

SEARCH Meeting  
February 8, 7:00 p.m.  
First Baptist Church, Burnsville  
Minutes

Welcome and news:

Susan Larson opened the meeting and recognized two first-time attenders, Sheila Blalock, the head of Mitchell County Transportation, and Jim Edwards, the chair of the Yancey County Dem. Party. Among good news items, Larson reported that the CMS recently ranked Blue Ridge Regional Hospital a 5-star hospital, one of only ten hospitals in North Carolina to achieve this status.

Cases of the flu are widespread in the area and the urgent care in Spruce Pine had recently seen 70 patients a day with 2 providers; usually it is 45 patients a day with 3 providers, but one was out sick.

Cards were circulated for Connie Sales, who is recovering at home after a week at BRRH and for Dwight and Katie Willett, whose second child was born last week. Connie is the SEARCH website designer and Dwight was the organizer of the initial meetings that have evolved into SEARCH.

Models of health care collaborations:

Mitchell Community Health Partnership– Risa Larsen reported on the quarterly meeting which she and Susan attended in Bakersville. Since it was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the partnership, Libby McKinney, who founded it with her husband Ron, gave an overview of its 20-year history and accomplishments. A broad representation of agencies present gave reports including Mitchell County Transportation, Toe River Health Department, Head Start, the Sheriff's Department, BRRH, and CHRI. Several agencies listed specific hiring needs (MC transportation and CHRI) and for volunteers (BRRH). Other specific needs related to children – rain/snow boots at Head Start and items for H.S. graduation bags. The crisis in foster care continues.

There was no report from the Healthy Yancey meeting because Karin Rolett, who had attended the meeting and planned to give a report, was home sick.

McDowell County Health Coalition – Meghan Merritt, Chair of the Coalition, made a presentation to SEARCH task force chairs. She said that county leaders, believing that they couldn't wait for healthcare reform, began organizing eight years ago to address the needs in the county – not just their medical needs, but also transportation, housing, workplace health, insurance and other gaps in service they identified. One of the problems was the lack of a referral system for people to know where to go (there are two medical facilities in McDowell County). MATCH – McDowell Access to Care and Health – was created to fill that need. Through a major grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust they have been able to employ navigators to help patients negotiate doctors' visits, insurance, follow-ups, etc., with the goal of decreasing ER visits and hospital readmissions.

Can/should SEARCH sponsor a healthcare round table?

We are in discussion with the agencies that sponsored a healthcare forum in McDowell County – The Rural Center, NC Child, and Care for Carolina. Our ultimate goals would be to explore regional solutions, to form a bi-county coalition and to show elected officials that this community takes healthcare seriously. We would like to gain a clearer picture both of what resources the community has, what resources are underutilized, and what we lack. This not only encompasses medical resources but also auxiliary services, wellness, nutrition, etc. The dates offered by NC Child, The Rural Center and Care for Carolina are April 30, May 2, 3, or 4. Healthy Yancey has its regularly scheduled monthly meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> so that might be a good day. The SEARCH task forces that would be involved would be media relations, government relations and outreach. By show of hands it was unanimously decided to proceed with the round table. Adam Sotek of NC Child will be in Burnsville on March 6 for a meeting

with Blue Ridge Partnership for Children and has offered to meet with members of SEARCH to plan the round table. Potential groups to be invited would include from both counties include the mayors, county commissioners, PATH, the two Health Coalitions, EMS, Toe River Health District, EDC Directors, DSS directors, BRRH, MCHP, representative providers, and SEARCH task force chairs.

#### Essential Services review:

Risa Larsen presented SEARCH's Essential Services List for review by the group. The list was compiled by Risa and Dr. Jean Hunt to show the services that should be maintained locally for the citizens of Mitchell and Yancey counties. They used lists from the ACA, the American Hospital Association, and a letter by Mitchell and Yancey County doctors published in both county newspapers.

The list garnered kudos from those present along with a suggestion by George Bennett that it be shared with Mission. The plan is to continue to solicit feedback and revise as appropriate.

Jon Ward recommended reading a comprehensive study on rural healthcare in seven Midwestern states conducted by a group he trusts. It can be accessed at:

<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/reinventing-rural-health-care/>

#### SEARCH Outreach Committee:

Tommy James was deputized by the ailing Karin Rolett to give the Outreach Task Force report with the assistance of Juanita Brown. The first item was about the use of 2-1-1. Cara Truitt, acting for Becky Carter, told how the service works and said that PATH, with the assistance of Schell McCall, oversees updating the inventory of services annually. Becky has asked Marla Brown in the Asheville office to provide a Mitchell/Yancey utilization report, which she expects will take 4-6 weeks for the state office in Raleigh to deliver. The 211 service is funded by United Way.

Several people had expressed reservations about how useful it really is. McDowell County had minimal results promoting it in their county and two people who tried it in our area said the resources were not current. The Outreach Task Force has plans to test it more thoroughly.

Also in the works is a way of gathering input from community members not normally represented. This would take place after the Community Needs Assessment is completed in both counties and would involve meeting with small groups in locations such as fire departments and churches and one-on-one at locations such as the Reconciliation House and the Habitat Re-Store. A recorder would take notes and the leaders and recorders would meet and compare notes from which to create a list of community concerns in priority order.

Outreach also wants to keep on the front burner issues around the way Mission charges and bills so that there is greater transparency.

#### The Meaning of Red:

The federal budget, including continued funding for FQHCs, was being debated on the day of the meeting. Attendees had been urged to wear red as part of a "red alert" to show Senators Burr and Tillis and Representative Meadows that our community health center's funding is critical. People made signs and photos were taken to post. Note: Funding for the community health centers was approved and signed into law the following day.

#### Next Meeting:

Tuesday, March 6, Trinity Episcopal Church, Spruce Pine, 7:00 p.m.

Minutes by Susan Larson, taken from meeting notes by Britt Kaufmann