

## SENIOR ASSOCIATE LETTER

Wow! Haven't we survived a lot these past few months? Between a pandemic, flooding in some of our communities and now civil unrest across the globe, we are taking stock of what really matters to us and how we can be a part of the change that is coming. Chief Sellars was kind enough to speak to Lauren about how they have been handling the emergencies in their area under the social distancing, climate change era that we are in.

Strategies North would like to acknowledge Indigenous History Month and wish you all a safe and enjoyable Indigenous Day on June 21st. We would also like to honour the diversity among us, from our team to your back yard. We respect your culture, your community, and your needs. We appreciate the learning opportunities you give us to see Canada for who it really is. We pledge to respect you, your culture and your diversity. It's an honor to be a part of your team.

And in keeping with our "family" motto, we've shared a bannock recipe that I have had on my fridge forever. I KNOW bannock is deeply personal and I've seen many a contest, so we're hoping you will share your go-to recipes that have been keeping you busy over the spring. We'd love to share with our readers so I'm going to say don't be shy and send us your best...we can handle it!

I look forward to traveling again, and seeing you all soon. Stay safe.

*Lynn Hutton*



### #DifferentTogether Pledge

*Our B.C. is inclusive and respects people of all ethnicities, cultures and faiths and their contributions to our collective well-being.*

*Our B.C. holds diversity as a fundamental value at the heart of the success, strength and resilience of our communities, workplaces, schools, public and private institutions.*

*I pledge to uphold and promote these values and I commit to speaking up to oppose racism and hate in all its forms.*

# OVERCOMING ADVERSITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS



(Photo credit: Chief Willie Sellars)

In recent years, Williams Lake Indian Band (WLIB) has seen a number of natural disasters, while also navigating the new reality of COVID-19. Lauren McIvor (LM) spoke with Chief Willie Sellars (CS), who served three terms on council before being elected Chief, to learn about how he's grown through the current realities and how they are moving ahead with innovative economic development projects despite challenging circumstances.

*Answers have been shortened for clarity and length.*

**LM:** *What made you want to run for Chief after being on council?*

**CS:** I wanted to be able to make a difference for my community. The most impact that I could see, and the best difference that I could make is as Chief of Williams Lake Indian Band. I also had really good mentorship. Former Chief Ann Louie was a very important part of that process. She wanted to continue on the vision that she had

and the progression that she had made with her years as a leader in the community.

**L:** *What motivates you to continue in such a time consuming, but also an impactful position?*

**CS:** The biggest thing is that we keep seeing progress. You drive through the community now and the grass is cut and people are working and healthy. It is never going to be a perfect world, and there are individuals who are still struggling, but we have so many success stories in our community now-a-days. Success stories historically, weren't always there. Growing up, the amount of opportunities that I had was encouraging and the amount of opportunities that my kids are going to have is even more. If an individual wants to work in our community right now, they are working. If somebody wants to have a good paying job to provide for their family, the opportunity is there.

We are more of an urban First Nation and so there is more opportunity because of the synergies between the City of Williams Lake and being close to an urban centre, but we have also built up this amazing team that is different than any other First Nation. The amount of expertise we have here is pretty special; how everyone works together and understands what the goals are. And not only do we have a special team of staff, but we also have a council that is progressive and supportive and they empower our staff to get the job done by giving them the support they need.

**LM:** *How have you attracted such a special team of staff? Are they all from the community?*

*Interview continues on next page*

**CS:** We are always moving and shaping and making stuff happen. That usually attracts talent. Our location is another key one. We are blessed with a good location for our region. Working for WLIB, you have everything you need right at your fingertips. When you come in to work for us you are going to have the opportunity to grow as an individual. As we build our capacity and build the team, our organization continues to grow.

**LM:** *In the last few years, WLIB has seen quite a few natural disasters. How have you managed that?*

**CS:** It's been super challenging. I was a firefighter for 6 years, and the 2009 and 2010 wildfires was my first taste of dealing with natural disasters in the region. In 2014 when the Mount Polly (mine disaster) happened, I was one of the first ones that got word of it. Chief Ann Louie brought me along and let me coordinate the response with the staff and handle some of the PR work. It was like she was mentoring me for eventually stepping into the role of Chief and also mentoring me on how to deal with disasters. You need to be able to trust your staff and leadership to give you good advice and coordinate the response in these instances.

Keeping the community informed is the biggest one - everyone wants information and everyone wants to be informed. Having leadership that is portraying that to them is important. It's not easy, but we have that support of council and the staff who are getting the work done on the ground and making sure our response on each one of these things is getting better and better.

***“Don't get overwhelmed, stay calm, get informed, make good decisions.”***

**LM:** *Do you think some of that ability to stay calm comes from your experience as a firefighter?*

**CS:** Firefighter, and a number of other things. I have 3 kids and have been a single dad for the last 3 years which has definitely tested my patience. I also play a lot of sports and was taught well growing up by my parents and uncles in trying to stay grounded in culture and tradition, for example, learning how to pray in the sweat and learning songs, and making sure that you stay humble. One thing that's really lacking from my personal balance right now is not having the ability to play sports like hockey and baseball. Just like finding the time to pray and to spend with family and to go to work, you need to find the time to have some kind of physical activity in your life. It is very easy to get stressed out nowadays; it can be very overwhelming, but try and ground yourself and go from there. There is only so much one person can do, and that's why you really need to make sure that you have that staff and council you can trust to alleviate a lot of that pressure you have as a leader in your community.

