



# Social Planning Cowichan

2023 Annual CVRD Report

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Social Planning Cowichan (SPC) is a registered charitable society founded in May 2004 as a function of the CVRD. Its goal is to provide leadership in identified areas, bring people together to learn and work towards creating quality of life for people in the Cowichan Region.

SPC is guided by a volunteer Board of Directors with a dedicated staff of community development professionals who work to engage the expertise that exists within the Cowichan Region. We provide the region with skilled facilitators, researchers and community development leaders who come together to collaborate and take action to meet identified needs throughout the Cowichan Region.

Public Benefit: Social Planning Cowichan fills a unique role in the Cowichan community, facilitating relationships, providing research, planning, facilitation and project development outside of the mandate of other organizations. In addition, Social Planning Cowichan brings people together to educate, plan, implement and improve the social determinants of health for the community

In 2008 Social Planning Cowichan was gifted the work of Cultural Connections as a legacy from the 2008 Cowichan North American Indigenous Games. This included the continuation of co-hosting the annual Walk of Nations for ten years, generating opportunities for cross cultural bridge building and learning, between First Nations and non First Nations community members and fulfilling the legacy projects as outlined by CC's Elders Counsel. Cultural Connections as formed its own Indigenous run organization that is projected to be independent from SPC by 2026.

In 2023, the funding assisted us in leveraging over 450,000 in additional funding to support the community benefit work that Social Planning provides for the Cowichan Region. These include funds from the Real Estate Board of BC, UBCM poverty reduction,(Lake Cowichan and Ladysmith Poverty Reduction), fees for workshops (Cultural Connections), Service Canada (Cultural Connections), BC Gaming ( Cultural Connections). These funds provided employment for 3 part time positions (ED, Project Director, and Administrative Assistant), 5 full time position (Cultural Connections Director and Cultural Connections Youth Leads), practicum interns/students. In addition this funding went to a number of contract positions: videograoher, communications, researchers and facilitation team members for cultural connections (15 contract positions).



Cowichan

# Living Wage

## Core Activities

2023

Everyone  
deserves a  
Living Wage

Since 2014, Social Planning Cowichan has calculated the Living Wage for our region, as part of the provincial campaign and in partnership with Living Wage for Families BC. The goal of the living wage campaign is to promote social health and sustainability; it is designed to enhance the long-term well-being of the employee, as well as that of one's family and community. At the current minimum wage of \$16.75/hour, there are thousands of families in British Columbia who are living below the poverty line. For families, this means children are unable to live a stable lifestyle due to frequent movement and the resulting lack of continuity in their education and with friends. Moreover, parents are forced to work more at lower wages, leading to less time spent with their children.

What is it?

Simply stated, a living wage is the hourly rate of pay one must earn in order to ensure the cost of basic necessities are consistently covered, including food, clothing, rental housing, transportation, childcare (in the case of families), and a small amount of savings for illness or emergencies. While a conservative figure representing a "bare minimum" of what a family would need to earn in order to cover a modest amount of expenses, the determination of a living wage is consistent in encouraging local employers to offer rates of pay significantly higher than the provincially mandated minimum wage to provide for greater financial stability and a way to avoid the cycle of living paycheque-to-paycheque.

**Social Benefit:** *As a poverty reduction tool, a living wage has the effect of leading to better overall health and wellbeing not just for families and individuals, but for the social health of communities as a whole.*



Increase since 2022

**\$25.20**

Living Wage For Cowichan 2023

"I want people to imagine what it would be like to live on a couple of dollars a day after basic expenses are paid our like rent and food . That's the reality facing thousands of people in our community."

LW Cowichan Feedback

Year	Living Wage	Percent change from previous
2014	\$17.04	n/a
2015	\$17.50	+ 3.0%
2016	\$18.81	+ 7.2%
2017	\$19.05	+ 1.3%
2018	\$18.18	- 4.6%
2019	\$18.15	- .02%
2020	(Not calculated due to COVID-19)	n/a
2021	\$19.13	+ 5.4%
2022	\$23.53	+ 20.6%
2023	\$25.20	+ 7.1%

The 2023 Living Wage report shows that the Cowichan living wage family has to spend over \$3780 more than last year for the same basket of goods. While parents with young children in licensed child care have benefitted from large fee reductions this year, the savings are entirely consumed by soaring prices in other areas. Housing costs alone demand an added \$312.73 per month from their budget—a spike of 17.6%. Food, the second most expensive item in the living wage family budget, is an extra \$74.36 per month, soaring by 6.1 percent this year.

