



2023 Community Impact Report

*Empowering Alaska's Youth, Young Adults, and Families
Through Behavioral Health and Well-being Services*

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FRONT COVER (l-r): Camper at the Begich Summer Camp facilitated by VOA's School-Based Program; Brian Emory, Admin Operations Manager, during our summer staff picnic; guests at a partner booth during our Fall Festival; Desiree Scott, Program Director of Family Services, during Camp Hope; an ARCH youth speaking with the Surgeon General during a youth mental health roundtable. RIGHT: Rachael Eliason, School-Based Clinician, and a helper speak to campers during Family Night at the Begich Summer Camp. BACK COVER: A child examines a dandelion during a Family Services plant walk with Dr. Ali Marvin, Psychologist and Program Supervisor at Aleutian Pribilof Island Association.

Reflecting on Our Responsibility

Responsibility is one of the core values that drive our organization. For VOA Alaska, responsibility means “meeting and exploring the need while holding true to the highest standards of excellence.”

As a direct-service provider on the front-lines of the youth mental health crisis, this understanding of responsibility takes us far beyond the walls of our offices.

Alaska’s current continuum of care for children, adolescents, and families is fragmented. A United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division investigation of the State of Alaska’s Behavioral Health System for Children found reasonable cause to believe the State is violating the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to provide appropriate treatment options. Furthermore, the investigation found that Alaska’s children experience unnecessarily long stays at inpatient psychiatric and residential psychiatric facilities due to a lack of community-based treatment options.

Since 2021, we’ve expanded our community-based services by 300%, including the launch of a new crisis intervention program called Rapid Response. Through this program, within one hour of calling VOA, a mental health clinician or peer support specialist from the team will travel anywhere within Anchorage to support youth, caregivers, or staff of youth-serving organizations. They can also support statewide through telehealth.

We recognize that it is not only our responsibility to serve the individual who meets the criteria for substance use and mental health services but to also do what we can to intervene as early as possible for those at risk of developing a diagnosis to prevent further suffering in the lives of our young people. You’ll find three stories in this year’s impact report highlighting how we do this across our continuum of care.

There is more that we can do and more that must be done, but we’re faced with a deteriorating system of care.

Medicaid rates do not reflect the cost of care, with many essential services not covered at all. Compounding this issue, our state-wide behavioral health system reflects what is needed for *adults* and does not encompass the unique needs and differences of the adolescent population. It is our responsibility to join partners, leaders, and community members to sound the alarms on what’s broken, what’s needed, and how to fix it.

This year, we joined panels with partners to share our front-line experience with Alaska’s social workers, school administrators, and peer support professionals. We met with state legislators, our congressional delegation, and government officials to ensure they understood the gravity of the crisis our youth are in, the challenges providers are facing to meet those needs, and potential solutions to break down barriers to care.

We cannot achieve the highest standards of excellence without a dedicated and talented workforce. Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure that our staff have the support and resources they need to not only do this challenging work but also to go home every night feeling fulfilled. This is why we offer paid parental leave, competitive salaries, professional development opportunities, and, most recently, pet insurance. No wonder we were named a Best Workplace in Alaska for the second year!

We appreciate the many partners, funders, organizations, leaders, and community members who joined with us to meet and explore the need in 2023 while helping us to serve, support, and empower over 1,000 youth, young adults, and families across Alaska. The challenges ahead are many, but it is our responsibility to do everything we can to protect our kids and put an end to Alaska’s youth mental health crisis.

Thank you for joining us in this important work.

With love,



Julia Luey
President & CEO



Who We Are

Since 1981, VOA Alaska has taken on the most difficult tasks to help our state's most underserved.

Volunteers of America (VOA) was founded in 1896 by Ballington and Maud Booth, who pledged to "go wherever we are needed and do whatever comes to hand."

At the time, the concept of "volunteering" meant serving others as a vocation. While our understanding of the term has evolved, our dedication to serving others has not.

In 1981, VOA arrived in Alaska to open a youth residential treatment facility in Eagle River. These humble beginnings have now led to over 40 years of empowering Alaska's youth and families through recovery services, housing, and promoting healthy communities.

Today, VOA Alaska provides a full continuum of care, from education and early intervention, to peer support and care coordination, to mental health therapy, substance use counseling, and family therapy, to supportive housing and residential treatment. We are in schools, in the community, and supporting Alaskans statewide via telehealth.

