

# CHA Spotlight – Agnes Silas

Some people spend a lifetime trying to find their passion, what they want to contribute to the world. Others, like Agnes Silas, one of three Minto health aides, knew from her earliest years what she wanted to be when she grew up. “Even when I was little, I was interested in the medical field, in helping people.” Now, after two decades as a health aide, her commitment remains strong.



Originally from Nulato, Silas moved to Minto with her partner, Dudley Smith. While they raised their three children, now adults, Silas managed to complete the rigorous CHA training and worked her way up to the position of senior health aide. Silas was reluctant to identify herself as a senior health aide, and was quick to give equal credit to her two fellow health aides. “We work in collaboration here, not with one person higher than another. It takes all of us to keep the clinic running and the community safe. I also must give credit to support and good relationships with the past and current village councils.”

Asked what she enjoys the most about her career, Silas answered with no hesitation. “Knowing how to help people when they need it most...The hardest part is coping with the loss of people you know so well. That does not get any easier no matter how long you do this job.”

Among the many changes in medicine that have impacted the job of a community health aide, one of the most significant is telemedicine. When Silas first started in the field, all charting was done by hand on paper, whereas now the computer is an integral part of the job. She admits that she resisted the changes at first, but now is a true believer in its many advantages. Being able to quickly share a patient’s clinic history when working with doctors by phone or computer, or when someone has to go to a specialist or the hospital in Fairbanks, means faster and more accurate treatment.

A village health aid’s job is not one that pays attention to the clock. In addition to her regular hours, Silas is frequently approached for advice when residents see her in public, but she does not seem to mind. She believes that there are teachable moments in nearly every interaction. These days, with sometimes confusing or conflicting information on the corona virus, Silas has to work even harder to keep up with the latest science on the pandemic, so that she can help protect other village residents by keeping them well informed.

When not busy at the clinic, attending community functions, or interacting with her children and her two grandchildren, Silas spends her free time sewing and beading or doing subsistence activities. “I do love putting away what we harvest, hunting, fishing, berry picking. I do try to garden but don’t really have a green thumb.”

Interviewing Agnes Silas for this profile was not easy because she is so modest about her achievements and knowledge base. However, the supervisor for the Minto Clinic, Ryan Clairmont, was quick to brag about her. “In August she will have been at that clinic for 21 years. She is dependable, works very well with everyone in the village, as well as the medical staff at Chief Andrew Isaac. Agnes consistently gets selected to travel to Fairbanks to train other health aides.” It was clear that Clairmont considers her an asset not just to her community but to the entire health aide program.