

One Health Insights from A Youth Dog Mushing Program in Rural Alaska

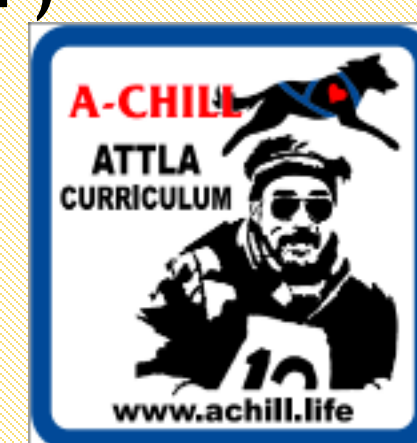
Reflected through Photovoice, Digital Storytelling, and Focus Groups

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Background

The Frank Attila Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program (FAYS DP)



Alaska Care and Husbandry Instruction for Lifelong Living



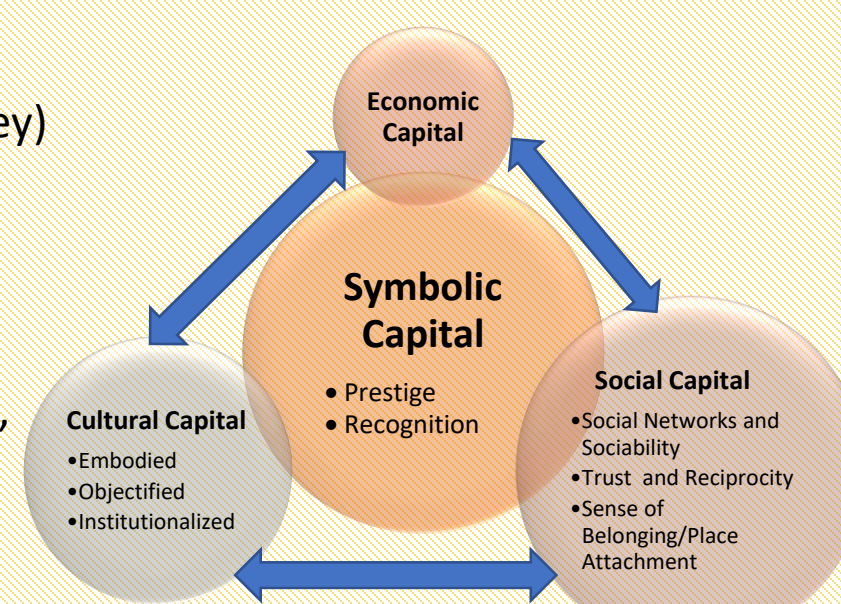
George Attila raced sled dogs as a career and was just an incomparable dogman. When he retired from mushing and grew older, he started to feel his village hurting more and more. Like in many other villages, George began noticing more suicide, substance use, and violence. Wanting to do something, he created the FAYS DP in memory of his son, who died of an asthma attack. The program began as a grassroots project in Huslia to provide young people with hands-on experience working with sled dogs under the guidance and mentorship of experienced mushers and Native Elders. This idea has now grown into Alaska Care and Husbandry Instruction for Lifelong Living (ACHILL); a collaborative project across the schools & communities of Alaska Gateway and Yukon Koyukuk School Districts.

Research Questions

- Q1: How do the youth perceptions of the FAYS DP fit with the dimensions of social capital?
- Q2: How do the youth perceptions of the FAYS DP align with Athabascan cultural values?
- Q3: Do community adults confirm youth perceptions?

Capitals Theory

Capital was defined as an investment that confers its holder an advantage to navigate social order. It could be material (e.g., money) or immaterial (e.g. social connections). Different forms of capital interact and may even transform one into another. Although the effects of material forms of capital on health have been widely studied, little has been done to understand how immaterial forms affect health, particularly for underserved populations.

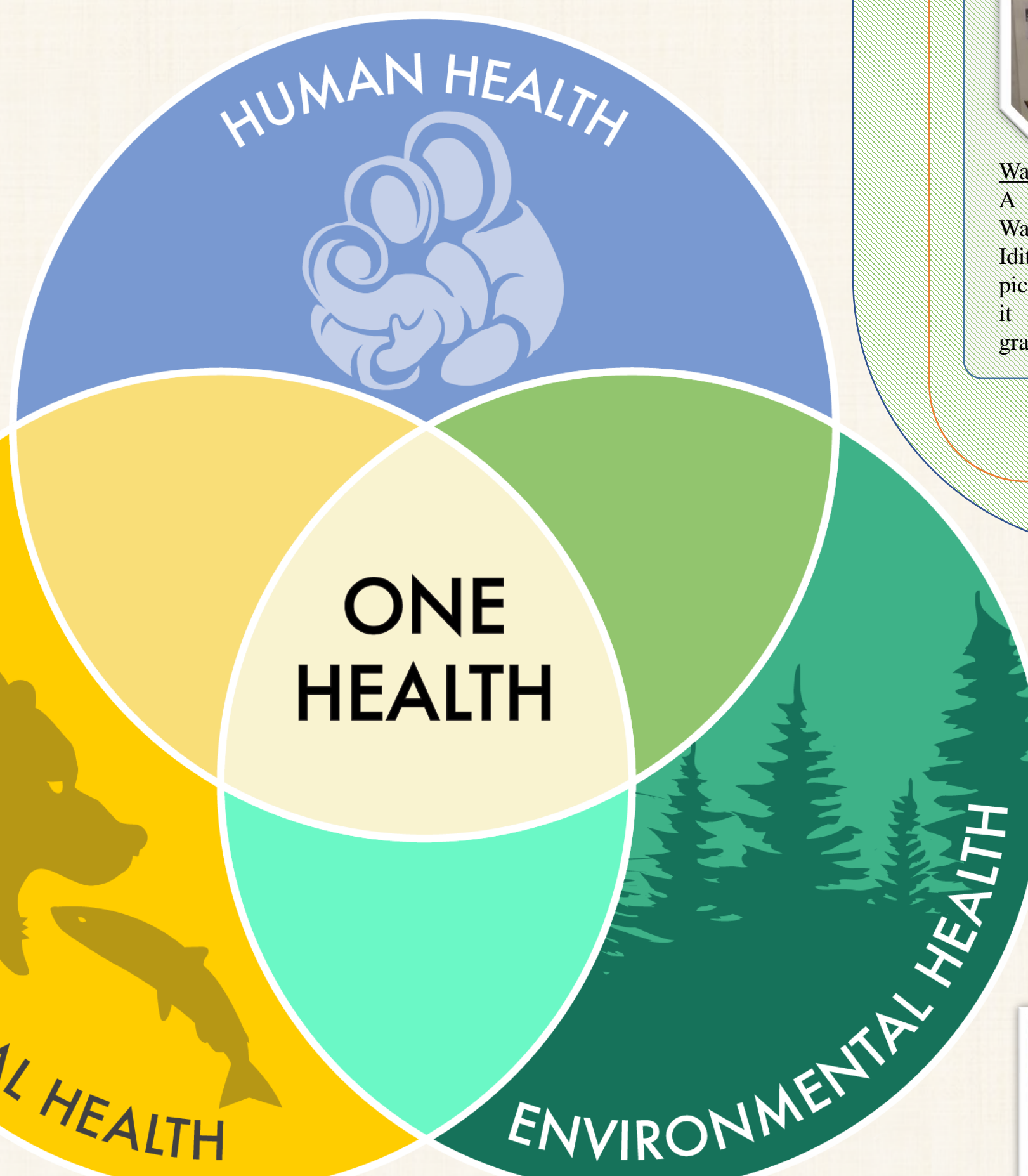
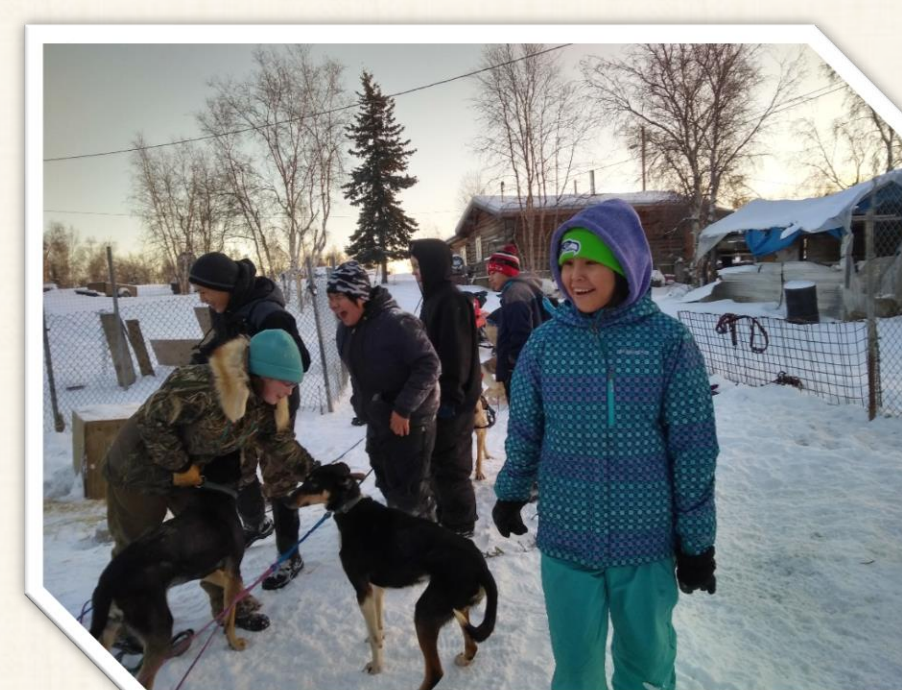


Sources: Bourdieu, 1990, Abel & Frohlich, 2012

Athabascan Cultural Values

- ❖ Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
- ❖ Care and Provision for the Family
- ❖ Family Relations and Unity
- ❖ Love for Children
- ❖ Village Cooperation and Responsibility to Village
- ❖ Humor
- ❖ Honesty and Fairness
- ❖ Sharing and Caring
- ❖ Respect for Elders and Others
- ❖ Respect for Knowledge & Wisdom from Life Experiences
- ❖ Respect for the Land and Nature
- ❖ Practice of Native Traditions
- ❖ Honoring Ancestors
- ❖ Spirituality

Sources: Alaska Native Knowledge Network <http://ankn.uaf.edu/ANCR/Values/athabascan.html>
DENAKKANAAGA ELDERS CONFERENCE- 1985



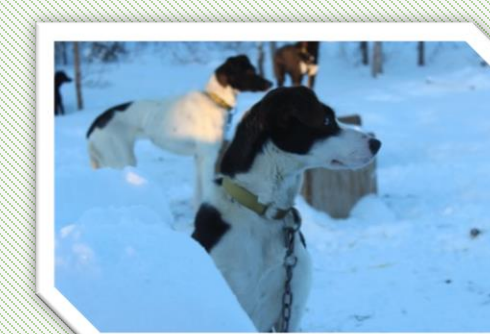
Results

Photovoice

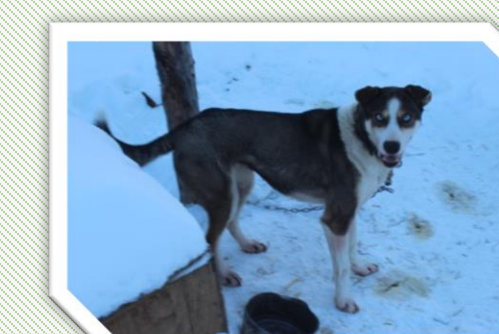
Here are two of the themes identified and comments posted by our participating students

"Family, culture, pride. I see our history, our Elders and teachers. I see family and friends, and teamwork."

Getting to know the dogs



The Regal Dog
Dogs showing their love of mushing

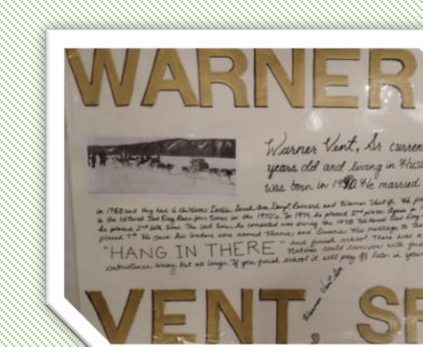


A Good Dog
A dog from Wesley's Yard. I think this picture shows how great dogs are.

