

INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAM



2021 FINAL REPORT
IISAAKOLAM.CA/CAYAC



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our program takes place within the Coast Salish territories of the Lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples, known today as Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples, known today as W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin), STÁUTW (Tsawout), W̱SIKEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.



RECONCILIATION WITH THE LAND AND EACH OTHER

The program brings together Indigenous and western ways of teaching and learning to facilitate early childhood educational experiences that foster respect, kindness, generosity, and openness to diverse ways of knowing.

A problem our program seeks to solve is the generational disconnect from our relationship to the land. This is directly related to the Westernization of our education system, which often fails to acknowledge other equally valid forms of knowledge, such as Indigenous knowledge.

Many Indigenous struggles are directly linked to the colonial displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional territories. Land and culture are inextricably connected; respect for Mother Earth is a central value of Indigenous cultures worldwide. Creation Stories, laws, principles, customs and ceremony are rooted in place and a reflection of the environment in which they emerge. Reconnecting local families with their environment under the leadership of the Indigenous Peoples of this place plays an integral role in reconciliation and in helping to address some of these systemic injustices.

Our program fosters relationships between peoples and our shared local environment by acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples whose land we are on, and celebrating our connection to each other and the ecosystems upon which we all depend. We hope to foster environmentally and culturally literate leaders of tomorrow who believe wholeheartedly in the value of collaboration.

As described in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's [94 Calls to Action](#), reconciliation between humans and the land is integral to reconciliation between Indigenous and newcomer societies. The ICAP program embraces this concept at its core. The program also brings life to the need to model reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in existing parks and protected areas, as recommended by the Indigenous Circle of Experts for the Pathway to Canada Target 1 in their 2018 report, [We Rise Together](#).





VISION & OBJECTIVES

OUR VISION

The Indigenous Climate Action Program (ICAP) gives children and their caregivers the tools to (re)connect with their home. By exploring what “home” means, we venture together on a journey of interconnection, guided by a combination of Indigenous and western worldviews and teaching styles. We discover and celebrate our connection to each other and to the ecosystems upon which we depend, helping to foster environmental and cultural literacy. Ultimately, the program instills the values of responsibility and respect for all life while strengthening the connection between children and their local environments and communities.

This program is inspired by the Indigenous law of IISAAK and other Indigenous philosophies that highlight the interconnection between humans, nature, and all living things. With similarities to other alternative education models, including nature and forest schools, the Indigenous Climate Action Program is unique in that it adds the elements of Indigenous knowledge and reconciliation to its curriculum, preparing children for healthy relationships with people from diverse cultures.

ICAP was designed by the IISAAK OLAM Foundation in 2019 and piloted in 2020 through a collaboration with Pacific Peoples' Partnership (PPP) and Saanich Parks, and funding from TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. PPP supported the sharing of knowledge and media, communications and financial coordination, while Saanich Parks provided community learning spaces.

ICAP'S OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

1

PLANT THE SEED FOR A LIFELONG CONNECTION TO NATURE

2

BUILD AWARENESS OF, AND RESPECT FOR, ALL LIVING THINGS

3

INSPIRE A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT



ONLINE MODULES



The Covid-19 pandemic became a factor shortly after ICAP launched in February of 2020. As such, the program was updated for 2021 to accommodate environmental and cultural education online during the Covid-19 pandemic. By presenting Indigenous knowledge and providing educational tools in accessible ways, our team worked hard to compile a variety of outdoor education activities to support online nature-based learning. We connected with Indigenous knowledge holders to share stories and worldviews to enhance our program's curriculum so that learners could connect to Indigenous perspectives of home, thus supporting nature connection and learning, thus setting a foundation for lifelong environmental stewardship.

Initially, the program aimed to deliver nine modules, which, once funding was ascertained, was reduced to five. The program was envisioned as an online resource combined with a live event for the launch of each module plus the option for classes to book virtual classroom events with an ICAP facilitator and Indigenous knowledge holder. The program went through several iterations in consideration of scheduling, time, marketing, program creation, and resource and operational requirements. This resulted in a shift to a completely online educational resource featuring pre-recorded videos to support nature-based learning with the goal of providing an online resource for children, educators, and caregivers to learn about and share Indigenous worldviews about the different natural aspects that make up their home.

For each module, we had three goals in mind:

1. Explore the theme of home, both broadly and specifically, in order to expand thinking from the micro (the house one lives in) to the macro (the surrounding environment).
2. Provide a space where Indigenous worldviews could be documented in a way that is both accessible and understandable to a wide range of audiences.
3. Provide tools to educators and caregivers to help support the nature connection and outdoor education of young learners.



COVID-19 AND RESILIENCY

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to be a reality throughout the duration of the program, with gatherings restricted, reflecting the wise choice to offer ICAP modules online and the desire for caregivers and educators to access educational models that keep their children safe. This also meant that our modules were, and will continue to be, not just available to children participating in a physical program, but to children who are in school - whether homeschooled or in public school - and to both formal and informal educators, as well to future ICAP instructors when in-person programs are again possible. Thus, our program and its impact, faced with the reality of Covid-19, has become more sustainable by providing an enduring online resource that can be applied in most outdoor, local settings.

