

# O'man's 'Nam'a (We are One) Project: Unearthing Indigenous Leadership Principles through Language

*Knowledge Synthesis Grant Report*

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Connecting Communities Through Research on Vancouver Island



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\*Appendix B will be posted February 15,2018

### **Key Messages**

- Truth and Reconciliation calls for actions to implement the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People (UNDRIP) to reconcile relationships for the benefit of all Canadians. Restoring Indigenous relationships to self, spirit, people, places and the land is fundamental to reconciliation. Indigenous youth leadership camp frameworks, conducted through the lens of the language, will provide an essential component of reconciliation because Indigenous languages are vital to restoration of those relationships.
- Research supports that Indigenous youth leadership camps positively impact lifestyles and wellness. Locally developed frameworks, grounded in Indigenous pedagogy and language, are restorative and will have greater positive impact on resilience, perseverance and wellness and therefore increase the efficacy of the camp experience on wellness.
- Locally designed and delivered, youth leadership frameworks must infuse local language, in meaningful and effective ways and be grounded in Indigenous research methodology, to restore Indigenous leadership principles encoded in language that are essential for individual and collective healing and wellness.
- Indigenous research founded on intergenerational, collective, cyclic, relational and reflective methodology, driven by local need, guided by community and grounded in local language, culture, ceremony and protocol is restorative and will directly benefit Indigenous communities and indirectly benefit Canadians. As such, implementing Indigenous research grounded in this understanding is urgently required due to the rapid endangerment of Indigenous languages.
- Further short and long-term research is required to support the growing understanding that Indigenous languages and language revitalization are vital to the individual and collective wellness of Indigenous peoples, and will benefit both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians and are therefore essential to the fulfillment of the UNDRIP.

## Executive Summary

The O'man's 'Nam'a Project: Unearthing Indigenous Leadership Principles through Indigenous Language was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada who awarded North Island College faculty Sara Child and Caitlin Hartnett with a Knowledge Synthesis Grant: Imagining Canada's Future. The project gathered Elders from Kwakwaka'wakw nations to explore leadership language and concepts in Kwak'wala as presented in a Youth Leadership Camp Framework developed by Sara Child for her Masters in Language Revitalization.

The knowledge gathered served to support the development of a locally-relevant Indigenous Youth leadership camp framework for youth to explore leadership through the lens of the language and in context to people, places and the land. Child, an Indigenous researcher from the Kwakiutl nation, was lead researcher while Hartnett, linguist Katherine Sardinha, and research assistant Colette Child made up the research team. The project included the synthesis of existing Indigenous research knowledge and Indigenous leadership programming to identify gaps in the knowledge surrounding Indigenous concepts of leadership and the vital link between Indigenous languages and wellness. Involvement of Kwakwaka'wakw Elders, fluent in Kwak'wala, allowed the team to document Kwakwaka'wakw leadership principles, values, knowledge systems, and connections to the land expressed through the lens of Kwak'wala, the local Indigenous language.

The underlying goal of the project was to synthesize the knowledge gathered to build a locally-relevant Indigenous leadership camp framework infused with the leadership principles found in Kwak'wala. This Kwakwaka'wakw-specific framework is meant to assist in the revival of local Indigenous leadership principles encoded in Kwak'wala and restoration and enhancement of Kwakwaka'wakw relationships to people, places, and the land. The secondary goal was to share the results of the process with other First Nations and Canadians to assist in the

development of locally appropriate leadership programming and to provide best practices knowledge for future research.

The Indigenous knowledge and best practices shared with Canadian educators, community facilitators, academic institutions, and non-Indigenous organizations that are working towards building bridges with First Nations, will provide a model that supports the Calls to Action expressed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Having the research inform decision-making across private, public and community sectors is of particular importance in light of TRC and the calls to action for Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Canadians to collectively work to revitalize the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society. However, the research team also realizes there is a need to mobilize this knowledge at a local level to address gaps in the knowledge. This will entail a revision of the framework to create a non-academic version that is useful to local community.

One of the key findings of the research regarded the research process. Abundant research has been conducted on and for Indigenous nations across Canada. Ensuring that future research is grounded in Indigenous research methodology and guided by Indigenous communities is integral to reconciliation. Involving Indigenous communities in the decisions regarding the value or even the need for the research is essential. It is not appropriate, from an Indigenous perspective, to conduct research 'in the best interests of' those being researched. Research that supports Indigenous methodology, is guided by community and grounded in local need, is restorative and will support reconciliation. Further, the very process must be holistic from an Indigenous perspective and in order to be holistic it must be founded on the understanding that doing this work through the lens of the language is necessary. Indigenous research needs to provide opportunities for experiences that are, intergenerational, collective, cyclic, relational, reflective, and based on taking the actions necessary to restore Indigenous ancestral ways and traditional systems that were fundamental for establishing and maintaining Indigenous

relationships to people, places and the land and also fundamental to individual and collective wellness of those nations.

Additional short and long-term research and ample ongoing funding is required to support Indigenous research grounded in the achievement of reconciliation and also support the understanding that Indigenous languages and language revitalization are vital to individual and collective wellness. Research that is action based, guided by community, developed, designed and delivered with the community is a necessary aspect of future Indigenous research. Short and long term research must also support the implementation of youth leadership camps grounded in Indigenous pedagogy and language, to create a pathway to resilience, perseverance and wellness that will directly benefit Aboriginal youth and communities and indirectly benefit all Canadians and is thus essential to reconciliation.

