



Repairing the breach in Russian Jack

St. Anthony Catholic Church puts children first

In 2006 the St. Anthony Parish Organizing Ministry secured a commitment from then Mayor Begich to provide an affordable, accessible summer youth recreation program in its Russian Jack neighborhood. The program was housed at St. Anthony, funded by the Municipality and staffed by Parks and Recreation—an amazing collaborative effort between the three entities.

For several summers, Neighborhood Play provided activities for the neighborhood youth, and in the past two years Williwaw Elementary also provided a summer program. This spring leaders of the organizing ministry learned that Municipal funding for the program at St. Anthony had been eliminated and the Williwaw program would also not be operating. While work continued to secure a comprehensive program for the 2012 summer, a short-term solution was necessary.


With school nearly out and no youth recreation opportunities available for children in the densely populated Russian Jack area, St. Anthony leaders were searching for a “band-aid” for the summer. They found the Food Bank of Alaska, which promotes a summer lunch distribution program that picks up where school lunches leave off, providing meals for school-aged youth during the summer.

At noon on any given weekday, more than 50 parish and neighborhood children of all ages flock to the church for a locally made, healthy lunch. The older youth help the younger children carry their milk or cut their food. Parents join their children, transforming the lunch into a daily neighborhood picnic.

During the first week of the program, Jasmine Fiamme, a senior at East High School and a parishioner at St. Anthony, observed the children playing in little pockets around the parish lawn. She organized a game of Red Rover and soon the children were holding tight to one another’s hands and learning one another’s names. Back and forth they ran, as if they had been playing together for a lifetime. Parents and volunteers were touched to see the children come together



so naturally and organize their game. At the close of lunch, everyone began picking up trash, wiping down tables, and stacking the chairs.

While the organizing ministry had hoped to find a temporary band-aid for this summer’s lack of activities, the summer food program far exceeded their expectations. One neighborhood parent of three, Charles White shared that he had walked around the neighborhood for years—he had walked by the church hundreds of times, and he always respected it as a “sacred place.” But now, after the lunch program, he sees the church as something much greater—it really is a “holy place,” he said. 

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Relationships Transforming Teachers and Families

A groundbreaking model of family engagement and outreach that breaks the cycle of blame between teachers and families inched forward in the Anchorage

School District (ASD) this past school year. The award winning Parent Teacher Home Visitation Project is currently training parents and teachers in ten states. The pilot project in Alaska was initially proposed by AFACT's Alaska Native Organizing Ministry beginning in 2009. The proposal was supported overwhelmingly by the Anchorage School Board and the project was initiated as a pilot in four schools in 2010-11.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

More than 50 Alaska Native community members attended an April School Board meeting to attest to the importance of the visitation project and to request that the administration provide timely information and feedback to the Alaska Native Organizing Ministry. The initial hope was that the district would partner with AFACT's Alaska Native leadership to build and promote the project.

ASD declined to partner, but at the April meeting then School Board President John Steiner told the mostly Alaska Native audience, "It was AFACT largely that convinced the board that this was a worthwhile thing to try....I absolutely agree that it should be collaborative." He further noted that "it would be terrible if the [PTHVP] ... was deemed a failure and we hadn't even collaborated with you to understand what we could have done to make it successful."

Mr. Steiner said, "We have public meetings, like when we do the budget, and people come and they talk to us and they leave. You folks [AFACT's Alaska Native Organizing Ministry] have an ongoing, abiding interest.... Since you have great community contacts to help us and you were part of the driver, I think it is a resource that we can't afford not to be using."

PROJECT REVIEW

In May, the Parent Teacher Home Visitation Project trainers from Sacramento, CA updated about 20 Alaska Native families on the progress in the Anchorage School District. The highlight was that several teachers had fully implemented the project in their classrooms. The disappointment was the school district's

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~Jan Stewart, First Grade Teacher
Lake Hood Elementary School

inability to secure parents for the full two-day "train the trainers" event. Those "trainers" would have continued to train more parents and teachers in

future years. However, Superintendent Carol Comeau has indicated that she believes the PTHVP training will be replicated and passed on to others in the district.

The project was initiated in August 2010 in four Anchorage elementary schools. According to a report from ASD, the families of 74 students were visited and 29 teachers participated. While the project was initiated by the Alaska Native community, ASD did not target any particular group. Eleven of the 74 families visited were Alaska Native. The district spent \$43,188 on the project, and has budgeted \$80,000 for the 2011-12 school year.

TESTIMONY FROM TEACHERS


Two teachers at Lake Hood Elementary School found the process transformative both in and out of the classroom. Joan Haskell teaches a combined second and third grade classroom at Lake Hood Elementary School. She began the visits in the

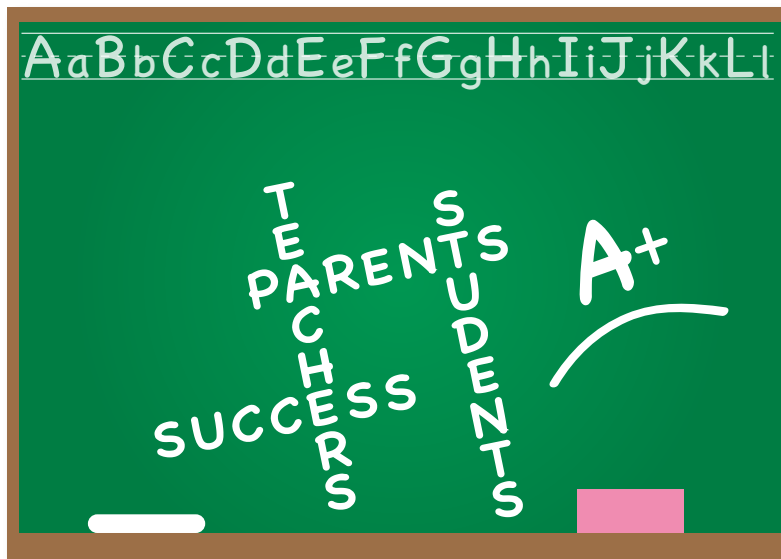
fall of 2010 with some hesitation. "The initial phone calls were difficult," she said, "but the majority of parents were excited." She went on the visits with another teacher or staff member, so others were able to experience her success.

