

Behavioral Health Town Hall Meeting
Barrow
June 23-25, 2015

ABADA/AMHB staff members Pat Sidmore and Scott Ciambor met with organizations and community members in Barrow. These stakeholders included the Native Village of Barrow, Barrow Mayor Bob Harcherek, the North Slope Borough, Arctic Women in Crisis, the Barrow Police department, Hope Community Resources, and members of the public at a community meeting at the Barrow library.

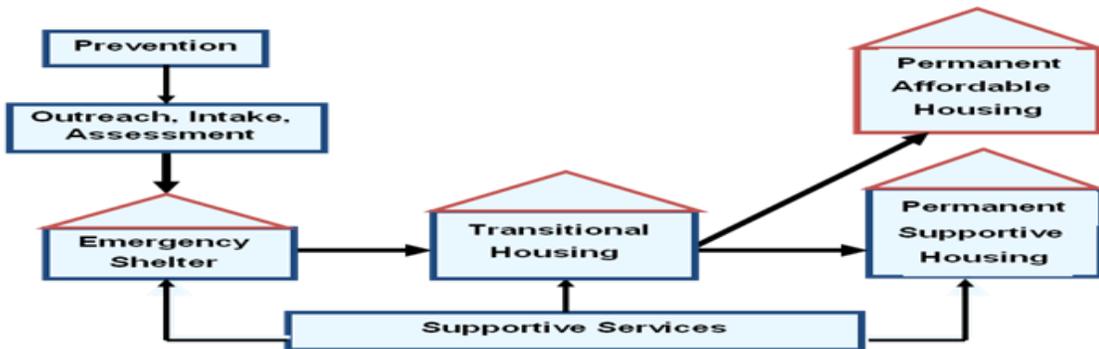
SUMMARY

During the visit to Barrow, there were a few common issues identified by most stakeholders:

1. An escalation of drug use:
 - a. More drug use found in schools, especially the middle school (marijuana in elementary school);
 - b. Methamphetamines and Heroin in town;
 - c. Blue Ticket: Known dealer of meth to middle school kids was served a blue ticket by the community, giving him 30 days to leave for good;
 - d. More violent Title 47 holds for Police Department;
 - e. Community looking for solutions to keep drugs out. (Alaska Airlines, checkpoints for oil workers making drops on the tundra.)
 - f. Treatment: Detox not really available, SATC closed.
2. Coordination
 - a. There are difficulties with the bulk of Behavioral Health/Mental Health services being run through the North Slope Borough.
 - i. Workforce issues: routine 6-month + vacancies leaving department understaffed, skilled clinicians needed for trauma work. An overall sense that staff was overwhelmed.
 - ii. Coordination with hospital, schools could be better – communication and programming seemed inconsistent.
 - iii. Community meeting opinion: “MH/BH doesn’t really exist.”
 - b. Positives: 2015 North Slope Healthy Living Summit October 21-23, 2015 in Barrow, Alaska & CARF Accreditation process complete – which helped improved Borough processes.

3. Housing (overcrowding) & Homelessness

- a. Fair market housing and housing for special needs, seniors, and the homeless is limited and expensive. This leads to severe overcrowding in many families and subsequently layers of trauma and behavioral health concerns.
- b. The Native Village of Barrow (Sam Okakok) is developing 20 lease to own single-family homes that will bring their overall portfolio to 46 homes. Targets low-income families that will pay 15% of income. Extensive waitlist for these future housing options.
- c. Homelessness: In the Continuum of Care(CoC) diagram of model housing and services for the homeless, Barrow currently has an Emergency Shelter for women (Arctic Women in Crisis) and 6 beds of transitional housing for SMI through Hope Community Resources (Joe Dingman's project).
 - i. Hard to gauge what additional CoC resources are needed. Outside of homelessness with domestic violence-related causes, the issue isn't being addressed by the community perhaps due to the overcrowding issue, culture - although homeless persons were acknowledged frequently in meetings.
 - ii. Barrow should participate in the annual Point-in-Time homeless count (January) and in the Homeless Management Information System. Determining the community organization to lead may be difficult.
 - iii. The Arctic Women in Crisis program is a regional asset; great space, safe houses in villages, welcoming staff. They noted more programming for kids was needed.



Public Meeting

Roughly 15 community members participated in the community meeting at the Barrow Public Library. There were a number of very vocal citizens and a heightened sense of concern during the hour due to an increase in drug use by school-aged children and a local resident who was dealing meth to middle school children was going to be served a Blue Ticket right after our meeting. In fact, many excused themselves early to participate in the rally and march to the dealers' house.

Additional resources for children to combat recent events were a key topic in the room:

Heroin in middle school, marijuana in elementary school, no DARE program in schools, the ASHNA summer camp was positive but doesn't happen consistently, children are out at all hours during the summer, substance abuse treatment for you is out of town (sometimes paid for out of the Mayors budget)

Other topics that were discussed at the public meeting, included:

- One parent mentioned the lack of SMI supports in the community and if transferred to API the difficulties of the family receiving information during the API stay and return to the community;
- Suicide in the community is often not discussed and described as an "accident".
- There were concerns about not having a District Attorney in Barrow; the position has been vacated and difficulties addressing the current drug problems were envisioned because of this;
- The Substance Abuse Treatment Center has been closed and an overall sense that SA services detox weren't available and due to issues at the North Slope Borough Behavioral Health Department (staffing levels, communication) – that behavioral health services weren't much better.
- Behavioral Health staff were present and discussed the difficulties of recruiting skilled clinicians (housing, constant turnover) creating a backlog/gap in services felt at the community level. Positions are often unfilled for 6+ months and paperwork is a barrier to effectiveness.
- It was obvious that the participants were fed up with the toll of drugs on the community and some time was spent on discussing how to keep drugs out. (Alaska Airlines, oil workers, etc.)

Native Village of Barrow

Sam Okakok met with us at the Native Village of Barrow offices and toured us through the subdivision of 20 lease to own single-family homes that they are developing.

The Native Village of Barrow has recognized the tremendous housing need and have targeted the low-income population. The Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996 (NAHASDA) Indian Housing Block Grant is the primary funding source for the project. (The Indian

Housing Block Grant is the single most important affordable housing development funding source in the state – roughly \$90-\$100 million per year comes to Alaska through the program which is utilized primarily by Regional Housing Authorities and Native Villages.)

The Native Village of Barrow in the past has attempted to address the emergency shelter shortage for adults – using some unsupervised space. Sam mentioned taking a look at the issue again perhaps working with the Tagiugmiullu Nunamiullu Housing Authority (TNHA) and other community organizations to see what could be done.

Mayor Bob Harcherek

Sam introduced us to Mayor Harcherek as he went to City Hall on other business. Mayor Harcherek spent about an hour with us discussing the issues related to SA/MH that he sees.

- **Council support for city-owned liquor store:** Mayor Harcherek indicated that there was council support to pursue a city-owned liquor store. The primary motivation seemed to be economical – the estimated tax revenue would be around \$3 million. Why should Brown Jug or other out of town stores be taking in Barrow money?
- **Already there are issues with the current distribution center:** Theft and handling issues of alcohol prior getting to the airlines and trafficking that already bypasses the community and gets the cheapest alcohol into town (R&R) at exorbitant prices.
- **Drugs, Blue Ticket:** Without prompting, the Mayor discussed openly the Blue Ticket that was to take place. Real concern for the school-aged kids, but real frustration since he (and everyone else in town) seemed to know the distributors (resident, or noticing the drug mules on Airline flights) but weren't being successful in stopping them.

North Slope Borough

Staff met with the North Slope Borough behavioral health team. (Justina Willhelm, Russell Bryant, Jacob Adams). Russell attended the community meeting so we were able to discuss in more depth the workforce recruitment, hiring, and housing issues.

The tone of this meeting was more official and less conversational than other meetings. The Borough team highlighted the CARF accreditation, the upcoming Health Summit, and that daycare for staff would be in place in July. When asked about homeless issues and if the Borough addressed they referred to The Gathering Place – a day program for SMI and Heather Dingman with the Borough health assessment impact program as potential people to talk with about homeless count/shelter services.

There was definitely the feeling that this department was strapped, even wary of criticism – if in fact they hear it routinely from the community.

Barrow Police Department

3 members of the Barrow Police Department, (deputy, 2 beat cops) met with us for about an hour.

The PD noted, like other community members, the toll that the increase in drugs has taken on the community. Meth and heroin have hit the community hard, they've encountered more violent Title 47 holds, and discussed the constant state of trauma that not only the department, but the entire community seemed to be in currently. They discussed:

- Drug charges being dropped to misdemeanors because of the lack of resources at the District Attorney's office;
- Interdiction of drugs difficult due to Alaska Airlines regulations. (Although, there were meetings with AA set-up in the future.)
- Community culture:
 - The community mistrust of the police department that seems to be prevalent in the younger generations now;
 - In general, a community that likes to fight, making Barrow one of the more violent assignments that current police officers have experienced. (Less so when the ice has broken up and people can get out on the water.)
 - Family skills/parenting: Two examples mentioned that they pinpointed the need for more family responsibility for children – 1) the large number of youth out all night in the summertime; 2) missing children calls that they receive 3,4,5 days after a child hasn't been seen in a while.

When asked about what was working well, the PD discussed the change to shift work for officers that works in the villages. This change seems to be really stabilizing villages and been great for the officers.

Arctic Women in Crisis

Didn't have much time at the domestic violence shelter (20 minutes). However, the Arctic Women in Crisis seems to be well supported in the community. They have a warm, welcoming space, friendly staff. They also discussed how the safe houses in villages program seemed to be really effective for their organization.

Hope Community Resources

The new supportive housing units for SMI residents is now open. (5 permanent beds, 1 respite). This is a spacious apartment complex with live-in staff that had 1 resident with plans to fill the other spaces throughout the summer.