



WISEWOMAN

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**Success Story 4** *Traditions of the Heart Promotes Wellness Among Alaska Native Women*

*Staff and Lay Health Advisors Lead Lessons on Nutrition, Exercise, Stress, and Tobacco*

**Location** Southcentral Foundation in Anchorage, Alaska

**Focus** Help Alaska Native women adopt a wide range of healthy behaviors that can improve their cardiovascular health and overall wellness.

**Strategy** WISEWOMAN staff members at Southcentral Foundation found a well-developed, successful nutrition and physical activity intervention and tailored the materials to be culturally appropriate for Alaska Native women. They tested the materials and got feedback from women in the intended audience.

**Levels of Success** This adaptation provides a model that other programs can use to develop culturally appropriate health materials. The Southcentral Foundation staff collaborated with the author of *A New Leaf... Choices for Healthy Living* to adapt the materials, sought input from Alaska Native women, and tailored the materials by adding foods and activities relevant to these women.

**Results** *Traditions of the Heart* is used for lifestyle interventions and counseling provided by WISEWOMAN projects in both Southcentral Foundation and SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium. Other WISEWOMAN projects and public health initiatives hope to use these materials in their efforts to promote the health of Alaska Native women.

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For program contact information, see Alaska in Appendix C or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman>.

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# Traditions of the Heart Promotes Wellness Among Alaska Native Women

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WISEWOMAN staff at Southcentral Foundation in Alaska recognized the need for an easy-to-understand lifestyle intervention that could be used in diverse settings by professional and lay staff. After reviewing the literature for existing interventions, staff members could not find any interventions that provided enough lessons to promote long-term healthy habits and that were designed specifically for Alaska Natives. They decided to tailor an existing intervention to meet their needs. Staff members knew they needed materials, written at or below the sixth-grade reading level, that provided consistent nutrition and physical activity messages, could be used with groups or individuals, and could be used by women at home following the sessions.

They found a well-designed, successful intervention that fit the bill. Developed by Alice Ammerman, DrPH, RD, at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, *A New Leaf . . . Choices for Healthy Living* is written at the sixth-grade reading level, contains sound lessons promoting nutrition and physical activity, and does not require an expert to deliver the messages. To adapt the materials for Alaska Native women, staff at Southcentral Foundation worked with a multidisciplinary work group that included Dr. Ammerman, registered dietitians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, exercise specialists, and graphic artists. They surveyed eligible Alaska Native women aged 40–64 to identify topics of interest to them and effective ways to reach them with health messages. Findings from the survey led to these adaptations:

- The project was named *Traditions of the Heart* to reflect the cultural emphasis of the adaptation.
- A Native artist created a heart-shaped design (above) that tells a story and reflects the diverse cultural heritage and traditions of Alaska Native women.
- A stress management/traditional wellness program was developed that helps women with relaxation, imagery, laughter, and time management.
- Culturally appropriate language is used in all materials.
- Dietary assessments used affordable and available foods commonly eaten in Alaska and included traditional or subsistence food choices.
- The cookbook used in *A New Leaf* was adapted to include traditional Alaska Native recipes and recipes with foods commonly available in the area, including salmon and berries.



*The Traditions of the Heart design tells a story of Alaska Native women's lives and reflects their many traditions.*

- Exercise lessons were adapted to reflect popular Alaskan activities, which are dictated by climate, accessibility, cost, and environment. Photos of Alaska Native women exercising replaced graphic designs that were in the original *A New Leaf* lessons.
- To promote total wellness among Alaska Native women, *Traditions of the Heart* developed a 12-week series of sessions that cover nutrition, exercise, stress management, and tobacco use.
- Information on tobacco use was expanded so that all forms of tobacco are now addressed.

*Traditions of the Heart* was pilot-tested with women in the Southcentral Foundation WISEWOMAN program. The staff then used the pilot test findings to refine and strengthen the intervention. The adaptation, started in May 2000, took 4 months to complete and required over 660 hours of staff and consultant time. Costs included personnel, consultant, and materials fees.

## Importance of Success

The 12-week series offered by *Traditions of the Heart* is tailored to meet the needs of Alaska Native women. The sessions convey messages that are culturally acceptable and can be easily disseminated by lay health advisors. *Traditions of the Heart* is now used by another WISEWOMAN project, led by SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC). Nancy C. Knapp, MPH, WISEWOMAN Project

Director at SEARHC said that *Traditions of the Heart* has made a difference in women's lives. "Because it references local subsistence foods and locally available physical activity options, women in the SEARHC WISEWOMAN program can relate to the materials," she noted.

## Lessons Learned

- Consider basing your program on a well-developed model like *A New Leaf*. By collaborating with the designer, you can save time and effort and keep your project on schedule.
- Learn about the needs and interests of women in your target population through surveys with the women and people who will lead the intervention. This information is essential if you are to design a culturally appropriate program.