On paying a living wage, Ellen Pেকেles, the Senior Vice President of Operations at Vancity—BC’s largest living wage employer—says, “If both parents in a family are working full-time, their children should not be living in poverty. Just as we consider our environmental footprint, it’s our hope that more BC employers will consider their social and economic impact and pay their employees a living wage.”

*Presently, the Cowichan Region is home to only 8 certified Living Wage employers, who have committed to pay all staff and contract workers a living wage of \$25.20.*

# Community Snapshots

Our series of community snapshot reports provide an overview of the status of our community and trends over time throughout our region, highlight what we have achieved, and identify areas of concern for us to come together and address. These reports are living documents and are updated on an ongoing basis as new information is released on the different topic areas. The principles that guide this work are defined in the Earth Charter and the Social Determinants of Health.

Every five years a new version of Community Snapshots are developed following the release of Statistics Canada data capture. We have been working throughout 2023 conducting community research and preparing for the release of our fully redesigned series of snapshots beginning in the early spring of 2024.



**HOUSING OUR PEOPLE**

Housing is a top concern for many Cowichan Valley residents. To be considered affordable, individuals or families must allocate less than 30% of their total income towards housing costs, yet this is not realistic for many. There is currently not enough affordable housing for people who work and want to live in the Cowichan Region. While migration to the region has increased in the last five years, the availability of affordable housing has not.

In fact, the benchmark price of a single family home has increased by 115% since 2017. This is directly connected to current labour supply challenges as employers struggle to attract and retain employees who cannot find an affordable place to live. Most simply, decent housing fulfills the basic human need for shelter but it also contributes to the mental and physical well-being of families and communities. Affordable housing creates employment opportunities, frees up income to be spent on dental and vision care, provides stability for children who can live at a fixed address, and fosters a sense of belonging.



**ENVIRONMENT**

The natural beauty of the Cowichan Region is undeniable. While doing community outreach, many community members mentioned how the scenic views and serenity of nature is what they love most about living in the Cowichan Region. In order to make sure the beautiful land remains beautiful, we must address many of the environmental concerns that are facing the region such as drought, extreme heat and flooding. The Cowichan Region is known for working together to face challenges while building community and resiliency. There are many organizations committed to addressing the needs of local climate change through a number of collaborative initiatives.



**OUR PEOPLE**

Demographic data helps us understand who makes up our community. Characteristics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, marital status, education, household size, and income give us a picture of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. Comparing historical statistics to current data allows us to understand social and economic trends. This is crucial for making predictions about the potential demands of the future and what kinds of services will be of increased importance. Ultimately, understanding these trends strengthens community resilience as understanding who we are and articulating what our needs are helps us to use available resources to respond to current and future challenges.



**What's Next?**

In carrying forward with this work, Social Planning is now in the early stages of creating and implementing an interactive regional reporting database. This database will serve as a centralized platform to store, compile, and visually showcase data and reports published by SPC, community organizations and other community and stakeholder groups. Through this, we hope to become a “hub” of local and regional information, making it easier for the public and other organizations to access and interpret.

# Poverty Reduction

Everyone deserves a chance to *thrive*

After completing their Poverty Reduction Strategies, Social Planning Cowichan continued to work directly with the Town of Ladysmith and the Town of Lake Cowichan who were both successful in applying for stream 2 funds from the Poverty Reduction Planning & Action Grants through the Union of BC Municipalities. This funding was designated towards completing selected actions identified in each of their strategies.

Each project began with strengthening their respective working/task groups, made up of various community organizations, partners, volunteers and peers (people with lived experience).

