

Inside this issue:

- Drafting the Council's New Five Year Plan
- Legislative Update
- Education Committee Outreach Meeting
- Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant
- 2011 Inclusive Practice Award
- Project SEARCH in Alaska
- Spotlight on Council Member
- Highlight on Staff Member
- Direct Service Professionals

Drafting the Council's New Five Year Plan

Every five years the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (Council) is charged with creating a new state plan. The plan serves as a guide to assist Council members in realistically evaluating and meeting the needs of Alaskans with disabilities. The plan is a valuable tool in the Council's decision-making process to set its capacity building, systems change and advocacy priorities. This year was the Council's year to create a new plan.

To fully understand the focus of the new five-year plan, Council members and staff spent the last 18 months traveling and meeting with communities all over Alaska, including Anchorage, Barrow, Cordova, Eagle River/Chugiak, Kenai/Soldotna, Fairbanks, Ketchikan, Matanuska-Susitna Valley, Nome, Petersburg, Seward, Sitka, and Wrangell. While visiting these communities, we sought opportunities to reach a large sampling of folks, ranging from individuals with disabilities, families, providers, school districts, infant learning programs, employers, and others. Council members and staff were well-received and they resoundingly heard what's needed to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Because Alaska is such a large state and the Council was unable to visit every community, the Council also sent out an in-depth survey asking for input from other individuals and entities from around the state. The Council received 300 responses! All of the data collected was presented to the various members of the Council's working committees for further review and consideration.

In May 2011, Council members met in Seward to review input gathered from all over Alaska. It quickly became apparent that many of the same issues were reported, although they were even more of a problem in rural and remote communities. Major concerns across the state are:

- Lack of adult services
- Lack of services for youth transitioning to adult life
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of accessible and affordable housing
- Lack of adequate public transportation

Another call for change came with regard to home and community based services, including waivers. The Council also heard many ideas about how to improve the early intervention and education system for children with disabilities. Council members and staff heard numerous comments on access to health care services in both urban and rural areas. And finally, people with disabilities said they wanted a new statewide self-advocacy organization to focus on issues most important to them.

After three days of lengthy discussion during the May meeting in Seward, Council members created a draft of the new five-year plan, which has been posted for public comment until July 15, 2011. For a copy of the draft plan, go to the Council's website (http://health.hss.state.ak.us/gcdse/news/201106_plan.htm) or call the office. If you have questions about the public comment process or if you need assistance completing the online survey, please contact Teresa Holt by phone (1-888-269-8990) or email teresa.holt@alaska.gov.

Once public comments are reviewed and changes, if needed, are made to the plan, it will be turned into the federal government's Administration on Developmental Disabilities by August 15, 2011. The new plan will become effective October 1, 2011.

Thanks to everyone who provided his or her "voice" in the creation of our five-year plan!

Highlight on staff

Carrie Predeger initially joined the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education in 2004 as a Health & Social Services Planner I. In 2006, she moved into the Research Analyst III position. Carrie's role as a Research Analyst allows her to use her love for numbers and pie charts to survey stakeholders, analyze data and research best practices in the disability field.

Prior to joining the Council, Carrie attended graduate school at Oregon State University where she received a master of science degree in physiology, with an emphasis on bone metabolism and nutrition. She received a research assistantship throughout her graduate work, which afforded her the opportunity to collaborate with world-renowned professors and researchers in the field of bone physiology. Carrie had the pleasure of working on a National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant that examined fall risk in the elderly. These data, combined with nutritional and bone density analyses, led her to the completion of her thesis, Retinol Intake, Bone Density and Falls in Post-Menopausal Women.

Carrie is a (proud) native Oregonian and is quick to point out the things she misses about the Great Northwest while living in the Last Frontier. Carrie enjoys hiking, cross-country skiing, gardening, cooking

and reading. But most of all, she relishes family time with her husband of eight years and identical twin boys, born in the winter of 2007.

Legislative updates on bills of interest

The Council follows the progress of bills related to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities throughout the two-year legislative session. The following bills of interest to the Council were introduced this year.

Disability-related bills

SB 127- A bill to permanently establish Sept. 9th, as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Day in an effort to promote awareness of the disorder. This bill is still in the Health & Social Services committee.

SB 74/HB 79—These bills would require health insurers to provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, with a variety of provisions. SB 74 has been referred to Senate Rules and will be taken up once the Legislature reconvenes in January and then once passed, will be referred to the House. There have been no committee hearings on HB 79.

SB 86/HB 150— These bills strengthen the laws against financial exploitation of vulnerable adults and enhance the ability to obtain emergency protective orders. SB 86 has been referred to the Finance committee. HB 150 was heard and held in the Finance committee.

Education-related bills

SB 6- A bill to require school districts to provide a pre-kindergarten program for students ages four and five using a model curriculum. This bill has been heard and held twice in the Education committee.

SB 10- A bill to repeal the statute requiring secondary students to pass a competency test (High School Graduation Qualifying Exam) to receive a high school diploma. This bill has been referred to the Education committee but has not been heard.

HB 198- This bill changes the way funding for the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) is calculated and eliminates the sunset requirement. This bill was heard in the Education committee and referred to the Finance committee.

Early Intervention-related bills

HB 49/SB 120- These bills create a statewide “Parents as Teachers” program for children under age five. HB 49 has been heard and held in the Finance committee. SB 120 has been referred to the Education committee but has not been heard.

HB 154- This bill requires the Department of Education and Early Development to devise a statewide early childhood education plan for 3 and 4 year old children. HB 154 has been heard in the Education committee and referred to the Finance committee.

Transportation-related bills

HJR 4- A resolution to make a constitutional amendment creating a dedicated transportation infrastructure fund. This joint resolution has been heard and held in the Finance committee.

HB 30- A bill that would provide a statutory basis for the administration of a dedicated transportation endowment fund to receive income from motor fuel tax, vehicle license fees, and other transportation-related receipts. This bill has been heard and held in the Finance committee.

HB 31- This bill would appropriate \$1 billion in general funds to capitalize the transportation infrastructure fund. This bill has been heard and held in the Finance committee.

SB 37- This bill would establish a transportation infrastructure fund for transportation projects, including public transit. It also creates an advisory council to make annual recommendations for fund expenditures. This bill has been heard in the Transportation committee and referred to the Finance committee.

SB 77- This bill would appropriate \$3 million to provide matching grant funds for operating expenses for locally or federally funded public transit programs that are not also state projects. This bill has been heard in the Transportation committee and referred to the Finance committee.

HB 131- This bill would establish a board to develop a long-range plan for coordinated community and public transportation. This bill has been heard in the Transportation committee and referred to the Rules committee.

If the above bills are not passed by the end of the 2012 legislative year, they will die and will need to be re-introduced in the next two-year legislative session if a sponsor is secured. This means your support in helping to get these bills passed is particularly important over the next nine or ten months.

Education Committee Outreach Meeting in Barrow

The Education Committee had a face-to-face meeting November 3-5, 2010, in Barrow! What an exciting trip! The big surprise of the trip was that Ted Danson was also visiting Barrow that day. We ran into him several times during our visit and ended up eating dinner with him one night. Everyone kept thinking that Duane Mayes (Council staff) was Ted and repeatedly asked for his autograph.

Immediately after arriving in Barrow, the Education Committee headed to Hopson Middle School for a site visit. Our school tour began with a visit to the Inupiat Culture classroom where we saw students working on an Inupiat language computer program, and students learning to sew gloves and other items. The middle school has about 202 students and 16 staff. Interestingly, the school recruits traveling scientists (who come to Barrow to work) to provide instruction to the students on their specialties.

Next, the Committee traveled to visit Ipalook Elementary School. This elementary school serves students from preschool to fifth grade. There are about 638 students and 38 staff. The district has universal

preschool for all children age 3 and 4. All preschool students attend an immersion classroom where they are instructed in Inupiaq for half of the time and in English for the other half. One interesting fact is that Barrow has indoor playgrounds because it is often too cold to go outside for recess. Another outstanding idea at this school is that they have created a school-wide Positive Behavior Support program. The staff created school rules based on Inupiaq values.

It is apparent that Inupiaq culture is an important part of education in the Barrow region. The North Slope Borough School district employs eight staff as Inupiaq educators. Its website posts an Inupiaq value of the month. The district also serves seven villages (Wainwright, Kaktovik, Point Lay, Atkasuk, Nuiqsut, Anaktuvuk Pass, and Point Hope) besides the four schools in Barrow (elementary, middle, high, and alternative schools). The district covers 89,000 square miles.

Barrow faces many of the same education issues as other remote communities, including difficulties with consistent attendance. Some students miss as much as one quarter of the school year. Another problem is being able to recruit and retain staff in such an unusual climate. The schools in Barrow have good staff retention, but those in the villages have a higher turnover due to the isolation and climate.

The Education Committee also worked on several issues while in Barrow. They discussed the graduation rate and the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). The committee was shocked that the graduation rate in Alaska for all students is 67 percent but the graduation rate for students in special education is 40 percent. Committee members felt the graduation rate might be increased by removing or changing the HSGQE. GCDSE staff investigated alternatives to the HSGQE and made recommendations at the Education Committee's December 2010 meeting. The Committee took their recommendations to the Commissioner of Education & Early Development (EED) and the State Board of EED at the June 2011 meeting of the Board. They would also like to see a focus on early literacy instead of waiting until the 10th grade to try to fix the problem.

The committee also worked on recommendations for state regulations on restraint and seclusion in schools as requested by the former Commissioner of EED. The Council presented these recommendations to the State Board of EED in January 2011.

Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant

Summary

On September 29, 2010, the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) was awarded a three-year Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Training Administration in the amount of \$2,727,000 to improve education, training and employment opportunities and outcomes of youth and adults who are unemployed and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits. Alaska was one of nine states to receive a DEI award. Partner agencies under this award

include the Employment Security Division, One-Stop Job Centers, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Public Assistance and the Council.

The DEI Team

Entities allocating staff to this project include the Employment Security Division, Alaska Workforce Investment Board and the Council. Shawna Harper from Employment Security Division is the Job Center liaison; Rich Sanders from the Council is the Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC); and Louise Dean from the AWIB is the state DEI project lead.

The Plan

DEI Disability Awareness training and on-site assessments of physical and programmatic accessibility will be done at each of the Job Centers across the state. In the first year, up to 12 staff, located at various Job Centers around the state, will be trained as lead DRCs in their specific locations, with staff at remaining locations to be trained in the latter half of 2011. The goal is to bring all staff up to a proficient level of awareness of best practices in serving individuals with disabilities and in coordinating with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, private community rehabilitation providers and other local service providers in each job center location. Once staff demonstrate proficiency, focus will move to bringing other staff members in that center to proficiency in serving job seekers with disabilities.

Activities to Date

- Application and Employment Network status awarded to the Juneau Job Center
- Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on the Employment Network system
- Training at the Juneau, Anchorage Midtown and Anchorage Muldoon centers (46 staff)
- Site accessibility assessments completed at Juneau and two Anchorage centers
- 12 local DRCs and Juneau Employment Network Coordinator have begun training

The end goal is to have in place an Employment Network system that is sustainable and ensures that individuals with disabilities who contact any staff within the Job Centers will receive accurate, appropriate, current information, and direction in developing a coordinated plan consistent with their individualized conditions of employment. By integrating the Employment Network aspect of the Social Security Ticket to Work program, the state and service provider partners can receive milestone payments for individuals served who obtain and maintain employment that can, in turn, be reinvested into the system for sustainability.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education established the Inclusive Practice Award to recognize outstanding educators who work to ensure students with disabilities have the opportunity for an inclusive education with their peers without disabilities as part of the general education curriculum.

Nominations are made by parents, students and educators. The award is given each February at the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference.

2011 Inclusive Practice Award

The 2011 winner of the Inclusive Practice Award is the team at Sterling Elementary School in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. The team includes: Connie Best, Connie Ferguson, Gail Frasher, Carolyn Hitzler, Amy Hogue, Nancy Kimball, Barbara McNinch, Brenda Moody, Bethany Nyboer, Trina Uvaas, and Susie Ward. The team at Sterling Elementary decided that all Sterling area children could be served at the local elementary school. In the past, students with significant disabilities were bused to a neighboring community to attend an intensive needs program. The Sterling Elementary team worked diligently to cultivate the belief that all Sterling children should be able to learn together at their community school. This passionate belief evoked feelings of protection, a strong sense of community, and a desire to expand the school program to serve the needs of all children in their community. Now Sterling Elementary families of students with special needs know that their children are wanted, loved, and supported at Sterling Elementary School. Data on individual students reveal that the team's effort to promote student independence has been hugely successful.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education would like to commend the other 2011 Inclusive Practice Award nominees:

- Rick and Jennie Asiala from Kiana School in Kiana
- Tricia Barnett from CyberLynx K-12 Correspondence School in Wasilla
- Bartlett High School Team in Anchorage: Valance Barber, Georgia Berry, Dianne Dabrowski, Lindsey Honemann, Warren Rhodes, and Stacey Woodward
- Darlene Bishop from Ladd Elementary in Fairbanks
- Cindy Corcoran from Badger Road Elementary in Fairbanks
- CyberLynx Correspondence School in Anchorage: Sue Button, Katrina Cooper, Deanne Shiroma-Carroll, Ann Slabaugh
- Michaela Kelly from Lake Hood Elementary in Anchorage
- Monica Charles-Leinberger from Lower Kuskokwim School District in Bethel
- Janet Long from Benny Benson School in Anchorage
- Ruth Mandsager from Huffman Elementary in Anchorage
- Soldotna Elementary Team in Soldotna: Tina Gilman, Kristin Sisneros, Zita Spann
- Watershed Charter School in Fairbanks

For more information on nominees, go to the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education website at: <http://health.hss.state.ak.us/gcdse/>. If you know any of these great educators, send them an email congratulating them on a job well done!

