

Kids these days

The publication for people who care about Alaska's Kids!

Green Projects Lift Spirits, Improve Climate in Akiak, Alaska



Community engagement can take many forms, but one thing that remains constant is the intention to work together to create environments that support the growth and education of children and youth.

A grassroots project in **Akiak, Alaska** is a prime example of students and adults working together to strengthen the community and empower youth.

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Green Projects Lift Spirits, Improve Climate in Akiak, AK

By Shelly Sinclair, Akiak, AK

Editors note: The village of Akiak decided it wanted to increase youth resiliency as a way to decrease the rate of suicide. Joe Digrande, the Akiak prevention coordinator realized that, first the community needed an idea to get behind. He asked the community to think of a time when the people worked really well together. An elder spoke up, remembering when the entire community pulled together and managed multiple gardens. That memory was the seed that led the community and the school to rally around a similar idea tying gardening, bunny-raising, and recycling together. A local AmeriCorp member was recruited to further engage youth throughout the summer. Digrande, the local coordinator for the state Behavioral Health prevention grant, hopes the by-product of these community-school engagement efforts, will be an increase in the physical and mental health of both youth and adults. Portions of this article, written by Akiak teacher Shelly Sinclair were published in the March issue of the Tundra Drums.

What are some of the current and future benefits of plant-growing, bunny raising, and recycling? As the people of Akiak eat more fresh vegetables throughout the year we hope to see a decrease in new cases of diabetes and cancer, an increase in the overall physical, dental, and mental health of the people of Akiak. As the physical and mental health of the students in Akiak increases due to a better diet, more exercise, and a better outlook on life we hope to see an increase in the desire and ability to learn.

Most Alaskan families have a Dog Pot where they put scraps for their dogs. In Akiak we've got Dog Pots, Bunny Pots, and Worm Pots! All our meat, bone and skin scraps go to the dogs, of course. In addition, our vegetable trimmings go to the rabbits. The rabbits then turn the vegetable trimmings into excellent fertilizer that is put into each pot of vegetables or herbs growing in our plant stands. Coffee grounds, fruit scraps, potato peelings, and even tea bags go into our worm bin along with some more of that bunny poop to be turned into loamy, fertile soil for our plants in the plant stands. The vegetables and herbs are being grown indoors in five different plant light stands as a source of fresh vegetables for people and the bunnies and also as transplants that will go into home gardens around Akiak this spring. In addition to providing excellent fertilizer for the plants our two female rabbits and one male rabbit are providing us with lots of baby bunnies.

We are also talking about getting all the contents of the Akiak dump

hauled away by a barge this spring in order to protect our ground water system from further pollution. We hoped to see the leaking oil tanks removed next spring also. Everyone is recycling his or her pop cans. Large plastic coffee cans and one-gallon food cans are being recycled to grow plants in them. Joe Digrande is getting another grant to buy two large rotating compost bins. We're hoping to get a grant to buy a paper shredder so that we can shred old newspapers and feed them to the worms. We're hoping to buy a chipper shredder so that we can turn small branches into wood chips



that will go underneath the cages of the rabbits and then after we clean under the rabbits, into the compost bins to be turned into rich soil. We want to find a way to recycle all cardboard boxes and other paper products to use as fuel for heating homes. We would like to have a sewage treatment plant built in Akiak so that all wastewater is completely clean before putting it back into our river and our ground water system. Our high school students did 11 different chemical tests on water from several sites

on the Kuskokwim River and found that untreated gray water is causing our river water to be high in phosphates and to have a pH of 8 to 9. So, we want to clean up our river.

Lena Foss is working hard to get the dump cleaned up and to get people to recycle in the village. Lena (Mumchuk) is definitely the Queen of Recycling here in Akiak. She's encouraging the villagers

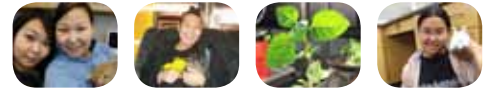
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KidS these days

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... Green Projects cont.



to dig up a garden plot so that we put in cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and kale plants for them, a long with seeds for carrots, parsnips, beets, turnips, radishes, swiss chard, rutabagas, potatoes, and onions. Lena is also looking for young people whom she can train to care for plants in the greenhouse, the plant stands, to breed and care for the rabbit colony, help families get their garden plots going, and help with the recycling projects.

