



Ts'ídāne á' nezen? Youth for Dignity

Sógá Sénlá' - Acknowledgements

As the Ts'ídāne á' nezen?: Youth for Dignity program launches for 2022-2023, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) would like to share some highlights, stories, photos, and successes from the last three years.

We would like to acknowledge the **38** amazing youth for participating in the Youth for Dignity program at Watson Lake Secondary School (WLSS). A sincere thanks for their commitment to being positive changemakers and building a safer community through learning, advocacy and action. We honor these youth for their dedication to violence prevention, justice and community safety.

Sógá Sénlá' to Youth for Dignity Elders Mary Charlie, Rose Caesar, Linda McDonald, Mary Porter, and Dorothy Smith for sharing your teachings, stories, and knowledge with the youth. We would also like to thank LAWS leadership, Elders and knowledge keepers, youth, family members, school staff, community partners, and the project team who continue to support and grow the program.



*"Always remember how powerful
you are when you use your voice
in a good way"*

– Ann Maje Raider
(LAWS Executive Director)



"I am proud about Youth for Dignity because they helped me learn how much good we can do for the community and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Trans, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWGT2S+)."

– Youth for Dignity Participant

About Youth for Dignity

Ts'ídāne a' nezen?: Youth for Dignity is a youth empowerment project designed to build community safety and justice in the town of Watson Lake and the surrounding areas.

Youth for Dignity was initiated by LAWS and recognizes the need for active youth participation in addressing issues of gender-based violence. It aims to provide youth with the knowledge and skills needed to assume a leadership role in promoting safety and justice for women and girls, LGBTQ2S+, youth to youth and within the community at large.

Youth for Dignity connects youth with Kaska culture, practices and teachings and supports youth to learn ways of restoring and preserving dignity of those harmed by violence. Participants connect with each other and Elders while learning skills around responding to violence, advocacy and violence prevention.

The Youth for Dignity program is made up of many committed youth and supported by community members (e.g., peer youth, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, family members) and partners (LAWS leadership, Advocates, facilitators, school staff, and service providers).



"More happy spirit with the Elders, and their stories, it's a different pace that I like."

– Youth for Dignity Participant

Dena A' Nezen

Kaska culture, principles and protocols are foundational to Ts'ídāne a' nezen?: Youth for Dignity. Youth for Dignity is supported by Kaska Elders at all stages and is guided by Dena A' Nezen, Kaska law that is passed on through Kaska Dena matrilineal kinship lines. Its meaning is summarized as:

We are held in the arms of our land and taught about our place in Creation. We call this Dena A' Nezen, the law of our land.

We are taught to honour all of Creation, from the Sky above to the Earth below, to all that lies between, to all things large and small, and to all things seen and unseen.

The land speaks to us today as it has to our ancestors of long ago. It is the source of Dena A'Nezen, teaching us about who we are, and about our place in Creation. It holds the memory of our people and shows us the way to live in harmony with all of Creation.

The ways of the Liard Women's Society are the ways of Dena A'Nezen. Dena A'Nezen opposes violence against the land and against each other, calling on us to be mindful of our words and actions, to uphold fairness, care, and harmony in our relationships with all of Creation, and to know our place.

"I would join Youth for Dignity again because I could learn more and because I feel really connected with my culture"

– Youth for Dignity Participant



"Culture is healing - the participants are more comfortable in the circle, in prayers, in Elder teachings and cultural activities like hand games."

– Facilitator



"Kaska culture helps you learn how to accept yourself for who you are."

– Youth for Dignity Participant



"The big difference Youth for Dignity made in my life is that I communicate more, and help support my community and support others."

- Youth for Dignity Participant

Youth for Dignity Topics and Conversations

Below are some of the topics that youth are learning about in Youth for Dignity. We also acknowledge the knowledge and experience youth already possess – their love and concern for families and community members, their connection to the land, their desire to participate and the support offered by their friends and families to facilitate their participation.

- Dignity & resistance
- Kaska culture, teachings & language
- Gender & sexuality
- Responding to current issues & needs
- Creating campaigns & raising awareness
- Empathy
- Team building
- Drumming
- Honouring & remembering MMIWGT2S+
- Standing up for oneself & having a voice
- Public speaking
- Sexualized violence against women & LGBTQ2S+
- Response-based practice
- Positive & negative social responses
- Structural oppression & colonial power structures
- Victim blaming
- Consent



"I feel like Youth for Dignity has made me more aware, not only of violence but also of people and their feelings, opinions, and actions."

- Youth for Dignity Participant



"I am more able to accept myself and support my community."

- Youth for Dignity Participant



"I've learned that everyone should care about what's happening to our women."

- Youth for Dignity Participant



"The unveiling with staff and students of the mural and putting up Stop Rape signs were highlights."

- Youth for Dignity Participant



"They are going to create a brighter and more equitable future with their fight for social justice"

- Community Member

The Story of Change

Youth for Dignity includes an evaluation so we can understand the impact of the program, the impact Youth are having in their community, as well as ways we can continue to improve and grow the program. We do so through surveys, interviews and sharing circles each year with youth, Elders, facilitators, and partners. Beringia Community Planning is supporting the evaluation and research with LAWS leadership and guidance.

71%

of participants feel that they understand more about the issues and causes of violence against women and girls and they are more involved in campaigns to end gender-based violence

82%

of Kaska and non-Kaska participants believe that Youth for Dignity has helped them feel more connected to Kaska culture

98%

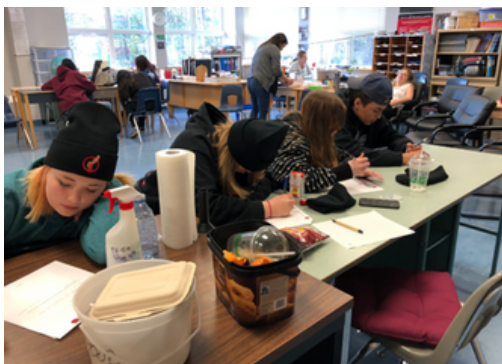
of community members said youth do an excellent job involving the community in conversations on violence, building community solidarity, raising awareness

94%

of community members see youth as leaders of positive change

100%

of community members surveyed stated that they are proud of youth involved in Youth for Dignity



"I have learned about the different issues facing Indigenous women and our community."

- Youth for Dignity Participant



"I am more respectful to everyone because I don't know their back story."

- Youth for Dignity Participant



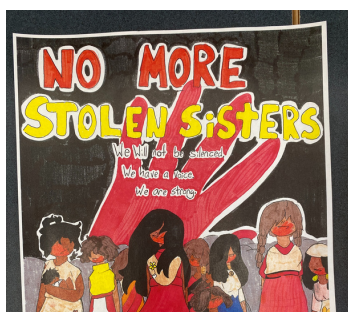
"Youth for Dignity helped me to speak up and have confidence in communicating in a group/circle."

- Youth for Dignity Participant

"I was so amazed to see our youth speak and talk to the community. It was my first time seeing that, it made me happy."

– Community Member

Celebrating Our Youth



Over the past few years, Youth for Dignity participants have led and supported many different campaigns and initiatives to raise awareness and to show their support for those harmed by violence.

- **May 5th Community Events:** On May 5th youth have held a community event for the National Day of Awareness for MMIWGT2S+. Roughly 100+ community members have attended this event. During the pandemic, youth adapted the campaign to be online through social media.
- **Red Dress:** As part of the December 6th, 2019 vigil, students and Elders created a model of a red dress to honor MMIWGT2S+. In May 2022, Youth for Dignity participants created a red shawl with beaded squares to be added to the red dress display. The shawl and the dress are displayed in the lobby of WLSS along with a plaque with information on the initiative.
- **Information Cards, Posters, and Decals:** The students researched and designed information cards with statistics to give away to community members attending vigils and marches. They also made posters and designed a decal to help raise awareness in the school and throughout the community.
- **Video:** LAWS worked with an Indigenous filmmaker who collaborated with youth to create a Youth for Dignity video to use for program promotions and awareness raising. Video link: <https://vimeo.com/595416371/563e6fb809>
- **Beading & Button Making:** Throughout the Youth for Dignity workshops, beading and button making with Elders and facilitators was a key activity to help raise awareness of gender-based violence and MMIWGT2S+. Youth for Dignity participants made buttons to distribute to community members at their campaigns and events.
- **Drumming:** Knowledge keepers and community members joined Youth for Dignity to teach youth how to make a drum, along with sharing teachings about drumming. Many expressed how proud they felt drumming. Youth play their drums at marches, vigils, and awareness raising events.
- **Stop Rape Campaign:** Youth worked with community anti-violence Advocates to advocate for space in the sign-post forest that is dedicated to Youth for Dignity campaigns. Youth were successful and organized an event to hang a mural and 'Stop Rape' signs on their dedicated posts.

“Dignity is respecting people, and their reputations. And the values of a person.”

– Youth for Dignity Participant

Stay tuned!

We look forward to continuing to support our youth in their work to build a safer and more responsive community. We encourage all community members and partners to come out and show your support at upcoming Youth for Dignity youth-led campaigns and activities in Watson Lake. Stay tuned through LAWS newsletters for future Youth for Dignity events and campaigns.

Upcoming events and activities that may be of interest include:

- **Community Event:** In May 2023, the Youth for Dignity team typically holds a community event for the National Day of Awareness to honour MMIWG2S+



“Respect all people, no matter who they are. Having respect for each other.”

- Youth for Dignity Participant



“Being in Youth for Dignity has taught me ways to cope with trauma and support others.”

- Youth for Dignity Participant



“Youth for Dignity has made a difference by allowing me to understand more about my heritage”

- Youth for Dignity Participant

Thank you to our partners and funders for your ongoing support:



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