

Local Foods to School (Stk'emplupsemc te Secwépemc Nation)

Program Model

Local Foods to School is a program that connects K-12 schools and local farms with Indigenous ways of knowing. Its objectives include: 1) serving healthy meals in schools; 2) improving student nutrition; 3) supporting local and regional farmers/agriculture; 4) fostering the development of school gardening/greenhouse and food forest projects; and 5) supporting Indigenous hunting, fishing and food gathering cultural practices by providing health and nutritional education opportunities. The model showcases the power of collaboration within a community and between two neighbouring schools both within the Stk'emplupsemc te Secwépemc Nation homelands.

Key Partners and Roles:

Learning Circle /Food Sovereignty Lead/Dietitian from Q'wemtsín Health Society: Plays an innovative role in the development, leadership and overall administration of the QHS's Food Sovereignty initiatives in TteS, Skeetchestn and Whispering Pines/Clinton Indian Band. This role provides consultation to the bands for project management, funding proposal and partnership development, strategic planning and evaluation.

Local Food to School Coordinator from QHS: Provides support to the Schools—Sk'elep and Skeetchestn—in program delivery, curriculum development and evaluation of QHS's food sovereignty programs.



Skeetchestn Indian Band (SIB) Knowing Our Roots: This Advisory Committee for broader Food Sovereignty Initiatives in Skeetchestn territory. Originally initiated the garden project at the school and their role has expanded to the food forest and other food sovereignty initiatives.

Skeetchestn Indian Band (SIB): Support and guidance for the program.

Tk'emplup te Secwépemc (TteS) Food Sovereignty Team: Includes Sk'elep School of Excellence - Community Services / Social Development departments, chief and council.

Permaculture Designer: worked with the Skeetchestn Community School to design the food forest; is funded by the Band to do learning activities with the students to link the garden and food forest to the curriculum.

Graphic Facilitator: played a vital role in documenting both of the Learning Circles and capturing the vision of each of the projects.

Split Rock Nursery: purchased plants from an Indigenous owned nursery for the garden projects.

School Garden Advisory: One advisory group at each school, to guide the project activities. The advisory at Skeetchestn consists of a teacher principal, school cook, QHS employee, two Skeetchestn Indian Band (SIB) Social Development employees, a community Elder, and a permaculture designer, and student representatives. At Sk'elep, the advisory consists of one school teacher, two Elders, two QHS employees and a permaculture designer.

Funders: Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program for Rural and Northern Communities, Social Planning & Research Council of BC (SPARC BC), Farm to Cafeteria Canada, Whole Kids Foundation, Tree Canada, ISPARC

Learning Circle Vision

Implemented by:

Knowing Our
Roots Committee
(Skeetchestn)

+

Skeetchestn
Community School
Food Working Group

Food Sovereignty
Advisory
Committee (TteS)

+

Sk'elep Community
School Food
Working Group



“Many of our community members no longer fish, hunt or gather but they still want to provide their families with good food. Food sovereignty, or our ability to take control over our food, is so important to make sure our children do not lose the traditions of the past.

- Elder Tony LaRue

Program Overview

This program, launched in September 2019 when Q'wemtsin Health Society (QHS) received a Local food to School Learning Circle grant from the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and Farm to Cafeteria Canada. Over the course of 18 months, the QHS Food Sovereignty team facilitated Learning Circle meetings, in partnership with Marie Bartlett, Graphic Facilitator from Thompson River University, for both Sk'elep School of Excellence (Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc or TteS) and Skeetchestn Community School (SCS) (Skeetchestn Indian Band) to build and strengthen community practices around Local Foods to School. The goal of the program was to increase the amount of food in school that is local, traditional, healthy, and reflective of local Indigenous cultural practices, including food grown, purchased, gathered nearby and/or donated to the school. So far, the program has achieved its goal and has increased access to food at both the community and school level, generating excitement from the community members.

Program Activities

Fall 2018

Skeetchestn Community School (SCS) took the lead in the region. In the fall of 2018 the project was initiated by a small advisory committee called “Knowing our Roots”. The members helped to support and guide the implementation of the school's garden program and this has since evolved to focus on working alongside the wider Skeetchestn community with a new “Garden Advisory Committee” replacing it at the school level.

