

“I feel great to accomplish something that is a challenge, that I’ve never made before.”

– Denise Taptuna-Okheena

# NUNAMIC OLLOHAKV

Denise Taptuna-Okheena with her sealskin mitts and fur hat.

**I**t is November, and Ulukhaktok is on blizzard warning tonight. Visibility is low as we trudge against winds up to 70km/hr and hard bits of snow whips into our eyes, we arrive at the youth center where *Nunamin Illihakvia: Learning from the Land* sewing classes are held. The door opens onto a scene that warms our hearts immediately – there is laughter in the room, and elder Margaret Notaina is sitting on the floor with young mothers Susie Nigiyok and Denise Okheena, between them a sewing machine and a scatter of wolfskins. Avery, Denise's two year

old daughter is imitating the elder and her mother, using her hands to press gently down the hairs on a wolf pelt for the amaruq that Denise is making. An *amaruq* is the sunburst wolf fur trim on the hood of an Inuvialuit parka, and Denise is looking forward to making her first one for her baby.

Annie Inuktalik, instructor and elder known for her exquisite sewing dips a straight teeth comb into water, gently taming the strands of wolf fur that are astray. "You comb it like this, to make sure that the length of the hairs are even," she shares.

"The *amaruq* is made of 3 layers of fur, with a canvas base. We use wolf furs with dark tips on outside layer, the middle layer is lighter, and the back layer too. If the skin is not straight but it's already dry we need to scrape it so it's easier to work with. We fold the wolfskin right down the middle. We cut the long hair right by the edges and use that. We use a measuring piece to cut little pieces of the same size, and we cut off the ends so it should be all even. You can make two ruffs with one skin."

In the room, there are other young mothers, most of them learning this skill for the first time. Annie remembers, "All my life I've seen my mother sewing, with different kinds of skins for



# LEARNING FROM THE LAND

“Nunamin Illihakvia: Learning from the Land” is an Ulukhaktok Community Corporation (UCC) cultural education project funded by Health Canada, dedicated to the transfer of traditional knowledge to younger generations.

It brings together youth and experienced hunters and sewers to gain subsistence skills for winter hunting. →

each season. She does a really fine job. That’s why I like to do it really slowly and patiently so they turn out good, that makes me happy.”

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– Annie Inuktalik



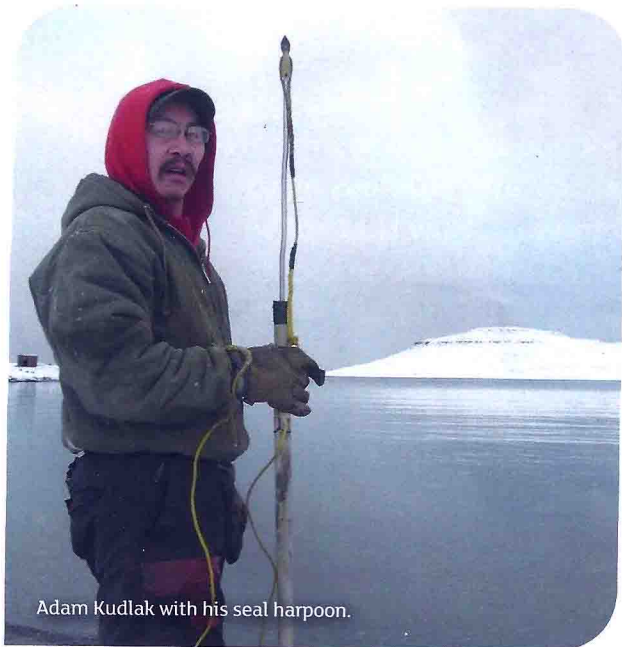
Youth Kendra Kudalk and Koral Marie Kudlak wearing seal skin hats they made. They took part in the seal hunting, skin tanning and hat making class.



Photo of crimped shoes taken from the British Museum.



Kendra Kudlak trying on the crimped shoes.



Adam Kudlak with his seal harpoon.



Elder Mary Kudlak, Lisa Alikamik, Kendra Kudlak and Koral Marie Kudlak wearing seal skin hats they made in the Nunamin Illihakvia Seal Skin Hat making class.

“I’m making my baby a Christmas parka, she’s 3 years old. I was really intimidated by sewing machines but now I want to own one.”

