

Indigenous Climate Action Preschool

A Pilot Project

June 2020 Final Report
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our pilot program took place in Marigold and South Valley Parks of South Saanich, which are located within the Coast Salish territories of the Lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples, known today as Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and the ƳSÁNEĆ Peoples, known today as ƳJOŁŁP (Tsartlip), BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin), STÁUTƳ (Tsawout), ƳSIKEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.

The Indigenous Climate Action Preschool (ICAP) program was led by the IISAAK OLAM Foundation in partnership with Pacific Peoples' Partnership and Saanich Parks, and supported by a grant from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation.



RECONCILIATION WITH THE LAND AND EACH OTHER

Our pilot program brought 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 sought to solve is the generational disconnect from our relationship to the land. This is directly related to the westernization of education systems, which often fail to acknowledge other equally valid forms of knowledge, including Indigenous knowledge.

The displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional territories has also created a disconnect from culture. 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 fostered 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 hoped to help 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](#).



OVERVIEW



OUR VISION

The ICAP Program began in January of 2020 with a focus on developing environmental responsibility, cultivating cultural awareness, and building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families.

This approach to early childhood development and education was spent at Marigold and South Valley Parks in South Saanich BC, observing, interacting with, and learning about local species, including plants, birds, and insects. We strived to share Indigenous teachings through monthly special events featuring Indigenous knowledge holders so that they could share place-based knowledge with the surrounding community and families.

Our program aimed to instil the values of responsibility and respect for all life while strengthening the connection between children and their local environments and communities.

OUR GOALS

1

Connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous children to each other and to nature in local parks near their homes in South Saanich BC

2

Create an opportunity for children to learn about the connection between place, nature, and culture

3

Introduce Parents/Guardians to an alternative nature of education that their family can experience and continue to learn from



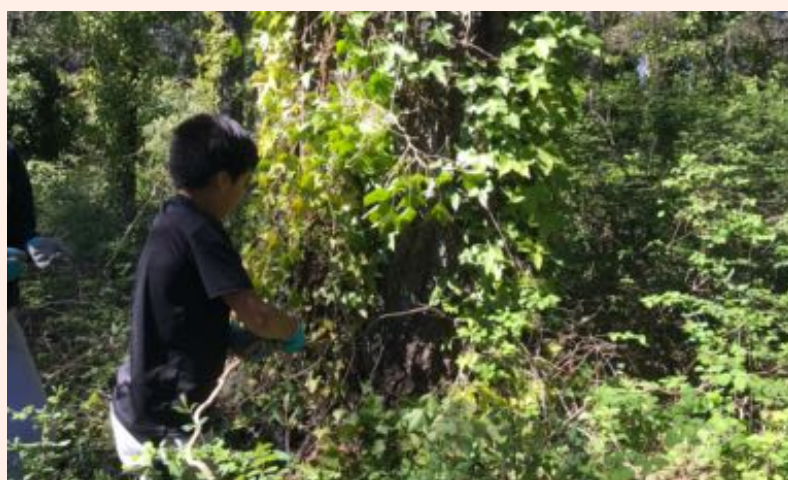
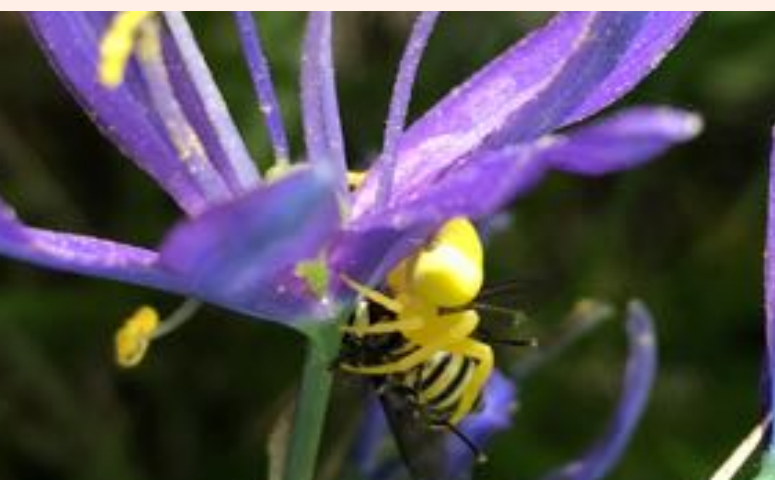


ACTIVITIES

The ICAP team developed a variety of outdoor education activities under different themes: Nature discovery, colours, rock 'n' roll, decomposition, and more! They also developed relationships with Indigenous knowledge holders from various Nations, infusing Indigenous knowledge and stories into the program's curriculum, such as place names, ethnobotanical knowledge, stories, songs and art.

