

KANA's 'Natural Highs' helps kids

Youth in Kodiak Island's villages are learning that caring about their health pays off in many exciting ways. A new health promotion program, offered to junior and senior high age youngsters by the Kodiak Area Native Association, give them an opportunity to earn shiny new Maxon three-wheeler helmets, which studies show, greatly reduce the possibility of head injury in an accident.

The youngsters can earn the helmets by participating in KANA's Natural Highs Program. The helmets are offered "at cost" to KANA by the Land Tool Company.

There are many other interesting features to the Natural Highs Program, which teaches youngsters why and how to say "no" to drug and alcohol use. Besides teaching them three-wheeler safety, Village Public Safety Officers help the youth develop boating safety habits and understand fire safety tips.

Cultural heritage is yet another feature of the Natural Highs Program. Youngsters develop new skills during a cultural activities hour. In some of the villages, they learn Native games. "Ooh chocks" or "enagoks," a dart game traditionally played during the Lenten season, is once more a popular activity.

Youngsters involved with the Natural Highs Program have no reason to complain. "There's nothing to do around here."

When the program ends in May, the participants will share what they learned at a community health fair in their villages.

Understanding the value of nutrition and learning how to prepare nutritional meals are objectives set forth for elementary age youngsters involved in

KANA's Nutrition Program, another feature of the health promotion effort.

Good food, fun and games make this program a popular after-school or weekend activity.

Each week, the programs are offered by leaders in the villages. In Akhiok, Kimberly Simeonoff is the Natural Highs leader, and Olga Simeonoff takes charge of the Nutrition Program. Natural Highs and Nutrition leaders in the other villages are, respectively, Betty Lind and Nadia Alpiak in Karluk; Pam Turrell and Barbara Hochmuth, Larsen Bay; Enid Knagin and Marilyn Haakanson, Port Lions. In the village of Ouzinkie, Cheryl (Dee Dee) Christopherson leads both programs.

Francia Schultz and Joan Minks coordinate the health promotions program. Edward Deau, Ph.D., is the evaluation consultant.

Village leaders exchange ideas and post each other on the progress of the health programs during intermittent telephone conversations and through a weekly

teleconference course at the Kodiak Community College, entitled "Working with Youth in the Villages." Since the villages are isolated from each other, it is important that leaders have a chance to exchange ideas.

Although the program is expected to end in May, KANA hopes to continue it this fall. Funding for the program, essentially in the research and demonstration phase, comes from a contract with the Alaska DHSS Division of Public Health. Pointing out KANA's intention to seek further funding for the program, KANA president, Gordon L. Pullar, notes that if the program does not continue, "We will not be able to determine its effectiveness fully." Pullar adds that the program is "innovative." As far as he knows there is nothing like it in Alaska or in the lower 48.

Coordinator Francia Schultz notes that learning about health and developing good, strong health habits take time. Kodiak Island youth, she reports, are having a good time beginning this very important, lengthy process.