

# Elders - Words of Wisdom: Episode 3 - Alaska Native Elders Moving to Anchorage Transcript

## **Thomas Moore**

Hi and welcome back to another episode of Elders - Words of Wisdom, a podcast from the National Resource Center for Alaska Native Elders at UAA. I'm your host Thomas Moore and this month we're talking to Chris Klabunde at the Southcentral Foundation Elder Program. Chris is the manager of the Elder Program meaning he oversees daily operations, including grant management, staff management, nutrition and food services and many other things.

## **Chris Klabunde**

So, my background is actually in youth development. So, when I was in my twenties I used to manage Boys and Girls Clubs. So, it's actually really interesting how there's a lot of similar things that occur, right? So, when you talk about this sense of community and a sense of belonging and a sense of influence. So, a lot of the things that I learned in terms of that background have come to apply to what I do here.

## **Thomas Moore**

So, I asked Chris to tell me a little bit more about the Elder Program and what kind of services that they provide.

## **Chris Klabunde**

So, Southcentral Foundation is the regional healthcare provider within the tribal health system. So, in the Anchorage area and everywhere kind of in the Southcentral region.

## **Thomas Moore**

So, our main topic of discussion this month is on Alaska Native Elders moving away from their home villages to Anchorage and what that looks like, what the experience is like for elders, and how we can help support them to make that transition easier. Chris is very well versed in this area so I'll let him talk on that for a bit.

## **Chris Klabunde**

So, the idea here really is that the Elder Program is here to promote aging in place, independence and to enable that. That exists for a lot of reasons, I mean there's better health outcomes, it's better for customer owners and their families, it's ultimately better for our system. So, you have better health outcomes with a lower cost than having somebody living in various homes or whatever it might be.

**Thomas Moore**

As a Title VI Director, Chris focuses on nutrition support which includes the Elder Program's daily congregate meal and other partnerships.

**Chris Klabunde**

With U.S. Fish and Wildlife they will bring us seagull eggs. So, they harvest seagull eggs from around town in places they don't want seagulls to be nesting like airports or on tops of buildings and stuff like that. So, for us in our culture seagull eggs are really important subsistence food and it's not something where we can just go out and go get them like they would if people were living in the villages. So, it's more of a challenge being in an urban setting like we are versus places that are obviously more rural.

**Thomas Moore**

So, I asked Chris what factors influence Alaska Native elders to leave their communities and seek care in Anchorage or other urban areas of Alaska.

**Chris Klabunde**

Access to care, wheel chair ramps and that sort of stuff. You have the cost of living factor. So, people who are on a fixed income. Trying to keep fuel in the tank or wood in the stove -- it's really a challenge. The other part is that there are younger people that moving and there's younger families. So, they're coming in to stay with their kids or their grandkids

**Thomas Moore**

In general, the hope is not to take elders away from their community whenever possible.

**Chris Klabunde**

People that are living in villages, the best outcome for them is hopefully, if they're able to, is to stay there. So, when the oldest couple in town really have this cultural and knowledge base are for whatever reason leaving the community, that's a real detriment to that community and that's something that, while we're honored to have them here and interact with them, it's bittersweet because we know it's a loss for that community. So, really challenging.

**Thomas Moore**

In addition to aging in place positive aging is really important when caring for elders to ensure a happy and healthy life.

**Chris Klabunde**

You know, if I had to narrow it down to three big things, again it would be social, cultural, and then their family. If they're close to their family and they have family support. Grand parents looking after grandchildren while mom and dad are at work, whatever those situations are. That's good for the kiddos and that's good for the elders.

**Thomas Moore**

So, what can we do to incorporate traditions and activities into the care that we provide for elders?

**Chris Klabunde**

So, there's the subsistence side of it and there's the other kind of cultural side. I think the challenge is access to the traditional and social and that subsistence based stuff. But I think that that's also something that each person is so individually different and each culture is different. You know, if you talk to someone who's from the coast they're gonna say that skinning seals are great and if you talk to somebody from up the Yukon seals are a consideration. So, it really depends on who that is, but I think that the important factor is the access to it. There is a really strong desire to pass along their knowledge and they're willing to share that knowledge I've found. So, part of that too is that there are willing teachers but there also needs to be willing learners. How to foster that relationship is challenging at times as well. I think what the common desire is to hold on to traditions that are important. Those are going to be like language, I hear that really consistently, subsistence food, subsistence and through that food.

**Thomas Moore**

Not only are there important cultural aspects to be aware of it's also good to remember the shift that occurs when elders move away from the life they've known for a very long time.

**Chris Klabunde**

If you have someone who's lived in a village for seventy years and then all of a sudden they're moving into Anchorage, that's like moving into a whole different country. There are transportation factors. There are cultural things that are very, very different. So, that transition is often really challenging for people

**Thomas Moore**

So, that about wraps it up for this month. Here's Chris for one last tip to remember about Alaska Native elders and why positive care is important.

**Chris Klabunde**

That elders are the keystones of the family and the community and really the culture bearers.

**Thomas Moore**

I'd like to thank Chris Klabunde from the Southcentral Foundation Elder Program for talking with me this month. You can find more info about them at [southcentralfoundation.com](http://southcentralfoundation.com). The Elder Program is located at 6901 East Tudor Dr. Suite 8 and they're open from Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm. Thanks for listening, this has been Elders - Words of Wisdom. I'm Thomas Moore with the National Resource Center for Alaska Native Elders and the School of Social Work at UAA. Until next time, take care.