

THE BARROW TEMPERANCE PROJECT REDUCING ALCOHOL-RELATED CRIME AND DISORDER WITH PROHIBITION IN AN ALASKAN COMMUNITY

NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, ALASKA, 1995

- THE PROBLEM:** The North Slope borough of Alaska was experiencing substantial problems with alcohol-related crime and disorder. Alcohol-related incidents included deaths, rapes, assaults, weapon-related felonies, domestic violence, and public intoxication. The borough spent nearly seven million dollars on alcohol treatment with few successful cases. The monetary costs of alcohol abuse were damaging the entire community.
- ANALYSIS:** Most of the alcohol-related incidents were attributable to alcohol legally sold in the community. Alcohol-related incidents were more prevalent at social functions, when residents received their by-monthly paychecks, and many inebriates simply drank when alcohol was available. Traditional responses—enforcement, treatment, education, and social and economic sanctions—failed to alleviate the burden of alcohol abuse on the community.
- RESPONSE:** The public safety director and the mayor initiated a campaign to ban alcohol from the borough. The local media was used to educate the residents about the perils associated with alcohol abuse. Town meetings and social events were held to gain support for the prohibition movement. On October 4, 1994, the electorate of Barrow voted to ban the importation, sales and possession of alcoholic beverages in Barrow. The new laws took effect on November 1, 1994.
- ASSESSMENT:** The alcohol ban immediately and substantially decreased alcohol-related incidents. Requests for police services have dropped by almost 80 percent. The state court judges in Barrow have reported that case filings since the ban are remarkably low.
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INTRODUCTION

Barrow, Alaska, is one of eight villages that make up the North Slope Borough, which occupies the upper one-third of Alaska's geography and spans over 90,000 square miles. The North Slope Borough's Department of Public Safety exclusively provides police services throughout the borough, including its eight incorporated villages with an amassed population of about 7,000.

Last year, the public safety department used a problem-solving approach to address a high number of alcohol-related crimes in Barrow.

SCANNING

About mid July, 1994, the North Slope Borough's mayor, responding to increased public concern, asked his public safety director what might be done to curb the tragedies caused locally by alcohol abuse. Since 1990, the public safety department

recorded 87 rapes by drunken men, 26 of which had victimized children; 675 drunken assaults, 109 of which were felonies involving weapons; 503 disputes between drunken spouses; 388 arrests for drunk driving; and 229 arrests of intoxicated children.

Additionally, Public Safety Officers dealt with 2,057 incidents in which they took people into custody because they were too drunk to care for themselves. In 1,757 of those incidents, the inebriated person was detained in jail because he or she was too violent for the local detoxification center. Citizens had called officers to remove drunken people from their homes 2,891 times, and had summoned officers 2,433 times to check on inebriates because they or others were afraid or worried.

Additionally, 22 of the 36 area deaths, eight of them suicides, were attributed to alcohol. The tragedies of alcohol abuse had become epidemic. About 95% of the alcohol-related problems occurred in Barrow, the boroughs largest city and seat of the borough government.

Public health, too, was under attack. During the same period, 522 people voluntarily entered treatment for Alcoholism at the Substance Abuse Treatment Center in Barrow, and the courts ordered another 136 people for treatment. Substance abuse counselors expended 209,887 hours, at a cost of almost \$7 million in borough dollars. Successful treatment was rare. During this period, 44 percent of 600 birth mothers consumed alcohol into their 2nd and 3rd trimesters, and local physicians projected that as many as 23 babies each year would be affected by either fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol exposure. Again, the majority of problems occurred in Barrow.

Economically, alcohol abuse in Barrow, which had voted damp in 1977 (barring only the sale of alcohol), was costing consumers an estimated \$350,000 every month, considering product cost plus the cost of air freight from retail outlets hundreds of miles away (Barrow is not connected to a road system). The money being spent on alcohol was not being reinvested in the community. Bootlegged liquor cost \$50 per 750ml-bottle in Barrow or \$100 a bottle in other Borough villages.

The line of people waiting to pick up liquor freight was sometimes longer than the checkout lines at local food stores.

ANALYSIS

From the outset, it seemed that everything had been tried that could be tried to alleviate the problems of alcohol abuse in Barrow. But, enforcement had not worked. Treatment had not worked. Education had not worked. Nor had social or economic sanctions. Nothing had worked, and the community's culture and quality of life continued to deteriorate despite all of the public funds and professional assistance poured into the effort to alleviate alcohol related problems.

