



# SelfDesign Learning Foundation Community Report 2020



## Message

Amber Papou, President & CEO  
SelfDesign Learning Foundation

*“We can’t always choose the music life plays us,  
but we can choose how we dance to it.”*

- Unknown

2020 has most definitely been a year that has challenged many of us in ways we could never have imagined. While it is easy to get focused on the negative things that the pandemic has caused, I have been reflecting back on last year and have been refocusing my thoughts on the positive. In particular, I have been focusing on those things that I am the most thankful for.

First, I am incredibly thankful for technology. Pandemics have been part of human existence for centuries, and in past eras a pandemic not only wreaked havoc on human lives but it also distanced friends, families and colleagues sometimes for many years. Although we all feel Zoom fatigue now and then, I am thankful that in 2020, we had the technology to see the faces and hear the voices of the people we love. I know technology is not a substitute for the real thing, but there is a benefit in pretending that your Zoom feed has frozen when a conversation with your siblings is going sideways. All kidding aside, technology is also the reason why SelfDesign Learning Foundation has continued to operate relatively unscathed throughout this past year – and I couldn’t be more thankful for that! Our contractors, families and 2000 learners were able to stay connected to each other and to our amazing programs with little interruption.

Second, I am thankful for the time that was unexpectedly given to all of us during COVID lockdowns. This ‘extra’ time was used by many to reconnect with their household families, read, write, create art, star gaze, and of course, learn how to master bakery-worthy sourdough bread recipes. This time also provided us with opportunities to take a deep dive into our work at SelfDesign Learning Foundation by helping our own educators and families and those outside of our community to adjust to different types of learning online. Through this work, we discovered that we could channel this knowledge and package it into a new program we are calling the HomeLearners Network (HLN). The HomeLearners Network is a new online platform (with a familiar name) that we began working on this year with the help of our SelfDesign Learning Community educators and which we hope to invite learners of all ages to participate in 2021. We will continue to share new information about HLN on an ongoing basis.

(On an aside, an interesting fact about creativity during pandemics: Shakespeare wrote most of his masterpieces while social isolating due to the ultimate pandemic, ‘the plague’ – which I understand was present through most of his adult life. Maybe those extra moments of social distancing allowed his creative juices to flow!)

Finally, I am ever thankful for all of you – our wonderful, empathetic and passionate SelfDesign community. Don’t get me wrong – it is not always easy work and we definitely experienced our share of challenges this year, but I am still very energized and excited about the future and what we do together. I am always thankful that somehow the stars aligned so that I was given the opportunity to not just ‘work’ for SelfDesign Learning Foundation, but I was also given the opportunity to continue to be part of this great, big SelfDesign family.

With gratitude,

*Amber*

# The SelfDesign Learning Foundation

## Education for the 21st century.

At SelfDesign Learning Foundation, we support learners of all ages and abilities in authoring their own lives and designing their own learning.

The SelfDesign Learning Foundation is a registered Canadian charity, incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in the province of British Columbia.

## We are your foundation for lifelong learning.

Since 1983, SelfDesign Learning Foundation has grown to become a global leader in the development of programs and initiatives that foster personalized and life-long learning.

Our model and philosophy set us apart, drive every initiative and fuel our passion as leaders in education. We believe that learning is unlimited, ageless and continuous.

## Our mission

To support learners, families and educators in creating what matters to them in their lives, through effective educational methods in alignment with the principles of SelfDesign.

## Our vision

SelfDesign is the leading model for natural and personalized lifelong learning in North America.





*“The SelfDesign model has nothing to do with schooling and everything to do with lifelong learning. It is a model that has emerged from real children learning together in true freedom – freedom to be curious and enthusiastic, freedom to work together in community. This model has come from the experts in learning – the children. It has also been integrated with the latest scientific insights into how we are optimally designed as human beings.”*

– Brent Cameron, SelfDesign founder, with River Meyer



# Our values



## LIFELONG LEARNING

Curiosity is our lifelong pathway to transformative experiences. We foster engagement in the natural unfolding of interest-based learning through conversation, collaboration and co-creation.



## RELATIONSHIPS

We embrace heart-centred and co-inspirational relationships based on acceptance, respect and support of one another.



## INNOVATION

We innovate and evolve our learner-centred educational programs and services based on an understanding of cutting-edge research in the fields of pedagogy, human development, neuroscience and technology.



## INTEGRITY

We live our shared values of honesty, authenticity, fairness and openness.



## ACCOUNTABILITY

We are responsible and responsive to our stakeholders, upholding our agreements to them and to one another. We assume individual self-agency and capacity while remembering we are part of the greater whole organization.



## QUALITY

We are committed to excellence by providing first-choice educational programs and services that are inclusive, supportive and accessible to those we serve, regardless of income level, personal or spiritual beliefs, or degree of need.



# Our philosophy

## The art and science of lifelong learning

### We believe

**That every learner, regardless of age,** brings a unique contribution to the world. SelfDesign ensures that the learning environment becomes the vehicle rather than the obstacle in making those contributions come to life.

**That people learn everywhere and in every moment,** and that learning is enriched and amplified through conversations and relationships with others.

**In the safety, acceptance and inclusion of all learners** in regard to ability, learning style, culture, personal or spiritual beliefs, gender identity and expression.



*“ I appreciate the emphasis that SelfDesign places on the differences between being creatively human versus being mechanically rote. SelfDesign emphasizes play, creativity, and design rather than routinely following procedures and recipes.”*

– David Tait, Director, SelfDesign Learning Foundation Board of Directors

# Board of Directors

**Devon Girard, Chair**, has a long and varied history with SelfDesign. He is an alumni of the Wondertree and Virtual High programs (predecessors to SelfDesign) and has roots in natural learning principles and practices. Devon has 25 years of experience in software development. He is passionate about the intensifying confluence of knowledge, technology and culture that is opening so many directions in learning.

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**Ken Banister** brings decades of regulatory and overall work experience, and a master's degree in Science in Environment and Management from Royal Roads University. He has guided the development and review of environmental curriculums at Royal Roads and Mount Royal universities and delivered in-class education, and he is developing a program for young professionals about how complex dynamic systems relate to the workforce and the tools that can be used to manage the day-to-day complexity of today's work lives.

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**Enid Elliot** has a PhD in Early Childhood Education and teaches at Camosun College and the University of Victoria. She was involved in creating the Sooke School District's Nature Kindergarten, which opened in September 2012. Her current research concerns the teaching practice that emerges as educators and children explore and engage deeply with all layers of the landscape found outdoors. She has also served on the board of directors of several youth- and child-oriented organizations.

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**Verena Gibbs** began her work with SelfDesign's predecessor, Wondertree Learning Centre, in 2002, first as an educator, then as vice-principal. Her Masters of Arts in Integrated Studies allowed her to weave teachings from Indigenous knowledge, self-directed learning and living inquiry into her practice. Verena lives on Haida Gwaii, where she is a principal with School District 50.

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**David Tait** is a professor emeritus from the Faculty of Forestry at UBC where he teaches systems theory, computer technology and statistics. He has been affiliated with SelfDesign for almost 25 years — first as a father to a learner in Virtual High, and then serving as a board member 20 years ago and again since 2015.

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**Suzanne Weckend** has 19 years of experience as a teacher in BC and a Master of Arts in Leadership from Royal Roads University. In addition to her education career, Suzanne competed for Canada at both the Commonwealth Games and World Championships in the sports of swimming and triathlon. She has sat on the boards of Triathlon Canada, Commonwealth Games Canada, AthletesCAN, Commonwealth Games Federation, and the Pacific Institute of Sport Excellence.

# Leadership team

**Amber Papou, President & CEO**, first joined SelfDesign Learning Foundation in January 2017. She is passionate about providing overall leadership and oversight to the organization's programs.

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**Sandy Steward, Chief Operating Officer**, is responsible for ensuring the Foundation and its programs operate effectively. She sees her role as one of supporting SelfDesign contractors to work with learners and families, and removing any challenges or obstacles that prevent that.

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**Dave Conroy, Chief Information Officer**, develops, maintains and oversees the operations of information, IT services and security to ensure the effective, efficient support to all the clients and programs of SelfDesign Learning Foundation. Dave joined SelfDesign in 2016.

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**Debra Farquharson, Director of Finance**, joined SelfDesign in 2019 to manage the organization's finances. She ensures accurate and timely tracking of all expenditures, grant funding from the BC Ministry of Education, compliance with regulatory and filing requirements, preparation of the organization's financial statements and budgets, and management of its cash and banking arrangements.

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**Nikki Kenyon, Principal of Educational Programs** provides support and opportunities for learners to engage in their personalized learning journeys in both SelfDesign Learning Community and SelfDesign Home Learning. She has worked with SelfDesign since 2007 and is the parent of four SelfDesign learners.

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**River Meyer, Director of Organizational Learning & Culture**, holds the vision and philosophy of SelfDesign and shares it with all SelfDesign Learning Foundation contractors, learners, families and more, through discussions and initiatives such as Community Conversations that build knowledge and culture within our contractor community. She first joined SelfDesign in 2004 and was also a SelfDesign parent.

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**Debra Sigfusson, Director of Human Relations**, provides advice and direction regarding all aspects of the contracting process for SelfDesign and handles human relations matters of a confidential and sensitive nature. She came to SelfDesign in 2008 after discovering and being drawn into the learner-centred philosophy of SelfDesign.

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**Karen Zukas, Director of Communications & Marketing** directs and oversees all external and internal communications including communications planning and implementation, internal communications, marketing, social media and website management, and much more. She joined SelfDesign in 2017.



A photograph of two women walking outdoors on a paved path. The woman on the left has long, wavy red hair and is wearing a blue and white patterned dress with a colorful geometric border at the hem. She is looking towards the right. The woman on the right has long black braids, wears a black cap, glasses, a black short-sleeved shirt, and blue jeans. She is carrying a young child with short dark hair on her shoulders. The child is wearing a grey t-shirt and red pants. The woman on the right is holding the hand of the woman on the left. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.

## Our commitment to diversity & inclusiveness

SelfDesign is committed to excellence by providing quality educational programs and services that are inclusive, supportive and accessible to those we serve. We believe in the safety, acceptance and inclusion of all learners in regards to ability, learning style, culture, race, personal or spiritual beliefs, gender identity and expression.

Acceptance and support for all facets of diversity is woven into every aspect of our organization and programs. Here are a few examples.



