



### Question and Answer Summary

*ič ay' apst' ałin, we are lifting each other up*  
*č išaa?ath adult language intensive program*

November 20, 2024

**Q: Thanks for your presentation. You're doing amazing work! How many students do you have and how many hours per day, days per week are they in the house?**

Every year we have about three or four new students and we have the returning graduates. So right now, including myself and yaacu?isaqs, I think there's about 12-14. Our space isn't big, so we break out into groups when we need. We have an office that one of the Years will go in to do lessons, the main room, and a kitchen. So, it's great that we have all these different spaces, but when we're all together people will be really tight. We really want people to feel safe and supported and what we found is having a small group really helped us achieve that.

We meet the main program with Year Ones, Year Twos and graduates and teachers on Tuesday to Thursday. It's part time with Tuesday from 9:00 to 1:00, because we share lunch that day, and the other days we meet from 9:00 to 12:00. Monday, we added last year for our graduates to be able to advance further.

What we're trying to figure out is a good amount of time for people to commit to. We don't want people to just go through the two years, but we chose it because a two-year commitment feels like a good place to be welcoming back our graduates to teach, which advances language and provides space and time for those learners to continue to advance. What we want is proficient speakers of our language, right? And you know, we're not there yet, we just all need to keep moving forward with our language journey and creating spaces for that as well.

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**Q: You mentioned assessment – could you say a little bit about how you do that?**

Yeah, assessment is something I think maybe a lot of communities struggle with. We use the one that was developed by Onowa and Peter at UVic and then we also use a modified ACTFL assessment. We want people to be able to assess where they're at and reflect on that. Three times a year, every year, and we do it and we ask people to use the same sheets and put different colors in a date and so that they can see their growth. And I think everybody that's in a language learning space, it's kind of like the more you know, the less you know.

So some of the reflection is like, *"oh, I thought I knew that"* until I learned more, and I was like, *"oh, I don't really know that"*. It can ebb and flow too. But right now, that's what we're what we're doing, it's a self-assessment.

And then, it's a little bit less formal, like with the List and Prove-its, we're able to assess where people are at for where they're pushing themselves in those spaces and what they're trying to learn. Also, in the Language Sprints we can go into Sprints with students, and we can see where they're at and what they need. In those Sprints, it's also an opportunity to be able to push a little bit of language on that student to see where they're at. See the next part they need to get to and then we can make a set-up and make it obvious and push that language. So it's another space where we can teach students as well individually, like one-on-one.

**Q: Were there any other systems you considered using before landing on WAYK?**

Yeah, absolutely. We spent a bit of time our first year of the program looking at other models like Paul Creek. We did start looking into Paul Creek quite seriously, but there was a lot of translating that we had to do and found it hard to understand what was happening or how to apply it because it was in a different

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language. That is wonderful and I think it's so great for those communities that have that language to be able to just pick that up and use it.

I did schooling in Indigenous Language Revitalization where I was exposed to a couple of different things, and I went to training for Where Are Your Keys (WAYK). I had connected with Khelsilem through some other work and saw what he was doing [with *Squamish Language*]. I was really inspired by seeing his students in his classroom having conversations, so I went to WAYK training. It's a bit overwhelming because there's a lot of pieces to it, and you just have to trust the process. But I was able to go to training and I was like, "OK Yeah, this makes sense to me."

Even though it wasn't like we got a curriculum (which would have been nice, honestly), we had all of the systems and structures to be able to run a program, to run a class, to create teachers, to create an immersion or immersive environment with. I feel like it saved us years of having to figure it out as we went. We were able to develop the curriculum that made sense to us and activities that make sense for our community, but it's really held by the structure and I think that was really helpful. And honestly, we just needed to do something! So we're like, "yes, this," and once we committed to it, we committed to it entirely because we just don't have the time to waste. We don't have a lot of fluent speakers of our language. We need more students that are advancing in the language and teaching.

**Q: Your program sounds amazing! I'm curious what the retention rate is. I've heard a lot of programs having high dropout rates. How do you avoid that?**

The interviews really help to see people that want to commit to the program. The method is not for everybody - some people can find the hand signs really awkward or intimidating, and we know that. So we really look to see who will jump in and use the signs. People that we accept in the program don't need to know the language, they don't need to have any experience with the language. Like kwaacaapi he started with being able to say čamas and like čims, just a couple

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words and now he's able to be in conversation and do advanced learning, so you don't need to know the language. But what you really need to be able to do is be willing to jump in and learn and use the methods.

We've had people leave because of health issues or other opportunities, but for the most part, most people get through the two years and are not fluent but what it gives them is the ability to have a conversation with somebody else and the skills to learn more language from a more proficient speaker. And I think that's really useful.

