

# 2023

# Project Report

## Indigenous Food Systems & Community-based Land Stewardship

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Acknowledgements: This project was in partnership with the Environmental Youth Alliance and funded by the Chapman and Innovation Grant through the UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning.

PREPARED BY

Shogofa Alizada (Grant Recipient)



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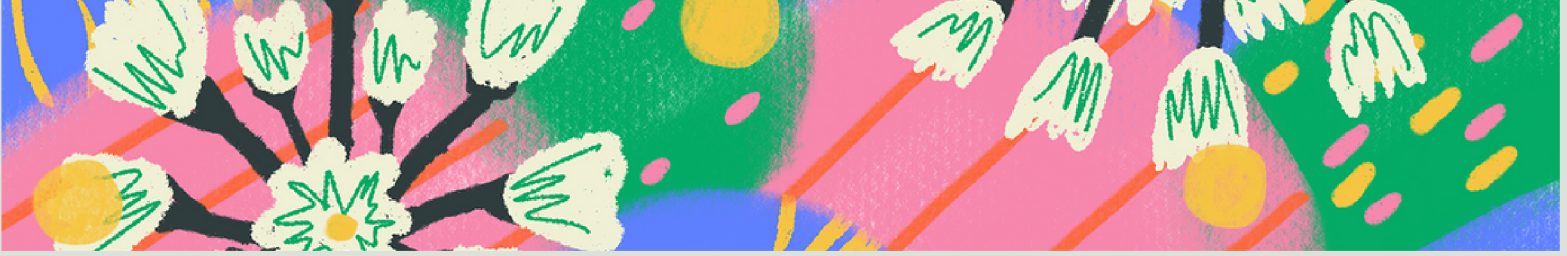
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PREPARED BY

Shogofa Alizada



## LAND HONOURING & POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

This project has taken place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, in particular, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh), and Skwx̱ wú7mesh (Squamish) First Nations. The wisdom and knowledge that have been cultivated since time immemoria by Indigenous peoples on these lands hold invaluable teachings that enrich us all, and as a settler on these lands, I am profoundly thankful.

I want to extend my appreciation to the Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, Matthew Williams and Elder Henry Williams from the Squamish Nations, as well as Daniel Mendoza from the “Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty,” for sharing their knowledge and wisdom with the youth during the workshops. In the spirit of gratitude, my appreciation also extends to Hives for Humanity and Alveole, an urban beekeeping organization, for imparting their knowledge about the intricate world of bees and their vital role in keeping the balance and harmony of our natural environment. Lastly, thank you to the Environmental Youth Alliance for providing me with the opportunity to take on this initiative and learn with and alongside the youth part of the project.

As a first-generation immigrant of Hazara ancestry on Turtle Island, I am aware and grateful for the privilege it affords me—the privilege to breathe in the wisdom of the earth, to learn and share its timeless lessons, and to draw inspiration from the lands that have been stewarded by Indigenous peoples for countless generations. It is of utmost importance to acknowledge that I am not an Indigenous person and, therefore, I do not possess the lived experience or deep ancestral connection to this land. However, throughout the course of this project, which has been guided by a profound respect for the Indigenous knowledge systems and community-based land stewardship practices, I have been fortunate enough to collaborate with and learn from Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and community leaders. Their knowledge and unwavering dedication to protecting and nurturing these lands have been a humbling experience for me, for which I am deeply grateful.



