

We put a face to social justice issues.

We bring street issues to the table.

VOICES  
INFLUENCING  
CHANGE



**Our Story**

We are members of your community.

We effect positive change.

## Our beginnings

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Voices Influencing Change (Voices) is a community-based initiative that started in 2017 as a storytelling, advocacy and leadership training program for people with lived experience of homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. Today, it is an advocacy and support group that works to raise awareness and bring positive change in the community. The group builds and creates spaces where voices of people with lived experience are respected and amplified.

Voices came into being thanks to the vision and experience of Jack Bogaard. In 2017, he sat on a working group that built the Safe at Home Plan to End Homelessness with officials from Yukon Housing Corporation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, the City of Whitehorse and Yukon Government Health and Social Services.

He says that experience: “taught me so much about how hard it is for government people to hear the experiences of people with lived experience. I felt alone and at the same time a huge responsibility to everyone who has lived on the streets, or faced challenges in their everyday lives.”

“I believe people with lived experience or expertise should be treated like everyone else in the community. We belong.”



*Jack Bogaard*

Twenty-seven people have graduated from the Voices training program. The 10 session course is developed and facilitated by Maureen Johnstone of Raventree Coaching with the help and support of a co-facilitator with lived experience.



photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Fritz Andre** identifies himself as Gwichya Gwichin (People of the Flatlands) and has lived most of his life in the Yukon. He loves reading, writing and listening to talk radio. A compassionate, and skilled storyteller, Fritz sees the connection between strength and vulnerability. He believes that a measure of our courage is our willingness to be vulnerable. He brings integrity, passion and humility to all his work and is an advocate for the underdog. Fritz can often be heard to say that the more he learns the less he knows - a mantra that speaks to his ongoing search to understand himself, the world and the systems and experiences that people struggle with.



photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Jack Bogaard** is from the Skeetchestn Shuswap Nation and has been supporting people living on the streets for many, many years. Jack sat on the Safe at Home Steering committee in 2017 as a person with lived experience of homelessness and saw firsthand the importance of his voice, and the need for more people with lived expertise to be at decision making tables. He was the impetus for the Voices Influencing Change program. Jack is known for his ability to live with an open heart and an open mind which leads him to remind us all to “create a good day”. He gets strength from drumming, carving with mammoth ivory and cedar wood, biking and walking on the land.

## Becoming advocates

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Through the Voices training process, participants explore and deepen their understanding of their life story. They learn to voice what they believe in and what they stand for. The training supports participants to share their stories with the broader community from a safe place. They also learn how to help and encourage others and work to create a community of support with fellow participants.

Voices currently has 19 active graduates who are involved as grassroots advocates in their community. In meetings twice a month, they share their perspectives and take action centered around themes of advocacy, community building and empowerment.



*Voices 2018 graduates*

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The work of Voices is built on the importance of relationships first. Every member brings an open heart and an open mind to their work.

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*We put a face to social justice issues.*

## Voices in Action

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- We participate in local and national seminars, round tables, boards and committees, and webinars to share our lived expertise. We participate in events like the Yukon's Poverty and Homelessness Action Week every October to increase public awareness.
- We advocate for improved housing rights and access to medical and mental health services.
- We invite organizations such as the Yukon Medical Association to hear our experiences of medical care in the Yukon.
- We meet with government ministers to advocate on behalf of our community.
- We participate in government planning processes such as the Yukon's Comprehensive Health Review and the Yukon Hospital Corporation's Strategic Plan.
- We meet at national round tables to discuss policy inequality and effect positive change.
- We speak at local high schools, sharing our stories and increasing public awareness and education.



*Voices meeting with City Council candidates, 2018*



photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Theresa Blackjack** is Northern Tutchone – a member of the Crow clan from Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. Theresa is proud of the knowledge that was passed from her grandparents and parents (Irene Alfred from Pelly Crossing and Stanley Blackjack from Carmacks) to her. Theresa is a mother of six, and grandmother of 12 and her love for her family keeps her going.

Theresa has experienced a lot of loss in her life, including her daughter in 2013, and continues to learn how to use those experiences to live her life as a positive influence and elder. She is a mentor and leader who is always ready to help others. She is a skilled seamstress who has also made her living as a cleaner, a daycare worker and administrator. Theresa's goal is to teach sewing and language to adults and youth.

**Bill Bruton** is a Tutchone elder and sits on the Ta'an Kwäch'än Elders Council. Bill says his two spirited nature and history of lived experience allows him to see solutions where others see problems. Bill believes that people come first and that everyone has a story. He works from a core value of love and respect and is most proud of being clean and sober. He says that if we listen to the earth, we will continue to learn about ourselves and one another.



*Bill received the City of Whitehorse's Volunteer of the Year award in 2021 for his work with Voices Influencing Change and the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition.*



## Community Building

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- We support partner organizations in leadership training such as the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon (FASSY).
- We have a community gardening project.
- We organize community events such as BBQ fundraisers, forums and gatherings.
- We give back to our community, volunteering at events such as the Yukon River Trail Marathon.
- We help organize community events like Whitehorse Connects.
- We share our stories with members of the public to destigmatize poverty, homelessness, addiction and social exclusion and foster greater community awareness.
- We meet with prospective political candidates and elected officials to share the reality of our experience and advocate for change on behalf of our community.



*Voices meeting and sharing stories during COVID 19*

# Empowerment

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- We give individuals a chance to bring street issues to the table.
- We empower participants to share their intimate truths in a safe and supported space.
- We put a voice to issues.
- We speak to the media about the reality of our own lives and of those around us.
- We act as the eyes and ears of our streets.
- We are committed to ongoing personal growth and skills building through training opportunities such as suicide prevention, naloxone use, mental wellness workshops and leadership and resiliency training.



*Book Club on CBC during Poverty and Homelessness Action Week*

**Jason Charlie** was born and raised in Whitehorse, Yukon. His indigenous ancestry is from Last Tetlin, Alaska. Jason speaks often of modeling his life after his ancestors, living the simple life and being a strong advocate for indigenous identity, culture and educating our youth. He never graduated from high school which hindered his chance of receiving the Yukon grant when he applied for post secondary studies. He fought this discrimination and the policy was removed. Jason graduated from Thompson Rivers University in 2019 with his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. A believer in always setting an example, Jason uses his lived experience to use his voice for others who feel they have none.



photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

## Some of what we've done

As part of YAPC, Voices members have worked on a variety of issues and projects ranging from being invited to provide input to the Yukon Hospital Corporation's Strategic Plan and the Putting People First review of Health & Social Services, helping to organize Poverty and Homelessness Action Week (PHAW), learning and growing food through the Backyard Garden Project, and volunteering at Whitehorse Connects and other community events.

Members of Voices Influencing Change have also provided presentations to Social Justice Clubs and high school classes upon request, on issues related to racism, poverty, homelessness, mental health, inclusion and reconciliation.



*Tending to our garden*



**Eugene Johnston** is a member of the Teslin Tlingit Council and grew up in Whitehorse. He often speaks of how different the community is now, and that he misses knowing people he would see on the street.

Eugene is a conscientious and hard worker who prides himself on doing a good job. He finds strength in creating art including carving, painting and drawing. Eugene is a natural born artist who knows when to act and speak out. He brings an optimism and playful spirit to his advocacy which includes sharing stories of his life experiences - negative and positive.



photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Omi Levins** (nee Ulrike Wohlfarth) is embracing this familiar name for Grandma in German, as she claims her new role of owning and sharing her wisdom. Wisdom she has gained by facing numerous personal, financial and family challenges in the last decade, including lived experience with homelessness.

Born in Germany, she immigrated with her parents to Whitehorse, Yukon when she was very young and has been a proud Canadian citizen since 1968. Omi is an avid lifelong learner, a possibility thinker, a woman of action and a creative, as well as a serial entrepreneur. She is passionate about advocating for change, encouraging and helping others where she can, and being a champion for causes for those who do not have the means nor the voice. She is committed to finding and advocating for solutions, one step at a time.

## Voices advocates for issues such as:

- Improved access to counseling services
- Increased supports for drug and alcohol programs
- Improved aftercare for people involved in alcohol and drug treatment programs
- An elders council (like Women of Wisdom)
- Elder outreach workers
- Paid living and lived expertise support workers 24/7
- Improvements to housing for First Nations people
- Increased tolerance and respect in the healthcare system
- The need for a men's center with services.
- Improved and free bus services
- Basic Annual Income



*Voices making posters in preparation for a rally*



*Fritz and new graduates*



*Voices participates in classes at schools like FH Collins and St. Francis of Assisi to help students learn about community issues.*





**Dianne Nolan** is a mother of four and a grandmother of three. Dianne is grateful for her community and all the people and support she receives from the Yukon land which brings her so much happiness. Dianne is an avid gardener and harvester who gets strength from the soil; seeing things grow and sharing what she has grown and harvested.

