



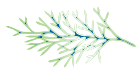
COMOX VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Join us in celebrating this year's community grant recipients and learn more about the incredible work taking place throughout the Comox Valley.

Read how:

- Elementary school parents are tackling food insecurity
- Community is coming together to inform dementia research
- Two organizations are building climate resiliency
- An early years collaborative is connecting families and children
- Volunteers are creating homelessness supports in our community

... And so much more!



We are grateful to live and work within the traditional and unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.



Photo Laura Stewart

Celebrating and connecting community

The Comox Valley Community Foundation is celebrating 52 community service organizations who received a total of \$665,000 in grants.

The funding is part of a record \$1.36 million total distribution this year to help meet the immediate needs of the Comox Valley.

Through these stories, the Foundation hopes to raise awareness of the significant achievements and ongoing work of incredible Comox Valley charities, societies, and other public non-profit organizations.

"Every organization has a story to tell and volunteers who believe deeply in their cause," said Foundation president Christine Helpard. "Together they improve the lives of community members in the Comox Valley. It's a pleasure to be able to share just a few of their stories in these pages."

Granting decisions were prioritized through community tables and advisory groups in five community-identified and specific-purpose funding streams, including:

- \$75,000 to housing insecurity and homelessness supports,
- \$57,960 to organizations serving adults with diverse abilities,
- \$80,000 to environment, conservation and climate organizations,
- \$130,000 in support of health research, and
- \$323,156 in Community Enrichment Grants, focusing on food insecurity and food systems; mental health and connection; Indigenous

-led or benefiting initiatives as well as arts, culture and heritage.

"These grants are made possible by the many individuals, families and businesses who have established funds with the Community Foundation over the past 27 years," said Helpard.

"Every organization has a story to tell and volunteers who believe deeply in their cause. It's a pleasure to be able to share just a few of their stories in these pages."

"This year, we also received \$135,000 in direct donations that made it possible for us to fund 13 additional applications that would otherwise have gone unsupported. I want to thank all of our donors who made these grants available to the community this year."

Since 1996, Comox Valley Community Foundation has awarded \$5.75 million to more than 175 local non-profits and 250 students in the form of grants and scholarships. It supports non-profit and charitable organizations in our community so that they may respond to the ever-changing needs and of our community.

For more information on the Community Foundation, or to donate, visit <https://cvcfoundation.org>

FOOD INSECURITY & FOOD SYSTEMS

Arden Elementary student Liam Wick shows off a heaping plate of Greek salad with school principal Andrew Ferneyhough, Parent Advisory Committee vice president Wade Wick, and school vice principal Teresa Cameron.

Photo: Lee Simmons, Island Life Photographics



Arden parents tackle food insecurity

On any given Wednesday, 250 students and staff at Arden Elementary are lining up to eat their vegetables.

The kindergarten to Grade 5 elementary school is one of eight schools across Comox Valley Schools (SD71) to offer a school salad bar.

"Our goal is to increase student's access to and intake of healthy foods," said Lesia Wick, an active member of the Arden Elementary Parent Advisory Committee. As students move from sampling one or two vegetables, to gradually trying unfamiliar foods, she hopes they will deepen their understanding and relationship with healthy local food.

The free salad bar is one of five different food programs at Arden, which serves a wide-ranging population, including a high percentage of lower-to middle-income families more deeply affected by rising food prices.

"It was chaotic to have it all run out of one small set of cupboards," said Wick, who also teaches part time at the school.

The Parent Advisory Committee received a Community Enrichment grant to install more cupboards to store food, serving materials, and pantry items. The



Grade 3 students at Arden line up for salad every Wednesday.
Photo: Lee Simmons, Island Life Photographics

grant also paid for a composter to ensure food waste goes back into their gardens.

"Buying a Speedibin composter allows us to invest in a local business and build on their nutrition information and food literacy, teaching children that their salad comes from the garden and ultimately, returns back

to it."

It is all done with community support: a Farm to School Canada Grant for the food, equipment, and materials; provincial funding; a Comox Valley Community Foundation grant; and donations from local businesses.

"I'm so thankful for all the donors who have been able to support the

needs of our community," said Wick.

In addition, the program mobilizes the collective power of 20 parents and community volunteers from both Arden and the Lake Trail Community Education Society who get together once a week to prep and serve the meals.

The time allows community volunteers, parents and grandparents of older children to mentor parents of younger students, creating opportunities to deepen community engagement and connections.

"Salad bar prep Tuesdays are filled with a dedicated group of wonderful people passionate about food security and the need to come together as a community to make it happen for others, particularly the kids," said an Arden parent, adding that the organization and creativity it takes to run the program is rewarded by the student's smiles.

While various levels of government continue to move forward on school lunch programs, school principal Andrew Ferneyhough is grateful for salad bar Wednesdays.

"I'm thankful to the volunteers who so put so much work into putting healthy meals in front of children each week," he said.

Comox Valley's Vital Signs Data Hub

The median after tax income for households in the Courtenay area, from North Courtenay to Fanny Bay, was \$69,000.

Learn more about Comox Valley specific income, health, housing starts, vacancy rates, crime rates, education levels, voter turnout, and more at Comox Valley's Vital Signs Data Hub, brought to you by the Comox Valley Community Foundation.

For more information, visit <https://cvcfoundation.org/community/vital-signs/>.



INDIGENOUS-LED OR BENEFITING INITIATIVE

Fighting the toxic drug crisis

Patti Alvarado leads a group of staff and volunteers committed to saving lives in the Comox Valley.

Unbroken Chain, an Indigenous-led harm reduction program at the Indigenous Women's Sharing Society, supports a growing list of individuals and family members affected by the toxic drug overdose crisis.

Supports include Indigenous harm reduction education and support, naloxone training, peer support, community education, and more.

Most weeks, staff and volunteers support multiple people, having conversations through difficult days and nights, safety planning, providing support to families who have lost loved ones, advocacy in community meetings, or connecting people to healthcare and support services.

"We are trying to help people stay alive, as well as mitigate the impacts and harm of the toxic drug poisoning epidemic," Alvarado said. "The feedback we get from participants is that we have helped save their lives. So, for us, this funding from the Comox Valley Community Foundation, has been a lifesaver."

Unbroken Chain ensures people with lived or living experience and their families and friends, have a listening ear when

they need it most and receive trauma-informed and culturally safe support. The practice reduces harm and creates a judgment-free environment that facilitates and promotes empowerment, self-autonomy, and healing.

Unbroken Chain hosts awareness events and participates in community action meetings to ensure Indigenous voices and those with lived experience are a part of local solutions, a key factor to reducing stigma and harm.

The toxic drug epidemic affects the entire community.

In February, the First Nations Health Authority released information showing COVID-19 pandemic and the toxic drug public health emergency shortened the life expectancy of Indigenous people in B.C. by 7.1 years, between 2015 to 2021.

"We're seeing illicit substance use more visibly now due to the supply of illicit substances becoming increasingly more and more toxic since the pandemic, but it's always been there and often behind closed doors," she said. "Dozens and dozens of people have died in our community. You are fortunate if you haven't had a family member or loved one affected by it."

In the last year, the Society's events have seen an increase of families wanting to

ensure they — and their children — know how to use naloxone.

Alvarado encourages the community to attend awareness events, such as Red Dress Day, May 5.

"Being a part of the Indigenous Women's Sharing Society has been a very welcoming experience. We have a lot of circles and activities where we welcome anyone to join us."

With additional funding, volunteers and capacity building, Alvarado hopes to expand toxic drug crisis support services locally and on the North Island.

"Unbroken Chain does have a waiting list," she said. "Unfortunately, we're not able to help everyone due to the limited resources and the need is great."

To learn more about the Indigenous Women's Sharing Society, follow them on social media, or call 250-338-3455.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Fight the stigma.** Read reliable sources to understand the causes of the toxic drug poisoning epidemic.
- **Talk to people.** Attend events, listen to people with lived experience.
- **Volunteer.** Take part in training and volunteer to help people in your community.



Volunteers Sarah Lewis, Ashawna Woodcock and her daughter attend a community event to raise awareness of the toxic drug crisis. Photo supplied.

