



Working Together with One Voice

“Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.”

Kofi Annan

One Voice, formerly Valdez Youth Awareness Coalition, has been operating in the Valdez community since 1999. One Voice is a grass-roots group focused on identification, discussion and development of a community-wide strategy impacting youth substance use and other related negative risky behaviors.

One Voice is a nonprofit organization governed by a five member Board of Directors. The Board is elected annually by the membership and serves in a voluntary capacity. The organization holds monthly membership collaboration meetings, and monthly board meetings.

One Voice has grown in the last 11 years to include over 40 member agencies and individuals, from business, school and youth sectors, serving a local population of just over 4,500 residents. One Voice not only focuses on youth but also has parent and community participation.

Currently, the organization receives financial support for continued organizational development through the Drug-Free Communities Support Program, a generous federal grant administered through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

One Voice is a community organization effort to change policies and practices of major community institutions to reduce accessible risky behavior by using environmental strategies. The targeted approach is to change aspects of the envi-

ronment that contribute to the use of alcohol, drugs, suicide, obesity, violence, promiscuity and sexual activity.

Four programs fundamentally calibrate the mission of reducing moral and behavioral hazards; Prevention, Youth, Family and Volunteer Services.

One Voice has been successful with its Prevention Services and has captivated youth participants within this program.

Recently, the organization, along with generous donations from local businesses, funded and promoted a Media Camp for local Valdez youth to participate in the making of a public service announcement (PSA).

The PSA featured local youth who participated in visualizing, designing, and creating an anti-alcohol commercial, “Not Everyone Is Doing It”, which is currently be aired throughout Alaska. The basis of the PSA is to promote positive perception that not every young person is drinking alcohol.

Earlier this year One Voice developed a Youth Coalition to help determine the needs in their community. This opportunity provided a collaboration effort with children, teens and adults to join forces and develop successful programs.

Based on the needs of the Valdez community and a requirement that One Voice members volunteer individual time and services, a new volunteer program has been created.

The One Voice 2012 Volunteer

Program is designed to foster creativity and increasing opportunities to assist enriching youth, families and community members.

Bertha O’Brien, One Voice Executive Director, said, “We are excited about the new program as it will address community needs in Valdez and help volunteers develop a lifetime commitment to service.”

This program targets youth, families and community members, demonstrating that you can make a difference at any age! It will encourage children, teens and adults to volunteer and promote the following:

- **Lifelong Community Engagement:** Youth who volunteer at an early age are three times more likely to remain active in their communities as adults. In fact, twice as many young people volunteer at 55% compared to 29% of adults.
- **Supports Healthy Decision-Making:** Children and teens who participate in volunteer projects are 50 % less likely to make destructive decisions or engage in risky behavior.
- **Develops Skills for the Future:** Youth that volunteer are more likely to develop a stronger work ethic, invaluable interpersonal, communication and leadership skills, which allow them to perform better in school and at work. New experience provides youth with new perspec-



tives, encouraging personal growth in empathy, compassion, respect and kindness.

One of the largest and fastest growing trends in volunteerism is family participation and involvement. A large part of this growth is due to kids who are willing to hang out with parents. Surveys show over 90% of kids “get along” with their parents, and nearly 80% say they get along “very well” or “extremely well” (Howe & Strauss, 2005).

Family volunteering also opens the doors to working with some agencies who would not normally take a young person age 17 or below. Ultimately, volunteerism is a great way for families to have fun and strengthen family unity.

According to Bertha, “It is all about empowering our youth and building a stronger community.”

Organizations and agencies who use volunteers are providing important services at low or no cost to those who are in need.

This program will encourage community members to volunteer. It will help community members gain self confidence in themselves as well as strengthen



Top, Youth Coalition members pose for a photo at the 2011 Media Camp. Above, a food sculpture created by One Voice Youth Coalition members for the 2011 SWAN Food Fest

Photos courtesy One Voice

the community.

One Voice believes that when a community is doing well as a whole, its individuals are sustained and have a greater chance to succeed into the future.

If you are interested in getting involved, please contact One Voice at info@onevoicevaldez.org or 835-8922. ■