

## Boat Trip Connects Tribal Leaders & Key Representatives



In order to understand rural Alaska – you have to experience it. In July, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) provided the opportunity for key representatives and leaders from various organizations to experience village life first-hand through a boat tour of the Lower Yukon Subregion.

TCC's Annual Partners' Boat Trip aims to bridge the gap between those involved in Alaska's decision-making

process and the realities faced by the communities in rural Alaska—creating the opportunity for dialogue, learning, and mutual understanding for everyone involved. This year's boat trip included TCC leadership, alongside representatives from the Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as esteemed legislators and

commissioners from the State of Alaska.

The purpose of the trip was to foster open conversations with local tribal leaders, community members, and representatives. The participants engaged in meaningful interactions, immersing themselves in the culture and witnessing the daily challenges faced by Tribal members.

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## Special Full Board of Directors Meeting

- November 1-3, 2023
- Westmark Hotel in Fairbanks, AK
- Visit [www.tananachiefs.org](http://www.tananachiefs.org) for more details

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## Mission

Tanana Chiefs Conference provides a unified voice in advancing sovereign tribal governments through the promotion of physical and mental wellness, education, socioeconomic development, and culture of the Interior Alaska Native people.

## Vision

Healthy, Strong, Unified Tribes



## TCC Executive Board Members

Trimble Gilbert/Arctic Village  
1st Traditional Chief

Andy Jimmie/Minto  
2nd Traditional Chief

Brian Ridley/Eagle  
Chief/Chairman

Sharon Hildebrand/Nulato  
Vice President

Charlie Wright/Rampart  
Secretary/Treasurer

Herbie Demit/Tanacross  
Upper Tanana

Claude 'Joe' Petruska/Nikolai  
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Lower Yukon

Lori Baker/Minto  
Yukon Tanana

Charlie Green/Louden  
Yukon Koyukuk

Peter Demoski/Nulato  
Elder Advisor

Alex Hanna/Minto  
Youth Advisor

## Chief's Report

Dear Tribes and Tribal Members,

As we begin this month, let us first recognize that September is Suicide Prevention Month. The impact of suicide on our Alaska Native people is immeasurable, and it is a solemn reminder of the challenges we face as a community. I encourage everyone to continue to foster an environment of openness and support, where anyone who is struggling can find a helping hand. Together, we can work towards building stronger, healthier communities.

Hunting season is here and I would like to extend my prayers for a safe and successful hunt and return with enough food to fill your freezers for the winter months. Our ancestral traditions and connection to the land play a significant role in shaping our identity, and hunting is an integral part of that connection.

In the past couple of months, I had the privilege of attending subregional meetings in McGrath, Fairbanks, Grayling, and Huslia. I also visited the villages of Nikolai and Takotna to discuss their Tribe's priorities. Meeting with Tribal members in our villages is a humbling experience, and it reaffirms the importance of staying connected to our roots and the people we serve. Having grown up in Eagle, I always appreciate any opportunity I have to visit the villages in our region.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Alaska Tribal Unity Gathering will be happening in-person for the first time since 2019. The meeting will take place October 18<sup>th</sup> at the Egan Center in Anchorage. This gathering is a great opportunity for Tribal Leaders from throughout the State to come together and collaborate on common goals and initiatives. If you are interested in attending, e-mail [Sonja.kokrine@tananachiefs.org](mailto:Sonja.kokrine@tananachiefs.org) to RSVP.

Right now, TCC staff are busy preparing for our Special Convention and Full Board of Directors Meeting set to take place November 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> in Fairbanks. This summer, tribal delegates were sent a survey for their input on what issues they would like covered at our meeting. We will use the information to shape the agenda. More details regarding the meeting will be provided at a later date. I look forward to seeing our Tribal leaders and having meaningful discussions.

Lastly, I would like to remind everyone that September 30<sup>th</sup> is the Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This day serves as a solemn reminder of the historical injustices faced by Indigenous peoples across our nation. I encourage all of you to participate by wearing an orange shirt on this day, showing solidarity with those affected and demonstrating our collective commitment to healing and reconciliation.

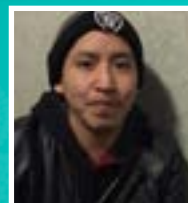
Mahsi' Choo,  
Brian Ridley  
Chief/Chairman



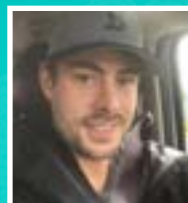
## MISSING PERSONS



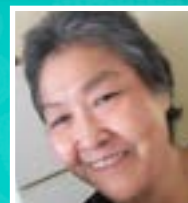
Lorraine Ginnis



Willis Derendoff



Doren Sanford



Debbie Nictune



Frank Minano

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tip to 84711 or visit [https://  
dps.alaska.gov/ast/tips](https://dps.alaska.gov/ast/tips)



Call the Alaska State Troopers at 907-451-5100,  
Fairbanks Police Department at 907-450-6500  
or TCC Public Safety at 907-452-8251 ext.3269.  
Visit [www.tananachiefs.org/missing](http://www.tananachiefs.org/missing) for more  
information.



## Boat Trip Connects Tribal Leaders & Key Representatives

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Julia Hnilcka, Alaska State Director with the US Department of Agriculture, joined the trip for the second time this year, "This experience is invaluable not only to myself, but everyone who has the opportunity to participate in this life and work altering trip. In reciprocity, as guests, it is our duty to build and maintain the working relationships that TCC works so hard to grow."

Clinton Lasley, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services, stated, "This trip gave us a fresh look at the impressive work happening in each community and the possibilities for more support and partnership. We're going to build on the connections we made during this trip and find innovative ways to assist our Tribal partners even better. The Alaska Department of Family and Community Services extends a heartfelt thank you

to the people of the region for their warm hospitality and for embracing us into their communities."

Traveling along the river from Shageluk, Grayling, Anvik and Holy Cross not only showcased scenic beauty but also highlighted challenges posed by remoteness, limited resource access, and climate change impacts. Witnessing these hardships firsthand equips decision-makers with invaluable insights that will shape future policymaking.

Chief/Chairman Brian Ridley emphasized the significance of firsthand experiences in shaping high-level decisions. He expressed, "We are deeply grateful to our partners for joining us on this journey. It is crucial that those in important decision-making

positions experience rural Alaska to better understand its unique challenges. Only through shared experiences like this can we build stronger bridges of cooperation and empathy."

TCC plans to continue this annual tradition by bringing representatives to a different subregion each year. This ongoing education effort represents TCC's commitment to ensuring that policymakers are properly educated before high-level decisions are made and to continue communicating Tribal priorities to those that can truly make a difference. In the future, TCC hopes that the annual boat trips will strengthen the bond between decision-makers and the people they serve, paving the way for a brighter, more collaborative future.

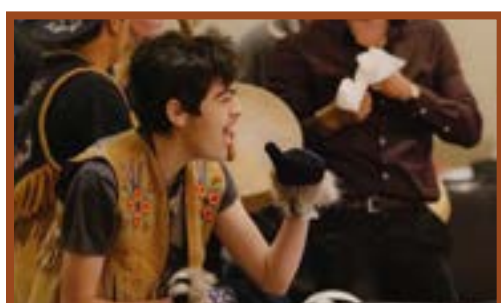
It is crucial that those in important decision-making positions experience rural Alaska to better understand its unique challenges.  
Chief/Chairman Brian Ridley





# Balancing Today for Safe Communities Tomorrow

## 39th Annual Tribal Court Conference



Tanana Chiefs Conference and the University of Alaska Fairbanks successfully co-hosted the 39th Annual Tribal Court Conference from August 1st to 4th, 2023. The conference planning committee also included tribal partners from Alaska Native Justice Center and Alaska Native Women Resource Center. The conference, centered on the theme ‘Balance Today for Safe Communities Tomorrow: How can our tribal justice systems help?’ brought together around 300 participants, including tribal leaders, tribal administrators, tribal court judges, law enforcement officers, lawmakers, and more. Over 70 tribal nations across the State of Alaska were represented and in attendance.

The event aimed to address critical issues and challenges faced by indigenous communities in Alaska and beyond. By focusing on the concept of balance, the conference sought to explore ways in which tribal justice systems could contribute to creating safer and healthier communities for future generations.

“Tribal courts are an essential part of

our rural justice systems and is a testament to tribal self-determination,” says Chief/Chairman Brian Ridley, “Tribal courts empower Tribes to address matters independently by delivering justice that is rooted in indigenous values, and fostering healing and wellness.”

The conference itself was organized into four categories of wellness, symbolizing the indigenous medicine wheel: emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual. Each aspect was covered through a series of presentations and discussions that offered a comprehensive exploration of tribal justice and community well-being.

Across the three and half days, tribal justice presenters and panelist engaged in dialogue to address and improve rural responses to child protection, domestic violence, establishing tribal police departments, and asserting tribal sovereignty to protect vulnerable tribal members. Attendees also were given the opportunity to hear from state and federal partners, including U.S. Congress and the Alaska Supreme Court, on state and federal initiatives



to improve government to government relations and access to justice for Alaska Native and rural communities.

One afternoon was used to offer the Alaska Blanket Exercise, a training curriculum developed by Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortia and authored by TCC beneficiary Teisha Simmons, the exercise is a history lesson – developed in collaboration with Alaska Native Elders, knowledge keepers and educators – that fosters truth, understanding, respect, and reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Following the exercise attendee broke up into talking circles to debrief and discuss their experience participating in the exercise.

A major focus in the conference was related to the newest federal legislation to impact Tribal justice systems, the reauthorization of Violence Against Women 2022’s tribal title ‘Alaska Public Safety Empowerment Act’, which affirms all federally recognized tribes in Alaska civil jurisdiction over all persons in their service area and criminal jurisdiction over all ‘Indian persons’ within a Tribe’s ‘Alaska

Village Statistical Areas’ as defined by ANCSA; as well as the new ability for Alaska tribes to apply for a pilot project to have ‘special criminal jurisdiction’ over non-native people within a Tribe’s ‘Alaska Village Statistical Area’.

Throughout the event, participants had the opportunity to connect, learn, and contribute to the collective efforts of enhancing tribal justice systems and fostering safe and resilient communities. By combining traditional cultural practices with contemporary knowledge, the event emphasized the importance of preserving indigenous values while adapting to modern realities.

TCC’s Tribal Government and Justice Division is extremely pleased with the high turnout of the conference from all over the State, and the feedback provided during the last days’ roundtable discussion and survey. TCC and UAF are already preparing for the 40th Annual conference which will be held in Fairbanks at the Westmark Hotel, May 3-6, 2024. A save the date will be sent later this fall.

**Tribal courts empower Tribes to address matters independently by delivering justice that is rooted in indigenous values, and fostering healing and wellness.**  
Chief/Chairman Brian Ridley





# Don Burnstick Combines Humor and Healing at Comedy Night

In a heartwarming and laughter-filled event, comedian Don Burnstick, a Cree from the Alexander First Nation in Canada, graced the stage for a free comedy night hosted by TCC. With over 30 years of sobriety under his belt, Don's standup not only entertained but also carried important messages about drug and alcohol prevention. The event aimed to promote a sense of community and provided an opportunity for people to come together and enjoy the best medicine - laughter.

Don Burnstick, known for his unique blend of indigenous humor and insightful storytelling, took the stage amidst a roaring applause. As a member of the Cree Nation, Don draws inspiration from his cultural background, infusing his



comedic performances with anecdotes and perspectives that resonate with both indigenous and non-indigenous audiences alike.

The event served as a reminder of the power of laughter to unite, heal, and inspire change. Don's story of overcoming adversity and achieving sobriety serves as a beacon of hope for anyone facing their own challenges.

The event was made possible by Gwichyaa Zhee Tribal Government who had invited Don to perform in their community that same week – which provided TCC to add one more show to his setlist in Fairbanks. Mahsi' Choo Gwichyaa Zhee for helping us bring some laughter to the community.



# Find Out How You Can Get Involved!

Tanana Chiefs Conference recently launched a new webpage called 'Get Involved'! Learn about key issues like the Yukon River Salmon Decline, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons, and Opposing the Ambler Road Project. **Find out how you can make a difference, support these important causes, and make an impact.**

Be part of the solution and take action now at [www.tananachiefs.org/get-involved](http://www.tananachiefs.org/get-involved)



# Wearing Orange is a Call to Action A Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) has long stood in solidarity with United States and Canadian boarding school survivors in acknowledging September 30<sup>th</sup> as a Day for Truth and Reconciliation. In 2023, we remain firmly supportive of honoring the lost children who suffered and disappeared in boarding schools in both countries.

Each year we invite you to wear orange on September 30<sup>th</sup> to honor the truth about mandatory Indian boarding schools, and to remember the generations who are forever impacted by their operation. "Wearing orange on September 30<sup>th</sup> isn't simply a sign of solidarity," says Brian Ridley, TCC's Chief/Chairman, "It represents a call to action. Wearing orange tells officials, communities, and the public at large that we will not keep these atrocities in the past."

have yet to experience any accountability for the atrocities committed within their walls."

Indian boarding schools operated in 37 states across the US for nearly 100 years, and worked in partnership with churches, religious orders and missionary groups. Together these entities supported more than 400 boarding schools, where attendance for Indigenous children was made mandatory by the United States government. Government estimates put attendance of Indigenous children in the tens of thousands, spanning several generations, and thousands of children are believed to have died. Other reports include sexual assault, physical abuse, and emotional trauma that has trickled down into the familial patterns of families affected by

mandatory Indian boarding schools.

In 2023, a reckoning is beginning. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna tribe whose grandparents were stolen from their homes and forced to attend boarding schools, travels the nation to expose the devastating legacy of the schools on families and tribes. Simultaneously, a nonprofit group called the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition is collecting thousands of documents on Indian boarding schools with the goal of creating an interactive digital archive, which is expected to launch later this year.

In addition to wearing orange on September 30<sup>th</sup>, TCC invites people to read, listen to, and watch the stories of our Elders, as their depictions are a historical unfolding and a call to action for officials to take action on this appalling history.



Wearing orange tells officials, communities, and the public at large that we will not keep these atrocities in the past.

Chief/Chairman Brian Ridley

# Firearm Safety Reminders

While you are at the range or in the field this moose season, be sure to make safety your main priority by following the five rules of gun safety:

- 1 Always treat a gun as if it is loaded.
- 2 Keep your finger off the trigger and out of the trigger guard until ready to shoot.
- 3 Keep the gun pointed in a safe direction at all times.
- 4 Be sure of your target; what is beyond and around it?
- 5 Always wear appropriate eye and ear protection while shooting your firearm.

Please remember to store unloaded firearms in a lockable safe and store ammunition in a separate secured location when not in use.

# Healthcare From Your Home!

For your next appointment at the Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center, request a video telehealth appointment and meet with your provider from the comfort of your own couch!

**Call us today to schedule at 907-451-6682, option 1.**



# Upper Kuskokwim Subregional Meeting Hosted in McGrath

The Upper Kuskokwim Subregional Meeting took place in McGrath, on July 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. The meeting was led by Chief Joe Petruska of Nikolai, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) Executive Board representative, and aimed to address crucial matters concerning tribal justice, emerging leaders, tribal resources, and self-determination.

We would like to thank the community of McGrath for their warmth and hospitality. Mahsi' Choo!



# Traveling to Alaska Native Medical Center and Need Assistance?

The ANMC-TCC Patient Advocates work closely with the medical teams at the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC) to ensure TCC patients receive clear communication about their care, excellent patient experiences, safe discharge plans, and access to support if concerns arise while at ANMC.

Please reach out to our ANMC-TCC Patient Advocates if needed.

**April Johnson**

ANMC-TCC Patient Advocate  
907-687-9193

**Lucy Frank**

Lead ANMC-TCC Patient Advocate  
907-378-8002





## Improving the Wellbeing of Rural Children & Families 2023 System of Care Summit

Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) hosted the System of Care (SOC) Summit in Fairbanks on July 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>. The SOC Summit brought together community members from Ruby and Huslia representing education, Tribal government, behavioral health, Tribal courts, family services, spiritual leaders, and elders. TCC division leaders were also invited to attend. Teams worked together throughout the summit to create plans to reduce barriers and improve access to culturally-positive services and supports in their communities.

During the first day, participants learned about many of the services TCC offers and were able to ask questions and give feedback to division leaders. They then broke into site-based groups to discuss the assets and needs in each

of their communities. The groups used this information to write goals focused on enhancing the wellbeing of families and children in their community and to develop some steps to reach these goals.

At the end of the convening, each group shared their plans. Participants were then invited to ask questions and share feedback with one another. These teams will come back together in January 2024 to share the progress they've made so far and to develop next steps.

SOC aims to improve the access and effectiveness of services through a collaborative approach that involves professionals, Tribes, families, and individuals. The SOC project is funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

(SAMHSA)—Center for Mental Health Services. This funding has allowed TCC to set up Ruby and Huslia as pilot sites for the project. TCC hopes to use what is learned through this pilot to eventually scale up the SOC project to other communities as funding becomes available.

TCC would like to thank everyone who attended this event for their commitment to the overall wellness of our children, families and communities. While the process of change can be challenging, it also holds the potential for improvement and better days ahead. Baasee' for your efforts!

For more information about the SOC and the outcomes of this project, reach out to Theresa Marks at [theresa.marks@tananachiefs.org](mailto:theresa.marks@tananachiefs.org) or 907-452-8251, ext. 2626.



## Foster Youth Gathering

By Niisha Walsh, Tribal Social Services Manager

On July 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, young people from all regions of Alaska who are in Tribal or State custody came together for the first Youth Gathering hosted by Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) Tribal Social Services. Youth ages 10 and older had the opportunity to learn new skills and make new connections during the day-and-a-half event. Guest speaker, Johon Echo Hawk Atkinson kicked off the event with an engaging activity and powerful message about embracing your culture and what it feels like to support others and to be supported. The activity left everyone with smiles and in awe of what they accomplished together as a team. When asked what they enjoyed, one youth wrote, "Learning about other cultures, meeting new people, and having a great time," while another wrote, "I got to learn about our culture."

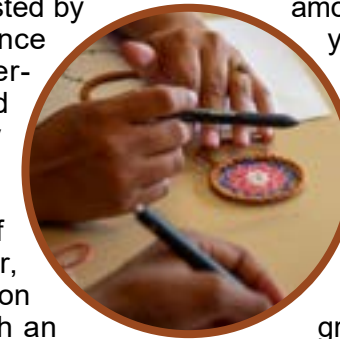
In between sessions of making drums, birch bark canoes, sun catchers, caribou tufted earrings, and necklaces with the Devil's Club plant from Metlakatla, the youth enjoyed a performance from the local Paava dance group

and even learned a dance and song. A song about the fox and the raven trying to trick each other was a favorite amongst the group. Some of the youth were familiar with the songs and approached the dance group afterwards with excitement. TCC's Healthy Transitions program also facilitated a 45-minute session that included a beading activity as the group had an open discussion about healthy and unhealthy coping skills and the importance of healthy relationships. Breathing techniques, like the 4-7-8 method, were practiced during this time. On the second day, participants continued their creativity while they painted rocks and learned how to introduce themselves in Yupik, Benhti, Gwich'in, and Inupiaq. One youth wrote, "I learned how to say my name is..., where I'm from, and ask, 'What is your name?' 'Where are you from?'"

"My team was more than excited to provide this opportunity for youth in care.

Currently, there are 131 youth in Tribal custody and over 50% of the 2,700 in State custody are Alaska Native. Most of the children are hundreds of miles away from home. The goal was to engage them in their Alaska Native culture while creating new experiences and connections. Many of them were bummed that it was not a week-long event, and in the future we'd like to include youth from our rural villages. It was a lot of work, but the smiles, laughter, connections, and hearing youth say things like, 'I recognize that song from back home,' or 'It was a lot of fun. I felt like my spirit opened up being here,' made it all worth it," said Niisha Walsh, Tribal Social Services Manager for TCC.

To close out the event, foster families were invited to join the staff and youth at the Tribal hall for food, singing, and dancing. Doyon catered the Indian Tacos, and Sunny Luke drummed as everyone learned songs from all over the interior. For some foster parents, it was their first time ever participating in singing and dancing, and by the end of the event, they were asking when the next one would be.





### Looking for a small school with a family-like atmosphere? Did you know you have a choice?

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### SUBMIT YOURS FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A \$100 GIFT CARD!

### Seeking Traditional Recipes

Tribal Protective Services is seeking submissions of traditional recipes from Interior Alaska for a cookbook that will be created and distributed at our upcoming 2nd Annual Traditional Healing Gathering in Fairbanks!

**SCAN ME TO ENTER!**  
Submissions are due no later than September 30th. Winners will be drawn on October 2nd!





# Patient Travel & Housing Improvement Process

TCC Health Services has been listening to patient concerns regarding Patient Travel and Housing and have been taking active steps to make improvements to our processes. Our goal is to ensure that patients traveling for healthcare services don't have to stress about travel and can focus on their health.

TCC Health Services continues to make improvements to our Patient Travel and Housing processes. We have held two virtual patient listening sessions and continue to receive feedback from patients on how our processes can be improved.

### Improvements we have implemented:

- Created a Patient Housing and Travel program which includes housing, travel and the patient shuttle to ensure clear coordination and communication internally.
- Provided meals to all patients who are traveling regardless of what hotel they are at.
- Coordinated with the Fairbanks Memorial Hospital Emergency Department to improve collaboration and communication while assisting patients who are medevacked and need after-hours housing.
- Secured room blocks with several Fairbanks hotels for patients.

### What we are working on:

- Implementing customer service training for patient travel staff.
- Hiring a Patient Housing and Travel Manager to oversee the new program.
- Identifying gaps in our internal processes and developing solutions to fix them.
- Identifying and securing a permanent solution for patient housing in the Fairbanks area.

### The TCC Patient Shuttle is available for pick-up services Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the following locations:

- Sophie Station
- Golden North
- Fairbanks Memorial Hospital Main Lobby Entrance
- Best Western & Chena River Lodge
- Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center Building 'A' Entrance
- La Quinta
- Chief Peter John Tribal Building
- Westmark Hotel
- Clarion Hotel
- 7 Gables
- Extended Stay
- Pike's

**Call 907-347-0765** for pick-up services or questions. *Medicaid patients do receive taxi vouchers, we ask that you please use those before calling the shuttle for services.*

**NEED HELP? WE ARE HERE!**

**TCC Patient Travel**  
Monday-Friday • 8am-6pm  
Saturday • 8am-5pm

**TCC Patient Travel After-Hours**  
For any patient travel needs afterhours, please contact us at  
907-451-6682 x 3711 option 5  
OR  
1-800-478-6822 x 3711 option 5



**Have you used TCC's Patient Travel and Housing Services?**

**We Want Your Feedback!**  
We want to hear from patients, family members and escorts about their experiences with TCC's Patient Travel & Lodging process. We want to hear your concerns, stories, comments and solutions!

**Scan to submit your comments!** 

## Nikolai & Takotna Village Visits

Last month, Tanana Chiefs Conference leadership traveled to the villages of Takotna and Nikolai in the Upper Kuskokwim Subregion. The trip provided the opportunity for TCC to engage in discussions with Tribal Leadership and community members to learn about their local priorities and identify how TCC can offer support.

We want to thank the villages of Nikolai and Takotna for inviting us into their community, for their hospitality and for the insightful discussions. We look forward to our next visit!



## Join Us at the October NPFMC Meeting!

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) is meeting in early October and will discuss chum salmon bycatch management. While there is currently no formal cap on Bering Sea chum salmon taken as bycatch by the pollock trawl fleet, there's been significant progress toward establishing bycatch limits, thanks in large part to advocacy of Tribal citizens and organizations across the state. TCC encourages all Tribal Citizens to join this next NPFMC meeting in Anchorage or via teleconference and urge the Council to move forward with establishing regulatory chum salmon bycatch limits.

**NPFMC Meeting**  
October 2-11, 2023  
Hilton Hotel in Anchorage

More information about this meeting, including Zoom teleconference information, can be found online at <https://meetings.npfmc.org/Meeting/Details/3003>.

## Housing Department Update

The TCC Housing Department has been busy! Across the region, the Housing Department has been hauling supplies and constructing spacious, beautiful homes for beneficiaries. Mitch Shewfelt Sr., Housing Department Manager, says he oversees construction projects in the communities of Koyukuk, Ruby, Northway, Circle, Tanana, and Holy Cross this season alone!

"We're familiar with all aspects of Housing and Urban Development, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and Bureau of Indian Affairs grants to help achieve the goal of building efficient homes throughout the region," he says.







## Community Health Aide *Spotlight* Heather Kangas - Ruby Health Aide

By Linden Staciokas

If only high school teachers who feel discouraged about how much they really impact students could meet people like Heather Kangas, the health aide in Ruby. Her path to becoming a first responder to her community began with her high school teacher encouraging her to take a college level anatomy and physiology class. Learning about the miracles of how the skeleton and organs of the human body function sparked her interest like no other subject had.

Born in Anchorage and raised in Stebbins and Ohio, Heather, her husband, and her children moved to his home village of Ruby in 2009. At that time, her sister-in-law was the only health aide in Ruby, and she needed help, so she encouraged Heather to apply. After the village council agreed to her candidacy, Heather began the lengthy process of becoming a fully-fledged Community Health Practitioner.

Full certification requires completing four intensive training sessions, each about a month long; students are paid during this training so that they can concentrate on their studies without the worry of how they can support themselves during this time. After each session, conducted in Fairbanks, a trainee must work with at least four patients, all under the guidance of the training supervisor. Only then is the trainee eligible to go to the next session, again followed by working with at least four patients with the training supervisor. The training can seem intimidating, but the training supervisors and other health aides work with students every step of the way, helping them through

difficult parts and encouraging them until they have successfully graduated.

Heather first started as a health aide in 2009, initially staying two years and then returning to the position in January of 2023. Being gone for a time, when she returned, she was amazed at how computers have changed the job for the better. The medical record keeping is now electronic, with supervising doctors in Fairbanks able to immediately pick up the notes on a specific patient. This means health aides are able to provide the most appropriate care for the patient, and it allows for speedier coordination of travel and appointments with specialists at Chief Andrew Isaac in Fairbanks.

The amount of documentation expected of health aides, as well as the administrative tasks involved in running the Ruby clinic, were somewhat of a surprise to Heather. Patient care is the major focus of the training and the usual reason people become medical providers, so other tasks involved in providing health care can be less enjoyable. Nevertheless, she finds great satisfaction in her career. As she says, "I love being able to help the people in my community. Providing care, advocating for them, being the eyes and ears of medical people in Fairbanks, is rewarding and fascinating... being on call around the clock on top of my regular day-to-day duties can be stressful but I would not trade any of it."

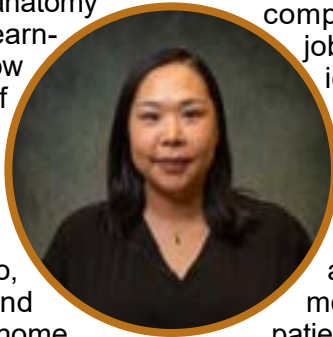
She handles the stress by spending time with her husband and four children doing family-oriented activities. "I used to do more individual activities, like

beading, sewing, and knitting, but did not have the patience to become very skilled at any of those. Now that we have faster speed internet, I do enjoy online game playing, especially with my sister in Georgia. But really, I get my greatest pleasure and relaxation doing things with my family."

