



LIFE 2005 Regional Meetings

Conference Report: Ellicottville

The LIFE 2005 Regional Meeting for the Western NY region was held on August 3, 2005 at the Holiday Valley Conference Center in Ellicottville. Fifty-nine individuals representing 31 organizations attended the event. Martin Insogna, Chair of the LIFE Steering Committee and Utility Consumer Program Specialist for the New York State Department of Public Service served as Master of Ceremonies. Support for the regional meeting was provided by our local host Cattaraugus Community Action. Tina Zerbian, Executive Director of Cattaraugus Community Action and a member of the LIFE Steering Committee provided a local welcome.

Agenda

The agenda for the regional meeting included the following sessions:

- **Session I: Energy Prices: Challenges to Affordability.** This session explored the impact that rising energy prices are having on low-income energy consumers. *Speaker: Charles Wesley, NYS Energy Research and Development Authority.*
- **Session II: The Low-Income Story: In Their Own Words.** This session provided an opportunity to hear directly from low-income consumers as well as the chance to discuss the barriers to participation, the difficulties that low-income consumers face getting assistance and the strategies they take to address their energy needs. *Speakers: Burlin Bridges, Customer and Tina Stanczykowski, Customer. Moderator: Sue Montgomery Corey, Community Power Network of NYS.*
- **Session III: Everybody Has an Advocate; Everybody is an Advocate.** This session identified policy advocates working on low-income energy issues at the state level. Opportunities for public participation in energy policy development and the constraints that affect participants when utilizing these opportunities. Finally, the program provided an overview of the upcoming low-income policy development agenda. *Speaker: Ben Wiles, Public Utility Law Project.*
- **Session IV: Being a Smarter Energy Shopper.** This session explored some opportunities we all have to become smarter shoppers. It also discussed steps New York State is taking to get more bang for its HEAP bucks. *Speakers: Virginia Stimson, NYS Department of Public Service and John McCarthy, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.*
- **Session V: Building Local Alliances.** One of the most important techniques for developing sustainable community energy solutions is the creation of local alliances. This session provided a close-up view of existing or potential alliances that may benefit the region. *Speakers: Candy Plants, Cattaraugus Community Action, Barry Gan, St. Bonaventure University, Tina Zerbian, Cattaraugus Community Action, and Sharon Mathe, Healthy Community Alliance.*
- **A group discussion** rounded out the day, which focused on the challenges and opportunities facing low-income households in Western New York and the impact that rising energy prices are having on those households. A summary of the group discussion comments is included here and is categorized into five areas: Outreach & Education, Information Clearinghouse, Assistance Strategies (i.e. Short-Term), Long-Term Solutions, and Crisis & Concern.

Discussion Group Summary

The following is based on three discussion groups that met during the regional meeting.

Outreach & Education	Information Clearinghouse	Assistance Strategies (i.e. Short-Term)	Long-Term Solutions	Crisis & Concern
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change energy conservation marketing strategies 2. Need to spread the word about services available 3. Need more education 4. Videos on energy conservation for waiting rooms 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to get info on getting help...well publicized phone number 2. Agencies working together can make life easier for consumers and workers 3. One-stop shot – consolidate application processes 4. 211/311 type of referral service 5. Maximize resources/skills 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve clients financial literacy 2. Add energy focus to case assessments 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Involve municipal utilities in dialog 2. Volunteer weatherization 3. First time home buying programs 4. More consumer input for programs 5. Treat clients with dignity and respect 6. Holistic approach to assistance 7. Value of budget counseling increases when applied long term 8. Value of education 9. Change culture/outlook 10. Renewables/local energy sources 11. Address energy costs – supply/demand 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Code enforcement officers sometimes unwilling to enforce code when they don't understand it 2. Enforcement officers not wanting to put families out of home but are unsure of options 3. Lack of support networks 4. How will we know if we are successful? 5. How do we move towards "high impact" strategies? 6. Increasing transportation costs 7. HEAP rewards abuse of system (emergency HEAP) 8. New look at who/what is "low-income"

Conference Evaluation Results

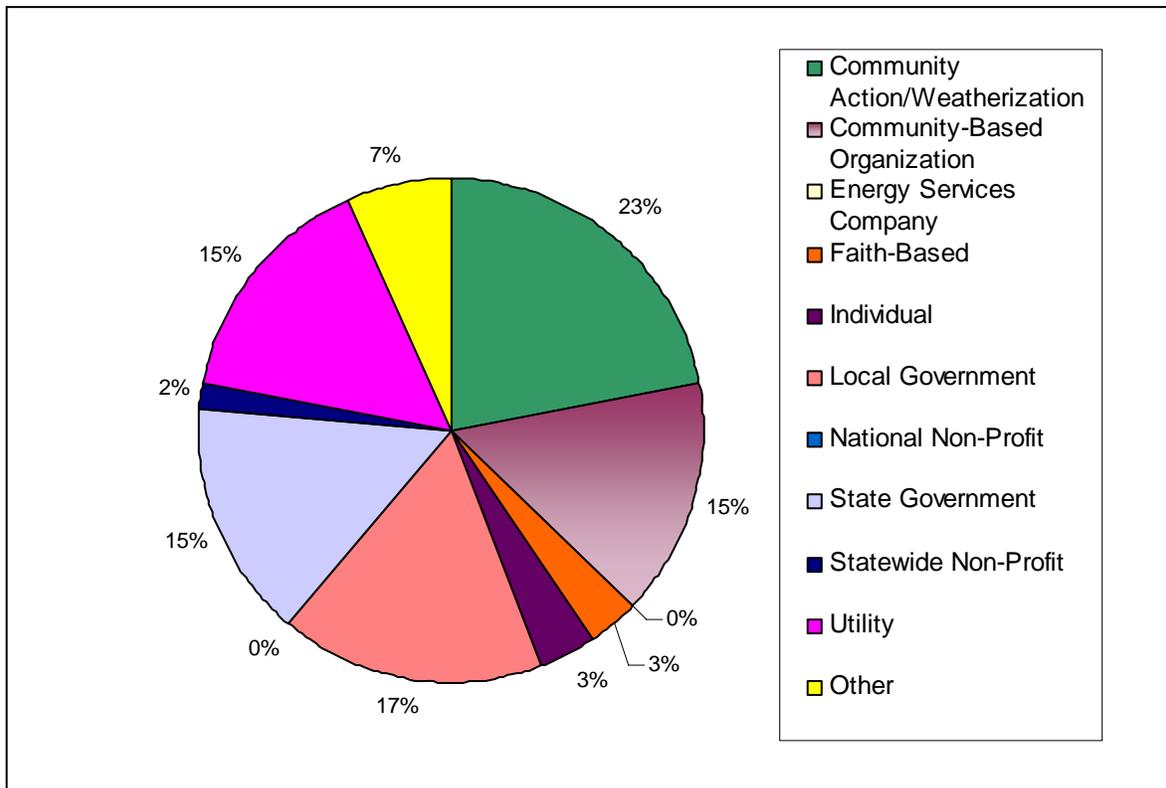
Each conferee was asked to complete a conference evaluation. Thirty participants completed evaluations with the following results.

1. How well did the Regional Meeting meet your expectations? *Over 86% of the 29 attendees who responded to this question indicated that the conference overall met or exceeded their expectations.*
2. Please rate the quality of the speakers overall. *Over 96% of the 29 attendees who responded to this question indicated that the quality of the speakers met or exceeded their expectations.*
3. Participants were asked to identify what three sessions included in the conference would most help them in their work. Based on these responses, all five sessions were ranked as follows:
 - a. *Session I: Energy Prices: Challenge to Affordability*
 - b. *Session IV: Being a Smarter Energy Shopper and Session V: Building Local Alliances*
 - c. *Session II: In Their Own Words*
 - d. *Session III: Everybody has an Advocate; Everybody is an Advocate*
4. When asked “do you plan to attend future LIFE Regional Meetings” *over 86% of the 22 attendees who responded to this question indicated that they would.*
5. Attendees were given a list of possible benefits of the conference. The following are ranked according to the percentage of participants who indicated that they found each item helpful:
 - a. *Network with others with shared interest – 66.67%*
 - b. *Receive valuable information – 63.33%*
 - c. *Identify new ideas that can assist you in your work – 56.67%*
 - d. *Gather a list of people/organizations to contact for further discussion/questions – 53.33%*
 - e. *Have an opportunity to ask questions & have a venue to discuss the issues facing the low-income households in your region – 30.00%*
 - f. *Compare your region to other regions in New York State – 23.33%*
 - g. *Provide input for future forums – 16.67%*

Unique Regional Issues

- Forced mobility is recognized as an issue for low-income families to a greater extent in this region because of efforts being made by Cattaraugus Community Action to track the housing disruptions caused by energy costs and other factors.
- New opportunities to address and resolve poverty may exist through high impact strategies such as those identified by the Move the Mountain model.
- There is recognition that many program outcomes do not lend themselves easily to numerical representation. New program metrics are needed to measure success.
- Transportation issues are critical in this region due to geography and rural character of the region.
- Issues and concerns of the region may not be adequately understood and addressed by the state capital due to the region's distance from Albany.

Participation by Sector



Organizations Represented at This Regional Meeting

- Catholic Charities of Buffalo
- Catholic Charities of Cattaraugus County
- Cattaraugus Community Action
- Cattaraugus County Community Services
- Cattaraugus County Department of Social Services
- Cattaraugus Development Corporation
- Chautauqua County Office for the Aging
- Chautauqua Home Rehab Improvement Corporation
- Chautauqua Opportunities
- Community Power Network of NYS
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cattaraugus County
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chautauqua County
- Erie County Senior Services
- Genesee County Office for the Aging
- Healthy Community Alliance
- Honeywell, Inc.
- National Fuel Gas Distribution
- Niagara County Department of Social Services
- Niagara Mohawk
- NYS Department of Public Service
- NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- NYS Energy Research and Development Authority
- NYS Electric & Gas
- NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
- Public Utility Law Project
- Rehabilitation Center
- Rochester Gas & Electric Corp.
- St. Bonaventure University
- Town of Java
- Urban Center Weatherization
- Western NY Energy Smart Communities