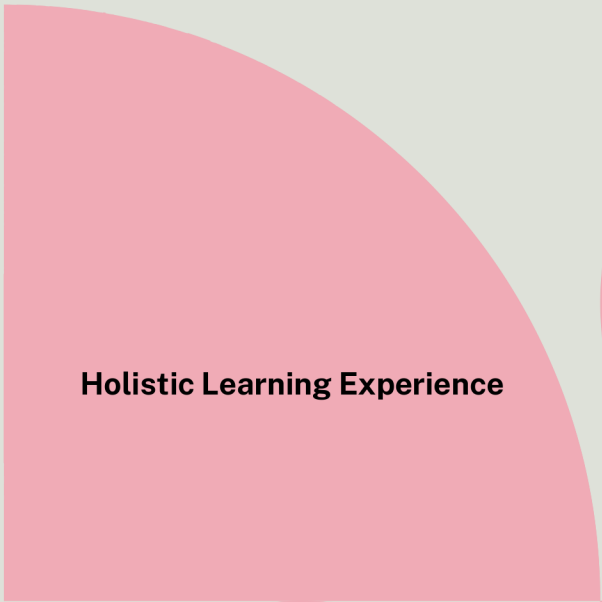
# Executive Summary & Objectives

This project was developed and delivered in partnership with the Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA), a non-profit organization in East Vancouver, invested in empowering youth from equity-deserving communities to become environmental stewards through land-based education and employment training programs that center on native plant horticulture, plant medicine, ecological restoration and stewardship. Leveraging the resources and expertise of EYA, we maximized the project's impact.

The project spanned two months and included seven workshops and a field trip, each centred around a specific theme. Workshops combined theoretical sessions with hands-on activities, fostering a holistic learning experience.

The goals of this project were to bridge the gap of knowledge and access to hands-on and land-based learning opportunities on Indigenous food systems and community-based land stewardship for equity-deserving populations, including BIPOC youth in the Vancouver Downtown East Side. Furthermore, the initiative sought to strengthen the connection of youth participants to the land and foster a sense of empowerment among them.

In addition to these learning objectives, our project was driven by a strong desire to foster a sense of community within the learning environment. Recognizing the transformative power of an inclusive community in shaping young minds positively, we endeavoured to create a nurturing space where the youth could connect, collaborate, and learn, thereby cultivating a sense of belonging and community.



**Holistic Learning Experience**



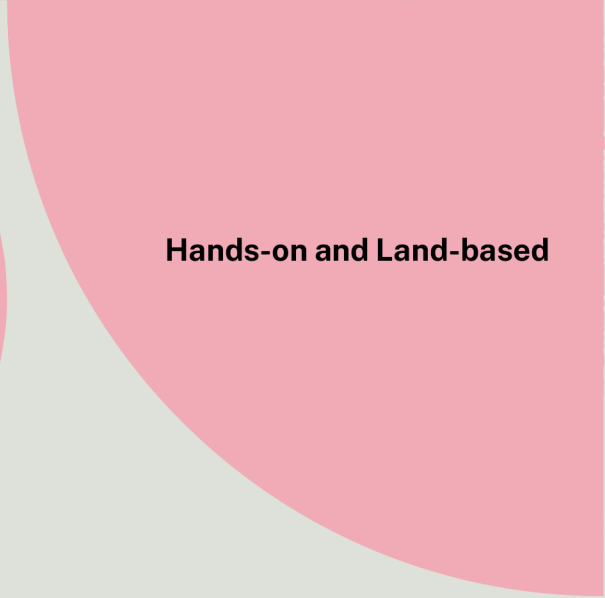
**6**

**Youth Participants**



**8**

**knowledge-sharing sessions**



**Hands-on and Land-based**



# Project Implementation

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**Workshop Design and Curriculum Development:** The specific themes and topics for each workshop were developed by the grant recipient with the support of EYA's co-director, Erica Ellis, and the site stewardship manager, Jess Duncan. However, the curriculum and content shared with the youth were developed by knowledge keepers and elders, as well as community partners who delivered the workshops themselves, which incorporated traditional knowledge with contemporary ecological understanding. Workshops covered topics such as indigenous plants, urban beekeeping, Indigenous food systems and sovereignty, and much more.

**Participant Selection and Outreach:** The workshop participants were youth attending the Youth Habitat Crew (YHC) Program run by EYA. The YHC is a land-based employment program that brings together six youths who have previously participated in EYA's programs to steward gardens, ravines, and EYA's programming sites across East Vancouver while gaining job experience throughout the summer. EYA prioritizes applications from youth facing barriers coming from equity-deserving communities. This year, 50% of YHC identified as Indigenous, 33% identified as Black and 100% identified as People of Colour. 100% of YHC faced intersecting barriers, including having a disability, struggling with mental health challenges, and/or being 2SLGBTQ+.

**Execution and Logistics:** Workshops were ensured to be conducted at accessible venues, with the majority taking place at the Strathcona Community Gardens, one of EYA's programming sites, enabling participants to interact directly with nature. Only one of the workshops was delivered at a different site in Burnaby, for which participants were provided bus tickets to ensure their participation. The Indigenous knowledge keepers and community groups who were invited to enrich the sessions with their knowledge were from EYA's workshop facilitator and knowledge keepers' list, relationships that EYA has built, developed, and maintained over several years based on trust and reciprocity. These already-established connections with indigenous knowledge-keepers and community groups ensured expert and relevant information.

