



2022 - 2023

LBN

INDIGENOUS
OUTREACH
PROJECT
REPORT

Christian San Juan

Report designed by LBN's
Communications Team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Learning Buddies Network is a registered charity that provides free one-to-one mentoring to elementary students who are performing below their grade level in reading or math. LBN makes tutoring accessible and free for families in BC. Our programs often reach participants from families who face financial, social, and/or cultural barriers which prevent their children from accessing resources to improve their self-esteem and attitude toward reading and math. Although the organization began operating on a solely in-person basis when it was founded in 2008, the pandemic shifted our programming online in 2020. As a result, LBN was able to continue pairing high school and university mentors with elementary-aged 'little buddies' in an online setting for its reading and math programs. These programs were based in the Lower Mainland. Our project aimed to expand our programming to a remote Indigenous community for the first time in LBN's history.

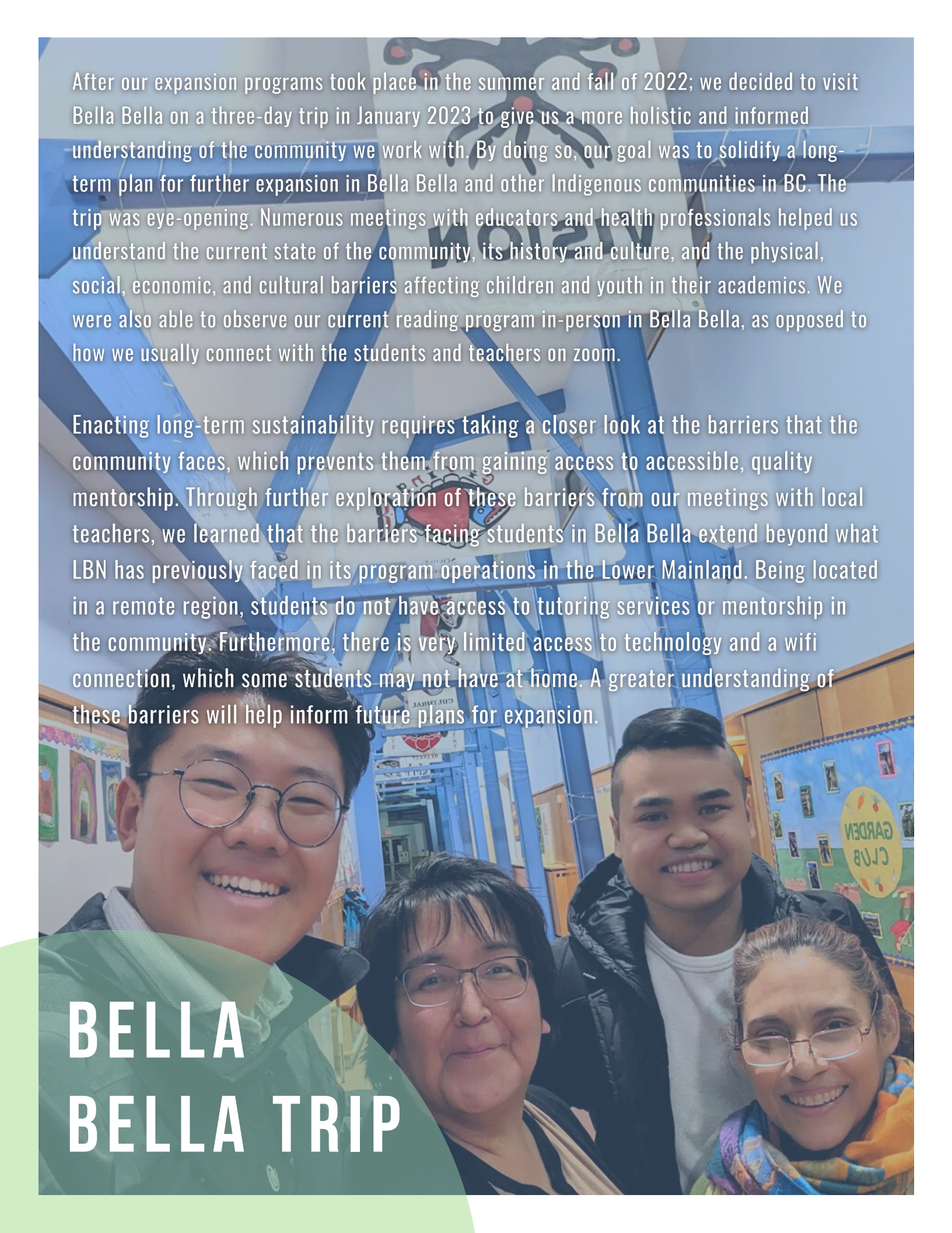
Dr. Alisa Lipson, Founder and President of Learning Buddies Network, is a pediatrician who has close ties with health and education professionals from Bella Bella, BC. Bella Bella is a remote reserve community belonging to the Heiltsuk Nation. The community has expressed their interest in our programming for quite some time, but this has not come to fruition due to financial constraints. The Chapman and Innovation Grant allowed Learning Buddies Network to provide two online reading programs for Indigenous elementary students from Bella Bella, spanning the Summer term (July to August 2022) and the Fall term (September to December 2022). This equates to 14 hours of mentoring to 16 little buddies at Bella Bella Community School (BBCS). Mentors from the Lower Mainland connected to their own devices in the Lower Mainland provide mentorship and tutoring to little buddies from Bella Bella who are present at BBCS via a tablet during sessions.

