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Outer Coast is a new post-secondary school in Sitka, Alaska. We offer programs for students both in high school and those who have graduated and are looking for an alternative way to experience higher education. We currently offer summer programs and a year-long course of study; in 2024 we plan to open the doors of a two-year college, awarding degrees. We are a small (you might even say tiny) institution. There are currently ten students enrolled. When we are fully operational, we plan to have no more than 20 students per class. Students, staff and faculty live and work together, sharing chores, cooking, and serving the community of Sitka. Our curriculum is focused on the study of the Tlingit language, Indigenous culture, and the science of the place that surrounds us—the forest, the tide pools, even the cycles of daylight and darkness.

Since last year, we've been beyond blessed to get to know many people from Deisleen. Some of them came to visit us in Sitka last April for a Tlingit language conference we hosted. Many more we got to know at the Sharing Our Knowledge Conference in Wrangell, where our community worked as volunteers. I had the great honor to visit with many of you in October, too.

We are especially grateful to have been gifted beautiful words from Teslin, spoken by Gadzóosdaa (Gadzûsda) Virginia Smarch. Below are some thoughts that will appear on our website about those words, expressing our gratitude and our sense of their many great meanings. Gunalchéesh Daakká K̓wáan, please visit us in Sitka soon. We feel so lucky to be able to make bonds of friendship with you over the mountains.

*K̓unáx sh toogaa haa ditee, with deep thanks on behalf of all Outer Coast,
Skeiwduśá Matthew Spellberg*

Our Motto

Tl'átk̓a Héendáx Yéi Haa Yatee

We Are Part of the Land, Part of the Water

These words were said by Gadzóosdaa (Gadzûsda) Virginia Smarch (1913-1994), a Matriarch of the Daḱl'aweidí Tlingit Clan in the village of Teslin. Gadzóosdaa's daughter Shaawatgaaxí Annie Smarch Grunsky has graciously given Outer Coast permission for their use.

The motto has many layers of meaning. Like blankets stacked for gifting at a *ku.éex'*, each layer gives protection and warmth.

One layer of meaning is the simple acknowledgment that human beings are made of flesh and blood, that is, earth and water. From water and earth we come, to water and earth we return.

Another layer is the absolute intertwining of life and environment. We are not somehow separate from the conditions of our survival, but an integral part of them.

Yet another meaning is more specific to the bioregion on which Outer Coast sits, *Lingít Aaní*, the home of the Tlingit people. For millennia the Tlingit have made their home at the knife-edge between the land and the water, on the coasts and riverbanks and lakeshores of this region.

These words imply balance and reciprocity. We strive to bridge opposing elements, to hold them equally in our hands. Outer Coast sits literally steps from the ocean, and is nested between salmon creeks.

These words outline a commitment. We acknowledge that we must tie ourselves to both land and water to flourish. Their fate is our fate.

This is only the beginning of what these words can and do mean. As the passing of a gift over generations increases its value, so the meaning of this phrase will grow as it passes into new hands and hearts.

This motto is important to us not just for its meanings, but also for how it came to us. Two years into the COVID pandemic, Outer Coast hosted a gathering of Tlingit language teachers and learners. A group of passionate Tlingit teachers traveled—masked and triple tested—all the way from the Yukon via car, ferry, and plane to honor us with their presence. It was the first big gathering most of us had been a part of since COVID had shadowed the world. We spent a joyous four days together. Elders, students, teachers, and community members were held up by the Tlingit language, and by the landscape on which it dwells.

After this gathering, Yeilt'ooch' Tláa Collyne Bunn, Kookhittaán Sháa of Teslin and Whitehorse, returned home, and went to Shaawatgaaxí to ask permission for her mother's words to be shared with Outer Coast. Years ago, Yeilt'ooch' Tláa and Shaawatgaaxí had spent summers together working at Gadzóosdaa's fish camp. Shaawatgaaxí generously agreed to share these words (and some of us have since gone to visit her in Teslin to thank her, and to offer our gratitude to all our friends across the mountains). Keiyishí Bessie Cooley, Kookhittaán Sháa of Teslin and one of the great living speakers of the Tlingit language, also helped with the Tlingit formulation of the saying.

This motto ties us to the past, to the communities over the mountains, and to teachers and elders whom we deeply admire. It inspires us to be worthy students and friends.