



The Community Mini-Grant was founded in 2010 with the intention of supporting small, time-sensitive community-based projects that are consistent with SCRA's mission, principles, and goals. We are happy to support the great work being done by SCRA members and their community partners, and even happier to be able to highlight examples of this work and share them with the GJCPP readership. Below, Dr. Jordan Lewis provides us with insight into the Denali Center, in Fairbanks, Alaska, and a description of the impact that Community Mini-Grant funding had on his work there.

The [Denali Center](#)

(http://www.bannerhealth.com/Locations/Alaska/Fairbanks+Memorial+Hospital/Programs+and+Services/Long+Term+Care/_Denali+Home+Page.htm) in Fairbanks, Alaska, is a long-term care facility that has a high proportion of Alaska Native (AN) residents, including elders, who come from various tribal/rural communities throughout Interior Alaska and across the State. This facility is referred to as the model for delivering culturally appropriate long term care services in the State by other health and long term care providers in the State.

The Denali Center has adopted the “Eden Alternative” philosophy and operates from an Elder-centered approach and identifying what is important to the residents. The [Eden Alternative](#) (<http://www.edenalt.org/>) is a revolutionary approach to long-term care focused on creating an environment conducive to health and happiness. Following the Eden Alternative principles with the intention of promoting a homelike atmosphere, the Denali Center is designed like a traditional neighborhood. The facility's four patient wings – Aspen Way, Birch Lane, Tamarack Trail, and Willow Run – resemble individual neighborhoods, with staff assigned to each. Birch Lane and Tamarack Trail provide general long-term care while Aspen Way serves as the short-term care unit and Willow Run cares for patients presenting with Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia. The wings of the Denali Center incorporate unique architectural styles, plants, animals, and multi-generational interaction to bring a true sense of community to those who call it home.

Many of the activities at the Denali Center focus on “Alaska Native culture,” and the sharing of culture in a group setting that includes:

- Traditional Alaska Native music;
- Traditional and contemporary Native dances;
- Videos (i.e., village documentaries, celebrations, World Eskimo Indian Olympics, Athabascan Fiddle Fests, etc.);
- News (i.e., Alaska Native specific, village/regional corporations, Denakkanaaga, Inc.);
- Traditional Native foods (i.e., moose, caribou, salmon, dried meats, berries, etc.);

- Participation in cultural activities in community (i.e., WEIO, Festival of Native Arts, potlatches, Athabaskan Fiddle Fest, North American race).

These activities incorporate various aspects of Alaska Native cultures familiar to the residents and remind them of their family and communities and keep them connected to their culture, natal community, and home region (i.e, Interior and Northern Alaska). The impetus for these activities came from realizing the importance of building relationships and trust; the importance of establishing and building rapport before providing care. Alaska Native Elders communication patterns are different than “Euro-American” patterns and it takes time and patience to gain their trust to provide quality care and these activities assist in this process.

The Denali Center began incorporating these activities because they recognized that the loss of culture and community ties increases isolation, boredom, and grief. The purpose of these cultural activities includes:

1. Supporting residents in transition to placement;
2. Nourishing body and soul;
3. Celebrating cultural wealth.

Based on the testimony from the residents, the impact of these activities has been positive. They have increased satisfaction with placement, increased involvement (participating in events, sharing ideas, recipes, etc.), and strengthened relationships between residents, family, and staff. The family members of these residents are happy with their family member’s involvement in the activities. They no longer view their family members as sick and dependent, but as active and healthy.

Mini-Grant Supported Activities

One of the main goals of the SCRA mini-grant was to develop a training manual documenting these cultural activities that promote physical and mental health, as well as ease the transition to institutional-based living. This manual is in its early drafts, and we are currently working on writing up Native food recipes and common Native phrases used in the facility setting to be included in the manual. Our goal with this manual is to have it available to all long-term care and skilled nursing facilities within the State, as well as private homes that may, or currently, provide care to Alaska Native residents. It is our hope this manual will also serve as template for other tribal communities and facilities to model after throughout Indian Country; we plan on distributing it through the Tribal Long Term Supports and Services conference and tribal health organization websites.

In addition to developing the manual of cultural activities, we used Mini-Grant funding to assist us in collecting digital recordings of Alaska Native dances, songs, stories, and celebrations that will be uploaded onto the computer at the Denali Center. To make the digital recordings more accessible to the residents, we upgraded the Denali Center computer to include a larger touchscreen monitor with help from funding from the SCRA mini grant. Once the computer was set up by the Denali Center IT staff, it is used in settings throughout the facility that is accessible by the residents to enjoy videos and internet materials. For example, one of the first activities was watching the Doyon Shareholders meeting online. (Doyon, Limited, the Native regional corporation for Interior Alaska, is a for-profit corporation with over 18,600 [shareholders](#), and is

the [largest private landowner](#) in Alaska. Doyon operates a diverse [Family of Companies](#) and has built a strong reputation for innovation and technical expertise)

Now that the computer is set up, we are working with the University on uploading the digital recordings into an iTunes library created specifically for this project and we will continue to add to the library as we gather more digital resources from the University of Alaska's "[Project Jukebox](#)," other Alaska based organizations, and even family members and Elders/residents themselves.

The Yup'ik group, Pamyua, is just one of several great groups with whom we partner. You can learn more about this group and hear some of their music at www.pamyua.com.

In regards to the interviews on the UAF Project Jukebox, we would recommend the following interviews from Fairbanks, in particular the interview with Howard Luke. He is not a resident at the Denali Center, but is from Fairbanks and is a very respected Elder that most of the residents of the Denali Center and Alaska know of. Here is the link to his interview:

<http://jukebox.uaf.edu/Fairbanks/html/hl.htm>.



The SCRA Community Mini-Grant is currently considering new proposals for funding (average award: \$1,200). All SCRA members are invited to apply for funding, in conjunction with their community and organizational partners. Applications are available on the [SCRA website](#), and are considered on a rolling basis until funding runs out; we expect to award 10 grants this year. For questions or more information, please email: SCRACommunityGrants@gmail.com