

An Appeal to Retain VISTAS

September 15, 1969

Willie Allen, Director
VISTA Program
Anchorage, Alaska

Dear Mr. Allen:

What is the VISTA Program?
What is it supposed to do? Tell me!

Does VISTA mean—helping the Eskimos and Indians in Alaska help themselves, or is it another program paternalizing the natives. Just exactly what is it trying to accomplish?

I have worked with the VISTA Program out of Eugene, Oregon, in the summer of 1968, and the only reason I worked with VISTA is because I like the concept of the VISTA Program.

The concept of the VISTA Program with my limited understanding is that, it is to try to help the people help themselves. I liked this concept of VISTA for I am a native and I know the situation I have gone through, and what my parents have gone through, and what is going on today.

It has been said time and time again, that something should be done for the natives of this great state. The government has passed bills and started programs and spent millions of dollars on behalf of the natives of Alaska. Grant you, this is all well and good but we should be more concerned with the results. There

are programs supposedly for the betterment of the natives like the VISTA program. I say supposedly, because the natives do not have a real voice in the program and all planning for the program is done outside the village in places like Anchorage and San Francisco.

On policy decisions, the natives are completely excluded. The experts in San Francisco make decisions for Alaska. The program tends to forget that Alaska is unique and nobody really finds out about Alaska by sightseeing. After all, they are the people who say that Alaska is unique and we are a unique people.

Natives are a proud people. We have been put down, stepped on, and put off for a long time. I think the native knows better his needs today than he did in the past. The natives know their needs and are starting to request assistance. This is nothing more than the people of Kongiganak and Kasigluk are asking for—they are asking for their previous VISTA Volunteers to be assigned to their villages for another year.

I would like to quote a man who said to the Federal Troops after surrendering back in 1877:

"Let me be a free man, free to travel, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think, free to talk, free to act for myself and I will obey every

law or submit to the penalty."

Is this not a free country? Is not the VISTA Program trying to help the natives help themselves rather than turning them off? Does not the VISTA Program preach about self determination? Is not the VISTA supposed to listen to the native people because the native people know their needs? The people of Kongiganak and Kasigluk are asking for their previous volunteers and the VISTA Administration is simply refusing their request and will not respond. Aren't you going against the true concept of VISTA? Is not the role of the VISTA Director and administration to be a servant to the native people since VISTA is the people's program and not the administrations's program. Just exactly who is the VISTA serving, the people or what?

Perhaps, my understanding of VISTA is wrong. Perhaps, it's another paternalistic program that tends to preach about self determination and will not listen to a self determined village.

The villages of Kongiganak and Kasigluk, from self determination and since they know their village much better than you or myself, requested that their volunteers be assigned for another year. I urge, you Mr. Allen, to grant their requests for they know their needs much better than you or myself.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Margaret Nick

cc: Marilyn E. Stadius, VISTA
Eugene, Oregon

Joli Morgan, VISTA
Anchorage, Alaska

Tundra Times