



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

## Department of Education & Early Development

DIVISION OF LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES & MUSEUMS

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Public Programs Office  
American Library Association  
50 E. Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611

Greetings

It is indeed an honor to provide a letter of support to the Juneau Public Library (JPL) for their *StoryCorps* grant application. The stated purpose of the JPL for this grant is to record stories surrounding the issues and experiences of Alaska Natives in the American Educational system. With a focus on the Boarding School system, this project is very timely.

Here in the Juneau school system we recently had a major controversy surrounding the districts selection/adoption of an elementary curriculum that contained several readings on Indigenous history and culture, including a unit on the American Indian/Alaska Native Boarding School experience. The curriculum was challenged by the local Alaska Native community as it was felt that it whitewashed and minimized a particularly painful part of North American Indigenous history. The curriculum was eventually removed, but the entire experience highlighted a far-reaching ignorance of these historical issues and experiences on the part of the Euro-American community in Juneau and Statewide.

These schools and their history represent one of the largest campaigns of forced assimilation and ethnocide in history and have caused incalculable Intergenerational PTSD and cultural loss in Indigenous communities and families.

With a project such as this, people can begin to tell their stories about this time period; the positive outcomes would be three-fold. Firstly, the youngest living members of the "Boarding School Generation" are now in their 70's, and it is crucial to record these stories before we lose these generations. Secondly, by telling these stories and making them available to the public, we can ensure that these horrifying crimes against humanity are never committed again, for as we know, a history unknown *is a history repeated*. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, both the Indigenous and Settler societies can begin to heal from the real damage caused by these historical events, for as the French Tunisian-Jewish historian Albert Memmi pointed out long ago, *both societies* are deformed by colonial brutality.

As an Alaska Native Librarian, Archivist and Museum Professional I have been working on making these issues a part of our shared disciplines for over 20 years and would welcome any ongoing effort to record and preserve these stories and make them relevant in the socio-cultural, historical and information science contexts.

I also have a personal stake in this history, as my Father, who is now in his 70's was sent to Boarding Schools and Children's Homes here in Alaska and we have had to also bear the brunt of the intergenerational damage that was done.

Lastly, I think an important component of this project would be to record the experiences of the "Post Boarding School" generations in the American Educational System, as it has become more than apparent that the experiences of our parents and grand-parents has adversely affected the younger generations ability to be successful and thrive in the modern educational system, as the dismal drop-out and performance statistics here in Alaska have shown.

Our division has recently come out in support of the Alaska Native Community on the curriculum issue in the Juneau School District, and we feel that this project dovetails nicely with those efforts as we are, in fact, part of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. The Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development's mission statement is "to ensure quality standards-based instruction to improve academic achievement for all students." We firmly believe that this project will further this mission not only for our division, but for all Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Sorrel Goodwin-Yashkanda.ets'  
Librarian II  
Alaska State Library-Historical Collections