

# Kanjiqsirugut News

kang·ik'·see·roo'·koot (Iñupiaq): we understand

Winter 2022

The Newsletter of Norton Sound Health Corporation

No. 74

## Look to traditional knowledge to maintain winter wellness

From her desk inside the Tribal Healing program office at Norton Sound Health Corporation's Wellness and Training Center, Etta Tall is transported to an earlier time.

From every view while sitting at her computer, she can see historic photographs of family members. Her dad's side of the family smiles at her from her right, while her mom's side of the family watches from her left.

"They remind me of how things used to be," she said. "They give me

strength."

For the first 19 years of her life, Tall lived in Little Diomedé with her six siblings and her late parents. She

ing greens, digging for Eskimo potatoes, and picking salmonberries. These activities kept her spirits high throughout the year.

**"Always stay busy and active.**

**Shovel snow, haul snow, dress appropriately.**

**Take care of oneself and look after family."**

recalls each season's traditional activities, such as walrus and seal hunting, bird hunting, egging, fishing, gather-

In the winter, when the days are mostly dark, the activities slow down, but tribal healers agree that it is import-

ant to continue to find ways to move your body.

Anne Marie Ozenna, another Nome-based tribal healer from Diomedé, says winter is a time to prepare for the hunting season ahead.

"Always stay busy and active," she said. "Shovel snow, haul snow, dress appropriately. Take care of oneself and look after family."

Maria Dexter, who has been an NSHC tribal healer since 2004, says

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Photo: Reba Lean

Angie Gorn, NSHC CEO, shares some opening remarks during the grand opening celebration at the new St. Michael clinic as Berda Willson, NSHC board secretary, prepares to assist Alice Fitka, NSHC board representative for St. Michael, with the heavy task of cutting the ribbon to the community's new clinic.

## St. Michael clinic triples in size

Fall was setting in on October 18 when a small crowd gathered outside the new clinic in St. Michael. Temperatures hovered around freezing, but the low-level sun shone golden on the building's fresh siding and glistening metal stairs, where a ribbon stretched across the entrance.

Alice Fitka, Norton Sound Health Corporation board representative for St. Michael and former village-based counselor for the community, took up a giant pair of scissors with fellow board member Berda Willson. Together they sliced

the ribbon in a ceremonious gesture of opening the clinic to the public. In fact, the clinic had seen its first patients the day prior.

Patients and employees walked into the 5,350-square-foot building with a new appreciation for their health care setting. The new facility replaces a 1,450-square-foot clinic built in 2003.

"Our old office was just from this wall to this wall," said Theresa Kobuk, a community health aide, gesturing to one-third of the space of the office she now shares. Five health

aides shared just two computers in the old setting, and now they each have their own desk space and computer.

Mark Roman, PA, was hired to work in Stebbins shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic began. He transitioned to working in St. Michael at the beginning of 2022, in the old clinic. From his new office space, which shares a hallway with exam rooms and the clinic's lab, he said the new facility can be compared to healthcare settings in Anchorage or Seattle.

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## Providers now answer medical advice call line

Norton Sound Health Corporation is changing the way its 24-hour medical advice phone service operates.

Advanced practice providers, including nurse practitioners and physician assistants, will be the ones picking up the phone when a regional resident dials up the formerly named Nurse Call Line.

NSHC has renamed its service the Provider Care Line to reflect the change.

"We heard from our customer-owners around the region, and we listened," said Kirsten Timbers, vice president of Community Health Services. "Healthcare issues can come up at any time of day, and it's important that we have a caring provider take our call. As a mom, I look forward to having a provider take my call in the wee hours of the night, when I need medical or mental health help."

In 2017, NSHC rolled out the call line service to residents of the region to help provide care over the phone. The Nurse Call Line successfully increased patient access to care advice and helped alleviate the after-hours, on-call work of community health aides in regional communities.

For the last five years, the call line has been operated by nurses in the

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Kanjiqsirugut News

Norton Sound Health Corporation  
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**NORTON SOUND  
HEALTH CORPORATION**

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Stebbins Community Association

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**Joanne Keyes**  
Native Village of Wales

Newsletter editor: Reba Lean  
Copy editor & layout: Carol Gales  
Writers: Alexis Erikson and  
Sarah Richards

P.O. Box 966 • Nome, AK 99762  
Phone: (907) 443-3311  
Fax: (907) 443-2113

Email: pr@nshcorp.org

Web: www.nortonsoundhealth.org

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# Our focus is on access, quality, growth

Happy Happy Holidays!

Fiscal year 2022 was a very positive year for Norton Sound Health Corporation. The pandemic situation has improved, and patients are once again able to access in-person care from local health clinics and traveling



## Angie's Report

Angela Gorn  
CEO & President

health departments. NSHC's greatest strength is our workforce, and while we've experienced some challenges with recruitment, this has also improved. The summer college internship program was a success at NSHC.

During its September 2022 meeting, the NSHC Board of Directors approved a \$232 million operating budget.

Cash collections for FY22 exceeded FY21's, due to continued high volumes of patient care. Primary Care vol-

umes for Nome are on par with FY21 volumes, while overall village clinic encounters are slightly down due to reduced COVID-19 testing as the pandemic winds down.

An observed trend in our village clinics is the increase in advanced practice provider visits, which have doubled over the past four years. Physicians are traveling more often to the villages, and although there are fewer telehealth visits logged, there is an increase in physician in-person visits.

In August, the Nurse Call Line transitioned to the Provider Care Line, operated by advanced practice providers, which has proven to be a success thus far.

The Joint Commission reaccredited Norton Sound Regional Hospital in June and again in November 2022, and Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services surveyed Quyanna Care Center in August; all surveys yielded positive results overall. In August, NSHC was recognized by the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) as a leader among health centers in the nation. NSHC was rec-

ognized with five awards in honor of the organization's improvement in the areas of overall quality, access, health equity, and COVID-19 public health emergency response. NSHC is among 27 health centers in Alaska that HRSA recognized for quality achievements in 2021. Of those Alaska health centers, NSHC is among only three to receive an overall quality award and to receive five or more awards.

The Capital Projects department remains busy with several projects in the queue. The new 5,500-square-foot St. Michael clinic opened this August, and progress has been made on the Wales Clinic and Housing Project. A renovation of the former Nome-based Community Health Services building into patient lodging is in the planning stage. A 12-bed expansion design for Quyanna Care Center is also in progress. NSHC purchased the old Shishmaref clinic building and it is currently under renovation to become a duplex to support provider housing. A daycare facility and more Nome-based patient lodging is currently in

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## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

### Kaitlyn Painter brings traditional values to work

*Kaitlyn Painter grew up spending summers in Nome, and recently moved back to the region after graduating with a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. An NSHC intern for the past four summers, she is now a full-time Behavioral Health Services clinical associate. Kaitlyn is now working toward a master of social work degree in Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency at the University of Toronto while continuing to work full-time at NSHC.*

#### Can you tell us a little about your family background?

My given name is Qattaq, and my English name is Kaitlyn. My parents are Nolee Sebwenna and Charlie Painter. My grandparents are the late Agatha Kokuluk and Raphael Sebwenna from King Island, and the late Herbert and Ruth Painter from Vermont.

#### Why did you choose this career path?

When I was asked what I wanted to do after high school, I always knew that

whatever career I went into, I wanted to help people. Many tribal communities have traditions to address mental health issues such as singing and dancing cultural songs, preparing certain foods, creating artwork, and many other beautiful forms of cultural ways of life specific to each distinct tribe. The juxtaposition between Indigenous ways of life and the trauma faced by Indigenous people shows that there is a need for healing and culture revitalization.

#### How did working at NSHC as an intern help you transition into your current career?

Each summer was spent working in a different department, so I've gotten to work with Human Resources, Quality Improvement and Risk Management, and Behavioral Health Services. I learned so much from the different people I've worked with, and the experience has definitely been worthwhile. NSHC has been incredibly supportive since the start, and I'm so glad that they provide our region with opportunities for our people to grow!

#### What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is working with people, community members, clients, and my coworkers! BHS staff are some of the most caring people I know, and I'm proud of all the work that everyone does.

#### What advice do you have for someone interested in this field?

One of our King Island elders gave me the best piece of advice that I'll always hold close: "Good things come to those who help." Working in the behavioral health field requires respect, cooperation, humility, empathy, compassion. These are some of our most prominent Inupiaq values. My advice for those interested in working in this field is to keep an open mind in all the spaces you enter, and to build genuine connections with those around you.

Kaitlyn Painter stands next to a display of her research on how expressing compassion can alleviate symptoms related to historic cultural loss. The display was part of an art exhibit at Fort Lewis College called "As Seeds We Grow."



Photo courtesy of Kaitlyn Painter

# New fund buys glasses, hearing tech for kids

Lack of money should not stop children from receiving the important healthcare fixes they need for their vision and hearing. That's the idea a team of NSHC providers rallied behind and brought to the NSHC Board of Directors earlier this year.

Thanks to them, a gap in the healthcare system is being filled so that parents without private insurance need not worry about being able to afford their child's vision or hearing needs.

In May 2022, the NSHC board approved the Pediatric Fund, which will help cover out-of-pocket expenses for eyewear and hearing technology,

including hearing protection and rehabilitative hearing devices, when no insurance is available. If the child is under the age of 18, an Indian Health Services beneficiary, and a resident of the Bering Strait region, they may be eligible.

It's no secret that hearing and vision play important roles in child development.

"There are many reasons that children have hearing loss, including ear infections and noise exposure," says Samantha Kleindienst-Robler, NSHC audiologist. "Both types of hearing loss are preventable, and we are doing a lot

of work to improve hearing outcomes and quality of life. Hearing is essential for life in our region—from listening to elders to hearing the rustling of animals when hunting."

Regular hearing screenings are essential to ensure children do not experience the negative effects of hearing loss on quality of life, school success, and vocational opportunities. The State of Alaska requires hearing screenings at birth, in early childhood education (Head Start), and throughout school. This is because long-term effects of hearing loss can be improved when action is taken quickly and appropriately.

Like hearing problems, vision difficulties can develop at any time but are often more obvious in school-aged children. Children should have their eyes examined at birth, between ages 3 and 4, and throughout school.

"Having the funds to keep children in glasses, no matter the circumstance, and provide them with the best vision possible allows them to succeed in school, sports, subsistence and their daily life," said Abigail Timmerman, NSHC optometrist.

Between June and October 2022, Eye Care has helped a total of 25 children receive glasses through the NSHC Pediatric Fund. This equates to about eight children each month. In Audiology, about five children each month have benefited from the fund.

Travel is not covered by the Pediatric Fund. Ask your provider for more information about eyewear

## Heed early warning signs

It is important that your children are regularly screened and, if results suggest follow-up, that you bring your child in to see a provider, audiologist, or optometrist right away.

### HEARING DIFFICULTIES CAN INCLUDE:

- ▶ Pain or pressure in the ears
- ▶ Ringing in the ears
- ▶ Sense of fullness in the ears
- ▶ Change in hearing
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Noises or voices that sound distorted or muffled

### SOME WARNING SIGNS OF VISION PROBLEMS:

- ▶ Eyes that are crossed or don't focus together
- ▶ Squinting at objects that are either near or far from child
- ▶ Poor reading comprehension
- ▶ Constant watery eyes, redness in eyes that doesn't go away, or discomfort that doesn't go away
- ▶ Light sensitivity or rubbing eyes repeatedly



Photo: Reba Lean

## Running for fun

Emma Takak looks joyous while being blasted with blue as she runs past an NSHC Color Run checkpoint on August 15 in Nome.

# Region anxiously awaits algal bloom test results

There is a heightened urgency in western Alaska to know more, and sooner, about potential harmful algal blooms in the area.

This summer, a research vessel that traveled through the Bering Strait collecting water samples sent alerts to regional agencies about high levels of a particular type of algae it found. The vessel *Norseman II* reported algal blooms near Gambell, Shishmaref, Wales, Brevig Mission, Teller, and Little Diomedede.

The type of algae the crew detected was *Alexandrium catenella*, a phytoplankton that produces a natural biotoxin called saxitoxin which, if consumed in a large amount, causes paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP).

According to UAF Alaska Sea Grant, PSP can occur when people consume clams, crabs, and other seafood contaminated with high concentrations of saxitoxin. PSP occurs when there is enough saxitoxin eaten to affect the nervous system and block nerve function. If high enough concentrations of saxitoxin are eaten, breathing difficulties and paralysis occur in humans, marine mammals, and seabirds.

As of early December, it was still unknown whether the detected samples contained the harmful saxitoxins because laboratories have yet to return



Photos: Gay Sheffield



**TOP:** From left: Janelle Pungowiyi, Tiffany Rookok, Susan Waghiyi and Emma Pate practice collecting water samples for testing. Community environmental workers can help NSHC collect water samples year-round to help understand levels of algae in seawater. **BOTTOM:** Tunicates, or sea peaches, from Savoonga will be tested for saxitoxin.

results.

In November, Emma Pate with Norton Sound Health Corporation's Office of Environmental Health traveled to Savoonga with Gay Sheffield of UAF Alaska Sea Grant's Marine Advi-

sory Program. Together, they helped train tribal environmental workers to collect seawater samples to better understand levels of harmful algae throughout the year. They also collected several different kinds of tuni-

cates—commonly called sea peaches and a local seafood delicacy—to send off for sampling.

"Most likely, we'll get lab results back from the NOAA lab that Alaska Sea Grant is working with before results come in from the samples collected by scientists during the *Norseman II* research cruise," Pate said, explaining that the research cruise collected such a large number of samples that its research laboratory is likely overwhelmed with the testing.

"Usually, research projects have their own process, and they don't budge on urgency, etc. They go their own steady pace," Pate said.

"But now everything is shifting because of this summer, with the *Norseman II*'s cruise, to work with all of us on the western Alaska coastline to help us develop an early warning system for the region and to improve the harmful algal toxin testing system so we get results sooner."

Pate said many groups have expressed interest in partnering with regional tribes and environmental workers to ensure harmful algal bloom testing can be done. Western Alaska groups are keeping an eye on sampling and testing support becoming available as the focus on algal blooms shifts northward with warming waters.

# YOUR BEST LIFE

NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE CAMP DEPARTMENT AT NORTON SOUND HEALTH CORPORATION

## Don't hibernate! Ways to stay active this winter

During spring, summer and fall, it is easy to keep our bodies moving due to all the subsistence activities and abundance of daylight.

But during the winter months, with the dropping temperatures, the darkening sky, and the chilly wind, the season seems to be begging us to stay indoors and hibernate on our couch under a mound of blankets.

Moving your body should be part of your daily routine, no matter the weather. The advantages of regular physical activity are too great to be put on hold when finding opportunities to move our bodies become inconvenient.

Regular physical activity will improve your mood, increase your energy level and help you sleep better at night.

To battle the cold weather excuses, explore some of these suggestions:

► **FIND SOMETHING YOU LIKE.** Don't force yourself to do something you don't like. You won't stick with it. Try doing a new activity a couple of times before deciding whether to continue with that activity. If one activity isn't a good fit, don't give up. Try something else.

► **START SMALL.** If you're not already physically active, you should begin slowly and work your way up to the desired level. For example, walk to the post office or grocery store, get up and move during TV commercials, or go for a 15-minute walk at your local school gym or rec center. Start small and gradually add a little more time and intensity each week.

► **FIND A PARTNER.** It's more fun when some-



Photo: Mandy Ellanna



Photo: Mandy Ellanna

one else is counting on you to show up. Having a partner may help you continue to be active.

► **PICK A GOAL.** An example of a goal could be to walk every day for a month or to be active every weekday for 30 minutes. Be specific and realistic.

► **SCHEDULE IT IN!** The more regularly you do an activity, the quicker it will become a habit. Think of ways to link activity to daily life. For example, you could schedule a walk with a friend after dinner. Try not to go more than two days in a row without being active.

Don't shy away from moving your body because of the weather. It just takes a little creativity and commitment.

Looking for some new ways to stay active? Contact the CAMP department at 907-443-3365 to try one of our many fitness DVDs for free! From yoga to dance and walking, we have something for everyone.

Check out our website for our monthly Wellness Challenges along with a schedule of our group fitness classes: [www.nortonsoundhealth.org/camp/](http://www.nortonsoundhealth.org/camp/)



Photo: Sarah Richards

**TOP:** Get the kids out for winter activities, too! Here, Abner Tran, Gabe Tran, and Tyler Ellanna celebrate after helping pull up a well-filled crab pot. **LEFT:** Dale Ellanna, Gabe Tran, and Tyler Ellanna get a workout clearing snow from their crab pot hole, preparing to pull it up and check their catch. **ABOVE:** Erin Carr grinds up the Anvil Mountain road on a fat-tire bike with friends after an early November snowfall.



Photo: Mandy Ellanna

Wearing a helmet and other proper gear is key for safe snowmachine travel. Be sure to tell someone your travel plans.

## Tips for safe snowmachining

This winter we want everyone to remain safe while participating in what they love to do. When planning to travel long distances on snowmachines, it is important to follow a few safety guidelines:

► Know the weather conditions before leaving.

► Wear a DOT-approved ATV helmet.

► Wear proper winter gear: hat, gloves, warm jacket, boots, etc.

► Check your snowmachine before leaving. Make sure you have enough gas.

► Know the trail and know how to identify overflow. Overflow can look like light blue slush on top of

the ice on rivers or the ocean. In these areas, the ice can be weaker and should be avoided.

► Tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return.

It's best to travel with an InReach device or satellite phone. If you do not have an InReach and would like to travel with one, the CAMP Department rents them out for a \$10-per-day deposit. When the device is returned, you get your money back. To rent an InReach, call CAMP at 907-443-3365 or stop by on the second floor at the Wellness and Training Center.

Have fun, be seen, and be safe in the Norton Sound region.

# A healthy idea for using that leftover turkey

## RECIPE: Creamy Mushroom & Leftover Turkey Stuffed Spaghetti Squash Bake

With the holidays come the leftovers! Here is a delicious way to use some of your leftover turkey to make a delicious, veggie-rich meal.

### INGREDIENTS

- ▶ 1 large spaghetti squash
- ▶ 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ▶ Salt & pepper
- ▶ 2 tablespoons butter (can use olive oil)
- ▶ 8 ounces sliced mushrooms
- ▶ 1 small onion, diced
- ▶ 2 cups fresh or frozen spinach
- ▶ 1 tablespoon dried Italian seasoning
- ▶ ¾ cup heavy cream or whole milk
- ▶ 1-2 cups leftover cooked turkey meat
- ▶ 1 cup shredded parmesan cheese (separated to two ½ cup portions)

### DIRECTIONS

1. With a fork, poke holes in the spaghetti squash. Be sure to get all sides.
2. Place squash on a microwave-safe plate and microwave for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 375 degrees.
3. Once the squash is done, remove from microwave and let it cool slightly.
4. When cool to the touch, cut the ends off the squash and then slice down the middle of the squash lengthwise. Scoop out the seeds with a spoon and discard.
5. Rub the inside of the squash with olive oil. Season with salt, pepper, and any other herbs you desire. Our favorites are thyme, rosemary, and Italian seasonings.
6. Place squash face-up on a baking sheet and bake in the preheated oven for 35-40 minutes until tender.
7. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, melt 2 tablespoons of butter over medium heat and add mushrooms, onion, and Italian seasoning. Saute until soft. Add spinach and cook until wilted.
8. Reduce heat to low. Add heavy cream and ½ cup shredded cheese, stirring occasionally until thickened. Once thickened, add leftover turkey meat and simmer until warmed through.
9. Once the squash is baked, scrape the flesh into a glass baking dish. Top with the creamy mushroom mixture and the rest of the shredded cheese.
10. Return to oven and bake for an additional 5 minutes until cheese is melted.
11. Enjoy!



## TRIBAL HEALING

Continued from page 1

that to help maintain a healthier lifestyle during the winter, people should “eat good, natural, traditional foods to help our all-around health” and keep active.

Born in White Mountain but raised in Golovin, Dexter worked as a community health aide starting in 1997 before transferring to the Tribal Healing program. Inspiration to switch positions began while, as a health aide, she sometimes used her hands to help patients in pain. Since 2020, Dexter has been based in Golovin, but like the other tribal healers, she often travels to nearby villages to provide her services.

This winter, to help her community members stay active in the slow months, Dexter will be leading yoga classes from the school.

Along with finding ways to stay active, there is another winter wellness tactic the tribal healers agree on. “For staying healthy during the winter time, you need to stay hydrated,” said Evelyn Karmun, a tribal healer originally from Kotzebue.

Karmun moved to Nome with her family in 2016. She said she loves winter activities because they’re a great way for family to gather and play together. Playing outside comes with the added bonus of soaking up as much sunlight as possible, at a time when subarctic bodies are lacking Vitamin D.

Another healthy habit to add to winter wellness strategies is making stinkweed tea to ward off all types of illness, including bad colds, infections and stomach issues. Ozenna recommends boiling water and adding stinkweed to put moisture into the air. Once the tea cools, it should be sipped in small por-



Photo: Reba Lean

Images of her ancestors inspire Etta Tall's work.



Photo: Reba Lean

Evelyn Karmun (left) and trainee Renee Cooper are part of NSHC's Tribal Healing team.

tions, as it is a potent medicine. Some recommend just a couple of tablespoons a day.

At NSHC, the four healers, along with Renee Cooper, Unalakleet-based Tribal Healing trainee, are well-versed in the knowledge of applying healing hands in forms of massage, understanding how traditional plants are used as medicine, and how to be culturally sensitive to seasonal shifts in mood.

Typical healing/therapeutic massages can be for, but are not limited to:

- ▶ General physical pain and mobility relief
- ▶ Whiplash
- ▶ Old injuries
- ▶ Moving organs to relieve abdominal pain, constipation, or other pain
- ▶ Restoring joint mobility
- ▶ Bringing back circulation
- ▶ Sciatica problems

The Tribal Healing program at NSHC was established in 2004, and since then, the use of traditional healing practices has grown. The healers are requested to attend gatherings, including sporting events, conferences, and trainings, and they are available to travel as a group to help attend to as many people as possible.

To make a Tribal Healing appointment or request their presence at your upcoming gathering, please call Rosealee Barnes, Tribal Healing coordinator, at 907-443-9004.

## NSHC doubles down on TB prevention

Tuberculosis, better known as TB, was an extremely prominent disease in western Alaska during the early to mid-1900s, with high infection and death rates among Alaska Natives.

Thankfully, unlike much of the 20th century, reliable treatments are now available for those affected, and patients who seek medical attention can expect to fully recover. Unfortunately, the region has been seeing more cases recently.

“Tuberculosis is a serious disease. We all know that,” said Dr. Timothy Lemaire, NSHC’s director of Public Health. “But sometimes we forget about things that we don’t see every day.”

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, NSHC and the Alaska Division of Public Health worked together to travel to regional villages to identify anyone with TB symptoms, successfully preventing spread of the disease. For the last two years, however, travel restrictions and other concerns made TB more challenging to monitor and control. Now, with COVID-19 numbers down and TB cases rising, NSHC has provided more TB training for providers and expanded its team of doctors able to treat positive patients.

“We work closely with the experts in Anchorage to develop treatment plans unique to each patient,”

Lemaire said. “The public health team keeps tabs on everyone who is being treated and we meet monthly with them to discuss the cases and make changes as needed.”

TB is caused by bacteria that attack the lungs and sometimes other parts of the body. It is an airborne disease; when an infected person coughs, laughs, or sneezes, the bacteria can be transferred to anyone nearby. Left untreated, TB can be fatal.

If the bacteria are growing in the lungs, some symptoms include a cough that lasts more than three

weeks, pain in the chest, or coughing up blood or phlegm. Patients can also experience weakness, weight loss, lack of appetite, chills, fever, and night sweats. If the bacteria are *not* growing in the lungs, the infected person may not have symptoms. These people cannot spread TB to others but should still be treated to prevent progression.

