



## Emmonak Juveniles and the Elders' Group

Since 1999, through an arrangement with the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice, the Emmonak Elders' Group Project has handled certain non-felony juvenile cases in the village. The project permits youths to remain within the community while their offenses are adjudicated through the body of elders – thus avoiding formal justice system processing which usually entails removal from the village. Youths are held accountable within the context of the local community and its traditions.

The Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage conducted an initial evaluation of the program in early 2001, after the court had been in operation for approximately a year and a half. The evaluation comprised a review of program files, direct observations of meetings, discussions with community residents and interviews with parents and juveniles. It primarily focused on project implementation: the process involved in establishing the court, its procedures and the necessary working relationships among institutions and individual participants.

### Program Background

Emmonak, which lies at the mouth of the Yukon, close to the Bering Sea, has a population of about 800, most Yup'ik Eskimo. The village economy depends heavily on commercial fishing supplemented by

subsistence activities. The juvenile population is proportionately large, with over 200 children enrolled in the local school system.

Concern about the problems and activities of this juvenile population led the Emmonak Tribal Council to design a program that would involve the elders in adjudicating juvenile misbehavior. A federal Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant (JAIBG) channeled through the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) funded the program.

The Emmonak Elders' Group was officially established in 1997 in response to increasing social problems in the village. Although the elders had always been integral to the cultural and social fabric of Emmonak, they began to exert greater influence in community decisions and discussions after a formal, tribally recognized council

was established. The goal of the Elders' Group has been to pass down traditional knowledge and wisdom to a new generation. They have formally addressed such community problems as domestic violence by educating families and providing culturally based guidelines. Becoming involved with troubled youth was a logical step. The problems of youth became increasingly obvious to the community after several suicides oc-

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### HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Statistics on statewide traffic fatalities, including alcohol-related fatalities, are presented (page 2).

