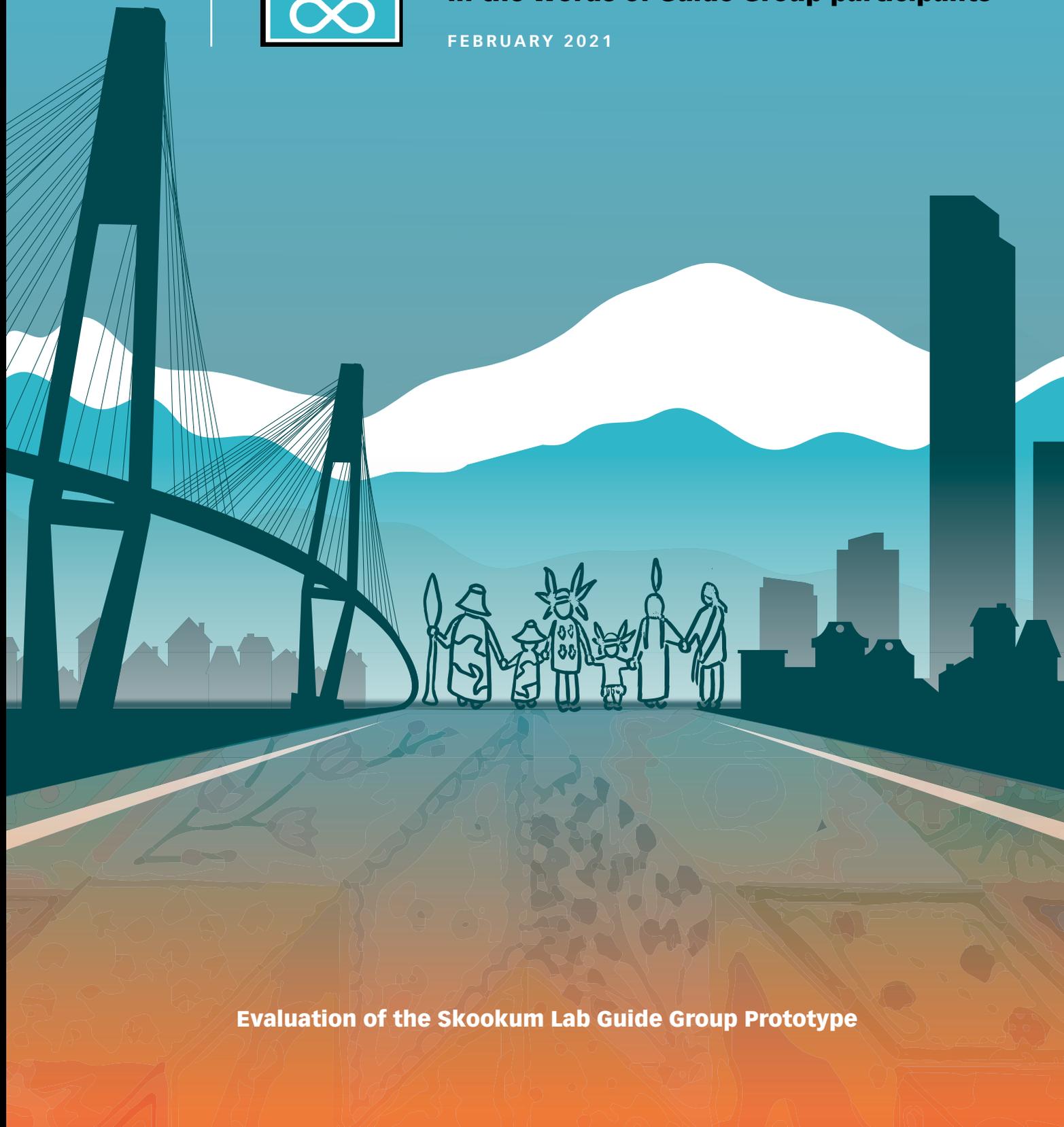




SKOOKUM LAB

Skookum Change Stories: In the words of Guide Group participants

FEBRUARY 2021



Evaluation of the Skookum Lab Guide Group Prototype

SKOOKUM LAB

Strong. Powerful. Brave.

Skookum means strong, powerful, and brave. With the support of strong leadership, powerful methodologies, and a brave community, Skookum Lab is developing new ways to address Indigenous child and youth poverty in Surrey, BC.

Convened by the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC), Skookum Lab puts Indigenous wisdom at the centre of its activities. Skookum uses a social innovation approach to tackle this complex issue in BC's largest urban Indigenous community. It's a methodology Indigenous Peoples have used since time immemorial. This report shows that it's working.

Located on the territory of the Semiahmoo, Kwantlen, Katzie, Kwikwitlem, Qayqayt and Tsawwassen First Nations, Skookum Lab is proud to be one of very few Indigenous social innovation initiatives on Turtle Island (North America).

Skookum Lab is made possible through the generosity of our funders:



Indigenous Services
Canada

Services aux
Autochtones Canada

vancouver
foundation

Vancity
Community Foundation



Our Goal

Making Surrey a great place for Indigenous children and youth

To meet our goal, we commit to:

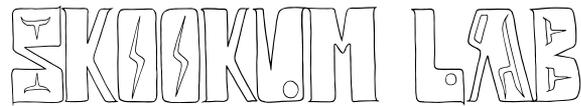
Listen to how Indigenous children and youth in Surrey experience poverty.

Understand the complexities of systemic barriers that affect our community.

Cultivate collective wisdom and knowledge to address these barriers.

Initiate prototypes that reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth that experience poverty in Surrey.

Build the capacity of community members and organizations to make and advocate for changes for the benefit of our community.