**LM:** *Are you receiving adequate support from the government to manage these disasters and the ongoing crises that you have been dealing with?*

**CS:** It's been good so far. Dealing with the flooding on reserve has been challenging to say the least, everyone wants the same end result but because there are so many different people and agencies involved it's challenging to do it in a timely manner. The hiccups we have had with the City of Williams Lake came to a head last week when we sat down and had a council-to-council meeting with them. Everyone wants the same thing, which is to work together. Because of our location, and the City of Williams Lake's location, we really don't have a choice but to work together on things. Hopefully we can move forward and have some success stories in the future.

**LM:** *What steps do you take to maintain those relationships? And how do you manage conflicts when they arise?*

*Interview continues on next page*

**CS:** We have a tripartite agreement with the Cariboo Regional District and the City of Williams Lake so we do sit down regularly. One of the things we identified in the meeting was that we need to sit down even more regularly. Communication needs to be better when we're announcing a big project. Part of the problem is that the COVID-19 pandemic has really shook up the whole world and community consultation is a whole different beast. I think the world is changing and we have to work a little bit harder to keep our governments informed. The key thing is just picking up the phone more often.

**LM:** *WLIB has undertaken a number of innovative economic development projects in recent years, on top of dealing with natural disasters. What can other communities learn from your approach?*

**CS:** I think part of our success is being able to build those relationships with the people around us. We understand the balance of what we are doing here. We are stewards of the land; our traditional territory is something that we need to protect for future generations. We also understand the economics of the situation. People need to provide for their families and revenue streams need to be created so that you can put programs on and help you get to where you want to be - which is a healthy community. Finding that balance of the economy and being stewards of the land is a key one for each First Nation community. I can talk about the vision of the WLIB and what it is going to look like in 10 years, but if i don't have people on the ground doing the work, then 10 years from now I am still going to be talking. One thing that sets us aside from everyone else is we talk a good talk, but then we also walk a good walk. Partners like Strategies North have been really crucial in helping us get to where we want to be. They are helping us build those networks and create those relationships that help elevate the

financial pressure that we see on every single one of these projects moving forward. It's collaboration between the provincial government and federal government, and between bodies like Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) that help us get to where we want to be.

***"Strategies North has helped make those connections and been really crucial in helping me and the WLIB leadership continue to get support for what we are doing in this area."***

**LM:** *With summer coming, do you have somewhere to go to escape the craziness?*

**CS:** The goal this summer is to do a lot of camping. We had this really epic camp on the weekend (pictured below). My kids really appreciated that, so having them fall in love with the outdoors and being out of service was a key part of me recharging personally. Getting them out exercising by being on the land is a key one. Right now we're trying to find those alternative ways to stay fit and also appreciate the region that we live in for its beauty, and have them fall in love with it the same way I did growing up. ●



Photo credit: Chief Sellars

# WORK BC: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES STREAM

The **Work BC Indigenous Communities Stream** fund is available to Indigenous communities for the skills training and support needed to meet local labour market needs. This fund aims to help Indigenous individuals obtain full-time employment or become self-employed.

Eligible activities include:

- Employment services assistance,
- Skills training,
- Financial support for participants.

The deadline to apply is **June 30, 2020**

The maximum funding per application is \$300,000.00 and the maximum fund per participant is \$15,000.00 per fiscal year.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.workbc.ca/Employment-Services/Community-Workforce-Response-Grant/Indigenous-Communities.aspx>

## KEY DATES

### June 15: NRT Direct Support

2020-21 Funding Application opens. Deadline to apply is July 27, 2020

### June 18: BC Ministry of Agriculture - Beneficial Management Practices Program

Deadline to apply

### June 18: BC Ministry of Agriculture - Environmental Farm Plan Program

Deadline to apply

### June 19: Agricultural Adaptation Council - Greenhouse Competitiveness and Innovation Initiative

Deadline to apply

### July 15: BC Healthy Communities Society - PlanH: Social Connectedness Grant

Deadline to apply

### June 21: National Indigenous Peoples Day

## How to: Make bannock



Bannock is Gaelic for bread. When Scottish fur traders came to Canada, they brought along the recipe. Here, aboriginal people tweaked it – eliminating oatmeal, adding root flour, and filling the bush with the warm scent of this ultimate stick-to-your-guts staple. As famed nature writer Sigurd Olson once proclaimed: "This is the bread of the North, and worth working at."

-  1 Sift together 1 cup flour, 1 heaping teaspoon baking powder and 1/4 teaspoon salt. You can also add 1 teaspoon sugar.
-  2 Knead in 3 tablespoons butter (or margarine) until mixture is coarse, resembling pebbles.
-  3 Add grease to frying pan. Heat. You can use lard, butter or any animal fat – moose is a favourite.
-  4 Make a well in the centre of the mixture. Add enough cold water to make a thick dough. Then get creative: add fresh or dried fruit, chocolate chips, cheese – anything goes.
-  5 Form the dough into patties at least 1/2 an inch thick. Put patties in frying pan, which should be warm but not scalding.
-  6 Cook for 12 – 15 minutes, flipping the bannock once after a bottom crust has formed. And then, well, enjoy!

## Do you have "the best" bannock recipe?

We hear you've all been COVID cooking up a storm so we thought we'd share a recipe. Do you have a go-to favourite? Maybe a secret sauce? If you're willing to share your pandemic recipe in our next newsletter, email Lauren at [l.mcivor@strategiesnorth.ca](mailto:l.mcivor@strategiesnorth.ca)