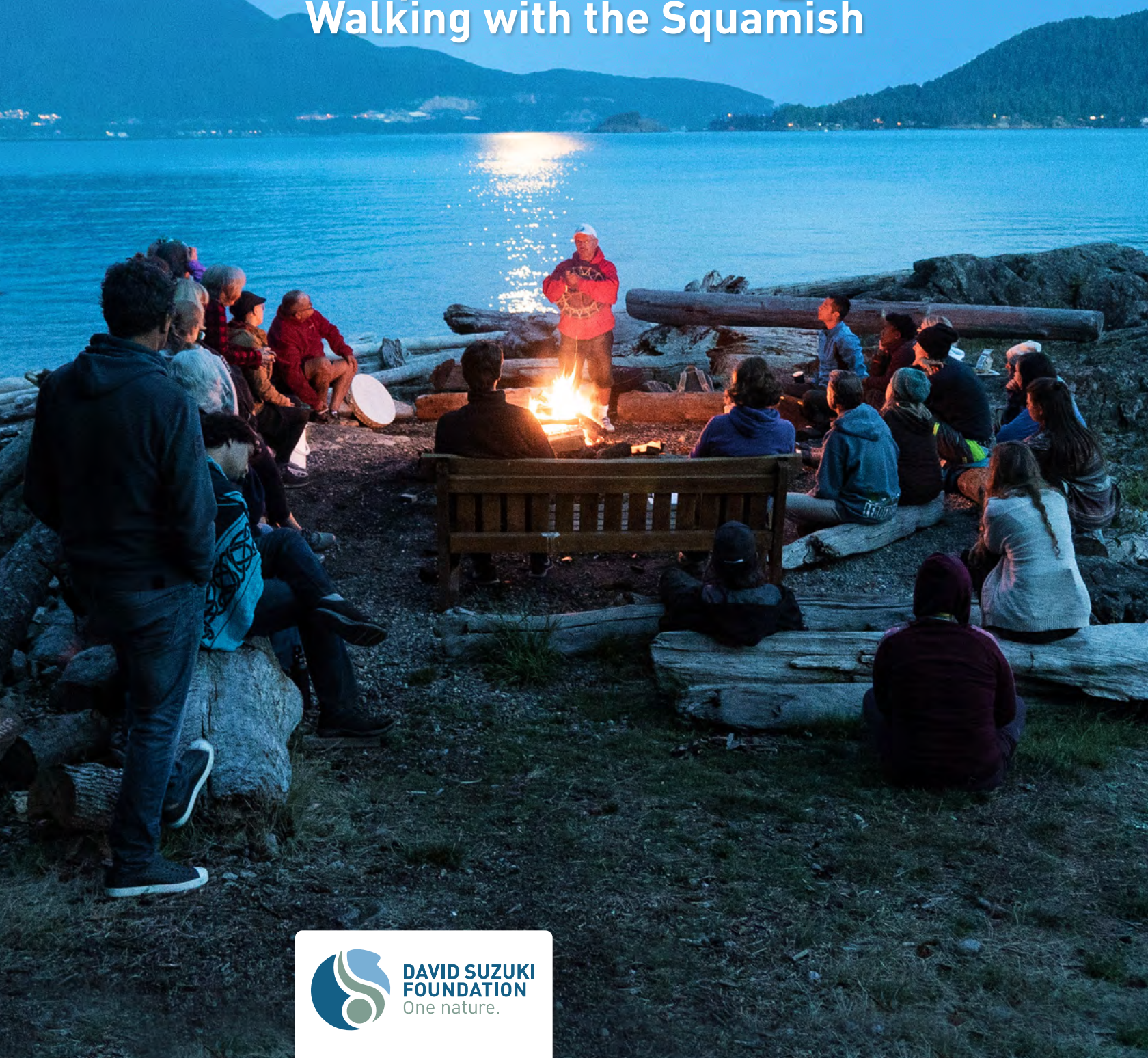


SETTING UP CAMP

LESSONS FROM

Camp Suzuki at Chá7elkwnech:
Walking with the Squamish



DAVID SUZUKI
FOUNDATION
One nature.

