

**Statewide Suicide Prevention Council  
Quarterly Meeting, Prince of Wales Island  
May 6-7, 2015**

**May 6, 2015  
Klawock City Hall**

Vice-Chair Meghan Crow called the meeting to order at 9:21 a.m. She expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet on Prince of Wales. It is invaluable to travel to and meet in rural communities and learn from the agencies in the areas off the road system.

Vice-Chair Crow commented that she has recently seen the Winter Bear and felt that it was good theater, very well done, with a palatable approach to suicide in rural communities. She feels that it is a valuable production and that, if Anne Hanley can come to speak with the Council again, that would be good.

Roll Call was taken: Meghan Crow, Sharon Fishel, Barbara Franks, Cynthia Erickson, Lowell Sage (telephonic), Alana Humphrey, Alavini Lata, Rep. Geran Tarr, and Senator Anna MacKinnon (telephonic) were present.

Senator MacKinnon joined by telephone at 9:45 a.m.

Absent: William Martin (excused), Brenda Moore-Beyers (excused), Senator Berta Gardner (excused), Kathryn Casello (excused), Rep. Benjamin Nageak (excused), Al Wall (excused).

Staff present: Kate Burkhart, Eric Morrison.

**Ethics Disclosure**

Sharon Fishel reported that the Department of Education and Early Development receives funding from the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) and the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council. Alavini Lata reported his children receive Medicaid Waiver services. Alana Humphrey reported that Boys and Girls Club receives DHSS funding. Meghan Crow works for Lower Kuskokwim School District, which is a state grant recipient. Barbara Franks serves on the advisory board for Alaska Psychiatric Institute, the advisory board for University of Alaska Anchorage suicide prevention, and the National Lifeline. Rep. Geran Tarr is a board member of Women in Government, a nonprofit leadership organization; she'll be serving on a behavioral health task force. Cynthia Erickson works part-time for Sen. Donny Olson.

**Review of Attendance**

Vice-Chair Crow indicated that the attendance records showed no major problems. Burkhart reported that Al Wall's attendance of meetings has not been for entire meetings, just parts of meetings. She has advised Chairman Martin of the issue.

### **Approval of the Agenda**

Humphrey **moved** to adopt the agenda. Fishel seconded. The agenda was approved without objection.

### **Approval of the Minutes**

Humphrey **moved** to approve the minutes; Franks seconded. The minutes were adopted as presented without objection.

### **Announcements**

Franks shared that the Out of Darkness Walk in Anchorage is May 16, 2015. She will send the time and other information to council members. In 2014, calls to the National Lifeline (all the suicide prevention lines in the country) totaled 1,357,605. She attributed the increase in calls to the publicity and awareness around actor Robin Williams's death by suicide.

Vice-Chair Crow shared that the Walk for Life in Bethel, sponsored in partnership with Drew's Foundation, will be May 16, 2015.

Gretchen Klein (guest) reported that a suicide prevention color run was held in Ketchikan recently. Fishel shared that Kathryn Casello's project in Mountain Village included a spontaneous walk for life.

### **Introduction of New Council Members**

Geran Tarr, District 19 Representative to the Alaska Legislature, is a new council member. She is a survivor of a suicide loss. Her district is the most diverse in the state. Many of the issues the Council addresses are important to the neighborhoods she represents. She is committed to prevention and education, and is excited to be part of the Council.

Vini Lata is the new Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse representative to the Council. He lives in Juneau. He coaches high school tennis and works at Alaska Airlines. He has two adult children experiencing developmental disabilities.

### **Election Process**

Last year, Moore-Beyers and Senators Gardner and MacKinnon served as the nominating committee. Vice-Chair Crow asked Sen. MacKinnon if that process worked. Sen. MacKinnon responded that it worked fine, but council members need to express interest in serving as an officer.

The current executive committee is Chair Martin, Vice-Chair Crow, Secretary Fishel, and At-Large Member Franks. Vice-Chair Crow reviewed the officer duties from the by-laws. Burkhart commented on the practical aspects of the function of the executive committee, especially the Chair and Vice-Chair, in supporting the executive director.

Vice-Chair Crow commented that a nominating committee is a good idea; Humphrey agreed. Vice-Chair Crow appointed Lata, Rep. Tarr, and Fishel to the nominating committee. She and Sen. MacKinnon encouraged people to express interest in serving as an officer to the nominating committee. Fishel, Humphrey, and Crow expressed interest in serving (just not as the Chair). Lata is interested in serving as Secretary. Franks is interested in continuing as the At-Large Member. Sen. MacKinnon and Vice-Chair Crow both encouraged Franks to consider becoming Chair, expressing confidence in her experience and knowledge. Humphrey asked if the youth member can serve on the executive committee; Burkhart responded that there is no prohibition on the youth member being an officer. Sen. MacKinnon asked if the legislators can serve on the executive committee, and suggested Sen. Gardner as a possible Chair. Morrison reported that the by-laws indicate that voting members can serve (legislators are not voting members.)

Staff will send a Doodle to schedule the election via a teleconference meeting in June and will have a public notice posted.

### **Introduction of Guests**

Gretchen Klein from the Prince of Wales Health Network, Colleen Watson from public health nursing, Beverly Rivard, a private practitioner with the POW Health Network, and Joe Yates from Boys and Girls Club were in attendance.

### **American Association on Suicidology Conference Report**

Barbara Franks represented the State of Alaska at the American Association on Suicidology Conference in Atlanta. She provided a written report, which she summarized for Council members. The theme was “Stay Connected.” Highlights of the conference included review of the evidence-based suicide intervention models, discussion of how the advocacy for assisted suicide intersects with suicide prevention, broadening the definition of “suicide survivor” and how to include survivors of attempted suicide, reaching out to LGBTQ populations, sharing knowledge and experience, and connecting with other suicide prevention professionals. Franks appreciated that the conference included discussion of what to do after a suicide occurs and how to support healing over time. She reported the healing conference, featuring author and survivor of suicide loss Iris Bolton, at the end of the event was very good.

