

# OSOYOOS INDIAN BAND COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER



AUGUST 2023



GO PAPERLESS AND RECEIVE THE NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL.

[RZUBECK@OIB.CA](mailto:RZUBECK@OIB.CA)

# BIRTHDAYS

Alice Hall

Shirley Alex

Jacob Bass

Richard Baptiste

Amanda Smith

Charlotte Stringam

Marie Stalkia

Rushell Baptiste

Louie Baptiste

Billy Allen

Meredith Alex

Stephen Mackie

Crystal Louie

Jennifer Gallagher

Shane Baptiste

Lukus Bent

Patricia Falkus

Zachary Chapman

Cody Hallett

Victoria Santoyo

William J.R. Hall

Hayley Gallagher

Michelle Durfee

Mya Louie

Tearance Louie

Solstice Baptiste

Camryn Gabriel

Kolby Robinson

Rider Hall

Louis Louie

Silver Armstrong

Myles Gabriel

Tom Glynn

Joseph McGinnis

Serenity Land

Rhoda Gabriel

Laurie Wilson

Yvonne James

Jose Martinez

Elizabeth McMann

Logan Sanders

Alisha Bell

Denise O'Connor

Aaliyah Hall

Jace Weinert

Quincy Gabriel-Baptiste

Ashling Baptiste-Schanuel

Chris McMann

Contessa Schierbeck

Teya Gabriel

Teyarra Hall

Jacob Beach-Alex

Sophia Baptiste

Treyton Mitchell

Zoey Chapman

Claire Runyon

Tereance Casimer

Peyton Adams

Ezra Sanders

Layton Mulligan

Logan Mulligan

Liyanna Shackelly

Laine McGinnis

Willow Hall

Gordon Colin Louie

Thunder Louie-Wynecoop

# COVID DISTRIBUTION

A few months ago, like all First Nations we received covid money (this is the last covid payment) and as we have done in the past, we will be distributing the amount out to each band member in the amount of \$900.00 per band member to be issued by cheque. There will be no advances and there will be no EFT this time as in the past there have been issues with incorrect bank account numbers and band members not receiving the EFT as bank accounts overdrawn. The only deduction to be taken from the cheque will be any Family Maintenance orders issued. The cheque will be issued on August 25-2023.

You can request that your children's \$900.00 be put into their revenue trust account. please advise Joanne McGinnis or Arlene Graham if you wish to do this before August 11-2023.

Cheques can be picked up between the hours of 9am to 4pm at the band office on August 25-2023. Those unable to pick up their cheque, it will be mailed out to you.



# BAND MEETING NOTICE



Please be advised that the next **MONTHLY BAND MEETING** will be  
**5pm Wednesday August 23, 2023**  
**NK'MIP COMMUNITY HALL.**

Dinner will be provided at 5:00PM.

## **Agenda:**

Topics you want discussed at the  
Band meeting, please contact  
Sammy Louie at  
250-498-3444 Ext 3020 or email:  
[SLouie@oib.ca](mailto:SLouie@oib.ca) and she will make up  
an agenda.

Sincerely,

Chief Clarence Louie

**All band members are encouraged to attend to voice your  
concerns and opinions.**

# Job Posting

**INTERNAL x** OIB Membership and External

The Job Posting will be posted at ,Osoyoos Indian Band Nk'Mip Resource Centre, OIBDC, OIBDC Businesses, Sen Pok Chin, Nk'Mip Daycare)

**EXTERNAL** ☐

Date: July 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2023,	Position: Education Coordinator
Contact Person: Leona Baptiste: <a href="mailto:lbaptiste@oib.ca">lbaptiste@oib.ca</a>	Phone: 250 498-3444 etc.: 3028
Company: Osoyoos Indian Band	
Location: Oliver BC	
<b>Basic Responsibilities:</b> Under the direction of the Band Administer the Education Director will be responsible for the coordination of the Osoyoos Indian Band Education program. The education program provides services to Band Members attending Elementary, High School, Vocational Schools, Colleges and Universities. The Education coordinator is responsible for the financial administration and funding acquisition for educational programs. This position plays an important role in achieving the social, educational and employment objectives of the Band. Education Director Supervisor's the OTDC position and Housing Coordinator position. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Effectively maintains a clear understanding of all aspects and levels of the educational system and understands how to access program information for students. (i.e. access programs for special needs, and tutors.)</li><li>Thoroughly applies career counseling skills and superior analytical skills in assisting students with the exploration of career options, identifying appropriate educational choices and addressing issues that arise during the planning process.</li><li>Efficiently compiles and oversees funding reports for the nominal role and Post-Secondary Student Registry (PSSR). Submits the reports to INAC within defined timelines for educational funding. (i.e., High school, Learning Centre, Elementary).</li><li>Prepare an annual forecast of funding requirements for vocational and post-secondary training and prepare related budgets. (i.e., PSSR post-secondary) (i.e. forecast budgets – returning students, new and graduates)</li><li>Thoroughly and without delay administers and coordinates students' requests for education assistance.</li></ul>	
<b>Minimum Qualification Requirements:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Familiar with the Osoyoos Indian Band Community and issues related to education.</li><li>Has valid BC Driver License (Class 5)</li><li>Training and experience as an Education and Career Counselor.</li><li>Current knowledge and understanding of all related educational systems, including how to access funds, where to find information on programs and how to register for programs</li></ul>	
Location	1155 SenPokChin Blvd Oliver BC V0H1T8
Start Date	Open until filled
Workdays	3 days a week
Hours of Work	8:30 am to 4:30 pm
Term of Employment	Part-Time
Pay Rate	Based on experience
Deadline for Applications	Open until filled

# Community Support Worker Introduction Letter



Way, isk<sup>w</sup>ist Melissa Gabriel. I am an Osoyoos Indian Band member that has recently taken one of the Community Support Worker positions.

I would like to share a little about myself and explain what my role is in the community.

I was born and raised in Penticton, and I am a graduate of Penticton Secondary School.

My passion lies in the beauty industry, and I obtained the Esthetic Diploma from the Blanch Macdonald Centre in Vancouver. From then on, I worked in day spas in the Okanagan as well as a spa in Calgary. It was a great career choice for a young lady. For 16 years I have done Esthetics and when I became a mother, everything changed, and I wanted flexible hours to accommodate my family. I decided to open my first business doing esthetics in downtown Penticton.

My family and I finally planted roots down in Oliver and have been here now for 2 years. My husband grew up here in the community and we have a son who is nine, a foster daughter who's also nine, two dogs and a cat. Both kids go to Sen'Pok'Chin school. We are also a hockey family, so that keeps us busy. We like to camp and be in nature as often as we can, and my husband and I found a love in landscaping our yard.

My role in the community is to organize and help with culturally driven functions and events, provide resources to community members, to encourage health, well-being, and self-esteem for all members. I can also help with transportation needs for appointments, to get groceries and help with light organizing. I am looking for ways I can support my community and my work partner, and I have some great ideas to maintain healthy relationships with our members. If I can be of any help, please reach out to me at the Resource Centre (250) 498-6935 ext. 2229.

Respectfully,

Melissa Gabriel





## Howdy OIB

Previously I did a small introduction on the Facebook page, for those that don't have access I'd like to introduce myself.

My name is Silvia Stelkia-Fogg, daughter of the late Robert Stelkia, and granddaughter of Jane Stelkia. I am newly one of two Community Support Workers for the Osoyoos Indian Band. I had previously worked in school district 53 for 4 years before having my daughter 11, and shortly thereafter, my son 10. I was very fortunate to raise them both on my father's ranch until they were eligible for full-time school which then I worked fulltime. I have also been an employee of NK'Mip RV, NK'Mip Desert Canyon Golf Course, the Band office and Health Building.



While working full time and managing my two cubs, through Okanagan College I completed my Certificate of Community Support work. My professor and the program were a wealth of knowledge in relation to Community needs and recourses, trauma, addictions, mental health, and much more. Being only my certificate, I haven't even skiffed the surface of Social Work in Indigenous communities and the obscene amount of supports and recourses we need provide for our children and families. With that being said I wish to continue my education to best support our community when the time is right for me to overload myself again with more school. I'll sleep when I am DEAD!!