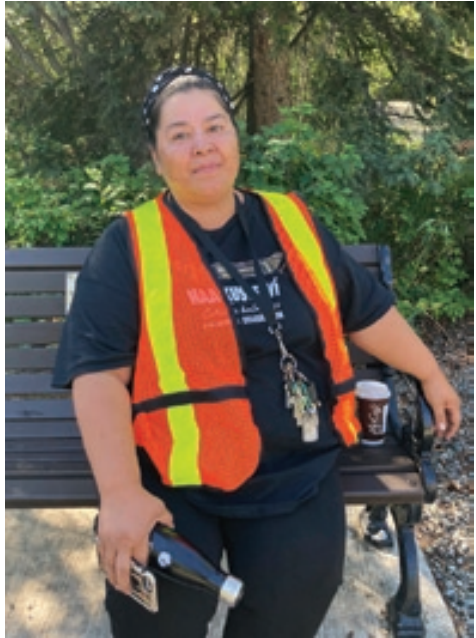
Dianne believes that every human being is worthy of respect and she demonstrates that belief by providing care, love and help to her family, friends and community however she can without judgement. Dianne often speaks of the support she received when she was homeless and how important it is that a men's shelter and services be available in Whitehorse for people who need it. Diane believes strongly that people struggling as a result of the opioid crisis need increased and urgent support.



**Kerry Nolan's** personal and professional expertise have prepared her to recognize and take action on disconnects and inequalities that exist within her community and beyond. She promotes equity and equality and is committed to supporting individuals, families, and communities to tell their own stories and to ensure that their voices are heard.

In her former role as Voices Influencing Change Coordinator and Co-facilitator, Kerry carried her personal reflections on her own history and her spirit of resilience to every table. She is a vibrant and bold advocate who is able to understand and support people who are often unseen and unheard.

*Voices volunteer to assist at fundraisers and community events like the Yukon River Trail Marathon, the Yukon Transportation Museum BBQ, and 100 Women Who Care.*



Members of Voices are keen to take part in consultations so that organizations and governments can better understand the people they are working for. Voices have provided insights and feedback during the following consultations:

- “Putting People First”
- the strategic plan of the Yukon Hospital Corporation
- Yukon Government’s Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy
- community housing consultations by the Yukon Housing Corporation
- Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada regarding how to improve client services and income support programs
- Campaign 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030

*We bring street issues to the table.*

Voices also make presentations, participate in panel discussions and write letters and articles to raise issues that are important to our friends, neighbours, families and people who don't have a voice. Additionally, we engage in various forms of advocacy and awareness-raising. Efforts have ranged from submitting a letter and forming a delegation to the City of Whitehorse to address racism, to participating in discussions about Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services. We've also been actively involved in discussion panels at recent Lived Experience Housing Forums, and dialogues concerning the implementation of a Basic Annual Income in the Yukon.



*Voices making good things grow*

*“The story of your life is not  
your life; it’s your story.”*

*John Barth*



**Melissa O'Brien** is a citizen of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation with both Northern and Southern Tutchone ancestors. Melissa is from the wolf clan and her native name is “mäddhia” meaning baby owl. She and her twin brother were born in Carmacks and grew up in Whitehorse. They share a passion and love for their family and their dogs.

Melissa is proud to work in the Finance Department at the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and takes her work seriously. She is organized, determined, and has a sense of humour that has helped her through some hard times. As have her fur babies!

Melissa possesses a warm and generous spirit and brings her enthusiasm and desire to learn and heal to every table. She believes that everyone is equal and is a proud member of Voices Influencing Change where she has found new friends and shares her positive outlook and love. She believes that together, big change can be made in helping others to live better lives.



photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Elizabeth Sam** grew up in Whitehorse, YT and comes from the land of the Northern Tutchone, the youngest of 9 kids. Elizabeth enjoys keeping busy and working. She loves riding her bike around town, and no distance is too far for her to bike. Elizabeth loves to travel outside of Yukon to big cities and to meet different people.

