



NEEDLES SPECIAL PROJECT



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NEEDLES SPECIAL PROJECT

BACKGROUND

The Needles Project evolved from the Grand Jury's tour of Needles County facilities in October 2002. It was evident that there were areas that should be looked into. A special projects committee was appointed and divided into three subcommittees:

- (1) Economic Development to look at economic concerns
- (2) Health and Human Services to inquire about the availability of medical services, including transportation services for the ill.
- (3) Law and Justice to examine the Public Defender's office and Sheriff's Department to see if any improvements could be initiated or transportation costs reduced.

FINDINGS - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A Needles City Council member and the City Manager were visited. The San Bernardino County Economic Development and Business Resources Manager is working with the City of Needles on a four stage participatory strategic planning process to identify and understand the economic problems of the area.

The County hired a consultant to help identify problem areas and find solutions. They are desperately trying to attract new business but the prospects are slim, as they don't have much to give as incentives. There is plenty of water and cheap power, but their labor pool is shy of skilled workers and it is difficult to compete with the low wage scale of neighboring Arizona.

The City of Needles is looking into legislation to improve the area with supportive programs. The First District County Supervisor and the area State Assemblyman are also working closely with the city to try and improve economic conditions.

The County is improving the parks around Needles, Moabi Regional Park in particular, to attract more recreational income and travelers.

RECOMMENDATION

03-15 THE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT AND THE FIRST DISTRICT COUNTY SUPERVISOR FOLLOW UP ON THE FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN THAT HAS BEEN PUT IN MOTION AND DETERMINE WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE.

FINDINGS – HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The City of Needles has a population of 4,830, of which 1,303 citizens are on disability (25 percent of the population). The median income for Needles is \$26,108. There is no available home health care. There are no hospice programs. There is no home-based food program. There is very limited affordable housing.

Meetings with the Department of Aging and Adult Services, Public Health and a private practice physician reflect the following:

The Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) conducted a needs assessment in the year 2001. This department worked with the State Independent Living Center's executive director to convene a Tri-State meeting (Nevada, California, Arizona) to assess a way to address resident issues in the Tri-State area. One problem is the lack of access to medical services because only one physician in Needles accepts Medi-Cal as health insurance, creating the problem of having to transport clients needing medical services to the Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (ARMC) in San Bernardino.

The Needles hospital (Colorado River Medical Center) does accept Medi-Cal clients, however, the physicians do not. Therefore, Medi-Cal clients can receive emergency treatment only and those clients requiring non-emergency services are referred to ARMC.

At the second tri-state meeting, DAAS and the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) volunteered to contact the various medical services providers in the Tri-State area to solicit their reasons for not accepting Medi-Cal and to inquire as to what changes were needed so that they would be willing to become Medi-Cal providers. The committee continues to work on this problem.

In the year 2002, DAAS social workers and Public Health registered nurses spent 417 hours transporting patients not given medical care in the Needles area. Public Health (PH) has since obtained a grant for a van and a driver, which partially alleviates the problem. This also returns the professionals to their primary function of caring for the patients' issues. However, the van is not available for the general population. Only clients linked specifically to PH programs are able to access transportation services to out-of-area doctors. DAAS is currently negotiating with PH to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to share costs, thus enabling DAAS clients' access to this transportation service. However, even with a DAAS and Public Health MOU in place there will still remain a population underserved.

Behavioral Health described feelings of frustration due to: (1) large patient caseload; (2) difficulty in obtaining appropriate medications; and (3) delays in obtaining necessary equipment for the totally disabled. Behavioral Health does have a video link with psychiatrists in San Bernardino.

At the Public Health Clinic the personnel, one Registered Nurse (R.N.) and one clerk, are scheduled four 10-hour days per week. Patients are scheduled every 10-15 minutes, plus they take walk-ins. Every other week a Nurse Practitioner is available 1.5 days. The R.N. sees many older or needy patients at Big River once a month and tracks 80+ patients with health problems in aging programs. This R.N. is also on the Drug Court Team as well as providing Public Health programs for this area such as primary care, reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV follow-up, TB follow-up, the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, pregnancy and pap smears. The capability of doing colposcopies (cervical exam under magnification) would alleviate travel to San Bernardino or Victorville and return results quickly. Public Health also has the school nurse contract.

The Public Health Department has video link equipment by which patients could be interviewed by an M.D., however this has not been connected. This would reduce travel time for patients.

Only recently has Needles acquired a dentist who will accept Medi-Cal. However, his practice is limited to adult Medi-Cal clients only. Children were referred out to the Victorville area. Recently a dentist in Bullhead City, Arizona area (within 20 miles) has agreed to accept children and Medi-Cal recipients.

A visit to a private physician's clinic that does accept Medi-Cal was made. This doctor stated that although the private hospital in the area does accept Medi-Cal, other physicians in the area do not. He explained that the very slow turnaround time for payment and low payment were the primary reasons. This physician is taking a second physician into the clinic this summer; an internal medicine specialist who he hopes will relieve his time with the heavy Medi-Cal practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 03-35 FORM A LIAISON BETWEEN COUNTY OFFICIALS AND HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS TO ADDRESS THE MEDICAL PROBLEMS IN THE CITY OF NEEDLES.
- 03-36 PROVIDE THE SERVICES OF A NURSE PRACTITIONER IN NEEDLES EVERY WEEK.
- 03-37 PROVIDE COLPOSCOPY EQUIPMENT AT THE NEEDLES PUBLIC HEALTH CLINIC SO THAT PATIENTS COULD BE DIAGNOSED AND TREATED WITHOUT LONG DISTANCE TRAVEL AND A PROLONGED WAIT FOR RESULTS.
- 03-38 EXTEND SOCIAL SERVICES, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND DEPARTMENT OF AGING AND ADULT SERVICES TO PROVIDE HOSPICE, HOME HEALTH AND HOME-BASED FOOD PROGRAMS IN NEEDLES.
- 03-39 CONNECT THE VIDEO LINK EQUIPMENT FOR THE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT IN NEEDLES.

FINDINGS - LAW AND JUSTICE

The Public Defender's office in the City of Needles is very small and cramped. The clerk's office area is also very small and, with increased filings for the past three years, the workload and limited workspace are detrimental to an efficiently run Public Defender's office. In the year 2000 there were 81 felony and 359 misdemeanor cases filed in Needles, 2001 showed 106 felony and 375 misdemeanor cases, and 2002 had 132 felony and 450 misdemeanor cases filed. In the first two and one-half months of 2003, there were 36 felony and 69 misdemeanor cases filed.

In the Needles City/County complex, the County owns three buildings and the City owns the fourth. The County is leasing 4,800 square feet of the city-owned building as part of a booking fee settlement agreement wherein the County received use of the space for seven years. The County currently occupies only 525 square feet of that building. Plans for expanding the County's use of the city-owned building are being developed.

The Sheriff's station at Needles does not provide client/attorney confidentiality in the interview room. A glass partition, separating the client and attorney, requires raising one's voice, which can be heard in the adjoining interview area.

There is currently no "video arraignment" or "video conferencing" system operating between the West Valley Detention Center (WVDC) and Needles. The installation of these video systems would, at times, reduce transportation costs by allowing the use of a van instead of a bus and potentially one less trip per week to transport inmates. The average annual cost to transport inmates from WVDC to Needles, at the current rate of three round trips per week, is \$403,470.

The County Board of Supervisors approved a request for a grant from the South Coast Air Quality Management District for \$301,284 to install a "video conference" system at WVDC and at branches of the Public Defender's office.

The County Information Services Department has the infrastructure and capabilities in place to handle a video arraignment and video conferencing system in Needles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 03-73 MOVE THE PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OPERATION IN NEEDLES INTO A PORTION OF THE 4,275 SQUARE FEET OF UNUSED SPACE.

- 03-74 INSTALL A PHONE SYSTEM IN THE ATTORNEY/CLIENT INTERVIEW ROOM AT THE SHERIFF'S COLORADO RIVER STATION IN NEEDLES.

- 03-75 INSTALL VIDEO ARRAIGNMENT EQUIPMENT IN NEEDLES TO REDUCE THE COST OF TRANSPORTING INMATES FROM THE WEST VALLEY DETENTION CENTER TO NEEDLES.

- 03-76 USE THE GRANT MONEY REQUESTED FROM THE SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT TO INSTALL A VIDEO CONFERENCE SYSTEM IN THE NEEDLES BRANCH OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE.