

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE
February 13, 2014
8:11 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Co-Chair
Representative Benjamin Nageak, Co-Chair
Representative Neal Foster
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Harriet Drummond

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Kurt Olson
Representative Lora Reinbold

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: COMMUNITY SUICIDE PREVENTION

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BILL CHARLES, Qungasvik Co-Investigator
Center for Alaska Native Health Research
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Emmonak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a presentation of the Qungasvik Project.

STACY RASMUS, PhD, Research Assistant Professor
Center for Alaska Native Health Research
Institute of Arctic Biology
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a presentation of the Qungasvik Project.

JOSIE EDMUND, Prevention Coordinator

People Awakening Project
Alakanuk, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information on the Qungasvik project in Alakanuk.

DESIREE JOE, Youth Participant
People Awakening Project
Alakanuk, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Related how the Qungasvik project helped her mother and family.

ROY BELL, Hooper Bay Qungasvik Prevention Coordinator
Hooper Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed the Hooper Bay Qungasvik project.

JOSEPH BELL, Mayor
Hooper Bay
Hooper Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During the presentation, provided comments.

TOW MANN, Youth
Hooper Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During the presentation, related his perspective as a youth participant in the Qungasvik Project in Hooper Bay.

BEN NUKUSUK, Healthy Families Coordinator
Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)
Hooper Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During the presentation, provided information as a Healthy Families Coordinator and resident who has personally been impacted by suicide.

WILMA BELL-JOE, Member
Building Initiatives in Rural Community Health (BIRCH)
AmeriCorps Program
Rural Alaska Community Action Program RurAL CAP
Hooper Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During the presentation, discussed the BIRCH program and her experience with suicide.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:11:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR BENJAMIN NAGEAK called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:11 a.m. Representatives LeDoux and Nageak were present at the call to order. Representatives Drummond, Foster, and Herron arrived as the meeting was in progress.

Presentation: Community Suicide Prevention

[8:12:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR NAGEAK announced that the only order of business would be a presentation of Community Suicide Prevention: Qungasvik Projects. He acknowledged that it's difficult to talk about suicide, but expressed the need to discuss suicide and relate one's experiences with suicide as suicide doesn't know one's station in life. He then related that his son committed suicide, which he thinks about daily and reinforces the need to discuss suicide.

[8:16:01 AM](#)

BILL CHARLES, Qungasvik Co-Investigator, Center for Alaska Native Health Research, University of Alaska Fairbanks, began by introducing Joseph Bell, elder and mayor of Hooper Bay. He explained that the presentation will relate how an indigenous structure is being built to combat disparities [such as suicide].

[8:17:45 AM](#)

STACY RASMUS, PhD, Research Assistant Professor, Center for Alaska Native Health Research, Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska Fairbanks, said that the presentation today will focus on what is working in the communities in terms of strengths and survival strategies to combat some of the issues youth face. She then directed attention to a document entitled "Qungasvik Projects: 2013 Legislative Update" for which the youth [from Hooper Bay] designed the cover. She said there would be discussion regarding how researchers are partnering with communities to help provide evidence that Alaska Native cultural and traditional practices are effective in terms of helping to prevent suicide, increase reasons for living, and create healthy young people. The aforementioned allows communities to build programming and services around traditional modalities. Dr. Rasmus then informed the committee that she is a Lummi tribal member from Washington State who has lived in Alaska for over 15 years. She noted that she continues to work

with her tribes in the Pacific Northwest while working with the tribes in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta region on issues related to youth and the creation of healthy youth and communities. The aforementioned, she opined, is very important to her, particularly since it saved her life, people, culture, traditions, and can continue to do so.

[8:22:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX asked if Dr. Rasmus grew up on a reservation.

DR. RASMUS answered that although she grew up on a reservation, her father was non Native so she experienced going between the city and the reservation, which she characterized as a struggle as well as a benefit.

MR. CHARLES explained that Dr. Rasmus lived in the Alaska Native communities when she was doing her work and he considered her a resident of the communities.