“As the COVID pandemic showed, people in our region knows how to support each other. This disease is a slow, secret disease that sneaks up on you. If you have symptoms, talk to your doctor or health aide and ask for a TB test,” Lemaire said.

“If we come together, we can eradicate this disease from our region.”

**NSHC has provided more training for providers and expanded its team of doctors able to treat TB positive patients.**

# New BHS director aims to strengthen spirit

In June 2022, Lance Johnson stepped down as administrative director of Behavioral Health Services.

During his 11 years at the helm of BHS he created a legacy of teamwork, camaraderie, and the dogged pursuit of dreams long held by the region. As he stepped down, he agreed to help with the transition as a new administrative director took over.

Kira Eckenweiler, who had served as a prevention planner with the IñUA (Intergenerational Native Understanding and Abundance) program for over a year, took on the administrative role, armed with a vision of empowering people and strengthening spirit.

Eckenweiler is from Unalakleet. She received her bachelor's degree in music performance from the University of Alaska Anchorage and her master of music degree from the Berklee College of Music. She was recognized by UAA with the 2021 Alumni Emerging Leader Award. She returned to the region after receiving her master's degree and will continue to be based in Unalakleet, traveling to Nome and throughout the region as needed.

She is excited for the possibilities in her new role.

"Mental health should be cared for just like physical health," Eckenweiler said.

"When someone has anxiety, depression, substance abuse issues, or other mental issues, it should be just as normal for them to go to BHS for a visit like they would for any physical health issues. I am excited for the day



Photo: Corinna Johnson



Photo: Kim Knudsen

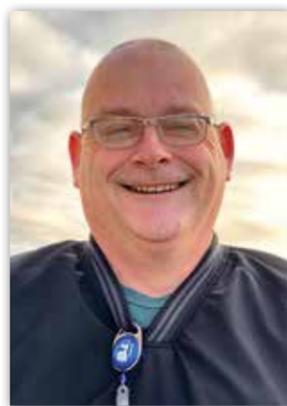


Photo: Kim Knudsen

Kira Eckenweiler (left) has taken the reins of BHS leadership from outgoing director Lance Johnson (center). Barrett Hesson (right) is NSHC's first BHS clinical director.

when someone goes to BHS and everyone who knows is proud and happy for them for working on improving their mental health. I know our ancestors are definitely cheering us on when we want to strengthen our iñua (spirit)."

In addition to Eckenweiler's hiring,

the past 20 years, including 11 in a residential setting, and the remainder of the time providing outpatient services for adolescents and adults.

Prior to his arrival in Alaska, Hesson was the clinical and program director for Palmer Continuum of Care

administrative director, NSHC opened the Day Shelter to connect resources to people without places to go. He also advocated for funding for building the new Wellness and Training Center and oversaw the transition of the department to the new location, along with new program offerings.

Johnson said the last 11 years have been the most rewarding of all his 30 years in management, thanks in part to the supportive NSHC Board of Directors, administration, and all BHS employees.

"I love these people, and I know BHS will continue to move forward because of them and the new administrative director, Kira Eckenweiler, who will bring her talents, insights, and culture to build on the things that are working, better those that are not, and create new opportunities for care and compassion," Johnson said.

Johnson is continuing to work in the behavioral health services realm. He intends to work to help reduce barriers—both state and federal—to accessing mental health services and to change the over-regulated system for the better.

Eckenweiler says she looks forward to Johnson's further impacts on behavioral health in his new endeavors and is grateful for his leadership thus far.

"Quyanna to Lance Johnson for his time he spent in this position," Eckenweiler said. "I am inspired by his commitment and determination to create the best program possible at BHS for our region."

**"I am excited for the day when someone goes to BHS and everyone who knows is proud and happy for them for working on improving their mental health."**

NSHC brought on its first-ever clinical director for BHS. Barrett Hesson, who had worked for over three years as a clinician at BHS, has stepped into the management role, which entails clinical oversight and giving program direction.

Hesson holds two master's degrees—one in addictions counseling and the other in professional counseling. He has been working in the field of mental health and substance abuse for

in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and brings this expertise to his new role.

"I have met some of the most amazing people since I have been in this region," Hesson said. "I am grateful for the opportunity to continue serving them in my new role."

Hesson said he hopes to take BHS's solid foundation of clinical services and be able to expand on those services in all communities.

During Johnson's time as BHS

## Lack of running water at home linked to hearing loss in children

A research study published in *Ear and Hearing*, the official journal of the American Auditory Society, examines how environmental risk factors such as lack of running water correlate with ear infections in children in western Alaska communities.

Co-author and NSHC Audiologist Samantha Kleindienst-Robler and other researchers observed that the presence of running water in homes

led to a decreased rate of ear infections, while in homes without running water there was a higher number of children with middle ear disease.

The data was used from screenings done between 2017 and 2019 in which children in the Bering Strait region had a 53% higher rate of middle ear infections if they did not have running water in their home. Those most at risk were younger

children ages 3-6.

In a bid to understand environmental factors in children's ear diseases, the study did not find a link between other known risk factors like poor air quality from indoor smoking and wood-burning stoves, or crowded houses.

Middle ear disease and infection-related hearing loss are preventable illnesses, and children who live in homes without running water, particularly

children ages 3-6, may benefit from earlier and more frequent hearing health evaluations, the study said.

Preventive hearing health services could include hearing screenings at well-child visits, school screenings, and check-ups with an audiologist.

Read the complete research study here: [www.bit.ly/earinfectionswesternakstudy](http://www.bit.ly/earinfectionswesternakstudy)

**NSHC'S PATIENT ADVOCATES ARE HERE TO ASSIST YOU**

Call Wendy Deering or Jason Harrell if you need assistance navigating through your health care delivery system, or experience issues with your designated patient lodging.

**In Nome:** (907) 443-4567  
**In Anchorage or Seattle:** (907) 434-2844  
**By Email:** [padvocate@nshcorp.org](mailto:padvocate@nshcorp.org)

**Come work for NSHC!**

Chase Gray, NSHC director of Village Facilities Management, wore a different hat during the Alaska Federation of Natives convention in October as he greeted visitors to the NSHC recruitment table.

# Cure your body, heal your mind



## The BHS team is ready to help

Going to the doctor for a broken bone or strep throat is a no-brainer, right? But where do you go when your mind needs healing? Behavioral Health Services! We offer individual and group therapy for anyone who lives within the region.

Our team is here to support you to work toward bettering your health and wellness. Whether you're feeling sad, overwhelmed, lonely, or grief-stricken, are struggling with addiction, or just want to talk, we are here.

Call 907-443-3344 anytime between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday-Friday, to schedule an appointment. We can't wait to hear from you!



Photos: Kim Knudsen

**TOP:** Shannon Klescewski, clinical associate at BHS, gets ready for the day. **ABOVE:** From left: Katelyn Tocktoo, Alisha Rose, Shannon Klescewski, Evelyn Reitan, and Celeste Washington welcome BHS clients into the Liitfik Wellness & Training Center, located directly across from Norton Sound Regional Hospital in Nome.



Photo: Kim Knudsen

Evelyn Reitan, Cultural Arts instructor, prepares a pattern for BHS clients to use.

## Bring a BHS wellness event to your community!

Would you like help host a wellness event in your community? Behavioral Health Services has several programs, including INUA, Substance Abuse Prevention (SAPTA), and Native Connections, that are available to help.

Activities can include sewing, crafts, youth activities, talking circles, and anything else designed to strengthen communities.

Ready to learn more about bringing a BHS wellness event to your community? In the village, reach out to your local village-based counselor. In Nome, call the main Nome office at 907-443-3344 and you can be connected with the appropriate BHS program.

## BHS group classes teach wellness, coping skills and more

Behavioral Health Services continues to expand group services, having added six new groups in the past year. New smartboards installed in the BHS group room allow clients to participate from anywhere in the region. For information on how to join these groups, please call 907-443-3344.

