

Partnership Generates Vocational Training Opportunities for Alaska Natives

Known for being the finish line for Alaska's famous 1,049-mile Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, Nome is also the transportation and commercial hub of the state's northwestern region. But there's another side of Nome, one far removed from its gold- and mineral-mining agencies.

In the Bering Straits region, there are 16 Alaska Native villages that are unacquainted with the city's prosperity. These rural communities have no road system and are accessible only by small commuter planes and barges in the summer. Since all supplies and food must be flown in, the cost of living is one and a half times that of urban Anchorage. The region is plagued with high unemployment, low income levels, and schools struggling to teach basic academic skills to village-based students. With little opportunity for vocational education, students were forced to travel outside the region for training—until the Northwest Campus (NWC) of the University of Alaska Fairbanks intervened.

Wanting to help fill the region's training needs but not having the faculty or facilities to do so, NWC formed a partnership with Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NACTEC). In addition to having dormitory facilities and mechanical, welding, and carpentry shops at Nome-Beltz High School, NACTEC is also affiliated with Nome Public Schools and the Bering Straits School District. This partnership created the opportunity for NWC to develop a dual-credit program for the high school students. The NWC-NACTEC partnership offers adults and high school students vocational education programs and life-skills classes that provide the knowledge and skills necessary to increase employment and small-business opportunities.

While NACTEC had shops and dormitories, some renovations were required to create a learning environment. So NWC used the funds it received from a 2003 Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities (AN/NHIAC) grant to rehabilitate the facilities.

The majority of the rehabilitation project took place in the summer and fall of 2005. During this time, all three shops and shop classrooms at Nome-Beltz High School were painted, and a new handicapped-accessible entrance to the vocational shops was created. The exhaust system was renovated and upgraded in the engine shop; restroom facilities for all three shops were renovated and brought up to code; lighting, wiring, and acoustical tiles were renovated and upgraded; and a hazardous materials abatement was performed.

"With renovation of older buildings, like the shops that were built in the early 1960s, asbestos abatement was a

challenge," says Lee Haugen, Ph.D., director of NWC. "You never know what you will find when you start digging around with ceilings of old buildings. Nonetheless, the project was completed and the shops were ready for occupancy in January 2006."

Training Opportunities

Through the partnership with NACTEC, NWC was able to access the facilities for its own programs during the evenings, weekends, and summer months. Examples of courses offered for the first time in the fall of 2006 include cardiopulmonary resuscitation, first aid, swimming, education, employment, aviation, and art. NWC also offered classes in snow machine maintenance and repair and 4-cycle engine repair for the general public.



Instructor Brian Marvin demonstrates snow machine repair in the small engines shop at NACTEC.

Dual-credit courses are now offered during 3-week sessions and are scheduled daily for 1 hour. Adult courses are offered as evening intensives and generally meet 2 or 3 days a week. Facilitators include NWC's adjunct faculty and program development manager and NACTEC's faculty and director.

Collaboration Equals Success

"This project yielded many successes," says Haugen. "Three students completed certification in CNA, and five completed courses in snow machine and small engine repair. The partnerships we developed were strengthened through constant collaboration, and additional partnerships were created. Students are gaining college credit while still in high school." In addition, the residents of the 16 regional villages in the Bering Strait region receive training and education without having to leave the area.

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Kea'au Middle College High School is the Answer for At-Risk Students

For many, mention of Hawaii evokes images of a tropical paradise, aqua blue waters, floral leis, magnificent coral reefs, and rugged lava beds. For residents of the state's Puna and Kea'au areas, reality clashes with the postcard version. Forty-eight percent of the Puna population lives below the federal poverty level, and the percentage of young children living in poverty is one of the highest in the state. In both areas, substance abuse and delinquency rates are high.

The faculty, staff, and students of Hawaii Community College (HawCC) decided to try to stop the steady decline of these areas, particularly the waning hopes and dreams of the young people. HawCC students and staff had already opened the Ola'a Community Center (OCC) as a hub for community events with after-school programs and workshops, and were working alongside another nonprofit community health agency, Bay Clinic, Inc. (BCI), through its Pulama Project, to promote substance abuse prevention for area youth. But they felt that they could do even more by focusing their efforts on providing quality services and programs for the youth of the Puna and the Kea'au areas.

After a series of community meetings followed by suggestions from a council of at-risk youth from the Pulama Project, HawCC formed a partnership with BCI to create the Kea'au Youth Business Center (KYBC), a state-of-the-art sound recording studio, multimedia computer lab, and mobile kitchen. To establish the KYBC, BCI would use funds from a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant to renovate a Bay Clinic facility. HawCC would use its 2003 Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities (AN/NHIAC) grant to staff and equip the center to offer after-school skill-building activities in sound-recording engineering and digital and culinary arts. And since the KYBC and OCC serve the same population and are located across the street from one another, there would be a natural flow of services from the middle school youth at OCC to the high school youth and young adults at KYBC.

Surmounting Challenges

A boom in the construction industry caused major delays in building renovation, but HawCC and BCI refused to be derailed. The college's AN/NHIAC grant Project Manager Trina Nahm-Mijo, in collaboration with Kea'au High School and BCI, established the foundation for the skill-building after-school program by creating Kea'au Middle College High School (KMCHS). This alternative program targets high school seniors at risk of not graduating because of disengagement, attendance, and family problems. After setting up a memorandum of agreement between HawCC's

Department of Education and the University of Hawaii to pilot the first middle college project in the state, KMCHS was launched in August 2005 in a classroom on the Kea'au High School campus.

Unique Curriculum...Great Results

KMCHS employs a learning community interdisciplinary methodology through an integrated, hands-on curriculum. A high school teacher and a team of community college instructors sponsored by HawCC's AN/NHIAC grant facilitate learning in video production, sound recording, and culinary arts. Students earn both high school and college credit during their senior year of high school.

So far, the program has proven a success. Of the first group of 13 KMCHS students, 10 have graduated with high school diplomas, and each has earned 12 college credits. Before attending KMCHS, the average grade point average (GPA) of these students was 2.0. At the end of their senior year, the KMCHS students' average GPA had risen to 2.6, and each of them had earned 12 college credits. One student had an amazing turnaround from a 1.08 GPA and 13 days of suspension in his junior year to a 3.6 GPA and no suspensions in his senior year.



Attending HUD's Honolulu conference in September 2006 are (l. to r.): Trina Nahm-Mijo, AN/NHIAC project manager; Moon Brown, sound recording trainer; and Brant Agudo, student assistant and 2006 Middle College graduate.

Of the KMCHS graduates, seven have decided to attend HawCC, two are enrolled in the Universal Technical Institute in Arizona for auto mechanic certification, and one received a full scholarship to Heald College in Honolulu.

A second group of 18 KMCHS students started the project in August 2006 at a new location 1 mile from the Kea'au High School campus and the KYBC site. KMCHS students will be able to meet at the new Kea'au Youth Business Center

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Champ Camp—A Safe Haven for Transient Youth

For several years, Christie Howell was a volunteer in the childcare program at the Bakersfield Homeless Shelter. It was during this time that she realized children 5 years old and younger were not the only community youth that needed nurturing and enrichment programs.

Howell, the program coordinator for Child, Adolescent, and Family Studies at California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB) Department of Teacher Education, noticed that many school-aged kids spent their after-school time loitering in the shelter's parking lot or under trees. This idle, unproductive, and unstructured activity sometimes resulted in verbal and physical altercations.

Howell wanted to create a program to provide these students, and the more than 200 homeless families the shelter serves, with a safe and enriching alternative to “just hanging out.” In collaboration with shelter staff, Howell and her CSUB colleagues began to establish such a program for the scores of homeless youth in the community. Their first order of business was to apply for a Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities grant from HUD's Office of University Partnerships. With that funding, Howell and her team began construction on Champ Camp, a family resource and literacy center for homeless youth.

A Work in Progress

Champ Camp is located on the site of Bakersfield Homeless Center (BHC), a community center that serves mostly families, single parents, the working poor, and the unemployed. BHC Associate Director Diana Campbell-Rice came up with the name because she wanted the center to sound like a place where kids would want to come. Construction on the building is complete, and although Champ Camp's after-school tutoring portion of the program has been up and running for 2 years, program options are still being developed and refined.

“We are a work in progress,” says Howell. “We are open Monday through Friday from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and provide after-school tutoring, craft classes, recreation, and games. We organize field trips to places like the zoo and the mall and provide emotional support and a listening ear for transient school-aged kids. We also provide school supplies for the school-aged children and collaborate with the local Boys and Girls Club to provide summer activities, including games and social events.”

Champ Camp is also working to be more of a haven for adults, hoping to offer educational classes and provide

one-on-one counseling for parents while their children are at school. The center's programs are supervised by a part-time staff member from the homeless shelter, four tutors provided through the university's 21st Century grant, and CSUB volunteers.

Successes...and Challenges

Homeless families are often transient. As a result, their children suffer academically, falling behind their peers in school. They can't get needed tutoring, and they are often unable to participate in after-school activities. Champ Camp focuses on helping these kids develop good study habits so that they can progress in school, find better paying jobs, and break the cycle of homelessness.

But this success does not come without challenges, and staff members often struggle to get the children and their parents to fully embrace and participate in Champ Camp. “Sometimes it's hard to get kids interested in coming to the center,” says Howell. “When you're in junior high, it's not cool to hang out with the adults. However, once they are here and participate in activities, they are excited. It's also a challenge to get their parents to buy into the Center. There's a different lifestyle, and we have to convince them that it's better for their children to be inside the Center than hanging out doing nothing.”

Having enough volunteers to provide one-on-one assistance is also a challenge for Champ Camp. And the very transient nature of the community makes regular attendance difficult. “Kids come and go,” says Howell. “That can be disappointing to the staff. It's difficult to devise a course of study for a youth one day and then not have him show up the next day. It inhibits us from providing consistent follow-up.”

A Coming Attraction

Despite the challenges it faces, Champ Camp has been operating successfully for 2 years. Now Howell and her colleagues are laying the groundwork for the Center's literacy component, which will focus on family literacy and education. This program will expand on existing services currently offered by BHC. It will help homeless residents find the resources they need to complete job applications, write resumes, develop strong interview techniques, learn problem-solving strategies, and much more. It will also help direct them to local services, such as the local Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, a federal grant program that provides nutritious foods, nutrition counseling, and referrals to health and other social services to participants at no charge.

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Grantee Converts Old Garment Facility to a Social Service Hub

When Bernstein & Sons Shirt Corporation packed up and left Utica, Mississippi, in 2000, it donated its 27,000-square-foot garment facility to the small community of 966 people. That same year, Hinds Community College (HCC) Utica campus was searching for a facility to house programs to provide human services and to address the educational needs of the residents of Utica and the bordering communities. Located close to both downtown Utica and the Hinds campus, the abandoned Bernstein building seemed a perfect fit for HCC because of its location and its size.

HCC contacted city officials and then formed a partnership with the city that would grant access to the old garment building. In return, they would assist in renovating the large warehouse facility to accommodate vital services and programs sponsored by local agencies. The college used funds from a 2001 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) grant to assist with the necessary renovations.

Taking the First Steps

HCC renovated roughly 2,000 square feet of the facility, converting all of the former administrative spaces into new open-access offices. “The Hinds County Human Resource Agency (HCHRA), a nonprofit community action agency, now uses these offices to administer its Meals on Wheels program and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP),” says Bobby Pamplin, HUD HBCU program director. “Both programs are available to residents of Utica and its bordering communities, but particularly target the elderly and vulnerable populations like the very young.”

The college also built storage space with freezers for food storage for the Meals on Wheels program, landscaped the site, and painted and cleaned both the exterior and interior of the building.

Meeting Basic Needs

Traditional meals-on-wheels programs focus on meal delivery to individuals who are bedridden or homebound. However, in addition to delivering prepared meals, this Meals on Wheels program, funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, uses the building as a distribution center where primarily elderly residents come 2 to 3 days a week for ready-to-serve meals. Many of them first sign up for the program through

HCHRA, while others are referred by social workers, nurses, aides, and other healthcare professionals who visit them in their homes.

The LIHEAP program, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, provides financial assistance to low-income people to help offset their home energy costs. The assistance is based on need and covers costs in high-energy-usage periods, such as summer and winter, when the demand for heat and air conditioning is high. The program also distributes air conditioning units, safe heating units, and blankets. Many Utica residents and those in bordering towns and communities come to this new facility to sign up for LIHEAP, Meals on Wheels, and other social services, while others receive help through referrals.

Community Engagement

By renovating this facility to accommodate such important social services, HCC has established itself as a solid partner with the city of Utica and its residents. The college has expanded its role in the community and is helping to provide local services to meet residents’ basic needs. The community benefits because the local site eliminates the need for residents to travel as far as 25 miles to places like Jackson, Mississippi, and other metropolitan areas for these much-needed services.

“This is rewarding on a personal level because many of those residents served by these programs are relatives of Hinds’ students,” says Pamplin.

In the devastation left in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the building was used as a distribution center serving residents of Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Alabama. For several months, Jacob’s Camp, a local Jewish community group, used the facility to distribute food, clothing, baby products, and other essentials.

“The bulk of the renovation is yet to come,” says Pamplin, who envisions the facility housing a small business incubator, a Head Start center, and daycare for the elderly.

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with its state-of-the-art sound recording studio and multimedia computer lab beginning in spring 2007.

As an outgrowth of the first KMCHS graduating class, the entrepreneurial group MAPS (SPAM spelled backwards) International was formed. Its members continue to gain culinary skills by preparing food for community and cultural events, specializing in Polynesian-Asian cuisine. Profits made from the entrepreneurial activities will be reinvested in the program to support more training and to sustain the KYBC site.

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CSUB students have gained valuable hands-on experience through the programs at Champ Camp. The Center is a service-learning facility, and students get the opportunity to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds, including Caucasians, Hispanics, and African Americans. Service learning is an important component in many CSUB classes. Through Champ Camp, students can fulfill this requirement.

As a result of CSUB's efforts with Champ Camp and its collaboration with BHC, the community gets educated, committed volunteers, much-needed tutors, and role models.

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HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP) provides grants to institutions of higher education to assist them and their partners with the implementation of a broad range of community development activities including neighborhood revitalization, housing, and economic development. This newsletter, *Diversity Works*, highlights the efforts of grantees in OUP's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities grant programs and includes a variety of interesting projects, compelling grantee profiles, and other valuable resources for minority-serving institutions.