



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

## 2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

**Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Water Bill Outreach

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Niles Family Services, Village of Niles, Niles, IL

Jurisdiction population(s): Residents in the Village of Niles

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: September Year: 2013

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Anthony J. Hollenback, LCSW

Title: Director of Family Services Jurisdiction: Village of Niles

Name: Cheryl Neuman Meltzer, LCSW

Title: Social Worker Jurisdiction: Village of Niles

Name: Bev Wessels, LCSW

Title: Coordinator of Senior Social Work Services Jurisdiction: Village of Niles

**SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Anthony J Hollenback, LCSW  
Title: Director of Family Services Jurisdiction: Village of Niles  
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# Village of Niles

"Where People Count"

## Family Services Department

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### Family Services

#### Director

Tony Hollenback,

LCSW

The Village of Niles like most suburban municipalities is charged with responding to issues and challenges faced by residents with creativity, innovation and sustainability. In 2013, with the installation of a new Mayor, new Village Leadership Team and new Director of Family Services new ideas and possibilities began to emerge to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of how Human Services were provided. Historically, "Human Services" has been impacted by the stigma of "asking for help" which often prevents residents from utilizing services sooner and waiting for the "crisis" to emerge. In addition, the preconceived ideas of the role of Social Workers and helping professionals often keep potential from receiving the services they need.

**Intention:** In June of 2013, the Village of Niles began to take a more pro-active approach with residents who had an outstanding balance for their water usage. Unpaid water bills put a strain on the Village's Finance Department as well as the Village's ability to provide water to the community. Niles Family Services proposed an innovative solution to address this issue.

Created in 1967, Niles Family Services has been the hub of all Human Service activity in the Village with services and outreach provided to elementary/middle and high schools, healthcare providers, community providers and residents of all ages. With the arrival of a new Director of Family Services in August of 2013, Tony Hollenback, and the leadership of Mayor Andrew Przybylo an intentional shift was made to focus on "wellness" approach through prevention and early intervention.

With a collaborative approach to enhance services provided to residents in the Village of Niles, the Finance and Family Services Department created a "water bill outreach" program to assist residents who had a balance of \$250 and could potentially be in need of additional support to assist them. The results of this collaboration were extremely successful and improved awareness/accessibility of services, reduced "stigma" of asking for help and created a holistic approach to service delivery by identifying/addressing any underlying issues that have contributed to their present situation.

**Implementation:** On a monthly basis, the Finance Department provide Niles Family Services with a list of residents who had unpaid water bill balance. Residents were contacted by letter and via telephone with a compassionate invitation to contact Family Services for assistance. As a resident driven initiative, NFS provided each resident (individual, couple or family) with education on the role of NFS, a comprehensive assessment and (if appropriate) a "care plan" to address not only their water bill but any underlying issues that precipitated their ability to meet their financial responsibilities including unemployment/under-employment, grief/loss, divorce, addiction, mental health, illness (or caregiving an ill family member) and other psychosocial situations. The response from residents was phenomenal. The familiar theme communicated to NFS was, "We didn't know the Village of Niles had these resources or we would have contacted you sooner". **99%** of all residents were unaware that NFS existed or had resources to support them in situations like this. Even residents who were aware didn't know that NFS had the ability to



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help them navigate through a situation which often created feelings of shame, embarrassment and frustration. One example includes a resident who stopped paying his water bill after the death of his wife after 65 years of marriage. The impact of his grief and loss was so significant it impacted his ability to monitor his bills and finances. NFS was able to assist him with the necessary support, prevent his water from being turned off and provide him with the emotional support needed to deal with his loss. NFS has also been able to successfully link residents with programs/services in the Senior Center and Teen Center when appropriate.

Another “success” story includes an 89 year old resident who had recently suffered a stroke, did not have supportive healthcare resources in place and a significant unpaid water bill. In addition, her adult son and teenage daughter had returned to home after losing his job. When NFS became involved with this family, efforts were made to assist the resident’s son with receiving financial support by caregiving his mother, access to the Food Pantry, employment assistance and a referral to the Teen Center for additional support for the resident’s granddaughter. NFS was able to assist the client with reducing her water bill with the collaboration and generosity of our community partners.

Although this program was resident driven, NFS also provided education/support to the Finance Department on the “red flags” present (i.e. domestic violence, mental health, etc.) that would indicate a referral to NFS would be beneficial. This gave the Finance Department the tools to pro-actively refer residents who needed more immediate support.

Since the implementation of this program began, 20% of all of the residents who received information (131) about the program contacted NFS and successfully received assistance and support to effectively address the issues involved. 98% of the residents who participated in this outreach received education, counseling and linkage with community resources to address the “under-lying” issue that precipitated their situation.

**Partnerships:** In a Municipal setting partnerships are critical to our success. NFS is fortunate to have strong partnerships with the Salvation Army, Center of Concern and the St. Vincent DePaul chapters at three Catholic churches in the Village of Niles. Once NFS has completed their assessment and determined the financial need, the NFS Social Worker then contacts one of the community partners to create a “financial assistance package” to effectively reduce the resident’s water bill balance. NFS was mindful that this was a relatively new concept but all of the community partners have been supportive of this mission/goal to address the underlying issues of poverty and economic distress.

**Holistic Perspective:** In addition to assisting residents with their water bills, NFS identifies other sources of support that could make a positive impact on the lives of our residents including caregiving resources for an older adult, employment assistance, counseling, access to the Food Pantry, child care resources, healthcare and assistance accessing public entitlement programs.

**Costs:** This program was provided using the existing NFS staff and financial support from the above mentioned community partners. It reduced the amount of staff time from the Finance Department to follow up on residents with delinquent water bills and prevent future delinquencies by providing comprehensive services to meet their needs. The Village has a dynamic Family Services department which provided the necessary leadership to implement this program along with support from graduate level Social Work Interns from local universities. NFS has promoted this outreach program through local media, the Village website and through community outreach. Outside of staff time, this program has provided cost savings, increased visibility of existing resources and strengthened inter-departmental collaboration between the Family Services, Public Works, Finance and the Community Development departments.