

Annual Report

2025-2026



**DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP
CENTRE SOCIETY**





OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ANDREW TOM
PRESIDENT

STANLEY NAMOX
VICE PRESIDENT

CAROLINE MUIR
DIRECTOR

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SECRETARY/TREASURER

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DIRECTOR

JOSHUA NAMOX
YOUTH DIRECTOR

ABOUT THE DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society is an organization guided by Aboriginal values that provides activities, services and information to all people. It focuses on developing skills and strengths while incorporating spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being to help people become self-sufficient and self-reliant. The Friendship Centre is dedicated to promoting awareness among all people.



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANNETTE MORGAN

Reflecting on a Year of Growth and Community Resilience

As we look back on the past year at the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society, we are filled with gratitude for the collective efforts of our dedicated team and the strong partnerships we have built across Houston, Smithers, Telkwa, the Regional District, and Dease Lake. Together, we have navigated challenges, celebrated achievements, and continued to honor our commitment to serving Indigenous communities with respect and integrity.

Our mission to enhance the well-being of Indigenous peoples is deeply rooted in the principles of Indigenous law and values. This guiding framework has shaped our approach to service delivery and community engagement, ensuring that we remain responsive to the needs of those we serve. We believe in a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of individuals, families, and the broader community, allowing us to create programs that truly resonate with our cultural heritage.

This year, we have made significant strides in reducing homelessness and providing essential resources to families at risk. Through our Indigenous Housing Support Program, we successfully placed individuals and families into permanent housing, ensuring they have the stability and security needed to thrive. Our commitment to supporting those fleeing violence and facing housing insecurity has been unwavering, and we are proud of the positive impact we have made in the lives of many.

Collaboration has been key to our success. Working closely with partners in Houston, Smithers, Telkwa, and Dease Lake, we have developed a network of support that strengthens our community ties and amplifies our collective voice. Whether it's through cultural events, workshops, or outreach programs, we have embraced the opportunity to come together and share our stories, knowledge, and traditions.

Our accomplishments this year are a testament to the resilience of our community and the dedication of our team. Together, we have not only provided essential services but have also fostered an environment where cultural pride and identity can flourish. We have engaged our Elders and youth, ensuring that their wisdom and perspectives guide our initiatives and uphold the values of our ancestors.

As we move forward, we remain committed to our vision of ascending to a future that remembers the past and is rooted in our cultures. We will continue to strengthen our partnerships, enhance our programs, and advocate for the needs of our community, all while honoring the teachings of Indigenous law that remind us of our responsibilities to one another and the territories we work, play and heal on.

In closing, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated staff, community members, and partners who have worked tirelessly to support our mission. Together, we are creating a brighter future for Indigenous peoples, and I look forward to what we can achieve in the coming year.

Dze L K'ant
Friendship Centre



**ALCOHOL & DRUG-
FACILITATOR**

ANNUAL REPORT

2019 - 2020

Dze L K'ant Friendship Society
1188 Main Street
Smithers BC, V0J 2N0

Mel Neil Bazil

250 847 5211 extension 207

alcohol.drug@dzekant.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre and Board of Directors supports the partnership with the Ministry of Children and Families to develop and host the Life Skills and Youth Transition program. We propose this strategy includes developing a program to assist youth in transition to adulthood.

These services will allow youth to achieve independence with confidence and success through interventions and support aimed at promoting the development of adult competencies. Services will provide youth with the necessary skills and supports to live in their community, with a plan for assisted transition to independence and/or have necessary skills for independence.

The program will be individualized based on the youth's strengths and needs, focusing on developing resiliency by ensuring informal and formal networks of support are in place within their community and families.

Introduction

Mission

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Alcohol & Drug Facilitator Program

The Alcohol and Drug Facilitator provides one-on-one, group, and family counselling to individuals and members who are or have been involved with substance abuse, including educational, activity-based, and counseling services. Other services offered are Grief and Loss, FASD, Family Support.

Where necessary, the Alcohol and Drug Facilitator also develops treatment plans and undertakes referrals. The Alcohol & Drug Facilitator can help to understand Harm Reduction, train in Naloxone Kits, and can also help to create a Harm Reduction Plan.

The services do not require a person to be struggling with addictions, but can also be provided to family and friends of individuals and members who are involved with addictions, heavy use, recreational use and beneficial use of substances.

Annual Highlights

- Trained as a trainer in Naloxone Kits and SAVE ME steps with the First Nations Health Authority in 2018, however formalized with FNHA for forming a community of trainers in BC for an Indigenous Harm Reduction Community Council.**

Annual Highlights continued:

- **The facilitator's skills include ASIST 11 Suicide Intervention, Decolonizing Addictions, Roots of Trauma, Indigenizing Harm Reduction, Naloxone Kit and SAVE ME steps Train the Trainer, Emergency Operations Command training, First Aid for Children and Elders with Defibrillator. Not Just Naloxone Harm Reduction Training, Food Safe, Wilderness Skills Training, Critical Incident Stress Management.**
- **The Facilitators Cultural Competency includes, Wet'suwet'en History, Drumming Singing, Storytelling, Spirituality, Wellness Through Culture, War Canoe Skipper, Traditional Healing Practice and Community.**
- **Mel is a member of the Smithers Community Council on Women's Safety, and Smithers Harm Reduction Committee.**
- **Forming an Indigenous Lead Volunteer Street Patrol involving Harm Reduction, called the All Clans Patrol. It involves training in Harm Reduction, Naloxone Kit Training, Situational Awareness, Radio Communications, Decolonization, Escalation/DeEscalation, Self Defence and Reporting. It will focus attention on volunteerism from peers, or network of folks who have lived or living experiences with substances, and their friends and family.**
- **Presentations for schools like iCount, Matriarchs on the Rise, Brown Bag Lunches at Bulkley Valley District Hospital, Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs, Dze L K'ant Staff, and Positive Living Northwest Smithers, as well as individual clients with a range of presentations: Decolonizing Addictions, Reducing Stigma, Indigenizing Harm Reduction, Cultural Competency.**
- **Cultural and Work Related Presentations with School District #54 in Smithers and Houston, as well as with Coast Mountain College. Especially a full day of delivering cultural presentations at the annual Indigenous Peoples' Day on June 21, 2019.**
- **Recently approved status as a Naloxone Training Site and Distributer Site. Will amalgamate that with the All Clan Patrol site.**

CONCLUSION

The Alcohol & Drug Facilitator Program now has plenty of work to continue with not only direct client services for the next year, but also with the projects that the facilitator has created that spurs more partnerships with agencies and schools to reach populations and increase safety for folks who chose to use substances and refine pathways that assist folks who wish to obtain sobriety.

The next steps will see the wave of trainings needed to create the All Clan Patrol. Connection via new partnerships and the growing Dze L K'ant Society is exciting and the local healthy community is growing. The new patrol will make that healthy community much more visible and active.

Mel Provides his services and skills with pride and accomplishments from the last 20 years of providing services in Smithers and Area. His range includes Residential School Survivor counselling, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder knowledge and supports to families, MMIWG herstory and supports, Cultural Competency, Suicide Intervention. His practices are Trauma Informed, Indigenous informed, and Social Justice Driven. He plans to continue to last in this field with self care, community of care and always creating and building on his skills and practices.

Sne Kal Yegh

Mel Bazil
Alcohol & Drug Facilitator



EMERGENCY PLANNING

ANNUAL REPORT
2024 - 2025

REPORT PROVIDED BY
ELMIRA SANATI NIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past year, the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre advanced a community-led approach to emergency preparedness and food security in Northern BC. Guided by Indigenous values and focused on climate-related emergencies such as wildfires and floods, the program clarified the Friendship Centre's role in emergency response, strengthened relationships with regional responders, and built the skills and partnerships required to activate a culturally safe Cultural Activity Location Support (CALS) site when needed.

Key accomplishments include drafting and sharing the first comprehensive CALS Action Plan with partners; developing practical tools such as an Emergency Contacts & Crisis Resources Pamphlet for regional communities; curating traditional food recipes and local edible plant guides with knowledge keepers; and coordinating staff and community trainings with FNESS, ESS, and the Canadian Red Cross. The program deepened ties with regional and provincial partners, participated in responders' planning tables, and prepared staff to support evacuees should activation be required.

Together, these efforts increased readiness, deepened cultural safety, and connected people to knowledge—so that in times of crisis, community members can access familiar foods, supportive spaces, and clear pathways to services.

INTRODUCTION

The Emergency Preparedness Program was launched to explore how the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre can play a key role in supporting our community before, during, and after emergency events. Our work has focused on building internal capacity, strengthening external partnerships, and supporting community members in preparing for emergencies through a culturally grounded lens. With the increasing impacts of wildfires, floods, and climate-related emergencies, the program has worked toward creating a safe, welcoming, and responsive model of support that centers Indigenous values, knowledge, and connection to land and food systems.

This report highlights the program's activities from May 2024 to September 2025.





PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Emergency Preparedness Program was guided by a central vision: to create a culturally safe and community-rooted emergency response model that addresses the specific needs and strengths of Indigenous communities in the region. The program aimed to:

- Enhance the capacity of the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre to serve as a hub during emergency events.
- Develop the Cultural Activity Location Support (CALS) Action Plan as a culturally specific alternative or complement to standard emergency reception services.
- Build community readiness through outreach, training, and education.
- Promote food security and traditional food knowledge as essential to emergency preparedness and recovery.
- Strengthen collaboration with external partners, including emergency responders, knowledge keepers, and Indigenous-led organizations.

Our approach was holistic, adaptive, and inclusive—ensuring that both cultural continuity and practical supports were at the heart of emergency preparedness planning.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WORKSHOPS

WHEN: NOVEMBER 21 AND 28 2024
WHERE: OLD CHURCH HALL (3704, 1st Ave)

Join us for a day of interactive activities and practical tips to help you and your family prepare for emergencies.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided.
 Please RSVP by November 15 using the links below or by phone.



Nov 21, 2024 - 9:30 - 3:00
 Topic: Personal Preparedness
 Please scan here to RSVP.



Nov 28, 2024 - 9:30 - 3:00
 Topic: ESS - Supporting Community Evacuees
 Please scan here to RSVP.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.




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 Program Coordinator: Elmira Sanatini
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 Phone: 255.847.9211

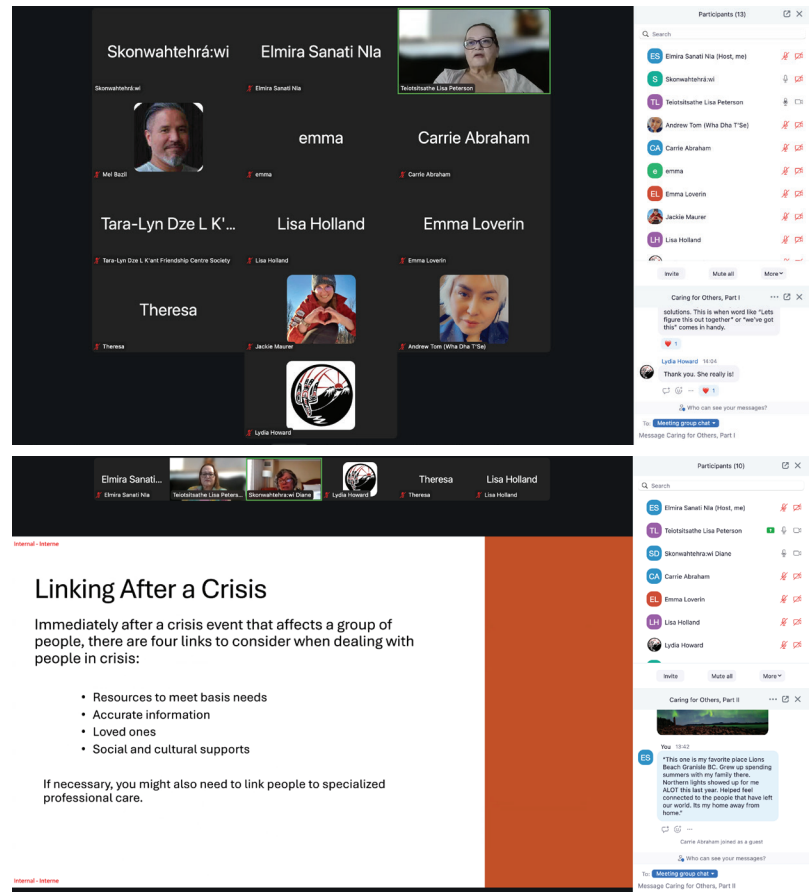


Linking After a Crisis

Immediately after a crisis event that affects a group of people, there are four links to consider when dealing with people in crisis:

- Resources to meet basic needs
- Accurate information
- Loved ones
- Social and cultural supports

If necessary, you might also need to link people to specialized professional care.




Emergency Preparedness Workshops by FNESS | Oct - Nov 2025

1. Capacity Building and Training

A major focus of the program has been preparing Friendship Centre staff to respond to emergency events. To this end, we:

- Organized and hosted four staff workshops in October and November 2024, led by the First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS), covering topics such as Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) basics, Cultural Activity Location Support (CALS) policy, personal preparedness, and Emergency Support Services (ESS).
- Facilitated a four-part Psychological First Aid training series in February 2025 with the Canadian Red Cross focused on self-care and caring for others during emergencies. These online sessions were well attended and provided staff with valuable tools to manage stress and support others.
- Participated in several webinars offered by the Canadian Red Cross throughout the year, including topics like wildfire preparedness, smoke-related health risks, and grief and loss in emergencies.
- Attended the Regional Emergency Responders Meeting.
- Completed Naloxone training, which equipped staff with critical life-saving skills.

These training opportunities strengthened our team's knowledge, built cross-departmental connections, and established a strong foundation of emergency awareness within the organization.



CULTURAL ACTIVITY LOCATION SUPPORT (CALS) ACTION PLAN

MARCH 2025



2. Planning and Policy Development: CALS Action Plan

A core deliverable of this program has been the development of the Cultural Activity Location Support (CALS) Action Plan. This document outlines how the Friendship Centre can activate a CALS location at the Hall during emergency events to offer culturally safe support for evacuees. Key components of the plan include:

- Staff roles, resources, and service offerings at CALS.
- Protocols for providing culturally appropriate food, mental health support, and activities.
- Integration with ESS operations and other regional emergency response systems.
- To enhance the food security components of the plan, we collaborated with local partners to create two CALS staff guides:
 - A Traditional Food Recipe Guide featuring 10 Indigenous recipes.
 - A Gathering Guide identifying traditional foods that can be safely harvested in the region before and during emergencies.

The CALS Action Plan is a living document, developed in partnership with ESS, FNESS, and community advisors. It reflects our ongoing commitment to culturally grounded emergency response.

RED DRESS DAY

On May 5, we gather to honour the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people and to stand with their families.

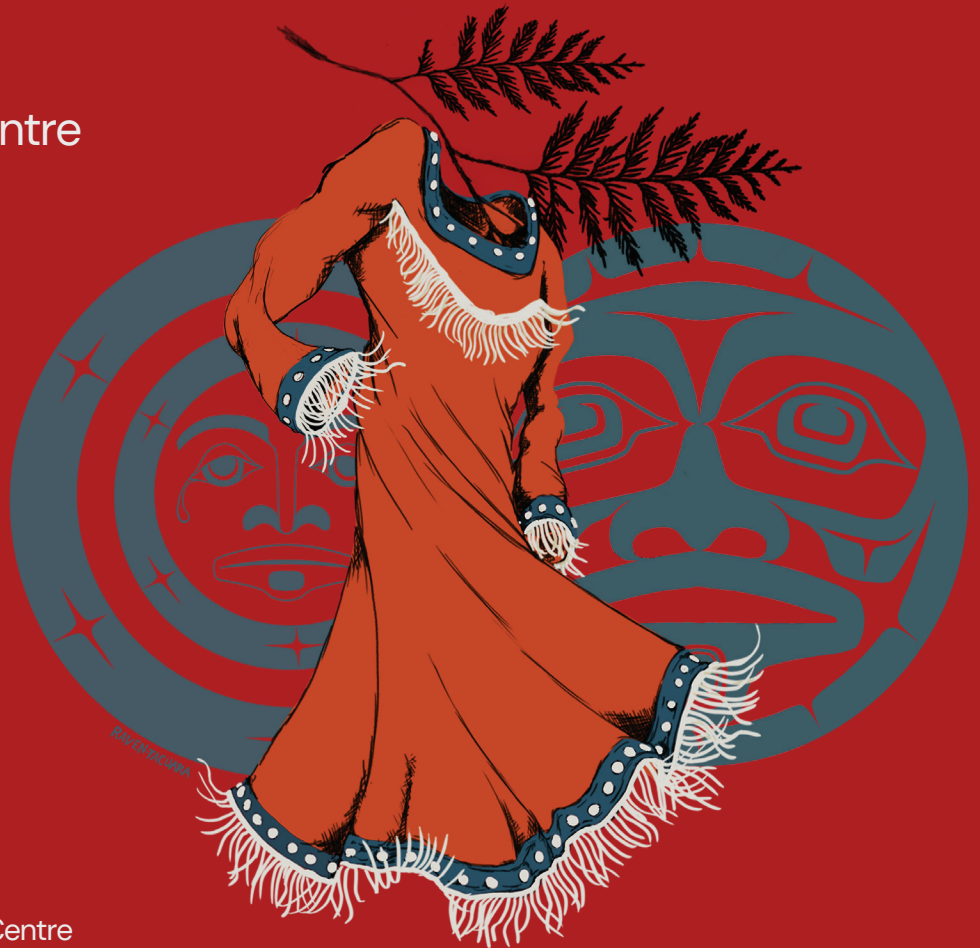
In recognition of Emergency Preparedness Week, we'll also share resources, stories, and strategies to strengthen safety and resilience in our communities.

MAY 5, 2025

11:00 – 3:00pm

Dze L K'ant Cultural Centre

3rd Ave, Smithers



Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre
For more information call us at 250.847.5211
Or email mmiwg.support@dzelkant.com

3. Community Engagement and Outreach

Throughout the year, we prioritized community engagement to raise awareness, strengthen connections, and gather input:

- Hosted public events and info tables during Indigenous People's Day, Red Dress Day, and Emergency Preparedness Week. These events included distribution of emergency planning guides, grab-and-go bag demonstrations, and ERA sign-up promotion.
- Created and distributed an Emergency Contact Pamphlet in May 2025 with key crisis and regional support numbers. This pamphlet has been shared at events Tea Creek Farm, and in our offices.
- Conducted an internal staff survey to gather insights on how each program could support the community during emergencies. Responses helped shape the CALS plan.
- Met with elders and community support workers to identify opportunities for personalized emergency planning. Grab-and-go bag outreach is ongoing.



