

## ASRAA serves rural Alaskans

Alaska Native villagers who come to Anchorage with many dreams but few specific plans often find themselves the victims of violence, abuse and illness.

All those dreams of more opportunity in a big city can evaporate pretty quickly for a person who does not have the urban survival skills to find an apartment or get a job.

Maybe the villager is unaware that he or she needs to do something as simple as save receipts for purchases made in a store in the city. Being accused of shoplifting can be an embarrassing and even heart-breaking situation if that person is a youth who has never committed a crime.

Maybe the villager doesn't realize you can't just ask anyone at the airport for a ride somewhere. It may take her years to get over the horror of getting in a car with men who planned only to abuse her.

And maybe the villager is a carver who doesn't realize you can't just give your ivory to a professional looking man who says he'll take your precious artwork and sell it for you.

These are not just hypothetical examples, they are *real* stories of Alaska Native people.

What these people also found, however, was that *someone* cared. And that someone was a staff member of the Association for Stranded Rural Alaskans in Anchorage.

This is an agency created to serve rural Alaskans. Its aims include:

- Providing emergency social services including shelter, clothing, food and transportation to the home village and counseling for culture shock.

- Providing crisis intervention services on an "as needed basis" for victims of crime, violence and consumer fraud.

- Providing urban survival skills workshops for people moving to Anchorage from villages to ensure a safe and supportive transition.

- Informing villages through the crime prevention-media campaign of the dangers of the city and the best ways to ensure their personal safety while in the city.

- Providing non-Native local, state and federal employees with information about cross-cultural communications to ensure better understanding between cultures.

We all know the State of Alaska is in serious economic trouble. And we all know that important services and programs will have to be cut.

But slashing the budget of the Association for Stranded Rural Alaskans in Anchorage — which, by the way, would be about \$180,000 for Fiscal Year 1988 — is not the way to solve Alaska's economic woes. We believe this is one of those important services that must be maintained.

We urge Governor Steve Cowper and all of the legislators who will be making these tough budget decisions in the next few weeks to take a long look at the need for ASRAA. This is one program that truly serves rural Alaskans, and the need for it will only grow as Alaska's fiscal situation worsens.