

*Continued from last week*

## Non-profits find state contracts elusive

by **Jim Benedetto**

Tundra Times Editor

*This is the second in a two-part story on the non-profits' efforts to improve services to the people they serve, and the state Department of Health and Social Service's campaign to frustrate them.* □

**The Division of Family and Youth Services** is one of the most important providers within the Department of

---

*'DHSS orchestrated a campaign to generate public opposition to TCC's proposal...'*

---

Health and Social Services. Dealing with matters such as adoption and child custody, it has long been an agency which Native non-profits and

tribal entities would like to have more input into. It is also the most important division in terms of its potential effect on Native families, and thus one that the state has a vested interest in maintaining exclusive control over.

Tanana Chiefs Conference is dropping the initiative to contract for the provision of the social services component of Family and Youth Services due to "lack of local support," says Spud Williams, president of TCC.

Williams told the *Tundra Times* that a coordinated effort by the nonprofits to provide these services would result in great improvement in services due to consolidation of services and administrative overhead.

In addition, Native people would benefit from having a Native entity in the decision making role, since many of the judgements which need to be made are of a culturally sensitive nature. Self determination is most

(Continued on Page Ten)



# Non-profits

(Continued from Page One)

crucial when it comes to domestic matters.

But the "lack of support" cited by Williams may not truly reflect the community's will on the matter. A source who did not wish to be identified charged that local and regional employees of the Division of Family and Youth Services (DFYS) within the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) orchestrated a campaign to generate public opposition to TCC's proposal.

*"Not one shred of comment was heard from any of the villages around Kodiak..."*

The *Tundra Times* has obtained a letter, written on State of Alaska stationery, and signed by DFYS employee Barbara Smith, to the Village Council of McGrath. Although the letter itself is innocuous enough, it is accompanied by a newspaper clipping of an article which appeared in the *Delta Paper*, entitled "Tanana Chiefs Conference proposal could result in reduction of social services here".

The one-sided article makes little effort to be objective: "Concern has been voiced over the lack of public input into the Tanana Chiefs proposal," the article says, "at this point virtually no public exposure or discussion has occurred. People in the community may wish to see this issue explored in public hearings..."

"Further, people may want to consider if it is wise to defer existing public funds from a state organization which has decades of experience in the human service field..."

The article concludes by urging citizens who wish to express their feelings to send a letter at their earliest opportunity to Mike Price, Director of Division of Family and Youth Services. A public opinion form was included with the letter and article.

These "information packets" were distributed around the McGrath area shortly before public hearings were held on the topic. They also bear a striking resemblance to similar packets distributed in the Delta, Tok and Ft. Yukon areas before public hearings there.

When asked about charges levelled in the *Delta Paper* article, an area source replied, "That's preposterous."

"What TCC was proposing was an increase, not a reduction. All they were attempting to do was to work in full conjunction with DFYS."

DHSS Commissioner John Pugh told the *Tundra Times* that he has no control over the efforts of state employees to protect their positions. Pugh blamed the lobbying activity against TCC's proposal on state employee unions, and said that state employees "have every right, both as employees, and as members of the Native corporations, to state their opinion."

But Native health care providers are beginning to ask if the right of a state employee to express an opinion extends to doing it on state time and with the state's letterhead.

At the public hearings, which were held in Galena, Delta, Ft. Yukon and Tok, TCC received strong support from the United Crow Band in Tok,

and from people at the Delta hearings. But there was also a large contingent of non-Native union personnel and people local DFYS employees had asked to attend. Several questionable invitations to speak in private after the hearings were reportedly issued by DHSS Assistant Commissioner Connie Syte.

Few found it surprising that DHSS used the "lack of public support" to deny TCC's contract proposal.

Beyond the question of who handles any specific contract, the larger policy issue seems to be, to what extent should employees of the State of Alaska affect the policy decisions of their agency heads? Exactly what types of activities are permissible when dealing with potential contractors for state services?

Another case of alleged employee interference by a DHSS employee, and the most recent, is ongoing in the city of Kodiak.

Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA), like the other non-profits mentioned, considered the desirability of contracting for certain programs with DHSS in order to expand services and eliminate duplication of overhead and services.

Acting upon the invitation of Pugh, KANA president Gordon Pullar had a resolution drafted and circulated to the village councils on Kodiak Island. The resolution provided KANA with the initiative it needed to study the feasibility of taking over the contract for Public Health Nursing (PHN).

The program is designed to provide a basic level of services to the villages

ted to DHSS by KANA.

One might expect that health care professionals would look favorably upon proposals to expand service to those they serve. But allegations quickly surfaced that Itinerant Public Health Nurse Rae Jean Blaschka instigated a petition in Larsen Bay, seeking signatures of villagers opposed to KANA's contract proposal.

KANA began to receive calls from villages after Blaschka made her rounds. One caller said villagers had been told in Ouzinkie that KANA would not provide care for whites living in the villages. The pattern seemingly exhibited by state employees in previous cases repeated itself, with local DHSS employees first allegedly spreading misinformation, then exploiting the emotional reaction generated by it.