4. Partnerships and Collaboration

We developed and deepened relationships with several key organizations to support our emergency preparedness goals:

- FNESS, ESS, and EMCR: Provided training, feedback on the CALS plan, and opportunities for regional collaboration.
- Canadian Red Cross: Facilitated training and provided ongoing support in identifying staff development opportunities.
- SPARC BC: Explored opportunities for research collaboration and use of our program as a case study.
- Tea Creek Farm: Hosted our staff for a site visit and knowledge exchange on Indigenous food sovereignty, with future collaborations discussed.
- Wetsuweten Native Arts: Contributed to the development of CALS food security guides.

These partnerships have helped shape a network of support that is both culturally safe and operationally practical.



5. Food Security and Traditional Knowledge

In alignment with our core values and funder expectations, we emphasized food security as a critical pillar of emergency planning. Highlights include:

- Ongoing collaboration with knowledge holders to gather traditional food recipes and identify local wild foods.
- Planned a food preservation techniques workshop to support traditional knowledge transfer. The workshop, led by Skyla Lattie, will focus on canning, drying, fermenting, and sustainable harvesting. (Tentatively scheduled for September 2025.)
- Shared emergency planning resources with organizations like Tea Creek to encourage cross-learning.

The integration of traditional food knowledge and local food systems into emergency response efforts supports cultural continuity, food sovereignty, and long-term resilience.



CONCLUSION

The Emergency Preparedness Program has made significant strides in its first year, laying the groundwork for a future where Indigenous communities are supported in ways that reflect their knowledge, values, and unique strengths. From staff training and CALS planning to meaningful partnerships and culturally rooted food security work, the program has created a vision of preparedness that centers community wellness, cultural safety, and Indigenous leadership. As we prepare to close this phase of the program, we look forward to sharing what we've built and continuing to advocate for a model of emergency response rooted in respect, care, and collective resilience.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Friendship Centre acknowledges and thanks Elders, knowledge keepers, staff, and partners whose guidance and collaboration shaped this year's work: FNESS, ESS, EMCR, Canadian Red Cross, Office of the Wet'suwet'en, Wetzin'kwa Community Forest, Wetsuweten Native Arts, SPARC BC, the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, Naut'sa mawt Tribal Council, and regional responders and community members who participated in trainings and planning sessions.



Friendship Centre's Staff | Tea Creek Visit | May 2025



Dze L K'ant Friendship Center

August 2025

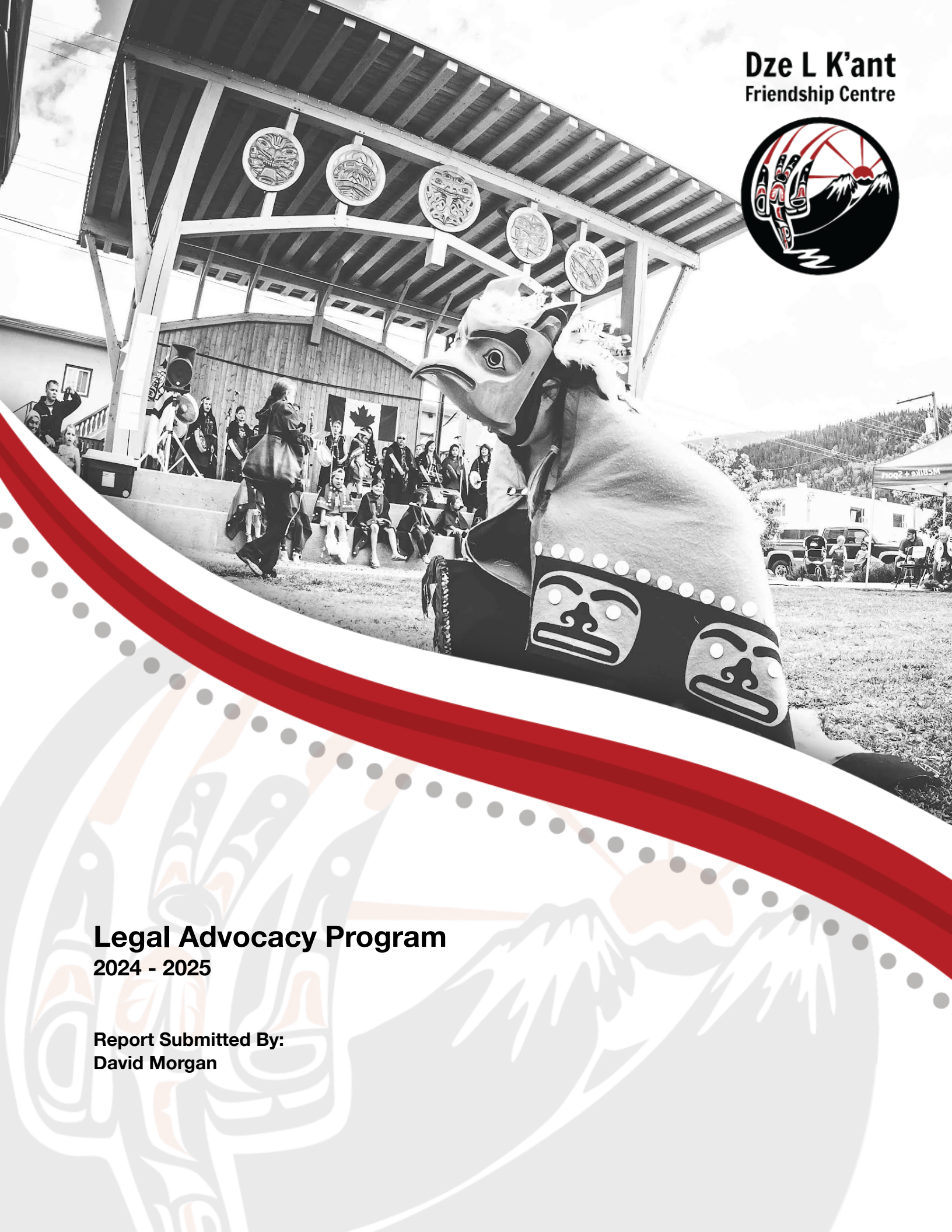
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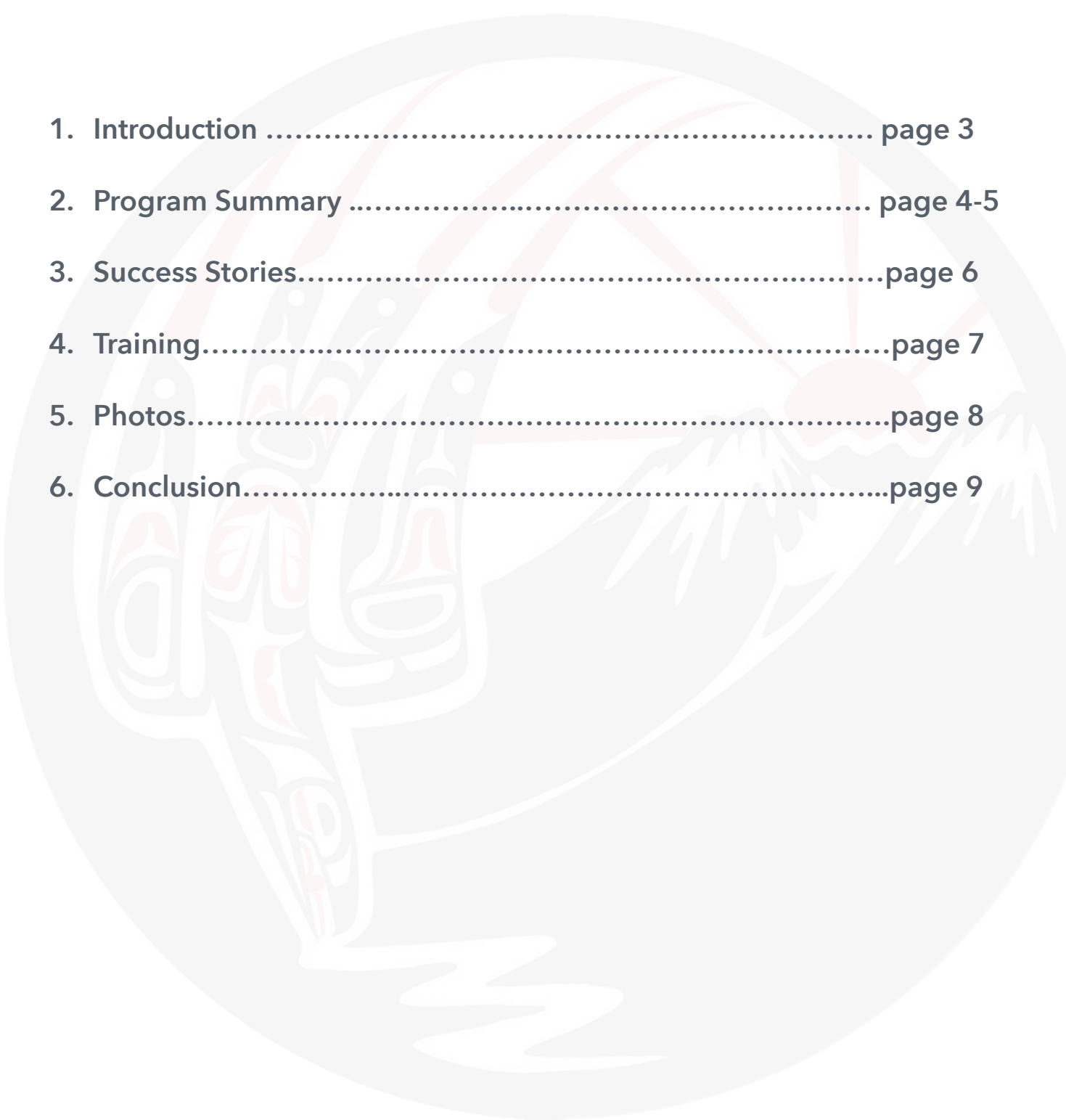
Dze L K'ant
Friendship Centre



Legal Advocacy Program
2024 - 2025

Report Submitted By:
David Morgan

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INTRODUCTION

The Legal Advocacy Program is committed to the advocacy, promotion and education of poverty law rights and benefits. Poverty Law is the body of law that concerns the rights of low-income individuals and families to access government benefits. The intake criteria is very specific. A Legal Support Worker can help with applications, reconsiderations and appeals for:

TENANCY

Issues with landlords such as unfair evictions, repairs, quiet enjoyment, guests, etc, support with Residential Tenancy Branch processes and hearings.

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION BENEFITS

Welfare, hardship, Persons with Persistent and Multiple Barriers benefits, Persons with Disabilities benefits, crisis supplements, general supplements, investigations and reviews.

FEDERAL BENEFITS

Canada Pension Plan- Disability, old age security, guaranteed income supplement, child tax benefit, eligibility reviews.

WORK RELATED ISSUES

Employment Standards, Employment Insurance, Worksafe BC benefits.

DEBT AND CONSUMER ISSUES

BC Hydro crisis customer fund, debt counselling referrals, stopping creditors from calling, information and responding to creditors.

HUMAN RIGHTS

BC human rights complaints process and submissions.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The program is achieving all outcomes in regards to providing advocacy, outreach, referrals, information and systemic advocacy for poverty law matters. This year there was a transfer of advocates, including a period where the position was vacant as the hiring process took place.

- **Direct client advocacy** was addressed by serving the maximum number of clients possible. Clients and their supports are able to gain a clear understanding of their legal matter through drop ins, appointments and phone calls. Almost all clients had their legal matters resolved, got the information they needed or got a referral if the issue was not in the poverty law scope of service.
- **Public legal education (PLE)** was addressed by handouts like the Tenancy Survival Guide and Know your rights handed out to clients and available in the program office. Throughout the year, public legal education materials were distributed to groups depending on specific needs, such as tenancy and human rights.
- **Systemic advocacy** has primarily been addressed through participation in the province-wide poverty law advocate network, POVNET. Through this network, the program advocate learned about issues in the larger community that are becoming trends and they are also able to share their own experiences in my role with the wider community and contribute to the identification of areas where systemic advocacy may be needed. Further, the program advocate regularly participated in the Smithers Situation Table.
- **Workshops** were hosted two times in this period. This included workshops on Tenancy in Houston, where clients got to ask questions and get answers regarding anything within the advocate's scope. This was provided with funding from the Law Foundation's Racial Justice Grant.
- **Outreach to Isolated Areas** continues to be both an important and challenging issue. This was addressed by: support being provided to clients from Burns Lake, Telkwa, Houston, Witset, Hazelton, Kispiox and Fort Babine using phone, fax and email; and having registered mail to Legal Support clients to have documents sent off in a professional manner.

- **Outreach** was addressed by offering drop-ins throughout the week. Many clients have barriers to appointments, but by holding a flexible schedule clients were able to learn about the program, identify issues early, and meet the advocate. This format supported early intervention, low-barrier service, and improved engagement. Further, during this period, the program focused on helping vulnerable clients who were experiencing homelessness and let them know of services provided, as the legal advocate position was vacant for a significant amount of time before it was filled. Outreach was conducted for this purpose by canvassing the neighbourhood and offering my services to clients during the homeless count and while teaming up with the community integration specialist to hand out things like snacks, drinks, hand warmers, gloves and toques during the winter. Many of these clients have barriers to appointments, and so this form of outreach worked well for them.

SUCCESS STORIES

- During this period, I had two cases that I helped a client come to an agreement with their landlord that worked for both parties following an eviction notice. These are some of my favourite outcomes showing how mediation can work out beneficial for everyone when coming to an agreement and a good representation of dispute resolution.
- One client came in unaware that they would qualify for disability benefits and had no other source of income at the time. Being able to get them set up with this income was vital to helping the client be able to afford to live in the rising cost of Smithers.
- Another success story came while a client was describing a problem that was outside my scope of service but realized the the landlord had handled a their eviction unfairly and the client was compensated for that with my help and then I was able to get a referral to help them with the original problem outside my scope of service to have that resolved.

TRAINING

The new advocate completed a variety of training for their role in this program. This included mandatory training required by the Law Foundation, as well as supplemental training deemed beneficial for legal advocates such as Occupation First Aid Level 1.

Summary of training completed:

- Part One and Two of the Legal Advocacy Training Course (LATC)
- Occupational First Aid Level 1
- HBS Negotiation Mastery
- HBS AI Essentials
- DAFGP Indigenous Doula Training
- Situation Table Training

Photos

With help from Yolanda Liman we had created boards with visual representation of the community's needs during a workshop.



YOUR VOICE MATTERS - DZE L'KANT - HOUSTON WORKSHOP - DAYTIME

LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING
Yolanda Liman and David Morgan
DRAWING IT OUT



YOUR VOICE MATTERS - DZE L'KANT - HOUSTON WORKSHOP - EVENING

LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING
Yolanda Liman and David Morgan
DRAWING IT OUT

CONCLUSION

The work the Legal Advocacy Program has addressed this year is reflective of both the issues and the barriers people face in their respective communities.

Tenancy-related issues continue to be pervasive in the community and compose the majority of full-representation files. Illegal eviction notices, lack of proper repairs and maintenance, and illegally retained security deposits have been common issues brought forward to this program. The Legal Advocacy Program has significant capacity to assist tenants with these issues and many positive outcomes were achieved.

Assistance with Income assistance and PWD applications, reconsiderations, and appeals were also common issues addressed by the program. Seasonal and unstable employment seems to be a recurring problem in the region contributing to this high need. High inflation in the area makes it hard for clients to find affordable housing, often leading to late rent payments and with that, eviction notices. It is important to make sure that landlords follow proper protocol as its often not looked over for clients without an advocate as legal documents can be hard to navigate for clients without help.

The scope of work we do within the parameters of the Poverty Law Advocacy program is critically necessary. We see our services vitally utilized and we continue to reach out with support to our clients. We aim to continue building trust and relationships with the community so that the future success of the Legal Advocacy Program, and the clients that it serves, is ensured for years to come.

Dze L K'ant
Friendship Centre



HIV/AIDS HEP C AWARENESS

ANNUAL REPORT

2024 - 2025

Dze L K'ant Friendship Society
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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HIV/AIDS Programme

Description of Program:

HIV-AIDS HEP C Awareness:

The program is for providing HIV- AIDS Hep C Awareness and prevention by providing information, resources and workshops, as well as community outreach and partnering with in house programs and local organizations to decrease infections and increase awareness of how HIV-AIDS and Hep C are transmitted and encourage testing.

Annual Highlights

- Distributed over 600 condoms to sss, NWCC, eagle books, smithers brewery
-
- Trained with and participated in multiple events with Alcohol and Drug / Harm reduction , MMIWG2+ emergency response , Housing Programs .
- We went on outing with the war canoe had cultural event and dinners to mention a few , we completed training in naloxone , car seat installation certificate , Doula training certificate, emergency response and prepared-

Annual Highlights continued:

With Mels training and guidance I've taken on the distribution of cell phones that are provided by the non profit organization ISpark, to date we have distributed over 60 Phones to our urban indigenous venerable sector peers.

CONCLUSION

This year, the program expanded its reach and impact through a wide array of activities that not only supported HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C awareness but also contributed to the broader well-being of the community. Beyond the distribution of resources, we immersed ourselves in critical local events and initiatives that fostered connections and strengthened partnerships.

The collaborative efforts with Alcohol and Drug/Harm Reduction programs, MMIWG2+ emergency response teams, and Housing Programs allowed us to contribute to collective action on pressing community health issues. Through training sessions and certifications, such as naloxone administration, car seat installation, and doula training, we enhanced our capacity to respond to immediate needs and provide essential services.

Cultural engagement was also at the heart of our activities, with events like the war canoe outing and community dinners bringing people together in meaningful ways. These moments not only reinforced our commitment to inclusivity but also fostered a sense of belonging and solidarity among participants.

As we look to the future, we are excited to continue building on these diverse efforts, refining our programs, and ensuring that our activities remain relevant and responsive to the needs of the community.



DZE L K' ANT
FRIENDSHIP
CENTRE

WWW.DZELKANT.COM

ABORIGINAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM 2023-2024

REPORTING PERIOD: APRIL 1ST 2023- MARCH
31ST 2024



ABORIGINAL EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW.

Throughout the past year, the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre facilitated the Aboriginal Early Childhood Development contract through the ministry of children and family Development. This contract provides a direct, culturally appropriate service to vulnerable indigenous families and the broader community of Houston. Families are supported to improve their parental capacity, and improve outcomes for indigenous children 0-6 years old and their families.

Supportive relationships form the basis of our service delivery. We work with parents and caregivers to address barriers that are preventing safe, effective parenting. Many of these barriers and vulnerabilities are often rooted in inter-generational trauma. Clients are offered a variety of formats, including group and individual sessions, to help empower clients in a culturally meaningful way to break the cycle of family trauma and be the best parents that they can be.



OVER VIEW

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Program Continues to adapt to the unique need of our clients and community in a cohesive attempt to respond quickly and efficiently supporting critical need, and culturally appropriate services.

Affordable housing, access to medical care, and affordable food continue to be a challenge for the most vulnerable community members of our community. we have seen an increased request from families to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, personal protective equipment, Mental health, and technology supports. The following are some examples of how the Aboriginal Early Childhood Development team met those challenges, supported clients and improved outcomes.



