

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE
and ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD

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Community Town Hall Visit Grant **Report on April 29-May 1, 2009 Outreach to Nome**

Project Overview

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) provided funding for the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) to conduct a series of town hall style outreach events in rural communities around Alaska. The objective of these visits is to obtain feedback about how behavioral health services are serving the community, what needs exist and whether there are gaps in services, as well as to find out what is going well in these communities.

Rebecca Busch, AMHB/ABADA Planner, is coordinating this project.

The Team

This visit was staffed by the following:

Bernard Gatewood, Board Member ABADA
Colleen Patrick-Riley, Ex-Officio Board Member (DOC), AMHB
Melissa Stone, Director, Division of Behavioral Health (DBH)
Steve Williams, Program Officer, Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHTA)
Rebecca Busch, AMHB/ABADA Planner

Nome

Nome was chosen as the fourth of five communities to be visited for this project. Nome is located on the southern coast of the Seward Peninsula along Norton Sound of the Bering Sea. Nome is the transportation hub and commerce center for Northwest Alaska. In the 1900's Nome became a famous gold mining community which offered a short boom to the area. Remnants of this time can still be seen along the road, lining the beach, and in the gold pan in the center of town that claims to be the largest in the world. The local economy continues to be shaped by gold and mineral exploration, as well as carved ivory and other Native Alaskan craft trade, the reindeer industry, tourism, and the Iditarod race (as the finish location).

Nome has an estimated population of 3,505 people, while the Nome census area (which includes 16 villages) reports around 9,261 people in the region (2000 Census). Of the region, 75.8% of the population report being Alaska Native (2007 census). Nome is considered a "wet" community, while many of the surrounding villages have voted to become "dry" villages.

Nome is served by an array of social services. There are a number of providers in the area, including:

- * Norton Sound Health Corporation
- * Kawerak, Inc.
- * Nome Community Center
- * Office of Public Assistance
- * Regional Wellness Forum
- * Bering Sea Women's Group
- * Bering Sea Community Partnership
- * Nome Youth Facility
- * Nome Eskimo Community
- * Anvil Mountain Correctional Center (DOC)
- * Seaside Halfway House
- * Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NAVTEC)

Preparation

Bob Froehle, director of the Nome Youth Facility, and Bernard Gatewood have worked together extensively over the years. As this visit was in the planning stage, they began exploring the idea of conducting the community visit during the time when the Regional Wellness Forum (RWF) quarterly meeting. Bob was instrumental in the planning, gathering RWF and additional community contacts, offering suggestions for meeting locations, assisting in spreading the word and hanging flyers around the community. An added benefit during this time was the scheduled visits from Alcohol Safety Action Program (ASAP) Acting Program Manager Tony Piper, Alaska Native Justice Center Youth Services Coordinator Karen Neagle, and Robin Koutchak, Assistant Attorney General with the Office of Special Prosecutions and Appeals Alcohol Interdiction.

The Schedule of Events

The visit to Nome was packed with events.

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| May 26 th | Arrivals 12:30 P.M.
Team Meeting with Bob Froehle, Tony Piper, Karen Neagle
Tour of Nome Youth Facility
Tour of NAVTEC, presentation
Consumer Meeting at XYZ Center
Dinner at Bob Froehle's Home |
| May 27 th | Attend Regional Wellness Forum Quarterly Meeting at Kawerak
Tour Norton Sound Health Corporation's Behavioral Health Department
Provider Meeting at NSHC
Community Town Hall Meeting |
| May 28 th | Tour of Anvil Mountain Correctional Center
Departures 8:30 A.M. |

Public Meetings

Around 25 community members attended the various meetings. The provider meeting was the best attended meeting, which speaks to the dedicated service providers in the area. There was low turnout for the consumer meeting and town hall meeting. Even so, the feedback we received was very informative. Attending the Regional Wellness Forum quarterly meeting was the highlight of the visit. It was a valuable opportunity to collaborate, listen, learn of the current happenings, and share information with this group. We would like to thank them for this invitation and the opportunity to work together.

What we learned: Successes in the Community

The Regional Wellness Forum (RWF) is a large group comprised of committed membership from Nome community members and members from the surrounding villages in the region. The goal of the forum is to “restore a culture of wellness in the Bering Straits Region” and its purpose is “to provide a forum whereby agencies (and departments within agencies) interested in reducing substance abuse and its effects on children, families, and communities in the Bering Straits Region may meet on a regular basis and share information, coordinate, communicate, and collaborate.”

