



RAVEN TALES STORYTELLING PROGRAM

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Introduction

In 2020, Ecotrust Canada's North Coast Innovation Lab (NCIL) expanded their work with community development projects to engage in a youth-led multimedia storytelling program on Tsimshian territory in Prince Rupert, BC. The Raven Tales Storytelling program collaborates with Indigenous youths and allies to create and stage interdisciplinary performances, and document and archive their experiences using multimedia and creative practices.

The program focuses on youths' understanding and experiences of the truth and impacts of colonialism, and the hope and ideas for moving toward reconciliation. The NCIL works to build networks, relationships, and initiatives in pursuit of systemic interventions to overcome the complex

and interconnected social, cultural, and economic challenges within the community. This work highlights the importance of a platform where voices of youth can be heard and creates space to nurture the Raven Tales Storytelling program. Innovative and collaborative programming brings people of various cultural backgrounds together to contribute their perspectives toward a greater understanding of the need to foster a vibrant and inclusive North Coast community.

The NCIL receives support, including funding, through Mitacs Canada, to enhance spaces for community projects. The funding supports university interns who bring research and prototyping support to socially innovative programs, led by local partner organizations.

Project road map



The Project Coordinator worked online for two months in Victoria, and arrived in Prince Rupert in early July, self-isolating for two weeks before entering the community.

Throughout this report, the Project Coordinator describes the Raven Tales

Part 1: Origins

Change Makers' Education Society (CMES) is a non-profit organization founded in early 2017. They provide literacy services, grassroots education, and experiential learning to create social change.

The society's mission is:

To help people gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate in creating a healthy community and lead a fulfilling life. The workshops and activities that we offer have the goal of strengthening our community.

CMES Executive Director Karen Buchanan, sees literacy on a broad spectrum that includes creative expression through several artistic mediums.

The Raven Tales Storytelling project was inspired by Buchanan's goal to develop literacy in reading, writing, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and technology for youth, through the creation and staging of a theatrical play. The program endeavours to document and archive youths' experiences using multimedia and creative practices. These goals include working with imagery in imaginative ways to communicate ideas interactively through social media.

Support for the Raven Tales Storytelling program began with funding from Canada Youth Services to offer meaningful opportunities to youth, 15-30 years of age. The project received support from the Ministry

Storytelling program in four parts:

1. origins;
2. evolution of programming and realization of creative projects;
3. lessons learned; and,
4. meaning of the project for the community.



Image created by Karen Buchanan to be further developed in collaboration with youth into a social media post.

of Advanced Education, Skills, and Training. The staff and board of CMES collaborated to design a program that offered skill-building and multimedia training focused on:

- skill building — oral and written communication, critical and creative thinking, time management, leadership and self-confidence, teamwork and self-discipline, costuming, and prop construction.
- multimedia training — recording audio and video, lighting and staging, editing with Adobe software, enhancing video quality, marketing, graphic design, and posting to social media sites.

2019 Program

In 2019, approximately 25 youths responded to online and print invitations to attend the Raven Tales Storytelling Revival program that ran throughout the summer and fall. Various groups were approached to participate or co-host events, which included:

- interactive community projects at local festivities such as Seafest, Canada Day, Friendship House Block Party, Valhalla Festival, Edge of the World Music Festival, and Prince Rupert Civic Centre community sign-up events;
- presentations by community members: Arlene Roberts from the Residential

Schools Survivor Association; Duane Jackson presenting Bringing Tradition Home; Gitksan artist John Wale; cultural keeper and drummer, Marlene Clifton;

- activities at Change Makers' offices including creative writing, video, silk screening, block printing, art, berry picking, resume writing, research, reading, costume designing, writing and composing rap lyrics, shooting video B-roll; and,
- theatre activities at Brilliant Experience Studio, including video experimentation, improvisation, movement, gesture and imagination exploration, reading plays and monologues, and presentations.

In the fall of 2019, Youth Coordinator Alfred Harris gathered the ideas, impressions, inspirations, and storytelling that came out of brainstorming sessions held with youth in the program. Harris organized the work into a preliminary script with the intention of workshopping the material and creating a play the following year.



Arissa Leland-Barnaby and Kamryn Bolton exploring video equipment in the summer of 2019.

Part 2: Evolution of programming and realization of creative projects

May and June 2020

The Project Coordinator identified a strong start born out of 2019 activities. CMES intended to continue developing the program from this foundation, however the COVID-19 pandemic had changed the way people interacted with one another. The pressures on the program required activities to be altered.

Rather than working with the script from 2019, the Executive Director and Project

Coordinator embraced other artistic possibilities to push toward new creative constructs. The decision was made to highlight online programming, increase social media traffic, and engage with youth through the digital arts. Schools and community organizations were contacted to increase participation. These groups confirmed that the connection with youth was diminishing due to the shutdown of activities in response to COVID-19.

Raven Tales Storytelling Program Pivot
Response to Covid-19 Pandemic



A monthly calendar was designed featuring three drop-in online programs in June. Two weekly online meet-ups invited youth to gather virtually for an hour at a time. The On site-In sight series used photography and video to explore outdoor spaces. The Creative Storm drop-in invited collective exploration of digital editing to design provocative social media. The Revisit program reacquainted past and present collaborators with one another.

Priscilla Dennis is a Literacy Outreach practitioner from Lax Kw'alaams First Nation, and an originator of the program. Her presence deepened the Project Coordinator's understanding of the work being done. In response to material shared by a guest video editor in the Creative Storm drop-in series, Sage Buchanan and Taylor Munro Sampson created the following stop motion animation clip.



[Click here to view the Soar video online.](#)

Working online through social media demanded more flexible branding than the 2019 print media that featured a drawing of a raven by participant Denny Yoraschuk. Integrating continuity between 2019 and 2020 was important. Invitations were made to seek a youth to design a new logo based on Denny's gifted raven drawing. A lack of response compelled the Project Coordinator to work on a logo with volunteer support from Gordon Celesta. Four designs were offered on polls on Facebook. Group members chose the 2020 Raven Tales Storytelling summer logo. It was incorporated into posters designed by CMES youth outreach worker Stefanie Stephens for summer events.

The pandemic also sparked community adaptation and innovation. The Rainmakers Interact Club of Charles Hays Secondary School produced a daily current affairs broadcast to increase community connection. The Project Coordinator was honoured to be interviewed, and it led to a relationship with Brendan Eshom (in the video below), a youth who shares his Tsimshian culture through the smalgyaxword.ca website and Smalgyax Word app he developed.



The above poster by Stefanie Stephens reflects work done by youth for the program.



[Click here to view the Brendan Eshom smalgyaxword.ca video online.](#)



Priscilla Dennis
Raven Eagle Media

[Click here to view the National Indigenous Peoples Day presentation video online.](#)

Other creative project opportunities, including the Seafest Parade and CFNR radio's National Indigenous Peoples' Day live stream show, invited online community

engagement. We drew from past and present video footage to produce a mini documentary in response to both events.

July 2020

The Project Coordinator developed programming that:

- responded to the drop-in nature of youth participation;
- gradually increased input from staff;
- built bridges between youth and community members and projects; and,
- began development of a prototype outdoor art show to inform possibilities for the final show in March of 2021.

The On site-In sight series and Creative Storm drop-in continued. Lighting the Fire: Sparking Change and the Memorial Pole for Mom drop-in were introduced. The Sparking Change series explored different ways humans use and understand fire, beginning with a silver carver

in July followed by a traditional helper and performance artist that rescheduled to August due to weather. This program connected youth with community members to support deeper thinking about movement toward reconciliation and potential representations of this complex concept.

Youth were invited to witness carvers creating a memorial totem pole by Haida artist Lyle Campbell for his mother, Alice Campbell. Weekly drop-ins connected youth to the carvers' ways of knowing, being and doing. Mr. Campbell encouraged them to open their hearts and minds and ask questions. Images captured by youth and staff were supported by other programs and shared on social media. Youth engaged in collaboratively editing the following clip.



[Click here to view the Alice Campbell Pole Collage video online.](#)

The pole project also connected Andrew Stewart to our program. As a First Nations Filmmaker with a diploma in Digital Film and Video from The Art Institute of Vancouver, Stewart recently established ProREz Studios, and had videoed Mr. Campbell's initial funding campaign, and eagerly joined our group to capture the final work on the pole. Mr. Campbell contacted CBC Arts, and ProREz has been contracted to produce a documentary about this extraordinary project.



Andrew Stewart shoots video of Haida artist Lyle Campbell.

August 2020

The Project Coordinator supported the development of programming that:

- fulfilled July programs;
- presented an outdoor art show;
- was developed solely by staff and was youth-led; and,
- continued to access leadership from community members.

New Programs

Write Your Truth was conceived and led by youth. This inclusive and experimental creative writing workshop mentored participants to explore voice through storytelling. Goals of the

program included experimental writing for zines and the continuation of cultural storytelling techniques. Cultural Connections was designed by staff in response to spontaneous opportunities that occur for youth to meet with guest hosts and learn more about cultural practices that take place in the area.

The Story Weaving project gathered youth to design and build an outdoor art installation at McKay Street Park. Tsimshian elder and Sm'algayax teacher Alex Campbell mentored the group to choose culturally meaningful words that could be woven into the park's fence with natural materials. The neighbourhood would be invited to contribute to the installation in September 2020, fostering an inter-generational project.

Continuing programs

The Memorial Pole project gave youth the opportunity to witness some of the final work and discuss the transformation with the carvers. The pole raising was private due to COVID-19 protocols. The Project Coordinator experienced a sense of completion and an even deeper respect and reverence for this piece of art when returning to the carving site, Mr. Campbell's childhood home, where it now stands.

The Sparking Change series had to accommodate for the weather. The final two workshops were land-based. Traditional helper Chris Nelson offered the group Indigenous cultural teachings related to smudging and an opportunity to experience ceremony. CMES Executive Director and performance artist, Karen Buchanan, drew upon training as a Chartered Herbalist to describe sacred fire elements and explore how to use them to create a magical space and enhance the power of storytelling.

The Creative Storm Outdoor Art Show

completed this series to reflect youths' ideas and thoughts on truth and reconciliation. Youth were presented the opportunity to imagine an art show of outdoor installations at several different sites downtown. In the spirit of social innovation, the Project Coordinator worked to build relationships with the City of Prince Rupert, businesses, and organizations throughout the project to move toward the creation of temporary, outdoor, public art spaces.

Conceived to be a walking art show, the public were invited to follow maps and visit each site. Volunteer hosts supported specific exhibits with additional information, and they ensured the practice of physical distancing was respected. Each site featured a specific theme, reflecting youths' hopes, dreams, and understanding of moving toward reconciliation. Most sites offered interactive elements, and gift giving was an important aspect to express understanding and healing. Below are the site descriptions and photos to describe the show.



City Hall fountain courtyard
 Theme: Gratitude rocks.
 There were visual and written messages of gratitude. (Right) Rolled paper wrapped in cloth with a youth's experience and understanding of gratitude.



Lax Kw'alaams Business Development Centre
 Theme: Respect
 (Left) Installation: 12' X 6' banner with a culturally significant Sm'algayx word and Northwest Coast formline border design. The Sm'algayx word toomsk translates to respect in English.



Outside Atlin Terminal in Cow Bay
 Theme: Ayaawx (the power of transformation)
 Stories of the shape shifters were told to passerbys.

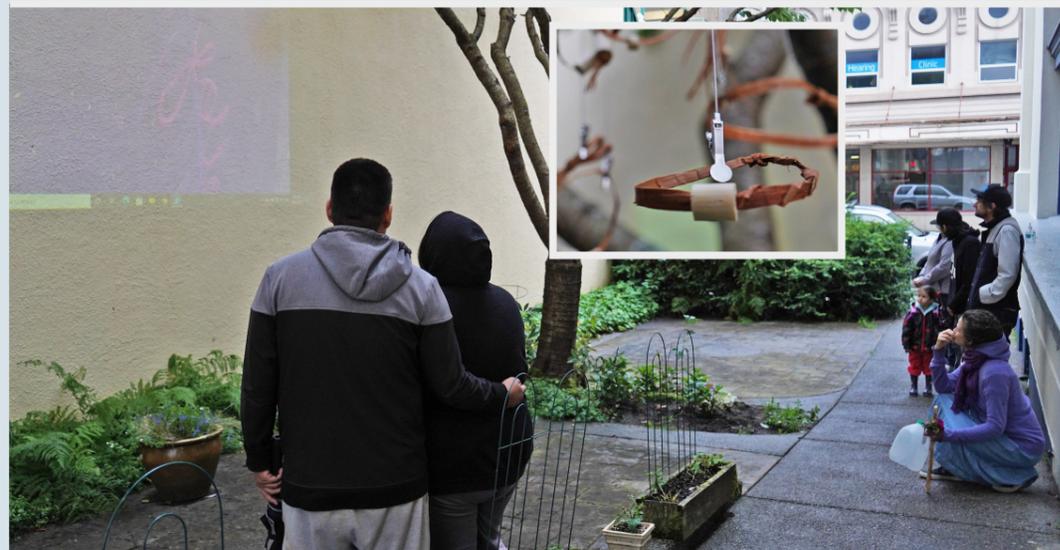


Pipes at the Manson Street walking bridge
 Theme: Master Carpenter and South-East wind story
 (Above). The public were invited to play the pipes.



Museum of Northern British Columbia Longhouse
 Theme: "Raven Brings the Light"
 (Left) Participants listened to a recorded storytelling by Roy Henry Vickers of *Raven Brings the Light*, co-authored by Roy Henry Vickers and Robert Budd. This version originates from one told to the author by Chester Bolton, Chief of the Ravens, from the village of Kitkatla around 1975.

