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Debra Jones

University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension

Linda Skogrand

Utah State University

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Informing 4-H Youth Development in Southeast Alaska Native Villages

Debra Jones and Linda Skogrand

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the research question, What are the needs of youth in Southeast Alaska Native villages and how can 4-H youth development respond to these needs in culturally responsive ways? The study offers initial findings regarding concerns about youth and shares Alaska Native voices and perspectives in how we can best deliver youth programming in remote rural villages in culturally responsive ways. Participants highlight the importance of establishing programs within the context of culture, language and spirituality, engaging youth in activities that give them a sense of purpose and belonging, and promoting youth leadership. Implications are shared for development of culturally responsive youth programming which may be applicable with similar populations within and outside of Alaska.

Introduction

The Cooperative Extension Service offers 4-H youth development programming throughout the United States, being the nation's largest youth development organization and implementing community-wide change at an early age (National 4-H Council, n.d.). This informal learning is typically delivered through parents and other community volunteers learning together with youth through youth-adult partnerships. Alaska 4-H has had intermittent presence in remote rural communities since 1930. As one of the authors of this study returned to Alaska 4-H in 2009, she met individuals who shared stories of 4-H when they were growing up and how they wished it was available for youth in their villages. In response to this, we began inviting those interested to sit down and have conversations with us. We found that people were quite willing to share their thoughts and ideas. These Alaska Native leaders responded to having a voice in developing something positive for youth. The overarching research question which drove this inquiry was: What are the needs of youth in Southeast Alaska Native villages and how can 4-H respond to these needs in culturally responsive ways? This study offers initial findings regarding concerns about youth in Southeast Alaska villages and requests for 4-H programming. It shares Alaska Native voices and perspectives in how we can best deliver 4-H in remote villages in Southeast Alaska in culturally responsive ways.

The current study invited the guidance of adults as they will be the ones to provide safe places for youth to engage in informal learning activities. Historically, relationships are not easily made between outsiders and residents of remote Alaska villages and, unfortunately, many programs which

are offered are not sustained. In many cases, adults, much less youth, are not invited to share their thoughts on potential new programs being offered in their communities.

4-H provides a flexible programming structure which is responsive to tribal contexts as it is largely driven by members of the local community. Youth thrive as they learn together with caring adults who will listen to and mentor them as they develop to their full potential. 4-H provides a safe place for youth to learn and have fun together while they develop greater understanding of self and their place in the world. 4-H also provides a strong connection to suicide prevention by offering youth opportunities to experience a sense of belonging within a caring community of peers and adults within their local community and beyond.

A national longitudinal study ([file:///Users/CCBPgrad/Downloads/13105NFRH_PosYouthDeveReport_v13%20\(1\).pdf](file:///Users/CCBPgrad/Downloads/13105NFRH_PosYouthDeveReport_v13%20(1).pdf)) revealed that youth in 4-H were less likely than other youth to experience depression and risky behaviors such as alcohol and tobacco use, and importantly, this influence appears to become stronger as children grow older. 4-H youth exhibited greater emotional engagement in school, achieved higher grades in school, were nearly two times more likely to see themselves going to college, and exhibited greater confidence in their ability to get and keep a part time job. Fifty-six percent were more likely to spend time exercising and being physically active, had higher self-esteem and communication skills, and were three times more likely to contribute to their communities than youth who did not have a 4-H experience.

