

## Social Work Professor Takes On Challenge of Working in Alaska

Contributed by Mary Stanton  
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[View photos from St. Paul Island](#)

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OXFORD, Miss. - The heat and humidity of Mississippi summers is partly the reason a University of Mississippi professor is spending five weeks as the only social worker in remote St. Paul Island, Alaska.

"I had just finished teaching (the first summer term); it was hot and humid in Mississippi and going to St. Paul Island, where the average summer temperature is 45, sounded like a good idea," said Susan Allen, associate professor of social work. "I love community outreach and prior to teaching I was a clinical social worker in community mental health for many years. I wanted to be of service. They had a need, and so here I am."

Part of the Pribilof Islands, St. Paul is approximately 40 square miles and inhabited largely by native Aleuts. The primarily Russian Orthodox community has one store served by barges or air delivery. The remote location makes it difficult to fill jobs, even though the clinic is state of the art, Allen said.

"The St. Paul community was without services," she said. "In the interim, Jane Bye, a colleague, asked if I would be able to help them out on an emergency basis."

After agreeing to help, Allen hit the ground running, attending a community meeting as soon as she landed on the island.

"I attended a community potluck, met key people in the community and did a lot of listening," she said.

The main focus of her work is to handle crisis intervention, complete assessments and make recommendations for treatment intervention. Allen also provides interim clinical counseling and supportive problem solving for the people.

"I am also doing community outreach with community leaders to address perceived needs in the community and provide support to other workers, such as the police department, families and workers here in the agency," Allen said.

Applied Sciences Dean Linda Chitwood said Allen's work in Alaska is an example of how important the professions within the applied sciences are to the health and stability of communities and families.

"Our faculty and students are engaged in providing the best practices and hands-on solutions to numerous critical health issues such as malnutrition, autism, stuttering, physical inactivity, child abuse, crime reduction and many more," Chitwood said. "Developing professionals who will provide innovative solutions and leadership is the core mission of the programs within our school."

Aside from her work, Allen also has enjoyed seeing Northern fur seals dominating the landscape surrounding the Bering Sea.

"This is the season that the pups will be born," Allen said. "The rookeries are off limits to anyone except authorized people, but I have been able to view from a distance and it is really amazing."

Allen, who will return to Mississippi in August, said she is thankful for her summer in Alaska. "It has been an amazing journey and experience, and one I will never forget," she said.

For more information on the Department of Social Work, go to <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/socialwork/> . For more information on the School of Applied Sciences, visit [http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/applied\\_sciences/](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/applied_sciences/) .