



PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska National Guard youth learn subsistence, culture in Bethel

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — The Alaska National Guard Warrior and Family Services program hosted a group of teenage military dependents in a cultural camp in Bethel, July 18 through July 22.

Bethel is a rural village 400 miles west of Anchorage, accessible only by air and river. It is the largest community in western Alaska, with a population of approximately 6,500.

Several Bethel-based community organizations partnered with the camp, including the Orutsarmiut Native Council and the 4-H Youth and Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Centers to provide service and learning projects, cultural classes and activities for the campers to experience.

The campers were completely submerged in western-Alaska culture for the week, which included touring a subsistence fish camp on the shores of the Kuskowim River where they learned the process of hanging fish to dry and smoke.

Drielle Welch, the Child and Youth Program lead coordinator, highlighted the significance of learning from the elders and having their teachings and principals passed down through the generations.

"I hope the youth will take away an appreciation and awareness for the local culture," explained Welch. "There is more to eating and surviving than just going to the supermarket and buying fish or fruit."

Service and learning projects focused on the education and importance of subsistence living and offered an opportunity for hands-on experience in preparing fish and gathering blueberries to last through the long winter months.

The campers spent several hours one morning in a large-open field by the National Guard armory collecting more than two gallons of blueberries. That afternoon, they delivered the fresh fruit to elders at the local senior center.

The campers and local 4-H youth also had a unique opportunity to hear from John Active, a Yupik storyteller and pioneering Alaska Native broadcaster. The 4-H Youth Center's Yupik-themed cultural week boasted fish cleaning and cutting demonstrations, a variety of fish-themed crafts and even Native Youth Olympic demonstrations. The youth made Akutaq or Eskimo ice cream, from scratch, and ended the camp with a community pot luck that was sprinkled with dishes from Yupik smoked fish to western macaroni and cheese.

"Bethel is very diverse...It's an entirely different world out here," said Sharon Chakuchin, a 4-H program aide in Bethel. "I think it's a good perspective for people to see."

Chakuchin mentioned that the youth partnership was beneficial for both organizations and especially motivating for Bethel teens. The local teens demonstrated their culture for the campers with various presentations.

“These partnerships benefit everyone and it is amazing to see the youth experience and learn new things while also teaching their peers,” added Welch.

One of Adjutant General Laurie Hummel’s priorities is to focus on maximizing engagement with all Alaskans and reenergizing Alaska National Guard efforts and presence in rural areas.

“We hope to continue to build partnerships in rural areas and continue to try and meet the adjutant general’s initiative,” said Welch.

Region 10 participants consisting of Alaska, Washington, Oregon and Idaho, were selected to attend the camp based on volunteer hours logged in Child and Youth Program activities and Alaska National Guard Youth Council meetings. The Alaska National Guard Warrior and Family Services Child and Youth Program is open to children of veterans and retirees from all branches of service, including reserve components.

For more information about Child and Youth Program volunteer opportunities, the Alaska National Guard Youth Council and upcoming events, please visit their website at <https://dmva.alaska.gov/family/ChildYouth> or their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/AKNG.YouthProgram/?fref=ts>.

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PHOTOS

1. Viewable photos included.

2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Flickr is not generally accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157671591279755>

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is also accessible from .mil computers and photos may be downloaded.)

<http://dvidshub.net/r/zvwnsz>



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Michael Ee, left, of Anchorage, and Anne Harrison, of North Pole, pick berries outside of the Alaska Army National Guard armory during an Alaska National Guard Warrior and Family Services cultural camp in Bethel, July 21, 2016. The youth learned the importance of subsistence living during the five-day program that focused on cultural-based service and learning projects. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O’Neal Dresel)



160721-Z-CA180-055

Participants of an Alaska National Guard Warrior and Family Services cultural camp cut dried fish into strips while touring a subsistence fish camp on the shores of the Kuskowim River near Bethel, July 21, 2016. The youth learned the importance of subsistence living during the five-day program that focused on cultural-based service and learning projects. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



160722-Z-CA180-071

Alaska National Guard Warrior and Family Services cultural camp participants, Emery Thornton, left, and Michael Ee, both of Anchorage, assist a 4-H student perform the wrist carry, a Native Youth Olympic event, at the 4-H center in Bethel, July 22, 2016. The five-day program focused on subsistence-living service and learning projects, cultural classes and hands-on activities for campers to experience. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)