

PROGRAM EVALUATION  
ROSE URBAN RURAL  
EXCHANGE  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREPARED FOR  
ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and Methods**

The Alaska Humanities Forum contracted with the Institute of Social and Economic to evaluate how well the forum's Rose Urban Rural Exchange achieved its purpose in 2002, the second year of the program. ISER also evaluated the first year.<sup>1</sup> The Rose Urban Rural Exchange is made possible by a partnership between the Alaska Humanities Forum and the Alaska Native Heritage Center. It's intended to build understanding and a state-wide sense of community by bringing urban students to rural Alaska, and rural students to urban Alaska, to learn about each other's cultures. It will continue through 2004.

About 20 urban and 20 rural students participated in the second year of the program—twice as in the first year. Urban students traveled from Anchorage to 11 villages in southwest and central Alaska—Shungnak, Kiana, Old Harbor, Ruby, King Cove, Alakunuk, Nanwalek, Kaltag, Pilot Station, Quinhagak, and Scammon Bay (see map). Rural students from these same villages traveled to Anchorage. In most cases, parents of students who traveled from Anchorage hosted the visiting rural students, and vice-versa. Parents also typically attended orientation sessions.

To do the evaluation, we collected a wide variety of data from: (1) observations of orientation sessions and participants' post-visit presentations; (2) interviews with participants, parents, and host families (primarily parents of participants); (3) surveys of participants and parents; (4) surveys of how participants' knowledge about urban and rural Alaska changed; and (5) focus groups with urban parents and urban host families.

We wanted to learn how the program changed participants' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions about the areas they visited and about their own home areas; how much they learned about the areas they visited; and how students and their parents rated the content, format, and effectiveness of the orientation sessions.

### **Changes in the Operation and Format of the Rose Urban Rural Exchange in Year 2**

#### **Changes in Program Operation**

A staff person who had been responsible for recruitment of rural students and rural host families in the first year of the exchange program left the Alaska Humanities Forum and was replaced with a temporary staff person. That change resulted in a slight delay in the start of the program. Also, the Alaska Native Heritage Center hired a new person to coordinate the student orientation program—which meant the loss of knowledge gained in the first year of the program.

The center also contracted with the Babiche Cultural Exchange, a non-profit organization specializing in bringing Native communities together through cultural exchange. Babiche Cultural Exchange supports Native youth and their communities. Babiche coordinated and provided the orientation for rural students as well as helping the urban students develop presentations describing what they learned from the exchange.

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<sup>1</sup> In its first year the program was called the Urban/Rural Youth Program.

Rose Urban Rural Youth Exchange Rural Communities 2002



### **Changes in Program Format**

Rural students came to the Anchorage area first this year, visiting for 18 days in the spring. The urban students went to the rural areas for 21 days during the summer. Their visits were longer, because they got the opportunity to participate in various cultural or spirit camps sponsored by rural communities and Alaska Native organizations.

Rural student orientation was a two-day retreat in Anchorage just before they started their home visits with urban families. Last year's rural student orientation consisted of two days of meetings at the Alaska Native Heritage Center during the students' first week-end in Anchorage.

### **Changes in Attitudes, Opinions, and Knowledge**

We measured changes on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing the least knowledge, lowest opinion, or lowest frequency and 5 representing the highest on all measures.

#### **Rural Students and Their Parents**

We collected data from 20 students and 27 parents before the visits. After the visits, we collected data from 17 students and 27 parents.

