



COWICHAN TRIBES
Child and Family Wellness
Legislation Project

Community Engagement Summary Notes

Summer 2023



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Introduction – About the Events

Over the summer of 2023, the Cowichan Tribes' Child & Family Wellness Legislation Project Team organized a series of community engagement events. Four community dinners and a family BBQ were hosted at Si'em Lelum Gym and Dining Hall. The other two dinners were hosted in Nanaimo and Victoria for Cowichan citizens living off-reserve. These events follow a series of prior open houses, online engagement sessions, [video interviews](#), and community meetings, during which the project team provided updates and sought community feedback on the proposed Child & Family Wellness law.

The purpose for these dinners was to inform the community about the proposed Child and Family Service Law and the future service delivery model. The gatherings also served as a platform for addressing concerns and answering questions from community.

Members of the project team who attended the events included Addie Price, Kim George, Molly Paige, Patricia Thomas, Robert Morales, Sarah Morales, and Tami Fuson. They took turns presenting and fielding questions. Matthew Louie served as a MC for a number of the events, Roundtable Consulting helped with logistics and Taiji media captured some of the activities on camera.

Elders joined for many of the events as well as members from Chief and Council. Local MP Alistair McGregor attended the BBQ. Combined the events reached approximately 345 Cowichan Tribes Mustimuhw.

Transportation and childcare were offered for all events to ensure accessibility. Each on-reserve event included fun activities for children such as bouncy castles, laser tag, or movie night.

Promotional efforts included outreach through newsletters, Facebook, and event-specific flyers available on the Cowichan Tribes and project website. [Posters](#) with the community dinner schedule were also mailed out to all members living on reserve, including a letter of Chief Lydia Hwitsum encouraging citizens to attend the events. Molly and Matthew reached 1,000 + people via [Facebook Lives](#) inviting people to come out.

The project team provided a variety of materials to facilitate understanding and engagement, including the [Householder \(kitchen table brochure\)](#), [Draft of the Law](#), Event schedule, and the "How Things Will Be Different" [brochure \(Householder #2\)](#). A powerpoint presentation and poster boards were used by the team to facilitate the conversation.

During the presentations, the project team aimed to communicate these **key messages**:



Jurisdiction Transition: Cowichan Tribes will assume jurisdiction over Child and Family services, taking over responsibilities previously held by the province. The focus will be on prevention and keeping Smun’eam (children) with families and in community.

A Law based in our Snuw’uy’ulh (teachings): With the help of our Elders, we’ve developed a law that is deeply based in our cultural teachings and values.

Preventative Focus: Our law will prioritize prevention and community-based solutions, with an emphasis on maintaining children within their families and in community.

Enhanced Funding: We will have more funding for the implementation of services that will enhance the well-being of our families and children.

Upcoming Vote: The community will have the opportunity to vote on the Child and Family Service Law in November 2023, providing a crucial chance for community members to influence the future of our children and families.

Family Champions: The project team is actively seeking individuals who can champion this initiative by helping share information about the new law and the upcoming vote throughout the community.

Questions from community members were noted, answered, and have influenced ongoing negotiations with Canada, as well as the development of our Final law and future policy development.



Event 1 - Community Dinner - July 11, 2023 (5 pm -7 pm), Si'em Lelum Dining Hall.

The first event took place on July 11, 2023 from 5pm -7pm at the Si'em Lelum Dining Hall.

Robert Morales provided an overview of our proposed Law and Addie Price helped to answer questions about the service model. The event was live streamed on Facebook. Elder Whulquletse (Albie Charlie) opened the session with prayer while Addie welcomed everyone.

Approximately 30 people attended, and the children had much fun on the bouncy castle and eating Pizza.



Introductory Notes

- Robert presents on the law (Appendix 1)
 - Brief introduction
 - Agency has grown a lot.
 - It has always been the goal of Cowichan Tribes to have our own Child & Family law.
 - Emphasizes that Lalum'utul' Smun'eem has moved away from removing children from their families
 - Emphasizes that we must vote on the law and the importance of understanding it.
 - We want citizens to have enough information to make an informed decision.
 - Government of Canada and BC has been intervening on how we have been raising our children.
 - Provides explanation of why it is written in legal language.
 - We need to still figure out how to reunify children that have been placed outside of community.
 - **Our Law won't be able to change everything, but it sets the foundation for change.**

Comments & questions from audience and answers

- ***What is the difference between the law now and in the future?***
 - Cowichan law will become part of the legal system of Canada and BC.
 - It is not going to apply to anyone but Cowichan people. It will be enforceable in BC & Canada.
- ***Our people need to heal from grief. Is there going to be a healing process for the Nation? We are potentially having unhealed people in leadership deal with our***
 - Our law is based on prevention and is intended to strengthen our families, and provide supports to help heal those who need it.

- **How is Cowichan Tribes going to know that a family needs support?**
 - Gone are the days we are removing children from the community because of poverty.
 - Real work will come from keeping children in the family.
 - We have the lowest number of children in care today. In the past three years, Lalum'utul' Smun'eem supported the return of 33 children to their families, and since October 2021, no children have been removed by the agency.
 - We don't want this to be lip service. It is Cowichan law. We are all accountable not just our Child & Family agency to look after our children.
 - We are advocating for more homes, services, community, healing, help in our negotiations with the government.
- **Is there going to be equality between Cowichan and Lalum'utul' Smun'eem to avoid discrimination.**
 - Law has provisions for accountability.
 - The proposed governance structure in the law prevents a preferential system from being established.
- **How are we able to look after children if we don't have homes?**
 - Housing is the biggest concern.
 - When we move to our own law, we can think about housing outside the box.
 - We are working on a capital ask that includes housing and supportive housing. But Canada is not prepared to deal with First Nation housing issues.
 - Addie gives examples of places that already have been created (Youth Pod housing) – and that there will be more in the future. We are advocating for more.
 - We are pushing the government as hard as we can.
 - Suggestion: We need to open doors for people who are willing to look after our children. Rules need to be relaxed. I.e. smaller mortgages, payments. Exercise that right.
 - Suggestion: Encourage Government/Provincial government to think outside the box for housing. I.e. office spaces.
 - Suggestion: Approach BC Housing for properties available– those properties should come to this program to expand the ability for families to take in children.
 - Audience member mentions the initiative to get settlement money to bring safe drinking water to community and build more housing. Infrastructure is being worked on.
 - Comments on housing: We live in a different time that we grew up in. Children might stay with us until they 30-40 because people can't find home, Grandparents are looking after kids because they have the stable homes. We are looking at three generations living together in one house.
- Expressed concern that Chief and Council is not in the room.
- A Councillor speaks in response to the lack of presence of Council.



