

## Alpine Kids

Alpine (al-pīn) -- of or relating to high mountains (Oxford Languages Dictionary).

The “Alpine” in Alpine Kids used to mean that it was a program for families living in Alpine County.

We are hoping to change that to include kids and families from our county as well. If we do so, then “Alpine” simply means *of the mountains*. How is Alpine Kids changing, and how can we be a part of that change? I’ll start with a little background info, then let you know what has happened in 2020 to make a change necessary, and lastly, I’ll share a vision for what our church might do with Alpine Kids.

Alpine Kids has operated for the last 40 years, and since 2004 it has been a stand-alone program funded primarily by a grant from the Alpine County Probation Department. Alpine Kids activities have contributed to a measurable decline in juvenile offenders and drug use in the county. The goal of Alpine Kids has been focused on strengthening Native American families and helping children and youth —especially those in the Hung a Lel Ti community in Woodfords. But membership has not been limited to Native Americans. At last count, membership included 102 Native Americans, 10 Hispanic, and 56 Anglo.

The method of Alpine Kids is simple—give families a drug-and-alcohol-free environment where they can participate in activities that most of us take for granted. They go to baseball games, theatre, campouts, hiking, bowling, amusement parks, etc. These outings may seem insignificant, but these are experiences that would not be available to these families without Alpine Kids. When asked what their group does, one child responded, “We go on adventures!”

For me, I think that what Alpine Kids has done is to provide a way for young Native Americans to see that they can indeed navigate, and even belong in, the Anglo culture. Once a young person can dream a dream of belonging, then their minds and bodies will follow. Alpine County Sheriff, Rick Stephens writes, “Many children who have been in this program have gone on to successful adult lives. One of my long-time employees’ daughters is now a successful executive in Reno.... My employee directly attributes their involvement in Alpine Kids to this success.”

So, what happened in 2020 to change things? Covid happened. Like many programs, funding stopped and it has not been restarted. Alpine Kids can’t afford to continue as a stand-alone social program. I heard about this and reached out to Edie Veatch (member of our church and director of Alpine Kids) to see if perhaps this social program could be transformed into a ministry of our church.

I’ll be the first to acknowledge that social programs don’t translate directly into ministries. But, I have been communicating with the Alpine Kids board of directors and I believe it can be done. It will require understanding our expectations, having clear goals, and working out the logistics.

Here are some of our expectations (of both the church and Alpine Kids). We are not focused on what we are getting out of this. We will have no agendas other than to be in each other’s presence. We will break down barriers and grow in love for Christ and in God’s love for each other. We will be open to misunderstanding and correction (especially when it comes to cultural faux pas). We look forward to learning—all of us learning about the other.

Here are our goals, currently. Cultural exchange—share each other’s culture. This will require respect and humility on our part, as many Native Americans are protective of their culture. Leadership development—helping children and youth take on responsibility and helping them be successful. Church and Community Enrichment—seeing the church grow with new members and programs, and provide encouragement to our Native American communities. Have church members participate in Alpine Kids just as Native American families participate in church activities. Spiritual Enrichment—becoming familiar with Native American spirituality while also communicating the good news of Christ.

At our church council meeting on April 10, we will be voting on whether to take on Alpine Kids as it transforms into a ministry. I believe this is an opportunity for us to bridge two cultures that have long been willfully separate from each other. The challenge and the promise are the same—to be one with each other, and yet distinct from each other. It is the prayer of Jesus for all of us, “...that they may be one, as [the Father] and I are one.” (John 17:22).

Be the church, --pastor tony