



Eastern Kentucky Ministry uses Technology to Serve Those in Need

Sandy Hook, Kentucky - The eastern part of Kentucky has long been known for its coal mines, rolling hills and, unfortunately, the high level of poverty among its citizens. The beauty of the land is a stark contrast to the living conditions many residents face.

But for the poor of Elliott County, one of Kentucky's poorest counties, a remarkable woman is providing a refuge where issues related to poverty can be combated. Sister Sarah T. Neale, affectionately known as Sister Sally, has been an active force in Sandy Hook for 12 years. As the Director and CEO of Sarah's Place Women's Resource Center, Inc. she brings technology to the people who need it most.

"The resources here are the biggest problem," Sister Sarah said. "It's a beautiful county but you can't eat it or send your kids to school with the beautiful scenery, so we help people find out what resources they can use to do those things."

Sister Sarah began Sarah's Place in the fall of 1996 with the help of Sister Maritia Smith, a long-time friend and coworker. The center was originally created to address domestic violence occurring in the area. However, as the needs of the community changed, the center adapted. Today, they also focus on the underlying factors that contribute to domestic violence, including poverty, lack of jobs and insufficient education.

Sarah's Place offers services from 32 state and local partnering agencies, with 23 of them providing on-site, in-kind services worth \$100,000. The center has also leveraged more than \$290,000 in grants and has brought in \$34,000 in unrestricted donations. It functions as a hub of resources providing people opportunities to develop to their full potential. The center's work is aimed at helping families, especially women and children, of the community.

The center's biggest contract is with the Kentucky WORKS program, the state welfare-to-work initiative. The county currently has a 15 percent unemployment rate, and Sister Sarah works to see those numbers decrease by offering employability skills programs. In addition, Sister Sarah, who is also a nurse, teaches a state-certified nurses aide class, which has successfully helped graduates obtain jobs at area nursing homes.

"Technology is at the core of everything we do. Through our computer lab, our students can do everything except actually get a job," said Sister Sarah. The center uses a T1 line for its Internet connection and operates a computer lab used extensively for course instruction, job searches and resume preparation.

The courses and guidance offered by Sarah's Place and her employees prove to be successful time and again in helping participants find full-time employment. "Ninety percent of the people who complete our programs get a job or have gone on to pursue higher education," Sister Sarah said.

Women are the head of household in 19 percent of homes in the area, and 60 percent of the population in Elliott County is comprised of women - statistics that spurred the creation of a Child Development Center in 2001, which today is the only provider of daycare in the county. Parents can use the center's course offerings without worrying about childcare because their children are nurtured in a loving and educational environment just feet from where the courses are taught.

Sister Sarah describes Sarah's Place as a place of reflection, peace and hope. She said, "We give opportunities to our clients to participate in daily reflection in peace and quiet so they can realize their own inner strength and do what they need to do. This is not just a job, it's a ministry. It's what I love."



Name:

Sarah's Place Women's Resource Center, Inc.

Internet:

www.sarahsplace.com

Products/Services:

Resource Center specializing in teaching employability skills, information technology training and services, job training and childcare

Location:

Sandy Hook, Elliott County

Leadership:

S. Sarah T. Neale, Director/CEO

Employees:

8

Founded:

1996

Reach:

Regional

Ways to Improve KY Business

Climate: "Excellent, continuing education is the key – encourage apprenticeships, provide professional mentoring to new employees and provide affordable broadband to small businesses."

Ways to Maintain Competitive

Advantage: "We depend on fast, reliable access to the Internet for our classes and trainings."

Ways to Continue to Attract

the Best Workers: "Adopt an inverse pyramid business structure, a reflective, monastic decision making policy that values every employee's idea, yet makes firm and fair decisions from the top."