Skookum Change Stories: In the words of Guide Group participants

FEBRUARY 2021

1	Foreword.....	5
2	Summary of Findings.....	6
3	Indigenous Social Innovation in Surrey.....	8
	Defining Indigenous Systems Change.....	8
	A Community-Based Understanding of Indigenous Child & Youth Poverty.....	9
	Skookum Lab Guide Groups: Prototyping for Social & Cultural Belonging in Surrey.....	11
	What are Guide Groups?	11
	What steps were taken in the Guide Group process?	11
4	Indigenous Evaluation Methodology.....	14
	Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing & Learning	14
	Hiring Community-based Indigenous Evaluators	14
	A Word from Indigenous Evaluator & SFU Student.....	14
	OCAP Principles.....	15
	Analysis of Findings.....	15
5	Guide Groups Stories of Skookum Change.....	16
	Theme 1: A Cultural Community	16
	“Learning so much more about culture”.....	17
	“Ribbon Skirts” for Indigenous Pride & a Feeling of Being Uplifted	17
	“Connection to my own culture [...] & Handing that Down”	18
	Theme 2: Making Amazing Connections to Indigenous Friends & Finding Family.....	19
	“Indigenous friendships”	19
	“We found family”.....	20
	Theme 3: “Deep Conversations” about Indigenous Struggles & Collective Action in Surrey.....	21
	“To be able to discuss some of the issues that we face”	21
	“Being able to actually have discussions with other stakeholders in the community”	22
	Theme 4: Financial Support.....	23
	“Skookum Lab is looking out for us”	23
	“Hiring Indigenous People”.....	23
6	Weaving It All Together: See Guide Groups as Systems Change.....	24

1 Foreword

It has been an honour to be part of the Skookum lab circle for the last two years. I have witnessed the passion, energy, and determination from everyone committed to addressing Indigenous poverty in Surrey. The following report exemplifies community-led advocacy and change. The journey outlined in this report is an exemplary model of Indigenous-led activism, research, and leadership. Upholding the principles of OCAP throughout this project has been key to asserting Indigenous sovereignty in research that is by and for our communities. Within this project the next generation is being prepared to be those Indigenous intellectual warriors and leaders in our communities.

I firmly believe that this report challenges all of us to do better for our Indigenous youth, families, and communities. It is clear that we as Indigenous peoples know and understand not only our needs but have clear ideas on how those needs can be enacted to support us and our families but also create better futures for the next seven generations.

I was one of many who had the opportunity to witness these leaders in action sharing their stories and the impact that being part of this work has had on their confidence, connections to culture, and sense of belonging to community. The stories contained within this report are indicative of engagement can enact change. It was an honour to read this report and hear the stories contained within. I raise my hands to all those involved in this good work and I look forward to the next steps of this journey for you all.

*Michelle Pidgeon (Mi'kmaq ancestry),
Associate Dean, Indigeniety | Associate Professor |
Director, CSELP
Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University*



2 Summary of Findings

Skookum Lab is a three-year Indigenous social innovation lab created by the [Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee](#). The Lab was created to address the high rate of Indigenous child and youth poverty in Surrey; 1 in 4 Indigenous children live in poverty in the city. After two years, the Lab is evaluating “the Guide Group prototype” which has been running since the Spring of 2019. The objective of this evaluation was to reveal the significant changes that Skookum Lab participants, key stakeholders, and our implementation team has been hearing about and observing transpire for well over a year. Also, the Lab wished to document how these significant changes contribute to systems change, as well as show how this prototype can be sustained and scaled.

Skookum Lab adapted the concept of “Guide Groups” from another social innovation lab, [the Winnipeg Boldness Project](#), in the context of Surrey. Skookum Guide Groups are innovative spaces for Indigenous people to build strong connections with each other and culturally engage in group activities, such as regalia making. Also, these are spaces for Indigenous people to use their voices, wisdom, and gifts to guide the social innovation process, alongside key community stakeholders.

Skookum Guide Groups are comprised of a total membership of 62 Indigenous Elders, youth, community support workers, and caregivers in Surrey. From Guide Group beginnings until now, a total of 72 Guide Group sessions have been carried out with an operational budget of almost \$100,000 annually.

Skookum Lab interviewed a total of 13 Indigenous community members, Elders and Caregivers, during the summer of 2020 and held 1 focus group session with the Skookum Lab Team. This evaluation has enabled Guide Group members to identify key themes in regards to the significant changes that they see in their lives and within their Indigenous community in Surrey. Skookum Lab’s principle is to centre Indigenous wisdom in our social innovations. This evaluation centres Indigenous wisdom by directly quoting Guide Group participants in order to communicate significant changes in their own words.



Significant change stories of Guide Group members reveal four key themes. Guide Groups have become organized groups in which they have emerged as a

1

Cultural Community where Indigenous peoples can learn about their cultures, be empowered through making their own regalia, and “hand down” cultural teachings to younger generations in Surrey. Guide Group members also shared that they are

2

Making Amazing Connections to Indigenous Friends & Finding Family through a new found cultural community. Before Skookum Lab, many guide group members did not have close Indigenous friends and connections with family members and kin. Guide Group members have revealed that Guide Groups are safe cultural, community, and social spaces which simply did not exist for them before Skookum Lab.

Additionally, Guide Groups are spaces to engage in

3

“Deep Conversations” about Indigenous Struggles & Collective Action in Surrey. Guide Groups are safe spaces to have discussions about the issues that Indigenous peoples and families face in the context of Surrey, such as the lived experience of Indigenous child and youth poverty amongst other interconnected issues. However, these conversations did not just happen between Elders, caregivers, and youth. Many Guide Group members took what they heard, discussed, and learned in Guide Group sessions and shared their wisdom with key stakeholders in Surrey; they said that it was a significant change “being able to actually have discussions with other stakeholders in the community”. And, central to doing this advocacy work, Indigenous peoples received various forms of

4

“Financial Support”, and other supports, in order to be able to participate in Skookum Lab events and processes.

As a result of these four themes that emerged from the evaluation, Skookum Lab has documented many “Guide Group Significant Change Stories”. Additionally, the Lab generated a reflection of how these changes are contributing to “systems change”. In Section 6, “Weaving It All Together: Seeing Guide Groups as Systems Change”, the Lab has generated a reflection of how Guide Groups are responding to systems change in 3 key ways.

