

*from The Council*

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Strong families and close communities are the two most important weapons in the war against alcohol and drug abuse.

In one strongly worded resolution at this year's convention, the TCC Board of Directors has demanded action against the single greatest threat to village life. Speaker after speaker at the convention declared war against booze and dope. They said Native people have the power to change the pattern of abuse, but first they must admit responsibility lies not with others but with themselves.

Statistics have proved that tribal identity is a force in breaking the cycle of abuse. Native American youths involved with alcohol or dangerous drugs have very little identity with families or tribes. And, more often than not, young Natives who stay away from alcohol and drugs choose family over peer activities. A strong self-image grew from family and cultural ties.

Tribal strength is the power of villages to control alcohol and drug abuse locally. TCC has consistently supported the right of village councils to establish liquor ordinances and the authority of tribal courts to enforce them. Such local control is more appropriate and effective than the state law enforcement and court systems.

Underlying TCC's regionwide effort is a reliance on traditional Athabascan values and the conviction that the people themselves can win this war through their families and their communities. TCC's plan also includes providing information in schools and supporting students who avoid drugs. Professional counselors and volunteer workers in the villages have organized response teams to attack the problem locally. And a new TCC-sponsored facility near Fairbanks is being developed as a regional training center to serve people referred from the jails and substance abuse treatment centers.

All these plans indicate a determination to treat the problem locally rather than relying on outside professionals who do not understand tribal strength or Athabascan values. Elders can be a leading group in teaching pride in the Native heritage. Denak-kanaaga, the regional elders group, works year-round to promote the traditions the Athabascan people have valued for generations. Among them are sharing with the community and caring for those who need help. These values lead to the strong self-image and family ties that are so important in preventing drug and alcohol abuse.

Winning the war against alcohol and drugs must involve all parts of the community, from individuals themselves to village councils, leaders, elders and chiefs. As Phil Lane told those assembled at the TCC convention, "Tribalism is one mind and heart and many bodies."

Pride in culture is at the center of Native life. Tribes throughout the TCC region are working to defeat alcohol and drug abuse themselves rather than waiting for government agencies to do it for them. The rewards for winning are tribal strength and self-sufficiency.