This group of volunteers came together to create some solutions after a number of deaths in the community due to alcohol consumption combined with extreme winter elements. In 2003, members of this forum developed a large group of volunteers and partnered with the Nome Police Department to conduct safety patrols during the Iditarod, New Year’s, and PFD time — when there are significant numbers of visitors in town, alcohol consumption activity is at its highest, and the temperatures are lowest.

The RWF Community Against Minors Consuming Alcohol (CAMCA) subcommittee has been very effective in organizing and collaborating with Nome Community Center to secure grant funding for a community service coordinator. David Elmore has been hired to develop and coordinate partnerships for meaningful, skill building community service placements for youth offenders.

The RWF has planned activities for the future which include: assisting in the development and promotion of village based Wellness Plans throughout the region; continuing Safety Patrols during PFD, New Year’s Eve, and Iditarod; including youth participation and input in the RWF; and holding another RWF meeting in one of their villages. The RWF is a strong, organized and established group offering leadership in encouraging and building wellness within the region.

During our visit to Nome, we had the opportunity to tour NACTEC (Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center) and learn more about. The mission of the program is to “prepare students for the world of work by assisting in the development of life skills, work readiness skills, academic skills, and career awareness while maintaining the academic standards of Nome Public Schools, Bering Strait School District, and affiliate partners in an atmosphere that respects diversity and individual identity.” The program’s vision is that “students will develop work

ethics and employment skills to become capable of independent living while sustaining a healthy cultural identity.”

NACTEC serves the region as a vocational learning center offering a variety of sessions. Last year the program offered 17 sessions with a variety of focuses on areas of career and technical skills, career exploration, life skills, and work readiness skills. Students have opportunities to attend college fairs; learn about careers in marketing, business, legal, and health systems; and learn trades of carpentry, welding, aviation through intensive hands on work sessions. It is a beautiful facility with updated equipment including poly-conference equipment for distance learning and a new housing facility with full time staff. The program administration shared our interest in growing aspects of the program to include substance abuse prevention and adding sessions to introduce behavioral health fields and build partnerships with programs around the state as a way to “grow their own” in the region. NACTEC is an asset and opportunity for the region’s youth.

Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC) provides a number of health and behavioral health programs serving Nome and surrounding villages. NSHC has recently filled the Executive Director position of their Behavioral Health Department, a position which has been unfilled for the past couple of years. NSHC Behavioral Health offers general behavioral health services, behavioral health out-patient services, village based counseling, Mobile Adolescent Treatment Team, Infant Learning, health aide training center, developmental disability services, WIC, and emergency mental health care.

Nome Youth Facility (NYF), a program of the State DHSS Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). It is a 14 bed youth facility with a unique focus on integration in the community with supervision, restorative justice, skill building community service, physical fitness, cultural integrity, creativity and social interaction. Bob Froehle, the director of this program, is a strong participant of the Regional Wellness Forum (and, as mentioned earlier, an integral coordinator for the community visit). NYF is in the process of growing program components to offer ASAP and Prime for Life programs (which led Bob to also include Tony Piper, Karen Neagle, and Robin Koutchak in the community visit).

Kawerak, Inc. is the regional non-profit corporation, incorporated in 1973 by the Bering Straits Native Association, to serve Nome and the region. Kawerak offers Children and Family Services; Community Services programs including a Wellness Program; Education, Employment and Training; and a Natural Resources Division. The Wellness Program recently received a three year suicide prevention grant from SAMHSA for \$1.5K. This grant will be used to fund efforts including: peer helpers, mentors, Elders Story Circles, Digital Story Telling, outreach, youth summits, developing/supporting village coalitions, a regional suicide prevention coalition, suicide prevention training, and promotion of overall wellness. The Wellness Program organized a Walk for Wellness, where more than 120 people in Nome walked on May 16 as part of the statewide Walk for Life to recognize community wellness and raise awareness for suicide prevention. Flowers for the event were made by Seaside Center residents, Nome Youth Facility residents, and the Boys and Girls Club.