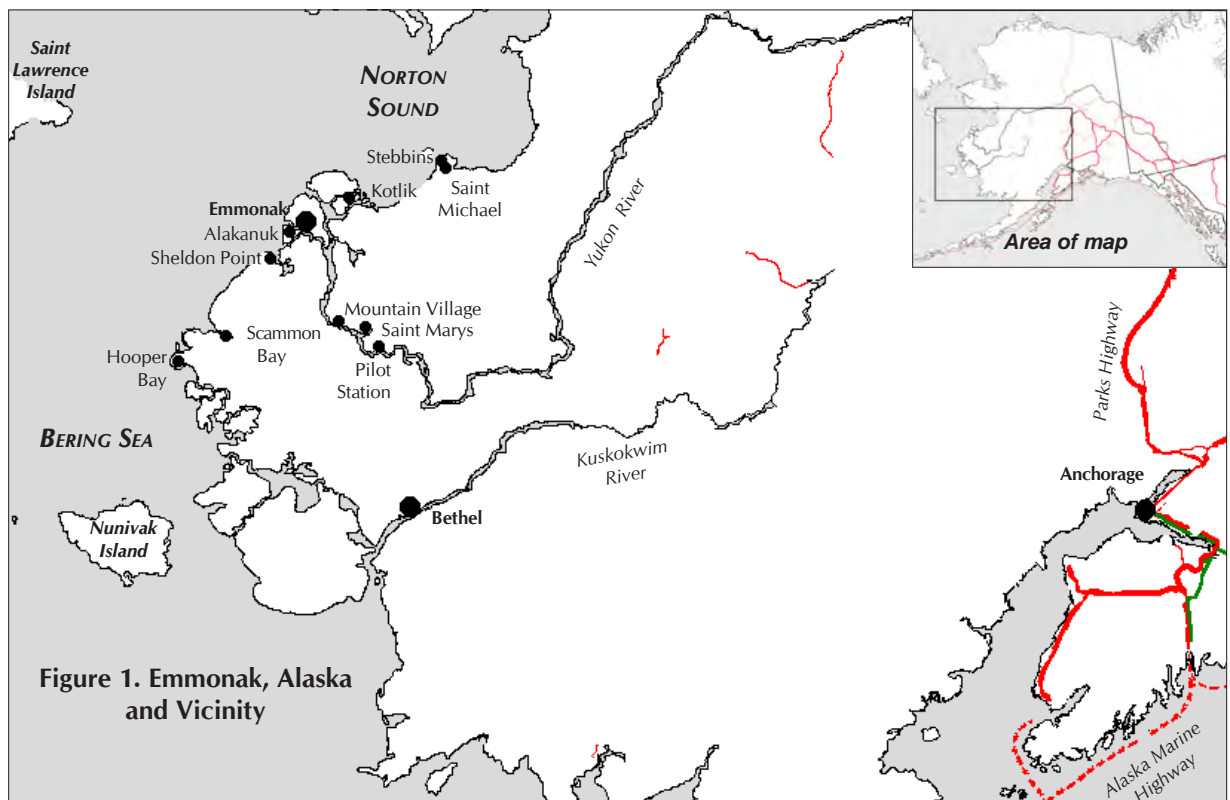


Figure 1. Emmonak, Alaska and Vicinity

# Statistics on Alaska Traffic Fatalities

G. Blair McCune

In the last year, a series of terrible alcohol-related traffic fatalities has again focused legislative and public attention on the DWI issue. In light of recent and pending DWI legislation, it is important to ask where Alaska stands, statistically, with regard to alcohol-related traffic fatalities.

Numbers compiled by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the U.S. Department of Transportation provide a somewhat surprising answer to this question. NHTSA statistics show a marked decrease in the total number of traffic fatalities in general in Alaska since 1975, while over the same period, Alaska's population increased significantly. There has also been a notable decrease in the percentage of fatal traffic accidents with anyone showing a high blood alcohol level.

## Alaska Traffic Fatalities 1975-1999

According to the NHTSA, in 1999 the total number of traffic fatalities in Alaska was 76. This was 12.26 fatalities per 100,000 of population. The national average was 15.26 fatalities per 100,000 of population.

Although the number of fatalities rose from 70 in 1998 to 76 in 1999, the overall trend over the last quarter century has been markedly downward. There were 112 fa-

talities in 1975, 88 in 1980, 127 in 1985, 98 in 1990, 70 in 1998, and 76 in 1999—a 32 percent decline between 1975 and 1999. Over the same period Alaska's population increased from 384,100 to 622,000.

NHTSA figures also show a decrease in the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities between 1982 and 1999 in Alaska.

In 1982 there were 105 total traffic fatalities, 57 involving alcohol—i.e., someone in the crash tested positive for alcohol. Of these, 54 involved high blood alcohol levels—i.e., someone in the crash tested over .10.) Thus, in 1982, 55 percent of the total fatalities in Alaska were alcohol-related, and 52 percent involved high blood alcohol levels.

In 1999, there were 76 total traffic fatalities, 40 involving some alcohol and 32 involving high blood alcohol levels. Thus, 53 percent of the 1999 fatalities were alcohol-related and 43 percent involved high levels.

In summary, the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities decreased by 27 per-

**Table 1. Traffic Fatalities in Alaska and the U.S., 1975-1999**

	Alaska		U.S. nationwide	
	Number of fatalities	Fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled	Number of fatalities	Fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled
1975	112	4.4	44,525	3.4
1980	88	3.3	51,091	3.3
1985	127	3.2	43,825	2.5
1990	98	2.5	44,599	2.1
1998	70	1.6	41,501	1.6
1999	76	1.7	41,611	1.5

Source of data: "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Traffic Data," National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

cent between 1982 and 1999. The percentage of the fatalities that involved at least some alcohol decreased slightly (55% in 1982 versus 53% in 1999), but the percentage that involved high blood alcohol levels decreased more significantly (52% in 1982 versus 43% in 1999).

## Alaska Drivers in Fatal Crashes With Blood Alcohol Levels

The statistics in the preceding section relate to any alcohol involvement, including that shown by non-occupants of the vehicle such as pedestrians. NHTSA also has statistics on only the drivers of the vehicles. These statistics are important because they concern DWI drivers—the focus of recent attention.

In 1982, a total of 143 drivers were involved in fatal crashes, with 60 of these drivers testing positive for some level of alcohol. Fifty-one drivers demonstrated high blood alcohol levels (over .10). Hence, 42 percent of the drivers in fatal crashes had some level of blood alcohol, and 36 percent showed a high level.

In 1999, a total of 101 drivers were involved in fatal crashes: 36 (36%) of these drivers had some level of blood alcohol and 27 (27%) had high levels.

These statistics show that 40 percent fewer drivers involved in fatal crashes tested positive for some blood alcohol in 1999 than in 1982 (60 in 1982 versus 36 in 1999) and 47 percent fewer had high alcohol levels (51 in 1982 versus 27 in 1999). Also, the percentage of drivers indicating at least some alcohol decreased from 42 percent in 1982 to 36 percent in 1999, and the percentage of drivers with high levels decreased from 36 percent in 1982 to 27 percent in 1999.

