

Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children

August 17, 2021

Alaska Regional Hearing

Virtual Utqiaġvik Site Visit: Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA)

Recording:

<https://commissiononnativechildren.org/hearings-testimony/alaska-regional-hearing-media-advisory/>

Commissioners Present In-person:

Gloria O’Neill, Chair; Dr. Tami DeCoteau, Vice-Chair; Melody Staebner; Carlyle Begay; and Donald Gray.

Commissioners Present Virtually:

Dr. Dolores (Dee) Subia BigFoot, Anita Fineda, Elizabeth Morris, Dr. Leander R. McDonald, and Jesse Delmar.

Commissioners Absent:

Stephanie Bryan

Detailees, Staff, and Contractors:

Ronald Lessard, Department of Education
Eileen Garry, Department of Justice
Regina Gilbert, Department of the Interior
Tiffany Taylor, Department of the Interior
Lisa Rieger, Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Joshua Franks, Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Miriam Jorgensen, Native Nations Institute, University of Arizona
Kyra James, Native Nations Institute, University of Arizona
Stacy Leeds, Leeds Consulting
Briana Moseley, Kearns & West

Agenda: 1:15 PM – 2:15 PM AKT - Virtual Utqiaġvik Site Visit: Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA)

[Transcript]

Chair O’Neill Courtney?
00:04

Courtney Yemiola Yes, I’m here.
00:10

Chair O'Neill 00:12 Please let me know when you're ready to, you know, begin the conversation. It sounds like you're still trying to connect?

Courtney Yemiola 00:21 I think we're actually ready, and Daniella is here as well.

Chair O'Neill 00:27 Great. All right. We're not going to be able to see you? Is that right?

Courtney Yemiola 00:37 So, I'm going to hang up on my phone, so we don't have all this background noise. Sorry for the hold up. Thank you for your patience. So yeah, here with us today, my name is Courtney Yemiola, and I'm the new Director of Social Services here at ASNA. We do have Martha who is the President and CEO. I also have Daniella, who is with us, and she is one of my managers with the CCDF program. And so, we're really excited to be able to just take this time to be able to talk with you guys today. So, thanks for meeting with us. I'm not sure if Caleb was able to give you guys that PowerPoint or not.

Chair O'Neill 01:36 Yes, we have the PowerPoint. But before we get started, I just like to ask the Commissioners who are with us today, and who joined us online just to introduce themselves. And then I'd like to just let you know of the charge of the Commission, and then we're looking forward to hearing from you. So, Commissioners, can you briefly introduce yourself please. Let's start online.

Commissioner Delmar 02:07 Yes, Courtney and Martha, I'm Jesse Delmar, Commissioner calling in from Arizona. Good afternoon.

Commissioner BigFoot 02:21 Good afternoon. This is Dee BigFoot, and I'm a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. And I'm of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma and affiliated with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana, in which my children are enrolled. I am the Director of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center and the Indian Country Child Trauma Center.

Chair O'Neill 02:44 Thank you. Commissioner Morris. Commissioner Morris, can you introduce yourself please?

Commissioner Morris 02:44 Sorry, I had something in front of the mute button. Okay, yes, this is Elizabeth Morris, I'm the Chairwoman of the Christian Alliance for Indian Child Welfare.

Chair O'Neill 03:14 Thank you. So, we'll go to the room. Commissioners, please introduce yourself.

