

CHA Spotlight – Cheyanne Esmailka

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Anyone who worries that the younger generation is not willing to work hard needs to meet Cheyanne Esmailka. In her early 20s, Cheyanne has been a health aide since 2019. Born in Fairbanks and raised in Ruby, she went to high school in Nenana, first as a boarding student and later as a day student who lived in town.

After graduating, she took a job as a housekeeper but kept looking for something with better hours and closer to home. When she saw that Tanana Chiefs was recruiting for health aides, Cheyanne applied and was soon back in school, this time in the vigorous health aide training held in Fairbanks. Even though she was eight months pregnant by the end of the training, she took maternity leave and was back on track to finish her training and start her first official position as a health care provider in Nenana by 2020.



Unlike some people who become health aides because their entire lives they have been interested in science or medicine, Cheyanne was not sure this career was going to be a good fit for her. “I did not think I would be a health aide this long. I did not expect to fall in love with the job the way I have. But it turns out that the more I learn, the more I want to learn and the more I love it. I enjoy doing blood draws and shooting x-rays. When I shoot a good x-ray, my whole day goes perfect! I also love how I have grown in this job, become much more responsible than I was when I started.”

But it is the human interactions that have been the greatest source of her satisfaction. “It is the relationships I get to build with my patients, the trust I earn from them. I don’t just know about their health problems, I get to know all about them, their lives. It is a privilege.”

Like all jobs, there are aspects of being a health aide that are not as rewarding or fun. “One of the things I dislike about the job is definitely the paperwork. At the end of the month there are multiple inventories and papers needing to be done and turned in. I usually try and give myself time to do these tasks, which includes prepping days sometimes weeks before anything is due, which makes it all a little quicker...Having a good computer system helps, it is much easier than the pen and paper method. And we have an excellent technology department, always willing to help no matter what computer issues we might be having.”

“Another hard part of the job is when I cannot figure out how to handle something. I go around and around about a problem, about a million times it seems like. Usually I can come up with a solution but there are times that I need the advice of a co-worker or my supervisor.”

Nenana has an Emergency Medical Services department, so the health aides are not on call after their shifts are over. That doesn’t mean that people don’t approach Cheyanne or her colleagues when they are not working, but not having to be available after hours reduces the stress of the job. Cheyanne spends her free time with family and friends, building memories through activities like fishing or cooking. She takes an active part in her daughter’s Head

Start program, reinforcing what she is learning during the day. At this stage of development, the alphabet and counting feature large in the games Cheyanne plays with her child.

No one builds a successful life without the help of others. Cheyanne is especially thankful to her mom and dad. “They not only raised me to be a hard worker, but they supported me and my daughter throughout all my trainings and long hours at work.” There was also one other person who helped Cheyanne get a vision for the possible. “Rachael Kangas, who was the health aide in Ruby when I was young. I was not afraid of going to the clinic, I liked seeing her in action. I wanted to be like her when I grew up. I don’t think I ever told her how much she influenced me.”

Cheyanne hopes she is a similar role model for others who might be interested in becoming health aides. “I want people to know that this is a job that is interesting and rewarding. The training can be hard but there are people throughout TCC who support you so that you can make it through.”