

Quarterly

Newsletter

FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By

Thomas M. Seilheimer
Middlesex County Department of
Human Services

"A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities; an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties," a philosopher observed. The Department of Human Services is maximizing opportunities in these very difficult economic times, and garnering marks of distinction while doing so, as we learn from reviewing the articles in this winter newsletter.

I must recognize the tireless advocacy for the homeless of the **Division of Social Work Services**, which championed the establishment of the Middlesex County Homeless Trust Fund by the Board of Chosen Freeholders. The fund will provide financial resources for affordable housing, supportive services, and prevention initiatives for the homeless. The Division staff has also been involved with a project to house homeless veterans in Highland Park, with the active support of the Middlesex County Veterans Advisory Council. The recent "Point-In-Time/Project Homeless

Connect" event, which aims to maximize federal funding opportunities for homeless housing is reviewed. A new PASP model, which converts service delivery to a self-directed cash model for disabled consumers is considered as well; County staff is working closely with the State to ensure the smooth transition of these services. Attention also is directed to "National Disability Employment Awareness Month," with Freeholder Blanquita B. Valenti strongly acknowledging the contributions to the workplace of persons with disabilities.

The **Division of Addiction Services** has presented and received honors. The Division presented Addictions Recovery Month Awards to individuals and organizations for their services to addiction recovery at a meeting of the Board of Chosen Freeholders. The Division's Middlesex Alliance Coordinator, Charoulla Castanos-Beaton, was elected Vice-President of the New Jersey Association of County Alliance Coordinators, and Donna Frandsen, Director of the Intoxicated Driver Resource Center was elected President of the Intoxicated Driver Resource Center Director's Association of New Jersey, both showcasing the Division's efforts at the State level. The Division also calls our attention to an important problem in this newsletter, the increasing use of recreational marijuana among older adults.

In the **Division of Behavioral Health & Children's Services**, there have been many diverse endeavors, including sponsorship of a Disaster Response Forum to train crisis counselors. The Office of Children's Services submitted a grant proposal to the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission to develop detention alternative programs for at-risk youth who do not pose a threat to public safety. The Office is an early participant in a Department of Children and Families needs assessment of the service needs of at-risk children and families. The Office presented, collaboratively, a conference on social justice, "Time for Change," which addressed significant, but frequently marginalized issues, including the growing South Asian Community in Middlesex County; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth; and minorities in education.

Being a Buffalo expat, I am naturally fond of the poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," in which Robert Frost wrote, "But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep." As we trudge through the snow and brave the winter cold, I remain continually impressed by the dedicated corps of staff and volunteers at the Department of Human Services, who strive diligently to fulfill the promise of delivering comprehensive social services to the most needy and vulnerable residents of Middlesex County.



MIDDLESEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS ESTABLISH HOMELESS TRUST FUND

**By
Bridget Kennedy, Director, Division
of Social Work Services**

At the Board of Freeholders meeting on November 23, 2009, the Middlesex County Homeless Trust Fund was approved and established. Middlesex County was the third County in New Jersey to establish such a fund. The legislation allowing counties to create these funds had been signed into law by former Governor Jon Corzine earlier in the fall. The legislation allows the collection of a \$3 surcharge on most documents registered with the County Clerk's Office, with exceptions that include filings of veterans' discharge papers, and legal documents regarding foreclosures.

While Middlesex County may have been the third County in the State to pass the Homeless Trust Fund, it will be the first County to actualize it, according to Middlesex County Clerk, Elaine Flynn, who has been contacted by her counterparts in other counties regarding implementation. County Counsel, the County Comptroller and County Clerk were all involved in establishing the procedural and administrative steps necessary to create the Trust Fund. The collection of funds will commence early this year, allowing sufficient time for the County Clerk's Office to notify those affected, and the Comptroller to set up the required account. The County Clerk's staff has estimated that even in the present poor economic environment, proceeds into the Homeless Trust Fund could exceed \$300,000 a year.

The State legislation governing County Homeless Trust Funds is very specific regarding the disbursement of these funds. Specific uses include: rental assistance vouchers that provide permanent affordable housing for homeless persons or families; supportive services to assure that homeless persons or families can maintain permanent housing; and prevention services for those at risk of losing their permanent housing. The legislation also requires the appointment of a Homelessness Task Force to advise the County on the expenditure of the funds. The Task Force membership must include: a County representative; representation from the three municipalities with the highest homeless populations; a representative from the entity charged with implementing the County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness (i.e., Coming Home of Middlesex County, Inc.); three agencies serving the homeless; and at least three homeless or formerly homeless persons.

As of February 2010, six counties have set up Homeless Trust Funds. They are in order of their passage: Passaic, Union, Middlesex, Bergen, Somerset, and Hudson. In all six cases, not a single freeholder voted against the Trust Fund. These counties understand the important social and economic implications of reducing and eventually eliminating homelessness.

**“BRING THEM HOME TO HOMES”
GROUNDBREAKING
HELD IN HIGHLAND
PARK**

Sunday, January 31, 2010, marked the groundbreaking ceremony for the “Bring Them Home to Homes” project in Highland Park. The genesis of this initiative was the demonstrations held monthly in Highland Park protesting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; however, unlike the anti-war protests of the Vietnam era, the demonstrators decided to do something positive to welcome today’s veterans home. Rev. Seth Kaper-Dale, of the Reformed Church of Highland Park, who was working on a project to assist young women transitioning out of the Department of Youth and Family Services foster care program, asked why there were not as many young men in this transition phase; the answer astounded him: they join the military.

From these differing arenas came a Veterans Conference at the Reformed Church in the summer of 2008, where “Bring Them Home to Homes” was born. The project faced numerous obstacles, including where to locate this housing. Pastor Seth noticed that All Saints Episcopal church a block away was vacant, and, after investigations and negotiations with the Episcopal Diocese, acquired the property through the Reformed Church of Highland Park Affordable Housing Corporation. Now the project had a site.



Site of the “Bring Them Home to Homes” project in Highland Park

A funding package was devised, including over \$1.1 million from Middlesex County [\$700,000 from the County's Housing First Capital Fund and \$400,000 from the County federal HOME account]. Other partners included New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency's Special Needs Housing Trust Fund; the VA's Homeless Domiciliary Program at Lyons; and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey/Behavioral Health Care, as the service provider.

The final and possibly most difficult hurdle was approval by the Highland Park Zoning Board. Although the Board was receptive to the project, the public initially was not. Members of the Middlesex County Veterans Advisory Council (MCVAC), a component program of the Middlesex County Department of Human Services, volunteered to attend and testify at the many public hearings before the Zoning Board. MCVAC members also got the word out to other veteran organizations, which rallied in support of the program.

This brings us back to the groundbreaking. Since much of the façade, structure, architectural features, and a beautiful two story stained glass window will be preserved and incorporated into what will be an 11 unit building, there were no shovels involved in the ceremony. Instead, a symbolic procession was held. Some of the church's sacred vessels were carried into the sanctuary, along with a table, which was set with a tablecloth, dinner plates and utensils, a vase with flowers and two chairs, indicating the change from a church home to an actual home.

Dignitaries, partners, and veterans spoke passionately of their feelings for family members who have served or are serving in the military, and how important this project is to paying back

the debt all Americans owe those who serve and protect the freedoms we enjoy. Among the speakers were Freeholders Blanquita B. Valenti and Mildred Scott. Both expressed their pride in Middlesex County's involvement and how important this project is to providing homeless veterans with an opportunity to reintegrate into a peaceful and supportive community.

WHAT IS "POINT-IN-TIME/PROJECT HOMELESS CONNECT"?

**By
Harriet Slonim, Social Work Services
Planner**

In conjunction with the annual nationwide Homeless Count, and as a prerequisite for Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care funding, the Middlesex County Housing Continuum of Care Committee (MCHC³) carried out its annual "Point-in-Time" survey and "Project Homeless Connect" on January 27th. The objective is to determine the number of homeless persons in Middlesex County. The data collected allow the Middlesex County Department of Human Services and Coming Home of Middlesex County, Inc. to support requests for funding for housing and services for this exceptionally "at risk" population.

Coming Home of Middlesex County, under the Leadership of Executive Director Bob Stewart, is the 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization incorporated in 2009 to work towards the eradication of homelessness in the County. Its mission is to implement the Middlesex County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness by establishing a single point of entry into the system, creating 520 units of permanent affordable and supportive housing in the next ten years,

economic opportunities, and preventing homelessness.

Membership of the MCHC³ includes government agencies, non-profit agencies and advocates for the homeless, along with representatives of the low-income and homeless populations of Middlesex County. All coordinated services provided to the homeless populations of Middlesex County are initiated through the efforts of the MCHC³.

The Point-in-Time is a two-part endeavor:

Agency Outreach: The MCHC³ forwards survey forms in advance to homeless provider agencies. The agencies have their clients complete them (if they know they will be homeless on the count day) and input the data into a prearranged online site and link.

Street Outreach: Teams of volunteers are sent to sites to complete surveys where homeless people are known to congregate. Other volunteers input the data from the surveys.

Project Homeless Connect takes place in concert with the Point-in-Time to provide services to the homeless at sites known to and easily accessible to the homeless during certain hours. This year, the sites were Elijah's Promise, at 18 Neilson Street in New Brunswick (11 am through 8 pm); and Salvation Army (11 am through 7 pm), at 433 State Street in Perth Amboy. Homeless individuals walk in, are surveyed by volunteers, receive information on how to access much needed services, such as housing, food stamps, and receive free community services, such as eye screenings, etc. The data from these surveys are also inputted into computers by volunteers.

Both the volunteer street outreach teams and volunteers at the Project Homeless Connect sites provide the homeless with snacks and "incentives," such as hygiene kits, socks, blankets, etc. as a "thank you" for filling out the surveys. These items are donated by various organizations for this purpose.

Please be aware that an individual can be working and homeless. There are many circumstances that can create a "homeless" situation, such as the lack of "affordable housing," working at minimum wage, etc.

Once the data from the surveys are compiled, an accurate "snapshot" of the number of homeless, the causes of homeless, the types of homeless, etc., becomes clearer. This information is then used to fill in gaps in services and to mitigate obstacles to housing. The 2010 survey data should be available by mid-march.



Respondents gather for Point in Time survey at Elijah's Promise.

Additional information regarding the 2010 Point-in-Time/Project Homeless Connect, including the surveys, flyers, etc. can be accessed at www.middlesexPITC2010.com.

If you are interested in donating your time next year (January 2011) or you have information on pockets of homeless are in Middlesex County,

please contact Harriet Slonim at harriet.slonim@co.middlesex.nj.us.

NEW BENEFIT FOR “GRAY AREA RESERVISTS”

**By
Doug Breen, Veterans Services
Coordinator**

“Gray Area Reservists,” the name given to United States Armed Forces National Guard and Reserve retirees who have not yet attained the age of 60, will soon qualify for an outstanding new health care benefit.

Tentatively called TRICARE Retired Reserve, the program was authorized under provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act for 2010. Retired reservists will now be able to purchase TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra health care coverage for themselves and their dependents. The new benefit is a significant and major departure from the status quo, because Gray Area Reservists formerly were not eligible for TRICARE coverage until age 60, and because there are no exclusions in this coverage based on pre-existing medical conditions. The new provision will require extensive design, development, and testing. Qualified veterans, however, should anticipate being able to purchase coverage by late summer or early fall of this year. Premiums, co-payment rates, and catastrophic cap requirements are still under review, but the legislation requires that the premiums must equal the full cost of the coverage. In other words, it will not be subsidized, but rates should still be less than comparable plans offered by private insurers. .