AECD Support Services

- Enriching Programs for children 0-6 yrs
- Confidential Counselling
- Family Support Worker
- Pregnancy Outreach worker
- Advocacy for MCFD clients
- Supervised Visits
- Parenting Classes.
- Parent Resources
- Cultural Programming.
- Food security Programming.



AECD Program Staff

- AECD Coordinator- Emma Bowen
- Family Support Worker- Kassandra Bright
- Pregnancy Outreach Worker- Jennifer Wilson
- Early Childhood Educator- Olivia WaterHouse

The Aboriginal Early Childhood development services incorporate four distinct service areas that are connected to enhance outcomes for children, families and their communities. The service areas are intended to achieve the following goals:

- 1) Improving parenting and family supports
- 2) promoting Healthy Pregnancy, Birth and infancy
- 3) Strengthening Early Childhood Development, Learning and care.
- 4) Strengthening Community Supports

Outcome:

- 1) Aboriginal Communities have dedicated support and resources that build and enhance culturally appropriate family and community capacity to effectively promote early childhood development.

Progress to Outcome:

The following programs, activities, and workshops highlight the supports and recourses that are accessed to enhance culturally appropriate Early Childhood Development and care and increase community capacity.

Improving parenting and Family supports

Families have an increased access to a range of family supports:

The AECD staff are skilled at assessing client needs and navigating families to help provide appropriate, supportive referrals to vulnerable families. We continue to offer workshops, support groups, and parenting programs in person and through zoom and video to connect families to essential resources and supports. The Dze L K'ant friendship center has strong relationship with community partners and agencies, allowing an easy referral process.

The following are some examples of weekly programming that are offered to increase access to a range of family support.

Component Service Objective: Prevention Practices/ Community Healing Practices/ Cultural Workshops.
Improve Parenting and Supports.

3a) Provide a range of individual and group activities and services that enhance parenting skills

3b) Provide healthy snacks and meals for participants.

3h) Provide cultural education (language, traditional cooking, and crafts) incorporate into leisure activities.

3i) Encourage extended family and elder participation.

Round Table:

Activities:

Offered once per week, facilitated by the family support worker, this program focuses on supporting parents by providing education, social connections, skill building opportunities and Cultural activities



Participants engage in a drumming workshop lead by the family support coordinator while children and grandchildren play and join in developmentally appropriate activities with the ECE.



The Family Support coordinator leading a beading workshop to complete a red dress for MMIW awareness



Participants connect and socialize while completing drum projects.

Component service objective: Prevention Practices/ Community Healing Practices/ Parent and child care programs.

Improve Parenting and supports.

3a) Provide a range of Individual and group activities and services that enhance parenting skills, story telling, traditional parenting, Nobody's perfect, positive parenting, Active parenting , child discipline strategies, and attachment.

3b) Provide healthy snacks and meals for participants.

3c) Build positive support.

3d) Provide parent circle literacy program.

3n) Provide advocacy services for families and make referrals to other community services and supports.

Activities:

Parent Workshops:

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Development team facilitate a number of parenting workshops designed to enhance parenting skills, competencies, confidence and connections

Workshops Currently Offered:

Nobody's perfect Parenting Program- This 8 week program is offered twice a year. The Nobody's Perfect program is parent lead and designed to enhance parenting skills, and Recognize realistic expectations as a parent.

Relevant topics included:

·*Helping your Child Cope-* Learn strategies on how to recognize stress in your child and strategies to help them cope.

·*Setting Limits-* Describes the importance and advantage of setting limits and establishing healthy routines with young children.

·*Building Independence-* Describes the positive outcomes of promoting independence.

·*Healthy Co- Parent-* exploring topics such as guardianship, parenting arrangements and communication. Indigenous parents learn to make positive and informed decisions based on the best interest of their children.

·*Conscious Parenting-* empower parents to find their own route of parenting without pressures of family or the community.

·**Bringing Tradition Home-** presents traditional values and cultural practices to help parents, grandparents and other family caregivers to raise healthy children amongst urban off reserve communities.

Navigating and understanding the Jordan's Principle application- we invite a Jordan's Principle service coordinator to facilitate information sessions regarding the details of the Jordan's Principle funding and how to access supports. The Jordan's Principle service coordinator works with the AECD staff to provide families with the tools and knowledge to access appropriate supports for their young children in a timely, culturally safe manner aiding to remove barriers and enhance services to indigenous families living off reserve.

Component Service Objective: Cultural Workshops.

Improve parenting and supports:

3h) Provide cultural Education

2g) Extend family and elder participation.

Activities

Workshops offered by the Dze L k' ant Friendship Centre from April 1st 2023-March 31 2024

- Traditional Medicine Workshops- Focusing on medicine traditions. Combing intergenerational knowledge in making Salves, and teas, promoting holistic wellness.
- Family Budget - Held once per month in partnership with Houston Link to learning and the Indigenous Housing program, this workshop gives clients tools to track their finances, plan for financial goals and to effectively develop a week to week financial plan for their family.
- Tenancy Rights: facilitated in partnership with the Indigenous housing program. This workshop aims at empowering participants by understanding responsibilities, rights, and how to communicate effectively with landlords and provide resources and referrals for advocacy
- medicine wheel teaching- To reinforce our connection to the medicine wheel and develop effective coping skills.
- Traditional medicinal workshops- Traditional medicine workshops focus on ethical harvesting. Making salves and teas, and learning the medicinal properties and traditions of medicines.
- Indigenous Crafts and Artwork. - therapeutic, empowering activities, such as beading, Painting, and making drums and moccasins.



Component Service Objective: Community Healing Practices. / Cultural Workshops.

Strengthen Early Childhood Development Learning and care

2. d) Provide Cultural Education

2g) Extend family and elder participation (encourage interaction between young and elders)

Activities:

Children participate in programs that teach traditional skills including harvesting. Some of the harvesting include materials such as animal hides and others focus on harvesting foods such as plants, berries, fish, and wild meat using traditional methods and newer technologies and tools. These skills promote food security and self reliance while connecting with family and supporting generational teachings. Harvesting from the land teach our young children about reciprocal relationships that exist between humans and living things, and about a way of life and knowledge system that sees humans as part of creation, which emphasizes the need to give back when something is taken.



Component Service Objective: Prevention Practices.

Improve parenting and Family Supports

3k) Provide community kitchen, cooking groups, good food box, low cost pantry program.

Activities:

Ts ' idihdzik Kitchen

The Ts 'Idihdzik Kitchen meaning "Gifts of food" is a program dedicated to help alleviate the ongoing food insecurities. This program is in partnership with United Way northern BC. The program participants vary in their needs from moderate to severe food insecurity, we reduce barriers, equip families with access to food, provide tools and knowledge around food and nutrition which helps reduce other issues that may arise preventing effective parenting.

The Ts' Idihdzik Kitchen operates every Wednesday offering two classes each day and hosts 16 families in total. Families come together to decide what meal they will be preparing and is involved in the budgeting and purchasing of items. The program encourages socialization and learning together to make nutritious, cost efficient meals. Nutrition, budgeting, meal planning and family participation are the fundamentals of this program.



Ts ' idihdzik Kitchen
" Gifts Of Food"

BUILDING SKILLS, CONNECTIONS, AND IMPROVING PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORTS THROUGH FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMING.

The image is a promotional graphic for the Ts 'Idihdzik Kitchen. It features a green banner at the top with the program's name in a yellow, cursive font. Below the banner is a collage of six photographs showing various activities: people preparing food, a woman in an orange shirt standing behind a counter, trays of food being cooked, and individuals working together in a kitchen. At the bottom, a dark green banner contains the text 'BUILDING SKILLS, CONNECTIONS, AND IMPROVING PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORTS THROUGH FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMING.' in white, uppercase letters.

Component Service Objective: Prevention Practices

Improve parenting and Family Support

Activity: Provide a community kitchen, cooking groups good food Box, low cost pantry program.

Activities

Meeting the needs of the community.

As grocery prices rise, families are finding it more challenging to meet the nutritional needs for their children, in response, the Dze I K' ant Friendship Centre continues to offer multiple programs each week supporting food security.
weekly program include:

“Lunches to Go” funded through Show Kids You Care Canada, this program supports children with quick, easy, nutritious lunches to support a day of learning, and healthy development.

“Fresh Choices” is a food security program supported in partnership with the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society offering dairy, fruit and vegetables to families with children 0-6 yrs of age aiding the health and development of children while enhancing skills and awareness around healthy food choices.

The Dze L K' ant Friendship distributed 50 food hampers to urban Indigenous families living in the community of Houston in partnership with BC Aboriginal Association of Friendship Centres



Component Service Objective: Prevention Practices/ Parent participating pre- school and child care programs.

Strengthen Early Childhood Development, learning and care.

2a) Provide an enriched environment that provides and encourages development opportunities for children

2b) Provide support to children and families with special needs

2c) Provide activities that enhance parent/ child interaction (parent participating pre- school, and drop-in play groups.

2d) Provide programs that promote early literacy and increase school readiness.

2f) Provide healthy snacks and meals for participants.

Activities:

Tadpoles Program!

Tadpoles is a play based kindergarten readiness program that involves parent participation. This inclusive program aims to promote developmentally enriching opportunities while providing parents with skills to better support their children's growth. We offer culturally rich programs that supports the vision that all indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high quality, culturally rich early learning. This program includes, a nutritious snack, and child centered developmentally appropriate exploration developed by an Early child educator. The program operates twice per week, in addition to offering a lending library of early learning cultural kits to families to enjoy at home and for ECE professionals to include as a part of their inclusive curriculum in community early learning programs.



Provide support to children and families with special needs.

OUR CENTER IS FULLY INCLUSIVE, MEETING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE AT AND SUPPORTING THEM IN THEIR JOURNEYS. THE ECE ROOM IS AVAILABLE FOR APPOINTMENTS SUCH AS CHILD DEVELOPMENT, SPEECH AND LANGUAGE AND A PHYSIOTHERAPY SPACE FOR FAMILIES WHO PREFER TO MEET AT THE CENTRE.



Component Service Objective: Prevention Practices/ Parent participation pre- school and child care programs.

Strengthen Early childhood Development, learning and care.

Strengthen Community Supports.

Play Gym

Play gym is provided in partnership with the Aboriginal Early Childhood development and the Indigenous Early Years program and offers a child centered program for children ages 0-6 to experience some tumble time and gross motor play during the winter months. The program is offered at the community Centre where there is ample room to run, jump and play, developing essential development skills during the cold winter months. It is also a great opportunity for care givers to socialize and interact with other care givers with children the same age, in addition to strengthening community engagement and services.



Component Service Objective: Prevention Practices
Strengthen Early Childhood Development, Learning and Care

- 2i) Health management for children (vaccinations, physical exams, dental checks.)
- 2j) Provide assistance and support to families with regard to medical appointments for themselves or their children.2k) provide transportation for families to attend programs/ activities and medical appointments.
- 2l) Ages and stages questionnaires, Battelle, Geselle or other child assessment tools.
- 2m) Develop action plans
- 2n) Link between Early childhood development programs and schools.

Activities:
Ready Set Learn:

The AECD program partnered with the Aboriginal Education Council and School District 54 to provide the Ready Set Learn event for young Indigenous families and their three- five- year old children. The intent of the program is to foster positive connections between families, the school system and local community agencies in order to provide a fun, family- oriented environment to support a healthy transition into school.

The event opened with a traditional territory acknowledgment, prayer, traditional drumming lead by School District 54 students, and developmentally appropriate activities.

The event proves to have significant impact in regards to building culturally appropriate family and community capacity to effectively promote early childhood development. The event was well received, in addition to 6 new AECD families in attendance.

Health management for children

We hosted one on appointment based visits from northern health for oral health, vision and hearing tests, in addition to offering vaccination updates.

The Three-Year-Old Screening: Our trained staff, along with the Child Development Centre and Northern Health, facilitated the ASQ assessment for all three year olds. The ages and stages questionnaire provides reliable, accurate, developmental and social- emotional screening for children between birth and age six. We offer the three- year old screening to pinpoint developmental progress and catch delays in young three year olds and refer to outer agencies and support networks if necessary.

The AECD program hosted the one day event, and included developmentally appropriate activities, resources, a small care kit and a healthy lunch.

The AECD program recognizes the challenge many Indigenous families living off reserve experience living in a remote northern community as many basic items may present a challenge to obtain due to availability and cost. The AECD program provides families with basic care items such as masks, sanitizer, hygiene kits, Nix kits, and comfort items upon request supporting optimal growth and development.

The Houston office provides transportation to families that require to travel to Smithers for medical and specialist appointments. The AECD program supported approximately 20 families to access health management services reducing barriers to accessible health care in the north.

Component Service Objective: Community Healing Practices.

Improve parenting and family supports.

3c) Build positive support

3e) Facilitate support groups and drop-in informal support.

3f) Provide family and individual counseling and support sessions.

Activities:

Holistic Health

The AECD program, Early Years, and the mental Health counselor partnered to facilitate the Holistic Health program. Participants meet each week and are invited to participate in various activities and workshops to support Indigenous people to become stronger and more confident in their abilities to live a safe and holistic healthy lifestyle.

Workshops Included:

Honor Your Health Challenge

In partnership with the Indigenous Sport, physical Activity and recreation Council, this 8 week program promotes healthy living by creating individualized health goals from each medicine wheel quadrant: Physical, Spiritual, Mental and Emotional health.

The program offers peer group support, incentive prizes, daily and weekly check-ins.

Mental Health Week

Our mental health counselor, Josephine Dechamps partnered with the AECD team to offer programming around supporting mental health. Workshops aim to address and support various aspects of mental health, including walking with grief, understanding addiction, and providing a drop-in support group.

In addition to offering group and peer support, Josephine is also available for one on one sessions three days per week offering free individualized and family counseling.

Services also extend to assisting individuals to access community, and external supports

•Truth and reconciliation week events.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is observed on Sept 30th. The Dze L k'ant friendship Centre offered a week of learning opportunities about residential schools and their impact. The Houston office offered a range of activities, including a lunch for residential school survivors hosted by our youth connections group, a smudging table, and resources on the impacts of residential schools while offering a safe space for reflection, and activities.



Component Service Objective: Community Healing Practices.

Strengthen Community Supports.

- 4a) Host community events to draw in community participation and promote education and awareness for families , service providers, and community.
- 4c) Enhance networks and partnerships within and between communities.
- 4d) Work with band councils and wellness committees.
- 3h) Provide cultural education.2g) Extend family and elder participation. (encourage interaction between young and elders.)

Activities:

National Indigenous Peoples Day

Community Healing Practices: Connect Family spiritually to the Indigenous ways of the past and present, promoting family, Community traditions and cultural values.

National Indigenous Peoples Day is celebrated on June 21st. A Day of celebration to recognize and honor the achievements, history and rich cultures of Indigenous, Inuit and Metis peoples in Canada. As a community, we recognize and honor the heritage, cultures and valuable contributions to our community.

In Houston, The Dze L k'ant friendship center hosted a Community event in Jamie Baxter Park and enjoyed a wonderful day to honor the Indigenous culture and its people. Over 300 people joined us for the day including over 150 students from School District 54

The day was celebrated with informative traditional medicine workshop, and recourse stations in addition to an interactive play space for children, elder guest speakers, Traditional dancers, delicious food and a wonderful drumming celebration.





Component Service Objective: Community Healing Practices/ Cultural workshops.

participation and child care programs.

Cultural Education and Day camps.

Family Day camps

Activity:

The Dze L K 'ant Friendship Centre Provides opportunity for families to connect spiritually to the Indigenous ways of the past and present. Enhancing family traditions, and cultural values to aid in the well- being and identity of Indigenous peoples.



Mel Basil, the Dze L' kant Friendship Centre's drug and alcohol counselor, leads a family event which includes story telling ,singing, and drumming while enjoying a day on the water in the Dze l k' ant War Canoe, (Nyibegh) means stability in Wet'suwet'en. Mel Basil adds that this is an important message as "we want to be stable in our lives and on water"

**Component Service Objective: Prevention practices/ Parent participating/ child care programs.
Strengthen Community Supports.**

- 4a) Host community events to draw community participation and promote education and awareness for families, service providers and community.
- 3i) Explore community facilities and participate in community activities with families and children.
- 3n) Provide advocacy services for families and make referrals to other community services and supports.
- 4b) Advertise and promote Indigenous early year childhood development programs with community services and agencies.
- 2d) provide programs that promote early literacy and increase school readiness.

Activities:

Teddy Bear picnic

The Teddy Bear picnic is an annual community event for families with children 0-5 yrs. The event is made possible by multiple Early Childhood development agencies including Dze L K' ant Friendship Centre, Houston Link to Learning, The child Development Centre and School District 54. The event aims at bringing multiple early learning agencies together in order to connect families to other service providers, linking resources and simplifying the referral process. The event is also a great opportunity to advertise and promote Indigenous early childhood development programs with other community members, and service agencies. The event was well received this year with over 100 families in attendance and was held at the community public library. The AECD team joined by contributing a gross motor activity, a sensory activity and provided early learning resources



Component service objective: Strengthen community supports

4a) Host community events

4c) Enhance networks and partnerships within community.

Activity:

Community Christmas Luncheon.

The Houston office partnered with Houston link to learning to provide a community Christmas luncheon for our community members. The annual event allows an opportunity for vulnerable community members to come together, connect and share a meal during the holiday season. The event was family friendly and included games, crafts, a small gift and a visit from Santa. The event was well received with over 250 people in attendance. 265 meals were served, in addition to delivering 80 meals to seniors and elders that were unable to participate in person.



INDIGENOUS EARLY YEARS ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



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ABOUT US

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre is a community-based organization founded in 1974 by a devoted group of Aboriginal people in Smithers, British Columbia. We are one of twenty-five Friendship Centres located across the province committed to building a stronger Aboriginal community. We were initially founded as the "Smithers Indian Friendship Centre". As we began to grow into our role of providing programs and services to the community our name was changed to reflect the local Wet'suwet'en culture. The name "Dze L K'ant" was chosen. It means "Foot of the Mountain" and represents where the centre is now located, at the base of Hudson Bay Mountain.

OUR MISSION & VISION

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society is an organization guided by Aboriginal values that provides activities, services and information to all people. This includes developing skills and strengths for spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being. Our focus is on helping people become self-sufficient and self-reliant. The Friendship Centre is dedicated to promoting awareness among all people.



INDIGENOUS EARLY YEARS PROGRAM

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre's Indigenous Early Years Program provides culturally appropriate programming for children and families, including weekly drop-in programming, referrals, home visit support, and one-on-one support to early years families in Houston and its surrounding communities. Its focus is on healthy child development, connections and referrals, and positive support for early years families. Cultural workshops, parenting workshops, child development programs are all offered as some of the Indigenous Early Years Programs.

