

Putting on the brakes

Welfare reform in our communities

by Donna Morgan

topic this issue

Welfare reform

The pros:

Future Benefits
page 4

The cons:

Present Threats
page 5

On the home
front
page 6



toolbox
Writing a press
release
page 9

Teamwork for
Tomorrow
mini-grants
page 14

The welfare train has been racing down the same track for decades, gaining passengers even as it gathers speed. Now some people are calling for that train to switch tracks or even come to a halt, while others are calling for more train cars and better fuel. Can the speeding train be stopped so quickly? Or, if allowed to keep barreling along, will it run out of steam?

Last August 22, when President Bill Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the caution lights came on to warn the welfare train of changes in the track ahead. The new law shifts responsibility for the nation's poor families to the states, cutting federal costs by \$54 billion over six years and changing programs that have been in existence for decades.

Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which provided cash benefits to families, has been abolished. So has the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, a work and training program for recipients of assistance. Emergency Assistance to Families with Children (EAFC), which provided one month's emergency assistance per year, has also been eliminated.

These programs have been replaced by block grants to the states, to be used at each state's discretion. Called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the federal plan allows each state to manage its own programs as long as these programs meet federal requirements. These requirements directly affect how the states can implement their programs. See the box below for some of these requirements.

continued on page 2

Some federal requirements of welfare reform

- Most welfare recipients must work within two years of enrollment in programs.
- Lifetime benefits are limited to five years, although 20 percent of adults may be exempted as hardship cases. States are allowed to exempt mothers with children under age one and single parents who can't find child care for children under six.
- Eligibility requirements are tightened for children who receive Supplemental Security Income because of disabilities.
- Unwed mothers who don't help establish paternity of their children will be penalized.
- Welfare recipients who are convicted of felony drug charges will be denied benefits and food stamps, although pregnant women and family members could still receive benefits.
- Adults without dependents have reduced eligibility for food stamps.
- Federal benefits are eliminated for most noncitizens, except for certain cases.
- Vocational training cannot exceed a 12-month period and must provide employment skills.
- Teen parents and minors receiving benefits must complete high school.

Much concern is being raised about how changes in federal welfare assistance will affect the Appalachian counties of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia—particularly those counties with high unemployment and poverty rates. Proponents of TANF note that states now have greater flexibility to assist families and design programs. Those who oppose the law worry that cutbacks in federal funds will cripple states' abilities to create programs focused on work while continuing to assist families.

The goal of welfare reform is to create a system that keeps families from needing assistance at all. Each state offers a diversion plan that may keep families from joining the welfare rolls. Through this diversion program, a family may qualify for a short-term cash grant to avert a crisis that would lead to enrollment in welfare programs. For those families who must enroll in programs, the states have formulated plans to move those recipients back into the work force as quickly as possible.

These plans were drafted at different times and go into effect at different times. Kentucky's Transitional Assistance Program (K-TAP) went into effect last October. In Tennessee, the Families First plan went into effect in September. The state of Virginia changed provisions of its Virginia Independence Program in July of 1995, but the welfare reform component of that program (Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare or VIEW) will be phased in over a four-year period beginning in April of 1997. Meanwhile, on January 1 of this year, West Virginia instituted a new program called WV Works in nine selected counties: Greenbrier, Mercer, Monroe, Nicholas, Pocahontas, Tyler, Wetzell, Wayne and Wood.

At the foundation of each state's plan is the precept that individuals are ultimately responsible for their own self-sufficiency and that parents are responsible for their children's welfare. Based on this common provision, the plans submitted by the central Appalachian states have many similarities. In most states, the plans are in flux, changing as states receive federal waivers for poorer counties and as new programs are implemented.

Personal Development Contracts

All the states require personal development contracts for recipients of aid. These contracts outline the activities that must take place for the recipients' families to achieve self-sufficiency. Some of the guidelines they must follow include compulsory school attendance for family members under age 18, immunizations for children, establishment of paternity, and adult-supervised living for teen parents.

A personal development contract also defines the participant's responsibilities toward work activities and explains time limits on benefits. If a recipient fails to meet the terms of the contract, cash benefits are reduced and may even be discontinued. Case workers will be assigned to families to direct them to programs and agencies that might help them meet contract obligations.

Each state offers programs to help welfare clients meet the requirements of their contracts. All four states will allow vocational training, limited to courses that provide employment skills and not exceeding a twelve-month period. Participants who choose to go to school will also be required to fulfill their work hour obligations.

Some states are planning programs to promote personal development and provide work experience. The nine WV WORKS counties will operate the Community and Personal Development Services program, offering structured mentoring activities, parenting classes, financial and nutritional counseling, and volunteer work with local community agencies. West Virginia will also offer Job Readiness/Job Search, a dual activity to provide classroom training and actual job search assistance.

The state of Kentucky will operate the Homeplace Project in collaboration with the University of Kentucky (UK). In this program, after 80 hours of classroom training and 80 hours of practicum, participants are hired by UK as health care advisors in their home counties. Kentucky will also enter a partnership with the Kentucky Motor Transport Association to provide a training program

in which participants can become qualified truck drivers after a twelve-week training period.

Some states are piloting new programs to assist families who are at risk. For example, Tennessee will operate the Renewal House, a residential treatment facility that will serve families where one or both parents are addicted to cocaine. The state will also operate Responsible Fatherhood to provide counseling and training for fathers not paying child support.

Work requirements

Work requirements vary somewhat from state to state. In Kentucky, six months from the time the reform program was implemented, participants who are deemed work-ready will be required to work at least twenty hours per week. With some exceptions, if an adult is not working after 24 months on assistance, benefits will be cut.

