

# Housing Choices

*A Newsletter for Mental Health Professionals*

Winter 2003 - 2004

*Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services*

## Expanding Services To Youth In Transition

By Peggy Robertson

At the September 17<sup>th</sup> OMHSAS Housing Specialist meeting, David Derbes, Program Specialist Supervisor for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Office of Children, Youth and Families, explained steps that are being taken to address youth who are aging out of foster care.

### ***John J. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program***

Mr. Derbes started his presentation by explaining, "The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 aims to ensure that teens emerging from the foster care system at age 18 or 19 don't resurface in the homeless service or criminal justice systems. Through this Act independent living programs are being created that really work. The law recognized that, no matter what, youth aging out of foster care have to be prepared to live independently."

The law established the John J. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program - named in honor of the late senator from Rhode Island, an original sponsor of the Act and a long-time champion of children.

The law made substantial changes in the Federal efforts targeted toward youth and young adults (up to age 21) in the foster care component of the child welfare system. It significantly improved states' ability to achieve the national goals of

safety, permanence and well-being for youth and young adults in the child welfare system. Specifically, the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program:

- Doubled the Federal Title IV-E Independent Living funding nationwide to approximately \$140 million and required all states to make services available for youth up to age 21;
- Allows states to serve youth younger than 16;
- **Permits up to 30% of a state's allocation to be used for room and board costs and services for youth ages 18-21 who have left foster care on or after age 18;**
- Allows states to provide Medicaid insurance to youth ages 18-21 who left foster care;
- Increases youth's savings account limit from \$1,000 to \$10,000 so that youth in foster care can save and still be eligible for Title IV-E foster care benefits;
- Requires states to develop outcome measures to assess their performance;
- Requires states to use Title IV-E funds to train adoptive/foster care parents, workers in group homes, and case managers to help them address issues confronting adolescents preparing for independent living;
- Authorizes additional funds for adoption incentive payments to states that increased the number of children adopted from foster care.

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### **Case Study**

The following is a portion of an article entitled "Growing Independence" written by Susan Kellam in December 2000 that illustrates the benefits of the Act to a youth leaving the foster care system:

*When she turned 18, Tracy thought for sure she could carve her own way in the world. She dreamed of a life without curfews, without school and without a list of rules pinned to her bed. She couldn't wait to break free from the restrictive binds of foster care. So as soon as she could, she left the home where she had been living without a backward glance. It was only a matter of months, however, before someone found her shivering under a bridge in Manchester, New Hampshire.*

*Fortunately, the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 allowed the state of New Hampshire to give Tracy the services she needed, even though she had "aged out" of the state's foster care system. Most importantly, Tracy got back in the state system, but in a new relationship better suited to her young adult status. That means trained workers helped to plot out her next steps, steps that might keep her from finding herself homeless again. Tracy was old enough to be eligible for programs, and perhaps more receptive to advice on education, job training, or some sort of subsidized housing that might include supervision.*

*Tracy, and other kids on the verge of adulthood, are the most vulnerable because they believe that they can live independently, and they're always shocked to face the reality of finances, the work place or a boyfriend who can't really be supportive. The 17- and 18-year-olds are the most difficult because they have fantasies that are totally unrealistic.*

### **Pennsylvania**

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) is committed to providing the skills and resources needed by youth to successfully make the transition from placement to independence. The primary purpose of the Pennsylvania Chafee Foster Care Independence Program or Independent Living (IL) program is to make every effort possible to reduce or eliminate the instances of homelessness, poverty, delinquent or criminal behavior, and non-marital childbirth and to increase employability, high school graduation rates, enrollment in post-secondary or vocational intuitions and successful transition to adulthood. The program emphasizes youth involvement, permanency, relationships with caring adults, and achievement of positive outcomes. In addition, there is a strong focus on collaboration, not only with local partners, but also with other agencies. Mr. Derbes outlined the following objectives during his presentation:

