



Tl'etinqox Equine Program and Tsilhqot'in Horse and Land-Based Healing Program

2020-2021 Initiatives Summary Report

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SECHANALYAGH

This report and the initiatives that it describes would not be possible without first recognizing the influence and guidance of Chief Joe Alphonse as a horseman, rancher, and fierce advocate and voice for Tl'etinqox and the Tśilhqot'in Nation as a whole. His vision for horse-human relationships as a vehicle for healing for his people is what brings us together as we manifest it through strategic efforts and partnerships.

A complete list of everyone who has supported our horse programs would be impossible to compile. However, we wanted to acknowledge the generous, dedicated and unrelenting support of the following individuals whose involvement has been so gratefully received, both from within and beyond the Tl'etinqox Government Office (TGO).

Outgoing 2019-2021 Council Members

Eleanor Cooper, TGO fleet manager*
Harvey Dick, TGO maintenance*
Blaine Grinder
Cecil Grinder, elder, wellness worker and traditional healer*
Dale Hance*
Ashton Harry, TGO executive director*
Brendon Harry
Isidore Harry
Tyron Harry, TGO operations and maintenance manager*
Gerald Johnny
George Mack
Leslie Stump*

Incoming 2021-2023 Council Members

**from previous list were re-elected*

Alanna Bobby
Peyal Gilpin
Paul Grinder
Rosaline Harry, school custodian
Melanie Johnny, TGO education and events director

TGO Staff

Janel Alphonse, accounts payable
Pam Alphonse, Chief's assistant
Shawn Alphonse, maintenance
Agatha Billy, social development receptionist
Krissy Billyboy, TGO receptionist

Dawn Bursey, capital project manager and finance manager
Shaylene Charleyboy, equine program ranch hand
Henry Dick, maintenance
Emma Enns, Tl'etinqox school teacher
Angela Giovanelli, Chief's advisor for social services
Clayton Grice, school principal
Sharyl Harry, school receptionist
Kimberly Johnny, payroll administrator
Brent Lulua, maintenance
Darell Petal, heavy equipment operator
Audery Poucette, health receptionist
Karen Reedel, Dechen/Klatassine finance
Rebecca Rosette, equine program assistant
Mitch Verde, health director

Tl'etinqox Community Members

Lawrence Elkins Sr., elder and horse person
Martha Elkins, horse person
Wesley Alphonse, horse person
Teddy Sam, horse person
Darren Sulin, horse person

External Supporters

Lisa Hartwick, consultant to Tl'etinqox equine program
Jody Nishima, Tśilhqot'in National Government
Paula Salter, Denisiqi Services Society
Sam Zirnhelt and team, Zirnhelt Timber Frames

We also extend deep gratitude to the Chiefs and Councils, Elders, equine program staff, cultural workers, children, youth, and families of the other five partner Tśilhqot'in Nation communities of Tsi Del Del (Redstone), Yunesit'in (Stone), Xeni Gwet'in (Nemiah), ?Esdilagh (Alexandria) and Tl'esqox (Toosey) for their dedication and commitment to the other equine-related initiatives that are concurrently being developed. These collective efforts at reclaiming the Nation's ancestral horse culture are evidence of healing in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action around Indigenous-led and community-controlled cultural revitalization projects.

Photo credits to: Rebecca Rosette, Angela Hartwick and Darryl Visscher, and Sarah Schlote. Thank you to everyone who consented for their photographs to be used for the horse program.

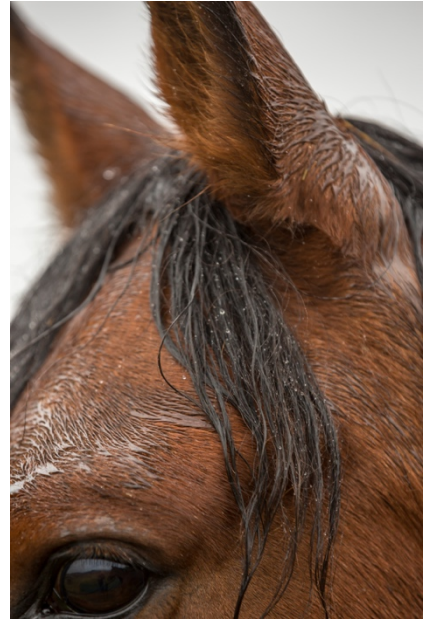
INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The Tl'etinqox equine program and the Tśilhqot'in horse and land-based project is the result of a longstanding vision held by Chief Joe Alphonse to address some of the longstanding effects of colonial trauma by reconnecting community members with horses and the land. These initiatives have been in development since 2018 through the dedicated support of various community members and professionals who are passionate about bringing Chief Joe's vision to fruition.

