

## Arts & Culture

### Faraz Amali

**Business Owner, Manager, Designer, Cooker, Baker**

My name is Faraz Amali, and I am the founder of Lavender Art Café — a cultural, artistic, and culinary space created from years of resilience, creativity, and deep respect for community. After immigrating to Canada, I spent many years working simply to survive, while my artistic spirit remained quiet. Over time, I realized that my true purpose was to build something that reflected my heritage, values, and passion for creating beauty.

Lavender Art Café was born from that vision: a place where traditional foods, breads, teas, and desserts from my home country are prepared with healthy ingredients, cultural authenticity, and artistic care. My goal is not only to share unique flavors, but also to offer a warm, peaceful space where people from all backgrounds can relax, feel at home, and experience the richness of Iranian hospitality.

As a woman, an immigrant, an artist, and a business owner living with autoimmune conditions, I have learned that strength grows from vulnerability, persistence, and believing in your own gifts. Through my work, I hope to inspire others to honor their creativity, embrace their culture, and build communities rooted in respect, connection, and kindness.

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### Dinah D

**Musician/ Music Producer/ Artistic Director**

Dinah D has spent the last 24 years smiling both on and offstage between many band projects, producing albums, acting, songwriting, festival production, and her small farm on Gabriola island. Dinah has produced five award winning albums for the Kerplunks, is a member of the infamous band GMO (the Gabriola Microsynth Orchestra), and is currently the bassist for Wild Little Spring! Whether Dinah D is fronting her swing band, working with the Vancouver Island Symphony Orchestra, performing spoken word at a coffee shop, backing another artist, or playing to 1,000 screaming Kerplunks fans, Dinah D loves it all!

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### Kelly Barnum

**Performing Arts Educator and Artist**

Kelly Barnum, BFA, MA in Theatre, has spent over two decades teaching performing arts in Nanaimo. Her most recent high school directing credits include 'Into the Woods' and 'Frozen Jr.' with NDSS students. She has also created original dance productions that blend history, social awareness, and movement; exploring topics such as the Radium Girls, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the Terezín concentration camp.



Her work has earned multiple awards and made her a finalist for the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Active in the local arts community, Kelly directs productions such as Mary's Wedding and The Melville Boys and performs onstage in shows including The Revolutionists and Matilda. She also teaches youth and adult musical theatre at VIBRANT Dance Studio, where her younger students will bring 'Seussical Jr.' to life at VIU in April of 2026. Her work fosters socially engaged theatre, develops performers' skills, and strengthens community cultural life. Beyond her creative contributions, Kelly inspires confidence, curiosity, empathy, and collaboration in the performers she mentors.

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## Tania Amaral

### Dance Teacher & Cultural Activist for Africa

I am a Mozambican dance teacher/ educator, performer, and cultural activist with a deep passion for the dances and cultures of Africa and its people. As a perfectionist, I am dedicated to preserving and sharing the richness of African heritage through movement. In 2015, I created Afro Fusion Sharqi Dance, a unique fusion dance style that combines only dance movements from Africa, blending traditional and urban forms together.



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## Laura Kelsey

### Musician

Vancouver Island art-folk musician Laura Kelsey has fronted everything from metal to folk bands, and she brings these musical influences together to create "earthy magic" inspired by natural West Coast elements, honesty, and dreams. With a powerhouse voice, Laura has performed in venues and at festivals across B.C., and has opened for artists such as Jeff Martin (The Tea Party) and Terra Lightfoot. She has also gone on tour with Matthew Good (2022). Her debut studio EP Hunting Season was released in 2023; and her full-length album called Hidden Mountains is out in 2026.

Poems by Laura have appeared in publications such as The New Chief Tongue, pocket lint, and Sea & Cedar Magazine. Her debut chapbook 'west coast shorts' was released in 2022 by above/ground press.

Laura recently completed a 12-episode docuseries for TELUS Optik TV called 'Found in Sound' that highlights the positive effects of sound, music, and vibration on human emotional, mental, and physical health. She is also the Local Coordinator for the Nanaimo Shoebox Project.

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## Amy Pye

### Designer & Artist

Amy Pye is a Nanaimo-based designer, illustrator, and storyteller whose work sits at the intersection of art, community, and civic life. For over a decade, she has led Pye Design, a creative studio focused on building meaningful brands and public art that reflect place, people, and shared values.

Amy is best known for her joyful, child-centered approach to creativity. As a children's book author and illustrator, and an In-School Facilitator with the Nanaimo Art Gallery, she brings storytelling and visual literacy directly to young people, showing how creativity can be a powerful tool for confidence, communication, and belonging. Her public-facing work includes major community projects such as Nanaimo 150, utility bin wraps, and Sensing Nanaimo, a ten-piece public art installation exploring the human senses through illustration and light.

Deeply committed to service, Amy volunteers with arts, cultural, and health organizations, and works closely with local entrepreneurs and nonprofits to help ideas grow. Guided by a belief that accessible arts strengthen communities, she leads with curiosity, generosity, and a long-term vision for creative impact, especially for children and families.



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## Mali Bain

### Founder, NextGen Story: Custom Publishing

Mali is a former high school teacher with a background working in university, non-profit, and philanthropic settings. She is a family historian, facilitator, and certified Guided Autobiography instructor, with a B.A. (UBC), B.Ed. (SFU), and an M.A. in Adult Learning and Education (UBC). She is also the author of *Our Homes on Indigenous Lands: Stories of My Ancestors Across Turtle Island*.

Mali worked with her grandmother to edit, design, and eventually publish a memoir. Since the founding of NextGen Story: Custom Publishing, she and the team have helped dozens of families complete memoir and legacy books. Mali lives with her daughter in Nanaimo, BC and works with clients across North America.



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## Diana Henry

### Owner/ Principal Instructor

Diana Henry grew up in Nanaimo. She was a Harewood kid who went to Georgia Avenue, Harewood, and NDSS. She moved to Chemainus for her final years of school, but made her way back to Nanaimo after graduation.

Diana is married to Charles, a Community Safety Officer. They have 2 sons. Marshall, 22, RCMP Officer, working in Northern Saskatchewan. Stirling, 21, Football player for The VI Raiders Football Club, who also works at Berwick on the Lake.

Brigadoon Dance Academy opened in 1995 under the direction of Diena Henry. The Academy participates in many community and charitable events. They perform annually at our local legions for Robert Burns shows, Saint Patrick's Day shows and for Canada Day shows. Brigadoon Dancers also perform throughout the year at many retirement homes. They have done many community performances over the years at the Port Theatre, Malaspina Theatre-VIU, VIEX, Maffeo Sutton Park, SPCA, Superior Farms, etc.

Brigadoon has produced Champions at the highest levels, including Provincial, National, Commonwealth and a World Champion. Their dancers have performed internationally in Royal Military Tattoos, including Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Canada!

September 2025 was the start of Diena's 30th year in business. Thank you, Nanaimo!



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## Margot Holmes

### Performing Arts Manager

Margot Holmes is a prominent figure in promoting Canadian culture through her extensive work in the performing arts over the past three decades. As the owner of Caline Artists International she has significantly influenced the careers of numerous Canadian musicians who have toured around the globe. Locally, she has served as the CEO of the Vancouver Island Symphony for 26 years.

Her contributions have earned her several prestigious awards, including the City of Nanaimo's Honour in Culture Award in 2023. She was recognized as Agent of the Year by Canadian Arts Presenters (CAPACOA) in 2015 and received the Cultural Champion Award for Arts Leadership (Business for the Arts) and the City of Nanaimo Award of Distinction in 2014. In 2017, she was named Agent of the Year by the BC Live Performance Network.

Margot has intentionally worked with youth and emerging artists alongside professionals. As the Executive Director of the British Columbia Boys Choir from 1993 to 2018, she mentored hundreds of boys, guiding them to become young men through performance and international tours.

Beyond her personal achievements and accolades, Margot has served on various boards, including the BC Live Performance Network, CAPACOA, Nanaimo Community Archives and Tourism Nanaimo.



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## Sara Raymond

### Studio Owner/Event Director

Sara Raymond is a studio owner and event director with over 20 years of teaching experience. Based in Nanaimo, she leads a vibrant dance studio offering classes for kids through adults in classical training, hip hop, line dance, and West Coast swing. Her



programs range from recreational classes to competitive training, with students proudly representing the studio at the Line Dance World Championships.

Sara is an active competitor herself, currently dancing at the UCWDC World Championships in Advanced Modern Line Dance. Her passion for community and connection extends beyond the studio. Each May, she hosts Nanaimo Dance Fusion, an international event that brings together instructors from around the globe to teach, judge, and perform. Held at the Nanaimo Convention Centre, the event welcomes more than 500 attendees annually and continues to grow as a celebrated hub for dancers of all styles and levels.

Driven, dedicated, and deeply rooted in the dance world, Sara is committed to creating spaces where dancers can learn, express, and excel—both on and off the competitive floor.

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## Samah Alkendy

### Founder of The Sky Above Creative Agency

Samah Alkendy is a visual storyteller and creative entrepreneur whose work lives at the intersection of art, community, and human connection. As the founder of The Sky Above Creative Agency, she captures meaningful stories through photography and film, working closely with artists, small businesses, and community cultural events. Guided by a deep belief in reinvention and creative empowerment, Samah uses storytelling to elevate voices, honour lived experiences, and create space for people to be seen, heard, and celebrated.



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## Breathe Fire

### Alla Zhukova

#### Volunteer with Help Ukraine Vancouver Island, Kinsmen club of Nanaimo. Retail sales.

I was born in Ukraine, where I earned an engineering degree, became a mother to two wonderful sons, and built my own business selling children's products. After Russia's attack on my homeland, I moved to Canada with my children, my brother, and my parents.

This journey strengthened my belief in kindness, compassion, and the power of family values. I never divide people into "good" or "bad," because every person carries their own story.

I believe that we must never give up. Each of us has a mission waiting to be fulfilled, and once we discover it, it becomes our driving force—lifting us through difficult moments and helping us move forward with purpose.

In Canada, I fell in love with a wonderful man who, like an angel, lifted me up and helped me spread my wings. I found many friends and understanding people who supported my family and helped us feel at home. Their kindness reminded me that empathy and connection can change lives.





My personal credo is to stay grateful—to the universe and to God—for everything I have. Gratitude inspires me to serve, to give, and to live with hope.

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## Chrissandra Unger

### Registered Therapeutic Counsellor

Chrissandra is an expressive arts therapist, sound healing practitioner, and multidisciplinary artist whose work blends psychology, creativity, and ritual to foster profound personal and collective transformation. With a master degree in expressive arts therapy, and psychology and certifications in Biofield Tuning and Sound Healing Therapy, she weaves together voice, vibration, movement, and mythic storytelling to help others reconnect with their inner wisdom and emotional resilience.

Her offerings — from sound ceremonies to narrative performances inspired by ancient feminine archetypes — create spaces of grounding, clarity, and deep remembrance. Known for her ability to hold a room in powerful stillness, Chrissandra brings a rare combination of sensitivity, intuition, and artistic mastery to every experience she leads.

Her creative work has reached communities across Canada and abroad, including public art projects in Italy and immersive workshops that integrate sound, somatic awareness, and expressive arts. Driven by a devotion to service and beauty, she continues to develop innovative programs that support healing, empowerment, and authentic embodiment. Chrissandra's leadership is rooted in heart, presence, and the belief that transformation becomes possible when we dare to listen — to ourselves, to each other, and to the unseen.



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## Sarah M Bramley

### Habitat for Humanity Executive Director

Sarah M. Bramley is a seasoned nonprofit leader with more than 20 years of experience advancing community development, affordable housing, and social impact initiatives. With a unique blend of residential construction expertise and strategic fund development leadership, she excels at mobilizing resources, cultivating donor and partner relationships, and building collaborative networks that turn generosity into lasting impact.

Sarah has led four Habitat for Humanity Global Village builds worldwide and will lead her next international build in Brazil in 2026. Her commitment to service earned her recognition in 2017 as one of Canada's 150 Philanthropists.

Beyond her executive leadership, Sarah has served on multiple local and national boards and committees, championing community-driven solutions for vulnerable populations. She has been a multi-year nominee for the Women of Influence (WIN) Awards and Vancouver Island's Top 20 Under 40.

A dedicated volunteer, Sarah has supported youth and families in crisis, contributed to the Dirt Cup fundraiser—which has raised more than \$230,000—and provided marketing and fundraising support to Aina, an orphanage and school in Kenya. She previously spent ten years as a Sparks and Brownies leader, was a Big Sister with Big Brothers Big Sisters, and contributed to major fundraising events including the CIBC Run for the Cure and the Seafood Extravaganza.



Driven by empathy and sustained by collaboration, Sarah brings a hands-on, people-first approach to leadership. Outside of her work, she finds balance through yoga, hiking, travel, and spending time with her dogs and fiancé.

## Taylor Farrell

### General Manager, Nanaimo North Town Centre

Taylor Farrell is a community-building powerhouse known for creating meaningful connections between businesses and the communities they serve.

Taylor has a strong background in marketing and public relations. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Vancouver Island University and an Executive MBA from Royal Roads University, where she was the youngest graduate for the program at her time of completion. Taylor is also a three-time Ch'nook Scholar with the University of British Columbia.

Deeply invested in community impact, Taylor has served on the boards of Volunteer Nanaimo and the Young Professionals of Nanaimo, contributing her expertise to help organizations strengthen local engagement. Her community-building passion extends into the world of golf where she helped lead the creation of the Women's Golf Project, with British Columbia Golf, to grow the game for women.

In her professional work, Taylor's known for building mutually-beneficial community partnerships through innovative events and impactful sponsorships. She enjoys helping small businesses get started and grow through thoughtful marketing and strategic leasing. Her dedication to delivering best-in-market events and experiences has helped elevate the vibrancy and economic vitality of the Nanaimo community. Through her leadership, Taylor continues to champion collaboration, inclusivity, and experiences that bring people together.



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## Cathy Holmes

### Host Producer of Act3

Cathy Holmes is a Nanaimo-based community builder, mentor, and storyteller with a deep belief in the power of shared voices. She is the producer and host of Act3, a television series on Rogers Channel 4 airing across Vancouver Island, with a companion radio show on CHLY 101.7 FM on Mondays at 1 p.m. She credits much of the show's success to the incredible team of 18 volunteers who help bring it to life. Cathy has also been a writer for the Nanaimo Voyager magazine for nearly 14 years. Alongside her media work, she serves as a Regional Coordinator with United Way BC and as Regional Mentor with the BC Community Response Network, supporting community-based responses to vulnerability and abuse. Cathy is honoured to be a three-time nominee for the Women of Influence Awards.



## Linda Sutton, MA, RCC

### Registered Clinical Counsellor

As a Registered Clinical Counsellor with over 25 years experience, my heart's work is to be a sacred witness for those carrying the weight of trauma, grief, anxiety, depression, and addiction. I offer compassionate support to people of all genders, while my primary passion and focus are devoted to women's healing and empowerment. I believe deeply in every person's innate capacity for healing and growth.

I am a woman rooted in love, shaped by life, and called to hold space for truth and transformation as women unravel, remember, and rise. Through connection, I empower them to cultivate self-worth, self-love, and authenticity as they reclaim their voice and become forces of beauty, courage, and love.

My path is intertwined with the women I serve. I am a mother of five, a grandmother of seven, and someone who has known deep pain and the grace of healing. I have been married to my wife for 26 years, and together we've woven a family story grounded in resilience, connection, and love.

I facilitate a women's healing circle and host a one-day grief retreat. My approach integrates self-compassion, somatic work, parts work, guided imagery, self-awareness, and mindful presence.



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## Adena Broadhead

### Owner of Fig Love Clothing Co.

Adena Broadhead is a co-founder of Fig Love Clothing Co. and a leader in size-inclusive, body-positive retail rooted in lived experience. At 31, Adena was diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer and underwent a double mastectomy—an experience that profoundly reshaped her relationship with her body and deepened her commitment to self-acceptance and visibility.

