

# GOOZIH DUST'LUS



Sept / Oct 2025

**Skak ha ba bay /  
Nezkeh ba  
(For the Children)**

Sparking conversations  
about child and family  
services through  
community BBQ event

**One Heart at a Time**

Transforming Indigenous health care by  
bringing culturally safe and accessible  
wellness services closer to communities

**Jamming Out  
with Joel West**



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FAMILY SERVICES**



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# CONTENTS

## News

- 2 **Update from our CEO**  
Message from CSFS Chief Executive Officer, Warner Adam
- 3 **New Low-Barrier Housing**  
New Housing for Indigenous youth, adults and families in PG
- 6 **From Player to Award Winning Coach**  
Step into the sports journey of 2025 BC Hockey Indigenous Impact and Legacy Award Winner, Ben Berland
- 15 **You're in Healing Hands**  
How CSFS is making a positive impact in Nadleh Whut'en First Nation

## Features

- 7 **Buts'odutel'eh (We will learn it)**  
Learn the colours of the rainbow in the Nedut'en Dialect
- 10 **One Heart at a Time**  
Bringing culturally safe care closer to Indigenous communities.
- 12 **Culture Corner**  
Me, My Guitar and the Stage - Jamming Out with Joel West
- 15 **Photo Submissions**  
Photos of amazing crafts from your communities



Program Highlight: Early Years Preschool



Jurisdiction: Skak ha ba bay / Neꞑkeh ba



Calls for Justice Updates: Research Focus Group

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## A Message from our CEO

Warner  
Adam

**H**adih,

In a significant step toward addressing the urgent need for accessible housing, CSFS in partnership with BC Housing, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and Yellowridge Construction, held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new low-barrier housing complex in downtown Prince George. This project will provide safe, culturally supportive homes for Indigenous young families and individuals seeking stability, connection, and wellness.

Our mandate at CSFS is for Yinka Dene to live to their fullest potential, and this project represents one way of walking alongside our community members as they reclaim wellness and self-determination. Housing is about creating space for healing, belonging, and laying a foundation for future generations.

In other news, it is my honour to invite you to the upcoming CSFS Annual General Assembly (AGA), taking place in Nadleh Whut'en on

October 2 - 3. This year's theme, Skak ha ba bay / Nezkeh ba — For Our Children, reflects our shared responsibility to uphold the inherent rights of the Nations and to ensure that our children grow up surrounded by culture, community, and safety. The AGA will be an opportunity to come together, reflect, and strengthen our collective vision. It will also serve as a platform to share updates on the status of our programs and reports. This gathering offers a valuable space to connect and engage with the activities and initiatives that will be presented.

We also continue to advance conversations on child and family jurisdiction across CSFS member Nations, listening to what families and leaders are expressing the urgent need to reclaim decision-making authority over the well-being of our children. These engagements are part of a broader call to action and emphasizes unity and the collective strength of our Nations. Your voice and leadership are vital as we move forward together. We will continue

to engage with our leadership and community to advance our self-governance and self-determination in the Child & Family and Health sectors.

It is important to realize that CSFS is not the entity to exercise jurisdiction but a vessel for our Nations to create the best model for our communities based on the well-being and safety for children and families. We have been advocating change for the last 60 years and we are finally at the precipice of a dawn for strengthening our model to meet community needs.

I am reminded that our strength comes from our unity and our unwavering focus on the wellness of each other. Together, we are creating environments where future generations will thrive; supported by the love, cultural knowledge, and strength of their communities.

Mussi Cho,

**Warner Adam**  
*CSFS Chief Executive Officer*



## Beginning of New Low-Barrier Housing for Indigenous Youth Adults and Families in Downtown Prince George



**C**arrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS), in collaboration with BC Housing, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and Yellowridge Construction, marked a major milestone with a groundbreaking ceremony for a new low-barrier housing project in downtown Prince George. This initiative will offer safe, culturally supportive homes for Indigenous individuals and young families, addressing the critical need for accessible housing.

The upcoming complex, located at 611 Brunswick Street, will feature 45 units of affordable, low-barrier housing designed to meet the unique needs of Indigenous community members, especially those facing systemic barriers to stable housing. Units for Elders will also be offered and live-in support for the younger residents will be available. The project reflects a commitment to healing, reconciliation, and the inherent right to housing for all Indigenous Peoples.