- To improve service delivery and outcomes for adolescents exiting the foster care system
- To reduce episodes of homelessness among former foster care youth
- To share knowledge at the state level with hopes to effect change at the local level
- To provide local contact information
- To get counties to establish local linkages and have different systems working together in order to make sure services are being provided to youth in transition

Although the federal allocations have doubled, in Pennsylvania allocations have grown but not doubled. Pennsylvania received \$5.3 million for 2003 – 04 with the allocation to individual counties ranging from \$8,000 to \$100,000. The use of the funds, which is determined county by county, is flexible. Although 30% of the state's allocation can be used for housing, Mr. Derbes pointed out that less than half of the counties in the Commonwealth are doing so at this time. However, housing is not always neglected, since a number of counties are working with other agencies to access housing resources.

Currently the state is revising regulations governing child welfare services to children and

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their families, including children in foster care. Since statistics show that youth exiting foster care are at an increased risk of homelessness, one consideration is to provide more instruction and guidance to caseworkers and the courts to better assist youth who are 18 – 21 who have serious issues. This will prevent them from being discharged without a plan in place. While county children and youth agencies still have control over adolescents in terms of treatment and recovery, once an individual is placed in the adult mental health system, access to services is voluntary, increasing the risk of homelessness.

### **Eligibility**

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program broadens youth eligibility by requiring states to serve former foster care youth and youth exiting foster care on or after age 18 up to the age of 21. In addition, pre-adoptive or adopted youth are now eligible to receive services, and services can occur concurrently with efforts to locate and achieve placement in adoptive families.

Title IV-E eligibility of a youth is not a requirement for enrollment in an IL program. CFCIP also makes it possible to serve youth younger than age 16 through the provision of age appropriate services such as pregnancy prevention or other preventative services. Eligible youth may be referred from a variety of sources, however the majority of referrals

are made by the Children and Youth case manager. Upon referral, youth are assessed to determine what services are deemed appropriate and they are encouraged to participate in the development of their Independent Living plan.

In general, to be eligible for IL services in Pennsylvania, a youth must:

- be at least 16 years old but less than 21 years old as of September 30, 2002;
- be in or have been in out-of-home placement on or after age 16; and
- have been adjudicated dependent AND/OR delinquent with shared case management responsibility between the county children and youth agency and juvenile probation office.

Due to limited Title IV-E IL funding, it may be necessary for counties to prioritize services to youth based on the requirements of CFCIP. In most cases, priority for services should be youth:

- most likely to remain in substitute care until age 18;
- who have left foster care because they have attained 18 years of age, but have not attained 21 years of age; and
- who meet the general eligibility requirements described above.

### **In Conclusion**

The Chafee program is definitely a step in the right direction to help the transition for youth aging out of the foster care system. However the discussion needs to be expanded to include agencies that focus on drug abuse prevention, mental health services, and the juvenile justice system. It is critical that agencies establish local linkages and collaborate in order to make sure adequate services are being provided to youth in transition.

An audio conference on preventing and ending homelessness among youth was held on June 12, 2003. Sponsored by the Council of State Community Development Agencies, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National Council of State Housing Agencies, the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the recorded webcast is available at [www.pathprogram.samhsa.gov/naeh.asp](http://www.pathprogram.samhsa.gov/naeh.asp).

For more information about the Pennsylvania Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, contact Dave Derbes at 717-705-2911.

## Driving To Greater Independence

By Peggy Robertson

A major focus among Housing Specialists in Pennsylvania has been how to address the housing needs of youth and young adults who are aging out of foster care. Cameron, Elk, & McKean Counties Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program (CEM MH/MR) is addressing this issue under its PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness) grant. The focus of their program is to assist homeless youth and young adults, ages 16-24, diagnosed with a serious mental illness or social/emotional disorder to obtain safe, affordable housing. CEM recently initiated a pilot program to target this population by assisting them to maintain housing, access community services and employment, and to develop a natural support group.

CEM MH/MR understands the needs of this population. They have found that the adolescents and young adults that are referred to them are typically in Residential Treatment Facilities (RTF), Foster Care placement, Transitional Housing (usually Community Residential Rehabilitation), living temporarily with friends or family, or living on the streets.

