



Empowering the Iñupiat through Language, Culture, and Education

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AQQALUK TRUST ANNOUNCES UQAPIAQTA DEVELOPMENT YEAR LEARNERS

5-member cohort will spend a year learning Iñupiaq in Qikiqtaġruk (Kotzebue)

Today, Aqgaluk Trust announces the five individuals who will participate in the Uqapiaqta Development Year. The Uqapiaqta Development Year is a pilot version of Aqgaluk Trust's envisioned one-year, full-time adult Iñupiaq immersion program. With most of our remaining Iñupiaq speakers now Elders, rapidly developing new adult speakers is critical to advancing Iñupiaq language revitalization. This is the goal of Uqapiaqta, which translates to "Let's Speak."

Aqgaluk Trust recognizes and congratulates these five Learners for their commitment to Iñupiaq language revitalization and calls upon community members across our region and Alaska to uplift and support their language learning journeys.

Kayuqtuq Savannah Bickley



Iñupiaqsisiga Kayuqtuq. My English name is Savannah Bickley and I've traveled to Kotzebue from Anchorage to reconnect with my culture. Living with my aunt and uncle, I've been able to experience many new things like preparing meat, creating my first *atiktuk* and trying boiled fish heads. (The best part of course, being the eyes!) I've found the more I learn about my culture, the more I grow to love both my heritage and my family.

Qunmigu Kacey Hopson



Qunmigu Kacey Hopson is Iñupiaq with roots in Anchorage, Ulġuniq (Wainwright), Utqiaġvik, and Kashmir, Pakistan. Her parents are Qutuk Muriel Hopson of Ulġuniq and the late Safdar Hussain of Kashmir. Her grandparents are the late Kunaq Ben Hopson and Qigñagaaluk Jeanette Hopson and Pehlwan Khan and Hassan Jan.



IÑUPIAT ILITQUSIAT

Respect for Elders • Knowledge of Language • Love for Children • Knowledge of Family Tree • Respect for Others • Sharing • Responsibility to Tribe
Respect for Nature • Hunter Success • Domestic Skills • Family Roles • Cooperation • Humility • Avoid Conflict • Hard Work • Humor • Spirituality

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Qunmigu is dedicated to uplifting Alaska Native ways of life and self-determination. She previously served as Director of Sovereign Pathways at Ginga & Igniñ Collective (G&I) where she focused on community-centered advocacy and healing. She is deeply grateful to be part of the inaugural Uqapiaqta Language Year cohort, where she hopes to contribute to community wellbeing and healing through language and cultural reclamation.

Saviigumaq Ayiana Browning



Uvaŋa Saviigumaq. Naluagmiutun Ayiana Browning. My parents are Jason and Audrey Lee. My aana is Carolyn Smith. I was born in Anchorage but spent my teens living in Kotzebue where most notably I worked with the National Park Service on a project documenting the Iñupiaq place names around the Noatak River. After, I went to University of Alaska Anchorage where I graduated with an Associate of Arts in Alaska Native Studies. I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to more language preservation!

Pauyun Helena Barr



My name is Helena Barr, my parents are Enoch and Rosaline Stalker. My maternal grandparents are Homer and Ruth Larkin, my paternal grandparents are Ross and Dora Stalker. I have 6 kids and 4 grandkids. I lived in Kiana and taught at the school for 20+ years in bilingual. During my off times from school, I worked summer jobs at the Elders' camp as coordinator. I loved working with kids and showing them what I know. I am now helping the church on Iñupiaq songs and reading the Bible in Iñupiaq for them.

Iqpiziq Violet Kuner



My name is Iqpiziq, English name Violet, and I grew up in Evanston, Illinois. I currently live in Chicago, Illinois and work at a pizza place. My parents are Jenny Senungetuk and David Kuner. I am the eldest grandchild of the late artist Joe Senungetuk from Kingigin (Wales). I am passionate about art, books, music, language learning and skateboarding. Growing up outside Alaska I did not have access to learn our Inupiaq culture and life ways. I am proud of myself and my family for doing the work to learn and reconnect with our people.

About the Uqapiaqta Development Year

These five Learners will spend their year learning Iñupiaq language in a classroom setting and putting their language skills to use through cultural activities with Iñupiaq-speaking Elders. Their curriculum will be based on the Indigenous Language Fluency Transfer System (ILFTS) developed by LaRae Wiley, Christopher Parkin, and their Elder S̄aṁtíča? Sarah Peterson. ILFTS has been implemented for over 15 years at the Salish School of Spokane, actively creating fluent speakers. The curriculum is seasonally based, rooted in local cultural activities, and uses interactive conversational methods designed to rapidly develop speaking proficiency in adults.

Each Learner will receive a \$5,000 monthly stipend to allow them to focus full-time on language learning. They will be based in-person in Qikiqtagruk (Kotzebue) from early January through mid-December 2027. The program is no strings attached – after completion, Learners are encouraged to use their newly acquired language ability in whatever capacity they believe will be most meaningful.

The Learners were selected from among 14 applicants through a two-round competitive application process that included a written application and online interview. Aqqaluk Trust thanks the members of the Admissions Committee that reviewed applications and selected these Learners: Northwest Arctic Iñupiaq Language Commission members Agnik Polly Schaeffer and Anallaq Norma Ballot, and Aqqaluk Trust staff Aviññaq Lucy Boyd and Taksruq Denise Koutchak. All five selected Learners have ancestral roots in Iñupiat Nunaat and demonstrated commitment to Iñupiaq language revitalization.

The Uqapiaqta Development Year is made possible through contributions from NANA Regional Corporation and a one-time Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) award sponsored by Senator Lisa Murkowski. To NANA and Senator Murkowski: *taikuullapiaq*, thank you very much. *Taikuu* also to our other funders and partners: Northwest Arctic Borough School District, Maniilaq Association, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Hilton Foundation, and Indigenous Fluency Now.

If you or your organization is interested in supporting Aqqaluk Trust's language revitalization work, financially or otherwise, please contact Paałuk Reid Magdanz, Uqapiaqta Program Director, at uqapiaqta@aqgaluktrust.com or 907-412-0338.

About Aqqaluk Trust

The Robert Aqqaluk Newlin, Sr. Memorial Trust is a 501(c)(3) private foundation based in Kotzebue, Alaska. It was founded in 1989 in honor of Iñupiaq leader Robert Aqqaluk Newlin, Sr. of Noorvik. Its mission is "Empowering the Iñupiat through Language, Culture, and Education." Aqqaluk Trust is governed by a 7-member Board of Trustees, and since 1989 has distributed over \$17 million in scholarships to the Iñupiat of Northwest Alaska.