"This project is so much more than just a building; it's a promise to our

young adults and families that they are seen, valued, and supported," says CSFS Board President and Chief of Saik'uz First Nation, Chief Priscilla Mueller. "By supporting our younger generations and creating low-barrier housing rooted in culture, we are building a stronger, healthier future for generations to come."

"Our mandate at CSFS is for Yinka Dene to live to their fullest potential, and we are walking alongside our people as they reclaim their wellness and self-determination," says Warner Adam, CSFS CEO. "With this housing project, we are seeing that mandate through and investing directly in that vision. We are supporting young families and individuals in building strong foundations. Our leaders have expressed the need to provide safe spaces and places for our youth so that they do not end up on the streets, especially for the youth that are in care of the province. CSFS will provide wraparound services to ensure that the young people are guided by Elders to make wise choices for success."

"It's vital that Indigenous people have homes where they feel culturally safe and supported," said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs. "With these new homes on the way in Prince George, more local Indigenous people will have housing that meets their needs, where they can build a future with deep ties to their values, culture and communities."

Working with CSFS as our construction partner is Yellowridge Construction. "Yellowridge is honoured to be partnering with Carrier Sekani Family Services on this transformative housing project," says Ed Mocnik, Vice President of Construction at Yellowridge Construction. "Their dedication to delivering culturally grounded, community-driven services is aligned with Yellowridge's mission to leave a proud legacy and build a positive future for communities. We are proud to support a project that will provide safe, accessible housing and foster long-term community wellness."

The construction of the 611 Brunswick Housing Complex is scheduled for completion in winter 2026. Funding for this project includes approximately \$17.9 million from the Province through BC Housing's Indigenous Housing Fund, with an additional \$301,000 in annual operating funding. CSFS wishes to thank the gracious funders who supported the development of this crucial resource: Indigenous Services Canada contributing \$5.0 million, and the Province, through BC Housing, contributing the remaining.







# Ben Berland On the Ice: From Player to Award-Winning Coach

**B**en Berland, Director of Maintenance and Asset Management, has more than a love for housing and capital infrastructure – he is also a committed advocate for Indigenous hockey players throughout BC and Canada, which led him to receive the 2025 Indigenous Impact and Legacy Award from BC Hockey. Ben's passion for Indigenous hockey has grown through his years of coaching and playing hockey in Northern BC. We sat down with Ben to dig deeper into his passion and the "why" behind it.

## Where did your love for hockey start?

"Oh, a lot of places, but mainly it came from my uncle, Archie Gladro. Every time we went to Uncle Archie's, he always had the game on, any kind of sport, but especially hockey. I loved visiting him because we didn't watch much hockey at home. He formed a lot of my love of sport. He always said, 'are you ready for the game?' And when I went over there, he'd be either, 'are you ready for a game to watch it? Are you ready for the game to play it? Are you ready for the game to coach it?' He actually bought me my first hockey gear I had when I was just a little kid, so he really shaped who I am as a person in sport."

## How did you become a coach?

"I had another uncle, Art Epson, who got me into coaching. I started with track and field, then ball, and eventually hockey in my early 20s. I learned from Chris Johnston, a legendary BC coach, who said, 'We don't coach sports, we coach kids.' That stuck with me. Coaching should be child centred. Not win or results centred. Most kids just want to have



fun, shoot a puck, score a goal, and be goofy. At the end of our course, Chris told us, 'If you ever turn my kid off sports, that's one sin I'll never forgive.' I still remember most of the kids I coached. I think of every player. That's how I got into it. My background is in physical education. I have an undergrad in it and a master's in sports science. I really enjoy coaching and sport more than anything else."

## What inspired you to advocate for Indigenous hockey players of all ages?

"When I was nine, we decided to move to Fort St. James. I wasn't big on the move myself, I liked living in Edmonton. But my mom and dad said, 'well, if we move to Fort St. James, you get to play hockey.' That was it, I was sold. Fort St. James itself is a big hockey town and there were some really good players there and one of

the guys I grew up watching was a guy named Cecil Martin. Cecil played well into his 50s and he was a very good player, and if he was given the same opportunities as, say, Brian Spencer who was the first guy from Fort St. James to play in the NHL, he would have made professional hockey. This is why I do what I do. Because there weren't opportunities for Indigenous people in hockey in those days."