- **What percentage of Kinship are you looking at?**
 - Government of Canada says: it is up to Cowichan to define who your children are.
- **I should not have to deal with more than one agency if it is a mixed family!**
 - We will have Nation to Nation agreements. If the other Nation does not have a law, the Nation with the law has first priority.
 - We need to enter into many protocol agreements with other Nations if kids are registered with another Nation but living on Cowichan.
 - Suggestion: Can other agency respect our law? - Cowichan law will prevail over Canada/Provincial law. We can't override other First Nations.
- **What happens to the rights of a non-Cowichan caregiver under this law?**
 - Agency would still respect that they are the caregiver if they are a significant person in the children's life.
 - Our policies will outline how to address these situations.
- **Will policies be able to be reviewed before the vote? How do we vote on the law if we don't know the policies?**
 - The law needs to be finalized before policies are being developed, as it provides the basis for developing policies and regulations. But we will start working on them soon.



Event 2-Community Dinner - July 24, 2023 (5 pm -7 pm), Si'em Lelum Dining Hall.

The second event was hosted on July 24, 2023 from 5pm -7pm at the Si'em Lelum Dining Hall

After an opening by prayer offered by Chief Lydia Hwitsum, Robert Morales continued his presentation of the Law. Addie Price and Chief Lydia Hwitsum helped answer questions from the audience. The event was again live streamed on Facebook.

Approximately 45 people came to share a meal and hear about the proposed law. Kids played laser tag and ate hotdogs in the gym.

Introductory Notes

Chief Lydia Hwitsum

- We knew how to have strong families.
- This is a big opportunity for us – here is the way our law needs to work, on how we deal with the well-being of our families.
- I have confidence in our Cowichan Mustimuhw to take back responsibility for our people and to do a better job than the government.

- Robert M.:

- Recap from last June 12 meeting.
- No boundary – our Cowichan Law will apply to all families across Canada. However the initial service delivery area will be Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.
- Guiding principles are the most important piece of the law (See Appendix).
- We have been working with Elders to capture these Principles and it has been difficult to put them into the law.
- The cultural principles we are talking about is love. Current Child & Family legislation does not mention love.
- Slide: Principles
 - These are our guiding Principles – our social workers are asked to adhere to them.
 - They form the foundation of what we do. If a lawyer/judge gets involved – these are principles they should be familiar with. This is the cultural piece of the law. They are the mandate. They will determine what's in the best interest of the child.
 - We're adding in there that the need for children to know their identity. The ability to learn their language, to have access to their ceremonial entitlements, to maintain kinship connections, what is child preference if they are old enough, identity and kinship connections.
- Reviews placement priorities.
- Raises the question from last session about housing challenges – he ensures audience that they are bringing it to the negotiation table.



- Children going outside of community we hope will not happen, but we have to work on preventing it.
- Cultural continuity is a big part of the agreement with the province. Details have to get worked out. We want to make sure that children are further a way from home can maintain a connection to our community. That is how the model is designed.
- Lalum'utul' Smun'eem will do what they can to support the family.
- **Slide: Minimum Standards**
 - We have to consider what's in the federal law. But we are adding our own requirements.
 - 'Active efforts' means that you have to be doing something.
 - Grandparents should be included. Again, we are embedding it in the law that this has to happen. Band designated representative may be doing it.
 - Elders committee – to be involved to making sure culture is part of the work.
 - Child blanketing committee.
 - Cowichan has several departments – each one of these departments has something to offer- this is providing opportunity for collaboration.
- Prevention dollars are based on each person. A challenge will be is to serve people off-reserve. How do we deliver prevention services to a family living in Alberta, and what kind of services?
- Chief closes the evening and thanks audience for raising questions.

Comments & questions from audience and answers

- ***What if there is an agency that is already servicing our family?***
 - Under the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) – a social worker gets involved with Cowichan family in Victoria then contacts Cowichan Tribes. Cowichan Tribes say yes and starts supporting the family.
- ***Can a Cowichan Tribes member opt out of Cowichan law?*** (As parent we get a choice – it is our right to opt out.)
 - Our law applies to all our families, irrespective of where they live.
 - Our agency will have the right to be involved in decisions being made for a family and to work with social workers who are dealing with a family, and make sure if children want a connection back to home, that is provided.
 - LS has returned over 30 children to their families since 2020. Our jurisdiction model is prevention focused. We are no longer bringing children into care if we don't have to.
 - Should families be able to opt out, that is a big question. We are working out the details.
- ***Will this reach across the border?***



- It may be possible to negotiate protocols in the future. We have had some discussion with US authorities in the past, there is a willingness to do that.
- ***How are these systems going to be streamlined so children don't pay the price?***
 - Removal is the last resort. If in immediate danger, we have to intervene.
 - Model based on prevention – our Child and Family agency will try everything to keep children with family.
 - Local judge will try to have a very fast turnaround. The mandate to the social workers is that this (our law) is a different approach.
- ***Do you need a board of director and Chief and Council?***
 - Yes. Chief and Council are the government. Board of directors will work with the agency. Different line of duties that the two entities will have.
- ***Will there be policies for Board of Director? The information is hard to understand without the policies.***
 - The law provides the framework. Next step is to develop policies and regulations.
- ***Will policies be done before the law gets voted on?***
 - Some of it, not all.
 - Regulation & policies must be consistent with the law. That's why we need the law first – it guides development of policies and regulations.
- ***There is nothing in the law that pertains to youth.***
 - There are provisions for youth service in the draft law and we are negotiating support services for youth.
- ***Example of audience member – grandma took children in without written agreement.***
 - Verbal agreements are built in the law. Families can take things into their own hands. Agency is there as a support.
- ***Will there be wrap around services?***
 - Yes, service delivery model is being worked on. Negotiations are happening with government for significantly more resources for our prevention-based service delivery.
- ***What about families that have children with special needs?***
 - One of the pieces in the law is on substantial equality – but we need to work on it.
 - We need to have resources to train families who have children with special needs.
 - We are also negotiating extra funding for assessment and support.
- ***Will there be someone in places where kids can go? (i.e. auntie, male role model)***
 - Important to remember – this is Cowichan People's law. We all carry responsibility for our families and children
 - It is something that could be developed.
 - The more we hear from community the more we can take into consideration.
 - We are among the First Nations in BC doing this. It is brand new.
 - Cowichan Tribes people have a voice.
- ***What if Chief and Council wants changes?***
 - This is not a Chief & Council Law, but a Cowichan Law.

- The Law is constant & binding. Future Councils cannot change it arbitrarily once it is voted on by community.
- **Will there be any services available for all community members?**
 - Chief: we want to build support for all families.
 - We want to get away from the fear that was established under MCFD rules – it was a way for them to insert themselves into our families.
 - We have not had prevention dollars. It is only the second year we have had some funding for prevention.
 - You can access prevention services without having an open file or worry about losing your children.
 - Prevention programs will be open to all families.
- Audience member comments Lalum'utul' Smun'eem and that it is great to see that Aboriginal women are leading the agency!
 - It is a tough job. You never going to please very one. They are trying to change things.
 - Audience member encourages citizens to ask questions and for the project team to take the time to answer.
 - Acknowledgement that the Chief is here. Very grateful.



Event 3 - Community Dinner – August 8, 2023 (5 - 7:30 pm), Si'em Lelum Dining Hall.

The third event at Si'em Lelum Dining Hall took place on August 8, 2023, from 5pm -7.30pm. This time the focus was on the future child & family service model under the proposed Law. The evening began with a presentation by the project team on the principals that are guiding the law, what will be different under the Cowichan jurisdiction, and the service model. Afterwards the group broke into to two groups for more intimate conversations about the Law.



Approximately 20 citizens attend the meeting, along with 30 children.

Two people signed up to be community champions.

Introductory Notes

- Presentations were guided by the poster boards (Appendix 1) – Principles, What will be different & Service Model
- 3 x Breakout rooms (note takers: Sebastian, Clarissa, Rosanne)

- Breakout Group notes from Clarissa
 - Kids are influenced by technology today.
 - We are protective of the Cowichan language and Cowichan word.
 - Practice pronunciation (with Auntie Wilma).
 - I didn't want my children go to public school.
 - Bring culture, spirit – everything to the child.



Comments & questions from audience and answers

- ***What is the age for the group home – is it for youth or is it for young families?***
 - Currently it is youth 12+
- ***Does the jurisdiction apply for all of Cowichan Tribes members?***
 - All Cowichan children – we will deliver services on Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands and once we build our capacity then we are going to expand.
- ***What would it mean if one parent is Cowichan and one isn't?***
 - Currently it is defined that it is a child under 19 who has membership or is entitled to membership.
 - A Cowichan child would receive services from us.
 - Collaborative processes with other Nations for inter-marriage families.
 - Another may be born and raised in Cowichan but are registered somewhere else – we will work close with that First Nation to provide services.
- ***If a child has been in care for 3 years- do they get adopted out?***
 - There is no adoption provisions in our law.
 - We never will try to sever the relationship.
 - We have returned children – even to one parent.
- ***If a child needs to be assessed for disability or referral is needed who do they see?***
 - We will contract someone to do assessments – that is something we are working on – we are asking for funding to have it done for our children.
- ***Who are the elders who were part of the process?***
 - Many Elders have lent their voice and shared teaching to develop the law including late Ramona Williams, late Wes Modest, late Violet Charlie, late Esther Bear, late Eliza Jack, late Philomena & Dennis Alphonse, Ruby Peter, Abner Thorne, Ben Canute, Arvid Charlie, Elise, Philomena Williams, Andrew Canute, Wayne Paige Sr., Molly Paige, Diane Modeste, Albie Charlie, Cal Swustus Sr, Francine Alphonse, Mabel Antoine, Lauraine Charlie, Ernie Elliott, Dora Wilson.



- **What do you plan to do to creatively nourish people – writing books, writing poems, from children?**
 - 2 Christmas’s ago we did a creative opening asking the question: What can adults do to help you feel safe and cared for? Children were encouraged to respond through art and videos. Some responses are included in our [Brochure \(Householder #1\)](#)
 - We are working on something more graphically right now to help people understand our Law.
- **How long has this project been going on and how has the community been involved?**
 - Early work by Cowichan Tribe on child protection services began in 1976 when the community saw its first dedicated social worker focused on child welfare. In 1999, Cowichan Tribes Chief and Council passed a resolution expressing the community’s desire to lead its own child and family wellness services and affirming its inherent right to do so. Shortly afterwards, we began working in earnest, laying the groundwork for the day when we could write our own law focusing on prevention, protection, and culture. In 2020 we signalled our intention to pursue our own jurisdiction and a project team was established in 2021. Five sub-committees with membership consisting of Elder, community, youth and technical experts. Sub-committees and community working groups continue to meet regularly to advance this work. More than 15 community events have been hosted since 2021 to get feedback from community on the law and to keep people updated on the progress.
- **How are you going to get everyone to vote?**
 - We are actively looking for Community Champions that will share information about our Cowichan Tribes Child & Family Services Law and encourage citizens to **VOTE**. We will be going door-to-door and speaking to community members. We will also mailout a voting package with information on our Law, and will host more dinners (Nov. 10, 16, 23 from 5pm-7pm at Si’em Lelum Dining Hall) where citizens can also get help with online voting. Online voting starts on **November 10th** and in-person voting is on **NOVEMBER 24th, 2023** (8am-8pm at Si’um Lelum Dining Hall). Transportation will be provided (250-746-1002).
- **I'm concerned about evictions in the Community. There's a family that's been there for 10 years and they're being evicted. Why is this happening?**
 - Our goal is to help families, and to ensure that poverty is never a reason for evictions or for children being separated from their families. This is not something that our Child and Family Services department is doing. It may be another department within Cowichan Tribes. Members would need to look into that situation as we are not familiar with it.
- **We would like there to be a youth centre, where families can access for cultural work and make sure our youth are not on the streets doing drugs. Will this happen?**
 - Yes, there is funding in our ‘capital ask’ for a new youth centre. We will be working with other departments like the housing and health departments (Ts’ewulhtun Health Centre) to help build a youth centre for Cowichan Tribes. And we also offer cultural programming and wish to grow this, including drumming, singing, youth culture camps, and more.
- **Until what age can we access support?**
 - Government usually provides support till the age of 19, but over the years we have seen this is not working. We aim to extend **post-majority** support until the age of 27.

