BERING STRAIT
SUICIDE PREVENTION
Nome, Alaska

The Land

- Located in Northwest Alaska, the region covers an area encompassing over 26,000 square miles and 15 villages. Nome is the regional hub.
- Daylight in the summer: 20 hours 55 minutes
- Daylight in the winter: 4 hours 17 minutes
- Villages are accessible primarily by air travel

The People

- Approximately 9,000 people live in the region. 3,500 reside in Nome
- 90-95% of village residents are Alaska Native
- 75% belong to one of three distinct groups: Inupiaq, Central Yupik, or St. Lawrence Island Yupik
- 45% are 19 years old or younger, 20% between 20-34
- Evidence of human habitation in the region dates back 10,000 years
The Life

- Strong family and community connections
- Traditional culture is central to identity
- Subsistence is necessary for survival
- Limited housing and job opportunities
- Poverty levels and cost of living in the region are among the highest in the nation.

The Problem

- Rapid cultural transition, high rates of trauma, limited communication, connection, and understanding of contributing factors
- Alaska Natives are taking their lives at alarming rates
- The suicide rate in the Bering Strait Region is 3x higher than the Alaska rate and 6x higher than the national rate
- Alaska Native youth account for 19% of the total youth population in Alaska and 60% of the suicide deaths in that age group

*Source: Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, Fiscal Year 2007 Annual Report to the Legislature

Our Approach

- Prevention of suicide through traditional cultural knowledge and wellbeing
  - Encourage healthy community connections
  - Enable positive relationships between youth, elders, and adults
  - Support community initiatives
Camp Igaliq

- 38 youth from around the region came together to share and learn from one another
- Several mentors from surrounding villages participated with the youth
- Games and activities
- Talking circles and storytelling

Youth Leaders

- Each of the 15 villages started a Youth Leaders Program
- Students were asked through surveys, who of their peers they looked to as a leader
- The students identified through the survey were recognized through the program as leaders
- At times those who students identified as leaders were not the same students teachers would have identified

Youth Leaders Training

- Nearly 100 students flew to Stebbins to attend a weekend training session
- Leaders are involved in presentations for fellow students, interventions for students who are having problems, school spirit, and community building activities
- Students selected by their peers have the confidence to model positive behavior
Youth Leader Interviews

How has the youth leader training prepared you?
- "I understand more of what I can do and how I can help people in better ways….how I can save a life"

What do you like most about being a youth leader?
- "What I like about is that we get to help people in every way that we can possibly……right now we’re having a game night for little kids because it’s too cold out to play on the playground"

Youth Leader Interviews

How has being a youth leader improved your life?
- "I’ve changed a lot. I don’t care what people think about me"
- "Getting along better with my family….acting a lot more like a family since I started….we are all trying to get along with each other"

What are your future plans as a youth leader?
- "Get bullying out of our school… out of the village"
- "Help people get through their hard times"