

MAMU TSHISHKUTAMASHUTAU INNU EDUCATION

# INNU AIMITAU LET'S TALK INNU: NATUASHISH LANGUAGE FORUM

2024 | Feb



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## Tshinashkumetinau

Lots of people came together to make this community meeting a success. A great big thank you to our fabulous speakers for sharing their thoughts about Innu-aimun and culture and school: Manishan Edmonds, Nora Pasteen, Joachim Nui, Angela Pasteen and John Nui. Thanks to Nachele Poker for her beautiful pictures of nutshimiu expeditions. We got to hear the important student voices of Jakayla Rich and Anastasia Katshinak. Thanks to Ava Provencher for helping with that. A special thank you to Mary Jane Edmonds for leading us through the day. Emma Ashini did a great job with translation during the event and Penash Rich translated this report. Teachers and Innu staff at school helped with set up. Ralph Clarke provided the sound system and Navarana Tretina filmed the day. We are most grateful to community members who came, for their interest, for listening and sharing their thoughts on how we can all work together to dream and keep the Innu language and culture alive.

This forum was made possible from Indigenous Languages funding from the federal Department of Heritage Canada.





I want to share a bit of my story. I was born to Innu-speaking parents; they were always speaking Innu. When I entered kindergarten in 1971, I spoke only Innu, and that's when I first heard English. Being a baby and naïve, I thought the white school was the right place to be. From that age of 5, I was brainwashed to think that the other culture was the best and I was second class as an Innu person. I believed that all the way to grade 8. My parents didn't know better. They did not have knowledge of this other culture, of schools, teachers, priests, because they came from the land. Where we were in kindergarten we were singing Ten Little Indians. We didn't know we were making fun of ourselves. We were dancing and we were just babies. We just accepted a culture that was being forced on us. There was no Innu language in the school. But we were fortunate because we were born to Innu-speaking parents. Today there are parents speaking English to their children from birth. Children are watching TV, shows like Cocomelon. It's a different generation, a different era, and it's a very critical time. We are at risk of losing our language. I'm just as guilty today because I speak English sometimes to my grandchildren when I should be speaking Innu.

**W**e welcome everyone here today. There will be a prayer and sharing of stories. This afternoon we will have group discussions to look at what we can do to make sure our kids are learning their language and culture. What can we do, as Innu or educators? What can the school do to promote language and culture. What can families do, leaders, organizations? How can we all work together to make this possible. It will be a very interesting afternoon because we have a diversity of cultures. We have young educators, health care workers, young people and older as well.

Nachelle is going to show us two videos of the boys' walk and the girls' expedition walks that she was on last year. She is going to share the wonderful pictures she took of the walks, of the scenery and the children. She's a great photographer and a very strong walker.





**W**e are here to talk about our Innu language and how it is very important to us. Every time I travel to Kawawachikamach or Uashat, people tell me how strong our Mushuau Innu voice is, and how we have to keep going to not lose our language. Sometimes here in school I hear the children speaking English. It makes me sad. I think parents should be speaking to their kids in Innu. Sometimes I get angry at myself when my grandchildren are speaking English. I always tell them they should speak Innu. I try to teach them to say Innu words. But I see my granddaughter is struggling to speak Innu. She's been speaking English since she was a baby. I tell the children if they want me to listen, they need to speak Innu to me.

I want to try to find a way to teach them to speak Innu. I grew up in nutshimish with my parents and it is very important to me now.

I got a lot of teaching when I was out there with my parents and other families. I can do anything I want now when I'm out there. I've seen a lot of changes, like now we have skidoos and other machines. When I was growing up and my father told me to get wood, I had only a handsaw and an axe.

I had to chop wood and carry it back to the camp myself. But now everything runs with a motor. I miss that time when I always went hunting with my late father. I always thought about how strong my parents were. I'm very proud of their teachings.

One time everybody went home, I was the only one to stay with my parents. I was so excited when they let me drive the skidoo, an Elan. My father's friend gave me a rifle and told me to get some partridges. I went hunting and saw many ptarmigan, so many.

## NUNA PASTEEN

I took a shot but I wasn't able to get one. When I got back to camp, my late father asked me if I tried to shoot using both eyes, and I said yes. He said, "use only one eye." He sent me out again and when I used the one eye, I got a couple ptarmigan. I was very happy to take those ptarmigan home.

