

# ćećəwət leləm

“Helping House”



Tsleil-Waututh Nation

## Health & Wellness: *Mental Wellness* *Toolkit*

- *updated Mar 27th, 2025*

[mentalwellness@twnation.ca](mailto:mentalwellness@twnation.ca)

t: 236-335-5783



### ***Message from the Mental Wellness Team,***

Mar 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025

The Mental Wellness Team are committed to creating wholistic, trauma-based, mental wellness support services with consistent, dedicated, mental health professionals who will create culturally informed programs that meet the needs of the community. We welcome feedback and ideas on how we can do better.

### **Intake Process**

Please reach out for supports through this central number or email. Our current intake person is Lara Fitzgerald, Clinical Lead. We also strive to be low barrier, so if you would rather do an intake directly with one of our therapists, that's okay too. Please reach out to them directly.

Mental Wellness intake/referral phone number is 604 354 0264.

and we have our own email address, [mentalwellness@twnation.ca](mailto:mentalwellness@twnation.ca).

### **Where to Find Us**

You can find our Mental Wellness offices in the upper middle section of the administration building. We can be accessed through the main administration reception, where you can sit and wait in our internal waiting area or enter the mental wellness space from the back door by arranging with your practitioner. We are very accessible, and every door is a pathway in!

### **Group program schedule launch (see website and Facebook for updates)**

**Mondays - *Women's Group* – 5.30 – 7.30pm, biweekly – the Gathering Space**

**Tuesdays – *Mental Wellness Peer Drop-In* – 3.30 – 5.30pm – Elder's Lounge**

***Weaving Our Wellness 12 Week Day Program* - 10-2pm-Takaya LeLum**

***Men's Club* – 6 – 8pm – biweekly - Elder's Lounge or off site**

**Wednesdays– *Wellbriety Group* – 6 – 7.30pm – Elder's Lounge & Zoom: 953 5012 9237**

**Thursdays- *Weaving Our Wellness 12 Week Day Program* - 10-2pm-Takaya LeLum**

***Youth Drop-In* - 5-9pm- Takaya Lelum**

**Fridays- *Youth Drop-In* - 5-9pm- Takaya Lelum**



## Introducing the TWN Health and Wellness: *Mental Wellness Team*



**Angela Merasty, MSW, RSW**

***Mental Wellness Manager***

T: 236 335 5783; [amerasty@twnation.ca](mailto:amerasty@twnation.ca)

Office number: 37; Mon – Fri

Angela is Assin'skowitiniwak (Rocky Cree) from the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, and Secwepemc from the Bonaparte Indian Band, Irish and Dutch. Angela has lived here in the lower mainland for most of her life and is honoured to be welcomed to this territory.

Angela is a graduate from the University of Toronto, Master of Social Work Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency Program. The foundation of her work is the tenets of trauma informed care, harm reduction perspectives, and anti-oppressive, social justice frameworks.

Angela's professional experience has been primarily in the realm of mental health and addictions, within the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, within First Nations community, and in treatment facilities for co-occurring disorders. She most recently worked in private practice providing direct therapy for Indigenous people's healing from trauma and the intergenerational effects of colonialism. In addition to that work, she has been teaching at City University and Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. She also recently contributed as part of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation St. Paul's Discovery Project, supporting elders to share their truths about residential school experiences. Angela is very excited to be a permanent part of the Mental Wellness team.

**Lara Fitzgerald, RCC, MCP-AT, Level 2 AEDP Therapist, Art Therapist**

***Clinical Lead***

T: 604 354 0264; [lfitzgerald@twnation.ca](mailto:lfitzgerald@twnation.ca)

Office number: 61b; Mon – Fri

*Works with all ages*

Over twenty years ago, Lara relocated to Canada from England (which is the accent you might be confused by) where she had grown up in an Irish/Scottish/English, working class family. She acknowledges that she is a white woman with many privileges working in an Indigenous community.

