

# Honoring, Protecting & Nurturing Our Children ~ A Community Outreach Project in the Copper River Basin Region of Alaska



## STEPS TO DEVELOPING A CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN FOR RURAL ALASKA

**1. Start with informed helpers!** Enlist the participation of individuals who are already engaged in addressing child abuse, neglect and child sexual abuse to assist with developing key messages and strategies. Invite Tribal ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) workers, community health aides, behavioral health providers, substance abuse treatment personnel, local clergy and elders to meet to identify (a) the most common circumstances in the service area for child abuse situations – i.e. alcohol use, domestic violence, neglect due to limited parent role models, fragmented families without support for young parents, are some of the examples you might hear about; and (b) what approaches seem to work the best to help people learn new information – radio, television public channel, community “fairs”, workshops, door to door information packets or flyers, one-on-one conversations, etc.

**2. Identify 2-3 topic areas for educational efforts.** Topic areas will be the focus of the media campaign and materials developed for distribution. If the planning group does not represent cross-cultural, multi-generational perspectives, it may be important to conduct focus groups among key types of individuals such as young parents, service providers, and elders before settling on the topic areas for focus. Another approach may be to conduct “community readiness assessments” in each of the communities or a selection of communities prior to selecting topic areas.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Community Readiness Assessment tool developed by the Tri-Ethnic Center at Colorado State University has been widely and successfully used in Alaska Native communities to assess issues such as child abuse, domestic violence and inhalant abuse. See [http://triethniccenter.colostate.edu/communityReadiness\\_home.htm](http://triethniccenter.colostate.edu/communityReadiness_home.htm).

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**3. Develop themes or slogans for each topic area** – or one that fits all the topic areas generally. For example, for the topic areas of neglect and sexual abuse that appear to be resulting from distracted parents who are using drugs and alcohol a slogan might be “Watching Our Children – Keeping them Safe” or “Raising Safe Kids – Preventing Child Abuse” or similar concepts in your Native language.

**4. Plan several activities** over a 12- 18 month period using these themes and different approaches to get the information to the community. Begin by planning for at least two activities in the first 3 months that will support each other (such as a newspaper articles about a poster contest, perhaps some radio and television announcements as well) and start planning for community events at least 3 months in advance.

Public awareness media campaigns are not just one-time events; media campaigns work best when they involve more than one approach using the same or similar themes and topics. Some parts of rural Alaska have local public television channels where public service information can be aired repeatedly. In other places, radio is the best media. Posters can be put up in high public traffic areas too. Regional newspapers should be used to expand on the topic areas and provide reports of events to strengthen public awareness, but posters and/or newspaper alone is not enough!

A note about planning: The activities you select should be based on the discussions in step #1 about **what works best in your region**. Visuals such as posters might be popular, but how can you make the posters MORE meaningful? Consider a poster contest with youth, for instance, rather than hiring a local artist to develop the image. Health fairs are a good place to distribute educational information, but how do you make the topic of child abuse interesting? Catchy handouts such as the Child Advocacy Center Word Find (attachment B) and booklets or activities for parents to share with their children is one approach that works!<sup>2</sup> Holding workshops for community members and providing a nutritious traditional meal may be a good approach where you are, but how do you attract participants when the discussion is going to be about child abuse? Calling the workshop something

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<sup>2</sup> Look at handouts such as “My 8 Rules for Safety” Attachment B; see websites with child abuse prevention materials such as [www.zimmy.com](http://www.zimmy.com))

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positive, such as “Raising Safe Children” and also talking about other aspects of safety may be the approach that gets people to attend. Talking about keeping children safe at fish camp, when traveling to the city AND discussing how children are affected (and don’t tell) when they are unsafe maybe the right approach! Be sure to provide safe child care providers so parents can participate fully too.

## CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

Below are examples of specific media and outreach activities that were used in the Copper River Basin to raise awareness of child neglect and sexual abuse. The steps to developing each of these activities is provided, but different or additional steps may be needed where you are located. Resources and allies identified by the planning group included the local, weekly regional newspaper, local radio station, school district, Tribal organization and regional Native corporation, Tribal governments and Tribal government operated programs, state law enforcement and child protection agencies and elders. You may also find that you have greater or fewer or different resources than are mentioned here; it is always better to have more points of distribution and education about your topics of focus whenever possible.



### A. Student Poster contest

The planning group felt that the “voice” of young people in the region was an effective way to draw attention to the needs of children to be safe from abuse. After securing the support of the school district to help with the poster contest, several “themes” were developed and then voted on by ICWA<sup>3</sup> workers after the planning group brainstormed several short, catchy phrases that youth might be able to depict through art. The school district Superintendent assisted by announcing the contest to the Principals at each school where the flyers were sent home with students. One ICWA worker served as the “hub” for art supplies to make sure all students had access to materials. Because it was a busy time of

<sup>3</sup> ICWA workers are individuals whose positions are funded to advocate for the Tribe’s rights under Indian Child Welfare Act when abused or neglected Tribal children are involved with State court cases.

