

2008 Rural Outreach Trip

Final Report

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MANILAQ REGION

Introduction

The 2008 Rural Outreach Trip, sponsored by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust), was the seventh trip since the program began in 1999. With this year's trip successfully completed, more than 230 visitors have travelled to 46 communities throughout Alaska.

The 2008 Rural Outreach Trip took place on May 13-15 in the Maniilaq Association service region in the Northwest Arctic Borough. This year's group of over 30 participants was comprised of state legislators, policymakers, behavioral health professionals and service providers. Participants visited the villages of Shungnak, Kiana, Kivalina, Noorvik, Point Hope and Noatak to share in their culture for a day, including an overnight stay. Activities involved meeting with village leaders in these different communities and discussing the challenges and opportunities of life in each place. Travel was also planned to the communities of Buckland and Kobuk. Due to seasonal flooding of the Buckland and Kobuk Rivers and the inability to safely land in these communities, travelers who were originally scheduled to travel to these villages were re-routed. Follow up interviews with these village leaders in Kobuk and Buckland will take place in late summer and early fall 2008. Information gathered from those interviews will be added to this report and circulated.

Those who travelled to this region returned with new insights and ideas on how to better serve beneficiaries of the Trust, and with a greater understanding of life in rural Alaska. Information from travelers was gathered in the form of group reports. On June 17th, 2008, the Trust hosted a debriefing meeting in its offices and via teleconference. From these activities comes the following "Final Report" on the lessons of the trip.

This report is organized into five sections: 1) This "Introduction" gives a brief overview of the purpose of the trip and how this document is organized. 2) "Summary of Findings by Village" provides detailed information gathered by participants organized into "Strengths & Opportunities", "Challenges", and "Possibilities" for addressing challenges in the villages when input was gathered. 3) "Overarching Themes" summarizes the salient issues that are prevalent among communities throughout the region. 4) "Ideas for Better Serving Communities" provides a summary of suggestions for better serving Alaska's rural communities as it concerns policy makers, funders, state agencies, behavioral health advocates, and the Trust. Ideas are separated into those that fall within the "Community and Regional" level as well as the larger "Statewide" possibilities. 5) The final section, "Trip Impressions" and "Suggestions", summarizes participants' feelings about the trip and lists their suggestions for improving the outcomes of subsequent years' trips.

Thank you again for your participation and enthusiasm as we work together with Alaska's rural communities.



Summary of Findings by Village

Kivalina

Travelers: Michael Howard, Steve Williams, Bill Streur, Tim Schuerch

Special thanks to all Kivalina residents who provided valuable information to trip visitors. The time and energy spent introducing visitors to your village are greatly appreciated.

Due to severe erosion and wind-driven wave damage, the City of Kivalina intends to relocate to a new site 2.5 miles away from where it is presently located. Relocation alternatives have been studied and a new site has been designed and engineered. The dominant theme of discussions with community members was the relocation effort. The cost of relocation is currently estimated at \$102 million – this number is steadily rising, due to increases in fuel costs which increases costs of all operations and projects in rural Alaska.

Strengths and Opportunities

- Residents hold both their village health aides and their clinic in high regard.
- Village elders respect the youth and see them as an asset for their community's future.



Challenges

- Residents are dealing with the relocation of the village due to erosion. Local residents Coleen Swan and Enoch Adams described for the relocation efforts for the village.
- Access to health care services through Maniilaq is viewed as sometimes inadequate. Two deaths have resulted recently in Kivalina due to a pathogen carried into the village by a wild dog. Leaders feel that these deaths could have been prevented, but that a lack of necessary referrals by doctors allowed time for the disease to worsen.
- Substance abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse are issues of great concern to village leaders.
- Kivalina sometimes feels a disconnection from other villages in the region due to their proximity to the Red Dog Mine and the resultant politics that consumed Kivalina's leaders in negotiating with the operation.
- Kivalina has no VPSO.
- Substance abuse, physical abuse, and domestic violence are all issues for the community. Because such things happen in the home, it is often hard to identify and to find ways to

effectively treat these social problems. Since there is no local law enforcement personnel to deal with these issues, they are compounded.

