Mental Health and Substance Abuse Boards Meet in Kodiak

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Erik Wander/KMXT

The Alaska Mental Health Board and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse are meeting in Kodiak this week, and all indications are that Kodiak is doing well compared with other communities in the state when it comes to treatment and care for people suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues. However, there's always room for improvement.

The two boards meet together three times a year, twice in larger, urban areas such as Juneau, Fairbanks or Anchorage and once in a rural setting. This year they chose Kodiak as their rural focus. Lonnie Walters, Chair of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, said the meetings, which are open to the public, provide the opportunity to listen to community members' concerns and needs regarding mental health and substance abuse issues. He said they tend to be better attended in rural areas, where those needs may be greater.

-- (Walters 1 21 sec. "In most rural communities ... in a larger urban area.")

According to Walters, the boards learned that Kodiak has a low suicide rate compared with other communities in the state as well as a lower commitment rate to the Alaska Psychiatric Institute in Anchorage, indicators that the various organizations providing such services locally are doing something right.

-- (Walters 2 28 sec. "For people who have severe ... showing some benefits.")

Walters, who lived in Kodiak 14 years ago, said he's personally observed less evidence of alcoholism

on this visit, which he called another encouraging sign for the community.

-- (Walters
3 20 sec. "I have seen less public ... used
to see 14 years ago.")

Debi
Keith is chair of the Alaska Mental Health Board. She said the boards encourage
dialog about substance abuse and mental health issues affecting each
community they visit and also assess what each is doing well and where they may
still have certain needs.

-- (Keith
1 13 sec. "We
really do want to know ... certainly want to do that.")

During their three-day
stay, board members visited the Kodiak
Senior Center,
Kodiak Area Native Association and Providence
Kodiak Island Counseling
Center and Safe Harbor.
They also hosted
a potluck dinner Tuesday evening at the Kodiak Teen
Center for community members
to discuss their concerns with the health care providers, clergy, recovering
addicts and mental health patients and others who comprise the state advisory boards.

I'm
Erik Wander.

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HOST TAG: The two boards met Monday and Tuesday at the Best
Western Kodiak Inn, and wrapped up their meetings early today.