



**Snuneymuxw**  
**First Nation**

# **LONGHOUSE LEARNING + HEALING FRAMEWORK**

# INTRODUCTION

**Federal, Provincial and Municipal knowledge partners and collaborators support Snuneymuxw First Nation's ancestral knowledge system because it addresses the urgent need for true curative learning and healing environments, in the context of the climate crisis and recent Residential School discoveries.**

Snuneymuxw is one of the few Nations in B.C. to have a pre-Confederation treaty with the Crown. The Snuneymuxw Treaty of 1854 is indicative of Snuneymuxw's history of prioritizing its peoples' wellness, knowledge and Land.

The living Longhouse Learning and Healing Framework (LLHF), co-developed by Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools and Snuneymuxw First Nation, invokes an ancient Snuneymuxw Longhouse healing and learning model. LLHF offers a whole person approach and an intersectional solution for healing and learning. It is a holistic guide for the user, a guide that understands the intrinsic relationships within our Ancestors' knowledge system and the vital relationships between the Land, Sacred Sites, the community<sup>1</sup>, the individual, and Spirit<sup>2</sup>.

1 Community includes all beings that hold Spirit – wildlife, plant life and human life.

2 Everything in the natural world has a spiritual energy. The spiritual energy of the universe, found in the air, water and earth, encompasses all. We are all connected by this universal energy, and we can draw energy from these natural elements. Spirit provides a lens that reveals a knowledge and healing system. A knowledge system that has sustained our people through unimaginable trauma, since time immemorial. Credit: Kwulasulwut (Ellen Rice White)

## CHALLENGE

The mainstream health, education and environmental systems continue to work within a deficit model, operating in isolation. The inter-jurisdictional, siloed approach is limited and creates gaps. Current funding is insufficient for the immediate high demand and perpetuates the impacts of historical trauma and short-sighted planning.

## OPPORTUNITY

LLHF is holistic, perpetual, and proven over thousands of years. The Framework eases collaboration, providing educators and health providers a common reference. LLHF cannot exist within current legislative models, therefore we have forged a “third model” and the results have been transformative. Results that affirm the brilliance and wisdom of our ancestors. **We are seeking permanent funding to expand our intersectional infrastructure in support of health, education and housing.**

# OUR STORY SNUNEYMUXW

The Coast Salish<sup>3</sup> Snuneymuxw First Nation is one of the largest Nations in British Columbia, located on Vancouver Island, neighbouring Nanaimo, and across the water from Vancouver. Snuneymuxw Ancestors were brilliant to protect our culture, way of life, Land, waters and resources by entering into the strongest treaty agreement available to Canada. The pre-confederation Snuneymuxw Treaty of 1854 preserves and protects Snuneymuxw villages, fields, and rights to hunt and fisheries. The Memorandum of Understanding that Snuneymuxw signed with Canada and B.C. in 2021 is a fundamental and transformative shift from extinguishment to recognition and implementation of the Snuneymuxw Treaty of 1854. We are reclaiming our rightful place as stewards and beneficiaries of the Land.

Much was done over the last 165+ years to deny or erase Snuneymuxw rights, knowledge and sovereignty. While fighting and prevailing against the weight of oppressive systems, Snuneymuxw has persistently prioritized its wellness and learning through ritual, ceremony and access to the Land.

While the Potlach Ban was in place, the Ancestors were prohibited from the Longhouse. Therefore, they embraced a new way to keep Snuneymuxw learning and wellness alive. They engaged the canoe as a teacher and a means of maintaining the important protocol and practices connected to a Longhouse way of life. Like the Longhouse, the canoe is a vessel that restores the balance between the physical and spiritual realm.

Complex and compounded historical and contemporary trauma is not new to our people. Well before contact, throughout an illustrious history, the Ancestors endured unimaginable traumatic events<sup>4</sup>. They relied on the curative properties found in their Ancestral wellness and learning methodologies to rebuild and thrive. These enduring gifts from our Ancestors have been proven and lived over thousands of years.

"We are honoured to share the powerful knowledge of our Snuneymuxw Ancestors and encouraged to see our partners embrace its practical applications. We warmly welcome you to reach out and learn more."