The two initiatives aim to support youth and their families by:

1. Reintegrating horses into daily life for Tl'etinqox members of all ages through a variety of structured programs and informal access within the community
2. Developing a historic ranch property into a healing and wellness retreat on the land with horses, offering more intensive programs in a private setting for members of the 6 partner communities of the greater Tśilhqot'in Nation as a whole



Both initiatives emphasize experiential learning, healing and wellness opportunities for youth and their families on the land. Programming aims to support the repair of relationships with horses and with one another through a blend of trauma awareness and recovery approaches, Nenqayni laws, cultural traditions and language immersion, life skills, sacred teachings, the Medicine Wheel and the 4 Directions, mentoring, neuroscience and equitation science, and relational horsemanship.

The complex challenges facing the community as a result of longstanding colonial trauma require strategic and intentional long-term solutions that build on the existing strengths and good will of its members. We will continue to harness expertise and lived experience from both within and outside the community, weaving together ancestral and western knowledge, principles and skills in service of Chief Joe's vision.

GUIDING DOCUMENTS

The Tl'etinqox and Tśilhqot'in equine initiatives address the ongoing need for services that engage and address the needs of youth and their families in meaningful ways; focus on healing the effects of trauma in terms of mental health, physical health, and addictions; and foster wellness through (re)connection and healing relationships between community members and their culture, language, traditional wisdom, the land, and horses. The goal is to foster healthy, self-determining and vibrant children, families and communities.

Our equine initiatives evolved out of the needs, principles, goals, and vision statements outlined in the following plans, which guide our programs' ongoing development in accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action:


- Tl'etinqox Comprehensive Community Plan, Part 1 (2017)
- Tl'etinqox Comprehensive Community Plan, Part 2 (2018)
- Tl'etinqox Chief & Council Action Planning Workbook (2017)
- Tl'etinqox Government 2017 Wildfire Report
- Tl'etinqox Community Health Plan (2016)
- Tśilhqot'in Nation Health and Wellness Plan (2016)
- Nenqay Deni Accord (2016)
- Interior Regional Health and Wellness Plan (2014)

KEY OBJECTIVES

Lisa Hartwick, former Tl'etinqox equine program lead, outlined the following objectives in her January 2020 program summary report. We have planned our 2020-2021 efforts with these objectives in mind.

1. Create a unique and attractive wellness and prevention program for Indigenous youth, young adults and families.
2. Utilize local expertise, Traditional Knowledge Holders (TKH), and other local resources to encourage a culturally-strong lifestyle, independence and responsibility.
3. Develop programming that supports wellness and belonging through traditional and land-based wellness approaches.
4. Develop protocols for safety and best practices for relationship with horses and people that align with Tsilhqot'in values and protocols.
5. Develop curriculum to address roots of serious issues faced by the communities including violence, addictions, physical and mental health.
6. Support local capacity building, education, mentorship and training.
7. Lead with Indigenous wisdom and healing powers of land supported with the skills and knowledge of western best practices by qualified professionals in social work and mental health.
8. Ensure family-based activities, including parenting skills.
9. Travel to key harvesting and cultural sites, by horse.
10. Build on Title rights, including land reclamation and use of wild horses in the area.
11. Consider research opportunities and partnerships that support the initiative.