Unfortunately, even those who are coming from structured RTF or Foster Care programs have not been taught the essential skills they need to live independently. If they have been taught to cook,

it's usually to make only one part of the meal. Preparing an entire meal is overwhelming. Most of the youth have never been to the grocery store independently, and have never had to budget their own money. Many of them have not had the opportunity to develop employment related skills such as completing an application or job retention skills. Others are not at grade level or have dropped out of school. They are accustomed to someone else scheduling their doctor's appointments, buying their clothing and supplying their meals. Although these young adults have not had the opportunity to gradually learn independent living skills, they are moving from total structure to complete independence.

Some consumers over the age of 18 have been referred after being evicted from their housing arrangement, and in most cases have burnt bridges behind them, making it extremely difficult to locate housing. Some are involved with the legal system, and their lack of housing and violation of probation sends them back to jail, or creates additional barriers to housing. The 16 -18 year olds are usually in some type of placement, however once they turn 18, or sometimes even prior to that, they may become homeless. By getting these referrals early, it is

the hope that PATH Plus, a new concept discussed below, will assist these individuals to avoid homelessness.

CEM MH/MR, in collaboration with the Public Assistance Offices representing the three counties, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), New Choices/New Options (NCNO), and Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services, developed a concept called **PATH Plus**. The goal is *to assist transition-age youth diagnosed with a mental illness with developing the skills they need to maintain safe, affordable housing in the community.*

It is expected that the program will foster the needed links to home, work, and community that will assist these young adults to a life and community of their own.

PATH Plus hopes to accomplish this goal in three ways:

- By bringing representatives from available community resources to the project, and having them discuss available programs and how to access them
- By using instructors from NCNO and other programs throughout the counties to assist participants in building on the daily living skills that are necessary to be a productive member of their community

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- By providing Driver's Education to the participants to minimize the transportation barriers of living in a rural area

In July and August of 2002, CEM funded a six-week PATH Plus Pilot Project using PATH funds. Additional funds and/or in-kind services for the project came from OVR, Goodwill Industries and NCNO. Several other community agencies also graciously donated their time and resources to give presentations during the project.

PATH Plus fills a gap by giving these teens something they need, group instruction on daily living and coping skills. Although each of these individuals has a treatment team planning with them to avoid homelessness, PATH Plus goes one step further by bringing "The System" to the consumers and teaching them the fundamental daily living skills they need to be successful. Even though all of these services are already available in the community, PATH Plus brings the agencies to the consumer under one umbrella and reduces the barriers to maintaining employment and housing in the community. In addition, the individuals participating in PATH Plus found an effective incentive that the teens wanted - a driver's license.

Nine young adults from McKean County were chosen to participate in the PATH Plus pilot project. Of the nine, six successfully

completed the program. During the program the individuals enhanced their job skills, were assisted in completing and/or furthering their education, and were provided a central place to learn how to access services in the community. The long-term goal of the program is an employed individual who has located and maintained safe and affordable housing.

One of the unanticipated advantages of PATH Plus is that the young adults bonded with, and learned from a group of peers, each of whom had unique experiences to bring to the group. Typically the individuals that have been referred to PATH have little or no positive supports in the community. During the pilot project they supported each other and, in some cases, continued to support each other after the program. This cannot be duplicated through individual contacts with a case manager.

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Corporation recently announced a request for proposals in the area. In response, CEM proposed to serve 16 disadvantaged youth between the ages of 18 and 21 in Cameron/Elk and McKean Counties under the direction of the CEM MH/MR Program's PATH Liaisons. The PATH Plus program, based on the pilot, appears to be beneficial and practical. The main purpose is to provide education about the

community so this population of young people can live independently and successfully and develop their own natural supports. Linda Thompson of CEM MH/MR added, "We know the bank officials, the probation officers and the folks at Children and Youth Services, so this makes it easy for us to collaborate and bring the system to the consumers. We hope to duplicate the program starting in January 2004 for 8 youth in McKean and 8 youth in Cameron/Elk."

