

AFN Report Findings and Recommendations

The data in "The AFN Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call For Action" provide a glimpse of the depth of the problems facing Alaska Natives.

While the data in the report summarize the status of Alaska Natives in the aggregate, it should not be equated with the personal status of all 75,000 Alaska Natives. Most Native people, whether they live in rural villages or Alaska's cities, are coping with change, maintaining their families and cultures, and trying to help others do the same.

Nor should it be concluded that efforts to solve many of the problems have been without success. Alaska Natives have a long history of active involvement in their own communities and village governments, non-profit Native regional corporations and other Native institutions have been working to provide resources to address these issues.

The analysis of the status of Alaska Natives stands in sharp contradiction to the improved physical health of Alaska Natives that has occurred in recent decades. The analysis documents alarmingly high rates of self-destructive

Native programs and developing new initiatives.

The findings purposely do not include detailed recommendations. Rather it is the intent of the report to open a broad debate among Native leaders, government officials and other interested parties on the causes of, and solutions to, the Native crisis.

Finding 1: A plague of alcohol abuse, violence and self-destruction is afflicting Alaska Natives.

Alcohol abuse, pervasive throughout the Native community, is undermining the ability of Alaska Natives to control their lives. It is the fuel that fires the cycle of violence and self-destruction. It takes its greatest toll on young Native adults, particularly men, infants not yet born, and abused children.

Policies and programs must encourage, build, and reinforce the self-help efforts of individuals, families and communities to combat alcoholism, in-

In ten years Native population growth will double the number of young Native adults, the segment of the Native population most at risk. Although the Native population is becoming increasingly urban, a majority of Natives will continue to live in rural villages. Because the capacity of village economies to absorb anticipated population growth is limited, increasing population growth poses serious physical, environmental, social and economic challenges.

The decision to stay or leave the village is influenced by family and cultural ties, the degree to which need-

Finding 5: Villages are precariously dependent upon the public sector spending and the cost of living in villages is exorbitant.

The expansion of the public sector economy, combined with the absence of self-sustaining economic growth, has contributed to village population growth and fostered increased dependency on public assistance. Public sector emphasis

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behavior and demonstrates that the major victims of such behavior - Native infants, children and young adults - are increasing in number. Most Alaska Natives are living in communities in which the local economies cannot provide a life-sustaining standard of living without substantial, on-going public subsidies. The analysis suggests that, more often than not, public policies and interventions intended to assist Native individuals, families and communities have created and perpetuated dependence, rather than self-sufficiency. It also indicates that in Native villages government has largely failed to discharge its most important obligation - the obligation to provide children an adequate education.

Social scientists convened by the National Science Foundation have identified the fundamental issue confronting Alaska Natives as "the struggle of previously self-sufficient individuals and family units to adjust to rapid social change largely imposed from outside." In their view, the struggle to adjust to political and economic systems over which Natives living in rural villages have little real control generates feelings of helplessness and frustration and results in destructive behavior, generally directed internally or toward family and friends. If the situation is to be improved, federal Native policy must be premised on facilitating self-help and on assisting individuals, families and communities to cope with social and economic change. Applying this principle, the following findings suggest a framework for redesigning existing

intervene in and prevent mental health crisis, protect Native children from abuse and neglect and take individual responsibility for individual behavior.

Finding 2: Alaska Natives are more vulnerable to serious injury, infectious diseases and death than non-Natives.

The rising Native birth rate will engender rapid population growth and significantly increase the segments of the Native population most at risk (i.e. infants, children and young Native adults). Between 1980 and 1990 the demand for children's services will have grown by 40 percent.

Unless the health care system expands to accommodate the increasing need, improvements in Native health status may quickly deteriorate. At a minimum, the current quantity and quality of health care must be maintained. To respond adequately to behavioral problems engendered by alcohol abuse, additional monetary and human resources are needed, particularly resources to address maternal and infant care and education.

Finding 3: Alaska Natives have a growing "at risk" population.

ed public services are available and the extent to which village residents have incentives to stay or leave. Policies are needed that both foster sustainable village economic self-sufficiency and enlarge the opportunity for Natives so inclined to work outside their home villages.

Finding 4: The village economy cannot meet the needs of the growing Native population.

In rural Alaska, most new jobs have been provided, either directly or indirectly, by increased federal and state expenditures. But despite government spending, large numbers of Natives who want to work in their home villages or region have no possibility of doing so. In most Native villages, the prospects for private sector economic development are limited, and due to declining oil

on capital improvements have saddled Native villages with operation and maintenance costs the communities, and the Native families who live in them, cannot sustain. Policies and initiatives that target economically realistic improvements in the physical quality of village life and do not undermine options for residents who want to pursue economic opportunities away from their home villages are needed.

Finding 6: Native children enter and exit village schools with serious educational handicaps and their education is worse than mediocre.

The educational achievement of Native children, particularly children who attend village schools, is far below national norms. As a result, Native students are being denied the opportunity to realize their potentials and to become full participants in society by

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revenues, state spending is projected to steadily decline throughout the 1990s. The projected decline in economic activity in rural Alaska coincides with the steadily increasing number of young Native adults who will be seeking to enter the work force. Every effort to take advantage of limited opportunities for private economic development should be encouraged, and Native access to employment opportunities expanded, including providing necessary training and support, including financial support to relocate, if necessary to secure permanent employment.

grade and high school educations that are condemning an entire generation to an underclass status and a life of limited choices.

To afford Native students attending village schools the opportunity to obtain an education equivalent to their non-Native peers, they must be afforded the opportunity to begin their formal education on a par with their non-Native peers. Expanded Headstart, infant learning and early childhood education programs, combined with parent education, are essential if educational handicaps are to be overcome.