

'Before it gets too bad, take a break, not a drink!'

by Anna Pickett
Tundra Times staff

Alaska ranks 4th in the nation for reported child abuse! Sexual abuse of minors is six times that of the national average. The Division of Family and Youth Services in Anchorage alone gets 2,000 calls per month regarding child abuse. Child abuse and neglect has increased 85% since 1989. About 86% percent of the reported child abuse and neglect cases in the Anchorage area are related to alcohol abuse.

Here's one possible explanation for these statistics.

One of the many stresses that lead single parents to drinking is the care they have to give their children, provide an income, and have a life of their own. When the stress becomes unbearable, drinking comes as an easy out and the children pay for it through physical and mental abuse.

Where can parents turn for help? There's one place in Anchorage, like others across the state, that take children on an emergency basis. This place, the Intermission Crisis Nursery, provides a safe and positive solution for many parents experiencing trauma.

Marilyn Moreno, executive director of this facility, says that about thirty-two percent of the children she sees at the center are Alaska Native. The

nursery sees about 800 children per year and of that, about 33-50% are "state beds", or children that have been taken from homes by the Division of Family and Youth Services.

"We like to see our role as family support," says Moreno. "We're the ones you call when you need support, when you are sick or reached a point where you can't take care of your child, then you call on us."

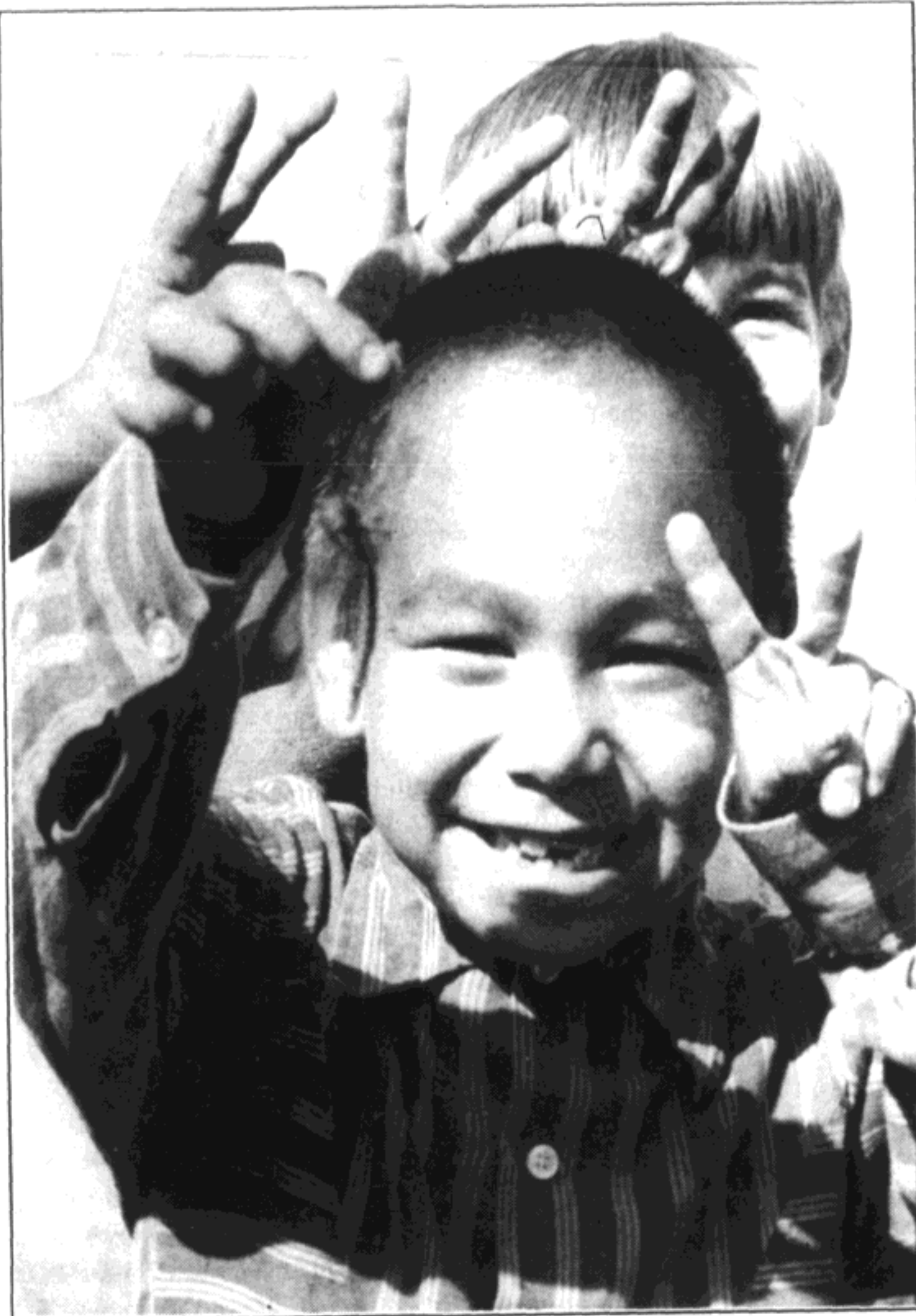
One of the ethical problems the nursery sees is that if they know the parent that is dropping off a child has a drinking problem, 'are we enabling the parents to drink by taking the child on a Friday night, or are they going to drink whether we take the child or not.'

"This is a continual battle that we have," says Moreno. "But I would rather err on the side of taking the child. At least we know what the condition of the child is during that period. We know that 70-80% of the parents we see have some sort of substance abuse."

Moreno says one of the causes of stress in the family that would make the parent want to go back to drinking or substance abuse is a scenario like this:

"Suppose you have a mother of three who has drunk most of the time during these childrens' existence. One of these children becomes the parent

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Even Sonny Adams and his friends know the 'peace' sign.

Photo by Mike Dalton/Tundra Times collection

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model. If the mother goes through treatment and becomes sober, you have these three children who know only to interact with their mother as a drunk. They're a real angry because their mother wasn't there to protect them or fill their needs. You have one child who has grown up far beyond their years because they've taken responsibility for raising the family. Then you have the mother coming back sober who feels guilty and who is a totally new person. That's when you have a real clash and a real difficult time trying to figure out each others new role."

Some of the things that need to be considered in determining these new roles and steps needed to implement these new roles can be very traumatic for the entire family.

"In terms of needing a new family

system," says Julie Alfred-Troiano, director of development for the Anchorage Center for Families, "when people come out of recovery, there was chaos before. When they come out of recovery, they have to come up with all these new systems that weren't there before, like positive discipline, and just how the household is going to be run. Simple things that were not taught to the children before are things like 'when is bedtime,' or getting up and getting ready for school."

Moreno says that kind of lifestyle has a real impact on the child's ability to do well in school or to organize. The disruption or lack of attention a child receives will affect the rest of that child's life. A routine is important.

The Intermission Crisis Nursery's mission is to prevent child abuse and neglect and to support families. They realize that it is difficult to raise chil-

dren and that children do not come with a set of instructions. They also realize that some people have better skills than others when it comes to dealing with children.

Some parents do not have many resources available to them. The nursery is a resource for parents.

The Intermission Crisis Nursery is the only residential program available in the state. Unlike day care centers, the nursery is able to take children over night for up to 3 days. A state-assigned child may stay for up to one week. The nursery is also capable of taking in newborn children. All intakes are based on a crisis need, instead of a regularly scheduled basis. Fees are based on a sliding scale, but they will not turn away a child based on the fact the parents don't have any money.

Counseling services are available to

parents regarding any problems the parents may be faced with. There are therapeutic providers who will do assessments of the child's needs. If a child is lacking in their development, or requires special attention, that specialized help is there. If the child is sick, referrals are made to parents so they will know what to do.

"If we feel that a 3 year old or younger has a real specific (learning) delay, we will refer that parent to an infant learning program," says Moreno.

The main purpose of the facility is the safety of children.

"You have to take care of yourself," says Troiano, "before you can take care of your children."

Singing the Sober Song says, "Before it gets too bad, take a break, not a drink!"