

Improving Postsecondary Transitions for Students in Rural Alaska: Applying Solution Focused  
Brief Therapy in the School Setting

by

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Description of Need.....	6
Theoretical Foundation.....	12
Introduction of Research Question.....	16
Literature Review.....	16
Cultural Importance of Family Inclusion.....	16
Transition Intervention Programs.....	24
Career Interventions.....	28
Application.....	33
Intended Audience.....	33
Basic Application.....	34
Conclusion.....	35
References.....	37
Appendix.....	41

### Abstract

Successful postsecondary transitions present several challenges for adolescents, and statistics show that Alaska Native youth experience additional adverse conditions and risks compared to their peers in the dominant culture. An effective intervention plan may assist rural Alaskan students in obtaining desirable education and increase opportunities for achieving personal and professional goals. This project is focused on answering the following research questions: What research has been done to show that SFBT groups could be effective in rural school settings to aid in postsecondary transitions? What components are necessary to include in an effective transition support plan for rural Alaskan students? A literature review was conducted to gain insight as to the aspects of Alaska Native culture that influence counseling outcomes, information regarding current postsecondary transition programs that are available, and the key facets of career development interventions for adolescents. This research guided the creation of a small group counseling curriculum that is grounded in the tenets of Solution Focused Brief Therapy and Family Systems Theory. The activities and discussion that are incorporated into the project target high schools in rural Alaska, and are designed to increase awareness, enhance self-efficacy, and embrace family, community and culture as vital supports in the career development process of adolescents.

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Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010) analyzed data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics to further the discussion on the disparagingly low graduation rates for American Indian and Alaska Native students. The authors of this article used the 2005 data from seven states with the highest percentage of Native populations, including Alaska, and five additional groups in the Pacific and Northwest regions of the United States. The authors calculated overall graduation rates for the selected states using the Cumulative Promotion Index. Next, Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010) measured the graduation rate gaps for subgroups identified by ethnicity and gender in the respective states. There was a wide variance in the graduation gap amongst the individual states, however male and female American Indian and Alaska Native students were consistently reported as having the lowest graduation rates. The discussion in this article focused on the lack of progress over the past decades and the immediate need for action to improve graduation outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native students as the ability to obtain a job and provide for a family is highly correlated to educational attainment. The authors acknowledge that data is limited for these populations, for several reasons, and call for additional research to investigate unanswered questions.

Clarke (2002) provides an overview of current research pertaining to the risk factors for American Indian and Alaska Native students. The author categorizes these risk factors into four domains: peer groups, families, schools and communities. Clarke (2002) cites several statistics that show elevated participation of Native youth in behaviors related to substance use and violent activities. He also makes a case for the disparities in school experiences for American Indian and Alaska Native youth compared to the majority. This minority population is reported to have

more school problems and show lower results on measures of academic performance compared to their peers in the dominant culture. Concerning statistics regarding the presence of poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse and domestic violence are also included in Clarke's (2002) paper.

Clarke (2002) explores the challenges that Native families face in supporting their children in school. A young, single woman heads many American Indian and Alaska Native households. These families are more likely to live in poverty, and the head of households may lack the time and resources to play an active role in the education of her children. The ramifications of the era of boarding schools continues to leave some families feeling alienated from mainstream schools, which also reduces their involvement in their children's education (Clarke, 2002). Research on resiliency shows promise for adding protective factors to the lives of Native youth. Clarke (2002) states that individuals and organizations can offer guidance and support, and can be found within the peer group, family, school and community. These role models and protectors will foster hope and allow students to lead fulfilling lives.

Flynn, Duncan and Jorgensen (2012) approached their research from a phenomenological perspective. Data collected over a ten-year period from individual interviews, journal analyses, and document analyses were included in an attempt to understand the internal, social, and institutional experiences of Native populations within the educational context. The researchers identified the following recurring themes: (a) antecedents for college completion and retention; (b) social connection; (c) family influence; (d) finances; (e) antecedents for college dropout and academic probation; (f) racism and discrimination; (g) institutional barriers; (h) academic unpreparedness; (i) reservation life as a barrier; and (j) mixed messages. The authors note that many factors contribute to poor academic outcomes in American Indian reservation schools including: low academic achievement, low parental involvement, disruptive students, truancy, a

high percentage of special education students, and students who suffer from the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome. The individual experiences of the 21 participants in the interview portion of this study revealed that successful transition to postsecondary education is facilitated by the formation of culturally supportive relationships with peers, counselors, faculty and staff (Flynn et al., 2012).

### **Description of Need**

There is a demand for workers with a higher education in the U.S. economy for the foreseeable future. Traditionally underrepresented students in postsecondary education pursuits include low-income students, first generation college-bound students, and students from Black, Latino/a, and American Indian backgrounds (McKillip, Rawls & Barry, 2012). The jobs that are available for workers without formal postsecondary education often lack benefits and do not pay enough to support a family. Furthermore, students that dropout are more likely to be unemployed, involved with the criminal justice system, and/or experience family instability than those students with a high school diploma (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010).

Postsecondary education is a means to obtaining a higher quality of life for many Americans. Despite a 40% increase in the number of American Indian and Alaska Native bachelor degree recipients over a decade, in 2008 this population represented about 1% of all students enrolled in college (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2011). Furthermore, the ethnic minority group with the lowest retention rate in the postsecondary education system, estimated as low as 15%, is the American Indian and Alaska Native population (Guillory, 2009). The dropout rates for American Indian and Alaska Native students are consistently the highest compared to students of other ethnicities and across all school types.

From 2000-2010, 66.4% of high school graduates across the nation stated that they were college bound (University of Alaska Institutional Research and Analysis [UAIRA], 2013). For that same timespan, 47% of Alaska high school graduates identified themselves as college bound and of this population 57% enrolled in the University of Alaska (UAIRA, 2013). Table 1 provides an overview of retention rates for Yup'ik students, minority students and overall retention for students attending UA during the recent decade.

<i>Full-Time Associate and Baccalaureate Students Enrolled in UA Fall Term</i>		<u>2003</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2013</u>
University of Alaska	First-Time Freshmen	88	91	102
Yup'ik Student	Return Following Fall	43	50	47
Retention	Retention Rate	49%	55%	46%
University of Alaska	First-Time Freshmen	569	720	773
Minority Student	Return Following Fall	334	455	499
Retention	Retention Rate	59%	63%	65%
University of Alaska	First-Time Freshmen	2022	2185	2246
Retention Rates	Return Following Fall	1335	1513	1541
	Retention Rate	66%	69%	69%

*Note.* Minority Students include IPEDS categories American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races. It does not include Nonresident Alien, White, or Race and Ethnicity Unknown. The data used in Table 1 was obtained through UAF Planning, Analysis and Institutional Research (2015) at [www.uaf.edu/pair](http://www.uaf.edu/pair)

The overall retention rates and rates for minority students increased or remained the same during the 10-year span shown in Table 1. However, the UA retention rate for Yu'pik students increased in 2008 but decreased in 2013. The retention rate at UA was lower than the national average retention rate of 71.6% for first-time undergraduates at all 2-year and 4-year institutions between 2006-2012 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2013). In 2010, only 12% of Alaska Native and American Indians age 25-34 had a bachelor's degree or higher, in contrast to 37% of Whites and the national average of 31% for this age group (National Indian

Education Association [NIEA], 2015). In 2012, 60% of White students that had enrolled in 2005 as first-time, full-time students at 4-year institutions graduated, compared to 39% of Alaska Native and American Indian students (NCES, 2013).

In the 2014-2015 school year 128,804 students enrolled in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the state of Alaska. Of this population 21.9% were Alaska Native, 1.3% were American Indian and 48.9% were White (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development [ADEED], 2015). Table 2 provides the current enrollment data by ethnic group for schools located in Yup'ik communities throughout southwest Alaska. The ethnic make-up of these rural districts is notably different from that of the urban centers of Alaska.

<u>District</u>	<u>Total K-12</u>	<u>AK Native</u>	<u>Am. Indian</u>	<u>White</u>
Bristol Bay Borough Schools	123	58.5%	2.4%	30.9%
Dillingham City Schools	463	52.9%	0.9%	12.3%
Kashunamiut Schools	322	99.7%	0.0%	0.3%
Kuspuk Schools	345	95.7%	0.6%	3.8%
Lake and Peninsula Borough Schools	317	77.0%	1.9%	12.0%
Lower Kuskokwim Schools	4104	94.7%	0.4%	3.4%
Lower Yukon Schools	2048	99.3%	0.0%	0.5%
Saint Mary's Schools	199	96.0%	0.0%	1.5%
Southwest Region Schools	590	96.6%	0.0%	0.8%
Yup'ik Schools	456	98.2%	0.2%	0.9%
<b>Total for Yup'ik Community Schools</b>	<b>8967</b>	<b>93.0%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>
Alaska State	128,804	21.9%	1.3%	48.9%

*Note.* The districts listed above are located in the southwestern region of Alaska and self-identify as part of a Yup'ik community. The data compiled in Tables 2-5 can be found at <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/stats/>

The number of Alaska Native students in Alaska constituted 21.9% of the total population in grades K-12. However, a high concentration of Alaska Native students in rural Southwestern Alaska accounted for a 93.0% average among school districts in Yup'ik communities.

The high school graduation rate for 2013-2014 for all students in the state of Alaska was 71.1% (ADEED, 2015). The statewide graduation rate for Alaska Native and American Indian students was the lowest among all ethnic groups at 54.9% compared to 78.5% for Caucasians (ADEED, 2015). The dropout rate for all Alaskan students in grades 7-12 has steadily declined over the past decade, and was 4.0% in 2013-2014. The statewide dropout rate for Alaska Native and American Indian students was the highest among all ethnic groups at 6.4% compared to 3% of White students (ADEED, 2015). Table 3 displays the most recent high school graduation and dropout data for schools in Yup'ik communities. On average, the graduation rates are lower and the dropout rates are higher in these remote communities compared to the state as a whole.

Table 3		
<i>2013-2014 Graduation and Dropout Rates for Schools in Yup'ik Communities</i>		
<u>District</u>	<u>Graduation Rate</u>	<u>Dropout Rate</u>
Bristol Bay Borough Schools	72.73%	1.45%
Dillingham City Schools	61.45%	7.60%
Kashunamiut Schools	51.85%	4.58%
Kuspuk Schools	63.16%	10.56%
Lake and Peninsula Borough Schools	64.00%	4.62%
Lower Kuskokwim Schools	39.31%	7.11%
Lower Yukon Schools	36.97%	9.89%
Saint Mary's Schools	78.57%	5.06%
Southwest Region Schools	55.32%	9.68%
Yup'it Schools	28.57%	13.95%
<b>Average for Yup'ik Community Schools</b>	<b>55.19%</b>	<b>7.45%</b>
Alaska State	71.10%	4.00%
<i>Note.</i> Graduation rate calculations are based on the 4-Year cohort. Dropout rate calculations are based on students in grades 7-12.		

Dillingham City School District had 463 students enrolled in 2014-2015, with 210 students in grades K-5 at Dillingham Elementary School and 253 students in grades 6-12 at Dillingham Middle/High School (ADEED, 2015). Table 4 shows that the average graduation rates for ethnic groups at Dillingham City Schools are comparable to other schools in the region and lower than the state average.

