WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SUMMARY

Event:	**Developing Rural Partnerships: Making Welfare Reform Work in Rural Communities**
Date:	July 11-12, 2000
Location:	Excelsior Hotel, Little Rock, Arkansas

I. Overview

The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network, funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) coordinated this rural workshop involving select representatives from twelve States from across four ACF Regions. State agency representatives were present from a variety of agencies including TANF, WTW, transportation, economic development, and domestic violence. Private sector speakers included a town mayor, a chief executive officer for a mass transit district, directors of several State coalitions against domestic violence, and key individuals from various private state-wide welfare service organizations. States represented included Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

The purpose of this one-day workshop was to promote the sharing of ideas and innovative practices designed to assist rural communities to effectively collaborate and utilize community resources to move welfare recipients toward employment and self-sufficiency. During the workshop, participants examined partnership building and the importance of collaboration among and between state, local, and community agencies as a key element in addressing many welfare reform issues. Collaboration among the following agencies was discussed: welfare, transportation, domestic violence, and economic, community, and housing development.

II. Workshop Summary

A. Welcome, Introductions and Workshop Overview

Carol Sedanko, TANF Program Specialist, Region VI, along with Ruth Whitney, Director, Division of County Operations, Arkansas Department of Human Services, offered welcoming comments from their respective offices. They both stressed the importance of addressing the needs of rural welfare clients and highlighted partnership forming as a priority. Blake Austensen,Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, facilitated an introductions activity and provided participants with an overview of the workshop. The one and one-half day workshop featured presentations and discussions around the following topics: the status of welfare reform in rural America, strategies to build partnerships, status of child care in rural America, economic and community development strategies for rural America, domestic violence, transportation, and building connections between housing and economic development agencies in rural America.

B. Welfare Reform in Rural America

Dianne McSwain, Special Assistant to the Director, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Health and Human Services, addressed the group and provided insights into how welfare reform for rural America can be advanced. She informed participants about the National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP). The NDRP enables rural institutions to work together more effectively and efficiently by bringing representatives of over forty Federal agencies and key national organizations to support the State Rural Development councils (SRDC) and to provide a rural voice to the national level regarding federal policy and program development. Similarly, the SRDCs bring key local rural players together to address critical community concerns and to respond to fast-breaking opportunities, leading to greater cooperation and collaboration among rural organizations across program and governmental boundaries. She encouraged participants to access the NRDP web site at www.rur.dev.usda.gov/nrdp and to connect with SRDCs in their own state.

Ms. McSwain also highlighted the NRDP's Welfare Reform Task Force. This task force was established in 1997 to provide a forum for local, state, tribal, and federal government representatives, and private and non-profit sector members to exchange information about the impact of welfare reform in rural communities. She stressed that rural communities need a voice in national politics and that urban areas are more organized and seem to be more influential with legislators. As an example, she noted that the original TANF regulations did not involve a rural voice as part of its planning process. In response, the NRDP's Welfare Reform Task Force issued comments on the interim final regulations of the TANF legislation in conjunction with the Rural Policy Research Institute's Welfare Reform Task Force in March 1998.

April Bender, Facilitator for the Welfare To Work Technical Assistance Team, Partnerships for Quality in New York, shared information on several research initiatives conducted by Partnerships for Quality. Ms. Bender also shared an abundance of resource materials for participants that included information on "welfare reform as economic development" along with an integrated service strategy approach complete with models and supporting examples of successful practices from all over the country; information on providing a rural context for service integration that included examples of several states that have been awarded an ACF research grant to identify successful rural Welfare to Work strategies (IL, IO, LA, MD, MN, MS, MO, NY, VT, and WA); an example model (mentoring program) of how one county (Chautauqua County in New York) has responded to its rural child care needs; and she discussed case study findings (from Delaware County NY's *Best Program*) that were part of Partnerships for Quality's research on identifying promising and successful practices leading to client self-sufficiency.

