

Question and Answer Summary

Dip siip'ntut Sm'algyax, das wii hana'nax: we love sm'algyax, from these strong women

with Dm Syl Haaytk Gyibaaw/Emily Bryant; Ama Goodm Laxsüülda/Ocean-Lynn
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I know you were able to finish your language plan, and I was wondering if you have any inspiring words for anyone who might be starting their language plan.

Emily: It's ever-growing - what we worked on 3 years ago is not what we worked on last year in December when we were really working hard. There's a lot of tears, a lot of laughter, a lot of celebration, and a lot of "let's keep going." We have to keep going. We're doing so much better than we think because we really did cry a lot. It's really wanting to capture a lot of the feedback from people who have helped us, people who have led us and people we're still learning from. We are still adding to that language plan. We're still growing from it. I would love to pass it over to Kim, because, man, we worked hard on that this past year.

Kim: I'm going to compare the language plan to language learning. Don't give up. Ask a lot of questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions. If you're unsure of something, reach out. FPCC is phenomenal. They will support you till the very end, and beyond. Their team is phenomenal. I came into this midway and I was blown away at the support that they offer, and that our team offers. When you stand together as a collaborative, as a team, and you really lean on each other, and you understand that you are going to have challenges.

That's just going to be part of it, but you don't let it stop you, you know? There were a lot of late nights, like, as Emily mentioned, sleepless nights. And as Ama Goodm Laxsüülda pointed at in her slides, we always think that we're supposed to be further ahead than we are. But then we step back from it, like, if we're painting a picture, and we

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think, wow, that's gorgeous. It's beautiful, we're doing it. So, I recommend asking questions, don't be afraid, stand together tall and you're going to do it really, well. Also, FPCC has amazing resources. Use their website, use their resources, fill out all the documents that they provided. A lot of work has gone into that for us. Reach out to other language teams. We're here. We want to help.

Ocean-Lynn: I'd just like to add one more thing about asking for help. After we had drafts, we also asked for help from our moms and our mentors. We had people come in on their precious time and oversee things with us. We read things, we showed them, we asked them, "how does it sound?" It was a huge joint effort. We invited people we trust and mentors who have work in other fields but are passionate about language, and we invited them to come help us.

Can you share some of your HedBanz?

Ocean-Lynn: *[shows an example of the game HedBanz to the screen]* I went over these with my mentor. The names for different things, and if things didn't have a good name - because some things don't translate well - I just took it out.

But also, we have other flashcards that we use for other games that we can stick right into the headband as well. This is a fun game but it's a bit more complicated if you're trying to make a cheat sheet like you saw I had for the *Uum hoon [Go Fish game]* with the relevant language. It's just in a document form right now. I haven't formatted it, but I have a bunch of prompts of questions.

If you go online and Google headbands questions, you'll get a big list of common questions that can help you narrow down. It's a guessing game, so you have to ask questions to figure out what you are. Then you could, if you have a fluent speaker you work with, just translate those.

I found the most valuable questions came with actually just playing which was really hard when we first played it. We first played it before approaching the fluent speaker we work with, Edward, about translating anything, and that's really hard but fun, too.

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Were land-based names taught, and the stories that go with the names?

Ocean-Lynn: We teach land-based names. I don't know if we have a class for it, but during our Sm'alg yax lunch sessions and morning sessions we talk a lot about stories. We translate English stories from our heritage into Sm'alg yax, but we also go on the Sm'alg yax.ca website, and there's tons of audio files and *adaawx* which is our histories on there. We listen to those, and we talk about where they are. We talk about it a lot.

Emily: I also have some storytellers in my family. Oh, my goodness, I love listening to some of my uncles and relatives. I've recently asked permission to translate some of their stories into Sm'alg yax and with those stories come chief names. Chief names come with territories. I'm really excited. A couple of stories aren't finished yet, but I am really excited to keep sharing, and I'd love to be a good storyteller one day.