Participant Comments

- Couple meetings ago – someone said why doesn't Lalum'utul' Smun'eem have Elders share rites of passage to children because we are so limited to that knowledge and be able to have someone walk them through that situation.
- There is so much paperwork. Too much when working with the agency!
- Is foster care really safe for our kids? Lalum'utul' Smun'eem did put my kid in a drug house to live in and their kids didn't get taken away. Social workers need to be checking the places and how they live.
- Concerns about Lalum'utul' Smun'eem practices under current law and how families have been treated by the agency. No matter how many hoops people jumped through they never were getting their children back.



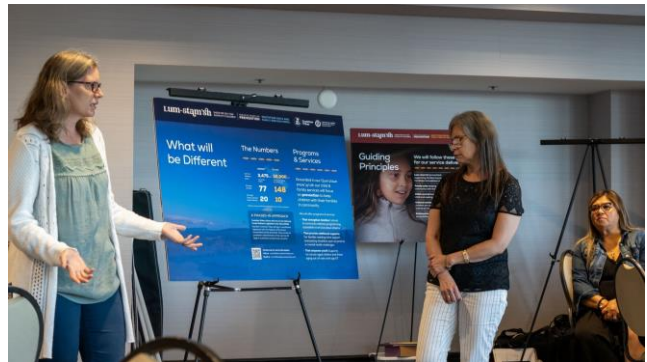
Event 4 – Off-Reserve Community Dinner – August 10, 2023 (5 pm - 7:30 pm), Coast Bastion Hotel, Snuneymuxw territory (Nanaimo BC).

Introductory Notes

On August 10, 2023, the project team travelled to Nanaimo, where they hosted a dinner at the Coast Bastion Hotel from 5pm –7pm. Approximately twelve (12) participants attended, namely nine adults and three children.

Comments & questions from audience and answers

- **Will supports be available to members off island?**
 - Yes ... all over Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. We will come to you as needed.
- **Will there be someone who can explain to our members what all the forms mean? Many times we sign documents and don't know what they mean – like our parents did before in the old days.**
 - This is a great suggestion, and we will work on training our social workers so they can clearly explain all steps in a process to the citizens we serve.
- **Will moms have support in the house including those suffering with addiction instead of losing our children? It's so hard to lose our kids and it takes a long time to get them back.**
 - Yes, we are looking at models with supportive housing where support is brought into the house or a living community, where mom or dad can get treatment and support and still be in their kids' lives.
- **The Law talks a lot about getting support for parents from their families, but what if we don't have any family members to help?**
 - We have a 'family finder' that helps with genealogy and connecting Cowichan Tribes members with extended family they may not be aware of, so they can learn more about who they are, who their grandparents and great-grandparents were, etc. And if there isn't family around, the agency will have Elders who can help provide some advice or assistance.



Participants Comments

- Elders may not know how to read because of residential schools, and they feel shame, so it's important to go talk with them in person to explain what is going on. So they can come out and vote on the law.

We are very grateful that Cowichan Tribes came to Nanaimo to meet with us members, that rides were provided. Keep up this important work for our children and families!



Event 5 – Off-Reserve Community Dinner – August 16, 2023 (5 pm - 7:00 pm), Songhees Wellness Centre (Victoria, BC)

Introductory Notes

On August 10, 2023, the project team presented at the Songhees Wellness Centre in Victoria from 5pm-7pm. Approximately 20 adults and 10 children from the greater Victoria area joined. The project team used the poster boards to present on the Principles that are guiding our Law, what will be different under Cowichan jurisdiction, and the service model.



Comments & questions from audience and answers

- ***Will there be separate meetings for Chief and Council to deal with Child and Family matters once we take on jurisdiction?***
 - There are currently six councillors who are working closely on this work with the two legal counsels, and some Council meetings have a portion dedicated to this work. In the future Council will be “arms’ length” and not involved in the daily operations of the agency to avoid conflicts of interest so the workload should remain similar. There will also be training provided for members of Chief and Council so they can take on this new responsibility.
- ***Is there an intention to detach from the Indian Act and Indigenous Services Canada? Or just separate governance pieces like Children and Families?***
 - Yes, our Nation is also working on a treaty, but this is taking more time. So instead of waiting for the overall process to be finalized which could take years and will depend on the wish of citizens, we are focusing on taking over governance in specific areas such as lands (Tumuhw), Education jurisdiction and now Children and Family Services.
- ***Will this be open to all families, including off-reserve?***
 - Yes, services will be provided off-reserve on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. We will also look to expand this in the future as we build our capacity. All registered Cowichan citizens can access our services and receive funding including for prevention/support services.
- ***You talked about growing the number of staff. Will our people get these jobs and be trained?***
 - Yes, our goal is to hire a majority Cowichan people, and get people trained for these roles. So, we're looking at funding and recruiting. And also working with other departments to deliver services with Quw’utsun staff.

- **Are Cowichan Tribes Child and Family workers getting support? Our band is really big, and they can suffer from burnout; we need to support them.**
 - There is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). But we need to do more. To connect our staff with Elders, some brushings, we want to make it better and are looking at ways including working with local experts to build our staff's capacity for self-care. We would like to host talking circles to debrief. Elder Albie Charlie has been instrumental in advancing this work and his experience as a social worker on the Downtown East side has been so valuable. He is helping support our Boundary office. The staff love his support and mentorship. He also supports family meetings.
- **Is funding continuous or one time?**
 - Yes, there will be continuous funding provided to support yearly operations. It will be provided as block funding so we can determine where to assign it. The first agreement will cover a two-year period, and there will be review at six-month mark.
- **What about individuals under Community Living BC; over 200 children who suffer from illnesses such as cerebral palsy and autism. What avenues will there be for those members?**
 - They will still be able to access provincial funding, but there will also be extra funds available for assessments, to ensure that they can get the services and support they need.
- **Future model - it's also good to look back to the past, but how will we help those that need helping like our aunts, the uncles, grandparents that need that support to heal from the trauma of residential schools and intergenerational trauma?**
 - Yes, good ideas to have programs to support them. Cultural programs and counseling. And also, House of Dreams – on the land programs. Support healing for the whole community.
- **You wish to grow your staff a lot, but do you have a retention plan?**
 - We do want to focus on retaining the social workers we have and the new ones we will be employing. We will be reducing their caseloads to a maximum of about 10 for social worker to give them a better working experience with workloads that are more manageable. We are already starting to do this. Many new staff will also be focused on prevention, supporting families before they are in crisis. We will also be looking at creative ways for people to stay and to come on board. So yes, retention is a priority and hiring. We also hope to attract and retain workers who are excited to work with us and because we are doing things differently in a cultural and holistic way aligned with our culture, not the colonial way.
- **Who is the Cowichan member? Will we abolish the colonial model or follow the Indigenous Services Canada rules?**
 - Anyone registered as Cowichan under the new membership code will be able to access supports and services through the agency. Some departments use different methods. We will follow the definition in our Law.