# Our commitment to diversity & inclusiveness

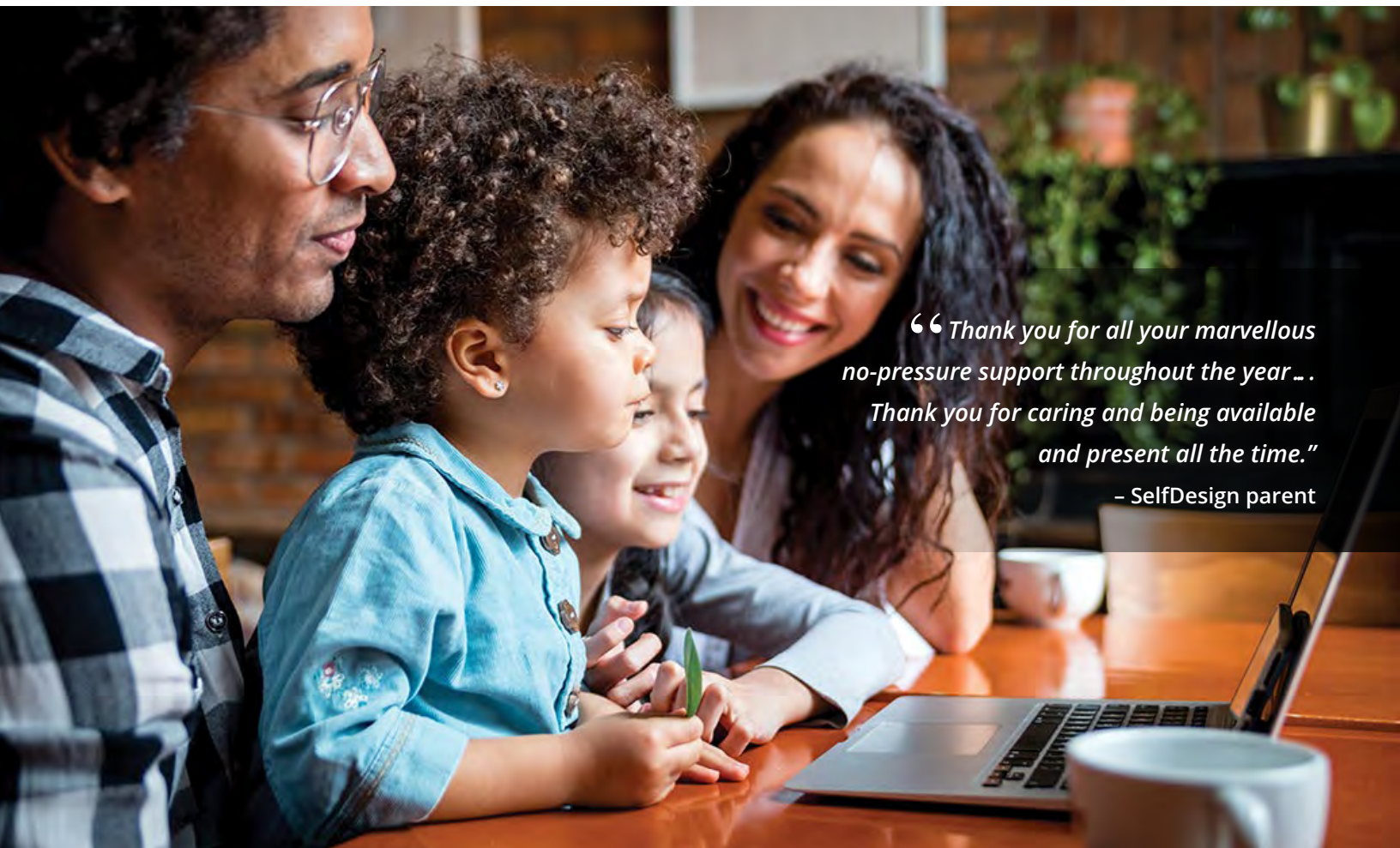
## We provide an inclusive, learner-centred approach to education

Personalized learning in the SelfDesign Learning Community means each child takes the lead in their own learning. This 21st century approach to education puts the needs of each child first. Our educators work with families to find out what their children's passions are and to create a unique individualized learning plan for each learner that draws on the child's own passions, interests, learning style, needs and goals.

In developing curriculum, programs and activities for our learners, we apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning. We use this framework to help ensure that every resource, activity, camp or offering that we provide gives every learner choice and flexibility in how they access material, engage with it, and show what they know, based on their own specific needs, learning style, abilities, and interests.

Our educators further customize the learning process to each learner's specific needs by using software and interactive media that can be adapted to the learner's pace, abilities and understanding.

Ongoing personal and professional development keeps our educators up to date on advances in learning science that support inclusive learning. For example, our Family Services team plans and presents training opportunities for our educators and support teams to facilitate and support inclusion and diversity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression in their work.



*“Thank you for all your marvellous  
no-pressure support throughout the year ...  
Thank you for caring and being available  
and present all the time.”*

*– SelfDesign parent*

# Our commitment to diversity & inclusiveness

## We provide equal access to learning opportunities for all learners

We provide services for all learners needing additional support to maximize their learning opportunities. Our BC certified educators work with learners, families and SelfDesign's Family Services team to identify and support each learner's individual needs. This includes specific services to support learners who have been, in accordance with BC Ministry of Education guidelines, professionally diagnosed with low incidence needs or who may or may not have been diagnosed with high incidence needs. Learners with special needs have access to specialists who can provide a wide array of services, including speech pathology, psychology, and so on.

We also provide resources and support to help learners and families when events or situations interfere with learning. Within SelfDesign Family Services, members of our Contact Assistance Team work with learners in kindergarten to grade 12, including learners with special needs who receive support services, to provide diverse and meaningful support for all learners and parents to successfully engage in their educational program.

Learners and families in grades 9 to 12 also have access to the SelfDesign Guidance Centre as they plan their final years with SelfDesign and map out their transition to life after grade 12.

In addition to these supports, SelfDesign provides a broad range of helpful online resources via the Virtual Brochure Rack in SelfDesign's online Family Resource Centre. Learners and families can consult the resources to help in their lives and in how they experience their education. We also work these resources into our core learning program.



*“Inclusion isn't a destination; it's a lifelong journey. Every day at SelfDesign, we seek out new, meaningful ways to include all our learners, families, educators and contractors – in all of their diversity and variety – into our community and to make them feel welcome, recognized and accepted for who they are and that they belong.”*

– Nikki Kenyon,  
Principal of Educational Programs



# Our commitment to diversity & inclusiveness

## We weave Indigenous perspectives and values into all aspects of SelfDesign

SelfDesign continues to implement its strategy to support Indigenous learners in our community and to advance reconciliation for all members. These efforts are driven by the more than 80 recommendations put forward in 2017 by SelfDesign's Indigenous education task force, which was composed of a First Nations elder, a First Nations SelfDesign parent and learner, and SelfDesign educators who included those with Indigenous heritage.

Our goal is to build capacity throughout the SelfDesign community for intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect.

See the Highlights section of this report for information about specific initiatives and activities undertaken in 2020.

*“ Our vision is for the learning community to be in a space where Indigenous education and mainstream education are integrated and woven together so seamlessly that you can't separate the two. Wouldn't it be fantastic to reach the point when a young person looks at a challenge and automatically considers the Turtle Island Indigenous perspective as well as the national or international perspective, and has access to fully integrated resources to help them learn more?”*

– Patricia Collins,  
SelfDesign Indigenous Education Facilitator



# Our commitment to diversity & inclusiveness

## We support all facets of gender diversity and sexual orientation in all members of our community

We actively seek out ways to implement SOGI 1 2 3 (sexual orientation and gender identity 1 2 3) throughout SelfDesign to support youth and other community members who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, or other, or who might be exploring their gender identity and sexual orientation. The BC Ministry of Education requires all BC schools to implement SOGI programming. Our own inclusive approach to community and learning facilitates this work.

Our Family Services team has been helping to lead the work at SelfDesign. They look at what services and information could be helpful to learners questioning or exploring their sexual orientation and gender identity, families of these learners, and educators working with these learners and families.

One of the key initiatives undertaken in 2020 was to work with a group of keen grade 10 to 12 learners to launch SelfDesign's own Gender Sexual Orientation Alliance (GSA).

*“ SelfDesign has always provided a place and a home for learners who come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse needs. Whether it's around culture or background or abilities or sexual orientation or gender identity or race or religion, we really pride ourselves and want to be an inclusive place where learners are themselves authentically.”*

*– Catherine Dinim, Vice Principal,  
SelfDesign Learning Community*





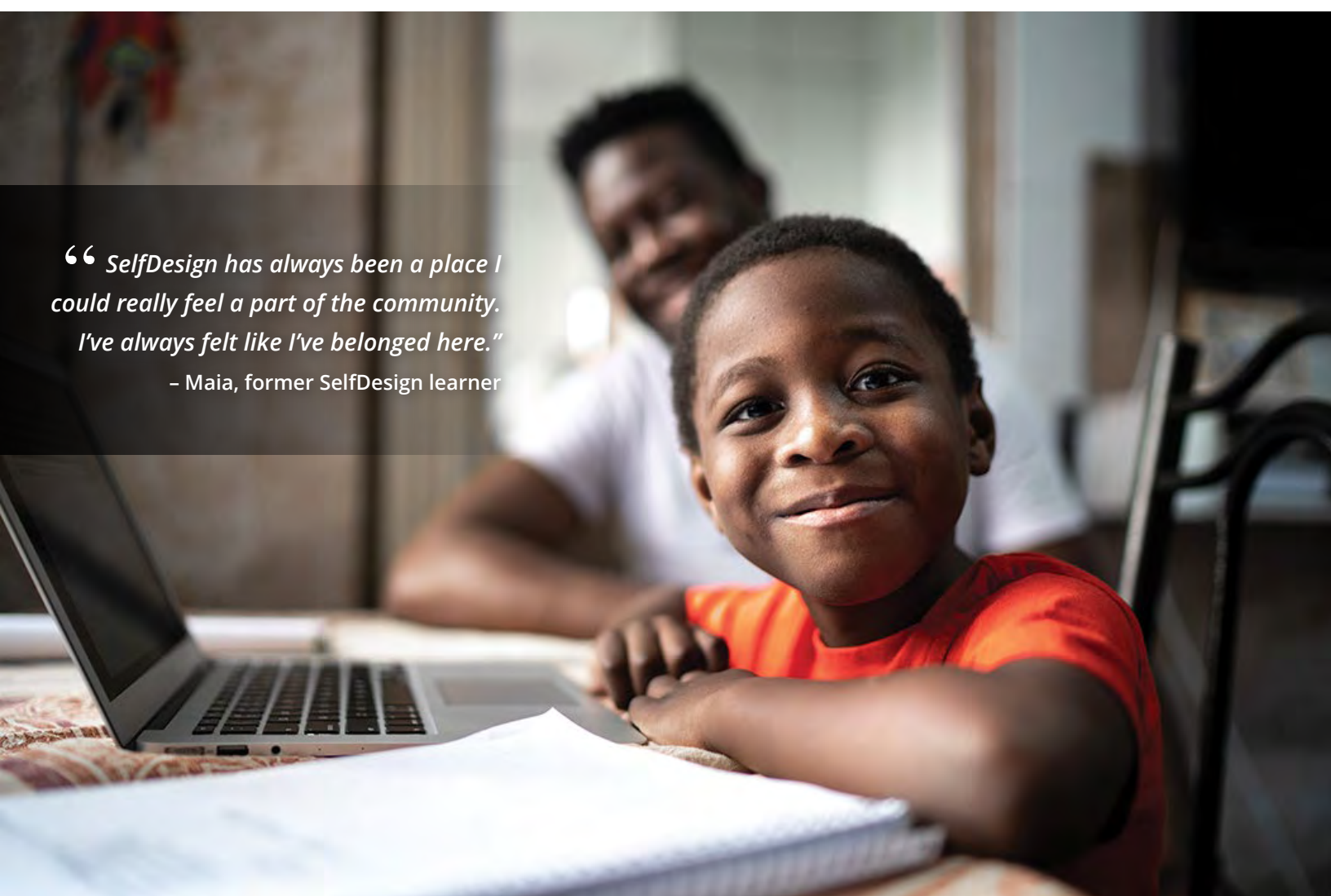
# Our commitment to diversity & inclusiveness

## We embed diversity and inclusiveness in all our learning content and events

We have policies and procedures in place to help ensure our camps, online gatherings, and curriculum content are inclusive of all learners, whatever their abilities, learning styles, cultures, race, personal or spiritual beliefs, and gender identity and expression.