She speaks her mind, and strongly says what is ok and not ok. She sees herself as a fighter, first and foremost for herself. Elizabeth is passionate about helping those who are living without a home, and to get the support they need. One of Elizabeth's favourite sayings is 'awesome'. Eagles inspire and guide her on a daily basis.



*Voices strategic planning*

We help bring attention and education on issues of homelessness and poverty by participating in events like the CBC book club, press conferences and being interviewed by local and national media outlets.



*Voices at Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2022*

*We are members of the community.*



*Voices doing outreach at Whitehorse Connects*

We learn from one another and take action. We have met with and heard from candidates for municipal and FN's elections and raised issues with MP Hanley, the Yukon Medical Association, Yukon Government Health and Social Services and Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

Outside the Yukon, members of Voices have participated in 4 Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conferences. The Tamarack Institute and Canada Without Poverty have used input and feedback from Voices on how to ensure that people with lived experience are heard, respected and compensated for their time.

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*"I wouldn't be where I  
am today if it wasn't for  
where I was yesterday"*

Kerry Nolan

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**Charlene Silverfox** is a member of Little Salmon First Nation, in Carmacks Yukon. She is an auntie, a cousin, a mother and an identical twin.

Quiet in her approach, she brings positivity and sunshine and a 'how can I help?' way about her. Charlene is not afraid to use her voice to share what she has to say, clearly and directly. She has a passion for gardening with fellow Voices members and her smile is infectious!

## **Our vision for the future**

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- We work closely with Yukon First Nations leadership.
- We have stable funding and a full time staff member.
- We have a dedicated building for the Voices program which we open for shared community use.
- We have access to a vehicle and can provide transportation services to help people attend meetings, appointments and funerals.
- We develop public education material regarding the public Justice system.
- We evolve into an organization with an established well-known and well-respected presence in the community.
- We have a presence across rural Yukon in the form of satellite groups.
- We continue to seek out community volunteer opportunities.
- We continue to work with local youth organizations and have a presence in high school Social Justice Clubs.





photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Darlene Skookum** is a proud Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in lady who can find the humour in almost all situations. She raised her three children on her own, and is proud of each of them and her 4 grandchildren. Darlene is acutely aware of the importance of education and supporting youth. As a person recovering from an addiction, she knows how hard it is to ask for help, and how important it is to have someone on your side. Darlene believes that everyone deserves good health care, adequate income assistance to get out of poverty and a place to live. She is not afraid to speak the truth, and is a strong and loyal advocate for people who don't have a voice.

## Our vision for the future

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- We take an active role in municipal, territorial, First Nation and federal elections. We put forward and support candidates with lived experience, host debates and meet with candidates to discuss our issues.
- We act as community organizers, holding rallies and protests to bring attention to our issues.
- We have an active public presence through social media, a webpage, a newsletter, published articles, videos and a Voices information booklet.
- We have Voices guidebooks to share with organizations that include our history, mandate, bios, what we do, what we have done.
- We are an organization that meets with decision-makers and officials to share the perspective of those with lived experience.
- We develop a guidebook for organizations and governments on how to engage with people with lived and living experience.
- We provide training for decision-makers.



*Voices doing interviews with CBC*



*Sharon and her daughter*

photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Sharon Stewart** was born and raised in Aklavik, Northwest Territories in the Beaufort Delta Region. She is deeply connected to her mother's roots and immediate family. She demonstrates gratitude every day and an appreciation for her own journey and that of her community.

Sharon works hard to always put her best foot forward and is encouraged by hearing and learning from others. Sharon has an ability to tell it like it is, and to name injustices with a good sense of humour.

A funny, wise advocate, Sharon brings determination and hope to her community and family.

## **Our vision for the future**

- We have members participating in critical decision making boards and communities such as the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Yukon Housing Corporation.
- We organize and host a living and lived experience conference.
- We offer low barrier programming like traditional crafts and holistic workshops.
- We create a time capsule.
- We increase youth involvement in the program.
- We have funds available to help graduates in emergency situations or for further education.



*Voices at Whitehorse Connects*



**Larry Smarch** is a member of the Teslin Tlingit Council who was given the name Wolfhead by his grandfather. A survivor of Indian Residential School (IRS), Larry says he is most proud of his people who taught him how to live off the land when he returned from IRS. He is driven by the belief that all people are equal, and that indigenous people should have equal say in what happens on the land, in education, in health care - in all aspects of society. Larry believes that people need to know about their rights. With his daughter always in mind, Larry says that we can't change the past but we can build a better future for our children who are attending school now.

