

Mother Allstars gives friendship, skills

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For many mothers who are new to Anchorage and have few friends, Mother Allstars gives hope and offers friendship along with the chance to learn new skills and crafts.

Mother Allstars is a Cook Inlet Native Association (CINA)-sponsored activity and has been in existence since 1976, but had been at a different location with a different name. Meetings are now held at the CINA Bingo Hall, 3812 Arctic Boulevard, on Fridays each week at 11:30 in the morning.

In a large city, there are almost no places you can go and socialize if you take your children along. But at this particular mothershare, children are especially welcome; they learn right alongside "mom."

During a few Fridays throughout the year, a community

college intern offered her services to CINA for college credit, which she does by telling stories to the small ones while the mothers get their lessons on macrame, sewing, knitting, crocheting, etc.

Lots of toys, playpens and childrens books are provided by the program.

The group, mostly young girls, in their twenties, whose children are usually under the age of four, are offered lunches of soup and sandwich twice a month. The lunch is provided by the program. Potlucks are on one Friday each month and the staff brings the food on these occasions.

The staff includes director Doug Peterson, Grace Lucier, Lillian Lapp, Betty Katchatag and Kathy Manook, who are all outreach workers and family aides, and Alma McCormick, who is a volunteer.

In the event a woman needs transportation to the Bingo Hall for the meetings, arrangements will be made for her to be picked up at home.

Any interested parents and their children are welcome to attend any and all meetings. "We do not discriminate against anyone in this project."

Sometimes the group goes on outings to visit the Alaska Zoo or picnics at the Valley of the Moon park; and on one occasion they traveled to the Arctic Valley Slopes to explore the terrain and learn about plant life including a lecture on various Alaskan berries.

Grace Lucier, outreach worker, said that "at one time we offered a parent/child program focusing on the interaction between mother and child to stimulate infant activity." However, decreasing funding supplies have forced us to stop these projects.

"Materials and supplies to enhance parent and child interaction were provided to the parents, when the Native Hospital called to tell us that a child was not bonding with the parent." According to Lucier, the program was quite successful and those kids under that program did very well in school.

The intellectual stimulation program ended about two years ago, but not before they were able to help a 15-month old baby who was considered retarded. He couldn't hold toys and was too weak, but after stimulation and Kathy Manook and Alma McCormick's tireless efforts at four to five times a week, they had the baby crawling and reaching for things. His motor coordination improved and at that point the mother was taught how to work with her child.

Mothers say this is a good

chance for their kids to play with other kids. As for Nadine O'Brien and her son Aaron, who is a year old, it is "an opportunity to get out of the house and meet others where you can do some sewing, and have lunch while you're at it."

Grace Lucier says that fathers are welcome, too, anytime, whether they just want to attend at lunchtime or be there the whole time. There are also Bingo and card games to be played by whoever is interested.

She explained that a visit by aides and workers to the participants' home are also encouraged so that she may learn to do crafts in her own atmosphere. She has been helping the writer make a velveteen Alaskan parka at home. "We can help or teach a person anything they want to learn wherever they want to learn," she said.