The SelfDesign Learning Experience Library is a dynamic, curated collection of resources, questions, suggestions and inspirations sparked by the curiosity of our learners and offered in integrated interest-based experiences. It contains approximately 75 unique learning experiences that contain significant levels of content dealing with topics of diversity. First Peoples' Principles of Learning are also woven throughout the Learning Experiences.

We apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning when we develop each new learning experience, resource to share with learners, group activity, workshop and camp that learners will participate in to ensure learners have choice and flexibility in how they access the offerings, engage with them, and show what they've learned.



*“ SelfDesign has always been a place I could really feel a part of the community. I've always felt like I've belonged here.”*

– Maia, former SelfDesign learner



# Our partnerships

At SelfDesign Learning Foundation, we seek out partnerships and relationships with people and organizations who align with our values and vision for personalized lifelong learning for all.

Our main offering, SelfDesign Learning Community, is recognized by the BC Ministry of Education as a Group 1 Independent School in the province of British Columbia.

We are also proud to be affiliated with:



**The Transformative Learning Foundation**, based out of the United States, develops and delivers educational resources and support services that promote various approaches to natural self-directed learning. The foundation's mission is to co-inspire self-authored and joyful lifelong learning.



**The Graduate Institute for Transformative Learning** is a unique learning community in the United States that is committed to the integrity and capacity of each person to design her/his own learning – and life. Many of our educators and contractors at SelfDesign have graduated from the institute.



**Cognia** offers accreditation, certification, assessment, professional services and consulting within a framework of continuous improvement. This year, we collaborated with Cognia to deliver a webinar for educators around the world on how to build meaningful relationships with and among learners in online environments, demonstrating our expertise and leadership in online learning.



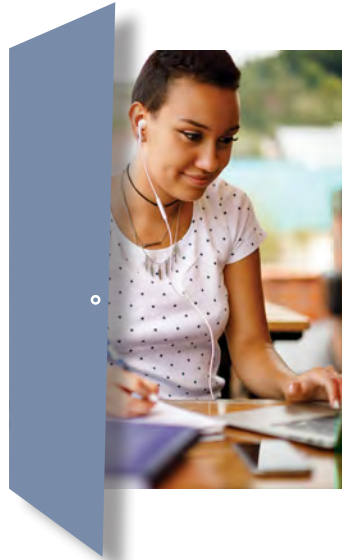
**The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Foundation** aims to build cultural understanding and create a path towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. SelfDesign is registered in the foundation's Legacy Schools program, joining a community of more than 1600 legacy schools across Canada and linking to funding and educational resources that advance reconciliation. One Legacy School activity that SelfDesign learners took part in this year was to design a T-shirt for Orange Shirt Day, the annual September 30 event that commemorates the residential school experience and commits to the ongoing process of reconciliation. As part of this event, SelfDesign also hosted a series of activities and speakers.

# Open the door to lifelong learning



## AUTONOMY

Author your own learning journey



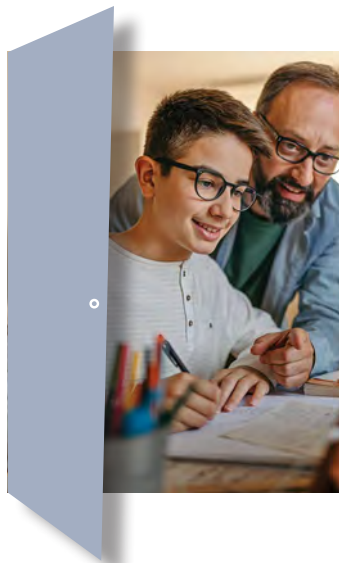
## INNOVATION

Innovative education for people of all ages and abilities



## CONNECTIONS

Learning through relationships with parents, peers, educators and community



## CURIOSITY

Learning is everywhere, curiosity is the beginning



## RESPONSIBILITY

Fostering personal, social, and global awareness and responsibility

# Learn what you love, love what you learn



Learning is a continuous and accumulating process rather than a product or set of outcomes. From imagining and planning, from enacting and experiencing, from reflecting and assessing to re-imagining – this process lasts a lifetime.



Learners are positioned at the centre of their individualized learning path.



Learning and personal development occur within nurturing, relational environments.

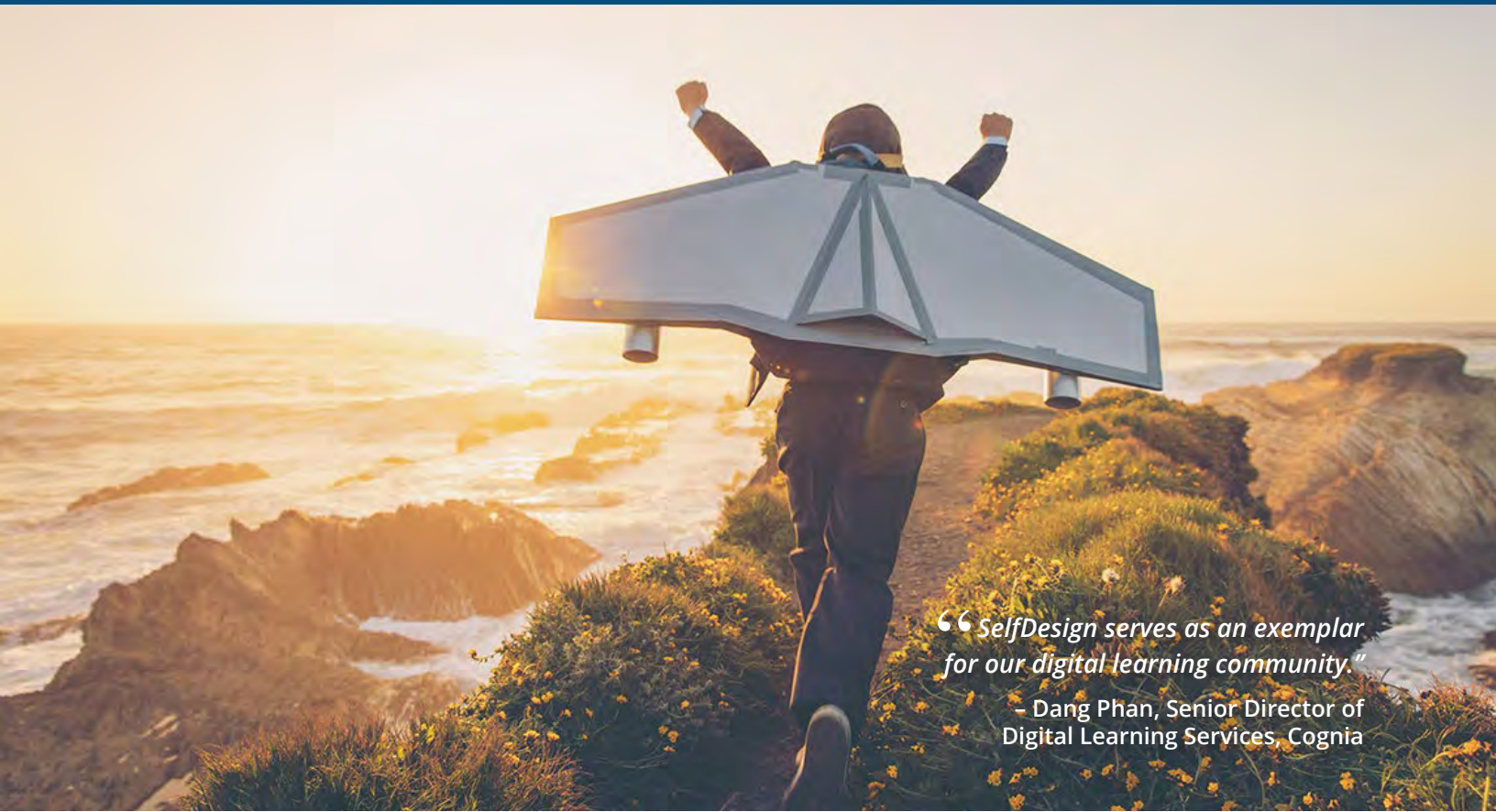


*“ Whether we realized it or not, we were learning an important SelfDesign technique: how to create intention around one’s own growth.”*

– Devon Girard, Chair, SelfDesign Learning Foundation Board of Directors, on his own experience as a SelfDesign learner in Wondertree (predecessor to SelfDesign)



# A leader in 21st century education



*“SelfDesign serves as an exemplar for our digital learning community.”*

*- Dang Phan, Senior Director of Digital Learning Services, Cognia*

Since 1983, the SelfDesign Learning Foundation has grown to become a global leader in the development of technology-enabled programs and initiatives that foster personalized and life-long learning. This year, we had many opportunities to share our expertise and experience with colleagues in the broader education community. From presenting at online-education conferences to joining BC Ministry of Education inspection teams to assessing other online schools, from advocating for increased access to online education for vulnerable and at-risk youth to sharing tips and resources with parents and educators transitioning from in-class learning to online learning, SelfDesign has continued to position itself as a leader in 21st century education.

