

## **NEAN Energy Assistance Committee Meeting**

March 4, 2010

Participants: Carol Fritzler, April Gross, Shirley Niemeyer, Tammy Green, Cheryl Holcomb, Mary Beth Rathe, Mike Kelly and Sharon Jefferson.

Topic 1 – A joint project between Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and NEAN concerning ACCESSNebraska, Customer Service Centers and topics near and dear to NEAN was discussed. Brainstorm possible ideas for seminars/forums/panel presentations/webinars or other.

- Mike talked about the use of ACCESSNebraska to take applications, report changes and view benefits through the computer/website (some of these are not yet available on ACCESSNebraska). This was a very basic overview. Mary Beth Rathe said many of the community action agencies would get computers to help individuals in ACCESSNebraska.
- Mike talked about the Customer Service Centers and how they would be located in Lincoln, Fremont, Lexington and Scottsbluff. Local offices would remain staffed in many areas with reduced amounts of staff in the offices. Again, a very basic overview.
- Have ideas for seminars, forums, panel presentations turned into the committee by March 19 (Just do a reply all to this note with your ideas.
- Questions that you have about how to use ACCESSNebraska and the Customer Service Centers (CSC). One question that was asked was how the centers will be staffed. I tried to give a quick explanation about staff that do interviews, process cases, work with reported changes, etc. The individual would call the CSC number and would have a menu to select what they needed to talk about and depending on the choice they made, what type of individual they would be connected with on the phone. Another question was would the phone menu be bi-lingual? Have your questions to the committee by March 19. These questions then can be presented to Deb Steidley in advance so she will have topics to cover in her presentation in April.
- Another question was: Has Nebraska contacted other states that have this process to determine what the barriers are that face individuals using ACCESSNebraska and the CSCs? I did not know enough about this process to answer the question. Thought this may be something that Deb would address in April.

Topic 2 - Discussion of NEAN Energy Education plans for Get A Head Start on Energy Education webinar.

- Four webinars have been set up. They are scheduled for July 22, July 29, August 5 and August 12. They are to run from 10 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. – Central Time. At this time community action agencies will have the webinars available, however the Energy Education Committee would like to expand the availability to a broader area of agencies.
- Age groups that would benefit from these webinars would be high school to adults.
- Can CDs be used with the webinar?

Please submit your ideas or questions by March 19.

Submitted by Mike Kelly

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## Follow-up to NEAN Energy Assistance Committee Meeting

March 4, 2010

Comments — Ideas on DHHS Access Nebraska outreach collaboration with NEAN:

This is follow-up discussion on the topic:

Background:

At the Omaha metro area energy assistance meeting in February, we discussed a potential outreach project between DHHS, Nebraska Energy Assistance Network and others. This project would focus on the changes concerning ACCESSNebraska, the new customer service centers and other topics, especially those near and dear to NEAN and others in our metro committee.

NEAN Energy Assistance Committee asked for input:

1. Who should these outreach efforts be focused on and why?
2. Should we target the clients who will be accessing the system for benefits?
3. Should we target those agencies and organizations that work with these clients and who might be able to provide resources to assist?
4. What other topics should be included in these presentations/forums that would be relevant for the different targeted audiences.

This information will be shared at the April NEAN meeting where a larger brainstorming discussion will be held. A state representative will be attending that meeting to provide input and hear and discuss our ideas.

Following are some of the ideas, comments and suggestions received:

- There are families in the community who could benefit from accessing different resources, and who would not be considered eligible income-wise. I was approached by a young woman at the Young Professionals Summit who expressed some concerns that families who fit outside of the normal scope of assistance providers are excluded from existing services. I heard the discomfort in her voice from admitting that she needed help, but at the same time I heard her frustrations.
- When we focus on areas, I suggest that you consider a broader scope of eligibility when possible. If we must continue to ask for income guidelines, we may continue to screen using those criteria. If we are not limited to do so, I suggest that we move away from that and look at the entire family/individual need.
- Yes, we can include them (see question #2), but not be exclusive to them.
- Yes, (question #3) and include other agencies and organizations who are proactive in scope.
- Other topics to include in outreach: Career fairs and employment skills; clothing closets; financial education; food coop programs; activate Omaha; Healthy Homes Partnership
- Two target audiences:
  1. Clients receiving benefits ( invites would be sent using state mailing list?)
  2. Agencies, organizations, community-based organizations who work with clients who may be applying or currently receive benefits and those groups who may be willing to help in the effort (CAAs, libraries, utilities, churches, senior centers, funders, schools etc)
- Client audience — panel on NDHSS changes — time to get on line( bank of computers); energy resources (assistance, weatherization), community resources (United Way, food banks, housing assistance), home safety
- Agency audience — panel — changes on NDHSS — why and impact; available resources (NEAN's Get a Head Start on Energy), UW 211; energy resources; working with low-fixed income households

to apply for assistance; poverty simulation(?); and how can we become involved in the application change... PSAs, use of computers, tutors, etc.

- They would be held statewide at multiple locations.
- A planning committee would be formed with representatives from NDHSS, NEAN, CAAs, etc.
- May need to contract with event planner to assist with planning/logistics details
  - Along with panels/forums, a public awareness campaign would be developed. Possibly promote those agencies/organizations willing to participate with the new changes. Positive exposure for all
  - Video tape the presentation to post on-line and send to others who could not attend
- Funding: Does state have funding for this? If not, maybe NEAN funds (or members) or apply for grant.
- Mike Kelly's comments concerning a bank of computers for people to use: If DHHS did that, it would require IS&T involvement from our end and I am pretty sure we would not be able to get a commitment from IS&T to move a bank of computers around the state for these sessions. Plus, that would be very expensive and I do not know if you would be able to get both a time and dollar commitment for something like this. But I will let Deb look at these.

Submitted by:

Judi Martin