

FALL/SPRING 2026 EDITION

K'weseltkten

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SECWÉPEMC CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY



Community members twirl around the dance floor at our most recent conference -- Me7 Mestentsút-kt es Twítentem. This conference was focused on parents and featured pampering, inspiring speakers, culture and tons of fun! See more 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

ERIN CHILLIHITZIA



Associate Executive Director Natasha Marshall and Erin Chillihitzia, left, at the Dr. Cindy Blackstock Award ceremony.

Erin Chillihitzia of the Sekúsentemc Team (formerly called Integrated Support) is the 2025 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 who 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 some of what the people who nominat-

ed Erin for this honour had to say, starting with Kristen McEachern, who works on Erin's team as ARC Admin Coordinator:

Iam writing this letter to nominate Erin Chillihitzia for the Distinguished Service Award named in honor of Cindy Blackstock for her outstanding contributions and exceptional service to the children, youth, young adults, and families we support here at SCFSA.

Erin has created new, innovative and barrier breaking programming for a demographic of our youth and young adults who were at an age where support was being removed, safety was being forgotten, and they were falling through every systemic crack.

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ERIN CHILLIHITZIA

With Erin's Integrated Support Team values rooted in traditional beliefs, she spearheads and continues to push to transform services for our Indigenous youth that have diverse abilities and complex needs in a culturally driven and guided manner.

Accessibility means that people can access services for their health and wellness. This can be a major barrier for people with disabilities, who may have a more difficult time getting the services they need. Erin has collaborated with many local supports to create housing options as well as mental health, cultural, community and life skills opportunities. She is a fierce advocate and fights to raise awareness that these resources may not exist or can be challenging to access for many of our young adults who can be at risk.

Many First Nations languages do not even have a word that translates to "disability". Rather than viewing disabilities in terms of what a person cannot do Erin's vision and programming focus on the person's strengths, gifts, and positive contributions to the community.

Erin's transformative programming empowers individuals, allows a safe space for voices to be heard and has opened doors for many to remain rooted in their culture, communities and families. She strives to create opportunities that lower or remove barriers thus creating a new service delivery that respects and values all our relations as generations before us have.

Here's what Cheyenne Bigcharles, Homeshare Coordinator, Cultural/Community Inclusion Worker, had to say about Erin:

It is with great respect, admiration, and gratitude that I nominate Erin Chillihtizia for the Dr. Cindy Blackstock Award. Erin embodies the courage, compassion, and relentless determination to supporting and caring for Indigenous children, families, and communities.



For years, Erin has dedicated her life to social work and many other roles in this Agency. She has walked into roles that demanded resilience, vision, and heart, and she has consistently brought all three. Yet, it is her ground-breaking creation of the CLBC partnership and program at SCFSA that truly sets her apart.

This program was the first of its kind — designed with deep empathy, inclusion, and cultural integrity for adults living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and developmental disabilities. This is a population that is routinely overlooked, marginalized, and excluded from services. Through her tireless efforts, Erin refused to allow this to continue. She challenged colonial practices, tore down systemic barriers, and built something profoundly

“She is a fierce advocate and fights to raise awareness that these resources may not exist or can be challenging to access for many of our young adults who can be at risk.”

**— Jordan's Principle
ARC Funding Coordinator
Kristen McEachern**

healing and transformative in its place.

Her work is not only a professional achievement but also a deeply personal commitment. She has followed her passion, trusted her vision, and held onto her dream of creating a program that values the dignity, humanity, and potential of every individual. Because of her, adults who were once left without a path forward now have a program that embraces them with compassion, understanding, and opportunity.

This nomination is more than recognition of years of service. It is a celebration of her courage to fight for equity, her refusal to accept the status quo, and her unwavering belief in the worth of every person she serves. She has given voice to those who have been silenced, created space for those pushed to the margins, and brought life to the idea that inclusion must be more than words — it must be action.

As Team Leader, she has led not from the front for recognition, but from behind the scenes, ensuring her team and the individuals we serve are always lifted up. Humble in every way, she has never sought the spotlight or the glory. Instead, she has been the quiet, steady presence — cheering others on, celebrating their successes, and making sure the voices of adults with FASD, ASD, and developmental disabilities are finally heard and valued.

Her work has not only transformed services for the people we support but has also ignited a fire within those of us fortunate enough to work alongside her. Our Integrated Support Team is profoundly grateful for the way she has inspired us, modelling passion, perseverance, and compassion. She has shown us what it means to dream boldly, act courageously, and serve humbly.

The Cindy Blackstock Award honours those who carry the fire of justice and love for community. Erin has carried this fire not just for a moment, but for a lifetime.

'BOLD EAGLE' FLYING HIGH



We are proud to report that one of our Kinship Youth, Teigan, has successfully completed his basic training and is now officially a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. It is a journey that began a few summers ago when the Kinship Team helped Teigan reconnect with his Community, Starblanket in Alberta.

Teigan was joined by his brother on that journey, and the boys enjoyed a tour of the land by an Elder from their community who introduced them to band members, band council, and other Elders. The brothers participated in a few traditional practices and were shown traditional medicines.

At the time, Teigan was graduating from high school and was interested in joining the military after his graduation.

"I'm so proud of Teigan. He has been loving the program and loves his independence!"

Kinship Worker Megan Griffith

His band suggested that he enrol in the Bold Eagle program, a six-week government training program that allows hopeful recruits to learn about Indigenous culture, teachings, and military training. His band even offered to sponsor and support him.

Teigan says that the program helped him develop valuable skills such as self-confidence, self-discipline, teamwork, time management, respect, and fitness. And thanks to his Community's support, and Teigan's hard work, he is now a full-fledged soldier stationed in New Brunswick.

Congratulations to all!

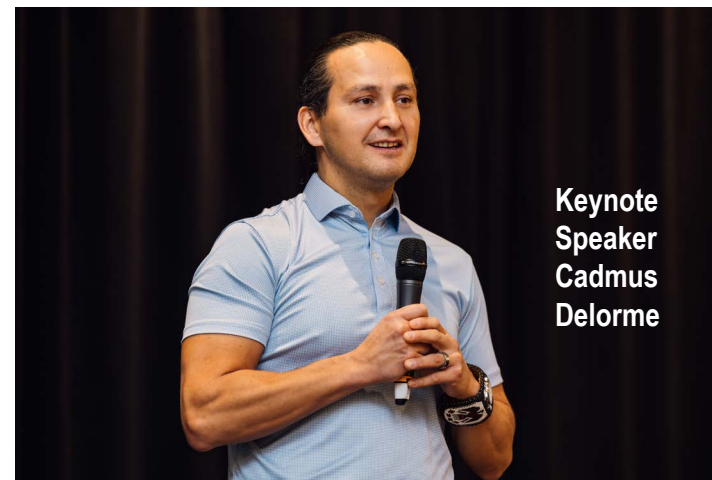
KINSHIP TEAM HELPED YOUTH RECONNECT WITH HIS BAND, AND WITH THEIR HELP, HE'S NOW LIVING HIS DREAM AS A SOLDIER



CONFERENCES

LE7 ES ELKST

THE SECOND GATHERING



Keynote Speaker
Cadmus Delorme

This conference was focused on unique, innovative practices learned in the present that are rooted in traditional and timeless techniques of the past and passed down for generations of Secwépemc people. Taking inspiration from May's Le7 es Elkst, we had our community members, Elders, social workers, and service providers gather once again for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have an ultimate knowledge-sharing conference. Whether registrants were pursuing jurisdiction, working to build ties with other organizations, bringing children home, or incorporating more family and relatives into safety plans, Le7 es Elkst worked to keep the conversation going. With our shared passion for serving children and families, we had a variety of experts share their experiences and knowing. We were especially touched by those who chose to share their story of lived experience and recognize these contributions as invaluable. Alongside workshops, there were cultural activities, vendors, and group meals.



MC
Cara Basil



Keynote Speaker
Andre Bear

PHOTOS COURTESY PHOTOGRAPHER SHELANNE JUSTICE

WHAT PEOPLE HAD TO SAY ABOUT MESTENTSÚT-KT ES TWÍTENTEM

RAINBOW PERRY: "I also would like to let you know as it was my first conference I have ever attended it was absolutely amazing soo inspiring, empowering and emotional at the end of it I really enjoyed the hypnotist show that was hilarious and very cool to see. I absolutely can't wait to attend more of them in the future"

LAURALEE VLASVELD: "Thank you again for providing such a wonderful weekend. I truly enjoyed every moment and found it incredibly fulfilling to be surrounded by our people. I look forward to joining future events."

KELSEY ARNOUSE: "I just want to start by saying how much I enjoyed the parenting weekend and how well organized it was! Kukwstsétsemc!"

MESTENTSÚT-KT ES

TWÍTENTEM

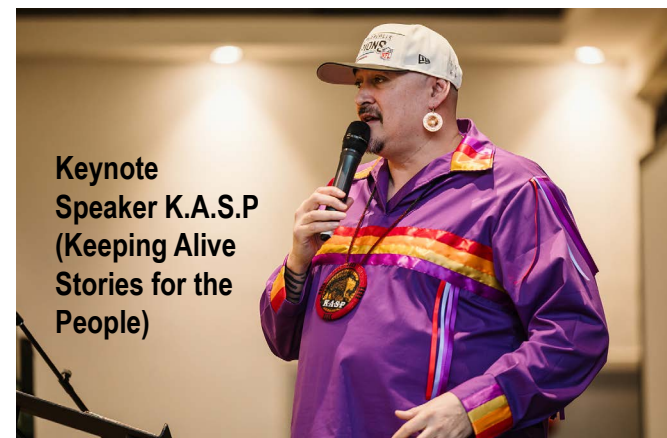
'WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO RAISE OUR CHILDREN'



MC, "Energy Mover", and keynote speaker Madelaine McCallum



Keynote Speaker Kendal Netmaker



Keynote Speaker K.A.S.P (Keeping Alive Stories for the People)

SCFSA was pleased to host parents from our seven communities at the 2026 Parenting Conference: Me7 Mestentsút-kt es Twítentem, or "We Will Do Our Best to Raise Our Children." This gathering focused on themes of wellness and connection, providing our parents and caregivers with the opportunity to connect with one another, rejuvenate, learn, and reflect. With wellness at the top of our intentions, more than 15 wellness practitioners joined us on site to offer our registrants a plethora of wellness appointments: reflexology, massage, haircuts, body work, energy work, gut health and healing, yoga classes and more. Registrants were offered various workshops, keynote speakers, and opportunities for group discussions to explore and share their respective paths within parenthood and/or caregiving. We also let loose with a rock karaoke session, and music trivia. Laughs and smiles were shared all around, and SCFSA truly appreciates everyone's participation and enthusiasm at our gathering.

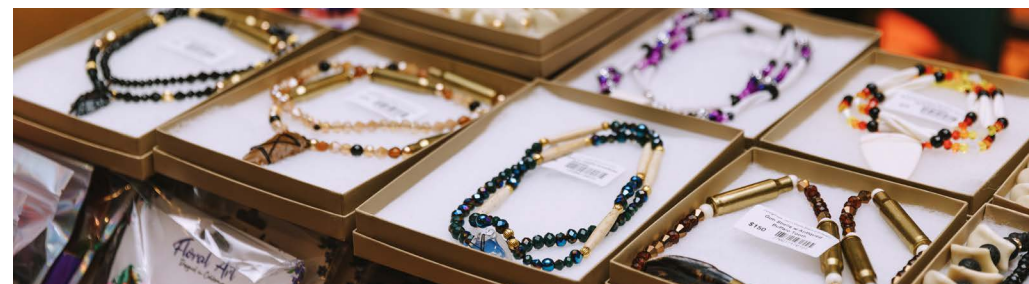


WINTER GATHERING

TRADITIONAL POWWOW



Kukpi Roeanne Casimir, left, and Coun. Nancy Bepple



There was drumming, dancing, vendors and so much great energy at our Seventh 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 3 years now.