# Workshop Descriptions & Impacts

**Background:** Workshop themes and topics were meticulously designed to address key themes, each carefully curated to build upon the knowledge gained in previous sessions, fostering active engagement and practical learning. The impacts of each workshop were evident in the participants' knowledge acquisition and participation. To assess the impacts of these workshops, engaging in dialogue with the youth participants during and after the project served as the main method of impact evaluation. Some testimonials from the youth participants and EYA's staff have been added to the impact assessment section of this report (see below).

**Workshop (I) on Indigenous Plant Knowledge:** Participants engaged in cedar weaving in this workshop, learning about native plant identification and discussing their ecological roles. Matthew Williams and Elder Henry Williams from Squamish Nations facilitated this knowledge-sharing session. The workshop started with a land acknowledgment which provided the group with an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which we honour and connect with the land we live on. This was followed by a plant walk around the Strathcona Community Gardens, where the youth were encouraged to identify native plants and discuss their ecological significance.

The highlight of the walk was learning about the interconnectedness between salmon and salmonberries; a good crop of salmonberries corresponds to a good salmon run in the harvest season. This inter-relationship not only highlights that the prosperity of different species is dependent on each other but also teaches us about the significance of mutual aid and reciprocity, a lesson that can be adopted and extended into our communities.

In the second half of the workshop, the youth engaged in exploring the art of cedar weaving and learning the different ways in which cedar is used in Indigenous communities. Overall, this knowledge-sharing opportunity helped foster a deeper connection with our natural surroundings and built on our knowledge of native plants.



### **Workshop (II) on Indigenous Food Systems & Land Stewardship:**

Facilitated by "The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty," this knowledge-sharing session delved into a comprehensive exploration of multifaceted themes. The group's mission encompasses the examination of crucial matters encompassing Indigenous food, land, culture, health, economics, and sustainability. Their approach is deeply rooted in honouring culturally appropriate protocols and embracing indigenous ways of understanding.

During this session, participants actively engaged in dialogues centred around Indigenous food systems and sovereignty. They delved into the reservoir of traditional ecological knowledge that underscores the art of crafting sustenance, mainly corn, considering its interconnectedness with community, family, and heritage. Led by Daniel, the youth participants got to engage in the making and sharing of Indigenous food.

### **Workshop (III) on Native Plant Knowledge & Medicine Making:**

This workshop was led by EYA's Co-Executive Director of Programs and Operations, Erica Ellis. The youth participants learned about plant medicines and shared knowledge from their own ancestral teachings as well as teachings learned throughout previous workshops. The group also learned about reciprocity and relationality through activities and discussions. Working with plant medicines harvested and processed by themselves and other youth through the season, the group made a batch of healing salves for specific remedies. The medicines made will be shared with Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders who visit EYA programs in the future, as well as Indigenous community members in the Downtown Eastside.





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**Workshop (IV) on Pollinator ID & Stewardship:** During this workshop, the youth participants had the opportunity to work together on constructing bumblebee boxes and actively partake in discussions centred around the preservation of native bees and their pivotal contribution to upholding the harmony of our natural ecosystems. As we delved into the hands-on process of crafting bumblebee boxes, we discussed the habitat needs of these essential pollinators and the crucial role that native bees play in sustaining biodiversity, supporting plant life, and ensuring the flourishing vitality of various species. This workshop was led by Shogofa.

**Workshop (V) on Stewardship & Community**

**Engagement through Beekeeping pt 1:** This workshop, conducted by Alveole's Vancouver team, provided the youth participants with a comprehensive understanding of urban beekeeping, the art of honey production, and the vital role of pollination in sustainable food systems. The event skillfully blended theoretical insights with practical experience, enabling attendees to enhance their comprehension of honeybees. Through hands-on activities such as honey extraction and bottling, the youth not only acquired insights into the meticulous honey production process but also fostered a tangible bond with the natural world and its intricate workings. The workshop concluded on a sweet note as each participant had the opportunity to take home a jar filled with freshly harvested honey.