[8:23:33 AM](#)

DR. RASMUS emphasized that although there is a tendency to focus on what's not working for and the problems of Native peoples, she wanted to discuss the strength and healing that is happening in Alaska. She said she would discuss the social movement toward the strengths, healing, and identification of what's good about being Native as well as why it's necessary to protect and support traditional ways. Dr. Rasmus told the committee that this movement began in Alakanuk, residents of which will share their story today. With the support of committee members and the state, the effort has grown to include four other communities. Today, residents of Hooper Bay are in attendance and will also share transformational experiences and the data to support that youth are changing because of the work in the community. Both Alakanuk and Hooper Bay are known throughout the state as communities that have been devastated by suicide. However, today the community residents will share stories of hope and healing. There will also be a review of the Qungasvik model, which is a Yup'ik process that is a community-level prevention effort. Dr. Rasmus then directed attention to a slide illustrating the disparities in alcohol abuse and suicide rates for Alaska Natives, including young Alaska Natives, in particular young Alaska Native men. She then informed the committee that young Alaska Native women, age 15-24, experience an exponentially higher rate of attempted suicides and being hospitalizations at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute.

[8:27:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX asked if the suicide rate itself is exponentially higher or just the attempts. She then inquired as to whether Dr. Rasmus reads anything into the difference between the attempts versus the actual outcomes.

DR. RASMUS presented a slide that illustrates the prevalence of completed suicides per gender and race. The slide relates that young Alaska Native males have a higher rate of completion of suicide. However, data from Alaska's Bureau of Vital Statistics relates that the rate of Alaska Native females who have been hospitalized from lethal attempts is the highest. In further response to Co-Chair LeDoux, Dr. Rasmus opined that the aforementioned information means that the issue of suicide crosscuts gender, race, and age. She clarified, however, that this doesn't mean that only Alaska Native males are the focus but rather that the issues impact youth of both genders. Suicide is a complex issue, she emphasized, as it's difficult to separate out other factors, such as substance abuse, thoughts, actions, and self-harm behavior.

[8:29:39 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX asked, with respect to women, whether the suicide attempts are a cry for help as opposed to actually wanting to complete the suicide.

DR. RASMUS emphasized that it's all a cry for help.

MR. CHARLES added that [attempted suicides illustrate that] something is missing.

DR. RASMUS pointed out that substance abuse is also a cry for help as it's another form of self-harm. Substance abuse, like suicide, is a symptom.

[8:30:32 AM](#)

DR. RASMUS, continuing her presentation, informed the committee that in 1988 a Pulitzer prize winning series entitled "A People in Peril" featured the community of Alakanuk. Historically, Alakanuk has suffered from epidemic levels of suicide and short periods of time during which clusters of [suicide] occurred to the degree that entire generations were lost. The series created a lot of attention on the state and the thought that the

rate at the time would result in [Alaska Natives] being gone. The aforementioned led to a summit of Alaska Native leaders in 1992 during which they acknowledged the suffering from issues but also stressed there are strong people in their communities who have the knowledge and teachings to bring back the strong and healthy ways. The [Alaska Native leaders] emphasized that they are not a vanishing and dying people as they have passion for life and so much for which to live. Therefore, the leaders said they wanted to learn more about how to use and follow the [tenets] of those Alaska Natives who are living healthy lives and don't commit suicide. The aforementioned call to action was supported by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). Dr. Rasmus stressed that the majority of young Alaska Natives don't commit suicide but rather lead healthy lives and become amazing leaders, and thus the question became how to do that. The aforementioned resulted in the People Awakening Project, which is how she was first connected with the Yup'ik communities of Alakanuk and Emmonak. The project sought to interview individuals to identify sources and strategies of strength that could be highlighted and supported through prevention efforts. The People Awakening Project described a model of protection and recovery. The model of protection has now come to inform the culturally based prevention work in Alakanuk. In the Qungasvik the protective factors are identified and there is a model regarding how to teach them and the process by which the strengths and protections are built into young people such that there is an increase in the reasons to live. Through a community initiated effort, the Qungasvik was developed.

[8:35:49 AM](#)

DR. RASMUS related that in 2002 she was a village clinical supervisor for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) and in that capacity helped serve Alakanuk. She noted that she thought she knew [the situation] since she had grown up on a reservation, but she encountered something she had never seen; Alakanuk had lost 11 young people in an 18-month period.

[8:36:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX asked if there is a statistically significant difference in the suicide rate among those who live on a reservation and others.

DR. RASMUS related that while living on the Lummi reservation she didn't see suicides but rather saw a lot of drug overdoses. However, she acknowledged that there are reservations with

[severe suicide problems]. She reiterated the complexity of suicide, and pointed out that there are villages in Alaska where there isn't the clustering of suicides.

