



FIRST NATIONS HOME ENERGYSAVE

# Community Success Story

## Building a Local Economy at Nuxalk Nation

### Community Context

The Nuxalk Nation's homeland and territory is located in and around Bella Coola, which is in the Great Bear Rainforest on the central coast of BC. "Nuxalk" means to come together, one heart and one mind, to form one. The villages of Kimsquit, South Benedict, Quatna, Q'umk'uts, and Snxlhh form the Nuxalk Nation. Currently, there are 7 Nuxalk reserves that cover 2,025 hectares, but their ancestral territory extends across 1,800,000 hectares.

The Nuxalk's worldview emphasizes that they are the caretakers of their land and they hold close ties to the natural environment, land and water. These values are reinforced through songs, dances, names and titles. The Nuxalk's environmental ethic can also be seen in the Nation's work in energy efficiency and exploring clean energy.

The total Nuxalk population is approximately 1800 people and 900 residents are living on reserve. The Nation has been working on a housing strategy to develop culturally appropriate, high-quality housing for their community members, and in the process have trained a local construction work force.

### Project Description

The Nuxalk Nation's New Housing Strategy is underpinned by 5 key principles. The first is to **utilize local assets and resources** to develop self sufficiency, economic stability and an opportunity for a career in trades for local members. For new homes, Nuxalk is using wood from their traditional lands for siding and trim, the wood is dried in their local kiln, and they are employing workers from the community. There are plans to develop a local concrete plant, trades school, cabinetry manufacturer, and door builder. The Nation recognizes that they need to **build capacity within their band membership**, as there is a need for more carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and trade workers overall. The Nation has moved away from the model of sending members away for training and are instead bringing instructors to the community. They have partnered with Camosun College to train a construction



### Project Lead

**Richard Hall**  
Asset Manager,  
Nuxalk Nation

### Collaborators

Nuxalk Nation  
Camosun College  
Great Bear Initiative



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## Milestones

### 2013

The Nuxalk completed their Community Energy Plan.

### 2014

Richard Hall started as the Nuxalk asset manager.

### 2015

The Nuxalk partnered with Camosun College.

### 2015

The building specifications for a coastal climate were completed.

### 2016

Multiple home designs were finished.

### 2016

The first homes were built.

### 2017

The Nuxalk began the design and construction of tiny homes.



workforce and are educating 34 students a year through classroom and hands-on training. Some students move on to electrical work, some become cabinetmakers, and some venture into administrative positions. From this process, the Nuxalk Nation has formed its own construction company that consists of an asset management team, building inspector, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and apprentices. The Nuxalk Nation is also emphasizing youth education, as they are teaching a financing and home maintenance curriculum at the band school.

Nuxalk recognizes that **housing should meet social, economic and cultural needs**. Their new homes have an open concept design to allow for large gathering spaces, which is important for First Nations families. They have also used wood sidings and natural finishes to meet traditional aesthetics. Another important factor for housing is **climate conscious construction**. In order to address their wet, coastal climate, the Nuxalk came up with their own building specifications. They have developed home standards that minimize waste and saves costs for doors, windows and room dimensions. All of the homes are also barrier-free for people with disabilities.

Lastly, Nuxalk's housing strategy is about **educating and empowering tenants and homeowners**. The housing team has created finance, maintenance and repair guides for community members and worked on strengthening relationships between the housing crew and tenants. The Nation is also working with Great Bear Initiative to create home maintenance videos for families and First Nations schools.

By working upon these 5 key principles, the Nuxalk's New Housing Strategy became a successful driver of local capacity building and economic development. The Nuxalk Nation plans to focus on enabling community members as they move forward.

## Lessons Learned

- Take stock of what assets your community already has at its disposal. Think about your strongest needs and how you can meet them yourself.
- Source materials from your local territory and processed by local workers when possible.
- When it is necessary to import materials, stock supplies for future projects to save on shipping.
- Empower residents to feel more accountability for their living spaces.
- Start educating band members about taking care of their homes at an early age. Teach children in school how to take care of their homes.
- Make homes accessible from the start by building on flat lots, at a single level and barrier free.
- Educate community members about their role and responsibilities to their home, the band office's role, and the role of CMHC and INAC.

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