## Context

As the principle researcher, it is only appropriate that I introduce myself. I am a mixed blood, Kwakiutl woman and single mother of three who comes from a strong, culturally connected family. I have ties to the Gʷsgimukw, Nuchahnulth, Ławitsis, Scottish and English ancestors and have raised my children to be proud of who they are and all that they are. Our family is gifted with many artists and knowledge keepers. My Grandfather, Hereditary Chief Tommy Hunt and Grandmother, noblewoman Emma Hunt were warriors of our language and culture. They worked diligently and passionately, throughout their lives, to live up to the challenge of upholding our rights to language and culture. This challenge they passed down to their children and grandchildren. In doing so, they made it our role and responsibility to take care of the *dlugwe*; the treasure which is our language.

Renowned Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson (2008) states that, “Indigenous research is ceremony and must be respected as such” (p.61). Wilson also shares,

“A ceremony, according to Minnecunju Elder Lionel Kinunwa, is not just the period at the end of a sentence. It’s the required process and preparation that happens long before the event. It is, in Atkinson’s (2002b) translation, *dadirri*, the many ways and forms and levels of listening. It is, in Martin’s (2003) terminology, *Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of doing*. It is the knowing and respectful reinforcement that all things are related and connected. It is the voices from our ancestors that tell us when it is right and when it is not. Indigenous research is a life changing ceremony” (Wilson, p. 61).

My experiences over the last four decades, have surrounded me in a process in preparation for this work. The process that led me here has been collective, relational, reflective, cyclic and intergenerational. This project is grounded in the pursuit to unravel the web of colonization, that continues to disrupt our lives in relation to self, our spiritual ways, our connection to the natural

world, our connection to our families and communities and our connection to others, to expose the web of wellness encoded in our language.

Over the last four decades, I have witnessed a cultural resurgence led by families, artists, scholars, educators, individuals and extended families from our Kwakwaka'wakw communities. They have dedicated their lives to challenge the system, searching for knowledge and agency to resist assimilation and repair the cultural genocide caused by colonization. These warriors dedicated their lives to researching and revitalizing our ways of being and our language. They have been steadfast in their pursuit, spurred on by what they know in their hearts to be true; it is our language that feeds our spirit, forms our way of viewing the world and guides our relationships; our interwoven language and culture are vital to our personal and collective wellness; and, our language is fundamental to who we are as Kwakwaka'wakw.

This cultural resurgence has led to a transformation in how we conduct our ceremonies and indeed our lives. In the last few years, many of our ceremonies that grounded us in wellness, belonging, love and collectivity have begun to resurface. The most liberating aspect of this resurgence is that as more and more people conduct these ceremonies and research them they continually transform, transform us and help us to adopt healthier lifestyles. As we experience, prepare, create the tools, unearth the language and discuss the ceremony, through countless conversations with elders, families and our Ni'nogad (Wise ones), it transforms us. Each time we prepare and discuss the processes it impacts and transforms the end result. I have been witness to this transformation that has gradually brought us full circle and helped us to realize that these ceremonies and the research are not the period at the end of the sentence. It is the process of preparing for them that is transformative, healing and leading us back to wellness from our perspective. It is the act of resurgence and resistance that is bringing us together to support one another in our pursuit of wellness.

Colonization disempowered our people and severed our relationships with our language, culture, land and ways of being. This disconnect left a lasting legacy of psychological, socio-cultural and socio-economic ills for our people both individually and collectively. Taiaiake Alfred (1999) in *Peace, Power and Righteousness* states, “The spiritual connections and fundamental respect for each other and for the earth that were our ancestors’ way and the foundations of our traditional systems must be restored” and that, “we cannot expect brighter futures without a commitment to take action and attack and destroy the heart of colonialism” (p. xiv). Yvonne G. Mcleod (2012) in, *Living Indigenous Leadership*, describes Indigenous leadership as a learned, intergenerational, and cyclic process that requires experience and reflection and that the reflection leads to self-direction. Moreover, Mcleod declares that this self-direction stems from the cyclic process. McLeod further states that, “reflection enables experiences to be transformed into learning”(p.17). Indigenous research then, and the work that we have been doing to restore our ceremonies and the language of those ceremonies, is an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to take action and destroy the heart of colonialism. More importantly, this work is lead by us. In my opinion, Indigenous research needs to provide opportunities for experiences that are, intergenerational, collective, cyclic, relational, reflective and based on action to restore the ancestral ways and traditional systems that were fundamental for establishing and maintaining our relationships and wellness, but it also has to be community driven, designed and determined and conducted through the lens of the language to be restorative.

The leadership camp framework and the work with our elders, offers an opportunity to have our youth be part of a process to unearth Kwakwaka’wakw worldview, encoded in Kwak’wala, that has been buried by colonial forces. Many aspects of the framework are built on our experience with “*Rediscovery*”, an Indigenous youth camp that immerses youth in culture, diversity and reconnection to the earth. The philosophy of Rediscovery was developed in collaboration with Haida-Gwaii Elders and founder, Thom Henley to help Indigenous youth

overcome challenges with substance abuse, delinquency and disruption in their families. Their philosophy was built on the idea that drawing on Indigenous teachings, culture, the wisdom of the Elders and reconnecting with the earth would empower youth to change their lifestyles. Rediscovery has been hugely successful and is now offered worldwide (<http://rediscovery.org>). There are many overlaps between my framework and the Rediscovery model. From our experience with Rediscovery we witnessed the positive impact that Rediscovery had on our youth and we began to formulate the idea that a camp that was structured on Kwakwaka'wakw pedagogy and perspective could have a much more positive impact on our youth.

Shirley Tagalik (2015) in *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada, Beyond the Social*, explains that Indigenous knowledge systems are based on a holistic, integrated, inclusive view of the world that denotes, “connectedness, reciprocity and relationality - the big picture perspective” (p. 25). Tagalik goes on to say that this relationality governs our actions with respect to self, others and the natural world and is the foundation of an Indigenous perspective. In addition, Tagalik explains that this perspective leads to a holistic approach to life and directly affects our wellness both collectively and personally (p. 25). Our perspective has been severely disrupted through processes that have altered our worldview, stolen our language from our people and hence changed our perspective of wholeness and wellness. In my opinion, the restoration of Kwakwaka'wakw perspective is necessary for healing and achieving wellness. Further, I believe the process for restoring Kwakwaka'wakw perspective needs to be holistic, intergenerational, inclusive and relational. This is the foundation for this project. I believe, that a leadership framework, that intends to restore perspective in relation to self, spirit, the land and sea, family, community and others also needs to be holistic to achieve wellness. Further, in order to be holistic, it must be founded on the understanding that doing this work through the lens of the language, which encodes Kwakwaka'wakw perspective, is essential to the restoration of a holistic approach to life.

This leads me to the next aspect of this work: language. Our elders believe that each person has unique gifts, roles, responsibilities and pathways in life. Every individual's perspective is shaped by everything they do, everyone who touches their lives and the world around them. Such is the nature of our language. It teaches us about that perspective. Our language shapes us; it shapes our experiences and behaviours and conveys cultural knowledge that has been passed down for generations. It contains within it the knowledge, wisdom, and protocols of our people. When we revisit our ceremonies, protocols and practices, through the lens of the language, in context to place and culture, it will provide the vital, restorative knowledge that will help our youth see the fundamental, vital connection between our language, culture, worldview and wellness. It will reveal essential information of the teachings, protocols, practices, moral and ethical principles that guided our behaviour and will guide our youth to live their life in wellness and lead their people to wellness.

The dilemma for us lies in language loss and the subsequent changes to our ceremonies, traditions and ways of life that guided our behaviour. Our elders say, "Higaman's K'odłął xan's Kwagu'leg legan's Kwak'wala: The only way you can know that we are Kwagu'ł is when we speak Kwak'wala" (Nelson, Julia, personal communication. 2014). My mother, once shared that, "When we teach our children how to dance, without our language, they are just like puppets putting on a performance" (Mildred Child, personal communication 2012). In our community there is a common misperception that language and culture are separate; that one can exist without the other. It is this view of language that is leading to accelerated language loss. This is a dangerous perspective in light of the fact that our fluent speakers are well over seventy years of age and there are few programs in place for adult learners. Further there are virtually no language programs currently being offered that will lead to fluency. There is an urgent need to create an avenue to change this perception and support language learning that is restorative to wellness and Kwakwaka'wakw perspective to stem off further language loss.

*In Indigenous Youth and Multilingualism: Language Identity, Ideology, and Practice in Dynamic Cultural World*, Wilson and Kauanoë (2014) state that in their language revitalization efforts they place heavy emphasis on, “the core of similarities between classical and contemporary Hawaiian culture and building a contemporary Hawaiian speaking society based on those similarities,” they also share the thoughts of one of their students regarding her view that they must establish the, “energy necessary to regroup, revitalize and even, in some respects, reinvent who we are” (p. 195). Wilson and Kauanoë express their view that, “language revitalization involves creating your own future based on your own past” (p. 195). Like the Hawaiians, I believe, we need to go through a process of regrouping, revitalizing and reinventing who we are by looking to our past to build the contemporary leader and address this misperception about language. By ensuring that this work is done locally, through the lens of the language, youth will synthesize the understanding that language and culture are intertwined and inseparable.

Another issue surrounds, commitment to language learning among our youth and adult demographic. Our children are learning the language but very few adults or youth speak it or are actively learning it. Wilson and Kauanoë (2015) state that:

“The key demographic in reversing language shift is young people ages 12 to 30. For this demographic to ensure the survival of their language, they must learn their ancestral language fluently, maintain fluency by daily peer-group use, pass the language onto their own children, protect and educate those children in strong Indigenous language-medium schools, join with Indigenous language-speaking peers to expand use of the language into higher socio-economic domains, and then live to see grandchildren repeat and strengthen the cycle (p.198).

We need our youth to embrace their roles as leaders of language revitalization, as well as, their roles and responsibilities as language learners. This includes offering opportunities for the

exploration of a variety of effective language acquisition methods and provision of the tools necessary to acquire language, understand the value of learning the language and bringing their languages to life in their homes and communities. Wilson and Kauanoe (2015) in, *Indigenous Youth and Multilingualism: Language Identity, Ideology, and Practice in Dynamic Cultural Worlds*, also share that youth from Mexico to Alaska, show great yearnings for ancestral language survival and must not be undervalued in language revitalization work.

