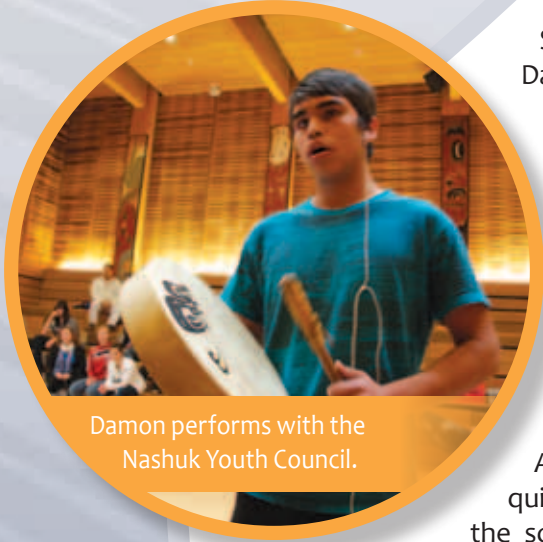


Uu-a-thluk Intern Shares Love of Culture



Damon performs with the Nashuk Youth Council.

Student interns like Uu-a-thluk's Damon Rampanen are the subtle backbone of many successful education programs. With a passion for his heritage and an ardent curiosity, the 19-year-old Rampanen has enriched Uu-a-thluk's cultural offerings over the last six months through his work as a capacity building intern.

Tracing his heritage through Ahousaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, and Hesquiaht First Nations, Rampanen is the son of Rose Marie Andrews and Joe James Rampanen, and the grandson of Charlotte and John Rampanen and Gretta Andrews. Since starting work with Uu-a-thluk in June, he has shared some of this diverse heritage by teaching old family songs to youth attending Uu-a-thluk programs.

He also delivered a multitude of cultural activities during Uu-a-thluk's summer science camps and feasting activities. This included leading traditional foods events and performing Nuuchahnulth prayers.

"Damon worked to bring culture into the camps," says Uu-a-thluk capacity building coordinator, Norine Messer. "He kept camp attendees focused on fun while they learned, which was a great help."

"I also got the rare opportunity to do traditional pit cooks for different Nations," says Rampanen of his work, "teaching

kids how to do traditional cooking while meeting elders and learning history on cooking and harvesting food from them."

Between working for Uu-a-thluk, attending VAST alternative school, and planning a career in the tourism field, Rampanen is a busy man. Yet he still finds the time to work towards his goal of learning to speak fluent Nuuchahnulth.

Rampanen cites trying to learn his language as one of the biggest challenges he has faced. He longs to speak fluently and use his language everyday, but finds it extremely difficult to maintain the required focus.

"I am trying, though," he says. "It's just finding the right way to learn that is most comfortable for me, which I haven't done yet – but I will."

For his work with Uu-a-thluk, Rampanen expresses gratitude. "Working with Uu-a-thluk has been really fun and good experience for me. I have met so many interesting people and learned so much from when I started working to now," he says.

"From harvesting fish and sea resources, to helping keep the ocean clean so that we [Nuuchahnulth people] can continue practicing our traditional ways..."

Rampanen is also a founding member of Uu-a-thluk's Nashuk Youth Council, which strives to engage youth in activities related to Nuuchahnulth ocean resources.

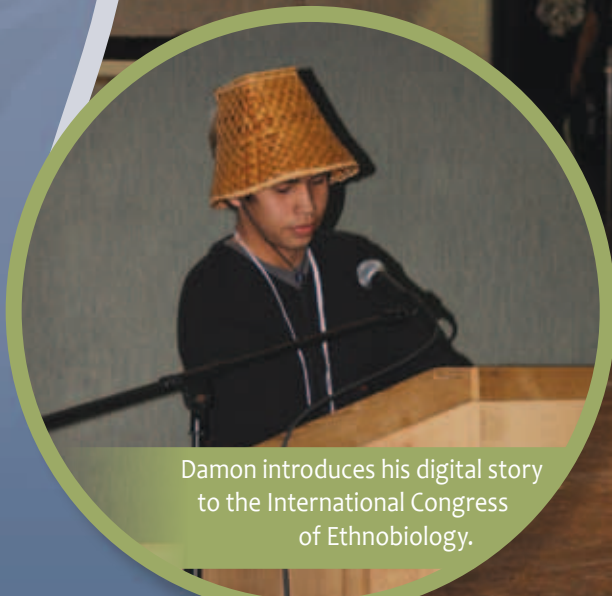
He takes part with the support and encouragement of his uncle, John Rampanen. Rampanen says that John is the person who inspires him most, and his work with the youth council is some of what he is most proud of thus far in his life.

