

Internship Boosts Indigenous Youth Interest in Science Careers

“If you don’t know, ask! Tell me what you don’t know,” biologist Jim Lane, told young science student Jared Dick early in his internship with Uu-a-thluk’s *Tomorrow’s Leaders Internship Program*.

Dick had pretended to know all about secchi discs, a white disc used to measure the clarity of water when it’s submerged. Lane, a Southern Region Biologist with the Uu-a-thluk aquatic resource and oceans management group on Vancouver Island, soon learned otherwise and gently encouraged the shy student to ask questions.

“I have very fond memories of that moment,” says Dick, who is now an Uu-a-thluk Central Region Biologist.

‘Uu-a-thluk’ is a Nuu-chah-nulth word which means, ‘taking care of.’ The organization is funded through an agreement between Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, which represents fourteen First Nations along the island’s western coast. The focus of Uu-a-thluk is to increase Nuu-chah-nulth access to, and the management of, marine resources and to build the capacity of community members to find jobs and careers related to the ocean.

In 2006, Uu-a-thluk launched the *Tomorrow’s Leaders Internship Program* to mentor Nuu-chah-nulth science students in aquatic biology and shellfish aquaculture by developing their technical skills and having them attend important industry and community meetings.

Dick, who originally wanted to be a high school science teacher, changed his career path after his first summer internship. “I couldn’t believe that I was being paid to do the fun stuff in the field,” he says. By going to community meetings, Dick learned how his fieldwork with Jim Lane influenced decisions made by the tribal council. He soon realized how important Uu-a-thluk marine biologists are and wanted to be one of them.

During his second summer as an intern, Dick was given more and more independence, such as installing a counting fence on the Henderson River in order to count salmon. “I was asking more complicated questions, driving the boat a bit more, and doing more readings,” he says.

Through the internship, he obtained his radio licence and his commercial boat licence and, after graduating from university, Dick was hired as the Uu-a-thluk Central Region Biologist. His favourite memory of his internship is Jim Lane’s patient answers to all of Dick’s questions during the long car rides to meetings all over the island.

The *Tomorrow’s Leaders Internship Program* also opened Sabrina Crowley’s eyes to a possible position with Uu-a-thluk.

Crowley grew up in Uchucklesaht Inlet and had done a practicum with the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council’s fisheries department. Crowley initially believed she’d end up working at her community’s oyster farm. However, the internship introduced her to a variety of different ways to deal with aquatic species says Crowley. “I was able to go on crab surveys with the nations, and there was a prawn survey...even a clam survey on one of the beaches,” she said.



Jared Dick, Uu-a-thluk Central Region Biologist.
Photo Credit: Uu-a-thluk



Sabrina Crowley, Uu-a-thluk Southern Region Biologist.
Photo Credit: Uu-a-thluk

In the Southern Region, Crowley worked with Jim Lane on a crab survey with Nuu-chah-nulth's Ditidaht Nation because they wanted to figure out why the large pincers were missing from the crabs. "It's neat being out there," Crowley says. "You're handling the crab, you're measuring them, you're determining their shell...counting how many females and males."

A favourite memory of Crowley's internship was helping out with a sea otter survey. "There was this little baby sea otter and it was crying away and its mother came up and grabbed it and they just went under the water. He needed his mum to pull him under the water because they're so buoyant when they're young," says Crowley. "There's never a dull moment when you're out in the field."

Like Jared Dick, Crowley was also able to see the importance of the data she was collecting in the field as it became part of community discussions and decision making.

"Being able to work with my community means a lot," says Crowley. "You have a kind of awareness and compassion for some of the things that you're doing because it affects you too. I know the connection we have to our resources, and being able to work with it just means a lot. You're making a difference and you're moving forward and you're helping your own community out."

The *Tomorrow's Leaders Internship Program* has ended, but Uu-a-thluk continues to mentor Nuu-chah-nulth young people with an interest in fisheries and aquatic resources—and to provide opportunities for them to develop their careers through internships and term employment says Eric Angel, Fisheries Program Manager at Uu-a-thluk. "In other words, the *Tomorrow's Leaders* program came and went, but we're still doing the same thing," said Angel.

Best Practise:
*Succession Planning
through Mentorships*

