



# Sasamans Society

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## *2022/23 AGM Report*

Lori Bull, Executive Director



## Our History

Our name was derived from community engagement discussions in 2009/10 with leaders and frontline workers. Our logo was created by the late Mulidzas *Curtis Wilson*, of the Wei Wai Kum Nation. The services Sasamans provides came from our community engagement sessions along with the Voices of Our Elders I & II. These were facilitated over a period of two years.

## Vision Statement

Sasamans Society's **Vision** is *Strengthening “our children” and families in a community-driven and culturally appropriate manner.* In the Kwak'wala language, Sasamans means "our children"; the society's name reflects our intention to listen, acknowledge and honour the voices of the communities that we serve. Sasamans Society is supported and guided by our Board of Directors (BOD), comprised of community representatives from our partnering First Nation Bands and Indigenous Urban agencies.

## Our Mission

For the well-being of our children & families, we are committed to providing support, and work collectively based on a holistic model from a community-driven process.

In pursuit of our Vision, Sasamans Society will respectfully:

- Appreciate and nurture the strengths and capacities of our people;
- Communicate and engage, openly and on an ongoing basis;
- Honour our traditions, customs and beliefs;
- Involve the voices of our children and wisdom of our Elders;
- Learn from one another;
- Dedicate ourselves to achieving our short and long-term goals.

## Beliefs and Values

- Every child needs someone to believe in them.
- Children and families have the right to be heard.
- All families do the best with what they have.
- Every child and their families have gifts and strengths.
- Every child deserves to be loved.
- Parents must start taking responsibility.
- Families must start taking responsibility.
- Children and their families need someone to trust.
- Children are our reason for living.
- Children are sacred.
- Children need a safe loving environment.
- Children have to be safe.
- Children belong with their family.
- Children have the right to be children.
- Children have the right to be respected.
- We are here to hold a sacred space for our children and families.

## Message from the Executive Director

Lori Bull, B.S.W., M.S.W., R.S.W.

Executive Director

*I would like to respectfully acknowledge that the offices of Sasamans Society are located on the unceded traditional territories of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples and the northern Coast Salish peoples, these are the Kwakiutl First Nation, We Wai Kai Nation, Wei Wai Kum First Nation, Homalco First Nation and K'omoks First Nation. I am grateful to live, work and play in the beautiful lands of my ancestors.*

It is my pleasure to be sharing another year of our work and programming at Sasamans throughout this report. I would like to acknowledge our staff and our board members and offer my sincerest gratitude for their ongoing commitment to our work, our sasam (children), our youth, our families and our Elders. Without their hard work and commitment Sasamans would not be where we are today. In December 2022, I celebrated my 10<sup>th</sup> year with Sasamans Society. I came to Sasamans after working in Alert Bay as a delegated social worker. Pauline Janyst (Sasamans form ED) brought me on to develop our first outreach program, the *Aboriginal Outreach Family Navigator* program. Since then, Sasamans Society has created many more programs that have kept us very busy in the community for 10 years.

In 2022 we received funding from the *Strathcona Regional District* (SRD) for a *Justice Support Worker*, while this program was successful, it was unfortunate that the funding was not renewed beyond January 31, 2023. We applied for a *Community Gaming Grant* through the BC Provincial government and received \$50,000, we did not receive the full asking amount however, it was enough to keep the program going for a while longer plus we were permitted to exhaust the surplus from the SRD funding. We have since restructured this program to focus specifically on Indigenous youth living in homelessness, at risk of being homeless and involved in the youth criminal justice system.

The 2022/23 year was a welcome change to recent previous years with the pandemic keeping everyone at home. We were able to travel a bit more and be in community more and one of the highlights for me was traveling to my home community of Alert Bay with Rachel Cain (Cultural Connections Worker) and Tasleem Mall (Mamalilikulla First Nation Designated Band Representative) to meet with some of our Mamalilikulla Elders. I was mostly there as a liaison between Sasamans Society/MFN DBR and my Aunties, the purpose of this trip was to do some cultural planning and find cultural connections for MFN children in care.

In November of 2022, four Sasamans Society staff attended the *Our Children Our Way – A National Forum for Indigenous Child & Family Well-Being* at the Vancouver Convention Centre. This forum brought together people from across the country to share best practices on Indigenous children & families, community wellness and preventative services, this forum was about honouring our children and acknowledging our own ways of caring for our own children and keeping our families and children safe in our own ways. There were many notable trailblazers of

the Indigenous child welfare community including Cindy Blackstock (Keynote Speaker), Mary Teegee and Deb Foxcroft but everyone who was in attendance either as delegates or speakers were all there because we are all invested in the health and welfare of our children and families. We are all working towards reform of the child welfare system while also protecting and caring for our children in our own way, this gathering brought together generations of traditional knowledge keepers but also western educational knowledge and expertise.

Immediately following the *Our Children Our Way* forum, I attended the *Jurisdiction Over Our Children: BC All Chiefs Meeting on Children and Families*, also in Vancouver. The focus of this meeting was supporting First Nations in their pursuit of gaining jurisdiction over their children through the recently implemented federal legislation, *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*. This meeting included First Nations leadership from all over BC as well as representatives from the BC Provincial Government and Indigenous Services Canada.

In March of 2022 I also attended *Gathering Wisdom XII* hosted by the *First Nations Health Council* in Vancouver, the work at this event was to present and seek endorsement (or veto) of the *10-Year Strategy on the Social Determinants of Health*, the wellness strategy included Healing approaches, Cultural infrastructure, Nation-based governance, and Sustainable funding with 7 Directives being: 1) Community driven, Nation-based 2) Increase FN decision making and control 3) Improve services 4) Foster meaningful collaboration and partnership 5) Develop human and economic capacity 6) Be without prejudice to FN interests 7) Function at a high operational standard. This was a very interesting gathering with a lot of questions and great discussions that brought on more questions about what the 10-year strategy will look like for our people. At the end of the gathering the final vote was YES in support of the 10-year strategy. It was also acknowledged that it has been 10 years since the transfer of health services from federal government to FNHA and much has happened in the last 10 years. During the event, FNHA honoured Dr. Shannon McDonald for her work with FNHA. There was an honouring of Indigenous youth, and an honouring of the first graduates of the Centre for Indigenous Health Leadership. FN political leaders, BC provincial and federal government leaders attended this meeting as well.

