

JOBS program aims at self sufficiency

by Helen Chase
Cook Inlet Tribal Council

Alaska Native regional non-profit corporations have been operating the Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skills Program since July 1, 1989.

The JOBS program is authorized under the Family Support Act of 1988. The JOBS program replaces the state's Work Incentive Program.

The program provides recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children with opportunities to become self supporting through education and employment programs.

The Family Support Act authorizing this program allows American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native organizations to administer their own JOBS programs.

All of the Alaska Native regional non-profit organizations have chosen to administer the program or have contracted other Native organizations to administer the program on their behalf.

In allowing Native Americans to administer their own JOBS programs, Congress acknowledged that tribal organizations have a much better track record than state and federal governments in providing Native Americans with programs that lead to a better quality of life.

In Alaska, implementing the Native JOBS Program is particularly challenging. Alaska Natives are vastly over-represented in the AFDC Program.

Natives comprise just 16 percent of the population in Alaska but represent more than 35 percent of the states AFDC recipients. In addition, much of the Native population is located in small rural communities with limited

employment and training opportunities.

The Native tribal contractors all operate many federal, state and tribal programs designed to help Native people obtain education and job skill upgrading.

In addition to these programs, Native organizations have social services programs such as Head Start, nutrition, Indian Child Welfare and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs that can help families cope with problems before they lead to a disruption in employment and training.

After Native clients residing in the Cook Inlet Region apply for AFDC benefits from the state, they are referred to CITC for participation in the JOBS program. Participation is voluntary for all clients until Oct. 1, when the state of Alaska starts its JOBS program.

After Oct. 1, clients who do not meet on the exemption requirements mandated by federal law may be required to participate.

The Family Support Act mandates that volunteers have the highest priority in determining participation in the JOBS program.

"Most of the JOBS clients want to be in the program. We have enough highly motivated clients who see the benefits of being in the program that it will be quite some time before any clients are asked to participate against their will," said Michelle Davis, CITC JOBS program coordinator.

Once in the program, the client has a wide range of education, training and employment opportunity to choose from. The education programs include: remedial education/GED

preparation, vocational training and post-secondary education.

The employment programs include: vocational counseling, resume preparation, interviewing skill building, direct placement/job referral, on the job training, internships and others.

A major difference between the JOBS program and the old WIN program is the emphasis on upgrading education and job skills to enable the client to obtain a high quality job that pays enough to support a family. Old "work-fare" programs have tended to emphasize employment with little regard to whether or not the job place-

ment would lead to self sufficiency.

Anyone who participates in the program after Oct. 1 will be guaranteed child care, medical care, a transportation allowance and funding for other work and training related expenses.

Clients also will be eligible for up to one year of transitional child care and medical care after leaving the program. At no time will clients be required to use their own money or go into debt to participate in the program.

If you reside in the boundaries of Cook Inlet Region and are interested in more information on the program you can call Michelle Davis or Elaine Cooper at 272-7529.