Commissioner Staebner 03:23	Hi, I'm Commissioner Melody Staebner and I'm also an Indian Education Coordinator for the Fargo and West Fargo School Districts in North Dakota.
Commissioner Begay 03:33	Good afternoon. My name is Carlyle Begay. I'm also from Arizona, Navajo, and glad to be here this afternoon.
Vice-Chair DeCoteau 03:42	Good afternoon. My name is Tami DeCoteau. I am also from North Dakota and Vice-Chair of the Commission.
Commissioner Gray 03:50	Afternoon, Don Gray and I am a shareholder of the Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation and the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. Welcome.
Chair O'Neill 04:02	<p>And again, my name is Gloria O'Neill and I serve as the Chair of the Commission and also have the privilege of serving as Cook Inlet Tribal Councils President and CEO. So, what I'd like to do today as we get started, just give you a bit of an overview of the Commission and our goal as we work together. And that is we are an 11-member Commission established by Congress to conduct a comprehensive study of all issues affecting American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian children from pre-natal to age 24. The bill that created us was co-sponsored by former Senator Heidi Heitkamp from North Dakota and Senator Lisa Murkowski from Alaska. We all know that Native children and youth experience severe health and social economic disparities compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the US. And although the Federal government has a trust responsibility to provide for the education, health, and safety of Native children, complex programs and limited resources have not been successful to address all of these disparities. We also know that historical trauma and intergenerational cycles of poverty contribute to the disproportionate health and well-being challenges faced by Native children and our families today. But we also know that we have incredible strength, resiliency, beauty and joy in our communities. We were created to address the challenges and build on the strengths to find creative ways to change the trajectory of all Native children for the better. We'll be looking at all issues affecting Native children and youth including health, mental health, education, early childhood development, child welfare, and juvenile justice. We'll be looking at data and research, identifying best practices and models of collaboration and hearing directly, and most importantly, from our Native communities and Native children themselves. Once we've completed our study, we'll issue a report with our recommendations, moving the needle on outcomes</p>

of Native children in a positive direction. This report will be submitted both to Congress and to the Executive Branch. And with that before I turn it over to our to Commission, Dr. McDonald, can you introduce yourself please?

Commissioner
McDonald
06:32

I can't hear you guys.

Chair O'Neill
06:36

We can hear you. Okay, well, while he's working that out, why don't I go ahead and turn it over to our panelists. And, again, we want to welcome Arctic Slope Native Association, and first by thanking the President and CEO, Martha Monnin. Nice to have you with us today. We're here to listen to you. Martha, can you hear us? Martha?

I. Panelist: Arctic Slope Native Association

- **Marth Monnin, President and CEO of Artic Slope Native Association**
- **Courtney Yemiola, Director of Social Services of Artic Slope Native Association**
- **Daniella Staska, Family Preservation and Development Program Manager**

Martha Monnin
07:32

Oh, we were muted. We're so sorry about that. We have been talking. Can you hear us now?

Chair O'Neill
07:36

Yes, we can hear you now and your presentation is up.

Martha Monnin
07:42

Okay, we're not able to -- is everyone able to view our presentation? Because we actually do not see it on the screen here.

Chair O'Neill
07:50

Yes, we can see it.

Martha Monnin
07:54

Okay. Okay. Well, what we could do is maybe start with just introducing ourselves here. We mentioned that we have Daniella Staska here with us, and she serves as our Family Preservation and Development Program Manager. And our Director of Social Services is Courtney Yemiola. And my name is Martha Monnin. And I have the privilege of serving as President and CEO for the Arctic Slope Native Association. And we're excited to share with you our programs today. And we'll just assume that our presentation is up in front of you. If you can see the first page

has our logo, a man and boy logo listed there. And we'll just kind of go through each of these services that we provide here to our region.

Courtney
Yemiola
08:50

So, our region is the North Slope Borough, which is a fairly large region. I guess it's roughly the size of Michigan, if you're looking at region size. One of the areas that we focused on, obviously, is with ICWA, Indian Child Welfare Act. And with the Tribal resolution, we are representatives for the Arctic Slope communities of Anaktuvuk Pass, Atqasuk, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, and Wainwright. The services we provide include representing the Tribal children in state court cases, assisting with the different adoptions. We work with the families, the courts, and the state, to place children with relatives and close to home. Some of the support services that we do help provide is supervised parent visits, parenting classes, case management, helping the parents attend appointments especially if the children have appointments that they need to attend, doing home visits, home inspections, that sort of thing, licensed foster care visits, and treatment planning.

