

Hul'qumi'num youth forum explores issues of governance and land

By Michelle Thompson
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When Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group's chief negotiator was in Grade 8, he quit school and became a self-proclaimed drop-out. "It wasn't until quite a bit later when I realized that wasn't the thing I should have done," Robert Morales said. "No matter what your circumstances are, it's important for you to develop some habits and develop some goals for yourselves." Morales, who eventually went back to school, was speaking at a Hul'qumi'num Youth Treaty Forum on Monday afternoon. Around 30 Hul'qumi'num teens listened as he delivered a keynote speech on treaty negotiations. "What is government?" he asked the youngsters. If anyone knew how to clearly define it, they didn't speak up. "Government is the group of people that make decisions and make law," Morales explained. "Governments make lots of rules. One of the laws they make regards who can own land." The problem, he said, is that sometimes more than one group lays claim to a piece of land. When that happens locally, Morales becomes involved with federal and provincial negotiations. "What do we say about the land?" he asked rhetorically. "It's ours. As First Nations, we say we own the land and we should be the ones who make decisions about the land. "The government says it's theirs," he continued. "Through negotiations, we try to resolve that." Brian Thom, a doctor of anthropology, delivered a speech about land during the daylong event. M'Girl, a Vancouver-based Aboriginal group, also performed. Joey Caro, communications manager with the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, called the event a success. "The band was sensational," he said. "The kids liked that." The event was intended to raise awareness about a number of First Nations' issues. "Where else would they go for this information? There's no place to go," Caro said. "If we don't get it out there, it's not going to get out there."