



Welcome to the ninth edition of our **Connective Report to the Community!** It has been a busy few months since our last update, and so we are pleased to offer this series of news, updates, and stories from across our Connective community here in Whitehorse.

This issue, we highlight recent activities at 405 Alexander, hear from our WRS Program Manager about a trip to Watson Lake, feature one of our valued community partners – the Justice Wellness Centre – and more!

TOUCHING BASE:

In Conversation with Connective Leadership

Greetings! I'm excited to be providing this update – my first since joining the Connective team as Director of Yukon Operations & Engagement.

As I continue to settle into this new role, the signs of fall are popping up all around us – from shorter days and yellowing leaves, to the chill that accompanies the morning and evening air.

Heading into hunting and harvesting season, I can't help but reflect fondly on memories of a summer packed with activities, at 405 Alexander and across our other local programs.

Between our neighbourhood clean-up, BBQs with the Council of Yukon First Nations and Moccasin Mobile, and a visit from our relations at Four Sacred Hearts in Winnipeg, the summer offered multiple opportunities to extend our hands outward and strengthen our community ties.



A Visit With Four Sacred Hearts



Chantal Genier

Director of Yukon Operations & Engagement

Meanwhile, internally, our regular Connections meetings and monthly Weaving Hope gatherings (hosted by The Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council and Vuntut Gwich'in Government), gave residents and service users ample opportunity to contribute to building safer, more welcoming spaces.

Food, music, and cultural teachings foster connection, build trust, and open the door to collaborative responses to challenges. Amid rising food insecurity, an ongoing housing crisis, and a variety of mental wellness concerns, these efforts are more important than ever.

Soon (though hopefully not too soon!), it will be winter, and our activities will move indoors. We are already planning some exciting new projects and exploring ways to make better use of our spaces, so we can more regularly welcome First Nations and community partners.



Weaving Hope Cultural Sessions

SUPPORTING RECONNECTION:

Whitehorse Residential Support (WRS) Visits Watson Lake

Recently, Joshua, WRS' Program Manager, travelled 400KM from Whitehorse to Watson Lake as part of a coordinated community and family assessment for James*, a resident at WRS.

Since joining the program in 2022, James has held two long-term goals: reconnection with family, and return to community.

The trip gave James meaningful time with his family, and allowed him and Joshua to meet with a wide range of local supports, including the Liard First Nation, recreational program staff, and local health care providers. These meetings painted a clearer picture of what resources and support could look like if James were to transition home.

Assessments like these are an essential part of ensuring continuity of care as staff and residents begin to plan for life beyond Connective. In the months ahead, Joshua and the rest of the WRS team will continue working closely with James' family, community supports, and clinical team.

*Names have been changed to protect privacy



Whitehorse Residential Support

WRS provides a home-like environment and 24/7 supervision to individuals who are under the Yukon Review Board, and who are facing complex challenges such as FASD or other mental and physical disabilities.

Program staff focus on offering personalized care and support, so participants can work toward independence, community reintegration, and achieving their goals.

"Supporting residents to maintain meaningful ties to home is a core part of our work. We do our best to ensure they can maintain cultural and family connections wherever possible."

- Joshua, Program Manager

PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

Spotlight On: Whitehorse Residential Support
Resident Q&A



How have things changed since you joined the program?

"WRS is great, I like it here. Things are going well, and we have a lot of activities to do every day, which keeps us engaged. Staff help us to do our daily chores and also teach us how to manage our daily work."

"I am loving it. It is a good place to live and learn how to do my daily chores properly. Staff support me all the time and I get good food...It's a safe and supportive environment for me to heal and to grow."

"I feel more engaged. Staff give me rides to programming, and help with medication, cooking, and laundry. I love how staff cook with residents - I have learned how to make Jamaican and Indian food."

What piece of advice would you give to a new resident joining the program?

"Trust the process and take your time to get things done properly. It's a nice place to live, and the staff are friendly."

"Be patient with yourself and take advantage of the resources offered. Staff are friendly and will support you."

"Don't be afraid to ask for things; staff are supportive and can often help with things like transportation."

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

JUSTICE WELLNESS CENTRE (JWC)

Accountability, Community, and Healing

The Community Wellness Court (CWC) works with people in the justice system who are struggling with unattended mental health needs, substance use, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), or other wellness-related issues.

