevost. The new centre will be used for helping youth transition to independence, Sacred Circles, supported visits and family enhancement work.

## Message from the Executive Director of Staff & Community Relations



I began my role as Executive Director of Staff and Community Relations on February 23, 2020 or almost at the end of the fiscal year 2019-2020. When I began, I had no idea we would soon be dealing with a worldwide pandemic which would turn our world upside down.

From the moment I walked through the doors I could feel the spirit of the agency; a sense of family. I was welcomed with open arms by everyone and treated like gold from the moment I arrived here.

Reporting to a Board of Directors is new for me and I have a great sense of appreciation for each of them and their focus on governance for our organization and support they provide. As I met staff, our Board of Directors, Caregiver support parents, Elders Advisory council, and Nation leaders, I witnessed firsthand and felt the passion and the heart they have for their work.

We were able to get our Elders Advisory council set up remotely on laptops to be able to continue their supportive role virtually in the agency along with their bi-weekly advisory meetings. Everything we do is vetted through our Elders Advisory committee - our "knowledge keepers." I personally feel blessed every time I get to spend time learning and gaining wisdom from them.

With Covid-19 and the staff concerned of children and youth isolated, our agency launched a Provincial Wide Social Distancing art and video contest. The contest went viral and we were proud that the artists received recognition in local media outlets! Our agency was approached by MCFD, and one artist's creation was made into a card that Minister Katrine Conroy included in her gift to all youth in care who were graduating in the Province.

I am so thankful to have been hired into this role and to be part of the Xyólhemeylh work family. I see and feel great things ahead with all of us walking together in partnership to better the lives of the children, youth, and families we are blessed to serve.

Penny Trites



## Elder Profile: Meet Arlene Heese



Arlene Heese who has been on the Elders Committee for nine years. From the Spuzzum First Nation in the Fraser Canyon, Arlene had previously worked for Xyólheméylh as a staff person with responsibilities for transportation of foster parents, families and children.

Arlene is known for her sunny disposition, her sense of humour, her big heart and her awesome and colourful wardrobe. She enjoys listening to social workers, caregivers and children and finding solutions to problems.

"I believe every child needs to know who they are, who their parents are and where they are from. That is in them," says Arlene. "The residential schools ripped the hearts out of children. The trauma that was in those children was horrible. They were never given love or hugs. Children need that, they need to know they belong," says Arlene.

## Our Vision, Mission & Core Values

### Vision

"We advance our inherent right to provide a healthy, safe and nurturing environment for all our Indigenous children and families living within our xáxá témexw té Stó:lō."

### Mission

"We endeavor to ensure the safety and well-being of children by working with and supporting all Indigenous families while respecting their cultural diversity."

### Core Values

#### Honour

We honour generations of diverse traditions and cultures.

#### Engage

We engage and foster safe family ties and cultural connections in the best interests of the child.

#### Accountable

We are accountable to children, families, communities, stakeholders and each other.

#### Respect

We respect our roots in xáxá témexw té Stó:lō and endeavor to provide services and programs that meet the unique cultural needs of all Indigenous people.

#### Trust

We trust in the ability of our children and families to grow and develop in a healthy way.

## Our Elders



Elders at the 2019 BC Elders Gathering

FVACFSS has an Elders Advisory Committee of Elders representing various First Nations Communities in Stó:lō territory as well some away from home Elders. They ensure we are delivering services in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way.

They meet with social workers and their clients to give recommendations on how the social workers and families can support the children and families in a culturally sensitive way. In 2019 -2020 the Agency reviewed the role of the Elders and made some changes aimed at giving the Elders a more prominent role in the Agency. This included expanding their participation in collaborative meetings and leading cultural protocols.

In July the Agency sponsored seven Elders to attend the 43rd Annual BC Elders Gathering in Vancouver. The gathering drew more than 1,800 Elders from across the province where they participated in a Grand Entry, listened to speeches by MP Jodi Wilson Raybould and Premier John Horgan. Thank you to the New Relationship Trust for the grant which helped us to send the Elders.

Thank you to all our 2019-20 Elders: Arlene Heese, Amy Victor, Rosemary Treherne, Roger Andrews, Julie George, Violet George, Barb Silver, Betty Paul, Yvonne Joe, Mona Sepass.



## Visions & Voices Youth Advisory Group



*Visions and Voices Soccerpalooza, July 2019*

The Visions and Voices Youth Mentorship Program was established seven years ago for youth ages 13 and older who have been in care or previously in care with our Agency. We believe it is critically important for these youth to be proud of their Indigenous heritage and culture. We also believe that by investing in their leadership capacity we can provide them with skills to be leaders in their communities and role models for other Indigenous youth.

The youth travel from across the Fraser Valley to meet monthly. During these meetings, they share a meal, and plan and organize the Vision and Voices Forum, a two-day forum in the fall.

During these meetings the youth build skills around leadership as well as connect with their culture through Indigenous arts, crafts and language. The group also acts as an advisory committee for the Agency, ensuring our programs are responsive to their needs. Their feedback and ideas help the agency develop plans on how to improve services that impact

them.

The Committee held its annual forum on November 22 and 23, with approximately 30 youth in care or previously in care, attending the overnight event at Camp Charis in Chilliwack.

Motivational speaker and musician, Mike Scott joined the youth for the weekend and presented two inspirational workshops. He talked about his own story as a youth in care, and how he overcame drug and alcohol abuse and developed leadership skills. Mike also talked to the youth about his journey as a musician, held a lyric writing workshop and talked about art and specifically, writing, as a way to release pain from the body and spirit. The youth then shared their own lyrics and poems.

The weekend also featured art workshops, a climbing wall, Medicine and Slahal teachings and tournament, and a Circle talk with Jennifer Charlesworth, the Representative for Children and Youth in BC.



*Mike Scott*

## Our Agency

Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (FVACFSS) is a fully delegated Aboriginal child welfare agency providing culturally appropriate and holistic services through prevention, community development and child welfare programs to Aboriginal (Status, Non-Status, On Reserve, Off Reserve, Stó:lō and other First Nation, Inuit, and Métis) children, youth and their families residing throughout the Fraser Valley.

Our programs and services are created and executed with a special attention on strengthening culture and identity. We focus on keeping families together, reintegrating children back with their families, and discovering and strengthening cultural connections.

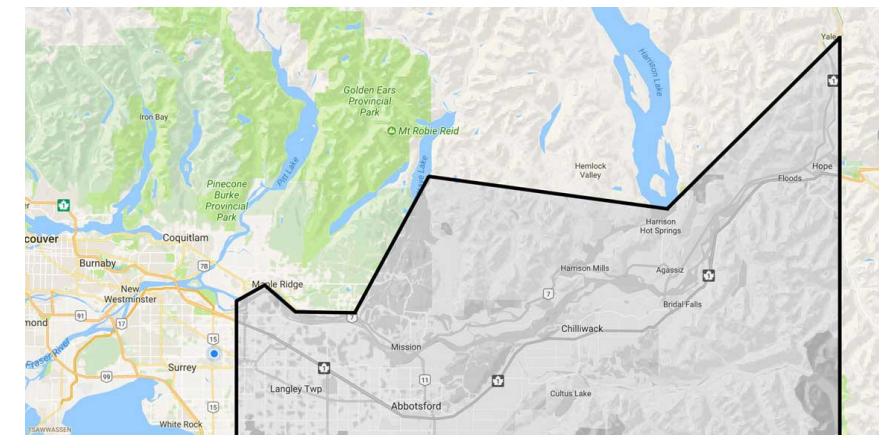
We work with 18 First Nations Bands – Atchelitz, Chawathil, Cheam, Kwantlen,

Leq'amel, Matsqui, Popkum, Shxwh:y, Shxw'ow'hamel, Skawahlook, Skowkale, Skwah, Soowahlie, Squiala, Sumas Tzeachten, Yakwekwioose, and Yale First Nations. We also work with urban, away from home, families. In fact, urban, away from home families account for 90 per cent of our clients.

FVACFSS operates with offices located in Agassiz, Chilliwack (our head office), Mission, Abbotsford, Langley and Surrey. In 2020 we opened offices in Chawathil, Cheam and Squiala First Nations.

In 2019-2020 we had 230 staff located throughout the Fraser Valley. While the vast majority of the staff are social workers, we also employ professionals in the areas of finance, human resources, communications and events, as well as traditional mentors, cultural connections and community engagement.

## Our Geographic Service Area



*Our Geographic Service Area (GSA) covers Yale to the East, Langley/Surrey Ministry Fraser Region boundary on the West (196th Street), Maple Ridge/Mission Ministry Fraser Region boundary on the North (Wilson Street) and the Canadian/US border to the South, including the Reserves of Member First Nations, and does not include the Reserves of non-Member First Nations, as set out in the map.*



## Our Agency



Langley Staff celebrate BC Child and Youth in Care Week, June, 2019

### Staff Appreciation

We held a staff appreciation day on Nov. 5 at the Coqualeetza Longhouse. A special honouring was held for Team Leader Elly Janik who has been with Xyólheméylh for over 25 years. Unfortunately, Elly couldn't attend but her sister Lorelei Roberts stood in for her.

Also, in attendance was Elly's spirit animal, an owl, which watched the event from the Longhouse rafters. Dan Ludeman spoke of Elly's patience and calmness and how she helped him

understand the power of the community.

A number of staff were honoured for long term service. Elly Janek, Janey Commodore, Herb Joe, Sonya Halper and Lorelei Roberts were all honoured for 25 plus years of service.

Speaker Brandon Chappell from the Semiahmoo First Nation, explained the two fires burning in the Longhouse as representing the land of the living and the land of death and how it's an honour to stand in between.

Elder Rosemary Treherne said it was an honour to see our culture and traditions at the event and told staff: "I'm so proud of all of you. So many of you go beyond your job descriptions and that's what makes us strong."

### Human Resources

Xyólheméylh's Human Resources team has gone through a lot of changes in the past two and half years.

The changes were necessary and in response to several factors – the restructuring and growth of the agency; the collective agreement with staff that came into effect two years ago; and the need to increase the Agency's compliance with legislation and HR best practices.

The Human Resources team has been busy

building a solid infrastructure for the last two years that includes new training processes, performance management review program; new grievance procedures; a first aid program; an incident investigation and hazard reporting program; a progressive discipline program; and a disability management program. This has also included the technology infrastructure to support these programs, such as a Learning Management System to track and encourage training, and a new payroll system that will be rolled out shortly.

Now that the Agency has all the processes that tick all the legislation boxes when it comes to OHS, employment standards, the collective agreement, the HR team will be turning its focus to cultural competencies and making culture "the golden thread that runs through every aspect of the agency" says Kristen Chafe, Human Resources Manager.





## Our Agency (Continued)

Kristen sees the Elders as being central to creating this workplace culture and has seen lasting impactful change happen when Elders get involved; whether it's conflict resolution scenario or healing workplace trauma.

"I want to see the cultural piece flourish in the organization with all our staff," says Kristen. She believes the agency is in a special place to do things differently and to adopt Indigenous ways of doing things. This includes adopting more holistic HR practices, including ceremony and healing practices.

### Training/Professional Development

As a Designated Aboriginal Agency, we sign off on the child welfare specialization certification for social workers. In 2019-2020, 13 social workers achieved delegated status with our agency. In addition, we offered training, in collaboration with our community partners. We offered approximately 40 training sessions on topics ranging from historical impacts training, first aid, suicide prevention, trial preparation and queer competency.

In 2019 – 2020, as a commitment to continuous improvement, we hired a Training Coordinator to take our staff training to a new level, through broadening our scope of training, offering more delivery methods and better accessibility to training.

The new Learning and Development plan for 2020-2021 includes a well rounded calendar of learning options, various delivery methods such

as online, self-directed and face-to-face. We have also connected with local universities to further develop our practicum student program.

The new plan also includes a Learning Management System that is integrated with our Human Resources Information System and features automated tracking, communication as well as reporting that is accessible for learners, supervisors, HR and the leadership team.

### Occupational Health and Safety

In January 2020 the agency hired a Health and Safety Coordinator to facilitate positive change by coordinating the implementation of new health & safety policies, programs, and procedures. This position ensures compliance and enforcement of the safety policies and programs for the organization.

As well as assisting in tracking incident statistics to develop proactive control measures, the position assists with worker's compensation (WCA) and Return to Work programs, and actively participates in internal safety committees.