Ben's commitment to his craft is evident through his accomplishments and the recognition he's received, including the prestigious Tom Longboat Award for excellence in sport in 2001. Since 2002, he has also been one of the first Indigenous people in Canada to become a certified High Performance 1 coach. His achievements are a powerful reminder that hard work and dedication lead to success and that individuals like Ben are driving progress in Indigenous sport.

## Program Highlight: Early Years Preschool



**T**he CSFS Early Years Preschool program is designed to support young children three to five years of age in their early developmental stages. The program runs from September to June and offers a nurturing environment where children can grow through play-based learning.

Held twice a week in Vanderhoof on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the program accommodates both morning (9:00–11:30 AM) and afternoon (12:30–3:00 PM) sessions, each welcoming up to 20 children with two dedicated educators. Families pay a monthly fee of \$155.00 and may be qualified for government subsidies which reduces the fee to \$135.00 per month.

“Early Years preschool is open to all ethnicities and our programming embraces diversity and encourages cultural exchange,” says Dawne Persson, Director of Early Childhood Development. “Families are invited

to share traditions, stories, and even meals, enriching the classroom experience with multicultural perspectives.”

“A typical day at the preschool includes free play, snack time (provided by families), structured circle time, and outdoor or gym activities. Children also participate in field trips throughout the year, visiting farms, libraries, and other community spaces. These experiences help foster curiosity and social interaction.”

“As children are unique, a two-and-a-half-hour preschool class may not be suitable for everyone. If there are difficulties at any time, a consultation will be set up between the educator and the parent(s) to determine what might be best for the child. We welcome children with disabilities, and our staff adapts activities to meet their needs,” continues Dawne.

**Currently, the preschool is at full capacity, but families are encouraged to join the waitlist. Interested families can contact Dawne Persson at 250-567-2900 ext 2042 or [dawne@csfs.org](mailto:dawne@csfs.org) for registration information.**





# Colours of the Rainbow

## Nedut'en Dialect

Dilk'i'n  
(Red)

Kwin Dut'en  
(Orange)

Diltl'its  
(Yellow)

Y'in Witl'its  
(Green)

Dildzeen  
(Blue)

Mee' Dut'en  
(Indigo)

Mee' Dut'en  
(Purple)

Source of spelling: [www.firstvoices.com](http://www.firstvoices.com)





# Jurisdiction: Skak ha ba bay / Nezkeh ba (For the Children)

## Jurisdiction barbecue sparks community conversations about child and family services

Last July, we hosted our first multi-community “Skak ha ba bay / Nezkeh ba” (For Our Children) Jurisdiction event in Prince George. The barbecue was part of a broader effort by the CSFS Jurisdiction team to strengthen relationships with member Nations and talk about the future of child and family services—not just in their home communities, but also for those living away from them.

We heard many powerful messages about what children and their families need to grow up safe, healthy, and proud of who they are and where they

come from. People spoke about the need to keep children connected to language, culture, and the land. Those living away from community shared challenges they face in accessing support networks for themselves or their loved ones. Others reminded us of the positive impact that a loving home has on community building and healing.

The insights shared at this gathering will help shape the laws and practices that guide how CSFS provides child and family services for current and future generations of Yinka Dene.

Mussi cho to everyone who came out to share meals, stories, and songs. To those who couldn’t make it this time, we hope to see you at a future gathering. Your voice is needed in

reawakening Carrier and Sekani laws for child and family well-being. When you walk this journey with us, you’re carrying on the legacy from our ancestors that saw children raised under the guidance of culture, clans, and community.

You can find upcoming events and more information about the jurisdiction journey at [www.csfs.org/jurisdiction](http://www.csfs.org/jurisdiction).

“Events like these remind us how powerful it is to come together. I hope there are many more like this to come—my spirit needed that.”