*“We have 20 years of experience in working remotely with learners across British Columbia and in building relationships of trust and authenticity with them. We’ve learned so much in that time, and we’re honoured and delighted to share those learnings with our colleagues and with families of learners in North America and beyond during this time of transition.”*

*- Nikki Kenyon, Principal of Educational Programs,  
SelfDesign Learning Foundation*

## Here are some of the activities and initiatives we took part in this year.

### CANeLearn Symposium & BC Digital Learning Conference, April

Our principal team, Nikki Kenyon, Catherine Dinim and Vanessa Kuran, presented workshops on collaborative assessment and interdisciplinary online learning to educators attending this online conference from across Canada.

### BC school inspection team participation

In late 2019, the BC Ministry of Education invited SelfDesign's Principal of Educational Programs Nikki Kenyon to join its school inspection team. She participated in the inspection of four online schools in BC, helping to evaluate whether their programs and processes meet the requirements of B.C.'s *Independent School Act* and regulations, as well as the province's educational standards and outcomes set out for kindergarten to grade 12 independent school online learning.

### Federation of Independent School Associations in BC (FISA BC) discussions

At the start of the pandemic, SelfDesign took part in FISA BC meetings to share our experience with leaders and educators from independent brick-and-mortar schools who were moving to online education. We also facilitated a panel discussion on how best to support learners in the online learning environment.

### Advocacy, BC Ministry of Education

SelfDesign Learning Foundation met with officials from the BC Ministry of Education to discuss and share insights about how online learning supports at-risk and vulnerable BC youth whose needs may not be served by conventional school programs. We are committed to speaking up for these vulnerable populations and to assisting the Ministry in finding solutions.

### Cognia webinar

SelfDesign collaborated with Cognia, the world's largest education improvement organization, to share our expertise in building meaningful relationships with learners online. The resulting 60-minute webinar provides helpful, tested advice on how to engage learners online and build their trust and confidence so that they can learn. Educators from around the world attended the webinar, which is available for viewing online through Cognia.

### Tip sheets for educators and parents

When in-person classes in brick-and-mortar schools across the province were suspended in March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, SelfDesign developed and shared tip sheets for educators and parents to support online learning. The tip sheet for parents has been downloaded 375 times.

### Media interviews

SelfDesign was featured in stories about at-home learning by *Global News*, *CityNews 1130* and the *Vancouver Sun* this year.



# Our response to COVID-19

## A commitment to safety, support and transparency

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached BC in March, SelfDesign Learning Foundation immediately asserted that our first priority is the health and safety of our learners, families, educators and contractors. We also committed to supporting our entire community and to communicating regularly and transparently with them.

Our model for education provides our community with resiliency in these times. As experienced leaders in online learning, we were able to adjust quickly to continue delivering safe learning experiences to our community. Because of this, many of our learners, families, educators and contractors have been affected less than other BC residents, whose children attend brick-and-mortar schools.

At the same time, we recognize that the pandemic has caused challenges. Although SelfDesign's regular online learning continued uninterrupted, we suspended in-person services and activities in March, in accordance with provincial directives, and moved all of our education, operations and administration online. Where the shift created challenges for learners, families and support providers, we worked to support those affected.

To keep all of our community safe and functioning, SelfDesign's efforts have been guided by the directives of the federal and provincial health authorities, the BC Ministry of Education, BC Ministry of Health and WorkSafeBC as those directives have been issued and updated. Two documents serve as our safety roadmaps. Our COVID-19 Safety Plan includes policies, procedures, and protocols to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission within our community. Our pandemic response plan outlines our step-by-step approach to returning safely to in-person activities in phases, as it has become appropriate.

We transitioned many of our camps and in-person activities for learners to online formats, provided new online camp offerings, and opened up our online camps to all learners from all grade levels to attend from the safety of their own homes.

We provided helpful and credible resources for learners, families, educators and contractors beyond our core community to help them adapt to at-home online learning during the pandemic, and we are sharing our expertise in delivering excellent online learning programs and opportunities with the broader education community. With demand for online learning options increasing this year, we have increased the number of learners registered in SelfDesign Learning Community and SelfDesign Home Learning, and provided additional supports as needed.

We remain committed to keeping our learners, families, educators and contractors safe and to providing our community with support and information as it becomes available through 2021 and beyond.





# SelfDesign Learning Foundation programs and services



## SelfDesign Learning Community

A technology-enabled school  
for students from  
kindergarten to grade 12



## SelfDesign Home Learners

A flexible option for parents  
who wish to homeschool  
their child

Watch for  
our upcoming  
launch!



HomeLearners  
Network

## HomeLearners Network

An online community for learners of all  
ages to participate in synchronous online  
activities guided by BC certified educators.



## Support Services

For learners with  
special needs



## Message |

Nikki Kenyon,  
Principal of Educational Programs  
SelfDesign Learning community

*“I'm really proud of how we've continued to grow this year in our capacity to support learners and – at the same time – become more inclusive and support diversity.”*

I have been inspired in many ways this past year! Who knew at this time last year what we would be dealing with now? We've all encountered challenges that none of us imagined we would ever face. The challenges aren't over – we're still in a pandemic – but somehow through it all, this amazing SelfDesign community keeps moving forward with grace and compassion – for each other, in our homes, and in our work.

Another inspiration for me is our Class of 2020, who commenced in June. These 128 young people are the first group of SelfDesign learners to complete all three years of our newly designed grades 10 -12 program. They started grade 10 with us in 2017, just as we were rolling out our innovations and programming. Since then, they have helped us develop, pilot, refine, improve and shape the program into the excellent, inclusive learning program it is today. We are so, so proud of them, and so thankful to have had the opportunity to be part of their learning journeys these last three years.

As you may know, we shifted our in-person activities online this spring to maintain the safety of our learners, families, educators and contractors. Our Camps and Events Team took that as a challenge to develop and pilot a new model for increasing access to online gatherings and for connecting learners online. As a result, we added more real-time, online camps and gatherings. This year, we offered two Virtual Arts Camps and an Online Movement Camp, in addition to Virtual Art Intensive, Virtual Encounters, and Online Music Camp.

I'm really proud of how we've continued to grow this year in our capacity to support learners and – at the same time – become more inclusive and support diversity. Inclusiveness has always been foundational to SelfDesign. We've worked it into many aspects of our practice and organization, and we're committed to continuous improvement and learning in this way. This year, we integrated Indigenous learning into many offerings.

We also spent the year adjusting how we approach continuous, adaptive improvement at SelfDesign Learning Community. We've begun gathering data from all areas of our learning program to guide improvements and changes into the future. And I'm happy to report that SelfDesign has passed its annual inspection by the BC Ministry of Education. We have, once again, demonstrated that we are in compliance with the requirements to continue operating as a Group 1 Independent School in British Columbia. We're always grateful for the opportunity to share our program, documentation and materials with inspectors and to be able to affirm who we are as a school, what we do, and how we do it.

Yes, 2020 has been challenging at times, but for me, it has also offered much inspiration. Throughout the year, the SelfDesign community has repeatedly demonstrated its compassion, generosity of spirit, and support. That is truly something to celebrate.

Thank you, every one of you.

*Nikki*

# SelfDesign Learning Community

## An innovative and personalized approach to learning

We go above and beyond the walls of a classroom.

We offer a unique, personalized and inclusive approach to education for approximately 2,000 learners from kindergarten to grade 12 each year.

- ✓ We follow the **BC Ministry of Education curriculum**.
- ✓ Our BC certified educators provide **personalized one-to-one learning**.
- ✓ **Learners can graduate** with a BC Certificate of Graduation, Adult Graduation Diploma or School Completion Certificate. They have the same opportunity to apply for university or college as a child in a brick-and-mortar school.
- ✓ Our **inclusive education program** provides equal access to learning opportunities for all learners, by providing personalized support services to learners with special needs.
- ✓ We are a **Group 1 Independent School** in the province of British Columbia.
- ✓ The **Ministry of Education inspects our program annually** to ensure our programs and processes meet our obligations as a BC Group 1 Independent School. Our Learning Experiences Library, our camps and gatherings, and how we provide learners with opportunities to design their own learning received particularly high praise from inspectors.





# SelfDesign Learning Community

With SelfDesign Learning Community, learners and families experience a supportive learning experience in their home, online and in their community:

- ✓ **Each learner takes the lead in their own learning** in their own home environment and within their local and online communities, guided by one of approximately 175 BC certified educators.
- ✓ **We engage professional service providers** to support learners in areas such as music, art, speech and occupational therapy, physical education classes, and more.
- ✓ **Families are an expert in knowing their child** and are a valued part of the circle of relationships that include parent, learner and educator.

“ *SelfDesign is a unique opportunity to pursue your interests in a different way. It's also a great opportunity to find like-minded people – which could be hard to do otherwise – but SelfDesign provides the perfect opportunities for these connections to be made.*”

– Erik, former SelfDesign learner





## A SelfDesign story

### ► SelfDesign provided the tools for this learner to follow her passion

"Trust that you have the power within you to follow your dreams, and try not to doubt yourself," recent SelfDesign learner Maia advises other learners. "You're a lot stronger, braver, and more resilient than you realize."

Maia began writing *Thrown to the Wolves*, her first novel, in January 2018; in June 2019, the teenager graduated with a Dogwood Diploma (BC certificate of graduation) after 12 years with SelfDesign. She has since published the novel on Amazon, and is now crafting its sequel and plotting out a third book in the series.

She credits her work ethic, drive and persistence to succeed in her craft to the support that her learning consultants and learning specialists provided through grades 10 to 12. If it wasn't for that support and guidance, Maia says, "I probably wouldn't have put in the effort to get the story published."

SelfDesign also allowed her to pursue her interests and passions.

““ I think the biggest learning for me was the ability to take my learning into my own hands,” she says. “Without the countless crazy, huge projects that I came up with [as a SelfDesign learner], I never would have had the conviction to finish this project.”

*Thrown to the Wolves*, published on Amazon with cover artwork by fellow SelfDesign graduate Wilde Marsh, draws on the research skills Maia developed during her SelfDesign projects. It also is informed by her grade 10 to 12 learning experiences – in particular, coursework in which she learned about women's fight for the right to vote and about how many rights that women today enjoy are so recently attained.

The novel follows the story of Myra, a princess of medieval-like Gandalon. Myra is abandoned in a nearby forest by her father as a sacrifice to the gods for his not having had a son. She adopts a wolfpack, which she communicates with. Hardship, derring-do, tragedy, intrigue, betrayal, and bravery ensue.

The story emphasizes the theme of acceptance, belonging and community, a theme Maia returns to when she talks about her own SelfDesign experience. "SelfDesign has always been a place I could really feel a part of the community. I've always felt like I've belonged here."

She specifies one key lesson from her novel-writing and publishing experience that she wants to share with other learners, aspiring writers and everyone else:

“ Trust that all the work you’re doing now is going to lead you where you want to go. Don’t say it’s bad or can’t happen before you even start – there are so many people out there who have always wanted to write a novel, but they can’t get past their own mental blocks. You are already ahead by starting. This applies to all dreams, not just writing,” she says.



