

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: EFFECTIVENESS AND FISCAL IMPACTS OF HOMEWARD BOUND

*Prepared for Homeward Bound and Rural Alaska Community Action Program • November 2001*

*By Institute of Social and Economic Research, UAA*

An innovative program aimed at getting chronic, long-term alcoholics off the streets and back into the Anchorage community saves money for state and city agencies—especially the Alaska Department of Corrections. That’s the broad finding of a preliminary evaluation ISER did of the effectiveness and fiscal impacts of the Homeward Bound program, a 25-bed transitional living program in Anchorage.

*There is a beauty to the  
daringness of the concept.*

Jewel Jones  
Municipality of Anchorage

The Rural Alaska Community Action Program and the Homeward Bound program contracted with ISER to evaluate Homeward Bound, which began in February 1997. We wrote two reports, one looking at all Homeward Bound clients and one looking just at Alaska Native clients. But because most Homeward Bound clients are Alaska Native, our findings for both are similar.

This analysis is based on limited data and a small sample—33 Homeward Bound clients and 35 people who were referred to the program but did not enter. We found a wide variation in how often people use services and which services they use—and the small sample and wide variation limit the ability of statistics to say whether apparent differences are real or chance variations. We’re also missing some data. Finally, because this project was small, we weren’t able to collect all the data and do all the analysis we would have liked.

### Summary of Findings

There are only an estimated 300 chronic, homeless alcoholics in Anchorage (defined as people who have been picked up by the Community Service Patrol at least 30 times in one year). But they’re expensive to the community—because they so frequently use state and city rescue and protection services, emergency medical care, and alcohol treatment facilities, among other things. We found that Homeward Bound clients:

- *Cost the justice system only about a third as much* per year as do those not in the program—because Homeward Bound clients commit fewer crimes.
- *Use the municipal sleep-off center less* and so save the city money.
- *Cost less in city ambulance services* than those outside the program, because they don’t use ambulances as much for advanced life support services (which are the most expensive ambulance services).

### Background

Homeward Bound deals with homelessness and alcoholism simultaneously, providing its clients with a place to live and allowing them to deal with their alcoholism at their own pace and over a much longer period than other alcohol-treatment programs. No alcohol is allowed in the Homeward Bound residence, and clients can’t stay in the residence when they are intoxicated—but they can drink off the premises.

Goals of the program include helping clients get jobs, move into stable housing, and pay bills. Clients can live at the Homeward Bound residence for two years (total, not consecutively) and they have six months of case management after completing the program. Since its inception, Homeward Bound has treated 134 people, with 36 graduates. Among program participants, 82 percent are men and 18 percent women; 84 percent are Alaska Natives; 26 percent are veterans; and 75 percent have at least a high-school education. Homeward Bound reports that among the 36 program graduates, it has continuously tracked all but two and found that 25 had maintained stable housing for anywhere from six months to three years.

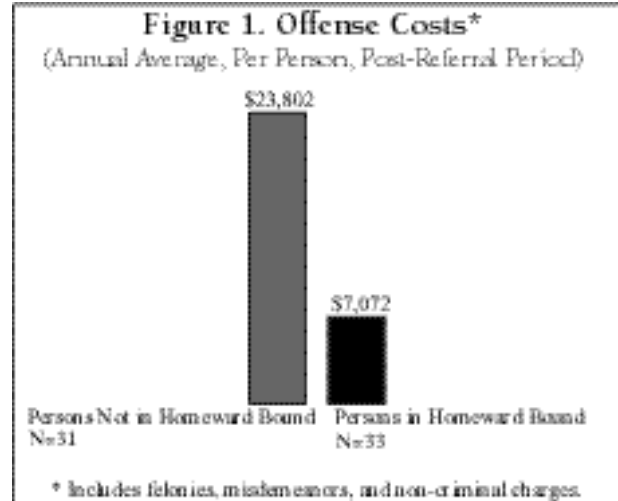
**Evaluation Methods**

We looked at (1) whether the Homeward Bound program is saving the city and state money, by reducing how much its clients use city and state services ; (2) whether the program is meeting its goal of putting chronic, homeless alcoholics back on their feet; and (3) how other social service agencies see the program.

**Crime Levels and Costs**

The Alaska Department of Corrections supplied records for persons in our sample who committed non-criminal or criminal offenses between September 1, 1996 and August 28, 2001. These data were the most complete we collected, and we were able to do the most thorough analysis—so we feel most confident about the results in this section. We broke the data into the pre-referral period (from September 1996 to the time a person was referred to the Homeward Bound program), and the post-referral period (from the time the person was referred through August 2001).