Asked what she would tell people thinking about becoming health aides, Heather says, "The information and skills they teach you in the program are so interesting! As a first responder you get to provide life saving care, far beyond what you get to do in other health care roles like that of Certified Nursing Assistants. And the entire staff of the program is so supportive." She would like to get the word out that by becoming a health aide you can make a good living helping others. And if you have an interest in going further in the medical field, being a health aide can be a stepping stone into becoming a Physician's Assistant.

No one has a successful career without the help of many others. Heather especially appreciates, "my husband Jonathan, who is my biggest supporter. And my in-laws have always been so good at helping me, especially when I have middle of the night callouts and my husband is not here to stay with the children. Also, my Coordinator Instructor Keith Lund is a huge support, always making sure I am set up with the information and help I need in general as well as with specific cases."

She hopes that telling her story will do for someone else what her high school teacher did for her-spark the flame that leads to a career that is never boring and saves lives.



## Can the Yukon River Support A Salmon Hatchery?

Because of the current salmon crisis, the discussion of hatcheries for the Yukon River keeps coming up. It is important to look at the environmental impact statements and cost-benefit analyses of a hatchery when making this decision. Gale K. Vick from the Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee shares that there are many questions regarding hatchery impacts on wild stock. It is important to ask, "What matters most to the resource itself?" If we want to save wild salmon stocks, we need to focus on those practices which help, not hinder, salmon's natural imperatives.



*What are the different kinds of salmon hatcheries in Alaska and the Yukon Territory now?*

*Where are they?*

### MITIGATION HATCHERIES

These hatcheries help replace salmon lost to human-made obstacles, like dams. They are very expensive and they have little impact on the total numbers of salmon.

The Whitehorse Rapids Hatchery in the Yukon Territory

### SPORTS FISH HATCHERIES

These hatcheries can only supply fish for non-anadromous (salmon that inhabit both salt and fresh water) sport fishing. These fish cannot be released into Alaska's rivers.

Ruth Burnett Hatchery in Fairbanks (and others)

### PRIVATE-NON-PROFIT (PNP) HATCHERIES

These hatcheries are meant for commercial fisheries, and they are the only ones in the state that produce enough salmon to harvest. They cost millions of dollars to build and maintain, and these costs can only be covered through sources like cost recovery, enhancement taxes, and loans and grants. It takes years to build up stocks that allow for harvest.

Gulf of Alaska at Tidewater

### EDUCATIONAL PERMITS FOR STREAMSIDE ENHANCEMENT

These permits are not hatcheries. They include things like classroom incubation where salmon are raised in a contained system or "streamside enhancement" educational projects that allow scientists to study salmon propagation. These are only available on a small scale.

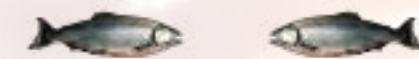
Varies by Need

*How does hatchery salmon impact wild salmon?*

As the salmon mix, salmon will become less fit for the wild

Hatchery-raised salmon will compete for the same food as wild salmon

Hatcheries require about 500,000 wild eggs from local salmon to start



It is important to be informed about the potential consequences of building salmon hatcheries on the Yukon River as we continue to explore the options. While they have been proposed as a potential solution to the Salmon Crisis, they could also create a never-ending dependency on expensive hatchery systems. We need to be sure that hatcheries will not ultimately make things worse for the wild salmon we are so desperately trying to protect.

To read the full article summarized here from contributor, Gale K. Vick, visit our website.





# September is SPAM Suicide Prevention & Awareness Month

By Kameron Reitan, Prevention Coordinator

## The Facts

Did you know that someone dies by suicide every 13 minutes? Suicide can happen to anyone, is often unpredictable, and suicidal thoughts can escalate quickly and are often brief. However, there are resources and practices we can all implement in our lives to reduce the risk of suicide.

## The Signs

Warning signs include depression, hopelessness, isolation, and expressing contemplation of suicide or no longer wanting to live. Other warning signs include prior attempts, giving away prized possessions, and using drugs/alcohol.

## Ask the Question!

Talking about suicide is the best way to determine if someone has suicidal thoughts. If you suspect someone is thinking about suicide, you should ask them about past or current suicidal thoughts. It is important to make sure you approach them calmly and listen nonjudgmentally. This can save a life!

## Safe-Proof the House

Store firearms away from the house (at a friend's or with law enforcement), place firearms in a gun safe, or disassemble firearms. Keep ammunition separate. Lock up abuse-prone medication and drugs such as prescription painkillers, anxiety pills, amphetamines, sedatives, and tranquilizers.