**- Chief Mike Wyse**



<sup>3</sup> Snuneymuxw is part of the Coast Salish world. The Coast Salish Territory extends throughout present-day British Columbia and Washington State. The Salish Sea is part of the marine areas of our Territory. The Coast Salish world is bound together by certain shared values and relations, and a worldview that recognizes the interconnectedness and spirit within all things. See: <https://www.snuneymuxw.ca/nation/culture/coast-salish-culture>

<sup>4</sup> Traumatic events experienced include serious illness; war; injury; natural disasters.

# THI LELUM LONGHOUSE

**The Longhouse is more than a residency.  
The Longhouse is the physical, social,  
ceremonial, constitutional and spiritual  
centre of our world.**

Built on the foundation of natural laws,  
the Longhouse is modeled after the  
natural world and therefore, is a complete  
ecosystem. It is a continuation of the  
Land; our first teacher and healer.

The brilliance of our Ancestors  
recognizes the Longhouse as a conduit to  
Spirit, and when combined with complex  
ancestral knowledge systems, it breathes  
life into its people.



# OVERVIEW: OBTAIN AND STAY IN SPIRIT

**In the past, we were more Spirit than human, and today we are more human than Spirit.<sup>5</sup> True wellness and healing rely on us knowing the spiritual energies of the Land and our unique relationship with those energies.**

The Longhouse Learning and Healing Framework addresses the complex relationship between the emotional, physical, and mental self, in the context of Spirit. Spirituality is the essence of our people and the cornerstone of our connectivity.

LLHF offers a holistic guide to support the user's lifelong learning and wellness quest. On this quest, the user walks the sacred and eternal path, one that presents new levels of knowledge needed to heal, raise awareness of Spirit, and stay in Spirit. Through Spirit, the Framework reveals doorways to a supernatural spiritual strength that restores unmatched resiliency and coping skills.

The Snuneymuxw First Nation disciplines of the mind and body are critical to understanding and accessing Spirit. For example, the Snuneymuxw Sacred Bundle is an essential component of our ancestral knowledge system and this Framework.

**All those on the Land can benefit from a deeper understanding of the Land.**

**LLHF supports a lifelong way of being and is not confined to a period of time.**

**Ancient Sacred Sites are sources of knowledge and healing. They have their own gifts and spiritual tools.**

<sup>5</sup> Ancestors understood the benefits of humbling themselves in order to walk in Spirit. This is where we began and where we are returning.

# SHARING THE SACRED BUNDLE

The Sacred Bundle is our sacred inheritance, a precious gift from our Ancestors, that provides knowledge and healing throughout the cycle of life.

The Sacred Bundle illuminates the sacred and eternal path, the path that provides what is needed to awaken, heal and stay in Spirit. The deep codes that are necessary to sustain wellness through Spirit are still embedded in the Sacred Bundle.

The curative ingredients shared below make up the Sacred Bundle and create the safe space needed to gain a deeper understanding of self. The Bundle lives in relationship with seasonal rounds<sup>6</sup>. Its ingredients are not tiered in importance; they are employed in full and equal measure. By engaging with the entirety of our Ancestors' complex knowledge system, including the Sacred Bundle, we can access the path to purposeful, higher knowledge and deeper healing.

## Sacred Pure Intentions | uy shqwaluwun

The intention is crucial to the outcome. Pure intentions move us away from a sense of entitlement to a sense of responsibility. We are taught to ask ourselves, what is our intention? Our Ancestors would ask, "What have you learned?".

As understood by our ancestral world view, if we don't share our gifts in support of the collective, they become our sickness. We must act with pure intentions. Without Sacred Pure Intentions, we become devoid of Spirit.

## Shared Sacred Breath | Language

The supernatural being, hul'q'umi'num', the language of the Land, is a spiritual life force that we are connected to through a shared breath. It presents itself and grounds us on the sacred and eternal path towards healing. It is a gift, voice of humility, love, respect, peace, and happiness and is experienced through songs, prayers and stories.

Ancestors have stored oral records in the language. The Ancestors endured more than we can possibly imagine, post and precontact. hul'q'umi'num' stores their learning experiences and healing resolutions.

## Sacred Lens | Knowledge of self

For Indigenous populations, resilience is rooted in traditional knowledge. The Ancestors describe true knowledge as, relational knowledge. It is a deep understanding of place names, Sacred Sites, history, culture, protocols, ceremonies, rituals, and self.

The teachings of the Ancestors encourage implicit learning, knowing that learning about our relationship to the Land is inherently linked to learning about self, language and culture.

People are given the opportunity to reach the critical first step: understanding how contemporary and historical trauma has impacted self (physical, mental and emotional)/the Land/community. In the safe space created by the Sacred Bundle, we can learn about ourselves through experiencing the Land and Spirit. This deeper level of knowledge opens the path to relational, curative healing.

## Sacred Spiritual Touch | Deep healing

In the Longhouse we have ceremoniously used plant medicines to stay in Spirit and heal self, community, and the Land. This Framework combines the curative properties of plants with other Sacred Bundle ingredients. Like hul'q'umi'num', the plants ground us on the sacred and eternal path towards healing. They reconnect the individual to themselves and to their bodies.

The Longhouse reminds us, that trauma and the related survival techniques, including operating outside of the body, prevents us from moving through trauma and truly acknowledging the pain of loss and disconnection. We have absorbed the violence in our body, and now, through the Sacred Bundle, we are releasing it.

<sup>6</sup> Snuneymuxw Seasonal Round: Spring: prepare to be with the people. Use medicines, as they are at their most potent at this time; Summer: engage in activities that bring people together. Social happenings including berry picking, paddling, and naming ceremonies; Fall: prepare the mind for spiritual growth. Visit sacred sites, meditate, and pray; Winter: Engage with this most sacred time. Ceremonial events and rituals in line with the intense spiritual energy of the Land.



# WALKING TOGETHER

## RESULTS THAT AFFIRM THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR ANCESTORS

The following are examples of how we have implemented our teachings in support of relatives throughout our community. We have made great strides by walking in both worlds alongside trusted partners.

The impact of historical trauma has left Snuneymuxw with a great need, with each generation experiencing a deep impact. Ancestral teachings led us to a natural and profound order of healing and learning, beginning with children and the most vulnerable.



**In partnership with**  
**Nanaimo Ladysmith Public School**

**Qwam Qwum Stuwixwulh Community School**  
Snuneymuxw First Nation's commitment to holistic wellness, collaboration and childhood education produced Qwam Qwum Stuwixwulh Community School. The school is open to all students, as all children are affected by historical trauma and benefit from Snuneymuxw knowledge. The \$10.8 million federally and provincially funded project is the result of a unique "third model" partnership between the Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District and the Snuneymuxw First Nation. Typically, the school would be governed by a board of trustees, but in this case, it is co-governed. School curriculum prioritizes traditional Snuneymuxw teachings, supported by contemporary and ancestral technology. We strive to support all aspects of education, going beyond intellect alone. We celebrate this example of how we can reimagine what is possible and create lasting positive change to all those connected to this great Land, together.

# WALKING TOGETHER

## RESULTS THAT AFFIRM THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR ANCESTORS

**In partnership with  
Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools**

### **Syeytsus Framework**

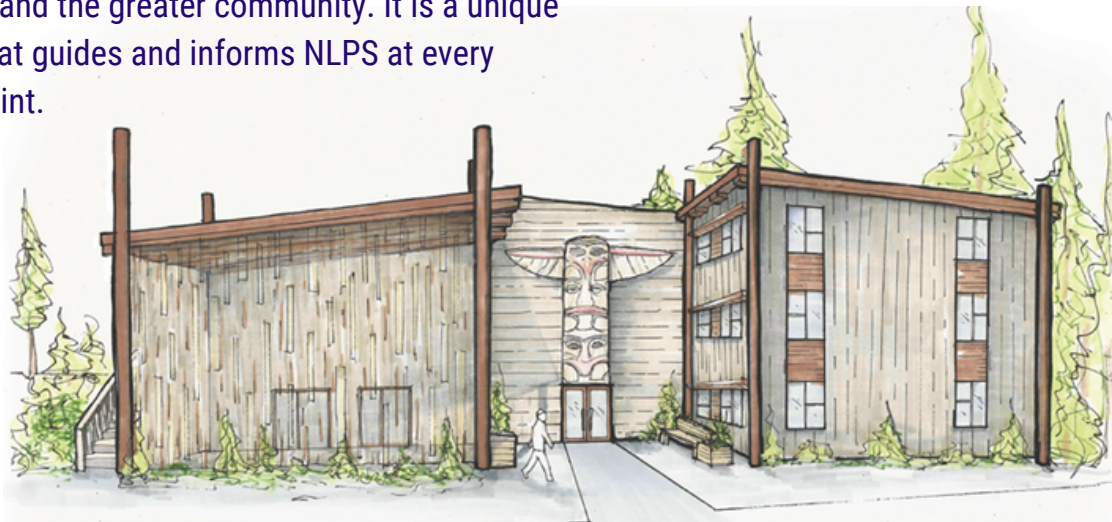
Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools (NLPS) has adopted the Syeytsus Framework as a means to improving the overall wellness of the community we serve. This policy honours Snuneymuxw as the original owners of the Lands throughout Snuneymuxw Territory. It lives and honours the teachings of the Land and First Peoples, while navigating the ever-changing complexities of today's world and society.

