

2008 Distinguished Educator Award

Mary Williard

An educator must stimulate the mental growth of a student, but a distinguished educator can recognize new and innovative teaching areas and strategies to benefit not only the student but also the community in which they live.

Dr. Mary Williard is a leader in oral health education - her vision of having a Dental Health Aid Therapist in strategically placed hub communities throughout rural Alaska has brought about the first real change in the way medical or dental care is provided in over 50 years. For six years, Dr. Williard lived in Bethel, Alaska, and when not traveling to one of the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporations' 50 villages, she worked tirelessly in the operating suite performing back-to-back oral restorations on children under the age of 5. A white paper developed and published by the Southeast Alaska Native Health Consortium in the year 2000 confirmed Dr. Williard's personal observations that Alaska native children have a much higher caries rate than non-native American children. When the opportunity to become the Clinical Director at the first ever American school of Dental Health Therapy arose, Dr. Williard jumped at the chance.

Begun in 2007, the two year training program currently has 11 students from around the state. Those students will go on to provide dental care in native Alaskan villages, from cleanings and check-ups to root canals. This program will provide an unprecedented level of dental care to the Alaska Native people who suffer from a great disparity in oral health. Dr. Williard has been instrumental in program development and training. She has been a strong and steady reminder that the program is about providing a better model of delivery for Alaska Natives living in 176 remote villages and in some of the harshest climates in the world. Dr. Williard's students also come from these villages, making them better able to work in and be accepted by the communities.