The bottom line is that while there are still many questions about the program, and many specifics about coverage need to be hammered out, the program itself is a very welcome and well deserved addition to the package of retired veterans’ benefits. Its approval is certain to add to the ongoing debate about veterans’ health care in general. Veterans are urged, consequently, to stay current on all pending legislation that could potentially impact them. To find out more about the program, go to www.tricare.mil.

MCVAC SPONSORS ANNUAL MEMORIAL DAY FLAG DISTRIBUTION

**By
Doug Breen, Veterans
Services/Interment Coordinator**

The Middlesex County Veterans Advisory Council (MCVAC) will sponsor its annual Memorial Day Flag Distribution on May 17th, and 18th, 2010, between the hours of 10 am and 3 pm, at the Middlesex County Fire Academy, located at 1001 Fire Academy Drive in Sayreville. More than 40,000 flags and markers will be distributed to veterans’ organizations representing every community in Middlesex County. Members of these organizations, along with church groups, Boy and Girl scouts, individuals, and civic organizations will then ensure that every known veterans gravesite in the County is identified with an American Flag.



County sponsored Memorial Day activities will culminate on Friday, May

28th, and Saturday, May 29th, when 237 commemorative wreaths will be distributed to municipal organizations for community Memorial Day activities around the County.

Because our older veterans are passing away at an ever accelerating rate, and volunteers are always stretched thin, it is possible that some deserving gravesites may not have received flags in the past. If you are aware of any veterans' gravesites that have not received a flag, please bring this to the attention of local Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and Vietnam Veterans of America post commanders, so that they can ensure that proper honors are rendered.

For more information on the distribution schedule, or to find out how to register your organization for flags, please contact Doug Breen, Veterans Services/Interment Coordinator, at 732-745-4051.

GOVERNOR CORZINE SIGNS PASP LEGISLATION

**By
Debbie Hehir, PASP Coordinator**

Prior to leaving Office, Governor Jon Corzine signed legislation that will dramatically change the New Jersey Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP), converting service delivery to a Cash Model. For well over a decade, persons with disabilities advocated for this change to a much more consumer-driven program.

The legislation was signed on November 20, 2009 and must now make its way to the New Jersey Register for a ninety-day public comment period.

In addition to providing services in a new consumer-directed manner, other significant changes include an increase in the age cap for the program, a raise in reimbursement rates and revisions to the cost-share scale.

Counties will gradually phase-in their consumers to this new program over the course of an expected two-year time period. The start of the phase-in to the new model is anticipated for late spring/early summer 2010.

The State training vendor, Community Access Unlimited (CAU), will provide numerous and multi-faceted training assistance to consumers and counties to make the switch a success. Recent CAU offerings include a Webinar, regional training and an updated Web site chock-full of information.

Further, County Coordinators and the State Division of Disability Services are working collaboratively on this shift in service delivery. The State will be offering a user friendly Consumer Guidebook and other materials to aid Counties and consumers alike.

We in the forefront of the changes expect the conversion to work well and have already implemented many steps to ensure a smooth, effective transition to the Cash Model. Our Middlesex County consumers know that we are committed to helping them make the change a success.



SPEAK UP: OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY IS LISTENING

The United States Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and its Federal partners will hold Listening Tours across the country on employment issues. These listening sessions are an opportunity for the public to provide input to senior Federal officials on their ideas for more effective ways to facilitate the employment of all people with disabilities.

Six cities have been selected to host the tours and residents of surrounding states are invited to attend. Comments are also accepted via the Web site, USPS and fax. Information is posted at www.disabilitylisteningtour.com.

Consumers, Disability, Advocacy and Service Provider Organizations, and public and private employers are especially encouraged to attend.

Kathleen Martinez, U.S. Department of Labor Assistant Secretary, is spearheading the 2010 Tour to gain insight and gather data on both barriers and best practices in the following three areas:

Effective strategies to increase the employment of women, veterans and minorities with disabilities.

Identification of Federal and State systems that are successfully collaborating to achieve employment for people with disabilities.

The top three issues on which the Federal government should focus to support an increase in labor force participation of people with disabilities.

In her open invitation letter, Ms. Martinez, states, "these Listening Sessions are absolutely critical to creating new strategies for workers with disabilities to successfully compete for, retain, and advance in good jobs."

With the twentieth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act looming, the employment rate of people with disabilities remains consistently low. The recession hit persons with disabilities especially hard with unemployment rates of 16.1%.

A true recovery from the recession must include the participation of people with disabilities in sustainable jobs. Innovative and practical ideas to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities are needed now more than ever. We urge you to take the time to provide constructive comments and suggestions.

DISABILITY CELEBRATIONS AND ISSUES

By
***Judy Cusumano, Director, Office for
the Disabled***

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DISABILITY

On December 3rd every year, International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD) is celebrated worldwide recognizing the achievements and contributions of people with disability. IDPwD was established in 1992 by the United Nations General Assembly, at the conclusion of the United Nations' Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992), to promote awareness of disability issues and the abilities of people with a disability. IDPwD brings together people with disabilities and the general community

to promote a positive image of people with disabilities, while showcasing the skills, abilities, contributions and achievements of people with disabilities. This helps to involve the broader community in activities with persons with disabilities to celebrate and raise awareness of IDPwD.

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This celebration was started in 1945 when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year "national Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." This celebration was an effort to educate the American public about issues related to disability and employment. In 1962 the word physically was removed to acknowledge the employment needs of persons with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to "National Disability Employment Awareness Month."



Left to right: Judy Cusumano, Freeholder Blanquita B. Valenti, and Anita Clavering receiving proclamation.

On October 15, 2009, Anita Clavering, representing the Middlesex County Commission for Persons with Disabilities, accepted a proclamation from the Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders declaring October as National Disability Awareness

Month. Freeholder Blanquita B. Valenti acknowledged the contributions of persons with disabilities in the workplace and in her remarks also noted, "Continued efforts are required in order to fully assure that all persons with disabilities may use their legal rights as they strive to achieve their full potential."

