# SelfDesign Learning Foundation Community Report 2023



It is with gratitude that the SelfDesign community respectfully acknowledges the many traditional, ancestral, unceded and treaty territories that we learn and grow on throughout this diverse continent. We honour and thank the many Nations whose voices and footsteps have marked this territory for millenia in recognition of their continued stewardship of the land. We also look forward to many collaborations and meaningful exchanges to create a shared vision for the future.



LEARNING FOUNDATION

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## MESSAGE

Amber Papou, President & CEO SelfDesign Learning Foundation

"The greatest thing in the world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving."

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As I reflect upon the journey of SelfDesign Learning Foundation over the past year, these words resonate deeply with me. As with any journey, this year has been shaped by the lessons learned from our past successes, and it is from these lessons that we build on a strong foundation to help guide us. In a world of constant change, our commitment to nurturing individual growth and fostering lifelong learning remains relevant. What we accomplished as an organization, a school, and as a community this year is a testament to all of the combined lessons of past years and to our unwavering dedication to empowering learners of all ages to chart their own course and discover the boundless potential that lies within.

In 2023, we celebrated several significant milestones. In particular, we proudly embraced SelfDesign Learning Community's first year as a recognized provincial online school. We were also able to secure our first multi-year contract with the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care. This milestone validates our dedication to high-quality education and adds a level of security and consistency to the services that we provide to our learners in a way that we have not experienced before.

Another significant accomplishment in 2023 was the successful completion of our new strategic plan. Under the guidance of our visionary Board and leadership team, we now have a road map that will ensure our organization's growth and development in the years ahead. The strategic plan reflects our commitment to excellence and innovation, ensuring that we will provide exceptional opportunities and make a lasting impact on all of those whom we serve.

Another wonderful achievement reached in 2023 is the IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) work that the organization has committed to. Although the "IDE" part of that work is ongoing, the accessibility plan has been completed. This plan will provide further resources and support for all of our community members to reach their full potential, to have a voice around our table, and to accomplish our collective goals.

Beyond the milestones achieved in our digital realm, 2023 held a special place in our hearts as we were finally able to come together in person, for the first time since 2019, at our much-anticipated LocalLabs. These events provided us with time to reconnect, where our community of educators, contractors, Board, and leadership were able to interact in real time and real space. The energy and creativity at the four June events across southern BC not only inspiring but, in my opinion, were also much needed. We were able to witness once again the magic that happens when our community gathers together in a physical presence.

As the CEO of this remarkable organization, I am continually reminded of the extraordinary individuals who make our community so special — our learners, their supportive families, our dedicated contractors, and our committed Board members. Together, we continue this journey of SelfDesign and, along the way, create the magic evoked from the belief in the limitless potential of each individual and the power of self direction. It is this magic that fills me with enthusiasm and with gratitude as I serve this organization into 2024, when we will be celebrating our 40th anniversary, and beyond.

With gratitude,

Amber

6 I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING OUR NEXT STEPS THROUGH AND ENHANCING THE BOARD'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT SDLF AND ALL OUR CONTRACTORS."

> —Carlos Da Ponte, Board member



## MESSAGE

Verena Gibbs, Chair, Board of Directors SelfDesign Learning Foundation

Reflecting back on 2023, a number of highlights touching on SelfDesign's Board of Directors comes to mind.

First and foremost among the Board's activities in 2023 is the completion of SelfDesign Learning Foundation's new strategic framework. This document articulates the organization's guiding vision and mission and affirms the core values that govern all that SelfDesign does. It provides the structure from which SelfDesign's operations planning will continue over the next three years.

I want to thank the talented volunteers who have served on the board over the last several years for making this happen. Their dedication and passion to the ideals of SelfDesign were essential to the process and the result. I also want to acknowledge the work of SelfDesign's Leadership team and of the many team leads and other contractors, whose input and ideas were essential in shaping the resulting framework.

I had the pleasure of working with President & CEO Amber Papou who introduced the new strategic framework to members of the SelfDesign community at LocalLabs in June. I was thrilled to collaborate with my "old" friend, River Meyer, Director of Learning and Organizational Culture, to facilitate this year's LocalLabs. River's deep understanding and embodiment of the SelfDesign's philosophy is a true gift to our community. The discussions and insights shared by so many passionate people inspired and reminded me why I continue to work on behalf of this amazing community.

For me, my experiences at the 2023 LocalLabs also emphasized how important it is to gather in-person, to get to know people and to build community. With SelfDesign being a fully remote organization, the circumstances of recent years have provided us with few opportunities to be together in one location. I hope we can continue to design meaningful in-person opportunities moving forwards.

In November, the SelfDesign Board of Directors gathered for its first retreat since 2019. We discussed policy and governance, current, emerging and potential issues that might affect SelfDesign, and how to onboard new board members so that they understand the organization as they work on its behalf. Mostly, however, we connected with each other. The SelfDesign board may be a single entity, and it may speak with one voice, but it is made up of six people with very different backgrounds, strengths, perspectives and motivations for volunteering on the board. This makes for incredibly rich conversations as we work collaboratively to make decisions that honour the spirit of SelfDesign.

I'd like thank my colleagues — Sherry Elwood, who retired from the Board of Directors in the fall, and Carlos da Ponte, Devon Girard and Frank Heinzelmann for their ongoing and stalwart support. I also welcome Lara Kehler and Werner Knittel, our newest board members. It has been a genuine pleasure to work with all of these talented, experienced people.

Sincerely,

Verena

AS BOTH A PARENT, LIFELONG LEARNER AND BOARD MEMBER, THE TIME WE SPENT CONNECTING, BEING, AND THINKING TOGETHER WAS INVALUABLE. I CAME AWAY WITH AN EVEN STRONGER DESIRE TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WITHIN SELF DESIGN WHILE DEEPENING THE ACCOUNTABILITY AND SKILLS I BRING TO MY ROLE ON THE BOARD."

> —Lara Kehler, Board member

### **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.

We are 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.

#### Mission

We facilitate lifelong learning and holistic personal growth through programs, opportunities, and support for people of all ages, with an emphasis on choice and self-direction.

#### Vision

A world deeply rooted in curiosity, compassion, and learning.

### **SelfDesign Learning Foundation**

#### 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.



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



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.



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



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



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.

#### SelfDesign's updated vision, mission and new strategic framework

A world deeply rooted in curiosity, compassion, and learning — this is the updated vision that resets the direction of SelfDesign Learning Foundation, its programs and its community into the coming years.

The SelfDesign Learning Foundation Board of Directors worked for two years to lay the groundwork for our renewed path. They delved into what we do as an organization, where our strengths are, what our purpose is, and who we serve. Their goal was to determine how we, as an organization, can grow into a future with integrity, resilience and grace.

In addition to revisiting our guiding vision, the board has updated our mission to more accurately reflect our purpose.

These guiding statements are part of a new strategic framework that provides high-level, overarching direction to help us chart our course through 2023 and beyond. Following the framework, as an organization and a community, we will seek to:



#### **INNOVATE**

We will continue exploring and creating new opportunities for increased impact.



#### ENGAGE

We will nurture relationships both inside and outside the organization



#### **STRENGTHEN**

We will build on our solid foundation to further enhance what we do



#### EXCEL

we will use data, best practices and research to maintain excellence throughout our organization.

• The strategic plan reflects our commitment to excellence and innovation, ensuring that we will provide exceptional opportunities and make a lasting impact on all of those whom we serve."

> —Amber Papou, President & CEO

### Our philosophy

### The art and science of lifelong learning

#### We believe...

- 1. 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.
- 2. That people learn everywhere and in every moment, and that learning is enriched and amplified through conversations and relationships with others.
- **3.** In the safety, acceptance and inclusion of all learners in regard to ability, learning style, culture, race, personal or spiritual beliefs, gender identity and expression.



