



**LEVEL**  
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

A background image showing a stack of books on a desk, with a teal diagonal overlay on the left side.

2019 Project Summaries

## CONTENTS

1	About the LEVEL Initiative
2	Aida Mwanzia
4	Andisheh Fard
6	Astraea Laliberte-La Rue
8	Jackie Obungah
10	Jamie-Lee Wesley
12	Lindsay Grant
14	Maheshi Wanasundara
16	Marcus Reid
18	Marion Erickson
20	Nargis Babrakzai
22	Sandi WanJun Liang
24	Sara Eftekhar
26	Savannah Wiest
28	Susan Arieveh Timayo
30	Tiaré Jung

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

## ABOUT THE LEVEL INITIATIVE

LEVEL is a youth-engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth population in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL CONSISTS OF  
THREE PILLARS OF  
WORK TO ADVANCE  
RACIAL EQUITY:



### ABOUT THE LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies and are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓d̓əm̓i̓n̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx\_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>

# AIDA MWANZIA



## “Building an Ethical Relationship Between the Province of British Columbia and International Students”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Post-secondary institutions in Canada and around the world have made a concerted effort to internationalize higher education in response to an increasingly diverse and globalized world. For the purpose of this research, globalization is defined as a “multi-level process signaled by the rapid advancement in technology, transnational economic trade, and international dispersion of humans, plants, animals, cultures, and worldviews.” Internationalization refers to processes in post-secondary institutions to diversify the student body, faculty, staff, curriculum, hiring practices, strategic plans, policies, and other key areas. These processes take place in the context of a “post-colonial” world where the legacy of colonization has resulted in the valuation of Western education, epistemology, and institutions over those that exist within the Global South and local Indigenous communities. The implications of this are that, in many cases, Western degrees and citizenship offer more mobility, opportunities, and income potential in this current market. Without undergoing meaningful processes of decolonization, post-secondary institutions in Western countries continue to profit unethically from imbalanced North-South relations.

The purpose of this research is to explore ways in which the Province of British Columbia can begin to build an ethical relationship with international students, who often become future Permanent Residents and citizens. Studies have shown that 25% of international students admitted to universities in Canada in the early 2000s went on to become Permanent Residents (PRs) within 10 years after their graduation, with approximately half gaining PR status through the economic class of migrants. This indicates that a significant proportion of international students remain in Canada, and continue to contribute meaningfully to the Canadian economy, as they are required to engage in skilled work verified by the National Occupation Classification in order to gain status through the economic pathway to permanent residency. However, ethical engagement with international students requires moving beyond an economic analysis of their contribution to Canadian society and recognizing their humanity and complexity.

Through reading academic studies, news articles, reflecting on my own lived-experience as an international student, listening to personal stories from international students in British Columbia, and witnessing several post-secondary institutions increase international student tuition at astounding rates, it is clear that BC’s approach to international education has mostly focused on internationalizing the student body. This internationalizing seems to be primarily for financial reasons, and diversifying of faculty, staff, curriculum, hiring practices, strategic plans,

and policies have been seriously neglected. The social and cultural value that international students offer, the support that they require, and the representation that they need in the curriculum, faculty, and staff needs to be recognized and addressed. It is also in BC’s best interest to increase subsidies for public post-secondary institutions in order to decrease the dependency on international students, as minor changes to the number of international students will result in major deficits that will effect education for BC citizens. This project proposes implementing a two percent tuition cap for international student tuition, which will allow for areas of international education other than recruitment to be addressed, while preventing the unregulated exploitation of international students for tuition.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I’d like to pay my respects to the **skwxwú7mesh** (Squamish), **selílwitulh** (Tseil-Waututh), and **xw̓məθkʷəy̓əm** (Musqueam) nations on whose lands I’ve been living and working on for nearly a decade. Our liberation is connected and one day, we will be free.

This policy project is dedicated to my parents, who sacrificed a lot for me to study in Vancouver, and to our community who supported us along the way.

Special thanks to the Vancouver Foundation for the amazing opportunities for learning and friendship, the BC Federation of Students whose research supported and inspired my policy ask, and Jennifer Reddy & Cherise Seucharan for their generous advice.

### BIOGRAPHY

Aida Mwanzia is driven by her mission to connect and empower youth through transformative educational programs. With roots in Kenya, Aida has lived on unceded Coast Salish territories for seven years. The purpose of her work is to shift the narrative about migrant and Indigenous communities through reframing our collective past, present, and future.

Aida graduated from the University of British Columbia (UBC) with an honours degree in sociology. She has had the privilege of coordinating the Youth Exchanges Canada and Youth Peace Network programs, and currently serves as an advisor for the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Dialogue and Civic Engagement Certificate. Aida has facilitated dialogues and workshops for several clients, including the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, Check Your Head: The Youth Global Education Network, Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC), the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Equity and Inclusion Office at UBC, West Coast Leaf, and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association. Through her dialogue facilitation and program coordination experience, she has seen the power of experiential education, storytelling, games, and relationship-building as pathways for decolonization and visioning.

# ANDISHEH FARD



## “The Barriers of “Canadian Work Experience” for Refugees and Migrants”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The arbitrary requirement for “Canadian work experience” is one of the main challenges Newcomers face in regards to accessing meaningful employment. Indeed many Newcomers resort to “survival” jobs as the process to obtain a job that matches their experiences, credentials, and education can be lengthy. The need to acquire “Canadian experience” has arguably become a norm in society, although there isn't truly a common understanding/agreement of why this criterion exists.

In 2013, the Ontario Human Rights Commission deemed strict requirements for Canadian experience as discriminatory based on the Ontario Human Rights Code. With a newly hired Human Rights Commissioner, British Columbia has an opportunity to follow suit. There are also opportunities for employers to incorporate unconscious bias training and create assessment models based on skills and competencies. However, these recommendations are only possible first steps.

In order to have recommendations on policy and policy implementation, we need to incorporate the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, while centering the voices and experiences of people with lived-migration experience who have faced the barriers because of the requirement for Canadian experience. By mapping systematic barriers that different stakeholders face, by unpacking the different components of foreign experience and credential devaluation, and by applying a human rights and anti-oppression framework in dialogues, we may be able to better identify challenges for all stakeholders involved, as well as identify innovative opportunities for change.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge that this policy project was written on the unceded and ancestral territory of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations of the Coast Salish peoples. As a settler on stolen lands, it is important to understand the implications of doing social justice and human rights work for settler communities, particularly when focusing on issues that also impact indigenous communities, such as discriminatory employment practices.

I would like to thank the Vancouver Foundation LEVEL YPP faculty, staff and other participants for the support in formulating and writing this policy project. In particular I would like to thank Jennifer Reddy and Lily Grewal for their suggestions, feedback and guidance during this process.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge that the idea for this policy project was first developed in the Simon Fraser University (SFU) RADIUS Refugee Livelihood Lab in partnership with Wafaa Zaqout and next steps will be conducted in partnership with Wafaa. I would also like to thank the SFU International Refugee and Newcomer Program for providing the space and time for me to attend the LEVEL YPP program.

Finally, I would like to thank others who have conducted research on this topic and those who have shared their experiences with me.

### BIOGRAPHY

Andisheh Fard is the Manager of the Refugee and Newcomer Program at Simon Fraser University International at Simon Fraser University (SFU). She holds a Master of Arts in Human Rights Studies from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Political Science with International Relations from the University of British Columbia. She has worked with, and volunteered for, numerous organizations, including Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, UN Women in Afghanistan, and the North Shore Women's Centre.