Thank you to everyone for your continued support of Sasamans Society, our staff, and our programs! We do this work because we believe in what we do but we can't do it without YOU! 'Gílakas'la!

## **2022/2023 Sasamans Society Programs and Services:**

- Indigenous Outreach Family Navigator (Campbell River, Courtenay, Port Hardy)
- Indigenous Youth Navigator (Campbell River, Courtenay, Port Hardy)
- Cultural Connections (Campbell River)
- Indigenous Parenting Support Worker (Campbell River, Courtenay)
- Designated Band Representative – Mamalilikulla First Nation
- Indigenous Elders Outreach Navigator/Aboriginal Harmony Circle of Elders
- Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator
- Justice Support Worker

### **Indigenous Outreach Family Navigator**

The purpose of the *Indigenous Outreach Family Navigator* (IOFN) program is to enhance service provision, provide advocacy, decrease children in care through preventative support services, and improve accountability through a family-centered approach that focuses on meeting the needs of Indigenous children and families.

The IOFN provides support and guidance to Indigenous families who are at risk of becoming involved with the *Ministry of Children and Family Development* (MCFD) or a *Delegated Aboriginal Agency* (DAA) as well as providing assistance to families whose children or grandchildren are in the care of MCFD or a DAA. The IOFN acts as a *navigator* for families to assist them in understanding the child welfare system as well as accessing various resources and support services (i.e. legal services, counselling services, parenting support services, drug and alcohol treatment services and supports etc.).

### **Indigenous Youth Navigator**

The purpose of the *Indigenous Youth Navigator* (IYN) program is to enhance service provision, provide advocacy, and to ensure that youth in care are made aware of the services available to them while in care and when they age out of care. Additionally, this program aims to decrease the numbers of Indigenous youth in care through preventative support services and improve accountability through a youth centred approach that focuses on meeting the needs of the youth. This program works with Indigenous youth aged 13 – 26 years.

The IYN assists Indigenous youth in understanding and accessing various youth support services and resources that may be available to them as well as participating in planning processes with youth and their social workers on Youth Agreements while also providing support and guidance to youth who are:

- In government care;
- On probation;
- Transitioning out of government care or;
- Aging out of government care.

## **Cultural Connections Program**

The purpose of the *Cultural Connections* program is to create Cultural Plans for children in care and to assist MCFD social workers in developing and implementing appropriate re-unification plans and identifying children for whom a return to family or community may be appropriate. Sasamans Society has one FT Cultural Connections Worker (CCW); this position is based out of Campbell River and works in partnership with various First Nations (provincially and nationwide), MCFD and community agencies including Laichwiltach Family Life Society. This program has at times required the CCW to travel to various Indigenous communities.

## **Indigenous Parenting Support Worker**

The *Indigenous Parenting Support Worker* (APSW) program was initiated in January of 2018. The purpose of the APSW is to provide essential and preventative support services to families identified as being in need of interventions and whose children are in government care or at high risk of removal. The APSW works very closely with our *Indigenous Outreach Family Navigators*. While these positions work closely together, they hold very different roles. The APSW provides intensive support through visits to the family's home while working collaboratively with the family to develop goals and reducing risks identified by MCFD. The worker walks alongside parents in their efforts to accomplish the goals set out by MCFD, they provide encouragement, parenting knowledge and resources with the objective of building strong and healthy families.

## **Designated Band Representative - Mamalilikulla First Nation (MFN)**

Sasamans Society and Mamalilikulla First Nation has been working in partnership since the fall of 2019 to provide *Designated Band Representative* (DBR) services for MFN children in care; The purpose of the DBR Program is to work with MFN families living on and off reserve to ensure their children in care remain connected to family, community and culture through planning, advocacy and mediation support. The goal to achieve successful outcomes through a collaborative approach between MFN and provincial child welfare agencies is paramount, while strengthening MFN's capacity building in exercising their inherent rights to be involved in all matters involving their children in care.

## **Indigenous Elders Navigator**

The *Indigenous Elders Navigator* (IEN) works with elders from both on and off reserve; the IEN assists elders in navigating the health care system and supporting them when attending medical appointments, assisting in finding housing, tax preparation and budgeting and supporting elders in whatever capacity they require. The Elders Navigator also meets with elders in Courtenay once a week. In pre-Covid times the IEN has spent a lot of time with the elders including attending Elders conferences that takes place in various communities each year.

The Elders Navigator program has been a valuable asset to many agencies, committees, schools and long-term care facilities in the community as they access the Elders support, love and

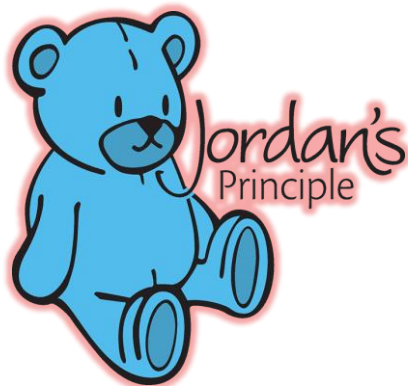
guidance. In previous years we had some amazing opportunities to bring Sasamans Society staff and Elders together to learn and grow from our knowledge keepers.

### **Aboriginal Harmony Circle of Elders**

The *Aboriginal Harmony Circle of Elders* (AHCE) was established in 2013/14 to provide support and guidance to Sasamans Society staff, local First Nations organizations, youth, families at risk, and other agencies including MCFD, John Howard Society, Foundry and Campbell River Family Services. The AHCE plays an active role in the community as they assist in facilitating workshops, giving opening and closing prayers and welcoming guests to the territory when attending meetings and workshops. The AHCE has participated in various training sessions and healing workshops throughout the years organized by Sasamans Society Elders Navigator, this training has provided them with the skills and confidence to work in community.