### **Spotlight on A SelfDesign Path**



Rooted in our philosophy, SelfDesign's unique approach to learning "has nothing to do with schooling and everything to do with lifelong learning," says SelfDesign's Director of Organizational Learning & Culture River Meyer. "It emerged from real children learning together in true freedom freedom to be curious and enthusiastic, freedom to work together in community."

Because our approach differs from many people's typical experiences with school, families enrolling their children with SelfDesign Learning Community can experience an adjustment when they begin their SelfDesign learning journeys.

"They may find themselves confronting their own deep-seated beliefs about learning," River says. "Their memories and experiences with school may no longer provide useful reference points to help them guide their child's learning with SelfDesign. They may discover their expectations about how learning happens no longer apply as they move forwards with their children on their learning journey. And having their child learning at home can heighten the importance of having quality interactions and relationships between parent and child."

To help families make the shift, River developed a guided, interactive online course called A SelfDesign Path, or "Path," in 2010 to explore the SelfDesign philosophy in practice in their daily family lives.

Beginning in the 2022/23 learning year, a series of live, online discussions, called Exploring Path Together, were also offered to course participants to help them explore and deepen their understanding of SelfDesign's philosophy.

At the start of each learning year, parents, guardians and caregivers of learners enrolled in SelfDesign Learning Community, as well as our educators, are invited to sign up for the free, self-paced course and engage with it and the Exploring Path Together meetings throughout the year. Participants can join in at any point of the year.

In 2022/23, 61 parents and guardians and 47 SelfDesign educators and other contractors signed up for the course and discussions. Path is available at no cost to all parents, guardians and caregivers of learners enrolled with SelfDesign Learning Community.

In 2022/23, River also explored many of the elements featured in Path in a series of articles on the SelfDesign Blog. The articles delve into the concepts of being present, being curious, relational learning, cultivating mutual respect, modelling and mentoring, and holding the long goal.

### **Spotlight on A SelfDesign Path**

SelfDesign's unique approach to learning has nothing to do with schooling and everything to do with lifelong learning," says SelfDesign's Director of Organizational Learning & Culture River Meyer.

### **Board of Directors**



Sherry Elwood



Verena Gibbs



Devon Girard



Frank Heinzelmann



Lara Kehler



Werner Knittel



**Carlos da Ponte** 

### Leadership team



**Amber Papou** President & CEO



Sandy Steward Chief Operating Officer



**Dave Conroy** Chief Information Officer



**Catherine Dinim** Principal, SelfDesign Learning Community



**Debra Farquharson** Director of Finance



**Debra Sigfusson** Director of Human Relations



Karen Zukas Director of Communications & Marketing



Paul Mackinsoc Director of Purchasing



**River Meyer** Director of Organizational Learning & Culture

Verena Gibbs joined the SelfDesign Learning Foundation Board of Directors in 2017 because she thought it would be a good way to support an organization that had given her so much early in her career.

She worked at Wondertree and SelfDesign between 2002 and 2009. She says, "The experience profoundly shifted my approach to education, learning and life! I'm so glad the organization continues to serve learners and families, and I'm happy to serve on the board supporting this work."

Verena, chair of the SelfDesign Board of Directors since 2021, first joined our community in 2002. At that time, SelfDesign was known as the Wondertree Foundation for Natural Learning. Brent Cameron was its principal and executive director, and BC's education ministry had recently decided to pilot online schools in the province.



#### **Transformative experience**

Over the next five years, she immersed herself in the organization's philosophy, beliefs, values and approach as a learning consultant.

In that role, she supported learners as they explored their own interests and passions through the organization's unique learner-centred approach. With a master's degree in Integrated Studies, she was able to weave teachings from Indigenous knowledge, self-directed learning and living inquiry into her practice.

"The experience transformed the way I approach learning and learning systems," she says. "The gifts it gave me regarding my own personal awareness and personal mastery were incredible. It was, at times, infuriating and frustrating and chaotic and messy, and it was also beautiful and heartfelt and community-driven. I wouldn't say it's for everybody, but it was really, really important to me."

In 2007, Verena became vice principal for SelfDesign, helping to grow and administer the program further. And two years later, she and her family moved to Haida Gwaii. She became the principal of brick-and-mortar elementary schools in Port Clements and Masset, where she applied the learnings she had gained with SelfDesign.

In 2021, Verena stepped out of public education and moved to Vancouver Island, where she continues to volunteer on the SelfDesign board and offers workshops for teachers and other members of B.C.'s education community.

### **Our partnerships**

At SelfDesign Learning Foundation, we are all about forming partnerships and relationships with people and organizations that align with our values and vision for personalized lifelong learning for all.

#### We are proud to be affiliated with these organizations:











### **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 For the first time in four years, SelfDesign leadership, educators and other contractors gathered together in person to meet one another, in some cases for the first time, to catch up with old friends face to face, and to learn more about SelfDesign's philosophy.

Almost 110 of our community members, including educators, general contractors, board members and leadership members, took part in at least one of the four events, called LocalLabs, held mid-June in Nelson, Kelowna, Nanaimo and the Lower Mainland.

"People were really hungry to come together and be together in person," says River Meyer, SelfDesign's Director of Organizational Learning and Culture and one of the events' organizers. "They've been asking for that for several years."



### **Spotlight on LocalLabs**

As a remote learning school, SelfDesign's educators and contractors, as well as learners, live and work in many areas of British Columbia and beyond. Although we meet frequently online throughout the learning year, we have fewer opportunities to gather in person. During the three-year pandemic, even fewer opportunities were available.

"It is a high priority of SelfDesign Learning Foundation to offer learning opportunities for our community of contractors whenever possible," says SelfDesign President & CEO Amber Papou. "LocalLabs offered the opportunity for all of those that attended to 'learn' together — learn about each other and learn about ourselves, both of which strengthen our connection."

SelfDesign started offering LocalLabs a few years before the pandemic began. The regional day-long gatherings provided opportunities for contractors to explore together topics to strengthen our organization, as well as to get to know one another better in informal social time. Before that, we held multi-day gatherings at a single location each year.

We've always felt strongly about providing our learners with opportunities to get together in person. But we don't just believe in in-person interaction for our learners; we think having our contractors come together in person is just as important."

> —River Meyer, Director of Organizational Learning & Culture



laness

### 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.



### **SelfDesign Learning Foundation programs**





#### SelfDesign Learning Community

A technology-enabled school for learners from kindergarten to grade 12, where learners with special needs are integrated with other learners, and all learners are supported to succeed





#### SelfDesign Home Learning

A flexible option for parents who wish to homeschool their child

3



#### HomeLearners Network

Downloadable activities and live online activities designed by certified educators to help children and youth pursue their passions, learn new things, build relationships and have fun

### SelfDesign by the numbers 2022

## 2,363

kindergarten to grade 12 learners were enrolled in SelfDesign Learning Community **846** 

learners with special needs received support services

## ~2,500

.....

external service provider– contractors supported our learners through Learning Resources and Services and individual education plans

### 322

home learners from 221 families were registered with SelfDesign Home Learning

.....

B.C. certified educator supported learners

174

.....

### 77

contractors supported SelfDesign administration and operations

.....

## 136

learners completed their learning journeys with SelfDesign Learning Community

## 12

guides offered 595 HomeLearners Network activities

## **169**

.....

new activities this year were created for HomeLearners Network this year



#### Our roadmap for feedback and ongoing improvement

At SelfDesign, being accessible means creating learning and working environments that allow everyone to participate fully without barriers.

"We are committed to providing a learning and working environment that supports all learners, families and contractors and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community," says SelfDesign President and CEO Amber Papou. "We recognize accessibility benefits not only those with disabilities but also our entire community."

