

STEWARDSHIP TRAINING MOVES ONLINE DURING COVID-19

As the global pandemic grinds into year two, Guardians and stewards throughout coastal First Nations continue to do the important work they love—protecting and restoring the natural and cultural heritage of their territories.

Although coastal communities have been negatively impacted over the past year with outbreaks, lockdowns and disruptions of “normal” life, vital stewardship efforts must go on in the face of these challenges. That’s certainly true for students of the [Stewardship Technicians Training Program](#) (STTP), who’ve been engaged in stewardship learning online since mid-January.

A partnership between Coastal First Nations and Vancouver Island University, STTP has been providing stewardship training for First Nations throughout the North and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii for several years. These courses are usually taught in the field or an in-person classroom setting, but they’ve moved online for the time being to maintain health and safety within coastal communities.

“I know the students would love to meet and learn in person, and they’ve certainly experienced some ‘Zoom burnout’ like everyone else,” says CFN Training Coordinator Jackie Peat, who’s facilitating the sessions, along with guest speakers and educators. “But these online courses have really been a great way for everyone to stay connected with each other during trying times.”

So far, students have focused on courses well suited to online learning, including Leadership and Reading & Writing, Indigenous Culture and History, and Case Studies: Reading & Writing. “The focus on writing skills has been really helpful, because it’s provided another great, virtual way to share knowledge, ideas and important aspects of their culture with one another,” says Peat. “Obviously, every course is going to be preferable in person, but these classes have provided an opportunity to have really meaningful discussions. It sets us up wonderfully for when we’re able to gather in person again.”

A benefit of moving to online training is the increase in computer skills that participants have gained. While Guardian work mostly takes place out on the land and water, it often involves desk-based work. “It’s really amazing to see how participants’ comfort and confidence using computers has increased over the past three months,” says Peat. “The group is learning more computer skills that will help them move into other areas of stewardship work that are more office-based.”

Peat says 11 out of the 14 STTP students are currently Coastal Guardian Watchmen, which means they have much in common and plenty share with each other already. “There is a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience amongst the participants,” she says. “Some of the most meaningful learning has been peer-to-peer, as Guardians share the work they’re undertaking within their own Nations.”



BRADEN ETZERZA

CLIMATE ACTION COORDINATOR



Braden Etzerza's passion for climate action is deeply influenced by his community.

"We spent a lot of time fishing and being out on the ocean. My culture really shaped my drive to want to help the environment. I want to help my people," he says.

Braden is always looking for ways to make positive change.

"I'm driven by something deeper than this country, capitalism, more than a job title; it's just what I feel guided to do. I want to see my community thrive, see my people thrive, and see the environment thrive."

His job description is wide-ranging. He is working on various climate action initiatives. Metlakatla is finishing up their feasibility study, looking into zero emission transportation, and the possibilities of a hydrogen project. They will also look at installing heat pumps in homes this year.

And then there are food security projects including a food assessment and a look at environmental contaminants. Etzerza also hopes to bring back the successful local food boxes, gear distribution, and garden box initiatives from last year. "It was an amazing opportunity to get to know community and provide food for our people, and to provide local seafood and vegetables that is healthy for them," but he also noted that the initiative highlighted that there was such "a need for food."

Braden also wants to change the current diesel powered ferry system that services the community to one that is zero emission.

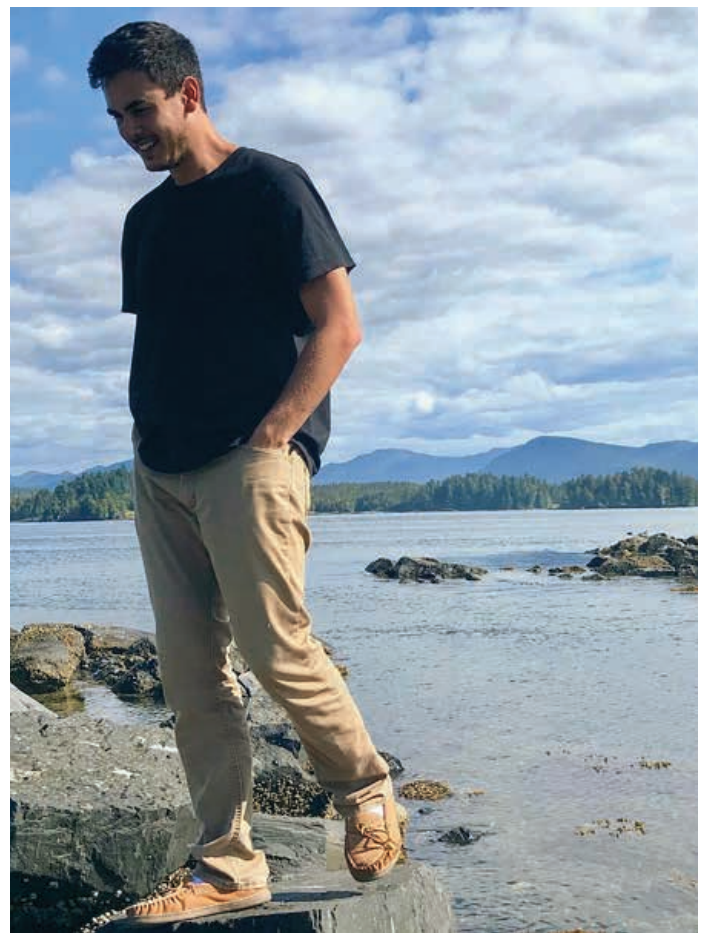
In the fall of 2019, the 29-year-old, Ts'msyen, Tahltan, and Metis environmental scientist was hired as the Climate Action Coordinator for Metlakatla. His education and passion for his people, his community, and the environment brought him home to make a difference.

