

## **Advancing Our Community Coalition**

June 14, 2007; Centennial Hall

### **Sitka Health Summit**

The Summit was hosted by both hospitals plus other organizations, and it brought together diverse audience. At the close of the summit, the community set 4 action priorities – to make Sitka pedestrian/bicycle friendly; work with insurance companies to start wellness programs; work on school nutrition; and provide a community health & fitness center. AOC is an acting umbrella to move forward on some of these items, particularly becoming Bicycle Friendly. Matthew, through the City of Sitka, applied for a SEARHC STEPS grant and received just under \$10,000 to work on this project. The grant will bring workshops for engineering, provide a website to help answer application questions, and facilitate people who make commitments to move forward.

### **Foster Care – YAS progress, presented by Jon Wunrow and David Voluck**

AOY did a survey/assessment of service gaps a couple of years ago, and through that one particular unmet need was identified that YAS is interested in – there are not enough foster homes, transitional living programs for teens, therapeutic foster care, crisis centers, crisis respite, etc.

A year ago, YAS submitted an initial concept proposal to the Bring the Kids Home project. They worked with Matthew Turner and Felix AuYeung to envision a campus of facilities to meet those unmet needs. But they soon realized after talking with State that wasn't the way to go; roadblocks, demanding, unsupportive. They backed out of that approach, and starting asking if agency can do stuff different way. They just submitted federal proposal for transitional living – they will find out in September. They proposed a family-based model, rather than a facility. They would train families to work with 16-20 year old kids in need of independent living or transitional living skills – these could be kids coming out of Hanson House, or state treatment not ready for independence; or local high school students in need.

This process evolved into one more thing – over last few months, in State of AK re: therapeutic foster homes, the state has said it wants to cut costs. They are not interested in building facilities, but want to find people to feed and clothe the kids. However, the State also wants to tie strings and dictate which kids get the care, i.e., the hardest and most difficult. There is a lack of homes in Sitka – 12-14 are licensed, but several were licensed to take care of a family member. To get into foster home, the kids have to be in state's custody, which limits those foster care options, also.

YAS started looking at this family model – a foster family with a lot more training for kids that don't need high level of therapy, but more than just foster care. Don't have to be OCS – can be recommendation from master's level clinician. Agencies can be licensed to recruit their own families and license them. Can be stand-alone program, not tied to OCS. Only one other SE community in Prince of Wales trying to do it. OCS is dying to have this. National training models, training and support out there. The kid might have been in treatment, still needing support, but would thrive in family environment. Or kid not in treatment, but exhibiting out of control behavior – needs more structure and support. Low cost to operate, need program coordinator to recruit and train families; case manager to work with kids, some therapy support, but not staff-intensive. Looking for start-up money, none

yet. In the meantime, YAS is starting to pilot it, hopefully, with one family. They have applied to be licensed as an agency who can train and license this type of foster care home.

After some brief discussion among the group, the YAS staff are asked how AOC can help them in their efforts. They suggest that writing a resolution of support could be helpful for them to show potential funders, to show the coalition's agreement of need, support of YAS, the initiative to take care of Sitka's kids (not any kids from anywhere in the state, as the State may dictate). The resolution could also clearly articulate the identified needs for foster care in Sitka, and how it ties into AOC's priorities.

### **Special focus and speakers for upcoming AOC meetings**

The group spent a brief time talking about ideas for special topics to address during upcoming AOC meetings.

Ideas:

- assembly candidates forum, bring in potential Assembly members and have them speak to relevant issues;
- early childhood studies and assessments;
- youth/peer helpers – finding a way to meaningfully interface with young people, keep them involved with AOC – monthly meeting not the best, but one idea is to meet with Peer Helpers when they meet – what if we had one AOC meeting at 8 am at the school, focused on Peer Helpers, youth issues, questions for their input, get their ideas;
- a housing forum, with Felix.
- Employment, helping kids be more employable, get decent wages; fuller array of jobs, entrepreneurial, mentoring options; (World of Work happens sometime – maybe before that, get those people to talk with AOC too)