

18. San Francisco Enrollment Assistance Demonstration Project

San Francisco, California

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

San Francisco Enrollment Assistance Demonstration Project is an expansion of the San Francisco Department of Social Services [DSS] Non-Assistance Food Stamp [NAFS] Outreach Program, a project that was funded in January 1993 to raise public awareness of food stamps and lower barriers to participation. Prior to receiving demonstration funding, the NAFS Outreach Program conducted a number of outreach activities primarily targeted to people who were over 65 years old, who were disabled, or who were homeless. Under the demonstration grant, the target population was expanded to include low income families with children and newly legalized residents. Existing food stamp outreach staff, which consisted of a supervisor and four eligibility workers, were believed to be able to handle the expected additional food stamp applications, and no new staff were hired.

Through the demonstration project, staff planned to develop a structured approach to locating and enrolling low-income families. They intended to work with childcare information and referral agencies and family crisis intervention centers, logical sites to locate families, particularly the working poor. The intent was to contact people who were already coming into contact with community-based organizations [CBOs] for other social service related activities and provide those who were eligible for food stamps with enrollment assistance.

Staff from five CBOs would work with the project to identify and assist eligible families to apply for food stamps. These staff would receive two days of classroom training in food stamp regulations and procedures at DSS, as well as a half-day refresher training session. This training would enable staff to pre-screen individuals for possible food stamp eligibility, help to locate and copy required documents, provide food stamp applications, and assist in understanding program requirements and completing application forms. Eligibility workers in NAFS would be responsible for processing all applications and following up with staff in each agency on difficult applications.

Barriers that were initially believed to inhibit participation in the Food Stamp Program [FSP] included work and/or childcare schedules, long lines and delays in the food stamp office, lack of knowledge, the possible stigma attached to food stamp use, complicated application forms, language and/or cultural barriers, and difficulty obtaining and/or copying required documents. Undocumented parents of children born in the U.S. often do not know that their children may be eligible for food stamps, and may also fear that information is shared between DSS and the Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS].

II. Project Activities

Materials were developed for training staff of the five CBOs and the project began. Outreach activities were inconsistent across sites and varied greatly. Activities implemented by staff at one of the participating CBOs, the Children's Council, consisted of mailing flyers to child development centers, placing notices in newsletters, and integrating information on food stamps into trainings focused on assisting women obtain their daycare license. The Children's Council did not have contact with large numbers of potential applicants.

Wu Yee Children's Services, which serves an Asian community, publicized their participation in the project on a local Chinese-language radio. They also conducted special workshops in several dialects of Chinese that focused on food stamp enrollment and the application process. Due to a lack of staff, they were unable to provide one-on-one enrollment assistance, and instead focused on locating and referring as many potentially eligible clients to the FSP as possible. People who were believed to be eligible for the FSP were given a list of required documents to bring back with them when they met with project staff. At that time, they were offered further assistance in completing their applications. On-site photocopying was necessary and eventually provided, thereby raising the success rate at this site.

For a variety of reasons, the other three participating CBOs were eventually dropped from the project. Staff from one agency, who was responsible for providing status offender services to youth, believed that asking their clients about their financial resources was an intrusion on the therapeutic relationship. A second cooperating agency, which provided crisis phone services, did not make personal contact with their clients. Due to the nature of the calls received, which were stress induced, staff from this agency felt that discussions about the FSP would be inappropriate. The third agency simply did not implement the project in a timely fashion. Flyers were sent home with clients, but no further activity was undertaken.

In an effort to involve other agencies that might be interested in participating in the project, the project director spent a considerable amount of time contacting a variety of agencies. Two agencies were identified and joined the project; Northeast Medical Services [NMS] and Mission Neighborhood Health Center [MNHC]. NMS, which is located in Chinatown, provides a variety of medical services. MNHC, a community health center, provides medical services to a primarily Spanish-speaking population. The majority of clients served by these medical centers are foreign born and unable to speak English.

Staff of NMS screened clients for potential eligibility and provided enrollment assistance, referring potential applicants to the project. MNHC did not focus on providing food stamp enrollment assistance, but were involved in disseminating information in the community regarding eligibility for Federal programs from the National Immigration

Law Center, and actively encouraged people who appeared to be eligible and interested to apply for food stamps.

After the addition of the two medical clinics, the initial focus on recruiting low-income families altered to include single persons, husband and wife couples, or one or more parents with their children. However, most of the people seen by the medical clinics were families with children.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

After project staff's experience working with the initial five CBO's, they learned the importance of recruiting and involving agencies that are willing to participate in the project, especially those with staff who are willing to become involved. Choice of sites is important; the addition of two medical agencies, both high volume agencies, was beneficial in that there was an increase in the number of clients who were provided with assistance and who were able to obtain food stamps. Changing sites when they are unproductive is also necessary. In addition, staff found that it is important to spend time with staff of all agencies in order to encourage their participation.

Although the idea of offering services in CBOs that clients trusted was found to be valuable, the approach of using existing positions to conduct client assistance did not seem to work well. The effort was time intensive, and put a burden on staff. People identified to conduct outreach in CBOs had full-time jobs from which they were not released.

Project staff found that it was almost impossible to get staff of participating agencies together for a group training, and instead trained them in separate sessions. They also learned the importance of providing training that focused on how to present the FSP to clients; the training that was provided primarily focused on defining eligibility criteria and instructing participants in how to assist clients complete a food stamp application. More information about how to approach people who are potentially eligible for food stamps would have been beneficial.

IV. Findings

Response was strongest in San Francisco's Asian community; the enrollment assistance project had only limited success in reaching the Hispanic working poor.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$79,193							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
3,510	\$23	408	\$194	248	\$319	169	\$469

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	12%
Contact/application rate	7%
Contact/enrollee rate	5%
Referral/application rate	61%
Referral/enrollee rate	41%
Application/enrollee rate	68%

The major barrier inhibiting recent immigrants [Asian and Hispanic] from applying for food stamps was the belief that if they applied they would experience difficulty with the INS. These fears provide one explanation for why only 61% of those referred to the FSP actually submitted applications. People were concerned that using food stamps would hinder their chances of bringing relatives into this country and would impact their ability to acquire citizenship. The project director contacted an immigration rights group in Los Angeles, who noted that accepting food stamps would not harm their chances of bringing their relatives into the country. However, immigration lawyers routinely instructed their clients not to apply for such benefits.

Other barriers clients encountered included difficulty getting to the food stamp office, which is located downtown and requires the use of public transportation, language barriers, and difficulty filling out forms. The stigma attached to what is perceived as a welfare benefit was also a problem for some clients. It was found that encouragement and assistance from staff of a trusted community agency and focusing on the needs of children can be effective in overcoming some of these barriers. The project addressed the issue of lack of transportation to the food stamp office by arranging for clients to pick up a food stamp applications in places other than the downtown food stamp office. Several persons assisting in the outreach efforts noted that if people with language problems had to go downtown to apply, they probably would not have done so. The food stamp office is in a very rough part of town, and a number of clients there are aggressive and frequently intoxicated.

V. Conclusions

Experience in food stamp outreach has taught project staff that locating and enrolling eligible non-participants in San Francisco requires persistence and commitment. Many potentially eligible clients have been surviving without food stamps for some time, and want to continue to be self-sufficient despite their need. Others feel their need is temporary and expect their situation to change soon. Intensive one-on-one assistance is often required to help those who experience both need and an interest in applying to the FSP.

19. Center for Employment Training [CET] Food Stamp Outreach Program San Jose, California

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The Center for Employment Training [CET] planned to work in coordination with the Santa Clara Social Services Agency [County Food Stamp Program] in order to increase accessibility to the Food Stamp Program [FSP] in the Hispanic communities of San Jose and the South County Gilroy Area. Staff from the County Food Stamp Program planned to provide project staff with two weeks of training in food stamp eligibility, in addition to technical assistance and verification of client enrollment in the FSP.

The Food Stamp Outreach Program proposed three levels of assistance. First, they would disseminate eligibility information through neighborhood outreach, literature, and Spanish language radio and television programs. Second, they would pre-screen and counsel those they thought might be eligible for food stamps and provide additional assistance as required to complete the food stamp application process. Third, if necessary, staff would provide transportation and childcare to clients during the application process and would provide an off-site enrollment center.

Various outreach efforts were planned, including mass outreach to the public. Such activities were to consist of participation in community events where written and verbal information on food stamp eligibility would be provided, and the development of an electronic media campaign. Public service announcements were to be submitted to the Spanish media encouraging those who might be eligible to contact the project to obtain further information.