If we go to the next slide and we're looking at Healthy Family Advocates, this is another program that we do have. And with the ASNA behavioral health aides, we provide services to some different communities: Atqasuk, Utqiaġvik, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Lay, and Wainwright. They provide access to deliver preventative behavioral health services within defined scope of practice. We assist in making preventative behavioral health referrals to resources available at the North Slope Borough Integrated Behavioral Health Program. We also work with the North Slope Behavioral, NSB, sorry, prevention team. And some of the behavior health aide services they offer: Suicide Prevention/Bullying Prevention, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, Parents as Teachers, Parent Project, which is parenting classes for parents of teenagers, Loving Solutions, which is a parenting class for parents with kids ages five to 12, and then outreach and education. Something else that we did this summer was a summer wellness camp, where we went to each village and we provided some fun activities, games and physical activities for the kids and families to come, kind of just doing a community event for them. If we're going through and we're going to the next slide.

The next program we have, which is one of the main programs that Danielle is in charge of, is our Childcare Program. We're the designated Tribal lead agency with the basic responsibility of the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). By Tribal resolution, we are the Childcare Program representative for the Arctic Slope communities of Anaktuvuk Pass, Atqasuk, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay, Utqiaġvik, and Wainwright. We provide direct care child services to low-income families who are working, attending job training, or an education program,

participating in eligible subsistence activities, and those who qualify financially for childcare. ASNA also provides training and supplies for eligible individuals to become childcare providers under the CCDF Program. And one of the reasons that this is really important is because a number of the families have had to have one parent stay home because they need childcare. And so this has really empowered them to be able to have jobs and careers and be able to further their education. One of the other things that we're really working on is we're working in the Village of Wainwright to actually establish a childcare center for the village. And so that's something we're working in conjunction with the village right now.

Another part of our program and some of the services we help provide is, if we're going to the next slide, is for higher education, job placement, and training. For higher education it provides scholarship grants for eligible Tribal members from the Native village of Atqasuk that are enrolled into a degree program or vocational trades program at an accredited college or university. With our job placement and training, we assist eligible Tribal members from the Native villages of Atqasuk and Wainwright that are enrolled in the short-term or long-term training program to obtain job skills needed for maintaining or obtaining full-time employment. We also work with the college up here to do referrals if they need further training and things like that.

Another aspect of our program is the Welfare Assistance Program. And by Tribal resolution ASNA is the Welfare Assistance Program representative for the Arctic Slope communities of Atqasuk, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, and Wainwright. We have a general assistance area and this is available to eligible Tribal members for basic essential needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and utilities, to increase self-sufficiency. Approved clients develop and sign individual self-sufficiency plans, take employment, and provide evidence of monthly efforts to obtain employment. And this is something we can help them go through in terms of if they need help filling out the paperwork, if they need help figuring out how to create a resume, those sorts of things as well. We also have the Emergency Assistance Program. And this can be provided to individuals or families when their home and or personal possessions are destroyed or damaged by a fire, flood, or other forces beyond their control. And payments are only for essential needs and other non-medical necessities.

Our last program that we really wanted to just kind of talk about today, that we have, is our Family Preservation and Development Program. And this program provides early intervention services for the Arctic Slope communities of Anaktuvuk Pass, Atqasuk, Utqiagvik, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay, and Wainwright.

These services are to keep families together to increase parent confidence in their parenting abilities, ensure children enjoy a safe, stable, and supportive family environment, and to promote healthy family relationships. ASNA Family Preservation Development Program works to support the ASNA ICWA services to include developing transitional living plans for clients approaching adulthood to support successful independence. One of the things that we're currently working on is actually developing a transitional living program for those who are approaching adulthood, and who may be involved with the state, with OCS and things. And involved in that program we're working with the OCS in Fairbanks to understand better how their program works, so that we can have a collaboration, but focusing on budgeting, focusing on how to apply for a debit card, how to apply for our driver's license, and some basic skills that some folks may not know how to do because they may have been in the system or just may need some additional assistance in learning those skills. And then you can see, those are our contact information in case you guys ever do have any questions and want to reach out to us. I think there's 10 of us total, and obviously Martha is our main supervisor. But we do come together, we have different areas that we all focus on. We do travel to the different villages and provide services to the families. And there's definitely a huge need. We are in rural Alaska and so there is definitely a difference than the lower 48. I don't know how many of you guys have visited Alaska, but it's definitely a different atmosphere. But it's also beautiful up here and it's amazing being able to work with this population and work with the families and be able to help them help meet their needs and everything. So that's just kind of an overview of some of the services that we provide and so we'll open it up in case you guys have any questions.