To that end, SelfDesign created an accessibility plan this year. This living blueprint builds on the work we have already done. It identifies needs, priorities and actions for the coming year.

"As we seek and receive feedback about the plan and accessibility needs, we will update the plan for the following year," Amber says — an approach that aligns with our commitment to continuous learning and continuous improvement.

Having an accessibility plan is a new requirement for schools in B.C. SelfDesign Operations Coordinator Paula Sobie says the work is a natural fit for SelfDesign and aligns well with our approach to learning and community.

"Part of our DNA is to take a personalized approach in designing our programs in a way that considers everyone's needs," she says. "Although new government requirements are helping us frame our accessibility plan, we have been working to meet the individual needs of our community members for a very long time."

Accessibility doesn't have to be perfect.
We just want to be a little better each day."
—Stephen O'Keefe

### Spotlight on accessiblity

Paula is working with accessibility expert Stephen O'Keefe to chart how SelfDesign can improve access to its programs, services and systems. She says the actions set out as priorities for the coming year have been underway at SelfDesign to some extent already.

"Some of these new priorities are in the beginning planning stages, and others have been in the works for several months," she says. "All of these actions have been identified as ways to improve what we already do."

Priorities and actions include putting in place easy-to-use feedback channels. Members of the SelfDesign community can now share input about accessing SelfDesign programs, offerings, spaces and so on via a new dedicated email address. They can also submit feedback about their experiences and observations with access at SelfDesign via an online form on our website. In 2024, we'll be surveying our community for input. We'll also be setting up an Accessibility Committee in the new year.



— Stephen O'Keef, accessibility expert

As SelfDesign works to increase access to our programs and within our learning and work environments, we're working with accessibility consultant Stephen O'Keefe. His extensive expertise helped shape our Accessibility Plan 2023–2026, a living blueprint that identifies needs, priorities, and actions for the coming year.

Stephen and SelfDesign Operations Coordinator Paula Sobie interviewed various stakeholders within SelfDesign, including members of the senior leadership team, to identify the accessibility priorities, and then we put together a list of accessibility priorities.

"These priorities were then reviewed and approved by the senior leadership team," he says.



Stephen brings to his work with SelfDesign many years of experience providing consulting services to private, public, and non-profit organizations to help them comply with accessibility legislation and as

a part of their business strategies. To do this, he draws upon his legal background and experience as a senior business leader. Stephen has a law degree from the University of British Columbia, was the CEO of a national manufacturing business, and was the board chair of the Children's Hearing and Speech Centre of BC.

Born with a profound hearing loss, Stephen also has personal and lived experience of accessibility. His TEDx talk, "How to Listen Better," was translated into 22 languages. He also developed and starred in a web TV series through Telus' Optik channel, Listening in a Silent World, and a documentary on his life and stand-up comedy interests was featured on PBS and CBC.

"I've always liked to make people laugh. I often use humour to connect with others, especially to break the ice, when people may get the deer-in-the-headlights look trying to communicate with me because of my hearing loss," he says. "I was terrified of public speaking when I was younger, so naturally I thought, "Why not make it even scarier and try stand-up comedy?" Go big or go home, right? I signed up for a comedy class. Let's be real — if I can't hear the boos, I'm already winning. When the time came to do my first stand-up comedy show, I nearly backed off, but I thought I'd never live with myself if I chickened out. I was so nervous just before I appeared on stage that I almost puked. When I did my first jokes, people actually laughed. At that point, I was hooked."

Stephen's advice to members of the SelfDesign community about the process to improve accessibility within SelfDesign: "Don't feel shy about speaking up if you have experienced a barrier to accessibility or witness a barrier to accessibility. SelfDesign's feedback form is posted on the SelfDesign website, and we'd love to get ideas from you. The process of creating accessibility is a collaborative process, where we work together to identify barriers."

# SelfDesign Learning Community



## MESSAGE

Catherine Dinim, Principal, SelfDesign Learning Community

My theme word for 2023 has been "deepen."

As some of you may know, every year, I select a "word of the year" to describe and focus my work at SelfDesign. Over the previous few years, that word has been "flux." The pandemic emerged just as we were finishing the three-year pilot of our new and innovative grade 10 to 12 program at SelfDesign Learning Community. Then, in mid-2022, we moved to our new learning management system. We needed to be flexible to be able to successfully move through and around any obstacles we encountered.

But the pace of change at SelfDesign has been able to slow a little this year. We're benefitting from our earlier work and well-thought-out decisions with the new learning management system. Our first year as a B.C. provincial online school is going smoothly, and our new, three-year agreement with the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care gives us a clear agreement and mandate to offer online schooling as an option in the province.

With this solid footing, we now have an opportunity to look at the places where we can delve more deeply into our philosophy and our unique practice and approach to education. We can take time to reflect deeply about what we're doing. We can shift our focus to what we want to do next as a learning community. What within our program can we dial up a little to make it even better? What aspects of the program that are working could be taken one step further? What are our learners and families telling us, and how can we give them even greater voice and influence in shaping their learning? Where are the places we can kind of sink in and find out more about what our community needs and would like? What do we want to improve even further? What's on the horizon for the next five years? The next 10 years? And how can we best shape and prepare that future for SelfDesign?

And while we've deeply considered these forward-looking questions and opportunities, we've paid deep attention to the present, too, ensuring our learners and their families continue to be well supported along their learning journeys. We started offering in-person camps for learners once again, after the pandemic hiatus, with Winter Camp in February a resounding success. We hosted two successful Cultural Daytrippers events for learners and families to explore the culture and heritage of the Sinixt and Syilx Peoples in southern B.C. We celebrated the achievements of our Class of 2023 at our in-person and online Commencement ceremonies in June. We've created a new Elder-in-Residence role, with Gitxsan Elder and SelfDesign friend Michael Harris agreeing to share with us his wisdom, culture and perspectives over the role's first year.

I talk of these achievements, opportunities, events and considerations as if SelfDesign alone were responsible for them. I and my colleagues know that none of what we do would be possible without the inspiration and support that our learners, families and the rest of you, our community, give to us.

For that, I humbly thank you from the depths of my heart.

Catherine

OUR FIRST YEAR AS A B.C. PROVINCIAL ONLINE SCHOOL WENT SMOOTHLY, AND OUR NEW, THREE-YEAR AGREEMENT WITH THE BC MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE GIVES US A CLEAR AGREEMENT AND MANDATE TO OFFER ONLINE SCHOOLING AS AN OPTION IN THE PROVINCE.

#### An innovative and personalized approach to learning. We go above and beyond the walls of a classroom.

- **1. We offer a unique, personalized and inclusive approach to education** for more than 2,000 learners from kindergarten to grade 12 each year.
- 2. We follow the curriculum of the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care.
- 3. Our B.C. certified educators provide personalized one-to-one learning.
- **4. Learners can graduate** with a Dogwood Diploma (Certificate of Graduation), Adult Dogwood Diploma (Adult Graduation Diploma) or Evergreen Certificate (School Completion Certificate). They have the same opportunity to apply for university or college as a child in a brick-and-mortar school.
- 5. Our inclusive education program provides equal access to learning opportunities for all learners by providing personalized support services to learners with special needs.
- 6. We receive funding from the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care and are a Group 1 Independent School in the province of British Columbia.
- **7.** The BC Ministry of Education and Child Care inspects our program annually to ensure our programs and processes meet our obligations as a B.C. Group 1 Independent School.
- 8. 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 guided by one of our B.C. 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 experts in knowing their children and are a valued part of the circle of relationships that supports learners.