The purpose of the Early Years' Service Framework is to define the service the Ministry of Children and Family Development(MCFD) funds within the early years' service area. The vision is Children and families have the supports and services that they need. MCFD early years services are intended to achieve the following goals:

- 1) Support Families - help support the well-being of children and families
- 2) Family Navigation - Serve as barrier- free access point, particularly for family facing acute or chronic vulnerabilities
Provide clear pathways to enhanced supports and services including Infant Mental Health, Children and Youth with Special needs.
- 3) Promoting Community Belonging - Welcome all people groups and strive to provide a place of growth and identity.
- 4) Support Indigenous Culture, Language Revitalization, Cultural Competency-Provide support and space for language revitalization, cultural sharing, sharing traditions etc

SERVICES OFFERED:

One On One Support

IEY offers one on one support, by social media, phone or email, in person, Home visit support, and referrals

IEY Weekly Program

The Iey program runs a weekly drop in program that helps support family navigation, positive child development, cultural and community connections, skill and resource building and referrals.

Cultural Connection

Cultural Connection workshops - talking circles, cultural workshops, traditional parenting workshops, building supportive allies, traditional vest and ribbon skirt making,

Referrals

Referrals to outer agencies - child development, FNHA, etc support for MCFD/Family navigation, EI, CERB applications, Covid recovery benefits, status renewal applications, Community network support - (Mill Closure etc)





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The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre's

Honour Your Health Program

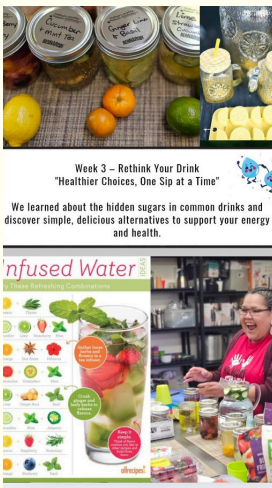
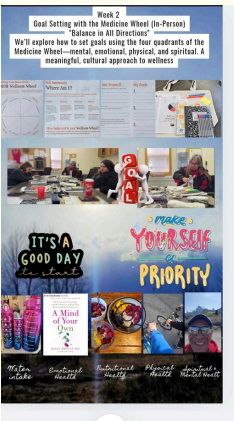
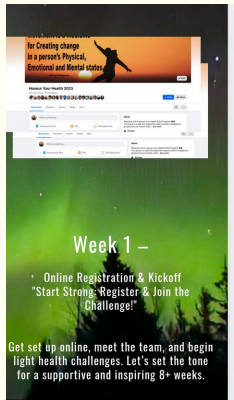


Movement is Medicine!

The Honour Your Health Program is an 8 to 10 week program sponsored by Indigenous Sport Physical Activity and Recreation Council. Using the medicine wheel participants created goals focused on the 4 quadrants of Holistic Health; mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health. Creating specific, obtainable goals to focus on each week. Every week the HYH program would host a workshop to help participants support these goals. This group also had an online facebook group that participants can post pictures and posts of daily goals, inspirational posts, recipes and more!

Holistic Health Workshops

- **Rethink your Drink-** In this workshop we talked about the amount of sugars that are in your drinks and provided healthy options and alternatives. We provided ingredients and several types of flavoured waters as well as smoothies to try and ingredients to take home.
- **Journalling workshop** - participants received a Journal, coloured pens, prompts and information on the benefits of journalling.
- **Smudging and Medicine workshops-** participants learned about traditional medicines, connection to nature and healing practices to help promote spiritual health. This 3 part workshop consisted of harvesting poplar buds, making salve and then creating their own medicine boxes to take home. Participants were able to design and make their own medicine boxes to take home that consisted of medicine like smudge, grandfather rocks, poplar salve, and more.
- **Gardening Workshop** - participants were able to pick and create a starter seedling garden to take home and grow their own food and herbs.
- **Health and Nutrition Workshops-** Participants were able to join in on a series of health and nutrition workshops focused on meal prep, healthy alternatives and options. They were able to make and take home meals like overnight oats, protein shakes, and more.
- **Walk Run Event** - Over the series of 8 to 10 weeks participants worked on their step count and made intentional efforts to get to reach their personal goal. We then facilitated a walk run event where participants walked or ran a 5km route. Followed up with lunch and celebration after.



Teddy Bear Picnic

(Community Event)



The Teddy Bears' Picnic is a fun kindergarten readiness event. It brought children, teddy bears and parents together for a morning full of fun, connection and play. Children were invited to bring their stuffed animals for a special play date they met with each agency in the community to do a fun and engaging activity from crafting, to blowing bubbles, running an obstacle course, story walks and more! The Houston Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre, School District 54, Thomas Robinson were some of the agencies that joined The Teddy Bear picnic that was Hosted by Houston Link to Learning at the Houston Public Library. Over 60 people participated in this event. This was a fun day of positive engagement, connections and building positive, and healthy development for children ages 0 to 6 and their families.



Story Walk

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre in partnership with Houston Link to Learning provides a story walk multiple time of year in our community. This is an important initiative for our community as it promotes early literacy, physical activity, and social engagement in a fun and interactive way. Story walks combine reading with outdoor exploration, allowing children to physically move through a story while developing essential language skills, comprehension, and imagination. As children read pages posted along a walking path, they become more engaged in the narrative and strengthen their ability to follow directions and sequence events. This outdoor experience also encourages active play, helping to develop motor skills and a love for nature. Additionally, story walks foster a sense of community by bringing families together in a shared experience that connects them to local spaces, enhances social interaction, and creates opportunities for intergenerational bonding. Overall, a story walk is an accessible and enriching activity that supports the development of early childhood skills while building stronger, more connected communities.





National Indigenous People's Day Community Event



For National Indigenous Peoples Day, our agency proudly hosted a community luncheon and cultural celebration in partnership with local organizations, including the District of Houston, Bulkley Valley Credit Union, and other community partners. The day featured a variety of interactive workshops such as smudging, devil's club teachings, beading, bannock making, and drumming, which gave participants the opportunity to connect with traditional knowledge and practices. The celebration was further enhanced by cultural performances from the Northern Spirit Dancers, whose powerful storytelling and artistry highlighted the richness of Indigenous traditions. By working together with our partners, we were able to create an inclusive and meaningful gathering that honoured Indigenous culture, strengthened community connections, and celebrated the spirit of unity.





Community Pride Event



The Community Block Party for Pride hosted by Houston Link To Learningg was a great success, bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds to celebrate diversity, inclusion, and love. Our agency proudly participated by highlighting and uplifting Two-Spirited identities, ensuring representation that is often overlooked.

This was an important addition, as it created space for Indigenous voices and teachings within the broader Pride celebration, honoring both cultural and gender diversity. By coming together as a community, we were able to strengthen connections, celebrate resilience, and foster understanding across different identities. The event not only provided joy and celebration but also served as a meaningful reminder of the importance of visibility, acceptance, and unity during

Pride

Indigenous Early Years

Play Gym



Play Gym

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre offers a once a week play gym program for families with children ages 0 to 6. Offering a Play Gym program during the cold winter months has a significant positive impact on both early years children and the broader community. During the colder seasons, when outdoor play opportunities are limited, the Play Gym provides a vital space for children to engage in active, gross motor activities like climbing, sliding, balancing, and riding plasma cars. This helps children develop essential physical skills such as coordination, balance, and strength, while also promoting social interaction, teamwork, and confidence. For families, the program offers a warm, safe, and welcoming environment where children can stay active, burn off energy, and continue their physical development despite the cold weather. It also provides a much-needed social space for parents and caregivers to connect, share experiences, and build community ties. Additionally, the Play Gym promotes healthy habits by encouraging children to stay active year-round, supporting their overall well-being. Ultimately, this program not only addresses the physical needs of children during the winter but also strengthens the sense of community by bringing families together in a positive, inclusive environment. This program is utilized by an average of 20 children a week. Sometimes up to 50 children and their parents have attended at one time.





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Traditional Foods Workshops

The Canning Salmon Workshop provided an invaluable opportunity for participants to learn traditional fish preservation techniques from experienced facilitators, Gitxsan Elder Matilda and Tahltan member Megan Dennis. The workshop emphasized the cultural significance of fish preservation, hands-on learning, and knowledge sharing between nations. In partnership with ISPARC Food systems grants the IEY program was able to help facilitate space, child minding and support IEY families with this enriching traditional and cultural connection.

Workshop Overview

Elder Matilda and Megan Dennis shared insights into how their respective nations traditionally can and smoke fish. They reflected on their experiences growing up in traditional fish camps, highlighting the cultural and community aspects of fish preservation. Participants gained a deeper understanding of the historical importance of these practices and their role in food security and sustainability.

The workshop included:

Traditional recipes, tips, and trade secrets for canning salmon. Step-by-step instructions on gutting, cleaning, and processing fish for canning. A demonstration and group activity on making fish head soup, a cherished delicacy in their nations. Through storytelling and firsthand demonstrations, participants learned how traditional fish preservation connects to identity, community resilience, and intergenerational learning. The exchange of methods between nations enriched the experience, reinforcing the diversity and adaptability of Indigenous food preservation techniques.

The workshop successfully fostered cultural exchange, hands-on skill development, and a renewed appreciation for traditional food preservation. Participants left with not only practical knowledge but also a deeper connection to Indigenous food traditions and the wisdom of their ancestors. The event highlighted the importance of continuing these teachings for future generations. Future workshops may explore additional traditional food preservation methods, such as smoking fish or drying meat, to further strengthen cultural knowledge and community skills.



Conclusion & Closing

This year, the Indigenous Early Years (IEY) Program has been a place of connection, learning, and growth for families and children. Every week, families gathered at our drop-in program, sharing stories, laughter, and the small victories of everyday life. Through one-on-one support, home visits, phone calls, and messages, our team walked alongside families, helping them navigate challenges, find resources, and celebrate milestones. Families were also supported through referrals to essential services, whether accessing child development programs, FNHA supports, or community recovery resources after events like the mill closure. In every interaction, IEY aimed to create barrier-free pathways to help families access what they needed, when they needed it. Through these efforts, the IEY Program has been more than a service—it has been a gathering place, a cultural home, and a source of strength. As we look ahead, we remain committed to walking with families, nurturing children, and honoring the traditions, language, and stories that make our community strong.

Pregnancy Outreach

1.Promote Healthy Pregnancy, Birth and Infancy

Provide education and counselling specific to prenatal, and new born care, Well Woman Care, Well Infant Care, and Harm reduction strategies.

The Dze L k' ant pregnancy Outreach Program offers one on one and group support to new and expectant mothers in a confidential, and informal setting. The program provides culturally safe practice and offers education and support to women and families during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum up to one year. We assist with a wide range of topics, including physical and emotional health, birth, breast feeding, nutrition, fetal and infant development, baby care, self-care and healthy relationships.

b. Provide education specific to FASD and substance use.

For the FASD awareness month, the coordinator joined northern health and FNHA to facilitate awareness and education around FASD, offered care kits, and invited a public Health nurse to provide a mini session regarding FASD in addition to hosting a healthy babies' afternoon to foster and enhance awareness around FASD. The program continues to offer education around FASD on a ongoing basis and working with both community members and partners to share FASD awareness and prevention.

c.Provide Pregnancy Testing

Free Pregnancy tests are available and distributed as needed.

d.Provide nutritional Information and support healthy eating (voucher)

Nutritious snacks are provided during group programming, providing clients an opportunity to try new healthier food choices.

Homemade baby food workshops are offered the first week of every month. Mothers are provided ingredients, and recipes to prepare their own healthy, cost effective baby food. During the Summer months, we partnered with the BC Farmers Market Association and offered a Market Voucher Program to help bridge the gap in food security providing vouchers for 20 families, in addition to providing weekly fruit, vegetable and dairy products to expectant mothers and those nursing. The Pregnancy outreach program has a ready supply of prenatal vitamins, and vitamin D drops for those who pregnant and nursing.

The Houston P.O.P program offers one on support for mothers breastfeeding. In addition to offering a series of breast feeding workshops and on line seminars to support mothers through their journey at their own comfort level.

c.Facilitate Support Circles for pregnant and parenting Aboriginal families, prenatal/postnatal drop-in group, peer support network

Weekly program sessions are held at the Dze K'ant Friendship Centre in a laid



Pregnancy Outreach Program

c. Provide one-on-one counselling

One on one support is available as needed with referrals to our licensed mental health clinical as well as other resources in the community as needed.

d. Provide Pregnancy outreach/home visits

Various home support visits have happened over the course of the year to support mothers preparing for a birth or navigating life with a new born. The support Develop birth plans and action plans (pre-and post-natal)

We have provided support and resources to expectant mothers in their birth and

action plans. Including education on pain management, natural comfort strategies as well as positive reinforcement of healthy baby is the most important outcome. We have also coordinated supporting families who need to stay in Smithers who do not have their own transportation. As well as liaising with the First Nations Health Authority to set up accommodations and food vouchers close to the hospital ahead of time.

e. Provide newborn (essentials baskets)

Over the year we provided baskets with diapers, cream, nursing pads, newborn outfit and more to new Mothers. We currently offer a lending library for expectant and new mothers to reduce barriers and increase available resources and supports. Items such as car seats, strollers, infant seats, and breast pumps are available to access upon request.

f. Provide transportation for families to attend programs/activities, medical Appointments

Transportation is offered to mothers pre- and post-natal to access medical appointments and outreach agencies. Bus passes are available for those traveling out of town for prenatal medical appointments.

g. Referrals to Early Childhood Development programs and other community resources and supports

We connect families in need of additional resources, further assessments and supports as needed on a case-by-case basis; Whether that is Bulkley Valley Child Development, the local health nurse, Beanstalk Daycare or various other agencies.



The AECD pregnancy Out Reach program facilitates the Parent Child Mother Goose Program once per week for care givers with children under the age 1 year. The program introduces adults and babies to the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs and stories together, Establishing positive family patterns during their children's crucial early years

In Conclusion

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Program 2023-2024 fiscal year saw steady intakes to the targeted/referral tier of the AECD program. self referrals, and MCFD referrals were the highest volume (in equal measure), and referrals from community partners were steady as well. This indicates success in our ability to connect with target clientele, as well as speaking to our reputation in the community as a trusted source of support. The Dze L k' ant Friendship centre Houston Office remains a thriving hub of support, and activity for families with children ages 0-6. counseling, group programming and therapeutic workshops form the basis of our service delivery and success.

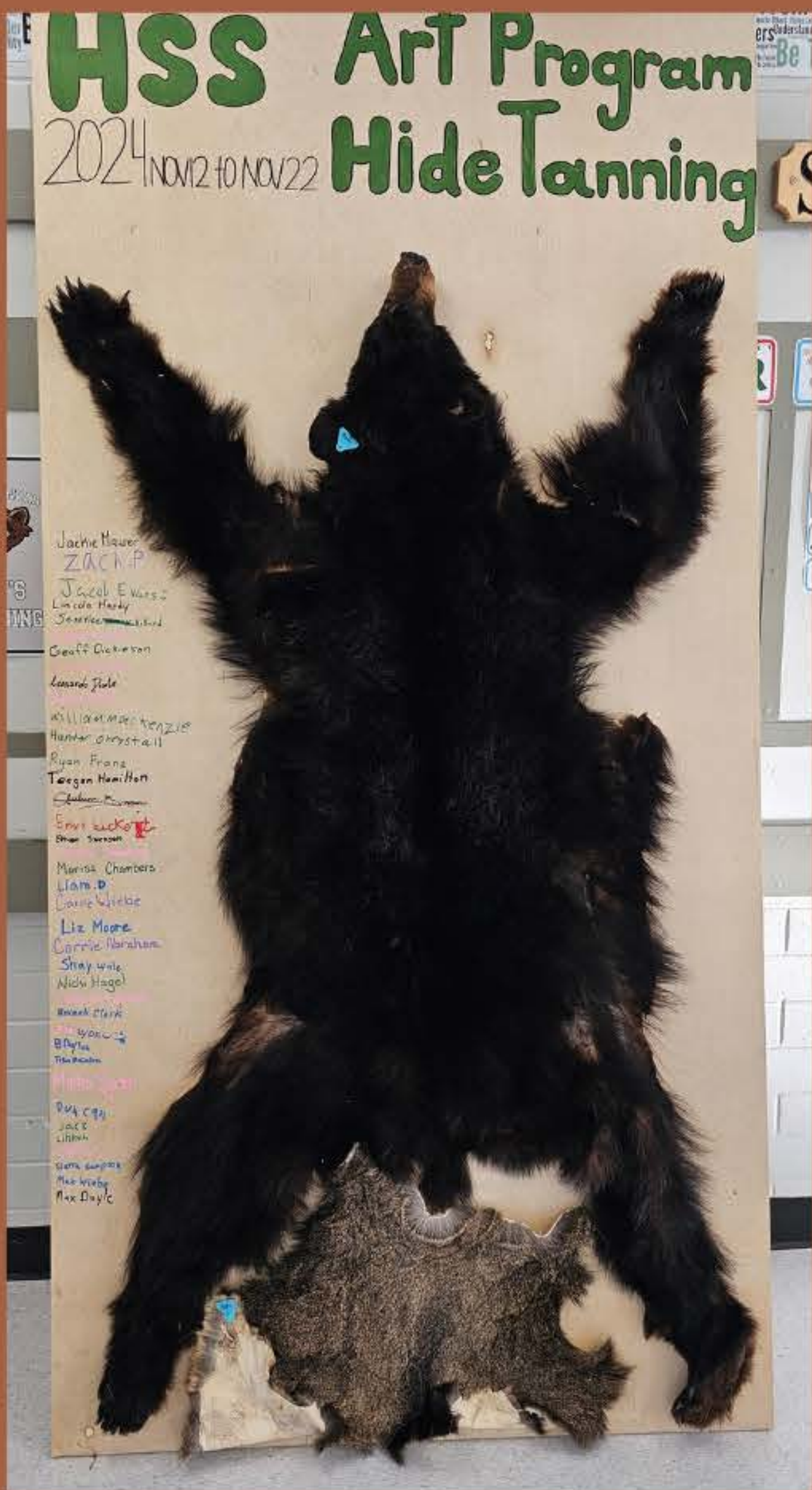
Many Thanks for continued support.





