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FY 25 Youth-led LeadOn Community Projects

In Alaska State Fiscal Year 2025, the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA) distributed twelve mini-grants across 10 different communities and one statewide organization to support youth-led community projects. The mini-grants were funded by the Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) Youth Pregnancy and Violence Prevention and staff time to administer the mini-grants was funded by the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA). ANDVSA supported LeadOn Community Projects in Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kiana, Nenana, Petersburg, Seward, Valdez, and two community projects in Sitka. Intending to build healthy relationship skills and strengthen leadership abilities, each LeadOn Community Project reflected a focus on at least one of the following **protective factors**:

- Positive Connection to other positive adults
- Positive Connection to Family
- Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community
- Safe, supportive, friendly school (a proxy for a positive school climate)
- Feel like you matter to other people
- Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive, meaningful activities
- Emotional regulation skills
- Connection to my Culture and positive cultural identity
- Access to Resources

Centering on protective factors allowed for a diversity of community projects, which ensured the intersecting needs of each community were addressed across the state. It also encouraged both youth and mentors to play an active role in tailoring the project to their passions, interests, and community needs.

Centering Youth As Leaders: LeadOn is built upon the pillar of establishing youth as leaders within their communities. This is done not only by equipping youth with the tools and skills needed to become leaders, but also by having them identify and establish opportunities to utilize those skills within the community. Part of accomplishing that is

through the mini-grant process, where youth teams receive funds to facilitate a project that they begin developing at LeadOn. The youth teams for LeadOn were asked to identify the biggest risk factors and the most prominent protective factors within their home community. After doing so, they began brainstorming ideas that became more defined throughout the mini-grant process. These projects are designed by teams specifically for their local communities, which makes each project unique and tailored to the needs of the town, community, and region where the youth live. This approach enhances the diversity of the projects, making them richer and more engaging.

Community Project Reach: The projects engaged youth, adults, and entire communities throughout the state of Alaska. The following table breaks down the reach of these projects by community, including youth and adult participation (i.e., the number of youth and adults who helped with planning and implementation) as well as community reach. For community reach, it includes the number of individuals who received healthy relationship information and were exposed to project messages in a variety of forms.

Community name	Community Project Focus	Mini-Grant Amount	Youth Participation	Adult Participation	Community Reach
ATAA	Healthy Relationships Education	\$2,000	10	4	70
Bethel-TAAV	Healthy Relationships Education, Community Connectedness	\$2,000	12	4	646
Fairbanks-FQYC	Healthy Relationships, mental health, and socio-emotional skill building	\$2,000	5	3	95
Juneau- GRIT	Community Connectedness, leadership skill building, Connection to Positive Adults	\$2,000	15	8	95
Ketchikan-KYPE	Healthy Relationships Education, Connection to Positive Adults	\$2,000	7	2	583
Kiana-Opt-In Kiana	Culture Connectedness, Wellness Education	\$2,000	6	5	112
Nenana	Community Connectedness, Connection to Positive Adults	\$1,000	25	5	250

Petersburg	Bullying, socio-emotional skill building, community connectedness	\$2,000	7	1	18
Seward	Mental Health, resilience building	\$2,000	15	6	175
Sitka- SYLC	Gender Roles, Mental Health, Healthy Masculinity	\$2,000	11	3	18,037
Sitka- Peer Education	Healthy Relationships education & messaging	\$2,000	10	3	12,445
Valdez	Mental health, living with invisible disabilities	\$2,000	3	1	190
TOTAL NUMBERS		\$23,000	126	45	32,716

Youth interacted with their community in a variety of ways. These included but were not limited to:

- Community Radio PSAs
- Community events
- Peer-to-peer educational presentations
- Cultural activities
- Mentoring
- Youth-to-adult presentations
- Training opportunities
- Youth conference
- Sharing resources

Community: Alaskan Teens Against Abuse (ATAA—Statewide)

Partnering Organizations:

- In Juneau:
 - o AWARE
 - o Zach Gordon Youth Center
 - o The Grind
 - o Heritage Coffee
- In Valdez:
 - o Advocates for Victims of Violence (AVV)
 - o Pamela Verfaillie (Valdez High School Librarian)
 - o Civic Center Cinema
 - o Valdez Parks and Recreation
 - o The Coffee Co.



Project Description: Alaska Teens Against Abuse (ATAA) is a statewide group comprised of ten youth leaders from across Alaska. Since its conception, ATAA has focused on promoting healthy relationships and increasing awareness around the topic of consent. This year, ATAA continued and deepened those efforts by developing an interactive Consent Education Matters workshop. The workshop provided an overview of the

concept of consent and explored how it shows up in both romantic situations and everyday life. It delved into Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data on interpersonal violence in teen relationships as well as Alaska's statute on consent and how to follow the law. Participants increased their comfort with the topic and built communication skills by practicing the use of consent language during the workshop. Attendees received additional resources on the topic and a personalized certificate of participation afterwards.

