

Struggle to Improve Housing Shows Gains

The long struggle by many agencies and individuals toward improvement of the deplorable housing conditions in the remote villages of Alaska is beginning to show tangible results.

Jay C. Mueller, Executive Director for the Alaska State Housing Authority announced this week that shipments of materials for construction of the first 100 houses and the pre-fabrication plant which will produce the new homes have arrived in Bethel.

"The plant which is being built by Braund, Inc., of Anchorage will be completed this year, and ten of the initial 200 homes authorized will be erected and in place by the end of this year," Mueller said.

The ASHA Executive Director said that funds have been made available by the Department of Housing and Urban Development for construction of the homes and that Hal Grindle, Assistant Executive Director, had just returned from Bethel where he and Janet McCabe, of ASHA's Planning Department, met with local officials and townspeople to give them a preview of the town plan, prepared by ASHA, and the layout and location for the houses.

The houses will be arranged in neighborhood clusters and for the first time in Alaska the occupants will enter into an

agreement to purchase these homes rather than rent them.

The plan for the house was prepared by ASHA and offers a practical and economical approach to housing for the arctic regions of the state.

"Various agencies are involved in the Bethel housing project. One of the unique features of the program is that local residents will be trained through funding by the Office of Economic Opportunity in home ownership, budgeting, maintenance and related skills," Mueller commented.

The Federal Economic Development Administration, State Department of Education, and the State and U.S. Departments of Labor have cooperated to provide training in construction skills to accomplish the fabrication and erection of the homes.

Mueller said that the program at Bethel is the beginning of a continuing program to improve the physical and social conditions throughout the deprived, remote areas of Alaska. The project schedule calls for completion of the entire 200 homes during the 1970 building season.