



Stqeeeye' Learning Society

2023 Annual Report



Our Organization

Stqeeye' is an Indigenous led charitable non-profit organization based on Salt Spring Island, BC in the traditional territory of the Quw'utsun Peoples. The non-profit was established by family descendants of Xwaaqw'um Village, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Youth, and other like-minded individuals for the common purpose of restoring the land and cultural sharing. Stqeeye' is committed to preserving the Xwaaqw'um village site in partnership with Quw'utsun mustimuhw (Cowichan people) and Cowichan Tribes.



Board Member Sume'el

2022-23 Board of Directors

Late Ron George - President
Late Fred George
Rosanna Jackson - Vice President
Tousiliye - Terri Allen - Secretary
Rhonda Sullivan - Treasurer
Queletstunaat - Audrey George
Sume'el - James John (JJ) Allen
T'awaxwultun - Joe Akerman
Kimberly Sullivan
Saleliye'naat - Stephanie Peter
Q'utxu-lenuhw - Tim Kulchyski

Our Staff

Sulsameethl - Deb George - Co-Manager
Leanna Boyer - Co-Manager
Jennifer Aberle - Financial Coordinator
Brianna Thorne - Education Coordinator
Sulatiye' - Maiya Modeste -
P'hwulhp Restoration Coordinator
Rachel Bevington - Restoration Coordinator
Tyee Joseph - Aquatic Technician
Tony George - Indigenous Land Steward
Ken Elliott - Nursery Manager
Colleen Joseph - Nursery Manager
Lucas Elliott - Nursery Technician
Michael Nash - Maintenance Technician
Ebonie Elliott - Summer Student

Our Board of Directors

The Stqeeye' Learning Society is led by 11 board members, a majority who are Quw'utsun mustimuhw. As an Indigenous non-profit we are actively seeking to decolonize the governance structure imposed upon us, creating a governance structure that better reflects our traditional ways of knowing and being.

Our Misson

The Stqeeye' Learning Society supports self-determination - nothing about us without us; relationship-building as the foundation of our community; and the sharing of traditional and ecological restoration practices through land-based education.

Our Vison Statement

Stqeeye' Learning Society is committed to preserving the land and water at the Xwaaqw'um by strengthening our Quw'utsun relationships. This will be accomplished by Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Youth working in collaboration with all our staff and partners to develop programs for future generations. We wish for our Youth and Elders to be proud, to value one another for who they are, and to serve as educators, land stewards and advocates for Xwaaqw'um.

Our Core Values

All staff, Board of Directors, volunteers, and community partners will emulate these values as we work in partnership to deliver our programs: Reciprocity, Honesty, Tradition, Integrity, Respect, Inclusive, Trust, Communication, Accountability and Honouring of Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Staff Biography - Brianna

Hi friends, my name is Brianna Thorne. I am of mixed Indigenous ancestry with roots from the Quw'utsun Territory in the village of Khenipsen and Lhumlumults'. Today I am grateful to not only reside in our village but to also work on the lands of historical village at Xwaaqw'um. When asked to write a bio about myself it felt odd given that we are an Indigenous-led organization and as such it is not customary to speak solely of oneself. We make decisions together, plan our work together, carry out our work together, much of all we are and do is done together. In this way, it feels only right to share of our Stqeeeye' family as part of who I am.

Working with the Stqeeeye' Learning Society has been the highlight of my life. Although formally trained in Education with Dean's Honour List Distinctions as well as, Mc Gill University's Executive Certificate Program Emerging Leaders for Sustainable Community Development, working on the land with Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Youth have taught me so much more than I ever learnt in a traditional educational setting. Throughout my lifetime I have felt a strong affinity for nature. From the time I was a small child it has

been hard to keep me inside. My heart and soul are pulled to be out on the land, tending to, giving back to, and learning from the land, much like the ways of our ancestors. Our Elders share "When we return our youth to land, we are putting a heartbeat back into it" This is a miracle I witness every day. Since we have returned to the land with youth, we have witnessed the return of many plant, animal, insect, and fowl species that were thought to be near extinction. To me, working with Stqeeeye' not only fulfils my lifelong dream of working with youth it also fosters my relationship with the living world through an interconnectedness beyond my wildest imagination. Huy tseep q'u siem (thank you honoured friends) for taking the time to read more about me.



Message from our Board of Directors

This year at the Stqeeeye' Learning Society has been marked by both sorrow and inspiration. The loss of our President was deeply felt, yet it has fueled our determination to uphold his vision of creating a space of profound cultural connection for the Cowichan Nation. In his honour and memory, we took a significant step forward by purchasing land, solidifying our commitment to our community's future. Throughout the year, we hosted numerous enriching learning events, fostering a vibrant atmosphere of growth and knowledge exchange. Our fundraising efforts exceeded expectations, and our successful bursaries and grants allowed us to continue to support our initiatives and pay our employees a living wage. As we look ahead, we are filled with excitement to build upon our foundation, strengthening our existing programs while adding important initiatives such as our land and culture based curriculum that will foster even deeper connections and understanding within our community and our allies.

