

Hampshire Community Action Commission's First Call for Help

News You Can Use

Volunteer Newsletter

November 2000

Happy Autumn!

Hope everyone is having a great autumn and taking advantage of those last, few good weather days before the bitter cold comes.

Thanksgiving is coming up soon and it reminds us of how thankful we feel to have such a wonderful group of volunteers. Special thanks to all of you who have generously given of your time and talent during a busy period of transitions here at HCAC First Call for Help.

Milestones

Special congratulations to Bev who has now completed **1100** hours!

Bev does a great job answering the phones in I & R and keeping resources updated. She played a very significant role in the publication of our *All the Help You Can Get 2000*—updating information, entering it into the computer, proof reading and problem solving.

Bev is also our in-house celebrity, after appearing with Karen on the local cable television show *Age is the Rage*. (You can view the show on videotape. It's available on top of the tan file cabinet in the Volunteer Office.)

Thank you, Bev, for all your dedication and hard work. We really appreciate it!

Holidays Ahead

Please make note that we will be closed for the following November holidays:

Veteran's Day	Friday, Nov. 10 th
Thanksgiving	Thurs., Nov. 23 rd ; Friday, Nov. 24 th

Happy Birthday!

Happy Birthday wishes are in order for:

Michael	September 29 th
Susan	November 10 th
Peter	November 28 th

Hope the year ahead is a healthy and prosperous one!

Program Changes

There are a few changes in the works that you should know about. First, the Hampshire County Family Network is moving from First Call for Help to the Early Childhood Department of HCAC, under the direction of Mark Leonas. This makes better sense since the Family Network is focused on the needs of families with children under the age of four years.

As a part of this reorganization, the Family Network will be moving to another site, probably in Amherst. They will continue to be here until arrangements are made. We will miss them when they leave, but we will need the space for our new BATON project.

For those that haven't heard, BATON refers to *Better Access To Organizations Network*. It is funded by a three-year federal TOP (Technology Opportunities Program) grant through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of the U.S. Dept. of Commerce. The award is to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services who will then subcontract the grant to HCAC.

The grant originated with the idea of a central location where families could obtain essential health and human services—a kind of multi-service center that would provide one-stop shopping for services and eliminate many of the barriers to service access. With the increasing use of technology, it became

evident that it was no longer necessary to have a centralized physical location.

According to the press release from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the BATON project “...will use web-based technologies to build new networks between state agencies, non-profit providers, and families in need of services... The BATON project will also help eliminate barriers for families in more rural parts of the state by bringing information and assistance to their homes or local libraries over the Internet. In addition, this model will assist state agencies and providers in identifying where gaps in services exist and where additional outreach efforts are needed most.”

The COSA (Council of Social Agencies), one of the members of the BATON Advisory Council, describes the project as follows in their newsletter: “...the ultimate ease is for consumers entering the system—telling their story only once—having someone to guide them through entry into whatever parts of the broader system they need to go, preventing them from falling into the cracks. Virtual One Stop Shopping—single initial intake and case coordination.”

All of us at First Call are excited about this project and its potential to better serve those who need help. Fern and Al Sax, the Director of Hampshire Community Action Commission, are attending a conference in Washington D.C. to get a better and more comprehensive understanding of the project details.

This is a pilot project, which, if successful, will be extended to all of

Western Mass. and then throughout Massachusetts. We are one of only two Community Action Agencies in the country to receive TOP money for this project. It is wonderful to be on the cutting edge of using new technologies to better serve families in need.

A press conference was held on Monday, October 16th to announce the project. A huge thank you to all who attended. Special thanks to Andrea, Bobbe and Peggy who served as greeters. You did a terrific job! Our Director, Al Sax received wonderful feedback from those attending.

Photos of the press conference are posted on the Volunteer Bulletin Board.

Welcome!

A warm welcome to new staff and volunteers:

Andrea is a student intern who is here about thirteen hours a week for fall semester. Andrea is a psychology major and a graduating senior. Although she has been here since mid- September, we haven't had the chance to officially welcome her. Unfortunately for us, she will be leaving in December. She has been a wonderful help with the tracking of orders for "All the Help You Can Get." As that workload becomes lighter, we look forward to her help with the Emergency Fuel Bank. Welcome, Andrea!