This project reached 55 youth and more than a dozen adults across Alaska, not counting online interaction with videos and promotions. ATAA facilitated the workshop three times: twice in-person (in Juneau and Valdez) and once virtually for a statewide audience. ATAA successfully implemented pre- and post-tests for each workshop. Youth attendees consistently reported an increased knowledge of consent, including nuances around age gaps and power dynamics. Each workshop provided an invaluable space for youth to be vulnerable with support, ask sensitive questions, learn from peer educators, and receive vital guidance and resources about consent. ATAA demonstrated great courage in hosting these workshops, deepening their own public speaking and facilitation skills in the process. The success of this project highlights how many teens across Alaska are eager and willing to learn about consent, boundaries, and safety. Thoughtful details (like sending personalized certificates to each attendee afterwards) demonstrated care and respect towards each participant while reinforcing the importance of consent.



Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Positive connection to other positive adults:** ATAA is a partnership between youth leaders across Alaska and an adult mentor. This year, ATAA also began working with Sitka and Bethel youth leadership groups and their supporting adult mentors on a shared project focused on healthy relationships.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community:** ATAA's workshops impacted two specific communities (Juneau and Valdez youth) as well as the larger statewide violence prevention community (LeadOn participants). ATAA promoted messages of safety and support within their workshops.
- **Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive meaningful activities:** ATAA provides a supportive and empowering space for youth leaders to connect, learn, and engage in advocacy. These workshops provided a skill development opportunity for research, writing, content development, public speaking, and facilitation.
- **Connection to my Culture and positive cultural Identity:** ATAA included perspectives from different cultural contexts within these workshops.
- **Access to Resources:** ATAA shared consent-focused resources with workshop participants.

Community: Bethel

Partnering Organizations:

- Walsh-Sheppard
- ANDVSA



**TEENS ACTING
AGAINST VIOLENCE**

Project Description: Teens Acting Against Violence (TAAV) is a violence prevention and youth empowerment program at the Tundra Women's Coalition. This year, Bethel youth leaders partnered with marketing communications firm Walsh-Sheppard to strengthen TAAV's brand identity and expand their media presence. This project included redesign of the group's logo, production of promotional merchandise, and development of new social media content (scheduled to air in early fall).

The youth leaders' input helped guide each stage of planning: from the logo redesign and merchandise purchased to the interview questions and video messaging developed (on consent and healthy relationships). This project reflects TAAV's strong foundation in social media content development as well as their commitment to engage in the challenges and complexities of the creative process. In partnering with Walsh Sheppard, TAAV learned how to more effectively share their knowledge with peers and increase their overall impact in the community. As a result, these fifteen youth leaders anticipate reaching a projected 500 teens and 100 adults in the community through merchandise distribution and social media viewership.

TAAV's strength and values shine through their new logo. The sunrise is a symbol of hope, visibility, and positive change. It powerfully embodies how important Bethel youth leadership is within the larger violence prevention movement in Alaska.

Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Positive connection to other positive adults:** TAAV partnered with SAFE in Dillingham at the WAYC-UP conference this spring. The youth leaders presented on healthy relationships and consent, engaged in dialogue with a wider group, and connected with new adult mentors.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community:** Through social media, TAAV's new messaging on healthy relationships and consent will be shared across communities in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

- **Safe, supportive, friendly school (a proxy for a positive school climate):** TAAV's messaging is geared towards youth and will contribute to safer, more supportive, and increasingly informed spaces for teens.
- **Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive meaningful activities:** TAAV meets year-round to engage in healthy out-of-school programming.
- **Connection to my Culture and positive cultural Identity:** TAAV's new merchandise, logo, and social media messaging will inform even more youth in the area about the group's offerings (which include culturally informed programming and resources).

Community: Fairbanks

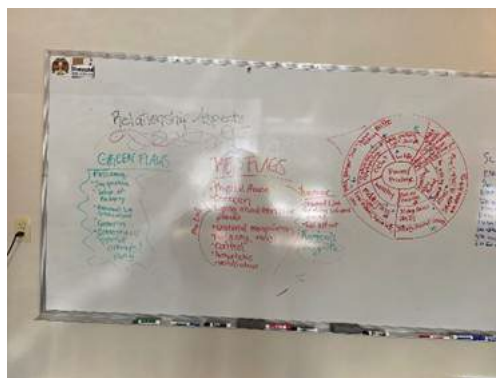
Partnering Organizations:

- Native Movement
- Fairbanks Wellness Coalition

Project Description: The Fairbanks Queer Youth Collective (FQYC) is a hub for queer youth leadership, education, and empowerment. Through mentorship, workshops, and youth-led initiatives, FQYC fosters leadership development and provides a space for young people to organize, share experiences, and make an impact in their community. For this project, five youth leaders brought together teens from across Interior Alaska for a two-day, peer-led gathering centered on connection, skill-building, and knowledge sharing. The event explored important issues impacting youth, including relationships, consent, bullying, substance use, and the environment (among other topics). Participants were also invited to engage in self-care activities and wellness practices, deepening their positive coping skills and re/connecting to their own culture.



With support from adult mentors, Fairbanks youth leaders planned the entire event: developing content, creating graphics, coordinating logistics, facilitating workshops, and more! 85 youth and 10 adults from the region attended. The gathering was a great success- evident in the level of interest and willingness of participants to engage in these critical conversations and develop relationships with fellow youth leaders. At the heart of this event was something fundamental to violence prevention: a deep sense of belonging.



Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Positive connection to other positive adults:** FQYC is part of the larger Fairbanks Queer Collective, which partners with Native Movement. Both organizations prioritize ongoing youth mentorship and leadership opportunities. This event paired youth leaders with adult mentor support.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community:** FQYC is an identity-based community group that cultivates belonging. The event they hosted this year reflects those values and practices.
- **Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive, meaningful activities:** FQYC is a community-based group; youth regularly participate in and plan both empowerment and educational events in Fairbanks. This event reflected those efforts, evident in the kinds of workshops facilitated and the wellness practices offered.
- **Emotional regulation skills, to be culturally sensitive:** Participants in the event engaged in both self-care and community care practices. The space centered accessibility and sobriety.
- **Connection to my Culture and positive cultural Identity:** Participants watched Wildhood (a coming-of-age film about Indigenous identity) and discussed tangible ways to re/connect to culture, experience belonging, and build community. Most of the attendees are Indigenous or Latinx, and the film was relevant to their experiences.
- **Access to Resources:** FQYC facilitated peer-to-peer skill-sharing during this event.

Community: Kiana

Partnering Organizations:

- Maniilaq Wellness Association
- ANDVSA
- Board members
- Kiana School

Project Description: Opt-In Kiana planned for a Wellness and Inupiaq Dance Conference on May 27-30, where youth from nearby communities would be able to participate in workshops about healthy relationships and safety skills, among other traditional activities such as skin sewing and Inupiaq dancing.

Ultimately, the conference was rescheduled to June 25-28 because the charter company, Lee's Sea Air, was down a charter plane that week in May and could not transport participants from nearby communities to Kiana. Leading up to the rescheduled event, a community member in Kiana passed away suddenly. The funeral was scheduled for June 26th amidst the



Sierra is reviewing the new Maniilaq Wellness curriculum with an intern

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conference. Out of tradition, Opt-In Kiana asked the grieving family if they could hold the conference and run the activities as planned. The family requested that the activities for the week be canceled and the event rescheduled. Honoring the wishes of the family, Opt-In Kiana rescheduled the conference for the fall.

Despite the conference being postponed twice, Opt-In Kiana quickly pivoted to use their funding to train Sierra in the Maniilaq Wellness Curriculum using a train-the-trainer model. The Maniilaq Wellness Curriculum covers various wellness topics such as bullying prevention, mental health and processing grief, connection to culture, and healthy relationships. Sierra, a former intern, graduated and has taken on the

role of the Intern Coordinator. In this new role, she is the lead in educating and working with the Opt-In Kiana interns in their after-school programming. Opt-In Kiana plans to have Sierra train the Opt-In Kiana interns in the curriculum moving forward and to have their interns use peer-to-peer education in their afterschool programming.

By using these funds to invest in their Intern Coordinator, a former youth in their programming, Opt-In Kiana is taking actions to sustain and increase the longevity of their staff and the work they do with the youth. Now having access to a fully developed curriculum, the interns at Opt-In Kiana can expand on their peer-to-peer education efforts in their community and extend their reach.

Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Positive connection to other positive adults:** Opt-In Kiana provides youth with opportunities to connect with positive adults in their after-school programming.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community:** Opt-In Kiana has been a pillar in the community and has continued to partner with the Kiana School District to provide a safe place for youth to go after school.
- **Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive, meaningful activities:** Opt-In Kiana provides youth with after-school programming opportunities to participate in fun, age-appropriate activities in their community. With the Maniilaq Wellness Curriculum, they will be able to engage in meaningful conversations about healthy relationships, bullying prevention, connection to culture, and mental health.
- **Connection to my Culture and positive cultural identity:** The Maniilaq Wellness Curriculum is culturally relevant and includes activities and guided conversations about connecting to their elders and ways of life.

Community: Ketchikan

Partnering Organizations:

- WISH
- Ketchikan High School
- Schoenbar Middle School
- Ketchikan Community Foundation
- Ketchikan Youth for Change
- Ketchikan Wellness Coalition
- ANDVSA

Project Description: Using the funds from this mini-grant, Ketchikan Youth Peer Educators (KYPE) completed a few ongoing projects related to healthy relationships to support teen dating violence prevention efforts in their community. They designed a new logo for KYPE and were able to purchase merchandise such as sweaters to hand out during their peer-to-peer outreach events. This allowed them to continue to build and strengthen their presence in their community and overall outreach.



During Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Awareness Month (TDVAPM), KYPE hosted peer-led educational sessions for the 8th and 9th graders in their community about navigating relationships, exploring the spectrum of relationships, and how to be a supportive friend and peer to others. In addition to their educational outreach, they hosted a school-wide interactive activity to discuss what a healthy relationship looks like, which was held throughout February. These various outreach events helped to normalize discussions among youth about healthy relationships and how to navigate unhealthy and/or abusive relationships.

Lastly, the youth were able to use some of their funding to make a public service announcement (PSA) about healthy relationships. They were able to use their creativity and artistic abilities to write, direct, and produce the PSA with the support of their mentor. The goal was to finish the PSA to launch it at the start of February to kick off TDVAPM. However, they ran into some technical difficulties with the platform and audio. They missed their initial deadline to run the PSA in February, but they were still able to produce and show

their final product later in the school year. The hope is to be able to use this PSA in the upcoming TDVAPM. With this funding, youth were able to participate in brainstorming, planning, and leading numerous events and activities promoting healthy relationships in their community.

Protective Factors Addressed

- **Positive connection to other positive adults:** KYPE allows youth to connect with Women In Safe Homes staff throughout the school year during their programming.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly school:** Throughout their educational outreach, KYPE's active presence is contributing to a safe, supportive school by sharing information about healthy relationships and resources to seek support.
- **Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive, meaningful activities:** KYPE meets once weekly to prepare lessons, work on projects and connect while getting support from adults.
- **Emotional regulation skills, to be culturally sensitive:** Youth participating in KYPE learn about emotional regulation and healthy coping skills and practice incorporating these skills into their school presentations.
- **Connection to my Culture and positive cultural identity:** KYPE is built on inclusive practices and exploring and celebrating all identities.
- **Access to resources:** KYPE was able to provide local and national hotlines, along with further online resources for questions about relationships and/or seeking support for unhealthy relationships during their TDVAPM.



Community: Juneau

Partnering Organizations:

- Juneau School District
- Tlingit & Haida
- Lam's Lemonade
- NAMI
- Alaska Job Center
- YEP Program
- Barlet Regional Hospital
- SEARHC
- Goldbelt Corp
- Zach Gordon Youth Center
- Juneau Public Library
- Coast Guard

Project Description: GRIT is a student leadership group for 10th-12th graders attending Yaak̄oosgé Daakahídi High School (YDHS). The youth group is focused on improving their school climate to make it a safer, more supportive, and friendly place for all, along with promoting mental health awareness. The youth group used the mini-grant funds to host multiple interactive school events throughout the year. In late March, they hosted a job and resource fair in their school's library, and over 10 vendors participated in showcasing internship and employment opportunities for youth. Four students were able to obtain summer employment, and one student received an internship at Barlet's Regional Hospital because of the connections built at the resource fair. This job and resource fair was able to provide youth with opportunities to invest in their future beyond high school and build lifelong skills through professional development. Additionally, GRIT was able to weigh in on an upcoming mental health panel at school and advocate for student-led discussions instead. Leading the charge, GRIT was able to plan for student-led discussions and tables of wellness that included activities for students to reflect on, along with mental health resources.

In May, GRIT organized and planned YDHS's **first** school carnival for students and their families. About 90 people attended, including 75 students, 11 families, and four different non-profit agencies that came with volunteers to help host booths and facilitate activities for attendees. Tlingit & Haida were generous to offer their space for the carnival to take place off school grounds. Despite logistical difficulties in navigating the funding with the Juneau School District, GRIT was able to host the event successfully with an engaging

turnout in their community. The youth were able to foster and enhance their teamwork and leadership skills in planning and organizing these multiple events for their school. With the support of their mentor, GRIT created safe spaces for youth to connect with peers and foster a sense of community within their school

Protective Factors Addressed:

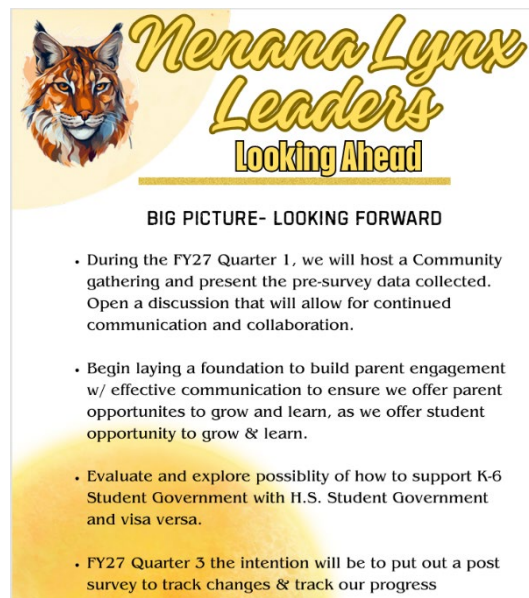
- **Positive connection to other positive adults:** Youth participating in GRIT are connected to supportive adults throughout the school year. Additionally, the school staff at YDHS facilitates GRIT, so youth are connected to supported adults in and out of the classroom.
- **Positive connection to family:** The school carnival allowed students to have an opportunity to engage with families and have a shared positive, fun experience with caregivers/ parents.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community:** GRIT was able to build connections to other community partners throughout some of their events and was able to provide opportunities for youth to feel connected to the community.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly school (a proxy for a positive school climate):** GRIT is a school-based youth leadership group that is committed to making YDHS a safer and more engaging school for all its students. GRIT was able to host multiple events throughout the school year to cultivate connectivity amongst its peers.
- **Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive, meaningful activities:** GRIT provides youth with meaningful, positive activities outside of school, such as hosting the first school carnival.
- **Emotional regulation skills, to be culturally sensitive:** GRIT teaches youth how to cope with stress, shared decision-making, and healthy communication skills.
- **Connection to my culture and positive cultural identity:** GRIT is dedicated to inclusive practices in their programming.
- **Access to resources:** GRIT was able to bring businesses and non-profits to their school for a job and resource fair for youth to apply to future opportunities outside of school. Additionally, the mental health student-led discussion event provided hotlines and resources for those seeking mental health support.

Community: Nenana

Partnering Organizations:

- Railbelt Mental Health and Addictions
- Nenana High School
- Nenana Living Center
- Tanana Chiefs Conference
- Prevention & Wellness
- Fairbanks Wellness Coalition
- OVC Healy Lake Village
- Interior AIDS Association
- City of Nenana
- Nenana Ice Classic
- Nenana Tribal Council

Project Description: The youth group wanted to use the funds to engage with their peers at Nenana High School and create a meaningful student- led event focused on strengthening community connection and wellbeing. Originally, the group decided to host a Mental Health BBQ event open to all interested community members to promote discussions about mental health and provide resources. However, the youth decided to shift the scope of the community project from a one-time event to building a collective youth movement in the city of Nenana. To do so, they needed to reach out and engage with other leaders in the community to garner support and investment in their youth-led initiatives.



Two concerns that the youth group wanted to address were that there was a lack of opportunities for youth, and organizations serving youth were working in silos. Unclear communication between agencies limited the information and awareness of services serving youth in the community. Additionally, investment in after-school activities has diminished throughout the years in the school district. By prioritizing youth voices, the group decided to have a student-led discussion that featured resources available to youth

to bring awareness to students, wrapping up the event with a community luncheon for students and the community.



In preparation for the event, the youth dedicated hours alongside their mentor to discuss the logistics of the venue, catering, and the objectives of the student-led discussion. Building on their leadership skills, they coordinated with several community agencies to secure resource booths for the event. Additionally, they met with the principal of Nenana High School to arrange for the event to take place in the school library.

They also sent invitation letters to various community leaders to encourage their attendance at the event.

Being intentional with their goals for this event, they created a presentation that outlined their observations as youth in the community, concerns of students, and offered potential solutions. To follow along, they created activity packets to hand out to participants that outlined some of the student initiatives taking place and space to reflect on how their organization could assist.

This event marked the beginning of rebuilding the bridge between youth and adults in the community. The group was pleasantly surprised by the strong support and commitments from various community members. Railbelt Mental Health and Addictions plans to create and launch a pre-survey in the community during the first quarter of FY27. They will also engage in ongoing discussions about the data collected to inform decisions about expanding opportunities for youth investment in the community. Additionally, with the support of the Nenana School District, students are exploring the possibility of reviving the student government class, which would enable them to participate in the Alaska Association of Student Government. The youth group throughout the community project demonstrated their leadership skills through effective planning, time management, and collaboration with city and community agencies.

Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Positive Connection to other positive adults:** The youth group is connected to supportive adults throughout the school year and is connected to the Railbelt Mental Health and Addictions prevention coordinator, who is also their mentor.

- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community:** The youth group was able to build connections to other community partners throughout some of their events and was able to provide opportunities for youth to feel connected to the community.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly school (a proxy for positive school climate):** The youth group is committed to improving their school environment and bringing back after-school activities to youth, such as the Alaska Association of Student Government.
- **Engaged in out-of-school time programs and positive meaningful activities:** The group provides youth with opportunities to have meaningful conversations and a safe space to explore their interests with the support of a mentor.
- **Access to Resources:** Nenana's youth group was able to partner with community partners to secure tables to present available resources for youth at the event.

Community: Petersburg

Partnering Organizations:

- Muskeg Wellness
- Petersburg High School
- Petersburg Middle School
- ANDVSA

Project Description:

After participating in LeadOn's mini-grant planning sessions, the Petersburg youth team identified different risk factors that they felt were most prevalent in their community. As a result, the youth in Petersburg decided to focus on the issue of bullying in school. They met with other youth to gain a broader perspective on bullying within the community. After collecting data from youth participants, the group shared their findings with the school, including support staff and the principal. In doing this, the youth advocated for change within the school environment to help create a safer, more inclusive, and more welcoming place for young individuals to grow and prosper. Unfortunately, the school was unable to follow up with some of the requests made by the students.



Tide Turners' New Logo



Tide Turners Leadership Group Recruitment Poster

As an outcome of this conversation, they realized that there was a lack of youth voice involved in decision-making; they created a youth group called Tide Turners Youth Leadership. This group was established by youth for youth to provide a safe space for discussing important issues within their community. This project was developed primarily using youth voices and ideas, with support from their adult mentor.

The group meets monthly to share experiences, address concerns, and develop action plans. Recognizing that young people have busy schedules, the team utilized grant funds to purchase prizes and provide stipends to the youth organizers. This approach not only demonstrates the value of their time but also incentivizes continued participation.

In addition to establishing a more consistent youth leadership group, the Tide Turners hosted and attended a three-day Muskeg Wellness training that used the YES! Youth

Empowerment curriculum to build upon their socio-emotional skills, including building empathy, practicing self-reflection, and learning about mutual empowerment and systemic awareness. In total, fifteen students received leadership and peer support training through the group's efforts, which represents 5% of the middle and high school population in Petersburg. Within the upcoming year, Tide Turners hopes to find a new location to meet and increase their scheduled meetings throughout the month.

Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Positive connection to Positive Adults:** Youth connected with adults across the Petersburg community to support their efforts
- **Safe, supportive, friendly community:** Youth actively sought out opportunities to create a healthier school environment by advocating to stop bullying
- **Safe, supportive, friendly school:** The youth talked to students both in the middle and high school to make their voices feel heard and seek out ways to help eliminate bullying.
- **Emotional regulation skills:** The youth participated in Muskeg Wellness training, which taught them emotional regulation skills and cultural humility.
- **Access to resources:** The youth received resources through additional training and provided resources to youth who participated in their meetings.
- **Engaged in out-of-school programs/meaningful activities:** Youth spent time out of school coming together to meet, plan, and develop strategies to address bullying in the community.
- **Positive Cultural Identity:** Muskeg Wellness training emphasized the role cultural connection can play in emotional regulation.



Community: Seward

Partnering Organizations:

- Seward Prevention Coalition
- Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
- KMTA
- ANDVSA

Project Description: The Seward youth group, Sources of Strength (SOS), gathered during the LeadOn event to identify the various protective factors within their community. They also discussed ways to address the risk factors that negatively impact young people. As a result, the team came together and created a ‘Shirts of Strength’ T-Shirt Design Contest that the entire school district would be eligible to participate in. To launch the art contest, SOS gave a 45-minute presentation about the Sources of Strength framework, along with highlighting available mental health services and hotlines available to youth in Seward. Leading up to the event launch, the youth group intentionally created the rubric and criteria needed for each art submission.

The project itself asked participants to incorporate a “Strength” from the Sources of Strength Wheel.

These topics included mental health, family, friends, mentors, physical health, spirituality, generosity, and healthy activities. By featuring strengths on t-shirts that will be distributed and worn across the school regularly, the youth team wanted to create an environment that was healthier and more supportive, especially in the school setting.

Youth members elicited feedback from the school community and came together to select a winner from the contest that best represented the purpose of the art contest. The final design features a heart surrounded by the words ‘You Matter To Someone’. It was selected because it stands as a continuous reminder that we all matter to someone even when in



our moments of loneliness. There was hope that these T-shirts would help create a school environment that was more supportive and caring.

After the design was selected, the design winner was allowed to speak about what the design meant to them. In doing so, the youth group was able to empower youth voices and share youth experiences in a way that was meaningful and impactful, as her testimony was noted as valuable and important by those who attended.

After distributing the shirts to both students and adults in the school, peer leaders decided to wear their shirts every other Friday. The intention behind this is to establish themselves as pillars of support within the school community, both directly and indirectly. By involving the school staff in their efforts, it demonstrated to the youth that the adults care about and value their efforts to make Seward School District a safer and more supportive place for all.



T-Shirt Contest Participants along with Sources of Strength Youth

Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Safe, supportive, friendly school:** Seeing the T-shirts in the school environment helped create a healthier, safer space that felt more inclusive to students
- **Positive connection to adults:** Adults supported the contest and wore the T-Shirts consistently, demonstrating their support for youth and creating a place for them to connect with the students.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly community:** Garnering student buy-in and support also happened at a community level, helping youth feel more supported out of school as well.



Seward High School Students meeting, with some wearing their T-Shirt

Community: Sitka – Sitka Youth Leader Committee (SYLC)

Partnering Organizations:

- Mount Edgecumbe High School
- Pacific High School
- Sitka High School
- Sitka Sentinel
- KCAW – Raven Radio
- CDVSA/PPPG
- ANDVSA/DELTA
- SAFV
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- Sitka Counseling
- Youth Advocates of Sitka

Project Description: SYLC youth have established themselves as a crucial part of their respective community, as they continue to build upon the impact they have made over the years. More specifically, SYLC increased its community reach and developed interactive toolkits for its three existing campaigns: Mental Health Is Health, Mold Your Masculinity, and the Equity Campaign.

Every part of SYLC's campaigns this year features youth voices and was built from ideas stemming from youth members, starting from initial brainstorming to developing key messaging, planning, implementation, and workshop facilitation. SYLC members, with the support of adult mentors and unaffiliated teens, also spent time becoming certified in teen Mental Health First Aid. Building upon this, the committee

also facilitated the **first** Youth and Adult Mental Health Cohort, which is designed to address mental health challenges that youth are facing across the community with support from school staff and community partners. Youth members led the Youth/Adult Mental Health Cohort, from brainstorming agenda items to facilitating discussion.

SYLC Members invested a lot of time preparing for the Youth/Adult Mental Health Cohort in response to mental health challenges across our community. The first meeting of the cohort was very successful, with youth members facilitating a collaborative brainstorm that resulted in tangible goals for the group to work towards. Goals include coordinating and disseminating resources, developing coordinated response systems and prevention



SYLC Youth posing together as a team

efforts, bolstering mental health training and education, and making support groups available. This meeting left both youth and adult members feeling energized and motivated to address our community's challenges together.

Each of SYLC's campaigns and their toolkits originated from youth members. The campaign toolkits served as templates for teen members to offer workshops/presentations about the topics this year. Tapping into the leadership of SYLC Interns allowed the group to be more youth-managed than if the supporting work was completed solely by adult mentors. While SYLC's project topics vary, the core intent remains to initiate conversation around difficult topics that impact youth in our community and provide the resources needed to encourage continued learning and practice allyship.



SYLC Youth working on the LeadOn Mini-Grant Planning Process

Furthermore, these conversations normalize and give voice to the experiences of youth who may have faced challenges relating to a number of these topics. SYLC's mental health work destigmatizes conversations around mental health, providing both youth and adults with the encouragement and resources needed to recognize and respond to mental health decline in youth. SYLC youth also illuminate how systems of oppression can impact an individual's mental health.

SYLC's gender norms work brings attention to and reduces limiting and unhealthy expectations based on gender, thus creating a more accepting, inclusive, and equitable community. SYLC's equity work provides community members with language to identify, name, and begin dismantling systems of oppression directly impacting them and those around them.

Team members were also able to present on their 'Minecraft IRL' workshop at LeadOn, the statewide youth leadership conference. This workshop focused on educating other young people about equity and how they can use their voices to uplift the voices of others. Across the entirety of in-person events facilitated and hosted by SYLC, 95 youths and 36 adults were directly impacted. When including the number of



SYLC youth, their Mentors, and their Certificates of Completion

youth and adults reached via media channels, such as PSAs, ads, and social media, 6,906 youth and over 11,000 adults were impacted through this work. Through their participation in these events as a member of SYLC, one youth member said she “learned that youth can make a big impact in their communities even when it can seem like youth don't have the power to”.

Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Connection to other positive adults:** SYLC youth worked with several adult mentors, built relationships with filmmakers and a graphic designer, and had meaningful connections with all the adults who showed up at the ‘Dear Men’ community event.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community and school:** This event incorporated an inclusive space for community and school members, promoting authenticity and connection.
- **Engagement in out-of-school time programs and positive, meaningful activities:** SYLC youth meet regularly in a safe, supportive environment to explore challenging, real topics with support.
- **Emotional regulation skills:** The event incorporated healthy coping and regulation practices.
- **Access to resources:** The event and the campaign actively share local and state resources.

Social media, along with traditional media outlets such as TV, radio, and newspapers, were utilized by the Peer Education team to engage youth and adults across the State of Alaska. Using media sources allowed them to reach nearly 11,000 individuals, comprising both youth and adults. The team created newsletters, used social media platforms, and developed and released a video series and various public service announcements (PSAs) to educate both adults and youth about teen dating violence

Peer Education helps normalize discussions about healthy and unhealthy relationships within their communities and shares resources for those in unhealthy relationships. Members conducted a needs assessment to identify challenges they observed in their communities concerning teen relationships. They then utilized this information to inform their planning and revise the curriculum for school use. To facilitate conversations aimed at adults, the teens host community events that bring together members from various groups across the city. This year they hosted a potluck and bracelet-making activity. During this event, community members created friendship bracelets that represented the qualities of a healthy relationship that were most meaningful to them.



Sitka Peer Educators, their Mentors, and their Certificates of Completion

By acquiring the skills necessary for delivering these presentations, youth become better equipped to address historically silenced topics and impact their peers profoundly in Alaska. In an end-of-year survey, all peer educators (100%) reported feeling more comfortable discussing healthy relationships, consent, and dating violence, as well as having a better understanding of how to support individuals in unhealthy relationships. Many peer educators noted that the best part of the program was the sense of community they built together as a group. Throughout the year, the students became closer and dedicated shared energy towards achieving the group's goals. This energetic and supportive environment made peer education a fun experience, allowing the youth to collaborate effectively in reaching their peers.

The Peer Education program had a positive impact on the youth it reached through presentations. Surveys revealed that participants left the Peer Education sessions with several valuable skills: 97% of students could identify where different relationships fall on the relationship spectrum, 98% could name at least three examples of red flags in unhealthy relationships, 96% could articulate their rights and responsibilities in a relationship, and 91% were able to correctly identify an abuser's behaviors during the honeymoon phase.

Peer Education members gained important skills from this initiative, including public speaking, project planning and implementation, facilitation, and outreach. Additionally, they learned about healthy relationships, such as how to identify red flags, understand the cycle of abuse, recognize the dynamics of power and control in unhealthy relationships, grasp the basic principles of affirmative consent, and define their rights and responsibilities in relationships or friendships. They also became familiar with resources available to support individuals experiencing violence

One peer education team member expressed, “Peer Education taught me to be a more respectful and genuine person overall,” and added that they “hope to pass that mentality down to the younger individuals in [their] life.” This sentiment encapsulates the essence of Peer Education and highlights the powerful impact of fostering change within a community.

Protective Factors Addressed:

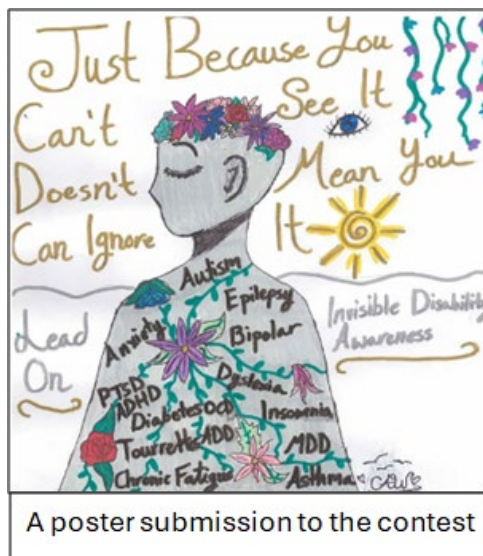
- **Connection to other positive adults:** Peer Education mentors strive to build intentional and positive relationships with members through creating a safe space for all members. Members affirm this hope by opening up about not just Peer Education-related topics, but about their personal lives. Mentors are part of why they come back to Peer Education.
- **Safe, supportive, friendly neighborhood/community/schools:** The messaging of Peer Education centers around preventing dating violence from occurring, building awareness for adults to be safe havens for teens, and educating teens on how to provide compassion and support for their peers experiencing unhealthy relationships/dating violence. One member shared that they are walking away from this year with “the knowledge that I helped a few hundred kids know what a healthy relationship is and know how to stay safe even just a little bit.”
- **Engagement in out-of-school time programs and positive meaningful activities/emotional regulation skills:** Peer Education is a meaningful after-school program that fosters an environment of education, safety, emotional processing, space to build new relationships with peers and adults, and structures to engage with their community in positive ways.
- **Access to resources:** Through the program’s intensive trainings, weekly meetings, and monthly workshops, peer educators learn about a variety of resources that are available to teens experiencing dating violence. One member notes in their end-of-year survey that Peer Education is making a difference in their community through “helping students in bad relationships understand they are in trouble and have the strength to leave and find resources.”

Community: Valdez

Partnering Organizations:

- Valdez High School
- ANDVSA

Project Description: The Valdez youth team wanted to create a project designed to make people with unseen, “invisible” disabilities feel seen, supported, and cared for. As they have in the past, the Valdez youth team built their project to tailor to the needs of their smaller community, using their platform to empower the voices of young people across the community to uplift stories and shared experiences. Last year, the group built a “Wall of Hope” within Valdez High School, which was comprised of positive messages, affirmations, and notes written and created by Valdez High School students.



Building on that, the team hosted a contest this year where students submitted posters that shared stories about invisible disabilities, such as Autism, ADHD, PTSD, Diabetes, Anxiety, and more—either from their own experiences or those of someone they knew. The students felt that, despite being part of a smaller community, individuals with invisible disabilities often navigate life without being seen, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and hopelessness.

The contest aimed to uplift the voices and experiences of those who felt overlooked, creating an opportunity to foster a safer, more accepting school environment where individuals feel supported and respected. Planned and facilitated entirely by youth with support

from adult mentors, the contest provided local youth with a platform to encourage one another while highlighting the importance of empathy. This initiative not only amplified youth voices but also raised awareness and educated students about various disabilities and the challenges associated with them. As a result, the youth team was able to educate and positively impact Valdez High School as a whole, both directly and indirectly.

Youth from different peer groups and grades were able to relate to one another's experiences and came to develop deeper understandings as they worked alongside one another. This allowed youth to practice their emotional regulation and deepen their empathy and other critical socio-emotional skills, which is a key protective factor this project was designed to inspire and build upon.



A poster submission to the contest

Protective Factors Addressed:

- **Safe, supportive, friendly school:** Having the submissions hung up for the month helped the students connect, building a sense of community in the school. Even with submissions being anonymous, the students can relate to their peers.
- **Emotional regulation skills:** This whole project relied on the students tapping into their own emotions and practicing empathy for others who may have different experiences than their own. This art contest provided a window to exploring and learning more about what it is like to live with invisible disabilities.
- **Access to resources:** They provided both local and national resources for students, including hotlines, online resources, helpful apps on their phones, podcasts, and books.
- **Feels like you matter to other people:** A participant from the art contest spoke up to share their experience with this art competition and mentioned that “they appreciate the topic and outreach because they felt like they mattered to others”.