

WAIM 2010-2011 ANNUAL REPORT



WAIM Mission Statement

The Windham Area Interfaith Ministry uplifts and unites our community by providing caring service and resources to meet our neighbors' needs with dignity and respect.

INTRODUCTION

WAIM began in 1984 as a used clothes closet in the basement of a local church. The original intention was to redistribute clothing to neighbors in need. From its first location in a convent, WAIM moved, in 1991 to a 7,000 square foot factory building. In 2000, WAIM moved into its new home, the Gordon Building at 866 Main Street, Willimantic, so named because retiring retailer Sam Gordon donated the building. WAIM was incorporated in 1984 as a 501c (3) nonprofit organization in response to the feeling that the religious community could better minister to the area's people in need by combining efforts of lay and clergy of all religious persuasions.

WAIM's core service programs are Material Goods Redistribution and Human Needs. In response to the need for deeper support than short-term case management can offer, and a desire of some members of our faith communities to engage in deeper, pro-active relationships with our clients, WAIM introduced two new programs: Budget Coaching, which is offered in partnership with Co-opportunity, Inc. and the Windham Region United Way; and Partners in Independence, a long term mentoring project designed to ultimately increase the clients' level of financial security. At the heart of everything WAIM does is our Volunteer Program which includes individuals, seniors, church, student and civic groups, as well as Alternative Incarceration Workers and Community Service volunteers. Finally, during growing season, WAIM hosts a thriving Community Garden at Lauter Park.

WAIM is governed by a Board of Delegates, with one clergy and one lay delegate from each of the 39 faith communities. The Delegates elect the Board of Directors, 15 people who serve 3-year terms. Board members represent the faith communities, the general community, area universities, local businesses, civic organizations, and other service providers.

WAIM's financial base is supported by WAIM's member faith communities, United Way, individual donors, foundations, local government, businesses and civic organizations, as well as three successful fund raising events each year.

WAIM PROGRAMS

MATERIAL GOODS REDISTRIBUTION

The Material Goods Redistribution Program was WAIM's very first project, and has been growing since 1984, where today we move tons of furniture, clothing and household goods through our doors each month. Not only does the program fill fundamental needs of its participants by providing them with a free bed, dresser, kitchen table, or other item needed in their home; it also provides a service to donors by picking up furniture that may have otherwise been discarded. Approximately 40 tons of items are redistributed annually. Under of the auspices of Material Goods Redistribution, we also provide a clothing "boutique" where clients shop for free for men's, women's and children's clothes and shoes, and a *Career Closet*, where professional clothes are set aside for people who need them for work-related activities.

HUMAN NEEDS PROGRAM

Under our **Human Needs Program**, last year WAIM provided *Operation Fuel* energy assistance to 101 families. WAIM provided an additional \$56,679 in energy assistance to 222 local families through our own energy fund which is supported through the Walk for Warmth and private donations. WAIM's Energy Program operates year-round.

Small grants are made to our neighbors in need through the *Unmet Needs Fund (UNF)*. *Unmet Needs* can cover anything from emergency rental assistance, to prescription assistance, to money for diapers or car seats. A significant amount of this fund is used for transportation, helping individuals get or keep their vehicles on the road in order to secure employment or get back and forth to work. Last year, we distributed approximately \$7,400 in small *UNF* grant to 147 families for an average award of \$50.

The *Women's and Children Fund* program was established in 2007-2008. The purpose of this program is to address some of the barriers that prevent women from achieving their potential in the workplace or their access to educational resources by providing emergency financial support for things that will enable them to keep their jobs, continue their education, keep their families safe, or maintain economic stability during an emergency or family crisis. During 2010-2011, we made eight grants from the fund.

In addition to these ongoing programs, WAIM sponsors four gift give-away programs. These include *Back-to-School*, where eligible children receive vouchers to help pay for at least one or two school outfits, and *Gifts-for-Teens*, where vouchers are given to the parents of teenagers so they may choose a proper holiday gift for them. With the help of volunteers, we also manage the *Adopt-a-Family* holiday program that matches eligible families with donors who provide resources to allow for holiday celebrations, and the *For Kids Only* program, where WAIM collects new or slightly used items that children between the ages of five and twelve may choose for holiday gifts for their parents or other guardians.

In FY 2010/2011 469 students received vouchers through the Back-to-School program, 82 families were matched through our Adopt-a-Family program and 87 teens received a voucher through our Gifts-For-Teens program.

Thanks to a generous grant of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds from the ACCESS Community Action Agency, WAIM was able to develop and administer the Partners in Independence Program Pilot (PIP). Through PIP, we have provided extensive training for four volunteer mentors who, in May, were each matched with a learning partner. The matches will work together for a minimum of one year with the goal of improving the learning partner's financial stability.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

During FY 2010/2011, WAIM's **Volunteer Program** managed an average of 78 volunteers each month, many of them retirees who treat WAIM like a regular part-time job. WAIM provides these individuals with meaningful work, and in return we receive approximately 1000 volunteer hours per month, which works out to almost nine employees based on a 30-hour work week. We COULD NOT do the work we do without the help of our volunteers.

