A red decorative border with Indigenous patterns, including stylized faces and symbols, runs along the left and bottom edges of the page.

# **Kwìkwèxwelhp** AND **Sts'ailes**

A HISTORICAL JOURNEY IN HEALING ABORIGINAL OFFENDERS

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Elbow Lake Institution.....	3
The Vision.....	4
How The Partnership Began.....	6
Reaching An Agreement.....	8
The Community House.....	9
Renaming of Elbow Lake Instituion and the New Logo.....	10
The Process of Working Together.....	11
Successes.....	12
Redevelopment.....	14
Interviews, Quotes & Comments.....	16
Author’s Note.....	18

*This publication follows the evolution of Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village – from its beginnings as a work camp into an Aboriginal focused facility that has developed a strong and respectful relationship with the Sts’ailes people.*

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this publication is to provide a review of the historical relationship between the former Elbow Lake Correctional Institution, now Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village, and the Chehalis Indian Band, now Sts’ailes.

This publication will outline the approval and development of Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village, as well as highlight the successes of the partnership and how the common goal of public safety is achieved.

In addition, interviews were conducted with key players from the formative years, as well as staff from Sts’ailes in order to gain a better understanding of the transformation processes involved. Additional information for this publication was extracted from the Community Consultation and Evaluation Report that was drafted by Sts’ailes in January 2013.

When one thinks of a prison, they tend to visualize locked cells, razor wire atop 10 foot fences, watch towers, and armed, uniformed guards. However, Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village does not meet up to these expectations of what a prison should look like. Instead, one’s eyes are greeted to a different and wonderful sight that has to be seen to be believed.

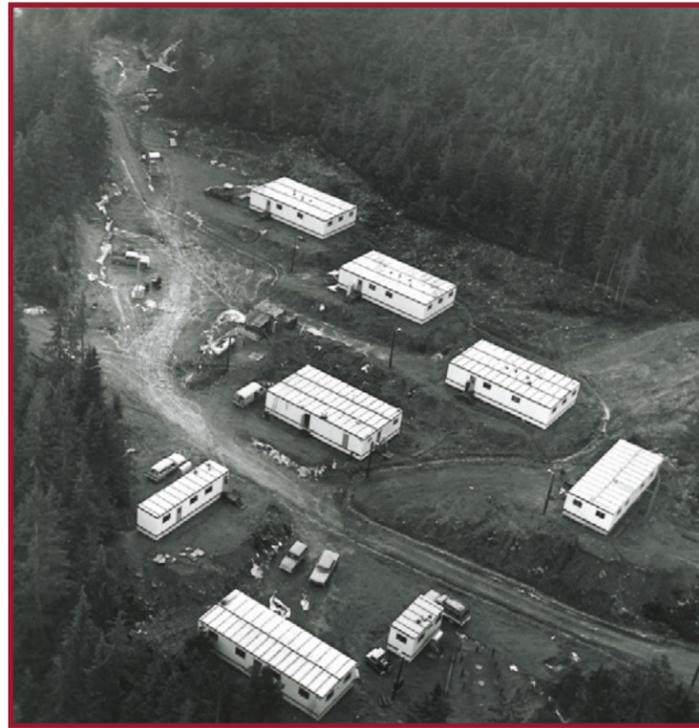
Welcome to Kwikwèxwelhp – a place that found its origin from the vision of a man named Ron Wiebe, and was brought to reality by the efforts of the Canadian government, Correctional Service of Canada, Kathy Louis and the People of the Land – Sts’ailes.

This is the story of its evolution to becoming a successful part of Canada’s Aboriginal history.



<sup>1</sup> For purposes of chronological integrity, the former name Chehalis will be used throughout this publication to the point where it was officially changed to Sts’ailes

## ELBOW LAKE INSTITUTION



Elbow Lake Institution, only the second minimum security institution in the Pacific Region, opened in 1975 and accepted the first inmates in December 1976.

Elbow Lake Institution was designed to house an inmate capacity of thirty to fifty, but was later rated the capacity for 90. The institutional program at that time was Forestry including protection, rehabilitation, stand treatment and clean up. Inmates at Elbow Lake Institution were trained in all aspects of forestry including forest fire fighting, chainsaw operation and first aid and were allowed the opportunity to work with qualified forestry technicians on various contracted ventures with BC Hydro, BC Forest Service and BC Highways, to name a few.

This forestry program remained in effect until 1993 when it was proposed that Elbow Lake Institution, along with Matsqui and Mountain

Institutions, would provide aboriginally sensitive programming based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Aboriginal Peoples in Federal Corrections.