Her journey began much earlier, growing up within systems of religious abuse, physical harm, and patriarchy that taught her women's bodies were something to be controlled, judged, or silenced. These messages later contributed to a long struggle with binge-eating disorder, reinforcing how deeply shame is embedded in both culture and commerce.

Rather than internalizing those narratives, Adena transformed them. She opened Fig Love Clothing as a radically size-inclusive space designed to honor bodies of all shapes, stories, and stages of life. Fig Love exists as both a business and a declaration: that comfort, beauty, and joy are not reserved for a select few.

Through her work, Adena turns personal adversity into collective empowerment—proving that reclaiming one's body is not just healing, but revolutionary.





## Cassidy vander Ros

### Lobbyist / Subject Matter Expert

As a queer woman and traumatic brain injury survivor, I woke up one day to a changed life. I had to relearn how society treats women and disabled people, and I saw clearly where systems fail. I chose to use that lived experience to fight for change.

I work to create affordable communities for those who don't have expendable income, challenging a system that treats housing as a luxury instead of a basic need. This led me to become one of the few experts in Western Canada chosen by the federal government to provide guidance on circular economy solutions.

I carry those same principles into agriculture, working to redefine farm status for small scale farms. By unlocking tax and policy supports, this work helps communities strengthen food security and build local resilience.

Everyone deserves dignity, safety, and choice.

Personally, I have been an admirer of wildlife forever. Slug on the ground? I still stop and tell you all about the species. I have two epileptic rescue cats. They keep me on routine, and keep me feeling safe and stable. I also have two rescue snakes, and countless fish, insects, and plants. I am recently engaged to the love of my life.



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## Marie Burrows

### PREC | REALTOR® | Nanaimo, BC

Marie Burrows is a quiet force of connection, resilience and heart. For over 18 years, she has guided women, families and newcomers through many of life's transitions—both exciting and challenging. As leader of the all-female Love Real Estate Group at RE/MAX Professionals, Marie has always worked with the presumption of gender equality, using her skills and influence to create spaces for herself and other women in a field that was primarily male dominated during her early career.



Known for her steady, calm, reassuring presence under pressure, Marie's support extends far beyond transactions, building lasting relationships rooted in trust and care. Her resilience and lived experiences give her unique perspectives into the safety of women and children, housing and food security. Charities dear to her include: Children's Miracle Network, Haven, Hospice, We're Here For You Canada, Loaves and Fishes and Nanaimo Women Helping Women.

Her greatest pride is in raising her daughters to be kind, empathetic, brave and capable young women—instilled with the belief that they can achieve and be anything without ceilings.

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## Business Impact

### Ellen Mann

#### Home Staging Specialist

Ellen Mann is the award-winning owner and President of Chrysalis Creative Home Staging Inc., a leading Vancouver Island staging company rooted in transformation, collaboration, and community impact. After a 30-year corporate career, she reinvented herself as an entrepreneur—and has since become known not only for elevating homes, but for elevating people.

An honouree of the Real Estate Staging Association, including recognition as one of the “100 Most Influential People in Real Estate Staging,” for the past 7 years running, Ellen pairs business strategy with a deep commitment to giving back. She donates staging inventory to local organizations, and her company fully furnished Haven House’s intake room for women and children fleeing violence. She hosts open-warehouse events, and brings local stagers and women-owned businesses together to foster growth, support, and shared opportunity.

Ellen believes business should be a catalyst for community connection. Whether mentoring new stagers, volunteering, or collaborating with local partners, she focuses on creating ripple effects that make her industry—and her island—stronger.

Known for her candour, clever humour, and heart-forward leadership, Ellen continues to champion a “pay-it-forward” culture wherever she goes



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### Stormy Sweet Huggins

#### Founder of RockSolid Bookkeeping Inc.

Stormy Sweet Huggins was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, and her life was shaped early by the profound loss of losing her mother at five years old. That experience forged a resilience that carried her through a trauma-filled upbringing and ultimately fueled her determination to build a purposeful, self-directed life.

Seeking a new beginning, Stormy moved from the United States to Vancouver Island to be with her now ex-wife with nothing more than a car full of possessions, driven by hope, courage, and the desire to heal. A decade later, she met the man who would become her husband, and together they built a loving family with their two children—an anchor of joy and stability in Stormy’s life.

In March 2011, from the spare room of her home, Stormy founded RockSolid Bookkeeping. What began as a one-woman operation, has grown into a thriving, service-focused business celebrating 15 years of success. Today, she leads an exceptional team of ten employees who manage a portfolio of more than two hundred clients, all grounded in Stormy’s commitment to outstanding customer service and professional integrity.

Now celebrating her 45th birthday, Stormy stands as a testament to perseverance—transforming hardship into strength, and strength into a legacy she continues to build every day.



## Maja Bogdanic

### CEO of NEWAY TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

I moved to Canada in 2010, after leaving an abusive marriage, and I took over a struggling traffic control business with no prior experience in the field. With my two young children, I relocated to Nanaimo and worked tirelessly to rebuild what had been left to collapse. Two and a half years later, I am standing strong as the owner of Neway Traffic Management Ltd.; leading with safety, integrity, and community impact while proving that resilience and determination can transform challenges into lasting success.

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## Sandy Herle

### Owner of Close To You Boutique

I was born in Nanaimo, the oldest of five girls and one brother, and spent my early childhood in Pender Harbour while my dad taught at the local high school and my mom stayed home with us. When I reached Grade 7, Dad accepted the head teacher position at Quesnel Elementary in Nanaimo. One of the things I admired most about him was his commitment to never work at any school his children attended; something that showed both his integrity and his understanding of family.

In 1971, my first husband and I opened a bicycle store, and over the next five years we expanded to three locations. Those entrepreneurial beginnings shaped my love for business and community connection. I sold my shares in 1990, and a year later, with my new husband Gil, opened 'Close To You'. What began as a small 700-square-foot shop focused on lingerie has grown over the decades into a vibrant 4,500-square-foot boutique offering fashions, lingerie, and footwear.

Building Close To You has been a wonderful journey—one filled with loyal customers, dedicated staff, and a community I care deeply about. I'm proud of how far we've come and grateful for everyone who has been part of this story.



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## Judy Stephan

### Editor / Publisher

Judy immigrated to Canada from South Africa in 2009. She was a high school teacher for 23 years and reinvented herself as a magazine publisher when she arrived in Nanaimo. She is passionate about being the positive voice of the community, is a serial volunteer, is incredibly patriotic and enjoys working in the community. Her magazines reflect this passion giving a voice to local personalities, businesses, community initiatives and the arts.



## Alexa McLane

### Owner/founder

My name is Alexa McLane, and I am the founder of Little Lavender Goods, a business inspired by my love for natural wellness, creativity, and intentional living. What began as a small passion project during the pandemic has grown into a thriving business that now helps support my family. Today, Little Lavender is a more-than-full-time operation, and I am proud to employ two part-time team members who help bring our products to life.

At Little Lavender, we are dedicated to creating high-quality, all natural essential-oil-based products, handcrafted in small batches with care. Our mission is to provide non-toxic, nourishing alternatives that support the well-being of the mind, body, and soul. We believe in the power of nature, which is why we use only minimal, pure ingredients and consciously source as many materials as possible from BC businesses to support our local community.

A recent highlight has been our collaboration with Mint Cleaning to launch a car diffuser featuring their signature blend. A milestone that reflects the quality, trust, and heart behind our brand.

Little Lavender represents resilience, passion, and the beauty of building something meaningful from the ground up.



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## Chantelle Hofferd

### Director of Sales and Marketing

Chantelle is a strategic and community-minded sales and marketing leader who brings both heart and vision to her work. As Director of Sales and Marketing at Tigh-Na-Mara Seaside Spa Resort, she leads with a people-first approach—strengthening alignment between departments, empowering teams, and helping every team member understand their role in driving business success.

Her influence is shaped not only by professional expertise, but also by a deeply personal journey. Navigating and breaking cycles of generational trauma has taught Chantelle the importance of resilience, compassion, and setting healthy boundaries. These experiences guide her leadership style today—one that prioritizes emotional intelligence, psychological safety, and a holistic view of success. She champions work-life balance as a non-negotiable part of sustainable performance and actively models this in her own career, encouraging others to thrive without sacrificing their well-being.

Beyond her organization, Chantelle contributes to Vancouver Island's tourism and business community through mentorship, partnership building, and advocacy for experience-driven, sustainable travel. Known for her creativity, authenticity, and grounded leadership, she continues to inspire those around her—proving that meaningful business impact is strongest when it is built on purpose, humanity, and genuine connection.



## Shirin Younessian

### Entrepreneur, Community Advocate & business Owner

Shirin Younessian is an award-winning entrepreneur and a dedicated community advocate who has spent more than eleven years contributing to the social and economic growth of Nanaimo. In 2019, she received the Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the Immigrant Welcome Centre, recognizing her innovation, leadership, and impact as a newcomer building a successful business.

Her catering company has been selected as Best of the City – First Place for the past two years and has repeatedly ranked among the Top Five Small Businesses in categories such as Inclusive Employer and Less Than 10 Employees. Beyond business success, Shirin's passion lies in community service. She actively participates in fundraising events, supports Foodshare Nanaimo programs, and volunteers through the Zonta Club of Nanaimo, CIVMS, WES Society, Bethany Place for Hope, and Nanaimo Women Helping Women.

Shirin is committed to empowering newcomers, helping them start businesses, find jobs, and integrate confidently into the community. With a master's degree in Pure Mathematics and years of experience as a math teacher in Iran, she continues to teach by offering online math classes to Afghan girls who otherwise have limited access to education.

Her work reflects resilience, leadership, and a lifelong dedication to lifting others up and creating meaningful change.



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## Meghan Weir

### Life and Business Strategist

Meghan Weir is a former mental health and addictions nurse turned life and business strategist, author, speaker, and founder of The Somna Method™. She is also a co-founder of Heart-Wired CEO and Legacy Leaders of Canada. Her work sits at the intersection of nervous system regulation, subconscious change, and embodied leadership.

After nearly two decades in healthcare, Meghan recognized that many high-performing leaders weren't struggling from lack of strategy, but from operating businesses in a way that their nervous systems couldn't sustainably hold. Rather than pushing harder, she stepped away from conventional success models and rebuilt her work around regulation, capacity, and internal safety first.

From that recalibration grew a body-led approach to leadership and scaling that now supports founders, CEOs, and leadership teams through digital programs, masterminds, immersive retreats, and corporate experiences. By blending clinical insight with lived embodiment, Meghan helps leaders scale without sacrificing their health, presence, or integrity.

Her work challenges hustle culture and proves that sustainable success begins in the nervous system and expands outward.





## Catrina Elliott-Kaminski

### Founder & Strategic Operator, Elite Image Print Group

Catrina Elliott-Kaminski is an entrepreneur who believes a bold vision is only as strong as the self-discipline and endurance required to see it through. Since founding Elite Image Print Group in her basement in 2010, she has built one of Vancouver Island's largest full-service marketing and print groups. Her journey is guided by a personal mandate: "Strength alone isn't what it takes to win—it's endurance. Life's challenges do not paralyze me; they empower me to prevail."

Today, Katrina leads 21 professionals across five specialized companies, delivering proprietary technology and production solutions to clients across Canada. She scaled the organization into an 8500 sqft facility through strategic acquisitions and disciplined expansion, all while raising two children and continuing to lead the group of companies.

Deeply community-focused, Katrina has served as: a Futurpreneur mentor, a founding director of Young Professionals of Nanaimo and board member, a Big Sister with Big Brothers Big Sisters, and a founding director of the International Widows & Orphans Fund. Her leadership has been recognized through honours including Top 20 Under 40, Entrepreneur of the Year, and Top 10 Small Business in BC. And her leadership is grounded in the belief that success is a collective effort. She remains committed to building a visionary future through collaboration, grit, and personal accountability."



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## Meghan Walker

### REALTOR®

Meghan Walker is an award-winning real estate professional and community leader on Central Vancouver Island. As co-founder of the McPherson Walker Real Estate Group, she's known for her client-focused approach, deep local expertise, and consistent national recognition, including top-tier Royal LePage sales awards, Award of Excellence status, and ranking among the Top 10% of agents in Canada. She is also a top 5% national donor to the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation, reflecting her belief that business success should create meaningful community impact.

Meghan's leadership extends far beyond real estate. She serves as Past-President of the Parksville & District Chamber of Commerce, Vice-President of the Corcan Meadowood Residents Association, a member of the Vancouver Island Real Estate Board Government Relations Committee, and a Director with the Parksville-Qualicum Beach Tourism Association.

Recognised for her integrity, warmth, and commitment to elevating others, Meghan continues to champion collaboration, sustainable growth, and stronger communities across Vancouver Island.



## Rae-Lynn Varga

### **Founder of Refine Home Inc. Downsizing Specialist and Professional Organizer**

Rae-Lynn is a Downsizing Specialist and Professional Organizer and the Founder of Refine Home Inc, a company that she launched in 2021. Built on equal parts passion and courage, Refine Home Inc. was born during a pivotal life transition as Rae-Lynn and her family made a bold move back to Vancouver Island. What began as a leap of faith quickly evolved into a purpose-driven business dedicated to helping others navigate change with clarity and confidence. With a deep commitment to "making a difference", Rae-Lynn supports individuals and families through some of life's most significant transitions. Her work focuses on moving, senior relocation, downsizing, and helping clients create and maintain organized functional homes that truly support their lives. Known for her compassionate, judgment-free approach, she brings both practical expertise and emotional insight to every client experience.

In addition to her hands-on work, Rae-Lynn is a co-author of Spread Your Wings, where she shares her journey and the powerful message that growth often begins with taking a leap of faith. Her story reflects the courage it takes to follow your passions, even when fear is present. Through Refine Home Inc. she continues to lead by example, inspiring others to embrace change, push past the fear and trust the process both in business and in life.



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## Grada Lynne Johnson

### **Investment Advisor**

Grada Lynne Johnson is an accomplished Investment Advisor with RBC Wealth Management, dedicated to helping people find clarity and confidence in their financial decisions. She combines tax efficient income ideas with simplified financial planning to provide guidance that is both practical and personally meaningful.

Grada's approach centers on what matters most to her clients—whether that's building a business, preparing for retirement, or creating a legacy—to support both their families and futures. Her work reflects a collaborative values-based philosophy grounded in integrity, trust and service.



## Elaine Nelson-Hosak

### Owner/Operator

Elaine Nelson-Hosak is the principal owner and operator of Carlos O'Bryan's Neighborhood pub located on the Nanaimo waterfront. Elaine has created an incredible environment for her patrons and staff to share in the most vibrant friendly atmosphere to enjoy a social meal, beverage or both.

Elaine was born and raised in Nanaimo. Elaine is a proud third generation Nanaimo-ite with roots firmly planted in Central Nanaimo. She has mastered an amazing balance in life with her husband Tom, two children, and three grandchildren.

Elaine is well known in her intimate circle of friends and associates as an extremely generous, compassionate, entrepreneurial "giver" of selfless acts of kindness. She is unconditional in her support of youth, seniors, sports teams and countless causes which capture her soul. She is a leader and mentor with a firm hand and large heart beyond compare.

Elaine is a passionate sports person and is a touring barrel racer in her spare time. As well, she has endeared herself to caring for animals in need. She promotes and represents the City and the people she loves and cares deeply for. Care and compassion for others does not begin to describe her love for humanity, animals, and the City of Nanaimo.



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## Debbie Mann

### General Manager - Island Corridor Foundation

Debbie joined the Island Corridor Foundation in 2023, inspired by the corridor's potential to shape the future of Vancouver Island. She quickly restructured and established new internal processes, creating a strong framework to better manage and steward the corridor on behalf of its members. Always seeking new opportunities to benefit the organization, Debbie recently introduced the concept of a hi-rail bus as an innovative use for sections of the corridor.