- Lack of clean running water has resulted in an increase in skin-related diseases.
- There is no access to the school facility when it is not in session.

Possibilities

- Kivalina could receive technical assistance with developing a project to begin educational forums addressing substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse issues.
- Provide large amounts of direct funding to make relocation a reality.

Noorvik

Travelers: Donny Olson, Andrea Doll, Kate Burkhart, Gwen Lee, Bill Herman

Thank you to all Noorvik residents who provided valuable information to trip visitors. The time and energy spent introducing visitors to your village is greatly appreciated.

Noorvik has a population of 700, one of the largest villages in the region. It has been growing quickly in the last few decades. Noorvik has both an IRA Council and City Council, and its lands are managed by NANA.



Strengths and Opportunities

- Clear, strong leadership, forward thinking, and leaders' involvement with the community to work towards a positive future.
- The Noorvik community works together cohesively when addressing problems.
- The vocational program in Kotzebue offers an opportunity for Noorvik residents. There is a good balance of subsistence and employment opportunities.
- Noorvik feels supported by the Northwest Arctic Borough. It is the primary employer for the village.
- Wind power could be a viable alternative power source.
- Four natural resources in the area include 1) the large caribou herd that migrates through the area every spring and fall, assuring them of food and providing an opportunity for some entrepreneurial efforts, 2) good fishing (ice fishing as well as summer fishing), 3) the large gravel quarry, which could be marketed to other villages in the area, and 4) an "artesian spring" near the gravel quarry.
- The school is open in the summer and provides youth with a place to recreate. The village has a history of statewide basketball championships. They would like to develop a Spirit Camp for youth in the summer months.
- Noorvik could be interested in becoming a hub for postal service in the region. They have generally better weather than other communities in the area. The airport is in a good location as well.
- Noorvik leaders would like to create regional "magnet schools" to be operated in conjunction with the Alaska Technical Center in Kotzebue and the University, as well as NANA and TekCominco. Students could receive post-secondary education related to healthcare, teaching, mining, and other natural resources careers.

Challenges

- Residents are concerned about an affordable supply of electricity. Wind power is not currently an option because the village is a member of the Alaska Village Energy Co-op, and wind power could not contribute the necessary quota to be a co-op member. (AVEC will only allow for less than 8% loss in revenue as a result of wind power generation.)



- Noorvik residents would like to enhance their existing airport.
- The community's heavy equipment is in disrepair. There is not local expertise to fix the equipment; Red Dog Mine has offered assistance. Parts and labor are still needed.
- The chlorination and sewer systems were broken, causing flooding and compromising the local supply of clean drinking water.
- Residents would like to have a safe house for women and children to come to.
- Bootlegging, alcohol and drug abuse are serious problems. Residents feel they have no ability to stop the bootlegging and drug trafficking, and no support from state troopers.
- Noorvik clinic is overcrowded. Plans are in place for a new expanded facility. Residents were encouraged to seek funding for behavioral health space.
- Some residents hesitate to accept jobs at the Red Dog Mine, because it would cause them to lose their HUD housing. Some families have had to move to Anchorage as a result.
- There is a high suicide rate.
- The cells in the village public safety facility are very old and dangerous places to house individuals.
- The multiple layers of government make local governance challenging. For example, Noorvik has developed a tribal court plan, but the court has not yet met. Council members are uncertain about the extent of their sovereignty.

Possibilities

- Offer more children's facilities.
- Need for flexibility in licensing for foster care program.
- Offer funding for a Youth Spirit Camp; possibly through Trust Small Projects funding.
- Work across divisions/departments to train VPSO's.
- The village could revise the clinic's plan to include behavioral health spaces.