Through the program, volunteers get involved in any every aspect of WAIM. Volunteers help receive, sort and distribute clothing, furniture, and household goods. They check clients in, maintain volunteer records, help with data entry and other administrative tasks, assist with special events, clean our facility, and manage our EBay program.

Volunteers come to us from a variety of sources:

Community Volunteers— Folks who hear about WAIM and like the sense of connection WAIM provides. WAIM has been a place where volunteers from area recovery programs can work until they find permanent employment. For those who are currently undergoing treatment or have recently been released from prison, WAIM provides a sense of community, and an opportunity to “give back.” Many community volunteers are former clients; others are retirees and folks who carve out a couple of hours a week to lend a hand.

Faith Community Volunteers – For members of the faith communities that support WAIM, their work here is part of their service mission. They include people who help in the office, receive and sort donations and assist with general operations. On Saturday mornings, one or two faith communities send a group of volunteers on a preset schedule.

Student Interns and Volunteers – Students from area colleges and universities work for a period of time, often a semester, or on special projects.

Mandated Volunteers – WAIM is host to volunteers who are mandated to do community service or who are assigned to the Alternative Incarceration Program. Frequently mandated workers return as Community Volunteers once their required hours are fulfilled.

Special Program Volunteers – These volunteers participate in programs for people with developmental disabilities. They come to WAIM with staff from the programs.

Workers in Training – Area job training programs may place people at WAIM to refine job skills prior to employment.

WAIM also participates in United Way's Day of Caring each year.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

In addition to core services, our **Community Garden** is a seasonal program supervised by Furniture Bank Manager, Neenah Shafer, and managed day-to-day by long-time volunteer Bill Treverrow. The space at Lauter Park is divided into two garden areas: plots which are made available to individuals, families and groups, including those who live in local residential treatment facilities; and a communal garden. The garden serves two major purposes for participants: they grow fresh, healthy produce, and they work together in a community-building activity. One of the goals of the communal garden volunteers is to grow produce for local programs that serve people who do not have access to the food they need. The garden provides fresh produce to the Covenant Soup Kitchen and ACCESS Food Pantry.

WAIM IN THE COMMUNITY

WAIM's Board of Directors and staff believe that being an active community partner enhances the success of both our clients and the organization.

WINDHAM HOMELESSNESS COALITION – WAIM administers a fund for the Coalition that provides small grants for security deposits or first month's rent to people who are homeless or at risk to become homeless.

NONPROFIT ALLIANCE OF NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT – WAIM is one of the founding members of this group of local Executive Directors, representatives of town governments and both Eastern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut. NANC's goals are: to improve the culture of cooperation and build strong community partnerships; to enhance institutional capacity; and to strengthen the coordination of services to increase efficiencies.

WINDHAM COMMUNITY CARE TEAM – WAIM staff attend regular meetings to identify and coordinate services to our homeless community.

HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE, TOWN OF MANSFIELD – The Executive Director represents WAIM on this committee.

AD HOC GROUPS – WAIM Staff is frequently asked to participate in forums on issues of relevance to social programs and the needs of low income people.

WAIM EVENTS

WALK-FOR-WARMTH – This event occurs the Sunday before Thanksgiving and raises funds for the Private Fuel Bank. Participants are from area schools, faith communities, businesses and organizations, as well as from the community-at-large. In fiscal year 2010/2011, approximately \$20,000 was raised through the efforts of 109 walkers.

INTERFAITH THANKSGIVING SERVICE – Clergy from WAIM member faith communities are invited to participate in this service, which is developed by the Worship Committee of the WAIM Board. The service is held right before the Walk for Warmth at our host congregation.

STEEPLECHASE BIKE TOUR – The rest stops on this tour are located in WAIM's member faith community's houses of worship, where members provide home-made snacks and encouragement to our riders. In August 2010, 401 riders raised over \$73,000 for WAIM and Perception Programs. Steeple Chase is considered a premier biking event in Northeast Connecticut.

THIRD THURSDAY STREET FESTS – Starting in 2003, participation in the Street Fest has become an annual event where Board members promote WAIM's programs and activities.

SUPER SUNDAY GRINDER SALE – Grinders are made by a team of volunteers at the First Baptist Church of Mansfield and distributed to member faith communities on the last weekend of January. This event raised approximately \$2,500.

SPRING FLING – This year's benefit dance featured donated talent of two bands: Bruce John & Friends and John Hinckley and the Outriggers, plus food from Fred's Brick Oven Pizza. Funds are raised through the sale of tickets and gift baskets which are donated by the Board of Directors and our member faith communities.

TAG SALES AND AUCTIONS – These events are held periodically at the local flea market or through a local dealer. Special items that are donated but are not of practical use by our clients are sold to raise additional income for the organization.

MEMBER FAITH COMMUNITY FUND RAISING EVENTS – Several of the 40 WAIM member faith communities hold dinners, dances, walks and other events to benefit WAIM.

WAIM VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION – An annual luncheon and awards ceremony honoring our volunteers takes place in April during Volunteer Recognition Week.

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS – WAIM staff and board members respond to requests to speak about the organization from member faith communities, United Way and other groups.