



# FAIRBANKS NATIVE ASSOCIATION



A Voice for the People of Fairbanks

Winter 2023

## FNA Head Start helps staff learn, too And families, and children, and the whole community

Angi Thomas was a Head Start kid.

Now she is the FNA Head Start family wellness coordinator.

She grew up poor in Wisconsin in a single mother home. Her mother fought to get her family out of those circumstances. While the children were at Head Start, mom attended college classes.

"I remember her cap and gown," Thomas said. "Mom was the first college graduate in the family. Head Start gave her the opportunity."

She is following in her mother's education footsteps, and this time, FNA Head Start paid for much of her tuition. It's an opportunity offered to FNA Head Start staff and many have taken advantage of it.

Thomas has earned a child development certificate and applied associate of science degree in early childhood development. She will graduate in May with a Bachelor of Arts in child and family services. All courses have been at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Thomas has a deep knowledge of child behavior, brain development and parenting styles, said Fran Cachucha, FNA Head Start director.

"We are happy to help with her education," Cachucha said. "Her success story as a Head Start student to a Head Start college graduate is something we continue to see and are looking for more like her."

Francisca Charriez-Miranda earned a child development certificate, an A.A.S. degree in early childhood development and a Bachelor of Arts in child development and family services, all from UAF and partially paid for by FNA Head Start. She started as a primary teacher and is now the FNA Head Start enrollment coordinator.

"I really wanted to provide quality services to our families," she said.

**...Head Start higher education continued on page 7**



Angi Thomas, left, and Francisca Charriez-Miranda, hold their college degrees. FNA Head Start mostly paid for both women's education, which they use at FNA.



### Board of Directors

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Steve Ginnis  
Executive Director



## Message from FNA executive director

First, I would like to wish all of you a safe and Happy New Year. I hope everyone is staying healthy as we move into 2024.

Fairbanks Native Association had a great 2023.

In FNA Behavioral Health Services, we added children's mental health treatment, including outpatient, day treatment and home-based treatment. We received temporary transitional housing funding for homeless youth that was desperately needed for our community. We've brought in more support for our young adults who are at risk for mental health issues and/or substance use.

For adults, we are addressing suicide risk among veterans, and developing a culturally relevant plan for suicide awareness, intervention and treatment. We plan to provide culturally appropriate training to crisis counselors who work crisis call lines. We added more tools to provide medically assisted treatment for opioid misuse and have strengthened plans to provide education and emergency treatment for overdose, and opioid and stimulant misuse.

Our Tribal Home Visiting program got a five-year continuation grant to support expectant mothers and 0-5-year-olds.

We are all looking forward to hosting our Annual Membership Meeting on March 8, 2024. We have three board seats up for election, currently held by Tonya Garnett, Terri Cadzow and Dr. Charlene Stern. We are accepting board applications until the deadline of 5 p.m. on February 5, 2024. Eligible applicants will be 18 year or older, a resident of the Fairbanks North Star Borough for at least 30 days, not a FNA employee, and a descendant of an individual who is Alaskan Native or American Indian.

We are excited to host our annual potlatch on March 16, 2024. This big event for us started on March 21, 1963. As always, we will serve our traditional potlatch food and convene our annual baby, princess and FNA queen contests.

Enjoy this newsletter and learn about FNA Head Start. If you are interested in your child attending or applying for a job, please visit [www.fairbanksnative.org](http://www.fairbanksnative.org).

Happy 2024 and I look forward to seeing you at our events!



Steve Ginnis, FNA executive director, listens as staff reads aloud a letter congratulating him on 15 years at FNA. Ginnis was recognized during a recent all staff meeting. Photo by Charlotte Peterson.



## FNA Head Start 0-5 Program Philosophy

FNA Head Start 0-5 empowers a parent as a child's first teacher. Our learning center provides a safe, loving, and inclusive opportunity for each child to explore and discover their identity, culture, or traditional values. We collaborate with parents using relationship-based practices to help their child develop the emotional, physical, and cognitive skills needed to successfully navigate towards school readiness.



