

***First Nations Families Negotiating Current Economic  
& Social Transitions***

a collaborative project between Gitxaala Nation & UBC, with Dr. Charles Menzies  
and Dr. Caroline Butler

by

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### *Introduction*

This research project, conducted under the collaboration of the Gitxaala Nation through its office, and UBC through the research of Dr. Charles Menzies and Dr. Caroline Butler, is a final report on the life and family histories of Tsimshian families negotiating current economic and social transitions in Gitxaala. Information was collected through interviews, given by lone parents and dual parents with dependent children who are living in conditions of material poverty, and analyzed to see how families are making a living and meeting their needs. The analysis highlights the strategies families use to help each other by providing support and coping mechanisms to chronic shortages of shelter, economic income and access to food through traditional mechanisms for sharing and distribution. It discusses other forms of help and opportunity available in support of meeting peoples' immediate and future needs, and what the real and perceived barriers are to accomplishing this. Family histories of people also reflect how changing social and economic conditions affect employment, education, family structures, and can challenge the communication of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, required for harvesting local foods and their preparation for storage, to future generations (Turner, Clifton 2006: 70; Menzies, Butler 2001: 412).

Looking at issues of material poverty and homelessness quickly mushroomed into many factors that mutually influence and affect one another. You cannot look at poverty without considering education, access to food, employment and income opportunities, housing, health, and family communication and support networks. It became clear that strong family support helps provide basic necessities and well-being. Barriers to this support, like family breakdown, abuse, or drug and alcohol addictions compromise this network making adults and youth vulnerable to the cyclical nature of poverty.

As identified recently in the report, *Seeds of Courage: Developing a Circle of Belonging*, by the Prince Rupert Steering Committee on Aboriginal Homelessness, “Needs of youth go beyond housing to include counseling, safety and well-being, health, drug and alcohol counseling, education, financial, emotional, and other support. Aboriginal youth need a strong sense of themselves and their identity to thrive. They need links to their culture, their families, their communities, and Elders. Without these, young people lack a purpose and hope for the future and become increasingly vulnerable,” (2006: 3). While intended for youth living away from the community, those living in Gitxaala need this identified support structure to be continued and heightened in some areas to succeed. It is family, elders and the collective community who foster this support.

Feeling the effects of material poverty depends on the perspective of who is asked. “People in Gitxaala do not feel they are poor because they have food, though they have no cars or good shoes,” (Chief Council, Clifford White). But the

effects of material poverty can be lessened or enhanced depending on help received from family and community.

It is important to understand that this report was generated through the knowledge, opinions, and perspectives of participants from the community, including those who hold positions that serve the community. The perspectives of these differing positions in the community are of interest as they show a difference in knowledge surrounding issues of concern. Participants' names marked with an (\*) have been changed to pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

### *Research Methodology*

Family support networks are a vital strategy and coping mechanism to alleviate chronic shortages of shelter, aid in supplemental economic income and access to food. Though the project looked specifically at under/unemployment, and social assistance, overcrowded housing, access to food, use and need for community services and programs, other concerns emerged from the responses of participants, shaping the preliminary conclusions of this report.

The research project proceeded through coordination with the Social Development Worker, Merle Bolton. A contact list was formulated of Gitxaala community members, starting with people responsible for community programs and services. These people provided overviews of the programs offered to the community, including the responses to them and level of community involvement.

Outreach services available from Prince Rupert were also examined. These interviews were conducted at the participants' offices.

A wide range of community members (adults with children, senior adults with adult children, men and women, employed and not) were asked to share their personal and family histories through interviews that focused on occupation, income, shelter, food, family ties and support, health, education, community involvement, support services, past residence or family members living in Prince Rupert, and any challenges or barriers to accessing these or other resources to meet family needs. Interviews with participants lasted on average of 40 minutes. These interviews were largely conducted in the participants' homes, with a few exceptions, which were conducted in our home.

