

SPIRIT OF YOUTH

ENERGY FOR A BETTER ALASKA

*"Alaska youth are extraordinary."
-Spirit of Youth Foundation*

Spirit of Youth is an Alaskan non-profit group dedicated to creating and promoting opportunities for youth involvement in their communities by building leadership and by providing media recognition for the positive contributions youth are making statewide.

Spirit of Youth began in 1997 as a media-based project to address the growing negative image of teenagers. Since then, hundreds of positive stories about Alaskan youth have spread through television, radio and local newspapers. An annual banquet honors the contributions teens are making in 10 categories of activity.

Below are some of the 2002 winners.

SPIRIT OF YOUTH 2002 WINNERS

Heather and Hanna Craig, Science and Technology Winners

The Science, Technology, and Media award recognizes youth who pursue science or technological endeavors for the education of others, safety, or fun. It also includes teens' involvement in all forms of media from newspapers, radio and TV to creating public information materials, like posters, or pamphlets.

Heather and Hanna Craig, sisters and seniors at East High School, Anchorage, have taken their love of robotics to new heights. Together they invented the one and only "Ice Crawler," a true Alaskan, lifesaving robot. Its job is to rescue people trapped in the ice, whether they have fallen into a glacial crevasse or into the freezing waters of a winter lake. The 20 pound robot is designed to cross rigorous winter terrain and deliver a lifesaving line to the victim. The "Ice Crawler" is maneuvered by the rescuer through a tether that does double duty as an electrical connection and a rope to tow the person to safety. The sisters mastered the multiple challenges of design and construction to develop a prototype that has won national awards. John Pursey, owner of Envision Product Design, stated, "There is nothing else like it; you would think the rescue industry, with its variety of tools to save people, would have something like this, but they don't!" Heather and Hanna hope that with additional funding the Ice Crawler prototype will become a reality to help save many lives in the years to come.

Aniak Dragon Slayers, Life Savers and Prevention Winners

The Spirit of Youth Life Savers and Prevention category salutes teens who have surpassed "the call of duty" by preventing injuries and saving lives.

The Dragon Slayers are a squadron of girls between 13 and 20 who are doing extraordinary life saving deeds for their community. This group began in 1993 when the volunteer fire department broadened its mission to include emergency medical services. The average call volume immediately shot from 20 a year to more than 250. Pete Brown, the fire and police chief, stated, "Clearly we needed help! So we turned to our teens."

Youth members begin as “fire-flies.” They must undergo over 100 hours of fire and first aid training. After another 140 hours of training, the “dragon slayers” can perform basic EMT functions. Squadron members wear beepers so they can respond to emergencies, day or night. Their calls range from fighting fires (sometimes being the first on the scene) to tending critical care patients often unreachable by plane or road.

One call was 17 hours long. A victim of a head-on collision who had a fractured skull and punctured lung required stabilization. He was 3 1/2 hours away by boat, at night, in the fog. The girls worked through the night without food, stabilized the man, and he recovered. Clearly the Dragon Slayers are one of the Aniak’s greatest resources, as well as role models for other youth.

Britanee Rayburn, Overcoming Challenges Winner

This category salutes youth who display exceptional determination and stamina as they overcome significant life challenges.

Britanee, a junior at Anchorage’s Dimond High, has proved to be an amazingly strong person. After the tragic death of her sister due to domestic violence, Britanee took the initiative to write a true-to-life report. She made many presentations that include pictures, a video and resources for anyone needing information on domestic violence. Britanee hopes that by telling her sister’s story she will help others who are in abusive relationships. Her focus is to get the message out: abuse is not to be taken lightly. Eventually, she would like to work in the field of domestic violence prevention. Spirit of Youth believes that Britanee’s courage and commitment opens others’ eyes to this often ignored situation.

Homer Skateboarder Association, Award in Government

After being banned from parking lots all over town, a group of young men formed the Homer Skateboarder Association. The group has a single purpose: to create a skateboard park in Homer. They knew that many businesses and school administrators viewed them as nothing more than “skate punks”. With the advice of some savvy adult mentors, and under the direction and leadership of co-presidents Eric Szymoniak and Ivan Heimbuch, some 40-50 students took on this cause and faced the opposition. The group did their homework—wrote letters to the editor, gathered signatures on petitions, researched and created a “white paper,” and attended and testified at numerous local council and parks and recreation committee meetings. Through various fundraisers, such as car washes and a concert, they managed to bring in almost \$5,000, enough to contract with a consultant to work with them on best designs for a skateboard park.

The group learned first hand how to follow the public process and managed to convince the city to donate a site for the park. Homer resident Annie Moyland stated, “These teens have helped change the way people in this town, until now, have viewed skateboarders.” The selected site is an old cracked basketball court that needs work, but with volunteers from the community, they hope to see their dream become a reality during the summer of 2002.

What makes for a successful teen program?

As you think about programs and services for teens, “Critical Elements of Successful Youth Programs” (in Adolescent Health Plan) can be a helpful tool. Extensive research on prevention programs targeting teenage substance use, tobacco, violence, pregnancy and school failure has identified critical program components for successful outcomes. The more these elements are incorporated, the more likely your teen programs will be successful. Some of these critical elements include:

1. When the program is staffed, staff encourages youth to do things they are capable of doing themselves—instead of doing things for them. Staff are respected, trusted and well liked by youth. Staff see youth as resources and have high expectations of all teens. Staff set rules and establish clear expectations for youth behavior.
2. Strategies are based on research, and are locally driven. Strategies are modified according to individual needs (identify youth who need extra support, provide or refer what is needed.) Strategies involve parents, extended family members and or significant adults in teen’s life. Strategies actively involve youth as the planners, doers, evaluators—not just as recipients! Activities have elements of fun and challenge. Strategies are evaluated and modified, incorporating ongoing feedback from youth and families. Successes are recognized along the way!

When planning your youth efforts, remember, all youth need:

- Safe, secure, supportive, welcoming environments.
- Time spent with caring, respectful, supportive adults, who expect the best.
- Time for sincere, trusting relationships to build.
- Multiple opportunities to be actively involved.



Photo Courtesy of James Poulson
From "Spirit of Youth: No Loitering"

Spirit of Youth: No Loitering by Ellen Frankenstein

NO LOITERING is an intimate portrait of teenagers trying to understand their world and their possibilities. The film weaves together video shot by teens and by the filmmaker, as they work together to make a film and create expressive outlets for youth in the community. They organize dances and community events and paint a mural. At the same time, with humor and pathos, these young people raise issues around violence, feeling misunderstood by adults and lacking respect in their community. Set in the small town of Sitka, Alaska, home to a large Native American population, the video chronicles the creativity, concerns and dreams of youth growing up today.

www.newday.com/films/No_Loitering

New Day Films
(201) 652-6590
www.newday.com

WHAT NUMBERS CAN TELL US

What do we know about the health of adolescents in Alaska? How can you find out about the health of adolescents in your own community? In addition to the developmental assets model, which attempts to measure strengths and resilience, researchers use health indicators from statistics and surveys to learn about adolescent health.

	Adolescent Health Indicators	Alaska	U.S.
1	<i>Students in grades 9–12 who have used any tobacco product in the last 30 days:</i>	39%	40%
2	<i>Students grade 9–12 who have used alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine in the past 30 days:1999</i>	51%	54%
3	<i>Violent death rate, age 15 to 19: 1999 Suicide, unintentional injury, homicide, and unknown intent (rate per 100,000 population)</i>	86	53
4	<i>Suicide rate, age 15 to 19: 1999 (rate per 100,000 population)</i>	41	8
5	<i>Young teen birth rate: 1999 (live births per 100,000 girls age 15-17)</i>	27	29
6	<i>Teens 16 to 19 who drop out of school: 1999</i>	8%	10%
7	<i>Teens 16 to 19 not in school and not working:1999</i>	10%	8%

Data sources:

1, 2: Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The Alaska sample for 1999 did not include Anchorage. Alaska data for 1999 are weighted and are representative of the state student population excluding Anchorage.

