



# Implementing UNDRIP in B.C.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN SURREY

January 2021

Surrey Urban Indigenous  
Leadership Committee



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# Taanshi kiya'wow / Hello everyone

In November 2019, the provincial government passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act)*. Section 4 of the *Declaration Act* commits government to preparing and implementing an Action Plan, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, to achieve the objectives of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In January 2021, the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee<sup>1</sup> (SUILC) received funding from the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to prepare a submission so that the voices of urban Indigenous people might inform the development of the *Declaration Act* Action Plan. We welcome this opportunity as more than 70% of Indigenous peoples in BC are living off-reserve, in urban areas.

To shape this submission, we have drawn on the deep engagement that we've done over the last five years in Surrey. First, in 2015, our engagement commenced the development of our "Surrey Urban Indigenous Social Innovation Strategy". More recently, we have widely and comprehensively engaged the urban Indigenous community through a major social innovation lab to reduce urban Indigenous child poverty - Skookum Lab. Through these community-based and co-creation processes, we've spent hundreds of hours speaking to well over 1,000 Indigenous people living in Surrey about their concerns and aspirations. This submission summarizes what we've heard.

**UNDRIP Article 21 – Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.**

Before I encourage you to read on, I must state the obvious: SUILC is not an Indigenous nation or an Indigenous government. Rather, we are a coalition of organizations that are working hard to give voice to the more than 13,000 Indigenous people that live and work in Surrey. One of our core values is to:

## **Respect the political autonomy of the Coast Salish First Nations in Surrey.**

In practice, this means that we do not represent local land-based First Nations and we are careful to not speak on their behalf. Given this, it is not SUILC's place as a coalition to comment on the legal or political nature of reconciliation; nor the specific ways the *Declaration Act* Action Plan should mediate relationships between the province and Indigenous nations. Having said that, the SUILC does have certain perspectives that we hope are considered in this important work. It is our sincere hope that the implementation of UNDRIP contributes in some way to the realization of our vision for Surrey.

We are cautiously optimistic that the *Declaration Act* is a step in the right direction. Why? Because we believe that implementing the UNDRIP in B.C. is about ending discrimination, upholding basic human rights, and ensuring more economic justice and fairness.

This submission outlines the priorities and aspirations of the Surrey urban Indigenous community. It is our hope that these voices might inform the development of the *Declaration Act* Action Plan.

All Our Relations,



Keenan McCarthy

Chair, The Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee

<sup>1</sup><https://surreyindigenousleadership.ca>

# Statement of Recognition

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Our work takes place on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish, including the Semiahmoo First Nation, the Kwantlen First Nation, the Katzie First Nation, the Kwikwetlem First Nation, the Qayqayt First Nation and the Tsawwassen First Nation. We recognize their connection to this land and acknowledge that we are newcomers to Surrey like everyone else.

Our group, the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee, does not represent these land-based First Nations, and we are careful not to speak on their behalf. Instead, we represent urban Indigenous people that have moved here from all over BC and in fact, from all over Canada to make Surrey their home. Our focus is on making Surrey a great place for Indigenous people living in the city, regardless of where they come from, their legal status, or their particular cultural heritage. As we do this, we endeavour to live in a good way with the land-based First Nations that have called this land their home since time immemorial.



## Our Name & Logo

The formal name of the committee is the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee. The short-form name we use is SUILC: pronounced "swill-see."

Our logo includes the Coast Salish Sea Wolf designed by Brandon Gabriel of the Kwantlen First Nation, with the Metis Infinity symbol.

# Background

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# Who We Are

SUILC is a coalition of organizations that have come together to advocate for the more than 13,000 Indigenous people living in Surrey.

Our membership includes all of the Indigenous organizations operating in Surrey, such as Métis Family Services, Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association, Nova Métis Heritage Association and Keginow Native Housing. Other non-Indigenous organizations that have a significant connection to the Indigenous population, such as as Fraser Health and the Surrey School District are also committee members.

All of the land-based First Nation governments with a historic and current connection to what is now the City of Surrey have a standing invitation to participate in all meetings of SUILC.

We are a diverse group. We believe it is one of our strengths.

**Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society (ACCESS)**

**City of Surrey**

**Seven Sacred Fires Society**

**First Nations Health Authority**

**Fraser Health, Aboriginal Health**

**Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA)**

**Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (Xyolhemeylh)**

**Indigenous Wellness Training Society**

**Keginow Native Housing Society**

**Métis Family Services**

**Métis Nation of British Columbia**

**Ministry of Children and Family Development Circle 5**

**Nova Métis Heritage Association**

**RCMP**

**Simon Fraser University**

**Surrey School District**

# How We Formed

We formed in 2015 as a project committee to develop an urban Indigenous social innovation strategy for Surrey. In 2017 we released the *All Our Relations: An Urban Indigenous Social Innovation Strategy*. Adopted by consensus in the spring of 2017, the *All Our Relations* report is our road map for creating the city we want to live in. The strategy coalesced SUILC and set us on the path to making Surrey a great place for Indigenous people. Shortly after that, Indigenous Services Canada—through the coalition stream of the Urban Programming for Indigenous Peoples—agreed to provide core funding to SUILC through to March 31, 2022.