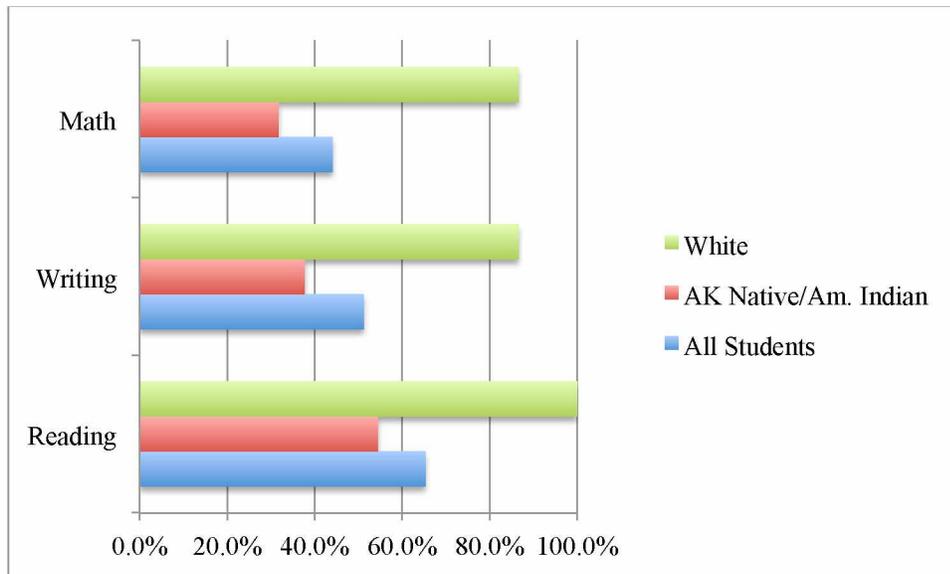
	<u>2009- 2010</u>	<u>2010- 2011</u>	<u>2011- 2012</u>	<u>2012- 2013</u>	<u>2013- 2014</u>	<b>5-Year Average</b>
AK Native/ American Indian	68.1%	33.3%	52.0%	33.3%	51.7%	<b>47.7%</b>
White	88.9%	75.0%	85.7%	83.3%	50.0%	<b>76.6%</b>
All Students	71.4%	37.5%	63.2%	42.4%	61.5%	<b>55.2%</b>

Additionally, Table 5 contains data for Dillingham City Schools that is consistent with the dropout rates measured at surrounding Yup'ik community schools and are higher than the state rates.

	<u>2009- 2010</u>	<u>2010- 2011</u>	<u>2011- 2012</u>	<u>2012- 2013</u>	<u>2013- 2014</u>	<b>5-Year Average</b>
AK Native/ American Indian	9.45%	9.84%	9.68%	12.23%	8.92%	<b>10.02%</b>
White	6.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	7.69%	<b>2.87%</b>
All Students	9.20%	8.29%	6.73%	7.52%	7.60%	<b>7.87%</b>

Aside from graduation and dropout rates, public schools in Alaska are required to report scores on standardized tests to be factored into their evaluation of Adequate Yearly Progress. In 2013-2014 the Standards Based Assessment (SBA) was administered to students in grades 3-10

across Alaska. Figure 1 depicts the percentage of students by ethnic group that scored at the proficient level or above at Dillingham Middle/High School (ADEED, 2015).



*Figure 1.* SBA proficient and advanced results for Dillingham Middle/High School 2013-2014.

Significant disparities among the test scores of Alaska Native and American Indian students are evident in all subject areas when compared with their White peers. More than half of Alaska Native and American Indian students at Dillingham Middle/High School that participated in this test scored below or far below proficient in Mathematics and Writing, while just over half of these students scored proficient or advanced in Reading (ADEED, 2015). The above results are a single representation of a small sample size, however these gaps in reading and mathematics are consistent with scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for Alaska Native and American Indian students (NCES, 2011). School counselors have the responsibility to understand the internal, social and institutional barriers that exist, and to advocate for policy change and services that will improve equity for American Indian and Alaska Native students (McKillip et al., 2012).

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The mental health issues affecting Yup'ik people in southwest Alaska are often related to historic trauma, forced acculturation, multi-generational trauma, and dysfunctional support systems (Jordan, 1997). For centuries American Indian and Alaska Native communities have been exposed to racism, catastrophic disease, violence and warfare. BigFoot and Schmidt (2010) cite specific events and policies that have altered the culture and way of life for American Indian and Alaska Native people including: military action, missionary efforts, the Federal Indian Boarding School Movement, the Dawes Act, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. BigFoot and Braden (2007) state that attacks on American Indian and Alaskan Native communities involve, “prohibiting the use of traditional languages, banning spiritual/healing practices, removing or relocating individuals or whole communities, and restricting access to public or sacred spaces” (p. 19).

BigFoot and Braden (2007) emphasize the need for mental health interventions that are culturally responsive. Holistic treatment for Native populations promotes and incorporates tribal heritage, traditional healing practices and ceremonies, and connectedness within the community (BigFoot & Braden, 2007). Ayunerak, Alstrom, Moses, Charlie Sr., and Rasmus (2014) conclude that the development of effective interventions in Yup'ik communities necessitates, “bridging historical cultural frames with contemporary contexts and shifting focus from reviving cultural activities to repairing and revitalizing cultural systems that structure community” (p. 91). Yup'ik Inuit individuals residing in villages in southwest Alaska agree that family structure continues to change rapidly with negative consequences for youth in these communities (Ayunerak et al., 2014). Jordan (1997) argues that a family systems approach and group therapy can be most effective for members of the Yup'ik population.

Family systems theory suggests that in addition to social and cultural forces, family history strongly influences an individual's thoughts, values and expectations (Henderson & Thompson, 2011). Bowen (as cited in Henderson & Thompson, 2011) proposed that patterns of behavior and emotion are passed down from one generation to the next. Family systems theorists claim that healthy family development is fostered by the formation of strong emotional attachments, preserving feelings of low anxiety pertaining to family, and differentiation amongst family members. There are several principles of family functioning and development within the family systems framework. These interconnecting concepts include: differentiation to self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, the family projection process, multigenerational transmission, and societal emotional processes (Henderson & Thompson, 2011).

Nuclear family emotional system refers to the emotional worldview that is passed from parent to child (Henderson & Thompson, 2011). Conflict within these processes can lead to problems such as depression, distancing and substance abuse. Family projection is an extension of these nuclear processes in which a child becomes the focus of a parent's emotional projection. Multigenerational transmission describes the process by which these patterns are perpetuated generationally. Societal emotional processes are social expectations about gender roles, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic groups, socioeconomic status and their implications on the family (Henderson & Thompson, 2011). American Indian and Alaska Native families that historically and/or currently deal with prejudice, discrimination, and oppression must pass on to their children the ways they learned to survive these factors. The coping mechanisms that youth learn from their parents and extended family may result in emotional health that is more or less adaptive (Henderson & Thompson, 2011).

BigFoot and Schmidt (2010) discuss a Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) approach that is culturally responsive to American Indian and Alaska Native children. The authors claim that the principles of TF-CBT are cohesive with the core values of American Indian and Alaska Native teachings. These ideologies include listening and responding to children, the significance of support provided by caregivers and family members, sharing experiences (through storytelling or ceremony), and the connections among emotions, beliefs and behaviors. BigFoot and Schmidt (2010) contend that the worldviews of American Indian and Alaska Native people embody the inherent spiritual quality and interconnectedness of all things, as well as the cyclic nature of life. The goal is for counselors to work with families to incorporate appropriate cultural components into treatment. The investigators emphasize the inclusion of family in determining the desired form of treatment (BigFoot & Schmidt, 2010).

Corey, Corey and Corey (2014) promote group counseling as a successful means of intervention and treatment for individuals coping with a variety of experiences and circumstances. Group therapy can be effective for diverse populations, and it has many advantages compared to individual counseling. It is efficient in terms of cost and time. Participants become members of a group that acts as a microcosm of society. Members are afforded the opportunity to seek support, give encouragement, and share feedback and perspective. The group provides a safe place for individuals to try new behaviors and practice new skills. The counselor can gain valuable insight by observing how clients act in social situations and therefore provide meaningful feedback (Corey et al., 2014).

Traditional Yup'ik values are based on a subsistence lifestyle. Physical, mental and spiritual fitness allow an individual to provide for their family and perpetuate community well-being (Ayunerak et al., 2014). The communal Yup'ik existence is dependent on healthy

relationships with family and community members and with the natural environment (Jordan, 1997). Practicing cultural awareness and sensitivity is ethically mandated for professional helpers working with individuals and groups. Continuous evaluation and reflection of personal biases and perspectives is one way a counselor demonstrates cultural-competency. Another method is to seek to understand the worldview of the client, and to frame problems and solutions with respect to the values and beliefs of the client (Thomas & Pender, 2007). Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is appropriate to use with diverse groups of clients. The client is the expert on her life, and the counselor plays a supportive role to affirm and empower the client (Burwell & Chen, 2006).

SFBT is categorized as a post-modern, strengths-based approach. It has proven effective in schools for modifying behavior through individual and group counseling interventions (Bond, Woods, Humphrey, Symes, & Green, 2013). Counselors implement SFBT strategies that encourage the student to identify and draw upon personal strengths and existing resources. Discussion is centered on positive future outcomes and the resiliency of the client. Counselors help students frame their thoughts in the context of solutions rather than spending time and energy on the cause of the problem (Gingerich & Wabeke, 2001). The counselor continually seeks student feedback throughout the counseling relationship to gauge student experience and progress (Corey et al., 2014). The implementation of SFBT in a group setting encourages group members to recognize one another's strengths and to propose alternate solutions (Jacobs, Masson & Havill, 2006).

This project aims to provide a framework that encourages school counselors in rural Alaska to strive for cultural competence, and inspire individual growth with respect to the student's worldview. These tasks can be accomplished by integrating tenets of SFBT and family

systems theory into a group counseling setting. The activities and discussion that are incorporated into the project are designed to increase awareness, enhance self-efficacy, and to embrace family, community and culture as vital supports in the career development process of adolescents.

### **Introduction of Research Question**

Considering the statistics regarding retention rates for Alaska Native youth, along with the potential outcomes when there is not an effective intervention plan, there is a need to explore options that might assist these rural students. Therefore, this project will be focused on answering the following research questions: What research has been done to show that SFBT groups could be effective in rural school settings to aid in postsecondary transitions? What components are necessary to include in an effective transition support plan for rural Alaskan students? The purpose of the next section of this paper is to review current literature that addresses the successful transition to postsecondary education for Alaska Native students.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Cultural Importance of Family Inclusion**

Paula Ayunerak, Deborah Alstrom, Charles Moses and James Charlie Sr. are Yup'ik elders residing in villages in southwest Alaska. Ayunerak, Alstrom, Moses and Charlie Sr. collaborated with Stacy Rasmus to author an important paper highlighting the traditional Yup'ik values and cultural practices that have been lost as a result of Western influence (Ayunerak et al., 2014). Ayunerak et al. (2014) describe the need to restore many of the customary Yup'ik ways in order to strengthen and heal communities in southwest Alaska. The authors argue that children in their own communities are experiencing stress and hardship disproportionately to their peers in the dominant society (Ayunerak et al., 2014).