Suicide is pervasive among Alaska Native youth. It is the leading cause of death for 15-19

year olds in Northwest Alaska, and statistics of this magnitude are unfortunately similar for other areas of the state (Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; Juneau Suicide Prevention, n.d.). According to the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (2010), Alaskan high school students think about suicide or attempt suicide at rates far higher than the national average. As we reviewed the literature, we quickly found that our inquiry reflected research with Alaska Native communities which indicates connectedness with family, community, and the natural environment is a protective factor for suicide, through its development of a sense of purpose and meaning in one's life (Mohatt, Fok, Burket, Henry, & Allen, 2011). As the Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan (2010) states, the time is now to "... mend the net of services and supports in place to prevent suicide...in a way that promotes physical, emotional, and mental wellness and strengthens personal and community resilience" (p. 3). There is a common conception that the role of youth development programs is to develop future leaders. Although that is one outcome, it is our contention that youth also need to be recognized and valued for who they are during childhood and adolescence and not just for the future adults they will become. Likewise, the Suicide Prevention Council (2010) emphasizes the value of youth programming that focuses "on the positive aspects of life and hopefulness" (p. 23), while the 2010 Statewide Suicide Prevention Summit recognized the power of Alaskan youth as one of the state's greatest strengths.

It is clear that 4-H can provide a vehicle for supporting youth in Alaska Native villages. Therefore, information gathered from this study will be utilized to inform development of 4-H positive youth development programming in remote rural Alaska villages which have indicated an interest in 4-H for their youth and families. We realize that the diversity among tribes and language groups precludes a cookie-cutter approach to tribal youth programming. Results of the study will not only inform youth programming but also collect foundational information about how Alaska Native leaders perceive the state of youth and their needs within their home village.

This study was conducted from the perspective of multicultural feminist theory (Tong, 2009). Multiculturalism focuses on people being encouraged to maintain their ethnic pride. The feminist component of the theory is that we hear the voices of those not typically heard. This study, therefore, was conducted from the perspective that

we need to hear the voices of Alaska Natives in how 4-H can best serve the needs of youth and their families; thereby reflecting and reinforcing ethnic pride.

Data analysis led us to hearing these voices through a lens of social exclusion theory. Social exclusion has been described as a concept in which individuals are excluded from fully participating in normal activities of society (Sen, 2000). The concept goes even deeper in remote rural Alaska as individuals feel a sense of exclusion not only from the normal activities of their local community but from the rest of the state, and society in general. In a vast geographic area with very few roads, many Alaska youth and young adults lack basic life skills and opportunities necessary to be productive members of their communities. Many youth suffer social and emotional exclusion. The pain these youth feel is real. Although it is understood that social exclusion affects emotional regulation in how one acts and reacts to others, research also reveals that social exclusion can lead to poor decision-making and diminished ability to learn (Campbell, Krusemark, Dyckman, Brunell, McDowell, Twenge, & Clementz, 2006).

Methods

Just as we acknowledge a culturally responsive approach in developing and implementing a youth program, we acknowledged a culturally responsive approach and ways of knowing throughout the research study. To this end, we invited people to share with us what they saw and what they felt was needed for youth of their village. Being culturally responsive also guides us to share what we are learning in ways such that it can be utilized both within and outside of academia for practical application in communities who wish to improve the condition of youth. What we present are peoples' stories about what youth need in their respective communities and these stories will be used for change they wish to see in their communities. As Carson and Hand stated (1999, p. 161), "Native Americans have been studied more than any other group ... yet they remain among the most disadvantaged groups within the United States." Being cognizant of a long history of distrust of outsiders conducting studies in Alaska Native communities, we invited participation of leaders in the research process. These leaders began by helping us develop the interview questions. They also helped us as we wrote the results and they contributed to the discussion. Their involvement was particularly important when findings reflected

negatively upon communities. The Alaska Native leaders encouraged us to report the findings as the data described the lives of youth in the villages even if it painted a negative view of life.

This study was qualitative in design which is consistent with indigenous cultural values (LaFrance, 2004) and brings to light individual interpretation and meaning. A purposeful sampling technique (Creswell, 2013) was used to select ten adults to be interviewed from Southeast Alaskan villages. These adults had lived and/or were currently living in these areas and had intimate knowledge of the culture in these villages. The basis of the conversations was to give us a sense of what communities looked like and felt like, and to better situate a positive youth development program in various contexts so that the programs could be meaningful and make sense to those involved.