## 2015

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**Formation of SUILC**

## 2016

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**SUILC interim governance terms of reference adopted by consensus**

**Release of All Our Relations - Phase 1 report**

**SUILC and City of Surrey host first annual Orange Shirt Day**

**City of Surrey proclaims Louis Riel Day**

## 2017

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**SUILC recognizes the first annual Indigenous Leadership Awards**

**Release of the All Our Relations Social Innovation Strategy**

## 2018

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**SUILC secures five-year core funding agreement from Indigenous Services Canada**

**SUILC governance terms of reference adopted by consensus**

**Launch of Skookum Lab**

## 2019

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**Partnership Agreement with SFU**

## 2020

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**Launch of Skookum Housing Solutions Lab**

**Implementation of Skookum prototypes**

**SUILC Anti-Racism Symposium**





## Our Mandate

The *All Our Relations* report set out our collective vision and mission. It also describes our five strategic objectives. They are to:

- 1** Create and strengthen partnerships that will benefit urban Indigenous people in Surrey.
- 2** Expand the urban Indigenous leadership capacity in Surrey.
- 3** Improve and grow programs and services for urban Indigenous people in Surrey.
- 4** Increase education and understanding about the urban Indigenous community in Surrey.
- 5** Increase funding for urban Indigenous programs and services in Surrey.

For each strategic objective, the *All Our Relations* report describes why it's necessary, sets out a number of goals in relation to the objective, and suggests strategies to achieve the goals.



## Vision

A city that values Indigenous contributions to city life. A city that is committed to working towards reconciliation at all levels. A city where every Indigenous person has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

## Mission

Our mission is to be a collective voice for urban Indigenous people in Surrey. We will advocate on behalf of all urban Indigenous people in Surrey and work collaboratively with other governments, organizations, and individuals that are committed to understanding and achieving our vision.

# The Indigenous Population In Surrey



Back in 2015, there was no profile of Indigenous people in Surrey. No one knew how many Indigenous people lived in Surrey, and there wasn't any basic demographic information to support funding and service decisions. So one of the first steps we took as SUILC was to develop a profile of Indigenous people living in the city using data from the 2011 Census. What we found confirmed the suspicions of our members: Surrey was quickly becoming the largest urban Indigenous population in the province.

Recently we updated the profile to include statistics from the 2016 Census. Here are some key takeaways from the updated profile:

- The population is large.
- The population is diverse.
- The population is young.
- Some people are doing relatively well.
- Some people need more support.

## The population is large

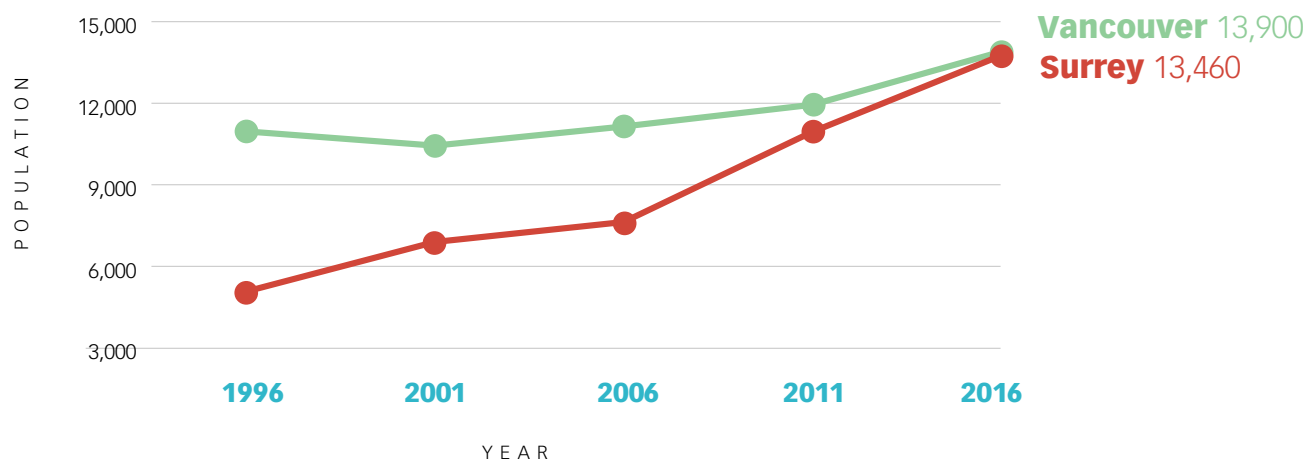
In 2016, 13,460 Indigenous people were living in Surrey<sup>1</sup>. That same year, the Indigenous population in Vancouver and Surrey were almost equal. The significant difference is that between 2011 and 2016, the average annual growth rate in Surrey has been 4.9%, whereas it has only been 1.2 % in Vancouver. Based on this growth rate, we are confident that Surrey is now the largest Indigenous community in BC.

What's more, based on these projections, Surrey's Indigenous population will nearly double Vancouver's Indigenous population within 16 years.

## The Big Implication

- Decision-makers and funders need to use current population statistics and trends to make funding decisions.
- Investments we make now are going to pay off well into the future.
- Surrey needs more funding, more services, and more programs.

## Indigenous Population Growth



<sup>1</sup> Indigenous is self-identified and includes First Nation, Métis, or Inuit.