Other outreach efforts were to include person-to-person outreach at the three Santa Clara County CET Skill Training Centers. CET staff would be trained to pre-screen for food stamp eligibility among students, and provide information on how to apply for those who appeared eligible. In terms of outreach to the neighborhood, project staff planned to establish relationships with local grocery stores in targeted neighborhoods in order to provide information to potential clients. Project staff also intended to distribute flyers to churches and social groups in order to correct misinformation.

Project staff planned to strengthen collaborative efforts with community service agencies that worked with members of the target group. These agencies would be notified about the project and supplied with a copy of the project's information video tape on eligibility to show to their clients.

In addition to these outreach efforts, the project planned to provide expanded access to clients, including 24-hour toll-free telephone availability, extended hours, flexible service delivery capabilities, and the development of bilingual informational materials. It was anticipated that under most circumstances after pre-screening and counseling participants

would begin the application process, and only in special circumstances would project staff participate in the actual application process with clients.

Staff believed that barriers inhibiting their target populations from accessing the FSP included an unfamiliarity with outside agencies, complex bureaucratic processes and procedures, lack of information or misinformation, previous negative experiences with FSP and other government programs, and conflicting cultural values such as a preference for relying on relatives, pride, and the stigma associated with asking for help. Other important identified barriers were language and literacy difficulties, and the fear of endangering their immigration status.

II. Project Activities

For the most part, proposed project activities did not change from those originally planned. The primary activities that were implemented consisted of person-to-person outreach where outreach workers provided off-site application assistance; outreach to other community service providers to improve their skills in assisting clients obtain food stamps; and, outreach to the public through a media campaign, various presentations to potential clients, and the distribution of flyers.

Off-site applications were distributed and processed at three CET offices and the Community Services Agency [CSA]. The plan to involve a member of CSA in project outreach efforts was not successful. Instead, CSA donated office space, and project staff were present one day a week to assist clients with the application process. Project staff discussed the food stamp application with virtually every person and were available to answer questions and handle any issues that arose during the application process. Project staff, unlike food stamp eligibility workers who could comment only on food stamp benefits, explained to people how various programs might affect other aspects of their lives. Also, project staff helped clients organize pertinent papers and at times supplied pocket folders in which clients could keep their correspondence, receipts, and check stubs. Further, when clients were confused about something and embarrassed to go back to the eligibility workers to ask for clarification, staff explained what needed to be done and discussed their options. Project staff also scheduled Reserved Appointments for client interviews with eligibility workers, who staffed the off-site centers in the evenings once a week. Eligibility workers worked four hours per site, and most processed three cases in that time.

In addition to staffing the application sites, project staff also worked with other agencies and the community to obtain new referrals. This work included making regular presentations at the CET sites to ensure that new students were aware of the services offered and working with CET students and graduates to identify people in need. Staff also made presentations to field workers in labor camps and spoke to English as a Second Language [ESL] and Citizenship classes. These last strategies were found to be effective outreach methods, in part because staff were able to specifically address immigrant

issues. Project staff also found the distribution of flyers to be a particularly successful method to reach potential clients.

An attempt was made to establish or maintain strong connections with agencies that served the same clientele. Project staff informed staff of these agencies about the project, provided them with food stamp applications and materials, and provided training regarding the application process. Staff from most community-based organizations received this primary training, after which they were encouraged to identify potentially-eligible clients at their sites and refer them to CET. Follow-up trainings were required at times to clear up misunderstandings about the process.

III. Lessons Learned from this Demonstration Project

Even though clients could normally make appointments and apply for food stamps at the County offices within a week's time, many were willing to wait two or three weeks in order to apply at CET sites. Clients reported feeling more comfortable at CET, which provided a familiar and non-threatening setting with an advocate there to assist with problems. They also mentioned being able to avoid the stigma of going to the "welfare office." Other clients appreciated that CET did not have long lines and offered evening hours, making it easier to arrange transportation.

Staff noted that speaking to outside client groups about the FSP was a time consuming task and believed that it would have been more effective to train the staff of other organizations to screen and inform their own clients. However, project staff were not very successful in scheduling training sessions for staff at these agencies. Also staff from these organizations did not have the time to add extra tasks to their current workload.

Project staff found that when they made presentations to small groups they usually included some people who were already receiving food stamps. These people were asked to assist the group and the project by filling in the form and sharing information about their own experience with the FSP application process. These activities appeared to increase participation levels while providing additional insight into how the FSP application process was perceived by those who were already involved in it.

Although CET initially experienced problems securing the cooperation and involvement of the Social Services Agency, the active role of the project director ensured that most issues were resolved quickly and lines of communication kept open. Project staff noted that this direct communication with the County, which allowed them to give clients solid, specific information, was a key component of the project's effectiveness.

After noticing that some eligibility workers tended to forget about the CET program over time, project staff noted that they should have made greater efforts to ensure eligibility worker's involvement. That way, eligibility workers would realize that the County was participating in a program that was helping them and their clients, demonstrate that the

management was supportive of CET's efforts, and hopefully establish more of a partnership.

IV. Findings

The project demonstrated that outreach can be very effective when it is performed by people who know and understand the language and culture of a population. The project was successful at establishing mutual trust and respect with the target group. Receiving applications at sites other than Social Services Agency offices and the availability of evening hours were two critical components of the project. These arrangements allowed people opportunities to apply for food stamps when they might not have done so.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$175,000							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
1,148	\$152	690	\$254	537	\$326	393	\$445

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	60%
Contact/application rate	47%
Contact/enrollee rate	34%
Referral/application rate	78%
Referral/enrollee rate	57%
Application/enrollee rate	73%

Primary obstacles to people applying for food stamps included the fact that people did not know that they were eligible or did not know how to apply. Food stamp eligibility is closely associated with AFDC eligibility, and people who are single, working, or living in intact families often did not believe they were eligible.

Another critical issue that affected the program was the negative public perception of both poverty and immigrants. This concern was in part responsible for the 23% of clients referred to the FSP who did not submit an application. Due to the political climate of 1995, the isolation of the Latino community appeared to be increasing, and people in the low income immigrant community became more self conscious about asking for help. Immigration concerns were also a major problem; people who were in need were reluctant to apply for food stamps for fear of being deported. In many instances clients did not complete the application process because other members of the household who were not legal citizens refused to provide residency information. Many clients also expressed concern over the potential negative impact enrollment might have on their future ability to become citizens or to sponsor other family members to immigrate.

Project staff had to spend more time resolving problems related to fear about the FSP and counteracting misinformation about the program in the community than they had expected. Additional time and effort was also expended in an attempt to convince

employers and landlords to provide the necessary documentation so that clients could complete their food stamp application. Many employers paid their employees "under the table" and many landlords were renting illegal rooms/apartments that were not designed for renting. Also, almost half of the clients served lived in shared housing, and many paid their landlords in cash, receiving no receipt. Because of difficulties locating affordable housing and jobs in Santa Clara County, many clients would not complete the food stamp application if they thought it would cause trouble with a landlord or an employer.

V. Conclusions

The CET project demonstrated that staff could serve clientele very well in an off-site location with extended hours of operation. Despite the project's success in reaching many people with information about food stamps and reducing many of the misapprehensions and difficulties that keep clients from making use of the FSP, the majority of the potentially-eligible clients chose not to apply out of fear of jeopardizing their way of life or future opportunities.

20. D.C. Hunger Action, Project Two District of Columbia

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

D.C. Hunger Action [DCHA] proposed a demonstration project to provide information and client assistance to two vulnerable populations in Washington, D.C. who were potentially eligible but not participating in the Food Stamp Program [FSP]: low-income, older residents and residents living with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS. The project design included providing members of these groups with information about FSP program requirements and application procedures, while emphasizing FSP rules designed to facilitate access to benefits for those clients with physical limitations.

DCHA, previously funded under this initiative [see project profile #4], is a small, non-profit advocacy organization that operates to ensure that low income residents of Washington, D.C. get adequate food and nutrition. DCHA had carried out their first demonstration project for the Food and Consumer Service of the United States Department of Agriculture in informal partnership with the D.C. Department of Human Services [DHS]. For this second project, DCHA intended to obtain a formal agreement of support from DHS. DCHA also proposed having project aides provide personal assistance to clients in order to overcome difficulties resulting from their frail physical, mental, and/or emotional conditions. Anticipated staffing consisted of a team of workers provided by AmeriCorps, and an additional part-time aide to work with older residents. Two other part-time aides would work with people in the HIV/AIDS community, and the overall project managed by an executive director and project manager from DCHA.

II. Project Activities

At the beginning of the project, DCHA staff trained the AmeriCorps participants in FSP application procedures, client assistance techniques, and data gathering. DCHA staff also accompanied trainees on their first visits to field sites. In addition, in order to set up networks for referral and information, DCHA managers joined a city-wide consortium of HIV/AIDS agencies and established relationships with staff from organizations operating on behalf of older citizens. Project staff developed informational materials about the FSP which the project distributed to these organizations.

As noted, the AmeriCorp workers and one part-time aide targeted people 65 years and older who were potentially eligible for the FSP. These workers contacted clients by making pre-announced visits to low-income senior housing units and meeting sites, distributing fliers and posters in neighborhoods with a high density of low income older residents, and sending fliers and informational letters to neighborhood churches. They made home visits when requested, helped clients complete the food stamp application

forms, and delivered the completed FSP application forms to the appropriate food stamp office.

The two part-time aides who were responsible for providing client assistance to the HIV/AIDS community in D.C. both had previous extensive experience working with low-income, high-risk population groups. These workers identified many potential outreach sites and successfully networked with other AIDS organizations and clients. Client contact was made through referrals from local agencies working with the HIV population, through canvassing, and through personal contact made by the aides at sites frequented by this population [including a regularly scheduled site visit to the D.C. General Hospital HIV Clinic]. Information about the project was disseminated through public service announcements in print publications and the distribution of fliers by the Food for Friends program, an organization that delivers freshly prepared, nutritional meals, six days a week to the homebound and frail living with AIDS. Most inquiries and referrals came by phone, and all phone requests were followed-up with return calls. Project staff provided information, prescreening, and other client assistance, usually during a home visit. Home visits were scheduled within twenty-four hours of initial inquiry if possible.

During the same time that DCHA was operating this demonstration project, the D.C. government was dealing with a budget shortfall, severely affecting the operation of DHS. The local food stamp offices laid off staff and offered early retirement packages that were accepted by many experienced workers, including by the project's liaison established during DCHA's first demonstration grant. These workers were not replaced, and remaining staff were insufficient to efficiently operate an office.

The lack of funds to run DHS efficiently for the many months of this project resulted in the slow processing of food stamp applications [at times taking more than 30 days], late mailings of food stamp vouchers, and a number of one-day furloughs of public employees. One local food stamp office was completely closed when it was badly damaged during a storm. The lack of funds also greatly affected the availability of office supplies at DHS. For example, DHS ran out of the film they needed for making photo ID's that clients needed to present in order to cash food stamp vouchers and use their food stamps. With a staff shortage and no money, DHS did not notify clients that pictures would not be taken, and many clients made unnecessary trips to the DHS office. DHS also did not have the funds to notify all of the local establishments where photo ID's were required to cash client vouchers that they were permitting the use of both vouchers and food stamps without the ID's.

DHS also experienced critical shortages of food stamp application forms; DCHA supplied them with Xerox copies of the applications a number of times during the project. DCHA offered to provide preapplication assistance at 12 DHS senior citizen outreach sites to release DHS workers for other tasks. This allowed DCHA to fulfill their project commitments while establishing positive relationships with DHS. In response,

DHS verified the application and enrollment of clients who were assisted by the project and provided information about problematic individual client applications.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

In terms of serving the older population, DCHA was not satisfied with the dependability, performance, and attitudes displayed by some of the AmeriCorps participants early in the demonstration. Tension increased over time among the DCHA staff, the AmeriCorps volunteers, and the D.C. Service Corps administrators, who supervised this particular group as a subcontractor to AmeriCorps. All of the parties arranged meetings to discuss problems, and DCHA involved the evaluator and the USDA AmeriCorps representative in exploring solutions. DCHA planners underestimated the amount of training and supervision needed for these volunteers, and overestimated volunteer's level of confidence and ability to negotiate different areas of the city. Some AmeriCorps volunteers were dismissed. In a discussion group with the volunteers, evaluators found that these workers were nervous about the travel, safety of the neighborhoods, and level of knowledge expected of them in some of their assignments, but most enjoyed working with older clients. These volunteers noted that they wished that DCHA had kept them informed of the outcomes of the applications of the older people they assisted. A survey form sent by DCHA to the senior sites staffed by the AmeriCorps team, revealed that clients and supervisors at these sites found the volunteers to be helpful and would like them to return.

The AmeriCorps volunteers and senior project aide reported that DHS staff did not always understand their role or the project objectives. Although the project workers had permission from DHS administrators to drop off applications at the local food stamp offices, their presence was not always accepted by local staff.

DCHA administrators were concerned that their small agency with its limited resources could not offer their staff members who were working directly with the low-income HIV/AIDS population extra support and counseling their exceedingly stressful positions deserved. These staff members were employed part-time and had neither personal resources nor benefit packages with would allow them to pursue counseling on their own.

IV. Findings

DCHA was unable to reach their original goals in terms of the number of people they reached and enrolled in the FSP. They did, however, bring the potentially-eligible clients they assisted into the FSP 90% of the time.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$106,365							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
781	\$136	705	\$151	589	\$181	506	\$210

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/enrollee rate	70%
Contact/application rate	90%
Contact/referral rate	90%
Referral/enrollee rate	72%
Referral/application rate	84%
Application/enrollee rate	72%

The especially trying circumstances at DHS did not allow the demonstration to be judged on its own merits. The DHS application process was greatly disrupted, and DHS staff lost or were so behind in processing many completed applications, that in many cases reapplication was necessary. These circumstances required DCHA staff to spend more time than was planned in following-up client applications. DCHA aides helped 31 older persons and nine HIV-positive persons fill out new applications when the DHS food stamp office confirmed that their original applications had been lost. Some applicants, who might have completed the application under normal circumstances, dropped out of the application process under these conditions. Despite the anomalies in the application system during the financial crises, the two agencies were able to renegotiate to continue to work and use their limited resources to serve their clients.

DCHA successfully provided information to both groups targeted for service. As the project progressed, however, DCHA staff found it increasingly difficult to identify and reach individuals in the potential client pools. Among the older population, for example, DCHA found that once they had visited the larger housing units and senior centers a few times, there were few clients left who were interested in their services. Letters and information sent to senior organizations and churches, as well as posters placed in neighborhoods and senior centers provided very few responses. Most effective was the presence of a worker at a senior center for a period of time, who could work individually with clients to provide screening and application assistance. DCHA found the older population to be especially difficult to successfully enroll in the FSP. This was in part due to the fact that the amount of the average food stamp benefit provided to older people was often equal to transportation costs incurred during multiple visits to the food stamp office, to places to cash food stamp vouchers, and to places to shop with food stamps.

With the HIV/AIDS population, DCHA staff found that the most effective methods of making contacts were through referrals from other agencies working with the same population. Although there are many large agencies working for this population in D.C., few of them have staff who facilitate client access to the FSP as part of their work. Most of these agencies were happy to have staff refer clients to DCHA. Among this target population those most reluctant to apply, despite obvious need, were those who were out of work but still well enough to hope to be working again. For many of these people, enrollment in public benefit programs was a new and unwelcome experience. For many it was seen as a marker of significant decline, much as it was seen by some older people.

Shopping for food, locating and purchasing special dietary foods, carrying and transporting food, and preparing foods put demands on both the older population and the more frail among the HIV/AIDS population. In discussion groups, older persons reported considering the energy and resources they must expend in such activities when making decisions about applying for food stamps. Often, the combination of benefits from another program enhanced food stamp's usefulness to both older clients and clients with HIV/AIDS. For example, the SOME program, which delivers food once a month to older low-income citizens, will accept food stamps to cover part or all of the \$14.50 charged for the service. This program not only delivers fresh food later in each month, a time cited by clients as being difficult economically, but also includes with the food recipes and nutritional information on the contents. In the case of the HIV/AIDS community, Food for Friends, which delivers meals to homebound people with AIDS, also accepts food stamps. This program will even prepare food for those with special dietary needs.

DCHA's anticipation of barriers resulting from the frailty of both populations was well founded. Individual client assistance often took many hours because of clients' fatigue, confusion, or ill health. Thus the client-intensive activities that were initiated, including help to fill out applications, gather and duplicate documents, and deliver initial applications to the food stamp office, appeared to successfully address these problems. When clients carried their own applications to DHS, they experienced long waits at the food stamp office, often in places where one could not even be seated, and many could not complete the visit successfully because of exhaustion or illness.

A particular problem that was not directly dealt with in the demonstration project, but which was brought up by clients and workers, was the fact that with both of the targeted populations, there was little chance that their economic status or health status would change for the better. All clients spoke about the stress of repeated recertification activities as a deterrent to being able to remain in the program.

