

# 4<sup>th</sup> Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

## Category: PCC#8 Tier 1 Profiles in Community Collaboration

### Project Title: Keep the Home Fires Burning

#### 1. **Project/Program Summary:**

Briefly summarize the project's history, purpose, timeline and budget.

During November, 2005, it became apparent that Emergency Assistance monies were not going to last thru the winter months. The high cost of gasoline and heating oil was playing havoc with individual budgets and power cut off notices were depleting emergency funds. The question became, "How can we help our clients stay warm during the winter months when no funds are available and estimating heating cost are continuing to rise"? Thus our project "Keep the Home fires Burning" was born. The title was the result of an agency contest for the best name possible and our Directors entry was the winner.

In Alexander County many residents still burned wood and we had furniture and frame companies with scrap wood blocks that could provide heat. Our first need would be a place to store the wood until it was needed. In December of 2005 a meeting with the County Manager resulted in an abandoned DOT Building being made available. Our County Commissioners were very instrumental in getting this setup. Several local frame shops and furniture companies were contacted, visited and came on board. One company delivered two dump truck loads of blocks and another frame shop donated several pickup loads of wood which were moved by Work First Job Developers, a Food Stamp worker and an Adult Medicaid worker with their personal trucks. During December of 2005 Work First and Emergency Assistance monies were depleted.

In January of 2006, the local radio station made time available on its afternoon talk show for the food stamp supervisor and job developer to solicit contributions from local citizens. This resulted in donation from several private citizens and organizations. In addition to fire wood, which was already cut and dried, \$1,300.00 in cash was given by a local church and individual persons or families. This was used to purchase gas and heating oil for those in emergency situations who did not have wood heaters.

Mid January, 2006, almost ready to begin with wood distribution but are there liability issues? Our DSS attorney researched this and created a "Memorandum of Understanding" which recipients of wood would be required to read and sign before any donations were given. This document educated recipients on the risk involved with burning wood blocks and relieved our agency of any liability should any type of accident befall the recipients while obtaining or using the donated items.

On January 18<sup>th</sup>, final repairs were made to our building door and extraneous materials were removed by County maintenance personnel. The Food Stamp Supervisor volunteered to keep records and oversee our project distributions in addition to determining eligibility, a major contribution. Regular Crisis Intervention criteria was used as the eligibility standard. February, 2006 was the last month any Crisis Intervention monies were available. Our wood supply was adequate for the mild winter and several families were assisted by our project with the last wood distributed on March 6, 2006. More wood was donated in June, 2006 and the Work First Job Developer cut and transported 4 more loads of oak for the upcoming winter.

The budget for this project was minimal as volunteers were allowed to assist clients during office hours and most of the travel cost were donated. The storage building was not in use and the only cost would be the few hours that County maintenance used to repair the door and clean out the building. No direct cost were attributed to this project.

#### 2. **Innovation:**

Why is the program unique? How does your project differ from similar projects?

We must assume that this project is unique to Alexander County as we have no information of any other County having anything like it.

**3. Project Success and Impact:**

What were the objectives? How well were they met? How widespread is the impact of the project/program? What is the anticipated long-term impact? Did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, businesses, etc.? Describe the outcome of the collaboration.

Our projection in 2005 that Emergency Assistance monies would not last thru the winter was correct. Our project did provide heating assistance to several families who might have suffered due to cold weather conditions. We were able to provide some assistance throughout the winter and had supplies left for the upcoming season. We feel that the impact was widespread and long term as organizations and individuals partnered with DSS to help those in need; responsibility was accepted at the personal level and not passed on as a government obligation. This hopefully will result in citizens becoming more involved with their communities and deeper commitment to helping those in need at the local level.

Collaboration partners included Alexander County DSS (all in house team units were involved), our County Manager, County Commissioners, the local radio station, several furniture manufacturing companies, faith organizations and individual citizens. This journey together helped Keep The Home Fires Burning. It warmed young and old; it warmed those who gave and those who received.

**4. Project Effort and Difficulty:**

How well did the program use limited resources? What obstacles or challenges did you overcome? How was this done?

This program began as a conceptual idea based on projections of monetary short falls for emergency assistance. Historically DSS budgets are lean and in Alexander County this held true in 2005. Our hope was to provide an additional emergency service without increased cost. We also wished to utilize recyclable materials available locally. Our plan was developed with the knowledge that funding would be minimal. Project obstacles were storage facilities and obtaining enough wood to meet emergency demands. The storage requirement was met by county government when our need was explained to the County Manager and County Commissioners. Obtaining good wood was a little more difficult. One company used the landfill for dumping wood scraps and glad to redirect a couple of loads to our building. These loads included a moderate amount of unusable materials. Securing a better grade of scrap wood (which normally was sold for \$10.00 a pickup load) required an explanation of our project goals and the benefits that resulted from such charitable acts, after this, another community partner came on board. An appearance on the local radio talk show to explain our project to the general public resulted in 5 donations of wood and more community partners. All clients who received wood provided their own transportation. We did not have to make any home deliveries.

**5. Ability to Replicate Project:**

Can this project be duplicated in other counties? What could counties do to minimize obstacles and problems?

We believe this project could be duplicated in those counties with either furniture production, timber industries, or any industry using wood products. They would need someone with the ability to promote the project and the cooperation of local government. Many county governments would have a space available that could be used for wood storage. Public service message can usually be obtained in local newspapers or radio stations to promote community interest in the project and personal visits to appropriate businesses can usually garner donation. We wish everyone the best of luck.

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