Harm Reduction Event





Connections Tanning Project with SD54





Play Gym Program



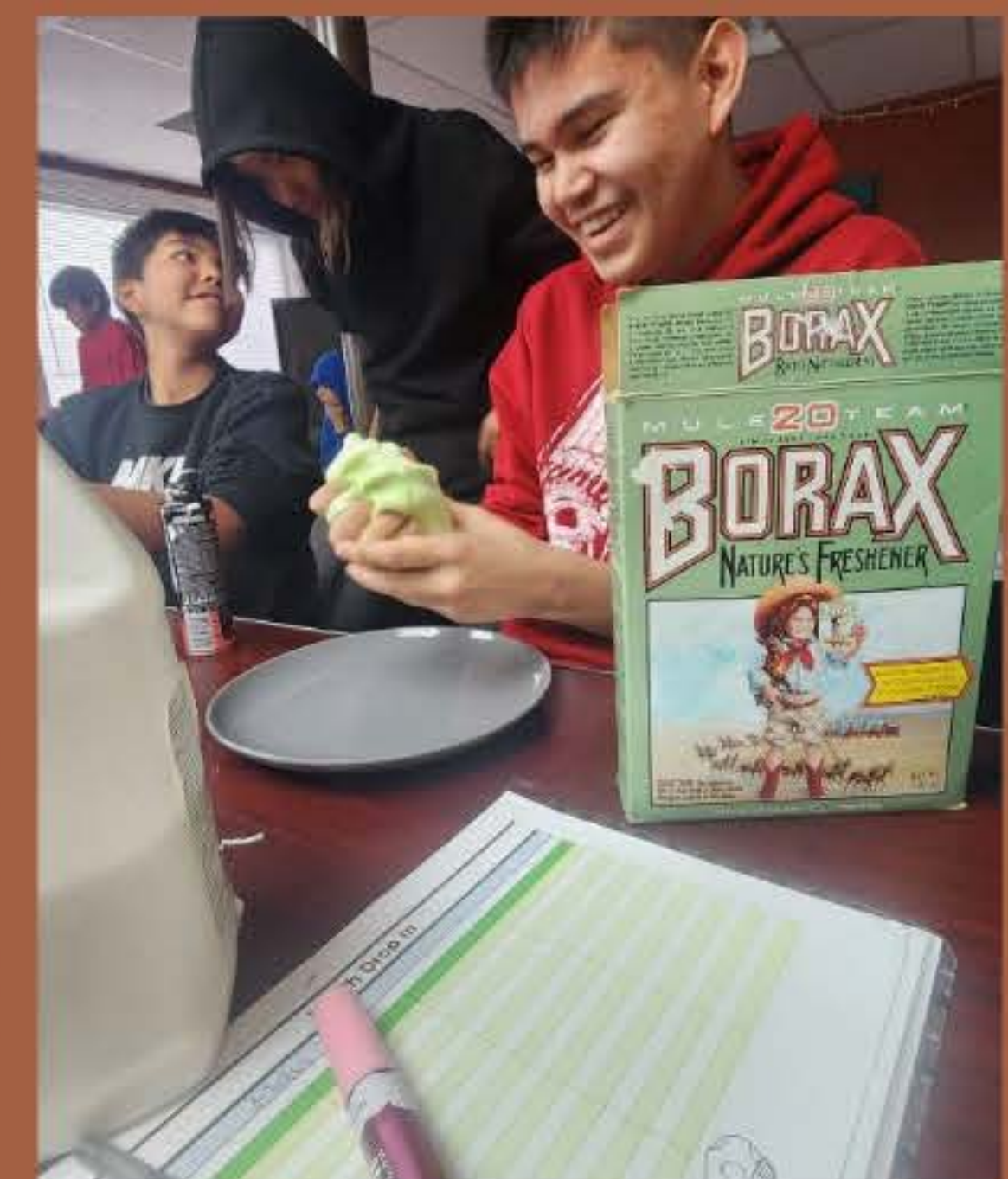


National Indigenous Peoples Day





Connections Youth Program





AECD Program



Dze L K'ant
Friendship Centre



MMIWG SUPPORT

ANNUAL REPORT

2024- 2025

Dze L K'ant Friendship Society
1188 Main Street
Smithers BC, V0J 2N0

Elizabeth London
250 847 5211 extension 209
mmiwg.support@dzekant.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dze 'L K'ant friendship centre society and Board of Directors supports the development and delivery of the **MMIWG Support Program** to stand with families impacted by Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We propose this initiative as a way to provide families with resources, guidance, and culturally rooted spaces for healing and justice.

These services will allow families to navigate their journey with strength, connection, and support through interventions, advocacy, and cultural practices aimed at honoring loved ones and fostering healing. Services will connect families with justice-focused resources, while also providing opportunities for cultural healing through sacred fires, community dinners, ceremonies, and traditional arts.

The program will be community- and family-centered, built around the unique strengths and needs of each family. It will focus on cultural resiliency, ensuring that both informal and formal networks of support are available. Families and community members will also have the opportunity to engage in traditional practices, such as making drums, rattles, medicine pouches, bags, and medicines, strengthening spirit, identity, and collective healing.

Introduction

MMIWG Support Program

The MMIWG Support Program is dedicated to walking alongside families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We provide guidance and connect families with vital resources to support their journey toward justice, healing, and community care.

Beyond resources, we create sacred spaces for remembrance and strength through traditional practices. We hold sacred fires, host community dinners, and gather in ceremony to honor our loved ones. Our program also uplifts cultural teachings through hands-on arts and practices. Families and community members come together to make drums, rattles, medicine pouches, bags, and traditional medicines, keeping culture and spirit at the heart of healing.

Through ceremony, culture, and connection, the MMIWG Support Program helps families and communities carry forward resilience, healing, and the pursuit of justice.

Annual Highlights

The Dze 'L K'ant friendship centre society and Board of Directors supports the continuation and growth of the **MMIWG Support Program** to provide meaningful, culturally grounded, and healing opportunities for families and community members. We propose that the program highlights include a series of events, workshops, and ongoing gatherings that foster resilience, cultural pride, and connections.

One of the program's key successes was hosting **Madelaine McCallum**, who delivered an inspiring and heartfelt presentation. By sharing her personal story with courage and openness, she offered hope and strength to participants. Following her presentation, the community came together in dance, transforming grief into healing energy and reaffirming the power of unity.

Another success was welcoming **Vanessa Brousseau**, who facilitated a hands-on workshop where participants created red seal skin dress pins. Alongside this creative practice, she shared her powerful story of resilience and advocacy. The event allowed participants to gain new skills, connect with cultural teachings, and experience healing through both art and storytelling.

The program also provides ongoing success through **weekly drop-in workshops**, which remain central to building community strength and resilience. These sessions bring people together to laugh, share stories, and engage in traditional practices such as drum-making, rattle-making, medicine preparation, and crafting. Each workshop creates a safe and welcoming space for healing, while also reinforcing cultural identity and community connection.

Through these events and workshops, the MMIWG Support Program continues to create opportunities for justice, healing, and cultural resilience, ensuring that families and communities are supported with compassion, strength, and purpose.

CONCLUSION

The **MMIWG Support Program** now has a strong foundation of ongoing work to continue, not only with direct support to families, but also with community-based projects that strengthen partnerships with local agencies, schools, and organizations. These collaborations create safer, more supportive spaces for families impacted by Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, while refining pathways toward justice, healing, and cultural resiliency.

The next steps will include expanding cultural programming, sacred gatherings, and traditional arts workshops to further connect families and community members. Partnerships will continue to grow, guided by ceremony and cultural teachings, ensuring that healing remains visible, accessible, and rooted in community.

The program provides services and support with pride, building on the strength of traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and lived experiences. Its range includes assisting families in finding justice resources, hosting sacred fires, facilitating community dinners, supporting traditional arts such as drum-making, rattle-making, medicine preparation, and bag-making, and creating spaces for storytelling and healing. Practices are trauma-informed, Indigenous-led, and grounded in social justice, always centered on the voices and experiences of families. The program will continue to grow with care, community guidance, and a commitment to honoring and uplifting families on their journey toward justice and healing.



Annual Report – Indigenous Housing Support Program 2024-2025

The goals and objectives of our housing support program is provide advocacy, culturally safe services, basic need supports and workshops to urban Indigenous people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes people who are:

- Homeless
- Couch surfing
- Living in overcrowded or unsafe housing situations
- At risk of eviction
- Living long term in motels
- Fleeing violence/abuse

Our program provides the following supports:

- Hygiene kits
- Bus tickets
- Food supports
- Tents/sleeping bags
- We also provided high levels of advocacy, referrals and cultural workshops.
- Damage deposit, rent in arrears, support with hydro bill
- cooling kits (handheld fans, spray bottles with cold water, cooling towels, bandana, hats)
- warming kits (hand and foot warmers, toques, emergency blankets)
- Winter clothing

Program Highlights from 2024-2025:

During this fiscal year we have served over 100+ clients. Our program was able to assist with rent, hydro bills, home starter kits, cleaning kits, basic need supports, and much more. We also had collaborated with other service providers to ensure we are giving our clients the best possible support.

In July 2024, we held a ground-breaking ceremony for our 37-unit housing project, a significant milestone for our organization and community. Once completed in early 2026, this development will provide safe and stable housing for many of our clients, creating lasting benefits for individuals and families in need.

Success Stories:

1. During this fiscal year we had a client who was getting evicted due to the landlords moving family in. With the assistance of our legal advocate, we were able to tell the client that until she gets the eviction notice on a letter, she still has at least 3 months to find a new place to live as the landlord only told her verbally which does not count as per the residential tenancy act states. We see this as a success as now our client knows her rights and this also buys us time to help look for a new rental for her.
2. During this fiscal year we had a client that was going to be short on rent and she was worried so she reached out to our housing program to see if we could help in any way. We then scheduled a time for a meeting to fill out an application form for financial assistance and we also discussed ways to make sure this doesn't happen again. She had her granddaughter living with her as well, so this was going to be a big problem if they were to be evicted. We contributed \$500 for rent. This was a relief to the client and she was grateful not to be behind on rent.
3. During this fiscal year our program was able to assist a client who is at risk of homelessness with food supports. She had been off work due to illness and only had enough to pay her rent and utility bills. We were able to do a small grocery shop for her to get her items such as bread, eggs, chicken, apples and cheese. The food bank here doesn't have those kind of items and she was wanting healthier foods so she came to the Friendship Centre so see if we were able to assist. When we got her the foods she requested she was so thankful for our program and what we were able to provide.
4. During this fiscal year, one of our clients had all of their belongings stolen. We were able to distribute a new tent, sleeping bag, sleeping mat, pillow, and hygiene kit to them. As this isn't a huge success it is still a success because if we didn't have this program available to our clients then they would not be able to get new shelter supplies as we are the only organization and program that is able to distribute these kind of things in our community.



THE DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE SOCIETY HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED ITS THREE-YEAR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) PREVENTION PROJECT, FUNDED BY WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY CANADA. THIS 29-MONTH INITIATIVE STRENGTHENED OUR ABILITY TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS GBV AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS, AND 2SLGBTQIA+ PEOPLE IN THE SMITHERS-TELKWA REGIONAL DISTRICT AND HOUSTON.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

- COMPLETION OF A COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC GBV PREVENTION TOOLKIT WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALINA PETE.
- DEVELOPMENT OF AN UPDATED STRATEGIC PLAN GROUNDED IN INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION.
- REVIEW AND UPDATE OF ALL POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUALS TO INCLUDE GBV PREVENTION LANGUAGE, PLUS A NEW COMMUNITY HALL POLICY TO ENSURE SAFER EXTERNAL EVENTS.
- CREATION OF A RISK MANAGEMENT AUDIT TOOL AND IDENTIFICATION OF NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO SUSTAIN GBV PREVENTION EFFORTS.
- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT — INCLUDING CONSULTATIONS WITH 10 ORGANIZATIONS, INPUT FROM ELDERS, YOUTH, AND 2SLGBTQIA+ MEMBERS.

THE PROJECT INCLUDED A STORYTELLING TO RAISE AWARENESS PANEL FEATURING WET'SUWET'EN ELDER MABEL FORSYTHE, MODERATOR ANGELA STERRITT, AND ARTISTS WANDA JOHN-KEHEWIN, COLE PAULS, AND ALINA PETE. A FOLLOW-UP WORKSHOP EXPLORED PRACTICAL WAYS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS TO BUILD GBV PREVENTION CAPACITY.

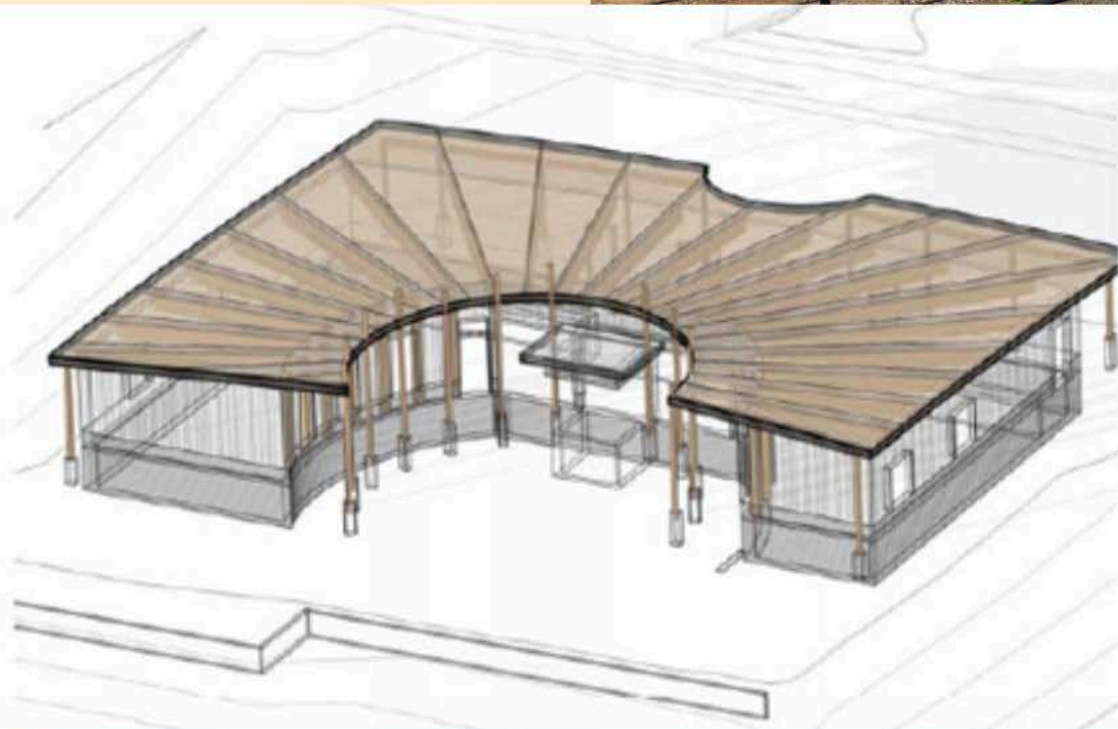
THE COMMITMENT OF STAFF, ELDERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS CREATED A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR LASTING CHANGE AND SAFER SPACES FOR EVERYONE.





Houston Childcare Centre





Construction is on schedule, with major site work completed, the foundation in place and the building well underway. In parallel, we're sourcing furnishings, developing policies, and completing all documentation required by AHSABC, Northern Health, and licensing authorities to ensure a smooth transition from construction to opening.

We are currently facing a budget overage of approximately 6%, driven by factors such as mandatory site upgrades, higher construction costs, and design requirements for energy efficiency and licensing. Over the past several months, we've streamlined the project significantly to control costs, removing non-essential elements while protecting the Centre's safety, functionality, and cultural integrity.

The project is rooted in ceremony and cultural guidance. In May, a ground blessing brought together Elders, matriarchs, families, and community leaders to mark this milestone. We're also pleased to have secured \$70,000 from the First Peoples' Cultural Council for Little Feet, Big Dreams: Building with Culture, Care, and Art—a series of six cultural installations that will make the centre a vibrant space for Indigenous learning and expression. These pieces will be created by regional Indigenous artists, with a formal call for artists issued this week to begin the selection process. Together, these murals, carvings, and storytelling features will surround children and families with language, art, and teachings that celebrate local identity and create a daily sense of belonging.

When completed in Summer 2026, the 3,600-square-foot facility will provide 37 licensed early learning spaces with nature-based play, Indigenous language programming, and culturally grounded care.

We're proud of the progress to date and are exploring options for additional funding support to close the remaining gap and bring this vision to completion.

Dze L K'ant Houston

Annual Report 2024-2025

Community Counselling Program, Mental Health

Overview

The community counselling program was developed to address the mental health needs of community members by providing accessible and culturally safe counselling services. It is funded by the Community Action Initiative. The program aims to provide support in a safe environment that empowers clients.

The program provides mental health support services including:

1. Individual counselling sessions
2. Psychoeducation workshops
3. Mental wellness boxes
4. Group support
5. Individualized resources such as worksheets
6. Referrals to treatment centres and programs

The objectives of the Community Counselling program include:

1. Providing accessible mental health support and counselling services to individuals in Houston and surrounding areas
2. Providing a safe and confidential space for clients to express themselves authentically
3. Improving the mental health and well-being of Indigenous clients by acknowledging and addressing the impact of systemic oppression and intergenerational trauma
4. Reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health care
5. Promoting mental health awareness and education

The program includes a focus on:

- Complex, developmental, and acute trauma
- Depressed mood and anxiety
- Substance misuse, including addiction and recovery
- Emotional regulation

- Grief and loss
- Life transitions and identity

Outcomes

The community counselling program has provided counselling services to a variety of clients throughout 2024 with a consistent stream of referrals. There was a gap in services for a few months due to funding in 2025, and the program is currently in the process of re-starting. The program has already received several new referrals in addition to previous clients voicing a desire to continue to access support. Self-referrals and referrals from other professionals are accepted and encouraged. Currently there is no waitlist and clients are able to access services entirely for free, removing a significant barrier of accessibility. Clients have reported a sense of relief by having the opportunity to receive mental health support without concern for affordability. Providing clients with the space to give feedback can both empower the client as well as allow the counsellor to continue to develop the program and counselling sessions in a way that is of most benefit to the client.

Summary

The community counselling program has been successful in improving the mental health and well-being of community members thus far. In re-starting the program after the gap in services due to funding, the program goals remain consistent but feedback is continuing to be implemented to enhance the overall impact of the program in addressing and increasing mental health. The program will continue to evolve and develop to ensure that it is meeting client needs as effectively as possible. Overall, the program strives to address the challenges and barriers faced by community members in accessing mental health services and strives to provide culturally safe and accessible mental health services to those who need them.

Healthy Care Pregnancy Program

The Healthy Care Pregnancy Program provides community based inreach to support pregnant and newly parenting individuals using and/or who have used substances and are experiencing risks to their health and wellness both prenatally and up to seven months postpartum.

Our designated HCPP Inreach Worker meets with the participants throughout the pregnancy and postpartum period, walking alongside their journey and supporting their access to basic needs, while supporting positive transitions in and out of acute care settings. Below are the services the In-reach worker has provided in 2024-2025

- Advocacy
- One-on-one meetings and support
- Transportation to appointments
- Collaboration with healthcare and service providers to deliver holistic and comprehensive support
- Working with MCFD, legal aid, parent legal centre, nutritionists and housing support workers to ensure clients are supported throughout their journey toward holistic health
- Delivered care packages, groceries, meals and healthy snacks to clients
- Support with basic life skills e.g. cooking and cleaning Navigation services including assistance with employment, education and various government application forms

Funding

Funders: in 2024 our funders for this program was BCAPOP but as that funding came to an end in March 2025, the First Nations Health authority is now our funder for the HCPP Program.

Highlight

A big highlight for this year was finding and receiving new funding for the program as we were not sure we were going to be able to keep it going after losing the funding from BCAPOP.