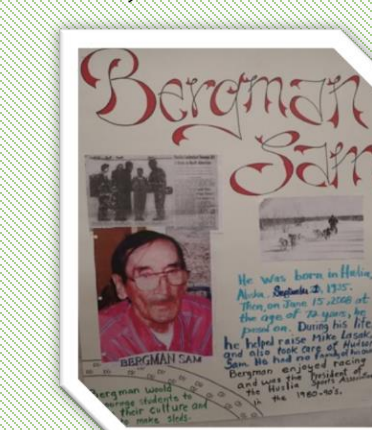
"I love that we are working together and having a great time. I think working with dogs, really brings us together."

"This program has really taught me many things, with Wilson's stories and Uncle Floyd and Wilson's guidance can really teach us great lessons on right and wrong."

Family, friends, connections, & mushing family



Warner Vent Sr.
A poster about my Grandpa Warner Vent. He ran the Iditarod in the 1970's. This picture is special to me because it reminds me of who my grandpa is.



Bergman Sam
A poster about Bergman Sam, a legend racer. It's important so we can remember his accomplishments.



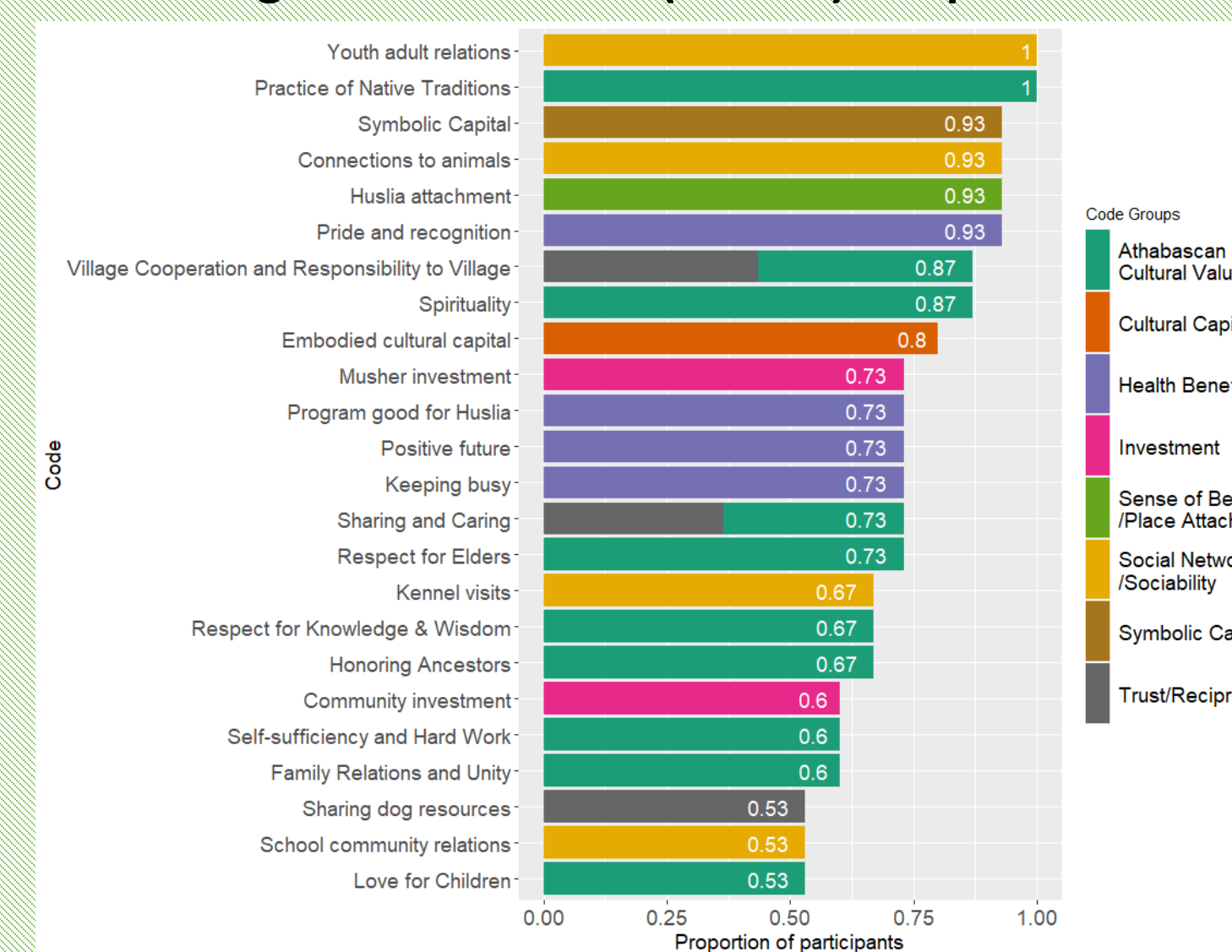
My First Iditarod
A student in the middle of Iditarod mushers. I like it because I see 11-year-old me at the baseball field.

