



For Immediate Release
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Contact: Karla Gatgyedm Hana'ax Booth
leadership@firstalaskans.org, (907) 677-1700

**ANNOUNCING THE 38TH ANNUAL STATEWIDE
ELDERS & YOUTH CONFERENCE THEME, KEYNOTE SPEAKERS,
CONFERENCE GUIDES, REGISTRATION AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED**

**ahnuu dAXunhyuu AXAkihya' iLka' GAdAqeeLinuu (Eyak)
"Side by side in the same direction the people go by canoe"**

Dgheyey Kaq'; Dena'inaq etnen'aq' qilan (Anchorage, Alaska; lands of the Dena'ina) – First Alaskans Institute (FAI) 38th Annual Statewide Elders & Youth Conference (Elders & Youth) will be held in the unceded **virtual** space of our Alaska Native peoples this October 17-20, 2021. Our conference theme is presented in the Eyak language – “**ahnuu dAXunhyuu AXAkihya' iLka' GAdAqeeLinuu**” – which translates to “side by side in the same direction the people go by canoe.” Now more than ever we want to ensure that our Elders and youth are the center of our attention. After almost two years of a grueling pandemic, we need this precious time to hear what is going on in their lives and communities, exchange knowledge and practices of our peoples, build strong relationships, and celebrate the brilliance and wisdom of our Elders and our youth. All others, especially community leaders, are invited to register and attend with the purpose of listening to, learning from, and engaging meaningfully with our Elders and youth so that their wellbeing, experience, and voices are uplifted as we pull side by side forward to thriving Native peoples and communities.

The theme amplifies this critical movement and journey we are on. The importance of being in solidarity during this pandemic and a polarizing time in our state and nation. We look to our Elders and our youth to help set our course in the right direction for our peoples. The theme is an empowering example of breaking the reins of colonization by Indigenizing all aspects of life and forever practicing the ways of our peoples. Awa'ahdah (thank you in Eyak) to Jenna May, Daxootsu Judy Ramos, Angela Butler, and Guillaume Leduey for engaging in the process of creating a theme generated first in the Eyak language and culture before being translated, and for being so wonderful as you took the topic ideas and advisement of the 2021 Statewide Elders & Youth Council into consideration as you brought forward this reminder and charge – that we must continue, side by side, to achieve all that our Ancestors dreamed for us.

This year also marks a milestone achievement with the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) which was enacted through the advocacy and sacrifices of many of our Alaska Native leaders, allies, families, and communities to ensure we maintain connection to our lands and waters. As our canoe advances ahead, we uplift those who started the journey long before us and amplify the power of those who are and will continue the legacy. During Elders & Youth, we are proud to celebrate our leaders and their work that created the momentum to keep our peoples moving in the right direction.

Elder Keynote

Ruth Booth (Tsimshian) is an 82-year-old mother, grandmother, and great grandmother of the community of Metlakatla. She was born in Lax Kw'alaams, British Columbia and later moved to Metlakatla after her arranged marriage with late Mel Booth that lasted 53 years. They took care of the water plant for over 40 years prior to the building of a road system, so they had to hike to test the water. Ruth has helped to raise many children and is affectionately known as everyone's grandmother. She is renowned for her ability to make traditional medicines and working on fish that fisherman often bring her to process and split, which she has been doing over 50 years. She generously gifts her processed salmon to family and shares at gatherings. Ruth's granddaughter Ruth Constantine says, "There's no stopping her from any harvesting. She had quit smoking fish about 10 times, but still finds herself back in the smokehouse." When showing her family how to cut fish, she can't resist taking over because it feels so good.



Ruth Booth. Photo by April Atkinson.

Youth Keynote



Oliver Iqitailnguq Tyrrell. Photo by Zach Oren.

Oliver Iqitailnguq Tyrrell (Yup'ik/Iñupiaq) is a sophomore at Mt. Edgecumbe High School. His Yup'ik name means the smart and wise one. He is a 15-year-old female to a transgender man. Iqitailnguq is a high school wrestler, basketball player, and active in the Mt. Edgecumbe High School Student Council. He was born in Fairbanks with family from Emmonak. After his father Jake Tyrrell died, Iqitailnguq and his mother, Emily Edenshaw, moved from Fairbanks to Anchorage. Emily is Oliver's biggest supporter and role model. Oliver loves listening to stories of his people. His goals are to help the Alaska Native and LGBTQIA2S+ community by supporting their mental health, and says, "There is so much unresolved trauma in our Native community and getting mental and emotional help can be so hard to reach out for." Iqitailnguq is an active member of the 2021 Statewide Elders & Youth Council as the Representative for the Southcentral region and has been the successful champion of two resolutions that passed through Elders & Youth and AFN.

Conference Guides



Averie Wells. Photo by Aliyah Wells.

Averie Wells (Tsimshian/Iñupiaq/Yup'ik) was born and raised in Anchorage. Her parents are Karla Weise and Clinton Wells, and her maternal grandparents are Eileen and John Weise with roots in Bethel and Metlakatla. Her paternal grandparents are Rhoda and Harold Wells with roots in Kotzebue. Averie is a junior majoring in Political Science at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She enjoys being outside and engaging in political conversations. She loves her family dog, Stevie, who has been a source of strength during this pandemic. Averie strengthened her advocacy voice through the FAI Public Policy Fellowship and Summer Internship Program. In the past she also served as a Statewide Elders & Youth Council Representative for the Southcentral region. Averie hopes to be a lawyer and travel the world.



Duncan Okitkun processing a beluga whale stomach. Photo by Louise Okitkun.

Duncan Aciniq Okitkun (Yup'ik) is from Kotlik and resides in St. Mary's. His parents are Marvin Okitkun of Kotlik and Stephanie Dukes of Stebbins. His paternal grandparents are Benedict and Louise Okitkun and maternal grandparents are Herbert and Minnie Aluska. Aciniq was raised in traditional ways of living and loves hunting, fishing, Yup'ik dancing, drum making, carving, and spending time with loved ones. In the past he served on the Statewide Elders & Youth Council as Representative for the YK Delta. He started college at University of Alaska Fairbanks and hopes to become a Yup'ik language teacher in his hometown. He is currently a Yup'ik Boys Skills Instructor at the St. Mary's school where he teaches craft and tool making and is also an Arctic Youth Ambassador for 2020-2021.

Registration

Registration for Elders & Youth will be free this year thanks to the generosity of our sponsors! We encourage schools and communities to partner with us and register as many participants as they'd like. **For schools, please consider participation in the conference as school attendance through virtual school offerings during this time of COVID-19.** This free registration and warm invitation is our way of holding up our communities during this time, and ensure connection, learning, relationship-building, and understanding of our rich and diverse Alaska Native cultures are fostered and shared across the state. **We encourage early bird registration by Friday, October 8th via online registration at https://whova.com/portal/registration/seyc_202110/** to ensure there's enough time to send out materials relevant to our Living & Loving Our Cultures workshops. Space will be limited in some sessions by request of the instructors and/or ability to get materials sent out in time. Registration will continue through the beginning of the conference though some sessions may not be available.

Call for Proposals, Volunteers & Sponsorships

Elders & Youth is made possible with the love and support of our community, volunteers and sponsors. Our **Call for Proposals** is still [currently available online](#), however we are fast filling up with incredible offerings from across the state. We are seeking **volunteers** to assist with registration, video editing, social media monitoring, kit packing and more; please sign up [online to volunteer](#). **Sponsorships** are vital to ensure a successful convening of our precious Elders & Youth; AwA'ahdah, thank you to all who have sponsored thus far! For more details about our call for proposals, volunteers and sponsors please visit: <https://firstalaskans.org/leadership-development/elders-youth-conference/2021-elders-youth-conference/>.

Community Hall

Our re-imagined Community Hall will feature our Alaska Native artists and community organizations virtually as well. To be considered for inclusion in the Community Hall, visit https://whova.com/portal/registration/seyc_202110/.

Broadcast & Livestream

Elders & Youth will be **livestreamed on the FAI website** and **televised statewide** through our partners on **KTOO 360 North** and **ARCS**, though interactive learning, engagement, and participation will only be accessible via registration. We are committed to having a culturally radiant and safe virtual experience for our participants where all are welcome with the understanding that we center our Elders and our youth.

We look forward to seeing you this October 17th-20th! To get involved and for more information, please visit our FAI website at www.firstalaskans.org, calling 907-677-1700 or emailing leadership@firstalaskans.org.

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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, please visit our website at www.firstalaskans.org, contact us at 907-677-1700 or email info@firstalaskans.org.*