

A Quarterly Publication
of Alaska Family
Services, Inc.

Navigator

Guiding you through our social service programs

A L A S K A



FAMILY
SERVICES

October 2010

AFS Locations

Main Offices

1825 S. Chugach St.
Palmer, AK 99645
746-4080
Toll Free 866-746-4080

Behavioral Health Treatment Center

5851 E. Mayflower Ct.
Wasilla, AK 99654
376-4000

Westside Center

899 Commercial Dr.
Wasilla, AK 99654
376-4080

Kenai Women, Infants & Children

601 Frontage Rd. Ste 102
Kenai, AK 99611
283-4172
Toll Free 800-283-4172

Family First Treasures

403 S. Alaska St.
Palmer, AK 99645
746-6260

24-Hour Crisis Line

746-4080 or toll free
866-746-4080

Visit us online
www.akafs.org



Voices for Recovery: Celebrating Success

More than 100 people turned out for Alaska Family Services' 4th Annual Voices for Recovery Rally. Held Sept. 18 in conjunction with the National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, this community event was intended to raise awareness about substance use disorders and honor those living a healthy life in recovery.

It featured food, fun and activities for people of all ages, as well as a lineup of people sharing recovery stories.

"We want people to know that there is life after recovery, that recovery is possible," said Darleen Walsh, a chemical dependency counselor at the AFS Behavioral Health Treatment Center and one of the rally organizers.

Shannon Benson is living proof of that. Shannon, a 38-year-old mother of two, is a recovering alcoholic. In 2007, after battling alcoholism for years, her family

sent her to a 21-day inpatient treatment program in the Lower 48.

"I came back with the idea that I was cured," Shannon said. "Three weeks later I relapsed. It was twice as bad."

It took a few more rounds of hospitalizations for detox before she realized she needed help. With her family and career teetering on the brink of ruin, she turned to AFS. A friend of hers had been through the agency's substance abuse program and it seemed to help him.

"I knew that there were people out there making it. I wanted what they had," she said.

She called the AFS Behavioral



Shannon Benson hands out door prize tickets at the AFS Voices for Recovery Rally.

Health Treatment Center in February 2008, from her hospital bed at Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. She was discharged the next day and headed straight to AFS, where, following a comprehensive assessment, she began intensive outpatient treatment.

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Fighting Domestic Violence and the Silence That Surrounds It

A steady stream of women and their children flow through the Alaska Family Services emergency shelter. The 32-bed facility, which provides refuge for battered women and their children and victims of sexual assault, is almost always full.

In fiscal year 2010 the shelter housed 96 women and 105 children, with an average length

of stay of about 38 days. And the AFS 24-hour crisis line received more than 1,000 calls.

Despite the high numbers, studies indicate there may be many more victims of domestic violence and sexual assault who suffer in silence. A recent survey by the UAA Justice Center found that 47% of women polled had experienced physical

violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives. And Alaska leads the nation in the number of women killed at the hands of an intimate partner.

The silence that often surrounds domestic violence is as sobering as those statistics. Judy Gette, director of the AFS

Continued on back

Thanks to all who donated a portion of their PFD to Alaska Family Services through the Pick. Click. Give. program. Your generosity will help fund much-needed supplies like food and bus vouchers for women and children in our Emergency Shelter. We hope you'll consider AFS again next year when making your Pick. Click. Give. selection.

Recovery Rally

Continued

This treatment involves eight hours or more of individual or group therapy five days a week. One day each week is devoted to family counseling, a factor Shannon and Darleen agree is essential to recovery.

"Sometimes family members think they're part of the problem," Darleen said. Including them in the treatment "helps them to see they're part of the solution."

With her family by her side and her AFS counselors helping her set goals and holding her accountable for reaching them, Shannon set out on her road to recovery. She joined Alcoholics Anonymous and began attending those meetings, in addition

to the time spent in the AFS program.

"The key to me wasn't just removing alcohol; I had to start working it, making changes, learning to share in a group setting, being comfortable with that," she said.

The expectation to show up five days a week helped her stick with it. "I knew where I was going to be every single day, whether I wanted to or not," Shannon said.

Little by little, her life returned to normal. She regained the trust of her family and began setting goals beyond recovery. She enrolled in classes at Mat-Su College, where she's studying human services.

This fall, she escorted her

son to college in Oregon, a milestone she knows she might have missed had she not battled her addiction.

Today it seems Shannon's recovery has come full circle. She now works with youth battling substance abuse, through the AFS Turn Around program. And she led the planning for this year's Recovery Rally.

It was a responsibility she says she felt honored to take on. She hopes her story and those of others shared at the rally left people with a sense of hope. Her recovery was a difficult struggle, but it was worth the effort, Shannon said. "This is how I've always wanted to live."

Thanks to Our Donors

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- Hoop 'n Hula Milk 'N Cookies
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- Matanuska Lodge
- AFS Board of Directors



Domestic Violence

Continued

Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Program, hopes some AFS activities conducted in October, in conjunction with Domestic Violence Awareness Month, will help end that silence.

"Part of awareness is to speak up," Judy said.

Clothesline displays set up at several Valley locations encourage people to do just that. The displays feature T-shirts decorated by domestic violence survivors or their loved ones to represent their particular experience.

The Clothesline Project, which takes place in communities across the country and around the world, serves many purposes. It is an educational tool for those who view it; it's a healing tool for those who make the shirts; and it allows those who suffer in silence to know that they are not alone.

An infant-size shirt included

in a display in the Mat-Su College Atrium reads, "I was born 2 months early because of domestic violence." It's a chilling reminder that there are often other victims caught in the wake of violence against women.



T-shirts from the Clothesline Project hang in the Mat-Su College Atrium.

stories and role playing intended to illustrate the barriers women face as they attempt to break free from their abusers. Another goal of "In Their Shoes" was to let battered women

know they don't have to go it alone. In addition to providing emergency shelter, AFS provides case managers, legal advocates and child advocates to help them navigate the judicial and social service systems.

"Our primary concern is for their safety," Judy said, "but we try to help with all their needs."