



# NEWsworthy

A newsletter for the members of Minnesota NEW – National Eligibility Workers Association

## National NEW Conference Report New Orleans, LA 08/2009

By Laura Wodtke & Karen O'Keefe

The annual National NEW conference took place in New Orleans, Louisiana this year from 08/16/09-08/19/09. What an amazing place to have a conference! Being right down town New Orleans with beautiful views of the Mississippi river made the hotel/conference accommodations soothing and the cultural event opportunities abundant. In between workshops, we had time to see some of the sights that New Orleans is famous for such as the French Quarter, Hurricane Katrina areas, the bayou and swamps, the above ground cemeteries, and the Garden District. Especially in the areas effected by Hurricane Katrina, we were able to see first hand how government planning and spending plays out in times of natural disasters.

The workshop selections and keynote speakers were also filled with great professional and personal growth opportunities. As Jerry Friedman executive director of *American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)* stated, "each case worker operates a multi-million dollar business with the amount of healthcare, food support, and cash benefits issued." For example, the caseload sizes here in Minnesota range from 150 – 400 where as in other states the caseload sizes can be almost triple that. Furthermore, the average case load size in Virginia is 650, the US Virgin Islands 350, California 600-650, and in Louisiana 780-1000. Hearing these numbers definitely puts what we do into perspective in terms of how many people we really do help in our communi-

ties even if we do not see the results.

Overall, the National NEW Conference was a great event to attend. Being able to have representatives from Minnesota present to speak up on behalf of our state and to have our voices heard on a national level was empowering. There were many great ideas presented and many memories made. Thus, we can only hope for positive changes to come as a result of such a lively conference.



## President's Letter

Serving on a professional organization board is often hard work and time-consuming; the rewards sometimes feel non-existent until someone says "thank you," "good job," and so on. A very tangible reward for me and fellow board member Laura Wodtke came as an opportunity to attend the National New Paths Conference in New Orleans.

The city has a number of nicknames – like the Big Easy and the Crescent City, for example - but I'd like to rechristen something along the lines of "The Friendliest Place in the USA." Even we "Minnesota-nice" folks could take a lesson from the "Nawlins" natives. One evening Laura and I chatted with a woman who played the washboard in her husband's Cajun band. She's spent her whole life in Louisiana. When our conversation



*Jackson Square of the French Quarter*

ended, she said, "Well, it sure was nice talkin' to y'all" and sounded like she meant it! It made me think: when was the last time I told a *complete stranger* I enjoyed conversing with her?

Everyone attending the conference had something interesting to share about their state. For example, California has incredible population and financial woes. Hurricane Katrina still impacts the New Orleans economy – only about 60% of the city's residents have returned. In New York, the amount of a family cash grant depends upon their housing costs. In many states, caseload sizes are anywhere from 800 – 1200 *per worker!* Each state has unique challenges and methods to overcome them, and it was interesting to hear other perspectives.

In Minnesota many of us are affected by the economy. We have parents, spouses, children, brothers and sisters, friends, and neighbors who have lost jobs, homes, vehicles, and day care. Nearly everyone we know is making adjustments to their lifestyle out of necessity, fear, or respect to those who have less. Let's be as supportive to humanity as we can. The NEW Board sincerely wishes the best for you and your families during these difficult times.

# Meet Your 2009 NEW HORIZON AWARD WINNER

My name is Kathy Nelson. I have worked at Chisago County Human Services for 34 years. I started in Accounting in 1975 and became a Financial Worker in 1978. I am the recipient of the NEW Horizon Award for 2009. I sincerely want to thank NEW for this honor. I was surprised beyond words. I especially want to thank my co-worker, Melissa Fertig who wrote very nice things about me in her nomination. I wish I could live up to it! I was asked to write a few tips for other financial workers.

My experiences have taught me the danger is 'thinking you know all the rules' because there is probably an exception to the rule and even if it was the rule the last time you used it, they probably have changed it. The manuals are your best friends! Look it up!

You should also utilize your experienced co-workers. Quite often it is not that two heads are better than one, it is hearing the scenario said out loud that allows you to sort out the issues. However, co-workers should be consulted after you have looked for it in the manual! You should be respectful of their time.

*Things turn out best for  
people who make the best out  
of the way things turn out.*

—Tom Terez

The most important thing with eligibility is to know what results you are expecting from MAXIS. Eligibility results are based on what you code on STAT panels and the functionality automated in MAXIS. Some programs require a system workaround or FIAT to create accurate eligibility results. It is the eligibility worker's responsibility to know who should be in the household, whose income counts/allocates/deems (whatever), when assets need to be counted, etc, etc, etc. I still do paper budgets on my GRH/MSA/

GA cases when they have counted income BEFORE I look at the MAXIS results. YOU know your client's situation best. Be sure to contact the TSS Help Desk if the system results are not what you anticipated.

