

Karen's Corner



I recently attended a Workforce Development Board meeting where I was privileged to talk about DHHR programs helping West Virginia families achieve self-sufficiency. One such initiative is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which provides a variety of services to strengthen economic independence of West Virginians. Through TANF, West Virginia Works offers employment related services such as training assistance, occupational skills development, job search support and child care assistance.

Recognizing the importance of education and job training when it comes to supporting individuals and preparing them for life's challenges, we announced a partnership with Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College (Southern) last summer. I am so thankful our state's first lady Joanne Jaeger Tomblin and former Southern president helped initiate this pilot.

The program allows individuals receiving TANF benefits to enroll in a cohort at Southern to gain the needed skills to succeed in the workforce; these could be certificate or degree programs. Southern offers boot camps to participants to increase math, English, and any other skills needed to succeed in their chosen program.

We had 27 TANF recipients enrolled in the pilot program last fall. Of those, 23 completed the fall semester, with five earning a 4.0 grade-point average, and two gained employment. It is helping West Virginians like Melissa Marcum, a 34 year-old single mother with two teenage children, who hopes to earn a two-year degree and become a surgical technologist. She says that she's not only working toward her education for her children, but also for herself. Another program participant, 36 year-old Irene Adkins, also a single mother with two children, aims to earn a two-year degree and become a probation officer. She is proud of her straight A grades, and credits Southern student services specialist Hattie Evans with helping her through the challenges. Hattie assists students with getting equipment like laptops and printers, as well as child care. She finds joy in helping these students succeed.

Given the success of the pilot at Southern, Chancellor for Community and Technical College Education Sarah Tucker and I have agreed to expand the program to all nine of the state's community colleges this fall. We will be adding a second specialist at Southern to continue providing individualized attention, and each community college will receive either one or two specialists for next year.

Mark Twain said, "The secret of getting ahead is getting started." Let's not keep this a secret. Instead, let's work together to get individuals on their feet so they and their families can have a greater quality of life.

DHHR Prepares for Safe at Home West Virginia Expansion

Progress continues with Safe at Home West Virginia as DHHR's Bureau for Children and Families moves closer to the implementation of phase two. In the first phase counties, 132 youth have been referred to Safe at Home West Virginia for wraparound services. Of those, 17 youth have returned to West Virginia; 23 have moved back to their home communities from in-state residential placements; and 37 have been prevented from entering residential placements.

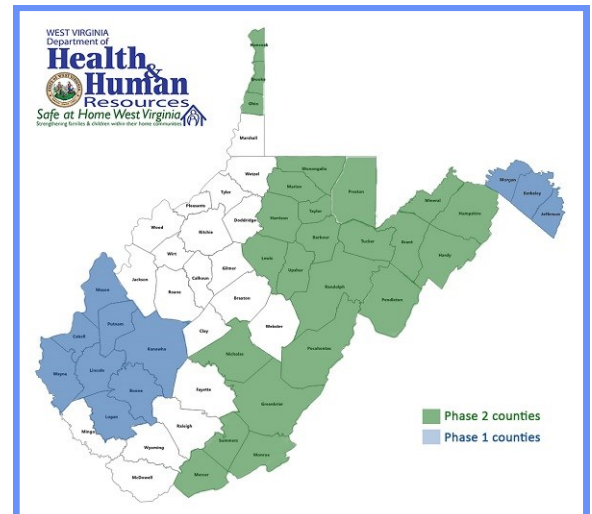
"Given the difference the program is making in the lives of these children and their families, we are excited to expand this revolutionary approach," said DHHR Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling. "We recently announced the selection of licensed behavioral health providers to act as local coordinating agencies for the next phase of the project, expected to launch summer of 2016."

DHHR Prepares, *continued*

Grants were awarded to Burlington United Methodist Family Services; National Youth Advocate Program; Youth Services System; Genesis; KVC Behavioral Healthcare of WV; and Pressley Ridge. These agencies will be responsible for the development and delivery of a high fidelity wraparound model with supporting services, and will hire wraparound facilitators who will coordinate the individualized services identified for the youth and their families in their homes. Local coordinating agencies are also tasked with providing those services or securing them from other sources.

“With the support of these agencies and our many partners, we will continue helping teens with behavioral health needs thrive in their home communities,” said Secretary Bowling.

Phase two of Safe at Home West Virginia encompasses Barbour, Brooke, Grant, Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hancock, Hardy, Harrison, Lewis, Marion, Mercer, Mineral, Monongalia, Monroe, Nicholas, Ohio, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph, Summers, Taylor, Tucker and Upshur counties. 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, providing wraparound services to children, family members, caregivers and foster parents to support developing and maintaining a stable and loving environment. Learn more at <http://safe.wvdhhr.org/>.



DHHR Leaders Share Importance of Infant Vaccinations



DHHR joined partners across the country and the world to celebrate national Infant Immunization Week, April 16-23, 2016.

On April 18, Karen L. Bowling, DHHR Cabinet Secretary, and Dr. Rahul Gupta, Bureau for Public Health Commissioner and State Health Officer, met with members of the West Virginia Public Employees Day Care Center to highlight the importance of protecting infants and young children.

“Despite the fact that West Virginia has one of the highest rates of immunization for school-age children, the state has the lowest rate of infant immunization in the country at 63 percent compared to 71 percent nationally,” Bowling said. “That gap means many of our young children are susceptible to diseases such as measles and whooping cough, which can easily be prevented with vaccines.”

Each year, thousands of children become ill from diseases that could have been prevented by basic childhood immunizations. Countless more miss time from school because they are under-immunized.

“Vaccines are among the most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death,” said Gupta. “They not only have the power to protect our youngest and most vulnerable, but also help protect entire communities by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases.”

Giving children the recommended immunizations by age two is the best way to protect them from 14 serious childhood diseases: Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Influenza, Measles, Rotavirus, Haemophilus Influenzae type B, Tetanus (Lockjaw), Mumps, Pertussis (Whooping Cough), Pneumococcal Disease, Polio, Rubella (German Measles) and Varicella (Chickenpox).

The West Virginia Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides free vaccines to children who are underinsured or whose parents or guardians may not be able to afford them. For more information, please visit www.immunization.wv.gov.

