Background

The Frank Attia Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program (FAYSDP)

The Frank Attia Youth & Sled Dog Care-Mushing Program (FAYSDP) was created by the Rural Alaska Outreach (RAO) in collaboration with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) to provide culturally relevant educational opportunities for youth in rural Alaska. The program aims to teach youth about the importance of dogs, mushing, and the Athabascan culture, while also fostering intergenerational relationships and promoting healthy lifestyles.

Methods

Participants

- 10 middle school students, ages 12-14, and 1 high school student, ages 15-18, from 5 school districts in rural Alaska.
- 5 middle school students and 1 high school student, ages 12-18, from 4 school districts in rural Alaska.

Procedures

Photovoice

The middle school students took photographs they felt were representative of what the FAYSDP means to them and how it affects their community. Photovoice workshops were also included during sessions following guidelines established by the NRHSP (2017). Reflective intervention, Developed Framework Designs (C., 2000) 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, video, music, and narration to illustrate their message. Participants worked with the youth in workshops to create their stories, scripts, and record stories.

Analysis

Qualitative analysis and data management were done using NVivo (Multi, T., & Morse, S., 2006). The research team used both deductive and inductive approaches to analyze the data (digital story scripts and scripts).

The codebook included:

- Deductive codes comprised of elements from existing theoretical models of capital theory and Athabascan cultural values established by the Denakkanaaga Elders Conference.
- Inductive codes derived from emerging themes that are the digital story scripts.

Deductive codes were used to code the data, and inductive codes were used to develop new codes. The data were analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns and themes.

Results

Positive Effects Identified in Adult Focus Groups

- Pride, self-esteem, sense of belonging and identity
- Education, fun, leadership, responsibility
- Fleming future, academics and life skills
- Resilience and solidarity, community unity
- Awareness of animals and nature, love and respect

Photovoice

There are two themes identified and consents posted by our participating students:

- "I love running dogs and racing in competitions. During competitions there is often a lot 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 calm, it is a period of time without noise and worry."

Conclusions

Human and animal health and the environment are increasingly interconnected in the youth's stories.

- Companionship with animals and Athabascan cultural values.
- Well-being is tied to connections to other people, the land, to animals, and to cultural traditions.
- The program fosters intergenerational relationships that link the generation of cultural knowledge and understanding being.
- Dog mushing connects youth to the land, to their environment, to nature, to their homes, and to themselves.
- The program shows how the youth can see the value of hard work and determination.
- These values and strengths open up future opportunities.

Digital Stories

Digital Stories Code (Theme) Frequencies

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
- Honor
- 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

Athabascan Cultural Values (Frequencies)

- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Honoring Ancestors
- Athabascan cultural values established by the Denakkanaaga Elders Conference

Athabascan Cultural Values (Proportion)

- Respect for the Land and Nature
- Honoring Ancestors
- Athabascan cultural values established by the Denakkanaaga Elders Conference

One Health Insights:

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

Digital Stories

Digital Story Quote from a High School Girl

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

Digital Stories

Digital Story Quote from a Middle School Boy

"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."

Methods

With the help of the UAF office, the FAYSDP began a youth-focused program and gained support from the Community Planning Group (CPG). The CPG was established to facilitate the research and provide cultural appropriate recommendations for all steps of the project. Examples of their guidance include, but are not limited to, implementation of workshops and generation of culturally relevant content.

One Health Insights

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

Digital Stories

Digital Story Quote from a Middle School Boy

"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."

Methods

With the help of the UAF office, the FAYSDP began a youth-focused program and gained support from the Community Planning Group (CPG). The CPG was established to facilitate the research and provide cultural appropriate recommendations for all steps of the project. Examples of their guidance include, but are not limited to, implementation of workshops and generation of culturally relevant content.

One Health Insights

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

Digital Stories

Digital Story Quote from a Middle School Boy

"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."