

National Association of County Human Services Administrators

Innovations in Human Services Award



WHEELS TO WORK

Service Shop at Morrow County Job and Family Services

Morrow County, Ohio, is a small rural county of approximately 34,322 residents. As our agency dealt with the challenges facing our clients in becoming self-sufficient, some interesting data began to emerge.

- **Nearly 80% of the population is dispersed outside of the villages or towns.** The largest community of Mt Gilead has a population of 3,290 and the next largest is Cardington with a population of 1,849. The vast majority of our citizens live down country roads.
- Morrow County has the highest percentage of out of county commuters in the State of Ohio. The lack of retail or industrial jobs forces **67% of our working population to drive outside the county to work.**
- **We have no public transportation.** A transportation collaborative, MCTC, provides rides to medical appointments and/or employment, but the costs are prohibitive for many who do not qualify for payment by contracted agencies.
- **Morrow County's aging population is one of the fastest growing in the State.** Services for the elderly need to increase quickly to keep up with this growth and transportation is high on the list of needs.

Job and Family Services took the first steps to collaborate with other agencies and develop a transportation program to address the needs identified in the data. A needs assessment conducted countywide in 2000 had clearly shown transportation as a problem area in Morrow County.

Our agency was already providing vehicle repairs through PRC, (Prevention, Retention, and Contingency Program) to assist working families maintain employment. However the yearly \$500 limit at local garages was not sufficient to keep older vehicles safely on the road. An in-house service shop could provide more extensive repairs if labor was provided by staff mechanics and considered administrative costs, allowing all \$500 towards parts for each client's vehicle.

The idea for an in-house service shop, *Wheels to Work*, was endorsed by the county commissioners, who agreed to assist with space if the shop would also provide repairs for

county vehicles. A supervisor and mechanic were hired in the summer of 2006 as our vision started to become a reality.

During the first nine months of operation, 97 client vehicles were repaired at a cost of \$177.94 each towards the PRC limit for parts. This compares to the previous average of \$353.03 per vehicle. Follow up with the clients showed that about 90% of them were able to maintain employment with the support from the service shop.

Wheels to Work quickly grew into a full service shop with three full time mechanics and three youth trainees. The purchase of two lifts, tire balancer and changer, wheel alignment system, a/c recovery system, and pipe bender allowed the mechanics to tackle more extensive jobs.

EXPANSION

Since Morrow County Job and Family Services is a quadruple combined agency, we wanted to branch out into each program area. This would assist with financial sustainability as well as expand the number of residents who benefit from the shop. Populations who may not be eligible for PRC but may receive services are:

- Food Stamp clients who work or are seeking work
- Child Support obligors who are working
- Child Welfare parents who need transportation to keep their family intact
- Older adults who need transportation to get to the doctor or grocery (these are repaired by youth trainees who are supervised by certified mechanics)

Several agencies in Morrow County struggle with funding issues. The services of the shop, including routine maintenance and repairs, are offered to them at a reduced rate through an MOU. In addition to servicing the 14 vehicles in the JFS fleet, we also have agreements with the following:

- Morrow County Commissioners and County Dog Warden
- Morrow County Veterans Services
- Seniors on Center
- Morrow County Transportation Collaborative
- Morrow County Sheriff's Department
- Morrow County Courts
- Village of Edison Maintenance and Police Department
- Cardington Village Maintenance and Police Department
- Mental Health Board/Alcohol and Drug Programs

A bulk fuel tank has also been installed at ***Wheels to Work***. The agencies mentioned above are able to purchase fuel at a reduced rate. The computerized system tracks purchases for billing and indicates if a certain vehicle may need maintenance for better fuel efficiency. This has been a tremendous savings for each department and created a sense of cooperation and collaboration.

The shop is also a WEP (Work Experience Program) site. Unemployed clients on cash assistance are placed in activities to assist them become job ready. Short term training can be accomplished in oil or tire changing, customer service, or office skills. Clients also receive

coaching on soft skills, including coming to work on time and when scheduled, and following instructions. Job seeking skills are a part of the training.

FUTURE PLANS

Wheels to Work is constantly looking for new ways to serve our community. Several counties have visited the shop in hopes of creating a similar program.

Our next phase, ***Wheels to Work +***, is a car buying program. Working families who qualify will be able to purchase a newer model used car with a warranty for any repairs through the shop. This will take away any worry about car problems and allow families the opportunity to become truly self sufficient.

Morrow County's ***Wheels to Work*** service shop has taken an innovative approach towards meeting the transportation needs of our residents.