First, past and present systems have prevented Indigenous people’s ability to gather as a “group” and transmit their cultures. Guide Groups are a community-based response to the lack of cultural gathering places and spaces in Surrey designed for and with Indigenous peoples. Second, Guide Groups are “scaling deep”, a social innovation concept, which means that they are making profound changes in terms of building new relationships and networks on their own terms in Surrey and centering Indigenous wisdom and values in the practice of social innovation. By creating Guide Groups, the Lab has created a “social container”, or “social infrastructure” grounded in Indigeneity and cultural revitalization, and rooted in a community system of care and kinship.

Finally, Guide Groups are advocating for change and key stakeholders are listening and taking action to make Surrey be the best place for an Indigenous child and youth. Having the social infrastructure, or “container”, of Guide Groups has been essential: they allow for Indigenous residents in Surrey to participate and centre their Indigenous wisdom in Skookum Lab prototypes and social innovation.

3 Indigenous Social Innovation in Surrey

Defining Indigenous Systems Change

The SUILC has grounded their Indigenous social innovation lab, Skookum Lab, in “Guiding Principles”; “Centering Indigenous wisdom” has been deeply embedded in the Lab over the last two years.

In [McConnell Foundation’s Report](#) on Indigenous Innovation, Justice Murray Sinclair describes in his own words why it is important to centre Indigenous wisdom in innovation work:

Innovation isn’t always about creating new things. Innovation sometimes involves looking back at our old ways and bringing them forward to this new situation. So, for the young people going forward today, I encourage you to understand what it means to be who you are. To understand where you come from. To know the teachings of your people including your creation story because that is the foundation of your life and you will be able to fulfill that purpose in many different ways.

Skookum Lab has also understood that “Indigenous social innovation” is about revitalizing old ways of doing things, in tandem with innovating new ways, in urban Indigenous communities. Also, the Lab has seen how “centering Indigenous wisdom”, such as centering Indigenous worldviews, practices, and protocols, translates as a “*foundation*” to solve present-day systemic problems.

Importantly, the field of social innovation has conveyed what Indigenous worldviews have articulated since time of immemorial: systems are interconnected networks built on diverse and complex relationships. The SUILC’s [All Our Relations Social Innovation Strategy](#), developed in 2017, uplifted this wisdom. “*All my Relations*” is a phrase that recognizes that “*we need each other*”. In a world of siloed and fractured systems, Indigenous systems change is about building bridges and creating networks that

Skookum Lab’s 7 Guiding Principles

- Centring Indigenous wisdom
- Interventions that change systems
- Community-based problem definition and solutions
- Building community
- Strategic application of resources and effort
- Take risks for the purpose of learning
- Seeking opportunities to learn and scale

reflect our societal need for interconnectedness and balanced relationships between people, sectors, and organizations.

In the beginning of 2019, Skookum Lab began innovating by creating “*Guide Groups*”. This community-based network is the essence of the Lab’s social innovation in practice. By co-learning and working together, Guide Groups are building social networks. They are weaving connections between Indigenous peoples in Surrey, as well as between the Indigenous community and influential people in institutional systems, such as organizations and sectors. The Lab understands that building social

networks and creating social infrastructure grounded in Indigeneity in Surrey is social innovation and social-systems change.

With a young and growing urban Indigenous population in Surrey and recognizing the pressing issue of Indigenous and youth poverty, the SUILC created Skookum Lab: a three-year, social innovation lab. Significantly, the SUILC applied a social innovation methodology to have the ability to immerse Indigenous wisdom in a system change process, while addressing the urgent issue of Indigenous child and youth poverty.

A Community-Based Understanding of Indigenous Child & Youth Poverty

Approximately, 4 in 10 Indigenous children and youth in Surrey, BC, are living in poverty. The rate of Indigenous children and youth poverty in BC's second-largest city is among the highest in Western Canada. At the same time, Surrey is home to a growing Indigenous community that is now the largest in the province. Almost half (45%) of the population is younger than 24 years old.

In the Fall of 2018, Skookum Lab began asking questions to listen to the urban Indigenous community and cultivate an Indigenous definition of child and youth poverty in Surrey. When Skookum Lab began in 2018, and through [community engagement and research](#), over a thousand responses were gathered from Indigenous Elders, caregivers, youth, and children in Surrey. Many described *systemic barriers* that prevent access to sufficient income and “*basic needs*” such as food, transportation, health services, affordable housing amongst others; what was striking in many responses was that the Indigenous community defined poverty in ways that went beyond solely addressing “*basic needs*” and “*barriers to accessing monetary wealth*”.

In fact, many responses also described poverty as “*a lack of*” cultural wellness and social connection in Surrey. For example, connection between Indigenous Elders and youth, language revitalization for children and youth, access to cultural ceremonies for Surrey based families, and the absence of a gathering place in Surrey were all Indigenous-defined indicators

of poverty. These factors were compounded with others, such as a sense of invisibility in the city and experiences of stigma, structural racism, and socio-economic segregation.

These findings were corroborated with the Skookum Lab Indigenous Poverty Reduction Literature Review. This document revealed that Indigenous worldviews commonly define poverty in a holistic way. Although, a lack of economic wellbeing is identified as a key indicator of poverty; it is not the only way to define “poverty”. Similarly, Skookum Lab found that a lack of cultural wellness and social connection was a significant factor that contributes to urban Indigenous experiences of poverty.

From 2018 until present, Skookum Lab has heard four key themes that arose from conversations about Indigenous child and youth poverty in Surrey. They are summarized here.

1

Our children and youth are culturally displaced in the city:

Skookum Lab participants talked about their experiences of displacement from their communities and cultures (on and off reserve). Families are displaced from their land-based nations and feel disconnected from the urban Indigenous community in Surrey. One Skookum Lab participant shared:

“I am from Northern BC, and we haven't been able to take the kids home back to the reserve, it's been probably two or three years. I know I'm always hearing from my mom, that the kids better know their culture, they better know where they come from.”

In Surrey, Indigenous caregivers consistently have shared their concern that urban Indigenous children are growing up not knowing their culture. They understood “*cultural displacement*” and an inability to transmit their culture as an experience of poverty.