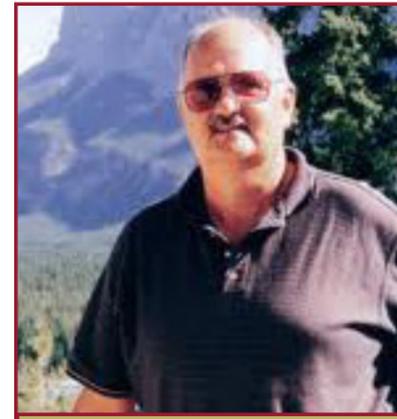
Within five years, the programs being delivered included:

- Native Substance Abuse
- Offender Substance Abuse Pre-Release Program
- Maintenance Program – Offender Substance Abuse Pre-Release Program
- Native Family Violence

At this time, Elbow Lake Institution had two Elders available – a male Elder and a female Elder. They provided spiritual counseling, conducted ceremonies and complete Elder Assessments.

Elbow Lake Institution was making progress in the rehabilitation, reintegration and healing of aboriginal offenders, but there was a man who believed that more could be done. This man had a dream – a vision. He was at the time warden of Elbow Lake and Ferndale Institutions, and his name was Ron Wiebe.

## THE VISION



Ron Wiebe, late Warden of Elbow Lake Institution

The late Ron Wiebe had a vision – he wanted Elbow Lake Institution to become an Aboriginal Focused facility, rather than an institution that had a few aboriginal programs. The idea for this vision came to him after viewing an Aboriginal-focused training session facilitated by Kathy Louis.<sup>2</sup>

He saw Healing Circles as a positive method to resolving conflict rather than standard discipline and correctional practices, and therefore wanted Elbow Lake Institution to base many of its operations on the principles of restorative justice.

He believed that by more fully incorporating traditional aboriginal elements, Elbow Lake Institution could become a center of excellence for the rehabilitation and reintegration of Aboriginal offenders.

Ron was also very conscious of the relationship between criminal activity among aboriginals and residential school. He noted that many of the incarcerated aboriginal population suffered from Fetal

---

*“Ron wanted Elders to have a more prominent role in dealing with the day-to-day interaction with offenders, he wanted them to teach not only spirituality programming but to teach the inmates of cultural matters as well.”*

**- Excerpt from *Reflections of a Canadian Prison Warden*  
*The Visionary Legacy of Ron Wiebe: An Unfinished Conversation***

---

Alcohol Syndrome, and was pleased that RRAC screening for this incurable illness in order to place the offenders in the proper institution be it Elbow Lake Institution, Kent or Mountain Institution. Ron was greatly in favor of having the involvement of the Chehalis and Stó:lō peoples to help the offenders reconnect with their culture, history and spirit.

Words from Ron on Elbow Lake: “It’s exciting, and I would have liked to have been part of that. Dianne Brown is taking over for me. I met her, and I think she is the right person: she has the right values, management skill and very good people skills. She is looking forward to coming there. I told her it’s probably the best job in Canadian corrections. It was the best job I ever had, and it is sad for me to have to walk away from it, but you’ve got to let it go. I only hope that we will not lose a number of the gains we have made over the years, doing this kind of work and doing it well.”

On March 17, 1999 Ron and Kathy Louis were honored in a ceremony recognizing their work in promoting and developing Aboriginal programs in the Pacific Region, and also for their efforts in the redevelopment of Elbow Lake Institution. Guests included Corrections Commissioner Ole Instrup, Mission Institution Warden Ken Peterson, and Pieter De Vink, the Regional Deputy Commissioner of the Pacific Region.

Sadly, Ron Wiebe succumbed to terminal cancer in 1999 and wasn’t able to see his vision become a reality.

<sup>2</sup> Additional documentation from this timeframe is located on page 5.

In June 1999, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) announced the creation of the Ron Wiebe Restorative Justice Award in honor of the late Ron Wiebe. This award recognizes Canadians who have demonstrated, through their work or lifestyle, ways of transforming human relationships, by enabling and promoting communication and healing between people in conflict be they victims, offenders, colleagues, families or neighbors.

Ron was deeply committed to the vision and values of restorative justice and modeled these as an expression of faith in his family, his work and his community life.

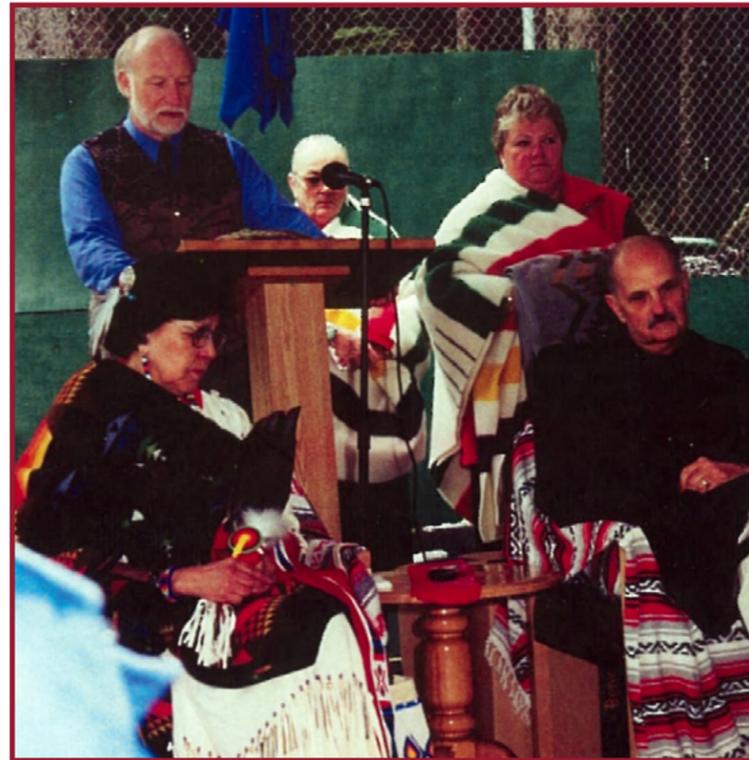
*Kathy*

*I would like to express my gratitude for allowing me to share the Blanket Ceremony with you. This was a very meaningful experience for my family. It helped give them a much better understanding of the value of traditional aboriginal ways. The spiritual nature of the ceremony was comforting and encouraging.*

*I am humbled by the opportunity to introduce first nations culture and spirituality as a way to humanize the criminal justice system. I see you as a leader in this regard and am pleased that you have agreed to assist in the redevelopment of Elbow Lake. If this project goes as expected, I anticipate that it will establish a standard of excellence in aboriginal correctional programming. So thank you for your commitment to this and thank you for teaching me a little more about the value of traditional ways.*

*all my relatives*

*Ron*



~Images provided by Kathy Louis~

## HOW THE PARTNERSHIP BEGAN

With the staggering number of aboriginals being incarcerated and the high rates of recidivism (re-offending), CSC and the government of Canada realized something had to change to help with the rehabilitation process for incarcerated aboriginals. CSC also recognized that the needs of aboriginal offenders are unique and who better to provide traditional, cultural and spiritual teachings than the members of a First Nations community.

So, in 1998, CSC approached the Chehalis Indian band (now Sts'ailes) and proposed a new concept for corrections in the Pacific Region. CSC believed that the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual practices of members from the aboriginal community could assist offenders in their healing, and help them to reintegrate back into society as productive, law abiding citizens.

On a side note, CSC initially approached the Stó:lō Nation about partnering with Elbow Lake Institution, and was informed by former Lieutenant Governor Steven Point, that the correct party to contact was Chehalis as the facility is located in their traditional territory.

*"If we were going to be involved, we had to look at our own people to see how they were healed. Our people became stronger and healed when our longhouse was built."*

**- Former Sts'ailes Chief, Alex Paul Sr.**



The Chehalis Chief and Council decided that extensive research was required before coming to a decision. They had to learn what the community members wanted, and also had to learn exactly what an aboriginal focused facility was and how best to action this proposal, so in March of 1999, a community-wide survey was conducted in Chehalis to assess the level of support for such an important venture. The survey results were positive – over 80% of the Chehalis people were in favor of forming a partnership with CSC for the redevelopment of Elbow Lake Institution into an Aboriginal Healing Village with a possible Section 81 transfer to Chehalis.

The community members of Sts'ailes were invited to attend a forum in March of 1999 where they could ask questions and learn more about the Elbow Lake Initiative. In the weeks following the forum, a community survey was completed by Sts'ailes members. This information was a key factor in the acceptance of the joint partnership between Sts'ailes and CSC. This was a very important step as there had been an incident in the community involving an offender which resulted in a petition to not allow inmates access to the reserve in the future. Fortunately, the petition was overturned and the partnership was able to move forward.

At the time of the first Community Consultation, Aboriginals comprised 2.8% of Canada's population; today, they account for 4% of the population. The numbers have increased from 16% to 20% for Aboriginals incarcerated within the same time period. Statistics continue to indicate that in comparison to non-aboriginal offenders, aboriginals serve more of their sentence (70% vs. 58.8%), are classified at a higher security rating, are held in pre-trial longer, and are less likely to be granted parole (23.7% vs. 43.4%). - Statistics sourced from [www.csc-scc.gc.ca](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca)

With the support of the community, Chief and Council, Chehalis decided to move forward and begin a new journey with the Correctional Service of Canada.