## *Findings*

### **1. Access to Local & Commercial Foods**

Local food is an important, highly nutritious, dietary staple. Having access to its availability is also an economic benefit, especially for people receiving social assistance. Families who own or have access to a boat, and who hunt, are able to harvest a variety of local foods, providing for the majority of their dietary and nutritional needs, and reducing strain on their food budget when purchasing non-local, commercial foods and produce. These local resources are shared with family and elders who may not have the same access or ability to harvest local foods. This traditional mechanism for sharing and distribution is also helpful in

times of shortage for specific foods like seaweed, roe, or grease. When availability of certain foods is affected, hard to get items may be shared with family. However, people without a boat or direct access to local foods, or who cannot rely on the frequency of sharing from family, may have to purchase their local foods from sellers.

There may also be a cultural impact from reduced availability or frequency of traditional foods in the diet, as well as preparation and storage methods.

Turner and Clifton, when discussing the Gitga'at community, note, "Although elders of the Gitga'at community still enjoy many of the traditional foods, many of the younger people prefer store-bought foods, and some of the traditional foods...are scarcely known to the younger people. One elder commented, "The more you eat the [old] foods, the more you like it." This statement reflects a common 'Catch 22' facing those trying to maintain cultural tradition," (2006: 77).

The issues that are presenting themselves are: 1) If children are not familiar with a traditional food item, or lose knowledge or an appreciation for it because it is difficult to get, and non-traditional foods, including sugary or high fat commercial snack foods, become preferred then there is a disconnect with the cultural significance of that food as well as its nutritional importance, which may not be passed to their children. 2) If local foods must be purchased, the importance of traditional sharing and distribution mechanisms, especially with difficult to get items, will not be learned, appreciated or emulated by children, possibly affecting their cultural maintenance of this practice in the future. 3) If most of the local resources are purchased, those youth may not learn, from their



parents at least, how to find, harvest, prepare or store it. Sharon Worth\*, a mother of six with two still at home, buys almost all her local food. “My boys don’t even go out berry picking.” Some forms of food preparation are not done by many people anymore. Lorraine Thomas\*, a young grandmother discusses smoked cockles and halibut. “I don’t see much of it anymore. There’s just a few that smoke halibut. I don’t know how to smoke sockeye.” Harriet Morton\*, a grandmother, just learned to smoke sockeye last year. So, those people and their nuclear family who do not have direct access to local resources and the experience of harvesting or preparing their own food for storage, and are not able to rely on the practice of family sharing, are at a disadvantage.

There may be impacts on dietary choice as a result of the additional costs of transportation and freight on commercial food supplies purchased in Prince Rupert. Transportation to Prince Rupert, possible accommodation if necessary, and freight costs increase the price of commercial supplies by as much as three times, according to participants. This added cost may influence the types of foods chosen. For instance, the number of trips made in a month will determine how much perishable foods and fresh produce will be bought. Those making less than two trips a month will have the dilemma of making food choices that will last a month or longer, possibly reducing the choice for perishables like fruits and vegetables. Fresh produce also weighs more than many other packaged processed foods, which can be bought in bulk to last for a month and to reduce the cost of freight. One respondent mentioned how difficult it is to get potatoes due to the cost of bringing them back to Gitxaala. Another reminisced about the

taste of watermelons and oranges and the length of time that had passed since enjoying these.

## **2. Support Services**

### **Health Services and Programs**

The issue of physical and mental health is central to an individual's well being and is dependent not only upon adequate access to food, shelter, and income, but also emotional support, access to health information and counseling services. There are a number of health services offered to community members. To determine how they were being received in the community both the participants' and the Nursing Clinic's perspectives were considered.

The Clinic looks at the needs of the community and develops counseling and activities programs for Elders, adults, youth and children that address mental and physical health issues and teach skills through information workshops, such as parenting and life skills, counseling for addictions and recovering addicts, diabetes, diet and nutrition, exercise for Elders, as well as providing regular patient care. Clients who attended and utilized specific programs and services at the Nurses' Clinic felt they were valuable for addressing their needs. Others who do not use the programs at the Clinic did not know of the range of services and information available. Many parents had attended the parenting workshops and the Tiny tots program. Addiction meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous and recovering addicts counseling have received positive feedback from people. However, there is difficulty holding the interests of youth in some of the programs

that are targeted to their needs. A youth worker at the clinic has noticed fewer and fewer youth attending programs.

While there is a lot of information provided about health concerns, as well as other services and organizations in Prince Rupert that offer counseling for issues not covered by the Clinic, there are a few identified logistical issues that ultimately affect client care and services. Some of the difficulties the Clinic is having are getting Prince Rupert organizations, which are supposed to offer outreach services to outlying communities, to be proactively involved and communicative with the community. They need to maintain regular and consistent visits, which are vital to the success of vulnerable clients and their families. At the moment, those services are only offered when those organizations are contacted, and it is at the expense of the Gitxaala community. Their transportation is paid for and meals often provided. The onus is put on the community to get providers to come out to address a problem or to bring information of all their programs to inform the community of their services. This sporadic visibility in the community undermines their encouragement and help they offer. Regular outreach efforts by Berry Patch with Success by Six, and parenting programs, and the Brighter Smiles program for dental health have proven successful because of their consistent profile in the community. The North Coast Transition House Society will also be running some regular workshops in the community to see if there is a desire to have their profile and services accessible on a regular basis by women seeking shelter and couples seeking help with addressing domestic violence.

Regular visits are needed by organizations that offer a wide variety of support services to all members in the community, especially youth, like Friendship House. The Northwest Band Social Workers Association offers focused one-on-one counseling with children, youth, and adults for issues such as residential school abuse, sexual abuse, and family crisis and break-up but at the moment is on an on-call basis. Skeena Native Development has vital information on training, education, business and entrepreneur opportunities that should be relayed to the community to stimulate adults and youth with opportunities and options for their future.

Another problem is that some organizations, like the Northcoast Health Authority or Skeena/Queen Charlotte Regional District who include outlying communities such as Gitxaala in their catchment area when writing proposals for funding, do not consult with Gitxaala about the needs in the community or how it will benefit, affect or include Gitxaala.

The constant rotation of nursing staff has also proven inconvenient for the Clinic. It disrupts rapport between chronic clients and nursing staff and knowledgeable patient history the nurses have with their patients. There is also not enough available staff for the time it takes to do home visits on a regular basis. Some doctors in Prince Rupert will not share their Gitxaala patients' information with the community nurses who look after them here.

The Clinic is an absolutely essential service, and one that is vital to the mental and physical well-being of the community.

## **Community Center & Cultural Center Activities & Programs**

Programs that get people involved in activities where they learn to do things, have fun and socialize together is important. Some parents expressed their concerns about children not having enough to do outside of school. Others stated that there are many activities and programs for kids. The difference of opinion may be in the ages of children that require parental supervision to attend the programs.

Roxanne Aster, the Parent Support Worker at the Cultural Centre believes that having enough things to do is not the difficulty, but instead getting kids to participate, and even more importantly, getting parents involved and actively supportive. The Cultural Center has activities and programs for adults and children that focus on the interaction between parent and child and on cooperation and sharing between youth. There are community groups to join like basketball teams, the Lach Klan dance group, and Junior Rangers. The Community Center has games, internet access, and activities, as well as fitness equipment. There are also cultural activities that teach food preparation skills, the importance of sharing, and the respect and support of elders. Harriet Morton\* discussed how a Youth Worker got many of the youth to come out and learn how to cut up and jar fish. The Band Office supplied the jars. When they were done, the jars of fish were given to Elders. One year they also learned how to smoke fish. Youth Workers at the Community Center try to instill consistency in involvement and that there are rules to respect and follow. They work at getting

information on suicide prevention across through program activities that involve both kids and parents.

It is felt that the biggest challenge to the success of all the programs is consistent involvement and the encouragement of and participation from adults. There are more activities available now for kids, ways to express themselves, and ways to address problems than when the older generation was growing up. Ultimately, these programs foster communication among family members. Continued visible encouragement from parents, leaders and Elders in the community is vital to attendance and success of community programs, for kids as well as adults.