Success Story

(Please note Jane is not her real name)

Jane became a participant as soon as I started this position last fall, but I have been working with her and her partner Joe (also not his real name) through the POP since they discovered they were pregnant approx. Spring of 2024. Jane has lived a very hard life, she has 2 daughters, now 3 but her first was a stillbirth and her second passed of SIDs at 3 weeks old. And after her second baby passed, her house burnt down and she had been living in a chicken coop for over a year, which is when they found out they were pregnant. Jane and Joe have been using opioids for a long time but as soon as she found out she was pregnant, she connected herself to public

health a local physician and the OAT clinic because she knew she was going to love and care for this baby. Jane gave birth 2 months early in smithers and was transferred to the NICU in pg. They spent a month there and on there way home way, MCFD was called and the baby was placed with a foster parent. Over the next couple months, Joe and Jane worked so hard to get there baby back, they started a 6-week program at the OAT clinic, got their own apartment and worked with other community practices like pop, public health and myself at HCPP. I mostly supported them through transportation, gathering baby supplies, supporting with groceries and advocating for them to fellow healthcare workers. Eventually they started to have supervised visits, then unsupervised visits, then baby was able to stay the night with them once a week and finally they had there baby back full time. Being on Jane and Joes journey was a privilege and I have never met 2 people more resilient, dedicated and strong as they were on there journey. There baby is now 8 months old, striving and living at home with her 2 parents.

Clients

Total number of clients that accessed the program was 9. 6 adults. 3 children

****unfortunately I do not have an pictures from this program as most of the clients had not given consent to pictures****

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



ADVISOR ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



ROLE OF HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR

As Housing and Economic Development Advisor I support strategic housing and economic development initiatives for the Friendship Centre and the Friendship Centre's Housing Society. I collaborate with the Board, Executive Director, staff, community partners, and government agencies to guide projects from early planning through completion, ensuring they are financially sound, culturally relevant, and aligned with community need and priorities.

On the housing side, I contribute to the planning, regulatory navigation, funding, and oversight of the development of our affordable, culturally safe housing projects. On the economic development side, I champion projects that advance local economic capacity, foster partnerships, secure funding, and support sustainable growth.

This dual role ensures our housing initiatives are embedded within a larger framework of community resilience and economic well-being.

I am honoured to do this work and am proud to play a part in the progress we are making toward long-term positive change in the communities we serve.

Lydia Howard, Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre | Housing and Economic Development Advisor

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

While my responsibilities span both housing and economic development, this annual report emphasizes the economic development initiatives of the past year.

Below is a summary of housing projects I am coordinating for context, full details on our housing projects are available in the annual report of the Dze L K'ant Housing Society.

Smithers Housing Project – Ken'ulh K'it Yikh project located on Gas Yik Territory in Smithers, will provide 37 homes for Indigenous families and seniors. The project began contrition in July 2024 and we will welcome families into the new building in early 2026.

Houston Housing Project – 41-unit housing project set to begin construction in fall 2025 with completion by winter 2026.

Further details, including financials, timelines, and programming, are documented in the Housing Society's annual report.



KEY HIGHLIGHTS 2024-2025

- Houston Friendship Centre – Ground blessing (March 2025); construction underway; completion expected in June 2026.
- Smithers Housing Project – Construction in progress; anticipated completion early 2026.
- Houston Housing Project – 41-unit development planned to begin construction in Fall 2025.
- Partnerships strengthened with District of Houston, Studio 9 Architecture, Lu'ma Development, BV Engineering.

Involvement in the following initiatives:

- 2025 HSABC Homeless Count - planning support and reporting.
- Website upgrades and communications support.
- Reporting support for a range of programs including: Northern Health, New Horizons, BCAAFC, NAFC, tenancy empowerment, racial justice.
- Grant writing and reporting for: Wetzinkwa Community Forest, Inclusive New Buildings, Accessibility, Cultural Centre Deck project, Civil Forfeiture, NDIT, Accessibility grant, NAFC, ICIP.

Funding & Partnerships

- Secured additional funding for Houston Friendship Centre (NDIT, Accessibility Grant, NAFC, BVCU).

Challenges & Future Plans

- Coordinating large-scale projects with overlapping reporting requirements.
- Managing construction timelines and regulatory requirements.
- Complete Houston Friendship Centre (July 2026).
- Advance Smithers & Houston housing projects to occupancy.
- Support operational readiness for Housing projects.

**2024-2025 HAS BEEN A
YEAR OF STRONG
PROGRESS IN HOUSING
AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT.**

**THE HOUSTON
FRIENDSHIP CENTRE
PROJECT STANDS AS A
FLAGSHIP PROJECT,
CREATING A CULTURALLY
ROOTED, ACCESSIBLE
HUB FOR GENERATIONS
TO COME.**

**TOGETHER WITH
HOUSING PROJECTS AND
NEW PARTNERSHIPS,
THESE INITIATIVES LAY
THE FOUNDATION FOR
LONG-TERM COMMUNITY
RESILIENCE.**

HOUSTON FRIENDSHIP CENTRE PROJECT



Our goal is to create a vibrant building in downtown Houston to ensure that the entire community can feel a sense of pride in their local Friendship Centre for generations to come.

ABOUT:

Our new building has been carefully designed to be a warm and welcoming safe space that reflects the culture and values of the community members we serve, in particular children and their families.

The new building will allow our organization to continue to provide high quality culturally centered programs, activities and services to a diversity of community members in Houston, ensuring opportunities for intercultural connections and community togetherness.

TIMELINE:

Our project development and design process is on track with construction of this project beginning in Spring 2025. Our new building will open in June 2026!

OUR PROJECT TEAM:

- Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre
- LDM
- Studio 9 Architecture + Planning

EXISTING FUNDING PARTNERS:

- Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP)
- Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT)
- Federal Accessibility Grant

PROJECT VISION:

THE NEW FACILITY—A THREE-STOREY, WOODEN-FRAME BUILDING—WILL FEATURE ACCESSIBLE, INCLUSIVE SPACES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING, CULTURAL CEREMONIES, WORKSHOPS, FOOD PROGRAMS, YOUTH AND FAMILY AREAS, A COMMUNITY KITCHEN, OFFICES, AND A CONFERENCE ROOM. ITS DESIGN PRIORITIZES ACCESSIBILITY (INCLUDING AN ELEVATOR AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN) AND REFLECTS COMMUNITY CULTURE AND VALUES.

HOUSTON FRIENDSHIP CENTRE PROJECT REPORT



In my role as Housing and Economic Development Advisor, I have been working since 2020 toward this project. I successfully secured funding for this project from a wide range of fundings including our major funder Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP), as well as Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT), the Federal Accessibility Grant and most recently NAFC and the Bulkley Valley Credit Union.

On March 7, 2025, a blessing ceremony for the new Houston Friendship Centre took place at 3383 11th Street, Houston. Local youth, led by our alcohol & drug counsellor and cultural advisor, brushed the site with juniper—honouring the positive energy of the existing building while preparing the site for redevelopment. The ceremony concluded with drumming, sharing bannock, coffee, and tea, and reflections on the Centre's significance in the community.

Work commenced in April 2025, supported by key partners including the District of Houston, Studio 9 Architecture + Planning, Westwind Enterprises, Lu'ma Development Management, and BV Engineering. Construction is expected to be completed in June 2026.

Significance of the project:

Our programs had outgrown our existing building which was aging, and inaccessible to people with mobility issues. These challenges were making it impossible for expansion of our much needed services. The level of upgrades and repairs required in the next 5-10 years, were making the long-term use of the building increasingly unviable.

This project stands as a hallmark of economic development rooted in cultural identity and partnership—creating space for services that support urban Indigenous families, youth, elders, for many years to come.

HOUSTON FRIENDSHIP CENTRE PROJECT REPORT



Strengthening community Partnerships:

This project has strengthened ties with the District of Houston via this project. We continue to engage with local first nations as well as with local contractors on this project. We are proud that our construction manager is local to the Bulkley Valley and all sub contractors are also local, as such this project has a significant economic benefit to the community.

Funding Achievements:

We have secured multi-source funding for the Houston Friendship Centre in order to ensure the project is viable, including, ICIP, NDIT, Federal Accessibility Grant, NAFC, the BV Credit Union. We continue to see funding to support this project.

Artwork Donations:

We are thrilled to have worked with the Bulkley Valley Credit union (BVCU) to access a donation toward artwork for our new building. This has allowed us to hire Stephanie Anderson, an experienced Wet'suwet'en artist to adorn the building mural art and carve a post for the entrance of the building. The goal of the partnership with BVCU is to support celebration of Indigenous healing and reconciliation. We also received a significant in-kind donation from our construction firm Westwinter Enterprises Ltd, toward the installation of the artwork. The Indigenous art not only enhances the look and feel of the building but will foster cultural pride throughout the entire community.

Housing and Economic Development Advisor's role moving forward:

- Continued coordination of project with architect, construction manager and development manager
- Reporting to our multiple funders
- Collaboration with finance regarding claims during construction
- Managing construction timelines, regulatory and funder requirements
- Continue to oversee final construction phase and move-in planning for the Houston Friendship Centre opening (target: summer 2026).
- Assist with expansion programming once building is operational—launch community workshops, food security initiatives, and cultural events in the new space.

ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN 2024-2025

Beyond capital projects, my role encompasses a wide range of administrative, communications, and reporting supports that strengthen organizational capacity:

- Assisting with board meetings and AGMS
- Grant Writing & Reporting – Overseeing and assist with preparation of successful grant applications and reporting requirements across multiple programs.
- Homeless Count 2025 – Assisted with planning, management, reporting, and coordination for the HSABC homeless count (Spring 2025).
- Dze L K'ant Cultural Centre – New Deck Project
- Communications & Website – Oversaw website upgrades and content updates, while providing ongoing communications support for projects and programs.
- Exploring new opportunities in collaboration with the administrative team.

Reporting Support highlights – Provided administrative and reporting support for multiple funders and initiatives, including:

- Northern Health programs
- New Horizons for Senior programming
- BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) core program reporting
- Tenancy Empowerment Project
- Racial Justice Project

Key Grant Writing Contributions – supported or led applications for a variety of projects, including:

- Wetzinkwa Community Forest (New Cultural Centre Deck Project)
- Green Inclusive New Buildings Grant (Accessibility for Main Street Building)
- Accessibility Grant (Accessibility for Main Street Building)
- Civil Forfeiture Grants (Beading and Sewing Program)
- Senior Chef program (renewals)

LOOKING FORWARD: 2025-2026

This year we have had a significant momentum on projects we have been working toward for many years. Especially around the Houston Friendship Centre project, which will provide a welcoming, accessible hub for cultural, social, and community services by mid-2026.

I am honoured to do this work with guidance and trust of the Executive Director and Board of Directors. I am grateful for the high quality of professionalism and care from our consultants and partners who I continue to work with collaboratively to make these projects a reality, including:

- Lu'ma Development Management,
- Studio 9 Architecture,
- Westwind Enterprises
- Boni Maddison Architecture
- Yellowridge Construction
- IDL Projects

Looking ahead, my focus will continue to be on shepherding the organizations major capital projects to completion, deepening partnerships, securing funding, and building economic capacity to meet the needs and values of the organization and those we serve.

Houston Friendship Centre New Building

Traditional Wet'suwe'ten Territory - Houston B.C.



Project History

- 2020 – Strategic direction from the Board of Directors to replace the aging Houston facility, recognizing accessibility challenges, limited space, and rising repair needs.
- 2021 – Initial funding commitment received from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP).
- 2022–2024 – Project design development and active fundraising to secure multi-source support.
- March 7, 2025 – Blessing ceremony at 3383 11th Street.
- April 2025 – Construction begins, with local contractors engaged to maximize community benefit.

Moving Forward:

- 2025–2026 – Active construction period and integration of Indigenous artwork into design.
- June 2026 – Anticipated completion and grand opening of the new Houston Friendship Centre.

OUR PROJECT PARTNERS:

STUDIO 9 ARCHITECTURE + PLANNING, LU'MA DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT, WESTWIND ENTERPRISES LTD, DISTRICT OF HOUSTON.

Project Overview

Our existing facility has long been a hub for programs and services, but it was aging, inaccessible to people with mobility issues, and too small to meet growing demand. The scale of needed repairs made long-term use unviable. Redevelopment became the most sustainable path forward.

The new Friendship Centre will replace the old building, ensuring continuity of services while expanding capacity to serve children, youth, families, and Elders in a culturally safe and welcoming environment. This project stands as a hallmark of economic development rooted in cultural identity and partnership—creating space for services that will support the community for generations.

OUR PROJECT FUNDERS:

- INVESTING IN CANADA INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM (ICIP)
- NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE TRUST (NDIT)
- FEDERAL ACCESSIBILITY GRANT
- NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES (NAFC)
- BULKLEY VALLEY CREDIT UNION
- LOCAL FUNDRAISING AND IN-KIND SUPPORT (WESTWIND ENTERPRISES LTD.)



DZE L K'ANT FRIENDSHIP CENTRE HAS RAISED OVER \$5 MILLION TO REALIZE OUR VISION OF BUILDING A BRAND NEW FRIENDSHIP CENTRE IN HOUSTON, BC

Houston Housing Project

Dze L K'ant Affordable Housing for Indigenous Families and Elders
Wet'suwet'en Territory - Houston, BC



Project History & Timeline

- **2024**
 - Proposal for a 36-unit affordable Indigenous housing project in Houston selected by BC Housing.
 - Long-term lease agreement signed with the District of Houston for municipally owned land at 3553 11th Street.
 - Development and building permit applications submitted.
 - Project expanded from 36 units to 41 units, adding bachelor suites to support singles and youth aging out of care.
 - Additional Project Development Fund (PDF) funding from BC Housing approved.
 - Applications submitted for Community Housing Infrastructure Funding and CMHC to assist with project costs.
- **2025**
 - Project in final approval stage with BC Housing.
 - Groundbreaking event planned for fall 2025.
 - Construction expected to begin fall 2025.
- **2026**
 - Completion targeted for winter 2026, with families, Elders, and individuals moving into their new homes.

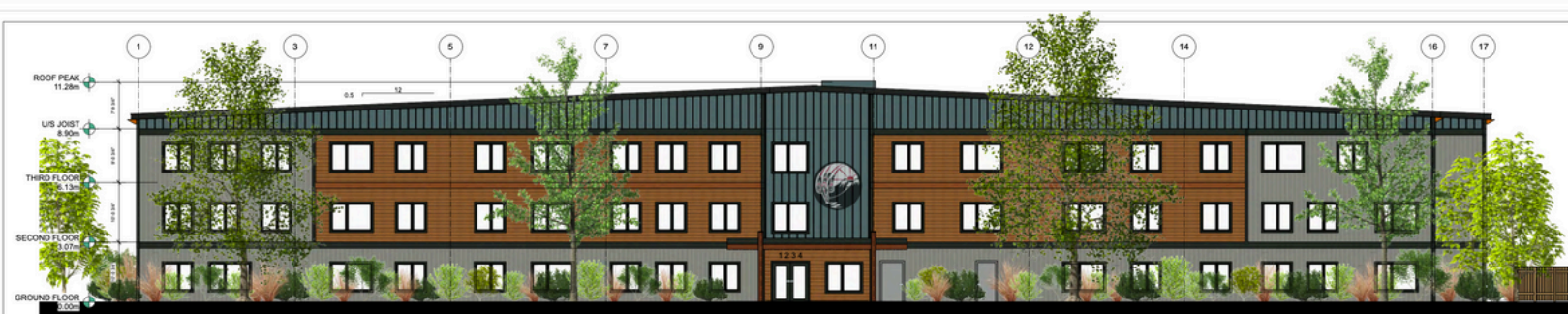
Our Project Partners:

BC Housing, AHMA, District of Houston, IDL Projects, Boni Madison Architecture, Lu'ma Development management.

Project Overview

- Location: 3553 11th Street, Houston, B.C. (District-owned land, long-term lease).
- 41-unit, affordable Indigenous housing project.
- Tenants: Low-income Indigenous families, Elders, individuals, and youth aging out of care, living off-reserve.
- Design Features:
 - Mix of bachelor, one-, two-, three-, and four-bedroom homes.
 - Accessible and adaptable units for Elders and people with disabilities.
 - Community gathering space for cultural and social connection.
 - Children's play area and on-site parking.
- **Development Approach:**
 - Dze L K'ant Housing Advisor - Project management and coordination.
 - Delivered as a Design Build project.
 - IDL Projects - Design Builder.
 - Boni Maddison - Architect.
 - Lu'ma Development Management (LDM) - Development Manager.

41 affordable culturally safe homes located on traditional wet'suwet'en territory (Houston, BC)



Ken'ulh K'it Yikh Project

Dze L K'ant Affordable Housing for Indigenous Families and Elders
Cas Yikh Territory - Smithers, B.C.



Project History

2018: Planning for affordable Indigenous housing begins.

2019: Location secured at Main Street and 10th avenue. Rezoning approved by Town of Smithers; Dze L K'ant Housing Society incorporated by the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre to own and operate affordable housing for urban Indigenous peoples.

2020: Funding application submitted to BC Housing.

2021: Funding awarded; site remediation completed. Project design development. Cultural Safety within Indigenous housing Study completed.

2022: Community engagement including Urban Indigenous Housing Study completed; Findings incorporated into project design. Project site expanded. Project expanded from 34 to 37 units.

2023: Project preparation and planning continues. Project receives provisional project approval from BC Housing.

2024: Long-term lease agreement with Town of Smithers finalized. Project receives final project approval from BC Housing. Groundbreaking held in summer 2024 and construction begins.

Moving Forward:

2025: Project construction, community awareness and education. Organizational capacity development and operational readiness.

2026: Building completion in early 2026. Dze L K'ant will welcome families and Elders into their new homes.

Project Overview

- The first urban-based Indigenous-led housing development in our region.
- Located at 1611 Main Street on land leased long-term from the Town of Smithers.
- 37-unit, three-storey building providing safe, affordable homes for Indigenous families and Elders living off-reserve.
- Funded by BC Housing, with ongoing provincial operating subsidy provided through Aboriginal housing Management Association (AHMA).
- Designed to foster cultural pride and wellbeing, featuring a mix of bachelor suite, one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom homes to support elders, families and intergenerational living.
- Includes green space, a culturally inspired playground, parking, and community-oriented indoor spaces:
 - Welcoming reception
 - Multi-purpose cultural amenity room
 - Community kitchen
 - Healing room

OUR PROJECT PARTNERS:

BC HOUSING, AHMA, TOWN OF SMITHERS, STUDIO 9
ARCHITECTURE + PLANNING, LU'MA DEVELOPMENT
MANAGEMENT, YELLOWRIDGE CONSTRUCTION LTD.