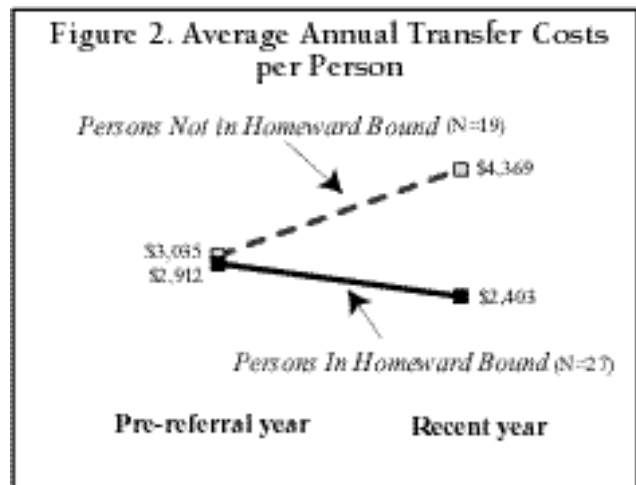
- *Homeward Bound clients committed about half as many crimes per person as those outside the program in the post-referral period. Crimes per person doubled among those not in the program between 1996 and 2001, while holding steady among Homeward Bound clients. The most common crime was trespassing. Most other common crimes were also non-violent—including probation violations, shoplifting, and disorderly conduct.*
- *Homeward Bound clients cost the Department of Corrections only about a third as much per person as did those not in the program, for all offenses combined. As Figure 1 shows, annual costs for persons not in Homeward Bound were about \$23,800 in the post-referral period, as compared with \$7,072 for Homeward Bound clients—for savings of \$16, 730 per person. The Homeward Bound program serves 60 persons a year, so savings to the Department of Corrections could amount to about \$1 million annually.*
- *Protective custody holds—police holding inebriates in jail while they sober up—increased over time among both Homeward Bound clients and those not in the program. Such holds are not criminal offenses.*



**Use of Services**

We looked at several services that street alcoholics use heavily: (1) the municipal transfer station, where people either go or are taken to sober up; (2) the Brother Francis Shelter, operated by Catholic Social Services; (3) ambulance services of the Anchorage Fire Department; (4) emergency and other medical care at the Alaska Native Medical Center.

We focused our analysis on two periods: the year before people were referred to the Homeward Bound program ("pre-referral year") and the year from July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001 ("recent year").

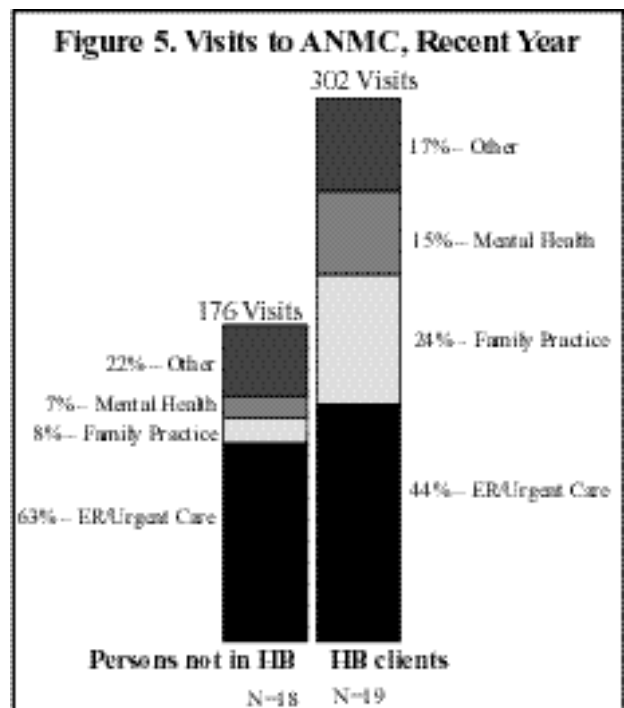
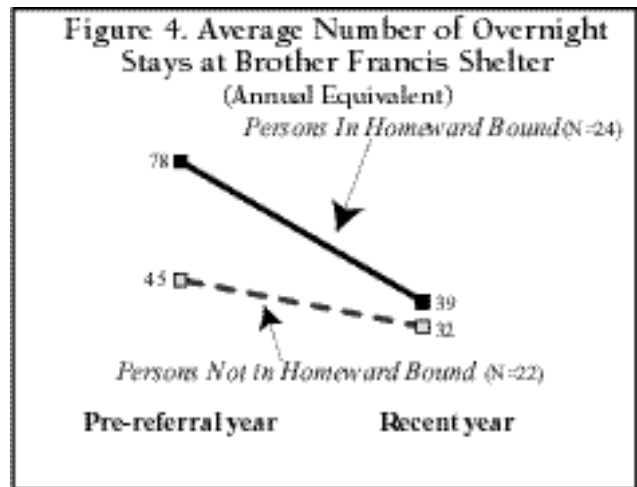
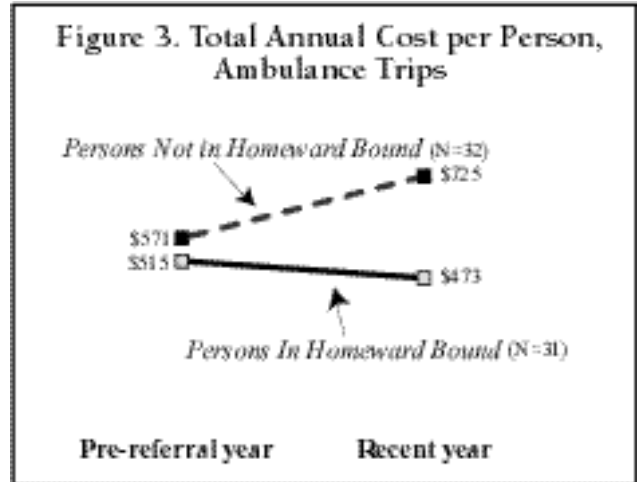


