



**Reflections  
from ʔs̱anabidu  
Danielle Dawson**



**Your best memory:** my best memory is our first day of class, I joined a little late and was super nervous about the program but when I joined I heard uncle bobby jo's voice he was saying very encouraging words. In that moment all my nerves went away and I felt good about the program.

**What did you learn?** I learned how to listen to old recordings, transcribe and translate then learn how to say the speeches said by our old people.

**How did you learn it?** Repeatedly listen to and say it out loud, re-write and transcribe, list words I already knew and words I didn't. Listened to the different sounds and try to imitate with tones and whatnot.

**What did you do (language project, assignment, lesson)?** My fave projects I did was the Daisy Robertson speech, family tree, teaching the books yola assigned and the lagu story!

**Language Lessons / Grad Highlights**

Everyone in the program works diligently to learn and remember our language. We work equally as hard to become comfortable sharing our language with others. Countless projects, presentations and teaching opportunities are built into the program, and students are also encouraged to share what they are learning within their communities. Here are just a few:



Pudliidi ḵana'ł gathered words and learned instructions to lead us through a yusagila exercise. We learned ingredients and equipment needed to yusagila. She asked us engaging questions throughout and taught us appropriate responses. This was done entirely in bakw̱amkala.

“ḵaḵax̱ws̱a'ma x̱a kwu'si, ʔus'i x̱a m̱aḵw̱aʔsi, aʔtsuda's x̱a kuṯala, aʔx̱ste', aʔtsuda's laʔa x̱w̱aʔḵwa, gan'wa sa ʔti'na. 'Walas ix̱pa, olakala yam, yam, yam!'”

- peel the potatoes, cut the onions, put in the fish, lastly, put into bowl, add some ʔti'na. Really good!



Kamiṉwadzi used ʔnis Ruby Dawson-Cranmer's story about being taken to the 'yaks̱am gukw̱dzi (St. Michael's Residential School) as a guide to educate us on Ruby's lived experience and learn our language through storywork.

“ki's̱an weṯ mamaʔakala', ḵotṯa'mida w̱aḵwa ḏtu' ḏtu'ligas ḵa's̱ mamaʔakale'.”

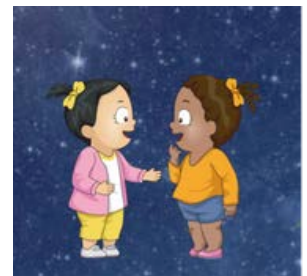
- I didn't know how to speak English; my sister and niece knew how to make white-person-noise.



Dẕamdzasila'ogwa also learned from ʔnis Ruby's story titled: lagu. She enthusiastically led us through a visual representation of the story's events and kept us engaged by asking comprehensive questions. We learned about village life and lots of language including this fun phrase: haga' ḵwidax̱!

“w̱aʔti ḏtu'ligas gax̱an ḵanu'x̱w le' aʔ'i x̱a lagu laʔ gukwes Aniʔsa. ki's̱ getes gaxe' Aniʔsa. "haga' ḵwidax̱!" 'nik gax̱anu'x̱w”

- My niece asked me to go with her to get some strawberries from Aniʔsa's house. It wasn't long before Aniʔsa came. "Go away!" She told us.



Ṭṣanabidu is knowledgeable about paddling our territories. Her desire was to gather and teach language around sixwatłá'yala (travelling, paddling on the water). She shared lots of pictures of her previous canoe journeys and pictures of our beautiful territory. We learned place names, tips for safe water travel and how to communicate effectively in our language.

“wigaxan’s sixwatłá’yala! yudaxwḅanxwatłan’s lax Lixis. Laṭatłan’s yudaxwḅanxwatłan’s lax Xoḵopa. Al’xste’tłan’s lał lax Gwa’yasdám’s”

*- Let's go paddling! We'll be at Lixis for three days. Then we'll be at Xoḵopa for three days. Lastly, we'll go to Gilford.*



## Alumas CILP

For the second cohort of our certificate program, we received an overwhelming response from ninety-one Kwakwaka'wakw inquiring to be a part of our next journey. This response speaks volumes about the desire to learn our language and the need to offer various types of language learning opportunities for our people. In September, we welcomed fourteen new students who have dedicated the next year to learning our language and supporting each other. We are excited to do it all again!



Ḡilakas'la, 'nugwa'am Pudłidi. He'man dliḡami, Rebecca MacKenzie. Gayutłan laxa 'Nanḡis dlu' Kwagu't dlu' Haxwa'mis. He'man ump wale' Benny Isaac. He'man abampi Liz MacKenzie. He'man ḡagasi Laura Cook. Kákuṭłan kwákwala!



