

Editorial



Guest Editorial

Rural Natives receive assistance ASRAA assists rural Natives

by Kay White, Executive Director

Association for Stranded Rural Alaskans in Anchorage

Anna had accompanied her 78-year-old mother on a medivac flight to Anchorage after the older woman fell and broke her hip. Anna didn't have time to think about the money she needed for a place to stay or how she'd get back to the village. Although she had no money saved, her mother needed her, and that was the important thing.

George has cancer and must fly to Anchorage for out-patient treatment. He needs a special diet and is too ill to stay in a shelter.

These and other stories are heard every day by the social worker at the Association for Stranded Rural Alaskans in Anchorage. ASRAA helped Anna and George with airfare and shelter costs at Providence House.

Since opening in 1981, more than 12,000 other rural Alaskans have received assistance. Yet misconceptions exist about the people ASRAA helps and under what circumstances. Perhaps the agency's lack of definition in the community is partly because it is viewed by some as not benefitting the people of Anchorage. Others see rural residents who become stranded in Anchorage as a rural issue.

The people who receive assistance are not given one-way tickets home after the party money runs out. They are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, without the financial resources to cope in an emergency. Most of ASRAA's clients are referred by Anchorage hospitals and other social service agencies.

In addition to being the only agency which provides airfare, shelter costs and bus tokens to rural Alaskans who become stranded, ASRAA's staff conducts crime prevention and urban awareness workshops to rural students and families in transition.

Recent affiliation with the Alaska Native Foundation to provide cross-cultural sensitivity training to agencies and employers allows consolidation of support staff and combines the expertise of both agencies.

As the economy slid in 1985, so did the funding ASRAA received. Staff positions were cut in half and salaries reduced.

In 1989 ASRAA assisted 12,960 clients, and in order to maintain the level of services, new funding sources are being explored.

Still, it is only with legislative and community support that ASRAA can continue its mission of providing direct service and community education in order to better serve the quality of life and dignity of rural and urban Alaskans.