Once the decision was made, the need for leadership, guidance and advice became apparent to all parties involved. Ron Wiebe saw the need for an advisory senate to oversee the redevelopment, planning and implementation of the project. Individuals were selected based on their commitment to healing, demonstrated leadership within their communities, restorative beliefs and experience – this group of respected people became the Elbow Lake Advisory Senate. The primary focus of the Senate was to oversee the transition of Elbow Lake Institution to an Aboriginal Healing Center.

The initial members to the Senate were Alexander Paul, Former Chief of the Chehalis Indian Band; Kathy Louis, Former Senior Member of the National Parole Board; Gerry Ayotte, Co-Regional Chaplain, CSC Pacific Region; Roy Mussell, Former Chief Skwah First Nation and Sto:lo Nation Human Resources Manager; Helen Joe, Tzeachten First Nation; and Leonard George, Former Chief Tsleil-Waututh First Nation (Burrard).

One of the major activities completed by the Advisory Senate was a tour of Healing Lodges from the Prairie Region in August of 2000. This tour provided significant insight to the development of the facilities and programming, which could possibly be modified to accommodate the vision of the new Elbow Lake Institution.

Along with the Advisory Senate, several groups and individuals were selected to assist in the redevelopment of Elbow Lake Institution and they include:

- Project Steering Committee, assigned to work on the Master Plan of Elbow Lake Institution, consisted of representatives of Chehalis, Elbow Lake and CSC Pacific Regional Headquarters
- Screening Committee – Boyd Peters named a member in 1999
- Citizen Advisory Committee – Boyd Peters and Willie Charlie joined the CAC in 1999
- Transition Coordinator – Boyd Peters
- Community Native Liaison – Mervin Felix



Garden dedicated to Rita Leon at Kwikw̓welhp

## REACHING AN AGREEMENT

The next step of the redevelopment was to create a proposal for the Section 81<sup>3</sup> Institutional transfer of Elbow Lake. The Project Steering Committee, renamed the Redevelopment Committee, played a major role in drafting the Master Plan. Once the initial draft was completed, the Advisory Senate was afforded the opportunity to review and provide suggestions. When all parties were satisfied with the proposal, it was submitted for approval.

Unfortunately, it was determined that the services Chehalis proposed to provide fell within the scope of the services provided by CSC and did not meet the requirements of a Section 81 transfer. This was disappointing news for Chehalis, but as they had a vested interest in partnering with CSC, it was decided that an Inclusive Partnership would be the option to best meet both the mandate and vision of CSC and Chehalis.

After the initial disappointment of the refused proposal, it was determined that the best option for Chehalis and CSC would be an inclusive partnership. At a meeting with Dale LeClair (April 2000), Acting Director General, it was decided that a Memorandum of Understanding was needed between CSC and Chehalis. The MOU would provide a framework for a shared understanding of, and commitment to establishing a cooperative and productive relationship between the Elbow Lake Institution and the Chehalis Indian Band.

Several drafts were compiled, reviewed and amended. After several meetings between CSC and Chehalis, a final draft was accepted in late 2000.



Former Chief Alex Paul signing the MOU



Commissioner Lucie McClung signing the MOU

On May 2, 2001 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between CSC and Chehalis at a traditional honoring ceremony at the Charlie Longhouse in Chehalis. The document outlined the principles and provided the framework for a shared understanding of, and a commitment to establishing a cooperative and productive working relationship to transform Elbow Lake Institution into an Aboriginal Healing Village.

With the signing of the MOU, Chehalis and Elbow Lake were able to focus on moving their partnership forward.

The next process was the updating of both the Elbow Lake Institutional Role Statement and the Master Redevelopment Plan.

<sup>3</sup> A Section 81 is, the entering of an agreement between CSC and an Aboriginal community for the transfer of the operation of a minimum security facility to said community

## THE COMMUNITY HOUSE



Following the advice of Kathy Louis, it was decided by the Steering Committee and Advisory Senate that the first phase in redeveloping Elbow Lake Institution (ELI) would include the construction of a longhouse. Local longhouse leaders from Chehalis visited ELI to identify a suitable location for the new structure.

Once the location was chosen, a Ground Blessing ceremony was held on January 25, 2001. The design of the longhouse was chosen and supported by the community members of Chehalis, as identified in the consultation that was conducted the previous year.

Chad Paul, a Chehalis resident, designed and led the construction of the longhouse; construction began in March, 2001. It is a rectangular structure measuring 59ft by 39ft and was constructed of natural woods with a cedar exterior. Seated in the center of the earthen floor are two wood stoves.