Spring 2019

In May 2019, the garden installation, took place at SCS and included ten raised beds and an automatic watering system used for growing a variety of vegetables and herbs, along with flowering plants chosen to attract pollinators. While SCS was initiating its garden project, Sk'elep School of Excellence was beginning their planning process. Early 2019 saw the

development of the Garden Advisory Committee at Sk'elep, which proposed the development of the school garden in the following phases (in alignment with SCS activities): Garden beds, Berry Walk, and eventually a Food Forest.

Fall 2019

Activities underway at both schools were catalyzed by the receipt of a Local Food to School Learning Circle grant as part of F2CC's [Farm to School: Canada Digs In!](#) initiative. The garden at SCS was formally launched in the fall with the support of the local bands and the Kamloops Naturalist Club. In November of 2019, the first Learning Circle meeting was held which allowed for networking and information gathering from various local stakeholders and community members. These events helped raise the profile and expand upon the strength of the network. Through discussions at these events, it was determined that the garden was in need of infrastructure upgrades, including greenhouse improvements, composting expansion, and irrigation. These improvements were addressed by the Skeetchestn Indian Band (SIB) Natural Resource Department in 2020. Stairs for accessibility, outdoor washrooms for volunteers, water harvesting, and a root cellar were all identified as necessary additions. These improvements are underway and ongoing.

November 2019

Sk'elep also hosted a Learning Circle in the fall of 2019 which guided their next steps. Activities did not go as planned due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the committee persevered and, with the help of the Thompson Rivers University's Women in Trades program, the school saw the development of ten raised garden beds, a work bench and storage shed during the height of the pandemic. The garden had some vegetables and herbs planted over the summer for the students to access upon their return in the fall. Sk'elep school purchased a salad bar unit and has researched indoor grow towers to supplement the project using the remaining grant funds.

Prior to the Learning Circles, the school's garden projects were at different levels of completion; SCS had an established Food Forest, greenhouse and garden beds, while Sk'elep School of Excellence was just in the early phase of planning for the construction of the raised garden beds. Following these community consultations there has been significant advancements at both schools, including: the development of advisory committees for both communities, infrastructure advancements, successful crops, the initiation of salad bar programs, and some curriculum development such as germination and planting of seeds, learning about seed development and how to care for young plants as they grow, plant life cycles, companion planting, creating optimal conditions for plants to grow on, amending the soil, optimization of water resources, and more.

Spring 2021 and Beyond:

Both schools and the Community Services and/or Social Development departments of the communities are collaborating with QHS to develop a series of gardening videos to be shared within the communities for educational purposes. Collaborations from the Learning Circles led to the completion of an Indigenous Agriculture Assessment to identify how to best support the local farmers and improve access to healthier foods in the schools. Partnerships with Kamloops Food Policy Council and Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nation have strengthened the local food economy, including a "regional Food Hub" which will feature the Kweltsken Mobile Food Processing Unit. This Processing unit will be available in the future for the schools and assist with food dehydration and canning with food grown in the garden and Food Forest. Through the food hub, a mobile kitchen will be available for small businesses and community training, as well as a rent-a-chicken program at the schools.



Additionally, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, the community that Sk'elep is a part of, has initiated its own community Food Sovereignty team, similar to Knowing our Roots. Sk'elep School of Excellence has representation on this committee and has been collaborating with the community on the construction of a local greenhouse, as well as the development of a new greenhouse; both of which will benefit the school and the community. The committee has been supporting the school in the planning process for the implementation of the proposed Berry Walk, which will take place in 2021.

Reflection

SCS has become a trailblazer in the Indigenous Food Sovereignty movement. Since the establishment of this project, they have shared their successes with neighbouring communities and as a result, there is now a growing interest in community garden projects.

As a result of the Learning Circles and other program activities, there has been increased community interest and involvement at all levels; students are becoming more aware of the importance of making healthy food choices, have an understanding of the nutritional benefits of the food they eat, and are more willing to try food they may be unfamiliar with. People within Skeetchestn who have heard about the school garden and a Food Forest are excited to learn more about what is being done. This has led to the formation of a community group and a youth group that both help maintain the garden during the summer months. The community group includes members who have been accessing social assistance and have faced or

are facing unemployment. The garden provides an opportunity for them to learn new skills and participate in important and enjoyable activities.