Other themes were 'Nature', 'Play, fun, puppies' and 'Dog care'

Digital Stories

- Youth participants produced 15 digital stories up to 3 min long
- Three representative quotes from those stories are presented below
- Athabascan Cultural Values and Capital themes were often overlapping
- All digital stories are available to view at: <https://canhr.uaf.edu/research/past-canhr-projects/faysdp>

Digital Stories Code (Theme) Frequencies



Proportion of youth participants having at least one quotation for a particular code. Only codes with 50% or more representation are displayed here. Colors indicate the different code groups

Positive Effects Identified in Adult Focus Groups

- Pride, self-esteem, sense of belonging and identity
- Discipline, hard work, resilience
- Positive future, academic and life skills
- Relationships with adults, Elders and peers, community unity
- Awareness of animals and nature, love and respect

"Overall it's a great thing having a dog yard. It will help my future in many different ways, it teaches me what determination is, it will help me have a better attitude towards work, and have a good work ethic."

- Honoring ancestors
- Self-sufficiency and hard work
- Embodied cultural capital
- Positive future
- Pride and recognition

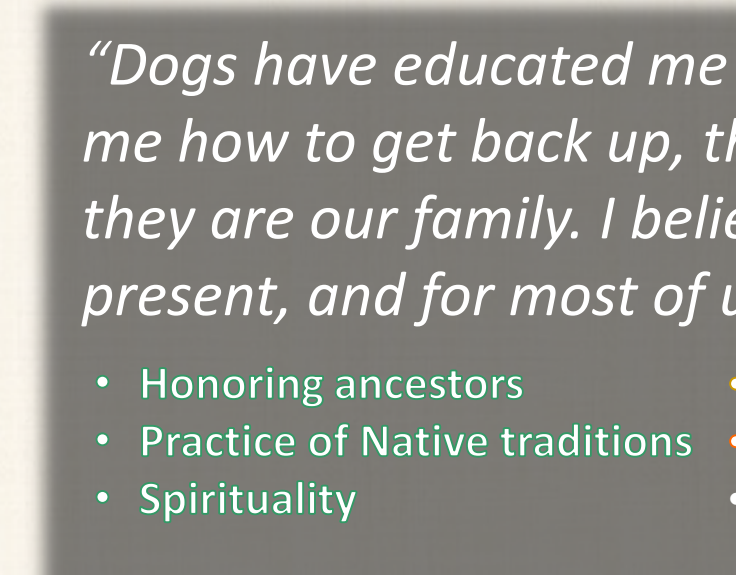
Digital Story Quote from a Middle School Boy



"I love running dogs and racing in competitions. During competitions there is often a ton on your mind and it is easy to feel anxious. Even with all these feelings, I love how dogs have almost a magical power to give you a calming peace. While running dogs I find clarity, it's a period of time without noise and voices."

- Respect for Land and Nature
- Spirituality
- Connections to animals

Digital Story Quote from a High School Girl



"Dogs have educated me with obedience, love, loyalty, they gave me company, taught me how to get back up, they made me tougher and smarter. Dogs are in our culture, they are our family. I believe we all grew up to love dogs, they are our past, our present, and for most of us, our future."

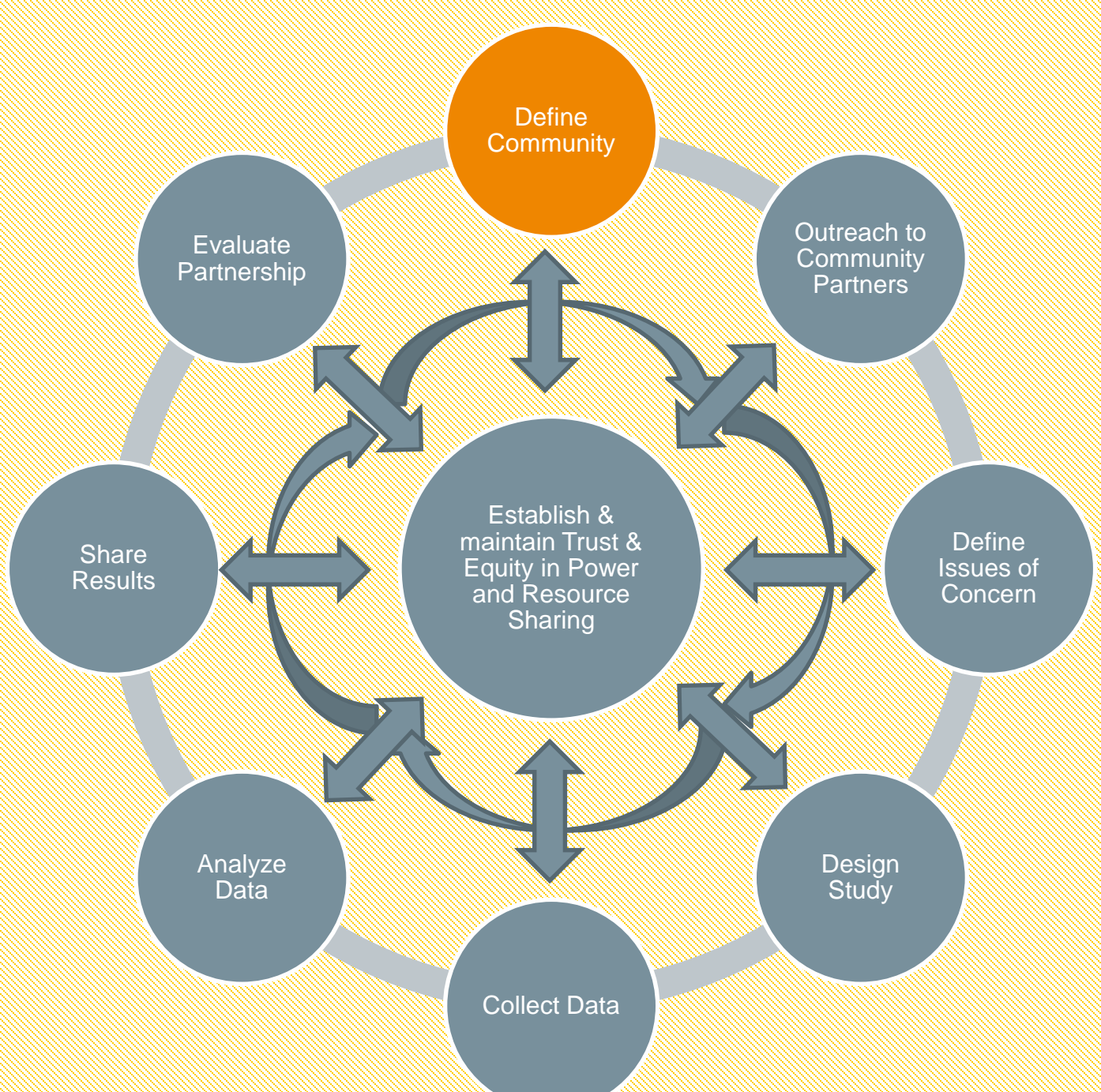
- Honoring ancestors
- Practice of Native traditions
- Spirituality
- Connections to animals
- Embodied cultural capital
- Positive future

Digital Story Quote from a Middle School Girl

Methods

CBPR Partnership

With the help of the Huslia tribal council, the PI began recruitment of a Community Planning Group (CPG). The CPG was comprised of 4 members - one from each of the following: the tribal council, school, active in the FAYS DP, and the community's wellness team. The CPG was established to guide the research and ensure cultural appropriateness for all steps of the project. Examples of their guidance include, but are not limited to, implementation of workshops and generation of codebook definitions.



Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Process

Participants

- 10 middle school students, ages 12-13, and 5 high school students, ages 14-16 (6 girls and 9 boys)
- 14 students identified as Athabascan, and 1 as Inupiaq
- 11 women and 8 men in 2 adult focus groups

Procedures

Photovoice

The middle school students took photographs they felt were representative of what the FAYS DP meant to them and how it affects their community. Photovoice workshops later included discussions sessions following guidelines established by the ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional) framework (Hogan, C., 2003) to mediate understanding of experiences, their significance, and to reflect on any indications for action. As part of the discussion, the students were asked to organize their photographs into themes.

Digital Stories

Digital stories use photos, videos, music and narration to illustrate their message. Facilitators worked with the youth in workshops to create their story boards, scripts and record stories.

Analysis

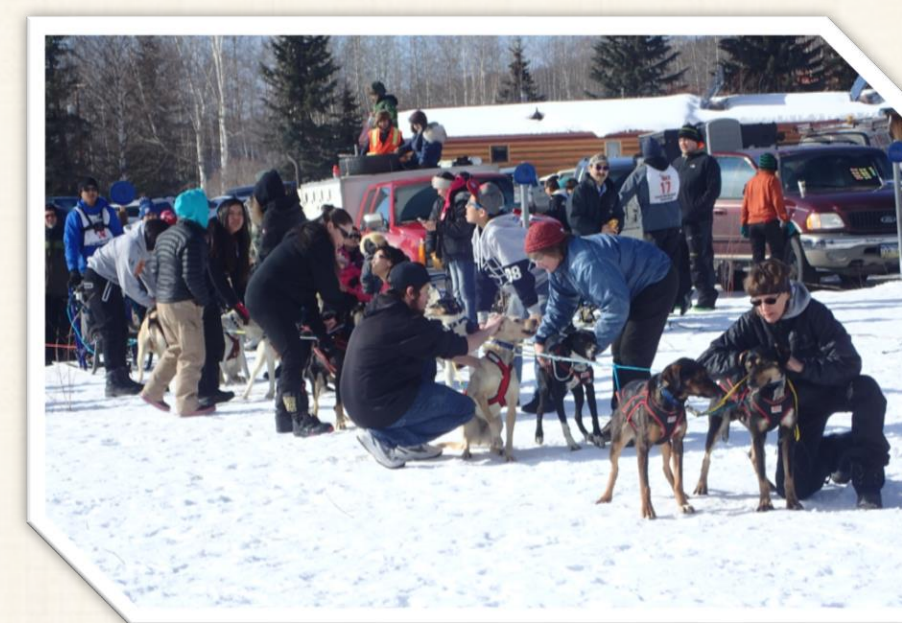
Qualitative analysis and data management was done using ATLAS.ti (Muhr, T., & Friese, S., 2004). The research team used both deductive and inductive approaches to analyze the data (digital stories and scripts).

The codebook included:

- Deductive codes comprised of elements from existing theoretical models of capital theory and Athabascan cultural values established by the Denakanaaga Elders Conference
- Inductive codes youth saw emerged from their photovoice session
- Inductive codes derived from emerging themes from the digital story scripts

Adult focus groups were coded using grounded theory.

Scripts were coded individually by all team members. Any code discrepancies were discussed to consensus by the team. Trustworthiness of data was established using multiple perspectives in analysis and multiple coders. The team was comprised of three faculty members who had experience in: dog mushing, social capital, qualitative analysis, digital stories, and photovoice; and two undergraduate student researchers who had experience in Athabascan culture and values.



Conclusions

Program Effects on the Community

The research helps show how the FAYS DP positively affected the community:

- The program connects the youth to their culture
- The integration of culture helps foster resilience in youth
- Dogs help create bridges and bonds across generations
- The program fosters intergenerational relationships that facilitate transmission of cultural knowledge and emotional well-being
- Dog mushing connects youth to the land, to their environment, to nature, to their home, and to themselves
- The program showed the youth the values of hard work and determination
- These values and strengths open up future opportunities

Youth digital stories illustrated:

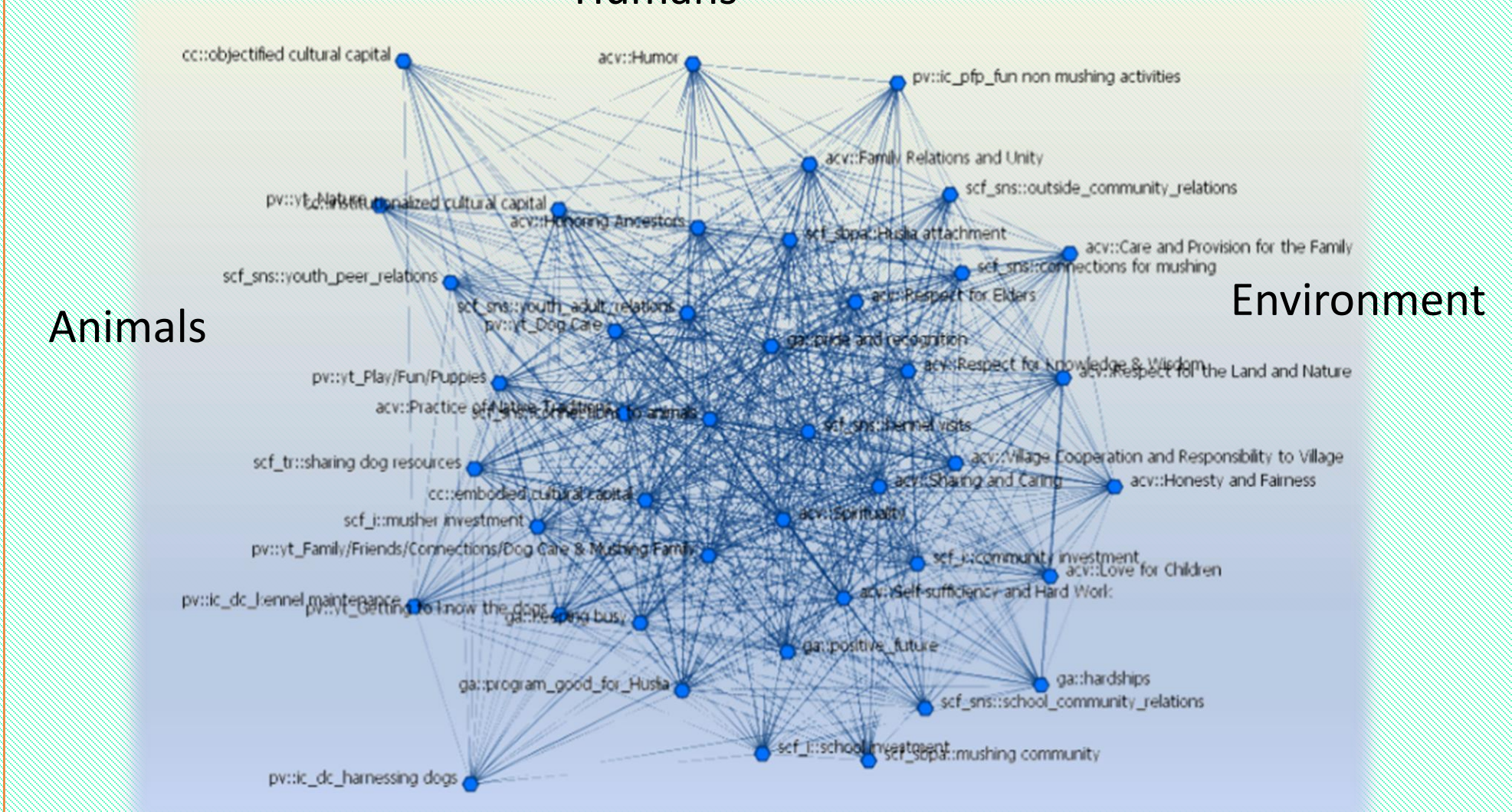
- o importance of relationships between youth and adults/elders
- o importance of cultural traditions
- o importance of connection to animals
- o Attachment to their home

Community adults confirmed and expanded on youth perspectives, supporting the value of the program.

One Health Insights

Human and animal health and the environment were all intricately interconnected in the youth's stories.

- Consistent with Koyukon Athabascan cultural values
- Well-being is tied with connections to other people, to the land, to animals, and cultural traditions.



Network of overlapping codes in quotes, showing that codes are highly interconnected across human, animal and environmental domains