### Why families choose SelfDesign

- ✓ We provide an accepting and inclusive learning environment.
- ✓ Our program is structured flexibly.
- ✓ Our program allows families to adventure, explore and travel with their children and to integrate that exploration as part of their child's education.
- ✓ Our program honours and values families' beliefs and philosophies, which may not align with the approach or philosophy found in brick-and-mortar schools.
- ✓ We support and integrate learners who have learning challenges in our program.



#### What sets us apart



Learning happens everywhere



Prepared for success



Personalized learning



SelfDesign Learning Experiences Library



A supportive approach



BC Ministry of Education and Child Care approved



Indigenous Learning





### Profile: Aria, learner



#### Grade 8 learner Aria and her sister joined the SelfDesign Learning Community for the 2022/23 learning year.

They live on Vancouver Island, but for this one year, the family took a sabbatical to go sailing. Aria and Micah needed an alternative to brick-and-mortar schooling to keep up with their learning during their travels. SelfDesign's flexible, personalized approach to learning provided a good fit.

We caught up with Aria when she and her family were stopping in the Caribbean in March, about halfway through their yearlong adventure. Here is what she told us about sailing, learning, travelling and being on the water.

#### SelfDesign (SD): Where did you start your travels?

**Aria:** We started in Martinique, in the Caribbean, where we bought the boat in March 2022. My dad and his friends sailed it over to Gibraltar, in southwestern Europe. We met him there last summer and sailed the Mediterranean as a family. Then we sailed to the Canary Islands, about 1600 km (865 nautical miles) southwest of mainland Spain, and across the Atlantic to the Caribbean.

We plan to head to New York in the next couple of months. We'll cruise up to the Bahamas, then over to the U.S. east coast.

#### SD: Why sailing?

**Aria:** We chose to go on a sailing trip to escape "normal" life, even if just for a year. My parents have always loved sailing, so when they saw their favourite boat for sale in the Caribbean, it was an easy decision.

We sailed from the Canary Islands to St. Lucia, in the Caribbean, because of an organization called the ARC, or Atlantic Rally for Cruisers. They organized our voyage, planned social events and have made sure we're all safe.

Before this, my family and I had been sailing for 14 years — pretty much all my life!



#### SD: What has it been like being a SelfDesign learner on this trip?

**Aria:** My SelfDesign experience has been very positive so far. At first, I was sceptical about home learning because I'd been at public school since kindergarten. However, my learning consultant, Lisa, has been very supportive and just spectacular. That has really helped me adjust to the different style of schooling. Doing school work while on passage has also been a bit difficult. The boat is always moving, and papers are always flying. However, doing schoolwork while we crossed the Atlantic was a nice pastime. I mostly worked on math and writing. I also learned about how to fish in the ocean and to estimate our arrival time by looking at our remaining nautical miles.

#### SD: How has this adventure helped you meet your learning goals?

**Aria:** Before our Atlantic crossing, we did lots of travelling around the Mediterranean. We visited many museums and historical sites. Some of my language goals were met by communicating in France. Europe is so full of history and things to learn that I always had a project to do.

And on the ocean crossing, we plotted charts and trimmed sails, and my sister and I would also figure out the time of arrival based on our speed.

#### SD: What stood out for you during your journey?

**Aria:** We went for a swim in the middle of the Atlantic — that was amazing. The water was breathtakingly blue and so clear to almost five kilometres deep!

My least favourite experience was the first few days of sailing. We had three-metre waves and 30-knot wind. The storm tossed the boat like pizza dough! It was unpleasant, but we made it.



We chose to go on a sailing trip to escape "normal" life, even if just for a year.



This year, we signed our first contract as an independent provincial online school with the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care and began the 2023/2024 learning year in that role.

A big "thank you" to former SelfDesign Chief Learning Officer Nikki Kenyon, the SelfDesign Learning Community Principals team and many others in SelfDesign who contributed to our application to become a provincial online school.

With our new status, for the first time in SelfDesign's history, we have a multi-year contract with the Ministry. Until now, independent distributed-learning schools in B.C. have had single-year, annually renewed contracts with the Ministry.

These are momentous changes for SelfDesign that affect how the organization will be able to plan at a foundational level. Learners and families enrolled in our kindergarten to grade 12 program, however, started the new learning with no apparent change in their day-to-day learning experience.

"That the transition was so smooth is largely due to the groundwork laid in 2021 and 2022, says SelfDesign learning Community Principal Catherine Dinim. "Key among those efforts is our move to the Province's designated learning management system, Brightspace, in August 2022," she says. "Our experience since then shows that the early decisions around how the platform would be configured to meet both the Ministry's requirements and our own unique needs were well thought out and executed. Only small adjustments have been required in terms of where we do things within the platform and how we do them."

She says thanks are due, again, to the team of dedicated educators and contractors who made this happen.

We also continue to explore how we can better support our learners who self-identify as Indigenous.

### Spotlight on becoming a provincial online school

Under the new Ministry contract, we are now operating within the Ministry's Accountability and Quality Assurance Framework for provincial online schools. We expect to see little significant change in our Ministry inspection cycle, with inspections and monitoring visits occurring on alternate years.

"Although now required under the new Ministry framework for supporting Indigenous learners, this is something we have been working on for years," Catherine says. "Our efforts are driven by our organizational culture of continuous improvement. They are also guided by the recommendations put forwards in 2017 by SelfDesign's own Indigenous education task force."

As part of that work, we surveyed our educator community for input about what they need to better support their learners who self-report as Indigenous and to better support SelfDesign's path towards reconciliation. We look forward to acting on their input and further developing our Indigenous Education offerings and resources over the coming year. Please read more about these efforts in our Spotlight on Indigenous Education (see page 48).





## MESSAGE

Learner Council, SelfDesign Learning Community

The Learner Council's mission is to connect and advocate for the learner body. We want to make sure their needs are met and that they have the opportunity and space to bring forward ideas, suggestions, and concerns connected to the grade 8 to 12 program.

Some of the ways we have executed and taken action on the Learners Council's mission in 2023 are as follows:

- Monitoring a shared email inbox, learnercouncil@selfdesign.org, and online Learner Council Discussion forum in 8–12 Homebase for learners to connect and share feedback, concerns and ideas.
- Writing monthly announcements about important days of note to bring awareness and educate learners, building compassion and empathy.
- Bringing to light outdated resources and providing suggestions to replace, etc. Supporting learners in the process of replacing and removing and bringing to light non-inclusive and outdated resources (i.e., Gender Unicorn, Harry Potter learning experience), leading to further review and considerations of other problematic content.
- Hosting the Welcome to Grade 10 Learner Campfire for learners in grade 9 to make a sustainable and mutual connection and support the upcoming grade 10 learners in their new learning journey. We offer personal stories and advice about what helped us transition from grade 9 to grade 10 in the hope of making it easier and less stressful for them!
- Hosting live and interactive learning offerings to offer advice, engage learners, create connections, as well as bring
  forward suggestions and ideas. The Winterlude Learner Council Campfire is one of these events. The purpose of the
  Campfire is to have a fun event before the second semester starts, where learners can get to know each other and the
  Learner Council while playing a chaotic Kahoot quiz.
- Facilitating Get Caught Reading Month by creating a submission form for learners to suggest books for a recommended reading list.
- New for Fall 2023: Hosting a weekly Open Spaces Learner Council breakout room. Our aim with this new endeavor is to connect and grow learner-to-learner connections, and to understand what the needs of learners are, as well as to listen to the concerns, questions and ideas that learners may have about their programs and course content. Some learners don't feel comfortable contacting us through email, as they find it intimidating. Open Spaces provides another option for them to approach us!
- Increasing learner engagement for live offerings throughout grades 8 to 12. Learner Council members with four or more years of experience have seen an increase in learner participation from 6–20 learners attending to 30–40 learners joining us! We are looking forward to seeing the student engagement grow even more in the future!

Going forwards, we plan to continue providing support, advocacy, connection, communication, accessibility and community for all learners within SelfDesign.

Thank you,

Self Design Learner Council

WE PLAN TO CONTINUE PROVIDING SUPPORT, ADVOCACY, CONNECTION, COMMUNICATION, ACCESSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY FOR ALL LEARNERS WITHIN SELFDESIGN.

— Learner Council

# Profile: Owain, learner



#### Too busy learning to sit in a classroom

# Owain, one of our Class of 2023, was awarded the Governor General's Academic Medal in June.

Established 150 years ago by Canada's third Governor General after Confederation, the medals are considered one of the most prestigious academic awards available to students in Canadian schools. The bronze award for secondary students is given to the student graduating with the highest average in all grade 11 and grade 12 courses from a high school.

Owain commenced from SelfDesign in the spring after 12 years of independent, personalized learning. During the last two years, he focused his learning at SelfDesign on completing as many science and math courses he could, achieving 100% in Physics 11, Pre-calculus 12 and Chemistry 12.

Owain's interest in science also started at a young age. One of his favourite pastimes was studying the images of the family Volvo manual as bedtime reading and watching "How Things Work" videos. He and his neighbourhood friends would excavate the front yard, building roads, bridges and ponds with water and mud with his Tonka collection. And he experimented with building structures with natural materials in the stream near his family's Thetis Island home.

"Owain spent hours and hours and weeks and weeks — so much time! — building berms and dams in that stream," mom Sherri says. "He started experimenting hands-on from a very young age — every day, he'd go for a walk, and he'd just find things to build — and he could see that what he was doing wasn't working, but he constantly experimented to see what might work."

He was so busy learning on a daily basis and so engaged with what he was learning that, when he turned five, Sherri says, "I felt putting him in a brick-and-mortar school would not only put an end to all that active exploration and learning and enthusiasm, it might stifle it. So we learned at home and did other alternative schooling instead, where he learned through living."

Eventually, he enrolled with SelfDesign Learning Community, where Sherri works as a learning consultant.

#### A love of science and math

Owain loves experimenting with materials and tools to further his understanding of chemistry and physics. He used the weekly learning challenges and personal projects in grades 10 to 12 to explore science topics that interested him.

His Governor General's Academic Medal shows that kids who geek out on mathematics, physics and chemistry can excel at SelfDesign.

Owain plans to attend university to study civil engineering, following in the career footsteps of his father and grandfather. He has been accepted into the University of Cape Town, in South Africa, and intends to start there in September.

# Our approach to learning



**Our model and philosophy**, which focus on personalized and lifelong learning, set us apart from other technology-enabled schools and brick-and-mortar schools.



We follow the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care curriculum in a way that puts childrenat 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 B.C. certified educators, to develop a personalized learning plan for each child to help them achieve the path to completion that best suits them.



# How it works



# 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 and Child Care competencies. A family with a learner enrolled in SelfDesign Learning Community is supported along that pathway by a B.C. 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 resources 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 B.C. curriculum in a holistic and unique way.

#### We assess learners based on competencies

Because our kindergarten to grade 12 program is based on competencies, we communicate about and assess learning through a process we call Observing for Learning. Our B.C. certified educators participate in ongoing weekly conversations with family members and their child.



Our learners in higher grades interact online every week to connect and further their learning, but we also provide informal opportunities for learners to gather together.

In 2023, we expanded several learner spaces to include learners in younger grades and brought back our popular in-person camps. Here are a few of the ways our learners gathered in new — or renewed — ways in 2023:



#### Open Spaces opens up to learners from more grades

Open Spaces is a weekly online space for SelfDesign learners to gather and generate their own interest groups based on common interests and offerings. Piloted in 2021 for learners in grades 8 to 12 and expanded in 2022 for learners in grades 4 to 7, this year we started also offering this exciting opportunity for learners in kindergarten to grade 3 to join the space with their parents or guardians to connect with their peers.



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#### Winterlude expands to include learners from kindergarten to grade 7

We were excited to welcome learners in our younger grades to our annual winter celebration in 2023. Winterlude takes place during the second week of January. The festival allows learners to gather online to connect with their peers and to build community.

Offerings presented by our Education Program and Family Services teams, guest speakers and learner groups such as Learners Council, Gender Sexual Orientation Alliance and the give learners an opportunity to discuss topics that do not fit into their regular learning activities in a fun and informal way. We also invite learners in grades 8 to 12 to present their projects and learning in a live learner showcase.

In 2023, learners in kindergarten to grade 7 and their parents and guardians were invited to meet each other and to take part in age-appropriate activities presented by HomeLearners Network.

SelfDesign first launched Winterlude in 2021. Initially focused on learners in grades 10 to 12, we expanded it to include learners in grade 8 and 9 in 2022.

Learners have free enrollment to HomeLearners Network activities for SelfDesign learners

In 2023, all families with children enrolled with SelfDesign Learning Community were provided with free enrollment for HomeLearners Network offerings. HomeLearners Network provides online downloadable and real-time activities for families, learners and youth. The activities are designed to help them pursue their passions, learn new things, build relationships and have fun.

#### In-person camps return

About 20 SelfDesign learners in grades 9 and up attended Winter Camp at Gardom Lake Camp, near Enderby in the Shuswap, in February. Another 20 learners gathered for Spring Camp at Cultus Lake, in the Lower Mainland, in May. The learners took part in seasonal outdoor activities, learning and fun. They connected to and socialized with each other, played games together, and explored Indigenous ways of knowing and art as a way to express themselves.

# Spotlight on opportunities for connection

A highlight was definitely being in such an incredible environment with such incredible people." "The combination of being in nature, having fun, having structure, having space held so wonderfully and having everyone there putting so much effort into their presence was so amazing."

> A SelfDesign learner, on the subject of SelfDesign's in-person camps

# **Spotlight on 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 in regards to ability, learning style, culture, race, personal or spiritual beliefs, and gender identity and expression.

# We support inclusive education

In 2023, the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care announced their vision to provide inclusive and responsive learning environments. As part of this, SelfDesign's Family Services team has updated our resource for using inclusive language in the SelfDesign community.



# We support Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity education

In 2023, we extended our Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) offerings by introducing the SOGI Newsletter to share SOGI-inspired news and events with our community. Each edition includes resources related to that edition's unique theme. It features regular contributions from a SelfDesign learner who is a member of our SelfDesign's Gender Sexual Orientation Alliance. The SOGI Newsletter is published every six to eight weeks.

The newsletter complements the resources and information shared and continually reviewed and updated on the Rainbow Hubs for learners in kindergarten to grade 7 and the SOGI Hub for learners in grades 8 to 12.



Early SOGI education takes it out of the taboo realm, providing well-curated resources instead of leaving it up to kids to 'find' is way safer."
—a SelfDesign learner

# We support learner safety

The Family Services team members attended information sessions on digital threat risk assessment and violent threat risk assessment with Safer Schools Together, an international organization that works to prevent school violence.

We also hosted the White Hatter's webinar, "Digital Literacy and Internet Safety for Parents and Caregivers." The White Hatter is an Internet safety and digital literacy education specialist company that provides workshops and presentations on technology safety and privacy.

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## We support mental health

As in years past, we promoted offerings from Erase BC (Expect Respect and a Safe Education BC) to empower learners, parents, educators and community partners to get help with challenges, report concerns, and learn about complex issues facing learners. These offerings included Establishing Respectful Relationships and Consent in Our Communities, for learners in grades 5 to 12, and Establishing Safe, Caring and Respectful Digital Communities, for learners in grades 5 to 8. For the second year, Family Services worked with the HomeLearners Network and the Canadian Mental Health Association to deliver the research-backed youth program, Living Life to the Full. Learners aged 13 and up took part in the eight-week interactive series. The program is designed to help youth deal with everyday life challenges and learn self-management skills.