- Community Member









# Transforming Indigenous Health Care in Northern BC - One Heart at a Time

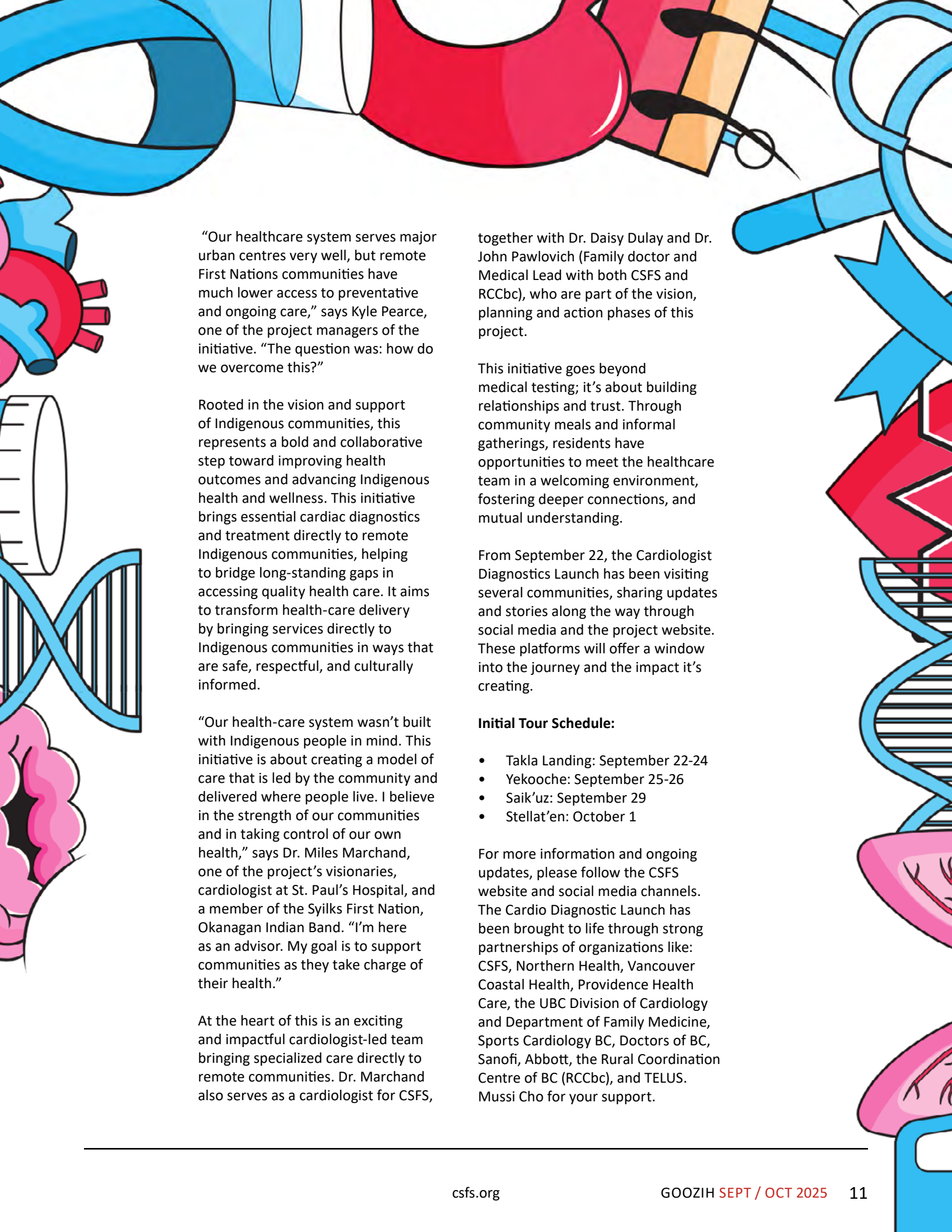


Accessing health care remains a significant challenge for many Indigenous communities in Canada. Barriers such as navigating complex systems and policies, traveling long distances for basic services, and facing systemic racism and cultural insensitivity in medical settings have contributed to persistent health disparities. For many First Nations communities, specialized care often requires journeys of hundreds of kilometres to urban centres, trips that are not only costly but also emotionally taxing. Elders, parents with young children, and those

without reliable transportation are especially affected.

In response to these challenges, there is a growing movement to bring culturally safe and accessible wellness services closer to Indigenous communities. Organizations like Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS) were founded to meet this need, creating health environments rooted in ancestral values and cultural knowledge. This vision is shared by many who recognize the shortcomings in the current system.