- Rosanna Jackson



Cover and dancers photos by Alex Harris



Pam and Tyee at Convergence in 2023

Land Acquisition Campaign

Coming Home is a once-in-a-generation campaign, a chance to bring our Quw'utsun (Cowichan) people back to live in our traditional territory in Xwaaqw'um (Burgoyne Bay) for the first time in 150 years.

The community of Salt Spring Island is coming together to support the Stqeeye' Learning Society's acquisition of an extraordinary 10 acre property in Xwaaqw'um. It is uniquely suited as a home base to expand our wetlands restoration work, and also expand our Youth on the Land program, which reconnects youth with the land.

Coming Home provides an opportunity to re-introduce native plants and traditional indigenous food systems, which will knit together many projects, including carbon sequestration, critical habitat protection and food security and sovereignty.



Mi tse' t'akw'
(COMING HOME)

Mi tse' t'akw'
stqeeye.ca/land

A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION LAND ACQUISITION

Salt Springers are coming together to bring the Quw'utsun people home to their territory.

Shtataxus Learning Centre Infrastructure

Shtataxus Learning Centre Infrastructure project is a complex of three interconnected buildings—office facility, outdoor learning centre, canoe/carving shed—designed to restore and sustain the transmission of traditional knowledge from Elders to Youth of our cultural practices, crafts, and ecological knowledge. Shtataxus means “sloping roof” in Hul’q’umi’num’ and refers to the traditional Coast Salish style of roof construction. Planning is underway for Phase I: an outdoor learning centre and canoe shed on a waterfront parcel of land at Xwaaqw’um (within BC Parks). After years of working with Cowichan Tribes to gain use of the site, BC Parks is negotiating a license of use for Cowichan Tribes who will in turn sign a sublicense with Stqeeye’ in August 2023. Dashwood Construction Ltd. is Stqeeye’s general contractor and project manager, with Donald Gunn as architect and GT Engineering as structural engineer.

Phase I of the project is funded through a grant from First Peoples Cultural Council (\$400,000) and a \$125,000 contribution from School District 64 for the learning centre. Construction is expected to begin in September and be completed in February 2024. Stqeeye’ is overjoyed with anticipation of having a safe and secure shed for our traditional dugout canoe and to be able to host Elders, Youth and community in the indoor/outdoor learning centre through all the seasons.



Tony and Mike 2023



The Dashwoods pouring footings in 2023



Our Grandmothers' Garden P'hwulhp (Garry Oak) Restoration Project

Our Grandmother's Garden is a native food garden that is creating a safe, accessible space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks to learn about, participate in, and support First Nations food sovereignty and security. The P'hwulhp restoration project is funded by Priority Places Species at Risk Funding (Environment and Climate Change Canada) and Salt Spring Island Foundation.

The name of this garden is meant to honour the matriarchs before us, those present and our matriarchs of the future. Garry Oak and camas meadows were traditionally taken care of by our life givers and we honour that tradition for our ancestors.

This project aims to recreate conditions for historical camas meadow cultivation. Traditional burning and intensive cultivation of the meadows were done by our ancestors to keep the valuable food plants healthy. The banning of cultural burning, removal of our people and extreme deer browsing has led to the removal of most of the flowering plants in Xwaaqw'um, and threatens the success of any food harvesting here. The fenced restoration project has excluded deer from this sensitive ecosystem, to allow time for flowers to return. This in turn supports over 100 Species at Risk that are endemic to Garry Oak Ecosystems.



Camas by Stuart Pagaduan



Maiya, Tony and Ebonie in Grandmother's Garden, 2023





Wetland 1 thrived in 2023, hosting many Red-legged frogs.

Important Restoration Initiatives

Wetland Restoration initiatives at Xwaaqw'um are funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada through two federal grants: Nature Smart Climate Solutions and Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk.

Funding for the 2022-27 Wetland restoration project is also supported by Indigenous Watersheds Initiative, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, BC Parks License Plate Fund, and Victoria Foundation Climate Solutions Grant. There are two wetland focus areas in this large project. Nature Smart Climate Solutions work area includes the 324 ha forested hillside of Mt Sullivan. New wetlands will clean and filter water as it runs off Mt. Sullivan and into Xwaaqw'um creek. Old logging roads will be deactivated to prevent run off and landslides from ruining this fish habitat. The AFSAR area as we call it focuses on the upper portion of Lee Creek above a culvert that is stopping fish from reaching critical rearing habitat. This project aims to create more fish and wetland habitat and bringing more water storage capacity to the defunct agricultural fields and ditches.