As a single mother in today's economy, I personally see the struggle with simple things such as being able to feed our children and house them, to take care of ourselves and our mental health, to reach out for support in a world that tells us how strong and independent we must be, to work ourselves to the grave, etc. If I can bring any ease, comfort, joy, and safe space to exist; my job as a human is done. Not only are these qualifications for this position, but that is how I was raised, to accept all.

I would state my hobbies, but what are those when you are a fulltime parent?!! My hobbies include making and seeing my children smile, happy, loved, and growing into incredible beings, they are my two best accomplishments. I enjoy all sorts of music and know every Elvis Presley song known to man, please feel free to rock out to Elvis with me on any transportation needs you may have. My belief is that LOVE always wins, what's meant to be will always be, and don't sh\*t where you eat! HUMOR gets me through the hard days, laughter is the best medicine.



I am so grateful to have been chosen to fill this important role within our community. To grow with our people, and learn what needs change, and improvement, and to be a safe space for all people to be.

**Silvia Stelkia-Fogg**

# Archers return to Oliver with one gold from successful NAIG

Sebastian Kanally - Aug 3, 2023 / 12:54 pm



Photo: Sebastian Kanally

Four OIB archers proudly standing together after returning from NAIG, (left to right) Gus Holmstrom, Terrel Frezie-Baptiste, Cikquix Hall-Andrew, Tikn Hall-Andrew.

The community came out to support four young archers from the Osoyoos Indian Band (OIB) who were welcomed home last week after successfully competing at the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) in Halifax.

Team BC sent an archery team consisting of eight members and half the team was from the OIB.

Of the four OIB youth that went to Halifax to compete Cikquix Hall-Andrew, won Gold in the 16 and under Male Barebow category.

The three other members of the team were Terrel Frezie-Baptiste who placed fourth in the 19U Compound Bow category. Gus Holmstrom, the youngest member of the team who placed fifth in the 16U Male Compound Bow and Tikn Hall-Andrew - who had a shoulder injury and wasn't able to complete the competition in the 19U Male barebow category.





The **2023 North American Indigenous Games** took place in Kijipuktuk (Halifax) from **July 15 - 23, 2023**.

Congratulations to **Hadley William, Terrel Frezie-Baptiste, Cikqwlx Hall-Andrew, Gus Holmstrom** and **Lexus Amut** for representing BC archers at the Games!

**3D Canadian National Archery Championships 2023,**  
**Cranbrook BC August 4-7, 2023.**



Congratulations: Cikwilx Hall-Andrew (6<sup>th</sup>), Gus Holmstrom (SILVER) and Lynnea Holmstrom (GOLD).



## APPLICATION FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Only the students attending public schools and are grade four and up need to fill out this form. All band members and nominal roll students will have their fees paid directly to the school.

	Student's Name	Band #	Birth Date	Grade	School
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

Usually live: On Reserve \_\_\_\_\_ Off reserve \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Education Supervisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### FREEDOM OF INFORMATION DISCLAIMER

I give permission to:

\_\_\_ SOSS \_\_\_ TEN \_\_\_ OES \_\_\_ SPC

To provide the OIB Education Department with information of my child's progress in the following categories:

1) \_\_\_ Attendance 2) \_\_\_ Grades/Marks 3) \_\_\_ Discipline 4) \_\_\_ All

This includes copies of report cards for the academic year

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



DR. KATIA LANGTON, CERTIFIED PEDORTHIST

## MOBILE FOOT CLINIC

Date: Monday August 21, 2023

Time: 9:00- 5:40pm

Location: Nk'Mip Resource Centre



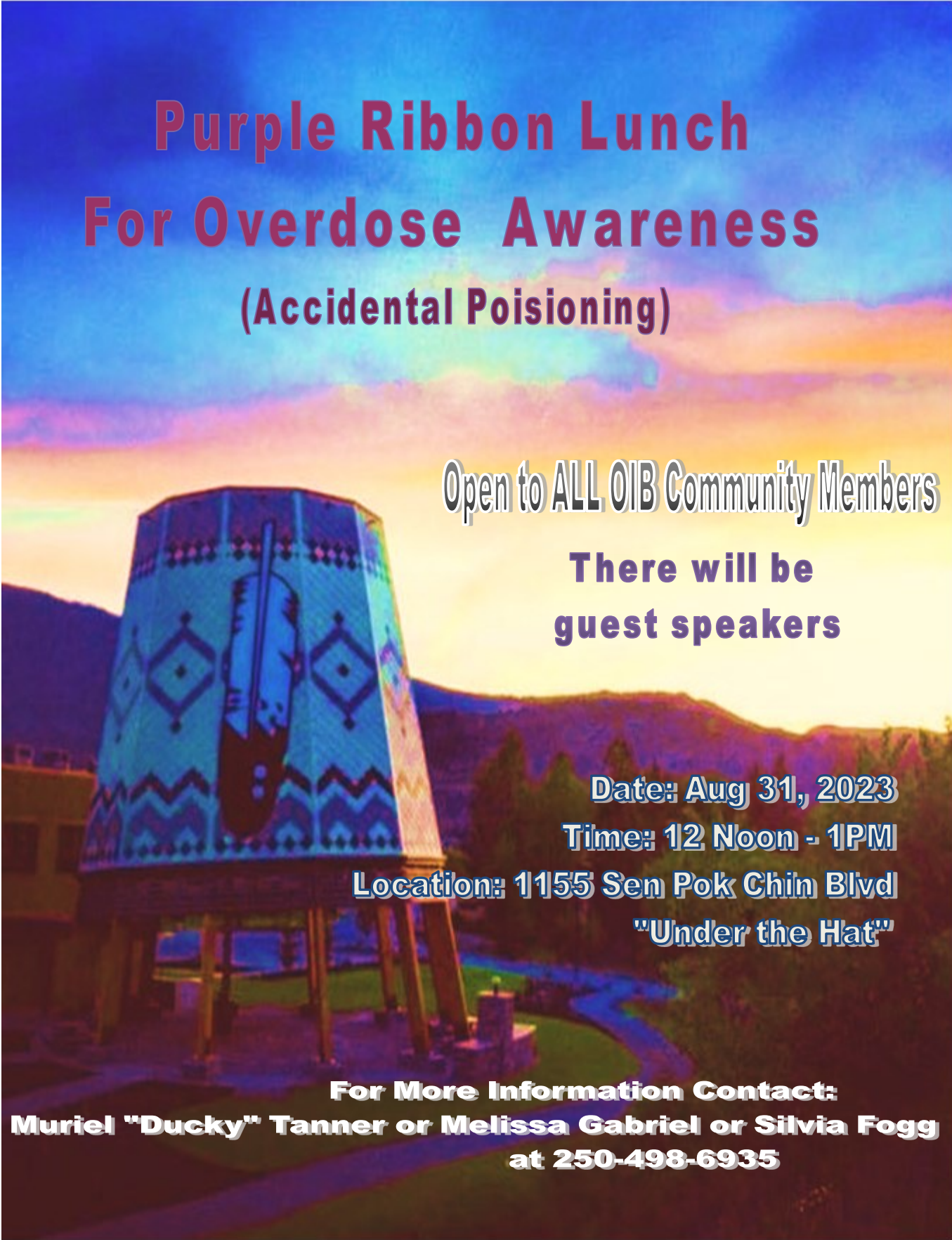
**PAINFUL FEET? PAINFUL KNEES?  
PAINFUL LOW BACK?**

**DIFFICULTY WALKING?**

**ARE YOU DIABETIC? ALL DIABETIC PATIENTS  
NEED TO BE ASSESSED ANNUALLY TO  
PREVENT COMPLICATIONS.**

**WE MAKE YOU FULLY COVERED ORTHOTICS  
UNDER FIRST NATIONS HEALTH AUTHORITY  
TO KEEP YOU ACTIVE, WALKING AND MOBILE  
AND TO PROTECT DIABETIC FEET!**

**PLEASE BOOK A COMPREHENSIVE FOOT  
ASSESSMENT WITH THE FRONT DESK  
250-498-6935**



# **Purple Ribbon Lunch For Overdose Awareness (Accidental Poisoning)**

**Open to ALL OIB Community Members**

**There will be  
guest speakers**

**Date: Aug 31, 2023**

**Time: 12 Noon - 1PM**

**Location: 1155 Sen Pok Chin Blvd**

**"Under the Hat"**

**For More Information Contact:  
Muriel "Ducky" Tanner or Melissa Gabriel or Silvia Fogg  
at 250-498-6935**



### **2023 Okanagan Sockeye returns to Osoyoos Lake**

- As of August 8<sup>th</sup>, a total of **135, 611** adult Sockeye migrated past Wells dam.
  - Estimated number of Sockeye to **Osoyoos Lake = range 7,708 to 15,416 sockeye**
- The high river temperatures have put a hold on the sockeye migration into Canada, with the majority of sockeye holding above Wells dam. Many are holding in Wells pool at temperatures of 20°C.
- This heat has affected the health and condition of the sockeye, so those that do make it to the spawning grounds are more likely to be in bad shape.
- Due to the low sockeye return and river conditions, there will be NO ONA-conducted fisheries open on Osoyoos Lake. It is recommended that members fish for themselves for food fish.
- From August 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>, Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) Fisheries department will be on Osoyoos Lake for harvest training on the ONA seine boat. It is unlikely that they will catch anything, however, if there are any sockeye caught, these fish will be given to the ONA Salmon Feast.

