

Smoother Operation Marks This Year's NYC

By TIM BRADNER

Despite last year's headache and growing pains of a mass program just getting started, this year's NYC project seems to be running along smoothly.

Some important changes have been made.

Federal policy limits a youth to working six months in the NYC program. The six-month period is based on a maximum of 32 hours per week for a period of 26 weeks — along the lines of the program in all 50 states.

Because harsh weather conditions during the long Alaskan winters at times prevent outside working, it wasn't really fair to have the maximum-time allowed for working to be based on a calendar-month schedule.

Youths in one village could work and make money, while in a second village a cold snap would prevent working and force the NYC project to a standstill. Despite the difference in hours between the two villages, both groups were laid off at the same time, according to the old federal regulations.

To base the six-month period instead on a figure of 832 maximum working hours allowed in any given period would allow young people in the second village to catch up to their hours later.

Where workers in the first village would reach their maximum 832 hour limit, the second village youths would be able to work on, making up the hours they had missed during the cold snap.

Late this spring, Juneau NYC officials requested a waiver from the federal government to allow the change from a calendar-month schedule to the 832-hour schedule.

The granting of the waiver was one more special provision for Alaska made by the federal Office of Economic Opportunity.

Other special provisions granted to Alaska were in the amounts of funds granted, and in the NYC pay scale.

According to official figures released by the Juneau NYC office, the Alaska NYC program last year received 2.4 million dollars.

This reflected a 400% increase over the normal share Alaska should have received, if the funding had been patterned along the funding in other states.

Another important special provision made for Alaska was in the pay NYC workers receive. In all other states, NYC pay is \$1.25 an hour.

When the \$1.25 wage scale was proposed for Alaska, Gov. William Egan refused to allow the program in the state unless a wage of \$1.75 an hour — the state minimum wage — was paid.

Although the higher wage raised the eyebrows of some village adults — who found their NYC-working sons and daughters making far more money than they, as adults, could make, the special wage provision probably spelled the difference between success and defeat for the experimental program in Alaska.

Although Juneau NYC officials take credit themselves

for securing the shift in working schedules to a 832-hour schedule, far more practical for Alaska, the Tundra Times has learned that the change was actually being pushed for — from below the Juneau level — long before the Juneau office actually requested the waiver.

The change was actually recommended for months by the NYC field representatives, and originally it came from the village level — youths complaining about the unfairness of hours allowed from one village to the next when bad weather set in.

As soon as the waiver was actually requested by the Juneau office, the federal OEO people were happy to grant it.

Many of last year's administrative problems in the NYC were simply growing pains — apparent when any mass program is initiated on a crash level.

A critically-small staff with sometimes one field representative responsible for literally hundreds of NYC youths, and all their timesheets and countless federal forms, didn't help the situation any.

The hours of voluntary overtime, never paid, worked by field representatives and in the Juneau office have never been tabulated.

Perhaps any of the problems were normal — under the circumstances of an over-worked staff and a constant turnover in the higher echelons of the organization.