



Hi friend,

Summer has flown by! As we head into the fall, we are sharing three important stories of cultural events and community champions. Read on to be inspired by our friends at Takla Nation, Spuzzum Nation, and Brokenhead Ojibway Nation.

Happy reading,

The Strategies North Team



Newsletter

AUGUST 2022 | ISSUE 51

COMMUNITY STORIES

Takla Supports Residential School Survivors with Coming Home Ceremony

In 2021, Takla Nation sat down with survivors of Lujala Residential School to learn their stories and work together on healing ways to help them heal. The survivors had an idea to return to the site of the school for a healing ceremony and then came home with the full support of the community behind them. This led to the creation of a five-day Coming Home Ceremony. Tamiela French, Takla's Elder & Youth Coordinator, explains the significance of each of the five days and offers advice for other communities hoping to do something similar for their survivors.

July 01-02: Letting Go.

"Day one was for Letting Go. We brought our group of Takla Nation survivors back to Lujala Residential School, which is located at the Haislaa Shu'as' First Nation. As children, the survivors were sent to Lujala because it was so far away that they couldn't see home. That first day, we hiked up Mount Mountain. This was a steep hike with waterfalls. Our Elders who are in their eighties were welcome to stay behind, but they wanted to be a part of it. At the top of the mountain, Chief John French did prayers and healing with his medicine bundle. We gave all of our survivors a chance to speak. One member got the chance to scream out over the mountain what had been traumatizing him for years. It was really powerful for a lot of our people. Later, we were drummed down to the water where we prayed and cleaned the survivors' relationships from the lake.

Our floatplane picked us up and brought everyone back to Takla. Flying home into Takla was amazing. Our families and the whole community stood on the plane to welcome the survivors home. It was great for them to be honored in that way. It was very emotional and brought back so many memories.



July 03: Day of Strength.

The last day was the most powerful day. Everyone gathered in the Potlatch Hall for a blessing ceremony. We drummed and sang - it was a joyful time. Then we called each survivor one by one and presented a blanket to them. These blankets had been sewed back in June by their family members and friends. Chief John thanked them in the blanket and told each one they were still seen for everything they offer to others. It was very emotional for them to feel that love and to be honored in that way, and it means a lot to their families. I don't think anyone left without tears in their eyes.

A big part of this week was bringing the generations together, to help the kids and grandkids understand what the survivors went through. Growing up, we all heard about residential schools, but we didn't realize how many layers of trauma there were. A lot of our survivors never talked about their stories. They kept the shame and sadness inside and didn't realize how much it has affected their families. In a huge part of this healing week was to make sure the survivors know that the community is supporting them.



Back in our interview in 2021, we had learned that our survivors felt so much pain for therapy their trauma was passed on to their kids. On this day, our survivors had the chance to lead an apology ceremony on behalf of the second generation survivors and release some of their trauma. We followed that with a formal welcome workshop to recognize how healing and working in the community has been influenced by these residential schools.

July 04: Honoring and Healing.

One of our Day Three activities was to get each survivor a piece of paper where they could write down the name of someone who had passed on before having the chance to see the healing. They came to the front of a circle and told the story of the person they were honouring. Many people spoke about their parents who never got to be a part of this experience. We arranged each person with like water and space medicine bundles, stories and Lakota games took place in the evening - we wanted to end each day with something fun so people could go to bed with happy hearts.



July 05: Day of New Beginnings.

Back in our interview in 2021, we had learned that our survivors felt so much pain for therapy their trauma was passed on to their kids. On this day, our survivors had the chance to lead an apology ceremony on behalf of the second generation survivors and release some of their trauma. We followed that with a formal welcome workshop to recognize how healing and working in the community has been influenced by these residential schools.



"Some of the survivors are well on their way in their healing journey and some will have a long way to go, but this week inspired a lot of people."

If I had advice for other Nations who want to help their survivors heal, I would say start by interviewing them to find out their stories, but what they need, what will help them, and what they have done for healing up until now. These conversations are where you'll hear all of your healing initiatives, but you need to find someone they really trust to be part of these interviews. We also had a mental wellness worker to support the survivors after the sessions. Finally, we involved youth in the walk and visual storytelling so that they could learn along with us - some of them got to hear for the very first time their 'uncles' or 'aunties' stories.

During the whole process of planning this week, everyone was ready and everyone showed up. It was a huge team approach. Because it's not just the survivors that are affected helping the survivors also helps our future generations."

