

## Connecting Generations Update February 2021

The last 12 months have been unusual for everyone.

The celebration of the new Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreement which took place on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020 was the last public event in which Connecting Generations was involved:



Thanks to a “Winter Wellness” grant from the First Nations Health Authority, we were able to invite students of all ages, their teachers, and members of the community to honour the district’s new Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreement.

"I would like to say thank you for inviting me here, and to be a part of this day. I thought it was amazing, how we started off with the drumming - welcoming everyone into this room and we're very grateful for where we live and where we spend every day. I could really feel the power in the room and the energy when the dancing was going on, and how everyone welcomed us all the same - together. I thought it was a really cool experience, and I think it's really cool, how we're involving all our youth into the Aboriginal community. And I'm in a First Nations course at the high-school and I think it's really amazing, and I'm honoured to be here. So, thank you!"

Taylor A. (Grade 12, Indigenous student at GISS)

A story from an Early Learning Educator who attended the event with one of the young mothers and her 2 small children:

“She is a single Mum and her 2 children have different fathers. The baby has Indigenous ancestry and it was the first time he had been at any traditional event. That morning, his mother said, for some reason she did not come to Strong Start and felt drawn to attending the ceremony for the celebration of the new Indigenous Enhancement Agreement. I held the baby and when the drumming started his little body was moving to the beat of the drums the whole time. It was as though he felt the connection to his ancestors...”

Since Spring Break in March 2020 Connecting Generations, like much of the world, has gone “online”!

### Conversations with English Language Learners

Beginning in April, community members who had been volunteering to participate in conversations with English Language Learners bravely took to Google Meet so that it was possible to continue the conversations. When some of the students returned to their home countries, the conversations carried on, despite technical difficulties. The online meetings were so popular that a student from Slovakia requested several conversations during the summer. Starting in Term 1 in September our virtual meetings increased from 2 per month to 2 per week, to the delight of everyone involved. A new volunteer joined us and there are now 4 of us participating in these online conversations.



### Gulf Islands Secondary Writers' and Editing Groups

The GISS intergenerational writers' group took to weekly virtual meetings beginning in April. Not only did we continue to meet once a week throughout the summer, thanks to the support of the district, we also began an “Editing Group” for those who had started a longer term writing project in October 2019. 3 students and 4 adults were part of this group. We continue to meet virtually every week and write to a prompt, sharing our writing and encouraging one another by doing so. There are now 3 students and 6 adults participating regularly, including one who joins us from New Zealand!



### Youth on the Land

The Youth on the Land project will bring Indigenous youth in Grades 9-12 attending the Gulf Islands Secondary School together with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers to learn traditional

ways of healing on the ancestral land at Xaaqw'um (Burgoyne Bay). Initiated in the Spring for our school district's Indigenous Education program, the project has received 5 grants to-date though has been thwarted by COVID in its implementation. The first and only meeting so far took place in October. Since then it has not been possible for our Elders, Ron (Tousilum) and Deb, (Sulsameethl) George to travel to Salt Spring for a day on the land. This exciting project includes "Cultural Days" for Indigenous Middle Years students as well as "From Hunt to Drum"



For Indigenous high school youth. The high school part of the initiative, will also include traditional practices from sweat lodges to cedar-harvesting, following the natural ebb and flow of the seasons with internal work, reflection and lessons to suit each time of the year. The final part of the project will be "Journeying with Peers", an invitation for indigenous youth to bring a friend with whom they can share the learning.

Thanks to the Healthy Schools BC (DASH) program, the Community Initiative program, (2 grants!) the Salt Spring Foundation and the New Relationship Trust, we anticipate a meaningful opportunity for everyone involved to learn about Indigenous ways of living and learning on the land.

### "Living Books Directory"

An incident in September 2020 has sparked a new initiative for the district under the Connecting Generations "umbrella". We are starting a "Living Books" resource for the school district to provide opportunities for high school students to speak with community members about their first-hand experience of racism. This has come about because of racist comments displayed on T-shirts worn by some of the graduating class at GISS at the beginning of the school year as well as the events on the world stage.

"it's easy to assume because everyone is hearing [about racism], someone will do something ... someone else will take care of it."

So instead of following the easier path of indifference, a few students at GISS have come together "to support students of colour and as well as Salt Spring's BIPOC community":

“We hope to educate ourselves and others about issues caused by and related to racism. As well as raising our voices as we speak up about racial injustice, we want to turn up the volume on the conversation around equality. We want to see how to dismantle the systemic barriers that are both stopping so many people from standing up and are silencing the voices of those trying to speak out.

On Salt Spring Island we feel as though we are a close-knit community and word travels fast which we hope will make it easier to spread the anti-racist principles we feel are vital. We have so far enjoyed being educated by BIPOC members of our community as well as reading "White Fragility" by Robin Di Angelo.

As students on a small island, we are relatively sheltered from the outside world, and the media is our only window. We understand that it is easy to see a real-world issue and turn your back on it leaving it for the adults of the world to deal with, for we don't feel it is our responsibility yet.

We hope that through this Anti-Racism Working Group we can help our fellow students realize that it isn't enough to just wave our hands at it and wait for it to go away. We need to embrace the uncomfortable truth that this is becoming our responsibility, and it won't go away unless we work at it.” - GISS Anti-Racism Working Group

We hope that part of our “new normal” will stay because along with the restrictions we have all felt, there have been opportunities during this strange time for more connection, more collaboration and more communication than before COVID!