### **Chinook Rebuilding Plan**

- Okanagan Chinook return numbers are very low, less than 100 return to the Okanagan River annually to spawn.
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) is drafting an Okanagan Chinook Rebuilding Plan with technical support from Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) that will focus on Chinook Recovery and Okanagan Chinook are also being considered for Species At Risk Act (SARA) listing.
- Potential listing for Okanagan Chinook under Species at Risk Act in April 2024.

**DFO will be attending the OIB Community meeting in September to present draft Rebuilding Plan information and get feedback from the community.**



**OKANAGAN NTITYIX (CHINOOK) RECOVERY: Broodstock Collection + Egg Take**  
**2023 ONAFD FACT SHEET**



**PROJECT:** Okanagan Ntityix (Chinook)  
Recovery broodstock collection

**GOAL:** To rebuild the Okanagan River Ntityix population abundance, life history diversity and spatial distribution.

**TASK:** Broodstock Collection + Egg Take

**LOCATION:** Okanagan River between Okanagan Falls and Oliver

**TIME FRAME:** September 5-30 as Chinook

move into the river and prior to peak spawning.

**KEY MESSAGE:** As a key component of the Okanagan Ntityix Recovery program, ONA initiated a hatchery supplementation program in 2017 using U.S. origin and local Okanagan Chinook broodstock. Annual broodstock collection efforts will be under way in the Okanagan River during the month of September using angling and seining methods. Chinook eggs and fry will be reared at the Kl cp' elk stim' Hatchery located in Penticton, and will be released into the Okanagan River in the following spring.

**BACKGROUND/HISTORY:** The Okanagan Chinook Recovery program was initiated in the mid-2000s with specific actions outlined in the ONA's Recovery Action Plan (2016). Specific actions include:

1. hatchery supplementation to increase Chinook numbers
2. habitat restoration to improve spawning, migration and rearing habitats
3. improvements to fish passage at barriers such as Okanagan River dams and drop structures
4. protection of existing high quality habitats
5. improved monitoring of juvenile and adult Chinook abundance and behavior
6. establishing and advocate for maintenance of Environmental Flow Needs for Chinook

The first release of Chinook in Canada occurred in 2017. Since then, ONA has obtained varying numbers of Chinook eggs from the U.S. and a very limited number of local broodstock (<5). We have trialed different release ages and strategies for the fry to explore optimal procedures for high survival and rebuilding of the population.

**GOALS:**

1. Collect and take eggs from 20 female and milt from 20 male Chinook salmon (80,000 – 90,000 eggs)
2. Follow best practices to maximize egg survival
3. Collect ovarian fluid and kidney tissue for disease testing
4. Biosample all adults for fork length, sex, DNA, otolith marks, and PIT tags

**PROJECT TEAM:**

- Chinook Recovery Biologist – Elinor McGrath (250-707-0095 ext. 102)
- Broodstock Collection Crew – Tyson Marsel + hatchery technicians
- Egg Take and Hatchery Lead – Dan Stefanovic
- Biosampling Lead – Lynnea Wiens
- Osoyoos Indian Band Fisheries Technicians Colette Louie (250-498-6935) and Lindsay George
- The program will be implemented in partnership with the Osoyoos Indian Band utilizing OIB fisheries technicians and anglers/fishermen from the community. Additional anglers will be from the nation member communities.
- Funded by Fisheries and Oceans Canada



**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Due to the inherent hazards of the project (working with nets in a large river), safety is always the number one concern. Essential safety gear includes: PFD, throw bag, first aid kit, cell phone, and knives. The crew must always keep safety in mind, and adjust field work to avoid excessively hazardous situations.



The OIB Language House will be having

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# BEGINNER LANGUAGE CLASSES

These classes will be 3 hours long and held once a week utilizing the Paul Creek Curriculum



**START DATE    SEPT 5 2023**

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE: AUG 15 2023**

For any further questions or registration please contact our general inbox  
[oiblang@oib.ca](mailto:oiblang@oib.ca)





250 498 3444  
oiblang@oib.ca

1006 Mckinney  
Oliver BC VoH 1To

## REGISTRATION FORM

**First day of Class: Tues. Sept 5, 2023**

Locations: 1006 McKinney Rd, Oliver BC

Studying Salish School/Paul Creek Nsyilxcn Curriculum: *nsełxcin 1, captikʷl 1*

**Course runs Sept. to June**

**Deadline to Register: August 16 2023**

Name (English & sqilxʷ)	Mailing Address:
Phone:	Email:
Age:	Employer:
Band:	Contact name to report attendance to (if requested)
Emergency contact:	Emergency Contact #:

Have you had any previous nsyilxcn language experience? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

If yes, provide more

information: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check the following class times you can attend (One class time for Beginner classes)**

<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>
Intermediate Class 9:00-12:00 <input type="checkbox"/>		Intermediate Class 9:00-12:00 <input type="checkbox"/>
Beginner A 1:00-4:00 <input type="checkbox"/>	Beginner B 1:00-4:00 <input type="checkbox"/>	Beginner C 1:00-4:00 <input type="checkbox"/>

### AGREEMENT

**My signature above indicates agreement with the following terms:**

I will attend scheduled classes and activities and I commit to complete the entire year. My attendance will be shared with my sponsoring Band/employer should it be requested. Nsyilxcn courses offered by OIB Language House are designed to move learners toward proficiency but are not credited through any institution. All meals, lodging, transportation, and other expenses are my sole responsibility. I absolve and release the OIB Language House and/or Osoyoos Indian Band from any liability for expenses or damages incurred by me while attending the language course. I allow my photos and videos to be used for promotional material.

_____	_____
Applicant signature	date
_____	_____
Supervisor signature	date

Please send completed form to [FBell@oib.ca](mailto:FBell@oib.ca) or the general inbox [Oiblang@oib.ca](mailto:Oiblang@oib.ca) or in-person at the OIB Language House

There may be supports in place to attend class, please contact Leona Baptiste, Human Resources (250)498-3444 for further information.

**SAVE THE DATE!**



# SALMON FEAST

The Salmon Feast is a three-day event that involves multiple activities including: traditional performances and ceremonies, a canoe paddle, and on the final day (Sunday) a salmon feast and ceremony for *snx̓ä?iwləm* (to honour the sacredness of the river).

**September 15-17, 2023**

**sx̓wəx̓wnitk̓w Provincial Park  
Okanagan Falls, BC**

Thank you to our sponsors:



**For more info:**

Summer De Guevara, Event Planner  
events@sylx.org  
250-707-0095 ext. 127

## ENTRY FEE

**\$100 PER TEAM  
3-5 PLAYERS PER  
TEAM**

## ACTIVITIES

### SEPT 15: STICK GAME TOURNAMENT

#### Tournament Schedule

5:00 pm Dinner | 6:00 pm Tournament Begins

**Prizes: 1st \$1000 | 2nd \$600 | 3rd \$400**

### SEPT 16: CANOE PADDLE

The Canoe Paddle will begin Saturday morning at 10 am.

### SEPT 17: SALMON FEAST & CEREMONY

The Salmon Feast and ceremony for *snx̓ä?iwləm* (to honour the sacredness of the river) will begin at 11 am.



