

Expressions of Daxgyet

1st Annual Gitxsan Wellness Film Festival



Feb.28th and March 1st 2017

Tri-Town Theatre

On Nikateen Territory in the community of Gitanmaax

Welcome:

Ama yuxwsa,
good evening!



Welcome to our first ever Gitksan film festival being held at the Tritown Theatre in Gitanmaax! On behalf of our committee we would like to thank all the organizers, leadership and you for coming to this event. Our focus this year is on “Expressions of Daxgyet”, the strength of spirit and songs of our people. In the spirit of storytelling over the winter months, we have a handful of short stories to share with you from local film makers in our area. We are blessed to have so many locals to share their talent and passions on the big screen.

And tomorrow night is the sharing of Gitksan Foods, there are vendors set up at the Anglican Church Hall at 5 to try out some local foods!

**'Ksan
Performing Arts
Group Bio:**

'Ksan Performing Arts Group are cultural ambassadors for the Gitxsan people. They have performed throughout the



province, across Canada, and around the world demonstrating through traditional song and dance the richness of our culture. The 'Ksan Performing Arts Group has worked with 'Ksan Historical Village and Museum for over twenty-eight years and continues to be a fundamental component of this institution.

Judy Wesley:

Judy Wesley is a Gitxsan woman born and raised in Gitanmaax/ Hazelton. Judy resides in Gitanmaax with her husband and two boys. Judy is of the Lax Seel (Frog) clan from Wilp's Muluuluk (Alice Jeffrey). She currently works with Gitxsan Health Society as their Parent Child Assistance program and Maternal Child Health Program Manager. She is a proud mother of two boys.

Table of Events:

Opening Prayer :Nikateen, Frances Sampson

Veronica Green: Deputy Chief of Gitanmaax

Introduction of MC

Judy Wesley:Healing Journey Song

Gitxsan Wellness- Introduction: Sandra, Gary

Gitxsan Wellness: Film

People of Skeena: 1949 Film

Angela Angela Sterritt -We Matter Campaign:Film

Wanda-Highway of Tears Introduction

Men's Wellness- Walk a Mile in Her Shoes. MMIW candle light Vigil - Film

Poster Engagement

15min INTERMISSION

Dana's intro to Land Based Film

LAT Lands-Based: Film

Gitxsan Spirit Goat:Film

Indigenous Trauma Film

Life - Dim Wila Dil dils'm The Way We Live:Film

Youth on Water SWCC:Film

Closing Remarks



Films:

**Gitksan Wellness
Video:**

10:16

Exploring Gitksan Wellness, through dialogue with knowledge holders and Gitksan speakers we pulled together a short

video identifying key concepts in Being Well. For health promotion and prevention in sharing key high level Gitksan teachings on being whole and well. Website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AHy9gAVuz8

People of Skeena:

14.41

This short film from 1949 introduces us to the Getikshan and Tsimshian First Nations of northern British Columbia. These peoples of the Skeena River exist in two worlds. Ancient totem poles tower against the mountains and the forests, old graveyards reveal fragments of shared history, and traditional crafts are still practiced on the reserves. But in the school games, in a wedding complete with white veil and white rice, and in the sawmill, we see how other ways of life are being adopted. Website: https://www.nfb.ca/film/peoples_of_the_skeena/



or at your local library.

Angela Sterritt - We Matter Campaign



CBC Journalist Angela Sterritt shares a message about her life when she was young as a part of the We Matter Campaign, in hopes it can help others. Website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DGykJRFtI8>



Men's Wellness- Walk a Mile in Her Shoes. MMIW candle light Vigil

4mins

Walk a Mile in her shoes: the local violence in relationship committee organized a Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event last October in Gitwangak Community Center. About 30 men participated in the walk and 125 community

members from the Gitksan area witnessed and cheered on the walkers. Walking a Mile in her shoes highlights the compassion towards women by walking a mile in her shoes, red high heels in this case. The Walk also builds awareness of the violence in girls and women's lives, and that violence in our lives need to stop. This digital story shares the highlights of the day. #MMIW candle light vigil was held at the highway 16 & 37 junction to honour and show love for the missing women (and men) along the highway of tears.

