



Kułustola awil'golakw,
a'ekakila'ena'yi,
a'ekakila'akw dła'wi
alumasagila

*A wellspring of
inclusive healing,
learning, and
renewal*

Nawalakw Community Foundation Transition

Earlier this year, our team completed the necessary work to launch a very exciting new phase for Nawalakw – the Nawalakw Community Foundation! It has always been a goal for Nawalakw to be an independent, Indigenous-led, certified and registered charitable organization, and now we're here!

Over the last 5 years, Nawalakw has grown significantly and nurtured our internal capacity, with intention and purpose. Our team is stronger than ever. We are committed to supporting our community, deepening our investment in our own leadership, offering meaningful employment opportunities, and uplifting our Kwakwaka'wakw people.

Our team worked countless hours to learn and build new systems and processes, and have created a solid foundation for the future of Nawalakw and the ongoing work we are committed to doing. We are grateful to Makeway for the support they provided for us over the years and we are excited to enter this new phase.



Amlilas Yaḱandala'as - Language Nest Launch

Our Bakwamkala Language Nest Pilot Project in partnership with the Amlilas Childcare Centre in Y'alis, Alert Bay has officially been launched! 🐾 ✨

This space gives our gāngānanām (23–36 months) the chance to be fully immersed in Bakwamkala with our Nawalakw staff and elders throughout the week. Plus, we have received commitment from parents to learn bakwamkala weekly at the U'mista Cultural Society to ensure our young ones have opportunities to speak in all areas of their life.

Ḡilakas'la to our language team — Gloria, Steven, and Emily for their dedication to reawakening our language alongside our elders Klink, Modi, and Gundy. We also want to express our deep gratitude to Natalie and Charlene at the Amlilas Childcare Centre for welcoming us into this space to do this important work. Each of you has played a vital role in creating this space where our gāngānanām get to grow up immersed in Bakwamkala. 'Walasano'xw mu'la!

HEALING CENTRE
CULTURE CAMP
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
GATHERING PLACE
ECOTOURISM
DESTINATION
SOCIAL VENTURE

Indigenous Peoples Day



Through rain and shine, our Bakwam Pride is strong! We were thrilled to see the community's support and all the gangananam smiling! A truly significant day uplifting our people!

The ferry terminal was our starting point, and we ended at the U'mista Cultural Centre, there were so many Bakwam activities that engaged everyone:

- xwaxwatsa'ma (Indian Baseball)
- Alaxwa (Bone Game)
- Yapa dlu' Galsa (Cedar weaving and painting)

We also extend so much gratitude to the volunteers who helped make this possible and the hands that prepared our delicious meal

Gilakas'la

Grad Highlights

We are very happy to celebrate our next four language graduates! Congratulations to Badidu (Shelley Cook), K'ixk'alagidz'amga (Laureen Alfred), T'l'ililawik (Tara Nelson) and Dekilas (Emily Lyall) for completing a one-year certificate in Indigenous Language Proficiency in Bakwamk'ala. This program is rooted in our language and culture and is offered in partnership with Kw'ikwasutinu'xw Haxwa'mis First Nation and the University of Victoria. It consists of ten full-time online courses and takes one full year to complete. We are proud of these four graduates for committing themselves to such important work – learning more of our language and learning to share it with others. We look forward to witnessing your continued journey.

Badidu



One of the program projects that called to Badidu was to sit and explore nugwa'am... Through hours of reflection Badidu created a beautiful 'family book' filled with genealogy, pictures and bakwamk'ala. She reflected on her pairs and pairs of grandparents, our ancestral homelands, our ancestral names, our histories, our language and our culture.

She shared that this project allowed her to remember and rediscover deep, powerful connections to our people and our traditional places again.



T'l'ililawik

For one of her final teaching projects, T'l'ililawik desired to teach us all how to bake chocolate chip cookies with the goal that she will teach the youth who visit Hada how to speak our language in the kitchen. She thoroughly taught us ingredients, tools and steps with some common cooking phrases - all in our language!

