

Betty Wescott Chosen Head Start Director

A young Alaska Native from the Kuskokwim River area was named last week as project director for the Fairbanks Head Start Association.

Betty Wescott, 30, started last week as director of Head Start in Fairbanks—the early childhood education program which tries to give underprivileged youngsters a “head start” before they reach school age.

“We try to develop socialization skills in the children,” explains Ingrid Eaton, the outgoing Head Start project director. Mrs. Eaton, who is leaving for Pennsylvania at the end of the month, started in Head Start three years ago as a teacher. She has headed the program for the past two years.

“The children have difficulty in relating to other children and adults. Here, they are exposed to all types of pre-school activities,” she explained.

At present, Fairbanks Head Start provides early childhood experiences for 80 low income youngsters from the community. Space limitations in their quarters at the First Methodist Church prevent expansion.

Mrs. Wescott, who is a Tundra Times board member and member of the Fairbanks Native Association, worked in Head Start teacher training of village teachers in 1966. At that time, she trained 10 Head Start teachers with varied levels of education. She has been involved in early childhood education for several years. While in Maryland, in 1968-69, she started and taught in a cooperative nursery school in her community.

At present, Fairbanks Head Start includes two classes for three-year-olds, two for four and five-year-olds. They draw their children from low income “target areas” in the community—recruiting through agencies and door to door campaigns. Under Federal Head Start Guidelines, 90 per cent of the children must meet low income requirements.

“It’s a well thought of program and well run,” explained Mrs. Wescott. “Ingrid is a very good project director and has started several good innovations during the past years.”

Alaska’s Head Start program, Mrs. Wescott explained, is thought of as one of, if not the best, among early childhood educators in the lower 48. Isolated from agency politics, the program has earned a reputation

for important innovations. In Fairbanks, Head Start is a parent participation program, including parents and volunteers in its activities.

Fairbanks Head Start has started an “infant in the home program,” visiting Head Start families with new babies to give nutrition and health care information.

Last year, Mrs. Eaton started a follow up program in the elementary schools—to try and spot reading problems among Head



BETTY WESCOTT

Start youngsters before they become serious.

“Last year, Ingrid also ran a model classroom,” explained Mrs. Wescott. “The model classroom situation is a training situation for staff, parents and volunteers.”

In her classroom, Mrs. Eaton could set up situations for staff members to observe, demonstrating methods without criticism in their own classrooms.

At present, Head Start employs four teachers, four teacher aides and several neighborhood youth corps workers. Two teachers started as teacher aides. One is a pediatric nurse and another has an M.A. degree in child development.

Mrs. Wescott, who is a 1963 graduate of the University of Alaska is a member of the Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children, a group primarily composed of people interested in early childhood education. She began her work at Head Start last week.

For the present, Mrs. Wescott will concentrate on administrative work for the program, writing the project grant, evaluating children going into kindergarten, etc.

Mrs. Wescott’s husband, Dr. Eugene Wescott, is a professor at the UA Geophysical Institute. She is the mother of Brian, 8; Liam, 5; and Siobhan, 3.