FUNDING & ADVANCEMENT

Because in-person mentorship was not an option due to the relative location of Bella Bella to the Lower Mainland, premium zoom accounts were purchased in order for little buddies in Bella Bella to connect with their mentors from the Lower Mainland. These accounts ensured programs were able to run online. Furthermore, we hired Sharon Johansen, an Indigenous teacher from Bella Bella, to serve as a Site Supervisor, Teacher Liaison, and Consultant. Sharon's strong teaching background, leadership experience, and educational background specializing in Indigenous Culture and Worldview, made her the right fit for this program expansion. Sharon's primary responsibilities during the project encompassed the following:

- Providing training presentations to LBN's mentors on the Indigenous worldview
- Supervising the little buddies in a classroom in Bella Bella during sessions
- Providing ongoing feedback and guidance to mentors of the Bella Bella program
- Ensuring zoom and other technology was set up for the little buddies before sessions
- Communicating timely updates to parents in Bella Bella regarding the program and their children's progress

A portion of the funding was used for our trip to Bella Bella (explained in the next section) which included the costs for our flights, food, and transportation. The remaining funds were used towards a staff appreciation dinner which took place in December 2022, recognizing the Board Members and Staff who supported and dedicated their time and efforts to make the project possible.

A group of four people, two men and two women, are smiling and posing for a photo in a school hallway. The hallway is decorated with Indigenous art, including a large mural of a person with a headdress and a sign that says "KWOISIV". There are also smaller signs and posters on the walls, including one that says "GARDEN CLUB". The lighting is bright and the atmosphere is positive.

After our expansion programs took place in the summer and fall of 2022; we decided to visit Bella Bella on a three-day trip in January 2023 to give us a more holistic and informed understanding of the community we work with. By doing so, our goal was to solidify a long-term plan for further expansion in Bella Bella and other Indigenous communities in BC. The trip was eye-opening. Numerous meetings with educators and health professionals helped us understand the current state of the community, its history and culture, and the physical, social, economic, and cultural barriers affecting children and youth in their academics. We were also able to observe our current reading program in-person in Bella Bella, as opposed to how we usually connect with the students and teachers on zoom.

Enacting long-term sustainability requires taking a closer look at the barriers that the community faces, which prevents them from gaining access to accessible, quality mentorship. Through further exploration of these barriers from our meetings with local teachers, we learned that the barriers facing students in Bella Bella extend beyond what LBN has previously faced in its program operations in the Lower Mainland. Being located in a remote region, students do not have access to tutoring services or mentorship in the community. Furthermore, there is very limited access to technology and a wifi connection, which some students may not have at home. A greater understanding of these barriers will help inform future plans for expansion.

