



The Smithsonian invited six youth to interview participants and speak on a panel at the Inuit Studies Conference. From left to right, Nichole Tukrook (14), Jaden Nethercott (16), and Kenneth Ivanoff (16) represented Alaska; Inunnguaq Jeremiassen (19) and Sarah Lyberth (19) represented Uummannaq, Greenland; and Sarah Jancke (22) represented Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, Canada.

## Engaging Our Youth

### Smithsonian pilots new program at Inuit Studies Conference

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LESLIE HSU OH  
FOR FIRST ALASKANS

**Nichole Tukrook, a 14-year-old freshman from Point Lay,** raced across the National Mall, an open-area park in downtown Washington, D.C. She checked her watch to see if she had time to devour a buttery salted pretzel. “We can’t buy these at home,” she said as she passed several snack carts.

It was her last day participating as one of six Learning Pairs at the 18th Inuit Studies Conference. She was on her way to the Ripley Center, Smithsonian’s underground conference center, where she hoped to squeeze in an interview before speaking on a panel with her peers.

Tukrook was a part of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History’s Arctic Studies Center and Office of Education and Outreach pilot project: Learning Pairs Program: A Model for Youth-Elder Conversations about Culture. From Oct. 24-28, 2012, in a packed schedule beginning at 8 a.m. and ending around 9 p.m., three youth from Alaska; two from Uummannaq, Greenland; and one from Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, Canada; were equipped with digital cameras. Then they were asked to “exchange responses and reflections on the ideas, resources and content discussed

throughout the plenary talks, collections tours and individual presentations with their mentors; and to test the most effective methods for recording and disseminating their conversations to hundreds of their peers in the north through social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Flickr), audio podcasts, social video (YouTube) or written blogs.”

Lessons learned from the Learning Pairs Program will be integrated into a new approach to natural history learning being spearheaded by its Office of Education and Outreach. The effort includes a 10,000-square-foot interactive Education Center with space, objects and technology to sustain conversations; a digital outreach infrastructure to expand learning opportunities across the world; and an international network “to initiate and research the most effective learning opportunities for diverse audiences.”

Margery Gordon, from the Office of Education and Outreach, is co-principal investigator with Igor Krupnik of the Arctic Studies Center on the project. Recently she gave a private tour of the project. While the youth snapped photos of the exhibits with their iPod Touches or iPhones, Gordon asked,

“We have 7 million visitors a year. Half of them are under 20. Is there a message we should be telling them when they come?”

One of the Greenlanders said that it was sad to see so little in the museums about the Arctic, especially about the importance of hunting. Another tweeted: “The ice is melting fast. We hope people learn 2 take care of our world!”

Project coordinator Laura Fleming said there were more than 1,000 online conference participants from 17 countries and 42 states. You can still register for the online conference at <http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/ISC18/onlineconference.html> and view plenary sessions and select papers presented Oct. 24-28, 2012. Reflections made by the youth are at <http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/ISC18/index.html>.

“It was an innovative program that tested different social media formats and learned about the ways in which youth in the Arctic communicate in their own communities,” Fleming said. “It provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss, from their perspectives – important issues such as climate change, culture, language and heritage





Nichole Tukrook enjoys pretzels that she can't buy in Point Lay, Alaska.



Sarah Lyberth from Uummannaq, Greenland, interviews an Inuit Studies Conference participant with a camera provided by the Smithsonian.

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with a major international conference of Arctic scholars and northern community leaders."

Another Alaska participant was Kenneth Ivanoff, a 16-year-old sophomore from Barrow. Ivanoff's eyes lit up when he talked about whaling. He was one of 12 members of a whaling crew captained by his great uncle. Last year, his first time on the boat, he helped catch a nearly 53-foot bowhead. "It took several days to harvest," he said. "Six hours alone for 12 guys to carve up a fin."

Later, Ivanoff interviewed the Greenlanders: Jane Østbjerg, Sarah Lyberth and Inunnguaq Jeremiassen. Lyberth and Jeremiassen not only served as Learning Pairs but are the stars of the award-winning film "Inuk" that premiered at the conference and is said to be a possible Oscar nomination. All three were raised at the Uummannaq Children's Home.

"So what do you do for fun?" Ivanoff asked. Østbjerg whipped out her smartphone and played some of her favorite Greenlandic songs. Lyberth answered in Danish. Malu Fleischer, their former teacher, translated into English, "hunting, fishing, dogsledding." Jeremiassen answered in Greenlandic, which Lyberth translated into Danish, and Fleischer translated into English, "handball, football, badminton, Taekwondo, Greenlandic games."

Near the end of the conference, Sarah Jancke, a 22-year-old from Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, Canada; addressed the crowd. Jancke had served as the program coordinator for women and youth for the Kitikmeot Inuit Association as well as a board member of the National Inuit Youth Council.

"It is amazing how all these people from around the world are deeply passionate about Inuit culture and studying Inuit," she told them. "It's mind blowing to see the amount of people who are here. I'd really like to see this shared with people at home so they can see how much the outside community is focusing on Inuit issues. And to know that there are opportunities for young Inuit to become professional, to become these people who spend their whole life researching and documenting all these things, amazing things about our culture. I just see so much opportunity for learning and growing together and opportunity to build partnerships and ensure that knowledge will carry on."

As the Alaska students took a long walk to the National Museum of American Indian for the last conference event, Tukrook bought herself the fattest pretzel she could find and leaped as high as she could. Then, just as we are about to enter the museum, all three of them succumbed to the temptations of something they've never seen before ... a frozen yogurt truck! ■

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