### **3. Income—Social Assistance & Un/Under/Employment**

As with all Tsimshian Nations, involvement in the industrial wage economy has been a crucial element to communities for over a century. For Gitxaala, it has been largely in commercial fishing and cannery work (Menzie's, Butler 2001: 409, 423). Participants' family histories show that grandparents and their parents relied on seasonal employment in these industries. Camilla Forbes\*, an Elder and grandmother of many, remembers working in the canneries as a child, helping her mother. Lorraine Thomas\* remembers looking after her siblings while her parents worked. Children's labour was vital to the economic survival of their parents. At the canneries, they helped increase their parents' income, and at home provided care for their siblings while parents were working (Menzie's, Butler Forthcoming: 7). They also helped with subsistence activities. But the steady

decline of these industries since the 1960s has meant that for young parents today, “informal activities and casual work have predominated” (Menzies, Butler Forthcoming: 14; 2001: 416).

Employment opportunities in Gitxaala are virtually non-existent, with the exception of limited and difficult to get casual and part-time work for the community, posted through the Gitxaala Office, and the roe-on-kelp industry, “the only commercial fishery in the Canadian Pacific region in which Indians have managed to secure a major share of licenses, and commercial production,” (Newell 1999: 121), which Lorraine\* says employs around five people from Gitxaala, is seasonal as well and has a limited quota. It has been losing money the last two years.

Residents seeking a stable and adequate income from full time employment need to seek it elsewhere. Choices for those wishing to stay in the community are putting their names on the work list at the Office, participating in seasonal and limited quota commercial fishing, or entrepreneurial activities to supplement social assistance.

Regardless of any of these choices, social assistance is the main source of income. For men participating in commercial fishing it is difficult to make enough income or accumulate enough hours to be eligible for Employment Insurance during the off-season. The increasing regulations and limitation of access to the resource in the commercial fishing industry has meant that the reliance on resource economies to provide the sole source of income has been lost. In regards to related employment, such as cannery work, this has been

significantly reduced due to closure of the canneries except for Canfisco.

Discussions on what previous generations had done for work brought up the changes seen from the times of when at least one if not both parents and grandparents worked in the commercial fishing industry and in the canneries.

Entrepreneurial activities are used to supplement EI or welfare, like selling of local foods, commercial items, baked goods and catering, or transportation services. Some participants, like Sharon Worth\* and Rita and Mel Johnson\* felt that selling local food conflicts with cultural values and the customary practice of sharing and distribution. However, for those who do not own a boat, are not invited on one, or who cannot physically collect local foods, this may be the only way to get it. Others did not see a problem with this activity, as money from the sale of local food goes to the gas and time used in harvesting or preparing it. So there is tension between making ends meet and being able to follow cultural practices. This activity whether seen as appropriate or not does fill a need for those resources. Illegal activities, such as the sale and distribution of drugs and alcohol are being carried out as well, further jeopardizing already at-risk individuals and target groups, such as youth, and family.

Gitxaala does not have a local economy to fall back on for employment or to support its infrastructure. Essentially, choosing to stay in one's community means many members concede to joblessness and poverty or low-income levels. Long-term unemployment means children are learning from their parents not to expect that they will find work in Gitxaala, and will not learn the importance of being able to work for income, to provide stability, and for a chance at future



opportunities. Unemployment becomes normalized and routinized. Opportunity and purpose is tied to a sense of self-worth, self-respect, and self-esteem and is learned at a young age. There is direct contention in the system between people wanting to, and having the right to, remain on their territory to make a living, and being forced to go elsewhere to seek employment and steady income which removes people from their cultural locus and family support systems, making them vulnerable to poverty and homelessness elsewhere where there is a reduced or non-existent family safety net.

#### **4. Housing**

No one is homeless in Gitxaala, but there is a housing shortage. Families are providing shelter to extended members until their housing needs can be met. This means overcrowded conditions are common. In some situations everyone may get along, but not in others. Living with parents may be difficult, undesirable or cause strained relations. There is a perception that families with the largest number of children should have priority. Lorraine\* explains that it goes by name, if the house is overcrowded they'll look at that first. The waiting list for on-reserve housing can be years before families can move out of overcrowded mutli-family dwellings. Single people in Gitxaala, or those moving back to Gitxaala will not be able to get a house. They will have to stay with family members. These situations can be long term, as the approval for building new housing is dependent upon funding by the CMHC, which is subject to the status of community member mortgage accounts administered by the Gitxaala Office. The CMHC will be

reluctant to release more funding for new homes when there are so many accounts in arrears. The social consequences and impact of housing arrears is resulting in a housing crisis. Urgent house repairs and upgrades needed to meet the requirements of the number of occupants staying in a house and to maintain safety are also subject to funding available from the Gitxaala administration. When rent or mortgage payments are not made, there is no money to maintain the homes. Homes can fall into disrepair before they are even paid for. Poorly maintained homes fall into disrepair faster when overcrowded. According to, *Housing Matters*, published by the Aboriginal Housing Committee for British Columbia, "The lifespan of a home on-reserve is half that of off-reserve homes due to poor construction and materials, lack of maintenance and overcrowding. Repairs, upgrades and renovations are needed to extend the life of these houses and make them healthy places to live," (Issue 7, 2005).

Some houses may have an inadequate number of rooms or facilities for the number of people in them. One family had 8 people living in a three bedroom home with one working bathroom waiting for urgent home repairs that include safety issues such as exposed live wires. Frustration was expressed regarding the time line on both urgent repairs and getting a family home.

People are not making their payments because of job loss or lack of employment, insufficient income, financial crisis, or family breakdown. Financial burden and stress can have social and physical impacts, affecting family relations and health. "This is where Band departments work together to help the person get back on their feet," (AHCBC 2005).

There is a combined responsibility for the maintenance of homes. Homeowners need to keep areas free from mold, because if repairs are needed, social assistance will not be enough to pay for them. Sharon\* discussed how moving furniture around on a regular basis, and not leaving piles of clutter around, especially in one spot, helps prevent mold from forming. In her previous house, which was older, she saw mold growth in one month. A friend who did not guard against mold growth in her house had significant mold growth and had to dispose of clothing and other items.

## **5. Education**

### *Adults*

The Gitxaala Office sponsors education and job re-entry training for adults. The length of the sponsorship is program dependent, and there is limited funding which may not be able to accommodate all applicants at one time. An adult education program used to be run at the school, but was phased out for unknown reasons.

A few of the concerns perceived by Ron Purdy\*, a single dad of two, about returning to school are that if a community member is living in Prince Rupert and being sponsored by welfare or EI to go to school, they must still look for work at the same time, making it difficult to make school work a priority if they have to worry about finding work to continue the sponsorship. This may also prove more difficult if there are children to look after as well. Ron also felt that if a person wants to go to back to school, they may not want to take their family with them if

their mortgage is in arrears because they feel they may lose their house. And if they came back to Gitxaala, they would have to stay with extended family for a long time until a house was available again. So this can act as a deterrent to people who do not want to be away from their family, but cannot bring them with them for fear of losing their house. So these opportunities are perceived as either too difficult or too costly to take.

There is a need to increase people's knowledge of what opportunities are available to them through Gitxaala Office sponsorships and programs. Some community members, like Ron\* and Rita\*, were not familiar with what is offered to community members.

### *Children/Youth*

Parents were asked whether they were happy with the education their children were receiving. There were mixed responses about the curriculum at Lach Klan school, but also common complaints. Some parents are unhappy that children in different grades are in mixed classes. They see the older kids doing the same homework as the younger ones, and not being challenged enough academically to keep them at the level they are supposed to be at. Lorraine's\* adult daughter with two kids remarked to her that they were still using the same textbooks as when she was going to Lach Klan. It was felt that the Sm'algyex program was inadequate because there are no new words introduced after grade three. So there is no improvement in their conversational skills until youth reach high school where Sm'algyex is continued. A few discussed how difficult the

transition into high school is for their kids. They see the youth having to work much harder because they are two to three years behind in their studies than their Prince Rupert peers. Some people have their kids do extra work between finishing at Lach Klan and entering high school in Prince Rupert. Some even hire tutors to help them catch up in school. This is frustrating for the youth and when they get amongst their peers in Prince Rupert, they may interpret this difficulty as a deficiency in their intelligence and believe that they are inferior, hindering their efforts at catching up or continuing with school. Susan Jeremy\*, a single mom of two, and Lorraine\* noted that these issues are not new and have been discussed, with little success at change. There is renewed hope that the new education portfolio holder, Bruce Watkinson, will be able to tackle these curriculum issues in collaboration with School District 52.

