

# STEPPING DOWN FROM NUMBER ONE IN CANADA: JUSTICE AND CRIME PREVENTION IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES



Wilderness Camp

BY SARAH JACKMAN

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah is the Executive Director of the *Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society*, a non-profit organization which provides Restorative Justice and Peacemaking services to the First Nations communities in the central BC area through the Tsilhqot'in Restorative Justice Program. The Society also provides life skills and cultural programming to at-risk aboriginal youth in the Chilcotin area through wilderness camps, sports camps, and workshops as well as youth supervision and adult probation clients. Sarah has training in both Community Justice Forums and Peacemaking Circles and provides training opportunities in the area. Sarah is a Board Member for the *Canadian Restorative Justice Consortium (CRJC)*, selected as a representative for British Columbia. Sarah also serves as a Board Member of the local Big Brothers & Big Sisters agency, and is a member of *Communities that Care* and the *Williams Lake Community Council for Restorative Justice*. Sarah was born and raised in west Chilcotin, the area in which she now works to provide services.

## We're number one.

That is, we are number one on the Crime Severity Index (CSI) released by Statistics Canada in July of 2015. Williams Lake has the highest rating of any other city over 10,000 people in British Columbia, and the second highest overall in Canada - not a list that anyone wants to get to the top of...

The Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia is facing some very serious challenges with crime, particularly with Aboriginal youth gang activity. There are over a dozen First Nations communities surrounding Williams Lake, each with their own challenges and struggles. With extremely low graduation and employment rates in the First Nations population as well as very high levels of poverty and substance abuse, the situation is critical. The traditional court system has not been effective at reducing recidivism rates or preventing crime from occurring; alternatives to the traditional justice system must thus be looked at in order to effectively serve and support the Aboriginal population.

## COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES BASED ON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND PEACEMAKING...

Peacemaking and Restorative Justice philosophies are based on traditional practices of indigenous cultures around the world. Restorative Justice principles and approaches/models are based on the understanding of compassion, recognize that no one can be successful alone, isolated or alienated in their community and that everyone is an equal member of society and has a contribution to make to their community. Although it is everyone's responsibility to make responsible choices in their own lives, their ability to do so may be hindered by a large number of influences and perhaps a lack of guidance and mentoring. When someone is following a

dangerous path or becoming disconnected, it is the responsibility of the community to bring that individual back to a place of connection within the community, to hold the individual accountable for their actions, and to take the appropriate steps to repair the harm that has been caused.

## ***Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society and "Tsilhqot'in Restorative Justice" (TRJ) program involving offender, victim(s) and all other community stakeholders...***

The "Tsilhqot'in Restorative Justice" (TRJ) program, funded through the Aboriginal Justice Strategies Directorate of the Department of Justice, supports the Tsilhqot'in and Southern Carrier Nations in the development of community-based approaches to social justice issues with their youth, families, and communities by assisting in the implementation of sentencing and conflict resolution alternatives that focus on healing, education, and employment opportunities. TRJ is governed by Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society (PLWCS) Board of Directors, whose seven members are representatives from the Tsilhqot'in and Southern Carrier Nation. Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society (PLWCS) is a community-based non-profit society designed to provide Restorative Justice, Peacemaking and crime-prevention initiatives and activities to at-risk First Nations youth and their families in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia.

## ***TRJ - a vital service to help heal and support victims of crime and help resolve other community conflicts...***

Using a unique blend of Peacemaking Circles and Community Justice Forums, the TRJ has become a vital service in the area to help heal and support victims of crime and help resolve other community conflicts. Referrals are received from the RCMP, Crown Counsel,



Probation, as well as First Nations leadership, on- and off-reserve schools, and support workers. Everyone involved in a specific incident or offence comes together to speak openly and honestly about the incident and the hurt or harm that was caused. The participants come to an agreement about how to meaningfully repair the harm and uncover what had gone so wrong as to cause the crime, i.e., how and why the offence happened. Often, after the circle is completed and sanctions are decided upon, offenders will express how much more difficult and impactful it is to face the victim and other circle participants - than to stand in front of a judge outside the community and have a sentence imposed. PLWCS not only governs TRJ, but also offers a host of programs and services in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region providing Restorative Justice, Peacemaking and crime prevention services.

The families and communities in PLWCS interventions surrounding the youth are included in order to provide a wrap-around approach that better the youth's quality of life. The Society takes a holistic approach using the Medicine Wheel as a philosophic base in its community work. The Medicine Wheel symbolizes a holistic view of human life where body, mind, emotion and spirit are the four quadrants of the wheel or circle. The interconnectedness of these four aspects of life is overlaid on a holistic view of the four seasons, the four cycles of life (infancy, adolescence, adulthood and old age), the four essential elements of the earth (wind, fire, rain and earth), and the four directions (north, south, east, west). Working with funds provided by various government contracts, the Society has become an instrumental and healing part of the justice system in the central BC region.

***(PLWCS): traditional indigenous solutions and problem-solving approaches...***

The justice workers of the Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society also work closely with both youth and adults on probation, providing not only supervision, and they offer assistance in furthering education, treatment and employability and acting as a support person during their probationary period. Bringing back traditional, indigenous solutions and problem-solving approaches in Aboriginal communities is a great first step to honouring the families that reside there, respecting their cultural values and traditions and helping them find their way back to the successful societies of the past.

***Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society's "Success" program culture camps and youth program in Tsilhqot'in Nation and Williams Lake...***

Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society's "Success" program, funded through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, aims to help Tsilhqot'in Nation and Williams Lake area youth to find and follow a healthy path and develop a health worldview through recreation, sports, life skills, and cultural programming - to avoid criminal and gang activities. Since assimilation, culture, storytelling, and traditional teachings are not always passed along to the younger generations as they were in the past. The young people in the area have expressed a real interest and hunger to reconnect and learn more about their culture and traditional ways of life, and the Soci-

ety has been working hard with communities and Elders to ensure that this need is met through Culture Camps and strong community involvement. Youth programs, whether it be a three-day hockey clinic, a dip netting and river safety field trip, or a weekly drumming and singing circle, are all provided free of charge to the youth and families of the region. Without the Success program, most of these children would never have the means to attend a summer camp or have professional coaching in a sport like hockey or soccer. The programs are also bolstered with a great deal of mentoring regarding the benefits of healthy lifestyle choices and the importance of education, family, and culture.

The Success program also works to assist foster parents help Aboriginal foster children to remain connected to their home community and family so that their culture and tradition are not lost from their lives. Ideally, these children will be returning to their homes and communities at some point in the future when it is safe for them to do so, and the transition is much easier if contact with family has continued. Every effort is made to provide support to all involved, during the fostering process and post-return.

All of these efforts work together to provide healthier environments in which the youth of the Nation can thrive and grow, hopefully avoiding the temptations and traps that can exist for this vulnerable population. The programs are very well attended with groups of youth ranging in numbers from 10-50 youth, depending on the activity.

**WORK TO GIVE PROGRAM: WHEN INCARCERATION IS THE ONLY OPTION**

***Work to Give, a Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society and Correctional Service Canada (CSC) joint Restorative Justice initiative...***

Since not all attempts to intervene are successful and inevitably some individuals do eventually end up incarcerated, the "Work to Give Project", a partnership between Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society and Correctional Service Canada (CSC) affords a Restorative Justice initiative designed to provide incarcerated offenders with employment skills while contributing to low-income communities and families in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region.

***Keeping incarcerated offenders busy and engaged...***

Incarcerated offenders have some amount of time on their hands whereby they are "idle" and may not have enough activity, employment or programming to fill their long days. It is believed that this inactivity is a factor that can lead to an increased demand for drugs and contribute to an institutional subculture that is not conducive to rehabilitation. Many offenders already have the skills to produce products, but they do not have the resources or capacity while in prison to build on their knowledge. Furthermore, other offenders would benefit from the opportunity to learn these skills from each other. The opportunity for offenders to give back to communities that are in dire need can engender a restoration that can prevent future harmful actions.



**Work to Give... A program that meets multiple needs...**

CSC, Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society, First Nations leaders and organizations in the region have developed lists of needs, which has resulted in offenders producing furniture for homes, schools and band offices, as well as children's clothing, toys, educational materials and other items.

**Work to Give: an innovative preventative approach...**

The Work to Give Project provides offenders with the raw materials to produce products found on the list of community needs. These products are then donated to Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society, which distributes them to charitable organizations, low-income families and communities throughout Cariboo-Chilcotin. Given that CSC has a clear over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in Canadian prisons, this project has specifically been designed to provide products to these communities in an effort to address this over-representation from a "preventative" lens.

**Success also involves follow-up and positive reinforcement...**

Follow-up and positive reinforcement is carried out through regular visits to the carceral institutions by the PLWCS, providing pictures and stories of the impact their donated goods are making in homes and communities, the offenders have become very enthusiastic about Work to Give. They are realizing that their work is being delivered right to the people that have a need for it, and feel engaged and appreciated. In turn, the benefits to the communities receiving the goods have been countless. Hundreds of children, families, schools, and communities are feeling the impact of this project every day.

*The goals of the Work to Give Project are three-fold:*

- 1) Provide offenders with opportunities to learn employment skills and make intrinsic changes that ultimately can assist them to adopt pro-social values and attitudes;
- 2) Contribute to safer institutional environments and to reduce recidivism rates by engaging offenders in meaningful work; and,
- 3) Improve the lives of Aboriginal children and youth through the contribution of products which can improve their quality of life.

Since the first meeting regarding this project in September 2012, it has grown to be a valuable and highly restorative program within CSC in nine federal institutions in three short years. In the fall of last year, CSC and Punky Lake partnered with the UBC School of Nursing to use Work to Give as the basis of a research project entitled Working 2 Give: Enlisting Positive Masculinities for Incarcerated Aboriginal Men's Mental Health. The findings will be published in 2017. We are already seeing exciting changes in the offenders that work within the project. They have been very open about how connected they feel to the program and the sense of pride it gives them. They are mentoring each other, sharing skills, and feel connected to community. Having a sense of purpose and usefulness is a major factor in reintegration, and it is our hope that this project will continue to

give the offenders participating in the activities the drive, skills, and goals they need to have a successful release.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The road to reducing crime rates and severity in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region is a very long and complicated one, especially considering the unique challenges it faces. Community partnerships and collaboration are playing a major role in working towards that goal. PLWCS works very closely with Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Canada, Communities that Care, and the Williams Lake Community Council for Restorative Justice as well as several other organizations. Communication and learning what services each local organization can provide allows for the community to make more of a wrap-around approach to dealing with the problems they face. ●●

***The three major areas of the Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society's holistic programming: Success for prevention, Tsilhqot'in Restorative Justice - for intervention, and Work to Give - for intervention, ensure that all areas and stages of the justice process are being addressed. And although our small city may still be number one on the Crime Statistics Index, we feel confident that we of the Cariboo-Chilcotin region will be stepping down from that position in the near future.***

**RÉSUMÉ**

**STEPPING DOWN FROM NUMBER ONE IN CANADA: JUSTICE AND CRIME PREVENTION IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

Par Sarah Jackman, directrice générale du Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society, un organisme sans but lucratif offrant des services de justice réparatrice et de rétablissement de la paix aux collectivités de Premières nations de la région centrale de la Colombie-Britannique

Sarah Jackman fait le point sur le programme de justice réparatrice *Tsilhqot'in*, un service vital de la région Cariboo-Chilcotin de la Colombie-Britannique, qui contribue à la guérison et au soutien de victimes d'actes criminels ainsi qu'à la résolution d'autres conflits communautaires. Ce programme est géré par la *Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society* (PLWCS), un organisme communautaire sans but lucratif ayant pour mandat d'offrir des services de justice réparatrice, de rétablissement de la paix et des activités de prévention du crime à l'intention de jeunes autochtones à risque et de leur familles dans les collectivités de Cariboo-Chilcotin. Faisant sombrement référence à Williams Lake comme étant au sommet de l'indice de la gravité de la criminalité déclarée, établi par de Statistique Canada, et mettant en lumière l'échec de l'approche traditionnelle de la justice pénale dans cette région, Jackman traite d'autres initiatives de la PLWCS, tel le programme "Success" (à l'intention de la nation *Tsilhqot'in* et des jeunes de la région de Williams Lake), de même que le programme unique *Work to Give* à l'intention de délinquants incarcérés.