

SQUAMISH LÍLWAT CULTURAL CENTRE

Located in Whistler, BC, the Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre (SLCC) was built as a partnership between the Skwxwú7mesh Úxumixw (Squamish Nation) and Lílwat7úl (Lílwat Nation), that have coexisted respectfully as neighbors since time immemorial. The cultural centre was built to preserve, grow, and share the traditional cultures of these unique nations and inspire understanding and respect among all people who visit it. In 1997, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) met with the Lílwat Nation to discuss opportunities for the Nation's participation and presence in Whistler BC. The idea of a cultural centre sprang from these discussions. Visitors to the centre enjoy fascinating educational displays, cultural programming, a giftshop and a café that serves Indigenous inspired cuisine.

Two Nations Working Together – A Historic Cooperative Agreement

In 2001, the Squamish and Lílwat Nations signed a historic Protocol Agreement, which formalized their mutual relationship and committed both nations to cooperate in matters of cultural and economic development and management of shared territory. It is the only agreement of its kind in Canada.

Youth Involvement and Succession Planning

The Squamish and Lílwat Nations developed a youth ambassador program in 2008 that has helped youth in both nations connect with their culture and their ancestors. The program lasts for about three months and during that time youth work at the cultural centre and participate in a variety of activities designed to connect them with their culture and learn valuable skills that help them understand what it takes to run a business, learn leadership skills and helps them become more employable. Close to 600 graduates have participated in the program and most of the permanent staff at the Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre are graduates of the program. “Graduates of the program are immersed in their culture and spend time learning from Elders and Nation leaders,” said Heather Paul, Executive Director of the Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre. “They are the ears and voice of their ancestors. They gain confidence and skills that make them an asset to their community and to any employer.

- Accessible Transportation: Getting to the cultural centre was one of the greatest challenges for youth who wanted to participate in the youth ambassador program and for Indigenous employees who work at the centre. Most staff live in community, up to a 2 hour drive away, with no public transportation and most without driver's license or vehicles. This issue was solved by providing transportation for youth ambassadors and for staff. The nations purchased four vans, trained and hired qualified drivers, and made transportation accessible.



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LOGAN SWAYZE

- Cooperative Carving Project: Covid presented challenges for indoor attractions like the Squamish Líl'wat Cultural Centre. “We had to bring our experiences outside and we started with a very large carving project,” explained Paul. “The municipality of Whistler supplied the cedar, and youth had the immersive summer experience of carving a pole alongside experienced cultural ambassadors and artists from their Nations. Part of Truth and reconciliation is about building bridges, respecting and listening to the voices of the original peoples of this land while creating opportunities for the voices of ancestors to be heard and the future of great grandchildren to be protected.” The finished piece will be installed as public art in the community of Whistler. The outdoor carving project was so successful that it will be continuing this year with visitors being invited to also participate in the carving process under the watchful eyes of master carvers, apprentices, and youth ambassadors. They will be carving a reconciliation canoe and visitors can not only carve, they can take their cedar shavings home with them as reminder of their own connection to the land.

Indigenous Employment

Ninety percent of the permanent staff at the Squamish Líl'wat Cultural Centre are Indigenous. One of the missions of the cultural centre is to create meaningful employment for Indigenous People – especially those from the Squamish and Líl'wat Nations.



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