Ayunerak et al. (2014) describe the integral role that religion, respect for animals, dancing, and rituals have in the traditional Yup'ik way of life. *Ellam Yua*, the spirit of the universe, is the creator and endows humans and animals with spirits. Yup'ik people have a deep respect for everything that *Ellam Yua* has created, and believe that their subsistence lifestyle depends on good relationships between humans and animals. *Pamaalirugmuit* is a wonderful and peaceful place after death. Yup'ik religious teachings state that all actions will affect a person's life and future, even after the body has died. One can prepare for the journey to *Pamaalirugmuit* "by helping others and keeping a clean house and body" (Ayunerak et al., 2014, p. 95).

Prior to missionary influence, the *Qasgiq* was a significant and sacred building in every Yup'ik community. According to Ayunerak et al. (2014):

The *Qasgiq* brought men, women and children together to listen to the elders of the village talk about *Yunyarraq* (Way of Life), *Alerquun* (Rules of Life) and *Piciryaraq* (Truth of Life). It was a place to teach Yup'ik morals and values and survival skills. (p. 95).

*Curuunqaaq* is a Potlach held after Christmas to memorialize recently deceased kin. It involves ceremonial giving and sharing of food and handmade items to honor the rite of passage.

*Agayuliyaraq* is the only type of Yup'ik dance still used today, it is a "prayer asking for animals, fish, berries, wood or good weather at a certain time of year in the hunting or fishing cycle" (p. 94). The community came together to learn songs and dances that would celebrate a successful hunt and offer thanks to *Ellam Yua*. Animal spirits were honored through the creation and display of masks during ceremonial dances. Drums were the predominant instrument, and the circular shape represented the cycles of life. It is a Yup'ik belief that spirits are reincarnated

through birth of new babies, and that animals will only return to the hunting area if the hunter and preparer demonstrate respect (Ayunerak et al., 2014).

The presence of missionaries, influence of Western civilization, and advancement of technology have forever changed Yup'ik ways. Subsistence activities provided structure for families in which each member had a valuable role (Ayunerak et al., 2014). Today subsistence activities can be completed with less time and energy, and are sometimes not necessary because of economic development in rural areas. Ayunerak et al. (2014) explain that parents used to teach their children through modeling survival skills, but now young parents often struggle with methods for child rearing. Children today lack the physical and mental chores to keep them strong, and many have not learned the Yup'ik language. The authors propose that focusing on empowering the elders to once again be leaders in their communities is an important first step toward healing. Ayunerak et al. (2014) state that elders can help revitalize the language, spiritual concepts and traditional parenting styles. The elders can help reestablish the value of relationships and belonging to multiple communities such as school, work, family, village, male/female and elders.

Anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan (2003) visited a summer cultural camp and highlights the importance of elders sharing their wisdom with Yup'ik youth. Children and adolescents in villages across Alaska are growing up in a time when traditional language, customs and values are in competition with the influences of Western culture and education. Fienup-Riordan (2003) observed and recorded the activities and conversations that took place during culture camp in an effort to preserve and disseminate traditional Yup'ik knowledge and practices. The activities that youth and elders participated in at camp were dependent on the weather and the flora and fauna available for harvest, not on a set schedule or a clock. To

promote interaction between the elders and youth, an hour was set aside each night for “Elder time.” This was an opportunity for the elders to use customary narrative techniques to teach the younger generations important moral lessons, survival skills, and ways to perpetuate health and good fortune (Fienup-Riordan, 2003). When the camp was over, many of the young participants shared their feelings of appreciation and explained that someday they will be passing these stories on to the next generation. The practice of elders teaching life lessons through words and story telling is a tradition that is not currently conducive to modern school and activity schedules. However, through efforts like culture camp, the unique learning styles of Yup’ik people can be preserved and perhaps better integrated into modern practices (Fienup-Riordan, 2003).

Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) discuss the ramifications of an educational system of the dominant society being imposed upon Native communities in Alaska. The authors state that indigenous students often respond with little enthusiasm to mainstream education, not for lack of intelligence or ability, but because they feel disconnected and disengaged from the unfamiliar cultural institution. The researchers explain that there are significant differences in the constructs of Western society and indigenous belief systems. In a Western model for example, a classroom or laboratory is often preferred versus direct experience in the natural world. Assessment is another critical distinction between the two approaches to education (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

In traditional Alaska Native cultures one’s ability to survive was proof of competency, whereas modern educational systems often test individuals on predetermined notions of what the person should know (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Alaska Natives have a holistic worldview and are experiential learners. They have learned to develop skills including observing natural cycles, responding to changing needs for survival, subsisting with plants and animals, and

producing tools with natural materials. Knowledge and skills were passed from one generation to the next generation through modeling and by story telling. Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) emphasize that there is some overlap in traditional and contemporary educational philosophies, and that both offer important insights into how students learn:

Native people may need to understand Western society, but not at the expense of what they already know and the way they have come to know it. Non-Native people, too, need to recognize the coexistence of multiple worldview and knowledge systems, and find ways to understand and relate to the world in its multiple dimensions and varied perspectives. (p. 9)

In 2002, American Indians represented less than 1% of all college students. Guillory and Wolverton (2008) sought to address the disproportionate number of American Indians that access, attend, and complete a college education. The researchers propose that the “Theory of Student Departure” accurately describes the experience of many American Indians in the education system. This theory identifies three main causes of student departure: academic struggles, inability to resolve educational and occupational goals, and the failure to integrate into the institutional community. The authors elected to use qualitative data collected during a 2002 study by Guillory to further investigate the perceptions of barriers to American Indian students currently attending universities. The interviews of American Indian students, faculty and board members at Washington State University, University of Idaho, and Montana State University were used to compare perceived barriers and persistence factors for American Indians. A key theme to student retention was institutional services, policies, and centers devoted to American Indian heritage, culture and ceremonies. Guillory and Wolverton (2008) emphasize the need for

institutions of higher education to incorporate family into the education of American Indian students in order to facilitate an atmosphere of support and trust.

Hicks and Heastie (2008) conducted a survey at a public college in North Carolina to identify stressors and measure the physical and psychological health of first-time college freshman. The authors refer to an extensive body of work that explains the complex multidimensional challenges that adolescents experience as they transition from life at home to college. As adolescents move out of their childhood homes, they are faced with changing family roles and dynamics and they become more differentiated. Additionally, first-year college students are often leaving behind friends and seeking a new social network. These students are likely to experience academic and financial stress, and at the same time are trying to establish autonomy, create a permanent identity, and form intimate relationships (Hicks & Heastie, 2008).

The study participants were predominately college students age 18-23 years old, a majority of these participants were African-American, and roughly two-thirds were women (Hicks & Heastie, 2008). The researchers modified an existing questionnaire titled, "Health Behaviors, Self-Rated Health and Quality of Life Questionnaire" to assess health behaviors, health status, mental health, lifestyle, depression and quality of life. The survey contained 30 items that were divided into four sets: socio-demographic characteristics, life-style, student life stressors and health status. Results of the study indicated that students living on-campus were more likely to experience stress related to problems with professors and poor housing than students that lived off-campus. Students living on-campus reported more physical ailments and less physical activity than their off-campus peers. Students that experience persistent high levels of stress, or that struggle with psychological and/or physical ailments are more likely to dropout. Hicks and Heastie (2008) caution that the results of this study are representative of a small

sample at a single locale, however the current investigation does contribute to the data pool and allows for policy makers, university administrators and student support personnel to make informed decisions about prevention and intervention strategies.

Fitzgerald and Farrell (2012) present a case for Native child development research that is a partnership effort among American Indian and Alaska Native communities and scientists. The authors argue that such research must be guided by solution-focused methods. Fitzgerald and Farrell (2012) refer to Sameroff's transactional model to provide insight in the identity development of Native adolescents. The transactional model argues that cultural codes, family codes, family rituals, and family myths play a fundamental role in identity formation, but are often underestimated. The researchers point to current literature that suggests that poor identity development in Native adolescents is directly related to historical trauma. Current rates of youth physical and mental health problems, such as drinking and other drug abuse, suicide, and obesity are associated with poor identity development (Fitzgerald & Farrell, 2012).

The pervasive effects of historic trauma are passed through generations as it influences the belief systems and worldviews of Native adults and youth. There is a call for therapeutic interventions that are built on the traditional values, identity and spirituality of American Indian and Alaska Native cultures in response to the consequences of historic trauma. Fitzgerald and Farrell (2012) discuss current studies that link chronic stress with altered nervous system functioning. The need is evident for prevention and intervention strategies for American Indian and Alaska Native peoples. Fitzgerald and Farrell (2012) propose that the most effective therapeutic efforts incorporate the culture and heritage of indigenous communities and are based on sound scientific data. Interventions that are developed by researchers in conjunction with Native community members offer the most appropriate and sustainable practices.

Grothaus, McAuliffe and Craigen (2012) explore the merit of incorporating cultural understanding and advocacy into strength-based approaches to counseling. The authors refer to literature that supports a shift from the medical or deficit model of psychotherapy to strength-based methods. Grothaus et al. (2012) describe the positive outcomes for youth that understand and appreciate their strengths and assets. The researchers denote the usefulness of strength-based counseling when appropriately adopted within the client's cultural context. Current publications suggest that in order to display multicultural competency a counselor must gain self-awareness, knowledge and skills (Grothaus et al., 2012). It is emphasized that self-awareness is best obtained through immersion and engagement experiences. Knowledge can be gained through formal and informal research of the adversities and strengths that cultural groups possess. A variety of therapies exist for work with particular populations, and the authors mention the use of Narrative Therapy or American Indian constructionalist family therapy for indigenous people. Furthermore, Grothaus et al. (2012) emphasize the role that counselors play in advocating and empowering their clients by working collaboratively to address barriers and injustices.

There are specific facets that the authors maintain must be integrated into culturally competent strengths-based counseling including: promoting critical consciousness, encouraging cultural identity development, and participating in social action. Promoting critical consciousness is a means for clients to become aware of the discrepancies and injustices that are engrained in society and perhaps their own worldview. Several ethnic and racial, as well as gay identity development models can be drawn upon to assist clients in recognizing their strengths and move toward the next level of identity progression. Grothaus et al. (2012) charge counselors with the responsibility of acting as agents of change to counteract inequities for minority

individuals and groups by partaking in social action. The following section is an overview of some intervention programs targeting transitioning youth that are developmentally appropriate and culturally cognizant.

### **Transition Intervention Programs**

Deemer and Ostrowski (2010) set out to examine the perceptions of students participating in a career development project based in solution-focused theory. Participants in the longitudinal study were students from a Pennsylvania high school. The first year of data collected included surveys from 157 students and focus group interviews in which 45 students participated. A majority of the participants were Caucasian, and no participants identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. A literature review supported the need for school counselors to structure work related to career development within a meaningful and applied context. Learning, effort, attendance and persistence rates, and work-related skills, behaviors and attitudes all improve when students have a personal interest and form real-world connections (Deemer & Ostrowski, 2010).

