

Children's Task Force Goes to Work

The Cordova Children's Task Force began when those community members who serve and care about the welfare of children realized that there was an immense impact occurring as a direct result of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. The Task Force solicited funds from the Division of Emergency Services, and through their support, was able to provide help to the children and families in Cordova.

The following is a list of the programs implemented:

1. Respite Voucher Program: This program provided \$50 to 47 parents so that they could take some time off, hire a babysitter and reduce their stress load.

2. "Listen To Me": This program was co-sponsored with, and funding support from, the Sustina Girl Scouts. There were 94 children who attended and spent one whole day with mental health professionals and environmental educators processing their sadness and confusion about the oil spill. They made arts and crafts projects, played games, sang songs and had a panel of professionals from this community to answer their well thought out questions.

3. Child Care Provider Training: A program contracted with Child Care Connection, Inc. to train parents, adults and teens to better care for the children in this community. The need for this program was based on the outflow of care givers in Cordova to oil spill cleanup crews.

4. Scholarships: This program gave \$3,000 to needy families who were impacted from the oil spill.

5. Child Care Center's Aid: Both of Cordova's child care centers were impacted when their staff left to work on the oil spill cleanup. Problems compounded when parents left, also increasing child care needs substantially. This program gave money to both centers to offer wage increases to their employees to keep them from leaving to work for VECO. They also received money for new equipment and one center received additional funds for construction of an infant center.

6. Exxon Grant: \$18,000 was given to the City of Cordova for child care. The Task Force divided this money between the two child care centers to be used to supplement wages to keep employees from going to work on the oil spill cleanup.

7. Oil Spill Activity Handbook: Endorsement of a proposal which would create a handbook of activities for young children, pre-school to sixth grade, related to the oil spill. The purpose of this handbook is to turn this disaster into a teachable moment about oil, our need for it and our responsibility toward it.

8. Testimony: Testimony provided to the Oil Spill Commission, the National Wildlife Federation and plan to make a presentation to ACAC to include children's issues in the contingency plan so that the "Spiller" is responsible for the impact on children, not the State or local governments.

These programs were implemented over the summer during the period of immense crisis. However, as we move into the recovery period, we are ever reminded that the crisis is not over. One result of the oil spill has been a change in the economic structure of this community.

Persons who made the high VECO wages are not looking for work and the inflated prices in this town make it impossible to live on \$6.25 per hour. Thus the crisis in the child care centers remains as they incur a debt by offering higher wages with no added revenues. To help this problem, two grants are proposed; one to the State of Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs and one to the City of Cordova. They ask for grant of a subsidy to these essential services so that they can meet their operational overhead which will allow them, in turn, to offer the wages necessary to maintain their staff, as mandated by law.

*Cordova Children's Task Force, 11/15/89
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PWSCC Assists Community

Although the Prince William Sound Community College (PWSCC) is usually closed during May, June and July, due to the many requests for assistance this year, the college remained open. The college began receiving requests in April for classes to help facilitate individuals who wanted secretarial, computer, bookkeeping and general updating of office skills.

The local campus requested and received transfer of leftover fiscal year '89 Outreach funds to the Cordova site to meet these needs. In November 1989, Exxon reimbursed the college for those expenses related to services provided during the summer.

Approximately 80 students took classes from April to August. These classes included various computer skills, bookkeeping, typing and English to help them on-the-job, or just function better in the community. The college computer instructor also provided consultation to local fishermen, businesses and other individuals with computer problems. The college administered exams for other Universities whose students left school early to work on the spill. Space was also provided to the Bidarki youth project.

The college responded to numerous requests from visiting journalists, researchers, television crews, NOAA, Forest Service, university professors, audio-conference calls, and many others. Rooms were lent, equipment was used, supplies were consumed. The college also acted as a public shower service to many who arrived on the ferry in the early morning hours and could find "no room at the inn".

PWSCC has just received full accreditation from the Commission on Colleges of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. Such an achievement is the culmination of the hard work of many Cordovans who shared their talents and time with students, who spent many hours of service to the college, and who gave material goods.

PWSCC exists to serve the community. It responded during the crisis this summer and will continue to be service-oriented. Indeed, it is a community college.

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