

HOW TO START AND RUN A YOUTH AND SLED DOG PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Simply stated, dogs can touch and teach children in ways our technology driven world cannot. Legendary sprint sled dog racer George Attla, in collaboration with the community of Huslia, Alaska, established the Frank Attla Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program in 2012. He believed that sled dogs, mushing, and dog racing are deeply rooted in Native Alaskan culture and can empower youth and strengthen communities. In her article “Big Dreams”, published in Mushing Magazine, Bridget Schwafel wrote: “He [George Attla] spoke about how today’s youth did not know their own history, their family connections, or the places they came from and how important it was that they knew and had pride in who they are as people. He believed that if kids were involved with dogs, the connection with historical pride and traditional knowledge could strengthen and help them become stronger physically and mentally.”

The Frank Attla Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program was developed as a pilot project in the remote Interior Alaskan village of Huslia to provide an opportunity for local students to learn about a traditional means of transport and competition that is central to their cultural heritage. This grassroots program was developed to revitalize and strengthen the community’s sled dog tradition by increasing awareness and knowledge of sled dog care, training, and racing. Not only does the program revitalize the Alaskan Native tradition of dog mushing, it also helps to strengthen community bonds and enhance self-respect. Since it is a school and community based program, it also supports academic learning through the team building efforts of youth, teachers, dog mushers, elders and other community members. It was George Attla’s dream that this program would serve as an example for other Alaskan communities.

This manual is divided into eight chapters that provide instruction on how to startup and maintain a community based youth and sled dog program. Chapter 1 provides basic information on starting the program while Chapters 2-7 give information on how to maintain the program after it begins, including how to obtain academic credit for these classes through the local school district. Chapter 8 offers the manual in its entirety as a PDF file. It is hoped that this manual will provide sufficient information to persons interested in developing sustainable youth and sled dog programs in their communities.

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FRANK ATTLA YOUTH & SLED DOG CARE-MUSHING PROGRAM