

FAIRBANKS NATIVE ASSOCIATION

A Voice for the People of Fairbanks

Summer 2020

First step toward recovery begins at Gateway

Addiction has no boundaries. It can affect anyone: rich or poor, religious or atheist, mom or dad.

While many people can use alcohol without a problem or stop taking drugs without a struggle, there are some for whom alcohol and drugs becomes a real problem.

That's because the way their bodies interact with the misuse of alcohol or drugs can cause a physical dependence.



Brian Robb, clinical director and physician assistant at Gateway to Recovery.

“There are physical changes in the brain,” said Brian Robb, the clinical director and physician assistant at Gateway to Recovery. “It’s an actual disease to overcome.”

Fairbanks Native Association’s Behavioral Health Department operates Gateway to Recovery, a 24-hour drug and alcohol withdrawal facility. Statistically, Alaska is third in the nation for substance and alcohol misuse. Gateway provides medication-assisted treatment for patients and is the only dedicated withdrawal center in Interior Alaska.

“It saves lives,” said Steve Ginnis, executive director of Fairbanks Native Association. “Personally, I’m grateful for the help they have provided to hundreds of people suffering from addiction.”

Alcohol withdrawal help is the most treatment sought at Gateway, which is important because unmanaged alcohol withdrawal can cause death. Opioid withdrawal also can cause death, but to a lesser degree than alcohol. The issue with opioid addiction is that when people who try to kick it alone often go back to using, Robb said.

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2020 has brought challenges to Fairbanks Native Association

Early in February, I began to hear concerns from international, national and statewide health officials about a devastating coronavirus that began in China. Without a doubt, it was heading to the U.S. We were told to expect major disruptions in work, home and social life. We have never faced something like this before, but we had to act.

I began meeting with key staff to make a plan on keeping staff informed and safe.

By March, FNA board of directors postponed the annual meeting, potlatch and pageants. Shortly after, I gave the order to send staff home to work remotely. Behavioral Health Services stayed open and essential workers continued to go to their offices. However, I felt it necessary to continue that order throughout the spring and summer. It's not looking hopeful for a fall reopening.

This COVID-19 is unpredictable and very contagious. We've already buried people from our community. For a while in the spring, it looked like we flattened the curve of infection. Now we are seeing numbers in the triple digits and have no assurances that the rates will abate.

These are unheard of times and FNA staff has had to think of innovative ways to provide services in a pandemic. People need FNA more than ever.

BHS has implemented sanitation and screening, while providing counseling and support via Zoom. Head Start has distributed food, activities for children, diapers, wipes and other needed items.

Community Services has provided masks, meals, food boxes and services to elders and others. The Johnson O'Malley program provided a parenting program called Opening Doors for local parents.

These are a few examples of how FNA employees have found ways to work in this uncertain time. I want to commend them for their service to our community. I know FNA's board of directors is grateful to FNA staff, as well.

For now FNA is stable. We've finished adding five infant and toddler classrooms at the Poldine Carlo Building and are on track to add more. We have a COVID-19 mitigation plan in place for when employees do come back to work. We will require staff to wear masks outside of their offices or in meetings.

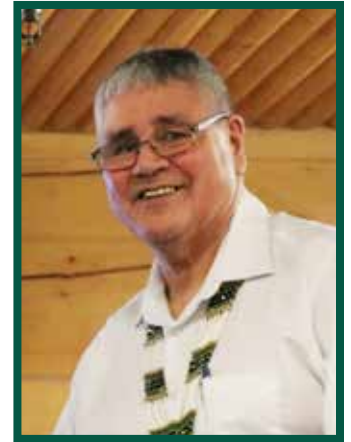
I signed a contract with Tanana Chiefs Conference so the clinic will provide COVID-19 testing for all staff.

Please, everyone, take this virus seriously. We need to protect elders, children, family and friends. Keep wearing a mask when out in public. Practice social distancing. Wash your hands.

All we can do is provide the best service we can and we will.

Mahsi' choo,

Steve Ginnis, Executive Director



Two posters are displayed. The top poster is for the 2020 Census, titled "FILL OUT THE CENSUS TODAY:". It features three icons: a telephone for "PHONE" (Call 844-330-2020), a computer monitor for "ONLINE" (https://my2020census.gov), and an envelope for "MAIL" (You should have received a form in the mail to complete). The bottom poster is for the "NATIVE VOTE" campaign. It features a black and white portrait of an elderly woman on the left. To the right, the text reads "NATIVE VOTE" in large letters, with a map of Alaska in the letter 'V'. Below that, it says "in the heart of Alaska" and "Our Voice Matters. Our Voice Counts." At the bottom, a yellow banner reads "Grandma Endorsed."



Renovations on the south wing of the Poldine Carlo Building finished in June. We added a new kitchen and five infant/toddler classrooms. Currently, we are working on installing the new playground at the Carlo building to be finished in August. Left photo is of playground construction. Right is a new toddler classroom.

Remote work in the time of COVID-19

Staff was formally sent home March 17 to work remotely. Staff forwarded telephones to cell or home phones. The FNA telephone system was revamped to go to departments and voicemail.

Social media became more important, and FNA has provided live chats, videos, educational resources, and announcements of FNA Zoom meetings. FNA now has Instagram and Twitter accounts to go along with the FNA Facebook page.

Head Start staff gave out 505 fun packs, 500 food boxes, 224 diapers packs, 68 adult masks, 109 children masks, and 76 bike helmets to their families through June.

Tribal Home Visiting staff distributed 110 books and has taken families berry picking, while social distancing, of course.

For May and June, Community Services has delivered to elders 1,296 lunches, 57 Farmers Market coupons, 200 emergency food boxes, and 70 other food boxes. They have given out over 900 masks, and provided 22 families with food assistance.

Johnson O'Malley Program staff is getting training in Google Suite to help with student

distance learning work. JOM, once all positions are filled, will have staff in 18 schools within the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District.

Behavioral Health Services started a new program called the Alaska Native Pandemic Project. This grant will provide a 24-hour call line for people who are struggling with substance use disorders or other issues during the COVID-19 crisis. The project will have counselors, peer support and outreach, too. Staff are in training now and plan to provide services starting in the fall of 2020.

Join FNA on social media



www.facebook.com/Fairbanks.Native



[@FairbanksNative](https://twitter.com/FairbanksNative)



<https://www.instagram.com/fairbanksnativeassociation/>

FNA's Youth & Young Adult Services help the most needy: At-risk youth

When the free food samples disappeared at the Fairbanks Costco because of COVID-19, so did the jobs for at risk young people.

As did restaurant, fast food and other entry level work some teens depend upon to work their way out of homelessness and poverty.

It didn't go unnoticed at Fairbanks Native Association Youth and Young Adult Services.

"In one month's time, 68 youth lost their jobs," said Rebecca Buckles, program director for Street Advocacy and Outreach Program, part of YYAS, and works with homeless youth in Fairbanks.

"I see how the youth have tried so hard to build a better life and in one crisis, due to no fault of their own, all their hard work was taken from them. Many have been trying for months to stay off assistance but had to go back on."

COVID-19 has been a challenge for the teens for whom the six programs under FNA Youth and Young Adult Services provides mental health and other support. For SOAP, that means providing extra food boxes and emotional support. Other staff are using the internet and

phone calls to keep up with their clients, who range in age 0-25 years old, during the pandemic, said Caroline Ramos, YYAS program director. SOAP focuses on homeless teens and young adults, while other programs provide family support, suicide prevention, alcohol use/abuse prevention, methamphetamine addiction, and case management



Leaving goods for teen families



FNA SOAP makes sure kids have fresh food.

services. YYAS is a part of FNA's Behavioral Health Services.

"We are here. We love. We care," Ramos said. "We're just a phone call away. We don't judge. Reach out to us."

Fairbanks youth face so many challenges, said Steve Ginnis, FNA executive director. FNA was formed in 1963 to help those young people and today FNA has grown to a huge organization with over 250 employees that provide mental health, educational and community support services.

"We have a dedicated staff who care about youth," Ginnis said. "I'm proud that FNA has grown enough over the years to reach our most vulnerable population, our youth."

Buckles, at SOAP, has been cooking meals for her "kiddos."

"The youth have gotten stronger because of the support of FNA's SOAP and have made better choices," Buckles said. "However, food insecurities have started to show."

She has teens living in tents, and is helping them and others to find ways to pay rent and navigate welfare applications.



Groceries for teens

She provides mental health counseling, as well.

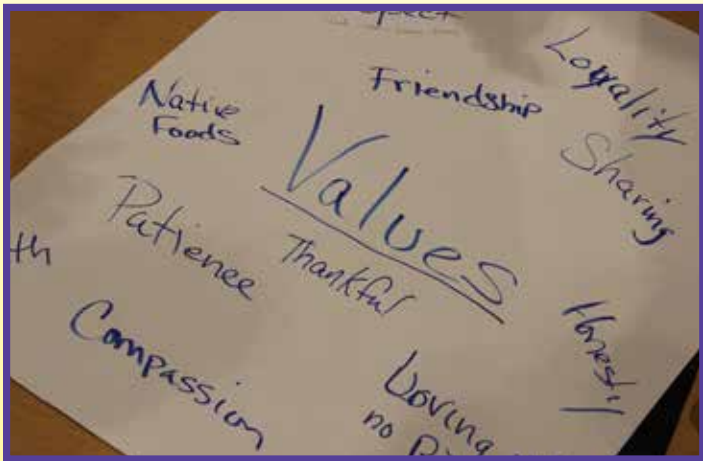
SOAP sees to the immediate needs. Other YYAS programs offer sober and emotionally healthy activities for their young people.

Gabrielle Johnson is using the internet and phone calls to reach out to her young consumers, knowing that COVID-19 has caused extra anxiety and depression. Johnson is the program coordinator for YYAS's Methamphetamine Suicide Prevention Initiative.

She partnered with Linda Thai, a local health and wellness expert, to teach a Zoom series on boundaries, communication, and relationships, an understanding that trauma-impacted teens need.

Johnson also started a Storytime Hour for 2-10 year olds and their parents and caregivers via ZOOM. She gave out cookie making kits to go along with the activity.

"We had Mason jars with all the dry ingredients needed for the cookie recipe," Johnson said. "Families picked up cookie jars, baked the cookies at home, and enjoyed them while listening to a short Alaskan story with a guest reader via Zoom."



Values of YYAS youth from a workshop

Amanda Fontana also used Zoom and Linda Thai to reach people. Fontana is the infrastructure specialist with YYAS's Synergy, and she is part of a local 17-member group of local Interagency Transition Council that work with youth and young adults in the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

Thai taught a series on trauma-informed care. The course went over how childhood trauma affects the brain and adult health. She offered a rethinking of how to understand trauma.

"What's wrong with you?" becomes 'What's happened to you?,'" Thai said. "Why don't you get it?' becomes 'Let's figure out how you learn.'"

The workshop is one way Fontana is kept in touch with her peers. Working with other mental health care providers is necessary because it ensures Fairbanks youth are getting the same levels of care, no matter where they go, Fontana said.

"We, as a community, can collaborate together as a team, and we're all here for our youth and young adults," Fontana said.

YYAS has two new programs. The Fairbanks Alaska Native Strategic Prevention Framework is meant to prevent the onset of alcohol use and reduce the progression of alcohol abuse among 9-20 year olds.

The other new program is Family Wellness, managed by Jackie Sunnyboy. The program is a collaboration with Thrive Alaska and the Alaska Center for Children and Adults. The group will address the mental health issues parents face after coming out of substance abuse treatment or incarceration with their children. The program is currently discussing the framework and strategy of making the program work.

FNA will work with parents or caregivers, while Thrive and ACCA will work with children ages 0-8. Many of the children aren't with their parents, and have attachment issues. This provides a challenge to newly sober parents. Yet learning to build a relationship with their children is important, because the trauma-impacted child more likely grow up to abuse alcohol or drugs. They may end up continuing the cycle of behavior.

"It's very scary and a lot of hard work for parents," Sunnyboy said. "It is my hope that we can provide that additional support and healthy sober activities. I want them to know they have someone to talk to and they are not alone."

YYAS continued on page 7

Help for brain hijacked by drugs and alcohol at Gateway to Recovery



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The consumer area outside of the nurses station at Gateway to Recovery.

Getting professional help for either give people a better chance for recovery because of the nature of addiction. At Gateway, alcohol treatment can take three to five days. Opioid treatment can take three to 10 days.

People who are alcohol or substance dependent have substance use disorder, which medical professionals compare to chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, or asthma, according to a booklet by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The disorder is why it's hard to stop using substances, even if the sufferer knows they need to stop.

"It's a hijacker," he said. "Drugs and alcohol hijack that part of the brain that says you will do this or you will die. This is not a choice. It's not a moral condition."

Since 2005 Alaska has exceeded the per capita

national average for alcohol consumption, according to an epidemiology report by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. Alaska is third highest state for excessive consumption, with Fairbanks having the highest excessive drinking rates in the state. About 23% of people here struggle with alcohol, above state and national averages.

Alcohol addiction is deadly. An alcoholic cuts 30 years off their life, Robb said. About one in three traffic accident fatalities in Alaska during 2012-2016 in Alaska were alcohol related, according to the state report. One in five people who were hospitalized because of an injury had suspected or proven alcohol use. Furthermore, 50% of all adults have someone in their family who misuses alcohol, which could result in death, injuries, neglect and domestic violence, Robb said.

Drug misuse is just as

dangerous. Drug-related deaths were five times greater for Alaskans aged 25-64 than any other age groups, according to the state report.

Yet treatment is hard to come by. Only 19% of 20.7 million who needed treatment were able to get it.

In Fairbanks, longer term treatment facilities have an average 30-day wait. However, GTR is open 24 hours a day, with around the clock medical staff. Patients, both men and women, can be referred or walk in.

The facility's windows provide plenty of natural light. There are double and single rooms, for a total of 10 beds. There are a nurses' station, a commons area, staff offices, a laundry room and a patient kitchen.

A patient will first be given an intake assessment by a nurse. Once admitted they are given a pair of scrubs to wear and

continued next page



Clean socks for consumers

assigned a bed. They are given food even if it's not during a scheduled meal time.

Patients are checked every 30 minutes by staff. Appropriate medications are prescribed: benzodiazepines for alcohol withdrawal; and clonidine, Suboxone and medications for nausea, vomiting and anxiety for opioid withdrawal.

The stay is voluntary and the doors are not locked. It's a safe place to be.

The staff don't want the facility to be known as just a detox center. It's more, said Robb.

"Gateway to Recovery is a good name for us, because we are a gateway," he said. "This is very often the first step toward recovery."



Consumer room.

YVAS continued from page 5

Sean Williams wants his youth to know they are not alone, too. Williams is the project manager for YVAS Visions program, which is a suicide prevention program.

"I'm up front with them," Williams said. "I would ask them straight up if they are thinking of suicide. Kids who are going through a lot will say, 'Yes, I am.'" He'll help them find ways to cope with stress, get a counselor, or in some cases, take them to the emergency room. He'll encourage them to remember their good relationships with friends, or even their pets.

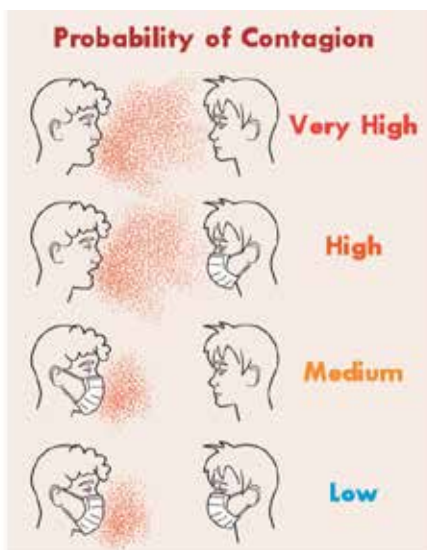
Kids often aren't willing to ask for help if they are hurting emotionally, and will put on a front that they are OK, he said. It's can be tough to knock through that barrier and Williams has learned from his training the best way to deal with a suicidal child.

"Flat out ask him or her if they are suicidal is the best," he said.

HOW TO HELP YOUR SUICIDAL FRIENDS

Don't minimize or invalidate their feelings.	Listen - really listen and create a judgement free space.	Be their advocate. Help them get help.
Ask them what they need from you. Do that thing.	Encourage self-care and taking care of basic needs.	Spend time with them and be present.
Let them know they aren't a burden to you.	Point them in the direction of helpful resources.	Help them create a crisis plan.

*In a crisis situation call 911 immediately.



How to Wear a Face Mask Properly

Cloth face coverings should—

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

STAY HOME! KEEP OUR COMMUNITIES SAFE.

FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.TANANACHIEFS.ORG



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Beautiful beaded vest worn by Alexander Hanna, 2019 Alaska Native Federation youth delegate. He is the son of Tanna Carter. Vest designed and made by Dixie Alexander.