

Masek spearheads new abuse prevention program

Athabascan Iditarod musher Beverly Masek and Charter North Hospital are working together on a prevention program to help end the serious problem of child abuse in Alaska. Nearly one in four Alaskan children are affected by abuse and statistics show the rate of child abuse in the state significantly exceeds the national average.

As the first step in the program, Masek will travel through 24 villages in October and November to bring information about the problem to parents, teachers, and community leaders in rural Alaska. Jointly developed by Charter North and Masek, the program will increase awareness about child abuse and stimulate discussion and ideas for solutions. Masek will also talk with children about self-esteem and reliance, setting goals and how to ask for help if

they need it.

In 1992, information compiled by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services reported an average of 315 monthly abuse cases for a total of 3,788 for the year. The total number of reported cases increased 9.1% over 1991.

Social stresses in Alaska contribute significantly to high rates of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Unpredictable employment or irregular income levels often cause abuse in already unstable households.

One parent households, low household income, high cost of living, difficult living conditions, isolation, and poor access to health care and treatment often cause stress and increase the potential for abuse in families in rural Alaska.

Also, alcohol abuse is evident in most Alaskan homes where abuse and neglect is reported. Rates of substance abuse among Native populations are significantly higher than the general population. Abuse cases are particularly high in rural Alaska and among Native populations. Rates of physical abuse for Native males and females are nearly twice as high as those in the general population.

Masek's village visits began in September in the Kotzebue area where she visited Noorvik, Selawik, Shungnak, Kobuk, Ambler, Kiana, Kivalina, Noatak, and Kotzebue.

Masek's remaining schedule includes visits to Barrow, Wainwright, Point Hope, Point Lay, Atkasuk, Nuiqsut, Kaktovik, Dillingham, Aleknagik, Cape Newenham, Twin Hills, Togiak,



Manokotak, Clarks Point, and Ekuk.

Masek will also begin a pledge program for child abuse prevention by collecting contributions from organizations and individu-

als for each mile of the 1100-mile long Iditarod she completes in 1994. Funds raised will be donated to a non-profit organization that works with abused children.