The project described in this study is designed for students in 9<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup> grades to identify their personal interests and strengths, explore career options that are suitable to these strengths, and begin creating documentation to prepare for college and career pursuits (Deemer & Ostrowski, 2010). An important aspect of the project involves community service and self-reflections on their abilities and interests, and their experiences related to career development. Deemer and Ostrowski (2010) concluded that the overall perception of students participating in their survey and/or interview felt positively about their school and the graduation project, but reported needing additional support. The researchers acknowledge that this is a new project in a

single school and that the data collected will be used to guide and revise the project for future students.

Guada, Conrad and Mares (2012) present a support group for youth transitioning from high school to postsecondary settings, entitled “Aftercare Support Program” or ASP. The researchers identified students that had exited the foster care or child welfare systems as being at-risk for a range of problems including low levels of educational attainment, low employment rates, high rates of homelessness, out-of-wedlock births, and involvement in illegal activities. Guada et al. (2012) included other students that lacked traditional family support, including individuals that were homeless, released from the criminal justice system or young parents, and were at elevated risk for difficult transitions into adulthood. The program was based in Columbus, Ohio and specific ethnic demographics of the participants were not provided. The ASP model is theoretically grounded in solution-focused brief therapy and a strengths-perspective. Volunteers from local colleges/universities and local service providers were recruited to collaborate with ASP, so the program required a minimal budget. The facilitators, support personnel and youth all participated in a psychoeducational group format. In addition, the youth were part of a social-recreational group, and the facilitators and community agency representatives met in a task-oriented group.

Guada et al. (2012) reflect on the successes and challenges that the participants in ASP experienced, and offer discussion about future ASP models. Providing crisis management is essential when working with at-risk youth, and several of the youth members of ASP faced crises ranging from failing graduation exist exams to abusing substances, becoming homeless or incarcerated. Attendance was sporadic and inconsistent for many youth, so the facilitators advocate for “stand-alone” sessions that are not dependent on attendance at previous meetings.

Another recommendation is to extend the length of services provided to a minimum of two years, as many of the education and work related goals of youth require a long-term commitment to attain. It was discovered that increasing financial literacy was a need that was not adequately addressed by ASP (Guada et al., 2012). Facilitators also noted a need to provide an individual intervention component in addition to the group counseling sessions.

The focus of ASP was to facilitate a setting in which adolescents could become a source of information and emotional support for one another, and to tap into the local services available to individuals age 18-29. Guada et al. (2012) determined that at-risk youth were most interested in obtaining assistance concentrated on education and employment. ASP was designed to improve awareness and access to post-secondary opportunities through referral and networking with existing programs and agencies. The facilitators provided support and encouraged youth to stay on task, while focusing on the strengths, resources and solutions available (Guada et al., 2012).

Whitmarsh and Mullette (2009) present a model that integrates a multimodal approach to counseling, positive psychology, and solution-focused brief therapy for use with adolescents. The authors explain that many challenges associated with identity development are specific to this life stage, and they make a case for interventions that are brief and that increase resiliency. Whitmarsh and Mullette (2009) reference the 40 developmental assets that promote mental health and highlight the eight categories that appear on the Positive Asset Inventory: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Positive identity is defined as, “a sense of purpose, personal power, positive self-image, and positive view of the future” (Whitmarsh & Mullette, 2009, p. 148). “SEARCH” is an acronym for the domains that the client

and counselor explore in this model: Self, Education, Activities, Relationships, Community, culture and Home.

Whitmarsh and Mullette (2009) divide the SEARCH process into three stages. The first stage entails exploring the six aforementioned domains, and the authors provide possible lines of questioning for each category. Stage two is the goal-setting phase. The client and counselor work together to summarize positive assets identified in the exploration phase. The counselor then assists the client in developing goals that are meaningful and personally rewarding. It is emphasized that each client possesses a foundation of strengths and resources from which to build upon and grow. Once goals are identified and both parties agree upon the necessary actions, the counselor facilitates skills acquisition and other means for overcoming obstacles. Termination is the third and final stage, and it affords the client time to reflect on the SEARCH process and to obtain a heightened level of self-actualization. Whitmarsh and Mullette (2009) recommend follow-up sessions to monitor progress, and suggest that booster sessions are appropriate when new concerns or challenges arise.

The aforementioned programs provide insight as to best practices for youth transitioning to postsecondary life. The common themes among these interventions involve self-exploration, capitalizing on personal strengths, career exposure, and networking. Deemer and Ostrowski (2010) underscore the value of community service and career development throughout the high school experience. Guada et al. (2012) maintain that a combination of group and individual counseling is effective in providing necessary education, support and personalized interventions for transitioning youth and young adults. Whitmarsh and Mullette (2009) emphasize the importance of positive identity development in adolescents; and they suggest that this can be achieved through self-exploration, goal setting and self-actualization. The next section describes

career interventions designed specifically for American Indian and Alaska Native peoples or for use in the school setting.

### **Career Interventions**

McKillip et al. (2012) conducted a literature review focused on the impact of high school counselors on student success in postsecondary education. The authors found that school counselors are an important source of social capital for students who would not otherwise gain the necessary information to access postsecondary education. Unfortunately, counselors often do not have clear job descriptions and are often assigned tasks that deter from their effectiveness in preparing students for transition. Current literature supports the importance of a comprehensive school counseling program in which staff and students understand the mission and role of the counseling department. The researchers found that beginning individual planning in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing the counseling process throughout high school is an important step in the successful transition to postsecondary education. McKillip et al. (2012) recognize that more research is warranted on the effectiveness of specific methods and programs employed by school counselors to prepare students for college.

Shutiva (2001) provides teachers and counselors with several methods for providing effective and responsive career counseling for American Indian and Alaska Native students. The author emphasizes the importance of inviting elders and tribal government leaders to play an active role in the teaching and counseling of Native students. It is also in the students' best interest to ease hiring restrictions to permit the employment of Native community members that can serve as positive role models. Shutiva (2001) encourages non-Native educators to seek to understand the cultural values and social factors affecting Native students as they pursue their educational and career goals. American Indian and Alaska Native students will see greater

opportunities for themselves once they gain an awareness and appreciation for the complexities of the ways that traditional and modern cultures interact. These students will feel validated and empowered when they recognize the contributions that Native people have made to American society as a whole (Shutiva, 2001). School counselors can help students connect with American Indian and Alaska Native mentors and professionals. Furthermore, scholarship programs that require students to participate in service or other social connection can be very beneficial.

Gibson (2005, 2008) endorses the use of genograms as a useful tool for counselors working in the primary and secondary school settings. Genograms are pictorial representations of an individual's lineage, and are often used in family counseling to identify characteristics and examine relationship patterns. Genograms have been used successfully in a number of fields including career counseling with adults, and Gibson (2005) advocates for the application of this tool within the K-12 framework. Research suggests that parental expectations and role models substantially influence students' career and education decisions. Career genomes not only encourage students to explore their values and interests, but also facilitate discussion between the student and their families (Gibson, 2008).

Creating career genograms is a brief, inexpensive and meaningful exercise for students. At the elementary and middle school levels, increased career awareness and fervent exploration are the respective goals of the career genome (Gibson, 2008). High school students will benefit from the recognition of patterns within their family tree, and through the identification of motivating factors that are guiding their decisions about education and career (Gibson, 2005). Gibson (2008) cautions that while genograms can be assigned by a teacher, or as independent work, their interpretation by a counselor is required. Finally, students from non-traditional families may prefer to discuss their genograms in private as opposed to a group setting.

McCormick, Neumann, Amundson and McLean (1999) offer guidelines for clinicians implementing the First Nations Career/Life Planning Model. The researchers describe the need for First Native youth to attain the education and training necessary to secure employment that strengthens the economy of their respective communities. Current data portray a concerning picture for youth that do not complete high school. McCormick et al. (1999) contend that providing career counseling using a strengths-based approach is a way to inform and motivate youth to complete their education. The First Nations Career/Life Planning Model was developed to better serve this population's needs. Western methods to career counseling often focus on individual aptitudes, interests and test scores, whereas the current model encourages family and community participation in the career exploration process. Recent literature conducted by Flynn, Duncan and Evenson (2013) indicates that parents have a stronger influence on the career path of aboriginal youth, in comparison to their non-Native counterparts.

As described by McCormick et al. (1999), The First Nations Career/Life Planning Model incorporates the pillars of career counseling (e.g., educational background, interests, suitable occupations and aptitudes) with the traditional values of indigenous people (e.g., gifts, roles and responsibilities, spirituality and balance). These factors are placed on a large circle that is divided into eight equal parts with a small circle titled "career goals" centered inside. Practitioners introduce a large version of this diagram at the beginning of the career counseling session and explain that the session will conclude when all of the components have been discussed and the participants are ready to end. McCormick et al. (1999) emphasize the importance of offering to incorporate some of the unique cultural practices into the counseling session. It is recommended that facilitators provide items like an eagle feather, talking stick, and smudging tools, and before the session starts invite participants to incorporate any of these items,

including prayer, if they prefer to. Throughout the session, the youth is identifying personal strengths, family and community members are providing feedback, and the counselor is the facilitator (McCormick et al., 1999). Sessions are recorded so that the practitioner can accurately complete the visual model afterwards and then mail it to the participant.

Neumann, McCormick, Amundson and McLean (2000) field-tested the First Nations Career/Life Planning Model and analyzed the implications for participants. The researchers conducted counseling sessions with thirteen First Nation residents of the Vancouver, B.C. area; these clients ranged in age from 13-26 years. Everyone present at the session sat in chairs that were placed in a circle, and food was offered. The sessions averaged about two hours, which was lengthy for some participants and impractical in a school setting. There were at least two facilitators present at each session. After the sessions were complete, the transcripts were gathered and reviewed by Neumann et al. (2000) to identify common themes. Central topics emerged including: increased self-awareness; usefulness of family, community, and peer input; openness to cultural practices; recommendations for improving the Career/Life Planning Guide; and feedback on the process.

Results of the analysis indicate that this was a positive experience for all of the participants (Neumann et al., 2000). Several participants noted that they gained personal insight from the feedback that their family, community and friends had to offer. The youth and adults alike appreciated the cultural context in which development and identity were explored, and those that opted to incorporate a traditional practice into the session reported positive feelings about it (Neumann et al., 2000). Many participants were in support of the circular diagram (similar to the Medicine Wheel), but recommended that the word choice be adjusted to make it easier to understand. Other suggestions included doing multiple sessions and shortening the

length of the session. The First Nations Career/Life Planning Model shows promise in helping youth to increase their self-awareness and to establish a plan for achieving their career goals. Ultimately, student success in school and work can help perpetuate physical and mental wellbeing of First Nation communities (Neumann et al., 2000).

Flynn et al. (2013) conducted a study of American Indians' career development process through the analysis of interviews and journal articles. The researchers aimed to identify unique aspects of the single-race American Indian experience and to present evidence to guide best practice for school and career counselors working with this population. The nine participants in this study were juniors or seniors in high school, lived in a tribal setting in the Midwest, had a low socioeconomic status, and self-identified as being at the beginning of the career development process (Flynn et al., 2013). American Indian students face obstacles ranging from a lack of family support in educational achievement to low graduation rates. The participants described limited exposure to careers and identified few career mentors or role models in the tribal setting. The authors cite literature that emphasizes the significance of career self-efficacy pertaining to interests, choice, action, and performance outcomes (Flynn et al., 2013).

American Indian students will benefit from the wealth of career-related skills, information and tools that school counselors can deliver. Flynn et al. (2013) suggest that school counselors adopt a comprehensive school counseling plan as outlined by the American School Counselor Association in order to ensure that ample time and resources are afforded to post-secondary and career planning for all students. Counselors working in tribal settings should advocate for opportunities that support diversity in career exploration. Flynn et al. (2013) contend that this can be accomplished by incorporating special in-school programming and presentations, coordinating visits out of the tribal setting, and securing job shadow placements.

An overarching theme of this research was the need to be mindful of how indigenous values differ from those of mainstream culture (i.e., cooperation vs. competition, present-time vs. future orientation, valuing group needs over individual, and relying on family help rather than that of an expert); and what the implications are on the career development process (Flynn et al., 2013).

Current career intervention programs for adolescents aim to increase awareness, build on student strengths and ease transitions. School counselors play a critical role in promoting access to postsecondary opportunities to at-risk populations (McKillip et al., 2012). Flynn et al. (2013) endorse the incorporation of cultural values, assets, and uniqueness pertaining to education and career opportunities into the comprehensive school counseling program. Research links family involvement and mentors from the Native community with positive career development outcomes for youth (Shutiva, 2001). Gibson (2008) proposes the use of career genograms to facilitate exploration and involve family in career development progression. McCormick et al. (1999) created The First Nations Career/Life Planning Model to place cultural traditions and family input at the forefront of the career self-actualization process. Aspects of the career intervention programs presented above can be adapted for use with Alaska Native students in rural Alaska.

## **Application**

### **Intended Audience**

This project is designed to be a resource for high school counselors in rural Alaska so that they may utilize appropriate skills and materials to assist juniors and seniors, their parents or caregivers, and community members in regards to postsecondary transitions. A culturally responsive high school guidance curriculum has been created to foster career development in a small group setting. Facilitators of this program are charged with the responsibilities of being

aware of and sensitive to the issues and values unique to the Alaska Native population. However, the material is not inclusive and some of the statements may not apply to all Alaska Native groups. Aspects of Yup'ik culture are purposefully incorporated into the career development lessons set forth, but there are differences even within Yup'ik population.

This program is designed to support students as they prepare for successful transitions to life after high school. This will be accomplished through self-exploration, increased awareness of career and educational opportunities, building student strengths and support systems, goal setting, and creating a personal transition plan.

### **Basic Application**

The application is a small group counseling curriculum designed to start at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and progresses through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. The program is divided into two sections spanning a two-year window. Sessions 1-6, a community potluck event, and an individual follow-up session are meant for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. Sessions 7-12, a community potluck event, and an individual follow-up session are intended for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Desirable group enrollment is between six and ten co-ed students.

Although the program is designed to occur in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade years, there is fluidity in the Smooth Transitions curriculum. Each activity is structured as a stand-alone section, therefore if a counselor/facilitator feels a younger student (9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grader) or older student would benefit from particular lessons they can attend at any time if needed. Students are allowed to repeat sessions if they want to further explore a section/topic. This could also be helpful for students who may have several absences, as missing a session will not impede individual or group progress.

Each session is designed to be completed within 45-60 minutes. Each student will keep a journal to monitor and reflect on their individual progress and to organize their planning efforts. These sessions could potentially benefit all 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in rural Alaska, so it may be desirable to modify these sessions for guidance lesson format and delivery. Appropriate activities, resources and homework have been designed and integrated into each session. Sessions are divided into three segments: warm-up, activity, and closure. Homework is an essential component to this program. It is designed to inspire dialogue between students and their families, and to give both parties a more active role in the career development process. Homework is assigned at the end of each session, and it is revisited during the warm-up each week.

### **Conclusion**

Retention at a postsecondary institution is defined as successful completion of coursework while remaining at a university for 6 months. The process of leaving home and adjusting to postsecondary education presents many challenges for all students, particularly for those from more vulnerable populations. The ethnic minority group with the lowest retention rate in the postsecondary education system is the American Indian and Alaska Native population (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). School counselors are charged with the responsibility of advocating for equitable opportunities for minority groups (McKillip et al., 2012). According to Ayunerak et al. (2014), “the key for the modern Yup’ik is to ensure that our children succeed in the Western school system while at the same time teaching them traditional cultural values that have stood the test of time” (p. 97). High school counselors can assist students in overcoming the challenges associated with transitioning to postsecondary educational settings by: setting high expectations, promoting a college-going atmosphere, involving family in the planning

process, and being aware of and sensitive to the issues and values unique to the American Indian and Alaska Native cultures (NCELA, 2011).

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## Smooth Transitions

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<http://www.mistynielsenphotography.com>

A working document created to support postsecondary transitions for students in rural Alaska.

By Jill M. Elliott

## Table of Contents

Program Overview .....	44
Parent Permission Letter .....	46
Individual Pre-Group Session & Informed Consent.....	47
Outline for 11 <sup>th</sup> grade year .....	50
Session 1- Learning About Myself with AKCIS .....	51
Session 2- Creating a Career Genogram.....	53
Session 3- Interpreting My Career Genogram .....	54
Session 4- Identifying Strengths and Values with the SEARCH Model .....	56
Session 5- Expanding Career and Education Awareness .....	58
Session 6- S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting .....	59
Invitation to Guest Speaker.....	62
Individual Follow-up Session .....	63
Outline for 12 <sup>th</sup> grade year .....	64
Session 7- Learning About Work and Schools with AKCIS .....	65
Session 8- Transition Preparation and Relationships.....	67
Session 9- Potential Obstacles & Coping Strategies.....	68
Session 10- Expanding Support System .....	69
Session 11- Revision of S.M.A.R.T. Goals .....	70
Session 12- Creating a Transition Plan.....	71
Individual Follow-up Session .....	73
Resources .....	74
Appendix A- CLDC Survey.....	76

### Smooth Transitions Program Overview

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This working document is designed to be a resource for high school counselors in rural Alaska so that they may utilize appropriate skills and materials to assist juniors and seniors, their parents or caregivers, and community leaders in regards to postsecondary transitions. Smooth Transitions is a culturally responsive career development curriculum for small groups in a high school setting. Career development is perceived as a lifelong pursuit. Therefore, it is beneficial for students and their families to begin thinking about and preparing for postsecondary transition well in advance of high school graduation.

The spirit of the Smooth Transitions program is the intentional infusion of culture in the career development path of Alaska Native students. Facilitators of this program are charged with the responsibilities of being aware of and sensitive to the issues and values unique to the Alaska Native population. However, the material is not inclusive and some of the statements may not apply to all Alaska Native groups. Aspects of Yup'ik culture are purposefully incorporated into the career development lessons set forth, but there are differences even within Yup'ik population. The Smooth Transitions program is grounded in the tenets of solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) and family-systems theory.

SFBT is categorized as a post-modern, strengths-based approach and is appropriate to use with diverse groups of clients (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014). Counselors implement SFBT strategies that encourage students to identify and draw upon personal strengths and existing resources. Discussion is centered on positive future outcomes and the resiliency of the client. SFBT is brief and cost effective, and it can be used with individuals as well as small groups, making it desirable in the school setting (Jacobs, Masson & Havill, 2006).

Family systems theory suggests that in addition to social and cultural forces, family history strongly influences an individual's thoughts, values and expectations (Henderson & Thompson, 2011). Facilitators of the Smooth Transitions program strive for cultural competence, and inspire individual growth with respect to the student's worldview. The activities and discussion that are incorporated into the Smooth Transitions curriculum are designed to increase awareness, enhance self-efficacy, and to embrace family, community and culture as vital supports in the career development process of adolescents.

### **Format**

The application is a small group counseling curriculum designed to start at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and progresses through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. The program is divided into two sections spanning a two-year window. Sessions 1-6, a community potluck event, and an individual follow-up session are meant for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. Sessions 7-12, a community potluck event, and an individual follow-up session are intended for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Desirable group enrollment is between six and ten co-ed students.

### **Target Population**

The program is specifically designed for Alaska Native students that are the first in their family to go to college, and/or are economically disadvantaged, but these sessions could potentially benefit all 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in rural Alaska. Counselors may modify these sessions for guidance lesson format and delivery if it is determined an entire school will be targeted for implementation.

Although the program is designed to occur in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade years, there is fluidity in the Smooth Transitions curriculum. Each activity is structured as a stand-alone section, therefore if a counselor/facilitator feels a younger student (9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grader) or older

student would benefit from particular lessons they can attend at any time if needed. Students are allowed to repeat sessions if they want to further explore a section/topic. This could also be helpful for students who may have several absences, as missing a session will not impede individual or group progress.

### **Logistics**

The weekly sessions are designed to last 45-60 minutes. A pre-group interview takes about 20 minutes, and a post-group follow-up takes approximately 30 minutes. A classroom in which group members can sit in a large circle is sufficient for the activities in this program.

Sessions are divided into three segments: a warm-up, an activity, and closure to process information and discuss homework. Homework is an essential component of this program. It is designed to inspire dialogue between students and their families, and to give both parties a more active role in the career development process. Homework is assigned at the end of each session, and is revisited during the warm-up each week.

### **Materials**

The standard materials for every lesson include: large whiteboard and dry erase markers, journals, pens and pencils, colored pencils or markers, computers with Internet access, and a projector for the facilitator. Each student will keep a journal to monitor and reflect on their individual progress and to organize their planning efforts. It is at the facilitator's discretion to determine if these journals are bound, loose-leaf or even digital. Students will be encouraged to use their journals during sessions and for homework.

**The goal of the Smooth Transitions program is to increase student success! So please feel free to contact me, Jill Elliott, at [jelliott@dlgsd.org](mailto:jelliott@dlgsd.org) with any questions, concerns or suggestions.**

*(Sample Informed Consent for Parents)*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Our school counseling program at \_\_\_\_\_ offers guidance and support to high school students preparing for higher education and careers. Transitioning from high school to postsecondary, and from rural to urban settings presents many challenges for our students. In an effort to facilitate smoother transitions, our school district encourages opportunities that foster career development.

Your child \_\_\_\_\_ is invited to be a part of Smooth Transitions, a small group designed to: identify personal values and assets, explore career and educational opportunities, and create personal goals and plans that will help them to achieve success. The small group setting is a supportive environment that promotes social connection and personal growth.

The group will meet weekly for six sessions beginning \_\_\_\_\_, and will run from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Parent permission is requested for a student to participate in the group. Please return the lower portion of this form to the front office. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have. You can reach me by calling \_\_\_\_\_, or by email at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

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My child \_\_\_\_\_ has permission to participate in small group counseling dealing with career and academic planning.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Individual Pre-Group Screening Session**

*The purpose of this session is for the student and facilitator to determine if Smooth Transitions is appropriate for the student at this time.*

**Discussion:** The facilitator explains the purpose and format of Smooth Transitions. Student expectations in regard to behavior, attendance and commitment are discussed. The facilitator informs the potential group member of the responsibilities and benefits of group counseling, as well as the limitations of confidentiality in this process. The student is given an opportunity to ask questions about the group.

Students are given a copy of the parent permission form and group membership agreement.

At this time no pre-assessment is included in the Smooth Transitions program. However, a sample career development survey is provided in Appendix A.