Located adjacent to the side door is a kitchen facility that is utilized for the preparation of meals that are shared in the Community House during Welcome Ceremonies, Winter Opening and Closing ceremonies and Pow Wows.



On October 18, 2001 a day long ceremony was held at Elbow Lake Institution to commemorate the opening of the only longhouse within Canada's correctional facilities.

The opening was attended by 200 people including Chehalis members, CSC officials, and elected officials who had the honor and privilege to witness a traditional ceremony presented by the Chehalis, rarely seen outside of traditional ceremonies.

Today, Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village is still the only correctional facility in Canada that holds the unique distinction of having a longhouse, known as the Community House, on site as part of the healing and rehabilitation of aboriginal offenders.



Monthly Welcoming ceremonies are held to honor new residents, say farewell to those being released and to honor staff who at times come and go.

## RENAMING OF ELBOW LAKE INSTITUTION AND THE NEW LOGO

In conjunction with the opening of the longhouse, there were two additional occurrences of note that took place on October 18 – Elbow Lake Institution received a new name – Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village and a new logo.

The rationale of changing the name was introduced by Senate member, Helen Joe. She believed that the name should reflect the fact that Elbow Lake was becoming a true center for the rehabilitation for aboriginal offenders and that the current name did not reflect this.

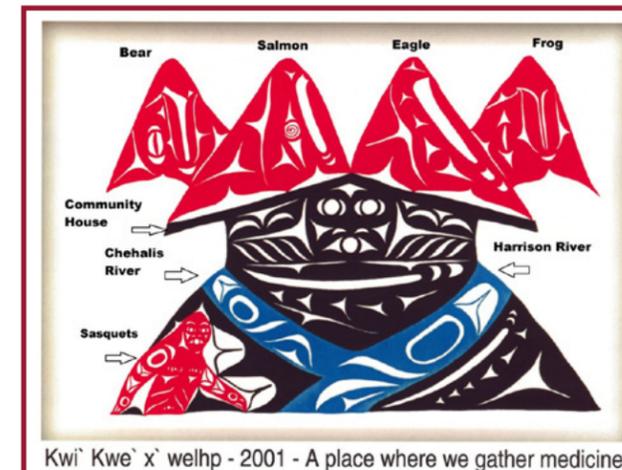
As the location of Elbow Lake Institution did have a traditional Coast Salish name, Elders from Chehalis were consulted to provide the translation and meaning.

Chief Paul stated, "The place is not being renamed, but we are taking it back and reclaiming the traditional name which our ancestors called it."

The name provided by Elders Albert and Elizabeth Phillips was Kwikwèxwelhp, which means "a place where we gather medicine". This, however, was not a new name – it was the taking of the traditional name **back**.



The new logo, designed by Damian George from Tsleil-Waututh, eloquently acknowledged the Coast Salish elements of the area, including the Chehalis People. The logo features the Community House atop a mountain (Kwikwèxwelhp), with four additional peaks in the background with traditional designs displayed within – a bear, a frog, a salmon and an eagle. Centered below the mountains, the juncture of the Harrison and Chehalis Rivers is shown, along with a Sasquets, which is a prominent figure in Sts'ailes cultural practices and laws.



## THE PROCESS OF WORKING TOGETHER

In order to achieve optimal relations between Chehalis and Kwikwèxwelhp, several initiatives were implemented to facilitate the strengthening of the trust, respect and involvement of the offenders within the community.

Cooperative Programming has been very effective in helping the residents reintegrate with society. To provide adequate methods of communication, direction, accountability and authority for programs, the Cooperative Programs Board was created in 2001. Working closely with the Cooperative Programs Board was the Community Native Liaison, Mervin Felix. His duties involved organizing and supervising Kwikwèxwelhp work crews who provided services to Chehalis including clearing the site for the new Administration building, cutting and delivering firewood to the Elders and installing a new fence at the daycare.

The Kwikwèxwelhp residents have helped out in many other ways. In 2003 the Chehalis healing center, Lhawathet Lalem, was saved from the rising waters of the Chehalis River by the appreciated assistance of Kwikwèxwelhp staff and offenders as they sandbagged the dyke to stave off the rushing water.

In 2005, the residents assisted Chehalis by working alongside community members with the clearing of the Heritage Trail. The Heritage Trail circles the Indian Reserve lands following a path along the Harrison and Chehalis Rivers where there are many cultural sites that have been identified by Sts'ailes Elders and the Aboriginal Rights and Title Department. This was an excellent cultural learning experience for the men as the Heritage Trail follows the ancient Chehalis village sites where long houses, burial mounds and pit houses were located thousands of years ago.