HEALTH RESEARCH

Listening to community for dementia solutions

A new vision of dementia care is taking shape in the Comox Valley, thanks to the voices of community members, health practitioners, and researchers.

Those voices came together in fall 2023 to learn from each other, with support from the Robert and Florence Filberg Fund for Medical Research held at Vancouver Foundation and administered by the Comox Valley Community Foundation.

The workshop included 59 health researchers, healthcare providers, and people with lived experience of dementia, including family members, caregivers, and friends who will inform the research's direction and potentially transform dementia care in the region.

"The biggest thing people wanted was to stay at home longer," said Dr. Uta Sbotto-Frankenstein, who facilitates patient-oriented research for Island Health. "That also means having autonomy, choice, supports, and defining what that looks like."

Participants also prioritized caregiver supports and respite, dementia-friendly communities, and co-ordinating dementia care resources and supports.



Dr. Uta Sbotto-Frankenstein leads a workshop discussion on dementia care with health practitioners, researchers and community. Photo supplied.

NEED

The Comox Valley has one of the largest populations of seniors, 75 years of age and older, in B.C., and that number is set to triple in the next 18 to 20 years.

The Alzheimer's Society of Canada estimates that every day, more than 350 people in Canada develop dementia. By 2030, nearly one million people in Canada could live with dementia.

More importantly, seniors with

dementia are more likely to wait longer in emergency rooms and stay longer once they get there.

"All of our hospital and community supports and services must be able to accommodate seniors with dementia," said Dr. Sbotto-Frankenstein. "The Community Foundation is enabling conversations to co-build community-informed research in this important area."

The Valley has the right components to address this need said Max

Jajszczok, Island Health's executive director for the region.

"Its relatively new long-term care facilities and an innovative dementia village under construction at the former St. Joseph's General Hospital site provide a foundation to explore how best to serve those who need 24/7 care and investigate how to expand care into the community. This research will be critical to sustaining publicly funded health systems over the next 10 to 15 years."

BUILDING CAPACITY

With an engaged community, inspired leadership, and the involvement of leading researchers, we have the potential to improve services for those living with dementia and their caregivers, said Cindy Trytten, Island Health's research director.

The health authority is exploring the creation of a new research network, focused on aging and dementia in the Comox Valley.

"If successful, the hospital could also support clinical trials of promising investigational therapies, providing treatment options now only available at the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria," said Trytten.

NEXT STEPS

Building on local priorities, the call for Comox Valley aging/dementia-specific pilot grants and student fellowships is now open. These opportunities will also link researchers with people with lived experience to inform the research.

Island Health's Research Department and community members will review proposals to support successful research teams and students and reach back out to the workshop attendees.

And that is just the beginning: the pilot grants will show project feasibility, with hope that the research will qualify for larger grants to increase the scale of promising initiatives. Island Health will support fellowship students to grow the next generation of patient-oriented researchers dedicated to collaborating with the community.

"This is about building research capacity, together, in the Comox Valley," adds Dr. Sbotto-Frankenstein.



The Glen Urquhart Creek rehabilitation in Courtenay is one of many projects Project Watershed has recently supported.
Photo: Laura Stewart

Collaborating for climate resiliency

Comox Valley environmental organizations are building hope and engaging volunteers in a community effort to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Comox Valley Project Watershed and the Cumberland Community Forest Society received grants from the Comox Valley Community Foundation as part of an Environment, Conservation and Climate Community Table. Together, the table participants consensus-directed \$80,000 to elevate the efforts of nine different environment-focused community service organizations in the Comox Valley.

Both organizations operate with knowledge, passion, and hope that connects their work.

"Whether we're talking about Kus-kus-sum or the Cumberland Forest, we are all trying to put integrity back into the landscape," said Meaghan Cursons, executive director of the Cumberland Community Forest Society. "We're looking at our forest and our watershed and asking how do we restore, protect and manage this landscape so that when the inevitable fire, drought or atmospheric river happens, we are all more prepared?"

CUMBERLAND COMMUNITY FOREST SOCIETY

The Forest in the Village is part of the Cumberland Community Forest Society's efforts to build community climate resilience within the Village with a focus on urban forests and biodiversity.

The approach is about learning, direct action, collaboration and celebration.