# SelfDesign Family Services – Helping to support learners and families

By Clarissa Tufts,  
Team Lead  
SelfDesign Family Services

At SelfDesign, the Family Services team works to support and contribute to a school culture of safety, acceptance, respect and encouragement for all members of the SelfDesign community.

Several goals inform our day-to-day work. Of these, the foundational goal is that learners and families have the support they need to be successful in their participation in SelfDesign.

We strive to ensure learners, parents and caregivers understand SelfDesign's program requirements and are aware of the help and resources available to them to meet agreements, participate meaningfully and plan confidently for their future educational goals, including how to complete grades 10 to 12.

We also aim to ensure educators have access to clear and meaningful information they need to support their learners and families' participation according to program agreements, school policy and procedure, and ministerial guidelines.

In addition to learner program participation support and planning, the Family Services team works to increase awareness of policies, procedures and resources in the realms of safety, inclusion and diversity. We work with our colleagues across the organization to integrate information and resources on these important topics into SelfDesign's educational curriculum, offerings and programming, and to provide opportunities for personal and professional development to educators and contractors. For example, in 2020, we arranged special presentations on online safety for learners, families and educators, hosted guest speakers and discussions, and collaborated with the SelfDesign Learning Experience librarian to develop resources for learners.

Other services we offer include Guidance counselling, provincial assessment planning, counselling services, program participation support, mediation for educators and families when they experience communication challenges, emergency response, anti-bullying and abuse support, online safety support, an online Gender Sexual Orientation Alliance (GSA) for learners in grades 8 to 12, and resources in our online Family Resource Centre's Virtual Brochure Rack and Guidance centre for our learning community.

If you are a member of the SelfDesign community and would like to learn more about what we do at Family Services, [see our articles](#) on the SelfDesign blog. We also encourage you to get in touch if you have any questions about our services and supports.

# A SelfDesign story

## ► Personalized learning, with a supportive approach

Olivia understands that when you can't go over it and you can't go under it, you must go through it. With great resilience, she has paved her own path – marching right through difficulties and barriers – even using them to her advantage to sharpen her purpose and her creativity.

This young adult, now 19 years old, commenced from SelfDesign in 2019 with the Adult Dogwood Diploma, after having started her journey with SelfDesign in grade 1. She is now a successful artist, teaching art out of her home studio and virtually, and having her work featured in Vancouver's 2019 Undercovered Art Festival.

She feels that doing her education through SelfDesign accommodated her needs and allowed her to thrive in a way that other environments may not have permitted.

"When I was almost 10, I got diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia," she says. "In addition to that, I have heightened sensory issues, an anxiety disorder and ADHD. I imagine all of that would have made it really hard for me if I had to go to a regular school."

SelfDesign's adaptability and learner-focused mandate allowed Olivia to find her gifts and passions and truly succeed at them. Doing the Adult Dogwood Diploma in her high school years allowed her to do the courses on her own timeline and in a flexible order that suited her needs.

“One of the things I found most supportive about SelfDesign was being able to learn based on what I liked and felt motivated by,” she says.

"That was a huge thing. For example, when I started with SelfDesign, I lived near a beach. A whole bunch of my learning that first year was about the ocean. I got to look at the rocks and read about fish, you know, just dive into that world."

It's amazing what can result from creating a supportive learning environment that is shaped and personalized to the individual learner.



# Expanding and integrating Indigenous learning opportunities at SelfDesign

By Patricia Collins

Indigenous Education Facilitator

The vision for Indigenous education at SelfDesign is for the learning community to be in a space where Indigenous and mainstream education are integrated and woven together so seamlessly that you can't separate the two.

To that end, our efforts this year have continued to focus on actively and authentically generating ways to incorporate the lived experiences and world views of diverse Indigenous Nations within all aspects of learning at SelfDesign. As part of this, I had the great pleasure of welcoming SelfDesign educator Amber Santos to the Indigenous Education team. Together, we're working to integrate reconciliation activities throughout SelfDesign. This is happening through our **Legacy School** partnership with the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Foundation, which links us to funding and educational resources that advance reconciliation, as well as through our community development and participation in **Orange Shirt Day**, which promotes awareness of the ongoing effects of Canada's former residential school system, and the **Moose Hide campaign**, which works to end violence against women and children. We've also committed to the goal of providing opportunities for all learners to see and engage with learning that celebrates and recognizes Indigenous contributions in the arts, technology, scientific and cultural pillars of our shared nation.





Our reconciliation-focused cultural learning opportunities for all learners continued throughout the year. We offered seasonal Indigenous Voices Book and Film Club gatherings, live offerings, and virtual camps. We increased access to Indigenous content in our subscriptions list and library resources and made additional resource support and up-to-date information for learners, families and SelfDesign educators available. We also regularly share information about our scheduled offerings with the entire SelfDesign Learning Community through Homebase messaging and weekly bulletins.

**We look forward to continuing working with Indigenous rights holders, parents, and youth to develop programming and enhance our offerings.**

These include seasonal Indigenous family and guardian discussion forums and invitations to Elders and Knowledge Keepers to take part in SelfDesign camps, the Commencement Ceremony, reconciliation activities, speaking engagements and educator professional development. We're also planning four educator conversations around deepening the expression of the **First Peoples' Principles of Learning** throughout SelfDesign activities, information sources and supports, and have recently concluded the first in this series with extremely positive feedback.

Our community is committed and actively engaged in bringing the vision of a reconciled Canada to fruition. We will be a part of this change, and we appreciate the many voices that have been raised in solidarity.

## Our approach

- ✓ **Our model and philosophy**, which focus on personalized and lifelong learning, sets us apart from other technology-enabled schools and brick-and-mortar schools.
- ✓ **We follow the BC Ministry of Education curriculum** in a way that puts children at the centre of their learning journey. We acknowledge that learning is a process, not a product, and that it is centred on relationships and conversation.
- ✓ We guide learners, with the **support of a BC certified educator**, to develop a personalized learning plan for each child to help them achieve the path to completion that best suits them – BC Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood Diploma), Adult Graduation Diploma or School Completion (Evergreen) Certificate.



## How it works

- 1 We place learners at the centre of their learning journeys
- 2 Learning takes place at home, in the local community and online
- 3 SelfDesign uses online technology to facilitate learning
- 4 We assess our learners based on competencies
- 5 How SelfDesign Learning Community differs from SelfDesign Home Learning



### **We place learners at the centre of their learning journeys**

We recognize that not all children learn in the same way, at the same pace, in the same learning environment. Personalized learning at SelfDesign Learning Community means each child takes the lead in their own learning. It is a 21st-century approach to education that puts the needs of each child first, because they are a unique individual with their own learning style, interests and goals.

We put the learner at the centre of their own learning experience and allow them to determine the pathway they will take towards meeting the required BC Ministry of Education competencies. A family with a learner enrolled in SelfDesign Learning Community is supported along that pathway by a BC certified educator. The educator works with the family and learner to develop a personalized learning plan tailored to the learner's own interests and passions. The educator then helps to guide the learner and family throughout the year through reflective observations of learning as it occurs and suggestions for learning and opportunities that can be explored at home, in the local community and online.

This is very different than classroom-based personalized learning. Classroom-based personalized learning involves customized educational lessons to support learners' needs, but the lessons occur within a fixed curriculum and learning schedule.



### **Learning takes place at home, in the local community and online**

Learning at SelfDesign means that learning happens everywhere – at home, in the community and online – and we use technology to support and facilitate the unique opportunities that presents. SelfDesign educators, learners and families also tap into technology to find the resources they need to pursue learning in the way that best suits them.





### SelfDesign uses online technology to facilitate learning

Our educators, learners and families use technology to create supportive, relationship-based spaces online where connection and learning happen. Communication, sharing and connection at SelfDesign can happen in many different ways online, including in online discussion rooms, in collaborative working spaces and in virtual meeting and sharing spaces. Technology allows our educators to communicate and interact with parents and learners, and it allows our learners to communicate and interact with each other.

We also use technology to create unique and innovative learning opportunities of our own. Our Learning Experiences Library offers learners and families a diverse and extensive collection of high-quality learning experiences tailored specifically to our learners' own interests, passions and needs. The appropriate and ad-free resources are specially curated to link learners' personalized learning paths to the BC curriculum in a holistic and unique way.

Our online camps bring together learners of all ages and abilities from across BC to explore interests, learn new skills, and share under the supportive guidance of our inhouse and guest facilitators.

Online learning meets provincial standards and is directed and supervised by a BC certified educator, with the responsibility for the program resting on SelfDesign Learning Community. In a recent BC Ministry of Education inspection of SelfDesign Learning Community's programs and processes, our Learning Experiences Library, our camps and gatherings, and how we provide learners with opportunities to design their own learning received particularly high praise.



### We assess our learners based on competencies

Because our kindergarten to grade 12 program is based on competency, we assess learning not through reporting, but through a process we call Observing for Learning. Our BC certified educators participate in ongoing weekly conversations with family members and their child.

## How SelfDesign Learning Community differs from SelfDesign Home Learning

In both SelfDesign Learning Community and SelfDesign Home Learning, learning takes place in the home environment. However, the two programs are markedly different. SelfDesign Learning Community offers online learning, whereas SelfDesign Home Learning is a home schooling program.

### SelfDesign Learning Community

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- ✓ Learners and families **work with a BC certified educator**
- ✓ **Learners and families are supported** through their learning experience and have access to a wide array of resources, including our camps and gatherings and our unique Learning Experiences Library.
- ✓ We **assess learning through a process called Observing for Learning**. Our BC certified educators map the learning that is observed to competencies within the BC curriculum.
- ✓ Learners in SelfDesign Learning Community **earn credit for courses in grades 10 to 12, and can graduate** with a BC Certificate of Graduation, Adult Graduation Diploma or School Completion after grade 12 with the same opportunities to apply for university or college as a child in a brick-and-mortar school does.

### SelfDesign Home Learning

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- ✓ **Parents take full responsibility** for their child's learning program and do not report to the school. This makes SelfDesign Home Learning **the most flexible educational program** that we offer.
- ✓ Learners and families have **access to a number of subscriptions to high-quality learning resources**, and receive newsletters with information about resources, opportunities open to home learners, and supports for learning at home.
- ✓ **Parents take responsibility** for the learning program and do not report to the school. Learners' work is not assessed.
- ✓ **Learners do not earn credit for courses in grades 10 to 12**, nor do they graduate and earn a high school diploma.

## A SelfDesign story

► Class of 2020 is the 1<sup>st</sup> to complete SelfDesign's new, unique high school program

In 2020, a group of SelfDesign learners moved on to the next stage of their lifelong learning journeys with Certificates of Graduation (Dogwood Diploma), School Completion (Evergreen) Certificates or Adult Graduation Diplomas (Adult Dogwood). They were the first learners to have gone through the three full years of SelfDesign Learning Community's newly designed high school program.

