

January 19, 2016

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## **Hereditary Chiefs' Newsletter**

**Urban Vancouver Wet'suwet'en Gathering**

**December 5-6, 2015**

### **Introduction**

The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and Office of the Wet'suwet'en staff would like to begin this first Hereditary Chief's Newsletter, created specifically for Wet'suwet'en members residing off the *Yintah* ("traditional territory"), by expressing our sincere wishes that all members had a joyous and wonderful holiday season!

The Hereditary Chiefs wish to utilize this newsletter to follow-up on the gathering that occurred in Vancouver, B.C. to provide a summary of the information that was shared. It is the intent of the Hereditary Chiefs that this newsletter will become a valuable tool to ensure members are aware of what is happening internally, and that serves to strengthen connections, communication and sense of belonging of Wet'suwet'en members living off the *Yintah* with their respective Clans and House Groups, extended kinship family members, and *Yintah* homelands.

### **Topics Discussed in this Edition**

1. Historic Gathering
2. Urban Vancouver Clan Liaison Position – "We Heard You"
3. Wet'suwet'en Governance – Presentation
4. ANABIP – Presentation
5. Genealogy - Presentation
6. Wet'suwet'en & Gitksan Unlocking Aboriginal Justice
7. Gitksan & Wet'suwet'en Learning Feast
8. Wet'suwet'en Traditional Information
9. Feedback and Next Steps

## 1. Historic Gathering

A historic event occurred when all of the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief's from all 5 Clans and 13 House Groups (see Appendix 1) travelled outside the *Yintah* to Coast Salish territory, to meet with Wet'suwet'en members residing in the lower mainland. Tremendous credit goes to the Hereditary Chiefs, Wet'suwet'en-Gitxsan Unlocking Aboriginal Justice program, Office of the Wet'suwet'en and ANABIP program for resourcing and coordinating this wonderful two-day event. Sincere thanks goes out to elder Eugene Harry, Squamish Nation, who provided the welcome and closing prayers, and the organizers from the lower mainland who were integral in this events success including: Jo Andrew, Dustin Thorkelsson, Natasha Jones, Maxine Tom, Cindy Pete, Alex Pete, Genevieve Sullivan, Cynthia and Heather Williams, Nick Joseph, and everyone who stayed after the feast and helped clean-up.

This two-day gathering was conducted for the purpose of:

- Strengthening the relationship between the Hereditary Chiefs and members residing off the *Yintah*;
- Sharing teachings regarding the hereditary governance system, *Inuk Nu'at'en* ("our laws"), and Feast hall protocols;
- Establishing connections and honouring Wet'suwet'en children and youth growing up in foster homes in the lower mainland to ensure they learn their cultural identity and that their chief's and people care for and love them;
- Acknowledging and thanking social workers and foster parents looking after our children and devising effective measures to ensure our children and youth are connected to their culture, Clan and House Group kinship, and *Yintah* homeland;
- Celebrating and sharing experiences regarding the historic *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* lawsuit;
- Sharing information regarding programs and services provided by the Office of the Wet'suwet'en and receiving feedback/input regarding member interests; and
- Presenting genealogical kinship information with members regarding their Clan and House Group families and traditional territories.



**Hereditary Chiefs**, Vancouver, B.C. - December 6, 2015



**Hereditary Chiefs**, Vancouver, B.C. – December 5, 2015

*Dini ze' Madeek* (Jeff Brown), Gitdumden Clan, expressed the importance of this historic event:



***Dini ze' Madeek***, Vancouver,  
B.C. - December 6, 2015

*My thoughts about the gathering in Vancouver, is that it was something that really needed to take place. To meet all the Gitdumden, and be able to explain our genealogy, I believe they were able to learn more about where they came from, which house and clan they belong to.*

*The best thing I liked was being there to show our people who their head chief is, and to help show them how our system works. I had a lot of requests from people asking me for more information.*

*I loved this event, and it is my strong desire that we can cover more cities, and develop these same relationships and connections with our people in other communities too, that would be awesome!*

*Dini ze' Hagwilnegh* (Ron Mitchell), Laksilyu Clan spoke eloquently in reflecting on the historic gathering:

*It was great to see my family and my father clan's children and children's relatives. I loved re-connecting with people like my childhood buddy classmate from St. Joseph's and Chandler Park Schools in Smithers, so many people I haven't seen for a long while. I deeply enjoyed talking to families and one that stood out for me was Caroline Tommy, and boy she was elated! I told her that all the Hereditary Chiefs were coming to see everyone, and she said, 'our chiefs gonna be here?' And you could see how happy she was, that warmed my heart.*

*There were some kids and teenagers at the feast, and they were so happy to learn. Many kids are teenagers now, and they were meeting with family and the chiefs for the very first time. For many, it was their first opportunity to learn our culture and history. I was one of the translators for the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa case, and I listened and learned so much and I am able to share that with others.*

*I heard over and over, the people said that we need more of this, as some said that they don't come home that often, when they do, it is sadly when a death has happened. Many said that they don't get to come back for our Bahlats', and they don't get to hear our drumming and singing enough.*

*For me, it was great seeing all the people there. I'm a people person, so I really enjoyed talking to our people. A couple of them I talked to them in Wet'suwet'en and they understood some, they said that they don't hear our language enough. I think that this was a great start, I enjoyed it very much.*



***Dini ze' Hagwilnegh***,  
Vancouver, B.C. - December 6,

## 2. Urban Vancouver Clan Liaison Position – “We Heard You”

Over the past several years the Office of the Wet’suwet’en has held a number of different meetings with Wet’suwet’en members in Vancouver through ANABIP<sup>1</sup>, Unlocking Aboriginal Justice and the Governance Team. The Governance team and Hereditary Chief’s *Na’moks* and *Hagwilnegh* met with the Urban Vancouver members in September 2015 and in the course of strengthening relations, learned the significant challenges they have experience in their efforts to continue to build their connections with each other, and their Hereditary Chiefs, Clan and House Group kinship, and *Yintah* homelands.