Starting in January our Health & Safety Coordinator has tracked our Incident Investigations of a total of 29 Incident Investigations, 17 of them are considered near misses - no personal injury was sustained but where, given a slight shift in time or position, damage or injury easily could have occurred. All the reporting has been completed per WorkSafe BC Regulations and has corrective measures that

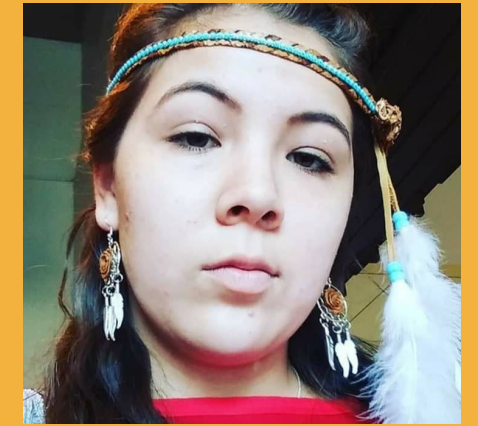
ensures any safety concerns are corrected. The Health & Safety Coordinator acts as the primary contacts for health and safety related issues, requests, questions and concerns.

During Covid-19 it has been an important role to assist with Safety Planning, Exposure Control Plans, Risk Assessments and help with ongoing Covid-19 concerns as well as assisting with the reopening plans of all offices in a safe way.



*The Agency hosted two Christmas parties for Children in Care in Chilliwack on November 30 and Abbotsford on December 7. The kids had their photo taken with Santa, decorated cookies and Christmas ornaments and participated in a drum circle. Pictured above are staff members Stacia Jones, Ben Vegt, Jill Hammond and Cordi Warbrick.*

## Youth Profile: Meet Summer Cousineau Wesley



Summer lives in Chilliwack. She is from the Nisga'a First Nation and her family comes from the Nass Valley. She joined Visions and Voices to help youth with their struggles and to give them a voice by sharing how to make the system better.

"Visions & Voices is important me because we organize events to show the other youth that our opinions matter. If youth on the committee are making choices, it proves to the other youth that aren't on the committee that their voices will be heard too," says Summer.

One of her goals is to have more youth attend the events and to learn about Indigenous culture. She wants more youth to feel comfortable speaking out and to use their voices. "The system is not perfect and the goal is for it to always be improving and the only way we know how to improve anything going on is listening to every youth that we can," says Summer.



## Xyólheméylh announces winners in social distancing art & video contest

### Indigenous kids create unique messages of protection against COVID-19

In May, 2020, a few months into the pandemic lockdown, the Agency decided to hold a Social Distancing art and video contest for all Indigenous children and youth in BC. We asked the kids to create posters and videos to describe their feelings about social distancing and COVID-19.

“We organized the contest to connect with children and youth who may be feeling a myriad of emotions during this strange time and to provide them with an outlet to express their feelings,” said Kyla Darby, Executive Director of Programs. “The entries showed a lot of creativity, heart and talent.”

Many of the entries expressed unique concerns about the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, concerns about the safety of Elders who carry our history and teachings was a common theme.

The winners were chosen by a panel consisting of the members of the FVACFSS Board of Directors and Elders Advisory Committee. “We received many artistic, creative and thoughtful entries and it was a real challenge to pick a top three. To our young artists thank you for sharing your work and please keep sharing your excellent artistry. The Board is honoured to have been part of this and we extend our heartfelt appreciation to all who participated and our congratulations to the prize winners,” said Marion Mussell, Board of Directors President.

The winners received cash prizes and their art will be displayed in Xyólheméylh’s offices.

#### About Some of the Contest Winners

Emma-Lee Kelly, who is 11 years old, performs a song she wrote called “Six Feet Away.” Emma-Lee is from the Soowahlie First Nation in Cultus Lake, BC and lives in Chilliwack. She is the daughter of Tara Kelly and Mack Hagel and her grand father is Grand Chief Doug Kelly. She loves to play guitar, ukulele, and piano. She is in sixth grade at Mt. Slesse Middle School and cites comedian, singer and actress, Colleen Ballinger as her idol. She is very proud of her First Nations heritage.

Bella Fitzgerald is 13, from Leq’a:mel First Nation and lives in Maple Ridge. She is eighth grade at Garibaldi Secondary and attends the Showstoppers Academy of the Performing Arts in Maple Ridge and loves music, acting and performing.

