

RURAL ALASKA PROGRAM

2024 REPORT



Camp Fire
Alaska



LETTER *from* RURAL TEAM LEADERSHIP

Friends,

2024 marks 60 years of Camp Fire's Rural Alaska Program — WOW! As we reflect on our history and last summer, our hearts are full of gratitude. We are thankful for our partners, the rural communities we served, and the new friends we made along the way.

Throughout Camp Fire's 60-year history in rural Alaska, we learned that developing partnerships is important. Not only do they allow us to further our reach and deepen impact, most importantly they ensure we are meeting community need. Our partnerships support the delivery of Camp Fire programs, which emphasize a culturally responsive approach to wellness. They also engage local leaders and partners to strengthen resiliency in communities. We appreciate and cherish the generous spirit of each rural community, and thank everyone who supported our programs throughout Alaska.

This year, we served 31 rural Alaskan communities including Eek and Pilot Station — first time visits for Camp Fire! Although it was our first time visiting, community members welcomed Camp Fire staff joyfully, offering help wherever the program needed. Camp Fire is thankful to serve the youth and Elders in these communities, and we appreciate the warm welcome!

Quyana caknek (thank you very much) for celebrating 60 years of sharing culture, resources, laughter, and impact!

Sincerely,

Nancy Andrew & Anne Geuss

CONTENTS

2. LETTER FROM RURAL TEAM LEADERSHIP
3. HIGHLIGHTS
4. OUR HISTORY
5. IMPACT
6. COMMUNITY EVENTS
7. WELLNESS
8. ELDER ENGAGEMENT
9. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
10. CAMP FIRE STAFF
11. TEENS
12. CULTURE CAMPS
13. OUR PARTNERS

HIGHLIGHTS



Elder Visits

Elders visit youth during the program, enhancing cultural learning by sharing stories, life lessons, and teaching a variety of skills.

Community Events

Community members and Camp Fire staff collaborate to host successful celebrations and gatherings.

Alaska Native Employment

Increase in Alaska Native hires at every level within the program.

New Partnerships

Partnerships bring new opportunities for meaningful experiences across communities.

Water Safety

Cold Water Immersion and Boating Safety activities continue with youth, adults, and Elders.



An Elder teaches ulu safety.



Saint Mary's welcomes Camp Fire with a Yuraq, a traditional Yup'ik dance.

OUR HISTORY

In 1964, Camp Fire's Rural Alaska Program began by providing aid to rural communities impacted by the Great Alaska Earthquake.

Our staff facilitated youth activities and enrichment services, allowing adults throughout rural communities to focus on clean-up. Years later, the Program and its initiatives are still evolving, working alongside communities to meet their changing needs. For example, Camp Fire's Rural Alaska Program adapted to quickly address the high drowning rates in Alaska by offering swimming lessons and cold-water safety education to children and adults.

Now, the program includes wellness and cultural activities, opportunities for intergenerational connection, cooperative games, outdoor recreation, teen activities, workforce development, and community events. Camp Fire continues to teach the importance of wellness, reduce high-risk behaviors, and bolster community engagement. Over the past 60 years, our programs reached over 100 rural communities throughout Alaska, providing support and connection along the way!

Rural Alaska Timeline

1964 - Program Begins

1975 - We begin hiring staff specifically for the Rural Alaska Program.



1989 - We contract with St. Paul Island to assist in creating a teen and community recreational center.



2014 - Fresh fruits and vegetables from Meyer's Farm through grant funding from YKHC.



Scan the code
to read the full Rural Alaska Timeline!

IMPACT

2024 COMMUNITIES

AKIACHAK	MARSHALL
ANIAK	MOUNTAIN VILLAGE
ALAKANUK	NAPASKIAK
ATMAUTLUAK	NIKOLAI
CHEFORNAK	NULATO
CHEVAK	PILOT STATION
CHUATHBALUK	PITKAS POINT
EEK	RUSSIAN MISSION
HOOPER BAY	SAINT MARY'S
HUSLIA	SAINT MICHAEL
KIPNUK	SCAMMON BAY
KOKHANOK	TOKSOOK BAY
KONGIGANAK	TULUKSAK
KOTLIK	TUNTUTULIAK
KWETHLUK	TUNUNAK
KWIGILLINGOK	

31 Communities

86.5 Weeks of programs

3,247 Participants

(2,234 Youth and 1,013 Community Members)

36 Community Events

32,430 Meals Distributed

"It is so good to see the kids smile!

Thank you for coming."

—Kwigillingok Community Member



Top: Family with self portraits during a community event in Hooper Bay.

Left: Youth learning about various emotions through play with puppets

COMMUNITY EVENTS

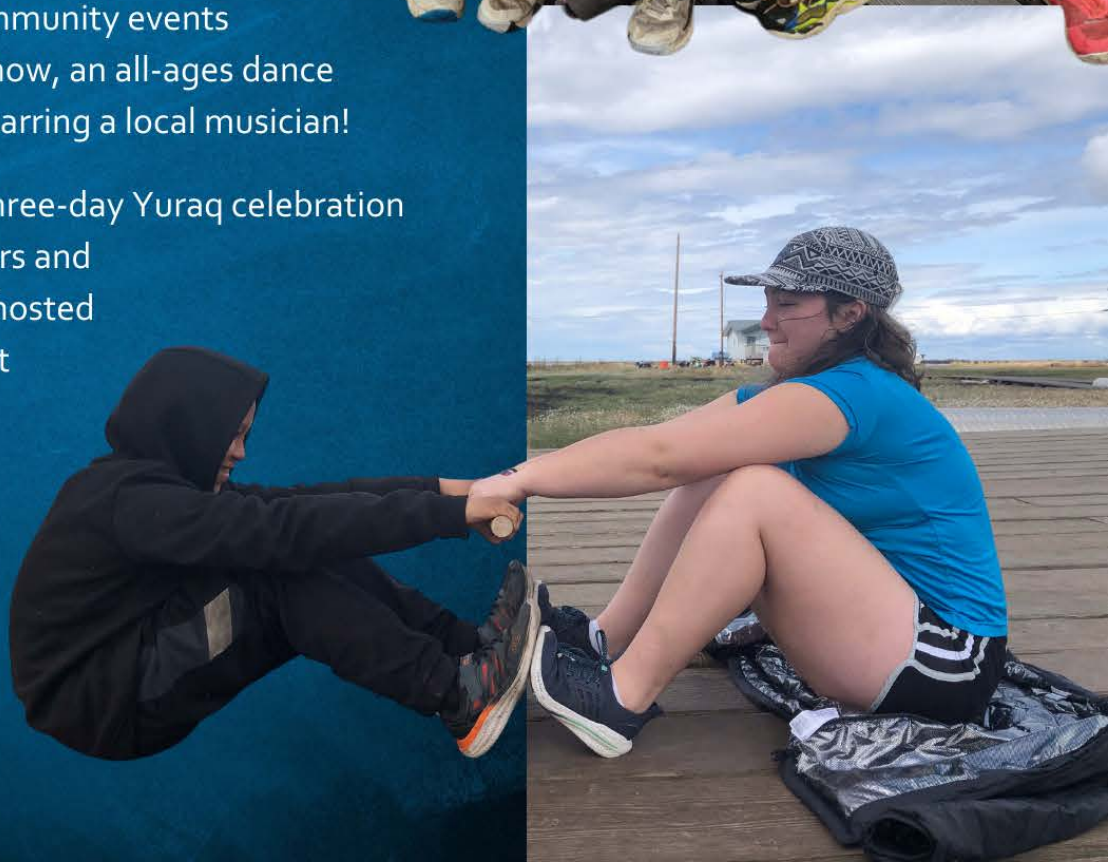
36

EVENTS HELD

2,686 participants

Family nights and community events invite the entire community and prioritize peer engagement and connection. Each year, Camp Fire's rural program focuses on bringing together community members across age groups, breaking down barriers, and fostering connections. This year, the community celebrations were especially beautiful to witness, featuring Native Youth Olympics (NYO) tournaments, basketball games, and traditional Yuraq celebrations. Other community events included an open mic talent show, an all-ages dance with a live DJ, and a concert starring a local musician!

Event highlights include the three-day Yuraq celebration hosted by Chefornak drummers and dancers, and the Kongiginak-hosted basketball tournament against Kwigillingok. Camp Fire is grateful for opportunities to support meaningful connection throughout rural Alaska!



WELLNESS

"The Strong Kid Wellness Curriculum provides activities and games to help kids see how their choices make their body, mind, emotion, and spirit strong. At camp, kids build trust with the staff and each other. And the camp play helps kids to feel good all day."

—Luz Smeenk, MS, RD

A partnership with Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) Dental Health Aids this year resulted in big, bright smiles worth highlighting! It was a fantastic opportunity to work with Dr. Humphrey who is committed to increasing access to quality dental care statewide.

As part of the partnership with YKHC, all Camp Fire program participants were given dental hygiene supplies. One community saw the deployment of a fully equipped mobile dental clinic. This innovative experience brought essential dental services directly to a community in need, eliminating barriers and providing them with a comprehensive range of services.