We really encourage our students to be like if you run into a fluent speaker, somebody who's more advanced than you, try to use the language you know. Try to learn more language from them 'cause you have the skills to do that. Yeah, we've lost a couple of people because of health issues. But for the most part, people want to come back. So we're hoping that in future we're probably going to need a larger space and I think that's really exciting.

**Q: I was also curious to learn more about the recruitment for your program and what's involved in the interview. How many people do you have interested when you open intake?**

We post online on our Facebook page, our Nation posts on their Facebook page, and it has a bit of the criteria posted on there. Are you excited to learn language? Are you excited to teach language? Because I think that's something that needs to be really emphasized - that our program isn't just a learning program, we're teaching you how to teach and we expect everybody to jump into teaching the language as well.

So, we put a post out and then we have online applications and then we do interviews. Often our questions are about working as a team because I think that's the most important thing. If we can work together and lift each other up, we can really get further faster as a team.

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So I think every year we have at least 8 to 12 people apply and then we set people up for interviews. Some people don't sign up for interviews, so we lose them then, and then we have interviews, and sometimes people have other things going on. We typically accept 3 new students each year and that has to do with space, being able to have enough people to be able to teach.

That first year, we also know having a small group creates that sense of community. They build connection and community with each other as year one and then they also do with the other years. We like to really frame our program around that - it's really foundational, community building and creating safety. So part of doing that is having a smaller group learn together.

**Q: A follow up question, I'm curious beyond that training that you received in 2016. What other training did you get aside from also visiting the Squamish language House and the Bakwamkaala?**

We work with the Where Are Your Keys team, so a big shout out to them. They're super supportive and really helpful. And like I said, it's not a cookie cutter approach at all, so it just depends on your community and your nation.

When we first started the language program, we did online trainings because we started at a weird time when there was a pandemic happening. We did an online training for Where Are Your Keys open to all *nuučaan̓ ut* (Nuu-chah-nulth language programs) and then when we started our program. We brought them in for two weeks online to train everybody and that's what we do every year - the Where Are Your Keys team comes in, mostly online.

We've been fortunate to partner up with *yuułu?it?atḥ* language program so we've been able to bring them in, in-person and they come and do the training as well with us. For the first three weeks we build our principles, our whys and build our community together and then the following weeks, we have Where Are Your Keys team in and we do training around the method so that everybody understands

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why we are doing it like this and what are all these things on the wall. It eases that learning curve for people when they're trying to use sign language and use a new language.

We'll bring them (WAYK) in in the middle of the year as well to do some more training on different elements like Language Hunting or Language Sprints so that we can get into other activities with our group.

**Q: Are there learners who have reached what ACTFL would consider "Advanced" according to their proficiency guidelines?**

That's where we want to go but our understanding, and definitely as a learner myself, is that it takes a long time to get there. We have definitely had students go from beginner to high beginner/low intermediate through the program so far.

We are a part-time program and our students have a 12-hour commitment per week, so 10 hours in the classroom, two hours at home. So it's not a lot and I feel like we get pretty far with that limited amount of time. I wouldn't say anybody is necessarily advanced at the moment. The hope is that we'll get there and the more that we're able to do what we're doing, the faster we're able to get people even to intermediate.

**Q: How many people were in the first cohort when the program started? Can you talk a little bit about how it has grown or changed over the years?**

In our first cohort, we had four people and we had three main language teacher facilitators. It has changed quite a bit. Every year it's different and it's exciting to see what happens. The first year, because we were building the ship at sea, it was a lot slower. We didn't have all of the lessons written when we first started and we were just figuring out how it was all going to look. We definitely kept the pace of learning a lot slower for those students because we weren't sure how much to

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push. As we have moved on throughout the years, we now have year four, year three, year two and year ones all together.

The language level is a lot higher than when we first started out and now, even though the beginners don't necessarily know all of it, we have a technique just - *let it go*. It does help because those students that are being exposed to a little bit more advanced language the other students are just a little bit ahead of them, so it is introducing it to them, like scaffolding. They're becoming aware of language that's coming up, and then once they get to a lesson, they're like, oh, I already know this. That's what we want- we want people to get to a lesson and they've already heard that language, already have some sense of it so then they're feeling encouraged. It's really reinforcing.

Every year is so different. This year it's like the dream is being realized because we have graduates who are returning and taking a lead on teaching. We have evening classes for community drop-in where we use the same teaching style and our students are teaching that now. It's been really great. Our whole purpose of doing what we're doing is having more people to be able to know language and be able to teach it. I think in lots of our communities, you have to teach what you know because it's not for us, it's for the next generation. We just need to teach what we know and give it out, be really generous.

