

## Seeds Planted Years Ago Thrive and Grow

Hoonah is a rural community in Southeast Alaska, accessible only by boat or plane with approximately 785 full-time residents, most of whom are Alaska Native. Public Health Nurses have been working with the Hoonah community for decades, and over the years services have ranged from exclusively clinical care, to today's model of a balance of individual, community, and systems work. Over the years of 2006 and 2007, the itinerant Public Health Nurse (PHN) and some members of the community sought a way to promote physical activity as an obesity prevention strategy.

The Hoonah Fun and Fit coalition's initial goal was to keep the active people active. Over time, the group used The Community Guide website ([www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org)) to develop interventions to increase recreational activities, enhance school nutrition, and raise awareness around the impact of obesity as a broader topic. The workgroup has expanded since 2006, and now includes Big Brothers Big Sisters, Parents as Teachers, Hoonah Organizers for Peace and Equality, the Salvation Army, the community youth center, the Hoonah Schools, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, Hoonah Indian Association, and the City of Hoonah Parks and Recreation, in addition to the local Public Health Nurse who itinerates from Juneau.

Over the past 5 years, the community has worked to develop and sustain an annual *Eagles versus Ravens Walking Challenge*, identified funding opportunities to re-open the community pool, and introduced locally gathered fish and vegetables into the school lunch program. The Fun and Fit group has worked to change school policy to make the school a No Junk Food Zone. All foods brought into the school, or prepared at the school must be nutritious. The local high school has added open gym hours for the community to recreate. The Fun and Fit partnership has also hosted regular community health education sessions and health fairs covering a variety of health topics.

The itinerating Public Health Nurse has changed several times in the last 10 years, but has remained a presence in the Fun and Fit group throughout it all. Long-time former itinerant PHN, Sonja Engle says "the group has been sustainable because of the people who came to the table to support the work." Sonja put in many hours of funding research, agenda building, and planning alongside the devoted Hoonah community members. The current itinerant Public Health Nurse, Valerie Gosselin, who is new to Alaska, reports she is "very impressed by the work the community has undertaken to make this partnership sustainable, and with how empowered the community is to make changes to improve health."

Over the many years public health nurses have served the community of Hoonah, itinerant visits built on each other to move towards a coalition such as this. Despite the hard work Sonja put into helping to build and sustain the coalition, she says, "This work belongs to the community. I never owned it. As public health nurses, we can work with communities to make changes, but it is successful because of the local people."

As we move forward together in partnership, Hoonah and the Public Health Nurses serving the community will continue to plant seeds that foster physical activity, health, and wellness.

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