CBPR on the Alaskan Frontier

or: "Go with God ... and Fresh Fruit"
An Intro to Iḷisaġvik College

Iḷisaġvik College is Alaska’s only tribal college, and is located in Barrow, Alaska. We serve the remote region of the North Slope Borough, a locale whose population is primarily Iñupiaq (over 80%). Iḷisaġvik was established in 1986 in a cooperative agreement between the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and the North Slope Borough (NSB), as an extension of UAF. In 1996, Iḷisaġvik came into its own as a nonprofit, independent institution. In 2003, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities officially accredited Iḷisaġvik, and the College remains accredited through that same body to this day. We place an emphasis on incorporating Iñupiat cultural education into all of our curricula, and the twelve Iñupiaqatigiigñiq (traditional Iñupiaq values) holistically guide our mission, goals, and objectives.
BH Needs Assessment & Access of North Slope Residents

Changed the Plan: from survey to FG – then survey

Phase 1: Conducting Focus Groups

Phase 2: Survey

• This community has not been asked permission before so there are no processes or mechanisms in place to give permission
• Capacity Building: First BH/CBPR/human subject research IC has done
• No policies or procedures in place regarding research --- I get to create them (yeah me!)
• No research committee or why have to submit to oversight of IRB and their limitations
• No real understanding at Ilisagvik of impact of HT on health of community
• This project the only one assessing community as a whole and not focusing on our students
Some Advice on Traveling to North Slope Villages

Pave the way with fresh fruit and cheese and cookies and donuts (bring enough for whole village)
Pack to stay at least twice as long as you planned
Take flip flops for the shower (Think "Man-Camp" and ditch the idea of 'hotel')
Get comfortable with small spaces and ditching whatever plan you have
Don’t be shy, the VHF Radio is your friend (except in Point Hope): "Good morning, good morning..."
Embrace the Iñupiat values of humor, sharing and respect for elders
Don’t go alone, take a crowd if possible. Take duct tape and Ziploc bags.

Small planes & big plans
Village Store in Kaktovik
Ilisagivk Campus
Each village has its own governing structure.

Many have their own 'tribal governments' or corporations and of course their own personality.

There are sometimes significant and always separate cultural traditions and practice of values.

Village schools are almost exclusively the venue for community activities including recreation, and are often the only place many kids and seniors can count on for daily meals (they close for the summer).
IRB Approved Focus Group Questions

• Can you tell me about the challenges/barriers your community faces that prevent people from leading healthy, meaningful lives?
  – Which of these barriers are the hardest to deal with in your community?
  – Can you describe some of the strengths your community already has in overcoming these barriers?

• Think back to when your community was really healthy/balanced. Describe what was going on in the community at that time.
  – How can your community bring back that balance?

• What is available or would be helpful for your community to overcome these barriers?
  – What do you think community members would use the most if they were available?
  – How do your cultural values and views effect you or others getting help when needed?
  – What do you think keeps people in your community from reaching out for help?
  – What do you think has encouraged people in your community reach out for help?

• Considering the barriers/challenges you shared, what is available in your community to address these?
  – Who could people turn to for help with these things?
Just "Getting Out There" on The Slope

- Total area of 94,796 square miles
- 7 villages, 1 hub – Utqiagvik
  - Anaktuvuk Pass -- Atqasuk*
  - Kaktovik -- Nuiqsut,
  - Point Hope -- Point Lay
  - Wainwright*
- 2010 Census: 9,600 population
- Primarily (80%) Iñupiaq
- 2* of 7 villages can be done as day trips
The Learning Process

• Ask for someone to pray prior to conducting the focus group (very Christian community)
• Survey will need to be in Inupiat as well as English
• Be prepared to feed the entire community
• Be flexible, be ready to ditch whatever the plan is.
• Be okay with last minute permission, remember that you are introducing the community to a new concept in doing research, they may not know how to give permission...
• Be prepared to remind people it is a focus group and not a therapy group. Have the resource list.