Our strength-based and person-centered services promote wellness in all areas of a person's life. Those in our care steer the course of their journey. We walk alongside them, providing connection and services designed to help them achieve their most meaningful goals.

As a non-profit, these services are offered at low- or no-cost, and no one is ever turned away due to an inability to pay.

We are honored to be a part of the healing process for all of the people, families, and communities we serve.



Who We Serve

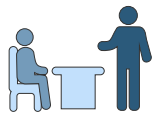
1,124 Alaska youth, young adults, and families were reached directly by VOA Alaska in Fiscal Year 2023.*



651 youth, young adults, and caregivers received treatment services, such as individual, group, or family therapy.

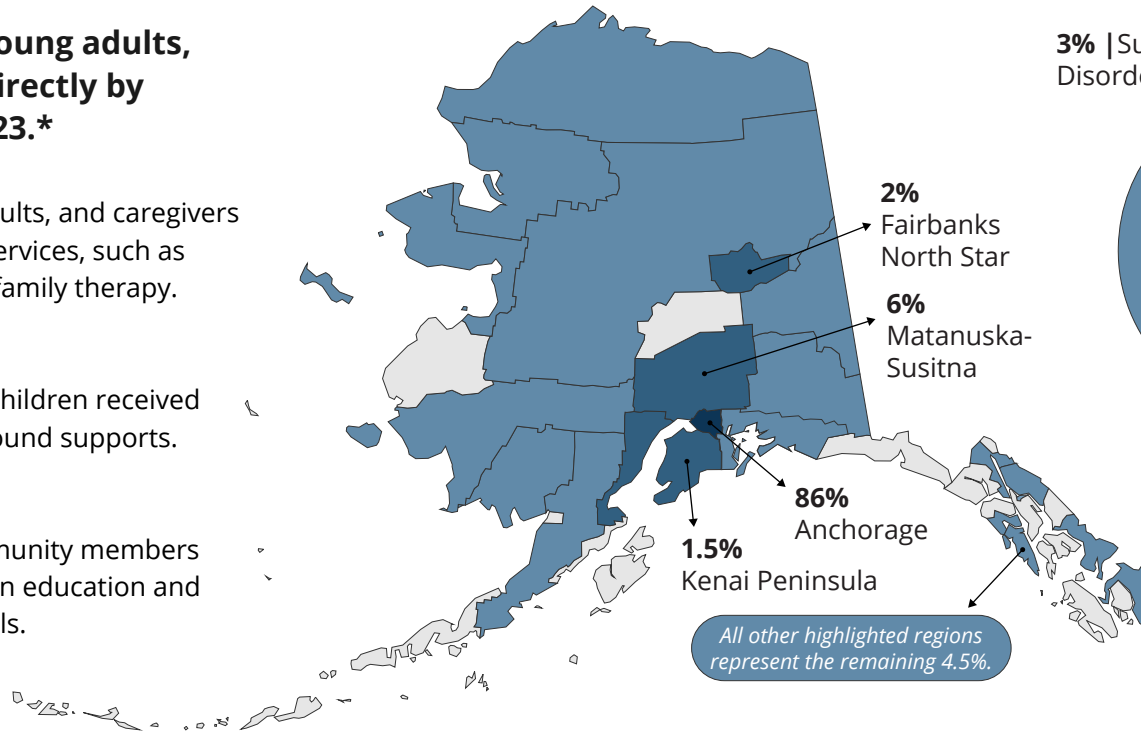


238 caregivers and children received Kinship Care wraparound supports.

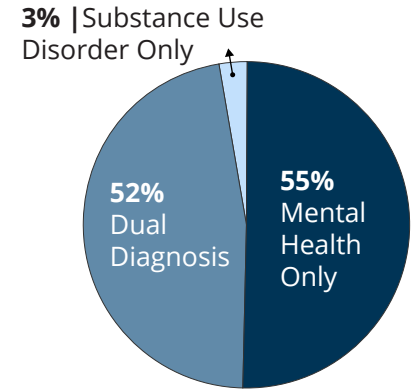


235 youth and community members engaged in prevention education and community Town Halls.