**Q: From what I've heard about WAYK, it's very focused on sentence structure- not as much vocabulary, is that true in your program? If yes, do your students tend to do vocabulary learning on their own time?**

The main thing about Where Are Your Keys is getting people away from just vocabulary to actually being able to use the language in conversation, so you really need to know how to build sentences and use sentences. So the lessons are framed around an open-ended question and you're having conversations going back and forth and not a ton on vocabulary. There is vocabulary and if you want to know in Sprints and in Hunts, you can ask what things are and we'll tell you if we

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know it. I don't think it's limiting people, but I don't find that people are trying to do that outside of the program.

We do have some vocabulary, of course because couldn't do a lot of our lessons without knowing what things are and some of our lessons are exactly that. We have vocabulary around the kitchen and animals and stuff like that. There's definitely vocab, but yeah, more focusing on how to use that because if you know how to use those nouns or those verbs in a sentence, then you can put other nouns and verbs in the sentence, and it makes it easier to be able to do that.

**Q: Because I see you have things written on the walls, do you have grammatical work? For example, in our language, we have words that change ending sounds when you add endings?**

It's definitely all happening, but we don't have it all written out on the walls. People can figure that out through lessons, through Sprints or through Lists and Prove-It times. I think when they hear people having different levels helps in this - they'll hear a student that's a bit more advanced than them and they'll be like, oh, what is that? Then they'll try and track it and figure it out, and then they can test it on their own so they can see. We'll obviously correct them too, like "oh, you need to flip that. That's in the wrong order".

**Q: Do you transcribe the recordings of Benson?**

Yes, absolutely. Not all of it is available because we're really focusing on documentation and recording right now because we have so few fluent speakers. We have a number of years of work to do to be able to transcribe everything we have and to be able to post it on First Voices. Part of the work of Grant [Watts], Linsey [Haggard] and Josh [Goodwill] is working on just that. Grant does the editing of the recordings and then it gets sent to start getting transcribed. It's a

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process and we want to make sure what we're putting up is as correct as possible and has all the information there.

**Q: I'm curious about the cost of the program, and if you've had any pushback about the smaller class sizes from funders or even community members?**

There hasn't been any push back from our community about this smaller program. We are really fortunate that our community has been super supportive. We have really supportive leadership who trust what we're doing. Both Linsey and I have gone to school for Language Revitalization and we've been adult learners since 2011. We're really passionate about this and being able to advance people faster than we were able to advance. This method has really helped with that.

Also, we've had leadership come into the space and they're like, oh, yeah, you couldn't really have a lot more people in here. The cost of the program, I think, is really similar to other communities. It does cost a lot to do stuff like this - it's the money for the people. One of the things that we do in our program is pay our students a stipend. We're not affiliated with a university, so we pay them an amount per hour to participate because we recognize that we all need to live. We want to hold up our students and have them be able to participate without a lot of stress. Also, their time is worth something, so we do pay our students and that of course is an extra additional cost.

We were provided a space by our nation which was really wonderful. When funding came through in 2019 for language programs, they gathered a couple of us that were involved in language revitalization work and asked what do you need. We said we need a space that's dedicated to language. I feel really fortunate for that. We're a bit out of the way, so we can just get to work. We don't get bugged very much and we can just do what we need to do.

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Funding, I think like all communities, is always something that we're working on and that's one of the main parts of my job - finding money to continue the work that we're doing. Hands up to First Peoples' and your team, I know that you guys are out there advocating for us and appreciate all that good work.

**Q: A follow up question because you mentioned that you're not working with any universities. Is accreditation something you have considered or might explore in future?**

Yeah, when we first started, we did consider it. I have talked to UVIC, and it might be something we need to do if the funding situation changes for language programs. Federally and provincially, there might be access to different funding if we are accredited.

One of the things that we did hear from other communities that were affiliated with universities a while ago, and maybe those relationships have changed, is that it did create a couple barriers for students to join. Potential students couldn't access student funding, or for some, something happened when they were at school a previous time that didn't work out that's inhibiting them from continuing at a university program.

Sometimes it means having to do courses that maybe aren't really language. We're in the language we don't want to talk about language. We want to be speaking the language, and so we've heard some of those challenges. So yeah, we've been really fortunate that we've been able to do it the way we've been doing it and I think it's worked as a result of that. Also, we're open to whatever we need to do to continue what we're doing, if we have to.

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**Q: I'm curious if you have adapted the model in any places or any components within your program to make it work for you? Or do you feel like you're staying pretty true to the model as it was taught to you?**

Well, I think the model is really flexible - it's not like it's cookie cutter. You make it however you want and you can add the elements that make sense for you. For instance, we've added different jobs when it's a need that comes out from students. They say we should have a cheerleader, so we've added a cheerleader to help keep energy up.