Joe Digrande keeps himself busy finding and writing grants for all these projects, supervising myself and Lena Foss, getting people excited about our ideas and making regular trips to Bethel for supplies.



Plant stands are located in several classrooms

Mrs. Sinclair and several other teachers at Akiak School are busy growing vegetables, flowers, and herbs in the plant stands within their classrooms. Mrs. Sinclair's classroom has become the home for the three adult rabbits and their numerous offspring. We have several large and healthy plants of oregano, basil, parsley, lettuce, cabbage, sage, rosemary, kale, cauliflower and kale going now. Several bags of soil, the seeds, fertilizer, the hydroponics equipment, and the pallets for compost bins are being stored in Mrs. Sinclair's High School Science/Math classroom along with the worm farm, a goldfish tank, and an aquarium full of Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches!

Sharene House is using one of the plant stands in an off-campus house to teach one of our Special Needs students some important life skills. They have zinnia flowers, green beans and a wide assortment of other vegetables growing successfully. Debbie Anderson, Akiak's 2nd Grade teacher, recently got a plant stand

put in her classroom. It will be fun to see what they grow. Hopefully, Steve Craft and the Akiak High School Shop class will have time to erect the greenhouse this March once basketball season is over. Once the greenhouse is erected they need to build our compost bins, the tables for the greenhouse, and move a shed up to the school for the rabbit colony and the outdoor compost bins. Whew! Spring is a busy time for all of us as we gear up for Spring Planting.

Already we are seeing that exposure to the full-spectrum lighting from four of the five plant stands within three of our classrooms is helping to decrease the incidence of depression amongst ourselves and our students. Being able to watch all these baby bunnies grow has lifted the spirits of all who come by to visit Mrs. Sinclair's Science class. The stress levels of many of our high school and middle school students has lessened as they've found it very therapeutic to hold a baby bunny while doing class work. In addition, many young people are finding it very relaxing to work with the plants either during transplanting or when planting seeds.

In the future, we hope to hold cooking classes for the youth and adults so that everyone will know how to prepare some of the new herbs and vegetables they are being exposed to. We hope to see the community of villagers and educators working together for a common goal. We hope to see the town of Akiak become a clean, healthy place for people, animals, and plants. Lastly, we hope that other villages around us will decide to do some of the same things that we are doing so that the entire Kuskokwim River delta can become the clean, healthy environment that we all seek.



This project is partially funded by the Alaska State Division of Behavioral Health.

Social Emotional Learning key in Anchorage School District

From the Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development Information Exchange (Jan. 15, 2010)

Social-emotional learning is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships and avoid negative behaviors. Students can use this process to enhance their ability to integrate their thinking, feeling and behaving in order to achieve important life tasks.

Recognizing that social-emotional skills are critical to academic learning, the Anchorage School District uses the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, one of the longest running, evidence-based K-8 programs for social and emotional learning in the United States.

The school board approved Social-Emotional Learning goals in 2006. All ASD schools have SEL goals, but they vary by school, according to Michael Kerosky, ASD Supervisor for Safe and Drug Free Schools.

“Teachers, who are intentionally using RCCP in their classrooms to directly teach pro-social skills, find that academic scores rise when they have laid the social and emotional learning groundwork and don’t have to spend as much time on behavior issues,” said Kerosky.

Within the school setting, SEL can best be accomplished through a layered approach of lessons directly teaching skills and strategies, infusion into the curricula and classroom practices, and an environment of safety, respect and caring, which models SEL values.

For the past 20 years, Safe and Drug Free Schools has offered federally funded mini-grants to schools between \$1,200 and \$3,500 to foster social-emotional learning. This year, 65 schools are using grants in a variety of ways. One school is using its grant to deal with recess issues students are experiencing there by incorporating SEL skill building into its Recess Club.

Several schools are using their mini-grants to provide professional development in SEL for teachers and staff.

Linda Lantieri, international scholar and speaker in the field of social and emotional learning, spoke with ASD teachers and the community this fall about how and why it is a good idea for adults

to help children develop good social and emotional skills and intelligence. She is a co-founder of RCCP and has been a district mentor for the past 20 years.

“The district is leading the country in this work,” said Kerosky. “Half, or more, of employable skills involve social and emotional skills. Early investment is time saving over the long-term.”