She approaches every project with purpose, always mindful of how it can benefit the Foundation's members and the overall community.

In addition to her work with the Island Corridor Foundation, Debbie is proud to serve as a key organizer of the Tour de Rock Golf Classic, which has raised nearly \$250,000 over the past five years. She is working to expand the tournament to multiple communities, creating a truly island-wide fundraising event to support local families with children affected by cancer.

Debbie and her partner have two daughters. She hopes to guide them by example, demonstrating dedication, integrity, a strong work ethic, and the importance of family and community. To her, influence is the ability to create a positive impact on others. It's about leading by example and empowering those around you.



## Amanda Von Hera

### Co-Founder and CEO

Amanda Von Hera is the Co-Founder and CEO of Dualistic Unity Media Inc. DBA Island Karaoke, creating public spaces for authenticity. Amanda is passionate about creative arts and community impact.

In her words, “We have a commitment to the Nanaimo Community to use our platform and resources to facilitate additional community support by hosting community-driven events. Like at the 2025 Canada Day Celebration at the Port Theatre, where we raised \$6,000 for two local organizations. Or like at the Nanaimo Foodshare Society and the youth fiddle group, Fiddelium within the Nanaimo Fiddle Society. Soon after the Port Theatre event, we created a new non-profit organization, the Spirit of Nanaimo Society, and already have 5 community-focused events planned for 2026. And this is only the beginning!”

Influence reminds her of the wind. The wind can push and pull things, but the wind doesn't control anything it moves.



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## Virginia Coverdale

### Owner/Operator My Undies Lingerie Boutique

A nominee for the Women of Influence Award in Business Influence, Virginia Coverdale brings a fresh yet confident voice to the local business community. While new to business ownership, her leadership is grounded in a long and respected career in health care at the local hospital, where she built a reputation for professionalism, compassion, and results-driven teamwork. These experiences now inform her approach to business—people-centered, strategic, and community-focused.

Deeply connected to downtown retail, she is an active supporter of local entrepreneurs and economic growth, believing vibrant small businesses are the heart of a strong community. Known for her active and healthy lifestyle, she brings energy, resilience, and balance to everything she does.

As a single mother who raised two strong and healthy adult daughters, she partially credits motherhood with shaping her work ethic, adaptability, and determination. Her journey reflects purposeful leadership, lifelong learning, and a commitment to making meaningful impact through business.



## Jennifer Kemp

### Executive Director

Jennifer Kemp is a dedicated advocate for service and community, with a diverse background that has shaped her into a leader in both the nonprofit and real estate sectors. Born in Vancouver and raised on the Sunshine Coast, she started her professional adventure at a young age. Her early years were filled with a diverse range of experiences, from assisting high-end retail customers to administration in law firms and innovative businesses. These formative experiences laid the foundation for her future endeavors.



However, the most significant chapter in Jennifer's life began when she embraced motherhood in 2003. This transformative moment led her to rethink her career path. With some self reflection and training she launched her own business, At Your Best Image Consulting. To gain experience and launch her business she volunteered her services to organizations in Vancouver's Downtown East Side, showing her dedication to making a positive impact on the lives of those less fortunate. Additionally, she shared her knowledge by teaching at Vancouver Community College, inspiring others to reach their full potential.

In 2009, Jennifer relocated to Nanaimo. There, she continued her Image Consulting business and expanded her horizons into the world of real estate and housing development. Her talents led her to design and build her family's home, then partnering with a developer in designing and building homes for others.

Jennifer's desire to get more involved in community led her to join the Board of Big Brothers Big Sisters, eventually leading her to become the organization's President. Through a two-year succession plan and mentorship, she assumed the role of Executive Director, where she now aspires to guide the organization towards sustainable growth, leaving a lasting impact on the children and youth of Central Vancouver Island.

Beyond her professional pursuits, Jennifer cherishes a balanced life. She finds joy in spending time with loved ones, connecting with nature, cooking, dancing, and nurturing her spiritual and personal development. She continues to embrace opportunities for learning and growth, ensuring her ongoing commitment to serving her community.

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## Meagan Buggy

### Digital Marketing Strategist

Meta ads strategist, funnel fixer, and the creator of the “Ad Bestie” brand, where women stop guessing, stop panicking, and finally learn how to run ads that actually work.

After six years in digital marketing and hundreds of webinar and lead-gen campaigns, I’ve become known for one thing: cutting through the noise. I help female founders ditch the overwhelm, understand their numbers, fix their funnels, and scale in a way that feels aligned not exhausting.

I built my agency, Meagan & Co., during nap times, pregnancies, and school pick-ups, proving you don’t need a marketing degree or a 40-hour workweek to build something powerful. Today, I specialize in helping female coaches and local businesses turn simple data into smart decisions (and profitable campaigns).





## Ashley MacLeod

### Founder

Ashley MacLeod is a community-driven entrepreneur, advocate, and leader whose work is rooted in connection, resilience, and purpose. As the founder of Carnivore Kingdom, a locally owned pet nutrition store in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Ashley has built more than a business — she has created a trusted community hub for pet owners who care deeply about ethical sourcing, education, and the well-being of their animals. Her passion for local pets is shaped by hands-on experience, transparency, and a belief that informed choices empower both people and their animals.

Beyond retail, Ashley is actively involved with the Bulldog Club of Canada, serving as Interim Regional Director for British Columbia, where she supports responsible breeding, mentorship, and preservation of the breed. Balancing entrepreneurship, advocacy, and family life, Ashley leads with integrity and grit, demonstrating that influence is built not only through success, but through service, education, and uplifting the communities we love.

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## Kimberly Knorr

### Tigh-Na-Mara Food & Beverage Outlets Manager

Kimberly Knorr is a lifelong member of this community and a true example of resilience, leadership, and selfless service. A devoted single parent, she has raised two wonderful children while navigating life's challenges with determination, grace, and an unwavering commitment to her family.

As part of the leadership team of the Food and Beverage department at Tigh-Na-Mara, Kimberly plays a key role in running an exceptional operation alongside an equally remarkable team. She leads with dignity, respect, and integrity, setting a powerful example for the many young and up-and-coming professionals she mentors. Known for her sharp problem-solving skills and calm under pressure, Kimberly has an unmatched ability to troubleshoot and lead confidently in any circumstance.

Even outside of work, her positive attitude is contagious. She is generous with her time, eager to help anyone in need, and always willing to jump in, learn something new, and teach others along the way. Kimberly Knorr is a born leader, an inspiring teacher, and a role model whose impact is felt across her workplace, her community, and beyond.

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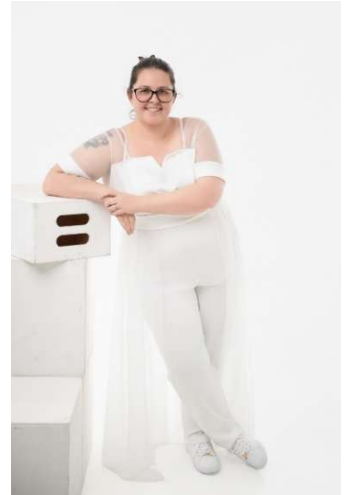
## Community & Social Responsibility

### Elizabeth Wennerberg

#### **Guider in charge**

Elizabeth is an enthusiastic and dynamic leader with a passion for fostering growth and empowerment in children and young adults. With years of experience in both leadership and community engagement, she has dedicated her career to making a positive impact in the lives of others.

As a Girl Guide Leader, Elizabeth has nurtured and mentored young girls, helping them to build confidence, develop leadership skills, and contribute to their communities. Through a variety of hands-on activities, she encourages her guides to step outside their comfort zones, gain independence, and learn valuable life skills.



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### Cathy Coulson

#### **Community member.**

My name is Cathy and I have been the owner/operator of Cinnabar Kids Childcare Center since 2003. I was born and raised in the Nanaimo/Lantzville area and am proud to call this beautiful city home. I have three kids (23, 20, 16) who I have proudly raised single handedly and whom are my absolute reason for everything I do!

I am an active volunteer for Nanaimo Minor Lacrosse Association, as well as the Timbermen organization and VIU Mariners Hockey. And I have chaired a wonderful committee to host lacrosse tournaments at the local and Provincial level.

Annually, I organize an amazing Christmas Hamper program, and I have helped more than one hundred and fifteen families over the last twenty years. This program is my biggest source of holiday joy and one of the most important and relevant projects I have ever been fortunate enough to spearhead!

I believe strongly in the strength of community, kindness, and inclusion. I am hopeful that many people will continue to benefit from my efforts in our fabulous city!

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## Celeste Walmsley

### Owner/Laser Technician & Singer/Songwriter

Celeste was a successful, self-employed entrepreneur in marketing. She loved serving clients and building relationships with them, and found that being her own boss gave her the freedom to offer personalized services and provide a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere, but she eventually decided to pursue a new career path.

She has been involved with the Laser Hair Removal industry for over 20 years as a consumer and is a Certified Laser Technician. She has a passion for helping others with skin issues that impact their lives negatively and wants to help them feel more beautiful and confident by treating 'unwants' from their skin.

Celeste used her knowledge and expertise to build a business that offers a wide range of laser treatments, including hair removal, skin rejuvenation, and treatment of scars, spots, fine lines, wrinkles, Rosacea & veins.

In addition to running her successful business, Celeste is also an active member of her community. She volunteers her time and resources to various charitable organizations, including those that focus on empowering women and supporting small businesses.

Overall, Celeste is an inspiring entrepreneur who has used her skills and passion to build a business that makes a difference in people's lives. That matters!



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## Sheri Ridgway

### Registered Nurse

I'm Sheri Ridgway (Shanahan), a mother whose loss sparked a mission. After losing my daughter Jesse at six weeks old, following time in the NICUs in Victoria and Nanaimo, I knew I wanted to channel my heartbreak into something meaningful. My advocacy began by raising funds for a central monitor system for the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital NICU, with support from the Nanaimo Hospital Foundation.

With that success, I remembered a mom I met in the Nanaimo NICU who had borrowed a motorhome to stay near her hospitalized child, constantly moving it to remain close. Her struggle motivated me to find others who felt as strongly about supporting Island families, and I found that partnership with the Children's Health Foundation of Vancouver Island.

Not only had they supported our stay during the hardest time of our lives, but they also believed in my story and the importance of creating a home like Jenesse Place in Nanaimo. Together, we turned vision into reality, and construction is now underway to build Jesse's House, a home away from home for Island families who need it most. While we've raised part of the funds, donations are still needed to make this dream a full reality.

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## Marnie Boers

### **Registered Nurse, Director with Risebridge, master's Student for Counselling**

Marnie Boers is a registered nurse with over 18 years of experience, currently working in the Emergency Department in Nanaimo. She brings empathy, compassion, and a trauma-informed approach to frontline care.

Marnie was raised in Nanaimo and is a mother of two; both experiences that continue to shape her deep commitment to community, safety, and advocacy. Marnie is a Director with Risebridge, where she founded the Birthday Program, an initiative that supports low-income and single mothers by providing birthday kits for their children. Through her work with Risebridge, she also supports women navigating divorce and separation, including those experiencing post-separation abuse and domestic violence.



For the past three years, Marnie has facilitated workshops that connect and support frontline workers across disciplines. She is currently in the final stages of completing her master's degree in Counselling and is committed to relational, person-centred, and strengths-based practice. Marnie believes empathy, safety, and community connection are central to healing and meaningful change.

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## Skye Ryan

### **Television Journalist**

Skye Ryan joined CHEK News in 2005 as an Anchor/Reporter. She has won multiple Jack Webster and RTNDA Awards, and treasures the ability to make an impact with her reporting. Skye has traveled the world extensively and is now enjoying the pace and lifestyle of Vancouver Island. The unpredictability of being a video journalist with CHEK News brings adventure and sees her covering stories up and down Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.



## Jane Vinet

### Community Developer

Hi, I'm Jane Vinet. I was born in Ottawa and lived most of my life in Aylmer, Quebec. In 2004, I made the move to Nanaimo to live near the ocean and raise my family in a small city. After years working in government and technology companies, I decided to switch gears and focus on something closer to my heart; building community.

For over 20 years, I've been deeply involved in the non-profit sector, always looking for new ways to bring people together and make a positive impact. My passion is helping to build relationships on all levels in community, focused on encouraging collaboration so we can all thrive. I believe that when we work together, we can accomplish so much more than we ever could alone.

Community means everything to me. I love seeing the difference we can make when we support each other, and I'm always striving to do more. My journey has been about service, connection, and believing in the power of collective action. Nanaimo is home, and I'm proud to help make it a place where everyone feels welcome and supported.



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## Donna Houssin

### Director of Science & Operations, Aurora Coast & Co-Founder, 100 Women Who Care Mid Island

Donna Houssin is a community leader and co-founder of 100 Women Who Care – Mid Island, a philanthropic organization that mobilizes collective giving to support local charities and community initiatives. Since its inception in 2016, Donna has played a key role in establishing the group's vision, governance, and collaborative culture, helping to build a strong network of engaged and values-driven members.

Professionally, Donna is known for her strategic thinking, integrity, and ability to build productive relationships. She brings strong organizational, communication, and leadership skills to both her professional work and her volunteer commitments.

Donna is deeply committed to local philanthropy and believes in the power of collective action to create meaningful, sustainable impact. Her involvement with 100 Women Who Care – Mid Island reflects her dedication to community engagement, responsible stewardship, and supporting organizations that strengthen the well-being of the Nanaimo-Ladysmith region.





## Melissa McGuire

### **Certified Financial Planner / Wealth Planner**

Melissa McGuire is a seasoned financial services professional with over 14 years of industry experience, serving clients across Vancouver Island from her bases in Victoria, Nanaimo, and Qualicum Beach. She holds a Bachelor of Music and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Victoria and has earned the Responsible Investment Specialist (RIS), Wealth Management Essentials (WME), and Certified Financial Planner (CFP®) designations. She is currently pursuing the Chartered Investment Manager (CIM®) designation.

Known for her curiosity and creative, strategic approach to financial planning, Melissa is a lifelong learner who brings thoughtfulness and clarity to every client relationship. Outside of work, she enjoys strategy board games—particularly Settlers of Catan and Ticket to Ride—which reflect her analytical mindset and love of collaboration.

Melissa and her husband, Doug, are proud parents of two teenage sons and share a deep commitment to community service. She is an active member of the Rotary Club of Qualicum Beach and serves as District Short Term Exchange Program (STEP) Coordinator for Rotary District 5020's Youth Exchange Committee. Together, the family is dedicated to giving back to the community they are proud to call home.

Rounding out the household are three much-loved pets: Kitten the cat, Jaco the English Cocker Spaniel, and Benson the energetic Vizsla.



## Jenn Houtby-Ferguson

### **Professor, Vancouver Island University**

Jenn Houtby-Ferguson, CMP, CMM is a recognized leader in sport tourism, destination development, and community resilience. With more than two decades of experience in destination marketing, event management, and crisis communications, she brings a strategic, practical lens to leveraging major events as economic drivers while managing community reputation and risk.

Jenn is a professor of tourism at Vancouver Island University, an instructor at the Justice Institute of British Columbia and a trusted advisor to governments, destination organizations, and nonprofits across North America. She is widely sought after as a keynote speaker and facilitator, known for translating complex challenges—such as emergency preparedness, crisis communications, and destination resilience—into clear, actionable strategies that strengthen community readiness and long-term competitiveness.

She holds a Master of Arts in Tourism Management and is a doctoral candidate at Royal Roads University, where her research focuses on risk communication processes between local authorities and tourism organizations.

Jenn is also the Principal of Twist Consulting, a firm specializing in strengthening resilience and competitiveness in the tourism and nonprofit sectors. Through Twist Consulting, she works closely with governments, industry associations, and community organizations to support destination development, stakeholder engagement, and emergency preparedness. The firm is known for bridging research, policy, and practice to build trust, preparedness, and sustainable outcomes for communities.



## Tracy Crawford

### Registered Massage Therapist, (RMT)

My name is Tracy Crawford, and I'm a proud mom of three active kids who are deeply involved in sports. Balancing motherhood with community involvement has become a meaningful part of my life. I volunteer with our school's PAC, where I enjoy helping create a supportive and engaging environment for students and families. One of my proudest achievements was working with a dedicated group of parents over a two-year period to raise \$65,000 for new playground equipment at my children's school. Seeing the project come to life and knowing it benefits not only my kids, but the entire school community has been incredibly rewarding.



Alongside my volunteer work, I have successfully owned and operated my Massage Therapy business for the past 13 years as a Registered Massage Therapist. Running my practice has allowed me to support the health and well-being of my clients while building strong, lasting relationships. I take pride in offering a caring, professional environment where people feel comfortable and cared for.

Whether I'm cheering from the side-lines, contributing to school initiatives, or supporting clients in my practice, I strive to bring dedication, compassion, and positivity to everything I do.

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## Kerri Isham

### Nanaimo Women Helping Women (Founder) & Power Up Education (Sexual Health Education)

Kerri is a leader, educator, and community advocate whose contributions have had a profound and lasting impact in Nanaimo and beyond. After beginning her career as a middle school teacher, Kerri transitioned into the field of sexual health education, becoming a Certified Sexual Health Educator and establishing her own consulting business in 2009. Her work has been recognized through multiple honours, including the Options for Sexual Health Education Award (2015) and the Nanaimo Business Award in the Health and Wellness category (2021). In 2024, she was nominated for the Women of Influence Nanaimo Award in the Community and Social Responsibility category.



Kerri's dedication to social justice and community wellbeing is further demonstrated through her founding of Nanaimo Women Helping Women in 2021. This grassroots collective was created to support women fleeing intimate partner violence—a mission that has resulted in direct assistance to more than 400 women and their children. This collective has not only provided vital resources and emergency support but has also strengthened the capacity of partner organizations serving vulnerable populations.

Kerri embodies the principles of compassion, service, and social responsibility. She consistently uses her skills, voice, and platform to uplift others, champion equity, and create safer, more supportive communities. Her unwavering belief in our shared responsibility to stand with those who are marginalized is evident in both her actions and her impact.

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## Amber Sparks

### **Equity-Driven Program Manager, Community Builder & Story Steward**

Amber Sparks is an equity-driven leader whose work centres people, community, and inclusive practice. As a Program Manager with ETHOS Career Management Group, she supports accessible employment programming through organized, compassionate, and barrier-aware leadership. With a professional background in technology and insurance, Amber blends analytical thinking with a people-first approach, ensuring programs are both effective and grounded in humanity.

Outside of ETHOS, Amber is deeply involved in the community. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Nanaimo Pride Society and volunteers at numerous local events, often stepping in to hold space, support safety, and create welcoming environments. Her presence in community settings reflects her belief that belonging is built through consistent care and collective effort.

Amber's perspective is shaped by her lived experiences, including life as a queer woman with an invisible disability, navigating work and community with resilience, humour, and authenticity. She is passionate about storytelling, economic empowerment, and building systems that don't just include people, but celebrate them for who they are and the strengths they carry.

Whether fostering connection, supporting individuals, or strengthening community networks, Amber leads with empathy, integrity, and a commitment to uplift others.



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## Mauricea Panchenko

### **Student, President of Indigenous Studies Course Union**

Mauricea Panchenko is firstly a mom, reconnecting to her Cree-Metis roots, and a student. She is graduating this Spring with a major in Indigenous Studies and a minor in Psychology. As President of the Indigenous Studies Course Union, she has been a strong advocate for Indigenous rights, student wellbeing, and the integrity of the program itself. Mauricea is committed to ensuring that future students inherit a program grounded in cultural guidance, community accountability, and meaningful relationships with Elders, voices she knows deeply are essential to true Indigenous education.

A single mother to her four-year-old, Mauricea brings resilience, compassion, and a deep sense of responsibility to both her studies and her community work. Her leadership focuses on creating spaces where all students feel supported, empowered, and connected, while also challenging systems that compromise cultural knowledge and student experience.

Guided by her own journey of reconnection and healing, Mauricea aims to continue advocating for decolonized approaches to wellness and education. She hopes her contributions leave a lasting legacy, one that strengthens the program, uplifts the community, and honours the generations who come next.



## Karina Strong

**Teacher–Counsellor & Program Lead, CROW (Creating Resilience and Opportunities for Wellness), Learning Alternatives, School District 68**

Playing for Positive Change:

Karina Strong has built her life around the belief that joy is a radical act of healing. Trained in social work, she learned early that hope and laughter belong even in heavy spaces. That conviction led her to found VestaFire Entertainment, a professional circus company known across central Vancouver Island for its fire shows, stilt performances, and community celebrations that brought people together through wonder and play.

Her time with Spark Circus, teaching in refugee camps and orphanages along the Thai–Burma border, deepened her understanding that play restores dignity and connection—and continues to shape her teaching practice today.

For the past nine years, Karina has led CROW, a trauma-informed, neurodiversity-affirming program at Learning Alternatives, serving neurodivergent, LGBTQ+, and youth with severe mental health challenges. There, she teaches resilience through play, creativity, and belonging, helping students move toward their own light.

Mentored by strong women and supported by her family, Karina now mentors others to do the same—believing that education is the culmination of a lifetime spent helping people find hope, power, and possibility through joy.



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## Cheryl Cote

**An ECE, a Mom, and a community helper**

Cheryl Cote is an early childhood educator, community volunteer, and lifelong caregiver based in Parksville, British Columbia, where she has lived for over a decade. With a background in healthcare and a deep passion for child development, Cheryl brings a thoughtful, compassionate, and play-based approach to everything she does. She currently works in early learning settings and is known for creating meaningful, inclusive experiences that support children’s curiosity, creativity, and emotional growth.

Beyond the classroom, Cheryl is deeply involved in her community. She plays a key role in local initiatives supporting families and seniors in need, including organizing and coordinating Oceanside Christmas Wishes. She is also actively involved with Girl Guides of Canada as a contact guider and is a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST), helping families keep their children safe.

Cheryl is a wife and mother to a school-aged daughter and shares her home with a lively mix of pets. In her free time, she enjoys painting, kayaking, hiking, and spending time on the water or exploring local mountains with her family. Known for her warmth, organization, and heart for service, Cheryl is passionate about building strong, caring communities where everyone feels supported.





## Ariann Sigsworth (Black)

### Community outreach/ Speaker

Ariann Black: Trailblazer, Humanitarian, and Magician of the Decade

Ariann Black is a decorated professional and celebrated trailblazer who shattered gender barriers in the historically male-dominated field of magic. As the recipient of multiple honors, including Female Magician of the Decade (IDM) and three-time International Female Magician of the Year, she is the only professional female magician with a specialized degree. She has headlined in Las Vegas and appeared on numerous national and international television programs.

Beyond her professional achievements, Ariann's influence is deeply rooted in her dedication to social responsibility and shared success. She actively creates opportunities for women in the entertainment industry and champions those facing challenges.

Her humanitarian contributions are vast: she developed specialized magic programs for individuals with disabilities to aid with communication and coordination, established an international resource for magicians affected by disasters, and grants wishes for critically ill children. She also fosters an inclusive culture by organizing community-building events like the "All Girl Gala", plus supports Medal of honor recipients, animal rescues, and Shero just to name a few.

Ariann Black's legacy is defined by her profound impact as a foundation builder, ensuring her success empowers the next generation to thrive.

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## Michelle Corfield, PhD

Dr. Michelle Corfield is a dedicated professional known for her thoughtful leadership, collaborative spirit, and commitment to meaningful impact. With experience spanning strategy, communications, and project delivery, she brings clarity and purpose to complex challenges. Michelle is valued for her ability to translate ideas into action, build trusted relationships, and guide teams toward shared goals. She approaches her work with curiosity, integrity, and a strong focus on outcomes, balancing big-picture thinking with practical execution.

Beyond her professional roles, Michelle is passionate about learning, mentorship, and community involvement. She believes in continuous improvement and invests time in developing skills, supporting others, and contributing to initiatives that create positive change. Whether leading initiatives, partnering with stakeholders, or advising on next steps, Michelle combines insight, empathy, and determination. Her work reflects a consistent drive to deliver quality results while fostering inclusive, forward-thinking environments. She values clarity, accountability, creativity, resilience, and decision-making in every endeavor.





## Marika Stevenson

### Community Organizer, Advocate, and Communications Professional

From supporting the business community through the pandemic with the Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce, to supporting constituents through Federal and Provincial government offices, our community's well-being has been at the core of Marika's work. She considers the opportunity to collaborate with the many incredible people and organizations steering Nanaimo's supportive networks the greatest privilege of her career. Every connection she has made has influenced her to remain hopeful and excited about the future of our community.

When asked what influence means to her, Marika said, "Life is about creating memories, and to influence someone is to make a lasting impression. Our lives are full of influential moments; it's a matter of noticing them and listening to what they have to say. It's the same with people. Listening and being engaged with the people around you that helps create memories and form community. Influence is the spark that ignites that connection."

Marika loves art and nature in all its forms, and she credits her parents as being her greatest source of inspiration. If Marika had a message to her younger self, it would be, "Let what you love guide your path and let go of what stands in the way."



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## Megan Lum

### Assistant Manager - Aquatics

Meg is your go-to pro for fun and engaging events that bring people in Nanaimo together. Passionate about building connections within her community, she has worked alongside local businesses, organizations and residents for almost 20 years to create events that leave a lasting impact. Her event planning resume includes the World Under-17 Hockey Challenge, the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay and the Play On! Sports Festival, among many, many others.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in Recreation and Health Education from the University of Victoria, and is a recent graduate of the Leadership Vancouver Island (LVI) program. She is passionate about leadership and mentorship. In 2022, Vancouver Island University's Centre for Experiential Learning named her a Mentor of the Year for her work with a co-op student.

When she's not at work, Meg is "mama" to two energetic kiddos (age 9 and 5) who keep her very busy. She plays hockey, devours books, and loves fashion (she is a budding seamstress herself). If you need a personal shopper who doubles as an event planner, you've found your girl!



## Melanie Crocker

### Miss Melanie Crocker

I was reluctant to accept the nomination. Can I be a Woman of Influence when I couldn't even prevent my own daughters from being alienated from me?

I didn't begin volunteering until becoming a mother at 32, before I was a globe trotting executive. Then my surprise child was born with a birth defect that made her "different"; all I wanted was to make things better, easier for her. If I was involved at school, I could keep an eye out for bullying. Struggling in an unhappy marriage, I found purpose and reward in volunteering at my daughters' schools. I loved being recognized as the "lunch lady" by kids when out shopping.

Finally brave enough to leave my marriage it ended in bankruptcy and homelessness. I was humbled by my community support; we had places to stay until settled and supported with gifts. This increased my drive to give back. I continued to volunteer at school and began with the SPCA.

I accepted, in hope, that maybe one day my girls will see that if I deserved this nomination then perhaps, I'm not the monster they were led to believe. That I did everything I could out love for them.



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## Katie Capadouca

### Teacher/ Girls Soccer Coach

I am a high school teacher and soccer coach who is deeply committed to empowering all youth, especially girls and young women in the classroom and on the field. Supporting confidence, leadership, and growth is at the heart of everything I do. As a mother of two, I balance my passion for education and sport with the joy (and mess!) of family life. I love spending time with my kids and our dog, and I find grounding through soccer and yoga. My work is driven by a belief in opportunity, equity, and creating spaces where young people—especially girls—can thrive and discover their strength and power.



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## Frenchie Viau

### Social and community responsibility

### Entrepreneur & Parliamentary Office Professional

Frenchie Viau is a dedicated leader, entrepreneur, and community advocate. She currently works in a local parliamentary office, supporting initiatives that strengthen public engagement and service.

She is co-owner of Nanaimo Rock & Gem with her fiancé, Jake, a local artisan business creating original pieces featuring Ammolite, one of the world's rarest gemstones, found only in Canada. Frenchie balances her professional pursuits with her family life, raising three children, Ezra, Olivia, and Gabriel.



Her career spans social work, business ownership, and political engagement, all guided by a people-first approach. She combines strategic vision with the behind-the-scenes work that builds trust and drives meaningful results.

Deeply involved in community initiatives across Nanaimo, Frenchie mentors, volunteers, and advocates for causes that improve the lives of those around her. Her resilience, empathy, and energy allow her to turn challenges into opportunities and make a tangible difference in the community.

Frenchie Viau exemplifies the qualities of a Woman of Influence, leaving a lasting mark through her leadership, commitment, and dedication to building stronger, more connected communities.

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## Creative Innovator

### Taylor Knight Performance Coach

Taylor is a performer, musician, creative producer and performance coach dedicated to helping individuals and business owners elevate how they show up both on stage and on camera. Born in Nanaimo, BC, Taylor trained extensively in New York, mastering stage presence, vocal performance, and the art of connecting deeply with an audience. Her ongoing work as a performer and musician continues to inspire her coaching, allowing her to bring fresh energy, authenticity and creativity to every client interaction.

Over the years, Taylor has combined her love of performance with her passion for helping others, guiding clients in expressing themselves confidently, refining their personal brand, and communicating with impact. Through workshops, group programs and one-on-one coaching, she helps business owners and creatives overcome hesitation, improve body language, and connect with their audience on camera, in meetings, or on stage.

Taylor also produces engaging content, from bio videos to social media strategies, ensuring that clients' messages are seen and felt. Whether performing, coaching or creating, Taylor Manns transforms self-doubt into confidence, helping others tell their story with clarity, presence and purpose

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### Cheryl Lien Founder of Sensory Balance Space Inc

Cheryl Lien is the founder of Sensory Balance Space Inc., a neurodivergent-led organization redefining inclusion and belonging through presence, emotional safety, and relational integrity. As an autistic, non-binary facilitator, identity guide, and coach, Cheryl moves beyond checkbox inclusion to create spaces where people meet themselves with honesty, compassion, and radical acceptance.

Their work centers the lived experience of difference, weaving somatic awareness, identity excavation, and systemic understanding to help individuals and organizations shift from performative equity to embodied practice. Cheryl's approach dissolves shame, builds inner stability, and invites people into deeper



self-recognition so they can lead, create, and relate from who they are—not who they were taught to perform.

Cheryl's work catalyzes meaningful, measurable change by strengthening a person's relationship with themselves. Whether supporting a leader, a team, or an emerging entrepreneur, Cheryl helps people access their innate clarity, rewrite internal narratives shaped by survival, and build structures that honour both capacity and humanity. The impact is practical and personal: clearer communication, more resilient decision-making, healthier boundaries, and environments where people feel safe enough to show up fully. Cheryl's methodology transforms inclusion from a concept into a lived experience that sustains people, systems, and the futures they're creating.

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## Kristina Crowson

### CEO + Marketing Director

Kristina Crowson is the CEO and Lead Marketing Strategist at Array, a full-service marketing agency, and a Director on the Nanaimo Science board. With over 16 years of experience in solutions-based marketing, she leads a team of 13 experts across different creative disciplines. Under her leadership, Array has earned 59 international awards. A visionary leader in the creative industry, Kristina excels at identifying opportunities, creating growth strategies, and strengthening community connections.



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## Pam Ivey

### Event Producer

Pam Ivey is the producer of BrandShots Live, a multi-city event series disrupting how entrepreneurs approach their branding and visibility. With more than twenty-five years in marketing, branding, and business strategy, Pam saw that many business owners were not short on ambition, they were short on accessible and effective ways to show up memorably. BrandShots Live is her answer, a high-impact single-day experience that gives entrepreneurs strategic brand photos, practical visibility guidance, and meaningful connections in one place.

Based in Ladysmith, Pam launched the pilot in Nanaimo in November 2025, where the strong response confirmed demand for a fresh alternative to traditional headshot sessions. She is now taking BrandShots Live to Vancouver, Toronto, Nashville, and Austin while staying rooted in her Vancouver Island community. Her model brings photographers, glam artists, speakers, and vendors together in a collaborative environment that helps entrepreneurs feel prepared, supported, and confident.