Franks shared the story of a chance encounter with a young man who manages Chick-fil-A stores. After talking with her, he asked for National Lifeline information to post in his stores.

Rep. Tarr asked about whether the National Lifeline is the same as Careline. Franks explained how Careline is locally staffed in Fairbanks, but will roll to the national network when staff are

already answering calls. Burkhart elaborated that the National Lifeline accredits suicide prevention crisis lines across the country. Franks prefers to use the nationwide statistics, to show how interrelated we all are in healing from suicide.

Humphrey spoke about how Boys and Girls Clubs nationally are working to better address suicide in Indian Country. She reported that 400 clubs are on reservations and/or in Native American/Native Alaskan communities. Joe Yates from the Klawock Club will present later in the meeting, and many of the issues he will share are the same as in clubs in other Native communities. Franks spoke about how important it is to share resiliency information in a culturally relevant manner.

Burkhart commented on the speed of change in the field, as AAS first started to speak about attempt survivors 4 years ago and now are actively engaging with this population as a voice in policy-making. She also spoke about the need for the Council to dig into crisis call data, as Alaska Careline is filling a gap and serving a large population of people who lack access to community mental health services and so call Careline as a surrogate on-call clinician. Careline is beginning to lack the capacity to address the demand.

Erickson spoke about the lack of community mental health services in her community, and the lack of a clear personal understanding of traditional culture and heritage. There is a need for leadership in rural communities. There needs to be more accountability by the elders in the rural communities. Colleen Watson spoke about the influence of historical trauma, and the need to restore the emotional tie between people. She has been wondering how to share the emotional and cultural connections with non-Native peoples.

Franks spoke about Carla Fine, an author at the AAS Healing Conference, who spoke about the importance of integrating physical and behavioral health care. She noted that May is Mental Health Awareness Month. There is still stigma and taboo in speaking about issues such as suicide, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other social issues.

*break*

### **DHSS Division of Behavioral Health Quarterly Report**

James Gallanos from DBH Prevention and Early Intervention provided the quarterly report for the division. A written report was provided to Council members. He provided an overview of the report.

DBH is funding 20 prevention coalitions to engage in a community needs assessment. Three coalitions have provided assessments to the division at this point. None have been approved by the division. Burkhart asked what the criteria being used to review the needs assessments, as she has seen what some coalitions have provided and it is not clear what criteria are being applied or whether they are consistently being provided. Gallanos said there is a “fidelity checklist” that each coalition goes through that outlines specific criteria that must be met. Burkhart asked that those criteria be shared with the Council. Vice-Chair Crow asked if only new

grantees were required to engage in this process. Gallanos said all grantees must do this process. The division wants to have very targeted strategies resulting in outcomes from coalitions and each coalition is at a different phase of assessing the needs in their communities. One of the key components of the needs assessments is to have very specific targeted goals that can be used in the future to measure outcomes of the work being done. Since the subjects of suicide and mental health prevention are very broad, they want there to be very specific targets identified in order to see outcomes in the future that would be difficult to identify if they are too broad.

Burkhart asked why the Division is requiring coalitions to conduct parallel or duplicative needs assessments in communities where hospitals are engaged in community needs assessments for the Affordable Care Act. There is a lot of funding that is going toward duplicating needs assessments by the coalitions that could go toward programs that they have identified as important to their communities. Gallanos responded that coalitions can partner and share data with hospitals. Burkhart asked for express confirmation of that from the Division, as there are communities – specifically Fairbanks – spending grant funds in a needs assessment that could be satisfied by the hospital’s work and the indication she has received from the Division is that the hospital community needs assessment is not acceptable.

Vice-Chair Crow asked how many of the 20 coalitions had finished the needs assessment process. Gallanos answered none have been approved. Vice-Chair Crow asked what the timeline is to complete the assessments. Gallanos answered that the coalitions had been given a year to complete the process. Most coalitions are still in the process of collecting and analyzing data. Fishel commented that grantees cannot spend any funds on activities during the assessment process, which means that school districts will lapse funds back to the division at the end of the fiscal year. Burkhart commented that evidence-based programs that have been in place and successful in some school districts have stopped and could be absent for up to two years because of the assessment process. Not having these programs in place is of great concern.

Rep. Tarr asked why the division made this policy change in prevention grants, and what are the services being disrupted in schools. Fishel answered that a wide array of direct services has been interrupted, including counseling, crisis intervention, resiliency building, wellness promotion, and a variety of other evidence based programs. She added that the Juneau School District has stopped their suicide risk screening program.

Gallanos explained the policy change was the result of a new three-year grant cycle and the rigorous application of the Strategic Prevention Framework. Coalitions are being asked to be outcome-focused and outcome driven. Burkhart added that there is a distinct difference in perspective between the Division and the more established community coalitions, which have expressed to the Council frustration over the Division’s actions and responses to their work. Gallanos responded that, while some coalitions are at different levels of experience, the Division wants to bring everyone through the process together.

Beverly Rivard from the POW Health Network spoke about how these processes need to be responsive to local community cultures and different ways of looking at wellness and health. They have made a lot of effort to engage community members, include disenfranchised people, and focus on “what the people say.” Gretchen Klein added that they can use the DBH grant to ensure that the communities focus on programs they want.

Vice-Chair Crow summarized that she appreciates hearing how new grantees are benefiting from the funds and process, and that agencies are extending to community partners. She also noted that established coalitions have expressed frustration about the disruption to their ongoing work.

Gallanos spoke about the Gatekeeper Training-QPR program funded by the federal Garrett Lee Smith grant. DBH hopes that, with additional funding, that training program will be enhanced with QPR triage and assessment components. The Division is hearing from trainers and trainees that, when they refer someone for mental health help, the services are not there. The triage and assessment components might help with that. The assessment is a standardized tool developed by the QPR institute.

Gallanos reported that the new SAMHSA suicide prevention grant is out – a 5-year grant for \$750,000. The Division is applying for those funds, which will be awarded based on the “zero suicide” concept. The Division has invited community behavioral health centers to be partners in the application. Burkhart commented that the Council has not been invited to participate or help develop the grant proposal. She asked what the Division’s intention was to include the Council and to ensure that the activities align with the state plan. Gallanos responded that DHSS staff were invited to discuss and provide input on the Request For Applications. Franks expressed concern with the “zero suicide” concept and the blame attached to failure to meet that standard.