# RIGHT TO PLAY SCHEDULE AUGUST 2023

		Tues. 1 <sup>st</sup>	Wed. 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Thur. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Fri. 4 <sup>th</sup>	Sat. 6 <sup>th</sup>
		1-5pm	1-5pm	1-5pm	1-5pm	OFF
Sun. 6 <sup>th</sup>	Mon. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Tues. 8 <sup>th</sup>	Wed. 9 <sup>th</sup>	Thur. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Fri. 11 <sup>th</sup>	Sat. 12 <sup>th</sup>
OFF	OFF	1-5pm	1-5pm	OFF	OFF	OFF
Sun. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Mon. 14 <sup>th</sup>	Tues. 15 <sup>th</sup>	Wed. 16 <sup>th</sup>	Thur. 17 <sup>th</sup>	Fri. 18 <sup>th</sup>	Sat. 19 <sup>th</sup>
OFF	OFF	1-5PM	1-5PM	1-5PM	1-5PM	OFF
Sun. 20 <sup>th</sup>	Mon. 21 <sup>ST</sup>	Tues. 22 <sup>ND</sup>	Wed. 23 <sup>RD</sup>	Thur. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Fri. 25 <sup>th</sup>	Sat. 26 <sup>th</sup>
OFF	OFF	1-5PM	1-5PM	1-5PM	1-5PM	OFF
Sun. 27 <sup>th</sup>	Mon. 28 <sup>th</sup>	Tues. 29 <sup>th</sup>	Wed. 30 <sup>th</sup>	Thur. 31 <sup>ST</sup>	Sept. 1	Sept. 2
OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

\***SUN FUN** WILL CONTINUE TO BE **MONDAY – FRIDAY 8:30AM-3:30PM**

WITH THE LAST DAY BEING FRIDAY AUGUST 25<sup>TH</sup>

\***RIGHT TO PLAY** LAST DAY WILL BE FRIDAY AUGUST 25<sup>TH</sup>

**RIGHT TO PLAY CONTACT:** MARVIN LOUIE 250-498-6323

[mlouie@oib.ca](mailto:mlouie@oib.ca)

**SUN FUN CONTACT:** RYAN McGINNIS 250-328-2215

ABBY THOMPSON 250-485-7592

**EVERYBODY ENJOY THE REST OF THE SUMMER!!!!!!! HAVE FUN & STAY SAFE..... MARVIN LOUIE – OIB YOUTH COORDINATOR**



## OIB YOUTH CENTER/GYM AUGUST SCHEDULE 2023

<b>Sunday</b>		Closed
<b>Monday</b>	Sun Fun	8:30AM-3:30PM
<b>Tuesday</b>	Sun Fun	8:30AM-3:30PM
	Right To Play	1:00-5:00PM
	Youth Center/Gym	5:00-8:00PM
<b>Wednesday</b>	Sun Fun	8:30AM-3:30PM
	Right To Play	1:00-5:00PM
	Youth Center/Gym	5:00-8:00PM
<b>Thursday</b>	Sun Fun	8:30AM-3:30PM
	Right To Play	1:00-5:00PM
	Youth Center/Gym	5:00-8:00PM
<b>Friday</b>	Sun Fun	8:30AM-3:30PM
	Right To Play	1:00-5:00PM
	Youth Center/Gym	5:00-8:00PM
<b>Saturday</b>	Youth Center/Gym	12:00-6:00PM

Youth Center is closed during stat-holiday's & community gatherings

(Unless otherwise stated)

\*YOUTH CENTRE OPEN TO AGES 10+.....

\*NOTE: **RIGHT TO PLAY** LAST DAY WILL BE FRIDAY AUGUST 25<sup>TH</sup>

**SUN FUN** LAST DAY WILL BE FRIDAY AUGUST 25<sup>TH</sup>





## **OIB Skin Cancer Screening on August 23rd at the Nk'Mip Resource Centre**

Do you have a skin issue or mole that is concerning you? Book an appointment for August 23rd at the Nk'Mip Resource Centre.

**\$100.00 to the first 20 patients  
to complete the on site survey!**



***Book your  
appointment by  
calling the clinic  
250-498-6935***



**More Information:**  
Contact Lesli or Lindsay  
Nk'Mip Resource Centre  
250-498-6935

Screening is fast! Photos of your concern are sent to a dermatologist for consultation. Results as soon as 48 hours.



# Okanagan-Syilx Hunting & Gathering 2023



Hosted by Okanagan Indian Band



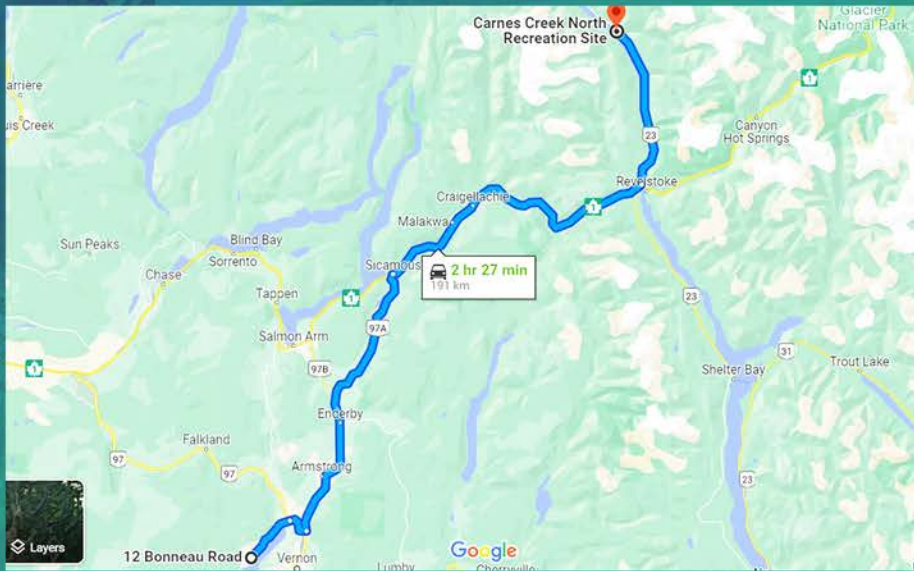
Dates: August 18th - 31st 2023

\*Camp set up \*\*Camp take down

Location: Carnes Creek North Recreation Site

**All Syilx Peoples Welcome**

**Look for Signage**



Our purpose is to provide an opportunity to gather traditional foods to disperse throughout the communities to those that are unable to harvest.

**\* Camp is in isolated area.  
No cell service or amenities.**

**Please bring your own camping gear, chairs, utensils and cups.  
No disposable Items.**

**For More Information Contact:**

**Julie Richard: (250) 542-7132 (w)  
(250) 309-5217 (cell)**

**Colleen Marchand: (250) 306-9796  
(cell)**





# UPCOMING EVENTS

August 2023



## AUGUST 1-3: SYILX YOUTH GATHERING

ASHNOLA CAMPGROUND, KEREMEOS

The Syilx Youth Gathering aims to empower youth voices and encourage healthy peer networks while connecting with Syilx elders & knowledge keepers and the land.

## AUGUST 8: OPEN HOUSE AT PENTICTON INDIAN BAND

PIB COMMUNITY HALL, PENTICTON

The ONA Open House will feature booths from all ONA departments that will showcase each program and service that is provided to Syilx Nation members and throughout the territory. There will be an opportunity to have individual discussions with staff and gather together to share information!

## AUGUST 25-27: FIRST SPEAKERS LANGUAGE GATHERING

PENTICTON

The First Speakers Language Gathering is a space for fluent language speakers to gather and discuss planning around sqilx<sup>w</sup> education, culture, and well-being.

## AUGUST 31: PURPLE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

ONLINE

The Purple Ribbon Campaign is an annual campaign to raise awareness leading up to International Opioid Overdose Awareness Day on August 31. The campaign focuses on sharing resources, promoting discussion, and offering information related to the drug and opioid crisis and is a response to the urgent need to address the stigma that surrounds drug use.