The Partnership's research found that there are two underlying factors contributing to the gainful employment and success of welfare participants: attitude/motivation and self-esteem. The factors that appear to have the greatest influence on increasing motivation and self-esteem of the participant include:

- How agencies identify the needs of the recipients
- How agencies identify the needs of employers
- How agencies respond to those needs in the form of services and delivery strategies

Ms. Bender stressed that if these factors can be identified and evaluated, the specific type of barrier becomes less important to those agencies possessing the infrastructure necessary to successfully address any barrier related to achieving the goals of welfare reform. The common thread of success she stressed is to serve individuals one person at a time. A discussion ensued around the concept of staff (and employer) culture change and keeping staff, as well as clients, motivated and positive. Staffs' view of "barriers" as opposed to challenges was also discussed by the group. For more information, visit the NY State Welfare-to-Work Resource Network web site at www.nyswtwrn.com.

C. Building Partnerships in Rural Communities

The next session focused on the need to build partnerships and collaborate with stakeholders, including foundations, employers, and faith-based institutions across the service sectors.

Tom Jones, Director, Missouri Division of Workforce Development, discussed Missouri's experiences with building partnerships. He noted that MO has had a long history of partnership building that began even before the Joint Training Partnership Act (JTPA) was passed. Currently with the new Workforce Investment Act (WIA) legislation, MO has been active in obtaining an excellent mix of businesses, business associations, chambers of commerce, and other parties' involvement in many of their Workforce Development Boards. Mr. Jones emphasized the fact that employers are more willing to be flexible in working with welfare offices and will many times now offer to provide training to new employees because of the shortage of workers in today's economy. He felt that community colleges need to join in and be more responsive to the training/education needs of welfare clients. He also called for increased collaboration and partnering between national organizations such as American Public Human Service Administration (APHSA), National Governor's Association (NGA), National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), and others.

Mayor William Graham, Scottsburg, Indiana, described the successes the town of Scottsburg was able to achieve through partnership building. He shared with the group how the town went from being a community in danger of falling so far into economic decline that no business or employee would want to live there to the success it now enjoys. Mayor Graham described to the group how over 50% of the town's businesses were closed in 1988, and the town was in desperate need of a turnaround to attract employers and keep employees from moving out of the community. The town's first response to this “crisis” was to launch a community beautification campaign to clean up the community to make it more appealing for residents to both live and work there. He suggested that communities should approach community development from a business perspective. They should look into what it would take to attract both employers and employees to a community.

The town’s first collaborative process was to begin a manufacturer’s forum for businesses to meet weekly. They discussed issues at the forum that were important to the business community. Employee skills and skill gaps were examined in light of the current local population of job seekers. Businesses agreed to accept applicants with GEDs instead of only those with high school diplomas. They then partnered with local schools to ensure applicants were learning the proper skills needed for local jobs. Through the Scott County Learning Exchange, the county brought businesses into schools to work with students and sent students to actual job sites to learn about local businesses.

The Scott County Partnership was formed as part of the town’s partnership building efforts. The Partnership stressed education initiatives, quality of life initiatives, and workforce initiatives. Its mission is to ensure a competent, competitive workforce through local initiatives in education, training, and social services. Its emphasis is on cooperation, performance outcomes, and effective use of resources among businesses, schools, government, service groups, and community organizations. Currently the Partnership is made up of over twenty-five entities representing each of these key areas. Over the last five years the Partnership has achieved success in helping job seekers to find employment, increased career opportunity awareness for both educators and students, built strong partnerships in the community, helped many welfare recipients find jobs, and has helped to reduce welfare rolls.

Raymond Haddock, Division Administrator, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, provided the group with an overview of Oklahoma’s team approach to service delivery. He described how his agency has made strides to become a better partner internally before it began marketing itself as a partner in the community. His office has been working toward making the culture change needed to break down the old welfare office mentality that many staff members maintain. All the agencies departments (i.e., TANF, Food Stamps, Child Welfare, etc.) are being merged into one team that shares data and works closely together to serve families more efficiently. Mr. Haddock stressed that rural areas should not be specialized and treated differently the same way services in welfare offices should not be delivered separate from one another. Duplication of data collection is being eliminated whenever possible in favor of serving clients more comprehensively within the agency as a whole. He described a pilot site in one county in particular that has been successful in making this transition. The county struggled through the transition (losing several staff members) but now no longer uses terms such as “co-location” and “intake process”, and finds it is able to make process decisions much quicker regarding client services.

