

SOCIAL PLANNING COWICHAN

ANNUAL REPORT

2021



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present the 2021 annual report of Social Planning Cowichan (SPC) which reflects the success of the SPC team in the realization of the Cultural Connections program, the collection of invaluable socio-economic data on COVID-19 impacts, and the beginnings of the visioning process for the Cowichan Valley until 2050. It's also been great to see the tremendous work done by staff on poverty reduction projects in partnership with local governments.

It is community-based projects like these as well as Social Planning Cowichan's organizational incubation successes that underscore how vital this organization is to the region.

Having participated in a recent workshop hosted by Cultural Connections, I came to understand that reconciliation means nothing less than the re-evaluation of Western values and social structures. As much as informing the public and policy-makers through research will continue to be an essential part of Social Planning Cowichan's future, it is the conversations that we'll be having around the social, economic, political and cultural changes that are needed which I am looking forward to the most.

Michael Lait, PhD
Chair, SPC



MICHAEL LAIT

BOARD CHAIR | SOCIAL PLANNING COWICHAN



*"The spirit of service
is the soul of
belonging."*

— Lailah Gifty Akita

2021 HIGHLIGHTS



Poverty is a cross cutting theme between all social issues in our communities and living in poverty is much more than simply not having enough money to make ends meet. It affects where a person lives, what we eat, what we can do, how we get around and how we cope. It causes stress that impacts a person's emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

With provincial funding through UBCM, SPC began to explore what poverty looks like this year for local communities within the Cowichan region through the development of two poverty reduction strategies with the Town of Ladysmith and Stz'uminus First Nation and the Town of Lake Cowichan.

LADYSMITH The **CommUNITY Together to End Poverty - Hw-nuts'-ulwum** project aims to create a solutions-focused approach to reducing poverty in the Ladysmith and Stz'uminus communities. Starting in the winter of 2020 we gathered a working group of community leaders to guide a process to engage the community to understand what those living in poverty were experiencing and what actions are needed to create change. Engagement was done through an online questionnaire, one-on-one interviews with peers and community champions helping to spread the word. We also conducted a series of poverty challenges encouraging those more fortunate to experience what it is like to live on a strict food allowance, rely only on active or public transportation or spend 12 hours out in the community with no where to go. MP Paul Manly and Mayor Stone both took the 12 Hour No Where To Go challenge and shared their experiences over social media. A Poverty Reduction Strategy was created based on the input from that engagement and was endorsed by the Town of Ladysmith Council in September 2021.

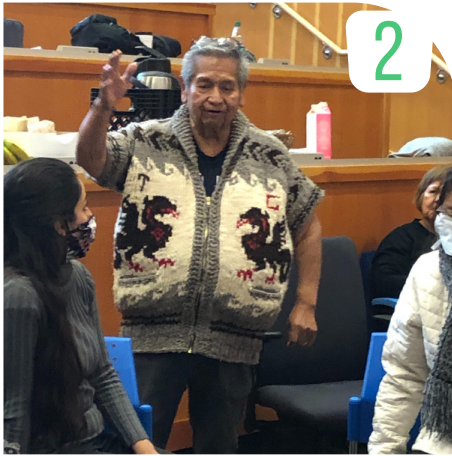


LAKE COWICHAN The **Movin' On Up Cowichan Lake Poverty Reduction** project is a collaboration between the Town of Lake Cowichan, and a diverse working group from agencies across the area. The goal was to engage the public on the impacts of poverty and identify local actions that meet the needs of the Cowichan Lake area residents. Community engagement also involved an online survey, with peers reaching out to do interviews and community champions promoting the project. We hosted a series of virtual community conversations to dig deeper into some of the themes that came up throughout the surveys and hosted presentations to both the Chamber of Commerce and Town Council. A Poverty Reduction Strategy was adopted by the Town of Lake Cowichan Council in August 2021 and actions added to their Strategic Plan.

The next phase for both communities is to turn these strategies into action! Early 2022, we applied for funds to move forward on actions in each strategy. Both communities were successful in receiving funds for another year!

