



ALASKA NATIVE
TRIBAL HEALTH
CONSORTIUM

Photovoice

Photos Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience (PhotoVOICE)

Alaska Blanket Exercise



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What is Photovoice?

Oppression is rooted in the loss of voice and erasure of collective stories.

Photovoice is focused on raising up, gaining insights, and empowering voices to bring lasting change to the people involved. The founder of photovoice, Wang (1999) noted that the goals of photovoice are to reflect personal and community strengths and concerns, promote empowerment and critical discourse of community experiences, and to influence policy.

Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology whereby participants identify, represent, and enhance their lives and communities through photographic techniques (Wang, 1999). Photovoice is commonly used in the fields of community development, public health, and education. Photovoice asks people to take photographs of their environment which are used as actual data. The photos capture the world through the participant's eyes. Visual methods create rich data by adding layers of meaning, validity and depth in creating knowledge.

Photos Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience (PhotoVOICE)



Learn more about PhotoVoice here:

<https://rutgers.international/resources/photovoice-facilitators-guide/>

Key Elements of a PhotoVoice Project include:

Step 1 Preparation: A Photovoice project begins with reviewing the basics of photography and the process of a Photovoice project.

Step 2 Research Question: Participants collaboratively develop the aims and questions they want to answer in the project.

Step 3 Fieldwork: The next step is simple: go out and take photos. Pictures are submitted with a narrative description of the meanings behind the photograph(s) based on the SHOWED questions: (1) What do you See here? (2) What is really Happening here? (3) How does this relate to Our lives? (4) Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist? (5) What can we Do about it?

Step 4 Review & Analysis: Each photo and narrative description is reviewed. People work together to caption and categorize the pictures into themes based on individual and collective perspectives. Data was analyzed using Tsang (2020) critical analysis four stage approach: a photograph analysis based on the participants' and researcher's interpretations, a cross comparison, and theorization. Participant-led analysis deepens critical reflections and therefore enriches critical awareness of their lives.

Step 5 Selection & Exhibition: The results are often showcased by participants in a place identified by participants as a way to create awareness of the project. The photos and exhibition site are selected based on the aims and intent of a project.

The Alaska Blanket Exercise

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) Alaska Blanket Exercise (ABE) program is a participatory history lesson developed in collaboration with Alaska Native Elders, knowledge keepers and educators. The ABE fosters truth, understanding, respect, and reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

During this experiential learning activity, participants will walk on blankets representing the land of Alaska and into the role of Alaska Native people by reading scrolls and carrying cards which ultimately determine their outcome as they literally 'walk' through Alaskan history including pre-contact, colonization and resistance.

Learn more about the ABE [here](#).

This Project

The ABE team collaborated to develop this Photovoice Project. The team sought to understand the impact of the ABE on their lives and their communities. The project questions were:



Truth, understanding, respect, and reconciliation

The Alaska Blanket Exercise graphic element models the coming together of the past and future of Alaska by bringing people together to learn and take in new ideas.

Colors

The red represents the strength and energy of taking action. The grey acts as a shadow representing the past, while the black represents the future.

Pattern

The rectangle represents the state of Alaska in the shape of a blanket. The abstract shapes within the blanket represent people connecting. The opening on the right side of the blanket emphasizes how the ABE facilitates learning and building awareness of colonization and historical trauma.

Question

1

How has your participation in the Alaska Blanket Exercise affected your life?