Participants Comments

My grandpa helped raise me. It's great that we're now going to be doing what our people and ancestors have always done.

Support is good, but we also need to teach the youth to look after themselves. Not to be victims. Support youth Leadership groups. It empowers them to use their own voices and intuitive thinking. Preparing young people for the world ahead of them.

We need short videos on social media. About how this will support our children. We don't need it to be fancy productions.

Thank you so much. This is the first time Cowichan Tribes has come to meet with us members who live off reserve up in Victoria area. Keep doing what you are doing. This is important work!



Event 6-Hybrid Community Dinner-August 22, 2023 (5 pm -7:30 pm), Si'em Lelum Dining Hall & Online (Zoom)

The 6th event was a hybrid event hosted on August 22, 2023 - 5pm –7.30pm. Sina'htun (Wayne Page) opened the evening with a prayer and Molly Paige and Matthew Louie facilitated the evening's conversations.

Robert Morales finished his presentation on the law, and Addie Price, Patricia Thomas and Tami Fusion went over the Principals, 'What will be different' and the future service model.

Roundtable Consulting managed the Zoom room. Approximately 21 people came to learn about the proposed law. Six kids enjoyed a movie and popcorn in the gym.



Introductory Notes

- Opening by Molly & Matthew
- Prayer by Sina'htun - Wayne Page
- Robert opening & setting context
 - As we are trying to find the path forward for being self-governing there are many areas to consider. Lots of responsibility for Chief & Council and Lalum'utul' Smun'eem.
 - We are concerned about the issue of liability and are looking at ways to address it.
 - We are working with another law firm to finalize our Law.
 - This area looking after our children and raising our children has been interfered with by the government for a very long time.
 - Their thinking was that the child should be raised outside of the home with non-first nation people – this was considered in the best interest for the child by the government.
 - There was a law (Indian Act) and a service delivery model (Residential Schools).
 - This changed slightly but not much under the Child Welfare system.
 - Government has been interfering in the way we raise our children since 1876.
 - Our law will affect every family in our nation.
 - Law is dealing with one of the most important parts of our life – how we will raise our children.
- Matthew speaks to cultural practice that teachings are shared over a meal – to digest the information.
- Presentation begins with Robert reviewing the slides on the Law.
- Law will have a Hul'q'umi'num' name – Addie and Sarah are working with Elders to name it.
- Law will be implemented in a staged approach; geographic reach will expand from Vancouver Island/Gulf Island to Canada.

- We will have a voice off-island how our children will be raised.
- There is the law, and there are regulations and policies. We are working on all three levels.
- There will be edits to the version of the law presented today.
- We will implement an authority and a board of directors who will oversee the ED of the Child and Family agency.
- Have been meeting with Elders and our Snuw'uy'ulh are the foundation of the law. Our guiding principles and Snuw'uy'ulh set out how we guide our relationships and how social workers must interact with families.
- Collaboration on how to decide for the child is stated in the law.
- Purpose is to help the family.
- New part of the presentation – Support services – Focuses on Prevention
- Under the government it is called prevention services. But the intent is to support.
- Goal is to help families, so they don't get to the state of crisis.
- Post-majority support for youth up to age 27 to transition to adulthood.
- Intervention Services: Model we are working on has a strong focus on early intervention.
- We plan to work in a cultural way. Families will often meet if there is a crisis in the family. Agency open to working with the family to come up with a plan. Agreement can be verbal. Next step could be writing down commitments. Emphasis is to help the family heal.
- Protection is the area what we think Child Welfare is. When a Child is at risk.
- Protecting our children is part of our culture.
- Removal is part of the law but it is the last resort.
- There are provisions for emergencies when a child is at risk. The Cowichan Tribes Child and Family services agency /Cowichan Tribes can take temporary custody.
- Parents won't lose opportunity for guardianship. They always will be able to regain the relationship.
- Tribal courts could be an approach for adjudication. Our own processes or Tribunal.
- In the interim we will continue to use the provincial court while we do our research and build our own mechanism.
- Provincial court will sit – likely in this room – most proceeding will be family case council. Elders will be present. Dispute resolution will be collaborative.
- People have the right to go to Provincial court.
- We are working with court services to follow processes.
- Phase two is building our own dispute resolutions. Learning from other Tribes to do our research to decide what path we want to go down.
- Overview of the law – Council would like us to complete draft on September 11.
- Ratification vote by community in November 2023.
- Voices have been reflected in the work we are doing – newsletter etc.



- Addie, Tami & Trish present:
 - We have gone to the community to inform them about the law.
 - Goal is for community to learn about the law and where we are going.
 - Guiding Principles overview.
 - Vision – not to have children in care. Want to ensure that we are wrapping our families in support, so they stay with their family and in community.
 - Review of Principles.
 - Review of what will be different (by Trish)
 - Review of Service Model (by Tami)
 - We heard what you said about not renting places but use our own Cowichan buildings – that’s why we have purchased property and will ask for more capital from the government to buy more properties/land.
 - Child & Family has been underfunded – we can now ask for capital funding for building that will help children & families.
 - We have not removed any children in the last few years.
 - It will take at least two years to implement future services using a “phased in approach”.
 - Cowichan is among the first Tribes doing this in BC.
 - There will be hiccups since it’s all very new.
 - Takes all of us to take the jurisdiction forward.
 - Information sharing with school district will be included in agreement.
 - It is mentioned that community members and Elders have been engaged in developing the law.
 - Closing prayer – Whulquletse - Albi Charlie



Questions from audience and answers

- **Who is the law firm Cowichan is working with?**
 - Woodward and company
- **Who will be the agency?**
 - Lalum'utul' Smun'eem will cease to be a delegated agency and become the Cowichan Tribes Child and Family Services agency.
- **Can the wellness law help non-Cowichan child who has a Cowichan member parent?**
 - Still an issue we are trying to work out. We have to deal with protocols. If the child is entitled to be registered per the citizenship code then yes.