Anchorage School District staff Stan Myra and Julie Vincek with students

In addition to reviewing the latest brain research and concepts in the field of social and emotional learning, Lantieri explored how stress affects life and work. She also identified self-care tools and reflexive approaches adults can use to care for themselves and the children in their lives.

Having worked since 2002 with teachers, guidance counselors and administrators who were survivors of 9/11, Lantieri’s latest message is one of connecting to our inner resiliency, according to Kerosky.

Lantieri believes that “when we nurture the inner lives of the caregivers, then they have a well of resilience to draw from when they work with children.”

“By being mindful, we can calm ourselves so that the children around us can relax,” he added.

Editors note: AASB/Alaska ICE has collaborated with ASD/SDFS and has provided financial support for school mini-grants, development of SEL standards and for school coaching and capacity building.

Examples of how SEL can help students:

- It enhances the potential for individual and social growth and learning,
- Academics/school involvement increases greatly when students are individualized, personalized and feel like they belong to the fabric of the school,
- The social and emotional aspects of each individual are the driving forces in one’s ability to learn,
- Integrating SEL skills and academic skills prepares our students for life in the world. This is what employers are asking for.

- from the ASD Standards and Benchmarks

AAEC Summer Arts Institutes in 3 Locations

From the Alaska Arts Education Consortium

This summer AAEC is offering trainings for educators from all levels: 3 two-week, 4-credit, intensive institutes in different locations and a unique, two-week workshop for educators as part of the Fairbanks Summer Arts festival.

- Learn how to integrate the arts (visual, drama, music & Native cultural arts) into school curriculum
- Understand the impact of the arts on student performance, motivation and achievement
- Learn about current brain research regarding the importance of the arts and learning
- Experience the production, criticism & appreciation of art
- Form a cadre of teachers in the arts across Alaska
- Personally experience new art forms



Participants from last year's Juneau Arts Institute

Fairbanks information and registration

http://akartsed.org/new/?page_id=351

Anchorage information and registration

http://akartsed.org/new/?page_id=367

Juneau information and registration

http://akartsed.org/new/?page_id=371

For more information, and to apply, visit the AAEC site.

<http://akartsed.org>



Participate in Global Youth Service Day 2010

Established in 1988, GYSD occurs in over 100 countries each year and is the largest service event in the world. On GYSD children and youth address the world's most critical issues by partnering with families, schools, community and faith-based organizations, businesses, and governments. In 2010, the event will be April 23-25. Visit www.GYSD.org for more information, resources to plan events, and a map of GYSD events around the world!



Global Youth Service Day Goals:

- **Mobilize** - youth to identify and address the needs of their communities; organizations to provide opportunities for youth

engagement; media and policy makers to promote and raise awareness of the youth service movement.

- **Support** - youth on a lifelong path of service and civic engagement; schools and organizations through training and technical assistance, grants, and resources that enable them to engage youth;
- **Sustain** - community improvement through year-round recognition of youth as problem-solvers and community leaders.*

Global Youth Service Day 2010 will be April 23-25

2010 Registered Events in Alaska

<http://www.GYSD.org/events/2010/us/AK>

For more information, visit: <http://www.ysa.org/gysd>.

Imagination Library evaluation positive

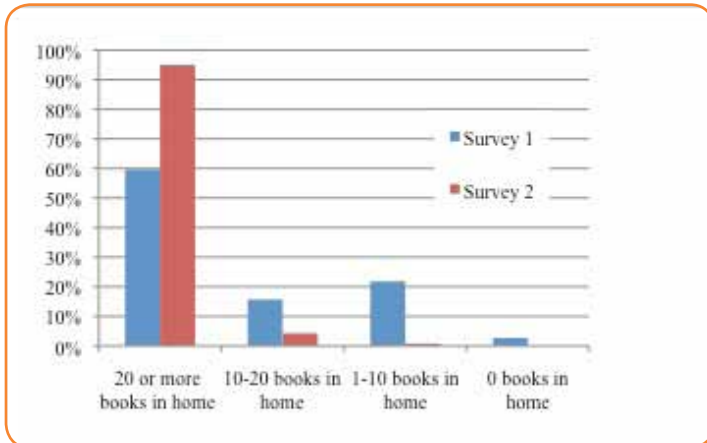
From Best Beginnings, Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

Alaska children enrolled in Imagination Library (IL) for at least one year are more enthusiastic about reading, are read to more often, are perceived by parents to be better prepared for kindergarten, and live in homes with more children's books. Those are among the findings of an evaluation conducted by two University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) researchers.