### Aataqun Adolescent Group

**Wednesdays 4 – 5 p.m.**

Aataqun translates to “give it your all.” Aataqun Adolescent Group is a psychoeducational skills group based on dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and cultural wellness. Aataqun emphasizes developing safe and healthy coping and communication skills. Members will learn skills to help manage difficult emotions, navigate relationships, and manage stress, and will also participate in mindfulness-based activities. This group is open to anyone ages 13-18.

### Anger Management

**Wednesdays 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m.**

The Anger Management group is comprised of 12 sessions that expand on participants' understanding of anger. Group members work on developing plans for controlling anger, learn about the aggression cycle, explore alternatives for expressing anger, and more. Anger Management meets every Wednesday morning and is open to anyone over the age of 18.

### Healing from Grief and Loss

**Fridays 12 – 1 p.m.**

The Healing from Grief and Loss group creates a space to heal by connecting participants with others who may be grieving. Group members will learn

about the five stages of grief, which can help with coping during difficult times. This group meets Fridays at noon and is open to anyone over the age of 18.

### Living in Balance

**Tuesdays and Thursdays 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. or Fridays 5:30 – 7 p.m.**

Living in Balance is an outpatient substance use group that offers two options for participation. New members can choose which group to join based on the time that works best for them. This group is made up of 12 sessions. Topics include conversations on cravings, planning for sobriety, stress, negative emotions, and relapse prevention.

### MATRIX

**Mondays and Wednesdays 1 – 4 p.m., Fridays 1 – 5 p.m.**

MATRIX is an intensive outpatient group comprised of the following sections: Individual and Conjoint, Early Recovery, Relapse Prevention, and Family Education. Group members attend three days a week for a total of nine hours. This group incorporates a book study on *The Red Road to Wellbriety*. Every Friday, group members participate in cultural activities.

### Men's Group

**Tuesdays 11 a.m. – 12 p.m.**

Few men are given an environment where they can express normal and healthy feelings. Our men's group provides a space for participants to express themselves in a way free of judgment or shaming. This is a community of men committed to uplifting one another and learning from each other's shared

experiences. This group is open to anyone who identifies as male ages 18 and older.

### Strengthening Families

**Tuesdays 4 – 5 p.m.**

The Strengthening Families program is for parents who have children ages 7-17 who would benefit from learning skills of bonding, setting boundaries, monitoring kids' activities, and helping prevent youth drug and alcohol use. Parents and children who experience difficulties in these areas would highly benefit from this group.

### Wellness Wednesdays and Feelings Fridays

**Wednesdays 1:45 – 2:30 p.m. (during the school year) or Fridays 1 – 2 p.m. (summer)**

This group is for K-5th grade students to engage in social-emotional psychoeducation and to develop healthy coping skills. Activities are regionally and culturally relevant. During the school year, Wellness Wednesdays meets at Nome Elementary School. During the summer months, Feelings Fridays meets at the Nome BHS office.

### Women's Empowerment

**Tuesdays 10 – 11 a.m.**

The Women's Empowerment group is a safe and supportive space where women can share ideas, hopes, and challenges around specific topics. The goal is for women to empower one another toward positive change and to build healthy community. Women's Empowerment is open to anyone who identifies as female and is 18 or older.

# NSHC now a sought-after med student destination

The process for selecting medical student candidates for rotation in the region's healthcare system is a deliberate one.

And it should be, as members of Norton Sound Health Corporation's selection committee would say, because the medical student program is one of the organization's biggest recruitment tools.

Medical students who come to NSHC get an in-depth look at what it takes to be a family doctor in rural Alaska, complete with the opportunity to travel to a village with an attending physician. Due to the uniqueness of the program, the selection process tends to be competitive, with around 20 learners accepted each year.

Though priority is given to applicants from local programs like the University of Washington School of Medicine's WWAMI (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho) program and Alaska Family Medicine in Anchorage, students and residents apply from across the nation.

Despite the high demand, the program boasts quality over quantity, striving to provide one-on-one training. Typically, three learners are accepted at any given time for four-to-eight-week rotations.

A committee—consisting of NSHC Administration staff Charlie Cross, Kirsten Timbers, Cameron Piscoya, and Michelle Krier—reviews all applications and conducts interviews with the students and residents, always taking long-term potential into consideration.

"Our teaching program is an excellent tool for us in recruiting future physicians here," said Dr. Mark Peterson, NSHC medical director. "We expect some of these students to one

day be physicians here."

NSHC currently employs six physicians who completed a rotation as a resident before being hired, and now they are helping to mentor incoming students and residents.

Realizing that program participants tend to come back to work in the region permanently, Dr. Marc Levin created the selection committee because he knew it was important to have regional tribal input in deciding who would be caring for the region's people in the future.

The committee uses breakout rooms during the virtual interviews to talk to the applicants about the region's culture, languages, and land.

"Even on Zoom, you can see the excitement rising as they start to talk to them about what life is like here. It adds a whole other layer to the discussion, and the students love it," Levin said. "We're really proud that we're representing the vision and ideals of

**"The commitment to putting the patient first, both at the Norton Sound Regional Hospital and at the 15 village clinics managed by NSHC, is truly admirable and impressive."**—An Nguyen, Tulane medical student

NSHC as a tribal organization."

Kirsten Timbers, vice president of Community Health Services, enjoys sharing the vibrant culture that makes the region beautiful and unique. She also explains the hardships that many in the region face in the wake of historical trauma, including high suicide rates and substance abuse.

Timbers said she chooses applicants who are passionate, understanding, and have a commitment to serve patients in a caring and informed way. Ideally, she looks for people who



Photo: Emma Lewis

Kirsten Timbers, NSHC vice president of Community Health Services, discusses Alaska Native culture and subsistence during a walk at Nuuk with Tulane medical students Udit Dave and Laurel Seltzer.

have experience working with indigenous communities or otherwise historically underserved populations, and wants them to be committed to providing excellent health care in a rural environment.

"I am so thankful as a tribal member

tence lifestyle.

"It is rewarding to share the amazing cultural revitalization that has occurred in my lifetime," she said. "I love explaining our way of life including gathering berries, food, fish, and greens. This outing has been very exciting for me and is a highlight for our students and residents."

Udit Dave, a third-year medical student at Tulane University, originally from Long Island, New York, was one of three students selected to spend six weeks in the region this fall.

Inspired to become a doctor by his grandfather who practiced medicine in India, Dave previously spent eight months in Sydney, Australia, and volunteered with indigenous groups while there.

At NSHC, he appreciated the one-on-one training with an attending physician and said that is one of the most valuable parts of the program.

"Getting that instant feedback and being able to put the work in and then improve the next day has been a very valuable experience," he said.

to be involved in this process because my family has been on this land for thousands of years and will continue to be here for thousands more," Timbers said.

"To be able to select a doctor for my children, family, friends, and community is a process I take very seriously and am honored to participate in."

Once applicants are chosen and arrive in Nome, Timbers makes an effort to bring them to her family's camp at Nuuk and expose them to Alaska Native culture and the subsis-



Photo: Reba Lean

## MyCache scholars convene at AFN

Scholarship recipients pose for a group photo at the MyCache banquet in Anchorage on Oct. 19. The celebratory dinner was complementary to any MyCache scholarship recipients and gave students the opportunity to share about how their post-secondary education has changed their lives and to express their thanks. Partnering MyCache organizations, including NSHC, provided updates on their continuing education programs and opportunities. Front: Amanda Gonzalez, Rebecca Young, Janelle Otton. Row 2: Santierra Burks, Galsy Gregg, Maggie West, Molly Kenick, Matthew Schubert, Lisa Ellanna. Back: Opal Brunette, Hazel Brunette, Kaelyn Nutuknginoun Schenkenberger, Veronica Driskill, Savannah Gonzalez, Kierann Bailey, Maggie Miller, Jolene Lyon.

# NSHC doctor honored for med student rotation partnership

A partnership that began as a chance encounter has earned Norton Sound Health Corporation's medical student program coordinator a special recognition.

Dr. Marc Levin, who heads NSHC's visiting student, resident, and fellow rotations program, was named Tulane University's Best Family Medicine Preceptor for 2022.

It all started in 2018, at 40,000 feet in a commercial jet. Levin was seated next to a student who was applying to Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, Louisiana. Levin told the student that he was the new coordinator of the student program in Nome and described life in the region. They exchanged contact information.

A couple of years later, after finishing his first year of med school, the student reached out, asking if he could come to Nome to shadow a doctor that summer. Levin agreed.

"And then he's like, 'Can I bring a couple of friends?'" Levin remembered with a laugh.

NSHC has been training new and future doctors for decades through a medical student and resident program focused on rural, full-scope family medicine. As program coordinator



Photo: Sarah Richards

An Nguyen, fourth-year Tulane University medical student, listens to Thor Noongwook's heart as Dr. Marc Levin stands by. NSHC hosts many Tulane students because many apply relative to applicants from other participating schools.

dinator over the past three years, one of Levin's biggest accomplishments has been a partnership with Tulane—sparked by that chance meeting with a student on a plane.

After two years of primarily classroom work, it was time for the three Tulane students who had spent a summer shadowing NSHC doctors to complete hands-on rotations. Tulane students usually stayed in New Orleans or the surrounding

area for rotations. But, citing their Nome experience, these students petitioned their department to allow them to do their family medicine rotation in Alaska.

The school hesitated. To ensure that students met core requirements, rotation sites had to be vetted by Tulane.

"But the students wouldn't take no for an answer," Levin said.

So one day, the program man-

ager in the Department of Family & Community Medicine at Tulane called Levin to suggest that NSHC seek approval as an official Tulane site. Several NSHC physicians would need to be appointed as adjunct faculty, or preceptors.

Levin was first to be appointed, and in May 2022, Tulane's Owl Club service organization bestowed his recognition at its annual banquet.

"Outstanding award," said Dr. Mark Peterson, NSHC medical director. "The students who have come here nominated him, and he won over all of Tulane's family medicine preceptors."

Alongside Levin, NSHC's nearly 40 physicians have all been important members of the team, each having taken on a teaching role in some capacity. Many have had students accompany them to villages or worked with them in the Emergency Department or Primary Care Clinic. Six physicians accepted Tulane faculty appointments, giving them extra accreditation and responsibility to train future doctors.

"All of our medical staff do an excellent job of teaching and making student experiences outstanding. It's a team effort," Peterson said.



Photo: Sarah Richards



Photo: Reba Lean

## All smiles at the Pumpkin Walk

Halloween guests made their way around the hospital during NSHC's Pumpkin Walk on October 31, visiting departments and collecting trinkets and healthy treats along the way. **TOP:** The Smithhisler family came costumed as a farm bunch, with dad Shane in a chicken suit, daughter Ali as the farmer, and mom Dani and twins Andi and Dale as cows. **ABOVE:** Holly Gray, Charlie Edwardsen, and Olivia Piscoya stop for a light-up toy from Elizabeth Herzner and Chris Waters at the finance department.



Photo: Reba Lean

## NEW CLINIC

Continued from page 2

The clinic now has room for the community's 13 NSHC employees—including the Behavioral Health Services staff and clinic manager, who used to work out of the tribal hall. The new facility has a reception area, three exam rooms, a trauma room with two beds, a specialty exam room, a laboratory, dental space, a village-based counselor office, a conference room, a sleeping room for visiting staff, and several large offices.

Angie Gorn, NSHC CEO, made opening remarks during the clinic's ribbon cutting ceremony. She recalled a community meeting when tribal members and residents weighed the ideas of building a new clinic versus expanding the old one. Eventually, they decided to build new. The chosen site is central to the school, clinic staff housing, tribal hall and city offices.

The clinic shares the same design by



**TOP:** An exam room with telemedicine cart at the new clinic. **ABOVE:** A spacious lobby with plenty of seating now welcomes visitors to the new St. Michael clinic.

Bettsworth North Architects as clinics built in Savoonga, Gambell, and Shishmaref. Crews completed foundation pilings in August 2020, and vertical construction began in August 2021. Construction cost \$8.1 million.

As clinic staff members settle into their new space, a few finishing touches are yet to come. Among them, plans for purchasing local artwork to adorn the clinic are in the works.

# Regional students supported by NSHC scholarships

Norton Sound Health Corporation offers a competitive scholarship worth up to \$5,000 per term to qualified Alaska Natives/Native Americans. Applicants must be enrolled in a formal education or training program that would benefit the healthcare field, and must meet all general scholarship requirements. The deadline to apply for the spring 2023 competitive scholarship is Dec. 31, 2022. Questions? Contact Irvin Barnes, Tribal Training & Development manager, at [ijbarnes@nshcorp.org](mailto:ijbarnes@nshcorp.org).

## FALL 2022 NSHC COMPETITIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

**Jennie Reynolds** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Justice  
**Amy Payenna** – University of Alaska Southeast, Business Administration  
**Skyler Ungwiluk** – Lewis-Clark State College, Psychology  
**Ana Karmun** – Oregon State University, Business Administration  
**Victoria Fisher**, University of Alaska Anchorage, Health Sciences  
**Alazae Waghiyi** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work

NSHC offers a general scholarship to higher education students aiming for health-related fields, but it may be awarded for non-medical-related studies if the degree can help further NSHC's mission and vision. Priority is given to Indian Health Service beneficiaries from our region who commit to returning to the region and possible employment at NSHC. NSHC's Scholarship Committee approves the award amount each year. It is currently \$1,500 per semester for full-time students. Apply online at [www.my-cache.org](http://www.my-cache.org). Deadline: December 31.

## FALL 2022 NSHC NON-COMPETITIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

**Debbie Peacock** – Alaska Pacific University, Business Administration  
**Laverne Saccheus** – Alaska Pacific University, Business Administration  
**Trista Topkok** – Alaska Pacific University, Business Administration  
**Teri Ruud** – Alaska Pacific University, Nursing  
**Taylor Anne Isom** – Alaska Pacific University, Nursing/Pre-health  
**Macey Witrosky** – Boise State University, Business  
**Alukka Ivanoff** – Boise State University, Gaming, Interactive Media, and Mobile  
**Sean Schenkenberger** – Cal Maritime University, Marine Transportation  
**Bode Leeper** – California State University Northridge, Computer Science  
**Will Fagerstrom** – Colorado State University, Biomedical Engineering  
**Sara Bioff** – Dartmouth College, Political Science  
**Dawson Schaeffer** – Diablo Valley College, General Education  
**Dawson Conant** – Eastern Washington University  
**Austin Moore** – Elon University, Doctor of Physical Therapy  
**Kelly McDaniel** – Ferris State University, Business  
**Imari Bright** – Fort Lewis College, Anthropology  
**Mauri Butzke** – Fort Lewis College, Biochemistry  
**Tiffany Ongtawasruk** – Fort Lewis College, Biology  
**Dawson Evans** – Fort Lewis College, Business Administration  
**Landon Varga** – Fort Lewis College, Computer Science  
**Payton Commack** – Fort Lewis College, Economics  
**David Anungazuk** – Fort Lewis College, Health  
**Evelyn Rochon** – Fort Lewis College, Psychology  
**Joseph Butzke** – Fort Lewis College, Psychology  
**Ashly Lockwood** – Fort Lewis College, Undeclared  
**Jeremy Koozaata** – Fort Lewis College, Undeclared  
**Jewels Iyapana** – Fort Lewis College, Undeclared  
**Stephanie Nielson** – Hutchinson Community College, Nursing  
**Laureli Ivanoff** – Institute of American Indian Arts, Creative Writing  
**Carol Hobbs** – Liberty University, Psychology  
**Wallace Ungwiluk** – Multnomah University, Management & Leadership  
**Nathan Ivanoff** – Oklahoma Baptist University, Elementary Education  
**Tristan Merchant** – Portland State University, Health Science  
**Christina Gard** – Regent University, Psychology and Counseling  
**Donna Rupe** – Seminole State College, Nursing  
**Lawrence Lynch** – Seton Hall University, Accounting  
**Margaret O'Connor** – Sinte Gleska University, MA-Human Services  
**Kastyn Lie** – Stanford University, English  
**Caden Hanebuth** – Texas Lutheran University, Kinesiology  
**Karis Evans** – Texas Lutheran University, Pre-Medicine  
**Ashlee Meeks** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Applied Business  
**Joshua Cannon** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Alaska Native Studies  
**Kaelyn Schenkenberger** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Anthropology  
**Gareth Hansen** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Aviation Technology  
**Katherine Smith** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Aviation Technology  
**Carter Commack** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Biological Sciences  
**Rebecca Young** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Clinical-Community Psychology  
**Nakita Crisci-Olanna** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Diagnostic Medical Sonography  
**Chelsea (Ryan) Sieh** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Finance  
**Madison Weyiouanna** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Health Sciences  
**Victoria Fisher** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Health Sciences  
**Jazara Ivanoff** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Undeclared  
**Nicole Patkotak** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Natural Science  
**Alice Amaktoolik** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Nursing

**Savannah Ivanoff** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Pharmaceutical Sciences  
**Molly Kenick** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Political Science  
**Kelly Lyon** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Pre-nursing  
**Devon Oyoumick** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Professional Piloting  
**Jolene Lyon** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Project Management  
**Marilyn Moore** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Social Work  
**Isaiah James** – University of Alaska Anchorage  
**Amy Bioff** – University of Alaska Anchorage, Journalism and Public Communications  
**Raenelle West** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Occupational Endorsement, Administrative Assistant  
**Annie Weyiouanna** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska Native Studies  
**Colleen Adams** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Accounting  
**Maggie West** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Accounting  
**Alyssa Jemewouk** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Business  
**Amanda Patrick** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Associate of Arts  
**Heather Sinnok** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Management  
**Jacob Iya** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration  
**Jana Schuerch** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration  
**Jenae Matson** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Computer Science  
**Makayla Marble** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Computer Science  
**Lizzy Hahn** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Digital Journalism  
**Frieda Southall** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Early Childhood Education  
**Kylie Evans** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Education  
**Sonya Annogiyuk** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Education  
**Nathaniel Appolloni** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, English  
**Mandy Ellanna** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, General Studies  
**Brayden Bahnke** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Mechanical Engineering  
**Parker Kenick** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Mechanical Engineering  
**Emily Adams** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Medical Assistant  
**Ellie Martinson** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Music Performance  
**Megan Rock** – University of Alaska Fairbanks  
**Melinda Anowlic** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nursing  
**Gwendalyn Trigg-Komakhuk** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nursing  
**Alexander Morgan** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nursing  
**Marie Katchatag** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Pre-nursing  
**Marina Koonooka** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Pre-nursing  
**Maggie Miller** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Rural Development  
**Ada Harvey** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work  
**Lily White** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work  
**Yuka Ungwiluk** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work  
**Clara Hansen** – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Undeclared  
**McKenzie Sagoonick** – University of Alaska Southeast, Health Sciences  
**John Wade** – University of Alaska Southeast, Biology  
**Erin Johanson** – University of Alaska Southeast, Biology  
**Amy Payenna** – University of Alaska Southeast, Business Administration  
**MacKenzie Goodwin** – University of Alaska Southeast, Elementary Education  
**Yvonne Gregg** – University of Alaska Southeast, Elementary Education  
**Larissa Figley** – University of Hawaii at Hilo, Exploratory Health Sciences  
**Stephan Anderson** – University of Hawaii at Hilo, Kinesiology and Exercise Sciences  
**Katlyn Smith** – University of Hawaii at Monoa, Climate Sciences  
**Talia Cross** – University of Hawaii at Monoa, Nutrition  
**Katie Kelso** – University of Oregon, Accounting  
**Kanayaq Ivanoff** – Washington State University, Biology  
**Sierra Musgrove** – Washington State University, Political Science  
**Faith Itta** – Washington University in St. Louis, Social Work with concentration in Alaska Native/American Indian  
**Cassandra Alba** – Wayland Baptist University, Finance  
**Jewel Wilson** – Western Washington University, Biology  
**Lisa Ellanna** – William Mitchell College of Law, Law  
**Ava Earthman** – Williams College, Psychology

NSHC offers a scholarship for students pursuing education in a field employable by NSHC through a vocational, trade, or technical school, or other short-term training programs in fields critical to support health care. The scholarship range is \$750-\$3,000 for students enrolled in trade programs, including carpentry, plumbing, mechanical, electrical, and boiler, etc., from an accredited institution. Students must apply at [www.my-cache.org](http://www.my-cache.org) by at least four weeks prior to the start of training. Questions? Contact Irvin Barnes, Tribal Training and Development manager: 907-443-4559 or [ijbarnes@nshcorp.org](mailto:ijbarnes@nshcorp.org).

## CURRENT VOCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

**Elaine Bogeyaktuk** – Alaska Career College, Business and Office Specialist Certificate Program  
**Haley Osborne** – Blue River Aviation, Private Pilot's License  
**Kellen Katcheak** – Alaska Technical Center, Heavy Equipment Operator Training  
**Mary Pete** – Alaska Career College, Cert. Medical Assistant Program  
**Lisa Haugen** – Northern Industrial Training, Commercial Driver's License  
**Crystal Wassman** – The Salon Professional Academy, hairdresser's program  
**Robert Dixon** – Northern Industrial Training, Commercial Driver's License  
**Shernyence Steve** – Alaska Career College, Medical Billing and Coding

# 2022 EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



**JANUARY – MARK ROMAN** Physician Assistant, St. Michael. Mark was thrown into the mix during the pandemic and proved to be an impressive provider in both Stebbins and St. Michael. He is a great asset to NSHC and continues to provide comprehensive and compassionate care to his patients. He is eager to learn and to help educate all staff on difficult clinical scenarios. In one instance, he was instrumental in an emergency delivery in St. Michael. He worked with the community health aide to provide exceptional care and great support to the mother and premature baby.



**JANUARY – JOYCE NESBY** Licensed Practical Nurse, Primary Care Clinic, Nome. Joyce is a pillar in her department. Her peers say she is extremely knowledgeable and always willing to train others. She is an excellent problem solver and sees problems before anyone else can. She never misses details and never leaves a mess or work for others to clean up or finish. Additionally, she is well known in the community and well respected, both professionally and personally. With her consistent care and kind personality, she is everything a medical professional should be.



**FEBRUARY – DIGNA ANDREWS** Village Maintenance Technician, Stebbins. Digna has demonstrated time and time again her commitment to health care and stepping in when the moment calls for it. She is dependable on a regular basis and in special situations, like when her community experienced an outbreak, and food needed to be delivered and people needed to be tested. She also went out of her way to spend a full day in a neighboring community to help during a trauma incident. When she is gone, she is sorely missed because she is never one to say “that’s not my job.”



**MARCH – ALICIA NIKSIK** Community Health Aide, St. Michael. Alicia is capable of providing outstanding care even in the midst of difficult times and short staffing, and she keeps an amazing attitude through it all. In one instance, Alicia had been the only health aide in her clinic for a whole week when a traumatic ATV accident occurred. She kept a cool head and helped the responding providers find needed items and keep family members calm. Her strength is noteworthy when helping care for friends and loved ones, and she is a valued member of the team.



**APRIL – JOSEPH SEM** Dentist, Dental Department, Nome. Joe has worked for NSHC for over three years now, and his exuberance for his job has not worn out. He takes pride in his work and treats his coworkers and patients with respect. He has profound appreciation for the region, its people, and the outdoors. He takes the extra time to make those around him feel special—by compiling music playlists for his patients or making ice cream birthday cakes for his peers. He enjoys village travel and does not seem to tire from the trips away from home; in fact, he will request more if there is still work to be done.



**MAY – ADA HARVEY** Health Aide Trainer, Health Aide Training Center, Nome. Ada went above and beyond to demonstrate customer care, which is something NSHC prioritizes in its employee conduct. One day, a patient whose English was their second or third language arrived at the Wellness and Training Center, confused because they thought their appointment was there. They were frustrated because they had been directed to multiple departments. Ada took the time to walk the patient across the street to the correct location and showed compassion and respect in doing so.