ANNUAL HOLIDAY SHOPPING EVENT

The Annual Holiday Shopping Day for persons with disabilities was held on Tuesday, December 1, 2009 at the Brunswick Square Mall, from 10 am to 2 pm. This is an event that both shoppers and staff look forward to every year with high spirits.

The Middlesex County Department of Human Services, Middlesex County Area Transit, and the Interfaith Network of Care sent volunteers who assisted nine shoppers with holiday shopping and gift wrapping. The following volunteered for the shopping event: Beverly Briggs, Christine Gasiewski, Theresa German, Leslie Gordon, Chris Gregis, Debbie Hehir, Kelly Lennon, Shirley Lowe, and Nancy O'Rourke.

The Brunswick Square Mall has always been very supportive and accommodating with this activity. As in years past, Middlesex County Area Transit contributed greatly by providing transportation.

PAY ATTENTION TO SNOW REMOVAL LAW

During the winter months years back, people who used wheelchairs and walkers for mobility had to negotiate, at risk to their safety, around dangerous icy ramps, snow covered curb cuts and accessible parking spaces filled with plowed snow.

In 1999, P.L. Chapter 182, (N.J.S.A.39:4-207.9), also known as the "Snow Removal Law," was signed into law. It requires owners and operators of parking lots to remove snow, ice and other obstructions from accessible parking spaces, accessible aisles, ramps, along with other improvements to provide accessibility for persons with disabilities. Owners and operators were told to remove the snow and ice within 48 hours of occurrence or be fined \$200 to \$500.

Please be advised that The Snow Removal Law Section 1 of P.L.1999, c.182 (C.39:4-207.9) is amended. The owners and operators must **now** remove the snow and ice **within 24 hours** of occurrence or be fined **\$1,000** for each occurrence.



The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities and other disability advocacy groups were instrumental in the Snow Removal Law's passage and have been working to inform businesses of their obligation under it.

Municipal police departments' enforcement of this law ensures that in inclement weather, access to and from parking spaces, curb cuts and ramps is not hampered for persons with disabilities.

PERSPECTIVES FROM A GRADUATE INTERN

By
Teresa German, MSW
Intern/Eagleton Fellow

As an MSW candidate and an Eagleton Fellow, I am really enjoying my internship at the Middlesex County Department of Human Services (MCDHS). I am being exposed to governmental processes that I had very little insight into prior to being here. Everyone I've met thus far has been friendly, interested in what I'm doing, and willing to help me.

During the fall semester, I had the opportunity to work on three projects as well as participate in and attend strategic meetings. First, I worked on a project for the initial annual meeting of Coming Home of Middlesex County, Inc., which is a non-profit corporation whose mission is to mitigate homelessness in Middlesex County through the implementation of the County's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Second, I reviewed all the County's priority populations' plans, the end product of which is a report comparing and contrasting the documents and resultant programs, in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of all the plans. This was a great introduction to the MCDHS. It gave me background knowledge to use when I attend committee meetings.

And last but not least, there is the Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC) Community Grant Review Panel. I participated as an acting staff member on this panel that reviews and scores the community service grants for the HSAC. It was an extremely valuable experience for me because I hope to manage a non-profit someday. Participating on this panel gave me a snapshot of the programs that are in existence, how the community perceives the programs, the best ways to respond to grant applications, what the needs of the community are, the true expenses of

various programs, and who other funders are. Aside from that I reviewed grants previously, enjoyed it, and always hoped I would have another opportunity.

I should also mention that I have a dedicated and informed supervisor, Bridget Kennedy, and am looking forward to what lies ahead in the Spring Semester.

ADDICTIONS RECOVERY MONTH AWARDS PRESENTED

**By
Elliot White, Director, Division of
Addiction Services**

For the second year, the Middlesex County Division of Addiction Services, in cooperation with the Providers Association of Counselors of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse services and the Local Advisory Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, presented its Recovery Month awards. These awards are presented to the individuals and agency that have demonstrated exemplary work in the field of addictions recovery during the previous year. The award presentation, which took place on November 23, 2009, has become and will continue to be an annual event.

The recipients for 2009 were:

**Individuals
Mr. George Berry, New Brunswick
Mr. Jim Foy, New Brunswick.**

Mr. Berry was nominated by the Middlesex County Division of Addiction Services. Mr. Foy was nominated by the Open Door, Inc, where he is employed as an addictions counselor.



**Jim Foy accepts Recovery Month award
from Freeholder Blanquita B. Valenti.**

**Agency
New Hope Foundation, Inc., Marlboro,
New Jersey**

The New Hope Foundation is the Counties largest sub-grantee, providing Addictions treatment (28 day) and Detoxification services.

MARIJUANA AND THE OLDER ADULT

**By
Roger Keaton, Addiction Services
Planner**

After years of abstinence, individuals in their 50's and 60's have started to rifle through junk drawers for roach clips and rolling paper.

According to the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, almost six percent of all adults between the ages of 50 and 59 reported smoking marijuana recreationally in the past year. That's up from three percent five years earlier. Meanwhile, the number of recent users over the age of 50 has climbed to 2.65 million people nationwide (all indications are that the numbers could be higher because they are based on self-reporting). It has also been reported,

that there are as many “Baby Boomers” using marijuana as high school students.

For various reasons, including divorce and retirement, there has been an increase in the number of “resumers.” Resumers are individuals who used previously and after numerous years and circumstances have resumed their addiction. Whatever the cause, older adults seem to be using marijuana now more than ever. People are still apprehensive about the public face of marijuana use, however, another reason why overall numbers could be higher. With that said, reports indicate that the experience of smoking itself is not perceived in this age group as causing any paranoia or anxiety; many folks claim a state of calm and serenity in marijuana that was lacking in their youth.

This addiction is not without risk. Some clinical evidence suggests that the greatest danger faced by boomers who use marijuana is heart disease. Getting high can increase your heart rate by 40 beats per minute and cause unusual blood pressure fluctuations, which may in turn temporarily boost the odds of a heart attack. A 2008 paper published in the American Heart Journal takes these findings a step further: as the results of studying a small group of individuals, the study found that marijuana users were significantly more likely to die from cardiovascular distress or other problems than those who didn't use illegal drugs.

In fairness, there are other studies and theories based on evidence that show the drug can be used to assist some folks with various medical problems, including the nausea and unintentional weight loss of chemotherapy, the pain and spasms of Multiple Sclerosis, and with Glaucoma and Parkinson's Disease, among other illnesses.



In view of the increased recreational use of marijuana by 50 to 60 year olds, there is an apparent need to develop and implement new prevention and intervention programs targeted at the elderly

who are at risk, and will soon be a sizable population.

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY
ALLIANCE
COORDINATOR
ELECTED ASSOCIATION
VICE-PRESIDENT**

**By
Roulla Castanos-Beaton, Middlesex
County Alliance Coordinator**

Middlesex County Municipal Alliance Coordinator, Roulla Castanos-Beaton, was recently elected Vice President of the New Jersey Association of County Alliance Coordinators. The purpose of the Association is to provide a forum for the 21 County Alliance Coordinators to share and exchange information and ideas; promote communication between the Association and Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, legislative (both State and Federal), governmental agencies and the public; provide coordination of efforts for the Municipal Alliance Network throughout the State of New Jersey, while striving for effective Alcohol/Drug Abuse Education and Prevention Programs. Roulla previously held the Association Treasurer position.

The Municipal Alliance Committees (MAC's) are linked to the county system for planning alcoholism and drug abuse services. Each county maintains a Local Advisory Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (LACADA) to determine and plan the alcoholism and drug abuse services that it needs. The MAC's present their prevention proposals to their respected County Alliance Steering Subcommittees (CASS) of LACADA.

Each CASS reviews the proposals submitted by the municipalities in the county and develops a County Alliance Plan. This plan is coupled with the county's comprehensive alcoholism and drug abuse services plan, and is then submitted to the county Freeholders and the state Division of Addiction Services. Each County Alliance Plan, as a single entity, is submitted to the Governor's Council. The Request for Funding Proposal (RFP) Committee reviews every County Alliance Plan to ensure it meets the programmatic and fiscal criteria developed by the New Jersey Governor's Council.

The State and county governments provide professional staff to guide the volunteer LACADA's and MAC's through the planning process. Each county has a coordinator who facilitates its LACADA planning work. An Alliance Coordinator (reporting to the County Coordinator) guides the MAC prevention efforts through the CASS. County Alliance efforts are coordinated by a State Alliance Coordinator and monitored by the Governor's Council. Governor's Council staff also provides technical assistance. This system integrates prevention planning at the municipal, county and state levels.

The Alliances are also encouraged to collaborate with Human Service Advisory Councils and County

Interagency Coordinating Councils to identify resource needs for youths in high-risk environments.

Middlesex County currently has 23 active Municipal Alliance Committees. There are over two hundred substance abuse education and prevention programs provided to local communities on an annual basis. These programs include Project Graduation, Every 15 Minutes, Heroes and Cool Kids, Peer Leadership, after school programs, DARE, Forest Friends, Footprints, Strengthening Families, BABES, Senior Citizen Education Programs, Community Newsletters, Parenting Workshops, Recreation Workshops/Activities and Summer Programs.

For additional information on the Municipal Alliance Program, contact Roulla Georgiou at 732-745-4065 or charoulla.georgiou@co.middlesex.nj.us

EDISON MUNICIPAL ALLIANCE/YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION PROMOTES F.U.N.

By

Lisa Gulla, Edison Municipal Alliance Coordinator (Note: an article in a series by Municipal Alliances Coordinators)

The Edison Municipal Alliance and Youth Services Commission are proud to announce that they will celebrate their first Strengthening Families Program (SFP) Graduation Ceremony. The Edison SFP, which has been designated Family Unity Nights (F.U.N.), was implemented in 2009 in 2 of Edison's 11 elementary schools. The Fall/Winter session had three programs with six families in each. Two general programs were run simultaneously and one Bilingual Spanish program (comprising families from three schools) is still underway. The graduation ceremony

for the two general programs takes place on January 25, 2010.



Strengthening Families is a highly effective, evidence-based parenting and family skills program that encourages communication and bonding. Activities as families included creating a "Thanksgiving Tree," where each child made leaves expressing thanks for various aspects of family life, and a marshmallow event, where the children created objects from marshmallows and toothpicks, while the parents sat nearby offering support and praise.

Graduates of the Edison F.U.N. program were proud of their achievements, but sad to see the program end. Most of them have asked to reenroll in the program's next session.

Anyone interested in more information regarding the Edison F.U.N. program should contact the Edison Municipal Alliance/Youth Services Commission at 732-248-7361.

DONNA FRANDSEN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF IDRC ASSOCIATION

**By
Roberta Scott, Social Worker**

Donna Frandsen, Director of the Middlesex County Intoxicated Driver Resource Center (IDRC), was elected in January to be President of the Intoxicated Driver Resource Center Director's Association for the year 2010. The IDRC Director's Association

acts to support legislation affecting drinking and driving laws in New Jersey, and interfaces with the Intoxicated Driving Program (IDP) in Trenton to establish better treatment practices for the DWI client. The Association membership includes representatives from 21 New Jersey Counties. It was established as a professional organization dedicated to the protection of the motoring public and to the deterrence of drinking and driving. Previously, Ms. Frandsen was Vice-President of the Association.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH BOARD SEEKS MEMBERS

**By
Lori Dillon, Director, Division of
Behavioral Health & Children's
Services**

The Middlesex County Mental Health Board is seeking members who reside in Middlesex County, and have an energetic and knowledgeable interest in mental health and wellness. The Mental Health Board is an advisory committee comprising dedicated volunteers who provide public leadership for the County in the area of mental health services.

