



CARRIER SEKANI  
FAMILY SERVICES



## Culture and Diversity



Creating wellness together.

## The Agency

In the late 1980's the elders and leaders of the newly formed Carrier Sekani Tribal Council (CSTC) came together and decided that it was time that social and health issues were brought to the forefront. The social well-being of the Carrier and Sekani people needed improvement and it was time to begin on a new path- one that would lead their member nations to a better place and a solid future. The CSTC took their first step on this path by employing eight people to support Carrier and Sekani families to navigate the Child Welfare system. In addition, they saw the need to have a patient advocate for Carrier people at the then Prince George Regional Hospital.

Based on their vision on August 1990, a non-profit society was established to provide social welfare supports, legal guidance, and research to First Nation people living in remote and urban areas in Northern BC's central region. The non-profit was named Northern Native Family Services. In later years it was renamed Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS). CSFS signed its first transfer

agreement in 1997 to provide community-based health programs. As the service needs in child welfare, social, health and legal programs were on the rise; these areas became the development priorities for the agency. Landmark events began with the incorporation of a small office and a handful of employees, and with the guidance of a board of directors, the society moved forward.

Today, CSFS is a leading organization with more than 170 skilled staff members in Prince George, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James and Burns Lake.



## 11 First Nation Communities

Society membership is made up of persons who are registered members at the following 11 First Nations Communities:

1. Sai'kuz First Nation (Stoney Creek Indian Band)
2. Wet'suwet'en First Nation (Broman Lake Indian Band)
3. Burns Lake Band
4. Cheslatter Carrier Nation
5. Nadleh Whut'en (Nautley Indian Band)
6. Stelat'en First Nation
7. Takla Lake Band
8. Yekochee First Nation
9. Skin Tye Band
10. Nee Tahi Buhn
11. Lake Babine Nation

Nak'azdli and Tl'azten First Nations while independent in services management are associate members.

## Our Vision

CSFS was created by First Nations Chiefs, Elders and Community members as a First Nations specific agency, registered under the BC Societies Act, Dedicated to promote and advance the health and well-being of its citizens and communities in a dignified, respectful and culturally appropriate manner.

## Our Mission

With the guidance of our Elders, Carrier Sekani Family Services is committed to the healing and empowerment of First Nations families by taking direct responsibility for health, social and legal services for First Nations people residing in Carrier And Sekani territory.

# The People

Carrier and Sekani people have historically resided in a vast territory of over 76,000 kilometers, primarily located in North Central British Columbia. Today there are approximately 22 Indian Bands or First Nations, as recognized by the Department of Indian Affairs, that identify as being Carrier or Sekani societies. The population represented by Carrier Sekani First Nations comprises over 10,000 individuals.

Carrier and Sekani people usually identify themselves by telling people their name, where they are from, their clan and sometimes their parent's names. This can be observed particularly when someone begins a public speech. For Carrier and Sekani people, everyone likes to know how everyone is related. In addition to legal names, people sometimes hold hereditary chief names.

## Common Words

Word	Meaning
Hadih	Hello
So en zen	How are you
So es ten	I am fine
Mah	Yes
Deh	Give or hand that to me
Mussih	Thanks
Mussih cho	Thank you very much
Sne chalya	You have honored me or you are very
Awetza	That is all
Goozih	Nosey
Oni den	Look how you look
Nayng	I'll see you again
Hotse nah	That's the way it is
Tabi en gus'ai	I love you



## The Language

Dakelh is spoken throughout the central interior Carrier Nations. Carrier people often refer to themselves as Dakelh which may be used as plural or singular. Dakelh is part of the Athabaskan language group, which includes many similar North American indigenous languages. Although the term Athabaskan is prevalent in linguistics and anthropology, there is an increasing trend among scholars to use the terms Dene and Dene languages and to apply these terms to the entire language family.

Current research divides Carrier into the following groups within the Athabaskan language family: a Stuart-Trembleur Lake group, Nat'oot'en (Babine) and a Southern group.