The therapeutic program recognizes the impact that addiction, historical trauma, poverty, and other challenges can have on behaviour, and takes a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to addressing the root causes of criminal activity.

Participants work in close partnership with a team of professional and community supports, creating and then following a personal wellness plan.

Unlike with mainstream courts, **“what’s awesome about [CWC] is that it is an option. It’s voluntary – you opt in, or you opt out,”** says Kelly.

Participants have to be willing “to take accountability for one or more of the charges before the court,” and to make meaningful change in their life.

“It could be really big or it could be small,” but that initial accountability gives Kelly and the team at JWC their starting point.

“That’s our crack in the mortar. That’s where the light comes out – we take that light and just try to make the crack bigger and bigger.” From there, “the impact becomes exponential.”

Through CWC, the healing process is a holistic one. The program takes a “culturally safe and trauma responsive lens, connecting participants back to identity and belonging, and exploring what accountability and harm reparation looks like – for themselves, for any victims involved, and for their community as a whole.” Most importantly, the program recognizes that “healing will look different for everyone; it can’t be a cookie cutter approach.”

Connective has witnessed the impacts of this program firsthand, at SHARP. Twice a week, JWC’s Indigenous Peer Support Worker and Cultural Practitioner work with residents, getting them out on the land.

For this issue, we were pleased to chat with Kelly, Clinical Counsellor at the Yukon’s Justice Wellness Centre.



Hiking Grey Mountain



Medicine Making

“They’re eagle feather picking, or foraging berries...yesterday they went for a wiener roast and collected pitch to make medicine – different ways to reconnect with themselves and with culture and identity.” By building people up and giving them these anchors, JWC hopes to “put further and further distance between them and the court system.”

With this work, Kelly knows that healing and change can’t be quantified by numbers alone. “We don’t think, ‘Oh, it’s a waste of resources because only two guys showed up. **They’re an instrumental part of the healing [at SHARP].** Making connection with even just one person can generate exponential positive change.”

Therapeutic courts are often misunderstood, but Kelly knows that they ask participants to do the hardest work of all: to look inward.

“I know a lot of people think that therapeutic courts are an ‘easy way out’, but it couldn’t be further from the truth. It’s hard work looking at yourself in the mirror and being accountable and facing your addictions and your challenges.”

The team at JWC believes in every person who walks through their doors. With their help, participants find ways to detangle from guilt and shame, and move forward with their lives, showing just what’s possible when justice is rooted in compassion, accountability, and community.



Eagle Feather Picking



SHARP BBQ

"SACRED YOU"

Violet Gatensby & 405 Alexander

Recently, we were thrilled to unveil a beautiful new panel art piece at 405 Alexander, created by Violet Gatensby.

Violet is a talented and renowned Inland Tlingit artist from the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. Born into a large family, Violet spent much of her childhood on the land.

Exploring art from a young age, she found support from community mentors and pursued her passion further by attending art school in British Columbia, ultimately earning an advanced diploma from the First Nations Fine Arts program at the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art. Her work is inspired by traditional stories and knowledge of the land told to her by her mother and grandmother.

The 8"x8" piece, titled "Sacred You", depicts a traditional bent box design of 2 humans harvesting plants in the forest.

"The salmon trout heads in the eyes are to share the wealth of having the knowledge to know where to go on the land to harvest."

Violet enlisted the help of local fifth grade elementary students to paint the mural, weaving a deeper sense of meaning and community into every brush stroke.

"Originally it was just going to be just green, but they said if I was using forest colours, then I was missing brown."

The piece is part of an ongoing effort to use art to foster a greater sense of inclusivity, cultural representation, and cultural safety, at 405 Alexander.

At the unveiling, Violet shared that inspiration for the piece came from a late work night, and a conversation about cultural division that left a lasting impact. Speaking on the piece, its creation, and its themes, she also left those in attendance with a powerful reminder.



Artist Violet Gatensby (Middle) Unveiling 'Sacred You' at 405 Alexander

"The most sacred part of our art, culture, and medicine is you. Remember that."

We're thrilled to have this piece hanging in the dining area at 405 Alexander, and excited for service users to engage with it in the weeks and months ahead.

Our sincere thanks to Violet, and the fifth grade students at Whitehorse Elementary School, for their work on this beautiful art piece.

"Art ensures Yukon First Nations are visible and reflected in spaces that matter where healing, connection, and care are needed most."

- CYFN Grand Chief Peter Johnston