In 1996 my father lost a friend and he stopped going to nutshimish. I did too but I went again in 2003. It was very hard because my late brother used to go on the land. I started crying when we landed. I was so happy. I've been going ever since. Now I am trying to teach my kids, I take them every year to nutshimish. I take a lot of kids in the spring and the fall. Last year I took 2 boys; they were so happy. We went out every morning hunting, fishing. My son was always driving the boat with his friend. I teach them and they have so many questions.



## ANGELA PASTEEN

We never spoke English back then when I started school. We used our language in school. We had an Innu teacher teaching religion and another teaching Innu. Now my daughter goes to school, I never see her learning the Innu alphabet. I never hear her saying 'a, e, i, u'. The things we were taught in Davis Inlet are all changed now. When we moved here the children didn't learn religion. My late grandfather was in a documentary, the Two Worlds of the Innu. He said that one day in the future our children will only be speaking English. They will not be speaking Innu. We will not understand what they are saying. So it's happening now.

I want to talk about the students and after they graduate. Where are the jobs? My son graduated and I asked him if he wanted to go further in school and he said yes. But he's still here. And my grandchildren. When one of my grandchildren is speaking English, I always try to talk to him in Innu, but he can't say it. He knows and understand Innu, but he speaks English. We are losing it. I hope our children in the future will be studying Innu.

# Joachim Nui

I'd like to talk about the old days, when I was young, how our lives have changed when it comes to the Innu culture. We lived a nomadic life. The people respected each other, everybody, the elders, the adults and the children, the caribou. When there was a successful hunt, everything was utilized. Women did their chores and men too. My mother was taught how to clean the caribou and the boys were taught by their fathers how to hunt the caribou, and other game. Nowadays everything is easy, done by machines with gas. It wasn't that way in the past.



Long ago, there were no dog teams. We were nomads and we walked and pulled sleds from camp to camp, from one place to another. We followed the caribou. There were no machines, only sleds. When I was ten years old, I travelled with my father all the way to Sheshatshit. It was 1941. There was no Goose Bay then, but they were bringing in workers and the ships came from all over to Goose Bay to bring men and heavy equipment and supplies. We saw some White Settlers.

I was born in Kameshtashtan Lake. I learned a lot from my father, by

watching him. And my sisters learned from watching my mother, how to make moccasins and other crafts. They knew how to make snowshoes and fill them with the babiche. The Innu were very strong people in the country, very strong in our skills, our traditions, culture. There were no White men involved in our lives then. No government. No English spoken then, no books. Before I got married I carried all these cultural teachings.



**It was in 1948 that the government transported us by freighter to Nutak, north of Nain. I don't know why they wanted us to move there. Although there were a lot of animals, we were not comfortable there...**

The land was barren, there were no trees, no forest animals. The land was no good, closer to the ocean. There was no snow. After two years we went back to Old Davis Inlet, to our old lives. We were given dogs when we lived in Nutak and we began to use dog teams to pull our sleds when we travelled to Nutshimish. Life was good. It was a healthy lifestyle. There was no alcohol, no fighting, just people helping each other in the camp. There were no problems whatsoever. No employment, just teamwork among the Innu. There was no such thing as money. We were all about sharing. That's what I saw. Then the Kakeshau brought alcohol and that changed a lot. It made us forget our culture, our way of life, our healthy life in Nutshimish. The first time I saw a priest, it was in 1950. His name was Father O'Brien and he came to Old Davis Inlet to perform baptisms, marriages. He could speak Innu. He would come for a week and go back. He taught the children their prayers in a tent. There was no building. We prayed with the Bible, and two other priests came and they all spoke Innu. Our lifestyle was healthier. We can learn more when we are healthy. People were taught how to pray, how to read the Bible. There were lots of Innu students and we were eager for the first school to be erected in Davis Inlet.

Then in 1967 non-Innu teachers came and they could not speak our language. They were all English. People from outside were settling into the community to teach our children and grandchildren. Later the government said we would not be teaching religion; we would no longer be saying the rosary. Elders were not happy when the crosses were removed from the school, and the students were not learning how to pray. Children were taught in English. It is hard now because the young people do not know their way of life. We are not following our traditional ways. Men take the women to live with them. I feel sad that the school is not teaching the Bible, or prayers.

Today's Innu generation is trying to revive our culture but it's going to be hard to live like our Grandfathers and Grandmothers did. I don't know if it will work. I tell my grandchildren the language is dying off. It will be hard to teach the students about life in Nutshimish. The children are not speaking enough Innu. They speak English not only in school but also at home. What's going to happen?



