



Journeying Together through a Pandemic

Walking alongside youth and families took an unexpected turn in March. As group activities and gatherings were restricted, we had to find new ways of serving our community. This December we are highlighting four key challenges we faced and the ways we overcame them, taking inspiration from Isaiah 9:6:

*"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."*



Two of our community kids dressed up for a Nativity

Wonderful Counselor

We strive to reflect Jesus' compassionate love as our Wonderful Counselor, and create safe places for youth to share their struggles and victories.

Many of our regular community events were not possible with social distancing and group size restrictions. Gathering in community is critical for the mental health and wellbeing of our youth and families. To continue to connect safely in the summer, we hosted outdoor campfires and small group camping trips.

Eternal Father

Reflecting on Jesus as Eternal Father meant meeting the critical needs of our young adults. Many of Inner Hope's young adults live on their own and require ongoing support to meet their needs. When COVID first hit, *numerous community resources closed down temporarily*. Our Post-secondary Coordinator kept the Inner Hope van at her house and went out almost daily to provide individual support to young adults, including one young woman who delivered her first child the week after the lockdown.

Mighty God

Through His strength as Mighty God, we can overcome obstacles that feel insurmountable. When *schools closed down* after spring break, students were expected to finish their school year online. Many Inner Hope youth did not have the resources necessary to thrive in online school. **We opened up our community house to provide safe work stations, supporting three youth to finish their school year.**

Prince of Peace

Jesus's role as Prince of Peace inspires us to raise up peacemakers through our discipleship program. *Church and summer camp programs were canceled* this summer, which hugely affected regular discipleship and leadership training. **We provided space for two teens to do an online Counselor in Training course through Camp Qwanoes, and followed up this fall with a small group Bible study.** God spoke to one of the young men about bringing peace to his home country, Honduras. He's currently raising money to help provide relief following the devastating hurricanes.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Stories of Impact: Hear from the next generation of community leaders



Stories of Impact

The past couple of newsletters emphasized the realities of racial oppression in Canada, and explored ways we can work towards changing this destructive problem. In this newsletter, we want to highlight how Inner Hope is supporting leadership development in our community, and some remarkable individuals who have overcome significant barriers. They are now dynamic community leaders who are impacting change in their families and communities!



Richie

I am from the Lil'wat Nation outside of Whistler, BC, and grew up in Vancouver with my parents and 4 siblings. My family wasn't very good at dealing with problems in healthy ways. When I was young, my mom sent me to a summer camp. I became friends with one of the counselors, and I noticed that he was able to deal with issues in much healthier ways than I saw in my family. That stuck with me.

During my teen years, a lot of youth in my neighbourhood were part of the Inner Hope Boundless program. The coordinator invited my sister to join, and since there wasn't much else going on for young people, I went too. I've always been a natural leader with my siblings and peers, but I didn't really have a place to lead people. I found out about the Camp Qwanoes leadership programs through Inner Hope, and it took me back to that summer at camp and the counselor who impacted me. I went through their leadership programs, and then worked there for 2 summers.

No one in my family has ever attended post secondary school. My parents thought it was a waste of time, and that I should just find a trade. Inner Hope helped me find my gifts and passions for youth ministry, and pointed me to the right programs to grow as a leader. Last year, I did a one-year Bible School Program at Torch Bearers International, and in January I'm starting a 2-year diploma in Youth Ministry at Pacific Life Bible College.

I'm now the first person in my family to ever get a post secondary education. I'm also the first to quit smoking. As someone who started in one place and ended up somewhere completely different, I know the kind of support youth need as they break out of harmful cycles. This fall I'm interning at Inner Hope as a Youth Support Worker. I'm happy to grow more as a leader, and to use my gifts and experience to give back to this community.



Larissa

Larissa is Cree from Saskatchewan and was fortunate to grow up with her grandmother, who lived a traditional Cree way of life. Most of her relatives attended residential school; many were sent to Gordon, Canada's last residential school which closed in 1996. The lingering effects of these schools continue to impact her extended family today. She moved to Vancouver as a teen and left school in grade 12 when she had her first child.

Larissa was a part of Inner Hope from the very beginning. With our encouragement and childcare support, she completed her high-school diploma. Larissa was also part of our Boundless mentorship pilot group when we launched the program in 2010. As a mom, she wasn't sure that she was a good fit for the program. Her mentor, a grandmother, didn't know if she could connect well with a young person. Despite their misgivings, their first month of weekly meetings had some exciting results. After returning to school, Larissa realized she excelled in sciences. They discussed some careers in the science field and determined that nursing was a good career fit. With Larissa working the computer and her mentor providing the credit card, she enrolled in an LPN program that started a few weeks later! Larissa went on to complete a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She is now working at Burnaby General Hospital, where her last rotation was on a COVID ward.

Larissa's main focus is raising her three children and supporting her extended family. With her stable income, and a driver's license and vehicle through Inner Hope's support, Larissa organized an extended family holiday at a cabin outside Mission last summer. This was a first for her family. Larissa is an inspiring role model in our community. She gives back to Inner Hope annually, providing health care training for our staff.



Mark

My maternal grandmother was Ojibwe from the Sandy Bay First Nation in Manitoba, and I grew up in the Native community in East Vancouver. I've known many of the families in the Inner Hope community since I was a kid. Growing up, I didn't have a father around and my mom was not able to care for me. I went into the foster care system at 11. I had an uncle who stepped up and fostered me until age 16, when I started living independently.

A goal I clung to in childhood was to surpass my family: I wanted to be the first one to graduate mainstream high school and not party. But I wasn't on a great trajectory—I wasn't keeping up with school and I was getting into the party scene. That changed in 2005 at Camp Qwanoes. The speaker that summer talked about God being a good Father, and the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This really shook things up for me. I realized I was trying to do things all on my own, but I needed help to get onto a better path. I finished camp a new believer, and right away wanted to work there. The camp director told me I needed to grow in my faith first. I spent the next year digging into church and the youth programs at New Beginnings Church, where I had first met Carla and Jenny. The next summer I got a job at Qwanoes. I wanted to keep growing in my faith after camp, so I applied for Qwanoes's one-year leadership program, Kaleo. My high school transcripts weren't great, but I got into the program. This put me on a path to higher education. The next year, Trinity Western University accepted me based on my Kaleo courses, and I started a degree. I'm now the first person in my family to graduate from not only mainstream high school, but also from university.

During university, I did a survey about the number of supports people have in their lives as they overcome educational challenges. I realized just how many people helped me get to where I was. This inspired me to support other youth and families in my community. Because of Residential Schools and ongoing systemic inequalities, our education system has failed many First Nations students, who often fall through the cracks. I have benefited from the support of people pushing me to believe in myself, to stick with it, and to aim higher. I want to give that kind of encouragement to other young people; they're capable of achieving way more than they or other people might think.

Mark has had many roles at Inner Hope over the years, and was recently promoted to the position of Manager of Youth and Community Programs.



Amanda

I am from the Mohawk territory of Akwasasne in Ontario; I am also Ojibwe on my mom's side. I moved to BC with my family in 2008 and started a Bachelor degree at Trinity Western University in 2014. As an Indigenous student, funding for a private school education can be a challenge, as band funding usually isn't enough to cover full tuition (each community has their own post-secondary funding protocols). In my first year, I received a scholarship that Jenny and Carla created. When I completed my degree, I was the first Trinity graduate to walk the stage in traditional regalia instead of a gown.

The summer after my first year at Trinity, I worked as an intern at Inner Hope (not knowing the connection to my scholarship!). Inner Hope was the first place where I felt God's love for my people. The kids in the community reminded me of my cousins and felt like family. It was so contradictory to what the church had shown my people in the past. I am now a full-time ministry support worker at Union Gospel Mission in a stabilization program for women called The Sanctuary. I still volunteer at Inner Hope, and since 2018 I have been a mentor to a teen girl through the Boundless program.

Decolonizing Christmas

By John Johnstone, Inner Hope Cultural Mentor



When I think about Christmas from a First Nations perspective, what comes to mind is the way of gift giving. I was out for lunch with a couple of coworkers at a conference, a soup and sandwich type deal, and one of the guys said to the other "Wow, that's a good looking sandwich you've got". Without missing a beat, the other guy picked up half of his sandwich and handed it over. "Wait, I don't want your sandwich", the first guy said, and the other laughed. "This is our way, you just have to accept it." In First Nations culture, giving is a way of honouring and blessing another person, to the point where it hurts. The point is simply to give, and not worry about how it makes you look.

The economy of First Nations is showing your wealth by how much you give away, but in Western society, we show wealth by how much we consume. This leaks into Christmas. Celebrating God's ultimate gift, His Son, has turned into a powerful marketing scheme. Christmas marketing starts before Remembrance day nowadays, because there's so much to consume. The sacrificial giving has been lost to materialism.

God honours sacrificial giving. We see this in the gift of His Son, and in the story of the widow with her two copper coins. This Christmas, think about ways to give that honour God and our neighbours.



Upcoming Events

We are planning several Christmas events that fit into current COVID restrictions. Head to our Facebook page for updates!

Boundless Christmas: Dec 12

Drive-by Family Christmas: Dec 13

Christmas at the Home: Dec 16

Post Secondary Christmas: TBA



Reflections from Amy - our new Director of Programs



It's been a little over two months since I drove across the country to Vancouver. Having lived in Southwestern Ontario for my entire life, I'm in awe of the beauty of the BC landscape. I see mountain peaks from my office window! I'm excited to share this part of the country with family and friends once travel is possible.

Before coming to Inner Hope, I served for 8 years as director of a Christian non-profit ministry that journeyed with vulnerable young mothers and their babies as they made significant life changes. I also spent 2 years in church ministry equipping people to dig deeper into faith and community. I was drawn to Inner Hope's commitment to long-term relationships as they walk alongside youth and families through all parts of life.

In the short time I've been here, I've witnessed the passion and dedication of a team who love and care deeply for this community. They're not afraid to engage in the important and hard work of reconciliation in East Vancouver, and I am incredibly grateful for the leadership of our cultural mentors. I see young people being encouraged and celebrated as they grow in leadership, set and reach goals, and move towards more independence. I am thankful and honoured that God brought me here, and I can't wait to see what's ahead.

Inner Hope Youth Ministries' mission is to walk alongside youth and families in East Vancouver nurturing hope, belonging and transformation through support, discipleship, life skills, and housing.

- Support promoting positive community engagement and loving youth, young adults and families in practical ways
- Discipleship guiding children, youth and young adults in a relationship with their Creator
- Life skills mentoring youth and young adults to develop the skills needed to build their futures
- Housing offering a safe, stable and supportive home for youth, young adults and their children