



## 20th Anniversary

Spring 2020 **GICEL**

<http://www.gicel.ca>

20 Years of bringing nature experiences to all

### Twenty Years of Programs and More to Come ....

*by Michael Dunn, Founder and Program Director, GICEL*

#### The Beginnings

It was the first week of June, 2000 and I was running a marine program for Environment Week/Oceans Day with the Mayne Island School children at Piggott Bay. During the lunch break, I was musing with the Gulf Islands School District Board Chair, May McKenzie, about the idea of creating a facility and nature-based programs for young people within the Gulf Islands. By coincidence, May said that the school district was looking at ways to create revenue-generating programs that would attract students from around the province. One of those ideas was an outdoor education program. From that random conversation, the nub of the idea was embraced by the school district and I was asked to create a feasibility plan for an outdoor environmental program within the Gulf Islands School District. That was delivered in the next year and the first pilot program was launched on Mayne Island at the Mayne Island School and Mt. Parke Regional Park during the summer. The concept at that time was to have programs running on all of the southern Gulf Island communities each with a slightly different theme that coincided with the different natural assets each of the islands had to offer. Over the following five years, programs began on Salt Spring Island, Pender



Over in the Meadow, Seedlings 2014

Island and Saturna Island as well as Mayne. Also at this time, GICEL was under the auspices of the Gulf Islands School District as a District program that ran in the summer. For various reasons, particularly funding related, GICEL separated from the School District and became a separate society and federal charitable organization. The connection with the school district was and is still strong and we have maintained this relationship through an agreement.

The core of the programs we created at that time, were grounded by the original vision created through public workshops with island groups and individuals interested in

the environmental education. We believe it still stands today.

*The Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning, using the rich and diverse ecosystems of the southern Gulf Islands, will offer educational opportunities for people of all ages (especially school children) that will help increase awareness of their role as environmental citizens. The overall mission is to help participants increase their ecological literacy and in turn, allow them to develop the ability to integrate key lessons from nature into their everyday decision-making."*

Definitely a lofty vision that required considerable planning to create the programs that would underpin this ideal. I should point out that this was developed before we knew for sure that children need exposure to nature as part of their development and that all of us benefit from time in nature. What we found was, that in order for the threshold for learning ecological principles such as energy flows, interrelationships, adaptation and change cycles to be reduced, it was imperative that we create an environment where participants could be comfortable in nature and not fearful. Also the process by which we would deliver these programs needed to be fun, joyful and provide awe and wonder about the world we share with other organisms and are connected to. We accomplished this not by showing, telling, and naming but by sharing, demonstrating, and doing. We also developed as much as possible multi-sensory explorations of place using touch, smell, sight, sound and sometimes taste to help create connections with nature. We also worked to create activities that reflected the different forms of learning children have, so our programs were blends of art, play, music, journaling, nature science, and free exploration to facilitate the connections. Our clan-based format was to allow for creation of both social



Building the fort, Seedlings 2018

and collaborative opportunities for the children and our leaders teams. The clans creating their forts as their home places while taking part in our programs reinforced this.

### **Looking forward**

So here we are twenty years later, some of our original ideas and components of the programs are still in place, but many also evolved. We tested them and evaluated them to ensure that they met our vision and if not, we adapted or we created new ones. Our leaders teams over the years represented so many wonderful adults and young people with different skill sets to offer to our participants. Special guests were and are always a tremendous addition to the programs. As of 2019, we have had just under 4,000 participants in our programs and the demand on some of the islands continues to grow. We know anecdotally that participants in our summer programs have been inspired and motivated to pursue passions in marine science, environmental law and green governance among others and many more have personal and family lifestyles tied to being in nature and continuing the explore it with continued curiosity.

The greatest testament to the value of what GICEL hoped to accomplish comes from our leaders teams. Once we had been operating long enough a curious and unintentional





Sharing circle looking at bones; Seedlings 2018. Photo Tina Farmilo

thing happened. We had young people (early teens) who had become too old for our SEEP programs wanting to continue in some capacity with the programs. To accommodate this interest and demand, we created our current hierarchical leaders team, starting at leaders in training to junior leaders to assistant Senior Leader and finally to Senior Leader. This structure is not only a learning opportunity for these young adults (13 to 18 year olds) but also a social opportunity. They are part of a culture of GICEL and have become advocates for its success and continuity.