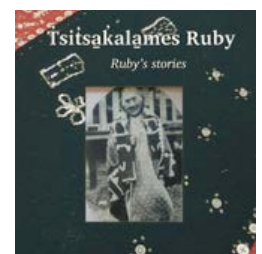


K'ixk'alagidz'amga



For one of her final teaching projects, K'ixk'alagidz'amga learned to retell a version of the Bakw'as story. She created detailed glossaries of words and phrases that she already knew and made an effort to understand the ones she didn't. She recorded herself at the beginning and end of the program retelling the story, with lots of oral story retelling throughout to improve pronunciation guided by anis Ruby. She put together a visual representation of the story to help us understand the bakwamk'ala through use of images, etc

K'ixk'alagidz'amga shared with us the importance of listening to your parents and not engaging in any bad behavior or else you might end up meeting Bakw'as. These are important lessons embedded in "Tsitsakalames Ruby".



Dekilas

For one of her final teaching projects, Dekilas invited the class to learn how to Pie-gila entirely in our language. She thoughtfully collected the names for ingredients, kitchen tools and the steps, collecting the language through working closely with ǵanis Ǵwiki'lakw. This immersion session was well over thirty minutes, not including baking time. 'walas ixpida apple pie!



UVic Cohort Visits our Homelands

Our UVic Certificate in Indigenous Language Proficiency Cohort traveled home for a week of in-person sessions this summer. We went to Hada, 'Mim'kwamlis, Ǵwa'yasdǵam's, and the Nawalakw Bakwǵamkala Gukw for immersion sessions with each other and our mi'maya'anl. We are grateful to our speakers, ǵanis Ǵwiki'lakw dlu' ǵanis Ga'e'ilakw, who traveled with us after spending the year with us, sharing their knowledge in kind and gentle ways.



UVic Cohort



The second cohort of the Certificate in Indigenous Language Proficiency recently celebrated additional graduates.

We'll share more about them and the projects they completed in our next newsletter!

1. Maḵwala'ogwa - Carolyn Dawson
2. Gwixsisǵalas - Felicia Greekas
3. U'maga - Rachel Hunt
4. Ǵa'axstalas - Alana Jacobson
5. Tli'linukw - Linda Jones
6. Pudlidi - Rebecca Mackenzie
7. 'Maḵlidi - Mercedes Webb



Cohort 1 Hires

1. Caelan Nicolson – Language Tech Assistant
2. Chabanee Matilpi – Garden Assistant
3. Claire Willie – Media Assistant
4. Daunte McKinney – Maintenance Assistant
5. Ellashani George – Communications Assistant
6. Giselle Alfred – Data Entry
7. Gordon Bruce – DeckHand Assistant
8. James Dawson – Maintenance Assistant
9. Jessica Wadhams-Mountain – Cultural Activities Leader
10. Kateri Wildcat – Admin Assistant
11. Lillianna McKinney – Garden Assistant
12. Sandra Cook – Garden Assistant
13. Taysia Smith – Cultural Activities Leader

Training and Employment Update

Nawalakw welcomed 13 youth employees hired across all departments for 16 weeks from May to August.

Our Cohort began with an incredible in-person training week, packed with orientation, introductions, learning, and community engagement. Day one kicked off with a warm welcome from team members K'odi, Eleanor, and Bill. We dove into introductions from both Nawalakw and Cohort 1, and got a verbal overview with the new ADP software. We shared our [Nawalakw videos](#) with the cohort before joining the powerful MMIW March in the afternoon.

Day two brought an insightful introduction to the world of tourism, led by young local 'Nāmgis member, Logan Wilson. On Day three, the focus shifted to financial literacy, with a valuable session led by Joyce Leppington.

Day four was all about preparation, as the cohort headed to ShopRite General/Rona to gather essential gear during their summer employment.

Finally, Day five saw the team giving back, spending time in the garden clearing broom bushes at the graveyard.

We are grateful for these incredible youth who spent the summer with us, learning, growing and contributing in meaningful ways across all areas at Nawalakw. As the summer winds down and they head back into their respective day-to-day responsibilities, we wish them well and look forward to planning for a new cohort of youth to return next summer.

There are a few of our youth who have stayed on to work with us year-round.



