

July 23, 2003

RE: Spokane Community Voice Mail and DSHS Funds

Dear Chair and Honorable Commission Members:

I am providing information to inform you of the valuable services that Spokane Community Voice Mail (SCVM) provides to members of our community. As you probably know, the legislature this year has provided that Community Voice Mail can be funded under the Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP).

Spokane Community Voice Mail (SCVM) is a cooperative effort of over 30 social service agencies to provide free voice mailboxes to low-income phoneless persons to help them obtain jobs, medical care, and for victims of domestic abuse, personal safety. This worthwhile program furthers our mission of providing services to low-income and highly vulnerable persons while preserving a client's dignity and encouraging self-sufficiency.

SCVM is a telephone computer system, with the capacity for up to 8 trunk lines located in SNAP offices at 500 S. Stone. The computer, currently running 5 trunk lines and 950 numbers, has the capacity to utilize 1,200 individual voice mailboxes. SNAP distributes voice mailboxes to participating programs and agencies. These programs and agencies are fully trained on how to use and maintain the numbers issued to them. Case managers can then distribute a private message box with a personalized security code and greeting to their clients in a matter of

SCVM boxes provide many benefits for its users. For example, it has become a very effective tool to provide safety for persons and children fleeing from domestic violence situations. These persons can use their number in order to receive information and notification that might otherwise lead to additional abuse.

It is also a useful tool to promote family preservation. Participants and their children can give their number to family and friends, allowing the same conveniences as their own phone line. This enables them to maintain contact with the people that are important to them while they are adjusting to life changes.

While clients may give their SCVM phone numbers to family and friends, they are expected to use SCVM for more than social calls, and, if they do not, caseworkers reset the boxes and assign the phone numbers to others who will use them more efficiently.

In 2001, 238 families, composed of 625 individuals, participated in SCVM. Specifically,

- 228 clients initially reported their primary need for SCVM was a housing search. After completion of the program, 103 reported finding permanent housing, 12 found transitional housing, and 23 reported finding shelter.
- 96 clients initially reported that they needed the SCVM for safety while dealing with domestic violence issues. After completion of the program, 72 participants indicated that SCVM provided them with a method of safe communication in domestic violence situations.
- 144 clients initially reported that access to health care was the primary reason for needing a voice mailbox. After completion of the program, 71 clients indicated receiving health care as a result of SCVM.

- 268 clients reported a need for voice mail in order to access social services. After completion of the program, 113 clients indicated success in obtaining additional social services as a direct result of SCVM.
- 336 clients indicated their primary need for SCVM was for employment searching. Of those clients, 29 indicated that they found full-time employment, and 29 found part-time employment.

These statistics make clear SCVM's proficiency in assisting vulnerable populations to stabilize their lives and recover self-sufficiency. A consequence of this success is that the demand for SCVM continues to increase. SCVM is highly successful in assisting people to have critically needed telephone access. As you weigh your various options, please ensure adequate resources are available and consider directing DSHS to fund Community Voice Mail with WTAP funding.

If you have any questions, please call me at 456-7111 ext. 233.

Sincerely,

Ray Rieckers

Assistant Director

Spokane Neighborhood Action Programs

2116 E. First Avenue

Spokane, WA 99202

Telephone: (509) 456-7111

Fax: (509) 534-5874