### **Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator**

This program was launched in Campbell River in February 2021, *Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator* objective is to provide knowledgeable and culturally safe support to First Nations



children/youth, parents and guardians in accessing the full range of federal and provincial health, education and social programs and services that will meet their needs. Jordan's Principle is a child-centred/child-first principle and applies equally to all First Nations children living on reserve or living off reserve and addresses the needs of First Nations children by ensuring there are no gaps in government services for them. This program may address but is not limited to gaps in mental health, special education, dental, physical therapy, speech therapy, medical equipment and physiotherapy.

### **Justice Support Worker**

In January of 2022 we responded to a Request for Proposals for a *Justice Support Worker*, the funding came through the *Strathcona Regional District* (SRD), the contract timeline was one year ending January 31, 2023. We were excited to learn that Sasamans Society was the successful applicant for this program to be delivered in Campbell River. The purpose of the *Justice Support Worker* program is to support people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness access various services that aim to address the causes of criminality and homelessness. In particular, the Justice Support Worker will identify opportunities and provide information/resources when it comes to addictions and mental health treatment options. This program is a much-needed program in our community and is the first program that Sasamans delivers that is not Indigenous specific.

The intention of this position is to help bridge the ever-widening gap between the justice system, the healthcare system and social services by having a trained professional regularly attend court



in-person and be available as a resource to assist Judges, Crown Counsel, Defence lawyers, Probation Officers and Restorative Justice to make more informed decisions when it comes to the availability of recovery services, detox treatment, counselling opportunities and housing programs.

The contract for this program ended on January 31, 2023, the timeline to deliver this program was one year, unfortunately we were unable to renew the contract to continue the funding. The SRD allowed us to carry over any unused funds until the funds ran out. We applied for a BC Gaming Grant to continue the program, we were successful in securing \$50,000 for one year which is less than we asked for, however we can continue this program with some adjustments.

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## **STAFF PROGRAM REPORTS**

### **Campbell River Indigenous Outreach Family Navigator (IOFN)**

#### **2022/23 Program Update**

#### **Jazmine McCrimmon-Cook**

A focus while stepping into this role has been relationship building. IOFN met with various local organizations and nations to discuss & learn about what is accessible for the children and families that they are supporting. Through this, IOFN has collaborated with other professionals to support families with child welfare, housing, addictions, and health/wellness & culture. Further, IOFN has participated in training to learn about the systems involved & advocate for family's rights in the child welfare system such as "The Act respecting Inuit, Metis and Indigenous Children, Family and Youth" & "The Child, Family and Community Service Act". A barrier that was noticed was the lack of referrals from MCFD to the program. IOFN attended the Children & Youth offices to meet the MCFD teams, introduce self & the program to discuss the importance of cultural safety & collaboration for the Indigenous families they are supporting. Following this, IOFN received various referrals from MCFD and has built a working relationship with MCFD.

IOFN completed training for the situation table in December and began participating in January. The purpose of the situation table is to support individuals to prevent harm to self & community. Various frontline professionals sit at this table and work together to provide wrap around care for escalating individuals so that they are supported.

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### **Port Hardy Indigenous Outreach Family Navigator/Indigenous Youth Navigator**

#### **2022/23 Program Update**

#### **Jane Watts-Ellens**

During this past year, the IFN/IYN attended several webinars, training sessions online, workshops, an amazing retreat & Conference held on Quadra Island and in Vancouver. All of which focused on the professional development of the work we've undertaken to best support workers in the roles of our jobs. The workshops were informative, helpful, and offered great tools for frontline workers

to learn, understand and navigate the many barriers afflicting our clients with trauma, abuse, addictions, lack of connection to our culture, lands, and families. Each of the online sessions/webinars/in person imparted important wisdom for self care practices and to remind us of the many pitfalls we can be exposed to via vicarious trauma.

It was amazing to witness many families become reunited with their children via more access, overnight visits and in some cases full return to the parents with safety plans. In addition, a few under 54.01 agreements, adoption, and Extended Family plan care options. The IFN/IYN has reconnected with the Case Manager from GNN health family services commenced collaborative meetings for shared files. The community received a new resource, “A Group home”, which has 2 indigenous children from GNN. The start of a new school year always affords the IYN/IFN the opportunity to reconnect with other agencies as planned to collaborate and stay connected for mutual client needs.

Sadly, our community is in mass grief for the many losses suffered in this community, leaving everyone, old and the young, to grieve and mourn. Many have resorted to drinking, engaging in high-risk behaviour, to numb out and escape their heartache. It’s been very difficult to see so many struggling with their losses and cope with their sorrow. Many folks are low-income earners, and struggle to find affordable housing, and suffer the affects of intergenerational traumas passed down the line.

Port Hardy and the Tri-port area could benefit from a low-income subsidized housing program and more resources which could aid in helping individuals and families to feel safe and comfortable with addressing their burdens, which are both organic and inorganic in nature. In addition to the losses and increase in substance misuse, there has been many staffing changes impacting programs available to community members. Sacred Wolf, Gwa’Sala – Nakwax’da’xw Health and Family Services, North Island Building Blocks, Native Court Worker, Mental Health, GNN elementary and Port Hardy High School, just to name a few.

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## **Campbell River Indigenous Youth Navigator**

### **2022/23 Program Update**

**Amanda Turner**

*Amanda was hired to fill a maternity leave position and worked in this role from October 2022 until May 2023 when she moved into another program within Sasamans Society. The following report reflects her 7 months as Indigenous Youth Navigator for Campbell River.*

Sasamans Society and John Howard made 150+ turkey dinners for youth and their families in our community. This event happened not long after I started in my role at Sasamans, and it was a great way for me to connect to new clients, staff, and service providers in the community.

Nicole Kitts, Indigenous Outreach Elders Navigator, and I had both heard our youth and elders tell us “We want to connect in person and have time together.” This had been lost, to an extent, over

years of Covid. We organised weekly cultural gatherings where an elder taught the youth through hands on activities. This created a safe space to tell stories, share traditional knowledge, language and have gifts passed on to the next generation. The Youth and Elders uplifted each other when faced with challenges and to celebrate successes and future goals. This program allowed me to connect over 40% of my client list to elders, this would not have been possible without this weekly offering.

