

frontier area report

the newsletter of the FRONTIER EDUCATION CENTER

The National Clearinghouse For Frontier Communities

Issue 3

May 2004

Innovations Project Highlights Model Communities

The Frontier Education Center established the *Innovations Project* to identify and publicly commend organizations that have successfully established strong health care systems, as well as economically healthy communities. Nominees must demonstrate leadership in both health care and the economic health of their community. Programs that have been nominated for this award appear on the Honor Roll page of the Frontier Education Center's website.

Hidalgo Medical Services in Lordsburg, Hidalgo County, New Mexico is the first organization to be written up as a case study by the *Innovations Project*.

Hidalgo Medical Services (HMS) became the first model community selected by the Frontier Education Center because of its unique transition from success in bringing comprehensive medical and dental health services to an isolated area of southwest New Mexico to also becoming the county economic development agency. HMS reached out to help revive a local economic development agency that had been inactive

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New and Improved Website Visit www.frontierus.org

The Frontier Education Center has updated and improved our website, making it easier to use and providing up-to-date information and resources.

The website is designed to help those working in and for frontier communities locate relevant information. The website is located at www.frontierus.org.

The website is a resource tool for frontier communities and their advocates. It is another aspect of the Center's work to grow The National Clearinghouse for Frontier Communities into a virtual community center.

The website provides useful information in the following areas: Defining Frontier, Research & Reports, Policy Issues, Frontier Maps and Related links. Two comprehensive annotated bibliographies for readers interested in frontier policy, history and literature are on the site. There is also information to introduce you to the Directors of the Center.

In addition, on the Home page you can sign up for "E-News", "Learn About Internships", "Nominate a Model Community", and "Support the Center."

Your support of the Center is greatly appreciated and donations can now be submitted online.

To learn more about the Center, contact us at
Frontier Education Center
HCR 65 Box 126, Ojo Sarco, New Mexico 87521
505-820-6732, 505-820-6783 (fax),
or by email: frontierus@frontierus.org.

And be sure to visit the website:
www.frontierus.org

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for over 25 years. The resulting cooperation among agencies and government officials has energized the area's economic climate.

HMS demonstrates that successful economic health in frontier communities requires a holistic approach. Communities need to address the whole picture, have a plan and build on locally held assets. If the strongest local asset is a medical clinic, that is as good a place as any to begin to address the non-medical needs of the community. HMS was selected because it sees no limit to how it can and should work to improve the lives of the people it serves. Its leaders have a vision, choosing to invest in many aspects of community life including health care, housing, and small business development. Investments such as these work to better the community as well as to circulate money in the local economy. Strong community support and involvement, along with a focus on reinforcing existing assets, have been the main elements of success for Hidalgo County, New Mexico.

To receive a copy of the 2004 issue of *Innovations* please contact the Frontier Education Center.

New Report Focuses on Seasonal Population Fluctuations

Seasonal Population Fluctuations In Rural and Frontier Areas, Phase One: The View From State Offices of Rural Health is a report which compiles available data on seasonal population fluctuations, documents known impacts on health services, and identifies how communities cope with these fluctuations. State Offices of Rural Health were surveyed, with twenty-six responding. The report concludes that many rural and frontier areas are heavily impacted by seasonal population fluctuations and that these fluctuations create stress on health systems. Further study is needed as there is no uniform system for collecting seasonal data, and in high impact states data is gathered by numerous agencies with differing degrees of collaboration and integration of data.

This ongoing project hopes to help states and communities learn from each other, by documenting

effective strategies to cope with these fluctuations, as well as identifying barriers to adequate provision of services to both temporary and permanent residents as well as transients.

The report includes a resource guide for states and communities that would like to find more information about seasonal population changes, how seasonal impacts are identified, and the federal and state agencies that collect and analyze this data. The full report can be found on the Center's website.

About the Frontier Education Center and the National Clearinghouse For Frontier Communities

The Frontier Education Center was founded in 1997 after decades of activism on behalf of the enduring American frontier. The founders and Board of Directors believe that a focus on frontier is necessary because the smallest and most isolated communities face extreme hardships and in many cases lack even the most basic infrastructure.

Mission: To be the national clearinghouse, conduct research, provide education, and support policy development on issues important to frontier communities.

The Center uses a **Healthy Communities model**, which includes physical, emotional, economic, cultural, environmental and spiritual health as all necessary to the health of a community.

Frontier residents, students, researchers, and other regional and national organizations contact the Clearinghouse on a daily basis. Organizational contacts are as varied as the Western Planner, American Association of School Administrators, Alzheimer's Association, and the NM Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Individual contacts include hospital administrators, community people writing grants, and even someone upset about the phone service in her remote community.

We share information, provide technical assistance and refer to other agencies, and organizations.

