

VILLAGE OF HUSLIA'S YOUTH & SLED DOG PROGRAM UPDATE: June 2013

The **Frank Atlla Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program** is the first of its kind. The village-based program was started by legendary sprint sled dog champion and now elder, George Atlla Jr., in memory of his late son, Frank. Launched in early fall of 2012, the program has been made possible by local sled dog kennel owners/mushers who use their dogs to teach about dog care and mushing. Run entirely by volunteers, the program took root in the curriculum of the Jimmy Huntington School and currently involves 33 high school and middle school students. High school students are enrolled in a veterinary science class, and middle school students are enrolled in a math and science class. High school students receive dual high school and college credit for completing the class. Also for a week in March, over 60 Kindergarten thru 6th graders and Headstart youngsters were mentored by the program's enrolled high and middle school students. The response was so positive that the program hopes to work more with these younger children in the future.

The foundation of the program is the youth's hands-on work with village sled dogs. A yard of sled dogs offer a positive and enriching emotional experience to youth of any age. The program design encourages the development of *pride* by learning from dedicated and experienced mentors/dogmen and Elders. Additionally, leadership, literacy and numeracy skills are incorporated into classes to support young people's academic success and future careers. Field classes taught by mushers are held twice a week for each participating age group at one of four local kennels. All students learn about dog care including feeding, cleaning a dog yard, and monitoring overall dog health. Students also develop dog handling and mushing skills including harnessing and hooking up dogs, training a team, and racing.

Kennel owners, the school principal and teachers, and 50+community volunteers work together to plan the field classes and also youth sled dog races that are run by the youth. This March the program incorporated skijoring, which was new for both the youth and the dogs. Records are being kept about all youth and sled dog activities and reporting about youths' well being has been done by teachers and parents. So far the program is showing a significant positive affect on participating youth. Program information is being shared with other interested rural communities and George Atlla believes the program can someday become statewide.

More great news from Huslia is that in late February, the youth of Huslia and George Atlla raised the funds for one middle school and one high school student of the **Frank Atlla Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program** to race in the 4-dog and 6-dog classes of the 2013 Junior North American Championship in North Pole. Each student musher had help from one classmate dog handler. Since the New Year, all students in the program worked together to care for and train the race dogs. It is thought to be the first time that youth from Huslia represented their village in a *junior* world championship sprint sled dog race held in Fairbanks/North Pole.

With sled dog care as a strong year-round "tie to the past," the program is trying to continue work with youth this summer by making a fish camp on the river across from Huslia. The hope is that dogs can be staked there and youth learn to fish, cut, and dry fish for dogs like long ago. The camp setting would also allow Elders a familiar place to teach youth many survival skills that they learned as youth by being in camp including putting away fish for their own food. The youth of Huslia are telling us they want to take care of dogs and want a camp!

In turning 80 years old this year with the goal of making the **Frank Atlla Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program** last beyond his life, George Atlla recently created a temporary program-specific *designated fund* within the Alaska Community Foundation (ACF) so that donations can immediately receive a tax deduction under the umbrella of their well-established status as 501 (c) 3 non-profit. Appropriately, the mission of ACF is to connect people who care with causes that matter. George is concurrently working to create a permanent Huslia-based program-specific 501 (c) 3 with a local board to be in place by January 1, 2014. George is actively seeking funds from private sources to finance a summer youth & sled dog program, and also to help support the winter program. For more information or for answers to questions, please don't hesitate to contact George at any time via email at kath@alaskas-spirit.com or by phone. His home phone in Huslia is 907-829-2248. When not in Huslia, George can be reached at 907-687-3655.

To make any tax deductible contribution to the program, please write the check to "Alaska Community Foundation" and in the memo write "For the FRANK ATTLA YOUTH & SLED DOG FUND." Please mail check to: **Anne Remick, Program Officer, Alaska Community Foundation, 3201 C Street, Suite #110, Anchorage, AK 99503.** Anne's phone number is (907) 274-6705. Once a check is received, ACF will send all tax related information.



For any questions about the program, please contact:

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The Frank Attla Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program was started by legendary sprint sled dog racer, George Attla, in memory of his son, Frank. Launched in Huslia in the early fall of 2012, the foundation of the program is youth's hands-on work with sled dogs under the guidance/mentoring of experienced dogmen and Elders. The program has been made possible by local sled dog kennel owners/mushers who use their dogs to teach about dog care. For youth to work with sled dogs during daylight hours all winter, the grassroots program became part of the curriculum of the Jimmy Huntington School (JHS) and for two years has involved over 30 high school and middle school students. High school students earn credit by taking a Veterinarian Science class from an accredited animal husbandry teacher, and middle school students earn credit by taking a Culture class.

Kennel owners/mushers, JHS teacher staff, local *Americorps* service members, and 50+ community volunteers work together to plan classes and to support youth in hosting their own junior sled dog races on weekends. The program's in school classes teach literacy and numerical skills and kennel classes teach dog care including feeding, maintaining a dog yard, and monitoring overall dog health. All students learn dog handling and mushing skills involving harnessing, hooking up, training, and racing a team. Both in school and kennel classes have offered students a unique opportunity to practice leadership and life skills. With community support, the program's high and middle school students have mentored 60 Kindergarten to six graders and Headstart youngsters.

The program has a noticeable positive affect including an increase in honor roll students and teachers of all subjects report students more engaged in learning with a good attitude. Students in the program share they feel happy working with sled dogs and their parents say they have a higher self-esteem. George Attla believes youth naturally feel more at ease with themselves when in a dog yard because a dog accepts any person without judgment.

Program Highlights: Over the winter of 2012-2013, the community of Huslia, JHS students, and George Attla raised funds for two junior dog handlers to assist two junior mushers to compete in the 4-dog and 6-dog class of the 2013 Junior North American Championship held in North Pole. All students in the program worked together to care for and train the Huslia sled dogs used in these races. Over the winter of 2013-2014, the community of Huslia, JHS students, and George Attla raised funds for one junior musher to compete in the 6-dog class of the 2014 Junior North American Championship. This young musher won all three race-heats to become Huslia's first Junior North American Championship. Also, another Huslia junior musher was selected by the state to represent Alaska in the 2014 Arctic Winter Games held in Fairbanks. It was the first time a Huslia junior musher competed in the Games. The young musher won two out of three race-heats to win a silver-metal for Alaska.

Program Long-term: This spring the Yukon-Koyukuk School District expressed interest in incorporating the youth & sled dog program into the curriculum of its eight other rural schools with the help of local kennels. The University of Alaska-Fairbanks' new Veterinary Science School says it wants to be involved in the further development of the program. In addition to the Veterinarian School, the University has ideas on ways undergraduate and graduate students of many fields could work with the youth and sled dog program via student exchanges, research, and more. Other news is Tanana Chiefs Conference has contacted Huslia about possible ways it can support the grassroots program. None of the organizations listed above have provided funding and none of the proposed ideas can occur without funding.

The program has been run with essentially no operating funds. For the 2012, 2013, and 2014 school year, 90% of the required dog food and care supplies came from private donors. George Attla continues to hear from the private sector believing the program has great merit. Small grants from private, state, and federal sources provided additional dog care supplies and gas to operate snow machines and 4-wheelers necessary for youth to safely train sled dogs. Funds have also been raised to work with youth and sled dogs in the summer, which involves fishing for dogs, dog care, and kennel maintenance. Until this month, the Anchorage-based *Alaska Community Foundation* has managed a program-specific fund under their well-established 501(c) 3 non-profit umbrella so all private donations to the program receive a tax deduction. This temporary arrangement has been taken over by the reputable Fairbanks-based Alaska Native owned and operated non-profit called *Native Movement*. In turning 81 years old this year with a goal of the program lasting beyond his life, George Attla has applied for a permanent Huslia-based 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization with a local board. He must wait for an answer but in the meantime, with an umbrella non-profit in place, George continues to seek funds from the private sector and help the Huslia Tribe write grants to finance the on-going youth & sled dog winter and summer program.

To make a tax deductible contribution to the program at this time, write a check to "*Native Movement*" and in the memo write "*For the FRANK ATTLA YOUTH & SLED DOG CARE-MUSHING FUND.*" Please mail the check to: **Enei Begaye, Administrator, Native Movement, P.O. Box 83467, Fairbanks, AK 99708.** Once a check is received, *Native Movement* will communicate about all tax related information. If you have any questions, please call Enei at (907) 374-5950.