Ms. Haskell shared that "parents were more apt to call or email throughout the year" after the initial visit. The real success came, however, when she "had every

parent at the parent teacher conferences this year for the first time" in her teaching career.

Also at Lake Hood Elementary School, first grade teacher Jan Stewart took the project to heart and visited the families of her students in their homes. Her experience was that the "parent teacher conferences were more relaxed, some barriers were broken down, the conferences were friendlier and there was more dialogue."

While initially intimidating to call a family and ask to come to their home for a visit, just to get to know them, the fruits of new and stronger relationships were plentiful. According to Ms. Stewart, "Every single visit we walked away saying, 'Wow, I am so glad I got to know this family.'" 



New Efforts, New Solutions for Glenn Square Mall

Since its January meeting that brought nearly 200 people together, Bethel Chapel Organizing Ministry has continued its work with stakeholders to breathe new life into Mountain View's nearly empty Glenn Square Mall.

In response to the public meeting, Kimco, the owner of the mall, lowered its lease rates and began construction on two empty store fronts. Following the January meeting, Julia O'Malley wrote an *Anchorage Daily News* article with the subtitle, "Bare storefronts at Glenn Square Mall leave community searching for solutions." One potential solution, according to Kimco and the Municipality, is the relocation of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to the Glenn Square Mall.

Mountain View residents have expressed overwhelming support for relocating DHHS to the mall. The project would not merely move city services—it would enhance an entire neighborhood. In March, the Mountain View Community Council passed a resolution in support of Bethel Chapel's work and the relocation of DHHS to Glenn Square. The Council and others expressed gratitude to Bethel Chapel leaders for their ongoing efforts in the community.

Bethel Chapel Organizing Ministry spoke with neighborhood residents at a recent neighborhood street fair about the potential for the DHHS relocation. One resident shared, "It is too hard to get to the current [DHHS] location. I would like services to be more accessible to residents." Another person said, "When



Above, Patrina Davis staffs the Bethel Chapel Organizing Ministry booth at the Mountain View Street Fair. Below, Colette Victor testifies before the HAND Commission.


one neighborhood improves [through a project like this] the whole city improves."

In July, Bethel Chapel leader Colette Victor testified before the Housing and Neighborhood Development Commission in support of prioritizing funding allocations to cover the cost of the relocation through a Community Development Block Grant. Ms. Victor shared that relocating to Mountain View would benefit DHHS. It would bring the services closer to the people who need them; the improved facilities might enhance the delivery of services; and it would solve the current location's parking problems.

She continued that it would enhance Anchorage's most culturally and ethnically diverse neighborhood and would introduce the Anchorage



community to Mountain View, a neighborhood which has often been misperceived.

Bethel Chapel leaders and Mountain View residents see this as a win for the city which needs a new facility, and a win for Mountain View which needs a "booster shot" at the Glenn Square Mall. 

Community Action Policing Team in Jewel Lake

"We are here to celebrate the presence of the Community Action Policing Team in our Jewel Lake neighborhood."

With those words, Pastor Scott Fuller, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, opened a meeting with members of the CAP Team and neighborhood residents. Pastor Fuller noted that the meeting was "the fruition of several years of work," referring to a January 2009 public meeting at which the congregation and neighborhood residents first asked the Chief of Police to commit the CAP Team to the neighborhood.

Anchorage Police Department's Lt. Garry Gilliam described

the work of the CAP Team and said patrol officers will still respond to incidents as they are called in to the police department. However, the members of the CAP Team will work with the community to determine if there is a "problem" beyond the incidents and if a string of incidents are related. Citizens are encouraged to call the CAP Team directly to provide "intelligence" regarding activity in the neighborhood.


AFACT has promoted a community policing model in Anchorage since 2004, and Lt. Gilliam noted that Pastor Fuller



Pastor Scott Fuller addresses the CAP Team, parishioners and neighbors at a meeting introducing the CAP Team to Jewel Lake.

represented AFACT on a Municipal public safety committee when the CAP Team was first formed and staffed.

According to Lt. Gilliam, "Police agencies that work directly with citizen groups are more effective" than traditional policing models. Therefore, he said, "The strength of the CAP Team is its ability to work with citizens and community groups." The meeting at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church was one example of resident and police collaboration.

Sand Lake Community Council president, Daniel Burgess, said the community is seeing increased visibility of police officers in the neighborhood, but noted that he had learned of two carjackings in recent weeks. Other neighborhood residents raised questions about the School Resource Officers (SRO) and the Neighborhood Watch Program. Lt. Gilliam responded that the SROs are still in the schools during the academic year. Further, the CAP Team has taken over the Neighborhood Watch Program and one officer devotes 50 percent of her time to Neighborhood Watch. 

AFACT Member

Alaska Native Lutheran Church
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church
Bethel Chapel
Catholic Native Ministry
Central Lutheran Church
First CME Church
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Immanuel Presbyterian Church
Lutheran Church of Hope
New Hope Baptist Church
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church
St. Anthony Catholic Church
St. Mark Lutheran Church
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For more information contact:

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