Employment outcomes will be emphasized in this PATH Plus project by forging strong linkages with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Employability Counselors.

The objectives of the new program are:

- To enhance the participants' knowledge of available services in the community.
- To increase the basic adult living skills of this young population.
- To increase the number of employed young adults and reduce reliance on County Assistance Office and Supplemental Security Income benefits.
- To reduce the barriers of attaining employment and access to services and recreational activities in the community by offering the ability to attain a driver's license.

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## **Governor Signs Order Creating Office of Housing and Community Revitalization - Names Larry Segal, Long-Time Housing Advocate, as Executive Director**

On September 10, 2003, Governor Edward G. Rendell signed an Executive Order creating the Governor's Office of Housing and Community Revitalization to better coordinate state government's housing efforts. The Order also establishes the Governor's Housing Cabinet, which will consist of the secretaries of seven state agencies as well as other top-level state officials. "The challenge of providing safe, decent and affordable housing in communities throughout Pennsylvania is one that we need to deal with immediately," Governor Rendell said. "Until today, Pennsylvania has used an outdated, multi-agency system to address housing and community revitalization issues. Today, we are putting an end to that inefficient system. With the Office of Housing and Community Revitalization, we will be able to focus our efforts in a way that will result in better coordination of our programs and more effective and efficient use of our resources."

Governor Rendell named Larry Segal, a long-time housing advocate, as executive director of the office. Lisa Yaffe, director of the Housing Services Division for the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, will serve as assistant director. Segal is the former director of the state's Office of Community Development and Housing. He also formed Impact Pennsylvania, Inc., a real estate development company focusing on major urban redevelopment projects throughout Pennsylvania. He has served on the boards of directors of the Pennsylvania Rural Development Council, the Pennsylvania Downtown Center, the Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania and also served as president of Residential Living Options, Inc. He also served as chair of the Housing Finance Committee of the Pennsylvania Builders Association and as vice chair of the Tredyffrin Township Planning Commission.

"Larry Segal is a zealous advocate of affordable housing and meaningful community revitalization," Governor Rendell said. "His experience in state government, the private sector and the non-profit world will bring a broad-based perspective to our overall housing efforts."

Mr. Segal commented, "As many of us who have worked in the housing and community revitalization arena know, the Commonwealth has been without leadership around these very important issues. Lisa and I are excited that Governor Rendell, together with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, has made affordable housing and the revitalization of our core communities a priority of this administration. Our goal is to work toward meaningful and effective housing policy that provides options for all citizens and work with communities to develop projects that impact their economy and their quality of life."

The Office will coordinate overall housing policy for the Commonwealth and serve as the primary liaison among all state agency programs, resources and policy areas involved in housing and community revitalization. It also will represent the Governor in developing partnerships with appropriate public and private housing agencies. The Governor's Housing Cabinet will advise and assist the Governor and the Office in identifying opportunities to improve the management and operation of state government programs affecting housing and assist in the development and implementation of housing strategies and programs, including the identification of barriers to sound housing policy and program efficiency.

Congratulations go to both Larry and Lisa, who will provide the leadership necessary to address the housing needs in throughout the Commonwealth. They understand the needs of Pennsylvanians with lower incomes and with disabilities, its seniors and its homeless, all of whom require greater attention and choice in housing alternatives.

## Successfully Pooling Resources

By Peggy Robertson

- ➔ A Housing Authority sets aside 130 housing choice vouchers for homeless individuals and individuals with disabilities.
- ➔ An agency that provides housing support services receives funding to hire staff to coordinate and support that program.
- ➔ A demonstration program is established to provide housing of choice for at least six people with disabilities and to test the effectiveness of the county housing and human service systems in helping people with disabilities to secure the housing of their choice.
- ➔ A concerted effort is made to identify new landlords to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

All of these activities designed to meet the housing needs of individuals with disabilities have been coordinated by one group, the Montgomery County Permanent Housing Options Team (PHOT). The PHOT is a committee of the Montgomery County Housing Coalition whose mission is "to expand affordable, accessible and permanent housing options for people with disabilities and homeless and formerly homeless families and individuals".