– Janet Kanayok



experienced hunters, sewers and elders to learn how to travel on the sea ice and hunt seals in the winter, how to prepare seal skins for sewing, and how to sew traditional seal skin clothing.

These skills are crucial for food security, social and cultural identity, but are under strain from rapid social and environmental change (ice dynamics and seasonal melting patterns, availability of species, ability to predict weather and travel safely).

**“It’s important to adapt to changing conditions and ice. We have to change our way of traveling, times are shorter, we are unsure of the ice, we don’t trust it. Many people don’t like to go out in -30s, -40s, pitch black, but it’s probably my happiest time of the year.”**

– Adam Kudlak

Researchers from IK-ADAPT are documenting the importance of seal in the lives and livelihoods of Inuit in Ulukhaktok (nutrition, wellbeing, culture, etc.) and integrating Inuit knowledge with scientific monitoring and assessments to better understand the impact of climate change on seals.

“We are teaching the 18–40 age group, where they are old enough to be out of school and unable to participate in on the land programs there, but are perhaps too young to have learned skills from older hunters and sewers,” said Susan.

“Right now they are making the equipment for going out to hunt in winter, snow knives, harpoons, seal hooks, sleds, and the wooden boat that they go out with. They have to make all their equipment before they get out there.”

“In January we will start to go out and use this equipment that they are making. We want to

include the ladies also, so now we are holding classes to make sealskin products. We finished seal skin hats, now they are working on *amaruq puhitaq*, and then *kiihimik* (bearded walrus/seal crimped shoes), it’d be nice to see that come back.”

Donna Ahiatak, who helps run the program is →

Troy with his snow knife and seal harpoon.



Patrick Joss (front) filing a harpoon tip.

The teachers hope there will be continued funding for such courses. Adam Kudlak, one of the equipment making teachers says the program is also about continuing a love for the land. "It's important to adapt to changing conditions and ice. We have to change our way of traveling, times are shorter, we are unsure of the ice, we don't trust it. Many people don't like to go out in -30s, -40s, pitch black, but it's probably my happiest time of the year." ■

also learning to sew. "Everybody enjoys coming to do sewing, some ladies come just to enjoy hanging out," she says. "We get elders dropping in too, they enjoy seeing what we're doing. Mary Kudlak, Margaret Kanayok, Elsie Klengenberg are some of the elders who've dropped in."

Janet Kanayok, one of the students agrees and adds, "It's really important for me, to feel like I'm learning part of my culture. I was really intimidated by the sewing machine, I had a really bad experience so I've just never really gotten into sewing before until a couple of years ago, but now I want to own one."

Instructor Annie says the students are doing well. "They catch on right away and they are doing very well. I try to teach them the basic ways and to use tools in a new way."

The sewing programs happen every Wednesday and Saturday, while the men are learning to make equipment to go hunting on the land.

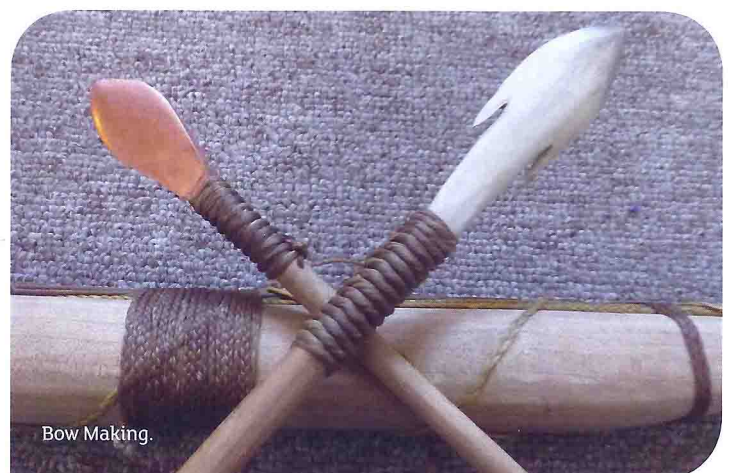
Instructors for equipment making classes include Adam Kudlak, Ross Klengenberg, Doug Goose and Walter Olifie (elder support teacher), and sewing instructors include Kate Inuktalik, Annie Inuktalik, with Margaret Notaina, Mable Nigiyok and Mary Kudlak as elder support teachers.



Men's equipment making class.



Filing a harpoon tip.



Bow Making.