[8:38:06 AM](#)

DR. RASMUS, returning to her presentation, informed the committee that in the early 2000s another cluster of suicides was occurring in Alakanuk. However, at this point the people in the community came together. In fact, the tribal administrator asked her what is going on with the youth in Alakanuk to which she suggested the community seek answers from its members. Dr. Rasmus said she then returned to UAF to work on the question and help support the community in its own process. Alakanuk was ready, evidenced by the steps it was already taking to address suicide by the time the university arrived with funding from the National Institutes of Health to help them grow their effort and create the Qungasvik. Dr. Rasmus highlighted the key difference with the community of Alakanuk was that it asked for help.

[8:39:58 AM](#)

JOSIE EDMUND, Prevention Coordinator, People Awakening Project, presented a slide with Alakanuk elders who met regarding why the community was going through such a difficult time. Although the meetings began with just a few elders, the numbers grew as they continued to meet. The name of the Qungasvik project in Alakanuk is Elluam Tungiinun Egelruciq Ikayuulluta Agauytmek, which means "Movement towards wellness together with the help of God." She then shared a slide with a photograph of a community meeting during which there were discussions about the issues and possible solutions. She next shared a photograph of the Qungasvik activities in which the men sit in a circle, which is what the ancestors did to teach life skills. This particular activity was related to gender roles and life skills. The meeting began with both genders and then they split into groups by gender.

[8:42:03 AM](#)

DESIREE JOE, Youth Participant, People Awakening Project, related that when the Elluam Tungiinun project began she was one of the many young people who joined the group. She further related that at that time she had a difficult family life because her mother contemplated suicide and talked to her about it. She explained that she was a child who didn't listen to her parents or grandparents, but the program helped her to learn to

respect them. She said the program helped her a lot as she related what the elders would say to her mother; she continued to talk with and listen to her mother. Although, as time passed, her mother began to say everything would be alright, Ms. Joe would still wake scared that her mother wouldn't be there when she woke, which was so difficult. Ms. Joe concluded by relating how thankful she is for the program, which she opined helps everyone including those who don't attend because others can relate the information. The program, Ms. Joe emphasized, certainly helped her mother and family.

[8:46:31 AM](#)

MS. EDMUND said [the community] was always afraid as it didn't know what would come about or who would be next. When community members met as a group, bonds were forged between everyone, including the elders and the youth. The bonds and relationships made it easier to share what people were going through, have support, and learn how to be self-sufficient by learning the cultural ways. Furthermore, this all provided people with confidence and a sense of their Alaska Native identity, which [is evidenced in their physical presence as well]. Ms. Edmund then shared a photograph of a qasgiq during which the importance of the ayaruq, the walking stick was taught. The walking stick discussion includes how it can save lives in terms of the life paths chosen. In a photograph showing a girl's Kuspuk making class, Ms. Edmund highlighted a young woman who lost her mother but continued to make her Kuspuk by hand. She then shared a photograph in which Hooper Bay was in attendance to learn the process used during Alakanuk qasgiq meetings so that Hooper Bay can make it its own.

[8:50:21 AM](#)

DR. RASMUS informed the committee that Alakanuk's program has been in place since 2006. Through research at UAF outcomes have been tracked. The communities have tracked their own outcomes and come together to discuss the changes they have observed in the communities. Dr. Rasmus reminded the committee that three years ago she and Mr. Charles came before the committee to discuss those outcomes and celebrate that it had been four years since Alakanuk cast the spirit of suicide from the community. However, the process is ongoing and the community needs to remain vigilant and continue the work in order to include new generations of young people and elders. Some of the elders who participated at the beginning can no longer participate, but their teachings were preserved through this program. Dr. Rasmus

noted that Ms. Edmund was an amazing instructor and parent leader who has now become the training coordinator for the Alakanuk project.

[8:52:59 AM](#)

DR. RASMUS then turned to the community of Hooper Bay, which she and Mr. Charles first visited in 2012 with lots of hope and expectations. The meeting was very much like the first meeting in Alakanuk; during the first meeting in Hooper Bay attendants related the community was ready to address the issue and had already identified resources and strengths, but just needed support.

[8:54:49 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX inquired as to the economic situation in Alakanuk and Hooper Bay.

[8:55:04 AM](#)

ROY BELL, Hooper Bay Qungasvik Prevention Coordinator, specified that the employment opportunities in Hooper Bay are very limited. In fact, the only jobs available are through the city, tribe, schools, or the local clinic.

