

Community Wellness, Culture & Education

Context

Portage Creek currently has few year-round residents but more than 78 tribal members. These members reside in a variety of places, including Dillingham, Anchorage, New Stuyahok, Koliganek, Nikolaevsk and other communities. The scattering of community members and dwindling of the year-round population has been one of the most significant changes in the community's culture. People who grew up in Portage Creek, however, retain a strong sense of identity with the history and place, and many would like to return and raise families there. Maintaining this sense of community for future generations is critical to the continuance of Portage Creek's culture, traditions and existence as a functioning community. Not only is holding onto a sense of community vital to Portage Creek's growth, but it is also important for the community and cultural identity for current residents and tribal members.

Portage Creek has a number of entities, both within the village and the region that can help achieve the goals and priority actions to promote wellness, culture and education. Locally, these include the Portage Creek Village Council, Choggiung Ltd. and the Orthodox Church. While no health aides, police officers, Village Public Safety Officers or other public providers are located in Portage Creek, the community has regional organizations such as Bristol Bay Native Association, SWRSD, BBHA, BBEDC, Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation, and other regional entities that can assist with the goals.

Much like other Bristol Bay villages, Portage Creek does not have road access to Dillingham and therefore lacks easy access to facilities such as the Kakanak Hospital, Dillingham Medical Clinic, Senior Center, Youth Center, and Public Library.

Effort should be made to retain existing residents, especially younger residents. Currently, extra-curricular activities for youth, adults and Elders alike, or space (such as a community, multi-use, youth or senior center) where residents can gather for community events is minimal. The community has identified re-opening the school as a primary strategy towards revitalizing the community, increasing the population and strengthening the community's wellness. The school, when open, provides not only education to the students, but water facilities, an emergency phone and Internet connection. The school also provides space for nurses and dentists to visit the community once a year. Because Portage Creek is so small, a community multi-use facility may not be needed if the school were to re-open and provide space for community gatherings, events, trainings, etc.



The following goals and priority actions for Community Wellness, Culture and Education focus on ways the community can, over time, strengthen the support structure of the village for all of its residents, retaining and building Portage Creek's sense of community and culture.

Goals

- 1. Maintain a local option for schooling in Portage Creek.**
- 2. Provide health services in the community.**
- 3. Locate social service providers in community.**
- 4. Create community youth activities and identify location to house activities.**
- 5. Maintain cultural identity and traditional ways.**



Goals & Priority Actions

I. Maintain a local option for schooling in Portage Creek.

- Provide more youth services and facilities to encourage families to relocate and settle in the village.
 - Provide an early childhood facility within the re-opened school.
 - Expand youth activity options.
 - Seek funding to support early childhood programs and childcare services.
- Encourage growth in job opportunities (See Economic Development section) and therefore numbers of families with school aged children residing in the community.
- Host community functions to raise money for school.
- When established, provide incentives for parents to send their children to the Portage Creek School rather than to Dillingham or elsewhere.
- With the re-opening of school, utilize and support the Parents-As-Teachers (PAT) and Early Learning opportunities (ELO), or similar programs.
- The State Department of Education and Early Development provide several education alternatives for Alaskan youth. While no correspondence, charter or boarding schools exist in Bristol Bay – pursuing alternative sources of education is a viable option in Alaska.
 - Hire a private teacher.
 - Collaborate to open a publicly funded correspondence or charter school in Portage Creek or elsewhere in Bristol Bay. Information on starting a charter school can be found on the State Department of Education and Early Development website (www.eed.state.ak.us/Alaskan_Schools/Charter/). To check out existing charter schools in the state, visit www.edreform.com/ncsw2005/websites/alaska.html.
 - Mt. Edgecombe Boarding School is one alternative for high school students. While located in southeast Alaska, families can send their children to school while maintaining Portage Creek as their primary residence. Visit their website at <http://www.mehs.educ.state.ak.us/> for more information.
- Encourage parents to home school their children – either themselves or by bringing educators into the village who are interested in living in a rural community. Children schooled at home by their parents or guardians are exempt from the Compulsory School Attendance Law. Parents are not required to register with the state or their local school district, and no testing or other requirements are placed on home schools not funded with public dollars.¹⁸
 - Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA) has an extensive home schooling program that serves students state wide. This program is through the Galena City School District and there is no cost to students who qualify. The program is also recommended by the Superintendent of the Southwest Regional School District as the

¹⁸ Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/faq.html#A11>

best home school option for Portage Creek residents. There are numerous benefits to the program including a supplied computer, an assigned certified teacher and field representative who is familiar with home schooling, and assorted academic clubs. More information on this program can be found in Appendix L.

2. Provide health services in the community.

- Create a position to oversee and coordinate the itinerant nursing liaison and pursue funding opportunities to bring health facilities back to Portage Creek. Because of its location along the Nushagak River and the summer fishing population in the area, Portage Creek is a prime location for an area clinic especially during summer months. The number of boats and fisherman along the river are such that the feasibility and funding of a clinic Portage Creek is not entirely unreasonable. BBAHC should be the first contact to determine a strategy and the level of service required by the village. Funding for a new clinic could come from a variety of places. The Denali Commission Health Facilities program, in conjunction with BBAHC is a potential source. Another funding source is the Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) Program.
- Request health aides from BBAHC to provide nutrition classes for youth and adults on a regular basis.

3. Locate social service providers in community.

- Establish community liaison to work with both State and Bristol Bay area social service agencies such as Bristol Bay Native Association, Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation, and State Department of Education and Early Development.
- Create a village Wellness Team to increase collaboration among service providers and community members and ensure village needs are identified and met.
- Initiate a community 'newsletter' that will increase community communication, reporting and knowledge.

4. Create community youth activities and identify location to house activities.

- While school is closed, utilize church as a gathering place for Elders and youth to participate in activities together, such as teaching traditional skills and knowledge to youth.
- Educate youth to take care of the Elders and to learn from them.
- Organize potlucks, clean-up days, fundraisers, holiday celebrations, art & craft projects, etc.
- Arrange educational outings to Dillingham and Anchorage.
- Eventually, invite statewide or national youth organizations to start a chapter in the village – such as Boys and Girls Club, Native Youth Olympics, National Wildlife Federation's Alaska Youth for Environmental Action program, etc.
- Engage youth in community decisions and invite youth to attend entity meetings.
- Utilize church (or school when open) for a combined Head Start/PAT/ELO and youth group/youth center/tutoring center/after-school program facility. This would help share costs and make the operation more easily sustainable.

5. Maintain cultural identity and traditional ways.

- Teach traditional arts and crafts skills such as beading, skin sewing, basket making, net mending, carving and sled building.
- Teach subsistence skills for gathering native food including: butchering, skinning, storing, places for hunting (*pisuryaraq*); snare setting, plucking duck and waterfowl; fishing skills such as net mending and hanging, splitting fish, ice fishing; knowledge of edible plants.
- Teach Yup'ik language classes – speaking, understanding, and story telling and writing.
- Teach Yup'ik dance at the school or other community space.

