

Teacher Corps Training

By MADELYN SHULMAN
Staff Writer

Alice has a goal. One day she will be a certified teacher in the SOS school in her village, or one of the villages nearby.

While she is working toward this goal, she lives in her village for most of the year, teaching and learning in the village school in a new pilot program.

She receives a good salary for her work in the school and, during the summer will attend classes at either the University of Alaska in Fairbanks or Alaska Methodist University in Anchorage.

Eleven Alaskan villages are part of a unique program to train village residents and other Native and non-Native young people as teachers for the state's rural schools.

Participants in the Teacher Corps/Career Opportunities Program will work while they study, to devise new methods of teaching which may be more successful than traditional methods being used in Alaska's villages.

TC/COP trainees will be teachers' aides and interns and later will student teach as their education progresses, assuming increasing responsibility till they earn their B.A. and teacher certification.

In the past, many Native people have been involved in the education of their children—as teachers' aides, Head Start teachers—but rarely were able to afford four years of University education.

Many young people, who might make fine teachers in their home villages, can't adapt to the alien environment of four years of college. TC/COP

will enable some of them to become teachers by working in the villages.

"This is a high risk program," according to SOS (State Operated Schools) program director D.M. "Mike" Murphy. "Most of our students wouldn't

be admitted by conventional standards. We found them by recruiting directly in the villages in which we would operate, and by giving an edge to applicants who knew the language of each village."

(Continued on Page 6)

Teacher Corps Training

Continued from page 2

On a Federal level, the national Teacher Corps program provides for college graduates to work in ghettos and disadvantaged rural areas toward M.A. degrees, while they improve education in their schools.

Alaska's program is different. To serve Alaska's special needs, Teacher Corps is open to people with two years of college who work to complete their B.A. while working in village schools.

Career Opportunities Program, which was incorporated, accepts students without college, even with less than standard high school certification.

Since preference was given to the villages in which TC/COP will operate, a large percentage of the trainees this year are residents of these or nearby villages. Hopefully, most will remain after the program ends.

In each village, teams of at least two TC people, two COP people and a certified teacher team leader will work to establish community oriented programs.

In October, each team went to its village to find housing, meet each other and get to know the village. All members will live in the community, rather than in teacher housing.

Team members from the village will share their knowledge of their people with other team members. In November, the 60 trainees and 12 team leaders went to Fairbanks for six weeks orientation.

"We chose teachers who are creative, open minded, sensitive people," explained UA coordinator Ray Barnhardt. "Our goal was to bring in new ideas, rather than perpetuate the status quo."

Team leader recruitment, open by legislation only to certified teachers, was delayed by late funding till late last summer. Eight of the twelve team leaders, however, have experience in rural schools in Alaska.

Two others have worked in ghetto and disadvantaged areas in the lower 48.

"The idea of the program is to get Native and non-Native minds together, people with experience in teaching and others with experience in the bush and try to improve education," said one young Native aide in the program.

Most of the trainees in the TC/COP program are Natives, 42 out of the 60 who started. Not enough Native applicants were found to fill the two years of college positions, however.

Cultural conditioning and hesitancy in English often makes many of the Native trainees slow to speak in their team meetings and in front of the entire group during classes.

To encourage them to participate and express their views, one goal of the six week orientation in Fairbanks it to get Native participants to speak out.

"I think I'm more able to speak to other members of my group," volunteered one young girl trainee, spending her first extended time in Fairbanks.

She, and other interns, admitted to still being hesitant about speaking out in a large group. Program directors take films of group meetings, then replay them to show students how white group members often dominate the discussions.

Other Native trainees, many of whom have lived or worked in Kotzebue, Fairbanks, Anchorage and other larger areas, find no such problems and find their opinions avidly received.

About three-fifths of the academic work of TC/COP is given in the villages, where teams will be working in the schools and in the communities.

The team leader will act as instructor, using video materials, programmed materials and other aides prepared by the UA and AMU, who are contracted to coordinate and provide academic training.

Students will alternate summers on each campus, completing work toward B.A. degrees and teaching certificates.

If the theory works, that problems of Native students are more easily worked with on their own ground, Alaska should be training a group of teachers who will bring unique and valuable knowledge to its children in the years ahead.