Suggestion from a participant to learn body parts during bathtime and bedtime.

Can the panelists share a specific way they work to ensure the learning environment is not just educational, but also a culturally safe and healing space for adult learners, especially given the history of residential schools and language suppression?

Lisa: I would love to say something on this. Part of why I started offering closed family classes for my family online was to ensure comfortability and safety in learning. Before I started Family Fluency Project, I created a document titled *Language Safety Plan*, and then *Family Safety Plan*. So, in the *Language Safety Plan*, I had sections about Elder and fluent speaker consultation and translations and sharing Sm'alg yax in safe ways with Ts'msyen learners and non-Ts'msyen learners. There are many subcategories within those. In my *Family Safety Plan*, I had sections on lateral violence, caring for our stories, treasures, and documents, and ensuring comfortable and safe learning spaces, and tending to triggers.

In those documents, I assured my family that they could reach out to me or any member of the Kitsumkalum language team at any time for support and they can leave at any

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time. I think all of us really hold in the spaces a lot of care and respect, and everything we do is based on that. That's where I come from with my initiatives. I also just really trust that all of us to care for one another and talk things out. I know we've had so many meetings with Emily where we just have plans to talk about work, but it's like we just need the day to just let some things out, so I feel really confident in all of us being able to keep each other safe and listen and hear each other and move forward in meaningful and safe ways.

Emily: I feel like we give that space, too during anything that we offer to community, whether it's online or in person when we're all together because big feelings rise, and I feel like so many hearts are still reconnecting to language and culture in our own community. So, we really stress that it matters that you walk through the door, it matters so much that you showed up, and it matters when you ask your questions, and we can't thank them enough. I feel like you're hit with grief at different times of anything to do with your language and your culture.

It could take over so fast, so we really fall to the floor with each other, and we really fall to the floor with people that walk in our door, and we hold on tight, and we just continue to keep building and learning. And, um, pay attention.

Kim: Just to add a little bit onto that. I learned something from one of our matriarchs recently, while we were and are actively working on decolonization of our policy and procedure. She would say that if it's not written down, it doesn't exist. And for me, that was something I held onto about safety. Because it's something that we can put forward and then remind ourselves. It's like living, and we can always adjust to it and keep going. So, knowing that we have matriarchs, and we have healers, and we have medicine people that we can call on as well if something does happen, like speed dial. "Hey, we need you". Then making sure that we can create safe spaces for them as well.

So that a big, big part of our policy and procedure was to assure that we had all this heart written down, so that we could create and cultivate safe, equitable spaces for everyone. It's defining what a safe person means, what an Elder, means. Like, what does that mean to us, as a team and or as community? So, putting words to that has really

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opened my eyes as to what it means to decolonize policy and create safe spaces for everyone.

Ocean-Lynn: Yeah, this is obviously something really huge on all our hearts. I remember the first Sm'alg yax session I ever led, I got screamed at. Since then, I've always done a little disclaimer about the behavior that's expected, and I always say if there is an issue approach me afterwards. I would invite my mentor to that meeting. We can work through it, but during this time is not the time to go over that.

And then, like Kim mentioned, we've been really working on really clear policy. Some people have differing opinions about ways of life, or how some allies should be used, or different things, so we work on being really clear in certain spaces. This is what this space is for, and there's going to be people that we might disagree with, but we all came here because we care about Sm'alg yax and we want to live Sm'alg yax, and that's what that space is. But we also allow time for ourselves, like Emily mentioned, but also the people we work with to air things out. None of us are counselors but we found it's really important for the people we work with to feel like that they have a say, and that they're being heard by our team.

So we sit there, and then we'll all have a meeting to debrief if there was something really heavy, but we use that to pivot. We think, okay, how can we make this better for everyone? And we look at the policy that's still in the works and we think, well, maybe this is something we need to add in. We address with confidentiality, we address our mentors and our mothers, our matriarchs if there's an issue that keeps arising. It's a really big thing, creating a safe place, and there are, like Emily said and all of our team mentioned, there's a lot of emotions that come with this work.

