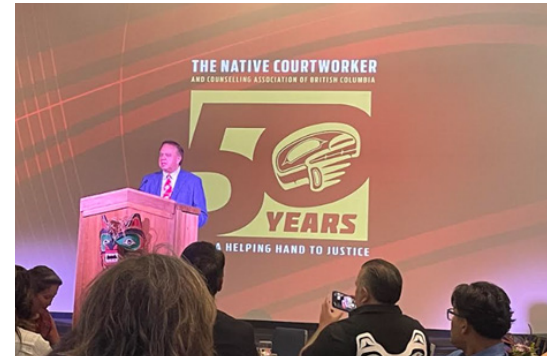


Native Courtworkers Celebrate 50 Years

By Christina J. Cook

2023 marks the 50th Year of the Native Courtworkers and Counselling Association of BC. It's an amazing legacy of 50 years of working to help Indigenous people navigate the legal system. The logo of the NCCABC includes a hand and their moto is to provide "A Helping Hand to Justice." Their work is vital to the operation of our legal system and vital for our Indigenous communities.

Hugh Braker, K.C., President of the Board of Directors for the NCCABC spoke to a packed gala on September 8, 2023, to celebrate this 50-year achievement. Braker shared remarks and well wishes sent to the NCCABC from the Premier and he spoke about the importance that Native Courtworkers play to the lives of Indigenous people across BC. Braker also shared a story about how a year ago, when the Province was considering reducing the funding for Native Courtworkers, it was the BC Provincial Court Judges that wrote to the Province to implore them to reconsider, saying many court rooms could not function without the efforts and assistance of Native Courtworkers. Thankfully, the Province continued to fund this important program and the NCCABC has continued.



NCCABC President, Hugh Braker, K.C.

The NCCABC has fascinating history. It was in 1970 that the seeds of the NCCABC were planted with the meeting of representatives from the Vancouver Indian Friendship Centre, Indian Homemaker's Association, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, BC Association of Non-Status Indians, North American Indian Brotherhood, and the John Howard Society. It was these organizations that saw the need for Indigenous community members to have Indigenous assistance in the court room and all throughout the legal process. From the meeting lead to the creation of the Native Courtworker program, on July 26, 1973 the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of British Columbia was officially incorporated.

The NCCABC program grew and evolved to meet the needs of the Indigenous community. In 1973 the NCCABC started the Vancouver Alcohol and Drug Program and in 1977 they started the Prison Liaison Worker Program to assist Indigenous inmates in the transition to community. In 1990, the NCCABC hosted a Provincial Native Child Welfare Symposium in Vancouver. The objective was for First Nations to take control of our children's welfare. In 1995, NCCABC and the Justice Institute of BC created the Aboriginal Sex Offender Retrainer Program. In 1999, the NCCABC developed the first "A Safer Place" booklet on Violence Against Women. In 2001, the NCCABC undertook the Native Courtworker Youth Court Program at the Robson Street Courthouse. In 2004, the NCCABC established a new Aboriginal Detox Support Program in Vancouver to assist clients in carrying out their aftercare recovery plans. In 2013, the NCCABC developed the Social Justice Policy Platform and Strategic plan which included a commitment to create a BC Aboriginal Justice Council. In 2018, the NCCABC worked on the Indigenous Incarcerated Parents to Reintegration Initiative, which provided a culturally appropriate and effective avenue to support Indigenous parents who were incarcerated in Federal correctional institutions in British Columbia as they prepared for reintegration. From 2020 to the present, the NCCABC has navigated COVID related challenges with court services, worked on the issue of human trafficking and ending violence against women initiatives.



Lt to Rt: Terry La Liberte, KC – NCCABC Director, Kory Wilson – BCFNJC Chair, Maxwell Johnson – Recipient of the NCCABC Justice Award, Mary Brown – NCCABC Director, the Honourable Melanie Mark, Darryl Shackelly – NCCABC Executive Director

These are just some of the highlights of the 50 years of the amazing work of the NCCABC.

As the NCCABC continues into its next 50 years of work, the Indigenous and the legal communities owe the NCCABC and the Native Courtworkers a debt of gratitude for their efforts; and our justice system, though far from ideal is better for the efforts of the NCCABC.