

Hampshire Community Action Commission's First Call for Help

News You Can Use

Volunteer Newsletter

March 2000

"Wise sayings often fall on barren ground, but a kind word is never thrown away."

—Sir Arthur Helps

In Gratitude

Many thanks to all our volunteers who do so much to maintain the high quality of services here at HCAC First Call for Help. We appreciate the commitment you make in coming here each week when there are so many other demands on your time.

Milestones

Congratulations to both Karen S. and Susan for giving 100 hours of time to First Call! Karen and Susan both began their volunteer work here in the Fall of 1999. Karen has been doing a tremendous job staffing the phones in I & R all day on Friday. Karen, you have been a wonderful help with your perceptive and respectful listening and your willingness to help. Thank you, Karen !

Susan has been involved with helping JoAnn to update resources in preparation for the publication of the revised 2000 edition of our directory "All the Help

You Can Get". Susan, you have a great knowledge of area resources and you have been putting that to good use in your work here. You have also done some great problem-solving and are persistent in your search for information. We really appreciate all that you do here on Wednesday and Friday mornings. Thanks, Susan!

Congratulations to Bobbe for giving 200 hours of time to First Call! Bobbe began working here in the summer of 1998. She has been on the telephone providing information and referral services to people who call. Bobbe, you have been generous in filling in when we have openings in the schedule. We appreciate your dedication, and your compassion and empathy on the phone. Thank you, Bobbe!

Happy Birthday!

Happy Birthday wishes go out to:

Catherine	March 4 th
Toni	March 8 th
Bobbe	March 23 rd

Enjoy your birthday and may the year ahead bring you much joy! May you, who give so much to others, receive back much happiness in return.

Updating the Big Red Book

Updating of the Big Red Book (our directory: "All the Help You Can Get") is going very well. We have a team of volunteers involved, *The Sensational Six*: Bev, Karen, Kelly, Rebecca, Susan and Toni. Plus we are getting additional support from our other volunteers, as needed.

We have sent out faxes or mailings to nearly all the programs and are now in the process of reviewing information that comes in, filling in any gaps and entering it into IRis. Those of you who are on the phones, using the data base, will begin to notice as the information about programs looks more complete and up to date, and the format becomes more uniform.

For anyone who hasn't seen it, you may want to take a look at the incredible "Tower of Updating" that JoAnn has put together. It's a stack of shelves that is usually located in the conference room. JoAnn has done an amazing job of organizing the updating process, with color-coding blazing the path from one step to another. Thanks to everyone who has been helping out with this long and complex process. When it has been completed, we will know that we are giving out the most accurate and up-to-date information to those who call and to those who purchase our directory.

Ideas for Publicizing Our Volunteer Program

I am interested in finding out if any of our volunteers here at First Call would like to be highlighted in the HCAC newsletter. What about when you achieve a milestone of 500 or 1000 hours? Please think about it. I'll be checking in with you at our next meeting.

For our next recruitment drive, I would like to take some photos of volunteers doing their work here to create a collage that I can bring to volunteer fairs. It is something that I think will draw people to our table to find out more about what we do. I'll be checking in with you to see if you are interested in having your photo taken and if you have any ideas on setting up a display that will draw people to inquire about us. What kind of display would appeal to you if you were looking to volunteer? Any help you can give me would be greatly appreciated.

Also, I would love it if anyone were interested in coming with me to the volunteer fairs and sitting at a table to talk with students interested in volunteer work.

--Thank you, from Karen.

New England I & R Conference

The offices of HCAC First Call for Help will be closed on Thursday, March 30, 2000. Staff will be attending a one day conference for Information and

Referral workers and administrators at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass. The focus for this year's conference is: *211: The Gateway to Community Resources*. The conference goes from 7:45 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

There are three sessions of workshops covering I & R Basics, Information on 211, Crisis Work and Issues of Aging. At lunch, David Parachini will speak. He is currently the co-chair of the National 211 Coalition, and was instrumental in implementing 211 in Connecticut.

Volunteers are invited to attend. There may possibly be some funds available to offset the \$40.00 per person cost. (Please check with Karen). This fee includes the continental breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, and a choice of workshop sessions. We will be car-pooling from Amherst. Please let Karen know if you'd like to join us!

HCAC—Our Parent Organization

Find out more about Hampshire Community Action Commission, our parent organization, from the annual report. Karen has left a copy for you to look at in the New Literature Reading Box. The report gives information about HCAC programs, a summary of the Community Action Plan, and a budget for FY 1999.

Info & Referral News

IRis Keyword List

Some people have found that there is a glitch in using the IRis keyword list. When you want to get to another section of the list, and you try typing in a letter, it may not always move you to where you want. Instead of trying to scroll down, you can press escape and try again. This usually fixes the problem.

Help! We Need Somebody...

We need I & R coverage for the following time slots:

Tuesday, 3/7/00	9:15 am-12 noon
Wednesday, 3/8/00	2pm – 4:45 pm
Thursday, 3/16/00	9:15 am- 1:00 pm
Monday, 3/27/00	2 pm - 4:45 pm
Wednesday, 4/12/00	2 pm – 4:45 pm

Please check your calendar and if you can be of assistance, let Karen know as soon as possible. Thank you.

