



ABORIGINAL COALITION
TO END HOMELESSNESS

November 2023

Centering the Voices of the Indigenous Street Family in Climate Health Action

End of Project Report

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BC Alliance for Healthy Living
Society



Honouring the ancestry of the population it serves, the Aboriginal Coalition's Climate Health Action Project took place on Coast Salish territory.

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Brief Overview

The Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society (ACEH) set out to offer a 2-part Climate Harm Reduction Circle with the Indigenous Street Family Members, to gain a deeper understanding of what is needed to support this community throughout climate crises.

Through these Climate Harm Reduction Circles, we quickly learnt that the first step towards supporting the Indigenous Street Family through climate change, was supporting them in reconnecting with the land and the traditional practices that symbiotically care for both the environment and the relatives that live within it.

Rather than offering a webinar to share our findings and highlight these practices, we focused on actively sharing decolonized land management, food sovereignty practices and traditional harvesting lessons with the Indigenous Street Family and other community members.

By focusing on tactical life-skills from an Indigenous lens, we were able to educate Family Members on traditional food & medicine plants, food preservation methods, traditional fishing practices and traditional food preparation ceremony, while building community at the same time.



These lessons offer insight and a direction towards sustainable living, which is inherently centered in climate health action. By sharing these practices and revitalizing Indigenous land management and food sovereignty, we are able to support a more secure future throughout climate crises.

Alongside these workshops, the ACEH worked closely with Orca Community Garden to build a community partnership, to highlight the importance of the Orca and Salmon life cycles on Vancouver Island through a Native Art installation. Additionally, we were able to prepare and hand out 25 cold weather kits for the Indigenous Street Family living rough.





Climate Harm Reduction Circle | February 2023

Live Graphic Recording
by Erica Bota



CLIMATE HARM REDUCTION CIRCLE #1

The main focus on this climate harm reduction circle was to identify from the Elders and knowledge keepers, along with the Indigenous Street Family, what the main focus of climate health is from an Indigenous perspective.

We focused on the 4 main habitats that we interact with on Coast Salish territory; the forest, river, ocean and harvesting grounds. The main message from this circle were teachings and reflections on how to “Walk Softly on the Land” by upholding traditional practices, harvesting sustainably, and living appropriately within the seasons.

Some lessons that were shared included proper harvesting protocol - only harvesting 1/3 of what’s on the plant and harvesting from every 3rd or 4th plant that you see.

We also talked about traditional burning practices in the forest, to maintain forest health and burn brush that can cause harmful wildfires. While also discussing the importance of the salmon life cycle and it’s reliance on healthy rivers levels and ocean temperatures.

Facilitators and numbers for both Climate Harm Reduction Circles:

FACILITATORS:

Marylin Olsen - Page (WSÁNEĆ)
Charlene George (T’SOUKE)
Tom Child (KWAKIUTL)

PARTICIPANTS:

10 Family Members from the Indigenous Street Community



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REALITIES: RESTORATION, RECIPROCITY, AND RESOURCES

A PLACE WHERE WE BELONG



Climate Harm Reduction Circle | March 2023

Live Graphic Recording
by Erica Bota



Climate Harm Reduction Circle #2

For the second harm reduction circle, we wanted to focus on how the ACEH highlights and prioritizes climate health practices. We decided to focus on 3 major themes; reciprocity & restoration, food sovereignty at home and resources in the community.

Reciprocity & Restoration:

Family Members identified that they'd like to focus on restoration work during land based healing camps and urban land-based programming, as well as local beach clean ups, invasive pulling for restoration of native habitats, specifically on the local First Nations and culturally significant sites.

Food Sovereignty at Home:

Major highlights include how to best utilize the medicine and food gardens at our supportive housing sites, local fishing and hunting trips with follow up food preservation and processing workshops and traditional medicine making lessons.

Resources in the Community:

Family Members identified safe spaces in the community to shelter and get resources during climate crises: Coolaid, Our Place, SOLID, ACEH, iHEART, John Howard etc. They also shared what cold weather supplies would be best utilized for Family Members living rough, focusing on footwear and shelter from precipitation.



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CALL TO ACTION

Once these important lessons were outlined in the Climate Harm Reduction Circles, the Family Members, Elders and Knowledge Keepers identified it was time to put these discussions into action. Over the time period of February - September 2023, the ACEH was able to complete 12 different climate health action focused workshops, alongside a 6-part art series partnered with Orca Community Garden.

CEDAR BARK HARVESTING

Charlene George took the SPAKEN House Cohort and Culturally Aligned Integrated Cohort members to learn how to ask for offerings of bark from cedar.

Traditional Uses:

- Fiber for clothing making
- Fiber for fish nets
- Medicine
- Art

Territory:

T'Souke

Family Members:

7



CAMAS RESTORATION WORKSHOP

The ACEH worked with Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) to attend a Camas restoration workshop at Matheson Point. The focus of this restoration work was on the PEAWEN Moon, which is the spring camas harvest moon, hosted by local WSANEC facilitator and environmentalist, Tiffany Joseph.

