

## **Child Abuse Outreach and Education Project for Copper River Basin**

There is no more underserved and socially and geographically isolated area in the entire United States than Alaska. Alaska has a rate of child maltreatment that is estimated to be over six times the national rate - there is no more dangerous or deadly place for a child to live. Access to professional services and education will always be problematic in Alaska where 80% of our communities do not have road access and travel is both expensive and difficult. Alaska covers an area larger than the next three largest US states combined (Texas, California and Montana).

The Alaska Children's Alliance ([www.akchildrensalliance.com](http://www.akchildrensalliance.com)) has partnered with the Copper River Basin Child Advocacy Center and is working with Tribal governments and programs in the region to develop a pilot approach to raising community awareness and accountability for responding to child sexual abuse. The honoring, Protecting and Nurturing Our Children" project began in early 2011 and is working with Copper River Basin communities to promote a community environment conducive to responding to child maltreatment and healing.

One aspect of this project has been meeting with Tribal and community leaders. Another aspect is to hold community meetings where residents can ask questions and improve their understanding of what is considered child abuse, the role of Office of Children's Services and Alaska State Troopers in response to concerns about children, and recognize the responsibilities each person has to speak out against abuse.

The two year "outreach and education" project is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime to raise awareness of needs of child victims. Alaska Children's Alliance Project coordinator, Pam Karalunas, reports that "through this project we

seek to facilitate the assessment of each community's level of awareness and understanding of child sexual victimization and to promote community-generated, culturally driven messages to change perspectives and improve response to these children.” Diane Payne, Director of the Justice for Native Children Project of Alaska Summit Enterprise, Inc. in Eagle River, Alaska was contracted to conduct the work under this project. Diane has worked with the communities in the Copper River Region in the past and is familiar with the history and resources here. She has been meeting with Tribal governments over the past 10 months and planning community events.

This month, during National Child Abuse Awareness month, The “Honoring, Protecting and Nurturing Our Children Project” is sponsoring information segments on KCAM and hosting an art contest among children from 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades. These April events were planned with advice from Indian Child Welfare representatives from Kluti-Kaah, Chitina, Gulkana, Chistochina and Tazlina communities. Watch for more information on the results of the poster contest!