

# Some Day They'll *Run* Your Agency



*From left to right, Kevin Solarte, Rebekah Johnson, and Kelley MacDonald are fellows in the Alliance and Public Allies' Turning the Tide program. Each is employed for a two-year commitment at Alliance member Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.*

**F**inding and replacing high-performing staff is often more challenging for the average nonprofit human service executive than for their counterpart in the for-profit arena.

In addition to the obvious challenges—finding someone with the required skill set and credentials, plus the time and costs required to conduct the search—there is the intangible aspect of finding a person who is mission-focused and can embrace the unique aspects of a nonprofit, including its vision.

“We look for individuals who are willing to take their skills and apply them in this way and who have a strong mission-focus in their lives,” says Larry Lutey, chief operating officer for Alliance for Children

# Turning the Tide program exposes young professionals to nonprofit human service careers



and Families member Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Milwaukee. "As an organization, how do you effectively find folks like that? How do you work that into an interview? For us to be able to find individuals with that type of skill and focus has been huge."

Lutheran Social Services and three other Alliance member agencies have been able to find 10 "folks like that" through Turning the Tide, a program created and administered by the Alliance and the national nonprofit Public Allies. The program, which is a response to workforce challenges in the nonprofit human services sector, recruits young professionals for employment in two-year fellowships at Alliance member organizations.

## Program Prepares Leaders

When crafting the Turning the Tide program, the Alliance and Public Allies could not have imagined a better spokesperson than Kelley MacDonald, one of the program's 10 current fellows.

Employed by Lutheran Social Services in a two-year fellowship as a community organizer, MacDonald says, "This is an important program because it can affect the future of nonprofits. A lot of work has been done for many, many years to get to where we are. All the time and effort and the uphill battles have been so important, and now we can continue the work others before us did so well."

With the nonprofit human services sector headed for the perfect storm of a distinct shortage of qualified leaders coupled with a lack of regard and interest in the field by young, talented people, the Alliance and Public Allies embarked on Turning the Tide in 2006 to better understand the barriers and opportunities to recruiting young talent.

After two initial phases, which included conducting research and preparing a model for the program, Turning the Tide is now in its third phase: the pilot phase. Ten fellows, recruited by Public Allies, are employed in fellowships by Lutheran Social Services; La Casa de Esperanza, Waukesha, Wis.; Children's Home + Aid, Chicago; and Board of Child Care, Baltimore.

## First Phases Include Research

With the ambitious goal of ensuring the future viability of nonprofit human services by recruiting more of the best and brightest, the Alliance and Public Allies began Turning the Tide by conducting extensive research.

During phase one, information was gathered from an advisory committee that included Alliance members and Public Allies representatives. Five focus groups were conducted with young people working in nonprofits, and Alliance member CEOs and human resources directors were interviewed.

Evaluation of phase one research informed phase two, and a model for the future of the program was developed. The model was inspiration for the current phase which Public Allies is administering with a grant from AmeriCorps, the national service program that provides funds for education in exchange for public service. The funding covers administrative and training support for fellows who have been hired by Alliance members.

Naomi Tannenbaum of Public Allies is program director of Turning the Tide. She says, "This is a leadership program rather than just a job program. This program is not just about bringing in staff to do front-line work. It is about engaging a young person who is interested in both a career and

meaningful work in the human services sector."

## Supports Prevent Burnout

In September 2008, most of the current 10 fellows began work at participating Alliance member agencies. Public Allies has implemented additional program measures to ensure that the fellows receive significant support in the form of mentoring, peer support, and continued learning.

"The added benefits have really helped the fellows build local networks," explains Tannenbaum. "We have these great groups of people on the ground called sustainer groups that can coach and mentor fellows through and around issues they are facing. This helps keep the fellows positive and moving forward with their placement and their career."

The fellows participate in meetings with the sustainer groups, which provide support and act as a sounding board. The groups are comprised of local alumni of Public Allies' apprenticeship program who are currently employed in the nonprofit sector.