In 2008, Chehalis member Terry Felix was awarded the contract for Community Engagement Coordinator, which is similar to the Community Native Liaison. His duties include taking the residents to the community where they provide services such as the ongoing supply of firewood to the Elders, restoring soccer fields, and village clean-up. The Kwikwèxwelhp residents are also invited to events such as the First Salmon ceremony, the Community Christmas Dinner and numerous other cultural events.

Terry also escorts community members to Kwikwèxwelhp who provide cultural teachings to the residents through storytelling, cedar bark weaving and drum making. It is these interactions that allow offenders to learn about their culture and reconnect with a community that sees not just “offenders”, but people who have made mistakes and are making amends to society and healing themselves.

## SUCCESSSES

Since the partnership began with CSC and Chehalis, there have been many successes:

In 2001, the MOU between Correctional Service of Canada and the Chehalis Indian Band was signed.

Also in 2001, the Community House (Long House) was constructed and opened with dignitaries from CSC, the Federal and Provincial Governments, and other First Nations in attendance. The new name and logo for Kwikwèxwelhp was also unveiled at the Community House opening. The Community House still remains the only structure of its kind that is located in a Federal Penitentiary.

The first Job Shadow program between Elbow Lake and Chehalis was implemented in 2001. This unique opportunity allowed community members to work alongside institutional staff and learn the operations and maintenance of the facility. Several of these individuals are employed by CSC today, due or as a result of this program.

In 2004, it was documented in the Advisory Senate meeting minutes that Kwikwèxwelhp's Work Release Program was significantly higher than all institutions.

It was suggested at the Senate meeting on August 29, 2008 that the residents of Kwikwèxwelhp needed a name as the term “residents” brought up negative references to residential schools. At the next senate meeting held October 17, 2008 the name Kwikw'te'alex was decided upon – the Halq'meylem translation is “Elbow Lake Brothers”.

In 2010, the Advisory Senate proposed a cultural protocol document to preserve the integrity, traditions and customs of the Coast Salish people who assist with the ceremonies held at Kwikwèxwelhp. This document not only explains the how's, but also the why's for following traditional Coast Salish protocols where ceremonies are concerned.

Below are some additional successes shared between CSC, Kwikwèxwelhp and Sts'ailes:

- Developing the Co-Management Model,
- Kwikwèxwelhp and Sts'ailes staff have co-presented at national and provincial justice conferences
- Kwikw'te'alex are recognized as people – not numbers
- A Sts'ailes band member was Programs Manager at Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village
- Sts'ailes has Elders on-site at Kwikwèxwelhp
- The Kwikwèxwelhp Transformation Action Plan was created by the S'íwesálh slélhals, and former Warden, Terry Hackett received a Transformation Action Award for his work at Kwikwèxwelhp
- The Sts'ailes Chief and Kwikwèxwelhp Director have a positive, respectful understanding and work together for the benefit of not only the Kwikw'te'alex but the people of Sts'ailes as well
- Aboriginal Kwikw'te'alex are more likely to be granted DP and have lower rates of reoffending than non-Aboriginal Kwikw'te'alex
- The recidivism rates of Kwikw'te'alex from Kwikwèxwelhp are substantially lower than the average for a Minimum Security Institution



- Kwikw̓xwelhp has developed a positive reputation and offenders request to be transferred there
- The Kwikw̓te'alex provide services to the Elders, single moms and persons with disabilities including yard work, assisting with funerals/memorials, firewood, etc
- There is significantly higher levels of acceptance of the Kwikw̓te'alex by the Sts'ailes people today than there was 10 years ago
- Kwikw̓xwelhp success has been recognized at provincial and federal levels
- In the past, the Kwikw̓te'alex have participated in talks to at risk youth on topics such as gangs, violence and addictions
- Kwikw̓xwelhp staff participate in Sts'ailes Culture Committee meetings



**This certificate, presented to Chehalis in 2001, clearly illustrates the depth of commitment by both parties for the redevelopment of Elbow Lake Institution to Kwikw̓xwelhp Healing Village.**

## REDEVELOPMENT

One of the main goals in the redevelopment of Kwikw̓xwelhp Healing Village has been to upgrade the facility. The past few years have shown a marked change in the physical structures on site.

Following a traditional ground blessing ceremony, the Corcan/Works building was constructed and completed in 2011. The exterior of the building clearly displays the traditional and cultural influences of the land with two beautifully carved totem poles positioned at the entrance. Sts'ailes (formerly Chehalis) community members and Kwikw̓xwelhp residents worked side by side to carve and complete the elaborate designs of the poles. Joint projects such as the totem poles allows Kwikw̓xwelhp residents the opportunity to learn traditional teachings, be it the stories associated with the figures carved or the techniques used to bring them out of the wood.