Communities of those Served Grouped by Borough/Census Area



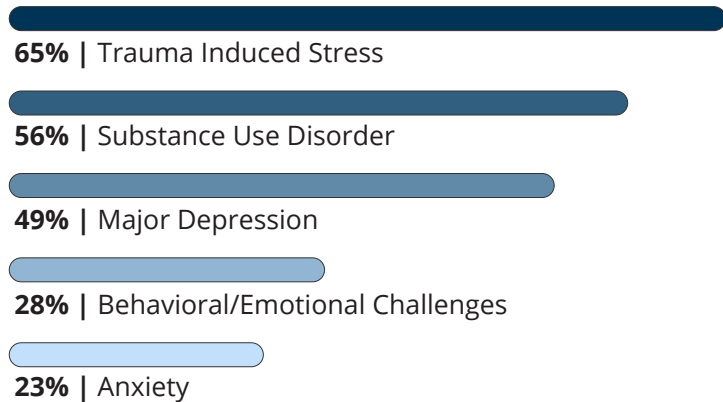
Primary Diagnoses of Youth in Treatment



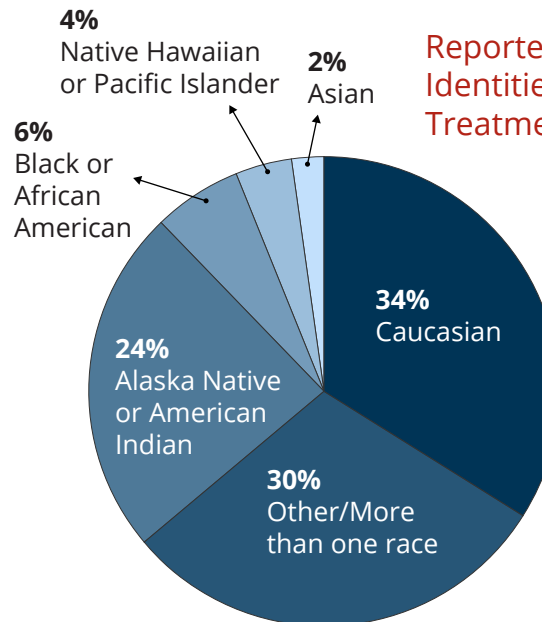
"Mental health only" diagnoses have increased 120% from 2021, surpassing dual-diagnosis for the first time in 2023.

5 Most Prevalent Diagnoses of Youth in Treatment

Includes youth with multiple diagnoses, percentages do not equal 100%



Reported Racial Identities of Youth in Treatment Services



74% of youth and families receiving services were enrolled in **Medicaid**.

Of those not enrolled in Medicaid, 19% utilized one of VOA Alaska's financial assistance options. Learn more about paying for services at voak.org/fees.



* Fiscal Year 2023 includes dates July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

How We Serve: Our Continuum of Care

Community Coalition

Advocating for policy changes alongside community partners and leaders to address youth substance use in our community with the VOA-led **Anchorage Adolescent Substance Misuse Prevention Coalition**.

Prevention Education

Engaging youth in self-evaluation and equipping them with the tools they need to make healthier choices about drugs and alcohol with **PRIME for LIFE** classes.

School-Based Mental Health

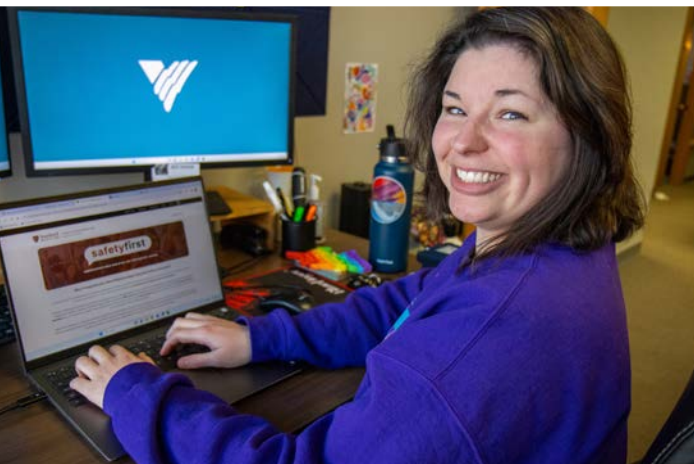
Providing on-site mental health and wellness support to students, staff, and families with VOA clinicians based in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout Anchorage.

Mental Health & Substance Use Counseling

Supporting youth and young adults in learning coping skills, building resiliency, and improving their mental health and well-being.