*Dini ze' Hagwilnegh & Dini ze' Na'moks*



*Urban Vancouver Wet'suwet'en Members*

**Vancouver Wet'suwet'en Member's Meeting**, Vancouver Friendship Centre – September 11, 2015

The interests and challenges members expressed included:

- Strong desire to meet and learn from the Hereditary Chiefs
- Strong desire to mutually develop future agenda's reflecting their interests
- No resources to rent meeting space and basic meeting supplies
- No resources to for a dedicated person to perform a coordinating role (i.e. people doing it off the corner off their desk amidst their own regular work/life duties)
- No resources for refreshments and food - staples of the Wet'suwet'en feast system

Chief's *Na'moks* and *Hagwilnegh* listened carefully and committed to pursuing resources to support the approximately 1,400 Wet'suwet'en members residing in the lower mainland. Upon returning back to the *Yintah*, Chief's *Na'moks* and *Hagwilnegh* reported at the monthly chief's meeting - that are open to all Wet'suwet'en members - what they had learned. All the chiefs agreed that something needed to be done to support their members' interests. The Hereditary Chiefs tasked Debbie Pierre, the Executive Director of the Office of the Wet'suwet'en with working with them to develop a plan and pursue resources to help support the Wet'suwet'en members in the lower mainland. All the chiefs also agreed that a trip to Vancouver to engage in a multi-faceted gathering would be very beneficial in many ways.

<sup>1</sup> The *Anuk Nu' At'en Ba'glh'iyi z'ilhdic Program* (ANABIP) means: We are Talking About Our Laws/Our Ways.

Debbie Pierre, with Dora Wilson, *ts'akë ze' Yaga'lahl* (Chief of Hagwilget Village Council), made a special announcement to the assembled members:

*It is a great honour to be here to meet and speak with all of the Wet'suwet'en members residing in the lower mainland. For the past couple of years we have been making our best efforts to hold meetings here to strengthen our relationship which I believe is growing stronger, this gathering is a reflection of that. We have listened and heard you when you told us that you wanted to meet your chiefs and have an opportunity to learn from them directly, and I am so happy that that is now happening.*

*In addition, we have heard how it is a real challenge for you to be able to come together both with yourselves, and also to be connected with us back home.*

*Today, I am very happy to announce that we have managed to secure some resources that will enable you to establish a Clan Liaison position that will support you here in the lower mainland. This is a part-time position that will also provide some resources for things like meeting space rentals, snacks and refreshments, and meeting supplies.*

*It is our sincerest intent that we find ways to support you and strengthen our relationship together, and all of our Wet'suwet'en people wherever you may reside.*



**Debbie Pierre & Dora Wilson, *ts'akë ze' Yaga'lahl*, Vancouver, B.C. – December 5, 2015**

### ***What will a Clan Liaison do?***

A Clan Liaison is a part-time position created by the Hereditary Chiefs that supports Clan & House Group business. Duties for the Urban Vancouver Clan Liaison include:

- Maintain & continuously update a member distribution list & identify most effective communications methods for members
- Organize & secure monthly meeting space including arrangements for snacks, refreshments, potluck meals
- Send & post meeting notice, and disseminate agenda & materials to members in advance
- Prepare & distribute summary reports that result from the meetings
- Participate in monthly Governance Committee meetings and: report back to members, research/coordinate members feedback to ensure your interests are included
- Participate in monthly Hereditary Chief's meetings and: report back to the members, coordinate members feedback to the Hereditary Chiefs
- Administrative work as required

### 3. Wet'suwet'en Governance – Presentation

#### 3.1 Constitution Background

Much of the discussion on day-one focused on the work being done to codify a Wet'suwet'en constitution titled, "*Wet'suwet'en Ní Cis Bighëwh diní ts'ën Lí*" ("Wet'suwet'en People Live by the Law"). Codification simply means putting all the oral traditions, laws and governance systems into a written document. Debbie Pierre spoke of how the laws have been passed down from one generation to the next and stated, "The Hereditary Chiefs names sitting at the table here are thousands of years old. The laws that manage our lands, our *Anuk Nu'At'en*, are alive and well and are being practiced today." Debbie took time to explain how it is the hereditary system and not the *Indian Act* band system that has jurisdiction and authority on the Wet'suwet'en *Yintah* as was recognized in the landmark *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* and *Canfor v. Sam* (aka *Kelah Redtop*) cases.

Allen Cummings, Governance Director, provided background regarding how the work has been undertaken including establishing a Wet'suwet'en Governance Advisory Committee (WGAC) that meets once a month to provide guidance and direction. The WGAC consists of Hereditary Chiefs, designated Office of the Wet'suwet'en staff and Clan Liaisons. Significant research has occurred drawing from the voluminous evidence of the Hereditary Chiefs who explained the laws and governance system in the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* court case. We have also researched ethnographic reports (i.e. scientific study of culture and practices), and analysed numerous constitutions to inform our work. As draft iterations become more refined, the intent is to translate the terminology into Wet'suwet'en language and context, which the Wet'suwet'en Language Authority will help with.

