



Bethel, Alaska

The Yukon-Kuskokwim (YK) delta of Southwestern Alaska is the ancestral home of the Yup'ik people who established the village of Mamterillermiut on the east bank of the Kuskokwim River. In the 1800s, missionaries facilitated the relocation of the village to the west bank, where Bethel now stands. The first Jesuit Volunteers (JVs) arrived in Bethel in 1965. With a population of 6,000, Bethel serves as the commercial hub for the 56 villages in the YK delta. Like Bethel, these villages are only accessible by plane, boat, or (in the winter) snow machine. Most Bethel residents are Yup'ik and use traditional subsistence hunting and gathering. As the largest populated settlement in Western Alaska, Bethel is a key point of access to services. In addition, climate changes have threatened the health of the tundra and disrupted the subsistence way of life. JVs assist agencies serving folks from primarily rural Alaska Native communities, alleviating some of the barriers posed by systemic marginalization, remote locality, and ecological crises.

Joys of being a JV in Bethel

Living in Bethel offers a unique and rich cross-cultural experience in a part of the world known to few outside of Alaska. JVs learn about Yup'ik culture and history, and may even pick up some of the language. JVs here have the opportunity to live very closely with the land. Between the spacious tundra, vibrant sunrises and sunsets, and views of aurora borealis, JVs are surrounded by nature's power and beauty. Each year Bethel hosts the Kuskokwim 300, the third largest dogsled race in the world. JVs typically volunteer at various checkpoints along the racecourse. Bethel is a dynamic, tight-knit community full of events, groups, and activities. It's the kind of place where you can't go to the grocery store without seeing someone you know. JVs have a wide support and social network, including many Former JVs (FJVs) of all ages who still live and work in Bethel.

The JV house is within walking distance of the gym, where many go to socialize, swim in the heated pool, and access free WiFi. (Oh, and exercise.)