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**February 2, 2018**

018-006

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## **The Alaska Military Youth Academy: Celebrating 25 years of changed lives**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — The high school counselor lowered his head, peered over his reading glasses, and looked straight into the eyes of the young man before him. “You’re not going to graduate this year.”

Justin (not his real name) was stunned. He was always the cocky smart-aleck, holding school – and most everything else – in disdain. Truancy? Of course. Drugs? Sure. He was smart, he was cool, and now he was worried.

“You don’t have enough credits to graduate on schedule,” the counselor continued, “and unless you’re a Super Student – and you’re not – you’re not going to finish.”

“What am I gonna do?” Justin stammered, holding back tears.

“Well, you could enroll in the Alaska Military Youth Academy and graduate with your GED in 6 months,” the counselor suggested.

And thence began a personal turnaround repeated more than 5,000 times over AMYA’s 25-year life.

The Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA) opened its doors January 30, 1994 as a National Guard Youth Challenge Program located on Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson, at the Alaska National Guard’s Camp Carroll Training Site. AMYA offers a holistic, 17-½ month, military-style Residential (22 weeks) and Non-Residential (12 months) program designed to help 16- to 18-year-old Alaskans experience educational and life changing success.

Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year of accreditation by AdvancED/Northwest Accreditation Commission, AMYA has graduated over 5,300 young men and women. Over the last 25 years, more than 145,000 students have graduated similar programs nationwide, changing the paths of their lives for the better.

According to a RAND Corporation cost-benefit analysis, every dollar expended on Challenge yields \$2.66 in social and economic benefits. This 166% return on investment is substantially higher than other rigorously evaluated social programs targeting disadvantaged youth. Youth Challenge is unmatched in

its effectiveness in helping young people prepare for the future. A multi-year study showed program participants achieve impressive results in educational attainment and employability: GED or high school diploma attainment increased by 29%; college attendance increased by 86%; annual earnings increased by 20%.

AMYA consistently places in the top five ChalleNGe programs in the country, but they haven't settled for mere superior performance year after year. Alaska's program is finding additional success in innovative education and job training programs.

Beginning in the winter of 2016, a grant from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development allowed 52 AMYA graduates to return for a four-week residential pre-apprenticeship program. The inaugural offering – “the Cadet-to-Work Program (CWP) – trained 20 cadets in construction trades through the Alaska Works Partnership. Areas of instruction included 40 hours each in carpentry, electrical, construction labor, and iron work/welding. The training included OSHA 10 and North Slope Training Certification. Twenty cadets received 160 hours of training from the Computing Technology Industry Association, and 12 received 160 hours of culinary arts instruction. Thirty-nine graduates successfully completed the training.

Cadets in the spring/summer class took advantage of a similar opportunity, and 25 graduates completed the training.

With increasing interest in the pre-apprenticeship program, AMYA restructured the academic rotation schedule to conduct CWP during the last four weeks of the Residential Phase. In the winter of 2017, 71 cadets successfully completed pre-apprenticeships and 18 completed Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) delivered in partnership with the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. These CERT-trained citizens are valuable assets to their home communities in times of crisis or natural disaster. In the summer, 72 cadets completed pre-apprenticeships and 83 finished CERT instruction.

AMYA received additional grant funding from several sources to enroll 72 current class cadets in the pre-apprenticeship program, with 87 receiving CERT instruction. Impressively, all students are receiving vocational education instruction in tool identification and use, tool safety and basic construction skills, framing and wallboard installation.

Through the fall of 2018, 100% of cadets will receive CERT and vocational education training. Sixty-four slots will be set aside for students to participate in the pre-apprenticeship program, while the remaining cadets receive an introduction into small engine repair and use welding and heavy equipment simulators.

But by far the most important “statistic” is the enormous positive change realized by thousands of young Alaskans, and no one knows it better than the parents of AMYA cadets.

After graduating AMYA, Justin enlisted in the U.S. Army. Upon his return from combat duty overseas, he enrolled in a university criminal justice program. He is now a full-time Sheriff's Deputy.

Justin's mother wrote, “I credit the Alaska Military Youth Academy for serving as the catalyst for the positive change in my son. After years of thinking we would be visiting him on the other side of the bars, it does my heart good to see him serving the community he lives in. We are so very PROUD of him! Many thanks to all of you who serve our troubled youth – you definitely are making a difference!”

Happy birthday, AMYA. And thanks.

For additional information or to apply to AMYA, visit our website [www.akmya.org](http://www.akmya.org), or contact the Admissions staff in Anchorage in the Muldoon Town Center Office, 1251 Muldoon Road, Suite 114, (907) 375-5553. Outside of Anchorage, contact Angela Chapin in AMYA's Fairbanks office in the National Guard Armory, 202 Wien Avenue, (907) 374-7960.

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**Attached pdf** includes story and photo  
Check out AMYA at <https://www.facebook.com/GOAMYA/>



Cadets from the Alaska Military Youth Academy celebrate their graduation with a traditional hat toss.