In February of last year, I asked Family Services, Robron Centre and SARP to team with me to facilitate “Let’s be Frank” Healthy Relationships for Humans. The purpose of this group was to connect youth to service workers in the community, provide connection and educate in a fun and informal way. I advocated to ensure this group was run in a culturally safe and trauma informed manner. We met for one hour once a week. This time was key to building trust and supported a foundation in connecting with my current clients and other youth many of whom later were referred to my program during times of crisis.

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### **Campbell River Youth in Care Network Monica Glendale**

The Youth in Care Network is a group made up of youth in and from care, ages 14-24, whose personal goals include:

- getting out of the house
- making friends, and
- participating in activities they may not be able to do otherwise.

This is the 5th year of Sasamans Society holding the role of host for the Campbell River Youth in Care Network. In August 2022, the coordinator went on a one-year maternity leave and put a hold on all CR Youth in Care Funding.

This year we engaged with **150 young people** alongside **3 adult supports**.

- Over 130 Easter community dinners prepared for and delivered to youth in care and households.
- Celebrating BC Child and Youth in Care Week
  - 2 In-Person Activities
  - 2 Virtual Activities
- Federation Family Summer Celebration
- Social Media engagement posts
- One on One Youth supports

The following is a link for a video we created for *BC Child and Youth in Care Week 2022* with uplifting messages to all children and youth who currently live or have lived in the government systems.

Created in part of the Campbell River Youth in Care Networks celebration for BC Child and Youth In Care Week 2022.



**BECAUSE YOU MATTER!**

*BC Child and Youth in Care Week 2022* <https://youtu.be/AZvKd21nw5I?si=N2fUtnyJK3VYN18Q>

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**Courtenay/Comox Indigenous Family & Youth Navigator  
2022/23 Program Update  
Kia Everson**

### **Indigenous Family Outreach Navigator**

Families on the Indigenous Family Navigator case load have made some impressive steps with the help and support of Sasamans Society. Through relationship building and resource sharing, families have accessed numerous community resources such as the Christmas Hamper Program, Santa's Workshop, Comox Valley Transition Society, Pacific Therapy, Courtenay Rec programs, recovery centres, and Wachiay's many programs like Hummingbirds, Eagle & Bears, Jordan's Principle, Legal Advocacy, and the free tax clinic. Families have worked towards personal and ministry goals and have increased visitation/access with their kiddos resulting in their active investigation files being closed and are utilizing their family service files for support. A small few have found and kept housing and are looking forward to future options for post-secondary and upgrading. A big win for this year is the families that have reflected on their past and current behaviors, and are actively trying to change reactionary responses and create personal toolkits for safety and regulation.

There has been an increase in challenges this year for Indigenous families in Courtenay/Comox. All of which are out of service providers' control and have resulted in increased MCFD and RCMP involvement and incidents. Increased mental health and substance use crisis, lack of financial stability, and intergenerational trauma is the perfect recipe for these families to be torn apart. Not to mention the over-capacity of childcare, housing, and many low barrier services. Even when services are available or have become available, some families are too overwhelmed with their circumstances to access them, including accessing the Indigenous Family Navigator. Another

stressor is when social workers transfer family files to another worker, this creates layers of distrust and confusion for families. A challenge for this program is the lack of clarity clients have when it comes to this role, many assume Sasamans can be a personal driver, lawyer and assistant, and this is where boundaries and explanations of the job come in. We can walk alongside, however cannot do it all.

### **Indigenous Outreach Youth Navigator**

There have been many successes for the Indigenous youth in the Courtenay and Comox area in this past year. This includes goal planning and working towards fulfilling those goals, participating in culture, youth gaining and sustaining employment, budgeting, doing taxes, finding housing, and studying for their driver's license. Many youths have found safety and solace in accessing Foundry for their mental health and medical needs. Six youths have attended and shared their stories and experiences in Gukwa sa wagalus Rainbow House discussions, on how Indigenous queer and 2 spirit youth can feel safest in group housing. Several youths have been returned to the care of their families after being placed with ministry and these youths are doing well in their studies, have made friends and no longer skip school. Every single youth within the Indigenous Youth Navigator case load who are attending school are moving on to the next grade level and all have made leaps and bounds in their capacity to trust and share with the Indigenous Youth Navigator which is something never to be taken for granted.

That being said, Indigenous youth in the Courtenay and Comox area have been met with tremendous stressors; several youth have been placed in the care of ministry and there has been an increase in risk taking behavior such as skipping school, youth pregnancy, mental health, and substance use relapses, not taking medications, going MIA, and surrounding themselves with dangerous people. Despite efforts of resource scaffolding, some youth have turned down opportunities to put themselves in a safer situation. Turning down supportive recovery or moving into housing for families escaping violence. Another issue has been accessing timely and effective mental health support and medical facilities due to the over-capacity within these resources. A large handful of youth have also been met with barriers due to not having their "Indian status." Many of the time, they do not have access to necessary genealogical information and therefore cannot access the necessary documentation to prove ancestral Indigeneity to acquire a status card/number. Without this card, they are unable to be eligible for countless resources that would be beneficial to them. Lastly, a significant challenge for these youth is not being able to connect, properly communicate or be heard by family and loved ones. Parent/youth conflict is a massive risk factor in these youth in staying well and safe versus choosing self-destructive avenues to garner love, attention, and support.

**Cultural Connections Program**  
**2022/23 Program Update**  
**Rachel Cain**

The Cultural Connections Worker (CCW) aims to provide culturally centered services to ensure Indigenous children and youth form and maintain connections to their communities, extended families and traditional cultures while in care and in their permanency placements. The program works closely alongside MCFD child protection workers, Nation representatives, caregivers and other community professionals to develop unique Cultural Safety Agreements for children and youth in care. These Agreements help to guide foster caregivers, extended family and adoptive parents in building up their child's cultural identity through information sharing and collaboration.

Between 2022 and 2023, the impacts of COVID were less so and as a result, community cultural programming and in-person services resumed. Although online cultural sharing has been beneficial to community members, especially those who are off-reserve, spending face-to-face time in community is an important way to support our families. In person engagement allows the CCW to spend more time developing relationships within community which leads to a stronger knowledge base and, ultimately, better outcomes for our clients. This in person engagement includes initiating contact between children and their traditional communities and utilizing existing knowledge of local families to identify community or family placements. The program has seen many successful outcomes for our children and youth this past year.

