

36th Annual Rural Providers' Conference

Spreading the Light Through Trusting Our Traditions



Anchorage, Alaska

July 8-12, 2019

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About the Conference

Rural Providers' Conference



RURAL PROVIDERS' CONFERENCE

RurAL CAP was proud to host the 36th Annual Rural Providers' Conference (RPC). This special gathering has become a leading force for expanding and strengthening traditional and cultural knowledge in creating healthy communities in rural Alaska.

The annual gathering has grown to include a wide range of community members, youth and Elders, from across the state interested in celebrating the continual growth of the Alaska Native Sobriety Movement.



LOGO RECOGNITION

Logo description: Little Mani is holding a ball of light in his right hand and he's pulling a sled of lit flashlights.

A huge thanks to Amy Modig (Deg Hit'an Athabascan) for designing this year's logo inspired by our conference theme "Spreading the Light Through Trusting our Traditions". The theme resonates with Alaskans as it unifies and empowers people to share healing stories through circle talks and sharing of resources.

The main emphasis of the 2019 RPC was coming together to explore strategic approaches to address historical trauma, alcohol and drug abuse, grief and other issues faced by Alaska Natives.

(Photos by Laura Knapp)

Keynote Presenters

ELSIE BOUDREAU

Trusting our Traditions Generates Light from Within

Elsie Boudreau (Yup'ik) is from the village of St. Mary's Alaska. She helped establish an Alaska Native Unit within a Child Advocacy Center where she provided advocacy services and therapy for families whose child(ren) have been severely physically or sexually abused and conducted forensic interviews of children. She is the President of Arctic Winds Healing Winds, a non-profit organization she enjoys working for. Elsie cares for her people and strongly believes that all children have the right to grow up in a safe and loving environment.

Elsie spread light through sharing personal survival stories of abuse. By sharing and recognizing historical trauma, ancestral knowledge and wisdom, strength is generated from within and illuminates brightly. (Photo by Amy Modig)



TEISHA SIMMONS

Recovery is Possible

Teisha "Neggeguk'" Simmons (Koyukon Athabascan) is Denakk'e from the communities of Notaalee Denh (Galena) and Meneelghaadze T'oh (Koyukuk), both communities along the Yukon River. She now lives in Fairbanks where she and her partner are raising their 13-year-old daughter Tassy and she works for ANTHC. In 1992, Teisha was injured in a car accident and as a result is paralyzed from the chest down. Wheelchair accessibility in rural Alaska does not make permanent life at home possible, but she loves going home to visit as much as possible.

Known for her many accomplishments, Teisha is a perfect example of just how strong people are and what we all are capable of doing. Teisha spreads light through her courage and empowers communities to reduce stigma surrounding suicide, addiction and seeking treatment. (Photo by Angela Gonzalez)



Keynote Presenters

AMELIA SIMEONOFF

Path to Healing

Amelia Mavis Simeonoff (Alutiiq) is a Traditional Healer working for the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) and loves working one-on-one with Dr. Rita Pitka Blumenstein. Originally from Kodiak Island, Alaska, she lives in Anchorage, Alaska with her husband Albert Walt Simeonoff Jr., of nine years and has been blessed with four beautiful children, three boys and one girl.

Amelia spread light through taking a positive path to healing than what her parents took. She talked about the hardships she faced as a child. Amelia continues to talk about her journey of healing through sharing her stories in talking circles and inspiring the youth around Anchorage to get crafty (beading in particular) as a healthy cultural activity to making the right choices in life. (Photo by Angela Gonzalez)



DAMEN BELL-HOLTER

Inspiring the Youth

Damen Bell-Holter (Haida) is from Hydaburg, Alaska and works for Sealaska. At 6'8" fate came along when he was drafted onto the Boston Celtics as a professional basketball player. Coming from a small village, he stated "It was like winning a lottery." He used basketball as a driving force to seek better educational opportunities, to explore the world and gain new perspectives. He now serves as an inspirational speaker (targeting young men and youth) in advocating for the cultivation and preservation of traditional Alaska Native values, language and people.

Damen spread light through his positivity and sharing of overcoming trauma. (Photo by Laura Knapp)



Conference Highlights

Circle Talks

Below: Amy Modig speaks during a Circle Talk (Photo by Laura Knapp)



Conference Highlights

Circle Talks



Talking circles, also called "peacemaking circles" are based on the sacred traditions of indigenous people of North America.

The purpose of the circle is to create a safe environment in which a person can share their point of view with others. In a Talking Circle, each one is equal and each one belongs.

