

Opening thoughts

30 years ago, at a place called the Brennan Gate House in Kinderhook, Catholic Family and Community Service, re-named Catholic Charities of Columbia and Greene Counties, began its mission. In that small gate house, the Board formalized a vision of an agency that would serve those less fortunate individuals and families who were experiencing trouble negotiating the world.

As I sat down with members of our Public Relations Committee, comprised of Board and Staff, one of my first questions was “How do we heighten awareness among our community members about the services we provide?” A newsletter was certainly one of the vehicles to use. In creating our inaugural issue, we will highlight and explain some of the programs we operate by providing a brief overview. A few of our programs have come and gone since opening in 1977, but our mission has remained unchanged: to serve, empower and advocate for persons in need.

A second question raised was, “How do we increase our efforts to meet the growing need in the community?” One of the challenges, as with all not for profit organizations, is providing quality programs with minimal funding to all of those who are eligible. During difficult times we need to prioritize our services to strengthen the safety net so that people, especially children, do not fall through the cracks.

As part of a larger system in the 14 county region of the Diocese of Albany, many directors are challenged by the same issues we are faced with in helping our residents of Columbia and Greene Counties. Individuals are finding it difficult to find and keep a job that pays enough to meet their basic needs. They are having trouble filling their shelves with nutritious foods, locating affordable and stable housing, and securing quality health care for themselves and for their families.

Thirdly, we wanted a way to express our thanks to those individuals and groups who make it possible for our services to reach those in need. Generous donors within and around the community, partnerships and collaborations with businesses and human service agencies, and dedicated volunteers and staff are the backbone of the Agency whose contributions are sincerely appreciated.

In closing, it is my hope that this newsletter will help us all better serve the community as we work together to improve the quality of living for our residents in need.

Tom Gillespie
Executive Director

Peter Kelly
Board of Directors President

Safety Net Over Rushing Waters

Looking down the Hudson River, the Rip Van Winkle Bridge stands as an impressive structure that serves numerous commuters and shoppers, not only in Columbia and Greene Counties, but it serves the State as a connection between east and west. To function properly, the bridge has a massive support system with some elements visible and others hidden below the water's surface. The bridge relies and benefits from the supports, as do the people who drive and walk across it.

Catholic Charities of Columbia and Greene Counties also has a massive support network that benefits the individuals and families who seek services and assistance. Visible to the eye are the staff and volunteers who treat each person with dignity and respect. Supporting them and aiding them in effectively serving the clients are their expertise and knowledge.

Two permanent locations anchor the bridge of services with



an office in Catskill and one in Hudson. Additional temporary locations are shared with community resources to better reach the clients, including a school and community projects counselor working within two Columbia County schools and five WIC sites in Greene County. (Continued next page)

Board of Directors

DeGuerre Blackburn, James Cashen, John Courtney, Ellen DeLucia, Tim Farley, Joseph Iraci, Peter Kelly, Francis A. O'Connor, Anthony Patsky, Margaret Sedlmeir and Shari Tesitore

Safety Net Over Rushing Waters (cont)

A suspension bridge uses numerous wires to distribute the weight of the bridge. Our wires are the financial support needed to provide service and direct assistance. Multiple sources, which include individual donations, fund raising, parish donations, monies from Catholic Charities Diocese of Albany, and contracts and grants, distribute the weight of funding for program and operational costs.



Many pillars of structural support are provided by our parent company, the Catholic Charities Diocese of Albany. Diocesan-wide standards and procedures are personalized for the Columbia and

Greene Agency to serve as safety regulations to ensure quality programming. We have linkages and access to other Charities programs, including AIDS Services, Disabilities, Caregivers Support Services and Immigration Services. Social Advocacy to change the conditions that are adversely affecting individuals and families is another support beam that is often hidden but is essential to making lasting changes for the poor and vulnerable.

Catholic Charities of Columbia and Greene Counties served 8,455 individuals in 2008, including children and seniors. How many others benefited indirectly is unknown. This is similar to the parent or worker who is able to cross the Rip Van Winkle Bridge to get home in time to read a bedtime story, or to arrive at work on time in the morning to serve breakfast to seniors in a nursing home. The true impact of our work cannot be measured in numbers, but rather in the improved quality of life for our residents in Columbia and Greene Counties, and the many people they interface with throughout the State.

We've Got Milk, Bread, Fruits, and Much More

Created by Congress in 1972 as a pilot program, and authorized as a national program in 1974, The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has been saving health care dollars for over thirty five years. For every one dollar spent by the program for nutrition education and supplemental food, three dollars are saved relating to health care costs.

Catholic Charities of Columbia and Greene Counties has been sponsoring the WIC program for thirty of those years. In addition to main offices in Hudson and Catskill, the WIC staff travels to outlying areas to reach those with little or no transportation. Sharing community space, WIC is available once a month in Coxsackie, Cairo, Chatham, Copake Falls, Greenville and Valatie. Tannersville and Prattsville are served alternately every other month.

Although the location may change, the services remain the same at each site. WIC provides checks to be used at grocery stores for federally approved food items that aid the pregnant breastfeeding, post partum mom and / or child in meeting their daily nutritional needs in areas such as vitamins A and C, folic acid, calcium, and iron. Other services include nutrition education on healthy eating, or other concerns that mothers may have for themselves or their family. WIC also provides health assessments to determine dietary needs including testing iron levels, and counseling and guidance on breastfeeding.

WIC is a health and nutrition program that has demonstrated a positive effect on pregnancy outcomes and child development. A pregnant mom receiving WIC is more likely to receive prenatal care and to deliver a normal weight infant. Referrals to health care agencies are another resource participants receive from the WIC program.



Eligibility for the program is based upon federal income guidelines and applies to pregnant and post partum women, and to infants and children under 5 years of age. As noted above, WIC is a federal program, but is administered by each state and, therefore, participants are also asked to show proof of state residency. For example, a family of 3, making less than \$652 a week, would be income eligible for WIC.

Catholic Charities is currently serving 2,000 participants on a monthly basis. Recent statistics show that there is a large population qualified but not accessing services. Our goal is to raise the bar and to serve at least 3,000 individuals monthly within the next two years. If you are aware of someone who may be eligible for WIC, they can call **518-828-9668** for more information.

Economic Crisis Creates Volunteer Network

The primary purpose of the Emergency Assistance Program is to assist individuals and families in accessing necessary resources relating to food, clothing, shelter, legal issues, transportation, health coverage, prescriptions, etc. Requests for such services increases annually, with at least a 50% increase in 2008 due in part to the rising costs of fuel and general living expenses, and the increase in unemployment.



Columbia County is rural with the majority of the County being occupied by non working farms and small towns. In the past Columbia County maintained several factories that employed the majority of residents. Unfortunately over the last several years these factories started closing one by one. Subsequently, within the last two years the few factories that had remained open shutdown, with the last remaining company announcing this year that they too will be leaving the area. This alone has had a devastating effect on the community and the employment rate. Unemployment dovetailed with the economic crisis in general has virtually crippled the County, in particular, the city of Hudson. The financial burden facing families and individuals today is making it near impossible for them to purchase nutritious food for the month. Costs are increasing for everything; milk, produce, gas, electric, etc. Donations are down and budget cuts are up. Our Agency is finding it difficult to keep up with the requests for assistance for not only food, but financial assistance as well.

The Emergency Assistance Program assists consumers in navigating bureaucracy, and the often complex requirements of county agencies, utility companies, and healthcare coverage; educating the consumer is crucial. Also a large component of the Program is empowering clients around employment issues. Additionally, workers help them look for appropriate jobs, access training and education programs, and offering support and encouragement during times when there is no where else to turn. Often, just lending an ear and having time to meet with those in need are enough to raise their morale. In some instances, immediate financial assistance will address a crisis situation e.g. seniors needing immediate prescription refills, or a single parent being evicted. However, given the fact that New York State and the Country in general is in the state of an economic crisis, providing these services are extremely challenging and difficult.

In order to enhance assistance services, we are in the initial stages of developing of a strategic network of volunteers. A key component of the Program will be networking and collaborating with parishes, interfaith counsels, faith-based organizations, Office of the Aging, and volunteer networks to recruit volunteers. These volunteers will be located throughout Columbia and Greene Counties. Training of volunteers will consist of detailed education surrounding all areas of assistance, but focused on emergency assessment, advocacy, and resources and service providers throughout the Counties in order to assist and make referrals. Volunteers will be at locations more accessible to those in need and have the necessary assessment skills and tools to begin the assistance process immediately. This is a significant change in the current process where clients have to make an appointment to come in to meet with a Catholic Charities staff member,

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Each day, more and more of our neighbors feel the reality of poverty. Catholic Charities provides help and created hope for people across the nation. Your donation empowers Catholic Charities to serve people of all faiths each year. Catholic Charities USA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Your donations are fully tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law.

Monetary Donation Opportunities:

You may contribute by check to

Catholic Charities of Columbia & Greene Counties

431 East Allen Street,
Hudson, NY, 12534

Or go to <http://www.ccreda.org/donate.htm> to contribute by credit card either by a one-time donation or by setting up a recurring donation monthly, quarterly or annually

Volunteer Opportunities:

Clerical, Gardening, Fundraising, Board Participation, Emergency Assistance/Food Pantry and Maintenance

Call Vanessa Vogel at (518) 828-8660 or email vvoegel@cathcharcg.org



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
431 EAST ALLEN STREET
HUDSON, NY 12534

CATSKILL OFFICE
82 WOODLAND AVENUE
CATSKILL, NY 12414
Phone: 518-943-1462
Fax: 518-943-9054

We Have Spirit Not 'Spirits'

It has been a busy and exciting year in the world of the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Program. Since April 2008 the Department has undergone some major changes, beginning with the acquisition of three new staff. In April, Vanessa Vogel became the new Program Director after returning from maternity leave, Tami Amodio was a new hire in a new position as Senior Prevention Educator and Mary K. Minahan joined the team in October as a Prevention Educator. This new team has a wealth of combined knowledge and experience that allows services to be delivered in a very unique and creative way.

Based on the results of a Columbia County needs assessment, the Program's services have been concentrated mainly in the Hudson City School District, although the team continues to provide education County wide. Currently prevention education classes are being provided in all schools within the Hudson City School District as well as the John L. Edwards Family Literacy Program, The Hudson City Youth Club, Chatham Middle School, Germantown Central School, and the Hudson High School 4H Club. Amazingly, the Program has served close to 2,000 students and youth through these activities alone. The youth and adult advisors and faculty are increasingly impressed and excited about the education curriculums which include topics such as, personal safety, bullying prevention, character building, and of course, alcohol and substance abuse prevention and refusal skills. It is with dedication and concerted effort that these curriculums are taught with imagination and a contagious enthusiasm that is not only enthralling the youth, but the adults as well.



The Team's schedule is already booked for next year, with a waiting list to boot!

With all these services happening at once, one would think that the workers are unable to extend their expertise any further... **WRONG!** Their abilities to expand services and increase their activities seem endless. In addition to the aforementioned programming, they also spearheaded initiating the "Parents Who Host Lost The Most Campaign... Don't be a party to underage drinking" in Chatham. They also attend an endless number of collaborative meetings regarding prevention services both in Columbia County and within the Capital District. Youth recognition dinners and socialization activities, parent education classes, mentoring, and health awareness activities are only a few of the additional events attended by the educators.

The Prevention Team has used their ingenuity to develop programming ideas to expand services further and to keep the youth engaged during a vital time... the summer... when they have more time on their hands to be influenced by negative forces. One of the most exciting developments is the outreach efforts they are making to connect with the migrant population in Columbia County. Typically this population is often overlooked and underserved. The Valatie Senior Center has graciously offered their site for a number of days in order for the educators to connect with the migrant youth and parents and to introduce them to the exciting world of prevention education. In turn, Mary K. is hoping that they help her with her Spanish, so this should be a fun learning experience for all!