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Youth in Community Economic Development

Bamfield Community School Association

The Bamfield Community School Association (BCSA) is a small non-profit society located in the remote village of Bamfield, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. BCSA incorporated in September 1995 with a mandate of "bringing community members together to identify and use their combined assets to improve the quality of life and education available in the community".

In partnership with the Huu Ay Aht First Nation, the BCSA has been creatively engaging and empowering local youth in a wide variety of ventures. This profile highlights the work of this innovative community school association, and in particular outlines the adventures of the West Coast Learning Community and the youth-led TV and media programs

This profile is one of fifteen stories examining youth involvement in community economic development (CED). The profiles have been produced as part of the Canadian CED Network's efforts to encourage effective practices in youth leadership and engagement to enhance the social and economic conditions of Canada's communities.

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Context

Bamfield is a small, remote west coast village that is accessible only by water or by a long logging road from Port Alberni. A hundred years ago Bamfield was the location for the pan-Pacific telegraph cable and twenty years ago it was a thriving fishing village. Today only one fishing family exists in the village and the timber industry has largely collapsed. Linda Myres writes, "The Huu Ay Aht First Nation has resided in the region for over 10,000 years. With the advent of European exploration and trade, the two cultures have lived side by side for more than 100 years. Culturally, the Huu Ay Aht demonstrate life long learning in traditional and informal venues. The Huu Ay Aht traditional economy is rooted in harvesting marine life. The settlers also harvested from the sea.

In the 21st century, new models of economy and society are developing. The fishers and hewers of wood, who could suffice with primary education in the old economy, now require an innovative global view and technology to support continuing education, the new economy and a new lifestyle." Educational institutions have been one of the stabilizing factors in the Bamfield economy and the focus on

education by the BCSA has helped this entrepreneurial community go beyond fishing and

forestry to explore new sustainable opportunities for this remote west coast community. This profile highlights how the BCSA and the Huu Ay Aht First Nations' 500 citizens are working together to actively engage their youth in the process of creating a sustainable economy in a small remote community.

History

The Bamfield Community School Association became a non-profit organization in 1995 with a volunteer board of directors. The association was formed when the school district gave Bamfield a community school designation because of the high risks to children's health and literacy levels in the area. The grant allotted to a community school allowed the Association to hire staff. With creative fundraising, the initial personnel also included three part time staff including a program facilitator, a community access youth intern, and a youth coordinator.

In 2003 Montgomery noted:

"In 2001 the school's 110 students held their first graduation ceremony for two grade 12 graduates. Relations between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities were excellent. High school students no longer had to leave home to continue their education. It was beginning to look as if sustainability was achievable, with the BCSA as the driver of local empowerment."

The BCS Association has made efforts to use school facilities more effectively for community programs, strengthened the K to 12 curriculum through greater involvement of available resources, developed a variety of educational, recreational, cultural and social opportunities for children, youth and adults, and encouraged active involvement of youth in community activities. It has also strengthened communications within the community, facilitated cooperation in the provision of community services, and encouraged and supported life-long learning.

From 2002 to 2005, BCSA spearheaded the West Coast Learning Community initiative with funding from HRDC's Office of Learning Technologies. Despite

enormous success in a variety of youth led activities the community and BCSA currently face many challenges.

Montgomery summarizes the key issues:

"In the last four years, local school boards were given control over the provincial grant for community schools. In 2002, School District 70 reduced funding to BCSA from \$75,000 to \$50,000, and finally to \$46,000. Two years ago there were 77 K-10 students; today there are only 32. The school has gone through four principals in four years, and is now operating with a head teacher and an off-site supervising principal. As the number of students decline, so too has the number of staff. Where there were 6 teachers four years ago, now there are three. As the school shrinks, more families with children leave the community. As families leave, more families leave. Because of the state of the school, the community's largest employer, the Bamfield Marine Science Centre is able to recruit new faculty only if they do not have school age children. Community decline and school decline are inextricably intertwined..."

