

AFN Youth Council wants to create unity

From our Anchorage Bureau

"We want to create unity among our people."

With this simple straightforward statement, Mary Jane Brower summed up the goals of the Alaska Federation of Natives Youth Council (AFNYC). Brower is president of the group, which is suffering growing pains caused by lack of funding and

communication problems.

The youth council was formally organized in May, 1975 at a conference of Native young people held in Anchorage. At a second conference last year, several hundred council members elected a permanent board of directors. As the name suggests, the council is affiliated with the Alaska Federation of Natives.

The effectiveness of the council has been hindered because lack of funding prevents its members from working full time on projects. Most members are students and many urban members who might coordinate statewide efforts must also work to support themselves.

Brower admits she has had difficulty maintaining communication with her people. To improve the situation, she had submitted a proposal to the Indian Health Service to fund a full time staff position for the council. She said the staffer would help put together a newsletter on issues affecting Native youth, including alcoholism and

other health-related problems.

"The overall goal of AFNYC is to provide a statewide information and assistance service for the Native youth of Alaska," Brower said. This assistance would include informing young people about services and resources in higher education and encouraging youth to participate in community social services programs.

Brower said she hopes the newsletter will also encourage Native youth interest in journalism.

Although the council has submitted a proposal for a full time staffer, Brower fears it may not be enough, that a part time secretary may also be necessary. "There's so many things that have to be done, one person can't do it," she said.

Brower laments the problems that have kept the organization from rolling and even caused some board members to resign. "A lot of them told me they couldn't handle it. I want them to keep their hopes up that

we're going to survive. We really want to become alive," she said.

And she keeps plugging away. She continues to seek funding for a third Native Youth Conference. She has met with new AFN President Byron Mallott and is hopeful that his promised reorganization of that body will help the youth council.

Although the Indian Health Service was supposed to

announce last week whether it would fund the council's staff position, that decision has been delayed.

Brower does not feel the council should just be worried about jobs and college education. "We want to be concerned about our Native spirits that seem to be dying out. We want to revive our Native joy that we had long ago."