

2024 COMMUNITY AWARDEE BACKGROUNDERS

Troy MacBeth Abromaitis, Richmond

Troy MacBeth Abromaitis brings his extensive expertise to community development and sustainable growth, with a career spanning over two decades. He has overseen major real estate development projects, while also serving in leadership positions such as President of the Real Estate Institute of British Columbia. Troy's advocacy for multi-family housing solutions and recent appointment as Senior Development Manager at Musqueam Capital Corporation underscore his commitment to advancing urban development initiatives.

As a member of the Nlaka'pamux Nation and the Lytton Indian Band, Troy draws upon his personal journey of resilience as a survivor of the 60s Scoop. After a 30-year journey to reconnect, Troy's return home marks a transformative chapter, where he channels his experiences into empowering his community. Troy provides mentorship to individuals navigating adversity and played a role in the rebuild of Lytton First Nation after the devastating wildfires in 2021 as a member of the LFN's Economic Development Corporation Board. He champions visual reconciliation in public spaces, recognizing art as a potent force for fostering healing, unity, and cultural expression. Troy leads initiatives in Surrey and Squamish that weave Salish art and narratives into the fabric of communities, creating vibrant spaces that symbolize collective resilience and hope.

Prof. Nemkumar (Nemy) Banthia, Vancouver

Prof. Nemkumar (Nemy) Banthia is a University Killam Professor and mentor at the University of British Columbia (UBC), fostering academic and personal growth among students. With over 70 PhDs and Postdoctoral Fellows trained under his guidance, Nemy's impact extends outside the classroom. As a world-renowned leader in carbon-neutral concrete infrastructure, Nemy's research at UBC has improved the safety, sustainability, and resilience of civil infrastructure especially under extreme events such as earthquakes. As a Canada Research Chair, Nemy has also developed numerous advanced sensors and cyber-physical networks that are providing early warning signals on potential structural collapses.

Nemy serves as the founding CEO and Scientific Director of the India-Canada Centre for Innovative Multidisciplinary Partnerships to Accelerate Community Transformation and Sustainability (IC-IMPACTS). This \$60 million Center, supported by the Indian and Canadian governments, focuses on developing scalable solutions and transferring advanced technologies to resource-limited communities. From self-healing concrete pavements to water treatment systems, IC-IMPACTS' projects have lifted boil water advisories and initiated transformative change in Indigenous communities in Canada and India, exemplifying Nemy's commitment to making a meaningful impact on a global scale.

Devon Black, Victoria

Devon Black is the co-founder of AccessBC, a grassroots campaign advocating for free prescription contraception in British Columbia. For more than six years, Devon played a pivotal role in the campaign's success, which led to the implementation of the policy in April 2023. Since then, 188,000 people in BC have accessed prescription contraception without cost, thanks to her dedication. Beyond organizing workshops and training over 80 volunteers provincewide, Devon has presented before government committees, served as media spokesperson (in both English and French), and propelled the campaign from local frustration to a national movement.

Devon continues her advocacy as AccessBC's national liaison, supporting sibling campaigns across Canada. Her voluntary efforts have been instrumental in drafting press releases, providing media training, and fundraising. Devon's impact empowers campaign members to advocate for reproductive justice issues, such as menstrual equity and improved pain management in gynecology. Without her work, prescription contraception access in the province would remain a financial barrier, defining her crucial role in advancing reproductive rights and health equity.

Earl Blacklock, Parksville

Earl Blacklock's goal is to make a difference in the lives of those affected by poverty, substance dependence, and traumatic life events. As the Executive Director of Island Community Counselling (ICC), Earl serves as an experienced clinician and as the agency's chief administrative officer. With three master's degrees and accreditation as a Canadian Certified Counsellor, Earl leads ICC's trauma program and has created initiatives that improve access to care delivery throughout the region.

