Do you think we met that goal?  
Evaluating Hopeful Connections Cancer Support Group for Alaska Native Survivors

Ashley E. Strauch, Ellen D. S. Lopez, Freda M. Williams

Ethics
- All materials & procedures were approved by FNA, & the UAF-Institutional Review Board
- Participants provided informed consent
- Participants were offered:
  - $30 gift card for completing an interview
  - $30 for taking part in an interactive findings forum

Methods/Procedures

Recruitment & Processes
- Participants were recruited via colorful flyers & Word of Mouth
- Interviews lasted 35-120 minutes
- Recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim
- The qualitative management package, NVivo 9, enabled conclusions to be drawn across questions & participants
- Findings were shared with participants during a Findings Forum offered as a Hopeful Connections Support Group Session Topics

Data Analysis & Verification
- Interviews were digitally audio-recorded
- Participants provided informed consent
- Interviews were conducted within a partnership between the Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) & the UAF Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR)
- 15 Support group members participated (11 women, 4 men)
- Research team because I feel like too many people from the outside world come into our villages & do some kind of study

Findings (regarding goal achievement)

Goal 1: Safety for sharing & caring
- Achieved? Yes (15/15 said ‘yes’)
  - “Just to get where we’re at with this support group I think was a big move for all of us – because it opened a door to a new way of thinking towards helping each other…”

Goal 2: Sharing Factual Information
- Achieved? Yes (15/15 said ‘yes’)
  - Suggested need for more handouts & speakers
  - “The few speakers that we had they were very positive and helpful in a way, but that goes back out into the community”

Goal 3: Sharing personal information
- Achieved? Most, but not all, agreed that goal has been achieved.
  - Participants indicated reservations about research based on past negative experiences
  - I personally would like to be part of that research team because I feel like too many times people from the outside world come into our villages & do some kind of study”

Goal 4: Awareness of survivor strengths & needs
- Achieved? Almost. (12/15 said ‘yes’)  
  - Suggestions for improvement:
    - Become more involved in Fairbanks community, talk with legislators, extend program to rural communities
    - “I think we’re just starting…”

Goal 4: Trust in research
- Achieved? Almost. (12/15 said ‘yes’)  
- Participants indicated reservations about research based on past negative experiences

Discussion & Implications

In response, Hopeful Connections is:
- Providing factual information & enhancing trust in research by offering “Cancer 101,” a multi-session training that provides evidence-based information about:
  - Cancer Basics, Cancer Prevention & Early Detection, Bio-specimen Banking, & Cancer Coping
  - Raising awareness about Alaska Native survivors by joining the Fairbanks (American Cancer Society’s) Relay for Life by:  
    - Establishing a Hopeful Connections Relay team
    - Creating Athabascan beaded pins to give and welcome all Relay for Life participants
  - Raising awareness & providing information by administrating a Hopeful Connections Facebook page
  - Planning to raise awareness by offering a toll-free call-in number during support group sessions
  - Planning to become a 501©3 to expand reach & achieve goals throughout Alaska’s Interior Region

Cited References
1. Frieberg & Melbye, 2008
2. Lanier, et al., 2006
3. American Cancer Society, 2011
4. Lopez, et al., 2013

We Express our Gratitude to:
- Evaluation participants
- Collaborative Cancer Program Advisory Committee
- UAF–URSA Program – for their generous funding
- Institute of Translational Health Sciences
- Native People for Cancer Control
- Alaska Native Health Research Program
- We Express our Gratitude to:
  - Ashley Strauch: aestruch@alaska.edu

Rationale & Introduction
Cancer is the leading cause of death among Alaska Natives. 1 When compared with other groups, disparities exist. Alaska Native people are less likely to survive 5 years beyond initial cancer diagnosis. 2 Due to improved early detection screening & advances in treatment, the number of cancer survivors is rising. 3 Yet, little is known how Alaska Native people experience cancer & cancer survivorship.

