

# ALASKA'S CALL TO ACTION

## Strengthening Families and Communities



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### DREAM

Alaska is a state that honors elder and family wisdom, values, caring and responsive communities and treasures each and every child in the state. Our vision is that by the year 2030 Alaska will be the safest state for a child to be born and raised and that each child will be healthy, safe and nurtured.

Research tells us that families and communities that build protective factors around children result in stronger families, healthier communities and children that are thriving. Five protective factors were identified by the Center for the Study of Social Policy based on an extensive review of the research literature related to young children. These are:

- **Parental Resiliency** – courage during stress or after a crisis; parents feel supported and able to solve problems
- **Social Connections** – a support system; relationships with extended family, friends, co-workers, other parents with children similar ages
- **Knowledge of parenting/child development** – basic information about how children develop
- **Concrete support in times of need** – supports and services within the community which can include transportation, food assistance, job training, mental health services
- **Healthy social/emotional development** – children feel loved a sense of belonging and can get along with others.

### DISCOVERY

The Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) was founded in 1988 with the mission to improve the status of children in Alaska by generating funds and committing resources to eliminate child abuse and neglect. All fifty states and the District of Columbia have Children's Trust Funds.

As a strategy to reach its vision of a safe and nurturing state to raise children by the year 2030, the ACT formed a Steering Committee to guide the development of a

statewide plan for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. With the assistance of the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, the Alaska Children's Trust and a diverse Steering Committee comprised of tribal leaders, nonprofit organizations, advocates, families and government agencies have begun a dialogue about how to restore, and build upon the collective community wisdom about keeping families strong and connected.

The ACT and the Steering Committee explored the factors that contribute to safe and healthy children and considered ways that communities could build on their strengths and become more responsive to the needs of children and families. It was decided that a lengthy, traditional spiral bound document was not the approach they wanted to take.

Alaska is a state rich in culture and tradition with core values that affirm diversity, builds on success and strength, embraces action with accountability and instills the importance of community ownership. It seemed more appropriate to increase the number of voices to help define, focus, strategize and then respond to a Call for Action to nurture children, strengthen families and foster healthy and thriving communities.

## **Design**

A wide net was cast to engage families, elders, community groups, advocates, tribal councils and others in a visioning process where collective wisdom was the priority.

A statewide Prevention Summit that focused on how to support and strengthen the families of Alaska was held in Anchorage on November 3, 2008. The Summit gave participants the opportunity to share their thinking, engage in dialogue and communicate ideas to move the vision from a dream to reality.

Through strategic conversations anchored by "questions that matter", Summit participants participated in a Community Café. Community Cafés are a series of guided conversations designed to build community wisdom to impact policy, practice and action to improve the lives of children and their families.

Community Cafés are planned and facilitated by "hosts" who facilitate dialogue among neighborhood residents including parents, elders, youth and other community stakeholders. Meaningful relationships develop as hosts and community partners participate as equals in conversations that value compassion and mutual exchange.

Conversations are guided by questions designed by the hosts to help participants think deeply about how to support and strengthen families. Conversation questions are designed to engage community leaders and key community partners to ensure that every child is sheltered by the five protective factors.

The Design Principles are based on the World Café technique and they are:

- Clarify the context
- Create comfortable space
- Explore questions that matter
- Encourage each person's contribution
- Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives
- Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions
- Harvest and share collective discoveries

## **DELIVERY**

The Summit was a critical first step toward harvesting the collective community wisdom as Alaska moves toward its goal of making the state a safer, stronger, and more responsive environment for children and families. Ongoing community dialogue throughout the state will be necessary and tools and resources will be provided to ensure that conversations will continue and that stories and insights are recorded.

Opportunities to share successful strategies, techniques and programs will continue to be provided, so that communities can learn and build on existing strengths and accomplishments.

The participants in the Prevention Summit had the opportunity to experience the process of sharing their insights and diverse perspectives through responses to questions about how to build on the existing strengths within their communities and across the state.

