



POLICY BRIEF 2022

Restoring Quw'utsun Snuw'uy'ulh (Teachings, Traditions, and Law) in Policy

Qwuyumaat Eyvette Elliott

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəjəm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwxú7mesh* (Squamish) & *səlilwətaɣ* (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

And Also Too

COVER ILLUSTRATION

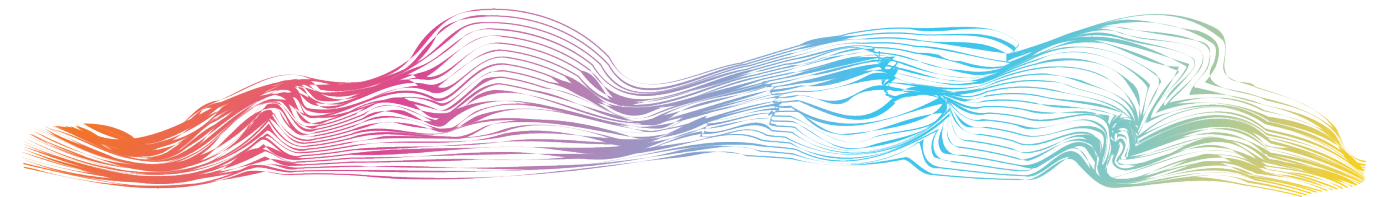
Jessica Joseph

HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY

Mike Wells

Contents

- 3 About the LEVEL Initiative
- 4 Situating Self
- 5 Opening the Table
- 9 Defining the Approach
- 10 Planting the Seeds
- 11 Bibliography



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 populations 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

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL BIPOC Granting

About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

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 dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but 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.¹ 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 *həŋq 'əmin 'əŋ*-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the *sníchim*-speaking *Sḵwxú7mesh* (Squamish) peoples.

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

Situating Self

Qwuyumaat Eyvette Elliott



Situating Self

As a Quw'utsun Sleni (Cowichan Woman), I have spent a lifetime grappling, journeying, and navigating the bureaucracies of policy, and the great limitations imposed under the *Indian Act* and the layering of different government policies. As a Quw'utsun Sleni, it is a necessity to be multifaceted in housing, lands, child and family services, health, government, education, economic development, and justice while also embracing healing and self-determination through re-claiming identity, language, culture, songs, dance, and self. Many people praise my path of obtaining a Bachelor of Business Administration, Certificate in First Nations Housing Management, and a Masters of Community Planning, while also being a mother, living on my own, starting my own consulting business, and continuing my career trajectory.

Despite my external achievements, my greatest journey has been striving toward being happy, humble, and “living a good life.” The construct of “living a good life” is rooted in the Quw'utsun worldview, snuw'uy'ulh, protocol, ceremony and the teachings passed down from our Ancestors. As a Quw'utsun Sleni, I have been honoured with the opportunity to live, learn, and/or spend a significant amount of time with my grandparents. My grandparents act as pillars or guideposts of everything that I do, and the core teachings shared with me, and that I hold closely are:

- Being present
- Greeting the day with gratitude
- Treating everyone with respect
- Embracing change
- Moving forward

**“My mind empties, my heart opens,
my spirit soars.”**

— RICHARD WAGAMESE

My journey thus far has been greatly influenced by their presence in my life, and their on-going and continuous love and support both personally and professionally. Although they are in the spirit world, I still carry their words closely in my heart. At times, I hear echoes of their words from other Knowledge Keepers, Elders, or see tokens and symbols that trigger my memories. This affirms my on-going connection to spirit.

From the onset, my grandparents instilled the importance of going to school, pursuing further education, working, and raising my son. Initially, I struggled to see the importance and value of

pursuing an education, because I recognized the legacy, history and on-going atrocities of colonization, cultural genocide, and assimilation. However, as Murray Sinclair stated, “education is what got us here and education is what will get us out” (Hilton, 2020). As I continue my journey in unravelling the truth, the history, and the stories, I am confronted by an on-going and an internal conflict of reconciling myself, my family, my community, and my nation.

