

YRDFA Teaches and Learns from Village Youth

By Teddy Willoya, Intern

In the beginning of July, the interns at First Alaskan's Institute were invited to volunteer for a program called Take Wing Alaska. The event, which took place on July 13, was structured as educational speed dating for Alaska Native high school sophomore students from the Y-K Delta. The purpose was to have older Alaska Natives who have successfully achieved or are currently working on specific educational goals speak to the students and answer their questions.

The high school students in attendance were interested in urban post-secondary education. They came from various villages in the Lower Yukon and Lower Kuskokwim school districts. The program aimed to help the students transition from the rural life into urban life to boost their chances of success when they come to the city. They also got to get experience of campus life at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

The students seemed very excited to be at the event. They asked me a variety of questions pertinent to my educational experiences: how did I fund my schooling, where did I get my first degree, what am I studying now, why did I choose to go to school, what was the most challenging aspect of school, and where did I work before I went to school. I was glad to share my experiences. In the beginning of my studies I used scholarships and student loans to fund my education. I got my associate's degree in business while working in Prudhoe Bay. I told them that I wanted to do more than what I was previously doing for employment. I am currently studying electrical and environmental engineering. I told them that getting into school was the most challenging; it gets easier as long as you keep up with your work and maintain decent grades. I told them that it's important for them to maintain good grades while they are in high school so that they can get scholarships for college, as opposed to having to take out any loans like I had to in the beginning of my studies.

I also brought a survey with me that YRDFA developed earlier this year to help find out how village residents like to receive information. The survey asked various questions to find out what social media tools are preferred, whether email or postal mail was preferred, if radio announcements were preferred over VHF announcements, and other miscellaneous questions about subsistence and other village issues. Twenty-two students completed the surveys.

According to the students, websites and postal mail are the best ways to get information to adults in the villages. Websites and e-mail were the top rated means for younger people to be contacted. Myspace and Facebook were the top rated social media picks of the students. Fifteen of the 22 students said they would be interested in volunteering or working for YRDFA on salmon conservation issues. Many of the students showed a large concern for subsistence issues in their regions. As I understand it, YRDFA will use this information as it designs future outreach, to be sure current information on the fisheries reaches people in the way they prefer.

It felt good to be able to go and give these students direction that would have been helpful to me when I was in high school. The students were prepared with good questions and showed great interest in post-secondary education. I hope the advice they received will help point them in the right direction.