- Rural students said chances to improve their education were most important in their decision to participate in the exchange. The three most important reasons they cited were hoping to get better grades; improving their chances of getting into better colleges; and learning about subjects not offered in their home schools.
- After their visits, one of the ways rural students said they would learn more about urban Alaska would be taking classes—showing that they continued to think about how the program could improve their education. Other top methods they cited after their visits were talking to friends or relatives, talking to people who live in urban Alaska, and reading magazine or newspapers about urban Alaska.
- When in urban Alaska, rural students found their free-time activities changed, with the biggest changes being less participation in sports; in hobbies or craft work; and in activities such as fishing, hunting, gathering firewood, and preserving food for storage.
- Rural students and their parents said their perceived knowledge of urban Alaska increased after the exchange—as was also true last year. Rural students perceived knowledge of urban Alaska rose from 2.19 before the visit to 2.86 after, an increase of .67. Their parents' knowledge went from 2.45 to 2.82—an increase of .37. ( 1=none; 5=extensive knowledge)
- Perceived knowledge of rural Alaska also increased among rural students and their parents, but less among the parents. Rural students' perceived knowledge of rural Alaska went from 3.34 to 3.78, an average increase of .43, compared to the change among parents, from 3.46 to 3.54—an increase of .08.

- Opinions about urban Alaska among rural students and parents also improved somewhat after the exchange visits, increasing from 3.24 to 3.48 among students (a .24 increase) and 3.3 to 3.57 among parents (a .22 increase). (1=highly negative; 5=highly positive)
- Rural students also had higher opinions of rural Alaska after their urban visits, increasing from 3.52 to 3.94, an average increase of .41. Their parents' opinions of rural areas were basically unchanged (3.69 to 3.73).
- By far the greatest change in attitudes about current issues was the increase in rural parents' commitment to recognition of tribal authority. Before their children's visits to urban Alaska, rural parents agreement with recognition of tribal authority stood at 3.8 and increased to 4.4 after the visits—an increase of .6. (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly disagree) Rural parents offered many suggestions about how Alaska could accommodate different cultures and people with different values. Detailed responses are included in the body of this report.
- When asked who most influenced their overall experience in urban Alaska, rural students most often cited other rural people like elders and family members. We were surprised by these responses, but it's possible that the students interpreted the question to mean who had influenced their decisions to visit urban Alaska.

Rural students said that differences in teaching and learning methods in urban and rural schools presented the most problems or difficulties during the exchange. However, few provided an explanation as to why these differences posed such problems. One student did comment:

*In urban schools, you have a better chance at getting a good education. In the village, we are far behind in some subjects compared to urban students. For example, I am in pre-algebra at home and here everyone in my grade was at a higher level of math.*

Looking back over the entire Rose Urban Rural Exchange experience, rural students and their parents felt they had been most affected by having a chance to get to know urban people and learn more about their way of life.

## Urban Students and Their Parents

We collected data from 20 students and 23 parents before the visits. We collected data from 18 students and 17 parents after the visits.

- Urban students ranked getting another perspective on urban Alaska as the most important reason for participating in the exchange, followed closely by increasing their understanding of rural communities. The third most important reason they cited was the opportunity to live or make friends in rural Alaska.
- After their visits to rural Alaska, urban students were more likely to say they would learn about rural Alaska by reading newspapers or magazine articles *from* rural Alaska, by talking to their friends or relatives about rural Alaska, by talking to fellow students or teachers about rural Alaska, and by talking with people who live in rural Alaska.
- Urban students said the biggest changes in their free-time activities while they were in rural Alaska were less time performing in music and arts, going to museums, theater, concerts, and movies; and more time participating in activities such as fishing, hunting, gathering firewood, and preserving food for storage.
- Urban students' knowledge about urban Alaska increased from 3.7 to 3.95 (up .26), while knowledge among parents was almost unchanged—from 4.06 to 4.08. (1=none; 5=extensive knowledge)
- Knowledge about rural Alaska among urban students increased from 2.07 before the exchange to 3.46—a jump of 1.4. Among urban parents, knowledge increased from 2.4 to 2.94, about .55.
- Urban students' opinions of urban Alaska increased from 3.74 to 3.97 ( up .23), while urban parents opinions slightly worsened, from 3.82 to 3.76 (down .060). (1=highly negative; 5=highly positive)
- The opposite was true in opinions about rural Alaska, with urban students' opinion of rural Alaska dropping from 3.52 to 3.4 and their parent's opinion increasing from 3.0 to 3.38.
- The greatest change in pre- and post-visit opinions about current events was on the question of whether Alaskans should be allowed to vote on amending the constitution to allow a subsistence preference for rural residents. Agreement among urban parents about whether Alaskans should vote on this issued dropped from 2.5 to 2.2 (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree)) Urban parents offered several comments on how Alaska could accommodate people with different cultures and values. These can be found in the body of the report.

- Urban students said that people from rural Alaska—such as elders, host families, host parents, friends they made, and other adults—were important to their exchange experience.
- Overall, the problem urban students cited most often was that they did not have enough time for travel during their exchange visits. (Other problems cited less often are noted in the body of the report.)
- When thinking back over the entire Rose Urban Rural Exchange experience, urban parents and students said what affected them most was getting the chance to get to know rural people and learn about their way of life.

### **Survey of Knowledge**

We asked students and their parents a series of questions on their knowledge about a number of things before and after the exchange visits. We did a similar survey of knowledge last year but revised it for this second year. We used one single test for all four respondent groups (urban and rural students and parents), while last year we used different tests for rural and for urban.

The orientation curriculum was revised during the second year, to include broader urban/rural issues and to be less specific to any particular Alaska Native group—so we also changed the survey of knowledge. We broadened the questions to reflect more general Alaska Native perspectives and to target urban/rural issues about subsistence, education, health and safety, and economics.

All the respondent groups did better on the post-visit test than on the pre-visit test, administered before the orientation session. The test is more a measure of concepts reviewed in the orientation session than of what participants learned from the entire exchange. Our later interviews indicated that participants learned a lot that wasn't captured in the survey of knowledge.

### **Program Evaluation**

#### **Urban Students' Comments**

- Comments about orientation were at the extremes: most students either said none of it was helpful or that it was very helpful. Some students missed sessions, others remember little of what was offered, and still others felt it focused on differences between urban people and Yupik and the people in the community the student visited were not Yupik. On the other hand, some students said they gained useful information on cultural differences, elders, food, and nature. Those students said orientation allowed time for them to learn about rural Alaska and to get to know the other students.

- Almost all the students felt their host families in the villages made them feel like part of the family. The host parents and siblings were very friendly and included them in many activities. One host family mostly spoke Yupik, so the exchange student sometimes felt left out but also noted that the family was very nice and really welcoming. Also, one student did not really have a host family and ended up in a lodge for most of his visit. That student didn't make any special bonds, but was able to draw on the resources of the entire lodge staff during the visit.
- Urban students visited during the summer, so they had the opportunity to participate in many activities: fishing (catching, cleaning, and cutting fish; some commercial fishing, soaking fish and braiding herring); four wheeling; berry picking; swimming; boating; cooking (defeathering a ptarmigan, making aquataq, or Eskimo ice cream); playing cards, playing basketball; collecting plants, working in the local store; and attending tribal council meetings. A number of students also mentioned watching television.
- All the urban students made friends during their village stays. Some have talked to their friends over the telephone since their visits. Having friends made them feel more comfortable. Some commented that these friendships helped them to see how similar people in urban and rural Alaska are. The urban students also established friendships among themselves, which also helped make the visits fun.
- The Alaska Humanities Forum staff was very helpful during the village stays, according to the urban students. They didn't mention any specific organizations in the communities that provided support. Host families provided support.
- The urban students wrote in great detail about what they learned about their host community and rural Alaska, including family life, rural economics, culture, and hospitality toward visitors. Several mentioned the importance of subsistence. Detailed comments of the students are included in the report.
- Several urban students said they were surprised by the "urbanity" of life in the villages. It appears that the program orientation had prepared them to find all rural families relying on traditional food sources and living "traditional" hunting and gathering lives. The reality is, of course, much more mixed: the social and lifestyle variations within rural villages are probably as great as the variations between rural and urban communities.