If you are a Nation that wants to do something similar or would like to offer interview questions to ask survivors, Tamiela is happy to chat. Feel free to contact her at you@takla.com

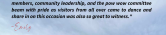
BY EMILY MONTWELAWK, COMMUNITY ANALYST

First Pow Wow at the New Brokenhead Arbour

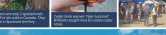
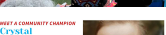
Brokenhead Ojibway Nation recently completed construction of their new arbour called Moomowinowin ("Sobering Place") in Ojibway. Emily was fortunate to attend the first pow wow held in the arbour. Strategies North assisted in applying for funding.

"Brokenhead Ojibway Nation was always a stop on my family's pow wow travels when I was young, and at the time, it was hosted under a big white tent. Although it was still a pow wow, Brokenhead has always claimed a cultural space that will be a permanent fixture in their community. I first saw the new arbour in March 2021 when I was in Brokenhead for community engagement with Strategies North and it was spectacular but seeing it fit up with dancers and drums was even better.

As an avid pow wow goer and an Indigenous person, I am thankful for another beautiful place to gather to continue growing our culture and as an IAN employee, I am proud to be a part of an organization that helped to secure an important cultural space that will live on to bring positivity and light to a community. There is a saying that when one Indigenous person or community succeeds, we all succeed - and to go along with it, we celebrate those successes. I am a huge advocate for economic, cultural and social development and firmly believe that there are further reaching positive implications beyond the community itself where that project is successful."



"At my pow wow, the best thing in my opinion is the grand entry because it is a complete sensory overload in the best way possible - from the bells, jingles, and drums simultaneously making the best rhythmic sound, to the swirling colours of the dancer's regalia moving across the dance floor and the sweet smell of smudge filling the air. Watching the community members, community leadership, and the pow wow committee beam with pride as visitors from all over come to dance and share in on this occasion was also so great to witness."



MEET A COMMUNITY CHAMPION

Crystal Hatzidimitriou, Spuzzum Nation Administrator

Need to get something done in Spuzzum First Nation and don't know where to start? Just ask Crystal - she'll have the answer.

Spuzzum is a Mhal'apemsa Nation in the Fraser Canyon of BC. Crystal Hatzidimitriou has worked for Spuzzum since 2005 as a Housing Assistant and now as Administrator. So far, she has "worked the same day twice."

Crystal helps to coordinate projects across every department, meaning that "There's always something new to do, something to learn, and new people to meet."

She's one of the many staff and administrators at First Nations Communities across Canada who work tirelessly to keep the programs running and make sure community members

get the services they need.

Of course, there are challenges that Crystal and her colleagues deal with when it comes to working in a community like Spuzzum: COVID 19, staff shortages, funding and availability, and the frustrating reality of being an Indigenous community in Canada.

"We're expected to provide all the supports for our community, write a non-Indigenous municipality," Crystal says. "We are trying to function at that level, but on a fraction of the budget."

The question is how we rise to the occasion."

Speaking of rising to the occasion, there have been many bright spots over the years. In the parks for Spuzzum are a day care, an Adventure Park, an amphitheatre, community garden projects, and the restoration of the Alexander Bridge over the Fraser Canyon, which will be an important heritage site and visitor attraction.

One of Crystal's proudest moments has been helping to spearhead the construction of six new homes in the community - Spuzzum's first new homes in over 20 years. "Bringing these homes to six families was huge," she recalls. Most of Spuzzum's population is off-reserve, but many are interested in returning to their traditional lands.

"My goal is to help bring them back. Because there's something really special about this place.

Raising kids here, it's a different experience. Most kids don't get the opportunity to run around in the bush and play with no fear of strangers. My hope is to bring more families back and to keep the community growing, to have more people to share the good times with and to lessen the burden of the hard times.

What we have here is quite unique and quite special, and there's room for everybody."

On the weekends, Crystal can be found outside looking or hiking with her family - or, sometimes, tending to emergency community calls ("I spend last Saturday cleaning out septic tanks - but there was no one on the ground, which makes it easier"). It's Crystal's passion, and the pride she has in her community, that makes her invaluable.

What advice does Crystal have for staff in other communities who are juggling big dreams for the future and day-to-day operations all at the same time?

"Find the people that you can lean on who are in the same boat. Ask them for help and advice, and if they don't have the answer, at least they can empathize with you."

More on our featured community members. They're in the spotlight.

Crystal took a walk from her home in Spuzzum to the Fraser Canyon.

Let's do community work and make a difference.

Secwepemc Words for Pesqelqeten (August)

Source: Researched by Brenda Bentley from FirstVoices.com

Pisekii (Pisot)
A word for the month of August.

Awoswip (Akwoswip)
A word for the month of August.

Spupup (Spupup)
A word for the month of August.