

SUMMER/FALL 2023 EDITION

K'weseltkten

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SECWÉPEMC CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

Traditional dancers add some fun and colour to a recent Caregivers Appreciation Celebration.



WHOM WE SERVE

Indigenous families and children living in the seven Secwépemc communities and Kamloops area. This includes: • Adams Lake • Bonaparte • Kamloops • Neskonlith • North Thompson • Skeetchestn • Whispering Pines/Clinton

Secwépemc Child and Family Services

MAIN OFFICE LOCATION

153 Kootenay Way

Kamloops

YOUTH OFFICE

348 A Tranquille Rd., Kamloops

SCFSA acknowledges, with deep respect and gratitude, that our work takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Secwépemc speaking Peoples. We recognize the past, present, and future generations of the Secwépemc Peoples who help us as stewards of this land, as well as honour and celebrate this place. We honour our connection to this land and the teaching and healing that it offers.



QWEQWENTSÍN (GRATITUDE PRAYER)

*Tqeltkúkwpí7,
Creator,*

*Kukwstéc-kuc re pyin te sit'qt
Thank you for today*

*Kukwstéc-kuc ren k'wséltkten-kuc
Thank you for my family/relatives*

*Kukwstéc-kuc te xwexwéyt te stem
Thank you for giving us everything we
need*

*Kukwstsétsemc
Thank you*

DR. CINDY BLACKSTOCK AWARD WINNER

ALEXIS WILTSE



Alexis Wiltse is this year's recipient of the Dr. Cindy Blackstock Award, a Distinguished Service Award that was created in 2018. Sadly, Alexis died in a motorcycle accident on May 6, 2023.

Alexis had been with SCFSA for 8 years, and worked extensively with Indigenous communities, allies, children, and families, most recently as a Family Preservation Caseworker for Adams Lake Indian Band. She was just settling into her new role as Family Preservation Team Leader of Ongoing Services when she passed.

Here's some of what Jen Kimble had to say about her friend and colleague Alexis at the all-staff meeting where the award winner was announced:

This was one of the hardest things I have ever had to write. I couldn't decide where to start. Do I start with talking about the time she chased her team down on the racetrack dressed like Bowzer? Do I talk about her temper tantrums when she didn't win the prizes at work? Or about her splitting her pants on the dance floor at the Christmas party? Do I talk about how she made everyone she came into contact with feel special and heard? Or do I talk about how when you effed around, you found out?

I decided to start at the beginning with her very first interview with the Agency, because right from the start Alexis showed her desire to be the best as well as that spazzy side that would pop out when she didn't get something right. Alexis arrived at her interview, sat down and was ready to destroy the questions. Michelle McMaster looked at her and asked her if she knew what agency she was interviewing for. Alexis did her head nod and said: "Yes, Secwépemc Child and Family Services," which is when Michelle replied, "I just wanted to check that you knew where you were as your resume is addressed to a different agency." Alexis got that look on her face, stared at them and snapped her pencil in half.

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The Dr. Cindy Blackstock Service Award is given to an employee in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the children and families who are served by Secwépemc Child and Family Services and in appreciation for their commitment/dedication towards realizing Dr. Blackstock's vision for all First Nations children.

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For a reason she could never figure out after snapping the pencil, they gave Alexis a job. Right from the start, she was always the first one to arrive with her hair pulled back in her tight bun, her red lipstick, and flat black pointy shoes shuffling around cleaning the kitchen and making coffee for everyone, a task she took on right until her last day with us.

When Alexis did Protection work and a family got her as their caseworker, they hit the jackpot. In the three years of being her team leader I never receive a single complaint about her. The only complaint I ever received was when I re-assigned a family to another social worker. You could count on the fact that if you worked with a family after Alexis, you were going to be told you weren't as good as her. She literally had families refuse to open the door for other social workers until they could talk to Alexis. This was because you could trust Alexis with your life.

Another example of this was the day we were invited to a welcoming ceremony in one of the communities that was extremely special to Alexis. We were all standing in a circle talking about what we were excited about for the future relationship between the community and the Agency. One of the kyé7es/grandmas that was in attendance meant the world to Alexis. This grandma sat in her chair and when it was her turn, she said: "Well, I don't really know what any of this means I'm just excited I got my Alexis back. I don't know about the other social workers, but I have been

She was the social worker who spent her weekends cooking meatballs for families when they were grieving, the one who sat with you for hours to come up with a plan for your children, and never gave up on you or on fighting for you.'

asking for a year to get my Alexis back and I'm glad ya all finally listened." To watch this relationship in front of you was to watch what true community work should look like.