The Montgomery County PHOT, which has been meeting regularly

for several years, has brought together representatives from the county office of Mental Health/Mental Retardation and Drug and Alcohol, with representatives from the Office of Housing and Community Development, the Montgomery County Housing Authority, the Fair Housing Council, the Center for Independent Living, the regional office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and staff from provider agencies, in order to provide the collaboration necessary to carry out their mission.

The main goal of the PHOT is to establish long term solutions to increasing affordable and available housing opportunities for people with disabilities through systems change. The PHOT exemplifies the successful collaboration of key stakeholders in the community that are interested in helping people with disabilities expand their housing options.

The first task undertaken by the PHOT was to identify the local needs and to educate its members on local housing obstacles and resources. Data was collected on the specific housing and support needs and preferences of these populations. As a result, there have been the following notable accomplishments:

The PHOT worked with the Montgomery County Housing

Authority to establish a preference for homeless and disabled in its Housing Choice Voucher Program, starting with a demonstration set-aside of 130 vouchers. A major incentive for the housing authority was the promise by county and private human service agencies to provide supportive services to individuals taking advantage of the preference. A team of these agencies is currently developing a process for creating the necessary linkages between program participants and service providers. Seventy-five letters have already gone out to people on the Housing Authority's waiting list who might be eligible for the preference.

In conjunction with the set-aside, Hedwig House received a HUD McKinney grant to hire staff to coordinate and support the homeless families and individuals. Hedwig House, a private, non-profit organization working under contract with the Montgomery County Office of Mental Health, provides fellowship, vocational training and long-term housing to persons with mental illness. Part of this grant provides assistance for transportation in the form of bus tokens for individuals taking advantage of the demonstration program. Alternative sources of funding are being looked into for both transportation and daycare that would serve people who are not homeless and therefore do not qualify for the McKinney funds.

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*(PHOT continued from page 7)*

Hedwig House has also held training sessions and has written materials for voucher holders on how to be a good tenant. The topics covered include:

- tenant rights
- accessing the legal system
- maintenance issues
- finding rental housing
- working with a landlord
- inspecting the desired housing
- understanding the rules and the language in a lease or rental agreement

Other information addresses the tenant's responsibility in handling parking, trash and utilities as well as tips on common negotiating issues and how to avoid misunderstandings.

With funding from the County Affordable Housing Trust Fund, the PHOT is undertaking its second major initiative - a demonstration program that will result in housing of choice for at least six people with disabilities. The demonstration is also designed to identify gaps and barriers in the county housing and human service systems that impede individuals with disabilities in securing the housing of their choice. The three populations being targeted to participate in this project are:

- adolescents who are transitioning out of foster care and need housing
- individuals with mental illness who are living in CRR's

- individuals with mental retardation who are living with aging parents.

The PHOT is currently exploring other avenues to expand affordable accessible housing opportunities for formerly homeless individuals and people with disabilities. Two strategies that the committee is advocating for are:

1. Set-aside of units for the homeless and/or disabled in all new county-assisted permanent housing projects including those funded through HUD, the PA Housing Finance Agency and/or County CDBG, HOME or Housing Trust Fund dollars. The Housing Coalition is recommending that 10% of the units in each project, but no less than 2 units, be set-aside for these families and individuals. This set-aside is especially important for non-disabled families and individuals exiting emergency shelter or transitional housing, since these households are unable to benefit from the HUD McKinney funds, which primarily target homeless individuals with disabilities.

In order for such a set-aside to be effective, the units reserved must be affordable to households with incomes at 30% of the county median income.

This may require deeper per unit subsidies from the County, especially for projects funded through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, since those units are generally affordable to households at 50% and 60% of median.