Below is a summary of the collective wisdom of the participants in response to the following questions:

### **How Does Your Community Support Families to Build on Their Strengths?**

- Name children after someone who has passed and love that child like you loved that person
- Dedicate a portion of the resources to going upstream/prevention
- Practical positive parenting workshops
- Doing Healthy Families the Yupik way, taught with elder traditional values
- Elder and student interaction for crafts learning and subsistence learning
- Culture camps to learn subsistence
- Parenting mentor programs building on strengths
- School community provides family activities, families involved in the school

- Honor Culture
- Job Centers – remove barriers to employment
- Working directly with families through programs
- Providing information to enable advocacy
- Working with foster children “aging out” of the system to independent living
- Ask parents what they need
- Parent input, parent committees offered by preschools and Head Start
- Faith-based efforts are working to focus on the entire family
- Not looking to government for funding

**What Will You Need to Leave Behind to Best Support Strong Families and Safe Children?**

- Preconceived notions about one another
- Leave technology internet, TV, texting, satellite dishes – sets limits
- Giving kids too much
- Differences
- Assumption that the community will not come together
- Community norms that marginalize people
- Belief system that says we can't do it
- Fear
- Judgment
- Men power over women
- Arrogance
- Urban – Rural divide

**What Would Going Forward Look Like to Best to Support Strong Families and Safe Children?**

- Compassion
- Viable rural communities
- Shift priorities
- Empowerment
- Acknowledgement
- Increased awareness of available resources
- Child Abuse prevention would be a priority
- Collective women's strength
- More power given to communities
- Beauty from Ashes
- Sharing stories
- Acceptance

**What will it take for Communities in Alaska to Come Together to Strengthen Families?**

- Acceptance of difference, diversity
- Feeling Safe
- Crisis
- Trust

- Common purpose'
- To be heard, to feel valued
- Representatives by District
- Community Councils
- Acceptance
- Tolerance
- Finding own voice and helping others find theirs
- Leaving behind the negative – in the community, in the family
- Focusing on positive, strengths and what we can build on with those
- Statewide community conversation
- "Life Think" blog
- Lots of one thing that many people can do
- Make it a political issue. Alaska Federation of Natives – get on next year's agenda
- Shared response – don't wait for government'
- Teach respect and love

### **How can Today's Dialogue be the Birth of Community Conversations and Actions Across Alaska?**

- Contact list to facilitate networking
- Tools that communities can contribute
- ACT blog
- Go back home and get involved with youth and community
- Humanize what we are doing
- Include time on agenda for elder wisdom
- Call on men to talk about this topic and to become involved – challenge men
- Email
- Public Service Announcements
- Hosting Community Cafés across the state
- Need to rethink what communities are
- Help communities find their own solutions
- Elders should be empowered to have standards and to pass those standard down
- How do we honor the right people – perpetrators = untreated victims

Participants made an oral and written commitment to reflect on the presentations and conversations of the Summit and to describe what they would personally do to strengthen families in Alaska. Each person received a copy of their form and the original was collected by the Alaska Children's Trust. A copy of the form will be sent back to each participant in May, 2009 as a follow-up and reminder of their role in the Call to Action movement. The Summit concluded with a Commitment Ceremony where participants stood in an outward-facing circle (representative of the circle that musk ox stand in to protect their calves when danger approaches) with children from the Winterberry Charter School in the middle of the circle and pledged to continue the conversations in their communities, villages, and tribal councils to create a call to action to nurture, protect and support the children and families of Alaska.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

According to research findings in the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, childhood stress can impact adult health. The ACE Study, collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego, CA, found that "Toxic stress results from intense adverse experiences that may be sustained over a long period of time --- weeks, months or even years. An example of toxic stress is child maltreatment, which includes abuse and neglect."

Child abuse and neglect is a serious health problem across the country. More than 1 of 7 children between the ages of 2 and 17 have experienced child maltreatment, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

Toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences increases the risk for health and behavioral challenges in adolescence and adulthood. The following risk factors increase as a result of toxic stress in childhood:

- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Substance abuse, dependence or addiction
- Depression
- Heart disease, pulmonary disease, liver disease
- Sexual promiscuity and unintended pregnancies
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Risk for domestic partner violence

In Alaska, there were 4,989 substantiated reports of harm to children in federal fiscal year 2006, the most recent year that data was available. Of these reports:

- 60 percent (2,091) neglect
- 9 percent ( 395) physical abuse
- 28 percent (1,297) mental injury
- 3 percent ( 146) sexual abuse

Child abuse prevention efforts focus on strengthening families and protecting children before abuse or neglect occurs.

Key components of prevention / strengthening families' approaches include:

- Supports and services are not targeted to those at risk, but are universally available
- Focuses on existing strengths and promotes continued growth and development
- Fosters parent leadership and empowers parents to identify resources, supports and strategies to help them parent more effectively
- Engages community partners that are not traditional child abuse and neglect prevention representatives

## **EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

Overview of a pervasive societal problem:

The long term health, mental health, and behavioral health conditions that are associated with child maltreatment are a pervasive societal problem. Indirect costs for child abuse and neglect include special or remedial education, welfare, criminal justice, and medical costs when abused or neglected children require services and subsequent interventions, including income maintenance programs, mental health services, and Medicaid. The indirect costs to society are not only for the long term treatment and intervention for children but also for the effects that childhood abuse may have on adult alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, suicide and chronic disease.<sup>1</sup> The estimated annual cost of child abuse and neglect in 2007 was \$103.8 billion.

