

BHA Spotlight – Kyle Davis

Can you tell me your name and a little background information on yourself?

Kyle: My name is Kyle Davis, I'm originally from Atlanta, Georgia. I grew up kind of in the city, kind of in between, I guess they call that the suburbs. My wife and I have been married for 12 years. We have three awesome boys. Our family has moved around quite a bit. We spent about eight years as house parents in residential children's group homes. In 2023, my wife was just finishing her doctorate degree, which was focused on residential models of care, and we felt like it was a good time to transition out of direct care. So, we started looking at what was next. We have some friends that were out here in Dillingham. One of them is a counselor and they recruited us to come check it out. We started that process in early 2023, and we've been in Alaska for almost two years now and we love it. It's awesome.



How did you learn about the BHA program?

Kyle: Well, I work for Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation, the hospital here and more specifically, Jakes Place, which is the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Facility. The BHA Program was presented to me as I started out here as a Residential Assistant. I then took the RA Supervisor position, and now I'm serving in a counselor position. With that, QAP certification is required. Through our program here at Jakes, the BHA program was presented as an option, and I was interested in pursuing it. So, I'm able to do it through BBAHC, which is awesome.

Why did you choose to go into this field and the BHA program?

Kyle: Well, I have spent quite a bit of time in direct care with children. To be honest, I thought I might end up being a substitute teacher or maybe even getting my teaching certificate and teaching at the Middle or High School. As I was looking around, I didn't really intend to work for the hospital. I was looking at options and realized that there was a huge need here at Jakes Place. As I started to learn more about the challenges of the Bristol Bay region and some of the hardships, I couldn't help myself. I realized that this was probably an area that I needed to be serving in. So, I jumped in.

Could you explain some of the goals when you first started out?

Kyle: I mean, to be honest, I didn't have any. I really didn't. And then, transitioning from Resident Attendant to RA supervisor, I just realized that there was a need and an opportunity that I was uniquely qualified for. Engaging with people and encouraging them to be the best version of themselves has always been something that I enjoyed about working directly with

people in need. So, I wanted to figure out how to best help our clients and best serve our community. By doing that, I realized that I needed more education in this field, even though I've got a lot of experience working with kids. I needed education and experience to work in this field and more specifically with this demographic and culture.

So, this program was available and, at some point down the road, I want to get the BHAIII, maybe, even a little bit further than that, also my CDC, and as far as I can possibly go. I also just recently started a master's program through Liberty University in Human Services and Counseling with a focus on Addiction Recovery.

I want to be equipped to best serve our clients and in order to do that, I feel like you need a sound education. The master's program is wonderful, but the BHA program is really more specific to what we're doing here in Alaska. And so, my hope is to get as much knowledge as I can from the BHA program and just be better equipped to serve our region and serve our clients.

Was there anything about the BHA program that initially stood out to you?

Kyle: Yeah, one of the coolest things about the BHA program is it's really focused on the culture of Alaska, it's focused on the people of Alaska and their specific needs, which are much different than a lot of areas and a lot of places. So that stood out to me as important. As I said, I always try to be very careful and cautious, but I'm from Atlanta, I'm from the South, I'm a white man. So anytime I step into a situation, or a career path or anything for that matter, I really try my best to make sure that I am culturally aware and culturally sensitive and that I'm not stepping into something with my personal ideas or views creating any bias. With the BHA program, it really does a good job helping you to understand everything from this region's perspective. So that was a huge thing for me, being able to not only get the knowledge that I need, but to get the right knowledge. I think the BHA program does a great job with that. So that's always been the biggest reason why I love it. I think it's a great program and it really helps me to identify with my clients.

When you first started off with the program, could you describe an initial experience or first interaction that you had? Think about first class, first client, first clinic day, first outreach day that really stands out to you.

Kyle: I wasn't sure what to expect at first but the interaction with the teachers in the program has been helpful and Katie has been phenomenal, and everybody is super supportive. The biggest thing that stands out is just the warm welcome and then everybody through the BHA program, pitching in and helping out and always willing to assist. We also get an opportunity to do some live classes, which I have really enjoyed. I have been able to meet some people within the region who are doing similar things to what we're doing here. So, I guess that's really the biggest thing that's stood out. Everybody is super welcoming and very supportive and encouraging and I guess that would be kind of the biggest stand out.

Was there any key people, resources or tools that were important to your progress?