Burkhart asked again how the Division will include the Council and solicit their input to make sure the grant activities are aligned with the state plan. Gallanos said he would like to include the Council in developing the grant proposal, which is due June 2, 2015. Vice-Chair Crow asked that the conversation with the Council occur via teleconference, scheduled through staff.

Sen. MacKinnon asked if a formal letter from staff related to Council participation in this grant planning effort should be sent to DBH that it is formally documented. Lata concurred, expressing concern at the apparent emphasis on standardization of evaluation when communities are so different and diverse across the state. Vice-Chair Crow commented that this is a recurring issue at council meetings, and a conversation or an agenda item for the Director of the Division of Behavioral Health could be helpful and is different from Gallanos’ reports. Rep. Tarr asked about a distribution list that is specific to suicide prevention efforts. Gallanos commented that he has a Listserv he uses that Council members could request to join.

## **Klawock Boys and Girls Club**

Alana Humphrey introduced Joe Yates. Yates first spoke to the Council at a meeting in Juneau several years ago. He is now employed by the Boys and Girls Club and Humphrey commented that he “is one of our stars” in the organization.

Yates opened his presentation with a traditional introduction and greeting in Haida. He shared an overview of the Boys and Girls Club in Klawock. An average of 20 youth are served every day through the after school programs. These programs include Power Hour homework and tutoring after school (participants are all on the honor roll at school), a trail program (part of a diabetes prevention program) that includes exercise and nutrition and stress management, physical activities (60-180 minutes a day), and Triple Play – exercising and stretching their minds, bodies, and souls. Leadership skills development, building connectedness, developing and meeting goals and personal standards, and mentoring are part of these programs. Participants exhibit these skills at school and in the community.

Yates explained that the Boys and Girls Club may be the only safe, fun place a young person has in the community. He commented it is a youth-driven and youth-focused club that emphasizes “this is your club,” and “the only limitation is your imagination.” He encourages every youth to create events including dances, spirit weeks, sports tournaments, talent nights, and other fun events.

Youth of the Month is a way the Boys and Girls Club recognizes youth who model shared values. At the annual banquet, they recognized every youth who is a regular participant. The 14 and over Youth of the Month goes on to a state and national competition.

Yates and his wife identified the need to support youth outside of the Boys and Girls Club. They go to ball games and community events. Youth see him out in the community and know “this guy is for real,” which helps new youth come and participate and existing participants stay engaged at the Boys and Girls Club. He also stays in touch with participants after they graduate or move out of the program.

“Be You” is a new partner with the club. This is an organization focused on supporting youth to “be themselves.” He commented there is no right way and no wrong way, as long as the youth are being themselves and having fun.

Yates commented that teaching participants the value of respect is a priority at the club. For example, on field trips youth might litter. Yates would say “Natives don’t throw trash on Mother Earth” and explain why respecting the earth is important. Now, youth say to each other “Be Native” and pick up trash in the community. Yates also spoke about how students from different schools would treat each other badly, but through the connection and “family” at Boys and Girls Club, they now see that they aren’t different from each other.

Franks commented that Yates didn't just end his presentation with respect, he also started the presentation with respect for his parents and grandparents. She loves his use of social media, promoting all the activities and Boys and Girls Club. She appreciates that the youth are recognized for their efforts, and she is humbled by the work he does.

Humphrey added that Boys and Girls Club teaches youth a sense of belonging, usefulness, influence, and competence. In the end, Boys and Girls Club staff celebrate everything because children deserve to be celebrated and to celebrate each other. She is proud of the clubs on Prince of Wales and to be here with them.

Erickson said she was really proud of Yates. She asked if the tribes support the Boys and Girls Club. Yates commented the City of Klawock is a major supporter. They also receive Bureau of Indian Affairs, state, federal, and local funds. Humphrey commented that each club has a different funding mix.

Erickson asked what Yates does when youth disclose abuse or other serious issues. He commented they have yellow ribbon week to raise awareness. They create an environment where there is connection and trust so youth feel safe. He commented that there are few good role models.

Humphrey commented that it is hard for Boys and Girls Club to retain teens because most leave the clubs around age 14. Clubs with male directors/mentors like Yates in Klawock seem to retain the older teens better. Humphrey added that their statewide staff are able to support the local staff and wrap community services around them.

Erickson commented that there are "trainings galore" but rarely is there follow through. She commented it is difficult to respond when youth disclose sensitive information. Rep. Tarr asked if Boys and Girls Club staff were mandatory reporters. Humphrey said they are, and they work through the response as a statewide organization.

Beverly Rivard agreed that there is frustration in these situations when a child discloses. The immediate reaction – get a counselor – may not work for every community. You have to think outside the box if counseling isn't available or a good fit for a child. There need to be grassroots efforts to teach people engaged with youth everyday how to communicate, to hear and receive these stories, self-care, and how to respond. She commented it is very scary for these adults.

*Break at 12:07 pm.*

*Reconvened at 1:33 p.m.*

### **Conversation with SEARHC Behavioral Health**

Forrest Anderson from Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) Community Family Services is a behavioral health aide in Klawock. Her focus is substance abuse counseling, primarily court referrals. She conducts assessments and facilitates group treatment, and refers people who need counseling to a clinician. She also provides substance abuse prevention and

wellness promotion education in the community. SEARHC had suicide prevention staff on POW, but that ceased with budget cuts about two or three years ago. She is not familiar with any other SEARHC suicide prevention programs on POW.

Vice-Chair Crow asked how SEARHC would respond to someone in crisis. Anderson explained that the clinician visits Hydaburg regularly, and goes to Thorne Bay as needed. SEARHC has a 24-hour on-call clinician available; that started about a year ago. Anderson has responded to help someone in crisis when necessary. They have access to mental health clinical services at Mt. Edgcombe Hospital through telemedicine, and have medical staff locally to help wrap around and keep people safe. Still, what they can do is sometimes limited. Anderson is a graduate of the Rural Human Services program at the University of Alaska and is considering becoming a clinician so that they have a permanent clinician on the island.

