

Accessing County Services for the Rural Poor

A proposal from the Rural Outreach Center (ROC)

The majority of families served by the Rural Outreach Center in southern Erie County are living on a budget with little cushion; in the event of small- or large-scale emergency events, e.g. an unforeseen sickness, doctor bills, rise in rent and or utilities these persons and families are unable to meet competing demands for resources.

Compounding this problem is the fact that most of these individuals are unable to access County services for a variety of reasons.

Accessing services in Buffalo is intimidating for most of our rural families. Some may have transportation but the cost of gas (\$8.00) and parking (\$7.00 a day) prohibits them from even considering a commute to Buffalo. Making matters worse, an individual has to go into Buffalo at least three separate times to apply for Public Assistance: one day for submitting an application, a second day for meeting with an individual for job training and third day to meet with a caseworker. This in combination with the stress of navigating in the city, which is foreign to many, virtually eliminates their ability to access services.

Accessing and navigating services is also difficult for these persons. The compartmentalization of services, e.g. someone applying for SSD may not receive information on SNAP or SSI and therefore may miss out on services for which they are eligible.

Many of our clients also have legal issues and have difficulty obtaining services through legal aid. Access to legal aid services can be frustrating on many levels. Reaching someone by phone, having a phone call returned and dealing with the bureaucracy of legal aid can be frustrating and intimidating to individuals and families.

Based on our experience, the top four needs for individuals and families we serve in the southern Erie County are individualized, comprehensive, friendly access to:

1. Legal Aid Services (in person to avoid miscommunication)
2. Professionals to meet with clients and to explain qualifications for Social Security Disability (SSD), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and emergency housing.

While these services are available on line most of our clients do not have access to a computer and have little or no working knowledge of how to use a computer to apply for benefits.

3. Job postings and assistance in applying and interviewing for jobs. Many of our clients are seeking employment but have limited knowledge in resume writing, applying for jobs and interview skills. A local location for job postings, job training, resume writing and skill building would benefit many of our clients. The closest location for these services is Williamsville NY. The Orchard Park One Stop Job Center currently offers access to computers only.

4. Public Assistance, including SNAP and Medicaid.

We propose that the County consider innovative ways to offer these critical services in partnership with the Rural Outreach Center, currently located in South Wales, NY. This cooperation could use the DMV model of satellite offices that currently operate in outlying areas of the county. The County might consider rotating a small number of personnel representing each of the above service areas on a once a month basis in the ROC. Since it would take time for persons to become aware of these services, it might start with ½ day a month and expand on an “as demand” basis.

Thank you for your assistance with this. If you need more information, please contact us.



Frank Cerny, MDiv, PhD
Chairman of the Board

The Rural Outreach Center
Activity report 2013

Three important developments were completed in 2013: the board of director's structure and membership was finalized, the application for 501c3 status was completed and approved and the Health Care Services Program was initiated.

Consistent with our bylaws the board is comprised of program directors, up to 3 outside members and the pastor of Pathways Christian Fellowship (PCF) as a permanent member.

Frank Cerny, (pastor of PCF) Chair
Jim Oubre, (Director of New Paths), Vice Chair
Don Birdd, Secretary
Jane Vosseler, Treasurer
Ruthie Hunt, (Director of Health Care Services)
Nancy Cerny/ Christye Peterson (Directors of Snack Pack)
Janet Stanek ((Director of Single Parent Program)
Norm Merriman
Steve/Sarah Tasker (Outside member)
Vickie Feine (Outside member)
Cliff DeFlyer (Outside member)

Committee Structure: Don Birdd will oversee the Internal Affairs Committee (all internal & operational issues in areas of finance, personnel, program oversight, and facilities). Jim Oubre will oversee the External Affairs Committee (all external issues in areas of fundraising, public relations and marketing).

501c3 Status was granted on August 26th, 2013, which triggered an application to be a United Way designation agency (approved) and a fundraising effort to increase support for our social worker and operations, which was successful. In addition this designation allowed us to receive funds from groups that were previously hesitant to donate to Pathways Christian Fellowship.

Ruthie Hunt agreed to facilitate the formation of a team to develop a plan to operate a health care service for the communities we serve. The first clinic for uninsured was offered on December 10.

The board spent much time working through to approve important policies, including:

- Volunteer policy – outlines our expectations and what our volunteers should expect.
- Sexual misconduct – policy and procedures for dealing with underage youth; all volunteers who have contact with underage youth must review and sign off on this policy.

- Sexual harassment – outlines policy and procedures.
- Conflict of interest – policy defines conflict of interest and requires that any conflicts of interest be declared at the start of board meetings

The board approved a contract with Gravitass to provide a system for recording all ROC client activities and reporting outcomes. We now have overall goals and outcome objectives for all ROC activities in a system that will allow us to track clients movement toward self-sufficiency. The complete outcome system is in appendix A.