Date: May 19th

Territory: Esquimalt

Traditional Uses:

- Staple food crop
- Trading crop
- Traditional feasting food and gift

Family Members: 4



CEDAR BARK PROCESSING

Charlene George was welcomed to SPAKEN house to process the cedar bark that was harvested with the Family Members. Once the cedar bark has been processed and cured over the summer, it can be used as a fiber for making art, clothing and tools in the fall.

Date: May 23rd

Territory: Lekwungen

Family Members: 5



SALMONBERRY HARVEST

Elder, Marilyn Olsen - Page took Kwum Kwum Lelum Family Members to the shared W̱SÁNEĆ and Malahat harvesting site at Goldstream to harvest Salmonberries for jam making!

Date: June 14th

Territory: Pauquachin

Traditional Uses:

- Berries
- Spring shoots
- Jams & fruit leathers

Family Members: 5



KEXMIN HARVEST

KEXMIN, otherwise known as “barestem bicuitroot” or “wild celery” is a staple medicine plant for Coast Salish peoples. Family Members joined for multiple harvesting sessions of this important medicine to offer to Elders as gifts and to bring home for their personal use.

Territory: Lekwungen, MEE-qan (Beacon Hill Park)

Traditional Uses:

- Ceremony
- Chewing on seeds for sore throats and colds
- Tea for headaches and fevers
- Treats lung and viral diseases



CAMAS EDUCATION AT VIC WEST FEST

Elders, Maryanne Thomas and Charlene George joined for a Camas education table at Vic West Fest to share knowledge around traditional food systems, cultivation practices and cultural food preparation methods.

The purpose of this event was to create more community building with the ACEH’s neighbours in the Victoria West Community, since the development of our newest Culturally Supportive House, Kwum Kwum Lelum (House of Courage).

Date: June 22nd

Territory: Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations



BLACKBERRY HARVEST

Family Members joined Elder, Marylin Olsen-Page, to go blackberry harvesting on WSÁNEĆ territory with offerings of tobacco. Marylin shared how the berry season has been late this year and how the hot weather and lack of rain has made it so there aren't as many berry flourishes for communities to harvest from.

Date: August 18th

Territory: WSÁNEĆ

Family Members: 4



FISH JARRING WORKSHOP

Fish processing is a very important lesson for food sovereignty and security after receiving fish distribution. Community members can receive up to 80 fish at a time and learning how to smoke, jar, preserve and process the fish is imperative to have this food source available throughout the year. Aunty Glo joined us for a fish jarring workshop to teach Family Members the full process from cleaning the fish, to opening a freshly sealed jar of canned salmon!

Date: August 30th

Territory: Lekwungen

Family Members: 14 throughout the day







JAM MAKING WORKSHOP

Family Members from SPAKEN House and the youth cohort joined Cultural Mentor, Lillian Underwood, for a jam making workshop. The full process of harvesting protocol, picking the berries, processing the berries and making jam was encapsulated within this project. This provided Family Members with the knowledge to source their own berries and make jam year after year. We hold importance, the lesson of “every season is preparation for winter” and we remember this when providing home made jam and jarred salmon to Elders and Knowledge Keepers in ceremony and potlach in the winter.

Date: September 1st

Territory: Lekwungen

Family Members: 8





FISH SMOKING WORKSHOP

Family Members joined Elder, Siemtino and her family, Anette and John, on Songhees reserve to learn how to traditionally smoke salmon in a smokehouse. Family Members were able to smoke 20 fish over a 2 workshop series, where they learnt how to filet and season the fish, then load it properly into the smokehouse with green Alder wood. Smoking fish is an important preservation method for the Coast Salish, and can be stored in the freezer for months when properly stored.

Date: September 15th

Territory: Songhees

Family Members: 7



COMMUNITY PITCOOK

Throughout this project, the ACEH has been finding ways to spread these traditional food preparation methods, preservation practices and ceremonies to as many community members as possible. It was important to us, to wrap the project up with an event that encapsulates the local Indigenous practices on Vancouver Island and allow the Family Members and staff an opportunity to come together to celebrate Indigenous resilience.

The ACEH hosted a traditional pitcook on Tsawout First Nation, to highlight a cooking method that has been used since time immemorial. The main purpose of these cooking traditions was to cook down harsh inulin found in staple crops here on the Island, such as Camas and Wapato potato. By cooking these tuber and bulb vegetables underground for 24 - 48 hours, it allowed the First Nations on the Island to absorb the most nutrients and minerals from these crops, without the indigestion that would come along with a shorter cooking time. Important protocol was shared during this facilitation day, alongside a feast for community members.

Date: September 28th

Territory: Tsawout

Community/Family Members: 28





SALMON RUN AT GOLDSTREAM

Family Members joined Elder, Marylin Olsen-Page and her son, Clayton Olsen on a fishing trip to Goldstream for the first flush of the salmon run. This day out on the land captured the impact of climate change on First Nation communities on the Island poignantly. The facilitators shared that at this time of year, we should be able to go right in the river and see salmon running, but due to lack of rain and rising ocean temperatures, the salmon weren't even waiting at the mouth of the stream to run up. While we were out at Goldstream, there were several other community members that had come to fish, leaving disappointed that the stream was so shallow and the mouth was bare. First Nation, Inuit and Metis communities have been consistently adapting to the ever changing environment that directly impacts seasonal traditions that have been passed down for generations due to climate change.

Date: September 30th

Territory: WSÁNEĆ

Family Members: 7



GREENHOUSE CONSTRUCTION

In addition to all of this programming, the ACEH has been able to utilize the remaining funds to put towards the construction of a greenhouse at our first Culturally Supportive House for Indigenous Youth. The grounds will include perennial and annual garden beds, that the greenhouse will help to support the development of. The youth at the house will be in charge of caring for the seedlings in the greenhouse, along with any annual vegetables throughout the summer. While other ACEH cohort members have been working away on getting the yard ready for the first season of planting, the first youth will be moving in and taking over in April.



Community Partnerships

ORCA COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

The ACEH Society has partnered with Canadian Orca Rescue Society as a part of this project to center the voices of the Indigenous Street Family through climate health action in the form of an art installation project. Part of centering these voices, is offering representation of this community within climate health focused spaces. Canadian Orca Rescue Society opened up a community garden down the road from the ACEH's newest Culturally Supportive House, Kwum Kwum Lelum (House of Courage) in the summer of 2022.

The Family Members at Kwum Kwum Lelum attended a total of 6 workshops with Elders Doug Lafortune and Kathleen Horne to create a series of art pieces that highlight the importance of the salmon and orca life cycles on Vancouver Island.

Between 9-15 Family Members attended each one of these sessions, with some of them drawing the designs that are now posted on the perimeter fences themselves. This project highlighted the importance of community connection and care, while uplifting the Indigenous Street Family Members as an important part of the climate health community.





OPENING CEREMONY

Family Members were able to sign their pieces in front of community members and a local news station, highlighting the experience of developing the art with Elders and Orca Community Garden. The Thomas Family Esquimalt dancers and singers joined for the opening ceremony for a land acknowledgement. Elders, Kathy and Doug, were able to say a few words about the importance of community building and representation within neighbourhoods.





Population and Reach

The ACEH Society has grown into multiple departments, focusing on support for specific cohorts of the Indigenous Street Community. This project, “Centering the Voices of the Indigenous Street Family Through Climate Health Action” worked with and brought together all of the different cohorts. Specifically, Family Members from SPAKEN House, Kwum Kwum Lelum, those living in our independent housing in the Westshore, the Youth Cohort, Justice Cohort, Culturally Aligned Integrated Supports Cohort and Family Members connected through Outreach and our Facebook page, were all included. Additionally to this, 25 cold weather kits were prepared and given out to the Indigenous Street Community for those in need of materials for the winter such as toques, gloves, boots, tarps, and more.

The ACEH Society also worked closely with many community members and Elders from local Nations such as Tsartlip, Pauquachin, Tsawout, Songhees, Tseycum and T’Souke. Community events such as the Pitcook and the Orca Community Garden opening ceremony were instances where Elders and community members were able to gather in a celebratory fashion, offering an opportunity for more connection.



Impact on Community Health and Well-Being

This initiative has significantly influenced the health and well-being of the ACEH community by serving as a meaningful opportunity for the Indigenous Street Family to recognize and embrace their inherent connection to the broader community. Through strategic collaboration with local nations and Elders, the ACEH has helped to facilitate a cultural reawakening for Family Members, rekindling essential but dormant skills. This project has not only supported ACEH's food sovereignty practices, fostering stability, but also allowed us to share cherished traditional foods such as smoked and jarred fish, jams, and cultural feasts with the wider community.

The on-going implementation of these programs has nurtured a sense of community among Family Members, who have participated in the programming. This consistent engagement has, in turn, created an environment allowing an opportunity for inter-generational relationship building with the ACEH cohort members.

We look forward to continuing practicing these skills that have been shared to us by community members, to continue to participate in seasonal and traditional food harvesting, processing and preserving methods. This work has allowed the ACEH to find an other level of autonomy regarding access to food and an opportunity to support the community around us.

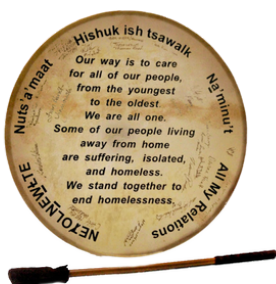


Lessons Learned

This project has highlighted the importance of gathering in community and passing down lessons that support the on-going resilience of food sovereignty and security within our housing sites, programming, ceremonies and cohorts. The main lessons that have been shared and reflected upon, is to continue this programming as a seasonal and continued offering to the Family Members that the ACEH works with.

It leads us to look deeper into food security, to lift the Family Members up by allowing them to share their knowledge and skill sets and to offer a program for those skills to shine. We look forward to offering opportunities such as hunting and animal processing in the future.

Contact Information



“Our way is to care for all our people, from the youngest to the oldest. We are all one. Some of our people living away from home are suffering, isolated, and homeless. We stand together to end homelessness.”

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