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## PEER NAVIGATION – ALASKA YOUTH AND FAMILY NETWORK

### Peer Navigators teach, support and empower

- Parent’s (or permanent caregiver’s) wellness and recovery management
  - Understanding the system of services
  - Skills to be equal partners with professionals in providing for their child’s effective neurobehavioral health related services in the least restrictive setting.
- Youth’s wellness and recovery management
  - Understanding the system of services
  - Skills to be equal partners with their family and professionals in putting in place the least restrictive effective neurobehavioral health related services that will lead to their being able to manage their own treatment and recovery.
- Professionals in developing and sustaining an effective system of care that family and youth driven.

### Alaska Youth and Family Network provides:

- 24 hour access to a Peer Navigator for support
- Education, modeling, preparation and debriefing of advocacy role of parent/youth in meetings related to the needs of the family members
- Weekly support groups for parents or adult family members
- Weekly socialization groups for children while parents are in support group
- Weekly support groups for teens and young adults
- Parenting classes and coaching specialized for parents who have children with behavioral health issues with concurrent children/youth wellness class
- Wellness, recovery management and transitional skills classes for youth
- Leadership training and support for family members in policymaking roles
- Leadership training and support for youth in policymaking roles
- Educational materials on children’s mental health

## DATA and PROGRESS

### Website

AYFN’s web site has a calendar of events in Alaska, connection to other agencies, access to Peer Navigators and information about children’s health and parenting. AYFN has a release form on the front page to assist agencies in making referrals. This is the use of the web site:

Month - Year	Average # of hits per day	Total # hits for the month	# of distinct individuals using site
July 2007	1,181	36,628	2,841
July 2008	2,723	73,796	2,148
July 2009	3,751	116,416	2,139

**Number of families served July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009 – 225**

**Number of families served July 1, 2009 through September 30, 2009 – 230**

**Number of children in the families served - 171**

**Number of children with a history of residential treatment or out of home placement -97**

**Number of children at risk of hospitalization or out of home placement -104**

**Number of children who went outside of their own community - 5<sup>1</sup>**

**Content of Peer Navigation with parents includes:**

1. Listening to a family member's experience - successes and failures
2. Explaining what terms means, where resources are available and how to access them
3. Assisting parents to find and understand behavioral health issues of children
4. Identify the forms that need to be completed and assist parents in including complete answers
5. Allowing the parent to express their grief and changed expectations for their child
6. Coaching parents in positive communication with their children and professionals
7. Pre-teaching and role playing anticipated difficulties with future meetings
8. Attending meetings with family members and the treatment team, IEP/504 team or other meeting the parent requests the presence of a Navigator
9. Debriefing difficult or complex meetings about their children
10. Teaching parenting and wellness recovery
11. Assisting parents to develop a family/community based support system
12. Supporting parents to share information and experiences with other parents

**Number of youth served July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009 – 224**

**Number of youth served July 1, 2009 through September 30, 2009 - 152**

**Number of youth with residential treatment experience – 67**

**Number of youth rehospitalized – 4**

**Number of youth jailed as adults or committed suicide - 2**

**Content of Peer Navigation with youth includes:**

1. Listening to the youth's experiences - successes and failures
2. Explaining what education and treatment terms mean
3. Understanding the role of different professionals and agencies
4. Coaching youth in positive communication with their parents, friends and professionals
5. Pre-teaching and role-playing anticipated difficulties with upcoming meetings
6. Attending meetings with youth and the treatment team, IEP/504 team or other meeting the youth requests the presence of a Navigator

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<sup>1</sup> This means that 97.9 % of the children at risk of out of home placement stayed in their own communities. This compares with 135 families and a 92% rates for all of fiscal 2008.

7. Debriefing difficult or complex meetings
8. Assisting youth to address shame, disappointment, anger and stigma about behavioral health problems
9. Teaching wellness recovery management
10. Teaching and mentoring transitional living skills
11. Assisting youth to develop a family/community based support system
12. Supporting youth to share information and experiences appropriately with other youth
13. Becoming engaged in positive youth development community activities

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

1. Family members, including youth, contacted by Peer Navigators have not rejected services or the contact even when that family member was initially unaware or unsure what a Peer Navigator does. However, family members often reject the use of Peer Navigators if they are under the impression that Peer Navigators are case managers, information and referral specialists or counselors.
2. Family members identify a need for Peer Navigators especially when there is a decision to be made about their child:
  - use of a treatment program,
  - potential change in a treatment or educational plan,
  - change in medication,
  - unresolved or pending discipline problems,
  - new or increased difficulties with siblings or other family members,
  - potential change in custody,
  - need to complete treatment related forms and
  - perception of being overwhelmed with tasks associated with identified child.
3. There is large amount of time devoted to adhering to data management since Peer Navigators often participate in two different data systems. Family members may use more than one community behavioral health center.
4. Some community behavioral health agencies do not have a contract with AYFN or will not or cannot use ISA funds to pay for services outside their own agency.
5. The family utilizes a private provider of behavioral health services and there is no mechanism to use ISA funds to pay for Peer Navigation services.
6. The youth does not qualify for DenaliKid Care, TEFRA or Medicaid based on age/economic status and there is no access to ISA funds to pay for Peer Navigation and transitional services.

7. Currently there is a backlog of approximately 70 families because of a lack of capacity in Anchorage. The backlog is in part created by the higher needs of families currently using Peer Navigation services. Some of the issues are:

- family involved with child protection services
- family unaware of treatment/educational plans and child is in residential treatment away from the home community
- family does not have insurance to pay for community-based services and
- at least one other family member has mental health/substance abuse/domestic violence related problems
- difficulties in implementing an effective special education plan.

8. The following issues identified by families that impede community based care:

- lack of respite services, either in their own home or in a home compatible with their values
- lack of wraparound services
- lack of clinical intervention services during evenings and weekends
- lack of coordinated effective interventions between home-community and the classroom
- lack of access to community behavioral health services because
  - family does not have insurance
  - waiting list
- lack of trust or rejection of professionals' recommendations about medication or treatment