# ASTRAEA LALIBERTE-LA RUE



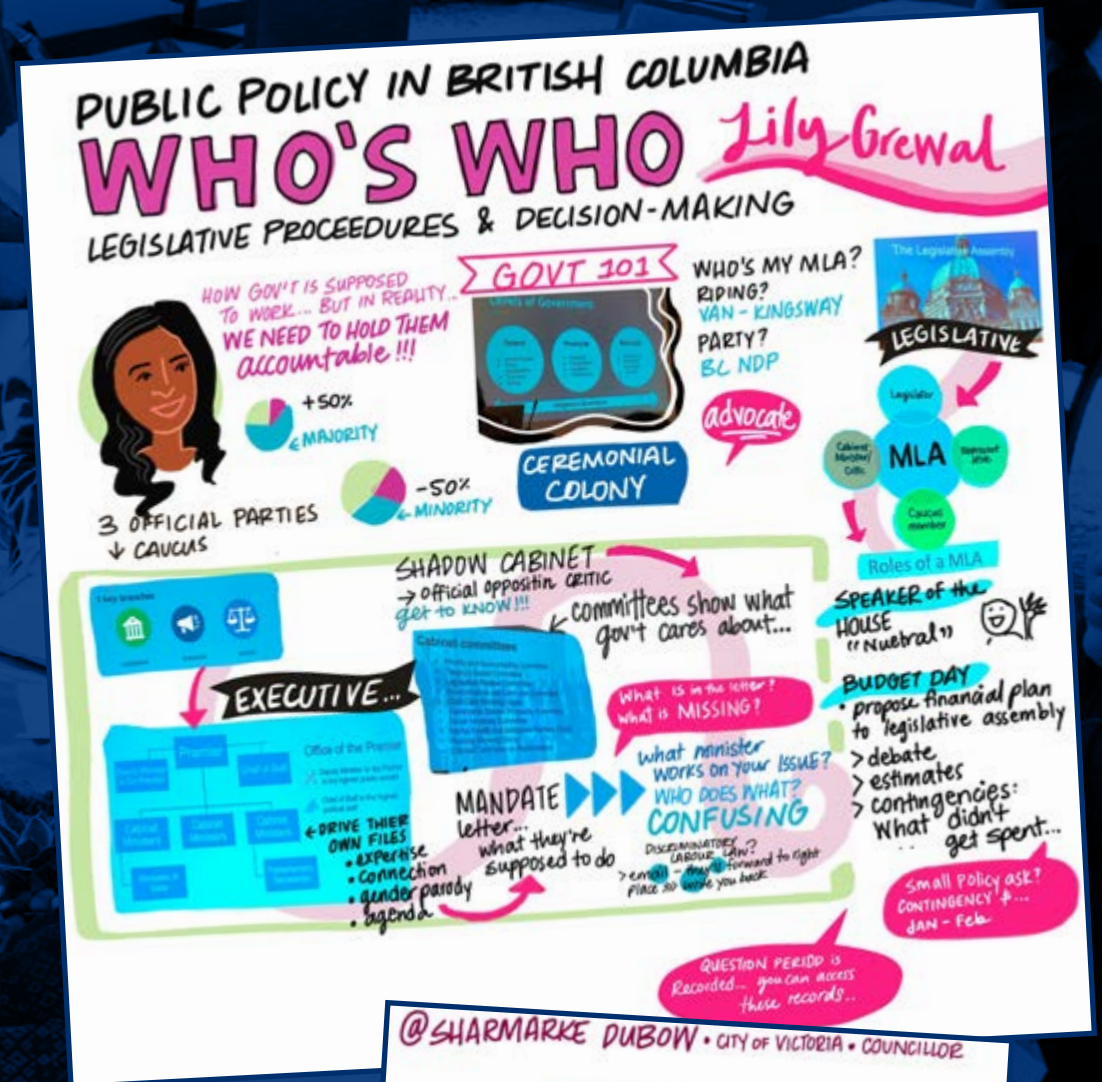
“Indigenous Youth in Care Rights to Culture and Community: How We Can Do Better”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Existing policy in the Child, Family, and Care Services Act includes cultural rights for Indigenous youth in care, however this legislation is not effectively meeting youth-in-care needs. Youth in care still lose connection to their cultures. Often this is facilitated by “inappropriate placement” choices. Inappropriate placement refers to non-Indigenous homes or homes that are not culturally suitable. Some reasons that lead to inappropriate placements are the lack of training, Indigenous homes, and understanding/knowledge about the youth-in-care cultures. Some shifts have been made, but they are not very strong or consistent, and have not resulted in substantially improved outcomes. Currently, there are opportunities to partner with organizations and adjust policy language that could result in more positive practice shifts. As well as strengthening the existing policy in legislation around cultural rights for youth in care, so that cultural-identity rights are upheld more consistently through the foster-parent training and guidance programs, which is already in place. To do this we need to create a policy to ensure that the rights concerning Indigenous youth in care are being addressed and practiced, by training foster parents in Indigenous culture, traditions, and language; also, by specialty training on how to attend to children who have suffered from trauma. A system of accountability needs to be provided that ensures social workers are recording their actions, and also ensures their clients are learning about, and are involved in, cultural activities.

## BIOGRAPHY

Weyt-k. *Astraea en skwest*. Hello, my name is Astraea Laliberte-LaRue. I am from the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Indian Band. I am currently a student at Thompson Rivers University, studying to complete my Social Work degree. I am honoured to be a part of the Youth Policy Program, and am grateful for the new knowledge and relationships I have gained. A goal of mine is to help the people in my home community by being a role model for its youth. I will continue this path by furthering my education in policy and Indigenous culture. *Kukwstsetsemc*.



# JACKIE OBUNGAH



## “Mental Health Support for International Students”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this work is to highlight the importance of mental health support for international students in Canada and to present strategies to provide intersectional and decolonized approaches to solve the problems that currently exist.

### DEDICATION

This policy ask is dedicated to Black and Indigenous self-identifying women who have directly or indirectly globally influenced policy in a myriad of positive and impactful ways. To those who continue to do the tireless and thankless work to ensure their communities thrive through political, social, and environmental justice and advocacy: My gratitude runs deep.

### BIOGRAPHY

Jackie Obungah (she/her) is a Black African femme living and working on the unceded territories of the *xwməθkwəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Skwxwú7mesh* (Squamish), and *səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh* (Tsleil-Waututh) Peoples.

She is currently pursuing her B.A in International Development at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and planning the Afrocentrism Conference 2019: Decolonizing Academia. She is an integral and supportive member of the SFU Women’s Center collective. She is devoted to learning and understanding the complex ideas and processes of decolonization, as well as putting it into practice.

Jackie is deeply passionate about the inclusivity of Afrocentric schools of thought in academia, and in her practice of community work. She loves exploring African literature, poetry, film and photography and expresses her undying gratitude to Indigenous peoples for their continuous relationship to the land. She is committed to working in solidarity to Indigenous peoples to dismantle colonial structures globally.



