



## Teens Acting Against Violence (TAAV) Program Evaluation



Prepared for the  
Teens Acting Against Violence (TAAV) Program  
Tundra Women's Coalition

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## **Executive Summary**

Teens Acting Against Violence (TAAV) is a student-led anti-violence education group that was formed in 1996 by Tundra Women’s Coalition (TWC) in Bethel, Alaska, and made possible by a grant from the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). The initial goals of the program were to recruit youth who were already peer leaders and have them promote messages aimed at reducing teen dating violence and promoting healthy relationships to their peers. This was accomplished through skits performed as peer education, public service announcements, and video/commercial spots. As TWC grew, experience with the needs of, and awareness of gaps in service to, youth increased. This led to the development of TAAV’s key strategies of working with youth: leadership development, work experience, skill building, healthy activities, teen empowerment, cultural relevance, outdoor education, peer education, crisis and family work, and community awareness. Over time, TAAV naturally evolved to include any teen who voluntarily selected to be part of the group. It is no longer a group of youth leaders specifically identified and recruited by TWC staff.

Currently, TAAV is primarily member-driven, open to any youth in middle and high school. TAAV has a yearly membership of approximately 60 to 100 youth participating in education and outreach activities. Although the program is open to all, program administrators report that nearly all participants are Alaska Native youth. The central focus of TAAV is for youth to engage in community and regional outreach activities meant to discourage interpersonal violence and to promote healthy relationships, healthy choices, and healthy lifestyles. Outreach efforts reach up to 1,000 Alaska youth annually.

TWC and TAAV partnered with the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) Justice Center to conduct an evaluation of the TAAV program through a one-time survey of former and current adult members (over 18 years of age) of TAAV. Pursuant to TAAV objectives, the focus of the evaluation was placed on examining efforts in the areas of domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, building healthy relationships, encouraging sobriety, and suicide prevention.

This evaluation was two-pronged, focusing on the program effectiveness itself, and the short- and long-term benefits experienced by teen participants up to 10 years post-participation.

TAAV staff identified 86 former or current TAAV members over the age of 18 years as a convenience sample of potential respondents. The majority of TAAV members identified for this evaluation were alumni, rather than current program members. TAAV staff used Facebook and e-mail to invite these 86 individuals to complete the survey. Eighty-five members of the sample participated in the survey, for an overall response rate of 98.8 percent.

### **Program Satisfaction**

Attendance patterns reported by respondents indicate long-term, consistent commitment to the TAAV program — a strong indicator of program satisfaction. Respondents indicated long-term participation in the program that ranged from one (16.4%), two (28.8%), three (32.9%), to four

(21.9%) years of active participation in TAAV. On average, the majority of respondents attended TAAV two (39.4%), three (21.1%), or four days (19.7%) per week.

Overwhelmingly, TAAV members reported satisfaction with the TAAV experience. Specifically, TAAV participants reported that they felt accepted and supported in the program. Additionally, respondents reported that they had made friends in the program and learned new skills to help build a healthier life. Overall, the majority of respondents reported that their behavior had changed (89.7%), the way they make choices had changed (87.9%), and the choices they make had changed (86.2%).

Ninety-four percent of respondents reported that TAAV members were engaged and respectful in the program activities, which helped increase overall satisfaction. Overall, TAAV members had an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the TAAV program, with only one member indicating that it is somewhat unlikely they would recommend TAAV to teens they know.

### **TAAV Staff**

Ninety-six percent of current and former TAAV members reported satisfaction with the job performance of TAAV staff. Additionally, respondents reported that staff were conscientious and kind (97.9%), and agreed that staff served as resources for leadership and support (98.0%). Further, 96 percent of respondents reported that staff provided leadership opportunities to TAAV members.

### **Cultural Considerations**

Connections to cultural beliefs and experiences are an important asset that can lead to increased resiliency. Alaska Native tradition and culture serve an important role in developing personal values or beliefs of TAAV members. The majority of respondents indicated that having traditional Alaska Native values and practices was important in their lives (95.9%). Respondents reported that following traditional Alaska Native culture (91.8%) and traditional Christian beliefs (87.8%) was important for developing their personal values and beliefs. Nearly 90 percent of respondents reported that following traditional Alaska Native beliefs was an important factor in their personal values and beliefs.

Exposure to cultural experiences is important to the continuation of cultural traditions and activities. Overall, the majority of respondents reported that they had taken part in Alaska Native cultural activities at least once in their lifetime. The four most common cultural experiences respondents reported participating in at least once in their lifetime were berry picking and taking a steam (tied at 95.9%), traditional dancing or drumming (93.7%), and fishing or checking a set net (91.8%). The three least common cultural experiences respondents reported participating in at least once in their lifetime were sewing —such as sewing a *malaqi* (79.6%); hunting for big game like caribou, moose, or seal (73.5%); and carving or net mending (49.0%).