Recognizing the pressing need for more qualified counsellors, Earl expanded a practicum therapist program that provides invaluable opportunities for graduate students to gain hands-on counselling practice. Many of these practicum therapists remained with the agency, significantly expanding ICC's counseling team from just five to 29 counsellors. His leadership helps address the shortage of trained mental health professionals while ensuring therapeutic counselling services are accessible to all who seek help. By providing prompt and comprehensive support, Earl's dedication changes lives and inspires others to contribute to the causes of mental health treatment and advocacy.

Robin Dawes, Williams Lake

Robin Dawes transformed the Williams Lake Cross Country Ski Club through personal and invaluable contributions. She played a role in securing funding, designing, and supervising the construction of a new state-of-the-art lodge facility. Robin's establishment of a ski rental program has significantly lowered barriers to entry for the wider community. Through her efforts, funding was secured, equipment purchased, and volunteers coordinated to ensure the

program's success. Additionally, she led the ski school program which has seen substantial growth and includes hundreds of children participating each year.

Engaging in both administrative tasks and day-to-day operations Robin contributes over 500 volunteer hours annually. From mowing ski trails to sealing floors in the new lodge, her hands-on approach supports the club's success. As a former board chair and current board member, Robin leads by example, sharing her expertise through webinars and further enriching the broader cross-country ski community. Robin Dawes's efforts have revitalized the Williams Lake Cross Country Ski Club, leaving a legacy that ensures future generations can enjoy the benefits of a thriving ski community.

Jane Devji, Delta

Jane Devji, founder and former CEO of Delta View Campus of Care is a transformative figure in senior care leadership. Over decades of service, Jane established herself as a trailblazer within residential care, breaking down barriers and elevating the standard of care for seniors. Drawing from her international studies, Jane pioneered a “hugs not drugs” gentle-care approach tailored for patients with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. Jane, her late husband Amin and her sons, Salim and Aly, were proud to have created the Delta View Habilitation Centre, one of Canada’s first purpose built for dementia care homes. Later, Jane and her family created the Delta View Life Enrichment Centre, where Jane championed the concept of care-hubs.

Jane advocates for seniors facilities to serve as comprehensive centers offering a spectrum of services tailored to individual needs. Continuously expanding Delta View's offerings, she introduced additional wrap-around services including dialysis, rehabilitation therapy, and respite care. Jane's innovative approach extends beyond the confines of Delta View. She shared her care-hub techniques with government and healthcare officials, catalyzing nationwide improvements in seniors care standards. Her legacy is marked by a tangible impact on countless seniors and their families, underscoring her commitment to advancing the quality of life for the elderly.

Doreen & Wayne Hewitt, Salt Spring Island

Doreen and Wayne Hewitt have championed water protection on Salt Spring Island for over thirty years. Recognizing the watershed's vulnerability, they forged partnerships with key stakeholders, including the Salmon Enhancement Society, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of the Environment, and Ministry of Water Land and Air Protection. In 1993, they founded the Cusheon Lake Stewardship Group. Their joint efforts have extended to establishing the Beddis and Cusheon Area Residents’ Association, fostering a broader community engagement from the original Beddis Area Residents’ Association.

Wayne's leadership roles in the Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society and Doreen's tenure as a Special Commissioner on the Beddis Water Service Commission exemplify their commitment. Doreen held leadership roles in 15 community groups, while Wayne led the

development of the "Watershed Management Plan for Cusheon Lake," completed in 2007. For over three decades, the Hewitt's have vigilantly monitored governmental initiatives, zoning applications, and potential threats to the island's watershed. Their role as educators and advocates has helped to safeguard Salt Spring Island's drinking water sources amidst increasing development pressures and climate change challenges.

Christopher Lee, Vancouver

***Emerging Leader**

As a grade eight student, Christopher Lee co-founded the Helping Hearts Youth Foundation. Now, two years later, Helping Hearts has grown into an ambitious youth-led non-profit, attracting over one hundred volunteers. Christopher serves as a mentor onboarding younger students who are experiencing their first service events while fostering a safe and welcoming atmosphere. Christopher mobilizes Helping Hearts' volunteers and leads fundraising efforts which have exceeded \$30,000. His team facilitates various community events and distributes back-to-school care packages to numerous elementary schools.