### **Urban Parents' Comments**

- Parents had few comments about the orientation. Some did not attend. Those who did comment generally said the orientation sessions they attended were effective or prepared them fairly well to be host families. They described the sessions as mostly responsive to their concerns.
- Parents said they learned a variety of things about the communities their children visited, including the complexity of the subsistence issue; the size of rural communities; use of honey buckets; westernized dress; rural jobs; rural governance systems; and how people relate to one another.
- More than half the responding parents said they had not formed any new opinions of rural Alaska as a result of their child's participation in the exchange program. Those that had formed opinions mentioned increased awareness about rural issues; that rural communities are more progressive than they had thought; that rural young people need more support; that rural people are nice and hospitable; and that one should not generalize about rural Alaska.
- When urban parents were asked to share their thoughts on what they had learned from their children's village visits, most talked about what their children had learned. They said the visits had broadened the children's knowledge and experience. They had learned what it was like to cope in a different culture; that rural Alaskans are much more connected to the land; that the lifestyle is more laid back. But they also observed that there is not enough for the young people to do in rural communities and that suicide, alcohol, and drugs continue to be a problem. When specifically asked what they had learned themselves, many urban parents answered that did not feel changed.
- Most urban parents felt the program did meet their expectations. Detailed responses about what they will remember and value most from their children's exchange experience are included in the body of this report.

### **Rural Students' Comments**

- Orientation sessions provided an opportunity for rural students to get ready to be in the city and with urban families. They also learned how to put a presentation together. At orientation they met and made friends with other rural students. Most felt that all the sessions were helpful, but one student thought the hospital visit could have been longer and another thought that the session on safety in the city the least effective.
- Rural students reported that urban host families were cordial and treated the students as family members; they felt they had developed relationships with host family members. In some instances, rural students mentioned that host mothers or siblings were especially nice to them and spent time with them.

- Many the rural students said they had been homesick early in their visit, and it appears some called home to talk about it. Some discussed how they had stuck it out, and in most cases it got better.
- The most common activities for students visiting Anchorage were attending school, going shopping, and eating dinner with their host families. Other activities included skating, watching movies and videos, going to concerts, taking trips to Seward, going horseback riding, working out at athletic clubs, and visiting the zoo.
- The Alaska Humanities Forum staff were very helpful and informative, rural students said, being very responsive to questions or situations.
- Both parents and students reported learning about the wide variety of choices of classes available in the urban schools and finding that the curriculum is more challenging than in rural schools.
- Both rural students and parents observed that urban people were always very busy, with a lot of things on their schedules. They noted how early urban families had to get up to go to school and work in Anchorage.
- Only two of the rural students said they had not developed any new opinions about Anchorage, but both had previously visited or lived in Anchorage or other urban areas.

### **Rural Parents' Comments**

- Orientation for rural parents was via teleconference and included information on what visiting students could expect and about hosting urban students. Most rural parents felt the orientation sessions were informative, helpful, and responsive to their concerns. Many mentioned that the written materials were especially useful in helping them learn about the program, and comments including words like helpful, great, and good were common.
- Rural parents overall were very pleased and happy with their children's host families in Anchorage. They reported that the urban families took care of and treated the rural children well during the home stays.
- Both parents and students reported learning about the wide variety of choices of classes available in the urban schools and finding that the curriculum is more challenging than in rural schools.
- As with rural students, rural parents observed that urban people always had very full schedules, and that they had to get up early to go to school and work. Parents also learned about the many additional activities available to students in Anchorage.

- Only a few rural parents said they had not developed any new opinions or views about urban Alaska as a result of the exchange program.
- Rural parents said their children had learned a variety of things from their urban visits. The children had more ability to handle new situations and deal with homesickness (good experience to have before going away to a city to live or attend college), as well as more experience with urban life large high schools. Some saw a new maturity in their children and willingness to accept more responsibilities.
- A little over half of the rural parent had comments about new opinions they had formed as a result of their children's participation the program. Some said that education was better in the city. They also observed that there are people in the urban area who care about rural Alaska. Overall they felt the students had a good experience in urban Alaska, making friends and gaining new knowledge.