We toured Anvil Mountain Correctional Center (AMCC). The AMCC population ranges between 80-110 men and women from the Nome (40%) and Kotzebue (60%) areas. AMCC has

received approval from the Department of Corrections for FY10 funding to offer Life Success Substance Abuse Treatment (LSSAT) will provide outpatient substance abuse groups for inmates who are living in the AMCC general population. AMCC will be one of 5 additional facilities adding LSSAT treatment this year with a hope of serving up to 1,000 offenders annually among all of the statewide DOC facilities. AMCC's program will serve around 25 people who will receive a three month "outpatient" treatment program during their incarceration. The AMCC LSSAT program will connect well to Seaside's program as a step down part of treatment once someone is released. A challenge will be enrolling participants early enough during their sentencing to allow for completion of the programs. Groups will be open and ongoing and allow for entry and participation for portions of the treatment program.

Nome Community Center (NCC) is yet another asset to the community. NCC is an umbrella agency offering a wide range of programs, services, and activities for the youth of Nome and their parents. NCC emphasizes prevention and early intervention. Services for youth and parents include communications training, family support/preservation services, juvenile offender intervention, DJJ diversion activities, delinquency prevention programs, tutoring, and socialization, recreational and cultural activities for youth. During 2008-09 NCC provided Nome Youth Court, a Summer Lunch Program, Adult Day Services, Nutrition, Transportation, and Support Services, Tobacco Prevention, and the Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) program. They also operate the Nome Food Bank, the only food pantry in the region, and are the only agency in Nome providing a Senior Meals Program.

NCC was instrumental in the formation of the Nome Emergency Shelter Team (NEST) last winter. NEST was a community collaboration which included volunteers from Kawerak, Nome Eskimo Community, NSHC, Bering Strait Women's Group, various churches and many community members. NEST collaborated with the Church of Nazarene to provide space for someone who has nowhere to go when it is -10 degrees to sleep and be warm. The Church of Nazarene has been generous in sharing their church space, although there is a need to secure a more long term solution as this may not be available in coming years. NEST has pursued funding from the city and is seeking potential use of a new space for next winter's location. Nome Community Center has offered to be the fiscal agent for the shelter, and Nome Youth Facility has offered maintenance, snow removal, and renovation services, as well as coordination of volunteer staffing by community members.

In March of this year, NCC was awarded a grant for a Residential Child Care (RCC) facility. Kawerak had to close Jacob's Home in January, 2009. The home was a facility or refuge for youth who had experienced abuse and/or neglect and were unable secure foster placement through state custody without having to leave the region for care. NCC's facility, the Nome Children's Home, is a Level II shelter that will house children who have been removed from their homes due to neglect and/or abuse and help keep them close to home. It opened in mid-May. The Nome Children's Home is licensed to serve up to 7 children currently. NCC has worked with residents and staff of NYF and Seaside to renovate the agency's available space into the home which is up and running.

Participants noted how easy it is to see only the needs in the community and to forget sometimes to celebrate successes. As outsiders visiting Nome, it was absolutely amazing to see the

collaboration, focus and the willingness from providers, RWF, and community members who are working together to address these community needs.

What We Learned: Needs Work

Providers and meeting participants alike noted the need for increasing access to services. At present there is a backlog in seeing clients because agencies have limited capacity. It was also noted the difficulty in retaining staff as it is such a rural and remote location. There is a lot of turnover, as staff who come to Nome for positions tend to only stay for a few years. The turnover requires a significant amount of training new staff and building relationships and rapport with clients, and in particular with village communities.

Prevention services were mentioned frequently during our visit. Participants described a clear need to reach youth earlier and more effectively to make an impact on substance use, suicide prevention, and mental health. ASAP and Prime for Life programs were discussed extensively during the visit. There are a couple of NYF staff trained to offer Prime for Life, but it and other efforts need to be delivered in the schools, summer camps, and incorporated into programs like NAVTEC and other community education efforts.

There is currently a need for a homeless shelter. NEST and the Church of Nazarene have been able to work together to offer shelter during some of the most extreme winter temperatures, but there is a need for a permanent emergency shelter. Many people come to Nome from surrounding areas and end up either spending their money in town or, for whatever reason, become stranded without a place to stay. As it was mentioned earlier, NEST is working to secure a location for the shelter for this upcoming winter.

It was said by many meeting attendants that community leaders in the city could improve the focus on wellness and attention to issues of substance abuse and mental health. While there are very strong groups involved in this process, it was said these groups have room to grow. Participants explained that, as a community, they need to lower the level of acceptance of intoxication and support people who are trying to change their lives and live in recovery.