Allen explained that the Hereditary Chiefs prioritized the critical importance of Clan and House Group engagements to ensure that the constitution is being built *with* and reflective of the Wet'suwet'en members. To date, the Governance Team has met with the Urban Vancouver Wet'suwet'en members on three (3) separate occasions, with a commitment to continuing engagements until the final draft is completed.



**Gitdumden Clan Engagement, Centennial Hall,  
Morisetown - March 8, 2015**

#### ***What is a Constitution?***

A constitution is a document that gathers all the rules & laws embodying the principles, values & culture that governed the Wet'suwet'en and *Yintah* since time immemorial.

### 3.2 Constitution – Section Review

Three sections (of 18 sections) were the subject of an interactive presentation with the Urban Vancouver members which were:

- Clan & House Group Decision-Making - Section 8
- Hereditary Chiefs' Successorship - Section 9
- Dispute Resolution - Section 17

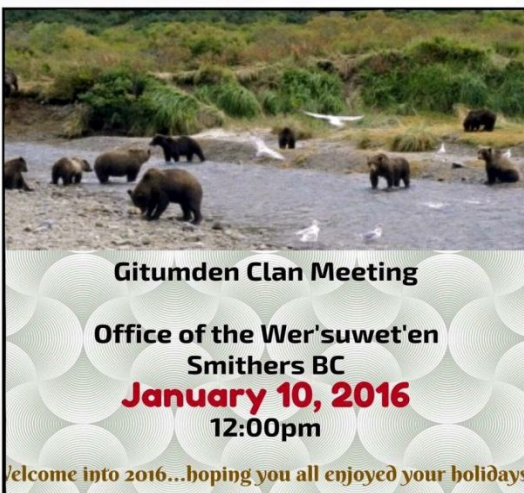
The Governance Team had previously met with the WGAC to review these sections, make edits and determine the best way to present and discuss them with the lower mainland Wet'suwet'en members. A joint-presentation format was decided in which some Hereditary Chiefs would present the sections, with support from the Governance Director and Executive Director.

### 3.3 Sections Reviewed

#### 3.3.1 Clan & House Group Decision-Making – Section 8

*Dini ze' Madeek (Jeff Brown)*, Gitdumden Clan spoke to this section as significant work has been undertaken by the Gitdumden Clan, and their three House Groups in the development of a collective decision-making process that was articulated in a Gitdumden Clan Declaration, August 16, 2015. The Gitdumden confirmed a collective decision-making process inclusive of all the House Group Chiefs and members within their Clan.

*Dini ze' Madeek* described how the Gitdumden Clan have a consistent schedule whereby they meet the first-Sunday of every month, unless something precludes a meeting, whereupon they re-schedule to the earliest opportunity possible. *Madeek* explained that they discuss any business of importance at the monthly meetings, which are akin to traditional Wet'suwet'en "tea" meetings that serve as the planning/coordinates precursor meetings that leads to a Feast.



Gitdumden Clan Meeting Poster – created by Sherri Green, Clan Liaison



Gitdumden Clan Monthly Meeting, OW Office, Smithers - January 10, 2016

The Gitdumden Clan confirmed a Clan Liaison (Sheri Green), who performs the coordination and administrative roles in support of the Clan House Chiefs and members. The Clan Liaison records minutes from their monthly meetings, and all Feasts, to ensure an accurate record regarding important matters is maintained. Clan decisions and updates are provided to Gitdumden Clan members through email, word-of-mouth and social media (i.e. Gitdumden Clan Facebook page).

### ***What are Examples of Gitdumden Clan Business?***

- Planning and preparation for Smoke Feasts, Funeral Feasts, Payback Feasts & Headstone Feasts
- Deliberations regarding Successorship for Head Chief, Wing Chief & Feast Hall Names
- Decisions regarding land-use & proprietorship of Gitdumden Clan territories
- Updating and maintenance of genealogy & contact list
- Review and input on draft Wet'suwet'en constitution

#### 3.3.2 Hereditary Chiefs' Successorship – Section 9

Three Hereditary Chiefs were selected to present the Hereditary Chiefs' Successorship section.

*Dini' ze' Hagwilnegh (Ron Mitchell)*, Laksilyu Clan began by sharing his experience when he took on successive Names leading to his accession of *Dini' ze' Hagwilnegh*.

*Wet'suwet'en is my first language, I never spoke a word of English. I didn't go to residential school, I was raised out on the territory. My great great grandfather [Arthur Mitchell, previous Hagwilnegh] taught us about the land and successors, and taught us that you don't put your hand up and say you want a Hereditary Chief's name, that's not how it works.*

*I spent a lot of time growing up with my grandmother and grandfather learning out on the land, we did a lot of hunting and trapping. I sat out on the territory with my uncle, Tommy Mitchell, and my dad's dad, Sylvester William [previous Hagwilnegh]. My late father [Alfred Mitchell, Xemsim, Gitxsan] also knew a lot about the territory. He knew his wife's [Elizabeth Mitchell, Laksilyu], and his father in law's [Dick Naziel, previous 'Aghg'odamaas, Gitdumden] territory inside and out. He did a lot of hunting with Sylvester William, who hunted on his wife's Gilseyhu territory. These were my teachers, and the land was my classroom.*

*I often wondered why, when I was a child, why I wasn't at home with my brothers and sisters; I only realized later on*



