

LOW
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News

LIFE Hit The Road In May

By Pamela Carter, LIFE Chairperson

Miles traveled - over 1,000.

Hours spent - over 500.

Participants' interaction and information shared - priceless!

During the month of May, the LIFE Steering Committee traveled across the state conducting regional meetings. Our stops in Batavia, Watertown, Johnson City, Queensbury, Kingston and New York City enabled us to share important information on New York's programs and services available to assist low-income energy consumers. It also provided an opportunity for us to get to know the many individuals and agencies who are dedicated to helping these New York residents. For the Committee, the time spent traveling this spring was invaluable!

Public Service Commission Chairwoman Patricia L. Acampora and Commissioners Robert E. Curry, Jr. and Cheryl A. Buley each attended and presented at a regional meeting. They had a chance to meet and interact with the attendees, which they all found quite helpful and informative. Further, many staff from NYSERDA presented at these regional meetings. Their combined participation helped to demonstrate the Commission and NYSERDA's continuing support of LIFE.

The day-long meeting in each city included time for participants to network with one another, learn about the current state of energy usage, see a weatherization demonstration, hear about key programs (including Lifeline Telephone Service, EPIC and Earned Income Tax Credit) and help the Coopers, a hypothetical family, identify resources to meet their financial and energy challenges. It was quite a full day for all!

We were pleased to learn that most of the attendees found the experience to be extremely valuable. For instance, a participant in Batavia said the seminar was "such a great place to learn about other resources." In Watertown, a woman said, "It was an excellent session. Networking opportunities were very effective. The hypothetical family exercise was a great idea." An attendee in Johnson City stated, "A very well presented program, excellent speakers and good communication between people." A Queensbury participant commented, "This year's session was very 'empowering' - no pun intended. I learned a lot that will assist me when working with customers and for my own personal benefit, too. Thanks for a wonderful day!" In Kingston, an attendee commented, "Every presenter gave me something to take away! The most crucial aspect today was the networking." A New York City participant said, "This was my first conference. I found the information very useful. I also feel it would be (helpful) to my clients."

It was certainly our pleasure to host these informative meetings across the state. Although the LIFE Regional Meetings have concluded for 2007, the LIFE Steering Committee has already begun planning our **2008 Statewide LIFE Conference**, which will take place **May 20-21, 2008 in Albany, NY**. Please mark your calendar now and plan to join us next spring!

For more information about LIFE, visit www.lifenynews.org

My LIFE Experience

By Karen Andersen, NYS Department of Public Service

Recently I attended the LIFE Regional Meeting in Kingston, NY. This was the first time I had the opportunity to attend a LIFE event. While the volume of information provided was astounding, it was disseminated in such a way that it was not overwhelming. The wealth of material presented ranged from basic knowledge, to more advanced updates on the state of energy and the concept of energy burden, to specific programs and services available to lower-income consumers. Useful energy savings tips, beneficial to people of all income levels, were also shared.

Perhaps the most important information that I received was on the benefit of using ENERGY STAR® appliances and available energy reduction methods. This information reminded me of how important it is to conserve our energy resources not only because of the high price of energy today, but also to ensure that there will be enough energy for future generations.

During the meeting, the participants also had three valuable opportunities to network with one another. By the end of the day, everyone participated in a role-play exercise and exchanged specifics with one another, such as their name, agency and area of specialization. We left the seminar with a rolodex of new sources of information and expertise. It's always helpful to know someone I can call when I have a question or a problem.

I can definitely say I learned a great deal about ways to help low-income consumers save on their energy bills, and I got to network with many dedicated people working to help low-income consumers deal with energy and other life needs. If you have never experienced a LIFE event, I encourage you to do so. You won't be sorry!

New York State Seeks Aggressive Energy Usage Reduction

Compiled by Elizabeth Katz, NYS Department of Public Service

This past spring Governor Spitzer announced **A Clean Energy Strategy** for New York, called the "15 by 15" plan. His directive is to reduce electricity consumption in New York State by 15% from the currently forecasted level for the year 2015.

On May 16, 2007, the New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) initiated a proceeding to design an electric and natural gas Energy Efficiency Portfolio Standard (EPS). This is a significant element of the implementation mechanism for Governor Spitzer's "15 x 15" plan. The Commission's role is to determine the paramount efficiency programs that will lead New York State to 15% by 2015.