Activities in CED

The BCSA has initiated, partnered, or supported numerous citizen-led initiatives to enhance social, economic and cultural conditions in Bamfield and the Huu Ay Aht communities with a strong focus on youth involvement and youth participation. These include; the Bamfield Huu Ay Aht Community Forest, the Bamfield Huu Ay Aht Community Abalone Project, a Community Access Program, VolNet, a community and school newspaper, a community-school based television station, a community craft store, several after school youth programs, and the Bamfield Huu Ay Aht Knowledge Adventure Project. A recent initiative brought the volunteer sector of the community, represented by

seventeen different societies, into one community organization, the Community Affairs Committee, to coordinate these initiatives. The key activities that were youth-led or had significant youth participation are summarized below:

The West Coast Learning Network

In 2002 the BCSA received funding for three years from HRDC to create the West Coast Learning Network. The WCLN was composed of a variety of local partners, including School District 70, the Huu Ay Aht First Nation and Malaspina University-College. The federal grant contributed \$300,000 to the partners with an additional \$566,700 in partnership contributions. The Learning Network established three objectives to implement the goal of enhancing knowledge-based entrepreneurship in the region.

The objectives were to:

1. Contribute to the growth and sustainability of Bamfield, and other communities on the west coast that joined the network,
2. Support economic and social development by selecting and developing entrepreneurial activities to contribute to community livelihoods, and;
3. Contribute to the health and sustainability of communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island by building on existing community capacity

An Advisory Council was formed to provide the leadership to sustain and guide the project. A core group of people on the council represented: the BCSA, the Huu Ay Aht First Nation, the Community Forest, School District 70, Malaspina University-College, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District, Bamfield Marine Science Centre, and the Bamfield Community Affairs committee.

Huu Ay Aht CD-ROM Project

This CD featured the Huu Ay Aht First Nation's language, history and culture. The WCLN promoted the CD, featuring it in a public forum in 2003 and they continue to integrate the CD into local curriculum where possible. Youth played a key role in the research and data collection for this project.

Community Capacity Assessment

The youth video club created a collection of video clips of resources and people in the community to enhance awareness and support for regional community development and transformational learning. Data was compiled by school students and the video club produced a video that was written, shot, and edited by students.

Community Web-site/listserv

Students created a community website which is now up and running. The listserv reaches one-third of the community. The web site www.bamfieldcommunity.com is currently being re-designed to enable a link to school and community learners' products including writings, artwork, and student research.

Kiixen historical site

Students recorded and digitized the launch of the ancient 5,000 year old Kiixen village site. They videotaped the dedication ceremony and worked with an archaeological team collecting research for the site.

Channel 5 News Bulletin

The Bamfield Community School Association has sponsored Media Programming for several years to encourage students to gain valuable experience in the field of television, video and radio broadcasting. Key volunteers have assisted in the creation of several local programs and news broadcasts. The local Bulletin Board style television station features weekly news broadcasts directed, filmed and produced by students. Additional content includes a variety of

vignettes highlighting community events and projects as well as current news items, community announcements and upcoming events.

The video club produces a weekly TV show that is run by students in grades 4 through 7. Students do the behind the scenes camera work, are the on-camera hosts and staff the news desk and weather board. Six youth from grade 6 to 10 produce the news broadcasts and also produce videos and commercials. Students maintain the community bulletin board that is broadcast 24 hours a day. The club also produced several short video documentaries in and around Bamfield. The videos were presented at the BC Rural Teachers' Association's annual conference and at the International Rural Network's conference in Aberdeen, Scotland. The club has created productions about the Kiixen historical site, the Wizard of Oz, and a Huu Ay Aht partnership project *Huu Ay Aht For Kids* and a CD of Huu Ay Aht children singing traditional songs.

Leadership Development

Leadership development has been an important component of the BCSA. Initiatives have included a youth camp focusing on leadership, and a workshop presented by a Duke of Edinburgh gold level team from Great Britain.

Community Celebrations

A community dialogue seminar culminated in the development of a community vision statement and set of goals. The International Rural Network's conference in Scotland looking at rural community sustainability featured Bamfield's WCLN in a collaborative comparison with a rural school project in Norway. Both projects looked at how a rural community's empowerment can be school-led. Tofino's Biosphere and Citizen Scientists/Community Health symposium featured the WCLN as a major participant. The WCLN was a key partner in the Non-Timber Forest Product Symposium, with the community and the Huu Ay Aht First

Nation, and the Innovative Learning Symposium that focused on developing a new model for the school to meet community needs.