We just do our best. A lot of writing things down, debriefing, putting things into policy, and putting out disclaimers. In some groups where I've known there's been some people who are prone to heightened emotions, let's say, and could possibly make a space unsafe, I've actually had a social contract that we all agree to before. That's really common when you have a classroom of kids. You go over how do we want to treat each other before a session with a new group, and you get everyone to agree with that, and if

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there's a new person that comes in, you mentioned it before they enter the group: "Oh, this is just how we act in this space."

I have gone so far as to get people to sign a little piece of paper that we all agree for this space to be really loving and caring.

For those who grew up hearing traditional stories or being surrounded by teachings, how has the decision to intensely immerse yourselves in Sm'alg yax as young adults strengthened your identity and your relationship with your ancestors and your homelands?

Lisa: I didn't grow up immersed. My grandmother passed along what she knew. Sm'alg yax was her first language, and she passed along bits and pieces here and there, and same with my mom. She passed along what she could, but I really started reconnecting and immersing myself in Sm'alg yax and our culture in probably, like, 2019. And it entirely brought me back to life. I think that's just the most that I can say about it. I had no idea the huge hole in my chest, in my heart, that had been empty, and as soon as I started learning Sm'alg yax, I was like, "oh, whoa, that's what that is" and I need to follow that. Then my family and I went up to our territory, I think in 2020 or 2021 maybe, and it was the first time I had been back since I was 9 years old. I immediately I felt that feeling of this is what I'm meant to be doing - this is where I'm meant to be. I have absolutely embraced any teaching, any opportunity I have to go back home and be with you guys in person and be with the land. I take that opportunity because it brings me back to myself, truly, and it has completely changed my perspective. Learning Sm'alg yax has opened my eyes to our way of life, and I take those teachings in every room I walk into now. So, learning Sm'alg yax and reconnecting with our culture, and connecting with you guys, and the land, and my family has absolutely saved me.

Emily: Yeah, holy, I agree. *Ap txaks lukwil goypa goodu dzila suwilaaymntu sm'alg yax.* I feel like my heart is extremely glowing the most when I'm learning and teaching Sm'alg yax. Everything fades away. All my worries from an hour ago and my heartaches and my tears are gone and the only thing that matters is: "How do I say go pick up that red pencil?" That's the only thing that matters, and when I'm transcribing as Sagoo Li'taa is talking, I can type fast, and I can follow him, and I can repeat him. Whereas in the

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beginning, I was struggling with that first word he said, and I lost it all.

Just reflecting on that, and my relationship with my family is extremely stronger. My uncles and my aunties are speaking to me way more in Sm'algax than they ever did my whole life. I was looking for something at our Seaweed camp this year, and my uncle Chuck said, and I wanted to fall to the floor, I was just so happy that he asked me, "what are you looking for?" in Sm'algax. My dear Grandma, she passed away last year. She lived to be 92 and the last 6 years since 2019.

She shared so much with me in that time, and our relationship extremely changed.

She was my last living grandparent. I think our introductions hurt at first because we talk about our grandparents, and we wish that they could hear us. We wish that we could talk to them. So, I was really glad that I had my Grandma for the last 6 years to teach me songs, prayers, and to be like, "Emily, you're learning Sm'algax? Come here, I have something to share with you." Profound, huge. And I feel like my feet are more solid on the ground and in the foundation when I speak.

Ocean-Lynn: I could share a little bit. I grew up in community attending feasts here in Kalum, and we didn't speak Sm'algax at home, but we had that slang. You know, those things that just hold on, all that slang, usually describing inappropriate things. But I went to school in Terrace. There weren't very many Indigenous people that went to the school I went to and as a teenager I just felt like I didn't fit. I didn't fit anywhere, didn't fit in community, I didn't fit at school. I had all these dreams of running away, and to another country or something. I actually left school, and then I did go on a little trip.

