

SPRING 2025 EDITION

K'weseltkten

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SECWÉPEMC CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY

Dancers assemble at SCF-SA's Sixth Annual Winter Gathering Powwow in February. See more photos inside.



WHOM WE SERVE

Indigenous families and children living in the seven Secwépemc communities and Kamloops area. This includes: • Cstélen • Neskonlith • Pellt'iq't • Simpcw • Sk'atsin • St'uxwtews • Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc

Secwépemc Child and Family Services Agency

MAIN OFFICE LOCATION
153 Kootenay Way
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

JANESSA ATSMA



Natasha Marshall, Jen Kimble and Janessa Atsma at the Dr. Cindy Blackstock Award ceremony.

Janessa Atsma of the Youth Intensive Team is this year's recipient of the Dr. Cindy Blackstock Award, a distinguished service award that was created in Dr. Blackstock's honour in 2018. Dr. Blackstock is tireless in her vision of improving the conditions for Indigenous children and families, notably in education, health care, and child protection. The Dr. Cindy Blackstock Service Award is given to an employee in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the children and families that are served by Secwépemc Child and Family Services Agency and in appreciation for their commitment/dedication towards realizing Dr. Blackstock's vision for all First Nations children.

Here's what Jen Kimble, Family Preservation Pro-

gram Manager, had to say about why she chose to nominate Janessa:

Iwould like to nominate Janessa Atsma for the Dr. Cindy Blackstock Award.

Janessa was my practicum student in 2017 and instantly I knew she had what it took to be a great advocate for children, youth and families. In our first meeting Janessa came in and asked questions that resulted in me having to question practice and how my practice aligned with the best interest of the children we work with. Janessa showed her ability to challenge policy and legislation in her first interview, which can take workers years to develop.

Continued on Next Page

JANESSA ATSMA

RESEARCH & POLICY DEVELOPMENT

I chose to accept Janessa as my practicum student after our meeting and in the first day saw someone with compassion, knowledge and drive. There was no doubt in my mind that Janessa lived by Secwépemc Child and Family Services Agency values: Courage/Bravery, Wisdom, Honesty, Truth, Love and Respect.

Courage/Bravery

From Day 1 of her practicum, Janessa showed her ability to step into intimidating situations and conversations. Throughout the years, I have watched Janessa deescalate children, youth, and families while remaining calm. Recently, when her team leader needed to take some time to heal, Janessa stepped into the leadership role without hesitation. Janessa's willingness to do this was due to her understanding that her team would function better with consistency and therefore the youth we work with would also experience their workers at their best.

Wisdom

When Janessa began her practicum she was still quite young, but she showed wisdom right from the start. Janessa's wisdom is intuitive and natural. When working within systems you can see Janessa using her knowledge to navigate her youth through them. Probation officers, health-care professionals, and other supports to her youth often listen to Janessa's insight into the impacts their systems are having on the youth she works with. The youth she works with trust her to be able to use her knowledge to advocate for them and will listen to her due to the way she presents her knowledge humbly.

Honesty

Janessa has always shown that she will always be honest even when it is hard. I have witnessed Janessa sit in meetings and say the hard things to other staff members, support staff, as well as to her youth. Even when I know she is nervous Janessa shows up and says what needs to



be said. Janessa has also shown this in her time as acting team leader by having difficult conversations with staff when they need to hear the truth about the impact their actions are having on youth we serve.

Truth

To me truth is when a person is always authentic and lives with integrity. Janessa shows up as the same person every day. Youth can read a person who is not being authentic in two seconds and will immediately call them

on it. Janessa connects with youth because they can see that her words align with her actions. By knowing who she is and what she stands for, Janessa's actions align, which shows her integrity.

Love

Janessa loves social work and each of her youth has a special place in her heart. You can see Janessa's love for her youth and the work by how she never stops advocating for her youth. I have witnessed Janessa show up for youth who have done everything in their power to push her away. The level of compassion she has for her youth is a beautiful thing to witness. This is not just a job for Janessa, it is her passion, and it shows up in the relationships she has formed.

Respect

One of my favourite stories that summarizes the respect Janessa shows to the families we work with was the work she did with 3 of our youth and their grandma. This group of youth are from one of the communities we serve and their grandma continued to live in their family home. When Janessa was newly delegated she spent an entire day helping Grandma around the yard, which earned Grandma's trust and therefore her grandchildren's trust.