2025 Students on Ice Participants

Two emerging leaders from the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation, Nevaeh Rufus and Emma Walkus, had the opportunity to embark on a life-changing journey with the Students on Ice (SOI) expedition this summer. Through their participation, both young women are deepening their connection to culture, education, and the land while stepping into roles that will empower their communities for generations to come.

Nevaeh Rufus, currently working at a Healing Centre and serving on her community's youth council, is driven by a powerful mission to preserve the Bakwamgala language. She dreams of becoming a content creator focused on working with Elders to document language and culture. "I want to make it accessible and engaging," she shared, emphasizing the importance of digital storytelling as a tool for cultural revitalization.

Emma Walkus is currently studying Environmental Science at UBC, and is forging a path that bridges western education with Indigenous knowledge. With ties to her home community, Emma aims to advocate for land and water by combining her academic learning with traditional teachings. "It's about taking what I learn and bringing it back in a way that helps," she said.

Both Nevaeh and Emma have completed educational certificates and are continuing their studies, showing strong commitment to personal growth and community advancement. Emma discovered the SOI program through a Nawalakw Instagram post, while Nevaeh heard about it from a cousin. Both were drawn to the expedition's focus on environmental learning and Arctic exploration.



They shared their excitement about stepping out of their comfort zones, gaining confidence in public speaking, and building environmental knowledge to bring back to their territories. Nevaeh, who has long been fascinated with the Arctic and climate change, called this "a childhood dream."

Both young women represent the strength and brilliance of the next generation of Indigenous leaders. They returned from their SOI trip in July sharing reflections on what they've learned and experienced, and expressed gratitude for the love, strength, and support of their entire community.



Nawalakw and Sea to Cedar have partnered for the past 5 years. We are so thankful our youth get the opportunity to have these beautiful learning experiences.

SOI 2019
Jessica Wadhams-Mountain
Nicole Dawson

2020 and 2021 cancelled

2022
Danielle Barnes
Oriana Bee Johnson

2023
Giselle Alfred
Gwimolas Hunt Cranmer

2024
Claire Willie
William Whonnock

2025
Emma Walkus
Nevaeh Rufus



Sowing Seeds of Food Sovereignty: Nawalakw Food Security Program Flourishes

Thanks to generous multi-year funding from the Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC) and others, our Food Security Program continues to thrive — not just in food production, but as a hub of healing, learning, and community connection.

Led by Verna Ambers, our dedicated Food Security Program Manager, our farm team includes two permanent staff, two summer youth employees, and one returning casual employee. Together, they've fostered a vibrant space that supports food sovereignty, nurtures well-being, and provides hands-on learning for all ages.

Growth Beyond the Garden

The farm's impact extends far beyond crops. Staff and visitors often talk about the mental health benefits of working outdoors, connecting with nature, and engaging in meaningful work. Youth workers, in particular, have shown remarkable personal growth — gaining confidence, skills, and in some cases, a new direction for their future. One graduate is now planning to study horticulture at the Camosun College campus in Victoria in 2026, while another has secured full-time work with We-la-la-U's Public Works program.

Community Engagement & Partnerships

This past year, the farm opened its gates for the Cormorant Island Garden Tour and hosted international garden visitors from as far away as Germany and Australia. Karibu Adventures continues to bring eco-tour groups to the farm each year, with each visit contributing to our programs.

We continue to serve our community and build strong partnerships with local organizations. We supported Alert Bay Elementary with the greenhouse project and the T'lisalagilakw School's junior kindergarten class with garden visits. Produce is shared with the 'N̓amgis Elders' Centre and the Nimpkish Restaurant, where Chef Pemba features farm-grown herbs and vegetables in her dishes.

In collaboration with Whe-la-la-U, we distributed seafood baskets to 40 homes and helped deliver over 120 frozen chum for use at Hada. And we're pleased to host the Royal Road University Horticulture and Environmental Studies curriculum as a field trip stop for the school of Environment and Communication.

Workshops & Wellness

Our new community kitchen has become a treasured gathering place. We've hosted seasonal workshops on everything from jam-making and composting to pruning and medicinal herbs. Through our GoodFoodBox initiative, we distribute dozens of boxes of fresh produce at each garden giveaway, often paired with easy recipes to give families ideas to make the most of their harvest. All permanent staff completed FoodSafe, ASIST, and SafeTalk training, equipping them to support both physical and mental wellness in the community.