Lara's therapy practice is grounded in collaborative, heartfelt, and unique relationship. She values the diverse experiences and





authentic selves of the people she's fortunate enough to work with. She believes we're hard wired to heal; each person has innate ability to transform, especially with compassionate guidance. Often her client bonds are fused with humour and loving connection.

Her approach springs from her *wholistic* beliefs in the interconnectedness of our ecosystems. She understands that our mind, body, spirit, and social dimensions are intertwined and must be integrated to create a steady sense of aliveness. Drawing on her Expressive Hatha Yoga Training (YTT 200) that focused on releasing emotions from the body, and being a dancer by nature, means she learned to embrace the wisdom of the body and movement centered healing practices. Likely, this training, and her own healing path, have led to her therapeutic passion of working with trauma in all its manifestations. She has specific knowledge and experience of trauma therapy healing.

Lara's theoretical knowledge stems from her Master's degree in Counselling Psychology and Art Therapy at Adler University, and ongoing post-graduate training. She values her education but equally holds the wisdom of her adverse lived experiences in high esteem. Her training includes Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP – Level 2,) Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR,) Emotion Focused Family Therapy (EFFT), somatic body-based practice, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT,) Humanistic/Existential, Internal Family Systems (IFS,) Art Therapy, Narrative Therapy, and Motivational Interviewing (MI.)

Lara has been a therapist at TWN for over 6 years and moved into the role of Clinical Lead on the team 3 years ago. When she's not working, Lara is making art, dancing, singing, swimming, or doing something adventurous.



**Mahara Allbrett**  
*Senior Mental Wellness Counsellor*  
*Health and Wellness Elder*  
T: 604 353 8193; [mallbrett@twnation.ca](mailto:mallbrett@twnation.ca)

Office number: 62; Tues – Thurs (Tues/Weds in the Healing Space in the primary care clinic)  
*Works with teens and adults*

Mahara Allbrett belongs to the T'Sleil-Waututh Nation. She is an elder, spiritual healer, counsellor and Family Constellation facilitator, as well as a mother and grandmother.

Her training has involved: two years intensive on the job training at the Nechi Institute in Alberta, a training facility for First Nations counsellors to learn how to counsel in First Nations treatment centres. This was an Elder led organization, and the facilitators were supervised by a psychologist. Pacific Coast Family Therapy program in Vancouver, a two-year training program in



which students had family systems theory in the first year and supervised practice in the second year. All instructors were Registered Clinical Counsellors and/or university professors.

Aside from this, Mahara has taken training in various methods of counselling and relevant areas of study and clinical supervision including dream interpretation, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Jungian symbolism, Trauma-informed therapy, Non-violent Communication, the Intensive Journal method, Family Constellation therapy, introduction to Art Therapy, Therapeutic Touch, Reiki (Master level), Dream interpretation and Somatic Experiencing therapy.

Mahara really enjoys working with Family Constellation therapy, which is a form of personal growth and healing that works with the subconscious. Symbols are used in the process to allow the individual a route to resolving issues in their life, including unresolved traumas, grief and past generations 'entanglements'. There is no 'wrong way' for the someone to do their Constellation work and no experience or special skills are required. Constellations are easier to do than to explain and so Mahara encourages you to book in for a Constellation session, as the benefits for people are exponential.

"Family Systems Constellations particularly resonate with Indigenous people because the principles, values and philosophy used are rooted in connection to the family soul, ancestral lineages, ceremonial practices, cultural values, and personal life influence on future generations". Eddie Gardner - Elder from the Stollo Nation and Family Systems Constellation Facilitator

Mahara has been working in the field of counselling since 1988 and facilitating workshops since 1984. In her spare time Mahara enjoys walking in nature with her dog, reading, journaling and doing art.