Actions that took place in Ladysmith and Stz'uminus through the Town of Ladysmith's Community Together To End Poverty Hw-nuts'-ulwum (as one) project included:

- Weekly food delivery from the Ladysmith Resources Centre Association's (LRCA) Food Bank to Elders and Families in need through the Stz'uminus Health Centre,
- The Fruit Rescue project which harvested and distributed 5500 lbs. of free locally grown fruit & vegetables to residents in need.
- An After-School Nutritious Snack Program pilot feeding 122-140 children for 14 weeks through 4 different organizations.
- The Neighbours Sharing Food Fair with information booths sharing education on growing, cooking and preserving healthy, locally grown food. Participants also shared a free meal, watched a cooking demonstration, attended a workshop on urban gardening & received healthy food giveaways.
- Two Cultural Awareness Workshops where residents, neighbours and employers/ employees attended the Journey of Our Generation and/or the Understanding Systemic Racism workshops.
- Two Dinner, Film & Dialogue events, Understanding Poverty and Understanding Food Equity.



**Community benefit:** poverty reduction plans provide substantial public benefits by fostering economic growth, social stability, improved health and education outcomes, reduced inequality, increased consumer spending, improved mental health, enhanced social mobility, and community empowerment. These benefits contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of the entire community.

# Positive Impacts

Created Community Connections & Social Inclusion

Increased Access to Free, Healthy & Nutritious Food Leading to Improved Health & Immunity, Mental Clarity & Participation

Building Empathy & Compassion for Others

Building Stronger Relationships with Community Organizations & Project Partners

New Learning & Understanding of the Local Impacts of poverty on Family, Friends & Neighbours

Increased Motivation for Contributing Towards Community Action and Volunteering

Skill Development Around Growing, Cooking & Preserving Food

Generating New Ideas and Identifying Priorities for Future Action!

Actions that took place in Lake Cowichan through the Town of Lake Cowichan's Moving' On Up Poverty Reduction Strategy included:

- Hosting an information table about the project at Cowichan Lake Community Society's Open House and Summer BBQ.
- Facilitation of twelve free community workshops on topics including Stone Soup Cooking class, Bike Repair, Residential Tenancy Law in BC, Basic First Aid and others.
- Organized two Neighbour to Neighbour Town Share Free Store Events, collecting & sorting community donations for free pick up with community information booths, a free lunch and food giveaways. A third event outside of the scope of the budgeted project, also took place on December 14, 2023 alongside CLCS' Christmas Hamper distribution day.
- A Neighbour to Neighbour Town Share page was created on Facebook where people can share skills/goods/services/tools, employment or rental opportunities, garden space, ride sharing, etc.
- A Peer Community Gardens project supported two community members with a regular honorarium to manage CLCS' new gardens. They then used the produce to cook and serve the free Community Luncheon and manage their satellite reFRESH market, both held two days a week.



# Cultural Connections

## History

Since the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), hosted by Cowichan Tribes in 2008, Social Planning Cowichan has hosted the Cultural Connections Program. Led by a group of Quw'utsun' Elders the program provides opportunities to build relationships and bridges between First Nations and non-First Nations communities within the Cowichan valley. The Games were the first time that many non-First Nations people in the community became aware of the enormity of the social, economic and cultural divide that exists in the region. From this point forward we began the journey of Nuts'amaat Shqwaluwun – working together with one heart and one mind.



Since NAIG, the Elders have developed a unique and highly impactful experiential workshop called Reconciliation: The Journey of our Generation. This cultural workshop builds a village pre-contact, sharing cultural values and teachings, then takes the village through the impacts of 150 years of colonial history. The Cultural Connection program also offers cultural experiences such as cedar weaving, canoe journeys, school art mural projects, Hul'q'umi'num language classes and longhouse gatherings. This unique group of Elders have inspired over 18,000 people in Cowichan, from school students to local politicians across our region, to take action in their personal and professional lives to address systemic racism where they can.

During the pandemic, Cultural Connections Elder team turned their attention to establishing an Indigenous-led non-profit organization to hold their work and the Quw'utsun' Cultural Connections Society (QCCS) was registered. QCCS's mission is to live the vision of Snuw'uy'ulh, the sacred laws that guide all aspects of life for the Quw'utsun; hwulmuhw. This will be done through generations healing the past for the generations yet to come. Social Planning Cowichan continues to support this work while the new organization becomes established over the next few years.





# Goals of QCCS

- To confront and eradicate the current reality of systemic racism and the impacts of colonization
- To understand the grief and loss that social and climate injustices bring to culture and identity
- To connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures locally
- To reclaim the innocence of children, the gifts of adulthood and the wisdom of elders
- To weave our story of a just and equitable future that is guided by Indigenous principles



**Quw'utsun' Cultural  
Connections Society**

## Community Benefit:

- By engaging community members in collaborative efforts, these projects strengthen social bonds and create a sense of unity.
- Prioritization of sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. This approach not only benefits the local environment but also contributes to global efforts to address climate change and promote ecological sustainability.
- Preservation and revitalization of cultural practices, languages, and traditions. This helps strengthen the cultural identity of the community, fostering a sense of pride and continuity.
- Contribution to broader societal goals of inclusivity and diversity
- Provide platforms for Indigenous voices to lead the conversations, education and teaching of history .
- Inspire a sense of shared purpose and contribute to a collective commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

# Legacy Projects

## Xpey'–Cedar

This project is taking actions to mitigate the loss of Xpey' (Cedar), a cultural keystone species, that is threatened by climate change and decades of forest harvesting and management regimes.

We are engaging youth and Elders to revitalize traditional cultural practices for the stewardship and use of Xpey' through reconnecting youth to cultural knowledge and teachings about the land.

### A brief overview of selected Activities:

- Hosted a gathering of Elders, knowledge keepers, western scientists and legal experts to share cultural, scientific and legal knowledge about Xpey'.
- Hosted Xpey' family planting days to involve Quw'utsun' and non-Indigenous families in restoring Xpey' ecosystems.
- Co-hosted Xpey' project launch and fundraiser at the HUB
- Researched legal and governance models from leading land trusts and conservation organisations to guide the establishment of a land trust to protect mature Xpey' stands on private lands.



# Th-uit [Truth]

A multi-media, immersive installation version of the Journey of our Generation workshop. Stories are shared in both a walk-through multimedia timeline exhibit and a 3-hour digital media immersive experience. The exhibit launched in the fall of 2022 with its first run for 3 weeks in the Cowichan Region. Over 2023 we focused on further development of phase 2 of this project to be tested June of 2024

A brief overview of selected Activities:

- Interviewed and documented Quw'utsun' Elders' and knowledge keepers' life stories and cultural teachings.
- Broadened the reach of the Thu-it stories and incorporated further historical research for the next version of the exhibit that will be hosted on Saltspring Island in 2024.
- Development of an online learning component and completion certification
- Developed scripts and design for a series of animated short films to share cultural teachings and stories about Xpey' (cedar).



2023 included...

32

Workshops

19

Events

2000

Participants

# 2024 *A few highlights for the year ahead*



- Spring 2024 release Community Snapshots
- Annual calculation and reporting of Cowichan Regional Living Wage
- Develop an online interactive research HUB and public awareness campaign of local data
- Continue to work with the Town of Ladysmith on a series of four Employers Seminars, four community-wide Dinner & Dialogues and a minimum of twelve Food Equity Workshops
- Complete a community engagement process on a transportation feasibility study to explore innovative public transportation options for residents in the Ladysmith and Stz'uminus areas.
- Host a series of region-wide community dialogues and poverty challenges followed by a debrief breakfast.
- Continue to offer Reconciliation: Journey of our Generation workshops for the general public, community organizations and School District 79 teachers, staff & Grade 10 students.
- Continue to develop video, audio and written stories for Thuit identify a permanent location to house Thuit installation in the Cowichan Region.
- Develop and publish an online training platform for Thuit
- Re-establish Cowichan 101 outreach and activities
- Host a 2 week exhibit of the next phase of Thuit in June in partnership with Stqeeye' Learngin Centre
- Complete digital animation and premiere a series of animation shorts on cultural teachings & stories related to Xpey'.
- Establish a Quw'utsun land trust according to snuw'uy'uih with an Indigenous Advisory Council to guide the work.
- Engage Quw'utsun' families and members, non-Indigenous fee simple landowners, local politicians and planners, and conservation organizations in Xpey' cedar restoration activities.
- Secure a parcel of land through QCCS to establish a memorial forest that grounds and holds the healing vision for this work and honours the children who did not return from residential schools.
- Unify conservation organizations in the region to support a common vision to restore and protect xpey' and other cultural values.