

Share What's Happening In Your Area

It's Time for Regional Roundup!

Regional Roundup (RR) is a twice-monthly newsletter focusing on local and regional DSS news and events.

Regional Roundup welcomes submissions of text and photos. Please identify individuals who appear in submitted photos.

*The deadline to submit items for the next edition is **March 16**. Send submissions to: robin.brannon@dss.virginia.gov.*

Please send questions or comments to Robin as well.

Find Your Office

Where Are You?

Local offices are grouped into five regions. Do you know the region in which your office is located? Click on the link below to view a map of the regions on the SPARK Web site.



Northern Region

Easing Tax Time Jitters With EITC

For the eighth consecutive year, the Alexandria Department of Social Services (ADSS) is sponsoring a free tax preparation assistance program for qualified individuals.

In 1999, the Social Services Advisory Board began a coordinated campaign to raise awareness of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). A tax preparation assistance center was established, and has grown large enough to have served more than 300 taxpayers in 2006.

ADSS developed partnerships to help promote and provide the service. For example, the Enterprise Development Group provides customers with free copies of their credit report, as well as individualized information on building, repairing and protecting their credit.

One of the most important partners is Community Tax Aid, Inc., a non-profit organization in the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. Each year, a dedicated cadre of accountants, attorneys and other experienced tax preparers help those who qualify for the program.

“What a joy it is to watch the volunteers at work,” says ADSS Director Suzanne Chis. “Nothing

pleases them more than to see expressions of relief on the faces of customers they assist.”

Keeping the volunteers happy is also important. Utilizing ADSS’ resources (carrels, computers, security and staff), as well as snacks, helps keep them cheerful. Volunteers also learn about the Department’s programs and services.

Also, ADSS is now involved in the regional EITC coalition. “We look forward to the opening of another site operated through the regional partnership that will serve many more customers,” said Chis.



Volunteers from Community Tax Aid, Inc., provide free tax preparation assistance at ADSS.

Finding Poetry In Everyday Life



It's not often that you meet a poet these days. Searching for just the right word, trying to convey thoughts and feelings within the confines of specific rhyme, meter or form is an exacting art. Too exacting for most people in our "instantaneous" culture. However, Warren Holdren, operations manager for the Piedmont Regional Office, enjoys it.

Holdren started working with the Botetourt County Department of Social Services (BDSS) in 1974, and will have worked for the State for 30 years this July. He has also steadily practiced his hobby. His interest was sparked by the poetry of Rod McKuen and fanned into a flame by the encouragement of his high school English teacher.

His years of practicing the art of poetry has now brought him national recognition. The League of American Poets has selected one of his poems for publication in the anthology series *Expressions – A Collection of Short Works*. The poem "Withered Hands" will be one of 250 poems in the next series. The poem also won first prize at the Highland Arts Festival in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania several years ago.

"When I was growing up, my mother used to pick apples off the trees in our garden," said Holdren. "My dad would peel them, then Mom would slice them into very thin slivers. She'd take them outside and place them on paper on top of a large King Edward Cigars sign to dry in the sun. The process took several days, and when it was finished she would place the dried apples in pillow cases and put them away.

In the winter, she would use the slices to make half-moon-shaped fried apple pies. Her hands became aged with time and effort, but she continued the ritual as long as she could. As I grew older, I remembered her laboring in the summer so that we could enjoy those apples in the winter. I wrote this poem to honor my mother, and I'm glad to be able to share my memories with others."

Withered Hands by Warren Holdren

Withered hands

Peel and slice June apples.

Carefully place them on a tin in the summer sun,

Gently scatter wasps and honey bees,

Turn the slices for another sunny day.

Juices drained for the final gathering.

Days pass - - the slices brown and wither.

In winter the smell of summer rises,

from fried apple pies

. . . of withered hands.



Central Region

They're Nothing Short of "Extraordinary"



In January, four staff members of the Hanover County Department of Social Services (HDSS) were honored for their "extraordinary client contributions."

Wendy Bolden, Amanda Payne, Betsy Ludwig and Karen Henley were recognized for their outstanding work. HDSS Director Donna Douglas congratulated and thanked each one as she presented the details of their accomplishments.

Wendy Bolden and Amanda Payne, eligibility workers, were recognized for "completing mass change by Dec. 31, 2006," stated Kelly Pauley, eligibility manager of the Family Resources unit. Completing mass change means they reviewed Social Security and other income changes for more than 430 Medicaid Long-Term Care (LTC) and Auxiliary Grant recipients. According to Pauley, Wendy and Amanda "were able to accomplish this excellent customer service while still completing their normal case management, LTC intake tasks and processing applications for foster care."

Betsy Ludwig, eligibility aide, was acknowledged for her work with the Fuel Assistance Program. From Nov. 13 through Dec. 8, 2006, she processed 725 applications for fuel assistance with a "human touch," said Monica Chenault, program coordinator in the Customer Service and Outreach unit. Ludwig streamlined the process while still providing exceptional customer service. Chenault said, "Betsy is a great team player and always exhibits a positive attitude. She has developed a wealth of knowledge in this program area and is a valuable asset to HDSS."

Karen Henley, marketing specialist, was recognized for her accomplishments as the Hanover County Holiday Program Coordinator. Approximately 2,200 Hanover citizens received gifts for Christmas after she matched them with local sponsors. During the 2006 holiday season, more than 500 Hanover families applied for assistance, an increase of 20 percent over 2005. The sponsors increased by 400 percent and included businesses, organizations, churches, individuals and families.

"Karen exceeded the Holiday Program's expectations in her dedication to coordinating the applicants to the specific requests of many sponsors," said Chenault. Henley achieved her program goal of each applicant receiving a holiday sponsor.

Eastern Region

He's The One!

Bill Gandel, director of Social Services for Prince George County, received the "You are the One" employee excellence award from the Board of Supervisors at their meeting on Feb. 13.

Every year, Prince George County sets a goal for United Way contributions collected from employees. Usually, the goal is not met. This year, however, Gandel was in charge of the program. Contributions totaled \$1,665, exceeding the \$1,500 goal amount. In fact, the total represents the largest amount ever collected for the United Way Campaign from Prince George County employees. The fund raising success could not have been accomplished so handily without Bill Gandel's dedication and hard work.

Below, left: Dr. Joe Leming, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Prince George County, presents the "You are the One" employee excellence award to Bill Gandel, director of the Prince George County Department of Social Services.



Western Region

Montgomery County Win-Win-Wins With A New AFC Program

The Montgomery County Department of Social Services (MDSS) has encountered an unfortunate dilemma: an increase in the number of disabled adults who need the level of care provided by assisted living facilities and a decrease in the number of auxiliary grant beds for them.

In response, MDSS has developed an Adult Foster Care (AFC) program that allows the adults to remain in their community in an agency-approved family home. It is a win-win-win situation: the client is cared for in a personalized setting, the agency has quality options for adult protective needs and the provider receives the auxiliary grant subsidy for the room and board and care for the client.

The program has been a success. MDSS is spreading the word about the program by placing brochures in pharmacies and making presentations at health fairs, PTA meetings, church circle meetings, etc. Through various efforts, MDSS is also informing the community of the adult foster care program benefits. The positive outcomes have resulted in more client referrals.

The AFC program's main obstacle is a shortage of approved providers. To receive information or make suggestions, contact Dianne Rhody-Scott at (540) 382-6990 ext. 231 or by email at dcr121@western.dss.state.va.us.



Above: Linda Eaton (center) with her parents Imaje and Earl. Linda played a pivotal role in the creation of the Adult Foster Care Program in Montgomery County. Linda works in Adult Services at MDSS.

Central Region

Hanover Selected One of America's "100 Best"

In January, America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth announced that Hanover County was among the winners of a national competition to identify the 100 Best Communities for Young People. The competition honors communities across America for their commitment to provide healthy, safe and caring environments for young people. Hundreds of communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands took part in the competition.

Hanover was selected as one of the "100 Best Communities," in part, because of the strength and commitment of its non-profits, coalitions, community and business partners serving the 25,461 youth that call Hanover County home.



Hanover County has been a designated "Community of Promise" by America's Promise since 2003. Of the seven localities in Virginia chosen for the 100 Best Communities for Young People competition, Hanover is the only one holding the "Community of Promise" designation.

Youth leadership and volunteer opportunities are integral to Hanover. Through inclusion-based programs for kids with special needs like the After-School Integration Program, to programs that enable youth to be decision makers and advisors like Hanover Youth Perspective, Hanover's youth are introduced to becoming contributing, responsible, productive members of the greater community at an early age.

A complete list of winners can be found on the [America's Promise](http://America's Promise web site) web site.

Abbondanza!

noun language: Italian
definition(s): abundance, or

1. a large amount
2. a great profusion



Northern Region

Gifts For 540 Kids...We Need More Wrapping Paper!

Page County residents again participated in a Holiday Assistance Program (HAP) to make the holidays brighter for 540 children. The program, sponsored by the Page County Department of Social Services (PDSS), utilizes a “holiday tree” concept to benefit children in need. A child’s gender, age and needs are placed on ornaments and hung on a tree. Sponsors pick an ornament and supply the needed items to PDSS, who deliver them to the children.

Alison Grinnan, a foster parent trainer at PDSS, is the program coordinator. She receives assistance from Pat Koontz, service supervisor, who was the previous coordinator. “Individuals and local businesses generously donated toys, money and assistance to the program. In fact, the sponsors were so generous that each child received at least four gifts. That’s more than 2,500 packages delivered by the agency.”

Local high school students and adults from the community volunteered to wrap the donated gifts. Even children whose ornaments were not selected received toys and clothing via donations that were not marked for a specific child.

The program still has some items remaining from a huge donation made by an anonymous group of local waitresses. Those items will either be used for next year’s program or be given to children entering foster care with little or no personal belongings.

Eastern Region

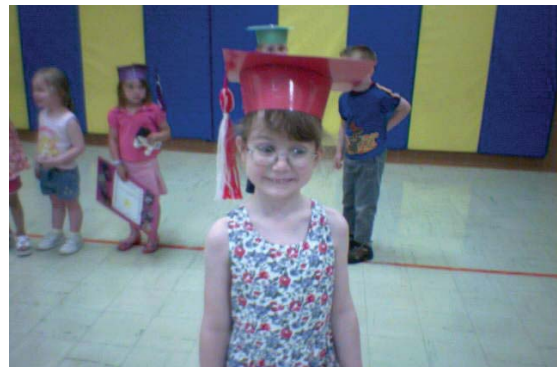
Mastering The Art Of Social Work

Eleven employees of the Chesapeake Department of Social Services (CDSS) recently received their Master’s Degree in Social Work (MSW) from Norfolk State University. They started the MSW Cohort Program on August 26, 2003 and graduated on Dec. 9, 2006.

Classes were held at CDSS and Director Doris “Cookie” Palacios worked with Dr. Marvin Feit, dean of the Social Work department at Norfolk State University, to ensure that the program was successful. The employees took six credits per semester which included summer classes. The graduates are:

Mark Bleil, social work supervisor
Deborah Brown, social worker
Kristen Hardison, social worker
Vickie Haralson, chief of Services
Ethel Hassell, social work supervisor
Karen Jackson, social worker
Sherry Marciano, social worker
Elise Pugh, social work supervisor
Robin Shaffer, social worker
Katherine Speights, social worker
Rhonda Yancey, social worker

A second series of MSW Cohort classes began on Sept. 12, with 10 employees participating. By offering the MSW Cohort program, CDSS affirms the value of self-motivation and lifelong learning. The people of Chesapeake and the Commonwealth will ultimately benefit from this unique program and its well-trained, dedicated graduates.



Thank you for reading this edition of Regional Roundup!