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year, only a few teachers were able to allow students time to work on the posters in class. Most students did their art at home. ICWA workers in each community assisted in picking up the posters and the judging was done by 8 people who represented the Child Advocacy Center MDT and Tribal leaders.

***Recommendation:*** *begin planning this event at the beginning of the school year; see if the poster contest it would fit within health or art curriculum if possible. Provide the school district with resources about mandatory reporting of child abuse. The Child Advocacy Center can help with more information and resources on state law and practice is available from <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/ChildrensJustice/resources.htm>. See flyer and photos of top three winners, attachment A.*

## **B. Community Education Events**

When planning a community event, there are several considerations – schedule, location, set up, speaker characteristics, incentives, comfort items, child care and getting the word out! Scheduling (date and time) is the most important – setting an event when there are competing activities will usually result in a low turnout when the topic is child abuse. It is important to look at school district, church, Tribal government and sports events calendars for all ages to find a date that will have the least competition. Consider the season too – is it more likely that you will have a crowd in the winter or early spring? Will participation be affected by fishing or hunting activities? Think about what time of day community members, including elders, are most available, and if it is held on a school night, how early in the evening should it be held to accommodate parents with school children. Do community members travel on the weekend so Saturday is not a good time to hold an event? Or does your community need an activity on Saturday evening?

The next most important factors are location and set up. If you have a community center or church where people are used to gathering for discussions, this might be the best location. Be sure the location has a separate room or space where children can be involved in activities while the adults are discussing child abuse issues. If possible, there should be a room for infants and toddlers where they can be cared for appropriately while older children are involved in personal safety activities.

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Your local Head Start facility may be a good option for child care even if it is not located right next to your community gathering place. When thinking about the room set up, be sure there is adequate space to place chairs in a circle or to have a U-shape or hollow square set up with tables. Having all participants able to see each other and interact openly helps assure everyone's voice be heard, and valued. It helps to neutralize any sense that some people are more important, or powerful, than others too.

After scheduling and location are decided, there are other aspects of community events that encourage participation. If your speakers are people already known to the community, you may not need to provide a lot of information about them. However, if it is a new speaker, you should give a brief summary of their background, heritage and experience in the announcement flyer. It is also helpful to have individuals known to the community present opening comments, inspirational closing messages or assist with some aspect of the event. Community members will trust the event more if some of the names on the announcement flyer are familiar to them. If your speaker is new to your community, it is important to give them guidance on local protocols and information to help make their presentation relevant and useful.

The content of your community session should be kept simple and focused on one or two topic areas. Asking community members to discuss their concerns or contemplate the needs of their children is a good way to start the conversation. One activity that helps get the dialog started is the "What Children Need" activity in Attachment B. Participants are asked to think about the dimensions we all have, and what children need from their caregivers to reach their potential as they grow up. This activity can be done in teams and then reported back or as a full group if the group is less than 15 people.

Next we look at "incentives" and "comfort items" that enhance community education events. If your community is accustomed to having door prizes at community education events, you need to plan accordingly and take the time to recruit donations that will act as incentives for people to attend. If your community is not used to having door prizes, then listing a few "incentives" may help as well. For example, ask the Tribal corporation or any local programs or businesses to donate funds toward purchase of several children's books or family oriented games and then do a drawing for winners of these items. Be sure your

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door prizes and “incentives” are child-family oriented! Participants will appreciate some “comfort items” such as having snacks and coffee, tea and juices during the event. You may even decide to do a potluck meal and have children participate during the meal before the presentation. Other “comfort items” could include things for people to do with their hands during the session – such as pipe cleaners, play dough, crayons and paper or simple beading supplies. Some people learn better if their hands are busy!

Child care should be provided for children up to the age of 11 with older children who are willing and responsible being recruited to help with the activities for younger children. Having 2-3 teens to assist with art project is usually quite helpful! Children can be given a task such as “draw me a picture of your safe places” individually or in a group mural during the child care. The adults and teens can talk with children about telling someone if they don’t feel safe and that they have a right to be safe and not afraid. Children can draw around their own hands and with help, write the names of 5 “safe” people on the fingers and thumb of their hand drawing.

Getting the word out should be according to local practices, but should always include at least two different ways of announcing the event. Flyers posted at the Post Office, in offices and schools and announcements on radio or TV may work; you may also find that asking the newspaper to cover a short story about your event is helpful. Some examples of these are in Attachment B.