Leadership learning is another key piece of the fellowship. The fellows participate in a Public Allies leadership curriculum which focuses on skills around nonprofit sector leadership, as well as team building exercises.

In addition to a face-to-face gathering during the first year, the fellows take part in organized monthly teleconferences with each other. The calls are administered by Public Allies and cover topics relevant to leadership skills, such as giving and receiving feedback, network building, and focusing on personal and organizational assets.

Turning the Tide is an AmeriCorps program, so in addition to receiving educational loan deferment while they are taking part in the fellowship, fellows

*Continued on page 16*

With the nonprofit human services sector headed for the perfect storm of a distinct shortage of qualified leaders coupled with a lack of regard and interest in the field by young, talented people, the Alliance and Public Allies embarked on Turning the Tide in 2006 to better understand the barriers and opportunities to recruiting young talent.



*Kara Moore, a Turning the Tide fellow, is Alliance member La Casa de Esperanza's volunteer coordinator.*

can receive about \$9,500 to use toward education when their two-year commitment is complete.

According to Vera Junge, a Turning the Tide fellow and residential counselor at Children's Home + Aid, "Alliance members are getting someone who is working in a field with a high burnout rate, but that person is getting more support than the regular staff. They then have more of a chance of staying and succeeding. All the benefits we are receiving provide great support and will hopefully prevent people from getting burned out."

#### **Members Gain Expanded Candidate Pool**

"A goal of Turning the Tide is to recruit and retain diverse young talent to the human services sector," Tannenbaum reiterates. "So working

with the fellows and the agencies to make sure they are both benefiting from the program is very important."

With its national network of program sites, connections with youth development agencies, and other outlets including AmeriCorps, Public Allies is able to recruit potential fellows from outside the traditional recruitment pools available to most Alliance members. Members not only save significant time and money in their recruitment process, but they instantly gain access to a pool of highly motivated candidates with a demonstrated mission-based purpose.

"The program targets passionate young people who have some experience, are self-identified leaders, want a longtime career in the nonprofit sector, and are willing to make the two-year

commitment," Tannenbaum says. "Alliance members will really benefit from having someone make this two-year commitment."

She continues, "The recruitment effort for this group of Turning the Tide fellows resulted in more than 65 applicants for the available slots. Based on initial review of those applicants, we picked about 45 and sent them on to the Alliance members so they could review them and conduct their own interviews."

Lutey of Lutheran Social Services says, "Recruiting good employees is a constant challenge for us. Because we perceive recruiting as mission-critical, the opportunity to work in a partnership with Public Allies and the Alliance to attract the kind of talent we got through this program has been a very pleasant experience all the way around."

La Casa de Esperanza planned to fill its new volunteer coordinator position regardless, but was happy to take part in the program and have the position filled by a Turning the Tide fellow.

“The savings of time and money to fill this position was appealing for us,” says Polina Makievsky, director of programs at La Casa. “Of course, with all searches there is a cost involved, but ultimately the time that it saved was most valuable. We were able to identify a candidate that has the skill set that we were looking for, bring her in and interview her, and identify that she was an excellent candidate a lot faster than if we were starting from scratch. It is not unusual to take two months to recruit a good candidate, sometimes longer.”

Nicole Smith, program director for Board of Child Care, shares that sentiment. “Recruitment is always an expensive and time consuming aspect of human service agencies. Having the screening that Public Allies did was really helpful in sorting through the applicants and finding the right fit for the fellow and the agency.”

The two-year commitment made by each of the fellows is also a factor Alliance members consider important.

Kris Rasmussen, milieu supervisor at Children’s Home + Aid, says, “I foresee myself being here for the next two years as well, so I am glad I can get them to the point that I was of being a supervisor, while ultimately also trying to push them a little bit more to get them to where I think they ultimately want to be.”

Makievsky adds, “With younger people, often times they come in and do their job for a year or so and then look to do other things. It may not seem like much, but the two-year commitment component with Turning the Tide is nice. Two years is enough time to put some systems into place and make some progress around one’s work.”

### **Fellows Approach Work with Enthusiasm**

Already the 10 fellows have dived into their new roles with enthusiasm and drive. Six are working with children as counselors in residential facilities, three are working in an urban ministries program as community organizers, and one is a volunteer coordinator.

“Our fellows are very goal oriented and they have brought a lot of energy to our agency. They are like sponges soaking up knowledge of our agency practices

and the field and are looking forward to more opportunities to make a difference working with our kids,” comments Smith of Board of Child Care. “They are even starting to challenge some of our practices, which is great because that is the best way to bring about change.”

For the fellows, the experience is also proving to have many rewards.

“A big benefit of this fellowship is the professional development component; I am very interested in being mentored so that I can continue in this field.

This program is 100 percent a pipeline between young motivated people and veterans in the field,” says MacDonald.

Junge’s experience at Children’s Home + Aid even caused her to consider a new career path. “This was kind of a leap of faith for me to see if I wanted to transition into another field completely different from what I was doing. The fact that we get an AmeriCorps education award has led me to think that after my job here I will go for a master’s degree in social work. I had no idea that that was something I would be interested in, yet now I have the drive to do something like that.”

The two-year commitment may turn into a permanent job offer or it could end there. Regardless, Lutey says the experience will have been worthwhile for Lutheran Social Services. “Whether these three fellows stay with us or not, the opportunity to get their footprint into the social services world was, for us, very exciting.”

Because of the common mission shared by many nonprofit human service organizations, even when fellows do leave Board of Child Care—or any of the other participating agencies—the shared mission doesn’t suffer, Smith adds.

“This program is important because we are all working to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families,” she says. “The fellows can move on to any agency at many different levels, whether they go into the policy level or clinical level or remain in direct services, we know that they will have a strong foundation because of the experiences that they have had and the work that they have done with us.” ■

*For more information about Public Allies and the Turning the Tide program, go to [publicallies.org](http://publicallies.org). For more information about the four participating Alliance members, go to their websites: [boardofchildcare.org](http://boardofchildcare.org), [childrenshomeandaid.org](http://childrenshomeandaid.org), [lacasadeesperanza.org](http://lacasadeesperanza.org), and [lsswis.org](http://lsswis.org).*

## **More Fellows Available for Two-Year Commitments**

Several slots are still available for Alliance for Children and Families members to hire Turning the Tide fellows in two-year employment commitments.

Created and administered by the Alliance and the national nonprofit

Public Allies, Turning the Tide provides promising young talent with opportunities to explore careers in the human services field while providing Alliance members with new, committed staff.

“With the nonprofit human services industry facing a difficult challenge in the competition for talent, the Alliance and Public Allies want to recruit, train, and retain future leaders,” says Undraye Howard, director of leadership and consultation services for the Alliance.

Fellows work full time at Alliance member agencies and benefit from additional leadership development and professional networking, which is administered by Public Allies with AmeriCorps funding.

Participating member agencies and the supervisors who directly oversee fellows play a critical role in the program. Research shows that strong supervisor/supervisee relationships and mentoring make a big difference in the success of young leaders. While there are few additional formal responsibilities for supervisors of Turning the Tide fellows, their role in supporting these young leaders is important to the fellows’ overall development.

“Members of the Alliance will get the cream of the crop, people who really want to be in social work and feel the fellowship is much more than a job,” says Kelley MacDonald, who is in the midst of a fellowship with Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Milwaukee.

*For more information, contact Naomi Tannenbaum, Public Allies’ program director of Turning the Tide, at [naomit@publicallies.org](mailto:naomit@publicallies.org) or 414-899-5342; or contact Howard at the Alliance at [uhoward@alliance1.org](mailto:uhoward@alliance1.org) or 414-359-6554.*