In Virginia, receipt of benefits is limited to a 24-month period with clients being required to work within 90 days of receiving assistance. When the first 24 months are exhausted, the client may be eligible for 12 months of transitional assistance. In areas where the unemployment rate exceeds the state average, the 24-month limit may be extended. Following receipt of welfare benefits and transitional assistance, the recipient will not be eligible for assistance again for 24 months with a 60-month limit on total assistance.

In Tennessee, most recipients will be required to work 20 hours per week for 18 months of their eligibility period, after which they must find full-time work. Families who live in a county with an unemployment rate that is twice that of the state can receive a six-month extension on this period. As families move into full-time work, they will continue to receive transitional assistance with child care, health care, housing and food, if needed.

In West Virginia, adults in families who have received 24 months of cash assistance must participate in a work activity beginning with the 25th month. They must continue to participate in that

work activity for as long as they receive assistance, up to the 60-month time limit.

Creating jobs for the jobless

The plans for each state contain methods for encouraging employers to hire welfare recipients or ways to provide workfare opportunities for participants in counties with high unemployment. Through the Work Opportunities Tax Credit, the states will provide tax incentives to employers who hire former welfare recipients. Employers who hire recipients who have been on welfare rolls for at least one year will be subsidized by the government if they agree not to displace regular employees.

For areas with high unemployment, workfare sites may be utilized to provide welfare recipients with the labor hours required to receive their benefits. Participants in workfare programs will provide services such as child care or adult day care, for which they will be paid more than their benefits but less than minimum wage. The businesses that generate

activity at these sites will be allowed to charge for the services provided.

In a public-private partnership with the state, local governments and non-profits can use participants for

up to 40 hours per week, if they provide transportation and child care. Again, these organizations can charge for the services provided by the participants.

Making the transition from welfare to work

Even after acquiring employment, a family making the move from the welfare rolls to the pay rolls may need additional assistance. The states offer varying levels of transitional assistance for families.

To permit families to have reliable transportation to school or work, the new welfare law allows an exemption for the first family vehicle, but the flexibility of this law varies from state to state. For example, in Virginia a participant may own a vehicle worth up to \$7500 without an impact on eligibility. In West

continued on page 8

Future benefits of reform

by Stan Cave, 45th House District Representative, Fayette County, KY

On any given payday in America, millions of workers bemoan the fact that their taxes are going to support a welfare system that simply does not work.

It is not so much that they disagree with helping those in need or that they dislike welfare any more than they do a host of other federal programs. Rather, it is the overwhelming consensus that welfare, as practiced in the United States, is counterproductive.

Welfare is supposed to be a hand up, a program to get people through in times of need. To be certain, most welfare recipients are in the sys-

To bury our heads in the sand and decline to assess the problems of welfare over concerns about compassion. . . is madness.

tem for periods of three years or less, but there is a segment of the welfare population that tends to stay in the system for eight to 10 years or longer.

These recipients tend to view welfare as a handout, not as an opportunity to return to self sufficiency. We have created a welfare class in America, a class of families

and individuals who have become dependent on welfare as a way of life, not just for a few years or months, but for generations. This is wrong, it is not compassionate, and it must change.

Calls to reform welfare have led to charges that reformers lack compassion.

Regrettably, some recipients may fall through the cracks as the reforms are revised and refined to properly address the needs of a highly diverse and varied welfare population.

However, it bears emphasis that the real needs of families and children were not being met under the pre-reformed system. It is to be hoped that policy makers will be deft in patching holes in the safety net so post-welfare reform initiatives adequately meet the basic needs of those less fortunate, but do so more responsibly than the old system did.

To bury our heads in the sand and decline to assess the problems of welfare over concerns about compassion, however, is madness.

Where is the compassion in a system that addicts its clients, and its clients' children, to a lifetime of dependency on the public till?

Where is the compassion for wage earners who see their incomes being drained into a runaway welfare program that will plunge our economy into Third World status if left unchecked?

Today, federal welfare spending totals \$387 billion. Without changes, this amount will balloon to \$537 billion in just four years. Any questions of compassion should be equally, if not more, concerned with the tens of thousands who will suffer from the continuation of a badly flawed system rather than the few who may be displaced as we go through the process of reform.

The challenge for policy makers is to craft a system that provides training for those who need training, work for those who can work, and continued support for those whose situations make it impossible for them to achieve any degree of self sufficiency.

The Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children is in the process of developing detailed plans to implement the new federal welfare reform law. Considerations relating to relocation assistance, subsidized employment, child care, transportation, and job training will begin to replace such welfare terms as AFDC, food stamps and social insurance.

Welfare reform is the hope for a truly compassionate system that gives a hand up to those truly in need. It has the potential to return pride and dignity, not just to individuals, but to generations.

It deserves our support and our blessing.

This article is reprinted from the *Kentucky Journal*, a publication of the Kentucky Center for Public Issues.

Present threats of reform

by Barbara LeMaster, a single mother, welfare recipient and graduating college student

Ask anybody what is needed to move distressed communities and families out of poverty and you are likely to hear one answer: education.

The latest study to verify the link between economic health and educational opportunities comes from the Kentucky Economic Development Cabinet, which reports that counties with the highest education levels also have the greatest per capita income. The counties ranking at the bottom in per capita also have the grimmest levels of education.

Kentuckians know the importance of education. Our state ranks the highest in the U.S. in the percentage of adults with less than a ninth-grade education. Only West Virginia has a worse rate of adults without a high school diploma. Forty-eight states boast better rates of graduates with an associate's degree or higher.