## Reflections from Pudłidi, Rebecca MacKenzie

We are just over 2 months into our kwákwala certificate program and I am grateful and excited for what I have learned so far, and what is yet to come. It has been a challenging start for me as I began the program only knowing a few words of kwákwala here and there. I am definitely starting to understand more, and can't wait to see where I am in August. I finished my Master of Education degree earlier this year, and I have to say learning kwákwala has been much more challenging! I teach my college students about the histories and impacts of colonization on our people, and this is one of those impacts, trying to revitalize our languages that were illegal for so many years. We have a great group of classmates and instructors and I look forward to continuing to learn with and from them over the next 10 months.

## Reflections cont.

**Who did you connect with?** I connected with our ni'noxsola, very grateful for aunty Margaret, Uncle Bobby Jo, Uncle Dick, Aunty Maggie Sedgemore and Oma Glo.

**What are you proud of, yourself and/or others?** I'm proud that I completed the program, proud that I choose to be learning our language, I am proud of my work and I am proud of the marks I received. Proud of my classmates for persevering working through technology.

**What was a challenge that you faced and overcame?** Challenges I faced were finding work around the program, i some how made it work, and the instructors were accommodating. Was also tough looking at a screen all day but breaks were good!

**How did you feel?** Stressed and a bit overwhelmed at certain parts, but relieved and proud of my work later on. Very grateful for this program, it helped me step out of my comfort zone and I feel a lot more confident now. I recommend this program to any and all people who are thinking about learning their language, it's healing and beautiful rewarding work! Ḡilakas'la.

**Maya'xalápa**  
respect one another

**Łaxwalápa**  
love one another

**Galgapóla**  
hold one another

**Ga'walápa**  
help one another



## Capacity Development & Employment

We sat down with putłalasame'ga, Rachael Hamilton, our training and employment lead to talk about her role and how she supports our people with skill development and employment.

**Q:** You have been in your new role for about six months. What are you looking forward to as you plan for the coming year?

**A:** I am looking forward to working with the youth the most, it feels like an empty nest when it is off season and I always look forward to finding out on who re-applies. I think what brings me joy is watching their growth over the seasons and seeing what paths they take post summer employment. Some go onto further education, some find other employment in the community and while some don't find other employment but I do notice they enhance their kwákwala language and culture. It motivates me to do more for them and look for other opportunities that interest them the most that align with our vision at Nawalakw.

**Q:** Do you have the number of weeks employment was extended for the youth?

**A:** 7 youth were extended. Ellashani George, Giselle Alfred, Dallas Nelson, Tamara Coon, Caelen Nicolson, Brendon Nicolson, Nicolas Conway. Some were extended by 12 weeks and some by 17 weeks but all are scheduled to be done by Christmas (roles: Administrative assistant, garden worker, communications assistant, data entry clerk, language techs and deckhand).

**Q:** Bear awareness training was provided to our camp staff - how many participated and who was the lead for this training?

**A:** We primarily have course materials, Grant has provided training for Nawalakw in 2021, 2022, and 2024. It was great to have him up at Hada this time, especially since we've added some new building structures (staff tiny homes). His hands-on approach and presence in the camp's daily operations were crucial. Camp life can be difficult to explain, so having him on-site allowed him to experience firsthand the challenges the Language team and camp staff face daily. This included reviewing their disposal systems and gaining direct experience with live bear spray. His practical involvement made the training highly relevant and effective.

**Q:** You spent time in Victoria planning the 2025 Calendar year - how was it to go through this process?

This process was unfamiliar to me but it was good. I felt like I was supported by my team and they provided me with some good insight as this was the first time I have done this. I did a lot of reflecting on what went well during my time in the training department and what I could do differently moving forward. During the reflection, it inspired me to think more of the seasons and how to reflect that to my calendar. I look forward to it again next year.

Thank you Rachael for creating space for our people to learn and apply their skills within our territory.

## Bear Awareness Training

More of our team gathered in Hada for their Bear Awareness & Safety Certification, learning about animal behaviors, signs, and safety protocols for encounters with the wildlife we share this land with.

Here at Nawalakw, we are deeply rooted in the heart of our Ƙwíƙwásuƚínuxw territory in what is often referred to as the Great Bear Rainforest where wildlife thrives— from orcas swimming in our oceans to bears, wolves, and cougars roaming our forests. It's vital for us to maintain a respectful relationship with the animals of this land, ensuring we cause no unnecessary harm while keeping ourselves safe.

Dzámzasilá'ogwa shared, "It's important to live with the wildlife in a respectful way, just like our ancestors have done since time immemorial. This training is essential for all our staff working at Hada, especially those taking our gąngąnanąm and maya'anł on the land during camps."

A huge Ɠilakas'la to Grant Machutchon for sharing his expertise and teaching us how to approach these situations with wisdom and respect! Through this, we honour our ancestors and foster a deeper connection to the land.