The research question guiding our inquiry was: What are the needs of youth in Southeast Alaska Native villages and how can 4-H respond to these needs in culturally responsive ways? A set of interview questions was developed and revised from initial listening sessions and reviewed through email inquiries and responses with Alaska Native leaders. Interview questions addressed three broad areas: 1) What are existing concerns with youth in villages? 2) What do youth need to be healthy? 3) What should programming look like? Interviews, on average, were about 45 minutes long and they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. These interviews were conducted in the Southeast region of Alaska in locations convenient to participants.

Analysis of the data was done in a way suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) in that researchers developed coding categories reflective of the themes described by the participants. When the researchers identified differences in the coding categories, they went back to the data and developed a consensus about which categories best reflected the participants' responses. The findings were shared with participants and they have indicated the findings are culturally accurate.

Demographics

Participants consisted of five females and five males. Of the females, four were Alaska Native and one American Indian from the lower 48 who was living in Alaska and working with a tribal government. One Alaska Native female was raised in the village, left for college, remained in the urban setting, and is actively working with Native organizations. Another left the village for college, returned to raise a family, and is working with

tribal government. One other has spent her life in the village and is also actively working with tribal government. The final female participant spent her life in a more urban area of the state with family ties to the village.

Two of the five males were Alaska Native, with one spending his life in a more urban area of the state with family ties to the village, and working with a Native Corporation serving youth and families, and the other, a young adult male who grew up in the village, left for work for a period of time, and moved back to the village to raise his family. Two males moved to the village through marriage with a 20+ year history within the community. The final male participant was an Alaska Native with a family connection to the village who spent his life in a more urban setting and is working with a Native Corporation serving youth and families.

Findings

Three major themes resulted in analyzing the data which were consistent with the research questions. These themes included existing concerns with youth in villages, what youth need to be healthy, and what youth programming should look like. A brief description of each theme follows with quotes from participants to illustrate the themes.

Existing Concerns with Youth in the Villages

There were two major areas of concern about youth in the villages. Participants talked about drugs and alcohol and gave some indication about reasons why youth turned to drugs and alcohol. Secondly, they indicated there was very little for youth to do in the villages, especially in the summer. Participants shared with us their concerns about youth in the village such as few meaningful activities for youth and youth with no vision for their future. Adults worry about the mental and physical health of their youth amidst unhealthy environments of alcoholism, drug use, and physical, and sexual abuse. Trying to cope with these negative influences around them and their own destructive behavior too often results in suicide. Ultimately, they shared that it is time to step up to the responsibility to provide healthier environments for youth and that change must start from within their communities.

Drugs and alcohol. All of the participants in the study identified drugs and alcohol as a problem for children in their villages. According to one participant, "I'm seeing a lot of substance abuse. Little kids starting to drink at a really young age." One participant felt that, "They don't know about

the risks that drugs have.”

The participants in this study also gave clues about why children use drugs and alcohol. One person said:

I think a lot of kids turn to drugs because they see their parents doing it, they see their friends doing it. It’s an escape for them. It’s a way to escape reality for a little while—to numb that pain.

Others alluded to where the pain might come from. One person described the unhealthy relationships their parents might have, which causes stress for young people. Someone referring to the abuse of children in villages said, “Other types of abuse that are major issues in rural Alaska ... I think some of those lead to drug and alcohol abuse.” One person did not elaborate but stated, “There are a lot of bad things going on.” There were comments made about children “feeling neglected” and children “don’t seem to get the love and affection they need.” Another participant said children, grow up in homes where there’s a lot of alcohol and abuse.” One participant indicated that alcohol was in four out of five homes in their village.

Finally, someone referred to the high suicide rate among youth and young adults. This participant said some adults cannot cope, so how would youth who are 10, 12, or 14 years old cope with these things. The result is that some individuals, along with using drugs and alcohol, also commit suicide.

Few meaningful activities. Several of the participants described the lack of things to do in the villages. Participants said, “There are a lot of kids who sit inside all day and play video games,” and as a result, “Kids mope around saying there’s nothing to do.” This was especially true in the summer when they were not in school. A reality of village life is that in most instances not only do schools close for the summer but teachers also leave for the summer. There were several references to youth enjoying basketball and they could play during the school year, but the schools were closed during the summer. One person made reference to lack of parental encouragement for kids to be involved in activities. One participant described, generally, the lack of opportunities for youth in villages. She said, “Like in Juneau ... they have swimming pools, ice skating rinks, all kinds of stuff. In the villages they don’t have things like that.”

What Youth Need to Be Healthy

Participants described what a healthy young person looked like, such as having positive self-esteem, respect for themselves and others, being spiritual, being proud of who they are, and knowing about their culture. They also talked about healthy youth having healthy relationships and being able to trust those around them, including people in helping professions. As one participant said, being healthy is, “knowing about their culture and where they came from and being proud of themselves. To me that is a healthy young person.”

Participants said to be healthy, youth needed to know the traditional skills such as hunting and fishing, and how to stay safe doing those things. They needed to know about their culture, language, and spirituality.

Traditional Skills

Many of the participants said there was a lack of activities for youth in the villages and they needed positive things to do. Participants then elaborated on what those things should be with the most often cited as learning traditional skills—things that were done in the Native way.

The majority of participants identified hunting and fishing and learning to live off the land as important skills young people should know to be healthy. Sometimes these skills were learned in culture camp which was usually one week during the summer. These skills, however, could also be learned in an ongoing way, throughout the year, through youth programs.

One participant reflected on her own upbringing when she talked about her father who would “... take me fishing, he’d take me hunting. We’d go and collect seaweed. He could relate to the Native way of life.” Although many youth are old enough to fish in boats, many are too young. These younger children, however, “... can bring up local foods from the beach such as seaweed, clams, gumboots, and maybe even fish.” According to one participant, there was also a need to “teach kids how to smoke fish. ... subsistence is a good thing.”

There was a resulting need to teach youth about water safety, since many of the villages are on major rivers or ocean inlets and fishing was part of living off the land. Another participant also talked about the importance of learning survival skills as they learned to live off the land. A story was told about how one young man who had lost the motor on his boat far from shore, but along with others in the boat was able to paddle to shore far from the village.

They paddled to shore, they hunkered down and built a shelter and they rationed their food... . And when the coast guard finally came and found him they were in great shape. They had all kinds of food, they had firewood, they had a shelter, and they were set.

The survival course he had taken two weeks before helped them survive; however, most kids do not have those skills and could benefit from learning them.

Most participants talked about sharing food with others in the village as being an important part of the food gathering experience. One participant said it was important for youth to do things for themselves, rather than having things given to them. The participant said, "... hunting and fishing, that's why so many kids do that, even berry picking. They go pick berries for their grandparents." Another participant said that many youth gathered their Native food and, "They distribute them to the elders. I know they go to the senior center and I know that makes them feel good." One participant suggested having fishing derbies, so youth could develop fishing skills and they would share the fish with their families."

Culture, language, and spirituality. The majority of the participants indicated that culture, language, and spirituality were important for youth to know about to be healthy. Some participants identified only one of these, but most described more than one or all three. For example, one participant said, "You need to know about your culture, and where you came from. You need to learn about your language... . that alone will make [a youth] a healthy person." This participant went on to describe the importance of spirituality and also defined it:

[Spirituality] is along the lines of just having a positive attitude and just doing things that benefit you and your well-being. To me, that is spiritual, so to speak... . that's what gets me through the day. It's not really praising somebody, it's kind of just respecting myself and finding things in life that make me happy—thinking positively and striving for more.

Other participants talked more specifically about activities that were components of culture. For example, participants identified Native dancing and Native music as being important for youth to experience. They also indicated beading and carving as being important cultural activities.