*over the years that it was because I was being groomed to become a Hereditary Chief. I never put my hand up and said 'I want to become a chief.' Back then, there were lots of elders, and they would all come together and discuss amongst themselves and decide who's going to get a chief's name.*

*When Sylvester [William, Hagwilnegh prior to Ron] passed away, all the chief's got together. I was not there at the meetings. Afterwards, Maxlalex [late Johnny David] approached me and told me, "we are considering you for Hagwilnegh." There were a lot of elders and chiefs involved in that decision, and I was honoured when they told me they were bestowing me with Hagwilnegh.*

*Something that is very important is when we talk about respect, 'wagghus' in our language, that is something that is not taught, it's demonstrated.*

*Dini ze' Kloum Khun* (Alphonse Gagnon), Laksamshu Clan next started by reinforcing Hagwilnegh's statements, "We have a process that deals with Chief's successorship, we don't just go out and grab a name. People who are chosen must be qualified to assume a Hereditary Chief's name."

*Dini ze' Kloum Khun* then proceeded to read out the first half of the "Hereditary Chief's Successorship" section which spoke to the qualifications and virtues required for becoming a Hereditary Chief. *Kloum Khun* paused often to expand on the content by providing examples of his own experience when he was in the process of receiving his head chief's name.



***Dini ze' Neekupdeh & Kloum Khun,***  
Vancouver, B.C. – December 5, 2015

*Dini ze' Neekupdeh* (Darren George), Laksilyu Clan reviewed the final half of this section focusing on the process to become a Hereditary Chief. He stated:

We follow our mother's matrilineal side, and it is important to know that the *dini ze'* and *ts'akë ze'* are always watching you. A candidate to become a Hereditary Chief must have knowledge of the House territory, where the boundaries are, where we have to have permission to cross, you can only gain this knowledge when you are out there. You must demonstrate leadership, it's a lifetime of showing this and it's in how you speak.



***Dini ze' Neekupdeh & Kloum Khun,***  
Vancouver, B.C. – December 5, 2015

Not everyone can be a leader; you have to use your eyes and ears, before you use your mouth. We have to be a good listener to what our house members are saying. You need to listen, to know what the community needs so that you can make informed decisions.

You must have respect, how can you give respect if you don't trust your house members. You grow your name as you live your life. It takes time to make sure the house stands as one. The Chief's Successor is a living organism in a way.

In our Wet'suwet'en system, we want you to know that you are not alone just because you are not on the *Yintah*. We need to stay alive with our traditions. I stand up here talking to you on behalf of Henry Alfred, *dini ze' Wah Tah Keht*. The head chief is not alone in making decisions in their house; they have wing chiefs and elders they consult in decision-making.

### 3.3.3 Section 17 – Dispute Resolution

Three Hereditary Chiefs were selected to present the Hereditary Chiefs' Successorship section.



***Dini ze' T'sek'ot,*** Vancouver,  
B.C. - December 6, 2015

*Dini ze' T'sek'ot* (Ron Austin), a master carver and esteemed singer/drummer from the Laksilyu Clan began this presentation with an introduction of the section, then walked the participants through it providing explanations of the traditional Wet'suwet'en dispute resolution.

*Dini ze' Na'moks* (John Ridsdale), Tsayu Clan then collaborated with *Ts'akë ze' Wil'at* (Sue Alfred) in sharing a recent account of when the Wet'suwet'en traditional dispute resolution process was utilized to help prevent potential violence that may have occurred between families involving a homicide. No names or identifying information was shared however, it was felt that using an example in Wet'suwet'en history would be useful to helping members understand the power of traditional Wet'suwet'en laws in resolving even the most challenging of conflicts.



*Dini ze' Na'moks*, Vancouver,  
B.C. – December 6, 2015

*Dini ze' Na'moks* began by stating that the Wet'suwet'en laws and traditional practices are, "not about shaming, they are about reconciliation and restoring balance." *Na'moks* and *Wil'at* explained that the Tsayu Clan had been asked to become involved as they were the Father Clan to one of the families involved. *Na'moks* explained that following what happened, there was a very real potential for violence to occur between the families and that the western justice system was wholly ineffective in helping to reduce the animosity and tensions between the families. *Wil'at* then shared:

A very emergency situation happened, and it could only be dealt with in the Feast hall. It was a matter of a young lady whose life was taken. The families were in dispute, it was becoming a matter of life and death, and thankfully, one of families that Tsayu is Father Clan too, asked us to stand with them. Other chiefs stood with the other family. We used eagle down, that is very powerful and you have to respect that, it is binding on all the people.

*Dini ze' Na'moks* shared that the process entailed bringing the families into the feast hall and using Wet'suwet'en laws and protocols:

We sat the families face –to-face with one another, and as *Wil'at* explained, we used eagle down that was blown on each family by their Father Clan. This is very powerful and we told them that they could not talk about what had happened for one year to make sure that no violence would occur. The spreading of eagle down is powerful; it is our law. We then asked the two families who were sitting across from each other for the first time if they would shake hands. They walked to each other and they hugged.

#### **4. ANABIP – Presentation**

On December 5 & 6, 2015 the entire ANABIP team travelled to Vancouver to present in the morning before a Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan Unlocking Aboriginal Justice Learning Feast was held to honor the *Gisday'wa-Delgamuukw* decision. As part of our contribution to this two-day, weekend event, our staff were in full attendance for the duration of the two-day gathering, assisting in any way we could as the Office of Wet'suwet'en departments reported out on their programs.



**ANABIP TEAM (top left to right clockwise):  
Betty Tom, Ian Michell, Lorraine Naziel, Diana Creyke,  
Gretchen Woodman, Jacquie Bowes**

For the feast, we helped set up the hall, organize seating and went on to present the following overview of ANABIP in the morning. We used the oral tradition of storytelling to describe our experiences with regard to the Wet'suwet'en camps and highlights. ANABIP was responsible for the cost of the dinner and helped to serve the food at the feast. ANABIP is administered under the umbrella of the Office of Wet'suwet'en.

ANABIP Background:

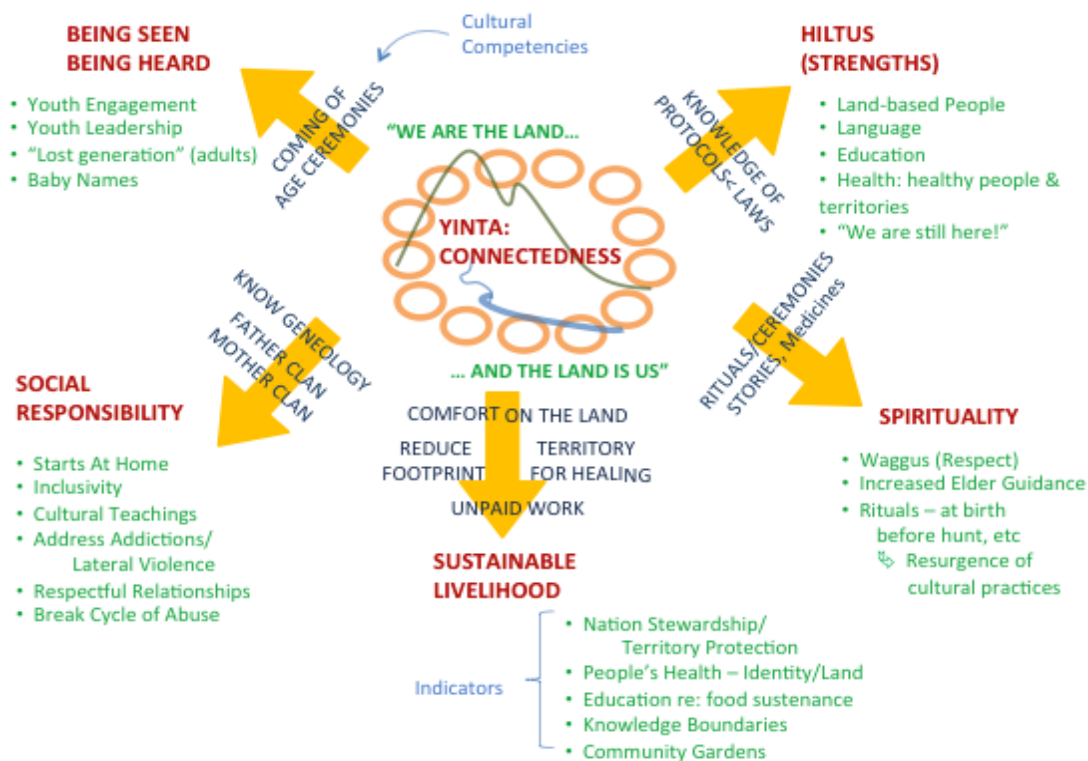
Since time immemorial the Wet'suwet'en have had a holistic approach towards child and family wellness. The *Anuk Nu' At'en Ba'gigh'iyil z'ilhdic* (ANABIP): *We are talking About Our Laws/Our Ways* program is a Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) funded Aboriginal Innovations Service initiative that focuses on providing both practical and cultural interventions to support Wet'suwet'en children, youth and families.

Our goal is to reduce the number of Wet'suwet'en in care. Grounded in ancient wisdom, the leadership of five clans and thirteen houses along with the leadership of the Moricetown Band and Hagwilget Village Council have collaborated (Wet'suwet'en Wellness Working Group) to create a distinctly Wet'suwet'en pathway to wellness. For now, we service the geographical areas from Hagwilget to Houston. The WWWG has a vision to provide service all Wet'suwet'en. We have been in operation for almost five years. The following framework outlines how services are delivered.

Wet'suwet'en Holistic Wellness Conceptual Framework (See Fig 1.)

In the first three years of operation, this framework was developed by the Wet'suwet'en Wellness Working Group (WWWG) and was the result of 250+ Wet'suwet'en members identifying what "Wellness means to us", the framework depicts the key elements of Wet'suwet'en wellness and lays the foundation for all ANABIP's service delivery.

Please see the diagram below:



**Fig 1.** Wet’suwet’en Wellness Conceptual Framework

ANABIP Program:

The program wellness pathway is anchored in the Wet’suwet’en Wellness Framework so that cultural services are at the forefront. Utilizing a strong Wet’suwet’en governance system, we assist in the creation of cultural plans of care for children and youth permanently connected to MCFD. We also strive to increase the focus on permanency planning (broadly defined) for Wet’suwet’en children and youth in continuing care of the director. There is also facilitation to transition youth in care into adulthood as healthy, active contributing members of Wet’suwet’en society. Direct in-home and outreach support to Wet’suwet’en parents and caregivers to strengthen cultural responsibility regarding social care (i.e. rites of passage, holistic wellness activities, etc.) to reduce identified risks in order to safely keep children/youth with their parents/caregivers. ANABIP staff does practical interventions (including “clinical practice”) and finally connections and advocacy are made within the systems that our families become entangled in. ANABIP is very comprehensive in service delivery and builds upon strengths within the nation and within families.