Creative Storm Outdoor Art Show



Java Dot Cup, outdoor courtyard local eatery and coffee house
 Theme: Truth and reconciliation. There was a video projection on the outdoor courtyard wall. (Inset) A hanging mobile of cedar bark and devil's club bracelets and talismans offered as gifts in recognition of healing.

Part 3: Lessons learned

This project continues to discover the innovation and resourcefulness of youth. Their designs incorporated exciting structures and safe approaches to live public presentation in the midst of a global pandemic. The strength of community-mentorship reinforces the ability to develop leadership in understanding the complexity of moving toward reconciliation in Canada.

A belief exists in Prince Rupert that outdoor public events are stymied by rules, regulations, and audience apathy. However, relationship-building and collaboration between organizations, businesses, and the city will likely create space for arts-based public events. In these spaces the voices of youth have an opportunity to be heard and make a stronger impact on the community.

Throughout the project term the connection between social innovation and arts-based programming was revisited. The process is not a straight-forward, cleanly-defined one. Diane Conrad, a scholar in drama and theatre education, explains that “Community-based

arts and social innovation seen through the lens of complexity theory share an understanding of the world as complex, interrelated, unpredictable, and messy, and ways of working based on imagination, intuition, the recognition of patterns and emergent, co-evolving processes with transformative potential.” As the work of socially innovative community-based art in Prince Rupert progresses, the potential to transform socially challenging assumptions and attitudes held about, and toward, one another increases.

Supporting youth is a community-wide endeavour, and the work of others in this field offers an opportunity to build and expand in this area. It is important to understand how other youth services and projects are offered to this demographic, and whether they share similar challenges. Insight can also be gained from looking at youth-driven projects in other locations. When this knowledge is informed by local experience and expertise, a stronger foundation for programming can be built.

“As the work of socially innovative community-based art in Prince Rupert progresses, the potential to transform socially challenging assumptions and attitudes held about, and toward, one another increases.”



Part 4: Meaning of the project for the community

For Change Makers’

The expansion of Change Makers’ literacy advocacy to explore arts-based youth-led programming encourages youth volunteerism and skill-building for the labour market. It addresses local social challenges. This type of programming needs to continue creating spaces for youth to reflect on the world they share, and what meaning it carries for them.

This summer’s Raven Tales Storytelling program afforded an opportunity to experiment with thematic development of an outdoor presentation and consider options for the final production. Re-imagining structure and form for the development and presentation of a public performance led to testing ideas within the Creative Storm Outdoor Art Show. This production offered insight into alternative presentations and continued to deepen exploration of its content. It was valuable to mentor youth’s leadership and wisdom, inform the public with more diverse views, and strengthen relationships between business, organizations, and the City of Prince Rupert.

Learning from the conception, creation, and presentation of this public event will serve the fulfillment of the Raven Tales Storytelling project in 2021. The artwork shared publicly,

and over social media has potential to cause a ripple effect and engage more youth in the following months to plan, develop, and create arts-based work addressing social challenges. In the long term, youth have demonstrated a flexibility to work within community needs and parameters to develop publicly engaged art. These skills transfer to several areas of employment where social justice issues are addressed.

For Prince Rupert

This program illustrates how the presence of youth-led public art has the potential to address community well-being and promote healing between groups experiencing inequality and misunderstanding.

The summer portion of the Raven Tales Storytelling program demonstrates that safe, physically distant art programs can take place during the COVID-19 pandemic. A base has been established to move forward and continue cultivating relationships necessary to hear youths’ perspectives while confronting social dysfunction and discord. When the final presentation takes place, a strong platform will exist to offer CMES, the NCIL, and other organizations, opportunities to continue supporting the power of art, and sow the seeds of social change.

Project Coordinator

Lori Hamar

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Lori Hamar is a contemporary dance artist who occupies the unceded lands of the Lekwungen people, also known as Victoria, BC. She was born on the original territories of Beaver, Sarcee, Sekani and Blackfoot peoples, also known as Northern Alberta, to a second-generation Ukrainian immigrant family. Later in her career, she engaged in the facilitation of improvisational dance for preschoolers and earned an Early Childhood Care and Education diploma. Lori received an undergraduate degree in Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and is currently a Master's student. Her arts-based research focuses on collaborative dance arts tapping into youth agency to promote movement toward reconciliation on land called Canada. This creative process has the potential to contribute to the ongoing task of decolonizing Child and Youth care practice.



Please visit the ecotrust.ca/innovation/north-coast-innovation-lab for updates

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