"They have been key to the success of our entire grade 10 to 12 program from its launch in 2017," says SelfDesign Principal of Educational Programs Nikki Kenyon. "They have helped us pilot and refine our offerings every step of the way as they learned, grew, matured and progressed. In the process, we have learned as much from their insights about the program as they learned experiencing it – and the result is an even better program for learners following in their footsteps."

“ The program offers a unique, comprehensive approach to high school that is based on relationships and aligns fully with the BC Ministry of Education curriculum.”

SelfDesign's philosophy is woven throughout to support a personalized way of learning where the learner is always at centre.

Courses are grouped and integrated into themes, such as travel and adventure, storytelling, entrepreneurship, or STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math). In keeping with SelfDesign's philosophy and approach to learning, the high school program centres on relationships. Educators get to know their learners one-on-one and can support them from year to year. They also get to know the entire family and the learner's service providers (such as a speech therapist, music teacher, psychologist, etc.).



“Learners can interact with their theme cohort on whatever level is comfortable for them,” says Vice-principal of SelfDesign Learning Community Catherine Dinim.

Amelia, a SelfDesign learner from the Class of 2020, recalls that her first theme class was exciting and full of new experiences. She says it taught her about what respect feels like.

“On one occasion I was at a real-time meeting,” she says, “and we were talking about what had come out of our discussions. The learning specialist for our group [...] always encouraged us to talk about what we knew and what we thought. I remember the exact moment she said something, which I still remember word for word: ‘Ah yes, every time I go to these meetings, I learn so much from you kids! I always tell people how much my students teach me!’ It may seem kind of cheesy, but this moment was a powerful example of respect from a mentor for me.

“I felt this feeling of recognition and support of my ideas, but most importantly respect of my intelligence. This teacher was acknowledging that we as students have legitimate ideas, that we can teach an elder something.”

One hundred and twenty-eight learners commenced from SelfDesign this year.

# We support...



## **INCLUSIVE LEARNING**

We provide learners with Indigenous learning opportunities so they can understand the world and its relations through a framework of Indigenous wisdom and philosophy.



## **SUPPORTIVE LEARNING**

The safety, acceptance and inclusion of all learners in regard to ability, learning style, culture, personal and spiritual beliefs, and gender identity.



## **INDEPENDENT LEARNING**

The development of traits such as autonomy, collaboration and a sense of social and global responsibility, which can position learners to be successful in post-secondary programs and careers.





# What sets us apart



Learning happens  
everywhere



Prepared for  
success



Personalized  
learning



A supportive  
approach



B.C. Ministry of  
Education approved



Indigenous  
Learning



SelfDesign Learning  
Experiences Library



Inclusive  
education



# A SelfDesign story

by Madelaine, recent SelfDesign learner

► Learner wins scholarship contest with essay on inclusive media

I joined the SelfDesign community as a child and graduated in 2020. Throughout my time there, I had the opportunity to form relationships with several learning consultants, all of whom influenced me and became an important part of my life.

“In SelfDesign, I always felt supported, both by my learning consultants and by the wider community. There was always a way to create the kind of learning experience I wanted while still meeting the requirements to go on to university after graduation, as per my plan. I also enjoyed the opportunity to be part of the first class to participate in and graduate from SelfDesign’s new high school program.

Last year, I entered A&E’s Canadian Classroom essay contest, “Lives That Make A Difference.” The challenge was to write an essay about someone who had made an important impact on Canadian society in 2019. I wrote my essay on Dan Levy, the co-creator and leading producer of the television show *Schitt’s Creek*. I think that what Dan Levy has done through his show is understated, yet nothing short of groundbreaking.



“ Most often, queer characters in television and the media are portrayed as one dimensional, their most important characteristic being their sexual orientation.

There is a definite lack of LGBTQ+ representation in general in the media, and there is an even greater lack of LGBTQ+ characters shown in healthy, stable relationships. Most often, queer characters in television and the media are portrayed as one dimensional, their most important characteristic being their sexual orientation. Plots involving these characters often revolve around ‘coming out’ and the trauma and pain commonly associated with this. Rarely do we see a queer character who simply exists like any other person does and who gets to have a life and a story that doesn’t revolve around a damaging revelation about their sexuality or a traumatic coming-out experience.

In *Schitt’s Creek*, however, we see queer characters who aren’t defined by their sexual orientation. We see a world in which people are accepted for who they are and are not judged by who they love.

That is the gift that is Dan Levy and *Schitt’s Creek*.

The show might not be for everyone, but for many queer youth such as myself, it is a source of valuable representation – and a hope for the way the world could look.

Read Madelaine’s winning essay on the SelfDesign Blog:

<https://www.selfdesign.org/selfdesign-learner-wins-scholarship-contest-with-essay-on-inclusive-media/>



## *A SelfDesign story*

### ► Building and learning through meaningful relationships online

When the BC government suspended in-person learning in BC schools in March to protect students and slow the spread of the COVID-19, SelfDesign immediately took its popular, in-person Arts Intensive camp online and opened it up to all interested SelfDesign learners. Response was so enthusiastic, the SelfDesign camps team tweaked the program and schedule, and offered it on Fridays over four weeks throughout April and again in May. Each time, they presented new themes for learners to explore art in new ways, delved into different media and techniques, and shared new sources of inspiration.

### **More than 140 learners participated in the three online camps.**

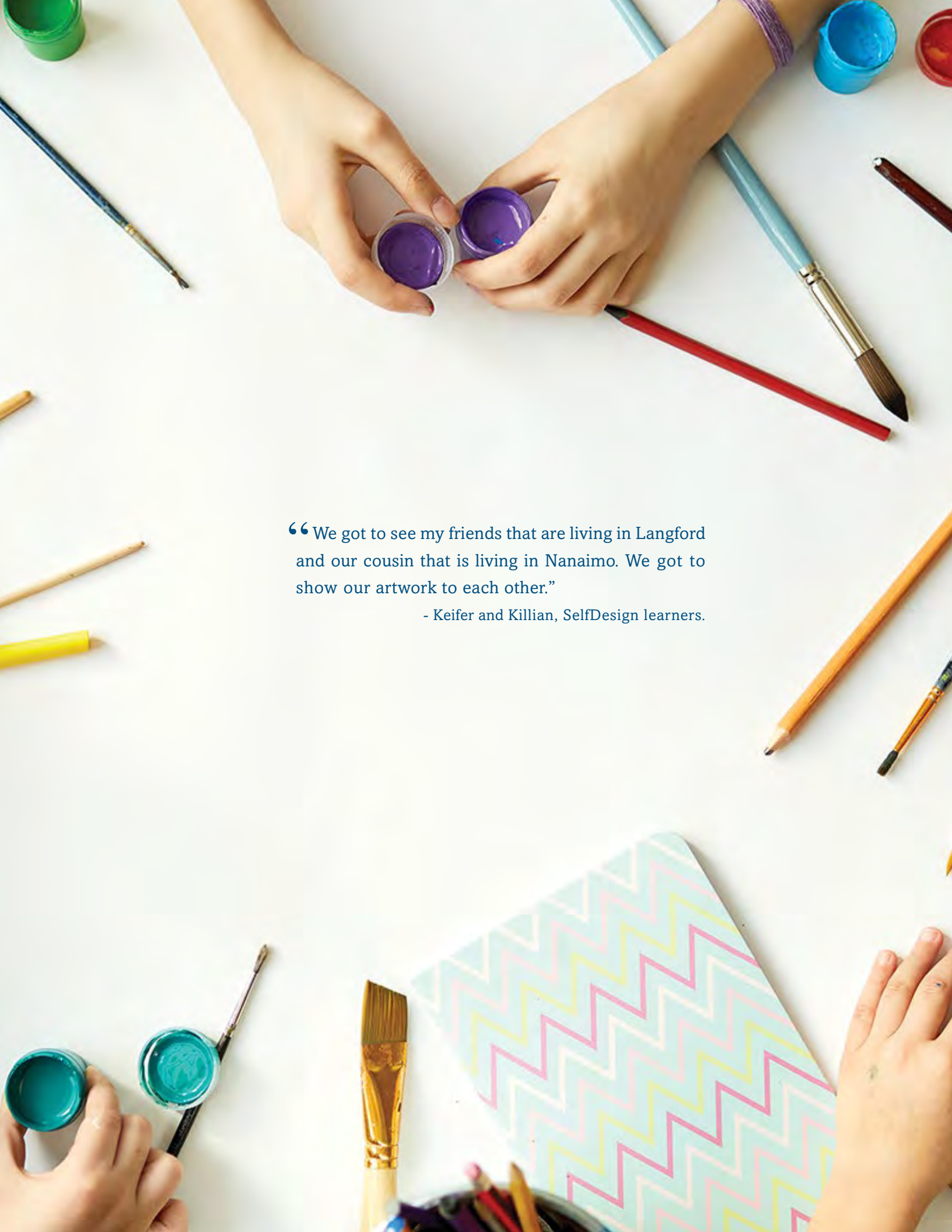
Keifer and Killian, brothers who are SelfDesign learners, say the camps let them work on art at home while still interacting with other learners, who were participating from their own homes.

Quinn, a SelfDesign learner in grade 5, says she really liked being able to take part in the camp's weekly virtual art sessions during the COVID-19 restrictions. "I learned so many ways of creating art, more than I thought there were. It really encouraged me to make art more often, because I found it super calming."

SelfDesign has since applied the experience it gained from transitioning Arts Intensive to a virtual format to other events. Virtual Encounters for older learners took place May 25–28, while SelfDesign added a second, new camp at the same time for younger learners. Learners, families and educators celebrated Virtual Commencement together on June 13. Learners also gathered online in September to collaborate on songwriting during SelfDesign's Online Music Camp and to take part in an online dance and movement camp in November. An online music forum brought learners together once again in November to perform a virtual concert for the broader SelfDesign community.

Combined, these events show that SelfDesign has the vision and know-how to keep learners connected and sharing even when it is navigating public health-driven restrictions on in-person gatherings.