## SEPTEMBER 15-17: SALMON FEAST

SĀWƏX<sup>w</sup>NITK<sup>w</sup> (OKANAGAN FALLS) PROVINCIAL PARK

The Salmon Feast is a three-day event that involves multiple activities including: traditional performances and ceremonies, stick game tournament on Friday, a canoe paddle on Saturday, and on the final day (Sunday) a salmon feast and ceremony for sn̓xaʔiwləm (to honour the sacredness of the river).

## SEPTEMBER 27-28: SYILX INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL GATHERING

TBC

The Syilx Indian Residential School (SIRS) Committee at the ONA holds an annual gathering for Syilx Okanagan residential school survivors, intergenerational survivors, and other family members to share stories, support each other, and participate in healing together.

## SEPTEMBER 30: WALK FOR THE CHILDREN

PENTICTON PEACH TO SYILX IRS MONUMENT

Join us for a 5 km Walk for Reconciliation on National Day for Truth and Reconciliation! We will be departing from the Penticton Peach and making our way along the channel to the SIRS Monument outside the Penticton Hatchery on En'owkin Trail.

## OCTOBER 3-4: ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY & ELDER YOUTH SUMMIT

PENTICTON TRADE & CONVENTION

The Annual General Assembly takes place each year, along with the Syilx Elder Youth Summit. The event brings together the Syilx Okanagan Nation to celebrate our accomplishments and provide an opportunity for Nation members to come together. The AGA is hosted by each of the Syilx Okanagan communities on a rotating basis.

## OCTOBER 3-5: RIVER RESTORATION WORKSHOP

EN'OWKIN CENTRE, PENTICTON

The ONA in collaboration with many project partners have been successfully restoring spawning and rearing habitat for salmon in the Syilx Okanagan Territory for 20 years. Traditional Ecological Knowledge, best management practices, measured stream geometry and natural habitat features have guided these restoration works.

## TBC: FOUR FOOD CHIEFS GATHERING

TBC

The Annual General Assembly takes place each year, along with the Syilx Elder Youth Summit. The event brings together the Syilx Okanagan Nation to celebrate our accomplishments and provide an opportunity for Nation members to come together. The AGA is hosted by each of the Syilx Okanagan communities on a rotating basis.

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# They Lost Their Kids to *Fortnite*

A group of Canadian  
parents say their  
KIDS ARE SO ADDICTED  
to the video  
game *Fortnite* that  
THEY'VE STOPPED EATING,  
SLEEPING AND SHOWERING.  
Now these parents want  
to hold its tech-giant  
creator accountable.



BY LUC RINALDI

**CODY WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD** when he decided what he wanted to do with his life. It was the summer of 2018, and he was watching the World Cup with his parents and younger brother at home on Vancouver Island. When he grew up, he told them, he wanted to play pro soccer.

Plenty of kids dream of becoming soccer stars but, in Cody's case, the idea wasn't entirely far-fetched. He was the best player on his local team, and he soon began training with the Vancouver Whitecaps' youth academy, a pipeline to the pro leagues. He was effortlessly athletic—he earned his black belt in tae kwon do at age eight—and he was in the gifted program at school. Cody, whose name I changed to protect his privacy, had been diagnosed with ADHD, and his parents had detected other signs of neurodivergence: he organized his bathroom counter-top fastidiously and couldn't fall asleep unless his blanket was folded to his liking. But to his teachers and coaches, Cody presented as bright, mature and polite. "He was on a path to do so much more," his mother, Alana, told me.







Then the pandemic hit. Soccer ceased. School and martial arts shifted online. Instead of bouncing between practices and classes, Cody was suddenly trapped at home. To combat his boredom, he played Xbox. One of his favourite video games was *Fortnite*, a multiplayer shooter that's available on pretty much every gaming console, computer, tablet or smartphone. He was partial to the "battle royale" mode, in which he had to outlast up to 99 other players in a *Hunger Games*-style fight to the death.

Cody's parents were uneasy with *Fortnite*'s violence—he was only nine, and the game was rated 13-plus—but its cartoonishness allayed their worries. The game looked less like a battlefield and more like a Pixar-produced acid trip. At the beginning of every round, Cody—or, more precisely, his avatar, a buff combatant wielding a comically oversized pickaxe—boarded a flying blue school bus. Then he'd skydive onto a vast, vibrant island dotted with whimsically named landmarks like Tomato Town and Wailing Woods.

Cody loved the thrill of reaching the final stages of a battle royale, when toxic storm clouds encroached on the island and squeezed him closer to his remaining enemies. In the corner of his screen, a ticker counted how many players stood between him and victory: 25, then 10, and eventually just one. If he managed to blast his last opponent into oblivion, a giant banner flashed across his screen, proclaiming "#1 Victory Royale." It was exhilarating—not just a Band-Aid for his boredom, but a cure.

Alana allowed Cody to play *Fortnite* for two hours at a time, a few nights a week. When he was gaming, he wouldn't eat, drink water or even go to the bathroom. If he lost a round, he'd yell and slam his controller on the ground. When Alana would tell him his time was up, he'd beg to continue. "He was miserable when he couldn't game," she says. "That's all he wanted to do."

Cody's parents weren't gamers. Alana hardly even used social media. As a nature-loving horticulturist, she always imagined her sons would spend their childhoods romping around the family's forested 18-acre property, not cooped up in front of a TV. But during COVID, video games

were one of the few ways her son could connect with his friends. They'd call the house, asking if Cody could come online to play. "Gaming became such a part of his social circle that it felt like we'd be depriving him if we said no," says Alana. So she reluctantly allowed it, making sure he offset his screen time with bike rides and walks along the river. For a while at least, they achieved a healthy balance.

In September of 2021, Cody resumed in-person classes at a new school, but his mind was stuck online. To make friends, he asked his classmates what video games they played. After his second day of school, he came home and excitedly told his mom that he and another student had agreed to game together that night. Alana refused to let him log on. "It's not a gaming night," she explained. Cody whined and pleaded, but she held firm. He started to cry, and then came the screaming. Alana begged him to calm down, but he shrieked for five straight hours. She had to shut the windows so the neighbours wouldn't hear.

That evening was the start of a long nightmare. Whenever Alana forbade Cody from gaming, he had panic attacks, wailing and weeping. He writhed on the floor and told his parents he wanted to die. "It was like taking heroin away from an addict," says Alana. Sometimes she thought, *maybe today it will be different*, and so she let him play. But the behaviour never changed. "We felt like his drug dealers."

Cody's gaming obsession ruined Christmas, then New Year's. He fell behind on schoolwork and looked dazed on the soccer field. "He was pretty much a zombie," says Alana. "He had no motivation to do anything else." He tried out for a rep team but didn't make the cut. *Fine*, he decided. He didn't want to be a soccer player anymore anyway. He wanted to be a pro gamer, streaming on Twitch and uploading videos to YouTube. (The 16-year-old victor of the 2019 *Fortnite* World Cup won US\$3 million, not much less than Rafael Nadal won at the U.S. Open in the same stadium weeks later.)

Alana didn't want Cody to become the Gretzky of gaming. She just wanted her son back. She tried to limit his playtime, but nothing worked. When she took away his Xbox, he played on another device. When she hid the power cords, he found

them. She tried using an app to restrict his internet access, but he stole her phone and turned the Wi-Fi back on. At wit's end, she sent Cody outside to play with his brother, locking the door behind them. In a fury, he smashed the door's window trying to get back in. It cost \$2,000 to replace. Alana banned him from gaming for a month after that, but he eventually came crawling back to the controller. "As parents, we were like, 'We're really failing him,'" says Alana. Her smart, smiling, soccer-loving son was gone, and she had no idea what to do. "It was horrible," she says. "We lost our kid to gaming."

Cody isn't the only kid addicted to *Fortnite*, and *Fortnite* isn't the only game ensnaring children. Parents are losing their sons and daughters to *Minecraft* and *League of Legends*, to *Roblox* and *Rocket League*. For some families, the problem isn't video games but smartphones and social media. Three-quarters of Canadian youth own a smartphone, and a 2022 study found that nearly half of those young people worry they spend too much time online.

Childhood is changing. The quintessential touchpoints of adolescence—building Lego and climbing trees, going to the movies and breaking curfew—are being replaced by a new slate of compulsive, screen-based activities: playing video games, binging YouTube videos and mindlessly swiping through 15-second TikToks for hours on end. Parents who are none too pleased with this shift are wondering who they can hold accountable. To them, there is no target so ripe as the tech giants and video game makers who have made billions by co-opting their kids' lives.

**T**O SOME DEGREE, Cody's story confirms those age-old knocks on video games: that they're a waste of time and money, an unproductive hobby with no real-world payoff, a brain-numbing activity that keeps pimply teenagers stuck to their screens while their grades nosedive and their muscles atrophy. But there's so much more to gaming than Cheeto-fingered escapism. Take it from me. I've been gaming longer than Cody's been alive.

As a kid, I played and replayed classic Nintendo 64 titles: *Super Mario*, *GoldenEye*, *Star Fox*. Some nights, after my parents had



Whenever Alana forbade Cody from gaming, he had a panic attack. **He writhed on the floor and told his parents he wanted to die.** “It was like taking heroin away from an addict,” Alana says.

gone to bed, my older brother and I would sneak downstairs and play GameCube until our eyelids drooped shut. In my teens and 20s, I occasionally spent showerless Saturdays in front of my TV, Xbox controller in one hand, slice of Domino's in the other. The Christmas break before I met my wife—who would never have tolerated such a thing—I played *The Legend of Zelda* for a week straight as if it were my full-time job. Was it healthy? Nope. Did I love it? Absolutely.

Some of my go-to games provided nothing more than cheap thrills. I wasted hundreds of hours on *Diablo*, a game in which I had to descend into the depths of hell to defeat the devil, because I couldn't resist the draw of finding new, ever-rarer weapons and armour. I replayed *Resident Evil 4* a dozen times because there's something endlessly satisfying about blowing up a zombie's head. But my favourite games were the ones that offered something my real life lacked. I've never landed a kick-flip, but in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, I was a master of the half-pipe. Exploring the fantasy world of *Skyrim*, I wasn't just some kid in the suburbs of Toronto; I was a noble swordsman on an epic quest to save the realm. In a video game, even a loner can feel like a king.

For me, and for millions of gamers like me, video games are a mild vice at worst. Enjoyed in moderation, they can be a benign, even constructive, pastime. Gaming develops hand-eye coordination, visual-spatial processing and leadership skills. Co-operative games teach kids how to work in teams, and health-care educators use games to train doctors and nurses.

I've played games that have sparked my curiosity, challenged my problem-solving skills, tested my morality and even moved me to tears. Games have even provided a backdrop to some of my deepest, most therapeutic conversations. Once, after a particularly bad breakup, my closest pals came over and let me bare my soul as we fended off hordes of the undead together.

I tried *Fortnite* when it first came out—practically every gamer did. It was unlike anything I'd played before. It combined the high-octane combat of *Gears of War*, the scavenger-hunt satisfaction of *Diablo* and the world-building mechanics of *Minecraft*. Still, I stuck with *Fortnite* for only a few weeks. I wish I could tell you I quit because I was impervious to its appeal, but the truth is that I simply defected to a different battle royale-style game: *Call of Duty: Warzone*. (It's essentially *Fortnite* by another name.) I still remember the first (and only) time I won a round of *Warzone*. Adrenaline rushed through my body. My heart raced and my breath quickened. When I got that final kill, I leapt from my couch and whooped with joy. It didn't matter that, in the real world, my victory didn't matter. The high was intoxicating.

I never got addicted to *Warzone*, but it was easy to see how someone might. The human brain rewards pleasurable and arousing activities—for example, eating chocolate or smoking cigarettes—by releasing dopamine. A study published in *Nature* showed that gaming can more than double a player's baseline dopamine levels, resulting in the sort of elation I felt when I won a round of *Warzone*. Stanford neuroscientist Andrew Huberman claims

that, for some players, gaming can increase dopamine levels as much as having sex or snorting cocaine. Our brains are programmed to seek out more of these hits, which is what drives gamers to keep gaming. People with ADHD and autism spectrum disorder—kids like Cody—have abnormal dopamine receptors. For them, games like *Fortnite* act as a firehose of feel-good chemicals.

The trouble is that the euphoric feelings don't last. Gamers develop tolerances. They need to play more to achieve the same rush. After overloading their brains with happy signals, an equal and opposite reaction occurs. Their baseline dopamine level drops. They get angry, sad and apathetic. When they lose a round or their parents kick them off their consoles, they throw their controllers, enter withdrawal-like hazes and lose the drive to do just about anything else.

Since the dawn of *Pong*, psychiatrists have been debating whether or not to treat excessive gaming as an addiction. In 2018, the World Health Organization recognized “internet gaming disorder.” People with IGD play video games pathologically, continuing long after their habits have negatively affected their physical and mental health and their professional lives. Estimates suggest that up to 60 million people have this condition. It doesn't help matters that games are cheaper, more advanced and more accessible than ever before, says Jeffrey Derevensky, a McGill University psychology professor who sat on the advisory panel that helped the WHO identify the disorder. “Kids are walking around with a mini-console in



their pockets," he says. "Gaming is a hidden addiction. You can't smell it on their breath and you can't see it in their eyes. And so parents are often totally unaware of what their children are doing."

In theory, any game can suck anyone in. For this story, I spoke to gamers of all ages who'd been addicted to real-time strategy titles and virtual pirate adventures, mobile games and first-person shooters. But modern video games—*Fortnite*, *Warzone* and their ilk—are especially seductive, stuffed with features that prey on the brain's desire for dopamine. This evolution has gone largely unchecked. Even as industry giants have rolled out increasingly addictive games, they've maintained that their products are innocent fun. Governments seem to have taken their word for it. Most countries have yet to specifically regulate video games or their makers. That leaves players and parents to fend for themselves—and some of them are starting to fight back.

**E**ARLIER THIS YEAR, Alana's friend sent her a news article. In B.C. and Quebec, it reported, a handful of children had stopped eating, sleeping and showering to play battle royale on *Fortnite*. Over the course of two years, one boy had played it for nearly 1,000 hours—the equivalent of almost 42 days—and started suffering from gaming-related migraines, back pain and panic attacks. Like Cody, the kids threw fits when their parents tried to intervene. Unsure what to do, the families had banded together to launch a pair of class-action lawsuits against *Fortnite*'s developer, Epic Games,

alleging that the company had intentionally designed the game to be addictive.

That in itself isn't illegal—coffee is addictive, yet no one's suing Starbucks over it. But the cases also claim that Epic broke product liability laws, which hold that manufacturers should be held responsible for their products' unexpected dangers or defects. If a driver gets injured because their airbag malfunctions, liability laws are what allow them to sue the company that made it. They're also what convinced the Quebec courts to order cigarette makers to pay \$15 billion to smokers in 2015.

Historically, liability laws have applied mostly to physical products. But lately, lawyers have been applying liability theories to technology, too. Late last year, a group of parents sued Amazon for selling toxic chemicals that their teenage children used to kill themselves. (Amazon denies liability, saying the substance, like many products, can be misused.) Another case concerned an Uber driver who hit and killed a six-year-old girl because he was looking for fares on his phone while driving. (Uber argued it was not liable and settled out of court.)

Courts and legislators are now using liability laws to rein in big tech. The U.S. Supreme Court is currently weighing whether YouTube, Facebook and Twitter can be sued because their algorithms allegedly led users to content that promoted acts of violent extremism. Last year, the European Union began updating its liability rules to make it easier for people harmed by artificial intelligence to receive compensation. Self-driving cars aren't supposed to crash, but when they inevit-

ably do, there will no doubt be a litany of liability suits to sort out.

Gamers and their parents have used liability laws against video game developers before. After the mass shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, grieving parents sued several game studios, alleging their games influenced the shooters' actions. (That case was dismissed; research shows there's no evidence that violent video games encourage real-world violence.) The Canadian class actions against Epic are novel because they allege a different sort of affliction: an addiction to a video game. The suits argue that the company knew, or ought to have known, that *Fortnite* could cause players harm, such as IGD. And because Epic failed to warn players about those dangers, the suit says it should be liable for the damage it caused.

Epic, of course, sees things differently. "*Fortnite* was designed to be a fun and easy-to-use experience," Candela Montero, Epic's senior director of public policy, wrote me in an email. "We will fight these baseless allegations." The company tried to get the first of the two class actions dismissed, but in December of 2022, a Quebec judge certified the suit. The decision signalled that, if Canadian governments and regulators weren't going to crack down on video game developers—and, by extension, other big tech creators—the justice system might. CaLex, the Montreal law firm representing the Quebec plaintiffs, is now selecting expert witnesses, finding more members and preparing for trial. Jean-Philippe Caron, the lawyer leading the case, told me that he's heard from some 500 families across Canada who are inter-

**A boy in South Carolina kept playing *Fortnite* even as a tornado ripped through his town. An eight-year-old in Tennessee went to the ER with a bladder problem because he refused to stop playing.**





ested in joining. The original case is only open to Quebecers, but, earlier this year, the firm teamed up with a B.C.-based law firm to launch another class action that, if certified, will allow families elsewhere in the country to participate. It may be years before either suit reaches trial, but if they do get that far, these families will be in for the fight of their lives.

Epic is a gaming Goliath, with more than 50 offices and thousands of employees. That includes a lot of well-paid lawyers. The company is worth about \$43 billion and has two major owners: the \$600-billion Chinese

conglomerate Tencent and Tim Sweeney, the code-writing, Lambo-collecting geek who founded Epic 32 years ago under the slightly less sexy name Potomac Computer Systems.

Sweeney is no stranger to spending long, lonely days in front of a screen. At age nine, he taught himself to code. In the early 1990s, he built his first game in his parents' basement. It was a lo-fi puzzler called *ZZT*, where players controlled a smiley face that fought pixelated creatures. Players could build their own levels, which opened the door to limitless customization and playability. *ZZT* was a

surprise hit. Sweeney enlisted his dad to help him mail CD-ROMs to customers to keep up with demand.

In his 20s, Sweeney parlayed his early success into a full-blown gaming business. He hired staff, coded more titles and kept his eye on the nascent industry. In the mid-'90s, the biggest game in the world was *Doom*, a 3D shooter with then-revolutionary graphics, lightning-paced play and a heavy metal soundtrack. Inspired by *Doom*'s success, Sweeney built his own shooter, *Unreal*. The game was good—it sold 1.5 million copies in its first four years—but its true legacy was the platform on which it was built: the Unreal Engine. The engine was like a starter kit for wannabe game makers. Its powerful, user-friendly interface allowed developers to design levels, create characters and dictate in-game mechanics without an in-depth understanding of the underlying code. Sweeney licensed the Unreal Engine to other developers, who could use it to build games if they agreed to pay him royalties. The arrangement was like selling pickaxes during the gold rush. As gaming boomed in the 2000s, studios across the world used the Unreal Engine to create blockbuster series like *Final Fantasy*, *Mass Effect* and *Borderlands*. Even TV shows like *The Mandalorian* and *Westworld* have leaned on the Unreal Engine to create fantastical on-screen universes.

By his 30s, Sweeney was a millionaire many times over. He bought a fleet of sports cars and took MTV on a tour of his sprawling new mansion. He showed them a dining table he'd never used and a piano he couldn't play. "I don't know why I have a big house," he mumbled uncomfortably to the camera. "I don't really need it. I don't use much of the space. I figured, *I have the money. Why not?*" An Epic employee told MTV that Sweeney could have easily bought an island in Fiji and retired. Instead, he chose to keep doing what he'd always done: spend 14 hours a day in front of a computer, coding. "This is just Tim's life, being here and working on the technology," the staffer said. After all, Epic needed him. The company had a big new project in the works.

When Epic began developing *Fortnite* in 2011, the company envisioned it as a co-operative, kid-friendly adventure in which players would work together

to save the world from zombies. But in March of 2017, just before *Fortnite* was finished, a Korean studio named Bluehole released *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*. The game—built, as it happens, on the Unreal Engine—took inspiration from the Japanese thriller *Battle Royale*, pitting 100 players against one another on an island. *PUBG* was, for a time, the most popular game in the world. Tens of millions of gamers bought it. Epic was eager to emulate its success, and the team added a battle royale mode to *Fortnite*.

*Fortnite* is now the most-played video game of all time. One survey found that 60 per cent of teen participants had tried it. It has roughly 500 million registered users. *Fortnite's* cultural footprint now extends well beyond the world of gaming. The rapper Travis Scott and the EDM DJ Marshmello have both played concerts inside the game. Epic has partnered with Disney and Netflix, the Olympics and the NBA, Lego and *Monopoly*, which means you can play *Fortnite* as Darth Vader, Michael Jordan, John Wick, Ariana Grande or a Ghostbuster. The game makes a cameo in *Avengers: Endgame*, and every Avenger appears in the game. The Marvel Cinematic Universe, it seems, is really just a tiny piece of the much larger *Fortnite* Universe. With every brand crossover, *Fortnite* becomes more like the bagel from *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, determined to suck up all the IP in the universe and stuff it into one never-ending entity.

For some players, it's too enticing to resist. A boy in South Carolina kept playing *Fortnite* even as a tornado ripped through his town. An eight-year-old in Tennessee went to the ER with a bladder problem because he refused to stop playing long enough to go to the washroom. It's not just kids. Several pro sports teams, including the Toronto Blue Jays and Vancouver Canucks, have restricted their rosters' *Fortnite*-playing privileges, concerned that excessive gaming was throwing players off their game. In the U.K., a divorce-services website reported that couples had begun citing *Fortnite* as the primary reason for their split. Speaking at a mental health conference, Prince Harry called for the game to be banned. "It's created to addict," he said, "an addiction to keep you in front of a computer for as long as possible." Two

months after Harry made those comments, Epic Games participated in an inquiry into addictive technologies at the U.K.'s House of Commons. One MP suggested the game was designed to make money off of its players. "I would disagree," Epic's general counsel said. "The battle royale mode is free to play."

**F**ORTNITE IS INDEED free to play, but it never stops reminding players of all the ways they can feed the game their cash. Between every round of battle royale, gamers have a chance to purchase "skins," a catch-all term for clothes and customizations that change the appearance of a player's characters, weapons and vehicles. There are thousands of these accoutrements available for purchase in the *Fortnite* shop for \$5 to \$15 apiece: backpacks that players' avatars can wear, dance moves they can bust out, giant flaming assault rifles they can wield. For \$10, players can buy a "battle pass," a 10-week subscription that grants them access to even more skins. These nickel-and-dime purchases are called micro-transactions, and they can add up. One of the children represented in the Quebec class action spent \$6,000 on skins, draining a bank account that was meant to help pay for university.

In 2020, the Federal Trade Commission began investigating the company's use of dark patterns and collection of kids' personal information. When *Fortnite* debuted in 2017, the FTC alleged, it employed deceptive digital tricks known as "dark patterns" that made it easy for players to buy skins and exceedingly difficult for them to get their money back. If a father were to enter his credit card information to buy his *Fortnite*-playing son a Batman skin, for example, the game would automatically save those payment details, allowing the boy to keep shopping on his dad's dime. No PIN or CVV code required. No screen asking, "Are you sure?" If the dad requested a refund for the unauthorized purchases, Epic would most likely inform him that the sales were, regrettably, final.

In response to situations like these, the FTC alleged, players and parents inundated Epic with more than a million complaints. At the company's HQ in

Cary, North Carolina, employees alerted the C-suite about the deluge, suggesting simple fixes like a purchase-confirmation screen. But, according to the FTC, the company's leadership weren't interested. They said it would add "friction" and prevent "impulse purchases."

Ultimately, Epic was forced to change its practices. In December, the company agreed to pay US\$520 million—the largest-ever FTC settlement, some of which would recompense players—though it didn't admit liability. The company also vowed to clean up the game. Epic ditched the dark patterns and overhauled the shop so players needed to confirm purchases and had a grace period to undo them. Today, if a new player tells the game they're under 13 (not that kids ever lie online), they have a daily spending limit of US\$100. Parents can now manage shop permissions, friend requests, chat filters and other settings from an online portal, and they can opt to receive playtime reports. These will be helpful tools for parents who have the time and technological savvy to use them. (Epic cited these changes in the statement they sent me refuting the claims in the class action suits. "These allegations do not reflect how *Fortnite* operates and ignore the ways parents can control their child's experience in the game.")

To date, it's estimated that *Fortnite* has earned \$20 billion for Epic Games. That windfall reflects a shift in the way the gaming industry makes money. Five years ago, developers reaped profits roughly equal to the number of games they sold. Now, a growing number of games are so-called "freemium" offerings: they cost nothing to download or play, but they're stuffed with opportunities for in-game purchases. Loot boxes—digital treasure chests that dispense in-game prizes in exchange for real-world currency—now appear in 70 per cent of the games available on Steam, a popular online games marketplace. In 2020, players spent roughly \$20 billion on loot boxes globally, and micro-transactions are soon expected to total US\$75 billion per year. John Riccitiello, the former CEO of gaming company Electronics Arts, told shareholders that the rationale behind the switch to the play-first, pay-later model was simple: players are more willing to spend once they're invested.



# The suits argue that the company knew, or ought to have known, that *Fortnite* could cause players harm. And because Epic failed to warn players about those dangers, the suits say it should be liable for the damage it caused.

Some gamers have welcomed the shift from upfront costs to micro-transactions. If a player isn't interested in skins or other in-game purchases, they're essentially getting free games that might once have cost them \$80 a pop. But this new financial arrangement comes with a cost, says Nigel Turner, an independent scientist with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. "These micro-transactions are a pernicious way of exploiting people and taking their money away," he told me. "Companies are picking on vulnerable people, like kids, who don't really understand the value of the money they're spending."

Like many experts who study video games, Turner first specialized in gambling. Lately, he says, the line between the two fields has blurred: what are loot boxes if not unregulated slot machines marketed to children? In Canada, casinos and online sportsbooks are subject to hefty taxes, age restrictions and strict regulations that determine how much money they need to return to bettors. So far, video game developers have avoided playing by the same rules.

Their impunity may not last much longer. Class action litigation, like the Canadian suits against Epic, is often the first step toward wider change. They can prompt regulatory action or persuade industries to self-regulate. They also have a tendency to inspire other lawsuits. Jon Festinger, a lawyer and University of British Columbia adjunct professor who wrote Canada's seminal guide to video game law for the legal website LexisNexis, says that a ruling against Epic would represent a monu-

mental legal precedent. "If this succeeds, it opens the door to more litigation," he says. Vass Bednar, the executive director of McMaster University's master of public policy program, suggests social media platforms could be at risk, too. "This generation might be able to retroactively say, 'I was addicted to TikTok. That was my childhood, and because of that I have fewer social skills, am more depressed, didn't play sports, didn't know what to study or what I wanted to do with my life,'" she says. "I think we'll see more people saying, 'You took this from me and you knew you were doing it.'"

**A**FTER SEVERAL months of *Fortnite*-related meltdowns, Alana went looking for professional help for her son. She called a Vancouver mental health agency, but they didn't have anyone who dealt with problem gaming. So she tried another. And then another. In total, she called eight facilities across B.C. "Nobody could point me in the right direction," she says. All the while, Cody kept screaming every time she tried to stop him from gaming.

Finally, a month later, Alana found Tracy Tsui, a B.C.-based registered clinical counsellor who specializes in problem gaming habits. Tsui provided Cody with talk therapy. With her help, the family established a new gaming schedule and helped Cody stick to it. Alana taught Cody breathwork and other coping mechanisms that he could employ when he felt the urge to game. And Alana worked with Cody's

family doctor to find medication that calmed Cody down and finally put an end to the screaming. "We're still struggling with gaming," says Alana. "But he went from being completely out of control to being manageable."

Tsui has seen it all before: kids who have stolen their parents' credit cards to buy skins, adults who have sabotaged their careers to game, families so shattered by gaming addictions that they've contacted their local MLAs to beg for governmental intervention. Tsui used to game herself, and she started specializing in gaming addictions in 2018 when she realized few others were.

The options are still sparse today. In Toronto, CAMH offers problem-gaming counselling and support groups. A few private clinics, such as Ontario's Simcoe Addiction and Mental Health, run digital detox programs in which gamers surrender their electronics, undergo therapy and spend time in nature. Most Canadian cities also have a chapter of Gaming Addicts Anonymous, a riff on AA.

The most valuable resource for Canadian gaming addicts is arguably Game Quitters, an organization founded by a former gamer named Cameron Adair. As a teenager in Calgary, Adair played *Counter-Strike* and *StarCraft* for 15 hours at a time, and he pretended to have a part-time job to hide his addiction from his parents. When he resolved to quit, he was underwhelmed by the resources he found, so he made his own. Now, he uploads game-quitting tips to his website and YouTube, and he and his colleague Elaine Uskoski, a family



**“This generation might be able to retroactively say, ‘I was addicted to TikTok. That was my childhood, and I have fewer social skills, am more depressed, didn’t play sports, didn’t know what to study or what I wanted to do with my life.’”**

coach whose son recovered from a severe gaming addiction, work with clients in Canada, the U.S., Australia and elsewhere on how to kick their unhealthy habits. “It becomes an outright war at home of parental controls and kids bypassing them,” Adair told me. “Parents have a lot going on. They’re trying to feed their families and do their work and pay their bills and have their own life in some way. And then they have to also have a world-class education on gaming that changes every week? It’s a lot to ask from them.”

Governments can’t—and probably shouldn’t—dictate what kind of video games developers are allowed to make. It’s practically impossible to draw a line between games that are addictive and games that are simply well-designed and fun to play. But Canada could follow the example of other countries that have taken simple, sensible steps to prevent gaming addiction. A law in South Korea allows parents to designate play times for their kids. (China went a step further, banning gaming outright between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m. for young teens.) Like Austria, Australia and the Netherlands, Canada could regulate loot boxes. Or it could mimic the U.K. and use public funds to create specialized clinics for gaming addicts.

Canada has done none of these things. To date, the federal government has yet to hold a single hearing or committee meeting about gaming addiction, micro-transactions or loot boxes. Vass Bednar, the policy expert at McMaster, suspects this is because gaming doesn’t fall cleanly within the

purview of a single ministry or government office. The CRTC has the power to regulate video games but has actively chosen not to. The Competition Bureau, Canadian Heritage, and the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development could all step up, but none of them has. Provincial gambling regulators like the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation could investigate game developers for violating gambling rules, but that hasn’t happened either. I asked Michael Tibollo, Ontario’s associate minister of mental health and addictions, what his government was doing to combat problem gaming. His office initially reported that he was excited to speak with me, but the interview never materialized. The province, they explained, wouldn’t grant him permission to speak on the topic.

Without regulatory oversight, the industry is left to police itself. Progress has been predictably sluggish on that front. In 2020, the Entertainment Software Rating Board, the body that assigns age ratings to video games in North America, began sticking an “in-game purchases” label on games that offer micro-transactions and loot boxes; a 2023 study found that those labels were applied inconsistently, if at all. Several academics and problem-gaming counsellors suggested to me that the board, which takes into account violence, profanity and nudity when rating games, should begin disclosing games’ addictive potential and immediately restrict any game with gambling-like features to 18-plus audiences. But few of them were optimistic that the organization—whose members include

industry giants—would pursue changes that might jeopardize developers’ bottom lines. In a 2021 paper analyzing the ethics of *Fortnite*’s financial model, a group of University of Amsterdam researchers concluded, “Economic interests are too great to rely on self-restraint from industry.”

And so the problem seems destined to get worse. The gaming industry is now adopting AI to more effectively target individual players’ preferences, and virtual reality is poised to draw players deeper under gaming’s spell. Lately, Tim Sweeney has been publicly musing about uniting all of Epic’s games in a single, all-consuming metaverse—a terrifying prospect for parents like Alana, who are already struggling to peel their kids away from their screens.

The last time I spoke to Alana, she told me that Cody had all but stopped playing *Fortnite*. His friends had moved on to different games, and Cody did too. “He is much more respectful, calmer and, in general, he is a lot happier since he stopped playing *Fortnite*,” says Alana. He’s also revived his dream of becoming a pro soccer player, though getting him to stop playing his new favourite games so he can make it to soccer practice is still a daily battle. Recently, Alana bought a timer to limit Cody’s gaming sessions, but he threw it out the window. “So that’s where we’re at right now,” she says. If all else fails, she told me, she’ll disconnect their house from the internet entirely. But she hopes Cody will move on soon. He’ll be a teenager next year. “When girls come into the picture,” she says, “maybe gaming won’t be so important anymore.” ■