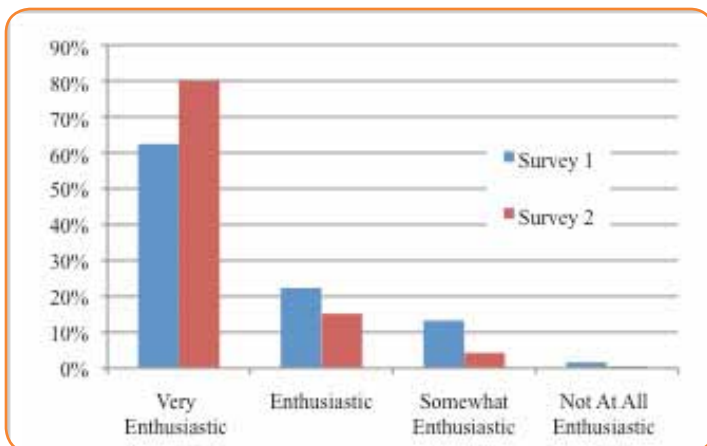
Drs. Hilary Seitz and Robert Capuozzo of UAA's College of Education designed and conducted the study to determine the impact of Imagination Library on children and families. Families were surveyed in two groups. In Study 1, parents of new enrollees in Imagination Library were given surveys before their children began receiving books. In Study 2, the researchers surveyed parents whose children had been enrolled in Imagination Library for at least one year. For simplicity, Study 1 respondents are referred to as "new enrollees" and Study 2 participants are referred to as "Imagination Library families." Both groups included urban and rural residents.

The findings include the following:

- Children's books in the home: 94% of the Imagination Library families reported 20 or more children's books at home, compared to about 60% of new enrollees. Strikingly, nearly 25% of new enrollee parents reported 10 or fewer children's books at home.
- Frequency of reading: In the IL families, 74% of parents read to their children daily. Of the new enrollee families, 64% of parents read to their children daily.
- Enthusiasm about reading: More than 80% of the Imagination Library families report their child is very enthusiastic, and less than 5% report their child is only somewhat or not at all enthusiastic. Although 62% of new enrollee parents report high enthusiasm, more than 14% are somewhat or not at all enthusiastic.
- Readiness for kindergarten (not asked of new enrollees): Almost all – more than 93% – of the Imagination Library families feel their child is more prepared for kindergarten because of Imagination Library. More than 90% of them had recommended Imagination Library to others.



Comparison of Books in the Home



Level of Enthusiasm



BEST BEGINNINGS
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment



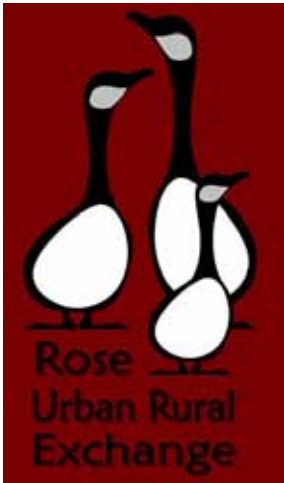
Start an Imagination Library in Your Community!

Sixteen Alaska communities currently participate in Imagination Library under the Best Beginnings umbrella including Anchorage, Barrow, Fairbanks, Greater Kenai/Soldotna, Juneau/Southeast Alaska, Koliganek, Kuskokwim, Little Diomedede, Nanwalek, Toksook Bay, and Unalaska/Dutch Harbor, with additional programs in Hoonah and Wainwright.

Find out how to enroll your child at www.bestbeginningsalaska.org.

Rose Urban Rural Exchange Invites Teens to Apply

By Matthew Turner, R.U.R.E. Program



421 W. 1st Ave,
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Anchorage, AK
99501
(907) 272-5301

www.roseurbanruralexchange.org



Apply for the Sister School Exchange

Represent your culture, participate in other Alaskan cultures, and build connections among all Alaskans!

Immerse yourself in another culture in Alaska. Host students from another part of Alaska to build bridges between different ways of life. Explore what it means to be Alaskan.

