

County Services News**Welfare Reform Brings "Community Service" to Some Counties**

For more than a year, welfare reform has been a hot topic in the halls of Congress as well as state capitals. While the federal government has yet to pass welfare reform, 40 states have enacted substantial reform to the welfare program through the federal waiver process, which allows states to set aside certain federal rules while still meeting federal objectives.

Several state initiatives have a "community service" requirement for welfare recipients who have received public assistance for a certain period of time. The community service component requires counties to assign welfare recipients to public service activities in order to maintain their program eligibility.

For example, the Virginia welfare plan requires welfare recipients who are unable to meet work requirements to perform community service work. The plan is being phased in over a four-year period which began July 1, 1995.

Georgia will begin pilot testing "Work for Welfare" in 10 counties later this year. The plan requires each recipient and non-supporting parent who has received Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) for 24 months of the previous three years to work 20 hours per month in a state or local government, federal agency or nonprofit organization.

Managing a community service program will mean developing potential jobs, screening and supervising individuals, and collaborating with local nonprofit agencies. Local volunteer centers and county government volunteer coordinators are excellent resources in developing a community service program.

Some counties in Virginia work with their own volunteer coordinators to connect with nonprofit agen-



cies and to help involve the community in the implementation of the legislation. Others are contracting with the local volunteer center to manage the community service aspect of their welfare program.

Volunteer centers are community resource organizations which serve as one-stop shopping centers for individuals or groups who wish to volunteer in government or nonprofit agencies. Volunteer centers mobilize people and resources to deliver creative solutions to community problems.

The existence of the volunteer office in Arlington County, Va. has allowed the county to benefit from the expertise of its staff and the resources and collaborative relationships it has already developed throughout the county. Jean Berg, director of the volunteer office, is working with Department of Human Services staff to involve the community by matching community resources with client needs.

"First, we identified needs that clients might have during their transition into employment. We then identified resources in our community that could be marshaled to assist welfare clients in their move toward self-sufficiency," said Berg. "Our

next steps will be to organize those resources into a centralized, automated resource bank which will be used by caseworkers. We hope to be able to use some welfare recipients themselves in helping to keep the resource bank up to date and perhaps even in operating the bank."

County government officials that want to prepare for a community service program should consider the following steps: involve staff from your county's volunteer office or local volunteer center (if your county has one) in the planning process, try to involve the community in your implementation plan through volunteer opportunities assisting clients, work with your volunteer program managers to help identify potential placement sites in community service jobs in both your local government offices as well as in nonprofit agencies, and contact your state office on volunteerism for further information.

To assist counties interested in establishing a volunteer program, NACo's Volunteerism Project will sponsor a workshop on this topic at NACo's Annual Conference in Harris County (Houston), Texas. The Volunteerism Project also offers a variety of resources on establishing and managing volunteer programs.

County officials who would like more in-depth information about establishing a community service or volunteer program in county government may sign up for a 30-minute consulting session with project staff at the conference.

(For free resources or to sign up for a consulting session at the Annual Conference, contact Peter Lane at 202/942-4288.)

(County Services News was written by Peter Lane, research associate for the volunteerism program.)