But trying to explain to people who I was, it didn't make sense to the people I was with. During these travels, I realized that I'm Ts'msyen and the reason why I'm not quite fitting is because we have a whole different worldview. Everything is different. The way I grew up at home, and the values that I was being taught at home is so community-based. Everything is to uplift our communities, whereas at school, I feel like it was a bit different. It was about succeeding, and there were different definitions of success.

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So, I came home, and I decided to go to my community school, because I had a Sm'algax program, and I really wanted to learn Sm'algax. It was really hard learning at first. How many tears I shed, oh my gosh! I jumped right in. I went to a program at UNBC for Sm'algax. I jumped in mid-cohort, so they had all this prior stuff, but I feel like through all of that, I've found, this is where I fit. This is what feels like home.

My team really loves that I'm a little kooky. I feel like my whole identity is based around this journey of learning Sm'algax, and our community. I hope that answered the question, but I feel like I'm rooted here. I'm rooted in Sm'algax. This is my life, and I want to just be there to welcome other people in and maybe make their journey a little bit easier. I think all of us had a bit of...not that it was a rough start, but there wasn't as many things in place for us when we all joined. That's what I really see us being, is the people that are here to put those things in place and make people's journey into coming into this a lot easier.

Annika: I love that we all needed a step back just to think about this question for a bit. It's an awesome question. My personal journey, just growing up with the family that me and Em have and how traditional we try to be with our feasts, our house, our names, and so many other things that I had. For the longest time for me, it felt like it was kind of just people were just telling me things. I didn't really take it too deep for the longest time, or I didn't think about it too much, and it's just this is what my family does.

Then I went to our community school here, NAGK, '*Na Aksa Gyilak'yoo* from Grade 5 to graduation, and they're very culture and language-led. But that was also school for me, so it was a weird mix of feelings for a while. I wanted it to be fun, but at the same time, it was like a school assignment that I needed done. After I graduated, I took a year off and I went to Vancouver for cosmetology school or beauty school. I don't know the proper name for it, but I was gone for about a year and a half, and then I moved back.

So many people throughout my school life, told me "Oh, you're so good at language, you should come back as a language teacher." I don't know what it is with me but when people tell me to do things, or people give this title on me without me really thinking about it myself, I just don't know how to feel about it. So, for a while, I was a little

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hesitant about the idea of being a language teacher or anything like that. But just, like, little baby steps.

When I moved back, I worked with Emily here, and I helped with some resources that were being done at the time, and then that just slowly led into everything that I'm doing now. That's another reason why in the beginning, that's why I put "with intention" since starting with the language team.

Especially with the protocol book, that is a big project right now. I remember being really excited because it involves also digging deeper into why we do feasts the way that we do. I'm just used to working them. I'm not used to knowing the complete whys of everything and that made me feel so much more connected to my family, the matriarchs in our family, and our uncles. It makes me... oh my god. Makes me realize...missed opportunities. Because I talked to my Gran a little bit what I knew at the time, but not as often.

It makes me feel so much more connected ultimately to my family. I was just talking about my Gran earlier, so it's heavy, right there. Ultimately, it's a heartache, but it's a beautiful heartache knowing that my Gran is still with me, and my uncles or aunties that have passed on, our cousins, even. Even with the grief, there's so much happiness, and there's so much laughter, and there's so much love. And I think that's what carries me right now.

What were the programs used? I remember hearing Canva, but not the rest.

Emily: I use Canva, Audacity, and Ocen Audio. Uh, Ocen Audio... That's so funny, it sounds like a little Rez accent. "Ooh, son."

- [Ocen Audio](#) is what I use for all my Apple audio files because a lot of platforms don't like those MP4 video files that Apple automatically saves it to. Ocen Audio has been a lifesaver to transfer my voice notes to any kind of resource in Canva or any other video platform.