## The population is diverse

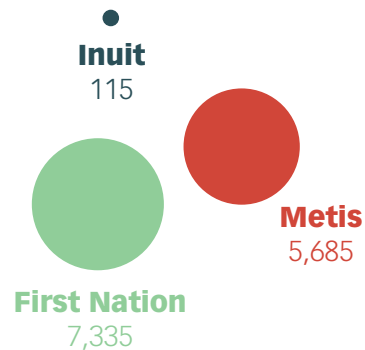
Fifty-five per cent of the Indigenous population in Surrey is First Nations. That 55% comes from all over BC and Canada, representing many different Nations, cultures, and languages.

Plus just over 40% of the Indigenous population are Métis. By far, the Métis are the largest cultural group represented in these numbers. And yet, the Métis are often battling for recognition and space.

Another factor when considering the diversity of Indigenous experiences in Surrey is to recognize that Indigenous people live in neighbourhoods throughout Surrey. North Surrey is home to many Indigenous Surrey residents...but so are Newton, Cloverdale, and South Surrey.



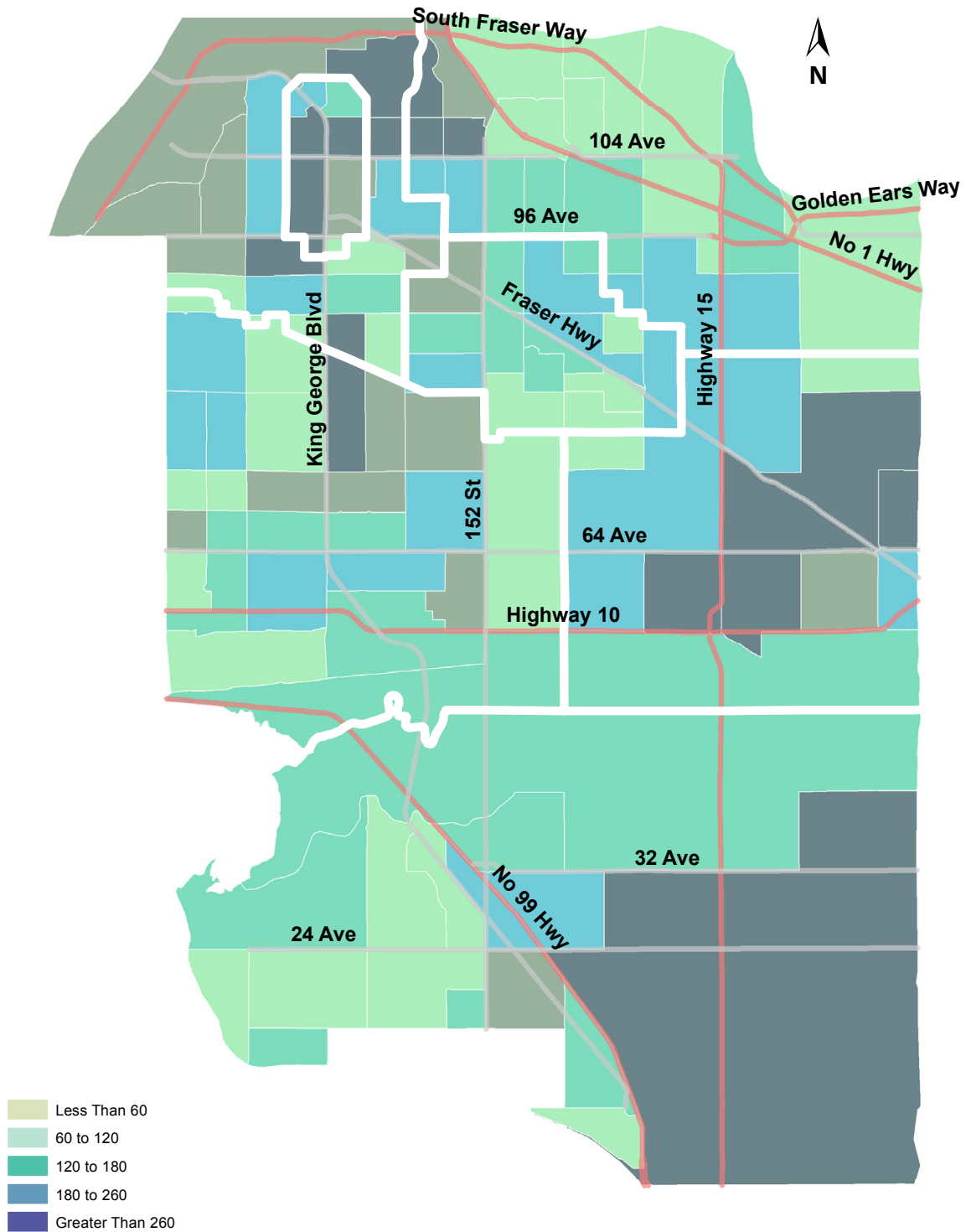
## 2016 Surrey Indigenous population by Aboriginal Identity