I don't see anyone making snowshoes today. I gave my time once to teach young Innu how to make them. They learned fast and did a good job, but now they have lost interest. Many Innu women still have the teachings from their mothers, like weaving the snowshoe, but we don't have any Innu doing the weaving now. We are not following our cultural ways. Today's world has had a negative impact on our way of life, like alcohol and drugs, abuse of girls. They have changed our lives and our Innu ways are gone. I feel sad that we can't go back to where our ancestors left us. It is very hard to see who we are right now.

Every year in our community, we have community gatherings, Innu-aitun. Every time when Innu come together in natuashish I notice that families bring all their stuff like mattresses, tables, satellites, dishes, generators and so on. In the past we didn't do that. That's another example that our culture is diminishing. Our children are feeling the effects of the elders dying off—our teachers, our mentors, our Heritage.



## **CAMILLE FOUILLARD**

It's an honour and a privilege to have an Elder here to share his stories. We heard a lot today about culture and language, about how the school was in the past and nowadays. We heard about how parents and grandparents are speaking to the children in English. But we also know that there are still many Innu speakers in the community. We know that there are people who still have Innu-aitun skills. Joachim talked about how he has taught men and women to make snowshoes. This is what this meeting is about and this afternoon we will split into groups to talk about how we can work together so that culture and language live on. We will also hear from students who have spent a number of classes talking about how they feel about what's going on and what they would like to see.





# Jerry Gregoire

I got hired to work on the Regional Education Agreement as an Innu Liaison/Consultant a few months ago. I'm working alongside Kanani Penashue, interviewing people who are over 60 years of age. We are gathering information on education and asking people what their vision is for the future of both schools and the education of our students. I am honoured to be part of this important forum about our culture. Since I have been interviewing the elders, I have heard so much about our language and how it is being phased out when it comes to our children. This forum really reflects what I'm hired to do. If you have any information you would like to share, come talk to me. Or you can reach me on our Facebook page. My contact number is 709-217-8253 and my business email is jgregoire@innueducation.ca. Thank you very much.

# Jakayla Rich and Anastasia Katshinak

These days the kids are doing drugs, which makes me feel sad and makes me want to move away, but I can't. I grew up here and I can't just throw that away. This place drains me now, all the time, but I have to believe that this feeling won't last forever. I suffer in silence because I am trying to understand by myself, alone, why my hometown is the way it is. It makes me a little embarrassed, but life goes on. Still I am proud of who I am. Without my mother I would not be here. I'm happy to be her daughter. Kids need to learn who they are and where they come from, or they will go on the wrong path. I've seen a lot of kids smoking, but I don't blame them. It's just kids making bad choices because they are not being taken care of properly.

**K**ids are struggling in the community, wondering who they are. The Innu language is an important part of who we are as Innu people.

We need a course that takes students on the outpost program, on the land. Just imagine kids being happy and playing outside, going fishing, going on walks, going to nutshimish every year, me and my mom. The whole family going out to outpost, being a family together. But some students hardly ever get to go. They are lost.

Those who know how to do things can teach other students. They'll be called the Bandit Queens. Elders should tell stories about the past and what it was like. This will entertain a lot of students. If we lose our language, we will struggle to find ourselves and we don't want that. Also we could have cooking classes, with enough food for students. A little Gordon Ramsay and his sidekick Ratatouille.



**K**nowing where we are from and being out on the land can help our mental health. If we lose our culture and language, we will never know who we are. It's even harder for people who can't read. You just lose it. I try to help my best friend write words so that she can learn. We should keep the culture and language together. We should learn to set up a tent. We should have a big school cabin with beds. And for cooking. We want to learn how to make Innu hats, mittens, socks and snowshoes. What I really want to learn is how to make moccasins out of caribou skin. My mom feeds the family the meat, but ever since my grandma passed, it has not been the same. Students should go to sweat lodges, older students. Younger grades need to learn to speak Innu. We should also have more therapists and counselors and the community should build a cultural centre. Everyone would appreciate all those things.

**P**eople need to speak Innu at home. Parents should help their kids by speaking Innu. They can help teach them, and say "what does that mean?" or "What is it?" Parents can make it easier for the kids to understand. They can figure it out when they get older. They will already have learned Innu, and they can teach their kids.