Many families in need are also the most culturally disconnected. ANABIP’s work is to focus on closing that gap so that families can become more resilient by becoming culturally stronger. We would like to highlight the seasonal cultural programming that the ANABIP team provides; along with direct services to individual children, youth we facilitate community wellness activities (Men’s Wellness Camp, Women’s Empowerment Camp and Pre-Teen & Teen Cultural Camps) along with five family camps.

ANABIP also provides practical interventions (i.e. “meets clients where they are at”) with the purpose of leading to cultural interventions. An example of this is the seasonal day camps focusing on moose hunting, trapping, harvesting berries, medicines and birch-bark and preserving fish. Strengthening cultural responsibility at all levels provides social care. The emphasis is with a goal towards increasing the numbers of Wet’suwet’en children and youth to stay in the homes of extended family, house/ clan and community/nation/territory via Extended Family Programs and other out-of-care options.

Of special note, the Wet’suwet’en chiefs, representing all five clans and most house groups were honored to meet and greet some of their children and caretakers that are residing in Vancouver. Plans evolved with the support of Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS) to have approximately 25 children and youth, along with their families (caregivers) attend the feast, this connection was a smashing success for the children and youth! Members of the WWWG and ANABIP stayed on to review each VACFSS Moricetown & Hagwilget file to initiate a stronger link to both the Wet’suwet’en Governance and the nation/territory. This permanency planning initiative has been in the works for many years, the feast was unprecedented in attendance and it was most definitively, a day to remember!! We are grateful and humbled to be a part of the wellness initiative.

Prepared by: *Wilawhl*, Laksamshu Clan  
(Lorraine Naziel)  
ANABIP Coordinator

## **5. Genealogy - Presentation**

*Dini ze' Hagwilnegh* and Diana Creyke held a presentation Sunday morning regarding Wet’suwet’en genealogy (i.e. record or account of the ancestry and descent of a person, family, group). *Hagwilnegh* presented on the history of the genealogy charts linked to the *Delgamuukw-Gisday’wa* case, and Diana explained about why we have some of the children under the father’s name and the importance of having our charts continuously updated. The presentation and availability of the genealogy charts was an effective tool that enabled some members to learn about their kinship ancestry related to their House Group and Clan members.

Genealogy data collection started in the 1980’s in preparation for the *Delgamuukw-Gisday’wa* court case and was an exhibit entered into evidence. The non-Wet’suwet’en needed a visual representation to understand how the Clan and House system worked, so the chart system was utilized. Since that time, the genealogical data is used by Clans and House groups to keep track of their members and serve as a teaching tool for Wet’suwet’en to learn about their lineage, Clans, House Groups, Hereditary Chiefs and Father Clan members. The charts also identify Wet’suwet’en children born to non-Wet’suwet’en women, whom are listed under the father. Following the history and background overview, the genealogy charts were placed on the tables and members had an opportunity to look at them and see their family, and Clan and House Group ancestry. Some members listed on the charts provided new information regarding children they had had and these new names were updated on the charts.



**Diana Creyke, lil' Jax Ambridge Paula Tait, Rodney Mack, *ts'akë ze' Wihaliy'te* (Theresa Tait-Day),** Vancouver, B.C. – December 5, 2015



**Janet Pete & Mary Alice Namox,** Vancouver, B.C. – December 5, 2015

A memorable story was shared by Diana and Sheri Green who attended the Vancouver Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society Christmas Dinner the day after which saw children and youth in care attend with their caregivers. Diana and Sheri had the genealogy charts with them at the dinner and were able to identify children who were first cousins, but who were living apart and had never known of each other. Sheri was able to locate the children at the dinner and bring them together and introduce them to one another. This was especially touching and heartwarming for Sheri as the children were members of her Gitdumden Clan, thus she was able to explain to them about their cultural and kinship family connections.

The children were initially shy as they met each other for the first time but they were soon overtaken with big beaming smiles. These cousins and Gitdumden Clan members will now be connected to one another as they grow up, a wonderful life-changing outcome resulting from the Vancouver gathering!

## **6. Wet'suwet'en & Gitxsan Unlocking Aboriginal Justice**

The Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan Unlocking Aboriginal Justice (UAJ) program was created in 1989 in response to dissatisfaction with the western judicial system. UAJ was established under the guidance and supervision of the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and elders to support members wherever they reside. The UAJ program applies traditional laws and practices in our work with members who find themselves in conflict with the western laws. We believe unequivocally that the ultimate responsibility for justice relies on all of us, as House and Clan Members, as Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan.

The UAJ program exists to help Clan and House Members take responsibility for each other. UAJ is designed to provide information on the content and practice of Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan law, and each client's kinship connection engendering healthy support networks that provide guidance and assist in the development and completion of the "Contract Agreement." This agreement is between the client, the client's clan and house, and the UAJ Program. Referrals to the UAJ program can come

from any one of the following: self-referral, community, Clan or House group, community corrections, crown counsel, lawyer or legal aid, RCMP, and MCFD.



**Sherry McKinnon, Lisa Mowatt, Marilyn Wright, Conrad Nikal, UAJ Staff – Vancouver, BC – December 6, 2015**

Individuals participating in the UAJ Program are taking responsibility for their actions, pleading guilty to their offenses if they are facing criminal charges within the Canadian Criminal Justice System or requesting support from their Clan and House Group in the development of a healing plan. All participants enter the UAJ program on a voluntary basis. UAJ is not mandated to give legal advice.