# JAMIE-LEE WESLEY

“Restore, Preserve, Revitalize”

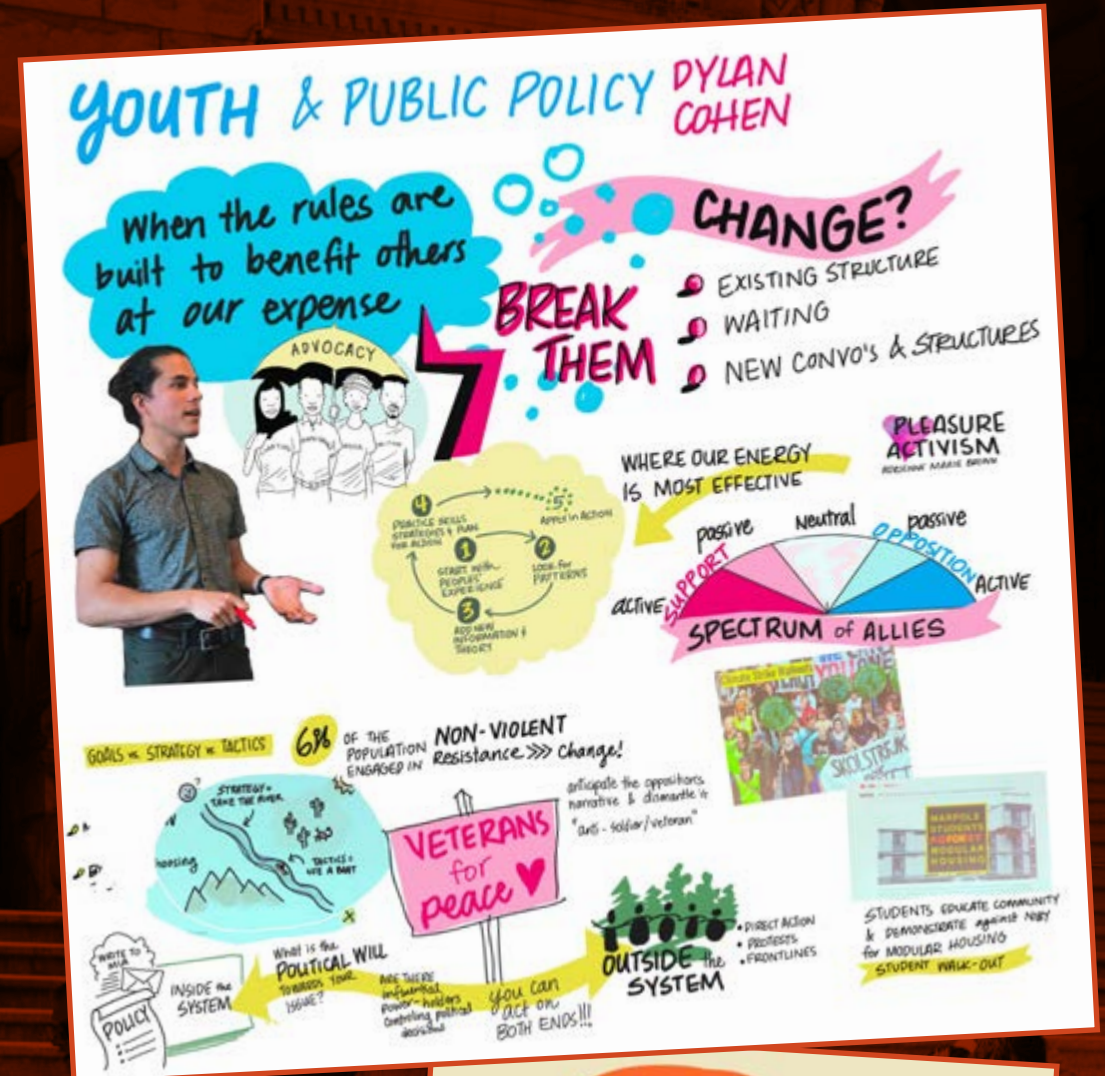


## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Language revitalization is something that I feel needs our focus. It is the healing in this process that our Nations should be striving for, and should be putting more action into, in favour of these outcomes of regaining our traditions. With the discussion of a new high school in the Upper Skeena in the works, this new school seems to be a great place to run a pilot program to target the revitalization of our Gitksan Language and culture at a local level. With efforts such as cultural dance and Gitksan class (in the elementary schools to lay the foundation for the Gitksan-speaking language), we see a plateau of language learning in the sense of unlearning Western ways of teaching a language that thrives more on influential experiences and practices. This unlearning is where I have come up with a solution to this particular problem.

## BIOGRAPHY

Raised as a strong, Indigenous leader, Jamie-lee Wesley has found passion in building up her Nation and its future leaders. Belonging to both the Gitksan and Tsimshian Nations in Northern British Columbia, and residing in Gitsegukla, she has spent years in youth leadership and empowerment. Jamie-lee has seen the value and hope of its youth and of her culture. As she sees barriers in being Indigenous and a leader in her community, she also sees her place of belonging. A place where she is ready to make a difference, and to be heard.



# LINDSAY GRANT



## “Empowering Communities in East Vancouver”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside is frequently referred to as “Canada’s poorest area code.” The community is home to the largest population of people experiencing poverty and homelessness in Vancouver. A number of government initiatives and strategies are targeted to address social challenges in the Downtown Eastside, most notably the “Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan,” approved by the City of Vancouver in 2014. In addition, the neighbourhood is home to an enormous concentration of non-profit organizations, social services, and housing providers working to address the needs of local residents. From health services to arts and culture organizations, these agencies are enormously important to the continuing resilience of the Downtown Eastside community.

The purpose of this report is to consider options to encourage greater engagement of local residents in community governance and service provision in the Downtown Eastside. Specifically, mechanisms whereby community leadership might improve the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability of policymaking, and social services are studied. An additional consideration is the intrinsic value of investing in civic engagement among traditionally underrepresented populations. Research and evaluation of policy options was conducted with reference to the goals of facilitating participation in direct democracy among residents in the Downtown Eastside, enabling partnership between local residents, businesses, organizations, and service providers, and directing accountability of non-profit agencies to the populations and communities they serve. Given the neighbourhood’s location on unceded Coast Salish territories and a large Indigenous community, recognition of the rights of the local First Nations and engagement of the diverse urban Indigenous population are also key goals.

Research for this report consisted of informal interviews with East Vancouver residents, community organizers, and non-profit staff and directors, as well as attendance at community forums, meetings, and events. Relevant literature on the Downtown Eastside community and community leadership strategies was also reviewed. Finally four broad policy models were

investigated and evaluated for feasibility and potential impacts and challenges. The four policy models elaborated include Board Diversification, Neighbourhood Councils, Resource Boards, and Participatory Budgeting. Specific examples referenced include the Let’s Speak Up Initiative (Vancouver), the OnBoard Canada Project, Office of the Neighbourhood Model (Vancouver Washington, Portland), Community Resource Boards (British Columbia), Participatory Budgeting New York City Council (PBNYC), (New York), Participatory Budgeting in Scotland (PB Scotland), (Scotland), and Empower LA (Los Angeles).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With gratitude to my colleagues in the 2019 Vancouver Foundation LEVEL Youth Policy Project.

### BIOGRAPHY

Lindsay Grant is a member of the NunatuKavut Southern Inuit currently living on unceded Coast Salish territories. She has worked in various roles in grassroots community development and leadership in East Vancouver.



# MAHESHI WANASUNDARA



## “Language: Our Heritage, Our Story”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

British Columbia is one of Canada’s most diverse provinces. With European settler influence establishing English and French as Canada’s national languages we have lost the richness of more than 30 different Indigenous languages and close to 60 dialects (42) in British Columbia, and more than 200 heritage languages (43) immigrants bring to Canada (a Heritage Language is a language that is not one of the official languages or Aboriginal languages). In this document I am discussing the importance and the right to preserve languages as well as the current state of language education in BC. This is an invitation for the BC government, especially the Ministries of Education, Child and Family Development, and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to take action towards preserving the diverse cultures we have.

Language plays a critical role in who we are, linking us to our culture and heritage. Learning additional languages helps children to be more innovative and improves critical thinking (15). We can own up to our global responsibility to preserve languages that are going extinct (20). Providing the opportunity to study one’s mother tongue leads to an increased feeling of belonging amongst new immigrants. It is also an important step towards Reconciliation with First Nations communities.

The Canadian government has recognised the importance of language revitalization for the wellbeing of individuals and communities (36), and has created the perfect platform for the provinces to take action. There are mentions in the provincial laws and policies encouraging heritage language and Indigenous language learning. However, there is a lack of clear direction and implementation between these broad statements and what we see in classrooms. Only 15% of BC’s Aboriginal population can speak their mother tongue (33). Close to 50% of BC’s population come from families that speak languages other than English (43). There are many grassroots organizations that promote language education and provide opportunity for students to learn Indigenous and heritage languages (46). Some post-secondary institutions have also taken leadership (45).

In this document, I am suggesting some short-term strategies that can be implemented within the next year to encourage language education:

1. Reduce barriers for community organised language opportunities.
2. Provide credits for existing language knowledge.

Followed by some strategies that may take up to a few years:

3. Extend the opportunity to vote for trustees and participation in school boards to include Permanent Residents and lower the voting age to 16.
4. Include Indigenous and heritage languages in the K-12 core curriculum.

And the long-term goal:

5. Develop and implement an Indigenous Language Education Policy and a Heritage Language Education Policy in BC.

This document is an invitation to the education systems in BC to help students develop a well-rounded understanding of the world grounded in our history and heritage to prepare them to be better citizens of the world.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge that I am working on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded Coast Salish territories. As a migrant settler, I want to take this opportunity to commit to ally-ship to elevate the voices of Indigenous communities and their rights to their heritage.

I am thankful to Vancouver Foundation, the LEVEL YPP initiative, the wonderful faculty and staff; especially Alejandra Lopez Bravo, and Jennifer Reddy, for helping me to materialise my thoughts and ideas. I’m thankful to my fellow participants of the LEVEL YPP for their friendship, support, and critical eye.

I want to thank my parents, Shyama Abeykoon and Kalinga Wanasundara, for guiding me through to the world. I want to say a big heartfelt thank-you to my partner Avtar Chatha, for being my constant motivator whenever I am feeling the slightest symptoms of Imposter Syndrome, and for being a mirror for my voice, helping fine-tune my policy asks, and for so bravely sharing his life experiences.

Most importantly, I would like to acknowledge every brilliant mind and kind heart who has worked on social equitability, and laid the ground before me.

### BIOGRAPHY

Maheshi Wanasundara moved to Toronto with her parents and brother from Ratnapura, Sri Lanka. She graduated from University of Toronto with an Honours Bachelor of Science degree focusing on Psychology and Women and Gender Studies. Following her post-graduate education, she worked for the Kingston Community Health Centre as a Project Coordinator introducing Social Determinants of Health into their client intake system. Maheshi moved to Vancouver to work as a Volunteer Experience and Engagement Coordinator with the Canadian Red Cross. Volunteering and building community have been her personal values, and she is currently volunteering with Battered Women’s Support Services and Beyond the Conversation promoting social inclusivity and mental health.

# MARCUS REID



“Advocating for Safety in Workplaces Through Public Policy Change: An Examination Powered by Indigenous Knowledge and Social Justice Support”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vision: Developing policy to create, maintain, and foster safer environments for Indigenous people, racialized newcomers, persons with disabilities, those impoverished, and LGBTQ2S+ (two-spirit), people for all-gendered communities. The purpose of staying true to this vision is to include everyone impacted by colonial suppressive systems, and further pay attention to those intersecting between various marginalized identity markers.

To ground this policy with an Indigenous knowledge and way of being, I'd like to define safety in terms of emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual safety. This also requires a deeper acknowledgement that safety cannot be so easily acquired under colonial systems like white supremacy, patriarchy, and more (Personal Communications, Nathalie Lorenzo). For those beneficiaries of hierarchy-imposed structures, it needs to be understood that unearned privilege is at the expense of oppressed people's livelihood. For example, the settler-stolen Indigenous land that we are situated on continues to effect and affect all aspects of Indigenous people's safety. This will remain an undue hardship for Indigenous peoples until there is reform in the hierarchies imposed on these lands. Acquiring reform is not for the purpose of repositioning Indigenous people at the top of a hierarchy, but completely dismantling these oppressive systems to centralize the true sovereign people's culture, values, and laws into the life of those residing on these lands. In contrast to Indigenous erasure, to centralize Indigenous people's way of life, values would emerge that are beneficial to contemporary society. Traditional values of many Indigenous peoples would foster safety for everyone, like respect for peoples of other nations, LGBTQ2S+ (two-spirit), empowering women and all genders, caring for Elders and those with disabilities. Grounding policy analysis with Indigenous knowledge demonstrates the importance of widening the scope of anti-oppression to all inflicted by a system that is not working for everyone.

Further, to build this policy with a comprehensive and intersectional lens, I'd like to acknowledge that European colonialism has also detrimentally impacted the aforementioned oppressed groups who have settled in Canada, or are situated in Canada by force of colonialism. Which is why this policy ask has a holistic range of groups to consider, centralize, and stand with in solidarity together.

With all these different communities, it's important to recognize the magnitude of hardship when individuals intersect between marginalized communities – for instance a Muslim woman of colour navigating different layers of oppression when immigrating to Canada. How does this individual come to terms with their safety?

These are questions and instances that the policy ask aims to explore solutions for.

Strategy to increase safety mandated through three main policy recommendations:

### 1. Examine and Update the Designated Groups in the Federal Employment Equity Act.

- The Federal Employment Equity Act designates women, Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities as groups who face inequity in employment. This policy ask observes who is excluded from this designation and what impacts there are for marginalized groups without anti-oppression support. These observations are for the purpose of recommending a larger scope of employment discrimination, as well as recognizing oppression within workplaces.

### 2. Amend the Federal Employment Equity Act to Deepen External Anti-oppression Training.

- This policy ask aims to lobby the Federal Minister of Labour to require outreach and training services in the Employment Equity Act. One recommendation is for an amendment to include and/or expand external anti-oppression training into employment equity policy. This would increase equity initiatives in federally regulated employers for the purpose of fostering safety within workplaces.

### 3. Stipulate Conditions to Federal Government Funding for Continual and Tangible Support for Designated Employee Equity Groups.

- Lastly, this policy ask utilizes the case study of attaching additional requirements to the Summer Jobs Canada program to prohibit discriminatory organizations from receiving funding. With successful methods of stipulating funding conditions, more options are recommended for what other anti-oppression initiatives can be implemented by furthering conditions to receive funding.
- First Nations and corporations should already align their values with anti-oppression initiatives and if they are not, their openness to change is integral in implementing new public policy.
- In the development of these anti-oppression initiatives, the purpose/core values of this youth program must continue to be central for the marginalized groups to be present in policy making decisions.

## BIOGRAPHY

With Heiltsuk/Nisga'a First Nation roots, Marcus Reid was urban born and raised on unceded territory of the Katzie, Semiahmoo, and Kwantlen people in the city of Surrey, also living as an uninvited guest on unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam land through living displacement. Having experienced diaspora, Marcus believes that it does not permit reaping benefits from Coast Salish people and further believes whether Indigenous, person of colour, or white – all have the responsibility to value Indigenous way of life, and now are even more accountable to dismantling systems of Indigenous oppression to achieve liberation of other identity margins the right way. Marcus feels like it has been an arduous journey to come to this worldview from his own impacts from and self-perpetuations of colonization, but he grants this way of thinking from post-secondary education, Elders, his renewing of culture, and connecting with like-minded people determined to disrupt the system!

Much love and gratitude for the LEVEL YPP participants and leadership.

T'ooyaxsiy' niin! Thank you!

# MARION ERICKSON



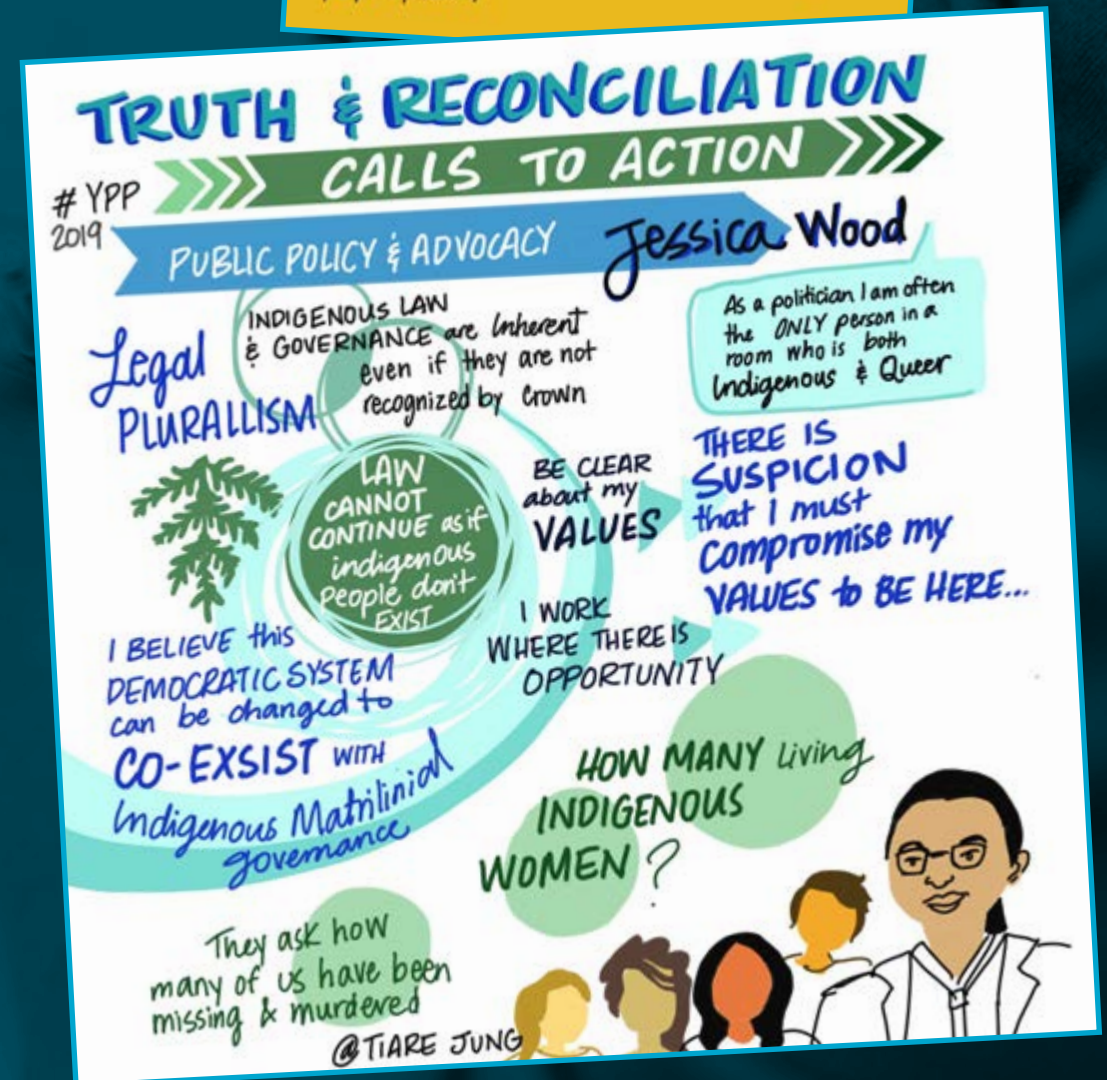
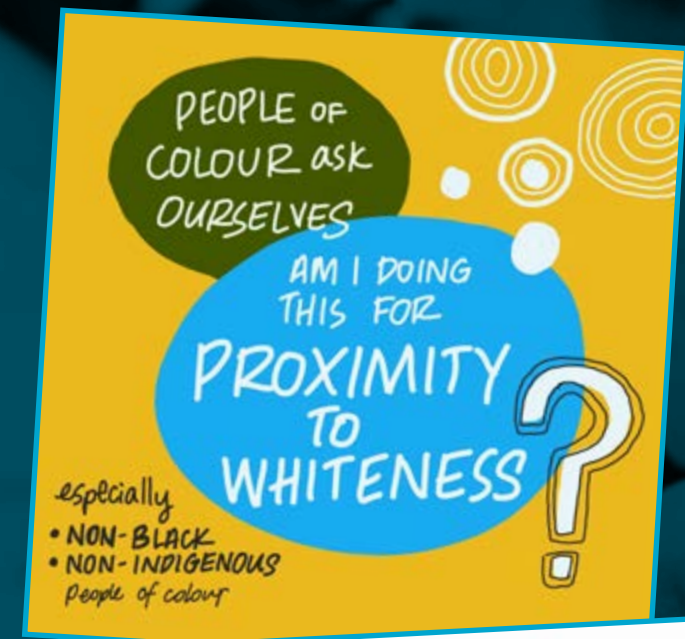
“Revitalizing Dakelh Midwifery Can Result in Better Healthcare Outcomes for Dakelh Women, and Greater Diversity in Healthcare”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The repatriation of childbirth back to Indigenous communities in the Northern Health Region (see Appendix figure 1) of British Columbia (BC) is beneficial to holistic and Indigenous-led healthcare. Policy interventions internationally, federally, provincially, and at a community-level related to the education of Aboriginal midwives is important to the repatriation of childbirth back to Indigenous communities. In the Northern Health Region, it is common practice that women living in remote places such as Indian Reservations, small municipalities, or rural areas in the Northern Health regions, leave their homes, families, and communities to give birth in larger centralized hospitals (National Aboriginal Council of Midwives, 2016; Northern Health Authority, n.d.; Smylie, J., 2016); I will explore how this practice has had negative impacts on Aboriginal women, children, families, and communities. This policy brief explains the benefits of allowing Aboriginal women to stay in their communities to give birth, and introduces policy changes that encourage the acquirement of more Aboriginal midwives to the Northern BC region through a process of training Dakelh doulas.

