

HEALTH CORP. SETS MODEL

Bristol Bay Group Bent On Improving Health To 29 S.W. Villages

By MARGIE BAUMAN

DILLINGHAM Bristol Bay Area Health Corp., bent on improving health care to 29 Southwest Alaska villages, has signed a \$45,000 contract to tackle the matter from its village roots.

Agreement was reached Saturday between the newly-formed board of directors of the area health corporation and Carl Jack of the Health Affairs office of the Alaska Federation of Natives Inc., who flew in from Anchorage with the contract.

"It went very well," Jack said later. "They're getting off on the right foot. Their primary job right now is to help the villages and the fact that they are establishing that link with the villages right from the start is very important."

The new contract, plus additional government funding totaling \$39,000 will allow the BBAHC to establish active five-member health councils in each of the 29 villages to clearly define health problems.

Each council will have one representative on the BBAHC and that board is expected to

have a great deal of impact on delivery of services and distribution of funds of the Kanakak service unit of the Indian Health Service, which serves this area.

"Instead of six people sitting on an advisory board guessing



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what the health needs of a village area, we'll have 29 people and no guessing," said Donald Nielsen, program director for the health corporation.

Nielsen, 28, of South Naknek, formerly program director for the Bristol Bay Area Development Corp., feels the Indian Health Service has made some improvements in health care for the area, but that many more are needed. "Poor transportation and poor communications have caused people to die out here," Nielsen said.

"Health services should be better. They should take time to meet the needs of the people. They come through (the villages) like we are a bunch of cattle," he said.

Nielsen, like BBAHC President Nick "Jake" Gregory, of Egigik, is especially critical of dental services. Dentists hired by the IHS "rush through like there's a fire. Some teeth are salvagable, but they just yank them out," Nielsen said.

"The dental care is very poor ... and health services are inadequate," said Gregory, who helped organize the health board and also serves as president of the Rural Alaska Community

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Action Program (RurAL CAP) at Dillingham.

Among other things, the health board wants improved training of village health aides, who for little over \$500 per month see about 20 patients a week and are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What's happening at Dillingham is expected to serve as a model for other health corporations around the state, including some still to be fully developed. Through federal community health service grants, the AFN Inc. will fund this year health corporations based at Bethel, Nome, Fairbanks, Kotzebue and Kodiak.

To keep its program running smoothly, the BBAHC has three full-time employees. Working with Nielsen are Archie Gottschalk, program planner, and Lou Ann Backford, secretary. Elected officers for the corporation are Gregory, president, Robert Clark, Clarks Point, first vice president; Marlene Johnson, South Naknek, second vice president; Joe Clark, Clarks Point, secretary-treasurer, and Ron Aaberg, Pedro Bay, member-at-large.

The board has voted to keep Robert Clark, of Clarks Point as its representative to the statewide Alaska Native Health Board, with Marlene Johnson, of South Naknek, as alternate.

Clark, who had been filling the post temporarily, was elected to remain there after a report on the current activities of the ANHB, in which he advised the statewide board needed careful watching with a strong representative from Bristol Bay.

In addition, the board is gathering information from others it feels can help improve the social well-being of area residents, including Harie Simpson, president of the Alaska chapter of the National Welfare Rights Organization.

Simpson, herself a mother of five and former welfare recipient, addressed the BBAHC Saturday, strongly criticizing present administration of public assistance programs in Alaska and advising the board on how to fight them.

"Food stamps and welfare checks are supposed to be given to you within 30 days after you apply, but when you have to mail in the forms, it may take six to eight weeks," she said.

"When those applications come in, they are stacked in boxes and once a week, they go through them. If they don't get finished, they go back in the box for another week," she snapped.

"Federal funds can be pulled out of the state if they don't provide uniform services to all the people," she said.

Simpson said there were a

number of impositions that state assistance workers must try to bring upon those requesting public assistance were downright illegal. In Anchorage, several Native women applying for assistance were advised that they couldn't get it unless they started taking birth control pills.

"They might advise you on birth control pills, but they cannot make it a condition," she said.

"Alaska's food stamp program is the worst run in the nation," she said, passing out booklets to advise board members about the program.

Citing numerous delays which she said were caused by inefficient administration, Simpson said that persons who did not receive their food stamps on time were eligible to receive them retroactively, although social workers might deny this.

Simpson had in hand as she talked a list of complaints brought by 10 of those workers at the Sept. 17 advisory hearing in Anchorage.

The signers, citing what they felt were a number of unreasonable state policies, included Norma Tillett, Gayle Trivette, Vincent Benevente, Irene Helbert, Pat Collar, Marilyn Elaine Lester, Vicki Simmons, Joan Lawton, Muriel Fish and Susan Bashaw.

Two of the complaints were pointedly critical of Native people.

"Recipients living in villages with no rent costs and hunt and fish for food, receive same grant as counterpart in city with high cost of living."

"Residents of oil-rich Tyonek (proceeds of oil belong to all residents and Tyonek is suppose to take care of its own), receive welfare. Eligibility exists because no one person has ownership. In some cases, houses are sold and thousands of dollars put in trust for children who are receiving welfare."

The social workers also charged that welfare recipients were using their payments to purchase automobiles, color televisions and seal skin parkas.

Simpson, in turn, was equally critical of the workers who made the complaints and appeared especially skeptical of charges that public assistance monies were going for autos and colored television sets.

She said if such programs did not improve the regional health corporation should consider asking the government to contract out administration of the program to regional organizations like BBAHC so that the program would be administered properly.