(Photos by Cathie Clements and Laura Knapp)

Conference Highlights

Blanket Exercise

Below: Attendees prepare for a blanket exercise led by Connie Jessen, MA, Program Manager at ANTHC (Photo by Laura Knapp)



Conference Highlights

Blanket Exercise



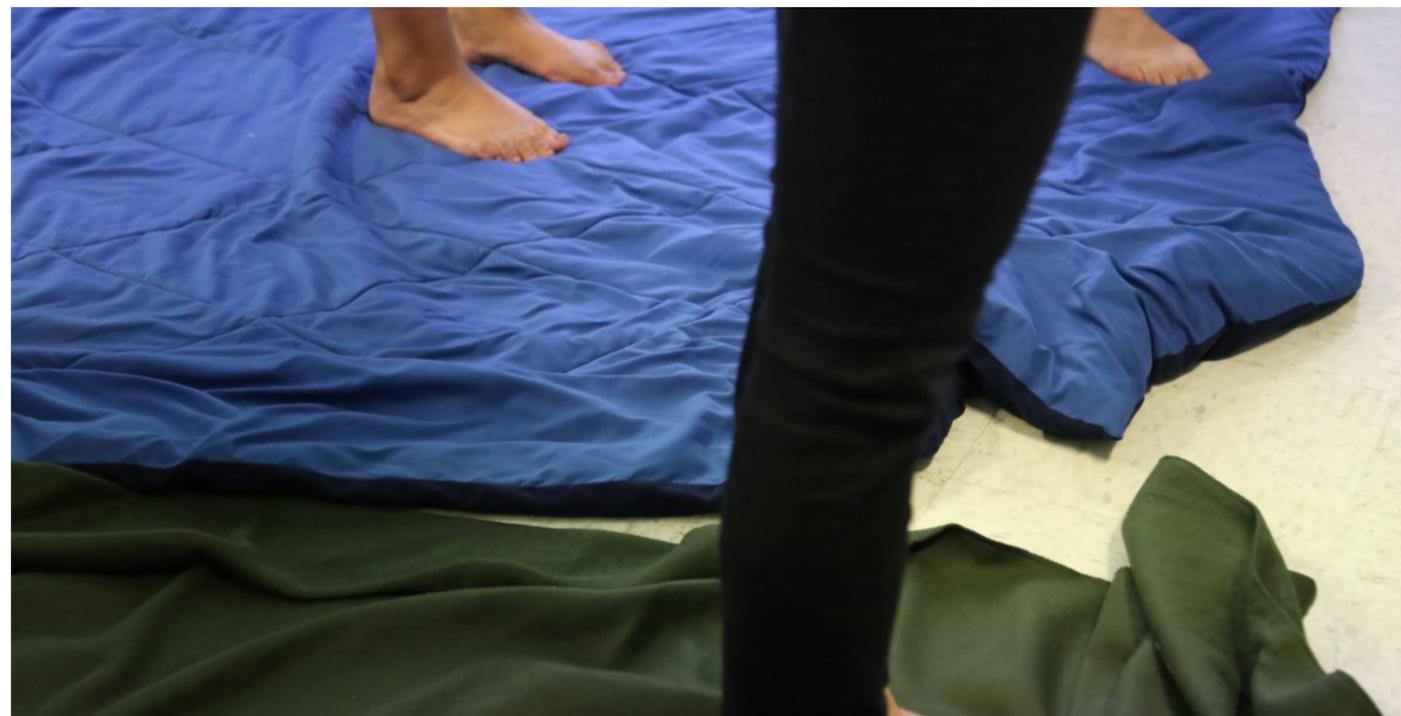
It is not meant to only teach about traumatic historical events but also about the resilience and strengths of Alaska Native people. Because of this resilience and strength, Alaska Native cultures are still strong today.

Alaska Blanket Exercise



THE STORY

KAIROS Canada (<https://www.kairoscanada.org/>) originally developed the Blanket Exercise to promote reconciliation between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Blanket Exercise has now been adapted by Indigenous peoples around the world. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) worked closely with KAIROS, the Alaska Center for Resource Families (ACRF) and a diverse group of stakeholders to create the Alaska Native Blanket Exercise. The blanket exercise is an opportunity for participants to learn about Alaska Native history and the historical events that our ancestors experienced. The goal is to create a shared understanding among people about historical events as well as the strengths of Alaska Native people in an effort to recognize and reconcile the impacts of historical and intergenerational trauma. The exercise touches on events such as the boarding school era, racism, sexual abuse, substance use, epidemics and suicide.