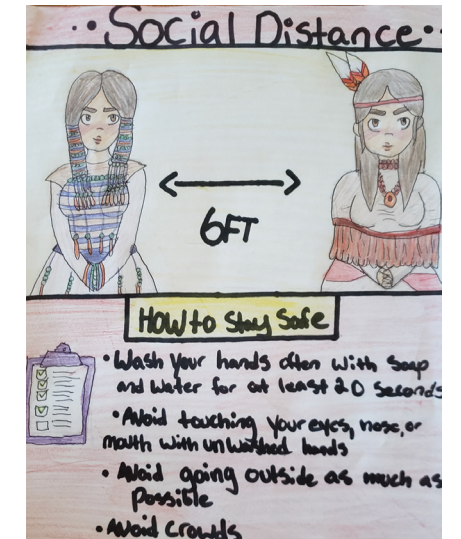
#### Poster Category



First Prize  
Myka Friesen, 19 years



Second Prize  
Jada Michel, 18 years

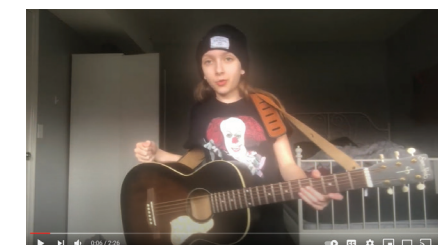


Third Prize  
Cora McIntyre, 15 years

#### Video Category:



First Prize  
Emma-Lee Kelly, 11 years  
Video link  
<https://youtu.be/G8y5cakHG04>



Second Prize, Tie  
Bella Fitzgerald, 13 years  
Video Link  
<https://youtu.be/ibQBOJEkaQo>



Second Prize, Tie  
Nikita Hance, 11 years  
Video link  
<https://youtu.be/tv4coLibyIQ>



## Our Programs

In 2019 - 2020 we restructured our agency in order to create better outcomes for Indigenous children and families in the Fraser Valley.

Thanks to additional funding of \$8 million for prevention and family strengthening from the Federal Government, we were able to fulfill a long held goal to provide specialized services for Stó:lō communities as well as hire more staff dedicated to family strengthening

Our focus has been on family strengthening and working collaboratively with families to develop relationships and find solutions to problems. We completed the restructuring in early 2020 and are very excited to see our vision come to fruition.

### Executive Leadership Team

One of the crucial aspects of the restructuring was completing the Executive Leadership Team and clarifying roles. It was decided early on to move to a model based on traditional leadership models of the Stó:lō people who valued individual strengths and skills as well as collaboration and teamwork.

We now have a complete Executive Leadership Team, consisting of Kyla Darby, Executive Director of Programs, Rod Spitzig, Executive Director of Administrative Services and Penny Trites, Executive Director of Staff and Community Relations.



First Salmon Ceremony, Kwantlen First Nations, May 2019

### Service Delivery Revitalization

Beginning in 2017, we initiated a process to gather extensive community and staff input. We have had several follow up consultations with staff and communities along with the direction and guidance from the board. These conversations generated the vision and framework we have tried to use in developing this new model.

When we began the journey, we were aware that it would take time to achieve our goal. Although we have made significant progress, we know that there are still things that need to be addressed. Every restructuring process comes with its challenges and opportunities.

We created 40 new positions for the Agency, which in turn created some opportunities for staff, and a lot of hiring for Team Leaders. The Team Leaders' group has shown significant flexibility with the staffing changes, hiring process, and ensuring staff are taken care of while we sort out our functional model with teams spread out within our agency. We were excited to see the quality of new staff that we have been able to recruit and promote.

With the new hires now on board, we are back to a typical vacancy rate for an agency this size.

### Stó:lō Service Team

Laura-Dawn Wilkin leads the Stó:lō service basket with two delegated teams and a family strengthening team. They serve the children and families from our 18 member communities. The teams also work closely with Nation reps to provide supports to families where child safety

## Elders and Youth Gathering



On Oct. 25 and 26, over 100 Elders and Youth gathered at Squiala First Nation to participate in workshops, celebrate culture, and have fun.

Keynote Speaker, Earl Lambert, gave an inspiring speech on Friday evening. Lambert is a Cree/Metis motivational speaker and inspirational storyteller who combines music, magic, hip hop, and humour to present a message of optimism, hope and pride in Indigenous culture. He also presented workshops on the Spirit of Self-esteem on Saturday.

Stó:lō historian, Dr. Sonny McHalsie (pictured above) took participants on a bus tour of Stó:lō territory; Darcy Paul led a Sweat Lodge workshop; Saylesh Wesley did a workshop on spiritual healing; Fred Jackson taught paddle artwork; and Wendy Ritchie presented on traditional medicine.