**We are part of the Earth
and it is part of us. The
perfumed flowers are
our sisters. The deer, the
horse, the great eagle;
these are our brothers.
The rocky crests, the
juices in the meadows,
the body heat of the
pony and man... all
things are connected like
the blood which unites
one's family.**

Chief Seattle (1780-1866)



TL'ETINQOX EQUINE PROGRAM

JANUARY-MARCH 2020

We are including Q4 of 2019-2020 in this document, since it was not included in the January 2020 project summary report. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in mid-March led to the closing of the health building and all related programs in Tl'etinqox and in other places around the province and country as a whole. Other planned offerings were cancelled or postponed, and the remainder of this quarter was spent waiting to learn more about the novel coronavirus and how to pivot and adapt procedures and protocols moving forward.

Family Fun Day and Sleigh Rides – February 14

Approximately 100 participants from Tl'etinqox and ?Esdilagh took part in this event that allowed community members to engage in fun, healthy play, and strengthen family and community relationships through land-based horse activities. Many Tśilhqot'in families have strong memories of being together on the land with horses, with wagons or sleighs. This activity created new experiences while reminding people of their legacy as horse people.

Horse Care 101 – February 15

Approximately 50 participants from Tl'etinqox attended this full-day event, where a veterinarian from Williams Lake came to provide health care for a total of 15 horses belonging to community members. The horses were given full health check-ups, including vaccines, sedation, teeth floating, and various dental care interventions. This was a valuable opportunity for skill building in support of building right relationship. Children, youth, adults and elders all had a chance to take part in hands-on learning about physical and dental care, horse health needs that can easily be missed, and signs to watch for. The veterinarian, Dr. Anne-Marie Meier, DVM, was appreciated for her ability to engage the youth in attendance. Participants explored life skills such as caring for others, empathy, horse handling, health monitoring, responsibility, and teamwork.

APRIL-JUNE 2020

In spite of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the equine program continued to forge ahead, focusing its energies in other areas. In lieu of program delivery, efforts focused on recruiting an Equine Program Director to build, deliver and supervise equine-related programming and services both in the community and at the new facility being planned for the Alexis Lake site. At the end of this quarter, a new Equine Program Assistant, Rebecca Rosette, was hired to support Tl'etinqox's existing Equine Program Manager, Wesley Alphonse. Projects included fencing, mobile infrastructure for pens for various events, and setting up turnout for the program horses.

Traditional Feral / Wild Horse Round Up – June 10

A total of 7 program youth and 4 adults took part in the Tśilhqot'in Rights and Title management of the community's wild / feral horses. The group headed out on horseback to round up and sort stud horses for the purposes of gelding. Community horsemen Lawrence Elkins, Teddy Sam, Wesley Alphonse and Darren Sulin mentored the youth and taught rope tying and knot skills.

Traditional and Relational Ways of Colt Starting – June 25-27

Roughly a dozen youth and an equal number of adults from Tl'etinqox participated each day, observing demonstrations and taking part in activities with young horses. Participants engaged with various community members' horses as well as horses belonging to two of the participants, in developing ground skills. Buckles Camille (Secwepemc), respected healer and horseman, was supported by Wesley Alphonse, Rebecca Rosette, and Pam Alphonse in teaching horsemanship skills. Buckles also offered healing to a number of the participants as well in support of personal and community wellness.

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2020

The program continued to experience achievements in this quarter in spite of COVID-19, including recruiting me from Ontario as the new Equine Program Director and team members supporting youth in smaller groups or on a one-to-one basis in learning hands-on ways of being with the land and animals as a way of life. I began supporting the program from across the country, and on-site program staff showed ingenuity in adjusting to pandemic restrictions and providing or supporting valuable offerings that met participant needs.

Youth Riding Program – July to September

The program took place 4-5 days per week, engaging groups of 2-3 youth per day to increase their riding skills and moving cattle on horseback. Wesley Alphonse and Rebecca Rosette gave youth an opportunity to engage in healthy activity, and supported the development of strong relationships with caring adults. While out on trail rides, staff also showed youth where to find traditional medicines.



Equine Program Launch Celebration – August 12

Wesley Alphonse and 3 program youth joined approximately 40 participants from Yunesit'in in honouring the initiation of their horse program. Following the opening ceremony and BBQ lunch, Wesley helped teach how to tack up. Many children, youth and adults came together to celebrate this powerful initiative reclaiming Tśilhqot'in horse culture.