Opening the Table

As a Quw'utsun Sleni, I am practicing active resistance and radical existence, because I feel now, more than ever, that the resurgence of the Indigenous Ways of Being is important for our environmental, political, financial, and social landscapes. Our community is on the verge of mass destruction however, this is not stated without the precursor that we live in an era of extensive capacity, knowledge, resources, power, and connections that could enable us to shift these existing conditions significantly.

Before starting the work, I would like to begin by opening the table. Normally, within my community, these discussions would happen around a table with many representatives/relations of all backgrounds, and sharing a meal or a snack with coffee and tea. I would anticipate these representatives/relations would be anyone within First Nations governance, youth, Elders, professionals, and other external representatives, whether they work for any level of government, non-profits, for-profit or truly,

any walk of life who is interested in shifting the world as we know it today. There is a seat for everyone at this table.

I would like to raise my hands virtually to those who interact with this paper. I would like to thank you for acknowledging, witnessing, and allowing me to share my worldview with you. I would like to recognize that now, more than ever, we are living in unprecedented times, which has unfortunately become the new norm. I would like to recognize and acknowledge the strength, will power, and tenacity to carry forward and continue to strive for a better life for generations to come. I would like to acknowledge your on-going dedication and commitment to yourself, families, and communities. I would also like to send you strength, prayers, best wishes, and wellness as you continue your life journey.

Huy steep q'u (thank you all).

JOURNEYING TO GOVERNANCE

In the journey to reconciliation, as much as it can be viewed solely from a governance lens, we are still striving to reconcile our own identities, existence, ways of being, language, culture, education, justice, land, and connections.

There are many avenues in which we can explore this topic, and as I want to apply a segmented and compartmentalized approach to policy, I must honour the teaching and protocol that “everything is connect,” naut'sa mawt shqwaluwun which means, “working with one heart, one mind, and one spirit” and “All My Relations.” This expansive worldview demonstrates and exemplifies a commitment and connection amongst all things, thereby removing power, hierarchy, dominance, and control, and viewing humans as superior.

It shifts the worldview by creating relationality, kinship, and connections among people, creatures, land, trees, water, air, species, and spirit. It acknowledges and upholds our responsibility, obligation, and commitment to maintain balance with all things, that also means recognizing the need to lean into change management, moving with the seasons, and learning to work with the lands and people rather than against it. For a long time, humans have grown to become stagnant, and instead of changing with the land, we have forced the land to change for us.

I beg to ask the question, “what if it is not about changing the world, but instead changing ourselves?”

DECOLONIZING POLICY

The act of decolonizing policy requires decentering the western worldview of time, power, control, and hierarchy while introducing the Quw'utsun worldview.

Learning Snuw'uy'ulh

Traditionally, our Quw'utsun snuw'uy'ulh, governance and worldview, were rooted in the seven core teachings (Morales, 2014).

- Sts'lhnuts'amat (“Kinship/Family”)
- Si'emstuhw (“Respect”)
- Thu'it (“Trust”)
- Hw'uywulh (“Sharing/Support”)
- Nu stl'i ch (“Love”)
- Mel'qt (“Forgiveness”)
- Sh-tiiwun (“Responsibility”)

Our snuw'uy'ulh acted as a governance system that wove together many members of the communities (i.e., families, Elders, youth, women, children, and neighbouring Nations). The fluidity of leadership and informal decision-making structures caused much confusion for settlers and western people (Kasten, 1987). Our system assumes that anyone can be Si'em, which means “respected one,” based on generosity, kindness, care, and guidance. Many settlers assumed Si'em referred to a political standing within commu-



The act of decolonizing policy requires decentering the western worldview of time, power, control, and hierarchy while introducing the Quw'utsun worldview.

nity that implied leadership, power, and control. However, they learned that Si'em did not only refer to men, Elders, or individuals who were highly respected and held authority. Traditionally Si'em is anyone who is “living a good life” or with naut'sa mawt shqwaluwun; by upholding our snuw'uy'ulh, affirming kinship and maintaining on-going relationality and reciprocity through witnessing and gifting.