Peer Support and Care Navigation | Providing immediate connection to youth and families in need, creating engaging pathways

Family Services | Supporting all families with youth enrolled in VOA Alaska's care through education, intervention, home-based services,



Providing the **right level of care** at the **right time**.

Intensive Outpatient

Creating a safe space for youth and young adults struggling with drugs or alcohol to take charge of their recovery and maintain sobriety.

Day Treatment

Helping youth overcome barriers in their continued recovery by combining academic and therapeutic services in which youth engage at least 20 hours per week.

Supportive Housing

Ending the experience of homelessness for young adults through affordable housing, mental health and wellness services, and life-skills development.

Residential Treatment

Empowering youth to address their substance use and co-occurring mental health challenges in a structured, therapeutic environment at the **Adolescent Residential Center for Help (ARCH)**.

to care, and guiding youth in their journey through mentorship from those with lived experience.

and family therapy; with additional supports for Alaskans raising relative children.



Our Impact, By the Numbers



23,300 hours of assessments, case management, counseling, therapy, outreach, and other treatment services.



88 young adults placed in housing or re-housed, including 8 households with children.



1,610 hours of community-based services, a 300% increase from FY21.



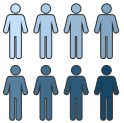
\$964,491 spent directly on rental assistance, meals, transportation, and other client needs.



493 hours of family therapy, counseling, and drop-in sessions provided in office, in schools, and via telehealth, up from 357 hours last year.



30 active members in the VOA-led Anchorage Adolescent Substance Misuse Prevention Coalition, representing 15 organizations.



7,784 Anchorage students with on-site access to a VOA Mental Health Clinician in 10 schools.



7,986 Naloxone (Narcan) overdose first-aid kits built and distributed locally or provided to Project HOPE for statewide distribution.



100% of caregivers say their family has an increased sense of connection since beginning school-based mental health services.



78% of youth say they were able to increase the number of supportive people in their life since starting services with VOA Alaska.



99% of VOA staff feel their work is meaningful to them, up from 94% last year.



78% of youth say they were able to increase their social and emotional skills while receiving services with VOA Alaska.

TOP: Aaron Osterback, Coalition Coordinator, hosting VOA's December Town Hall. BOTTOM: Angie Harris, ARCH Program Assistant, during our summer staff picnic.



Introducing Rapid Response

In 2023, VOA Alaska developed Rapid Response, a new program specializing in crisis intervention for youth ages 12-24, with behavioral health consultations and support for parents, caregivers, and staff of youth-serving organizations.

Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 6:00 pm, mental health clinicians and peer support specialists can be deployed anywhere in Anchorage to provide triage and screening, assessments, de-escalation, peer support, referral coordination, and crisis planning.

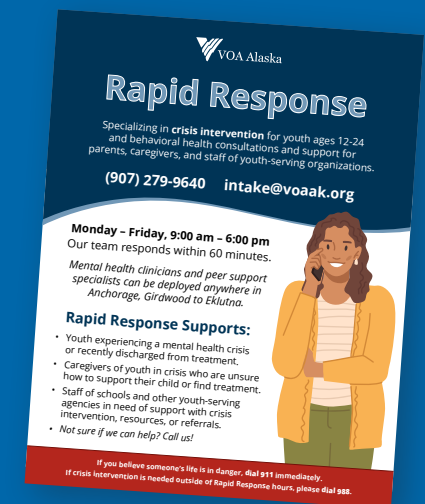
In one of their first deployments, our Rapid Response team saw just how vital these crisis intervention services are. A partner organization reached out because they had a youth who had experienced a traumatic event and was in the hospital receiving medical treatment. To help reduce the potential for a behavioral health crisis, the organization wanted her to get a “check-in” from a mental health clinician. Our team provided both her and her family interim services to provide a bridge of support while she awaited an assessment to begin treatment.

Other meaningful impacts we’ve witnessed with this new program include supporting a parent of a child whose best friend had recently died by suicide; a young adult who was pregnant, experiencing mental health symptoms, and at risk of losing housing; and a youth discharged from VOA Alaska’s residential program with a complex legal guardianship who needed to be connected with a community-based program.

If you have a youth in your life and need support for supporting them, contact the Rapid Response team during regular business hours by calling (907) 279-9640 or by email at intake@voaak.org.



Scan the QR code to download a Rapid Response flyer from our Community Materials Library.



