



Corrects the Careline website to CarelineAlaska.com.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 18, 2011

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Iron Dog racers partner with state health, safety departments to prevent suicide

2010 champs share the message that suicide is preventable, starting Feb. 12 in Wasilla sports center

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Iron Dog riders Chris Olds and Tyler Huntington are racing to do more than win (again) this year. They are partnering with the state to spread the word that Alaska’s suicide rate is too high, and that individuals and communities can take action to bring that rate down.

Prevention materials will be available 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 12 at the 2011 Iron Dog Safety Expo in the Curtis D. Menard Memorial Sports Center, Wasilla. Troopers, representatives from race sponsor the National Guard, and the racers will also distribute materials along the Iron Dog route during the race, which starts Feb. 20 in Big Lake.

Tanana resident Cynthia Erickson, a long-time Iron Dog volunteer, recruited Olds and Huntington for help in the aftermath of youth suicides in her village. The men said they were glad to help.

“One suicide is too many and I grew up with a lot more than that in my village and with my friends and family,” said Huntington. Alaska Native male teens have the highest suicide rate in the state.

Erickson contacted the departments of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and of Public Safety (DPS) for help with her idea of printing and distributing cards with the racers’ photos and contact information for Careline, the statewide suicide prevention hotline.

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council printed cards and posters, and DHSS, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Iron Dog and the Alaska Brain Injury Network pitched in to help fund reflective stickers.

DPS will send two Troopers who are Alaska Native to villages along the race route to visit schools and share the materials and the messages that Olds and Huntington will carry as well:

1. Suicide is preventable. We know how to foster mental health, which suicide-risk evaluation programs are effective and how to intervene when appropriate.
2. We can all help. Alaskans can attend or adopt school- and community-based programs that teach students and community members how to identify signs of depression, how to reach out and how to connect people to help.
3. Need help? Get help. “Life is a team effort!” the cards and posters say. Iron Dog racers ride as teams because it makes sense to use the buddy system when covering 2,000 rough, remote miles. All of us hit rough patches in life – if you need help, call Careline at 1-877-266-HELP (4357), chat online at carelinealaska.com, or text 907-2-LISTEN (547836).

“It’s up to us as Alaskans to use these tools to build healthier communities,” said Erickson. “Suicide prevention is only going to happen when we make it happen.”

For more information on suicide in Alaska, the campaign and to see the materials, visit www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention.