



**LEVEL**  
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

Restore,  
Preserve,  
Revitalize

**JAMIE-LEE WESLEY**

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The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tseil-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 hən̓d̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx\_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

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



JAMIE-LEE  
WESLEY

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.

## 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.

## PROBLEM DEFINITION

Language is being lost amongst Indigenous communities, and the languages loss continues to worsen through inter-generational trauma. I, personally, have been affected by not being fluent in Gitksan and I understand how crucial it really is to connect with the traditional teachings of my people; as Indigenous languages are lost, the connections with knowledge, culture, and well being are also lost. We experience small efforts to re-introduce the use of our mother tongue – through things such as cultural dancing and language classes at the elementary school level – but what about education beyond elementary?

## BACKGROUND

Through personal experiences in the education system, I saw minimal Western approaches to learning something as important as a language, and it was being passed on through worksheets and nothing more. What good is a language that you can read, on average, but are not able to fluently speak? It is here where a problem arises. We see gaps between generations that need to be bridged so that the cultural knowledge will not end. We see minimal efforts in making the current curriculum successful. We see languages like French being taught, in both regular and immersion classes, but Native languages are only taught as a regular class. We are in a time and place where we see Nations starting to take back their culture and traditions through Reconciliation and growth. We need to put in the effort to target specific areas that need improving in order to start seeing small successes. Doing this targeted work with the children in schools is a strong approach, and an investment in Reconciliation, that demonstrates commitment over time.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

A curriculum of Language Immersion in the local Indigenous dialect (that follows the French Immersion class model) must be created. This would include salaried pay for those involved in the creation of this program to show that the knowledge shared has just as much value as any other part of the school curriculum. This would include constant involvement throughout the program to support the class, the students, and the instructor. These supports would include not only include motivated leaders, but also local knowledge keepers and Elders, as our culture is raised and understands the community aspect. Leading this program as a student-centred focus towards success of the participants will be the differential, notable outcome.

## CONCLUSION

Through effort, such as this, to restore and preserve our language, our Nations will once again become empowered and rich in culture. Language is such an important aspect of Indigenous culture, and it is something that will continue to be depleted over time if we are not careful. It is through human effort that we will make the world a better place.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- NRT Funding Initiative, Language Revitalization <http://www.newrelationshiptrust.ca/funding/language/>
- FPCC Funding initiatives, Language Revitalization <http://www.fpcc.ca/language/>

## 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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