Kyle: Katie has, I mean, she's phenomenal. We have a lot of people at Jake's Place who are involved in this program and are pursuing this program. I have some RA's who are doing it, some counselors, and our harm reduction nurse. So, there's a lot of us in the program and Katie's kind of like the cog in the wheel that keeps us all moving. We help each other out, but I know we're always asking questions about what to do and how to do it. She is very responsive and always provides the support we need. She's been amazing helping out and every teacher has been absolutely incredible, always willing to help out and to lead and to guide. And they do it in a super, super gracious way. If you need help, they're there to help. If you're not sure on something, they don't hesitate to give you a little extra help. So, all the teachers, but mainly, I mean, Katie's a rock star. Without her, not that I would have given up, but I have got a lot going on. So, she does a really good job when I ask and then I ask again, and then I ask again. She's never gotten impatient with me. So even when I come at her with the same question over, "I remember you said... but I'm not really sure... or, help me understand better", she does a great job with handling that.

Was there any, how has this program positively impacted your life or career?

Kyle: In a lot of ways. The rural perspective that the BHA program focuses on is such a big deal, because serving here is really different than anything that I've ever experienced or been a part of. We're almost year two here, and my wife and I talk about it all the time. We're still adjusting to things. And it's challenging. It's not always easy. And I'm an outsider and I recognize that. Sometimes, because of that and because of what I do here at Jake's, it does not always feel welcoming. That's understandable, especially when you start digging into why that is, and the generational trauma and historical trauma that the people in this region have experienced. When you really start to get to understand that you realize a little better why it does not feel welcoming to an outsider.

I try really hard not to come in with my ideas and views on the way that things should be. I try to approach the work with an open mind and an open heart and just ask myself, "what can I do? How can I help? Forget ME, what can I do to help you? What do you need?"

I think a lot of times, people come in and they want to help but they don't take the time to really ask what the people we work with really need. When you hear that, when you hear from people and you hear what they need, then it's important to put your boots on and you go do it.

If they say, hey, I've got a net out, it's two o'clock in the morning and it's full, and I need help. Well, you asked, right? You're here, you want to help. And that's not, that's not anything I've ever done. That's new to me. But if that's what's needed in order to gain that trust and build that rapport. Then you go. You go down at two o'clock in the morning and you get in the bay and you pick fish. That's what you have to do.

I say all that to say, the BHA program for me has given me so much invaluable insight into how to do this job from the perspective of the culture here and the people here. And that is huge. It's huge. It's an awesome program, not to mention all of the other things, like, you learn at your own pace and can be as flexible as you need to be within the course dates.

Kyle: Here at BBAHC, there are a lot of transplants. There are a lot of people that come in for work from the lower 48 or outside of Alaska who aren't from here. And there's a lot of people that come in through different churches that want to help that come to do outreach and mission and all that. And that's wonderful. That's great. But how can I legitimately expect to come in and start talking about the path forward to healing from historical trauma when, in a lot of ways, I represent the historical trauma. I can't do anything about that. I was born into this and so were the people here. A lot of people just miss that. They can't connect those dots.

I can't come in and just start talking about healing when I represent the historical trauma just based on the color of my skin. That happens a lot and it's an issue. We have to be aware of that.

In order to approach the things that need to be approached and in order to get to where I want within the community then it's going to take years of picking fish. It's going to take years of delivering fish to elders.

Going out and picking berries and making sure that the elders get them. It's going to take years of helping and it's going to take years of doing the things that people need. It's going to take years in order to gain that trust so we can start moving the needle on some of the things that need a little push. It's going to take a long time. And I think typically what happens here is people show up and then things happen, and they realize, oh man, this is hard. This is tough. And they don't realize the challenges that are here, that rural Alaskans face daily and they're not willing to do what it's going to take. I've seen that in just the two years I have been here. I mean, I've seen it over and over and over and over and over again. And it's tough. The BHA program gives you invaluable insight into this perspective.

For example, I'm from just north of Atlanta. So, I grew up in the rat race. I'm a hustler. I'm 90 to nothing all the time, and that's just not the way things go here. It's literally like, pump the brakes. Matter of fact, just stop. Go ahead and get out of the car and just chill.

It is a slower pace here. Getting used to that has been very difficult because you just want to go and get things done. And the program is especially helpful in learning those things and learning about the culture.

Education on culture is vital. I used to come into work saying, "hey, hey, how's it going?" And everybody just looks at you. I didn't know that they were saying "good morning" without saying anything.

I was thinking, “oh gosh, okay, here we go”. I come in with a face tattoo and had a long beard, I'm all loud and bubbly and people tend to look at me like I'm crazy anyway. So here I am thinking, “oh my gosh, these people hate me”.

It took months for someone to verbally respond to me, but it's a culture thing.

They don't have a lot to say sometimes but it doesn't mean they're not communicating, they'll carry on a whole conversation with you just with facial expressions. So, I've learned how to watch intently. I still talk a lot, obviously, but you pick up on those things.

The BHA Program is great for just kind of giving you an education on what the culture is and approaching that from a culturally sensitive position and it helps you to keep these things in mind in your dealings with people.

Do you have any specific takeaways or lessons that you've learned?

Kyle: Everything has been beneficial and great. For me, Working in Rural Communities was a pretty good class, just from the perspective of learning what to expect. One of the biggest things is it's such a small town here in Dillingham and with these smaller villages like Manokotak and Togiak, you learn a lot about the town quickly.

Navigating dual roles is focused on a good bit in the course work, which I think is really important in rural areas. It's not as difficult for me, per se, because I don't have distant family or lifelong friends here, but that aspect is difficult and can be difficult to navigate in the counseling setting. I'm a youth pastor also at the local church, so we have kids show up whose parents are in treatment and I'm their counselor. You really have to know how to handle that and the focus on that has been really helpful.

So that's one area that I think is really beneficial because I couldn't imagine being a BHA in a village like Togiak and you might have a client that's coming in and that client is your sister. That's the reality. Like that's the reality that we're dealing with. So, getting an education and learning how to deal with that not only appropriately, but with sensitivity and compassion and while still maintaining that integrity piece is really awesome. So, I think the BHA Program classes do a great job of kind of focusing in on that and helping out in that area.

Why do you think others should choose this program?

Kyle: I mean, well, first of all, it's an incredible catalyst to a career. You gain so many useful tools and it sets you up to be successful in helping people and providing care for people.

There's not a lot of that in the more rural regions and the smaller villages. I think it's a great program that people A) Have access to and B) Should definitely pursue, so that we have more members of our community that are equipped and able to care for and support each other when it's needed.

Do you have any advice for people who are starting out?

Kyle: I think a lot of times people get nervous and are afraid that it's going to be overwhelming and it's going to be a lot. Honestly, it is challenging, but at the same time, you can make it whatever you need to make it or whatever you want to make it. You can put as much time into it as you need to. If your week is busy or it's the weekend and you're like, "man, I'm spent. I don't have it in me". Then there's no pressure to get an assignment done by a deadline. As long as it's done by the due day, it's awesome. So, you get to kind of learn at your own pace, but also you have the support of the teachers, the professors, and the people who are leading the program. You have their support. If you need additional help with something there are people who are there, and they provide it for you when needed.

Don't go into it thinking that it's going to be overwhelming or too hard or difficult, just know that there's support and that sometimes it's not the easiest thing in the world, and when it's not the easiest thing in the world, all you have to do is send an email, pick up a phone and call. There's so much assistance and encouragement and support. My suggestion to everybody would be, if you're thinking about it, jump in and see what it's about. One thing I love about the BHA program is, if you just wanted to take one class and see what it was like, that's an option. The classes are inexpensive. So if you just kind of wanted to see what it was about and check it out, don't be afraid to jump in. There's lots of support and encouragement and it's a great program and you can learn a lot.

Is there anything else that you would like to add or elaborate more on?

Kyle: I think that the program is really beneficial and helpful and especially if you are working in the rural villages. They need people who are willing to help or are willing to stand in the gap. It's desperately needed, and the BHA program is just incredible. It offers a path to equip individuals to do that. That's exciting to me. Especially when you hear about and you see the destruction and devastation that drugs are causing in the region, especially opioids, and you see people who are suffering and who are hurting and dealing with mental health issues, amongst other things, and they don't have access to much. It's very minimal access, so the more people that we're able to get into the BHA program and the more people who are able to complete it and gain that knowledge and education and step into behavioral health, is huge.

For me, realizing that these people have been here for hundreds of thousands of years, and they are such a resilient people and without supports in those communities moving forward, I worry about how long people can sustain life the way that things are, in a lot of those areas and that is heartbreaking. I mean, it's awful to think about that, and to think that there's no access to behavioral health services, there's no access to support like that, and even minimal health care. It is tough and then you just see people struggling with addiction and it ruins lives and struggling with mental health and the high rate of suicide. You just see communities who have been around forever crumbling and it's sad. So again, the more behavioral health aids that we can put in those places to help is a really, big deal and incredibly important.