37 AFFORDABLE CULTURALLY SAFE
HOMES LOCATED ON CAS YIKH
TERRITORY (SMITHERS, BC)

Connections Project

Annual Report 2024-2025

By Carrie Wiebe -
Aboriginal Family Development
Coordinator



Connections Team

Carrie Wiebe - Aboriginal Family Development Coordinator



Carrie Abraham - Child Youth Worker

Dze L K'ant Friendship Center Society

The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre is a community-based organization founded in 1974 by a devoted group of Aboriginal people in Smithers, British Columbia. We are one of twenty-five Friendship Centres located across the province committed to building a stronger Aboriginal community. We were initially founded as the “Smithers Indian Friendship Centre”. As we began to grow into our role of providing programs and services to the community our name was changed to reflect the local Wet'suwet'en culture. The name “Dze L K'ant” was chosen. It means “Foot of the Mountain” and represents where the centre is now located, at the base of Hudson Bay Mountain.



Mission and Philosophy

The philosophy of the Dze l K'ant Friendship Center Society is that everyone involved with the centre, whether they are board members, staff, members of the society, or volunteers, is ultimately responsible to the community and the constituency they serve. It is for this reason that we must at all times conduct ourselves with dignity, and do our very best at and every endeavor we undertake. If we cannot give our best, then we must teach ourselves and learn from others. It is in this manner that we will achieve competence and excellence in our actions, as did our ancestors in their lives.

The Dze l K'ant Friendship Center Society is an organization guided by Aboriginal values that provides activities, services and information to all people. Developing skills and strengths, incorporating spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well being focusing on helping people become self efficient and self reliant. The Friendship Center is dedicated to promote awareness among all people

Inspire

Believe

Belong

Year in Review

This year, the Connections Project made significant strides in supporting families, youth, and community engagement.

We continued to provide essential support and resources to families navigating the challenges of raising children in care. Through workshops and personal assistance, we were able to strengthen families' connections and provide them with the tools they need to thrive.

Our popular tanning workshop gave participants the opportunity to learn traditional tanning methods, connecting them to the history and culture of their heritage. The beading workshops were equally impactful, providing a creative outlet and fostering a deeper understanding of traditional art.

Partnering with the Houston High school, we offered students the chance to participate in traditional craft workshops. These sessions allowed students to engage with cultural practices, strengthening their ties to heritage and enhancing their creative skills.

A significant milestone for the Connections Project and the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Houston office was moving out of our old building. This transition marked the beginning of a new chapter, as we look forward to the new building with more accessible and dynamic space to serve our community.

These accomplishments were only possible thanks to the dedication and support of our community, partners, and volunteers. As we move into the next year, we are excited to build on this foundation and continue making a positive impact.



Hide Tanning Workshops

This year, the Youth Hide Tanning and Traditional Art Workshops, led by facilitator Leo Duarte in partnership with Houston High School, provided an invaluable cultural learning experience for Indigenous youth. These workshops created opportunities for students to reconnect with traditional skills, gain hands-on experience, and deepen their understanding of ancestral practices.

Hide Tanning Workshops

Under the guidance of Leo Duarte, youth learned the intricate process of hide tanning, an essential skill passed down through generations. The workshops taught participants the traditional methods of preparing hides, emphasizing patience, respect for the land, and the importance of utilizing every part of the animal. Students developed a stronger connection to their culture and the land, gaining both practical skills and a sense of pride in carrying forward traditional knowledge.

In addition to hide tanning, students had the opportunity to engage in traditional art, including beading, carving, and painting. These workshops not only provided a creative outlet but also allowed youth to learn cultural symbolism and the stories behind traditional designs. Many students found a renewed appreciation for their heritage through art, using it as a form of self-expression and cultural preservation.

The collaboration with Houston High School was instrumental in making these workshops accessible to youth, integrating cultural education into the school environment. The impact of these workshops was evident in the enthusiasm and dedication of the students, many of whom expressed interest in continuing to practice these skills outside of the program. The workshops fostered cultural pride, community connection, and personal growth, reinforcing the importance of preserving Indigenous traditions for future generations.

Moving forward, we hope to expand these cultural workshops, ensuring that more youth have the opportunity to learn from knowledge keepers like Leo Duarte. We are proud of the success of this program and grateful for the partnerships that made it possible.



Gathering Our Voices

The youth from our community had an incredible experience attending the Gathering Our Voices (GOV) conference in Kamloops in 2025. This event, which brings together Indigenous youth from across the province, provided an empowering space for them to connect, learn, and grow.

For many of the youth, GOV was an eye-opening experience, allowing them to engage with peers from different backgrounds while strengthening their own sense of identity. They were inspired by the wisdom and guidance of elders, and by the stories of other youth who are making a positive impact in their communities.

The Gathering Our Voices conference was a transformative experience that will have a lasting impact on the youth who attended. It provided them with the tools to be leaders in their communities and a renewed sense of pride in their heritage. As they return home, they are eager to share their newfound knowledge and experiences with others and continue building a strong, vibrant future for themselves and their communities.



Hobiye

One of the most exciting highlights for the youth this year was the opportunity to attend Hobiye 2025. This cultural celebration was a powerful experience, allowing youth to witness and participate in the traditions of the Nisga'a Nation. Through drumming, dancing, and storytelling, they deepened their understanding of Indigenous culture and the significance of the new year. The trip fostered a strong sense of identity and pride among the youth, helping them connect with their heritage in a meaningful way. For many, it was their first time attending such a large-scale cultural event, and the experience was both inspiring and empowering. The program is incredibly proud to have provided this opportunity, as it strengthens cultural connections and reinforces the importance of passing down traditions to future generations.



Challenges

As we reflect on the accomplishments and challenges of the year, we recognize the resilience and strength of our community. Despite facing significant obstacles, the Connections Project has made strides in offering support, building connections, and empowering individuals. However, there have been a number of challenges that have impacted our work and the well-being of the people we serve.

One of the most pressing issues continues to be the shortage of services and resources available to families and individuals in need. The limited access to mental health support, housing assistance, and community programs has placed a strain on many families, especially those facing additional barriers.

The closure of Canfor has had a profound impact on the local economy, leading to the loss of many jobs. This has created financial instability for numerous families, particularly in a community that heavily relied on the forestry industry. The unemployment rate has risen, and many individuals are struggling to find new sources of income.

|

The rising cost of living has further exacerbated the challenges faced by families. Housing prices, groceries, and other essential expenses have continued to climb, creating added pressure on households. This has made it more difficult for families to make ends meet, leaving many to face hard choices when it comes to their basic needs.

Another critical issue that has affected many families this year is food insecurity. With the increasing cost of living and limited resources, many families are struggling to access nutritious food. Community food programs are stretched thin, and individuals are often forced to choose between paying for basic necessities and ensuring their families have enough to eat. The ongoing food security challenges are a significant concern that continues to impact the health and well-being of those in our community.

While these challenges have certainly impacted our work and the community, they have also underscored the importance of the Connections Project's mission. As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing our efforts to address these issues through innovative solutions, community partnerships, and by advocating for greater support at the local and provincial levels.

Despite the obstacles, we remain hopeful. The determination of our community, the dedication of our team, and the unwavering support from our partners provide a strong foundation for overcoming these challenges and ensuring that the needs of our community are met.

We are deeply grateful to all who have contributed to our work this year, and we look forward to the opportunities and growth that the coming year will bring. Together, we will continue to navigate these challenges, create meaningful change, and build a brighter future for all.

Successes

One of the standout successes this year has been the reduction in the number of children entering care. Through the unwavering support of the Connections team, families have been empowered to stay together and overcome challenges that may have otherwise led to children being removed from their homes. Our team's holistic approach, offering emotional, practical, and cultural support, has played a significant role in keeping families intact.

This year, we have seen remarkable success in supporting youth aging out of care. Many of these youth have found stable housing, pursued further education, and secured meaningful employment. Our mentorship and life skills programs have been key in providing these young individuals with the tools they need to thrive as they transition into adulthood, creating a positive and lasting impact on their lives.

Strengthening partnerships with other community agencies has been a major success. By collaborating with local organizations, we have been able to provide more comprehensive support to individuals and families, enhancing the resources available to the community. These partnerships have allowed us to address gaps in services and ensure that our community receives the best possible care.

Another highlight of the year has been the expansion of our traditional workshops. We have offered more opportunities for community members to engage with cultural practices, including beading, tanning, and other traditional crafts. These workshops have not only allowed participants to connect with their heritage but have also fostered a sense of pride and community. The positive feedback we've received has inspired us to continue expanding these programs in the coming year.

While the year presented many challenges, the successes we've achieved together have shown the strength and resilience of our community. As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing our efforts to address the challenges we face, while building on our successes. We remain dedicated to supporting families, empowering youth, and creating meaningful connections with other organizations to better serve our community.

We are deeply grateful for the unwavering support from our partners, volunteers, and the community. Together, we are creating lasting change and building a brighter future for all.

Youth Drop In Program

The Youth Drop-In Program has had a successful and fulfilling year, providing valuable support to Indigenous youth in our community. Our goal has always been to create a safe, supportive environment for youth to thrive, and this year, we saw positive outcomes from our ongoing efforts to engage and empower young people.

This year, the Youth Drop-In Program continued to play a crucial role in supporting youth with their schoolwork and day-to-day challenges. Our team was able to assist youth with homework, provide guidance on navigating school life, and offer emotional and mental support to help them overcome personal struggles. This support has helped improve academic performance, build confidence, and ensure that youth feel seen and valued in their educational journeys.

One of the key features of the Youth Drop-In Program is providing a safe and welcoming space for youth after school. This year, many young people used the Drop-In space to relax, socialize, and participate in structured activities. Offering a place where youth can feel comfortable and secure has had a positive impact on their mental and emotional well-being, giving them an alternative to potentially unsafe situations.

This year, the youth in the program had the opportunity to attend cultural and community events, including the Hobiye 2025 and the Gathering Our Voices conference. These experiences were transformative, allowing youth to connect with their culture, learn from elders, and engage with peers from other communities. The trips provided invaluable opportunities for personal growth and leadership development, fostering a deeper sense of pride in their heritage.

The summer months brought a variety of exciting activities for youth, including outdoor adventures, workshops, and cultural events. From hiking to arts and crafts, the summer activities were designed to keep youth engaged, active, and connected to their culture. These activities helped build a sense of community and teamwork, allowing youth to have fun while learning important life skills.

One of the greatest accomplishments of the year was seeing two youth from the program graduate in 2024. We are incredibly proud of their hard work, perseverance, and accomplishments. Their graduation is a testament to their growth, and it brings us great joy to see them take this significant step toward their futures. These achievements serve as an inspiration to other youth in the program and show what's possible when they have the right support, encouragement, and opportunities.

The Youth Drop-In Program has made a significant impact this year, creating a safe, supportive space for youth to grow and thrive. Moving forward, we will continue to expand our offerings, ensuring that we are meeting the evolving needs of our young people. By providing support in both their academic and personal lives, as well as fostering cultural connections, we are equipping youth with the tools they need to succeed in their futures.

We are incredibly proud of the youth who have participated in the program and look forward to even greater engagement and growth in the year to come. With the continued support of our community and partners, we are excited to see how the Youth Drop-In Program will continue to inspire and empower Indigenous youth.

Conclusion

As we close out this year, we reflect with gratitude on the resilience of our community and the impact we've made together. While we have faced significant challenges, including a lack of services, employment losses, food insecurity, and rising costs, we've also witnessed incredible successes that inspire hope for the future. The Connections Project has proven time and again that when we come together—whether through providing support to families, empowering youth, expanding cultural programs, or strengthening partnerships—we can create meaningful change.

Our achievements this year, from reducing the number of children entering care to supporting youth aging out of care, and fostering deeper connections with other community agencies, show that our work is making a real difference. The increased offering of traditional workshops has not only connected people to their cultural roots but has also contributed to healing and pride within our community.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to addressing the challenges ahead while continuing to build on our successes. We are deeply thankful for the support of our community, partners, and volunteers, and we are excited for the opportunities and growth that the coming year will bring. Together, we will continue to strengthen our community, provide the resources families need, and ensure a brighter future for all.





2024 /
2025



Dze L K' ant Friendship Centre Licensed After School program Annual Report

Vendor Name: Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre
Society

Contract #: QT10492003

Program: After School Program

Reporting Period: 01/04/2024-31/03/2025

Total Annual Service Hours: 1820



Prepared by
Emma Bowen



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www.dzelkant.com

Introduction

A Year of Growth, Connection, and Impact

This year, the After School Program (ASP) continued to operate at near daily capacity, with an average of 15 children attending each day and a total of 58 community children served throughout the year. This consistent attendance highlights both the critical need for the program and the trust families place in ASP as a dependable, inclusive space.

The ASP provides a safe, welcoming, and barrier-free environment where children feel seen, supported, and valued. Designed to meet the needs of school-aged children in Houston—many of whom face complex life challenges—the program offers more than just recreational activities. It delivers essential supports that promote social, emotional, physical, and cultural well-being.

ASP is a cornerstone in the lives of many children, providing access to trusted adults, nourishing food, academic help, cultural connections, and peer relationships in a space where all are welcome. The program acts as a hub for supportive services, identifying and responding to the needs of participants through:

- Referrals to community partners for children requiring additional supports
- Collaboration with schools, including regular liaison with Twain Sullivan Elementary staff
- Family advocacy, such as hosting and facilitating family meetings and education planning
- Psycho-social support and developmental enrichment for children and families
- Culturally grounded programming reflective of the urban Indigenous population we serve



Program Overview: Supporting Houston's Most Vulnerable Indigenous Children



What We Do!



- The After School Program offers free, daily, year-round drop-in support for children ages 8–12, serving primarily Indigenous children living with risk factors and vulnerabilities in their home environments. Many participants face food insecurity, unstable housing, exposure to substance misuse, or the absence of consistent adult support.

ASP responds to these complex needs with a comprehensive model of care that integrates:

- Nutritional support – daily healthy snacks, meals, and take-home lunch kits
- Academic support – daily homework help and school readiness assistance
- Cultural enrichment – connection to Indigenous teachings, crafts, drumming, and Knowledge Keepers
- Physical activity – regular opportunities to swim, hike, ski, and explore the outdoors
- Social-emotional development – relationship-based mentorship and support in peer interaction
- Family engagement – outreach and family meetings to support home stability and family support.

Program Highlights and challenges

Program Highlights:



- Culture Camps
- Down Hill Ski Camps
- Legendary Swim Days
- Cross-Country Skiing
- Summer BBQs and Field Trips
- Back-to-School Gear Giveaway
- Kids Kitchen & Cooking Program
- Pizza/Movie Fridays
- Holiday Parties & Family Events
- National Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration

Program Challenges



- Food security continues to be an on going challenge for many families in Houston. Despite daily food programs offered in schools, kids continue to face hunger and inadequate nutrition.
- Houston is facing significant issues with regards to safe, and adequate housing. Children are presenting with needs around hygiene, safety, and physical health, related to the condition of their rental homes and tenancy issues. Transportation continues to be a barrier to access for some participants.



Committed to MCFD Outcomes

Our licensed after-school program, funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), is committed to aligning with the ministry's desired outcomes. Through thoughtfully planned activities and daily interactions led by our dedicated staff, we strive to create a supportive and enriching environment for every child. Guided by the principles and goals outlined by MCFD, we use our best efforts to promote positive development, enhance well-being, and support the unique needs of each child in our care.



Improving Outcomes through Program Delivery



Outcome 1: Children develop social skills and an enhanced sense of confidence.

Progress to Outcome:

Children are consistently engaging in group activities that promote communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. ASP staff facilitate structured and unstructured peer interactions that support the development of self-expression and confidence.

Changes Due to Outcome:

Children demonstrate improved ability to express feelings, resolve conflicts peacefully, and take initiative in group settings. Increased participation in group sharing, leadership in games, and confidence in presenting their ideas are noted.

Activities:

Group discussions and check-ins during daily arrival

- Weekly Crafty Mondays, Democracy Days (group decision-making)
- Peer support and mentorship built through consistent staff relationships
- Games, free play, and teamwork-based outdoor activities
- Working together help coordinate National Indigenous Day event activities.



Outcomes continued

Outcome 2: Children develop and maintain positive peer relationships and support networks.

Progress to Outcome:

Children are forming friendships and learning conflict resolution skills with staff support. Peer mentoring and modeling are integrated into activities.

Changes Due to Outcome:

Children increasingly identify “safe friends” and express feeling connected and supported. Conflict incidents have reduced, and children demonstrate collaborative behavior and empathy.

Activities:

- Daily peer-led activities and team-based games
- Conflict resolution support by staff
- Opportunities to mentor younger peers during summer programs
- Movie/Pizza Fridays that encourage informal social bonding

Outcome 3: Children increase knowledge around healthy eating.

Progress to Outcome:

Nutrition is a consistent part of programming. Children are actively involved in food preparation and learning about food choices.

Changes Due to Outcome:

Children express preferences for healthier foods, understand basic nutrition concepts, and apply knowledge in meal planning and preparation. Some are even taking on cooking at home.

Activities:

- Daily healthy snacks and light meals
- Weekly "Kids in the Kitchen" program
- Monthly family meal take-home day
- Lunch kits to go (supported by Show Kids You Care)

Out Comes Continued

Outcome 4: Children increase in physical activity level.

Progress to Outcome:

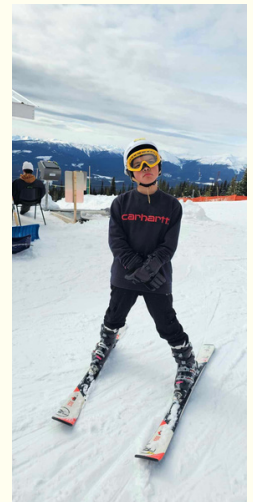
Our after-school program is committed to promoting physical activity as a vital part of each child's daily experience. Children engage in a balance of planned and spontaneous movement both indoors and outdoors, with activities woven into our daily and weekly schedule. From weekly swimming sessions to exploring local hiking trails and surrounding lakes, we ensure children stay active while connecting with nature. Seasonal programming includes unique opportunities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and tobogganing in the winter months, and kayaking, canoeing, hiking, and biking during the summer. This year, we were excited to offer two full days of downhill skiing, complete with lessons for 15 children—an experience many would not otherwise have access to. Our “Bring Your Own Wheels” days invite children to bring bikes, scooters, or skateboards to enjoy local parks, and we also provide a selection of equipment to borrow, generously supported by the Indigenous Recreational Council. Through these enriching activities, we foster physical health, confidence, and a lifelong love for the outdoors.

Changes Due to Outcome:

As a result of our diverse and engaging physical activity programming, we have observed positive changes in children's physical literacy, confidence, and overall well-being. Children are demonstrating increased stamina, coordination, and enthusiasm for physical challenges, both familiar and new. Many have built stronger peer connections through cooperative outdoor play and team-based activities. Exposure to new experiences—such as skiing, kayaking, and biking—has not only expanded their skillsets but also boosted self-esteem and resilience. We've also noticed children showing greater respect for nature and a willingness to try new activities outside of their comfort zones. These outcomes reflect our program's success in promoting active lifestyles and nurturing personal growth through inclusive, adventure-based experiences.