The school district has developed programs to address the learning needs of students transitioning from village to Rupert and from home to school. This is in response to the identified learning needs of high school age students in the community who are entering transition points up to two to three grade levels behind in their studies compared with students from Prince Rupert. Christy Clifton, the Coordinator of the English Language Development Program at School District 52 Resource Centre in Prince Rupert, explains that the ESD (English as a Second Dialect) program, “is framed around the recognition that the language kids bring is a First Nations language dialect and an Aboriginal/English dialect...You need to offer a bridge to meet the expected English standard and to go between the home environment and school. Adding the dialect of standard

English to their own First Nations/English Dialect instead of replacing it respects the value and valid communication of the language the kids bring to school. Language and conceptual knowledge may be the difference between kids coming from schools in outlying communities to high school two to three years behind.”

Having strong family connections outside the community to provide shelter for high school kids, or for members who are returning for college education can make the transition, especially for already struggling youth, a little easier with a comfortable, stable environment. The Gitxaala Office will pay a monthly shelter cost for community youth living in Prince Rupert and attending high school.

Sharon\* and Camilla\* mentioned that if there are no family members to rely on for high school youth to stay with while attending school in Prince Rupert, then a parent or family member from the community will likely have to move over with the youth. Ron\* and Susan\* discussed how Gitxaala community members living in Prince Rupert are more alone and isolated. There are not as many people to talk to or familiar surroundings. There is not as much family around to help with food or child care and struggling youth. Community counseling and support services may be needed, such as Friendship House, or the Salvation Army.

When youth transition from Gitxaala to Prince Rupert for high school, familiarity, family members and rules may be different between homes. They may not get along with family they are staying with. There is more diversion in town, like access to drugs and alcohol. These, combined with serious frustrations from

having to work hard to keep up in school, youth become more vulnerable to dropping out, addictions, and homelessness and poverty.

Sharon\* was also concerned for the future of graduates who come back to Gitxaala to take a 'break' for a year, then end up not going on to college.

## **6. Challenges to Community Communication & Family Function**

Elders and some parents share concerns for the changes they see in village life and attitudes of youth from when they were young. Camilla\* remarked how easy it is so easy to get alcohol and drugs now, even it seems without money. There are more people walking around late at night. The youth are different now than they used to be. They run wild, without curfew, and there is not enough parental supervision or discipline. Past generations were more strict with kids. People have it easier now than Elders growing up. People didn't use to have speed boats. Just fishing boats and row-boats. There was no social assistance or family allowance. They had to survive on the food that they picked and with wage labour. Even kids worked because the family needed the money.

A few other Elders were heard expressing similar concerns that the kids are not being taught, and are not interested in learning how to prepare and store foods. Youth do not come and learn from them. They noticed changes in attitudes of youth over time. They seem aimless, and there is a lack of involvement by kids and parents. So there may be a change occurring in how involved kids are in food procurement now, and the knowledge required for it being communicated to them. If there are adults who may not know how to

prepare something, their kids will have to learn from another family member. Which is also why strong family networks are important. If there is no close kin, or if there is family break-up, then communicating that essential knowledge to children and youth is compromised.

Ron\* believes there is better communication with family now through all the support workshops and counseling offered in the community. People talk about things more now with their kids now. Youth are being exposed to more dangers and distractions, as well as parents' problems and/or addictions, so the programs available deal with these social issues.

The more serious barriers for youth and adults are substance addictions, domestic violence and child abuse. These have the ability to disrupt social networks and family bonds and support mechanisms, disable people's ability to function and maintain employment, or pursue an education. This is why the local counseling programs, outreach programs, and information about addiction treatment centers are vital to have available, and the Clinic provides information on these solutions. Myles Moreau, a counselor with the Salvation Army, was brought in recently to do a presentation on addiction and consequences for a mixed group of youth, parents and Elders. Myles is known for his confidence and street experience in helping people with addictions and other problems. He has people come and see him from Gitxaala to talk with him and deal with their issues. Mental, physical or sexual abuse in the home is one dysfunction that is not often detectable, or something people get counseling for, and has long lasting implications and consequences for family. None of these issues came up



at all in conversation with participants, with the exception of some people attending AA meetings or counseling.