Brandi is a work-study student from Hampshire College who will be assisting us with directory orders, resource updating and special projects. She will

be working ten hours a week here and it will be great to have that ongoing extra support for what we do. Brandi will begin on Friday, November 3rd and will be scheduled for all day Monday and 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon on Fridays. Welcome, Brandi!

Pam is the new Case Coordinator for the Hampshire County Family Network. She is one of the founding members of the HCAC Amherst Family Center and has an extensive background in services to children and families. She will be a valuable addition to the Family Network during a time of transition. It's a real pleasure to work with her. Welcome, Pam!

Ron is the new director of the Hampshire County Family Network. Originally, Fern was to supervise both programs, but as Family Network moves under the HCAC Early Childhood Department, it made sense to have a separate director for Family Network. It's exciting to have Ron here and we look forward to the continued good work and further development of the Family Network. Welcome, Ron!

Sally is our new Information & Referral Resource Coordinator. She will be taking the position left vacant by JoAnn . Sally has had extensive experience in senior services, most recently at a local retirement community. We are very excited about having her come on board. Her first day will be Monday, November 6th. Be sure to introduce yourself and welcome her to First Call for Help.

Sarah is our new Administrative Assistant. She has had a wealth of experience in a variety of office settings

that make her extremely well qualified to handle the demands of our busy office. She is also very warm and welcoming, just the right person for greeting everyone that comes to the door. If you haven't already met, please take a moment to introduce yourself. Welcome, Sarah!

Technology Update

Some of you may have noticed a new face here at HCAC First Call. Bill, from Central Administration, has been working on our computer system to update it and make it more responsive to our current and future needs (especially for our new BATON project). He will be providing help for 15 hours per week, although not all those hours will be based here.

He has already connected Karen to the current network and made it possible for Sarah to print at the computer at her desk. He has also brought in a useable computer for a new work station for volunteers located in the Administrative Office. He did it in record time, too! Thank you, Bill.

Goodbye and Thank You

A special thank you and goodbye to Ann, one of our long term Information & Referral volunteers. Ann is busy with school and work and can no longer commit to being here on a weekly basis.

She had been on leave at the end of the summer. Ann has been with us

since September of 1998 and has given a total of 268 hours. She did a great job on the phones, answering calls with competence and compassion. She also did some wonderful work with the Emergency Fuel Bank during past winters.

We will miss you, Ann, especially your kindness, and your commitment to the work of First Call. Despite a demanding schedule as a nurse you made time to be here, even when it was difficult. Thank you and good luck in the future.

“All the Help You Can Get” and Thank Goodness We Got It!

“All the Help You Can Get” is in its second printing. So far, 220 books have been sold. It has been quite a journey to date. It all began at the end of last year, with the diligent work of JoAnn supervising volunteers and interns as they researched information that was up to date and complete. Susan was up to her ears in faxes.

This colossal job continued with formatting the book, first with JoAnn and then under the careful eye of Bev and Lillian; writing both the alphabetical and the subject indices, till Karen saw double and getting the whole thing camera ready, with a ton of help from Bonnie at Central Administration.

Even before it went to Staples to be copied and bound, a thousand letters and order forms informing people that “The Big Red Book is coming—Y2K edition. This was followed by a deluge

of telemarketing calls by volunteers to encourage and remind people to buy, especially before the discount expired. Andrea, Bobbe, Emily, Jacky, Peggy and Susan were the force behind this very successful effort. Michael set up a beautiful record keeping system.

Then came the waves of orders, checks and purchase orders. Systems were established and problem-solving occurred. Andrea mastered the system and helped carry us through the extremely busy days of receiving orders and processing them. Bobbe, Peggy and Susan have been terrific about helping to send those orders out.

Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped in some way or other with this process. Thank you to the staff who have been so supportive and helped us to think through policies and procedures.