 All of SelfDesign's educational programs are built on a foundation of technological safety and security.
Then, in terms of online safety, we work with parents and caregivers, as well as with the learners. Parent involvement in our kindergarten to grade 9 program helps to ensure that online safety is a team approach."

> -Clarissa Tufts, Vice Principal, SelfDesign Learning Community

## We provide counselling services to learners and families

In 2022/23, SelfDesign's Registered Clinical Counsellor Franya Jedwab supported 75 learners and families. Learning consultants identify and refer learners or their families who might benefit from clinical support to Franya. Franya offers support by either directly working with each referred learner's own learning team and providing counselling sessions or by referring learners and families to clinical resources and related support within their own communities.

6 My approach to counselling is multifaceted to best suit the needs of the people I am speaking with. I take an empathic and non-judgemental person-centred approach to my work, and I believe the first task in counselling is to form a safe therapeutic relationship from which to evolve and grow."

—Franya Jedwab, SelfDesign Registered Clinical Counsellor

#### We offer support to families through the Contact Assistance Team

In the 2022/23 learning year, Family Services' Contact Assistance Team (CAT) received almost 2,000 requests for support.

For over 15 years, the CAT has supported SelfDesign families with learners in kindergarten to grade 12 and their educators when families do not meet their program commitments for SelfDesign Learning Community.

This year, we increased awareness of what the CAT does, we updated the information available to families in 2023 about who the CAT is and what they do.

It could be there are extenuating circumstances going on in a family and the learner can't participate as usual, or something might just interfere with the learner's ability to focus or commit to the program. Whatever the reason, we're here to help them get back on track and to put supports in place for them."
—Clarissa Tufts, Vice Principal,

SelfDesign Learning Community





# We arrange and support learners taking provincial graduation assessments

Every young person in B.C. seeking to finish grade 12 with a Dogwood Diploma is required to write the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care's three high school assessments in numeracy and literacy. As supervised events, these assessments are often held in person at brick-and-mortar schools.

SelfDesign's Guidance team collaborates with brick-and-mortar schools in communities around the province to find placements for our learners. In communities where we have a significant number of learners taking the assessments, we host our own assessment sittings.

In 2023, more than 90 per cent of SelfDesign learners writing provincial assessments wrote them in January and April. Of the total assessments written by SelfDesign learners in 2023, 65 per cent were written in a SelfDesign-hosted location. This is an increase of almost 20 per cent over 2022.

SelfDesign continues to maintain positive working relationships with schools around the province willing to host our learners, thanks in large part to the work of Guidance team member Wendy Hawkin, who organizes placements for the majority of learners not writing assessments at SelfDesign-hosted sittings. Throughout 2023, about 30 schools and learning centres hosted our learners to write their assessments.

I had a great experience.
The assessment was held in such a healthy and supportive environment."
—a SelfDesign learner

It wasn't as stressful as I had made it out to be, and everyone was calm and patient. Personally, if I were to do it over again, I would just prepare myself a bit more beforehand in terms of Math knowledge, but I tried my best and now I know what I should work more on in the long run."

—a SelfDesign learner



# **Spotlight on Indigenous Education**

SelfDesign works to advance the journey towards reconciliation by building cultural bridges to Indigenous ways of being, seeing and knowing throughout our educational programs and offerings.

Our efforts are driven by the recommendations put forwards in 2017 by SelfDesign's Indigenous education task force, which comprised a First Nations elder, a First Nations SelfDesign parent and learner, and SelfDesign educators with Indigenous heritage.

We integrate the First Peoples Principles of Learning into our work, programs and learning opportunities.

We carefully curate authentic resources to help learners explore and understand Indigenous ways of being, seeing and knowing.

We provide grants for Indigenous learners to connect with and learn about their cultures and languages.

We offer learners opportunities to connect with Indigenous Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, Indigenous educators and each other.

## This work is ongoing. We are always seeking ways to improve:

- · how our programs and offerings integrate Indigenous ways of being, seeing and knowing,
- how we include and acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous Peoples, cultures and territories our community members live and learn on,
- how we support our learners and families who self-report as Indigenous, and
- how we support all members of our community as they deepen their understanding of Indigenous world views and ways of being in the world.



# **Elder-in-residence** program

We designed SelfDesign Learning Community's Elder-in-residence program with Gitxsan Elder Michael Harris, a contributor to the SelfDesign community for many years. Michael expressed an interest in supporting cultural safety and learning at our organization. Our team researched and consulted with knowledge keepers to plan how best to honour and support Michael in this role.

We meet with Michael in various capacities on a weekly basis to consult, plan and reflect on how we can further integrate First Peoples ways of learning, seeing and being into our own program.

Michael has guest facilitated Open Spaces with learners in all grades and their families. In these informal gathering spaces, Michael has passed on teachings, connected with learners and their families and brought Indigenous perspectives to themes such as Halloween, reconciliation and reconnecting with culture and spirituality.



Michael also shared teachings at two Lunch and Learns in the fall, where educators brought questions to shape the conversations.

# Indigenous families provide input

In the spring, we sent a survey to our Indigenous families to encourage feedback about our program, to learn how we can better support our Indigenous learners, and to help shape our program. We recognize that our Indigenous families come from unique cultural backgrounds and territories. The better we know and understand our families, the better we can support them.

Their responses are helping us to guide our work. We are looking at the specific territories and cultural groupings of our families, learning about them, and shaping resources and curriculum with them in mind. Our goal is that our learners can see themselves and their cultures and communities reflected in their learning materials.



# **Crafty Time offered in Open Spaces**

Crafty Fridays started two years ago as an Indigenous-led space where learners gather online on Fridays to work on their own Indigenous-inspired craft projects and work in community or learn the Indigenous craft or art technique being shared that week.

Remaining true to the theme of the offering, the session leaders weave in the current issues of the season and encourage learners to think deeply about them and discuss them while they work on their crafts. Some of the issues discussed include Reconciliation Week, Secret Path Week, Métis Month, Louis Riel Day, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), the Moosehide Campaign, and Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week.

At the start of 2023, 43 learners registered for Crafty Fridays, up from 18 in 2022. SelfDesign Indigenous Educator Coordinator Amber Santos led sessions on embroidery, inspired by her Métis heritage and the Métis tradition of floral embroidery. SelfDesign Indigenous educator Patricia Collins led a session on moccasin-making, and guest Indigenous guide Angela Gladue led session in flat stitch beading and shared her work in fashion.

In the fall, we brought Crafty Time into Open Spaces, our informal online gathering space for learners. This move provides several benefits:

- We are now able to offer Crafty Time three times weekly, with each session targeting specific grade levels where age-appropriate resources around themes of Indigenous justice can be shared and discussed.
- We can provide an Indigenous-led session within Open Spaces.

We also welcomed Elder-in-residence Elder Michael Harris at our Crafty Time Open Spaces, where he shared his teachings.





# **Indigenous Education highlights 2023**

#### **Reconciliation Week activities**

During the last week of September, we encouraged learners, families and educators to consider reconciliation in a deeper way. Although we integrate Indigenous content and worldviews throughout our coursework, during Reconciliation Week, this work goes deeper for our learners in grades 10 to 12.

We also hosted Office Hours and a session for learners to use art to process what they've learned and their emotional reactions to help any learners that could benefit from more time and connection in processing or anyone who felt triggered from this coursework.

# Cultural Daytrippers explored Indigenous culture and history at two sites in southern British Columbia

SelfDesign offered two Cultural Daytripper events in May. Indigenous Education Coordinator Amber Santos led a visit to the Autonomous Sinixt information gathering at the Sinixt pithouse and burial grounds in the Slocan Valley. Indigenous educator Patricia Collins arranged a visit to the Sncewips Heritage Museum in West Kelowna.