Question

2

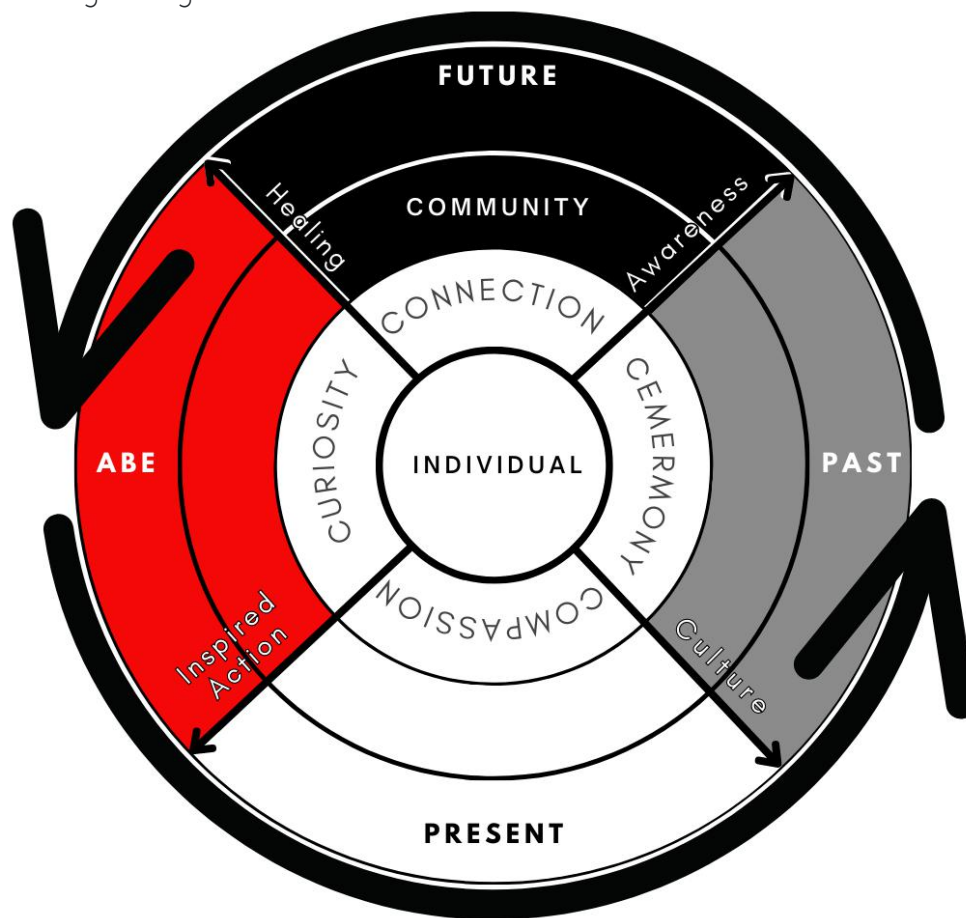
What changes have you noticed within your community from attending the Alaska Blanket Exercise?

Summary: Visual & Narrative



The ABE is a transparent story of the historical trauma, colonization, and resilience of Alaska Native Peoples across time. The program aims are rooted in culture and grounded in healing, centered on community and a horizon of resilience and hope in the face of atrocities and oppression.

The journey of the ABE is centered in present efforts of decolonization and reconnection. The ABE looks through the history of atrocities and colonization, to continued resilience and future of healing and empowerment of Alaska Native Peoples and communities. The results highlighted how the ABE program promotes learning and awareness of historical trauma, as well as a journey of change and inspired action through Indigenous culture.



The journey of the ABE involves looking through the past into the future:

The Past: History of Harms & Resilience

Historical trauma is the cumulative harm of generations of colonization and oppression experienced by Alaska Native People.

The Present: Reconnection & Decolonization

The Alaska Blanket Exercise brings together the history to break cycles of harm while promoting decolonization efforts.

The Future: Empowerment & Healing

We acknowledge the continued resilience, adaptation, and healing through culture and community.



AWARENESS OF CULTURE & CONNECTION

This drum is a product of an activity through the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium Behavioral Health Department Meeting. The illustration on the drum represents the photographer's life experience.



The swirls in the photo represent ancestors. We honor and acknowledge them because they are with us even after they have passed on. The vibrant colors on the outside represent the seasons: bright orange is spring, yellow is summer, brown is fall, and the silver is winter. The colors of the elements of land and water in the photo encompass all seasons: green grass, mountains, flowing water, and snow.

