

Alaska Youth Academy

2013



Article by:

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Teenagers living in rural Alaska villages grow up in a world very different from urban Alaskans. Suicides plague their friends and family at an alarming rate, people can go missing riding from one village to the next during the winters and alcohol abuse runs rampant.

“Sometimes I look around my village and it seems dead,” said Allison from Crooked Creek. “Kids sleep all day. They don’t want to do anything, like zombies. I don’t want it that way. I want to do something to help.”

Allison learned about the Alaska Youth Academy (AYA) earlier in the year when she started seeing information and hearing about it around the village and online. “One was in Barrow! How cool is that? I signed up and here I am—top of the world.” (Allison also found a summer camp online in Japan but her parents opted to support her bid for an in-state adventure.)

Many kids aren’t as excited to participate in something that has Troopers involved. Trying to reach kids in a proactive manner has been tricky for law enforcement.

Patrol Troopers perform village visits and attempt to meet with kids while they are in school. More often than not when troopers go to villages it is in response to a crime or it’s to pick up people who have warrants out for their arrests. All in all, Troopers get a pretty bad reputation just because the nature of the job. From a teenagers point of view, why should they talk to someone who only arrests their family and friends? The camps are helping to change that perception.

“I walked away, I wouldn’t talk to them. I thought they were people that wore big pants and just came around and told us to do stuff like wear your life jacket and don’t do drugs,” said Allison.

“I didn’t know that they had to go through so much to earn the title of a Trooper. And now that I know that my perspective has changed dramatically on them. I think they are someone who actually cares about the community and what kids do and want them to have a bright future.”

AYA gives teenagers a glimpse into public safety issues and provides a disciplined, structured schedule



Allison (center) learns to apply a splint during a CPR/First Aid class at the 2013 Alaska Youth Academy in Barrow, Alaska. The class taught the teens to recognize many injuries and medical issues that occur regularly in Alaska and how treat the injuries or to provide symptom information to first responders that they summon to help.

Six academies were held this summer. In addition to Barrow, Mt. Village, Bethel, Hooper Bay, Fairbanks hosted approximately a hundred teenagers from across rural Alaska to not only give them an up-close and in-depth look at public safety issues in Alaska but to provided them with guidance on how to make good life choices. State, federal and local law enforcement officials were at all the camps for a well-rounded public safety perspective.



Students and instructors from the 2013 Barrow Alaska Youth Academy visited the North Slope Borough Search and Rescue hanger. The North Slope Borough is the world's largest municipal government spanning 89,000 square miles and it conducts medevac, search and rescue, and emergency response missions any hour of the day or night year round.



Teenagers at the Alaska Youth Academy Camp in Mt. Village enjoyed learning about evidence collection and forensics. The crime scene segments of AYA was a favorite session for many of the kids.



Miranda, from Pilot Station, learns to make fire from flint and steel during the survival training session provided at all of the Alaska Youth Academies.

focusing on making positive choices for a better life and future.

The camps are put together and ran by the Department of Public Safety, the US Marshal's Service and the VPSO program and supported by the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, the Lower Yukon School District, the Ilisagvik College in Barrow, University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the Yuut Elitnaurviat "Peoples Learning Center" in Bethel.

"We go beyond just talking about career paths and positive choices," said Captain Steve Arlow, head of the VPSO program and an integral partner in establishing and running the AYA. "We teach them skills that they can put to use as soon as they get home. We go into suicide prevention, survival skills, CPR/First aid—these things really can make the difference in a life or death situation when there isn't anyone else around to help."

AYA empowers teenagers. "The other day we saw a video on the VPSOs. I want to consider becoming a VPSO now and a pilot," said Allison. "A VPSO can bring a community together and help them, to fix what's going on in my village. I'd like to be a VPSO and be supportive of my people that live there and help them out because they really do need help and if no one else will do it, it might as well be me as a VPSO."

Naomi Ahsoak went to an AYA two years ago. While she hasn't gone into a public safety related career, she says the camp truly changed her life. She was in an emotionally abusive relationship and had already started down a bad path.

"I was stealing and being around the wrong people. When this [AYA] came up and caught my eye. I decided to try it and then I learned discipline," Ahsoak said. "If that camp hadn't really come when I really needed it I think I would have started to get into more trouble—more than just running away. If you guys didn't catch me I probably would have been arrested already."

Allison wants to see other kids step up to the plate. She believes that the only way for problems to stop is for people living in the villages to be their own solution and to help each other. She thinks that by attending the Alaska Youth Academy, teenagers like her can breathe life back into their communities.

“I know a lot of people in my village don’t know CPR except maybe the floating health aide who is only there for a week,” said Allison. “So what if someone passes out and needs CPR? What are we going to do, just stand around and watch? We have to get engaged and support others and our safety. We can’t just sit

around and watch.”

By the end of the summer, the Alaska Youth Academies will have graduated roughly 100 teenagers from rural villages across the state.



The 2013 Alaska Youth Academy would like to thank the following for partnering with and supporting teenagers across Alaska:

- Alaska State Troopers**
- U.S. Marshals Service - District of Alaska**
- Village Public Safety Officer Program**
- Alaska State Crime Lab**
- Alaska Division of Fire and Life Safety**
- Fraternal Order of Alaska State Troopers**
- North Slope Borough**
- Yuut Elitnaurviat**
- Tanana Chiefs Council**
- Association of Village Council Presidents**
- Lower Yukon School District**
- Brian Krosschell**
- Yukon Kuskokwin Health Corporation**
- Alaska Court System**
- National Rifle Association**
- Alaska Airlines**
- Sea Lion Corporation**
- Iliasguik College**

Check out the Facebook Pages for some of the 2013 AYA Camps!

Mt. Village

Hooper Bay

Bethel