The UAJ program works with between 30-70 Wet’suwet’en members each year, with approximately the same number of Gitxsan members served. UAJ promoted more intervention strategies this past year (2015) which resulted in the number of members served dropping to 35. The UAJ has worked hard to create understanding with the Wet’suwet’en members in Vancouver beginning with a 3-day event held in 2013 where information was provided to create awareness and understanding of our program. We have held events in Vancouver every year since to continue to raise awareness and understanding regarding the support we can provide to our Wet’suwet’en and Gitxsan members. We also supported the ANABIP program in 2014 when we jointly held the first Learning Feast in the Vancouver. It is our sincere goal to continue to grow our relationship and the awareness of UAJ with our Wet’suwet’en and Gitxsan members wherever they may reside.

For more information please contact:

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## **7. Wet’suwet’en & Gitxsan Learning Feast**

The Wet’suwet’en & Gitxsan UAJ program hosted the wonderful Learning Feast with support provided by Office of the Wet’suwet’en staff, and Wet’suwet’en members. Sherry McKinnon liaised with the Hereditary Chiefs and Office of the Wet’suwet’en in planning for the Feast. Marilyn Wright of UAJ coordinated the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre hall rental. We wish to thank all the volunteer



members from the lower mainland who purchased food items locally, then prepared the food in their homes and brought them to the Feast.

Hereditary Chiefs performed traditional roles including taking each person to their respective Clan section and tapping the talking stick as they sat down. Hereditary Chiefs also provided teachings regarding Feast protocols in their respective Clan seating areas. The Feast was conducted in the Gitksan style, as the year before it was done in the Wet'suwet'en way. It is estimated that over 500 Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan members attended the Feast, which Vancouver Friendship Centre staff expressed was the largest First Nation turnout they had ever seen.



**Wet'suwet'en – Gitksan Learning Feast, Vancouver Friendship Centre – December 6, 2015**

The Feast began with an opening prayer by *Dini ze' T'sek'ot* (Ron Austin), Laksilyu Clan. Debbie Pierre then welcomed everyone and spoke of the historic significance of the gathering. Debbie introduced the UAJ team, and Sherry McKinnon shared that the UAJ program started as a Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan joint-program, but then separated in 2000, and then came full circle in reforming 3 years ago. Sherri spoke of the importance of never forgetting the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan leaders who fought to keep the culture and traditional practices intact. Lastly, she thanked all the volunteers including the Gitksan Urban Society for preparing the food, and wished everyone a Merry Christmas. Food then began to be served and door prize draws were done for: the posters that had pictures and quotes from *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* case participants, books for children, and gift cards from the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre gift-shop. The Gitksan Dancers then drummed, sang and danced in a wonderful celebration of their ceremonial practices and culture.

Following the meal, in accordance with Wet'suwet'en and Gixsan feast protocol, the Hereditary Chief's were drummed into the hall dressed in their full regalia. Each Chief stood in front of their respective Clan and House Group tables. *Dini ze' Hagwilnegh* spoke of the duties of the chiefs to their members and said the purpose of the Feast was to bring everyone together to share and celebrate Wet'suwet'en

and Gitxsan culture, to honour the Wet'suwet'en children in foster care and their caregivers, and to celebrate the anniversary (December 11, 1997) of the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* court case. Each of the Hereditary Chiefs then spoke and thanked their members for attending the Feast. *Dini'ze' Na'moks* expressed that a key purpose of the Feast was to strengthen the connection of the members to Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan culture as the Feast system is a central component of Wet'suwet'en culture, governance and identity.



**Wet'suwet'en & Gitxsan Learning Feast –**  
Vancouver, BC – December 6, 2015



**Sherry McKinnon & Volunteers– Vancouver,**  
BC – December 6, 2015

Another highlight of the Feast was the introduction and honouring of Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan children growing up in Vancouver in foster care, and both acknowledging and thanking their social workers and caregivers. Vancouver Aboriginal Children and Family Services worked in the preceding months with the ANABIP staff and Debbie Pierre in making arrangements that would enable the children and youth, social workers and caregivers to attend the Feast. Words cannot do justice in explaining how profoundly important and heartwarming this part of the gathering was. Children and youth who had no connections or limited connections with their extended family members were able to meet with relatives that some did not know existed. Social workers and caregivers were able to gain insights and some understanding regarding Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan cultural practices that can help them in supporting the children and youth to continue to learn and embrace their distinct Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan cultures.

Bernadette Spence, Executive Director, VACFSS and their staff members did a gifting of blankets for the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and some Gitxsan delegates to signify their commitment to developing a strong relationship with the Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan in the planning for cultural connections and well-being of our children and youth in foster care.



**Cindy Pete (right) & Julia** – Vancouver, BC – December 6, 2015



**George Michell & Jayda (niece)** – Vancouver, BC – December 6, 2015



***Dinī ze' Na'moks*, Nathaniel Arcand, Madelaine McCallum, *Dinī ze' Kloum Khun*** – Vancouver, BC – December 6, 2015

*Dinī ze' Na'moks* had made a special invitation for well known Indigenous actor Nathaniel Arcand (Alexander First Nation - Alberta) to attend the Feast as a special guest of the *Tsayu* Clan, along with his fiancé, motivational speaker and traditional dancer Madelaine McCallum (Île-à-la-Crosse First Nation - Saskatchewan). When *ts'akē ze' Simke-Yaks* (Barb Wilson) met Nathaniel, she decided she would adopt him to the Laksamshu Clan, but unfortunately that was not scheduled and we simply didn't have the proper time or preparation to do that, maybe next time 😊

Nathaniel not only attended the Feast, but he actually participated in Feast protocol as he assisted *Dinī ze' Na'moks* in putting-on and taking-off his Head Chief's regalia.

