

# Forum Focus

## Bowling Green, Missouri



**T**he Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) completed the first half of its 2003 forums on June 24 in Bowling Green, attracting 26 citizens from Pike, Cole, Marion, Monroe, Lincoln, Audrain, St. Charles and Lewis counties. Pike County Health Department Home Care and Hospice co-sponsored the forum, held at Bowling Green High School.

Although a variety of concerns were raised, a common thread was the need for attention to the next generation. Multiple speakers advocated programs to educate and care for children, teens and young adults.

**Penny** DeLaPorte, North East Community Action Corp. (NECAC), spoke about the growing teen pregnancy issue in Pike County, noting it has the highest rate within NECAC's seven-county area and also is second highest in sexually transmitted diseases. DeLaPorte said NECAC provides family planning services that do not include abortion but is the victim of budget cuts directed toward Planned Parenthood, drastically reducing the number of clients it can serve for free. Through CHART Teen Task Force, NECAC also goes into schools to educate students about prevention and abstinence, hoping educated

young people will make better health choices.

**Joanne** Schrader, Court Appointed Special Advocates, spoke about the needs of young adults coming out of the foster care system, stating that Missouri has opted out of the benefits offered through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

According to Schrader, many of these young adults have experienced trauma from abuse, neglect and separation from their families, incurring additional problems as they enter adulthood, including unemployment, homelessness and incarceration.

Schrader said, "Chafee is a wonderful thing and it creates a safety net for this population between the ages of 18 and 21 ... The federal government gave the states the option of keeping these young people in Medicaid or not providing health coverage. So Missouri, this administration, has decided to opt out of health insurance for this 18- to 21-year-old population."

Peter De Simone, acting chair of the MFH Community Advisory

Committee (CAC), responded to Schrader, emphasizing the foundation's willingness to embrace advocacy and policy and urging attendees to submit proposals for public advocacy.

Another advocate for the young was Janice Van Meter with the Governor's Advisory Council on

**"All of our general revenue funding was completely wiped out by the General Assembly a few weeks ago. We lost approximately 125 people we can serve in Pike County for free, and that's possibly 125 more pregnancies."**

**Penny DeLaPorte, NECAC, Hannibal**

Aging. "Our priority is for wellness programs – not just for seniors, but to start with children so when they are seniors they will know how to take care of themselves," she said. Van Meter stated that educating citizens as young people might prevent the health problems that place seniors in nursing homes.

**V**an Meter also addressed the issues Missouri's seniors face and supported a program – CLAIMS – that educates seniors about what services are available to them under Medicare. "By understanding and expanding the

# Bowling Green, Missouri

outreach, we could help more low-income and uninsured individuals learn more about coverage that is available to them," she explained.

**T**ransportation and access to services also continue to be issues in this part of the state. Mary Sullivan-Thomas, Community Opportunities, spoke on behalf of the Lincoln County Commission, which received a grant for its LINC program. LINC previously only provided transportation within Lincoln County but is now able to transport residents to medical appointments in other counties at a minimal fee. "We hope to provide service to about 1,000

**"One lady has been working for us for four years and she has to pay \$110 a month to get MC+ for her child. When your wages are \$6 or \$7 an hour, that's a significant amount."**

**Betsy Barnes, Pike County Agency for Developmental Disabilities, Bowling Green**

people through the grant," said Sullivan-Thomas.

Betsy Barnes, Pike County Agency for Developmental Disabilities, seconded concerns about access, particularly for those with disabilities. She also spoke about the high cost of



health insurance and the need for interpreters for Pike County's large Hispanic population. "We have some volunteer interpreters who try hard, but they are not trained to convey the medical information accurately," Barnes explained.

**A**ccording to Pat Murdock with Mark Twain Area Counseling Center in Hannibal, several organizations are attempting to bolster the shortage of mental health services in northeast Missouri. Serving nine rural counties, her organization received a two-year grant from the foundation to recruit and hire a full-time psychiatrist for the area and is working to provide this new service to the community.

Several speakers mentioned the lack of cooperation between organizations in their communities. One speaker shared how cooperating with

others has helped his organization better serve developmentally and physically disabled children and urged attendees to make more attempts to collaborate.

**T**he foundation concluded the meeting by encouraging attendees to participate in the MFH Web site's Community Voice bulletin board, an interactive section that allows visitors to post comments, exchange ideas and ask health questions.



Grand Central Building, Suite 400 • 1000 St. Louis Union Station • St. Louis, Missouri 63103-2269

Phone: (314) 345-5500 • Fax: (314) 345-5599 • Toll Free: (800) 655-5560

E-mail: [info@mffh.org](mailto:info@mffh.org) • [www.mffh.org](http://www.mffh.org)