The Commission's EPS proceeding will include development of target goals and timetables for electricity and natural gas usage efficiency, and will also:

- Examine critical design options led by Department of Public Service staff, including cost-effectiveness, the role for New York State Energy Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) based models, the role of competitive energy services companies and an inquiry into whether certain types of efficiency programs are best administered centrally while others are more suited to delivery by utilities, competitive load-serving entities, or others;
- Measure and compare the expected benefits and costs of various design options;
- Develop energy efficiency programs to ensure all New Yorkers, especially those with low incomes, have the opportunity to benefit from lower bills resulting from lowered usage and consider environmental justice concerns in program design;
- Assess best practices to integrate demand response technology and utility rate incentives to encourage customers to shift usage and reduce peak loads;
- Address coordination of the development of energy efficiency resources with other State initiatives and New York City and other municipal and local energy efficiency programs; and
- Ensure transparent and technically sound methods for measurement and verification of net energy savings, benefits and costs, as well as assessment of customer satisfaction and program efficacy.

New York State continued

The Commission will issue a written order reflecting the above action. That order, when available, may be obtained from the Commission's web site www.dps.state.ny.us by accessing the Commission Documents section of the homepage and referencing Case Number 07-E-0548.

The Commissioner welcomes input from any interested party. If you would like more information about how to participate in this ongoing case, please contact Elizabeth Katz at 518-486-7282 or elizabeth_katz@dps.state.ny.us.

Another Tool For Your Tool Box Grandfamilies: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

By Dr. Deborah Langosch, LCSW, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

Most of us know of a grandparent who is raising a grandchild, but did you have any idea that there are 2.4 million grandparents raising 6.7 million grandchildren in the United States? This phenomenon involves one out of ten grandparents regardless of income, ethnicity or family history. Research shows that there are many reasons parents can't care for their children, including illness, death, substance abuse, mental illness, divorce, physical abuse and neglect, domestic violence, incarceration, unemployment, poverty and most recently - military deployment.

Some of us could quickly become one of these Grandfamilies. Imagine knowing that your child has struggled with mental illness or substance abuse for many years and has been raising your grandchildren. You've been concerned about the situation and have tried to help in many ways, but assumed the children were not in any immediate danger. Then, one night there's a knock on the door and you see a child protective services worker standing on the porch with your grandchildren at her side. The worker explains that the parent wasn't caring for the children adequately and the children need another home right now. You are their closest relative and the logical choice to provide this new home because the children feel safe with you.

As you accept this new role, you assume multiple new responsibilities. The children must be enrolled in your local schools; they may need counseling due to the circumstances of being separated from their parents; they will need food, clothes, doctor visits, and medical insurance. In fact, it's a pretty long and overwhelming list of needs. You may need financial help, information, guidance and resources to fulfill all of this. So, where do you turn?

New York State is fortunate to have a Kinship Navigator System. You can contact them toll free by phone: 1-877-454-6463 or by email: www.nysnavigator.org.

They have a listing of all NY State programs and resources for relative caregiving families. In NYC, you can contact the Grandparent Resource Center (GRC) at the Department for the Aging at 212-442-1094; they can provide you with local information about support groups, services and case management.

Each NYC borough has a grandparent coalition and you can learn more about these from the GRC. Brooklyn's Coalition is accessible by calling Dr. Deborah Langosch at the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services at 212-632-4760 or www.brooklyngrandparents.org.

In the Bronx, Presbyterian Senior Services has specialized housing and services for relative caregiving families and they can be reached at: 212-874-6633.

Keyspan Energy Delivery has been a valued partner with the Brooklyn Grandparents' Coalition (BGC) and is dedicated to helping relative caregiving families through their "On-Track Program". Keyspan has generously supported the efforts of the BGC by hosting forums for caregivers, providing space for meetings, and publishing the BGC newsletter.

Here is a big caution: Caregivers tend to neglect their own needs when they are raising relative children. We strongly encourage you to join a local grandparent support group, develop a strong social network and take time for self-care. It is very easy to become overwhelmed and stressed by this new role and it's important to remember you are not alone and there is help out there.

Keep Your Home Cool!

Save Energy and Combat the Summer Heat with Informed Decisions and Passive Cooling Techniques

By Chris Coll, NYSERDA

With the hot and humid weather brought on by the summer months, most New Yorkers are turning on their air conditioners to escape from the heat. Did you know that the average cost to run a room air conditioning unit exceeds \$300 annually? Additionally, this cost can increase based on certain factors such as the size and daily usage of the unit.

