

For Immediate Release
January 20, 2012

Help Create a Vision for a Healthier and Safer Rockbridge

The Rockbridge Area Free Clinic, recognizing the need to further develop a sustainable system of care for the medically underserved in the Rockbridge Area, applied for and was awarded an \$80,000 federal grant. This grant is being used to fund a 12-month project to broadly define and assess the health of our community, develop a strategic plan, and design an appropriate health service delivery model that incorporates all aspects of health, safety, and wellness delivery. The three local governments supported the grant application and have representatives serving on the steering committee.

To accomplish this mission, the Free Clinic, in partnership with Carilion Stonewall Jackson Hospital and the Central Shenandoah Health District, is using a tool developed by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). MAPP, which stands for Mobilizing Action through Planning and Partnerships, is a program designed to help communities evaluate and implement a community health improvement plan.

Under the MAPP program, the steering committee will undertake a four-fold community health assessment, formulate strategic goals and complete a service delivery plan based on those strategic goals. In the process, the committee will gather a comprehensive collection of health care data available to the community and will collaborate in strategic thinking. In addition, the documents produced in the MAPP process will be used by the Free Clinic should it decide to pursue a Federally Qualified Health Center designation, and by the hospital for its IRS-required 3-yearly assessment and strategic plan.

On Tuesday, January 17 Carilion Stonewall Jackson Hospital is sponsoring a community visioning event at the VMI Center for Leadership and Ethics which is located just behind the Marshall Library on VMI's campus. The event will run from 5:30 until 7:30 p.m. with food and door prizes provided.

The goal during this event is to solicit public opinion that will help assess where Rockbridge is today and what needs to be done, as a community, to create a healthier Rockbridge in the future. There will be facilitated small group discussions designed to gain community input. The event is open to the public although RSVPs are helpful to ensure there will be enough food and seating. Please contact Katy Datz to secure your space at the event by calling 464-8700, ext. 118 or by emailing development@rockbridgefreeclinic.org.

Free Clinic Executive Director, Suzanne Sheridan, comments: “It is important to us to have broad community representation. The success of this event really depends on hearing from a broad spectrum of our constituents.”

At the January 17 event there will be opportunities for individuals to express their opinions related to health and services in the Rockbridge area. Some of the questions to be considered include: What are the assets present in Rockbridge today that contribute to a healthy community? What are the needs of the community? What can we do to improve the health of our community? The community response to these questions will be used to guide the remainder of the project.

In addition to the upcoming event, the steering committee has a goal to survey at least 10% of the county-wide population over the course of the next 3 months. The intent is to assess existing needs and barriers to health care access, capture population demographics and determine how and where people are currently accessing care. The steering committee will conduct focus groups to hear, first-hand, people's experiences and opinions regarding health and safety in the Rockbridge area. A final key element of this project is to gather existing reports, plans, surveys, etc. that may exist and use the information when applicable. Many organizations, public and private, have completed projects that contain a wealth of information. The steering committee is interested in hearing about these reports and welcome input.

Ultimately, the project including the Jan. 17 event, surveys, focus groups and data collection will have public health and economic development value and will be a valuable planning tool for a variety of purposes.

The Rockbridge Area Free Clinic is a United Way Agency.