Skeetchestn Indian Band Chief and Council have expressed full support and interest in ongoing initiatives that have burgeoned from the success of the school garden project. Families and Elders in Skeetchestn have benefited from the delivery of fresh produce baskets during the COVID-19 pandemic, harvested from the school gardens. The school and various classroom Facebook pages highlight the learning taking place in the garden on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis; with photos and explanations of the lessons and activities happening. The students themselves have learned the value of the hard work involved in setting up and tending a garden, along with the daily maintenance needed for successful crops. Government officials are supportive and can see the value of dedicating resources to implementing and improving food focused initiatives in Indigenous communities.

This program has demonstrated the inherent resilience of the residents in these areas and both the communities and schools have shown a marked interest in supporting Indigenous Food Sovereignty initiatives within their territories. The pandemic has heightened both communities' awareness of the need for food security within their lands and strengthened participation in these projects. There is a renewed sense of community ownership within these projects, and increased collaboration between all the stakeholders.

Learnings and Observations:

MENTORSHIP:

Having one school (SCS) take the lead in the community allowed for them to mentor and support the other nearby schools and communities who were able to learn from the school. The hired permaculture designer was also able to provide their plant expertise and mentor teachers to engage with the gardens.

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

The Learning Circles were essential in developing relationships and articulating a vision. This also allowed for the creation of a long term food sovereignty plan, which helped to secure additional funding. Having widespread community involvement helps to build momentum and sustain the activities at the school.

ESTABLISH SUPPORT FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Building buy-in from Chief and Council by presenting regular updates helped to establish support and communicate the program's progress. This increased their understanding of the project and their willingness to contribute to it by writing letters of support or helping in other ways.

FUNDING:

Adequate funding is vital, and leveraging funds to generate more funds is crucial in ensuring sustainability. A paid position should be dedicated to seeking grants and increasing program funding.

Skeetchestn Community School

“It is truly a team effort and the professional help from a permaculture designer has been critical to the project’s success.

- Maureen Zutz, Teacher Skeetchestn Community School



increase engagement. Both schools are incorporating cultural, artistic, linguistic, historic, scientific and mathematic lessons into how the teachers and students engage with the garden. The combined efforts to create and sustain these gardens and the hands-on learning opportunities they provide had resulted in students increasingly showing appreciation, excitement, pride and ownership of their school’s garden projects.

Students are able to connect to the gardens in numerous ways, making them such an invaluable resource. Classroom based hands-on and guided instruction allow the students to learn about seed starting and planting, soil amendments, composting with worms and industrial composters, irrigation system set up, wise use of water resources, the designing and setting up of garden beds, how to attract pollinators, and general garden maintenance. Through this process they have been able to take ownership of the space, express feelings of peace in the garden, and joyfully share knowledge they have gained from their time in the garden.

Food Forest / Garden Description

The garden, envisioned by permaculture designer Shelaigh Garson, is a combination of a number of different practices and has been built up over a number of years. Features include:

- Raised vegetable beds,
- a food forest with a variety of fruit trees such as pear, cherry, apple, etc, including 35 fruit trees,
- a wide variety of herbs, berries, and traditional native plants, including companion plantings,
- the incorporation of a swale system for effectively utilizing water during dry summers, and
- a greenhouse on site for seedling starts and season extension.



“It helps them learn about nutrition and the peaceful feeling of being connected to the land in a real and immediate way.

