

Added Alcoholism War Edges Front to Bethel

In an expanded effort to fight alcoholism in Alaska's rural communities, the Community Service Corps of Rural Alaska Community Action Program has set up an alcoholic information program in Bethel, the second such program established within two months by RurALCAP.

Mrs. Elizabeth McCallum, a social worker with the Service Corps, has been assigned the task of establishing these programs, and last month set up one in Nome.

She believes alcoholism can be the basis for many family and community problems, and getting the people themselves to recognize the problem and consider ways to combat it is half the battle.

Working with an Alcoholics Anonymous member, Mrs. McCallum visited Bethel early in November and set up alcoholic information booths at both the Bethel Hospital and the RurALCAP Regional Action Center there.

Philip Guy, center director, and Willie Nicholi, area community developer for the Bethel area, will be the ones to maintain continuity of the programs.

An AA member who lives in Bethel and has already successfully completed a rehabilitation program assisted Mrs. McCallum in setting up a schedule of two meetings a week in Bethel. The meetings will be open to the public.

One weekly meeting will be held within the jail. Judge Nora Guinn in Bethel said she would consider sentencing those arrested for alcoholism to meetings of AA now that a group has been established in Bethel.

Mrs. McCallum said the judge

indicated about 99 per cent of those people jailed in Bethel were there because of alcoholism, and she estimated the number of people in Bethel jailed due to alcoholism to be approximately 600 people a year.

Most of those people Mrs. McCallum talked with, including officials of the Public Health Service Hospital there, the Catholic priest, and Judge Guinn, volunteered their support of the project.

During the visit to Bethel, Mrs. McCallum and her AA associate attended meetings of the village teenagers and of the families selected to occupy the first 10 homes in the Bethel low-income prefabricated housing project.

They discussed the consequences of excessive drinking, how teenagers could live with alcoholic parents, and the dangers of excessive drinking among homeowners.

Bethel medical authorities tended to believe much of Bethel's—and other rural communities in the state—alcoholic problem was complicated by the difficult transition Natives are now going through to adjust themselves to a new way of life.

The alcoholic information program at Bethel is the fourth RurALCAP has helped to establish. Others are located in Nome, the Juneau Regional Center and the Welcome Center in Anchorage.

Hugh Nicholls, deputy director in charge of the Community Service Corps, said his office plans to eventually establish similar information programs at the action centers in Kotzebue, Ft. Yukon and Kodiak.