One participant described a carving activity that had been very successful in the past, "There was a halibut hook carving class... . and it was amazing how many kids were interested in it." One person summed it up by saying, "Teach them how to go about their way of living."

Another person described the importance of learning about cultural art, such as basketry, and also being able to sell that product:

One, is they're learning a cultural art form that made them feel important and provided a cultural relationship. On the second hand, they were able to then sell some of those things in the store so that they could make a little bit of money. It's really important to provide something to earn something on your own, so it's not just given to you.

One participant talked about the feeling she had "when singing in our language" and the importance of youth having this opportunity:

Maybe we didn't know what everything meant, but it just, it really warms your heart ... when you hear the music, because even if you don't know what the words mean, you know it's your language, it's your culture, and something in it is just empowering, it's just heartwarming when you go to a celebration and hear the music and see everybody coming together. It's just an amazing feeling. It just touches your heart and soul. We've been stripped of it and now it's been given back to us.

What a Program Should Look Like

As participants provided information about what an effective youth program should look like in villages, they described the qualities that were needed in leaders and the kinds of activities that would be effective. Some participants also talked about the need to include mental health issues such as how to deal with abuse, safety, and suicide.

Qualities of leaders. Several of the participants talked about the necessary qualities of people working with a youth program. Some said it should be parents who are positive role models, or to at least get parents involved with what their kids are doing. In the absence of parental interest, other family or community members could serve in this role. One person added, "But somebody else can. Like my cousin... . She had my family and she had our English teacher and our principal." Another participant described how several people helped in the process of one's development in positive ways:

[My] family telling me, “Yes, you can do this.” And as far as I knew, I could do a whole lot. And that’s the way I grew up. At some point I figured out, well, I’m not so perfect, but they gave me the confidence that I could excel at anything, and I’ve tried to—and thought I could do it—and generally I did alright. It was because of that ongoing commitment from my family, my mentor—I kept chugging along.

Another person said a leader should:

... embrace the kids that are struggling and tell them not to give up because there are ways and means that they can get through this and constantly remind them, “Hey, did you get that work done for me? You’ve got to get that application in. You want to go to the job corps, and are you almost done?”

Another participant also talked about the need for a leader to support youth:

Sometimes you stand right by them. You stand right by them and go through whatever they’re going through with them, together. Knowing that they have someone by their side to support them ... it gives them self-worth. And they feel better about themselves ... they have somebody to talk to.

Finally, a participant said, “[They need] people believing in them—positive people in their lives who come just in time.” This same person added that it could be anyone who gives kids the attention they need in their lives, or someone who tells kids, “‘Yes, you can.’ That’s what kids need.”

Other participants also described who the leaders should be. One person said, “You have a stable person. That’s the main thing, that you find someone that’s respected in the village... . Find the right person that everybody can get along with.” People talked about role modeling and good things happening so youth can see they have a choice of more than just negative things around them, “The confident youth grows to adulthood and you’ve broken the cycle.”

It was suggested that older youth need to be engaged in activities which give them a sense of purpose and vision—a sense of belonging. Older youth can develop a sense of purpose as well as leadership

skills by teaching younger kids. This sense of belonging and purpose is necessary to successfully navigate through adolescence and envisioning a positive future to which to aspire. Although they would like to have parents involved and serve as positive role models, they shared the challenge in finding safe local leaders. At the core, a youth program should offer a place for kids to be safe, a place to be themselves, and a place to have fun with others. In essence, they need to know that someone cares for them. It was also proposed that youth need to feel safe to speak up about things going on around them, learn how to be safe, and know what resources are available to them and how to access them.

Kinds of activities. Several participants indicated children needed to be involved in physical activities. One person indicated that even an hour of fun once a week can add to the health of a child. They said things like:

I’m always trying to get kids to just get outside and do something.

* * *

Staying active and having somebody to do it with is definitely key.

* * *

I know one thing that’s really popular in the village is sports. Basketball is where it’s at. Most of the villages have a place for them to participate in sports programs.

