



October 2010

THE

NEWSLETTER

Fairbanks Native Association

## Elders and homeless benefit from Williams' quiet advocacy, persistent goodwill Freda Williams leads Community Services team, enlarging share of pie

The atmosphere is welcoming, well-used and colorful in the FNA Community Services building. Located at 315 Wendell St., and in the adjacent Hannah Solomon elders building, FNA Community Services is a leading effort in supporting Fairbanks seniors and its homeless population.

The unassuming building (with a fading mural of a circling whale) is more like a home than an agency that delivers services to needy people.

First time visitors pass bulletin board notices from referral agencies offering specific assistance, family violence educational materials, tidy shelves of clean, used clothing, a copy of the local newspaper, Internet access, and on Wednesdays, the aroma of moose liver or salmon in the kitchen.

For many people the place is an oasis of care and assistance. Meals for elders are scheduled on a daily basis, M-F. During August more than 440 meals were served. Some of the food is prepared in the small but state-licensed kitchen while some arrives via the North Star Council on Aging. In the freezers is donated traditional food. Blueberries, salmon, moose, and beaver.

The space is small, but in the summer months the dining area expands to an outside deck on the south side of the building. At mid-day, elders congregate there, close to the garden plot tended by Elaine Pitka. Elaine, who is from Ruby, is the elder coordinator and knows everyone's first names and their birthdays.

Transportation for the elders is vital in order to maintain links to one another. The vans (two of four were donated) assure these con-



*Freda Williams and her senior driver, Kenneth Housley, in the Community Services reception area. Highly regarded for her energy and dedication, Freda has been directing the program since 1994.*

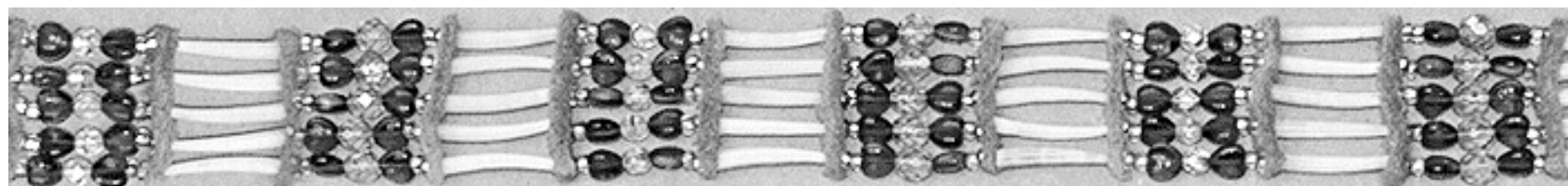
nections and wider community access is maintained. Most days the vans are busy delivering food boxes (70/week), shuttling people to medical or agency appointments, to schools where elders share cultural stories with children, other errands, or to the cemetery to visit a family grave.

Most elders arrive at the center in vans driven by Kenneth Housley from Stevens Village, or by Esther Frykman, a part-time student

at UAF in Human Services. From Northway, Esther joined Community Services in 2006.

Freda Williams, a confidant woman who grew up in Ruby, is the director of Community Services. She knows people and she knows how to make things happen. In her office, a visitor is surrounded with artifacts of family reunions, photos of ancestors and her three boys, special

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## Early Head Start and Head Start teaches parents to advocate for their children

Whether we like it or not, children whose skills advance early are more likely to reach their fullest potential. Parents who invest in their children's efforts to learn how the world works are the first and best partners in their education. These sentiments are embraced by FNA's early childhood education programs.

Head Start is one of the few remaining "War on Poverty" programs from the 60's. It's survived budget hawks, good times and bad, because it works. Data from Alaska as well as nationwide show that Head Start children function at higher levels once they reach the primary grades than children who were not enrolled in the program.



Angela Foster-Snow, director of FNA's Early Head Start program, interacts with two of its young students.

In Fairbanks, as in most communities, Head Start and Early Head Start target two age groups. Head Start is for kids 3 - 5 years old. Early Head Start, which got underway in the 1990s, enrolls infants and their families from prenatal to 3 years old. Over 100 children are currently enrolled in center-based services while several dozen are served by home visits.

FNA's Early Head Start (EHS) programs are housed in a former sporting goods store in east Fairbanks. According to its director, Angela Foster-Snow, the program provides services for pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers. At this age, the children are extremely vulnerable to neglect and poor caregiving. Early Head Start works to prevent and mitigate developmental delays.

Such circumstances arise as the result of illness, immaturity, substance abuse in the family, domestic violence and separation due to

incarceration. EHS is the social safety net that seeks to limit damage. As an advocate for these children and others with physical disabilities, Angela and her staff "bend heaven and earth" to realign the playing field.