The imagery on the drum symbolizes Indigenous ways of life and the photographers life as an Iñupiaq woman walking in two worlds. This highlighted the role of the ABE in promoting awareness of Indigenous culture and connection to cultural values and ways of being.

Indigenous lifestyle is process-oriented. It's less chronological and rigid. Instead, Indigenous life is about seasons, hunting, gathering, and being present and patient with those around us in the present moment.

**All of life's processes
are important. We
live life in response
and preparation to
the environment. In
turn, the
environment takes
care of us.**

JOURNEY OF ATROCITIES & HOPE



The experiential learning of the Alaska Blanket Exercise is impactful, eye opening, and moving. The blankets symbolize the lands of Alaska which have been lost as a result of colonization, genocide, and historical trauma.

This photo visualizes how the end of an Alaska Blanket Exercise can look. You see some personal cultural items, with blankets disheveled and kicked. One blanket also showcases red, symbolizing an example of one of the atrocities we continue to experience, like the Missing or Murdered Indigenous Peoples.

Journey of the ABE: The History of Atrocities & Hope

Learning about the history, stories, and historical trauma is one of the first steps to change and to inspire action. Change begins with the individual, then others, such as programs, organizations, community, a nation, and finally generations to come.

This photo is about leaning into learning; like Tristan Madros said, *“you have to start somewhere.”* Despite highlighting the history of atrocities, the cultural items are a reminder of hope and the importance of culture in the midst of the disregarded blankets.

**“When one person heals,
the community heals.
This program can be
the first step. Healing
starts with truth.”**



FIGHTING THE ERASURE OF INDIGENOUS VOICES

Decolonization Efforts

This is a photo of a cloud-covered Mount Denali in Denali National Park. Denali sits on the land of Ahtna, Dena'ina, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, and Tanana peoples. I snapped this photo while hiking Curry Ridge Trail. Viewing the spectacular Mount Denali is awe inspiring.

Denali is the Indigenous name of the mountain, which was renamed in 2017 from McKinley. President Obama renamed Denali on the 100th anniversary of the National Park to acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska.



This photo serves as a reminder to continue to share knowledge of sacred lands and Indigenous people in an effort to heal from historical trauma and work towards decolonization and reconciliation between all Alaskans.

In the Chugach Mountains a snowy path winds through the valley. A path that symbolizes the journey of joy and hardships all imbedded in the nature of Alaska.



Challenge, Adapt & Inspire

On the surface, this photo represents the pillars of the ABE program and the people who created and continue to adapt the program based on the needs and recommendations of attendees.

From a larger view, the path symbolizes the story and journey of Alaska Native Peoples described in the ABE and the continued path of the ABE program into the future. Together, we continue to listen to one another, learn and grow together to better serve the communities of Alaska.

LEARNING, LISTENING & HEALING



Mendenhall Glacier Juneau, Alaska

The glacier sits in the mountains and feeds into the huge lake below, from which this smaller lake sits. You can see the beautiful balance of nature and changing of season. Three forms of water are here - ice, snow, and water.

Water is Healing

In the ABE, we highlight how water is healing. The ABE strives to be a part of the healing journey of attendees, organizations, and Alaska from the painful atrocities of colonization experienced by Alaska Native Peoples. The ABE does not hide these truths but raises them up so it may never be hidden, forgotten or repeated. While at the same time offering a space of learning, listening, and healing. In each ABE, we continue to strive for healing.

ALASKA NATIVE CULTURE PRESERVATION & REVITALIZATION



This photo showcases a Iñupiaq dancer pin inside of a desk lamp. It's centered on the light because this symbolizes the power and healing of culture, truth, and understanding. There is darkness in the majority of the photo. However, the photo is centered around the Iñupiaq dancer surrounded by light. The light looks like a drum which is a large part of many Indigenous cultures; although not planned in the photo, it was meant to be.

"Before starting my learning journey, I felt like I was in the dark because I didn't understand that I was experiencing historical trauma symptoms and effects. The dancer reflects the resiliency of her people, her culture, and the reason why this knowledge is important for everyone to know. In Indigenous teachings, there are so many teachings within the light and darkness."

We all begin somewhere in our learning journey, and that light can grow and can spark change. The photo reflects growing understanding, with the light of culture at its center.

Alaska Native Culture Preservation & Revitalization

**"Together, we can
brighten this light
of knowledge and
understanding."**



Alaska Native Ceremony

Cultural revitalization is the deliberate and organized conscious process through which unique cultures reclaim and regain a sense of identity through promoting heritage, language, traditions and customs.

Alaska Native Pride

A feeling of satisfaction, fulfillment, or dignity around being Alaska Native and holding onto the values and history of being Alaska Native.



Traditional Inuit Tattoos

"Indigenous ceremony has existed for time immemorial, but colonization severed many elements of culture. Here, you see a photo of my traditional Inuit tattoos. Traditional Inuit tattoo is a practice that, in recent years, has been reclaimed through a group of Inuit artists and activists. This photo is special to me because it was immediately taken after the ceremonial process. In this moment, I felt proud to be an Inupiaq woman, raised and prayed over by generations of Inuit ancestors. I felt that it was important for me to engage in this ceremonial process. My tattoos are a reminder of my matrilineal lineage and to stay true to my cultural values."

Learn more about traditional Inuit tattoos here:

<https://springboardexchange.org/honoring-inuit-culture-traditional-tattoos/>



STEWARDSHIP OF THE LAND & WATERS



The set net in this picture was placed in the Tanana River to catch fish during the late summer of 2020. The fish migrate through the Tanana river during the Summer and Fall months each year. Local residents in the community have been fishing for humpback whitefish since time immemorial. The process takes hard work to catch the fish and then process it in an efficient manner. As with most subsistence fishing, the processed fish is stored away for the winter months.



Sharing Subsistence Knowledge & Culture

There is a summer culture camp that occurs in Northway every summer to teach youth about the importance of subsistence fishing, hunting and gathering. Teaching youth the process of subsistence is important to continue the tradition.



Gratitude, Respect & Living in Harmony

Connection to the land is a crucial part of Alaska Native culture and values which acknowledge the resilience and beauty of nature. Stewardship of the land is our responsibility; to connect to our roots and live in harmony with the land through gratitude and respect.

This is the Upper Tanana river located in Northway, Alaska.

HEALING COLONIAL PAIN

"The photo, as a whole, is an external reflection of how I internally feel. In this center, there's affirmation card of someone with their hands on their heart, with light illuminating off of them. Behind the card, the Alaska Native Language Map and Own/Manages Alaska Map are shown side by side. The maps in the background symbolize the history of colonization, as well as the pain and suffering that came with it. The affirmation card reflects how I continue to grow because the work of the ABE do together. I remember hearing that working in this program is heart work, which is what I wish to showcase in this photo. As I continue to grow, I want to be a part of the positive impact in Indigenous communities."

The themes of this photo are two fold. If you look at the bigger picture, you see the importance and motivation for this work. It reflects that there is so much more work to be done, and the healing as a collective from generations of colonial pain. Yet, the card still is the center of the photo, and that is because it starts with you. This is what creates and will continue to create positive change for Alaska Native people and communities.