I firmly believe that an exploration of leadership concepts embedded in Kwak'wala, will set the stage for initiating the process of re-establishing youth leadership, literally, in Kwakwaka'wakw terms. This can only be done by immersing youth in the land and sea, where our language springs from, to explore and synthesize their newfound knowledge and through their experiences transform their ways of thinking. Eventually, we will transform our collective view of leadership and re-invent worldview in relation to wellness and leadership in a contemporary sense.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) calls to action are another important aspect of this work. TRC commission was established as a holistic and comprehensive review of the abuse and violence inflicted on Indigenous children and families during the residential school's era ("TRC Findings," 2015). These schools were an aspect of the federal governments deliberate attempt to indoctrinate and assimilate Indigenous children into the Canadian body politic. Chief Justice Murray Sinclair states that, "those who were in the residential schools suffered in the same way that those who have been to war suffered" (Sinclair, Justice Murray. 2014). The impact of residential schools, equated to cultural genocide, has left an aftermath of devastation. In 2015, TRC completed their work with the release of their final report and the calls to action. There are 94 calls to action that were put forward to, "redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" ("TRC Findings," 2015). In my opinion, the calls to action of TRC are not achievable without ongoing, locally driven, designed,

determined and delivered measures and ongoing action to revitalize our languages and restore our cultural practices that once kept us well in all of our relationships.

I also believe that this work must be conducted in a local context. Across Canada, Indigenous nations share several common views of the world and leadership ideas, however, our languages, that encode our underlying values, beliefs and perceptions are unique and diverse thus our worldview is also diverse. Understanding that our diversity and uniqueness springs from our languages and is shaped by the natural world, leaves no room for Pan-Indigenous models. Pan-Indigenous leadership models are not culturally or linguistically appropriate because our Indigenous languages encode the concepts that tie us together, to spirit, to the land and sea, to community and to others in wellness; it is our language that will pave the way to reconciliation.

Another issue surrounds our collective and individual human rights. Youth must understand our collective rights in relation to the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People (UNDRIP). I believe, we must provide our youth with the understanding that the responsibility for taking the actions necessary to revitalize our language and stand up for our Indigenous rights, lies with them as our future leaders. We must help them to embrace the understanding that Kwak'wala is the core of our existence that provided a firm foundation for all of our relationships; Kwak'wala held us together in relationships built on, respect, reciprocity, responsibility and reverence to self, others and the natural world; that our language, which once tied us together in wellness can do so once again, when we play a role in ensuring that Canada addresses the TRC calls to action and fulfills the UNDRIP. As future leaders, the youth have a responsibility to play a role in this work and need to be empowered to become committed to action in the restoration of the vital voice of our ancestors, worldview encoded in Kwak'wala and Kwakwaka'wakw perspective that grounded our relationships in respect, reciprocity, reverence and wellness.

## Implications

Many Indigenous peoples experience cultural dislocation from community, as well as, divisions within their communities as a result of colonization (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Alfred, 2013). Reawakening local Indigenous leadership principles in the Kwakwaka'wakw communities will work towards healing these internal divisions as the project will unearth and revitalize further common cultural ground on which Kwakwaka'wakw can stand. The decolonized process, of gathering this knowledge and synthesis of this knowledge during the camp, will help Kwakwaka'wakw move toward understanding and adopting the epistemologies (how we come to know), ontologies (understanding of existence), methodologies (protocols and ways of being) and pedagogies (ways of learning, teaching) that once guided our people and restore these processes that are so integral to our individual and collective wellness.

This project will offer other First Nation communities, who suffer similar colonial maladies, a body of synthesised knowledge and a development framework for unearthing their own leadership principles through their Indigenous languages and thus move towards healthier futures. The holistic nature of Indigenous knowledge means that the unearthed leadership principles will help repair relationships with people, places and the land, as the local Indigenous leadership principles incorporate all three. Further, this project supports understanding and bridge building between Canadians and First Nations and may even offer leadership principles that Canadian leaders take up in their own leadership practices. In addition, by sharing the results with other organizations, and through scholarly gatherings and discussions at a variety of academic institutions, this project will contribute a model and resource for instructors, facilitators, and academics. This model will help instructors, facilitators, and developers to understand the worldview of the Kwakwaka'wakw and also the importance of looking through a localized lens in order to deliver programs in respectful, culturally appropriate ways.

The completion of this youth leadership framework will lead to the opportunity to run an inter-disciplinary, long term, research project, further explore and restore the language and explore the vital link between language and wellness. It will provide the means to explore a decolonized approach to community language revitalization and wellness and restoration of leadership principles embedded in Kwak'wala. It will help our community and nation move toward greater collaboration and embrace the need for land based immersion programming that is grounded in the restoration of Kwakwaka'wakw worldview and thus perceptions of wellness. This work will initiate the discussions necessary to begin the process to help our people realize that language is vital to wellness and healing and is essential for reconciliation. I anticipate that this project will mobilize community toward greater effort in language revitalization.