## Governance

Carrier people maintain a governance system commonly referred to as the *bah'lats* or potlatch. Four primary clans make up Carrier society (Bear, Caribou, Frog and Beaver), each with several sub-clans. In the Bear or *Likh ji bu* clan there are five sub clans including the Black Bear, Grizzly, Fox, Crow and Timberwolf clans. In the Caribou or *Gilhanten* clan there are four sub clans including the Mountain, Geese, Mask and Flag clans. In the Frog or *Jihl tse yu* clan there are four sub clans including the Marten, Thunderbird, Beads, and Ribbon clans. In the Beaver or *Likh sta Mis yu* clan there are four sub clans including the Grouse, Owl, Moose and Sun clans.

The primary forum in which business of the *bah'lats* is conducted is known as the feast hall. The feast hall is organized around the clan system and is the core economic, political, social, legal and spiritual institution of Carrier peoples. While protocol adapts to the differing systems of each community, the guiding principles of the feast hall are shared by all member communities.

All formal business in the feast hall is conducted in an open and transparent environment where clan members (whether hereditary chiefs or not) are witnesses to transactions that may occur. As witnesses, individuals are expected to commit to memory the details of transactions, and in the case of hereditary chiefs, to recount in oral histories the transactions at future

feasts when those transactions are relevant.

There are several protocols in Carrier society expected to be followed when specific formal business is being conducted in the feast hall. The most commonly known protocols include when hereditary chief's names are being assigned, the solidifying of law, shaming, and the announcement of births, marriage or adoption. An integral component of law making authority in Carrier law is the sanctioning of actions, business plans, and transactions. This is called *Chus*, the law of the eagle feather plumes. This law is expressed in a ceremony that opens and closes all law making business in Carrier society, and in particular the feast hall.



Gilhanten  
(Caribou)



Likh sta mis  
yu  
(Beaver)



Jihl tse  
yu  
(Frog)



Likh ji  
bu  
(Bear)

## Bah'lats Protocols



Protocols dictate how formal business is conducted and may vary from Nation to Nation. There are protocols and etiquette for bah'lats which are expected to be followed at all times:

- \* When attending a bah'lats, you will be seated according to your clan (Frog, Beaver, Cariboo, or Bear). If you do not belong to a clan, you will be seated with a clan. This is where you will sit for all future bah'lats unless you are formally adopted by another clan. Do not sit anywhere until seated. A hereditary chief or designate holding a tuz (a staff, usually elaborately carved and embellished) will walk you to your seat and bang the tuz in front of the chair you are to sit on. Chiefs have specific seats so it is important that you only sit where you have been seated.
- \* Stand during opening and closing prayer.
- \* Be very careful not to spill any food or drink (such as coffee, tea, water and/or soup). The clan you are sitting with will have to pay the host clan for any spills. If this occurs it will take place on the row where you are seated.
- \* Accept all food and gifts offered to you. This is a sign of respect. It is considered disrespectful if you refuse the offerings of the host clan (you may put items away in a container and/or take it home afterwards).
- \* Stay for the duration of the potlatch business and listen to learn. Avoid participating in a side discussion while there are speeches and or businesses being conducted.
- \* Behaviour and attendance is always noted and respected by witnesses and all those who hold hereditary Chief names
- \* Songs, dances and stories belong to the person who performs them so recording is not allowed at most times unless special permission has been granted by the host clan.
- \* When volunteering and/or helping to serve; servers are taught to serve everyone and be careful not to miss or skip anyone (there is always someone in charge to provide instructions as to who to serve first and what to serve to each person)
- \* It is always good to bring money in denominations of \$5, \$10 or higher. At any event each clan may be called to dance in to their clan song or others. The purpose of any dance will usually be explained. The clan song is like a National Anthem to the Clan and singing and dancing takes place with great pride. Clan members and guests who are sitting with a clan will dance with money in their hands to pay for the drummers (a container will be sitting in front of them). There may be other times that clan members and guests are invited to contribute funds as well. You may be offered a blanket to dance in with.
- \* When CSFS hosts a bah'lats style feast it is called an 'All Clans Feast' to distinguish it from an event which is being hosted by a clan.





