

ATTACHMENT A

take a hike FOUNDATION®

June 10, 2020

Dear Councillors,

RE: 2020 Community Vitality Grant – Nanaimo Take a Hike Program – Redirection of Funds

We deeply appreciate the City of Nanaimo's support for the Take a Hike Program through a \$10,000 Community Vitality Grant for 2020. **In light of the COVID-19 crisis, we would like to propose redirecting the grant from our original request towards mental health supports.**

We have seen first-hand how the COVID-19 crisis is compounding many of the challenges that the youth we serve already face – anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, addictions, and trauma. A number of their families have lost income and are experiencing food insecurity (many for the first time), heightened anxiety and hopelessness. They are not alone: our school district partners have identified an increased need for mental health supports among vulnerable youth not enrolled in Take a Hike.

Without adequate support, many youth risk regressing to destructive coping behaviours like further isolation or withdrawal, using substances, or self-harm. With redirected funding, we would be able to hire a clinical counsellor earlier than the September start date originally planned, and provide intensive supports through the start of the school year. Helping vulnerable youth to improve their mental health and resilience now will not only support their wellness through the immediate crisis; it will help them to re-engage with school and achieve social and academic success.

In parallel with increased mental health needs, the COVID-19 crisis is affecting the adventure-based learning and community involvement activities outlined in our original application. We originally requested funding towards a 24-passenger bus to transport youth to these activities, but we are now preparing for physical distancing and in-person capacity restrictions to continue through the fall. This will change the delivery of program activities and reduce the need for a 24-passenger bus.

We are also anticipating fewer donations in 2020/21 as a result of the economic consequences of COVID-19. In our original grant application, we anticipated raising matched funding from additional sources to purchase a vehicle. Based on updated information, it is unlikely that we will receive sufficient matched grants and donations this year. For these reasons, we are planning to postpone the vehicle purchase.

In line with the City of Nanaimo's strategic funding priorities for the Social Planning Grants program, our proposed redirection of funding will continue to support community wellness, diversity and social inclusion priorities. Take a Hike provides Nanaimo-Ladysmith youth with access to a full-time clinical counsellor embedded in the classroom providing prevention and early intervention mental health supports. These supports go beyond what school districts are able to provide, and beyond the occasional check-ins or short-term specialized supports that

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are often available to youth elsewhere. Our partners at Nanaimo-Ladysmith Public Schools have identified a need for Take a Hike that is not being met through other community wellness resources.

In addition to mental health challenges, the youth we serve often experience other barriers to wellness and social inclusion. In Nanaimo, 100% of the youth we serve come from families in financial need. Across all Take a Hike locations, including Nanaimo, 85% of families who are already in financial need have lost jobs as a result of COVID-19. All current Nanaimo participants have had involvement with police and around 35% have experience of the foster care system. In addition, 35% of current participants identify as Indigenous.

Take a Hike gives the same group of youth and staff, including a full-time registered clinical counsellor, the opportunity to spend substantial shared time together. This creates a unique learning environment grounded in core values that reinforce connectedness and social inclusion, including safe and caring relationships, and a safe, predictable environment that includes cultural safety and respect for diversity. Through this, vulnerable youth build healthy attachments with their peers and adults, and come to feel a sense of trust and belonging as part of a community. Alumni successes show that this sense of connectedness, together with the skills and resilience youth learn at Take a Hike, supports participants' long-term social inclusion.

Together, we can have a lasting impact on vulnerable youth and their families' wellness and inclusion in the community. We can create a more equitable community in which all youth are able to succeed, and in which COVID-19 does not disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Gordon Matchett, MBA, HBOR
Chief Executive Officer