2

We lack our own community: With a large Indigenous population in the suburban city of Surrey, there is an observable lack of social interaction between Indigenous Elders, caregivers, youth, and children. A Skookum Lab participant expressed:

“For us, we don't have a lot of cultural community here. We don't really have much community of any sort here.”

In Surrey, cultural disconnect and social isolation is implied when Indigenous peoples say “we don't have community here”. This means that children and youth are growing up without connections to Indigenous Elders and experience barriers to making Indigenous friends who share their realities and worldviews. They understood “a lack of community” as an experience of poverty.

3

We have a scarcity of Indigenous cultural programs: Indigenous people struggle to find culturally relevant activities where they can encounter fellow Indigenous people from all ages and Nations. An Indigenous mother described this experience as:

“Grasping at whatever I can.”

Another Indigenous caregiver said:

“I've always lived in cities and towns, and we moved around every two years. I never stayed anywhere long enough to really develop mentorship in that [cultural] way.”

These narratives attest to how much Indigenous peoples are struggling to connect to their culture. “A scarcity of resources allocated to cultural programming” was a sign of poverty for Indigenous peoples.

4

We have no central gathering place. Why? We have the largest Indigenous population

in BC: Indigenous people highlighted that they rarely encounter other Indigenous- Surrey residents because they have “no centre” or “central gathering place” designed for and by Indigenous peoples in Surrey. For example, an interviewee highlighted the following:

“[...] We have the largest population of Indigenous people in all of the suburbs of Vancouver. But you don't see anybody, there's no centre, central gathering place, or anything like that. You don't really know who's all out there.”

Participants identified the high priority to create urban spaces and places that foster deeper culturally based community connections and networks. Indigenous caregivers and Elders have expressed a strong desire and vision for a central gathering place where they can bring their children and youth to make friends, experience ceremonies, and grow stronger in community. An Indigenous specific indicator of “poverty” was “a lack of urban spaces and places” where they could socially gather and culturally pass down teachings to children and youth and for generations to come.

Throughout history, urban areas have been strategic colonial sites of social and cultural displacement. In narratives of Indigenous child and youth poverty, Skookum Lab has witnessed how the city of Surrey is a place where Indigenous peoples feel segregated, isolated, as well as displaced from their families and cultural communities. The Lab understands these experiences of poverty as symptoms of much bigger, systemic issues.

At the same time, urban Indigenous people are resilient and brave and continue to resist many systemic barriers to building thriving and strong Indigenous communities in the city. It is no wonder that the Indigenous community coined the name of the SUILC's social innovation lab: “Skookum Lab” because “skookum” means strong and brave. The Lab has intended to honour the urban Indigenous community

who disproportionately face many daunting and complex systemic issues in Surrey. The following is a summary of how Skookum Lab has innovated a community-based structure, called “Guide Groups” to tackle one of the most pressing and urgent issues faced by the urban Indigenous community: a lack of social and cultural belonging in Surrey.

Skookum Lab Guide Groups: Prototyping for Social & Cultural Belonging in Surrey

WHAT ARE GUIDE GROUPS?

In June 2018, a small delegation of SUILC members travelled to Winnipeg to visit the [Winnipeg Boldness Project](#). Winnipeg Boldness is a social innovation lab aiming to improve outcomes for young Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living in the North End of Winnipeg. They heard about the concept of “Guide Groups” and adapted this social innovation in the context of Surrey.

Skookum Guide Groups are innovative spaces for Indigenous people to:

- 1. Build Strong Connections** with fellow Indigenous people;
- 2. Culturally Engage** in activities such as beading and regalia making; and
- 3. Guide the Social Innovation Process** by sharing their wisdom and lived experiences in Surrey and collectively take action for systemic change, alongside key stakeholders.

Guide Groups are comprised of a total membership of 62 Indigenous Elders, youth, community support workers, and caregivers in Surrey. Guide Groups have emerged as a social innovation to foster a culturally connected community of care. Since Spring of 2019 until present, a total of 72 Guide Group sessions have been held with an operational budget of approximately \$100,000. This was a process which the Skookum Lab Team has documented for the purpose of learning and sharing.

WHAT STEPS WERE TAKEN IN THE GUIDE GROUP PROCESS?

Step 1: Going to where the Indigenous community gathers

In the Fall of 2018, Skookum Lab Lab contributed funding toward the events (powwows, community meals etc.) in reciprocity for conducting research with community members attending the events. The Skookum Lab facilitators used an engaging, interactive art activity to ask the question “*What would make Surrey the best place for an Indigenous child and youth*” while applying Indigenous designed art-based research and community engagement methods. At these events, Skookum Lab facilitators began to build connections with Indigenous Elders, youth, caregivers and support workers and recruited future Guide Group members.

Step 2: “Coming together” to do a deeper dive into the issue of Indigenous child & youth poverty

Later, in the Spring of 2019, community members were invited to contribute their wisdom and more deeply explore the systemic issue of Indigenous child and youth poverty in Surrey. Applying a focus-group style and appreciative inquiry methodology, a total of 15 Guide Group sessions were held with Elders (3 sessions), youth (5 sessions), caregivers (3 sessions), and support workers (4 sessions) at the Fraser Regional Aboriginal Friendship Centre (FRAFCA), City Hall, and the Surrey Central Library.

While Guide Groups began asking questions and generating knowledge on the experience of Indigenous child and youth poverty, Skookum Lab facilitators made sure to bring a high level of safety in these conversations. People not only shared stories and lived experiences but began to connect with one another. Guide Group participants brought their children, grandparents and family members and would spend time getting to know other Indigenous community members.

Facilitators wanted to go beyond an extractive research relationship and included ample time in sessions for informal conversation, laughter, and sharing meals together. Also, to ensure that Skookum Lab reduced barriers to participation, all sessions provided meals, bus tickets, childcare, and honorariums.

