PROJECT UPDATE

Illinois Delta Network Report
Joel Fritzler, IDN Project Coordinator

The Illinois Delta Network Project (IDN) is part of a three-year federally funded program designed to improve access to primary health care in the Mississippi Delta Region including the southern 16 Illinois counties. After completing community-based needs assessments, most of the local networks are preparing to implement Year-Two activities based upon their Year-One findings.

The need for non-emergency medical transportation and the lack of dental healthcare were two of the pressing concerns that were reported in the local networks health plans and final reports. An issue of significance identified by almost every project was the lack of awareness of existing local healthcare and social services among residents and even local healthcare providers. Most of this year’s applications include projects to develop different types of resource guides using various strategies to distribute them.

Local Project Highlight: White County
The White County IDN Project is coordinated by their Community Encourager, Gerarda Simmons. In addition to overseeing the process of conducting their needs assessment, Ms. Simmons assisted in planning the Delta Peer Learning meeting in Memphis this past January. She also represented Illinois at the meeting by giving a presentation on their project.

Building and strengthening local healthcare networks is one of the two primary goals of the IDN. Thus, organizing an active 15 member Community Health Council (CHC) was a successful outcome for this local project. The local network partners include the lead agency Egyptian Public & Mental Health Department, RIDES Mass Transit, Wabash Christian Retirement Center and the Visiting Nurse Association. Partner representatives serve on the CHC. The project’s final report listed a total of 390 volunteer hours and the majority of these hours are attributed to the work of the CHC.

Members of the CHC and Ms. Simmons conducted 13 focus groups and 19 key informant interviews to gather information and three community-wide meetings at the end of the project to share with residents the findings of their study.

The three healthcare priorities identified through the White County needs assessment were: 1) improve the awareness of existing services, 2) improve the oral health of county residents with an emphasis on children and low-income individuals, and 3) improve or increase the healthcare access of the “working uninsured.” The plans to address these priorities are to: 1) publish a comprehensive resource guide to be distributed to both health care providers and consumers, 2) develop and implement an oral health program modeled after a currently used program in Wabash County, 3) develop an internship program for dental students to work under practicing dentists, and 4) research the feasibility of opening a free clinic.

To strengthen the local network, monthly lunch meetings of the CHC will be conducted with guest speakers covering topics relevant to their projects and concerns. Additional CHC members will be recruited, especially from school districts since the oral health project is focused on school aged children.

The activities of the White County IDN project are a glimpse of what is being accomplished in one county and is a reflection of the possibilities the Illinois Delta Network is bringing to the region.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

SIUC-COPC Offers College Night 2004 to North Carbondale Youth
Juan L. Maultsby, Community Development Specialist

The SIUC-Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) College Night 2004 convened on February 18, 2004 at the Eurma Hayes Center Auditorium. Approximately twenty-three students from the North and Northeast side of Carbondale attended the event. Students present were from the Carbondale Middle School and Carbondale Community High School. Dr. Seymour Bryson, Rick Steudel, and Donnell Wilson from the offices of SIUC Center for Basic Skills, Financial Aid Office, and Upward Bound respectively, and Chester Hood from Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. were speakers for the occasion. Preparing for college, obtaining college credit during high school, balancing school work and social life, and applying for financial aid were the topics presented to these prospective postsecondary students. At the end of the event students had the opportunity to ask questions, of which, financial support was a major concern.
After the program, as practice, Juan L. Maultsby allowed students to sign up for on-line financial aid applications. While several students took applications for SIUC’s Upward Bound Program and surrounding community colleges, students also expressed interest in scholarships and inquired about how to improve their G.P.A. College Night 2004 was an attempt to familiarize students with the resources available to them to further their education.

The primary goal of College Night was to introduce and attract first generation students to take necessary steps toward preparing themselves for entry into college. The SIUC-COPC program operates on the principle that early intervention by providing young students with positive role models, education and assistance is the key to motivating students to become college freshmen. Program objectives of the SIUC-COPC education component served as a key factor in hosting College Night 2004. These objectives are:

- **Continuing Education**: Maintain and publicize continuing education opportunities
- **Educational Assistance**: Assist residents in completing and processing applications for post-secondary education programs
- **Financial Assistance**: Facilitate relationships to make referrals to University/College financial assistance officers

SIUC-COPC College Night 2004 was co-sponsored by Attucks Community Services, Inc., City of Carbondale, SIUC Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development, SIUC Office of Economic & Regional Development, SIUC Center for Basic Skills, and the SIUC Upward Bound Program.