**JUNE – RICHELLE HORNER** Registered Nurse, Acute Care, Nome. Richelle is an extremely valued member of her team, where she is a constant advocate for patients, a steward of traditional culture and values, and a quality caregiver at all times. She had the opportunity to make her department shine in a recent survey. She displayed superior knowledge of policies and procedures and performed important work under pressure. She leads by example and takes ownership of her unit and team. She is a fast learner, kind, and always willing to patiently explain processes to other employees.



**JULY – MARTINA LEEDY** Material Support Technician, Materials Management, Nome. Martina is a member of a department that is short-staffed, but with her help, you would never know it. Her role is essential in the operation of the hospital, and she keeps things ticking so providers have what they need in order to give patients timely care. She is quick to respond and always makes sure to check in with those departments she works with to ensure their needs are covered. Through significant medical issues of her own, she overcame challenges to continue her role, always with a smile and kind word for others.



**AUGUST – FELICIANO ABBA** Environmental Service Worker II, Environmental Services, Nome. Feliciano is not taken for granted by the departments where he works. When he is gone, his absence does not go unnoticed. When he is there, his presence is appreciated. He does the job of four people and does it well. He regularly cleans departments and patient rooms with excellence, is readily available when needed, never complains, and always makes friends by sharing his candy stash with others. He takes pride in his work and is an important member of the team.



**SEPTEMBER – JOEL ROSE** Warehouse Operator, Facilities Maintenance, Nome. Joel received numerous nominations for recognition, and they all mentioned his great attitude and willingness to work with others. Joel always steps up when there is a need, and in doing so, makes lives easier for departments in need. During the September storm weekend, he worked to transport patients and staff members and handle other requests. He never shows hesitation or annoyance to help take a stressful situation and make it possible. He is a fantastic example of teamwork in the organization.



Photo: Kristin Paniptchuk

A sign made for Shaktoolik’s Suicide Prevention Awareness Walk in September shares a message of support.

## Suicide prevention hotlines ready to help

In July 2022, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline switched over to the three-digit number 988.

Anyone can contact the easily remembered number, including when they are in crisis or feeling suicidal. Operators on the line are highly trained and compassionate and will provide confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for anyone of any age, including non-English speakers and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. People can call or text the 988 number or chat with operators online at [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org).

The 988 line does not replace Alaska’s Careline. The State of Alaska operates its own suicide prevention line toll-free at 1-877-266-4357 (HELP), which is also available all day, every day.

In-region, people with urgent Behavioral Health Services needs can call BHS directly at 907-443-3344 during business hours. After hours, people should call the Provider Care Line at 907-443-6411, where providers will connect callers with on-call BHS professionals.

If someone you know needs support, make sure they know there is

- ▶ National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (call or text): **988**
- ▶ National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (online chat): **www.988lifeline.org**
- ▶ Alaska Careline: **1-877-266-4357 (1-877-266-HELP)**
- ▶ NSHC Behavioral Health Services (8am-5pm): **907-443-3344**
- ▶ NSHC Provider Care Line (5pm-8am): **907-443-6411**

help at their fingertips if they dial any of the numbers above.

# Merbok slams NSHC facilities

Typhoon Merbok blasted western Alaska with powerful winds and waves in mid-September, flooding communities, destroying coastal campsites, and displacing several homes.

In Golovin, where the storm's surge flooded half the town with water, mud, sand, and sewage, many families had to leave their uninhabitable homes at least temporarily.

"We've lived here all our lives and never seen it this way," said Maria Dexter, a Norton Sound Health Corporation tribal healer based in Golovin, as she sat next to her sister in the community's tribal hall in the days following the storm. Dexter was among residents of the community whose homes were undamaged, and she was able to help cook meals for those who were displaced.

Several feet of water inundated the low-lying part of town. Where waters did not seep inside the homes, it likely lapped around the skirting or subflooring of houses.

NSHC's staff housing building, which was the community's clinic about 20 years ago, was among homes impacted. NSHC's Village Facilities Maintenance team replaced the subflooring in the weeks after the storm. Golovin's local advance practice provider lives in the building, located next to the current clinic—which was largely unscathed.

Outside of Nome, the storm's surge annihilated generations-old cabins and subsistence camps along the coast. At mile 20 on the Council Road, NSHC's Camp Nuuk fared comparatively well. The campsite, consisting of four cabins and several smaller outbuildings, is used as a wellness retreat site for different programs throughout the year. Early assessments of damage show that the cabins were thankfully not displaced, but there was some evidence of flooding. Some outbuildings shifted or flipped over. Three outhouses were lost all together.

In Diomedes, water surged about five feet above the normal high tide line to where a shipping container



Photos: Reba Lean



ABOVE: Maria Dexter, NSHC tribal healer, shows an image of her house amidst the floodwaters. The waters rose to the skirting of her house but luckily no higher. In the days after the storm, she helped cook meals for the Golovin residents displaced from their homes who were staying at the local tribal hall.

LEFT: Floodwaters deposited debris all around Golovin. Detritus on the clinic steps show how high the waters flooded during the storm. Though undamaged itself, the clinic was surrounded by homes that experienced flooding and mud and debris left behind by the storm.

sat full of furniture, fixtures, and equipment for the community's newly built clinic. The container was swept away in the storm and its contents are considered a loss. While NSHC is filing an insurance claim for the lost items, it is also actively working to replace the items. The clinic opened in 2021, but delivery of the equipment was delayed until 2022 due to poor weather. The storm swept away the container before the items could be installed.

Shortly after the storm, the Rasmuson Foundation connected NSHC to the Direct Relief organization. Direct Relief awarded \$160,000 to NSHC through its National Emergency Fund for Diomedes medical equipment. The grant will be used to help fly new equipment to Diomedes.

NSHC is extremely grateful for the grant award and the connection through the Rasmuson Foundation.



Photo: Alexis Erikson

Wanda Lewis, NP, was an itinerant village provider before taking on Provider Care Line duties. She has traveled to many of the region's villages and knows many of the staff members and patients in village communities. Hers is now one of the voices callers will hear on the other end of the Provider Care Line.

## CALL LINE

*Continued from page 1*

NSHC Emergency Department. When medical issues arose, the nurses were able to triage patients and either provide advice and education over the phone or connect the patients to their local healthcare providers in an emergency.

Since its implementation, the call line has served around 4,250 individual patients in over 20,200 phone calls. In

about 40% of the calls, the nurse was able to help provide home care or to advise the patient to follow up in their clinic during regular hours.

With advance practice providers on the other end of the line, a phone call is now more equal to a healthcare visit. Many of the providers who answer the phone have practiced in the regional clinics and know the patients and health aides.

If ever a provider assigned to answer the line is unavailable, an Emergency

24 hours a day, use the  
**NSHC PROVIDER CARE LINE**  
**907-443-6411**  
 OR DIAL TOLL-FREE  
**1-844-586-8773**

- + TIP: Keep these numbers visible in your home. Cut out this box and stick it to the fridge with a magnet!
- + TIP: Save the NSHC Provider Care Line number as a contact in your cell phone—then save that contact to your "favorites" or emergency contacts.

Department nurse will pick up the phone. The nurse will either take a message and send it to the provider, so the provider can call the patient back as soon as possible, or, in an emergency, the nurse will contact the local on-call health aide.

Callers can be confident in the medical knowledge of the provider taking their call and that they will continue to act fast in emergencies and connect them with their local healthcare responders.

## ANGIE'S REPORT

*Continued from page 2*

the planning stages.

Sanitation Services at NSHC continues to make progress with the development of the Community Utility Assistance Program (CUAP). A new administrator, Denise Michels, has been hired. Both Stebbins and Wales have been included with infrastructure bill funding for new piped water and sewer projects. Indian Health Services visited the region twice this summer to learn more about water and sewer needs.

The NSHC Board of Directors and staff members participated in strategic planning this spring, and Administration looks forward to making progress with goals that were set. In early December, the Site Planning Committee participated in master planning to document a ten-year capital investment plan.

Thank you to our customer-owners and patients for your trust in NSHC as your preferred health care organization and much appreciation to the Board of Directors for the continuous support, leadership, and dedication to meeting the healthcare needs of the people in the region.

Looking forward to 2023!