

DRAFT

Faith Based and Community Initiative

Group 1—Gaps and Needs

12-11-2003

Background

In 2003 Lt. Governor Loren Leman appointed 21 citizens from around Alaska to the Faith Based and Community Initiatives (FBCI) Task Force. The Task Force was asked to identify how Alaska could maximize its resources of compassion to meet the challenges faced by those in need. At the November 5, 2003 meeting of the Task Force, Chairman Scott Merriner established working groups to examine four key questions to help the Task Force meet its mission. The goals and objectives for each work group are stated below:

Group 1: Where can faith-based and community initiatives be most help?

- Define the areas that the state agencies need help in and where FBCI organizations can help.
- Identify the major gaps in social services in Alaska.

Group 2: How can we ensure the initiatives have the highest impact?

- Identify case studies of best-practice FBCI examples and glean best practices.
- Define what partnership between state government and FBCI organizations should look like.
- Develop measurements that we can use to obtain hard data FBCI impact.

Group 3: What resources exist that can be better advertised?

- Develop a complete list of all the tools and resources that are available for FBCI organizations.
- Develop a complete list of all FBCI organizations.

Group 4: What can be done to assist FB&C initiatives?

- Recommend any legislative action that is needed to facilitate greater impact from FBCI.
- Help FBCI organizations expand their impact by providing information and/or training.
- Educate public officials and leaders of FBCI organizations on the legal issues surrounding government-FBCI partnerships.
- Spur a greater number of individuals to begin taking personal action to assist others.
- Develop recommendations on how service providers can more effectively communicate with each other to deliver better service, avoid duplication and reduce the chance of people taking advantage of the system.
- Each state agency develop an internal assessment of what is needed for it to more effectively partner with FBCI organizations.

Group 1 solicited written comments to identify major gaps in social services in Alaska. The group hosted a public video and audio conference on November 18, 2003 and received input from faith and community groups, individuals and representatives of State agencies. People were also asked to share their ideas on how and where they felt faith and community based groups could assist the State in meeting its social service program objectives. Thirty-five individuals from faith, community and State agency groups submitted 121 gap/need statements to the working group. This non-scientific inquiry was not intended to be a comprehensive review and evaluation of the State's social service system. It is hoped however that the findings and recommendations coming out of this inquiry will help the Task Force maximize the use of faith, community and State initiatives to serve Alaskans in need.

Social Services gap and needs.

Gaps and needs can limit a person's progress toward self-sufficiency and hamper individual or program efforts to effectively support the health and well being of Alaskans in need. Most of those who provided input to the work group generally expressed their concerns with regard to specific client populations including women, children and teens, seniors, those leaving adult or juvenile correctional facilities, single women with children, families, veterans, disabled persons, the homeless, those receiving public assistance and victims of sexual abuse or other crimes. Looking at the 121 statements as a whole, people generally focused their concerns on just a few gaps and need categories or subject areas. Regardless of which specific client group was being addressed in an individual statement, the concerns raised most often related to one of these three subject areas:

- Housing
- Direct service
- Relational support

A few statements were submitted relating to gaps and needs in single and unique subject areas like rural subsistence preference or development of international trade. While concerns in these areas are valid, this report will focus on the common concerns over the gaps and needs related to these three main subject areas.

Housing. The concern voiced most often was the need for safe and affordable housing. Those who provided input to the work group identified housing as the greatest challenge and the most significant barrier to a person’s progress or success. The statements below are indicative of those made with regard to gaps and needs in this subject area:

- *There is a need for affordable, drug and alcohol free housing for both individuals and families. Those who complete treatment or who are waiting to get into treatment have a hard time finding safe, affordable, sober housing.*
- *Many prisoners return right back to the situations that led them to be incarcerated to begin with. There is a need for safe housing for felons re-entering society.*
- *The “working poor” can’t qualify for housing assistance because they make too much money, but don’t earn enough to get into decent housing.*
- *There is insufficient shelter space for homeless, 2-parent families.*
- *Most federal housing programs don’t cover various rent or utility deposit costs set by landlords, the power or water and sewer companies. A person who would otherwise qualify for housing assistance continues to be homeless because they can’t come up with the cash to cover these ancillary expenses.*
- *Housing lenders don’t provide enough financing for multi-unit housing.*
- *Homeless people trying to get their lives together by getting a job need an address they can list on an application or a message phone number where a prospective employer can contact them for work.*

❖ At any given time there are between 3-5,000 families on the Section 8 and Public Housing statewide wait lists and close to 5,300 households in Alaska are receiving housing assistance from AHFC. (Alaska Housing Finance Corporation FY 2003 Annual Public Hosing Agency Plan 07-01-2003)
❖ In 2002 among the 2,000 plus applicants on the Anchorage Housing Choice Voucher wait list, 20% were on the wait list for more than two years. (Alaska Housing Finance Corporation FY 2003 Annual Public Hosing Agency Plan 07-01-2003)
❖ Market analysis suggests that upward of 50% of landlords in Fairbanks and Anchorage will not accept voucher assistance. (Alaska Housing Finance Corporation FY 2003 Annual Public Hosing Agency Plan 07-01-2003)
❖ The number of homeless in Anchorage shelters has grown 8 to 9 percent per year and the increase is projected to continue at the same rate in the near future. (Final Report of the Anchorage Comprehensive Homeless Program Strategy Group, June 2002)

Examples of how faith and community groups can help meet needs and close the gaps.

- Promote and recruit foster and adoptive families from the congregation or membership of the organization.
- Develop and operate a group home or transitional housing program for teens, women with children or other client groups.
- Group members can be trained to complete simple home and rental unit surveys to help housing authorities expedite the approval process to qualify a home for a housing subsidy program.
- Groups could offer classes or personal mentoring and transportation support to those in a housing subsidy program.
- Groups could construct and then lease and manage affordable multi-unit apartments for low-income individuals and families.
- Encourage group members to offer rental units to those who may be involved in social service, classes or mentoring programs provided by the church or community group.
- Group members could mentor or befriend people in public housing units to help them continue their progress once they return home after completing substance abuse treatment.

- *Released inmates, recovering substance abusers, homeless, older teens and low-income families need both transitional and long-term housing.*
- *Convicted felons who need help re-entering society after they are released from jail don't qualify for housing assistance and all too often they either end up on the street or back in bad living situations like those they were in before they went to jail.*
- *There are not enough foster or group homes to meet the needs of children under the state's care.*

People listed a host of housing problems including lengthy waiting lists for the few shelter beds that are available, no safe and supportive housing alternatives for single fathers with children or for felons who have completed their jail sentences, delays in completing simple inspections to get a home on an approved housing list, market prices that put 2-bedroom rental units out of the reach of the working poor and those who are underemployed. Many of those who voiced concerns for safe and affordable housing

said that without adequate housing, little else mattered.

Direct service. This broad subject category serves as a heading for direct care and service activities to an individual or family. Gaps and needs in this category relate to substance abuse and mental health treatment services, child care, jobs and job related training, classes to improve parenting skills, academic achievement, a variety of mentoring programs, conflict resolution and anger management programs, food programs for the poor and homeless and transportation assistance for those involved with social service agencies or programs. Direct service would also include health care and medicines and other activities and programs that

provide direct and targeted services to remedy a physical, emotional, behavioral or spiritual need of an individual. The following comments were provided in this subject category.

- *More mental health and substance abuse treatment services are needed in rural Alaska, for both adults and juveniles. There is a significant difference in the number of direct services available to meet needs of those in urban areas compared to what is available in most rural communities.*

- ❖ Alaska's FAS rate is 4 times the national average at 1.4 per 1,000 population. The lifetime cost of care for one FAS infant is about \$1.5 million. (1999 Annual Report of the Alaska Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse)
- ❖ Alaska's rate of alcohol dependence and alcohol abuse is nearly 14 percent, compared to about 7 percent nationally. (State of Alaska, DHSS, *An Integrated Substance Abuse Treatment Needs Assessment for Alaska*, January 2002)
- ❖ In fiscal year 2002, DHSS provided at least one episode of mental health care to 5,930 children in Alaska. (Children and Youth Needs Assessment, ACSES Report by UAA, 10-29-02)
- ❖ Over 97% of crimes committed by Alaska Natives are committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs. (Alaska Commission on Rural Governance and Employment, Final Report to the Governor, p 106, 1999)