Pam serves on the Board of Advisors for the Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce, where she advocates for women in business and the visibility they need to grow. She is dedicated to turning brand photography from a stressful task into a clear, energizing step toward growth for entrepreneurs who are ready to be seen.



## Andrea Dershin

### Found and CEO of Good Life Juice and The Rise Society

Andrea Dershin is a Vancouver Island-based entrepreneur, wellness advocate, and founder of Good Life Juice and The Rise Society. She is best known for sparking joy, being "The Juice Lady", building meaningful community, and bringing health and wellness to the forefront of everyday life. Andrea is deeply committed to creating inclusive spaces, cultivating an exceptional company culture, and giving back to the community that has supported her journey.

Andrea founded Good Life Juice in 2014 as the Island's first cold-pressed juice company, growing it into a beloved wellness brand rooted in quality, education, and connection. She is also the creator of The Rise Society, where she hosts sold-out events including the 'We Effed Up, Now What?' series. Through humour, honesty, and heartfelt storytelling, Andrea peels back the highlight reel of entrepreneurship, exploring the power of vulnerability and resilience through the lens of fun, laughter, and real-life lessons.

Her leadership philosophy is shaped by a global entrepreneurial journey that includes early business ventures in Beijing and professional experience in New York's wellness industry, experiences that continue to inform her grounded, big-picture perspective today.

Andrea is passionate about redefining success for women, emphasizing resilience over hustle and alignment over burnout. Through her work, she encourages women to build businesses that support both ambition and wellbeing.

Outside of her professional roles, Andrea is a proud mom of two, a devoted friend, and a firm believer in movement, laughter, and the power of a really good green juice.



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## Christa Smith

### Hairstylist and product creator

I'm Christa, the founder of BTYQN (Beauty Queen), based in Nanaimo, BC. After more than 20 years behind the chair as a hairstylist, I saw firsthand how everyday hair products can quietly affect our health. When I began experiencing respiratory issues myself, it became clear that something had to change, not just for me, but for my clients too.

Dry shampoo was a non-negotiable in my routine, but I was constantly disappointed by the options available. They felt heavy, left hair looking dull, and didn't align with the clean, health-conscious lifestyle that I try to practice. That frustration sparked a bigger idea. I wanted a better solution. One that made hair feel fresh, full, and confident without compromising health or self care.

What started as a personal need has grown into BTYQN, a brand now trusted by salons and spas across Canada. I'm incredibly proud of the journey so far and deeply grateful for the community that continues to support a more mindful approach to hair care.





## Staci Chimes

### Tattoo Artist and Shop owner

Staci Chimes is a tattoo artist, studio owner, and creative leader based in Nanaimo, British Columbia. She is the founder of Le Jardin Noir Tattoo Studio, a boutique, female-forward space that reimagines what a tattoo studio can be, one rooted in professionalism, emotional safety, artistic excellence, and community care.

Through her work, Staci has helped shift industry norms by blending fine art values with tattooing, emphasizing consent-based practices, client education, and a calm, welcoming studio environment. Her approach challenges outdated perceptions of tattoo culture and creates space for women, first-time clients, and marginalized individuals to feel respected, heard, and empowered. Under her leadership, Le Jardin Noir has become a model for intentional studio design, ethical business practices, and collaborative artist mentorship.

Staci is also known for her commitment to elevating tattooing as a legitimate art form. By bridging classical artistic principles with contemporary tattoo practice, she encourages higher standards of craftsmanship, professionalism, and long-term career sustainability within the industry.

Beyond her studio, Staci is a mentor, advocate, and role model for emerging artists, particularly women, demonstrating that it is possible to build a successful creative business without compromising integrity, compassion, or artistic vision.

As a mother and entrepreneur, Staci leads with resilience, empathy, and purpose. Her influence is measured not only in the businesses she has built, but in the culture that she has helped redefine, one where artistry, humanity, and leadership coexist.

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## Harmony Lise Regan

### Lifestyle & Wedding Videographer

Harmony Regan is a Vancouver Island-based videographer with a lifelong passion for filmmaking and the arts. Drawn to visual storytelling from a young age, Harmony began filming weddings professionally in 2022 and founded her business, Harmony Lise Visuals. She creates a wide range of content, including wedding films, real estate videography, and branding films—such as dynamic dance films for studios and creatives. With a background in gymnastics, competitive dance, piano, and singing, creativity has always been at the core of her life. Videography has become the perfect outlet to blend movement, emotion, and storytelling, and Harmony feels incredibly grateful to have turned her passion into a career.

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## Liza Taylor

### **Entrepreneur & CEO of MavenFair Artisans and Crafters Market Inc.**

Liza Taylor is an entrepreneur, creator, and community builder whose work is rooted in creativity, collaboration, and purpose. As CEO of MavenFair Artisans and Crafters Marketplace Inc., Liza champions Canadian handmade artists and makers, empowering them to thrive through connection, visibility, and shared opportunity.

With a professional background in graphic design, web design, and marketing, Liza brings both creative vision and strategic insight to everything she does. After moving to Nanaimo, BC in 1985 to attend college, she made the community her home and has remained deeply committed to its growth.

Liza has dedicated decades of service to arts, youth sports, and charitable organizations, including leadership roles with KidSport Nanaimo, Nanaimo Women's Business Network, and the International Children's Festival. She has also taken on supportive committee roles with the JDRF Gala of Hope and the Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation Golf for Life organizing committees. Known for her strong work ethic and generous spirit, Liza believes in lifting others up, empowering women, advocating for children, and building inclusive communities where creativity can flourish.

Liza's approach to leadership is deeply informed by her understanding of influence as a shared and ongoing responsibility. She draws inspiration from the women who paved the way before her, opening doors and challenging norms, as well as from individuals who took the time to invest in others and envision new possibilities. Recognizing that influence often works through small, unseen moments, Liza believes her own journey has been shaped by countless ripples of courage, creativity, and kindness. Together, these moments formed a wave that continues to guide her decisions, fuel her advocacy, and reinforce her commitment to empowering others, supporting community, and leading with intention and heart.



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## Hollie Quiring

### **Business Banking Relationship Manager**

Hollie Quiring is a dedicated community leader and business banking professional based in Nanaimo, BC. She currently works with RBC Royal Bank of Canada, where she supports local businesses and entrepreneurs with strategic financial guidance. Hollie has an extensive background in commercial and personal financial services, including her previous leadership role at Coastal Community Credit Union.

Outside of her professional work, Hollie serves on the boards of the Nanaimo Women's Business Network, the Nanaimo Minor Softball Association, and Community Futures, where she applies her expertise to strengthen business growth, support youth sport development, and champion community initiatives. Hollie brings her creative thinking, collaborative spirit, and deep commitment to community impact into everything she does.



She is married and a proud mom to a daughter, and together with their two fur babies, Hollie loves to travel, hike, and explore new places and cultures. Her passion for people, connection, and innovation is what drives her influence and community leadership.

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## Amanda Toma

### Owner Van Isle Hairstyle

Amanda Toma is the founder and creator of Van Isle Hairstyle, a natural hair care brand rooted in authenticity, education, and care. After struggling to find non-toxic products that truly worked, Amanda created her own, making healthy, effective hair care accessible to others.

Her passion for helping people feel confident led to the launch of her 60-Day Hair Growth Challenge, which quickly sold out and continues to do so. While her success is notable, it is Amanda's genuine commitment to helping others repair their hair, regain confidence, and embrace natural beauty that truly sets her apart.

Through her consistent and engaging social media presence, Amanda has built Van Isle Hairstyle into more than a brand. It is a trusted community where education, humour, and real connection come together. At her core, Amanda leads with heart and integrity, creating a ripple effect that extends far beyond her business.

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## Fan the Flame

### Angela Hope Waldick

#### Author, Podcaster

I build communities the way Clever Girl survives the jungle: with curiosity, care, and a refusal to look away when something feels wrong.

My work centers on creating inclusive, accessible spaces where people feel safe to show up as their full, complicated selves. I actively advocate for marginalized voices, challenge harmful norms, and believe allyship is not a badge you wear but a practice you repeat. Often loudly. Always intentionally.

Through podcasting, writing, photography, and community leadership, I use humor and storytelling to open conversations about consent, boundaries, mental health, disability, gender equity, and healthy relationships. I believe education doesn't have to be boring and accountability doesn't have to be cruel. Growth works better when people feel seen, not shamed.

I prioritize accessibility, whether that's designing content with clarity in mind, building events that welcome families and neurodivergent folks, or modeling what it looks like to ask for help and set limits.



I actively support LGBTQIA2S+ inclusion, body autonomy, survivor-centered conversations, and disability visibility, especially when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient.

At the core of my allyship is this belief: community isn't about being perfect. It's about showing up, listening harder than you speak, correcting course when needed, and protecting the most vulnerable when the jungle gets loud. Extinction-level empathy only.

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## Tricia Thomas

### Founder and Principal

I am a First Nations professional working at the intersection of governance, clean energy, education, and media to advance Nation-led solutions and strengthen Indigenous leadership across business and policy spaces. As a mother of two, my work is driven by a desire to help create a future where my children can feel proud of who they are, and where all races and Nations can thrive together.

As an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Bachelor of Commerce program at the University of Victoria, I teach teamwork, collaboration, and relational competencies. I weave reconciliation into the foundation of business education, empowering students with cultural intelligence, critical thinking, and values-based leadership skills that shape tomorrow's ethical decision-makers.

I am also the founder of Tumuxw Communications and Salish Eye Productions—two First Nation-owned companies supporting First Nations, governments, and partners through research, facilitation, storytelling, policy development, and strategic communications. My practice spans clean energy, cumulative impact, treaty implementation, and economic development, often bridging legal orders, community priorities, and sectoral goals.

I hold an MBA in Sustainable Innovation, and my leadership draws from cultural teachings and my background in combat sports—grounding me in discipline, clarity, and courage under pressure.

Across all roles, I work to build trust, honour relationships, and ignite meaningful, long-term, Nation-led impact.

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## Kim Trottier

### Founder of Culturally Committed

Kim Trottier is the Founder and Principal of Culturally Committed, an organization dedicated to advancing Indigenous cultural safety, relational accountability, and reconciliation. With a 25-year career in healthcare, Kim shifted direction in 2014, choosing to work exclusively in rural and remote First Nations communities across Vancouver Island. This experience was profoundly transformative and led her to confront her own ingrained biases while walking a continual path of learning and unlearning.

Through Culturally Committed, Kim works in close relationship with Indigenous Mentors and Knowledge Keepers, ensuring their voices are centred, uplifted, and honoured in every aspect of the work. With humility and accountability, she intentionally carries the burden of operations, creating space for Indigenous collaborators to guide direction without carrying the organizational, logistical, or administrative weight.



Her work prioritises genuine relationship and shared decision-making, grounded in the understanding that safer relationships are nurtured through listening, witnessing, and unlearning. Kim is committed to motivating other professionals to practise cultural humility in ways that move beyond policy or theory, toward deep relational change, collective learning, and meaningful reconciliation.

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## Shaun Lee

### Creator Safe Spaces for ALL

Shaun is a non-binary drag artist, speaker, and community catalyst whose work lives at the intersection of art, identity, and transformation. Through drag, storytelling, and lived experience, Shaun invites people to question what they've inherited, shed what no longer serves them, and courageously unbecome in order to arrive at their most authentic selves.

Their work creates spaces where honesty replaces performance, and inclusion becomes a lived practice rather than a slogan. Whether on stage, in corporate rooms, or within community gatherings, Shaun challenges audiences to unlearn rigid narratives around gender, power, and belonging; all while offering permission to be seen, messy, and real.

Shaun's impact is felt in the moments when people soften, exhale, and recognize themselves reflected back to themselves with dignity. They are known for fostering brave conversations, cultivating emotional safety, and helping individuals and organizations move from performative allyship to embodied action. At the heart of Shaun's work is a belief that authenticity is not something we become, but something we remember, together.



## Jennifer Borzel

### Montessori Educator

Jennifer is a devoted mother, educator, and caregiver whose family and community are at the heart of her life. With nearly 30 years of experience in education, she began her professional journey studying developmental psychology before pursuing early childhood education and Montessori training.

A certified National Geographic Educator and avid hiker, Jennifer deeply believes in the restorative and essential role of the outdoors in supporting health, learning, and well-being. For the past 22 years, she has been committed to cultivating an inclusive and welcoming environment for families at Maple Tree Montessori. She has dedicated hundreds of hours to specialized professional development to ensure children with a wide range of abilities are supported and empowered to thrive. Mentorship is an important practice at Maple Tree and many student teachers as well as children and families stay connected for many years.

Jennifer's belief in community extends well beyond the classroom. As a dedicated sport parent for two decades, she also continues to coach adaptive soccer, creating meaningful opportunities for children of all abilities to belong, participate, and succeed. Guided by a strong commitment to social justice and global citizenship she engaged young learners in many projects to share this passion.





Jennifer's educational practice focuses on nurturing compassionate, capable children who are prepared to engage thoughtfully and advocate for a more peaceful, kind, and connected world.

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## Kari-Lyn Owen

### Founder, Wellness Leader & Community Builder

Kari-Lyn Owen is a wellness leader, community builder, and the founder of Meno-Mingle, a growing movement supporting women through perimenopause and menopause with education, connection, and hope. With a deep belief in holistic health, Kari-Lyn empowers women to reclaim their energy, confidence, and joy by addressing the whole person — body, mind, and purpose.

Through her work with 2elev8 Leadership Inc., Kari-Lyn mentors women to build strong foundations of health and meaningful, values-driven lives. Known for her warm presence and “real talk,” she creates safe spaces where women feel seen, heard, and supported during one of life's most transformative seasons.

Inspired by her mother's courage and resilience, Kari-Lyn leads with heart, integrity, and a passion for helping women rise. Her mission is simple yet powerful: to ensure every woman knows she is worthy of vibrant health, connection, and a life she's excited to live.



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## Kezia Cloke

### President of the Ladysmith Pride Society

Kezia is the founder and president of the Pride Society, which she launched in 2023 with a simple goal: to build a more visible, supportive, and joyful community. Since then, she has led the organization through two successful Pride celebrations and a growing number of year-round events that centre on both Pride as a celebration and as a protest.

Her work focuses on creating inclusive spaces where people feel seen and welcomed, and she's especially proud of the way the Society has brought together volunteers, local partners, and community members to make that vision real. Outside her role with the Pride Society, Kezia is also a trustee for the Ladysmith Eagles Auxiliary #2101 and brings the same dedication, compassion, and attention to detail to her professional life.

She's honoured to be nominated and grateful for the opportunity to continue uplifting 2SLGBTQ+ voices in her community.



## Tania Brzovic

### School Trustee, Nanaimo–Ladysmith Public Schools

Tania Brzovic entered education governance with a strong background in advocacy, shaped by years of work supporting anti-poverty initiatives, women's issues, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. This commitment to equity and social justice drove her to run for School Trustee, determined to ensure historically underrepresented voices were heard, respected, and reflected in school district policy.

As a School Trustee with Nanaimo–Ladysmith Public Schools, Tania is recognized for her integrity, compassion, and fairness. She consistently centres the well-being of students, particularly those requiring varied supports, and works to remove systemic barriers while strengthening safe, inclusive learning environments for students and staff alike. She has contributed to numerous committees, including Policy, Student Voice, Long Range Facilities, and school safety initiatives, and has been a vocal advocate for expanding student participation in board governance, firmly believing that students provide a vital voice in decision-making.

Tania is a committed ally to Indigenous communities and a strong supporter of the district's Reconciliation Framework, Seyé'tsus. Beyond the district, she serves on Nanaimo's Accessibility Committee, advancing inclusion across the community. Despite facing daily physical challenges, Tania is a trailblazer whose empathy, deep listening, and collaborative leadership continue to create meaningful, lasting impact.