Also, a lot of the techniques too, come from learners. One of our students made-up "deer in headlights." [*gestures with hands open, thumbs on side of head like antlers*] because this is a really good way to indicate if you're a new learner. Somebody's trying to do the Question of the Day to you and you're like, ah, deer in headlights. I don't know what to do. I'm totally blank.

For our lessons, they're definitely structured the same way, and we find it really helpful because each of the lessons goes through an open-ended question, which I think is really valuable to know. It makes me say *yes* and it makes me say *no*. Saying *no* to things often is more complicated, so people are getting that practice throughout, which is really, really helpful. But again, you set it up however makes the most sense for you and your goals.

**Q: In the future, if the opportunity arises, will you be creating or having a larger venue so you can add more students to your group, or possibly a second group?**

Yeah of course the goal is to grow and to have more people speaking. We definitely would like to figure out more ways of advancing people. So, we don't want our graduates to just go away. We want them to come back and advance because we need to have speakers of our language. Our space is just really a limitation and also capacity.

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We need to be able to keep supporting people to be able to teach, so that when we're not there, they'll be able to take on programs. That's part of what we want for this program. The intention is to have people with the skills to teach - to either start their own programs or be like "I want to do this with the language" or "I want to do that with the language." It's going to take some time for sure, but a new language space would be great and that would really help with it. We have students too, that are bringing the language they know into not only their houses but into their workspaces because a lot of them are working in our communities in different ways. It's rippling out.

For example, one of our students yaaquuḷa works at our market. Anytime we see our students or somebody in our classes, we use the language with them, to encourage them to use language in other spaces. At first when he was a first-year learner, he used to run away but now he's the person that if he thinks you know language, he'll say something to you. He's in second year and he's also right now doing his Bachelor of Education. So it's really cool because it's a space where many Nuuchahnulth people go but also it's a space outside of the classroom and he's using language there. We also have one of our students who is a yoga teacher and is bringing language into to that space and into her work there as well. We have students that have worked up at the high school with youth up there, and so they're taking the lessons and teaching them.

So this is one of the ways to build the program. It's like they can take what they know, they can take even the lessons and they can teach it in these spaces to other people. So our program doesn't necessarily have to get huge, but we just need our people that are taking the program to take language out into community.

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**Q: I would love to hear more about your language level when you started the program and how far you've come since then? Do you also do MAP?**

Khasha, one of my friends, Stephen Reid, started an adult immersion program before us, and I often outreach to people getting ideas and trying to figure out how to do things. He said your language is going to really advance fast and it definitely has being a teacher. I think that's the great thing about how Where Are Your Keys works, is making people teach. It puts your head in a really different learning space when you know you're going to have to teach it. I think you have to pay more attention. You must use a different part of your brain when you're learning language when you're also thinking "I have to know this to teach somebody else."

So I would say yes, I definitely have advanced as a result of teaching in the program, but also it's really important to be a learner and continue to be a learner. I am not fluent at all and I have so much to learn but we do create opportunities and spaces for us. Linsey and I have been learning together since 2011. Back then there was an offering at the college for a class, and that's how we started. Then we started sitting with Benson Nookemis and his late wife, Hilda, once a week, making them dinner and sitting with them learning language. We did that for many, many, many, many years. And that's how Benson became one of our key language mentors in our life and family. We're very, very appreciative and grateful for his time and energy.

The learning is continuing. I definitely have advanced a lot since starting the program because I've had to. It's nice to be able to feel a little confident about it, although we're all learners and I always tell our students that we're all learners in this space. We're not going to know things and we're not going to tell you we do. If we don't, we'll have to figure that out, so we'll go to our mentors and figure that out to be able to bring back to our students. We don't do Mentor-Apprentice, but we learn as much as we can with our speaker who comes in every afternoon into our language space with our recording team.

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I know Linsey learns a lot in that space and is working with the First Voices team quite a bit in that. Then in the afternoons on Mondays, we have an online advanced class for people like me and Lindsey. We've used that for ourselves to be able to keep advancing and we encourage and invite some of the more advanced students to participate in that as well.

**Q: Do you have Elder fluent speakers who you pay honoraria? If so, do you get push back from paying honoraria on a daily basis versus hiring them as a casual on call employee of the nation?**

Yeah, we absolutely have fluent speakers that we pay honorarium to and we pay them well because their time and their expertise is more valuable than anything else that can be offered to us as individuals, as humans to our program. I'm just so deeply grateful and we honestly can't pay them enough. So yes, we pay them honoraria. There is no pushback, and we pay them as much as we possibly can.

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