

# NUNAMIN ILLIHAKVIA

## Learning from the land

Inspired by the Piqqusilirivvik Inuit Cultural School in Clyde River, Inuit in Ulukhaktok, NWT, launched Nunamin Illihakvia: learning from the land, with support from Health Canada. Nunamin Illihakvia is a step towards a new Inuit-led cultural education program in Ulukhaktok that is dedicated to enabling the transfer of traditional knowledge, skill sets and values, based on Inuit knowledge and guiding principles. Specifically, this pilot project brings together young Inuit, male and female, with 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. Having such knowledge and skills provides young Inuit with the opportunity to engage in productive activities that continue to have value economically and socially. Ulukhaktomuit hope revived participation in winter seal hunting and traditional sewing skills will strengthen the health of community members during a time of rapid climatic and societal change.

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### Rationale

The Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) states that “to preserve Inuvialuit cultural identity and values within a changing northern society,” Inuvialuit traditional knowledge and skills need to be passed down from generation to generation. This includes instructions on how to hunt, fish, travel, and survive on the land, and on how to prepare and sew hides. Many Inuit under the age of fifty, however, are spending less time on the land and there is concern that some traditional knowledge and skills are being lost, with severe implications for health and wellbeing (Condon 1995; Pearce et al. 2011). In particular, knowledge and skills for hunting and traveling safely in the winter and for sewing appropriate winter clothing are being lost. This is also the time of the year when the food banks in several communities are most heavily used, in part due to limited access to country foods.

### Enhancing Inuit health

The project is closely linked to human health. Traditional education is much more than acquiring hunting skills, and Inuit knowledge encompass many of the teachings needed to survive in a rapidly changing world: patience, forbearance, observation skills, control over one’s physical reactions and one’s emotions, the ability to overcome adversity, and the ability to develop strategy and to efficiently execute it. Some of the social suffering that exists in Ulukhaktok and elsewhere in the Arctic – homelessness, limited educational attainment in formal schooling, unemployment, health inequities, and suicide – can be partially attributed to feelings of low self-worth and position in society (Lehti et al. 2009).

Alongside direct support for safe hunting and food security, Nunamin Illihakvia supports dimensions of health and wellbeing related to developing a sense of achievement. Having knowledge and skills important for safe and successful harvesting under changing conditions, and for hide preparation and sewing to provide appropriate winter clothing, provides young Inuit with the opportunity to engage in productive activities that continue to have value economically and socially.

### Objectives

The importance of both formal and traditional models of education to Inuit is well established; however, many challenges have been identified for the brokerage between the two educational models including creating and transmitting culturally appropriate curricula. The project responds to a pressing need in the community to establish an Inuit-led cultural education program and support the transfer of traditional knowledge, skill sets and values, based on Inuit knowledge and guiding principles in a changing climate.



#### OBJECTIVE 1: Sharing winter seal hunting knowledge and skills

*Younger generation Inuit will work with experienced hunters and Elders to make seal hunting tools and equipment. Participants will travel on the sea ice during January, February and March to hunt seals in aglus (breathing holes), and in the aolagot (open water lead).*



#### OBJECTIVE 2: Sharing traditional seal skin preparation and sewing skills

*Younger generation Inuit and Elders are working together to share traditional knowledge of seal skin preparation and sewing. This includes: i) how to flesh and soften a seal skin, ii) sewing seal skins, and iii) patterns for traditional clothing.*



#### OBJECTIVE 3: Interviews with Elders, hunters and sewers

*Inuit-led interviews are being conducted with Elders, hunters and sewers about the health-related aspects of seals and their importance in Inuit diet and culture in the context of climate change.*



#### OBJECTIVE 4: Film and Radio

*Activities are being filmed, photographed and recorded throughout the course of the project by participants. Learning tools will be developed such as online and interactive lesson plans and education modules and bi-weekly radio broadcasts that can be shared with other northern communities.*



#### CASE STUDY AREA: Ulukhaktok Region

### Images

**MAIN IMAGE:** Adam Kudlak, Alan Joss and Allen Pogotak hunting nattik (ringed seal) at the aolagot (open water lead).  
**OBJECTIVE 1:** Adam Kudlak and Emily Kudlak hunting nattik at an aglu (breathing hole).  
**OBJECTIVE 2:** Lily Alanak shows her puhitaa, a traditional ‘sunburst’ fur collar for a woman’s parka.  
**OBJECTIVE 3:** Karen Kitekudlak and Lily Alanak learn from Margaret Notaina how to prepare amaruq (wolf) skins for sewing.  
**OBJECTIVE 4:** Eric Kagyut learns how to braid rope with Walter Oliffe. The braided rope will be used to connect the naulaq (harpoon head) to the unaq (shaft).

### References

Condon, R. G., Collings, P., and Wenzel, G. (1995). The Best Part of Life: Subsistence Hunting, Ethnicity, and Economic Development among Young Adult Inuit Males. *Arctic* 48(1): 31–46.  
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Pearce, T., Wright, H., Notaina, R., Kudlak, A., Smit, B., Ford, J.D., Furgal, C. (2011). Transmission of environmental knowledge and land skills among Inuit men in Ulukhaktok, Northwest Territories, Canada. *Human Ecology* 39, 271–288.

### Acknowledgements



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ULUKHAKTOK COMMUNITY CORPORATION



### Significance of Project

A short-term goal of Nunamin Illihakvia is to revive participation in winter seal hunting, and seal skin sewing, and to strengthen the health and food security of the community in a changing climate. A long-term goal is to continue to develop Nunamin Illihakvia as an Inuit-led cultural school to help document, preserve and promote Inuit traditional knowledge and skills that are important for a healthy lifestyle, physically, mentally, and culturally, in a time of rapid climate and societal change.