Activities:

- Weekly Thursday swim days
- Hikes and exploration of local trails
- canoeing, kayaking, biking, base ball Soccer, basketball
- Cross country and down hill skiing, tobogganing



Out Comes Continued

Outcome 5: Children develop awareness of local facilities and the environment.

Progress to Outcome:

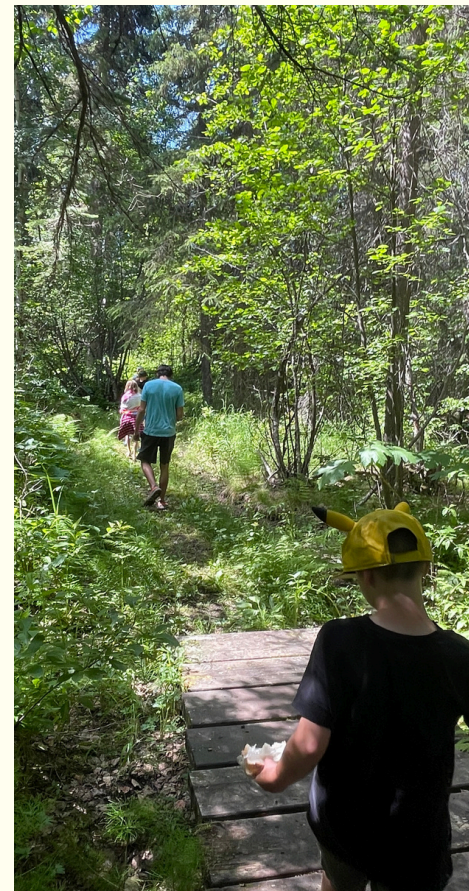
Children are introduced to local parks, cultural centers, and natural spaces through regular field trips.

Changes Due to Outcome:

Children demonstrate knowledge of local geography, cultural sites, and express curiosity about nature. They are beginning to act as local guides for their peers and families.

Activities:

- Field trips to local lakes, hiking trails
- Visits to the Kasan Cultural Centre and Fort St. James National Historic Site
- Environmental learning during outdoor activities



Outcome 6: Children's attitude towards schoolwork improves.

Progress to Outcome:

Daily support with homework and school-related tasks helps children develop routines and confidence in their abilities.

Changes Due to Outcome:

Children report less stress around schoolwork, show improved focus, and demonstrate more pride in their academic achievements. School staff note improved classroom behavior.

Activities:

- Daily homework club
- Coordination with Silverthorne Elementary for academic supports
- Provision of school supplies, back-to-school gear, indoor shoes, etc.

Outcome 7: Children increase knowledge on a variety of local cultures and crafts.

Progress to Outcome:

Cultural programming is meaningfully integrated into our weekly routines, with a focus on Indigenous teachings and practices. Children regularly participate in hands-on cultural activities such as beading, drum-making, and storytelling, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for Indigenous cultures. This year, children visited the Kasan Cultural Centre, where they toured totem poles with a local guide and learned about local traditions and history. They also explored the Fort St. James National Historic Site, gaining insight into traditional food systems and the historical role of the Hudson's Bay Company in fur trading. In addition to these experiences, children take active roles in our annual National Indigenous Peoples Day celebration by preparing materials such as medicine bags and bannock, and assisting with event activities. Our program also supports participation in Truth and Reconciliation and Every Child Matters community events, helping to instill empathy, awareness, and a sense of shared responsibility among all participants.

Changes Due to Outcome:

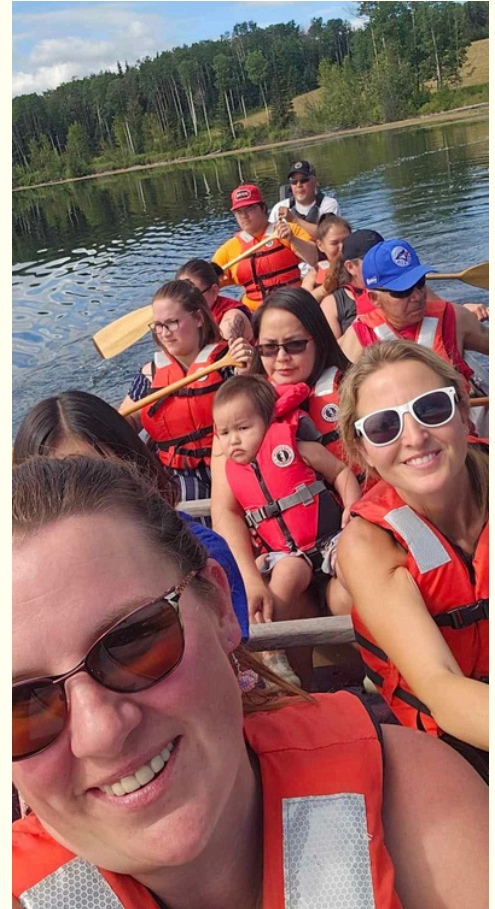
Children are demonstrating greater cultural awareness, empathy, and respect for Indigenous traditions. Through active participation in cultural activities and community events, they are developing a deeper understanding of reconciliation and local history. Many now show pride in sharing what they've learned and express genuine interest in Indigenous teachings. These experiences are helping to foster a stronger sense of identity, belonging, and social responsibility.

Activities:

- Monthly drum circle
- Cultural craft days
- Field trips to cultural centers
- Engagement with Knowledge Keepers from multiple nations

Highlights of our Year!

The After School Program and Youth Program participants invited their families to attend our Every Child Matters Truth and Reconciliation dinner



War Canoe cultural camp on Round Lake



Hike to Red Bluff and Old fort Trading post



Children receiving their first Ski Lesson on Hudson Bay Mountain!



Conclusion and looking ahead



Conclusion & Looking Ahead

This past year has been a powerful reflection of what is possible when children are given consistent access to safety, support, and opportunity. The After School Program has continued to grow—not just in numbers, but in depth of impact. We have seen children flourish: building meaningful friendships, finding joy in movement and learning, gaining pride in their culture, and developing confidence in who they are. Despite the challenges our community faces—especially around food security, housing, and mental health—ASP has remained a steady, compassionate anchor for families. Through trust-based relationships, responsive programming, and deep community partnerships, we’ve helped create a foundation of stability and resilience for many of Houston’s most vulnerable children. We are proud of what has been accomplished, and grateful to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, community partners, donors, and families for their continued support.

Looking Ahead

As we prepare for another year, our focus remains clear:

- To strengthen our capacity to meet increasing demand
- To advocate for and support children and families navigating complex circumstances
- To expand culturally rooted programming that reflects and uplifts the diverse identities of our children
- To invest in staff and infrastructure that sustains safe, high-quality programming

With the continued support of our partners and community, we are excited to build on our momentum and continue nurturing the potential of every child who walks through our doors. Here’s to another year of learning, laughter, connection, and growth—together!





For the Month of: April 2024 - March 2025

2024 - 2025

REPORT PROVIDED BY: Manal Sayed, Mark Larsen, Mel Bazil

Name of Program: Trauma Informed Mental Health Counselling and
Neurofeedback

Funder: National Association for Friendship Centres (NAFC)



**National Association
of Friendship Centres**

Description of Program:

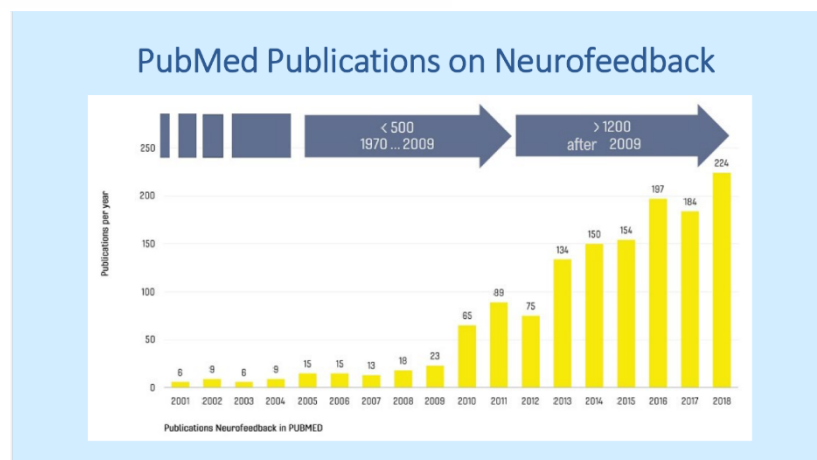
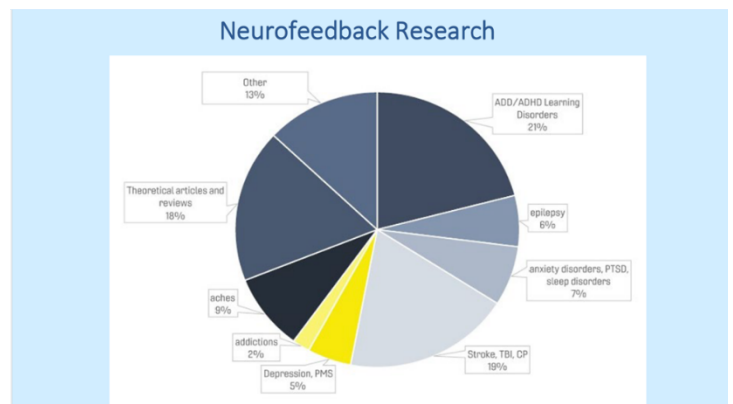
This program provides culturally safe, and trauma informed one-on-one counseling, Infra Low (ILF) Neurofeedback, group therapy, and workshops for individuals and families. (ILF) Neurofeedback is a treatment modality that has been specifically effective in the treatment of trauma symptoms, such as hyperarousal, hypervigilant, chronic dissociation, sleep disorders, panic attacks, nightmares, flashbacks, muscle tension, fatigue, lack of concentration, emotional instability, depressive symptoms and many other symptoms (Spreyermann, 2022).

This project serves all people in the Bulkley Valley region, including Smithers, Telkwa, and Houston. We have also provided service to clients from the surrounding Indigenous reserves, such as Witset, Gitanmaax and Lake Babine. The mission of our project is to make counselling and neurofeedback accessible to those who need them by building capacity within our existing programs. We are passionate about delivering our services to the underserved and those most vulnerable.

Counselling:



Neurofeedback:



Program highlights in 2024-2025:

- 1- The National Association of Friendship Centre attended a mental health conference in Calgary and presented the work we are doing at the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society featuring the program success stories, as they were very impressed learning about the neurofeedback sessions we are providing.
- 2- We were selected as some of Bee Medic favorite customers. Bee Medic is the Medical Equipment company; they are located in the USA, and they sell Neurofeedback equipment worldwide. We were featured as a customer highlight in their newsletter, social media channels, and their blog. They highlighted the work in neurofeedback that our team at the Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society are doing. Please see photo below:

Customer Highlight

Meet the Dze L K'ant   Centre Society in British Columbia!



The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society is an organization guided by Aboriginal values that provides activities, services and information to all people. It focuses on developing skills and strengths while incorporating spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being to help people become self-sufficient and self-reliant. The Friendship Centre is dedicated to promoting awareness among all people.

"The Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society is committed to utilizing innovative tools like neurofeedback and BEE Medic equipment to support the well-being of all individuals we serve. By incorporating these technologies into our services, we have seen remarkable transformations in our clients' overall wellness.

Clients have shared stories of feeling a renewed sense of happiness, improved social interactions, and a stronger sense of self after undergoing neurofeedback sessions. They have expressed gratitude for being able to manage their emotions more effectively and overcome negative thought patterns. Additionally, some clients have reported significant improvements in managing chronic pain, achieving better sleep, and experiencing increased energy levels.

Through the integration of neurofeedback and BEE Medic equipment, we are dedicated to promoting holistic well-being and fostering a sense of empowerment in our community. We are grateful for the opportunity to witness these success stories and look forward to continuing to support our clients on their journey towards self-sufficiency and self-reliance."



Get In Touch

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Email: info@dzekant.com

[Learn More](#)

Stats as Relevant:

This year, we provided 1750 counseling and neurofeedback sessions. There were 3963 points of services.

We served 343 clients in total: 117 were males, 223 were females, sixty-one of those clients were elders, 28 were youth, 123 were status clients, and 213 were non-status clients.

One-two Success Stories:

The vast majority of our clients reported significant improvement in their symptoms after attending therapy with the Dze L Kant Friendship Centre's Counsellors, Mel, Mark, or Manal.

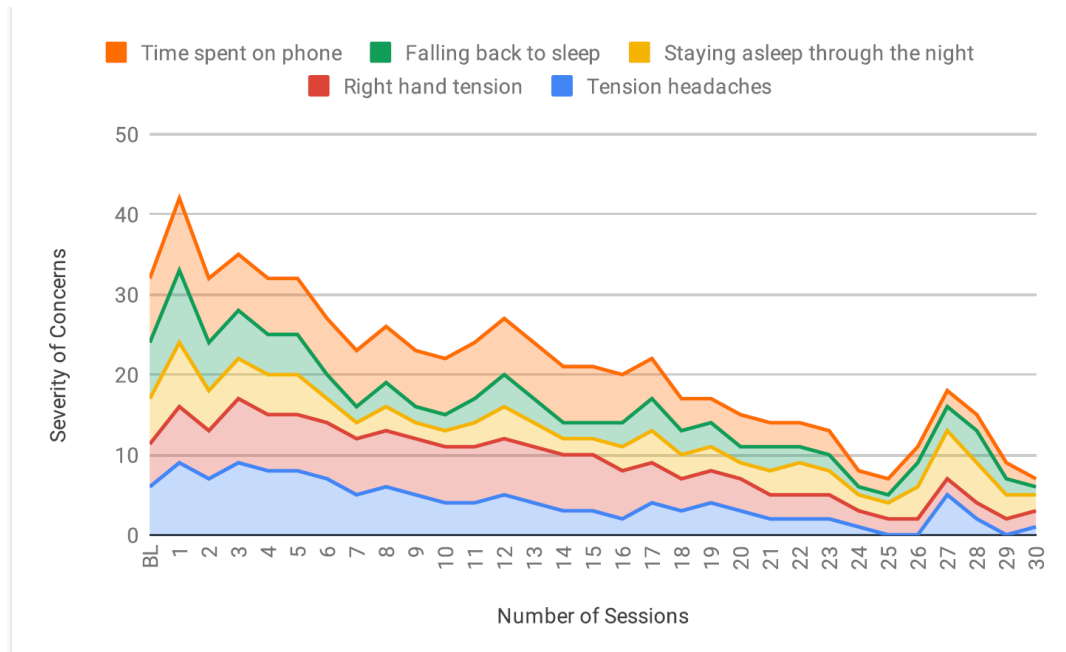
We worked collaboratively with members of the community to address the various issues affecting the community's health and well-being. Our outreach strategies were vital because we helped bridge the gap between our organization and all different audiences. We provided opportunities and meaningful interactions with the community to increase participation and to achieve our organizational goals effectively. As a result:

- We provided counselling to clients who were victims of violence. We supported clients referred by the RCMP Victim Services, and we provided counselling and Neurofeedback sessions to the RCMP Victim Services' staff.
- We provided counselling and neurofeedback sessions to vulnerable women from the Women Shelter in town, and we supported the Women Shelter's staff with either counselling or Neurofeedback sessions.
- We received referral from pain clinics and sleep clinics. We were able to help many clients with chronic pain issues and sleep concerns.
- Our services also reached to the staff at the hospital, we provided neurofeedback sessions to pharmacists, Massage Therapists, and Clinicians.
- We helped clients with chronic issues, such as migraine, tinnitus, multiple sclerosis, sensitivity to light and sounds, or food disorders.
- Some of our clients traveled for our services from Witset, Gitanmaax, Hazelton, Houston and Burns Lake. We were also contacted by the hospital in Victoria for information and referral and we were contacted by psychiatrists and doctors in town for referrals and information.

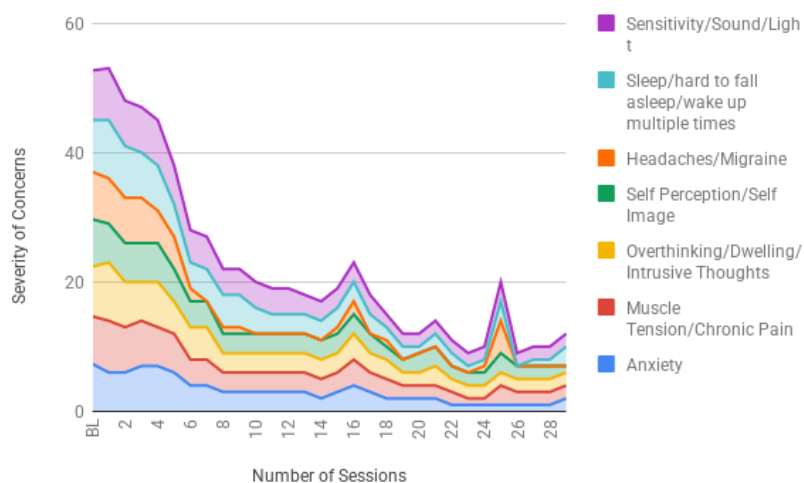
Your Report Should Include Photos:

See samples of client's progress below:

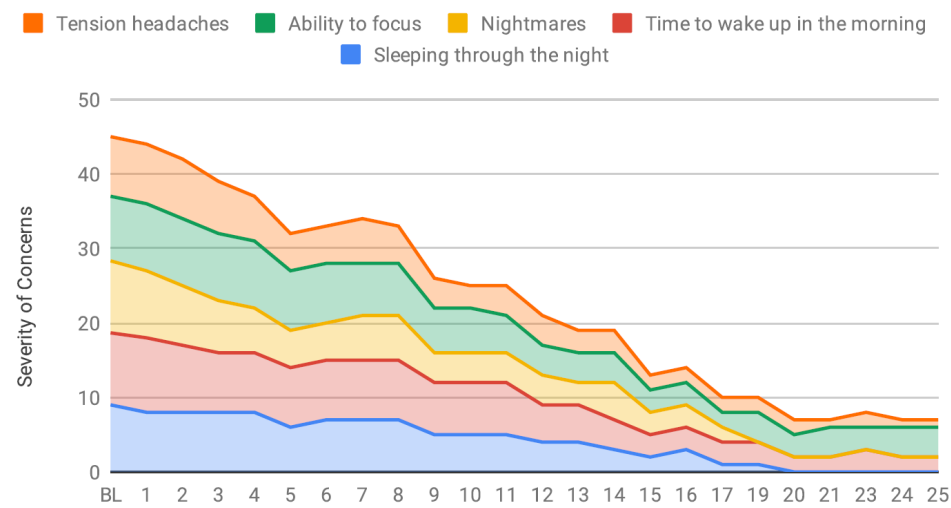
Severity of concerns reduced significantly within only 30 sessions:



Severity of concerns reduced significantly within only 28 sessions:



Severity of concerns reduced significantly within only 25 sessions:



Thank you on behalf of The Dze L K'ant
Friendship Centre Staff And Board