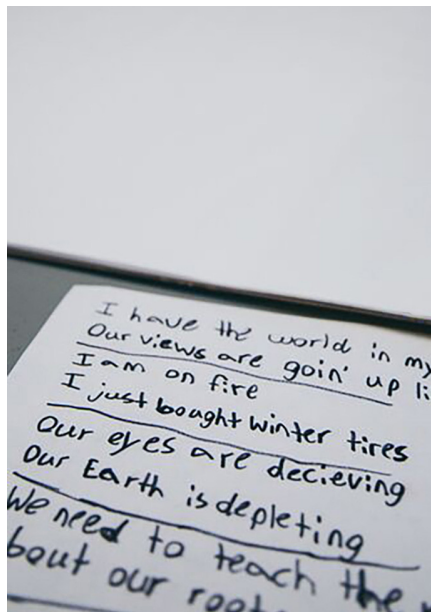
## The Big Implication

- Services need to be geographically connected to where people live.
- Distinctions-based approaches (that recognize the uniqueness of First Nations and Métis people) should be considered to ensure that the design and delivery of services are appropriate.
- Not all Indigenous people in Surrey share the same culture, experiences or have the same needs. The design and delivery of programs and services for Indigenous people in Surrey needs to involve Indigenous people from Surrey!

## Number of People with Aboriginal Identity, Surrey (2016)







Significantly more young Indigenous families and children live in Surrey than in Vancouver.

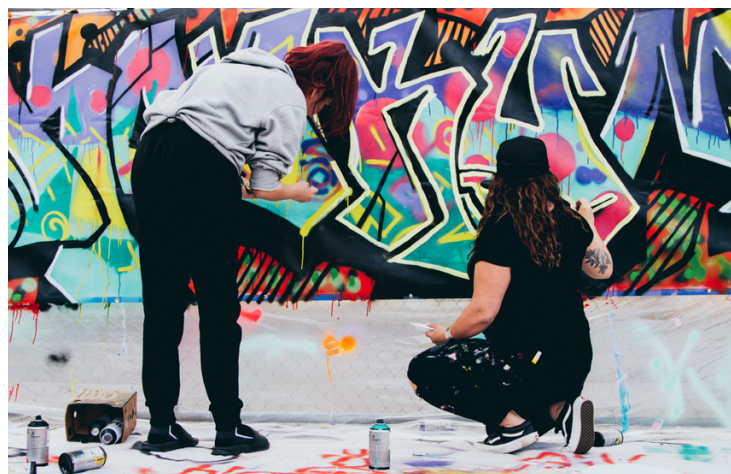
## The population is young

The median age of the Indigenous population in Surrey is 28 years old. This is different than in Vancouver, where the median age of Indigenous peoples is 33. In Surrey's total population, the median age is 38 years old, and in Vancouver, it is 39 years old.

Almost half (45%) of the population is younger than 24 years old. There are 3,655 Indigenous children living in Surrey (0 – 14 years).

## The Big Implication

- Funding for programs and services directed to young children and families will have a significant return on investment.
- What is true about the Indigenous population in Vancouver is not necessarily true in Surrey.
- Surrey needs more funding, programs, and services to support young Indigenous children and families.





## Some people are doing relatively well

46% of Indigenous households in Surrey own their own homes.

47% of Indigenous people in Surrey have some type of post-secondary education.

Indigenous people in Surrey participate in the labour force at the same rate as non-Indigenous people.

Many Indigenous people have post-secondary education and are employed or seeking employment. These facts challenge some of the most persistent negative stereotypes about Indigenous people.

### The Big Implication

- The Indigenous community is large, there's a lot of diversity, and we must not paint everyone with the same brush.
- Not all Indigenous people in the city need intensive services, but most are still seeking ways to connect and experience culture and sense of Indigenous community in the city.

## Some people need more support

While we celebrate the success that some Indigenous people are having in Surrey, we also need to recognize that some people are very challenged to make a home and a life in Surrey. For example:

- 37% of Indigenous children and youth in Surrey live in poverty—that's 1,610 children and youth.
- 41% of Indigenous children in Surrey live with a single parent.
- 85% of Indigenous single parents in Surrey are women.
- More Indigenous women have low-income status despite having higher levels of employment.

### The Big Implication

- Investments to support Indigenous people need to be more targeted and based on actual data.
- Addressing these statistics requires a fundamental shift in the systems that are perpetuating poverty.
- Indigenous women, young families, and children need more funding, programs and services.

For additional information on a wide range of socio-economic indicators, please see the *2016 Profile of the Indigenous Population in Surrey*.

## A group of people are gathered on a rocky beach at sunset. In the center, a man wearing a white robe and a tall, dark, pointed hat stands facing the group. He appears to be speaking or performing. The group consists of people of various ages, some wearing winter clothing like hats and scarves. The background shows the ocean with a bright reflection of the setting sun on the right side. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. The overall atmosphere is serene and communal.



Over the last five years, the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) has carried out two major initiatives:

1. Developed a comprehensive social innovation strategy - All Our Relations Strategy<sup>2</sup> in 2017; and
2. Implemented a major social innovation lab to reduce urban Indigenous child poverty - Skookum Lab<sup>3</sup>.

Through these initiatives, we have spent hundreds of hours speaking to well over 1,000 Indigenous community members in Surrey about their concerns and aspirations. What we've heard is both heart-breaking and inspiring. While our community has many challenges, our hopes and dreams are not diminished. Indigenous people are resilient and our commitment to our culture and our community is strong.