**Workshop (VI) on Stewardship & Community Engagement through Beekeeping pt**

**2:** This session delved into honeybees and beekeeping and its potential as a powerful tool for nurturing sustainable food systems, particularly within the dynamic landscapes of urban environments. Apart from the knowledge shared regarding the significance of bees in urban food systems, a significant portion of the workshop also focused and invited the youth to reflect on how they connect with the land and draw inspiration from it. This reflective aspect of the workshop played a pivotal role in fostering a deeper understanding of the harmonious relationship between humans, bees, and the environment. This knowledge-sharing session was delivered by Hives for Humanity.

# HONEY BEES

The Life Cycle of a Honey Bee



# TRANSFORM

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**Workshop (VII) on Food Equity and Security:** This workshop was facilitated by one of the youth participants; through creating a safe space for open dialogue, the youth engaged in a discussion about issues surrounding food justice and security, especially within underserved and marginalized communities. The discussion provided the youth participants with an opportunity to share their perspectives, stories, and concerns related to food access, affordability, and accessibility. In the second half of the workshop, the youth facilitator brought the group together to prepare a cake with minimal ingredients and resources available to illustrate the importance of resourcefulness in addressing food insecurity. While the cake was baking on our portable stove top, the youth facilitator guided us on a walk around the community garden. Here, we learned about sustainable food practices and the vital role of community gardens in improving food access. The highlight of this outing was harvesting ripe berries, which we later collectively decorated the cake with. This knowledge-sharing session, spearheaded by the youth participant, left us not only with a deeper understanding of the issues at hand but enabled and inspired us to engage in deeper and more meaningful conversations around the topics explored during the workshop. This highlights the significance of mobilizing youth with the resources and knowledge to influence positive change within their communities.



**End-of-Program Celebration and Conservatory Visit:** The project ended with a celebration; participants visited the Bloedel Conservatory to connect with nature and reinforce the importance of environmental stewardship, a core theme of our workshops. Nestled within the heart of the city, the Bloedel Conservatory provided the perfect setting for the final gathering. With its lush greenery and diverse range of plant species, it offered a tangible representation of the beauty and diversity of the ecosystems and the power of the community to protect and preserve the natural world.

# Impact Measurement and Assessment


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**Post-Workshop Evaluation:** Post-workshop evaluations in the form of “conversations” were conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of content delivery, engagement methods, and overall experience. Some highlights include:

- All six participants expressed that the workshop series was a positive experience that they would like to see included in the program in the future.
- All six participants expressed that they increased their knowledge of Indigenous Food Systems and Community-based land stewardship through the workshop series.
- One of the highlights was creating the space for one of the youth participants to lead one of the workshops. Creating this space and providing resources through this funding felt very valuable. The youth participant who led the workshop stated, “I would keep the weekly workshops - and extend the opportunity for the [participants] to do them again in the future as I had a lot of fun participating in the workshops each week and also facilitating one.”
- The provision of food and transportation on workshop days was positively received. This is an important offering for this program that works with youth facing barriers. One youth participant shared, “I really enjoyed the workshops and all that we learned this summer. The compass tickets were greatly appreciated!”



**Fun**



**Positive  
Experience**



**Valuable**

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## Staff Reflections:

- This project added valuable learning opportunities to a program that has been historically under-resourced for these types of offerings. It added a new dynamic to the program weeks and allowed the participants to deepen and apply learning gained through the season.
- In working with youth facing barriers, the ability to provide nutritional food offerings, extra program materials and transportation support (bus tickets) is something we prioritize when the budget allows. We are grateful that this project was able to support us in providing these resources.
- This project allowed Shogofa and program participants to connect with other organizations and knowledge-keepers in the community and get exposure to different knowledge-keepers and organizations doing work in the community. This exposure to diverse leaders/workshop providers was greatly appreciated.
- Shogofa is an incredible leader and mentor. Having her engage with the program participants and be a leader and mentor for them through the program was impactful. Her prior experience working with youth facing barriers and with EYA programs was an asset and allowed for an easy transition into the group.
- EYA is very grateful for this opportunity to partner on this project, although it required more staff resources (from the Program Manager, Co-Executive Director of Programs and Operations, and Accountant) than compensation to ensure a successful project.