TOP: Michelle Gutierrez, Connection and Engagement Manager, hands out one of 200 backpacks distributed to families at VOA Alaska’s Back to School Community BBQ. BOTTOM: Kids enjoying food at the BBQ!



Roman's on the Road to Recovery

On a late summer night, Roman sat in the back of a police car, the lights flashing on the liquor store he had just tried to break into with his friends.

At the time, Roman was 15 years old and had already been enrolled in Day Treatment at VOA Alaska. Only a few months before the break-in attempt, he had been fired from his fast-food job for issues with alcohol.

Day Treatment was his chance to get sober, repair relationships with friends and family, and learn how to be a kid without alcohol in his life. But he says he hadn't taken the situation seriously and was ignoring the true weight of his actions.

Going from the back of the cop car to juvenile detention changed his entire perspective. "I was really freaked out," Roman says. "I was like, 'Oh man, I'm never getting out of here.'"

The day before his sixteenth birthday, after a month at McLaughlin Youth Center, Roman moved into ARCH, VOA's residential treatment center in Eagle River.

He was happy to be out of detention, but he still didn't like his situation. During his first few weeks, he says he just messed around and didn't focus on his treatment. As Devin Gardner, Behavioral Health Associate Supervisor at ARCH, put it, "Roman was in denial of the reality of his use."

It's not unusual for youth to need time to adjust to residential treatment. In fact, staff recognize that this is part of the process and hold space for it. "We extend patience, understanding, and support them," Devin says. "We continue to pour into youth who are in a stage of ambivalence."

For Roman, little by little, through sessions, interactions with his peers, being given more responsibility, and learning the stories of others, his perspective began to shift.

He says much of that was due to ARCH's peer-led model. He became the Department Head of Kitchen and then a Senior Resident. It was his favorite thing about ARCH, how it gave residents "a lot of different opportunities to grow and experiment a little bit [to] see all the different things you can really do, outside of using drugs."

It also provided him with a sense of responsibility. "I started realizing more and more about the consequences of my actions while at ARCH," he says, "and that what I did really did matter...and how it affected so many people. [I] just tried to be a good role model for my peers."

"A guiding process here at ARCH is show one, teach one: learning how to care for yourself, then learning how to teach it," Devin says. "Roman was a great advocate who balanced taking care of himself and doing his own work while supporting and encouraging his peers to do the same."

After three months, Roman completed his treatment goals and graduated from ARCH. He then returned to Day Treatment, which offers a chance for youth stepping down from residential services to integrate back into their home and community while attending treatment and schooling.

"I would probably be doing drugs if I didn't come back to Day Treatment," Roman says.

Although it was challenging, Roman shares that he is going to miss VOA and plans to apply for a job at ARCH someday. "If I could go back up [to ARCH] and visit," he says, "just to help out, I would go right now."

But for now, he's ready for the next steps, like getting a job and transitioning back into school to graduate. "I'm really happy because now I can move forward," he says.

Reflecting on what he learned during treatment, he thinks about how his self-confidence has grown, especially in social situations.

"I didn't realize I drank because of my confidence. VOA actually helped me realize that, and it helped me just to stay sober. I've met a bunch of people that I've helped out, and they've helped me."

Roman says it's hard to handle recovery on your own, which is why he wants to share his story and continue helping others.

"In the beginning, it may seem like it's never going to end," he says, "but seeing someone else that's been able to do it, I feel like it would help a lot of kids get the help that they need."





VOA's Summer Camps Help Kids Build Friendships and Resiliency

VOA Alaska brought adventure, joy, and social-emotional learning into the lives of children during the summer with two camps—one for rising sixth graders at Begich Middle School and another for youth in Kinship Care.

Begich was chosen for the three-week camp to help strengthen and support that school's community after experiencing a series of significant challenges among its families.

VOA's School-Based Services team of mental health clinicians collaborated on designing engaging activities to help students improve their interpersonal skills and grow self-awareness. These included playing with Oobleck to learn about bouncing back from stressful situations and rock climbing to learn healthy methods for navigating challenges.

For clinician Rachael Eliason, teaching these social-emotional lessons and helping the kids build coping skills was the highlight of the camp.

"The best part is watching resilient students in action," she said. "Using these tools to support themselves and others. Skills such as open communication, positive self-talk, conflict resolution, and healthy coping strategies were all taught while having a total blast."