Studies show that welfare recipients who complete educational programs dramatically improve their earning potential. In California, for example, AFDC recipients who completed a degree experienced a 248% increase in income for three years after graduation, compared to a 40% increase for other students.

Graduating from high school or college is no guarantee of employment. Where jobs are scarce, discrimination, family connections, and the "good ol' boy" system still dominate. But nearly every new opportunity to earn a living wage requires quality job training and education. This is doubly true for women, whose earnings continue to lag far behind men's for comparable work.

Now short-sighted welfare reform measures threaten to suffocate Kentucky's best chance for economic health—fair access to education.

The impact of federal welfare reform on access to education in Kentucky is serious and long-term. Over 5,000 welfare recipients were enrolled in college or vocational school in 1995, and 3,000 others participated in literacy, GED or basic edu-

cation classes. All of these students also cared for children, and most were single parents.

The new federal welfare law passed last year allows recipients only 12 months of "vocational educational training" before they must work 20-35 hours per week. Students in GED, literacy or adult basic-education classes are given no time before they must also work. In Kentucky, critical support services for low-income students, including help with eyeglasses and school supplies, dried up on May 1. Even those who manage to juggle work, school and family are threatened by a five-year lifetime limit on family benefits.

Even before the new law, these adult students faced significant barriers to going back to school. Safe, reliable child care is scarce or unavailable. Many welfare recipients face hostility and violence at home when they strive to go back to school. Some need glasses or hearing aids or basic supplies before they can enter classes. In most rural areas of Kentucky there is no public transportation, and what exists in our cities is often expensive and inadequate. Car insurance, payments, and up-keep are out of reach for many families.

To make matters worse, workfare is a dead-end program for welfare recipients and threatens existing workers with displacement. The "work" that welfare reform now forces many recipients into does not pay minimum wage, is not covered by worker's compensation, and does not trigger the earned-income credit. In fact, many of those work slots pay no wages, nor is there any requirement that the "employer" provide specific training or have any intention to hire.

... short-sighted welfare reform measures threaten to suffocate Kentucky's best chance for economic health—fair access to education.

continued on page 16

This article was distributed by the *Kentucky Forum*, an educational organization that provides the media with views of state experts on major public issues.

On the home front

What welfare reform means to one family

Mountain Promise searched for a participant in welfare programs to get some idea of how the changes wrought by welfare reform might affect a real family. Sheri Arms was kind enough to talk with us about her family situation and her future plans. She is working on the welfare reform issue with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC), a grassroots organizing group. She invites interested citizens, whether they receive public assistance or not, to call the KFTC office at (606) 886-0043 for information on how they can become involved in this effort.

Growing up in eastern Kentucky as the daughter of a coalminer, Sheri Arms learned the value of hard work. When Sheri's father became disabled, her mother worked to support the family, keeping them off public assistance. Sheri went to work at age 15 in a local grocery store and still graduated from high school with honors.

Today, as a 28-year-old mother of two, Sheri finds herself in the position of supporting her family. Her husband has been disabled since he was run over by a car at age ten. The jobs Sheri can find in her area pay low wages and she finds herself needing public assistance.

Sheri's family has experienced the prejudice and stereotypes associated with receiving public assistance—"the looks you get when you spend food stamps at the store or cash a check at the bank."

One of Sheri's worst experiences came during a family medical emergency. "One time we took our daughter Amber to the hospital with a 103° fever. The doctor asked if we smoked. When we said no he responded, 'Damn, I was going to tell you to use your cigarette money to buy this baby her medicine.'"

When Sheri received a form letter telling of coming changes in public assistance, she was already looking beyond low wage jobs to a career that would sustain her family. She is currently attending Morehead State University, where she is ten classes away from a bachelor's degree in political science. Her ultimate goal is to obtain a law degree.

With over three years of school left, Sheri acknowledges that welfare reform will affect her. "Because I was already in school, the new law requires that I work at least twenty hours per week within one year of the program's implementation. When I become employed, it will affect not only my benefits but my husband's disability and medical assistance."

"I definitely feel that the welfare system needed to be reformed," states Sheri, "but reformed in a way

that helps people move forward instead of pushing millions more into poverty."

Sheri admits that welfare reform does offer benefits for families. For example, consider a family receiving aid through Kentucky's Temporary Assistance Program (formerly AFDC). That family's first car, which previously could not be worth over a set amount, is exempt from being counted toward their assets. "Now if I could afford a good car," notes Sheri, "I would be able to get back and forth to school."

Will Sheri be able to finish school? "Regardless of the reform changes, I will finish school and meet the goals I've set for myself," she says. "I just don't give up that easily." If she can't finish school, she doubts she will be able to find sustainable employment in her area.

Leaving her home county is not in Sheri's plans. Her work with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) has stirred in her an awareness of the need for teachers in the realm of community organizing. In ten years, she would like to be working as an attorney for legal services or as an organizer. Like all recipients of public assistance, Sheri faces some challenges.

"I think the average participant has skills and dignity and wants a job that will sustain his or her family," she says. "I'd say the biggest challenges are child care and transportation. Welfare reform won't come close to meeting these needs."

Seeing her own children as second generation recipients of public assistance definitely is not in Sheri's plans either. "My hopes for my children is that they develop to their fullest potential and always stand up for what they feel is right. I want them to listen to other people's stories, and I also want them to always speak their mind."

Is Sheri Arms a typical welfare recipient?

Some national welfare statistics

According to an article titled “Challenging the Myths of Welfare Reform” that appeared in *BCR Reports: A Quarterly Publication of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society*, Sheri is not unlike many recipients of public assistance.

Due to the fact that 90% of the 4.5 million adults on welfare are women, the report focused on female clients. Here are some myths and facts supplied in that report:

Myth: Women on welfare have large families.

Fact: The typical welfare family is a mother and two children. Forty-two percent of AFDC families have only one child, thirty percent have two.

Myth: Welfare mothers live “high on the hog.”

Fact: In 1993, the average welfare benefit for a family of three was \$367 a month. In no state do food stamps and welfare benefits lift a family of three out of poverty. In fact, from 1972 to 1993, the real (after inflation) value of AFDC grants fell 45%; if food stamps are counted, it fell 26%.

Myth: Welfare recipients do not want to work.

Fact: Of the 14 million AFDC recipients, only 4.5 million are adults—many of these are mothers of young children. In nearly 60% of welfare homes, the youngest child is under age six. Many welfare moth-

ers combine work and welfare. Others cannot find a job at all or one that pays enough or cannot work due to disability or lack of job skills.

Myth: Few women on welfare are white.

Fact: Of all AFDC mothers, 38.8% are African-American, 38.1% are white, 17.4% are Latino, 2.8% are Asian, 1.3% are Native American, and 1.6% are of unknown race.

Myth: Once on welfare, always on welfare.

Fact: More than 70% of women on welfare stay on the rolls for less than two years; only 8% stay on for more than eight years. While many return to AFDC for a period of time within five years, due to renewed family crisis or job loss, research on intergenerational welfare has been unable to establish that daughters of welfare mothers necessarily end up on welfare too.

Voices of Hunger Report Released

The West Virginia Coalition on Food and Nutrition has released *Voices of Hunger in West Virginia*, a report based on a listening project done as part of the Building Community Food Security Project. The goal of the listening project was to let West Virginians tell their own stories about hunger in their communities.

Seventy-six people, including low-income families, assistance providers and community leaders were interviewed about hunger in their communities. The project examined why it is difficult for people who need help to get it and asked participants to propose long-term solutions to hunger problems in West Virginia. With upcoming changes in the welfare system and other proposed cuts in the public funding

for food and nutrition programs, the hunger issue needs to be understood and addressed by a growing population.

The report does not attempt to quantify the issue of hunger with statistical data, but uses real stories of day-to-day struggle to promote understanding of families in poverty who may face hunger. *Voices of Hunger* can serve as a companion to the county data found in the *West Virginia Food Security Status Report* that is also produced by WVCFN.

Voices of Hunger is available for \$5.00 from the West Virginia Coalition on Food and Nutrition, PO Box 11268, Charleston, WV 25339; (304) 342-0917; Fax: (304) 342-0918.

Welfare reform

continued from page 3

Virginia and Kentucky, there is no cap on the value of a family's first vehicle.

A unique and controversial part of Kentucky's Transitional Assistance Program is a relocation assistance plan through which the state will pay up to \$900 to participants for moving purposes if they have located a job outside their area. Many Kentuckians worry that this plan will cause further outmigration and more economic drain from rural counties.

In all states, participants whose aid is terminated may receive day care, transportation and medical assistance for up to twelve months following termination. Each state also allows Individual Development Accounts, a savings account in which families may put as much as \$5000 without losing benefits. These savings must be used for education of a family member, for down payment on a home or for starting a business.

What can citizens do?

As welfare reform becomes a fact of life in each state, residents will begin to see the effects, whether good or bad. For many states, the real effects of welfare reform may not be felt for another couple of years. Some states planned for welfare reform with input from citizens, and these citizens can still play a role in implementation by contacting elected officials or taking place in community efforts to meet the challenges of reform.

In an article in the March 1997 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Peter Edelman, who recently resigned as assistant secretary for planning and evaluation at the Department for Health and Human Services, notes:

Citizens can make a difference in what happens in their state. They can push to make sure that it doesn't adopt a time limit

shorter than five years, doesn't reduce its own investment of funds, doesn't cut benefits, doesn't transfer money out of the block grant, doesn't dismantle procedural protections, and doesn't create bureaucratic hurdles that will discourage recipients. They can press for state and local funds to help legal immigrants who have been cut off from SSI or food stamps and children who have been victimized by the time limits. They can advocate an energetic and realistic jobs and training strategy, with maximum involvement by the private sector. And they can begin organizing and putting together elements of a real fix. . .¹

According to Edelman, a real fix goes beyond jobs creation, although employment opportunities in the private sector are a first priority. Edelman also lists good schools, safe neighborhoods, healthy communities, proper health-care, accessible day-care and an ending of racial and ethnic discrimination. He sees the personal responsibility of the individual intersecting with the collective responsibility of the community.

Edelman predicts "The time limits [of welfare reform] will be especially tough in states that have large areas in chronic recession—for example, the coal-mining areas of Appalachia." As the states move into the first active months of welfare reform, local leaders and citizens will need to look with optimistic and critical eye to the changes being wrought—and the whole community will need to facilitate the way for some of the tough changes ahead.

¹ Edelman, Peter, "The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done," *Atlantic Monthly* March 1997: 43.

For more information on welfare reform in your state, you can contact your social services departments. These are the numbers for the offices in the state capitols.