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX asked if the lack of job opportunities has anything to do with the depression that leads to suicides.

MR. BELL answered yes and no.

REPRESENTATIVE FOSTER informed the committee that Hooper Bay, Alakanuk, Emmonak, and all the communities in the Wade-Hampton census area are considered the most economically challenged, in terms of income levels, in the state. Suicide, he emphasized, is such a complex issue and certainly [the lack of economic opportunities] is part of it.

[8:56:44 AM](#)

MR. BELL related that the project name for Hooper Bay is "Civuliamta Picirayarait," which means "Our ancestral way of life." Although Naparyarmiut, the Yup'ik name for Hooper Bay, means "trees," there are no trees in Hooper Bay. However, he recalled learning from the stories of his father and grandparents that [those in Hooper Bay] are warriors who, like trees, stand tall, strong, and together. The aforementioned is

the message being passed on to the youth in the area. He then shared a photograph of elders, Yup'ik teachers, and a teacher's aide who met with the principal to relate that they want to be part of the education of the Hooper Bay youth. Therefore, they began working with the Yup'ik teachers. He also shared photographs of meetings, meetings much like those held in Alakanuk, with the elders and youth regarding gender roles in the community. While sharing photographs of jigging hooks the youth made and the youth ice fishing with the jigging hooks afterwards, Mr. Bell explained that not only are the youth in Hooper Bay being taught life skills, they are being taught subsistence hunting and gathering as well as ice, gun, and boat safety and survival skills including landmarks. The next photograph he shared was of the local youth group, which is named the Native survivors. He noted that the youth group, for the first time, was involved in the annual Louie Bunyan Memorial Festival. Mr. Bell shared a photograph of the winter games held in Hooper Bay. He pointed out that like Alakanuk, Hooper Bay explains the many uses of the ayaruq, walking stick, including how it can save your life. The last photograph he shared was of the entrance to the Youth and Elder Center in Hooper Bay, which uses photos to relate the history of the area. In response to Co-Chair LeDoux, he stated that the population of Hooper Bay is 1,244.

[9:04:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON inquired as to when Hooper Bay realized it was ready [for help].

MR. BELL related youth have been learning to gather beach grass as Hooper Bay it's known for its baskets, greens and eggs from the Tundra, clams, and fishing. In response to Co-Chair Nageak, Mr. Bell said Hooper Bay has been using [the Qungasvik program] for three to four years.

DR. RASMUS related that during the initial meetings with the Hooper Bay tribal administrator and other leaders, they said they were ready because they had enough [of the suicides]. Furthermore, it was the first time when all of the community entities were came together.

MR. CHARLES added that the leaders of Hooper Bay had heard stories of various programs, but didn't pay too much attention to them because they saw programs come and go with the funding. However, during that [initial] meeting with the administration, the discussion of the Qungasvik seemed to resonate with one of

the vice chiefs who said a meeting of the leaders should be called.

9:07:25 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON recalled the large fire that started by the school [in Hooper Bay] and asked if that caused the community to come together to discuss the situation and have an awareness that the community had enough. Representative Herron recalled that when the fire occurred he was working for Alaska's congressional delegation and when visiting Hooper Bay it was striking to him that at that time Hooper Bay, one of the larger communities in the area, was forced to contemplate its future. He commented that it's remarkable that Hooper Bay has come so far.

9:09:08 AM

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX inquired as to what Representative Herron meant by his statement that Hooper Bay was forced to come together.

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON explained that the fire in Hooper Bay could've been catastrophic due to the nearby fuel tanks. He said he was questioning whether the near catastrophe was the reason Hooper Bay decided to change.

9:10:28 AM

MR. BELL, continuing the presentation, reiterated that the residents of Hooper Bay are warriors and one of the hunting tools is the yo-yo. He then shared a photograph of youth being taught how to make yo-yos and how they are used for playing and hunting. Hooper Bay has a lot of history and the youth in Hooper Bay are being taught that history. In fact, youth have been boated to various historic sites, including the site of the famous footprints of the ancestors of Hooper Bay.

9:12:53 AM

JOSEPH BELL, Mayor, Hooper Bay, began by noting that being mayor has been a learning experience, one he said he took on because community members encouraged him to do so and since no others stepped forward. He then related gratefulness for Dr. Rasmus and Mr. Charles and what they have brought to Hooper Bay, the oldest subsistence village with a population of 250. He shared a photograph of the location of the footprints of his ancestors.

MR. BELL informed the committee that stories of Hooper Bay's history are told in the center as well as the location in the story. He then shared a photograph of youth digging for clay to make clay pots.

MAYOR BELL, referring to a photograph, recalled learning from his elders how to make sod houses and fire bath sod houses. He also discussed using the clay to make items that the ancestors used to make from it.

[9:21:15 AM](#)

MR. BELL informed the committee that every year the community received new teachers who don't understand the Yup'ik way of life. Therefore, a community potluck for the teachers is held in order to welcome the teachers and to show them who the residents of Hooper Bay are and how they live.

[9:21:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX asked if the teachers ever stay in Hooper Bay.

MR. BELL answered that there are teachers who stay year after year while others don't stay.

[9:22:24 AM](#)

MAYOR BELL then shared a photograph of youth making black fish traps, taluyat. He emphasized his desire for youth to learn how to make actual/real tools, not toys, and use them. The youth used the black fish traps to catch black fish and then distributed them to the elders in the community.

[9:24:45 AM](#)

MR. BELL then shared photographs of the youth making Kuspuks, dipnetting, and learning how to drum and dance. The interest in these activities from the youth has been increasing, he pointed out as he shared a photograph of the Hooper Bay Traditional Youth Dancers.

[9:25:38 AM](#)

TOW MANN, Youth, related that originally he was one of only two youth involved with the drumming, but once the word spread more youth, drummers and dancers, became involved. As more youth participated daily, the faces of the youth "lifted," he said.

9:26:31 AM

CO-CHAIR NAGEAK remarked that [Alaska Native] youth [throughout the state] are becoming more interested and involved with making and playing drums and dancing. He expressed his pleasure in this return to the basics of [the Alaska Native culture] by the youth as it's a way in which to heal and pass on traditions.

9:27:41 AM

MR. BELL highlighted that youth are not only taught about tools for subsistence hunting but also about healthy relationships, taking care of oneself, and goals and dreams. Mr. Bell explained that he relates to the youth the steps he took to attend college in Los Angeles and the experiences he had accomplishing his goals.

9:28:11 AM

DR. RASMUS reminded the committee that Hooper Bay's program began in 2012 and the community has come together as it has continued to work on the program. She highlighted that the committee packet should include the data illustrating that the community and its youth are already changing and need to continue to build on that. She then pointed out the large number of people from Hooper Bay present to illustrate their commitment to the program.

9:30:22 AM

BEN NUKUSUK, Healthy Families Coordinator, Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), related that for many years suicide was something to which the community became accustomed. However, the community came together to work with Dr. Rasmus and Mr. Charles, both of which he characterized as a blessing. Last year, folks worked hard in their individual jobs as well as together as a coalition. He noted that his specialty is talking with 9th-12th grade students, which is the age group that most often commits suicide. The community is taking a strong stand and doing what it can to stem the [suicide trends]. Mr. Nukusuk opined that [the program] has made the biggest difference as evidenced by no suicides in Hooper Bay in 2013. He related the story of his 14-year-old nephew's suicide and the impact it had on his mother. Mr. Nukusuk emphasized that suicide is preventable. He said he relates to the 9th-12th graders that there is no problem on this planet that is cause to commit

suicide. Furthermore, there are people who care and help is available.

9:37:07 AM

REPRESENTATIVE FOSTER mentioned that he was in Hooper Bay during the suicide of Mr. Nukusuk's nephew in 2010, which really brought the issue of suicide to the forefront for him.

9:37:50 AM

CO-CHAIR NAGEAK remarked that the sad days are the anniversaries of those evil events as no one wants to go through it again. He mentioned that the anniversary of his son's suicide is in the near future. Co-Chair Nageak emphasized that there are many who have been touched by suicide and people need to start talking about it. People, youth in particular, need to understand that it's okay to feel bad, but one must get better and talk to others. Furthermore, he urged people to talk with those who seem to have the weight of the world on their shoulders because it may save that person. He thanked everyone, particularly the youth, for the hard work, the discussions about suicide, and the resulting healing. He concluded by emphasizing that life is precious.

9:40:43 AM

WILMA BELL-JOE, Member, Building Initiatives in Rural Community Health (BIRCH) AmeriCorps Program, Rural Alaska Community Action Program Rural CAP, told the committee that the BIRCH program discusses suicide prevention, drug and alcohol prevention, and living healthy lifestyles. She related that three years prior to her involvement with the program, she lost her stepdaughter to suicide. A few months after she lost her stepdaughter, she said she realized that her oldest son was struggling with suicidal thoughts. Moreover, she related that growing up she lost eight friends to suicide, was a victim of the 2006 fire, and was involved in a troubled and domestic violent relationship for 18 years. The aforementioned and being told by an elder that she needed to address her own family's issues, made her realize she had to stop [working as a community health aide] in order to address the problems in her own family. Last year, she was hired with the BIRCH program for which she shared a photograph of its participants and introduced the youth leaders who were present. Ms. Bell-Joe said she realized that some of the youth didn't understand the information from other organizations that talked to them about suicide, which led her

to learn to speak in the language of the youth so that they could understand depression and stress. Ms. Bell-Joe related that through the program her son is changing and realizing that she, too, has changed to be a better person. All the youth are told that they are the future and shouldn't give up. She then expressed her gratitude for Dr. Rasmus and Mr. Charles because without their help, the community would likely not have been as successful addressing the issues. Ms. Bell-Joe said she encourages the youth to respect their parents, do better for themselves, finish school, and attend college. She noted that at this point the members of the youth group are helping each other and see things as a collective. She expressed pride in the youth, their unity, work with learning their Alaska Native language, and pride in being an Alaska Native. The youth group decided to call themselves the Native Survivors as they are going to study and learn how to survive and take the best of both worlds [Alaska Native and non-Native].

[9:52:21 AM](#)

MR. CHARLES thanked the committee and expressed hope that the presentation will illustrate a curriculum for [Alaska Native] communities. He related his belief that education is how one survives in the environment, but too often the education of the Western culture isn't utilized to the fullest extent Native Alaskans could. He pondered how much of Western education Alaska Native youth could capture if they were taught the protective factors early in life. He opined that Alaska Native ancestors had early childhood education down to a science. He emphasized that he is proud to work as a researcher representing his community just as his ancestors who did things over and over until perfection was reached. Mr. Charles noted that Representative Foster was instrumental in the [Qasgiq Model], the only indigenous model with scientific proof that it works in Alaska. He reminded the committee that the qasgiq is a communal place that has existed for years, a men's house, a place of cleansing, and a gathering place. The [Qungasvik] is a guide with modules illustrating the process to perform an activity, an activity in which the elders teach with compassion and love. Even the teaching of the ayaruq, the walking stick, is a symbol of life, love, and relates that one is not alone. Furthermore, the qasgiq provides a place to come together to begin healing.

[9:56:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND related her appreciation for the graphics in the presentation.

[9:57:34 AM](#)

DR. RASMUS thanked everyone, particularly Representative Foster, because the support provided in 2010 resulted in the ability to hire another person in Hooper Bay, which she opined was extremely critical to the success in Hooper Bay. Dr. Rasmus stressed that there is empirical scientific data as well as community observations that the process is working in Hooper Bay. She noted that people become scared to talk about suicide when it's not happening. She further noted that during her visit last summer Hooper Bay felt different as something is happening there and it's something that should continue, she opined.

[9:58:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FOSTER noted his appreciation and thanks for the efforts of everyone to address the issue and testimony in which folks shared their stories. He then pointed out that this committee meeting is being transmitted via the Internet. He recalled being in Hooper Bay when Mr. Nukusuk's nephew committed suicide and in St. Michaels when there was a suicide as well. He echoed earlier remarks that suicide is complex such that lack of jobs, loss of culture, alcohol, domestic violence and sexual assault, lack of hope for the future, and depression are things that become compounded by other things that aren't so direct, such as health issues and food insecurity. Some of the solutions, including understanding goals and dreams, having respect for elders, and supporting traditional and subsistence practices, have been discussed. The bottom line, he opined, is that it's rooted in the culture of the local community and this program brings the issue to the community level and embraces Alaska Native heritage.

[10:03:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND related her appreciation for everyone who traveled to be here today. She then charged the researchers with letting the legislature as a whole know how to help them with every aspect of village life as the legislature is charged with providing education to every child in Alaska. She also noted her appreciation that youth are being encouraged to continue their education and return to their communities.

10:04:59 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:04 a.m.