

Éy St'élmexw St'elt'ílém - Good Medicine Songs (GMS) Biography as of July 2025

Éy St'élmexw St'elt'ílém - Good Medicine Songs (GMS) is a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who collaborate to create and share bilingual songs in the traditional language of the upriver Stó:lō First Nation, Halq'eméylem, and English. This unique, cross-cultural performing group promotes revitalization of Halq'eméylem, and inspires reconciliation, belonging and unity. The co-founders and core members include: Dr. Siyamiyateliyot Elizabeth Phillips, the last remaining fluent speaker of Halq'eméylem; Dr. T'it'elem Spath Eddie Gardner; Dr. Lolehawk Laura Buker; Xotxwes Jonny Williams, Holly Arntzen and Kevin Wright. We honour the late Dr. Stelomethet Ethel Gardner, who helped to give birth to GMS in 2019. Joining Holly, Jonny and Kevin as a core performing member is Speplól Tanya Zilinski.

In its first project, GMS was successful in getting a grant from the BC First Peoples' Cultural Council, in partnership with Skwah First Nation. The inaugural songwriting retreat resulted in four beautiful bilingual songs, each one expressing ancient Sto:lo stories and teachings. The songs and Audio Glossaries were recorded, a Teachers' Handbook and Student Guide was produced. Live concert videos featured 270 K-5 children from McCammon Elementary performing with GMS and members of The Wilds band.

In 2022 and 2023 GMS partnered with the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) to produce gatherings to celebrate National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. "Chowiyes-Xwithet/Rise Up-Wake Up!" is a song written by GMS to honour children lost to residential schools, survivors and their families. The events of the same name took place at the UFVs Gathering Place. The GMS project has a life of its own. It keeps growing. 2022 saw a main stage appearance at the Mission Folk Festival. Two years running GMS was featured at the Chilliwack Canada Day celebrations in Townsend Park. GMS performed at St Andrew's Wesley Cathedral for Orange Shirt Day.

In 2023 GMS partnered with SD33 (Chilliwack), Tire Stewardship BC (TSBC) and Interchange Recycling to produce Xwelelam te Sto:telo / Listen to the Stream project. They collaborated with teachers and students at Imagine High Integrated Arts & Technology Secondary in Chilliwack. Students in the Stream Restoration Program shared their thoughts to help form the lyrics. Students in the Rock Band program helped develop the music. No one was sure how 15-year-olds would respond to being asked to sing in Halq'eméylem. They embraced it whole heartedly.

This led to a series of other performances, including at the BC School Superintendents Association conference at the Westin Bayshore for 800 delegates who sprang to their feet in a standing ovation.

“What a performance! I had so many people from the conference making positive comments about the student performance. For many, it was a highlight of the conference for them – and it forever sets a high bar for future exhibitions. It sets that high bar because — on so many important levels – what the partnership accomplished is such rare air. Combining all the aspects of learning, curriculum, the arts, Indigenization, community leadership, language revitalization, authenticity, and voices for change...wow! Thanks again for your team’s work on this with us – it was transformative, not just for the students, but for all the adults as well. It showed everyone the potential that exists in our learning communities.” --- Kirk Savage, Assistant Superintendent, Chilliwack School District (Host district for the BC School Superintendent’s Association Conference 2023)

In 2023 GMS was nominated for a Fraser Valley Cultural Diversity Award.

In 2024 GMS collaborated with the music teachers at three Chilliwack secondary schools, Sardis, GW Graham and Chilliwack Senior Secondary, in the Step in the Right Direction project. Again, SD 33, TSBC and Interchange Recycling stepped up. The band and choir directors created choral and R & B band arrangements. 57 students arrived at the spectacular Shxwa:y Cultural Centre to perform in the song video. The world premiere was given at the 32nd Annual Donors’ Dinner for SD33. And was featured at the SD33 Indigenous Awards on May 22, 2025, at the Chilliwack Landing Sports Complex.

On July 5, 2025, GMS opened the first annual Controlled Chaos Music Festival at the Chilliwack Coliseum.

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