Community Trail Ride – August 29

Wesley Alphonse brought one of the program youth to join 5 youth and 3 adults from Yunesi'tin on a joint community trail ride. Among the participants was an elder whose presence and guidance supported the experience of being out on the land.

Cultural Ride to Siwash – September 4-6

A total of 23 participants from Tl'etinqox (including 8 youth riders and 3 adult riders) took part in this annual historical event. Wesley Alphonse and Rebecca Rosette were joined by Chief Joe Alphonse, Teddy Sam, Melanie Johnny, Shawn Alphonse, Martha Elkins, Darren Sulin, and Darrel Petal in supporting the youth, along with various family members and caregivers on hand as drivers, helping with meals, overnight care, and general support. Participants benefitted from riding as a community, Elder storytelling, traditional hunting, and preparing deer meat. This pack trip involved collaboration and planning, culture, problem solving, and community celebration and traditions being shared as a collective experience supporting Tśilhqot'in identity.



Ride to Anah Lake – September 28-30

A total of 9 youth (5 from the program and 4 through MCFD) were supported by Rebecca Rosette and Janel Alphonse on a pack trip on horseback. This event offered healthy interactions with adult mentors and experiential learning around goal setting, team work, and building confidence in horse riding skills.

Fall Cattle Round Up – Month of September

Wesley Alphonse mentored 2 youth 2 days per week in herding cows and teaching riding and ranching skills. This was the first time these particular program youth had an opportunity to practice these skills.

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020

I relocated from Ontario to begin my role in person. Due to an increase in COVID-19 restrictions and winter weather, the 3rd and 4th quarters of this fiscal year focused on program development and putting the infrastructure in place to ensure quality program delivery when conditions will allow for us to safely gather again. Amidst these efforts, we still managed to offer the following in terms of community engagement and service delivery.

Community / Youth Engagement and Outreach – October-December

We held a contest to develop a logo for the program and its branded apparel. The winner of the contest was Stacey Hance. Branded apparel (jackets, hoodies, and face masks) was distributed to 14 youth and 12 adults (staff and program volunteers, comprised of community members and participant family members) to create a sense of belonging, pride in identity, and build connections for program delivery. We also created a Facebook group that grew quickly to 47 members to promote our programs and share resources. All 47 students from Tl'etinqox School were sent information about the horse program to share with their families. We also distributed 2 riding helmets to program youth.



Youth Riding – December 7

Three sisters came to the fairground to ride. I engaged with them to discuss future programming, their previous experiences in the program, and their personal experiences of healing their relationship with their own horse with the support of Buckles Camille.



Equine Veterinary Care – December 10

Chief Joe and I brought some horses to Williams Lake for dental care, and one program youth took part. He had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Lauren Beaulieu, DVM, about teeth floating, equine welfare, and visual and behavioural signs of equine pain. He took part in hands-on learning involving palpating inside horse mouths and learning about tooth overgrowth. I taught him about understanding and reading body language in order to understand emotional resonance and how we can experience other's emotional state, while the horses were recovering from sedation or awaiting their turn.

Equine Veterinary Care – December 18

Invited youth to learn about horse health care and experience horse handling when Dr. Beaulieu came out to treat the remaining program horses. Wesley Alphonse, Rebecca Rosette and I engaged 3 youth to support the care and safe transfer of horses to their pasture area afterwards, on horseback and on a quad.

Additional achievements include the following:

Horse Welfare

- Identified and obtained approval from Chief Joe for a winter pasture for the program horses, and Wesley Alphonse, Rebecca Rosette, Isidore Harry, Shaylene Charleyboy and Corinne Hance completed new pasture fencing (took 2 months to complete).
- Ramped up horse welfare and care efforts for the program horses to address gaps in regular monitoring, health care, hoof care, and training. All our program horses have now gotten tetanus vaccines, and 6/8 of them have received tooth floats (to remove sharp overgrowth and resolve chronic pain due to abscesses inside the mouth) and gotten hoof trims.
- Began gentling and halter training for our yearling filly and gave her a Tśilhqot'in name, Yat'ax (sky).
- Began monitoring Yat'ax's mother, Colt 45, who is pregnant and due in the spring.