- **Who funds the services and research provisions?**
 - Costs are primarily from Indigenous Services Canada.
 - Province is also expected to contribute.
 - We will receive significantly more than we are currently receiving.
- **Will there be a role comparable to the current Representative of Children and Youth (RCY)?**
 - Depends on their scope of work. We have to have our own equivalent. We can explore this for our Law.
- **Who is the firm to conduct the ratification vote and what does it cost?**
 - Stephanie Atleo is leading this. Not sure on name or cost. Cowichan Procurement policies will be followed.
 - Cowichan Tribes is collecting resumes right now for a ratification officer.
 - For the online voting we will be using One Feather. [Register HERE](#) to vote online. Online voting opens November 10th.
- **How is the decision being made on how to mitigate the liability?**
 - Proposal is made for an authority. Create a legal entity that will work in between governing body and agency. Still have to work out the details on how a board will be elected, and how they will operate (policies). Skeleton model is in the law. Board of Director largely composed of Cowichan Tribes members (1 Elder/1 Youth). If non-Cowichan – application needs to show experience.
- **How do we assess the governing bodies capacity?**
 - This is a decision of the electorate – each one of us has a vote. We need to be informed and it is up to us to select the right people for Council.
 - Council needs good legal, policies, financial council.
 - Elect the people we trust. They need to have the resources to hire people that can support them.
- **Where does treaty come in and who will play the role of the federal/provincial government when we take over?**
 - We don't know if or when we will get a treaty. But self-governance would be part of it. Treaty is not going to happen anytime soon. Our own Chief and Council and Authority will fill roles previously filled by government officials.
- **How much more work is this going to be for Chief & Council (C&C)?**
 - Councils' role is to ensure the law is in place and the agency is developed – do the high-level work and oversight body
 - Recommended that Council does not day-to-day activity.
 - Not able to say how much work it is going to be for C&C – but it won't overwhelm them.
 - Provision proposed that C & C cannot be on the Board of Directors.



- **Why do we propose a Provincial Court?**

- Using the existing court is the quickest way to bridge us into our own court system.
- It is a bridge.

- **How basic are the support services we will have?**

- All Cowichan families will have access to our community health and family services. You don't have to have a file open with the agency.



- **What safe houses do we currently have?**

- In the capital ask we included funding for safe house
- Resources will be there to support parents when they need it.
- Youth pods we use currently are just for our youth but a young family is staying in one of them as we are finding a better place for them.
- There will be interim-housing solutions until we find a better home for families.

- **Where do Trauma informed practices come in?**

- Collaboration with other agencies.
- Capital ask includes funding for healing programs.
- Training of all staff will be important.

- **What types of agreements with RCMP & Victim services?**

- We currently have an agreement with them.
- Once our law is in place, we will create our own agreements across all sectors.
- We have brought on people who have the training who will help implementing the law through this lens.

- **Will there be a there a social worker in place for 24 hours?**

- Future Service Model has an after-hours team, including being on call 24/7
- One of our own Cowichan Staff members responding and checking on the wellbeing of children

- **What is the percentage of youth that have been successfully prepared in aging out?**

- We need to be better at ensuring our youth are better prepared.
- In Cowichan Tribes Child & Family law will support our youth until they reach the age 27. Supporting them as they figure out what is next.

- **What does a customary agreement look like?**

- It's an out of care option, the family is involved, grandparents also where they have custom adopted their children.
- No timeline for the agreements and how long they are signed for.
- Designated band rep started a few years ago – works along families, other service providers and Lalum'utul Smun'eem. Dora was the first one to do it. Lori has joined. Nation funded they receive based on population.
- How do we position the designated band reps? They will fall under prevention services in organizational chart. We are planning to grow that team. We will have a director with more than 4-5 band reps.

- **What is the percentage of the Cowichan Tribes members to pass this legislation?**
 - Yes, it will be shared
 - 50% + 1 of votes for our law to pass, though we would like to achieve 20% of eligible voters – aiming for 700 + voters
- **What other agencies will you have agreements with?**
 - Will have protocols and agreements with all the Cowichan agencies working with families, RCMP, School District, hospital, etc.
- **How will we wrap around people who are mentally or physically challenged at the age of 19-27?**
Answer wasn't strong
 - Youth safe spaces, more programs and regular assessments.

Participants Comments:

A participant reached out to a LS staff member. She said that she is really happy with all the work that we are doing and that she wanted to tell someone. She said she wanted to write us a note but didn't have time. That Albie's words at the end of the night really touched her. She shared that her children were taken away from the Ministry and she did not have a good life. She said that Lalum'utul' Smun'eem saved her daughter and her granddaughters lives and that her daughter brought her granddaughter to LS for help because she knew she couldn't raise her. She wanted to thank them for all the work we do and that she is grateful that the agency is here.

She also said when she was doing the video that she does get to see her granddaughter sometimes. She is working on herself and doing good. Thank you to LS.

August 22, 2023

Confidential feedback form submissions:

I am wondering if these different lum-stamsh (prevention) will still continue if the vote does not pass? I am concerned that the leaders will be ready to take on this huge responsibility to self-govern. I need to know that those in leadership will know the C& F law completely!



This comes at a critical time! Big thanks to the original 1994 'Project Child' and to those who continue to realize this important work. 'One Feather' is a good working solution for our Tribal Citizens to record the instrument necessary to create the law. This work in progress is coming together to best protect our team,

our community and our Cowichan Citizen children/youth/elder population. Let's get those 700+ votes to make this law reality! Don't forget to vote!

Community Input form:

What's most needed to help Cowichan children grow up healthy and stay in community?

To be included in our culture and development programs. Have an immediate and nurturing connection to our tribe, ancestors and elder teachings.

How can we deliver our Child and Family Services in a way that aligns with our culture teachings?

