

KAREN DUTRO



ON NETWORK WILLIAMSBURG

Karen Dutro is the Founder and Executive Director of NetworkWilliamsburg. She has a passion for nonprofits and the valuable work they do to help people in our community. Her understanding of their needs led to the creation of NetworkWilliamsburg in December 2007.

In addition to her role as Executive Director, she works with smaller nonprofit organizations in a consultant role assisting with grant research, grant writing, and board development.

She also served as Co-Investigator on a PORT grant for Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia and



has written grant proposals resulting in more than \$2 million in program funds.

Prior to founding NetworkWilliamsburg, she served as the Assistant Development Director and later as Interim Development Director of Military Ministry Campus Crusade for Christ in Newport News, VA and was the first Development Director for William Byrd Community House in Richmond, VA.

• **What is NetworkWilliamsburg?** NetworkWilliamsburg is a nonprofit organization that supports nonprofits in the greater Williamsburg area by connecting them to people and businesses in the community and to opportunities that will enable them to continue the valu-

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able work they do.

• **What led you to this idea?** I have worked in the nonprofit field as a grant writer, development director, and board member for 16 years. I know how hard it is for nonprofits to get their message out into the community and to let everyone know about the work they are doing and the help they need from the community at large. I also know that it is hard for nonprofits to focus on obtaining resources to help them grow when they have limited resources to help them with immediate needs.

• **What is the mission of the organization?** Our mission is to raise awareness of the needs in the greater Williamsburg area, encourage involvement from the community, and strengthen nonprofits working to meet these needs by increasing resources available to them.

• **What kinds of programs do you offer to nonprofits?** Registered nonprofits have free access to all continuing education workshops; the ability to post volunteer

or item needs on our website for community members to review and respond to; a grants database with notifications of upcoming grant deadlines from foundations all across the country; ability to post upcoming events on our community-wide calendar; access to networking events with area business leaders; and membership in our Preferred Provider Network which provides nonprofits, and their employees, discounts on services and products from area businesses. We also have a Resource Library that contains articles, statistics, and reports relevant to nonprofits for use in grants, marketing materials, etc. In addition, we hold community-wide collection drives in partnership with local businesses, civic and faith-based groups to collect items needed by more than 50 nonprofits for their programs. We have also worked with area businesses to coordinate fundraising events that give community members an opportunity to support the nonprofit of their choice. In February, we started a Nonprofit Networking Group where nonprofit leaders meet monthly in a structured, positive, professional environment that encourages shar-

ing of ideas including collaboration of efforts where possible, learning how others are facing challenges with funding and other common issues, and much more. Our newest program launched in May. The Board Network includes the Nonprofit Board Training Series, a 7-week class designed to help community members better understand the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of serving on a nonprofit Board.

• **Ultimately, how does this benefit the residents of our community?** We believe that knowledge is power and information creates opportunity. By working to develop ongoing relationships with businesses, civic and faith-based groups, and individuals in the community, we can make resources available to nonprofits that will equip them with the tools needed to survive, and thrive, in today's economy. The community at large benefits from knowing that these organizations are capable of serving the needs of our community and that they are developing new avenues of support and increasing resources available to them in order to do just that.



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The community also benefits from being made more aware of the needs in the community and ways they can help.

• **How many non-profits are associated with NetworkWilliamsburg?** When we launched in December 2007, we had 11 nonprofits registered with us. We now have 71 registered nonprofits, with more coming on every month!

• **How do residents use the features devoted to the community such as volunteer net, gift net etc.?** Our goal from the beginning was to provide an easy to use website for community members to get involved. People can go to the Volunteer Net to review the volunteer opportunities available for children, adults, during the summer, one-time needs, etc. Whether it be a particular skill needed, a group to stuff envelopes, or someone to mow the lawn, it's all there and everyone is sure to find a way they can help an area nonprofit. If you don't have time to give, you can visit the GiftNet. This provides a listing of items that area nonprofits are in need of, either for their programs or simply to run

their organization. Sometimes, it's an item you might have right in your home that you don't want to throw away but don't know who needs it. We can also post any volunteer time or items that a community member has available. Just as important, all listings contain direct contact information so the person wanting to help can communicate directly with the nonprofit to finalize details.

• **What are some good stories you can tell where your organization has benefited individuals within our community?**

It is always rewarding to help community members find ways to serve. We often receive a lot of inquiries at Thanksgiving and Christmas and we match them up with area churches and organizations that are collecting items, hosting dinners for low-income families, wrapping presents for seniors, or ringing bells for Salvation Army. Our first Aware Fair at Walsingham Academy was a lot of fun and it was rewarding to see how interested the students were in learning more about the nonprofits in our area and ways they can help. Each nonprofit left the Aware Fair with at least

30 students signed up to get additional information about volunteering. We were able to help raise awareness about a "Dress for Success" event that was sponsored by the Workforce Development Center to help women from Avalon with career preparation. We sent out an e-mail blast for business clothing donations to all of our community contacts, including businesses, churches and individuals, and the response was overwhelming!

• **What type of training or educational opportunities does NetworkWilliamsburg offer to non-profits?** Our NEXT Program (Nonprofit Excellence through Training) is a series of continuing education workshops offered free of charge to registered nonprofits, including their Board and staff members. All workshops are designed to assist nonprofits in growing the capabilities of their organization by learning how to increase productivity and effectiveness, use resources wisely, and maximize their impact on the community. Topics have included "How Nonprofits Can, and Should Use Social Media Marketing", "Creating an Annual Fundraising Cam-

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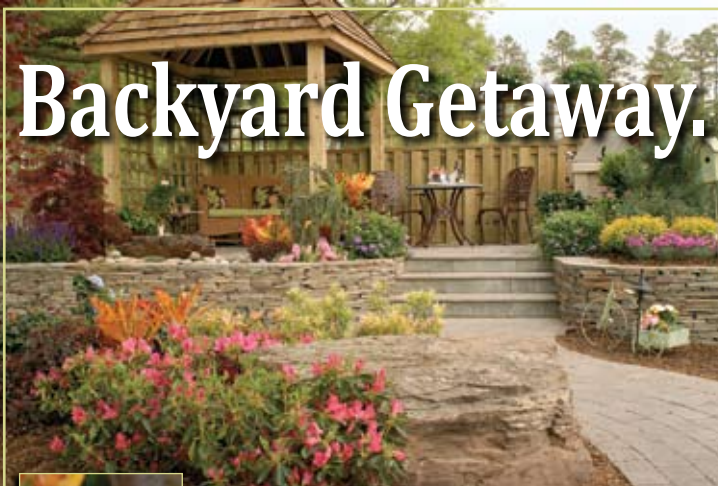


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paign" "Developing & Managing an Effective, Working Board," and "How to Start a Planned Giving Program". Future workshops include a full-day workshop on "Planning Strategically", as well as workshops on grant writing and research. Since 2008, we have provided 20 workshops to 215 nonprofit leaders, board members, and staff representing 58 nonprofit organizations.

• **How have the networking events helped those who have attended?** Our Network After Hours events have proven very successful in bringing nonprofit leaders and business leaders together to find ways to work to improve the future of our community. Nonprofit collaborations have included an AIDS education organization now providing free HIV testing to clients of a local outreach center; and a breast cancer advocacy group now providing free educational materials on breast cancer to patients at area free clinics. Business and nonprofit partnerships have included a local bank offering the use of their Spanish translator to assist Spanish speaking clients of an outreach center, a

florist providing flowers to residents in the Grove community, and businesses offering space for nonprofits.

• **What are some of things you are the most proud of in the few short years the organization has been in business?** I love to see the partnerships formed among nonprofits and businesses and the new relationships formed among nonprofits. We are working hard to demonstrate the importance of relationships and the need for collaboration, both of which are key on so many levels. Too often, we, as nonprofits, feel the need to mind our own "territory", particularly funding sources, afraid we will lose something. The reality is that we can help each other. It has been exciting to see nonprofits donate items they can't use to other nonprofits and nonprofit leaders helping each other with ways to promote an upcoming event, suggestions for fundraisers, etc.

• **What's next?** I hope that more people in the community will come to find Network-Williamsburg as a valuable and information-packed resource. We currently av-

erage 400 visitors to the site each month and would love to see that number continue to grow. We also hope to grow the number of nonprofits we are helping, as well as the number of partnerships we have with area businesses and civic- and faith-based organizations. I believe we can all help each other to the ultimate benefit of the entire community.

• **How has NetworkWilliamsburg been rewarding for you?** I truly enjoy helping nonprofits and I want to see them succeed and grow. I don't think any organization, or their employees who are working so hard to help others, should be sacrificing their own financial stability for their desire to serve. Unfortunately, that is what happens far too often, particularly now in these tough economic times. I think there is a role for all of us to have a part in helping others and I hope that Network-Williamsburg can be a conduit for that to happen in our community even more than it already does. NDN

To find out more about NetworkWilliamsburg, please visit:

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