*(Sample Informed Consent)*

**Group Membership Agreement**

I agree to commit to working hard and participating in group activities to further my career development.

I understand that it is my responsibility to inform the school counselor/group facilitator if I am unable to attend any of the meetings.

I understand that the information shared in group is privileged, and I agree to protect the confidentiality of my fellow group members.

I agree to follow the behavioral guidelines we establish during the first session of Smooth Transitions.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Outline for 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Year**

#### *Fall Semester*

Students will participate in six weekly sessions as outlined below, and a potluck will be the culminating event for the group.

- ❖ Session 1- Learning About Myself with AKCIS
- ❖ Session 2- Creating a Career Genogram
- ❖ Session 3- Interpreting My Career Genogram
- ❖ Session 4- Identifying Strengths and Values with the SEARCH Model
- ❖ Session 5- Expanding Career and Education Awareness
- ❖ Session 6- S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting
- ❖ Community Potluck Celebration

A discussion about the potential continuation into the 12<sup>th</sup> grade year can begin at the initial pre-group session and be integrated into subsequent sessions when appropriate.

#### *Early in Spring Semester*

An individual follow-up session will be scheduled for each student participant, and if necessary additional individual counseling will be provided throughout spring semester.

## **Session 1- Learning About Myself with AKCIS**

*The purpose of this session is to support group cohesiveness and encourage self-exploration.*

**Materials:** large whiteboard and dry erase markers, M&M's or Skittles, journals for each student, pens and pencils, colored pencils or markers, computers with Internet access

### **Introduction**

Explain that this program is designed to support students as they prepare for successful transitions to life after high school. This will be accomplished through self-exploration, increased awareness of career and educational opportunities, building student strengths and support systems, and goal setting.

Discuss the positive outcomes associated with group counseling as well as the importance of confidentiality. Basic behavioral group norms such as respect, honesty, effort, and commitment should be established collaboratively. The facilitator should adequately address all questions and concerns from group members.

### **Ice Breaker**

Each student will be invited to take three multi-colored candies. For each possible color, assign a topic to it such as:

- Blue = family
- Red = school
- Green = hobbies

Each student will tell the group one fact about him or herself for each candy they have. So, if they have two blues and one green, they must tell two facts about their family and one fact about a hobby they have. The facilitator should go first to provide an example.

### **Warm-up**

Pass out a journal to each student and explain the intended use. It is their personal "career development journal" and is a place for students to reflect on activities and experiences related to school and work. These journals will allow students to monitor their growth, and to collect resources pertaining to career development. Student journals will remain private, although there will be opportunities to share verbally with the group during each session. Creativity is encouraged, and students are welcomed to incorporate color and/drawings in their journals. Provide writing utensils and colors, and give students 5 minutes to write their name inside the journal and to decorate/personalize the cover. Students will take their journals home and bring them back to each session.

### **Activity**

**Tutorial:** Provide students with an overview of the Alaska Career Information System ([akcis.org](http://akcis.org)). This a free resource provided to teens and adults living in Alaska. Use a projector to highlight some of the features of the website. Introduce students to the "Career Cluster Inventory", "Interest Profiler" and "SKILLS Inventory" assessments available on AkCIS.

**Independent Exploration:** If students have not used AkCIS before, it will be necessary for them to create a login. Encourage all students to store their login and password information for future use. With the remaining time, students can begin one of the assessments.

### **Closure**

**Homework Prompt:** Complete the “Learn About Myself” assessments on AkCIS. Answer the following questions in your journal.

- What career clusters are most compatible with your interests?
- What occupations support the skills you like to perform?
- What excites or intrigues you about any of the suggested occupations?

The “Reality Check” is another great tool to look at when you have time.

## Session 2- Creating a Career Genogram

*The purpose of this lesson is to create a genogram that allows students to identify patterns of education and career within their family tree.*

### Warm-Up

Check in with students to see how the assessments on AkCIS went. Ask students to share some of their results. Did any of these results surprise you? What insights did you gain from this process?

### Activity

Inform students of the usefulness of genograms in the career development process. Genograms are diagrams that show how individuals within a family are related to one another. Career genograms contain information about the work experience and education of family members. An individual's career decision may be influenced by their family's education, career choices, and attitudes towards work.

**Tutorial:** The facilitator can show a sample of a career genogram either by drawing one on the board or projecting images. Discuss the meaning of different symbols. Direct students to begin creating a preliminary genogram chart like the one on the board listing their parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents and each of their careers and educational levels. Students should try to go back as far as possible to their great-grandparents or further if they can. Students should focus on those individuals that are emotionally closest to them. An example of a career genogram is provided, but several are available online as well.

**Independent Work:** Students are given time to create their genogram and the counselor provides assistance as needed. If the student is unsure of someone's name or job right now, they should leave that space blank. They may fill it out later with their families help.

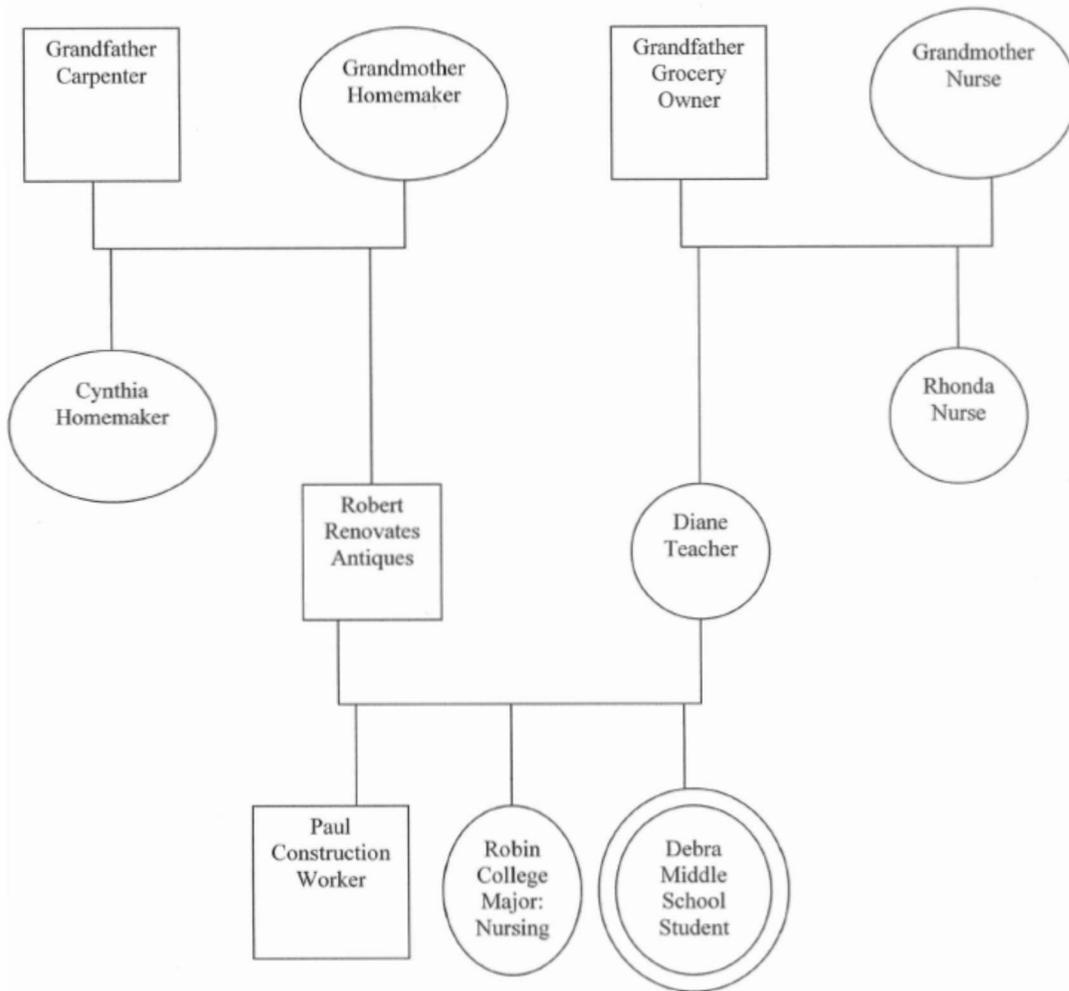
### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** Reflect on the following questions in your journal.

- What are the personal interests/hobbies of your siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and great-grandparents?
- What are the traditional versus nontraditional occupations represented in your family?
- How is your mother's and/or father's education related to her and/or his career choice?
- Do your parents work in the community or must they travel outside of the community?
- How do your parents manage their extracurricular activities and work?
- Did the economy affect your parents', grandparents', and great-grandparents' employment?

(Adapted from Gibson, 2008)

### Career Genogram Example



This is a very simple version of a career genogram. Squares represent males and circles represent females. Horizontal lines signify marriage and vertical lines signify offspring. More personal descriptors may be included if desired, and additional symbols can be used to show types of emotional relationships or familial circumstances. An exterior circle denotes the individual completing the genogram.

### Session 3- Interpreting My Career Genogram

*The purpose of this session is to use the career genograms that students created to increase awareness of familial and cultural influences on student career choice.*

#### Warm-Up

Check in with students and inquire about their homework assignment. Did anyone have trouble completing his/her genogram? Did anyone discover something new or interesting about his/her family's education or work experience?

#### Activity

**Partner Discussion:** The facilitator can post the following discussion questions.

- Do you think that you are more likely to pursue a career that someone in your family already has because those are the careers you know most about? Why or why not?
- Are there any careers that your family really wants you to pursue or do not want you to pursue? What is their reasoning for this? How does it make you feel?
- Think for a minute about your parents' attitudes towards education. Do you think that children could be influenced by their parents to either go to college or not go to college? Why or why not? Is this good or bad?

**Group Discussion:** Go around the circle and encourage students to share one insight he/she gained from the analysis of his/her genograms and their partner discussions. Next, pose the following questions.

- Beyond family, who else influences your perceptions and expectations? (Students may generate answers that include peers, coaches, teachers, mentors, religious leaders, bosses, etc.)
- Do you think these individuals increase or limit the career options that you see for yourself?

#### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** Consider how society as a whole might influence your perceptions and attitudes about career choice. How do stereotypes that are based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. impact your beliefs about what career paths are appropriate for you?

**Session 4- Identifying Strengths and Values with the SEARCH Model**

*The purpose of this session is to bolster student self-efficacy through the affirmation of existing strengths and resources.*

**Warm-Up**

Post the following discussion topic on the board.

- Is there a job that interests you, but you have not seriously considered because of societal expectations? Explain why this stereotype is inadequate.

Ask students to take a few minutes to formulate their responses. Remind students that everyone is entitled to their opinion and that respectful discussion is welcome. Then go around the circle and allow students to share their views.

**Activity**

Solution-focused theory promotes tapping into an individual's strengths and coping strategies to overcome challenges. The SEARCH Model has six domains that can be explored to provide valuable information about the current functioning of adolescents. Write these domains on the board.

