Carbon County Community Forum
Roundtable Discussion Notes
April 24, 2024

Education Access:
The discussion revolved around giving students more access to developmental and career resources but did not detail how the broader community should best support that process.

- Get the non-college bound to realize what else is available.
- Career readiness begins with Grade 1 - this is apparently aligned with State requirements.
- Expand the higher education model to include cooperative, or career shadowing activities - maybe second semester of the senior year?
    o Running High Lehigh Valley Children's Centers may be an example.
- Assess and instill Values from early education.

Emergency Preparedness:
- What are the primary emergency risks our community faces, and how well-prepared do you feel we are to handle them?
    o fire, flood, fragmented ambulance services.
    o We're likely OK at an individual household level but have little experience with community-wide emergency response.
- How can we engage and educate the community about the importance of emergency preparedness and encourage greater participation in preparedness activities?
    o FEMA and other state and federal entities won't be the first on the scene. They can do a lot, but they likely won't do a lot fast.
    o Communication across first responders (especially fire fighters) is critical and expensive, with fragmentation likely. This is especially an issue in Carbon County because the terrain makes more expensive digital+analog dual mode radios necessary. Would Monroe County firefighters be able to communicate well with their Carbon County peers if a fire were racing towards the Monroe/Carbon county line? We don't want firefighters spending their time fundraising for comms - we want them to spend their time training and preparing for coordinated emergency responses. So maybe citizens had better take more of a role in fundraising for county emergency services - especially radio communications support.
    o Citizens should participate in National Night Out events https://natw.org to get to know their local police and register an interest in volunteering or support of emergency services.
    o The county has an emergency operations center in or near Weatherly. They can provide more information and suggestions.

- Other questions and topics:
  - WVIA recently aired a video on the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes flooding 50 years ago. What would be the lessons we should have learned if a hurricane stalled out over Lehighton today?
  - What agency might coordinate Penn Forest volunteers to help respond to a Panther Valley emergency or vice-versa? Does CCCF have better outreach to Carbon County volunteers than the American Red Cross?

Homelessness/Affordable Housing
- Are there shelters in place to provide resources to those who need them?
  - Yes and no. Shelters like Peaceful Knights in Lehighton, Family Promise in Nesquehoning, and New Beginnings Women's Center in Beaver Meadows offer much needed housing, but more is needed including Transitional Housing.
- What can your organization do to create more resources?
  - Congressional funds through annual Congressional Directed Spend (CDS) and Community Project Funding (CPF) is available, State, and local-level grants are also available.
  - St Luke's has a Behavioral Health Walk-In Center in Lehighton at the former Gnaden Huetten hospital.
  - LVHN has a 365-day ExpressCare and walk-in facility in Palmerton.
  - The St Vincent de Paul Society connected with St Peter's Resource Center in Weissport and Sts Peter & Paul Church in Lehighton to offer emergency services like Operation Cold Front and continue to stay in contact with the unsheltered in the local area.
  - Minsi Trails Boy Scouts can provide service hours and Eagle Scout-candidates for special projects like food collection and distribution programs.
- What resources do you need?
  - Physical resources including more affordable, low-cost housing, transitional housing, transportation to/from medical appointments and work.
  - Building/creating more housing can include new construction and renovation of existing structures and may require additional infrastructure including water and sewer in municipal areas.
  - Educational resources to address the stigma of homelessness in the perception of communities and municipalities that house shelters and transitional housing.

Supporting Vulnerable Populations
- How can we ensure equitable access to essential services for vulnerable groups, especially in times of crisis or emergency?
  - Ensure equity.
  - Education for caregivers, public, first responders on resources available.
  - Peer support/networks to help navigate community resources.
- What are the barriers that vulnerable populations face in accessing healthcare, housing, education, and employment?
  - Transportation/inconsistent public transportation
  - Stigma
  - Pride/willingness to access community resources.
  - Awareness
  - Lack of technology/limited availability when applying for services online
  - Systemic issues – i.e. meeting program eligibility for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) guidelines.
  - Financial, medical, housing issues
  - Childcare or other caregiving needs, including disabilities.

Mental Health
- What events or strategies can we implement to create a better environment for mental health?
  - Mental Health First Aid by Carbon Monroe Pike Mental Health & Development Services or AHEC
  - May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Promote on social media to help breakdown stigmas.
  - Promote relationships and confidence building at young ages through programs including daycare, scouting, early learning centers, and community outreach.
  - Promote events occurring for collaboration and participation.
  - Training/education for volunteers
- What can your organization do to improve mental health?
  - Professional development days
  - Team education or training for staff
  - Offering mental health time off/extra lunch break
  - Offer yoga.
  - Rewording to decrease stigma.
  - Teambuilding and networking
  - Awareness campaigns
- What resources do you need?
  - AHEC – Mental Health First Aid Training
  - Support websites to learn more on working with staff with mental health and strategies to combat stigma.