

Kristin Helvey
(907) 729-6317
khelvey@scf.cc
SCF-PR-10-09-09

Southcentral Foundation's Family Wellness Warriors Initiative Earns National Indian Health Board Award

(Anchorage, AK, Oct. 9, 2009) –

At the annual National Indian Health Board Consumer Conference in Washington, D.C., the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative was selected as one of 12 recipients nationwide to receive the NIHB Regional/Area Impact Award. This award pays tribute to an individual or organization whose work has contributed to improving American Indian/Alaska Native health care or affected change on an area or regional basis.

“As we celebrate our 10th year, it is an honor to have the work of hundreds of volunteers appreciated in this manner,” said FWWI Administrator Bobbi Donadio. “Ending domestic violence, child sexual abuse and child neglect in our generation requires the entire community partnering together.”

“FWWI uses a model based on working with communities, otherwise known as a collaborative resiliency model. It opens doors for villages, regions and communities across Alaska to request FWWI’s education and trainings,” said Southcentral Foundation President/CEO Katherine Gottlieb. “This unifies the Alaska Native and American Indian people in our efforts to increase the awareness and commitment to combat the conditions that lead to abuse.”

A report by the Alaska Native Health Board noted that Alaska Native and American Indian people are abused “three to four more times frequently than other Alaskans” when it comes to sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse. Abuse has been such a prevalent issue for Alaska Native families that few have been spared the impact. To break the cycle of abuse in the Native Community, FWWI was established by a community steering committee in 1999 as a prevention program. Men were asked to rise up and reclaim their roles as protectors of family values, and women to step forward as instillers of these values, teaching by both word and deed.

This special initiative has evolved into a movement that continually brings together leaders from the Alaska Native Community, the faith community, Alaska Native regional corporations, health care providers, and more. FWWI's work consists of education and trainings, offered across the state of Alaska, teaching how to evaluate and address the root cause of behaviors and motivations. Providing tools for healthier relationships, this training guides participants to affect change in family violence and child maltreatment.

The FWWI model provides a three-year plan to work with the natural helpers within the community (e.g., tribal members, community health aides, clergy, law enforcement personnel), to hear the needs of their region, community or program, and to provide tools to work with those who have experienced domestic violence and child abuse/neglect in their community. Partnerships have fostered community change through a four-stage process: engaging the community, developing a plan, implementing the plan, and transitioning out of the community while empowering community members to continue the process. FWWI provides a structure, core philosophy and framework, but the plans are developed by the Native people of each region. Teachers, health care providers, and other community leaders, are trained with the understanding that they will help expand these trainings and services in their home communities. Two thousand participants have been trained to date.

FWWI's approach utilizes traditional and spiritual ways of teaching and learning through "story." Alaska Native presenters teach specific topics and share their stories of how they survived abusive circumstances growing up, and how it contributed to developing a poor self-image and affected their ability to have healthy relationships. After hearing the teaching and stories, participants meet in small closed groups designed to create a safe environment for sharing how they related to the topic taught and the speaker's stories of abuse.

FWWI encourages family environment and atmosphere that simply discourages any type of interpersonal abuse – sexual, physical, or psychological, including child neglect and harm; it assists in increasing a sense of "harmony" within the family and constructing support systems that help both those who cause harm and those who are recipients of the harm. FWWI continues to aim to bring together leaders of the Alaska Native Community, the faith community, regional corporations and agencies, health care providers, and all interested people, in an effort to restore wellness to the Alaska Native Community.

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Established in 1982, SCF's mission is to work together with the Native Community to achieve wellness through health and related services. The nonprofit health care affiliate of Cook Inlet Region, Inc., SCF has grown in its 26 years, from a single dental clinic to an internationally recognized, award-winning health care organization that employs more than 1,400 people and administers a budget of more than \$181 million annually to manage more than 60 health care programs and services.

4501 Diplomacy Drive • Anchorage, Alaska 99508
(907) 729-4953 • FAX (907) 729-5069

www.southcentralfoundation.org / <http://twitter.com/SCFinsider>