More than anything, what we've learned is that the urban Indigenous community in Surrey is diverse. There isn't one Indigenous experience in Surrey, there are many. Consequently, there are many issues that are very important to some people and less to others. We want to honour all of these voices. At the same time, however, we must acknowledge that four priorities have risen to the fore.

These four priorities have taken precedence because of the frequency with which they are raised by community members. Also, these priorities have been chosen as a result of the impact they have on our collective vision and by the commitment of resources that the SUILC has dedicated to addressing each of them.

#### The four priorities are the following:

**1**

**Reducing urban Indigenous child poverty;**

**2**

**Creating more Indigenous housing options;**

**3**

**Establishing the infrastructure for community and cultural resurgence; and**

**4**

**Addressing anti-Indigenous racism.**

This submission describes SUILC's understanding of these four priorities.

<sup>2</sup> <https://surreyindigenousleadership.ca/downloads/all-our-relations-a-social-innovation-strategy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://surreyindigenousleadership.ca/downloads/skookum-progress.pdf>

## Reducing Indigenous Child Poverty in Surrey

Nearly 4 out of 10 Indigenous children in Surrey live in poverty. In 2016, this was 1,610 Indigenous children. The number is probably higher today as the population has grown since the 2016 Census and as the economic fallout of the pandemic disproportionately affects Indigenous people.

As a coalition, the SUILC's shared vision is to live in a city where every Indigenous person has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. It is nearly impossible to imagine a future where children, who live in poverty today, can realize their full potential. Poverty affects children in so many ways: it affects family stability; the quality of early learning and childcare; school performance; self-esteem; housing stability and safety; and is a determinant of children's health and wellbeing. Poverty excludes Indigenous children from fully participating in our community – now and into the future.

In our work through Skookum Lab, we have investigated the root causes of urban Indigenous child poverty and the systemic forces that sustain it. Critically, we came to understand poverty differently than simply as a lack of financial resources. While financial stability is a key factor, it is not the only one. In Surrey, Indigenous child poverty is widely perceived as the lack of four key characteristics:

- Community belonging;
- Connection to family;
- Cultural identity and awareness; and,
- Cash (or Financial Security).

These four characteristics of poverty, have been colloquially termed the 4Cs by community members. The relevance of the

4Cs to the *Declaration Act* Action Plan is this: addressing urban Indigenous child poverty is a priority and it must be done from a wholistic, Indigenous worldview.

Solutions to urban Indigenous child poverty must address financial security, but they also have to strengthen connections to culture, community, and family. At Skookum Lab, we have created 16 prototypes to reduce urban Indigenous child poverty. Each prototype incorporates the 4Cs in its design. One example that we have implemented is called "Guide Groups: A Culturally Connected Community of Care". The impact of this one intervention has been profound. Guide Groups have emerged as a focal point for creating resiliency, hope and supportive relationships through a culturally connected community of care in Surrey. They are also spaces for community dialogue, deep engagement on issues, and the co-creation of solutions.

**Guide groups** offer a safe space for cultural learning opportunities (regalia making, honoring ceremonies, Indigenous protocols, drumming, singing, language learning), community connection and supports (regular meetings, shared meals, facilitated discussions, referrals to services, family mentorship), creative art-based activities (murals, beading, portraiture, song writing), and financial supports (gift cards, food, childcare, and opportunities to supplement income through community projects).



The Guide Group prototype demonstrates the ability that we have to transform the systems that create and sustain Indigenous child poverty. With sustained government support, Guide Groups could be scaled-up to support more families. Without support, the prototype will end in May 2021 when funding for Skookum Lab runs out.

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**In the words of Skookum Lab  
Guide Group participants:**

*"Skookum Lab seems 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."*

*"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."*

*"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."*

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



## Creating More Indigenous Housing Options for Priority Populations

Surrey is home to the largest urban Indigenous population in BC yet the city has far fewer Indigenous housing options compared to other large cities. Community members have told us about the challenges they face such as: unaffordability, low availability of larger units for families, limited services and supports for youth aging out of care, and few culturally appropriate housing options. Indigenous families have also shared with us their collective experiences of racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma, and the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their families.

These conditions make it difficult for Indigenous people with low incomes to find safe and secure housing. This truth is reflected in 2016 Census data as well:

- 53% of Indigenous households rent in Surrey, compared to 27% of non-Indigenous households;
- 88% of Indigenous households in core housing need are renters;
- 43% of Indigenous renters (1,470 households) are in core housing need;
- 17% of Indigenous renters are in extreme core housing need, meaning that they also spend more than 50% of their income on shelter and are at an increased risk of homelessness; and
- 59% of renters in core housing need, or 850 households, were families with children, mostly single-parent families (635 households), followed by couples with children (215 households).

**As of 2020, there are only 270 non-market housing units dedicated to Indigenous households in Surrey compared to 1,471 units in Vancouver.**

Despite significant housing challenges and barriers for Indigenous families in Surrey, as of 2020, there are only 270 non-market housing units dedicated to Indigenous households in Surrey compared to 1,471 units in Vancouver. Moving forward, we've identified two key priorities for new housing investment in Surrey: (1) Families with Children and (2) Youth, Elders, and Single Adults.



