



CENTRAL COUNCIL

Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 2, 2009

Suicide Prevention Symposium Held

Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Central Council), and the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Behavioral Health/Prevention and Early Intervention Services, provided a Suicide Prevention Symposium June 1-2, 2009 at the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall in Juneau, Alaska. The symposium was initiated to begin community suicide intervention/prevention planning.



President Martin and Barbara Franks

President Bill Martin welcomed over 80 participants and guests that included Southeast tribal leaders, Central Council, State of Alaska, Alaska State Legislature, ANB Grand Camp, Sealaska, Sealaska Heritage Institute, SEARHC, and representatives from 14 Southeast communities—Angoon, Craig, Douglas, Hoonah, Juneau, Kake, Kasaan, Ketchikan, Klawock, Klukwan, Metlakatla, Petersburg, Wrangell, and Yakutat, among others.

Day one consisted of several participants sharing their stories and presentations were provided by James Gallanos, State of Alaska; John Martin Sr.,

T'aakdeintaan, X'āawk' Hit (Big Sockeye House clan leader); and Central Council's suicide prevention taskforce members Bill Martin, John Hawkins, Colleen Felkl, Jeri Museth, Les Hamley and Ric Iannolino. The presentations touched on suicide statistics, a Tlingit perspective of depression and suicide, myth vs reality/common signs of suicide, reactions to grief & loss/acute traumatic events, and assessment and planning.

"Sometimes it is difficult to reach out for help, but as we saw in the two-day suicide prevention symposium, we are not alone, that we share the same sentiment that as Alaskan people we are resilient and we can move forward to a positive goal to help with suicide prevention in our respective communities," said Barbara Franks, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, filling the seat of a family member who completed his suicide.

Day two offered participants key actions and essential discussion/interaction with Le Florendo facilitating "Developing a Community Plan for Youth at Risk". Taskforce members provided community leaders with information that was used to construct the shell of a plan that tribal leaders will now take back to their own communities to build customized intervention/prevention plans. A performance from the Woosh.ji.een dance group closed the symposium on a positive note.

Thank you to the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council for providing travel funds for representatives to attend from our Southeast communities; Sealaska Corporation for providing a luncheon; BBC-HRDC (Berners Bay Consortium-Human Resources Development Corporation) and Coeur Alaska for providing the symposium's daily refreshments; and Central Council's Tribal Family & Youth Services Department and Community Services & Self-Governance Division for their efforts in coordinating this event.

"Central Council recognizes the need to bring this serious problem to the forefront. We have wanted to bring the Southeast communities together to address suicide prevention for a long time, but it wasn't until we received help from the State that we were able to do this," said President Martin. "We hope to partner again with the State of Alaska to continue this important community suicide intervention/prevention planning. Statistically, each death touches tribal families—not only within their community, but within several communities."

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