

# Leadership program seeks to build confidence

By Bill Hess

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A newsletter published by the Alaska Native Leadership Program addresses a problem: thanks to a lack of Western-style leadership in the Alaska Native Community, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act has often seemed to benefit more white people in terms of jobs than it has Natives.

The ANLP is now entering its fourth year of quiet combat

against that problem, and is seeking applicants with leadership skills from throughout Alaska. Applicants must be 18 years of age and older, and must be high school graduates.

Judy Ramos, who heads the nine-member "network committee" of past participants who set the guidelines for ANLP, said that while they are hoping every region in Alaska will be represented, they are especially looking for candidates from the Ahtna and Arctic Slope Regional Corporation areas.

Although 42 Alaska Natives have went through the program in the past, there has never been a participant from either of these two regions.

A major goal of the program is to build self-esteem among participants and to strengthen their confidence, according to Mary Dalton. Dalton, who is the director of the Cook Inlet Native Association Head Start program, went



through the second year of the program along with Ramos and serves with her on the network committee.

Frank Berry has served as ANLP director in the past, but the position has not yet been filled for this year.

"It means something different for everybody," said Dalton. "To me, it re-enforced my commitment to what I am doing. It really improved my self-esteem and self-concept. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet people; people from all over, from Gambell, from the Interior, from Southeast...."

But it was not easy. "It was a real challenge," explained Dalton. "The Alaska

Native Leadership Program created a lot of stress for me. It

seemed people expected a lot more out of me, and they watched me. Then I expected more out of myself, and I learned to deal with that."

Dalton had only recently taken over as director of the Head Start program and was faced with organizing it and making it function. She gives her experience at ANLP credit for helping her get it done. "I came to headstart with no management skills," she remembered.

"I feel a lot of people were expecting me not to succeed in developing a new program. We had almost nothing; no program, no procedures ... but ANLP really increased my confidence, and gave me the desire to succeed."

Dalton gives much of the credit to ANLP's Human Potential Seminar. She hopes that the values she learned there can benefit others besides herself. "A lot of school kids are lacking the support to improve their self-esteem," she explained. "There is a high drop-out rate, and a low percentage of high achievers."

"Pre-schoolers at the ages of three, four and five, are at the most impressionable age. They observe what is going on around them. If they get a lot of negative reaction, they will act that out. If they get more positive reaction, they will act that out. We need to promote the more positive."

A highlight of Dalton's experience with ANLP was when Rolling Thunder, an "intertribal medicine man" of Cherokee descent from Carlin, Neva-

da, visited Anchorage and spent some time with the ANLP students.

"It really was a new awareness to me," Dalton recalled. "Life in Alaska can get so isolated from Outside. It was like being introduced to another culture." Dalton said she was impressed to find some of the basic values in the land and the "Great Spirit" that Rolling Thunder spoke of as being similar to the traditional cultures of Alaska.

When Rolling Thunder gathered everyone into a circle to speak of his beliefs and give blessings, Dalton said she felt a strong sense of power.

Ramos recalled the same incident, explaining that it helped bind the group together, and unity and trust among its members is a major goal of the ANLP.

"We felt out responsibilities to live up to as Alaska Natives," she said. "It reinforced a lot of ideas we had already learned in ANLP." Ramos said the experience caused participants to feel a closer bond with all American Indians and "people all over the world who belong to the land. The indigenous people. We felt our responsibility as caretakers of the land."

"Networking" is a major goal of ANLP. This means that contacts are developed with people across Alaska and elsewhere who are involved in one way or another in the Native movement, and who are working for similar goals.

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"I realized that there are other people out there who are struggling to achieve the same goals as I am," said Ramos. "People who have the same commitment I do... People who I can identify with and find support from."

Dalton recalled the trip she made to observe the Minto Elders Conference this past June. It was raining and cold when she got there. She didn't seem to know anyone there and it seemed like she was in for a depressing time. Then she found Dixie Dayo of Manley Hot Springs, who par-

ticipated with her in the program. "It made the trip for me. I felt accepted after that," Dalton said.

"It was the greatest experience of my life," is how Bartz Englishoe described his participation in ANLP. Englishoe was living in Fairbanks and working as a freelance photographer when he entered the program. Now, he serves as the land manager for the Bethel Native Corporation.

"Just the ability to learn to be a positive thinker, that really helped me," said Englishoe. "I guess I basically learned by learning how to open

up, with the help of other Native people who as a group were thinking positive.

"Just sharing my beliefs and concerns, and realizing that most of the other people in the program had the same beliefs and concerns, that helped."

The experience has helped him in his present job, said Englishoe. "Absolutely! I do my job a lot better. I know how to deal with people, I know how to make meetings work, I know how to work toward a 'win-win' situation. I know how to present the Native side of an issue.

"I can network. I can call all

these other people in Juneau; state people, federal people; I met so many people."

ANLP has a "mini-internship" program where participants spend time studying with people in leadership positions, such as the Native members of the state legislature. Englishoe did his internship with U.S. Interior Secretary Watt's Alaska Programs staff in Washington, D.C.

"I learned the government perspective on issues," said Englishoe. "I know that perspective and I can deal with it," whether it is working for or against Native interests,

Englishoe added. "I learned how to work in the system, and how to get it to work for you. I don't have to fight it."

Englishoe also learned to accept his own imperfections. "Sometimes you make mistakes, and just feel like a failure! I learned you can make a mistake and just put it aside and say, 'well, that's one mistake,' and just keep on going."

Ramos noted that the networking committee hopes to select participants during the next Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, to be held in Anchorage on October 20-22.