Anderson shared an example of their outreach for suicide prevention. Her daughter, Marina Anderson, is a young leader serving on the Central Council Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska council as the youth representative and an active wellness ambassador. She started Alaskans for Suicide Prevention to develop a youth/teen suicide prevention media resource with young Alaska Native leaders such as Ariel Tweto, Damen Bell-Holter, and others. Anderson is working on a film that she hopes to screen the film at the next Alaska Federation of Natives gathering.

Marina Anderson shared how suicide has affected her life, losing her best friend to suicide, and how it affects the families and communities left behind. She commented on how very young children think about suicide these days. She advised the Council to include Alaska youth from each region in its work, so that the perspective of young people is heard. Vice-Chair Crow shared that Kathryn Casello is the youth representative to the Council and has been active in suicide prevention in high schools statewide. She commented that there are funding sources that could support Anderson's film project.

Forrest Anderson reinforced the need for early education and intervention with young children in the state. Marina Anderson explained that many people avoid seeing a professional counselor because they do not want to be labeled or stigmatized. She commented that youth are more comfortable talking to peers than to adults or mental health professionals.

Erickson spoke about the lack of mental health and youth-specific resources in rural Alaska, and how grant funded services aren't sustained. Franks congratulated Marina Anderson on her role on the CCHITA council and agreed about the transience of services.

Rep. Tarr asked if people are screened for suicide risk when they come to the clinic. Forrest Anderson explained that everyone is asked directly about suicidal thoughts and self-harm. She shared how hard it was to learn how to talk about suicide directly. Now, she is trained in ASIST and would like to have an ASIST training on POW. Colleen Watson concurred and commented that public health nursing could help plan that. Gallanos commented that research shows that training in interventions has shown an initial decrease in mortality that needs to be maintained by keeping it at the top of people's minds.

Forrest Anderson wants to teach young people to talk openly and directly about suicide. Erickson agreed that this is important, and that youth want someone to talk to who will listen. Vice-Chair Crow shared that, in Toksook Bay in 2010, youth expressed frustration that they are told “tell a trusted adult” but the adults either don’t know what to do or say “leave it alone.” Also, youth want to be equipped to act, not just “call behavioral health.”

### **Prince of Wales Wellness Coalition**

Andy West, Colleen Watson, Gretchen Klein, Beverly Rivard, and Forrest Anderson spoke about the local wellness coalition. The coalition grew out of the effort to respond to the closure of COHO, the community behavioral health center, eight years ago. PeaceHealth is the fiscal agent for the POW Health Network, which is funded by local partners and state grants. The POW Health Network provides coordination and staff to the Wellness Coalition.

Originally, the POW Health Network received state funding to do a small health needs assessment. A behavioral health coalition began to create the network to provide behavioral health services locally available. Over time, it became a wellness coalition so that it could focus more on resilience and the strengths of the communities on the island. They have an “inter-prevention” committee, a wide group of stakeholders that has met regularly for 8 years to develop and implement strategies to improve wellness on POW. The Green Dot domestic violence prevention program is an example of their collaborative efforts.

The Wellness Coalition has extended to Naukati, Hydaburg, and other communities by finding champions in each community. They are conducting an island-wide community needs assessment. They are being careful with the data, which could be skewed or sensitive given the small number of people in some of the communities. Rivard explained that they are committed to translating the prevention framework results into language meaningful to the people.

While the needs assessment focuses on adults, youth are specifically included in the readiness assessment. The coalition is listening to the people themselves and continuing to gather information. The focus isn’t on what’s wrong, but on what’s right. Forrest Anderson gave the example of having an “affirmation booth” instead of an “anti” booth, to build positivity instead of negativity. They also have hosted a culture camp.

The POW Health Network offered Gatekeeper QPR Training last year, so the coalition extended that training to the local schools. The Craig Middle School participated in that training and were very glad to have it. A youth specific model would also be good. Vice-Chair Crow commented on how well safeTALK works with students and school staff.

Rivard commented that students want skills, not just referrals to adults. They also need personal tools for self-care for when they are trying to support suicidal friends and family members. Youth are texting each other, disclosing suicidal ideation and seeking help, so students need tools on how to respond.

Gretchen Klein commented that the wellness coalition needs help maintaining momentum and getting people to take community ownership of the issue and how to respond to crisis. They do not need to focus on more training, but ways to give local people resources to help others. Franks spoke about combining a local response to suicide with a larger initiative (like World Suicide Prevention Day) to make the issue a community issue and not a family-specific response, to prevent suicide and not just to respond to suicide. She also suggested having coalition members identified publicly in the community as a resource as someone people can talk to. Klein spoke about the need to support volunteer first responders, who are often stressed or burnt out as a result of dealing with suicide and other traumas.

Rivard commented that increasing local resources is important because of the need for trust and reliability. It's difficult for people to establish a relationship with mental health professionals because they come and go from the communities so quickly. Having clinicians and trainers come from outside periodically just isn't enough. There needs to be more than one choice on the island for help.

The POW Health Network also receives Health Resources and Services Administration funding to support wellness promotion in their communities. Watson commented that the number of people involved is impressive and they are ready to implement change. Fishel asked if the school districts were involved in the coalition. Rivard commented that they are being recruited. Erickson asked about tribal participation. Klein commented that they have representation from Kasaan and Klukwan, and are recruiting more. Klein shared materials, and the idea of partnering with SEARHC on programs related to local traditional foods and healthy nutrition.

Rep. Tarr asked if anyone had attended Mental Health First Aid. Anderson took it through the Rural Human Services program and thought it was very valuable. Fishel spoke briefly about the DEED Mental Health First Aid-Youth project.

Fishel introduced Jack Walsh, superintendent of Craig School District.

*Break*

### **Boys and Girls Club Suicide Prevention Pilot**

Humphrey reported that Boys and Girls Club received \$500,000 from DHSS for suicide prevention. Suicide – plans, attempts, and completions – is a pervasive issue for Boys and Girls Club staff and participants. The pilot, Alaska After 3, is focused on character and leadership development, academic support, goal setting and graduation, and healthy life styles in 11 communities. They added staff in these 11 clubs and increased activity hours. They are not measuring suicide risk or impact on suicidality, but are measuring their usual benchmarks through pre- and post-surveys. This is a one year project without much prospect of future funding. The additional staff will be maintained through new funding from the federal Department of Education. The program has helped expand its exposure to potential funders due to the work done through the grant. The grant came at a time that helped boost the work

at the 11 communities. The main office has helped the local clubs with their efforts and with networking. Over the years they have dealt with suicide in the communities of these clubs. The retraining of staff through the grant was paramount to the success of the clubs in those 11 communities. Some of these villages are very remote and do not have many services so having staff that know when to ask if youth are suicidal has been important.

Erickson asked about parental involvement. Humphrey answered there is not much parental involvement, except at the Eagle River club, but there is elder involvement in all the clubs. There is a lot of cultural awareness that is shared with the youth. Erickson asked if the clubs do background checks. Humphrey commented that all staff and volunteers go through a background check. Humphrey and her management team review the background checks if there is something questionable that comes up. Last year there were about 38,000 volunteer hours across the state, many of which are in the athletic activities. A lot of college students volunteer in the sports programs.

### **Alaska Community Foundation Teen Suicide Prevention**

Burkhart provided a brief overview of the second year of the ACF teen prevention program, funded by the State of Alaska and private donations. The initial contribution of \$25,000 from the state was matched by the Alaska Children's Trust. The priority for this program is to fill a gap that came about 8 years ago when DHSS changed its grant funding. It became difficult for communities and organizations to provide suicide prevention projects rather than full programs. Communities that lacked the capacity to apply for the more complex prevention program grants could apply for these smaller grants. The intent of the grant is to fund teen suicide prevention projects that are time limited. The cap on each grant is \$5,000. The application process was simplified to one page. In the first year there were projects funded all over the state. This is the second cycle. One of the benefits of having the Council involved in the grant is its ability to provide technical assistance to the grantees either through staff or Council members. These grants are aligned with and support the state plan and the Council can help ensure that the projects are beneficial to their communities and organizations. There are minimal reporting requirements, but the review of the projects is rigorous. There were some applications that were not related to suicide prevention and were subsequently dismissed. There will be a report at the January meeting, since the funding just went out recently. The next round of funding will be next spring.

Rep. Tarr asked if it was \$75,000 each year. Burkhart commented that it is \$75,000 spread out over three years. Rep. Tarr asked what the legislature contributed. Burkhart commented that the legislature provided \$25,000 the first year and an additional \$25,000 to this cycle and they were capital funds.

Sen. MacKinnon asked how much money is left in the fund. She commented that additional funding will be difficult to come by. Burkhart commented that there is funding left but did not have the exact number in front of her. There might be a need to reach out to philanthropic

groups for future funding of the program. The Alaska Community Foundation has already been reaching out to potential funders because it was understood that future money from the state may not be an option.

### **Public Comment**

**Amy McDonald from Thorne Bay** is a long-time teacher and school counselor at Thorne Bay schools. She also works for the International Institute for Student Support with the Southeast Island and Hydaburg School Districts. “Phlight Clubs” are 2-4 day lock-in events focused on building the “developmental ecology” (based on positive youth development principles) of children and youth. Relationships with 5 caring adults, whether family or other caring adults, are the foundation for the program. These adults are “anchors.” Other supports, tangible and intangible, and assets are referred to as the “kaleidoscope” needed for positive development. Suicide prevention is integrated into the program but not primary to it.

Phlight Club Academies are the major lock-in event, but there are club activities, newsletters and other resources provided afterward. Children and youth are very excited to attend the events. Adult volunteers are oriented to Phlight Club, but are not trained or subject to a background check. However, most adults are teachers or work at organizations that perform background checks. Anchor adults do not currently receive training, but they are working on developing resources for those adults. “Phlight Clubs” are currently being implemented in the Yukon Kuskokwim School District. McDonald reports that none of the children/youth engaged in the Phlight Clubs have attempted or died by suicide. Phlight Clubs have been held on Prince of Wales for about 3 years. This is a grant funded project. Students apply to participate, and parents give permission for students to participate in follow-up surveys and tools. Teachers receive stipends to participate. Southeast Island School District will extend the Phlight Clubs to other school districts at a cost. Kenai and Galena are also implementing Phlight Club.

**Jack Walsh, Superintendent of the Craig School District**, has taught and been an administrator in Alaska in many small communities for many years. He also serves on the Special Education Services Administration Board. He shared that in Fall 2015, 2/3 of the superintendents statewide will have less than 2 years in their current community, so he encouraged the Council to reach out to them. He has been in Alaska since 1987. Domestic violence and suicide have been major issues in the whole time he’s been in Alaska.

Walsh spoke to the value and importance of Boys and Girls Clubs in rural Alaska. He also appreciates the support from DEED to school districts: “That’s a department we can’t live without.”

Walsh raised concerns about raising the small school size from a minimum of 10 students to 25 or 50 students. This could result in closure of 35 to hundreds of schools statewide if the minimum size is increased. He expressed concern about what will happen to students and commented that students and/or families may have to leave their communities if there is not a school. Walsh runs a correspondence school that serves its students well, but not as well as

students coming to the school building every day. Franks commented that she has seen communities suffer from the loss of schools. Erickson added that loss of a school takes the heart out of a village.

Walsh thanked the Council for its work and for visiting the community.

**Colleen Watson, public health nurse**, commented on the lack of a comprehensive personal and relational health and safety class in schools. This is a major gap for youth in communities with a lot of dysfunction. A universal mandatory health class and curriculum would benefit students statewide.

Fishel referred her to Patty Owen at DEED for the Fourth R and Healthy Relationships+ curricula. These curricula are free to school districts. Training on these curricula is offered at the school counselor conference and the school health and wellness institute. While a teacher is not required to present the information, it does require time during the school day dedicated to the effort.

Humphrey commented that Boys and Girls Club has a healthy relationship program, Date Smart. They offer it in some but not all clubs, depending on the age of the participants and funding availability.

Fishel said teacher suicide prevention training is currently required (SB 137) but that requirement sunsets next year. The Council would need to pursue legislation to extend it if desired. Sen. MacKinnon spoke about the conversation during the legislative session about reducing the mandated trainings for teachers by extending the time periods between trainings and making it easier for teachers and districts to decide what training to prioritize when.

**Rep. Geran Tarr** spoke as a private person about the legislation she filed, Erin's Law, which mandates sexual abuse training in schools. She commented that it is important training for teachers and will help reduce various social issues in Alaska, including domestic violence, sexual assault and suicide. Burkhart noted that the Council has not taken a position on this piece of legislation.

Sen. MacKinnon asked what the time to develop an e-Learning training module. Fishel answered that it takes 5-8 months of staff and contractor time and about \$50,000 per module.

*The meeting recessed at 4:30 p.m.*

**May 7, 2015**

**Prince of Wales Vocational and Technical Education Center**

The meeting reconvened at 1:35 p.m.

## **Debrief of Site Visits, Public Comment**

Vice-Chair Crow reported that the Council toured Peace Health Clinic and Community Connections in the morning.

Lata commented that the Community Connections clinical director spoke about the extent of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder on the island, but reported very little FASD prevention. Providing information in bars and around the community is relatively easy.

Rep. Tarr appreciated that Community Connections provides services via home visits. She also appreciated the conversation about their workforce challenges and strengths.

Fishel was impressed by the plethora of services offered by Peace Health on the island. Community Connections have provided consistent services to the kids of Prince of Wales, which helps because the school districts do not have the resources to support them.

Franks has been hearing about a disconnect of services on the island and of people feeling passed by when they feel suicidal here. She heard that same concern – “we need help” – last night at a traditional dance group. But the visits revealed lots of services available. It may be that people don’t want to talk to their family, which is hard in small communities where many people are related.

Vice-Chair Crow was impressed with both the Peace Health and Community Connections programs. She appreciated that services are provided in schools to help youth with severe emotional disturbance. Often the Council hears about the gap between community members and service providers. The Council can bring trainings to communities, but we need to be sure those trainings stick and people are connected to follow-up services. The Council needs to help community members feel more comfortable addressing these issues and more connected to the health care services. The health services are there, but not everybody knows how to get the most out of them.

Franks added that she learned that SEARHC, the tribal health organization serving POW, is hiring a new behavioral health director. These transitions can be disruptive. These communities are looking to SEARHC for help, so she’s hoping the change will result in them getting the help they need.

Burkhart commented that when the POW Wellness Coalition presented the previous day, they noted that the coalition began after the closure of the community behavioral health center in the community in 2008. The collaboration with Peace Health and Community Connections was born out of the very sudden closure and loss of services. She commented that there is still a gap in services related to substance abuse that the community behavioral health center helped address when it was open. Having one chemical dependency counselor for the entire island does not meet the demand. Community Connections ability to be in the communities and serve children in schools and in homes is a result of DHSS’s commitment to serving people where they are. In 2010 the Integrated Behavioral Health Regulations said that the state will pay to

have services provided outside of clinics. Community Connections is showing success in that area. One thing that wasn't mentioned at the site visit is the state doesn't reimburse for the actual travel of clinicians between communities. It is not a billable service to Medicaid. The fact that Community Connections has been able to travel between the communities is significant and shows a commitment. Some people don't want to visit clinics because it can add to the stigma, so providing the services in communities and schools reduces the barriers to receiving services. It is a strong lesson for the Council that success can happen over time when communities and organizations come together, because the work the Council does is not something that has overnight results.

### **Legislative Session Discussion**

Burkhart explained that the Council is not an advocacy board; its statutory authority limits it to an advisory capacity. Thus, the Council monitors budget and legislative items that have an impact of suicide prevention and the web of causality. There is no FY16 budget yet, so the Council staff continues to monitor that progress. This year the focus was looking at a broader range to monitor how potential cuts could have both short- and long-term effects. This agenda item was included with the intent that a budget would have been passed by now, but it hasn't so that discussion will need to take place at a separate meeting.

There were bills introduced that the Council was not asked to take a position on. For example, Rep. Harriet Drummond filed a bill to permit assisted suicide. It received two hearings and is being held in the House Health and Social Services Committee. The Council was not asked for a position, and as an advisory board did not offer a position, especially as the Council has not discussed or deliberated on the issue of assisted suicide. The bill could be brought back up next session.

Lata asked if the Council could have that discussion on assisted death. Franks agreed that the Council should have that discussion, because it will be asked at some point for advice. Lata stated that the Council should discuss but not take a position one way or the other. He shared his family's recent experience dealing with a terminally ill family member. Burkhart said there should be a conversation, but reminded that the Council is an advisory body and not an advocacy body.

Beverly Rivard (member of the public) suggested that the Council provide a statement about how to support the family members of people who choose to die in this context. Franks suggested looking at advance directives.

Humphrey said she would be very uncomfortable with the Council taking a position on this issue.

Lata analogized this to the ABADA response to the legalization of marijuana. ABADA provided information only to educate people making decisions but not telling people what to do. Saying the Council is for or against it is a "danger zone" for the Council. Even though no one has asked

the Council for a position, it should be ready when they do. Franks said it could be like how the Council responded to Congressman Young's comments to students in Wasilla – information only without judgment.

Vice-Chair Crow agreed that the Council should not take a position but should be able to respond. She appreciated Rivard's comments about supporting people who are left to cope with the loss. Erickson agreed that the consequences of these emotional decisions can last a long time. She suggested that staff develop a statement with the executive committee so that the Council is ready to respond when needed.

Lata **moved** that staff develop a white paper on this issue with the executive committee. Humphrey **seconded** the motion. The **motion passed** without objection.

