



## Family Wellness Warriors Initiative Develops Training Programs about Domestic Violence, Abuse and Neglect for Alaska Natives

Addressing domestic violence, abuse, and neglect among Native Alaskan families through training and education

### SUMMARY

The Southcentral Foundation's [Family Wellness Warriors Initiative](#) (Wellness Initiative) employed four different training programs to raise awareness and combat domestic violence, abuse and neglect among Alaska Natives.

The training programs are designed to increase a network of individuals proficient in addressing these problems and to help Native people develop safe environments for children, families and communities.

### Key Results

The Family Wellness Warriors Initiative employed four training programs:

- *Training the Trainers*, which works to develop a core base of group leaders who are capable of conducting other types of training events. During 2006, trainers at two Training the Trainers series in Anchorage prepared 19 individuals, representing nine villages and communities, to serve as voluntary leaders at Family Wellness Warriors Initiative events.
- *Beauty for Ashes*, a one-week, comprehensive training conference offering participants training and tools they can use to work with others in their communities to reverse the negative health and social patterns that result from abuse and violence. During 2005, a total of 153 individuals participated in a *Beauty for Ashes* conference.
- *Survivors of Abuse Leader Training Seminar (SALTS)*, an intensive six-day program that teaches skills for working with small groups. Some 16 individuals participated in the program, which is led by Open Hearts Ministry of Muskegon, Mich.
- *Grace for the Wounded*, a one-day workshop conducted within a village or community. A total of 66 participants from faith-based and social service organizations attended workshops in the communities of Big Lake, Minto, Unalakleet

and Kenai. Ten men and 69 women attended workshops at correctional facilities in Eagle River, Alaska.

## Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported this *unsolicited* project with a \$323,000 grant to the Southcentral Foundation from December 2004 through November 2006.

## THE PROBLEM

Domestic violence, rape and child abuse remain significant issues in Alaska, according to the [Alaska Family Violence Prevention Project](#), which notes that:

- Alaska ranks among the top five states in the nation for per capita rates of domestic violence and rape.
- The rate of Alaskan women being killed by a partner is 1.5 times the national average.
- Child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in households in which adult domestic violence is also present. The health, behavioral and social consequences to childhood victims of violence include depression, suicidal tendencies, eating disorders and developmental delays.

## CONTEXT

RWJF's Vulnerable Populations Team supports promising new ideas to help overcome long-standing health challenges for the people in society who bear an excess burden of disease. One of these challenges is domestic violence, also called intimate partner violence.

## THE PROJECT

Southcentral Foundation's Family Wellness Warriors Initiative (Wellness Initiative) is a training and education program that addresses the issues of domestic violence, abuse and neglect through intensive, culturally sensitive training. The program philosophy is to integrate the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical needs of the whole person.

For this project, staff used four types of training events:

- *Training the Trainers* develops a core base of group leaders who are capable of conducting other types of training events. It usually consists of nine sessions, three days each, over a three-month period.

- *Beauty for Ashes* is a one-week, comprehensive training conference on issues of abuse. Participants receive training and tools they can use in their communities to work with others to reverse the negative health and social patterns that result from abuse and violence.
- *Survivors of Abuse Leader Training Seminar (SALTS)* is an intensive six-day program that teaches skills for working with small groups. Held at Open Hearts Ministry of Muskegon, Mich., it is the only out-of-state training program offered by the Wellness Initiative.
- *Grace for the Wounded* is a one-day workshop conducted within a village or community for participants from faith-based and social service organizations, tribal staff and community members. Leaders introduce the programs of the Wellness Initiative to open doors into communities and to identify potential leaders.

## RESULTS

Project staff reported the following results to RWJF:

- **During 2005, a total of 153 individuals participated in a *Beauty for Ashes* conference.** The participants included 107 Alaska Natives and represented more than 24 villages and communities across Alaska.
- **During 2006, trainers at two *Training the Trainers* series in Anchorage prepared 19 individuals, representing nine villages and communities, to serve as voluntary leaders at Family Wellness Warriors Initiative events.** Trainers used a new curriculum that emphasized the tools and experience needed to start and lead small groups in participants' home communities. Ongoing small group support is considered essential to changing attitudes and awareness concerning abuse.
- **During 2006, team leaders held *Grace for the Wounded* workshops in the communities of Big Lake, Minto, Unalakleet and Kenai for a total of 66 participants from faith-based and social service organizations.** The morning of the scheduled Minto workshop, an unexpected death occurred in the community. The team canceled the workshop and operated as a village crisis intervention team. Even though the formal agenda was set aside, its ultimate goal-the provision of a safe environment for issues of domestic abuse, child abuse and neglect to be discussed-was met, according to the project team. The formal training was rescheduled and held in 2007.
- **Leaders held two additional *Grace for the Wounded* workshops at the local correctional facilities in Eagle River, Alaska.** Ten men attended the workshop at the men's facility; 69 women attended the one at the women's facility. The team planned to conduct additional training at the women's facility, given the high level of interest.

- **Throughout the project, 16 individuals received scholarships, supported by RWJF grant funds, to attend a six-day program, the Michigan *Survivors of Abuse Leader Training Seminar (SALTS)*.** This training is designed to enhance small group training skills for those with some previous training in these skills. SALTS, which takes place at the Open Hearts Ministry of Muskegon, Mich., provides an opportunity for participants to learn perspectives from outside their familiar settings.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Follow-up is essential for sustaining any change achieved in a community.** This includes following up with each participant, connecting with community leaders, assessing needs and offering small group training. (Project Director/Gottlieb)
2. **Small group training in communities is a very important part of follow-up.** "Requests have been increasing for continued support within the community. Conducting small groups was always one of our goals, but it was not until this project that it became a real focus for us-so much that we changed our curriculum," Project Director Katherine Gottlieb reported.
3. **If the opportunity presents, modeling behavior can be a powerful way to achieve an objective.** Responding as a crisis intervention team in Minto, rather than holding the planned training, broke the silence in that community. The whole community is now willing to talk about child abuse, child neglect and domestic violence. (Project Director/Gottlieb)

## AFTERWARD

Family Wellness Warriors Initiative staff continued to hold training events of all types throughout 2007. The *Beauty for Ashes* event for Minto was rescheduled and held in Fairbanks. An additional 12 individuals attended SALTS training in 2007–08 with the support of surplus RWJF grant funds from this project.

Project leaders are developing training programs for people with addictions and working on a program for veterans. They are also targeting specific regions for continued contact.

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