1st Graduating Class of Business-Led High School Transition Program

Project SEARCH is a nationally recognized business-led high school transition program that provides on-the-job training for students with disabilities, age 18–22. Thanks to funding from the Department of Education & Early Development, the Council helped start two pilot programs this year: one based at Providence Hospital in Anchorage and the other at the Mat-Su Regional Health Center. Another Project SEARCH site will begin in Fairbanks this fall. The state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides job coaching and placement services. The local school districts provide a teacher on-site at the place of business, and each of the hospitals provides a classroom and job experiences. Pictured are the first graduates from the Project SEARCH site at Providence Hospital. From left to right, Elizabeth Blackburn, teacher, ACE/ACT Anchorage School District; Amy Black, intern, Sterile Processing Department; Thomas "T.J." Jacobson, intern, General Stores; Danielle Myers, intern, Day Surgery; Michael Cobaugh, intern, Radiology and Imaging Department; and Marilyn "Lyn" Waldron, intern, Dietary Services. (Not pictured, Christina Flaherty, intern, Sterile Processing Department). The program will grow to 10–12 students at each site this fall.

Watch student produced Project SEARCH video

Watch this student produced film of Matsu Project SEARCH, a high school vocational training program for youth with disabilities on our Vimeo site. The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education has helped get two Project SEARCH sites going in 2011--one at Matsu Regional Health Center and one at Providence Hospital in Anchorage. A third site is starting this fall at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital. <http://www.vimeo.com/25774937>

Spotlight on Council Member

Tonja Updike is the mother of three children. Like many parents on the Council, Tonja is the proud parent of a child with special needs. Garrett, her eight-year-old son, has autism. Tonja lives in Soldotna and is a tremendous asset to the Council. Tonja has been a Council member for three years, serving on the Education Committee as well as on the board for the Special Education Service Agency. In addition to being a parent of a child with special needs, Tonja is a strong advocate for individuals with autism and an organizer for the Autism Society of Alaska. The Updike family has been successful in building relationships and assisting their schools in how to best support Garrett. At school, Garrett receives one-on-one teaching from Kenai Peninsula Borough special education teacher Tina Gilman. Gilman uses a special curriculum called TEACH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related-Communication Handicapped), a program from the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. This curriculum and

the creativity of the school district, in addition to the wonderful support and involvement of the Updike family, have assisted Garrett to grow and learn in ways that work for him. Tonja is a wonderful advocate and mother, and the Council is fortunate to have her as a member. If you would like to read more about Tonja and Garrett, you can read an article that was printed in the Peninsula Clarion in December 2010 titled, "Christmas with the Updikes" (http://www.peninsulaclarion.com/stories/123010/new_763443516.shtml).

Thank you Tonja for all the work you do for the Council and your community!

What is a Direct Service Professional?

Direct service professionals (DPS) are those staff at agencies who work directly with Alaskans experiencing disabilities and seniors to perform daily tasks such as personal care, administering medication, food preparation and community activities. Direct service staff are vital in maintaining Alaska's home and community-based supports system in lieu of costly institutions, which require significantly more amounts of state funding. According to an AARP report, Medicaid can support approximately three elderly people or adults experiencing a disability in home and community based settings for every one person in a nursing home.

What is the issue?

When a person leaves their loved one in the care of a direct service professional, they essentially trust that person with their loved one's life. Depending on the severity of disability he or she experiences, the direct service professional can be responsible for anything from community inclusion activities to tube feeding an individual to job coaching. Despite the seriousness of the work these workers are asked to complete, they are paid significantly less than their counterparts in state institutions, earning on average \$12-15 an hour (often with no benefits). According to a recent survey, one in five direct service professionals is eligible to collect public benefits because their income is under the poverty level. Nearly 30% of direct service professionals report having two or more jobs to make ends meet. Provider agencies report on average a 40-60% annual turnover rate for direct service professionals. This continuous high turnover has been shown to be in direct correlation to poor wages and lack of benefits. The cost of turnover can be as high as \$8,300 per individual depending on location and skills required to train new staff. Lack of personnel to take shifts requires provider agencies to pay overtime to DSPs, which also creates a increasing the likelihood of burnout. High turnover rates and low wages require provider agencies to hire unskilled workers, many of whom will more than likely opt to work for the same wage in a less stressful field.

What are projected consequences?

The shortage of direct service professionals is already at a crisis level and it's only going to get worse. The senior population, Alaskans who are 65 or older, is projected to increase by 50% before 2018, adding

to the number of those being served. Alaska's health care industry is projected to grow by 26.5% from 2008-2018, faster than any other industry in the state, with "Personal and Home Care Aid" positions increasing by 14.4% adding positions to be filled by the provider agencies.

The Council has been working on ways to raise awareness of the value of direct service professionals and their wage and benefits crisis. The Council understands that without some action, Alaska's home and community-based service system will face an extreme crisis in the near future. Help raise awareness by celebrating Direct Services Professionals week September 11-17. Contact the Council for other ideas to raise awareness of issues associated with inadequate pay and benefits for direct services professionals.

i 2009 Across the States: Profiles of Long Term Care and Independent Living

ii Survey of Direct Service Workers in Alaska conducted by the Center for Human Development at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, 2009.

iii Ibid.

iv Alaska Economic Trends, September 2010 Issue.

v Ibid.

HIRE SOMEONE WITH A DISABILITY

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority's new TV ad campaign urges employers to hire people who have disabilities. "We all have talents to share," declares Smitty Cheemuk, who has worked for the same employer more than two decades while serving in several elected positions including mayor of Saint Michael and president of his village corporation.

<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/gcdse/jobs/media/Smitty.wmv>

Council Members

Marlene (Anna) Attla

Self-Advocate from Anchorage

Committee: Education, Rural Services Chair

Julie Broyles

Parent and Special Education Teacher from Anchorage

Committee: Education

Milton (Smitty) Cheemuk

Self-Advocate from St. Michael

Committee: Rural Services, SESA Board

Art Delaune

Parent from Fairbanks

Committee: Developmental Disabilities, Legislative

Don Enoch

State Special Education Administrator from Juneau

Committee: Education, SESA Board

Kathy Fitzgerald

Parent and Center for Human Development representative from Anchorage

Committee: Developmental Disabilities Chair, Legislative, Executive, Autism Ad Hoc

David Flynn

Parent from Fort Greely

Committee: Legislative Chair, Executive

Dean Gates

Self-Advocate from Anchorage

Committee: Legislative, Early Intervention

Eric Gebhart

Parent and Special Education Superintendent from Nenana

Committee: Council Chair, Executive, Legislative

Taylor Gregg

Self-Advocate from Ketchikan

Committee: Education Co-Chair, Rural Services, SESA Board

Heidi Haas

Parent from Fairbanks

Committee: Education, Early Intervention, Autism Ad Hoc

Tara Horton

HSS Commissioner's Office representative from Anchorage

Committee: Developmental Disabilities

Wes Keller
Legislator from Wasilla

Margaret Kossler
Parent from Anchorage
Committee: Early Intervention, Autism Ad Hoc

Banarsi Lal
AK Commission on Aging representative from Fairbanks
Committee: Legislative, Rural Services

Kaleen Lamb
Self-Advocate from Fairbanks
Committee: Developmental Disabilities

Ernest (Ernie) Manzie
Special Educator from Fairbanks
Committee: Education, SESA Board

Sharon Miranda
Self-Advocate from Anchorage
Committee: Early Intervention

Ric Nelson
Self-Advocate from Anchorage
Committee: Council Vice Chair, Executive, Legislative

Sean O'Brien
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation representative from Juneau
Committee: Developmental Disabilities

Lelia (Lucy) Odden
Self-Advocate from Anchorage
Committee: Developmental Disabilities, Executive, Legislative Co-Chair

Robert (Bob) Petersen
Disability Law Center representative from Wasilla

Committee: Developmental Disabilities

Justine Sheehan

Self Advocate from Barrow

Committee: Education, Rural Services

Amy Simpson

Infant Learning Provider representative from Eagle River

Committee: Early Intervention Chair, Executive, Legislative

Donna Swihart

Self Advocate and Parent from Wasilla

Committee: Education, Autism Ad Hoc

Tonja Updike

Parent from Soldotna

Committee: Education Chair, Executive, Autism Ad Hoc, SESA Board

Fredrick Villa

Parent and UAA representative from Fairbanks

Committee: Education, Legislative

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