

# Alaska Youth Academy

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The Alaska Youth Academy 2012 Class in Barrow, Alaska.



The Alaska Youth Academy 2012 Class in Bethel, Alaska.



Who says survival can't be fun?

Up in the most Northern city in the United States, 11 teenagers from tiny communities spent the week rising at 6:00 am to do physical training in the bright rays of sun. Leading the workouts are VPSOs, Alaska State Troopers and U.S. Marshals. The teenagers are the second group to go through the Alaska Youth Academy in Barrow. The first Alaska Youth Academy occurred last year and a few weeks prior an Academy was held in Bethel, Alaska for the first time with 22 teenagers.

For many of the participating teenagers, these academies are the first time they've seen cops as more than just someone who arrests friends or family. And quite frankly, law enforcement officers can look rather daunting to teenagers when wearing their pressed uniforms, Kevlar and a gun belt— while it isn't as impressive as Batman's, is still intimidating.

One Anchorage based U.S. Marshal who helped with the Barrow Academy, Deputy Marshal Jimmy Johnson, is the perfect example of intimidation, said Marc Otte, Alaska's Chief Deputy U.S. Marshal.

"He's a big dude. Seriously. He was crowned the strongest man in Utah in a past competition," said Chief Deputy Otte in reference to Deputy Marshal Jimmy Johnson. "The first day the kids were very leery of him. But, three days into the academy I walked in the common area to find him and three kids sitting on the couch watching the Three Stooges together and just laughing."

"It is a successful program because these kids actually get to know cops as people," said Marc Otte. "When they can see Law enforcement as people, it gives them the ability to see themselves doing something in public safety as a career possibility."

To really make the academy an eye-opening experience, a forensic technician from the state crime lab came to teach them about crime scene investigations, a Defense Tactics instructor is whipping them into shape and showing them purposeful moves, and attorneys and a judge even volunteered their time to do a mock trial with the teens acting as jury.

The teens are getting a real CSI experience on top of education in survival skills and how to make positive life choices. They've learned to dust for finger prints, take castings of shoe prints in the mud and the ins and outs of processing a scene.

"It's more complicated than what they've seen on TV and they got to learn that there is actually a lot more steps involved than what those CSI shows depict," said Jessica Hogan, a forensic scientist at the State Crime Detection Laboratory. "It takes time."

The mock crime scenes for what a burglary would look like were set up. The teens had to take their new found skills to secure and process the scene.

The program is really a group effort among law enforcement agencies and the exposure given to the teens covers the full gambit of what law enforcement encompasses. While the Alaska Youth Academy is attempting to build interest in any number of the career paths in Public Safety, the real goal is to grow well-rounded and successful adults.

Besides the Alaska State Troopers and the crime lab personnel, the U.S. Marshal's, Fire Marshal's and Village Public Safety Officers took part in the Alaska Youth Academy. In Barrow, the North Slope Search and Rescue Group invited the teams to its hanger to tour the aircraft it utilizes during missions on the North Slope. Housing was made possible for the Academies through the cooperation and generosity of the Ilisagvik College in Barrow and the Yuut Elitnaurviat "Peoples Learning Center" in Bethel. Additional funding and support came from the Association of Village Council Presidents, Fraternal Order of Alaska State Troopers and Regional for profit Calista Corporation of the Yukon/Kuskokwim Delta.



**Alaska Youth Academy participants get ready for a frigid Arctic swim on the top of the world.**



**Teens put their new found skills to work processing a crime scene in Bethel.**



**Picking up what criminals leave behind.**