## Other Protocols and Cultural Norms

- \* It is customary to consult with the Chief or designate of any of the member Nation's before conducting any business outside of normal services in their territory or community. Examples of this include any ceremonies, focus groups, community consultations or training events. Normally, a Program Director or Supervisor will consult with the Chief or their designate.
- \* Meetings or gatherings usually begin with a prayer, often the Lord's Prayer, or song. Prayers are also said before eating a meal. It is always preferred to have the prayers said in the Nations language whenever possible. Respect is required during this time with full attention (no side talking).
- \* Whenever speaking publically, it is customary to acknowledge the territory you are in at the beginning of a speech.
- \* It is also important to acknowledge any hereditary chiefs who may be present before your presentation. This is done by acknowledging them through saying "I would like to acknowledge our male chiefs, female chiefs and future chiefs (or children of chiefs) Dene-za, Tsekay-za, skey-za."
- \* Sometimes a speaker will pause as he/she searches for words or to give people a moment to absorb what they have said. Those in the audience must give the speaker time to finish. Normally, a person will state "that is all," "awetza," or simply sit down to indicate he/she has finished speaking. Long pauses amongst Carrier and Sekani people are not uncomfortable so one must not feel an obligation to say something in order to avoid silence. It is better to say nothing at all than to fill the air with inconsequential talk.
- \* At times of intense meetings, a person may get up and tell a funny story. People welcome these pauses as it can lift the air and change the mindset. These interludes are not seen to be time-wasters.
- \* Regardless of the meeting agenda, if an Elder or Uza-ne attends the meeting and wishes to speak, he/she is given the floor. There may be times when the elder's words do not seem to relate to the meeting topics but if you listen carefully, there will be good information provided.
- \* At times, people who speak may appear angry. Your duty is to actively listen to him/her, and not necessarily try to dispel the anger or take it personally. Demonstrate that you understand their concerns and document them to channel to the appropriate person. If misinformation is present, this may be a good opportunity to share information in a respectful manner.
- \* It is customary to wish someone safe travels whenever they are travelling. Carrier and Sekani people believe that it is important to acknowledge people when they have travelled to their territory and to wish them a safe journey back.
- \* Traditional foods are harvested at various times throughout the year. The fish harvest in the summer months is still largely practiced by many people. For this reason, there may be difficulty in arranging meetings or providing services over these months.
- \* When harvesting food, there are special protocols in place for menstruating women. For example, a menstruating woman should not handle or eat fresh meat. It is believed that the power of the hunters will be damaged. The same can be said for participation in hunting, touching guns or fishing nets, etc or participating in smudging (or brushing off with smoke). If a woman is menstruating and at a food harvesting gathering, it is customary to explain that you are on your 'moon time' or 'moon' and it will be understood that you are excused from participation.



## Guiding Principles and Spirituality

There are several principles that flow from Carrier laws that are intended to govern the conduct of individuals in everyday life. These principles include: respect, responsibility, obligation, compassion, balance, wisdom, caring, sharing and love. Each of these principles is expected to be followed concurrently and with equal weight. No one principle is understood to have greater significance than another principle.

In Carrier society all behaviour is conducted in relation to spiritual energy. It is believed that whatever energy is expressed, good or bad, will be visited on the individual in the future. This belief guides the respect demonstrated toward all other beings.

The Carrier concept of illness is closely related to spiritual beliefs. Illness exists within a holistic framework in which both spiritual and physical ailment must be treated. The cause of illness can be both physical illness and the result of bad spirits. Various plans are used to cure physical illnesses and healers are used to deal with spiritual aspects of wellness. These beliefs continue to be practiced in communities.

Similar to many indigenous nations worldwide, the communities CSFS serve have been heavily

impacted by colonization, residential schools and the attempts by government to apprehend children commonly referred to in Canada as the “60’s scoop.” An active policy of cultural genocide and disrespect for self-determination have manifested in high rates of crime, substance abuse, suicide, family violence and high-risk behaviours; all of which CSFS and its member communities are actively working to resolve.

Carrier practices and philosophy continue to thrive in contemporary times and are responding to the ever changing relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies despite (Canadian) Government attempts to undermine Carrier institutions and culture. One of the biggest challenges facing the *bah'lats* is the ability to coordinate its law making powers and the principles with those of the western-based system. In meeting this challenge, CSFS views Carrier philosophy as a catalyst for community development using an integrated service delivery model based on the philosophy and principles of Carrier and Sekani governance structures.

“Our people are no different from other indigenous nations. Attempts of colonization to break our people's soul and spirit have never succeeded. We continue to demonstrate that our responsibility rests in preserving our culture, philosophy and beliefs. We have been able to put into practice our values of healing people based on basic principles of humanity.”

**Warner Adam,**  
Chief Executive  
Officer