Conference Highlights

Cooking Demonstration



Above: Ally Bril of Ionia leads a cooking class focused on macrobiotic cooking - strict vegetarian diet (Photo by Amy Modig)

Conference Highlights

Sobriety Dance



Dancing onto the path to sobriety.
(Photos by Laura Knapp)

Conference Highlights

Drum Making

Below: The drum making crew. (Photo by Anna McGovern)



Conference Highlights

Drum Making



A cross-generational group
of drum makers led by Julian
Thibedeau
(Photos by Charlene
Hoffman and Anna
McGovern)

Evening Entertainment

Storytellers, fashion models, rope skipper, musician, jokesters, and artists.

Below: Martha Senungetuk showcases her mask and painting done by her husband, Joe Senungetuk. (Photo by Amy Modig)



Evening Entertainment

Fashion Show



Left: Joie Millett and Crystalyn Lemieux model Unangan clothing.



Right: Amelia Simeonoff and her two children wearing a Kuspuk - designs vary across the state, reflecting the uniqueness of Alaska's Native people.

(Photos by Amy Modig and Angela Gonzalez)

Evening Entertainment

Talent Portion



Left: Laura Knapp jumps to the rhythm of life through strength and beauty.

Right: Musical soul from Irene Coyle as she serenades the crowd with her melodic vocal tunes.

(Photos by Angela Gonzalez)



Workshops

RPC Sessions

Below: Patrick Anderson, CEO of RurAL CAP, leads the session on a whole village model for Restoring Health. (Photo by Susannah Deeds)



Workshops

Breakout Sessions

- Resilience Blossoms from Adversity - Dr. Tina Woods
- Gathering Brings Healing: It Is Time - Elsie Boudreau
- Alaska Native Health Resource Advocacy Program - SCF - Tara Durand
- Healing Through Traditions - Yaari Walker
- Cancer Among Alaska Native People - Dr. Sarah Nash
- Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation - First Alaskans Institute
- The Recovery Wheel: Finding Balance by Honoring Tradition - Becky Jacobs
- Dreamwork - Traditional and Western - Jim Miller
- Your Heroic Journey - Dorothy Dunne, Lois Law
- History and Hope: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Resilience, and Trauma-Informed Care - Laura Norton-Cruz
- RurAL CAP's Whole Village Model for Restoring Health - Patrick Anderson
- Women's Group Meeting - Amy Modig, Shirley Holmberg, Linda Joule, Irene Coyle
- Men's Group Meeting - Doug Modig, Ed Peele, Fred Coyle, Jim Miller
- Drum Making - Julian Thibedeau
- Plant Walk and Salve Making - Kim Aspelund

(Photos by Amy Modig)



Workshops

Breakout Sessions



Staking Ceremony

Staking Down for Sobriety

Stakeholders: Ed Peele - Haida, Linda Joule - Yup'ik/Inupiat, Fred and Irene Coyle - Suqpiaq, Shirley Holmberg - Koyukon Athabaskan, Doug Modig - Tsimshian, Amy Modig - Deg Hit'an Athabaskan (Reggie Joule - Inupiat) [Photos by Laura Knapp]



History: The Staking Ceremony



THE STORY

The Staking Ceremony was introduced to the Rural Providers' Conference in 1986 to signify the commitment to sobriety. The involvement in the ceremony is a public declaration of one's intention for wellness, because it is made in public with those one respects or honors.

The Staking Ceremony's roots lay in a battle between the Mandan Indians and the Lakota Sioux. According to the tale, a Mandan warrior "staked" himself to the earth during a battle with the Lakota. He believed so strongly in his cause that he refused to retreat. A Lakota Elder was so impressed by the Mandan warrior's courage, honor and commitment to his people that he stopped the Sioux who were about to kill him, saying, "Even in an enemy, we must honor this example." Instead, they nursed the warrior back to health and returned him to his people.

Since its symbolic reenactment years ago by a small group in Canada, the modern staking ceremony has grown tremendously with stakeholders all over the country. Phil Lane Jr. of Alberta, Canada introduced the ceremony to Alaska in 1986. In the RPC's modern staking ceremony, participants declare their commitment to sobriety and wellness.

The small stakes in the ceremony symbolize the warrior's spear. It is a way of "tying" oneself to the spear and facing the enemy. The stakes are always decorated with black, white, yellow and red. Black represents the West and African American people; white is for the North and White people; Yellow is the East and Yellow People; and Red stands for the South and Red people. Each RPC participant is given a stake to take home that reminds them of their commitment to wellness for themselves and their loved ones.