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**Indigenous Parenting Support Worker**  
**2022/23 Program Update**  
**Marisa Anthony & Lavina Boyd – Campbell River**

*During 2022-2023 year Marisa moved from Indigenous Parenting Support Worker program to the Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator role and Lavina joined our Sasamans team as the new Indigenous Parenting Support Worker. The following report reflects a synopsis of the highlights of the year.*

Campbell River Indigenous Parenting Support Worker (IPSW) recognizes the Campbell River Situation Table to be an excellent community resource, the Situation Table is comprised of a group of community professionals who have come together to provide collaborative support to highly vulnerable people in Campbell River. The IPSW has been able to refer clients who are at elevated risk to the Situation Table and as a result they have been able to access detox beds, housing, counselling, and other community support within days, rather than spending months on waitlists. The implementation of the Campbell River Situation Table is an incredible new resource for all service providers working with clients in need of more intensive intervention services.

The IPSW also had the opportunity to attend several training opportunities during the year including, *Recognizing Abuse and Neglect, Bill-C92- An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* , and *Designated Band Representative Training*, which were hosted by *Indigenous Perspectives Society*. IPSW also attended *Gathering Our Medicine* training,

which focused on returning to Indigenous ways of knowing and being as a way to uplift children, youth, and families we work with.

The CR IPSW was able to host a cultural circle at Sasamans for a family, their supports, and MCFD led by a cultural mentor. The culturally-led circle allowed the family a safe space to express their thoughts and feelings during the meeting and reported they finally felt heard this is one step towards building a trusting working relationship with MCFD workers involved with Indigenous families.

CR IPSW also reports families have participated in local workshops such as *Grief & Loss* and *Abandonment & Shame*. A few families are open to family treatment to address grief & loss and learn new coping mechanisms, unfortunately there are lengthy waitlists for family treatment centres. Families are very interested in cultural support, language learning support, traditional learning support and most of the families are seeking out traditional ways to heal, traditions and culture learning, and are drawn to cultural and traditional activities in community.

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### **Indigenous Parenting Support Worker**

#### **2022/23 Program Update**

#### **Cecilia Plecas – Courtenay**

There have been definite successes and challenges during this past year. To begin, there was a tremendous amount of education and training provided during the year, some of the training included the *Circle of Security Program* training (COSP), *The Why, What, and How of Navigating Difficult Conversations*, and a multitude of free webinars that I was able to access. It was great to use these new skills with the families I work with in my role as the Indigenous Parenting Support Worker, (IPSW). Other learning opportunities included *Family Support Worker Training*, *Bill C-92* and *Understanding Abuse and Neglect* through the Indigenous Perspectives Society (IPS). As well the IPSW was able to complete the FASD project course through Douglas College.

These trainings were valuable to understand the historic impact and experiences Indigenous people have endured with the child welfare system. What stands out for me is the valuable experience of the COSP training and the learning and healing that was initiated with the six families who completed it last year. What was particularly valuable for the families that engaged with the COSP process is the demonstration of their commitment to their growth as parents with their MCFD workers.

It was also valuable for the IPSW to take part in the online version of the *BC Aboriginal Childcare Societies* conference with presenters participating from all over BC. Some of the discussions included decolonizing the school system and decolonization of foods, also, it was great to hear of how there are different methods to connecting to culture.

During the year, I was able to participate in different meetings in the Comox Valley such as the Child and Youth Matter and the Early Years Council meetings which helped me to set up a range of contacts for my families. The Early Years Council meeting is a bi-monthly collective of many

different early year's educators which also gives me the opportunity to build connections within the school district as well as daycare providers.

It is also important to acknowledge the successes within the families I have worked with over the year including an element of breaking cycles of Intimate Partner Violence or IPV. Also worth noting was the opening of new transition housing in March of 2023 which has forty plus units for women and children fleeing violence. Throughout the year I worked with families in closing their MCFD files while keeping Indigenous children out of ministry care.

Alongside these great achievements there were many challenges. A main concern was lack of communication with families, at times there would be no contact for many months but then I would receive a message requiring my help. Also, for some families the inflation made it difficult to afford basic necessities, I had to support families in accessing the local foodbanks which is difficult for families to access if they have no transportation. Another challenge has been the lack of affordable housing within the Comox Valley and beyond, unfortunately, some families have had to resort to living in RV parks for housing. Although there were challenges over the course of this year there were some celebrations as well. It was a year filled with networking, learning, and connection to families. It was also filled with positive supports for some families who needed it. Looking to the next year is an exciting time of positivity that there are going to be better times and challenging ones for many.

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## **Designated Band Representative for the Mamalilikulla First Nation 2022/23 Program Update Tasleem Mall**

Sasamans Society continues to provide support to the Mamalilikulla First Nation in maintaining the Designated Band Representative (DBR) position within the agency, providing ongoing mentorship, peer support and professional development to the DBR over the past four years. This arrangement has proven to be a successful one and continues increased growth for the Nation in asserting their inherent right to be involved in any matters related to the protection, connection and overall involvement with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

As such, DBR continues to work with parents and MCFD child protection workers to minimize traumatic and stressful encounters with the child protection process and continues to support parents to arrange access with their children, advocate and include more meaningful supports into their family plans and help to ensure that parent's voices are heard in court processes. Additionally, helping to ensure that all parents have access to legal advice and legal representation in the court processes, has lent to more clarity on child protection concerns and has allowed the parents to have a stronger voice in addressing the challenges and communicating their position. This includes involvement of the DBR in negotiating terms of supervision and hosting Family Case Planning Conferences prior to court applications.



DBR furthers Mamalilikulla First Nation's work with MCFD in strengthening our agreement with the province under the *Child, Family, and Community Services Act* (CFCSA); the legally binding legislation under which the MCFD operates in the court system. Under this act, the Mamalilikulla First Nation entered into a Section 92.1 Agreement in 2018, which outlines the various ways in which MFN and MCFD are to forge a working relationship regarding child protection matters. DBR continues to work with MCFD towards strengthening this agreement. For example, asking for mandatory transfer meetings between social workers when workers change; when family files are being transferred between MCFD departments, between the intake and investigation team to an ongoing Family Services team; or when transferring to MCFD in other communities. This allows the proper transfer of information to be shared transparently and in respect for the work that prior parties have undertaken to build the working relationship. As well as, providing the new team and new child protection worker with the scope of involvement in keeping with Section 92.1 Agreements, in understanding the investment that Mamalilikulla makes toward the families in walking beside them through their involvement with the Ministry and ensuring that the new social worker continues to include Mamalilikulla in all matters regarding Nation members and children.

In efforts to uphold 2020 Federal legislation: *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, which provides Indigenous communities with a pathway to apply their inherent jurisdiction over the care of their own children and families, and which follows their own traditional laws and values, the Mamalilikulla First Nation and Designated Band Representative, have been provided with increased opportunity to take the lead in family finding efforts and making first contact with relatives and members of the community in discussions about long-term care arrangements within community. This ultimately is a preventative measure to long-term MCFD and foster care placements for our children. Mamalilikulla then informs MCFD of relatives of the children who are willing and wanting to engage in MCFD assessments toward permanent custody arrangements and walks beside the family throughout the process.

Mamalilikulla DBR has collaborated with Sasamans Society's Cultural Connections social worker and has been able to identify community members in a wider scope search for ancestral connection to find potential forever homes for our children before they enter the Continuing Custody of MCFD. This is a significant step towards the recognition of Mamalilikulla First Nation's inherent right to exercise jurisdiction over matters relating to our children and families.

The Mamalilikulla First Nation has been involved in a number of processes that supported the transfer of custody of children from the temporary care of MCFD to the children's relatives. These processes involved many family circles and collaborative meetings, conversations with all parties, including legal supports, and robust wholistic planning to ensure that the transition is timely, practical matters such as assessments are well communicated and completed, and that financial supports are in place for start up costs, and that long-term contracts are understood. Being involved as a Nation in a number of planning and decision-making opportunities has strengthened the working relationship between MCFD and Mamalilikulla, as well as, strengthening the relationship between Mamalilikulla, the children and their family.

An important area of growth and success of the Designated Band Representative role supported by Sasamans Society is the increased involvement with the Elders program at Sasamans which has supported the Mamalilikulla First Nation to help connect families and children, as well as, providing support from Elders to share their wisdom and insight in Family Group Conferences where permanency options are discussed. Elders participation in supporting children in care to connect with their family, identity as a Mamalilikulla Nation member and community are significant highlights of this last year.

Mamalilikulla First Nation looks forward to continuing to include our Elders in this work with families and to increase opportunities for Elders to share their knowledge and guide our work.

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**Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator  
2022/23 Program Update  
Marisa Anthony**

The Jordan's Principle Service Coordination position came into effect in early February of 2021, with a change in Service Coordinator occurring in October 2022. From October 2022-March 2023, there were many successes in the program. The new Service Coordinator was able to support 98 children and youth to apply for Jordan's Principle funding. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) has been open to all types of creative supports that ensure the well-being of Indigenous children, including recreational programs, cultural mentorship, land-based healing programs, food and clothing support, and educational technology. If there is a recommendation letter attached that clearly articulates the need/benefits of a support, ISC will generally approve the request. ISC BC region has also been re-reviewing and approving prior denials for orthodontics, rather than sending them to an appeals committee. This has been a great relief to families, as orthodontics is now being recognized as an integral part of a child's physical and mental well-being. The Service Coordinator also collaborated with School District 72 to apply for group funding to hire a full-time Speech and Language Pathologist for Cedar School. Funding was approved and SD72 is now able to provide accessible, in-school speech therapy to 15 Indigenous students who struggle to access private speech therapy outside of school.



Unfortunately, there have also been significant challenges during this fiscal year. Wait times for decisions have steadily increased due to the volume of requests being processed within the BC region. For requests marked as time sensitive, it can take 1-2 months or more for a decision. For non-urgent, non-time sensitive requests, the wait times for a decision can be extremely lengthy. These wait times far exceed the mandated 48 hour-1 week timeline. The payments department of ISC BC region has become extremely backlogged with processing invoices and reimbursements. Unfortunately, service providers are becoming hesitant to utilize Jordan's Principle as a funding

source because it typically takes over 6 months to receive payment, creating further barriers to access necessary services.

The reimbursement model also continues to be a barrier for many families who do not have the ability to pay for products or services upfront, particularly with the lengthy delays for reimbursement. Moving forward into the new fiscal year, Indigenous Services Canada will be implementing new measures to improve the efficiency of payment for approved Jordan's Principle supports and services.

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**Justice Support Worker  
2022/23 Final Report to SRD  
February 1, 2022 – January 31, 2023  
Melony Larre**

The Justice Support Worker Program carried out the following activities from February 1, 2022-January 31, 2023:

- Attended weekly criminal court proceedings and support individuals in accessing a variety of supports available at the courthouse and broader community to deal with their legal matters.
- Produced Gladue submissions for pre-sentencing reports/letters of support which in turn tells an Indigenous offender's sacred story and suggests a healing journey for the individual to seek restorative justice programs, treatment programs and/or counselling in place of incarceration.
- Assisted clients and health professionals in accessing recovery beds and other addiction treatment options.
- Supported clients who are on their healing journey with Opiate Antagonist Therapy (OAT) options (such as Suboxone and Methadone treatment) and supporting emotionally with detox.
- Acted as a community mentor for the weekly collaborative community meetings (Situation Table) – where Sasamans Society is the one of only two Indigenous social service agencies present and involved in most interventions brought to the table.
- Attended a variety of community triage/resource meetings (ICAT, VIR, Coalition to End Homelessness, Complex Discharge from Hospitals, bi-weekly Mental Health Substance Use Huddles).
- Connected clients to housing supports in the community.
- Assisted clients in making S.M.A.R.T. goals to engage them in their personal healing.
- Provided transportation to recovery homes, the hospital, meetings, and doctors/lawyers appointments.
- Helped clients better understand the processes they are involved with.
- Advocated for access-to-justice programs, adequate healthcare, and Indigenous healing for the unhoused.
- Aided clients in navigating systems of poverty.
- Provided wrap-around support to clients in a culturally safe manner by utilizing in-house resources as often as required.

