

Rural Youth Corps Program

Facing Some Obstacles

The Neighborhood Youth Corps in rural areas, one of the few anti-poverty programs which has gotten off the ground in Alaska and has

been praised widely by Native leaders for its effectiveness, is meeting with obstacles and may be curtailed.

But Ransom Dick, the newly appointed head of the Rural Development Agency which sponsors the youth program under the Economic Opportunity Act, says efforts are being made to extend the program as far as possible and meet the areas of greatest need.

One of the biggest obstacles that the program faces, oddly enough, is the war in Viet Nam which threatens to drain off funds and prevent the funding nationwide of Neighborhood Youth Programs this summer.

Other obstacles include the difficult task of communication and coordination among the sponsoring agency, other agencies, and the residents of the outlying communities themselves.

Last month funds for the rural Neighborhood Youth program became exhausted

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under the current program and this necessitated the laying off of all the youth under the program, approximately 600. Application has been made for federal funds on a 90-10 matching basis for a second program to start soon but so far this program has not been approved, leaving a gap.

Some confusion arose with the "lay off" last month. Village leaders indicate that it was "sudden" and "caught them by surprise."

"We had just got started good and then wham, on Feb. 19 we were given the message to stop hiring as of Feb. 15 and on Feb. 28 we were told that those who worked after Feb. 15 would probably not get paid," one leader said.

Typical of the reaction to the layoff, Daniel Lisbourne, of Point Hope, a supervisor in the program, gave this example.

A girl who had been doing well training to be a cook had taken the place of the

regular cook in the school's pre-school program. The regular cook had gone to a National Guard encampment at Anchorage.

When the girl was terminated, the school program was without a cook. The girl was also in tears because believing she would be employed longer, had contracted for a washing machine on time. It was the first such machine her family had ever had. With the "sudden" termination, she envisioned losing not only her investment in the machine but being unable to pay the amount owing on it.

Don Young, president of the Village Council at Ft. Yukon, while praising the program greatly, indicated they were "caught short" by the suddenness by which the program was chopped off.