



# MUSEUMS & SUSTAINABILITY

## The art of storytelling

**The Secrets of the Willow  
Bunch Museum**

**Sustaining Communities:  
From Objects to Relationships**

# Message from MAS

**The Museums Association of Saskatchewan (MAS) is a non-profit, collective organization with more than 400 members, including 200 member museums and galleries. MAS is governed by an elected Board of Directors that develops policy and provides direction for programs and services to benefit all Saskatchewan museums.**

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Cover image courtesy of Adam Martin

**E**ducation is a vital part of what museums do. When someone mentions museums, exhibits and interpretive programs — museums' traditional approach to education — are often among the first things people think of.

Education is also critical for building sustainable communities — so much so that a whole subfield of education has emerged to focus on sustainability education. It's called Education for Sustainable Development, or ESD. As UNESCO explains,

ESD empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society. \*

What does that mean for us in the heritage sector? Mostly, it means keeping our goals in mind, educating ourselves, and creating programs that have a real impact in our communities.

It might sound like a tall order to transform society, and build "environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society" — and it is! — but we don't have to do it all on our own. Our job is to be catalysts: to make what change we can in our own little piece of the world, and nurture it so that it can grow and spread.

The people, programs, and organizations you'll find here are trying hard to live out their values, and to create that impact. In different ways — some big, some small, but all meaningful and important — they're making their communities better. Let's all strive to do the same.

\* UNESCO "What is ESD?" Accessed 16 May 2017. <http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-esd>



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# Sustaining Communities: From Objects to Relationships

By Dan Holbrow

**M**useums usually have artefacts and buildings and exhibits, but these things don't make a museum. A museum is made of relationships.

Collections have been the main method museums use to preserve our cultural and natural heritage. Museums take in artefacts that are significant, and they preserve them for future generations.

But the things a museum collects and preserves aren't meaningful on their own. Their meaning and value comes from relationships.

**An old shoe isn't important on its own. Its cultural importance lies in our knowledge about the shoe's relationships to other things: who made it, how its design shows that person's cultural heritage, the young girl who wore it, what she grew up to accomplish, and so on.**

An old shoe isn't important on its own. Its cultural importance lies in our knowledge about the shoe's relationships to other things: who made it, how its design shows that person's cultural heritage, the young girl who wore it, what she grew up to accomplish, and so on. Our knowledge of all these relationships transforms a dried-out piece of leather into something significant.

Relationships are important to preserving artefacts, too. An artefact's materials are affected by relationships to its

environment: light, humidity, temperature, pests, and so on, can all cause objects to deteriorate. And a museum's relationship to a skilled conservator can help mitigate damage.

Museum collections aren't only made up of objects: some museums work to preserve stories, traditional knowledge and skills, or even ecosystems. Stories, for example, aren't just collections of words. They involve relationships between storytellers, language, listeners, and the ideas and ways of life that let us make sense of them.

Traditional crafts come from structured relationships between people, materials, and activities. And ecosystems aren't just an arbitrary bunch of plants and animals. They're made of relationships between species, linked through natural processes.

Museums gain and maintain knowledge about all these relationships through even more relationships: relationships with researchers, with databases, with tradition-bearers, with community members, with donors, and so on.

Our job isn't just to collect and preserve artefacts. It's to create and sustain meaningful relationships.

In this issue of Museums & Sustainability, you'll find stories about these kinds of relationships. All the people and organizations featured here share a commitment to sustaining traditions by building relationships.

Their great work shows us what's possible when we look beyond the things we're directly interested in — whether they're artefacts or skills or languages — to the relationships that create and sustain them.

When we do that, we won't just preserve objects. We'll help sustain communities. 