II. Questions and Discussion

Chair O'Neill
17:18

Thank you. I'd like to open it up to Commissioners, if you have questions or comments. I have a question. We heard from OCS team this morning, from the State Leadership. and then more directly from the small OCS team and up Utqiagvik. One of the big challenges that they said that they're having is on the lack of state licensed daycare facilities. And I'm just wondering how you work in coordination with OCS and what that partnership looks like. And how in our roles as Commissioners, when we look at the well-being of our children and families, what recommendations would you give to us around how we help support leverage partnerships?

Courtney
Yemiola
18:30

So, I think one of the important things for us, when we're first looking at this, is to come from the basis of ICWA, and to remember that we need to be looking at this as a family preservation thing. And I think sometimes we have to remind people of that. And so, we definitely want to make sure that we are reiterating that and advocating for the protection and enforcement of ICWA. And so, we do meet with OCS and we do work in partnership with them. And they're absolutely right, there is a significant lack of license. There used to be a licensed childcare facility here run by the Borough. However, it was closed down, I'm not entirely sure why. I think it was lack of funding. And that is something. you know, our organization is just looking at. We're looking at it in the villages and everything as well. Part of our program with the CCDF, Childcare Development Fund, is looking at getting individual providers licensed and able to have individual providers provide childcare in their homes. And so, we go through and get them licensed and everything like that. We work in conjunction with the Tribe as well. In the past, they were providing those services. We now are providing those services here in Barrow and there is definitely a need. It is something, we are at times a transitional community in terms of the teachers and everything as well. I do know that sometimes the teachers do want to be foster families and stuff. However, with the housing shortage that's up here, sometimes it's hard for some of the larger sibling groups to be in foster care and not for them to be separated. And sometimes we don't want to have, if kids do have to be placed out of the home, for whatever reason, while a family is working on their case plan, you know, it might be due to housing, it might be due to a number of reasons. And so, we do work with OCS. Yes. And we're continuing to find new and inventive ways to improve that relationship.

Chair O'Neill
21:03

Other questions and comments?

Commissioner
Morris
21:07

This is Elizabeth Morris.

Chair O'Neill
21:08

Yes, Commissioner Morris.

Commissioner
Morris
21:11

I have two questions. I would like. What are some of the reasons for family break downs up there in the Borrow? And my second question is with family preservation, the priority, what criteria are they involved in, to shift that child into protection? When does child protection, when is the line drawn for when child

protection becomes more important than family preservation? So those two questions.

Courtney
Yemiola
21:59

So, I'm going to be completely honest with you. We are not the ones ultimately who take guardianship. We're not the ones who remove children from the home, that is ultimately OCS and ultimately on the Tribe. In terms of child protection, if we look at the definitions and criteria that the different states have, if a child is in imminent harm, we have to look at those different definitions. Now, part of our job, and what we do, especially with ICWA, is when they go and do those home visits, and they do those site visits, we go with them. And so, if the OCS worker or Tribal worker is looking at, actually it's OCS, yes sorry, and they're like, well, due to not having enough bedding, or due to this, there's this happening, the child is at danger or is being neglected. Those are immediate resources that our program is equipped to help fix. And so those are the ways that we are being preventive in the children being removed from the home. And that is our goal, for those, quote unquote, smaller things that in other areas, children may or may not be removed from. We're trying to prevent those things. So, if they're not part of the reason for the childcare development fund, in terms of having a provider and everything as well. Because at the end of the day, if a mom is drinking, does that make her a bad mom? No. If you have a glass of wine, I'm not saying that that makes you a bad mom. If the mom is able to get the child to a safe place while she's having her glass of wine, that is a protective factor at the end of the day. And not everybody sees it like that. And I know not everybody will agree with me. And so, I do apologize for that. But that's part of the reason for our childcare providers. And so, we're making sure that they do have, quote unquote, safe places to go. And so, we're trying to help equip and empower the families to meet those resources, and to meet those basic needs at times too. And so ultimately, our program and us as ASNA, we don't make that criteria. If there's some basic things that we can help so that those kids aren't removed, we're doing everything we can. So, if it's clothes, if it's cleaning supplies, if it's doctor's appointments they need help setting up those things, if they need help getting birth certificates, if they need help getting bedding, so that they can reunified faster. We want to serve and that's what we're here for. Now, in terms of your first one, the reasons of family breakdown. There are a lot of different reasons. I mean you've got mental health problems, you've got, we do have alcohol use up here, we do have domestic violence, we do have drug use. So, you know, and we do live in a very unique area in terms of with our darkness and with our light. We do live in a very isolated area at times too. And sometimes, some people do need to pick and learn some additional coping skills. But we also do teach and help empower and help come alongside the services to support them in that. And that is our goal at the end of