The first ceremony had one couple represent each Alaskan culture, and included an original bundle of stakes. The first holders of the bundle were Doug Modig of Ketchikan and Amy Lohr of Tanacross. They expanded the circle and passed the bundle to John and Teresa Pingayak of Chevak in 1991 and they in turn passed the bundle to Reggie and Linda Joule of Kotzebue in 1995. The bundle in 1999 was then passed to Randy Mayo and Violent Hunt of Stevens Village. The circle was expanded to include two couples, Ed and Priscilla Peele and Tom and Jennifer Young of Sitka, all of whom held the bundle from 2003-2009. Fred and Irene Coyle of Kodiak carried the bundle from 2009-2011. In 2012, the bundle was passed to JD and DeeDee Bennis of Dillingham. Over the years, the circle was also expanded to include Shirley Holmberg, Carol Rose and Amanda Peele who represent single women. Thomas Tilden joined the Stakeholders in 2012 to represent single men.

Staking Ceremony

Painting of the Stakes



Over 200 stakes were painted for the Staking Ceremony.

(Photos by Cathie Clements)

Acknowledgements

Thank you planners and volunteers

Host site: Thank you to Alaska Pacific University (APU) for making the 2019 RPC possible! (Photo by Laura Knapp)



Acknowledgements

The crew who made the 2019 RPC possible!



CONFERENCE EVENT COORDINATOR

- Bridget McCleskey
- Jaelyn Larson

RPC STAKEHOLDERS

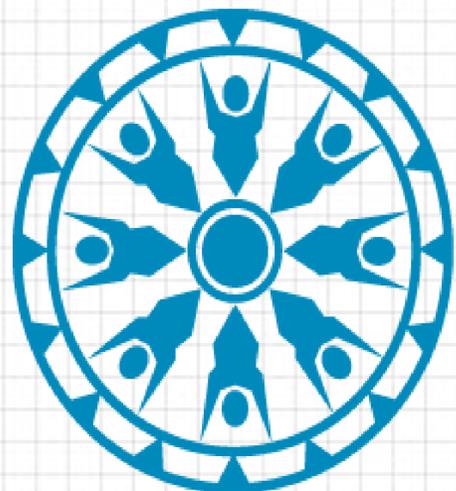
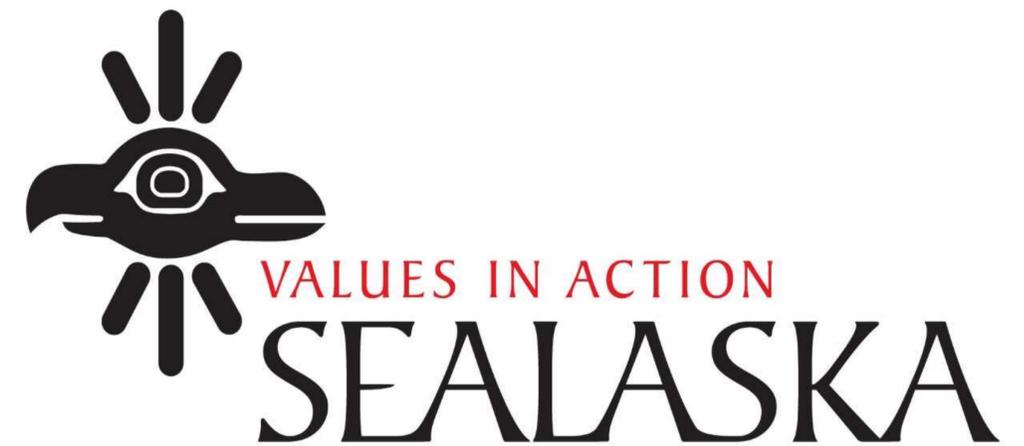
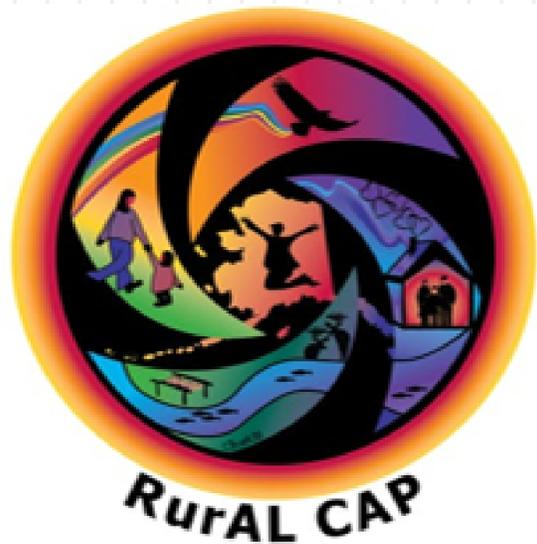
- Doug and Amy Modig
- Fred and Irene Coyle
- Shirley Holmberg
- Reggie and Linda Joule
- Ed Peele

RURAL CAP STAFF

Our sincere gratitude and thanks to RurAL CAP staff and members of the 2019 RPC Planning Committee.

Sponsors

Thank you!



ALASKA NATIVE
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Indigenous Native Music Association