



Reaching Out

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Surge in Need for Utilities Assistance

As the heating season draws closer and as a result of worsening economic conditions, the FRCA Family Support Center (FSC) is seeing increased demand for utility assistance.



Family Support Services Supervisor Emidio Rosa

In the first six months of 2010, 219 households received financial assistance through the FSC to avoid a shutoff or to restore utility services. This compares to 166 served in the first six months of 2009, a 25% increase in families served.

Nearly \$48,000 was paid to utility companies on behalf of vulnerable families with funding for this from sources including the Salvation Army, Emergency Shelter Grant from the City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island Foundation,

member, will be an especially important resource for utilities assistance that can prevent families from becoming homeless.

When a family seeks utilities assistance, FSC staff does a comprehensive assessment around the family's needs.

FSC connects families with services such as financial education, income tax assistance, employment and training, preventative family based and early childhood services, emergency shelter and transitional housing, health care and behavioral health resources to ensure their safety and stability.

Family Advocates follow-up to ensure these resource con-

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United Way Safety Net, Homelessness Prevention (ARRA) and local churches.

FRCA is often the only resource for families struggling with utility shutoffs once the LIHEAP office closes in March. The Red Kettle Campaign, which begins in No-



School Success Conference
November 6th



October 16th

The Woonsocket Shelter - A Family's Story

The Woonsocket Shelter is a critical safe haven for a growing number of vulnerable families. Recent reports show a record increase of 30% in the number of individuals in shelters and transitional housing in RI in July as compared to last year.

Lena Braxton knows firsthand what it is like to be homeless. She and her children Unique, age 14 and Alexandro, age 11, lived in the Woonsocket Shelter for 14

months. She also knows the important role support services play in reaching the goal of permanent housing.

Lena learned of the Woonsocket Shelter while receiving substance use services; she has been clean in recovery for a year.

"Each staff person at the shelter has been devoted to something that has had an



Lena Braxton with daughter, Unique

impact on my life," Lena said.

"I couldn't have done it with-

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FRCA Executive Director
Ben Lessing

Greetings from the Executive Director

Context is everything. In this issue of *Reaching Out*, we share with you the current reality for families in the midst of a deep recession.

Due to layoffs, more families than ever are trying to make ends meet through the unemployment system.

Some families previously served by FRCA that have made progress in their financial stability and functioning now need assistance again to prevent their successes from

unraveling.

Daily, families struggle to pay their utility bill or rent while wondering how they will feed and clothe their kids.

The other reality we share is the efforts of our staff and partners to strengthen the community through projects such as the Grow Up Community Garden, School Success, Northern RI Visitation Center and Holiday Programs.

The lesson we are continually learning as an organization is

that assisting families and individuals to overcome complex situations requires collaboration, flexibility, creative and best practice approaches, relationship building, and long term persistence.

Thank you for your interest in this important work!

Benedict F. Lessing, Jr., MSW
Executive Director

"This journey has taught me so many things. Before I walked with my head down. Now I can walk with my head up and enjoy life."

-Lena Braxton, Former Shelter Resident

The Woonsocket Shelter: A Family's Story

out them. Before I was hopeless and helpless. They taught me that I was worthy, that I could be somebody."

Lena continues to receive substance use services from NRI Community Services. Shelter Case Manager Maria Williams connected Lena to other support services including utilities assistance that helped pay a back bill and opened the door to housing.

The road to housing was not easy. Affordable units are scarce, and a one-time drug possession charge led to multiple rejections.

"I told Lena she is not her past, she has started this new life," said Maria. "I told her no matter how many times a landlord said 'no,' you have to keep going."

On September 20th, Lena and her children moved out of the

Shelter into their own apartment.

Lena joined FRCA's Shelter-Walk planning committee, and plans to walk with her children.

"I want to be involved in the community. I want to give back," she said. "I'd like to someday go into a field where I can help people like those who helped me."

Lena and her daughter want to start a support group for children whose parents have addiction issues.

"Success to me is every day," Lena said. "I thank God for another day clean. I can tuck



Lena Braxton with FRCA Case Manager Maria Williams (center) and daughter Unique

my kids in at night, help them with their homework. I can have people look up to me now. It feels good. "

"The Shelter was my first and best step I ever made. I'm so proud of what I've done."

Join Us for FRCA's 22nd Annual ShelterWalk on **Saturday October 16th**. Registration begins at 9am at River Island Park, Woonsocket with walk kicking off at 10am.

For more information, contact Elena Marchand at 401-235-6083 or emarchand@famresri.org

Every Step Matters, Every Person Counts!