Mentorship and grooming for executive level tribal governance (self). Participate in traditional Big House activities. Through our education department have guided cultural classes, language and heritage site visits.

Do you have any suggestions for the project team?

Develop programs and services on/off reserve children, specifically Cowichan Citizens born youth and Vancouver Island initially (Funded by population demand). Model court system based on USA Tribal Court system. Research a combination with our Tribunal (familiar).

Anything else you would like to share?

The nine reservations need to be treated as one; a safe place for a child and family, cultural differences to be celebrated and shared. And, completed with full and complete protection safety, trust and love with respect to our elders.



Event 7-Community BBQ – August 24, 2023 (3 pm -7 pm), Si'em Lelum Gym and Dining Hall

Introductory Notes

The final event was a summer BBQ on August 4, 2023 from 3pm –7pm at the Si'em Lelum Gym and grounds. Over 250 Cowichan Citizens came out for the BBQ and another 200 showed up for the Backpack give away. The project team had giveaways, a raffle and the project information were handed out. They also hosted a brief presentation on the law and service model. The Tzinquaw dancers performed for community.



Comments & questions from audience and answers

Strong comment from an Elder: she asked that social workers not reproduce the Hwunitum (colonial, non-Indigenous) system. Change it – not use the same system and candy-coat it. That workers really know who they are, so they can help youth know who they are as Cowichan Mustimuhw, to have that pride, hold their heads up high. Identity. And that it's more than about running 'programs'. Put yourself in that child's shoes – what would you really want? Another program ... really?? She also encouraged grandparents to get involved in the lives of their grandchildren and spending time with them; showing the youth how to do things, and showing them with kindness. So many of our Elders did not receive their teachings because of residential schools. Be proud of who you are and carry it on; don't leave your children out in the cold. Are they really important - of course they are! It's ridiculous the situation we are in with Hwunitum government.

Also received a comment from a parent who has had children removed from his family, upset that kid was removed because they lacked the funds and support for a child with disabilities, and they missed appointments because they didn't have rides, and instead of giving parents the \$4,300 / month to support the child, they were removed and put into a Non-Indigenous home that received that money instead of the parent who needed it. We need to better support our families, including those who have youth with special needs.

Ethics are very important. It's important for every staff member at the agency to be ethical, and also for anyone who will be on the Board or Council doing this work. It's a big responsibility and we need to make sure they understand their role and are well prepared for it.



Appendix – Event Poster Boards

Lum-stam'sh SHOW ME SO I CAN SHOW MY CHILDREN

SERVICES BASED ON **PREVENTION** QUW'UTSUN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE MODEL

Cowichan Tribes COWICHAN TRIBES Child and Family Wellness Legislative Project

What will be Different

Quw'utsun Child & Family Services will ensure citizens are connected to our ancestral ties, culture, teachings and traditional lands.

Cowichan Tribes will govern our Child and Family Services, NOT the Province of BC.

Our focus will be on Lum-stam'sh (prevention) to strengthen families and support hun'ta'wuqw (family unity). We wish to end the practice of child removals.

Quw'utsun Child & Family Services will provide services guided by our snuw'uy'ulh (teachings) according to our Law, policies and standards.

An Independent Quw'utsun Tribes Board will oversee our Child and Family Services.

Agreements with Federal and Provincial Governments will provide additional resources to oversee our Child and Family Services; block funding will allow us to determine where to assign funding.

Our Law will apply to all Quw'utsun citizens in a phased-in approach. The initial service delivery area will be on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. We will assemble new teams to eventually serve Quw'utsun children and youth across Canada.

S-ul'hween (Elders) & family members will be more involved in decision-making.

Funding will be secured for capital expenditures to support new housing options, office space for staff, additions treatment and a youth centre.

Lum-stam'sh SHOW ME SO I CAN SHOW MY CHILDREN

SERVICES BASED ON **PREVENTION** QUW'UTSUN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE MODEL

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What will be Different

The Numbers

	CURRENT	FUTURE
Service Delivery Area	3,475 km ² Cowichan Valley	32,300 km ² Vancouver Island & Gulf Islands
Number of Staff	77	148*
Average Case Load per Social Worker	20	10

* Majority of new staff will be dedicated to prevention programs.

Programs & Services

Grounded in our Quw'utsun snuw'uy'ulh our child & family services will focus on **prevention** to keep children with their families in community.

We will offer programs & services:

- That strengthen families** Cultural & community wellness programming accessible to all Quw'utsun citizens.
- That provide additional supports** For families needing extra support overcoming situations such as poverty or mental health challenges.
- That empower youth** Supports for school-aged children and those aging out-of-care until age 27.

A PHASED-IN APPROACH
Cowichan Tribes citizens will vote on the Child and Family Wellness Legislation in the fall of 2023. If passed, Cowichan Tribes will sign a Coordination Agreement with the Federal and Provincial Governments shortly thereafter. Once we take on jurisdiction, implementation of the new law will begin in a phased-in process over two years.

Contact us for more information
Visit us ourchildlaw.cowichantribes.com
Email us ourchildlaw@cowichantribes.com

Guiding Principles

Raising our children our Quw'utsun way

Our Law is to be interpreted and administered in accordance with our snuw'uy'ulh, including the following guiding principles which apply to all Child and Family Service matters.

tii tul st love

si'emstuhw respect

ts'ts'uwatul' helping one another

thu'ti stuhw thu shqwaluwun trust/focused in your thoughts and mind

shtun'na'ous importance of knowing where you come from

'uqwitul ensuring our familial relationships are strong and resilient

hwi'ulusmutaal looking out for people in vulnerable circumstances

nuts'amaat shqwaluwun One Mind, One Heart, One Spirit

mukw' tu shhw'a'luqw'a' 'o' tth'ele's tu shhwull family is the heart of life

The spelling and descriptions of the principles in Hul'q'um'num are still being confirmed with the Elders.

Guiding Principles

We will follow these principles for our service delivery

Lum-stam'sh (prevention) supporting families to prevent hardships and address challenges

Family unity keeping children in community with their family

Child-centred best interest of the child and seeking child's input

Cultural continuity ensuring children are connected to the culture of Cowichan Tribes

Substantive equality service accessibility without discrimination

Elder guidance Elders voices help guide our services and decisions about children

Holistic approach using a holistic approach that creates a "circle-of-care" around the child to ensure their well-being

Cultural safety increased emphasis on trauma-informed, culturally sensitive care and training



QUW'UTSUN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE MODEL CURRENT SERVICES

CONTINUUM OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES From those accessible to all Quw'utsun Citizens, to more intensive supports.