- [Audacity](#). Again, I love keeping those projects in their project files. No MP3, MP4, or WAV files, it's just as it is and then I download the MP3, and I adjust accordingly.
- [Canva](#). I love Canva. I can't speak enough at how user-friendly it is. It's so fun to create comic books, storybooks. You could do voiceovers on your projects and record in real time. Oh, gosh, it just feels endless. Lisa gave us brochures one year from Canva. I ordered a first book from our Family Fluency Project that was a little too expensive, so I didn't order anymore. But I did order one book to preview that we created in our Family Fluency project, which was really sweet, and we have it here at the Robin House for anybody to see.

Ocean-Lynn: I just wanted to add, I don't know why, for years I was averse to Audacity. I tried a couple different things. I was using GarageBand which I did have success with, but in the end, Audacity won out. One of my favorite features is that you can label easily. It's just a shortcut, you can Google it, where you can label different points in your file. You can highlight points and put a label. So, while I'm recording, especially if it's an immersion session, I can just label this is where we talked about that, this is where we talked about this. Or this is a clip I'm inspired to use for something else. I love the labeling function, that's super easy. And honestly, it's really easy to use, so that's my plug for Audacity. If you're like me, and for some reason don't want to use it because it's not very pretty, GarageBand is way nicer to look at, but I like Audacity.

Lisa: I use all these as well, but I want to show my hard drive. It's Lacie. It's really great. This is what I put all my recordings from the Mentor Apprentice program and the Family Fluency Project on. I'm planning on getting another one and storing it at my parents' house, so that I have two locations in case anything happens to one. Yeah. I'm not going to put that out in the world, but I'm going to have two in two different locations. I just wanted to share this, because it's really great, and it has this fun little orange thing on the outside.

One of the struggles that most, if not all, communities have is engagement with community. You can have the most perfect programs or projects happening, but

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the challenge can be getting people into seats or getting people to participate. Any tips on how you got people involved?

Emily: When I first started, sitting in this role with just me, Lisa and Ocean, I went around to all the department heads and some Elders in community that I knew worked with language before, whether it was in the Head Start or the school, or just in general, that I know spoke Sm'algyax. With permission, I have audio recordings from 3 years ago from a lot of different interviews with these people, to figure out how to move forward. That immediately created our Wednesday luncheon sessions. It's a lot of our family and friends that showed up first to any kind of session we had, whether it was Ocean's Go Fish Nights or Painting with Lisa and Arlene.

Then it just grew from there. Some programs fizzled out, where nobody would show up at all, and we were just sitting there twiddling our thumbs. But again, we would practice with each other, and if one person showed up, we would take the time and just be with them. Me and Ocean played Go Fish with this young boy. He was the only one who showed up to our game night, but that was so much fun. We hold on tight to anybody that walks through the door. We just keep building and we still go meeting. Kim, Annika, Kirsten and I went and did a survey with everybody for our language program, for our 5-year plan, and that, again, opened doors. Kim has a record of names and phone numbers of anybody who's interested in any kind of resource. We hold on tight to those names, too.

Ocean-Lynn: I could add, too, we always have food, and really tasty food. Maybe a little bit of bribery. It's also following up, messaging the people that said they want to come, visiting them, and showing up to other community events. Promoting or doing something little there, and then just being really friendly and inviting everyone. We all spend time and take turns, or go as a team, and we try to attend as many community events as possible, and just be, like recruiters. And posting pictures - posting pictures of how much fun we're having, and all the food.

Kim: When we're at these community events using the language. Just going to add that in there. It's scary being out at the events and starting to say, *Ama Gantaak* instead of

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'good morning'. But when we're together and we're doing this, it loosens people up, and then people start having fun as well. So, don't forget to have fun.

Ocean-Lynn: At a recent community barbecue, we greeted people in Sm'algyax every single time, and we sang happy birthday. So many people were engaging with it, they were trying, it was awesome.

Lisa: I just want to say that we meet on Fridays as a team to do immersion, so we really have just turned inwards, honestly, and tried to build up our fluency as much as we can so that we can extend it to community.