Stqeeeye's goals include bringing back beaver to the landscape - a proven ecosystem architect, to restore what was once a thriving wetland valley full of berries and food plants.

Stqeeeye' has many key partner groups, without whom the work would not happen! We wish to acknowledge and thank all of our Partners: Cowichan Tribes, BC Parks, Quw'utsun Cultural Connections, School Districts 64 and 79, the Nature Conservancy, the Water Preservation Society and John Milson, Dr. Briony Penn, RBC Museum, BCWF, RBCM, The MotherTree Network, Tony MacLeod, Ren Ferguson, UBC and Dr. Tara Martin, Pete Davidson and Birds Canada, Robin Annschild, Miranda Cross, and Ken's Native Plants.

We strive to work with partners who value the Traditional Ecological Knowledge that our Elders hold, and work to find ways to incorporate Western science alongside the TEK. BCWF Wetlands Workforce team provided free Amphibian Monitoring Training to Stqeeeye' staff in Spring 2023

Youth on the Land

A Year in Review: January 2023-December 2023

'Uy skweyul. What a wonderful year we have had with our Youth on the Land program through the ongoing financial support from the following funding partners: Salt Spring Island Foundation, The Berman Foundation, Indigenous Resiliency Fund, Salt Spring Island and School Districts 64, 79 and 61.

Throughout the school year we hosted a variety of youth groups from School districts 79, 64 and 61 on the land for a total of 1,059 youth ages 12- 18 on our ancestral unceded territory at Xwaaq'wum.

Guided by the teachings of our Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and Youth Mentors we explored and celebrated Indigeneity from a historical perspective, honoring the ancestral ways of knowing while seeking to explore who we are as modern Indigenous People. As we are faced with an ever-changing world and landscape: our focus has been on land restoration using traditional ecological knowledge, climate change mitigation, carbon intensive food systems and how to grow, harvest and preserve traditional food. It is our goal and dream to move forward together in the best way possible. It has been said that Education helped get us in this mess, and education when done integrally can be the vehicle for profound change, helping us to walk together in a new way.

Exciting news: It is with the deepest gratitude to our dear friends at School District 64, for their generous donation of the funds to build Our Outdoor Learning Center. We are pleased to announce it is nearing completion and will soon be fully operational to host our youth.



Youth on the Land brings Indigenous youth and Elders together on the land at Xwaaq'wum.





Maiya leads a group on a medicinal plant walk at Xwaaq'wum.

Snuw uy ulh tuna tumuhw (Teachings of the Land): Reconnecting Indigenous Land Stewardship practices & traditions

Through a grant from the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), our education team has begun developing a land-based curriculum. Our aim is to create curricula that addresses climate resiliency to Indigenous youth, their families, and communities through the development of curriculum solely based in traditional ecological knowledge and practices as passed down by our Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers. Of equal importance the curriculum aims to be an accredited course framework aligned with the current BC Education Standards.

The project coordinates and facilitates 3 working groups including: Elders Advisory Board, Youth Advisory Board, and team of highly skilled and sought after Indigenous Educators, District curriculum writers, Policy and change makers bringing with them a plethora of lived experience both in the current Canadian Education system as well as having lived Indigenous experience in colonial settler society.

In addition to developing a land-based curriculum in the second phase, through our land-based education program, we will identify and train a team of land and water guardians who will work with other Quw'utsun communities to identify and lead the restoration of coastal eco-systems.

Aiyanna's Gift

In October of 2022 one of our Youth on the Land students suddenly passed, this left a huge hole in the hearts of all who knew her. This tragedy amplified the need for our youth to have something to do when they age out of school. Hence, a grant was written and secured to start an extension of our Youth on the Land program to include youth ages 18 -30.

Similarly to Youth on the Land, the goal is to uplift, empower and support our youth as they transition to the next phase of life. Aiyanna's gift will be hosted once per week in the Spring of 2024 on the land at Xwaaq'wum. While participants are with us, they will be met by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Mentors to engage in a variety of activities including cedar harvesting and weaving, native plant identification and sustainable harvesting techniques, be provided with the opportunity to work with traditional native plants such as Camas, Garry oak, Western - red cedar. In addition to this, participants will gain experience working with a variety of art mediums such as beading, creating natural dyes for artwork, drum making and more.