3, 4, 5: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics and National Center for Health Statistics

6, 7: Kids Count 2002.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

What can we learn from Spirit of Youth?

Spirit of Youth reminds us of the many positive contributions youth make to our communities. Research shows that making a contribution to others is an important part of growing up healthy. Recognition of such contributions may also help encourage more constructive activities. Communities or agencies can look for positive things youth are currently doing, share those stories with local media, and recognize youth who are doing positive things at public events. Submit positive youth stories to www.spirtofyouth.org for further recognition and media coverage.

What’s the idea behind Spirit of Youth?

“Youth developmental assets” describe those parts of children’s lives that help kids succeed—the building blocks in children’s lives that help them grow up strong, capable, and caring. Children who have positive experiences in their lives avoid such negative behavior as substance abuse and early sexual experimentation. Youth developmental assets are described in *Helping Kids Succeed - Alaskan Style* by the Association of Alaska School Boards and the Alaska Division of Public Health.

Spirit of Youth Foundation incorporates youth participation and what is known about encouraging healthy behaviors into all phases of its planning, implementation, evaluation as well as governance. These and other activities are discussed in the Department of Health’s Adolescent Health Plan which describes what families, schools, community members, local agencies and policy makers can do to contribute to adolescent health and well-being.

What are other groups doing?

Local organizations in many communities across Alaska have adopted the Developmental Assets framework and have adapted their programs to include asset building practices, policies, and services in many ways. Some school districts are using the developmental assets framework to determine what activities and projects to support. Youth are involved in some local agencies' boards of directors, serve on municipal advisory commissions or serve as committee members for program planning, delivery, and evaluation. Regional organizations sponsor youth-adult partnerships to address community identified needs.

A recent example is a six-year statewide youth development initiative known as AK-ICE (Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement). The project is jointly managed by the Association of Alaska School Boards and the Department of Health & Social Services. Alaska-ICE emphasizes our shared responsibility for preparing Alaska's children and youth for the future, including their academic success, civil behavior, racial tolerance and reduction of risky behaviors. AK-ICE is based on the Association of Alaska School Board's 1991 long-range plan and their 1998 book, *Helping Kids Succeed - Alaskan Style*. This book is based on the Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework and ideas provided by thousands of Alaskans. It provides tools and suggestions for building "assets" or protective factors among Alaskan youth. AK-ICE provides local, regional and statewide training, technical assistance, demonstration projects, coaching and resources to schools, community organizations, parent groups and faith communities.

Alaska 20/20 regularly includes students regularly in conferences and in planning activities to look at priorities for Alaska's future.

TO FIND OUT MORE

Spirit of Youth Foundation
(907) 566-7676
(907) 269-3425
www.spiritofyouth.org

Adolescent Health Plan:
www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/mcfh/default.htm
(907) 269-3425

Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement
Alaska-ICE
(907) 586-1486
www.alaskaice.org

Search Institute - Development Assets
www.search-institute.org/

Adolescent health indicators for Alaska:

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
Division of Public Health
Section of Epidemiology
School Health Program
www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/programs/chronic/school.stm
(907) 269-8000

Kids Count Alaska 2001
Institute for Social and Economic Research
www.kidscount.alaska.edu
(907) 786-7710

Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics
Division of Public Health
www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/bvs/statistics
(907) 465-8604

REFERENCE CHAPTERS IN HEALTHY ALASKANS 2010, VOLUME I

Chapter 5. Mental Health
Chapter 6. Educational and Community-Based Programs

NOTES