Inquiries to substance abuse treatment providers revealed that, although the man hours expended in counseling and the costs of treatment were relatively high, their efforts were directed toward a relatively small number of clients. Many of the clients during the five-year period were recidivists. Only about half of the total number in treatment during the period was involved in disorders that had required the intervention of public safety officers.

Before the problem-solving effort, the prevailing assumption was that chronic alcoholics intoxicated on bootlegged liquor caused most alcohol-related disorder. This assumption turned out to be incorrect.

In reality, most of the disorder was due to the effects of legal alcohol in the community. Public safety officers discovered this by interviewing the people involved and by studying alcohol freight records. These records revealed that those involved in alcohol-related crime and disorder had legally imported their liquor. Also, street intelligence from informants identified only a small number of bootleggers who served a limited number of repeat buyers.

Officer observations and a review of incident reports revealed that a large number of calls involved intoxicated persons who had been going to or from, attending, or hosting social engagements that catered to multiple attendees. Most of the liquor available at these engagements was legally imported and shared socially by the purchaser with family and friends.

Analysis of police records revealed that citizens were most likely to be involved in inebriated disorder just after they received their bi-monthly paychecks. Between paydays, disorder generally diminished until the next payday cycle.

When asked about their drinking habits, inebriates often told officers that if they had a bottle of liquor, they would drink a bottle. If they had a case, they would drink a case. If they had none, they would drink none. Physical addiction did not seem to be a problem for them; they would take it or leave it as the moment suited them. Medical and ambulance records, as well as reports from officers and correctional staff, showed that most of those detained for drunkenness did not suffer from alcohol withdrawal while they were confined.

Public safety officials eventually agreed that local disorder seemed less of a matter of why or when people drank, than of how they drank. It appeared that Barrows inordinate amount of disorder involved binge drinkers, not chronic alcoholics. This realization promoted a new way of looking at the problem.

After analyzing previous prevention and intervention strategies, public safety researchers concluded that only abstinence had not been tried. From that conclusion, an initiative was born. That initiative was to put before Barrow's electorate, during the October general election, ballot questions that would give them the opportunity to ban the importation, sale and possession of alcoholic beverages in their community. Title 4 of Alaska's statutes allows any municipality within the state, by a majority of registered voters during a special or general election, to choose to limit access to alcoholic beverages to ban them entirely.

An initial poll of Barrow's citizens, conducted by a professional Anchorage based research company, revealed that there was an even split between citizens who supported a total ban on alcohol and those who did not. Forty five percent said they would vote for the ban, while forty five percent said they would not. Ten percent of citizens were unsure how they would vote on the initiative.

RESPONSE

The public safety director approached the borough's mayor with the idea and the mayor officially adopted a pro-ban policy. He appointed the public safety department to coordinate the education of Barrow's citizens about the deleterious effects of alcohol in their community, and to gain public support for a total alcohol ban. Likewise, the mayor of Barrow embraced the pro-ban policy, and both mayors championed the cause.

The public safety team designed a campaign logo, which consisted of a stylized depiction of a face with a tear under one eye. A slogan around the stylized face read, "*STOP THE ALCOHOL. STOP THE PAIN.*" The logo was applied to buttons, posters, and street banners, reminding voters to vote for the ban during the October election.

Public safety officials formed a coalition with other service providers. Together, they compiled statistics about the effects of alcohol abuse in Barrow. The compiled data were distributed to the public via printed handbills and bulk mailers.

The data were released to local and statewide news media, which followed the campaign in newspaper articles, and in radio and television broadcasts. Public Safety spokespersons presented the facts about alcohol abuse at meetings of local organizations. Media and educational events were designed specifically to educate the 45% who were against a ban and the 10% who were undecided.

Next, a drive was initiated to petition the city of Barrow to place the local-option questions on the October ballot. Sufficient signatures were obtained.

The coalition organized town meetings for the general public. Respected elders, politicians, clergy, and community leaders moderated open discussions about the pros and cons of a total alcohol ban. The public participated from the audience.

The coalition sponsored similar panels for local radio talk shows. These panelists educated the public with statistics, and with anecdotes about the effects of alcohol on them, their community, and their culture.

The coalition also organized the grassroots North Slope Celebration of Sober Life Movement to maximize public involvement in the prohibition effort. The Movement particularly included the community's youth. The Movement sponsored and participated in public meetings and social events in support of prohibition, and it entered into a partnership with the Alaska Federation of Natives Sobriety Movement, whose spokesperson delivered a powerful keynote address at the critical town meeting held just before the October election.

ASSESSMENT

On October 4, 1994, the electorate of Barrow voted, by a narrow margin to ban the importation, sales and possession of alcoholic beverages in Barrow. The new laws took effect on November 1, 1994.

Although the alcohol ban is relatively new, its effects have been dramatic. Citizen requests for police services have dropped by almost 80 percent. Before the ban, the number of substance related calls hovered around 200 per month. In contrast, there were only 32 substance related calls during November, 15 during December, and 15 during January. Call levels for the same months in 1993 and early 1994 were 220, 170, and 167, respectively. The two state court judges in Barrow say that case filings since the ban are remarkably low, and that, for the first time in their memory, they have had weekends uninterrupted by arraignments.

Since the ban, officers have interviewed students, parents, teachers and principals, DARE officers, health practitioners, justice professionals, elders, community leaders, and others about how the ban has affected the quality of life.

Barrows schools report that children are attending school more regularly, and are more alert since the ban. Many students claim that their parents are providing for them better since they've stopped

consuming liquor, that they are less frequently kept awake by drunken squabbling and fights, and that their parents are spending more time with them.

Physicians and nurses at the local Public Health Service Hospital, say they are no longer plagued by alcohol-induced medical emergencies. They are diagnosing and treating true illnesses that are no longer masked by alcohol

There are fewer public inebriates. The pre-ban number of people removed from public areas due to acute alcohol intoxication, 30 to 50 per month, has decreased to three to four per month since the ban.

Generally, the quality of life in Barrow has improved since the alcohol ban. There has been a resurgence of traditional values and cultural activism. Many report that they are able to provide for themselves and their families better since they have stopped spending most of their money on liquor. Some have remarked that if they knew it could be so good to be sober, they would have stopped drinking years ago.

The North Slope Celebration of Sober Life Movement has grown to more than 80 members, and has assumed a leadership role in preserving Barrow's prohibition status. After gaining the ear of local politicians, the Movement recently prevailed over an opposing group's immediate attempts to force a second vote on the ban.

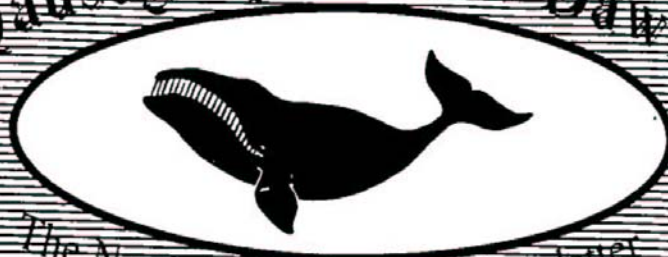
During the late campaign to make Barrow dry, opponents predicted that a ban on alcohol would lead to the deaths of alcoholics who were forced to drink toxic substitutes; that there would be a dramatic increase in the use of illegal drugs; that bootleggers would just get richer; that the hospitals and treatment centers would be clogged with a flood of people suffering from alcohol withdrawal. They proclaimed that prohibition had not worked before, and it would not work now!

Qausagniq - A New Dawn

VOLUME VI
NUMBER 5

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER
1994

The North Slope Borough Newsletter



The Ballot

The following is the question you will see on the City of Barrow ballot that relates to the issue of alcohol importation and possession in Barrow. If the initiative fails, the situation in Barrow will remain the same — sale of alcohol will be illegal but possession and importation will be legal. If it passes, all possession and importation will become illegal.

1. Shall the sale and importation of alcoholic beverages be prohibited in the City of Barrow (yes or no).
2. Shall the possession of alcoholic beverages be prohibited in the City of Barrow (yes or no).



BARROW - DAMP OR DRY?



Alcohol abuse hurts our families. Healthy families are sober families.

The problems caused by alcohol abuse on the North Slope are well known. Our communities have spent years battling the social, economic and cultural consequences of this abuse.

Despite the millions of dollars that have been spent to address the problem, statistics from the Department of Public Safety (see box on Pg. 3) make it clear that we are far from a solution. Alcohol abuse is still a major contributor to most of the social and physical health problems facing us today. Its costs in terms of money, human suffering and cultural degradation are too great to be estimated.

What we do know, according to Public Safety Director Dennis Packer, is that it is not the bootleggers

alone who are responsible for this problem. Every month, over \$350,000 is spent by Barrow residents to legally purchase and import liquor to Barrow. This works out to a conservative estimate of \$4.2 million a year spent on alcohol just in Barrow.

All North Slope villages, except Barrow, have voted themselves dry. This means that liquor can not be sold, imported or possessed in them. Only Barrow has continued as a damp community — one in which the sale of alcohol is illegal but importation and possession is not.

Many villages feel that Barrow contributes to their