Surge in Need for Utilities Assistance (con't from pg 1)

nections are in place many of which occur within FRCA and through or in combination with community partners. Additional services may include:

- ⇒ Advocacy with Utility Company and the PUC (Public Utilities Commission)
- ⇒ Obtaining the A-60 rate to reduce family utility burden
- ⇒ Assistance with LIHEAP Application (Low Income

Home Energy Assistance Program)

- ⇒ Information about Weatherization, Appliance Maintenance and Boiler Replacement Programs
- ⇒ Connection to Financial Fitness Services, including the *More for Your Money Program* administered by FRCA with NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley.



Interested in volunteering with the Salvation Army Red Kettle

Campaign to help with utilities assistance?

Contact Elena Marchand at emarchand@famresri.org or 401-235-6083.

Family Support Center Trends:

- More families are receiving unemployment
- Over 30% of families have some household income from employment
- Household incomes average between 76-100% of federal poverty guidelines
- About 50 new families each month are seeking assistance from the FSC
- About 20% of newly opened families are former clients who returning due to extreme financial hardship

School Success Coalition hosts Fall Conference

On Saturday November 6th FRCA will host - **Families Matter** - The School Success Coalition Fall Conference from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm. at Woonsocket High School.

The conference offers an opportunity for families, teachers and community leaders to come together to share the experience of educating the whole child.

Over 20 workshops will be presented on topics such as:

- *Improving Early Literacy at Home*
- *Cooking with Children*
- *Homework & Study Skills*
- *IEP Advocacy*
- *Health & Stress*
- *Understanding Cultural Diversity*

- *Parent-Professional Communications*

Many workshops will be conducted in Spanish. The keynote address will be given by Tonya M. Glantz, MSW, of the Rhode Island Child Welfare Institute. CEU and PD credits are available. Child care will be provided.

Families Matter is sponsored by The United Way of RI & the School Success Coalition, a part of the School Success Project funded by the United Way of Rhode Island's Children, Youth & Families grant.

The first year of the project involved the creation of the School Success Coalition comprised of parents, educators and community leaders from across Woonsocket who identified barriers to school



success and developed a plan to address those barriers.

The second and current third year of the project focused on implementing solutions to the identified needs, such as this conference for parents, teachers and the entire community.

30 years of research on parent engagement have confirmed what we know anecdotally – when parents show their children that school is important by becoming in-

involved, children are more likely to succeed academically and socially in the educational environment. This conference is a step towards helping to nurture that engagement.

For more information about the conference, contact Julie Wunderlich at 401-235-6087 or jwunderlich@famresri.org. A copy of the registration form can be found on FRCA's website at www.famresri.org.

Youth Work to Beautify & Prepare Garden

With the growing season winding down, the GrowUp Community Garden in Woonsocket received a beautification-boost thanks to the Woonsocket Rotary Club and involvement of local youth.

The Woonsocket Rotary provided a \$2,000 grant to FRCA used to purchase a much-needed tool shed as well as benches, planters and materials to beautify the Reading Pagoda area of the garden.

"We are pleased to be able to support a local green project,"



through projects such as this," added Rotary Board member Ron Miller.

Youth enrolled in the *Jobs Now Rhode Island* summer program funded by the Department of Labor & Training and the Department of Human Services worked to stain the new shed, plant flower bushes in the new barrels surrounding the pagoda, and arrange the donated benches. They also helped harvest late-season produce and prepared a compost pile to create high quality soil for future planting.

The GrowUp! Community Garden, now in its second season, has had the support of dozens of volunteers who have helped prepare, plant and harvest produce to share with local food pantries. With continued involvement of community members, the garden hopes to continue to grow and improve in the future.

For more information about volunteering with the GrowUp Garden or with other FRCA programs, contact Elena Marchand at 235-6083 or emarchand@famresri.org



noted Gerry Noel, Rotary Club President and Chair of the Community Service Projects. "The Rotary is committed to helping the community

"We are pleased to be able to support a local green project"

- Gerry Noel,
Woonsocket Rotary Club
President

What's New at the YouthWorks411 Center

FRCA's Youth Center has been hopping this summer and we hope to see that continue throughout the fall!

We formed the Youth Programming Council made up of a cross section of the youth served in the center.

This exceptional group of young people tackled the task of remodeling the youth

center.

They moved the computers to form a more functional computer lab and then chose very bright colors to spruce up the walls. They call it the reverse Barney room! Once you see it, you'll understand the name.

They are now in the process of coming up with youth-focused programming to offer at the

center. Their first event will be a jewelry making workshop Oct. 13th from 5-7pm!