2. Additional funding for home modification grants, since many people with disabilities prefer to remain in their current homes rather than to move. Due to their limited incomes, however, the availability of grants for home modification is essential for many of these individuals. Although Montgomery County has applied for and allocated funds from the DCED Access Grant Program for home modifications, a sizable demand remains for this program. The PHOT has urged the County to apply for additional funds from DCED for this purpose.

The Montgomery County PHOT has been successful in bringing the right people together to work collaboratively in order to find creative solutions to the housing problems that exist for people with disabilities. Part of this success is based on local leadership, a dedication of time on the part of the participating representatives, and a commitment to the process. The more people that participate, the

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## ***Olmstead: Reclaiming Institutionalized Lives - Abridged Version of Report Available on Web***

The National Council on Disability released an abridged version of its report *Olmstead: Reclaiming Institutionalized Lives*. The report, which is an analysis of federal and state implementation of the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision, says community-based services work, but more needs to be done. The report measures progress to date in the implementation of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999), and related federal and state government initiatives.

The abridged version is available at <http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/reclaimabridged.html>.  
Single copies can be obtained by sending e-mail to [sbrown@ncd.gov](mailto:sbrown@ncd.gov).

*(PHOT continued from page 8)*

more opportunities there are to learn about available resources as well as additional funding streams. Many other issues are being discussed at the PHOT meetings and it is exciting to witness the creative ideas that are generated.

One issue under discussion is how to educate landlords about the Housing Choices Voucher Program. At the October PHOT meeting, ideas were generated on different networks that can be developed to reach landlords and

to explain the benefits of participating in the program.

One idea is to facilitate communication between the housing authority and the landlords. Participants at the PHOT meeting thought it was critical to identify specific incentives that would encourage landlords/property owners to participate in the program. For example, landlords may be unaware that the individuals who will be utilizing the set-aside vouchers in Montgomery County will all have case managers who

can serve as contact people if landlords have any concerns. The PHOT recognizes that by bringing more people such as landlords, property developers and realtors to their meetings they can further their agenda.

Through leadership and commitment, the Montgomery County PHOT exemplifies how agencies can collaborate to pool their resources in order to help meet the housing needs of people with disabilities and help agencies deliver their services in the most effective manner.

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- To increase the development of a natural support group and connections to positive involvements in the community.

Evaluation will be a key component of the newly proposed PATH Plus project. The initial pilot project was based upon listening to what the consumers said they wanted. Any additional PATH Plus projects will be

guided by the same approach. After the course is completed, the participants will be asked to meet as a group with the Oversight Team and to complete the program evaluation form. Each group will be treated to a graduation luncheon that will also address social etiquette while in a restaurant, how to determine an appropriate tip for a server, etc.

The consumers participating in

the project will be encouraged throughout the program to make suggestions and comments to the Project Coordinator or PATH Liaisons as they arise. If there is a concern with any provider, the PATH Liaisons and County Mental Health Program Specialist will meet with this provider to resolve the issue. By working together within the community, this population of young people has a strong chance of living independently and successfully.

## Upcoming OMHSAS Housing Specialist Meeting

### SAVE THE DATE

### Tuesday, March 9, 2004

10am - 3 pm

Department of Aging  
555 Walnut Street, 5th Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

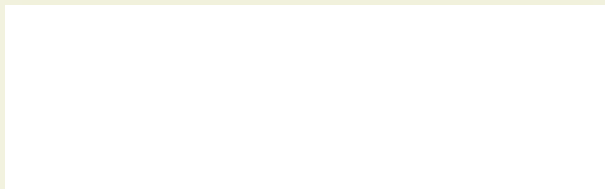
*More information will be forthcoming. Please contact Mona Weisberg if you have questions at 215-576-1558.*

**Visit the OMHSAS Website for Mental Health Professionals -**  
***www.pahousingchoices.org*** - (formerly *www.harpoofpa.org*)

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We welcome your submissions, ideas for articles, and information on related housing efforts and projects. If you have information about a related project or would like more information about a project described here, please contact us at the following address: Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc., 6 South Easton Road, Glenside, PA 19038  
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