

Alaska Tots' Head Start Terminated

APRIL 29, 1968—Some rooms festooned with A's and B's and cutout cats and seals, and hung with crackly opuses in fingerpaint and glue, will fill with only silence these May mornings.

The children, almost 1200 sons and daughters of Alaskans in 52 villages and towns from Pt. Barrow to Hydaberg won't be coming in for Head Start anymore this winter.

The Alaska State Community Action Program's biggest set of projects, the funding and training of adults from the villages, the providing of food and cook's wages for hot lunches, and the medical and dental service for the children of Head Start, closed down April 26.

For the coming summer, plans are for only three communities—Ketchikan, Juneau, and Bethel—to conduct Head Start in Alaska.

The remainder, which means the 52 winter Head Start programs plus the more than 40 other villages in Alaska that have asked to join the Head Start rolls for the 1968-69 term, await the decision of the board of directors of ASCAP.

It is a harsh and painful choosing that must be done. But the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), from whence ASCAP derives its Head Start funds, this year sustained serious losses in Head Start appropriations, and has been forced to call for austerity and worse.

The program just ended gave, or was designed to give a head start in learning and in mere "being together" to 1180 children, most of them in or near three years of age, to help them prepare for the formal school situation they will face at five and six. The hope and the plan is to give them confidence and knowledge enough to put them on an equal footing with the middle class children who are the majority in our public schools.

It did this for a remarkable \$625 per child, which is about 40 per cent below city programs, like that of the Greater Anchorage Area School District.

The secret was that the program was built not by ASCAP, but by the people of the villages and the towns themselves. ASCAP only stood by with technical advice, funding, food and guidance and training. The people of the villages made Head Start work, sometimes with hammers and nails as they built buildings to house it, and sometimes with mere ingenuity, as they found ways to raise money and collect toys and food and clothing for their Head Start children themselves.

So austerity means little to the mothers who got up before the rest of the villagers and went down to start the stove and put together the dough for cookies and donuts and bread for the day's lunch, and who took pleasure in the grins of the children fed.

And it means less to the children who discovered how to make their own name come into existence on a sheet of paper, or how to make a friend, or how a horned toad smiles, or how good it feels to put your head in the teacher's lap for a second.

For at least a part of the 250 employees ASCAP trained from the villages and the towns, the program was a rung up toward a better job. Several teachers are now on their way to college, to begin studies leading to professional teaching careers. And many villagers trained in accounting for the Head Start books are moving up to better and bigger jobs.

A thousand things were clumsily done in the villages as Head Start happened. A thousand more were mishandled in administrative chains from the village to ASCAP. And from OEO, some of the unkindest cuts of all came—especially in funding.

As ASCAP executive director Larry Brayton said, "It is exceptional that our Winter Head Start program was good and sound throughout despite two major budget cuts—the most recent of them being a big \$100,000 slash that hit on March 3, 1968, six months after our program began."

(Continued on page 8)

Alaska Head Start Terminated . .

(Continued from Page 2)

And now, as the ones who have known Head Start and the others who have watched and want it for their communities flood ASCAP with their requests and their proposals for the next winter Head Start program, the real strength of the program is revealed.

The people of Noorvik say it as well as any. "We will teach songs...comb hair...read stories...donate fish and native food...help build plywood floors...or painting, fix windows, or do anything."

And the plucky folk of White Mountain, like those of several villages in Alaska, willing to run a program for their children even if ASCAP's shrunken budget cannot help them, write "everybody agrees to work as much as they can to do it."

In the special code of the War on Poverty, that is called involvement. Its the ingredient that makes the difference . Head Start is here.