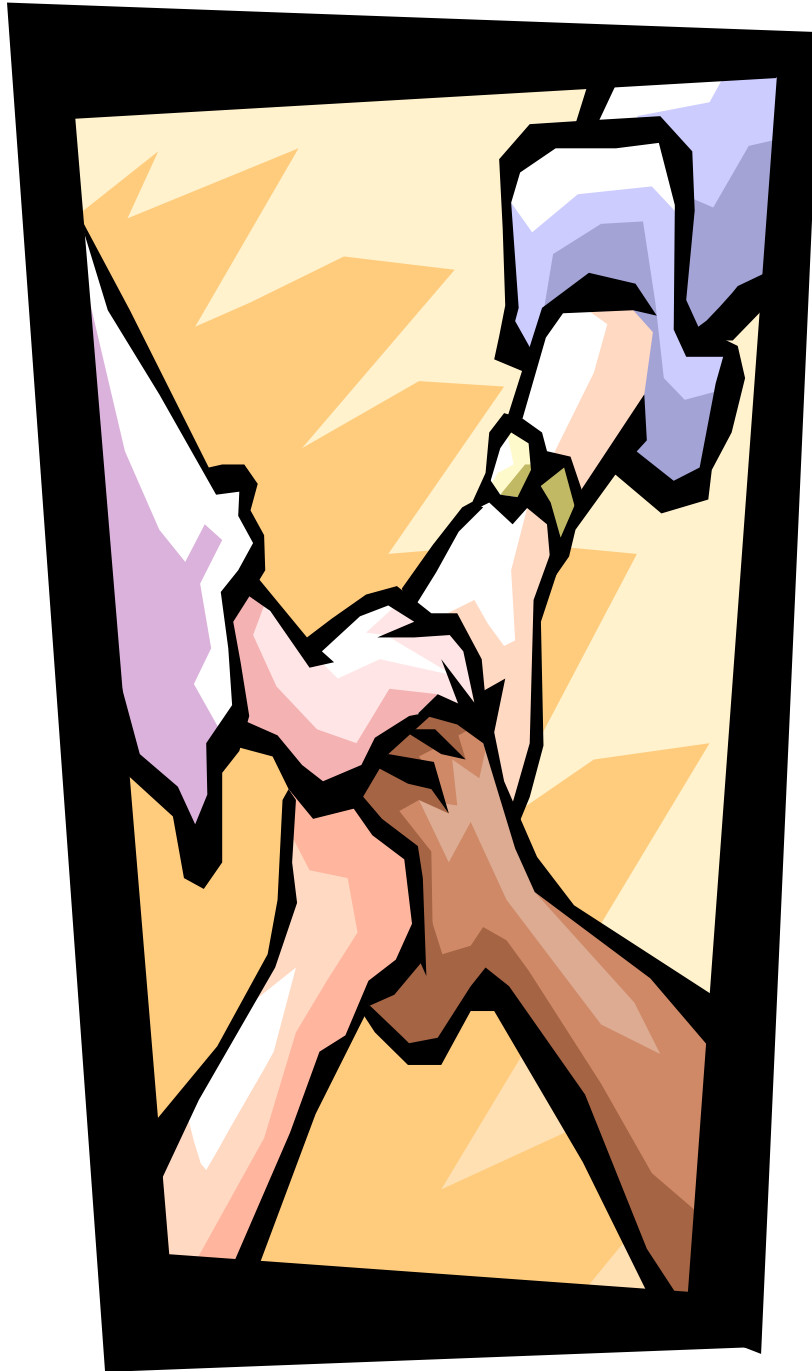


Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force



**2004-2005
Update**

July 2005



KENT COUNTY EMERGENCY NEEDS TASK FORCE
2004-2005 UPDATE

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KENT COUNTY EMERGENCY NEEDS TASK FORCE
2004-2005 UPDATE

Table of Contents

Introduction

Coordinating Committee Status Report 4
Coordinating Committee Member Roster 11

Flow Chart Updates

Food Assistance 12
Shelter Assistance 14
Heating Emergency..... 15
Water Shut-off 16
Electric Shut-off..... 17
Cooling Assistance.....18

2004-2005 Subcommittee Reports

Emergency Food Assistance 19
Subcommittee Member Roster..... 25

Emergency Shelter Assistance 26
Subcommittee Member Roster..... 32

Utility/Conservation Assistance..... 34
Subcommittee Member Roster..... 42

Transportation 43
Subcommittee Member Roster 49

Leadership 50
Subcommittee Member Roster..... 54

Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force



Coordinating Committee

- **Purpose:**
*Assessment of
Community
Needs, Overall
Publicity, and
Long-range
Planning*