Land based Programs for Youth Video:

7:12

This video was created by the Upper Skeena Local Action Team, a group focused on youth wellness. The video celebrates land based programs for youth on Gitksan territory. There are many amazing programs in our area that recognize the vital connection between land and wellbeing, a few of these programs are featured in this video. Stand in your power. Get involved. Connect with land, culture, community, each other, yourself.



Gitksan Spirit Goat :

45 secs

The one-horned goat. From David Attenborough's The Tribal Eye.



Indigenous Trauma Film:

5:00

14 local women completed a one year training program, aboriginal focusing complex trauma (AFOT) with the JIBC. The AFOT program is grounded in Indigenous understandings of historical, colonial and intergenerational trauma and genocide, as well as, in resilience and healing. It offers Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners Indigenous, holistic, land-based, justice-centered and ceremonial strategies and approaches to the healing of complex trauma. The video captures the our one year of classes and sessions; our graduation ceremony was Jan 21, 2017.

Life - Dim Wila Dil dill's - the way we live:

10:00

The Gitxsan Traditional Health Plan. Understanding Dim Wila Dil dill's (the way we live) And Wila da dils lax yip (the way the land lives) By all sagyit ha'hle'alst (working together)



Documenting our efforts this year at the Traditional Medicines Gathering and Tam Giist Culture Camp, in supporting traditional values and community infrastructure by promoting preventative health care, realizing our assets as communities and creating the capacity, in the spirit of reconciliation. To create land and traditional knowledge-based interventions and prevention, by creating grassroots capacity building. We are acknowledging and promoting basic community rights in regards to safety, inclusion, celebrating by remembering and supporting who we are. We work toward a renaissance of the Gitxsan nation through the hereditary system, matriarchs, the arts, language and land based programs. Seeking to identify, articulate and support preventative health, based on Gitxsan traditional values, by understanding Dim Wila Dil dils'm (the way we live).

Youth on Water and Women on Water Programs

YOW and WOW are going into their 8th year of operation. Offered in the 5 communities of Terrace, Smithers, Moricetown, Gitsegukla, and Hazelton, YOW and WOW offer youth and women a chance to develop their river based skills, build confidence, challenge themselves, and connect with the land and water. The week long program offers participants the opportunity to see different parts of their watershed, learn about local territories they are on, meet elders and local experts who share their knowledge and stories, and have a lot of fun. At the end of the day,

participants go home tired, happy and with a feeling of wellness that comes from connecting with nature. YOW is for youth aged 15-19 and WOW is for women of all ages. Anyone can join, there is no experiences or fearlessness necessary, a local healthy lunch is



provided along with all the safety gear and experience of the guides, and the program is totally free! Contact Anissa Watson: YOW/WOW Organizer and Guide for more information anissa@skeenawatershed.com or 250-842-249

