**Northern Lights Episode 8**

**Hurt and Healing**

Produced, edited and narrated by: Barbara Johnson, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Interviewees:
- Ronalda Angasan – Co-Founder of [Alaska Natives Against Domestic Violence](http://www.facebook.com/groups/alaskanativesagainstdomesticviolence/)
- Professor Amber Fullmer – Director of Native Student Services at the University of Alaska Anchorage.
  
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Introduced by: Sarah Mackie

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**Sarah Mackie**

Hello everyone and welcome to Northern Lights, the Harvard Arctic Initiative Student Podcast.

Today, Barbara Johnson brings us a story of hurt and healing as she discovers one way in which victims of domestic violence in Alaska are supporting each other in their recovery from abuse.

This episode deals with the sensitive topic of domestic violence. If you are affected by these issues and need support, today’s guests have shared their contact details in the episode notes. You can also contact the US National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233 or online at [https://www.thehotline.org/](https://www.thehotline.org/). If you are not in the USA, you can access the [International Directory of Domestic Violence Agencies](http://www.thehotline.org/).

Barbara Johnson is a PhD student at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

This is Barbara Johnson with ‘Hurt and Healing’.
Barbara Johnson

In Alaska, the deadliest occupation is being female. Year after year the CDC and FBI rank Alaska as one of the country’s most violent State and the most dangerous state for women. The violence is insidious. If you are in a room with 10 Alaskan women at least six of them will have experienced assault and/or violence in their lifetime. Alaska Native women experience even higher rates of violence – by some estimates, up to 10 times higher than the rest of the country. According to Data for Indigenous Justice, an Alaska based nonprofit, a lack of data likely hides the full scope of the situation, meaning these numbers are underestimates.

Why is Alaska so violent? The reasons are varied and intertwined - Colonial trauma, isolation, mental health, a lack of services and law enforcement - over 80 Alaskan communities have no law enforcement presence.

Tired of inaction and failed policies some Alaskans are working to change things. One of them is Ronalda Angasan, who is confronting Alaska’s horrible rates of violence head on through a Facebook group, Alaska Natives Against Domestic Violence. We will also be joined by Professor Amber Fullmer, the Director of Native Student Services at the University of Alaska Anchorage and a former law enforcement officer whose research focuses on domestic violence and perpetrator interventions.

Ronalda, Professor Fullmer thank you so much for being with us today. Ronalda, can you start by telling us what your Facebook group is and what it does.

Ronalda Angasan

Alaska Natives Against Domestic Violence is a Facebook group and it's made of mostly survivors our families, our friends and people that support us and help us heal or help us pass policies that improve our situation in Alaska, whether it be state representatives, legislators, senators any anybody that wants to help is invited and welcomed.
The group was actually created by my husband Brad Angasan. He started the group to help me heal from my trauma from an abusive marriage in an abusive relationship that took me 20 years to escape from. He saw the tail end of that while we were friends. We have known each other for a very long time.

He started it to help me heal. I had Him and my cousin Taryn Shannon, who was a state trooper at the time. They helped me escape from my situation and they thought this would be a good outlet for me to be able to help other people out of the situation or just even vent and have a safe space. A safe space to say this isn't right, this, this is what I'm going through, or this is what I've experienced if that's what helps.

It does say Alaska Natives, but that name came from who we are, as you know, Brad and I, my husband, Brad, we are Alaska Native so it when that is that was the intention when the group started Is to focus in on our own people. But we very quickly realized that our own people has a very broad definition and we don't want to exclude anybody.

There is 5000 people in this group. And we are not even close to the number of people that are experiencing it or have experienced it. You know, getting out there over these last few years and talking to people…I found that everybody In Alaska, especially Native people have a story, whether it is them being abused whether they have been raped whether they have been assaulted whether somebody tried to kill them or their family, their mothers, they grew up watching their mothers going through it you know their grandmothers were. It was just something that just happened. It was shocking to me; everybody had a story, and everybody has experienced something And they don't. They did not know what to say. They did not know what to do. They did not know how to get through it

**Barbara Johnson**

According to Dr Fullmer, responding to trauma requires having space to build skills and resilience. Unless this space is provided, the trauma is unresolved.
**Professor Amber Fullmer**

You know, we were hungry or were wet that's trauma to a baby because I never experienced it before. So, kind of, same thing as a kid, you know, you are supposed to fall and have a caretaker pick you up and say knots. Okay, explain what happened and maybe kiss your knee or whatever. And then you are like, Okay, I can do this right that's resiliency building right that is the that's secure attachment, all those things. You know, if you do not have that if you do not have somebody there that helps with that trauma, you know, instead of getting the trauma and then having somebody there that that helps you know put it away. You get this like trauma ball and then You do not get any tools for how to put it away. So just kind of stays there and rattles around and then the next time you are traumatized, and nobody helps you It just kind of lays on top of it. And so, then you end up getting all these layers of trauma in this huge trauma ball. Eventually the trauma ball gets so big that it literally is busting at the seams. Right. And so there's just nothing but pain there because there's just and you got to get rid of it. And you cannot go to that original trauma and fix that and have it dissipated. You have to start with the most recent one and work on that and give people skills. And then work on the next one and give them some more skills so that as they get more independent and resilient and they start working towards that original trauma. They are doing more and more work themselves, but they're also practicing all these resiliency skills, you know, in everyday world and becoming more resilient. That's really the key of trauma work.

**Barbara Johnson**

When talking of trauma work, we think of therapy. But in Alaska, these services are limited and inaccessible to many because of costs and lack of infrastructure – in some communities, dial up internet would be an improvement. And for many people Ronald's group can help, filling these service gap and offering a supportive space.

**Ronalda Angasan**

What the group. This group does is it gives everybody that safe space in social media. We are a
very social media centered world now. And with that, it is people that are in there just, hey, I am here. I am going through this, I need help, and they can do it any way they want. They are free to cuss, they're free to scream and they're free to be gentle. It is how the day want to approach it and for me, that meant the world because there's times I wanted to scream. There were times I wanted to lash out and then there was times I just needed somebody to tell me it was okay.

Barbara Johnson

According to Professor Fullmer, the experience and advice provided by this group is extremely effective thanks to the lived experience of the people who participate in it.

Professor Amber Fullmer

I definitely would prefer talking to people who have some experience in being a victim based on my victimization. Because I have to do less explaining to them. We constantly asked victims to re go over all this stuff so that we can hear it and go, Oh, right. Do that hurts people like can we stop making people like parade their their their their pain out so that you know we can feel better about fixing it.

So for me, that's kind of what that page does is that it makes it so that you can go to a place with people who are like minded that and understand and feel safe without having to pull it out. And talk about it, unless you want to and are ready.

I think that the Facebook page does a really phenomenal job of bringing a community together, especially right now, especially where people can come and talk about things, but it's also pretty cool because victims can be part of that page and get resources on the down-low right. They don't like, they could go get on there for a day or two to find somebody that's local enough to them that it's just a friend for them to talk to you. And then they could get rid of it so that nobody sees it. They're not part of that group. They just have a new friend on Facebook, right, that can help them and talk to them. And so the opportunities that that Facebook page provides to people, especially right now in our virtual world. That's real support that's real stuff.
**Barbara Johnson**

Group members know all too well what support is unavailable, and try to and help others by filling those gaps.

**Ronalda Angasan**

There were times that we've raised money to get people to the hospital to get those rape kits because you don't always get a ride from the cops or sometimes you don't want to be in the car with the cops depending on if you trust them or not.

**Barbara Johnson**

The most dangerous time for victims of DV is when they leave, which requires planning ahead, preparing an escape plan. Abusers often live with their victims and they have complete control over you. Leaving requires preparation, like deciding where to go, how to get there, what to bring, people to reach out to. The group helps people figure that out and prepare for some uniquely Alaskan challenges.

**Ronalda Angasan**

So, an escape plan for rural Alaska is almost near impossible. You know, if I have known some, some women in it just happens at their women that escape while they are in Anchorage for medical appointments or they're in town to go to a convention. So, they take that opportunity to leave then. Because that is when they can get to the state troopers, that is when they can get to a shelter. You know, if you're If you're in a small rural community or in a village. You don't have that many places to go.

So those plans actually have to be planned out. They have to be saved for and if you're in an abusive relationship. Many, many, many times that includes financial abuse you do not have access to those funds without them knowing. So, in order to plan $800 airline ticket – that is not getting anywhere else but to Anchorage or a hub city.
It takes time and it takes like actual thinking how can I do this, how can I save. How can I get that ticket? How can I get to the plane? If everybody knows you're headed to the airstrip.

It's a step and you hope. In the house, you get, you know, away from the situation that you and that's putting your life in danger.