Mr. Haddock mentioned staff training when asked how the state was able to bring all staff members up to the same level in certain skill areas (i.e., substance abuse, domestic violence, etc.) that are part of client service delivery. Oklahoma started this training by acquiring case management training curriculum that APHSA has developed. APHSA staff members trained Oklahoma staff members in the early stages of this initiative. The state now conducts cross training and uses other methods to ensure that all team members on the staff are at the same skill level.

D. Meeting Child Care Needs in Rural Communities

Nancy Guy, Program Manager, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development, Research and Policy Unit, presented the findings from the Child Care Bureau's Leadership Forum during the working lunch session. Ms. Guy offered the group a snapshot of the realities of life in rural areas, economic issues facing rural communities, along with some recommendations and promising models.

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, the national average of the percentage of the rural population was 24.8%. Of the states represented at this workshop, the percentage was well over 30% on average with several at nearly 50%. The populations in these areas face such challenges as: lower numbers of employers, limited or no transportation, isolation of service providers, turf issues, and fewer resources overall. Rural areas have fewer child care workers and limited child care networks mostly due to the fact that they are so isolated. The national median hourly wage of child care workers as of 1998 was $6.61. In all but one of the states present at this meeting (Illinois), that wage was significantly lower. Other issues related to child care facing rural areas are the effects of state and/or county policies. These policies are many times applied the same way for urban areas as they are for rural ones. Rural areas have different child care needs that are not being addressed in most policies (e.g., seasonal work). During certain times of the year, more support is needed in rural communities for child care due to the increase in work demands on parents.

Based on the Forum's findings, Ms. Guy reported that more creative approaches to capital costs are needed; improved data analysis should be conducted on costs; and the low wages of providers need to be addressed. Funds could be better utilized if they are coordinated and involve major players in the community. Policy recommendations from the Forum included suggestions such as the establishment of an advocate with state legislatures, provision of child care development funds for construction, increased parent/provider outreach efforts, and improved collaboration with the Department of Agriculture. On cost recommendations, the Forum suggested states/counties identify rural employers to provide support, bring stakeholders together to partner, and identify other successful models.

Ms. Guy shared with the group several promising models for child care in rural America. Some of the models discussed included:

- T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship
- Project Reach, child care careers
- Head Start Expansion and Quality Improvement Funds

- Mentoring programs
- Use of telecommunications for training

Strategies for improved child care for rural America that Ms. Guy referred to the group included:

- Use state and federal funds to support training and education
- Create loan funds, special license plates, and child care license fees
- Create subsidy reimbursement policies that support quality and availability

A discussion on viewing child care development as economic development ensued following Ms. Guy's presentation. There is a need for more capital funds for construction of child care facilities nationwide. She described a program in Hazzard County North Carolina that actively supports this view and invests generously in capital development.

E. Economic and Community Development Strategies for Rural America

Rural areas often have limited employment opportunities, lower wages, and fewer job training opportunities. Rural workers are more likely to be underemployed and less likely to be able to improve their employment circumstances over time. The following presentations examined how rural communities can develop their economic situation.

Ben Kendrick, Rural Economic Development Specialist, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Office of Community Development, presented some of the innovative strategies Oklahoma has been using to promote economic and community development. His office is active in carrying out a unique community outreach methodology. A representative from the Office of Community Development meets with key community leaders and conducts a strategy session to identify ways to promote economic and community development. The approach involves several activities that begin with an assessment of a community's economic base. A town/community "walk around" is conducted in which an assessment of the local economic situation is made of the town/community. Using this base economic base determination, the Office of Community Development recommends technical assistance approaches. Tools, resources, and programs are then discussed in next steps. Most options recommended begin with a review of potential funding sources. Some of these funding sources, including the Federal Community Development Block Grant program and the Workforce Investment Act as well as many state grant programs (infrastructure funding, community development funding, venture capital funding, rural fire funding, etc.), are then discussed with community leaders seeking to develop their local economies.

