

# Community can help those who are in need

President Obama, on establishing a White House office on faith-based initiatives, stated, "There is a force for good greater than government."

In Benton and Franklin counties, there is a mechanism for coordinating that good — 4People's online Community Case Management System.

The web-based software system has helped connect more than 6,000 people in the two counties with critical services provided by government, nonprofit and faith-based organizations.

But hard economic times have brought cutbacks in many important programs, leaving the faith-based community to take up the slack.

Faith-based groups have programs and projects that fit certain needs. Food pantries, clothes closets, car

loan programs and cash for rent and utilities are examples.

Volunteers often spend an hour or more listening to an individual's story and entering pertinent data into the online system, even if they cannot help that person directly.

A sympathetic ear is a valuable resource, and the individual often gets help from other community groups that list services.

Funded professional agencies have resisted participating in the online system because they follow the money.

Such agencies are a vital part of the health and human services community, but their case managers often are unable to serve clients' needs that don't fit into one of their funded programs. Entering even minimal client data into the online system

requires nonfunded time.

But without the system, those in need are forced to go from agency to agency, retelling their story, filling out duplicate paperwork, and all the while those trying to give help are unaware of each other's efforts.

The local United Way's "Community Solutions" plan, for example, provides lots of verbiage about outcomes and measurables, but there are no provisions for real-time coordination and collaboration by participating agencies.

The online system helps close that gap. Benton Franklin Community Action Committee (BFCAC) provided funding for operations from 2006 through 2008.

During those three years, 20 organizations coordinated services and shared client information, serving 3,000 adult clients and 3,000 children.

The faith-based members alone documented nearly \$200,000 worth

of services provided.

Update 2009: BFCAC no longer has funds available to support the online software licensing fees. The system endures with faith-based members who fund some of the fees. The remainder is coming from the pockets of the all-volunteer 4People board of directors.

Anyone can help support this program by going to [www.tcfm.org/secure/forms/reca/contribute.html](http://www.tcfm.org/secure/forms/reca/contribute.html).

BFCAC and the other funded agencies in the Tri-Cities have left the collaboration and coordination to the faith-based community.

The needs are rising while resources are shrinking. Making optimal use of community resources to help those in need has never been greater!

CAN (Coordinated Assistance Network) uses the same online system to coordinate disaster relief on a national level.

Partners include the American

Red Cross, Catholic Charities U.S.A., Lutheran Disaster Response, National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, The Salvation Army, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, United Way and United Methodist Committee on Relief.

The United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra requires agencies that receive its funding to participate in their VisionLink Tapestry online system.

CAN gets it, Reno United Way gets it, our local faith-based community gets it. But until those with the power to do so put coordination and collaboration into the "follow the money" equation, the vacuum with its duplication of services and associated inefficiencies will continue outside of the faith-based community!

► *Bruce McComb is treasure for 4People. To read more about the online service, visit [www.4people.org](http://www.4people.org).*



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Voices