Parents are often as deeply involved as their children. Their needs draw on resources that link social, medical, dental, nutritional and mental health services to enrolled children.

There are occasions when service providers have helped arrange transportation to assure a parent got to employment training or a job, access to emergency cash, smoking cessation training, and safe housing.

"We can't do it all ourselves, so

we have to find ways to empower parents to engage the process of partnering with us in the care and education of their children," Angela says.

One of the pillars of EHS is working with community partners (agencies whose mission overlaps) to collaborate efforts to assure appropriate resources reach parents and children in need.

"We get most of our funding from the feds, the Administration for Children and Families under the Department of Health and Human Services," she explains. "About 10 percent comes from the state."

"While there are strict requirements on accounting for expenses, we're encouraged to be creative in finding ways to reach children effectively."

To meet the challenges, Early Head Start partners with another FNA program: Women and Children's Center for Inner Healing (WCCIH). Managed

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### Fairbanks Native Association

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#### FNA's Mission

We provide our membership and the greater Fairbanks community quality services in a professional manner. These services are provided through special and innovative programs, which preserve the membership's unique lifestyle and culture, while improving the quality of life for the community.

Steve Ginnis, Executive Director  
Doreen Deaton, Deputy Director  
Duane Hoskins, Director of Finance  
Rhonda Howard, Director of Human Resources  
Perry Ahsogak, BHS Director  
Carrie Lucas, WCCIH Program Director  
Suzanne Christenson, Graf Program Director  
Mary Willey, Head Start Program Director  
Angela Foster-Snow, Early Head Start Program Dir.  
Shirley Williams, PAT Program Director  
Freda Williams, Community Services Program Dir.  
Louise Glynn, FASAP Program Director  
Linda Woods, Johnson O'Malley Program Director

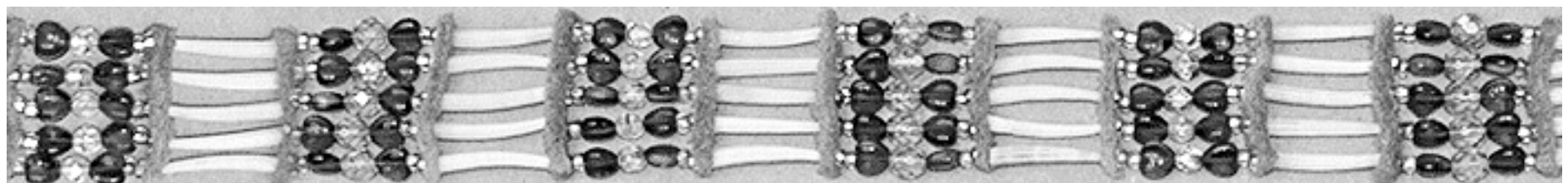
**AFN is coming to town.  
FNA welcomes all delegates,  
families and guests.**

Mark your calendars  
for October 18-23  
for the 2010  
AFN Convention Week!

Community committees are working hard to be ready to warmly welcome the delegates and all visitors in town for the Elders and Youth Conference and the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention.

Go to [www.afn2010.com](http://www.afn2010.com) for information on planning your trip to Fairbanks, what to see and do, transportation, lodging, volunteer opportunities and more!

**We look forward to learning about  
your deliberations and participating  
in the cultural events.**



## FREDA Continued From Page 1

objects, artwork, and mementoes from a lifetime in Alaska.

Freda leads a team of five permanent employees. Bertha Nollner also hails from Ruby; Chelsea Semaken, Kaltag; and Ruth Esmailka, Galena. All are cross-trained so that if one is absent, the others pick up the slack.

“I give my team a lot of autonomy and ownership of their roles and responsibilities. This gives me the time to carry out administrative work, the grants, budgets, agency and nationwide networking, and meeting with funders. In this way, Community Services runs smoothly and holistically,” she says.

From this vantage, Freda has directed the client-based program since 1994. In the course of a month, people seeking assistance, in one form or another, can exceed 1,000.

All ethnic groups are represented in the program’s work.

As the second-oldest in a family of 11 siblings, it’s not surprising that Freda has the skills that fit her role as director. Thinking about family ties in Ruby, she says, “Mother taught us to help each other; sharing is everything.”

Her father, a musician who loved to play the guitar, died when she was nine. In the aftermath, the family moved to Fairbanks.

“It was a big culture shock,” she says, eyes widening in emphasis. “It took a couple of years before I assimilated. My early years were in Birch Park housing, [kids there] called themselves ‘Birch Park brats’. Hannah Solomon lived there. By the way, she’s going to be 102 next month.”

