

BLESSED GROUND TRANSCRIPT

Fairbanks Native Association
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Vanna: And now, most days, we only go home for a funeral or a potlatch down the highway. And it's really sad to see that that's the only time we get to learn more songs and dance more.

Irene: I think the biggest problem facing our youth today, is the loss of language, the loss of the native songs. Right now we're learning to sing, "Sweet By and By," from a recording and from written material. We're trying to learn those songs so that we can pass them on to our young ones. Then the students that learn them, learn those songs, can pass them on to even the younger generation.

Irene: I think native dancing gives them a place for them to go when they really need something in their life. I think it gives them a meaning, a self-confidence that helps them get through hard times.

Shyanne: So what happened is we're losing a lot of our culture when we're not learning how to dance, when we're not learning the stories or the language. And we realize we're going to lose a big portion of our history if we do that so we are creating programs and groups to learn more about that stuff. So then we don't lose our culture and our own history.

Irene: It's important for their self-identity. It's important that they know where they come from, what their culture is. And to have meaning in their life. It's truly a joy to teach these students. I saw them when they first came into the program and they were lost. I mean many of them were lost without their culture. Having growing up in the cities and when they started dancing and singing, it seemed to really help them overcome the problems that they faced.

Isahiah: The feelings really unexplainable when I dance with my friends. It just, it just feels good to be with the people who I love to dance with. When I first got in this group I used to be very internal and shy but when I first made friends here and started dancing I learned more about my culture and heritage and I, I got more confidence in me.

Carl: It helped me to become more self-reliant. I've been living with family beforehand and since working with FNA it helped me to get my own place, my own vehicle, and now it's just one step at a time to more leadership. I've been told for years now that culture is prevention. What I wanna do and how I want to help that is promote awareness and promote sobriety from any such harmfulness that is plaguing Alaska.

FNA kids: Dancing is a holistic approach to the behavioral health. Dancing is a healing process. Dancing is an intervention strategy and the impact of dancing on the youth can be major. It helps youth open up become part of something positive and offers a safe place for them to voice their needs. It improves the mental health and fosters spirituality. It creates bonds across generations and provides key cultural connections that can be difficult to maintain in urban areas such as Fairbanks, Alaska.