

## Dewey Hoffman Goes the Distance for Alaska Native Languages

Dewey Hoffman's grandmother gave him two gifts, his Denaakk'e name and a passion for sharing Alaska Native languages with others. Now, Hoffman is bringing those gifts to a national audience by way of upcoming PBS KIDS series MOLLY OF DENALI.

Named Kk'oleyo, after his great-grandfather, Hoffman's name means "long distance walker." It's a name that Hoffman, who is Koyukon Athabaskan, strives to live up to. Throughout Alaska, he is known for going the distance and has collaborated across learning communities and advocacy groups to help Alaska Native languages thrive.

Hoffman also speaks Spanish, French and Portuguese and has worked to learn several local Alaska Native languages in community settings from first and second language speakers. He says that learning Denaakk'e, the Koyukon Athabaskan language, was the most challenging and the most meaningful.

"Learning my ancestral language has helped me connect to my roots and grow as a person," said Hoffman, who studied Native American studies and Portuguese at Dartmouth College. "When I started finding little ways to incorporate my own culture and traditions into my everyday life, speaking and understanding the language clicked with me."

It's been more than a decade since Hoffman began studying the Denaakk'e language. Throughout his journey, he has openly shared his knowledge with others. His patience and passion for teaching has inspired people of all ages. Hoffman designed Denaakk'e language coloring pages and worksheets for young language learners. Hoffman has led language circles for adults and taught dual language Denaakk'e-Koyukon Athabaskan and English to 3-5-year-old students through the Fairbanks Native Association Head Start.

Hoffman has appeared several times as one of the guest hosts on "[In My Family](#)," a series of 30-second video spots that air on Alaska Public Media in between children's programming. In the segments, Hoffman teaches Raven (a hand puppet) how to say words and phrases in Denaakk'e like "deneege - moose," "leggune - dry fish," and "Nedaats'e ne'ooze'- What's your name?" in various Alaska Native languages.

"Learning a language is just like CPR training or driver's education in that anyone can learn it and anyone can teach it," said Hoffman. "Alaska Native languages are a connection to culture and a guidebook to survival for our people."

Now, Hoffman is a part of the team working on a new series that will bring Alaska Native culture to a national audience. This summer, MOLLY OF DENALI, an action-adventure comedy about the adventures of feisty and resourceful 10-year-old Molly Mabray, premieres on PBS KIDS. MOLLY OF DENALI is the first nationally distributed children's series in America to feature a Native American and Alaska Native lead character. Set in the fictional village of Qyah, Alaska, each episode follows Molly and her friends Tooye

and Trini on their daily adventures throughout Interior Alaska. Along the way, they explore informational text – a foundational aspect of literacy learning.

Hoffman has been with the PBS KIDS series since the beginning of production as one of a team of Alaska Native cultural and language advisers from across the state. Each episode features Alaska Native words and/or phrases with enough context for viewers outside Alaska to understand. MOLLY OF DENALI is more than just an opportunity for people in Alaska and in the lower 48 to learn new Alaska Native languages, it is also an opportunity for Alaska Native children to see themselves reflected in children's programming.

"Alaska Native and Native American people are under-represented in movies and television," said Hoffman, the father of a young daughter. "It's empowering for Alaska Native children like mine to see themselves, their language and their cultural traditions positively portrayed in MOLLY OF DENALI."