

8. East Bloomfield Central School District East Bloomfield, New York

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The East Bloomfield School District, in conjunction with the New York Migrant Education Office [MEO], conducted a food stamp client assistance demonstration project in agricultural areas of New York State. The project was designed to reach migrant workers and their families in the counties surrounding Albany and in the Upstate region. MEO's 1992 census indicated that there were 10,893 migrant children in the catchment area, of whom 35% were enrolled in the Food Stamp Program [FSP]. Project planners believed that 75% of the migrant families in the area were eligible for food stamps and anticipated that they would provide client-enrollment assistance to 4,000 families over the course of the project, 1,600 of whom would successfully be enrolled in the FSP.

Prior to the demonstration project, MEO had been regularly sending outreach workers to farms and homes throughout the area to identify and recruit children for school programs, and to inform migrants of their rights to special educational assistance. The demonstration project intended to expand upon these outreach efforts by using current staff to inform migrants of the FSP and of the client-enrollment assistance that the project could provide. Specifically, project workers planned to ask their clients if they were enrolled in the FSP, and if not, whether they had a need for food stamps and wanted assistance completing the application.

A number of barriers were identified in the project proposal as possible reasons eligible individuals might not enroll in the FSP. These reasons included a lack of information concerning FSP eligibility and enrollment procedures, a lack of transportation to the local Department of Social Services [DSS] office, a community stigma about using food stamps, an inability to apply because of a lack of English skills, wrongful denial of expedited food stamps for migrants, and a discomfort among clients with DSS office procedures. Staff believed that by helping clients in their homes and providing transportation when necessary, the process of applying for food stamps would be facilitated. Project planners also intended to print a resource manual with information on the FSP for migrant outreach workers in the State to ensure on-going sustainability of project activities.

II. Project Activities

The definition of "migrant" for this project was based on the legal definition used in the Education Consolidation Improvement Act of New York State. This definition includes children who have moved within the year so that the parent or guardian could gain seasonal or temporary employment in an agricultural or fishing industry, as well as children who were migratory within the last five years. The definition, then, includes many low-income farm families who in the context of other government

programs would not have been considered migrants. Project staff decided early in the project that priority would be given to migrants who had moved across State lines in the last 12 months.

Twelve outreach workers, many of whom had worked for years for MEO, were recruited to work on the project. They were expected to add the topic of food stamps to the issues discussed during their outreach. The project director developed a training manual about the FSP and worked with new staff for two days at the beginning of the project. Each staff member initially was to work fifteen hours a week on the food stamp project, but hours varied with each worker.

As they were accustomed, project staff canvassed the countryside for migrant families on a regular basis. Many staff were familiar with places where migrants were likely to live, and made visits to determine whether anyone was home or if there were signs of someone living there. When someone was located, staff tried to engage them in conversation about their children and the school programs that were available to them. Then they asked the family whether they were participating in the FSP or if they had ever considered enrolling in the program. Few families indicated an interest, but most seemed to know of the program. Most potential clients seemed to view the visitor as a potential threat and did not want to carry on an extended conversation.

The project director developed brochures for distribution by the migrant outreach workers and had them translated into Spanish. When out-of-state migrants arrived in the summer, these brochures were ready and helpful. Staff also placed announcements in local papers and on bulletin boards in markets and other community centers, and stayed in touch with clergy, food banks, and staff of other social service agencies to identify recent newcomers to the community.

In addition to canvassing the countryside for migrants, project staff also canvassed urban areas around Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester. In these areas, they solicited the help of private social service agencies and church organizations to identify potential clients. Many of these clients were not migrants, but fell loosely into the broad definition of "migrant" under the State's criteria.

For those clients who showed an interest, project staff attempted to help them gather documentation for the application. Few clients had necessary papers at hand, such as marriage licenses, birth certificates, earning statements, etc.

DSS made a twenty-two foot bus available to the project to use in traveling to migrant camps and on which to conduct client assistance. There was some difficulty in finding a convenient way to use the vehicle, but eventually it was in service for several months. Many roads into migrant camps were too rutted and unsafe to allow staff to drive such a large vehicle. When the bus did access a camp, migrant workers did not tend to approach it themselves. Individual MEO workers still had to go from door-to-door to locate people.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

One of the first problems encountered in this project was the incongruity of the definition of "migrant" used by the Department of Education and DSS. Workers for the project had to be careful not to promise expedited service and special consideration to clients who did not meet the criteria of the FSP.

Project staff had been called "outreach workers" by the Education Department and considered their jobs solely to entail reaching out to isolated farm families. Many were not prepared to incorporate the added tasks of informing families about and assisting them to apply for the FSP. In many instances, staff tended to only superficially ask about the family's experience with or interest in food stamps, and spent most of their time addressing educational issues. This tendency indicates a possible disadvantage in attempts to "piggy back" one program onto another when project staff have already identified strongly with issues of the more established program.

In addition, DSS staff indicated to evaluation staff that they did not "need new business" and did not appreciate an influx of new clients due to the demonstration project activities. Staff at local DSS offices varied a great deal in their willingness to be available to clients, to help them with literacy problems, and to accommodate special circumstances arising from clients' lack of telephones and transportation. The staff in some offices adhered to office procedures very rigidly, whereas others offered some flexibility in meeting the needs of clients.

From the beginning of the project, staff found that reaching migrants was a long and laborious task and that the numbers of clients they were projected to reach were unrealistically high. It was not uncommon for a single worker to drive all day long and see only three or four families. Many people were either not home or would not come to the door. Those with whom the worker did speak were often already receiving food stamps or received food as a condition of employment from their employer.

Project staff were more efficient when conducting outreach in migrant camps, but contact here was also problematic. Not all of the farm managers were pleased to see staff from a government project on their grounds and were not uniformly cooperative. Using a van from which to conduct the interviews was found to be less effective and efficient than using private vehicles.

IV. Findings

The number of clients who were contacted and assisted to enroll was much smaller than initially anticipated. Fewer than 200 people were actually verified as successfully completing the application process and enrolling in the FSP. Some people may have pursued enrollment without client-assistance after hearing about the FSP from project workers, but there was no way to track and count any such client.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$199,962							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
4,015	\$50	942	\$213	365	\$548	171	\$1,169

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	24%
Contact/application rate	9%
Contact/enrollee rate	4%
Referral/application rate	39%
Referral/enrollee rate	18%
Application/enrollee rate	47%

Many eligible families had already enrolled in the FSP. Others found work and were therefore over the income level to qualify for food stamps, and some were undocumented immigrants and not eligible for assistance. In addition, the process of applying for food stamps was difficult for some, and DSS offices were often intimidating to clients. As the project director reported about one local office, "...we had to go through a metal detector, have our bags searched and were scrutinized by two armed guards. We then had to wait to talk to an unfriendly receptionist who questioned us as to what we wanted, called an office to see if anyone was available to talk with us, and then sent us to that office." In another local DSS office where the project director went to talk to staff about the project, she described also being met by a guard who "told us to remain in the secretary's office...[Someone] entered the office five minutes later and began shouting at us that he was very busy, itemizing all that he had to do, and that he did not have time to talk with us. Besides, who did we think we were showing up without an appointment. I explained that [we] had tried to make an appointment but was put off...If you are a farmworker unfamiliar with the city it takes courage, a reliable vehicle, money for parking [and gas] and perseverance just to get to the food stamp office."

A project worker reported that in acting as an authorized representative for a client, an eligibility worker in a local office questioned why the client did not come in herself and suggested that the need could not be too great or perhaps that the client's husband was withholding information about his income from her. According to this report, the eligibility worker stated, "We get [migrants] applying here from time to time. You know, they'll lie to you to get anything for free."

