

# Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

August 2002

*The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them, through programs and services funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.*



**Alaskan Seniors:  
Living Longer,  
Growing Stronger**  
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Jill Greer, shown here inside the Harrington Cabin, works at the Pratt Museum in Homer, Alaska through the SCSEP.

## Alaska's Senior Community Service Employment Program

According to the Administration on Aging, the number of older workers age 55 and over will increase from 16 million in 1996 to 22 million in 2005. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that a half million workers aged 55 to 64, and 140,000 aged 65 and older lost jobs in 1993-1994 "because of company closings, insufficient work, or abolished positions or shifts. The BLS notes that the displacement rate was about the same in all age groups—around 3 percent—but that many more older workers than younger ones remain unemployed or out of the labor force."

In Alaska there are other issues to consider: limited employment opportunities, geographic issues, economics of a particular region, cultural differences, and, as in all aspects of hiring an experienced, mature worker, age discrimination. A Bureau of Labor Statistic labor expert said that "Even if you are not discriminated against, you may *think* you will be and not go looking for a job." This is a major barrier for seniors seeking employment. The Senior

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## SCSEP (continued from page 1)

Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) strives to alleviate this issue by focusing on the value older workers bring to the workplace: dependability, responsibility, a willingness to learn, and a positive attitude.

The federally regulated SCSEP program, administered in Alaska by the ACoA, provides temporary work experience for people age 55 and over whose incomes fall at or below the federal poverty line. Enrollees are given temporary assignments with nonprofit community organizations where they have an opportunity to sharpen and develop skills while searching for a permanent job.

The goal of the program is for each of its enrollees to gain the skills necessary to find unsubsidized employment outside the program. The SCSEP program is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under the authority of the Older Americans Act of 1965.

Eligible applicants are placed in nonprofit or public/community service agencies where they receive on-the-job training for 20 hours per week. They are usually paid at least minimum wage, which will be \$7.15 per hour effective January 1, 2003. During their temporary assignments, enrollees work with the director of the local project or the host agency to locate permanent employment either on a part-time or full-time basis.

The SCSEP program has two “sub-grantees” which operate in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Nine Star is an employment and training organization in the Anchorage area which is “dedicated to developing individual and group potential for success through quality education, job preparation, and skills training.” In Fairbanks, Adult Learning Programs of Alaska, or ALPA, is a non-profit community based organization that provides adult education services to those wanting to re-enter the mainstream workforce. Fiscal year 2002 was the first full year of the SCSEP “sub-grantee” programs in the two communities.

Other than Nine Star and ALPA, most SCSEP participants are enrolled at “host agencies” that meet the criteria for the program by being non-profit, community-based, community service organizations. The role of SCSEP within these organizations has become somewhat muddled over time. Many host agencies have indicated they were told, or were under the impression, that SCSEP participants could fill essential positions needed to operate their respective meal programs for seniors. According to federal regulations, this is a clear violation of the intent of the program. When a past SCSEP coordinator realized the program was not in compliance with federal regulations, the Commission staff began to implement corrective steps.

The Commission is realigning SCSEP to be an employment/training program that helps low income seniors re-enter, or enter, the mainstream workforce. This falls in line with the federal government’s effort to clean up subsidized employment programs by questioning programs that do not work. Much of this, according to federal SCSEP representatives, is due to the current administration’s effort to make all federal grant programs more accountable with the implementation of stricter performance measures and adhering to the federal regulations. Some of the effort comes as a result of Sept. 11, 2001, which displaced a considerable number of people.

The Alaska SCSEP program must continue to change, helped by better communication between the ACoA and grantees and growing consistency in the message of the program’s intent. This change is difficult, however, as many host agencies have come to rely on the enrollees that train at the agency site. Emphasis on the program’s intent, which in part is to serve as many seniors as possible, will continue.

# Alaska Legal Services Corporation Stands for Seniors

Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC) receives funding from the ACoA to assist seniors with civil-related legal matters.

Here's are a couple of great examples of how ALSC staff have recently helped and provided a valuable service to older Alaskans:

- A homebound senior living on Social Security disability had several checks bounce and was assessed over \$500 in bank fees. She asked for assistance from ALSC as she believed she had sufficient funds in her bank account. ALSC learned that the bank had mistakenly placed a "do not pay" order on her account. ALSC was able to convince the bank not only to restore the \$500 bank fees to the client's bank account, but also to send individual letters of explanation to the affected businesses regarding the error.
- An elderly couple spent their entire life savings to purchase and improve a mobile home located in a mobile home park. Improvements included adding a wheelchair access ramp as both individuals are disabled. The park owners ensured the couple that the park would not be closing down anytime in the near future. Unfortunately, one year later the park owners notified residents that the park would be closing, and residents would have 6 months in which to move their mobile homes. ALSC learned that the owners knew that the park's infrastructure was failing at the time the home was purchased by the elder couple and that the park would need to be closed. ALSC filed a lawsuit against the park owners alleging fraud. Eventually the owners settled the matter by paying the couple \$10,000 which enabled them to find other suitable housing.

ALSC has recently launched a new Website to provide legal information and assistance to individuals via the Internet and will eventually offer information in specific areas of interest to seniors. Visit [www.LawHelp.org/ak](http://www.LawHelp.org/ak). Click on "Legal Services Providers" which lists ALSC offices statewide.

## NTS Title III and VI Training Scheduled for End of the Month

ACoA will be hosting a Nutrition, Transportation and Support services Title III and VI Training Conference on August 26-28, 2002 at the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel. During the first two days, Chisatao (Chaz) Kawabori, Regional Administrator and Terry Duffin, Program Operations Coordinator from the US Administration on Aging, Region X office in Seattle, will be conducting the training and will answer questions from NTS Project Directors, staff and board or tribal council members regarding the NTS grant program. On August 28<sup>th</sup>, for a half day, an informal Project Directors meeting is scheduled so folks can meet other staff from senior centers across the state and share ideas and topics affecting their community or region.

If you have questions about the training, please contact Program Coordinators Lisa Morley (465-4798) or Linda Gohl (465-4876). More information on the training is also available on the NTS and HCB pages of the ACoA Website, [www.AlaskaAging.org](http://www.AlaskaAging.org).

