

March 23, 2010

Chairman Weisz and members of the **Health and Human Services Committee**. I am Edward Forde, Director of Benson County Social Services, through a contract with Lakes Social Service District, a collaborative of Ramsey & Towner Counties. Benson County has the Spirit Lake Reservation within its boundaries. Minnewaukan is Benson County's county seat.

Following are some examples of how we live collaboration:

Benson County Social Services provides **outreach** to Fort Totten four half days each week in the Spirit Lake Tribal Social Services Office Building. Nine eligibility workers cover this outreach site on a rotating basis spending four days each week in the outreach office taking applications, doing interviews, answering questions, etc. Another two workers provide EBT Card Issuance services are provided to the outreach site 2 half days each week. Spirit Lake Tribal Social Services provides office space for these services rent free.

Benson County administers the **TANF** program, which is a cash assistance program with a total County caseload of 184 cases. 161 cases (87.5%) of our TANF caseload is Native American residing on the reservation. Tribal Social Services operates a General Assistance program for Native American households. There is a lot of communication and to avoid duplication of benefits.

TANF clients are required to be in an approved work or training activity; clients are referred to the Career Options program for this service. The Department of Human Services has contracted with the Tribal Employment and Training program to provide services to some of our TANF clients who are enrolled in colleges. The county works these closely in these endeavors.

The county also administers the **SNAP** program (previously known as the Food Stamp Program) serving 496 cases county wide 39 cases (68.8%) are Native American residing on the reservation. The Spirit Lake Tribe also administers a food commodity program. Native American clients may choose to receive benefits from either SNAP or the commodity program. We frequently communicate with the tribal program to avoid duplication of benefits.

Both the county and the tribe operate **Child Care** programs; families can apply at either office.

There are two fuel assistance (**LIHEAP**) programs in Benson County; the tribe determines the population they wish to serve, and the county serves all others. The

tribal program serves enrolled members of the Spirit Lake Tribe who live within the boundary of the reservation. All other residents apply at the county office. Currently the Benson County LIHEAP caseload is 141, 19 cases (13.5%), are Native Americans residing on the reservation.

We often receive referrals from the Indian Health Service if they believe a person may qualify for North Dakota **Medicaid** without a recipient liability.

Another area I was asked to address is the referral process for **child abuse and neglect reports**. When our office receives a report of child abuse or neglect, our first step is to determine where the child lives. If the child is Native American residing on the reservation, we forward the referral to Tribal Social Services. In some situations reports related to Native American children residing have been referred back to us for investigation because the children were not enrollable or were enrolled with other tribes. Tribal Social Services is typically very understaffed and the work can do is often limited to crisis resolution and referral to other service entities.

Benson CSS has 3 licensed **child foster care homes**. Foster care subsidized adoption is also an area that also collaboration. We service 7 non-Native American children in our foster care caseload and 64 Native American residing on the reservation plus 18 sub-adopt (92.1%) of the children. Tribal Social Services certifies their own "foster care homes".

Home and Community Based Service (HCBS) has an average caseload of 104 elderly or disabled individuals. In this program 63(60.6%) of the clients are Native American residing on the reservation. The program reimburses QSP's to provide care. Some of the QSP's are family members and other times the individual requests the services offered via the county. Benson CSS has four part time In Home Care Specialist positions. Thus, we budget to provide the needed services to our elderly and disabled citizens.

Budgeting process: The proposed budget is developed based on recent history, service trends, taking into account new mandates and program changes. The Budget is published at least two weeks before the final budget hearing. Benson County is a poor county being heavily impacted by poor farm economy and Devils Lake Basin flooding issues over the past 13 years. The social service budget supports a sizeable staff to administer mandated programs, as well as our share of the various program costs, such as foster care, medical assistance, and SPED. Our budget does not include any optional HCBS services, as we just don't have the resources. We too are very understaffed, but it is a fact of life for us in a county with so little tax revenue.