

# Liard Aboriginal Women's Society Annual Report



Reflections on the  
Year Ending  
March 31, 2021

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Liard Aboriginal Women's Society  
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# About Us

## *Our Mandate*

The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) is a registered non-profit, charitable, community-based Indigenous organization. Over the many years since our founding in 1998, we have dedicated ourselves to improving the health and wellness of Kaska women and girls and our Kaska Nation. In these efforts, we have created a diverse range of unique social development programs and services centered on cultural revitalization, restorative healing, gender-based empowerment, social justice and the direct and intergenerational impacts of Residential School.

## *Our History*

Our organization arose from humble beginnings in 1998 when a small grassroots circle of women from the Kaska Nation concerned about their community began fundraising for social and recreational purposes. Over the years since, both our circle and our concern for community have grown, giving rise to an evolving series of programs and advocacy projects fitted to the holistic needs of our community.

## *Our Vision*

We are a strong, proud, free and equitable Nation where members thrive, and participate actively in community life and governance. We are connected to our culture, our traditions, language, and land and to the knowledge of our Elders. Our Youth are our activists and our leaders. Our members work together to sustain supportive kinship, family and community bonds in a safe and secure environment, and we have all of the resources needed for the healing and development of our people.

We are an established organization with strong and diverse leadership and staff. Sustainable funding and strong partnerships support our purpose and mandate as we lead the way for other organizations and levels of government.

## ***Our Governance***

As a registered charitable, non-profit society, we are governed by a Board of Directors consisting of six women of Kaska Dene descent, representing a diversity of age, experience, traditional knowledge, professions and communities. The role of the Board of Directors is to uphold the constitution of the Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society in its efforts to provide cultural, personal, and community healing support; to preserve and protect the Kaska Dene culture, traditions and customs; and to pursue the empowerment of Kaska women.

## ***Our Services***

Our services are designed as an effective, holistic response to the needs of our community, offering an evolving range of initiatives rooted in the themes of advocacy, healing, social justice, land, governance, community safety, and culture – noting that culture is a central theme informing all of our services.

## ***Our Reputation***

As an organization we have maintained organizational stability, sound financial management, and effective program design and management for over 20 years. We continue to focus on our land, culture and traditional practices, strong principles of empowerment, and resilient and inspired leadership.

## ***Our Kaska Nation***

Our Kaska Nation is comprised of approximately 3,000 Kaska Dena living primarily in the communities of Upper Liard, Watson Lake, and Ross River, Yukon, and in the Kaska communities of Lower Post, and Good Hope Lake, British Columbia.



# Our Supporters

## *Our Funders 2020-2021*

Government of Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indigenous Services Canada</li><li>• Public Health Agency Canada</li><li>• Status of Women Canada</li><li>• Crown-Indigenous Relations Canada</li><li>• Heritage Canada</li></ul>
Government of Yukon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yukon Women's Directorate</li></ul>
Other Funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Catherine Donnelly Foundation</li></ul>

***Our  
Partners  
2020-2021***

**Yukon Health and Social Services, Watson Lake  
RCMP Watson Lake Detachment  
Dena Keh Justice Program  
Johnson Elementary School  
Daylu Dena Council  
Ross River Dena Council**

**Our Kaska Elders**

**Watson Lake Secondary School  
Help and Hope for Families Society  
Yukon Women's Directorate  
Centre for Response-based Practice  
Beringia Community Planning Inc.  
Liard First Nation**

*“Tell me and I’ll forget.  
Show me, and I may not remember.  
Involve me, and I’ll understand.” -Unknown*

# Our Accomplishments

The following initiatives are chosen from a long list of our 2020 -2021 activities, highlighting our dedication to inclusive and holistic community development, with a focus on culture, safety, healing, land, advocacy, social justice and governance.

## *Youth for Dignity in Relationships*

Themes: Safety, Advocacy, Healing, Social Justice, Culture



Youth for Dignity in Relationships is a five-year project addressing the issue of gender-based and relationship violence among youth in Watson Lake. The project engages youth from grades 8 -12 attending Watson Lake Secondary School in understanding the issue and its prevention, mobilizing youth as community anti-violence leaders, and expanding community knowledge of gender-based and relationship violence issues.

24 youth participated in a series of seven 2-day knowledge and skill development workshops focused on gendered violence, activism, social action, Kaska cultural teachings and practices including a drum making workshop. Youth engaged in several live social action activities, developing a Youth for Dignity logo, creating a social media presence, and campaigning for action on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women.

## Advocate Training

Themes: Advocacy, Culture, Land, Healing, Social Justice, Safety

In May 2019, we began a five-year project to address gender-based violence in Watson Lake, Yukon and surrounding areas by training a team of community Advocates who are survivors of violence, to become anti-violence leaders in their communities. Training is a blend of western-based and cultural practices supported by Kaska Elders and the Centre for Response Based Practice.



The project is designed to support the community safety needs of Indigenous women in Watson Lake and surrounding areas, while demonstrating the value of a unique, community-based, culturally relevant approach to advocacy.

23 advocate trainees joined the program and participated in 6 training sessions in response-based practice and Kaska Dena principles and teachings of dignity, justice and healing.



As part of their training, advocates assumed a leadership role, corresponding with governments and industry on gender-based violence prevention, building collaborative community relationships and organizing community events including:

- the creation of a Red Dress model capturing and memorializing the messages of participants in the Canada National Day of Remembrance Vigil;
- participation in an online social media campaign National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Trans and Two-Spirit people.

## ***Covid19 Social Impact Mitigation – Breaking the Silence: A Therapeutic Lifeline in a Time of Isolation***

Themes: Healing, Social Justice, Safety

In response to the social Impacts of Covid19, the Society undertook to provide remote access to professional therapeutic support for Kaska members residing in Watson Lake, and Ross River, Yukon, and in Lower Post and Good Hope Lake, BC. who may be experiencing significant mental health impacts related to the coronavirus pandemic.

Early on and with anxieties on the increase, there were concerns that a significant segment of Kaska members faced technological barriers in accessing remote support -- this being of particular concern in respect to those most vulnerable including Elders. In responding to the technological barriers limiting access to remote therapeutic support, the organization purchased a small inventory of tablet computers, providing borrowing access to those in need who would otherwise be unable to obtain counseling services using applications such as Skype and Zoom.

Of note to date, the remote counseling service has provided members with over 70 sessions .

## ***Covid19 Social Impact Mitigation – Sewing for Traditional Mental Wellness***

Themes: Culture, Healing, Social Justice, Safety

Pandemic stresses on the mental health of Kaska members are particularly acute given rural, remote and insular living conditions, significant access barriers to mental health services, and prohibitions preventing traditional social practices. At the same time, extreme isolation amplifies the stresses of loneliness, poverty, overcrowding, family violence, remembered trauma including the range of direct and intergenerational residential school effects, and fear of the virus itself.

In response, the Society initiated a project to provide the basic means for Elder and youth participants in Watson Lake and Ross River, Yukon and in Lower Post BC to engage in in-home traditional sewing practice. Sewing practice is known to be an immersive experience having significant interrelated mental and physical health benefits. Added to this, sewing is a traditional cultural practice made significantly relevant to Kaska Elders and youth through a relationship with traditional materials.

In total, 167 packages of 3 large deer hide were delivered to members in Ross River, Watson Lake YT and Lower Post, BC. In addition, 50 large beaver hides were distributed to Elders. The supplies allowed members to create and complete a variety of beautiful projects including slippers, vests, and shawls, contributing to a sense of community and pride during long periods of isolation.



## ***Reclaiming Dignity – Commemorating the History and Legacy of Residential Schools***

Themes: Culture, Healing, Social Justice, Safety

Reclaiming Dignity was designed to address the legacy of residential schools, namely its colonialist practices contributing to the intersecting losses of belonging, prideful self-image, cultural practice, and cultural voice. In redressing these losses, this *identity project* was designed to promote: (a) an authentic sense of belonging within the Kaska Nation; (b) a sense of pride in being Kaska; (c) the revival of neglected cultural practices; and (d) the assertive promotion of Kaska language, customs and protocols.

The project allowed Kaska members with a strong interest to participate in a series of interrelated project activities including: the sewing of traditional regalia; offerings of traditional cultural teachings on name giving and other Kaska protocols; vision boarding; a traditional name giving celebration subject to COVID19 restrictions; and public education.

A mix of 26 adults and children participated in on-line cultural teaching sessions, with more than a dozen participating in the sewing of traditional regalia.

## ***Social Impacts of Mining: Never Until Now Report***

Themes: Advocacy, Culture, Land, Healing, Social Justice, Safety



As *Mothers of the Land* and as stewards of our traditional lands, we are responsible for speaking to the impacts of extraction industries on our traditional lands and our people. In line with this responsibility, Kaska Elders and Advocates met at the Tu Cho Elders Culture Camp on shores of Frances Lake in July 2020 for a “land is medicine” gathering and identified the need for a study about Indigenous women’s working conditions in the mining sector of northern Canada.

Research for the report *Never Until Now – Indigenous & Racialized Women’s Experiences Working in Yukon & Northern British Columbia Mine Camps* commenced in 2020, culminating in the Report dated August, 2021

The Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society defined the need for this study and shaped the project purpose. *“We believe that this report holds the sacred stories of women who have endured violence in the mining industry and will help us to work with industry and governments in forming policies to change the environment.”* (Ann Maje Raider, Liard Aboriginal Women's Society)

The Report is rightly-named based on the words of an anonymous research participant *“...this is the first time I've ever talked about it until now, like nobody's ever asked: ‘So how was your experience as a woman in camp?’ Right. Yeah, seriously. Never until now.”*

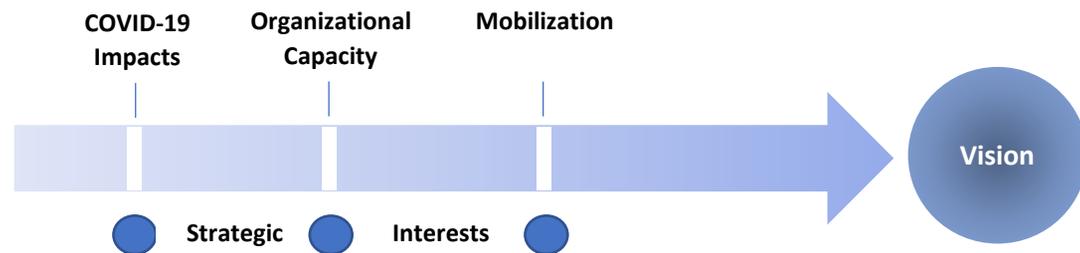
The key findings from the Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society's *Never Until Now* study confirm that women’s jobs – across all age groups, education levels, racial backgrounds, mining seasons, job type and camp types -- are concentrated in typically low-paying and gendered roles, and that working conditions often compromise their personal safety. .

# Our Challenges

Our challenges and related strategic interests in 2019-2020 include COVID-19, organizational capacity, and mobilization.

## *COVID-19 Impacts*

The health and safety of our community members is a priority for us as we search for ways to cope with social isolation, developing creative solutions to support the emotional impacts of the virus, and finding safe ways to connect that respect the need for social distancing.



## *Organizational Capacity*

In working toward the vision for our community, we face several ongoing challenges -- overlapping issues involving limited funding, facilities and staffing, and the absence of a comprehensive information management system to guide our work.

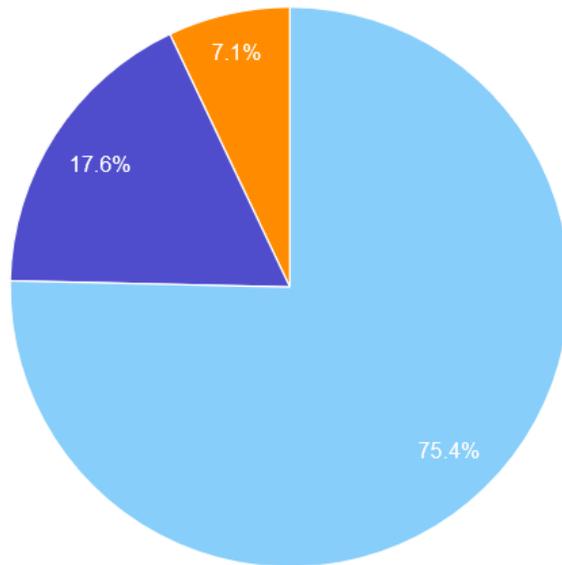
## *Mobilization*

The path to realizing our vision is a shared one, challenging us to mobilize common ground, shared inspiration, and unified action within our community, partnerships, governments, and allied organizations.

# Our Finances

## Revenue by Source

■ Govt. Canada \$857,203    ■ Govt. Yukon \$200,000  
■ Other Sources \$80,296



Revenues from the Governments of Canada and Yukon are consolidated, being the sum of more than one department or agency.

Revenue from other sources includes Donations and Other Revenue

## Excess of Revenue over Expenses.

Revenue	\$1,137,499
Expenses	\$1,043,185
Surplus	\$94,313



Amounts are drawn from the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society Statement of Operations for the Year Ended March 31, 2021