Janessa shows up for her youth in the good times and the bad times. Due to Janessa's values aligning with decolonizing child protection practice, anyone who supervises her can trust the work she is doing in the field. I can say with full confidence that Janessa will be fighting the systems impacting Indigenous children for decades to come. It is her fighting and compassionate spirit that has led me to nominate her.



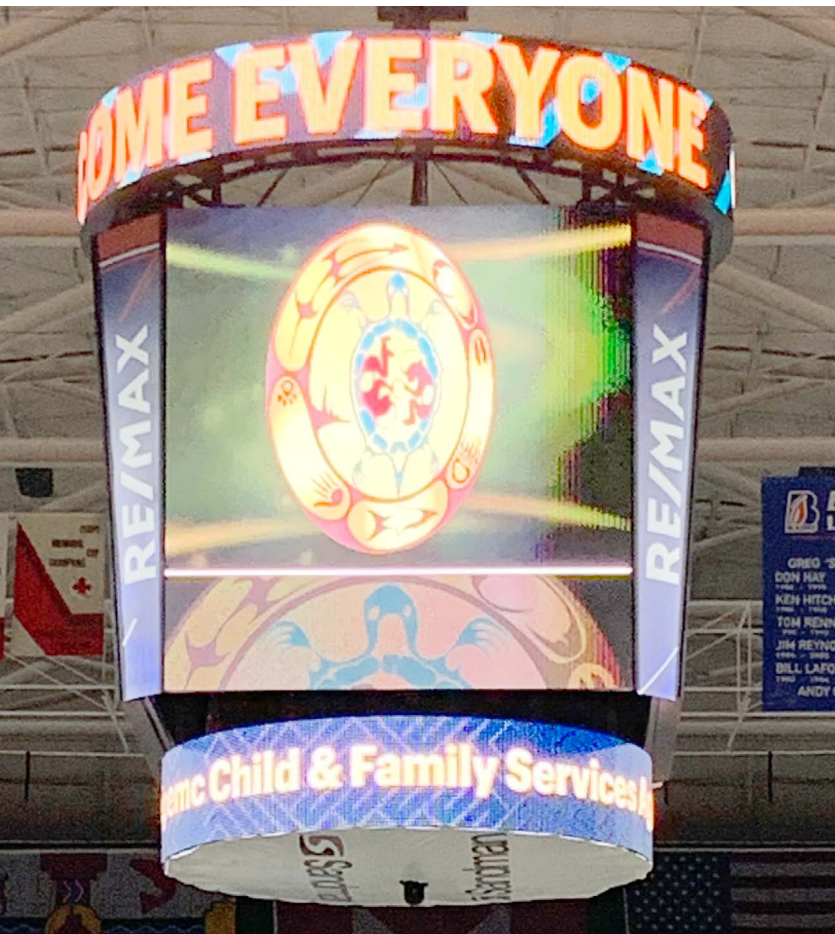
A view from the Living Spaces property on Coldwater Drive.

SCFSA's Research and Policy Development Team is expanding! We are currently accepting applications for a part-time proposal writer and a research and policy development coordinator, and at the end of March we look forward to welcoming Taylor Pertus as the new Living Spaces Coordinator! This role will be supporting SCFSA's Director of Research and Policy Development, and Director of Operations as the NICHI Living Spaces Pilot Projects continue to be developed. This project will see the first ever, First Nations-led Rapid Response and Transitional Living Spaces in the City of Kamloops through NICHI funding!

The National Indigenous Collaborative Housing Inc. (NICHI) shares on their website that "(NICHI) exists to uphold and advance housing as a human right for all Indigenous Peoples living in urban, rural and northern communities from coast-to-coast-to-coast. NICHI is built on a principle of cooperation and coordination of expertise amongst members, partners, and stakeholders committed to ensuring that no Indigenous person living off-reserve or away from their home community gets left behind because of where they live." To read more about NICHI, visit www.nichi.ca.

WINTER GATHERING

TRADITIONAL POWWOW



There was drumming, dancing, vendors and so much great energy at our Sixth Annual Winter Gathering Traditional Powwow. The event was a great success and we can't wait to see what next year brings! Also, a shout-out to our partners at the City of Kamloops, who have helped make this event happen at the Sandman Centre for 2 years now.

CONFERENCE

YOUTH GATHERING



SCFSA's first ever Youth Gathering Conference was a resounding success! Our youth were inspired by speakers like Ashley Michel, owner of 4 Generations Creations, and "Energy Mover" MC Madelaine McCallum; dancers; cultural workshops: a Nations Skate Youth demonstration; and a Saturday night music showcase headlined by DJ Shub.