In Alaska, there were 9,411 reports of harm to children in federal fiscal year 2006, the most recent year for which data are available. Of these reports, 55 percent or 5,178 were due to neglect or deprivation of necessities and 22 percent, or 2,041 were due to physical abuse. The reports of neglect or deprivation of necessities were the most frequently made reports across all regions, and ranged from 51 percent to 65 percent of the total number of reports of harm in each region

Identification of the need for Prevention Strategies:

In response to the incidence of child abuse and neglect and the long term direct and indirect costs for victims of abuse, there is an urgent need for communities to implement prevention initiatives and to develop resources, supports, and strategies

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2005) Using Evidence-Based Parenting Programs to advance CDC Efforts in Child Maltreatment Prevention Research Activities. Atlanta,GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005.

that are targeted to prevent child abuse and neglect. The tremendous costs for intervention services combined with the indirect costs for mental health treatment, law enforcement, and remedial education that can be compared to the much lower costs for prevention services demonstrate that investing in prevention is a sound direction to take to ensure that today's children become tomorrow's productive adult workers, caregivers, parents, and taxpayers.

The focus on prevention of child abuse and neglect has included the development of multiple strategies that promote positive parenting and nurturing relationships between children and their caregivers. These strategies and related programs have received support from the CDC and the Administration of Children and Families that have also promoted the replication of programs that have been determined to reduce risk for maltreatment.

The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance) Evidence Based Practice (EBP) Committee adopted this definition, "a decision making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom, along with cultural values and other values to choose, from among available research-tested models, the course of action that is best for a given family."<sup>2</sup> The emphasis is on the experiences of families and the wisdom of practitioners to guide the selection of strategies while also recognizing the available research-based evidence on strategies that have been effective in some populations under certain conditions.

Many of the Children's Trust Funds have provided funding for a number of prevention strategies at the individual, interpersonal, community and society levels. The strategies have included primary prevention services or interventions directed to individuals, groups, or to entire communities. Strategies are inclusive of many types of programs or interventions that are targeted to certain groups or individuals with selected characteristics. These include: home visitation, early childhood center-based services, mutual support groups, parent education, and public education media campaigns that may be aimed at the general public or targeted to specific groups.

The research in child abuse and neglect prevention has primarily focused in three areas: evaluations of home visiting programs and parent education programs, and assessments of educational programs on child sexual abuse prevention. In relation to a social-ecological model, the research focused on evaluating specific strategies including parent education at the individual level and the parent-child centers and home visiting strategies at the relationship-level. The non-federal Task Force on Community Preventive Services found that early childhood home visiting did result in a 40% reduction in episodes of child abuse and neglect.<sup>3</sup> These results were associated with programs that were aimed at high-risk families when the intervention was conducted by professionals over at least a two year period. There is less research available on community level strategies that include public awareness campaigns that influence attitudes and behaviors. There has also been a great deal of research on developing protective factors that can be considered in relation to the

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<sup>2</sup> Buyesse, V., & Wesley, P.W. Evidence Based Practice in the Early Childhood Field. Washington, D.C.: Zero to Three.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. First Reports evaluating the effectiveness of strategies for preventing violence: early childhood home visitation and firearms laws. Findings from the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. MMWR 2003; 52(No.RR-14):1-9.

risk factors for child abuse and neglect. The approach focuses on building the protective factors that include resilience, social connections, and knowledge and this is done through ways that are respectful of families' values and often in child care settings, but the approach can be applied as an underlying framework in other settings as well.

Considerations to move forward in the development of a plan and selection of strategies:

1. How do we in Alaska want to define Evidence Based Practice? How do we ensure that we are supporting approaches and programs that work while keeping the door open to innovative practices and culturally sensitive approaches and programs that are developing?
2. How do we consider and include some strategies at the individual level such as parent education, along with relationship-level strategies that include home visitation and center-based interventions, as well as community-level strategies that include public awareness campaigns and society level strategies such as overall public policies that support prevention.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- The Alaska Children's Trust, with support from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds. will provide training and technical assistance on planning, hosting and supporting Community Cafés in Alaskan communities.
- A Toolkit on Alaska's Community Café Practice will be available with information on the Protective Factors, descriptions of conversations that build commitment, strategies for developing questions and sample forms for planning the Community Café and agenda, tips for hosting and collecting the harvest.
- An online resource will be available for communities to retrieve information and access tools, as well as post resources from their communities and information about their Community Café experiences.
- Community grants will be available from the ACT to support post-Summit activities including community conversations through the Community Café process.
- Community partnerships with the media will be explored to raise the visibility of the ACT's vision and the steps underway to achieve them.