Near the conclusion of the Feast, Nathaniel and Madelaine were asked to address the audience and they thanked the Hereditary Chiefs for inviting them, and explained how impressed they were and how important it was for them to have participated and learned another First Nations culture and traditional practices. Soon after the Feast *Dinī ze' Na'moks* was learned that Madelaine spoke about how powerful and wonderful an experience the Feast had been for both her and Nathaniel, and how it had served to revitalize and lift their spirits.

Each of the Hereditary Chiefs provided concluding statements and thanked everyone for all of the hard work and preparation that had been put into the two-day event, and how appreciative they were for all of the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan members who participated. The Hereditary Chiefs spoke about how it

is their intent that this will be an annual event, to enable the continued building of connections and relationship with our membership and families.

The Feast ended with a final concluding prayer performed by elder Eugene Harry, Squamish Nation, who had opened the two-day gathering. As are their laws, he must open and close the gathering on their Coast Salish territory.

## 8. Wet'suwet'en Traditional Information

One key intent of creating this Newsletter for the Urban Vancouver Wet'suwet'en members is to provide information and materials that provide teachings with respect to Wet'suwet'en Hereditary governance, laws, Clan and House Group systems, Feasts; and in subsequent editions, language.

Teachings information provided in this edition are:

- Appendix 1 Identification of 5 Wet'suwet'en Clans and 13 House Groups & listing of all Wet'suwet'en Head and Wing Chiefs who attended
- Appendix 2 Wet'suwet'en *Yintah* Map

## 9. Feedback and Next Steps

### 9.1 Feedback from Urban Vancouver Wet'suwet'en Member



**Jo Andrew**, Vancouver, BC –  
December 6, 2015

I really appreciate that the staff that came that were present through the whole event. They really took to the time to connect with families. I know it really meant a lot to families to build that trust and relationship that is so important to develop the type of engagement and growth that we are seeking. Overall it was really well managed by participants and delegates who were patient and helpful.

Otherwise the meeting was so helpful and beautiful. I loved it. It would be great to facilitate more sharing back and forth. There was a moment for questions and 'open mic' but that led to the few people that did share, share grief rather than knowledge. Maybe we can make a point to share stories, knowledge and history together rather than 'questions' and leave a question day or monitoring/measuring method where people can submit their questions, feedback etc.

## 9.2 Wet'suwet'en Constitution – New Sections

The Governance Team and Hereditary Chiefs have prioritized the following sections of the constitution to be drafted next:

- S. 6 Wet'suwet'en Membership
- S. 10 Hereditary Chiefs Powers, Authorities & Responsibilities
- S. 12 Feasts
- S. 13 Wet'suwet'en Laws
- S. 14 Wet'suwet'en Law-Making Procedures

As each new section is written into drafts, and following their review by the WGAC, then the drafts will be sent to the Urban Vancouver Clan Liaison for distribution, review and input to ensure your interests are included. It is anticipated that an additional face-to-face review of the final completed draft of the constitution will occur at sometime in the spring, 2016.

## 9.3 Wet'suwet'en Language Strategy

The Hereditary Chief's de-briefed on January 13, 2016, and one next-stop matter that resulted was their desire to create a Wet'suwet'en language strategy for the urban Vancouver Wet'suwet'en members. This is in its most initial discussion and will be the subject of future engagements with the lower mainland Wet'suwet'en members.

## Appendix 1

### Wet'suwet'en Clans & House Groups and Chief Participation at the December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Urban Vancouver Gathering

CLAN NAME	HOUSE NAME	CHIEF NAME	ENGLISH NAME
GIL_SEYHU	Yex T'sa wil_k'us (Dark House)	Knedebear	Warner William
GIL_SEYHU	Kayex (Birchbark House)	Samooch	Herb Naziel
GIL_SEYHU (Delegate)	Yex T'sa wit'ant' (Thin House)	Goohlaht Lay'oh	Vacant James Namox
LAKSILYU	G'en egh La yex (House of many eyes)	Hagwilnegh	Ron Mitchell
LAKSILYU	Tsee K'al K'e yex (House on a flat rock)	Wah tah K'eght	Henry Alfred
LAKSILYU (Delegate)	Tsee K'al K'e yex (House on a flat rock)	Neekupdeh	Daren George
LAKSILYU (Delegate)	Kwen Beegh Yex (House beside the fire)	Wah tah Kwets Wihaliy'te	Frank Patrick (medical leave) Theresa Tait-Day
LAKSILYU (Delegate)	G'en egh La yex (House of many eyes)	T'sek'ot	Ron Austin
TSAYU	Tsa K'en yex (Rafters on Beaver House)	Na'Moks	John Ridsdale
TSAYU (Delegate)	Djakanyex (Beaver House)	Kweese Mutt	Vacant Bill Naziel
TSAYU (Delegate)	Tsa K'en yex (Rafters on Beaver House)	Wila'at	Sue Alfred
LAKSAMSHU	Medzeyex (Owl House)	Kloum Khun	Alphonse Gagnon
LAKSAMSHU (Delegate)	Medzeyex (Owl House)	Simke-Yaks	Barb Wilson
GITDUMDEN	Kaiyexwentis (House in the middle of many)	Gisday'wa	Fred Tom
GITDUMDEN	Anaskaski (Where it lies blocking the trail)	Madeek	Jeff Brown

# Appendix 2