Additionally, Helping Hearts has provided meals in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and is collaborating with the Vancouver School Board to establish a tutoring program for marginalized elementary students. Alongside his entirely youth-organized executive team, Christopher leads consistent and sustainable initiatives. His hands-on approach reflects his concern for all participants, promptly addressing issues and staying until the last task is completed. Christopher has ignited a culture of service within his organization, inspiring youth to engage in meaningful community service while making a difference.

Siân Lewis, Kamloops

Siân Lewis believes in the power of helping individuals overcome addiction to create healthier communities in Kamloops and beyond. Since assuming the role of Executive Director of Day One Society in 2011, Siân's leadership has transformed the organization by redefining its mission, rebranding, and expanding service offerings to better serve the community. She has cultivated a governance-focused board, driving strategic growth initiatives and fostering a culture of accountability and effectiveness.

Recognizing the need for targeted interventions, Siân spearheaded initiatives such as the "Ashes to Dust Bike Camp" and "Adventure Sundays" to support at-risk and disadvantaged youth. Her approach led to the creation of programs aiding individuals transitioning to sober lifestyles, earning contracts with Interior Health for supportive living initiatives. Siân's advocacy extends past organizational boundaries, establishing a sobering center in Kamloops and collaborating with various community groups to challenge stigma while addressing root causes of substance use disorders. An academic background in social work, coupled with extensive experience in mental health and addiction services, youth emergency services, and community development, underpins Siân's vision to creating systemic change.

Brian McConaghy, Delta

Brian McConaghy's transition from RCMP member and forensic scientist to humanitarian advocate reflects his dedication to justice and human rights. His experience in law enforcement laid the groundwork, but it was his work in Cambodia that ignited his commitment to combatting child abuse and human trafficking. In 1989, Brian founded Ratanak International, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping the people of Cambodia rebuild their country torn apart by war, revolution and genocide. Under his leadership, Ratanak has become an internationally recognized model in the fight against modern slavery.

In 2017, Brian's team built a multi-story restoration centre to provide compassion, secure shelter, and holistic trauma care for survivors on their journey to healing. Brian's expertise has led him to speak on international human trafficking at prestigious platforms such as the Canadian Senate and advise on G7 law enforcement policy, amplifying awareness and advocacy for survivors on a global scale. More recently, the government of Cambodia invited Brian's team to assist in building protective systems at a national level. From Canada to Cambodia, Brian's efforts are restoring dignity and hope to those robbed of freedom while protecting the most vulnerable.

Connally McDougall, Vancouver

***Emerging Leader**

Connally McDougall is the founder and creative force behind Connally Goods, an innovative clothing company at the intersection of sustainability and social justice. With a commitment to dismantling systemic oppressions, including fatphobia, sexism, and ableism, Connally infuses each design with a powerful message of inclusion and empowerment. Her journey began with a vision to challenge the status quo of the fashion industry, seeking to create a brand that champions sustainability while celebrating diversity and advocating for social change.

Connally Goods' values are prioritized through ethically sourced materials, eco-friendly, local Vancouver production methods, and fair labour practices. Each crafted piece serves as a statement of solidarity with marginalized communities. As a designer with disabilities, Connally uses her business to amplify underrepresented voices and promote body liberation. She supports social causes such as the Pace Society Vancouver, advocating for sex workers, The Addison Fund for Paediatric Organ Transplant through Transplant Research Foundation BC, and Saucye West's #fightforinclusivity initiative.

Marcus Mosely, North Vancouver

Marcus Mosely is renowned for his musical performances and profound impact on the cultural landscape of British Columbia. As the Artistic Director of the Marcus Mosely Ensemble, he leads with passion and vision, bringing an authentic gospel sound to audiences across the province. For more than four decades, Marcus has used his voice to entertain and educate people of all

ages and backgrounds. A gifted singer, Marcus's repertoire spans gospel, blues, and soul music, captivating audiences with his soulful performances. His annual "Songs of Freedom" celebration, now in its 12th season, has become a staple in the community, showcasing the rich history of black music and culture.