### **C. Targeted Media Blitz**

A media blitz can be effective in raising awareness if done in combination with other activities and announcements around the same time, such as during April, which is National Child Abuse Awareness Month. Through an arrangement with the local radio station, the planning group in Copper River Region was able to produce four segments under a regular program called “With You In Mind” that aired weekly. Local Tribal representatives went to the studio and recorded the segments which included brief information and always announced the local child advocacy center as a resource to the listeners. (see Attachment C)

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The local newspaper carried some articles about child abuse prevention activities provided by the Copper River Basin Child Advocacy Center during April, and the Tribal Leader's Gathering was also announced in the newspaper, bringing additional attention to the importance of talking about prevention of child abuse during the month of April. In addition, the winners of the poster contest were announced and their posters printed in the newspaper early in May. (see materials in Attachment C)

#### **D. Targeted Events**

When planning your child abuse awareness media campaign it is important to discuss leadership and influence aspects of your service area with your "helper group" and decide on some target events. In most Tribal communities, the elected and traditional leaders are key individuals who will have influence over how others think and act regarding child abuse issues. In some communities where there is a mix of Native and non-Native leaders, you may find that there are certain individuals who have credibility and influence with elected leaders on matters involving social issues and community well-being. When planning events with busy leaders be sure to check for scheduling conflicts and invite them far enough in advance for them to clear their schedules. The voices of young people in the community may also carry strong messages to adults about the needs of children. Youth in your community may welcome an opportunity to let adults know how they feel about child abuse and use their creative talents to develop the prevention messages.

In any targeted event, be sure to follow local protocol regarding cultural opening and closing prayer or remarks from an elder or other respected individual and serve lunch as well as snacks if possible.

##### **1. Tribal Leaders Gathering**

Recognize that Tribal leaders are responsible for delegation of program resources and developing policy for their communities, thus, the engagement of Tribal leaders in dialog and information sharing about child abuse issues is usually pivotal in strengthening child abuse prevention efforts. For example, elected tribal

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leaders from seven tribes were asked to gather to discuss issues of concern relating to the safety of children in the Copper River region. One Tribal government volunteered to host the gathering and individual meetings were held with other Tribal governments to discuss the idea, which most agreed was a good approach. Some handouts were provided to help prompt the discussion, and small groups were utilized to facilitate more input. See Attachment D for sample invitation letter, flyer, agenda and a sample of handouts. Information used with the community education event (see Attachment C handouts) may also be shared. From this event, a report was issued with recommendations for action and copies were sent to all Tribal governments.

## 2. Elders & Youth Discussion Group

This activity could be included in your local Youth & Elder's gathering if you have one, or could be scheduled especially when elders otherwise gather together. Careful deliberation about which elders have knowledge of appropriate child abuse response and would be supportive to child victims should take place before scheduling this event. It may be important to have a focus group with just elders first to determine what they know and how they feel about children having the right to be safe, and who is responsible for children's safety. Then, select youth leaders and youth who are interested in addressing child abuse issues (perhaps those who entered the poster contest) and arrange a discussion time. Share the idea of development of a Children's Bill of Rights for children of your region or Tribe. Some Tribes create this "bill of rights" in their Native language first, and then translate it into English for non-Native language speakers. This "bill of rights" (See Attachment D sample) or "guideline for parents & caregivers" would be defined through discussion of these concepts:

Preventing abuse and neglect of children by (1) Identifying Rights of Children to safety, identity, nurturing, etc, (2) Responsibility of Parents and others to assure the safety, nurturing and guidance of children, and (3) identifying modern/contemporary consequences for parents who fail to meet these basic needs of their children and/or Standards that the Tribe should set and seek to enforce through Tribal justice processes for the safety & protection of children, to prevent abuse of children.

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After this discussion and creation of a “bill of rights” the elders and youth may jointly request that the Tribal leaders adopt the document, and then share it with the community members. The “bill of rights” can be posted in public places to remind community members about how children should be treated and supported.

### 3. Youth Activity - theater, video or music video

Specific funding would be needed to cover the technical aspects of this activity. Tribal wellness programs, suicide prevention funding or elders and youth programs may be resources for the funds needed or a combination of several sources could be used. Through youth programs and/or the schools, recruit several youth between ages of 13- 18 to participate in the development of video messages, a music video or another such video-type project that would express the Youth’s ideas, feelings and beliefs about the importance of preventing child abuse. If possible, work with a Native actor/film director who understands the dynamics of child abuse and can facilitate discussion with the youth to develop the script and determine the settings, content and select actors. (NOTE: Be sure all individuals chosen to work with your youth have passed a criminal background check first!) Some others, including elders may also be needed depending on the messages & method selected.

The Youth Activity project could be completed over several sessions in the evening or on weekends, depending on the scheduling that works best for all involved. You should plan on a minimum of 15 hours for discussion and selection of content, production decisions and scripting; practice time may also be needed before performance or filming. This activity could also be done in conjunction with culture camp or another youth event over the summer or early fall.