**Amber Fullmer**

It is not just as simple as your partner's abusive and so you're going to leave and go start your new life right and then talking about people who have been systemically oppressed. We don't have a lot of resources. And so, the option to just leave and go start a new life is not really there because we're struggling to maintain as it is because of things that are beyond their control. You know what I mean. And so, I think that I think that we have to start looking at abuse. In a multi layered way. And I think we need to start looking at the causes of it and how we as a society are perpetuating it

**Barbara Johnson**

According to both Ronalda and Professor Fullmer, part of the problem is the court system.

**Ronalda Angasan**

A lot of people don't think about that, you have to navigate the legal system just as much as the criminal and when you're an abuse victim, it's even harder. You have to navigate that system justice much and you have to deal with attorneys, you have to get to know the laws, you have to figure out…what's going to be the best option. Do you want to fight and face them for isn't going to be better for you to let the prosecutors takeover and you not be involved?

And then you also have to know is the prosecutor GOING TO EVEN INVOLVE. The prosecutor process on my case didn't know my name, the judge didn't know my name they offered him a deal. He got off. Um, and nobody even spoke to me. Nobody knew the backstory.
It was being processed like a herd of cattle. You go in, you accept the deal. And then you walk away. You know, there was no consequences to it.

**Barbara Johnson**
According to Professor Fullmer, this is not only a common problem around the country, but is also what helps perpetuate domestic violence.

**Amber Fullmer**
I thought about how many times I had to stop the judge. To say the victims in the courtroom and wants to speak. And it was an inconvenience for everybody in the courtroom and that the victim wanted to speak and talk about impact. And that always got me.

And I think that that plays into why we don't have a better understanding of what abuses is because we see the people who go to court for the worst things. And so that is abuse to us and we don't want to hear all the other stuff around what got to that point because there's tons of stuff that got to that point. And then we just want an easy answer will put them in jail lock them away, throw away the key.

One of the big things that I love about Ronalda’s work is that the healing part of it, right. Like, it all started from healing. And it started from a place of her husband, her, her current husband, wanting to help her right and in heal and come in as a man and say this isn't what men do, and so that's kind of different than how most treatment or rehabilitation is done within the Western system, especially if you have the courts involved with it right.

**Barbara Johnson**
In this online peer support group, helping and supporting each other, and focusing on survivors and their needs is key, and helps everyone heal.

**Ronalda Angasan**
The healing comes about, just I got to see other people that were leaving the same situation. I was, I got to see that I wasn't the only one that struggled with leaving. I'm not.

People that are abusers. They don't just use physical abuse and physical restraint. They do wear down your confidence. You don't know what you're truly capable of or what you truly are with them constantly beating down on you and telling you... you're worthless, you're stupid. You can't make money. You can't, you know, take care of a child on your own and... and when a confident person tells you you're just as good. It makes you believe it. At least it did for me.

I'm a survivor because I've gotten through it and it no longer dictates what I'll do, it doesn't it....Being a victim, I would have never told my story. I would have never been out there on you know on any kind of media, social media, whether it be TV, radio, any of it. To tell my story a victim doesn't do that, the survivor does, and a survivor gets healthy a survivor finds happiness in life again.

It does stay with you. I mean, just because you learn to live with it and move on, doesn't mean that it's not there. There are still moments of anxiety. You know, I do have PTSD, you know, I do know my limitations as well. So it's knowing, knowing what you are comfortable with. And then also acknowledging when you're going through it. When you know when you're having that anxiety.

**Barbara Johnson**

Ronalda has a concluding remark that she wanted to share and an offer of help.

**Ronalda Angasan**

The group isn't us the group is every single one of those five thousand members that have joined. You know, it's not for just us it's not just for me to sit here and toot my own horn. The more people we have helping other people, the better it is, and the faster the culture changes. If somebody needs, wants to get started, they can ask to help in the groups they can start their own
Barbara Johnson
Ronalda has offered to share her advice to anyone interested. If you would like to contact her, or Professor Fullmer, their contact info is in the caption for this podcast. Thank you both for joining us and sharing your expertise.

Sarah Mackie
Today’s episode was written and produced by Barbara Johnson.

We would like to thank Ronalda Angasan, Co-Founder of the Alaska Natives Against Domestic Violence Facebook Group and Professor Amber Fullmer, Director of Native Student Services and Researcher in domestic violence and perpetrator interventions at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

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