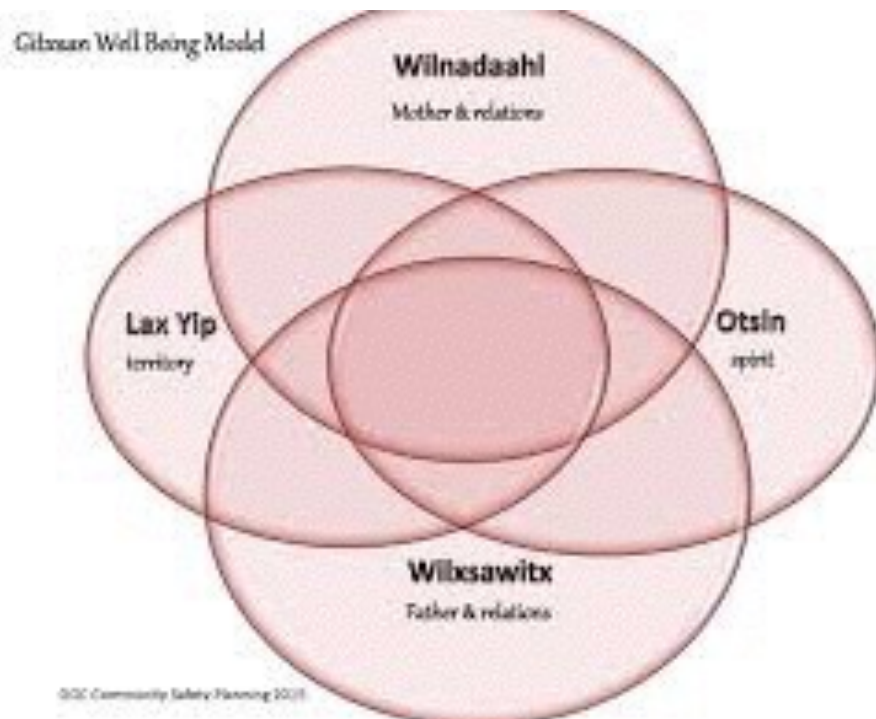
Gitxsan Wellness Model

Background

The concept of wellness is deeply embedded as who we are as Gitxsan. Ama Didils, means living in a good way. Within Gitxsan society this means that there is a balance in one's life between the personal, political, social and spiritual. One walks slowly and softly and is in balance in the core Gitxsan social structures. Historically the Gitxsan halayt specialized in healing the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health.

As part of our engagement work through the community safety planning process we put a request out for people to submit photographs that represented Gitxsan Wellness for a mural. Upon receiving hundreds of

submissions we recognized four themes of: wilnaatahl (Matrilineal rights and responsibilities), wilxsawitxw (father's matrilineal rights and responsibilities), lax Yip (relationship to the land) and ots'in (spirit that permeates everything). Each of these themes is interconnected and we represented this with an image of intersecting circles on top of the pictures. The border of a button blanket was added to frame the mural. These traditional blankets are worn to this day in the feast hall and for ceremonies by hereditary chiefs. The border of the blanket symbolizes the earth, walls, roof and smoke hole of the Gitxsan Wilp. The Wilp, or matrilineal family unit, is the basic social structure of the Gitxsan. Everybody has a place in Gitxsan society in their Wilnaatahl and Wilxsawitxw.



The second addition to our work from this event is the central importance of breath. In particular the importance of Gitsanimax and Simaglyax (Gitxsan language), the rhythms of speech, the songs, our unbroken connection to the first Gitxsan breath of our ancestors, and the continued gift of breath to our children and those yet to come. Gitxsan society is recognized as sui generis by the Supreme Court of Canada, which is a Latin phrase that describes something entirely unique and of its own kind. Gitxsan society is maintained through oral traditions and the central place of breath is both fitting, and a good reminder to you as a reader that the English language and the written word are both recent adoptions of Gitxsan people.

The four areas depicted in this model are deeply interconnected with each and situated in social realities lived in place and time. This model reflects a dynamic, living, oral tradition and must be used as a starting point to engage in the Gitxsan cultural paradigm. Gitxsan society is a contemporary, evolving and alive culture and the exploration and presentation of Gitxsan wellness in writing here is not intended to claim authority over the subject, but present a partial view into a dynamic, living way of being in the world.

Wil n'aa t'ahl

The wilnaatahl is one's matrilineal family. This matrilineal social unit is also known as a Wilp, or house group, that has a particular history, lax yip, and clan relationship. The wilnaatahl is described as being necessarily intergenerational where the responsibilities to teach and transfer knowledge happen between all ages, especially from elders to the young people. Great stress is placed on the reciprocal nature of relationships within Gitxsan society. "We're born with responsibilities" said an elder, "its part of who we are as Gitxsan. We take care of our family because the elders took care of the children and it's the children's responsibility to carry on what needs to be done". In this system every child is connected to, and cared for by many mothers, aunts and uncles. Within this loving environment, children, youth, and young adults are groomed to be strong Gitxsan.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer within the wilnaatahl is intimately tied to the specific lax yip of the Wilp. The importance of being on the land is described as critical for teaching the language, the ayookw, the laws and

histories. Dim lip gyat (self-sufficiency) is a result of the people in the wilnaatahl using their knowledge and skills in their lax yip and maintaining strong relationship with neighboring wilps and nations. This includes sustenance as well as medicines. A key word that captures these intersecting dynamics is gwalxyye'enst (intergenerational teachings). It is important to note the difficulty in direct translation from Gitsanimax into English. It is not our goal to simplify and translate, but rather accepts the complexity and the culturally embedded differences of the languages.