In Kentucky:
Cabinet for Families
and Children
(502) 564-7130

In Tennessee:
Department of
Human Services
(615) 313-4700

In Virginia:
Department of Social
Services
(804) 692-1709

In West Virginia:
Department for Health
and Human Resources,
Office of Family Support
(304) 558-7980



toolbox

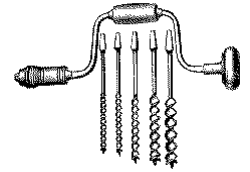
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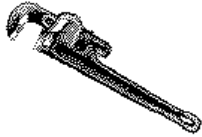
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May 30, 1997



(Name and number of a contact person)

For more information: Zella Truthtella, We Are the News
(789) 987-4321



ORGANIZATIONS REACH THOUSANDS THROUGH THE PRESS

(Catchy headline)

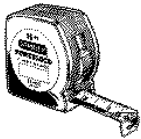
*(Who,
what,
when,
where
and
why)*

Zella Truthtella, Head Newsmaker at We Are the News, will offer pointers on writing press releases during a seminar at the Community Conference Center on June 14, 2010. "With this training, organizations will be able to send their messages to thousands of people," Truthtella stated.

Truthtella will provide a checklist of elements of a good press release, including the following:

- ✓ Follow the newspaper's preferred format: double-spaced, typed, fax/no fax, e-mail—whatever they want.
- ✓ Write the press release the way you want them to print it—make it an article that can be readily used.
- ✓ Give them an exciting headline—even if they don't use it.
- ✓ Use clear short sentences—avoid technical jargon or acronyms.
- ✓ Keep it short—preferably one page.
- ✓ Use quotes—"Using short, effective quotes from experts lends credence to your topic," noted Truthtella.
- ✓ Look professional—print the release on your letterhead. Check, double-check and triple-check for typos, name spellings, and dates.
- ✓ Develop a relationship with reporters and editors—be a good source to them and they will provide coverage for you.

(Key message)

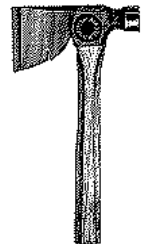


(Background information)

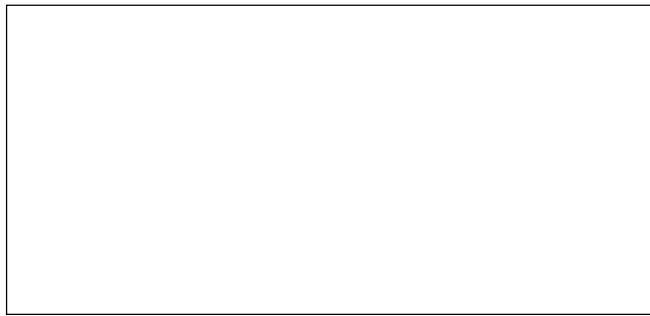
We Are the News is a non-profit organization that for the last fourteen years has helped community organizations plan for their media future.

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(Shows end of release)



Bell County, Kentucky
**Bell Leaders Achieving
a Stronger Tomorrow:
*It's a fair project***



BLAST members entertained workshop participants with a song recounting their Brushy Fork experience.

When a county is physically divided by a mountain and a river, the population may experience a sense of division as well. This was the problem that the Brushy Fork team from Bell County, Kentucky, sought to address with their six-month project.

With the long-term goal to unify Bell County, the Bell Leaders Achieving a Stronger Tomorrow (BLAST) decided to create a fair that serves the whole county. Bell County currently holds several small fairs and festivals that are associated with individual towns. There is no such celebration for the entire county. At the opening workshop, BLAST's short-term goal was to create the structure to make such a fair possible.

To get pointers on how to establish the event, the group contacted Brushy Fork Associates who had done fairs in previous cycles. "We mostly got ideas on what not to do," laughed one member. Then she added more seriously, "But we were able to learn from their mistakes." The BLAST team also brought in speakers, such as a fair board member from Lincoln County, Kentucky, who described a fair that serves 200,000 people a year. Although the Bell County fair will be much smaller, the team still gained valuable information.

BLAST also sent two members to a state-sponsored fair seminar about funding and planning events for the fair. Making this connection established an important link to state offices in Frankfort. With some logistical know-how and potential funding in hand, BLAST was ready to think about publicizing the idea of a county-wide fair.

By involving their stakeholders, the BLAST team learned that the Area Development District (ADD) council had already been discussing a fair. In fact they had property next to Highway 25E, a main route through Bell County. Suddenly, the BLAST team was very close to finding a good location for the

fair. The ADD council agreed to work with BLAST and continue negotiations for a land lease with the families who own the property.

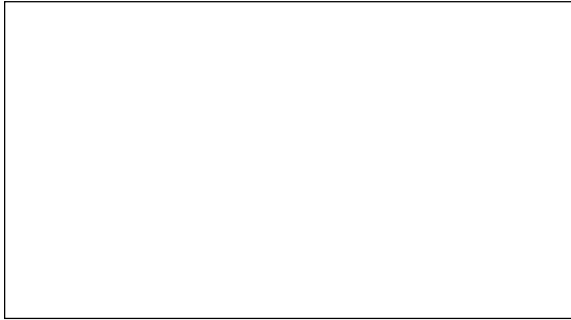
As BLAST members planned to inform the general public, they decided it was important that they didn't put something in the paper that said just "If you are interested in a fair, come one, come all." Instead, they wrote up a plan from which they could address groups. As a result, stakeholders came away with a common message about BLAST's mission.

Team members visited the Chamber of Commerce and got lists of civic organizations and businesses in the county. They went to group meetings and gave presentations about BLAST and its mission.