## Families with Children

59% of Indigenous renter households in core housing need were families with children (850 families). Single-parent families, primarily led by mothers, face the most critical need with 61% of all Indigenous single-parent families in core housing need (635 families). Single-parent families typically have far lower household incomes than other family types and Indigenous single parents have even lower incomes. In 2016, the median income for Indigenous single-parent renters was \$25,966. This means means that half of Indigenous single-parent families would require a rent of \$649 per month or less to be affordable.

The implications of these facts are as follows:

- Families with low incomes face poverty and housing insecurity;
- Indigenous-single-parent families face the greatest barriers in finding and maintaining safe and secure housing due to lower incomes;
- A lack of affordable units that can accommodate children and extended family is putting Indigenous households at risk of child separation. Unaffordable housing is breaking critical family connections and creating cycles of trauma and stress; and
- Increasing the supply of safe, secure, and deeply affordable housing for families is needed to create the stability required for parents and children to thrive. It is a key leverage point for addressing child and youth poverty within families.

**61% of Indigenous single parents are in core housing need.**



## Youth, Elders, and Single Adults

43% of Indigenous renters, who live alone or with roommates, experienced core housing need. These households include youth, adults, and Elders. They may include future parents, young women who are pregnant and separated from their partners, fathers who are separated from their children, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. While people living alone may not have children living with them, they may have important and influential connections with children—both their own and through other families they interact with. The median income for Indigenous individuals who rent was \$18,840, meaning that half of these people need a rent of \$471 per month or less to be affordable.

These facts have many implications:

- Breaking the cycle of poverty means supporting Indigenous households at all stages of life;
- Without secure housing, youth and young adults are more likely to face barriers to education, employment, and cultural connections; and
- When young people, Elders, and Indigenous single adults have safe and stable housing, they are able to leave a state of episodic and chronic livelihood disruption. Significantly, they are more able to actively support Indigenous families and children in their communities and networks. They are able to participate in creating a community, with safe and stable homes, that foster Indigenous family and cultural identities, connections, and belonging—core aspects of addressing Indigenous child poverty in Surrey.

Returning to our original proposal, Surrey is home to the largest urban Indigenous population in BC. Yet, Surrey has far fewer Indigenous housing options compared to other large cities. To put it bluntly, Surrey needs at least 1,470 units of deeply affordable rental housing for Indigenous households. This is the number of renter households who were in core housing need in 2016 and this number has likely grown. Within this statistic, single-parent families are facing an urgent housing crisis; 61% of Indigenous single parents are in core housing need. Affordable rents are urgently needed. The existing housing market is not serving priority populations with low incomes.

**Surrey needs at least 1,470 units of deeply affordable rental housing for Indigenous households.**



## Establishing the Infrastructure for Community and Cultural Resurgence

One of the characteristics of poverty as defined by our community (the 4Cs) is the absence of opportunities to connect with other urban Indigenous people in Surrey and share cultural practices, teachings, and kinship. Unlike Vancouver, where a dynamic community of Indigenous people, service providers, and cultural spaces and places already exist; Surrey has little to no Indigenous-community based infrastructure. For example:

- Surrey does not have an Indigenous gathering space that can accommodate a drum night, a pow-wow, a regalia class, a potlatch, or an Indigenous graduation ceremony;
- The built environment in Surrey doesn't reflect Indigenous presence;
- There are only a small handful of Indigenous organizations based in Surrey;
- There are few funding opportunities to support social or cultural connections; and
- Indigenous organizations in Surrey own few assets which are insufficient to leverage new development of community-owned spaces and housing.

The result is that the urban Indigenous community in Surrey is underrepresented in decision-making, absent from public consciousness, and lacks a central hub for community activities.

Community members report feeling invisible, isolated, and alone. On this point, community members have spoken: Surrey needs a purpose-built Indigenous center that can accommodate Indigenous cultural activities and community connections.

*"Our son loves to drum, and we don't know anywhere to go, and he is two-year-old...we don't have any way of teaching him."*