Community Riding Program

- Installed the riding arena panels at the horse fairgrounds and obtained approval from Chief and Council for temporary fencing for pens at the site (temporary fencing to be completed in new year).
- Began to draft a trauma-informed equine program policy and procedures that will be presented to Chief and Council for approval prior to implementation. This is a significant project that will cement the program's guiding principles and direction moving forward, including the integration of Tśilhqot'in values, decolonizing horsemanship, trauma-informed horsemanship, Indigenizing curriculum, and specific protocols and procedures around horse care, facilities management, and staff expectations and responsibilities.
- Identified which horses in our herd might be suitable for the riding program with further training.
- Tl'etinqox School hired a new teacher in August, Emma Enns, who also happens to be a certified riding instructor. We have obtained permission for her to support our riding program by training selected horses and working with our existing team on curriculum development and delivery.
- Rebecca Rosette, Emma Enns and I developed a new structure for the riding program given COVID and weather restrictions, and started identifying topics and curriculum to present to participants.
- Identified inventory needs in order to have the right horse equipment on hand.



Team and Program Development

- Began to teach team members about equine welfare, reading signs of pain in horse facial expressions and body language, principles of relational horsemanship and equine behaviour intervention, and trauma-informed horse-human interactions.
- Provided supervision to team members to build on existing strengths and address challenges.
- Identified personal and professional development and learning goals to support program delivery.
- Addressed logistical, practical and ethical factors to ensure cultural protocols, industry best practices, ethics, horse welfare standards and COVID guidelines are respected.
- Developed program forms (registration form, consent form, incident form, and COVID waiver).
- Developed curriculum for the revamped riding program in collaboration with Rebecca Rosette and Emma Enns, prioritizing Indigenous knowledge (in progress).
- Began to work on curriculum for the Alexis Lake horses and land-based healing program.
- Continued to identify solutions to improve communication, teamwork, safety, task completion, animal welfare, morale and work performance.
- Liaised with various other local, provincial and federal partners.

JANUARY-MARCH 2021

During the final quarter of this fiscal year, the community faced a serious outbreak of COVID-19, resulting in heroic measures taken by Chief and Council and Executive Director Ashton Harry to limit the spread. Two lockdowns were implemented until the number of COVID cases returned to zero and it was safe to return to work in person. Because it was not safe to offer direct services during this quarter, and due to inclement weather conditions, we continued to focus on infrastructure and program development. Our successes include:

Major Acquisitions

- Chief Joe sourced out a tractor for us from Country Tractor in Kamloops. The tractor is a joint purchase between the Horse Program and Health Services, which was approved by Chief and Council and delivered in early February. The tractor has been a much-needed resource, allowing Rebecca Rosette to complete tasks that used to require us to outsource.
- Zirnhelt Timber Frames completed the construction and delivery of two portable horse shelters, which are currently set up in the horses' pasture by the river.
- We obtained panels to complete the fairgrounds holding pens and to build a round pen in the horse pasture, for the purposes of training and equine-assisted learning experiences. Rebecca Rosette set up the round pen, with the assistance of Tyson Coutlee and Erica Petal.
- We sourced out and selected hay with a good analysis result from Quesnel and had it delivered to the fairgrounds for temporary storage.





Team and Program Development

- We hired Shaylene Charleyboy as our new Ranch Hand, to replace Wesley Alphonse following his departure from the equine program.
- Rebecca Rosette, Emma Enns and I continued developing curriculum content and materials for the community riding program.
- Continued working on the framework to guide Indigenous horse programs, aligning trauma-informed principles, equine welfare, decolonizing horsemanship principles, and the importance of Indigenizing curriculum with Nenqayni Laws and Tśilhqot'in values. This is a significant resource development project requiring extensive research and writing time, with the goal of producing a tool that can be used to support all 6 of the Tśilhqot'in Nation communities as they reclaim their ancestral culture as horse people.
- Developed additional forms, including a revised riding program registration form, updated incident report form, updated informed consent form, anecdote release form, equine professional agreement, and multiple liability waivers, under lawyer revision.

