

Lalum' utul Smun 'eem

Cowichan Tribes Child and Family Services



Q'ushintul's tse' Adoption Program

Mission statement

Cowichan Child And Family Services will:

- **Promote a healthy Cowichan community which supports everyone having a voice.**
- **With respect for tradition we will focus on our precious gifts of children, families, elders and community.**
- **Cowichan Child And Family Services will work towards achieving this vision from a place of growth, equality and strength.**

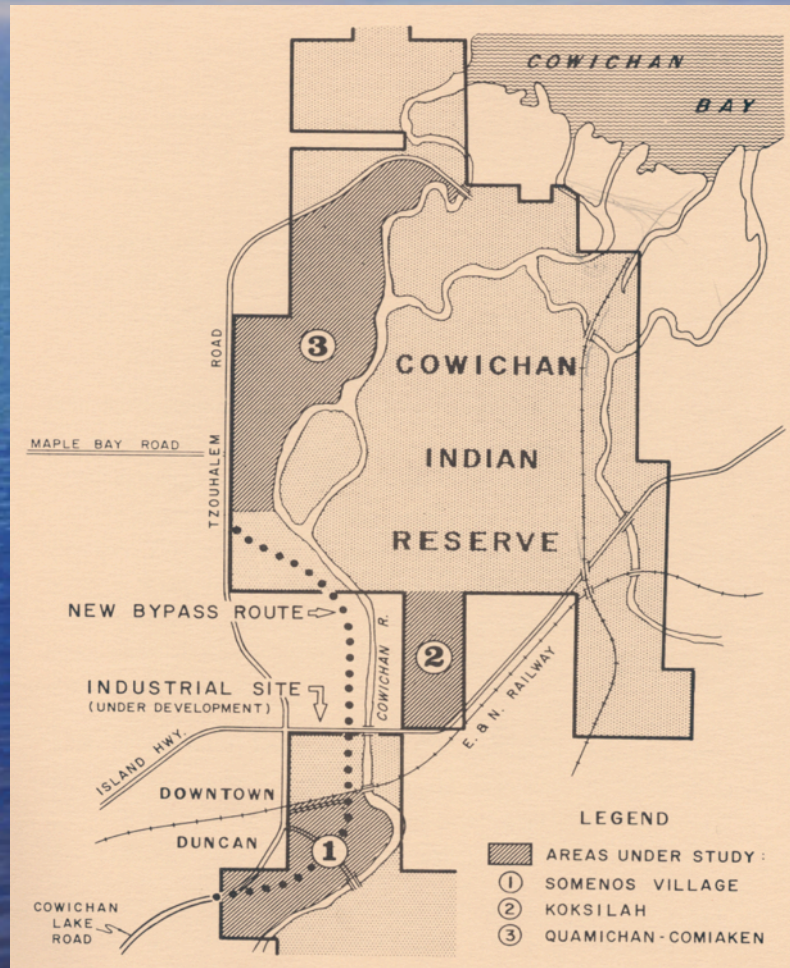
Our Location

Duncan is the hub of the Cowichan Valley. This land has been the traditional home of the Cowichan for hundreds of years. Cowichan is the largest First Nation in BC.



Cowichan Indian Reserves

Currently the Cowichan Tribes membership is 4084



About Lalum' utul' Smun' eem:

Lalum' utul' Smun' eem has delegated authority from the Province which includes voluntary support services, guardianship and child protection services as well as adoption services.

For many First Nations, delegation through provincial governments is interim measure until such time that treaties are in place. Currently, Cowichan Tribes is involved in treaty negotiation and are in discussion with the provincial government to proceed in developing a Cowichan Tribes specific Child Welfare legislation (which will include adoption). This is indeed an exciting time for all of us.

Our view of adoption of aboriginal children is shaped by both the positive cultural traditions of each community and the negative legacy of the Canadian government's intervention into the live indigenous peoples, including residential schools and the "Sixties Scoop".



Traditionally, adoption was viewed as an honourable act among family members and First Nations communities and custom adoption in many communities continues to this day.



Closed adoption into non-Aboriginal homes has had a damaging effect on both Aboriginal children, because of the disconnection of culture and community, and on Aboriginal communities, who saw the loss of their children.



Brief History of Adoption in BC

In 1992, in response to an outcry from Aboriginal communities, the BC government placed a moratorium on the adoption of Aboriginal children into non Aboriginal homes by the Ministry, which lasted almost two (2) years. The moratorium certainly accomplished the stop of Aboriginal children being placed for adoption in non-Aboriginal homes. However, it did mean that Aboriginal children were growing up in foster care, often with non-Aboriginal foster parents.

With the enactment of the *Adoption Act* (1996) there was a shift in the values underpinning the legislation. The new legislation promotes openness in adoption; informed decision making by all parties to adoptive placement, including the child and in the case of Aboriginal adoptions, the child's band; collection, disclosure and preservation of background information; an inclusive approach to placement planning decisions; culturally compatible placements and where that is not possible, openness and cultural connectedness. Each of these measures helps to bring provincial practice closer to Aboriginal cultural values.

Inherent Right

First Nations and Aboriginal peoples never relinquished their inherent right to care and plan for their children and families. Cowichan Tribes, like Yellowhead Tribal Council of Alberta, through their child welfare agencies, decided to reclaim this right and seek delegation to enable them to return the honour of adoption for their communities in providing adoption services through a cultural lens.

Our Journey Begins

In 2004, Cowichan Tribes negotiated the return of 23 of our children in continuing care (or in permanent custody as it is called in some provinces) from the Provincial Government to our agency.

The Ministry had already begun adoption planning for some of these children.

By Cowichan Tribes reclaiming our right to plan for our children that meant that even prior to our agency receiving adoption delegation we needed to:

- **Get the support from Chief and Council**
- **Seek community input**
- **Train Lalum'utul' Smun' eem staff**
- **Gain an understanding of adoption legislation**
- **Create our own policy, forms and systems**
- **Create a structure to review the adoption plans for our children in care**

What Makes Our Program Unique from the Province:

- **Cowichan Tribes Adoption Committee**
 - **Cultural Contract**
 - **Family Meetings**
- **Elders Teachings imbedded in our programs**
 - **Our own Cowichan Staff**
 - **Collaborative team approach**
 - **Our Adoption Cultural Ceremony**

Cowichan Tribes Adoption Committee

The role of the Cowichan Tribes Adoption Committee (CTAC) will be to:

- **Promotes community support for honouring the Cowichan tradition of adoption and understanding its implications.**
- **Supports the implementation of adoption policy and protocol**
- **Supports program development by providing cultural context**
- **Considers recommendations for adoption made by social workers of Lalum' utul' Smun' eem**
- **Provides advice and support to the Adoption Team for the plans for adoption or offer suggestions for an alternative plan and recommendations for follow-up by agency social workers**
- **Provides cultural guidance in the development and implementation of our cultural ceremonies**



The Membership of CTAC

- **Chief of Cowichan Tribes**
- **General Manager**
- **Council Member (one)**
- **Advisory Committee Members (2)**
- **One Cowichan Tribes Elder**
- **Lalum' utul' Smun' eem Executive Director (Committee Chair)**
- **Adoption Manager**
- **Adoption Social Worker**
- **Child Safety Manager**
- **Support Services Manager**

Cultural Contract

Purpose:

To commit parties to a plan that ensures that adopted Cowichan children remain connected to extended family, Cowichan membership, culture and community.

Cultural Contract

Principles:

- **Safety and well-being of the child**
- **Respect for the child's Cowichan culture, language, traditions, & community**
- **Recognition and promotion of the values and expertise of Cowichan people and services**
- **Acceptance of the evolving willingness of the child to take part in Cowichan cultural events and activities**
- **Acceptance of the evolving knowledge of the adoptive parents with respect to the Cowichan culture expectations**

Cultural Contract

Obligations of the adoptive parents:

- **Work closely with the Lalum'utul' Smun' eem Support Services Team to ensure the implementation of this agreement**
- **Accompany their child to the custom adoption ceremony**
- **Attend Cowichan Tribes cultural awareness training provided by Lalum'utul' Smun'eem**
- **Ensure their child is supported in attending cultural events by their own attendance to these events**
- **Ensure their child has opportunities to learn the Hulqu'minum language**
- **Regular extended family visits according to the child's best interests as recommended by the Child Safety Social Worker.**
- **Discuss with Lalum'utul' Smun'eem the implications of any change of address**

Cultural Contract

Obligations of Cowichan Tribes:

- **Notify child and parents of Cowichan cultural events (both family and community based)**
- **Provide opportunities for families to be involved in cultural training**
- **Provide the family with a copy of the Cowichan Tribes Newsletter**
- **Provide cultural resource information to the family**
- **Visit the family at least every six months**
- **Provide access to Cowichan Elders when required to support the needs of a child**



Training

- **Staff require three weeks of MCFD training in order to receive delegation**
- **Training for staff on permanency planning and adoption**
- **Orientation to CTAC and any workshops on adoption**
- **Adoption education program for prospective adoptive parents**
- **Training for administration for administrative functions and systems**
- **Ongoing community consultation**

Funding

- **Provincial Ministry**
- **Regional Ministry**
- **Indian and Northern Affairs Canada**
- **BC Adoption and Permanency Trust Fund; grants**
- **Secondment of Adoption Manager from MCF from Provincial Ministry**
- **Post Adoption Assistance for our families through Provincial Ministry (in negotiations with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)**

Partnerships

- **Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency**
- **Indian and Northern Affairs Canada**
- **3 Branches of Ministry -Region, Adoption Services, and Aboriginal Services**
- **BC Adoption and Permanency Trust Fund**
- **North American Council on Adoptable Children**
- **Adoptive Parents Assoc. of BC**
- **Choices Adoption License Adoption Agency**
- **Other First Nations and delegated agencies across Canada**
- **Last but not least....our adoptive families, children and our community**

Conclusion

What is going well:

- **Strong support from our Chief and Council**
- **Support and advice from the Cowichan community**
- **Support from government partners**
- **Advice from Cowichan Tribes Adoption Committee**
- **Willingness of caregivers to consider adoption**
- **Willingness of Non-Native caregivers to ensure regular involvement of children in cultural events and programs**
- **Training of staff, Adoption Committee, Chief and Council**
- **Partnership with Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency**
- **Partnerships with Federal and Provincial governments**

Conclusion

- Home studies getting completed for children who were awaiting adoption
- Delays in finalizing adoption program funding
- Finding the best ways to meet and learn from our community Elders
- Securing ongoing funding that will sustain the adoption program
- Systems issues – CFS Best Practice and Interface with Ministry system
- Policies that are Ministry driven
- Recruiting Cowichan adoptive homes when overcrowding and housing are significant issues
- Having the resources (time, staff, and funds to seek extended family to place children with)

Future of our Program

- **Expanding services to cover any Cowichan child regardless of residence.**
- **Assisting other BC First Nations with adoption of their children.**
- **Services for adult adoptees returning to Cowichan Tribes.**
- **Providing services to birth parents who wish to make adoption plans for their children.**