Eighty-six percent of respondents reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that TAAV activities/programs were culturally relevant. Fourteen percent of respondents reported that they were neutral about the cultural relevance of the TAAV program.

## **TAAV Activities**

TAAV activities have evolved over the years, and not all activities have been offered every year. Survey respondents reported that the three most-liked program activities were Outward Bound trips, TAAV meetings, and travel to villages for outreach. Overall, respondents indicated that they preferred these activities because they enjoyed traveling to neighboring villages as well as outside Alaska, they enjoyed educating others, and they enjoyed working toward a common goal with others (teamwork).

Although respondents indicated that cultural activities are important to them, overall, only six percent of respondents said that they enjoyed learning/practicing cultural activities while they were actively participating in TAAV. The four least-liked program activities were boating the Kuskokwim River; kayaking local lakes; *manaqing* (ice fishing trips); and traditional crafts like sewing, making a storyknife, and carving. Possibly, these activities were less enjoyable to TAAV members because they were familiar activities that were already a part of their lives in Bethel. Cultural activities were not available to TAAV members until the early 2000s, so smaller groups of youth have engaged in those.

Fundraising activities are an important part of the TAAV experience because they help pay for program activities — such as Outward Bound which is a favorite activity of TAAV members. The majority of TAAV participants reported having worked on fundraisers. Over 94 percent of those respondents reported that it felt good to be a part of a group effort, and nearly 73 percent felt proud to contribute toward a common goal. More than half of all respondents reported that participating in fundraisers was a good use of their time.

## **TAAV Impacts**

Overall, TAAV was perceived by respondents to have been a positive to very positive influence on developing life skills necessary for healthy relationships and lives. Respondents reported that they had increased their skills and knowledge the most about domestic violence (81.8%), healthy relationships (77.3%), and sexual assault/abuse (71.2%). Further, respondents agreed that they had been positively impacted by their time in TAAV. Overall, TAAV participants experienced positive impact on how they live their lives today, their personal importance and impact on the community, and on the new opportunities afforded them by their participation in the TAAV program.

TAAV has also impacted participant lives by sharing knowledge about how to make healthy life choices, how to avoid or end unhealthy relationships, how to practice healthy communication skills, how to nurture healthy relationships, and how to resist peer pressure. Over 90 percent of

respondents reported that their participation in TAAV resulted in positive impacts on these areas of personal development and empowerment.

A key aspect of TAAV's approach to individual and collective empowerment of youth is encouraging members to embrace outdoor activities. This is especially true with respect to the program's efforts to link its activities and programs to traditional cultural practices. Nearly 90 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced positive impact from participation in outdoor activities at TAAV. Respondents reported that TAAV's outdoor programming and activities had the highest impact on the following three areas: increased their skills and knowledge (80.4%), helped to build pride of self and place (66.7%), and increased self-esteem (64.7%). About one-third of respondents reported that they had discovered cultural traditions and learned traditional ways of doing things through TAAV's outdoor activities.

## **Life Skills**

The TAAV program strives to instill healthy life skills in all TAAV participants. Healthy life skills are associated with managing and living a better quality of life. Overall, more than 90 percent of respondents reported that they experienced positive outcomes from their participation in the TAAV program. Nearly 80 percent of respondents reported that they had definitely come away from TAAV with a better connection to at least one adult, increased knowledge about healthy relationships and domestic violence, and respect for themselves and their bodies. Further, they reported that they would be sharing the knowledge and skills they developed in TAAV with their community.

This section reported the positive or negative impact of TAAV participation, as well as the lasting impact of TAAV on current life skills. Ninety-seven percent of respondents reported that TAAV had a positive impact on their interpersonal skills, with 25 percent of respondents reporting that they had mastered this skill set. Ninety-two percent of respondents reported that TAAV had a positive impact on their healthy self-care skills, with 28 percent of respondents reporting that they had mastered this skill set. Eighty-eight percent of respondents reported that TAAV had a positive impact on their abilities to deal with adversity, with 21 percent reporting that they had mastered this skill set.

## **Self-perceptions**

When participants leave TAAV, the intent is that they should leave with a better understanding of themselves, the ability to have healthy relationships, and a stronger connection with the community. We measured respondent level of agreement about their individual value, support networks, self-esteem, and value to the community of TAAV members. Just under 94 percent of respondents reported that they had individual value and healthy self-esteem. Ninety-four percent of respondents reported that they had developed strong support networks. Ninety percent of respondents reported that they were valuable members of the community. Ninety-seven percent of respondents reported that they were considered role models in their community.

