

## Among Native Boarding Students— High Incidence Of Hearing Defects

COLLEGE—Tests performed on Native students from the Fairbanks Boarding Home Project have revealed a high incidence of hearing defects—close to 31% of those tested had impairments which were considered educationally handicapping.

Hearing tests were conducted on the campus of the University of Alaska for the students, as part of their complete physical examinations, by Dr. John Cochran and Phyllis Phillips, both of the University's Speech and Hearing Program.

Over 100 students were tested, 38 from Monroe High School and 84 from Lathrop High; those with hearing impairments were referred for medical attention.

However, according to Professor Phillips, "If we add those with 'borderline' hearing (thresholds along the lower limits of the normal hearing range) who will require a re-test in six months, the incidence of hearing impairment is closer to 40 or 45%. These are staggering figures when one considers the educational implications for these students."

According to Mrs. Betty Magnuson, head of the Boarding Home effort, the figures are not really surprising considering the high number of "scarred ears" encountered in the rural villages of Alaska.

"We are just beginning to be able to provide social services in this area," she added, "but the schools have just not been equipped in the past to provide adequate hearing and visual screening. This is why we called upon the professional services of Dr. Cochran and Professor Phillips."

Mrs. Nancy Norum, school nurse at Lathrop High School, put it yet another way. "Having Prof. Phillip and Dr. Cochran conduct these tests is a real blessing. We just don't have the time or the staff to administer this type of intensive testing."

School regulations require that all new students receive visual and hearing tests at the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, and 11th grades. Even with a nurse at each school, Mrs. Norum expressed deep concern over the problem of testing.

The nurses have neither the facilities, equipment, nor the specialized training to undertake the task properly. Adding all of this to the everyday routines of cuts, bruises, stomachaches, and aspirins the problem seems to be almost insurmountable.

To give added perspective to the problem Mrs. Magnuson cited a paper presented to the 19th Alaska Science Conference in 1969.

The author of the paper, J. Kenneth Fleschman, M.D., Chief of the Pediatric Service at the Public Health Service's Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, stated that, "The most significant physical handicap

facing the Native child is hearing loss."

He places the blame on acute otitis media, an infection of the middle ear. Although the infection is a relatively common occurrence in children, in the Native child the attacks are much more frequent and often are not treated. Lack of proper treatment in this case leads rapidly to perforation of the eardrum.

Dr. Fleschman continues, "It has now been definitely documented that children so affected will show a significant delay in all language skills...The child will appear to hear normal conversation in that he demonstrates awareness of speech. In a less favorable auditory environment such as a classroom, he will not understand much of what is being said."

From the data collected thus far in the state Dr. Fleschman concludes that 2500 school-aged children have a damaged ear and 625 of these are affected critically enough to create problems in their educational development.

He adds, "We have no knowledge of the degree of language delay suffered by even those whose ears appear well healed."

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## Large Grants Strains AFN Overhead

The Alaska Federation of Natives has been losing money on several of its extensive grant programs.

Programs for On-the-Job Training, Economic Development, and Healthright, involving millions of dollars, do not include provisions for paying the general overhead required to administer these programs.

"Several of these grants have been getting a free ride," explained Nels Anderson, chairman of the AFN finance committee. The AFN finance committee recommended to the Board of Directors last month that it renegotiate and reexamine grants such as OJT and Healthright to resolve problems of overhead.

Without administrative costs included, the Board decided, AFN would not accept any grant.

Until this year, individual directors have been negotiating grants with such agencies as OEO, EDA. As of last December, all such negotiations must be reconsidered and approved by the finance committee, composed of nine board members.

"The major money decisions are now being made by the finance committee," Anderson explained. "We're trying to get more back from our money and put together a more efficient operation with more control as AFN begins to expand."

Meanwhile, the AFN is in danger of losing a lucrative \$5,000 per month contract with

TAPS to update a survey of Alaskan labor along a pipeline route.

The TAPS contract has been paying the general operating expenses of the AFN office, and will not be renewed unless TAPS is satisfied with the number of names being added to their year old survey of available manpower.

In January, the AFN employee finance committee member

Al Ketzler as a consultant to visit villages for a labor survey on the pipeline route.

Ketzler made trips up and down the extent of the Alaskan highway, contacting villagers and village organizations to poll available labor.

As of yet, there is no word on whether the contract with TAPS will be renewed. The AFN has asked for a 2 year extension on the contract.

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