

October 21, 2024 [EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE](#)

Old Massett shares a taste of community collaboration with BCCDC

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Haida Elder and knowledge sharer Ada Swanson and the coordinator of the Old Massett Village Council Elders Centre, Chris Horner, blessed the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) with a visit in early October.

Elder Ada and Chris collaborate closely with the Chee Mamuk, Two-Spirit Dry Lab and Prevention and Health Promotion (PHP) teams at BCCDC, and this particular gathering was to celebrate the fruits of a 2023 grant facilitated by the centre.

At the "Taste of Haida Gwaii" event at the BCCDC office on West 12th Avenue in Vancouver, staff sampled halibut soup rehydrated with boiling water, freeze-dried beans with tomato sauce, and freeze-dried ham. Everyone was gifted a mason jar of freeze-dried salmon berries, cherries, rhubarb, peaches, banana, strawberry and raspberry to bring home – everything but the bananas were either grown in Old Massett or local to B.C.



Members of BCCDC's Prevention and Health Promotion Team, Food Skills team, Environmental Health Services, Labs, Two-Spirit Dry Lab and Chee Mamuk stand with Chris Horner (middle left) and Elder Ada Swanson (middle right).

Thanks to \$10,000 in funding secured by the PHP team, the Old Massett Elders Centre was able to purchase a massive food freeze drying appliance and all of the tools and supplies needed to process food with it. The machine has been used every day since it was installed in June, preserving meats, fish, fruits and vegetables that are re-distributed throughout the remote Island community.

Chris says the new equipment is a great addition to a growing set of food assets and programming that Old Massett is facilitating and developing to work toward a more food secure future. Sharing land-based knowledge, and teaching food skills to young people helps to protect future generations and the health of their land.

Speaking about a local greenhouse and garden program, he explained how the goal of the community's partnership with BCCDC is to support community health and wellness with the people who live there.

"While the greenhouse doesn't provide enough for the whole community, it does provide learning grounds for anyone looking to get their hands dirty and learn something new," said Chris.

"Our goal is to give people the opportunity to provide for themselves."

With the freeze-drying appliance, the Elders Centre provides preserved food to local Elders and families, and it's also sealed some of the goods in packages for emergency rations that are safe to eat for up to 25 years.



Chris Horner (back right) talks about some of the community initiatives happening in Old Massett with staff at BCCDC.

Longstanding collaboration

BCCDC's connection to the people of Old Massett started with Chee Mamuk, a self-determining, Indigenous-led health program created to repair trust and build relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit who experience anti-Indigenous racism and struggle to navigate the ongoing legacies of colonization in the health care system. Chee Mamuk means "new work" in Chinook Jargon.

Chee Mamuk reached out to the people of Old Massett in 2015, working with the Village Council and Elders Centre to co-create community programming and outreach based on local needs. Two Chee Mamuk initiatives launched in Old Massett are Around the Kitchen Table, a nationally accredited program that facilitates conversations among women around sexual health and well-being, and Encouraging Strong Paths, which focuses on land-based healing and brings together Indigenous men to build skills, share knowledge and foster connections between Nations. Chee Mamuk also works closely with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Warriors program, based in the northern part of Vancouver

Island. Young Warriors offers mentorship, knowledge sharing and group activities out on the land for Indigenous youth and is working to establish another program in Old Massett.

Food Skills for Families

Diane Collis is a PHP Program Manager at BCCDC who runs Food Skills for Families. The program offers hands-on cooking and nutritional skill building, bringing people around the table to experience the rich social benefits of cooking and eating together.

"It's about cooking up connection and a sense of belonging," says Diane, explaining that the program aims to nourish the mind, body and soul.

Diane says in 2022, she and her team were invited by Chee Mamuk and the Two-Spirit Dry Lab to visit Old Massett and see some of the community programming and ongoing food sovereignty efforts taking place in the First Nation.



"We helped distribute special holiday food hampers to Elder homes, facilitated a massive cookie decorating event at the elementary school, supported community workshops and sat in on a female and family-focused health centre gathering hosted by Chee Mamuk," says Diane, explaining that this was the start of a meaningful relationship and a deeper understanding of the work of both Chee Mamuk and the Old Massett Elder's Centre.

After supporting the Elders Centre with grant funding to buy the freeze-drying machine, two members of the PHP team visited Old Massett in July to talk about the community's learnings, impact and vision with the addition of the new appliance.

"We saw an opportunity to pilot and explore a newer approach that had been gaining interest across the regions over the past two years," says Diane. "The intersection of reducing food waste, building emergency preparedness and increasing foundational food skills are all part of the food freeze-drying experience."

Do you want to learn more about the Food Skills team, or connect with them about potential collaborations? Reach out to FoodSkillsBC@bccdc.ca.