Shungnak

Travelers: Anna Sappah, Diane Casto, Bob Roses, Kathy Fitzgerald

Thank you to all Shungnak residents who provided valuable information to trip visitors. The time and energy spent introducing visitors to your village is greatly appreciated.

The population of Shungnak is approximately 260. It is a second class city located within the Northwest Arctic Borough and is part of the NANA region and included in the Maniilaq service area. Most of the local residents participate in subsistence activities as well as some who work for the nearby Red Dog Mine. Many residents rely on assistance programs to help with housing and energy costs as well as food stamps. Shungnak is approximately 150 miles east of Kotzebue.

Trip visitors remarked on the fact that this village has a strong sense of community and residents are very connected with each other.

Strengths and Opportunities

- Excellent teachers who have stayed for 3 years or more.
- The clinic currently provides dental and primary care services.
- The clinic staff are very committed to providing the best services and caring for the community.
- Potential uses for National Guard armory building.
- Strong elders are willing to teach traditional skills.

Challenges

- There is a high rate of alcohol and drug use, and few services available to treat addiction. Many times, those who need services do not seek out available services such as the itinerant counselor.
- Troopers tend to be unresponsive about reports of bootlegging or drunkenness.
- There is no access to the local school during the summer months. There are no organized activities for the youth in the community. Unsupervised youth engage in vandalism, underage drinking and other risky activities.
- Many suicides are related to alcohol abuse, and the community feels powerless to solve the problems of alcohol and poverty. Recently the community was shaken by the suicide of a 13 year old.
- Few of the traditional craft skills are being passed down to the younger generation. Fewer of the young people are participating in subsistence activities as they move towards a cash lifestyle.
- Residents are concerned about high fuel and energy costs, as gasoline prices are nearly \$8.50 per gallon.
- Domestic violence linked to substance abuse in the community. Many injuries at the clinic are attributed to alcohol related violence.
- There are not enough jobs for young people.

- The community needs a better landfill, with proper containment, ways to dispose of waste appropriately and equipment for sorting trash.

Possibilities

- Use money from ROTC or DOD to renovate the Armory building and put it to use.
- Identify ways that people can work and not lose eligibility, or have wages high enough to compensate for the loss of assistance with things like heat and housing.
- Open the school during the summer so the kids can play basketball.
- Gain state money to assist in the development of a new landfill site.

Kiana

Travelers: Melissa Stone, Ginger Blaisdell , Kjersti Langnes, Erika Wolter, Jeff Jessee, Mike Chenault, Reggie Joule

Thank you to all Kiana residents who provided valuable information to trip visitors. The time and energy spent introducing visitors to your village are greatly appreciated.

Kiana has a very dedicated VPSO and administrative staff that are engaged in Trust activities. Innovative entrepreneurs in the village run three grocery stores, manage a bed and breakfast that serves as radio control tower, and run a cargo business. Their advanced and up-to-date clinic serves as the ER and dental clinic.

Strengths and Opportunities

- Leaders in the school serve lunch and deliver it to elders who are homebound.
- The views of nature and the wildlife in Kiana are impressive.
- Kiana residents are proud of their community, and subsistence style of living is strong.

Challenges

- Residents expressed concern about children lacking parental guidance. The school isn't open during the summer. Youth have a lack of coordinated activities.
- Some residents reported that they feel that the local work ethic is not strong in part because of government programs such as welfare, which decrease incentives to work or remain employed in the long term.
- As in Kotzebue and other villages in the region, Kiana is concerned about the high cost of fuel. Kiana's sewage has to be pumped uphill, which consumes a lot of energy. Also, the pipe that carries this water and sewer conflicts with a new subdivision to be developed.
- Kiana's housing authority is unwilling to build due to a lack of supportive infrastructure, but no infrastructure can be developed until there are houses.
- Some elders have expressed resistance to the interests of the younger generation such as dancing and cultural activities, because the Church prohibited the elders from taking part in these activities during their youth.