Our snuw'uy'ulh, is taught from birth to end of life, and continues to be an on-going process of challenges and lessons that one must navigate throughout life. This approach to governance affirms and upholds natural law, that one will learn from natural consequences and, when necessary, guidance and counsel would be sought from Si'em and Elders to restore balance and harmony. This is important to re-iterate as history emphasizes that “Indians were lawless,” which is not true, our governance structures were lived and embodied deeply in respect and kinship.

Learning the Truth

“How can you possibly learn to love and value yourself when you're told consistently – daily, that you're of no value. And that we need to take the Indian out of you. How could you value or love yourself?”

– NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS, 2019

The governance systems of Indigenous peoples across Canada have been significantly disrupted and as a result Indigenous peoples having been forced to abandon traditional Ways of Being, living, and governing. One cannot point to one catalyst or source of the disruption, as Canada made a deliberate effort to disrupt Quw'utsun's economic, political,

social, spiritual, emotional, physical, environmental, and relational ties to communities, families, and self. With on-going assimilation tactics, land theft, cultural genocide, and child apprehension, Indigenous peoples had no choice but to operate under imposed systems to re-claim and re-store our traditional Ways of Being, which continues to be an on-going process to this day.

Reclaiming Policy

“The Indian Act is anti-family, and thus stands in the way of love. Love forges and welds family ties in the present and through generations. The Indian Act does not love. Love would promote legislation and community approaches that recognized and affirmed family relationships, like husband and wife, parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, aunts and nephews, uncles and nieces, cousins, siblings, and other kinship bonds. We are spiritually and sociologically a people of extended kinship and clan relations.

The Indian Act currently severs these traditions.”

– JOHN BORROWS (HILTON, 2020)

Our people are abundant, spiritual, relational, cultural, and collectivist societies that hold a wealth of knowledge, skill, capacity, wisdom, and expertise. Our communities were/are rooted in love, connection, and reciprocity.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

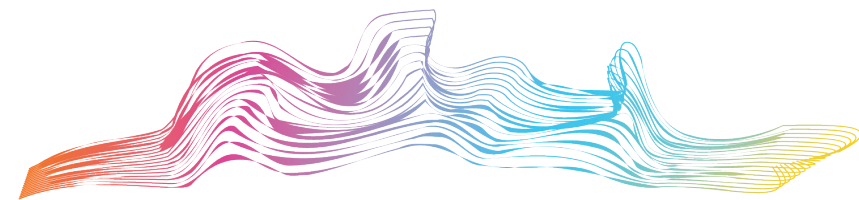
As with many things, the journey is not linear and there will be mistakes along the way. The seeds of wisdom (not knowledge) for the next generation and those that come after.

Here is what I can offer today:

- Policy still does not make sense to me.
- Along the way, you will feel like you are disconnected and out of relation with family, community, and governance.
- Multiple truths exist even though the world will insist that the western worldview is the sole truth.
- Reconciliation begins with reconciling yourself. You can encourage non-Indigenous people to do the same. Reconciliation is for everyone. Many hands make light work.
- Wisdom is knowledge. Indigenous Knowledge is valid and true.
- Self-care is active resistance.
- Culture is not practiced, culture is lived. Knowledge is not practiced, knowledge is lived. Policies are not practiced, **policies must be lived.**

My approach to policy:

- What is the hul'qumi'num for policy?
 - What would my Elders do?
 - How can I explain my work to my son?
- How do I know I am living a good life?
- Striving for “work-life balance” and from a decolonial lens, embedding rest, self-care, connection to tumuhw (land), time for reflection and being with family.
 - Recognizing I am part of a web of interconnected systems.
 - Living in alignment with my grandparents’ teachings.
 - Working to reclaim identity and heal myself.
 - Being fully present and taking everything day-by-day.