# Secrets of the Willow Bunch Museum

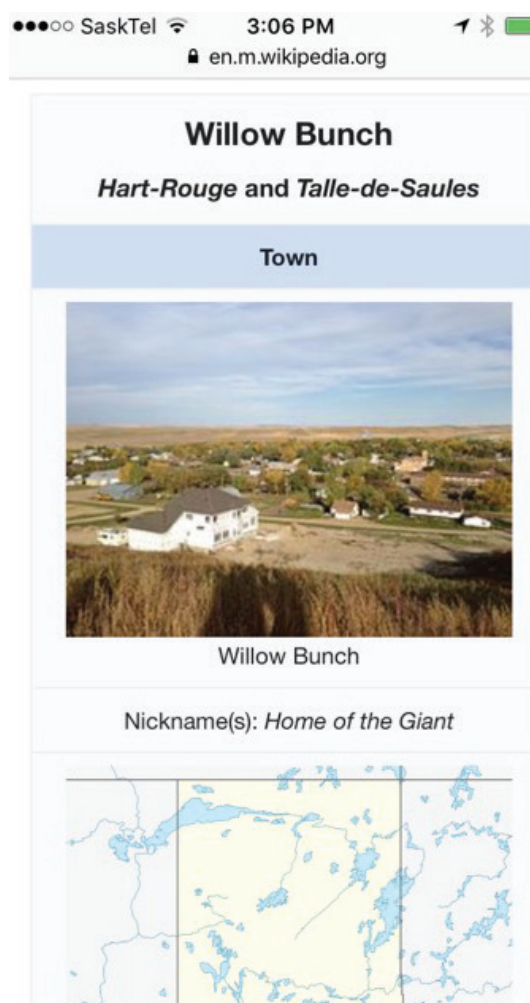
## How a small prairie town got a lot of people invested in their heritage through modern ideas

When Patricia Elliott toured a museum in small-town Newfoundland in 2010 and learned about their close working relationship with Memorial University students, it sparked an idea. Elliott, who is a professor with the University of Regina's Journalism School, knew right away that the project was one she wanted to replicate back home as an enhanced element of the school's annual Big Stories in Small Places project, in which students travel to small communities and research stories. Having just been to Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan on a family holiday, she knew just how active the town's museum and community were. When the museum board agreed to take on students as volunteers, a fruitful educational relationship was born.

The project, which took place in the fall of 2013, presented a learning opportunity for students and meant additional person power for the museum. While the museum provided space to work, access to archives, and interview opportunities, the students were able to help with digitization, research, and content creation for the web.

One of the facets of the project was a much needed

**As a result of their hard work, the article for Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan now boasts more than 250 references and over 18,000 words.**



freshening-up of the town's Wikipedia page, which necessitated extensive research and fact-checking. The article features information about the town's history, from prehistory to present, political past, tourism, industry, architecture, and more, and features much of what students learned in interviews with the community. But because of Wikipedia's standards for articles, the students had to conduct extensive additional research; secondary sources and references were needed to back up anything they learned in interviews. As a result of their hard work, the article for Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan now boasts more than 250 references and over 18,000 words. Doris O'Reilly, who was President of Willow Bunch Museum at the time, describes the project as having been "great publicity for [the] museum."

Although they were there to learn, the students brought to the table their own experiences and abilities. When the museum was asked to identify their needs, they indicated that digitization was a priority. The students were able to take a "big bag of VHS tapes and audio cassette tapes" and turn them into digital archives that will help preserve the museum's collection in the

[See Willow Bunch on Page 14](#)





Cree language teachers at the First Language Speaking Project. Photo by Natalie Owl.

# THE POWER OF WORDS



## Saskatchewan: Land of Living Languages

Saskatchewan is a province of many voices: voices that speak in many tongues. Keeping those languages alive is the vision and mandate of The Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage Languages, an umbrella organization guided by a specific set of objectives centred on the preservation, development, and advancement of education in the heritage languages of Saskatchewan people.

The organization defines heritage languages as those other than French and English, and has supported heritage language schools, teachers, and community groups in the province since 1985. SOHL emphasizes that “people of many cultures contribute to the vibrancy of the cultural life in the province” and strives to support that vibrancy through the maintenance and revitalization of those many languages.

SOHL’s website lists over 30 schools in both Saskatoon and Regina, with classes available in languages from Arabic to Yoruba, and two language programs in North Battleford and Yorkton. The programs vary in size, structure, and level of activity, but are often centred on a specific community. While the languages are many and varied, the goal is the same: keep language, and by extension culture, alive.

Below is a look at three different language learning programs in the province and their approach to teaching heritage language: The Salvador Allende Latin American Spanish School, The Queen City Japanese School, and First Language Speaking Project Inc.

### Salvador Allende Latin American Spanish School

Marco Fuentes is the principal of the Salvador Allende Latin American Spanish School, which has been running in Regina since the 1980s. He says the school was born after Chilean migrants to Canada, many of whom were political refugees, identified a need for



the youngest members of the community to maintain their native language. For many children, the move to Canada and starting school in English meant that Spanish quickly began to be lost. Since then, the school has grown and adapted to include an increased interest in learning conversational Spanish, and to encompass many Latin American cultures.

The school, which has seven staff and runs one day each week, offers classes for children and adults of all backgrounds. Class sizes are small enough that students get to work closely with teachers.

