

The Canadian CED Network Youth in Charge

Host Community & Community Partner Profiles

1. MOBERLY LAKE

Community Partner: The Boreal Centre for Conservation Enterprise

The Boreal Centre is a not-for-profit association of approximately 50 members concerned with sustainable community development in the Peace River Region. Its goal is to help improve the livelihoods of the marginalized northern, rural communities through the promotion of profitable, but also ecologically & socially responsible micro – and small enterprise. Support for the goals and objectives of the Boreal Centre has come from producer groups, all levels of government, elected representatives, First Nations leadership, academic institutions, community development groups and financial organizations. The Society Board of Directors and members have experience in a wide range of community development initiatives in B.C., elsewhere in Canada and overseas including:

- business planning
- community-based environmental assessment
- cross-cultural education
- community sustainability auditing
- business development
- agro-forestry & eco-tourism market research
- First Nations resource-access negotiations
- Inuit workplace education
- youth environmental projects
- traditional ecological knowledge studies
- community land-use planning
- resource mgt. training program implementation
- forest stewardship planning

Community Information: Moberly Lake

Moberly Lake is an unincorporated settlement which consists of approximately 1000 people. Approximately half of the population is of aboriginal ancestry at the Saulteau and West Moberly First Nation reserves, where approximately 56% were less than 30 yrs of age in 1996. Many low-income, and less educated

aboriginal and non-aboriginal people continue to face barriers to employment in the dominant local resource-industry. There are no accurate assessments of employment levels in the community, but in a 1996 human resource survey of 80 Saulneau residents, approximately 30% of that group was unemployed -- a statistic which is thought to be an accurate reflection of the general community. Key employers are the First Nations administrations, seasonal forestry & heavy equipment contractors, and a few retail businesses. Less than 25% of the aboriginal population have a secondary school certificate. The median income at Saulneau FN was \$15,346 which is less than half the provincial average \$31,544.

The rising youth cohort (36% are <20 yrs; another 30% are 20-34) are an increasingly vulnerable group in the Moberly Lake/Chetwynd area. High rates of substance abuse, violence and property crime are considered symptoms of a growing malaise in the community due to idleness and unemployment. Since there are also very high income families in the community, Chetwynd can appear to a community of relative prosperity -- but for the majority in the low-income bracket, there are few prospects for new employment. A significant number of the under-employed, and unemployed in Chetwynd are off-reserve members of either the Saulneau or West Moberly Reserves. Few incentives exist for young to break out of the welfare trap, though efforts to encourage training in the resource-based industry are creating opportunities for those who are committed to increased self-reliance.

Since the non-reserve Lakeshore settlement is primarily a seasonal recreational, retirement and bedroom community, the driving force for economic development is weak though there are many un- under-employed, non-Native people living there. Recent investments in a private luxury lodge, retail store and mini-mall, however, are now spurring on the community development process though many speculate that low-income people are not likely to benefit from these developments. Further, as residents witness significant economic growth in other parts of the Peace region, local leaders are now focusing on creative ways to stimulate investment and employment.

2: HAIDA GWAI/QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS

Community Partner: Haida Gwaii Community Futures

Haida Gwaii Community Futures is a CED organization that has a board of 8 representing all communities on Island. The Board is 50% Haida, thereby making

it an Aboriginal Community Futures Development Corporation. The organization has 8 staff (4 full time and 4 part time), and has been a key catalyst in establishing the Islands Youth Society. Through this partnership, HGCF has worked to bring many programs that are orientated towards the youth of the Islands.

Haida Gwaii Community Futures works together with other community building organizations for a healthy Islands economy and is dedicated to improving the quality of life on Haida Gwaii by facilitating meaningful economic action. A key focus of the organization is on empowering the entrepreneurial spirit on the Islands by uniting people with the resources they need to realize their ideas. HGCF does this by creating an environment that promotes individuals taking responsibility to establish a vibrant future for Haida Gwaii.

Community Information: Haida Gwaii

The Islands consist of approximately 4,800 people living in one of 7 communities of which two are Haida. The islands' population is approximately 40% Haida. These communities are spread out along 130 km on a single highway and two islands with a ferry connection. The Islands are connected to the mainland by ferry or float plane to Prince Rupert and a Dash 8 or a small commuter prop plane to Vancouver. Overall, off Island travel options are limited. The economic base of the Islands is based on significantly declining forestry and fishing industries and a small local run tourism sector and a large off island run sports fishing lodge sector that functions almost entirely over the period May to September. Unemployment is high on reserve, and moderate off reserve.

3. CHETWYND

Community Partner: Chetwynd Social Planning Society

Chetwynd Social Planning Society is a non-profit society which works towards building a caring and inclusive community. In particular, the CSPA works to build a community where everyone is afforded the appropriate resources and encouragement to be successful and valued members of society. Through community collaboration, CSPA promotes innovative community learning opportunities and pro-active approaches to address local issues. Using comprehensive approaches, CSPA encourages the development of a strong, diversified and sustainable community that will provide expanded opportunities for employment, health services and community growth. The Society is currently working towards a number of community goals, focusing on a range of issues

including: housing, food security, citizen engagement, community resources and family health.

