

Alaska Fellows Newsletter

Greetings from the Great State of Alaska!

As we, a new class of Alaska Fellows, settle into our homes in Juneau, Anchorage, and Sitka for the long winter, we've begun introducing ourselves to each other and our local communities. We've had potlucks with neighbors, hikes with friends, and a beer or two with strangers. We take the time now to introduce ourselves to you, our larger community of friends, family, and supporters.

Each of us has followed a different path to get here, some moving just across town and others across the world, but all of us felt drawn to Alaska. The promise of beauty, new adventures, and engaging work lured us from the known to the unknown. Our paths merged on a grey October weekend in the small town of Hope on the Kenai Peninsula as we gathered for our opening retreat. We spent the weekend enjoying the fall colors and preparing ourselves as a group for the journey ahead. Although we've returned to our respective homes we continue to be bound together by our larger sense of community and purpose. And this newsletter!

Our newsletter will come out periodically with insights and updates from all three Alaska Fellows sites. We hope this newsletter will help to close the gap that separates you from us by providing a window into our lives. Thank you all for your love and support on our journey through the next seven months of the Fellowship. Enjoy!



WHAT IS THE ALASKA FELLOWS PROGRAM?

The Alaska Fellows Program, constituted by three fellowship sites in Anchorage, Juneau, and Sitka, is a near-year-long postgraduate fellowship program that places dynamic recent college graduates with organizations across Alaska.

Fellows across the three sites live communally and attend program-funded opening retreats as well as facilitated "convenings" — programmed events that draw together all 20-25 fellows across all three sites to cultivate connections, friendships, and common identity at the beginning and end of the program.

Anchorage

Armed with our trusty vehicles, Ulysses (an eccentric Jeep from the early '80s) and Ginsberg (an Altima whose heating only partially works), we've been exploring the booming metropolis that is Anchorage. We've been occupied immersing ourselves in the political scene, attending cultural events at the Museum, and finding the best dance spot in town. We've kept busy, but with the Chugach Mountains only 20 minutes away and coastal trails just outside our back door, it's easy to escape the bustle of city life. With winter upon us, we're sharpening our skates and waxing our skis, ready to take full advantage of the next six months of ice and snow. If you're ever in town drop us a line!

The Fellows



Sam Aamot, Business Services Fellow-Anchorage Library

I grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota and attended Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. After graduation, I worked at the downtown Minneapolis Public Library in their Special Collections department cataloguing a photograph collection and repairing and preserving books and maps. I currently work at the Anchorage Public Library as the Business Services Coordinator. My goals are to build and market the library's business services and be a community partner to help support small businesses and diversify Anchorage's economy. In my free time I love to read, bake chocolate chip cookies, and folk dance.

Sarah Ludwin-Peery, Community Development Fellow-Cook Inlet Housing Authority

Sarah Ludwin-Peery has been thinking about this for a while, and is pretty sure that the fruit she most strongly identifies with is the coconut. Like a coconut, she is hairy, brown, and generally spherical. Cutting her in half is not a good way to make a comfortable bra. As an angiosperm, Sarah is protected by a thick outer layer; cracking through her hard exterior shell yields a watery liquid rich in electrolytes, the perfect drink for a hot summer day. On occasion, she has been known to fall from the top of a palm tree onto unsuspecting bystanders below, earning her the nickname "the killer fruit".



Sarah Richardson, Local Government Fellow-Department of Health

Sarah Richardson is from Montpelier, Vermont and thought that the Anchorage Alaska Fellows Program was just for people named Sarah from Vermont. She is working as a Fellow at the Anchorage Department of Health, doing a community assessment of substance misuse in the city. In her free time she does her best to stay bear aware, complete u-turns in the jeep, and get her daily portion of garlic.

Daniel Ahrens, Urban North Fellow-Anchorage Museum

Daniel Ahrens is a recent graduate from the University of California, Berkeley where he studied Environmental Science. From growing up in Northern New Mexico's Rio Grande Valley to spending his last summer working on climate research in the Arctic, Daniel thrives negotiating the nexus of human identity and resource management. A listener first and foremost, Daniel is a thoughtful and equitable leader that's excited to take his next steps at the Anchorage Museum.



Jacob Shercliffe, Sustainable Business Fellow- Alaska Venture Fund

Jacob Shercliffe is a recent graduate of University of Alaska Anchorage. He is currently working on sustainable economic development research at the Alaska Venture Fund with a focus on diversification away from resource extraction. In his free time, he enjoys playing board games, watching esports, and arguing with people. He hopes to someday make a number of fictitious non-profits to fix the world's problems.

Meg Pritchard, Community Outreach Fellow-Alaska Ocean Cluster

Meg works with the Alaska Ocean Cluster to help diversify the Alaskan economy through blue startup growth. A warm-blooded Virginian by birth, she's making do with extra layers and actively seeking recommendations for electric blankets because apparently "it's not even that cold yet." Once she figures out how to warm up (much like our beloved Altima), she's excited to hike, ski, climb, and run more in the coming months!



Cuckoo Gupta, Public Programming Fellow-Alaska Humanities Forum

A Gilmore Girls enthusiast you need around to use her people skills, charm, type-A-ness & witty header statements.

Langston Alexander, Salmon Gold Fellow-RESOLVE & The Nature Conservancy

Langston first ventured up to Alaska in the summer of 2017 and, after spending a glorious summer tramping around the Kenai River, was intent on returning. As an environmental policy fellow with RESOLVE and TNC, he is working to incentivize miners to engage in fish habitat restoration at their sites. Outside of work, he's either trying to improve his bridge game, learning to cross-country ski, or struggling with a crossword. He looks forward to winter camping and reading by the fire throughout the winter.



Highlights



Our first weekend together, enjoying the sun at Manitoba Hut.



Hosting a Twin Peaks themed Halloween party.



Our first taste of snow in beautiful Hatcher Pass!



Sitka

Hello from the Sitka Fellows! Now entering its fifth year, the Alaska Fellows Program first originated in the beautiful city of Sitka. This year, the Sitka Fellows' residence has been moved from the Sheldon Jackson campus to a custom-built, cedar-shingled home on Etolin Street, which is sporadically the home to a sixteen-year old, very lovable but occasionally ill-tempered black cat named Gus. So far, Etolin has lovingly housed a number of delicious family dinners which included fish and game generously provided by Joe, one potluck, frequent movie nights, countless listens to the Mamma Mia Soundtrack, and one very memorable albeit disturbing "yogurt party."

The Fellows

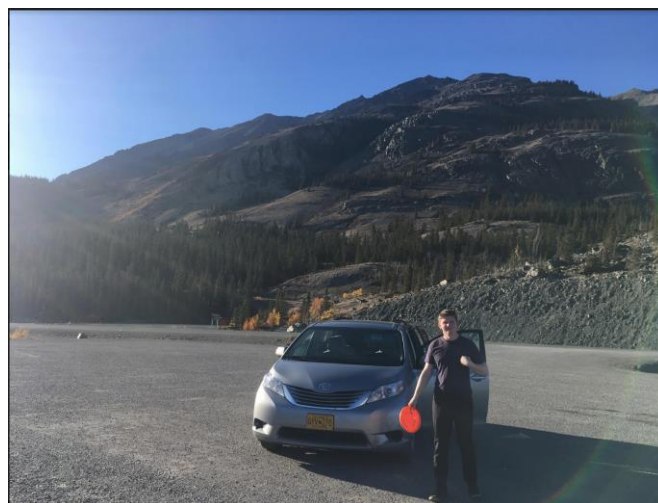


KT Wiley, Housing Advocacy Fellow-Assn. of Alaska Housing Authorities

KT defines home as a place with "good humans". So for now, Sitka is her home, but home to her has been a variety of places: mostly Lowell, Cambridge, & Chapel Hill, but originally, she is from Hudson, Ohio. KT is working at the Association of Alaska Housing Authorities. Her responsibilities include developing storytelling methodology to document the social impacts of (in)adequate housing across communities in Alaska; developing legislative advocacy & education material. KT came to Sitka for the mountains, the community, as well as because of her passion for housing advocacy. Some of her favorite things about Sitka include: the sea lion she regularly sees from her window at work, the whale skeleton @ the Science Center, and Mount Verstovia.

Joe Weyhmiller, Development Fellow-Outer Coast

Hails from Craig, Alaska on Prince of Wales Island. He works as the Development and Administration Fellow for Outer Coast - a project to establish a two-year liberal arts college in Sitka. Joe loves a lot of things about Sitka, including the rain, wild food, and the support of a small-town community. These, as well as the exciting work that Outer Coast is doing lured Joe back to Southeast Alaska. He loves it here and is happy to be living with the rest of the wonderful Alaska Fellows in Sitka this year.



