

## Parent Support Services Society of BC: Celebrating 50 Years

*A personal reflection from a former staff member*



My first time working for Parent Support Services Society of BC (PSS) was as a co-op student, back when I was still an undergraduate finishing an arts degree at UBC. I was young and inexperienced, but PSS' mission resonated deeply with me, so I was delighted when I was accepted for the position. The staff and volunteers at PSS could not have been more welcoming, and I soon found myself feeling fully at home and inspired amongst a group of people passionate about a shared cause.

The meaningful work that PSS does, and the heart and soul of those who do it, made it an exceptionally easy choice to return to work there as an executive and communications assistant after my initial co-op term had concluded.

During my time at PSS, I connected with parents and kinship caregivers from a myriad of diverse backgrounds and experiences, united through a love for the children under their care. Raising a family is one of the most challenging yet rewarding jobs one can do.

How do you build a safe, nurturing environment for a growing child? How can you support a young person through struggle and trauma? How do you manage your own doubts, fears, and complicated emotions in a healthy way? There are no clear, black and white answers to any of these questions, but PSS' work helped (and continues to help) empower families to build their own understanding in the face of these questions, in a supported and non-judgemental environment.

Behind-the-scenes, PSS staff and volunteers work tirelessly to create, plan, and coordinate Support Circles, the Kinship Care Help Line, parenting workshops, parenting book clubs, trips and special events for families, and more. I saw first-hand how these initiatives provided community connection, education, empowerment, and non-judgemental safe spaces, and how all of this formed solid foundations upon which families could grow and thrive, empowering themselves and their communities.



One of PSS' unique initiatives was the Galiano Nature Camp; my experience coordinating and participating in one of them remains one of my most cherished memories. During my co-op term, I joined a couple of PSS staff members, a fellow co-op student, and Galiano Conservancy staff members in this days-long nature excursion for a group of kinship care families to Galiano Island.

I remember the clear blue skies and radiant sunlight as the excited children ran across beaches, watching wide-eyed as Galiano staff members showed them all sorts of aquatic life such as starfish and crabs. The crisp summer air rang with curious queries and enthusiastic exclams as the kids took turns sifting through the tidal pools for their own discoveries, aided by patient caretakers and staff members. Children tugged eagerly at my hand to show me what they found in the sand, or dared me to play games of tag or hide and seek. Cosy evenings were spent chatting and connecting with each other over a barbecue as the sunset cast the rich, forested landscape in hues of purple and orange.

Many of the families at the camp had been through incredible strife and adversity, and many continued to face significant systemic challenges in their desire to support the children they loved. Yet sitting together in that beautiful landscape, there was a real sense that the strength, resilience, and mutual support and empathy that everyone had could overcome anything.



To me, that unforgettable trip highlighted the significance of PSS' mission. Nothing I write can fully encapsulate the joy and excitement radiating from the children's eyes, the loving expressions of their caretakers – grandparents, aunts, uncles – the sense of community and family across all different ages, backgrounds, and households united through heart. I still reflect fondly on the connections I made and conversations I had that summer, and it remains a glowing example of the positive impact that PSS' initiatives can have on children and families.

Another initiative I was a part of was PSS' Grandparents Day event. PSS honours this annual day of appreciating grandparents and kinship caregivers by hosting a community event rich with games, live performances, and fundraising auctions. Each Grandparents Day, I see families from all around the diverse neighbourhoods of the Lower Mainland gather together to celebrate each other and socialise with PSS staff and volunteers.

Although so much of the work PSS does is behind-the-scenes, this is one of those cherished occasions where the whole community involved with PSS – from staff to volunteers to families – has a chance to gather all together. From the beautiful singing of volunteers to the adventurous kids running circles around the adults, from the spontaneous dancing to the shared staff-cooked barbecue, Grandparents Day was always a testimony to the strength of connection and community at the heart of PSS.



As I reflect back on my time at the organisation and this momentous 50th anniversary, I reflect on the work PSS does and what it has accomplished over the years. One can attempt to quantify it through spreadsheets, graphs, or reports, but numbers cannot fully capture the meaning of a child's smile, a grandparent's gratitude, or the formation of life-long friendships. Numbers and typed words cannot fully encapsulate the long-lasting, wide-spreading impact that the organisation has on families and communities, but it is there, and it is felt.

A lot of dedication and passion has been behind the organisation over the last 50 years, leading it to this point in time. The road here has been paved by the hard work of every staff member, volunteer, partner, and family that has been involved with PSS, past and present. The staff and volunteers that I have known during my time at PSS are some of the most dedicated, caring people I have had the pleasure of working with. I know from the bottom of my heart that the road will continue onwards into a bright future ahead for this organisation. It takes a village to raise a child, and PSS exemplifies the love and commitment of a village united.

Congratulations on 50 years, Parent Support Services! It is an incredible milestone for an incredible organisation. Here's to many, many more.

*Yuyan (Jake) Huang, 2024*