Community Information: Chetwynd

Located in the foothills of the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, Chetwynd is placed at the junction of Highways 97 and 29 and is considered the entrance to the Peace River Country. Chetwynd is a community of approximately 3,400 people, serving an area of about the same number. The surrounding area includes two reserves, West Moberly First Nations (approximately 80 members on reserve) and Saulteau First Nations (approximately 400 members on reserve). The district of Chetwynd is relatively young having been incorporated less than 45 years ago.

Surrounded by natural beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities, Chetwynd is also the gateway to large tracts of wilderness, and the Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association is a vibrant organization seeking partnerships with the municipalities and aboriginal groups in the region. Smart Growth BC recently ranked Chetwynd as the most livable place in the province for a small community (under 25,000 people) and given the presently engaged and progressive municipal and regional governments and citizenry Chetwynd is poised to build on that ranking.

The area is rich in oil, gas, coal and timber but while new mines are opening, a substantial blow has been dealt the community with the indefinite closing of the Canfor sawmill (188 workers directly affected.) The mines are Asian owned, and this has brought a few more people to the area with ESL needs, but the community is not that visibly culturally diverse. The services for ESL are minimal. The most visible populations are Aboriginal (First Nations and Metis) and Caucasian (largely of European descent) settlers. The percentage of people with post-secondary education is still very low, and substantially more women than men have some post-secondary training. The median age in Chetwynd from the 2001 Census was 31 with just over 30% of the population under 18 years of age. Approximately 11% of the population was over 55 years of age, but that number is growing as the Baby Boomers come of age. There are very few seniors over 75 and a large percentage of the population is within the ages of 24 – 36 years old and of those the greater percentage is very transient, often residing in Chetwynd for no more than two years.

Oil and gas, mining, and proposed hydro projects will still offer employment opportunities for years to come, but there is an increasing awareness of the need to build sustainability into long term planning and to expand on economic

opportunities in the area. The recent announcement of the Carbon Tax will hit this Northern Region hard as well although people are aware of the effects of global warming through the pine and spruce beetle devastation to local forest economies and the need for changes to be made.

4: HAZELTON

Community Partner: Storyteller's Foundation

Storytellers' Foundation is a registered non-profit learning-based community economic development organization located in the Upper Skeena region in Northwest BC. Its work supports local people to work together for the economic, social and cultural well-being of citizens in the region. Storytellers' uses a learning-based approach to its work, which means that the organization fosters environments for people to learn with and from each while collaborating to better local conditions. Learning is recognized as a powerful tool for change, and the organization tracks learning as a key outcome from its projects.

Storytellers' has a strong focus on supporting youth engagement around issues of concern to them. The Learning Shop, an storefront informal education centre, provides supported opportunities for youth to take their ideas to action through mentorship, peer educator programming, service learning, experiential education, and fostering community partnerships around youth driven projects. Storytellers' also aims to employ between 9-12 young people as staff each year. Some of the youth-led accomplishments over the past two years include:

- Getting a Good Food Box Project started, and facilitating a youth kitchen/ youth community garden to increase access to healthy food for local residents, and to build youth skills around growing and preparing healthy food;
- Organizing the start-up of a skate-bike park with the purpose of building a common space for youth to hang out as one means to address issues of segregation among youth as well as create healthy activities for youth;
- Organizing an anti-racism workshop and skill building day to animate the discussion of how do we work together within diversity to improve local conditions for youth;
- Running youth philosophers' cafes at the Learning Shop to encourage other youth to think critically about local issues and to connect them to a global context.

Community Information: Hazelton & Upper Skeena:

The Upper Skeena area served by Storytellers' is a remote, rural, northern region with a combined population of approximately 5,000 people, 70% of which are of Gitksan First Nation ancestry. The 14 communities of the area suffer from long-standing impoverishment stemming from the fallout of colonialism and years of external corporate control of local resources. Demographically, the area has a very high youth population with over 70% of residents under the age of 30 – a rate that is approximately twice the provincial average. The current socio-economic indicators point out that local youth are growing up within some of the worst living conditions in B.C. including: extreme unemployment rates (90% in some communities, 60% overall), a failed education system (28% have less than high school graduation- almost twice the provincial average), deteriorating infrastructure (32% of houses in need of major repair- quadruple the B.C. average), and a health care and wellness crisis (residents are four times as likely to die from medically treatable diseases as in a standard population). Many agencies recognize the urgency these conditions dictate for youth development, as demonstrated by the fact that Storyteller's is currently in discussions, as the host community organization, with Literacy Now and HRSDC to take a collaborative approach towards addressing the fallout these circumstances are creating.

Youth in the community are growing up in impoverished conditions. Destructive cycles of poverty have led to widespread impacts on health, literacy, social safety networks and economic activity. Local youth are, however, also incredibly resilient. There is a deep connection to place and to kin; and many of youth have a strong sense of identity and connection to their culture.