Freda was a Nordale student, then at Denali, Old Main and Lathrop. Her first job was

as a teachers aide in Ft. Yukon. Later, she was a secretary to the school principal in Tanana.

After a move out of the region, when her husband’s FAA job shifted to Anchorage, she found employment at the University of Alaska’s School of Nursing. When the FAA sent her husband to Fairbanks, Freda took an assistant position at student services, under the Alaska Native program. Eventually, she found her way to the School of Education, where she worked in administration for 13 years.

“It was there that I was redirected by the influence of the people I met. Ray Barnhardt, Rick Caulfield, Ralph Gabrielli, Dennis

Demmert. I’ve had great mentors through my career,” she says.

Though she’s been with FNA for 16 years, Freda keeps her university contacts fresh. She’s a member of the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Native Education and has been an advocate for the establishment of the Troth Yedtha’ Park.

Troth Yedtha’, which means ‘wild potato hill’, was a place where food was gathered. Today, it’s the location of the university. She also serves on the Fairbanks North Star Borough’s Senior

Citizen’s Advisory Commission where she tracks policy options as it relates to the region’s senior population.

Sarah McConnell, a

university faculty member, calls Freda a gift to the community. “She brings a bright, thoughtful and creative energy to her many community connections. Her positive attitude and insights touch many people and events in Fairbanks.”

For the past 10 years, Community Services has been the point of contact for year-round burials at the Alaska Native Birch Hill Cemetery. Recently Freda, and representatives from

other Native-led organizations, sat in on discussions that led to the resolution of a long standing problem. For years, the cemetery on Birch Hill lacked a dedicated area for Alaska Natives.

As someone who often acts as a go-between for families of the deceased and organizations that pledge assistance, she’s seen the anguish that accompanies a one-size-fits-all policies affecting burial plots at Birch Hill. Local leaders at Doyon, Ltd, FNA, IRHA, Denakkaagna, Tanana Chiefs, the Alaska Native Veterans Association, the City of Fairbanks and the Fairbanks North Star Borough put together an agreement that transfers 10 acres to FNA for use as burial sites. It allows families a level of autonomy and control that is culturally connected to final rites.

Hosting a tour of Community Services facilities, Freda is obviously proud of the improvements she helped create. “It’s all disability act compliant,” she says, pointing out the kitchen, dining area and bathrooms.

“The community college students held a cosmology class here. Clients got perms, haircuts, and manicures and twice a year we have a BBQ in the parking lot that’s aimed at people who are homeless. In July, 300 people turned out for it,” she says.

Community Services has also sponsored wellness gatherings. With minimal advertising, over 200 people attended the last one. The focus was domestic violence, a scourge most often fueled by alcohol. In the talking circles, people exposed its harm and opened doors of healing and understanding.

Freda says the facility is running out of space for such meetings as well as for routine operations. She’d like to enlarge the kitchen and the dining room, finish a room devoted to sewing and crafts, and develop future-looking planning initiative that recognizes population trend lines and the physical limits of the facilities.

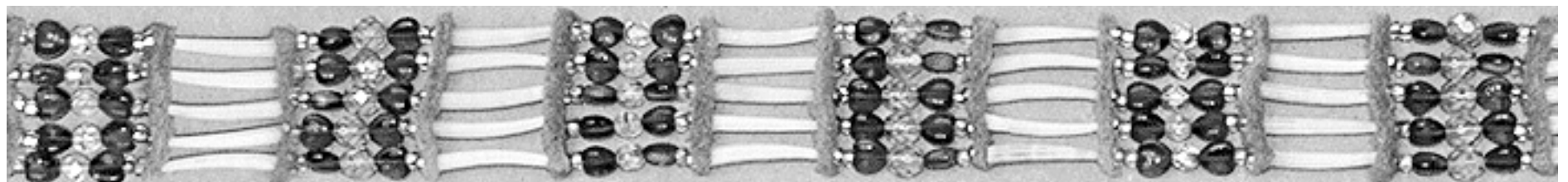
In the meantime, balancing budgets, doing more with less, and advocating against the odds provide daily challenges. Freda says she loves it, that the variety and tempo keep her engaged. Several times a year, however, she returns to Ruby to recharge, to touch home base. “I always go back to Ruby,” she says. “It’s where I learned to share.”



The kitchen at Community Services is a daily component of delivering services. Freda knows it like her own.

**“I always go back to Ruby,” she says. “It’s where I learned to share.”**

**Freda Williams**



## ADVOCACY Continued From Page 2

by Carrie Lucas, WCCIH is a 4-6 months residential program that serves mothers, and mothers-to-be, who want treatment for chemical abuse and greater self-awareness. A treatment plan is tailored to each client. It may include sobriety training, emotional literacy, and professional counseling.