In the past year, they have facilitated workshops and walks with a focus on urban biodiversity, organized after school programs, and planted 125 ecologically important trees in partnership with the Village of Cumberland, whose Urban Tree Strategy aims to increase the forest canopy by 30 per cent in the Village by 2030.

"People really love planting trees. It's a tangible and hopeful way to engage in building climate resiliency," said Cursons. The fall tree planting, along with B.C.'s intense wildfire season last summer, created new opportunities for community conversations around urban wildland interface zones, Fire Smart landscaping and the importance of the urban forest canopy to biodiversity and resilience in the face of climate change.



The Cumberland Community Forest Society organizes an annual Fungus Fest, with fungus-themed fun and education.
Photo supplied.



CONSERVATION & CLIMATE



The Cumberland Community Forest Society volunteers are active in the forest and watersheds. Photo supplied.

The programs represent an evolution of the Forest Society's efforts, in the past several years, from solely purchasing and saving forest land, to stewardship, and community climate resilience. The Forest Society is thinking regionally and stewarding the Perseverance Creek Watershed, which flows into the Comox Valley drinking water supply at Comox Lake.

"It's not only about setting aside forest land anymore," said Cursons. "It's caretaking, restoring, and healing the landscape that has been damaged by industrial logging and mining over time. When we're restoring creeks or wetlands or protecting species at risk, it's to ensure those entities are more resilient in the face of climate change, the Forest in the Village project is a part of that. It's about building community climate resilience, this time, inside the Village."

And just as the trees in Cursons' backyard are connected biologically and ecologically to our adjacent forests, every creek and stream is a part of the larger watershed that support species across the Valley.

COMOX VALLEY PROJECT WATERSHED

That's where the Project Watershed's Community Water Monitoring Initiative comes in. The initiative brings together Comox Valley streamkeepers and stewardship groups for a better understanding of the health of the region's streams and watersheds. Starting this summer, Project Watershed will connect streamkeeper groups to improve the way we monitor water temperatures, oxygen levels, turbidity, and more.

While the work isn't new — streamkeepers, government and industry groups have been monitoring fish habitat for years — it is the first time data related to climate change has been coordinated and collected in the same way by every organization.

"Having the data to support the documentation of the extreme changes we're seeing in these creeks based on climate change and extreme weather

events will really allow us to understand the health of these creek systems through time," said Caitlin Pierzchalski, Project Watershed's executive director. "It will also inform any measures we do to help support improvements in health. If we're seeing really warm creek temperatures, really low dissolved oxygen, or really high turbidity, there are measures we can take from a restoration perspective to potentially slow down or improve some of those changes in the long term."

Project Watershed is best known locally for its recent work with the K'ómoks First Nation and the City of Courtenay on the restoration of Kus-kus-sum, the former Field Sawmill site just south of the 17th Street bridge. However, its work has been rooted in ecological restoration, research, and education in the Comox Valley for nearly 31 years.

The Community Water Monitoring Initiative kicks off this year with potential volunteers from the Millard Piercy Watershed Stewards, the Beaufort Watershed Stewards, the Brooklyn Creek Watershed

Society, and the Cumberland Community Forest Society as well as the Little River and Glen Urquhart Creek neighbourhoods. With enough equipment and volunteers, a cohesive picture of the health of the region's watersheds will be uploaded to a public database, available to industry, government, volunteers, and the community.

The idea, said Pierzchalski, is a long-standing goal of the Comox Valley Conservation Partnership, coordinated through the Comox Valley Land Trust, with participation from the K'ómoks Guardian Watchmen.

But it wasn't until funding came available, through the Comox Valley Community Foundation, that the idea began to feel like a reality.

"The fact that we're going to be able to have access to funding and actually start moving forward, is really exciting," said Pierzchalski. "When I see these projects move forward, it helps stave off the apathy and makes me see the real possibilities here."

City grants support local organizations

Our thanks to the City of Courtenay Grant in Aid program, which contributed \$50,000 to the Community Enrichment Grants, making it possible to provide more funding to 10 organizations this year. The Comox Valley Community Foundation administered the funds in support of the following organizations and their valuable service to the Comox Valley community.

- Comox Bay Care Society
- Comox Valley Arts Council
- Comox Valley Hospice Society
- Comox Valley Transition Society
- Courtenay Elementary Community School Society
- Eureka Support Society
- Glacier View Lodge Society
- LUSH Valley Food Action Society
- Project Watershed Society
- Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry Society



ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE

Growing arts and artists in the Comox Valley

The Comox Valley Community Arts Council is listening, engaging the public, and growing the arts in the Comox Valley.

The 55-year-old organization is one of the Comox Valley's oldest non-profit groups. It is best known for promoting arts and artists across the Valley, in partnership with businesses, government, and non-profit organizations.

With a mission to champion the artistic vitality of the Comox Valley, the Council creates the Central Island Arts Guide and an annual regional studio tour, produces a directory of Comox Valley artist studios, maintains an event calendar, and provides art experiences and community engagement at events around town.

In recent years, it has also been an incubator, innovator, and community builder, thanks in part to the Comox Valley Community Foundation.

Take, for example, the A School, a professional development program exclusively for artists, made possible through vital operating grants from the Community Foundation. The program provides a community of practice for early career artists to connect, learn, and develop their skill sets, outside of the art school setting. Emerging artists can access tools and structures that allow them to grow their practice and learn how to operate as a small business, said Jennifer Casey, the Council's execu-

tive director.

"Initial surveys say it's making a huge difference," Casey said. "Artists are building skills to be able to be able to market their work in new ways, that's a huge benefit to the community."

Likewise, its low-cost Digital Creation Hub offers a space for artists to access the digital tools for artmaking. The equipment, software and studio reduce financial and technical barriers and gives artists a head start in marketing and promoting their work.

"You come in and somebody's there to hold your hand and walk you through it, and you end up with a product that you can then use as an artist to elevate your practice."

In addition, CV/Arts runs an adjudicated art show at the Comox Valley Airport that highlights regional artists, turning the terminal into a cultural space. It also runs festivals that bring art to the public streets, 30-day drawing challenges and partnerships with community organizers that bring arts programming to existing events.

New this year is the Art Wagon, a colourful trailer that CV/Arts is transforming into a mobile art centre. The aim is to provide programming that travels to schools and areas of the Valley that don't necessarily have access to traditional art galleries. The Council launched a fundraising campaign in April to fulfill this vision and provide programming dollars to sup-



The Comox Valley Digital Creation Hub Featuring Caresse Nadeau and DJ Resonant Dogg. Photo: Caresse Nadeau

port the Art Wagon in its debut season.

While the Council has previously focused on broad services, CV/Arts is working to ensure programs "go deep" and speak to community-relevant values and conversations.

Last summer, in partnership with community groups, they presented the video installation, Go Fish, by artists Scott Smith and Nettie Wild on Hornby and Denman Island, which 2,400 people attended.

"We're building from this momentum and

applying for funds to offer an annual Arts and Land Festival that works with artists and brings those two connections together," Casey said.

The activity is designed to be community facing, discussion provoking and engaging.

"The Arts Council is all about community. We do community engaged projects" said Casey. Our work is for the public. We think about providing access to arts and culture to everybody."

For more information, visit <https://comoxvalleyarts.com/>.

HOMELESSNESS SUPPORTS

Care-A-Van offers hope to those who are homeless

Across the Comox Valley, a team of volunteers is making a profound impact on people who need it most.

The Comox Bay Care Society delivers essential health services to people who live on the streets through a community-funded mobile outreach unit, known as the Care-A-Van.

Three times a week, each week, the Care-A-Van sets up in Comox Valley parks, parking lots and street corners to provide food and water, wound care, harm reduction supplies, social connections and referrals to essential services.

It's no small feat. Since 2009, the non-profit Society's medical professionals, people with lived experience, mental health support workers, Indigenous advisors, student nurses and allies have helped more than 4,700 people in the Comox Valley.

Most nights, the team sees about 25 people. On average, three to five volunteers offer health promotion, food, hygiene, and immediate medical support, often re-connecting people with medical and social systems usually not designed for those who are homeless.

