

Graduate Speaks

By Cecilia Ulroan Martz

Right from a small high school, where most of our needs, cultural and otherwise were taken care of, I went into a large university. There I encountered many difficulties. Most of all I sensed a great loss. In high school, I was treated like a human who had feelings and identity. In the university I was tagged with a number. The university, professors, dorm life, and different activities were all geared for one who had grown up in a white, middle class society—with hardly any of the warm human feelings that we were used to in our small villages. So, after two years of struggling through the impersonality of a regular university education, I dropped out. So do many of the students from rural communities. Before graduation, 85% of the rural students drop out.

Then I heard about a new program called the Alaska Rural Teacher Training Corps. I was at first hesitant and thought that it was just like any program that 'they' brought to native people, with nothing but administering from

a far-off place . . . If we did not strictly follow 'their' guidelines, it would cause discontent on 'their' part and they wouldn't even think about us.

But, at that time I was looking for something, so I thought I would just try it to see how it was. I was surprised! This was a different program. It had human beings in it that were concerned about us . . . We at once got involved in the school and community activities, home visits, getting to know different agencies, and many other aspects that were present in our particular communities.

The program wasn't pure heaven but it was enough for most of us to stick with it and graduate. We are now on our own. A lot of us feel gratitude towards our coordinators and team leaders for the understanding, willingness to listen, open-mindedness, and sincerity. A lot more programs like this, not only in education, are needed. Too often there is too much formality, impersonality, and irrelevance for programs in rural communities.