**Wanda Stefansson** is a proud Inuvualuit whose great, great grandfather was a famous Arctic Explorer and Ethnologist in the early 1900's. Wanda's connection to the land, culture and traditions are at her core.

Born in Inuvik, NWT, Wanda comes from a close knit family of 5 siblings and is known for her positive energy and happy go lucky, infectious laugh. Wanda is committed to learning and wanting to grow and will try anything. She has a can-do attitude and works hard on everything she does. She is energized by helping others.

Wanda has a faith and hope in people who may be going through tough times. She is known for finding the best in people.



*Proud graduates from 2019*



## We want to work with you

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- Work with partners to educate those in positions of leadership on racism, oppression and privilege.
- Collaborate to create public awareness videos of people with lived experience
- Collaborate on a way to support people to get to appointments
- Provide more low barrier programs
- Support day programming for alcohol and drug programs
- Provide more training for Voices members in Crisis Intervention training
- Create a Speakers Bureau
- Offer more resilience training led by people with lived experience
- Collaborate to provide peer support counseling



*Voices celebrating more graduates!*



photo: [www.gbpcreative.ca](http://www.gbpcreative.ca)

**Martha Vaneltsi** is Gwich'in from Tetlit Zeh, NWT. She was raised by her grandmother and uncle. As a child she was surrounded by elders who shared themselves and their rich culture which has made her who she is today.

Martha is a proud mother of 4 children and grandmother to Leonardo who she has raised from his infancy. She is driven to learn about herself, and believes that it's important to keep things simple.

Martha believes that having goals and continuing to grow and move forward is the only way to face the challenges and loss that some people face. She has persevered through her own challenges and loss throughout her life to learn, share, support, and demonstrate to others the importance of determination and to keep going. Martha brings a depth of wisdom, quiet power and strength to the Voices table. She wishes for everyone that they live into their potential, every day.

## Out in the community

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Mabel Logan, Jacqueline Vigneaux, Sandrine Jallet, Jason Kaiser, Nicole Lamb, Corina McMahon and Lester John completed Voices Influencing Change training and are currently using their storytelling and advocacy skills in their communities - new and old, near and far!



**Annette Peters** is Southern Tutchone from the small Northern community of Beaver Creek, Yukon. She was born in Whitehorse, Yukon in 1971. She was part of the 60's scoop and returned back to the Yukon at 15 years old when she found herself homeless months later. She has since moved back to her home community of Beaver Creek. She says: "I feel that Voices Influencing Change has helped me to create the strength within myself to continue to help people who are struggling to find their voices and to support them to move forward, as I have learned to do."



**Brady Murphy** started his career in the food industry at the age of 14. Now in his 30's, he is rethinking his future and finding his footing after the pandemic and its impacts on him, his family and his mental health. Brady's perseverance, determination and desire to remain positive along with his love and care for his family is providing a foundation for his future. Although not currently active with Voices, Brady is happy to lend his voice to any discussion around the importance of housing.



*Voices harvesting happiness*



*Voices completing training*

# Thank you to our leaders and supporters!

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*Maureen Johnstone, Raventree Coaching and  
Kristina Craig, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition*



*Cyprian Bus, Co-ordinator*



*George Green,  
Gardening Mentor*

## Remembering...

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Since 2017, we are saddened with the passings of two members of the Voices family.

Sharon Rose Smith passed away in 2018. She was instrumental in the work of the Yukon Status of Women as they heard stories and learned from women with lived experience of homelessness, substance use and other challenges. A graduate of the first group of Voices Influencing Change in 2017, Sharon Rose was not afraid to tell her story and we are grateful for her bravery, courage and time with us.

Chris Vaneltsi passed away in the fall of 2022 at the age of 42. We remember him for his sense of humour, deep love for his family and his ongoing efforts to learn about himself, the land, his people and his spirituality. He had a gift to see and accept each person for themselves, and used his own experiences to support others who were struggling – both in Whitehorse and the downtown Eastside in Vancouver.





# We want to work with you!

Call (867) 335-8646 or  
email [projects@yapc.ca](mailto:projects@yapc.ca)

“Thanks to all our friends,  
neighbours, families and  
organizations for supporting us.”

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**Yukon Anti-Poverty  
COALITION**  
anti-pauvreté du Yukon