We have also increased our hours to include two evenings a week of drop-in center time for extended after school activities.

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Youth decorate the new YouthWorks 411 space

What's New at the YouthWorks411 Center *(continued from pg 4)*

Monday evenings we have an *LGBTQQ peer-to-peer support group*, as well as a *Book Club* series. Wednesday evenings we are offering *Movie/Game Night* with snacks.

The Center, located at 55 Main Street, Woonsocket, provides a variety of career readiness and social services for youth ages 14-24 including:

- ⇒ Career exploration
- ⇒ Job readiness workshops
- ⇒ Academic skill building
- ⇒ Tutoring and homework help



- ⇒ College planning
- ⇒ Youth Plus, a credit recovery program for high school students
- ⇒ Leadership development

Check out the calendar of events posted on the Youth Services page on FRCA's website www.famresri.org

For more information, contact Youth Services Manager Stump Olsen at 401-671-2971 or solsen@famresri.org.

Northern RI Visitation Center Celebrates Opening

On September 22nd FRCA celebrated the opening of the Northern RI Visitation Center, a collaboration of FRCA with the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF).

The center provides visitation and recovery services to families whose children have been placed in foster care due to a persistent problem with substance use.

"This is a historic day in Woonsocket," noted guest speaker Patricia Martinez,

Director of DCYF. "We are celebrating a unique environment for families, a new approach to serving families."

"The center is designed the way families actually live their lives," noted Craig Stenning, Director of the Dept. of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals. He noted the center, a collaboration between state agencies and community organizations, provides a comprehensive approach to ad-

ressing the real needs of families.

Eagle Scout candidate Jacob Metivier was recognized for his beautification project that included installing a stone meditation path and adding glider and picnic table to enhance the environment for the families using the center.



From left: Shannyn Vicente, FRCA Program Manager, Jacob Metivier, Paulette Metivier, Patti Corbett, FRCA Child Welfare Director, Ben Lessing, FRCA Executive Director

Employment & Training Helps Prep Individuals for Workplace

Over the past year, 120 individuals received valuable training through two of FRCA's Adult Employment & Training Programs.

Medical Billing & Coding Program, an 8-week, 240 hour training program, provides hands-on instruction on fundamental medical billing practices, software and terminology, preparing individuals to

manage medical and health insurance operations, data entry and record keeping.

Computer and Career Training, an 8-week, 240 hour training program, provides basic computer and customer service skills in subject areas including Microsoft Word and Excel basics, Keyboarding, and Customer Service.

"Thank you for changing my life and giving me the confidence to succeed."

- Medical Billing Participant

Individuals receiving services from DLT, DHS and ORS may be eligible to participate in the training at no cost to the participant.

The next training sessions for both of these programs begins on *November 29th*.

For more information about these and other FRCA adult training programs, contact Joe Potenza at 401-235-6016 or jpotenza@famresri.org.



transMISSIONs Vehicle Donation Alliance

FRCA is now able to accept car donations through transMISSIONs, a vehicle donation alliance of Good News Garage (GNG).

GNG, a program of Lutheran Social Services, accepts, repairs and awards donated vehicles to low income families so they can commute to work, earn a living and build a better life.

All donated vehicles are evaluated to determine their best future use. Vehicles that can be repaired and are de-

termined to be safe and reliable are awarded to a family in need. Last year, a family served by FRCA was a recipient of one of the first cars donated through the GNG in the newly opened RI office.

A portion of the proceeds from vehicles not deemed for use will be donated to FRCA. All donations qualify for a tax deduction, and some may qualify for fair market value--the highest donation allowable under current IRS regulations.

Donations from the transMISSIONs program will support FRCA's efforts to strengthen families and individuals.

For more information about donating your car to FRCA or eligibility about the car donation program, contact Way to work at 401-235-6082 or WaytoWork@famresri.org.

Visit FRCA's website at www.famresri.org to donate your car online.

"I can work more hours now that that we have a car. I can't thank you enough!"

- Bernadette Upshur, mother of four who was awarded a car through the GNG donation program last year.

FRCA Gearing Up for Holiday Programs

Each year, FRCA assists low income families through several holiday programs. We are always seeking volunteers to help with these programs that make a difference in the lives of vulnerable families.

⇒ Adopt-A-Family

FRCA screens and completes applications for families for the Adopt-A-Family Program, which provides holiday gifts for low income families. Last year we completed over 1,000 applications.

⇒ Toy Distribution

FRCA sets up and distributes toys for the Children's Holiday Hope Fund; last year 540 families with 1,100 children were served.

