

Monthly Message to Staff from DPA Director, Chris Ashenbrenner
October 18, 2002

The last month has zoomed by – DPA has been very productive this fall, as always. Thanks for all your hard work and dedication to the job! Here are some highlights of the month.

Central Region Shines!

Central Region received a big compliment from the FNS (Food & Nutrition Services) state agency reviewers. They were so impressed with the newly designed service processes that they plan to tout them nationally as best practices. Thanks, Central Region staff for hosting the reviewers and for being so good at what you do!

Cool EIS Enhancement

Systems Ops received more positive feedback on their SSN cut and paste function in the first 10 minutes after the broadcast was sent than on all their enhancements for the past year! This has inspired them to continue to work in quick and easy field enhancements as often as possible. Keep telling them you appreciate them – they do great work for us.

Food Stamp Accuracy Needs Improvement

We're not looking too good in our Food Stamp accuracy rate right now. Many of you are working hard to develop improvement plans. I encourage you to think creatively and enthusiastically about how we can beat this thing. We've done it before and I have no doubt we can do it again. Let your leaders know what you think will make a difference and we'll work with you make it happen.

Congressional Update

TANF was extended through the end of December 2002. The current best bet is that Congress will probably just extend it with little or no changes through the end of this fiscal year, September 30, 2003, and work on changing it next session.

Extraordinary Service

It was my great pleasure to present a number of service awards to staff over the last month. I'm always so impressed with the number of long term DPA staff – it's truly this core of people that help make us so good. Receiving **25 Year (!!)** awards were:

Randy Moore, Budget Man Extraordinaire

Pam Van Kirk, Director's Most Excellent Secretary

Margo Nash, Network Services Fearless Leader

Ruth McConnell and **Vicki Harmon**, Our Super Workforce Development Expert PAA's

Thank you all for your dedication and contributions!

More Help for Folks

Many of you may have seen the following in the Anchorage Daily News article. However, I think it's worthy of repeating here because of the positive impact this will have on our customers.

Alaska lands millions in federal grants

Daily News Staff (*Published: September 27, 2002*)

<http://www.adn.com/business/story/1849491p-1964146c.html>

[partial list--see full article for complete list]The Alaska congressional delegation announced recent federal grants, awards and contracts worth tens of millions of dollars:

\$5.8 million to build, renovate and modernize low-income housing in 13 villages: Arctic Village, Curyung, Dillingham, Grayling, Marshall, Diomedes, Ekuk, Kotlik, Kwinhagak, Tatitlek, Newtok, Scammon Bay and Sleetmute.

\$2 million to the state Department of Health and Social Services to fund a Healthy Families home visitation program.

\$1.7 million to the Fairbanks Native Association to fund a year-round part-time early Head Start program.

\$465,000 to the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in Juneau to continue to provide civil legal representation to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

\$413,419 to the state government to utilize telephone and Internet technology to administer the unemployment insurance program.

\$302,228 to Safe and Fear-Free Environment in Dillingham to provide services to domestic violence victims in 33 villages in the Bristol Bay region.

\$250,000 to Tanana Chiefs Conference in Fairbanks to fund tribal and state information systems for Native Alaskan children.

\$199,257 to KIDS Are People Inc. in Wasilla to fund a transitional living program.

\$194,835 to Juneau Youth Services Inc. to fund Cornerstone Emergency Services.

\$109,450 to the Cook Inlet Tribal Council Inc. of Anchorage to fund a Health Homes Father Involvement Enhancement program.

\$8,000 to the Rural Alaska Community Action Program Inc. in Anchorage to address social problems, including domestic violence, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, employment and training, teen pregnancy and corrections, and juvenile delinquency.

In summary, some food for thought

"Hope isn't about believing that we can change things. Hope is about believing that what we do matters."

Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic

Message from the DPA Director, Chris Ashenbrenner

September 10, 2001

This is the first edition of a DPA Director's message to staff. Its purpose is to give you quick updates on what's going on from my perspective, acknowledge your good work, and share ideas. I also encourage feedback from you to me.

Office Visits

Over the last month, I visited the Fairbanks, Muldoon, Gambell, Quality Assessment and Fraud Unit offices. As always when I visit staff, I leave energized from your good work and enthusiasm. We have a great range of duties in our agency, and each person has an essential role in making it all come together. Your commitment shines through your work. You have brought this Division great credibility throughout the State – thank you!

Employment Outcomes Improvement Project

Regular updates about this project are posted, so I won't repeat the information. However, I would like to acknowledge the dedication of Mary Rogers and Central Region staff (Jamie Jones-Burch, Suzi Pulczynski, Sue Stone, and Julie Riley to name just a few). These folks have worked untold hours and, despite the enormity of the project, have kept the focus on an outcome to make improvements for both clients and staff.

Here's my quote of the day for this project:

" Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must be first overcome."

--- Samuel Johnson

Keep up the good work – and let's all keep an open mind and give EOIP a chance – I think we'll see major positive results soon.

Bristol Bay Fishing Income Suit

Thanks to the Quality Assessment and Coastal Field staff for their patience and time-consuming work on the Bristol Bay fishing cases. As you probably heard, we were sued over our policy on anticipating fishing income. When we looked, we found that fishing families in Bristol Bay no longer have cash draws available to them as in the past (BB region earnings from fishing have declined nearly 80% since 1995). Thus, we were closing cases based on anticipated income that people would not receive for 2 or 3 months. We negotiated with the Food Stamp feds, FNS, and made a change to policy so that the programs now provide support to families when they need it and count the income when actually received.

2004 Budget

Budget development has begun for Fiscal Year 2004 – seems incredible, doesn't it? I am working with the Division sections Chiefs (Mary, Ellie and Jim D.) to put forward a budget that addresses our needs, yet is reasonable in light of the state budget situation. Tough assignment, but I will be advocating for our most basic needs – staffing, equipment and supplies – along with funding to support the growing APA caseload.

NEW Conference

Thanks mostly to food stamp reinvestment and NEW funding, DPA was able to send nine employees to the National Eligibility Workers (NEW) Training Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas. Attendees were Vinita Kunnuk and Helen Scollan, Central; Christine Wheeler, Coastal; Robin Brit, Northern; Morgan Effenberger, Southeast; Clarrissa Ridgway, Field Services; Maria Celli-Miller, SD&T; Gwen McCormick, Sys Ops and National New Board Member; and NEW President JoLynn Cagle, SD&T.

Reports say that learned lots, had fun and were able to support the NEW national president, our very own JoLynn Cagle. If you haven't heard about the conference from one of these folks, be sure to ask them!

Federal Legislation Updates

The Farm Bill was signed into law recently and has some very good provisions – more reasonable QA standards and allowing states to choose some options to improve Food Stamp Program support for working recipients. Food Stamp Policy is working with Chief's and other Division folks to sort out the changes we may be making over the next year or so. I think you'll like them, so stay tuned.....

TANF Reauthorization has stalled in Congress. The House passed a bill that looks quite different enough from the Senate's direction. People are concerned that they will not come to agreement this year (they only have until the end of September as that is when the current authorizing legislation expires). It's quite possible that the current program could just be extended for another year. There's an outside chance that there will be a 3-year extension. However, it's very difficult to predict what Congress will do, so we'll just wait and see.

Food for Thought:

" Great people are those who make others feel that they, too, can become great."

--- Mark Twain