It's like this grandma described it -- Alexis wasn't a social worker, she was a friend, she was like family. When Alexis was training new staff, she would take them to see this grandma as a test. After the visit, Alexis would call me and tell me if the new worker got a jar of jam or not. If they got the jam, you were golden in Alexis's books, if not, well, you were gonna have to work a little harder for her to like you.

Right in that first interview at the Agency where she snapped the pencil in half, Alexis told the panel she was going to be a team leader one day. Everything Alexis did was to work towards this goal. The day had come when everyone, including herself, knew she was ready. She did her typical note-taking and prep work, but something was different in her last interview. She had found a calmness in her power, a belief in herself that not even she could convince herself didn't exist. She went into her interview, didn't second-guess herself, and stuck to her intuition. When she was done, she came speed-walking to my office, shut the door, waved her hands and said: "I don't know if I got it, but I effing killed it, dude." Her favourite part of that day was when one of our bosses cried telling her she had gotten the job. It meant the world to her that there were so many people at the Agency rooting for her that day and that they believed in her.

I wish she could have had more time to experience reaching her goal, but I am so thankful I got to walk alongside her for her first few weeks in her new role. It was amazing to watch her in the last months of her life. She had her hair down with her crazy curls, she wore pink to work, and was vibrating at a level that many of us hope to reach one day. One of the greatest losses is that her team didn't get to have the time to learn from one of the greats and

GOODBYE, SHEILAH

Longtime Finance Associate retires after 15 years



For 15 years, Sheilah Matthey has been a mainstay of the SCFSA Finance Department — handling payroll, extended health benefits, out-of-care payments and account payables among her many duties and responsibilities.

Sheilah's value to the Agency went well above her day-to-day duties, though, and with her retirement coming at the end of December, we had her boss, CFO Cindy Carusi, share a few words about

her colleague and friend as a tribute to her time at SCFSA:

"Most days, Sheilah was so eager to start the work-day she would be at her desk ready to work before the start of the shift. Sheilah is a career accountant, payroll and tax specialist and she should be proud of the work she did for our communities. Sheilah always went out of her way to advocate for children, families, employees and SCFSA.

"It has been incredible to work alongside Sheilah as we advanced the Finance Department's systems. Sheilah never hesitated to go above and beyond to help the team whenever it was necessary. If employees needed advice, Sheilah often went out of her way to offer support and advice. There have been so many changes and Sheilah never hesitated to take on new projects and mentor new employees.

"We are so grateful for everything Sheilah has done for this Agency in the last 15 years. Her dedication to Secwépemc Child and Family Services and remarkable work ethic was unparalleled. Sheilah started at a time when there were 26 employees and SCFSA was just preparing to serve off-reserve families.

"You walk with determination and honour, Sheilah, and your worth is immeasurable.

"Congratulations on your retirement Sheilah. There is a whole new life ahead full of experiences just waiting to happen."

On behalf of everyone at SCFSA, please let us all wish Sheilah an amazing retirement and a happy farewell on her next journey.

DR. CINDY BLACKSTOCK AWARD WINNER (CONTINUED)

to feel what it was like to know you had Alexis fighting for you. I want everyone to know, especially her family, that Alexis was not just a good social worker, she was an exceptional one. She was kind, honest, hard-working, authentic, tenacious, and her favourite thing about herself? She was hilarious. She was the social worker who spent her weekends cooking meatballs for families when they were grieving, the one who sat with you for hours to come up with a plan for your children, and never gave up on you or on fighting for you.

She was the co-worker you could depend on for a laugh, for comfort, for words of wisdom and that she was going to do her job right. And for some of us lucky ones, she was a best friend who never let us down and showed us unconditional love and kindness. She truly is one of the great loves of my life.

THE AMBEARRISTERS



Mégcen and Skwékw7es (Sun and Moon) are part of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society's *Ambearristers* (ambassadors + barristers) program, which helps promote the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice. The bears have been here all year to witness the work we do.

Clockwise from top left, Mégcen and Skwékw7es at their naming ceremony; the two get dressed up in red for Have a Heart Day on Valentine's Day; and the two make an appearance at Bear Witness Day with Integrated Support Team Leader Erin Chillihitzia.