the day, to help preserve the families. And so, it's not that we are fighting against OCS, or anything like that. I think sometimes maybe that might be how it's viewed. But ultimately, at the end of the day, we do want to protect the children, obviously, and keep them safe. And if somebody is in imminent danger, obviously, we want them to be safe. But we also want to preserve their families, because at the end of the day, people are going to flourish best when they're in that family environment with their family. And whether that is ultimately with mom and dad, or an extended family member, at the end of the day our values are ICWA.

Chair O'Neill
26:20

Thank you. I have Dr. BigFoot next.

Commissioner
BigFoot
26:28

Thank you. I have been up to Point Hope and it's amazing terrain up there. And I come from Oklahoma where it's really flat. I am wondering two things. One is, is there any evaluation that you've got, that you're doing to show what kind of results you're getting over time, to see how well the programs are working? Or you said that you want to improve. So, is there quality improvement? What are the kinds of things that you're doing? Not just, you know, customer satisfaction, but you know, actual benchmarks to see, you know, what kind of improvement in terms of family? And then the other question is, in your childcare, are you doing assessments of children to see what their individual needs might be in terms of learning disabilities or other kinds of special needs? Thank you.

Courtney
Yemiola
27:34

No, those are some really great questions. And so, I'll be completely honest with you, I am still new to the program. And so, some of this is me developing and putting some of these things into place. We do have customer satisfaction surveys. And we're also looking at reunification numbers. We work in conjunction with OCS, and also at times with children and youth services to look at the number of days children are in care to see if those are being reduced, because those are obviously important if we can reunify families faster. We're looking at the number of families that we're having going through our parenting classes. Daniella, did you have you guys have surveys for the CCDF as well?

Daniella Staska
28:17

We do. Yes, we do have a survey for CCDF, which is sent to all providers, and they let us know their satisfaction, or if there is anything we can improve. Like, let's say for example, if they have any special activity they would like to do with the kids which can improve the kid's development as well. And we are sending each month, pretty much, different things to the providers that they can utilize with the children at home. Like, from outdoor activities during the summertime, coloring, painting, board games, books, and different activities. Even

developmental and age-appropriate activities, as well, like brain activities where the kids can educate from playing.

Courtney
Yemiola
29:12

And so, with that some of the trainings that we provide to our childcare providers does include those developmental activities. We do work in conjunction with what's called the Infant Learning Program up here. However, they only cover zero to three. And so, I will say that is a gap in the services and resources that we do have up here. But if a provider does see that there might potentially delays or anything, they can let us know. And we'll work with the family and the provider to make those referrals if it needs to be for FAS, because we do have a high fetal alcohol population up here. Or if it's suspected that a child may be on the spectrum, or something like that. And we're also working on getting our providers trained to look for those suicidal or depression symptoms as well. Obviously, they're not behavioral health aides or anything like that. But, we do want to make sure that they are aware of it, not only for those that they're serving, but in the community as well because we do feel that that's important, especially when, you know, a suicide in a smaller community can really make a huge, huge impact and can potentially trigger others as well.

Commissioner
BigFoot
30:34

I appreciate that. Because I'm the Director of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, I'm always interested in how communities are responding to the need of those with suicidal ideation and thinking. I was just wondering, as you distribute these monthly activities, is there any assessment of, if they're being used? If they're, you know, improving the capacity of the child and the parent? I mean, and just in terms of measure of improvement, and utilization, how is it being utilized? And how's it making a difference in the life of a child? Thank you.