Now here in 2020, we have been required to take an unexpected break and in this time the GICEL team is going to re-evaluate all our past and present programs, revisit our vision and mission and most importantly, attempt to analyze the impacts of our programs on the choices participants (particularly those who attended multiple years) have made in their lives.

Let me close by saying that the success of GICEL can be measured in so many different ways but for me it has been the absolute joyousness, excitement, hope and positive energy that GICEL programs have provided for so many young people in such troubling times.

The young adults who have been with us since they were children continue to hold this legacy. We are in good hands and hopeful for the future of GICEL and its important work in this complex world.

### **Postscript**

We are going to celebrate our 20 years with as many of you as we can, if we can, next year. So please mark you calendar for late August 2021 and let us know your interest in attending once we know it is safe to do so.

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## **GICEL at 20**

*by Desmond Berghofer*

We've got something to celebrate! The Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning, GICEL is moving along in step with the 21st century. Twenty years ago, when fear for the loss of nature was spreading around the industrialized world, GICEL was founded and raised its voice for ecological literacy that could be learned among the pristine ecosystems of the southern Gulf Islands of British Columbia. It was a new century and a new millennium, and the time was right for this voice to be heard. In 2020, as the century

enters its third decade, so GICEL celebrates its twentieth anniversary of encouraging children to discover and appreciate the wonder of the natural world.

It is a challenging endeavour, for this is also the age of digital technology with its multiple screens of seductive programs that entice young minds to confine young bodies to become viewers rather than participants in physical exploration. As the years have rolled on, concerned voices like those of Bill McKibben and Richard Louv have decried “the end of nature” and “nature-deficit disorder.” In step with these concerns has come the broader worry that human activity and disregard of the natural world is causing a shift in climate patterns that have sustained civilization for millennia.

The 21st century is turning out to be a time of uneasiness for the human psyche, now only too evident as countries struggle to control a global pandemic and normal life and economic activity is disrupted everywhere. But throughout all this time, GICEL every year has presented its summer camps for children to engage them as full participants in learning about the mystery and the magic of the natural world on which all life depends.

And the children have responded with the enthusiasm of the young, proclaiming their time at GICEL camps to be the most wonderful experience of their lives and lining up year after year to be return participants. So, the GICEL presence is surely a good thing for the Earth. And, after 20 years, it is good for all those involved to take time out to celebrate what has been achieved, and to recommit to the effort that will be required in the years ahead.

May we look forward to new generations of GICEL children passing through our summer camps and finding the inspiration to become the ecological citizens of the future, who can show the way for the 21st century to become an age of reconciliation between human progress and preservation of the natural world.



Rope swinger, Seedlings 2016

## **Report from GICEL Board Chair for January – December, 2019**

GICEL again offered its Summer Earth Education Programs for 6-12 year olds on Mayne, Pender, and Saturna Islands in 2019, and as in previous years there was good uptake, The Seedlings program for 3-5 year olds on Mayne also experienced another very successful year. Congratulations to all the GICEL staff involved.

GICEL will be celebrating its 20th year of existence next year, and the board has decided to undertake a review of GICEL programming, both historical and current, while reaffirming our focus on place-based ecological learning. The review will recommend ways to incorporate the environmental concerns of our junior and senior leaders into GICEL programming, and to incorporate more Indigenous knowledge where there are appropriate and respectful means to do so.

### **Board Membership**

Members of the GICEL Board of Directors for 2019 were: Michael Hoebel (Chair), Desmond Berghofer (Vice-Chair), Tina Farmilo (Secretary), Michael Dunn (Programs), Shelly Johnson, May McKenzie, Scott Benwell, and Sky Losier.

### **Board Meetings**

Meetings of the Board were held on March 28, June 7, and November 29, 2019. The 2019 Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on June 7.

*Michael Hoebel*



## **A Glimpse of Seedlings - Summer 2019**

GICEL's Early Years Nature Day Camp on Mayne



**Over in the meadow on the log by the tree... Under the giant Arbutus Queen**

**The Seedlings Early Years Nature Day Camp is a week-long half-day summer program** that takes place in a secluded little private meadow and forest on Mayne Island every July, since its inception in 2014. The camp staff is made up of three experienced Early Childhood Educators including the camp's coordinator, ECE & artist-educator Tina Farmilo, with the enthusiastic support of five or six talented junior staff and volunteers. The younger staff are usually also graduates of the Summer Earth Education Programs (SEEP), offered by GICEL since 2000. Teens and adult staff alike look forward to their annual week together with the lively and diverse group of three to five-year-old children for whom the camp is designed.

