



Communicator

Summer 2010

Making connections across Minnesota

Project gets cell phones into people's hands

Having mastered the use of voice mail technology that was cutting-edge in 1994, Twin Cities Community Voice Mail has been leaping into 21st century technology on behalf of the people using its services. With the assistance of a grant from the St. Paul Foundation, TCCVM has begun a new pilot project giving cell phones to clients.

This new project is a collaborative between TCCVM, Dorothy Day Center, the Housing Crisis Response team of Ramsey County, and Safe Zone. Clients are provided with a cell phone and 300 minutes per month. As they work toward their goals and keep in touch with social workers at the agencies, the clients can receive cards with additional minutes for up to 6 months.

While for many of us a cell phone is a must-have item, people who are homeless may be scorned for wanting such a "luxury item." In reality, this luxury truly is a necessity for low-income adults and families.

In this difficult economy, people looking for work need every advantage. One of those advantages is time, or, more accurately, timeliness. When there is a job open, often times it may go to one of the first responders to the posting. As reliable as voice mail has been over the past 16 years, it can-

not immediately announce a new message. A cell phone allows a person to be in touch at all times.

This is not to say that the voice mail system isn't useful. To the contrary, almost 2,000 people are checking their voice mail every day, over 4,700 people during 2009.

Nationwide trends

TCCVM's pursuit of cell phones as an essential tool for low-income people to improve their economic standing is supported by research done by the Opinion Research Corp. Two surveys done by the organization showed the importance of cell phones in the ability of Americans to find work and manage emergency situations. Nationally, the report issued by the New Mille-

nium Research Council says, providing cell phones to the poorest American households could help them earn from \$2.9 billion to \$11 billion.

Graham Hueber, a senior research at ORC, said: "A large percentage of Americans use their cell phones to find jobs and earn other income. This effect clearly would be beneficial to millions of low-income households that have the greatest need for work and income, but do not have cell phones."

TCCVM's pilot project on cell phones has been reported nationally by The Huffington Post and locally by online news organizations The Line and Minn-Post. To find links to these articles, go to our website, www.tccvm.org.

Advocating at Minn. Public Utilities Commission for low-cost cell phones

Twin Cities Community Voice Mail has recently participated in hearings at the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission regarding applications to be Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETC). These applications are by companies requesting permission to utilize federal Universal Service Fund monies to provide low-income persons with cell phones and monthly phone minutes.

The impetus for TCCVM to participate in the comment and hearing process with the PUC has been its ongoing research into the viability of offering cell phones in addition to voice mail numbers to the low-income users of TCCVM. Through surveys of our advisory and 50+ groups, we have learned features that they believe are essential for a cell phone program to meet their needs of finding jobs, housing and medical care, and caring for their families.

With those comments in mind, TCCVM staff drafted formal replies to existing applications at the PUC. TCCVM's view is that any plan to be approved by the PUC must include several key elements: a satisfactory number of minutes per month that realistically reflect people's real needs; reasonable rates for customers to purchase additional minutes on their own; free customer service calls; free 911 calls.

In addition to advocating for low-income people receiving cell phones through efficient use of federal dollars, TCCVM will also work with other low-income service providers and organizations to advocate to the FCC to change rules surrounding Lifeline eligibility, making the service available to as many people as possible.

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The Call-Sheet...Messages about TCCVM happenings

Voice Mail: "Old" technology is still much-needed

Despite the fact that voice mail itself is such a 1990s technology, the need for it has not diminished over time. TCCVM has been active in making the service available statewide, ensuring that more agencies know about its benefits for their clients. TCCVM has also been reaching out to partner agencies who have been unable to utilize voice mail as much, due to staffing cutbacks. We developed outreach sites, staffed by past voice mail users in Ramsey County, where people can apply for a voice mail number. This fall, we will have a VISTA volunteer working in central Minnesota, making connections with new agencies and supporting existing partner agencies in the St. Cloud area and region.

Voice mail users play important role in TCCVM's success

TCCVM values the participation of people who are now using or have used the voice mail service in the past. Right now, nine people who are past or current voice mail users serve on our board of directors. Members of both our Advisory Group and the 50+ Group are regular volunteers at events like Project Homeless Connect and Veterans StandDowns, where many voice mail numbers are given out at one time. We have grown in large part because of the input of those who use our service, and we are thankful for all they contribute.

Annual picnic Sept. 12

TCCVM's annual picnic and walk fundraiser will be Sunday, September 12 at 1pm at Minnehaha Park in Minneapolis.

We will provide a picnic lunch, games and prizes, and an informal walk will take place. Some transportation will be available to help people attend.

For more information, contact Ed at 651-603-5147 or go to our website, www.tccvm.org.

Watch for our new name!

Next month we will be unveiling our new name and logo, which we've developed throughout a yearlong branding effort. We think it reflects well the work that we do. Stay tuned!

Please support our work:

Twin Cities Community Voice Mail relies on the financial support of many different segments of our community. While much of our annual budget is funded through government contracts and foundation grants, there is a growing need for the generosity of individuals, organizations and companies. This is only natural in these continued difficult economic days.

Government funding—no surprise—is in jeopardy at each turn. Foundations have been forced to restrict their giving to make up for hits their endowments have taken during the economic downturn. And we understand that for so many individuals these times are ones of necessary cost-cutting.

However, in times like these we are heartened by the tax-deductible donations from individuals, congregations and civic groups. Please use the form at right to make a donation to support our work. If you like, you may also donate securely online through giveMN.org, through our website, www.tccvm.org. All credit cards are accepted there.

Thank you for your continued support.



I support TCCVM!

Name _____

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Enclosed is my donation of:

___\$50 ___\$100

___\$250 ___\$_____

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