

Sarah Evangeline Hughes News Residency Program



Sarah Hughes joined Raven Radio (KCAW, Sitka, Alaska) as a news reporter in 1999. She had worked the previous summer at KDLG, in Dillingham, Alaska, after earning her graduate degree in Journalism from the University of California, Berkeley.

Within months of starting her position at Raven Radio, Sarah became the station's news director. She covered a wide range of issues, from the hyperlocal, such as school board decisions, to issues of national import, including controversies over environmental management and Native sovereignty. She was known in the community as a hard-working reporter sensitive to local issues. She developed a portfolio of outstanding stories, including on the Tlingit cultural renaissance, and collected an Alaska Press Club award for her business coverage.

From Raven Radio, Sarah went to WAMU, in Washington, D.C. where she worked as a reporter and established the radio journalism training program Youth Voices for local high school students. She went on to report at Aspen Public Radio followed by Colorado Public Radio, where she also worked on youth programming. She returned to Washington, D.C. to continue her career in public service, working to improve public education and later serving veterans and other beneficiaries of federal programs.

During the last few years of her life, Sarah experienced treatment-resistant depression. After her passing in late 2023, her family and Raven Radio decided to honor her calling to public service by establishing a news residency that allows young journalists to get the experience she got in Alaska, and which marked the start of her life's work.

Sarah's tenure at Raven is followed by the creation of Summer News Internship Program

Raven Radio has a long history of fostering young radio journalists. The first few interns were informally placed at the station by Bill Drummond, a UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism professor.

Following Sarah's departure from Raven Radio in 2002, KCAW formalized its Summer News Internship, which lasted for 17 years. The program was designed to attract candidates with Sarah's extraordinary potential. It worked: The roster of former KCAW alums includes people like Julie Caine, the supervising editor of NPR's "Throughline," and Andi McDaniel, the former CEO of WEBZ, in Chicago.

KCAW formalizes its training program

From 2012 to 2019, KCAW ran a Post-Graduate Fellowship in Community Journalism parallel to the internship program. The program accepted recent graduates and immersed them, over the course of an academic year, in the same experience that launched Sarah's career. The Fellowship turned out an extraordinary number of fine reporters, including Katherine Rose, now a Raven Radio reporter; Rachel Waldholtz, an editor on NPR's Climate Desk; and Emily Kwong, an NPR podcast host.

A better model: A Journalism Residency in Sarah's honor

While the fellowship/internship model was successful in helping young journalists advance their careers, it had one significant drawback: KCAW could only offer a small stipend, housing, and travel allowance. This limited the applicant pool to reporters who had the means to subsidize their participation. Raven Radio and the Scheper-Hughes family want to increase the pool of reporters who can participate by creating a true residency in Sarah's honor, one with a salary and benefits. The residence will last seven months each year for a reporter who is excited by the prospect of reporting in Alaska and eager for the opportunity to develop the full complement of skills required by the profession: writing, editing, audio production, photography, and web content. The individual must come to the residency with a baseline proficiency in reporting. At the end of the residency the reporter will have a portfolio of stories broadcast locally, regionwide on CoastAlaska stations, statewide on Alaska Public Media, and perhaps nationally on NPR.

What's needed now

While Sarah's passing is a huge loss, it is also the impetus to push on and do some good in a way that reflects all that we admired about her: the determination and love that she brought to an embattled profession. We encourage you to support the Sarah Evangeline Hughes News Residency Program with a donation – large or small – that will allow KCAW to perpetuate its record of success in cultivating the next generation of journalists, while providing ambitious, provocative, and creative reporting in the tradition begun 25 years ago by Sarah herself.