



Biography



Biilts'ik Colleen Austin is the President of the First Nations Schools Association. She has been an adult educator since 2005 and the Principal and a Sm'algyax language teacher at 'Na Aksa Gyilak'yoo School in Kitsumkalum, BC, since 2014. Although her ancestral territory is St'at'imc (Lillooet Nation), Colleen was adopted by the Tsimshian Nation as a member of Waaps Niishaywaas Gitselasu and was bestowed the name Biilts'ik, a house symbol meaning red sunset – “tomorrow will be a nice day.”

Colleen is the editor and publisher of *Two Whale Stories*, which tells two adaawx (true stories) shared by her language mentor, the late Mildred Roberts, from Kitsumkalum. Believing passionately in her students and the importance of their language, songs and stories, Colleen contributed Tsimshian Sm'algyax words to the book.

Colleen has also received her Masters of Education in Indigenous Language Revitalization from the University of Victoria, which included publishing, *More Than Words, It's Personal*, which describes her journey of learning the Sm'algyax language in order to share her knowledge with her students. Her thesis, Łoomsk dm małdm da na galkgüüm (We will tell our children about respect), focused on the indigenous research methodology of community youth and elders as co-researchers, and resulted in raising awareness of how the Tsimshian law of Łoomsk (respect) inspired language learning in Kitsumkalum. Her thesis generated the musical composition of the Łoomsk Song which is performed, with American Sign Language, by her dance group, Gañ Luaama Goot Dancers (From a Happy Heart).

Colleen is the wife of Robin Austin, former NDP MLA for Skeena, and the mother of two adult children, Graeme (a lawyer in Vancouver) and Amber (an education assistant in Kitsumkalum).