**Laura Avery, MCP, Ex-AT, RCC**

***Mental Wellness Counsellor***

**T: 778 227 5064; [lavery@twnation.ca](mailto:lavery@twnation.ca)**

**Office number: 36; Mon-Weds**

***Works with all ages***

Laura is a European settler of mixed German and Scottish ancestry, born on the territories of the Semiahmoo people. She has been gratefully living and working on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations for the past ten years. Laura completed her initial Expressive Arts Therapy practicum with the Tsleil-Waututh Nation in 2017, working with children and youth, and joined the TWN health team as an Expressive Arts Therapist in April 2019. Since then, Laura has obtained her Master's in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria (Lekwungen territory) and has returned to the team at Ćecəwət leləm "Helping House" as a Mental Wellness Counsellor. Laura is excited to be back working with the







Tsleil-Waututh Nation and feels very fortunate to have the opportunity to continue growing, both as a person and a counsellor, alongside the team at Ćecəwət leləm "Helping House." Laura identifies as queer and uses she or they pronouns.

Laura's counselling approach draws from a range of counselling theories, while striving to be collaborative in tailoring an approach to therapy that feels right for each person that she works with. First and foremost, Laura believes in the healing potential of relationships, and believes that moving into deepening connection with one another can foster mutual growth and transformation. Laura's counselling work is holistic in approach, in that she recognizes the interconnection between body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Her work is further informed by experiential and somatically oriented counselling approaches, which draw attention to what is unfolding in the "here and now" between the therapist and client, as well as recognize that our bodies are important sources of knowledge.

Finally, Laura's therapeutic orientation is supported by her commitment to anti-oppressive practice, social justice, and the values of Two-Eyed Seeing. She believes that we cannot understand individual healing without understanding the various ways that we may each experience privilege and oppression. In her eyes, Laura understands that systemic change and individual change are interconnected, and she recognizes the interrelationship between activism and healing work. In her spare time, you can find Laura riding her bike, walking her rescue dog, dancing, or hanging out with loved ones.



**Nicole Parks**

***Addictions & Mental Wellness Counsellor***

T: 604-787-5468; [nparks@twnation.ca](mailto:nparks@twnation.ca)

Office number: 34; Mon-Fri.

*Works with all ages*

Nicole is a second-generation ally born on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen people and is of Caribbean, Portuguese, and English descent. Nicole grew up in Calgary on Treaty 7 Territory and is grateful and honored to have resided on Coast Salish lands for the last 15 years.

As a Registered Social Worker, Nicole holds a bachelor's degree in social work. She is currently completing her master's degree in social work at The University of Toronto, specializing in Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency.

Nicole's professional experience primarily focuses on working with youth, although she has also gained valuable experience with adult populations. Most recently, she was involved in a program supporting sexually exploited children and youth. Additionally, she is an active board member of



several groups dedicated to assisting youth in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Nicole also facilitates men's groups within BC Corrections.

Her approach to counseling is trauma-informed, client-centered, and wholistic. She utilizes evidence-based therapies and mindfulness, recognizing the person, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Nicole is dedicated to providing a safe, non-judgmental space for individuals and walking with them on their path to healing.

**Maura Gowans, M.S.W., R.S.W.**

*Mental Wellness Counsellor*

T: 236-660-2178; [mgowans@twnation.ca](mailto:mgowans@twnation.ca)

Office number:36 ; Thursday.

*Works with all ages*



Maura Gowans is Dene from Tulita, NT and has been honoured to live on the Unceded Traditional Territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Semiahmoo and Kwantlen First Nations for the past 32 years and in doing so is committed to supporting others in a good way to honour this privilege. Maura Gowans is a registered social worker (BCCSW, 12924) and was born in Yellowknife, NT. She is the proud mother of 5 boys and has worked in the non-profit sector for over 20 years. Maura is almost completed her training in Indigenous Focused Orientated Therapy as well is certified in EMDR. Maura is currently attending Yorkville University online in the Doctorate of Psychotherapy and Counselling program.

She is also very passionate about preventive measures within the Indigenous Communities in terms of breaking cycles of abuse, addiction and poverty as well as working to keep families together. She works from a Strength based, trauma informed and anti-oppressive approach and is skilled in cultural sensitivity, narrative therapy and solution focused therapy.

Maura is an active member within the community through social justice and advocacy and has participated in the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Coalition, the Women's Memorial March, and the Pan Canadian Voice Symposium. Maura participates in ceremony and believes that culture is instrumental for some individuals to heal.

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Tseil-Waututh Nation



Ashley Aguasin

*Wholistic Wellness Nurse*

*(a bridge between primary care and mental wellness)*

T: 236-785-3716; [aaguasin@twnation.ca](mailto:aaguasin@twnation.ca)

3 day a week, flexible times.

*Works with all ages*

Ashley is a second-generation settler born on Coast Salish lands to Filipino immigrants. She is grateful that she was able to spend her first few years in her ancestral home of the Philippines, where she was able to truly immerse herself in collective community and land-based living on the farmlands of her family. Once she was school age, her family relocated once again to Coast Salish territories, where she continues to reside today. She is humbled and grateful for the opportunity to support and empower

community members on the lands she occupies.

Although she has only recently completed her Bachelor of Science in Psychiatric Nursing, Ashley has been in healthcare for the last decade, and her experiences include working with children and youth, families, and older adults. She is passionate about providing holistic, trauma-informed and person-centered care. She believes that mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness are interconnected, and that it is not possible to address health without considering each of those domains. Ashley is also trained in teaching trauma-informed yoga (YOCP-200) and has been volunteering her time sharing her practice with marginalized populations at different wellness and care facilities.

Her own healing and decolonizing journey have led her to approach care from a place of compassion, empathy, advocacy and social justice. She strongly believes in each person's ability to heal individually and collectively, and although her formal training is as a psychiatric nurse, her practice is rooted in embodying cultural safety and anti-oppressive care. She believes in the healing power of connection and hopes to walk alongside folks to empower them in making their own autonomous and informed wellness decisions.

In her spare time, Ashley has been reconnecting with her roots: she is relearning Tagalog, the spoken language of her people, and learning Baybayin, the written language of her precolonial ancestors. She loves cooking for her loved ones, spending time with her rescue cat, practicing yoga and enjoying nature.





**Fraser Mackenzie**

**Peer Support Lead**

T: 236-334-0419; [fmackenzie@twnation.ca](mailto:fmackenzie@twnation.ca)

Office number: 35; 5 days a week, flexible times.

Fraser Mackenzie previously managed Coast Mental Health's Peer Support Program based in Vancouver's Downtown South for over 10 years. Fraser uses his lived/living experience of madness, his academic background in psychology and his artistic background as an actor and recording artist to help inform the curricula and vocational roles he has spent the last decade developing for clients and peers.



Most recently, Fraser was honoured to co-create *calls*: a mad stories project, with Michele Marie Desmarais, a Métis poet and scholar. They shared *calls*, a living poetic and musical reflection of their experiences of madness, at Oxford University in Fall 2023.

Part of the Canadian music scene for the past 20 years, Fraser has toured both nationally and internationally with Thurston 5/Thurston Revival and The Blue Alarm. Fraser was signed to Cazart! Records and had The Blue Alarm's Astronauts and Angels released and distributed through Maple Music/Universal. He recently completed a four song EP with producer Howard Redekopp (Tegan and Sara; Said the Whale; Hannah Georgas).



**Guy George**

**Peer Support Worker**

T: 236 339 5620; [guygeorge@twnation.ca](mailto:guygeorge@twnation.ca)

Office number: 37; 3 days a week, flexible times

Guy George grew up in a few different places including his own community of Tsleil-Waututh Nation. He's had many people support him throughout his life and credits to why he feels drawn to this helping work. He believes in this work and his purpose to share what's been gifted to him.

He's currently attending Nicola Valley Indigenous Technology taking the Indigenous Holistic Wellness and Addictions diploma program. This is starting his journey into the counselling field. He's looking forward to passing on his knowledge and lived experience as part of our t'soutin peer support program.