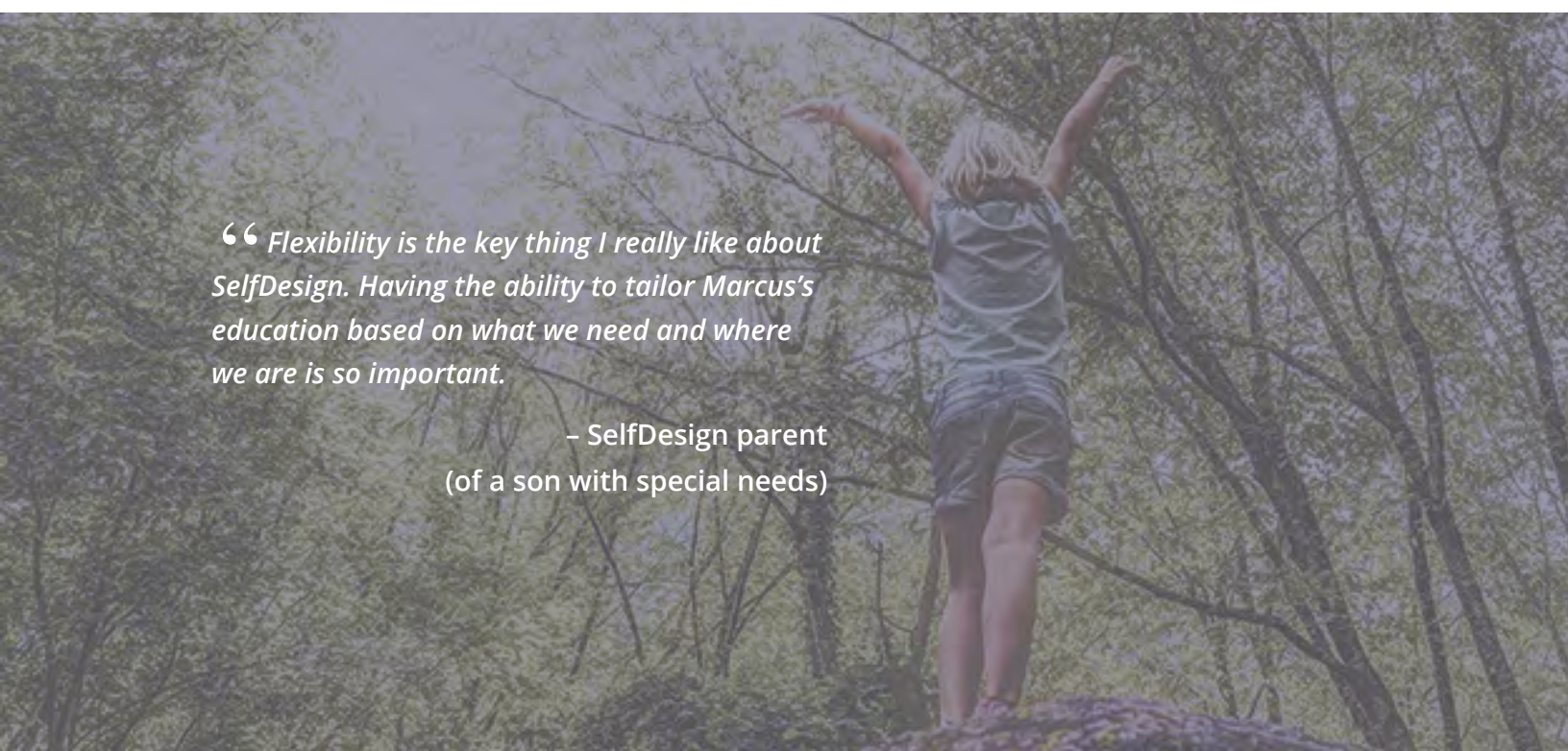


“We got to see my friends that are living in Langford and our cousin that is living in Nanaimo. We got to show our artwork to each other.”

- Keifer and Killian, SelfDesign learners.

# Supporting learners with special needs

- ✓ **Our inclusive kindergarten to grade 12** program provides equal access to opportunities for all learners, including specific services to support learners of all ages with special needs.
- ✓ **Learners are unique so we adapt our programming** to them. Every learner has a unique voice, and our inclusive kindergarten to grade 12 program is committed to listening to each and every child – however they are able to communicate.
- ✓ **Families know their child better** than anyone and, while opinions of professional experts are highly regarded, parents insights are equally valued.
- ✓ SelfDesign's **Support Services creates Individual Education Plans** for children that go above and beyond a regular learning plan. Each plan is learner-centred and created through collaboration between families, their child, and a BC certified educator (specialized learning consultant) to identify and support their child's individual needs. Learners will have access to specialists who can provide a wide array of services, including speech pathology, psychology, etc.
- ✓ **In 2020, we adjusted our template for individual education plans (IEPs)** for learners who have diverse abilities or disabilities. Whereas these IEP documents were primarily administrative, they're now learner-friendly, learner-centred documents that focus specifically on building core competencies. Learners and families can now use the plans to track their own progress towards their learning and life goals.
- ✓ **We provide services for all learners needing additional support** to maximize their learning opportunities. We offer support services to learners who have been, in accordance with BC Ministry of Education guidelines, professionally diagnosed with low incidence needs or who may or may not have been diagnosed with high incidence needs.

A photograph of a young child with blonde hair, seen from behind, jumping over a horizontal tree branch in a dense forest. The child is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and dark shorts. The background is filled with green foliage and tree trunks, creating a natural, outdoor setting.

*“ Flexibility is the key thing I really like about SelfDesign. Having the ability to tailor Marcus’s education based on what we need and where we are is so important.*

– SelfDesign parent  
(of a son with special needs)



## A SelfDesign story

### ► Support Services creatively respond to learners' complex, individual needs

At SelfDesign Learning Community, we listen to each and every child – however they communicate. Every learner with special needs is unique, and we recognize this by providing programming tailored to each learner's needs.

We offer support services to learners who have been professionally diagnosed with low incidence needs or who have been identified with high incidence needs according to BC Ministry of Education guidelines. About 30 per cent of our learners use these services.

Kathleen Forsythe, who has served as SelfDesign's vice principal, principal and executive director and remains, to this day, a SelfDesign educator, was instrumental in developing and implementing our support services since our start in 1983. In 2007, she met a mother who desperately needed support for her child. In response, Kathleen created a supportive space for one of SelfDesign's first learners with complex needs. Other learners joined soon after, and desire for the support SelfDesign offers in this way kept on growing.

"I could see that the system wasn't serving these families well," Kathleen says. "And I saw that we could. We could provide a legitimate educational program for them that was equivalent to the educational programs we were providing to all kids."

An already experienced educator, Kathleen started specialized training when she took on that first student. She responded to a need, and that changed the course of her life and career.

"As numbers grew, it became important that people were trained," she says. "We developed our own training modules.

**“ I always took the approach of learner-first – the same approach applied to every other kid in the program. This became our model of inclusion.”**

Each learner using our support services receives an individual education plan, or IEP, in addition to a learning plan. The learner-centred IEP is created in collaboration with the caregivers, the child and a BC certified educator to identify and support the learner's own, individual needs.

SelfDesign Principal of Educational Programs Nikki Kenyon believes our approach is to tailor our support to the unique needs of each learner in the context of that family, their community and their environment.

"We figure out what that entire system needs in order to thrive," she says. "We're really able to assess a need and provide resources to meet it in support of reaching educational goals. This model of putting the learner at the centre and figuring out how we can best support their growth is how we approach every learner – complex needs or not."

# SelfDesign HomeLearners' Network

Familiar name, entirely new program

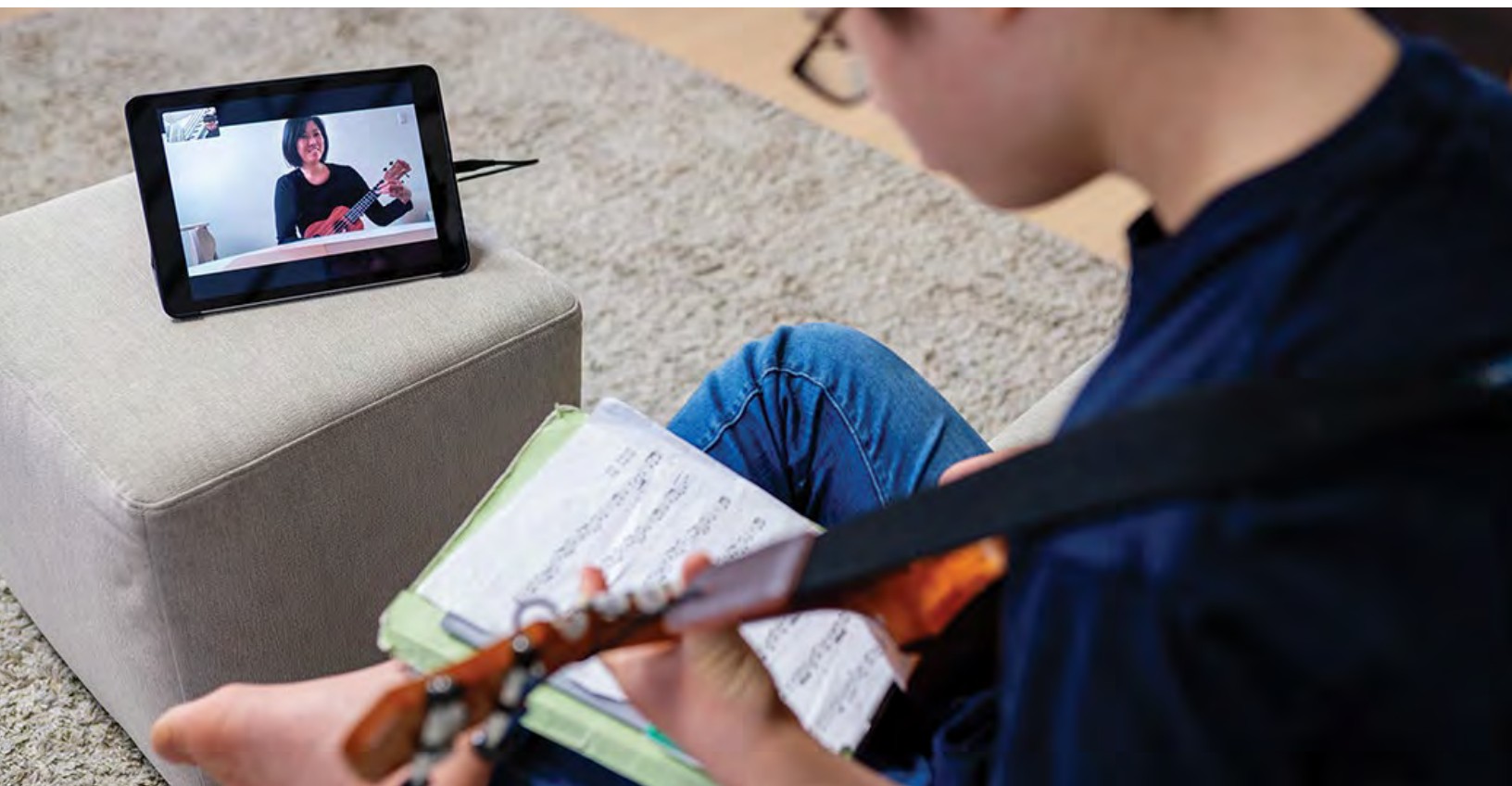


HomeLearners  
Network

At SelfDesign, we take continuous learning to heart and consider every challenge encountered an opportunity to learn more and to improve. This year, we approached the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting rapid move to online education, as well as an increased demand from our own learners, families and educators, as an opportunity to help educators and families both within and beyond the SelfDesign community to adjust to different types of online learning.