* * *

The big old list of things that they like doing, like riding, hiking, night hikes, and then they open the gym and some like racquetball tournaments.

Some individuals talked about the need to prepare youth for jobs:

They could explore the fields that are projected to be in their area, or maybe just in Alaska in general. In the future what’s coming down the road in 20 years... . and maybe giving them some career direction and getting them lined up with biology or something where you know there’s a need for Native biologists.

One participant said that activities for older teens needed to be “something that they have a vision for, and a sense of belonging.” It has to relate to “where they want to be and how it relates to their lives.”

Participants also added that activities needed to be interactive and hands on, such as gardening, doing things that get their hands dirty, and doing projects that are short-term so kids did not lose interest. Others concluded that the ideas about specific activities should come from the kids. One participant said, "I think that's the key—not telling them what we want for them, but getting them to realize what they want for themselves and to have the will and the fortitude to go after it."

Support positive mental health. A few of the participants referred to the challenges youth experience in the villages. They said things like, "I want them to have a safe place. I think mostly it's the safety. Be safe and be in a loving atmosphere. Get those positive reactions from people. I don't see them getting the love and affection they need." Another said a program might help kids "escape reality." Others became more specific in saying that youth needed to know about how to respond to abuse, "They need to be able to speak up and say, 'hey, you know what. I've got to get out of here. This is not healthy for me ... It's okay to say what's going on. It's OK.'" Another went further to suggest:

[They need to know] how to recognize abuse, cycles of abuse, and then how to try to be safe if you're in that position. How do you get yourself safe if you're feeling depressed, if somebody in the house is belligerent or threatening. It may not be physical, but mental abuse—to help them recognize it. ... Like every morning we talk for a half hour when we get started. "How is it going for you today?" If there's somebody who's having a hard time, let's work it out together to try to solve it... getting them to a safe place and feeling better about themselves.

Another participant added, "At times leaders need to ask, 'Is everything okay at home?'"

A few of the participants also talked about the need for suicide prevention information being provided to the youth. These participants also connected suicide prevention with helping youth understand their culture. In one village, suicide rates had dropped after they got youth connected to their cultural heritage. We also heard that it's important to involve youth at a young age. As one person shared:

I know in the villages there's a lot of negativity going on all the time. And it's just like any village, when somebody gets

ahead the other guys are pulling them back, so just to work with them when they're younger. I don't know if you can save them at 19, but the younger kids, if they start young enough that they can have a positive outlook, even no matter what situations they're in.

Discussion

Participants in this study talked openly about the challenges of youth in the villages and their hope for the future of youth. Social exclusion was evident in the responses of participants. They all spoke openly of alcoholism "and other bad things going on." They spoke of children "feeling neglected." The participants also integrated mental health issues into what youth needed. Literature about the well-being of adolescents indicates that a sense of connectedness to others is important as a protection against risky behaviors such as alcohol or drug use, and suicide (Bernat & Resnick, 2009). Wexler and Goodwin (2006) reinforce the importance of youth programs to create youth/adult connections as likely prevention measures to address the alarming rates of youth suicide in Alaska villages. This connectedness or sense of belonging is an essential element of 4-H, which reflects values of Native American youth development based on the medicine wheel (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990) as well as values of Alaska Native tribes (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2011). If these needs are met in positive ways, youth are more likely to grow up as adults who contribute and care about themselves, their families, and their communities. If not offered positive ways to meet these needs, youth will find other potentially harmful ways to meet them. The findings of this study, then, suggest the urgent need for youth programs, such as 4-H, where adults work in partnership with youth.

There are implications for what 4-H programming should look like based upon this study.