In addition, we must embrace the idea that integrating our language into Western or Pan Indigenous frameworks is not enough. A sound framework is based on Kwakwaka'wakw worldview, our local need and must be locally developed, designed, and delivered in order to transform camp experiences for youth in such a way that they will help our youth live their lives strongly rooted to who they are and where they come from; grounded in the understanding that our language is vital; and committed to standing up for maintaining and protecting their human rights and the rights of their people and calling the government to action to support our language revitalization and the restoration of our wellness.

### **Approach**

This project embraced an Indigenous, decolonized methodology in order to reflect the cultural protocols of the Kwakwaka'wakw. As such, the project undertook to utilize, "a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference" (Chilisa, 2012, p.12). To adhere to this ethic, much of our project involved bringing fluent Kwak'wala language speakers together in a community setting to unearth leadership terms

in the language. To begin, however, the research team synthesized existing research from traditional academic sources. Following this, the team facilitated several sharing circles by calling together Elders to *n̄n̄wakola* (meeting with the knowledgeable ones). Drawing on and inviting fluent Elders from each of our five local Kwakwaka'wakw communities we reviewed the camp framework completed by Sara Child during the completion of her Masters in Language Revitalization. The Elders were invited to participate and completed an oral consent process in keeping with Kwakwaka'wakw cultural protocols. Through the sharing circles we reviewed the draft camp framework to verify the language and leadership concepts identified by Child, and made additions, identified omissions and documented our findings. The framework will undergo revisions to reflect the Elders feedback. We also discussed and sought feedback from the elders on the research methods and pedagogical frameworks of the camp to clarify and make changes to the framework. The final stage of the project will involve bringing Elders together to present the revised framework and the mobilization of the knowledge.

During the project, we recognized that the academic nature of the framework, developed by Child, presented an obstacle to local knowledge mobilization. Child's original document is not suitable for community use and must be adapted. The knowledge mobilization plan has been altered to reflect the needed revision of the framework was not included in the original plan. Completing the adaptations to the framework is beyond the means of this project. Child has begun and will share research results by calling our Elders together to celebrate our work and acknowledge our Elders in a culturally appropriate way. In addition, we will share the results with North Island College, local School District 85, local First Nations schools and Sacred Wolf Friendship Center. We will also invite the local newspaper to share the results. There is an opportunity to share the results in a variety of academic journals including the Canadian Journal of Native Education and the Canadian Journal of Native Studies.

The framework will also be shared among First Nations and non-First Nations who deliver Aboriginal programs and with academics who are delivering programs. This process will provide an avenue to develop a leadership model that empowers youth toward self-determination from a truly Kwakwaka'wakw perspective. This can only be achieved through the integration of concepts of leadership as determined through the lens of our language. This will ground our youth in their identity and prepare them to take on leadership roles to lead their people towards bright, sustainable, and resilient futures. This will also allow for the development of a resource that correctly identifies and defines Kwakwaka'wakw terms of leadership that have been developed locally and collectively by our fluent Elders and leave a lasting legacy for future work and multi-disciplinary research.

### **Results**

This project helped us to affirm, with the help of our elders, that youth leadership camp frameworks that immerse participants, for ten or more days, in an exploration of language and culture is necessary to begin the process of restoring Kwakwaka'wakw perception in relation to self, our spiritual ways, our connection to the earth, our connection to our families and communities, and our connection to others. The camp framework must be holistic in nature to set the pathway to restore the foundations of our traditional systems that helped us to maintain states of wellness and wholeness through spiritual connections, ceremonies, and activities that tied us together in wellness and respect for others and the natural world. The leadership camp framework needs to draw upon leadership concepts encoded in Kwak'wala (and other dialects) and expressed through ceremony, as well as, daily activities of living, in an intergenerational, collective, relational, cyclic and reflective context, in order for Kwakwaka'wakw perspective to re-surface. The overarching leadership terms that will be explored will have to address relationships that were severely disrupted by colonization and residential schools policies. These concepts will need to be explored through language, activities and ceremonies connected

to self-care, care of our spirit and gratitude, care of the land and sea, connection to family and community, and connection to others. In addition, the Kwak'wala will need to be explored, in context to these activities and ceremonies, using effective immersion methodology, to build the capacity to restore the language of the land and ceremony that has been lost.

Youth will also need to explore the calls to action of Truth and Reconciliation (TRC), and the United Nation Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People (UNDRIP). To ignite the fire within our youth as a pathway for restoring the self-determination and perseverance to carry out their roles, responsibilities, and commitment to take action in the pursuit to fulfill their Indigenous rights in respect to the UNDRIP, calls to action of TRC and restoring the language and vital voices of our ancestors.

Leadership camps should not propose the exploration of leadership in a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw sense: the role of leaders (chiefs and noble women) for Indigenous nations, was a lifelong training process and commitment that began at birth and was bestowed through an hereditary process. It is not the place of anyone, who may run a camp, to pass on this important aspect of our culture. The leadership camp is meant as a platform to assist our youth to develop an understanding of their roles, in a contemporary sense, as our future leaders who are committed to nation development, restoration of Indigenous perspective, personal and collective wellness, language revitalization, self-determination and achievement of reconciliation.