Program reports:

- **New Paths Household Goods Redistribution Center** – complete report attached in Appendix B. Because of increased activity, both in terms of donated items donated and distributed the Center is now open 2 days a week and staffed by a regular group of volunteers. A policy requiring either a (minimal) financial or in-kind contribution or volunteer hours to assist the ROC was instituted as part of our empowerment effort. Our social worker or student intern is present at distributions and many people have been assisted in this way. New Paths has been able to cover its costs, including rent through contributions. Almost 300 families/individuals were assisted in 2013
- **Snack Pack** – the Snack Pack program continues to help students in the Holland and East Aurora school districts. Over 80 students receive backpacks filled with nutritious food items every Friday during the school year. In addition, boxes of food and non-food (toilet paper, personal hygiene items that can not be purchased with SNAP) items are distributed to these families throughout the year. This program is sustained through cooperation with local civic and church group volunteers and financially through grants and other donations.
- **Health Care Services Program** – this program has established a policy manual, recruited physicians and allied health care workers and provided its first service to uninsured adults in December. This program has partnered with the UB Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Schools and developed relationships for referrals to local drug stores and physician groups. Flu shots were provided at the monthly free community dinner and health insurers have been available at these dinners to sign up uninsured. Almost a dozen clients were able to access insurance through this mechanism. Blood pressure screening is also provided at these dinners and many have been referred to other health care providers through this. This program has cooperated with the Erie County Senior Services division to provide educational programs for those with chronic diseases and looks forward to expanding these educational programs. This service has been self-sustaining in 2013.

- **Greenhouse** – the greenhouse provided fresh greens for most of the year, but due to an inability to recruit volunteers this program has been temporarily suspended.
- **Singles support program** – complete report in Appendix B. This program continues to provide empowerment and growth activities for single parents.
- **School backpack program** – the ROC, in cooperation with the local Boys and Girls Club provided backpacks filled with school supplies for over 80 children. The distribution event included free haircuts, eye exams and other services.
- **Financial coaching** – As other ROC services allow clients to save money, i.e. by receiving a washer and dryer, there is no need to pay for Laundromat services, or by providing minor home repair money is freed, we provide financial coaching to help clients build financial reserves toward self-sufficiency.
- **Home repair** – Many clients live in substandard housing and are unable to afford regular home maintenance. Volunteers through the ROC have provided roofing, plumbing and other services to help clients improve their living situation. Fifteen persons received such services in 2013. We are working with our financial coaches to ensure that clients are not being forced to maintain housing that will continue to use limited resources.
- **Literacy** – In cooperation with the Southtowns Literacy program, in partnership with Houghton College, we provide reading resources for children of those attending our monthly free community dinners. Our vision is to expand this to adults and to offer more services to empower children of our clients through play therapy, preventive emotional counseling and universal pre-K.
- **Social work** – complete report in Appendix D. Our social worker continues to be the core of our programs by providing a direct connection between clients and services. We have been greatly assisted in this with our student interns from the University at Buffalo's School of Social Work. Maria receives referrals from our other programs, local food pantry programs (FISH, Trading Post and) and word of mouth. We have recruited social work assistants to support Maria in tasks that may not require her professional expertise, e.g. keeping appointments, ongoing social support. With our emphasis on movement from dependency toward self-sufficiency it is important to provide continuing support and counsel for our clients; these assistants help with this important tasks.
- **Christmas for families** – In cooperation with several civic organizations and churches the ROC provided Christmas presents (and a tree) for 10 families.

Facilities

We currently use space provided by the South Wales Community Hall. This hall has no office space and limited space for other programs that may require privacy. In addition, since we do not have control over this space conflicts arise limiting our ability to commit to need expansion of services.

Pathways Christian Fellowship has purchased 7.3 acres of land just south of East Aurora and in cooperation with that group the ROC has been developing plans for a 19,000 ft² multiuse facility to serve the needs of the ROC. An investment has been made to provide a driveway to the building site and a small parking area. Plans are being made for a capital campaign to raise the projected \$3.6 M required.

To overcome frustration at our inability to offer services and to provide space for interested partners we have pursued the gifting of a 70 x 38 ft double-wide trailer with a reception and waiting area, 5 offices, a conference room and washrooms. We expect this to become available in the spring of 2014. At that time we will raise the projected \$80,000 to site the facility, including running utilities. Plans are to site this unit such that the utilities will then be available for the eventual building.

Fundraising

Our campaign to raise funds to support our social worker raised \$13,000. In addition, we were able to secure \$ through grants and another \$ through undesignated gifts and \$ from designated gifts and grants. Outside funders include Kiwanis, Kelly for Kids, Oishei Foundations, and others.

Several board members were invited to attend a presentation from the founder of Benevon on a non-profit fundraising model based on developing long-term relationships with those who have developed a passion for our work rather than based on a series of disconnected events. The board has agreed to pursue this model once we can recruit several key persons.

In addition our fundraising committee is developing a strategy for raising the funds for the building.