Old Works Building



Ground Blessing Ceremony for new Works/Corcan Building

Following a ground blessing ceremony in 2011, construction began on the Welcome Building. Again, the building's design clearly displays the traditional, cultural influences of the Sts'ailes and Coast Salish Peoples.



In September 2011, the new Corcan/Works Building was officially opened with a traditional ceremony presented by Sts'ailes members. To bear witness to this type of ceremony is considered a very high honor.

The new building boasts two separate bays, divided by office and meeting rooms. One of the bays is used to house/repair equipment and vehicles used by the Works Department, while the other's function is to house the Corcan department, though it is currently being utilized as a hobby/carving area for the Kwikw̓te'alex.



Duty Office



Background: Administration Building

The building was completed in March 2013, and it has brought together departments that have previously been located in different buildings on site. This coming together of staff will aid in safety, as the building is in direct sight of the main entrance at the bridge. It also adds to the feeling of community within Kwikwèxwelhp.



## INTERVIEW QUOTES & COMMENTS

I have had the distinct honor of speaking with individuals who were instrumental in the redevelopment of Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village, as well as current and past staff. Sadly, several of the key visionaries have since passed on but they left strong words of reverence, wisdom, and hope for the future on behalf of all Canadian aboriginals, incarcerated or free.

James Leon, a Sts'ailes community member, stated that some of the major changes he observed during the transformation process were the reduced beds for offenders, the introduction of Cultural sensitivity screening for new staff, and the positive impact Kwikwèxwelhp has had on staff and residents alike. He stated, "Kwikwèxwelhp is a special place for staff and residents if you believe in it; Kwikwèxwelhp is a powerful healing place."

Quote from Genevieve Lavoie, CSC Prairie Region, August 27, 2005 "The Chehalis First Nation is extremely innovative in its community involvement with Kwikwèxwelhp. The community reinforces to these men that they have a role and gainful contribution to make that is invaluable."

In speaking with former Sts'ailes Chief Alex Paul, he offered these words: "If we were going to be involved, we had to look at our own people to see how they were healed. Our people became stronger and healed when our longhouse was built." Both Alex Paul and Kathy Louis were both instrumental in having the Community House constructed at Kwikwèxwelhp, along with Pieter DeVink, who helped to push through the red tape involved in having such a structure within a federal correctional institution.

Boyd Peters, who has been a member of the Kwikwèxwelhp CAC since Sts'ailes became involved, had these words to share in regards to Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village: A common understanding of our people is that our strength is derived from our culture and spirituality. We are a prosperous First Nation that has developed many innovative made-in-Sts'ailes programs and services and are glad to provide these culturally appropriate services for the Kwikw'te'alex. The land and environment at Kwikwèxwelhp is a natural form of medicine and healing for the Kwikw'te'alex.

Many Regional Deputy Commissioners have asked us why we would ever want to be involved in Corrections. We recognize that our brothers are vastly over-represented in the prison system and believe that our people have the capacity to help offenders in their healing path. We are open to sharing our cultural and traditional forms of healing for the reintegration of offenders into their home communities. This is for the Safety and well-being of all our communities benefit. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that has gained national and international recognition.

Former Elbow Lake Deputy Director Rob Harrison has spoken these words at many gatherings: "The evolution of Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village is positive example of community and government coming together towards the common goal of public safety. The willingness of those involved to adhere to the teachings of the Elders, has resulted in a very innovative approach to addressing the over representation of Aboriginal people in the federal correctional system. I recall upon the time when the Community House had just been built and it was the initial winter season opening; a Coast Salish offender from Vancouver Island led his family into the brand new Community House. The family was led by a grandfather, and as he entered the home and looked all around, he smiled from ear to ear saying to his wife "This is good." For myself, witnessing this Elder's response to the initial opening required no further comments; the foundation for the Village had been established for the generations to come.

Ken Peterson, former warden of Mountain Institution, and who became a member of the Kwikwèxwelhp Advisory Senate in June, 2006 had these words to share in regards to Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village: "In

the past decade, we have begun taking steps – the first steps to making changes in the Federal Corrections system; we are headed in the right direction. I believe that the rationale behind what we are doing is true rehabilitation for the offenders. We have started working on offender relationships within each other, then working on their relationships with the community. You have to love yourself before you can love anyone else.”