One promising contribution to this communal issue is the **One Heart at a Time - Cardio Diagnostic Tour**, a collaborative medical outreach initiative aimed at improving cardiovascular care in Northern British Columbia. This project reimagines how care is delivered, bringing services directly to the people. Instead of requiring patients to leave their homes and communities, the diagnostic launch brings advanced cardiac diagnostics, such as stress tests and echocardiograms, to local clinics, making care more accessible,



"Our healthcare system serves major urban centres very well, but remote First Nations communities have much lower access to preventative and ongoing care," says Kyle Pearce, one of the project managers of the initiative. "The question was: how do we overcome this?"

Rooted in the vision and support of Indigenous communities, this represents a bold and collaborative step toward improving health outcomes and advancing Indigenous health and wellness. This initiative brings essential cardiac diagnostics and treatment directly to remote Indigenous communities, helping to bridge long-standing gaps in accessing quality health care. It aims to transform health-care delivery by bringing services directly to Indigenous communities in ways that are safe, respectful, and culturally informed.

"Our health-care system wasn't built with Indigenous people in mind. This initiative is about creating a model of care that is led by the community and delivered where people live. I believe in the strength of our communities and in taking control of our own health," says Dr. Miles Marchand, one of the project's visionaries, cardiologist at St. Paul's Hospital, and a member of the Syilks First Nation, Okanagan Indian Band. "I'm here as an advisor. My goal is to support communities as they take charge of their health."

At the heart of this is an exciting and impactful cardiologist-led team bringing specialized care directly to remote communities. Dr. Marchand also serves as a cardiologist for CSFS,

together with Dr. Daisy Dulay and Dr. John Pawlovich (Family doctor and Medical Lead with both CSFS and RCCbc), who are part of the vision, planning and action phases of this project.

This initiative goes beyond medical testing; it's about building relationships and trust. Through community meals and informal gatherings, residents have opportunities to meet the healthcare team in a welcoming environment, fostering deeper connections, and mutual understanding.

From September 22, the Cardiologist Diagnostics Launch has been visiting several communities, sharing updates and stories along the way through social media and the project website. These platforms will offer a window into the journey and the impact it's creating.

#### **Initial Tour Schedule:**

- Takla Landing: September 22-24
- Yekooche: September 25-26
- Saik'uz: September 29
- Stellat'en: October 1

For more information and ongoing updates, please follow the CSFS website and social media channels. The Cardio Diagnostic Launch has been brought to life through strong partnerships of organizations like: CSFS, Northern Health, Vancouver Coastal Health, Providence Health Care, the UBC Division of Cardiology and Department of Family Medicine, Sports Cardiology BC, Doctors of BC, Sanofi, Abbott, the Rural Coordination Centre of BC (RCCbc), and TELUS. Mussi Cho for your support.



# CULTURE CORNER

## Me, My Guitar and the Stage - Jamming Out with Joel West

**J**oel West is a singer-songwriter and storyteller from Burns Lake. His music carries the grit of blues, the soul of rock and country, and the heartbeat of his culture.

*Joel got his passion and love for music from watching his late father, Alec West, Sr. play for family, friends and strangers. Seeing how music brought joy and hope to people who were sometimes having a hard day, Joel instinctively knew he wanted to be of service to his community through music. With his first debut at 13 years old, Joel rocks the stage and keeps people on the dance floor sweating it out for hours.*

*With performances across Turtle Island, Joel has opened for artists like Crystal Shawanda, Derek Miller, Murray Porter and Ernest Monias and played major events including the Canada Winter Games and Surrey Canada Day. Joel's creative journey proves that no dream is too far out of reach when we stay consistent and keep showing up.*

### **When did music first become part of your life?**

Through my late dad. There was always music at our home. Whenever visitors would come over, my dad would pull out his guitar and entertain our guests. My uncle Jimmy was the one who taught me how to play my



first song 'Dead Flowers' by the Rolling Stones. My late buddy Kelly Dennis taught me how to play barre chords.

### **What stories or experiences inspired you when you made the album 'Cause That's How Baby Does It'?**

Every song on that album is a piece of myself and all moments and experiences I have gone through. For example, the song 'Gramma' was about missing my grandmother. I grew up having a special relationship with my grandparents, both from my mom and my dad's side. Although, I didn't get to meet my mom's dad, the late Frank Erickson.