Facilitators found that applying an art-based research method allowed people to connect with one another and illustrate their vision for a city that is *“the best place for Indigenous children and youth”*. Indigenous Elders created a medicine mural and Indigenous caregivers created a wolf mural with their vision for Surrey. Indigenous youth created a rap song with JB the First Lady and a “Skookum” graffiti mural with Indigenous Graffiti artist KC Hall. This second step in the Guide Group process produced incredible art and mobilized knowledge and storytelling within the Indigenous community. However, it did not stop here.

Step 4: Culturally Grounding Guide Groups in an Intergenerational Community of Care

After months and months of deep listening and understanding needs, Skookum Lab facilitators heard that Guide Groups were a great space to offset experiences cultural and social disconnect and lack of belonging. A total of 14 sessions were held and alternated at Surrey Central Library and a Kekinow Native Housing Society complex every two weeks. In Fall of 2019, Guide Groups began to form a consistent cohort of 15-25 Indigenous Elders, caregivers, youth, and children.

Guide Groups began to convene as a space to learn and share in:

- Drumming
- Beading and regalia making sessions
- Talking circles
- Metis specific events such as Metis style beading sessions

Guide Groups have transformed into an intergenerational community space. They are no longer separated groups. In the beginning, Skookum Lab responded to community interest to do art-based and cultural activities. Now, the Lab responded to the request from Indigenous youth to have more time and relationships built with Indigenous Elders in their community and vice versa. This was important as many families expressed that they never had an open and intergenerational community space in Surrey where they could make art, bead, make regalia and share stories amongst Elders, children, youth and caregivers.

Step 5: ONLINE Beading during the Covid-19 Pandemic

In March of 2020, and ongoing during the Covid-19 Pandemic, Guide Groups have moved to a virtual format where they can meet online every week and continue to make regalia and support each other during a physically and social distanced time. A total of 34 sessions were held.

Given that participants had built relationships before the pandemic; this online format has not felt impersonal. Rather Guide groups are a smaller group of on average 5 or 6 people who attend. This online format is a semi- closed membership to maintain relationships that are built on trust and a feeling of cultural safety. In fact, many people feel closer from virtually beading together and provide emotional support and a listening ear during these sessions.

Step 6: The Emergence of Skookum Lab Ambassadors in “Campfires”

Through Skookum Lab Team’s co-mentorship and co-teaching approach, leaders have emerged through the Guide Group process. They have been called “Skookum Lab Ambassadors” and now, many of them are leading Guide Group activities and other Skookum Lab processes. Skookum Lab has been an initiative that not only contributes to community organizing but also community-based leadership.

One way that leaders have emerged is through their attendance at four “Campfires”: Skookum Lab’s social innovation lab sessions where the Indigenous community and key stakeholders are convened. Campfires have engaged on average 40 people each who have listened to Guide Group members who share their lived experiences on pressing issues and worked to collectively take action.

After almost two years of this Guide Group process, participants’ have stories of significant change and memorable experiences as a direct result of the Lab.

4 Indigenous Evaluation Methodology

Skookum Lab developed an evaluation with the objectives to:

1. Communicate our community-based, significant change stories, systems change impacts, and the value of our social innovations; and
2. Learn about prototype performance, processes, and how to scale and sustain them.

Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing & Learning

Skookum Lab applies Indigenous methodologies in engagement, research, and, now, in evaluation. In total, Skookum Lab interviewed 13 Indigenous community members during the summer of 2020.

1. Observing social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lab's Evaluators met with 6 Elders in a sharing circle and asked each participant to share Guide Group stories about their involvement in Skookum Lab.
2. The Lab organized online conversations with 7 Caregivers and listened to participants talk about their Guide Group stories.
3. Also, the Lab held 1 focus group session with the Skookum Lab Team. This session has informed analytical narratives of Guide Group significant change stories and the description of social innovation processes and recommendations.

Hiring Community-based Indigenous Evaluators

Skookum Lab applies a participatory approach in all applied methods. Through the support of SFU-Ceri funding support, Skookum Lab hired 3 "Skookum Lab Ambassadors"; these are leaders who have emerged from Guide Groups. Ambassadors carried out interviews with fellow Guide Group members.

The Lab also hired, Amelia Boissoneau, as an SFU undergraduate researcher and Indigenous Evaluator, to lead interviews alongside Ambassadors and with mentorship from the Skookum Lab Team.

A Word from Indigenous Evaluator & SFU Student

Aaniin boozhoo (Hello), my name is Amelia Boissoneau and my traditional name is "namadabi naawayi'ii waaban minawaa giizhig" which translates to "Sits between the dawn and day". I am a 20-year old Ojibway and Lakota woman. My non-Indigenous heritage is Russian and French. I was born and raised in Saskatchewan. I belong to the Garden River First Nation in Ontario. Currently, I am in my fourth year studying at Simon Fraser University for an undergraduate degree in Political Science. After I convocate I will be attending law school.

It has been an honour to be a part of the Skookum Lab evaluation. Conducting this work has brought me humility and fulfillment. I got to fulfill my role in Indigenous research work, but also in my cultural teachings which I deeply value. Listening to stories is a livelihood, it is a sacred act that has preserved ancient cultural teachings, and the lives of my ancestors. Today, I fulfill that duty by listening to my relations speak of their struggles, victories and needs. Their stories will be preserved and will contribute to the improvements Surrey can make for the Indigenous community. I hope these stories touch your heart and spirit, like they did to mine. I am contributing to the shift in research and academia by being an Indigenous individual who can lead and carry out this work. Skookum Lab's Indigenous evaluation process has been a great experience that has changed the way I view research and urban Indigenous living. Miigwetch (Thank you) to Simon Fraser University and Skookum Lab for believing in me to do this work. All my relations.

OCAP Principles

The Lab honours the gifts within the Indigenous community and centres Indigenous wisdom. The Indigenous community, including Guide Group members, have a role to play in evaluating Skookum prototypes and sharing the significant changes that they are seeing in their own words.

Skookum Lab upheld research ethics and OCAP principles through the free, prior, and informed consent of participants in all research processes carried out. Participants have ownership, access, and possession of recordings and documentation as the result of their participation in research activities. Participants were informed that all stories gathered will be owned by them, the SUILC and stored at the City of Surrey.

