Kodiak Woman Falling Through Cracks in Health Care System

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{audio}/images/stories/mp3/090526.isabellacancer.mp3{/audio}

Erik Wander/KMXT

A local businesswoman who has been involved in the Alutiiq Museum's Alutiiq language program for the past few years, was recently diagnosed with a rare and aggressive type of cancer and now finds herself in need of help in covering her medical costs.

The museum's Alutiiq language manager, April Laktonen Counceller, said the woman, "Isabella B.," as she prefers to be known for business-related and privacy reasons, was actively involved in the Alutiiq Museum's volunteer program in addition to learning the language, before she was diagnosed with advanced stage lobular breast carcinoma two months ago. Counceller said Isabella was always giving of her time while working with the museum, particularly in her friendship with elders, and hopes people will help give back.

Isabella, who is currently in Phoenix, Arizona, receiving treatment, said she was misdiagnosed four times before finally learning that she had the rare form of cancer. She said that for the past year and a half, she had been seeing doctors at the Alaska Native Medical Center and Kodiak Area Native Association, because she was continuously feeling fatigued.

To make a donation through the Elka Best Foundation click here .

-- (Donations 1 42 sec. "We went through tests ... through the lymph nodes.")

Scared and overwhelmed, Isabella immediately contacted the Alaska Native Medical Center

requesting help in covering the costs of doctor's visits, tests and chemotherapy, but was denied.

-- (Donations 2 47 sec. "It was very heartbreaking ... really improve the system.")

The Elka Best Foundation, a non-profit organization whose mission it is to help people battling cancer and in similar situations as Isabella's, has set up a web site, where they are accepting donations on Isabella's behalf. She said one of her physicians directed her to the foundation.

-- (Donations 3 35 sec. "I told him I was not going to ... back in for more treatments.")

Isabella spoke about how she became involved with the Alutiiq language program and her relationship with the elders there, whom she said reminded her of the grandmother she lost to cancer when she was young. She said she especially misses being around the Elders and hearing their voices.

-- (Donations 4 45 sec. "I remember the first time ... I was really drawn to them.")

Isabella said she doesn't expect to be out of the facility where she is receiving treatment until August at the very earliest. However, she maintains a positive attitude and looks forward to returning to Kodiak and especially visiting her dear friends at the Alutiiq language program when that time comes. She said she is grateful for any support she receives. All tax-deductable donations made through the Elka Best Foundation go straight to Isabella's treatment.

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