First, learning activities should be holistic, involving skill development as well as knowledge, and activities should promote healthy lifestyles. Knowledge about dealing with abuse should be included. Second, learning activities should be provided within the context of culture, language, and spirituality to promote ethnic pride. Third, adult leadership needs to be provided by people who are safe, supportive, and can deal with emotional issues of children and youth. As was suggested, even an hour of fun once a week can

add to the health of a child. Youth programming should engage youth in activities which help them feel good about who they are, to have hope for the future, and to see themselves as active participants in their future. Above all, youth need to know that someone cares about them and can help them navigate through life successfully. Of note is that these findings and implications support the goals of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan (2010) for developing healthy lifestyles among Alaska's youth as stated within the plan, "Mental health promotion is as simple as adding five things to your life: exercise, social connection, acts of giving, self-awareness, and learning (p. 5). The statewide plan also addresses a need for positive role models in the lives of youth, trusted adults providing a source of support and guidance, and a need for youth to be involved in healthy activities such as sports, clubs and cultural activities that promote connectedness (p. 6).

There are multiple challenges in providing programming addressing the above issues. Adults who work with youth should be from the village or nearby villages so that appropriate cultural values can be taught—values around spirituality, language, and culture. It is also important that parents or other adults are safe for youth to be with and can address content as well as emotional issues. If, in fact, four out of five families experience alcoholism as described by one of the participants in the study, finding adults to provide leadership for 4-H could be challenging.

Most of the people we talked to grew up in the village and left to go to school. Whether they returned to the village or not, they are now all working in some way to bring services to the communities. We heard them speak of gaining different perspectives which had an impact on their outlook for the future—they saw a different world from that in which they had grown up. This change in perspective which they experienced provides a bit of context to better understand how their vision of healthy youth may become a reality. We have felt some trepidation with the challenge of identifying adults in local communities to take on the role of youth leader/mentor. We may have to rely more heavily on bringing in caring adults from outside of the home village based on what we are hearing, and this may not be a bad thing. Youth in the villages may benefit from having fresh perspectives which are different from what they experience in a small, fairly isolated environment. Healthy relationships with someone outside the village may provide new perspectives for youth to

see the good things in their lives and their ability to see themselves in crafting a positive future.

We also heard young adults tell us that they have gone to culture camps for years and, yet, say they do not know their culture. After hearing their stories, we wonder if they really do know their culture but just don't know they know. There is fear that the ways of the Elders are disappearing and that young adults are not learning the ways of the Elders. We speculate that many may actually know more about their culture than they realize—it just may not be that obvious to them. Adults may need to be challenged to think about what they do know about their culture which can be passed on to youth.

The challenges participants shared are not solely problems of Alaska Native communities in the Southeast but are likely to be problems facing many or all Alaska Native communities. A major finding of this study is that we move beyond identifying and talking about problems to exploring ways to create community capacity through positive youth development. Healthy youth lead to healthy families, which lead to healthy communities. As participants talked and shared with us, they indicated it is time to stop talking and take action. At this crucial point in time, they are concerned that if they do not take action now to make things better for their youth, there may be no hope. They realized that change must start from within their communities. They are concerned about high rates of suicide, child abuse, and domestic violence. These voices shared the darkness of a current reality in hopes that by uncovering the darkness, they will help bring to light solutions for a better future for their children. The Alaska Native leaders who indicated our findings are culturally accurate also indicated that the findings needed to be shared, even though some are negative.

In conclusion, how 4-H programming should look in Southeast Alaska based upon this study may take a variety of forms but should be guided by the implications stated above. Resulting programming should be developed in collaboration with caring adults in the villages and may result in differing models in each village. Recognizing challenges and deficiencies while focusing on positive aspects will serve to bring communities together with a vision for the future. Research findings provide a base of knowledge informing development of culturally responsive youth programming in Southeast Alaska which may also be applicable with similar populations of Alaska Native and Native American youth both within and outside of Alaska.

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About the Authors

Debra Jones is the state 4-H program leader and Youth, Family, and Community Development chair at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension. Linda Skogrand is a family life extension specialist and professor in the Department of Family, Consumer and Human Development at Utah State University.