CEREMONY

HISTORIC AGREEMENT



SCFSA, Community Living BC sign deal for kids and youth aging out of care

We were honoured to have the Honorable Sheila Malcolmson, MLA Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and Community Living BC CEO Ross Chilton on hand in September for a historic signing agreement between SCFSA and Community Living B.C.

The agreement, the first of its kind in B.C., will ensure that youth in SCFSA care with intellectual and developmental disabilities will be supported when they age out of care while being able to stay in their home communities. It will create Secwépemc based, community inclusion programs that serve our 7 communities and urban Indigenous populations, with each community having jurisdiction in how they want to receive funding.



SUMMERTIME

OUT AND ABOUT



Summertime was the right time to get out and about. Clockwise, from top left, taking in the scene at Skeetchestn, where we served up burgers at the Rattlin Ramble 5K; SCFSA representing at the Children and Youth in Care event hosted by MCFD; grilling up a storm at the Ttes BBQ; and getting the word out at National Indigenous Peoples Day at Ttes Arbour.

FAMILY SUPPORT



Our **Men's Night** continues to draw a crowd and is hosted bi-weekly here at our Kootenay Way office. This gathering not only brings community members together over a shared meal but also fosters an environment where open dialogue and support thrive. Attendees gain access to valuable information on parenting, community resources, and wellness.

In the heart of Whispering Pines, our **Warrior Women's Night** has been accomplishing its mission of cultural revitalization, community connection, and well-being. This monthly gathering offers the opportunity of shared knowledge, parenting support, and cultural teachings. From drumming and storytelling to beading, sewing, and baking, this diverse group engages in activities that resonate with their community ties after sharing a meal together. Community members have told us that they enjoy the cultural activities and learning style of this group. Gratitude, excitement, happiness, feeling supported, heard, and enthusiasm are words participants chose to describe the impact this group has had in their lives.

Our team partnered up with Bonaparte First Nation to host a **Family Halloween Event** in October. Families were able to gather and have fun and win prizes. Halloween-themed cultural crafts were popular, as well

as our Halloween Sensory Table! Our team was able to build connections within the community and witness the closeness between families and children, as well as the impressive efforts from community workers and members to put on this event.

Our commitment to community well-being extends to hosting events like the **Indigenous Food Sovereignty Canning Workshop** at the Kootenay Way office. Families had the opportunity to delve into the teachings of traditional food sovereignty. A notable presence at the workshop was a member of the T'kemplups Rural RCMP, fostering relationships and connections within our community.

The Family Support Team attended several **community events** to build connections and survey community needs. Some of the events we attended include the Skeetchestn Health Fair, Qwemstin Health Fair, and T'kemplups Community Services Open House.

Our Direct Support Workers brought joy to Little Fawn Nursery with **Circle Time** this month. We brought in a healthy snack, and the kids absolutely loved the sprinkles and yogurt! The group sang a Hello Song to get to know each other's names, followed by Hickity Pickity Bumblebee, and then facilitators had the class teach our team the *Weyt-k Song*. We sang a total

"Just knowing that I'm not alone in this motherhood journey means so much to me. I was struggling with guilt and I'm very happy to be able to be a part of this."

"I took little bits from everything. I felt like this workshop grounded me back to being the mom I am for my daughters."

— *Quotes from moms who took Nurturing Bonds Parenting workshop*



of 7 songs and read two books including "Don't Push the Button" and "The Wonky Donkey". We will be going back in December for cookie decorating and a Christmas craft. Community members have asked our team to look into offering Circle Time at other locations as well!

Our first **Nurturing Bonds Parenting** workshop was a great success! The goal of this program is to provide a culturally rooted framework for mothers to strengthen their relationships with their daughters through traditional values, self-care, and dedicated bonding time. Our group discussed attachment, traditional values, communication strategies, and the importance of self-care in parenting and relationships. Our Elder-in-Residence Janet Deneault provided valuable insight into traditional parenting practices as well as traditional medicines and self-care. Each participant was gifted a self-care basket and created their own medicinal bath salts with the guidance of our Elders. We closed the session with a guided meditation led by Elder Iris Jules. The following are quotes from mothers who attended the workshop:

"I took little bits from everything. I felt like this workshop grounded me back to being the mom I am for my daughters."

"Just knowing that I'm not alone in this motherhood journey means so much to me. I was struggling with guilt and I'm very happy to be able to be a part of this."

As we look ahead, our commitment to community well-being remains steadfast. Stay tuned for more updates on upcoming events, workshops, and community initiatives.