

Feb. 12, 2013

To the editor:

We are honored to be able to run in this year's Iron Dog race for suicide education and awareness. We were raised in many small villages on the Iron Dog trail and see what suicide has done to our family and friends in these communities. Both of us now teach in our hometown of Tanana. We love our jobs and the children and hope we can make a difference.

We work with children every day and see the many struggles that they, and the adult figures in our community, go through. Many have issues with mental health, drugs and alcohol, domestic violence, and sexual assault.

It is a daily struggle to deal with personal problems, emotionally and physically, and at times people may feel that suicide is the only answer, or the easy way out. SUICIDE is NOT the answer!

It is a challenge in rural Alaska to get help for these types of issues, as our resources here are very limited.

Today, though, we have unbelievable resources available to help prevent suicide. Help is there, we just need to work on getting it to rural Alaska. Many of us are becoming educated on suicide prevention, becoming trainers, and we can teach others how to look for signs and where to go for help.

As young Native men, we are the men of the household; the hunter, the provider, and it is hard to ask for help. Sometimes we are too proud. It is important when times get tough that we set our pride aside and ask for help, for the sake of our own selves, and for our family or friends who are hurting. We need to stick together and be there for each other. There are many times when there were signs of suicide and we overlooked them.

Today more than ever, we are talking about suicide aloud with the people in rural communities, which is a step in the right direction because in the past, suicide has been an untouched subject.

The Careline number we are sharing (877-266-HELP (4357)) is an amazing resource. We can all call for help, all over Alaska! Now we can text 4help to 839863 to reach Careline, too.

We believe by talking publicly, spreading the word of hope, and working together we can help prevent more suicides in the future. In the Iron Dog, and in our lives, we stress that "life is a team effort." When our partner struggles and breaks down, we stop and help each other. It is the same for another team on the trail that has mechanical issues or is in overflow — we lend a helping hand. Life is a team effort whether you are on a trail, in a village, or the city. We need to stick together and support each other during hard times.

We would like to thank Health and Social Services, the Iron Dog and our family and friends for their love and support.

Sincerely,

Arnold and Aaron Marks

Team 4Zero