



OMBUDSPERSON
BRITISH COLUMBIA

News Release

December 14th, 2022

Ombudsperson Pathfinders raising awareness, building trust and facilitating complaints about provincial and local public services in Indigenous communities across B.C.

Victoria – The B.C. Ombudsperson has launched an initiative as part of the office’s commitment to building sustainable and ongoing relationships rooted in respect and reciprocity with Indigenous Peoples and communities across British Columbia. Four engagement specialists, known as Ombudsperson Pathfinders, are working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit people to provide information about the Ombudsperson’s role. They are also guiding members of the Indigenous public to find the best avenue to bring concerns forward if they believe they have been treated unfairly by public sector organizations in B.C.

“Government policies and processes have unfairly impacted Indigenous people throughout history and systemic racism has resulted in intergenerational harm,” said Ombudsperson Jay Chalke. “As a result, there is a distrust of public organizations and this can be a barrier to bringing concerns forward. The Pathfinder initiative is one way of trying to help address this challenge.”

The Ombudsperson Pathfinders are connecting with Indigenous people and communities and are working across B.C., meeting with community members and leaders, attending community events and holding in-person complaint clinics when requested.

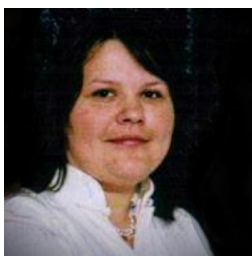
The Office of the Ombudsperson is independent from government and has the authority under B.C. law to investigate more than 1,000 provincial and local public bodies including schools, health authorities, provincial government ministries, local governments and Crown corporations like BC Hydro and ICBC. Where an Ombudsperson investigation finds a person has been treated unfairly by a public body, outcomes can include recommendations for an apology, financial reimbursement, changes in decisions or broad improvements to the administration of public programs that impact many. The Ombudsperson also has a legal mandate to investigate allegations of serious wrongdoing in the workplace from current and former public sector employees.

“We are developing culturally safe and trauma informed approaches that will help us serve Indigenous people including people with intersecting identities better,” said the Ombudsperson’s Indigenous Liaison Officer Jolene Andrew. “Indigenous people might not know our services are for them or don’t feel like they can trust us. Pathfinders are a direct connection to the Ombudsperson’s office which can assist in getting answers to concerns Indigenous people may have about provincial and local public services. This helps ensure they are being treated fairly.”

To find out more about the Ombudsperson Pathfinder Program and the Ombudsperson's Indigenous services contact Cindy Allen at Callen@bcombudsperson.ca or visit: <https://bcombudsperson.ca/about-us/our-indigenous-services>

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Ombudsperson Pathfinders across B.C.



Crystal Bird, Northern/Interior Region
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Crystal is an artist, musician, Feng Shui Design Consultant and social justice activist from the Ts'msyen (Tsimshian) Nation. Crystal comes with a strong grass-roots background in community advocacy and brings over 25 years of experience collaborating with various organizations rooted in social justice activism. Crystal has a life-long appreciation for education in all its forms and has a background in Anthropology (First Nations, Women's Studies and Psychology) and Archaeology through Coast Mountain College, Camosun College and the University of Victoria. She is passionate about holding systems to account and addressing systemic barriers.

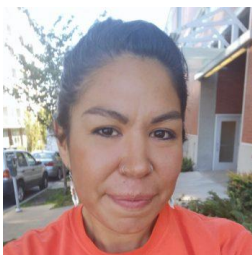
"Indigenous people use oral teachings to help those who do not know, to understand our ways. We can combine the essence of our personal experiences with the influence of the B.C. Ombudsperson to teach others what it is like to be Indigenous in our province, and also effect and create positive change now and in the future, for every one of us." – Crystal Bird, Ombudsperson Pathfinder for northern BC and the Interior.



Lenny LaRock, Fraser Valley/Interior Region
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Lenny's current role at the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society as Regional Community Developer and Jordan's Principle Service Enhancement Coordinator, has her coming to us with experience in networking and reaching Indigenous communities across the province. Lenny, who is a Sts'ailes First Nation member, is a Delegated Social Worker with a BA in Child and Youth Care; a Certified ECE with a Diploma in Working with Children with Special Needs; a Certified Family Support Worker; a Certified Case Management Strategies and Preventative Security Worker; and, a Certified Respite Worker with MCFD. Lenny has extensive experience working in

communities and with families and is passionate about working with Indigenous communities and learning more about culture.



Wendy Simon, Vancouver Coastal Region

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Wendy (Haida/Mohawk) brings experience as the former Dean of Student Services and Registrar at the Native Education College. Wendy is grateful for her many teachers who have provided the cultural education that is at the heart of her social work practice. Wendy holds a Masters in Social Work and was awarded a Medal of Excellence from Wilfrid Laurier University. Wendy's community approach begins with upholding the laws of the lands and building good relations. She enjoys travelling and the honour of hearing peoples' stories as a trained counsellor and death doula.

“Indigenous people have their own laws based on the protection of the sacred including people, cultures, lands & waters. The Pathfinders bring this wisdom and strength to the Office's mandate which helps us co-create a more equitable approach to fair treatment.” – Wendy Simon, Ombudsperson Pathfinder for Vancouver Coastal.



Justine Thomson, Vancouver Island Region

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Justine was Executive Director of a non-profit society and developed programming for mental health and wellness. Justine is a mindfulness facilitator, a master trainer in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) and has worked alongside Indigenous communities throughout BC. She brings a strong trauma-informed skill set to the Pathfinders team. Justine completed her MA in Socio-Organizational Psychology and received her training from the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University. She is a wife and mother of two and is grateful to live on the traditional lands of the Ləkʷəŋən-speaking people.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit people deserve to be treated fairly when accessing government programs and services. The response to the Pathfinder initiative has been promising. As Pathfinders, we create awareness and guide confidential individual reports with safety and compassion. Equity, inclusion and respect for all Indigenous peoples are essential stepping stones on the road to reconciliACTION. – Justine Thomson Ombudsperson Pathfinder, Vancouver Island.