

# FNA — ALCOHOLISM PROGRAM

## Native Organization Asks to Take Over Alcoholism Facilities

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Staff Writer

The Fairbanks Native Association last week presented a proposal to the Fairbanks City Council to assume all of the present alcoholism programs now run by the city. These included a detoxification unit, a rehabilitation program, and a half-way house for clients.

The city would contribute \$70,700 with the remainder of the \$761,741 budget coming from state and federal funds. FNA would sub-contract the detoxification portion to Care-age North, a local nursing home with an adequate medical staff and available beds.

Currently pending before the National Institute on Alcohol and Abuse is a FNA proposal for federal funds to operate a sleep-off facility and activities lodge and to provide outreach counselors for native alcoholics.

The NIAAA proposal is the result of a year's work by FNA's alcoholism committee, Carol Drake, chairman. Located in the downtown area of Fairbanks, the Fairbanks Native Community Center is often the place where native alcoholics come for help.

The grant proposal grew out of the Center's deep concern on the subject of alcoholism within the native community. Taking a grassroots approach, the committee researched the problem consulting experts in the field, but working out ideas they felt would work best with native people, a people to people approach.

Serving on FNA's alcoholism committee were Ms. Drake, Gabriel Grafton, Agnes Moore, Virginia Dows, Charlie Biederman and Claude Demientieff.

The office of the present Social Services Director, Glen

(Continued on page 6)

# FNA AND ALCOHOLISM . . .

(Continued from page 1)

Wilcox, confirmed that of 45 patients treated at the city's three facilities, 77 per cent are native. In the outpatient portion of the program, 66 per cent of the 87 persons seen within a 60 day period were native.

FNA stressed that it was not working on a program "for natives only".

"We're not going to design a program to fit the individual into," said FNA president Tom Drake. "We're going to treat the individual. That means there will have to be a variety of programs."

The problem may not be one of native or non-native but of those who are educated and those who need education.

"FNA presently operates an Adult Basic Education Program at Gillam Way," added Drake. "We could very easily funnel into it those people who need job-training or skills as part of their rehabilitation."

"You have a lot of native alcoholics with a low education factor," said one committee member.

"This does not mean they have a low intelligence, although they may have been made to feel this by the white community. When they come into a program that is run by the same whites, by non-natives, they feel threatened, they don't feel comfortable."

"That was the success of 1030," said Carol Drake. 1030 was a live-in facility for native alcoholics. "All of the people on the staff are native - the counselors like Al Grant, even the desk aides. They felt it was a home. They felt comfortable, accepted. It worked on the buddy system."

But on Monday, the people at 1030 were being moved. The building that was "home" was no longer available. However, many were reluctant to move to the Rehab Center where they felt the routine was too rigid, too formal.

"Some are already back on the street," said a staffer.

As boxes stood by the door ready for the move, several of the clients were sitting in the lounge, playing cards, watching the street. "We don't know what it's going to be like over there," one of them said. "But let's give it a try."

The strongest indictment against the present programs came from alcoholism expert Bob Scott, program director for a treatment and rehabilitation center in Orange, California, and an authority in the field.

Scott toured Alaska this month conducting a university of Alaska workshop course for community leaders on alcohol related problems.

He was appalled by "the tragic situation" and urged Washington officials and the Alaska delegation to act immediately to "help preserve the Alaska Native and his culture."

Commenting specifically on Fairbanks, Scott said: "Plenty of alcohol money in town, but being controlled and directed by non-native people."

"The program is excellent but the present native halfway house (1030) is being phased out and this is tragic since natives say they do not feel comfortable going to the rather sophisticated and intellectual rehabilitation program."

"I believe the natives in Fairbanks are going to raise hell," concluded Scott, "and I encouraged them to do so. The native alcoholic will thrive much better in a place where he feels comfortable, or at least acceptable."

The natives in Fairbanks are not raising hell, but they are raising the serious issue of long-range direction for the city's alcoholism programs.

If 77 per cent of the clients now in these programs are native, it would seem a good starting point to begin to listen to the native voice on a solution to the problem.