In partnership with the Middlesex County Division of Behavioral Health & Children's Services, the Middlesex County Mental Health Board plans, monitors, and promotes mental health services and community education with a focus on recovery awareness, cultural competence and ending stigma.

The Board's fiscal responsibilities include review, recommendation and on-site monitoring of State and County funded mental health services.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Middlesex County Mental Health Board is to promote efforts that will enhance the wellness and recovery opportunities of consumers. The Board will advocate for consumer driven community supports, services and best practices throughout the continuum of care. The Board is dedicated to consumer empowerment, ending stigma and educating the community on all aspects of mental health awareness.

***Empowerment * Advocacy *
Education * Wellness &
Recovery
Hallmarks of the Middlesex
County Mental Health Board***

Middlesex County Mental Health Board meetings take place on Monday evenings at 6 pm. A light dinner is served. To apply for Board membership, please email lori.dillon@co.middlesex.nj.us or penny.grande@co.middlesex.nj.us or call 732-745-4518. An outline of the Middlesex County Mental Health Board's inspiring *Guiding Principles* follows.

Guiding Principles

A Consumer Focused, Recovery Oriented Mental Health System

We value a mental health service delivery system that:

- Is consumer focused;
- Offers the wellness & recovery model throughout the continuum of care;
- Supports consumers in their transition to wellness;
- Looks holistically at the overall needs of the individual and empowers persons in recovery to make purposeful choices that lead to a more satisfying and healthy lifestyle;
- Is community based;
- Prioritizes recovery awareness, prevention, cultural competency & de-stigmatization;
- Includes psycho-educationally based family services as

an essential element in mental health services.

**Fostering Collaborative Partnerships:
Consumer/Family/Provider**

Mental Health Community Involvement

It is our expectation that input from individuals and families affected by mental illness and their advocates will be included in all phases of administration, planning, decision making, implementation, and monitoring of the overall mental health system. We fully support and value a strong consumer presence and voice.

Comprehensive, Accessible and Inclusive Services & Supports

We are committed to improving the quality of life for residents of Middlesex County through a comprehensive, inclusive, integrated, community based system of mental health services & supports accessible to all residents of the County.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is a vital part of service delivery. Mental health services should be flexible and responsive to the diverse population of Middlesex County, with access to bilingual / bicultural care available to people of all backgrounds.

Evidence Based Best Practices

Our mental health system must embrace evidence based and best practices that promote wellness throughout the continuum of care, and should be driven by outcome measures and consumer satisfaction.

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH &
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
CO-SPONSORS
DISASTER RESPONSE
FORUM**

By

Penny Grande, Mental Health Services Planner, and Lori Dillon, Director, Division of Behavioral Health and Children's Services

The Middlesex County Division of Behavioral Health & Children's Services

serves as the local coordinator of the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management's mental health response. In the event of a declared disaster or incident affecting the community, the Division is responsible for the deployment of local certified crisis counselors. Within 48 hours of the devastating earthquake in Haiti, a skilled cadre of certified counselors were activated to outreach to the Haitian community in Middlesex County, and to offer assistance.

In order to be ready for such events, the Division supports training workshops and conferences to ensure that local responders are certified and appropriately credentialed to respond to the needs of the community.

A highly successful **"Best Practices Forum for Disaster Response Crisis Counselors (DRCC's)"** was held on January 11, 2010, at the Middlesex County Fire Academy in Sayreville, in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services Disaster and Terrorism Branch, and the Mental Health Association in New Jersey. All certified Middlesex County DRCC's were invited to attend. Invitations were also extended to DRCC's from neighboring counties.

The forum included refreshers on **"Psychological First Aid,"** an evidence-informed approach to assist children, adolescents, adults and families in the immediate aftermath of a disaster; and the **"Incident Command System,"** which allows personnel from a variety of agencies to rapidly meld

into a common management structure in the event of a disaster or large scale emergency. Both courses are required for initial certification of DRCC's.



An experimental drill exercise took place in the afternoon with a review of safety and wellness practices. Throughout the day, photo ID's were taken and distributed to nearly 40 DRCC's.

Looking ahead, a series of trainings for DRCC's is planned and will be held at the Middlesex County Fire Academy. Details are as follows:

- ***January 27, 2010: "Introduction to Disaster Mental Health & Crisis Counseling" with Megan Sullivan***
- ***February 10, 2010: "National Incident Management System 700 (NIMS 700) & Incident Command System 100 (ICS 100)" with Steve Crimando (8:30am ~ 1:00pm)***
- ***February 11, 2010: "Assisting Children and Adolescents in Disasters" with Nicci Spinazzola***
- ***February 25, 2010: "Ethical & Legal Issues in Disaster Mental Health" with Barbara Maurer***

To learn more about the Disaster Response Crisis Counselor credentialing process and its required trainings, go to www.njdisasterresponsecrisiscounselor.org.

ANNUAL HOLIDAY NETWORKING EVENT ~ A HUGE SUCCESS

By
Penny Grande, Mental Health Services Planner

On December 7, 2009, the Middlesex County Division of Behavioral Health & Children's Services hosted its Annual Holiday Networking Meeting for Mental Health Board, Professional Advisory Committee (PAC), Moving Forward Self Help Center and Laurel House members. This lovely event was held at the East Jersey Olde Towne Village in Piscataway and provided a wonderful opportunity for members to gather together for an evening of fun, great food and networking. Over 40 people attended.

The Annual Meeting was kicked off with a presentation of an **Extraordinary Service Award** to the Mental Health Board outgoing Chairperson, Stephen Jakubowycz. Steve has been an active Board member for many years and Chair since 2008. He will be sorely missed by all and we wish him much luck as he moves on.