Christine Mollenkopf-Pigsley, Associate Director of Economic Development and Program Manager of the Iowa Women's Enterprise Center, Institute for Social and Economic Development (IESD), shared information on how IESD is providing economic development assistance. ISED is a nonprofit business development organization providing start-up business training, capital access, and basic early support for economically disadvantaged individuals and micro-level businesses in distressed and urban areas. The program is funded by the Iowa Department of Human Services. ISED uses micro-enterprise as an anti-poverty strategy to build upon the unique ideas and skills of disadvantaged individuals and residents of economically distressed communities. The program empowers them to create their own economic opportunities and achieve self-sufficiency. ISED provides a comprehensive approach to business start-up that is structured to maximize successful outcomes. Participants develop a business plan that is realistic and feasible. The training program helps clients develop the personal skills required to be successful business owners and provides follow-up technical assistance to business owners. This follow-up may last as long as five years after the completion of the training, or the life of the business in order to increase the likelihood of its survival and success. In 1997, ISED also expanded services by including a job search component for clients that elect not to start businesses. In general the program is 13 weeks long and about 43% of original clients actually start or expand a small business. The program's main goal is to provide the needed training and technical assistance to clients to help them get started on their way to self-sufficiency by operating a small business.

Some of the challenges ISED foresees in the future include:

- Obtaining additional funding for technical assistance
- Broadening client eligibility and increasing capital available to clients
- Integrating existing small business owners on welfare-strengthening enterprises to the self-sufficiency level

F.	Domestic Violence in Rural America

Victims of domestic violence many times find themselves in vulnerable positions where existing danger is intensified by physical isolation, lack of local services, transportation, and weather issues. The following section highlights discussions held around the status of domestic violence in rural America in regards to serving TANF and low-income clients.

Anne Menard, Special Consultant on Violence Against Women, Office of Women's Health, Department of Health and Human Services, shared with the group an overview of domestic violence and its importance as an issue for county assistance offices; an overview of a national study that examined domestic violence within the context of the TANF program; and briefly discussed the need for proper staff training.

Ms. Menard began by pointing out that 95% of domestic violence victims are women and that county assistance offices need to be aware of the economic implications of domestic violence. Most women are economically dependent on their partner which makes it difficult to leave the relationship. The Family Violence Amendment (42 USC 602 (a)(7)) allows states to adopt a *Family Violence Option* (also called the Wellstone/Murray Amendment, section 402(a)(7) of the TANF Final Rule). This *Option* plays a significant role for welfare offices dealing with victims of domestic violence. In general, it allows states that are screening and identifying individuals receiving assistance and then referring these individuals to counseling and supportive services to waive requirements such as:

- Time limits (for so long as necessary) for individuals receiving assistance
- Residency requirements
- Child support cooperation requirements and
- Family cap provisions

Other provisions allow states to waive requirements to establish paternity and identify absent parents for purposes of child support collection if doing so would expose the custodial parent and/or children to potential abuse.

Ms. Menard then disclosed highlights of the findings from a recently released (June 2000) study examining the *Family Violence Option* entitled *Strategies for Addressing the Needs of Domestic Violence Victims Within the TANF Program: The Experience of Seven Counties.* The study was published by the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Ms. Menard, along with Jody Raphael of the Center for Impact Research, contributed to the report.

As part of this study, researchers visited seven counties in five different states. The sites examined included Anne Arundel County Maryland, Douglas and Multnomah Counties Oregon, Shawnee County Kansas, Orange County Florida, Denver County and City Colorado, and El Paso County Colorado.

The researchers conducted all-state surveys and site visits to determine answers to questions such as:

- Did states and localities adopt the *Family Violence Option*?
- What are they doing about domestic violence in TANF caseloads?
- How are they identifying clients for whom this is an issue?
- What are they using as screening tools?
- How are they getting clients to disclose their situation especially when many clients have good reasons to keep their abuse secret?
- What are they doing with and for clients who are identified at risk (i.e., do they simply exempt them from participation requirements, or do they offer some assistance that helps clients move toward both freedom from violence and self-sufficiency?)
- How does the incentive structure for frontline workers affect what actually happens in TANF offices?

One of the major findings of the study in the sites researchers visited was that a state or county's basic approach to TANF played a critical role in determining the nature and success of its approach to domestic violence issues. States and counties that had successfully instituted culture change policies in their welfare offices were having more success with domestic violence clients. This factor along with those that made strong advances in child support also had more success in serving domestic violence clients. Agencies that had effective screening tools in place for all barriers in general for hard-to-serve clients, along with committed leaders in their offices, usually fell into the same category in being more successful in serving clients dealing with domestic violence. Staff training was critical in all the sites visited. As could be expected, many sites experienced problems with staff turnover as many staff members did not want to conduct screening for domestic violence as part of their job.