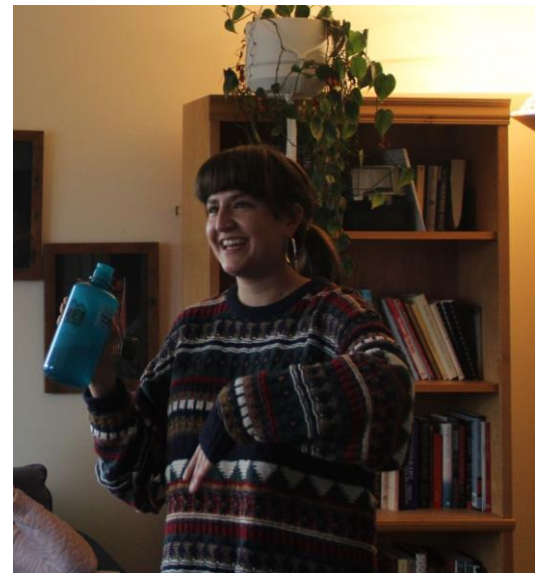


Emelia Vigil, Legal Fellow-Sitka Tribe of Alaska & ANDVSA

Emelia comes from Northern California and came to Alaska seeking somewhere new. She'd never been to Alaska and likes living in new, interesting places. Currently, Emelia works as a legal fellow for Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. At STA she's helping improve the already well-established Tribal Court by making forms and other services more accessible to court users. At ANDVSA, she's assisting with volunteer acknowledgement and recruitment, in addition to policy work. One of her favorite things about Sitka is all the local foods! From salmon to spruce tips and everything in between, Emelia loves eating foods from the island and attempting to incorporate them into her own repertoire.

Sam O'Brien, Communications Fellow-Sitkans Against Family Violence

Sam chose to come to Sitka because after spending four years living in the glory that is Western Massachusetts, she recognizes how important it is for her to live and work in a beautiful place. Additionally, after living with five of her best friends for one blissful if not slightly absurd year, Sam really wanted to continue living in a vibrant community. Currently, she works in the Prevention Department at Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV). Her role involves the implementation of community programs devoted to getting at the societal roots of intimate partner violence. She also works on implementing and developing SAFV's communication strategy. In Sitka, Sam has found so much to love--the wonderful, eccentric, intelligent, hilarious people she cohabitates with, the gorgeous trails to hike and run, the screened in porch on which she sleeps, reads, and attempts to occasionally write, and the plethora of salmon/salmon-related dialogue.



Anna Roy, Community Outreach Fellow-Brave Heart Volunteers

Anna calls Vermont home. Her host organization is called Brave Heart Volunteers and you may be surprised to learn that it is in fact not related to Braveheart the movie or Mel Gibson. It's actually a group that supports individuals who are isolated and in need of companionship, at the end of life, or experiencing grief. Anna spends her days organizing volunteers, visiting with care-receivers, and planning trainings and community outreach related endeavors. She chose to come to Sitka because she'd heard great things about the community and outdoor access. Since arriving in Sitka, she's loved living by the ocean and being able to walk out our front door and go camping.



Ellie Handler, Communications Fellow-Sitka Conservation Society & USFS

Ellie is from Woodbridge, CT. This year, she is working at the Tongass National Forest and Sitka Conservation Society. As the public lands communication fellow, Ellie's working to get out the word about the Tongass National Forest! She's coordinating efforts between SCS and the Forest Service to publicize projects and events. Ellie came to Sitka the summer after her freshman year and loved it. She loved how accessible the outdoors was and how much more connected to the land and waters everything and everyone felt. The Fellows Program had been on her radar as a way to get back to Sitka, and when she saw this position, she knew she had to apply. What does Ellie love about Sitka? The salmon! Salmon eggs in rivers, baby salmon growing and moving out to the ocean, adult salmon coming back to the forests! She's never been somewhere with nutrient cycling so in the front of people's minds. And everyone she's met has strong opinions about the best kind of salmon; it's never just "salmon" we're eating, it's coho, sockeye, king.



Shannon Flores, College and Career Guide-Mt.Edgecumbe High School

Shannon "Shandawg" Flores hails from the relentlessly sunny suburb of Santa Clarita, California. She is currently serving as a College and Career Guide at Mt. Edgecumbe High School, a public boarding school of around 500 students grades 9-12. Shannon's work revolves around helping her students figure out what they want to do post-high school, whether that's attending a four-year college, shooting for an associate's degree, or enrolling in a trade school or technical program. The aspect of her job that she finds most meaningful is her one-on-one conversations with students—she loves helping her kids reflect on what gives them purpose and pushing them to dig deeper into the reasons why they want to pursue the plans they have in mind. When Shannon isn't hosting SAT/ACT prep, reading boatloads of personal statements, or creating overly enthusiastic, meme-laden powerpoint presentations, she can be found hanging out at home or around town with her lovely housemates. Her favorite thing about living in Sitka so far is how much there is to learn from everyone and everything around her. From crocheting granny squares, to sautéing mushrooms, to exploring new trails, to practicing languages, to trying crazy workout classes at Hames, there is always something new to try around town. Shannon is looking forward to spending the rest of the year exploring Sitka and Alaska with her 700 Etolin Fam.