- *Self domain* (strengths and personal assets, areas for enhancement)
- *Education, work, and career domain* (passions, skills, educational experiences and successes, career goals)
- *Activities domain* (interests, values, current and past activities)
- *Relationships domain* (peer/mentor relationships, social competencies, support system)
- *Community and culture domain* (ethnic identity, cultural influences, community involvement)
- *Home domain* (quality of relationships, areas of support or conflict, potential resources)

**Journal:** Students copy each of these categories into their journals. For each section students will list their positive experiences, achievements, assets, values, and the people that support them in these areas. The facilitator provides assistance to students as needed.

**Closure**

**Homework Prompt:** Discuss the strengths and values that you identified in this exercise with at least two individuals that are close to you. Then respond to the following questions in your journal.

- Did your family and/or friends agree with the strengths and values that you identified?
- Did they recognize any assets that you left out?
- What surprised you about their feedback?
- What insight did you gain from this process?

## Session 5- Enhancing Career and Education Awareness

*The purpose of this session is to inform students of summer programs, and to explore other opportunities for career development.*

### Warm-Up

Check in with students and provide the opportunity to share how the homework assignment went. Invite students to share the insights they gained from the discussions with their family and friends pertaining to strengths and values.

### Activity

**Discussion:** Introduce various summer programs that the University of Alaska sponsors for high school students including: Della Keats, Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP), Rural Alaska Honors Institute (RAHI), and Alaska Summer Research Academy (ASRA). Other programs such as the Sitka Fine Arts Camp, College Horizons, and locally sponsored camps may also be included. Students may know a friend or family member that has participated in one of these programs; encourage these students to share their knowledge. Refer students to the appropriate websites to find out more details and/or download the applications. This is an appropriate time to encourage students to visit college campuses during upcoming vacations.

**Brainstorm:** Pair students and instruct them to generate ideas about community service and job shadow prospects within their community. After about 5 minutes, the group reunites to compile a single list. During this time, students are networking and making note of what opportunities interest them.

### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** In a few weeks we will celebrate your work towards career development with your family and friends at a potluck. Please set aside time this week to consider the following items so that this event is meaningful to you and your loved ones.

1. Who will you invite to join our group at the potluck?
2. When and where should the potluck be?
3. Are there any traditions or cultural practices that you would like incorporated into the potluck?
4. Are there any special foods, music or dance that you think should be included?

**Session 6- S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting**

*The purpose of this session is to assist students in developing career and education goals.*

**Warm-Up**

Obtain feedback from students as to their suggestions and requests for the parameters of the potluck. The group should agree on a setting that is amiable to all members. The facilitator should inquire about the specifics of any cultural practices so that appropriate materials can be obtained, and to ensure that there is a student in the group that can teach other attendees the expectations and model appropriate behaviors. Students may prefer to sign-up to bring specific food items. The group can also decide if they will use verbal and/or written invitations.

**Activity**

**Journal:** Students are to review the strengths and values they identified using the SEARCH domains in session four. Explain that today's session is going to focus on goal setting. When there is something in your that life you want, a goal can help you achieve it. Instruct students to write, "Wants" at the top of their page. Tell them that they have one minute to write down things that they want to accomplish in their lives.

*Note:* Students should write down things that will improve their lives or make them a better person.

Examples to generate student ideas:

- To make better grades in science class
- To make the basketball team
- Learn how to play the piano
- Open up a lemonade stand business
- To buy their mother a nice dress for her birthday
- To be a doctor

After one minute, ask students to select three "wants" that are related to work or school. These "wants" will be turned into S.M.A.R.T. goals (Adapted from Simply Outrageous Youth, 2006).

Explain to students that each letter in the word, SMART, stands for something. The facilitator may project or write these steps on a white board.

### **S.M.A.R.T. Goals**

**Specific –You should be clear about what you want to happen.**

- Not Specific: I want to make good grades.
- Specific: I want to have a 93 average in science by December 13, 2015.

**Measurable –You should be able to track your goal.**

- Not Measurable: I want to make a lot of free throw shots.
- Measurable: I want to make at least 9 out of 10 free throw shots in the next basketball game.

**Action –What small specific actions must you take to achieve this goal?**

- Wrong: In order to make a 93 average in science by December 13, 2015 I must study.
- Right: In order to make a 93 average in science by December 13, 2015 I must read over my science notes every night for 20 minutes.

**Realistic –Can you achieve these goals? Is it doable?**

- Unrealistic: I want make 200 free throw shots in one game.
- Realistic: I want to make 8 out of 10 of the free throw shots that I attempt.

**Time –You should set a timeframe for your goal.**

- No time: I want to learn to play the piano.
- Time: I want to learn to play “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” by June 3, 2016.

Provide guidance as students create three SMART personal goals related to career or education.

### **Closure**

**Homework Prompt:** Think about how you will present these goals to your family and friends. Is there an art form (drawing, sculpture, poetry, music, etc.) that will enhance your presentation? Do you want to use technology?

You will not be expected to get up and speak in front of the whole group. Rather, there will be time at the potluck for you to share your goals with your family and friends sitting together at a circular table.

Consider addressing the following questions in your presentation. How can your family, friends and community best support you in achieving your goals? How will these people benefit when you accomplish your goals?

**Group Evaluation:** Pass out the evaluation forms and explain that they are anonymous. The information students provide can help the facilitator improve the program for future students.

### Group Evaluation

Please respond to the items below based on your experience in Smooth Transitions.

1. Overall, this group was helpful to me.  

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
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2. I enjoyed working with other students.  

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
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3. I felt supported by the other group members.  

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
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4. The counselor was able to provide guidance and support when I needed it.  

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
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5. The activities were useful in my career development process.  

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
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6. The discussions were important in my career development process.  

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
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7. The homework assignments helped me talk with my family about my future.  

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
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8. The thing I liked best about this group was:
  
9. The thing I did not like about this group was:
  
10. If I could change anything about this group it would be:

Additional Comments:

*Your input counts! Thank you for completing this anonymous evaluation.*

*(Sample Letter Inviting Guest Speaker)*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Our school counseling program at \_\_\_\_\_ offers guidance to high school students preparing for higher education and careers. Transitioning from high school to postsecondary, and from rural to urban settings presents many challenges for our students. In an effort to facilitate smoother transitions, our school district encourages opportunities that foster career development.

This year students in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades have worked in small group settings to: identify their personal values and assets, explore career and educational opportunities, and create personal goals and plans that will allow them to achieve success. Students have made significant progress in their career development, but the importance of family and community support in this endeavor cannot be overstated.

A potluck will be held at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_. The hard work and commitment of these students will be acknowledged during this event. There will also be time for students to share their goals with their family and friends. We would be honored to have you as a guest speaker at the potluck. Your career experience and personal achievement make you a positive role model for our youth, and they would greatly benefit from hearing your wisdom and advice.

Please consider joining us as we offer support to these students and celebrate the positive steps they are taking toward a strong future. I can be reached by phone at \_\_\_\_\_, or email at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

**Post-Group Individual Follow-Up Session**

*The purpose of this session is to check in with each student and evaluate progress toward his/her SMART goals.*

**Beginning of Spring Semester of 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Year**

The facilitator should schedule a follow-up session with each student after semester break. This opportunity gives students a time for self-reflection and to evaluate their personal career development process. The facilitator can provide feedback and help students identify solutions to new obstacles that have arisen. If necessary, SMART goals can be revised appropriately. Students should be encouraged to apply for summer programs and job shadow opportunities that increase career awareness, or to commit to service activities that promote social connectedness and self-efficacy. During this follow-up the facilitator and student will determine whether the student needs additional individual counseling.

### **Outline for 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Year**

#### Fall Semester

Students will participate in six weekly sessions as outlined below, and a potluck will be the culminating event for the group.

- ❖ Session 7- Learning About Work and Schools with AKCIS
- ❖ Session 8- Transition Preparation and Relationships
- ❖ Session 9- Potential Obstacles & Coping Strategies
- ❖ Session 10- Expanding Support System
- ❖ Session 11- Revision of S.M.A.R.T. Goals
- ❖ Session 12- Creating a Transition Plan
- ❖ Community Potluck Celebration

#### Early in Spring Semester

An individual follow-up session will be scheduled for each student participant, and if necessary additional individual counseling will be provided throughout spring semester.

**Session 7- Learning About Work and Schools with AKCIS**

*The purpose of this session is to support group cohesiveness and inspire further career and school research.*

**Materials:** large whiteboard and dry erase markers, M&M's or Skittles, journals for each student, pens and pencils, colored pencils or markers, computers with Internet access

**Introduction**

*Many of the original group members may be continuing on, so for them this is a review. For new members, this is an introduction. Taking time to discuss the purpose of the group and to establish expectations is important for positive group experiences and outcomes.*

Explain that this program is designed to support students as they prepare for successful transitions to life after high school. This will be accomplished through self-exploration, increased awareness of career and educational opportunities, building student strengths and support systems, and goal setting. An additional component for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade year is creating a personal transition plan.

Discuss the positive outcomes associated with group counseling as well as the importance of confidentiality. Basic behavioral group norms such as respect, honesty, effort, and commitment should be established collaboratively. The facilitator should adequately address all questions and concerns from group members.

**Ice Breaker**

Each student will be invited to take three multi-colored candies. For each possible color, assign a topic to it such as:

- Blue = family
- Red = school
- Green = hobbies

Each student will tell the group one fact about him or herself for each candy they have. So, if they have two blues and one green, they must tell two facts about their family and one fact about a hobby they have. The facilitator should go first to provide an example.

**Warm-up**

Pass out a journal to each student and explain the intended use (students that still have their journals from the previous year are welcome to continue work in those). It is their personal "career development journal" and is a place for students to reflect on activities and experiences related to school and work. These journals will allow students to monitor their growth, and to collect resources pertaining to career development. Student journals will remain private, although there will be opportunities to share verbally with the group during each session. Creativity is encouraged, and students are welcomed to incorporate color and/drawings in their journals. Provide writing utensils and colors, and give students 5 minutes to write their name inside the journal and to decorate/personalize the cover.

### Activity

**Tutorial:** Use a projector to highlight some of the useful features on akcis.org. Explain to students that they will have free access to all of the resources on AkCIS as long as they are Alaska residents. If a student is expressing interest in pursuing specific careers, model how to utilize the “School Sort” tool to find colleges that offer their program of study and match their desired criteria. Show students some of the other helpful functions such as resume builder and financial aid worksheets.

**Independent Exploration:** Students will login to akcis.org. First-time AkCIS users will need to create a username and password. In order for the school counselor to access student information on AkCIS, the student must first login with the school district’s username and password to create their own portfolio. Encourage all students to store their login and password information for future use.

With the remaining time, students can begin the “Learn About Work” or “Learn About Schools” modules.

### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** Complete either the “Learn About Work” or “Learn About Schools” modules on AkCIS. Then answer the corresponding set of questions in your journal.

For students transitioning to work:

- What are some of the occupations that you found most interesting?
- Describe what you learned about these jobs.
- What additional information would be helpful in guiding your decision to pursue this career?

For students transitioning to college:

- What are some of the schools that you found most appealing?
- Compare your top selections.
- What additional information would be helpful in guiding your decision to attend this school?

## Session 8- Transition Preparation and Relationships

*The purpose of this session is to inspire a dialogue about how transition from high school impacts personal relationships.*

### Warm-Up

Check in with students to see how the exploration on AKCIS went. Facilitate a group discussion using the following questions.