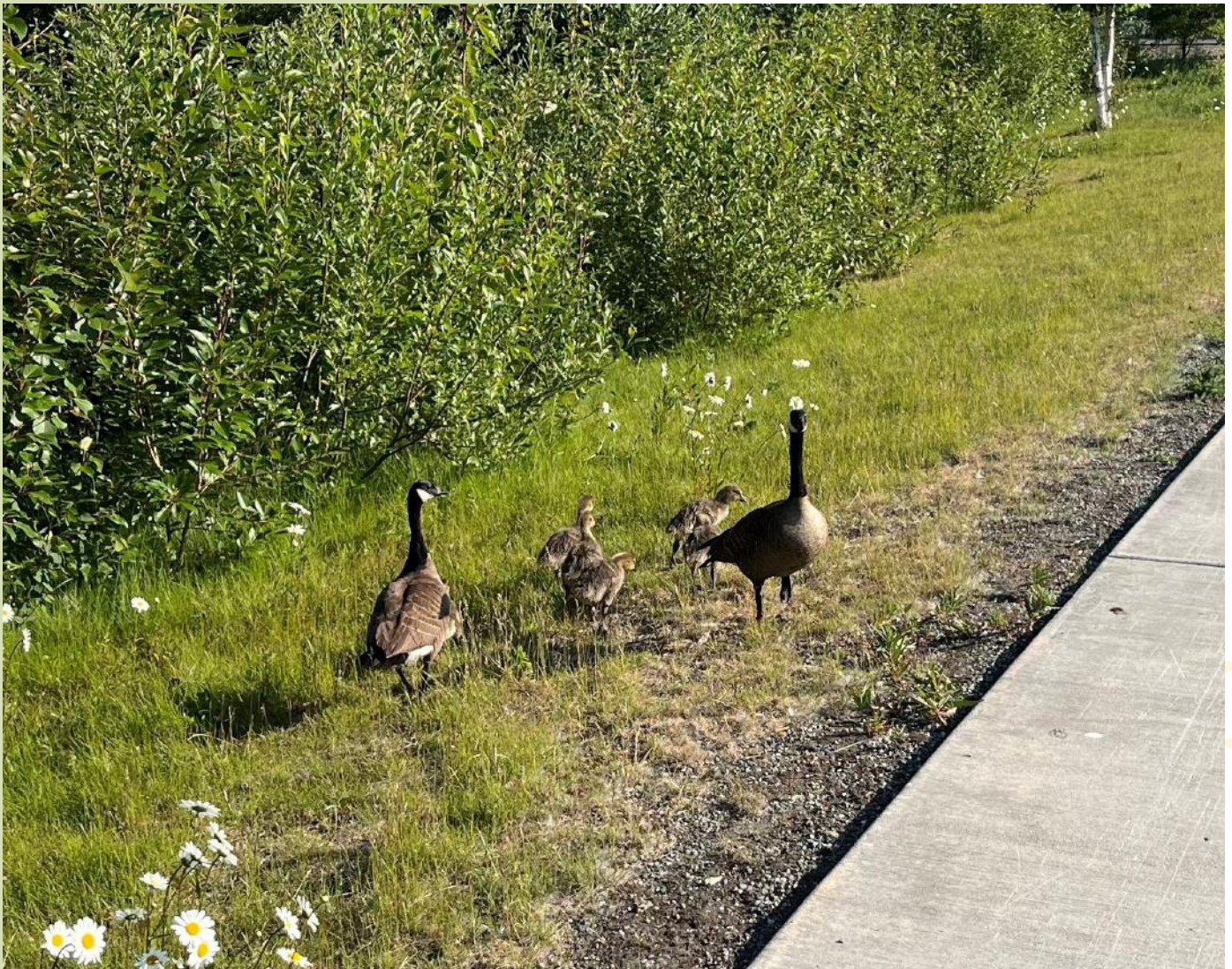


**"One person can make a difference for the community.
When you heal, the community heals."**

COMMUNITY HEALING

In this photo are a family of geese on a warm, sunny day. There are two parents and four geesling. Undoubtedly these geese have negative experiences that tell them they need to protect their children. The geese are eating and the parents are being protective of the geesling. One goose is watching the photographer with a close eye.

Children, like geesling, need protection. **It is important that we collectively ensure a positive future for children and future generations.** Historically there has been harms. For humans, this harm can be from historical and/or intergenerational trauma. By breaking cycles within our own families, we can uplift youth, start to discuss history, and inspire healing in our communities



Sparkling Change

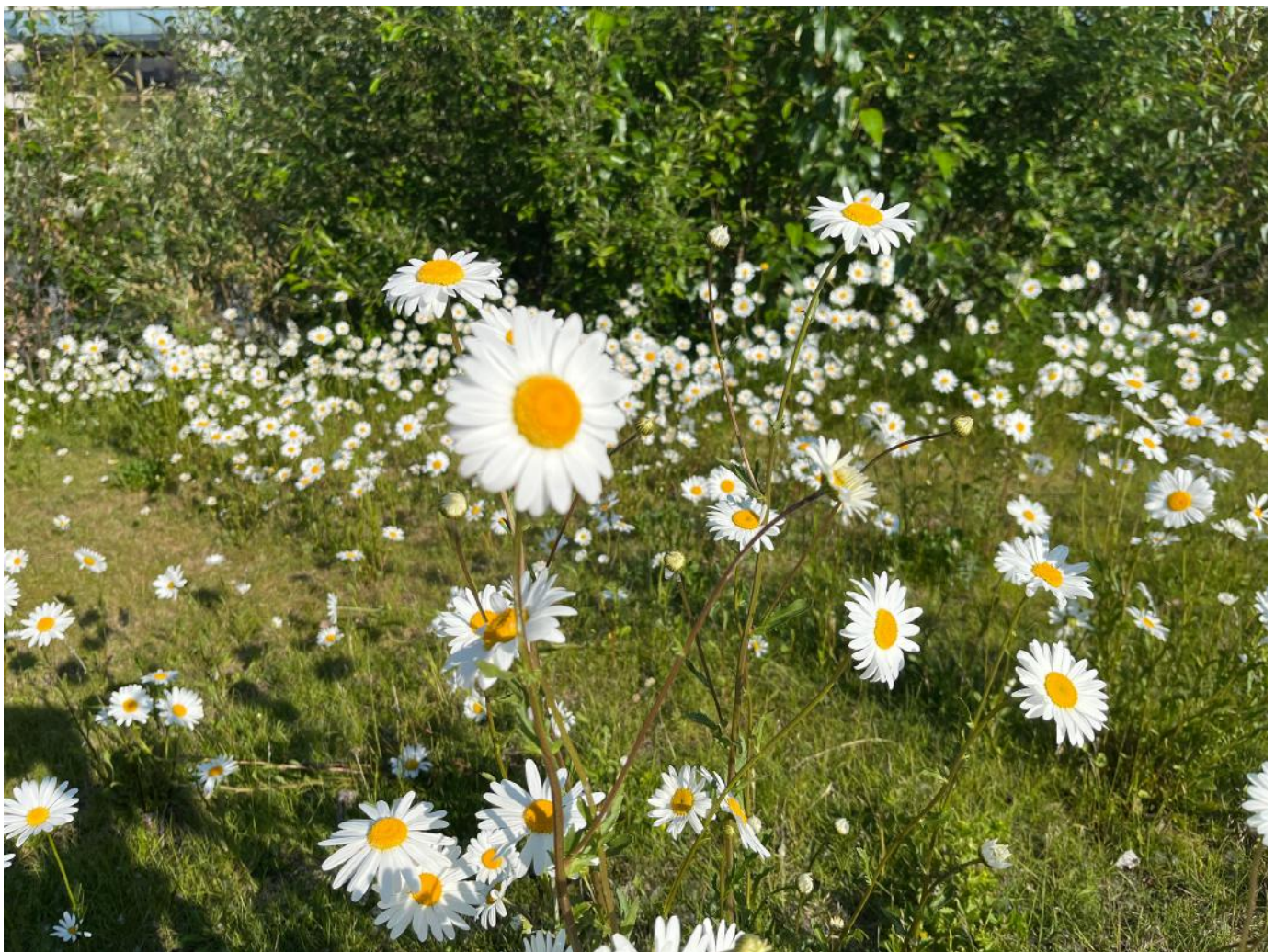
Inspire Healing

Hope for the Future

COLLECTIVE AWARENESS

An unfocused daisy at the center, with other, clearer daisies in the background. The day is bright and sunny. The daisies are abundant and growing everywhere after a long winter and break up season. It's possible to find joy and sunshine after difficult times.