**The Seedlings program emphasis** is on social, affectionate, play-based creative learning, with a focus on sensory experiences and discovery in nature: listening, looking, smelling, touching, tasting, singing, talking, laughing, digging, climbing, running, hiking, swinging, building, eating, sharing, story-telling, painting, sculpting, and - did we mention? – playing! Parents and grandparents are warned beforehand that the children will get *Very Dirty Everyday!* And they generally do...





**Adventures on the Arbutus:** As well as the place where we gather for daily face-painting and story-time, the log (actually an enormous fallen branch) is the every-day site of many exciting role-plays, games, and feats of derring-do. In this photo we see the children absorbed in acting out a dramatic story involving scary creatures. Free play is an important component of the camp experience. The children create stories as easily as they breathe, and, after a day or so becoming familiar with one another, the field and the forest, they embrace the possibilities of the new environment with great enthusiasm and creative inspiration.

**Every July we rebuild the fort in the cedar grove** using the fallen branches that the winter storms have left lying about under the old trees. Restoring the structure is a tree-weaving exercise that provides an excellent opportunity for the children to test their understanding of the building materials, their suitability and structural integrity, weight and balance, as they choose their branches and sticks and arrange them one against the other, weaving new elements into the existing construction in an exciting collaborative building process. The fort is a daily destination; a refuge, a den, a favoured place to hang out and play, eat snack, tell stories, and sing songs.

As with painting and story telling, music is an important daily component of camp. We learn the classic camp-songs during the daily circle, along with rhyming games, finger-plays, clapping songs, dances, lullabies, and traditional folksongs. We make up spontaneous songs and chants to accompany our activities, like the annual "March of the Sticks" when we carry our decorated driftwood poles in triumph from the art-works-yard up the hill through the cedar grove to add a brief splendour to this year's fort.



**Drumming in the fort**





**Another regular event during camp-week is our forest hike.** Some of the campers are very new to the experience of being in the woods. We gently practise 'becoming deer': finding our way along the winding deer trails, walking in the deer's path. It is often a challenge for these small children to traverse the tangles, negotiating under over-hanging branches and over fallen logs, or finding the path through the Great Sea of Salal with bushy branches high overhead closing out the light. With any luck, the salal berries will be ripe enough to eat along the way – always an incentive to keep going.

◀ **Listening in the forest:** Here we have paused to wait for others in the group to catch up. With packs on our backs for water and snacks, we stand very still while we wait, so as not to tread on the fragile moss all around us on the hillside. We look and listen carefully. What do we hear? What do we smell? What do we see?

Further along the trail we stop to admire the roots of one of the ancient Douglas fir heaving up the moss and stones, and to hear the legend of *The Mice, the Fir & the Great Fire*, another beloved *Seedlings* tradition. All week long we respectfully honour the First Nations' history and presence here through

stories, songs, and traditional local knowledge arising from our place-based explorations.

Later on during the hike we'll rest for a time in another clearing to enjoy a bite to eat, and add a stone to the memorial cairn which is growing yearly. We'll be back at basecamp in time for the daily frutisicles and closing story on the log under the Arbutus Queen, before it's going-home-time once again.

**Camp Song:** Every year *Seedlings* staff and children learn the *Seedlings* Camp Song together – and teach it to their families. It's sung to the tune of "I'm a Little Teapot", with dramatic actions!

### **The Seedlings Song**

**"I'm a little Seedling  
Plant me in a row,  
Feed me, water me, watch me grow.  
From little seed to seedling,  
Flower to fruit,  
I'm a happy little plant  
From root to shoot!"**

Respectfully submitted: Tina Farmilo, May 2020  
Photos © Patti Cameron, 2019

## 2019 Summer Earth Education Program

### Mayne and Saturna

After several supportive and insightful meetings with Jess Willows and Michael Dunn to orient me in my role as camp coordinator, I had opportunity to observe and participate in the running of the first SEEP (July 22-26) camp under the excellent guidance of Sky Losier. For the remaining 2019 camps on Mayne and Saturna Islands, I welcomed taking up the reigns as coordinator.

The camp activities and organization continued to be based on the finely tuned rhythm and pattern that had been established over the past 20 years. During a meeting on the Sunday prior to the start of camp, the senior and junior leaders provided valuable input as to the morning and afternoon learning activities, songs and games, as well as determined who would run the activities. Many traditional, well-loved activities were included, as well as new learning opportunities.