## Head Start began as part of the 1960s War on Poverty *But is now a tool for life success*

Helping children in poverty was a radical idea in the 1960s. Many people believed that people were poor because of their own moral failings.

Yet it's hard to blame a child for their circumstances. Poverty is not a choice. Enlightened thinkers of the day realized that providing children with early education, good nutrition and healthcare would make a difference in families.

That thinking brought about the national Head Start program in 1965, part of President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty.

Since then, over 37 million U.S. children have gone through a Head Start program. While Head Start certainly made an impact on poverty, the most telling success of Head Start is that early childhood education helps youngsters have successful lives, no matter what their economic circumstances.

"I'm a Head Start kid," said Fran Cachucha, FNA Head Start director. "My mom was a Head Start director and now so am I. There are so many more people out there who were Head Start students, even at FNA."

FNA Head Start has made an impact on Fairbanks since opening its doors in 1993. FNA's original program provided part-day services for 60 children and home-base services for 22 children. Now the FNA program is funded to serve 303 enrolled students prenatal to five years of age. The current program, in addition to classroom learning, has helped families keep immunizations up to date, coordinated physical and dental check-ups, helped with housing, assisted with employment training, and more. FNA Head Start also provides home-base learning, prenatal help, nutrition help, and transportation.

Although FNA Head Start promotes cultural identity of Alaska Native and American Indian families, the program is available to all eligible families in the Fairbanks area. FNA HS 0-5 is a State of Alaska licensed childcare provider.

As of 2023 all of FNA Head Start programs are located in the newly renovated Poldine Carlo Building at 3830 South Cushman.



**Fran Cachucha**  
FNA Head Start director





# A day in the life of an FNA Head Start student

FNA Head Start lets the child lead their learning.

The classroom is set up for exploration. There's an art station. A reading station. All kinds of stations to play, learn and develop skills.

Part of the day, the supervised youngster wanders around the room and chooses where they want to be. The teacher will go from child to child and guide them in their learning.

There are other activities, too. FNA Head Start staff have packed the day with a variety of things to do and learn, said Michelle Farrell, FNA HS education manager.

FNA Head Starts offers part-time, full-time, extended day and home-base programs for families with children 0-5 years. The goal is to make sure parents and caregivers are ready for kindergarten, physically, emotionally, and mentally.

Some classrooms start at 8 a.m. and others start 8:30 a.m., depending on the child's age and type of program they are in.

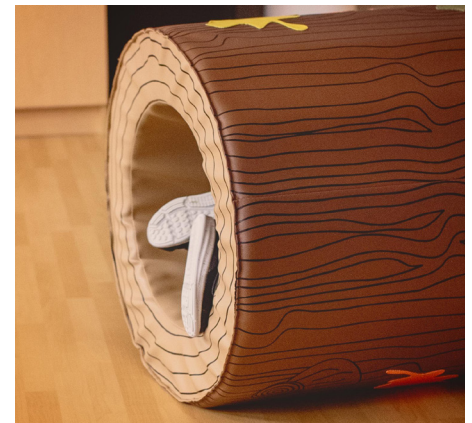
At the Poldine Carlo Building, the Head Start day begins with parents taking their children to their classroom. It's a good time to go over any updates on the child with the teacher, such as if they slept well or how their mood is. The parents will help their child wash their hands and make sure they use the bathroom or have a fresh diaper on.

Breakfast is the first thing on the agenda for the classroom. The children might have pancakes, cereal, biscuits and gravy, yogurt, fruit, or bacon, depending on the three-week, rotating menu. Milk is always served.

Some parents might stay for the meal and volunteer to help, Farrell said.

The children will go outside to play. A recently finished playground has soft material on the ground, and kid-friendly structures, such as a canoe, a salmon structure, or a cache, to play on.

Below ten degrees is the cutoff for toddler time outdoors, while -20 is the cutoff for preschoolers, Farrell said. Infants get stroller rides in the building's halls. There are





After naptime, the children will get snacks and then do more exploration learning, large group time, and outdoor play. FNA Head Start have Hatch tablets, electronic devices that help children learn.