Cultural Daytrippers are in-person opportunities for learners, families, educators and contractors to deepen their connection to and learning of indigenous culture on specific territories and to strengthen relationships within our organization and to the land we are on.

# Supporting learners who self-identify as Indigenous

During SelfDesign Learning Community's Educator Orientation in August 2023, educators participated in the survey, "Exploring Reconciliation in Action." We designed the survey to get to know our educators better, to understand their needs in bringing reconciliation and Indigenous worldviews into their work, and to gather input on how to honour our Elder-in-residence and best work with him in our learning community. Among the 101 responses, we identified various action items that we are implementing.



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# **Indigenous Education highlights 2023**

# Cultural Learning Grants connect Indigenous learners to in-community opportunities

Twenty-five Cultural Learning Grants helped our Indigenous learners access Indigenous education opportunities in their communities this year.

## Lunch and Learns around Indigenous Education and Reconciliation

Twenty-three educators took part in the three Lunch and Learns conversations in the spring, where we met with Elder Michael Harris and discussed how to bring Indigenous teachings into our education practice, and how to cultivate safe spaces.

In our two fall Lunch and Learns with Elder Michael Harris, educators brought questions for Michael and we discussed how SelfDesign learning specialists could prepare learners for real-time discussions with Michael.

# Indigenous Education and reconciliation professional development

More than 20 SelfDesign contractors and educators signed up for the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation course, presented by the Outdoor Learning Store. This initiative encourages and empowers educators to deepen their understanding of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives while strengthening connections with the local land.

Participants have been sharing and discussing their learnings in this course in an ongoing discussion space hosted on SelfDesign's communication platform.



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# 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, and 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, family insights are equally valued.

SelfDesign's Support Services team 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 B.C. certified educator (specialized learning consultant) to identify and support their child's individual needs. Learners have access to specialists who can provide a wide array of services, including speech pathology, psychology, etc.

We provide services for all learners needing additional support to maximize their learning opportunities. This includes offering support services to learners who have been, in accordance with BC Ministry of Education and Child Care guidelines, professionally diagnosed with low incidence needs or who may or may not have been diagnosed with high incidence needs.



## Learner success rate remains high

In the 2022/23 learning year, 84 per cent of learners in grade 12 with individual education plans and receiving Support Education services successfully achieved their chosen paths to completion.

The other 16 per cent of our Support Education learners in grade 12 may be continuing their journey on BC Ministry of Education and Child Care's School Completion Certificate Program until age 19 or may have chosen to pursue an Adult Graduation diploma.

# Extra support for learners in our regular program extended from grades 9 to 12

The Learning Support Services Resource Room is now offering drop-in, and one-on-one sessions for learners in grade 9. The resource room is tailored to those who are in the general program or receiving high-incidence Support Education services and have need of extra support. For the past three years SelfDesign has offered drop ins, individual tutoring, and executive function support to learners only in grades 10 to 12. We are very proud of the team and the amazing support they are providing to many of our SelfDesign families.



# **Profile: Nicholas, learner**



# On October 30, 2022, 18-year-old Nicholas set a world record in the men's 200-metre freestyle S14 swimming event at the FINA [International Swimming Federation] World Cup preliminaries in Toronto.

Three months earlier, he had set a Commonwealth Games record in the 200-m freestyle S14 Para swimming event in Birmingham, England. Those achievements followed a silver medal in the same event at the World Para Swimming Championships in Madeira, Portugal, in June.

Taking part in international competitions wasn't a new experience for the Parksville, B.C.-based SelfDesign learner. He finished among the top five in his event in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics. And in 2019, at the Parapan American Games in Lima, Peru, he medalled four times, including with three gold medals, and set several world short-court records in his category.

Nicholas swims in the S14 competition category, reserved for swimmers who have an intellectual impairment. Often that means a swimmer has difficulties with pattern recognition, sequencing, and memory, or has slower reaction times — all of which can affect athletic performance.

At age 3, Nicholas was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The diagnosis led him and his family both to swimming and to SelfDesign Learning Community.

# A combined SelfDesign-swimming journey

Nicholas started with SelfDesign in grade one. He says his family was trying to find therapy options that worked for him.

"We were focusing more on therapy as opposed to academics," he says.

SelfDesign allowed them to do both — and to succeed at both. Our learner-centred and flexible approach to learning allowed his family to fit his learning around the demands of the therapy he needed and to pace himself. In addition, the support we provide to learners, including to learners who have neurodiverse learning challenges, is tailored to each learner's individual needs.

Nicholas's family decided to see if water therapy and swimming lessons would help him.

"We tried it out. At seven years old, I seemed to really like it," he says. Equally importantly, the family also found that "when I was swimming, I seem to be able to unlock finer motor control and also a higher level of language."

Nicholas started swimming competitively around age 10.

When Nicholas made the national team three years ago, SelfDesign's flexibility continued to work in his favour. Nicholas, who attained his Dogwood Diploma in January 2023, was able to arrange his schedule to give his learning, his training and his competitions the time, attention and focus each required when they required it.

And when he travelled for competitions, he could adjust his hours to avoid getting behind on schoolwork.

I wouldn't have to double up or triple up so I didn't miss, like, a whole month of schooling opportunities like that," he says. "It afforded me the ability to travel for my career and also do school at the same time."



# More SelfDesign Learning Community highlights

## **Celebrating the Class of 2023**

Almost 150 learners finished their learning journeys with SelfDesign Learning Community in 2023. Of these, 59 attended the in-person Commencement ceremony in the Lower Mainland with their families in May. More than 200 community members celebrated the Class of 2023 during the online ceremony in June.



# Participation on Ministry accountability and quality assurance framework panel for provincial online schools

SelfDesign Educational Programming team lead Janice Green was invited to sit on the panel of education experts that developed the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care's Accountability and Quality Assurance Framework for provincial online schools. Janice contributed her insights and expertise regarding continuous improvement and gained new insight into the quality assurance processes the Ministry expects from B.C.'s provincial online schools, including SelfDesign Learning Community.



# Game On! Grade 12 digital media theme launched

In September 2023, SelfDesign launched a new digital media theme for learners in grades 12. Game On! combines courses in computer information system development and digital music. The new theme allows learners who joined our Minecraft group for learners in kindergarten to grade 9 and followed our grade 10 and 11 Life Gamified and Virtual Dreamers themes, to continue pursuing their interests in digital media through their final year of high school.



# SelfDesign Home Learning

# Pursuing learning independently

SelfDesign Home Learning provides an alternative for families across British Columbia who wish to have their children learn independently at home. As a homeschooling program, as defined by the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, it is the most flexible learning program we offer at SelfDesign Learning Foundation. It best suits families where the parents wish to take on the responsibility for their child's education and do not wish to follow BC Ministry of Education and Child Care 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 do they graduate and earn a high school diploma.

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



# **SelfDesign Home Learning**

# Comparing our programs

How SelfDesign Learning Community differs from SelfDesign Home Learning.

# **SelfDesign Learning Community**



★ Kindergarten to grade 12 provincial online learning school ★



3

# **EDUCATOR LED**

Learners and families work with a B.C. certified educator.

# SelfDesign Home Learning



# Homeschooling option ★



2

#### PARENT LED

Parents take full responsibility for their child's learning program and do not report to the school.

#### **ONLINE & EXTERNAL SUPPORT**

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.

#### **EDUCATOR-LED ASSESSMENT**

We assess learning through a process called Observing for Learning. Our B.C. certified educators map the learning that is observed to competencies within the B.C. curriculum.