Sustainability in Action

Farm techniques continue to evolve with a strong focus on sustainability. Our new infrastructure includes a drip irrigation system, rain barrels, and a food waste digester to boost composting. This season we added 14 potato rows, 1,600 garlic plants, and thriving beet and pepper crops, thanks to improved irrigation and soil care. Ducks are being trialed for natural pest control, and we dream of expanding with U-pick operations for strawberries and rhubarb.



Looking Ahead

While challenges like the need for onsite bathroom facilities remain, the program is resilient and forward-thinking.

Strategic planning is in motion, and ongoing learning is embedded in all we do.

With continued support from REFBC and other generous organizations, we're not just growing food — we're cultivating leadership, resilience, and personal growth in communication, with connection across generations. The Nawalakw Food Security Program is an ongoing journey by living the example of what's possible when land, learning, and community come together.



First Smoking Fish Camp Iax Hada

With the abundance of salmon returning to our rivers after the removal of fish farms, we gathered for our very first Fish Camp at Hada — harvesting and processing salmon from our river with our youth and elders.

“We would be both physically and spiritually poorer. Our sense of worth, a part of our purpose would be decimated if there were no more salmon. When our young people cut, prepare, and preserve salmon, they are not only learning skills — they are deepening their spiritual bond with all of creation.” — Uncle Bobby Joe

We are so grateful to Tidi Nelson, John Macko, and Arnie Wadhams for taking the time to come out and share their knowledge and wisdom with us on how we as Kwakwaka'wakw work on our beautiful kutala (salmon). Throughout the week, our young people learned how to catch, prepare, preserve, smoke, and jar salmon, knowledge our ancestors carried for millennia.



To mark this moment in history, we painted pictographs at the site where the first fish farm was removed from our territory, carrying forward the traditions of our ancestors so that story would never be forgotten. This ceremony was a celebration for the removal of the fish farms in our territory, the strength it took for our people to hold true to our values of stewarding our lands, and the abundance of salmon we are seeing in our rivers again after the fish farms were removed.

“When fish farms were here, the spirit of our territory was dying. Now, with their removal, we see the fish returning in abundance by the millions. That’s worth celebrating.” — Uncle Bobby Joe



Gilakas'la - Thank you

Gilakas'la to our supporters, donors and friends. Gilakas'la for the many gifts that support this vitally important work. We are abundantly blessed, and our hearts are filled with love and gratitude for the local and global partners we have met on this journey so far. Through language and culture programs, Nawalakw is committed to being a place of hope and healing, strengthening the identity of our people through a connection to our ancestors, culture, and this sacred place. We know the land, air, and sea heals and sustains us. The Nawalakw mission will continue for our children and youth, and our children yet unborn thanks to many loving people and generous companies that have come alongside us to support our vision and work.



Donor Spotlight: Vancouver Foundation

Founded in 1943, Vancouver Foundation and its donors have granted over \$1.5 billion to hundreds of charities and non-profits in BC. Vancouver Foundation supports initiatives focused on creating healthy, vibrant, equitable, and inclusive communities.

Nawalakw is a grateful recipient of the Thriving Indigenous Systems Fund, which supports land-based First Nations, and Indigenous-led organizations serving land-based First Nations in the territories now known as British Columbia.

These grants support Indigenous-led initiatives that focus on healing, land, rights, and culture and create the conditions for systemic transformation by preserving, evolving, and transforming the social, political, and cultural systems of Indigenous communities. We are grateful to Vancouver Foundation for recognizing our contribution to this work and providing financial support to Nawalakw to sustain our work.

Celebrating Leadership Excellence

Congratulations to 'Maxwayalidzi K'odi Nelson who was recognized with the Roy Group's McGregor Cup for his leadership at Nawalakw.

The MacGregor Cup honours champions whose "leadership development activities have made a significant impact on organizational practices. It celebrates mastery, leadership and character. Skilled, compassionate and inspiring, these kinds of leaders create powerful workplace cultures that elevate others to serve as their finest selves."



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