

Chiefs will begin new child welfare program

Over the past few years, major changes have occurred in the state which have put a strain on rural lifestyles and cultures. Broken homes, alcoholism and child welfare have resulted from the changes and require the assistance of an organization that knows the problems and the Native people.

Child welfare is in particular need of attention. At this time, no Native contract organization has even one child welfare worker and 66 percent of all children placed in foster care in Alaska are Native youth.

The Native children, for the most part, are being placed in non-Native homes, as there are few Native foster homes. The

young rural youth are being removed from their families and culture 11.1 times more frequently than non-Native children, and 93 percent of the adoptive Native children are placed in non-Native homes.

The Tanana Chiefs Conference Social Services program is in the process of receiving monies to establish a Native child welfare program. In April of 1977 they sent a proposal to Senator Ted Stevens, along with the Fairbanks Native Association and the Arctic Slope non-profit Native association asking for financial aid to improve child welfare in rural Alaska.

Carole Drake of Tanana Chiefs Conference; Theresa Peoples of the Fairbanks Native Association; and Pam Kaiser of the Bureau of Indian Affairs

from the Arctic Slope organization were the persons responsible for compiling the proposal.

The proposal, a report that took two years to compile, included 14 case studies and reviewed and summarized all major social services research in Alaska. Through the proposal, Senator Stevens got \$3.8 million from the Federal Government for Native social services nationwide. The money was distributed to the 11 Bureau of Indian Affairs areas throughout the country, where various social service departments can request

money. The Tanana Chiefs Conference has requested, and will receive in March, \$113,000.

The money will be used to hire two child welfare workers, provide travel, equipment, supplies and training expenses. The two workers will serve 43 villages and will provide counseling, advocacy, education, planning and community organizing. The proposal stated the main objective of the two social workers will "be to promote family and tribal stability."

At present, the TCC Social Services has one supervisory social worker and one social worker, and three other staff members. Mary Steele, the social worker, said there are very few Native families that meet the re-

quirements for being a foster family. TCC Social Services and the Social Services Department of the Fairbanks Native Community Center have worked jointly in developing more Native foster homes. They will be assisting the State Division of Social Services in licensing foster homes in the villages.

Clara Johnson, of the Youth Services Task Force organization, said, "These services are needed so that our youth will see that there are people who care."

As TCC Social Services stated, "...Indian and Alaskan people can plan and administer their programs that will serve their own children."

By SHARON McCONNELL