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## Amanda Hall

### Self Advocate

Amanda Hall is a proud recipient of the King Charles III Coronation Medal, recognized for her exceptional service to the community. She is a dedicated member of the B.C. People First Society, where she serves as both a self-advocate and a passionate advocate for others, championing inclusion, empowerment, and lived-experience leadership.

She shares her insights through a thought-provoking human rights blog and leads welcome workshops for Community Living B.C., helping individuals navigate their journeys with confidence, knowledge, and support. Amanda has also worked with a local daycare for over 15 years and is currently employed at Homesense, bringing the same care, reliability, and commitment to inclusion into her professional roles.

Outside of her advocacy work, Amanda is an accomplished powerlifter, having trained in the sport for three years and earning second place in competition in 2025. Her vibrant personality shines through her love of cooking, baking, swimming, and building meaningful connections.



Her unwavering commitment to social justice is deeply rooted in the inspiration she draws from her late mother, whose words continue to guide her: never let anyone put you down. Through her advocacy, determination, and authenticity, Amanda continues to make a powerful and lasting impact on her community and beyond.

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## Health and Wellness

### Dr. Ashley Burton

#### **Doctor of Chiropractic, Holistic Nutritionist**

Dr. Ashley Burton, DC, RHN, FMM, is a chiropractor, holistic nutritionist, author, and women's health educator based on Vancouver Island. She practices at Vancouver Island Physiotherapy Clinic (in Cedar and Ladysmith), and through her private home clinic in NanOOSE Bay, BC. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Sciences from the University of Guelph and a Doctor of Chiropractic degree from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College.

As a Registered Holistic Nutritionist (CSNN) and a Fertility Awareness Mastery Certified Practitioner - and the only currently certified FAM practitioner in Western Canada - Dr. Burton specializes in body literacy, cycle tracking, fertility education, and hormone-supportive lifestyle care.

She is the author of the Fertility Fitness cookbook *More Lemon* and the host of *The Dr. Ashley Burton Podcast*, where she teaches approachable, evidence-based women's health.

Dr. Burton is Ojibway (Matachewan First Nation), and her work is rooted in community, education, and empowerment. She is passionate about helping women trust their bodies, understand their cycles, and build lifelong strength from the inside out.



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### Kathryn Atkinson

#### **Registered Clinical Counsellor and Approved Clinical Supervisor**

Kathryn Atkinson is a clinical counsellor, supervisor, instructor, and student mentor, dedicated to creating workplaces that are joyful and that reduce systemic toxicity. As a woman with a physical disability, and a mother of a neurodiverse child with disabilities, she passionately advocates for accessibility and environments where everyone feels safe, heard, and able to find hope. In 2022, she founded Island Clinical Counselling, which now holds over 40 practitioners across five locations, growing rapidly through shared values, passion, integrity, and community demand.

Previously, Kathryn worked as a team leader and clinician at MCFD Child and Youth Mental Health. She now volunteers at Nanaimo Family Life and the



Child Development Center. As a spiritual person, she values bringing people together and has facilitated workshops, including a sold-out 'Women and ADHD' event last year.

Before studying psychology, Kathryn attended film school—using film as a means to process her life journey. Skilled in collaboration, she partnered with pediatricians at Red Canoe Pediatrics, becoming their first counsellor. Despite enduring chronic pain and physical limitations, her focus remains on personal growth and leadership. She dedicated her work to fostering safety, accessibility, and healing, driven by her love for community connections and meaningful care

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## Candace Schule

### Personal trainer

My name is Candace and I am the founder of The Strong Collective, a women's only strength training community in Nanaimo. I created this space to give women a place where they feel seen, supported, and never intimidated.

My work focuses on helping women build strength and confidence through sustainable, empowering training. At The Strong Collective, the priority is safety, education, and trust. I believe when women feel comfortable in the gym, they're more likely to show up for themselves in every area of life.

Through in-person training and group programs, I lead with the belief that strength is a powerful tool for confidence, resilience, and self-respect. What drives me most is creating an environment where women feel confident taking up space and recognizing their own capability.

My mission is simple: to build stronger women by first creating a space where they feel safe, valued, and empowered.

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## Laura Wishart

### Certified BodyTalk Practitioner & Co-Owner of Westcoast Naturopathic Medicine

For more than four decades, Laura Wishart has devoted her life to understanding healing, human potential, and the quiet courage it takes to return home to oneself. As co-owner of Westcoast Naturopathic Medicine in Parksville and a certified BodyTalk Practitioner, Laura brings a rare blend of deep intuition, rigorous study, compassion, and lived experience to her work. Described as a health detective, Laura has a rare ability to listen with precision and intuition, connect the unseen dots, and guide others toward root causes and lasting balance.



Laura has completed over 107 courses across a wide range of healing modalities, including Family Constellation, Human Design, personal inquiry, women's wellness, and mind-body integration. This depth of education, combined with decades of hands-on practice, informs her thoughtful, integrative approach to healing. Her lifelong passion is simple and profound: to be of better service to humanity.

Laura holds particular tenderness for those navigating infertility, pregnancy loss, identity shifts, disease, and major life transitions, not only because she has walked these paths herself, but because she has devoted years of study to understanding them. Her capacity to lead with empathy and clarity is grounded in real-world insight and thoughtful reflection. Through her own healing journey, Laura found, reclaimed, and learned to use her voice, one of her proudest moments, and a cornerstone of how she supports others today.

Laura is also an abstract healer, performing musician, and teacher, guided by a deeply-rooted connection to nature and the human heart. Whether she is gardening, cooking, practicing yoga, or sitting quietly with a client, she brings the same grounded presence, curiosity, and reverence for the healing process. Affectionately known as "everyone's mom," Laura has a natural gift for making people feel safe, seen, and authentically cared for. She connects effortlessly with the hearts of others, humans and animals alike, and creates spaces where trust, release, and transformation can unfold.

At her core, Laura is a mother, wife, healer, animal lover, and lifelong student of growth. Through compassion, wisdom, and unwavering service, she helps people release what weighs them down, rediscover their inner resilience, and reconnect with the wellness that has always lived within them.

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## Holly Gagnon

### Fitness Coach

I am a fitness instructor passionate about creating a more inclusive, welcoming, and body-positive fitness industry. I believe that movement is for every body, and that all bodies deserve to be represented, respected, and celebrated in fitness spaces. My approach to exercise is rooted in the belief that it does not need to be about changing your body, but about caring for it, honoring it, and showing it love.

I am especially passionate about supporting women who have struggled to find joy, confidence, or a sense of belonging in movement. Through my classes, I strive to create an environment where people feel safe, empowered, and free to move in ways that feel good for them—without judgment, pressure, or comparison.

In addition to teaching, I host a run club built on the belief that running should be accessible to everyone. With a strong focus on pace inclusivity, my run club welcomes all levels and abilities, ensuring that no one is left behind. "Built on belonging" is more than a tagline—it's the foundation of everything I do. My goal is to help people reconnect with movement as an act of self-love and community, and to remind them that they are already worthy, exactly as they are.

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## Amanda Chinn

### **Owner of Almost Famous Laser and Founder of InkFree BC Initiative**

Amanda Chinn is the owner of Almost Famous Laser in Nanaimo, BC, where she specializes in advanced skin rejuvenation and laser services with a strong focus on client care and confidence-building results. As the founder of InkFree BC Initiative Society, Amanda is dedicated to making laser tattoo removal accessible to individuals facing barriers, including those overcoming past trauma or navigating major life changes. Driven by community empowerment and social impact, she continues to expand her efforts to help people feel more comfortable in their own skin—both inside and out.



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## Laura Friesen

### **Neuromovement Practitioner and Registered Holistic Nutritionist**

Laura approaches health with a holistic lens, believing true well-being emerges from the integration of body, mind, and spirit. She is passionate about helping clients discover new possibilities in how they move, think, eat, and live.

Laura worked as a physiotherapist before retiring due to chronic Lyme disease. Not long after her own diagnosis, other family members were also diagnosed with Lyme and ADHD. This difficult period sparked her exploration of holistic healing, ultimately leading her to the Anat Baniel Method® Neuromovement®. Through this work, she experienced meaningful improvements in energy regulation, mental clarity, and ease of movement.

As a Neuromovement® Practitioner, Laura uses gentle, intentional movements, grounded in neuroplasticity research, to help clients build awareness and strengthen mind–body connections. This method supports the release of old patterns, such as chronic pain or trauma, and opens the door to healthier, more joyful ways of functioning. She is certified to work with both children and adults and offers online group classes, in-person studio lessons, and mobile lessons.

Laura is also a Registered Holistic Nutritionist and has witnessed profound growth when clients combine nutritional support with Neuromovement®, creating a comprehensive approach that nourishes both brain and body.



## Tiffany Hendricks

### Case manager/Outreach Worker

My name is Tiffany Hendricks. I'm someone who believes deeply in compassion, honesty, and showing up for people exactly as they are. My journey has been shaped by my own lived experiences with ADHD, healing, and navigating systems from both sides, which has inspired my commitment to making mental health conversations more real and accessible.

Through my podcast, Tidbits with Tiffany, I share raw and honest reflections on mental health, growth, and the everyday realities that often go unspoken. I'm passionate about helping people feel seen, understood, and less alone.

Whether in my personal life or my career, I value authenticity, humour, and human connection. These values guide everything I do and continue to shape the way I move through the world.



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## Joani Litchfield

### Certified Practice Registered Nurse

Joani is a registered nurse whose work is anchored in education, advocacy, and patient-centred care. She brings intention and clarity to healthcare, prioritizing understanding—whether supporting patients as they navigate complex health systems or sharing knowledge with colleagues to strengthen collective practice. Her approach reflects a belief that informed people and informed teams create better outcomes.

Her passion for learning and high-quality care is reflected in her pursuit of advanced training and specialization, including intensive care, certified practice, and nature-based therapy. These diverse qualifications inform a thoughtful, whole-person approach to health that integrates clinical excellence with an understanding of mental well-being and environment.

Open about her own experiences with mental health challenges, including PTSD, Joani speaks candidly in order to reduce stigma and encourage others—especially those in high-pressure professions—to seek support earlier. By leading with honesty, she helps create space for conversations about burnout, trauma, and recovery that are often left unspoken.

She is the founder of SeaStrength, a nature-based health initiative rooted in her belief in holistic, accessible approaches to physical and mental well-being, and an expression of her long-term vision for health supported through connection with nature.



## Colleen Franklin

### Registered Clinical Counsellor

Colleen Franklin is a Registered Clinical Counsellor and the founder of Sandstone Counselling, a growing team-based clinic in downtown Nanaimo. Sandstone Counselling is home to warm, trauma-informed counsellors who support individuals facing burnout, trauma, anxiety, grief, relationship challenges, and major life transitions. The clinic is known for its grounded atmosphere and its commitment to accessible, client-centred mental-health care for the Nanaimo community.

Colleen specializes in supporting trauma survivors, individuals experiencing chronic stress or emotional overwhelm, and first responders. She is recognized for her steady presence, practical approach, and ability to help clients reconnect with resilience, clarity, and a renewed sense of wellbeing.

Under her leadership, Sandstone Counselling continues to expand its services and deepen its impact, contributing to stronger mental-health supports across Vancouver Island. Colleen ensures the clinic remains inclusive, welcoming, and supportive for people from all walks of life.

Beyond her clinical work, Colleen is a mother and long-time foster parent—roles that reflect her deep commitment to caring for others. These lived experiences shape her values of compassion, stability, and community connection. Her work reflects a deep belief in strengthening the wellbeing of individuals, families, and the broader community.



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## Tami Hirasawa

### Pediatric Physiotherapist

Tami Hirasawa, PT, is a highly experienced pediatric physiotherapist dedicated to supporting children with disabilities and their families. She boasts extensive clinical expertise and advanced certifications in Neurodevelopmental Therapy (Bobath), Perception–Action Therapy, Lower Extremity Development (Cusick), gait analysis, and the prescription of wheelchairs and adaptive equipment. Through her work, Tami provides individualized, evidence-based care that focuses on optimizing function, participation, and quality of life for children across a wide range of abilities.

In addition to her clinical practice, Tami is an active leader and advocate within the community. She serves on the BC Pediatric Physiotherapy Council, where she represents pediatric physiotherapists on Vancouver Island and contributes to provincial collaboration and professional advancement. She also sits on the Nanaimo Advisory Council for Accessibility and Inclusiveness, supporting initiatives that promote equitable access and inclusive community design.

Beyond her professional roles in healthcare, Tami is deeply committed to cultural advocacy and community engagement. As President of the Central Vancouver Island Japanese Canadian Society, she works closely with the Japanese Canadian community to celebrate Japanese Culture. She is actively involved in sharing and preserving the history of Japanese Canadians in Nanaimo, ensuring these stories and contributions are recognized for future generations.



## Gypsy Hart

### Holistic Practitioner & Founder

Gypsy Hart is a passionate, intuitively guided holistic wellness practitioner and entrepreneur based on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. With a rich Hungarian and Romanian heritage, she draws on both her ancestral roots and her deep spiritual sensitivity to embody a natural, visionary understanding of the soul and its connection to mind, body, and spirit.

As a certified Holistic Practitioner and RDY500-level Yoga Teacher, Gypsy brings over a decade of committed service to wellness, combining her training with intuitive gifts in mediumship, clairvoyance, divination, and empathy to guide clients in transformational healing. Gypsy's philosophy is rooted in empowerment: she sees every individual as unique, with their own path, and works to create safe and sacred space for healing, self-discovery, and growth. Whether guiding gentle yoga practitioners or deeper energy-work clients, she meets each person with compassion, respect, and authenticity. Island Healing - Holistic Wellness & Spiritual Sanctuary on Vancouver Island was born out of Gypsy's vision to offer a holistic space where mind, body, and spirit are nurtured with equal reverence. The studio is located in North Nanaimo and maintains a reputation for safety, professionalism, and compassionate care.

In addition to her hands-on work, Gypsy is a community builder. She founded Island Healing with the vision of weaving wellness, spiritual connection, and community support together. As Event Organizer, she creates opportunities for small businesses, healers, and metaphysical practitioners to connect, share, and flourish — offering workshops, fairs, and gatherings that uplift the local community.

With warmth, wisdom, and dedication, Gypsy continues to serve individuals and families across Vancouver Island, guiding them toward physical ease, spiritual clarity, and soulful alignment.



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## Meghan Gorosh

### Mental Health Support Worker

Meghan Gorosh is a social worker with Island Health supporting patients in Kidney Care and Transplant Services. Her compassion and genuine care make patients feel seen, valued, and supported during some of the most challenging moments of their lives. Calm, knowledgeable, and deeply empathetic, Meghan navigates complex situations with grace and unwavering dedication. She is a powerful advocate for her clients, consistently protecting their rights and dignity. Through her thoughtful and eloquent support, Meghan leaves a lasting impact on those she serves and is truly someone you want on your side.



## Mikayla Welsh

### Mental Health & Addiction Services

Mikayla Welsh has spent over five years supporting Nanaimo's most vulnerable in the mental health and addiction sector. Because she's lived the struggle from the inside, her empathy isn't theoretical — it's felt, lived, and embodied. When she meets someone in crisis, she doesn't just see symptoms; she sees the human underneath the chaos. She has a rare ability to restore dignity and hope through hands-on care, advocacy, and connection, helping people fight their way back to themselves, one small act of courage at a time.



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## Matriarch

### Yvoone Rigsby Jones; traditional name Yahtquamaat

#### Retired

Yahtquamaat, Yvonne Rigsby-Jones dedicated 29 years of her professional life to leading the Tsow-Tun Le Lum Treatment Center and she retired in June 2015. Through this, she worked in The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was an amazing part of this journey. She worked with a Pro-Active Board of Directors to help develop leading edge treatment practices; for example, pioneering the healing of Residential School Trauma.