I. Coordinating Committee Introduction

The Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force Coordinating Committee – the ENTF oversight body comprised of non-profit, governmental, religious, human service and funding leaders from the community – has met annually since December, 1982 to review the status of basic and emergency service activities throughout Kent County. These meetings have provided community leaders opportunity to identify new and emerging issues while working towards improved coordination within Kent County's service delivery system. The Coordinating Committee reviews and endorses ENTF Subcommittee status assessments and recommendations. The Coordinating Committee additionally makes its own recommendations to assist policy makers, funding sources and the community as well as ENTF committees in further refining Kent County's basic human services.

Kent County ENTF members have completed their 23rd year of working together to meet the challenges of helping the community meet basic and emergency human service needs. Each of the Emergency Needs Task Force Committees has made strides in using data to design strategies to respond to need more efficiently. Plans proposed last year have been implemented. The work reported by each committee reflects a strong continuing commitment to help each Kent County resident live in a secure, decent environment. This report shows how ENTF members are making a concerted effort to implement prevention strategies designed to reduce or eliminate emergency assistance requests.

The ENTF Food Committee has launched its strategic plan. The committee's vision, developed during the planning process: *Kent County will be a hunger free zone* is driving work of the committee's five critical issue work groups. Self-sufficiency, better health through nutritious eating and more efficient food procurement both at the consumer and provider level are primary focal points. Committee members are developing methods to enhance food stamp participation; designing systems for increased use and distribution of locally grown food and expanding education on food options and nutrition to those using the food support system. The last year saw major changes in local food system management and thinking. Work continues and will result in better ways to help those who are hungry in Kent County.

The Housing Continuum of Care Committee will present its *Vision to End Homelessness* plan to the community in December, 2005 after two years of hard work by hundreds of Kent County residents who provided input on what should be done to keep everyone in a permanent home. The Housing Management Information System (HMIS) member-agency computer system is on line and providing data that will guide *Vision* implementation. The HCoC will use *Vision* implementation to immediately begin work on more effectively integrating low income housing resources into the Kent County human support network.

The Utility Committee has improved emergency bill payment coordination via funding information sharing and better data collection and analysis processes. During the fall of 2004, the committee developed a white paper on funding shortfall issues that helped push state policy makers to expand assistance options resulting in stability during last winter's heating season in spite of increased costs and continuing high demand. Prevention efforts started in the last year include increased weatherization efforts, tighter eligibility determination procedures and increased elementary age children's conservation education efforts.

The ENTF Transportation Committee is finishing work on a single access computerized medical transportation system, scheduled for launch by the end of the year. When in place, medically fragile, low income Kent County residents will be able to complete a connection for a ride to the doctor with one call. Resulting data on savings in local case work staff time, more efficient ride scheduling and better control of transportation costs will be used to guide management of the project. The committee

has assisted the Area Agency on Aging's *Creating Community For A Lifetime* to develop senior transportation strategic planning. Similarly, the transportation group is supplying expertise to the ENTF Food Committee and the Kent County Early Childhood system initiative on issues related to each group's focus. The committee will continue advocacy efforts at all levels. On October 3, 2005, the Transportation Committee, working in conjunction with Faith in Motion, *The Rapid* and others will invite the community to a transportation summit inaugurating the next level of transportation development in Kent County.

The Leadership Committee continues to provide support to the Task Force in a variety of ways. During the past year, inter-committee communication has been further expanded, funding resource development support has increased and basic needs community education strategies have been refined. The committee will continue the work it began last year.

The effectiveness and continuing enthusiastic response shown by Emergency Needs Task Force members is encouraged by the unflagging support provided by the Kent County Board of Commissioners who originally charged the community to meet basic and emergency human service needs. The City of Grand Rapids, Heart of West Michigan United Way and Kent County FIA have provided financial, in-kind and especially, great moral support to all ENTF members and agencies. With this combined, community effort, Kent County continues to be a very good place to live as it's population grows in diversity and need.

II. Subcommittee 2005/2006 Recommendations/Needs:

A. Emergency Food Assistance Subcommittee Recommendations

The planning process has expanded the membership of the committee but we will continue to emphasize the importance of committee diversity as a priority. The following are the specific action plan objectives.

- 1. Improve food distribution from the original source to the end user, by engaging the entire ENTF in addressing transportation issues that affect meeting the community's emergency needs (Transportation).**
- 2. Increase the availability of healthy foods within neighborhoods by increasing the number of people growing their own food who have used food assistance resources, and by increasing residents' participation in programs that foster self-reliance (Long-Term Causes of Food Insecurity).**
- 3. Increase residents' knowledge and ability to obtain food that maintains and improve their self-reliance while reducing the onset and impact of food-related health problems, and improve the nutritional quality of food distributed through all sources, including pantries, meal sites and wholesalers (Health / Illness Trends).**
- 4. Increase institutional (foundations, businesses, churches, nonprofits, etc.) resources dedicated to the food assistance network, by increasing community, individual, and recipient support to the food assistance network (Increased Costs/ Sufficient Resources).**
- 5. Increase participation of eligible residents in community food programs, and increase community awareness, support, and partnerships to help meet increasing demand (Demand / Outreach).**

B. Housing Continuum of Care Subcommittee Recommendations

- Adopt the Vision to End Homelessness Plan for Kent County and begin implementation of the Plan's recommendations.
- Generate regular data reports from HMIS to support funding requests, community planning efforts and individual participating agency needs.
- Coordinate community requests for SHP and ESG funding and obtain approval for requested amounts.

C. Utility/Conservation Assistance Subcommittee Recommendations

Prevention:

- Expand Energy Conservation Workshops-targeting those households that repeatedly need assistance paying their utility bills.
- Expand Energy Conservation working with elementary school children, tailoring the presentations to those age groups.
- Enhance the Client Education that is done with the clients who have received Weatherization. Train and education front line staff about basic energy conservation and weatherization services.

Funding:

- Continue to work with ENTF Leadership Committee to identify potential funds to aid in meeting needs at those times when funds are scarce.

Information Management:

- Continue to work with 2-1-1 ENTF Basic Needs Data Committee to obtain detailed information regarding utility conservation funding. This will allow the committee to analyze and track status of local resources and will put us in a better position to close the gap in services at various times in the year.

D. Transportation Subcommittee

A. Education

1. Continue to raise awareness of existing transportation services and eligibility criteria via the Kent County Healthcare Transportation Resource Directory, published in 2004 by the subcommittee and the Health Department's Taskforce on Health Care for People of Color. This is available through the Kent County website (www.accesskent.com at the Health Department's publication section) and in hard copy from the Kent County Health Department- Task Force on Health Care for People of Color.
2. Continue to educate the community on the need for the development of a county-wide land use plan with an eye on transportation beyond the automobile that
 - integrates the Kent County Sprawl Task Force Report, the Orfield study, and census data showing areas of concentration of poverty in the county;
 - includes maps with the locations of dialysis centers, health care providers, public/subsidized housing, and employment centers, as well as the service areas and criteria of transportation providers;
 - is coordinated with the surrounding counties and townships, especially eastern Ottawa County.

3. Continue to educate municipalities and the public on the impact of transportation decisions – their costs and benefits – so they come to see the benefit of including public transit in their decisions.
4. Continue to oversee the efforts between providers to increase service efficiency and productivity and to lower costs through a single access scheduling system.
5. Continue to work with the ENTF Food Subcommittee on the in depth review of transportation issues and transportation resources within the food pantry system.

B. Advocacy

1. Continue to advocate for a cost-effective affordable county-wide public transit system that would serve all people and locations within the county.
2. Advocate for restoring state funding of public transportation at the constitutionally-allowable level (50% match for urban systems and 60% for rural).
3. Move toward a schedule-less urban bus system (buses running frequently enough, i.e., every 10-15 minutes, that one doesn't need a schedule to know when the next bus is coming; one can simply stand at the bus stop), making public transportation easier to use and much more accessible.
4. Maintain adequate transportation to the increasing number of seniors, especially those over 75, living in their own homes throughout the county – an option that is less expensive for all involved and provides higher quality of life.

E. Leadership Subcommittee

The Leadership Subcommittee continues to serve as the administrative support for the Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force. This role allows other ENTF subcommittees focusing on direct service issues the ability to continue their work knowing that administrative support will be available to help them get their work done. To continue this work, the following recommendations for 2005/06 include:

- Refine work on ENTF inter-committee communication and coordination.
- Work on aligning the ENTF with other Kent County collaboratives as community service system building continues.
- Continue developing strategies to expand and enhance basic needs education and advocacy.
- Continue to support basic needs resource development and coordination.
- Continue to develop and refine data collection, analysis and data based decision making.