Ms. Menard then described some of the training programs the researchers examined. They found a wide variance in the range of successes in most of the TANF offices researched. Some offices were teaching staff to use a flawed screening tool. They were having staff ask clients questions such as “Are you in a domestic violence situation?” Some clients may not realize that they are or may not want to disclose it so directly. Other states were training their staffs to conduct screening similar to the way police officers are trained. However, some states were more effective with their training. Oregon was found to have particularly effective screening questions. Pennsylvania has developed a domestic violence curriculum training program that it uses for case workers that includes guidelines for working with clients who are dealing with domestic violence.

Sharon Sigmon, Executive Director, Arkansas Coalition Against Domestic Violence, shared a local perspective on the status of domestic violence in Arkansas. Ms. Sigmon stressed that Arkansas is extremely rural and only has one major urban area- Little Rock. Many of the women who need help are separated from their neighbors and families because of where they live. Local law enforcement authorities are not always an option for many women due to concerns over confidentiality in such a small community. Although there are 75 counties in Arkansas, there are only 27 domestic violence shelters available throughout the state. Compounding the lack of shelters is the fact that Arkansas is the only state in the country that has no legislative funding allocated for victims of domestic violence. Due to the isolation of rural communities, these shelters offer the only hope for many victims of domestic violence. Ms. Sigmon emphasized that the key to being able to locate a shelter and obtain other needed assistance for many women is through the help of county TANF workers. She stressed that these workers need proper training and should be aware of the unique needs and concerns of rural victims of domestic violence. She encouraged all states to get involved with their state’s coalition against domestic violence.

Tiffany Carr, Director, Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, reinforced Ms. Sigmon’s emphasis on the unique needs and situations involving rural victims of domestic violence. Ms. Carr introduced the group to a multi-year statewide rural initiative by the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence that culminated in a manual entitled *Domestic Violence in Rural America, A Resource Guide for Service Providers.* The manual outlines specific steps to establishing community infrastructure and the provision of direct services in rural areas. What began as a statewide rural initiative for the establishment of victim services in five rural counties where limited or no services existed, has become a national community organizing model for creating coordinated community support. The project is funded through the Federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). To obtain copies of the manual, contact the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence at (850) 425-2749 or e-mail at tcarr-fcadv@worldnet.att.net.

Ms. Carr also stressed the importance of appropriate training of TANF staffs in domestic violence screening and referrals. The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence received a federal grant to develop a curriculum for staff training. Issues she highlighted included safety for staff, cultural issues, and the importance of TANF office administrators knowing how to work with state coalitions against domestic violence as well as local shelters. The curriculum is also available for distribution from the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Regarding additional resources, Ms. Carr mentioned the *Women's Rural Advocacy Programs* (WRAP). The WRAP is a collective of six offices serving six counties in southwestern Minnesota that advocates for domestic abuse victims. Each office has a web site with an abundance of different information and resources available including links to resources all over the country. The web site is located at www.letswrap.com/.

G. Providing Rural Transportation Alternatives

Transportation is frequently cited as one of the primary barriers to moving people from welfare to work. Rural areas, in particular, face many unique challenges in meeting transportation issues. Isolation and long distances between home, work, child care, and/or training and education courses pose major barriers to rural TANF clients. This section features a variety of insights from a state administrator (and policy maker) to insights from a transit provider (policy implementer) who is actually providing transportation services to clients.

Charles Carr, Manager, Public Transit, Mississippi Department of Transportation engaged the workshop participants in a dynamic discussion around the topic of transportation collaboration. He challenged the group to consider their own personal views of what public transit is and how it is used. He pointed out that public transportation meets basic transit needs and is paid for by everyone's taxes. A discussion ensued around how particular states at the workshop are collaborating effectively to provide transportation services for their communities. Mr. Carr then asked participants to describe the types of barriers they are facing and offered potential solutions or suggested strategies in response.

Funding was the number one challenge participants said they were facing. Mr. Carr pointed out that there are over 71 federal funding resources available. One major source of federal funding for rural transit that has increased significantly in the past year is the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). This is largely due to unmet transit needs that still exist in rural areas. The Community Transportation Association of America's (CTAA) winter 2000 issue of *Community Transportation* magazine featured a list of all the federal funding sources available for community transportation along with state funding comparisons and contact information. CTAA also has resource information available for non-traditional funds for community transportation that include several programs under TEA-21, loans and finance programs, local funds, foundation programs, and various other avenues for funding.

Collaboration issues were raised as the second challenge states expressed as a major barrier to effectively providing transportation services to clients. Suggested strategies included approaching state legislators to gain their support in mandating transportation coordination. Florida has successfully mandated transportation coordination for Medicaid and several other programs. Wisconsin has also made substantial headway in mandating its coordination efforts. Mr. Carr advocated that states formalize the collaboration process or they will have to rely on positive communication and committed leadership between different agencies and programs. Mississippi has no money set aside by the state legislature for transit but has been able to effectively collaborate. He credits this success to the positive communication that has taken place between the various transit providers. He emphasized that collaboration efforts will benefit transit and other providers greatly, and they are in everyone's best interest as human service agencies spend over $3 billion dollars annually nationwide on transportation.

Mr. Carr mentioned several resources available for assistance in obtaining funding sources and assistance in collaboration planning. These resources include:

- CTAA's National Transit Resource Center at www.ctaa.org/ntrc or 1-800-527-8279
- CTAA's *Managing Mobility* Technical Assistance Brief Series
- The Federal Transit Administration's web site at www.fta.dot.org/wtw
- CTAA's *Employment Transportation Toolkit* (A Department of Labor funded guide to help workforce development agencies access community transportation services for dislocated workers and other un or under-employed people.)

Collaboration at the federal level has been taking place between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Department of Labor (DOL). An Administration for Children and Families TANF Policy Announcement dated May 26, 2000, (No. TANF-ACF-PA-00-2) provides updated guidance regarding ways in which TANF, Welfare-to-Work, and Job Access funds can be used to help states and communities provide transportation services to eligible individuals. In addition, the DOT and DHHS are jointly developing a coordination resource, the *Transportation Coordination Toolkit*, to assist states and communities in their efforts to improve access to transportation services with special mobility needs. The resource guide will include a listing of over seventy federal programs in which some aspect of transportation services is an allowable use of funds. Specific details will be provided on twelve DHHS and eleven DOT programs that together provide almost $10 billion annually to assist transportation systems to provide trips for persons with special transportation needs. It will address specific information necessary to coordinate the transportation resources of various programs of DOT and DHHS. The toolkit is being prepared by the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) on behalf of DHHS and DOT. More information on the document is available at the CCAM web site at www.ccam.org.

Betty Green, Chief Executive Officer, RIDES Mass Transit District, provided an overview of her organization's successes in serving clients over the last 25 years. Rides

Mass Transit District, headquartered in Rosiclare, Illinois, is a public transit system providing service to nine counties in rural southern Illinois. The rural area it provides service to covers an area of over 3,300 square miles. The agency was honored at this year's CTAA national meeting, EXPO 2000, with the CTAA *Community Transportation System of the Year Award*. The agency's success in serving its rural clients relies on its combined ridership policy and its innovative use of funding streams. What began mainly as a van service for seniors is now a successful transportation service provider that provides service to seniors, Medicaid riders, childcare riders, job search riders, job training riders, and is even expanding into carrying local tourists. Partners involved with Rides include human services departments, Welfare-to-Work, Workforce Investment Boards, employers, social service agencies, and child care providers. Types of service offered to riders include existing route, extension of routes, and new routes.

Using its first FTA Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) grant, Rides has provided service to over 510 clients for new routes for employment, job training, childcare, and job searches. The agency now operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week in some counties to meet the needs of its Job Access clients. Rides has submitted its second JARC grant application and proposes to focus on service, training, and marketing in the coming year. Future plans call for Rides to implement new and expanded routes; concentrate more on training passengers, agencies, and employers regarding transportation issues and options; and to market the use of public transportation by TANF and low-income individuals as well as general public passengers.

Ms. Green commented that Rides has gained valuable knowledge regarding transportation issues related to TANF and low-income individuals. Highlights of these comments follow below.