As a result, we are packaging our unique knowledge and expertise in this area into a new program. The HomeLearners Network is a new SelfDesign online platform (with a familiar name), separate from SelfDesign Learning Community, that we began developing with the help of our SelfDesign Learning Community educators. We hope to launch the first phase of The HomeLearners' Network soon – creating an online community of learners of all ages and a safe, supportive place where they can connect and participate in real-time online activities that are guided by BC certified SelfDesign educators.

We are excited about this new venture and the opportunities it presents here at SelfDesign and in the broader community. Please [subscribe to our newsletter](#) and stay tuned for more information.





# SelfDesign Home Learning

## Pursuing learning independently

As schools across British Columbia implement new provincial requirements put in place to keep learners and educators safe, many families with school-aged children are seeking alternatives to traditional, brick-and-mortar schools. SelfDesign Home Learning – called HomeLearners' Network until recently – provides an alternative for families across BC who wish to have their children learn independently at home. As a home schooling program, it is the most flexible learning program we offer at SelfDesign Learning Foundation. It would best suit families where the parents wish to take on the responsibility for their child's education and are not concerned with BC Ministry of Education requirements.

SelfDesign Home Learning differs from our regular kindergarten to grade 12 program in the following ways:

- ✓ Families do not work with an educator.
- ✓ Parents take responsibility for the learning program and do not report to the school. Learners' work is not assessed.
- ✓ Learners do not earn credit for courses in grades 10 to 12, nor graduate and earn a high school diploma.

This year, to enrich the at-home learning experience, we provided learners and families with access to a suite of subscriptions to high-quality online learning opportunities, such as BrainPop, Go Zen, and Enchanted Learning. We also shared information about key resources and supports for learning at home – including Indigenous Education resources, information on SelfDesign camps and gatherings that are open to Home Learning families, and information about free online learning resources.

The SelfDesign Home Learning program has been serving learners since 1989. By the end of 2020, about 482 home learners and their families were registered with SelfDesign.



# SelfDesign Learning Foundation by the Numbers

In 2020, we celebrated many successes. Here are just a few of them.

2076

Kindergarten to grade 12 learners were enrolled in SelfDesign Learning Community in 2020/2021.

483

Home learners and their families were enrolled in SelfDesign Home Learning in the 2020/2021 learning year, up from 276 in 2019/2020.

909

Learners with special needs received support services.

175

BC certified educator contractors supported learners; **64** of these are specialized learning consultants who support learners with special needs.

1500

External service provider-contractors supported our learners through Learning Resources Services and Individual Education Plans.

57

Contractors supported SelfDesign's administration and operations.

360

Learners and families attended seven SelfDesign camps, six of which were online.

150<sup>+</sup>

Learners and families attended our online Commencement Ceremony.

169

Learning resources are available in the SelfDesign Learning Experience Library, providing almost 1,700 content pages of online resources, with each page listing eight to twelve individual high-quality resources.

128

Learners completed their learning journeys with SelfDesign Learning Community.

8

Community Conversations were attended by 325 SelfDesign educators, contractors and leaders.



# SelfDesign Learning Foundation

## Other Highlights and successes, 2020

The past year offered new opportunities and spurred interest in and demand for our programs and services. SelfDesign was well positioned to respond to the challenges.





### **Pivot to online activities**

When COVID-19 pandemic restrictions limited in-person activities in BC, SelfDesign Learning Community quickly and successfully transitioned many of its in-person activities to online formats. As part of this, we developed and piloted a new model for increasing access to online gatherings and for connecting learners online. As a result, we have added more real-time, online camps and gatherings, and we've expanded our offerings. We look forward to expanding our offerings even further in 2021.



### **Class of 2020 completes full grade 10 to 12 program**

In June, 128 young people finished their SelfDesign learning journeys as the first cohort of learners to go through all three years of our new, unique and innovative high school program. During those three years, they helped us develop, pilot, refine, improve and shape the program into the excellent, inclusive, learning program it is today.



### **Unprecedented demand for SelfDesign programs**

By July 10, SelfDesign Learning Community had reached 96 per cent capacity for the 2020/2021 learning year, and we stopped taking applications for our kindergarten to grade 12 program in the third week of August – much earlier than in any previous year. By September, about 2,000 learners were on our wait list.

SelfDesign Home Learning also saw record numbers of registrants. About 480 learners are now registered, up from 276 in 2019. Of the learners registered this fall, almost 250 are new to SelfDesign.



### **New supports for registered SelfDesign Home Learning families**

To enrich the learning experiences of our SelfDesign Home Learning families, we're now providing access to subscriptions to high-quality online learning opportunities, such as BrainPop, Go Zen, Enchanted Learning, and more. We are also sharing information more often about key resources and supports for learning at home.





### Keeping our online community safe

We continue our commitment to online safety. When brick-and-mortar schools moved to remote, online formats in the spring, SelfDesign was ahead of the curve in ensuring that the tools and platforms our learners, families, and community members rely are secure and meet our needs. In October, we hosted online safety presentations for learners, parents and educators by Safer Schools Together, an organization that provides training for violence threat assessment and preventing bullying to schools and communities across Canada.

Our Family Services Virtual Brochure Rack and Learning Experiences Library offers more excellent resources for learners and families to learn more about staying safe online.



### Learner-initiated Gender Sexual Orientation Alliance

This fall, a group of grade 10 to 12 learners, working with our Family Services team, launched SelfDesign's Gender Sexual Orientation Alliance. The alliance, led by the learners, is one of the SOGI 123 (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) initiatives SelfDesign has undertaken in recent years to support youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, or other (LGBTQ2S+), or who might be exploring their gender identity and sexual orientation.



### Renewal of A SelfDesign Path: A course for parents

This year, we renewed A SelfDesign Path, the course we designed to guide parents through SelfDesign's unique approach to learning. This self-paced, module-based course allows parents to make the most of the SelfDesign experience and can lead to supportive conversations between families and their learning consultants, as well as contribute to richer family conversations.

Our Support Services team offers a special edition of A SelfDesign Path course, adapted for parents of learners with special needs.



## Integrating Indigenous perspectives and values into the learning experience

SelfDesign continues to implement its strategy to support Indigenous learners in our community and to advance reconciliation for all members, based on the recommendations put forward by our Indigenous Task Force in 2017. Here are a few of the opportunities, activities and initiatives

### We worked on in 2020:

Our virtual and in-person camps and events integrated themes and activities that reflect Indigenous perspectives. In addition, our Learning Experiences Library features an ever-growing collection of resources, questions, suggestions and inspirations sparked by the curiosity of our learners and reflecting the cultures, diversity and history of First Nations in BC and other Indigenous peoples.

We hosted a series of activities, speakers and a T-shirt design competition in September in honour of Orange Shirt Day, which commemorates the residential school experience and commits to the ongoing process of reconciliation.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners and their families gathered to participate in Cultural Explorations 2020 activities. We also discussed films, documentaries, picture books, novels and autobiographies at our monthly Indigenous film and book club and hosted online experiences and sharing circles for Indigenous families and learners, as well as seasonal Indigenous parent discussion forums.

We offered professional development opportunities to help our educators and contractors deepen their understanding about reconciliation and Indigenous Canadian worldviews and perspectives. Indigenous author and speaker Monique Gray Smith joined us for a Community Conversation about reconciliation and helping learners deal with trauma. We also hosted a lunchtime discussion series and an online workshop about First People's Principles of Learning.

To learn more about our commitment to weave the Canadian Indigenous worldview and perspective into all aspects of SelfDesign Learning Foundation, please check out our blog series on this topic, which we published in June to celebrate National Indigenous History Month.





### Community Conversations, meaningful discussions

A series of eight online Community Conversations throughout the year drew 325 SelfDesign educators and contractors to explore key and ongoing issues affecting our learners. We hosted Indigenous speakers, psychologists, counsellors and other experts, each of whom shared wisdom and expertise on topics such as inclusion, reconciliation, trauma and support.



### Family Services Virtual Brochure Rack: part of our supportive approach

Our Family Services team provides a broad range of helpful online resources – called the Virtual Brochure Rack – in SelfDesign's online Family Resource Centre. The resources cover more than 125 different topics within the broad categories of Self-Expression and Identity, Relationships, Parenting, Safety, Health, Mental Health, Mindfulness and Stress Management, and Crisis and Trauma.

Learners and families are welcome to browse the resources and use them to help in their lives and in how they experience their education. We're also integrating the resources into core learning activities.



### New website supports SelfDesign's vision as a leader in 21st century education

Our new website, launched in March, facilitates the experience of navigating around our public online presence. It offers a fresh, coherent, modern look, streamlined layout, and easy-to-find information about our programs. New features include a series of heartfelt videos about learners, families and educators that speak to our culture and values, and a blog with stories and information about our unique approach to learning, who we are, what we do, and how SelfDesign learning works.

To coincide with the website launch, we enhanced our social media channels, bringing our Instagram and LinkedIn accounts in line with our existing Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Since March, our website has been visited more than 63,000 times, with approximately 157,500 individual page views, and our program information packages have been downloaded almost 3,000 times.



### Increased efficiency in managing learner supports and resources budgets

Over the past year, SelfDesign has integrated and optimized its financial systems and processes, increasing in-house efficiencies in the day-to-day management of funding support for resources and services that help learners in our kindergarten to grade 12 program explore their learning interests, learn within their local communities, and meet their learning goals. Transferring administration of the school's learning resources and services to a new purchasing-management system has helped our Finance team respond to requests more quickly, manage purchasing more effectively, and report metrics based on reliable, real-time data. For spending related to individual education plans for learners with complex needs, we re-engineered and implemented processes that allow for more timely spending management and prioritized re-allocation of unused funding to learners who need it.



### Attracting, managing and retaining quality contractors

During the last year, SelfDesign has laid the groundwork for ensuring we have the right number of contractors with the right skills in the right place at the right time to meet the organization's needs. Our Human Relations team researched, adopted and are now implementing a staffing-management system that helps us systematically improve and support how we attract, manage and retain quality contractors.

*“ SelfDesign has provided us the academic flexibility to focus on our children's individual needs as well as clarifying our family values and aligning our studies with what matters to us most. Creating a warm, cozy learning environment at home has not only allowed us to connect more deeply as a family, but it's also allowed our children to blossom emotionally while feeling unconditional love and support.”*

– SelfDesign parent