- Accessed temporary housing for at-risk Indigenous women and their children.
- Collaborated with many community partners to ensure clients do not slip through the social safety net.
- Liaised with a variety of legal professionals to move people quickly through the legal system.
- Accessed healing workshops, retreats, and a variety of cultural opportunities to enhance opportunities for Indigenous people to overcome intergenerational trauma from Indian Residential Schools/Day Schools.

Given the very short timeline that these activities have occurred, it is quite difficult to gauge whether the program has met the intent of decreasing crime and homelessness in Campbell River. Many variables outside of the programs scope may interfere with what could be defined as outcomes, including whether a person would accept the offer of services. The biggest impact of each of the activities that took place would be the connection to services in a non-judgmental and supportive manner. The relationships built between our health care, social services and the legal systems and the JSW provided a link for many people involved in the program to make attempts at healthier lifestyles and safer choices.

Sasamans Society was well-suited to deliver this program because of the culturally safe and trauma informed approach that was utilized with all clients regardless of Indigenous ancestry.

53 Individuals were involved in the program and received support in case-specific actions. Sadly two of these individuals died prematurely and suddenly while in the program and living unhoused.

The JSW attended 3 encampment clean ups and supported individuals in relocating from Nunn's Creek Park and other areas. As well, in coordination with several other service providers, the JSW would conduct outreach activities one to two times per week in this period, resulting in over 100 engagement sessions with people experiencing homelessness in Campbell River.

The JSW acted as a culturally safe liaison between clients, Indigenous organizations, and the broader community of legal, health and social service providers. A trauma informed approach was consistently utilized, while actively incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings as the programs guiding principles. Through this lens, many people involved in the program recognized that culture and connection was the path toward healing. In this capacity, Sasamans Society was well suited to deliver the JSW program in Campbell River.

The JSW received training in Gladue Report writing delivered by Indigenous Perspective Society (IPS) and participated in several webinar engagements with the Continuing Law Education Society of British Columbia.

The JSW recognized early in the program that many agencies and organizations had been working very independently or "in silo's" as this practice is often referred to. Many agencies explained that this was a result of procedures that came to be from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Justice Support Worker program brought other agencies together in a collaborative fashion that fast-tracked services for the vulnerable people living unhoused in the community. The intersectionality of the program created a community "team" approach that effectively broke down barriers in services.

Through the “Sasamans Justice” social media platform many anti-stigma topics were explored and promoted as public education. During our municipal elections this year, the JSW had the opportunity to speak with the incumbents about their platforms around our housing and lethal drug/healthcare crisis’s. An anti-stigma approach was used to try to educate the public that the unhoused people in our community are more than just a “homeless problem” and that the misconception that other cities are transporting their unhoused people to Campbell River is false and further perpetrates the dichotomy of “Us versus Them.” At every opportunity the Justice Support Worker encouraged connection as the answer to building a healthier community.

Many of the individuals involved in the Justice Support Worker Program were able to find housing (mostly temporary or precariously housed), and many had their legal issues dealt with in this time as well. Those few people that attempted to cease misusing illicit substances have been grateful for the guidance and support that assisted them in making a life-saving change. One client recently wrote:

*“Was the best decision I had made for myself in such a long time, I able to do some much needed work on myself to make a strong foundation for this journey and it led it back to being able to be the mama that I was to be. So very grateful for the life I get to live today. Huge thanks to [Sasamans Justice](#) for helping me get this journey started and all the support”*

With the generosity of some supplies funding from the Strathcona Regional District, the JSW with the team at Sasamans Society, were able to provide some cold weather supplies in anti-theft, waterproof backpacks, clothing, and a warm meal consisting of hearty chili and frybread as a “thank-you” to the community the program served. This was truly a heart-warming a beautiful way to pause the Justice Support Worker Program, and Sasamans Society is grateful for the partnership with the Strathcona Regional District that made the endeavor possible.



**Indigenous Elders Navigator/Harmony Circle of Elders  
2022/23 Program Update  
Niki Kitts**

This year has been very special. The Elders Navigator was able to celebrate and honor the Elders with a ceremony at Tsakwaluten Lodge highlighting the beautiful person they are. The *Be-You-tiful Me* event was a great success! At this event the Elders were honored for what they have been through and blanketed for the work they have done to heal and help others. This wellness retreat meant so much to them as they were able to feast together, laugh together, create art together, heal together and honor themselves as well as each other. The Elders surprised the Elders Navigator with a special blanketing ceremony as well which was extremely emotional and meaningful as she feels so blessed to work with them.

From this event was born the *Elders Wellness Art Hive*. With the same theme this weekly group was created to keep a more regular feeling of happiness and comfort of being together and healing through Art Therapy. We created a sacred space to host our Elders. The Elders voiced their interest in spending more time with the Youth and at the same time the Youth were expressing their interest in spending more time with the Elders. The youth navigator and Elders Navigator collaborated to create the Youth and Elder Connection. This has also been an amazing resource for youth to access cultural support and the connections that have had positive results for both the Elders and the Youth.





## New Vehicles

In March of this year, we finally added two vehicles for our programs. In December of 2021, we lost our Sasamans van in an unfortunate accident. After some time we took the time to shop around for a new vehicle. With some discussion at a recent board meeting it was decided that we would look into purchasing two vehicles. We bought one outright with our insurance money, a 2019 Nissan Pathfinder and we are leasing a 2023 Honda HRV.