## Our Programs (Continued)

is a concern.

Their goal is to support building parental and extended family capacity wherever possible, and protection and guardianship services are provided when needed as well. Although the teams are still new, they have already seen positive practice shifts.

"I have also witnessed the passion of staff grow as they recognize the ability to return to the original mandate from our communities and provide prevention and support in true collaboration. We are fortunate to have recruited a significant number of Stó:lō and Indigenous

staff which will help us infuse our practice with culture. I love being a small part of supporting our communities to regain what is rightfully theirs; to find justice, and to truly be supported to make the decisions about how to protect the most vulnerable," says Laura Dawn.

### Family Service Team

The Family Service Team uses a holistic approach in working collaboratively with families and community partners to develop strategies in problem-solving, life skills and conflict resolution to enhance parenting skills.



## Resources and Family Strengthening

Inderjit Aujla is responsible for providing services in a culturally holistic manner with the overriding goal of ensuring the safety and well-being of children which involves assessing, recruiting, training, supporting, and developing a range of resources to serve children in care.

Her staff are also committed to preserving the cultural identity of Indigenous children and maintaining their ties and attachment to extended family, therefore, providing services to Out of Care families. Through Family Strengthening programs, they work collaboratively with families and communities to develop strategies in problem solving, life skills, conflict resolution and to develop or enhance parenting skills.

"I feel connected to each one of our families, children, and communities although I may not have met them in person. Most importantly, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve FVACFSS in my role as Director of Operations Resource and Family Strengthening where I find my own personal values are in alignment with the agency values. All my relations!," says Inderjit.

### Family Development Response

Ann Hagel is the Director of Operations for Family Development Response and provides leadership for our Screening and Family Development Response teams.

The Screening team's primary role is to manage child protection reports and initial requests for services. Members of the team screen child protection reports and determine the appropriate action to be provided.

## Meet a Support Parent: Deb Hill



Deb Hill has been a caregiver with Xyólheméyhlh since 1993, almost at the very beginning of its inception as an agency. She has eight kids ranging in age from one year to 20 years, and she has officially adopted six of them.

"I couldn't do this without the kids' families and their communities," says Deb, who was honoured by the Seabird First Nation two years ago. "I get a lot of support from the families, they visit regularly, they bring me salmon during fishing season, they take the kids canoeing. They have become my extended family," says Deb.

Deb is passionate about her responsibilities as a caregiver. "It's not all rosy, but when the kids are not biologically yours, you owe it to them be there for them. And to not be judgmental."

Deb is also passionate about connecting the kids with their culture. "It's not just culture, it's who we are, we all have a history and we all deserve to be connected with it."



## Our Programs (Continued)

When the information received by the screening team raises concerns about a child's safety the concerns are managed by our Family Development Response team with the support of our Family Strengthening team.

Family Development Response is an approach to child protection that focuses on how to keep children safe while the family stays together to work through their challenges whenever possible. When this is not possible the team works along side the family to identify extended family or community members that can provide temporary care for the children. The philosophy

guiding Family Development Response emphasizes collaboration and strives to build on the family's strengths.

"I am honoured to work with a dedicated and compassionate group of team leaders, social workers and family strengthening workers who share my belief in the value of strength based practice that focuses on creating safety for children while supporting families to stay together," says Ann.

### Guardianship & Youth Services

Rebecca Eassen's role is to ensure that the children and youth falling under our Agency's

umbrella of care (not serviced by our Stó:lō Services Basket) receive the care and support they need to reach their fullest potential.

Permanency and stability for children & youth is a priority as we aim to change the legacy of children growing up in care and becoming young adults who are disconnected from family, culture, and support.

Connection and belonging are the two most important words guiding our work. If children and youth cannot grow up with family, or within their community, we will ensure they grow up connected in meaningful ways to both; knowing who they are, where they belong, and with a deep sense of pride in their Aboriginal identity.

Rebecca says she feels privileged to work with a large group of staff who are passionate about the work they do, and who go consistently above and beyond what is required of them.

"They are the ones who truly make a difference in the lives of the children and youth we serve, and I am always grateful to them. Nothing fills my heart more than hearing them speak about how they have found new family for their children, reconnected them to siblings or grandparents, brought them home to their land, and have watched them succeed in ways we may not have thought possible. I am honoured to be witness to these moments," says Rebecca.

### Complaint Resolution

In the course of working together, disagreements may arise between the clients we



Over 100 caregivers attended FVACFSS's annual Caregiver Appreciation event on October 16 at the Rancho in Abbotsford for an evening of great food, cultural performances and presentations.

## Cultural Gathering



Approximately 120 people attended our first ever Cultural Gathering on Sept. 28, 2019 at Squiala First Nation.

The event began with a Sqwedilech led by Saylesh Wesley. A Sqwedilech or Spirit Boards is a sacred ceremony and is among the Coast Salish most powerful and sacred medicine. The boards are carved and painted plaques that were used to cleanse the house and people present at the ceremony. The ceremony can only be performed by trained spiritual healers who are specifically gifted with these boards.

"Our children have an inherent right to know who they are and where they come from," said emcee Chris Silver.

The entertainment included the Sasquatch Dancers, the Cree group Thunderbird, Haida group T'agwaan Xaada and Stó:lō group Kwakwaka'wakw.



## Our Programs (Continued)

serve and our FVACFSS staff members. Most concerns are addressed directly by staff without a formal complaint being made, however, when this is not possible, the Complaints Resolution Process provides a mechanism for our clients to express their concerns.

Our Client Complaint Resolution Analyst received 107 complaints over the last 12 months, of which 70 per cent were eligible for the Complaints Resolution Process. Youth made up 11% of complainants and on average, the Complaint Resolution Process took 29 days to

complete. 93% of complaints were addressed and resolved at the local level of resolution and 7% of complainants requested an Administrative Review. The Complaints Resolution Process continues to work with clients and staff to actively engage in a flexible, solution focused process to address our client's concerns.

### Cultural Events

Throughout the year, Xyólheméylh hosts various cultural events for caregivers, children



and youth in care and sometimes the general public. This included:

Five Summer Camps that included:

- Boys Cultural Camps and Girls Cultural Camps
- Youth Canoe Day Camps
- Caregiver Camp
- Family Camp

The Camps were held at various locations in the Fraser Valley and featured arts, singing, canoeing, storytelling and traditional games and teachings. Through a unique partnership with UBC, students in the health sciences also attended the camps as a cross cultural learning opportunity to better inform how they practice medicine with Indigenous peoples.

We also hosted:

- Family Nights
- Youth Nights
- Beading Groups
- Anger Management Workshops
- Life Skills for Youth
- Traditional Kitchen Workshops
- Children's Christmas Parties
- Cultural Gathering
- Youth and Elders Gathering

One of our most significant events of the year is the Smimeyath Butterfly Ceremony we host in May every year to celebrate youth in our care who are turning 19 and transitioning out of care and into adulthood. Forty-two Xyólheméylh youth graduated to their next phase of life in 2019 and 21 of them attended the ceremony. The

youth were joined by their Xyólheméylh social workers and caregivers.

The butterfly totem is significant to this special ceremony as we are honouring our youth in their journey through their own life cycle into a new chapter. The butterfly represents transformation, rebirth, movement through life as well as lightness of being. An important message carried by the spirit of the butterfly is about our ability to go through important changes in life with grace and lightness. This is a message of hope our youth will carry and share as they go forward on their journey.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of these events beginning in March 2020. We are now adjusting to the new reality and beginning to offer these cultural opportunities either virtually or in small groups.





## Caseloads

### On Reserve Files Count Team 1

| First Nation     | FS | CCO | YAG | IN | SR | OOC-FS | OOC-CS | VCA | TCO | EFP | Total |
|------------------|----|-----|-----|----|----|--------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Kwantlen         | 2  | 1   | 0   | 5  | 0  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 2   | 10    |
| Leq'amel         | 5  | 5   | 0   | 7  | 2  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 3   | 0   | 19    |
| Matsqui          | 3  | 4   | 0   | 0  | 6  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 13    |
| Sumas            | 3  | 0   | 0   | 5  | 0  | 1      | 2      | 0   | 1   | 0   | 12    |
| Shxwha:y Village | 5  | 10  | 0   | 6  | 3  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 4   | 0   | 28    |
| Aitchelitz       | 0  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 1  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1     |
| Soowahlie        | 3  | 0   | 0   | 5  | 1  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 4   | 13    |
| Squiala          | 4  | 0   | 0   | 3  | 3  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 3   | 3   | 16    |
| Skowkale         | 0  | 4   | 1   | 3  | 0  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 8     |
| Tzeachten        | 3  | 3   | 0   | 9  | 1  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 16    |
| Yakweak-wioose   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0     |
| Total Files      | 28 | 27  | 1   | 44 | 17 | 1      | 2      | 0   | 8   | 9   | 136   |

