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Minto sings and Esther Combes of the Cook Inlet Association in Anchorage, Alaska.

Moses Wassillie, interviewer

Series: Potlatch series

Minto singers perform a dance song.

Esther Combes said she was born in Mountain Village. Her family moved to Flag, Alaska when her father worked for a mining company. When the mining company closed down her family moved to Anchorage. She attended school and attended college in Anchorage. She has visited Outside by herself. She appreciates how hard it is for Natives to come into Anchorage. She talked about the nature of a city. She said Native people have expressed their feeling that Anchorage is a cold feeling place. A lot of the people who work for Cook Inlet have experienced this. She said this is why they want to be there.

Minto singers perform the good luck song.

Esther Combes talks about the advantages and disadvantages Native people have when they move from a village to a big city like Anchorage. Combes said coming from a village is more of a disadvantage. People in village life have close attachments. In the city it is hard to stay in contact with friends. She said at potlatches people are glad just to be together. They have a sewing group every week and enjoy each others' company. There are advantages in the city like education, training or a job. They are here to point them in the right direction. She said people don't adjust very well right at the start. A lot of times people are nervous with a lot of anxiety. As long as they have assistance it subsides. She had a meeting with the district representative at the state welfare office. The representative said their case loads are very high. People that come in from villages are taught about city life such as learning to use a telephone. They are also taught to try to do for themselves. The case worker may only see that person once. Combes said she sees their point but she would had to be a client with the welfare system. At her organization she tries to deal with the fears that people have coming into the city. Moses Wassillie asked her about people living in the large city and then returning to the villages. Combes said she thought that would be difficult. She thinks of herself as a city person. In a village she has to watch what she says and how she says it. Survival in a city versus the Bush are two very different things. Survival in the city is mental and emotional. She has to remind herself to slow down when she is in the village. Moses asked her if she knew of any people that do well in the city and the village. Combes said she really doesn't know anyone like that. There are people that do adjust faster from one pace to another. She talked about the boarding home situation for high school students.

Minto singers perform the beautiful creation song.

Moses Wassillie asked Esther Combes what the Cook Inlet Native Association is. Esther Combes said it is the non-profit arm of the Cook Inlet Region. They serve all Alaska Natives not just Cook Inlet Region shareholders. They run the Native Assistance Center and that is the program she operated. It is funded through the Health, Education and Welfare Department. The services include social services such as

housing. There are community outreach staff people who set up activities at the center. Manpower services also operates at the center. They help all Natives seek employment or get in training programs. People come to Anchorage and housing is a problem. They have a housing information office. Another problem is jobs. It is a real problem because a lot of the Natives need more skills. They get them into training programs. The third problem is getting used to the pace of living in the city. They have a recreational center for relaxing and use as a home away from home. There is a youth section, too. Esther talked about the purpose of the Cook Inlet Association. It was created ten years ago to get Native people together. They had a goal of having a place for Natives to come to for socialization and set up activities such as potlatches. They want to help Natives overcome problems after coming to Anchorage. She has seven people working in her program. She carries out social services and recreational activities. Their primary purpose is to create a place for Native people. They have a Native Assistance Center. Bertha Peavey operates an office at the airport. She meets the flights from the Bush and meets the people. She has a good system of meeting up with the people. She manages to meet up with twenty five or thirty people a day. After five at night she contacts the Wien dispatcher and leaves information. The Native youth Olympics were held in Anchorage a month ago and Bertha was there to help. Bertha is bilingual. She helps about 300 people a month coming and going into Anchorage. Combes emphasized again that they serve all Natives.

Minto singers perform a song.

Esther Combes talked about the transportation service for adults. If people need transportation for medical appointments or job interviews they can call into the center and schedule an appointment. They also have an adult driver education program. A lot of Native adults haven't had an opportunity to learn to drive. The recreation center for Native youth has various games and activities. They have also applied for program to develop an alcoholism, recreational and counseling program. They feel this would hit a lot of the problems encountered by Natives in Anchorage.

The moderator said Potlatch is produced in the KUAC studios in College in cooperation with KTOO Juneau, KOTC Kotzebue and KYUK Bethel under Title One of the Higher Education Act.