The Sister School Exchange is an Alaskan cross-cultural immersion program. Teams made up of five students (middle or high school) and one teacher from an urban area of Alaska are paired with another team from rural Alaska.

After sharing a little about themselves and their community, and learning a little about where they are going, each team travels to their Sister School community to live there for one week. Each student and the teacher are hosted by a different host family.

During the one-week stay, educational projects and field trips are organized to broaden student knowledge of other parts of Alaska. The students spend the first part of each weekday attending classes at their Sister School, and then spend the remainder of the day participating in experiences to help them learn more about the culture of the community.

Go to www.roseurbanruralexchange.org to learn more about the program, watch stories from past Cultural Ambassador teams, and apply for the 2010 - 2011 school year.

Your students will:

- Discover more about the geography of Alaska and the cultures and lifestyles of its people.
- Learn about key Alaska issues, and how Alaskans are meeting these challenges.
- Learn what "culture" really means, and how it applies to their own lives.
- Use digital video and a dynamic website to tell their story.
- Tell how the exchange has made them think differently about yourself, your community, and your state.
- Entire classrooms (or schools) can take part with course work and hosting exchange students.
- Course work can be taught as a companion to an Alaska Studies curriculum.
- Course work aligns with Alaska education, cultural, and social-emotional learning standards.
- All traveling expenses are paid by the program.
- Travel in the Fall or Spring semesters.
- Apply early, this opportunity is limited.
- Visit the website or call (907) 272-5301 for more information.

Building a Strong Foundation for Life

By Melissa Pickle, RurAL CAP Parents as Teachers Director (Village Voices - Winter 2010 issue)

If you have ever held a newborn baby in your arms and watched him or her grow into a walking, talking, energetic little person by the third birthday, you know the amount of changes young children experience during the first three years of life. A baby's babbling turns into its first word. An infant who could not hold his/her head up begins to sit up, crawl and even walk. It is during this time that the foundation for all future growth and development is being laid.

When a child is born, the brain is still developing. At birth, a child's brain is just over 25% of its adult size; however, by the time the child reaches 3 years of age the brain has grown to 90% of its adult size. This is an amazing amount of growth in an extremely short period of time.

What is happening in the brain to make that growth occur? This growth is largely due to the rapid creation of connections in the brain. When we learn something new our brain makes a connection called a synapse. Each time we repeat that activity that connection in our brain gets faster and stronger. Every experience we have, whether it is positive or negative, either creates a new synapse or strengthens an existing one. For infants and toddlers, nearly every sight, sound, touch, taste and movement is new and this causes an explosion of synapse development. The rate of synapse development is at its greatest peak between birth and age three years. During the first year of life, the foundational brain connections for vision, hearing, language and various learning styles are all laid down in the brain. All future development is built upon these first connections.

Technological advances over the past several years have made it possible for us to view the brain activity of a young child and see the development of these brain connections. We are able to observe the connections and activity in children who have been raised in healthy and supportive environments as compared to those of young children who have experienced prolonged neglect or abuse. The differences are shocking. In a typically developing child we see many strong synapse connections as well as a lot of

activity occurring in all regions of the brain. In children who have experienced prolonged neglect or abuse, however, it is a very different story. These children show less brain activity as well as have fewer connections in the brains and often these synapses are damaged. These children struggle with activities that involve memory and learning and have less developed social skills, all of which are needed for school success.

Research has also shown us that the more risk factors a child birth to three years of age is exposed to, the more likely that child will experience difficulties in language, learning, social emotional development and even physical health.

As you can see from the chart below, if a child experiences one or two of these risk factors, there is about a 5% chance of a developmental delay. This percentage

increases with higher numbers of risk factors such as those listed below the chart. It is clear that early experiences and a child's environment impact brain development.



Willie David, Kwethluk Head Start teacher, reads to children, helping to promote healthy brain development (Photos courtesy of RurAL CAP)

<u>Risk Factors</u>	<u>Potential Chance of Developmental Delay</u>
1-2	5%
3	20%
4	40%
5	80%
6-7	90%

Risk factors

- Poverty
- Domestic violence
- Teen parent
- Being a minority
- Living in a home with 4 or more children
- Parent with a substance abuse issue
- Child abuse or neglect
- Parent with a mental illness
- Parent with a low level of education
- Single parent

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... a Strong Foundation *cont.*



What experiences promote healthy brain development? **One of the most powerful experiences an infant can have is bonding with the parents.** Holding the baby, singing, talking, responding when he/she cries, rocking and gazing into the baby's eyes all help to make strong connections in the brain. The messages being sent tell the child he or she is safe and secure, and allows the child to focus on learning about the world around him/her. Reading a book together, playing games like peek-a-boo, building with blocks, coloring, and talking to the child about what he/she sees or is experiencing all help to create positive synapses.