She continues to actively facilitate healing workshops for communities and is a member of the Cultural Support Team for Indian Residential School Survivors Society. She is on the Board of Governors for the MSW Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency Program, has been a University of Toronto Elder for Simon Fraser for 3 years, and participates with various other organizations.

In June 2024, Yvonne was the recipient of the Harold Johnson "Changing the Alcohol Story" Award, from the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, at University of Victoria. Recently the recipient of the King Charles III Coronation Medal, she was nominated by the National Survivors Circle, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Awarded to individuals who have made a significant contribution to their communities.

Yvonne understands traditional practices and ceremony are the way home for many of our wounded people. She has listened, encouraged, challenged and lead. She believes in compassion because compassion works.

Yvonne, Snuneymuxw First Nation, Coast Salish.





## Wendy Johnson

### Senior Sales & Events Manager

Wendy is a highly respected leader in British Columbia's tourism community, bringing more than 40 years of experience grounded in integrity, connection, and care. As Senior Sales & Marketing Manager at Tigh-Na-Mara Resort, Wendy is known for her high standards, fierce loyalty, and the trusted, long-standing relationships she has built with clients, partners, and colleagues.

An exceptionally skilled event planner, Wendy serves as the resort's senior lead for large-scale events and works closely with the Indigenous market, ensuring thoughtful collaboration and exceptional guest experiences. Her leadership, attention to detail, creativity, and commitment to excellence have been instrumental in building a loyal clientele and supporting the resort's continued success.

Beyond the resort, Wendy plays an integral role in coordinating major community events through her leadership with the Bathtub Society. Her rare ability to manage complex logistics while keeping people connected sets her apart. She leads with humility, humor, and heart—consistently showing up for her family, her team, and her community.



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## Marilyn Sullivan

### Volunteer

I am very proud to have been involved with many organizations in Nanaimo. I am a past President of the Chamber of Commerce, which also involved chairing the Public Relations Committee for many years, as well as being a past Co-chair of the VIU Foundation Board,

where I chaired the Lotto For Learning project for 5 years. For four years, I was the Secretary/Treasurer of the VIEX, and when my boys were young, I was involved with Nanaimo Minor Hockey as House Manager and Secretary. Additionally, I sat on the Board of 3 BC Games held in Nanaimo as the Director of Friends of the Games.

Currently, I am in the 21st Year of Chairing the Nanaimo Sport Achievement Awards, am the Chair and Founder of the Autism Society CVI, and am a member of the Volunteer Nanaimo Board. I have sat on the Port Theatre Board for the past 6 years and I have chaired the fundraising and Building of the Frank Ney Statue.

Over the 52 years that I have lived in Nanaimo I have been proud to dedicate time to enhance and make a difference in our community.



## Bev Hilton

### Rotarian and Mother

I was raised on a farm in northeastern BC in the late 1950's. As a family we looked out for our neighbors and friends. My mom always grew a large garden and would gladly share vegetables with those who needed them.

Besides my long involvement with Rotary, I worked in the banking industry for more than thirty years. Now that I'm retired, I treasure the time I get to spend with my two daughters and my grandson.



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## Andrea Paris

### Licensed realtor with EXP Nanaimo

Andrea Paris is a dynamic Nanaimo-based entrepreneur, community advocate, and a driving force within the Vancouver Island professional landscape. Known for her "nimble" approach to business and her unwavering commitment to local growth, Andrea embodies the modern leadership qualities, resilience, innovation, and a deep-seated passion for empowering others.

Her professional journey is defined by a unique ability to bridge the gap between strategic business objectives and genuine human connection. Andrea has built a reputation as a trusted collaborator who understands that the strength of Nanaimo's economy lies in the success of its people. By fostering a culture of support and mentorship, she has become a vital resource for fellow citizens.

Andrea is a dedicated enthusiast of the West Coast lifestyle. Whether she is exploring Nanaimo's trail networks or engaging with the community through local activities, she leads by example, proving that a balanced, active life is the catalyst for professional creativity. Her social media presence serves as a beacon of positivity, highlighting local achievements and advocating for a more connected, inclusive business community. Andrea Paris is not just a participant in Nanaimo's story; she is an architect of its future.



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## Maureen Arabsky

### Teacher and Leader

Maureen has been a teacher for 37 years and a Girl Guide leader for 25 years. Her passions include supporting others to help reach their potential, hiking, and Girl Guides. She has been inspired by many women over the years who she has met and they have enriched her life to create the person she has become. If she had any advice for her younger self, it would be "Jump In! Don't hesitate with your life"

Maureen leads with quiet strength, humility, and action. In her roles as a leader, treasurer, and volunteer, she lives by the belief that actions speak louder than words, inspiring others through kindness, responsibility, and service.

She leads by example, never asking others to do something she wouldn't do herself—whether camping, cooking over a fire, or rappelling alongside youth. Each week, Maureen mentors 20–30 young people, building confidence, leadership, and compassion through steady encouragement and participation.

Beyond youth leadership, Maureen gives countless hours to the community through Meals on Wheels, the Hospice Society, and the Loaves and Fishes Food Bank. Her quiet dedication reminds us that true leadership is found not in the spotlight, but in service, integrity, and care for others.

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## Marlys Diamond

### Community Advocate

Marlys has dedicated decades to strengthening her community through civic leadership, collaboration, and long-term planning. Her involvement began with a group of committed volunteers who preserved a historic schoolhouse and transformed it into what is now the Old School House Gallery and Art Centre, a lasting cultural hub.

She served two terms on Qualicum Beach Town Council, with responsibility for Healthcare and Emergency Preparedness. In this role, Marlys served on the Board of Directors for Eagle Park, advocated for a primary care clinic for residents on the province's long waitlist, and continues to champion the need for assisted living facilities to support the town's changing demographics.

Marlys also played a key role in the Communities in Bloom program for seven highly successful years, helping the town achieve national and international recognition, including mentoring communities in Dyce, Scotland, and Sequim, Washington. The program has since evolved into the non-competitive "Friends" category and now integrates climate change awareness.

Her ongoing interests include healthcare, Communities in Bloom, and emergency preparedness in the context of climate change. To Marlys, influence means elevating the impact of collective action to inspire new and lasting community benefits. Inspired by her grandparents' unwavering care for people and place, Marlys carries forward a legacy of service and community stewardship.

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## Diane Brennan

### Public Servant

Diane Brennan has dedicated her life to building a stronger, more compassionate, and inclusive Nanaimo. She began her public service as a Nanaimo-Ladysmith School Board trustee, advocating for students and families, and later served multiple terms on Nanaimo City Council. Diane was a catalyst for meaningful change, championing the legalization of secondary suites, placing Nanaimo at the forefront of progressive housing policy, and helping secure a provincial agreement for 140 low-barrier housing units that continue to support the city's most vulnerable residents.

Beyond elected office, Diane has contributed extensively to community organizations, including Nanaimo Youth Services, Community Futures, United Way campaigns, the Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, and the Island Health Board of Directors.

In 2021, she received Freedom of the City in recognition of her extraordinary service and "quiet strength, steadiness, calmness, and grace." A true community matriarch, Diane's legacy is one of compassion, vision, and lasting impact, shaping Nanaimo for generations to come.

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## Tanya Hiltz

### In Loving Memory of Tanya Hiltz - Wisteria Community Association aka Stone Soup

Tanya was an unwavering advocate and a source of strength for those in need. As the President of the Wisteria Association, she lead with compassion, determination, and an unrelenting commitment to uplifting her community.

Tanya and her husband, Doug, co-founded Stone Soup, a volunteer-driven, community-supported nightly meal program that ensures Nanaimo's homeless population has access to food and clothing every single day. With the help of dedicated volunteers, Stone Soup has become a lifeline for countless individuals, demonstrating the power of kindness and collective action. As of 2025, they marked ten years of looking after Nanaimo's homeless population every day, without missing a single night even through COVID and other challenges.

Beyond her hands-on work, Tanya was a fierce champion for the rights of people experiencing homelessness. Her advocacy extended far and wide, inspiring others to take action and created a ripple effect of positive change.

Tanya's support and encouragement were boundless. She has personally impacted lives, offering strength and guidance during the most challenging times. Her leadership, paired with her deep empathy, made her not only a hero to many but also a beacon of hope in the Nanaimo community.

Tanya's legacy is a shining example of what it means to care deeply, act boldly, and make a difference every day.

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## STEM

### Janna Gillick

#### Director of Engineering

Janna Gillick is the Director of Engineering, working to build the world's largest direct air carbon capture facilities. She brings more than twenty-five years of engineering experience to her current role where she collaborates with a multinational team who all have the mission of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. She also serves as a board member of the Nanaimo Airport Commission.

Janna graduated with honours from the University of Waterloo, where she was recognized as an Academic All-Canadian. In addition to her professional career, Janna is a decorated athlete. She is a multi time national champion and recipient of Nanaimo's outstanding master athlete award.



### Shawna Kjartanson

#### Aquatic Biologist & Office Branch Manager

Shawna is a senior biologist with extensive experience in ecological research and conservation. Based in Nanaimo, BC, Shawna has led projects focused on biodiversity, habitat restoration, and sustainable resource management. Her work bridges science and practical solutions, supporting evidence-based policies that protect ecosystems while fostering community engagement.

With a strong commitment to STEM advocacy, Shawna mentors emerging scientists and champions equitable representation of women and gender diverse people in science and consulting. Her collaborative approach has driven impactful partnerships across government, industry, and academia. Recognized for her leadership and innovation, Shawna continues to advance scientific excellence and inspire future generations to pursue careers in science.



### Angela Faye

#### Founder, FuturVille

At the cutting edge of AI, hologram technology, and regenerative real estate, Angela Faye is boldly reshaping what the future of healthy living can be.

Angela is the visionary behind Canada's first Health and Longevity Village, now being built in Vulcan, Alberta - the Star Trek Capital of Canada. This groundbreaking project introduces a new and emerging real estate asset class: regenerative communities intentionally engineered to improve human health, extend longevity, and restore local environments.

A true STEM trailblazer, Angela is also Canada's first distributor of Proto Hologram technology focused on health, wellness and longevity.





She brought this advanced, full 3D human-presence communication to the VIEA Summit in 2025, demonstrating how holograms and AI can deliver high-tech, high-touch healthcare, coaching, and connection in ways never before possible—especially for rural and underserved communities.

Angela is a Founding Contributor & Business Advisor, Canada's Entrepreneur, an evolving performance-media platform that amplifies the stories of innovators, helps entrepreneurs get connected to the right people at the right time, and inspires the next generation to think bigger, push boundaries, and embrace the future of STEM.

Poised as a leader—and contender for this year's STEM award—Angela Faye is not just imagining the future.

She is building it.

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## Laura Banick

### Owner & Lead, Tax & Cloud Bookkeeping Specialist

I'm Laura Banick, CPB, and I run Admin Advantage Tax & Bookkeeping Services, a cloud-focused bookkeeping and tax practice supporting small businesses in British Columbia and Alberta. I've been doing this work for more than 20 years, and what keeps me here is simple: I care deeply about helping business owners feel steady and less stressed when it comes to their numbers.

My path hasn't been dramatic or flashy — it's been built through trust, consistency, moving provinces, raising a family, and running a business through all the practical realities that come with it. I understand the pressure and uncertainty of running a business because I've done it alongside the people I support.

As a woman in business, I've learned that strength doesn't have to be loud. It often looks like showing up, doing the work well, and creating systems that help people breathe easier. My work isn't just about getting the numbers right — it's about clarity, calm decision-making, and building something that lasts. And I believe in being a steady resource in the communities I serve, whether someone is just starting out or simply needs things to feel clearer and less overwhelming.

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## Peggy Richardson

### Technical Marketing Consultant

Peggy Richardson is a hands-on technologist and digital marketing expert with more than 30 years of real-world experience designing, implementing, and maintaining technology infrastructure and technical marketing systems.

Her background includes large-scale network and system design, systems administration, programming, technical documentation, and high-stakes remediation work, including extensive Y2K upgrades in government and law-enforcement environments. She has spent years in the trenches, performing hands-on onsite systems work, rebuilding broken systems, wiring networks, and turning complex technical requirements into working solutions.



Peggy is also a technical author and contributor to hundreds of books, digital publications, and training products for clients across technology, health, business, education, and public service sectors.

Today, she designs and implements digital advertising and marketing campaigns and automations, as well as being the creator and manager of several web-based applications serving business and healthcare. She has delivered projects in Canada, the United States, the UK, Australia, and the UAE for both business and government organizations, including TELUS Canada, the Workers' Compensation Board of BC, and the BC Ministry of Attorney General.

Based in Western Canada, Peggy lives on Gabriola Island with her husband and their two dogs.

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## Alison Evans

### Co-Founder and Owner of Gulf Island Seaplanes

Alison Evans is the co-founder of Gulf Island Seaplanes, where she plays a pivotal role in management and shaping the company's vision for sustainable and accessible air travel. With a strong commitment to community connectivity and environmental stewardship, Alison has been instrumental in the company's regional growth and sustainable tourism development.

Gitxsan from Hagwilget Village First Nation (Hazelton BC) and living in Nanaimo the past 20 years, Alison is committed to working closely with Indigenous communities to enhance accessibility and promote tourism opportunities.

In addition to her leadership at Gulf Island Seaplanes, Alison serves as a dedicated board member with 4VI Social Enterprise Group as well as Indigenous Tourism BC where she advocates for innovative business models that drive social impact and promotes authentic Indigenous cultural experiences, economic empowerment, and responsible tourism practices.



## Rimpy Mahal

### Accountant

I am the founder of UniSol Accounting Services Ltd., based in Nanaimo, British Columbia, where I support small businesses, corporations, and individuals with accounting, tax, and financial clarity. My work is rooted in integrity, precision, and a deep commitment to helping others succeed with confidence.

Beyond accounting, I am actively involved in real estate, interior design, and community initiatives. I am passionate about empowering women, supporting local entrepreneurs, and using my skills to create positive, lasting impact in both business and community spaces.



## Natasha Wilch

### Physical Therapist

Natasha Wilch, MScPT, is a nationally recognized physiotherapist, entrepreneur, and leader in concussion and brain health whose work is reshaping how complex neurological recovery is understood and delivered across the globe.

She is the Founder of Symphony Brain Performance, a destination clinic specializing in complex concussion, neurological rehabilitation, and brain optimization, and the creator of Concussion Nerds, an international education and mentorship platform supporting clinicians in delivering integrated, evidence-informed concussion care.

With over a decade of clinical experience, Natasha is known for her innovative, multi-systems approach that bridges neuroscience, autonomic regulation, vestibular and oculomotor rehabilitation, somatics, and lifestyle medicine. Her work has improved outcomes for individuals navigating persistent and life-altering symptoms while empowering clinicians to work confidently with complexity.

Natasha is a sought-after speaker, educator, and thought leader, delivering workshops, immersive trainings, and keynote presentations to healthcare professionals nationwide. She also hosts The Roundtable, creating space for honest, interdisciplinary conversations that elevate care standards.

Her leadership has been recognized with multiple honors, including leadership awards from the BC Physiotherapy Association, Top 20 Under 40 Community recognition, and Entrepreneur of Canada distinction.

Above all, Natasha is deeply mission-driven—committed to making the invisible visible and helping people reclaim meaningful participation in their lives.



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## Jennifer Hufnagel

### AI Educator and AI Readiness Consultant

Jennifer Hufnagel is one of Canada's leading AI Educators, blending over 25 years in software focusing on learning and development, instructional design, operations, and corporate training with deep expertise in digital readiness. As Principal of Hufnagel Consulting, she helps organizations, non-profits, and nations build AI fluency and readiness through practical education, strategy, and facilitation.

She has held senior learning and development roles at Canadian companies including Hootsuite, Qtrade, QuickMobile, 1-800-GOT-JUNK? (O2E), and Men in Kilts. Her audiences range from entrepreneurs and internal teams to global Fortune 100 firms such as Walmart, Whirlpool, KPMG, Intuit, and VISA. For the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, she developed and delivered venue-specific training to 35,000 participants.