## BIOGRAPHY

Marion Erickson is an Indigenous feminist from the Dakelh Nation. Marion has a Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration and Community Development from the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), as well as a certificate in Applied Business Technology from the College of New Caledonia (CNC). Marion has served as an elected representative for the CNC Students Union and the Senate at UNBC. Marion is dedicated to improving the lives of Northern British Columbia Aboriginal women. Marion is currently working with the Aboriginal Business Development Centre as the Research Facilitator.



# NARGIS BABRAKZAI



## “Educated Social Immigrants for a Globally Competitive Canada”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada has an ambitious three-year plan to bring 1.3 million immigrants to the country between 2018 and 2021. Today, more than 40% of Canadian population is either a first- or second-generation immigrant. This speaks volumes about Canada’s reliance on immigration. The main driver of this immigration plan is lack of population growth. For a country to sustain itself and survive, it must grow its population. Current reproductive rate of the country is at 1.6 children per woman (1. statcan.gc.ca). For the country to sustain its current population, it must have a reproductive growth rate of two children per woman. And if the country wants to grow its population, it must have a reproductive rate above two children per woman. This challenge is not unique to Canada it is a common problem facing developed nations. Underdeveloped nations on the other hand are known for high-reproductive rates. Canada is a great candidate for immigration as it has one of the lowest-population densities in the world, it’s the second largest country in the world after Russia, but with population of only 37 million people. Bringing more people is easy, however standards must be applied to ensure competitiveness of human resources. With a composition of people from more than 200 countries, Canada has the potential to ensure long term economic and global competitiveness. This policy brief examines opportunities to better utilize immigrant human resources to ensure Canada grows its population and maintains competitiveness.

This policy brief shows that alleviating challenges facing social immigrants can unlock an immense human potential, which would otherwise be lost. It also explores the current challenges. In case of immigrant dependency on welfare, their children’s chance of education attainment decreases significantly. When parents of social immigrants are not economically active and educated in the host country, it has long-lasting effect on the future economic activity of their children. Immigrants often are from the middle- to upper-class of their society. However, when they come to Canada, unless they are skilled immigrants, they face tremendous challenges and end up entering lower socioeconomic levels of society. This experience of change in class is a shock and disappointment to many. Immigrants are often risk-takers, innovative, and leave home in hopes of giving their children a better future. What they don’t know is that the host country might have the opportunities but substantial barriers will prevent the family from achieving their goals. We will look at opportunities to significantly reduce those barriers.

Being a first generation immigrant myself, I can attest to the challenges of integration. The recommendations here are a combination of my observations of other immigrants and research conducted. To give immigrants the best chance at a life in Canada, and to give Canada the competitive edge it requires to succeed in future, it is best to invest in undergraduate education of social immigrants. This equips them in the best way possible. Four years of a Western-style undergraduate degree trains the mind to think critically, and to make the most out of the knowledge of home country and host country. Other forms of training and education, including a Masters degree, while useful, does not have the depth and strength to transform life of an individual. The four years of education allows enough time to explore self, Canada, history of Canada, the world, and to put everything in perspective. Because of the profound experience of immigration, an immigrant is ready to absorb information at the early stages of arrival. This would be an ideal time to offer them incentives and scholarships to enroll in an undergraduate degree. That is despite having a degree from home country, which is often not enough due to often limited and different style of education. Additionally, for the individuals working in the more-globalized world of tomorrow, information from both home and host country is essential. Therefore the previous degree is a plus, but a Canadian degree is essential as well. Canada needs smart immigration with the most impactful experience for the immigrant. When they are empowered and transformed, their product is a strong economy, innovative nation, and increased global trade.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge that this policy project was written on the traditional and unceded territories of Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Kwantlen, Qayqayt, and Tsawwassen First Nations. The LEVEL Youth Public Policy program takes place on the traditional territories of Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish Nations of the Coast Salish people.

I want to thank the Vancouver Foundation Level YPP faculty, staff, and mentors for their support throughout this program. This was a very unique opportunity for all program participants and me to learn from each other, and to understand our community problems and potential solutions. As a Newcomer, this program helped me to research, think, and write about issues that impact my community and me. I would also like to thank my family for their gracious support and encouragement.

### BIOGRAPHY

Nargis Babrakzai is currently studying at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. She came to Canada as an immigrant in 2015. Since then, she has volunteered in different programs and organizations. Recently she has been working as the Surrey Refugee Youth Team Co-chair. She would like to continue working in roles to serve community. Her aim is to be one of many Newcomer youth voices at government level.

# SANDI WANJUN LIANG



## “Prioritizing Newcomer Engagement in Creative City Strategy”

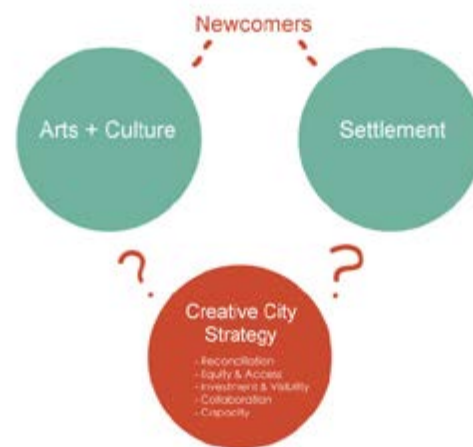
### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A majority of Newcomer residents in Vancouver, unceded homelands of Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations, do not feel they belong to the city.<sup>2</sup> To support integration, a federally funded settlement program provides services to meet Newcomers’ needs in the everyday life. The service topics can range from finding a job, to learning English, to getting a driver license. The settlement program is free and available in many languages. When learning about how to live in Canada, at the same time Newcomers are disconnecting from their own heritages, languages, and cultures that are not well-represented in the city. Those who came with passions as artists and cultural workers, may get lost in the settlement journey. Individual’s migrant story can be very different between immigrant and refugee, between those who choose to move to the country, and those who are forced to leave their own countries. Newcomers are looking for creative spaces and supports to express their stories.

This urgent need aligned with the key themes of Creative City Strategy, a vision and plan for art, culture, and creativity in Vancouver under a framework of Reconciliation. The strategy aimed to commit to equity, access, and inclusion. To support art and cultural diversity in the city, Creative City Strategy should work with the Newcomer community to learn about their needs; to make collaboration and to create opportunity for relationship-building between Indigenous people, Newcomers, and other arts and culture communities in the city.

This project looks to fill the three main objectives:

- To identify the current approach of Creative City Strategy and its challenges for Newcomers engagement.
- To identify key gaps in resources and services between what is available in settlement programs and art service programs, with the actual needs of Newcomers.
- To provide recommendations and specific actions on how Creative City Strategy can address to the gap identified to better support Newcomers in the city.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea of this policy project has developed out of my experience working as settlement worker for Newcomers, as an emerging social-practice artist, and on my journey with LEVEL Youth Policy program. I have been living, studying, and working on these traditional and unceded territories since 2009 as an uninvited guest. I would like to acknowledge Indigenous people on Coast Salish Territories with my deepest gratitude; it’s my responsibility to ground my connection to the land and foster the relationship building between Indigenous people and Newcomers, while working toward justice and equity.