<u>Problems Providing Service</u>

- Short notice requests for transportation
- Multiple employment sites (same employer but different locations-i.e., factory work)
- Multiple shift times (same location, different shift each day-i.e., fast food industry)
- Temporary jobs at numerous locations

<u>Passenger Problems</u>

- Frequent no-shows
- Lack of understanding by riders about public transportation and how it works
- Failure of passengers to notify dispatch offices regarding shift changes or pickup time changes
- Lack of completed schedule
- Passengers quit riding for no reason then reappear at a later date

<u>What Rides Has Learned</u>

- Partnerships with other Welfare-to-Work agencies are crucial to the success of any Job Access program
- Passengers found that free transportation was easy and did not want to pay once required to do so
- Educating passengers on transit use is key to their overall participation and making them responsible transit users
- Being flexible is important when dealing with clients moving from welfare to work as they change jobs and locations frequently
- Sustainable service must have sustainable funding when working with hard-to-place individuals

For more information on Rides Mass Transit District, visit its web site at www.rides.mtd.com.

Dave Avans, District Administrator, Tennessee Department of Human Services (TN DHS) briefly described Tennessee's *First Wheels* revolving loan program policy. The program is a collaboration between the TNDHS and the Tennessee Resource Conservation and Development Council. It allows all current and former Tennessee Families First customers an opportunity to apply for an interest free loan to purchase a dependable vehicle needed for transportation to work and/or training. Its goal is to provide basic transportation to clients in order for them to pursue self-sufficiency and improve the quality of life for their families.

H. Building Connections: Housing and Economic Development in Rural Areas

Affordable, quality housing is critical for community economic development and client self-sufficiency. Communities without adequate housing many times find it difficult to retain or attract new residents or businesses to the area. In response to the need for housing agencies and TANF agencies to work together, DHHS issued an Information Memorandum entitled *Guidance on Cooperation Agreements for Economic Self-Sufficiency Between Public Housing Agencies and State/Local TANF Agencies.* (No. TANF-ACF-IM-00-2 dated June 1, 2000) Rural areas face significant challenges in addressing housing and economic development issues. Rural areas have problems with the inadequacy and/or lack of current infrastructure and quality, affordable housing units. Low-income rental housing is much less available in rural areas as compared to urban areas. This next section offers insight into two local grass roots examples of effective housing and economic development strategies used by two rural communities.

Mayor William Graham of Scottsburg, Indiana, told the group about the town of Scottsburg's experiences with housing and community/economic development. The town realized several years ago that a potential problem was at hand when they found out many business owners and managers did not want to live in the community. The town formed the Scott County Housing Partnership and set out to improve the housing in their community. They conducted four different housing studies to determine the best way to fund community development efforts. They also spoke to the Federal Home Land Bank Office in Indianapolis in search of financial assistance. Through its various efforts, the town was able to secure a loan for $300,000 for community development. In forming an appealing community, the town wanted to mix neighborhoods according to income levels. The Scott County Housing Partnership studied planning models for affordable housing in Kentucky and Florida. The Seaside Florida Housing Project was especially helpful to the town's planners. This project included over 100 acres of affordable housing and helped the Partnership to realize the type of community it wanted. They also liked the Florida project's use of at-risk vocational technical (vo-tech) students involvement in housing construction. In Scottsdale, vo-tech students working for contractors built the last four houses that have been added to the community recently. The town was able to attract a hub office of the United Parcel Service (UPS) to its area as a result of additional homes it built. Scottsdale is currently now looking into assisted care and setting up nursing homes. Mayor Graham emphasized that the Partnership realizes there is a housing need in all communities for different phases of a community's economic development and growth.

William Bay, President, Impact Seven (I-7), Inc. (Wisconsin) presented to the group about his organization and the successes it has had in housing and economic development. Impact Seven, Inc., is a community development corporation that has been serving low-income residents in northwest Wisconsin for the past thirty years. Impact Seven was organized in 1970 by local citizens with a mission to have a comprehensive impact upon the population of Wisconsin with emphasis on the rural areas and less fortunate of Wisconsin. Some of the activities they are involved in are economic development, housing development, property management, and employment and training. I-7 has developed over $45 million in single and multi-family housing units with an emphasis on special needs populations such as the elderly, handicapped, and low-income individuals and families. I-7 and its subsidiaries own over 600 units and have been involved in the rehabilitation of over 1,100 units of low-income single family homes valued at nearly $11 million. Since 1981, I-7 has been recognized and received numerous national awards for its efforts as an effective and productive community development corporation funded by the federal government.

Mr. Bay reflected on the findings of Dr. Cornelia Flora, a former Kansas State University Professor, on the potential for failure or success of small towns. He commented that Dr. Flora's research is very accurate and in accordance with the experiences of I-7. Some of the highlights of this discussion follow below.

<u>Why Small Towns Grow or Die</u>

- Growing communities considered controversy a normal part of participatory government, while dying towns refused to address regulations, issues, and the people who made them.
- People in growing towns held an objective view of politics, while those in dying towns gave their loyalty to people over issues.
- Growing towns were willing to tax themselves, while dying towns were not.

- Growing towns had the ability to expand and had room for those new to the community, while dying towns were not willing to share power and certain groups held all the leadership.
- Growing towns were flexible and disbursed community leadership, while dying towns often looked to a few key individuals for leadership.

In regards to rural areas, two primary barriers to housing and economic development facing the low-income population that were discussed are: many rural areas do not have a physical infrastructure (i.e., sewer, water, septic systems, etc.), and the negative attitudes of "not in my backyard" regarding low-income housing and welfare reform in small communities.

Mr. Bay also shared with the group the success I-7 has had in its participation in the revitalization of a rural farming community of 625 people in Almena, Wisconsin. This initiative has become a national model of a public/private community economic development partnership to halt the decline and restore the vitality of a small rural community. In 1996, I-7 was selected by the National Preparatory Committee for Habitat II with the support of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for a National Excellence Award. The revitalization of Almena has become known as *The Almena Idea.*

The *Almena Idea* approached the goal of community revitalization by concentrating on and addressing three areas of special effort: (1) marketing, (2) infrastructural improvements, and (3) direct financial assistance to businesses with an interest in locating or expanding in Almena. In Almena, Wisconsin, I-7 aided the town's planners in partnering with the faith community to identify resident housing issues and barriers. As community buy-in increased, a public/private partnership was developed with the aim of diversifying the local economy, creating new job opportunities, and spurring private reinvestment in the community by attracting and coordinating local, state, and federal public development assistance. The group used the funding for marketing, infrastructural improvements, housing development, and financial assistance to businesses interested in locating in the community but lacking sufficient equity. *The Almena Idea* demonstrates that targeted financing and commitment can accomplish a great deal. Over the years, I-7 has helped to develop two industrial parks, complete a zoning project, stimulate the production of market-rate housing, develop low-income housing, revitalize and expand educational facilities, and encourage job creation through business development. The project has allowed millions of investment capital to be mobilized and targeted to the town of Almena; 22 business start-ups or expansions to occur; over 158 jobs to be created; and downtown traffic flow and demand for housing to be increased while local industry diversified and prospered.

III. Final Remarks

This Welfare Peer Technical Assistance workshop provided recipients with a wealth of information, innovative strategies, and practices for building successful partnerships and collaborations, strengthening economic and community development strategies, providing rural transportation alternatives, and building connections for housing and economic development in rural areas. In addition, participants gained insight into the status of welfare reform overall in rural America; rural child care challenges and some promising practices to meet the child care needs of rural communities; and a greater understanding of the realities of domestic violence in rural America along with research findings and various resources for TANF offices to respond to the needs of clients dealing with domestic violence.

In general, a review of participants' evaluation forms indicated that they were pleased with the amount of information shared, resources distributed, and regretted not having more time to dialogue with the various workshop presenters. Some of the key themes that emerged during the workshop follow below.

Key Workshop Themes

- The rural community needs a collective voice both locally and nationally to promote welfare reform at all levels.

- Each rural community is unique: Only the *context* of program ideas from one community to the next can be duplicated when examining "promising models."

- Change comes to rural communities by people *voluntarily* working together at the *local* level in partnerships.

- Culture change is needed in rural communities to change ways of thinking at all levels: TANF staffs, employers, and clients.

- Many states that have been successful in forming partnerships have formalized the collaboration process; some have even mandated it.

- Rural communities many times lack needed funding levels and must be creative in partnering, combining, and otherwise streamlining welfare services.

- Rural communities that get involved, work together, plan appropriately for the future, are willing to take risks, and obtain buy-in from key community leaders are most likely to be successful in their efforts at welfare reform and helping TANF clients attain self-sufficiency.

For more information about this event, or the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network in general, contact Blake Austensen at (301) 270-0841 or e-mail baustensen@afyainc.com.