

# CHAPTER ONE – Six Steps to Start and Run a Youth and Sled Dog Program

## **1 Find an Elder and a local Sled Dog Kennel Owner(s) interested in working with Youth.**

The first step in starting a local youth and sled dog program is to identify at least one Elder in the community with a history of dog mushing who might be interested in mentoring youth. The elder(s) may already be mentoring an adult who could also assist in starting the program. The Elder(s) may know of at least one sled dog kennel owner willing to work with youth. Generally, the kennel owners choose with whom they are most comfortable working. The number of kennel owners available in a particular community combined with the number and age range of participating students will determine if separate classes can be formed based on student age. The in-kennel field class component of this program is essentially the same for all ages, but is modified by grade level.

## **2 Evaluate the number of Youth in your Community who are likely to participate.**

Determine how many youth are interested in participating. Once you have identified the number of youth, categorize them by class standing (i.e., elementary, middle or high school level). High school students simultaneously taking a class in veterinary science may be given academic credit toward graduation. This link between the participant's school curriculum and activities with sled dogs helps to validate the program and provide it with greater credibility. Additionally, this high school course can provide dual high school/university credit. Elementary and middle school students may not receive formal academic credit, their experiences in a sled dog program will help prepare them for high school education.

## **3 Gather Community Leaders, Parents, Community School Committee (CSC) Chairman, and a Regional School Board District Representative.**

Hold a community meeting to introduce the youth and sled dog program. Begin by explaining the benefits of the program to the health of the community as shown in Huslia (i.e., the demonstrated success of the **FAYSDP**). The positive impact of the program on the community will increase with more community member participation and support. The community meeting provides an opportunity for attendees to learn and volunteer for the roles that best suit them. The success of the academic portion of the program lies with the parents, community school committee, and local school board representative. Without their support and the support of the local school district it will be impossible to incorporate the program into the school curriculum. It is essential to have a local kennel owner involved in this meeting and who is willing to commit his dogs to the program. Without sled

dogs and a participating dog musher there can be no program.

#### **4 Select a Program Coordinator.**

The program coordinator functions as a liaison, communicating with student participants, parents, Elders, dog mushers and school staff to ensure that the program runs smoothly. The responsibilities of this essential position include creating and distributing a master kennel field class schedule. The regularly updated schedule needs to specify which students will participate in various program activities on a particular day. The schedule organizes both the student's field experiences and in-school based activities related to the sled dog program. Finally, the program schedule pairs each student with a particular kennel, teacher, and class time taking into consideration the available daylight hours during the school year. The program coordinator also maintains contact with kennel owners to discuss and document weekly activities and student performance. He or she monitors and obtains information on any dog health issues and takes appropriate action. The coordinator also helps to organize and direct community member volunteers. These volunteers assist with classes and field experiences, help the student participants start a junior dog mushing club, assist with weekend sled dog activities, assist with youth sled dog races, and help raise funds for sled dog related trips outside the local community.

#### **5 Approach the local School Principal and teachers.**

The program coordinator needs to schedule a meeting with local school principals, teachers and other school officials. This meeting should include at least one community Elder; the kennel owners; parent representatives from the elementary, middle and high schools included in the program; and at least one member of the CSC and a regional school board representative. This meeting should be open to the community. During this meeting, the dog kennel owners present a list of dog yard rules for all students who will be placed at their kennels. Parents and students must agree to and sign a form that outlines these rules. It is the principals' responsibility to coordinate with the district superintendent and obtain final approval for the youth and sled dog program's presence in their schools.

#### **6 Funding the program.**

Some potential funding sources include district and tribal funds, state and federal grants, and/or private donations. While a youth and sled dog program can start with volunteers, it is very difficult if not impossible to sustain such a program with an all volunteer staff. Dog care is of primary importance to the success of this program. Mandatory program expenses include dog food, medicines, and vaccinations. Dog yard supplies (tools, dog houses, chains, etc.) and dog mushing equipment (collars, harnesses, gang lines, sleds, etc.) must be regularly repaired or replaced. In addition to these expenses, the shipping costs for these items in addition to the dog care supplies (dry dog food, rice, straw, meat, etc.) add another major expense.