The Framework recognizes NLPS and Snuneymuxw's connection to Snuneymuxw Territory including the spiritual and cultural importance of Snuneymuxw values and way of life. Teachings of the Land are integrated throughout, as a means to improving the overall wellness of children and the greater community. It is a unique policy that guides and informs NLPS at every touch point.

**In partnership with  
BC Housing**

### **Cedar Woman House**

Cedar Woman House serves the immediate need for emergency shelter and services for women and children fleeing violence. It is designed around the Land, Indigenous values, cultural knowledge and learning programming. Cedar Woman House also provides inter-agency linking services, creating an ongoing, reliable women-centered relationship.





# WALKING TOGETHER

## RESULTS THAT AFFIRM THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR ANCESTORS

**In partnership with Oshio Traditional  
Chinese Medicine College of Acupuncture**

### **Snuneymuxw Wellness Centre and Acupuncture Program**

The Snuneymuxw Acupuncture Program continues a longstanding relationship with the Chinese community. We recognize the connection between Snuneymuxw Ancestral healing and wellness knowledge with other traditional practices, including Chinese Acupuncture. The Snuneymuxw Wellness Centre delivers wellness and healing to the whole community through traditional knowledge.

A common trauma response is to disconnect from Spirit and body, and this disconnection needs to be acknowledged through Sacred Touch before moving forward towards healing. Acupuncture helps users connect to self, a critical first step in connecting to sources of holistic healing.

**In partnership with  
BC Housing**

### **Snuneymuxw culturally appropriate housing**

The signed memorandum of understanding, the first of its kind in B.C., between BC Housing and the Snuneymuxw First Nation was established in order to revitalize a sense of place for Snuneymuxw people through housing.

All Snuneymuxw learning and wellness knowledge built by our ancestors, was done so by watching the relationships within, and being a part of, the natural world. Therefore, reestablishing our presence on the Land and reconnecting with our Sacred Sites, is essential to our learning and wellness.

Ancestral housing, the Longhouse, is a continuation of the Land. Therefore, the Land needs to be healed before building.

All Snuneymuxw x BC Housing developments recognize this way of being.

# WALKING TOGETHER

## RESULTS THAT AFFIRM THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR ANCESTORS

**In partnership with City of Nanaimo and  
Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools**

### **Welcome Pole**

The Welcome Pole is a 49-foot-tall carving by Snuneymuxw Master Carver Noel Brown, located on the Sway'a'Lana ancient village site (Maffeo Sutton Park, Nanaimo). It restores the healing energy to the Land and is an important source of knowledge.

From an Ancestral perspective art is and always has been an important source of knowledge, speaking to connectivity, humility, a way of being with the natural world and a gentle reminder that these great lands touch every aspect of our life. In a modern context, the installation of the Welcome Pole is an invitation to think more deeply about the Land and its great teachings. That ultimately these teachings offer a gift of deeper wellness, deeper healing and access to higher level of knowledge.

This important collaboration is intended to create a sense of belonging and pride for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on this Land.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Snuneymuxw Ancestors

Nanaimo-Ladysmith Public Schools

BC Housing

Oshio Traditional Chinese Medicine College  
of Acupuncture

City of Nanaimo

**WE THANK YOU**  
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

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