### On Reserve Files Count Team 2

includes family living on and off Stó:lō Territory

| First Nation  | FS | CCO | YAG | IN | SR | OOC-FS | OOC-CS | VCA | TCO | EFP | Total |
|---------------|----|-----|-----|----|----|--------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Skwah         | 7  | 4   | 0   | 5  | 3  | 0      | 0      | 1   | 0   | 4   | 24    |
| Cheam         | 5  | 8   | 0   | 8  | 5  | 0      | 1      | 0   | 0   | 5   | 31    |
| Popkum        | 0  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0     |
| Chawathil     | 6  | 2   | 0   | 12 | 6  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 5   | 1   | 35    |
| Shxw'ow'hamel | 0  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0     |
| Skawahlook    | 1  | 0   | 0   | 1  | 0  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 2     |
| Yale          | 0  | 0   | 0   | 1  | 0  | 0      | 0      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1     |
| Total Files   | 19 | 14  | 0   | 27 | 14 | 0      | 0      | 1   | 5   | 10  | 93    |

|     |                                     |        |                            |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------|
| FS  | Family Services files               | OOC-FS | Out of Care Family Service |
| CCO | Continuing Custody children in Care | OOC-CS | Out of Care Child Services |
| YAG | Youth Agreement                     | VCA    | Voluntary Care Agreement   |
| IN  | Investigation                       | TCO    | Temporary Custody Orders   |
| SR  | Voluntary Service Request           | EFP    | Extended Family Plan       |

## Looking Ahead

With our restructuring now completed, a renewed focus on prevention and family strengthening and our staff now located in Stó:lō communities, we are excited about the next chapter.

Our goals for 2020 - 2021 are:

### 1) Ensuring a Culturally Vibrant Workplace

This includes initiatives to expand and strengthen the role of Elders, enriching cultural teachings internally, ensuring our offices physically reflect Indigenous culture, and increasing morale and a sense of belonging with staff.

### 2) Sound Human Resources process and procedures

This includes reviewing HR policies and procedures to ensure they are up to date, reviewing the on-boarding process and ensuring the process involves cultural protocols and teachings. It also involves implementing a new HRIS program.

### 3) A Place where employees are engaged, make a difference and are accountable.

This includes improving internal communication with staff, staff recognition, and appreciation, training, establishing Wellness Committees, and improving our performance management and evaluation procedures. It also includes developing a facilities strategic plan.

### 4) Sound Financial Management and Reporting

We will be reviewing our Finance Policies to ensure they are up to date, implementing a new ADP Payroll System

### 5) Building and Strengthening relationships with communities.

We are implementing information sharing agreements with the communities we serve, partnering with community organizations to develop an urban strategy for away from home communities, and improving how we support and communicate with Caregiver Support Parents

### 6) Strengthen Delegated Programs to ensure culturally relevant practice that is compliant with standards.

This includes increased use of prevention services and family strengthening meetings; increased support to families for children to remain safely with their families; increased use of out of care options; ensuring permanency plans for CYIC are at the forefront of planning; increased support for youth transitioning out of care; increased support for caregivers; and increased focus on culture and accessing the knowledge of Elders.

### Covid 19 Pandemic

As we adjust to the new reality of a worldwide pandemic that is likely continuing for the foreseeable future, the Agency is adapting how we work. Working closely with the Ministry of Child and Family Development and Worksafe BC, we have implemented safety procedures in our offices, for our vehicles, and for working with our stakeholders. We have reduced the number of staff in our offices, with many of our staff working remotely from home. We have also had to cancel large events and think about ways we can communicate and share culture virtually.





Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children & Family Services Society  
Head Office: Bld. 1, 7201 Vedder Road  
Chilliwack, BC V2R 4G5  
[www.fvacfss.ca](http://www.fvacfss.ca)



[www.facebook.com/Xyolhemeylh](http://www.facebook.com/Xyolhemeylh)



[FVACFSS@Xyolhemeylh](https://twitter.com/FVACFSS@Xyolhemeylh)

*Létsé mót té sqwálewel ...*

*With a good mind, a good heart, and good feelings"*