### **Focus Groups**

ISER conducts pre- and post-visit focus groups with urban parents, to identify gaps or missing information and concerns of urban parents. Concerns raised in the pre-visit focus group are addressed in the orientation session just before urban students go to the villages. The post-visit focus group helps the program administrators find out if parents' got the information they asked for and to inform the program staff of other things that came up during the student exchange. Summaries of discussions in these groups are in the body of the report.

This year, urban host families made several call to the Alaska Humanities Forum staff for help while the rural students were visiting. As a result, the forum asked that in addition to the pre- and post-visit focus groups for parents, ISER hold a focus group for urban host families, to get feedback about their experiences. In that focus group, urban host families talked about their experiences with visiting rural students, and by consensus suggested that the Alaska Humanities Forum provide additional information to urban host families:

- Develop guidelines for rural students who want to visit with relatives and friends while in the Anchorage area
- Clarify the purpose of the Rose Urban Rural Exchange with the rural student participants
- Provide more information on rural students' past experiences in urban Alaska
- Develop guidelines for host families to use when talking with rural students about spending travel money, acquiring more travel funds, and going shopping
- Describe the urban host family's role in helping rural students with homework
- Provide guidance and hints on how to make the school experience more enjoyable and appropriate for the rural students
- Develop guidelines for appropriate dress for students on exchange visits

- Clarify with the urban host families and the rural students the basic program rules—such as no overnight visits away from host families
- Clarifying how the rural students' visit might affect the urban students' homework schedule
- Make sure the urban host parents know what social events planned for the urban and rural students during the urban exchange
- Provide a separate urban host family orientation.
- Provide a list of telephone numbers and addresses of all the urban host families, so when rural students are visiting they can plan some activities together

Other issues raised at the host family focus group included student hygiene, transportation, the amount of flexibility and time parents need in their schedule during the rural student exchange, and additional information urban host families would like about the rural students prior to their visits.

## **Host Families**

After the exchange visits, ISER interviewed rural and the urban host families by phone, to learn about their experiences, hear how the families felt the program worked, and record ideas about how it could be improved.

### **Rural Host Family Comments**

- Most host families felt the reading materials provided and the teleconference were informative. The materials explained the program, addressed safety issues, and talked about planning activities for visiting urban students. Families that had short notice about becoming host families (that is, they were recruited at the last moment) said they did not receive much orientation. Some families said that the essays written by urban students, describing what they wanted to do, were helpful. Most felt that the orientation prepared them for their participation in the exchange, but one family would have liked a face-to-face to meeting with program staff and another would have liked to talk with other host families.
- Some families commented that it took a few days for the urban students to fit into the family, but most families developed relationships with the visiting students. overall, the urban students tried to fit in and adapted easily.

- Most host families felt the program was a worthwhile experience. Many said other community members offered to involve urban students in activities like boating, fishing, and beading. They felt it was good for the urban students to come out and see the rural lifestyle. Rural host families felt that the more exposure urban residents have to rural Alaska, the better they will be able to understand the rural way of life. The rural host families felt that this type of program demonstrates that you really get to know something only by experiencing it. Overall, they thought the exchange program was a learning experience for both the student and the host family. Rural host families said they would like to see the program continue.

### **Urban Host Family Comments**

We conducted interviews with urban host families in two phases this year. While the rural students were visiting, some urban host families needed more in-depth support than others; the Alaska Humanities Forum staff had several telephone conversations with these host parents and the rural students and did some counseling sessions with rural students and host families in their homes.

Those host families were the first ones ISER asked to complete the urban host family interview. They provided very detailed daily accounts of their experiences, including insights into what situations occurred, what the host families' reactions were, and how they worked through any problems. They had many observations on what the program did well and how it needs to improve. Several host families commented on the recruitment and screening process for the rural exchange students. They also encouraged having an orientation for the rural students on the mission and expectations of the program, before the students come to Anchorage.

### **Organization of Report**

The main body of this report provides information in both table and narrative form. Most of the qualitative information consists of verbatim quotes from students and parents.