Courtney
Yemiola
31:24

That's a great question. No, it's a great question. And I appreciate you asking about the suicide because it is definitely something that can impact a lot of things. And we do want to make sure we're doing the follow up to because we are noticing that at times, you know, there's a lot of support and everything right immediately after an event, after completion, but not necessarily the follow up a month or two months after, or six months after. And so, we are working on making sure we're there for the, supporting the village and the family. And now in regards to those assessment tools, that is something that we need to improve upon. And so, I do really appreciate you offering that suggestion. And so that is definitely something we can work on. Thank you.

Chair O'Neill
32:11

Thank you. I'd like to ask if any other Commissioners have comments or questions for our panelists? Yes, Commissioner Begay.

Commissioner Begay 32:22 Thank you, Madam Chair. You mentioned that you administer a 638 contract for higher education, job placement, and adult vocational training programs. I imagine that being in a very rural and frontier area presents a lot of challenges in operating these programs. Can you kind of describe to us, maybe some of the challenges and or successes of your program, and any recommendations that perhaps would give you an ability to better provide some of these services or functions through your 638 contract?

Courtney Yemiola 33:07 Yeah, so I'll be completely honest, we all mainly work through the college, to provide a lot of those trainings and a lot of the education things. We aren't the ones who actually physically are doing the trainings and the education. We're helping provide the scholarships and everything for it. And so, the main challenge that we are facing a lot of times is actually making sure that there are instructors for the people who want to do certain things. And so, I would say that this is probably one of the main challenges. But we are able to serve if they're wanting to go outside of Utqiagvik, if they're willing to go down to Anchorage, if they're wanting to go somewhere else and get their CDL [Commercial Drivers License], if they're wanting to do a lot of the technical stuff, we are able to help connect them, help do the paperwork and the referral paperwork and everything for that. And so, I think that answers your question.

Commissioner Begay 34:04 In the follow up question to that, Madam Chair, is there a dual credit program available in the community for your high school students to perhaps begin accruing credit or begin some potential job placement to workforce development programs while in high school?

Martha Monnin 34:27 Thank you for your question. There is. To answer your question on that, the local college, Ilisagvik College, does partner with the school district and there is dual credit program that they support here, as well as via distance education. And so, what we've done is partner with them, and we also provide them some tuition monies for those students who are taking those dual credit classes. And that is supportive to our Tribal members via the Tribal resolution for the higher education programs that you're mentioning.

Chair O'Neill 35:08 Commissioner Gray.

Martha Monnin 35:49 Are we still connected?

Chair O'Neill
35:52

Are you, you need to turn your mic on.

Commissioner
Gray
35:57

So, this is Commissioner Gray. I spoke without turning my mic on, I apologize. I just wanted to recognize you guys and that you guys really should be recognized as first responders. You guys bring a tremendous amount of dedication and compassion to the villages and communities in which we serve. I did have a follow up question on, are you guys actually teaching the parenting class? Or is that contracted through Iliisagvik? And is that like a semester long course? Is that an intensive? Or what does that look like?

Martha Monnin
36:36

Thank you for your question. One of our goals here at ASNA along with them, with our hiring practices. -- when we are hiring for staff, that is the part of our professional development. But then it is also for enrichment to our Tribes, right? So we get our staff trained to be the trainers. And then we also send our staff to be those trainers to support development with our other Tribal members. So, to answer your question, it is our staff that are trained to be the Parents as Teachers, and then go out and do the outreach, and recruit, and train our Tribal members here at home.

Courtney
Yemiola
37:20

And in terms in the length of time and everything, we really work around the parents' schedule. We try to be very flexible to that because we recognize they're working, they're raising kids and everything as well. And so, some of that is dependent, it's not a semester long, or anything like that, we use different curriculum. So, it kind of depends on that. Some of them are a little bit more intensive. And so, we can cram some of them into it if we have to go to a village and teach it. We can do it in like a weeklong thing, or we can speak to that a little bit more. With COVID, we are we are doing some Zoom sessions and everything to make sure that we are still serving those communities and everything as well.