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Issue 2

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New Reports Focus On Behavioral Health

Two new reports released by the Frontier Education Center focus on behavioral health problems in frontier communities. Both reports are posted on the Frontier Education Center's new website at www.frontierus.org

Frontier Communities: Leading the Way with Innovative Approaches to Behavioral Health

provides an overview of the problem and then shares ways that frontier communities are responding. Providers, consumers, and community leaders were interviewed about the programs highlighted in the report. A resource list for individuals and community members is included. Policy recommendations are made in five categories:

- 1 Increased recognition of the problem;
- 2 Training, Recruitment, and Retention of Providers;
- 3 Insurance Reform;
- 4 Recognition and Support for Dual Diagnosis; and
- 5 Support for Drug and Alcohol Use Prevention.

Frontier Youth: Living on the Edge presents data on high-risk behavior among frontier youth. Underlying the

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Information You Can Use! Now On The Web

Visit www.frontierus.org

The Frontier Education Center has a new website to help frontier communities and those working in and for frontier communities locate relevant information. The website is located at www.frontierus.org.

The website is a resource tool for frontier communities and their advocates. It is another aspect of the Center's work to grow The National Clearinghouse for Frontier Communities to become a virtual community center. Frontier people may be spread across millions of square miles, but now there is one place they all can meet to share their ideas and concerns.

In addition to providing biographies of the Board and Staff of the Frontier Education Center, the website also provides the following useful information:

Research & Reports - Included are reports and research conducted by the Center on frontier issues. Also included are two annotated bibliographies of articles, journals, books and even poetry to help increase understanding and support for frontier communities.

Policy Issues - Information is provided on relevant policies for frontier communities, including proposed and enacted federal legislation and policies adopted by organizations to promote frontier issues.

Frontier Maps - The maps chart the location of health resources and services, economic data, as well as land use and land ownership patterns for frontier communities.

Related links - Included are links to the websites of other organizations interested in frontier and rural issues.

data on risky behaviors, are the findings that all of the 50 poorest counties in the U.S. (100%) are frontier. Save the Children Federation, in 2002, identified 42 of 100 counties with the highest child poverty rates as frontier and 202 of the 500 counties with the lowest per capita income. These high poverty rates are largely the result of the structure of the frontier economy; people in frontier areas are poor, not because they do not work, but because their jobs do not pay them enough to lift them out of poverty.

The report also shows that although youth in many areas have excessive rates of very high-risk behavior, other communities are lower than the national average. This finding reinforces the Center's position that there is great variability among frontier communities and that 'when you have seen one frontier community, you have seen one frontier community.'

Looking For Information About Communities Affected By Seasonal Population Swings

Do you know a community that seems empty part of the year and bursts at the seams at other times of the year? Maybe that community is next to a major national park or recreation area? Maybe it has the best boating and fishing for miles around.

Population swings impact the ability of a community to provide health services. A study is underway to determine how frontier communities plan to best meet the ups and the downs of the population swings. For instance, do these swings affect the ability to recruit and retain health professionals?

The Frontier Education Center is collecting information about seasonal population fluctuations on small and frontier communities. For years, anecdotes about the impact of these fluctuations have circulated. The Center is now working to document the extent of these impacts by collecting and analyzing data from key resources in every state. The Center is still looking for information and resources on this issue. If you have relevant information, please email the Center (frontierus@frontierus.org) or call 505-820-6732 to be sure that your community is included in this important study on seasonal population fluctuations.

Frontier Education Center And National Clearinghouse For Frontier Communities Continue to Grow

The Frontier Education Center was founded in 1997 after decades of activism on behalf of the enduring American frontier. The founders and Board of Directors believe that a **focus on frontier** is necessary because the smallest and most isolated communities face extreme hardships and in many cases lack even the most basic infrastructure.

Mission: To be the national clearinghouse, conduct research, provide education, and support policy development on issues important to frontier communities.

In recent years, the focus of the Center has expanded beyond healthcare. The Board and Staff found that looking at healthcare in isolation from other services and sectors was not effective and that a holistic approach was necessary. The Center uses the Healthy Communities model, which includes physical, emotional, economic, cultural, spiritual, and environmental health as all necessary to the health of a community.

The Clearinghouse is contacted on a daily basis by frontier residents, students and researchers, and other regional and national organizations. Organizational contacts are as varied as the Western Planner, American Association of School Administrators, Alzheimer's Association, and the NM Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Individual contacts include hospital administrators, community people writing grants, and even someone upset about the phone service in her remote community. We share information, provide technical assistance when we can, and refer to other contacts, agencies, and organizations.

To learn more about the Center, contact us at

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Issue 1

January 2002

States Respond To A Broader Definition of Frontier

The debate about the American Frontier has been going on for more than a century. After the 1890 census, a demographer named Fredrick Jackson Turner wrote the historic treatise that declared the frontier dead – made obsolete by the settling of the West. A century later, after the 1980 census, Land Use Professor – and honorary board member of the Frontier Education Center – Frank Popper began publishing a series of academic and news articles refuting Turner. Popper observed that huge tracts of the United States were still very sparsely populated and remote. His research demonstrates that more than half the land area of the United States is *still* frontier and that the number of frontier communities continues to grow.

In the mid-1980's, the federal Community Health Center program decided to consider as frontier, those counties with a population less than or equal to 6 persons per square mile. This was unfortunate because frontier advocates have always opposed a single number as a definition.

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Frontier Education Center Opens a New Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico

Hello from the brand new Frontier Education Center office in Santa Fe, New Mexico! The Frontier Education Centers founding mission is "To conduct research, provide education and advocacy on issues important to frontier communities." The dream of having a formal organization and office dedicated to working on frontier issues came into being in 1997 and continues to grow each year. The expansion was possible due to a three-year cooperative agreement with the Office of Rural Health Policy. We were lucky enough to find a sunny office with a small courtyard and garden along the Santa Fe River.

Along with a new location, there have been some changes in staff at the Frontier Education Center. Project Director, Mary Visarraga retired in October 2001. Two new employees have been hired: Kristen Sharp and Daran Moon.

Prior to working at the Frontier Education Center, Kristen was the Community Outreach Director at La Clinica del Pueblo in Tierra Amarilla. Under her directorship, the Community Outreach Department budget has increased by a factor of 10. She is thrilled to remain working on rural health issues, focusing now on policy rather than community-based programming and evaluation.

Daran comes to us after more than 20 years in the non-profit world. She was most recently the Director of Administration at the Nature Conservancy of New Mexico. Her track record is proof that she excels at helping small organizations grow, which is exactly what we need!

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In 1997, the Frontier Education Center convened a group of frontier providers and policy experts to develop a consensus definition of "frontier." We created a definition that would be widely accepted and supported. The new definition includes a matrix of population density of 20 persons per square mile or less, and distance to the closest "market" for services, as measured by travel time in minutes and distance in miles. We have determined the frontier counties using the consensus definition matrix, there are fewer than nine million people (less than 4% of the population) living in the frontier but they are spread over more than half the land area of the United States.

In 1999, information about this broadened definition was sent out to 39 State Offices of Rural Health. One hundred percent of the states responded with which frontier counties to add or delete, based on the new matrix and the 1990 U.S. Census.

In 2001, this process was repeated using the same matrix but with the Census 2000 data. Again we have received a 100 percent response.

The Western Governors Association and the National Rural Health Association have already approved this broadened definition of frontier. Federal legislation has just begun to incorporate the broadened definition.

If you would like further information about this expanded definition, or a report about the consensus process used to reach the new definition, do not hesitate to contact us at frontierus@frontierus.org.

Frontier Education Center Responds to HHS Initiative on Rural Communities

Secretary Tommy Thompson announced the Health and Human Services Initiative on Rural Communities, a department-wide effort to improve the provision of health and human services to rural families and individuals. HHS received a total of 450 responses from individuals and organizations. The Department of Health and Human Services is currently in the process of aggregating the information. The efforts of the Initiative continue, despite the recent federal focus on the events of September 11. A full report of the public input will be

available soon. If you would like to see our letter of input to Secretary Tommy G. Thompson, contact us at frontierus@frontierus.org.

The Frontier Economy

The Frontier Education Center recognizes that there is an indelible link between the health and economy of frontier communities. The following article is a summary of a section in "The Geography of Frontier America – The View at the Turn of the Century", which can be found at the rural information center website, www.nal.usda.gov/ric/richs/frontierinventory.htm.

Historically, frontier area economies have been fragile, single-industry, and dependent on natural resources – farming, forestry, fishing, and mining. However, there has been a general shift in the economic base of frontier communities from a resource-base industry to more service-base economies. Frontier communities are extremely diverse in the geography of the land, the sociodemographic characteristics of the population, the history and culture, and the economic base (De la Torre and Luft, 1986). The west and southwest of the United States is seeing a growth due to tourism, retirement, and recreation. The Great Plains and the south are experiencing a decline in economic growth and population.

During the 1980's, there was a mass out migration in farming-based communities, leaving fewer working people supporting the non-working population of youth and elders. This contributed a growth in the underclass. The dependence on a single economic base creates a dangerous Boom or Bust cycle that can be detrimental to the stability of the frontier areas.

How does the nature of frontier economies affect the health of the community? Health statistics demonstrates that the health status of rural residents is poorer than urban residents. This is due to a variety of reasons: unique occupational hazards, poverty, lack of insurance, and lack of health care resources.

For frontier communities, economic analysis must accompany the focus on health care. The Frontier Educational Center pledges to continue to have a broad mission to do research, education, and advocacy on frontier issues, including economic issues.