



NEWsworthy

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

Summer Seminar 2005

Registration at Summer Seminar



The Minnesota Chapter of the National Eligibility Workers Association held its annual Summer Seminar event on May 13 at the Hampton Inn in Shoreview. The day began with a welcome from chapter president, Dale Carlson, introduction of chapter board members and the annual business meeting.

Johanna Berg, Chief Information Officer at DHS, lead the Technology Town Hall meeting, along with representatives from Health Match, MAXIS, MEC2 and SMI. This group engaged attendees in DHS' vision for using existing technology to provide services to clients and better support the efforts of county staff and other business partners in the delivery of services.

Attendees were able to select from several interesting and enlightening workshops. A diversity workshop with panel members representing Islamic, Vietnamese and Hispanic cultures was engaging. Each told his story of personal trials in an effort to find freedom and have a life free of oppression and persecution. Adapting to life in the United States isn't always easy either. It's impossible to know what some of our co-workers and clients have been through until we hear and understand their stories.

Mike Plankers from the Anoka-Hennepin Drug Task Force gave a well-attended workshop on Meth. This workshop focused on helping participants understand the addictive nature of this drug and its effects on those who use it. Many of us will likely encounter meth users among those we serve.

Tamara Kosin gave an informative workshop on "Email Etiquette." She provided some excellent tips on how to communicate properly through email and use "e-manners" in doing it. Tamara is a computer applications trainer for Anoka County.

Our day ended with a keynote address by Gary Berg who talked with us about "Simple Truths." In a humorous way he helped us focus on what is really important in our daily work, doing our best and helping those around us to do their best. He provided us with a great perspective on truths we know but at times need to be reminded of.

And the Winners Are.....

The Minnesota Chapter of N.E.W. had a booth at the Minnesota Financial Worker & Case Aide Association's (MFWCAA) 2005 Fall Conference in St. Cloud. Thanks to all of you that stopped by! We held a drawing for a free N.E.W. membership and \$50 in cash. The lucky eligibility professionals are; Kathy Kelly, Polk County (\$50) and Mary Noyes, Stearns County (N.E.W. 1 year membership worth \$35).

NETWORKING--Meet Your Board

Meet Erica Buelow

This issue introduces Erica Buelow from Anoka County. Erica has been a Program Coordinator and Trainer for the past six years. She began her career in Anoka County as a temporary clerical support person and was then hired permanently in 1994 as a Financial Worker. Erica's background in human services and education has kept her in the eligibility field where she can provide problem solving skills to both clients and co-workers.

Erica heard about N.E.W. four years ago from co-worker and Minnesota N.E.W. board member, Cheryl Hanks. During these years, Erica attended Summer Seminars and the National N.E.W. conference held in St. Paul in 2003. Erica joined the Minnesota N.E.W. board in December 2004. Being a part of N.E.W. has introduced Erica to many knowledgeable eligibility professionals who have provided helpful information to do her job better. Erica likes the fact that N.E.W. is open to ANYONE that works in the human services eligibility field, from Directors and Managers to line staff.

When asked what N.E.W. can offer its members, Erica states that being a part of N.E.W. provides "access to great trainings," a "voice" in what laws are made that affect program policy, and "networking" with other human service professionals. Erica has learned many helpful skills by belonging to N.E.W. on a professional and personal basis.

Erica's vision for N.E.W. is to increase membership so Summer Seminars can continue to be offered and that N.E.W. becomes an association that will be "heard" and "recognized" by the Legislature.

Erica is married and has two daughters, ages 15 and 13, one dog and two cats. She enjoys gardening and camping. Three important moments in Erica's life are; having her youngest daughter born at home – NOT ON PURPOSE; being able to work with Katrina Survivors; and taking a family vacation to Canada which included white water rafting!

When asked what advice she would give to new eligibility workers, Erica says "Allow yourself time to learn and know that you need to ask questions. Everyone makes mistakes. Almost everything can be fixed."

Good advice, Erica! We hope more eligibility professionals can "fix" their "mistake" of not being a part of N.E.W. and renew membership or become a N.E.W. member today!

N.E.W. Adventures in Anchorage

By Kitty Brown, Hennepin County



This year's annual training conference in Anchorage, Alaska truly was an adventure. Opening ceremonies entertained attendees with music, storytelling, bagpipes, and Highland and Alaskan Native dancing. This was followed by food, birthday cake (it was N.E.W.'s 30th anniversary) games and dancing.

The following 3 days were packed with interesting keynotes and workshops. Jerry Friedman, Executive Director of American Public Human Services Association shared personal and poignant stories concluding with his Top 10 List for a N.E.W. Vision:

1. Stick to the Mission;
2. Be Proactive;
3. Take every opportunity to grow;
4. Always maintain our values;
5. Teamwork;
6. Be accountable;
7. Never forget you are role models;
8. Be creative;
9. Maintain client focus;
10. Treat others as you want to be treated

He added an overall extra – **Have Fun!** Attendees readily complied by having their funny bones tickled by luncheon speaker Tim Gard and closing speaker Marilyn Grey.

The traditional Town Hall provided the latest updates on Food Stamps, Medicaid and TANF. A highlight of this presentation was the premier showing of a new FNS video entitled "Hunger Champions" that featured front line eligibility staff talking about their role in helping others. They expect this video to be available in the near future... watch the FNS website.

As always, it was good to connect with old friends, make new ones and re-energize myself. Next year the conference will be in Omaha, Nebraska. Mark your calendar now for August 20 – 23, 2006!

Notes from the President

By Dale Carlson, President

Quite a bit has happened in the past few months that affect us all in our personal and professional lives. Since the Minnesota-N.E.W. Summer Seminar in May, the Legislature wrapped up its work. One of the bigger issues faced was MinnesotaCare for adults. Had this been eliminated, potentially thousands of people would be without healthcare coverage and be left with very few alternatives. After a lot of hard work, the Legislature was able to continue funding MinnesotaCare.

More recently, we saw the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the entire country. Economic Assistance departments have been an integral part in helping those that are victims of Katrina with Food Support, medical and cash assistance, as well as help with obtaining housing and finding new jobs in a new home. In Minnesota, financial workers were ready from around the state to go to Camp Ripley to provide assistance. Financial workers also staffed the State Assistance Center in St. Paul providing help and processing applications.

It is times and situations like these that we can be extremely proud of our profession and the positive impact we can have on people's lives. The National Eligibility Workers Association has as its motto "*Personally we care, professionally we serve.*" We do this not only in times of national crisis, but also on a day to day basis, helping one person at a time. We do not always get recognition for our work and we certainly do not receive large financial rewards. We do however, feel rewarded in knowing that we make a difference in people's lives and in our communities. Be proud of the work you do and take personal satisfaction that your work is important to the many people you serve.

N.E.W. Horizons Award

Chris Holshauser and Dale Carlson



During the 2005 Summer Seminar, Minnesota N.E.W. President Dale Carlson, presented the first annual Minnesota N.E.W. Horizons Award to Maria Ticia, Dakota County and Chris Holshauser, St. Louis County. This award is presented to eligibility professionals who exemplify N.E.W.'s ideals of having a positive attitude, a dedicated team spirit, practical knowledge and skills, creativity in utilizing those skills, a sense of pride in the work we do, and a genuine desire to improve the lives of others. Maria and Chris each received a framed certificate and \$50 cash.

Dakota County N.E.W. Members



Nominations for next year's award can be submitted by emailing Donna.Biederman@state.mn.us or Dale.Carlson@co.dakota.mn.us. Emails should include the name of the nominee, the nominee's job title, the county or agency where the nominee works, and why you feel the nominee should get this award. The award will be announced at the 2006 Summer Seminar. Nominations may be submitted starting November 15, 2005 through February 28, 2006.



AROUND THE STATE

by Karen O’Keefe, Stearns County

“I didn’t know about N.E.W. until the 2005 Summer Seminar.”

On August 26th, I uttered this confession to a forgiving N.E.W. board. “So? What’s the big deal?” you may be wondering. Well, please allow me to tell my story, and perhaps you’ll understand my reluctance to admit this little truth.

In 1999, I landed in a financial program supervisory position, eager to learn the ropes. As you probably know yourself, obtaining critical information in the county can be hit and miss. Everyone is so busy! Not to diss my co-workers, bless their hearts, but they had time only to teach the basics. The fundamentals certainly got priority over exploring professional organizations. In time though, I got acquainted with MFWCCA, MAFAS, MSSA, and AMC, to name just a few, but N.E.W. escaped my radar, until...

A month before the Summer 2005 seminar, a supervisory colleague from a neighboring county casually asked me whether I planned to attend. “Why? Isn’t it just for financial workers?” I asked. She explained that *N.E.W. is for anyone involved with the public assistance eligibility process*, and recommended I go.

Fast forward to the present. Not only did I attend that seminar, but I came away so impressed that I’ve since volunteered to become a board member of the Minnesota chapter of N.E.W.! Just one meeting convinced me that N.E.W. is worthy of my time (and perhaps yours as well?) for the following reasons:

- *Timely and relevant information.* That day, I heard about a law enforcement officer’s first-hand experiences with dealing with Minnesota’s meth epidemic. This wasn’t textbook stuff; he told real street stories. I also became enlightened on the subject of e-mail “netiquette.” Until then, I was aware of very few rules governing this unique form of communication.
- *An opportunity to network.* A cliché, I know, but isn’t it interesting to occasionally converse and compare workplace practices with a colleague from another county over a bakery treat and cup of coffee?
- *A focus of “professionalism.”* I don’t have to tell you we are inundated with technical information - all necessary, to be sure. N.E.W.’s goal is a bit different, however. The emphasis is on soft skills, which

encompass everything from building our overall awareness of community issues to strengthening our personal abilities to perform at our very best in demanding situations.

Can you now see why I was sold on N.E.W., and, consequently, why I felt bad about my ignorance of N.E.W. for the past six years?

I must make one more confession. It’s not like me to volunteer to serve on a board after just one encounter, so naturally, I had some reservations. As I drove to my first meeting, I had these nagging thoughts: What will the members be like? Will we “click?” Will we share the same philosophy? Will there be doughnuts? My fears dissipated within minutes. The N.E.W. members in attendance made me feel immediately welcome, demonstrated a collective commitment to N.E.W. and its goals, and graciously fed me to boot.

In summary, thank you for reading my personal N.E.W. story. Maybe you have one of your own, but if not, please consider a membership. Tell them Karen sent you. See you soon!

MN N.E.W. Board Members

Dale Carlson , President	651-554-5671
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Melissa Ruth , Treasurer	651-554-5715
Donna Biederman , Secretary	651-297-4923
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