Student Calls

When taking calls from college students who are doing assignments for school, (e.g. a list of referrals to certain types of services), please, if possible, get the name of their professor and the class and leave in JoAnn or Karen's box. Thank you.

Tax Season Reminder

Please don't forget to take a second look at the Tax Information folder that is located to the left of the computer monitor at the I & R volunteer desk. Inside the folder is:

- ◆ Information on Earned Income Credit
The Earned Income Credit is a special tax benefit for people who work full- or part-time. Who can get it? Single or married workers who were raising children in their homes and who earned less than \$30,580 in 1999 can receive an earned income credit up to \$3,816 (or less than \$26,928 if they were raising only one child). Also eligible are single or married workers at least age 25 and under age 65, who were not raising children in their homes, and who earned less than \$10,200 in 1999.
- ◆ A Guide to Free Tax Services (although dated it may still be useful)
- ◆ A Copy of the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997.

Don't overlook the red "Tax Help" folder as well. It gives specific information on where callers can go to get help with their taxes.

News from Mass. Coalition for the Homeless

MassHealth Basic provides a fairly comprehensive set of medical benefits to EAEDC (Emergency Aid to Elders,

Disabled and Children) recipients and long term unemployed people. Mass. Coalition for the Homeless is proposing that the definition for long term unemployed include "homelessness". People who are homeless often find it impossible to produce income verifications and other such documentation. Allowing homeless people to automatically be eligible will require verification of their homeless status from a shelter provider.

The housing allowance is a three year demonstration project that provides project based rental assistance to families who have either earned 130% of the federal poverty level or who have been cut off of Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) benefits over the last 12/24 months. The project will serve 2,500 families during the three years. The subsidy will be shallow at \$300-\$400 per month and will attach to an existing subsidy such as tax credit and set aside units.

TAFDC benefit levels have not increased since 1988. TAFDC benefit levels are now, for a family of three, LESS than 50% of the federal poverty level. The Mass. Coalition for the Homeless together with the Family Economic Initiative proposes a minimum 10% cost of living adjustment for all recipients resulting in an average increased benefit level of \$55/month or \$660/year. The cost of living adjustment would also cause the gross income and net income levels to increase as well (assisting some working poor families currently ineligible)

(Taken from the newsletter of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless: Budget Priorities for 2001)

Volunteer Notebook

Marjorie has been doing a wonderful job keeping our volunteer notebook updated. This resource binder is available to anyone who is interested in locating volunteer work. Most of our listings are located in Hampshire County. As you open the notebook, you will notice in the front pocket, some flyers of volunteer opportunities that have been sent to us.

The first section of the notebook contains newspaper clippings of all kinds of volunteer opportunities in the area. Marjorie has dated these so we can see how recent the listings are. Be aware that they aren't grouped by any special criteria and there may be some repetition from page to page.

The second section of the notebook is a little dated. Generally these computer print-outs (from our now defunct Volunteer Referral Service) are from Fall of 1998 to Spring of 1999. They may still provide useful information about the kinds of services the program provides and the types of volunteer positions they might have available. When someone comes in to look at the notebook, please emphasize that once they find some opportunities that they like, they should call to get updated information on what positions are actually available at the present time.

There is also another resource on the top shelf in the I & R book case that may be helpful. The UMass Office of Community Service Learning of the Commonwealth College publishes a directory of community service and service learning at UMass. Called the *Big Yellow Book*, this resource is

published every fall. The volunteer opportunities listed are not restricted to Hampshire County. While oriented towards students and faculty, it can be a useful supplement to our Volunteer Opportunities Notebook.

UMass also offers the information collected for the *Big Yellow Book* on the Internet. You can give out their web site at www.umass.edu/csl/, if you think it might be helpful.

When someone comes in to the office to use these resources, please be sure to enter this interaction into the contact screen in IRis. Thank you.

New Resource

Please check out the *Medical Reference Guide for Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden Counties* that was recently published by the Daily Hampshire Gazette. There are a couple of copies on the top shelf of the I & R bookcase. It provides listings and phone numbers of all kinds of medical professionals including physicians, physical therapists, opticians, optometrists, podiatrists, chiropractors, and dentists, among others.

Reminder

If you can't find the perfect referral, but you're thinking of giving a second best choice, please check in first with JoAnn or Lillian. They may know of a better choice. Thanks.

March Moon Over Winter Sweden—1971

Classic northern winter night.
White, resplendent,
like a lump of molten silver
the intense disc of the moon
pours its cold magic
over hills and ice-bound lakes
paralyzed fir and birch,
into the marvelous
yard-long icicle spears
suspended outside my window.
Glittering icicle diamonds
strung down the tapering stems
hypnotize with moonscape madness
the awe struck, gazing poet
behind the window-panes.

Black, cold blue, and silver white—
enchanted northern March
sculptured in crystal glory.

--Martin Allwood