Burkhart commented that although the legislature has yet to pass a budget, the Council can discuss FY16 in relation to the FY15 budget. It remains pretty much the same in the Governor's proposed budget, except for the \$60,000 increment in FY15 that was used to develop the e-Learning postvention module with DEED. That was expected because it was for a one-time development of the module and not intended for ongoing funding.

Burkhart commented that the budget for FY15 was \$662,500. That sounds like a lot of money for the Council, except \$475,000 was sent to DEED for its grant program and the new e-Learning module. The actual budget for the Council was \$187,500. Of that, \$96,300 is for staff, \$36,400 went for travel, \$51,300 for contractual funding including rent and phones, and \$3,500 for supplies. As much as a 5% of the travel funds could be reduced. On a good note, is \$32,000 that has been going to the Kognito pilot program each of the last 3 years will now be shifted to DEED with the idea of developing more e-Learning modules, which have been used more than Kognito in recent years.

Burkhart commented that if the Council wants to meet outside of the larger cities it will need to continue to meet at least once or twice a year by teleconference. Also, the Council has had the majority of the funds needed for the Summit donated from other agencies and those agencies will most likely have funding shortages and will not be able to sponsor the planned summit in January. She commented that she is concerned that the summit will not be able to happen in January.

Sen. MacKinnon asked for clarification regarding the FY15 increment for curriculum development and the possible reductions to the FY16 budget. Burkhart said the \$60,000 increment has been taken out and is not before the legislature this year.

### **Statewide Suicide Prevention Summit (2016)**

The biennial statewide summit has been planned for January 2016. Morrison reported that the 2014 summit raised \$35,000 and spent \$29,000, which did not include the Council's travel expenses. Most of those funds were for travel scholarships – the venue and other expenses were minimal.

Staff is concerned that, given the state of the anticipated FY16 budget, the most that could be reasonably expected in contributions is \$10,000. Options for planning could include asking Methamphetamine and Suicide Prevention Initiative grantees to contribute, requiring attendees to pay their own travel, or co-sponsoring the event with an agency that has funding. The Interior Suicide Prevention Coalition and Jim Wisland have been planning a clergy training and may have funds to host that, so the summit could be held under their umbrella.

Rep. Tarr asked how often the summit had occurred. Morrison commented the summit has occurred four times since 2010. Past summits have been funded with contributions from the Alaska Mental Health Board, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, ABADA, DBH, and DEED.

Humphrey commented that the regional teams are too big. Limiting the teams to 3-4 scholarships might allow for hosting the summit. Morrison said each team was offered up to \$5,000 in scholarships.

Fishel's funding for school district participation is still available, as it takes the place of an annual training in her grant program. It's an opportunity for these grantees to highlight their work, as well as to offer Mental Health First Aid training. Gallanos reported that DBH could contribute from the GLS no cost extension and the new federal grant if the division receives the grant.

Franks asked if MSPI grantees have been approached. Vice-Chair Crow recalled that the IHS funding for MSPI programs is ending. Morrison commented that the MSPI grantees have not been directly approached.

Burkhart suggested that the Council at least consider the public and political perception of holding a big event in lean financial times.

Vice-Chair Crow spoke about whether the Summit is the best way of communicating with regional teams, especially in very large regions. She asked how attendees were chosen to attend. Maybe a resource kit or mailing would be more effective. Morrison commented that regional teams applied to attend. He suggested a webinar series might be a substitute and could be informative virtual presentations that wouldn't need to spend money on travel.

Rep. Tarr commented that face-to-face meetings are most effective. Low cost venues and additional teleconference options could help. Seeking corporate sponsorship in partnership with a non-profit like the National Alliance on Mental Illness might help. Because suicide is such a high profile issue in Alaska it would likely not be viewed by legislators as a useless event. She offered to help find those resources and partnerships.

Franks stated that, even though funding is limited, the Council is continuing to push forward with its good work. The Anchorage Rotary Club project could lead to business support.

Beverly Rivard suggested mini-summits in the regions with webinars of the major presentations. This would save money and allow face-to-face conversations. Fishel suggested a go to meeting format for people who can't attend, like national conferences do.

Erickson commented that she attended the last meeting and found the networking very effective and would have liked to have done more of it. It was worthwhile meeting face-to-face and learning what others were doing in different parts of the state.

Jim Wisland of Fairbanks called in to continue his discussion on the summit from last meeting. HE commented that it is difficult to recruit pastors to a summit on this issue. Ideally it would be good to have a track based specifically for clergy from across the state and to receive training.

Burkhart explained that the technology and logistics of broadcasting the summit via the internet and teleconference will not work well. Many rural communities lack the broadband to effectively participate in web-based meetings. Teleconferencing large groups of people is also not effective. Some of the ideas such as the mini summits and resource kits could be options, but broadcasting it like a national conference is not likely to be effective.

Morrison suggested holding this for the summer meeting to discuss it after a budget has been passed to better understand the options.

Rep. Tarr suggested a sub-committee to research possibilities to present to the full Council at the next meeting. Vice-Chair Crow thought this was a good idea. She appointed Tarr, Fishel, and Lata to the committee. Gallanos will also participate with the intention to include the summit in the grant proposal being developed for SAMHSA funding. Morrison will staff the committee.

### **Helping Ourselves Prevent Emergencies**

Lisa Ness presented on behalf of Tiffany Mills, interim director. Ness is a speech pathologist who participates in the wellness coalition and volunteers with Helping Others Prevent Emergencies. Katrina Ellicott from the Office of Children Services joined her in the presentation. HOPE is the domestic violence awareness and prevention program on POW. HOPE is an active partner in the POW Health Network.

Ness led the Council members in an exercise to experience how differently people experience, remember, and know about things. Council members were asked to draw a penny from memory. The group then tried to identify the elements of the penny together (with limited success).

Jessica, Jim, and their daughter Sapphire (a family with whom Ness and Ellicott work) participated in the presentation. Jessica shared her personal story about experiencing abuse and neglect, growing up in foster care, experiencing domestic violence, and becoming addicted to alcohol. She shared how the emotional pain led her to attempt suicide. Her healing journey included meeting her husband and creating a healthier family.

Ness spoke about the importance of each and every personal story. The new advocacy program at HOPE is driven by personal experience, with the goal of everyone feeling safe at home. The beautiful thing about POW is that people can support and work together. She commented that POW communities has a lot of services for its population size and has a strong network of dedicated organizations and individuals. She appreciated the Council took the time to meet on POW.

*Break*

### **School-Based Suicide Prevention Program, DEED**

Sharon Fishel coordinates the school-based program managed by DEED and funded by the Council. Ten school districts receive \$25,000 each under the grant program. A written report will be provided to the Council at the next meeting that will summarize all the activities of the grantees this school year. Fishel provided an overview of the evidence-based prevention programs and strategies implemented by the grantee districts.

The North Slope Borough School District focused on student and teacher training in ASIST, peer-to-peer and older youth mentoring young children, and cultural events after school. Haines, Petersburg, and MatSu School Districts are using grant funds to support partnerships with community behavioral health providers to offer mental health services in schools. New Path Alternative School focused on social and emotional learning and skills. Avail Alternative School has used funds for a speaker series to address the web of causality and issues specific to homelessness (many of the students are homeless). Burchell Alternative School focused on staff training. They were able to identify and support 16 suicidal students. Fairbanks North Star School District trained students and staff in Gatekeeper-QPR and Signs of Suicide. Fairbanks and Avail students engaged in community service (awareness walk in Fairbanks, blankets and cookies for youth at Covenant House in Anchorage). Lower Kuskokwim School District provided historical trauma training and training for community advocates from villages, in partnership with the local health corporation. There have been 5 suicide attempts but no completed suicides in that district. Northwest Arctic Borough School District has augmented its youth leader program, and reports no adolescent suicides in the past 5 years. Bering Straits School District augments the youth leader program, extending it to Nome Public Schools and presenting to the Norton Sound Health Corporation board of directors. The Juneau School District is implementing Reconnecting Youth and Sources of Strength, training staff and students. They are focusing on transitioning youth to adulthood and restorative justice.

Fishel commented that this funding, with the DBH wellness grant, is helping to reduce the stigma associated with alternative schools. These students are often seen as “bad kids,” and that is changing. Other big change seen as a result of these efforts is schools’ reduced resistance to talking about and addressing suicide. Franks commented on the change in perspective in Barrow, and how the Arctic Slope Native Association have supported ASIST materials and training for teachers every year.

Gallanos reported that 15-19 year old deaths by suicide occur most often in summer. This phenomenon flattens out in higher age groups. Fishel commented that the Summer Term in Barrow is one way to address this issue, though it is limited by teacher contracts and grant funding. The Northwest Arctic Borough School District uses funding received from Teck, Inc. to support summer camps and activities.

Humphrey commented that there have been school-age individuals not enrolled in school who have died by suicide in the Northwest Arctic Borough. The Boys and Girls Clubs in that region serve these youth and respond when someone dies by suicide.

Gallanos commented that Selawik has received funding from Native Aspirations (now Native Connections). Humphrey asked to be connected with that grantee so that the Boys and Girls Club in Selawik can partner with them. Gallanos responded that there is a SAMHSA evaluator and Koffman and Associates providing technical assistance to Selawik.

Rep. Tarr asked what the legal responsibility is of schools for students. Vice-Chair Crow commented that schools do measure and pride themselves on getting through the school year without a school-age suicide. Though, they also realize that older youth are at-risk and there is a gap of services for the youth out of school.

Burkhart spoke about the need to look earlier than high school dropouts to intervene. Addressing educational neglect and young children missing school is also necessary. Vice-Chair Crow commented that not all schools are safe, respectful places for children and that contributes to absences and drop outs. Rep. Tarr noted that Anchorage schools are stepping up efforts to deal with truancy. Vice-Chair Crow commented that perfect attendance may not align with cultural and subsistence needs. Humphrey added that some schools' focus is exclusively on getting students to school and not engagement in learning.

Fishel continued with data from the eLearning suicide prevention course utilization. A written report was provided. Over 90% of school districts are using eLearning to meet state suicide prevention training mandates. Fishel described the process for developing the new postvention module, which was designed to provide continuing education credits for nurses, social workers, and professional counselors. Feedback on the eLearning modules is overwhelmingly positive, except that people think two hours (the statutory requirement) is too long.

### **Final Comments**

Vice-Chair Crow appreciated the chance to visit Prince of Wales and getting the chance to learn from people in the community. Humphrey echoed this sentiment.

Franks shared that visiting Prince of Wales was "an answered prayer." She is grateful to see the collaborations among organizations.

Fishel admires the unique nature of the communities on the island, and appreciated getting to see more than the school side of Prince of Wales. She appreciates the coalition's work and collaborations and encourages the school districts' participation in the coalition.

Cynthia Erickson commented on how much has changed since she first addressed the Council five years ago. So many things like the Iron Dog Campaign and Winter Bear play and the Tanana youths' presentations in Ruby and Bethel have been possible through networking and persistence. She is proud to be part of the Council. It was fun to visit Prince of Wales, which is rural but a different kind of rural than her community.

Rep. Tarr said her first Council meeting was enjoyable and informational. She took lots of notes. She was inspired by the Green Dot program signs all over Craig and Klawock. She thanked the Council for welcoming her.

Lata agreed that it was a great first meeting for him. He was glad to see the resiliency and array of services on the island, and though there are needs and gaps, it feels like Prince of Wales works well with the resources available to serve the people. That is refreshing. He is grateful that the Council is able to visit communities like Craig and Klawock. He asked Beverly Rivard (community member) what she would like the Council to take back to Juneau.

Rivard answered she would like to see more of the people actually responding to suicide crises receiving training and support. She was happy to be part of the meeting and thanked the Council for visiting Prince of Wales. She commented that the Council meeting created an opportunity to network with her colleagues on the island.

Gallanos was glad to get to learn from local people to inform state-level decisions about suicide prevention. He encouraged the Council to participate in the development of the SAMHSA grant he described in his presentation.

Humphrey **moved** to adjourn; Fishel **seconded** the motion. The meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.