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# Opportunity

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In West Virginia—

Idea + VITA + People = \$Jobs

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## Ambulance Service Comes to the Inner City

By Richard F. Long

Pittsburgh's "Hill" area is one of those black ghettos that has the worst of everything: run-down streets, poverty, crime and dilapidated housing.

But, in one important area of community need, emergency medical care, the tide has been turned. Pittsburgh can boast a black-owned ambulance service that has received national attention. It has also changed the lives of more than 40 young unemployed or underemployed Blacks.

"Most of these young men and women had little to look forward to. But through this program they went from the image of being life failures to the image of being life givers . . . and that is a big jump."

The speaker is John Conley, a blind attorney, a Black who is one of the early forces behind the unique program. He is a member of the board of directors of Freedom House Enterprises (FHE), a predominantly black Pittsburgh economic development corporation. The ambulance service is one of the most ambitious and successful FHE projects.

Conley is a veteran of working with government-sponsored programs. Though dissatisfied with some, he believes the ambulance service "hit the mark."

The Freedom House Ambulance Service has been funded for nearly three years by the Office of Economic Opportunity as a pilot project. It has also received other support. Besides the OEO grant, the ambulance service is supported by grants from the City of Pittsburgh; Model Cities; contracts for commercial work from hospitals; and from the following foundations: The Falk Medical Fund, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Allegheny Conference, Scaife Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation and the Allegheny County Medical Society Foundation.

"What I think was good and effective about this program," Conley said, "was that we said to the trainee, 'If you successfully complete this course you have

a job.'"

"Unfortunately many programs train people for jobs that don't exist. My experience is that the best motivation is to say 'if you make it buddy, you got a job.'"

In the space of two years the program trained 34 paramedical professionals—persons who are qualified to administer emergency medical care.

The medical director of the training program and the Presbyterian-University Hospital-based FHE ambulance service is Dr. Peter Safar, chairman, Department of Anesthesiology, University of Pittsburgh Health Center. He is a most vocal and nationally recognized leader in the field of emergency medical care.

"This is the type of program that every city in the nation should have. One of the critical areas for emergency care is in the poor areas, where it is needed the most," Dr. Safar said.

Dr. Safar would like to see Dr. Don Benson and Mr. Jerry Esposito, who conducted the one year courses for the FHE attendants in 1967 to 1969, establish a national school for emergency medical technicians.

**Dr. Safar said:**

"The training and life support capability of FHE emergency technicians are probably unique in the nation. They have become models for national standards and should be made more use of community-wide by citizens with acutely life-threatening illness or injury."

Robert Zepfel, the project director of the program, said that Pittsburgh is the only city in the nation that has this type of program.

"It is surprising that we are the only one, especially when all of the urgent needs of the inner city, throughout the nation, are considered."

However, it is felt that Pittsburgh could become a national model for other cities.



*Attorney John Conley, who is blind, is a member of the board of directors of Freedom House Enterprises.*

*Robert Zepfel, project director of the Freedom House ambulance service, displays the Elder valve for resuscitation and oxygen administration inside the mobile intensive care unit.*



*Ray Davis, a paramedic instructor, tells Freedom House ambulance trainees about the correct use of oxygen as part of their emergency medical training.*

"We have had officials and health representatives of other cities visit us for the purpose of learning about the program," Zepfel said.

Philip B. Hallen, President of the Maurice Falk Medical Fund of Pittsburgh, a foundation that has given substantial support to the ambulance service, when asked why he thought this program succeeded where others failed, responded:

"The nature of the program, saving lives, has a lot to do with it. This is important work. For the first time most of these young black people were put in the position of making decisions. Some of these decisions were the most important a human being could make—the difference between life and death."

Emergency ambulance service in Pittsburgh is provided by the Police Department. The Freedom House service has taken over three of the nine districts formerly served by the police.

A white male nurse, associated with the ambulance service, gave some interesting views on the Freedom House project:

"Let's face it, the poor areas of every city get the worst type of service in every way, and this includes ambulance service.

"Most privately run ambulance services don't like to go into poor areas, mainly for two reasons.

"There is no money in it. The people they are serving, many times don't have enough money to buy groceries much less pay for ambulance service.

"Also, there is a racial aspect. Most privately owned services have white drivers and white attendants. The poor areas are usually black. And on emergency calls you can run into some pretty tough situations, stabbings and shootings, and the like. Many white attendants don't like these calls because of these factors.

"That's why the Freedom House attendants are per-

forming such an important service."

David Thomas, 21, a black man who was born and brought up in one of the poor areas of Pittsburgh, is a good example of what the program has done in a short time.

"Man, this program turned my whole life around," Thomas said as he relaxed in the dispatch room of Presbyterian-University Hospital, between emergency calls.

"The most gratifying experience is when you save the life of another human being or when you bring a new life into the world. And this is our daily work," Thomas said. Thomas has delivered five babies, some of them in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. He has also treated several elderly people for cardiac arrest.

Mitchell Brown, another young Pittsburgh black who is an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) with the program, recently returned from service in Vietnam as a medic.

"I guess you could say there is a similarity between what I was doing in Vietnam and what I am doing here," Brown said.

"In both cases I was dealing with people who needed help urgently. The most satisfying aspect of this work is that your training prepares you to deliver this assistance when it is needed," Brown said.

Zepfel said there are now four returned GI medics and they make a welcome addition.

Thomas said his work as an EMT has valuable side effects.

"When I go into some of the poor, black neighborhoods, the kids gather around and talk to me. They are impressed to see a black man like myself in a responsible position. Their attitude is 'gosh if he made it, maybe I can,'" Thomas said.



*Dr. Peter Safar, center, chief of the Department of Anesthesiology, Presbyterian-University Hospital, Pittsburgh, and director of training for the Freedom House ambulance service, instructs trainees.*