Highlights



Ellie and Sam @ the top of Gavan Hill



Anna and Shannon on the Cross Trail



Celebrating Emelia's 22nd with a salmon-shaped cake and an Emelia-themed trivia game (Em-Dawg Vigilonaire)



Taking a week-long road trip through Juneau, British Columbia, the Yukon, and all the way up to Anchorage.



Winning second prize at the annual Stardust Ball Lip Sync Competition, for a performance of Mamma Mia's version of "Take a Chance on Me" by ABBA . We owe it all to three days of diligently rehearsing our hip pops, finding creative ways to cover ourselves in glitter, and most importantly, the tireless efforts of our choreographer and friend, Cecilia Dumouchel.



Juneau

The Fellows



Shelby Surdyk, Youth Congress Fellow-Juneau People for Peace & Veterans for Peace

Hi! My name is Shelby and I want to help build a world free of nuclear weapons. I grew up in Skagway, Alaska, but my anti-nuclear activities have taken me around the world, from the South Pacific, to the Southwestern United States, to North Africa. Currently, I live in Beirut, Lebanon, but in January I will move back home to Alaska to work with Veterans for Peace and Juneau People for Peace and Justice on a new project: the 2020 Youth Summit for the Global Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

Taylor Holshouser, Statewide Trails Initiative Fellow-Trail Mix, Inc.

Hello all! My name is Taylor Drew Holshouser and I'm stoked to be working on a statewide trails initiative with Trail Mix, Inc. in Juneau. Originally from Eagle River, AK, I recently graduated from Yale University and spent the past summer avoiding emails, desks, conference calls by guiding backpacking and rafting trips across the state. When not working on trails, I often find myself collecting books on Arctic exploration and exploring the mountains around town.





Katie Gannon, Rural Development Fellow-Spruce Root

Hey y'all! My name is Katie and I am stoked to be up here in Alaska. I am originally from Montana and I am currently working with Spruce Root Community Development and the Sustainable Southeast Partnership here in beautiful (and rainy) Juneau Alaska. I grew up with a strong connection to the outdoors and I am passionate about working holistically to support resilient communities and ecosystems. I am grateful for the opportunity to support individuals and organizations working together to reach cultural, ecological, and economic prosperity for Southeast Alaska.

Lily Odekirk, Program Assistant-Juneau Arts and Humanities Council

Hey everyone! My name is Lily. I originally hail from Charleston, WV and feel right at home in the mountains of Juneau. I am really excited to be working at the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council this year, where my work in program coordination and fundraising is aligned with my own commitment to promoting (equity within) the arts. I have a strong background in theatre and writing and am enjoying getting to know those communities here in Juneau.



Katherine Sims, Outdoor Economy Fellow-DCCED

Hello friends! My name is Kat and I'm a Fellow with the State of Alaska's Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development within the Division of Economic Development (whew, that's a mouthful). Born and raised in Seattle, I'm excited to be learning about everything that makes Alaska and Juneau unique. I'm a big fan of civic engagement, podcasts, pugs, food, and exploring. You can often find me canvassing for upcoming elections or hanging out at The Rookery.

Building Our Community



Our first weekend post-retreat was spent in the cozy Lena Cove home of community member Judith Meier, where we hid from the rain and learned about her experiences in the over 60 years she's spent in Alaska. We also all bonded (but especially Taylor) with Judith's energetic golden-doodle, Crusoe, who understands commands in Spanish.

What We're Up To: 1st Week in Juneau Edition

Tuesday Mudrooms | Kat, Lily, and Taylor head to Juneau's version of The Moth on their first night to listen to community members recount stories about their lives.

Wednesday We visit the Mendenhall Glacier with our awesome pal Pat, of Alaska Robotics, and go for a walk on the Rainforest Trail with Lia, of Barnacle fame.

Thursday Shelby, Lily, and Kat check out Juneau's amazing gin distillery and then join all of Juneau to listen to comedian Tig Notaro wow them with her Adele impersonation.

Friday Katie's back and we all have our first day of work! That night, we go to Judith's. (see Building Our Community)

Saturday Fam Dinner - Taylor cooks us chicken noodle soup. Kat and Lily brave the rain to check out the Halloween drag show.

Sunday Shelby rocks her film screening and Q&A on nuclear warfare. We host a potluck at our apartment and meet a ton of wonderful new people.

Monday Kat, Katie, and Lily say goodbye to pals Shelby and Taylor who are traveling to Beirut and Reykjavik respectively. Katie makes delicious banana bread.

Tuesday Lily goes to a playwriting masterclass at Perseverance Theatre, Juneau's professional theater company.

Wednesday We check out Juneau's new open mic night (spearheaded by Pat's amazing wife Marian) at the crowd-favorite coffee shop, The Rookery.

Thursday We attend Perseverance Theatre's production of Our Town (after noshing on pizza), and get to crash the cast's after party.

