



AILDI News & Updates

September 2022 Issue

News, events, updates, opportunities... everything and anything related to AILDI and native languages.

[Our Website](#)

International Decade of Indigenous Languages



2022-2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
Indigenous Languages

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has declared the decade 2022-2032 as the international decade of Indigenous Language. Globally about 40 percent of the languages spoken in the world are at risk of extinction, and a large share of those are Indigenous languages. In the words of the United Nations, “Indigenous languages add to the rich tapestry of global cultural diversity. Without them, the world would be a poorer place.”

This declaration comes following the International Year of Indigenous Languages (2019), which passed with relatively little public awareness. It also follows a period of great strife for Indigenous language communities worldwide, as the Covid-19 pandemic has tragically taken the lives of many native speakers and elders. The need for large-scale action has never been more pertinent.

On September 17th, AILDI held a planning session to discuss activities already underway to support the decade, as well as to brainstorm new ideas. We heard about all sorts of amazing work being done by

AILDI associates, including many past attendees of our institute.

Dr. Joseph Dupris spoke to us about his work aiding the Klamath tribes (Klamath, Modoc, and Yahooskin) in creating a brand new language department. He also shared with us the news that the University of Colorado Boulder decided to recognize 48 tribes with historic ties to Colorado, even though there only two federally recognized tribes of Colorado. Joe also shared with us that he contributed to a short film project titled [This Is Their Land](#), which heavily features the Modoc language. Cool stuff!

Dr. Rolando Solano spoke to us about the interaction of technology and Indigenous Language Revitalization. He told us about a project in Tonga and the Cook Islands where talented young students will learn to build and program robots, and then give commands to them in their native language! Spurred on by a question from Robert Elliott, we also discussed how recent technological advancements could contribute to language education, including Virtual Reality as a potential vehicle for language immersion.

Dr. Melanie Cody shared with us some of her work in the field of Indigenous Sign Languages, including archaeological work demonstrating the ancient nature of such languages. Some of her work focuses on rock art which depicts American Indian sign languages being used—from Oaxaca to Utah—which can date to as far back as 6000 BC. Much about these ancient carvings is still left unanswered, such as which groups left them behind. One thing is clear, though. The widespread conception that American Sign Language is the oldest signing language in the Americas is simply untrue. Indigenous Sign Languages predate it by millennia!

Plenty more projects and ideas were discussed, which unfortunately cannot all be summarized here. Of course, not every contribution to the decade needs to be so large. You can contribute to IDIL by simply speaking your language in your own home, with your loved ones, or in your community. There is no step too small when it comes to American Indian language revitalization.

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages already seems promising. We are thrilled to see how these next ten years will pan out, not just for AILDI, but for Indigenous peoples everywhere!

[If you are interested in learning more about IDIL, check out their website here!](#)

Indigenous Language Program Directory Highlight

Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program

Revitalizing language in *Chikashsha Iyaakni'*, the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma.



The director of the Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program provided us with some information about the activities and goals of their division, as well as those of the Chikashsha Academy, their relatively new language immersion program.

First off, can you introduce yourself?

Saholhchifoat Lokosh, naahollo imanompa'at Joshua D. Hinson saya. Chikashsha saya. Kowishto' ikxa' micha Imatapo inchokka-chaffa'ako ishtaaonchololili. *Division of language preservation* imishkoboka saya.

My name is Lokosh, in English I am Joshua D. Hinson. I am Chickasaw. I descend from the Panther clan and Their Lean-To People house group. I am the leader the division of language preservation.

Which tribal/Indigenous community is your program/institution affiliated with?

Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma.

How many staff members work for your program/institution?

12 full time, and 8 part time temporary speaker positions. However, we're going to be expanding.

How long has your program/institution existed?

Formally, the revitalization program was founded in 2007, under the department of Chickasaw studies. In 2021 we were pulled out and reorganized as our own division.

How long has the language immersion program being going on for?

We kicked off with a Master-Apprentice program at the founding of the revitalization program as a whole. We ran Master-Apprentice formally from 2007 to maybe 2014. But we gradually phased that out because the program was not leading to our proficiency goals. So we started the academy program as a pilot in 2015, and then we formally launched with an ANA grant in March of 2022.

Can you provide me a description of your program/institution?

Our mission under the language preservation division is to enhance the overall quality of life of Chickasaw people through the revitalization of the language. The division is essentially divided into two parts. One part encompasses all public facing outreach and enrichment, non immersion education. The other half is strictly immersion; the Chikashsha Academy program. We do a variety of things to make sure any citizen anywhere with an internet connection can access their language. We do flash cards and social media campaigns and videos and online community classes... Eventually, the plan is to have either a virtual or in-person language class for the purposes of world language credit for graduation in any given school on the reservation.

And then there's the academy. Attendees work 32 hours a week for three years. Once you reach an intermediate level, we put everyone through a teacher training program. Once they graduate we look to hire them all. Our aim is 60 participants by the end of the decade.

They don't have full benefits, but they are offered birthday leave, all major holidays off for example. But it's a competitive wage, we offer them 15 dollars an hour, moving to 20 after a year. Our focus is on 18-24 year old's, but there are people as old as 30s all the up to their 50's in this current cohort. Our oldest participant gave up his full time job with benefits just to participate, so we're really looking for some exciting things to come out of him. But for the most part, it's relatively young folks.

What is your role in the program?

I'm sort of the chief paper pusher. Ultimately everything comes through me. I facilitate certain things, such as assessments with the Academy. I do co-research with our linguistic unit. I'm the most proficient second-speaker of the language, so sometimes I sub in when we don't have a native speaker available. When all of our native speakers are gone, I'll be the de facto native speaker.

What are some challenges your program/institution has faced?