On successful evaluation, children to age 7 may join their mothers in the facility. There's a nearby school and Early Head Start will arrange teacher home visits.

Angela, who grew up in Idaho and was once a high school basketball coach, is a single mom with four kids, from 21 to 10. Her father was a former assistant superintendent of the school in Galena, Alaska. She came to the state six years ago.

FNA education programs felt like a good fit from the beginning. At EHS An-

gela moved from teacher to education coordinator to interim director and later was offered the position. She now oversees a staff of 48 and a \$3 million budget.

Angela emphasizes that it's the employees who make the program successful. "I Think we are so lucky to have the staff we have. They're dedicated and intentional. It's really powerful to work with this team. If people ever feel that they want to be a part of this they should come and talk to us. We want parents in our program; we want them to work for us."

Part of this spirit is likely the result of tradition. According to Angela, over 65 percent of current EHS employees were either Head Start students or their parents were in Head Start.

Down the street and across the river is Head Start's center. It's in a concrete block building on Second Ave. and named for its founder, Poldine Carlo. Next to the parking lot and surrounded by a chain-link fence is the school's playground. A washed gravel pad supports a small swing set and slide.

Due to realities of Fairbanks commercial

property Head Start conducts operations from two other venues, both leased. One is located at 909 Cushman, the other at 1024 Barnette. The Carlo building, considered the main campus, is owned by FNA.

It's from here that Mary Willey directs operations for the 3-5 year olds program. Four days a week, September to June, 80 kids look to HS for social competence training, mental stimulation, and self-control guidance.

Mary was born in Fairbanks; her parents were longtime residents of the Healy Lake/Dot Lake region. She and her husband, Randy, have been "married for forever (26 years), and I say

that lovingly," she says, smiling at the thought.

The Carlo building is a model of space utilization. Every wall and level surface is optimized toward the mission of education and enhancement of young students. Posters,

maps, globes, books, the alphabet, artwork delight the eye in a swirl of color and meaning.

Mary has a long association with Head Start. First as a parent and volunteer (stay-at-home mom for six years), then as a teacher. Years ago, when she first arrived with her child, a line on a wall of the Carlo building marked the height of the 1967 flood. That reminder of the place's history left her thinking about the past and future. Today, the building is still here and so is she.

After years of experience in the trenches, the director's position came open. She was named to the post in 2005.

Echoes of more Head Start tradition: Two of Mary's children went through the HS program. The oldest is now a high school graduate and working for FNA as a EHS Teacher Aide. The other is in the 5th grade.

The HS program lacks the acute vulnerability issues inherent in some EHS infants. But Mary notices other indicators that trouble her. "We get to know these children personally; we watch their behavior. We're seeing economic

stress coming out in [kids] play," she says. "The cost of living is going up and there's no income gain. Kids sense the parents anxiety."

Like Angela, Mary works to include families in the mission. "If the family is healthy then the kids will have a foundation for future success," she says. "We teach parents to be advocates for their kids. This is particularly important at transition to kindergarten and the primary grades. It can be intimidating for parents. We help them push for what's best for their children, whether it's a public school, charter or private."

Both early childhood education directors share concerns about unfunded federal mandates. Their staff is facing new requirements, forcing them to become fully accredited early childhood specialists. But there's no funding for training. Nationwide, Head Start has been flat-funded for years.

## JOM makes grade with school supplies

The Johnson O'Malley program continued its longstanding practice of giving school supplies to students and families that need them. In mid August, over four days, 225 students received the gifts of pencils, pens, notebooks and the other assorted supplies for the school year.

According to Linda Woods, JOM director, the event has been held for more than 20 years. JOM purchased the supplies. All Alaska Native/Native American students enrolled in the FNSBSD are eligible to receive supplies. To learn more about the effort, call Linda at 452-1648.

## Doyon announces Spring 2011 Basic Scholarship, students urged to apply

In a cash-strapped economy, scholarships offer major advantages. Doyon's online application for 2011 spring semester basic scholarships are now available. Applications are due November 15, 2010. Basic scholarships range from \$400 for part-time students to \$800 for full-time students. To apply, students must submit:

- A complete online application form.
- Proof of academic enrollment.
- Official transcripts.

Deadline for all documents is November 15. This applies to hand-delivered and post-marked. Don't miss this opportunity; apply now. Visit: [doyonfoundation.com](http://doyonfoundation.com) to learn more.



Mary Willey, director of FNA's Head Start program, works one-on-one with one of its students.