Finally, we need to have patience with our clients. Many have never done this before and don't understand why we require all these verifications and ask all these personal questions. They don't understand our acronyms and our notices can be very

*Don't let what you  
cannot do interfere with  
what you can do.*

—Tom Terez

confusing. Often it is not what we say but our tone that can ignite or embarrass a client. We could all use more respect and should be ready to give it to our clients too.

I am grateful to have attended 1 national NEW conference. It was 1999 in Bismarck, North Dakota. It was an eye-opening experience to see the differences & similarities between states. I had a great time. I hope the economy changes soon so all of my fellow financial workers across the state can experience the same opportunity.

*Failure is not fatal,  
but failure to  
change might be.*

—Tom Terez

# NEW Advice!

**Question:** There are often collection envelopes circulating throughout our office for baby showers, retirement gifts, funeral bouquets, and so on. Even though I'd like to, I can't afford to contribute every time I'm asked. At what point is it considered OK not to participate?

**Answer:** In these times, it is unrealistic to expect to gift giving *and* receiving to equal those in times of prosperity. Even well-known charities are experiencing fewer contributions and in turn, *their* benefactors expect to receive less. You have a variety of options:

- Continue to participate but contribute less to each individual gift. That way, it may remain affordable for you to participate.
- Acknowledge your co-worker by sending him a card instead – perhaps one you've made yourself. A personal note conveying your sincere sentiments will be meaningful to the recipient. Or, consider a personally-delivered greeting with a message appropriate to the situation.
- Ask your co-workers if they feel the same way - after all, you are not the only person struggling right now. You may reach a group consensus that fewer collections will be undertaken or that a smaller donation is acceptable.
- Make a personal choice about what you can reasonably contribute to. Limit your donations to a small number of co-workers, mentors, or causes that have had the greatest impact upon you in the workplace.
- Declare a personal across-the-board

moratorium for a definite period of time. That way, you will not agonize: should I or shouldn't I? You have already decided not to.

Pick the option that is right for you and stick to it until you are comfortable bumping it up a notch. Your co-workers will understand as long as you continue to express well wishes in other ways and do not expect others to treat *your* causes any differently.

## **Check These Web Sites!**

[www.nationalnew.org](http://www.nationalnew.org)

National NEW web site

## **Check out the "TANF Best Practices Handbook"**

Written by National NEW. This handbook includes best practices from members across the US.

[www.tanfbestpractices.org](http://www.tanfbestpractices.org)

[www.mn-new.org](http://www.mn-new.org)

## **Minnesota Chapter of NEW web site**

## **Recycle--Recycle-Recycle!**

Pass this newsletter on to a co-worker!



## 2010 N.E.W. HORIZON NOMINATION FORM

**IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR TO NOMINATE YOUR FELLOW CO-WORKER FOR THE 2010 NEW HORIZON AWARD. THIS YEAR'S NOMINATION WILL BE BASED ON THE MINNESOTA-NEW CODE OF ETHICS. (Members of the Board are exempt from nomination)**

**LISTED BELOW ARE THE NOMINATION CRITERIA:**

**\*SERVES THE PUBLIC INTEREST: TREATS ALL COLLEAGUES, CLIENTS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WITH RESPECT, DIGNITY, AND COURTESY.**

**\*RESPECTS THE LAW: ADHERES TO ALL DATA PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY LAWS AND POLICIES.**

**\*DEMONSTRATES PERSONAL INTEGRITY: CARRIES OUT PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES IN A WAY THAT INSPIRES PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, TRUST, AND RESPECT.**

**\*PROMOTES AND SUPPORTS ETHICAL ORGANIZATIONS: DEMONSTRATES SUPPORT FOR THE MISSION, GOALS, AND POLICIES OF NEW.**

**\*STRIVES FOR PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE: BY ACKNOWLEDGING AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ERRORS.**

**TO NOMINATE AN INDIVIDUAL SIMPLY WRITE A FEW SHORT SENTENCES AND EMAIL IT TO [Donna.Biederman@state.mn.us](mailto:Donna.Biederman@state.mn.us) OR [Dale.Carlson@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US](mailto:Dale.Carlson@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US)**

Nomination Deadline : April 5th, 2010

### **The Minnesota NEW Board Needs You!**

We currently have several openings on our board and invite you to consider joining us. As a board member of the Minnesota Chapter of NEW, you will have opportunities such as:

- Developing articles for our semi-annual newsletter;
  - Providing ideas for legislative input;
  - Networking with other professionals;
  - Planning the annual Seminar; and
- Enhancing your professional skills and career opportunities.

Please feel free to call one of the board members if you want more information.

Take the challenge and become active in **NEW!**

### **MN NEW Board Members**

Karen O'Keefe, President	320-656-6119
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