History emphasizes that “Indians were lawless,” which is not true, our governance structures were lived and embodied deeply in respect and kinship.

Defining the Approach

Within Indigenous culture there is a common theme and power within stories (Wilson, 2019).

There is also a growing shift towards re-storying, re-telling, and reclaiming our stories, histories, and truth. Storytelling is a powerful tool to give insight, impart history and share lessons. Traditionally, in Indigenous culture, these lessons would be told orally, recognizing there may be a component of song, dance, prayer, pauses, or even noises and sounds. The power and magic in story is that it does not have to be formatted with headings, titles, and structures to be understood, that one could easily sit, listen, or watch. Another admirable quality of story is the connection between storyteller and listener, that they are giving the greatest gift of time and presence.

Perceived pitfalls of storytelling, whether written or oral, is that they typically do not fall or easily conform to western standards. My writing style never seems to appease anyone and usually falls greatly out of western standards and norms. However, through active re-claiming and understanding of Quw'utsun ways of being, I began to understand:

- Repetition is a method of upholding and affirming oral histories and traditions.
- Repetition acknowledges interconnections and that all things are connected.
- Incomplete thoughts or ideas leaves room for imagination and for the listener/reader to make their own conclusions depending on where they are in their life journey.
- Visions for the future and “untrue” stories provide valuable lessons for future generations. Multiple realities can exist, especially spiritual.
- Stories are non-linear, so is life.

Storytelling is my method and my framework to instill knowledge about the Quw'utsun worldview, as an initial step towards decolonizing and “Indigenizing” policy.



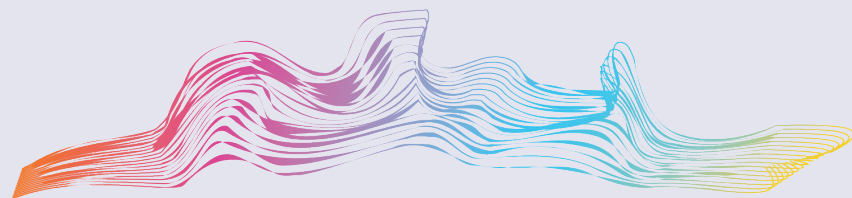
The power and magic in story is that it does not have to be formatted with headings, titles, and structures to be understood, that one could easily sit, listen, or watch.

Planting the Seeds

My vision for the future is that policy is lived.

Policy needs to be woven into the fabric of our communities and that policy acts as the ground, the floor, and the bare minimum, and instead we strive for better.

There is great opportunity when we lean into possibility and break free from the colonial barriers, constructs, and systems. As much as we strive for a better future for tomorrow, realistically speaking, all we have is right now, the present. What can we do today in order to create a better future for tomorrow? Given that we live in an era of significant abundance, knowledge, wealth, and resources, how can we restore community and relationality amongst all things? How can we ensure governance and policy is for everyone?



Policy needs to be woven into the fabric of our communities and that policy acts as the ground, the floor, and the bare minimum, and instead we strive for better.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hilton, C. (2020). *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table*. New Society Publishers.

