

**Severna Park Assistance Network
(SPAN) Agency History**



Early History

Span was founded in 1990 by 13 Mainline Protestant churches as a central place for needy people to receive help after they had exhausted resources at the Maryland Department of Social Services (DSS). Needy individuals were making the rounds of the area churches for assistance and SPAN was formed to address this concern.

Each of the founding churches pledged a monetary amount and SPAN raised monies from donations. A board consisting of a representative from each of the founding churches was formed and met once a month. SPAN was located on the grounds of the Lutheran Church in Severna Park. It was staffed by volunteers; a paid part-time director oversaw the day-to-day operations.

SPAN was set up as a 501(c)3 and it originally operated four days a week. It provides financial assistance based on a catchment area so only those people in the Severna Park area receive assistance. In addition to food, SPAN provides temporary financial assistance (usually \$100 to \$200 once a year) for help with such things as Baltimore Gas and Electric bills, evictions and medications.

Various part-time directors served SPAN until 2006. Demand for services had been growing and the board felt it was time to expand some of the fund raising activities. Changes had been occurring including: the 1996 legislation that added faith based language to welfare issues and changed the provision from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF); during the Bush years DSS became the second responder and the churches became the first responder. The end result of these changes was a significant increase in requests for assistance.

In spite of attempts by Dr. Belcher and others attempted to educate SPAN about these changes, the SPAN board continued to operate as they had in the past. The board operates

very loosely and has often not met in the past, because of lack of interest. Thus, as the demand for SPAN services has increased the board has often not been involved. There are currently efforts taking place to get the board to become more active.

Two part-time directors were hired and the division of labor gradually evolved into to one director who handles operations and one who handles fund raising and overall public relations. The Board wanted to move SPAN past being a small assistance network to one that was broader. However, the physical plant of SPAN remained the same; a converted abandoned parsonage that was over 100 years old. The aging of the volunteers made it difficult for SPAN to sometimes meet the more complicated needs of clients. Many of the volunteers complained that they felt overwhelmed by the growing needs of the clients.

The directors' salaries became an issue as the responsibilities at SPAN began to increase. Two executive directors were hired and left within a year and a half. It was becoming obvious to many board members that the expected duties for the executive director were becoming greater than a \$20,000 salary warranted.

The director in charge of fund raising has developed an annual Golf Tournament and Christmas fund raising. In addition, she has increased the public relations and actively sought support from the churches. All these activities were new for SPAN, some of the participating churches felt overwhelmed and two churches dropped out. In reality, nothing much changed in terms of delivery of services to SPAN; however, the amount of money being distributed by SPAN did increase.

Thirty percent of the funding for SPAN comes from churches; about sixty comes from grants and individuals. For example, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts will operate an annual food drive for SPAN. In addition, each sponsoring church will set aside time in their worship services for special offerings for SPAN.

The conversion of clients has occasionally led to some infighting between a Baptist church sponsor and the other mainline Protestant churches. The Baptist church has threatened to withdraw at times. SPAN operates on the assumption is that clients will note that SPAN is located on the grounds of a church and the literature from SPAN talks about church involvement which will lead to the conversion of clients.

SPAN continues to operate four days and one night per week with volunteer staff primarily from the member churches. SPAN continues to operate in the back of the Lutheran Church in Severna Park. As need has increased, SPAN has reduced the geographical area served and is more aggressive about referring people to other programs and agencies. SPAN serves about 3 to 7 people per day and distributes about \$200 per family. There is no specific budget.

Some of the founding churches are considering or have already dropped out of supporting SPAN. Some have set up on their own assistance sites. SPAN is at a crossroads; need for assistance continues to grow and the state DSS demands that people needing assistance go to places such as SPAN before DSS will serve them. SPAN is a vital part of the Severna Park community; however, they are at risk of exhausting their volunteers, limited finances, and on and off again board.



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