The song 'Happy Inyun' just happened as a conversation with my buddy. He showed me a little clip and a small outline of what he was working on, and I tweaked it and sent it back to him in about five minutes. He listened to it and surprisingly let me have the song. It's the little things like this that have really made a difference in my journey.

### **Do you have a songwriting process?**

To be honest, a lot of the time I just pick up my guitar and start messing around, and just sort of go from there. Ideas will come to me, and I pick up my phone and hit record. I have so many songs ready to go—enough to

put together a new album, which I'm starting to work on now. So, stay tuned for more original music next year.

### **When do you know a song is done and ready to be released?**

You feel it and know. I've learned not to overthink every song I write. I just pick up the guitar and jam out. It's funny, sometimes I hear a snippet of the song in my head before I even play it. It's a process that keeps me grounded and rooted, especially in my sobriety journey.

### **How would you describe your sound to someone who's never heard you?**

I would say it's classic-country-rock. Although, I pull a lot of influences from different genres. I love listening to Ray Charles, Hank Junior and Hank Senior, Merle Haggard, Buddy Guy, Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughn. You know, the legends. And of course, CCR [Creedance Clearwater Revival].

### **Have you ever wrestled with a song that just didn't want to come together?**

I have more than 12 of them that I'm currently working on. Writing can be challenging, especially when you're really pondering about what to say in the best way possible.

Is there a lesson from your music journey that you wish you could send back to your younger self?

Don't worry what anybody says! Just go out and do it because you only get one shot. Practice every day, even when you don't want to, and do your best to stand out from the crowd.

If you won the lottery tomorrow, what would be your first purchase?

A happy meal.



Listen to Joel West's album "Cause That's How Baby Does It"



## Calls for Justice Updates

A poster for a Research Focus Group in Prince George. It features a background image of a landscape with a red wavy border at the bottom. The text includes the event title, date, time, location, registration information, and logos for UNBC and Carrier Sekani Family Services. A QR code is also present.

**Research Focus Group:  
Prince George**

Saturday October 4  
12pm - 4pm

301 George St, Prince George, BC

Register with Emily  
at [emaclise@csfs.org](mailto:emaclise@csfs.org)  
by September 29

UNBC

CARRIER SEKANI  
FAMILY SERVICES

This project has been reviewed by the UNBC and Carrier Sekani Family Services Ethics Boards.

Friday of each month. Please join us in a safe space to connect, reflect, and discuss how the 231 Calls for Justice can guide change within our communities and organizations.

### Research Focus Group

Community members affected by the Highway of Tears and MMIWG, as well as those with ties to the community or working in academic fields, are invited to take part in a Research Focus Group this Fall/Winter. Focus groups will be held in Northern BC, with locations based on interest and responses.

The Calls for Justice team continue to raise awareness and support action around the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people (MMIWG2S+). In June, the team supported various MMIWG2S+ awareness walks and initiatives and remains present at the monthly Healing Fire as a space for reflection and connection.

Planning is underway for the 20th Anniversary Highway of Tears Symposium, to be held in Prince George on April 2026, where we will discuss "Where we've been, where we are, and where we are

going" with advocacy and change, in regards to the 33 Highway of Tears recommendations, and 231 Calls for Justice.

In the near future, the team will also host a photo series exhibit at Two Rivers Gallery, in honour of the National Day of Action for MMIW. This photo series is part of the Hope and Strength campaign that combats negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, and highlights the hope and strength that has remained throughout generations. Additionally, staff and service providers are invited to our monthly Coffee & Tea Hour at the George Street location on the last

The goal is to gather input on the 33 Highway of Tears recommendations; what's been done and what still needs attention. Meals will be provided.

If you're interested in participating, please contact Emily MacLise at [emaclise@csfs.org](mailto:emaclise@csfs.org)





# Nadleh Whut'en First Nation

## You're in **healing hands** with Carrier Sekani Family Services



CSFS provides a variety of holistic services to member Nations – have you explored all the services we have to offer?

Impact reports have been made for each member Nation to identify community needs and provide information on available services. These reports are a powerful tool for understanding and accessing information. Here are four services that you told us you wanted to know more about:

To view the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation Report, other Nation impact reports, or to find programs and services in your community, visit [www.csfs.org/healinghands](http://www.csfs.org/healinghands), where the information is available for you.

# 38%

of respondents from Nadleh have heard of:

- **Collaborative Practices Program:** Collaborative Practices offers specialized facilitation for families in crisis or needing extra support to resolve a dispute. This program is based on research conducted around Carrier decision-making practices to ensure families receive culturally relevant support. Facilitation can include Family Group Conferences, Permanency Planning Meetings, Family Case Planning Conferences, Youth Transition Conferences, and Prevention Meetings. Anyone can refer to the program.

## Key Survey Results

### Staff members at CSFS...

...are easy to talk to.

# 78%

answered yes

...are involved in care or treatment options.

# 58%

answered yes

...explain things clearly.

# 73%

answered yes

...deliver high-quality services and programs.

# 75%

answered yes

...treat me with respect.

# 85%

answered yes

...follow up on appointments and action items consistently.

# 63%

answered yes

- **Who is eligible:** Families living in/away from community
- **How to access:** In person, virtual
- **Phone:** (250) 562-3591  
[www.csfs.org/collaborativepractices](http://www.csfs.org/collaborativepractices)

# 33%

of respondents have heard of:

- **Middle Years Program:** The Middle Years Program provides holistic, engaging, and culturally enriched programming to enhance children's development in all developmental domains. Services include Equine Assisted Learning groups, one-on-one services, sensory groups, sexual health workshops, culture camps, and more. Children can be self-referred by family members or by a professional.
- **Who is eligible:** Children aged 6–12 living in/away from community
- **How to access:** In person
- **Phone:** (250) 567-2900 ext. 2999  
[www.csfs.org/middleyears](http://www.csfs.org/middleyears)

# 36%

of respondents have heard of:

- **Youth Services:** Youth Services provides wraparound and low-barrier support to children and youth. Programming includes cultural, recreational and life skills opportunities in a group or through a one-to-one service delivery approach.
- **Who is eligible:** Children/youth aged 8–29 living in/away from community
- **How to access:** In person
- **Phone:** (250) 567-2900  
[www.csfs.org/youth-services](http://www.csfs.org/youth-services)



50%

of respondents from Nadleh  
have heard of:

- **Dzee Ba'yugh Safe House (Heart House):** Dzee Ba'yugh (Heart House) Safe House program offers a safe place for women and their children fleeing family violence. The safe house, located in Burns Lake, can support up to six women and their children for up to 30 days. Depending on the situation, stay may be extended month-to-month for a maximum of 12 months. The program also offers cultural activities and teachings, ceremonies, individual and group programming, and wraparound support.
- **Who is eligible:** All women/children
- **How to access:** In person
- **Phone:** (778) 924-0004

[www.csfs.org/safe-house-dzee-bayugh-heart-house](http://www.csfs.org/safe-house-dzee-bayugh-heart-house)