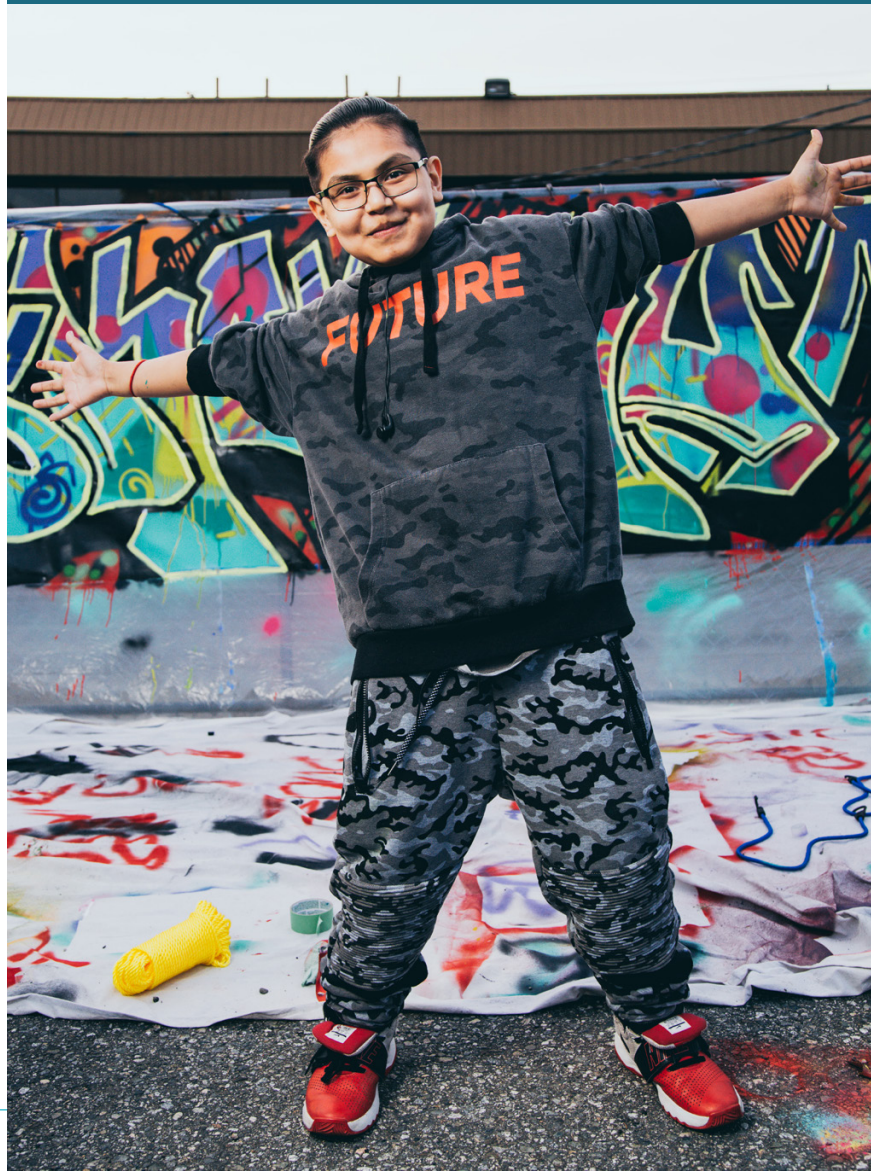
To date, we have worked with the community to complete a "Vision and Program Report for an Indigenous Mixed-Use Space in Surrey" (Urban Arts 2020). The report sets out the parameters of a cultural facility that could meet the needs of a community as large as ours. Furthermore, we are keen to leverage this cultural facility so that compatible social services and possibly housing could be sited together to create a dynamic hub for Indigenous people in the city.

Creating the infrastructure for community connections and cultural resurgence in Surrey has already started – as the Guide Groups prototype demonstrates, however, our work needs a focal point. More than just a physical space, the Indigenous community needs a place to gather as the spiritual center of the community; an urban space and place where people can connect to each other and to resources and services they need, and to be immersed in culture, language and indigeneity.

An Indigenous-owned multipurpose facility would be the heart of the community and would favorably move BC's largest urban Indigenous community from the periphery to the center of social consciousness in the city. It would support the healthy development of Indigenous children, facilitate the preservation of Indigenous families, be a focal point for Indigenous Nations to connect with their citizens living in Surrey, and recreate the supportive kinship networks of our ancestors in the urban environment.

We know what we want and why it is important. But how can we build it? Collectively, all of the Indigenous organizations in Surrey do not have the critical assets or capacity to make this dream a reality. Funding programs typically reward applicants who can contribute existing assets to a project. Urban Indigenous communities in cities where these assets have been accumulated over time have an advantage to continue to grow their social and cultural infrastructure. Surrey's emergence as a major hub for urban Indigenous people in BC is a relatively recent phenomenon and these assets are lacking. This is clearly an opportunity for governments and other partners to step-up and support urban Indigenous people in Surrey.

**"We want a gathering place. Somewhere we can cook, eat and bond with other youth and do healthy activities together. Really nice, big...makes you feel like you are at home. Like a Big House, like a feeling of being on the Rez, or having a community in the city."**



## Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism

If any one phenomenon pervades all of the concerns, issues and challenges that Indigenous people face in Surrey, it is the experience of racism. Racism is insidious. It infects everyone, everywhere: our neighbors, the health care system, landlords, small business owners and employers, front-line service workers, the police, and even our own minds. It makes us invisible and insignificant. It grinds down our self-esteem. At worst, it means physical violence and death. Destructively silent and indifferent, or overtly racist, societal attitudes, beliefs, and values have been effective in harming Indigenous lives.

Addressing Indigenous priorities in Surrey must be done in concert with a more significant effort to address anti-Indigenous racism. The current opportunities to support local initiatives are sporadic and ad hoc. A more robust response specifically targeting anti-Indigenous racism is required. Without it, racism and discrimination will continue to undermine our constructive efforts at reconciliation.

In their own words, Indigenous-Surrey residents reported that they are repeatedly perceived as *“knowing nothing”, “on welfare”, “lazy”, “violent”, and “not good mothers”*. Families are *“afraid”* to access services available to them, because of overt racism. For example, one participant said: *“I don’t let them know when I go to the hospital that I am Indigenous.”* In the school system, many participants shared stories of Indigenous children being *“bullied”* because of their cultural identity. Participants shared these painful and common experiences. They conveyed how anti-Indigenous racism is rooted in societal beliefs that Indigenous peoples are inferior, impoverished, and inadequate.



