

Gatherings showcase Native beliefs, values

By Jonella Larson

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Sub-regional Wellness from Within Gatherings occurred from January 6-February 5, 2005, in Shishmaref, White Mountain, Savoonga, and Unalakleet.

The purpose of the gatherings was to allow us to celebrate our stories and beliefs in our principles, our values and our histories as Inupiat, Yup'ik and St. Lawrence Island Yupik people.

The focus of the gatherings stemmed from the topics in the wellness video: subsistence, family and community, sobriety, and healthy coping skills.

Megan Baker was hired in Nome to help me with the four conferences.

Shishmaref

Residents of Brevig Mission, Diomed, Shishmaref, Teller, and Wales gathered in Shishmaref for the first sub-regional gathering Jan. 6-8.

The conference was entitled Iliptun Inuuniaglutin, which is "Be Who You Are" translated in the Northern Inupiaq dialect.

Activities included:

- Watching the *Be Who You Are* video (Frieda Tocktoo, role model from Brevig Mission, was in attendance and available for questions following the showing),

- Sara Scanlan, from the First Alaskans Institute, presenting statistics on education within the region,

- Principal Joe Brach giving a presentation to the youth on the importance of education;

- a youth, leadership, and elders panel consisting of one representative from each community speaking on each of the focus topics;

- a break-out session where communities created a one-year action plan focusing on wellness;

- traditional games and dancing;

- a hands on seal cutting demonstration;

Jennifer Demir was hired as the conference coordinator in Shishmaref.

White Mountain

Residents of Elim, Golovin, and White Mountain gathered in White Mountain for a subregional conference Jan. 13-15.

The conference was entitled Ilviulutin, which is *Be Who You Are* translated in the Southern Inupiaq dialect. Activities included:

- watching the *Be Who You Are* video (featured role models Tom and BeeJay Gray and Roy Agloinga were available for questions following the showing);

- sobriety talk by Iditarod dog musher Joe Garnie;

- elder and youth panels;

- a subsistence panel;

- White Mountain health aides giving a presentation on smoking facts;

- Tracy Speier from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and clinician Lester Keller giving a presentation on HIV/AIDS;

- healthy coping and traditional healing by NSHC Maria Dexter;

- and a presentation on positive parenting by Ida Lincoln.

Ida was also hired as the conference coordinator.

Savoonga

Colleen Kingeekuk, originally from



During a panel discussion at the subregional wellness conference in White Mountain, Velma Brown of White Mountain described the period right after she stopped drinking. "My eyes and ears began to open and I began to realize there were better things in front of me than what I left behind," Brown said. "Alcohol and drugs are not the answer. It's learning to be who you are and staying with it."

Savoonga and now living in Anchorage, contacted Kawerak in November with concern about the youth in Savoonga. In a two-week time span there were apparently eight attempted suicides among youth between the ages of 14 and 20. Kingeekuk was soon hired to put on the wellness event focusing on youth and the issue of suicide. Jay Ulak and Jimmy Walker, two young men from Scammon Bay attended, sharing their talent of music and healthy coping. *Be Who You Are* was shown and Merle and Rhona Apassingok, role models from Gambell, were in attendance and also gave a presentation. Yup'ik spiritual leader Tim Sergie gave a presentation on the importance of spiritualism among Alaska Natives. Kingeekuk conducted exercises with the youth and will pres-

ent the collected information to the governing bodies of Savoonga, NSHC and Kawerak, and to the Regional Wellness Forum. She also traveled to Savoonga in May for a follow-up gathering with the youth.

Unalakleet

In February the Bering Strait Wellness Program wrapped up the sub-regional events with three full days of wellness in Unalakleet. The participating communities included Shaktoolik, Koyuk, and St. Michael. Stebbins initially planned to attend but unfortunately opted not to due to scheduling conflicts with a potlatch held in Kotlik. Yvonne Sarren from Unalakleet was hired as the coordinator and collaborated with the participating communities to select

topics of discussion and guest speakers. Topics included subsistence; youth and elders from each community together identifying and naming traditional hunting/gathering grounds, plant identification and medicinal importance, proper hunting methods including safety, training youth, preparation, respect for animals. Alcoholism/sobriety, suicide, healthy coping, traditional healing/massage, and the importance of balancing the physical/mental/spiritual of the being were all discussed. The evenings were set aside for entertainment including an Athabaskan band with members visiting from Nulatto, Fairbanks, and Ft. Yukon, a band of three from Kotzebue and Selawik, and the King Island traditional dancers from Nome.

Subcommittee of the Regional Wellness Forum still spreading the word on health

What is wellness?

If you didn't know the answer a few years ago, you might have a better idea now, thanks to efforts of a subcommittee of the Regional Wellness Forum.

The Public Awareness Subcommittee has three goals:

- to spread the word about ways Kawerak, Inc., and Norton Sound Health Corporation are promoting wellness;

- to draw attention to role models of healthy living in our region; and

- to deliver the message that wellness comes from within, and is about choices you make.

Projects included:

- Asking people across the region to nominate community members who are role models of healthy living. Instead of focusing on problems in the region, the subcommittee wanted to let everyone know about some of those among us who are already leading healthy lives.

- *Be Who You Are: Wellness from*

Within video. The subcommittee's largest project, this video featured eight of the role models from around the region. In the video, role models talk about healthy choices they make, why they make them, and how they stick to them.

The video was shown in all villages of the Bering Strait region, at the movie theater in Nome, and on *Heartbeat Alaska*. Thousands of copies have been given out across the region, state and beyond. To get a DVD or VHS copy, call (907) 443-4501.

- Posters featuring role models from the region. Three different posters will be printed this fall. Each includes a photo and quote from several role models.

- Radio public service announcements with quotes about wellness from role models. These will be aired on KNOM and KICY beginning this fall.

- Feature articles about some role models in *Kaniqsirugut News*.

- Monthly ads in the *Nome Nugget* with the theme: Wellness from within: Recreate a culture of wellness in your community. Each ad focuses on a

healthy choice people can make to improve life in their communities.

- Large berry buckets printed with information about the *Be Who You Are* video and about wellness—including nutrition information about local berries.

- Two break-apart magnetic sheets printed with words relating to wellness in our region. The words can be arranged to make sentences. Copies were sent to all post office boxes in the region.

- Waterbottles printed with health tips and the message, "You have the power to choose health! It rocks!" Bottlers were distributed to junior high and high school students around the region.

A project still underway is a 365-page, day-by-day calendar that can be used year after year. The calendar will be packed with photos taken by people in villages around the region. It will also include some quotes from local people and recipes using traditional foods.