Bamfield Huu Ay Aht Story Adventure

This project was funded through a grant of \$300,000 from Heritage Canada's 'Canada Culture On-line Program'. The Knowledge Adventure is an inter-active website that children can enter and to work their way through a mystery they have to become engaged with the history, culture, geography, and the people of Barkley Sound. It is a computerized interactive adventure based on people and places in the Bamfield and Huu Ay Aht communities. It is a combination of stories from local citizens collected in taped interviews by the project writing team. Much of the data that contributed to the story was researched and shot by the youth video team (research data, archived materials, and the Huu Ay Aht CD ROM package). The landscape is presented as digital photos in still images, 360 degree panorama views, or video pathways that users can select as they travel through the landscape. Along the way, characters appear, contributing information to the puzzles, tasks, and mysteries that reveal the adventure. This adventure is designed for Grade 4-7 students.

Innovative Learning Symposium

A symposium was developed with community members, school district staff, teachers, students, parents, scientists and staff from the marine centre, and university faculty. The group explored a wide range of innovative and alternative forms of delivery. Western Economic Diversification fund contributed a \$50,000 grant and along with \$20,000 from the Ministry of Education, funding was secured towards the development of a business plan. An educational consultant was hired to conduct a study looking at developing a K-12 program for local students, a 10-12 high school program for local or residential students, and a continuing education

program to support community entrepreneurship.

Youth Inclusion in CED

A key objective of the Bamfield Community School Association is to enhance opportunities for its young people to be able to remain in the area through a holistic and integrated approach to their social and economic issues. Youth lead all the communications initiatives of the association including the Channel 5 TV station, the radio station, the community notice board, and the online learning community. Megan Myres, the young coordinator of the media programs, is also leading the movement to bring broadband to the community. Although there are spaces on the Board for youth members, they have not as yet been filled. However the philosophy and approach of the BCSA has created a growing number of young people in Bamfield who are staying in the community, starting small business and working to enhance community economic development in the region.

Linda Myres believes the Catalyst Network contributed to growth and sustainability in the region by providing support for entrepreneurial activities that contribute to livelihoods by building on existing capacity and assets – and through harnessing the potential of its young people. Residents now acknowledge that they live in a learning community. Opportunities are available for traditional, informal and formal learning. Building on community assets and capacities, the Network has developed five entrepreneurial projects with strong youth participation. The projects reflect the strengths identified by the community in science and technology, arts and culture, tourism and hospitality, and the new resource economy. The Community Broadband Internet project provides infrastructure for e-learning, e-health, and e-commerce that is required for community growth, and it has been completely youth-led. Seafood Processing and Brokerage builds on the traditional marine economy, using new techniques to cultivate, harvest and market internationally desired species.

The Non-Timber Forest Products project provided training for sustainable harvest and sales. The Bamfield Huu Ay Aht Story Adventure and Archives showcases the cultural richness and diversity of the region and was created with and for young people. The creation of the Adventure and Archives were teaching tools for youth and by youth in all facets of video and web production. A very real outcome of the project was the metamorphosis of the Bamfield Community School into the Bamfield School for Coastal and Marine Studies.

Outcomes and Evaluation

The West Coast Learning Network produced several vignettes, community videos, community plays (television and radio) and various other digital media projects including large format digital print publishing. The WCLN invested in technical training for a young staff member. Megan now shares her knowledge with community members, ensuring the knowledge base grows within the community. Megan has produced a community website as a community tool designed to encourage involvement in an online environment and she has offered community workshops and personalized training sessions for residents encouraging the integration of technology as a tool into their day to day lives. WCLN documents each of its workshops and community events year round, keeping a collection of community digital media productions for community viewing.

Jim Montgomery did a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the WCLN. The key points from his report are summarized below:

“In the last three years at least 350 people have been involved in at least one of the WCLN’s activities. Statistically, this means that 75 % of the community has been involved. Not only has community participation been widespread, it is also evident that successive activities have actively reached out to include community members not already actively engaged. In

particular, recruitment of youth has become a major goal within many of the various activities. Through community support, the school has a functioning television station, skills are taught by community members, the community is resolving the issue of broadband access, and the contribution to technological skill building has resulted in the creation of an Internet based model that will contribute to children's learning and at the same time attract tourists to the region. It is well set to be a model contributing to both education and the local economy. The new School for Coastal and Marine Studies is currently exploring the potential for hosting videoconferences. This way of using technology is creative, far thinking, and will attract much attention from other communities.