V. Conclusions

This project demonstrated the difficulties of using established personnel to staff a new program. In order to be most successful, it is important for staff working on a project to be interested and invested in the project's efforts. However, it is difficult to conclude that solely having staff who were more dedicated would have increased FSP

enrollments. Many clients had already heard about the program, had less need for food than for other kinds of assistance, and were not underserved by outreach programs coming from other agencies. In this instance, the unmet need of the population for food assistance was not demonstrated.

The project developed an excellent manual on the FSP for the outreach workers and the commitment of many of the outreach workers to the overall welfare of farm workers and their families was outstanding. The information about the FSP will remain with the educational migrant workers beyond the life of the project, providing an opportunity for information to continue to be disseminated in the areas being served by MEO.

9. Community Food Resource Center New York City, New York

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The Community Food Resource Center [CFRC] was founded in 1980 as a nonprofit organization to address public issues of hunger and nutrition in New York City. It has been directly involved in outreach and client-assistance activities for more than a decade. This demonstration project represented a public/private partnership in which CFRC worked directly with the Human Resources Administration [HRA] of New York City. HRA is responsible for New York City's wide array of social programs, including Medicaid and the Food Stamp Program [FSP].

Working with many divergent populations in New York City on issues of food availability for over a decade, CFRC staff observed that certain low-income populations were frequently eligible for multiple public assistance benefits. Based upon these observations, CFRC staff hypothesized that a large percentage of persons participating in the Medicaid program were also eligible for, but not participating in, the FSP. They believed that if these persons were provided with sufficient information, they would choose to participate in the FSP. Subsequently, a one-year project was designed whereby HRA authorized project staff from CFRC to work in Brooklyn Medicaid offices to inform Medicaid applicants about food stamps and offer pre-screening and application assistance. The Regional FSP office signed a waiver authorizing that food stamp applications could be completed at this Medicaid Center for the duration of the project.

The specific population that the project sought to reach were low-income families and Supplemental Security Income [SSI] recipients who were receiving or applying for Medicaid benefits. It was estimated that 5,000 New York City residents would be provided with FSP information, 3,456 [75%] of whom would be prescreened for eligibility, and 1,210 [35%] of whom ultimately would be enrolled as a result of the project's activities.

The major barriers believed by project planners to be inhibiting eligible clients from pursuing participation in the FSP was a lack of accurate information about food stamp eligibility criteria. Other barriers inhibiting food stamp participation identified prior to initiating the project were lengthy waiting periods at local food stamp offices, difficulty in obtaining information by phone about the FSP, the negative attitudes of some FSP personnel, and perceived inappropriate denial of benefits experienced by some clients. Staff also anticipated that some eligible clients chose not to participate because of the social stigma attached to receiving this government benefit.

II. Project Activities

Two CFRC staff members trained in food stamp application regulations conducted food stamp client assistance at a Medicaid office in Brooklyn. These workers, who were fluent

in the languages of the local neighborhood [English, Haitian Creole, and Spanish], provided information to Medicaid applicants or recipients on the FSP. Project staff used laptop computers to help assess clients' potential eligibility for participation in the FSP, and upon determining potential eligibility, helped clients complete food stamp application forms. Staff took the completed applications to the local food stamp office for final review and processing.

The project received a Federal waiver of regulations to allow the applications to be transported every evening from the Medicaid office to the food stamp office. Eligibility workers at the local FSP set aside time to review these applications and conduct the required interview with clients. Appointments for interviews were made for clients by project staff. Staff from the food stamp office also provided on-going information to project staff about food stamp regulations, answered questions as they arose, and verified application and enrollment outcomes quarterly.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

The model demonstrated in this project was highly efficient. First, the computer program to prescreen applicants eliminated worker error and led to a high number of applicants being accepted into the FSP. Second, targeting a population in a single location eliminated the need for project staff to engage in outreach activities. Third, the public/private partnership worked well; client application and enrollments were verified by the food stamp office, and personnel at HRA and the Medicaid Office were extremely supportive of the project. While initially apprehensive about potential administrative issues, food stamp senior managers became ardent supporters of the project's work in identifying and processing new food stamp enrollees. Food stamp eligibility workers, on the other hand, were not as enthusiastic about the project, believing that a heavier workload was created as a result of project efforts.

IV. Findings

CFRC's projections of contacts and enrollments in the FSP were exceeded in practice. At the end of the project year, CFRC staff had direct and extended contact that included a personal interview with 3,750 Medicaid applicants and recipients in the Brooklyn Medicaid office. From this contact group, 2,781 [74%] clients were prescreened on the computer for their possible eligibility for the FSP. Subsequently, 2,706 households appeared eligible of whom 2,256 [83%] completed the application process. In total, 1,824 clients were approved for food stamps. The number of confirmed new food stamp enrollees exceeded the original projections by 614, an increase of 51%.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$80,604							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
3,750	\$22	2,706	\$30	2,256	\$36	1,824	\$44

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	72%
Contact/application rate	81%
Contact/enrollee rate	49%
Referral/application rate	83%
Referral/enrollee rate	67%
Application/enrollee rate	81%

CFRC staff conducted a non-random survey of 484 clients at the Medicaid office to determine why individuals who were eligible for the FSP did not use food stamps. [Eighty percent of the clients at the Medicaid office were eligible for food stamps but were not currently enrolled.] Ninety-three percent of respondents indicated that they would apply for food stamps if they knew they were eligible, indicating a lack of knowledge regarding eligibility requirements. These results were confirmed in interviews between clients and the evaluation staff as well. Survey results also showed that older people in particular were not applying to the FSP because they did not believe that the benefit they would receive would justify the effort needed to apply. However, in reality, people on SSI received an average of \$77 a month in food stamps. Of those who applied, almost one half did not complete the verification needed for the process.

V. Conclusions

This project was successful in providing outreach to a population with a high number of persons potentially eligible for food stamps. Clients noted that they were favorably impressed by the assistance provided by the project, which was relatively quick, required no additional forms to be filled out, reduced transportation time and costs, and provided direct answers to their questions. New York State uses an integrated public assistance form for its benefit programs, but intake services take place in different offices, requiring separate applications and separate verification interviews. This project demonstrated that integrated intake procedures can reduce worker and client efforts and provide more efficient and effective customer service.

Providing potential clients with an estimate of their eligibility and the amount of the benefit they might receive if they applied to the FSP was a powerful incentive to them to make the effort to apply. Also, simplifying client responsibilities in the application process by delivering the application to the food stamp office and making the first appointment most likely increased the likelihood of the process being completed.

10. InterReligious Council of Central New York Syracuse, New York

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

Prior to demonstration funding, the Hunger Outreach Program of the InterReligious Council of Central New York [IRC] had shown success in assisting households with food stamp application assistance. Project planners hoped to use the model of "Help Sites" (ongoing social service programs from which the project could conduct its activities) in the metropolitan area and expand upon it for use in nonmetropolitan, rural areas. It was projected that staff would focus on reaching households in the eleven-county rural target area that included persons who were employed but eligible for food stamps, recently unemployed, and over the age of 60.

The barriers to Food Stamp Program [FSP] participation that IRC planners had identified prior to the beginning of the project were a fear of social stigma in accepting "welfare," and many misunderstandings of the FSP criteria for enrollment. Project planners also suggested that transportation difficulties as well as a reluctance to disclose personal information would discourage people who were eligible and in need of food assistance to apply. Other barriers that were identified through IRC's previous work were the inability of clients to complete the application during local food stamp office hours, a hesitancy of clients to be involved in face-to-face interviews, a fear that the local food stamp office employees would make a mistake in determining their eligibility that would end up costing the client money, and a general intimidation of bureaucracy.