Although we would have liked to continue in-person learning, Covid-19 allowed us to re-examine different options for future program delivery and has given us several options for continued dissemination of Indigenous knowledge that promotes the development and growth of future sustainability leaders and environmental stewards:

- In-person, Indigenous-based, outdoor programming for preschool and homeschool learners;
- In-person, Indigenous-based, outdoor programming for school-aged children (i.e. school field trips, with an ICAP leader, to local parks);
- Virtual, guided nature- and Indigenous-based education programming, in a nature setting led by an ICAP educator for school classes;
- Virtual, moderated discussion with an Indigenous knowledge holder and ICAP leader on topics of home, the environment, restoration, climate change, and stewardship; and
- Online toolkits and modules rooted in Indigenous knowledge, as was done in the current ICAP project, to support the educational development of both formal and informal educators and, thereby, the nature connection and education of young learners.

MODULES

Each module of the program, released every 3-4 weeks, had a theme with a pre-recorded video of an Indigenous knowledge holder speaking on the subject and both written and video supporting resources for educators. The five intended module themes were: home, wonderful water, the air we breathe, animal life, and plants & food; thus, aiming to explore how home is more than the house we live in, but the entire environment. The activities created follow child-led, place-based, outdoor education principles and target children aged 4 to 7 although they could be adapted to older learners. Thus, each module presented a different Indigenous perspective on the theme, creating a resource with pre-recorded videos to support nature-based learning and stewardship. Unfortunately, only the first three modules were able to be completed.



By exploring how to offer nature-based learning in a time when accessibility and in-person learning was complicated allowed us to examine the resiliency of the program and challenged us to become more sustainable in moving forward. Overall, successes of the program have been identified as follows:



- Clarifying and improving methods for online program delivery of nature-based education;
- Bringing the program online created the opportunity to disseminate Indigenous knowledge and catalyze environmental stewardship in households across the country;
- The creation of three high quality modules, exploring the theme of home and promoting nature connection and education;
- Connecting with three Indigenous knowledge holders from three different Coast Salish Nations and sharing their stories through three online videos in an accessible, sustainable way;
- The creation of seven video walkthrough guides for educators, exploring different nature themes;
- Sharing three different Coast Salish languages as they pertain to the module themes;
- Providing instructions for 13 different nature-based activities and games to connect children's learning to the natural spaces in which they live;
- Connecting with parents who homeschool their children, teachers, and community members to better understand needs and wants for programming;
- Establishing a model for continued online learning;
- Exploring additional way in which we can continue to disseminate Indigenous knowledge through accessible, nature-based learning;
- Refining best practices for working with Indigenous knowledge holders in moving forward with online learning;
- Exploring and refining best practices for school and community outreach and marketing for programs.

Throughout the process, certain challenges arose that required critical thinking and problem-solving and creativity to ensure the success of the program. While some were more easily managed than others, the following represents a list of some of the challenges and considerations that were encountered throughout the design and delivery of the program:

- Discovering how to best deliver nature-based programming from in front of a screen;
- Scheduling the participation of Indigenous knowledge holders in a way that is respectful of their time and external obligations and allows enough time to work within the requirements of the program;
- Working with Indigenous knowledge holders to define priorities and messaging for educational modules (i.e., working in ethical space);
- Building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders in a way that is not one-sided or exploitative;
- Working with pre-existing recorded videos of Indigenous knowledge holders to stay true to their messaging and worldviews, and present this in an accessible way to the ICAP audience;
- Exploring best practices for community and school outreach, engagement and marketing to increase awareness of and engagement in the online modules;
- Understanding how teachers, caregivers, and informal educators wish to engage with online material;
- Integrating module content within the needs and required outcomes of school curriculum;
- Building connection with an online audience through pre-recorded videos;
- Ensuring curriculum can be applied to the intended audiences;
- Creating modules that best represent different Indigenous worldviews and provide supporting activities that honour and respect those ways of understanding our world;
- Ensuring language used throughout the modules is appropriate, respectful and not alienating to either Indigenous participants, educators, or learners.





CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the duration of the online version of ICAP, we focused on bridging knowledge systems and reconciliation, ensuring this is easily understood and available to our multi-generational audience. While there were challenges from the planning through to execution stages, adapting the program to an online model has ultimately been successful, most notably allowing us to establish how to extend the impact of our program through various engagement strategies, whether online or in-person. Ultimately, this has allowed us to improve the resiliency and sustainability of our program.

One of our greatest achievements was being able to share the stories and experiences of three different Indigenous knowledge holders - something we had intended to do in 2020, which was not possible with Covid-19. Not only were we able to share three different Indigenous worldviews on the subject of home, we also connected with other Indigenous knowledge holders who are interested in participating in future events and who were not able to participate due to time constraints in this iteration of the program. Furthermore, as we continue to work with community members, educators, knowledge holders and stakeholders, we will continue to deepen an understanding of and connection to our homes and habitats for all participants.

Ultimately, we, as an organization, are more confident in our ability to deliver Indigenous-informed, nature-based education in a way that promotes nature connection and encourages children, their caregivers, and educators to be environmental stewards. This intergenerational approach recognizes that we are learners at all stages of life and can support one another, deepen our understanding, and learn from each other to positively impact our communities and environments. This is particularly important when it comes to integrating Indigenous knowledge, both as a part of reconciliation and in consideration of the fact that our Indigenous Peoples have been stewards of the places we call home since time immemorial. However, we still have work to do, continuing to refine our educational models, extending our outreach, and considering how we can work with different Indigenous knowledge communities to bridge different ways of knowing to positively impact our environment and future.

HUY CH Q'U



OUR PARTNERS

We would like to extend our gratitude to our partners, Pacific Peoples' Partnership and TD Friends of the Environment for supporting education systems that operate outside of Westernized schooling. It is thanks to you that we get to create a program that aligns with IISAAK OLAM's mission to mobilize Indigenous knowledge.



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Environment
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