Marcus engages, encourages, and inspires communities through his ensembles, choirs, and gospel workshops. His contributions extend beyond the stage, as he serves as a public speaker, guest CBC radio presenter, and advocate for cultural awareness and understanding. Marcus received the 2020 Legacy Award for Music from the National Congress of Black Women Foundation and has received numerous accolades, including a star on Granville Street, induction into the BC Entertainment Hall of Fame, and nominations for Juno Awards.

Coralie Nairn, Vernon

Coralie Nairn's 35-year tenure with Search and Rescue has been defined by her role in advancing the organization to become one of BC's leading Search and Rescue groups. Starting as a Ground Search Team Member with Central Okanagan Search and Rescue, Coralie's journey eventually led her to become a Senior Search Manager at Vernon Search and Rescue (VSAR) and the team's Safety Officer and Media Liaison. Her extensive training in various rescue techniques has earned her recognition as a respected leader and mentor within the Search and Rescue community.

As a Level II Search and Rescue Manager, Coralie has overseen numerous large-scale operations. Her 11 years of experience with the Canadian Civil Air Search and Rescue Association and maintenance as a Search and Rescue Master with the Canadian Military further attest to her commitment and expertise in the field. In addition to her role at VSAR, Coralie is a program instructor for the Justice Institute of British Columbia and volunteers for the Adventure Smart Program. Through this initiative, she has trained over 1000 children and 500 adults, emphasizing the importance of safety during outdoor exploration.

Alison O'Toole, Prince Rupert

Alison O'Toole stands as a pillar in the Prince Rupert arts community. A teacher for School District 52 since 1993, Alison's commitment to education and the arts earned her the prestigious title of Drama Teacher of the Year by the BC Drama Educators Association. Alison has directed over 30 high school musicals and major theatrical productions, advocating for student recognition, and leading the charge to make these annual performances count for school credits.

Alison's passion for theatre extends to the broader community, where she directs productions that bring people together and foster a sense of belonging. As the Drama Representative for the region and a board member of the Lester Centre of the Arts, she mentors aspiring artists and champions the importance of the performing arts. Alison's legacy is measured in the countless

students she has educated and in the many who have pursued careers in the arts, inspired by her guidance and mentorship.

Jazz Pabla, West Kelowna

Jazz Pabla, former Chief Information Officer & Director of Information Services for the City of Kelowna, leverages technology to improve citizens' lives and inspire innovation nationwide. Recognized for pioneering AI and cloud solutions, Jazz's leadership has enhanced efficiency, transparency, and sustainability in city services. Under Jazz's guidance, his team developed ground-breaking projects and solutions for snow removal optimization and smart waste management systems. He also drove initiatives addressing homelessness, including a real-time Outdoor Sheltering Dashboard, and created a chatbot for citizen queries.

During the recent wildfires, Jazz led a team that deployed drones and satellite technology to detect hotspots and assess damage, facilitating swift response efforts. Jazz and his team also developed a digital twin called Model City, empowering transparent and informed decision-making. Jazz's vision for AI-driven solutions extends to housing crises, with plans to expedite building permits. As an active member of Municipal Information Systems Association of BC, Jazz shares expertise and drives advancements, positioning Kelowna as a trailblazer in municipal technology adoption.

Len Pierre, Surrey

Len Pierre, Owner & CEO of Len Pierre Consulting (LPC), stands as a leader in Indigenous cultural consult and education, guiding seminars and workshops province-wide with a diverse team comprising youth, educators, and elders. Offering over 20 workshops and courses, Len's team delivers education on Indigenous cultural safety, reconciliation, decolonization, lateral violence, and motivational speaking for youth. Moreover, LPC has curated an extensive online educational resource across YouTube, Spotify, and its website, addressing evolving reconciliation topics. Len's approach creates understanding and tangible action towards reconciliation, challenging norms in a culturally safe and respectful manner.

As a member of the Katzie First Nation and former Indigenous Education Assistant for the Surrey School District, Len serves as a role model both in and out of the classroom, leaving an enduring impact on communities. His efforts inspire individuals and organizations across BC and Canada to become genuine allies in the journey of reconciliation.