Analysis of Findings

After an Elders sharing circle and storytelling with Caregivers, recordings were transcribed. The Skookum Lab Team conducted thematic and emotion coding, a type of qualitative data analysis that finds themes and emotion in text by analyzing the meaning of words and sentences. The following section reveals all themes and emotions that emerged from this analysis.



5 Guide Groups Stories of Skookum Change

After almost 2 years of convening Guide Groups and 4 Campfire gatherings, Guide Group participants have stories of change and memorable experiences. The key themes that emerged from significant change storytelling are:

- 1 **A Cultural Community**
- 2 **Finding Friends and Family**
- 3 **Campfires and Deep Conversations for Change**
- 4 **Reciprocity & Financial support**

I liked learning new techniques and meeting new people, **seeing people start beading** and **come alive by being creative.**



A Cultural Community

“Learning so much more about culture”

Cultural learning with children & caregivers: A significant change that people identified was that they were able to be together, engage in cultural learning, teach new cultural skills to their children, and gather as a family and cultural community.

Indigenous children enjoyed art and cultural activities. Parents particularly expressed how happy they were to watch their children engage in Indigenous cultural activities.

Participants shared how Skookum Lab was a cultural learning space where Indigenous families and residents could gather as a diverse community (of many Nations) in Surrey.

Regular and consistent beading sessions:

Participants mentioned how Skookum Lab is “consistent”. In this case, people expressed that, through the Lab, they are gathering and connecting more consistently/on a regular basis to learn beading skills. A caregiver described this experience:

“One of the things that my daughter quite likes is beading. For me that's one of the things that the Lab has provided for me in regard to family, that I get to enjoy watching her create, be artistic, create beading projects and do crafts. [...] I think for me, that's what it helps provide in just opportunities of spending time together and doing something other than watching a show or watching them.”

Participants also mentioned that beading sessions continued online in the COVID-19 pandemic. In the words of a guide group member, they were finally able to connect and learn through Skookum Lab.

“Ribbon Skirts” for Indigenous Pride & a Feeling of Being Uplifted

When women discussed the memorable moments of Skookum Lab, they talked about making ribbon skirts for themselves and with their daughters. Making ribbon skirts and wearing them was accompanied with a feeling of “being uplifted” and a sense of “pride” in their Indigenous identity.

For me, the most memorable was when we got together to make ribbon skirts. A lot of the women made them for themselves. I actually made one for my daughter because she's now 10. She did have regalia when she graduated from preschool and she does try to squeeze into it, but it really doesn't fit her. She has nothing else. We were able to make her a ribbon skirt, which she actually wore to school several times and she was very proud of it.

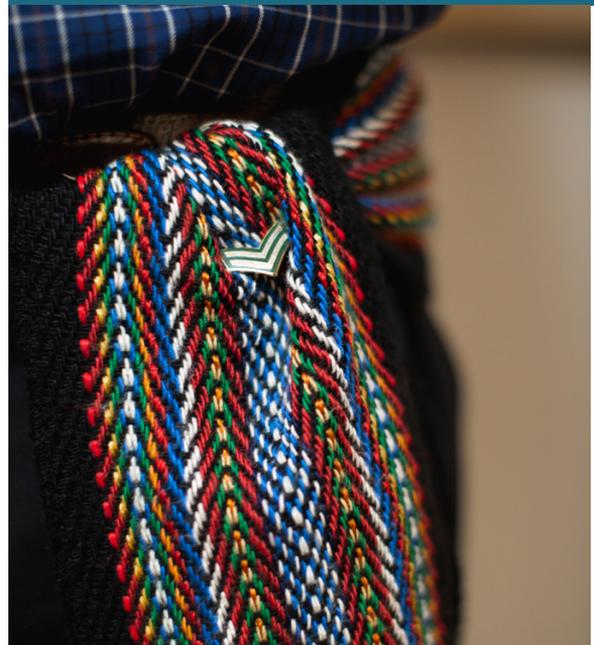
“Connection to my own culture [...] & Handing that Down”

Through learning cultural teachings from Indigenous mentors, caregivers expressed their gratitude for the Lab’s ability to bring together children, youth, caregivers, and Indigenous elders in Surrey. Some participants understood this as “intergenerational cultural mentorship”. An Indigenous woman and caregiver said that she enjoyed:

“Learning from a really strong Indigenous woman. It was just a blessing coming into the program. It was amazing.”

As a result of being a part of the Lab, participants described feeling more connected to their culture and, now, were able to pass down cultural practices to their children; this experience has been identified as missing because urban Indigenous peoples tend to be displaced, disconnected, and experience barriers connecting to their land-based nations and cultural communities in Surrey.

Skookum Lab gave me more of a personal connection to my own culture, responsibility, and handing that down to the children.



THEME 2

Making Amazing Connections to Indigenous Friends & Finding Family

“Indigenous friendships”

Making new friends: Participants expressed that they did not know that so many Indigenous people “were out there” in the city. Before the Lab, many participants mentioned that they did not have opportunities to interact with other Indigenous peoples and families.

One younger guide group participant described how they experienced these new friendships:

*“The most significant change is the **new connection to elders**. A really strong connection, you know some elders in the community, we say “hi”. Now, I have a really strong connection to them and that is really precious. I didn't have that before, we can just call them and talk on the phone for hours. That's my favourite part.”*

Through culturally relevant programming, Guide Group experiences were said to be “eye opening” because, for the first time, participants were meeting other Indigenous caregivers, Elders, youth, and children in Surrey. Many described how “amazing” it was “watching everybody come together” through Guide Groups.

I have created friendships with people in the community who I didn't know before. That's been really impactful for me personally, because **I didn't have any Indigenous friends.**

A “Pocket of Support”: A caregiver said that Skookum Lab has “created a whole little pocket of support.” And went on to say, “That feels so good, and I'm so grateful.”

Participants mentioned that Guide Group members supported each other by calling each other and checking in, and “uplift each other” during the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, Guide Group members help each other access services, programs, and share information. For example, one participant commented:

“I know in the groups they've helped members, when they've had questions about filling in the service payments, they offered to help with that. They've offered to help with applying for like subsidized daycare or health care, accommodations and stuff like that. Leaders have been very helpful with sharing information.”

Additionally, through guide group participation, people were more connected. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these groups were a community network of support: a commonly referenced indicator of community and social resiliency.

“We found family”

Finding relatives: A guide group participant found out that another guide group member was related to her. A significant change for one participant was that they had “found family through the guide group”.

A Sense of Family Connection & Care:

Participants have developed relationships with fellow Surrey Indigenous residents through the Lab. Although, many Guide Group members are not related by blood, they do feel a sense of kinship as the result of building friendships and a close-knit family connections. A participant shared that:

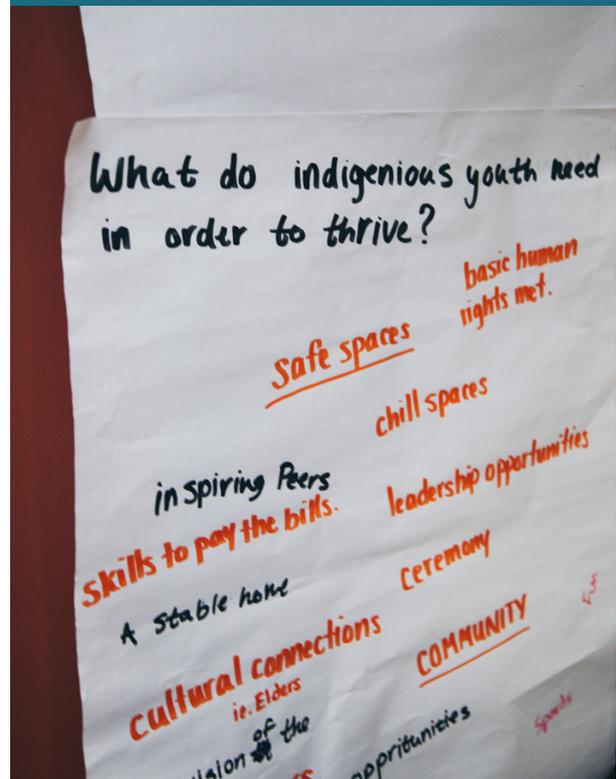
“Creating connections with other people or building a community that way, feels more like a family connection than just a bunch of people getting together talking.”

Social time as a family: Guide Group participants also mentioned that Skookum Lab offers family-friendly activities. One Indigenous father said:

“It was just nice to have a regular activity where the family got together.”

Guide groups were also seen as much needed social time to connect and be with their own children and loved ones when families are so busy on a daily basis.

I hope that these groups continue and continue to get funding because they're so good. I just wish everybody could get involved because it's all good for people. It's **so good for us, and our family, and it made such a difference.**



THEME 3

“Deep Conversations” about Indigenous Struggles & Collective Action in Surrey

“To be able to discuss some of the issues that we face”

Indigenous led discussions about issues:

Participants talked about Indigenous peoples’ building their own community groups, where they could bead and make ribbon skirts; at the same time, they could have “interesting”, “deep”, and “heartbreaking” conversations about being Indigenous in Surrey. One Indigenous parent expressed how meaningful it was for them to have these discussions:

*“My actual most memorable meeting so far, was one where we were able to actually just have a meeting, we were at city hall. We were just sitting around a table and talking about the different things that affects First Nations, why we’re part of the group, and what we’re looking at. I expressed a **fear of being First Nations**, just knowing what the specifics are. When our son had hurt himself, both times in daycare, it required actual visits to the hospital. I did not want to go in with them. I allowed my wife [who is non-Indigenous] to come in and talk to the doctors and nurses.”*

Many participants shared experiences of racism and fear of being targeted as an Indigenous person in Surrey. Some participants also shared, that they learned about struggles that they themselves had not experienced as an Indigenous person. One Indigenous caregiver said:

“I learned a lot about our community and all the struggles that happen.”

However, these conversations helped them learn more about diverse issues facing their community in Surrey and develop Indigenous driven solutions. One participant expressed that groups discussion involved talking about fears and how to make change:

*“I know that I’m not alone in that and start talking about some of the things that we can do as a group to start trying to alleviate those fears, and try to **make some positive changes** in the neighborhood as well.”*

A “Concentrated” and “Visible” Group: Guide Group members mentioned that being together and talking about lived experiences of systemic issues that they face was helpful in a sense. Many shared the sentiment that Guide Groups helped them not feel alone in their struggles in Surrey.

“Skookum Lab sees that we are tight in it, we’re concentrated, doing stuff in the community, for the community, building community [...] it’s for us by us.”

Guide Groups created a sense of being “concentrated” and “visible” as an Indigenous group in Surrey. Significantly, the Lab upholds the principle of “centering Indigenous wisdom” in ways that participants feel they are actively deciding their own pathways for action and change.

“Being able to actually have discussions with other stakeholders in the community”

Convening Non-Indigenous Stakeholders

to Centre Indigenous Wisdom: Participants emphasized how the Lab not only convenes the Indigenous community to talk amongst themselves about systemic issues affecting urban Indigenous peoples in Surrey. They shared that they have witnessed how Skookum Lab is addressing these issues by convening non-Indigenous key stakeholders in the community, such as with Ministries, and other organizations.

Non-Indigenous stakeholders in the community have been invited to: deeply listen to the Indigenous community, hear “their voices”, and have discussions in partnership with them. A participant commented:

“I see a lot of things, right? So, I feel like it was really nice to have someone asking those questions to us parents.”

Taking Action to Address Issues: Guide Group participants spoke about witnessing how their stories shared at Skookum Lab Campfires, where non-Indigenous stakeholders can attend, bring about awareness and action within systems.

