



Anna Meyers, Barrow, is helped by Ricardo Mercurief, St. Paul Island, and Marian Estelle, program coordinator, to climb a rope ladder in Ayagneq's "Challenge by Choice" adventure-based activity, sponsored by the Sitka Education Consortium. The SEC consists of University of Alaska Southeast/Sitka, Sitka High School, Sheldon Jackson College and Mt. Edgecumbe High School.

Sitka Education Consortium focuses on student retention

Native Alaskans will have the opportunity to participate in college with the added support of a new program aimed at offering students a family-like setting with the support of mentors. This project being developed by the Sitka Education Consortium seeks to increase the number of Alaska

Natives who enroll and remain in education beyond high school. The program, named "Ayagneq", the Yup'ik word for "point of departure" or "starting place" combines local effort with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improve-

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ment of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE)

The First groups of twelve students began with an orientation in mid-January and fifteen more students will begin each August and each January for three years. Half of each group enrolls in University of Alaska Southeast - Sitka, and half at Sheldon Jackson College. Each student chooses the curriculum which meets personal goals and attends classes participates in campus activities with other students.

The program provides a wide variety of activities aimed at maintaining a culturally relevant and supportive atmosphere. A key to the program is the presence of mentors who serve in the traditional role of "aunt" or "uncle" to small groups of students. During the two to three week orientation, all fifteen students live, eat, and work together while participating in trust building, family-based activities which include exercises in reading/writing/thinking, and physically challenging, adventure based activities. The student groups work as a team to develop a common goal to become oriented to the community and to the college campus.

As the academic semester begins, students begin classes on their respective campuses and move to adjoining rooms in their respective halls. All of the students continue to meet together regularly, forming study groups and continuing social activities on

campus and in the community. The Ayagneq students also enroll together in one class designed specifically for them, receiving credit from their own respective colleges. This class, which is team taught by faculty from both schools, provides continuing college orientation information as well as personal goal setting, career planning and exploration and job readiness skills.

The program encourages principles of self-determination, decision-making skills, and academic persistence. The Total Quality Management and Continuous Improvement processes which have brought gratifying results when instituted at Mt. Edgecumbe High School are also utilized in this program.

Strong ties with home community and frequent contact with Native role models and with mentor families within the Sitka community help in maintaining cultural and family ties the loss of which often cause homesickness and lack of success among college students who may not have experience away from home.

Through its expected goals, this program recognizes that, while attending college is a valuable experience, the choice to remain in traditional college for a four-year degree is not the only option available. Students are encouraged to explore other appropriate options such as vocational training, entry into the workforce, and/or returning to traditional

and meaningful participation in their home communities. A very significant effort, however, will be made to keep students in the college setting for at least two semesters, allowing them to remove barriers to a productive, self-sustaining life through self-termination and planning.

While recent high school graduates are encouraged to apply for admission to this program, non-traditional students and those who may have completed high school and/or who have not successfully remained in college in the past are also welcomed.

For inquiries about enrollment call the Program Coordinator at 1-800-478-6653 in Sitka.