A new strategic plan will be presented to the board early in 2014. This will outline our strategy to obtain bridge funding until our fundraising provides sufficient operating funds.

Partners

We have approached or been approached by several agencies interested in partnering with us. Discussions with these agencies have included possible financial support for operating expenses as they use the ROC facilities. Among those agencies are Hearts and Hands, the Veteran's One-Stop Center, Erie County, counseling and therapy services and others. We are unable to provide these services currently because we have no space.

Finally, we approved a logo that is now used on all of our material.

Appendix A

Case Outcome Reporting System (CORS) Outcome matrix

Outcome category: Financial stability

Overall scores from 1 (unstable) to 5 (stable)

Objective 1: develop a savings

1	2	3	4	5
None reserve	1 week reserve	2 weeks reserve	1 month reserve	6 months

Where "reserve" = current monthly income

Activity to accomplish is our financial coaching program

Objective 2: Increase total income

1	2	3	4	5
< HHS poverty	130%	150%	\$40 – 50,000	>\$50,000

Activity to accomplish = social work case management to access full available resources and encourage greater employment through job coaching programs, training, etc.

Objective 3: Improve employment status

1	2	3	4	5
Unemployed benefits	PT	multiple PT	FT no benefits	FT with

Activity to accomplish = see above, especially job skills training and connecting to employment agencies

Outcome category: Family stability

Overall scores from 1 (unstable) to 5 (stable)

Objective 1: marital status

1	2	3	4	5
Single marriage	single, no male	single, male support	married, some support	stable

Activity to accomplish = single parent support group

Objective 2: housing

1	2	3	4	5
inadequate	minimal	adequate	comfortable	own dwelling
inadequate = needs more space, repairs, etc				

Activity to accomplish = our home repair service and social work case management.

Objective 3: literacy

1	2	3	4	5
<25%				Full
(need to find a measurement scale)				

Activity to accomplish = literacy program

Objective 4: emotional stability

1	2	3	4	5
(need to find a scale)				

Activity to accomplish = support groups, counseling

Objective 5: Improve health

1	2	3	4	5
Life threatening Disease	chronic condition (diabetes, COPD, heart failure, etc	vital signs and history indicate emerging disease	multiple risk factors indicate high risk	healthy

Activity to accomplish = health care program, including education and support groups.

Objective 6: Reduce substance abuse

1	2	3	4	5
Hard drugs				clean

Activity to accomplish = AA or similar groups.

Appendix B

2011 totals	2012 totals – (Didn't charge for items)	2013 totals (Began new pricing)
Times open - 24	Times open - 27	Times Open - 55
Groups attending - 138	Groups attending - 251	Groups attending - 198
# Items taken – 280	# Items taken – 517	# Items taken - 494
Value - \$11,740	Value of items - \$20,505	Value of items- \$14,765
Cash collected -\$0	Cash collected - \$300	Cash collected- \$4248
Calls received - 75	Calls Received - 320	Calls received - 526
# Pickups - 75	# Pickups – 181	Pickups - 138
	# People receiving free items - 245	# People receiving free items - 25
	# Free items - 505	# Free items -180
	Value of free items -\$20,000	Value of free items -\$5400
		# of volunteers -21
		Expenses: Rent - \$100/mo Gas for truck – Insurance for truck Registration for Truck Registration for trailer Repair for trailer Advertising Supplies

Appendix C

Single parent report for 2013

For the year overall we served approximately ten individuals in the Single Parent/Caregiver Ministry.

As a group we continue to work on life-skill enhancements primarily in the areas of Self-worth, grief and loss, communication techniques and building better relationships.

Those involved with the group express their observations of seeing how they have changed and become stronger as individuals. One has commented that she “found her voice.” After years of being in a relationship that took from her any sense of self-empowerment, this 60+ lady now finds herself in social situations, her work environment, and even dealing with her ex-husband in a way that allows her to speak her mind and be a productive part of dialog.

Others simply walk away from group meetings encouraged to continue their journey into discovering and using their individual strengths more fully and in all aspects of their life.

And for others, they have found a welcoming place where they can be heard.

Appendix D

Social Work Annual Report 2013

Program	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Number of First Time Calls	12	12	14	16	14	24	20	19	12	14	10		167
Home Visits	7	6	6	8	8	8	5	7	5	6	6		72
Phone Assessments	8	6	8	10	12	16	7	8	10	10	12		107
Meetings	5	3	5	6	4	5	6	7	8	8	12		69
Admin Hours	16	18	20	16	16	26	32	25	28	26	30		283
Emergency Food (families)	0	0	0	1	3	4	6	3	5	6	15		43
Follow up Calls/short	15	18	20	24	26	24	26	26	26	30	42		277
Emergency Food Cards	\$50	\$50	\$100	\$75	\$50	\$50	\$100	0	0	\$100	\$300		\$875
Coordinated Thanksgiving dinners											12	3	