## JOHN NUI

We have a lot of good people who are doing good work out here, my father Joachim who knows so much. You need to go to him for advice. He's a good man. There are a lot of other people, like Manishan and Jerry, Penash, Nora, very good people, who want to learn and help and think with you today. I'd like to share a little of where I come from, it's not all good. I used to go to school in Davis Inlet for 9 months of the year. My father would take us, me and Manian, Clarence to school. We never had those snow days when we were kept at home, right? My father would take us to school and we would walk back. After 9 months in school it was back to work for us. We never had a summer holiday like students today. My father was a commercial fisherman, and we started to work with him in May. We collected ice to store the fish in the shed. Right after school my father put us to work: fishing, cleaning fish, for 6 to 8 weeks. It was a treat for us when he took us to the community for a couple of hours. We would meet up with our friends and then we'd head back on the boat with my father about 35 km south from here. That's how I grew up, with my brothers and sisters, there's 8 of us. Now there are 6 of us.

I wish my father had done more to teach us about Innu culture. One of the things we did back then is go out at 8:00 in the morning to check his nets, about 15 or more of them altogether. We had to clean the fish, cut them up and it was the same routine every day, right up to when the fish stopped coming. Then we went back to school. In the winter, we would get a break when my father would take us out in the country and teach us his way of life. One of the things I learned from him is to always share the food that you kill. It's not for you, but it's for your hunting party. That is who you give it to first. That's what you do to be Innu. Every time we go out, my brothers, we don't keep our kill to ourselves. We give it to our friends. That is our Innu tradition. A lot of other Innu hunters do the same.



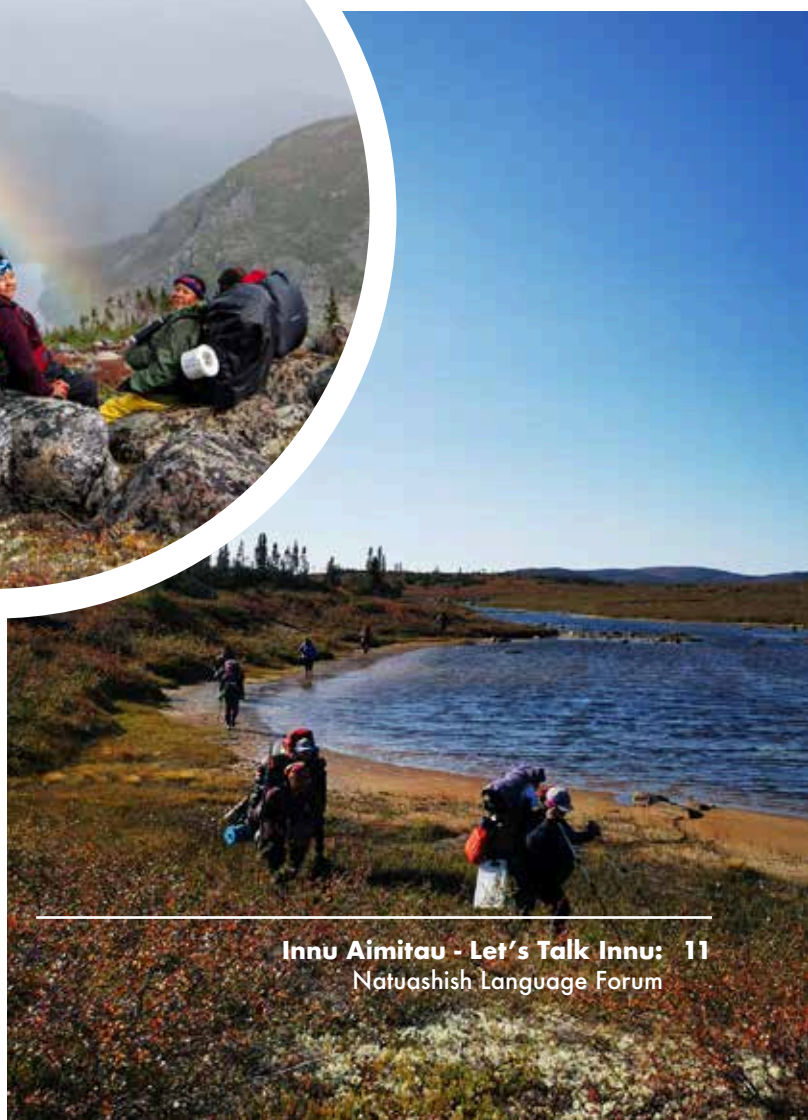
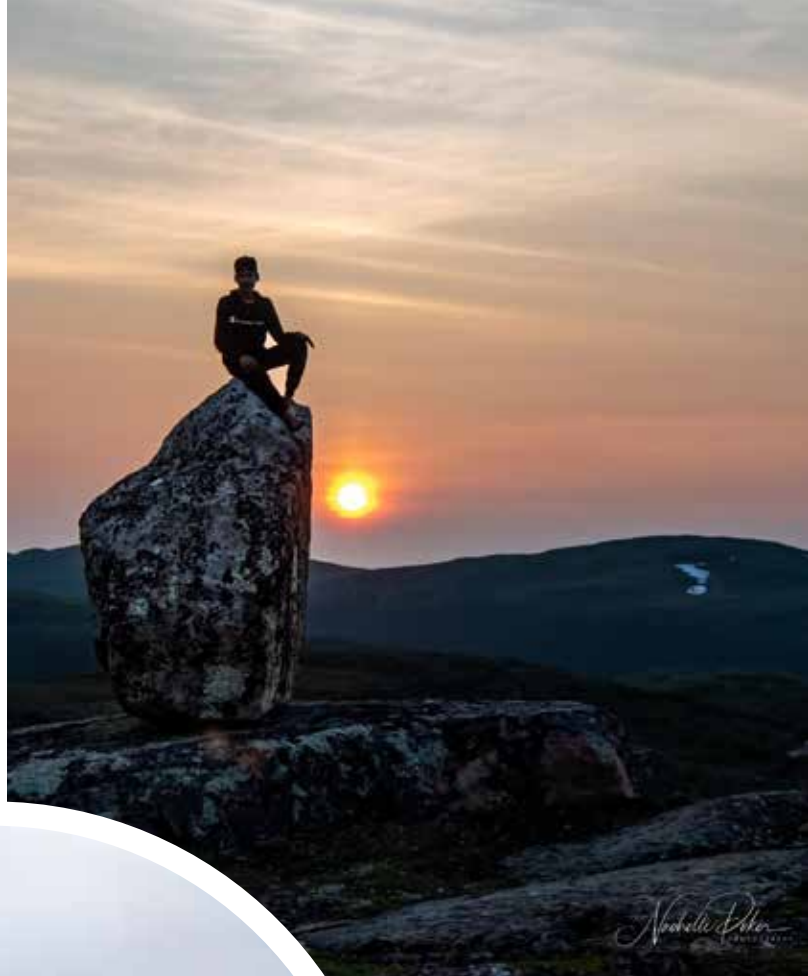
**It's important to keep our way of life, to keep what we were taught in the past, especially now that there are so few elders. Others are doing it, so we don't forget where we come from. I listened to Jakayla and what she says is true. Once we lose our language, we lose our identity.**