With every activity, ICAP instructors had two goals in mind: First, to provide a space where children can engage in stewardship and restoration projects around the local parks to instill the values of responsibility and respect for nature. Secondly, to instill the values of peace and friendship within participants and their families.

Activities centred around identifying native and invasive plant and animal species, understanding the role and function of various plants for humans (e.g. which ones are edible), and telling stories about them. Within the daily schedule, there was time for creativity, allowing children to learn through crafts, dance, and songs.



Through the Looking Glass

Give your little ones a magnifying glass. Go around the park and allow them to look at anything. Make sure to share your knowledge of what they're looking at and encourage their curiosity!

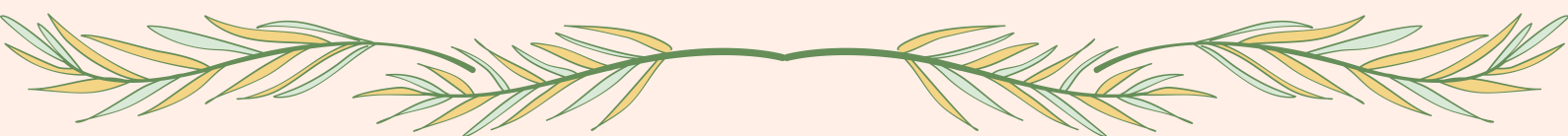
Our ICAP students enjoyed this activity so much that we brought our magnifying glasses everyday.



Colour Discovery

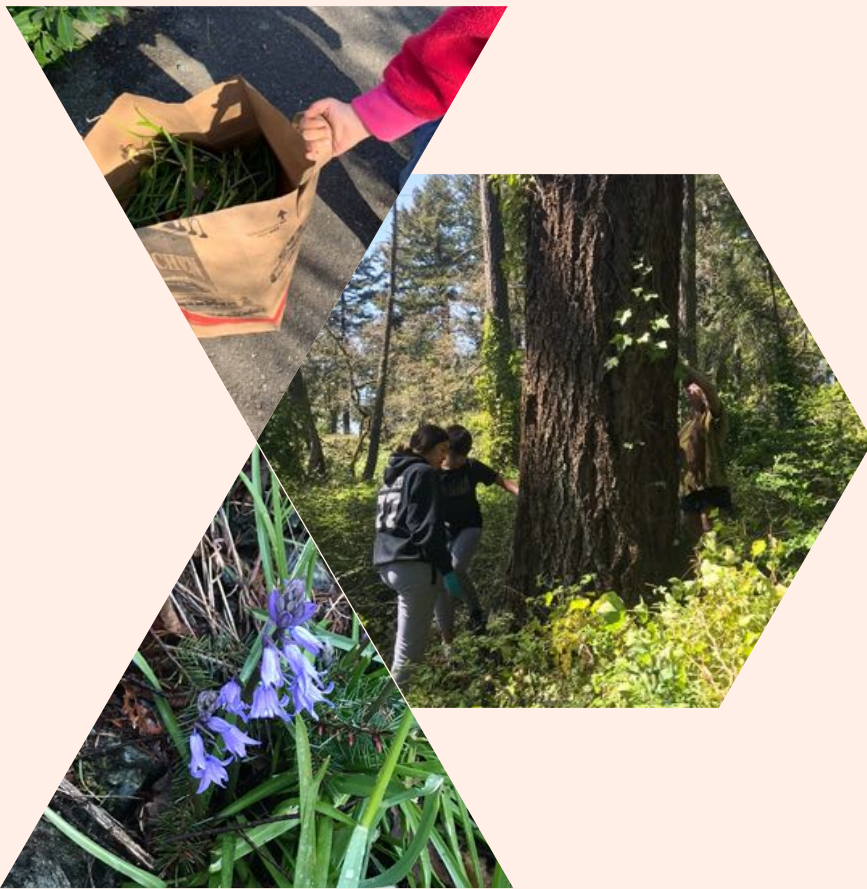
We put a little bit of fun in discovering the colours around our local park.

Grab some paint swatches with holes in them so the children can easily match the colours with plants and animals on your outdoor adventures!



Our invasive species week was so successful with our participants that we did it multiple times in our pilot cohort.

We spent a few months learning to identify both native and invasive species with the children until they were able to identify them on their own.



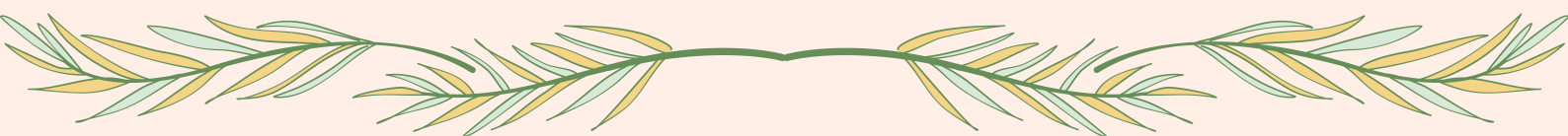
We created a variety of native and invasive species grids as a key for the children when they are out in our local parks. These invasives include Scotch Broom, Bluebells, and English Ivy.

In these photos, you can see us pulling English Ivy and Bluebells.

This activity can be done by anyone at any age! It is crucial to contact your municipality to ensure that what you pull is an invasive species, and further, to ensure you dispose of them correctly.

Learning about invasive species shows children our impact on the world.

Scotch Broom grows pods that carry about 3-5 seeds that can spread up to 5 meters!



Our Gardening and Edible Wilds week was another great success!

Our little ones were excited to try some of the edible wilds in our neighbourhood like Dandelions (top triangle), Purple Dead Nettle (middle) and Blue Camas (bottom).

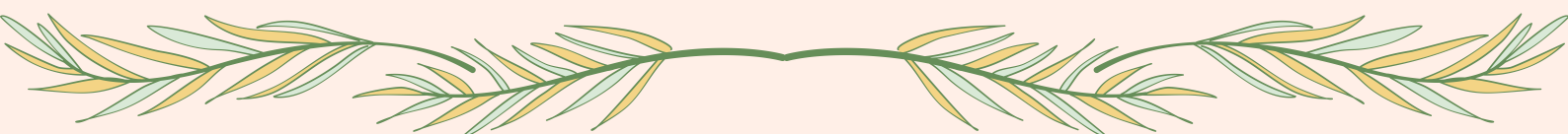
We learned together that these plants have provided Coast Salish First Nations with medicine. For instance, Camas roots are similar to an onion bulb. Coast Salish Nations would harvest and boil the bulbs to create a cough remedy.



As COVID-19 made grocery shopping less appealing, many local residents began to build gardens in their backyards. As we had initially planned to teach our students about the benefits of eating locally, there was no better time to act! We have now a plentiful garden full of brussel sprouts, kale, zucchini, tomatoes and more that the kids helped plant. They are proud to see when love is put into a garden, Mother Earth shows her love back with fruits and veggies.



Hang your Purple Dead Nettle or other wild herbs to dry before brewing it into a tea! They make a beautiful decoration as well.



COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

One of our main goals was to build meaningful relationships with volunteer community members, Saanich Parks representatives, our partners and Indigenous knowledge holders. These relationships were sought out to unite our local community and to offer a space where multiple knowledge systems can connect in parks and places that are often left underutilized and underappreciated.

Our Launch Party, held on February 11, 2020 in Marigold Park offered a great space to network with all of those who we reached out to as valuable guests and community members who were interested in the program. We remained in contact with Saanich Parks and Recreation representatives who later connected us with two Park Ambassadors. Park Ambassadors volunteer their time on educational initiatives and tending to their assigned park. The two Ambassadors we met offered to give us an educational tour around both Marigold and South Valley Park. Although COVID-19 prevented us from meeting with the second Park Ambassador, two of our ICAP team members were able to get a tour around Marigold Park. This experience was invaluable.

The Park Ambassador had been stewarding Marigold park for a number of years and has been witness to the ecosystem and its health. On the tour, she showed us how to identify both native and invasive species around the park, explained her duties as a Park Ambassador and pointed out restoration projects throughout the park. She also offered us a nature guide for Victoria. All these tools informed our curriculum. Additionally, stories and experiences she told us were important for conveying the existing web of connections within the park's ecosystem, and how our story, as ICAP participants and instructors, can connect to it.

For example, she told us of a family of Eagles who had once inhabited a tree that now lies across the forest floor due to a windstorm from two years prior. These narratives are important for our ICAP team as it instills a sense of understanding of the occurrences in the ecosystem that make the park as it is today.



INDIGENOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Furthermore, our ICAP team was successful in making connections to Indigenous knowledge holders from Tla-o-qui-aht, Sauteaux, Tsawout, and Songhees First Nations. Our initial goal was to host monthly events for our local community to provide a space to connect to Indigenous knowledge holders and Elders. We had gotten as far as planning our first event with a Tla-o-qui-aht knowledge holder who was going to offer her own version of an education tour, in Nuuchahnulth, of Marigold Park, until COVID-19 restrictions began.

Although we were unable to follow through with hosting our events, we see success in the interest of those knowledge holders who supported our program's vision. The traditional knowledge we gathered from our Indigenous knowledge holders and from independent research informed us of medicinal properties from native plants, what the landscape looks like in its most natural state, and culturally significant stories of Coast Salish First Nations and their history.

The relationships made in our projects timeline was one of our greatest successes. Learning from First Nations who have stewarded the land for time immemorial and from those who have cared for the park such as Ambassadors, was an integral aspect of our curriculum that sets ICAP apart from other early childhood education programs. Sharing stories from both Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge into our program works to normalize multiple knowledge streams in children's lives in hopes that their learning will highlight multiple ways of knowing.



COVID-19 Reality

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting into question many of the societal models that we depend upon. We were ultimately unable to follow through with our plans of hosting monthly events with Indigenous knowledge holders for our community and Saanich Parks and Rec had to revoke our park permit due to the advisory against social gatherings. Our project is vulnerable to changes on a day to day basis. Some of our team have had family members hospitalized by COVID-19 and we recognize this is a time to be gentle and adaptive in our work.

Although we have faced some unprecedented challenges, we chose to view this pandemic as an opportunity, not a problem. Parents around the world are now looking for educational models that will keep their children safe, knowing that the next few years may bring new waves of the COVID-19 virus. Although this program was not developed with pandemic resilience in mind, it is one of the models of education that can survive and even thrive within this new reality through its smaller cohorts and locality. We will be continuing to develop the Indigenous Climate Action Program and build upon what we are learning today.

Adapting for the Future

Bringing our program online has been an opportunity to catalyze environmental stewardship in households across the country. Bridging knowledge systems and reconciliation is still at the forefront of our curriculum. Although COVID-19 and the physical barriers it has brought poses a threat to creativity, this is a great time to follow our program online to try our projects at home.

School curriculum is being assigned to students from home. We are finding opportunities to collaborate with the curriculum provided to them while also providing support to complete their assignments. We are in the same situation as many others. We have been researching social media tactics to broaden our audience and support parents at home attempting to help their children finish school. Framing our curriculum as intergenerational will encourage parents to learn along-side their kids. We hope our projects are both challenging and simple so families can fill their day with fun.





CONCLUSIONS

Overall, we were able to create an early childhood education program that is inclusive of multiple knowledge systems, place-based, and adaptable to different locations. We are proud to hear feedback from our participant's parents that explain that their child enhanced their usual Sunday stroll by identifying some native and invasive species names.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused necessary adaptations, we will continue to develop and release content that aligns with the values of ICAP on our social media outlets. The IISAAK OLAM Foundation plans to work with Pacific Peoples' Partnership to continue program offerings in the fall of 2020.

By the end of this year, Canada is expected to have conserved 17% of terrestrial areas and 10% of marine areas as promised at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010 in the Pathway to Canada Target 1. These goals are expected to grow, increasing Canada's protected areas gradually into the future. Children are our future. With the rise of awareness surrounding the need for reconciliation within Parks Canada, our education system and throughout the general public, there is a need for alternative education models like ICAP. We hope our program may lead the way for other educators, highlighting the importance of locally based, inclusive and adaptive preschool programs where children of all walks of life may find community through nature.



THANK YOU



OUR PARTNERS

We are grateful to Pacific Peoples' Partnership, Saanich Parks, and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation for supporting an alternative education program that embraces diversity and inclusivity while making a positive environmental impact.



The IISAAK OLAM Foundation invites your family to join us for our

Indigenous Climate Action Preschool Program Launch

A ceremony, meet and greet, play and general information about the program

FEBRUARY 11 AT 10:00 AM
MARIGOLD PARK
1080 IRIS AVENUE

For questions, please contact
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iisaakolam.ca/cayac-preschool

IISAAK  OLAM