**Crystal Guss**

*Peer Support Worker*

T: 236 268 7509; [cguss@twnation.ca](mailto:cguss@twnation.ca)

Office number: 37; 3 days a week, flexible times

Crystal Guss moved to the TWN community in 2010, and since then has resided various places, but always stayed on the North Shore. She most recently moved back to the TWN community and is excited to be pursuing some new opportunities that have come her way. Crystal has always received unconditional support from both her mother and the people within this community, and it is this factor that has inspired her to want to be a Peer Support Worker and to offer support of her own.



Crystal will be attending the Indigenous Holistic Wellness and Addictions Diploma Program at Nicola Valley Institute of Technology beginning this fall. She wants to help people who may need support and walk along side them as they get where they need to be. She is looking forward to connecting with people in the community, sharing her lived experience, and further growing her relationships in the Tsleil-Waututh Nation.

### **Crisis Supports and Mental Health Resources**

The following TWN Crisis Response Plan is for staff and community members who are worried about their own safety and safety of others and the ability to cope with traumatic triggers.

If you or anyone you know is looking for support services for counselling or urgent after hours care, please do reach out to the following contacts. If there are any individuals who require assistance completing residential school application forms, we can support you to complete this process. Please reach out and ask us.

During business hours the following TWN counsellors can do in-person or distance risk assessments and referrals and counselling services:

- **First contact: Angela Merasty 236 335 5783**
- **Second contact: Lara Fitzgerald 604 354 0264**

After business hours, if you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis outside of regular working hours, please call 9-1-1 or go to the closest Hospital Emergency Room.

Other crisis response supports include:

- BC Crisis Line: 1-800-SUICIDE **1-800-784-2433**



- Kuu-Us Aboriginal Crisis Line: [1-800-588-8717](tel:1-800-588-8717)
- Indian Residential School Survivors Society Crisis Line: [1-866-925-4419](tel:1-866-925-4419)
- Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program: 1-877-477-0775
- Hope For Wellness Help Line: 1-855-242-3310
- Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society (cultural support & outreach services): 1-888-403-3123  
(Website: [tsowtunlelum.org](http://tsowtunlelum.org) / Facebook Page: [facebook.com/ttllnanaim](https://facebook.com/ttllnanaim))
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Health Support Services: 1-855-550-5454
- First Nations Health Authority – Culturally Safe Supports: [fnha.ca/mental-health-and-wellness-supports](https://fnha.ca/mental-health-and-wellness-supports)

### **Peer Assisted Care Team – North Shore PACT (Weekend Evenings)**

During weekend evenings, connect with a peer support worker at PACT, who respond to crisis calls related to mental health or substance use. They provide trauma-informed, culturally safe support for North Shore residents ages 13+. Hours: Every day, 7am – 12.30am. (Canadian Mental Health Association)

Call: 1-888-261-7228 / Text: 778-839-1831 / [North Shore PACT Website](#)

Additional supports and services for the Urban and Away From Home Community (see below)

#### **Overdose Outreach Team:**

[http://www.vch.ca/locations-services/result?res\\_id=1422](http://www.vch.ca/locations-services/result?res_id=1422)

Refer/self-refer anyone at risk of OD for service navigation & connection to care: 604-360-2874  
(Vancouver, North Shore, Pemberton/ Whistler area, Sunshine Coast)

#### **Metro Vancouver Indigenous Services Society (MVISS):**

Counselling, cultural support and healing

<https://www.mviss.ca/>

Intake Navigator: PH 604.255.2394 EXT 110 and the email is [intake@mviss.ca](mailto:intake@mviss.ca)

#### **IRSSS**

<https://www.irsss.ca/>

For CRISIS SUPPORT 24/7 call 1-800-721-0066

#### **Saa'Ust Centre (IRSS centre in DTES):**

44 East Cordova St

Vancouver BC V6A 1K2 | Phone: 604-985-4464