

# First Alaskans Institute

## News Release

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## FIRST NATIONS' FUTURES PROGRAM – 2018 ALASKA FELLOWS ARE SELECTED

Anchorage, Alaska – First Alaskans Institute (FAI) is pleased to announce the selection of our 8<sup>th</sup> annual First Nations' Futures Program (FNFP) Fellows cohort:

- **Damen Nanggaahlaangstangs Bell-Holter** (Tlingit/Haida)
- **Bernadette Aanavak Fischer** (Iñupiaq)
- **Debra Djik Sook O'Gara** (Yup'ik/Tlingit)
- **Jackie Qataliña Schaeffer** (Iñupiaq)
- **Grace Singh** (Koyukon Athabascan)
- **Darlene Paqpaluk Trigg** (Iñupiaq)

FNFP is a unique leadership partnership between the indigenous peoples of Alaska, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Hawai'i. It was created to cultivate and challenge indigenous leadership in order to impact our Fellows and families, our cultures and communities, the other participating cohorts, our homelands, and the world. The host organizations are [First Alaskans Institute](#), [Ho'okele Strategies](#), [Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu](#) (a Māori Iwi on the southern island of Aotearoa), and [Stanford University Woods Institute for the Environment](#), and it is also supported by Sealaska, Kamehameha Schools, and the University of Canterbury.

FNFP features a two-week, on-site certificate program and the gathering of the three cohorts at Stanford, plus other obligations which differ per cohort. Fellows strengthen their leadership while envisioning ways to enact our ancestral imperative to steward and care for our peoples, lands and cultures. They participate in diverse sessions such as meeting with the local Tribe, the Muwekma Ohlone peoples, and hearing from cultural, thought, and entrepreneurial leaders from across the cohorts. They will dialogue about indigenous law and policy issues, cultural paradigms and advancements, and stewardship of land, animals and resources. They will build relationships with one another, indigenous leaders from former cohorts, and special guests from Stanford and Silicon Valley. A core element of FNFP is the values propositions the Fellows develop to crystalize their ideas for being in service to their communities in ways that resonate with their work, their passions, and the needs of their peoples. Cohort members are active leaders, generally in mid-career/cultural/community leadership roles or at a pivotal stage in their journey where an extra boost or challenge will amplify their abilities to advance our indigenous peoples.

On behalf of the FAI Board of Trustees and staff, we extend our congratulations to the 2018 Fellows and gratitude to their communities and families for supporting their involvement and leadership!

### **About First Alaskans Institute (FAI):**

*At FAI we know we are responsible for carrying more than 10,000 years of ancestral knowledge into the future with rigor, humor, resilience, vigilance, and love.*

To learn more visit our website at [www.firstalaskans.org](http://www.firstalaskans.org), contact us at 907-677-1700 or email [info@firstalaskans.org](mailto:info@firstalaskans.org).

## 2018 First Nations Futures Fellows – Alaska Cohort

**Damen Nangaahlaangstangs Bell-Holter** grew up in the community of Hydaburg. His mother is Cherilyn Holter, and he grew up practicing his culture and learning to live off of the land. Nangaahlaangstangs developed a love for basketball at an early age and excelled at the game as he got older. In high school, he decided to chase his dream of playing collegiate and professional basketball. He played for Oral Roberts University at the Division 1 level, achieving all-conference his sophomore and senior seasons, and was named a mid-major-all-American his senior year. After college, he became a professional athlete, and played for the Boston Celtics his rookie season becoming the first Alaska Native to play in an NBA game and then played in Europe for the remainder of his professional career. Nangaahlaangstangs created his own basketball camps in the hopes of giving back to Native youth and has traveled across the US and Canada. He enjoys working with Native youth by instructing camps, workshops and providing keynote speeches. Nangaahlaangstangs retired from basketball to work with Native youth full time and became the Director of Youth and Community Development for Sealaska Corporation.



**Bernadette Aanavak Fischer** was born and raised in Barrow and resides in Utqiagvik with her daughter. Her parents are Robert Jr. and Margie Fischer. Aanavak's paternal grandparents are Robert Sr. and Georgiana (Ahmaogak) Fischer, and maternal grandparents are Nimrod and Emma (Hopson) Bodfish. She enjoys giving back to her people in the Arctic Slope region by being a role model and a resource. Aanavak holds an associate's in Architectural Engineering Technology and a bachelor's in Construction Management from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). She is currently working toward a master's in Public Administration through the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). Aanavak enjoys serving people as a council member for the City of Utqiagvik and is serving her second term. She is the Program Manager at the North Slope Borough's Department of Capital Improvement Program Management. Aanavak oversees the North Slope Borough School District projects, childcare facilities, health clinics, and other infrastructure projects.



**Debra Djik Sook O'Gara** grew up in the Seattle area and spent summers in Mountain Village, where her mother, Carol O'Gara, was born and raised. Her father was the late Lawrence O'Gara. She is Raven from the Teey Hit Taan clan. Djik Sook's grandmother is Frances Tamaree Sheppard of Wrangell and great grandparents were Tillie Paul Tamaree and William Tamaree. She is an artist and creating beautiful objects gives her balance and brings an important sense of connection to Juneau and Southeast Alaska. Djik Sook commits many hours practicing and teaching multiple art forms, including cedar bark and spruce root basket weaving, and Chilkat and ravens tail weaving, sewing and beading Native regalia, wood carving and needle point. She has practiced law for over 26 years and is currently the Presiding Judge for the Tlingit & Haida Tribal Court. Djik Sook continued her education by earning a master's in Public Administration at UAS. She is currently an Associate Professor working with the administration to create an Indigenous Governance concentration in the MPA program.



**Jackie Qataliña Schaeffer** is from Kotzebue and is the daughter of Mary and the late General John Schaeffer.



Qataliña enjoys practicing and sharing traditional healing and medicinal plant knowledge, and recently participated in the Tikahtnu Plant Symposium. She believes Alaska Native people’s strength and ability to adapt in some of the harshest conditions will be the catalyst that shifts solutions for the future. Qataliña’s background in design and sustainable building science allows a perspective of placing the end user at the center of change. She works to infuse traditional knowledge into strategic planning transforming from the top down to a locally-driven, grassroots approach. Qataliña has found this innovative approach allows local leadership to be empowered to own and lead the discussions and decision making. Her passion is to find innovative sanitation solutions for underserved communities, tribal resiliency adaptation planning, community relocation projects, regional sanitation planning and tribal engagement. Qataliña is a Senior Project Manager for the Division of Environmental Health and Engineering at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, where she has worked in comprehensive planning, energy, housing and water/sanitation in rural Alaskan communities.

**Grace Singh** was born and raised in Fairbanks and is a Stevens Village tribal member. Her parents are Karm and Renee Singh and her grandparents are Stephen and Valarie Matthew. Grace’s traditional education began as a small child on the Yukon River and abruptly ended with the King Salmon disaster in 2010. She believes the king decline was a devastating convergence of inequitable distribution of resources, impacts of climate change and lack of political response. Since then, Grace dedicates her life to protecting traditional hunting and fishing activities and has worked toward the unification and mobilization of the Alaska Native voice to solving issues. Grace holds a bachelor’s in Political Science from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). She has worked as a Government Affairs Liaison for the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, where she organized a state lobbying campaign made up of tribal nonprofits called the Alaska Regional Coalition. She was also the Deputy Rural Field Director for Senator Mark Begich’s re-election campaign, and Staff Assistant to Representative Neal Foster from Nome. Grace currently serves as the Chief of Staff for Representative Tiffany Zulkosky from Bethel in Alaska’s State Legislature.



**Darlene Paqpaluk Trigg** is from Nome and is the daughter of Jerome and Barbara Trigg. Paqpaluk is the wife of Keith Morrison, mother of three children, Gwendalyn, Owen and Paris, and grandmother to Kangisaq. She is passionate about her culture and land and works to pass this on to her children and granddaughter. Paqpaluk recently worked as the Social Justice Manager for First Alaskans Institute, where she was responsible for the Advancing Native Dialogues on Racial Equity (ANDORE) project through the Alaska Native Policy Center and the creation of a collective impact project for Racial Equity in Alaska. She currently serves as the President of the Nome Community Center Board of Directors and is the Co-Chair of the Nome Regional Wellness Forum and the Chair of the Nome Social Justice Taskforce. Paqpaluk currently works for Norton Sound Health Corporation (NHSC) as the Assistant Vice President of Community Health Services and is responsible for supporting the Community Health Services Division and assisting with special projects under the guidance of Lucy Apatiki. She has worked for NHSC in a variety of capacities and has over 15 years of experience in the tribal health system.