Later that evening, there was a special screening of the award-winning documentary film, "**Crazy Enough to Care,**" featuring Drew Horn of the Turn A Frown Around Foundation (TAFa).

Drew is the President and Co-Founder of TAFa and has dedicated his life and work to the mission of ending loneliness for mental health consumers in psychiatric hospitals and agencies. He and his group of volunteers visit these settings throughout New Jersey, bringing fun and laughter to the "forgotten." For further information on the Turn A Frown Around Foundation, call 973-746-7353 or go to their Web site, www.turnafrownaround.org.



Drew Horn and Penny Grande

The evening was topped off with a performance by musical trio, "Sunsweet Mystery." This inspiring performance featured the talented musicians of the Moving Forward Self Help Center who played holiday tunes for our guests.

The Middlesex County Division of Behavioral Health & Children's Services would like to thank all of the members of the Mental Health Board, PAC, Self Help Center & Laurel House for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. A warm and peaceful New Year to all!

MIDDLESEX COUNTY SUBMITS JDAI APPLICATION TO THE STATE

By

**Wanda Dillon, Administrator,
Office of Children's Services**

Middlesex County juveniles who break the law, but pose no real public safety or flight risk may soon be spending more time in a new support program than in a detention center. Middlesex County has applied to participate in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Launched in 1992 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, there are approximately 100 JDAI sites in 24 states and the District of Columbia.

The New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) began implementing the initiative five years ago and currently

JDAI is in 12 counties: Atlantic, Camden, Essex, Hudson, Monmouth, Bergen, Burlington, Mercer, Ocean, Union, Somerset, and most recently Passaic, which is scheduled to have a kick-off ceremony in February 2010. New Jersey has the distinction of being named as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives first-ever Model State Program. The State legislature appropriated \$8 million over the past two years, allowing New Jersey to incorporate and take its JDAI reform activities to scale. JDAI was designed to support the Casey Foundation's vision that youth involved in the juvenile justice system have opportunities to develop into healthy productive adults. JDAI goals include making sure that secure confinement is used only for serious and chronic youth offenders.

Middlesex County's recent submission for inclusion in JDAI is currently under review by the State. The JJC anticipates that in 2010 three counties will be selected, one from each region: Southern, Northern, and Central. Currently, Middlesex is the only county that has submitted a formal application for 2010. On December 8, 2009, Middlesex County hosted an event announcing the submission. Should Middlesex County be selected for JDAI, the State would provide a detention specialist to research and identify the critical points in the local process contributing to the overuse of detention. The data will assist in highlighting systemic problems in case processing and inappropriate detainment.

In a press release, the Honorable Deborah J Venezia, Middlesex County Presiding Judge of Family Court stated "JDAI presents a unique partnering opportunity between the Judiciary, County, and Juvenile Justice Commission to improve the quality and effectiveness of the juvenile justice system." She continued, "We look

forward to the prospect of joining the other JDAI counties in what is considered to be one of the nation's most effective, influential, and widespread juvenile justice reform initiatives."



Freeholder Blanquita B. Valenti, Co-Chair of the Council for Children's Services, remarked "I want to echo Judge Venezia's comments and totally agree that JDAI would make the juvenile justice system more efficient, while offering these at-risk youth another chance."

For further information on JDAI NJ, please go to the Web site: <http://www.jdaihelpdesk.org/Pages/NewJersey.aspx>.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

By

Lucy Aladeselu-Counts, Differential Response Project Manager

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) has launched a county-based needs assessment to be implemented in seven counties in early 2010. Middlesex County has volunteered to be one of the first seven counties to implement this needs assessment. Counties are responsible for assessing service needs of at-risk children and families. For the purposes of the needs assessment, at-risk

children and families includes those who are “under DYFS supervision whether children are in-home or out-of-home, and children and families about whom a call has been made to the state central registry, including children and families referred to differential response and other prevention programs.”

The Middlesex County Department of Human Services and the Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC), in partnership with the Middlesex County Department of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), are working on a collaborative effort that will allow smooth facilitation of the assessment process. Information regarding the needs assessment process has been provided to potential stakeholders in the Middlesex County community inviting them to participate in this important endeavor.

The needs assessment seeks to ensure the needs of this at-risk population are met, and if the needs are not met, to determine the programs/services required to meet these needs. The needs of at-risk children and families will be assessed in the following target service areas (as identified by the Department of Children and Families (DCF): basic needs, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and transitional living services for youth leaving foster care. The needs assessment comprises four parts that are necessary to implementing the overall process: an analysis of existing county-level data, an inventory of services in target areas, a stakeholder survey, and focus groups to prioritize needs.

Middlesex County will analyze plans that have been developed by or for the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC), Division of Behavioral Health and Children’s Services (DCBHS), Human

Services Advisory Council (HSAC), Municipal Alliances, Differential Response, and other sources. In addition, an inventory of existing services will be developed. This inventory will help in the identification of service/need gaps.

A survey, which has been developed by DCF, will be distributed to gather information related to current services available, barriers to accessing available services and service gaps. The survey will be distributed to a broad base of individuals and organizations, including consumers/clients/families.

Upon completion of the county-level data analysis, when development of the service inventory and the survey data has been compiled, this information will be presented to a representative group of stakeholders. During these focus group settings, stakeholders will be asked to identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to each of the target service areas, as well as to prioritize the needs in each of the target service areas.

At the conclusion of the process, a report will be submitted to DCF summarizing the needs assessment process, a list of priority needs in each of the target service areas, an inventory of services in each of the target service areas, and results of the survey. DCF will review all reports submitted by the counties and use this information in the future to reach the important goal of ensuring “the right services are available to children and families when needed.”