We are one of many and there's great beauty in that. **Ideas can spread like wildflowers and change a landscape.** These flowers portray that change is possible and uplift the idea that tomorrow can bring sunshine and joy. Understand that the focus is not us as individuals, but us as a collective.



Together

We are one of many and there's great beauty in that... Understand that the focus is not us as individuals, but us as a collective.

Awareness

Ideas can spread like wildflowers and change a landscape.

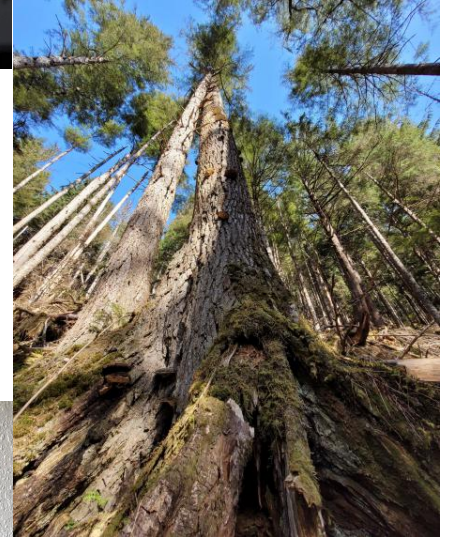


Making Meaning Together

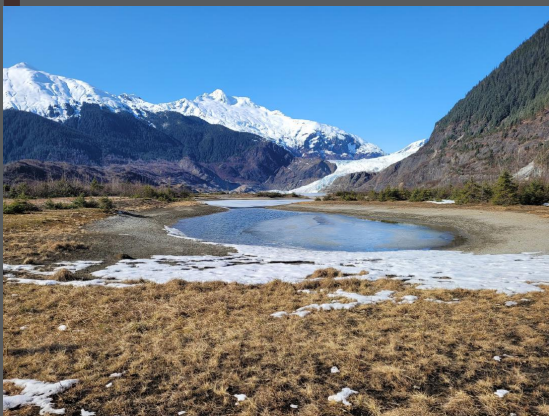
What do these photos all mean together?



The Alaska Blanket Exercise is a ceremony of compassion and curiosity that connects the past history of harms and resilience of Alaska Native Peoples, present efforts of reconnection and decolonization, and a future of empowerment and healing.



A Horizon of Decolonization



The mountains captured in these photos, create the horizon of lands stewarded by Alaska Native Peoples since time immemorial. The values present in stewardship of the land are present in the ABE: gratitude, respect, and honor. This symbolizes present connection and decolonization.

Paul Ongtooguk said:

"They've called this a wilderness because they didn't see us in those places. They couldn't imagine that people could live so well with the land it would appear untouched by them."

Like the Alaska Native Peoples, the mountains persist in the face of hardships.

The ABE is a journey of telling the story of the harms and hardships experienced through historical oppression and colonization of Alaska. We learn from the telling of history to inspire connection and raise up Indigenous Voices.

Community at the Center

We Have Not
Done This
Alone.
We Walk
Together.

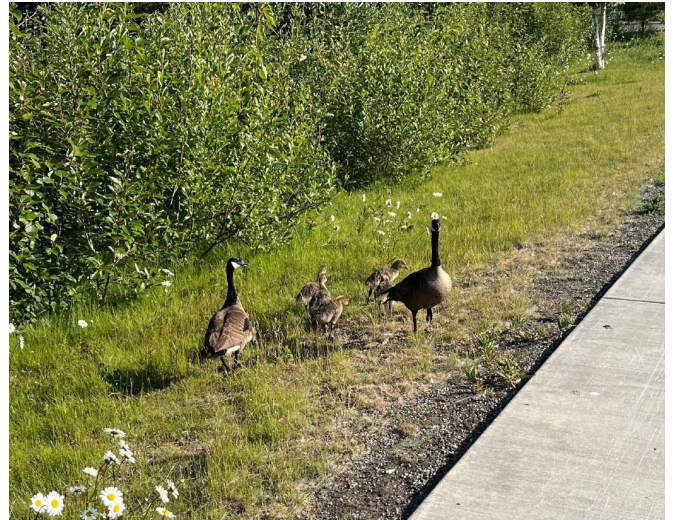


We live life in response and preparation to the environment. In turn, the environment takes care of us. The ABE creates an environment of curiosity, compassion, connection, ceremony and community to spark awareness, change and healing.

One person can make a difference for the community. When you heal, the community heals. This program can be that first step through truthful storytelling. And together, we can brighten this light of knowledge and understanding.



ROOTED IN CULTURE & GROUNDED IN HEALING

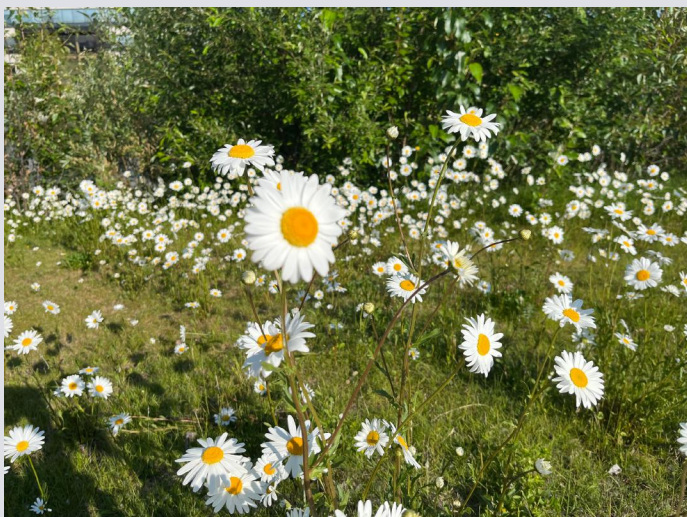


Grounded in Collective Healing

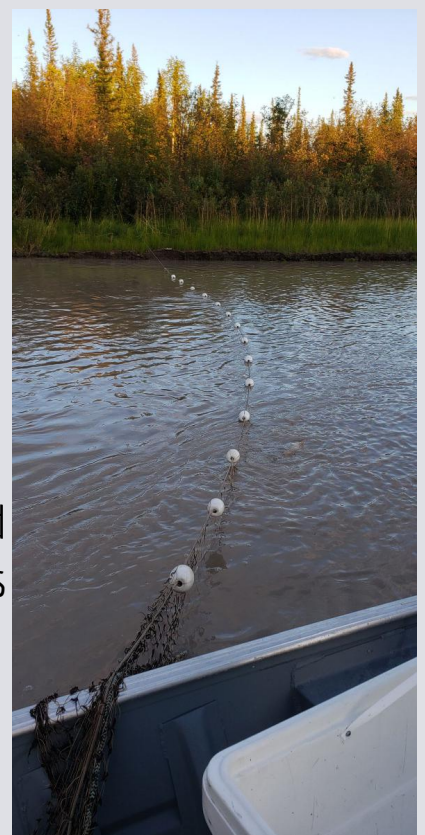
We are many, the focus is not us as individuals, but us as a collective. We collectively ensure a positive future for our children and future generations through the preservation and revitalization of our culture and our ceremonies.

Rooted in Culture

Our resilience is rooted in cultural preservation and revitalization which is spread throughout this project. As stated: "*Ideas can spread like wildflowers and change a landscape.*"



Teaching youth subsistence fishing, hunting and gathering is important to continue the tradition.



Prepared by the Alaska Blanket Exercise Team whose continued passion drives this program forward, led by Jaclynne Richards. This photovoice project was spearheaded by Amber Frasure, and would not have been possible without the passionate fire of Panikaa Teeple, the undaunting support of Jackie Engebretson, the compassionate heart of Rebecca Ervin, and the curious mind of Lauren Gillott.

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Thank You