## **Interpersonal Relationships**

The importance of healthy relationships is a focus in the TAAV program. Developing healthy relationships free of controlling behaviors and other abuse is a key part of the program. Overall responses were positive, indicating that TAAV was successful in developing interpersonal relationship skills in former and current TAAV members.

Respondents indicated their agreement with questions measuring respect, trust, and communication in their relationships. One hundred percent of respondents who reported having been in a relationship since TAAV agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed respect in their current relationship. Ninety-seven percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had trust and good communication in their relationship.

## **Bystander Intervention**

Part of TAAV's mission is to help participants be able to identify domestic violence and sexual violence outside of their own relationships. This may apply to interactions among family members, friends, peers, or strangers in the community. Part of being a healthy member of the community is feeling empowered to speak up about inappropriate behaviors that one may witness.

Current and former TAAV members reported that they were more likely to intervene if they witnessed behavior that is inappropriate and potentially illegal, rather than do nothing. TAAV members were slightly more likely to intervene if the involved parties were friends of the member rather than strangers (95.4% and 93.7%, respectively). Additionally, 80 percent of TAAV members were likely to speak in public about the issues of domestic and sexual violence.

## **High-risk Behaviors**

Following participation in TAAV, it is hoped that illegal behavior by TAAV members will cease or decrease. When asked about alcohol and drug use in the preceding month, 100 percent of the adult respondents had not used methamphetamines, LSD, cocaine, heroin, or other illegal drugs, or inhalants for the high. Ninety-eight percent of current and former adult TAAV members reported not using non-prescription, over-the-counter drugs for the high or prescription drugs without doctor's orders in the past month. Seventy-two percent of adult respondents had not used marijuana in the preceding month, while only 41 percent of the adult respondents (over 18 years of age) had not drunk alcohol or homebrew.

Further, 100 percent of respondents had not carried a handgun for a purpose other than hunting or protection from wildlife, while 98 percent of respondents had not carried another weapon (such as a knife) for a purpose other than hunting or protection from wildlife. Ninety-eight percent of current and former TAAV members had not sold illegal drugs, stolen or tried to steal a motor vehicle, or committed acts of vandalism in the past year. Ninety-six percent of respondents had not stolen something other than a car or other motor vehicle; and 92 percent had not threatened,

bullied, or harassed someone in their community in the prior year. Finally, 82 percent of TAAV members had not been arrested and 80 percent had not been in a fight (20% had been in a fight the prior year).

The prevalence of these high-risk behaviors by TAAV members prior to participation in TAAV is unknown. However, the low prevalence of high-risk behaviors in former TAAV members suggests a remarkably positive outcome following participation in TAAV.

## **Member Feedback**

The TAAV experience has left current and former members with many avenues through which they can put what they have learned into practice, such as sharing the knowledge and having the ability to help others in need. The majority of respondents would like to remain active in TAAV social events and activities.

Respondents shared their ideas for improving TAAV. The top three ideas for improving TAAV were to expand program availability to more youth (including beyond Bethel) (n = 6), to increase the presence of male participants as staff and role models (n = 2), and to establish an alumni program (n = 2).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Overall, TAAV was a positive experience for the majority of the current and former TAAV members. TAAV is poised to remain a model for prevention, intervention, and education of middle and high school students in Alaska, if not the country.

Future evaluations would be helped by obtaining base-level data from TAAV members as they enter the program. These data could then be used to ascertain more accurate levels of improvement in knowledge domains. In addition, annual surveys would be helpful in attempting to objectively identify the level of improvement experienced by individual TAAV members, as well as the group as a whole.

Expansion of the TAAV program to other communities in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta would provide maximum impact in the region, while increasing the number of male participants and adult role models within TAAV may encourage more male youth to participate in TAAV activities. Additionally, TAAV should continue to take note of program activities that resonate most strongly with TAAV members and continue to make those activities available regularly. Some of these activities include Outward Bound trips, traveling to neighboring villages, attending TAAV meetings, fundraising efforts, and helping with TWC events. TAAV should also further develop their community partnerships to allow for more opportunities for job skill development of TAAV members. Finally, establishing an alumni program may provide an avenue through which former TAAV members can give back to not only the program, but to the current TAAV members.



### ***Note to Readers***

Because of the sampling procedure used and the intentional limiting of the sample to adults (over 18 years of age) only, the results presented cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of youth who participated in TAAV since 1996. Instead, they can be extrapolated to TAAV members who regularly participated in TAAV programs.