# NACHELLE POKER

Photography of Girls' & Boys' Walk Expeditions



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# GROUP DISCUSSIONS: What can we do to keep the language and culture alive?

Then groups formed to talk about what we could all do to keep the language and culture alive: what individuals could do, families, the school, leaders and organizations. This is what came out of those discussions. Some groups gave themselves a name, like Team Bannock, Team Peneuts, Team Petapan, Team Nipishapun and Team Fish.

## What can I do as an individual?

- speak Innu at home all the time, around kids and youth
- Teach my siblings Innu
- Teach teachers to speak Innu
- Teach my future kids to speak Innu
- Teach Innu to other kids
- get involved in expeditions, like the girls' and boys' walks
- keep cooking traditional Innu food
- continue to clean the animals and have children watch and help out.
- Use proper Innu words when speaking
- Learn to read and write Innu
- Show respect
- Educate ourselves about Innu culture and history
- Show posters in Innu (about animals, colours, numbers, etc.)
- Offer stories and experiences on the land
- No starlink in the country
- Show interest; Follow-through on ideas, don't just talk about it
- As a non-Innu person, I can immerse myself in the community, build relationships, learn more about Innu cultural norms and values, get involved in community events and out-post trips. I can learn to speak Innu, join the Innu-aimun classes on Wed at the school, 6:30, join the conversation and learn the culture



# What can families do?

- Speak Innu, instill Innu in children
- teach children language and Innu songs
- Entertain kids with Innu language and culture, games about surviving
- Post notes on items around the home to remind you to speak it and teach the children
- Learn to read and write Innu;
- Display the Innu alphabet at home; teach it to your kids and numbers too
- Join community language lessons
- Turn off devices and television; limit the time children spend on their devices; no Cocomelon for babies
- Show children how things are done in the Innu ways; teach them traditional way of life
- Make snowshoes with kids
- Make and wear traditional clothing
- Keep cooking traditional Innu foods
- Take children hunting and fishing, wooding
- Storytelling and legends
- Take students to outpost or on walks
- Learn and teach about Innu values
- Record elders' stories and play them at the Easter gathering
- Parents show videos/books about ancestors
- Create flash cards with Innu words
- Parents ask children, grandchildren to leave their electronics home; don't allow them to take these to school
- Document trips on the land to share with others, like Innu have always done