Commissioner
Gray
38:05

Thank you for that. I appreciate it. And this might be a question for Martha. What does success look like for you, for the ASNA?

Martha Monnin
38:20

Thank you for that question. So, I work very closely with our Board of Directors, and supporting the mission of the Arctic Slope Native Association. We really want to see that our people are happy and content, that they're healthy and that our values are being expressed in a way with one another, and that we are working together across the region and across the state. And so, what does success look

like? I think it's in our people. And it's how well we come together and continue to exercise our cultural relevance. And I hope that answered your question. I know that's very broad, but we really are working to empower. And I use the word empower, because I think that's exactly what it is here. We're working to empower our traditions and keeping our cultures alive here. So, thank you for your question.

Commissioner
Gray
39:38

That did answer that question, I appreciate the response of an expression of values and keeping people connected. So, thank you for that.

Chair O'Neill
39:47

Other questions and comments from Commissioners? Is that you Commissioner Morris?

Commissioner
Morris
39:57

Yes. Just wondering how they are funded and how many students they are able to help with tuition?

Courtney
Yemiola
40:13

So we are grant funded. We do get funds from the state. We have got CARES funds. We've gotten, we apply for different grants as well. And so, we are diligent and making sure those go out. In terms of the numbers, I personally, Like I said I am still new and working on figuring out all of those numbers. And so that would be a question I would have to ask my grant person. I apologize.

Commissioner
Morris
40:47

Thank you.

Chair O'Neill
40:50

I'd like to ask Dr. McDonald and Commissioner Fineday, you both joined us here during the conversation. Do you have any comments or questions?

Commissioner
Fineday
41:07

None here.

Chair O'Neill
41:09

Thank you.

Commissioner
Delmar

I have one.

41:11

Chair O'Neill
41:12

Yes.

Commissioner
Delmar
41:14

This is Jesse Delmar. I think one of you stated that keeping our culture alive and well is one of the goals that you have. That is pretty much tremendous. And I want to encourage you. As far as the unfortunate subject of suicide, it happens in Native country, not only particular to Alaska, but it happens here too, on Navajo, unfortunate. I don't know what it is, but I think my personal opinion is that it pretty much comes back to culture and who we are as a Navajo people is very important. Self-identity is what we try to teach our young ones. But just to let you know that it doesn't only happen there in Alaska, but it happens here too, as well. I think we as Natives, we as Indian country people, I think we have this figured out and I think personally, I think that culture has a big thing to do with it. But thank you for your comment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chair O'Neill
42:41

Thank you, Commissioner Delmar. All right. Yes, Commissioner Gray.

Commissioner
Gray
42:47

I'd just like to add to Jesse Delmar comment, in that I agree that it is somewhat culturally related. Personally I feel like it's related to a loss of identity and loss of culture. That is one of the driving forces behind suicide and it's a pain that is deeply felt by, unfortunately, many of the representatives here on the Commission and throughout the Tribes that we represent in the State of Alaska, and in the lower 48 as well. Thank you for the comment.

Chair O'Neill
43:29

So, my last question to our panelists, or Dr. McDonald, do you have a question or comment?

Commissioner
McDonald
43:37

Yes, I sure do, Madam Chair. Thank you. And thank you for the comments from Commissioners Delmar and Gray towards the end there. You really got me thinking. And hearing what's been happening in the community, I think you guys are doing a tremendous job. I've been to your community, and man, it's pretty isolated. To compare it, we think we live in the country here in North Dakota, and you're not in the country until you go, you know. So providing those services are being a community is just, you just got to, just shake your guy's hand in a virtual way. And thank you for your service. Just to build on our fellow Commissioners comments, is that, you know, we're seeing this information coming out in the residential schools in Canada. We're seeing the research, we're seeing some of