Project staff intended to overcome these barriers by providing client assistance in outreach sites such as churches, community centers, food pantries, and other accessible locations during hours convenient to clients. They hoped to provide an atmosphere that was conducive to clients and provide extra assistance in the application process when needed, including assistance with transportation and assistance with interviews in the local food stamp offices. The project proposal also included plans to provide authorized representatives to make trips to the local food stamp office for disabled people.

Project staff assumed that about 20 clients would be assisted each month at the Help Sites, of whom about 68% would be eligible for food stamps. Using these estimates, IRC goals were to assist 2,640 clients over the course of the project and enroll approximately 1,750 people in the FSP.

II. Project Activities

Staffing of the project consisted of a paid project director and local volunteers who were responsible for working at the Help Sites. Fifteen volunteer client-assistance workers were ultimately recruited for the project.

Project staff carried out intended project activities in two rather than in eleven counties as originally planned. In Madison County, five volunteers worked at Help Sites in three separate towns. The remaining volunteers worked at sites in Chenango County, four of which were under the auspices of the County office of Aging and three of which were new sites added by local social service agencies. The project was in operation for 18 months, six months longer than anticipated.

The project director wrote a series of public announcements to introduce the project to the community. She placed posters in local churches that listed the volunteer's schedule at the Help Sites. Eventually, the project used shoppers' guides that were distributed free of charge to announce the program's schedule at the various sites.

Although forms were prepared for data-keeping, volunteers did not use them, and information about their activities was never clear. The project director had more direct control over her own activities than over the volunteer's activities, and spent her time making visits to local food stamp offices. During these visits she introduced the project to food stamp eligibility workers and attempted to gain their understanding and cooperation in working with the clients referred by the project.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

The project director believed that using members of the community to assist people apply for food stamps was a failed approach. The stigmatizing effect of having other community members help gather and report personal data was overwhelming, and instead of receiving 20 requests for help a week, each site received about one. In addition, typically a prerequisite for a successful volunteer program is on-going support and training. In this project, volunteers were trained only once, and there were few on-going meetings and discussions about what they were finding in their work.

A single project director as paid staff may not be an optimal arrangement. The director spent much time recruiting volunteers and Help Sites and did not feel able to provide continual supervision of the various activities. She had no one with whom she could share her experiences and was disappointed as the project progressed with what appeared to be ineffectual activities.

VI. Findings

This project was not successful in reaching clients. Either the stigma was too great to overcome or the need was not sufficient to encourage clients to feel comfortable with and approach the outreach workers. Only a fraction of the projected number of contacts were actually seen by project staff. Of those who were contacted, however, many were assisted and applied for the benefit. The actual numbers of those who ultimately enrolled are uncertain due to the lack of verification by the Department of Social Services [DSS].

GRANT AMOUNT - \$46,310							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
364	\$127	180	\$257	165	\$281	Unknown*	Unknown*

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	49
Contact/application rate	45%
Contact/enrollee rate	%*
Referral/application rate	92%
Referral/enrollee rate	%*
Application/enrollee rate	%*

**Enrollments were not verified by the Department of Social Services at this site.*

V. Conclusions

Although this project was built upon a previously successful model that utilized both volunteers and Help Sites, it did not work well. It seems as though volunteers working in their own communities did not afford enough privacy to potential food stamp applicants. There is evidence that the volunteers themselves became discouraged when only 1/20th of the expected number of clients showed up for their help. Unfortunately, reliable data on why people chose not to apply for food stamps was not produced at this site.

11. Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority, Inc. Morristown, Tennessee

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority, Inc. [DCEA], a Community Action Program agency located in rural eastern Tennessee, proposed a demonstration project to determine effective methods to expand public awareness of the Food Stamp Program [FSP] and to increase the use of food stamps by underserved, low-income population groups living in the eleven-county service area. Specifically, the demonstration project was designed to reach rural, older, homeless, single-parent, working, female-headed households, all of whom faced a number of barriers to accessing the FSP. These barriers were noted in the project proposal to include a lack of knowledge regarding eligibility requirements, an inability to complete application procedures, inaccessible local food stamp offices due to transportation difficulties, and a perceived community stigma attached to people who required government assistance.

It was planned that a project director would manage the demonstration project with the support of an administrative assistant. A community outreach specialist would also be hired and would assist in advertising the project in the targeted communities. Project staff intended to reach people living in the eleven-county service area using a variety of approaches, including placing advertisements in local newspapers and on billboards, holding public forums, disseminating flyers, and making group presentations. Staff intended to recruit volunteers to assist them in all aspects of the project in order to cover the large service area. Staff and volunteers would both provide preapplication assistance to interested clients, including case management services for clients needing more intensive support.

II. Project Activities

The project model was implemented with some adaptations. The original plan to recruit volunteers to assist in all project functions was found to be too ambitious for the project's limited resources, and as a result, fewer staff were involved in the project than anticipated. In an effort to provide quality services to potential food stamp applicants in the large, rural area, project activities were adapted. Preapplication assistance, although still provided as planned, was offered over the telephone rather than in the field. In addition, the primary focus of the project was redirected to developing a strong informational campaign.

A number of methods were used to advertise the project, including placing advertisements and articles in local newspapers and creating a billboard campaign utilizing unused billboards that were donated by a major company. Staff also made presentations at senior centers and at inter-agency network meetings and set up booths at county fairs where information was disseminated. In addition, posters with pockets containing flyers were developed and placed in numerous sites, including grocery stores,

employment offices, homeless shelters, subsidized housing projects, gas stations, and mini-markets. Brochures were also developed, which were translated into Spanish and distributed in migrant camps, to churches and businesses in the service area, and mailed to individuals who were involved in DCEA programs, such as the Emergency Heating Assistance Program and the Home Delivered Meals Program.

As noted, the preapplication assistance that was provided was primarily conducted over the telephone. The project staffed a toll-free telephone line that clients could call to obtain more information about the FSP. When clients indicated they were interested, staff mailed them an application packet that included instructions for completing the application form, a list of required documents, and a description of the application process. Project staff alternately were in the office to receive calls from potential clients and out in the field.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

Staff found that placing advertisements and articles in local newspapers generated the most telephone inquiries. The telephone assistance provided through the toll-free number effectively allowed clients to inquire about the FSP anonymously and without embarrassment. Clients commented on how they appreciated the opportunity to discuss program requirements before contacting the Department of Human Services (DHS) and that this service saved them both time and an unnecessary trip to the local DHS office.

The effect of negative community attitudes towards food stamp recipients often influenced potential clients' desire to apply for food stamps. Staff reported that even those applicants who desperately needed the assistance voiced their embarrassment to become enrolled in the program. Confirming this general public perspective were reactions from individuals to the billboard campaign instituted by the project. Numerous callers voiced their disapproval of the project's effort to recruit additional clients into the FSP, stating that those receiving government assistance should pursue employment instead of relying on government programs.

IV. Findings

The number of client enrollments stemming from the project's client-assistance efforts were not verified by DHS. Staff attempted to determine whether clients who had been assisted were ultimately enrolled in the FSP by contacting them for a report on their status. However, without DHS verification, project outcomes must be viewed as tentative.

The project estimated that 15,074 persons living at poverty level were eligible for food stamps but were not receiving them. There were an estimated 21,423 low-income households, sixty-eight percent [14,567] of which probably did not receive food stamps. The project predicted that 20% of these households [2,900 households or 3,014 persons], would be approved for food stamps as a result of the project's assistance. However,

project staff in reality only reached 7% of those they had projected to enroll. Over the course of the project, staff made a total of 1,807 contacts, and 1,072 were referred to the FSP. Total enrollments came to 217, 20% of client referrals.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$99,938							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
1,807	\$55	1,072	\$93	NA	NA	217	\$461

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	59%
Contact/application rate	NA
Contact/enrollee rate	12%
Referral/application rate	NA
Referral/enrollee rate	20%
Application/enrollee rate	NA

The project was able to overcome barriers to enrolling in the FSP for some clients by educating them regarding the FSP eligibility requirements and application process. However, staff frequently found that clients, although they met FSP monthly income qualifications, exceeded the vehicle allotment, and therefore were not eligible for food stamps. As more welfare recipients were being required to work or attend school, purchasing a reliable vehicle for less than the allowed amount was difficult. Applicants reported that having a vehicle negatively affected their eligibility for some benefits and, therefore, some gave up reliable transportation. In turn, this lack of transportation greatly affected employment and job training opportunities for these clients.

V. Conclusions

Project staff were successful in implementing many of their planned activities, but were unable to meet the project's goal of enrolling 3,000 persons in the FSP. However, this goal was unrealistic from the start in respect to the nature and size of the service area and to the number of staff responsible for implementing the project activities.

Project staff found that the use of billboards and public presentations were not effective outreach measures. As noted, newspaper advertisements and articles were found to be the most effective in reaching clients and were the most cost effective as well. Relying on the 1-800 telephone number to provide preapplication assistance enabled staff to provide assistance to potential food stamp applicants in a large service area.

12. West Tennessee Legal Services, Inc. Jackson, Tennessee

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The Food Stamp Participation Project [FSPP] was a joint project between West Tennessee Legal Services [WTLS] and Just Organized Neighborhood Association Headquarters [JONAH], an African American grassroots volunteer organization. FSPP, in an effort to increase food stamp participation in rural minority communities, planned to target five counties in West Tennessee that had a large percentage of African Americans, older persons, and low income families. These communities were chosen because of the presence of active local JONAH chapters and the numerous barriers faced by these populations in accessing the Food Stamp Program [FSP]. These communities lacked adequate transportation, telephone services, and sufficient Department of Human Services [DHS] staff to reach and assist all eligible clients. In addition, many potential clients feared sharing information when applying for assistance, lacked adequate literacy skills to comply with and understand the application process and requirements, and were intimidated by the bureaucratic system.

To meet the needs of this population, and to overcome these obstacles to FSP participation, the FSPP proposed a project with three major components: community education, client identification and preapplication assistance, and legal advocacy. A project director would oversee the management of the project and provide legal support, a community education coordinator would conduct the community education program, and a community outreach worker would coordinate the client-assistance activities of the JONAH volunteers in the five-county area.

II. Project Activities

As noted, the project model had three components. The community education component, the purpose of which was to raise awareness of the benefits of food stamps and encourage enrollment of eligible persons, was implemented as planned. FSPP staff used a variety of approaches to achieve these goals. Fact sheets and flyers that explained the food stamp process were specifically created for those with limited literacy skills. These were distributed at numerous locations where potential clients congregated to attend community events, meetings, church gatherings, etc. Articles were also published in local community newspapers and in the "Update," a WTLS quarterly newsletter.

Information about FSPP was also presented by project staff and volunteers at JONAH monthly meetings, senior citizen centers, commodity distribution sites, food pantries, church gatherings, local clubs, and other events. Following each presentation, flyers and fact sheets were distributed and staff and/or volunteers were available to discuss the FSP with those who were interested.

Client preapplication assistance was primarily provided by project staff over the telephone, but was also provided in person in the field and in the office. The WTLS hotline number was made available to project clients, and this number was noted on all project materials. Clients could call the number and speak with project staff, who provided information about the FSP application process, including the address of local the DHS office and information about documentation they would need for the DHS interview. If clients requested further assistance, volunteers or staff accompanied them to DHS or even provided transportation.

As the project evolved, it became clear that volunteers were not reaching the number of clients that had been initially expected [200 families]. As a result, project staff took over the volunteer's preapplication activities, and were obliged to increase their own number of hours on the project.

A WTLS attorney served as the project director and occasionally provided legal counsel to those who had applied to the FSP and believed their designation as ineligible should be challenged. Telephone conversations with contact persons at DHS often were sufficient to clarify any problems clients encountered regarding issues of eligibility.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

As noted, the use of volunteers did not work out as planned, and project staff ended up carrying out most of the demonstration's objectives themselves. Overseeing and supporting the volunteers adequately proved to be difficult for staff members, especially because volunteers were dispersed over a five county area. In addition, volunteer recruitment was difficult; the project initially recruited approximately 20-25 volunteers from the JONAH membership, which later dropped to ten. Many people who had initially responded favorably to volunteering for the project changed their minds when they realized the responsibilities they would be asked to fulfill. A number became intimidated by the amount of paperwork involved, and many were heavily involved in other volunteer activities. Lack of volunteer involvement could also have been attributed to the volunteer's own skill levels or to their lack of confidence in handling official documentation procedures. Staff learned that the skills and abilities of each volunteer varied, and that they must gage project tasks and activities based on the individual strengths of volunteers.

Even though staff were not able to rely on JONAH volunteers to consistently provide the in-depth FSP preapplication assistance needed by clients, they were able to use these volunteers to publicize the project, refer clients, and identify sites frequented by potentially eligible clients. Volunteers were also involved in planning outreach activities, in developing project educational materials, and in helping to assess how well project presentations and materials conveyed the intended messages to the target population. Consequently, the project helped to create a stronger partnership between WTLS and JONAH.

IV. Findings

The following tables indicate the number of clients contacted, referred, and enrolled with assistance from project staff and volunteers. In total, 323 people were contacted, only 33 of whom [10%] were contacted by project volunteers. Preapplication activities conducted at food commodity distribution sites generated 18% of client contacts. Interagency referrals accounted for 27%, JONAH referrals 12%, and other agency referrals 4% of total contacts. Clients most often contacted project staff by telephone, with 137 clients using this method.

Sixty-one percent of all contacts were referred to the FSP, and 78% of those were ultimately enrolled. The original target figure for the project, to enroll 200 families in the FSP, was not met. The project enrolled 155 persons, 78% of their target figure.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$50,000							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
323	\$155	198	\$252	NA	NA	155	\$322

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	61%
Contact/application rate	NA
Contact/enrollee rate	47%
Referral/application rate	NA
Referral/enrollee rate	78%
Application/enrollee rate	NA

Discussions with clients indicated that they found the application process and forms complex and intimidating. The new DHS computerized system for sending notices to clients listed all government assistance programs, which was confusing to clients. In addition, the small print on forms was often difficult for older persons to read. These elements discouraged potentially eligible clients from applying for food stamps.

Some clients indicated that they felt a number of the eligibility workers in the local offices were disrespectful and that some of the information these workers requested of clients was intrusive. Consequently, some clients, because of their own previous negative experiences with local DHS office staff or because of reports of such experiences from friends, were hesitant to apply to the FSP. Other clients were hesitant to apply because of prior mistakes they had made in reporting their income and assets to DHS, which had resulted in their having to reimburse DHS for the overpayments.