S-HUN'TS'A'WUQW FAMILIES & PEOPLE COMING TOGETHER AS ONE FOR A PURPOSE

Service Category	Cultural and Community Wellness Services	Early Intervention Services	Ts'lh'a'amutim' Family Connection Services	Thuysshenum Guardianship & Permanency Services	Skwami'lhum' Support Services	Shhw'a'mut Family Home Services	t'luqw' Administration & Support Services	
CURRENT STATE MODEL	<p>Can be accessed at any stage available to all community members</p> <p>Cultural Programs & Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journey of Strength (canoe paddling) Sons & Daughters of Tradition Drumming for Medicine Hul'q'um'num Language Cultural Medicine Traditional Painting Traditional Spear Creation Cedar Weaving Healthy Relationships Women's & Men's Healing Circles Supporting Ceremonies 	<p>Wellness Programs & Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental Health In-Home Crisis Prevention & Support On-Call/ Drop-in Services Suicide Awareness Day A-S-I-S-T HOPE to Suicide Healthy Homes Family & Parenting Community Events Ask Auntie Outreach Services 	<p>Referrals to Community Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Care Agreements Intensive Family Preservation Services Basic Needs Support Financial and Other Supports for Citizens (food, clothing, etc.) Referral to Substance Abuse Treatment & Rehabilitation 	<p>Family Support Agreements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life Skills Coaching Genealogy 	<p>Guardianship & Permanency Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption Post Adoption Assistance Ageing Out of Care 	<p>Recruitment of New Homes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring & Supporting Care Homes Specialized Training for Caregivers SAFE Home Studies 	<p>Huilthut Group Home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and Youth with Special Needs Support (contracted) Youths Housing (Pods) Family Housing (4-plex & emergency units) Trestle Road 4-plex 	<p>Human Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training Finance Legislation Policy Research Urban Office Procurement Community Engagement
Existing Services & Programs								
<p>Family is Community, Community is Family.</p>								
<p>Services offered across all above categories</p>								
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency & Short-Term Respite & Intervention Domestic Violence Programs & Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counselling & Healing Programs Family Plan Meetings (in-house) Case Planning & Assessment (intake) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition Planning Access & Visitation Criminal Record Checks Prior Contact Checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Court Services, Mediation - Alternatives to Court Temporary Custody Orders; Out-of-Care Options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary Care Agreements Independent Living Agreements 		



QUW'UTSUN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE MODEL FUTURE SERVICES

CONTINUUM OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES From those accessible to all Quw'utsun Citizens, to more intensive supports.

S-HUN'TS'A'WUQW FAMILIES & PEOPLE COMING TOGETHER AS ONE FOR A PURPOSE

Service Category	Cultural and Community Wellness Services	Child Safety & Family Unity Programs and Services	Administration & Governance Services
	<p>Most of the prevention programs & services will continue and be expanded significantly with an emphasis on culture, youth and family support – which will be available to all community members.</p>	<p>Child Safety & Family Unity programs will now be delivered Island-wide and on the Gulf Islands. All of the Child Safety and Family Unity (protection) programs will continue in revised form, now delivered in alignment with Quw'utsun teachings as per our Child and Family law, principles, policies and standards.</p>	
FUTURE STATE MODEL	<p>New Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elder Circles/Elder(s) in Residence Community Smokehouse & Traditional Food Gathering and Processing Healing Circles Youth Camps and Mentoring, Land-Based Programs including Therapeutic Ones (gardens, animals, etc.) Indigenous Child & Youth Mental Health LGBTQ2S Support Services Pilot Projects <p>Notes Collaborations with other Agencies</p> <p>Some of the new and expanded programs and services will be delivered in collaboration with other Cowichan Tribes departments such as Ts'ewulhnut Health Centre, the Housing department, Lequimim' (Cowichan Tribes Daycare) and Quw'utsun, Skwam'isat Lelum' (Education Department), as well as external agencies like Hup'yu Lelum' (House of Friendship) and others in the Cowichan Valley.</p>	<p>New Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cowichan Tribes Own 24-hour Screening & Intake Line Cowichan Tribes Temporary Guardianship Remote Services Support (drive/fly/ferry) S-ulhween Committee S-ulhween Peace Giving Advisory Body Quw'utsun Alternative Dispute Resolution <p>New Post-Majority Care Services (up to 27 yrs)</p> <p>Supports in the Areas of: Transportation; Technology; Basic Income; Cultural Supports; Recreation; Housing; Life Skills.</p> <p>Expanded Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Out-of-Care Options with Wrap-Around Supports Basic Needs Support – Financial and Other Supports for Citizens (food, clothing, etc.) Elders to Support Programs and Services Child Blanketing Committee Ceremony (training, re-unification) Family & Child Unique (specific) Needs Assessment and Referrals Child Development Services In-house Family Support Workers (with Hiyi'yu Lelum' & new dedicated child & family agency worker) Access to Drug/Alcohol Programming and Services & Detox Supports (Ts'ewulhnut) Including Youth, Not Just Adults 	<p>New Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board & Committee Reporting, Support & Training Information Management/IT system New Policy Development Quality Assurance Legal Services, Alternatives to Court, Education Coordination of Inter-Departmental & Inter-Agency Initiatives & Collaborations <p>Expanded Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR & Finance Services Training & Development (incl. Cultural & Trauma-Informed) Procurement Designated Band Representatives Expedited Services
CAPITAL INVESTMENTS	<p>New Child and Family Services-Specific Capital Investments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased office & program space, with upgrades to the parking area Squ'iquil' thum Lelum' The House of Dreams – a Supportive Family Housing Complex with wrap-around services (facility similar to Lumert model) Development of 3615 & 3623 Gibbins Road Housing for Youth Transitioning Out-of-Care, supported living arrangements for youth and young adults Safe housing options for youth and families 	<p>Some of the funds secured through the Coordination Agreement with federal and provincial governments will help pay for the following community capital assets that will benefit all community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent Youth Centre Treatment Centre for Addictions Expansion of the Canoe Shed Community Smokehouse 	