# What can the school do? *IN SCHOOL*

- Provide a safe and caring environment to promote cultural activities
- reflect Innu culture with displays of Innu crafts and arts inside the building
- Innu staff take the lead on Innu cultural activities
- Praise/appreciate what children do because they are proud when they complete their work; no making fun, children are shy
- Teach Innu-aimun in all grades, especially younger grades
- Have k to grade 6 Innu-aimun immersion
- Have Innu-aimun in every class, not just Innu-aimun classes

# What can the school do? *IN SCHOOL*

- Teach the Innu alphabet, numbers, traditional teachings about animals, the names of the animals in Innu
- Buddy reading with older students reading Innu books/stories to younger ones
- Games and activities with Innu resources
- More Innu homework
- Record stories and legends
- Infuse new Innu cultural curriculum wherever possible
- Create Innu resources, imaginative videos, books, games; Innu language kids' programs, tv shows dubbed in Innu
- Create resources (flash cards, posters) to send home for parents to teach their kids
- Have games in the classroom for kids to learn Innu
- Share more Innu tipatshimuna and history
- Hold an Innu-only month: only Innu is spoken
- Offer a core Innu class with a tokens system; kids get rewards for learning
- Parent/teacher meetings focused on Innu language
- Show Innu videos
- Organize a legends/storytelling club
- Present projects in Innu
- Innu-aimun for all messages and posters
- Innu guitar lesson
- Teach older students to sew traditional clothes
- organize an afterschool club to learn Innu
- students teach teachers how to speak Innu
- Teach Innu religion
- Invite elders to do a lecture for the students
- Teachers take away iphones and electronics in school
- Allow time for students to speak Innu
- Show and tell: e.g. explain to teacher what an Innu item is used for
- Organize a debating competition in Innu
- Coordinate language learning between school and family
- invite elder to do a lecture for the students





# What can the school do?

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## ON THE LAND



- Invite community members to teach skills;
- Have land-based classes, allow students to work on outdoor Innu activities, like setting up tents and Innu-aitun, snowshoeing, hunting, fishing, cooking, cleaning animals
- Have land-based activities on a regular basis with skilled Innu hunters/resource people
- Teach girls to clean a caribou hide
- Build a school cabin big enough to hold classes and with beds
- Organize school trips to nutshimish
- Organize a makushan; teach youth how to clean the bones
- Teach Innu medicines/remedies and their names
- Set up an Innu tent classroom to learn about traditional culture (cooking, crafts, Innu-aitun)

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## TRAINING

- Have an orientation for the new teachers/students about Innu culture
- Teach outsiders about Innu culture and language, in person or online
- All teachers learn a core set of Innu words
- Train teachers and Innu staff to know how to teach Innu-aimun, how different learners learn

# What can leaders & organizations do?

- Need support from band and community
- Reinforce mandatory speaking of Innu (public and private)
- Organize more visible cultural activities for kids and the whole community
- Create a youth council and support it
- Have focus groups with kids to see what their ideas are so they will buy in
- Invite more youth to get involved in expeditions
- Take children out on outpost more often
- Organize Innu-aimun only evenings for people to attend
- Have community champions who work on promoting language and culture
- Make this issue visible with posters
- Show Innu movies
- Have Youth centre hold Innu classes every week
- Have a drama club, plays in Innu
- Have a nursery program in Innu with caregiver
- Organize land-based activities, like setting traps, setting up a tent
- Set up traditional skills groups for girls and boys
- Leaders visit school more often
- More funding for language and culture programs
- Budget for a cultural centre
- Funding should come from all organizations in Natuashish including Health Canada
- Set realistic goals and follow through
- Organize an accountability committee
- get buy in from the whole community
- Lead development of Innu culture at school



## How can we work together?

- Come together as a community; organizations cooperate
- Visit more; Get to know each other, social life
- Show respect to each other
- Learn from each other
- Communication and teamwork
- Coordination between family, community and school
- set clear goals
- Pray for one another to feel okay
- Work on Innu immersion school
- More community meetings to improve things
- Show action
- Regular meetings to review progress

**“Let’s stand together and face what is fading away and the need to bring it back. We know this is going to be hard and we will do our best for our children to speak their mother tongue. This starts tomorrow, no later!”**

-Small group discussion