Like any summer camp, the best part for kids was the friendships they made. However, what's special about the Begich Camp is that the friendships continue into the school year!

"Coming to middle school in Anchorage requires meeting new people from different elementary schools throughout the community," Rachael explains. "Many

students came to camp fearful of not having friends going to school. It was amazing to see the strong connections they made."

Over in VOA's Family Services program, another camp instilled hope and built resiliency in younger kids. After a long hiatus due to the pandemic, Camp Hope returned to engage and connect 7–11-year-olds affected by substance use or behavioral health challenges. Many of the kids were part of VOA's Kinship Care program, which supports caregivers of relative children.

Like the camp at Begich, Camp Hope emphasized social-emotional learning. Campers practiced identifying emotions, built self-confidence, and learned how to work as a team to achieve a shared goal.

Activities were structured around a daily routine, with morning and afternoon check-ins to see how well the kids were learning and applying their new skills, while time dedicated to journaling helped them reflect on their personal growth.

The campers also went on field trips and tried new foods and activities. For Felicia Nichols, Family Care Coordinator, those were her favorite moments, when "a child experienced a first with us and shared their reactions."

Campers visited the Botanical Gardens on one of their many field trips, where they picked herbs and made salad dressing in cooking class. Felicia says one camper "could not wait to make the recipe at home with their family!"

Younger siblings would learn about all the fun things and tell our staff they couldn't wait



until they were old enough to attend camp. Kinship caregivers even joined in on some of the activities. One caregiver expressed how grateful she was that her kid was able to build more positive adult relationships.

Back at Begich, the families also expressed their gratitude. One shared that her "grandson was very reluctant, but after two days, he could not wait to get there in time!"

Through all the fun enjoyed by kids and adults alike, over 50 young Alaskans have gained valuable life skills to help them navigate the challenges of growing up.

Both camps were made possible through funding from the Municipality of Anchorage Alcohol Tax Grant.

Connection is Prevention

A drug and alcohol informational class isn't something you expect teenagers to be raving about, but talk to students leaving VOA Alaska's Prime for Life class, and that's precisely what you'll hear.

"We are all teenagers, and it is very hard to get through to us," a student wrote in a letter to Brian Pickett, Program Coordinator and PFL teacher. "Because we are so shut off and defensive, and we don't like to be vulnerable. In the matter of 2 days, you have taught me and hopefully us all so much."

Prime for Life (PFL) is an evidence-based prevention and intervention program that helps youth learn to reduce their risks of alcohol and drug-related problems throughout life.

That's the by-the-book definition, but Brian explains it a little differently. He says it's a chance for youth to "freeze time and look at themselves. Like stop everything, every external factor...and determine if their trajectory is aimed at what they want it to be aimed at."

Most of the youth coming to PFL are on suspension for substance-related offenses, which the Anchorage School District will reduce for students who complete the course. Experiences can range from a wrong-place-wrong-time situation with very little exposure to drugs or alcohol to youth who are heavily using substances to cope with trauma.

With so many varied experiences in the classroom, Brian's approach to teaching the class is, well, by not teaching.

"I don't teach, I connect," Brian says. As he works through the two-day curriculum, Brian finds moments to dig into the questions and responses to help students consider their choices and why they made them, helping them to look "at things that they were probably never asked to look at, about themselves and the world around them."

As the lowest level of care in VOA's continuum, Brian hopes that the class "opens up a door of curiosity" for those who may need to find healthier ways of coping through more intensive services and support in VOA's school-based, outpatient, or residential levels of care.

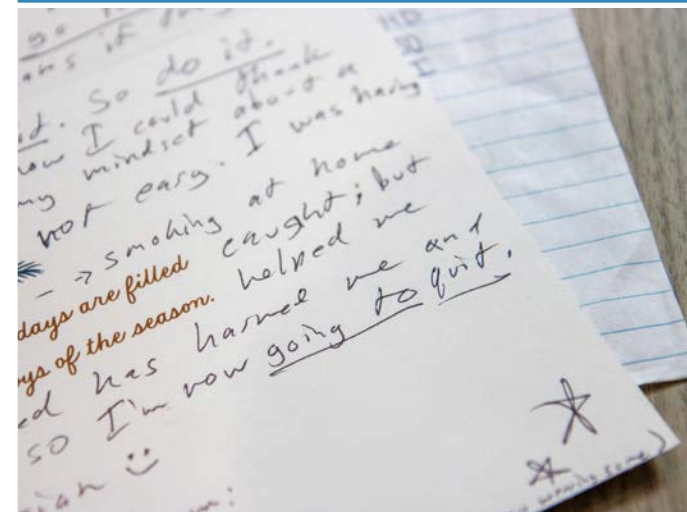
Ultimately, no matter what comes next in the lives of the youth he connects with, Brian says his goal "is that if they're going to continue down the path that they're on, that at some point, they remember the things that they heard about how they can live a better life."

VOA's two-day Prime for Life course is available for middle and high school students and offered every week during the school year, Monday and Tuesday or Thursday and Friday.

Learn more at voaak.org/pfl.



ABOVE: Brian Pickett, Program Coordinator, teaching a Prime for Life class. BELOW: A student letter noting they are "now going to quit" smoking weed after taking a PFL class with Brian.



And the Award Goes to...



Outstanding Peer Support Organization

VOA Alaska was recognized for our work in the field of peer support during the 2023 Healing Kinships: Alaska Peer Support Conference, held June 6-7. The award is dedicated to organizations that go above and beyond in the growth, empowerment, integration, and employment of Peer Support Specialists and integrating peer support services.

Best Workplaces Alaska

For the second year, VOA Alaska received a Best Workplaces Alaska award. Recognition for the award is determined by feedback directly from staff, highlighting the impact of our commitment to building a culture of belonging, wellness, and professional growth.



Shooting Star Award

Julia Luey, President and CEO, was awarded the first-ever “Shooting Star” award at the Alaska Behavioral Health Association’s fall conference. The award recognized Julia as an emerging leader in the field of behavioral health in Alaska.

Finalist: Non-Profit Above and Beyond Award

VOA Alaska was one of three finalists for the Non-Profit Above and Beyond Award at the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce’s Gold Pan Awards. The award recognizes non-profits who significantly improve the city of Anchorage outside of their daily operations, exemplify its mission through their work, and have evolved to meet the needs of their members or the community.



Tiffany Vassar, GCI, cut the ribbon celebrating the purchase of new minivans (seen on the opposite page) for VOA Alaska's Day Treatment program. Contributions from GCI, Rasmuson Foundation, and individual donors helped make the purchase possible.



Scan the QR code to learn more.

Our Supporters

Thank you to the organizations, government agencies, and community members who joined with us in Fiscal Year 2023* through contributions of cash, time, and other resources in support of our mission.

Connection | \$1 Million+

State of Alaska

Hope | \$100,000+

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
Municipality of Anchorage
Providence Health and Services Alaska
Richard L. and Diane M. Block Foundation
U.S. Department of Health Resources and Services Administration
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Innovation | \$25,000+

Anchorage School District
GCI
George and Stephanie Suddock Foundation
iHeart Media*
Powers Brothers dba Tudor Bingo Center
Rasmuson Foundation
United Way of Anchorage

Courage | \$5,000+

Alaska Community Foundation
Anchorage Lodge 17 F&AM
ConocoPhillips Alaska
The Carr Foundation
Wells Fargo Foundation

*Fiscal Year 2023 includes dates July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

Responsibility | \$1,000+

AT&T
Best Storage Midtown*
First National Bank of Alaska
Katherine & Kevin Gottlieb
KC Hostetler
Linda Bowers
Matson Navigation
Spark Design, LLC
Thomas, Head & Greisen, PC



Joy | Under \$1,000

Aaron Briggs
Agnew::Beck Consulting
Alaska Children's Trust
Alaska State Parks*
Alexandro Cetina
Andy Lohman
Anthony Lekanof
Barbara Banaszynski
Bauer Construction, Inc.
Carmela Warfield
Carolyn Albright
Carolyn Heyman
Debra Rouse
Dianne Katzenberg Swanson
Don Winchester
Donna Stein
Elaine Dahlgren
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Erica Traxler*
Erin Messmer
Gary Scott
Gwen Swanson
Heather Fairclough

Jackie Wallen*
Jami Bishop
Jane E. Luey
Janey Estes
Janice Braden
Jessica Begnal*
John Weddleton
Jose Cetina
Julia Luey
June Koegel
Just Reign Cycle Studio
Karen King
Karen Zeman
Kate Weisler
Katherine Severin
Kenni Linden
Kirsten Witt
Kris Luey
Kristin Stoepler
Lindsey Hajduk
Lisa Lindquist
Lori Landenburger
Lucille A Lincoln