The teachers follow a child's custom learning plan, Farrell said. For instance, many young children don't have gripping or squeezing strength in their hands, something called fine motor skills. Teachers will make sure they use scissors or eyedroppers to strengthen their hands. This will give them an advantage in grade school, Farrell said.

FNA Head Start staff develops a learning plan with families upon acceptance into the program, she said. Teachers do ongoing observations to modify plans if needed.

The teachers share observations with parents when they come to pick up their children at day's end. FNA Head Start has bus transportation, and a public bus system has a stop at the South Cushman building.

There are three levels for a child to progress through: infant, toddler, and preschool. After the last class, the student and family should be ready for kindergarten. A family advocate will help enroll the child in school, make sure they have all paperwork needed, including immunization records, and, in general, have a good idea of what to expect, Farrell said.

The children will know how to write their name, know their parents' names, phone numbers and other bits of learning that will help them settle into kindergarten.

Studies have shown that Head Start children grow up to become successful adults. Many of them work at FNA, said Fran Cachucha, FNA Head Start Director.

"Head Start children are everywhere!" she said.

three large indoor play areas.

Back inside, the teachers will hold "large group time" where the whole class learns something together. Recently the children learned about all kinds of lights, and what they can do. Last summer the children learned about gardens, and had their own garden on site. Food harvested from the garden went to FNA Head Start families.

Large group time also means time for singing and book reading.

Currently, Lorraine David, the Denakke' language teacher, goes from classroom to classroom to teach the Koyukon Athabascan language.

Head Start cooks serve lunch around noon, and is a balanced meal of protein, carbohydrates, grains, fruits, and vegetables.

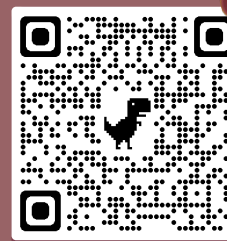
After lunch is naptime, with cots or cribs for each child. The naps can be from 1-2.5 hours long. The teachers help the students settle down by turning down the lights and playing soft music.



**FNA Head Start  
JOB FAIR**  
Friday, Jan. 19  
3830 South Cushman  
12:30-2:30 p.m.  
[www.fairbanksnative.org](http://www.fairbanksnative.org)  
to apply today or scan QR

Scan QR code

Enroll your child into  
**FNA Head Start 0-5!**  
Visit  
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# FNA JOM students earn a spot at climate congress

By Tsi-yaa Cuny, FNA Johnson O'Malley family service coordinator

Effie Kokrine Charter School students and I attended the 2023 Native Youth Climate Adaptation Leadership Congress along with students across the country to discuss climate adaptation and related environmental issues impacting Native peoples. NYCALC's mission is to develop future conservation leaders with the skills, knowledge, and tools to address environmental change and conservation challenges to better serve their schools and home communities. We were in Shepherdstown, West Virginia for nine days.

As a mentor I felt that students should be exposed to growing outside of their comfort zones. This opportunity came up and I took advantage of it and applied. I also felt that this would give the students an opportunity to grow with other youth socially and emotionally. The students' voices were heard, and they came together and shared their ideas about climate change and presented them to everyone on the last day. They also grew in knowledge of one another's culture.



A presentation at NYCALC



L-R: Tsi-yaa Cuny, Neveah Ofperman and Linda Pitka



Neveah Ofperman and Linda Pitka

## A life changing experience

NYCALC was a life changing experience. You make friends that will last a lifetime. Some might even say you make a new family. In the span of days, you meet everybody there, while learning about everyone's culture. All the people that go to NYCALC had a different story to tell about climate change, and how it has impacted their homes.

We all worked in different small groups that had different topics that related to the big question. The big question of 2023 was "What does an intergenerational approach to climate justice look like?" Each small group would put a presentation together and on the last day everyone presented.

The last night was also cultural night. Cultural night is a night where everyone gets to show dances or share stories from their culture. This is an experience that I personally think every high school student who have an interest in climate change should get to experience.

**Neveah Ofperman**

## I'm not alone

I learned so much at NYCALC. I learned about climate change and not only where it's happening in Alaska, but all over.

- I learned about other cultures, not only my own. That everyone is so similar but also different
- I learned I wasn't alone
- I learned that if I get out of my shell, I can meet some pretty awesome people
- I learned that I wasn't just a kid at NYCALC. I was a young youth leader
- I learned that everything can't change in a day and that things take time
- I learned that I have a voice
- That even this world is sad and depressing, but there are good and very kind caring people
- I learned so much and I want other Alaskan Natives to experience what I had.

**Linda Pitka**

# FNA Head Start staff earn higher education

Continued from page 1

As she adapted her learning to her classroom and was able to see the difference it made for children and families.

“Not all children develop the same and they have different learning styles.” Charriez-Miranda said. “And I want to add we work in partnership with parents, recognizing they are the child’s first teacher.”

She came from Puerto Rico to Alaska. “Love brought me here. Courage made me stay.”

Francisca was not a Head Start student, but she saw her younger siblings attend in Puerto Rico. They were raised by a single mother, also.

“I saw how my mom changed her parenting style by volunteering in Head Start,” Charriez-Miranda said.

Head Start was started in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. The idea was that preschool education for youngsters and parent support would help families. Over 37 million children have been served since then, with many success stories of those who have gone on to earn college degrees.

“We broke the barrier of poverty,” Thomas said. “What I learned helps me at work and with my four adopted children.”

“Head Start works and changes lives for children, families and staff,” said Charriez-Miranda.

## Head Start remodel almost done

FNA Head Start has a new wing at the Poldine Carlo Building.

Ghemm Company oversaw the project which added two new classrooms, a conference room, an office and large indoor playroom.

Now all FNA Head Start programs are in the Carlo building.

“Before, parents sometimes had to drop their children off at different locations around Fairbanks,” said Fran Cachucha, FNA Head Start director. “Now parents are able to drop off and pick up children from one location.”

The new wing carries on FNA’s tradition of naming classrooms an Alaska Native name. The two new classrooms are named “Dagoo” for ptarmigan, and “Negoodzeghe” for owl. Each children room have outside exit doors for safety.

The color scheme fits in with the rest of FNA Head Start classrooms, using muted natural colors of coral, green and yellow.

The FNA Head Start playground will be completed by Spring 2024. This playground will have an airport and dog mushing themes, as well as an igloo and canoe.



Happy Holidays and  
Happy 2024!





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**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**JOM ALASKA NATIVE YOUTH BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT**  
**MARCH 11 - 13, 2024**  
[www.fairbanksnative.org](http://www.fairbanksnative.org)



**FAIRBANKS NATIVE ASSOCIATION**  
**2024 FNA Board Election**  
**Three seats open**

Candidates must submit a completed application to FNA Administration **before 5 p.m., Monday, Feb. 5, 2024.**  
 Applications and information may be found on our website [www.fairbanksnative.org](http://www.fairbanksnative.org)

**To be eligible for the FNA Board of Directors, you must be**

- A direct descendent of an individual who was/is Athabascan, Inupiat, Yup'ik, Unanagan, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Cup'ik, Sugpiaq, Eyak, and/or Alaska Native/American Indian.
- A resident of the Fairbanks North Star Borough for at least 30 days
- Eighteen (18) years of age or older
- Not employed by FNA

**Submit an application by Monday, Feb. 5, 2024 by 5 p.m.**  
 Contact: Shaylene Dublin 907-452-1648, ext. 6235 or [sdublin@fairbanksnative.org](mailto:sdublin@fairbanksnative.org)

# FNA Employee of the Month



June 2023  
Tiffany Straw-Botts



July 2023  
Crystal Miller



August 2023  
Dave Howard



September 2023  
Melanie Anderson



October 2023  
Soleil Dent



November 2023  
Lara Rambo