Youth leadership camp frameworks should be founded on the understanding that an exploration of leadership, through concepts embedded in the local Indigenous language and dialects, will be restorative in relation to wholeness on a personal and collective level. For the Kwakwaka'wakw holistic wholeness can be explored through five overlapping leadership concepts that are characteristics of wholeness: Maya'xala xus Bak'wine' (respect for self), Mu'lano'xw (we are grateful), Awi'nakola (we are one with the land and sea), Maya'xalap'a (respect others), and O'man's 'Nam'a (we are one). For additional leadership concepts see

appendix: A. These leadership concepts influence our perspective in relation to self in a holistic sense, traditional spirituality, relationship to the land and sea, relationship with family and community and relationship with others and therefore influence our personal and collective wellness and perspective of it. These concepts are essential components of *sanala* (wholeness). The concepts overlap and must all be explored in association to one another to influence perception. These concepts must be explored relationally to restore balance and wellness in a holistic way and therefore must be explored in a local context while immersed in language, the land and sea, activities and ceremonies that tied us to wellness.

Leadership camps need to be experiential, inquiry-based and holistic; they must provide opportunities to unearth Kwakwaka'wakw perspective and be built on the premise that all things are connected and relational. By exploring leadership concepts through Kwak'wala, coupled with traditional ceremonies and activities that tied us to self, spirituality, others and the land and sea, we will embrace Kwakwaka'wakw pedagogy. The concepts will be studied in relation to one another to help youth synthesize their knowledge and grasp the understanding that the concepts are interwoven. Through this synthesis, youth will gain the understanding that Kwak'wala is tied to wellness and wholeness in a personal and collective way and that personal wellness is also a collective responsibility.

Frameworks will need to support the processes to restore the language of relationships built on respectful, reciprocal, relational and responsible behaviours by revisiting ceremonies, activities, and our ancestral ways through the lens of the language. This will set the stage to engage in the additional research necessary to include or renew traditional practices and language that has been disrupted or lost. The elders are vital to this work and the intergenerational, cyclic process. Ensuring the opportunity to engage the elders, document their knowledge, document the language and renew the language will be vital to future camps and

capacity building. Thus there is an urgent need to implement and run the camps while we have fluent elders to support this restorative work.

Helping youth understand that language revitalization, like reconciliation, requires time, commitment and resources to continually build our capacity is an integral aspect of the camp framework. Our growing capacity (each time the camp is offered) will provide a springboard for further research and delving deeper into Kwakwaka'wakw worldview and language restoration. Our ability with the language, like our understanding of the Kwakwaka'wakw perspective, will spiral outward and upward each time we offer the camp by supporting ongoing research, rediscovery, and re-invention. This growing capacity will in turn have a greater influence on personal and collective wellness as it expands.

Reconciliation, when achieved with integrity, will heal the hearts and souls of Indigenous people and reconcile the relationship between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians. This is integrally tied to language revitalization. The Hase' (breath of our ancestors) and Kwakwaka'wakw perspective is embodied in Kwak'wala. Language revitalization then lies at the roots to wellness both personally and collectively and will be the number one catalyst for change: change that will offer hope for all of our children and future generations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on Canada and Canadians to implement the measures necessary to fulfill the UNDRIP. The UNDRIP clearly states that our Indigenous and human rights include the right to revitalize, restore and maintain health and wellness of our people and the need to revitalize, preserve and maintain our Indigenous languages: both are intricately woven together and must be addressed in concert for reconciliation to be achieved.

### **State of Knowledge:**

Much scholarship calls for context-specific leadership models and considers the role of Indigenous language in informing Indigenous leadership as well as describing pan-Indigenous principles (Alfred, 1999; Cajete, 2015; Kenny, 2012; Marker, 2015). The recently published

anthology edited by Carolyn Kenny and Tina Ngaroimata Fraser, *Living Indigenous Leadership: Native Narratives on Building Strong Communities* (2015), collects context-specific work around Indigenous leadership, including Stelómethet Ethel B. Gardner's contribution, which looks at leadership in the language revitalization of her community (Gardener, 2015). The anthology as a whole is one of several important starting points to consider language's role in Indigenous leadership theory, yet there is still work to be done around best practices for the inclusion of Indigenous language in the revitalization of Indigenous leadership principles and programming.

In addition to scholarship in the academy, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has called for urgent action to support reconciliation. The TRC Calls to Action identify the need to apply Indigenous knowledge systems grounded in respect, diversity and reciprocity. This can be best achieved through the lens of Indigenous languages and through reviving Indigenous concepts of leadership and worldview that are embedded in language. For many years the Kwakwaka'wakw community, Indigenous communities and Non-Indigenous communities across Canada have been researching, designing and delivering youth leadership camps such as Rediscovery, IndigenEYEZ, and the Koeye Culture Camp. These leadership camp frameworks sought to implement programs grounded in language, culture and connection to the land to address the multitude of social issues rampant among Aboriginal youth and deeply embedded in Aboriginal communities. These include but are not limited to high rates of suicide, widespread unemployment, homelessness, high drop-out rates, high rates of incarceration, addictions and lower life expectancy. Aboriginal research conducted in the late 1990s pointed to the marked decrease in many of these issues among youth who lived in communities that embraced strong language and culture programs: "those bands in which a majority of members reported a conversational knowledge of an Aboriginal language also experienced low to absent youth suicide rates. By contrast, those bands in which less than half of the members reported conversational knowledge suicide rates were six times greater. Altogether these results

demonstrate that Indigenous language use, as a marker of cultural persistence, is a strong predictor of health and wellbeing in Canada's Aboriginal communities.” (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998, p. 7).