## Photo Submissions

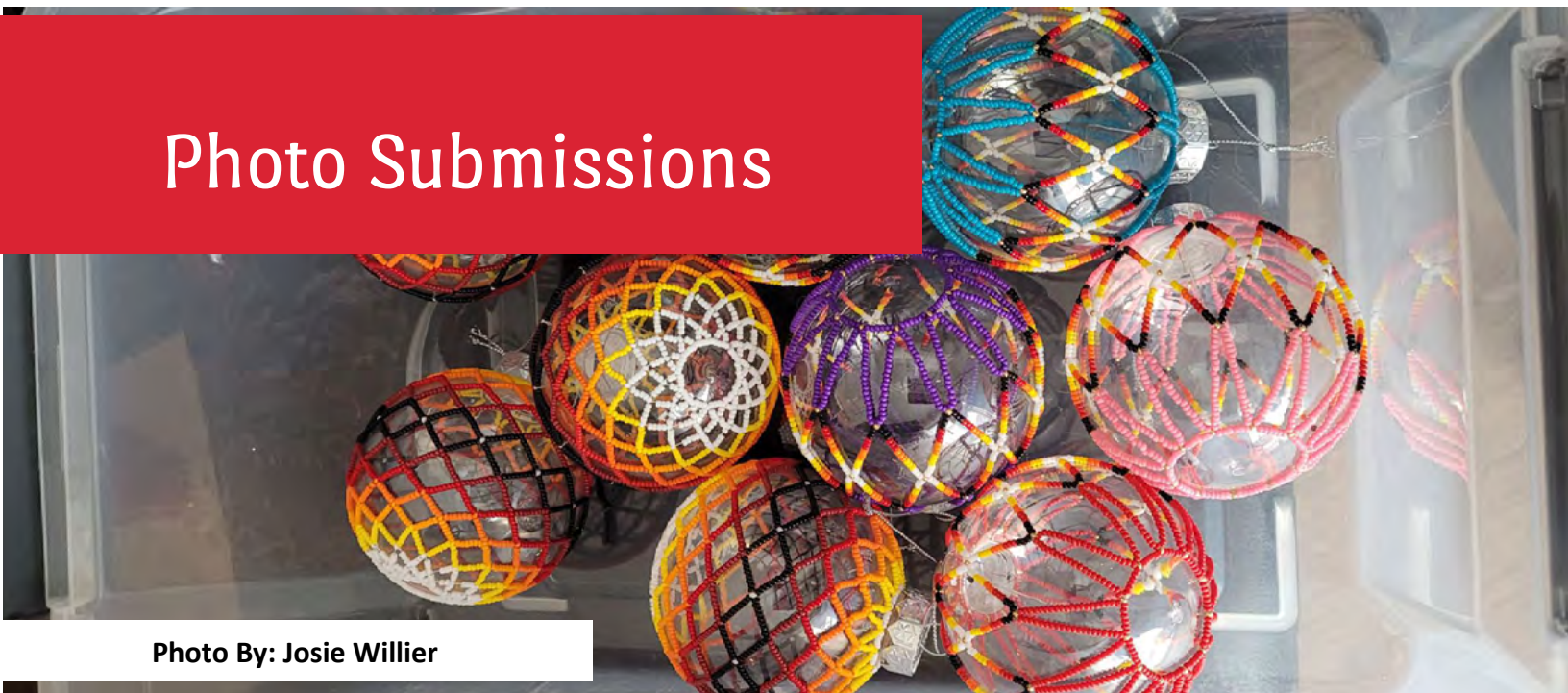


Photo By: Josie Willier



Photo By: Saik'uz Mel

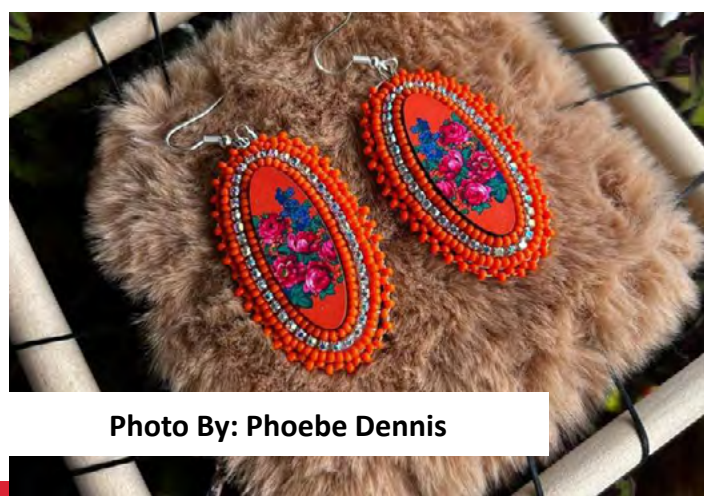


Photo By: Phoebe Dennis

### Want to share your photos?

Send us your best photos, and we'll include a number of them right here in the next issue!  
Submit your photos to David Sikobe at [dsikobe@csfs.org](mailto:dsikobe@csfs.org).





Photo By: Mark Anthony Louis



Photo By: Lucy Martin



Photo By: Crystal Dawn Behn



Photo By: Francoise Prince



Photo By: Kassi Leigh





20  
24  
—  
25

**Skak ha ba bay / Nezkeh ba**

*For Our Children*

**2024/25 Annual General Assembly**

**Nadleh Whut'en First Nation**

📍 **Nadleh Gymnasium**

**October 2-3, 2025**