## Grounding Exercise

In moments of crisis, it is important to slow down and regulate your mind and body. These are some simple strategies you can try if you are in crisis or experiencing emotional distress:

- Dunk your head in a bucket or bowl of ice water for 30-seconds; repeat two or more times.
- Ground yourself by engaging your five senses: observe 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

## Substance Use Risk

It is crucial to stop all substance consumption in crisis as alcohol and drugs have immediate effects on your mind and body. Alcohol and drug consumption can escalate a situation, impair judgment, and lead to poor decision-making. In fact, alcohol users are 6X more likely to die from suicide and 40-60% of suicides have a blood alcohol level above the legal limit.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, **Call** or **Text 988**, or **Chat** at **988lifeline.org**

*We are asking you to stay. For your friends. For your loved ones. But above all else, for yourself.*

*-To Write Love on Her Arms (TWLOHA)*

**We're Here for You!**

Division of Wellness & Prevention  
prevention@tananachiefs.org  
(907) 452-8241, ext. 2026



## Alaska Officially Recognizes Community Health Aide Appreciation Day!

During Alaska's last legislative session, advocates for Health Aides across the state were able to pass House Bill 78, officially designating September 10<sup>th</sup> as "Alaska Community Health Aide Appreciation Day." This landmark legislation stands as a testament to the essential role Community Health Aides (CHAs) play in safeguarding the health and well-being of remote and underserved communities across the state.

CHAs are a vital lifeline in bridging the gap between medical care and those who would otherwise have limited or no access to it. CHAs diagnose, treat and monitors various health conditions and offer emergency services while working with limited resources and facing the unique challenges of rural Alaska. They are not just medical professionals; they are trusted members of the community.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, let us take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to these unsung heroes who work tirelessly to keep our remote communities healthy.

***Mahsi' Choo to all of our amazing Community Health Aides!***



## October 8<sup>th</sup> is Indigenous Peoples Day

In honor of the true history of America's First Nations, TCC will be observing Indigneous Peoples' Day on Monday, October 8<sup>th</sup>. Indigenous Peoples' Day is a recognition of the truth of colonization, a celebration of our rich Indigenous histories, and an opportunity for our Tribes to share their own narrative. We invite you to join us in honoring the sovereignty & resilience of Indigenous Peoples throughout the world.

## TCC's Ambulatory Surgery Center Achieves AAAHC Accreditation

Tanana Chiefs Conference is proud to announce that the Accreditation Association of Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC) has officially granted our Ambulatory Surgery Center (ASC) AAAHC Deemed Status Accreditation!

"Our success in meeting the rigorous criteria of AAAHC is a direct result of the dedication and unwavering efforts of our clinical staff," says Vanessa Ketzler, Health Services Quality Management Director, "From our skilled medical professionals and nursing staff to our administrative and support teams, each of them has played an integral role in achieving this significant milestone."

Mahsi' Choo to all of our staff for your efforts to uphold our commitment to providing exceptional healthcare!





# The Council Newsletter

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[www.tananachiefs.org](http://www.tananachiefs.org)



Tanana  
Chiefs  
Conference



## Find Your Purpose

Join our Team at Tanana Chiefs Conference  
[www.tananachiefs.org/careers](http://www.tananachiefs.org/careers)

### New Vacancies

<b>Fairbanks</b>	Medical Coder
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Certified Nursing Assistant
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Biomedical Equipment Technician II
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Tribal Compact Coordinator
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Dental Assistant Intern
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Biomedical Equipment Technician III
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Administrative Assistant II-Medical Services
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Program Assistant
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Alternate Resource Coordinator
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Tribal Resource Stewardship Division Director
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Family Services Intake Specialist
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Manager-Community Health Aide Training Center
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Patient Travel Claim Auditor
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Broadband Program Manager
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Certified Nurse Assistant
<b>Fairbanks</b>	RN Diabetes Care and Education Specialist- Advanced
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Residential Care Coordinator I
<b>Fairbanks</b>	Family Support Coordinator-TANF
<b>Galena</b>	Dental Assistant Intern



JOBS LISTED WERE OPEN AS OF AUGUST 21, 2023

## Do You Have Medicaid?

Don't Miss This Letter!



## Medicaid Renewal Letters



Medicaid renewal has started the annual renewal process, and the Division of Public Assistance will be reaching out to households to verify information to renew medicaid coverage.

### Questions?

Contact Alternate Resources at  
907-451-6682 ext. 3100

## SUBMIT YOUR PHOTOS FOR THE 2024 TCC CALENDAR!



Scan Me to  
Submit Your  
Photos!

**Deadline to Submit is October 13, 2023**  
Fill out the form, upload pictures, give a caption  
and you're done!