Although it is clear that experiences during the first three years of life are critical to brain development, sometimes the brain can be repaired for a child who has had negative experiences through intensive intervention. However, it is much easier to build a strong base through providing positive early experiences than it is to

try to repair a fragile one later on. We can all make a difference by giving our children a solid foundation to grow on and the best possible start in life through positive experiences and loving care at all times.



Parents who play an active role in their child's early cognitive development build a strong foundation for lifelong learning, like Regina Nicholai in Napaskiak with son, Jeffery

*Visit the
RurAL CAP website*

Quiz: Who Makes a Difference in Your Life?



(You don't have to actually answer the questions. Just read the text straight through, and you'll get the point.)

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America.
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winner for best actor and actress.
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

How did you do?

The point is, none of us remember the headliners of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

Easier?

The lesson: The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones that care.



A Way From Despair: Decoding the past for a brighter future

By Diana Campbell, UAF Center for Alaska Native Health Research

The people of Alakanuk knew a spirit of suicide and alcohol and drug abuse walked about freely, scenting the air with its rancid nature. It had just claimed two more victims; unsatisfied, it was looking for more. Sheltered inside the small Yukon River community's tribal hall, elders, youth and parents huddled together in a circle. Some hunched down, faces void of tears, tense bodies pressed against unyielding metal chairs. Others let tears quietly slide down their cheeks. The two recent deaths were the newest heartaches in a long line of many.

The group knew too well the spirit's easy reach into their community. They've carried many to the cemetery, dug many graves. Some knew intimately how alcohol or drugs seemed to dull the pain but deceitfully brought more tragedy and sorrow. From time to time, outsiders had come to the village to help deal with the spirit's long reign, but nothing they brought seemed to last. But in spite of disappointments and heartbreak, the people gathered this day because they still believed things could change. This time the solutions and answers would come from their community, from themselves.

"We had to do something," recalled Josephine Edmund, mother of three, who sat in the circle that winter day. "We had to help our children."

The gathering that day was part of the Center for Alaska Native Health Research's Elluam Tungiinun program, funded by the National Institutes of Health. This research project is testing to see if the values that Alaska Natives have said helped keep them sober and alive could be taught to Alaska Native young people, their families and their communities.

Alakanuk was one of the first Alaska Native communities to sign up to be in the research program and the only one that agreed to go public about their involvement.

"We had to help our children."



Traditional Yup'ik activities teach life lessons along with practical skills.

"Elluam Tungiinun means 'toward wellness' in Yup'ik, a name Alakanuk chose for themselves," said Jim Allen, who is the project co-principal investigator and a UAF psychology professor. "The community insisted the focus be positive and strength-based. They had ownership. They designed the cultural activities. They planned it. They ran it."

>> Continue reading this article at the UAF website.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks Center for Alaska Native Health Research website: <http://canhr.uaf.edu/>

Teens: Let Your Voice Be Heard

From the Youth Alliance for a Healthier Alaska



What can you do?

Join the **Youth Alliance for a Healthier Alaska** and other teens across the state to voice your ideas and opinions. You can help shape the way the State of Alaska responds to important teen issues such as substance abuse, suicide, violence, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and nutrition & fitness. This is your chance to influence State programs and meet with decision makers.

Who is eligible?

Youth ages 14-18 from across Alaska.

When?

12:00pm-2:00 pm on the 1st Saturday of every month except va-

cation (for the 2010-2011 school year). Plus one full-day meeting in Anchorage (travel, lodging and per diem paid).

Where?

Youth living in Anchorage and surrounding areas will attend a face to face meeting every month in Anchorage. Youth in other areas of the state will attend the meeting via telephone/video conference.

What you get?

- For each hour you participate, you'll receive a \$10 gift card or school service learning credit.
- A chance to have your voice heard and make a difference for Alaska youth.

Learn more: www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/wcfh/adolescent/yaha.htm