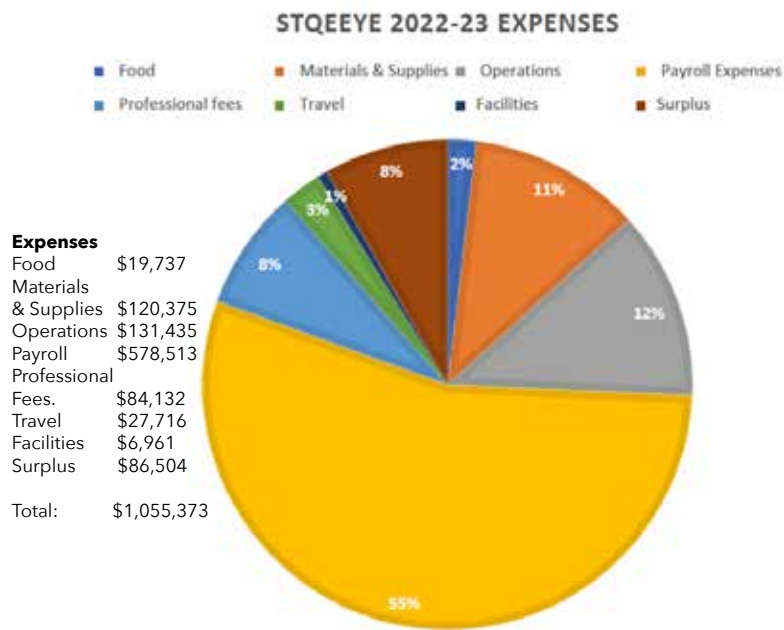
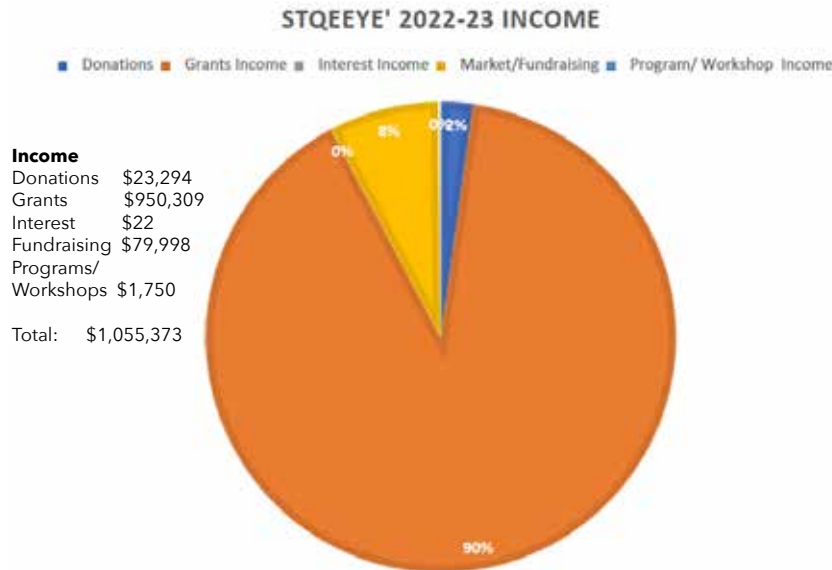
A unique aspect of our program is that our youth participants will be provided the opportunity to enhance their skill set by working in a variety of land restoration settings. Through experiential learning, and the "know-do-see" pedagogy our youth will gain knowledge in Land Stewardship, cultural practices as well explore who they are as Indigenous people in modern day Canada.

The hope is to educate and train as many Indigenous youth as possible within the Stqee'ye' group of projects, creating the next generation of Land Stewards.

Funding & the Future

Huy steep q'u to all that made this funding possible. We raise our hands in gratitude for making our dream become reality for the Stqeeeye' Learning Society: to work in close relationship with the land, to connect with ourselves, our ancestors and for helping us ensure a future for our generations to come. Supporters include private donors, businesses and community organizations.

2022-23 Financials



2022-23 Funders



2022-23 Corporate Supporters





Message from our Elders

Prior to contact, the Indigenous People of Xwaaqw'um lived in reciprocal relationship with the land, harvested from the abundant natural food systems, and tending the land and waters with great care. Families passed down the responsibility to tend to these important areas to their children, and the members of Stqeeeye' Learning Society are direct descendants of the last Indigenous Stewards of the land. Due to this direct connection to this place, Stqeeeye' Land Stewards and Knowledge Keepers are intimately connected to the land and ecosystems at Xwaaqw'um. We share our responsibilities to the land, sea and each other in this spot, as we always have.

Support Stqeeeye' Learning Society

Stqeeeye' is a registered charity (CRA # 8089 94555 RR 0001) and we gratefully accept donations.

Ts'ewut (contribute) on our website through Canada Helps, by e-transfer to admin@stqeeeye.ca or by mail to: Stqeeeye' Learning Society, PO Box 407, Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2W1.

Sign up to our newsletter and volunteer list online at www.stqeeeye.ca or www.xwaaqwum.com



Xwaaqw'um



@xwaaqwum





Leanna, Brianna, Maiya, Tyee, Jordan, Tony, Sulsameethl and Makayla at the new land on possession date, 2023.

www.stqeeye.ca