As Fuentes puts it, small class sizes mean “classes almost become one-on-one with the teacher.” He says that most of the adults are “Canadian people who live here and want to learn the language... Some of them are older, some are younger.” Some have a Spanish-speaking background and family, while others want to learn to speak Spanish for travel.

## “Language is how people connect to us.”

While the program’s main function is still to sustain culture through language, Fuentes says it’s been an opportunity for Canadians of all backgrounds to engage with Latin American cultures in a variety of ways: “Language is how people connect to us.” Through language, he says, Canadians involved with the school often take up an interest in Latin American food, music, and history.

As is so often the case, the school is wholly rooted in community. “The Chilean community that began [in the 80s],” Fuentes explains, “that connection was very close because those people became your family in Regina.”



Above: Spanish teachers at the Salvadore Allende Spanish language school

That sense of family and community carries through everything the school and its members do, and they invite people to take part. “We’re always looking for people to get involved,” Fuentes says. “Especially as teachers.”

When asked about why the school and its work teaching Spanish are important, Marco Fuentes says, “I have two kids that were born in Canada, and I can very proudly say that they both speak fluent Spanish.” “I’m very in touch with my roots, with where I came from. And that’s something I passed on to my kids, and I think for generations on, is going to be passed on.”

To get involved with the Salvador Allende Latin American Spanish School, check out their facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/escuela.regina>

### Queen City Japanese School Inc.

Madoka Otani, principal of the Queen City Japanese School, knows how hard it can be to find language instructors.

For over 20 years, the Japanese school has offered classes at varying levels. There were years where there weren’t enough students to offer classes at all, but demand has increased in recent years, with about thirty students currently in attendance. Unfortunately, lack of teachers is a limitation, says Otani.





**Above:** A child learns Cree at the First Language Speaking Project Inc

These days, the only classes offered are for “kids who want to maintain it as a heritage language,” those with a background in Japanese and an opportunity to practice outside of class.

They offered beginner classes for a few years, but there just isn’t the capacity right now. “The focus is on kids right now so they will keep their heritage language,” Otani explains. “Our mission is to provide them the tools to learn and hopefully it will provide more opportunities in the future.” Communication is one of the school’s key goals, she says. “Globalization is happening and you need to understand certain cultures... To be more open-minded is also important. To understand each other.”

The school, which has been registered non-profit since 2011, is also an integral part of the city’s Japanese community and is closely involved with the Regina Japanese Canadian Club and Regina Hibiki Taiko, a group that performs with taiko, Japanese drums. As Otani puts it, “It’s a small community.”

And the school is a kind of bridge between the community at large and those interested in Japanese language and culture.

Otani explains that “people who inquire about [beginner] classes are usually interested in the culture.”

When asked about the connection to the cultural community, Otani says she wishes the school could do more. They once organized a Japanese tea ceremony as part of a program at the Regina Public Library, for example, of which she exclaims, “I wish that we could do something like that more, but we just don’t have the resources to.” Madoka Otani says of Queen City Japanese School, “We could offer more.” She hopes that, one day, they’ll be able to.

For inquiries about teaching or getting involved with Queen City Japanese School, email [madokao@sasktel.net](mailto:madokao@sasktel.net) or visit <http://www.facebook.com/QueenCityJapaneseSchool>.

### **First Language Speaking Project Inc.**

Cathy Wheaton, co-creator of the First Language Speaking Project, hopes to one day be fluent in Cree, like her mother. Wheaton, who is Woodlands Cree from La Ronge, began the project in 2009 with husband Allan Adam, friend Natalie Owl, and the knowledge that she was not alone in her desire for fluency. While the project started as a Speaking Circle at Albert Library in Regina, Wheaton says that it quickly became apparent that those looking to learn their languages needed more than a weekly engagement. “After a couple weeks, we realized that people didn’t have anyone to practice with once they left, and that they would probably forget how to pronounce words.”

They needed a way to store information that was being transmitted in person that people could access again later, says Wheaton. That’s when her daughter suggested hosting information online, and the website component of the project was born.

Since then, The Speaking Project’s community of volunteers have contributed over 1,000 MP3 audio recordings and over 500 videos in 3 dialects of Cree, Dene, Nakota, Saulteaux and Anishnaabemowin. The clips being hosted online makes them more easily accessible and completely free, which is an integral element of the project.

This focus on audio allows those visiting the site to hear and practice the oral facet of language, which Wheaton says is key. “In a lot of First Nations communities, the most knowledgeable people are the ones that are fluent in our language.”

Many of those people, she says, do not read or write in their language at all. Oral fluency is therefore the most

highly valued. Wheaton says that the focus on oral fluency, on speaking rather than reading and writing, “took advantage of the knowledge where it was actually being held.”

Direct connection with the respected members of communities who hold that knowledge is critical to self-concept and identity, she continues.

“It’s very important that we know and understand who we are as people by being able to communicate that knowledge to each other.”

While the website is an important asset of the Speaking Project, it isn’t the whole story; the project continues to be a two-pronged approach to this day. In addition to the website, a weekly First Nations Language Speaking Circle continues to be held at Albert Library. The program, which is currently focused on teaching Cree, runs for adults on Tuesday nights with an after-school option on Thursday or Friday evenings from 4:30-5:30. For now, the focus is on conversational skills.

Like Wheaton, Natalie Owl, program coordinator of the

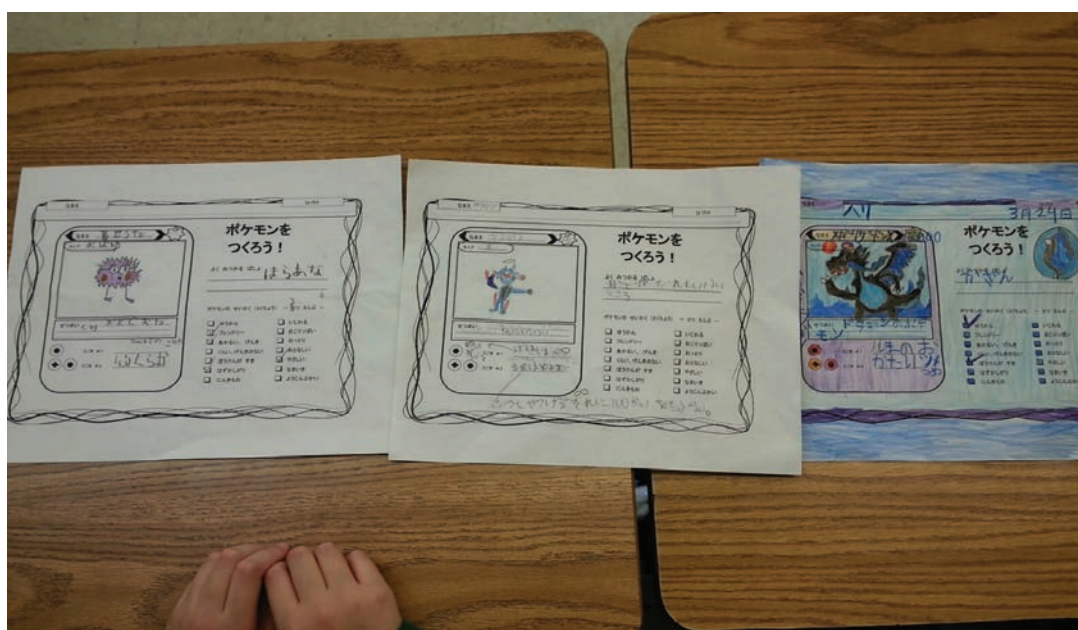


Another child learns Cree through the First Language Speaking Project, Inc

Speaking Circle, emphasizes the oral focus of the class. “Literacy is both written and oral skills. The focus is on oral literacy at this point.” As she points out, most Indigenous languages are oral languages. “We focus on how a language has been transmitted orally. It’s an oral history of a language, but it’s also a complete way of learning in and of itself.”

Owl says the best option is often to find a fluent speaker who can help you learn, which is exactly what the Speaking Circle seeks to provide.

“We’re extremely fortunate to have two elders who are fluent speakers of Cree who come in and help our program,” Owl says. “I think that they really appreciate coming in and sharing their language and culture with our youth. It’s definitely... closing an intergenerational gap. You can teach it in school, but if no one’s speaking it in the community or there’s no interaction there, then it almost feels pointless. So [we’re] trying to close that.”



Language learning activity at the Queen City Japanese School.

The Speaking Circle has completed bigger projects with Street Culture Kids, running a summer camp program, and the North Central Family Centre, running a four-month-long after-school program that, in addition to teaching Cree language, also introduced aspects of Cree and Métis culture, including dances and explanations of ceremonies.

Owl says she hopes they can continue to partner with organizations so they

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Photo by Adam Martin

# Telling stories

**Annual showcase of Indigenous arts in Saskatchewan attracts artists in spoken word, music, film and dance**

Since 2001, Sâkêwêwâk Artists' Collective's Annual Storytellers Festival has been a showcase of Indigenous arts in Saskatchewan. Every year, community members are invited to share in the festival as talented artists from the province and beyond gather to share work from a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to storytelling, spoken word, music, film, visual arts, and dance.

The collective, which has existed in various iterations for over 20 years, is a multidisciplinary arts organization focused on the development, promotion, and exhibition of Indigenous arts and artists in Saskatchewan, says Adam Martin, Sâkêwêwâk's Executive Director. The word sâkêwêwâk, the origin of which is a point of some contention, is a Saulteaux or Plains Cree word meaning "they are emerging" or "they are coming into view," which gives a good idea as to the organization's mission: to nurture, support, and showcase artists right here at home. And this is exactly what the Annual Storytellers Festival seeks to do.

The festival began as a traditional storytellers' gathering with students at Scott Collegiate in 2001, described as "wildly successful." In the early years, Martin says, there was a particular focus on traditional storytelling. But the goals and format of the event have since shifted. While there were years organizers focused on bringing in big-name artists from around the globe, Sâkêwêwâk is, first and foremost, about home-grown talent.

Organizers are now seeking to "expose our local talents," says Martin. "We have a talented base, and most of that group are emerging artists." And in the last few years, the collective has made changes to ensure that their base, local Saskatchewan creators, are at the centre.

The festival, which runs for a week every year, is specifically designed to present an opportunity for those artists to present their work in whatever form it takes.





Speakers present lessons on storytelling. Photo by Adam Martin

Martin explained that artists are encouraged to be creative in how they present their work and that Sâkêwêwâk strive not to be restrictive: “It’s a fluid, dynamic space.” He says that he prefers to “give the artist the space to do what they want to do and just get out of the way.”

This year, for example, one of the week’s highlights was a collaborative project between celebrated Métis cellist and composer Cris Dersken, The Regina Symphony Orchestra, and local powwow dancers Teddy Bison and Rebecca Sangwais. The dancers performed two pieces, scored by Dersken and the orchestra, which they worked on during a multi-month residency with mentorship from New Dance Horizon’s Robin Poitras.

**The festival, which runs for a week every year, is specifically designed to present an opportunity for those artists to present their work in whatever form it takes.**

The performance was a culmination of several key goals of Sâkêwêwâk: partnership between a celebrated, nationally established artist and local emerging artists, wrapped up in professional development for those artists and a beautiful showcase from which the whole community benefited.

The Annual Storytellers Festival is a celebration, but it is also a platform.

The week’s events provide an opportunity and create a space for those not already involved with Sâkêwêwâk to come and see what all the fuss is about and get to know more about the

organization. There are many opportunities for partnership with the organization and its membership.





Zoe Roy at the Storytellers Festival. Photo by Adam Martin.

Too often though, Martin explains, organizations look to the collective to hastily fill a gap in involvement with Indigenous arts and communities, rather than to genuinely engage and collaborate.

Too often, they want an Indigenous artist to come in and give a comprehensive overview of Indigenous issues and perspectives, which is an unfair expectation. “Indigenous artists are looked at as being knowledge keepers,” he explains. “Some people really see themselves that way; others just want to be artists.”

Events like the Storytellers Festival, Martin explains, are a great and accessible way to engage with an already established community of Indigenous artists who are already

doing great work. Sâkêwêwâk’s multidisciplinary, flexible, and open approach to the event provides an opportunity to those looking to genuinely undertake the project of reconciliation. But it requires effort and intention on the part of the individual or organization.

For Adam Martin and Sâkêwêwâk, the artists and their work remain the focus and lifeblood of what they do. They have amazing opportunities for Saskatchewan-based artists, and encourage anyone interested in getting involved to get in touch at [sakewewak@gmail.com](mailto:sakewewak@gmail.com).

The Annual Storytellers Festival runs every spring and is not to be missed. ♦♦♦

# Willow Bunch

(continued from Page 5)

future, all while practicing using the University's equipment.

The project can be categorized as an intergenerational education. It was a matter of give and take, says Elliott. "For us, it's great to go to a town and learn, but it's also good to be useful in some way."

The project was one of preservation, but also of uncovering. The research the students did was far-reaching, and brought to light points of contention in the town's past and present. The students, as O'Reilly puts it, "brought back things we didn't have or weren't aware of. It was an eye opener on some things."

Some of what students wrote about the town, which has a long and rich history with strong French and Métis roots, disrupted the narratives to which some community members

en.m.wikipedia.org

Previous names for Willow Bunch have been *Hart-Rouge* and *Talle-de-Saules*.

The area has seen influences from [Métis](#) and [Fransaskois](#).

## ✓ History

## ✓ Political history

## ✓ Notable people

## ✓ Women of Willow Bunch

were accustomed.

As Elliott sees it, the students were tapping into the town's "living history." O'Reilly sees it, as she wrote in an email to Elliott after the project's end, this way: "the reports did bring to light some points that people were not aware of and thus contributed to lively discussions at coffee row."

By endeavouring to dig deeply into the Willow Bunch's past, the students engaged with the people of its present, and in turn left their impact on the town. Elliott says that the goal of the Big Stories in Small Places project is to show students that wherever they go, there are stories they want to hear and tell. "It doesn't matter how tiny or off the beaten path the place is; it's full of fascinating people." In this regard, the Willow Bunch project was a resounding success. 

# Languages

(continued from Page 9)

can "maintain that presence," but there are also bigger goals.

She says the organization hopes to one day form an immersion school with a more structured curriculum, but they simply don't have the person power at the moment. As she explains, "It's a volunteer program, so it takes a lot of time to keep it going." Owl herself is a board member, program coordinator, and language instructor. "I wish we had more sustained interest


in our program," she says, pointing out that most people "don't realize the effort that it takes to learn a language."

Owl believes that since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, more people are beginning to understand the impact that the residential school system has had on the intergenerational transmission of languages and language loss. While she feels that there is more support for programs like the Speaking Project than there once was, she feels there needs to be "more concrete effort and support."

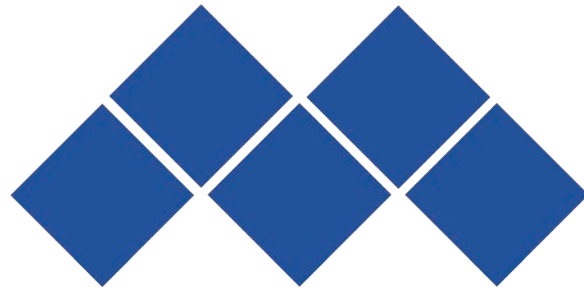
**"(There is a need) to continue to develop language programs and policies that are going to be reflective of the Indigenous people that are involved with it."**

Not just financially, but in terms of human resources to help keep programs sustained and "to continue to develop language programs and policies that are going to be reflective of the Indigenous people that are involved with it."

When asked if she's hopeful, Natalie Owl says simply, "It's going to be a lot of work, but I think it's doable."

The First Language Speaking Project can be found at [allanadam.com](http://allanadam.com). For inquiries about the First Nations Language Speaking Circle, please email [natalieowl@yahoo.ca](mailto:natalieowl@yahoo.ca). All are welcome. 





MUSEUMS  
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## ABOUT US

### Museums Association of Saskatchewan

**The Museums Association of Saskatchewan is a non-profit member organization for Saskatchewan's public museums and museum professionals. Our purpose is to serve our members in Saskatchewan and work for their advancement.**

**Membership in MAS is open to everyone. MAS provides learning opportunities for museums, personnel and their governing bodies. MAS is responsible for establishing the first Standards for Museums that now guides museum development throughout Saskatchewan.**

**The Association raises public awareness of museums and fosters communication among members of the museum sector. MAS represents the interests and concerns of the museum sector to all levels of government and with other relevant agencies.**

**Heritage is our social and natural inheritance: the objects, ideas, places, and traditions of intrinsic value which have shaped our present and will guide our future. We believe our collective inheritance is an asset that must be preserved, understood, and built upon by each generation. Museums, in service to society, provide stewardship for the material evidence of our human and natural inheritance and contribute to the understanding of the world and our place in it - our past, our present, and our future.**

**Museums and Sustainability is an annual look at sustainability issues in and for Saskatchewan's museums.**

**Sustainable Collections, the sixth publication in the series, looks at the ways that collections affect the sustainability of museums, and in turn, the ways that collections can be mobilized to affect the sustainability of the communities museums are part of.**

**Inside, you'll find thought-provoking essays and interviews, as well as stories and photos showcasing sustainability work in Saskatchewan museums.**

**The Sustainability Committee of the Museums Association of Saskatchewan produces this publication as part of its sustainability initiative. The Museums Association of Saskatchewan is a non-profit member group for Saskatchewan's museums and museum workers.**

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