V. Conclusions

DCHA kept the project operational with paid staff for as long as possible in order to provide service to clients, and is in a good position to apply the knowledge gained to both client assistance and client advocacy in the future. The formal agreement and mutual assistance provided in the public/private partnership between DHS and DCHA demonstrates how such arrangements can keep benefits reaching clients even during times of fiscal strain.

DCHA contacted a sufficient number of potentially-eligible clients during the project to demonstrate that there may be less need than expected among the low-income older population and people living with HIV/AIDS in D.C., a number of whom were already in touch with other agencies and community groups. The project also demonstrated that time-intensive client assistance in the application process is required to assist those who do want help to enroll in the FSP. The numbers of individuals known to be in both populations were not fully reflected in the numbers of clients contacted during this

project, leaving the impression that there may be many who were not contacted and remain unserved. These individuals, indeed, may be the most isolated and disabled, who do not congregate with others, and who are not being provided assistance by any agency. Different ways of accessing this population may need to be developed.

21. Cambodian Association of Illinois Chicago, Illinois

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

Five Chicago Mutual Assistance Associations [MAAs] located in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago collaborated to implement the Food Stamp Outreach and Enrollment Project [FSOEP]. The Cambodian Association of Illinois, which was responsible for managing the project, proposed working with the collaborating MAAs to provide Food Stamp Program [FSP] preapplication assistance to 450 low-income refugees and immigrants. Specifically the project intended to target Cambodian, Chinese, Ethiopian, Laotian, and Vietnamese populations living in and around the Uptown section of Chicago. Different methods to reach these limited-English-speaking populations would be examined, and assistance provided in the FSP application process to overcome two of the major barriers to food stamp participation that affected this group of clients: linguistic isolation and lack of information about the FSP.

According to the project plan, activities would include informing clients about the FSP. This would be accomplished by making presentations in community institutions such as temples, churches, and clubs; distributing flyers printed in various languages throughout the community; and conducting forums to discuss FSP benefits and the application process. In addition, project staff would meet interested clients individually in their homes or at the agency office to further inform them about the program, provide assistance filling out the application and gathering documentation, and to accompany them to the Public Aid office for the interview in order to translate and to clarify procedures. Each collaborating MAA would contribute a client-assistance worker to the project to conduct preapplication activities with their particular target population.

II. Project Activities

The project service area, which originally was to have only covered the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago, was extended to include two additional neighboring communities. The reason for this change was that large pockets of the target populations served by the MAAs were living in these adjoining sections of the city.

Clients learned about the project and the FSP in a number of ways. Staff advertised the program through fliers, radio announcements, and ads in local community newsletters/newspapers. They made presentations at gatherings within their own agencies and at community and religious events. Once contacts were made, project workers informed clients about the program, screened them for potential eligibility, and provided information about the application process. Project workers often escorted clients to the Public Aide office; initially for an intake interview and to hand in the application, followed by a second visit to participate in the interview for eligibility determination.

In addition to providing quality client assistance, staff provided a service to the Public Aid office by ensuring that applications were completed accurately, correct documentation was gathered, and translation services were provided when needed. This quality assistance helped to ease the amount of work required of eligibility workers when assisting clients referred by the project.

The project director found supervising project staff to be problematic, primarily because staff were located in different agencies. The project director was not physically located in the same offices as project staff, nor did she have direct authority to ensure that they attended to the project agenda. In addition, staff were often over extended with other agency responsibilities and therefore were unable to work on project activities the required 48 hours per month. Some agencies were not able or willing to release their staff members to work on the project due to staffing shortages within their own agency and due to the demand for these same staff to provide a wide array of other services to clients who were not part of this project. In the project director's attempts to solve this problem, she spoke with individual staff by phone on a monthly basis, held monthly staff meetings, and met with agency directors to request their support in ensuring that workers complied with the project time requirements.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

The project director found that the project proposal was not realistic in terms of the projected number of clients that were to be served by each agency and by the project. This discrepancy was due not only to the fact that staff were unable to commit to the required number of project hours, but also to the low number of potentially eligible people in the target populations being served. The Cambodian, Chinese, and Vietnamese populations consisted of a sufficient number of individuals to elicit a reasonable pool of potentially eligible clients. The Ethiopian and Laotian populations were much smaller, however, making it more difficult for project workers from the agencies serving these two populations to locate many eligible clients.

Based on these experiences, staff suggested making a few changes to the project design. For example, they believed it would have been beneficial for project staff to have been more directly involved in the initial planning of the project, thereby increasing staff's investment. In addition, even though the MAA's had a history of collaborating on other projects in equal capacities, project staff believed that expectations for each participating agency could have been more tailored to the individual needs and realities of each agency. Further, more time should have been allocated to staff supervision, to allow for periodic visits to each agency and for increased individual staff support and oversight.

Most project staff themselves came to the United States as refugees. Because of their experiences as refugees, they were able to provide a great deal of support to their clients. As representatives of their individual communities, staff members were sensitive to their clients' needs, understanding of clients' cultural values and beliefs, and fluent in their languages. On the other hand, some workers were limited in their effectiveness due to

the level and conflicting nature of their involvement in their community, which limited their choices when setting boundaries and managing time. Some staff members had difficulty in adhering to the perimeters of their project responsibilities because they were inclined to attend to immediate agency needs that resulted in postponing completion of project tasks.

IV. Findings

Project staff assisted and referred 250 clients to the FSP, 108 of whom were ultimately enrolled. The project proposed to assist and refer 450 clients to the FSP. With 250 referrals they reached 55% of their projection. Project staff reported a total of 2,786 client contacts. However, these contacts included clients who participated in project workshops and presentations in addition to one-on-one individual interactions.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$84,160							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
2,786	\$30	250	\$337	206	\$409	108	\$779

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	8%
Contact/application rate	7%
Contact/enrollee rate	3%
Referral/application rate	82%
Referral/enrollee rate	43%
Application/enrollee rate	52%

The project plan indicted that each MAA would assist 90 clients over the course of the project. There were wide variances between collaborating agencies in regard to meeting these projections. One agency assistance-worker, for example, referred a total of 76 clients, reaching 84% of the agency goal, whereas another agency project worker only referred 27 clients to the FSP, reaching 30% of the projected agency number.

Additional barriers to enrolling in the FSP were identified by clients. Some clients indicated they had not previously pursued the application process because they had not understood requests or instructions given by Public Aid staff. Some clients, who had experienced difficulties in the past when applying for assistance, expressed a reluctance to try again. In some instances clients who had not followed through on previous requests made by Public Aid were fearful that they would be reprimanded for not having complied with regulations.

Staff indicated that many clients who as refugees had been enrolled in the FSP when they first arrived in the United States did not want to apply again, even though they were eligible for food stamps. Staff stated that these clients believed that asking for public support again would mean that they had somehow "failed." Those who were eligible

because they had recently lost their jobs often stated that they would rather focus their efforts on looking for work. Many refugees and recent immigrants, upon their arrival in the United States did not envision themselves dependent on government assistance. They expected to work and get ahead, and did not understand that food stamps could be a supplement to help them during more difficult times.

Staff found that it was necessary for clients waiting for assistance at Public Aid offices in the service area to be assertive or they would find themselves waiting for long periods of time or never called upon at all for their interviews. As a result, clients who did not feel comfortable speaking English and/or who were not very assertive did not always get the assistance they needed or gave up the process completely.

V. Conclusions

Project staff used a number of approaches to contact and assist the immigrant and refugee populations in applying to the FSP. Even though staff made presentations at agency meetings, distributed flyers at community events, and placed advertisements in local newspapers, the most successful methods to contact and identify clients were through word-of-mouth by friends or through brochures placed in the collaborating agency's waiting rooms. Those people that were interested in applying for food stamps contacted project staff and often needed help to complete the FSP application process. In-depth assistance decreased the amount of time and money clients had to spend pursuing FSP participation.

Project staff will continue with their permanent jobs at each agency and fulfill their assigned responsibilities, which include linking clients to needed services. As a result of the project, staff from the collaborating agencies have a strengthened understanding of the FSP application process and will be able to incorporate FSP preapplication assistance into the ongoing services they provide to clients.

22. Penquis Community Action Program Bangor, Maine

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

This project used the Community Action Program's involvement with the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program [LHEAP] to identify those households receiving heating assistance but not food stamps. Because the criteria for both programs are similar, project developers believed that many of the enrollees in LHEAP would be eligible and interested in the Food Stamp Program [FSP]. Most of the clients in the LHEAP program were older Caucasians, reflecting the population, and all were low-income.

Four agencies intended to form a consortium under the direction of the Bangor agency, with each providing one or more outreach workers to work on the project. These workers would call LHEAP eligible clients from a computer-generated list, screen them for potential eligibility in the FSP, and assist them in applying for the benefit.

The project proposal identified several barriers that staff anticipated would inhibit clients from enrolling in the FSP. These barriers included a lack of transportation, shame of accepting enrollment in a public program, a lack of information about eligibility, and a lack of literacy skills to complete an application.

II. Project Activities

The project followed its plan of operation very closely. Outreach workers were trained by staff from the Department of Social Services [DSS] and were very soon able to begin their calls. The community service agencies were well-known and respected in the communities, so this introduction was facilitated. In addition, project staff used a "friendly visitor" tone over the telephone when they introduced themselves. During the calls, workers informed clients of the FSP and of their potential eligibility. Those who expressed an interest were then engaged in conversation about their income and assets. If a person appeared to be eligible, the worker completed gathering information over the telephone and made an appointment to see the client either at the office or, occasionally, in their home.

Only about a quarter of the 600 or 700 calls made during a month resulted in an interest of the client in the FSP or in the discovery that a client might be eligible for food stamps. In these instances, project staff helped clients in every way to complete the application. In addition to assisting with reading and writing, staff often looked for necessary documents or suggested how clients might go about either finding them among their papers or obtaining them. When problems occurred with an application, staff assisted clients by following up with the local food stamp agency.

The project was supervised by a project director stationed in Bangor. Although she made a few trips to the sites, most information about the conduct of the demonstration project was gathered over the telephone. She and the director of the LHEAP program worked closely together and with DSS. DSS provided training for the outreach workers, verified the applications and enrollments of clients, and answered questions of the project staff regarding the FSP.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

A few issues emerged from this project. The evaluators found a lack of trust between project and local food stamp office staff. The local food stamp eligibility workers felt that project staff often were too quick to call about clients' problems, were taking up too much of their time, and questioned their decision-making too often. Some local food stamp eligibility workers also felt that their jobs might be threatened by project staff.

DSS staff, in part because of budget cuts and insufficient staffing, could not verify the number of clients the project assisted to apply and enroll in the FSP in the within the time frame required.

IV. Findings

The outcome data show that the project was able to accomplish its goals; it was successful in reaching large numbers of potentially eligible FSP clients. In total, the project contacted 6,648 people and assisted 1,655 of them by providing information and/or an application. Of those assisted, 1,278 applied to the FSP and 656 were enrolled. This project was straight-forward and relatively trouble-free.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$169,000							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
6,648	\$25	1,655	\$102	1,349	\$125	656	\$258

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	25%
Contact/application rate	19%
Contact/enrollee rate	10%
Referral/application rate	82%
Referral/enrollee rate	40%
Application/enrollee rate	49%

Working from a list of potentially-eligible participants in the FSP is an efficient way to conduct outreach, even though it did not serve to contact as many people who were eligible for food stamps as anticipated. However, it was a quick and easy process by which to contact people.

The original belief that most of the LHEAP enrollees would also be eligible for food stamps was very much in error. In fact, about half of those contacted were either over-income for the FSP or had assets in the bank that they could not or would not divest in order to enroll in the FSP. Many rural people had land holdings that resulted from selling parts of the family farm, leaving them with noncontiguous parcels of real estate. Others had certificates of deposit in the bank that they were saving for "a rainy day." Those living on the ocean or near one of the many lakes in Maine often had a boat that they were unwilling to sell. Ultimately, many clients indicated that the need for food was not sufficiently great to divest themselves of other assets.

Of those whom project staff felt would be eligible, 82% applied and 49% went on to receive benefits. Of those who were not enrolled, approximately half were found to be ineligible by DSS workers and half failed to complete the application process even after they had submitted their initial application to the local food stamp office. Interview data indicate that these people felt that the process was either too much trouble or they were deterred by having to go to the DSS offices. For some, the circumstances that made them want to participate in the FSP changed. Some found employment, others became ill, and still others moved into nursing homes or with family members.

The primary reason people did not want to apply for participation in the FSP was that they were embarrassed to be seen using food stamps [41%], confirming the fact that pride is a significant deterrent to FSP participation. Almost as many [37%] said that the application process was "too much bother." This statement could be taken literally, but could also be a gloss for literacy problems or confusion about how to go about the application. It may also be an indication that need is not so great for many people who may be eligible. Ten percent of the clients who did not want to apply for food stamps said that their previous experience with DSS had been sufficiently negative so that they no longer wanted to be involved with the agency. In addition, about 10% of the clients contacted by the project noted that they were able to survive with gardens and sharing food and did not need help.

The barriers that were discovered over the course of the demonstration project also indicated that cost was a significant factor. Many clients felt that the process became too expensive due to the cost of gasoline for multiple trips to the local food stamp office in order to complete the application. Particularly for older people who knew they would receive a small monthly benefit, the costs of the process of applying reduced the potential benefit to an insignificant amount, and at times even left them in the position of losing money if they applied.

Project staff discovered that other barriers that they had not anticipated played an important role in the decision to apply for food stamps. Literacy problems created great fear among some. Others could not reach the 1-800 line of the FSP in Maine for information because it was always busy. Errors made by eligibility workers left some people unserved and both clients and local food stamp offices lost documentation for the applications in some cases.

Despite these barriers to entry into the FSP, many clients were excited to have the assistance and became participants through the project's work. Most did not find the application process excessively burdensome and were pleased with the experience they encountered with personnel at the local food stamp office.

V. Conclusions

This model is a strong one for information dissemination and was effective in reaching clients to some extent, many were helped to access the FSP. For others, however, the process remained too difficult or unwieldy for their circumstances. Many older people needed a case management approach in order to complete the food stamp application. For instance, client-assistance workers paid home visits to help gather necessary documentation or assisted frail or confused older persons to obtain what they needed. They copied documents and often got them ready to deliver to the local food stamp office.

Some improvements were noted in the relationships between the nonprofit agency and the local food stamp offices over the course of the project, resulting in better client services. Strong leadership at DSS helped overcome eligibility workers' fears of displacement and criticism by nonprofit association employees.

The LHEAP program and the FSP were not as similar in their eligibility criteria as had been anticipated. Assets were an important distinguishing characteristic among those clients eligible for LHEAP but not for the FSP. In addition, need for food may be less wide-spread than had been thought among rural people who have family and community ties. More than a third of the LHEAP clients reached indicated that they could supply their own food needs and did not see the need for extra food assistance provided by the FSP. However, the procedures used in this project to combine LHEAP outreach to include information about the FSP were not difficult and will continue to be used after the funding ends.

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

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The Community Food Resource Center [CFRC] received a second grant to continue the work it had been doing in the first round of funding of food stamp demonstration projects. In this second project, CFRC planned to place three full time multi-lingual staff people in unemployment offices, utility offices, telephone companies, and senior centers in New York City. Staff were to approach clients at these sites to inquire about their interest in and need for food stamps. Prescreening with the aid of a specially-designed computer program would be conducted for those interested clients. Staff would provide further client assistance to those people who appeared to be eligible.

This project intended to target low-income working families, newly unemployed workers, and senior citizens. They expected to contact 15,000 people, prescreen 4,800 people, and enroll 1,920 eligible nonparticipants in the Food Stamp Program [FSP].

Previous research had identified certain reasons that many people within the groups CFRC planned to target were not receiving food stamps. CFRC staff expected that many individuals lacked information or had misinformation about the FSP. They also believed that for some people pride was a barrier to applying and that for others the application process itself was too difficult. Project staff believed that many of these difficulties could be overcome by making it more convenient for people to learn about the FSP and to complete an application with assistance in locations where clients were already conducting business.

II. Project Activities

The second project was quickly underway and workers spent 32 hours a week conducting client assistance at utility offices, unemployment offices, and senior centers in Harlem, Queens, and in Brooklyn. It was believed that many people in these areas were eligible for the FSP, but were not being served. Staff were regularly scheduled to spend a certain amount of time each week at the utility and unemployment offices, but made single visits to senior centers unless they were asked to return. At each site, staff distributed flyers describing the FSP and made public presentations. The staff also used laptop computers on which to enter information while conducting preapplication screening. These data were then analyzed by the project director's analysis program to determine clients' potential eligibility for the FSP. Clients were assisted in English, Spanish, or Creole by workers fluent in these languages.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

Unfortunately, the project gathered little data on reasons why people had not previously applied for food stamps. The nature of the computer program encouraged project

workers to answer standardized questions and not record substantive narrative comments. This was a loss for the project and the evaluation.

The public-private partnership in this project was helpful. Although the local food stamp office's role was solely to verify a sample of client enrollments for people who had been served by the project, food stamp worker's support of the project was always clear to project staff.

Clients liked the fact that project staff were able to assess their potential eligibility on-site with their laptop computers. They noted that prescreening saved them a great deal of time in preparing an application that would not have been accepted, on the one hand, and a reason to spend the time pursuing the application process if it appeared to be leading to enrollment. Clients felt that the computer prescreening process was a common sense activity that took only a little time, but which provided them with major insight into their eligibility for the food stamp benefit.

IV. Findings

Project staff provided food stamp information to 9,125 households and completed prescreenings for 3,834 individuals. About a third of those who were prescreened went on to become enrolled in the FSP. Although the project did not reach its goal in terms of the numbers of people who became enrolled in the FSP as a result of project efforts, the project did serve to provide information to thousands of working and unemployed low-income families and individuals. Staff were surprised by the fact that there was somewhat less interest from people than expected; many were in a hurry and did not want to stop to talk to the client-assistance workers.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$147,000							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
3,834	\$38	3,060	\$48	1,377	\$107	1,115	\$132

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	80%
Contact/application rate	36%
Contact/enrollee rate	29%
Referral/application rate	45%
Referral/enrollee rate	36%
Application/enrollee rate	81%

It is interesting to note that less than half of those thought to be eligible for food stamps actually completed an application. From discussions with clients, many did not feel comfortable applying for the benefit even when they knew that they might be eligible. Previous experience with the city bureaucracy had made them wary of entering into the system if they could in any way manage without assistance. Others felt that their need

was too temporary to make the effort to apply; they anticipated being employed again before long. A few males indicated that their wives should be the ones to apply, that such efforts were “women’s work.” This explanation also may have been a way to avoid issues of literacy and the cognitive skills required to complete an application or issues of personal stigma.

Clients described confusion over the documentation needed for the application. Even when they believed that they brought the necessary papers, they often were told those papers were not what was needed. This discouraged them from pursuing the application further. One client described some people as having “a Ph.D. in welfare,” indicating that they knew the system and how to use it. Many people, however, including the newly poor, do not have that skill of managing the system, nor do they always understand the requirements when they are described.

Some clients were afraid that their application would be rejected and preferred not to apply rather than to be turned down. Some simply did not have the courage to voluntarily put themselves in the position of being told once more that they did not have the qualifications to improve their lives. Although this does not appear to be rational to those who are relatively successful in life, it is a phenomenon that many clients recognized and respected.

There was a great deal of misinformation among clients. Some thought that it was necessary to buy into the FSP and wondered what percentage was needed to get the stamps. Others associated the FSP with illegal activity on the street and feared being drawn into food stamp selling or being threatened with robbery of their food stamps near grocery stores where they might use them. Overall, fear was a reality to these clients in relation to the FSP.

There is no doubt that one change in this project from the previous demonstration conducted by CFRC was significant. In this second project, client-assistance workers could not transport a completed food stamp application form to the local food stamp office. This meant that this step had to be made by clients, and often it was not.

V. Conclusions

The project was taken over by the city of New York and will continue to provide FSP information and assistance in this metropolis for the coming year. The computer prescreening system proved to be a reliable and replicable system, allowing potential clients to assess their chances for being accepted into the FSP before they make the effort to apply. Estimates of the margin of error made by the prescreening system was found to be only 6.5%.

24. Outside In Portland, Oregon

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

“Outside In” is a multi-service center for homeless youth, which has provided medical and other support services in Portland to low-income adults and homeless youth for more than 25 years. The agency offers a primary care clinic, needle exchange program, street youth program, transitional housing assistance, and employment training. Staff of Outside In estimated that there were about 1500 homeless youth in Multnomah County [the county in which Portland is located] between the ages of 12 and 21. For some of these young people, going home was not an option because of prior abuse or family circumstances. For these individuals, living independently while avoiding dependence on substances is the goal of Outside In.

This demonstration project intended to provide information about the Food Stamp Program [FSP] and offer assistance in applying to the program to sick youth residing in temporary shelters. The project also proposed to reach and encourage restaurant managers to accept food stamps from their clients.

Project planners suspected that homeless youth did not know about the FSP or realize that they might be eligible for participation. Even if informed of this eligibility, staff believed that many would find it hard to apply without assistance. Many of the youth have difficulty organizing their lives, managing their affairs, and completing forms and applications. Many suffer from stress and the effects of substance abuse. Many fear or resent authority and will not voluntarily interact with public programs. The staff of Outside In felt they could overcome these difficulties by disseminating information and providing client assistance in their own buildings.

II. Project Activities

The project got underway and developed its procedures within a few months. One paid project staff person was hired, who also functioned as the Food Resources Coordinator [FRC] at Outside In. This individual worked closely with the Department of Social Services [DSS] in providing on-site assistance to youth. The relationship between the local food stamp office staff and the staff of Outside In was historically a positive one, and the funding initiative was greeted positively by DSS.

The FRC had a number of tasks in relation to the project. He identified youth in need, both in the agency’s buildings and while on the streets, and developed and disseminated a flyer explaining food stamps. He made oral presentations on the FSP to clients of the drop-in center, spoke to clients individually about food stamps while they ate the meals offered by the agency, and helped those who were interested complete the application form in preparation for meeting with the eligibility worker. This assistance served to eliminate the problems some clients had with literacy. The FRC also arranged with the

local food stamp office to have an eligibility worker placed at Outside In one day a week and accompanied clients to the local food stamp office when they needed to go there. The FRC was familiar with many of the youth served by the project and was energetic in reaching out to other youth who were in need.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

The project staff decided to focus primarily on providing information and assistance to homeless youth, rather than attempt to encourage restaurant owners to accept food stamps. This decision was made for several reasons. First, many of the youth felt that the restaurants that would take food stamps were not safe enough for them to frequent. Second, given the size and staffing of the project it was more reasonable to focus on one component of the project.

This project succeeded in overcoming the reluctance of some youth to interact with a government agency in order to receive benefits. In general, feelings of vulnerability among homeless youth were a determining factor in their willingness to access benefits. Some were vulnerable because of their involvement in criminal activity and chose to remain aloof from any agency that required them to give information. Others felt they were vulnerable because they were not protected by adults and lived on the streets in the lowest income neighborhoods. Outside In addressed these client fears by accompanying clients to appointments with the food stamp eligibility worker at DSS and by providing client-assistance services in a safe and friendly environment. Close cooperation between the local food stamp office and the nonprofit agency led to a reduction in what youth referred to as "hassles;" one reason they gave for avoiding authority figures.

The project found that in order to serve homeless youth, it was critical that these individuals be provided with some type of identification, without which they could not apply for the FSP. [Often homeless youth do not have a social security card or any other form of identification.] Information about the FSP was also important to distribute; there had not been information about food stamps circulated among homeless youth prior to the project and many were interested in the program.

IV. Findings

Interviews with clients indicated that food stamps were crucial to them. Without them, youth felt that they were more vulnerable to crime and prostitution. However, because it was difficult for homeless people to store food, these young people reported that they sometimes gorged on food, eating as much as they could when it was available. At other times, they reported that they sold their food stamps for cash to buy a hot meal. Because of the difficulties of storing perishables when homeless, many clients expressed a desire to be allowed to purchase prepared food with food stamps.

Project staff discovered that one reason clients were not applying for food stamps was to avoid traveling to the DSS building, which was located in a run-down part of town.

Clients reported that when they went to that area they were harassed by people on the street and preyed upon by loiterers. Outside In eliminated this problem by allowing youth to apply for food stamps on-site or by accompanying them when they had to go to the DSS office.

The project did an excellent job of locating and contacting potentially eligible homeless youth for the FSP. Many youth who were contacted, however, were placed back in their homes or in foster homes, and therefore did not need food stamps. Of those who were referred to the FSP, most completed and returned the food stamp application. This high rate of referrals and applications was due in large part to the close coordination between the FRC and the DSS eligibility worker. The case management approach to providing client assistance that was adopted was also important to youth completing FSP applications. Most the young people who applied were eligible. However, the presence of other sources of income, or the belief of the eligibility worker that the young person should remain a part of the family unit and that the entire family be evaluated for participation in the FSP, led to some youth being deemed ineligible.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$50,000							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
1,360	\$37	507	\$102	406	\$123	321	\$156

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	37%
Contact/application rate	30%
Contact/enrollee rate	24%
Referral/application rate	80%
Referral/enrollee rate	63%
Application/enrollee rate	79%

V. Conclusions

The project activities effectively brought information and assistance at low cost to an underserved group within the potentially-eligible client population. Because of the nature of the assistance provided, many young people entered the FSP. The cooperative arrangement between Outside In and the DSS office allowed for a flexible and helpful arrangement of client assistance at a location convenient for the clients. The results of the project demonstrate that by providing services to clients in a setting where they feel relatively safe and comfortable, their reluctance to become involved with government agencies and programs can be successfully overcome.

The project also demonstrated that a single staff member working in a geographically confined area and with sufficient knowledge of the client group, can reach a large number of people. Outside In's decision to concentrate on only one of the two planned components of the project proved wise given the size of the project and its staffing.

The project activities will continue after the present funding has stopped. A food stamp eligibility worker will continue to come to Outside In one day a week, and case management activities at Outside In will continue to include information about the FSP.

25. Green Thumb Food for Health South Dakota

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The demonstration project Green Thumb Food for Health [GTFH] was a collaborative effort involving the South Dakota Program of Green Thumb, Inc., the national organization of Green Thumb [Senior Community Service Employment Program], United Seniors Health Cooperative [USHC], and the South Dakota State Department of Social Services [DSS]. GTFH was funded to increase ease of access to the Food Stamp Program [FSP] for low-income residents 60 years of age or older in ten counties in rural South Dakota.

Project planners believed that 70% of potentially eligible older people in the target area were not using food stamps. Reasons for not applying for food stamps, as noted in the project proposal, included an individual's previously unsatisfactory experience with the FSP or other government agency, isolation, lack of information or misinformation, a perception that the process involved a great deal of paperwork and "red tape," and language-fluency problems. Further, project planners believed that a number of older people who were eligible for food stamps were hesitant to apply because doing so would make them feel as though they were asking for "welfare" or give the appearance to others that they were no longer able to provide for themselves.

Various strategies were proposed to address these issues, including the use of four older, low-income people, trained and employed as Green Thumb aides, to identify potentially eligible clients and to provide them with information about the FSP and with personal application assistance. As many Green Thumb trainees are or have been receiving benefits from the FSP, project planners anticipated that these trainees would be particularly capable of understanding the difficulties and fears some older people might have when enrolling in the FSP.

GTFH also planned to involve staff from other public and private agencies to identify and refer older clients to GTFH. Marketing lists of potentially eligible low-income older people living in the ten targeted counties were to be purchased so that aides could contact them directly. Other planned activities to reach isolated older people included the development and distribution of flyers and posters as well as public service announcements for newspapers, radio, and television. Discussion groups comprised of older people would also be organized to help identify other methods of reaching isolated seniors, as well as to obtain feedback on project materials and planned activities.

Two proposed components of the project were especially innovative. The first involved the use of a software program by Green Thumb aides on portable computers and printers during client interviews to pre-screen clients for multiple benefit programs. After gathering and entering a client's pertinent information, aides could print out the completed South Dakota food stamp application. The software program that would be

used to pre-screen clients was to be designed by USHC of Washington, D.C., based on a customized application of USHC's Benefits Outreach and Screening Software [BOSS]. USHC staff were also to be responsible for installing the software, providing training materials, and training GTFH staff in its use. The South Dakota DSS, through their Office on Aging, would provide guidelines and program information to USHC staff on other programs in the State that were available for older citizens that could be included in the software program. The second innovative component that was planned was the monitoring and recording of experiences by older food stamp recipients using FSP benefits on debit cards. The cards were scheduled to be introduced in South Dakota to replace food stamps during the period the project was to operate.

II. Project Activities

The GTFH demonstration project was designed and directed by the Green Thumb State Director from the Sioux City headquarters in eastern South Dakota. The project office was established in Rapid City, South Dakota because of its location; Rapid City was the closest urban area to the ten targeted counties. A project manager was hired to administer the project from this office. In addition to coordinating and designing project activities, the project manager hired, trained, and supervised the Green Thumb aides, and provided client assistance herself.

This project was carried out as proposed with the exception of monitoring the use of debit cards for benefit delivery. The introduction of cards in South Dakota was delayed and was just being initiated in a few counties when the project came to a close. Activities that were implemented included group presentations and face-to-face outreach in community centers and homes. As planned, information on the FSP was provided, and clients were screened for multiple benefits. These activities were conducted over the phone via a 1-800 line as well as during home visits, where aides could fill out the food stamp application and help clients gather proper documentation. A waiver of FSP regulations allowed project aides to deliver applications to the food stamp office.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

The project experienced problems recruiting and retaining Green Thumb aides. The roadblocks that made it difficult for aides to carry out their jobs were in many instances a reflection of what the target population was experiencing themselves when trying to access the FSP. For example, it was necessary for aides to have a reliable vehicle in which to cover great distances and very severe weather, to travel alone, and to be in good health; similar problems that kept some older people from accessing the FSP.

Having the administrative support of a large, established agency was beneficial in that it provided the time and flexibility for this small project to adjust to staff changes, augment undelivered services from subcontractors, and handle delays caused by weather as well as handle delays in the development of the computer software program. It also provided a network through which to look for replacement workers.

Only a few inquiries about the FSP were made as a result of media efforts, the most successful of those efforts being the distribution of brochures at low-income senior housing projects. A good response was also gotten in response to individual handwritten letters, which were sent to people on a mailing list and followed-up by a personal phone call.

IV. Findings

GRANT AMOUNT - \$160,755							
CONTACTS*		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
407	\$395	152	\$1,057	152	\$1,057	75	\$2,143

**2,200 older citizens were present at events and given information or literature about the FSP. The cost for reaching these individuals was \$73 per contact. However, the project considered "contacts" to be those clients who completed the pre-screening process.*

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	37%
Contact/application rate	37%
Contact/enrollee rate	18%
Referral/application rate	100%
Referral/enrollee rate	49%
Application/enrollee rate	49%

GTFH activities provided many older people with information on the FSP, exceeding the project goal of reaching 1,800 low-income seniors by 400. However, these activities did not produce the 600 anticipated enrollments in the FSP. Even using the contact figure of 407, which indicates the number of clients who were pre-screened for benefits, the contact/enrollee ratio was still only 18%, representing 75 successfully enrolled seniors. This figure corresponds roughly with the 17% of those who stated during screening that they had not applied to the FSP earlier because of a lack of knowledge about the program.

Although the project directly addressed many of the problems that might keep older low-income residents of South Dakota from accessing food stamps, such as a lack of transportation or a need for assistance in gathering necessary documentation, the number of clients who ultimately enrolled was very small. Thirty percent of the initial applicants withdrew their applications before completing the process. Being able to duplicate documents for clients at local banks, libraries, or social service offices proved to be an important part of the client application assistance process, as were follow-up activities. For example, follow-up on clients enabled project staff to locate and assist a number of individuals who were having difficulty understanding or responding to DSS requests for additional documentation. Of the individuals who submitted an initial application and then continued to complete the application process, 62% were enrolled. Most of those not enrolled were deemed ineligible because they were over the resource or income limit. On the other hand, during the time the project was running, GTFH was responsible for

enrolling 57% of new clients in the nine rural counties. While statewide enrollment figures decreased for residents under 60 years of age, figures increased for those over 60 years.

Although both project and DSS staff identified low-income older people as a population that was in need of financial assistance, a number of older people did not choose to take advantage of the FSP, especially if it meant divesting themselves of savings and ownership of a reliable vehicle. Data show many older persons were conserving cash resources and making expenditures on added health insurance, to assure that they would be able to make payments on the portion of medical bills not covered by Medicare and for prescription drugs. Those persons still living in their own homes also needed cash for homeowners insurance as well as home and automobile repairs and upkeep. GTFH did a further anonymous sampling of the older population at the end of the project to confirm that they were reaching people who could use help but who were choosing not to apply to the FSP. Seventy-seven percent of their sample had a family income of less than \$900 a month and 32% of these people had assets of less than \$3,000.

Fully 60% of the clients who were screened in the project cited overwhelming paperwork or previously unfavorable experiences at government offices as reasons they had not applied for food stamps. In addition, clients spoke often about the fact that they had "always gotten by and provided for our own," and spoke of food stamps as welfare, prompting clarification from Green Thumb staff on the origins and purpose of the food stamp program in USDA. Stigma also tended to be a reason why people did not want to enroll in the FSP; some who did enroll preferred to have their groceries delivered to their home so that they could spend their food stamps privately. Clients also expressed fears that using government programs could endanger their finances. Despite these views, however, food stamps were seen by some as a useful resource, especially by those who had to follow restrictive diets.

Although the BOSS software program took most of the project period to be completed, it was at least usable for much of the project. Being able to provide clients with information and access to multiple benefits proved both attractive and beneficial to many clients, and also helped keep project staff enthusiastic about providing client assistance. Even if staff were unsuccessful in enrolling a client in the FSP, whether due to a client's reluctance or eligibility rules that disqualified them, they often were able to provide clients with access to other services. Having the capability to produce a printed copy of the food stamp application for the client to sign was also very useful. Because the food stamp application form was lengthy, aides would sometimes complete the prescreening interview on paper and later enter the information into the computer and present printouts. GTFH staff suggested that a shorter screening instrument be developed which could then supply data on multiple forms, including the FSP, within a software package.

V. Conclusions

GTFH has gained a better understanding of the needs and problems of their clients, having spent much time educating themselves about services. When designing this project originally, project planners did not expect that it would be immediately cost effective. It was hoped that by applying what they learned during this demonstration, and continuing to use both the software and the hardware acquired, costs would be realized in service over the years.

The South Dakota Program of Green Thumb is planning to continue their efforts to provide the low-income older population with the nutrition help they need. As a result of restructuring, the Sioux City office and its administrator are now responsible for seven North Western States, which include more than 10% of Green Thumb's national total of 17,000 participants, an excellent arena in which to expand on the positive aspects of this demonstration.

26. LOAVES Program Norfolk, Virginia

I. Overview of the Demonstration Project

The LOAVES Project proposed to inform 400 older people living in rural Accomack County, Virginia, about the benefits of the Food Stamp Program [FSP]. Staff planned to recruit eight older volunteers to identify and provide preapplication assistance to potential clients at various sites such as food pantries, medical centers, and local stores frequented by older people. Volunteers planned to use the SHARE program as an incentive for clients, showing them how they could maximize the benefit of food stamps. A project director would coordinate volunteer efforts and manage the project with the help of a part-time administrative assistant.

Project staff assumed that many older clients living in Accomack County encountered a variety of barriers to FSP participation. These included a lack of comfort when dealing with the system, a lack of motivation stemming from the belief that they were eligible for only a small benefit, and lack of transportation.

The Accomack County Department of Social Services [DSS] agreed to support the project by providing training to staff and volunteers on FSP eligibility and certification as well as on how to complete food stamp applications. In addition, they would provide guidance on food stamp application processing procedures over the course of the project as needed.

II. Project Activities

Staff initiated the project by recruiting volunteers. Presentations were made at events and meetings sponsored by groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons, Area Agency on Aging, Lions Club, and local churches. A total of ten volunteers were recruited. In spite of support from staff, a number of volunteers dropped out of the project in the first few months, primarily due to time constraints. A core of five volunteers worked consistently throughout project. Core volunteer team members were all over 65 years old, and consisted of four women and one man, three of whom were African American and two of whom were Caucasian. Each individual varied in ability and skill, which significantly influenced the number of people each volunteer referred to the FSP and helped to enroll.

Outreach sites were established at major medical centers, local drug stores, discount stores, and food pantries. Usually a volunteer sat at a table at the entrance of a site in order to easily approach potential clients and to provide preapplication assistance. Project staff and volunteers met monthly to develop a schedule of site preapplication activities.

Staff had extensive experience in working with volunteers and the older population, and therefore were able to provide the support necessary to sustain this small but consistent pool of volunteers. They met with volunteers both individually and in a group, and discussed any problems that were encountered and possible solutions. Staff regularly showed appreciation for volunteer efforts and tried to offer incentives to increase volunteer motivation.

III. Lessons Learned from the Demonstration

Project staff encountered a number of challenges reflective of many programs that rely on volunteers. However, project staff were determined to implement a genuine volunteer program where volunteers actually conducted outreach activities and FSP preapplication assistance. Their first difficulty was recruiting and maintaining an adequate number of volunteers. Staff found it challenging to locate volunteers willing to commit to ten hours a week, and therefore had problems staffing the outreach sites consistently throughout the month. Most volunteers had other obligations and were limited in the days and hours they were able to volunteer.

Staff also had difficulties recruiting volunteers who had high quality documentation and interviewing skills. Two of the five volunteers were skilled in interviewing, had previous experience working with government benefit programs, and understood documentation requirements, including the completion of the FSP application. These volunteers regularly recruited clients from a pool of friends or acquaintances in their community and provided preapplication assistance in clients' homes, resulting in a number of successful referrals and enrollments. These same volunteers also assisted their clients in gathering documents, making copies, and helping them to deliver the documents to DSS. The in-depth assistance helped to ensure that the application process was completed and that clients were ultimately enrolled.

The remaining volunteers were not as effective and did not demonstrate adequate skills in assisting clients with the FSP application, despite working a considerable number of hours on the project. The inability of project staff to find a sufficient number of persons willing to assume project volunteer responsibilities and who had the appropriate skills to provide client assistance limited the outcomes of this demonstration project.

IV. Findings

Over the course of the project, volunteers and staff contacted a total of 119 people individually. Fifty-four of these contacts, or 45%, were referred to the FSP. Of the 54 referrals, 21 clients were ultimately enrolled. The project proposal indicated that 400 individuals would receive information about the FSP and that 25% [100 persons] would "pursue" the FSP. The project fell short of its projections, only reaching 29% of projected contacts and 21% of enrollments.

GRANT AMOUNT - \$35,165							
CONTACTS		REFERRALS		APPLICATIONS		ENROLLMENTS	
Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per	Total #	Cost per
119	\$294	54	\$648	54	\$648	21	\$1,666

PROJECT EFFICIENCY	
Contact/referral rate	45%
Contact/application rate	45%
Contact/enrollee rate	17%
Referral/application rate	100%
Referral/enrollee rate	38%
Application/enrollee rate	38%

Data indicate that the preapplication assistance was most successful when provided in client homes. Sixty-one percent of clients who were assisted in their homes were ultimately enrolled. Clients seemed to feel comfortable in this setting and had access to needed information and documents. The agency food bank was also a good site for reaching clients, in part because clients frequenting the agency were by definition in need of food assistance. However, many of these clients were either already on food stamps or were not eligible due to their income and/or assets. Thirty-five percent of clients who were assisted at the food bank were enrolled in the FSP.

A few of the church food pantries and medical centers were adequate sites at which to contact and enroll people in the FSP; a client referral system had been developed between project staff and site contacts. The more public locations, such as discount stores and local drug stores, were unsuccessful sites at which to contact and enroll people in the FSP. Few clients who were initially contacted at these sites were ultimately enrolled. These clients were often in a hurry and/or dependent on someone else for transportation. They neither had the time nor the information necessary to complete a food stamp application and also appeared reluctant to show interest in the FSP in such a public location.

With help from volunteers, project staff were able to become more knowledgeable about barriers to enrolling in the FSP. Volunteers found that older clients had difficulty gathering required documents and did not always understand DSS correspondence. In addition, clients often stated that they found the food stamp applications too long and complex for them to complete without help. Consequently, they did not always follow through with the application process.

Transportation, including trips to the DSS office and to copy required documentation, remained a problem. In rural areas such as Accomack County, where families lived in isolated areas with little or no public transportation, finding a copying machine could be difficult. Many older persons were dependent on friends, neighbors, and relatives for

transportation and in some instances had to pay for transportation. Even though regulations stated that under "hardship" interviews could be made by telephone, many older clients were unaware of this option.

A number of low-income, older potential clients had small savings accounts that they maintained to pay for emergencies and burials, making them ineligible for food stamps. [Although prepayment for a burial plot and funeral expenses is not considered an asset under FSP regulations, money in the bank set aside for such purposes is considered an asset.] Furthermore, numerous clients refused food stamp assistance because they stated that they did not want to take the time and effort to complete a complex application form, share "personal business," and gather and mail "private papers" for a small monthly amount of food stamps. They stated that the dollar amount was not compensation enough for such an anxiety-producing process.

V. Conclusions

Project outcomes indicated that providing assistance in client homes is significantly more effective than assisting people in public places. Often, simply informing clients of a program is not enough to overcome barriers to enrollment in the FSP. Some older clients need ongoing support to combat their possible anxiety, uncertainty, lack of confidence, and/or low literacy skills, and to ensure that they follow-up on all requirements of the application process.

Project data provided excellent information about recruiting client-assistance workers. Potential food stamp recipients may have an heightened interest in applying for food stamps, and may feel more comfortable in their own homes interacting with workers with whom they are familiar. In addition, volunteers may be more motivated to follow-up on their clients and provide additional support if they are familiar with the people they are helping.