Lack of communication is another barrier to people's knowledge of what is available to help them where they need it. Some community members expressed feelings of estrangement about information on what is available to them, be it for housing, education, or support services. They do not know enough about what is offered in the community and outside of it. This may lead to perceived barriers that may deter initiative for seeking work, education or services. This lack of knowledge then deferred to perceptions of Gitxaala Office members having access to opportunity and information while others do not. Or it is a 'who you know' situation for on-call work, re-training and education sponsorship, and housing. While there are community newsletters available for people to access and read, perhaps a more direct distribution to homes, or more publicized announcements on the status of things or the criteria that are used to decide on issues would alleviate suspicion, and instead garner support and involvement.

### *Conclusion*

During the course of the research and participant interviews it was noted on several occasions how poverty, marginalization and oppression are being felt and expressed by a portion of the teens and adult youth in the community through ghetto-culture associations. This identification was expressed through style of dress, music, movies, media figures, and video/computer games that

glorify violence and criminal actions. "8 Mile Road" is spray painted on a power box outside Lach Klan school, a nod to the semi-autobiographical movie starring rap singer Eminem and his life story of poverty, family breakup, and rise to fame through his music/rapping skills. Its message denotes that either this road, or the entire community, is a ghetto. This is an extreme view, but demonstrates the sentiment of a segment of the population who are the most vulnerable to some of the more serious issues in the community.

The community of Gitxaala is tackling many social and economic issues, which require the involvement of all its community members to deal with them, not just the administration. Many are participating in a community way by being involved in the many programs offered to help people, and volunteer groups offering fun, valuable experiences, and extra-curricular activities. Individuals who do not participate in the wider community and become more informed, form perceptions that only serve to set up barriers for themselves that block opportunity and continue the cycle of poverty. Traditional family support mechanisms are the ways family help each other cope with stress and socio-economic hardships, providing care for and assistance to others. When this system fails, real and challenging barriers to the livelihood and well-being of people ensue.

Communication seems key, between community infrastructure and its members, and more importantly, between family members. More open and accessible forms of communication to the community would eradicate any

misconceptions and ignorance around opportunities that exist for people and their futures.

Parental and community involvement in youth activities, groups, and learning and education is vital to this vulnerable group, and opens lines of communication between parent and child, and community and parent. Communication is what brought kids back to Gitxaala to meet their family and make connections to them and their home.

Family support and social networks are vital to basic necessities like food, shelter, and help in rearing children. Without positive family support, people are at an economic and social disadvantage. Families helping each other can fill some of the gaps in making a living and meeting family's needs.

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## Appendix I

### Interview Themes & Questions

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**Focus:** *Tsimshian family life histories and how parents are making a living and meeting their family's needs.*

Looking for names, contact info, genealogy—parents, grandparents, siblings, children (how many) and names.

#### **Food—subsistence/harvesting practices**

- fishing, hunting?
- how often, what kinds of foods, from where (around Gitxaala, further?)
- buying in Rupert (Cost?)
- trading/sharing items? What, with who?

#### **Occupation/Employment—income earning activities**

- what, where, when?
- what did parents, grandparents do?
- involvement in industry? (fishing, cannery, logging)
- on social assistance—EI/welfare/disability?

#### **Housing**

- adequate size and condition?
- options?
- living with who? How long?

#### **Health Clinic—use of facility, mental and physical**

- programs & services used?
- adult health?
- child/youth health?
- counselors?

#### **Community/Cultural Programs & Services**

- what programs?
- are kids involved in any programs?
- are parents?
- do parents actively support/participate with their kids in programs? Which ones?

Any family in Prince Rupert?

Have you ever lived in Prince Rupert? How long? How did you like that?

Difficulties?

Use of community services or programs there? Eg. Friendship House or others?