FAIRBANKS NATIVE ASSOCIATION

A Voice for the People of Fairbanks

Spring/Summer 2026

Dear Membership,

I'm sharing my speech I gave as the commencement speaker for the Effie Kokrine Charter School Class of 2026. My goal was to offer hope, praise and encouragement to the class, and I'm hoping that you will find the same.



Melissa Charlie, FNA Executive Director, gives graduation speech at Effie Kokrine Charter School. Photo by FNSB School District.

Graduation is such a time of achievement, not only for the student, but for everyone involved in a child's life: teachers, counselors, tutors, families and friends. Graduation marks the end of a season of life and the beginning of another. It's good to take time to reflect.

Congratulations to all our graduates, of all ages.

Melissa Charlie, FNA Executive Director

2026 EKCS Commencement Speech

Welcome graduates, families, educators, Elders and future graduates.

Baasee' for having me here this evening. I have spoken before many people in many different capacities. This is different. This is an honor I will always cherish.

I am Melissa Charlie, Executive Director of Fairbanks Native Association, daughter of Norma Dahl and the late Bobby Charlie; granddaughter of the late Cerosky and Linda Charlie of Minto; and the late Dale Dahl of Fairbanks and Bertha Pease of Beaver.

I graduated from Lathrop High School 28 years ago. Had you told me that I would be standing here before all of you as an Executive Director and a Fairbanks North Star Borough school board member, I would never have believed it. Not because there were few female leaders during that time, but because there were even fewer Indigenous female leaders to look up to. I am thankful for Shirley Dementiff, Georgina Lincoln, Rosemarie Maher, Bernice Joseph, and Lucy Ann Carlo for breaking the trail for so many strong female leaders today.

Today, we have smart Indigenous women from the Interior in key roles running major organizations. For example, Sharon Hildebrand is the Chief/Chairman of the Tanana Chiefs Conference. Dr. Charlene Stern is the Interim Provost at UAF. Natasha Sigh is the CEO of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium in Anchorage, and Sharon McConnell is the Executive Director at Denakkanaaga and board chair for FNA.

I'm not diminishing the value of our men. I'm emphasizing that Indigenous women had to overcome additional barriers to attain leadership roles that were historically limited to men.

As Native people it is important that we seek guidance and mentorship from our Elders, both men and women. They have gone through things in

Board of Directors

Dr. Anna Frank, Elder Advisor
Sharon McConnell, President
Beverly Kokrine, Vice President
Jolene Malamute, Treasurer
Brittany Woods-Orrison, Secretary
Dr. Jessica Black, Member
Travis Cole, Member
Steve Ginnis, Member
Caleb Peters, Member
Teisha Simmons, Member

Melissa Charlie
Executive Director

Fairbanks Native Association 2026 Board Election Results

The membership of Fairbanks Native Association elected three people to its board of directors.

Caleb J. Peters and Brittany Woods-Orrison join incumbent Travis Cole for three-year terms on the FNA board, ending in 2029. The elections were held March 6 at the 2026 FNA Annual Membership Meeting.

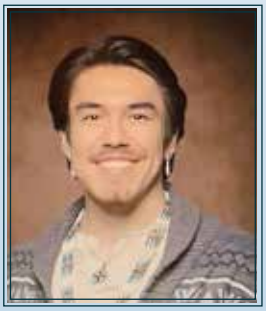
FNA thanks outgoing directors Sharon Hildebrand and Brenda Krupa for their service.

FNA is a nonprofit organization that provides behavioral health, mental health, educational and community programs. FNA services focuses on Alaska Natives, but are available to all.

Formed in 1963 by Alaska Natives, FNA is governed by its membership who are 18 years of age, live in the Fairbanks North Star Borough for 30 days and are Alaska Native/Native American or Indigenous or a descendant. They are the ones who elect the board of directors.



Travis Cole



Caleb J. Peters



Brittany Woods-Orrison

FNA celebrates culture, cuteness, and traditional regalia

In a celebration of Alaska Native culture, two young women and a baby boy were named as Fairbanks Native Association Miss FNA, FNA Princess and FNA Baby.

The new Miss FNA is Nanieezh Peter, 21, who is Neetsii Gwich'in, Dinè and Tohono O'odham. Her parents are Taa'ąįį Ch'igiionta' and Enei Peter, of Arctic Village and Arizona.

Nanieezh modeled traditional Athabascan, Dinè and Yup'ik regalia, and displayed a woven art piece. She also highlighted salves she made from Alaskan plants and caribou tallow. She earned a standing ovation for performing a song she wrote in Gwich'in, while giving English translations, called Vidrii Tr'ahtloo (Their Warming Heart).



Nanieezh Peter
2026 Miss FNA



Trinity Hardy
2026 FNA Princess

"I feel very fortunate to come from my family and be a part of my communities, including the larger Fairbanks Native community," she said.

"They have taught me and will continue to teach me my values as a young Indigenous woman. Thanks to you all, I value love, and the medicine that is laughter, and sharing space with community. I value sobriety, health, and mindfulness towards myself and others. I value harvesting, sharing, and eating our native foods."

Trinity Hardy is the FNA Princess. She is the daughter of Shannon and Michael Hardy. She wore a traditional beaded shawl with fringe, a fringed beaded belt, and Canadian Athabascan style dancing boots. She also wore high top beaded gloves and beaded earrings. Trinity's mother made most of the regalia, meant to be used for her high school graduation in May from Effie Kokrine Charter School.

Royalty continued on page three









Over 250 people attended the Gathering of Remembrance in May at the Golden Heart Plaza. Doyon, Limited, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Denakkanaaga, Interior Regional Housing Authority, the City of Fairbanks, and the Fairbanks North Star Borough join FNA in supporting this year's gathering. We remembered those who were missing, murdered or lost.

Royalty continued from page two...

Trinity is a Natural Helper at EKCS and has played basketball and volleyball. She likes to run, hunt and fish.

FNA Baby is Lennox Johnson, 18 months old. His parents are Niesje Tindall and Thomas Johnson. His tribal affiliations are Fort Yukon and Galena. Lennox was decked head-to-toe in a moosehide vest, boots, and headband made by his mother and grandmother Ethel Sakalaskas. Grandparents Lewis and Christine Johnson created a little wooden guitar with beaded flowers, and Lennox's mother made the beaded guitar strap.



Lennox Johnson
2026 FNA Baby

Lennox's favorite foods are moose meat, applesauce, and yogurt. He likes playing with his three brothers and singing along with music while dancing.

The pageants happened at the FNA Annual Potlatch, an event that began in 1963 and was the founding of FNA. Runners-up for Miss FNA are Alliyah Nay and Linda Pitka. Jinga Joy James was runner-up for FNA Baby.

2026 FNA JOM Basketball Winners

Congratulations to our Alaska Native Youth Basketball Tournament winners. We had 250 players, with 25 teams, from the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District and 11 rural communities. We saw great competitions and good conduct.

Fairbanks City Mayor Mindy O'Neall and FNSB Mayor Grier Hopkins led the tip-offs for the March 2026 tournament.

Elementary Division, Grades 3-5
Salmon Slayers
Laila Charlie
Piper Joseph
Carter Wilbur
Elijah Mayo
Cassidy Stickman
Ronan Thomas
Tanner Carroll
Tevita Mokofisi-Siereri
Laken Thurman
Madison Wigley

Middle Division, Grades 6-8
Doyon Leaders
Avery Demoski
Kylie Hildebrand
Jackson Joseph
Mary Nield
Nigel Vent
Matthew Haynes
Kaysen Kriska
Victor Kubanyi
Olivia Thurman
Eugenia Wassillie

High School Division, Grades 9-12
Native Pride
Leah Edwards
Brenten Everett
Max Tansey
Sean Volavong
Hailey Albert
Alivia Gonzalez
Gordon Vent
John Kubanyi
Sidney McCarty
Isaiah Snow

Every child deserves to feel safe and protected

By Karen Eddy, FNA Community Services Director
Speech given for Child Abuse Prevention Month.



About 40 people walked in support of FNA Community Services Child Abuse Aware Prevention Awareness Month.

I want to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude. Thank you for showing up, for caring, and for choosing to be a part of something greater than ourselves today.

We gather here during Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month, not just to walk, but to stand as a united community with one shared purpose: protecting our children.

Every child deserves to grow up feeling safe, loved, and supported. They deserve laughter, stability, and the opportunity to realize their full potential. Yet, we know that not every child has these experiences, and that is why today matters.

Today, every step we take is a step towards awareness. Each step is a step toward healing. And each step is a promise that we will not look away.

Child abuse prevention is not just the responsibility of one person, one program, or one agency; it is a shared responsibility. It belongs to parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, service providers, community leaders, and to anyone who has ever cared about a child. That includes every single person here today.

Prevention begins with connection. It begins with checking in on a family. It begins with offering support instead of judgment. It begins with creating spaces where children feel seen, heard, and valued. Sometimes prevention looks like something simple, like listening. Sometimes it looks like offering a helping hand. And sometimes it means stepping in and speaking up when something doesn't feel right. We all have a role to play.

We know the strength that comes from unity. We understand the importance of relationships, culture, and shared responsibility. Our children are not just individuals; they are the heart of our families, the keepers of our traditions, and the promise of our future.



Karen Eddy, FNA Community Services Director

When we protect a child, we protect generations.

But we also have to be honest. The work is not always easy.

Families face daily challenges-stress, financial hardship, substance use, trauma, and isolation. These struggles can create environments where children are at risk. That is why prevention is also about providing support. It's about making sure families have access to

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Safe children continued from page 4...

resources. It's about making sure parents are not alone. It's about building systems that uplift rather than punish. When we invest in families, we prevent harm before it begins.

And when harm does occur, we must respond with compassion, accountability, and care. We must ensure that children and survivors are supported, believed, and empowered with the tools to heal.

Today is also about hope. Hope that we can do even better. Hope that we can strengthen our communities. Hope that every child can grow up knowing they are safe and loved.

Think about why you are here. Maybe you are here for a child you love. Maybe you are here for the work you do every day. Maybe you are here because you believe in a better future. Whatever brought you here, it matters. Your presence matters. Your voice matters. And your actions make a difference.

Let today not be the only day we show up. Let this serve as a reminder that prevention is a year-round commitment. It happens in our homes, our schools, our workplaces, and throughout our community.

It happens in small moments. When we choose kindness. When we choose patience. When we choose to care for one another.

I want to leave you with this.

Every child deserves a champion who will stand up for them, protect them, and believe in their worth. Today, we are the champions.

So, when we leave this Tribal Hall today, let's continue to walk together with purpose. Walk together with strength. And let's walk together with love—love for every child, every family, and every future we are working to protect.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for standing with us. And thank you for walking this journey of prevention and hope together.



An Elder listens to messages about child abuse prevention.



A young one looks at a fun feature at the FNA Community Services Spring Fling, one of the events for Child Abuse Awareness Month in April 2026.



Young people have fun with crafts at FNA Community Services Spring Fling 2026



People gather at the Chief David Salmon Tribal Hall after the FNA Community Services Child Abuse Awareness Walk.

Graduation from page 1 continued...

life that we have no understanding of. Always seek their guidance. We don't know what the future has in store for us, but it is with their wisdom and knowledge that we can overcome any obstacle. Growth comes from learning not only from our own experiences, but from the mentorship and counsel of others.

You will fall, but get back up.

You will fail, but learn from it.

Come out of it better than you were before.

You will grieve. Loss is inevitable, but God will wipe your tears, and he will heal you.

You will also succeed, but stay humble.

You will be happy. You will be healthy. You are strong.

You will succeed. This is the first step.



Be true to yourself and be kind to yourself.

Never give up.

Go into the world with gratitude. Always seek knowledge. Never quit learning. Better yourself and love yourself.

Leave your mark in this world. Leave this world a better place because you are here. May your legacy be filledwith courage, purpose, and a service to others.

To the Effie Kokrine Charter School class of 2026, may God bless your trail, guide your heart, and strengthen your journey.

Effie Kokrine Charter School Class of 2026



Photo courtesy of FNSB School District.

Step by Step
The Power of Little Things

Facing a massive hurdle on the path to a better life can feel overwhelming—so much so that it often stops people from trying at all.

Fairbanks Native Association Behavioral Health Services staff emphasize that meaningful change doesn't have to happen all at once. They know that winning small battles is how we gain true ground in sobriety and mental health.

Why Little Things Matter: Behavioral health research shows that breaking larger goals into "micro-steps" prevents the brain's threat response from hijacking your motivation. Small victories trigger dopamine releases, which gradually rebuilds the neural pathways tied to reward, focus, and resilience.

Small Steps for Mental Health

If you are looking for simple ways to boost your well-being or support your sobriety today, try focusing on these bite-sized actions:

Move Your Body

Get outside: Take a short walk or hike to clear your mind.

Find your rhythm: Dance, try a yoga flow, or take a self-defense class.

Get active: Play a sport or shoot some hoops.

Connect with Loved Ones

Be present: Play with your child or spend intentional time together.

Lean on community: Join a local youth organization or seek out family resources.

Reach out: Keep in touch with family and friends, or do an activity with others.

Speak up: Talk about your problems with a trusted person just to get it out of your system.

Care for Yourself and Others

Pet therapy: Hug a pet to immediately lower your stress levels.

Lift others up: Look out for other people and offer a helping hand.

Fuel your body: Eat healthy foods and drink less alcohol.

Prioritize rest: Protect your sleep to let your brain recharge.

#Littlethings



Connect with loved ones.



Exercise is good for your mental health.



Spend time with your child.

Trauma is what you experience, not who you are.

Intergenerational Trauma: A cycle that can be ended in understanding.

No child is broken, just in pain.

Pain is mandatory. Suffering is optional. Healing is work.

Trauma is not a lifetime sentence.

Feel It. Heal it.

Progress, not perfection.

Healing is not linear.

Protect your peace.

You are allowed to outgrow survival mode.

You can be healing and still hurting.

From FNA BHS

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