Well we've never had issues with political support. The governor is an incredible booster for our language. We've never had issues with funding. When we have clear demonstrated needs, we always get the funding to do what we need to do. There's some obvious limitations and challenges, though. We have less than 35 speakers. The committee itself is composed of 24 people, less than half are native speakers.

There's always the issue of lack of interest. The average citizen really has very little interest in language, and culture, in the deep sense. You discover that you have a Chickasaw ancestor from 200 years ago and you become a citizen, but you don't really know what that means. Some people get closer to the center and some people stay on the periphery. But a robust revitalization movement that's producing new speakers requires some bigger numbers. Our goal is 35 newly proficient speakers by 2032. That means intermediate or higher. It's a challenging target, certainly.

What are existing projects your program/institution is working on?

We have really turned up our documentation efforts. We are gathering 32 hours a week of audio and video from the academy. And then on average we are doing 6 hours a week with native speakers. Either narrative production or conversation amongst one another. We realized they are all of a certain age, and the one gaping hole in Chickasaw documentation has been the lack of a corpus. We have excellent description, but even the narratives that Munro published in the grammar book are rather artificial. How do I say hello? How do I have a conversation? There is some practical stuff, of course. For example, how do I soothe a baby? How do I talk to a baby? The last Chickasaw babies that were raised with the language were born in the 40's. They don't remember, they were babies! We're going nuts collecting as much documentation as we can.

What are the short-term goals for your program institution (present-day – one month from now)?

One month from now we'll have launched our Wordle game. It's called Anompa - a Chickasaw Word Game. We were gonna call it Anomple, but speakers would hate that because it doesn't make any sense. We're working on a big BIA living languages funded grant project with Buffalo Nickel Creative out of Pawhuska. So we'll have in a month an initial rough cut of all of our animated emojis. And then we're gonna turn all of those emojis into short animated frames for people to use.

What are the long-term goals for your program/institution?

The big ones are expansion of the division, a dedicated language building, and a newly conversational speech community of 35-45 people within the decade. Comprehensive language education throughout our tribal schools. Expansion of our high school classes to every high school on the reservation, probably virtually. We also want to have an immersion program for babies before 2028, and then build it out from there. We'll see if we can accomplish that!

From your perspective, how do you view the language activity in your tribe?

We have always had a successful program. We've always met the needs of the average citizen in terms of what they need out of the language. Simple stuff, like how to introduce themselves. Flash cards and such - its all there. Master-apprentice taught us some things about the current narrative-based immersion that

we're doing now.

Some of our growth now is in response to the pandemic. We've lost a number of speakers during the pandemic, though only one was actually to Covid-19. We developed a really strong 10 year strategic plan and then with the governor's encouragement we are rapidly moving towards those goals. We're actually accelerating the 10 year plan. So yes, I feel really good about the state of our revitalization program. And I would put us up against pretty much anyone. In the lower 48, anyway. That means different for every tribe. For smaller tribes, maybe meeting the enrichment needs would be easier. We spend so much time and effort and money to ensure that all 70,000 or so of us have access. But the hard work, the daily work that has to be done, is the academy. Because you can enrich yourself into a state of extinction. I don't really like that word, but you know what I mean. You can enrich your language into a state of sleep.

Anything else that you feel is unique about your program?

We feel incredibly blessed that we have full support from our elected officials, and that we are well-funded. What we do in terms of Indian Country as a whole, is that we are happily sharing our triumphs and our tragedies with other groups that are trying to do similar things. Even at the federal level, we have been pushing for dedicated, guaranteed, non-competitive funding for other language programs around the country, because not everyone is as blessed as we are.

Thank you to Joshua D. Hinson, and the rest of the Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program, for contributing to our directory!



Joshua D. Hinson (Lokosh)

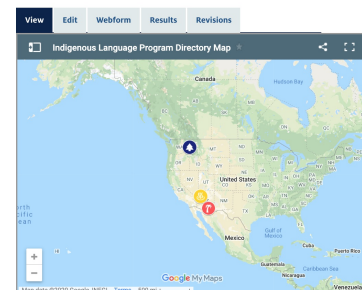
[For links to the Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program page and social media, visit the AILDI Directory page here.](#)

SUBMIT to AILDI's Indigenous Language Program Directory

Showcase and share the work you do for your language!

Our intention is to compile a directory map of Indigenous language programs across the continent increasing support and awareness. Each submission will contain program information to serve as a resource for those interested in learning about language work and further collaboration.

Indigenous Language Program Directory Map



To submit to our directory, please click [here](#).

AILDI Podcast - Coming Soon!

AILDI is working on starting a podcast focused on Indigenous Language! Do you have experience working with indigenous languages, contributing to language revitalization, or do you have another interesting background or area of expertise? If so, would you want to participate in the AILDI podcast? Feel free to send our graduate assistant an email at zionsmith@arizona.edu.



Support Indigenous Language Stewards at AILDI *with a donation towards student scholarships*



Support from our friends makes AILDI possible for future generations of students, teachers, community members, and activists.

All donations go towards AILDI scholarships and any amount—however big or small—is welcome.

If you have ever attended AILDI, you know its value. Honor your experience by giving back today!

[*Click here to donate*](#)

[Sign up for our newsletter!](#)



The American Indian Language Development Institute's (AILDI) mission is to provide critical training to strengthen efforts to revitalize and promote the use of Indigenous languages across generations. This is accomplished by engaging educators, schools, Indigenous communities and policy makers nationally and internationally through outreach, transformative teaching, purposeful research and collaborative partnerships. As a result of our work, we envision that the larger society will know that language revitalization is critical to sustain and reinforce Indigenous linguistic, cultural, and spiritual health and identity.