- For students transitioning to work: Briefly describe what you learned about the two occupations that you are most interested in pursuing.
- For students transitioning to college: Briefly compare your top two school selections.
- For all students: What other information will help you make informed decisions about your future career or school?

### Activity

**Group Discussion:** Students discuss their feelings and thoughts pertaining to their final year of high school and their preparations for postsecondary life. Check in with students to gauge their mental and emotional processes. Give each student the opportunity to share their feelings about completing high school and elaborate on their future plans.

**Journal:** Students consider how this transition is impacting their relationships with family members and friends. Ask students to respond to the following in their journals.

1. List the important people in your life.
2. Consider how your relationship with each person may change as you transition to life after high school.
  - How will physical distance impact the way you interact and communicate?
  - How will your role change when you leave home and live independently?
  - How will others roles be impacted?

**Partner Discussion:** Post these questions on a white board to guide partner discussion. What relationship changes will impact you the most? What are some of the positive changes you identified? What are some of the negative aspects of these changes?

### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** Have a discussion with some of the important people in your life to come up with ideas of how best to preserve and strengthen your relationship after you graduate from high school. Write these thoughts down in your journal. What are some of the feelings you are experiencing as you think about these changes to your relationships?

## Session 9- Potential Obstacles & Coping Strategies

*The purpose of this session is to increase student confidence in their ability to successfully solve future problems by using their existing strategies and resources.*

### Warm-Up

Check in with students and inquire about how the homework went. In regards to postsecondary transition, ask students to share with the group one aspect they are excited about and one aspect that they are nervous about.

### Activity

**Partner Discussion:** Post the following topics on the white board: family, friends, housing, finances, academics, and employment. Instruct students to find a partner and talk about the potential obstacles and setbacks they will experience during the first year out of high school. Students can refer to the list of topics to guide their discussion.

**Group Discussion:** Go around the circle until each pair has reported back to the group. Generate a list on the white board of the recurring themes. Next, encourage students to consider individual resiliencies and coping strategies to generate plausible responses to these adverse circumstances. The facilitator should write these solutions on the white board as well.

### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** In your journal please respond to the following.

- Name the current support people in your life.
- Describe the situations in which you have sought out their help.
- List some of the potential challenges you may face during your first year out of high school.
- Who best can help support you in these scenarios?
- Are there any situations in which you would need an alternate support system?

## Session 10- Expanding Support System

*The purpose of this session is to identify current support people and discuss possibilities for expanding the student's support network.*

### Warm-Up

Check in with students and inquire about the homework. Encourage group members to talk about key support people in their lives (names can be omitted). Ask students if they were able to identify any situations in which their current support system may be inadequate.

### Activity

Explain to students that there are many people at the organizations they will be transitioning to that are equipped to offer support pertaining to finances, housing, academics, work, mental and physical health, and relationships.

**Independent Exploration:** Instruct students to conduct Internet research to find offices and services at the location they intend to transition to. The facilitator can provide assistance as needed.

**Group Discussion:** Ask students to report back to the group with their findings. Discuss other possible sources of support, i.e., mentors and role models that have taken a similar path as the student.

### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** In a few weeks we will celebrate your work towards career development with your family and friends at a potluck. Please set aside time this week to consider the following items so that this event is meaningful to you and your loved ones.

1. Who will you invite to join our group at the potluck?
2. When and where should the potluck be?
3. Are there any traditions or cultural practices that you would like incorporated into the potluck?
4. Are there any special foods, music or dance that you think should be included?

**Session 11- Revision of S.M.A.R.T. Goals**

*The purpose of this session is to update SMART goals and begin drafting a postsecondary transition plan.*

**Warm-Up**

Obtain feedback from students as to their suggestions and requests for the parameters of the potluck. The group should agree on a setting that is amiable to all members. The facilitator should inquire about the specifics of any cultural practices so that appropriate materials can be obtained, and to ensure that there is a student in the group that can teach other attendees the expectations and model appropriate behaviors. Students may prefer to sign-up to bring specific food items. The group can also decide if they will use verbal and/or written invitations.

**Activity**

**Journal:** Students created SMART goals during Session 6, and today they will update or create new goals using the same process. After students set three SMART career or education goals, they will incorporate them into a transition plan.

**Individual Work:** Students will login to their AkCIS accounts and access their portfolios. Point students to the “My Career Plan” page. From here students select “Next Steps”, then “Make Plans”. Students will now begin to create their Education Plans, Experiential Learning Plans, Financial Plans and Action Plans. Depending on the student’s postsecondary goals and time constraints, the facilitator and student should agree on necessary and practical content for inclusion in the transition plan.

**Closure**

**Homework Prompt:** Continue work on your AkCIS transition plan.

## Session 12- Creating a Transition Plan

*The purpose of this session is to create a personalized, comprehensive postsecondary transition plan.*

### Warm-Up

Ask students to provide an update on their transition plans. Inquire as to any difficulties with this process.

### Activity

**Individual Work:** Students continue to work on a postsecondary transition support plan that includes resources, people and strategies that they can rely on when faced with adverse conditions. The facilitator offers assistance as needed.

*Note-* While this is an individual task, students should be encouraged to share progress with one another. Students will benefit from seeking feedback and offering support to one another.

### Closure

**Homework Prompt:** Think about how you will present this transition plan to your family and friends. This is a comprehensive plan, so you may want to select the aspects of the plan that are most important and that you are most proud of.

Is there an art form (drawing, sculpture, poetry, music, etc.) that will enhance your presentation?  
Do you want to use technology?

You will not be expected to get up and speak in front of the whole group. Rather, there will be time at the potluck for you to share your plan with your family and friends sitting together at a circular table.

Consider addressing the following questions in your presentation. How can your family, friends and community best support you in this plan? How will these people benefit when your plan is accomplished?

**Group Evaluation:** Pass out the evaluation forms and explain that they are anonymous. The information students provide can help the facilitator improve the program for future students.

### Group Evaluation

Please respond to the items below based on your experience in Smooth Transitions.

1. Overall, this group was helpful to me.

*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

2. I enjoyed working with other students.

*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

3. I felt supported by the other group members.

*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

4. The counselor was able to provide guidance and support when I needed it.

*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

5. The activities were useful in my career development process.

*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

6. The discussions were important in my career development process.

*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

7. The homework assignments helped me talk with my family about my future.

*Strongly Agree*      *Agree*      *Disagree*      *Strongly Disagree*

8. The thing I liked best about this group was:

9. The thing I did not like about this group was:

10. If I could change anything about this group it would be:

Additional Comments:

*Your input counts! Thank you for completing this anonymous evaluation.*

**Post-Group Individual Follow-Up Session**

*The purpose of this session is to check in with each student and evaluate progress toward his/her SMART goals and the functionality of his/her transition plan.*

**Beginning of Spring Semester of 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Year**

The facilitator should schedule a follow-up session with each student after semester break. This opportunity gives students a time for self-reflection and to evaluate their personal career development process. The facilitator can provide feedback and help students identify solutions to new obstacles that have arisen. If necessary, SMART goals and transition plans can be revised appropriately. Students should be encouraged to submit applications for postsecondary programs and scholarships, or to build their resume and reference list in preparation for a job search. During this follow-up the facilitator and student will determine whether the student needs additional individual counseling.

### Resources

Corey, M.S., Corey, G., & Corey, C. (2014). *Groups: Process and practice* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Gibson, D. (2008). *Using career genograms in K-12 settings*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncda.org/>

Henderson, D., & Thompson, C. (2011). *Counseling children* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. ISBN: 9780495903383

Jacobs, E.E., Masson, R.L., & Havill, R.L. (2006). *Group counseling strategies and skills* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Simply Outrageous Youth. (2006). *Goals activity*. Retrieved from [www.simplyoutrageousyouth.net](http://www.simplyoutrageousyouth.net)

Whitmarsh, L., & Mullette, J. (2009). SEARCH: An integrated model for counseling adolescents. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education & Development*, 48(2), 144-159.

*(Additional Resources to Share with Students)*

**College & Career Prep Checklist**

[http://acpe.alaska.gov/STUDENT-PARENT/College\\_Career](http://acpe.alaska.gov/STUDENT-PARENT/College_Career)

**25 Common Myths about College**

<http://www.mycollegeoptions.org>

**College Counseling Sourcebook materials:** ACT at a glance, SAT at a glance, Tips to review before going to an interview, College Application FAQs, Guidelines for students requesting a recommendation, Tips on writing a college admissions essay, Do's and Don'ts of the Personal Essay

<http://www.collegeboard.com>

**Financial Aid Options & Free Application for Federal Student Aid**

<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>

**Alaska Performance Scholarship**

[http://acpe.alaska.gov/STUDENT-PARENT/Grants\\_Scholarships/Alaska\\_Performance\\_Scholarship](http://acpe.alaska.gov/STUDENT-PARENT/Grants_Scholarships/Alaska_Performance_Scholarship)

**ACT calendar and registration**

<http://www.actstudent.org/>

**SAT calendar and registration**

<http://sat.collegeboard.org/>

**Tribal Colleges & Universities**

<http://www.niea.org/students/tribal-colleges-and-universities.aspx>

**Western Undergraduate Exchange**

<http://www.wiche.edu/wue>

**NCAA Eligibility Center & Quick Reference Guide**

<http://www.eligibilitycenter.org>

## Appendix A

The following survey was created by Ohio University Career & Leadership Development Center ([www.ohio.edu/careerandleadership](http://www.ohio.edu/careerandleadership)) and administered to students enrolled in CAS 1130X in Fall 2013. This survey could potentially be adapted and used as a pre- and post-assessment tool for the Smooth Transitions project.

### CLDC Survey

#### CAS 1130X Learning Outcomes:

*Rate your current ability within each of the areas below by circling the appropriate indicator. Circle only one option for each statement. Be honest with your rating of your skill level. This is intended to guide the direction of this course and the intended learning outcomes upon completion of the course. This assessment is anonymous and will not be associated with your grade in the course.*

**I am familiar with the idea that my career will evolve over my lifetime.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I play an active part in determining my career exploration process.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I am aware of the different factors influencing my career exploration.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I create action steps to move my career development process forward.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I can identify the work attitudes of influential friends and family in my life.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I can describe my interests, skills, values, motivations, and personality and how they influence my career plans.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I am prepared to identify specific ways to get involved within the campus community.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I can name specific and marketable skills gained from my degree interest(s) in the College of Arts and Sciences.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I am aware of the specific skills I need to have in order to succeed in the workplace when I graduate.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I know why it is important to gain experience outside of the classroom.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I have a clear understanding of what a full-time job will be like when I graduate.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I know multiple tools or resources to use to explore occupational possibilities.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I currently use more than one resource to explore major or occupational options.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I am comfortable with the elements of building an intentional network of professional contacts.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I am aware and comfortable with the skills required to pursue an internship opportunity.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I know the elements required of a professional resume, cover letter, and reference sheet.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I understand how to link personal experiences and skills to an organization's needs when I apply to a job.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I know how to tailor application materials to the needs of an organization.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**It is important for me to plan out specific goals for involvement and professional experience during my time in college.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I have a clear idea of the specific academic and professional steps I will take over the next four years.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I am comfortable making decisions about my college area of study.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I am comfortable making decisions about my future career path.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**I have the skills necessary to make informed career decisions.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree