

BRUNSWICK FAMILY ASSISTANCE **STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2014**

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Directors and staff of Brunswick Family Assistance (BFA) developed this strategic plan for the period 2012-2014. It provides direction and a three-year road map for programs, services and organizational development. The Board and staff will review progress quarterly and update the plan annually as needed.

The plan was prepared with broad involvement and guidance from the Board and management staff. A Planning Committee, comprised of seven Board members and the Executive Director, developed an organizational framework and process for creating the strategic plan. The Committee met several times to establish the vision, mission, core operating values, and strategic directions for BFA which were then approved by the full Board of Directors. BFA staff provided valuable support, assistance, and analysis in completing the plan.

Board members and management staff conducted an environmental scan which involved meeting with several key community stakeholders and the Planning Committee undertook an organizational assessment. In addition, reviews of our major programs and services were conducted. These activities helped BFA assess the opportunities, challenges, and threats that we may face over the next several years and set the framework for the strategic decisions reflected in the plan.

VISION STATEMENT

To be a forward-looking organization that helps low income people in Brunswick County to live better. We envision a community where all people have access to an adequate and nutritious supply of food and resources to sustain themselves.

MISSION STATEMENT

BFA is dedicated to improving the lives of families and individuals in crisis in Brunswick County, who are willing to help themselves, by providing emergency assistance. BFA distributes food and provides financial assistance for essential needs. We provide these services by establishing constructive and collaborative partnerships and programs with government, community and faith-based organizations and through the work of dedicated volunteers and the generosity of donors.

VALUES---OUR CORE PRINCIPLES

- We will do the best job possible to meet the needs of our clients
- Client comes First, Agency second
- Integrity, Service, Responsiveness, Compassion, Accountability
- We will promise only what we can deliver and deliver what we promise
- We will develop partnerships with stakeholders that share our vision
- We will work collaboratively to seek solutions to community problems
- We will be trusted and effective stewards of our resources
- We value, recognize, and thank our volunteers and donors

BFA HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

BFA was started in 1981 as a private, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of Brunswick County residents who are in financial crisis. We serve low-income people and those in crisis by addressing their needs through a comprehensive approach and providing a wide range of coordinated programs and services designed to have a measurable impact on people's lives.

Today, BFA is the largest United Way Agency in Brunswick County and is the only County organization devoted exclusively to aiding the unemployed, the homeless, the elderly, the disabled, and the underemployed. We touch the lives of approximately 17% of our Brunswick County neighbors. As a result of the programs, services and assistance that we provide, BFA strives to improve our community and make it a better place to live.

BFA collaborates and coordinates with other non-profit organizations, community groups, and faith-based organizations to leverage resources and services. We carry out our work through a small, dedicated staff and a cadre of volunteers who generously donate their time and talents. BFA also benefits from the on-going generosity of the community as shown by monetary contributions, food and clothing donations, and volunteer service. Without this support, the scope and extent of our assistance would have to be reduced and needs of the community would go unmet.

BFA PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

BFA has a number of programs and services that provide food, clothing, and financial assistance for essential needs to individuals and families in financial crisis, based on eligibility and availability of funds. Assistance is provided based on a demonstrated need and in many instances individuals are required to pay part of their expenses. When providing financial assistance, BFA never gives money directly to clients.

Food Program.

1. Food Pantry. BFA operates a food pantry that distributes food five days a week to those in crisis. Our food pantry is the largest one in Brunswick County in terms of the number of unique, individual families served and total geographic area served.

2. Commodities. BFA is the sole organization in Brunswick County authorized to distribute surplus Government food from the U. S. Department of Agriculture (i.e. Commodities) to residents on a quarterly basis.
3. Food Collaboration and Acquisition. We also coordinate and collaborate with other food pantries by maintaining a centralized data base of individuals who use the services of food pantries. This data base is available for use by other pantries. In addition, BFA purchases and stores food for other pantries in an effort to reduce costs through economies of scale.
4. Food Stamp Assistance. BFA staff provides food stamp information and referral services for clients and assists them in completing applications for the food stamp program (i.e. Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program).

Housing Program. BFA operates the Housing and Urban Development Supportive Housing Program which helps pay rent and utilities for chronically homeless and disabled individuals. The program is designed to develop supportive housing and services that will allow homeless persons to live as independently as possible.

Direct Emergency Financial Assistance. We have a number of programs that disburse direct financial assistance for such critical needs as rent/housing, electricity and utilities, medical prescriptions, and transportation.

1. Rental/Housing Assistance. We help pay rent and for individuals and families who are at risk of becoming homeless due to eviction.
2. Electric/Utilities Assistance. BFA provides monetary assistance to help pay electric and other utility bills for residents who are at risk of losing these services.
3. Medical Assistance. We provide limited monetary assistance to individuals to help pay for life-sustaining medical prescriptions.
4. Transportation Assistance. BFA collaborates with the Brunswick Transit System to provide referrals for transportation assistance.

Christmas Program. This program distributes Christmas presents to children under 12 years of age and seniors who meet eligibility requirements, many of whom would not have any gift to open on Christmas morning. In addition, each family receives food and all the trimmings for a traditional Christmas dinner.

Back to School Program. School supplies, backpacks, and clothing/uniforms are provided to students in grades K through 8. This program is also known as Christmas in July.

Family Thrift Store. BFA operates the Family Thrift Store which is used to provide eligible individuals and families with clothing and household goods. The Family Thrift Store is also a source of revenue for BFA from the goods it sells.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

We expect a continuing and an increasing need for BFA assistance and services over the next three years given the economic downturn and slow economic growth. Nationwide, the economy expanded at a very weak rate of 1.7% in 2011 compared to 3.0% in 2010 according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. The outlook for economic growth continues to be dismal. The most recent forecast of the Federal Reserve (January 2012) projects the economy to grow between 2.2% and 2.7% in 2012, which is down from its November 2011 estimate of between 2.5% and 2.9%.

The unemployment rate in Brunswick County has been consistently higher than the national average for the last few years. Based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the December 2011 unemployment rate for Brunswick County was 11.9% compared to the national rate of 8.5% and an increase of 1.4% over the November 2011 rate. The unemployment rate is expected to fall much more gradually than previously estimated; the Federal Reserve estimates unemployment to remain above 8% throughout 2013, between 7.4% and 8.1% in 2013, and between 6.7% and 7.6% in 2014. It is unlikely that the construction and service industries, which are major sources of jobs in Brunswick County, will rebound enough to create a significant number of new jobs given the stagnant economy and the collapsed housing market. The construction industry has hardly begun to recover. Nationwide, it has lost 2 million jobs in the housing bust but has added only 60,000 jobs in the last six months of 2011.

In addition, approximately 13% of Brunswick County residents, or 1 in 8, are living below the poverty level. This has profound implications for BFA.

As a result of these factors, BFA has seen a major increase for our services over the last few years. We expect the demand for these services to continue and to outstrip our ability and capacity to meet the needs of our neighbors. In 2011, requests for BFA assistance and services were 37% greater than in 2010 and we see many individuals seeking help for the first time. While the needs continue to grow, we are experiencing a decrease in funding and grants.

Discussions with our major benefactors and contributors indicate that it will be difficult for them to maintain our funding levels at current amounts in the future. With declining revenues, scarce resources, and increased requests for funding, our grantors and benefactors will need to be much more judicious and frugal in providing funds to non-profit organizations.

Our external discussions identified certain groups and areas that should be the focus of our attention and support given the scarce resources available. The underemployed and working poor, who are struggling to make ends meet, even when working more than one job, are prime groups that deserve special attention. People who have temporarily hit a difficult patch in their lives and are in need of short-term financial and other assistance are another group that should be considered for priority consideration. Low-income housing and affordable housing are viewed as serious problems in Brunswick County and areas that are not receiving the degree of attention that they deserve.

Similarly, homelessness is a situation that is long overdue for action. There is no reliable information on the number of homeless in the county or the extent of the problem. We collaborate with Cape Fear United Way in conducting the annual Point In Time (PIT) count. The PIT count is an attempt to identify the extent of homelessness in the county. In addition, there are no homeless shelters in Brunswick County, forcing many homeless, including families, to seek shelter in cars, the woods or abandoned buildings. BFA has joined the Brunswick County Homeless Coalition, a new volunteer group, which is working to raise awareness of the problem of homelessness.

As part of our strategic focus, BFA intends to give priority attention to these groups and areas over the next few years. We will seek additional grants and funding to expand our supportive housing and rental assistance programs. BFA will also play a leading role in working with other organizations and church groups to gain credible information about the homeless problem, to understand better the needs of the homeless, to be effective advocates for the homeless, and to provide them shelter, food, and other assistance.

BFA intends to take a more proactive stance in ensuring that residents seeking assistance from BFA are in real need. As demand for our services increase but our funding, grants, and resources decrease and become less certain, we have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that we are providing services to those who are most at risk. We will seek more information and documentation in order for us to determine better whether individuals and families are eligible for our programs and services.

In addition, BFA will undertake a renewed and concerted effort to help people find and participate in programs that will help them help themselves by becoming more self-reliant and self-sufficient. We will look to partner with other organizations to develop or provide programs, training, and assistance that will help people learn or strengthen skills that are necessary in the workforce or to support a family. Our focus will also take aim at trying to address the root cause of problems that require individuals to seek assistance from BFA. We want to break the sense of entitlement by helping people become more self-supporting, responsible, and independent so that they will be able to provide for themselves and their families. In discussions with our stakeholders, partners, and benefactors, there was strong support for the idea that individuals seeking and receiving assistance from BFA should take action to improve their situation in life so that they become less reliant on local government or non-profit organizations for services and assistance.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, GOALS AND ACTION PLANS

We have identified five strategic priorities that will set our direction and will be the focus of our attention over the course of this planning cycle. Each strategic priority is supported by a goal. In turn, each goal has multiple action plans that will be critical to the successful achievement of the goal.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1 FINANCIAL SOUNDNESS

GOAL: Strengthen BFA's financial soundness to ensure long-term sustainability.

ACTION PLAN 1: Establish a Contingency Fund using 20% of the gross sales from the Family Thrift Store. This fund will be used for capital expenditures and emergency operations.

ACTION PLAN 2: Increase the reserve fund by 50% in 2012 and 2013 and 30% in 2014.

ACTION PLAN 3: Maintain operational and administrative expenses at their 2011 levels through 2013.

ACTION PLAN 4: Increase and improve fundraising awareness, efforts, and events in order to increase donations by 10% from 2011 levels in each of the next three years.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2 EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

GOAL: Provide services and assistance to those in financial crisis while helping them become more self-reliant and self-sufficient.

ACTION PLAN 1: Actively pursue larger space for the food pantry, thrift store, and office by March 2013.

ACTION PLAN 2: Develop and implement eligibility criteria and requirements for BFA assistance programs by July 2012.

ACTION PLAN 3: Establish a Review Board to determine how to best help an individual or family become self-reliant and self-sufficient by October 2012. This Board will evaluate case files referred by staff.

ACTION PLAN 4: Seek new sources of revenue for rental and housing assistance in order to increase available funding over 2011 levels. Ongoing.

ACTION PLAN 5: Increase the amount of food donations to the pantry by 5% over 2011 levels from golf courses, stores, community food drives, and other organizations by January 2013. Maintain going forward.

ACTION PLAN 6: Use existing data base tools to monitor and increase participation in the food stamp program among clients over 2011 levels. Ongoing.

ACTION PLAN 7: Develop and implement strategies by April 2012 to increase sales in the Family Thrift Store over 2011 sales levels. Maintain a continued upward trend through 2014.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3 PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

GOAL: Expand, leverage, and strengthen partnerships and collaboration with community groups and stakeholders.

ACTION PLAN 1: Initiate quarterly meetings and luncheons with agencies and organizations in order to build coalitions and partnerships and develop common goals by October 2012.

ACTION PLAN 2: Collaborate with government agencies, non-profits, faith-based organizations, and community/business groups in Brunswick County to provide programs for individuals to increase their skills and give them tools to become more resourceful and self-reliant. Ongoing.

ACTION PLAN 3: Participate with the Brunswick County Homeless Coalition and Brunswick County Streetreach to raise awareness of homelessness, to be an advocate for the homeless, and to provide assistance to address the needs of the homeless. Ongoing.

ACTION PLAN 4: In concert with other organizations, develop an after-hours emergency response and referral call program for Brunswick County by January 2013.

ACTION PLAN 5: Encourage food pantries and organizations that provide financial assistance to use BFA's centralized data base in order to achieve more equitable distribution of services. Ongoing.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4 PUBLIC RELATIONS

GOAL: Increase and strengthen BFA's presence, visibility, and image in the community.

ACTION PLAN 1: Become active and participate in Brunswick County Chamber of Commerce events, meetings, and activities. Ongoing.

ACTION PLAN 2: Prepare press releases, articles, and stories on a monthly basis for local newspapers and media outlets that publicize BFA services, events, and milestones beginning in April 2012.

ACTION PLAN 3: Conduct speaking engagements before government agencies, civic and church groups, the Chamber of Commerce, and business organizations no less than four (4) times a year.

ACTION PLAN 4: Enhance and expand use of the BFA web site and social media and keep information and content current and refreshed. Ongoing.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5 BOARD GOVERNANCE

GOAL: Improve and strengthen Board governance in order to provide more effective direction, guidance, and oversight.

ACTION PLAN 1: Rewrite the BFA By-laws by July 2012.

ACTION PLAN 2: Develop and implement by the end of 2012 a training program for Board members that focuses on roles and responsibilities, fiduciary duties, and strategic planning.

ACTION PLAN 3: Expand the diversity of the Board by the end of 2012.

