

Karen's Corner



As 2015 comes to a close, I reflect on the many accomplishments made possible by the hard work and dedication of the DHHR team and its dedicated partners. Over the past year, we have continued in our mission to protect and improve the quality of life for countless West Virginians through a number of new projects.

In August, DHHR teamed up with Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College (Southern) to offer an innovative program for individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. Former Southern president Joanne Jaeger Tomblin, also our state's First Lady, helped initiate this project, which allows TANF recipients to enroll in a cohort pilot program at Southern to gain skills to succeed in the workforce by providing support to those seeking to improve their opportunities for gainful employment.

The Bureau for Children and Families (BCF) also made history with the phase one implementation of Safe at Home West Virginia on October 1, 2015. Through Safe at Home, we are providing wraparound services to children, family members, caregivers and foster parents to support developing and maintaining a stable and loving environment so our children can be safe, healthy and successful in their own home communities. The long-term goal is to serve 12-17 year olds and their families in all 55 counties over the course of the next two years.

We have also made strides in protecting those in long-term care facilities with the West Virginia Clearance for Access: Registry and Employment Screening (WV CARES). The program, launched August 1, 2015, reduces the potential for abuse, neglect and exploitation of the elderly and other vulnerable adults by ensuring that individuals with certain criminal histories will not become direct access workers in long-term care in the Mountain State.

In addition, West Virginia was named a national leader in providing healthcare coverage for children. According to Georgetown University Health Policy Institute's Center for Children and Families, ninety-seven percent of the state's 386,718 children are now covered by private insurance, West Virginia Children's Health Insurance Program (WVCHIP) or Medicaid. This great accomplishment would not have been possible without our team at WVCHIP and the Bureau for Medical Services (BMS). I also appreciate BCF and RAPIDS staff, who work tirelessly to get the word out about WVCHIP to beneficiaries of services like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Moreover, BMS' new contract designed to cut down on non-emergency transportation costs for Medicaid patients has saved the state \$1.9 million in its first year. BMS also estimates that it saved \$1.5 million this year by securing a non-emergency medical transportation broker, bringing the total savings to the state to more than \$3.4 million. The funds will be used to provide medical services to West Virginia residents.

With a focus on improved health, we committed \$10,000 in funding, as well as \$10,000 in technical support, to the Cabell-Huntington Health Department (CHHD) for the state's first-ever Syringe Exchange Program pilot project. This program highlights the partnership of DHHR, the City of Huntington and the CHHD coming together to not only acknowledge the seriousness of intravenous drug use, but to take action in helping to reduce the spread of infectious diseases in our communities caused by sharing needles.

We are also working to decrease the number of tragedies that result from substance abuse through the administration of Naloxone, a drug used to help counter the effects of respiratory depression caused by opioids like heroin. Earlier this year, our Bureau for Public Health started training those who will teach first responders how to administer Naloxone to individuals suspected of an opioid overdose.

In the same vein, the Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities continues the fight against substance abuse with the support of the Governor's Advisory Council on Substance Abuse. On September 9, 2015, Governor Earl Ray Tomblin announced the launch of 844-HELP4WV, the first statewide 24-hour substance abuse call line for those battling substance abuse and other mental health issues. Through this holistic approach, we are making sure all West Virginians have access to the treatment and care they need to achieve the bright future they deserve.

I am so proud of our team for continuing to make a difference in the lives of West Virginia residents, with a top priority of improving the population's health and well-being. Together, we have accomplished many great things, and I am excited to see what collaborations and initiatives 2016 will hold. As we move into the new year, keep these words in mind:

"Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others." (Booker T. Washington)

WV VOAD Receives 2015 Governor's Service Award

On Wednesday, October 14, Governor Earl Ray Tomblin recognized the West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (WV VOAD) with a 2015 Governor's Service Award. The ceremony and luncheon were held at the Charleston Civic Center as part of Faces of Leadership, the annual state conference on community service, program management and volunteerism. Since 1995, the Governor's Service Awards have recognized individuals, families and organizations that exemplify outstanding dedication to volunteerism and community service in West Virginia. WV VOAD received its award in the Disaster Services category.

WV VOAD is a membership-based umbrella organization comprised of non-profits and faith-based entities that coordinates and partners with DHHR, WV Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, WV Division of Military Affairs and Public Safety, Volunteer WV, WV Housing and other federal, state and local agencies to address crucial, long-term recovery issues that arise after an initial response is provided. Some of the supports WV VOAD coordinates include provision of shelter and food; delivering supplies; counseling; property clean up; and donations of building materials and labor for repairs.

Importantly, WV VOAD member organizations give hope to survivors. WV VOAD's work is especially critical when ongoing Individual Federal Assistance is not made available through FEMA, such as in the 2015 flooding events in West Virginia's Southern and Mid-Ohio Valley regions. The storms this year have affected more than 300 private crossings, amounting to over \$5,000,000 in damages.

The Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities (BBHFF) provides support to WV VOAD through grant funding, made available through the Bureau for Public Health's Center for Threat Preparedness for WV VOAD's director, and through in-kind support provided by the BBHFF Disaster Coordinator, Joann Fleming. Joann has been active with WV VOAD for seven years and serves on the board of directors. When asked about a meaningful memory from her work with WV VOAD, Joann notes that there have been many, but that a 2012 project in Logan County is an exceptional demonstrates the four "C"s of VOAD: collaboration, cooperation, communication and coordination.

"The family still had mud and rock from the hillside stuck against the back of their house. They had mud under their house and mold inside the structure, but most importantly they were living without clean water. They were a retired couple and living on a fixed income, and they did not have the funds to do all the repairs and cleaning that needed to be done. They have never had access to public water; and therefore, they used well water. After the flooding, their well was filled with mud and rock, and the water left in the well was contaminated. The family tried to disinfect the water themselves by using bleach, but they were unsuccessful in decontaminating the water. The man drank the water and then had to be admitted to the hospital for a stomach infection he received as a result of drinking the contaminated water. They explained to the crisis counselors that the public water lines came to just below their property, and they just didn't have the money to have it extended to their house. On the drive home, the crisis counselors were at a loss for words to have seen a family living in the United States in these conditions."

Ultimately, with the help of WV VOAD and its partner agencies, and with special support from a local pastor, Helping Hands, the West Virginia Housing Development Fund, and the Community Lutheran Partners, the family was connected to Logan PSD and has indoor running water. Appalachian Service Project removed mud and rock from the backside and underneath the house, and a wall was built to keep dirt and mud from sliding against the house.

The Governor's Service Awards are administered by Volunteer West Virginia, the state's Commission for National and Community Service. A volunteer review committee reads and selects the recipients on the basis of achievement, community needs, continuing involvement, innovation and impact of service.

WV VOAD will hold its next quarterly meeting on December 1 in Gassaway, West Virginia. For more information about the meeting or joining WV VOAD's efforts, visit <https://wvvoad.communityos.org>.



David Hoge, WV Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety; Dan Lowther, United Methodist Disaster Relief; Jenny Gannaway, WV VOAD State Chair; Brooke Powell, Disaster Case Manager; Christina Wilbert, VOAD; Joann Fleming, WV Department of Health and Human Resources-BBHFF; Gina Namay, Volunteer WV