- *There aren't enough services, programs and placements for children, adolescents and adults impacted with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.*
- *Families need help dealing with issues of domestic violence and spousal abuse. Training in conflict resolution would help people find ways to deal with conflict without violence.*
- *People who suffer from undiagnosed mental illness often self medicate with drugs and alcohol. Mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence play a huge part in child abuse and neglect cases and more services are needed to meet demands in these areas.*
- *Suicide is a big problem for many Alaskan communities. There is a need for screening, diagnosis and professional care to help those who may pose a danger to themselves or others.*
- *There is a need for treatment on demand for substance abusing parents. We need programs that allow parents to have their children with them while they are in treatment.*
- *Teens need after school programs, study and tutoring assistance and the support of positive adult role models. It is difficult for people in rural areas to get help to prepare*

for and pass GED exams.

- *Those who make too much money to qualify for Medicaid, do not have health insurance or are not eligible for Native health services need access to doctors, medicines and health care.*
- *More supervision and treatment services are needed for sex offenders and more counseling and support resources are needed for victims of sexual assault, especially in rural Alaska.*
- *Transportation is a big issue for those moving from welfare into the work place. Public transportation is either not available or is limited in service.*
- *There is a need for service providers to become informed about the State's behavioral health integration efforts. Agencies providing direct care to clients need to communicate and coordinate more effectively when serving the same clients.*
- *There aren't enough services, programs and placements for children, adolescents and adults impacted with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.*
- *Families entering the workforce need a lot of help with childcare. There is little or no childcare in rural areas and parents don't feel they have safe alternatives for their children as they pursue work or job training.*
- *People and communities need sustainable economies. We need to work together to develop resources, generate jobs, provide job training while protecting our environment and beauty of Alaska.*
- *Disadvantaged persons can suffer from a variety of issues ranging from mental health, poverty, alcoholism, homelessness, etc. There is a need for coordinated,*

Examples of how faith and community groups can help meet needs and close the gaps.

- Faith groups can offer scriptural based substance abuse intervention programs
- Groups can offer parenting classes and child care services
- Faith and community groups can offer after school programs for teens that would include some recreation and academic skill development opportunities
- Congregations, service clubs and group members can offer rides to seniors, women with children and others who need transportation assistance.
- Groups can host a suicide prevention training event for their congregation and the community at large.
- Groups can encourage their members to offer job or job training opportunities to those wanting to get off welfare or those coming back into the community from a correctional program.
- Groups can conduct special fund raising events to provide money to individuals or families to buy furniture, dentures, car repair, etc.

comprehensive case management. Integrated case management would help maximize the service benefits of individual programs and agencies serving those in need.

- *Before the system is able to help someone, they must reach bottom. We need more services dedicated to earlier interventions so people don't have to get so bad off before they can get help.*
- *When the court makes a referral for services such as anger management, batterers intervention, etc. there are few if any of these services available in smaller communities.*
- *Alaska doesn't have a long-term mental health treatment program for you so youth needing this help have to be sent out of State.*
- *Some on public assistance or fixed incomes like SSI only qualify for \$10 in food stamps per month. Income qualified seniors need higher food stamp allowances.*

Some individuals commented that their faith organization or faith coalitions provide a variety of mental health, anger management, couples counseling and treatment services for substance abusers but their programs are not approved to receive State funding. Groups have an interest and desire to work with the State to establish a mechanism that would open a governmental funding stream to support these faith centered mental health and substance abuse treatment services.

This subject category also includes gaps and needs for materials, equipment, special needs funding to meet expenses that are not covered under the State's social service programs. State assistance programs do not pay for things like dentures or baby cribs.

Relationship support. Individuals who are confronted with difficult challenges in life often times need a friend or helper, someone who can provide encouragement and support to see them through. This category speaks to relationships between individuals that would be more personal rather than professional. These support relationships would be informal and much less structured than the interactions that typify the relationships between a counselor and client, therapist and patient. People saw a need to support those who were moving into the community after they completed treatment or finished a period of incarceration. In various ways people identified the need of social service client populations to have a companion or friend supporting them as they moved towards greater self-sufficiency and independence. In this category, a volunteer wouldn't necessarily do something for another, but rather would do things with the other person.

These statements illustrate the concerns related to the gaps and needs in the area of relationship support.

- *Youth returning home from a detention or youth facility need relationships with healthy adults willing to help the youth “make it.” This would be the same for an adult leaving jail too.*
- *Families and caretakers who care for a disabled person need support and help. There are services for the disabled person, but families and caretakers need support too.*
- *Women re-entering the community following release from jail are often returning to the same environment they left. These women need help to develop social skills, increase their self worth and transportation to help them re-integrate into the community.*
- *Agencies and families would benefit if volunteer “grandma/grandpa” could watch the children during court hearings or appointments with caseworkers.*
- *Victims of crime need support and advocacy.*
- *Volunteers are needed to supervise visits between children and parents involved in the child protective services system.*
- *Relationships can be strengthened between husbands and wives through involvement in faith group activities and classes.*
- *A person eligible for a housing subsidy sometimes doesn’t know how to present or sell themselves to landlords. They may find a suitable apartment to meet their needs, but they don’t know quite how to interact with the landlord to complete a rental agreement. Maybe if these people had a “friend” or “buddy” to go with them to look at apartments and to talk with landlords and apartment managers to finalize rental agreements, perhaps more of these people could get off of the street and into homes.*

Examples of how faith and community groups can help meet needs and close the gaps.

- *Groups can “adopt” someone transitioning back into the community from a treatment or correctional program and provide them with companionship, recreational and social activities.*
- *Group members can volunteer as victim advocates, tutors or playground attendants at the local school during lunch periods.*
- *Group members could be a “buddy” and be available to others after hours to talk on the phone or help when some challenge comes up after the caseworker is off duty.*

Success may be easier to find when the person has the support of a friend or mentor as they make their way through a transition processes, learn appropriate social skills or finish school and

training programs. Beyond the formalities of our structured social service assistance and treatment programs, people need the help, understanding and encouragement of friends and neighbors long after the social service program case files have been closed. This category is as much about being a good neighbor as it is meeting a program gap in our State social service system.

Areas of need for State agencies and community groups. Agencies were invited to identify areas of need where they thought faith and community groups might render assistance to help them meet their missions. Programs often have a variety of requirements and constraints place on them that limit their organization ability to meet all of the needs of those they serve. The following is a list of good and services State agencies and community groups said would help them help those in need.

- *Clients need cash grants to cover rent and utility deposits. Sometimes for the want of \$250 cash, a person remains homeless because they can't come up with the funds for rent and utility deposits.*
- *Low-income people need help to keep their vehicles operational. They could use the help of a friend who could help them learn how to change the oil or do minor maintenance of their vehicles. Sometimes they need financial help to get emissions inspection or vehicle registration.*
- *Schools need volunteers to help mentor students in reading, math and science. Volunteers can also help as classroom aides, lunch room and play ground monitors. Volunteers can also help supervise after hours sporting or social events.*
- *Funds have been cut for services and staff training. When someone has a training session, it would be good if the training could be opened to others who otherwise might not be able to afford or have access to that training.*
- *Youth need adult mentors to help them learn good social skills and appropriate behaviors.*
- *State funds usually don't cover the costs of a baby crib, linens, kitchen utensils, personal care items like hairbrushes, deodorant, etc. Women's shelters, foster families or families moving into a new apartment for the first time are some of those who could use help with these things.*

- *Youth and adults in residential, treatment and correctional facilities welcome opportunities to visit with ministers and lay people who are willing to provide moral and spiritual guidance and support.*
- *People in rural communities and those who are disadvantaged need others to advocate for them so policy makers can be made aware of their needs and concerns.*
- *Volunteers are needed to deliver meals to homebound seniors. Volunteers are also needed to help seniors with transportation to appointments or the grocery store. Volunteers might also help with routine cleaning tasks around their homes.*
- *Volunteers are needed to teach home economics (simple cooking, budgeting, cleaning, etc.) to teens with mental health issues.*

Conclusion and Recommendation

There are numerous gaps and unmet needs in our social service system in Alaska. Most of the gaps and needs identified by those who provided input to the work group could be classified under three general subject categories that include:

- Housing
- Direct services
- Relationship support

As faith, community groups, tribes, local governments, the State and Federal government work together we can respond to these gaps in service and answer the unmet needs of Alaska's people. The work group would recommend the Faith Based and Community Initiatives Task Force adopt a policy statement to support the development and implementation of initiatives throughout Alaska to address the gaps and needs in housing, direct services and relationship support for those in need.