A TIME FOR CHANGE

By

***Estania Schmidt, Program
Development Specialist***

The Middlesex County Department of Human Service, Council for Children’s Services’ Minorities Issues Committee’s

(MIC) presented the Social Justice Conference, "Time for Change," on November 12, 2009, at the Sayreville Fire Academy, in partnership with eight organizations: National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence (NCADD), Governors Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (GCADA); Manavi; South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT); Rutgers University; the NAACP; Perth Amboy's Mayors Office, and the Edison Mayors Office. The conference covered topics, including the growing South Asian community; Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth; and the disparity of Minorities in Education, three frequently marginalized issues. The all day conference opened up with former Edison Mayor, Jun Choi, keynote speaker. Mayor Choi addressed the diverse audience, which included youth, community providers, and administrators from different fields, noting the importance of developing such discussions on the need of solidarity and social competency.



The morning session proceeded with a panel addressing the importance of community engagement. Dr. Sunanda Guar, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-Robert Wood Johnson Pediatrics, shared her expertise and experiences in the South Asian community. She noted the importance of educating the community and the providers on the services that are needed and available, as well as the importance of data collection. Mary Lou Powner, GCADA Executive Director, spoke on addiction and the crucial steps that are being taken and need to be taken to educate all communities. Ms. Powner emphasized the importance of creating a strong

bond between service providers and the marginalized community. Closing the morning panel, Perth Amboy Mayor Wilda Diaz, shared her struggles and successes as a member of the current community she is serving. She spoke on the overwhelming need to engage youth and to continue social and cultural education in the effort to change labeled views.

After a successful morning session, the audience had an opportunity to attend one of the following sessions: "Youth and Sexuality," "Where are we today?" and Minorities in Education, or "5 W's of the South Asian Population." Jennifer Kurtz, Rutgers Community Engagement and LGBTQ Issues, and Silismar Suriel, Rutgers Center for Latino Arts and Culture, clarified the differences/similarities among youth in the LGBTQ community and helpful resources. Reginald Johnson, NAACP, Patrick Piegari, Superintendent, Middlesex County Schools, and Jane Brady, Workforce Development, spoke to the youth "drop out" epidemic, and provided information on alternative programs and other community initiatives. Finally, Saswati Sarkan and Debjani Roy of Manavi Inc. and Qudsia Raja of SAALT, presented on the many customs of the South Asian community and stereotypes that when avoided are beneficial to both the community and service providers.

The Council would like to extend a warm thank you to all those involved in the development and execution of the conference. The following are a few comments by the audience: "Loved the personal experiences relating to social justice," "The workshop was very useful," "Panelist well suited and well chosen for their specialties," and "Widen the conference to various counties in New Jersey."

SAFE KIDS MIDDLESEX COUNTY HOSTS SPRING FUNDRAISER

**By
Shelly Joseph Thoms, Program
Development Specialist
Office of Children's Services**

From birth through adulthood, children are increasingly at risk for fatal injuries, childhood hospitalizations and disability. **Safe Kids Middlesex County (SKMC), Level One Trauma Center at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital** is dedicated solely to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury. These childhood injuries may range from motor vehicle collisions, bike crashes, and playground falls, to fires, choking and drowning. SKMC has developed a coalition whose mission is to raise awareness of safety issues for the entire Middlesex County area. To accomplish this task, an array of services and programming are offered that highlight various injury risk areas, i.e., home, school and car passenger safety, etc.

SKMC is planning a fundraising event this spring to help the Coalition meet their goal and raise the funds needed to continue to provide important programs and resources for the families and individuals in our community. This fundraising event, a "**Gourmet Pasta Party,**" is scheduled for **Saturday, March 20, 2010, from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm, at Camp Kiddie Keep Well, Roosevelt Park in Edison.** This will be a family event featuring great food, face painting, music, and fun. Tickets for the event are currently on sale.

All proceeds from this fundraiser will benefit Safe Kids Middlesex County, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital/Level One Trauma Center, helping to support community injury prevention programs for children and families, in addition to the distribution of safety devices, such as helmets, child safety seats, and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Donations are also gratefully accepted.

For tickets or more information about this spring fundraiser, please contact Safe KIDS Middlesex County's Injury Prevention Coordinator, Diana Starace, at: 732- 418-8026; by fax: 732-418-8097; or by email: Diana.Starace@rwjuh.edu.

2010 MEDICARE UPDATE FOR SENIORS AND DISABLED INDIVIDUALS

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17,
2010 at 10 A.M.**

**Location: Lord Sterling Seniors Apts.
40 Hassart Street
New Brunswick, NJ**

Free Presentation by:

**NJ Senior Health Insurance Program
(SHIP)
Middlesex County Dept. of Senior
Services
Social Security Administration**

**SHIP Counselors will be available
after the presentation to provide
individual counseling.**

**Please call the Middlesex County
Dept. of Senior Services at 732-745-
3295 if you have questions.**

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN
SERVICES WEB SITE**

<http://co.middlesex.nj.us>

Info Line

Info Line of Middlesex County is the comprehensive, confidential County-wide Information & Referral system for health and human services. Info Line's staff will help you to find available services through their extensive database. For information and referral, call 1/888/908-4636; or go to the Web site: www.infoline-org.

**The Middlesex County Board
of Chosen Freeholders**

**Christopher D. Rafano, Freeholder
Director**

**Ronald G. Rios, Deputy Director
Carol Barrett**

**Stephen J. "Pete" Dalina
H. James Polos
Mildred S. Scott
Blanquita B. Valenti**

**Thomas M. Seilheimer
Executive Director
Middlesex County Department of
Human Services**

**Barbara J. Sewell
Editor, Quarterly Newsletter**

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN
SERVICES**

**Administration.....732-745-4186
Addiction Services...732-745-4190**

**Behavioral Health & Children's
Services.....732-745-3290
Social Work Services.....732-745-
4086**

Department of Senior Services

732-745-3295

NJ EASE 1-877-222-3737 (toll free)

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