Because Kodiak Island is incorporated into a borough, the borough authorities must first approve any change in the contract for itinerant health care. Nurse Blaschka provided the borough assembly with a 17-page paper entitled "Itinerant Public Health Nursing Service on Kodiak Island Borough," during a work session held in January.

Although its purpose was ostensibly to provide the borough assembly with an overview of the role of the Public Health Nurse's function as defined by DHSS policy, the emphasis of the presentation quickly shifted to a comparison of village and city population growth, and justification for not expanding services beyond their present level.

*"Does the right of a state employee to express an opinion extend to doing it on the state's time, and on the State of Alaska's letterhead?"*

in the areas of immunization and communicable disease prevention.

Currently, there are three PHN positions budgeted for Kodiak Island, one of them presently vacant. There are also Health Aide positions present in the villages, who can provide many of the same basic services. The Health Aide positions are funded by the Indian Health Service, which has stringent requirements, as does the state, concerning what services can be provided through their funding.

Because of this duplication of services, and the fact that the services presently provided by the PHN are not particularly medically demanding (the PHN does not operate under the supervision of an M.D.), the Public Health Nurse is scheduled for one visit to each of the six villages around Kodiak every three months.

KANA proposed to increase not only the frequency of visits to the villages (from four a year to twice a month), but also the type of services available. In addition, KANA has several MD's on staff, and would have their Itinerant Nurses operate under their supervision.

"The most severe threat to the health of our villagers has clearly shifted, away from infectious diseases, which are largely under control, and towards problems that are behaviorally caused. These include the health risks of smoking, poor nutrition, insufficient exercise, drinking, drug use, incorrect use of all-terrain vehicles, and other well-established behavioral causes of increased morbidity and mortality among the Natives," says a portion of the concept paper submit-

"It is obvious, KANA would cost more while decreasing service to 12,000 borough residents with a hope of possibly increasing service to 1100 residents. Therefore, in these times of decreasing state revenues it is most cost effective and most service oriented to continue the present DHSS delivery system," concludes Blaschka's paper.

Blaschka's concern over "decreasing service to 12,000 borough residents" is explained on page four of her paper. "There are times when village travel is not possible and/or advisable (e.g., poor weather, Russian Holidays, prior to fishing openings, and traditional holidays). As a consequence, the IPHN has become increasingly involved in providing services at the Health Center to the road system population."

On the same page of the paper, Blaschka admits that "Health care to the villagers is the first priority of the Itinerant PHN..."

At the same meeting, Dan Maciak, who identified himself as the local head of the Division of Family and Youth Services, said that "contrary to the resolutions that were passed, the villagers don't want the system changed."

Pullar was invited to the work session to answer questions; a public hearing was scheduled at a later date (February 6), when comments could be heard from the people who would be affected by the change. At the work session, Pullar says he was surprised to find that the room was filled with people opposed to KANA's proposal, none of whom were Native, and only

one of whom was from the villages (there was one white school teacher from Larsen Bay). KANA had not attempted to notify anyone to appear at the work session, since the February 6 public hearing was scheduled expressly for that purpose.

Imagine Pullar's surprise several weeks later, while preparing for the scheduled public hearing, in finding that the Kodiak Island Borough Assembly had decided to act at a non-public meeting on January 9. Not only did the assembly decide to oppose the contract, they went one further step and instructed the Mayor of Kodiak to draft a "resolution of non-support."

Not one shred of comment was heard from any of the villages around Kodiak who are intended to be the primary beneficiaries of the PHN program.

"We're kind of disillusioned," says Pullar, "we entered the process in good faith, and we believed that the state would be operating in good faith, too."

"The PHN contract is a small contract relative to a lot of other ones, but it would really fit in well with our delivery system. We are really confident that we could provide more services for less money..."

Pugh denies that Blaschka had circulated a petition or given any false information, though he admits that he is a "third person" and cannot know for sure what any employee has done. Such activities, he says, would certainly be inappropriate for state employees.

"As far as the public health situation, our Public Health Nurse, in checking on that, does not give the same story...I think you do need to talk to other people directly, too, other than just the (non-profit) corporations," said Pugh.

Blaschka, however, refused to speak with the *Tundra Times*.

Pugh points out that there are three criteria for any further contracting Native non-profits can do with his department. Due to a grievance and lawsuit brought against the state by the unions, where there are jobs filled by state employees, the state cannot contract out those services without doing a cost study to demonstrate that the non-profit can do the job at a savings to the state. Secondly, the state cannot do any "sole-source" contracting with the Native non-profits, and third, where there is a local government, DHSS must have their support.

"There is a borough on Kodiak," says Pugh, "and in areas where there are organized boroughs, a contract out would require support from the borough that this is the direction the

*"To what extent should state employees be allowed to influence policy?"*

borough should be taking. The borough is a legitimate local power. So, those three caveats can be important for contracting out in the future."

Whether those caveats are really cautions, or they turn out to be obstructions to improved health care, some who provide that care have begun to question Commissioner Pugh's sincerity in calling for contract proposals from Native non-profits, as well as his department's commitment to providing the maximum level and quality of necessary services to the Native people of Alaska.

In the near future, the *Tundra Times* will examine those non-profits that provide all of the Health and Social Services to their regions. □