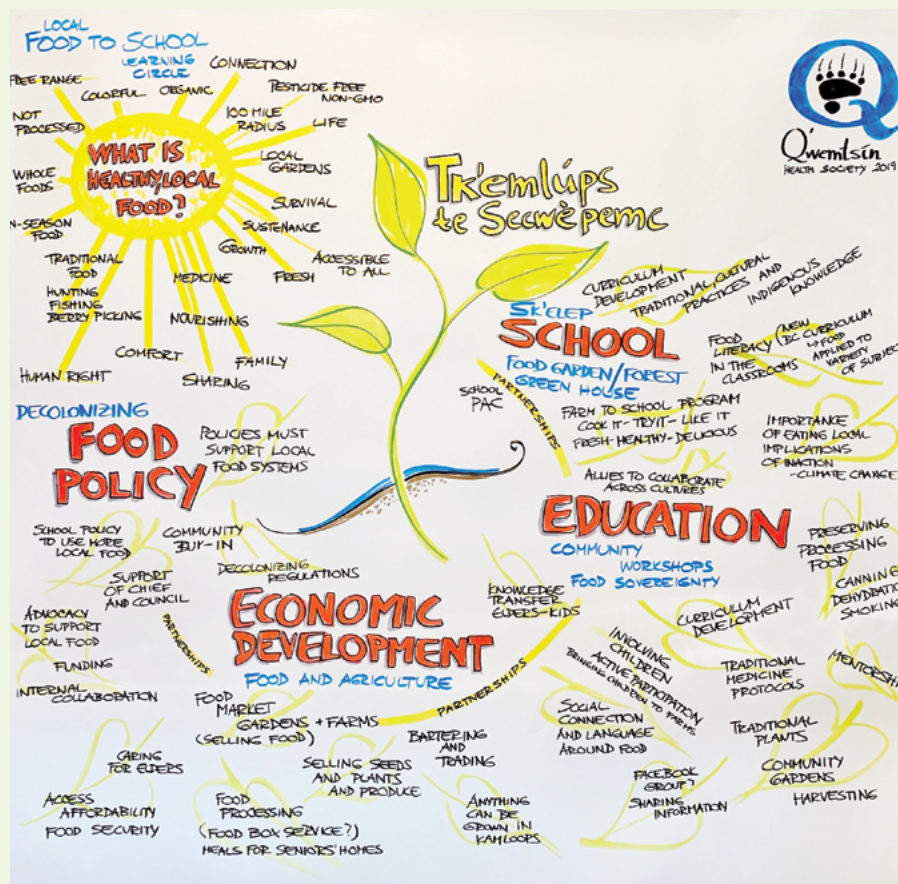
- Maureen Zutz

Engaging with Indigenous Plants and Pedagogy

The project’s lead teachers from both schools have reported a garden-based curriculum that meets the province of BC’s educational requirements leads to better student engagement. Direct supervision and clear instruction in everyday gardening tasks help to

Plans are in place to expand the garden infrastructure and on the following enhancements and activities:

- Building habitat for bees, birds, and bats,
- doing art and writing in the garden,
- building seats for relaxing in the garden,
- using the space for math such as measuring or learning area and perimeter,
- using the garden for science experiments,
- learning about traditional plants and their uses,
- making tea and bath bombs with herbs,
- hosting events in the garden for all community members (planning, set up etc.), and
- having peer groups and multi-grade groups cooperate to grow their individual crops within the garden.



Impact on School Community

As the projects have grown, facilitators have observed increased increased community awareness towards Indigenous Food Sovereignty within the two communities. More and more teachers are coming on board, by supporting the projects with their own knowledge and skills and engaging their students by offering learning opportunities in the garden. Students are sharing knowledge with their peers and learning valuable skills which they are taking home to share with their families. Parents and community members are supporting the work conducted by their youth and, in turn, taking it upon themselves participate in the movement. Moreover, Chief and Council are seeing the value of this good work and supporting the movement within each of their respective communities at a level and community Food Sovereignty committees are becoming more developed and their implementation is deepening, especially Sovereignty committees, especially within TteS. Finally, both communities have developed positions of employment for a school garden educator and Indigenous Food Sovereignty Liaison workers to assist in the successful continuation of these projects on a larger scale.

Learnings and Observations

Key challenges in the beginning included a lack of running water to the greenhouses and the need of a knowledgeable individual to provide guidance and expertise to make the project a success. The hiring of a Permaculture Designer was invaluable, as they helped provide technical expertise to those involved in the project. Starting small was crucial for the success, as it allowed the adults and students time to be involved and learn about the many steps of creating a successful garden at a slower pace. Local gardeners have offered helpful information related to how various plants will manage in the local area's hot and dry climate.

“Traditional foods are important to the community because it gets people up and out on the land, asserting our traditional rights. We have many lakes in the territory that have spring run offs of trout and every four years there will be a big sockeye run. This is beneficial to our people.

- Marshall Gonzales, Councilor for Skeetchestn Indian Band