"It's been really fun reconnecting with who I am and my First Nations' roots," Rampanen says. "It makes me happy and I feel proud of everything that I am doing today."

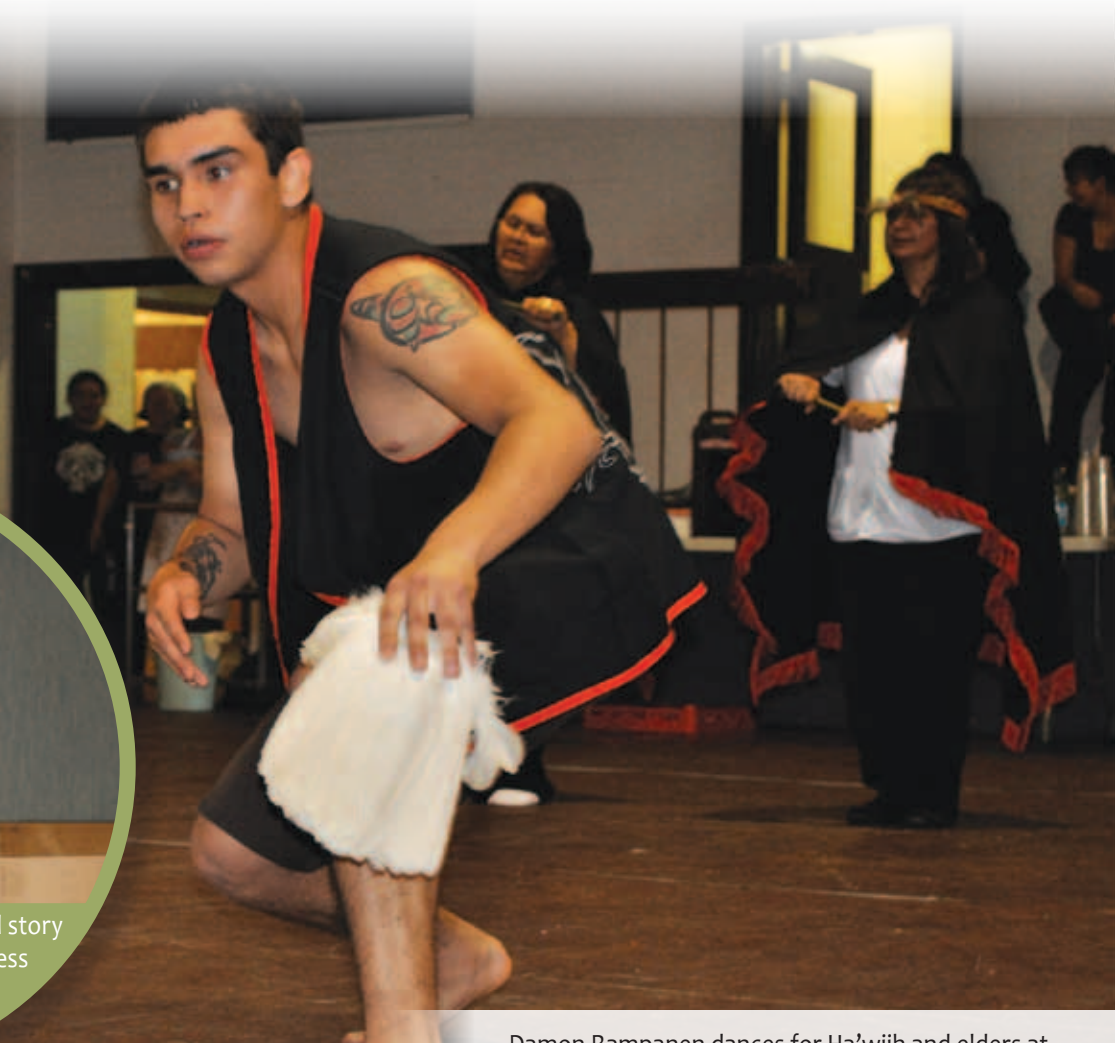
Special thanks to the YWCA's Eco Internship Program and the B.C. Capacity Initiative for providing funding towards Damon's internship with Uu-a-thluk.

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—Damon Rampanen



Damon introduces his digital story to the International Congress of Ethnobiology.



Damon Rampanen dances for Ha'wiih and elders at the Nashuk Youth Conference, May 2010.

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