This project also aims to make space for creative voices in the policy shaping process. I would like to thank Juno Yiwei Zhang for illustrating her experiences as a Newcomer artist into visual storytelling. I would like to extend my special thanks to Kevin Huang for his guidance and encouragement that motivated me to take new challenges during the process. I am also grateful to connect with and learn from individuals who research or practice at the arts and culture sector, settlement sector, and public service in Vancouver.

Finally, sincere gratitude to the LEVEL YPP Program staff, faculty, and youth participants for supporting and upholding each other during this journey. Also thanks to my family and friends who have encouraged me to take this first step and to always be true to myself.

### BIOGRAPHY

Sandi WanJun Liang is a settler to unceded Coast Salish territories, born and raised in Guangzhou, China. She immigrated to Canada with her family at age 15. Sandi has worked with Newcomers, immigrants, and refugees as a Settlement Practitioner. She is passionate about supporting her community through working and volunteering on the front line. Sandi holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts degree from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Believing in Art as Empowerment and as Catalyst for social change, she enjoys participating in storytelling, community collaboration, and art in public space.

2 A survey of Metro Vancouver 2017, Vancouver Foundation

# SARA EFTEKHAR



## “Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Violence: A Case for Paid Domestic Leave Policies and Legislation in British Columbia”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the Canadian Women’s Foundation, every six days a Canadian woman dies after facing violence by an intimate partner. Domestic violence is a socially complex issue that impacts individuals, families, and communities. Domestic violence is a violation of human rights and a significant problem in British Columbia (BC). According to Statistics Canada, over half of women in BC have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 16, and make up more than two-thirds of domestic violence victims in Canada. Therefore, domestic violence is a public-health issue since it impacts a shockingly large portion of the population and has profound influence on the health and well-being of victims and their families.

As a registered nurse working with survivors of domestic violence on a daily basis, I am aware that anyone can be a victim of domestic violence. Domestic violence exists within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds, and economic levels. While domestic violence can occur to anyone, Indigenous women and immigrant/refugee women are at increased risk for domestic violence. This is important, as the intersectionality of domestic violence receives very little attention.

My clients’ experiences demonstrate that domestic violence is more than a personal issue; it extends beyond the home and into the workplace. In fact, a Canadian analysis estimates that every year, employers lose \$77.9 million as a direct result of domestic violence. Women’s career development is also impacted as domestic violence influences work attendance and performance.

One of the main barriers for women attempting to leave an abusive relationship is taking the time out of their current jobs to access resources. In fact, half of these victims end up losing a job because of the impact of domestic violence on their work and personal life. Too often, I meet women who want to find alternative housing, access health care, make a police report, or make an appointment with an organization but these support systems are not available after business hours. These women also fear accessing resources after work hours due to the ongoing abuse and threats. Moreover, women fear losing their jobs when disclosing violence, or they may face financial barriers when taking the necessary time off work and it has been well documented in studies that financial barriers can trap victims in abusive situations. Therefore, new research is beginning to shed light on the importance of the workplace in empowering women to support themselves and become survivors instead of victims.

Addressing domestic violence as an employment issue provides a more holistic response to supporting victims and eradicating the cycle of violence for families. Domestic violence legislation and policies in the workplace are important parts of promoting equality for women. Research indicates that one of the most effective interventions by employers is paid domestic leave, where victims of domestic violence are entitled to some paid leave time by their employers to leave their domestic situation. Currently in Canada, BC is one of the only provinces where paid domestic leave is non-existent. In fact, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Labrador all have legislative policies that allow victims of domestic violence paid time off.

Ontario, for example, provides five days of paid leave and five days of unpaid leave to survivors. This paid time off is meant to support victims to leave their abusive partner by accessing community resources, making appointments, seeking safety, dealing with the police, seeking legal advice, and getting medical attention.

Momentum for paid leave for survivors is continuing to build across Canada and some progress has already been made. In 2017, Bill M 235 – 2017, which would propose providing leave for BC victims of domestic or sexual violence passed its first reading, however, it needs to be reintroduced to push it forward. Simultaneously, private employers and institutions can adapt policies to offer paid domestic leave to their employees.

This is way overdue in BC, as paid domestic leave can save lives. It is time for our provincial government to enact policies that provide support for victims of domestic violence by ensuring victims have paid leave.

### BIOGRAPHY

Sara Eftekhar is passionate about gender equality as it relates to women’s health. She is currently a Labour and Delivery Nurse at BC Women’s Hospital, and a research nurse at Canada’s first ever study testing a Health Promotion Intervention for women who are survivors of domestic violence. She has also worked on women’s health programs in Tanzania, Egypt, and Kenya. Through her patients’ stories of injustice, she is inspired to make policy and systems change and has represented Canada at the United Nations, has worked on creating Canada’s first ever youth policies, and has acted as a consult to local and international development programs. She holds a Masters of Arts degree in Peace and Development as a Rotary Peace Scholar, where she examined the impact of conflict on women’s reproductive health. She has been awarded the YWCA Young Woman of Distinction Award, and RBC’s Top 25 Immigrants of Canada Award.

# SAVANNAH WIEST



“tapwewin: The Truth. Sharing the True History of Indigenous Peoples in Canada with a Focus on Resiliency and Reconciliation”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The history of Indigenous people's interactions with residential schools, Indian hospitals, and the long-term effects of colonization has not been previously taught in mainstream Western academia. Lack of education on this subject has resulted in stereotyping, racism, and discrimination against Indigenous peoples, both individually and systemically. The lack of this history being included in mainstream academia has resulted in individuals denying the existence of the schools, let alone the extent to which they irreparably damaged the lives of Indigenous peoples. It has also resulted in people trying to reinforce the idea that these schools were a positive experience for students and that good came from them. It's not uncommon to find that an older generation is stuck in a mentality based around bias, stereotyping, and blatant racism. Although there is no excuse for this behaviour, I do believe a lot of it stems from a lack of education. We have a responsibility to acknowledge and teach the truth. As said by Pamela Agawa, a curriculum coordinator for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education (FNMI) at York Region District School Board in Ontario, we need to figure out the truth for ourselves: “What biases do we carry; what learning do we need to do to better understand the true history of the country?” (Schiedel, 2018).

The role that leaders have in Reconciliation is to bring an awareness of the history of colonization and the long-lasting effects of intergenerational trauma, including Residential School Syndrome. This is defined as the result of children experiencing trauma, physical and emotional abuse, shame, neglect, feelings of abandonment, marginalization, and racism. When all of that is unresolved, those experiences and emotions become internalized. Those emotions manifest into depression, anxiety, addiction, suicidal inclinations, rage, and mental illnesses (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2014). There is a need for insurgent education as an important part of the anti-colonial struggle and the pedagogies of decolonization. Insurgent educators will exemplify Indigenous forms of leadership by relating their struggles for Indigenous resurgence to a broader audience using innovative techniques to inspire activism and reclamation of Indigenous histories (Corntassel, 2011). Leaders in Reconciliation also need to help restore the balance of power when it comes to decision making. The decision-making process has fallen into the hands of Canada for too long.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge this policy project was written on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish Nations of the Coast Salish peoples.

I want to thank the LEVEL Youth Policy Program staff, faculty, and fellow participants for the opportunity to learn more about public policy in British Columbia, for their support during this journey, and for sharing their stories. I would like to thank Kris Archie for her feedback and guidance while completing my policy project. Furthermore, I want to acknowledge that the idea behind this policy project was inspired and encouraged from the educators at the First Nations University of Canada, a university which stands in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, and is a home fire for Reconciliation in Canada.

I would also like to thank Silvana Guglielmetti and Farrell Docherty for allowing the time and space for me to fully participate in this program. To say thank you is not enough. Your continued support made the tough days easier.

## BIOGRAPHY

Originally from Montreal Lake Cree Nation, Savannah Wiest now lives as an uninvited guest on traditional Coast Salish territory. Savannah completed a Bachelor of Indigenous Social Work and Certificate of Reconciliation Studies at the First Nations University of Canada. The First Nations University is where she began to reconnect with her culture and language and to learn more about how she can bring Reconciliation into her career. She has a passion for working with women and bringing healing into the work she does.

# SUSAN ARIEYEH TIMAYO

*With research assistance from Chloe Da Mata*

## “Eliminating Barriers to Accessing Refugee Mental Health in Canada”



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Refugees experience difficult migration journeys and many challenges by leaving home and adapting to a new country (Salami, Salma & Hegadoren, 2018). These stressful and, in many cases, traumatic experiences often lead to adverse mental health outcomes; especially when met with lack of adequate support and resources (Salami, Salma & Hegadoren, 2018). By focusing on resettled refugees, we do not intend to suggest that only refugees experience barriers accessing appropriate mental health care services. We recognize that while refugees are a uniquely vulnerable population, racialized Canadians, low-income populations, immigrants, Indigenous Canadians, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community also face barriers accessing supportive and appropriate mental health care services. We focus on refugee mental health because we recognize that refugees are a growing demographic in Canada who are especially vulnerable to developing poor mental health and mental illness. We believe that a truly equitable healthcare policy is one that seeks to provide all Canadians with affordable, high-quality culturally and linguistically appropriate care in a timely manner (White-Means, Gaskin & Osmani, 2019).

The stressful pre-migration and migration experiences of refugees are made worse by lack of access to appropriate mental health services upon arrival in Canada. Additionally, refugees' experiences of isolation, discrimination, prejudice, and racism post-migration can worsen feelings of negative mental health and experiences of mental illness. While Canada continues to be a global leader in refugee resettlement, it does not have a comprehensive, equitable, and accessible mental health care policy that meets the needs of refugees. Many refugees experience long wait times for referrals, difficulty affording out-patient mainstream treatment, language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination while trying to access the support they need. This means that despite having a greater risk of developing poor mental health and mental illnesses, refugees are amongst the least likely to utilize existing mental health services and programs. Canada is well-positioned to support refugee mental health through a coordinated comprehensive mental health policy. To meet the needs of refugees, Canada must invest in an institutional strategy that seeks to bridge the gaps between service providers and mental health programs. For effective policy changes to mental health services Canada

must seek to effectively and meaningfully engage resettled refugees in the planning, and implementation of a policy seeking to improve their mental health. Canada has a responsibility to provide equitable and accessible mental health care services to its resettled refugee population. Developing an equitable response to address refugee mental health requires addressing systemic barriers such as language barriers, lack of culturally appropriate methods of service, and treatment. It also involves prioritizing coordination between settlement services and mental health care providers.

### BIOGRAPHY

Susan Arieyeh Timayo is set to graduate from the University of Victoria in 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Public Administration. Her interests include decolonizing academia, mental health advocacy, and championing safe, inclusive community spaces. She describes herself as a curious learner, intersectional feminist, and a comedic intellectual. She currently supports a women's empowerment initiative in her hometown of Kaju Keji, South Sudan and looks forward to serving on the 2019/2020 City of Victoria Youth Council.



# TIARÉ JUNG



“A Step Towards Meaningful Inclusion of Trans, Non-Binary, Two-Spirit Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) in BC’s Poverty Reduction Strategy”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BC Poverty Reduction Strategy recognizes that “poverty doesn’t affect all people equally. Indigenous peoples, transgender people, people of colour, refugees, and people with disabilities all face more barriers and higher rates of poverty... Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty. Poverty is an intersectional problem.”

There are skilled people living at those intersections, specifically trans, non-binary, and 2-Spirit BIPOC people whose lived experience and professional capacity positions them uniquely to offer solutions and uplift the most marginalized in community. In creating well-paid, well-supported positions for skilled workers with lived experience in poverty and homelessness, our province is investing in more inclusive, resilient, and creative communities.

This is a proposal for the creation of well-paid and well-supported roles for skilled trans, non-binary, and 2-Spirit BIPOC people to do essential frontline support work and systemic policy change work:

1. Create at least two well-paid, well-supported outreach worker positions at the Broadway Youth Resource Centre, Vancouver, BC.
2. Hire two to four outreach workers with two or more years’ experience to inform ongoing poverty reduction strategy and commitments.
3. Creation of scholarships/ grants to enable trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people to access education and enter roles as outreach, child, and youth support workers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy ask takes place on the stolen and occupied Coast Salish territories of the **xʷməθkʷəy̍əm** (Musqueam), **Skwxwú7mesh** (Squamish), and **səlilwətaʔt** (Tsleil-Waututh) people. Let’s move beyond acknowledgements and work towards land back! Governance back! Bodies back!

This policy ask is dedicated to BIPOC survivors, particularly the Black and Indigenous Two-Spirit, trans, and non-conforming chosen family and friends who show up despite all the things. Your existence and wholeness and joy are wanted and needed in my life, in your communities, and in this world.

Thank you to the friends, family members, and those who do care work (paid and underpaid), who stepped in during crisis and filled in the gaps while we work to close them in the system.

Thank you to the LEVEL YPP, to everyone who shared a coffee, meal, or phone conversation with me. Angela Serritt, Jotika Samant, Sulva Khurshid, and Kingsley Strudwick. Thank you to Sam Bradd, and Drawing Change, for supporting my desire to participate in this program!

Mahalo nui loa

## BIOGRAPHY

I am a Hawaiian, Chinese, multi-racial of origins still being uncovered, guest living on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh stolen land. As a graphic recorder and illustrator I draw live conversations and use images for knowledge translation and sense-making. I love to collaborate with those who centre dignity, health, education, housing, anti-racism, and decolonization in their work. Supporting friends who are trans, non-binary BIPOC, and living with neurodiversity through constant displacement and violent living conditions moves me to advocate for housing and services in which we all belong.

I speak from my own experience of displacement as a 27-year-old, person of colour, Mahu (gender fluid in Hawaiian - my ancestral language), queer person. I speak from my experience of supporting my chosen family, trans, non-binary BIPOC through violent living situations, constant displacement, and homelessness. I speak as a loved one who has been forced into the role of becoming an unpaid support worker to ensure the survival of my chosen family.

I have lived as an uninvited guest on the stolen land of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish people (Vancouver) for the past 10 years. I have moved more than 10 times in these 10 years. In 2018, I was displaced in the middle of the night with my partner due to the anti-Black racism, transphobia, and survivor-blaming attitudes of our roommates. I was temporarily homeless and couch surfing while acting as a full-time caregiver for my partner. I moved six times before finding dog-friendly, affordable, safe housing where we wouldn’t face racism, transphobia, or mental-health shaming. That year, I worked full-time while doing unpaid support work to assist six of my close family and friends through housing crises.



## ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.



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