Formative interviews conducted with 28 Alaska Native cancer survivors revealed the need for a culturally responsive cancer support group. 4

In response, the FNA/CANHR collaboratively founded Hopeful Connections. With funding from:
- Doyon, Ltd
- The Institute of Translational Health Sciences
- Native People for Cancer Control

After offering 8 bi-monthly sessions, Hopeful Connections conducted a qualitative evaluation about research based on past negative experiences

Hopeful Connections is a cancer support group for Alaska Native cancer survivors & their loved ones. It is offered through our FNA/CANHR collaborative

Goals of Hopeful Connections are to enhance:
1. Safety: for sharing & caring
2. Sharing: evidence-based & personal information
3. Trust: in cancer/health-related research
4. Awareness: about the strengths & needs of Alaska Native cancer survivors

Support Group Session Topics
- Telling our stories
- Photovoice
- Cancer Treatments
- Strategies for Coping
- Early Detection
- Cancer Nutrition
- Cancer Basics, Cancer Prevention & Early Detection
- Cancer disparities among Alaska Native people

1. Frieberg & Melbye, 2008
2. Lanier, et al., 2006
3. American Cancer Society, 2011
4. Lopez, et al., 2013

Data Analysis & Verification
- Interviews were digitally audio-recorded
- Participants provided informed consent
- Participants were recruited via colorful flyers & Word of Mouth
- Interviews lasted 35-120 minutes
- Recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim
- The qualitative management package, NVivo 9, enabled conclusions to be drawn across questions & participants
- Findings were shared with participants during a Findings Forum offered as a Hopeful Connections Support Group Session Topics
- Participants were recruited via colorful flyers & Word of Mouth
- Interviews were digitally audio-recorded
- 15 Support group members participated (11 women, 4 men)
- Research team because I feel like too many people from the outside world come into our villages & do some kind of study

Goal 1: Safety for sharing & caring
- Achieved? Yes (15/15 said ‘yes’)  
  - “Just to get where we’re at with this support group I think was a big move for all of us – because it opened a door to a new way of thinking towards helping each other…”

Goal 2: Sharing Factual Information
- Achieved? Yes (15/15 said ‘yes’)
  - Suggested need for more handouts & speakers
  - “The few speakers that we had they were very positive and helpful in a way, but that goes back out into the community”

Goal 3: Sharing personal information
- Achieved? Most, but not all, agreed that goal has been achieved.
  - Participants indicated reservations about research based on past negative experiences
  - I personally would like to be part of that research team because I feel like too many times people from the outside world come into our villages & do some kind of study”

Goal 4: Awareness of survivor strengths & needs
- Achieved? Almost. (12/15 said ‘yes’)  
  - Suggestions for improvement:
    - Become more involved in Fairbanks community, talk with legislators, extend program to rural communities
    - “I think we’re just starting…”

Goal 4: Trust in research
- Achieved? Almost. (12/15 said ‘yes’)  
- Participants indicated reservations about research based on past negative experiences

In response, Hopeful Connections is:
- Providing factual information & enhancing trust in research by offering “Cancer 101,” a multi-session training that provides evidence-based information about:
  - Cancer Basics, Cancer Prevention & Early Detection, Bio-specimen Banking, & Cancer Coping
  - Raising awareness about Alaska Native survivors by joining the Fairbanks (American Cancer Society’s) Relay for Life by:  
    - Establishing a Hopeful Connections Relay team
    - Creating Athabascan beaded pins to give and welcome all Relay for Life participants
  - Raising awareness & providing information by administrating a Hopeful Connections Facebook page
  - Planning to raise awareness by offering a toll-free call-in number during support group sessions
  - Planning to become a 501©3 to expand reach & achieve goals throughout Alaska’s Interior Region

Cited References
1. Frieberg & Melbye, 2008
2. Lanier, et al., 2006
3. American Cancer Society, 2011
4. Lopez, et al., 2013

We Express our Gratitude to:
- Evaluation participants
- Collaborative Cancer Program Advisory Committee
- UAF–URSA Program – for their generous funding
- Institute of Translational Health Sciences
- Native People for Cancer Control
- Alaska Native Health Research Program
- We Express our Gratitude to:
  - Ashley Strauch: aestruch@alaska.edu