## PARTNERSHIPS

Our work at Sasamans is enhanced through our many partnerships; we have nurtured many collaborative working relationships in each of the communities we work in (Campbell River, Courtenay and Port Hardy). These partnerships include but are not limited to our community agency partners and Nations:

- Laichwiltach Family Life Society
- John Howard Society
- Sacred Wolf Friendship Centre
- Gwa'sala-'Naxwada'xw Health Centre
- KDC Health
- Wachiay Friendship Centre
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- The Federation of BC Youth in Care Network
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Legal Services Society
- Legal Aid - Parent Legal Centre (PLC)
- Strathcona Regional District
- Da'naxda'xw/Awaetlala
- Mamalilikulla
- We Wai Kai
- Wei Wai Kum
- K'omoks
- Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis Tribe
- Quatsino
- Tlatlasikwala
- Dzawada'enuxw
- Gwa'sala-Naxwada'xw Nations

## FUNDING

With the support of our funders Sasamans Society has been able to deliver our programs and services in our three urban centres of **Port Hardy**, **Campbell River** and **Courtenay** as well as surrounding communities within our catchment areas. Sasamans Society has always served families, children, youth and Elders who identify as Indigenous which includes First Nations (status or non-status), Metis and Inuit. The following partnerships and funders make it possible for us to continue serving our communities:

- The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) provides funding through 3 funding programs:
  - Aboriginal Service Innovation (ASI) - MCFD Provincial Office
  - Prevention and Family Support - MCFD Provincial Office
  - Roots Program (Cultural Connections) - MCFD Campbell River Regional Office
- First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) Elders Navigator Program
- Mamalilikulla First Nation for the Designated Band Representative
- Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator
- The Federation of BC Youth in Care Network – Campbell River Youth in Care Network
- Strathcona Regional District –Justice Support Worker, Campbell River
- BC Gaming Grant – Youth Justice Support Worker, Campbell River (2023-2024 Program)
- Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation



# Drawing on the Wisdom of our Elders To Ensure Cultural Safety

*Wolkani Wolkani*  
A gift to us from above

*Wad'z'id*  
the reason I live for

*Jax'ala*  
I really love you

*X'uk'anien*  
foster child  
child we brought into  
our family

*X'anuk'*  
My child

*Ha'Hoype*  
talking to the child - from  
the womb through life

*Sasamans*  
Our children

*Maya'ent*  
respect

*Weis*  
treasure

*Gana*  
treasure

*Gwalyu*  
precious one  
reason for living

*Cux'tama*  
grandchild

The children & grandchildren  
are medicine to us  
Elders: they keep  
us going

We need people in  
the ministry to work  
WITH us

We don't have many  
Elders any more for the  
young people to talk to  
& we need them

It is very important for  
ministry staff to break down  
& explain complicated  
processes & language

The young people are  
our future generation -  
how can we support them?

We need more meetings  
like this where we can learn  
& get our children & grandchildren  
into our care where they  
belong

There are so many strengths  
in communities that need to be  
brought forward & celebrated

Long ago grandparents did what  
we are doing now - they loved &  
cared for the children

*Lellen Stevenson*

Sasamans Society March 21, 2013

## Cultural Safety

Sasamans is committed to providing culturally safe services to Indigenous children, youth and families in Campbell River, Port Hardy and Courtenay. We are aware that the urban communities are comprised of many different Nations; therefore, we respect and value the traditional teachings of all Indigenous people.

# Cultural Safety Inside Myself, My Home & Society

Suggestions for MCFD

- Creating a welcoming ministry office - Aboriginal art - Aboriginal person behind the desk
- Ministry to suggest that families bring a support person(s) perhaps a staff person from the band who knows the system
- Have an Elder present at meetings to create that Sacred Space through prayer
- Meeting outside the ministry office perhaps in people's homes
- Having social workers more aware of the power they possess & the language they use (eg. family might not mean nuclear family)
- The use of ceremony - honoring families - celebrating when children return - healing past hurts - lifting people up

*Lellen Stevenson*

**Namima**  
People of One Kind

Suggestions for MCFD

- Social workers attend cultural events celebrations or gatherings
- Create system where families who take related children in are compensated equal to Non-Native foster families
- Social workers go to an Elder to learn about a family
- Be & be courteous
- Respect silence, don't interrupt
- Allow a navigator or liaison to guide families through the processes & explain
- Continued teaching of traditional ways to children, families & ministry staff
- Ensure that children in Non-Native foster homes maintain contact with extended families & entire community
- Safe alternatives for kids leaving the foster system
- Take time with people
- Be present

*Sasamans Society*  
March 21, 2013

## **2022/2023 Sasamans Society Team**

Jane Watts-Ellens	Indigenous Family & Youth Navigator	Port Hardy
Amanda Turner	Indigenous Youth Justice Support	Campbell River
Jazmine McCrimmon-Cook	Indigenous Family Navigator	Campbell River
Taylor Shuttleworth	Indigenous Youth Navigator	Campbell River
Monica Glendale	Indigenous Youth Navigator	Campbell River
Rachel Cain	Cultural Connections Worker	Campbell River
Marisa Anthony	Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator	Campbell River
Lavina Boyd	Indigenous Parenting & Caregiver Support	Campbell River
Kia Everson	Indigenous Family & Youth Navigator	Courtenay
Cecilia Plecas	Indigenous Parenting Support	Courtenay
Nicole Kitts	Indigenous Elders Navigator	Campbell River
Tasleem Mall	Mamalilikulla FN Designated Band Rep	Campbell River
Fiona Hansed	Executive Assistant/Bookkeeper	Campbell River
Mary Henderson	Reception	Campbell River
Lori Bull	Executive Director	Campbell River

## **Staff who moved on during the 2022/2023 year**

Melony Larre	Justice Support Worker	Campbell River
Jerry Mundi	Jordan's Principle Support Worker	Cambell River
Skye Bourget	Reception	Campbell River

## **2022/23 Sasamans Society Board of Directors**

Richard Dawson	Chair	Sacred Wolf Friendship Centre
Nick Chowdhury	Vice-Chair	Da'naxda'xw/Awaetlala First Nation
Shelly Haunch	Treasurer	Wei Wai Kum First Nation
Vera Peacey	Secretary	Laichwiltach Family Life Society
Cindy Inrig	Director	We Wai Kai First Nation
Bert Boucher	Director	Mamalilikulla First Nation
Elizabeth Carter	Director	Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis Tribe
Katherine Frank	Director	K'omoks First Nation
Rita Pimlott	Director	Wachiay Friendship Centre
Willie Moon	Director	Dzawada'enuxw First Nation
Patricia Hall	Director	Quatsino First Nation



*Thank you for attending  
Sasamans Society AGM for 2022/23*