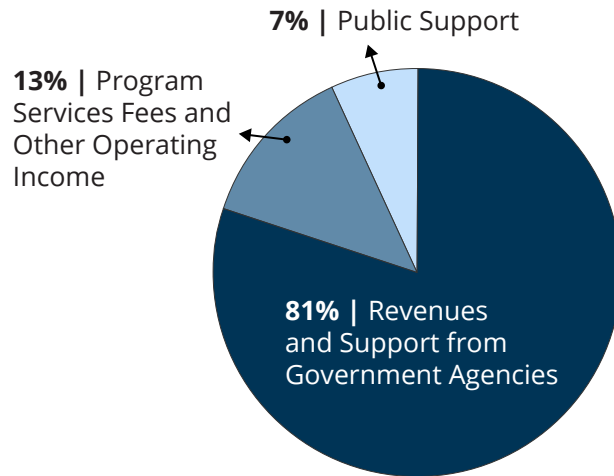
Margaret Ratcliff
Maria Hernandez
Marie Richardson
Marie Smith
Marilyn Hurtlely
Marilyn Kerr
Mark Schmeling
Marsha Tyson
Mat-Su Health Foundation
McDonald's*
Michael Estes
Misti Maisey
Morgan Maxwell
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Patrick Malone
Paul Landes
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Rhoni Kay
Riverside Community Church*
Ron Combs
Sammy Sue

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Sherrie Hinshaw
Sheryl Martin
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Sophie Minich
Spawn Ideas
Stacy Bell*
Terri Potter
Theresa Brooks
Tiffany Tutiakoff
Timothy Auer
Tom Turnbull
Toni DeBoer
Wendy Woolf
William Jacobson

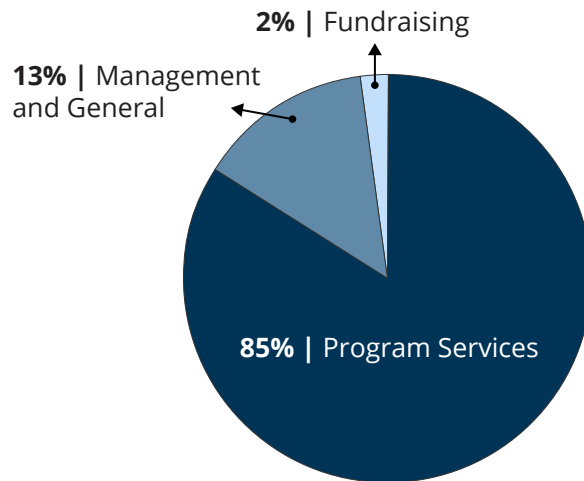
**Includes in-kind donations*

Our Finances

Revenues



Expenses



Unaudited finances for Fiscal Year 2023
July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023



TOP: Lee Post, Board Chair, face painting at our Fall Festival. MIDDLE: Board Member KC Hostetler stocking books during Alaska Airlines' Week of Care. BOTTOM: Board Members Kate Weisler and Andy Lohman during our summer staff picnic.

Our Board of Directors



Lee Post | *Chair*
Owner, Postmarks, LLC
Retired, Dept. of Juvenile Justice



Don Winchester
Former Parter,
Vend Alaska



Jackie Engebretson, MSW | *Vice Chair*
Director of Behavioral Health,
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium



Kate Weisler
Alaska Logistics Manager,
Schlumberger Technology, Inc



Audrey Lance | *Treasurer*
Manager of Audit and Taxation,
Thomas Head & Greisen



KC Hostetler
Regional Strategic Account Manager,
Alaska Airlines



Dr. Lisa Lindquist | *Secretary*
Chair, Department of Psychiatry,
Providence Alaska Medical Center



Kim Kovol
Commissioner,
Alaska Dept. of Family and Community Services



Amanda Estes
Vice President of Social Marketing,
Northwest Strategies



Lonnie Ridgeway
Owner,
Ridgeway Family Business, LLC



Andy Lohman
Area President, Alaska,
iHeart Media



Maria Hernandez
Principal,
Steller Secondary School



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voaak.org | (907) 279-9640 | info@voaak.org

VOA Alaska is located on the ancestral homelands of the Eklutna Dena'ina.

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