Jennifer holds a BCom in Entrepreneurship from the University of Victoria and adult learning certifications from BCIT. A certified AI Futurelab Mastermind Trainer, 2025 Nanaimo Chamber Women in Business Award recipient, and two-time nominee for Women of Influence in STEM, her mission is to make



AI literacy accessible to all through practical, human-centered education. A sought-after speaker on AI and the future of work, she brings clarity and inspiration to audiences across sectors.

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## Trades

### Connie Kuramoto Horticulturalist

Connie started gardening with her parents at a young age and as a girl scout, she received all the nature badges. She studied Botany at the University of Massachusetts and then put her knowledge into action with a market garden in Port Albion on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. She was a commercial fishing person for a few years before going back to school to get a diploma in Horticulture at Malaspina College, which is now Vancouver Island University. She ended up teaching there and running the greenhouses as the technician for 20 years before she retired. She then moved to working for North Island College, teaching the Horticulture Apprenticeship Program, and for Gaia College, in their Organic Landcare Diploma.

She has also started her own Horticulture Consulting and Training Business named 'Gardens on the Go', and has worked developing the curriculum, assisting municipalities with implementing their agricultural plan, and helping First Nations bands establish more Food Security, as well as consulting with individual home owners and doing workshops for Community Gardens.



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### Adrianna Golinsky Interior Designer and Kitchen Specialist

Adrianna Golinsky is the founder of Aligned Kitchen and Cabinets, a Nanaimo-based design and project-management studio known for its warm approach, thoughtful processes, and commitment to creating timeless, functional kitchens. With a Bachelor of Interior Design and over a decade of experience in renovation, sales, property management, and entrepreneurship, she brings a rare blend of technical expertise, creativity, and people-centered leadership to every project.

Her career began in home services and evolved through design firms, restoration work, and managing rental properties—experiences that deepened her understanding of how real families live in their homes and what makes a space truly work. Today, her signature process includes in-home LiDAR 3D visualizations, full-service project coordination, and a relationship-focused experience that helps clients feel seen, understood, and supported through every step of their renovation.



Adrianna is passionate about community connection and has quickly become recognized in local business circles for her professionalism, friendly, and collaborative spirit. She is continuously developing her skills in communication, leadership, and project management, driven by a desire to uplift homeowners, strengthen partnerships with trades, and build a trusted, legacy-driven brand on Vancouver Island.

Her work blends beauty, function, storytelling, and care—transforming homes and inspiring confidence in the people who live in them.

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## Savanna Constable

### Chief Operating Officer

Savanna's deep-rooted connection to Nanaimo and her family's company, IWCD, has profoundly shaped her career in the construction industry. From a young age, she immersed herself in various facets of the business, cultivating a comprehensive understanding of its operations. Her academic journey led her to earn a Bachelor of Business from Vancouver Island University (VIU), followed by a diploma in Architecture and Building Engineering from the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). This blend of business acumen and technical expertise has been instrumental in her ascent through the company's ranks to her current role as Operations Manager.



In her leadership position, Savanna is renowned for her unwavering commitment to fostering a strong, positive team culture. Her passion for people and dedication to building trust and integrity have been pivotal in uniting IWCD as a cohesive family. She firmly believes that success is built on a foundation of trust, integrity, and a solid team—principles that drive every aspect of the business. Under Savanna's guidance, IWCD continues to thrive, upholding its reputation for excellence and community engagement. Her leadership exemplifies the company's core values, ensuring that IWCD not only meets but exceeds the expectations of its clients and stakeholders.

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## Kerriann Coady

### CEO CHBA VI

Kerriann Coady is the Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Home Builders' Association Vancouver Island (CHBA VI), leading the region's residential construction sector through a period of rapid transformation in housing policy, affordability, and building innovation. With a collaborative approach and a strong advocacy mandate, she works closely with municipal and provincial partners, industry leaders, and community stakeholders to support a resilient and sustainable housing market.

Known for her clarity, professionalism, and strong convening ability, Kerriann has led CHBA VI in advancing education, workforce development, and industry standards, ensuring the Vancouver Island building community remains innovative, informed, and future-ready. Her leadership reflects a deep belief in collaboration, shared vision, and the essential role home builders play in shaping the places people call home.

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## Elizabeth Maybury

### Home Inspector

I'm a female professional home inspector with a strong focus on clear communication, practical guidance, and helping clients truly understand the condition of a home. With over a decade in the construction industry, I can confidently say I've found my calling. Even when the findings are grim, I pride myself in delivering and explaining my findings in a way that respects my client's level of knowledge about home systems. I know my job can involve a lot of bad news at times so delivering it with empathy and respect for the emotions they are experiencing is important to me.

I believe a good inspection is about more than just identifying issues; it's about education, transparency, trust, and emotional intelligence. Most purchases are emotional, and there are few greater than the purchase of a home. I take the time to walk clients through my findings, explain what matters most, and answer questions without jargon or pressure. Whether I'm inspecting an older home or a newer build, my focus is on helping people understand what they're buying and what to expect moving forward. I take pride in being thorough, honest, and calm under pressure, and I strive to make what can be a stressful process feel clear and manageable.



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## Kelli-Marie Gaboury

### Founder & Principal, Simply Painting & Wallcoverings

I am a master painter & wallcovering installer, colour consultant, and founder of Simply Painting, a Vancouver Island-based trade business known for craftsmanship, precision, and thoughtful design. With 28 years in the painting and decorating industry, I have built my career from the ground up, earning trust through skill, consistency, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

Working in a male-dominated trade, I carved out my place by refusing to shrink in spaces not designed for women. My expertise spans residential and commercial interiors, specialty coatings, wallcovering installation, and colour theory, where I am known for transforming spaces with intention and artistry.

Beyond the work itself, I am deeply committed to mentorship and industry advancement. Accredited through the BCCA Skilled Trades Program, I sponsor and mentor apprentices pursuing their Red Seal and support Vancouver Island University's CTC program by providing hands-on work experience for emerging tradespeople. I also participated in the Builders Code pilot program, helping establish respectful and inclusive workplace standards across British Columbia's construction sector.

Today, I lead a primarily female-identifying crew and foster a culture grounded in integrity, education, collaboration, and community impact. Together, we have been recognized as Top 3 "Best of Nanaimo" and awarded Platinum in Community Votes, reflecting our shared commitment to raising the standard in the trades.



## Selina Hannen

### Founder & Lead Interior Designer

With over a decade of experience in the interior design industry, Selina Hannen is the founder and lead designer at Hannen Homes & Interior Design. Specializing in luxury kitchen design and millwork, Selina's work blends aesthetic elegance with functional excellence, creating bespoke spaces that elevate everyday living.

Graduating with a bachelor's degree in interior design, Selina's career has been driven by her strong passion for construction and the renovation process. She thrives in collaborative environments, working closely with fellow designers and tradespeople to bring visionary designs to life. Her dedication to quality craftsmanship and innovative design solutions has made her a respected leader in the field, with a particular focus on creating timeless spaces that reflect her clients' lifestyles and personalities.



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## April Bourcier

### Ironworker/ Welder

I am a journeyman welder and ironworker apprentice who built her career through grit, perseverance, and an unshakable work ethic. Raised below the poverty line by a single mother, I learned early the value of hard work and resilience. I carried those lessons into the trades, earning my journeyman welder status before stepping into the challenge of an ironworker apprenticeship.

I am also a proud mother of three, balancing demanding work that often takes me far from home. Time away from my family is never easy, but it fuels my drive to build a better future for them. In an industry where women are still underrepresented, I have faced and overcome discrimination, proving my place through skill, determination, and integrity.

Working at heights gives me a sense of power and freedom that few experiences can match. I love what I do, and I take pride in building structures that stand as a reflection of my strength, perseverance, and passion for the trade.

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## Diane Campbell

### Interior Designer

Diane Campbell Interiors is a full-service interior design studio rooted in the belief that great design should feel both beautiful and livable. Diane brings a thoughtful, practical approach to every project—balancing aesthetics with how spaces are truly used day to day.

Known for her collaborative style and strong relationships with builders, trades, and trusted vendors, Diane works closely with clients to create spaces that feel intentional, functional, and timeless. Her work spans residential and commercial projects, including renovations, custom homes, hospitality, medical spaces, and barrier-free environments.



Diane is especially passionate about designing spaces that support people at every stage of life, ensuring comfort, accessibility, and longevity without compromising on style. From early concepts through to completion, she guides clients with clarity, care, and attention to detail, making the design process approachable.

The result is interiors that are warm, considered, and designed to truly support the people who live and work within them.

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## Youth Resiliency

**Kaitlin Goodman**

**Therapeutic Recreation Manager**

As the Therapeutic Recreation Manager at Nanaimo Seniors Village, I oversee all recreation and leisure opportunities for residents living in our community.

I also oversee a team of 14 Recreation Aides and 1 Recreation Therapist, and support them to create meaningful recreational experiences for all residents across 3 levels of care.

I am passionate about providing access and opportunity for recreational activities for older adults. I advocate for choice and autonomy for all residents following the person-centred care approach to recreation therapy. Additionally, I work alongside the leadership team at NSV in cultivating an autonomous, respectful, and supportive work environment for all staff.

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**Jenna Krajinovic**

**Emergency Support Services & Resilience Coordinator**

Hi, my name is Jenna Krajinovic. I'm a first-generation Canadian-Croatian with big dreams and a big heart. Currently, I work as the City of Nanaimo's ESS and Resilience Coordinator, as well as for VIMHS and a few other casual roles. I also volunteer with Nanaimo Search and Rescue, and the BCSARA CISM team.

My educational background is in Sociology, Business Management, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. I currently compete locally with the NIFHA Black Ice hockey team, and the Nanaimo Timbermen Sr. Women's lacrosse team, all while training to represent the Croatian National Women's Lacrosse Team as an aspiring Olympian.

I love pursuing opportunities for betterment and strive to do all I can for myself and others while I have the time and ability in this world. It's important to me that I lead a life that instills belief in future generations that they can also achieve whatever goals they set their hearts and minds to. My end goal career-wise is to one day train service dogs to support folks with PTSD, especially after having my own traumatic experience as a CISM peer. Because nothing is more fulfilling than a life led with empathy, resilience, and growth.



## Sidney Mrus

### Community Champion

Born and raised in Ladysmith, I am a proud member of a community that has shaped my values, work ethic, and passion for service. At 25 years old, I work with FYidoctors, where I help create a welcoming, supportive, and reliable experience for every patient who walks through our doors. My commitment to helping others is at the heart of everything I do, both professionally and within my community.

For many years, I have been an active volunteer across Ladysmith, contributing to organizations such as Ladysmith Family and Friends, the Ladysmith Festival of Lights, the Ladysmith Show & Shine, and the Ladysmith Health Care Auxiliary. Giving back to the place that raised me continues to be one of the most meaningful and rewarding parts of my life.

My leadership journey began early through the Ladysmith Ambassador Program, where I proudly held both the Ambassador and Miss Congeniality titles for a full year. In 2024, I continued that path by running for BC Ambassador, an experience that strengthened my confidence, public speaking skills, and dedication to representing my hometown. During the program, I was honored to receive the Friendship Award, recognizing my positivity and ability to connect with others.

As I grow personally and professionally, I remain inspired by Ladysmith's spirit and committed to making a positive impact wherever I can.



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## Kalli Stuart

### Youth Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of Kalli & Co.

At just 14 years old, Kalli Stuart is already an entrepreneur, creator, and leader who turns adversity into purpose. She co-founded Kalli & Co., a Vancouver Island-based self-care brand, alongside her mom. What began as a homeschool learning project has grown into a company whose products are sold in boutiques across the Island and beyond.

Kalli has learned business through experience, formulating products, serving customers, wholesaling to retailers, and speaking about confidence and self-care. Along the way, she has navigated her own challenges, including anxiety and health obstacles within her family, which strengthened her empathy, resilience, and desire to help others feel supported.

Kalli's mission is to spread kindness, confidence, and joy. Through entrepreneurship, community involvement, and storytelling, she demonstrates that resilience is not about perfection, it's about courage, learning, and showing up again. She hopes her journey inspires other young people to believe in their ideas, care for their mental well-being, and shine in their own way.



## Dayna Briggs

### Founder of Nanaimo Women's 5-Aside

I created Nanaimo Women's 5-A-Side with the goal to create a safe, inclusive environment where women can connect, socialize, and engage in physical activity within their community. Growing up on Vancouver Island, opportunities for girls and women in sport were limited. I played boys' hockey throughout my youth, often feeling excluded, and later decided to pursue competitive hockey on the mainland and across North America.

That experience required significant sacrifices, including time away from family, friendships, and school activities, but it also shaped my resilience, discipline, and perspective on life. Due to multiple concussions, I was forced to end my hockey career earlier than planned. Transitioning into recreational soccer, I quickly recognized how few opportunities existed for women to participate in sport in a supportive, female-focused setting.

This realization inspired me to build a community that empowers women to develop confidence, support one another, and believe in their abilities—both on and off the field. Nanaimo Women's 5-A-Side is more than a league; it is a platform for connection, growth, and opportunity for women through sport.

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## Ruby Barclay

### Child and Youth Injury and Death Investigator & Child and Youth Care Worker

Ruby holds a bachelor's degree in Child and Youth Care, with a Specialization in Child Protection. She has been working with children, youth, and families since 2016 and has dedicated her career to work grounded in advocacy, equity, and dignity.

Ruby advised on the creation of the Tuition Waiver Program and went on to develop and serve as the first Peer Support Navigator at Vancouver Island University, helping to reduce systemic barriers to post-secondary education for youth from care. As Coordinator of the Nanaimo Youth Advisory Council, she empowered youth to lead initiatives addressing youth homelessness, child welfare, and community change. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ruby served as a Substance Use Outreach Worker, supporting youth and families impacted by the toxic drug crisis.

Currently, Ruby contributes to system learning and accountability as a Child and Youth Critical Injury and Death Investigator, while continuing her community-based work as a Child and Youth Care Worker support to children, youth, and families. Across all roles, Ruby remains deeply committed to amplifying youth voices and creating meaningful, lasting change.

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## Nikkayla Gladstone

### Clean Energy BC Intern

Nikkayla Gladstone is from Haida and Heiltsuk territories, and has spent the past two years working with the provincial government through the Indigenous Internship Program. In her first year, she worked with the Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship on the cumulative effects framework and with the Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department as a Fisheries Assistant.

For her second year, Nikkayla joined the Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions under the Indigenous Clean Energy Opportunities Team, where she supported initiatives aimed at advancing clean energy solutions for Indigenous communities. In September, she transitioned to Clean Energy BC as an Administrative Intern.

Nikkayla is also a new mother to a baby girl named Saylor. She is passionate about the intersection of Indigenous rights, environmental sustainability, and clean energy.



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## Lily-Ann Thomas

### University Student and Indigenous Culture/Student Support Worker

I am a 19-year-old Indigenous woman, reconnecting to my culture through community. My overall focus in life is to give back to my community and make my community proud; I am doing this by attending university, working in Nanaimo schools, supporting Indigenous youth, and helping when I can in the community.

I work on-call in schools supporting Indigenous youth and maintaining Indigenous education. Additionally, I try to support and encourage my peers with their knowledge and learning, regardless of the topic or subject. An example of this comes from my involvement in SD68's Indigenous Culture Nights. I have been involved in planning, cooking, learning and now teaching in these culture nights, an honour I hold with much respect.

I love beading, reading, dancing, and when I can, relaxing. A major passion of mine is learning; I love learning and helping others learn, especially about topics important to others.

To me, influence is an action of reciprocity. Everyone is influential in their own ways and are always either being influenced or influential, possible both. It is a personal and social relationship that gives, receives, and provides. Many community leaders have inspired me, including all of the WIN nominees from this year. In my personal life, the women in my family have inspired me in countless ways, they are truly my inspiration and my motivation.

