



Issue 43

## **More Kodiak Community Leaders Become BrainWise Instructors**

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The Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA) in Kodiak, Alaska, is a tribal organization that provides health and social services to the Kodiak region, including the villages of Akhiok, Karluk, Old Harbor, Ouzinkei, Port Lions, and Larsen Bay. The youth and families in these rural communities face many personal and health challenges.



**Matthew Kozak, KANA's  
Prevention Grants  
Coordinator**

Alaska Natives and American Indians.

Matthew Kozak, KANA's Prevention Grants Coordinator, grew up in Kodiak and says that "supporting kids in their efforts to make healthy, positive choices is something I have been interested and involved in since I was a high school student myself." He said that KANA administrators chose BrainWise because of its successful results teaching critical thinking and decision-making skills with

In 2015, KANA staff members were trained to teach BrainWise to participants in the Youth with a Vision Leadership program and Emerging Adults Class for young adults ages 18-24. In 2019, additional training was scheduled after Tori Frank was hired as the new Prevention Specialist for Youth and Adults. Tori wanted to learn BrainWise herself and saw the training as an opportunity to become involved and connected with community members from KANA's multi-faceted programs as well as from schools, the local college, and public health.

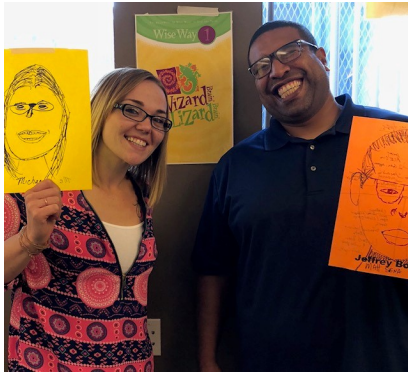


**Tori Frank\_ KANA Prevention  
Specialist**

With Matthew's support, she organized training for 16 educators,

counselors and health professionals who work with Kodiak's youth and families. The training provided KANA staff with an opportunity to engage with community members and learn about their different perspectives for using BrainWise.

## Matt Sena and Michaela Perez Shine at KANA!



**Michaela Perez, BrainWise Trainer and Matt Sena, BrainWise Trainer and Board Member**

Veteran BrainWise trainer Matt Sena and trainer Michaela Perez, both long-time educators in Alaska, conducted the two-day event in Kodiak. They used their knowledge of health, social, and political issues in rural Alaska Native communities to customize problem scenarios for the groups. Participants said the training helped them understand the 10 Wise Ways and showed them how they could integrate them into existing materials and create culturally sensitive lessons and activities that address specific needs of

the various populations.

Tori said the training opened up conversations about using the program in the different agencies, including discussions about how instructors would teach and reinforce the wise ways. An example would be **Never Alone**, an interactive video game co-created by the Alaska Native Community in partnership with a media company ([www.neverlaonegame.com](http://www.neverlaonegame.com)).



The game tells a story about Nuna who explores a harsh Arctic world with a fox companion, trying to find the source of a never-ending blizzard threatening her village. Gamers help her make choices on her journey, and instructors can use these

decisions to discuss using wizard brain thinking vs. lizard brain reacting. Gamers can see how Nuna uses her constellation of support, recognizes red flag warnings, exits the emotions elevator, separates fact from opinion, asks the right questions, considers



consequences, sets goals and communicates effectively.



Other teaching strategies include using older students as mentors to reinforce BrainWise with younger students and exploring ways to involve parents.

The new instructors are looking forward to introducing BrainWise to

their sites and creating activities to reinforce the lessons. Tori said that BrainWise will add new energy to existing programs and will help others get off the ground.



**KANA and Community BrainWise Instructors, Kodiak, Alaska**

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## **Everyone Wants to be Happy and Healthy**

The skilled health professionals and educators serving the rural Kodiak, Alaska region have new tools to teach their students and clients how to control their feelings and behaviors - strategies that will increase positive decision-making and well-being. Starting with "Everyone Has Problems," participants recognize they are not alone and that even famous people have problems.

They also learn that the 10 Wise Ways can help them prevent and minimize problems. For example, someone with depression may have a Constellation of Support in place but follow-through requires that he or she use a combination of wise ways that include Wizard Brain thinking to recognize red flags and lower their emotions so they can seek help from support resources. This process may also involve separating fact from opinion, identifying choices, considering consequences, setting goals and communicating effectively. BrainWise graduates who have practiced using the skills quickly go back and forth among the 10 Wise Ways, assessing their options to make good choices.

BrainWise is comprehensive and includes teaching evidence-based skills like mindfulness but even better - it links mindset skills to building a number of related thinking processes that also build brain connections. A BrainWise graduate said this approach was not overwhelming and said, "It took time to learn the 10 Wise Ways, but now they just come to me."

Recent scientific research supports the concepts BrainWise teaches. We have updated the evidence and present it in a newly

published chapter, "Life Stress and Inhibitory Control Deficits: BrainWise as a Neurocognitive Intervention in Vulnerable Populations." The chapter appears in *Inhibitory Control Training - A Multidisciplinary Approach*, edited by Sara Palermo, University of Turin, and published by IntechOpen, London (2019). [Marilyn Welsh, PhD](#) and [Jared Greenberg, MD](#) are valued co-authors. The chapter will be available soon.

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My heartfelt thanks to all the BrainWise instructors/users who understand why it is important to teach the 10 Wise Ways.



**Dr. Pat**

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*On a lighter note . . .*

**Never Alone** is a powerful story and **game** that illustrates how instructors can teach students to practice using the 10 Wise Ways. You can use BrainWise posters, cards, or problem-solving worksheets as teaching aids, or create your own teaching aids, and ask students to identify the wise ways they use as they guide Nuna and assess the choices of other characters. For more information visit [neveralonegame.com](http://neveralonegame.com)



Never Alone (Official Launch Trailer)

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[Take a look at the BrainWise Blog](#)

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