BELLA BELLA TRIP

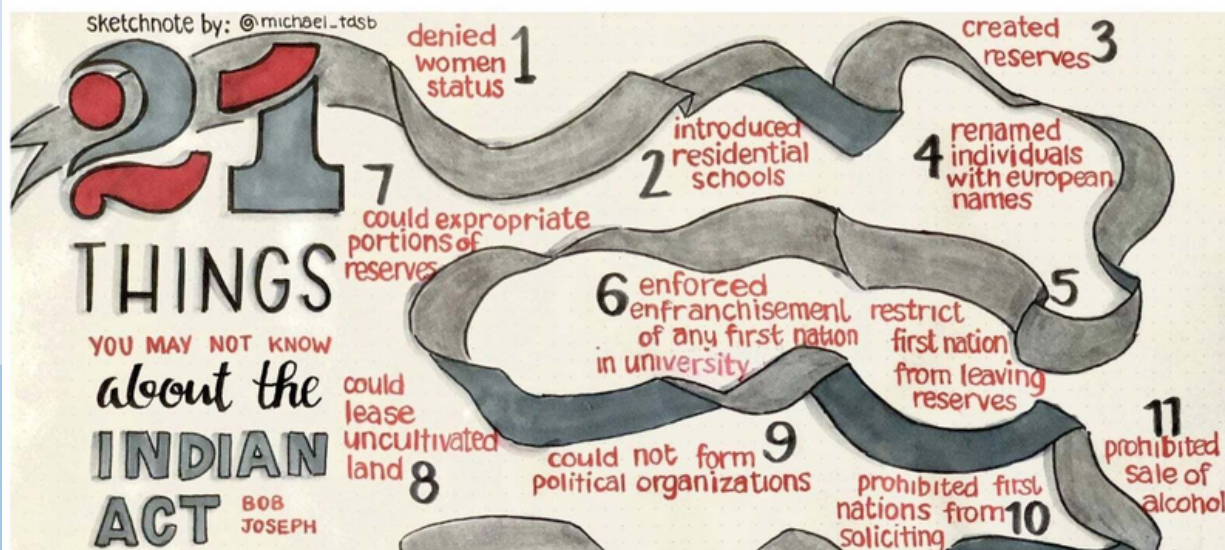
The success of our expansion into Bella Bella was the most unanticipated result. A key contributor to making this happen is Dr. Lipson's connections to the Bella Bella community. This ultimately facilitated the buy-in from the community regarding the idea of bringing our programming to the community at the onset of the project. Dr. Lipson's efforts also led to the strong personal connections we at LBN now have with the community. This allowed us to hire Sharon as part of the LBN team. Sharon's delivery of an Indigenous Worldview training presentation for LBN staff and volunteers provided a valuable learning opportunity. This paved the way for our implementation of an Indigenous Worldview training module via Moodle, a learning management system. Developing the training module allowed us to implement an accessible learning opportunity for staff and volunteers to learn about the Indigenous Worldview. The module is currently a requirement to complete in order to volunteer in LBN's Indigenous programs.

Module 3 - "21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act"

The "21 things" illustrate the restrictions imposed by the Indian Act.

This includes:

- The right to vote
- Naming policies and the outlaw of traditional names
- Prohibiting the act of soliciting funds for First nation legal claims, which gave government control over the land
- Practicing one's language, religion, and taking part in cultural activities
- Challenges with forming political organizations.
- A permit system that controlled First Nations' ability to sell products from farms



Going into the project, we initially planned to establish an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee to help spearhead our expansion into Bella Bella. After ongoing discussions with the Board of Directors and Staff members, we concluded that it would be best to instead focus on taking our efforts one step at a time - with the first step being successfully expanding into Bella Bella. With that being said, the idea of an EDI Committee remains on the table to spearhead such efforts.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

LBN utilizes pre-program and post-program online assessments stored on Google spreadsheets to keep track of students' reading levels, their respective levels in different reading concepts (e.g. fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, etc.), and general progress notes from their mentors. Based on the number of little buddies for which LBN has data, 60% of students who participated in Bella Bella's summer program improved in reading. In the summer program, all buddies scored the program at least a 4 out of 5, with '5' being the highest score.

Our fall program with Bella Bella was met with positive feedback from parents. Sharon shared with the LBN team that she "had goosebumps listening to [the buddy's parent] share what a difference she thinks Reading Buddies has done for her daughter". Sharon expressed to us at LBN that "as a teacher, I have happy tears to hear what a difference [the program] makes for our children".

FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

A key part of ensuring the success of the project is focusing on how we can enact long-term sustainability. In early 2023, LBN was awarded a significant grant from a local family foundation to strengthen and expand the organization's Indigenous programs. The project seeks to establish permanent Indigenous programs at LBN, including hiring an Indigenous Program Director to oversee LBN's Indigenous-based programs going forward.

During our trip to Bella Bella, we met with teachers from Klemtu, a reserve community near Bella Bella. After learning more about our pilot program in Bella Bella, Klemtu's school expressed a deep interest in our programs during our meeting, and preliminary discussions began.

In addition to supporting elementary students, we also hope to support high school students in Bella Bella. One of our next goals is to recruit high school students from Bella Bella to provide them with the opportunity to be a mentor with LBN. By doing so, we seek to address barriers surrounding the lack of access to job/volunteer opportunities in the community and help them develop their leadership skills for post-secondary.

We are currently operating an online reading program with Bella Bella, and opened a new online math program in February, 2023. We look forward to implementing in-person programs in addition to our online programs in Bella Bella in the near future. We are very pleased with where three terms of programs in Bella Bella have taken us as part of our expansion, and we thank the UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning for the opportunity to put our plans into action.

THANK YOU TO THE CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING FOR SUPPORTING THIS PROJECT THROUGH THE CHAPMAN AND INNOVATION GRANT.