Using systems thinking approaches and methodologies, we worked with the Surrey urban Indigenous community to define steps to address anti-Indigenous racism. The ways forward that are recommended to us by community members include the following:

- Recognizing, identifying, naming, and acknowledging racism in Surrey;
- Learning new approaches to see and document systemic racism around us;
- Collectively developing more tools, policy, and structures to respond to anti-Indigenous racism;
- Creating allyship with non-Indigenous people and other racialized minority communities;
- Grounding the work in culture. As one participant reminded us “Culture is medicine.”; and
- Embolden emerging leaders to have the confidence to be anti-racist activists.

These community developed strategies for addressing anti-Indigenous racism need government support to be successful. Developing the *Declaration Act* Implementation Plan is a perfect opportunity to tackle one of the most pervasive forces that undermines our efforts at reconciliation.

*“We need space to heal, unpack how racism has historically and currently affects our family systems so we can move forward and build the resilience needed to dismantle racism.”*



These four priorities presented in our submission - reducing urban Indigenous child poverty; creating more Indigenous housing options; establishing the infrastructure for community and cultural resurgence; and, addressing anti-Indigenous racism - have emerged through our conversations with the urban Indigenous community in Surrey.

While these priorities are presented individually, it is very clear to us that they need to be seen in relationship to each other. For example, Indigenous child poverty is a result of and exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing options for Indigenous families; racism works at all levels to make the Indigenous community invisible and undermines our efforts to re-connect with our cultures; the precarious nature of housing for Indigenous people and the threat of homelessness reinforces the harmful and racist narratives that infect the decisions of child protection workers and other social services; and so on. All to say that, isolating one of these priorities from the other systemic forces, in and of itself, will not be enough to leverage meaningful change.

Our collective response needs to be driven by a wholistic Indigenous theory of change. Our efforts must center Indigenous wisdom and encourage community-based problem definition and solutions. In our example, we have used social innovation as a methodology for addressing systemic challenges. However, whatever approach is used, the objective must be to give local urban Indigenous communities more control over the decisions that impact their lives – including the on-going implementation of priorities that will be established in the *Declaration Act* Action Plan.

### Indicators for measuring the progress on UNDRIP implementation

- Per capita government funding for the urban centers with the largest urban Indigenous populations (goal: to ensure investments match population)
- The number of Indigenous children in care (goal: reduce the #)
- The number of Indigenous children living below the poverty line (goal: reduce the #)
- The number of Indigenous non-market housing units compared to the number of families in core housing need (goal: ensure housing investments match actual need)
- The amount of funding provided to Indigenous organizations to acquire assets for the purpose of building cultural/service hubs in urban centers
- The amount of funding to community-based anti-Indigenous racism networks and strategies (goal: increased anti-Indigenous racism activity)
- The amount of funding to urban Indigenous coalitions (goal: more organized capacity to give voice to local urban Indigenous populations)

## Looking Ahead

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It is our hope that the development of the *Declaration Act* Action Plan will wholistically address the four priorities outlined within this submission. These priorities represent the voices of our community: the more than 13,000 Indigenous people living in Surrey.

One of the key things that facilitated this submission is the fact that our coalition – the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee – exists and is consistently present and active within our community and city. We received very small financial contributions from the federal government and foundation donors to carry out our work. Through our own efforts, we have been able to establish a strong foundation in order to carry out meaningful action: we have a structure for engagement with the community; created a shared vision to guide our work; and begun the long and arduous journey to make Surrey a great place to raise an Indigenous child. We think this place-based thinking and organizing is necessary to address the very real and specific needs of urban Indigenous people.

To replicate our experience, however, governments need to support the development of urban Indigenous organizational capacity. This means supporting the creation of more Indigenous service delivery organizations and offering communities more financial support to develop urban Indigenous coalitions. It is necessary to provide capital funding for urban organizations to expand their asset base. In order for urban Indigenous people to take on much needed leadership roles within the community, resources are required to facilitate Indigenous leadership training and development. Additionally, governments need to provide targeted funding so urban Indigenous strategies can be implemented to meet the unique needs of the largest urban Indigenous populations in BC.

What we are proposing and advocating for will require a change in thinking on the part of governments. Funding for housing is an example. Currently governments fund housing organizations that are “shovel ready”. This tends to reward existing, legacy housing organizations but not necessarily communities where there is the most demonstrated need.

A new approach to funding in the housing sector would mean making funding decisions based on need. It would also require providing additional support so that new housing organizations can develop the capacity (including an asset base) to be successful. This is but one example, of how a new approach to funding urban Indigenous priorities is required. Obviously, using census numbers to guide investments for the urban Indigenous community is another. In our view, this new approach is forward thinking – it targets resources to where urban Indigenous populations are growing the fastest.

As we set out in the beginning of this submission, our vision is to live in a city that values Indigenous contributions to city life and where every Indigenous person has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. We sincerely hope that the work to develop the *Declaration Act* Action Plan will consider the perspectives of the urban Indigenous community in Surrey.

## All Our Relations.



**We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation**

**All Our Relations.**