After making contact with several groups, BLAST held a special stakeholder meeting at which they established the fair board. Among the organizations represented at the meeting whose members became part of the board were: the Farm Bureau, County Extension, Horseman's Association, high school, rescue services, Lions Club, ADD council, historical society, public library, League of Women Voters and several individuals. The 19-member board is currently writing by-laws and working toward incorporation as a 501(c)3 organization.

The board will hold a fair this year, although it will probably be small, perhaps being held at the high school if land negotiations aren't finished. The group hopes to see a bigger fair in the fall of 1998.

With the Bell County fair in the hands of the newly established fair board, BLAST plans to pick yet another project that will address the long-term goal of unifying the county—a goal that is not so hard to visualize, according to a BLAST member. "I learned that as divisive as our county is, there really are people in all areas of the county who have common goals. That really surprised me."



Braxton County, West Virginia
**Braxton Leadership Team:
*Running with the best***

BLT's Cathy Sowa describes the proposed track layout as team member Patty Fussell looks on.

When the Brushy Fork team from Braxton County, West Virginia, was in Berea last fall, they knew that they wanted to do something that would benefit the whole county over the next six months. There were plenty of options from developing a Chamber of Commerce to building a track at the local high school. After much deliberation, the team settled on getting the track built.

Five years ago the middle and high schools in the county were consolidated. Near the school complex is a wellness trail built by the hospital. The Braxton Leadership Team (BLT) wanted to put in a running track that connected to a nature trail that in turn connected to the wellness track. Not only would this create a full cross country trail for students, it would provide additional wellness opportunities for other county residents.

The team returned to the county ready to begin fundraising for their project. Then they discovered that such a track would cost \$140,000! To fit the track around the schools, the high school stadium would have to be turned around. Still, the group sent out letters to their initial investors and received over \$1,000.

Soon after they returned from Berea, BLT members found that the local officials were trying to pass a bond levy to improve the schools. The bond would be used for improvements to every school in the county and included a track at the high school. The team was faced with the decision of whether to appear in support of the bond issue or not. Finally, they decided with or without the bond, they wanted to do the track.

The group planned to contact graphic artists to do a brochure and a video tape about the track to present to social organizations and funding organizations. The team ended up doing their own brochure, which turned out fine. They decided not to make the video.

One of the biggest challenges the group faced was getting across the point that they just wanted to do the track—that the bond levy was really not part of their agenda. With the track and the bond levy so closely related it was difficult for conflicting sides to separate the issues. The vote for the levy came up on March 15. It did not pass.

Realizing that raising \$140,000 was more than they bargained for, the BLT opted to switch to a different project. The first step of that process was to decide what to do with the \$1,000 from the initial investors. The team wrote to each investor, asking if they could use the money for another project. Within three days all the investors had replied that they could keep the money for another project.

When they returned to the closing workshop, the group had two potential projects in mind—both of which would require additional fundraising and more long-term commitment. The first was a community sign for the hospital, a project with would run \$15,000-\$18,000. The other project was to do a scaled-down sawdust version of the track.

After considering the pros and cons of each project, the BLT decided to give the \$1100 they had raised thus far to the coaches of the boys and girls track teams at the high school. The money will be used for equipment for the teams.

Despite the fact that the big track didn't become a reality, BLT members don't label their efforts as a disappointment. The team's attention to the need for a track at the high school spurred another group to apply for funding for a cross country trail. The funding was received and construction of the trail is underway. As a member of the BLT points out, "[The cross country trail] wouldn't have happened if this group didn't exist . . . so we've done well whether our larger project happened or not."

Smith County, Tennessee

Visions in Progress: Bringing home a dinosaur

In Smith County, Tennessee, softball and baseball are favorite sports of many residents, young and old. The county park boasts five baseball fields and is one of the most used recreational facilities in the county. Ball playing is a fine activity for older children, but when the Smith County team came to Brushy Fork last fall, they decided the park needed a playground for children between the ages of two and seven.

Adopting the name Visions in Progress (VIP), the team set a short-term goal of creating this playground for young children. The group saw their short-term goal as the first step of a long-term project to have the county purchase more land and build a soccer complex, a large playground, a fairground and an animal show area.

Even with such a tangible project, VIP realized the importance of knowing where they were going in the long-term. Despite differences among individuals in the group, their mission was always clear. A member of the team noted, "One thing we did early on was develop a mission statement. At least then when you disagree about how to do things, you can agree about what you are trying to do."

An early lesson for the team was that setting up a playground was not a simple matter. They learned that their first choice of equipment wouldn't handle enough children and that not all equipment is appropriate for the age spread from two to seven. Besides these restrictions, there are many rules about the type and placement of equipment and fences.

The group finally found a piece of equipment that met safety and age requirements and could accommodate a large group of children. Called the Megasaurus, the equipment is designed to look like a dinosaur. Each leg is a slide and the tail is a walking beam. The main obstacle to obtaining the equipment was the \$15,000 cost.

Realizing that community support would be an integral part of their project, the team set out to encourage community participation by involving their stakeholders. One of the first things they did was communicate with the county government.

Visions in Progress designed t-shirts in answer to the Proverbs verse "Where there is no vision the people perish." T-shirts are modeled by team members David Carr and April Martin.

The group started communication between the county and the owner of the land which VIP hopes to incorporate into a larger park. "We were acting in a large sense as the facilitators. After all, we can't buy the land, but the county may be able to buy it at a low market price," noted a team member.

To communicate with the general public, the group sent out a survey form to a diverse group of people, asking whether they saw a need for a park. Of the over 200 surveys returned, only 5 indicated no need for the project. The team also printed a pamphlet that explained VIP's mission and project. The group gave community members opportunities to participate and provide input for the project. Two members did a call-in talk show on the local radio station. The whole team held a walk-a-thon with prizes to raise money for the playground.

