

ALASKA RURAL JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

Place of Healing – Best Practices

‘Committed to Individual Responsibility For Health and Quality Care Through Tribal Self-Governance’

Introduction to Mavsivig

Maniilaq Association established Mavsivig, as a traditional subsistence lifestyle treatment camp. The name Mavsivig means “Place of Healing.” Located thirteen miles from Selawik, Alaska, Mavsivig is staffed and maintained year round to promote sobriety efforts for those individuals and families seeking relief and help from the illness of addiction. Maniilaq maintains a runway for local aircraft to make weekly flights into Mavsivig, re-supplying program’s needs and bringing new clients and their families in for treatment.

The Mavsivig site is remote and isolated to allow residents time to heal without the distractions they often face in their own villages. Our approach to treatment is based on cultural practices. Emphasis is placed on self-directed healing and personal responsibility. Treatment is built on the foundation outlined in the Inupiat Iitqusiat Values and focuses on individuals becoming directors of their own healing. Healing is taught through example and experience. Staff and clients work side by side, share stories, cook, clean, gather and build interdependence on each other for survival. Other activities include subsistence gathering, native crafts, talking circles, and individual counseling.

Additionally, Mavsivig staff utilize Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT). MRT is a national program used by numerous correction facilities to help individuals take responsibility for their past actions and behavior, while learning new behaviors. Treatment services at Mavsivig vary from short term stays up to longer two year stays.

Problem:

Many of the residents of the Maniilaq service area, in addition to the identified illness with addiction, find themselves overwhelmed with legal problems that result in long term incarceration away from our region. The majority of our region’s inmates are warehoused at Anvil Mountain Correctional Facility, managed by the Department of Corrections. The State of Alaska does not provide addiction counseling within the prison system, and further, does not have trained Probation Officers to conduct assessments for individualized treatment.

Issue:

Maniilaq Association developed Mavsigvik for those who are in need of help. However, many individuals who are shuffled through the legal system cannot take advantage of Mavsigvik, the place to heal due to Department of Correction's regulations and inability to give Nygren credit for treatment services and length of stay at Mavsigvik. There is an unwillingness of the Department of Corrections to change their policy and procedure in regards to allowing individuals to receive services at our place of healing.

Solution:

With closer interaction with the State Court and the District Attorney's Office, the assessment, placement, healing, and the issue of Nygren credit can be resolved by the Department of Corrections changing their policy.

In addition to the change in policy, Maniilaq Behavioral Health Services is willing and open to collaborate with the Department of Corrections, to provide services and assist in the decision making process when it directly relates to addiction services. With this new collaboration, rather than a gap in services, a strong bridge can be built to provide services where none existed before.

Mavsigvik is a safe place; it is a place of healing, resulting in healthier individuals and families, and breaking the revolving door of institutionalized incarceration. The cost of our traditional treatment and healing is far more effective than the daily cost of institutionalized incarceration.

We know traditional healing works, as Maniilaq receives comments and letters of thanks from individuals and their families who have participated in the Mavsigvik program. They state gratitude for the opportunity to heal in a traditional way. One such recent letter included the following statement: "I never got a chance to thank you all. God bless and be with you. To the clients, if you are thinking of long term treatment, think of Mavsigvik, it's so good up here, I love it!!"