Possibilities

- Create incentives to value work and community participation.
- Work with DEC and City of Kiana to resolve the water/sewer problem.



Point Hope

Travelers: Pauly Swanson, Pat Jackson, Krag Johnson, Darell Hammel

Thank you to all Point Hope residents who provided valuable information to trip visitors. The time and energy spent introducing visitors to your village are greatly appreciated.

In Point Hope, the North Slope Borough is currently subsidizing the cost of water, sewer, and heating fuel to help keep residents' costs down. The prospect of offshore drilling is being discussed at the local level, and Shell Oil was in town during the outreach trip. The environmental impacts, effects on the subsistence lifestyle, as well as potential economic benefits for the community are all issues of local concern.

Strengths and Opportunities

- The community has a history of strong leadership.
- Subsistence activities and whaling are integral parts of the community. Residents are proud of their whaling traditions and of their coming together to process whales and participate in festivals. Artists work with baleen, ivory, whale bone.
- Extended family throughout the village provides a network of community and support.
- Point Hope benefits from past infrastructure improvements including a paved runway and streets, garbage pickup, a fenced and clean landfill site, a water/sewer system and well-built public and private buildings.
- The village clinic and school are anchor locations in the community.
- The community store is well-stocked and sells goods at lower prices than in Kotzebue.
- “The radiance of the land is matched only by the openheartedness of its people.”
- The Tribe and the local Village Corporation are working together to build a baseball diamond next summer. Also, the Inupiat teacher is interested in building a traditional sod house together with the youth in the community to promote traditions and culture.
- Many of the youth are involved in subsistence activities, and the school accommodates this in working around their school schedule.
- Tribal government representatives spoke of desire for a community wellness center and a community-wide acceptance of the Healthy Community Model.



Challenges

- Many buildings including the Senior Center, Washeteria, Search and Rescue, Community Center and Youth Center are boarded up and not utilized. The Washeteria is closed because many residents have acquired their own dryers, and it is expensive to operate. The Community Center and Youth Center are closed due to renovations and local politics.
- The high school drop out rate is 60%.
- There is a need for alternative housing options including transitional housing and support programs.
- There is a need for emergency funding for substance abuse treatment and detox programs for those in crisis.
- There are high incidences of suicide, domestic violence, sexual assault, and FASD related to substance abuse. Kids living in multi-generational houses witness a lot and are affected by 'post traumatic stress' disorder.
- Many people are unable to pass the drug tests required to get jobs at Maniilaq.
- Medical issues include diabetes, hypertension, and teen pregnancy.
- Privacy is always a concern in a small village, particularly in regards to reproductive health care and contraception availability to teens.
- There is a housing shortage; numerous newer houses in the community are not suitable to live in due to mold issues.
- The School Library needs new books.
- Bootlegging has become a way for families to support themselves.
- There have been negative consequences associated with sending kids outside for mental health treatment due to a lack of resources within the community.
- Regarding brain injury prevention, helmets are not being worn much at all. Elders should wear these as an example.
- Local politics are divisive between the Tribe, City, Village Corporation, Borough, School District. Point Hope has had three mayors in the past two years. This contributes to community instability.



Possibilities

- Offer funding for additional behavioral health providers in the community to serve this population so that kids are not sent away for treatment.
- Offer a "bridge" program to facilitate transition back into the community for returning kids or offenders.
- Fund more dental and eye care services on a regular basis.

Noatak

Travelers: Vivian Hamilton, Ramona Duby, Duane Mayes, & Jennifer Simmermeyer

Thank you to all Noatak residents who provided valuable information to trip visitors. The time and energy spent introducing visitors to your village are greatly appreciated.

Tribal elders and tribal council members met with the team of visitors for about two hours during which they outlined eight major issues of concern to the nearly 500 residents in their village. The top three issues were housing for elders, and a recreation center and a summer camp for youth. All eight issues are described below. In addition, community leaders offered a possible solution to several of these problems, by taking over a soon-to-be-vacated school building and turning it into a multi-purpose facility for housing, recreation and community use. Details are included below.

