

Presentation Title: *tuuk^w2asiil* (cultivating) a Space for Community Healing, Wellness, and Revitalization: The Tseshaht Community Garden Project.

Presentation: As the Tseshaht Crisis Care and Wellness Coordinator Gail Gus strives to improve the individual and collective health of the Tseshaht community and in 2014 she started the Tseshaht Community Garden Project utilizing a half-acre plot of land to grow vegetables, fruits and herbs. As the garden grew, so did community engagement, and more and more Tseshaht members came out to help cultivate, plant and weed the land. As a result, the garden began to flourish, growing healthy foods that all members could enjoy. The garden sits on land located on the former site of the Alberni Indian Residential School (AIRS), a place of unspeakable physical, emotional, and sexual abuse for the Tseshaht and other Indigenous children who attended it. Why cultivate a garden on land scorched by this pain and sorrow? Trauma is deeply embedded in the collective Indigenous experience and histories of colonization. Sisters Gail Gus and Charlotte Côté will discuss the Tseshaht Community Garden Project through the lens of decolonization to demonstrate how *tuukwasilth* (cultivating) the *nism'a* (land) creates a new narrative for this space, one centered on health, healing, and community empowerment. In reclaiming and restoring a relationship with the *nism'a*, the Tseshaht are decolonizing this space by removing years of collective historical trauma and replacing it with a garden that feeds, nourishes and strengthens community wellness and revitalization.