When asked to offer a few words on the Kwikwèxwelhp/Sts’ailes relationship, Chief Willie Charlie provided the following statement: “Sts’ailes is pleased with the way our relationship has been evolving with Correctional Service of Canada. We understand and respect that Kwikwèxwelhp is a Healing Village within a federal institution. This adds to our appreciation of the sincerity on Kwikwèxwelhp’s part in upholding the culture of our people, our traditions, and our land. From our perspective, the development of the new facilities at Kwikwèxwelhp is a true testament to this positive relationship. The development was done in a good way as CSC consulted with our people regarding the incorporation of traditional elements into the buildings designs. For us, this is a strong indication of the commitment on CSC’s part for a long-term partnership with the Sts’ailes people.”

Charlene Belleau: As a Senate member, I compliment the community and leadership of Sts’ailes for the vision of engaging with Corrections Service Canada to work in collaboration and partnership for the healing and reconciliation of many that have been or may come to Kwikwèxwelhp. I honor the commitment of previous as well as current Senate and staff for diligence in planning and operating such a successful community based intervention and service. The Senate provides an opportunity for our communities at large to engage in innovative and challenging ideas in programs/services that are targeted at improving better outcomes for clients, their families and communities. As governments, and more importantly society, comes to terms with the ever increasing costs to taxpayers for over-representation of Aboriginal people, Kwikwèxwelhp offers a unique service that will meet the long term needs of our communities. We encourage other Aboriginal organizations to take the initiative of providing solutions to the over-representation of our people in institutions.

Hilda Fehr, current Warden, Kwikwèxwelhp, has stated the following at numerous gatherings: The relationship between Kwikwèxwelhp and Sts’ailes is one of respect and trust. Kwikwèxwelhp recognizes the importance of ceremony within the Aboriginal culture and is respectful of the protocols around ceremonies. The community members attend ceremonies at Kwikwèxwelhp and share their gifts with the staff and residents. Sts’ailes invites residents to participate in appropriate programs and in return the residents assist the community with various projects such as cutting wood for the Elders in the community, assisting with setup of their ceremonies and other projects that are identified through the Cooperative Program Board. A co-mentorship program was also developed between Kwikwèxwelhp and Sts’ailes with the goal of increasing the representation of Aboriginal staff within the Healing Village. This program was mutually beneficial. Members of Sts’ailes worked at Kwikwèxwelhp in order to get exposure to CSC with the goal of securing permanent positions in future. Kwikwèxwelhp gained the knowledge from the community members. Communication is integral to any relationship. Regular meetings occur between Kwikwèxwelhp staff and the Sts’ailes Culture Committee, the Senate Advisory Committee and monthly meetings with the Chief of Sts’ailes.

Tsartlip Elder Tom Sampson, who led the first Spirit Bath for inmates at Kwikwèxwelhp, offered these words of wisdom: To know where you came from is to know where you are going. Kwikwèxwelhp helps the brothers learn of their heritage, their roots. Only then can they move forward in a good way. Kwikwèxwelhp is a place where true healing can occur, if you believe in it. One thing to remember – the way of healing can’t be explained, it can only be shown.

## AUTHOR’S NOTE

I would like to thank those who assisted with the making of this publication – I am honored to have been chosen to put together the pieces of history that tell the story of the relationship between Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village and Sts’ailes. This experience has opened my eyes, my spirit and my mind to a new way of thinking.

In 2012, I was fortunate enough to be selected as one of the members of the job shadow program at Kwikwèxwelhp. I chose the position of Social Programs Officer as I felt it offered a good cross-section of not only the CSC operations and directives, but it also allowed me to work with the Kwikw’te’álex. I am proud to say that I was taught so much while at Kwikwèxwelhp, and in a very good way, of my heritage from both staff and the Kwikw’te’álex. I should mention that I am a Sts’ailes member but was not familiar with the traditional teachings or history of my people. It was this experience at Kwikwèxwelhp that led to my employment at Sts’ailes and the opportunity to not only create this publication, but to reconnect with my home community. I have found both experiences to be invaluable.

Over the course of the past 14 months, I find that I am of the same mind as many of the people that were and still are involved with Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village. The men are there for a reason, yes, but they are still human. Kwikwèxwelhp staff, Elders and Sts’ailes community members have managed to keep this in mind over the years, and they do something that one might not have thought possible – they offer a human element to Corrections that is unexpected but greatly appreciated and effective. It is this humanization that allows the Kwikw’te’álex to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate into society in a safe and supported manner while maintaining the goal of public safety. There is a lot that could be learned from Kwikwèxwelhp – and I think it’s time to share.

-Brandi Stobbart



### **Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village**

PO Box 110  
Harrison Mills, British Columbia  
Tel: (604) 796-1650  
Fax: (604) 796-8431

### **Sts'ailes First Nation**

4690 Salish Way  
Agassiz, British Columbia V0M 1A1  
Tel: (604) 796-2116  
Fax: (604) 796-3946