It's about building relationships, ensuring people are safe and walking them toward the people and services they need, without stigma, said Sabina Acheson, the Society's co-ordinator.

"People think they know what

Care-A-Van volunteers head out three nights a week to support the health of the Valley's homeless population. Photo: Dave Prothero



homelessness is, but I need to tell you it can happen to anyone," said Acheson.

"Over the years, many homeless people have told us the Care-A-Van is the place where they can get a number of their needs met, in one place, without judgment or bias," she said. "When you are out there meeting people sometimes in the heart of their lowest moment, that's important."

When it started, the Care-A-Van was the only one of its kind west of Calgary. These days, the Care-A-Van team co-ordinate their schedule with an Island Health team in the Comox Valley. On the Island, similar models exist in

Campbell River, Nanaimo, and Victoria.

As the need has grown, Care-A-Van volunteers adapt their services and supports, helping displaced roommates, supporting people through mental health crises, helping those with chronic illnesses find a path toward lower cost medications, and navigating the rental market for those in need.

"Right now, we're seeing more youth and more elders," she said. "We are seeing more people in more vehicles and more women in precarious housing."

In the past year, they have added peer support and navigators with lived experiences to

the team. Indigenous advisors are also available to help the overrepresentation of homeless people who identify as Indigenous.

And while homelessness can seem too large to tackle, Acheson said there are straightforward ways to address the situation by collaboratively strategizing to address systemic issues at a local level.

"People think homelessness is too big and they can't help," she said. "For the price of a cup of coffee, you can make a big difference. For example, the community collectively generates funding for housing support services by contributing a small amount per household with their annual land tax. This collectively adds up, and it is distributed by the City and Coalition to End Homelessness."

"Small donations can help procure items that help people maintain their personhood; every bar of soap helps us run the Care-A-Van - it's the smallest things that can warm someone's heart when they need it most."

Acheson is honoured to receive dedicated funds from the Comox Valley Community Foundation whose philosophy and donors have a real commitment to social responsibility and making a difference.

"We can't operate without you," she said. "We can't be front and centre without the support of the donors, so thank you."

Learn more at <https://www.cvcaravan.com>.

ADULTS WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES

I Belong Centre builds community

The I Belong Centre can make anything seem possible.

The community centre, apartment building, and L'Arche Comox Valley administration office is a welcoming community of adults who come together to share their lives and support each other.

From coffee chats at local restaurants to art classes, cooking and candle making, the Centre's activities bring people with and without disabilities together in fun and inspiring ways.

"We all have gifts and weaknesses, and we all have strengths and needs," said Hollee Card, L'Arche Comox Valley's community leader and executive director. "We never know when we are going to need help. By creating a community, sometimes where we least expect it, we can help the people who need it the most or be helped ourselves."

The Centre is a vital part of L'Arche Comox Valley, a non-profit society dedicated to creating and running a supportive community for people with intellectual disabilities.

L'Arche Comox Valley offers two housing communities for adults with disabilities in the Comox Valley, and is now raising funds for the Anchorage, a \$3.5 million affordable housing project with 15 safe and inclusive suites and social spaces for people with diverse abilities.

When the I Belong Centre opened in Courtenay in 2017, it was the first housing model to offer an activity centre and community hub for people with diverse abilities among 29 L'Arche communities across Canada.

The Centre offers an environment of support and independence as people take part in social activities. The

formula creates new friendships that allow people to see each others' possibilities.

"It really is a place of hope," said Card.

The Centre can feel like a lifeline to participants and their family members, who can otherwise feel very isolated. That's why, adds Card, the Centre continued to run with limited hours during the pandemic.

The list of activities people take part in is long and varied. Throughout the year, the Centre offers painting, drawing, music, cooking, fitness and movement, games, puzzles, and of course, coffee chats.

L'ARCHEWORX COLLECTIVE

Some activities have been so successful, they have sparked the L'ArcheWorx Collective, a craft collective which sells beautifully made stationary, recycled candles, soup mixes, risotto, and fire starter sticks.

Items are available for purchase from the I Belong Centre, online and at stores across the Comox Valley. The collective shares profits with participants, who earn income from their work. The remaining funds go back into the collective to buy supplies and support the program.

The Centre is open to people of all abilities, who live in a L'Arche unit, or in the community. The cost to participants varies depending on the funding available.

"Unfortunately, the I Belong Centre is an unfunded program; the grant funding from the Comox Valley Community Foundation makes it accessible to everyone," said Card. "We are so grateful to the donors who see the value in what we do here every day."

To learn more about the I Belong Centre and L'Arche Comox Valley, visit <https://larchecomoxvalley.org/>.



The L'Arche family takes part in several activities each year, including the City's annual Mile of Flowers. Photo supplied.

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 1: Artisan Market and Garage Sale
9 am to 2 pm

June 12: Open House, starting at 11 am

MENTAL HEALTH & CONNECTION

Connections program supports local families

Sometimes, having a place to connect and play in the neighbourhood can be a game changer for young families.

Building Connections for Valley Families (Connections) is an initiative of the Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative, a network of more than 50 individuals and groups who focus on ways to help early years families in the Valley thrive.

When early development indicators showed that much could be done to improve the early childhood developmental outcomes of children in Comox Valley, the Collaborative created Connections.

The project tackles childhood vulnerability across the Valley in a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood approach, designed to address parents' needs to be connected and supported socially.

It currently offers organized drop-in play groups in Dove Creek and Black Creek, and a pilot group in Fanny Bay, with additional supports under development in other areas of the Valley.

"We wanted a welcoming space for families to gather, play and connect," said Darcie Emerson, the family connector for the North Comox Valley area. "Creating a place for neighbours to meet who may never have crossed paths before is

especially important for families living in rural areas. Parenting can be isolating enough and we know how valuable social connections can be for adults and children alike."

The initiative's first years have shown how instrumental connection points have been for creating friendships, reducing isolation, and localizing supports for rural Comox Valley families.

"I wouldn't have met all these amazing families without having this in the area and I probably wouldn't have developed friendships here, as it is hard to put myself out there like that, especially as a busy mom," said one mother.

Tailored to caregiver and child interests, Connections brings in information and resources, music, art and activities, mobile library services, and guest speakers to answer questions about early years development.

Connections also hosted a Teddy Bear Picnic for the whole community last year. The upbeat event drew more than 200 parents and children who came out to enjoy the day with other families, and hopefully, spark a few friendships.

"We know how important the early years are and how important it is to pro-

vide support for families," said Betty Tate, the leadership liaison with the Early Years Collaborative. "The more support we can provide for families now, the more we strengthen their future."

NEXT STEPS

In 2018, the Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative found 40 per cent of Comox Valley children were considered vulnerable on the early development instrument scale, which measures the developmental health of kindergarten age children. Since the Connections project began, the Collaborative has already seen a slight reduction in childhood vulnerability.

"We know, however, that moving this population level measure is complex and we are developing other indicators to evaluate the impact of our programs more fully," said Tate.

With ongoing support from Comox Valley Community Foundation donors, the Collaborative's work continues with the hiring of a part-time coordinator, who will engage professionals on ways to help early years children and their families thrive in the Comox Valley.

For more information, visit <https://www.cveyc.ca/>.

Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative
www.cveyc.ca

MAY IS CHILD CARE APPRECIATION MONTH!!

SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION BY:

- Write a thoughtful note about how they make a difference
- Bring them a cup of coffee or treat
- Say it out loud: tell them in person what a great job they are doing
- Buy them a small meaningful gift to match their hobbies
- Consider a group thank you from your community!

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN!!

Nominate your favourite early years professional and tell us why they are special for a chance to win a prize!

TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE

Enter to win during the month of May by emailing



Community Foundation announces grant recipients

More than \$665,000 awarded to 52 organizations

ENVIRONMENT, CONSERVATION & CLIMATE

\$80,000 to 9 organizations via community table distribution

■ Beaufort Watershed Stewards	Purchase stream monitoring equipment
■ Conservancy Hornby Island	Restore and conserve eelgrass at Tribune Bay
■ Cumberland Community Forest Society	Build stewardship community in lower Perseverance Creek
■ Denman Conservancy Association	Ecological resiliency speakers series
■ MARS Wildlife Rescue Hospital	After-hours night drop; bat flight recovery pen
■ Millard Piercy Watershed Stewards	Replace smolt counting box at the Piercy Creek site
■ Morrison Creek Streamkeepers	Remediate Morrison Creek fish passage at Miromar Road
■ Comox Valley Project Watershed Society	Monitor water quality in the Valley's watershed
■ Tsolum River Restoration Society	Purchase stream monitoring equipment and software for Eyes on the River project

ADULTS WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES

\$57,960 to 7 organizations via community table distribution

■ Beaufort Association for Inclusion in Action	Social programs for adults with diverse abilities
■ Comox Valley Child Development Association	Support access to outdoor camp
■ Comox Valley Therapeutic Riding Society	Subsidize access to Trailblazers program
■ Courtenay Recreation Adapted and Inclusive Programs	Support adapted recreational and social programs
■ L'Arche Comox Valley	Support I Belong Centre programs
■ Comox Valley Special Olympics	Support access and athlete participation
■ Vancouver Island Adaptive Snow Sports	Support access to adapted programs and participation

HOUSING INSECURITY/HOMELESSNESS SUPPORTS

\$75,000 to 4 organizations via the Coalition to End Homelessness

■ Comox Bay Care Society	Care-A-Van mobile outreach services
■ Comox Valley Head Injury Society	Supports for head injury survivors at risk of homelessness
■ Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society	Create community through access to recreation
■ Everybody Deserves a Smile	Care packages for people experiencing homelessness

HEALTH RESEARCH

\$130,000 from the Robert & Florence Filberg Fund held at Vancouver Foundation

■ Comox Valley Healthcare Foundation and Island Health	Engaging community to build aging and dementia research capacity in the Comox Valley
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COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT GRANTS

\$323,156 to 31 organizations via community advisory

■ Alano Club of Courtenay	Create safe green space for clients
■ Arden Elementary Parents Advisory Committee	Increase capacity at Arden Elementary School salad bar
■ Comox Valley Arts	Improve access to Arts programs for all ages
■ Comox Valley Broadcasting Society	Create connection via a seniors and youth podcast project
■ Comox Valley Community Justice Centre	Purchase laptops to mobilize and empower volunteers
■ Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative	Co-ordinate initiatives that connect children and families
■ Comox Valley Hospice Society	Improve connection and wellness in the end-of-life journey
■ Comox Valley Transition Society	Modernize addiction recovery program materials
■ Courtenay Elementary Community School Society	Increase lunch program capacity via a kitchen renovation
■ Courtenay Little Theatre Society	Enrich performing arts with support for the 2023/24 season
■ Cumberland Community Schools Society	Support for Cumberland Food Share program
■ Denman Island Community Education Society	Mental health and connection programs
■ d'Esterre Seniors' Centre Association	Support kitchen coordinator wages
■ Eureka Support Society	Food security and training for kitchen program
■ Fanny Bay Community Association	Commercial refrigerator for community hall kitchen
■ Farm to Family Meals Service Society	Support Denman Island Family Meal program
■ Glacier View Lodge Society	Food security for seniors and low-income caregivers
■ Hornby & Denman Community Health Care Society	Healthy meal and food boxes for at-risk seniors; dragon boat recreation equipment
■ Hornby Island Arts Council	Interpretive trail and Indigenous medicine garden
■ Hornby Island Community School	Classroom iPads for student learning and connection
■ Hornby Island Education Society	Support coordinator wages for hot meals program
■ Hornby Island Housing Society	Food garden water collection and irrigation system
■ Indigenous Women's Sharing Society	Unbroken Chain harm reduction programs
■ Lake Trail Community Education Society	Expanded programming and outreach
■ LUSH Valley Food Action Society	Operational support for food security programs
■ Sid Williams Theatre Society	Subsidized accessibility to Sid Docs 2023: Journeys
■ Sunday Station Society	Weekly meal service
■ The Salvation Army Comox Valley Ministries	Christmas hamper program for children and families
■ The Weird Church	Amplifying the arts in Cumberland
■ Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry	Cultural Family Networker costs and programs
■ Vancouver Island Symphony	Music education concerts in partnership with SD71

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY TO ENRICH LIFE FOR ALL

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