# Lessons Learned & Conclusion

**Significance of Community Engagement and Inclusion:** Community work and inclusion is the cornerstone of any successful initiative to foster positive change. The youth attending EYA's YHC program were from diverse backgrounds, coming from different communities across the Greater Vancouver area. This diversity within the group helped enrich the youths' learning experience much more. During the workshops, the youth participants brought forth their unique experiences, stories, and pieces of knowledge rooted in their cultural, traditional, and ancestral backgrounds, making the learning process more meaningful and applicable.

**Traditional Indigenous Knowledge:** As a guest on Turtle Island, I recognize the significance of indigenous traditions and knowledge for the well-being of our planet. The wisdom of Indigenous peoples, their deep-rooted connection to the land, and their sustainable practices are vital for the preservation and protection of our environment. Through these workshops, it only became clearer that for any meaningful progress to take place in the realm of food justice and environmental conservation, we must honour and learn from the stewardship of Indigenous peoples.

**Optimizing Resource Allocation for Partner Organizations:** Reallocating additional funding to support partner organization staff hours is crucial for maximizing the impact of such projects, particularly in enhancing the UBC student experience and fostering growth. To make this project more meaningful, it is essential to provide greater flexibility and resources to the staff hours of our partner organizations. While EYA generously contributed more staff hours to this project than the funding allowed, sustaining such a commitment can pose challenges for smaller organizations that operate on limited funding.

**Interactive and Practical Learning:** While hands-on and land-based learning is at the heart of EYA's work, the addition of these workshops further provided an opportunity to enhance engagement and retention of knowledge for the youth participants, leading to more profound and lasting impacts. In the context of the YHC program, which prepares youth for environmental stewardship jobs through land-based learning, these workshops served as a dynamic educational tool, enriching their knowledge through practical and theoretical learning opportunities. Future initiatives can elevate participants' learning by infusing more interactive learning alongside theoretical learning curriculums to make learning not only informative but immersive and enjoyable.

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**Peer-Led Learning and Educational Opportunities:** Empowering youth participants with the resources and knowledge to lead similar knowledge-sharing sessions should be prioritized. Peer-led sessions cannot only increase engagement among participants but will also acknowledge youths' potential to drive positive social change in their communities.

Future similar projects and initiatives can draw on the lessons outlined above to help foster the learning and growth of participants and the broader community.



**Brief Reflection:** Throughout this collaborative project with EYA this past summer, the act of sharing emerged as a central and transformative theme. EYA, in particular, demonstrated the spirit of sharing by generously offering tea, plant medicine, and healing salves. These gifts were meticulously harvested and crafted by the youth participating in EYA's programs and were gifted to knowledge keepers and the broader community as a means of appreciating their knowledge and wisdom.

Witnessing this act of sharing throughout the project was an opportunity for me to view sharing as another potent means of learning and teaching our collective knowledge. Beyond the mere exchange of physical gifts; sharing became a vessel through which learning transcended the program's boundaries, extending its reach into the broader community. It was not solely about offering the fruits of youths' labour but also about transmitting and sharing the lessons, stories, and personal experiences exchanged among the youth and knowledge keepers attending EYA's programs.

In the spirit of upholding this tradition of sharing, I am delighted to share this project report with you, which provides an overview of the work I was fortunate to collaborate on with EYA this past summer. My hope is that by doing so, we not only draw inspiration from the beautiful act of sharing that has characterized this project but also learn from the wisdom, gifts, and conversations that took place among the youth participants throughout the knowledge-sharing sessions. It is through opening ourselves and sharing our gifts with others that our collective and individual wisdom can grow stronger, fostering a culture of mutual learning and reciprocity and a deeper sense of care for one another and the world around us.



**Acknowledgements:** I would like to extend my appreciation to the Environmental Youth Alliance, in particular, Erica Ellis (Co-Executive Director, Programs & Operations), Jess Duncan (Manager, Sites & Stewardship), Niki Westman (Accountant), Emily Keller (EYA's Executive Director at the time of the grant application process), and the youth participants, who showed up to these workshops with much enthusiasm. Without their unwavering support, this project would not have come to fruition.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Jacquie Kwok (Educational Programs Coordinator at the UBC-CCEL) for her continuous assistance during the application process and encouragement throughout the project's implementation phase. Lastly, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Sydney Kroes (Student Engagement Coordinator at the UBC-CCEL), whose words of encouragement were instrumental in inspiring me to take the lead in initiating this project.