V. Conclusions

The project met most of its intended goals and was successful in a number of ways. First, staff developed a true collaboration between agencies and were partially successful in applying a volunteer model. As noted, volunteers had input into the planning of the project

as well as into the development of project materials and presentations. However, the question remains whether the project could have reached a higher number of clients if staff had spent more time working in the communities than in the agency office, or if they had provided more direct support to the volunteers for their client application assistance efforts in the communities.

Second, the project model and approaches used were successful in overcoming most identified barriers. Through the educational methods implemented, project staff were able to help clients understand program requirements and to increase their awareness of the FSP. Staff developed client-friendly materials, made group presentations, and provided individual assistance which successfully encouraged eligible persons to enroll. Clients who may have been hesitant to approach staff and volunteers in public could call the 1-800 number for assistance. Client fears were diminished when staff and volunteers explained the application process and, in some instances, accompanied and provided transportation to clients for their DHS appointments.

Project staff did not indicate that the project would continue after project funding had ended, but noted that it left community members and legal services staff more aware of the FSP and its eligibility criteria.

13. The Daily Planet Richmond, Virginia

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The Daily Planet is a private, non-profit social service agency dedicated to serving populations in the Richmond area that do not fit into the traditional social service delivery system. Many of their clients are without permanent shelter, are substance abusers, or have disabilities. The Daily Planet has been working in the city of Richmond since 1969 to provide short-term assistance to those in need, empower their clients to improve the quality of their lives, and assist clients to reintegrate into the local community.

This project was designed to assist people to enroll in the Food Stamp Program [FSP] by using staff to prescreen potential participants for eligibility and help them complete the application process. The anticipated target population of this project was an estimated 4,000 to 6,500 homeless persons in Richmond, the majority of whom were single males. People without stable living arrangements often found it difficult to get to the Virginia Department of Social Services [DSS] offices during working hours, to read and understand the necessary papers, and to communicate clearly. Many did not have the conversational skills to carry on an interview. In addition, Daily Planet staff believed that many DSS eligibility workers were not sufficiently sensitive to the life styles of homeless people and did not always help them gain access to the FSP.

Working in conjunction with DSS, project staff intended to arrange for a DSS eligibility worker to conduct application interviews and process applications at the Daily Planet. An eligibility worker would come to the Daily Planet several times a week and use a computer that would be connected to the main DSS office to enter client applications into the system. Staff at the Daily Planet would inform clients about this service and help them prepare for the interview with the eligibility worker. Project staff projected that 300 FSP enrollments would result from the project's activities.

II. Project Activities

Activities that were implemented followed the project plan that had been developed, with a few exceptions. There was no computer link with the DSS office as planned, but the eligibility worker took the applications to DSS at the end of each day. Therefore, as planned, clients did not have to wait at the DSS office for an appointment and could receive food stamp vouchers at the Daily Planet if she or he were approved for participation.

Project staff were very active in locating and informing clients of opportunities that were made available to them through the project. Staff went to "labor pools" where homeless people gathered to find temporary employment, visited street corners, and talked to clients during the "living room" segment of their day [when all clients came together in a common area of the Daily Planet to discuss topics of concern].

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

The Daily Planet had a good relationship with DSS. The first eligibility worker who took part in the project was not suitable, and based on discussions between the project manager and DSS, was replaced. This situation did not seriously affect the project's progress, and indicated the attention and seriousness with which the public/private partners viewed the demonstration project.

Staff at the Daily Planet were effective in helping DSS eligibility workers feel comfortable in their surroundings. When a client was likely to be difficult to interview because of mental health problems, project staff stayed with the eligibility worker to facilitate the conversation. Daily Planet staff did some prescreening, and because they were familiar with clients and their situations, were able to inform them of other assistance they might be eligible for and help them organize documents. The clients themselves were enthusiastic about the chance to get personalized help from people who understood their circumstances.

IV. Findings

This project was successful in reaching its projected number of clients. In all, 442 clients were enrolled in the FSP through the Daily Planet, 47% more than anticipated.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$69,524							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
8,191	\$8	583	\$119	481	\$145	442	\$157

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	7%
Contact/application rate	6%
Contact/enrollee rate	5%
Referral/application rate	83%
Referral/enrollee rate	76%
Application/enrollee rate	92%

This project not only met its enrollment goals, but provided an opportunity to assess the difficulties that people without shelter have with the FSP application process. In interviews with clients, evaluation staff found that many worked through temporary job agencies and could not predict in advance what their incomes would be. Clients also had difficulties producing documentation of their work, which is necessary to enroll in the FSP; employers would not always readily provide such confirmation. In some instances, clients reported that asking for such documentation cost them opportunities to work or put them in a position of having to accept dangerous or unpleasant work assignments in order to ensure cooperation.

Living arrangements for clients could shift daily, causing difficulties for these clients to predict and explain. In order to be in compliance with the food stamp application procedures, clients were required to be more definitive about their arrangements for shelter. Many eligibility workers questioned the authenticity of the person's homeless status, queries which often served to reinforce a sense of despair in clients. The conflict between helping applicants and checking for possible fraud made some eligibility workers very wary in dealing with homeless men who appeared to be able-bodied.

Another difficulty homeless people encountered when using food stamps was their lack of ability to store or cook food. Often, homeless people traded favors with acquaintances or friends for cooking facilities to prepare food. Clients universally expressed the wish that hot food could be obtained with food stamps, especially now that many convenience stores offer such purchases.

V. Conclusions

This project demonstrated that homeless people could be effectively served in their own environment with the help of an out-placed eligibility worker from the local food stamp office. The public-private partnership worked very well in this instance, and to the advantage of people who are difficult to serve in traditional settings.

14. Project Hunger Action Barre, Vermont

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

In order to help people understand and apply for the Food Stamp Program [FSP], project Hunger Action, proposed by the Central Vermont Community Action Council [CVCAC], intended to use volunteers from communities throughout a large part of the State to canvas door-to-door. CVCAC hoped to develop 20 two-person teams to conduct client assistance in ten towns. The intended target population was people who were believed to be most in need; older people living in rural and isolated settings and low-income families with children. The population of the area being served is predominantly Caucasian.

CVCAC has an on-going, active volunteer program from which Project Hunger Action intended to recruit volunteers to work on the food stamp project. As motivational incentives, reimbursement for travel expenses and lunches for the volunteers on days that they worked would be offered. Staff from the local food stamp offices would provide training in the FSP's eligibility criteria and be available to answer volunteer's questions.

CVCAC had much experience working with low-income people in Vermont and believed that the barriers to FSP participation would be similar to those barriers people encountered when enrolling in other government programs. Among problems clients might face were a lack of information or misinformation about the FSP, a lack of transportation, a reluctance to participate because of the social stigma associated with using food stamps, and problems with literacy. CVCAC staff believed that if people were approached in their homes by people from their own neighborhoods, they would be more likely to view the FSP as an acceptable assistance program.

II. Project Activities

The project had only one primary paid staff member. This project director had an office in the CVCAC building in Barre, Vermont, from which she monitored the project.

The project director had difficulties conducting the demonstration project as it had been planned. She made many efforts to recruit volunteers, first from the cadre already working on CVCAC projects, and then through advertising in newspapers and shopping guides. Eventually 17 volunteers agreed to participate. These volunteers were trained for their jobs by the project director [who in turn had been trained in FSP regulations by local food stamp office personnel] and assigned territories to cover when canvassing within the communities. It was soon found that volunteers were very uncomfortable going door-to-door to speak with people. Most of the volunteers just left brochures in mailboxes without attempting to make contact with occupants.

Those volunteers who did attempt to interview people in their homes were not successful. The volunteers reported that people were very hesitant to give information to a stranger at the door and would not give identifying information. Volunteers did not attempt visits at every house they passed. They selected those without dogs, where someone appeared to have kept the property in order, and where there was no sign that would indicate they might have a problematic encounter.

During the course of the project, no close ties were developed between the volunteers and the project director. The project director found it difficult to determine what activities had been implemented and where volunteers had spent their time, despite having established an excellent system of reporting. She did not interact regularly with the volunteers and therefore lacked a good understanding of the project's progress. There never was a team experience in this project. The extremely small number of clients reached indicate the difficulties encountered.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

Successfully utilizing volunteers in client-assistance work requires clearly defined tasks, good training and support, and continuing motivation. The project expected volunteers to make "cold calls" to potentially-eligible food stamp recipients. This assignment would have been difficult for paid and trained workers, and was apparently more than these volunteers wanted to do without support.

Without proper supervision and support in the field, volunteer outreach workers were left with a broad mandate in making decisions on where and how to reach clients. In this project, many people who might have been eligible for food stamps may have been missed by the rational choices that the volunteer outreach workers made in regard to their own safety and peace of mind.

IV. Findings

Outcome data shows that the project never reached the anticipated 1,800 people they had projected contacting to inform them of food stamps, nor did they enroll 900 people as expected. In fact, so few people were contacted that outcome data are not relevant. Project staff reported that the demonstration project was able to disseminate food stamp information more widely than before. It is possible that where the volunteers shared information, more applications may have been made to the local food stamp offices. Unfortunately, there are no data to support this assumption.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$44,986

V. Conclusions

This project did not meet its goals, but elicited important information on the use of volunteers in client assistance. Using volunteers from the community to go door-to-door in small towns appears to be a difficult technique in client-assistance efforts.

15. Fremont Public Association Seattle, Washington

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

In this two-pronged project, the Fremont Public Association [FPA] in Seattle joined with the Northeast Washington Rural Resources Development Association [NRR] in the eastern part of the State to provide client-assistance services to people interested in the Food Stamp Program [FSP] who did not have permanent residences. Both FPA and NRR are community action agencies that have had State contracts in the past to conduct outreach.

The demonstration project intended to serve both urban and rural populations. Project staff planned to contact potentially eligible clients in Seattle by visiting homeless shelters and feeding sites. Clients in eastern Washington would be contacted by canvassing State parks or shelters. People would be given correct information about the FSP and helped with the application process. This assistance would include providing homeless people with an address at which they could receive food stamp authorizations. Further, the project hoped to install a voice-mail system so that when homeless people called they could be informed about the status of their application or provided with instructions on where and when to pick up their food stamp certification card and monthly authorization.

The project also planned to train community service agency personnel in the needs of homeless people and develop a public/private relationship with the Department of Social and Human Services [DSHS]. They hoped to explore the possibility of using volunteer assistance in the field work.

The two agencies anticipated that they would be able to assist 2,400 homeless individuals during the course of the project by using three full-time field outreach specialists. The barriers that the project intended to overcome were illiteracy and language barriers, lack of information about food stamps, lack of accessibility to local food stamp offices, and feelings of shame, fear, or resentment.

II. Project Activities

Project staff scheduled regular visits to a series of shelters and feeding sites in both parts of the State. In eastern Washington, NRR attempted but was unsuccessful in gaining cooperation from the Department of Natural Resources [DNR] and as a result did not work in campgrounds as hoped. DNR staff were concerned that the project would encourage homeless people to use the State's parks for permanent residences if they allowed social services to be delivered in this environment.

Training did not take place as planned because DSHS increased their own training during the course of the project and there was not enough staff time available. Project staff did, however, train food bank volunteers at 16 food banks to identify homeless people and

refer them to the agency's 1-800 number that the project was using to make appointments for further assistance in making a food stamp application.

Particularly beneficial services included the use of authorized representatives, who took food stamp applications to the local food stamp offices, thereby reducing the number of trips that rural or homeless people had to make. In addition, the two grantee agencies allowed homeless clients to use their addresses as their place of residence. Workers were also aware of literacy problems that their clients might have had and were sensitive in helping them fill out the application forms. Language was another issue that was addressed; a Spanish-speaking worker was hired to work in the field and translate materials.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

This project did not develop a close partnership with DSHS. Communication between project staff and DSHS staff was not consistent, and led to slow progress in accomplishing the goals that had been established. Many of the activities that had been planned were not possible to implement because necessary permissions from state agencies were not forthcoming.

Excellent field staff made a difference for clients, however, who were enthusiastic about the help they had received. Staff found that working individually with their clients and directly engaging potential clients in conversation was more effective than merely announcing their availability and waiting for clients to approach them at shelters and feeding sites.

IV. Findings

If one looks at project efforts that were implemented in eastern Washington and Seattle separately, it is clear that staff were more successful in enrolling individuals in the eastern Washington site than in the Seattle site. This may have been due to the nature of homelessness in the two places. In eastern Washington there were more families who had been homeless a shorter period of time, had been a part of the social fabric of their communities, and who had a better idea of how to apply for benefits. In Seattle, many clients were not only homeless, but mentally ill, had been on the streets for long periods of time, and were unable to concentrate on getting documentation together for the application.

The project reached only about half as many people as they had anticipated contacting. They were successful, however, in using volunteers in the food banks to assist in finding clients who were in need of help and potentially eligible.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$157,216								
CONTACTS			REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
FPA	937		613		600		264	
NRR	339		303		299		281	
Total	1,276	\$123	916	\$172	899	\$175	545	\$288

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	72%
Contact/application rate	70%
Contact/enrollee rate	43%
Referral/application rate	98%
Referral/enrollee rate	59%
Application/enrollee rate	61%

The project gathered important information about the barriers that clients encountered in trying to enroll in the FSP. On both sides of the State, homeless people were not well informed about food stamps and many had difficulty with the reading and writing demanded of them in filling out the application. Problems of having no identity card or and address continued to plague people without permanent shelter. Teens who no longer lived at home with their parents often did not have the information required to get a Social Security card. In general, the application was confusing to homeless people who often used the address of the shelter where they stayed as a permanent address, only to find they were no longer considered to be homeless and thus not entitled to expedited service.

An unwillingness of many eligibility workers to serve men who appeared to be able-bodied or to accept alternative forms of identification from homeless people was also a problem in both areas. In addition, staff noted that many people who did not speak English found it difficult to access the FSP and that bi-lingual services were not sufficient to cover the need of those in homeless shelters. The stigma attached to using food stamps remained a problem for people in rural areas, but appeared to be of little concern in the city. Often clients noted the FSP was difficult to make use of because they had no place to store food.

Fear of the consequences of making an application for food stamps and enrolling in the program was strong for many potential clients for various reasons. Some felt that they may have been deported or believed that their immigration status may have been negatively impacted. Other people were unwilling to be found by authorities who were looking for them because of other problems. Some feared that making a mistake in obtaining or using food stamps would have dire economic consequences for them and, therefore, they preferred not to use them.

V. Conclusions

The project found that it was impractical to reach clients in campgrounds. It was too difficult to distinguish who might be in need, and those potential clients were hesitant to identify themselves. Working through shelter programs was more effective.

Project staff were not able to develop cooperative arrangements with DSHS that would have facilitated the project. A long history of advocacy made the grantee agencies seem adversarial, and tensions arose.

16. Wisconsin Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council Inc. Independence, Wisconsin

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

Wisconsin Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council Inc. [WDEOC], a community action agency located in western Wisconsin, proposed a project that would educate potentially eligible clients regarding the Food Stamp Program [FSP] and assist them in applying for food stamps. The intended project plan consisted of two major components: [1] developing an education and information campaign; and, [2] providing preapplication assistance at alternative application sites. The project was designed to reach potential food stamp recipients among homeless and older people, low-income working families, and other non-participating eligible people living in the three-county service area. A major portion of the target groups lived in rural areas and were believed by project planners to be deterred from FSP participation due to pride in their self-sufficiency, lack of information regarding eligibility requirements, lack of transportation, and the difficult and intimidating nature of the application process.

The proposed staffing plan included a project director who would oversee the management of the project, a program assistant, and two client-assistance workers who would visit alternative sites to provide preapplication assistance to potential clients. Volunteers would also be recruited to assist clients through the application process, and an information specialist hired to coordinate the education and information campaign.

WDEOC reported having close ties to the local food stamp offices prior to the project. The agency hoped to continue to maintain a close working relationship and had developed agreements with local food stamp office staff to provide training to project staff in the FSP application process and to provide them with support during the course of the project.

II. Project Activities

The information/education campaign, which was designed to reduce negative community attitudes toward the FSP and towards persons needing its services as well as provide information to those interested in seeking food stamps, was conducted as originally planned. Staff used a number of approaches to reach these goals, believing that potentially eligible individuals would be less intimidated by a public information campaign that did not always emphasize a person's need for help. Therefore, humor was often reflected in many of the informational materials that were developed by the project.

The information/educational materials that were developed included public service announcements that were sent to local television and radio stations and advertisements that were printed in local newspapers, local shoppers, and senior citizen reviews. The project also developed a series of posters and flyers that were distributed in many locations, including food pantries, community kitchens, senior meal sites, grocery stores, laundromats,

and churches. Attached to the posters were small slips of paper describing the project that individuals could tear off and take with them.

WDEOC made its 1-800 number available to the project, and the number was noted on all project public information materials. Clients interested in obtaining information regarding the FSP could contact project staff through this number. Project staff then explained the FSP application process and sent interested persons an application packet that included the Wisconsin food stamp application and the list of required documents. Home visits were made if requested by clients. During these visits, the client-assistance worker explained the application process and documentation requirements, and helped clients complete the application form.

Over the course of the project, staff visited numerous outreach sites in the service area, including Head Start centers, community tables, senior meal sites, and commodity distribution sites. They made presentations, disseminated project information, and spoke individually with potential clients. At commodity distribution sites, where there often were up to 200 people standing in line for parcels of food, the project worker gradually went down the line speaking with approximately groups of ten people and distributing flyers.

Several proposed elements were changed during the course of the project. First, preapplication activities that were to be carried out at alternative application sites were curtailed. Staff found that many clients contacted at these sites preferred anonymity when inquiring about the FSP and felt more comfortable speaking privately over the phone than in public places. Consequently, most client-assistance activities were conducted by phone when clients called the 1-800 number.

Second, the staffing plan was altered to eliminate volunteers from the project. The project had planned to recruit volunteers to assist at the alternative preapplication sites but discovered through their own FSP training that the application process was more complex than they had anticipated. As a result, staff believed that volunteers would require more in-depth training and support than they would be able to provide. Another staffing change that was made was the combination of the two part-time client-assistance positions into one full-time position. Under this arrangement, the client-assistance worker was responsible for all alternative preapplication activities in the three county service area. Covering such a large area alone was a difficult task; travel to a site or home could take more than an hour. Modifications in the staffing plan limited the effectiveness of the project in serving a large pool of clients, but the institution of the 1-800 number allowed project staff to meet the limited needs of a larger number of clients.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

Outreach at commodity distribution sites and at Head Start parent meetings were not successful in recruiting additional food stamp participants; most families were either already enrolled or not eligible for the FSP. Outreach also tended not to be successful at senior meal sites. A number of older people regularly spoke out during staff's presentations

against the use of government assistance, often stifling any outward interest from others in the audience.

The project found that older people were among those least interested in participating in the FSP. Many of them had endured and survived the Depression on their own and they assumed they could do without food stamps as they always had. Many older people believed that if they sought assistance, it implied that they could no longer make it on their own. Also, some older clients indicated that the amount of food stamps they were eligible for was not worth the effort.

The one-on-one approach at individual tables at a meal site located in the town of Eau Claire seemed to be an effective method to reach clients. However, many of the same people returned each week and the number of contacts dropped over time.

Staff noted that the majority of people who called the 1-800 number wanted information about FSP income and asset eligibility guidelines and often declined assistance with completing the application form. Consequently, staff provided them with an application form and directions on how to proceed with the application at the county office. Clients reported that this assistance saved them time and decreased the number of visits they had to make to the local food stamp office. Those who accepted the offer for assistance with completing the food stamp application form came to Western Dairyland's main or satellite offices, or were visited in their homes by the client-assistance worker. Project staff found that home visits were the most effective means providing client assistance.

IV. Findings

Project staff were unable to ascertain whether clients they had assisted actually applied and enrolled in the FSP; the State of Wisconsin was undergoing a major change in its computer system, and local offices could not retrieve this data. Project staff tried to verify client enrollments by interviewing clients by telephone. The following enrollment numbers are, therefore, based solely on client reports and can only be viewed as tentative.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$147,000							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
538	\$273	360	\$408	NA	NA	111	\$1,324

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	66%
Contact/application rate	Unknown
Contact/enrollee rate	20%
Referral/application rate	Unknown
Referral/enrollee rate	30%
Application/enrollee rate	Unknown

Project staff contacted a total of 538 persons regarding the FSP and provided 498 people with preapplication assistance by phone, resulting in 92% of the total number of client contacts. Only four percent of those contacted were assisted in their homes, one percent at the agency, and almost three percent at the alternative application sites. Of the total number of contacts, 360 clients [66%] were referred to the FSP, and 111 people [30%] were ultimately enrolled. The number of clients who were referred and enrolled in the FSP due to the project did not reflect the numbers that were proposed.

The project spent a large portion of funding on an extensive public education campaign and tabulated client responses to questions about where they heard about the project. Data indicate that the most successful means of advertising the project was also the least expensive approach; through local newspapers. This included town newspapers, shopper guides, senior citizen newsletters, and articles and advertisements in the WDEOC bi-monthly newspaper. The most expensive approach, radio and television advertisements, produced few project inquiries.

The largest barrier to FSP participation was community attitudes. As noted, older people often spoke in condemnation of persons who used public assistance or food stamps. In addition, clients, who noted their embarrassment when others learned of their involvement in the FSP, often commented on how they felt as though they were being watched while shopping with food stamps. This belief was substantiated by the fact that citizens frequently called the Department of Human Services to report names of food stamp participants who had bought unhealthy or expensive foods with food stamps such as steak, pizza, or candy.

V. Conclusions

Project activities provided needed information regarding eligibility requirements and aided to a certain degree those who did not understand the FSP application process. The toll free number permitted clients who were hesitant to inquire publicly about food stamps to find out about the program.

The effect of the educational campaign on community attitudes could not be documented or verified. However, community attitudes regarding self-reliance and independence from government assistance were vocalized and often served to subdue those persons who might have been interested in what the project offered.

The project did not reach the number of intended project clients. The projections may have been unrealistic given the nature of the populations living in these highly independent rural communities, the size of the service area, and the number of staff.

17. Food Bank of North Central Arkansas Norfolk, Arkansas

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The Foodbank of North Central Arkansas, in partnership with the Baxter County Office of the Arkansas Department of Human Services [DHS], planned a demonstration project to examine possible solutions to barriers to food stamp participation faced by older people and low-income working families with children living in Baxter County, Arkansas. The target area was largely rural, had a large older population, and encompassed numerous isolated communities in which a large percentage of the work force was employed at or near minimum wage.

A number of barriers to participation in the Food Stamp Program [FSP] were identified prior to project implementation. These barriers included isolation and a lack of transportation, inaccurate information, cultural distrust, insufficient hours of DHS office operation, and complexity of the food stamp application. A variety of activities were proposed to overcome these barriers. First, the project planned to implement a local media campaign to advertise the project and provide pertinent information regarding the FSP to potentially eligible individuals. Staff intended to run advertisements in daily and weekly newspapers and on five radio stations. Second, the project planned to establish and maintain outreach sites, thus providing opportunities for residents of outlying areas to receive FSP preapplication assistance in their own communities. Sites such as local senior centers, city halls, community buildings, and churches would be used to reach potentially eligible food stamp recipients, in addition to the Foodbank of North Central Arkansas and participating food rooms.

The proposed staffing plan included a project director, an assistant project director, and two part-time Delta Service Corps [DSC] participants. These DSC volunteers would assist staff in scheduling activities, staffing preapplication sites, and assisting interested clients in completing the food stamp application. Staff and volunteers would also be available to make home visits to assist older residents to complete the food stamp application in their own homes.

II. Project Activities

Three significant changes to the proposed project were necessary. First, the staffing plan was modified. The DSC volunteers did not participate in the project as intended because the project could not meet certain Delta Corps program requirements. Consequently, the project director and the assistant director implemented all project activities. Second, State level FSP administrative staff did not grant project staff the authority to become qualified representatives, nor did they obtain a waiver to allow project staff to deliver FSP applications to DHS offices. These changes limited the degree to which project staff could assist clients. Third, the project service area was increased in the last months of the project to include five additional neighboring counties. This geographical expansion was

due to two factors: one, a desire by project staff to increase the number of clients assisted by the project, and two, DHS policy changes. New program procedures instituted by DHS allowed residents of a county to apply for food stamps in an adjoining county if the DHS office in that county was closer or more convenient. In response to this change, project staff contacted DHS offices in the five adjoining counties for permission to establish outreach sites in their county food pantries. Project staff hoped this change would increase the likelihood of reaching a higher number of clients.

Outreach sites, which were established in places such as city halls, community centers, and food pantries, were visited by staff on a monthly basis. The schedule of staff visits to each site was posted so that potential clients would know when to expect staff. At each site, staff provided preapplication assistance to interested clients. They explained the food stamp application process and, if requested, assisted clients in completing the application. Some clients wanted to complete the FSP application independently, and for these individuals staff provided them with the application forms, instructions for completing the applications, and a list of the documents they would need to provide to DHS. Home visits were also made when requested, during which time staff assisted clients in completing the food stamp application, and helped them in gathering the needed documents. Transportation was also offered to clients who needed help reaching the DHS office.

During the course of the project, advertisements were placed monthly in community newspapers and senior citizen bulletins, and public service announcements were run on three local radio stations. Project staff also developed fliers and posted them regularly in public locations such as post offices, convenience stores, and laundromats.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

As in most of the rural demonstration projects, the number of clients who were assisted and enrolled in the FSP was low. Certain outreach sites such as city halls and community centers did not generate many clients. Staff spent numerous hours at these sites without seeing or speaking to potential clients because the targeted communities were so isolated and thinly populated. The most successful sites for contacting interested clients were the food pantries where clients were already looking for ways to supplement their food supplies. By expanding the project service area into neighboring counties and establishing new sites at additional food pantries, staff began to reach a higher number of clients toward the end of the project. Staff indicated that the new sites in food pantries generated clients because they were located in low-income communities where the need for assistance was great.

Staff also found that at many of the sites most clients did not want to spend time to complete the FSP application. Clients often preferred to take the forms home and complete them themselves, in part because applications contained questions that many clients were unable to answer without access to their personal records. Staff found that

many of these persons did not continue with the application process; a higher percentage of clients who were provided more in-depth assistance were ultimately enrolled.

IV. Findings

Staff recorded the number of client contacts, referrals, and enrollments at each site. In addition, they kept data on the type of assistance each client received. Project staff contacted a total of 625 potential FSP clients and referred 235. Of those referred, 84 or 35% were enrolled. A sizable difference occurred in outcomes between those clients who chose to fill out the applications independently and those who received in-depth assistance. Of the 242 clients who chose to complete the application independently, 71 or 29% were ultimately enrolled. A much smaller number of clients were provided additional assistance [14 people], 11 or 78% of whom were enrolled in the FSP.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$70,071							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
625	\$114	235	\$302	Unknown	Unknown	84	\$845

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	37%
Contact/application rate	Unknown
Contact/enrollee rate	13%
Referral/application rate	Unknown
Referral/enrollee rate	36%
Application/enrollee rate	Unknown

As noted, the location of sites where project staff provided assistance proved to be important. Senior centers generated no enrollments. The new sites in the neighboring counties' food pantries were relatively successful; staff contacted a number of people, many of whom were successfully approved for food stamps. The agency food pantry was the most successful site, with 195 contacts and 60 enrollments. However, it must be noted that this site was staffed consistently by one of the two project staff, whereas the other sites were staffed only once or twice a month.

The majority of clients seeking assistance from project staff were female, and all were Caucasian. In addition, most clients assisted by project staff had children; only 27% were older persons. Staff discovered that families with children were more open to food stamp assistance than older persons. Older individuals often believed that families had a greater need for food stamps than they did; it was important to provide nutritious meals for children. Moreover, many older persons noted they did not want government assistance and would "make it on their own." Staff often encountered older persons who needed food stamps but who had savings that brought them over the allowable asset limit for the FSP.

Staff suggested that client numbers were low not only because of low population density, but because some barriers still remained. Staff were not able to reach the deeply isolated areas; they did not feel comfortable visiting strangers in their homes [unless requested] for reasons of safety. Many of these potential clients did not use the sites where outreach was provided and, therefore, remained unserved by this demonstration project.

Traditional approaches of advertising the project, including public service announcements on television and radio, notices in local newspapers, and presentations in public places served to increase people's awareness of the FSP, but were not effective in overcoming the more complex reasons why potentially eligible clients did not seek food stamp assistance. The frequently-stated barriers to FSP participation in rural areas, such as isolation, lack of transportation, and lack of accurate information, appeared to only partially explain why eligible clients did not apply for food stamps.

Local values influenced many low-income people to be strongly independent of government assistance. Clients expressed that many people "looked down" on people who used food stamps. Store cashiers and people in check-out lines made comments about people buying food with food stamps. A client completing an FSP application with a worker cried and said, "I feel so ashamed to ask for help." Other clients visited the food bank several times before they approached project staff for assistance. Of these clients, some expressed how difficult it was for them to overcome their embarrassment in asking for government assistance. Staff found that community members perceived less of a stigma when asking for help from a user-friendly local food bank than a government program that required the disclosure of personal information.

V. Conclusions

The project was able to overcome most barriers to food stamp participation for a small number of clients. Clients who did not understand the FSP application process were provided with instructions and some were assisted with completing their application forms. In addition, through their ongoing communication with clients, staff helped several older clients understand the FSP and its potential to improve their nutrition and food security.

Reaching potentially eligible clients is a challenge to programs located in isolated rural communities. Unlike urban areas that have high density populations and more potential sites for contacting eligible clients, rural programs such as this one have populations that are widely dispersed and with few sites for contacting potentially eligible clients. In addition, negative attitudes towards government assistance were pervasive and proved to be a powerful deterrent to eligible people who could have benefited from food stamp assistance.