### **Final Thoughts**

A public awareness media campaign is a big project! To be effective, it is important to have a sustained effort over several months, to include a variety of special “guests” to increase the credibility of the messages, and to use a variety of approaches so a greater number of people are reached. One-on-one conversations

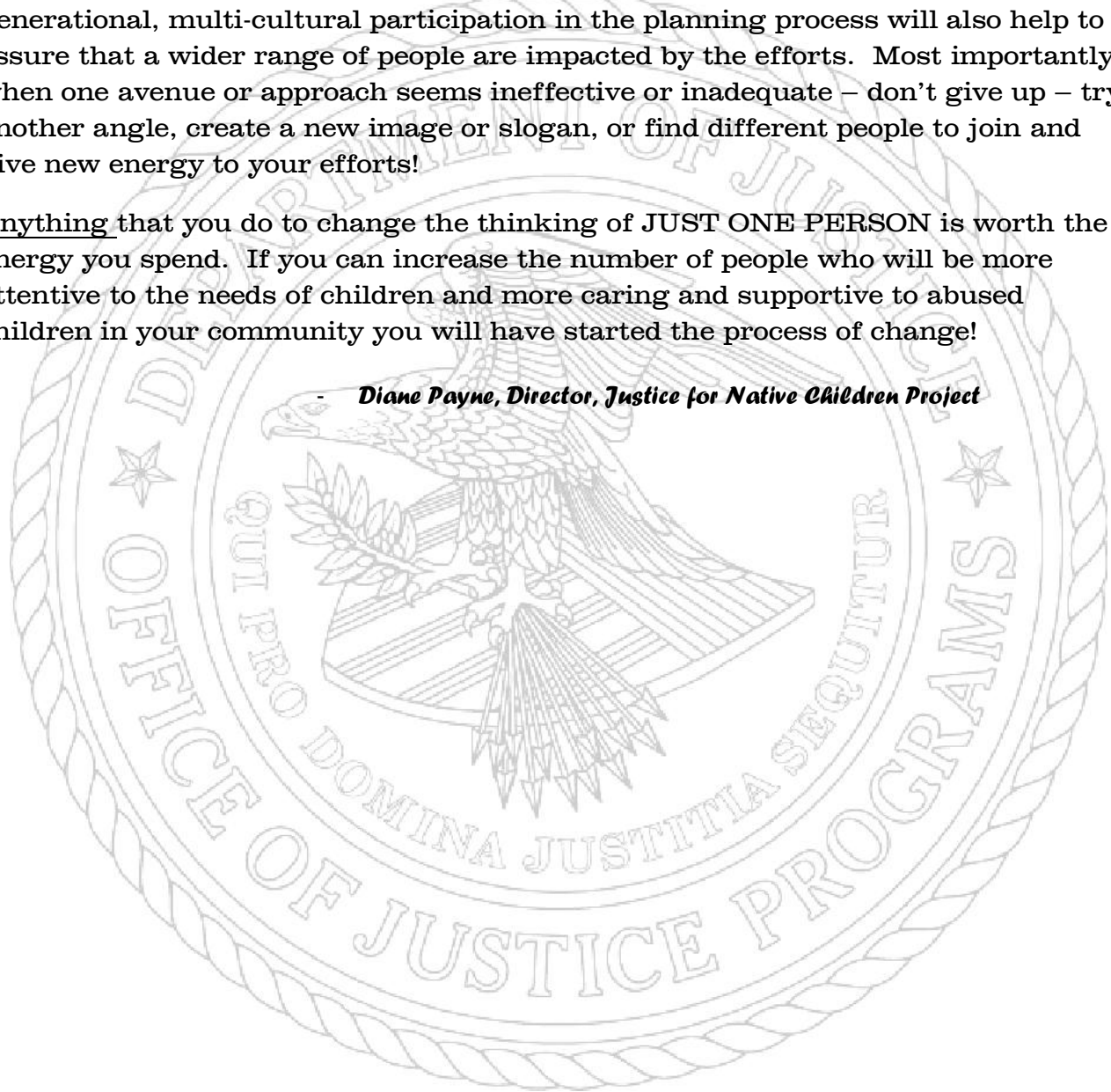
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may be necessary with elders, government leaders, school administrators and community programs to “plant the seed” and get commitments before undertaking the planning process described at the beginning of this document. Multi-generational, multi-cultural participation in the planning process will also help to assure that a wider range of people are impacted by the efforts. Most importantly, when one avenue or approach seems ineffective or inadequate – don’t give up – try another angle, create a new image or slogan, or find different people to join and give new energy to your efforts!

Anything that you do to change the thinking of JUST ONE PERSON is worth the energy you spend. If you can increase the number of people who will be more attentive to the needs of children and more caring and supportive to abused children in your community you will have started the process of change!

- ***Diane Payne, Director, Justice for Native Children Project***



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