

Telling their stories

Alaska's youth lend powerful voices to suicide prevention

BY ESTELLA CLAYMORE

Suicide remains a sensitive and urgent topic and an issue that continues to impact families and communities around Alaska. Suicide prevention work has brought awareness to the subject, and few efforts are more moving than the heartfelt and hopeful messages of Alaska's young people.

For three years, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) has partnered with the Alaska Association of Student Governments (AASG), the Alaska Careline and GCI to support the AASG Suicide Prevention Media Contest. The competition encourages Alaska students to use new media and share how suicide has changed their lives.

In April, the partnership announced the top entries in this year's competition: Mitchell Forbes and the Bethel Regional High School Student Council took first and second place while Cara

Online

Watch all of the entries in the AASG Suicide Prevention Media Contest online at:
youtube.com/anthctoday

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Chapman and the Chugiak High School Student Council placed third.

"We felt it was our part to help combat the issue. Additionally, our student council this year has worked diligently with our administration to improve the school climate for all students," said Forbes, Bethel Regional High School's student council president.

In the winning entry, Bethel classmates showed how negative words act as burdening weights, and how when someone is there to help or listen, the weight is shared. The second place video features dozens of Bethel students and staff moving around a gymnasium floor to spell out messages of hope and unity.

Bethel students recognized the importance of using their creativity and sharing their stories as part of combating suicide around Alaska and among their peers.

"With our videos, we aimed to show our student body the effect



1st *The winning video in the AASG Suicide Prevention Media Contest, submitted by the Bethel Regional High School Student Council, shows how high school students can help each other deal with problems that make life difficult.*

they can have on each other, whether it is positive or negative," said Forbes.

Chapman and her Chugiak classmates filmed their third place message near a wall of hope in their school, where fellow students wrote what they lived for on pieces of paper and added the messages to the wall.

All contest submissions can be viewed online at youtube.com/anthctoday. ANTHC has turned the top two entries into television public service announcements, which GCI is airing around Alaska. Last year's winning PSAs ran more than 200,000 times on statewide cable. GCI and ANTHC received the Outstanding Community Support Award for hosting the

statewide media campaign and for giving students an opportunity to share their important messages.

ANTHC's Barbara Franks, Suicide Prevention Program Associate, knows that contests like these empower youth to use their voices and make positive change.

"As I shared with the students, I want you to be able to ask your friend if they have thoughts of suicide, but to also be prepared for any answer they give and to know who can help with the next level of care," said Franks. "They are prepared, they are not afraid to ask, and they are determined to keep suicide prevention awareness as part of their annual goal."