

DIVISION of *Public Assistance*

MISSION:

*... promote self-sufficiency
and provide for basic living
expenses to Alaskans in need.*



Katherine Farnham, Public Assistance Division Director.

“We’re seeing fewer families on temporary assistance, but more complex needs among those we serve. We’re stepping up our efforts to create more integrated services with our partners and a new family-centered model to better serve these families.”

*—Katherine Farnham,
Director*

The Division of Public Assistance meets its mission by administering programs that provide temporary economic support to needy families and individuals, and financial assistance to the elderly, blind and disabled. The division also provides food assistance to supplement nutrition, access to medical benefits, and supportive services that assist and encourage welfare recipients to become economically independent.

Among the division’s most recent achievements is the Native Family Assistance Program, which authorizes the 12 Native regional nonprofits and the Metlakatla Indian community to administer Temporary Assistance for Needy Families within the Native community. “The main reason that the Native Family Assistance Program pilot has succeeded is that Native organizations are more effective than the state in helping Native families move from welfare to work,” Division Director Katherine Farnham said.

The division also awarded grants to 11 faith- and community-based organizations for services that support marital and relationship education, family financing,

responsible fatherhood, conflict resolution and other services that help people make healthy life choices relating to marriage and committed relationships.

The Healthy Marriage Initiative provides grants to community and faith-based organizations for programs and services designed to support the formation and maintenance of married, two-parent families. Healthy two-parent families are more likely to ensure the well-being of children, as well as prevent poverty, than single-parent families and those with two unmarried adults.

The grants have underwritten programs such as Anchorage School District’s Crossroads School, which targeted young fathers and mothers with instruction in relationship maintenance and academic achievement. Catholic Community Services in Juneau used its grant to implement the Money Smart financial curriculum, which teaches financial management and budgeting to families. In the last two years, more than \$600,000 in grants have been given to organizations statewide. The funds — limited to \$50,000 per organization — were made possible by a federal bonus award for

success in moving families from welfare to work.

Unemployment, illness and other personal emergencies can threaten the well-being of any Alaskan and create the need for public assistance. One out of every eight Alaskans requests some type of cash, food, medical or energy assistance every year. In fiscal year 2005, the division assisted approximately 43,000 families each month. While many families and individuals are served only seasonally or for a short period of need, an estimated 90,000 individuals will receive some form of assistance in the coming year.

To better serve families in need, approximately \$376,000 has been spent on redesigns for Job Centers in Juneau, Mat-Su, Kenai, and the Muldoon location in Anchorage. These projects provide improved flow and a “one stop” experience for clients. The division looked at it from a customer’s point of view and modified the buildings and services accordingly. Modifications included moving the resource rooms — computers, phone banks, and specialists who assist in job seeking and résumé writing — near the center entrances.

The division also increased signage within the Job Centers, and employed cross-training among its staff so everyone knows what everyone else is doing, aimed at streamlining and expediting the client’s experience. “It’s a ‘no wrong door’ approach,” Division Director Katherine Farnham said. Inside the redesigned Job Centers, the division has integrated its services with partners, such as the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, businesses and community nonprofits, such as Nine Star, and other training organizations that have representatives working in the Centers. The division participates in 24 Job Centers statewide.

The division’s performance in moving welfare recipients from public assistance to the workforce has been recognized in two ways. Federal performance awards totaling \$12.2 million over the last four

years recognized the division’s improved performance in moving welfare recipients from public assistance to the workforce. The division also received a \$205,389 bonus from the U.S. Department of Agriculture recognizing the division’s improved payment accuracy in its Food Stamp program.

Under the reorganization, the division inherited oversight of child care, which is often a critical service for families seeking to move from welfare to work. The Child Care Program Office has been at the forefront of a department-wide effort to align licensing regulations and statutes.

Because child care is fundamental to welfare reform, moving child care to Public Assistance helps to align and integrate the department’s policies and client services.

The creation of the Child Care Program Office enabled the division to implement new technology to support the integration of child care licensing and Child Care Assistance.

The Integrated Child Care Information System (ICIS) includes all providers and families, and enables timely reimbursement and elimination of duplication. The comprehensive system will allow the division to efficiently monitor the approximately \$34 million it pays for child care assistance annually.

Accomplishments 2003-05

Highlights

- Created a team-based approach to serving families transitioning from welfare to work through the Family Centered Services Project. See story page 34.
- Successfully moved administration of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families for Native families to Native-run nonprofits, which have a higher success rate moving Native clients from welfare to work.
- Streamlined programs and instituted cost efficiencies over the last three years, including the way in which the division pays its “welfare to work” contractors. The new “pay for performance” contracts reward high performance and quantifiable outcomes. As a result, expenditures were down 7.7 percent in fiscal year 2005, saving more than \$3.1 million.

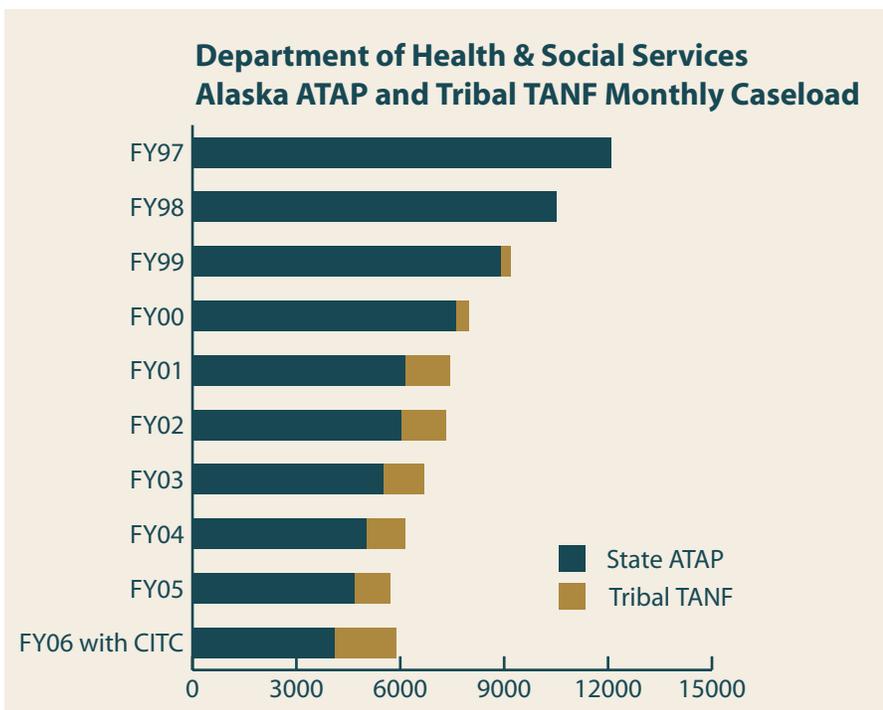
What we continue to work on

By the end of 2005, the division will be fully online with the Integrated Child Care Information System (ICCIS), which integrates child care licensing and approved child care providers within the Child Care Assistance program.

In an ongoing effort, the division promotes regional partnerships with public and private groups with a stake in the economic and social health of their communities. The division solicits advice and direction through these partnerships in respect to providing temporary assistance for individuals and families in need and strategies to promote healthy communities.

The division is investing in more Adult Basic Education for rural Alaska in the northern and Bristol Bay/Dillingham areas, which have a high percentage of adults on public assistance who do not have a high school diploma or a GED.

The division is streamlining the delivery of child care eligibility services to reduce administrative costs and increase quality and consistency throughout the state.



Helping people achieve independence is difficult — but gratifying

“Alaskans see that the service we offer now is about self-sufficiency — and our community plays a significant role in helping families achieve self-sufficiency and financial independence.”

— Marilee Roberts

True to its mission, the Division of Public Assistance encourages and promotes self-sufficiency and independence one family at a time. But paradoxically, the more successful the division is in helping its clients find jobs and reducing public assistance rolls, the more challenging their jobs become.

“We’re discovering that as caseloads dwindle — and we’ve been extremely successful since 1997 — we are now serving a higher percentage of families with multiple barriers that hinder them from obtaining and sustaining employment,” Fairbanks Regional Manager Marilee Roberts says.

“One young woman who has been on temporary assistance for more than 40 months has had difficulty getting jobs and keeping them,” Roberts says. “She has several children, health problems and mental health issues.”

The woman wanted to work, but needed a patient employer and a job that did not require multitasking. “We knew she could be successful with the right employer,” Roberts says.

Just in time for the client in question, in

February 2005 the division established its Family Centered Services Customized Employment program. “This program has a special emphasis on community involvement and wraparound services,” Roberts explains. The program involves the creation of one service team, with one plan and one support network. The family picks its team members, which may include people from the Department of Labor, the employer, community service agencies and/or mentors. “We help them build a support network so the family can sustain self-sufficiency with minimal state support,” Roberts says.

This woman took advantage of workshops provided by the Fairbanks Job Center and its partners and made progress. “By using all the resources available to her, she was able to get full-time employment in the janitorial field,” Roberts says. In addition to her full-time work, this woman also has a part-time job in the health care field that has given her a great sense of pride.

“Because of her tenacity and the support of the service team, her case closed in September,” Roberts says. “The client is very pleased — her service team celebrates her successes! She loves her jobs — she’s done a great job providing for her family and achieving a sense of independence.”

“We are pleased with these early results from the Family Centered Services team approach,” Division Director Katherine Farnham says. “This is also the result of years of partnership and collaboration by quality staff at the Job Center.”

Social change is very hard, Roberts explains. “To transition ourselves from providing an entitlement program to empowerment takes a long time,” she says. “Alaskans see that the service we offer now is about self-sufficiency — and our community plays a significant role in helping families achieve self-sufficiency and financial independence.”



Fairbanks regional DPA manager Marilee Roberts celebrates clients' successes.