Community Engagement

- Began the process of coordinating a community member's horses to join our program herd for the purposes of helping train them and to facilitate this person's children's involvement in the program.
- Launched a call for Tl'etinqox and Tśilhqot'in community horse persons of all ages to share their horse stories, photos, drawings, writings, practices, or teachings for the purposes of compiling this traditional knowledge into a collective resource to preserve it for future generations.
- Launched a community contest to give one of our program horses, a gentle gelding whose prior name is unknown to us, a Tśilhqot'in name.
- Brought Buckles Camille out to provide bodywork and emotional release work for our horses.
- Began to develop connections to support Indigenous-led research about the program.
- Opened up registrations for the riding program, confirmed ongoing subsidies from Health Services for helmets for participants, and established a new subsidy for community members facing financial difficulties to cover a portion of the costs of riding boots.
- Rebecca Rosette and I coordinated and organized the Indigenous Tools for Living (ITFL) training for community members, which is taking place in April 2021. ITFL was developed by the founder of Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy, Shirley Turcotte. ITFL consists of 8 half-day online classes taught by ITFL faculty, exploring Indigenous teachings and hands-on learning about walking beside complex trauma. The workshop series includes land-based ways of "setting the load down", working with the body and sensations, boundaries, intergenerational wisdom, collective and personal grief and loss, working with wounded parts of ourselves and dreams, and reclaiming ancestral gifts around healing and living.
- Continued to liaise with various community and professional stakeholders to promote and advance the horse programs.

T̂SILHQOT'IN HORSE AND LAND-BASED PROJECT



Progress continues surrounding the Alexis Lake site for the land-based horse program. This is truly Chief Joe's legacy and great care is being taken to examine all facets of site design and development in order to set this project up for success. This project follows in the footsteps of other land-based healing with horses retreat facilities around the world, but is unique in North America for being Indigenous-led and for its curriculum, which will reflect the integration of Nenqayni Laws, T̂silhqot'in values, traditional teachings and medicines, language, and horsemanship with Western neuroscience, somatic healing practices, and other related trauma-based approaches.

The Tl'etinqox Government has been working with Zirnhelt Timber Frames for the site design, site preparation and construction phases of the project. We have had multiple meetings with Sam Zirnhelt and his team, including visits to the Downey Stump Ranch property that was acquired for this purpose, to discuss needs, demolition, building placement, logistics, and other planning details. While the site's original intention has been to provide a location for the horse- and land-based project, it will also be ideal for hosting other activities and events, including traditional ceremonies, culture camps, and teaching other land-based skills. The scope of the project is inspiring and we are currently investigating the possibility of purchasing an adjacent property to allow for site expansion as things unfold over the coming years (image of the proposed lodge courtesy of Zirnhelt Timber Frames).



NEXT STEPS

We are proud at what we have accomplished in such a short time and in spite of many barriers outside of our control. We have become experts at pivoting in response to COVID and weather conditions, and at adapting on the fly in order to continue to reach the goals we set out for ourselves. We would not be where we are now without the tireless efforts and commitments of those people who were involved in the program's inception and early years, and we fully recognize that it truly takes a village and generations of ancestors to make a vision of this magnitude come to fruition.

With such extensive foundational pieces in place, and with the coming of warmer weather and horse training under way, we are preparing to roll out the community riding program offerings in the coming weeks. We have already starting bringing youth out to interact with the horses on the ground to start building relationships, and have a number of offerings planned for family bubbles. We are currently hosting the ITFL workshop, which is providing an opportunity for a number of Tl'etinqox community members to learn about traditional medicines and experience body-based healing with one another to be in right relationship with oneself, others, animals, the land, culture and language. Curriculum development for the Alexis Lake site project is ongoing. We are also exploring how we can support the other horse programs taking place in the other Tśilhqot'in communities as well. There is a lot of work to be done, and we are taking great strides in moving things forward. This is an inspiring project and I am proud and humbled at the opportunity to support it to the best of my abilities.



We do this work because we believe in the power of horse-human relationships on the land.

We aim for interactions and programs to be as beneficial to the horses as they are to the humans.

And we envision a vibrant Tśilhqot'in Nation where horse culture is once again a core part of community life. Reclaiming culture and decolonization are essential to wellbeing.

As Chief Joe likes to say, we ride for the health of it.

At your service,

Sarah Schlote