Therefore, the number of drivers both with some level of blood alcohol and with high levels decreased significantly in Alaska.

**Table 2. Alaska Traffic Fatalities by Highest Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) in the Crash, 1982 and 1999**

	1982		1999	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No alcohol (BAC = 0.00 g/dl)	48	45.7 %	36	47.4 %
Any alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.01 g/dl)	57	54.3 %	40	52.6 %
Low alcohol (BAC = 0.01-0.09 g/dl)	3	2.9	8	10.5
High alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.10 g/dl)	54	51.4	32	42.1
<b>Total fatalities</b>	<b>105</b>		<b>76</b>	

Source of data: "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Alcohol Estimates," National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

**Table 3. Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes in Alaska by Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of the Driver, 1982 and 1999**

	1982		1999	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No alcohol (BAC = 0.00 g/dl)	83	58.0 %	65	64.4 %
Any alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.01 g/dl)	60	42.0 %	36	35.6 %
Low alcohol (BAC = 0.01-0.09 g/dl)	9	6.3	9	8.9
High alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.10 g/dl)	51	35.7	27	26.7
<b>Total drivers involved</b>	<b>143</b>		<b>101</b>	

Source of data: "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Alcohol Estimates," National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

The percentages of these drivers as they relate to all drivers involved in fatal accidents also decreased. Again, this decrease is all the more significant because the population of the state increased by 25 percent during the same period.

### National Figures in Comparison with Alaska

NHSTA data show that Alaska had 76 fatal accidents in 1999. This was the second lowest number in the nation. (The District of Columbia showed the lowest.) Alaska's rate of fatalities was significantly lower than the national averages in terms of population, licensed drivers, and registered vehicles. It was slightly higher in terms of vehicle miles traveled.

Between 1989 and 1999 the number of fatal accidents in Alaska that were alcohol-related decreased by 5 percent, and the number of fatal accidents with high levels of blood alcohol decreased by 9 percent, while nationally there were decreases of 22 percent in fatalities with some alcohol and 23 percent in those with high levels of blood alcohol.

The percentage of drivers involved in fatal crashes Alaska with high levels of blood alcohol decreased at a lower rate than the national average. (Alaska started at 36% in 1982 and went down to 27% in 1999, versus

**Table 4. Alcohol Involvement in Fatal Traffic Crashes in the U.S., 1989 and 1999**

Percentage of fatalities by highest BAC in the crash.

	1989	1999	Percent change
<b>Any alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.01 g/dl)</b>			
Alaska	56 %	53 %	-5 %
U.S. nationwide	49	38 %	-22 %
<b>High alcohol (BAC ≥ 0.10 g/dl)</b>			
Alaska	47 %	43 %	-9 %
U.S. nationwide	39	30	-23

*Source of data: "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Traffic Data," National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*

the national averages—30% in 1982 down to 17% in 1999.) However, this statistic should be viewed in conjunction with the marked decrease in overall traffic fatalities.

### Conclusion

It appears that efforts in Alaska to stop traffic fatalities in general and DWI fatalities in particular have had positive results, since both the actual numbers and the percentages have decreased at the same time the population has grown substantially.

*Figures in the preceding article were assembled from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Traffic Data" and "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Alcohol Estimates." G. Blair McCune is an attorney and an adjunct professor with the Justice Center.*

## Alaska Traffic Fatalities

Some highlights of the NHTSA statistics for Alaska are:

- Alaska has had a significant decrease in the number of traffic fatalities. There were 32 percent fewer traffic fatalities in 1999 than in 1975. This decrease is especially noteworthy in light of the 38 percent increase in the Alaska's population over the same period.
- Alaska's overall decrease in traffic fatalities is higher than the national average. Between 1975 and 1999, the Alaska decrease was 32 percent while the decrease nationwide was 7 percent.
- The percentage of traffic fatalities in Alaska with anyone involved showing a high level of alcohol (over .10) also decreased—from 52 percent in 1982 to 43 percent in 1999.
- The percentage of traffic fatalities in which the drivers had high alcohol levels decreased as well—from 36 percent in 1982 to 27 percent in 1999.
- The percentage of drivers involved in fatal crashes with high levels of alcohol decreased at a lower rate in Alaska than in the nation as a whole. Alaska decreased from 36 percent in 1982 to 27 percent in 1999. The national average was 30 percent in 1982, down to 17 percent in 1999.