Knowing they had a lot of money to raise, the group began their fundraising efforts within their own ranks. One team member stated their strategy: "If you want to raise money, you have to be committed yourself," so the first money came from within the group. Then team members approached local businesses that were members of the Chamber of Commerce. In three visits team members raised \$1500.

The group contacted almost every civic group in the county, reaching close to 300 people. Rather than having these people come to the VIP meetings (even though they were invited), the members went to the civic group meetings and spoke. They also approached more local businesses who were willing to involve their employees and provide financial backing for the playground. As of the closing workshop, VIP was one-third of the way toward their \$15,000 goal.

The team plans to complete the small playground this September.



Smyth County, Virginia
Smyth County
Action Team:
Acting for the future

SCAT members Judy Wilson and Ronald Maxey discuss the preliminary steps the team has taken to establish a teen center for Smyth County. The group will continue to work toward that goal.

Smyth County, Virginia, lies along Interstate 81 in Southwest Virginia. The major highway has been a blessing in providing transportation for business growth and development, but the road also carries many of Smyth County's young people away. When a group of Smyth County residents came to Berea for their opening workshop, they wanted to promote an atmosphere in Smyth County that encouraged new people to come and current residents to stay there.

The Smyth County Action Team (SCAT) saw providing community support for their youth as an important first step in their long-term mission. For a short-term goal they decided to establish an advisory board of youth and get a youth center up and running.

Before SCAT left Berea last fall, members had been on the phone, had a site selected and had been in touch with more students. Even with this head-start the team realized upon returning home that the project depended largely on youth involvement and interest.

One of the first actions SCAT took was to recruit a member from the high school that was not represented on the original team. Then the three students developed a survey that was distributed at their high schools. Of the 820 young people surveyed, nearly 90% noted a need for youth activities. They requested such activities as a dance floor, video games and a snack counter.

Assured that the young people in the county wanted to see a youth center, the group moved on toward establishing a youth advisory board composed of three students from each of the county's three high

schools and a SCAT member, for a total of ten board members. The youth advisory board will eventually govern the center.

With the advisory board established, the group turned to the logistical aspects of opening a youth center. Although SCAT had selected a site early on, the group was unable to sign the lease due to concerns about liability and legality issues.

The team sought legal advice and were told they needed to establish by-laws and incorporate so they could be an official organization. While working on the by-laws, the group began to think about fundraising as well. The teen members of the group approached their local city councils and requested support for the teen center. Each city council donated \$250 and the county itself donated \$250 for a total of \$1000.

SCAT members realized the youth center was more than could be accomplished in six months, so they revised their six-month goal to say they would establish the youth advisory board that could work toward getting the teen center up and running. In addition, the team hopes to schedule a publicity event to promote the center—perhaps an open house.

The team still has much work to do before a teen center can be up and running. The basement of the building where they want to open the center needs some renovation, painting and cleaning. The building has bathrooms, a snack counter, and an area that would be ideal for a dance floor—all of which need work.

"To get all this off the ground we need to have outside investors," said a team member. Over the next several months the team plans to work on getting those outside investors—involving their stakeholders.

Teamwork for Tomorrow update:

Twenty-four organizations awarded grants

Twenty-four eastern Kentucky organizations submitted proposals for mini-grants through the Teamwork for Tomorrow Program. Made possible by funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the program offered community organizations training in fundraising, program planning, proposal writing, involving volunteers and strategic planning. Participants also explored skills for running effective meetings.

As part of the program, organizations that sent three representatives to the workshop series were eligible to submit a proposal for a community project. Requests for funding could be up to \$2000.

Brushy Fork had \$25,000 to distribute among the twenty-four organizations, so no organization was able to receive a full \$2,000.

Proposals that were submitted were evaluated based on the use of volunteers, the overall quality of the proposal itself, the potential community impact of the project and the effectiveness of the proposed process for evaluating the project.

Organizations submitted proposals for a variety of creative projects that addressed a myriad of community issues from child care to agriculture to arts programs. Descriptions of the proposed projects are below.

Appalachian Co-op Gallery (Morgan County): awarded \$1200 to renovate their educational workshop space.

Berea Children's Center (Madison County): awarded \$1200 to upgrade facilities.

Black Mountain Improvement Association (Perry County): awarded \$1000 to implement a Micro-City Government Youth Project.

Booneville/Owsley County Chamber of Commerce: awarded \$1100 to beautify downtown Booneville.

Botts Elementary Parent Involvement Council (Menifee County): awarded \$1200 to build a school/community playground.

Casey County Community Ministries: awarded \$1200 to furnish the community/youth center.

Clay County Softball Association: awarded \$900 to build bleachers for community softball field.

Cumberland County Arts Council: awarded \$1000 to implement an Arts Involvement Program.

Fleming County Ag 2000: awarded \$900 to research marketing strategies for feeder cattle.

Foothills Artists (Morgan County): awarded \$1000 to conduct arts workshops during Sorghum Festival.

Letcher County Youth Leadership Team: awarded \$1000 to do youth leadership training and activities.

Letcher County Action Team: awarded \$1200 to print and distribute a community resource guide.

Letcher, Knott, Leslie, Perry Community Action Council: awarded \$1000 to create a marketing plan for local artisans.

McCreary County Animal Protection League: awarded \$1000 to meet medical needs of animals up for adoption.

Menifee County Family Resource Youth Service Center: awarded \$1000 to develop an arts council and implement fifth grade arts programs.

Menifee Information Group: awarded \$750 to establish a Chamber of Commerce.

Morgan County Historical Society: awarded \$1000 to replace windows on WPA Jail Museum.

Owsley County Future Farmers of America: awarded \$1200 to build a greenhouse at high school.

Project Worth (Menifee County): awarded \$800 to operate a Parents and Children Together life skills program.

Pulaski County Educational Consortium: awarded \$1200 to implement the EconomicsAmerica Program in high school.

Russell County Historical Society: awarded \$750 to buy a secure display case for genealogical materials.

Southern Appalachian Recycling (Morgan, Magoffin and Letcher Counties): awarded \$1200 to implement Bag-It System for recycling in local schools.

Wolfe County Arts Association: awarded \$1200 to develop Hazel Green Academy for arts workshops.

Benedum grants \$40,000 for West Virginia programs

Thanks to a \$40,000 grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, Brushy Fork is able to continue exciting work in West Virginia. The Benedum Foundation has provided support for a range of programs and activities.

First, the Benedum funding allows Brushy Fork to include two West Virginia counties in the 1997 cycle of the Leadership Development Program. Brushy Fork has chosen to include Mason and Gilmer Counties, both of which have participated in the Benedum Mini-grants Program.

Second, funding for participation in the Benedum Community Mini-Grants program will make it possible for staff to work with leaders in some new counties and perhaps to work with Brushy Fork Associates. Brushy Fork will facilitate sessions for counties participating in the program. Brushy

Counties selected for 1997 Leadership Program

Recruitment is underway in the counties selected for the 1997 cycle of the Brushy Fork Leadership Development Program.

Funding from the Benedum Foundation makes possible the participation of Gilmer and Mason Counties in West Virginia. Joining the West Virginia counties will be Elliott County, Kentucky, and Claiborne County, Tennessee.

A fifth team composed of Berea College students, faculty, staff and administrators will also be included in the cycle.

The 1997 cycle opens with the beginning workshop from September 11-13 and closes on April 17-18, 1998.

Fork will also seek to revive the Facilitators Forum, a peer training venue at which facilitators can network and share session ideas and plans.

A third activity is Brushy Fork's participation in the West Virginia Community Collaborative, a network of community development organizations. The Collaborative actively explores ways to enhance member programs' impact in the region through improved communication and coordination.

Lastly, the grant will help underwrite the cost of publication and distribution of *Mountain Promise* to readers in West Virginia.

Our sincere gratitude goes out to the staff and board of the Benedum Foundation for their support of Brushy Fork's programs and West Virginia's leaders.

ARC to research effects of welfare reform

The Appalachian Regional Commission will focus research on the Appalachian region's response to welfare reform. At an April meeting, the Commission's Research Committee allocated \$300,000 of the research budget to be used for up to three demonstration projects across the region.

A preliminary analysis of the potential regional effects of reform indicates there are significant issues the region must face. Challenges include transportation, child care, the capacity of local welfare agencies, and the implications of potential reallocation programs for welfare-to-work participants.

The demonstration projects would offer models for other states and communities to use in responding to the requirements of welfare reform legislation.

Summer *Mountain Promise* will focus on collaboration

Mountain Promise, the newsletter of the Brushy Fork Institute, is published quarterly. Our next issue will examine collaboration in community efforts. We encourage readers to submit articles, reports, photos, line art or story suggestions. If you have an article or a story idea, contact:

Mountain Promise, attention Donna Morgan
Brushy Fork Institute
CPO 35, Berea College
Berea, KY 40404

Phone: (606) 986-9341 extension 6838
Fax: (606) 986-5510
e-mail: Donna_Morgan@berea.edu

Threats of reform continued from page 5

As lawmakers discuss ways to improve Kentucky's higher education system, we should demand that they address the real issue—access. Here are some steps we could take to help recipients get a quality education and ultimately become self-supporting:

- Work with schools to relate work activities to a person's course of study. Employment in tutoring, work-study, or other community service at school would cut down on transportation and scheduling conflicts.
- Provide assistance with transportation, child care, and essentials such as eyeglasses, for low-income students.
- Reward people who are making progress on educational goals by extending their five-year time

clock. Kentucky should also fund more financial aid and work-study slots to provide students with alternate sources of income.

- Require caseworkers to provide clear, consistent explanation of information about educational and work requirement options, and to encourage their clients to seek out educational resources and support services available within each community.

We all benefit when people have a quality education and the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. Other states, including Virginia and California, are already moving to protect access to education for welfare recipients. Kentucky cannot afford to do less.

from the calendar

Summer Appalachian Seminar June 16-July 3, 1997

Sponsored by the Appalachian Center at Berea College, this year's seminar will focus on exploitation of the Appalachian Region, both in historical and contemporary contexts. Students in the session will examine race, gender, age and ethnicity as factors of exploitation and will attend to the role of social groups, governments and economic powers in exploitation. Deadline for applications is May 30. For more information, contact the Appalachian Center, CPO 2336, Berea College, Berea, KY 40404, or call (606) 986-9341 extension 5140.

Appalachian Writers Workshop July 27-August 2

This 20th annual session of the Appalachian Writers Workshop is dedicated to the memory of Jim Wayne Miller. Sessions on poetry, short story, novel, nonfiction and Appalachian literature will be presented by area writers and scholars, including James Still, Lee Smith, Sharyn McCrumb, Robert Morgan, George Ella Lyon and Sidney Farr. For more information, contact the Hindman Settlement School, Forks of Troublesome Creek, Hindman, KY 41822; or call (606) 785-5475.

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