

Helping Sobriety Happen, a manual for everyone

by Anna M. Pickett

What else is there to do besides sitting at home and drinking? Well, there are plenty of things. The Alaska Native Health Board in conjunction with the Alaska Federation of Natives Sobriety Movement produced a culturally relevant resource manual for people to utilize in their efforts to achieve sobriety. In fact, the title of the manual is *Helping Sobriety Happen*.

"Any more, and in varying degrees, sobriety is used to describe a way of life; that is, abstinence coupled with personal development (spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically)," writes Greg Nothstine, coordinator of the AFN Sobriety Movement in the forward of the manual.

The manual offers informative, easy-to-read, definitions of sobriety, prevention and explanations of various reasons why people use drugs and alcohol. It gives examples of how to implement strategies with individuals, peer groups, parents, schools, teachers and communities in their efforts to prevent alcohol and drug abuse.

Some of the activity ideas offered to help communities with planning are: Youth and Elder gatherings, role model poster contest, Spirit camp, Regional Youth Leadership Institute, Parent training workshops, Cross-cultural sensitivity workshop for teachers, Village forum to discuss

health issues, speaker night (using regional resource people), Village planning retreat, Youth fundraising walk or runathon, a community newsletter, men and women's conferences, development of prevention kits, a prevention calendar, an annual youth day, and more.

The manual also offers ideas for alternative activities to drinking and drugging. These include traditional dancing, doing beadwork, subsistence activities, taking a steam/sweat bath, berry picking, building sled, skin sewing, community service, training classes, visiting friends, reading, performing traditional games, having a potlatch/potluck, watching or making videos, carving, snow machine racing, writing, doing the blanket toss, going to fish camp, learning a musical instrument, or travel to a nearby community.

The manual also tells of success stories of various people that visit groups and have had a positive response from those they talked to. Take one of Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association's stories for example. There's a story of a successful retreat held by the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association.

"They told them a little about their recovery and what it's like to be sober and how their lives have changed and everything. And some of the kids wrote that that was the highlight of the re-

treat for them," said Thea Smelcer, health educator for the A/PIA.

How about when the Mekoryuk residents celebrated a sober New Year's, even in a traditional manner with games and fun at the school. Or that they had outdoor games on the Fourth of July instead of drinking their holidays away.

The manual suggests ceremony as an important weapon in the fight for sobriety, defining ceremony as "a method of honoring and recognizing the connections to all life through rituals and dancing. The purpose of a ceremony is integration." The concept of ceremony is correlated to talking circles, where one is all and all is one with the earth and oneself. That could be the community, individual or group - bringing the word unity to the fore.

Best of all, the resource manual has a hands-on section explaining in detail how to:

**brainstorm
conduct workshops
organize youth groups
get community involved
publicize events
utilize meeting tips
use a talking circle
plan a spirit camp
start an AA group**

It even explains the local regulatory options available to communities. These include: Stopping the sale of alcohol, having a community liquor store only, stopping sales and importation, package liquor store only, or prohibition of possession. The manual gives a good, clear explanation of what these options are and also details the election rules needed to implement an option.

These are a just a few of the very informative topics in *Helping Sobriety Happen*. If you are a charter member of the AFN Sobriety Movement, you may have already gotten your copy. If not, you can get your copy by writing to the Alaska Council on the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse at 3333 Denali Street, Suite 201, Anchorage, AK 99503, or by calling toll free in Alaska (800) 478-7738.

We encourage you to talk to your community leaders to obtain this valuable resource manual and implement some of the ideas contained in it. The future could be brighter for you and future generations.