*These statistics were compiled from two NHTSA reports: "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Alcohol Estimates" and "Traffic Safety Facts 1999: State Traffic Data." These reports are available on-line at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).*

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curred in the mid-1990s. During the same period delinquent behavior was increasing.

This project proposed two major goals of equal importance. The first was to reduce juvenile crime and recidivism. This was both a goal with individual youths and a safety and health goal for the community as a whole. It encompassed issues such as accountability, sentencing, and local solutions to problems of youth crime. The second, but no less important, goal was to increase the skills, knowledge and control of local Native entities in administering solutions to village issues. This included increasing collaboration between state and local/tribal entities as well as restoring cultural relevance to the way in which youth are educated and guided toward positive behavior. Of primary importance here was incorporating Yup'ik traditional values and beliefs into the systems that serve youth, including the schools and, in this case, the juvenile justice system.

### Program Participants

The program funded with the JAIBG grant established a formal link between the Juvenile Justice office in Bethel and the Elders' Group through which non-felony cases could be referred to the elders at the discretion of the juvenile probation officer.

Grant funds were used initially to support one staff position for the program—the Elder-Youth Specialist—which would bear responsibility for nearly all of the administrative tasks. Foremost among these have been processing referrals from the state justice system and monitoring sentence completion. (Also, because outside the school system this position is the only one in Emmonak that deals specifically with youth, the Elder-Youth Specialist has become a source of information and assistance beyond the program.) The Elder-Youth Specialist works as a facilitator, with the relationship between this position and the participating elders critical to the success of the program.

The village elders are the essence of the project in Emmonak. By requiring individuals to appear before the elders, the grant project has stretched the role of the Elders' Group. Before its inception, some youth and families received counseling from the elders, but they were usually self-referred. The project has raised new dynamics within the community. People who were less connected to Yup'ik traditions are now exposed to traditional ideas; they have been spoken to in Yup'ik; and they have interacted with a gen-

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**Table 1. State-Referred Youth (May 1999 through January 2001)**

Age	Offense(s) <sup>1</sup>	Elders' Group proceeding		Outcome <sup>3</sup>
		Participants	Disposition <sup>2</sup>	
13	Burglary, vandalism	Parent, youth, victim	Restitution, restoring damaged property	After Elders' Group proceeding, additional felony charges were filed. Youth transferred to Juvenile Correctional Facility. Elders' Group disposition requirements were not completed due to institutionalization.
13	Vandalism, criminal trespass	Parent, youth, victim	Restitution, restoring damaged property	Disposition requirements completed. One additional local citation since Elders' Group proceeding for curfew violation.
17	Burglary, vandalism, criminal trespass	Parent, youth, victim	Restitution, restoring damaged property	Disposition requirements partially completed (restitution). Case transferred to Adult Court – charged as adult.
15	Minor consuming, resisting arrest	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, written apology, family guidance	Disposition requirements completed. No community service was mandated. Three city violations and one state charge since Elders' Group proceeding. Youth has not been referred since.
11	Burglary	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, written apology, family guidance	Unknown if disposition requirements were completed. Additional charges filed by state. Transferred out of Emmonak.
13	Theft, property destruction, vandalism	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, written apology, restitution, restoring damaged property, community service (40 hours)	Disposition requirements completed. 2 curfew violations since Elders' Group proceeding.
13	Theft, property destruction, vandalism	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, written apology, restitution, restoring damaged property, community service (40 hours)	Disposition requirements completed. 2 curfew violations since Elders' Group proceeding.
13	Domestic violence	Parent, youth, victim	Verbal warning, written and oral apology, community service (10 hours)	Disposition requirements completed. No further violations or referrals since Elders' Group proceeding.
10	Burglary	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, restitution, community service (100 hours)	Disposition requirements completed. No further violations or referrals since Elders' Group proceeding.
10	Burglary	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, restitution, community service (100 hours)	Disposition requirements completed. No further violations or referrals since Elders' Group proceeding.
11	Pointed unloaded firearm at a youth	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, guidance	No further referrals. Referred for psychiatric services. It was noted that youth experienced a disability.
13	Theft	No meeting	---	Moved to Anchorage before scheduled date of proceeding.
13	Unknown	Parent, youth	Verbal warning, guidance, community service (hours unknown)	Disposition requirements completed.
14	Domestic violence	Family member (aunt)/victim, youth	Verbal warning, guidance, written apology, community service (20 hours)	Disposition requirements completed.
11	Property destruction	Parent, youth	Restitution, community service (20 hours)	Disposition requirements completed. No further violations or referrals since Elders' Group proceeding.
15	Minor consuming, resisting arrest	Family member (aunt)/victim, youth	Verbal warning, guidance, community service (20 hours)	Disposition requirements completed.
14	Unknown	Pending as of last site visit	---	

<sup>1</sup> Offense as described in referral notes to elders.

<sup>2</sup> *Verbal warning* means the elders specified that one more offense or negative report by parents or other community members would result in the youth receiving additional sentencing. *Guidance* means the elders told stories or offered other verbal counseling directed at parents and youth regarding cultural mores, rules, and community expectations.

<sup>3</sup> The only quantitative follow-up data with which to track post-Elders' Group behavior or youth were data from the local magistrate on all youth cases opened in Emmonak from January 1999 through January 2001. This may not include felonies committed that were immediately referred to the Bethel Probation Office. However, the Bethel Probation Office states that all non-felony juvenile offenses referred to Bethel P.O. in the second year of the project were referred to the Elders' Group. There were no repeat referrals to Elders' Group from the Bethel P.O. of youth that were referred to Elders' Group in the project's first year.

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eration that they previously might have avoided.

One issue raised by the project was the extent of the elders' authority, particularly if that authority seemed to conflict with other established rules and regulations. On one occasion, for example, an elder decided to go into the school to check on a youth who had come before the Elders' Group, but the school district has regulations for non-family school visitors, which the elder did not follow.

### Procedures

Juveniles in Emmonak who violate the law are referred to the Juvenile Justice office in Bethel. Each case is assigned to a Juvenile Probation Officer who decides whether the charged youth should have the option of appearing before the Elders' Group in Emmonak or continue through formal processing within the state system. The officer considers such factors as: number of prior offenses, nature of the charge (only non-felony cases are heard by the Elders' Group), and age of the offender. Both the youth involved and the parents must agree to authorize the Elders' Group to administer the case. Once this authorization is received, copies of the original referral letter and the authorization letter are sent to all of the elders for review. The Elder-Youth Specialist then schedules an Elders' Group hearing for the case.

Referrals from the official juvenile justice process are termed *state referrals* to distinguish them from the increasing number of local referrals being made by family members, community members or school personnel without the involvement of the DJJ office. These local referrals also require the agreement of both parents and youth.

The Elders' Group hearing takes place in the community hall in the Tribal Offices Building. Elders sit at a conference table facing the youth and the parent or family member. Also present are the Elder-Youth Specialist and occasionally a translator. Some of the elders are primarily Yup'ik-speaking, with limited skill in English. At times the Elder-Youth Specialist may serve as translator.

In two cases, the arresting Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO)

or Village Police Officer (VPO) has also been present, but for the majority of cases the police, although invited, have not attended. Each meeting has an agenda that includes opportunities for all parties to speak, a break for elders to confer in private, and finally the sentencing of the youth. During the sentencing, all of the elders present have an opportunity to speak to the youth and to family members. Their presentation, which is the core of the hearing, may include stories of their youth, discussion of the values and guidance handed down from their own parents and grandparents, Yup'ik myths, and warnings directed toward the behavior in question. Emphasis is placed on the welfare of the community and the culture and the role the youth themselves will someday play as leaders in their community. The sessions, which last from two to four hours, can be emotional and powerful statements about both the historical and personal repercussions of destructive youth behaviors such as drinking. Finally, the elders prescribe a sentence—usually a period of community service—and the youth is given a chance to speak.

The referral process appears to work well. In its evaluation the Justice Center assessed the turnaround time between arrest and referral to the Elders' Group and between referral and Elders' Group proceeding. All state referrals were sent to the Elders' Group

within six weeks of arrest, and hearings before the elders were scheduled two weeks to a month after receipt of the referral. The turnaround time was important to the community, because one of the problems with the state justice system often mentioned by community members was the length of time between the behavior and any repercussions. This community concern mirrored the intent of JAIBG legislation and reflected the belief that if too much time elapsed between the behavior and its consequence the sense of responsibility was diminished.

Follow-up and monitoring procedures for the project have been less clearly articulated than the actual hearings and sentencings. Failure to maintain careful records of hours of community service completed and/or restitution paid is a primary weakness of the program. At present the youth seem to view their community service as busywork, and there is little supervision of youth at their work assignments, unless the work takes place in an office or classroom. Since work assignments often involve walking around the village and picking up trash, this is rarely the case. One important reason for this lack of supervision is staffing: there is only one staff member. Another is the absence of a plan for service opportunities in Emmonak.

There is also a lack of monitoring of the

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**Table 2. Locally-Referred Youth (May 1999 through January 2001)**

Age	Referred by	Number of violations			Notes
		January 1999 to December 2000	6 months prior to Elders' Group proceeding	6 months after Elders' Group proceeding	
14	Family member	6	0	2	
14	Family member	9	1	1	
14	Family member, project staff	11	2	0	Referred twice to Elders' Group. Two meetings were held with youth to discuss behavior and family problems.
12	Family	6	0	2	Referred twice. Second referral resulted in informal one-on-one Elder-Youth discussion. Continued city violations into 2001.
10	Family	1	1	0	
10	School	0	0	0	Elders' Group meeting held; no further referral.
11	School	0	0	0	Elders' Group meeting held; no further referral.
13	School	4 (prior criminal charge/prior incarceration)	1	?	Elders' Group meeting held; youth remanded to juvenile facility for additional charges. This youth had previously been state-referred to Elders' Group (see Table 1, case 99-09).
13	School	0	0	0	Elders' Group meeting held; no further referral.

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youth's behavior in school and at home after sentencing. The original program proposal contained a very cursory description of what would happen after the Elders' Group Meeting. The referral process and Elders' Group hearings seem to be working as described in the proposal, but as the number of youth who flow into the program increases, more attention to follow-up and monitoring is necessary.

### Collaborative Relationships with Key Entities

The Emmonak Elders' Project has required ongoing collaborative relationships with a number of agencies and groups as well as continuous efforts to form new relationships with other entities. Among those groups working with the project have been:

- **Juvenile Justice Office.** The Bethel office of the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice has cooperated in both the development and implementation phases

of this project. The probation officer who handles Emmonak youth has routinely referred misdemeanor cases to the Elders' Group for disposition. This relationship continues to be a strong one.

- **Tribal Council.** The Tribal Council was the initiator of the program and received the JAIBG grant. Their belief in and support of the program have not diminished. The Council formally recognized the initial Elder-Youth Specialist with a community service award for his work on the project. Many council members have expressed their support for the concepts underlying the project: they recognize the contribution of the elders to maintaining Yup'ik traditions and passing these on to the youth.
- **Magistrate.** In rural Alaska the magistrate handles minor (misdemeanor) juvenile cases under the authority of a District Court Judge. The relationship with the magistrate's office has been strong since the inception of the program. The magistrate is now directly referring youth offenders handled by her office to the Elder-Youth Specialist for assignment to community service. Although this has added to the workload of the single staff member, it has also increased the visibility and credibility of the project.
- **Rural CAP Youth Empowerment Project.** The Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc., was originally established through federal legislation to "protect and improve" life for rural Alaskans. Their Youth Empowerment project in Emmonak has provided volunteer activities for youth and some community service opportunities for referred youth who appear before the elders.
- **School District.** At the time of the evaluation there was not a strong connection between the school and the program. This is a general community issue, as there appears to be a strong social division between community and school personnel. Most school personnel are not permanent residents of the community; many are from outside Alaska. The school/program linkage was not developed at the outset of the project but in the second year several meetings were held with the principal; as a direct result of these meetings four school referrals to the Elders' Group were initiated. This is, at present, an under-utilized relationship but one that has potential for growth.

efforts are underway to establish links with other groups.

### Results

The Bethel office of the Division of Juvenile Justice referred a total of seventeen youth to the Elders' Group from July 1999 through January 2001. Nearly two-thirds of these youth were under fourteen; five were younger than ten. Only two of the state-referred youth were female. Table 1 displays details on the state-referred youth.

The state-referred youth had committed a variety of offences, including burglary, criminal trespass, vandalism, theft, domestic violence, minor consuming, resisting arrest, and in one case threatening another youth with an unloaded firearm. All cases referred by the state juvenile justice system met the terms outlined in the original agreement. None of offenses were sex crimes.

Since January 1, 2001 only one case has been referred to the Elders' Group from the Bethel Juvenile Justice Office. The Bethel Probation Officer also stated that there had only been one Emmonak youth case referred to the Division of Juvenile Justice during the last six months of 2000.

Sixteen of the seventeen referred youth appeared before the Elders' Group for counseling and sentencing; one moved to Anchorage after referral but prior to his scheduled Elders' Group appearance date. Three of the sixteen appearing before the group were ultimately referred back to the Bethel office because of additional charges; two were referred on felony charges and one was waived to adult court.

In the first five cases the youths were sentenced to restitution of property if the crime involved theft or destruction; a verbal warning was given and an apology for other crimes was required. It had been the original intention of the elders to give those appearing for the first time a warning along with guidance regarding their behavior. After several parents and one crime victim (who happened to be the local magistrate at the time) requested that the youth all be assigned community service hours in addition to restitution for their first offense, the policy was changed. It was noted that although this was a first time for these youth to be referred to the Elders' Group, many had accumulated multiple prior violations of city ordinances. After the fifth case, all state-referred youth were given 10 to 100 hours of community service in addition to restitution and/or restoration of property.

Community service assignments tended to focus on cleanup tasks—e.g., picking up trash. A few youth worked at the school or maintained the community hall. There did



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In addition to these ongoing relationships,

not seem to be very many occurrences of the culture-specific types of community service that were emphasized in the proposal, e.g., chopping wood, drying fish, etc. This seemed to be due to an absence of necessary supervision and training.

Of the seventeen state-referred youth, eleven satisfactorily completed the disposi-

tion requirements, one partially completed them, three did not complete them, and for two the outcomes were not known. Five had had no additional violations of the law after their referrals, and for five it was not determined if additional violations had occurred. Seven of the youth had at least one further violation; some had several, and two com-

mitted felonies.

As of December 30, 1999, nine youth had been locally referred to the Elders' Group. (See Table 2.) These referrals came from the school or families. Local referrals ranged in age from 10 to 14 years. Two of the nine

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## Experiences with the Emmonak Elders' Group

The Justice Center evaluator interviewed as many participants as possible about their personal experiences with the program described in the accompanying article. Concerns regarding privacy limited interviewing, but the comments of several people involved in the program are presented here.

### Parental comments

*This is better for minors. To stay in community. The elders are good at transmitting the ideas of caring and love but they needed to be more strict. They (elders) are not good at setting rules. Kids need to do community work. [The boy was referred prior to the new policy that all referred youth be assigned some community work.] Youth need more follow-up after the elders' meeting.... I did not see a difference in his behavior after Elders' Group. I would still rather him go before the Elders' Group than through regular court system. Because they (court system) do more harm than good.... I took my son to the Elders' Group again. And it seems to have made a difference. His grades are better, he has a better attitude. He is taking more responsibility.*

*She had been in trouble with the law, had been sent to Bethel, and had spent time in juvenile custody. When she started to get in trouble again, staying out late, drinking, etc., I referred her to the elders' court.... When she was incarcerated in Bethel she was very angry. They had someone talk to her there—a counselor, but she didn't understand anything about her as a person. She was just a piece of paper. She was angry the whole time and just wanted to come home. When she went before the elders she didn't seem angry. The elders opened her eyes. It doesn't make sense for the young people to sit in jail and not do anything. They should be here in the community at home, doing something productive. In court the kids are just pieces of paper and with elders' court the kids are people with families and histories.... She really changed, changed her attitude. The whole community gets involved when the general elders' meetings occur. After going to Elders' Group she changed her group of friends and started doing things with the Sunshine Group. She later decided by herself to go to Lifegivers Project (Rehab) for three months. The Elders' Group didn't force her to do these things—they just sort of opened her eyes to what she was doing to herself. They encouraged traditional ideas and explained to her how they are useful to her and her life.... Elders should work with Headstart. Need to get the elders' message to kids at an earlier age. Need to start working with young adults, training them to be future elders.*

*The elders provided very good advice. My daughter changed as a result of the elders' meeting. Within a week I noticed that her face was glowing. The elders talked a lot about hanging around the wrong people. They told her their own stories about their troubles, and those of their kids. I think that a lot of what they*

*told her might not sink in right away but it will make sense to her as she confronts different problems. We were able to talk more openly about things after the group. We talk about things now that we never did before. Going to the elders for help with your kids takes a load off of you.... By referring my daughter to the Elders' Group it made my daughter feel more cared about, both from me, and also by people in the community—the elders. She mentioned that she is now closer to elders. When they see me out in the street or at the store they stop and ask my how my family is and how I am. In the past I never before talked to elders except those in my own family.*

### Elders' Comments

*Our role is to pass on wisdom. We don't add on stuff that we make up. It's knowledge, values, passed down. Knowledge is worthless unless it's passed on.*

*We try to give advice, without breaking their spirit. This is what I see when kids come back, from Bethel. Their spirit is broken.*

*Everyone can change their way of life. I've seen this for many years. The kids know we think this.*

### Community comments

Elders, parents and community leaders also discussed the merits and challenges of the program at a public meeting.

*There are few elders left in the village. We are grateful to have people in the community whom we can ask for advice and help.*

*We've seen change in the community; there is more interaction between the generations.*

*[The project] is helping to bring back a new generation. Our dances are coming back and we are taping the elders' proceedings, saving the wisdom and the language.*

*Kids shouldn't go to jail, we need our kids here. We can solve these things with the help of the elders.*

*Our kids need to be more accountable at home. This can only happen if they are taught here in the village.*

*This project is a good start. We need more of it.*

## **Emmonak**

(continued from page 7)

were female. This local referral component of the Elder Group's work is becoming substantial. While local referrals were not part of the original proposal, they appear to take as much time as state referrals do. They also consume as much of the Elder-Youth Specialist's time as do state referrals. The local referrals were processed much like the state-referred youth. The meetings were identical in form as those for the state-referred youth, although for the most part these youth received guidance and warnings and were not required to perform formal community service. Because they reflect an effort on the part of the community to intervene early in a youth's problem behavior, local referrals can be seen as a positive expansion of the program.

All of the locally referred youth had committed one or more violations of such city ordinances as minor consuming alcohol, violation of curfew, or underage smoking—all status offenses. As a group, the locally referred youth had higher numbers of city ordinance violations in the past two years than the state-referred group, both before and after the Elders' Group intervention. Locally referred youth had a mean of 4.1 violations per person between January 1, 1999 and February 22, 2001, compared with .88 violations per person for the state-referred group. Parents who requested help from the Elders' Group cited these violations as reasons for the referral, along with school issues, not doing chores, and parental disrespect.

To date, youth have not been directly referred to the Elders' Group by the local magistrate or by local police, but during the second year of the project the Elder-Youth Specialist began supervising the community service component of juvenile dispositions

handed down by the local magistrate. None of these youth was referred to the Elders' Group. In some months, the Elder-Youth Specialist has received as many as 10 of these community service cases. Although this has added to his workload, it is indicative of a strengthening relationship between the magistrate and the project.

### **Overview**

Although there has been no substantial accumulation of quantitative data for evaluation, the two major goals of the project appear to be being met: juvenile crime seems to have decreased and village control of the administration of justice has risen. Through its use of the traditional strengths of the elders to formally address the delinquent behavior of youth, the Emmonak Elders' Group Project has helped to demonstrate the efficacy of a locally-based approach to handling juvenile misbehavior.

The Elders' Group Project has, by several measures, been a success. Although a direct cause-and-effect relationship cannot be established, there has been a decrease in the number of Emmonak referrals to the Division of Juvenile Justice. There were none during the last six months of the period covered by the evaluation—September 2000 to February 2001. The relationship with the DJJ Bethel Office has functioned well. The project is also resulting in financial savings by avoiding more costly formal processing.

Intensive on-site observation and discussions with parents, community members, and youth suggest that the program is having a positive effect on the community. More members of the community have had opportunities for contact with the elders, and many express pride in the elders and in the program.

One important measure of success is the interest near-by villages have shown in the

program. One has suggested sending youth to Emmonak for appearances before the elders, and a more serious suggestion has been to establish similar elder-youth programs in these villages.

Expanding the program to local referrals in Emmonak can also be seen as a measure of success. The move toward dealing with local referrals whose offenses are usually status offenses suggests a high level of trust in the influence of the elders as well as a belief that earlier intervention in the behavior will have greater impact.

Another outcome of the project has been a renewed interest in understanding youth needs.

The program does exhibit some weaknesses. The sole staff position is now overextended in responsibilities. In addition, poor record-keeping has been a major weakness in the program. If other villages hope to emulate this program, records information is important. It is also useful for evaluation. The number of post-disposition contacts might be a factor in the success of some youth, but this cannot be determined without a log.

A related flaw in the program has been the lack of a formal system for providing case information to referral agencies. Communication with the Bethel Juvenile Justice Office is good, but feedback should occur with all local referral agencies (school, magistrate, police). This is particularly important for a project that deals with overlapping jurisdictions.

*The research discussed in the preceding article was conducted by Corey Knox, Research Associate, and N.E. Schafer, Professor, Justice Center.*

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