In both communities, the vision is to create communities where everyone feels valued, healthy, supported and connected.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS - CULTURAL CONNECTIONS



2

THU-IT [TRUTH] STARTS WITH THU-ITSTUHW [TELLING THE TRUTH]

For the Quw'utsun' Elders Cultural Connection team, 2021 has been an impactful year, as we took big steps toward realizing the Elders' vision for two legacy projects – Thu-it [Truth] and the Xpey' (Cedar) Project. As we continued to offer Journey of a Generation workshops on zoom and outdoors, the pandemic was an opportunity for a vision to emerge that allows the Elders to have a greater impact with their work.

Thu-it [Truth] will be a multi-media, immersive exhibit based on the Journey of our Generation work. Sharing stories, teachings and history in an interactive multi-media visual and sensory experience, the exhibit will run at the Cowichan Valley Art Council gallery for a month in 2022. Thu-it is designed to feature a walk-through timeline gallery, a 3-hour digital media immersive experience and an Indigenous youth art exhibit using video interviews, photos, graphics and art, all connected through traditional oral storytelling and music. Participants will leave reconsidering history and with a greater understanding that we have much to learn from Indigenous world views, values and ways of knowing. An Indigenous Youth Art exhibit will feature Indigenous excellence and youth expressions of what this era of reconciliation means to their generation. A digital library of video recordings of the Elder's personal stories and cultural teachings will be available for use by generations to come.



XPEY' CEDAR PROJECT

The Quw'utsun' Elders are deeply concerned about scientific projections that suggest that cedar won't survive climate change in 60 years. This has fueled their commitment that 'we won't just stand by and give up'. The Xpey' (Cedar) project is finding ways to protect existing cedar stands on private lands and restore the conditions for cedar ecosystems to thrive through community stewardship and care. A Cedar Forum will bring together those who hold cultural knowledge – weavers, harvesters, carvers and others to document and share. This year, we have begun to research the best tools and approaches for protecting, restoring and providing access to cedar and other Indigenous cultural values on private lands throughout the region.



Stayed tuned in 2022 for all the ways that our communities will be able to participate in Thu-it and the Xpey' project!

2021 HIGHLIGHTS



After a freeze of the Living Wage calculation for the year of 2020 due to the pandemic, 2021 allowed SPC the opportunity to once again join many municipalities across BC as part of the Living Wage for Families campaign. We took steps to determine what rate of pay is necessary for a family of 4 to live comfortably in the Cowichan Region. This year's calculation indicated that two working parents must earn at least **\$19.16** per hour in order to adequately cover the cost of living while raising two children in our region; this is an increase of 5.4% since the previous calculation completed in 2019.

With costs rising at an alarming rate across nearly all aspects of our lives, this year's calculation really highlighted some extra challenges residents of more rural regions like ours face. These include a need for multiple vehicles in order for both parents to be able to get to work, as opposed to larger urban centres where a more robust transit system can allow for greater cost savings. However, we have seen some positive indications from the campaign organizers that future calculations might better take into account these types of differences, and we are hopeful that future calculations might more accurately reflect the situation facing residents of the Cowichan Region. Full Living Wage report can be viewed [here](#).

We want to see more certified Living Wage employers in our region, and challenge all business owners to adopt a living wage policy! To certify as a Living Wage employer, visit [Living Wage for Families BC](#).

2021 saw the release of our second in a series of COVID-19 Snapshots that track the community's reactions to a resurgence of the virus through what we know as the second and third waves. Key insights and observations included a dramatic rise in the cost of food and other essential goods, coping with the return of in-person learning in schools, and restlessness and isolation associated with a return to significant restrictions placed on activities we previously enjoyed. We appreciate the candidness and honesty with which so many residents responded to our surveys, and so many of the personal stories shared were very helpful in understanding and highlighting what our community members were feeling when the crisis was at its worst.

Our third round of surveys, launched in January 2022 at the height of the Omicron wave, is still available as we continue to track the community's COVID-19 story.



CHANGES AT SPC

With a new view in 2021, Social Planning Cowichan moved into our new office space! After nearly a year of working remotely due to the pandemic, it was a great feeling to be back meeting in-person in a refreshing new space in the heart of vibrant Downtown Duncan. Along with this change, we unveiled a brand new logo that you now see across our different platforms and printed media. We feel revitalised and renewed energy with these positive changes in our organisation, and look forward to what the future brings for Social Planning Cowichan.