Strengths and Opportunities

- Residents are able to work well together as a community. They have taken a strong stance on alcohol and drugs.
- Residents exhibit a strong sense of pride in their community. For example, many of those who leave and go to college come back after they graduate.
- Community leaders would like to take over a soon-to-be-vacated school building and turn it into a multi-purpose facility for housing, recreation and community use.



Challenges

- The community wants to keep their elders in their home community as long as possible so they can continue to have their subsistence foods and remain close to their families, but the only housing available for village seniors is in Kotzebue.
- There are no after-school activities for youth in the community. The school gym is closed during the summer season. Leaders feel that supervised recreation programs would help prevent substance abuse, reduce depression, and encourage traditional values.
- Community members identified a need for a summer camp for their local youth that would teach traditional values and subsistence skills.
- The village currently has no after-school/summer programs for severely emotionally disturbed/disabled youths. There is also no transportation for people with disabilities in the village.
- Noatak residents acknowledged high teenage pregnancy rates. While leaders feel that it is the school's responsibility to teach "health" or "sex education", parents & elders felt

uncomfortable and unprepared to talk to youth about sex, pre-marital sex, moral-cultural expectations, and the responsibilities of parenthood.

- Tribal leaders are concerned that they have no full-time VPSO to assist with law enforcement in the community

Possibilities

- The community wants assistance in finding grants and other funding to help renovate the old school building. If they are able to upgrade the facility, they could then pursue funding and assistance to develop some of the programs outlined here
- Leave the gym open.
- Village leaders said need some land on which to build a summer camp and the supplies (tents, boats, etc) to make the camp viable.
- There used to be parenting classes offered that were crucial in helping young parents learn how to care for their children. This training has been discontinued due to lack of funding. Begin offering this program again.
- Leaders suggested an outdoor basketball court could be set up that could serve multiple functions. Members of the community could also use this hard surface to put on community events. Although they have a local school with an indoor gym, the community felt that this was an opportunity that warranted locating funds to make summer activities possible.
- Offer more senior services.
- Obtain sustainable financing and support for long range planning.



Buckland

To be completed upon interview with village leaders

Kobuk

To be completed upon interview with village leaders.

Overarching Themes

- Fuel costs are increasingly high, and residents are worried about fuel costs, their ability to live sustainably and practice their subsistence way of life.
- There is a lack of healthy activities for youth. There is generally no access to the schools during the summer months, so there are no organized activities for the youth in the community.
- Local residents would like school buildings to be more available to community for sports and other cultural activities.
- Alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence and suicide plague the communities in the Northwest Arctic Borough.
- There is a lack of ability to enforce local alcohol laws and difficulty in stopping the bootlegging.
- The Northwest Arctic has the highest rate of suicide in all of Alaska. Alaska's rate in turn is three times higher than that of national rate. Many of the suicides are related to alcohol abuse.
- There is a general disconnect between elders, their traditional values, and younger adults.
- Fewer of the young people are participating in subsistence activities as they move towards a cash lifestyle.
- Jobs are available, but people are afraid to lose eligibility for other support services.
- Economic stagnation and/or a lack of economic and employment opportunities.
- Many communities feel very little hope for future changes, and suffer from a lack of local resources that are willing to step forward to initiate change.
- Many communities are relatively small, and everyone is very closely connected. This means that many communities are able to pull together easily for subsistence and other activities. In the same way, however, privacy is a concern in small villages, particularly in regards to reproductive health care and contraception availability to teens, substance abuse treatment, and counseling services. Some people tend to not want to visit the clinic for counseling for fear of everyone else knowing about it, and go without services as a result. Law enforcement is also challenging.