⇒ Red Kettle Campaign

The funds raised from the Salvation Army Campaign are used to provide utilities and



Kettle Volunteer William Decesare

other basic needs assistance to low income families in Woonsocket and North Smithfield.

Beginning in November, we work to staff the kettles at several stores including Wal-Mart and Shaws in Woonsocket, Stop and Shop in North Smithfield and Brigidos in Slatersville.

Last year, over 100 volunteers helped staff the kettles, help-

ing us raise over \$19,000 to support local families.

Utilities assistance can and does prevent homelessness. In this economy with more people affected by unemployment, the need for this support is greater than ever.

For more information about becoming a Holiday Program Volunteer, contact Elena Marchand at 401-235-6083 or emarchand@famresri.org

"Utilities assistance helps stabilize families in a very unstable economy. It literally keeps a roof over people's heads."

-Darlene Magaw, FRCA Family Support Services Director

5th Annual Golf Tournament a Great Success!

FRCA's **5th Annual Golf Tournament** was held on **Friday, June 18th** at the Wentworth Golf Club in Plainville, MA on a picture-perfect weather day.

Many thanks to the more than 80 people who came out to play golf and the more than 20 hole sponsors. Special thanks to our Major Sponsors:

- ⇒ *ACE Sponsor:* Technical Support International
- ⇒ *EAGLE Sponsor:* Merrill Lynch/Christopher Bouley

⇒ *BIRDIE Sponsors:* KLR (Kahn, Litwin, Renza & Co); Realty Maintenance Services, Inc.; Soucy Insurance Agency; Shore Point Capital Partners; and Konica Business Machines.

⇒ *REGISTRATION Sponsor:* Fournier & Fournier Funeral Home

Funds raised from the tournament support the Woonsocket Shelter and homelessness prevention programs.

Details about next year's golf tournament coming soon!



Tournament Co-Chairs FRCA Board members Suzanne Blades & Julien Ayotte

Board of Directors

- Nancy L. Benoit - **Chair**
- Rev. Dorian Parker - **Vice Chair**
- Julien Ayotte - **Treasurer**
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- Bamby Mohamed
- Charles Noel
- Janette Ortega
- Vimala Phongsavanh
- Jo Ann Rajabian
- Candy J. Seldon
- Carol Wilson-Allen

FRCA Holds Annual Meeting, Presents Awards

FRCA held its Annual Meeting on June 14th. Over 120 guests including the Board of Directors, staff, community members and volunteers attended.

Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts delivered the keynote address which focused on the connection between health & wellness and a strong network of social services.

FRCA presented the Paul Dempster award to Dee Henry, a FRCA Board member for over 35 years. The award is to honor a member of the community whose life exemplifies one of service and dedication to assisting people living in poverty.

Ms. Henry is currently the Director of Family Services at Woonsocket Head Start Child

Development Association, Inc.

The Doris L. O'Brien Award was presented to Elena Marchand, FRCA Development/Volunteer Coordinator for her commitment to strengthening volunteer support for FRCA's programs.



Dee Henry (left) with FRCA Board Chair Nancy Benoit

FRCA Re-Accredited by the Council on Accreditation

In June, FRCA was re-accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA), an independent non-profit international accreditor of community-based behavioral healthcare and human service organizations.

As an accredited organization, FRCA is recognized as a provider that successfully implements high performance



standards and delivers the highest quality services to all of its stakeholders.

The COA reaccreditation process involves a detailed review of an organization's administrative operations and service delivery practices which are measured against

national standards that emphasize services that are accessible, appropriate, cultur-

ally responsive, evidence based, and outcomes-oriented.

"Our staff worked extremely hard preparing for the COA reaccreditation, demonstrating their commitment and dedication to the delivery of quality services," noted Ben Lessing, FRCA Executive Director.

Family Resources Community Action

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Upcoming Events & Info Sessions

Events

- **Saturday October 16th** - Join us for FRCA's **22nd Annual ShelterWalk** to benefit the Woonsocket Homeless Shelter. Registration opens at 9am and the walk kicks off at 10am! River Island Park, Woonsocket.
- **Saturday November 6th** - **School Success Coalition Fall Conference** - 8:00 am to 2:30 pm at the Woonsocket Middle School. Sponsored by the United Way of Rhode Island.

Information Sessions

- **Learn about FRCA's Employment & Training Programs** at the Information Session Wednesday afternoons at 3:00pm, 55 Main Street Woonsocket, RI.
- **RIPTA Services Information Session** conducted by FRCA's Way to Work Center at netWORKri - Wednesday mornings at 11:00 am Pond Street Woonsocket, RI. Call 401-235-6082 for details.