Wilxsi'witxw

Each Gitxsan child has a Wilxsawitxw. The father clan has particular roles and responsibilities in Gitxsan society. Understanding the wilsawitxw relationship is very important, especially when it comes to the privilege of access your wilxsawitxw lax yip (amnagwootxw). Members of the wilxsilaks (plural of wilxsawitxw) have social responsibility throughout the life of the child.

Lax Yip

Lax yip means of that land. Lax yip describes both physical space as well as the nature of one's relationship with that space. The physical territory of the lax yip is managed through the wilnaatahl. The lax yip is reaffirmed through the feast system where business is ratified and witnessed and history is remembered and maintained. Gitxsan names, used in the feast hall, are attached to the land and history of the wilp. "Without our land we do not have names as Gitxsan people" an elder clearly states. All members of the wilnaatahl are expected to learn and know the history of their Wilp and lax yip. Those being groomed to be leaders have greater responsibilities.

The social and physical realities of the Gitxsan are interconnected. Lax yip is also important as a source of strength and healing. People describe being replenished and strengthened. The therapeutic nature of being on the land includes the traditional ways people would meet all of their needs for sustenance, medicine, building materials and clothing. Similar to the reciprocal relations between people, there is a responsibility to maintain and enhance the bounty of the lax yip. There is an acknowledged reciprocity having received abundance from the land, that the Gitxsan are stewards of this abundance.

Otsin

Everything in the world has life energy. Otsin is a key concept of Gitxsan spirituality described as one's spirit. One's otsin can be harmed, depleted, or scared away by trauma. Indian Residential Schools (IRS) are considered a societal harm in the Gitxsan perspective as not a single wilnaatahl or wilxsilaks escaped the trauma of having children taken from the family. The adults left behind were harmed individually and collectively by this process and feelings of guilt depleted otsin. Subsequent effects of this original harm continue to be felt through the social discord that is the topic of this safety plan. The loss of innocence from sexual abuse, parental neglect, disconnection from lax yip or living in poverty affects one's otsin. Trauma and bad medicine that affects a person can be remedied by a Halayt (healing person). There are numerous forms of healing that include ceremonies, medicines, prayer, sweat lodge, humour, fasting and cleansing. Gitxsan spirituality permeates life and relationships and is not contained within a building or special time of the week. There is a strong connection between one's otsin and their Lax yip. Otsin is strengthened from within and is a result of being around others that are healthy. There is a vibrant network that is beyond ourselves that connects people at this spiritual level and when we take care of our own otsin we help others on their path to healing as well.

Gitxsan Trade:

The Gitxsan (et al) have a long history of trading with other Nations throughout BC.

The most well-known trades had been with the Tsimshian Nations down the Skeena River to Terrace and to the Coast in Prince Rupert and area. Food items that are traded are Halibut, Clams, Cockles, Abalone, Seaweed, Seal, crab, shrimp, prawns etc. The rivers were the highways of the First Nations people in BC for a long time. Once the foods were consumed some of the shells of the Abalone were used for in creative ways and made into art pieces or other finer pieces of clothing accessories. There also existed a trade with the Nisga'a. This trade was through the inland and was known as the Grease Trail. This trade was better known during the latter part of winter and nearing Spring when the food caches were becoming low. These were times when it was near famine. Some food items that would have been traded from the interior were moose meat, caribou, Mountain goats to name a few. One other that is still sought after today is the 'Iss' or Soap Berries. This small berry had many uses, medicinal and other. One form was when it was mixed up as 'Indian Ice Cream' the people used to and some still do ~ swishing it back and forth between in your mouth, front and back and back of your teeth. Aerating it and the effects help with stomach and digestion. There are other medicinal purposes for using the Soap berry juice and the berry itself ~ for pain and for arthritis.



There is much more that can be said. To be continued at another venue.

Thank you's:

Haa miya; haa miya
Thank you to our
committee for all their
hard work in
organizing this event.
Many hands made
this happen! We are
so fortunate to be

able to host such a local event. Storytelling is
a powerful way to share about Gitxsan
cultural experiences and about living in our
area. Haa miya to all the film makers across
the generations for sharing their voice,
passion and provide a fun and innovative way
to share their ideas and insights.

Safe journeys home to you all.