# WHAT'S WORKING IN ALASKA

## **Alaska Children's Alliance (ACA)**

**Chapter Coordinator: Pam Karalunas (907)688-0163**

[pkaralunas@gci.net](mailto:pkaralunas@gci.net)

## **AWARE, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 20809, Juneau, AK 99802, (907) 586-6623, [www.awareak.org](http://www.awareak.org)**

Provides comprehensive intervention and prevention, outreach and education regarding domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

## **Bartlett Regional Hospital – Bartlett Beginnings: Family Birth Center**

**3260 Hospital Drive, Juneau, AK 49801, (907) 796-8900,  
[www.bartletthospital.org](http://www.bartletthospital.org)**

Offers family-centered classes including Prenatal, Lactation Support, Just for Dad, Baby-Parent Time, Babies Play Group.

## **Catholic Community Service – Childcare and Family Resources**

**419 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Juneau, AK 99801, (907)463-6100, [www.ccsjuneau.org](http://www.ccsjuneau.org)**

Provides leadership in developing, maintaining and advocating for services that keep children safe and strengthen and enhance the health, harmony and self-sufficiency of families. Services are provided in the home and community, wherever families are.

## **Family Wellness Warriors**

**3916 East 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99508, (907)729-5440, [www.fwwi.org](http://www.fwwi.org)**

A movement that brings together leaders of the Alaska Native Community, the faith community, regional corporations and agencies, health care providers and many other interested people in an effort to restore wellness to the Alaska Native Community. It addresses all forms of violence that occur within the family.

## **Juneau Family Birth Center**

**1601 Salmon Creek Lane, Juneau, Alaska 99801, (907)586-1203,  
[www.juneaubirthcenter.org](http://www.juneaubirthcenter.org)**

A complete family healthcare facility with pregnancy and birthing care. It also offers family practice clinics. The emphasis is on family care with an emphasis on prevention, creating healthy lifestyles and empowering individuals to take control of their health.

### **Kodiak Area Native Association**

**3449 E. Rezanof Drive, Kodiak, Alaska 99615, (907) 486-9800, [www.kanaweb.org](http://www.kanaweb.org)**

The mission of this tribal organization is to promote pride and self-determination on the part of the sovereign and indigenous people of the Kodiak Island area. Programs include Infant Learning, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Supplemental Youth Services.

Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults

5000 Shennum Drive, Wasilla, AK 99654 (907) 352-1200, [mssca@mssca.org](mailto:mssca@mssca.org)

Mat-Su Services for Children and Adults, Inc. (MSSCA) is a valley-based non-profit corporation that provides a wide range of home and community based services for:

- Adults with developmental disabilities
- Families with children experiencing developmental delays or disabilities (Infant Learning Program)
- Parents with questions about child development and/or child safety

### **Pathways to Hope**

**Tribal Law and Policy Institute: Diane Payne, Children's Justice Specialist**

**(907) 770-1950, [diane@tipi.org](mailto:diane@tipi.org)**

The Pathway to Hope video is a resource for Native people to use to strengthen tribal community responses to child victimization and to support community healing from historical and intergenerational impacts of child sexual abuse. Our goal is to have the video used as an educational resource for Native communities and to have it presented by individuals who have skills and knowledge that will facilitate discussion and assist Native victims in their healing journey. Contact Diane Payne for more information.

### **REACH – Infant Learning Program**

**213 Third Street, Juneau, AK 99801, (907) 586-82228, [www.reachak.org](http://www.reachak.org)**

Provides services to communities throughout northern, Southeast Alaska including development screening and assessment; individualized home visits; a group setting for parents and children to play together and learn, educational therapy services.

### **South Peninsula Haven House**

**3776 Lake Street, Homer, AK 99603, (907)235-7712, [www.havenhousealaska.org](http://www.havenhousealaska.org)**

Haven House is committed to preventing family violence and sexual assault through education and community programs such as advocacy training; volunteer training and community education for professionals in schools

## Steering Committee Members

Marcia J. Amik  
Association of Village Council  
Presidents  
Bethel, Alaska

Cathy Baldwin-Johnson  
Providence Matanuska Health Care  
Anchorage, Alaska

Connie Beckwith  
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## Facilitators and Advisors

The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds