



We are all here to support each other

As we approach the end of 2020, I'm sure many of us are reflecting on this unexpected year, a year that saw our usual routines and expectations completely up-ended by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eight months since the emergency hit Canada in mid-March, we are all now used to formerly-strange concepts like wearing masks in public, staying a couple of metres away from other people, and forgoing any events or gatherings. Obviously, the new reality has had a huge effect on every aspect of life, from our mental and physical health to our incomes. We know a lot of people are worried about money, about child care, and about taking care of the vulnerable elders in our communities.

Here at the Gwaii Trust, the pandemic and its effects have been consuming our attention since March. Working remotely and holding virtual meetings, our board of directors and staff moved immediately to create a COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund at the start of the crisis. As of October, this new fund had distributed almost \$800,000 to non-profit organizations and local governments on Haida Gwaii. We've been beyond impressed with the way applicants have put forward innovative ways to support each other and our communities, and at how these projects have brought people together in the spirit of collaboration. For example, the Haida Gwaii Recreation commission is organizing winter activities for isolated seniors and elders, Old Massett Village Council is organizing harvests of deer meat to be shared in the community, and the Local Food to School program has been taking care of school

greenhouses and providing food hampers to families. The Queen Charlotte and Skidegate fire departments are purchasing COVID-19 personal protective equipment for their volunteers. The Council of the Haida Nation is providing iPads to elders, while Old Massett and Masset both got garden projects going over the summer season.

As part of our COVID response, we also created a new Haida Gwaii Staycation grant, aimed at encouraging islanders to enjoy local accommodations and tours. Since late summer we've approved more than 100 applications, giving locals up to \$250 each to spend on tourism businesses like accommodation, gear rental and fishing charters. With the pandemic forcing us all to stay on-island and cancelling the 2020 tourist season, the Staycation grant allows us to explore adventures right here in our backyard, while at the same time bringing just over \$50,000, so far, to local tourism businesses.

Christmas is coming and it certainly looks like this holiday season will be an unusual one. Already, islanders are planning creative, COVID-safe ways of holding traditional events like craft sales and Christmas markets. As in past years, our Winter Holiday grant provides \$11,000 to each Gwaii Trust community. The deadline for local government to apply for this grant is December 1, and applications must be received at least one month before events or projects begin. Our website has full details.

From all of us at the Gwaii Trust, our warmest wishes for this holiday season and the new year ahead. We will get through this, together.