#### **HIGHSCHOOL DIPLOMA**

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 Certificate. Learners leave SelfDesign Learning Community after grade 12 with the same opportunities to apply for university or college as a child in a brick-and-mortar school does.

LIMITED ONLINE SUPPORT

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 homeschoolers, and supports for learning at home.

# **LEARNING NOT ASSESSED**

Parents take responsibility for the learning program and do not report to the school. Learners' work is not assessed.

# **DOES NOT GRADUATE**

Learners do not earn credit for courses in grades 10 to 12, nor do they graduate and earn a high school diploma.

# **Profile: Cass, learner**



When Cass started the Bachelor of Arts program in Digital Media Studies at Vancouver Island University, he had already completed one of the four-year program's courses.

Cass finished his SelfDesign journey in June 2023. During grade 12, he took one of the program's first-year-level courses as part of the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care's dual-credit program.

The program is available to learners in higher grades in B.C. It allows learners to earn high school credits that count towards their BC certificates of graduation (Dogwood Diplomas) while banking the course credits for university.

Cass worked with SelfDesign's Guidance team to set the opportunity up. The Guidance team provides information about the opportunity to interested learners, processes requests, and makes sure the paperwork required by the Ministry is complete and filed.

#### Learning at home with SelfDesign

Cass began his SelfDesign journey in grade 2 with our homeschooling program, SelfDesign Home Learning.

He'd been diagnosed with apraxia of speech, a motor speech disorder that makes it hard to speak. Home learning allowed him to get the therapy he needed without interrupting his learning.

"My very amazing mom taught me," Cass says. "Learning at home also allowed me to pursue my interests in filmmaking, storytelling, digital media, and all that stuff. It provided the flexibility for me to pursue my passions and gave me time to build skills related to those interests."

Recognizing he'd want to pursue his interests further with post-secondary studies, Cass knew he needed to finish grade 12 with a Dogwood Diploma. He transferred into SelfDesign Learning Community at the start of grade 10.

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# HomeLearners Network builds on SelfDesign's 20 years of experience in educational programming for kids and families everywhere.

HomeLearners Network offers online downloadable and real-time activities for families, learners and youth. The activities are designed to help them pursue their passions, learn new things, build relationships and have fun.

All of our activities are led by passionate B.C. certified educators and are designed using educational best practices. Our third year since HomeLearners Network launch was busy, with business and content development undertaken and new initiatives launched.

## **Business development and planning activities**

We established a Customer Advisory Committee to provide regular feedback on platform and product development, allowing us to quickly test our assumptions and gain a better understanding of customer needs during platform improvements user experience and functionality — and content development. We collected feedback and conducted focus groups with learning consultants, HomeLearners Network guides, customers and other key stakeholders to inform the evolution of the platform and product offerings.

We commissioned quantitative research on the home learning markets in B.C., Alberta and Ontario to identify nichemarket opportunities and customer personas and to identify customer needs. We completed a competitive scan to better understand the comparable and competitive landscape and possible gaps and opportunities in the market.

In 2023, we provided free enrollment for HomeLearners Network offerings to all families with children enrolled with SelfDesign Learning Community.

The work undertaken over the last year will inform HomeLearners Network business plan and roadmap currently under development.



## **Customer-driven content and product development**

We also increased our content offerings, narrowing the market focus of our online real-time activities to learners in kindergarten to grade 7. Twelve new guides, including two new lead guides, help us to ensure our offerings include a diversity of topics and grade levels. As part of this, our recruitment and onboarding processes have been refined to better support the culture, quality and efficiency required to create the best learning experiences that align with the HomeLearners Network brand.

We've also revised our approach to content development to link all activities to science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM). Our market research clearly shows a need for more STEAM content and learning. Based on customer feedback, we've added more guides and more new content. We've also limited enrollment to most HomeLearners Network activities to 12 learners to increase the quality of the learning experience.

We experimented with 'teaser activities,' offering singles as a sample activity to upcoming series, and other types of packaged offerings. Our product testing showed that customers want these option.

We shifted more of our single offerings into series, camps and clubs to allow learners to get to get to know the guides and each other and to dive more deeply into the topics. We simplified the design and layout of the HomeLearners Network platform, and created a new page on the site that introduces our guides.

We've added a notification feature on the site that allows customers to sign up to be notified when an additional offering of a fully enrolled activity becomes available. We find the need for this feature especially exciting, as it shows our activities are in demand and at full enrollment often enough to require this type of functionality.

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# New initiatives underway

We're working on the redesign of guide-led on-demand activities to better align them with our customers' feedback and needs. Many of our customers are asking for more asynchronous activities for neurodiverse learners to work through at their own pace.

We've partnered with Satel, our development partner, to integrate artificial intelligence–powered learning tools into the platform to enable the following functions:

- Linking all of our offerings to the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care's curriculum outcomes
- · Allowing parents to post Observing for Learning entries that are tied to our activities
- Generating suggestions for new Anytime Activities and guiding curated ideas for Anytime Activities
- Adding Show & Tell functionality
- Allowing learners to keep learning journals

I just also NEED to tell you, your home learner instructor Alecyn is AMAZING!!!! My kids ABSOLUTELY LOVE HER and all of her activities!!!! Even my daughter Alex, who is on the spectrum and has trouble doing online Zoom classes (due to getting overwhelmed with following directions) absolutely LOVES doing her classes and is comfortable doing them!! That is a HUGE step for Alex, so I just wanted to tell you how much we APPRECIATE her and love her classes!!"

-a HomeLearners Network parent

# HomeLearners Network by the numbers, 2023



★★★★ Customers rated HomeLearners Networks 4.6/5 stars overall

# **Profile: Tanya, lead guide**



Tanya's home learning experience with her own boys drew her to become a HomeLearners Network lead guide.

"I've had a blast engaging in home learning activities with my own kiddos over the years, and wanted to dive into creative, hands-on activities with HomeLearners Network," she says. "I enjoy sharing my interests through fun and supportive activities, and felt HomeLearners Network and I would be a great fit."

Tanya has been an educator for 26 years and enjoys HomeLearners Network as an inclusive, supportive and imaginative space for kids and teens to discover their passions and connect. She started as a classroom and learning support teacher. She's also run her own tutoring business and has worked with SelfDesign since 2009.

Tanya facilitates interdisciplinary activities such as drawing, storytelling, writing, experiments, movement and other interactive exercises like learning about growth mindset and stop motion, to name a few.



# **Profile: Alyssa, Lupine and Sawyer family**



HomeLearners Network was recommended to Alyssa by a friend and her SelfDesign Learning Community learning consultant. Lupine and Sawyer have participated in more than 50 HomeLearners Network activities.

Lupine's favourite part about HomeLearners Network is taking art activities with her favourite guide, Amber Santos. She loves them so much that sometimes she participates in three activities in a day. The family also converted their downstairs spare bedroom into an art room. Sawyer loves STEM- (science, technology, engineering and math-) related activities. "He got so much inspiration from the STEM activities that I would find him rustling through the recycling to find materials to build all sorts of things."

"The kids have learned so many skills through HomeLearners Network that I don't necessarily have the ability to teach," says Alyssa. "I do a lot of art with the kids, but if Lupine can do a watercolour class with someone who actually teaches watercolour, she's learning those skills and can use them on her own time. It's neat to see them realizing things they can do with the skills they're learning and expanding on them." Alyssa and her husband chose home learning for their daughter Lupine (grade 6) and son Sawyer (grade 3) because it gives their family muchneeded flexibility. She loves that they spend so much time outdoors and that home learning made Alyssa and her husband's summer-heavy workload more manageable.

"Having the kids wrap up school in May allows our schedules to be open and free for the summer. It's a huge bonus for us," says Alyssa. "The flexibility of home learning is a huge appeal."