When the pandemic hit last year he like many others had to pivot quickly. Working from home is a mixed blessing. It has been a struggle to stay connected and motivated while working alone. He misses the interactions and noise of a busy community.

Braden says his position is a tough one. He can handle it though. He has managed to overcome social, educational, and systemic barriers to achieve his goals. These skills help him get his work done.

He has been influenced by the women in his family especially his aunties, grandmother, and his great grandmother. "My Grandma was a social worker. She got her degree at 50, which was amazing. Anyone who thinks they can't get their degree can do it. You're never too old. It took her 6 years to get her BSW but she did it." Her success influenced him to follow his passion and take the leap into Environmental Science.

Etzerza is also keenly aware of the privilege that has allowed him to work in the position and he shares with other youth or those in career changes brought on by the pandemic to look closer to home for opportunities and think deeply before going to University or college. He weathered the western education system to bring change and hope to his position but still has a passion for killer whales and food security.



Provided by Braden Etzerza



“You don’t have to go to University to be successful” or to get involved in the sciences. You don’t need a degree,” he stresses. “Our Indigenous ways of knowing is our science,” he says.

“For a lot of Indigenous youth out there, I would advocate for them to speak to their elders. I think we can learn a lot from our elders and leaders. ... Get on the land, rebuild, and re-establish connection to your territory or the territory you are on,” and he goes on to say that, “You can move away from your communities to go to school but I want to highlight that our communities hold a lot of knowledge. There are a lot of opportunities for learning and mentorship.”

With each successful initiative, it is still the small actions that bring him excitement and joy like how his 87-year-old great grandmother has learned how to recycle.

“She washes everything out. She put the bags aside for me to bring to the recycling depot. If she can do it anyone can.”



Photos provided by Braden Etzerza

COLLEEN MCCORMICK JOINS CFN TO SUPPORT CONNECTIVITY



Colleen McCormick, a dedicated community-builder and passionate 'intrapreneur', joined Coastal First Nations on February 15, 2021 to support regional and community connectivity priorities on a 1-year secondment from the Province.

Colleen says, "It's a dream come true! I have always been amazed by the work CFN member Nations lead as global masters of stewardship, and this secondment offers an opportunity to better support Nations in charting their digital futures. This is a responsibility I take very seriously."

Colleen sees connectivity as a catalyst to strengthen the well-being and economic resilience of communities. Her work is part of the MoU between CFN and the Province to support community connectivity priorities.

A social activist at heart, Colleen has worked with communities throughout the Great Bear Region for almost two decades. Leading the Indigenous tourism portfolio for many years led her to an understanding of the interconnectedness of the awe-inspiring lands and fierce cultural resiliency of communities.

Colleen reflects on her time supporting Heiltsuk Nation leading up to the 2014 Tribal Journeys Gathering, working with Hereditary Chief Frank and Kathy Brown to support building an Indigenous ecotourism program with VIU and host an Economic Opportunities Summit, one which featured Doug Neasloss to share the story of Spirit Bear Lodge. She was introduced to the 7 Fundamental Truths and learned more about the significance of the region through this work. She reflects, "community has always educated me, sharing such precious time and knowledge, and I made a commitment long ago to do whatever I could, however I could, to offer my support in advancing CFN community priorities out of deep respect and admiration."

Colleen holds an MBA centred on social entrepreneurship and teaches Social Innovation at Royal Roads University. After

studying under Harvard's legendary community organizer, Dr. Marshall Ganz, she reflects on how her academic experiences have helped her learn how to build shared purpose and collective vision among diverse people, and she sees links to her work now, "showcasing the stewardship Nations are leading to bring partners together while educating the world on our interconnectedness."

Colleen works with justice-driven advocates, impact investors and change-makers on the front lines of social change with the [BMW Foundation's Responsible Leaders Network](#) and [Global League of Intrapreneurs](#). She says, "at my first BMW Responsible Leadership Gathering in Berlin, I relentlessly promoted CFN's global stewardship leadership efforts, and enroute back home in Vancouver's airport lounge, I happened to meet Billy Yovanovich, the Chief Councillor of Skidegate Band Council for the first time." This chance meeting led to these two community showcase videos profiling the vision of a connected coast.

[Connecting Haida Gwaii](#)

[Connecting Heiltsuk](#)

Colleen, who has Scottish/Yugoslavian heritage, was adopted by Bill and Jean McCormick and raised in Toronto, Treaty 13 territory. She is a mother of two beautiful children, a fierce lover of nature, surfer, a yoga teacher, and ignites her soul through facilitating transformational music sessions for self-healing and movement medicine as a community DJ. She is always seeking to turn "moments into movements" in community organizing and [is learning how to play the Djembe!](#)

She says, "It's an honour to serve Coastal First Nations and I'm ALL IN to pick up my paddle and work hard for maximizing community benefits through connectivity."



Photo courtesy of Colleen McCormick

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