Such services included: thorough dental examinations conducted by qualified professionals and personalized dental hygiene instruction. The program also offered vital preventative dental care, such as professional teeth cleaning, and restorative treatments, like fillings. Currently, Camp Fire is partnering with YKHC to explore options to expand services like this to additional communities in the future. Together, we seek to provide more opportunities for children and teens to access professional, kid-friendly dental care!



Toothbrushes and toothpaste for all!



Cold water safety in Chuathbaluk.

ELDER

Engagement

“Kids loved to make cards and gifts for the Elders in their life. They also loved visiting the Elders and giving them gifts.” —Camp Fire Staff in Nikolai



For youth, connecting with their Elders offers profound benefits. They develop a deeper connection with their culture and identity, gain confidence, and have increased self-awareness. Intergenerational connection is important to the program each year in every community.

Camp Fire staff invited Elders to be honored guests, giving them an opportunity to teach during program hours. This encouraged intergenerational engagement, allowing Elders to share insight into the Yup'ik way of life.

Elders shared traditional stories, taught culturally relevant skills, and provided historical context. Some topics included winter survival, medicinal plants, foraging, sewing qaspeqs (a traditional Yup'ik overshirt with a large front pocket for berry foraging), and spear making.

Most lessons were taught in the Yup'ik language, and Elders ensured lessons felt special. For instance, an Elder in Kongiganak made walrus buttons for the kids, which they took home with excitement!



Chuathbulak Elder demonstrating how to use an ulu to cut fish.



Elder sharing stories with youth in Kipnuk.

“When working with the children, Elders, and especially the community, I reconnected with my culture. I engaged in their way of life. I want to relive that feeling — it was something I’ve never felt before. Alongside the children and youth, I also found my spark.”

- Community Liaison from Kipnuk

WORKFORCE *Development*

Now an ongoing goal, Camp Fire actively seeks to increase Alaska Native hires across programs. By developing Community Liaison positions to support program delivery, seven Community Liaisons joined Camp Fire for the season, and we even saw two staff return from 2023!

Travel Staff were instrumental for our local recruitment efforts with teens, providing one-on-one support for those applying for Camp Fire’s Leader in Training (LIT) program. The LIT program provides teens ages 15–17 job skill development for camp-related leadership roles. This program is hosted annually at Camp K on Kenai Lake in Cooper Landing. Camp Fire offers it cost-free to rural Alaskan youth participants and provides travel from their rural Alaskan homes to Anchorage and back. This year, eight rural Alaskan teens participated in the three-week LIT program!



Youth participating in a strong lungs challenge.



LITs from rural Alaska teach other LITs how to filet salmon.

CAMP FIRE

Staff

"I'm your mother for the next three weeks."

-Lucy Martin of Kwigillingok, a community member and supporter of our staff every year.

The work that goes into developing a thorough and comprehensive training program for Travel Staff is a top priority when preparing for the season. The multi-day staff training ensures that staff are ready to enter community with an understanding and respect of Native culture.

Staff training included the Alaska Blanket Exercise (ABE), developed by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's Behavioral Health Department. ABE is a participatory history lesson for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, telling the true story of pre-contact colonization and resistance. This training increases awareness of indigenous intergenerational traumas, respect for indigenous resilience, and creates an understanding of the reconciliation Alaska Native people have lived through. Staff were also introduced to Native Youth Olympics (NYO) games with award-winning Arctic Sports athlete and coach Kyle Kaayák'w Worl.

As a result of these trainings, staff recognized the honor in being welcomed into the homes of community members, sharing a meal, fishing, boating, berry picking, or taking maqi (Yup'ik outdoor steam bath). These opportunities to learn about Alaska Native cultures, subsistence living, and communities have a profound and lasting impact on program design, delivery, and relevance.



TEENS

"We loved doing NYO and it was such a success! Our community contact was a coach, and it was so cool watching him do the Alaskan high kick. They did an hour during teen night and more teens and community members came to participate!"

-Camp Fire staff in Tuluksak

620

TEEN PARTICIPANTS

Camp Fire's Teen night programming often includes physical activities such as basketball, volleyball, and Native Youth Olympics (NYO). This year, teens initiated and led drumming, dancing, and singing events. Teens also enjoyed craft activities, like sewing qaspeqs, making journals, writing cards for Elders, and beading — they even had access to impressive bead collections displayed on handmade racks!

Another exciting development for teen programming was a teen night dedicated to resumé writing and interview practice. This event was offered largely thanks to one of Kipnuk's community liaisons, who thought it would be a great way to build skills in teens. Leadership staff loved this creative twist on teen nights and plan to incorporate this into more communities next summer.



Teens enjoy space to connect and do activities they choose and enjoy.



A group of teens play outdoor games late into the evening.

CULTURE CAMPS

"What an honor it was to support youth at culture camps! And what a great privilege to listen to the Elders share Yuuraraq lessons and their own stories of wisdom!"

-Camp Fire Staff

In recent years, Camp Fire has been invited to support various Culture Camps. This summer, Camp Fire's Rural Alaska Program supported two culture camps by providing chaperones and facilitating activities.

In July, Camp Fire facilitated activities during Huslia Culture Camp. Among the activities were NYO games, swimming lessons, cold-water safety and survival training, and other Camp Fire Wellness Curriculum activities.

In September, Camp Fire's Rural Leadership Team, Anne Geuss and Nancy Andrew, and Camp K Director Tom Martin, supported Calista Education and Culture Inc. (CECI). They chaperoned youth during the Annual Gathering, which brought together three CECI Culture Camp cohorts. They were joined by roughly 80 middle school youth, Elders, cultural mentors, and teachers. The Yuuyaraq Cultural Immersion Camp session was hosted at Camp Gorsuch on Mirror Lake and lasted five days. It taught Yup'ik/Cup'ik culture, history, language, traditions, and values, and emphasized the importance of protecting and respecting wildlife. Other learning activities included sewing gaspeqs and traditional headdresses (used for Yup'ik dancing), fur scraping, and assembling sewing kits for the mending of clothes while hunting, fishing, or gathering.



Camp Fire staff teaches Cold Water Safety at Huslia Culture Camp.



Camp Fire staff at CECI Culture Camp.

OUR PARTNERS

2024

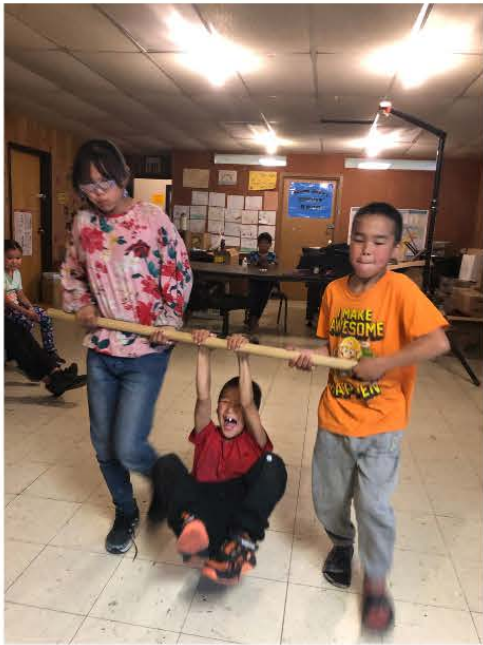
HIGHLIGHTS

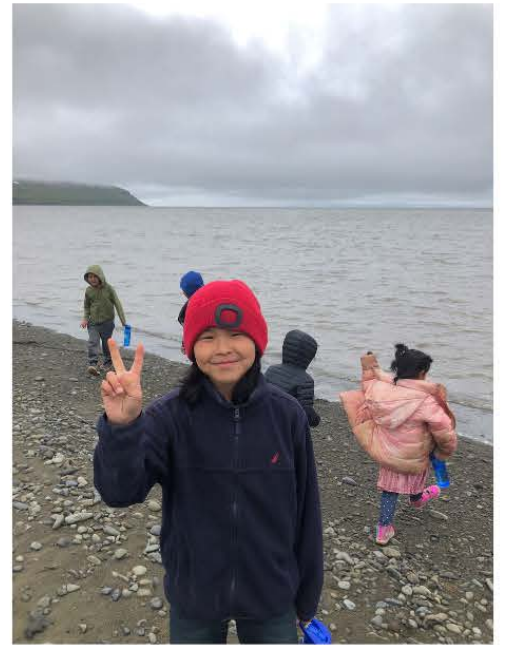
- ▶▶ YKHC Dental Program Partnership provided dental activities and mobile dental office to provide free cleanings, exams, fillings, and referrals to families in Chuathbaluk.
- ▶▶ ANTHC Behavioral Health Alaska Blanket Exercise facilitation training for leadership team increased Camp Fire staffs' historical and cultural awareness of Alaska Native communities.
- ▶▶ Meyers Farm in Bethel provided fresh produce for Elders and youth with funding from the Alaska Kidney Foundation.
- ▶▶ The Holy Spirit Center in Anchorage graciously provided the space to house travel staff and hold trainings leading up to the season and at the end of season.

Thank you!

to our generous donors and partners!

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 Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation
 And many individual donors!





Join us!

RURAL ALASKA IS WAITING

Bring Camp Fire to your community.

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Become a partner.

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Thanks to support from partners,
Camp Fire's Rural Alaska Program
has visited over 100 communities
throughout the past 60 years!

Keep us with us!



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