During our visit, many discussions focused on substance abuse. These concerns are a very public issue, and one that is easy to see. Areas that are less apparent are mental health issues, grief, cultural loss, and trauma. It was said by a meeting participant that there are reasons people drink: substance abuse masks the deeper issues of pain.

What We Learned: Unmet Needs

Lack of Services

Nome has significant gaps in the continuum of substance abuse services from prevention to treatment to recovery. Since the closure of Northern Lights Recovery center in 2000, the community has been without residential substance abuse treatment. Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority granted NSHC \$50,000 for strategic planning to address areas of needs within the substance abuse treatment system in Nome. Additional funding from the Alaska Mental Health

Trust Authority may be available to continue the planning process (we won't know until later this summer/fall).

There have been two large strategic planning meetings held, one on April 9th and one on June 18th. These meetings gathered members of the community to identify the needs, define and review the scope of the problem, and seek strategies for solutions. Emergency room traffic, police contacts, criminal arraignments, transports to the ER, and transports home by the police during safety patrols disproportionately involve substance use. As NSHC moves toward its development of a new health facility, there is question about the availability of the existing hospital to house detox and treatment programs.

Community participants report that, once someone has been successful in reaching sobriety, Nome seems to lack a culture of recovery. Meeting participants mentioned how Seaside is surrounded by bars — they need to have a community location to offer a welcoming space for sobriety to be celebrated. It was mentioned how a sobriety clubhouse could benefit those who are in recovery. Providers and community members shared that there are few sponsors for AA or NA members, which results in lack of this leadership in the community. Many discussed how there is not an Al-Anon group, and that AA, or NA groups meet irregularly. Currently there are not many social locations which encourage sobriety, which makes it very difficult for someone in recovery.

Various housing services are needed in and around Nome, including transition housing (a need not unique to Nome). NSHC has a transitional housing program for women with children, but it is limited to only this population. As discussed earlier, there is a need for a homeless shelter as well as increasing available affordable housing. Housing development must consider the unique design needs as the ground is above permafrost and thus creates constant shifting and requires specific building design.

The Northwestern region has very little available for FASD specific services. Melissa Stone discussed the FASD Waiver program and how this could benefit the area. There is not a diagnostic clinic in the region currently. For someone to be screened by a diagnostic team, they have to go to out of the area to receive the service (travel to which is extremely expensive).

What We Learned: Issues of Policy

Robin Koutchak, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Special Prosecutions and Appeals Alcohol Interdiction participated in meetings and tours during the community visit. The new mandatory minimum penalties for manufacturing alcohol within or transporting alcohol to dry communities went into effect July 2008. Nome is not a “dry” community itself, but many of the surrounding villages have elected to be “dry.” Manufacturing alcohol in and transporting alcohol to these surrounding communities is a serious legal offense. There have been a number of cases from this area, many including youth. It is important to educate people about what the consequences are for bootlegging or importing alcohol to villages.

Robin explored several opportunities to spread awareness of the new regulations, such as reaching students coming in to attend NACTEC sessions with materials or in person, discussing

with RWF about publicity campaigns, as well as working with NYF, ASAP, and JASAP to collaborate and deliver Prime for Life and JASAP programs for youth in outer lying villages.

As NSHC is in the process of building a new hospital, with plans of completion by 2012, there are discussions and strategic planning sessions being held to discuss the possibilities for the existing buildings.

Nome is exploring the process of becoming re-engaged with the state for residential substance abuse inpatient treatment and funding streams to support this type of program in the community. Questions being explored: Are the costs of sustaining this type of program and if this will be supported by the legislature? Will substance abuse waivers be an asset on which this type of program could rely? Community members are working with the city, native corporations, and the community as a whole to identify substance abuse and mental health concerns as a priority, and to develop active partnerships for funding.

Follow-Up

Thank you notes and emails have been sent directly to all community agencies who participated, those who attended the community meetings and provided contact information, and to the Regional Wellness Forum for so graciously inviting our team to participate in their quarterly meeting. Team members (or their staff) have begun to contact participants for follow up on specific questions or interests. Melissa Stone responded to questions about FASD waiver programs. Steve Williams was able to attend and participate in the community's strategic planning for treatment and detox needs.

The Alaska Mental Health Trust, the Boards, and the Division of Behavioral Health are all very invested in working with the community to address the continuum of care for substance abuse and mental health concerns. During the community visit, there was a shared message between the visiting team and community members that developing solutions for the needs within the community must be driven by the community itself. We look forward to supporting the community in the development of their solutions.