Ideas for Better Serving the Communities

Community and Regional Level

- Provide school-based behavioral health counselors.
- Offer work incentives that enable people to work without losing existing eligibility for assistance programs.
- Engage organizations that can offer funding and ideas for alternative energy options, such as the Denali Commission and the Alaska Village Energy Co-op.
- In all areas of importance to rural Alaska, advocate to state and national government. This includes: energy issues, behavioral health, subsistence
- Take a strong stance against drugs and alcohol coming into the community.
- There is a great need to fund more VPSO positions and to find individuals to fill these positions.
- Increase coordination between the city councils, local native corporations, and IRA councils. Regional entities could provide support such as grant writers, land, funding, and partnerships.
- Provide leadership training programs.
- Open the local schools for community activities and training, especially for youth.
- Due to privacy concerns related to providing counseling and treatment services as well as maintaining effective VPSO positions, hire positions from outside the communities, or offer support for travel to other communities to receive treatment and counseling.
- Facilitate talking circles, 12-step support programs, by people in recovery, in communities.
- Create a position for an individual to take the lead on a recovery model and organize a program to focus on young child intervention to prevent ongoing substance abuse/domestic violence.
- “Initiatives from within the communities will be key to their successes. Funding alone cannot solve local problems.” - Trip Participant



Ideas for Better Serving Communities

State Level

- Provide direct financial support to assist the villages in addressing their needs. The amount of regulations and overlapping jurisdictions hinders the effectiveness of developing programs and gaining funding for them while negotiating the maze of government.
- “I believe the real assistance is people on the local level having the freedom to make decisions.” –Trip Participant
- Subscribe to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation winterization program for both low and otherwise income families.
- Create an economic stimulus program to subsidize fuel costs.
- Provide more funding for substance abuse recovery, treatment and transitional services
- Provide planning, training, management, legal assistance, and financial support and education for community members and to IRAs/Cities so they can apply for cultural and training grants.
- Focus resources on intervention programs to help break substance abuse cycle.
- Fund more after-school and summer activities for youth, and provide more sports areas and playground equipment.
- Grants need to be for longer than one year period to ease the burden of planning, data collection, and administration. Grant writing process needs to be updated
- Allow for more flexibility with grants. Performance measures requirements force providers to spend more time on collecting data than with clients.
- Electronic health records systems should be implemented.



Trip Impressions

- “A positive outcome for me was meeting other Alaskans who work in related fields from across the state. I greatly appreciate the efforts of the Trust to make the trip happen and feel enriched for having been able to participate.”
- “The introduction Reggie and Linda gave was very inspiring and insightful. Having regional leaders conduct this part of the program was most beneficial and should be considered for future trips.”
- “The residents act as though they would like to see a change, but there is little desire for anyone to take the lead. A very repetitive and cyclical lifestyle.”
- “Very illuminating in terms of getting to know people we traveled with.”
- “Because I got engaged in a clinical situation, I saw upfront how the folks live and the particular challenges working in the bush (phone contact; transportation out for client; no one to delegate to; no one to brainstorm with; the burden of decision-making).”
- “A quick tour to see Kotzebue’s windmills at work would be valuable since energy issues are impacting virtually every sector of our state. Just a bit of a wish list on my part.”
- “Dinner at the senior center was great! We all loved the elder whose table we shared. His smile is ingrained in my memory, along with Pauly’s first taste of muktuk.”

Suggestions

- Offer more information about the AMHTA to the community leaders and members, as the AMHTA was an unknown entity to most people.
- Have an AMHTA staff person accompany every group to help connect the mission of the outreach trip and AMHTA.
- Consider scheduling a return visit to show commitment and continuity in effort. (This was recommended by a village resident.) Create a way to follow up directly with all wanting contact.
- We would have all benefited from pre-planning for a community meeting.
- Create a brochure size card with contacts and information about programs and resources, and about how the AMHTA can assist the community and the beneficiary groups. Everyone wanted to know who we were and what we wanted.
- Have group participants on future trips volunteer to talk with junior high/high school students about our own career paths and opportunities in today’s global economy.
- We brought too much food, as we were graciously fed local fare at nearly every meal. Bring less food next time