

# Native mother-daughter program jeopardized

*Tundra Times staff*

A unique dropout/substance abuse prevention program that brings teenage girls and their mothers together is in jeopardy due to a loss of state funding.

The YWCA's Native Mother-Daughter program received only about half of its hoped-for funding from the State of Alaska, says program director Sharon Richards.

"It's a real positive program," notes Darlene Hawk, an Inupiat student at the University of Alaska. Hawk and several other women serve as "big sisters" to the program. "It encourages and fosters the mother-daughter bond at that crucial sixth grade stage. That time period is so confusing for a girl because the upcoming peer pressure will be so great."

The program is simple but effective in its approach. One Saturday a month from 11 a.m. to 2:30

p.m. during the school year, mothers and their daughters gather as a group to share social time and activities, as well as a meal. The program provides transportation and babysitting for mothers and daughters. Low income, lack of a vehicle and younger children needing care are among many factors that distract parents from spending needed time with pre-teens and teenage children. This can lead young women to feel adrift from their families and makes them more at-risk for substance abuse and dropping out of school, says Richards.

The program also organizes and funds the Saturday gatherings, which often feature activities from crafts to manicures and fashion

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shows, as well as a cultural presentation.

"Common sense would indicate that if you strengthen that bond, your daughter may turn to you later when peer pressure and other problems increase in junior high and high school," says Hawk. Big sisters serve as mentors and stay in touch with mothers and daughters between gatherings "just to let them know we care."

Response to the program by participants has been very positive, say Richards and Hawk. For example, Isabelle Davis, an east Anchorage mother, wrote: "I enjoyed getting to do something with Janel before she gets older. It'll be

a lasting memory because we hardly ever get this kind of chance for quality time together. I think it's a very good program and I hope the YWCA can continue it in the future."

According to Richards, the Native mother-daughter program was initiated during the 1991-92 school year. Saturday gatherings average about 10 girls and their moms. Hawk, one of four big sisters, kept tabs on 22 girls throughout the last school year.

Although the program received a \$10,000 grant from the state, the projected budget for this year was nearly twice that amount. Additional funds are being sought for the 1991-94 school year.