BRINGING TOGETHER INDIGENOUS TEACHERS WITH EXISTING OUTDOOR EDUCATION FACILITIES AND KIDS CAMPS



***Setting Up Camp* by Panos Grames and Delaney Beaton**
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INTRODUCTION

It's impossible to adequately describe in a report the joyful engagement of a multigenerational, Indigenous-led summer camp. But we hope these pages will convey some sense of the experiences of 170 people ranging in age from eight to 75, singing songs together and learning about Squamish language (Skwxwú7mesh sníchim)*, cedar weaving and Indigenous plant uses at Camp Suzuki at Chá7elkwnech: Walking with the Squamish.

This report aims to inspire and guide others to build on and expand partnerships for Indigenous-led outdoor education throughout Canada and beyond.

Since 2015, the David Suzuki Foundation, Squamish Family and Children's services (Ayás Ménmen), the Squamish Nation and Camp Fircom have worked together to offer camps on beautiful Chá7elkwnech: (Gambier Island) in British Columbia's Átl'ka7tsem (Howe Sound).

Camp Suzuki at Chá7elkwnech is a nature-based summer camp that combines environmental stewardship and First Nations education. As soon as we put out the invitation to co-create a camp, educators, activists, Indigenous leaders and engaged community members stepped forward, reflecting people's emerging desire to reintegrate and share Indigenous histories and ways of knowing.

If we can inspire others to bring together Indigenous Peoples and conservation groups through an enjoyable outdoor learning environment that teaches the interdependence of Indigenous culture, history and environmental stewardship, this report will have served its purpose.



*The phonetic spelling of Squamish is Skwxwú7mesh. The word for language is *sníchim*. For audio recordings of how to pronounce Chá7elkwnech, Átl'ka7tsem and other Squamish place names, please visit SquamishAtlas.com



HISTORY

The David Suzuki Foundation began the journey into the world of outdoor education in 2015 as a way to foster leadership in youth activists who wanted to participate in conservation campaigns. It then expanded to include adult, teen and kids' camps running concurrently.

Originally called "Camp Suzuki: Howe Sound," the name of the camp evolved to "Camp Suzuki at Chá7elkwnech: Walking with the Squamish" in 2019, reflecting increasing leadership from the Squamish people.

Learning from our Squamish partners, the David Suzuki Foundation's role shifted from leading the camp toward a full partnership. This made room for Squamish leaders at Ayás Méñmen (Squamish Family Services) to teach campers about their culture, language and traditional knowledge.

Along with teachings from Squamish Nation members — including the famed Canoe Family — Camp Suzuki at Chá7elkwnech: Walking with the Squamish came to include seminars from DSF staff, academics, scientists and other skilled educators. Camp Fircom staff offered expertise in outdoor education and the day-to-day business of running an outdoor camp with more than 100 children, 50 staff and 20 adult leadership campers.

"It was an incredible experience. I walked away with a greater understanding of conservation planning, Indigenous ways of learning, inclusive environmentalism and connections with people that really care about 'all life' on this planet."

— FONDA, PARTICIPANT

"My experience provided me with a foundational approach to teach an introductory design drawing course for First Nation students at the Squamish Trade Centre. Camp helped me become aware of other ways of teaching and learning, and left me with a profound respect for Squamish knowledge and ways of living."

— BRENDA, PARTICIPANT



GETTING STARTED

If you're an Indigenous group, nation or person, we recommend contacting the director at a local, long-standing outdoor summer camp. They already have the infrastructure, facilities, settings, staff, registration systems and more to help you get started. Send the camp a copy of this report and ask to set up a meeting.

If you're part of an organization or existing camp, approach your local Indigenous community or members and ask if they would be interested in an outdoor camp that emphasizes Indigenous learning. Keep in mind that many are underfunded and overworked. Do as much of the legwork as possible.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators expressed that co-operation through an equal partnership was the most important aspect of the camp. Develop programming and curriculum together well in advance, not as an afterthought.

"Either you need to go and cultivate those relationships or you need to partner with an organization that has. It needs to be co-creation, not tokenism — it's basically their curriculum and we're helping facilitate. It also needs to be from the start. Don't come up with boxes and ask them to fill it in. Ask 'what would be most important for you? What are the topics that you want settlers and non-settlers to learn?'" — MAI YASUE, FACILITATOR (QUEST UNIVERSITY)

"It's really important to start small to build trust. First we sat and talked, then we hosted a day event. We really built the relationship before we launched into hosting a camp." — STEPHEN FOSTER, ORGANIZER (DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION)

Many facilitators and campers talked about the importance of mutual and cross-generational learning — youth and elders can learn from each other in different ways. The diversity in educators and attendees was reflected in the curriculum, which featured lessons from all of the partners (Squamish FN, DSF and Fircom).





GETTING STARTED *continued*

“Elder and youth involvement is really important because the elders have the history and the knowledge of the land and culture and the youth can share what they’ve learned We share your teachings and our teachings. We’re there as guests but also as hosts. We both learn from each other and we both give to each other. I learned some of the songs that you shared that I’d never heard before. So there was a lesson for me too.” — ALROY “UNKA BUCK” BAKER, FACILITATOR

(SQUAMISH NATION)

Ayás Méhmen highlighted the importance of communication and planning before the camp. We had many pre-camp conversations and meetings to get to know each other, come up with creative ideas, weed out the weak ones, and allow for the development of the best concepts.

“For me, the most important part of the whole dialogue was ensuring that we [all partners] were all on the same page. That our objectives and goals were similar. Building a relationship and having an open discussion is important. Even though [the planning] seems long and tedious at times, it all pays off in the end. Everyone left smiling. If we had the opportunity to do the camp again this year,¹ I know that it was going to be 100 per cent successful.” — CHATATOLT – JACKIE GONZALES,

FACILITATOR (MANAGER OF YOUTH AND PREVENTION SERVICES, AYÁS MÉHMEN)



¹Due to public health restrictions, we had to suspend Camp Suzuki at Chá7elkwnech: Walking with the Squamish in 2020.



FACILITATORS

We brought together Indigenous youth, elders and others who wanted to share culture through history, language and song, along with academics, ecologists and community activists. The teachers and people leading the camp worked hard, but the creative and cooperative environment allowed for individuals to bring their best forward.

“It’s a welcoming environment — that is very important. Our traditional ways, protocols and teaching methods are woven into the camp structure. It wasn’t just run by DSF and Camp Fircom, it was a true partnership with the Nation. This makes a big difference because it’s not paternalistic. In so many areas, we’re told what to do or where we fit and are often tokenized. And it wasn’t like that at camp.” — JARED VAN SOMER, FACILITATOR (SQUAMISH NATION)

Building relationships takes time, so invite Indigenous facilitators for the entire week to allow time for real conversations and experiences. Indigenous leaders and elders often have many roles and duties within their community, so be sure to invite more facilitators than the bare minimum. In the event of a community crisis, respect the needs of Indigenous leaders.

Of the 170 people at the 2019 camp, more than 40 were Indigenous campers, facilitators and leaders. We believe the partnership and attendance will continue to grow.





CURRICULUM

Squamish teachers chose to teach through action and experience, not worksheets and lessons. Learning language and culture through song, kxwu7lh (seagoing canoe) trips, dance, nature walks and storytelling was primary.

Working together, Ayás Méhmen, DSF and Camp Fircom wove together experiences for kids that were engaging, fun and interactive. Adult campers had a mix of Squamish teachers, but also received a package ahead of time with reading materials and vocabulary lists that allowed them to “study” ahead of time. DSF staff led seminars on community organizing, environmental rights, communications and GIS map-making. Academics and community leaders also led sessions with campers. Our partners were clear:

“What makes this camp unique and important is the partnership with Squamish Nation. The parts of the program that relate to reconciliation and race/racism are really important and are a major draw.”

— MAI YASUE, FACILITATOR (QUEST UNIVERSITY)

Don’t overbook the schedule! During our 2018 camp we were excited to offer a wide range of experiences and education for campers. However, by the third day, course facilitators and campers were exhausted. In our excitement to provide a broad curriculum, we didn’t leave time for campers and facilitators to simply enjoy nature, rest and recuperate! Schedule breaks in the afternoon and evening for participants to enjoy nature, connect with fellow campers and take in the day’s learning.

“True partnership can mean a completely new way of running a program — you need to keep an open mind. Ensure the essentials for your staff to function. At Camp Fircom we kept the same mealtimes, but everything else on the schedule was fair game! Bring your wisdom for transition timing and fun activities — be open to changing programming session lengths, content and ages.

— MARGO DUNNET, DIRECTOR (CAMP FIRCOM)

For schedules and other resources go to www.daidsuzuki.org/camp-report





ADMINISTRATION AND BUDGET

Although most of the camp's budget came from camp fees, all the partners gave staff time and resources to ensure its success, with considerable in-kind support for marketing and facilitators. The partner organizations also contributed significant financial resources, especially during the early years. We also worked to make sure it was affordable, and provided scholarships for Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids.

Budget discussions and considerations included paid facilitators; camper scholarships for Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids; pricing for the adult, youth and kid streams; grants; and materials for sessions like cedar-weaving and drum-building kits.

Initially DSF set up its own registration website and organized transportation and all logistics. However, it soon became apparent that Camp Fircom already had the expertise and infrastructure to do this so we reworked our partnership so each party could focus on what it did best. In turn, those efficiencies significantly lowered the operating budget. The partnership required careful co-ordination, including adjusting schedules to accommodate the different teaching styles of facilitators, Indigenous experts and others.

Make sure you budget for additional facilitator costs. Grants or other funding might be available to offset special programs, including opening and closing ceremonies.

"Organizing food, transportation and lodging for 170 people on an island isn't easy. Neither is recruiting campers, finding cedar for weaving, or organizing overlapping schedules for kids, teens and adults. Once we started to recognize each of the partner organization's strengths, the whole camp went to another level.

— JAY RITCHLIN, DIRECTOR (DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION)





RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

DSF has the good fortune to have a nationally recognized name and a robust communications network, but there are still many ways for smaller camps and organizations to let people know about a camp. Here's some of what we did to spread the word:

- Contact local school districts, ask partner educators to distribute posters and share email and/or social media posts.
- Host informational events
- Attend teacher-training conferences.
- Run ads and stories in local newspapers.
- Post on social media (e.g., Facebook posts and ads).
- Ask past participants to share with their communities.

Our post-camp survey suggested word of mouth and DSF emails attracted the highest numbers, followed by school district communications and social media.

We also began to specifically invite teachers, as educators told us Squamish teachings and methods helped them in the classroom, including fulfilling new British Columbia provincial curriculum requirements. But the learning goes much further than simple curriculum guidelines.

Adult leadership and youth camps

Camp Fircom had separate housing for adult, youth and kid campers, including private cabins for facilitators. (Make sure to prioritize the best spaces for elders.) All adult campers had to submit a criminal record check to attend this intergenerational program.





CAMPER EXPERIENCE

"I will put Camp Suzuki up there in my top three immersive, pro-d experiences in 25 years as an educator. It's hard to convey the potential transformation that one can get from five days 'Walking with the Squamish.'" — TOM, PARTICIPANT

"I learned so much about the Squamish First Nation's culture, spirituality, language, stories and history from the wonderful Squamish elders, in a way that will stay with me forever."

— JANET, PARTICIPANT

"For me the language session was the highlight. I was expecting we would learn a little basic Squamish language, but for a group of adult learners what actually did happen — conversation about their personal relationship to language, to their community's work, to some of the lived experiences of language revitalization — was an honour to witness and participate in." — ALISON, PARTICIPANT

"Personally, [the overnight solo] was a big step for me, as it challenged my preconceptions about my place in nature. I found this quite profound and grounding." — BRENDA, PARTICIPANT

"I have gained a new understanding of the land, of First Nations' connections, and how that can permeate my everyday life." — PARTICIPANT

"I loved the coordination and shared experiences with people from the foundation, the people from the Squamish Nation, and the participants."

— TAMMIE, PARTICIPANT

"I was struck by the generosity of the Squamish people. It has inspired me to know more about Indigenous nations and I am now more sensitive of the issues they are facing. I left camp with a sense of community that I am trying to create around me every day."

— PARTICIPANT





REFLECTIONS: WHAT WORKED WELL

Youth ambassador program

Ayás Méhmen (Squamish Family and Youth Services) has a year-long mentorship training for young leaders aged 12 to 17 to prepare them for community events and lifelong leadership. At the end of their year's training, the youth ambassadors attend camp to assist with learning songs, language, dance and other cultural teachings, including cedar weaving.

These youth ambassadors were fundamental to the camp's success. They provided a bridge for kids and teens attending the camp, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and brought a surge of energy to everyone. Although some were initially shy or cautious, their confidence and pride soon inspired the entire camp.



Mealtimes and campfires

As with any group, some of the best memories, conversations and learnings happened over meals around the campfire (real or metaphorical, as fire restrictions were often in effect). Mealtimes and campfires offer opportunities to share language, song and dance.



"For me a lot of camp was putting academic ideas and workshops into relationship and lived experience. I was able to do that through the depth and extent of immersion workshops that would invariably be followed by a meal and informal conversations." — ALISON, PARTICIPANT

"I absolutely loved the morning cleansing ceremony and found it a wonderful start to the day's activities. And I loved 'campfire' each night." — EVELYN, PARTICIPANT



Being flexible

Every morning at breakfast, camp administrators, facilitators and DSF staff would have a 20-minute meeting to share information, re-allocate staff and adjust schedules to match the situation (weather, facilities, mistakes, illness, etc.). This allowed us to adapt and build great programming. It took trust, active listening and a sense of adventure, but it really worked. Starting with a solid schedule as a foundation allowed us to adjust and be flexible.

Resetting colonial history

Many Canadian camps have rituals, buildings, statues, names and other artifacts appropriated from or named after Indigenous cultures. Be ready to learn and willing to change practices, titles and names.

As an example, when this partnership began, Camp Fircom used “tipis” for teen accommodations. In 2015, a Squamish leader pointed out that tipis were never used in Squamish territory. The camp took note and replaced these with Sibley tents in 2017. Furthermore, when it was suggested that the older camp buildings reminded some Squamish elders of residential schools, elders recommended hosting a cleansing ceremony to re-establish the places.

The partners worked together to commission a welcome pole, expertly crafted by respected Squamish carver Richard Baker. Campers young and old participated in painting and finishing the welcome pole, which after careful consideration was raised on a cliff overlooking the camp entrance with a ceremony in autumn 2018.





THANK YOU

To the many facilitators, advisers, campers and friends who helped with advice, guidance and boundless energy, Camp Suzuki at Chá7elk̓wnech: Walking with the Squamish thanks you for your many big and thousands of “small” interventions that helped make this camp such a joyful learning experience.

FROM SQUAMISH NATION: Sekyu Siyam – Chief Ian Campbell; Sempulyan – Stewart Gonzales; Chatatolt – Jackie Gonzales; Calder Cheverie; Latash – Maurice Nahanee; Delia Nahanee; Maykw Cha7em – Marissa Nahnee; Shamantsut – Mandy Nahanee; James Manalo; Ellen; Cheñá̓wtn/Swú7wu Billy; Tsitsayxemaat – Rebecca Duncan; Liz Ross; Jarod Van Somer; Chixten – Wes Nahanee; Larry (aka Shucks) Nahanee; Alroy “Unka Buck” Baker; Richie Baker; Találsamkin Siyám – Chief Bill Williams; Salsimiya – Janine Gonzales

FROM THE DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION: Stephen Foster, Kyle Empringham, Jay Ritchlin, Peter Wood, Trevor Leach, Delaney Beaton, Janice Williams, Ian Hanington, Bill Wareham, Panos Grames

FROM CAMP FIRCOM: Margo Dunnet, Marissa Gilmour, Jeff Willis, Rowan and all the amazing counsellors, cooks, gardeners, board and staff

FROM THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE: Mai Yasue (Quest University), Ruth Simons (Future of Howe Sound Society), Helen Foster, Tyler Clayton

Funders

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sitka foundation





START YOUR OWN CAMP!

If you're interested in starting a camp, or have any questions about this program, please contact camp@davidsuzuki.org.



This report aims to inspire and guide others to build on and expand partnerships for Indigenous-led outdoor education throughout Canada and beyond.

Join us in building opportunities that teach the interdependence of Indigenous culture, history and environmental stewardship in a natural setting.



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**Skwxwú7mesh
Úxwumixw**

Ayás Méñmen
Child & Family Services



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