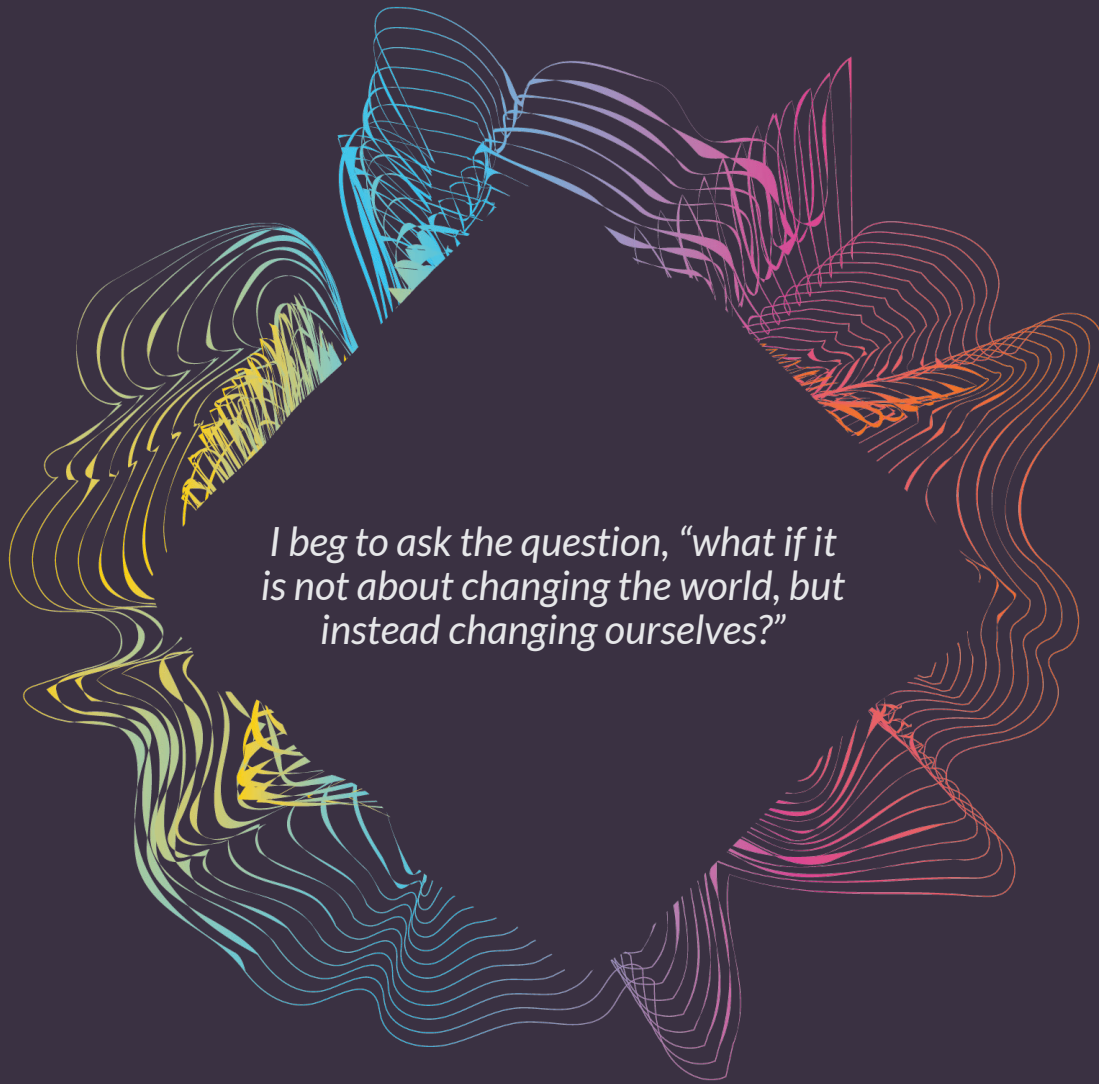
Kasten, E. (1987). *The Return of the Elders: Contemporary Trends in Indian Self-government on the Northwest Coast*. *Sociologus*, 37(1), 1–19. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43645239>.

Morales, S. (2014). *Snuw'uyulh: Fostering an Understanding of the Hul'qumi'num Legal Tradition* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1828/6106>.

National Inquiry into MMIWG. (2019). *Reclaiming Power and Place: the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0028038/>.

Wagamese, R. (2016). *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*. Douglas and McIntyre.

Wilson, S., Breen, A., and DuPre, L. (2019). *Research and Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing through Indigenous Relationships*. Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.



I beg to ask the question, "what if it is not about changing the world, but instead changing ourselves?"

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.

200-475 W. Georgia Street
Vancouver, BC, V6B 4M9

level@vancouverfoundation.ca www.levelvf.ca 604.688.2204

[f @LEVELVF](#) [t @LEVEL_VF](#) [@LEVEL_VF](#)



AN INITIATIVE OF

vancouver
foundation