*“One thing that we can do to be a positive influence of change, is by **bringing some knowledge and insight to people who aren't First Nations in the community.**”*

Building relationships with non-Indigenous

and Indigenous people in Surrey: Participants mentioned, that connecting and meeting with non-Indigenous stakeholders was a meaningful experience. For example, one elder highlighted that building relationships and “friendships” means a lot to them and the community in Surrey.

Being able to actually have discussions with other stakeholders in the community

at Skookum Lab, or the Campfire [A Skookum Lab Gathering Event]. Seeing that unfold as people hear everybody's stories and experiences with the school system, Ministry of child and family, Ministry of Social Development, and income assistance.

Financial Support

“Skookum Lab is looking out for us”

Gift Cards: By providing gift cards and making efforts to reduce barriers to engagement and participation, participants expressed words of gratitude. They stated that gift cards offset family expenses such as groceries and children’s supplies. One participant explained that they felt that “Skookum Lab is looking out for us”. Another participant stated that gift cards were a “stress reliever” during challenging times and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We received a gift card for attending and participating. [...] Skookum Lab is looking out for us and doing things for us as well."

I have gotten employment opportunities, which has been amazing.

“Hiring Indigenous People”

Skookum Lab hires Surrey-Indigenous residents: Participants observed that they themselves and others, who are Indigenous and live in Surrey, are hired by Skookum Lab in different ways; they feel that this is a significant change. Notably, one participant acknowledged that Skookum Lab has influenced a Ministry organization to hire Indigenous personnel.

“A Living Wage”: Compensation in the form of a living wage (\$25 +) has proven helpful to participants. A living wage helped offset expenses during COVID and rising costs of living in Surrey.

New opportunities: People expressed gratitude for the new training/career opportunities and unique forums where they interact with community stakeholders. One person shared:

“But for me specifically, a lot of the different training opportunities that Skookum Lab has offered. All the different projects were really interesting, and to build up my own kind of portfolio which is really good [...] even developing that engagement with the rest of the community, strengthens my own skill set as well.”

6 Weaving It All Together: See Guide Groups as Systems Change

In a two-year process of listening and learning alongside the Indigenous community in Surrey, the Lab reveals diverse ways in which the Indigenous community experiences poverty in the city. Significantly, Skookum Lab kept hearing that one of the most devastating ways that Indigenous families, youth, and children experience poverty is: a lack of community and social opportunities for Indigenous peoples, an inability to access cultural programs, and encounter spaces and places designed for and by the Indigenous community. As a result, Indigenous peoples experience barriers to social, community and cultural wellness.

An important example of a systemic barrier to social, community and cultural wellness is the lack of a cultural gathering space. The Indigenous community has asked the question: *“Why do we not have an Indigenous gathering space in Surrey?”* and then stated, *“We are the largest Indigenous population in BC”*. The lack of cultural space designed for and by Indigenous peoples in Surrey is a key factor that prevents children and youth from interacting with Indigenous Elders, caregivers, and their cultural community. Lack of cultural programs and funding, coupled with a lack of organizational space, are key examples in which Indigenous cultural revitalization is stalled in Surrey.

When an Indigenous-Surrey resident, and Guide Group member, states that they are *“grasping at whatever they can”* to connect to their culture; we know this is a symptom of a systemic problem and a Canadian historical legacy of cultural genocide. *“Structures”*, such as community and informal based networks, as well as big institutions, foster social gathering which in turn permits groups to transmit their culture. When there is no gathering space; there is a lack of collective transmission of culture on a community-wide scale.

Skookum Lab is responding by building a community-based structure and community of practice that

enables Indigenous peoples to organize on their own terms and flourish as a cultural community of care. In Skookum Lab accounts of Guide Groups, Indigenous caregivers and Elders are working to *“hand down”* their cultural practices to their youth and children and for future generations

Skookum Lab has been making positive changes with Guide Groups *“to scale deep”*. As [the McConnell Foundation](#) has observed:

“Scaling deep transforms relationships and culture, so that people see themselves reflected in the change and make it part of their day-to-day lives.”

Skookum Lab’s significant change stories narrated by Guide Group members reveal that relationships, friendships, and groupings have changed. Guide Group members have made Indigenous friends, learned to bead, and make regalia, and caregivers and youth have new relationships with Indigenous Elders. Namely, this has been a significant change in their day to day lives.

Creating a *“social container”* or community group for *“scaling deep”* to happen is essential. This is where are guide groups are scaled; they are scaled deeply in a cultural community of care to revitalize kinship systems and cultural practices in the suburbs of Metro Vancouver.

Skookum Lab sees Guide Groups as an innovative social container, or social infrastructure. And, we have seen how Skookum Lab Guide Groups have been a *“pocket of support”* and a manifestation of social and community resiliency during the COVID-19 pandemic. Guide Groups have proven to sustain the Lab during a physically/socially distanced time. Indigenous elders, caregivers, youth, and children have virtually sat together in each others’ homes, told stories, beaded together, and supported one another.

Also, an initial but very important step to systems change has meant that people within formal institutions are listening and working in partnership with the Lab's Guide Groups and their vision for Surrey to be the best place for an Indigenous child and youth. Having the safety and the support built in Guide Groups has been essential to enable participation of Guide Group members in *Skookum Lab Campfires*: where key stakeholders are also convened. For example, one participant highlighted that Guide Groups are "concentrated" groups of Indigenous peoples who are building their own community and collectively advocating for change.

Skookum lab events, such as *Campfires*, have allowed for the balancing of relationships between Indigenous community members and professionals working in key institutions. The Lab has seen how the Indigenous community are "the experts" on how to address Indigenous child and youth poverty. The Skookum Lab Team witnessed this recognition on the part of key stakeholders. They are acting in partnership with Guide Groups to make change through listening and relationship building.

In conclusion, Guide Groups are a direct response to a system that has a formidable tendency to prevent social and cultural organization of Indigenous groups in cities. And to this end, Skookum Lab understands Guide Groups as a social innovation to cultural revitalize Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and learning in social, community, cultural, and family systems in Surrey. This is "social innovation" and "systems change" in the best sense of these words.

All Our Relations.

