

ON AGAIN, OFF AGAIN NYC



CORPS AT WORK—It's dirty, hard work building a bridge and these Nulato youngsters are hard at it digging holes for log supports for the structure. Neighborhood Youth Corps "enrollees" have tackled a bridge cross Mukluk Slough, near the village, as one of their summer work programs. The bridge was needed to connect the village

with its airfield, on the side of a nearby hill. The frame of an old communications tower was dragged to the bridge site and used as a temporary frame until permanent supports can be put up. Villagers are cutting logs, towing them up the slough to the construction site by small boat.

—TIM BRADNER Photo

NYC Program Now On But May Close Down In September

By TIM BRADNER

Alaska's on-again, off-again Neighborhood Youth Corps program is on again, at least for a while.

But it will probably be off again come September.

The program, started with great fanfare under the wings of President Johnson's poverty program and the Alaska state Department of Rural Development, began last year with a

\$1½ million funding to put village youths to work on community improvement pro-

jects.

In late February of this year, right when bush family budgets were thinnest and the winter coldest, the work program was abruptly terminated when state officials, realizing suddenly that they had used up the \$1½ million federal funding panicked and ordered sudden mass layoffs for village youths.

Now, with limited re-fund-
ing from the federal govern-

EDITOR'S NOTE—This is the first of a series of articles on problems faced in Alaska's Neighborhood Youth Corps.

ment, the program has been resumed in Alaska villages, but it is a thin shadow of the mass program that last year had at times, 1,800 village youths in Interior Alaska alone working on village-improvement and other projects.

Ambrose Towarak, NYC Field Representative in Fair-

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On Again NYC...

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banks, told the Tundra Times yesterday that programs have been re-started in 14 interior villages.

Fort Yukon, Barrow, Wainwright, Tanana, Stevens Village, Minto, Venetie, Nulato, Koyukuk, Allakaket, Ruby, Kaltag, Galena, and Huslia now have NYC work programs going in Interior Alaska.

Thirty-two interior villages were under the program last year. This year there are only 14.

New programs are being started again in the western Alaska district, headquartered out of Nome, and in the lower Yukon and Kuskokwim area.

Terry McLean, NYC coordinator in western Alaska, was in Unalakleet yesterday and unavailable for comment, but reliable sources indicate that programs in these areas, too, will be a far cry from last year's.

Towarak, recently hired in Fairbanks to fill a vacancy left by Mike Bradner, former NYC Field Representative, yesterday told the Tundra Times that, "there's probably going to be a lot of hard feelings in villages that we missed this year, but there is not much we can do."

"We're only given so much money and that money can be spread only so far," he said.

Towarak said that as of this month, the NYC program in the Interior was up to its full allotted strength with 204 village youths from ages 16 to 21 enrolled. No more will be hired.

The figure includes 140 school youths home on summer vacation and 64 not in school enrolled under the special "drop out" program that is supposed to encourage a return to school in the youngster.

But the entire program will be closed down September 15 anyway, Towarak said. There is a "possibility" that additional funds will allow a temporary extension for out-of-school youths, he said, but this was still in the formative stages.

Most students, of course, would be returning to school in late August anyway, he said.

BUSH INCOME

The Neighborhood Youth Corps program has been termed by far the most constructive of many poverty-war campaigns initiated from Washington and administered in Alaska.

The program puts Native youngsters to work on projects that benefit villages, plus provides an income in depressed areas of the bush where the welfare check is now the base economy.

But the real benefit, many feel, is teaching Native youngsters the value of earning money, saving money, and living in a cash economy.

And the on-again, off-again, inconsistent nature of the NYC program only leads to confusion among village youths, who had come to place trust in the state government when the project was initiated, many in the villages feel.

A Kotzebue resident recently said, "It seems the inconsistency of the thing destroys one of the main purposes of it. Sure, it's a

make-work deal like the CCC was during the depression, but the projects the kids work on are of real benefit to the villages. The biggest benefit was teaching these kids how to handle their money, though."

"At first, when they got that first paycheck, the kids would tend to blow it all, buy something expensive and extravagant that they've wanted for a long time. This is only natural—anybody who has been without money for a long time does this."

"This wild spending went on with succeeding paychecks, until little by little the kids came to realize that they ought to save a little of this money, put it away for a time they might need it."

"It was just when this point was reached for most of them that the whole program was axed."

AXED

When the program was axed, of course, it was sudden and without warning. Field Coordinators in Fairbanks, Nome

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On Again, Off Again NYC Is Expected to Close . . .

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and Bethel were contacted from Juneau and told that there was no more money for the Neighborhood Youth Corps.

Payrolls were due but no checks were coming. It looked as if village workers would not be paid for their previous two-week period.

The word to shut down operations had to be sent out fast, and NYC field men in the cities had to move quickly, flying to villages and closing out the program.

In many cases, a personal trip was impossible because of time or weather.

Radio messages to the villages told them bluntly their program had been eliminated. In most cases, villagers had no inkling that the termination was coming.

NO PAY

The state, having overspent the NYC budget, was not willing to pay the youngsters for their last two weeks of work. Finally, after considerable publicity and pressure, the state paid off—a month late.

Even the Field Representatives in the cities were late getting their checks.

A reliable source in Bethel disclosed to the Tundra Times that 15 NYC workers employed at the BIA school at St. Mary's, near the Yukon's mouth in southwestern Alaska, have never been paid by the state.

Also, it was reported that NYC youngsters at Kotlik, in the Yukon Delta, were never paid for their time working.

Several other villages in the Bethel area, around the lower Kuskokwim Delta, also had pay problems. Among them was Chevak, northwest of Bethel.

BUNGLING

What caused the huge administrative bungle that almost wrote an end to the NYC in Alaska?

Lack of communication between different levels of the state administration and between officials of the Rural Development Agency and their NYC men in the field.

One criticism was that Field Representative's recommendations in improving the program, based on on-the-job observations in the villages, were never listened to in Juneau.

Indications are that Gov. William Egan, whose responsibility the RDA and NYC administration is, was never quite aware of the critical problems faced in the program, particularly in the no-pay bungle.

Ransom Dick, head of the Rural Development Agency, had just taken over after John Cates, former director, resigned, and at the time of the mass layoffs, was still getting acquainted with his new job and was not aware of the true nature of situations faced.

Another factor may be the lack of communication between Juneau and the NYC regional headquarters in San Francisco, and Washington.

The one clear lesson out of the NYC confusion has been that the gulf of misunderstanding between the village residents and the Juneau bureaucracy is great indeed, increasing the dangers of breakdowns due to ivory tower behind-the-desk planning in Juneau.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK