



Southern Kenai Peninsula Communities Project

Forces of Change Assessment Report

Homer, AK
November 2009

FORCES OF CHANGE ASSESSMENT

The forces of change assessment seeks to identify forces – such as trends, factors, or events – that are or will be influencing the health and quality of life of the community and the work of the local public health system.¹ The goal is to better anticipate change and to raise our awareness of factors that are often beyond our control. We brainstormed these issues in a meeting of our whole Communities Project in February, in addition to asking the question in our Key Informant interviews in March and April of 09. What follows is a list, with challenges and opportunities that community members anticipate accompanying the forces. The following matrix provides an overlay onto each of the other 3 assessments.

Matrix of Observations

What follows is a list, with challenges and opportunities that community members anticipate might accompany these forces.

Trend	Challenge	Opportunity
Redoubt Volcano eruption	-Uncertainty -possible respiratory risk	-Neighbors planning together -Connection in risk of adversity
Healthcare system changes	-Uncertainty -Politicizing of issue -Divisiveness over taking a step toward national healthcare -strong insurance lobbies	-More prevention and wellness programs, opportunity to use the positive models -better continuum of care -Grassroots care -Expand services -More health care for more individuals -More Mental Health care, also (parity laws 1/10) -More Denali Kid Care coverage -Electronic medical records
Economic downturn	-Loss of revenue sharing, tax base and other costs -Job Loss -Employer insurance costs rise -State can't meet volume of applicants – more cost to State -Uncertainty -Workforce training - need more housing	-Paradigm shift -Workforce training - (economic development strategies)
Stimulus Monies	-Prioritization of projects	-Funding of shovel-ready Projects provides long-term jobs -More collaboration
Aging Local Population	-Need for services Fewer Revenues for schools	-Engage wisdom
Climate Change	-Ocean Acidification -Water sources Fish run irregularity -Survival	-Collaboration -Positive Global Community
New renewable resource development	-Lack of sustainable practices -Lack of healthy environment -High energy costs	-Lower future energy costs -Cleaner environment -More jobs
New resource	-Population influx	-Monetary gain

¹ Achieving Healthier Communities through MAPP: A User's Handbook, CDC and NACCHO, 2008

development	-Environmental degradation -Boom bust system -Increased STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) -Controversy / divisiveness	
More/different drugs available to teens	-How to empower teens to make positive choices -Finding positive adult role models -Controlling availability of prescription & non-prescription drugs -Mixed Messages	-Greater awareness -Community/parent responsibility -Identify root causes and alternative strategies
Peak Oil	-Price volatility Budgeting uncertainty	-Get on with sustainable and renewable alternatives -Get beyond dependence
H1N1	-Protect vulnerable populations Avoid fear-based policies	-Healthier Community - Healthier food production
New Federal Administration	-Bipartisanship -Resistance to change	-Hope
SAMSHA Money Available (Federal funding for Substance Abuse)	-Prioritization	-More Prevention and Treatment for Substance Abuse
Borough Deciding Funding for Region	-Share	-Equality and Fairness
Pollution= more Disabilities	-Improve legislation -Taking responsibility for our polluting	-Healthier people and environments
Changing Technologies	-Ethics -Loss of physical activity	-Infinite
High Turnover in Law Enforcement	-Funding	-Safer communities -equality and social justice
Increased Insurance Costs	-Political lobbies	-Crisis mandates system change with universal coverage
Adverse Childhood Effects (ACE) – Brain Based Research	-Raise public awareness of new research	-More recognition of lifelong impact of trauma
state govt. Administration	-Instability -Personnel changes	-Values clarification
War on Drugs	-Intolerance -No one wins in war	-Values clarification
Rich getting richer and poor getting poorer	-Disappearance of middle class -Concentration of power -More crime and other social impacts of poverty	-Wake-up call -Increased grassroots collaboration
Effects of FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder)	-Loss of human potential	-New care modalities
Exxon Valdez Spill	-Environmental & social impacts	-Increased awareness of safety -Increased safety regulations

Observations and Discussion

There is currently a heightened atmosphere of worldwide economic uncertainty; this was mentioned often throughout the assessment. A new federal administration with a specific platform of change and healthcare reform has provided hope, uncertainty, and debate. In Alaska, climate change has been increasingly in the media forefront with impacts manifesting in the melting of glaciers, and in our own community, with changes in ground's freezing, resulting in the need for a new water treatment system. This type of changes will continue to impact Alaska first, according to Terry Chapin of the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology, who reports that warming is happening here twice as fast as the global average².

This year the city completed a Climate Action Plan to "recognize that local action is one of the best tools available to address the threat of global climate change, and that we have a responsibility to do our part."³ Economic stimulus funds, coming in stages into Alaska, have created some opportunity and more uncertainty as the state grapples with what to accept and how to spend it. At this writing, many of our local partners are shifting the focus of their work to H1N1 flu, providing mass immunization clinics. Some forces of change can dramatically change the daily operations of one organization or an entire population.

There are currently wars in at least three countries worldwide, in which the US is participating. Although not mentioned in our brainstorming earlier in the year, the growing number of troops could be an impact felt locally, as well as worldwide.

Also noteworthy locally, as the result of a City of Homer special election in October 2009, voters decided not to have a sales tax on non-prepared food, with potentially severe city budget implications and threatened cuts in town services. The ultimate impact is unknown, but may affect people's sense of what is "affordable." This could affect the community's prioritization of goals as we move into creating our Community Health Improvement Plan.

Lastly, our community has experienced many staff changes in leadership just over the course of our assessment. Each of these forces comes with challenges and opportunities still unfolding.

² From a talk given in Nov. 09, reported on KDLG, to UAF students preparing to attend the UN Climate Change Convention in Copenhagen, in Dec. 09.

³ City of Homer, AK, Resolution 07-42(A)