F. Coordinating Committee

On June 6, 2005, Andrew Zylstra called the Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force Coordinating Committee's annual meeting to order to review with ENTF Committee representatives, data and issues presented in the report and approve the preceding recommendations for meeting basic and emergency human needs in Kent County. In addition to accepting the report and recommendations presented here and endorsing the document to the Kent County FIA and Commission Boards, the Coordinating Committee reviewed the status of its 2005

recommendations and added new ones for work during the next report period ending in the Spring of 2006.

Opening Comments

Robert Haight, Heart of West Michigan United Way President welcomed the Coordinating Committee to United Way and noted how the ENTF has been a key support to the community for almost 25 years and continues to offer a focus for helping meet the basic needs of local poor people. The supporting connections between the ENTF and such United Way components as 211 and the Earned Income Tax Credit Coalition are examples of the importance of work done by the community by collaboratives such as the Emergency Needs Task Force.

David Morren, Kent County Board of Commissioners Chair, in his comments opening the meeting, noted that the ENTF represents a positive pay-off to the community with effective systems coordination resulting in long term solutions to short term needs. Mr. Morren pointed to the Housing Continuum of Care *Vision To End Homelessness* initiative as one example of many Task Force groups are using to shape how we, in Kent County, are responding to helping the less fortunate. The ENTF is the understated workforce in the community, but known locally and throughout the state for its accomplishments. Real work happens with the ENTF, even if it does not always receive the recognition it should.

Status of 2004 Coordinating Committee Recommendations

- The Coordinating Committee reviewed *basic needs related data* presented by United Way staff and strongly recommended that this work continue. The Coordinating Committee suggested developing longer term, 5-10 year data trend presentations; information on utility funding resources; monitoring City of Grand Rapids income tax revenues as a measure of economic well-being and trends on diversity in county population growth as they impact on basic needs demands.

Status:

ENTF Committees are including data collection and analysis in their deliberations – HCoC has hired a data consultant for its *Vision* process. The GVSU Community Research Institute and Seidman School of Business are working with the food and utility collaboratives. The United Way 211/Basic Needs Data project supports ENTF work. The 2005 Delta Strategy/CRI Community Survey was commissioned by the Heart of West Michigan United Way to include specific, national basic needs indicator questions as it collected data during Winter 2005.

- The Food Subcommittee was encouraged to clarify and publish, as part of its strategic planning process *priorities for addressing food security – providing food and addressing nutrition issues*. This concern was raised in light of Subcommittee member agencies' traditional focus of assisting those without food to meet immediate needs by filling shelves first, then addressing root causes for the need.

Status:

The food group's strategic plan work responds to this request.

- Utility Subcommittee members were asked to review the impact of responding to *residence addresses with consistently high consumption utility bills* and work with local housing inspection, weatherization and utility assistance providers to reduce demand at particular addresses in addition to assisting with client utility bill payments.

Status:

The Subcommittee continues to work on this assignment and has made initial contacts with GVSU/CRI and utility providers to start work on next steps.

- *A change in name and purpose for the Advocacy/Funding Subcommittee to the Leadership Subcommittee* to reflect its administrative support to other the ENTF groups was recommended.

Status:

The name change has been made. The committee continues to refine its efforts around the management mandate to assure more cohesive collaborative management.

2005 Recommendations

- The Coordinating Committee, in its formal acceptance of Subcommittee recommendations, encouraged and supported committees as they continue to pursue the strategies outlined in this year's recommendations. The Coordinating Committee's endorsement further formalizes the direction ENTF work is leading the community and should be continued. Regular reports on achievements to the Coordinating Committee and the community will add to success and should be pursued.
- Given the longevity of the Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force – the collaborative will be celebrating 25 years of continuous operation in 2007 – recommendation was made to create a history of its development and accomplishments. Further recommendation was made to share Kent County's work on a broader scale by submitting an application for recognition to a national organization such as the Harvard University/Kennedy School of Government *Innovations In American Government* award program.

Closing Comments

Kurt Kimball, Grand Rapids City Manager, referred to the work accomplished by the Task Force during the past year and planned through 2006, and pointed out that effective collaboration sustains the ENTF even as continuing reductions in government support push for its continuation. Mr. Kimball stated that the community should get the word out on what the Emergency Needs Task Force has done and is doing, especially considering the continuing challenges we will face as public human service funding dwindles.

Daryl Delabbio, Kent County Administrator, reflected on the history of the ENTF and referred to the Biblical statement that "With no Vision, people perish". To the credit of this community when it started the Emergency Needs Task Force almost a quarter century ago, the vision was there. Mr. Delabbio noted that while the vision continues, the passion to work together is still strong and amazing. The vision drives the commitment.