### Highlights:

#### July 22 – 26

Marine Theme at Georgina Point Lighthouse

- Seaweeds with Michael Dunn
- Water Conservation Challenge with Jill Westby
- Climate Change with Lina Losier
- Seine Net Pull with Michael Dunn
- Beach Exploration with Jill Westby
- Inshore Ocean Critters with Michael Dunn and Robert Anthony (diver)

#### July 29 – August 2

Forest Theme at Bennett Bay

- Bat Echolocation with Jill Westby

- Insect Investigation with Michael Dunn
- Island Geology with Michael Dunn

#### August 5-9

Marine Theme at Georgina Point Lighthouse

- Seaweeds/Beach Explore with Michael Dunn
- Inshore Ocean Critters with Michael Dunn and 2 divers
- Beach Scavenger Hunt with Kelly Nordin



Mayne Marine explorations

#### Saturna August 12 – 16

Winter Cove

- Water Conservation Challenge
- Beach and Forest Scavenger Hunt & Explore

For me, the highlight of the summer was experiencing the GICEL legacy of an interconnected, supportive, multi-generational community that is deeply infused with a strong sense of place - and celebrates all life on the Gulf Islands. I suspect it is this that brings campers back year after year. Thank you.





Mayne Forest gathering

### **Pender Island**

The camp included learning activities about: Sanitation (composting toilet), Shelter Building, Journal Making and Journaling, Navigation (leapfrog, with compass, with topography, Map Making, First aid (blisters, emergencies, bandaging, transporting, grid search), Food (predator and prey game, hunting and gathering, wild edibles), Initiative Games, making drinking water (boil, snow, dew, rain, transpiration bag, fog catching, evaporation tent, charcoal filter), Amazing Race, crafts, (painted rocks, Knot Making, Duct Tape First Aid Kit).

Our sites included Pender Island School, Medicine Beach, Mortimer Spit, Roesland, Shingle Bay and Magic Lake. We used the Community Bus to get to one of our sites.

We received \$800 from the Pender Lions

Club. These funds supported 10 campers with partial Camp Scholarships and remaining funds were used to assist with the cost of the daily healthy snack.

### **Participation**

In 2019 we were able to provide almost 5 weeks of nature-based themed programs. Mayne offered 2 weeks of marine themed programs and one week of forest themes. For Saturna it was a one-week program providing both forest and marine opportunities for the participants. Pender focused on outdoor survival skills and activities. Over this period we had 149 participants and were able to provide employment opportunities of 1 to 4 weeks for our leaders' team. This translates to employment for 29 teen and adults.



Mayne Leaders post program gathering

### **Thanks**

We wish to thank the continuing and enthusiastic support from the Barraclough Foundation, the Mayne and Saturna Islands Park and Recreation Commissions and the Pender Island Lions.

### **Postscript**

As of writing this report on last year's programs, the Board of the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning has made the decision to cancel our 2020 programs

in light of the COVID 19 pandemic and orders and restrictions posed by national, provincial, regional and local governments and health authorities. 2020 was to be our 20th year of operation (see article elsewhere in this newsletter), but not to worry we are planning to celebrate sometime in August 2021 on Mayne Island, so please watch our website in the new year for more information on this event.

*Kelly Nordin, Mayne and Saturna Coordinator  
Andrea Mills, Pender Coordinator*





# G.I.C.E.L.

## Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning

Throughout the world awareness is spreading that people must form a new relationship with the Earth—one that will allow civilization to prosper rather than flounder in global conditions hostile to life. The key to building this new relationship is ecological learning.

For twenty years GICEL has championed the new learning programs that must one day be taught to all children. We are honoured to have your support.

In celebration of our 20th anniversary, we are making GICEL Memberships free for the rest of 2020. By becoming a member, you'll be the first to know about any new programs we are offering.

To become a member, please visit <http://www.gicel.ca/about/become-a-member/>, or fill out the attached form and sent it to us via email or mail. If you have any questions, please contact us at [membership@gicel.ca](mailto:membership@gicel.ca).

### GICEL Membership Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Membership    Family Membership    Corporate Membership

Normally GICEL Memberships cost \$25 a year, if you are able we would be grateful if you consider donating in addition to signing up for a membership.

Please make your cheque payable to:  
Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning  
171 Georgina Point Road  
Mayne Island, BC  
V0N 2J1