As we go on from here, we plan to meet to examine the process and to determine what worked great and what needs to be done differently next time. If you have ideas about this, please let Karen know so we can include you in this process.

As promised, we will be celebrating all the hard work that went into "The Big Red Book—Y2K Edition". We will let you know when and where. Again, thank you for all your generous help!

MAIRS

The Massachusetts Association of Information and Referral Service has scheduled the Certification Information & Referral Specialist (CIRS) exam in Worcester this fall. They usually try to schedule opportunities for those who desire to take the exam with a brief workshop beforehand on the basics of I & R. Those of you volunteering on the phones may want to consider certification.

CIRS is a professional credential awarded internationally by the Alliance of Information & Referral System (AIRS) to individuals who meet established standards and show their understanding of these standards by passing the exam.

In order to take the exam, you must meet the following criteria and fill out an application packet, which is available from AIRS. The application packet must be in to AIRS 30 days prior to the exam.

The qualifications to take the exam are as follows:

You must be actively involved in providing I & R as paid staff or a volunteer for:

- three (3) years if you have a high school diploma or GED;
- two (2) years if you have an associate of arts degree; or

- one (1) year if you have a bachelors degree or higher.

For part-time staff and volunteers, 1,000 hours equals one year of service. A copy of your most recent diploma must accompany your application.

Application packets are available for \$5.00 from AIRS by calling 206-632-2477. You can also download an application packet from the AIRS website at www.airs.org. E-mail cheryl@airs.org with any questions.

Emergency Fuel Bank

The Harold Seewald Emergency Fuel Bank opened on Monday, October 16th. For those who are unfamiliar with the Fuel Bank, it is through the generosity of private donors that a fund is available to provide for a one-time delivery of fuel to an individual or family in need. Last year we kept 155 households warm; this represents more than 600 people.

This year, the Emergency Fuel Bank will operate:
Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 9:30 – 12 noon. During these times, please refer calls to Peggy.
Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00 – 3:30 p.m. During these times, please refer calls to Lillian.

Andrea will also be assisting with tasks associated with the Emergency Fuel Bank on Monday and Friday afternoons.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask Lillian or Karen.

On Saturday, October 28th, Bread & Circus had a jack o' lantern lighting to raise money for the Fuel Bank. Bonnie Dowd at HCAC Central Administration has been working hard to keep donations flowing into the Fuel Bank in anticipation of a difficult winter ahead. Our goal is to raise \$45,000. If you can help with a donation, it would be greatly appreciated.

Info & Referral News

Scheduling Needs

We are in need of someone to help in Information & Referral on Monday, November 6th from 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. If you can help out, please let Karen know. Thanks!

Resource of the Month

Have you looked through the reading box lately? It is a wonderful source of information about area resources. Some recent highlights that you may want to take a look at:

- A recent article (10/22/00) in the *Sunday Republican* that described a helpful service for veterans who need help with the costs of prescription drugs.
- The COSA (Council of Social Agencies) newsletter with a

useful article about Fuel Assistance.

- Information about the Hampshire County Interfaith Shelter (Cot Shelter) with a map of the location.
- Flu Clinic and Thanksgiving Meal information from the Amherst Senior Center.

Make use of this ever changing guidebook of human service information. You never know-- something you read about may provide help to the next caller.

BRB Corrections

All corrections to the Big Red Book—"All the Help You Can Get" should be recorded on yellow correction sheets.

If someone calls who is interested in receiving an order form, leave a pink slip for Karen or Andrea including the caller's phone number and fax number (if available).

If someone calls to complain about the ordering process or the price, please refer them to Karen. Thank you!

Gershwin Memories

By Barbara Marks

As I listen to Gershwin tunes
all those salty tears
bring back memories
of all those years.
They strike like lightning bolts
sending chills up and down my spine.
I say they're mine .all mine.
I dance around the room.
a seventy year old
brushing off the gloom.
Moving my body with ease
swinging arms like wailing trees
back and forth like seaweed.
A sense of elation overtakes me.
I can still propel myself
with voice and harmony
singing at the top of my lungs
in perfect pitch. I never miss a note
it just bursts forth from my throat.