

Concern for Native elderly leads to special study by Foundation

Concern for the elderly population of Native Alaskans has led to an in-depth study of their special needs.

A project, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, is currently being conducted by students at the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

According to Charles Hines, student project director, various agencies provide social services to the elderly Native population in Anchorage, but no overall assessment of the delivery system for the urban Native elderly has been attempted up to this point.

The project will be the first overall in-depth study of various problems and will involve academic disciplines of sociology, anthropology, public communication, health care, political science and criminal justice.

Hines and seven other students are currently in the process of interviewing Native Alaskans found in Anchorage. According to Hines, there are approximately 500 Eskimo, Aleut and Indian older persons here in the city. He would like, he said, to interview about 100 of them.

The participants have located many of the older people, the first task of the project, in such places as Careage House and Pioneer Home. But many more are being sought for interviewing.

One of the reasons for this project, Hines said, is that there is a "critical lack of knowledge"

concerning elderly Native people.

"Most programs nationwide have been designed for an average population," he continued.

The \$16,650 grant then, will seek both physical and attitude data on Alaskan Natives.

The students are developing a pre-test in order to see if it will be accepted by the Natives. The initial process of the interview, said Hines, is to become acquainted with the person and to obtain his or her trust.

Through the interview the project team members hope to learn of the specific needs of this group of people. Their transition, for instance, from a subsistence lifestyle to an economy based on cash is a topic which lends itself to the study.

Other problems or needs to be pinpointed by the group through the project pertain to transportation, nutrition, delivery of social services, cross-cultural problems in adapting to urban living, housing, awareness of civil rights, and cultural differences involved with aging.

Once the information is obtained and sorted out, said Hines, it will be offered to organizations and agencies that deal with the elderly such as the Salvation Army Hot Meals Program and the Cook Inlet Native Association.

According to Hines, "The results of the proposed study are expected to be of high value as a basis for future development for both local and state

Native organizations and agencies."

Assisting the students in this goal is Dr. Kerry Feldman. An anthropology professor, Feldman is acting as faculty advisor to the project.

The Student-Originated Studies Program sponsored by the National Science Foundation has 504 students involved in 65 projects nationwide this year. Those projects selected were among 172 proposals received in the annual competition.

UAA's project team is composed of a number of undergraduate and graduate students in varying fields. The Salvation Army and CINA also have donated time and personnel to the project.

"The project wouldn't be possible without the dedication of the other members of the project team," said Hines. "These people have contributed hundreds of hours to make the project possible."

Hines, 58, is a graduate stu-

dent with a sociology major and anthropology and gerontology minors. A former carpenter and farmer, Hines has worked with social service agencies before which led him to the realization that they were not fully reaching the Native Alaskan elderly.

Hines is now combining his interest and knowledge in the elderly person project, and welcomes all interested older Native Alaskans to contact him for an interview.