- *Transfer station costs per person were 45 percent lower for Homeward Bound clients in the recent period (Figure 2). Per person costs over time rose more than 40 percent among those outside the program, but did not increase among Homeward Bound clients.*

- *Costs for city ambulance trips per person held steady for Homeward Bound clients and rose nearly a third among those outside the program. As Figure 3 shows, per person ambulance costs in the most recent year were more than 50 percent higher among those not in the program.*

- *Homeward Bound clients' use of the Brother Francis Shelter dropped sharply over time (Figure 4). But in the recent period they still used the shelter more often than those outside the program did.*

- *Homeward Bound clients used more preventive (non-emergency) medical services than those outside the program did in the recent period. (Figure 5.) About one quarter of the visits Homeward Bound clients made to the medical center in the most recent period were for family practice care, and another 15 percent were for mental health care. Homeward Bound clients and those outside the program visited the emergency room close to the same number of times, but those outside the program made less use of preventive services.*



## **Interview Findings**

Of the 68 people in our sample, we were able to interview 25, including 18 in the Homeward Bound program and 7 outside the program. Our interviews didn't tell us as much as we had hoped, partly because we weren't able to interview more people. We discovered that 11 of the 68 people we hoped to interview were dead. Some refused to talk with us; others we couldn't locate. Still, we can draw a few general points from the interviews.

- On average, homeless inebriates we interviewed both inside and outside the program were middle-aged Native men who had been on the streets longer than 10 years. The main difference we saw was that those in the program were more likely to be high-school graduates.
- People in the program were more likely to say their lives were better now than five years ago—mostly because they had a place to stay off the streets. And six people in the program told us that getting a place to live was a big motive for going into the Homeward Bound program.
- Five of the 18 Homeward Bound clients who answered the question, "What do you like best about your current life?" cited sobriety. None of those we interviewed outside the program cited sobriety. And five of those we talked to in the Homeward Bound program said a big reason they wanted to be in the program was for help to quit drinking.
- When asked why some homeless alcoholics are able to get off the street while others aren't, those we interviewed cited both internal factors (like having motivation or lacking it) and external (like adequate or inadequate income and availability of agency outreach programs).

## **Opinions of Agency Administrators**

ISER staff asked administrators from social service agencies their opinions about Homeward Bound's contribution to community services and its effectiveness. We talked with people at Anchorage Downtown Partnership; Cook Inlet Housing Authority; Alaska Office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Anchorage Division of Health and Human Services; Brother Francis Shelter (Catholic Social Services); Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center; and Alaska Psychiatric Institute.

- *All administrators agreed that the program filled a critical gap* in community services and that it was doing an excellent job.
- *Most administrators felt that the Homeward Bound Program should have more flexible entry requirements.* Currently, to be eligible for the program a person must be over 18 years old and homeless, not be on the national sex offender's list, and, within the year prior to program referral, have 40 Community Service Patrol pick-ups that result in a stay at the city sleep-off center (transfer station).
- *All program administrators agreed that the Homeward Bound program has been effective.* They cited their knowledge of in-house evaluations, progress reports, and outcomes as evidence of this effectiveness.