The community clearly accepts that being a 'learning community' is their future market niche. There were several part-time jobs within the WCLN that became catalytic in themselves. The director of the WCLN, for example, was instrumental in the creation of avenues of learning with opportunities for jobs. These opportunities appear in the Non-Timber Forest Products project, the Abalone Shellfish project, the Story Adventure, and the Sea Food Processing and Sales project. There are opportunities connected with the innovative and entrepreneurial directions for the school, as well as new ways to create curriculum and use resources. The concept of cooperatives was thoroughly explored. The community capacity assessment opened many, many eyes throughout the community about the resources that already existed, and those that were needed. The technical support person trained citizens to do things that were not previously thought possible. The Mushroom Festival is now an annual event in the community, providing work and learning in a number of areas. The Adventure Story taught one citizen how to use his music studio at a professional, commercial level. Another citizen's French language abilities became commercially marketable with the requirement to translate the Adventure Story. It is clear that the WCLN is doing things the right

way; it exhibits every indication that its role in the community will continue."

Twelve citizens of the Bamfield / Anacla community were interviewed to determine their views on the impact of WCLN. In addition to increased competencies using technology, many comments reflected increased confidences working in committees, working with different levels of government, and communicating effectively. Similarly, there were numerous comments reflecting increased competencies individuals enjoyed with their small businesses and the taking of advantage of expanding networks of people with similar interests and skills. In some cases these networks were loose and informal partnerships, in others they became formal and contractually based partnerships.

Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Linda Myres notes that:

"The West Coast Learning Network created a 'Catalyst Council' of local, regional, provincial and federal organizations and individuals to advance community development on the west coast of Vancouver Island. More than 50% of the population participated in the Network. Beginning with a place-based learning concept, building on existing capacities, presenting and reflecting, and most importantly, celebrating the successes publicly, gave a sense of ownership to the community. Through this ownership of knowledge, skills and success, the community of learners recognized the benefit of the project. The West Coast Learning Network will continue to support the new economy with encouragement, support and life long learning opportunities." There was an increased awareness in the importance of the school to the survival of a community, how the school is such an integral part of their community, and how much people really do value education. People saw the mutual benefits to lifelong learning with the community supporting the school and the school supporting the school. These

benefits were alluded to economically, technologically, and socially.

Jim Montgomery's evaluation report adds:

"People commented with pride about the record of successes the WCLN had enjoyed. With respect to the sustainability of the WCLN, most comments reflected the potential of individual activities. Economic potential yet to be realized was frequently mentioned, as was the potential still to come from increased abilities with technology. The Story Adventure and the Non-Timber Forest Products projects were frequently used as examples of very strong projects with unlimited potential. The new School for Coastal and Marine Studies project was without doubt seen as potentially having the strongest economical, technological, and social impact on the community."

Policy and Future Directions

The Bamfield Community School Association continues to support the youth-led TV and media programs. In an attempt to maintain school aged children and families in the community they are currently focusing on developing a new school and continuing education program that specializes in marine education. This school is part of the trend in rural education on "place based learning" - learning that is connected to the place and to the community. In Alaska, place based learning has been very successful in increasing student achievement, decreasing drop out rates, increasing post secondary attendance, and raising the numbers of First Nation students studying in the sciences. The BCSA is working closely with the Huu Ay Aht First Nation and the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre to create the Bamfield School for Coastal and Marine Studies.

The Institute will see the re-establishment of a K-12 school offering an enriched, experiential elementary curriculum and a unique high school program based on coastal and marine studies as well as continuing education opportunities in

aquaculture, community forestry, fisheries habitat restoration, heritage interpretation, hospitality and tourism. The youth coordinator has also spearheaded the task of bridging the digital divide in the Bamfield and Anacla area and currently is in the process of rolling out a wireless community broadband network, with plans to offer service to residents by the end of June 2006.

Thanks to Linda Myres and Megan Myres for the interviews.

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Montgomery, Jim Bamfield Community School Association, *West Coast Learning Network Final Evaluation Report, 2005*

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