## Wildfire Training ƙł Hada

Last May, trainees gathered at Hada to embark on a week-long training program to learn about wildfires and how to protect our sacred places should an emergency occur. We are grateful for the participants who took the time to learn in classroom style sessions and to get out on the land to learn critical firefighting techniques. This training is essential in protecting our beautiful and remote villages throughout our territory.

Ɠilakas'la to Geoff Harms from Claddagh Consulting for leading the participants through the classroom theory and on the land firefighting techniques.



## Bear Awareness ƙł Hada

**Instructor:** Grant MacHutchon, Wildlife Biologist, Nelson, BC.

**Participants:**

1. Brittley James
2. Dale Peterson III
3. Dallas Nelson
4. Darryll Dawson
5. Emily Lyall
6. Gloria Hunt
7. Baby Raiden
8. Keith Dawson
9. Kristian Lagis
10. Margaret Wilson
11. Pewi Alfred
12. Sarah-Martha Bruce
13. Shane Cook Jr
14. Shelley Cook
15. Shadow Alfred
16. Tara Nelson



## Language and Culture Camps

Our Language and Culture Camps continue to be a transformative experience for all, offering a space to disconnect from the distractions of the outside world and truly be present. This is a time to step away from our phones and the busyness of life, to sit, listen, learn, understand, heal, and grow. Our camps are an opportunity to walk in the footsteps of our ancestors, reconnect with the land, and build meaningful connections with each other.

This year, we had the privilege of hosting participants from local schools and welcoming our mi'maya'ąnl̓ to the heart of our Kw̓ikw̓asut̓inux̓w territory in Hada. While each camp offers a different experience due to the season, the weather, and the age groups, they all share a deep immersion in language, culture, and the land. These camps not only teach traditional skills but also offer tools for the g̓ang̓anan̓m to nurture their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, grounding them in the values that have been passed down through generations.

A new focus for us this year is to make the boat ride to Hada more than just a journey, but a cultural and educational experience that sets the tone for the entire camp. Our goal is to make this time on the water a special opportunity to share language, stories, and the connections we have to the lands and waters we pass through. From storytelling to practicing our Kwakwaka'wakw introductions and acknowledging the territories we travel through, every moment is infused with meaning and serves to deepen relationships and plant seeds of knowledge.

Staff arrive Sunday morning to prepare the lodge and tiny homes, ensuring that everything is ready and welcoming. The air is filled with excitement as the team comes together to finalize schedules and set intentions for the days to come. Our team patiently waits for the students' arrival on Monday morning, where they are greeted at the dock by the sound of drumming, singing, and dancing to Wuhuhuwe.

As the students unload their bags from the boat and make their way to the lodge, they are reminded of the old ways, when our ancestors lived together in large communal houses. In those times, everyone contributed whether through cooking, cleaning, or harvesting because they understood that "many hands make light work." This spirit of teamwork, where everyone supports each other is at the heart of our camp experience. Our lodge, which accommodates up to 30 people, allows us to live together under one roof for the week, sharing daily tasks and truly connecting with one another like our ancestors once did before us.

The week begins with an opening circle, where the g̓ang̓anan̓m learn to introduce themselves in Kwakwaka'wakw. This not only brings them closer to the language and their cultural identity, but also helps build confidence in speaking in front of others. Participants learn to share their names, where they come from, and who their families are. This is an important part that allows everyone to get to know one another, and often discover family ties they may share.

Tuesday morning we welcome our elders to Hada, greeting them with the students to Wuhuhuwe. We are grateful to our mi'maya'ąnl̓ who join us at each camp, sharing their wisdom and teachings, and spending time with the g̓ang̓anan̓m as they learn the language and immersing themselves in everything Hada has to offer. The connection we build with them at camp is transformative—it's a time to listen, to learn, and to reconnect with the very nature of who we are as a people. Spending time with our mi'maya'ąnl̓ is crucial not only for the revival of Kwakwaka'wakw, but also for the nourishment of our hearts and spirits.

**Language**

**Land**

**Connection**

**Learning**

**Healing**

**Growth**

**Confidence**

Each morning we gather for circle is a time where we reflect, connect, and check in with one another. After breakfast, we take a moment to share how we're feeling, what we were grateful for yesterday, and what we are grateful for today, creating a space for openness and support. These practices ground us, and allow us to check in with ourselves and each other, setting a positive tone for the day ahead. It's heartwarming to see how students, many of whom arrive shy, grow in confidence throughout the week. By the end of the week, their voices are louder, their spirits brighter, and they fully embrace everything Hada has to offer.