Rishika Selvakumar, Richmond
***Emerging Leader**

Rishika Selvakumar is dedicated to making a positive impact through her various volunteer and work commitments. Passionate about mental health and sustainability, Rishika has contributed to numerous organizations, such as the Acne Education Project UBC and Mentoring the Stars

Foundation, where she supported tutoring and volunteer recruitment. Her involvement extends to other community outreach efforts, including educational panels and donation drives with Ignite the Warmth Society, volunteering with the Richmond Olympic Oval, and designing accessibility resources for the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association.

During her time pursuing a Bachelor of Science at UBC, she immersed herself in various volunteer initiatives, including World Vision UBC, Right to Play UBC, and serving as Campus Director for the first UBC Chapter of the United Nations' Millennium Fellowship program. Currently pursuing a Master of Public Health at UBC, Rishika continues to prioritize her volunteer work while also working at UBC currently as a Graduate Academic Assistant in climate research.

Wendy Toyer, Richmond

Wendy Toyer dedicated 19 years to the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Society of British Columbia (ALSBC) serving as its Executive Director. Under her leadership, ALSBC established innovative programs that have positioned the Society as a recognized role model across Canada. Her notable achievements include the development of the Equipment Loan Program, a partnership with Communication for Youth and Adults and the Provincial Respiratory Outreach Program to ensure people living with ALS were given priority attention and care. In addition, Wendy coordinated and administered the ALS training for a team of volunteer psychologists and registered clinical counsellors to support patients throughout British Columbia.

Wendy also conceived an annual summer camp for youths aged 8 to 17, offering a safe and supportive environment for young people affected by ALS to connect and form a circle of support. Her latest initiative, "Project Hope," is a ground-breaking collaboration between ALSBC, the University of British Columbia, and the Provincial Government aimed at advancing ALS research and clinical care. Through her advocacy and strategic partnerships, Wendy's efforts have improved the lives of ALS patients in BC and advancing research to find a cure.

Mary Trentadue, New Westminster

Mary Trentadue's impact as a city councillor for New Westminster continues to resonate throughout the community following her tenure. An advocate for arts and childcare, Mary challenged developers to incorporate non-profit daycare facilities into new developments, ensuring accessibility for families. She also played a role in simplifying processes to attract daycare providers, recognizing the importance of childcare for working parents. Her contributions to improving housing policies to protect tenants and supporting local women-owned businesses underscores her legacy.

Mary's strategic efforts to bring people together through the arts led to the initiation of the multi-year community mural project, Paint New West Beautiful. Additionally, her leadership as chair of various arts committees significantly contributed to the advancement of cultural policy

and the production of cultural celebrations in New Westminster. Her mentorship to women aspiring to serve in government, advocacy for childcare, arts, and diversity, equity and inclusion in government and community exemplifies her dedication to making New Westminster a more vibrant and equitable city for all residents.

Janna Wale, Gitanmaax / Hazelton

***Emerging Leader**

***currently resides in Nanaimo**

Janna Wale (Gitksan/Cree-Métis), serves as a policy advisor for the newly established Indigenous research stream at the Canadian Climate Institute. She holds a Bachelor of Natural Resource Science (Hons.) and a Master of Science in Sustainability, where her research focused on climate resilience in Indigenous communities. Her commitment to improving the world for the next seven generations is evident through her impactful work and research projects. She has represented Indigenous youth on a global stage, speaking at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai with SevenGen, a collective of Indigenous Youth Energy Leaders. Janna participates in various climate change advisory committees, volunteering her time with non-profit organizations and encouraging youth to pursue research in this field.

Throughout her studies and career, Janna integrates Indigenous and Western ways of knowing to build resilience to climate change in Indigenous communities. She serves as a role model and mentor for young people, inspiring them to speak out and take action on issues affecting their communities. Janna's commitment to inclusive climate action has made her a sought-after speaker, ensuring that Indigenous voices and knowledge are central in shaping policies and solutions for a sustainable future.