

# Sees Generation of Orphans--

## Sending Native Children Away to School Deplored

At 30, Woody Morrison looks back on a "generation of orphans" whose lives were twisted in pursuit of education and vows to help a new generation growing up in the Alaska bush.

"We Natives of my generation became orphaned at the age of 13; separated from our parents because we had to go away to school and so, in reality, we grew up as orphans," Morrison

said.

As statewide project director for Alaska Student Higher Education Services, administered by the Alaska Federation of Natives Inc., Morrison feels that he can help neutralize the culture shock and simultaneously boost the educational opportunities of Native students outside their traditional village environment.

Under a \$497,874 grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Morrison writes contracts, negotiates with three Alaskan colleges and monitors a trio of programs called Talent Search, Upward Bound and Special Services.

Talent Search contracts go to non-profit agencies or institutions of higher learning to identify youth of financial or cultural need with exceptional potential

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for secondary and post-secondary education.

Upward Bound aims to generate the skills and motivation necessary for success in education beyond high school for enrollees from low-income backgrounds and with inadequate secondary school preparation.

Special Services for disadvantaged students in college provides for remedial and other special services for students with academic potential at schools covered by the special services grant.

"For too long now the student has been told that he has to go out and get an education, but in order to get an education he has had to totally divorce himself from his background because his cultural heritage was something bad, wrong, evil, sinful, dirty...and he was made ashamed," said Morrison, a Haida Indian.

"And now they tell him to be proud. How do you be proud of something you know nothing about?" he asked.

His is the story of thousands of Alaskan Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts forced to leave home to get the free public education guaranteed but not provided for in their local villages by the federal government.

It is a story so far without end; a story of annual migration of youth hundreds of thousands of miles from home to get an education.

"We are seeing the same thing happen again in this boarding home program," Morrison said. "We find the Native having an extremely difficult time adapting to an alien world because he does not have the support of his parents; no family ties."

So the emphasis now is not so much on telling the Native student he's got to be proud of his heritage. "No, we are just saying you have nothing to be ashamed of," Morrison said. "Being proud is not having to be ashamed or guilty of anything."

"That area is one of our major thrusts. The other is that in the past we've had to take whatever's given to us: programs administered to the Natives, for the Natives and about the Natives, but never with the Natives! Now we're saying all right, you are going to have a program deal-

ing with the Natives. We will serve in a policy-making capacity or we won't serve at all.

"We will no longer accept positions as advisors," Morrison said.

History and statistics show that Morrison's attack on the state of Alaska Native education is not merely an emotional argument.

Students have suffered psychologically from being taken from home in their early teens to attend school far away.

"The dramatically sharp increases in suicide among the 15-25 year olds began at almost the same time as the Alaska Boarding Home Program began," Morrison noted in a report to HEW Region Ten officials at Seattle.

In 1947, the U.S. Naval station at Sitka was turned over to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and converted into a school subsequently named Mount Edgecumbe. The curriculum was primarily vocational education and two airplane hangers were used as classroom facilities.

Students came from as far north at Pt. Barrow (2,000 miles) and as far south as Metlakatla (300 miles) to remain nine months, with half a day off for Thanksgiving and one day for Christmas. Due to the distance involved, some students were forced to remain at school for periods ranging to six years, Morrison said.

Modernized transportation has made it possible for Mt. Edgecumbe students to return home every spring, but they are still forced to spend most of their teen-aged years away from home.

The new system of high school education for bush youngsters instituted in Alaska in 1967 is the foster parent or boarding home program, which places most: Native students with predominantly white families of the middle to lower-upper income levels. In nine months of school, the students become accustomed to the modern conveniences which are luxuries at home and indoctrinated with the norms and mores of non-Native life.

"In the village, binge drinking is socially acceptable, cleanliness is not necessarily next to Godli-

ness and the clock runs on seasonal increments rather than on minutes and seconds," Morrison said.

"The student is faced with being bounced from one world to the next and back, resulting in many students finally arriving at a point of total normlessness. The end result sometimes is suicide."

Under the federal grant, the AFN, Inc. formed a board of 12 Native regional representatives and that consortium board hired Morrison.

He, in turn meets with student boards on the campuses of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Sheldon Jackson College, University of Alaska-Anchorage, and Alaska Methodist University to hear and recommend policy changes to the statewide consortium board.

Field counsellors for the program talk to village students about available educational opportunities in adult basic education, education for veterans, welfare recipients and persons who are under-employed.

While the program is in its early stages, Morrison is optimistically contracting with Native associations and universities within Alaska to seek out Native students and guide their education, with supportive services in

career, academic and personal counseling, tutoring and cultural activities.

He feels little progress has been made of administrators of past programs along the same lines, but that now the cultural life style gap can be eased through a Native-operated trio program - Talent Search, Upward Bound and Special Services on campus.