Through this research several gaps in the knowledge surrounding the integral place that Indigenous languages play, in the wellness of youth and indeed Indigenous communities, have been identified. In addition, many youth leadership camp frameworks sprung out of the research of Chandler and Lalonde and thus responded to the call for culturally-infused programming. These camps demonstrate the close and important connection between culture, nature, Indigenous values and knowledge systems, youth resilience and self-determination. However, the camps fall short in their attempt to inject local Indigenous languages in a meaningful way, therefore the social issues experienced by youth continue to plague Indigenous communities and youth outside of the camps. This shortfall reflects that “Indigenous principles of leadership are more than culturally specific, they are specific to place” and that “general theories of Indigenous leadership have a diminished efficacy outside of the unique conditions of each community or region.” (Marker, 2015, pp. 4-12). Without the inclusion of Indigenous language, pan-Indigenous frameworks not only disconnect Indigenous culture from Indigenous language and worldview, they also diminish the “efficacy” of local leadership philosophies as they remove a vital “unique condition” of a “community or region”—the very language that is connected to that specific place. When we understand the integral ties between language, culture, worldview and connection to the land, we recognize that leadership concepts must be applied through the lens of the local language in order to be applied appropriately, impactfully and in such a way that they properly reflect the local Indigenous identity and worldview. It thus becomes critical to explore concepts of leadership with the only individuals who hold this knowledge: the fluent speakers.

We currently live in an era of accelerated language loss and the majority of Elders who understand leadership terms in our language are well into their 70s or 80s. It is therefore urgent

that we draw on their understanding while we can, because it is the Elders whose deep understanding is built upon Kwakwaka'wakw epistemology (how we come to know), ontology (understanding of reality) and pedagogy (method of teaching) and who can reconnect us to Kwakwaka'wakw leadership principles so that we can adopt an Indigenous methodology (guidelines) and pedagogy when passing on leadership principles to future generations.

Through interviews with Elders, when asked to interpret leadership terms, Child came to understand that many younger Elders interpret words differently than Elders who were raised in the language and engaged in traditional practices and spirituality. For example, younger Elders interpret *awi'nakola* to mean "land and sea," while fluent older Elders interpret it to mean "the land and sea we are one with." Where younger Elders interpret words, the Elders interpret whole concepts; concepts that speak to our need to act responsibly in our relationships with people, places and the land. This discrepancy, in interpretation, can also be observed among fluent speakers who were not raised in our traditional ways or were prevented from participating in the traditional ways of our people. This observation is evidenced in other research on language revitalization. In the case of Indigenous language revitalization in New Zealand, for instance, after 15 years of language revitalization, the Maori noticed that although their children were speaking Maori, the traditional worldview of the Maori was absent when they spoke their language. They attributed this to the practice of teaching language apart from culture and have since addressed this by linking language to culture in their teaching practice (Hale & Hinton, 2001). This data demonstrates the urgency and importance of exploring leadership terms with fluent Elders in context to self, people, places and the land and sea, as well as, the need for sufficient time, resources and ample finances to support the work.

### **Additional Resources**

**Awi'nakola: We are One with the Land and Sea, Igniting the Fire Within; Youth**

**Leadership Camp Framework.** Document available at:

<https://www.nic.bc.ca/carti/projects/omans-nama/Default.aspx>

**Knowledge Mobilization****Target Research Users and Associated Knowledge Mobilization**

The results of the research will be shared with each of the following user groups as follows:

**Kwakwaka'wakw Nation:** In a community celebration with Elders and participating First Nations: Kwakiutl, Guscimukw, Gwa'sala, 'Nakwaxda'xw and 'Namgis Nations.

**North Island College:** NIC's research department will share the results via our regular "Research News" publication, via our institution website, and by producing a short video for use on our Social Media channels. This work may also inform new leadership programming.

**Post-Secondary Educators and Researchers:** Framework will be shared with academic institutions through two post-secondary gatherings and conferences. In addition, the leadership camp framework and documented language will be shared with various academic institutes and disciplines for future research of language in the departments such as but not limited to: linguistics, anthropology and education.

**North Island School Districts and First Nations School located in North Vancouver Island:**

The knowledge of Kwakwaka'wakw leadership principles will be shared with the local band-run schools and with SD 85 educators who are instructing courses and covering residential schools, colonization, TRC and the UNDRIP content in their courses.

**General Public:** North Island College will also prepare a media release for distribution among local and national media sources, including First Nations media.

**Conclusion**

Scholarship in the academy and Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has called for urgent action to support reconciliation. The TRC Calls to Action identify the need

to apply Indigenous knowledge systems grounded in respect, diversity and reciprocity. According to Kwakwaka'wakw elders, reviving Indigenous concepts of leadership and worldview can only be achieved through the lens of the language as it is our languages that encode worldview. The inclusion of a greater emphasis on language, in youth leadership frameworks, will enable the restoration of local Indigenous philosophies, perception and worldview.

Our elders warn that there is an urgent need to do this restorative language work in context. “We can't just speak words, we have to be talking about it and doing things to really understand what it is we are talking about” explains our elder Billy Bird (Billy Robertson, September 17, 2017). Elder Hiłamas adds, “K'odłanakwala, learning is constant. It's not just a one time thing. Everyday is a learning process,” (Hiłamas Henderson, September 17, 2017). Our elders warned that this work would take time and would need to be repeated to restore the language that has been lost. Elder Spruce Wamiss says, “Hiłalışan's nalax̄,” which means we are correcting the world or making things right. In his words, this is the closest thing he can equate to reconciliation. He went on to share, “they forced us to loose our language and they should use the same force in helping us bring back our language. This project, that we're doing, it's one small step for them to help regain our language; U'mista x̄an's yak'andas, give back our language; making things right” (Spruce Wamiss, September 20, 2017). What we can take from this is that reconciliation can only occur through action-based activities that are restorative to our language and worldview and that such activity needs to be embedded in place and community.

Evidence points to the beneficial health outcomes of Indigenous leadership and outdoor education camps. It is conceivable that a greater emphasis on language, will be restorative to worldview and coincide with increased “efficacy” of leadership camps on the health and wellness of youth who attend, because this will include a vital “unique condition” of a “community or region”—the very language that is connected to that specific place. It is the language that

encodes the values, beliefs and underlying philosophies that are vital to wellness, however, there is a dearth of research to support this. Although much scholarship calls for context-specific leadership models and considers the role of Indigenous language in informing Indigenous leadership as well as describing pan-Indigenous principles (Alfred, 1999; Cajete, 2015; Kenny, 2012; Marker, 2015), there is still work to be done around best practices for the inclusion of Indigenous language in the restoration of Indigenous leadership principles and programming to support the growing understanding that language is vital to individual and collective wellness.

Elders understand the integral ties between language, culture, worldview and connection to the land, and that leadership must be applied through the lens of the local language in order to be applied appropriately, impactfully and in such a way that the local Indigenous identity and worldview is properly reflected. It is critical to explore concepts of leadership with the elders who fully understand Kwakwaka'wakw worldview. In this era of accelerated language loss, where the majority of Elders, who understand leadership terms from a purely Kwakwaka'wakw perspective, are well into their 70s or 80s, it is therefore urgent that we take measures to implement locally, designed, developed and delivered camps to draw on their wisdom immediately and ensure the restoration of Kwakwaka'wakw epistemology, ontology, axiology, methodology and pedagogy. This is vital to the achievement of reconciliation and adoption of Indigenous leadership frameworks that are based on Indigenous perspective and leadership principles and that support the restoration of relationships that were grounded in reverence, reciprocity, respect and responsibility.

Elders also warn that this work is place specific, because our languages and worldview spring from the land and sea. Place specific Indigenous youth leadership camp frameworks, conducted through the lens of the local language support the reparation of relationships between people, places and the land and thus are integral to reconciliation. Therefore, the implementation of place specific, restorative leadership camps will be beneficial to individual Indigenous

communities, individuals and their families, as well as, collectively for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians.

Sharing the framework locally and with other Indigenous communities, with instructors, facilitators, and academics, as well as, organizations, at scholarly gatherings and discussions (at a variety of academic institutions) will contribute a model and resource to help further the understanding that there is an urgent need for re-establishing Indigenous leadership principles, that the benefits of doing so is vital to reconciliation and will be beneficial to both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians. Sharing this model will also help instructors, facilitators, and developers to understand the benefits of restoring Kwakwaka'wakw worldview and how vitally important Indigenous languages are to the delivery of respectful, culturally appropriate leadership programs. As such, this model demonstrates how the knowledge systems, experiences and aspirations of First Nations peoples is essential to building a successful shared future for all Canadians.

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## Appendix A

### Elder's Recommendations

- Wiga O'amx̄: Just do it. The elder's would like the camp and the activities done with them in a comfortable setting because just sitting and talking about the language is not enough.
- Run the camp with elders (fluent speakers and knowledge keepers) from each of our nations: Kwagu'l, Gwa'sala Nakwaxda'xw, Gusgimukw where elders are comfortable (ie. Cluxewe Resort) so the elders can watch the camp activities and explore the language and support each other in remembering this language that they no longer have opportunity to speak.
- The elders need time to talk about these things, watch them (activities of the camp) being done and talk about this together to remember this language that they have forgotten or were forbidden to speak for so many years.
- Invite camp facilitators to participate in elder camp and do the activities while the elders watch. The elders will help each other create the activity resources, in the language. The elders will have to support each other in the process to restore this language and may even need to make up new words for these modern activities.
- Have support from local people who have training in documenting our language and dialects who can then create written and audio resources.
- Create the language resources and recordings to teach the facilitators.
- Have a training camp once the elders have helped created the resources.
- Run the camp in each nation's homelands, once facilitators have been trained to do several of the activities completely in the language, or teach each facilitator is taught a few activities in the language so that they each become the expert of their topics or activities.
- Have follow up sessions with elders to make additions or changes to the resources and create new resources as needed.
- Have a follow up elders camp the next year to create new resources with the camp facilitators as our ability grows.
- We will need to go through the process over and over to gain more and more ability with the language
- We have to have people who are committed to be part of the process for several years

## **Appendix B**

**Will be posted February 15, 2018**