

Railway of Hope, the Movie

By Sophie Clark, Klawock High School Senior

My name is Sophie Clark and I'm a 17-year-old senior at Klawock School. A few years ago, I saw a suicide prevention movie that was rather engaging. It presented the information necessary to provide adequate training, yet told a story rather than spewing facts upon the viewers. After my attendance to many suicide prevention trainings, I noted that this movie held the attention of my peers to a much greater extent. However, the movie was outdated and hard to take seriously.

I decided that I would like to create a movie that presented suicide prevention in story form; similar to the design of the movie I had seen. I presented this idea to the Alaska Association of Student Governments (AASG) Executive Board and they seemed excited at the prospect, but what did a bunch of teenagers know about producing a movie? The idea was truly stuck.

After returning from a mission trip to Tonga, I had my light bulb moment. I had met two professional videographers, Bryan Fellows and Arody Bermejo, who had been hired to create a documentary of our mission trip. I immediately presented the idea to Bryan and Arody, and they were enthusiastic about helping.

Bryan and Arody provided an initial quote of around \$8,000 as a rough estimate, which was far less than half of any other quotes I had received. They believed in my cause and capability to pull off such a feat, and were willing to provide their services at a greatly discounted rate. AASG agreed to pay half, starting me off with \$4,000. So I set to work, handing out letters requesting sponsorship from businesses and applying for grants, with little success. I think many corporations didn't understand my drive, and found it hard to take a 17-year-old seriously.

The next people to believe in me included my family and Jan Bush, who took this idea to the Chamber of Commerce, and Jon Bolling, Craig City Administrator. Due to their sincere care and belief that a teen like me could contribute to society in a positive way, I quickly learned the meaning of a "grass roots" movement. Soon many local sponsors came forward, fulfilling a large portion of the remaining funds required. Without the support of this community, my movie would never have been a possibility.

I'm still continuing my quest for funding so that I'll have enough money to put the finished product onto DVDs and produce a booklet/pamphlet to accompany the film, but thanks to your donations, the premiere is still on schedule for April, which will take place at the Spring AASG Conference in Healy. You can follow the progress of the movie on Facebook at www.facebook.com/railwayofhope.

Organizing the production of a movie has been a ton of work and it's been stressful trying to balance the rest of my senior year around that, but I know it will be worth it in the end. Alaska is a huge state with a small-town feel, and I really appreciate all the assistance everyone from across the state has provided. Whether it's housing for filming week, or funding to provide transportation, the donations that have been made are truly appreciated and I will never be able to adequately express my gratitude with anything other than a thank-you from the bottom of my heart.