Living Lab
Youth Eco-Stewardship Program
Summer 2023 Report
Fun, Friends, Food, Restoration and Resurgence, everyone!

Living Lab is a community-school-campus partnership supporting land-based learning, eco-cultural restoration and Indigenous resurgence. The Eco-Stewardship Youth Camps program started in the summer of 2017 between the Songhees and the University of Victoria. Since its inception, it has grown to include the Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) and Pauquchin Nations, PEPÁKEN HÁUTW Foundation, the WSÁNEĆ School Board, School District #61 Indigenous Education, Parks Canada, Science Venture, Camosun College and many other communities and NGO partners. Our Eco-Stewardship Youth Camps program supports local Indigenous youth to restore and maintain the environment and traditional food systems through outdoor, creative, and “fun science” activities. We also aim to establish and strengthen all generations' bonds, grow friendships, and recover ancestral connections to our history, language, lands and waters.
Highlights of Summer 2023

Fun and Excitement
This past summer, our Eco-Stewardship Youth Program engaged 35 youth from Songhees, Esquimalt, Pauquachin and WSÁNEĆ Nations. Over 4 weeks youth experienced hands-on land and marine-based learning and restoration activities throughout their homelands and ‘TCHAES’ – Islands in the Salish Sea.

Food and Harvesting
In 2023, our activities in Lekʷəŋen and WSÁNEĆ territories focused on traditional food & plant systems, visiting the forest, ocean, beaches, parks, lakes, rivers and creeks and understanding how the sea & camas gardens sustained the youth's ancestors for thousands of years. We weaved ecosystem & science with history, heritage, archaeology, ethnobotany, marine biology & more! Community knowledge keepers, including Yux'weylupton (Butch Dick), xʷəɬqələetsə (Bangus George) and TE,TE,TE (Lyndsey Joseph) from the Lekwungen Nations and PEPAKIYE (Ashley Cooper), Sarah Jim, XETXÁTHEN (Earl Claxton Jr.) and Mark Sampson from the WSÁNEĆ Nations, along with archaeologist Darcy Mathews and educator John Harris, shared their knowledge and stories.

The Songhees Marine Team supported the youth trips to Tl’Ches and Parks Canada (Erich Kelch and team) coordinated the day to TEMÁ,ČES (Russell Island). The youth went fishing & clamming, harvested traditional medicine & wild berries, and prepare a feast for the elders and community. The youth also witnessed the fantastic restoration of BOKEČEN (Coles Bay) by the Pauquachin Nation & Marine Teams.

Looking Ahead
Moving forward, we are committed to creating a year-round program. Our core partners are SD#61 IED, WSÁNEĆ School Board, PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation and local Nations. Together, led by youth and community vision, we plan to create education/training pathways and opportunities between schools, Camosun College and the University of Victoria (UVic) as appropriate and needed.

TOP LEFT: PEPAKIYE (Ashley Cooper) sharing Traditional knowledge with youth

TOP: PEPAKIYE (Ashley Cooper) showing cultural modified tree

BOTTOM: Youth Canoeing and Swimming at the Gorge
Golden August Day! End-of-Summer Trip

Coast Salish Indigenous peoples throughout TETÁČES (Islands in the Salish Sea) designed & cultivated sustainable food systems on the lands (e.g. camas, hunting) & seas (e.g. clam beds, reefnet fisheries) for thousands of years. Today, these systems are being recognized & restored in magical places such as WEN, NÁ, NEĆ and Tl’Ches. Local Indigenous youth re-connect with pride and excitement to their incredible & beautiful living heritage.

Healing ourselves, our communities, our land and the planet.

Rebuilding the Sea Garden at WEN, NÁ, NEĆ (SaltSpring Island) Summer 2023

“For us, the foundation for caring about climate change and wanting to protect our living heritage IS reconnecting to our homelands. We are recovering the practices of our ancestors who stewarded the lands and waters since time immemorial. We want to serve our communities while gaining meaningful, related employment skills tied to environmental protection and community-ecosystem wellness.”

Jess Joseph, Songhees Nation- LLab Arts & Community Engagement Coordinator

Visual created by Jessica Joseph

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More Adventures

Image 2: Elder Butch Dick sharing stories with youth (up in the tree and ground) at Meeqan/Beacon Hill

Youth Quotes

“Fun and friendship” “lots of laughter” “new friends” “visiting new places” “archaeology” “forest walks” “good food” “swimming in the ocean and Gorge” “being on boats” “singing ‘Call Me Maybe’ in the Community Action Bus on our last day” “catching crabs and fishing” “making a feast for community and elders” “local food systems” “connection – pride in our heritage and thousands of years of eco-stewardship of our lands” “speaking our language”

Image 1: Summer Youth Eco-Stewardship Program Staff L to R: John Harris, Jessica Joseph, Ben Jimmy, Kyle Clarke

Image 3: Community Feast Lunch (for youth, families and elders) Front: John Harris and Elder Bangus George (opening with prayer)

Image 4: Youth Team @ SNIDCEL
Our Goals

Restoration and Resurgence
Organize community-driven ecosystem and climate action projects which affirm Indigenous knowledge, rights, and access to/ use of traditional lands and waters.

Capacity Building and Engagement
Create community skills, capacity-building activities, and a regional Indigenous eco-stewardship program focused on children and youth.

Educational Transformation
Develop land-based learning and school programs connecting sustainability and environmental/science education, student well-being and success and the transformation of the education system.

Community -Driven Research
Lead and support community-driven research projects based on Indigenous and community knowledge and priorities, healing and wellness, and restoring the connection to lands and waters.

Our Partners and Funders

Lyndsey (TE,TE,TE) Joseph photo from Tl’Ches