Our camps are filled with storytelling in many forms, each one weaving together our culture and language, passing down knowledge that has been shared for generations. Whether Pewi reads from the Book of Legends, our elders share their wisdom, or we watch documentaries created by Darryll that showcase the strength and resilience of our people—there is always a story to tell and a lesson to learn. A very meaningful moment takes place at camp when we gather at the *Ṭseḱame'* carved pole to hear the origin story of the first ancestor of our *Kw̓ikw̓asut̓inuḱw* people. This story is especially significant because it is told on the very land where *Ṭseḱame'* survived the great flood, hiding in a cedar tree in Hada.

Our camps are designed to nurture the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of our participants through a variety of meaningful activities. We believe that movement is medicine, and that engaging our bodies in different ways is essential for overall health. Whether we're paddling canoes, hiking to the waterfall, walking among the old-growth trees, or harvesting seafood and cedar bark, each movement deepens our connection to the land and the ways of our ancestors. These activities also provide opportunities to learn about traditional medicines and the importance of sustainable harvesting—always taking only what we need. Through these practices, we are reminded of our vital responsibility to care for the land and oceans, ensuring their continued health for future generations. Each day, we incorporate physical movement into our schedule. If we're not out on the land, you'll find us practicing guided yoga and exercises at the lodge, where Kwakwaka and cultural teachings are woven into every movement.

We were fortunate to have Brittley James, our new Camp Director, who spent much time over the last year at camps to offer valuable support to our staff, *ḡaḡaḡanaḡ*, and *maya'aḡ* as they navigate any challenges or emotions that arise throughout the week. At Hada, mental health, healing, and wellness are central to our focus, and we believe it's important to introduce the *ḡaḡaḡanaḡ* to various tools for self-care. These include grounding practices, breath work, cedar brushings, and river cleanses, all aimed at clearing the spirit and releasing emotions we don't want to hold onto. Additionally, they learn about the power of their thoughts and the importance of acknowledging their feelings, understanding that crying is a sacred ceremony for emotional release and healing. These teachings empower the *ḡaḡaḡanaḡ* with lifelong tools for personal growth, resilience, and moving forward in a positive, balanced way.

By Friday, the students have formed deeper connections to the land, our culture, and each other. The closing circle is often filled with mixed emotions as the students reflect on their favorite moments and share the lessons they will carry forward. In just 4 days we get to witness the *ḡaḡaḡanaḡ* come out of their shells more, expressing gratitude for the experience and their newfound knowledge.

The success of our Language and Culture Camps would not be possible without the support of many. From our maintenance crew, cooks, and boat drivers, to our *mimaya'aḡ*, and language team, each individual plays a vital role in ensuring that the camps run smoothly and that students have a meaningful experience.



## Outdoor Gathering Space Reflection from Gana, Verna Ambers

The outdoor community kitchen/learning space was constructed by Rough Bay Enterprises from Sointula, BC. It is 20 feet by 14 feet with a metal roof and seating for up to 20 people.

One day as I was up on Tier II, the blueberry patch, taking photos, during a giveaway day looking down on all the visitors. I thought oh my goodness it's so hot and the Elders should not be lining up waiting to get their Good Food Boxes. They need a comfortable shaded place where they can sit and our team would physically deliver the boxes to them. Prior to the construction of this beautiful cedar facility there was no shade and no place for visitors to sit. At the time we only had one picnic table and a few chairs. We also had lots of groups visit us to learn more about our small scale farm so we required a seating area to host visitors and set up tables for farm giveaways too. It's a very useful space.

Our team worked with the grant writing team and came up with a plan to seek funding to build an outdoor community kitchen/learning area. We made sure we added this wish to our strategic plan so it would not be forgotten.

We received funding from Island Coastal Economic Trust, (ICET), Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food - Local Food Infrastructure Fund (LFIF), and two foundations to secure enough funds to complete our beautiful space. We were so fortunate to have funding in place from the Real Estate Foundation of BC for a three year time frame for labour and additional priorities for the farm. This gave us the time we needed to leverage additional funds from other sources. It was a win win situation for everybody involved in our project.

It's been one of the highlights for us and we are so proud to work and communicate with the grant writing team who helped make this aspect of infrastructure for the farm the huge success it is.



## A Visit from our Partner at Mastercard Foundation

Gilakasda'xw'la to our friends at Mastercard Foundation Assets Management (MFAM) for paddling with us on this journey! As 'Maxwayalidzi, Kódi Nelson says, "when we all paddle in the same direction, we make life much easier, reaching our destination a lot quicker than if we were to do it alone."

We want to take a moment to share a heartfelt thank you to MFAM for choosing Nawalakw to host their corporate retreat. Committing themselves to experience the work they are supporting first hand means the world to us.

Nawalakw has been a Mastercard Foundation program partner since 2021. We are grateful for Mastercard Foundation's partnership and financial support for the vital work we're doing every day!



Contact Us

nawalakw.com  
admin@nawalakw.com  
@Nawalakw

17 Gatu Street  
Alert Bay, BC V0N 1A0