these same investigations starting to go on here in the lower 48. And we're seeing that, you know, I think believed the count now in regard to mass graves, a little over 5,000. And that one of the things I've seen on social media was that just kind of made me think a little bit more, was that there's not supposed to be any dead kids in school, at our schools, you know. And so, just the devastation that was impacted on our peoples from the boarding school era in regard to stealing our children from our communities and forcing them into boarding schools, punishing them for speaking their language, for praying in their cultural manners. You know, it's just been, hurt our people overall. It has resulted in intergenerational trauma and the loss of self-identity, loss of our language, and culture. I agree with our Commissioners that our culture, that the answers are there. We didn't have any, our culture, holds our children sacred. Our culture, we don't hurt our children in our culture, you know. So, these things, we pray, we're very spiritual people. These are the things that we've lost. And so, there's a striving too, that we need to continue to focus to bring those things back in regard to, because I believe we have the answers. Like most rural communities, we have the answers to what our problems are. We don't need somebody from the outside telling us what to do. We just need the resources in order to do what we know what needs to be done. And I hear you, I hear you're saying, sharing that within your comments today. And I just really appreciate what you shared today. And I know that some of these are questions, but we're really trying to get down to the matter. So, when we put this report out here at the end of this work that will have good information. And I just want to thank you again for sharing and allowing us to visit with you guys. Thank you very much.

Chair O'Neill
47:07

Thank you, Dr. McDonald. My last question to the panelists is in our official capacity as the Commission, as we think about our recommendations, is there a recommendation that we could put forward that would really help you as an organization, as you support the children in the Utqiaġvik community?

Courtney
Yemiola
47:48

I think there's a couple of different things. I know Martha and I had spoken about earlier. I think the culture and recognizing the traditional healing practices as not just necessarily for our community, but for American Indian and Alaskan Natives in general. Medicaid doesn't always recognize traditional healing practices as worthy of being considered reimbursable. They consider evidence-based practices as, quote unquote, more important. However, traditional healing practices should be recognized as evidence-based, because of the thousands of years they were working. And so, that might be something to look at. I think that continuing to advocate for the protection and enforcement of ICWA will be super important. Continuing to look at those strengths-based protective factors for

youth and families. And that's where the, you know, the culture and traditions can come in with that. I think with some of the assessment tools that are available, especially for mental health, I don't know if they're always necessarily culturally competent. I know there's one that I know the State of Alaska uses, such as the CBCL, the Child Behavioral Checklist. One of the things mentioned was, you know, does the client or youth look you in the eye. And for some of our kiddos that doesn't necessarily apply. And that doesn't mean that they have a mental health deficiency, it just might be a sign of respect or something that their family taught them. And so, a lot of the assessment tools or BHA requirements, Behavioral Health Assessments and things are very westernized. And I come and I say this as a clinician who grew up in the Western culture and as a white clinician, coming in and saying that it's not appropriate for serving these communities and appropriate for serving the family and it's just going to push away the families and children more and more, and not encourage them to access the services. And so, you know, we need to be able to build that bridge because there's already that suspicion. Like you're saying, we're talking about the generational trauma, we're talking about removing them and everything. We need to do better. Not necessarily as ASNA, but granted we can always do better, but just as a community, as a people, at being more accepting of cultural differences, of traditional healing ways, of how we assess people, of how we find pathology. So, that would be some of the recommendations I have.

Chair O'Neill
50:47 Thank you. That's a great list. I'm going to give the last comments from the Commissioners to Dr. DeCoteau, who serves as Vice-Chair.

Vice-Chair
DeCoteau 50:59 Good afternoon, thank you all for the really informative presentations that you gave this afternoon and for the work that you're doing. I'm a psychologist, and just to respond to the last comments there. The behavioral assessment measures aren't just for the Native population. And so, I completely agree with you that there needs to be a lot more work to develop measures that are properly normed for our Native population. So, thank you for those comments, and we will be able to give the proper recommendations to Congress to help you.

Courtney
Yemiola
51:45 Thank you.

III. Wrap Up

Chair O'Neill 51:47 Thank you so much for your time, this was so helpful. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your schedules to have this conversation with us.

Courtney Yemiola 51:57 Thank you for having us.

Martha Monnin 51:58 And we thank you as well. Thank you for all the good work that you're doing and hearing from everyone. And we just appreciate you.

Chair O'Neill 52:10 We appreciate you as well. We wish we were there in person. Next time. All right. Thank you. I would like to ask the Commissioners to stay online for a minute, please.

Martha Monnin 54:39 Thank you and take care.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

[Transcript completed by Kearns & West]