Fortunately, a number of low-cost, high-reward actions can reduce the amount of energy needed to cool your home:

Weatherize: Keep the hot air out and the cool air in by sealing drafty windows. Window insulation kits and caulk are available at your local hardware store.

Use blinds and shades: As much as half of the summer heat gain in your house can come from unshaded or improperly shaded windows. Shading devices such as blinds, awnings, solar screens, and curtains can reduce heat gain by up to 65%.

Utilize natural ventilation: Opening windows on opposite sides of a room or house creates a cross breeze that can cool. This strategy is particularly effective in the evenings.

Plant trees: Trees and vegetation provide a natural cooling effect by providing shade and through the process of evapotranspiration. Studies have found that strategically placing trees and other vegetation on the south and west sides of the building, where the sun's rays are most direct and intense, could reduce cooling energy consumption by up to 25%. If you don't have room to plant trees, shrubs and vines can provide the same benefit.

Shift energy-intensive tasks: Reschedule laundry and dishwashing to off-peak energy-demand hours (mornings, nights and weekends).

Replace incandescent light bulbs: ENERGY STAR® compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) reduce heat, use 66% less energy and last up to 10 times longer than a standard incandescent bulb. Switch out commonly used bulbs with CFLs. ENERGY STAR® CFLs burn cooler, whereas incandescent bulbs give off 90% of their energy as heat and only 10% as light.

Turn it off: Save electricity and reduce waste heat by shutting off lights and home electronics, especially computers, while not in use. Televisions, cable television boxes, cell phone chargers and other electronics give off far more waste heat than you might imagine! Check it out for yourself! Unplug these items to eliminate electric consumption entirely when not in use.

Use ceiling fans: ENERGY STAR® qualified ceiling fans can help cool a home without greatly increasing electricity use. They improve airflow and create pleasant breezes.

Cut out interference: Trim or remove grass, weeds, leaves and other obstacles from around the outdoor unit of your cooling system. When airflow is blocked, it puts a strain on the system and lowers efficiency.

Check the filter: A dirty filter will increase energy use and can damage the air conditioner, leading to early failures, so check it every month and replace as needed.

Choose ENERGY STAR®: When purchasing a new air conditioning unit, choose an ENERGY STAR® model. In-room air conditioners that are 10 years old use nearly 35% more energy than comparable ENERGY STAR® models. In fact, ENERGY STAR® models use 10% less energy to cool than a model meeting minimum federal standards and can save a New York household as much as \$250 in cooling costs over the lifetime of the unit.

Purchase the right size: Because air conditioners come in a variety of sizes, it is important to choose a unit that is proportional to the area that you want to cool in order to optimize efficiency. An oversized unit will experience more frequent run cycles, which ultimately decreases system efficiency as units expend a great deal of energy on start up. The longer the run cycle, the more efficient the unit operates; in fact, an increase in run time from 5 minutes to 9 minutes will increase overall system efficiency by 10%. Your local appliance retailer will be able to help you determine the proper size unit.

An effective cooling strategy will incorporate a combination of these decisions and methods. Enjoy the summer and stay cool!

Community Action to Community Angels

By Nadir Raja, NYSERDA

Following a family tragedy, Pat Standish found herself taking care of her mother-in-law, but with no source of income. Thanks to Community Action, Pat was able to survive these harsh times. She qualified for a home grant and weatherization assistance, enabling her to drastically reduce expenses. However, her story does not end there. After receiving this assistance, Pat was determined to give back to the community.

Pat joined her local Community Action Agency, where she sat on the Board of Directors for six years and served on the Executive Committee as Secretary and Vice President for four years. During those years, Pat noticed that many people's requests for help were turned down due to a lack of programs available for their needs. She wanted to help these people as she had been helped. So, in 1997, with the support of family and friends, Pat started the **Community Action Angels Program**.

Angels is a resource development program that relies on volunteers, donations and community commitment to bring in-kind goods, services and unrestricted dollars to benefit the poor. Originally, Pat managed the program from her home. However, as the program grew, it required more and more resources. In order to manage the program more efficiently, Pat accepted the Volunteer/Public Relations Coordinator position at the Wyoming County Community Action.

As the Angels program continued to grow, Pat realized that many Community Action Agencies could benefit from this program. In 2003, Pat documented the program for replication and gifted it for the specific use of the Community Action Agencies. Soon afterwards, Evelyn Harris*, Director, New York State, Department of State, Division of Community Services approved it and provided financial support to help disseminate this program through New York State Community Action Agencies with Community Services Block Grant funding. Now, any Community Action Agency interested in using the Angels program can sign on as a member and can use it.

This story of Pat Standish is an actual account of a woman who needed and received help from Community Action. Her generous spirit then led her to work diligently to give back to the community. For more information, or to become involved in the Community Action Angels Program, please call your local Community Action Agency. You can also contact Pat Standish directly at 585-237-2600 or by email at pstandish@wccainc.org and she will direct you to the Angels program closest to you.

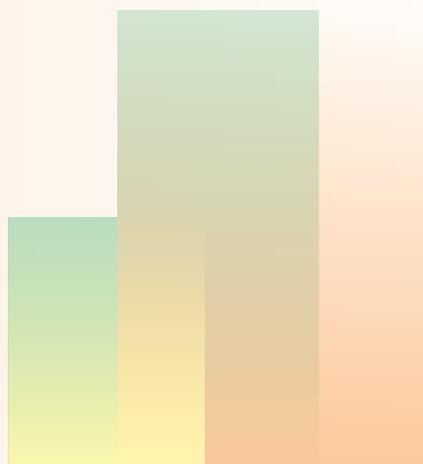
**Evelyn Harris is a member of the LIFE Steering Committee*

Save-the-date: 2008 Statewide Life Conference

May 20-21, 2008

Albany Marriott

Albany, New York



Steering Committee Spotlight

Virginia Walsh - A Valuable Resource to Low-Income Populations

By Mary Thompson Grassi, NYSERDA

Virginia Walsh believes that she has always had the community service “bug”. While working as a sales administrator for Carr Business Machines, Virginia said that she received a spiritual calling, encouraging her to serve the community. She answered this calling by becoming a strong client advocate of the New York low-income population.

Virginia held several community outreach jobs, and eventually joined Honeywell, serving as the Residential Energy Affordability Partnership (REAP) Marketing Coordinator. Honeywell is contracted by the Long Island Power Authority to run REAP, a residential program helping low-income customers manage their energy use and lower their electric bills. When she joined REAP and the LIFE Steering Committee, Virginia admitted, “I realized how little I knew about utilities, how energy is delivered, the rights and responsibilities of consumers and the numerous energy assistance programs.” LIFE has provided her with a great forum to learn the basics about energy in New York; it truly helps her better serve the REAP low-income customers.

The goal of REAP is to help customers better control energy costs through efficiency. Under Virginia’s guidance, the REAP Marketing Department has been able to break many barriers and surpass many goals in the Long Island region. Originally, REAP was not a familiar program to the mass population. Now, REAP is easily recognized and respected by many people, especially community advocates. Actually, their goal is to expand outreach to working people whose income is still under REAP guidelines. For example, about 259,000 Long Islanders used food pantries or soup kitchens in 2005. If REAP could help these customers save a few dollars on their energy costs, that money could be spent to put more food on the table.

Virginia knows that there is a long way to go and she is constantly seeking new methods of helping people. Virginia invites anyone with innovative ways to help the low-income populations to contact her at 1-800-263-6786 x 3211 or email at Virginia.Walsh@honeywell.com.

LIFE Steering Committee

- New York State Department of Public Service
- Association for Energy Affordability
- Cattaraugus Community Action
- Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation
- Community Energy Services, Inc.
- Community Power Network of New York State
- Consolidated Edison Company of New York
- Dutchess County Community Action Agency, Inc.
- KeySpan Energy Delivery
- LIPA/REAP
- National Fuel Gas Distribution Company
- National Grid
- New York State Consumer Protection Board
- New York State Department of State Division of Community Services
- New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- New York State Electric & Gas Corporation
- New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
- New York State Office for the Aging
- New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
- New York State Weatherization Directors' Association
- Public Utility Law Project
- Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc.
- Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation

Please share and forward this newsletter to colleagues.

If you know someone who you would like us to add to the LIFE News mailing list, or if you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please send an e-mail to Chris Coll at czc@nyserdera.org

To submit an article to be considered for inclusion in a future issue of LIFE News, please contact LIFE Steering Committee Member, Elizabeth Katz, at 518-486-7282 or by e-mail at elizabeth_katz@dps.state.ny.us

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