

Letters to the Editor

Non-Native parents understand ICWA problems

Dear Editor:

A statement in the November 2, 1994 article, *State resists ICWA*, calling the suicide rate among Native children adopted by "white" families both inordinate and inexcusable, caught our attention.

As the non-Native parents of an adopted Alaskan Native, we

too view the suicide rate as unacceptable. While we agree with the concept of the ICWA mandate, we are concerned that the connection between adoption and suicide obscures a very real and heartbreaking situation.

Our Inupiat daughter is a case in point. Ours is an optimum situation, in that her family and ours

were good friends, and me. "Ahna" Flora was grandmother to all of our children. But our child is FAS, with all of the attendant difficulties, including suicide risk.

In our case, as in others, medical needs could not be met in the village homes, so we were lovingly accepted as an alternative.

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Education system needs upgrade to meet needs

Dear Editor:

Jeff Richardson's excellent article on Native education priorities is well worth distributing to educators throughout the circumpolar north. It addresses timely issues in an objective, yet challenging way.

I am enclosing several articles from recent District publications

which highlight its commitment to Native education. Our commitment extends far beyond our region, as well. Three of us recently returned from a trip to Canada's Northwest Territories. There we met with students, educators, and the territorial department of education (whose Minister of Education is Gwich'in). We were inspired by the Territories' commit-

ment to Native education and to the protection and development of indigenous languages through their Official Languages Act. Wherever we went, the message was the same — the educational system needs to be redesigned if it is to adequately meet the needs of the Native community.

Interestingly, we found that our

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Healing is lifetime effort for some

Dear Editor:

Why do we need to heal? What are we healing from? What was it that prompted some members of our families to travel the road of tragedy and not the mainstream of Western society? What does a normal-healthy Native family (look) like?

When I first started reading the statistics about Alaska Natives, I felt discouraged and incapable of making any positive changes in my life or the lives of my families. I started counseling to address my feelings of self-hate and denial of my cultural heritage. It took years of working on core is-

sues, like incest, my suicide attempts, my addictions to drugs, alcohol, sex, and food.

I could not do what the counselors asked and look in the mirror and say, "Marge, you're a great person and I love you." No, I had to start at a level even lower than that and instead say, "Marge you look better when your fingernails are painted pink." Soon, I progressed to a level where I could finally look in the mirror and see myself and study myself and say, "Marge, you look nice when you smile."

I received treatment from several organizations and institutions and I used to think that I was wast-

ing my time. What good is it to talk about all the crazy ideas and

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Canadian colleagues are facing the same challenges and responding in the much the same manner. We are developing materials written in the Native language and making it the language of instruction, particularly in the primary grades. We strongly believe that the development of "Native" curricula is a priority. It must not be simply a translation of existing curriculum, but one that is written from the Native perspective.

Therefore, we are set to begin a comprehensive review of all LKSD (Lower Kuskokwim School District) curricula with the goal to "Yupicize" it wherever possible. At our regional bilingual conference, to be held at St. Mary's March 8-10, we will begin the process of writing a new curriculum which reflects the

knowledge and beliefs of Yup'iks. Our key note speaker will be Liz Apak Rose, a Canadian Inuk educator who was primarily responsible for the development of *Inuuqatigiit*, a locally-written Inuit curriculum.

I would invite *Tundra Times* to attend our conference to learn me about efforts, not only by our district, but others throughout the circumpolar region, to recreate the educational system to meet the unique needs of Native people. I am very optimistic that these efforts will result in an empowerment of Native people that will be crucial to meet the challenges of

the 21st Century.

I look forward to more articles in the *Tundra Times* such as those found in your recent issues which highlight achievements of rural Alaska school districts. Such articles can only help us meet our goal to graduate students who are ready to meet the future head-on, with confidence, and with pride in their unique heritage.

Sincerely,

Duane Magoon

Language Development Specialist

Lower Kuskokwim School

District

Bethel, AK

Healing is lifetime effort . . .

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feelings I had. What difference did it make to sit in a group and have b—— sessions? But like a mother who watched her baby everyday she sees gradual growth and those that see the baby once a month, are astonished at the growth and accomplishments of the baby. Treatment is the same way, as I sat in the circle and watched and listened I saw how others dealt with their personal tragedies and I learned how to quit beating myself up. The irony of my life was that I forgave all of my perpetra-

tors but I could never forgive myself for my childhood experiences. In treatment, I was able to reprocess my thinking errors and begin to live and not just exist.

I have been in treatment since 1981 and I will be in treatment the rest of my life. The inner-peace I have found is the kind I wish everyone could have. I am happy that I have the ability to articulate my thoughts and have progressed to a level where I can look back at the big picture and see what I am a product of. A Native Nation that went through a severe process of rapid acculturation and oppression. The point is, that in order to help others, you have to heal yourself first, because you can't give what you don't have. So began my journey into my family history and the discovery of the courage, wisdom and strength of my family. A family that had to make tough decisions to save their family and the future generations.

Peace,

Marge Edais

Anchorage, AK

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Certainly, the cultural and racial differences play a part in this situation, but we believe that drug and alcohol abuse are the significant factor in this tragedy and truly are "Breaking Alaska's Heart," as the poster states. AFN's recently adopted stand against what alcohol is doing to Alaska's Native Peoples is both courageous and to be supported.

Those interested in reading more about the unique challenges and rewards of raising children with F.A.S. should read the fine book, *Broken Chord*, by Michael Dorris.

As for our family, with the power of God, our daughter is still living; struggling, but doing well.

Sincerely,
Rod & Edith-Helen Hilts
Seldovia/Kotzebue, AK