SOLUTIONS
FOR AMERICA

WHAT'S ALREADY OUT THERE

A sourcebook of ideas from successful community programs

Pew Partnership
FOR CIVIC CHANGE

The Pew Partnership for Civic Change is a civic research organization. Our mission is to identify and disseminate promising solutions to tough community issues. *Solutions for America* is an action research initiative of the Partnership designed to pioneer a new model of documenting best practices and communicating results. The Pew Partnership is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by the University of Richmond.

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Introduction

What all inventions have in common is that they start from a knowledge of what's already out there.—James Dyson, *A History of Great Inventions*

True invention is a gradual process. Inventors identify a problem and stay with it until they find a solution; but they rarely, if ever, start from scratch. Prior research and experimentation inform the next generation of ideas and inventions. In case after case, one discovery literally leads to another. The solutions to our most challenging human problems begin with knowledge and end with adaptation.

What's Already Out There is an attempt to accelerate the civic inventing process by highlighting programs that effectively address urgent community issues. The profiles included here are the result of a research project called *Wanted: Solutions for America* that set out to document existing solutions to some of our nation's toughest challenges. We chose these 19 programs not because they offered the *only* solutions to specific kinds of civic problems—we were more interested in providing examples of *working* programs with demonstrable results that could be replicated in other places. At a time when all sectors need succinct information on what really works, these programs are invaluable as places to start.

Over the last 24 months, researchers from more than 20 institutions have taken an independent look at these community initiatives with an eye toward results and process. The collective conclusion of this group, as presented in this report, is overwhelmingly positive: these initiatives are working; these communities are stronger as a result; and we can learn a great deal from their triumphs as well as their mistakes. The program profiles included address a handful of specific issues, but the lessons learned have wide-ranging applications across all categories of civic invention. What these programs have in common is knowledge—knowledge about improving our ability as a nation to provide citizens with opportunities to succeed. Taken together, these 19 community success stories are examples of American ingenuity at its best.

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PROGRAMS THAT HELP YOUNG PEOPLE STAY IN SCHOOL, OFF DRUGS, AND ON TRACK

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Programs that Help Young People Stay In School, Off Drugs, and On Track

THE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION FOCUSED ON YOUNG PEOPLE has increased dramatically over the last several decades. Research from all quarters has proven that young people just don't grow into active, productive citizens by themselves. They need guidance and nurturing. They need to set goals. In spite of our new knowledge, young people in every community are still falling through the cracks and making decisions in their teens that will alter their life choices forever.

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One area of major concern that faces every community is how to ensure that teens stay in school and prepare themselves for life ahead. Between October 1999 and October 2000, over 500,000 young people dropped out of high school (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). This one decision—drop out or stay in—has lifetime implications. We know that a young person's decision to leave school negatively affects his or her ability to earn a living wage. In 1998, men aged 25 and older who had not completed high school earned just under $24,000 annually—25% less than their peers who had completed high school and 50% less than those with a college degree. The situation is worse for young women. In the same year, women who had not completed high school could expect to earn little more than $16,000 annually, $6,000 less than those with a high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2001a). In today's dollars, $16,000 is below the federal poverty line for a family of four.

Young people drop out of high school for a variety of reasons, but there are five indicators that seem to find their way into every community: teen parenthood, family income level, family background, academic achievement and relationships at school, and out-of-school activities, including substance abuse.

High school students with children of their own are at a greater risk of dropping out than students without children (Kauffman, McMillen, and Sweet, 1996). In fact, less than one third of teenagers who begin families

before turning 18 ever complete high school (Halperin, 1998). Nearly 80% of young unmarried mothers eventually go on welfare (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998). Nationally, poor teens are two times more likely to become parents than teens in general (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1999).

In 1998, the high school graduation rate for students from the poorest families (lowest income quartile) was 25% lower than that of students from the most affluent families (top quartile) (Halperin, 1998). Further, children whose parents have a low level of educational attainment are at greater risk of dropping out (Kauffman et al., 1996).

Leveling the Playing Field

The percentage of African-American students who dropped out of high school in 2000 was more than twice that of white students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In 1999, 1.4 million Hispanic students (28.6% of the entire Hispanic young adult population) left school without a diploma, comprising nearly 40% of the nation's high school dropouts for that year (NCES, 2001b).

Finally, a student's academic background and out-of-school activities may affect his or her ability to stay in school. An individual is less likely to complete high school if he or she has repeated a grade, has extremely low grades, or has fallen behind with needed credits (Kauffman et al., 1996). Young people who abuse drugs or are involved in violent behavior add another layer of risk to success in school.

Fortunately, there are some remedies and interventions that work to help young people stay on track. The following chart isolates particular "success indicators" that, when achieved, work to improve young people's chances of finishing high school and finding good jobs. The rest of this chapter will outline each of these successful remedies in detail.

Success Indicators	Before You Begin— Check These Programs for Ideas
Eliminate substance abuse	Region Nine Prevention and Healthy Communities Network
Connect youth to adults	Cincinnati Youth Collaborative Mentoring Program
Improve life skills	Taller San Jose
Prepare students for work and college	Massachusetts Youth Teenage Unemployment Reduction Network
Encourage better life choices	The Bridge of Northeast Florida
Build self-esteem	West Virginia Dreamers Project

Region Nine Prevention and Healthy Communities Network

Challenge: How can a community reduce youth substance abuse in an environment where young people are routinely tempted to use drugs and alcohol?

Background: Community members and service providers within a nine-county region in southern Minnesota were not going to let substance abuse diminish their young people's opportunities for success. The alarming results of the 1989 Minnesota Student Survey served as the catalyst for immediate community action: the region's young people were using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs more frequently and at a substantially younger age than Minnesota's youth as a whole. Families in these rural communities were also facing economic hardships and increasing problems related to rapid depopulation and school consolidation. Then and now, families in the region typically live in one town while parents commute to work in a second town. Children go to school in a third town and attend church or recreational activities in a fourth or fifth town. Consequently, young people in these communities have little adult supervision. Mentored after-school activities are often impossible due to lack of transportation and geographic distances. These families are stretched too thin. With few alter-

native activities, limited transportation, and a lack of adequate local law enforcement, young people have a hard time making positive choices.

Solution: Recognizing that each small county could not successfully combat youth substance abuse on its own, the nine counties formed the Prevention and Healthy Communities Network. By working together, they made the most of their limited resources. The Region Nine Development Commission already served the area in other capacities (e.g., roads and infrastructure, senior services, and regional planning), so it was a natural regional partner. Soon after the release of the survey data and the decision to form a partnership, Region Nine applied for and received a federal grant to explore the network option. Now in its tenth year, the Prevention and Healthy Communities Network is making a profound difference in the lives of youth aged 5 to 21, their families, and the community environment.

Leveling the Playing Field

The network consists of 13 community coalitions that are all focused on the reduction of youth substance abuse throughout the nine-county area. The coalitions work individually on local prevention and youth promotion issues and band together to learn from each other, share strategies, leverage resources, and work on larger regional issues. Local coalitions enter into partnership agreements with the regional network. A regional advisory committee with coalition and at-large members governs the network. The methods used by each community to identify needs and implement strategies are shared across the network. Each coalition uses a "Prevention Wheel" to identify key sectors to involve in the partnership. The sectors included are youth, parents, law enforcement, schools, community groups, elected officials, health care providers, government and policy makers, area businesses, service organizations, youth-serving organizations, and religious institutions. Implementation strategies are wide-ranging. They can be informational brochures, booths at health fairs, parenting classes, peer leader programs, supervised dances, drug-free parties, youth drop-in centers, or community service activities.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Through an outside evaluation and data collected in the 2001 Minnesota Student Survey—ten years after the problem was identified—it is clear that use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs among Region Nine youth has decreased. Coalition members report that three strategies made the difference: on-site technical assistance from the Region Nine staff and others, intercommunity communication, and opportunities for broader exposure to best practices in prevention and youth develop-

Working together regionally and through local coalitions allowed all to benefit and reach a level of success that probably would not have occurred working alone.

ment. In other words, working together regionally and through local coalitions allowed all to benefit and reach a level of success that probably would not have occurred working alone.

Maintenance Required:

- Develop and sustain relationships with all sectors involved in the partnership. Some participants may be more involved than others, but all are necessary to build a community-wide program.
- Celebrate and have fun. Even when progress seems slow or nonexistent, seek out "small wins." Sometimes they may be *really small*—but minute progress is better than none at all. Use small wins to introduce a sense of accomplishment into the work. It energizes people.
- Build on the assets and knowledge that exist in the community. Stronger partnerships develop when every partner has a role to play. Make sure everyone in the community understands the problem and is invested in the solution.
- Citizen volunteers are essential to the network. Their knowledge, commitment, and hard work drive results.

Warning:

- Use information wisely. Information is a tool that can effectively mobilize whole groups of people and instigate action. It can also cause harm.

When important information is shared selectively, it has the potential to create factions and marginalize individuals.

- Avoid exclusivity. One danger in building a strong collaborative group with a high level of trust is that it runs the risk of becoming a closed system or "club." Communities change, and so should the groups (formal and informal) that mobilize to meet the needs of those communities.

Leveling the Playing Field

The Prevention and Healthy Communities Network shows that substance abuse prevention cannot occur in isolation; it must be embedded into the social fabric of community life and must include multiple community partners. This model of a regional network providing support to local coalitions to affect community change can apply to any critical problem. Never underestimate the value of cross-site learning. For more information, see www.rndc.org.

Cincinnati Youth Collaborative Mentoring Program

Challenge: How do you connect young people with caring adult mentors when lives are busy and demands great?

Background: In the 1980s, nearly one quarter of Cincinnati's young people were dropping out of school. It was clear that the school system couldn't tackle the problem on its own. With leadership from the CEO of a major international company based in Cincinnati, along with the superintendent of schools and a city official, the community decided that something needed to be done. Before long, schools, businesses, government agencies, religious organizations, and civic groups in Cincinnati recognized that it would take a community-wide effort to bring high school graduation rates back to an acceptable level.

Solution: Community members in Cincinnati decided to be proactive in reducing the dropout rate. A significant first step was the formation in 1987 of the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (CYC), a school-based community program. The Collaborative offers a variety of programs and initiatives including tutoring, mentoring, internships, and college preparation assistance. It also provides a forum for numerous public/private/nonprofit partnerships that support Cincinnati's youth. Over 60 local corporations, organizations, and

individuals provide financial support to CYC. The mentoring program was launched in 1990 in response to what CYC members saw as a need to create opportunities for youth to have positive adult relationships in their lives.

The CYC Mentoring Program recruits, trains, and supports volunteer mentors from the community and matches them with students in need of extra support and encouragement. Mentors work one-on-one with students. They provide emotional and social support, and serve as positive role models. The typical mentor has weekly contact with a student and participates in at least one meaningful activity per month. Since 1990, the number of volunteer mentor/student matches has grown to 2,000 (September 2001), with 1,000 more young people on the waiting list.

Testing 1, 2, 3: An outside evaluation of the CYC Mentoring Program found that mentoring can reduce the dropout rate. Ninety percent of the teens studied stayed in school, compared to graduation rates of 40 to 75% throughout the school district. In fact, for students facing multiple challenges, mentoring can be the difference between falling behind and moving ahead. Teachers reported that mentored students showed improved motivation, better school attendance, and better attitudes toward school. While mentoring is an important foundation for academic success, its real promise lies in its ability to inspire hope. One Cincinnati program participant who formerly aspired to be a garbage collector is currently enrolled in college as an engineering student.

Maintenance Required:

- Maintain flexibility in program implementation. Unscheduled changes within the schools—like teacher cutbacks or transfers—occur frequently, so the program must be able to "change gears" to ensure continuity.
- Remain active in volunteer recruitment. Public service announcements, editorials and feature stories in the local press, video advertising, letters, and telephone calls can help reach potential volunteers. Asking every

mentor to recruit one more mentor is another way to build your volunteer base.

- Do not underestimate the importance of training mentors. Reinforce the goal of building strong, long-term relationships between mentors and students by stressing that youth need sustained support and encouragement in mentor training activities.
- Recognize the value of cultural activities (i.e., going to a play or visiting a museum), educational opportunities, and the development of meaningful, authentic interactions where students and their families feel accepted.

Leveling the Playing Field

Warning:

- Understand that academic performance indicators, like grade point averages, do not always accurately measure the success of a mentoring program. The value of a one-to-one connection with an adult—in which a young person feels comfortable talking about everything from future goals to racial discrimination to personal problems, hopes, and fears—is in some sense immeasurable. Consider using other indicators, like school attendance, self-esteem, or aspirations for the future, to determine program success.
- Be aware of the delicate nature of collaboration with other agencies with child-focused missions. It is important to highlight both the common

goals and the distinctions between agencies in order to avoid perceived competition.

- Mentoring programs are not free to operate. They require administrative support to screen and train potential mentors, to monitor mentor/student relationships, and to provide public outreach and information.
- Realize that non-fiscal challenges, like changes in leadership, are as significant as fiscal issues. Organizations need to prepare for and manage non-fiscal challenges in order to ensure successful organizational transitions.

Do not underestimate the importance of training mentors.

The Cincinnati Youth Collaborative brings public, private, governmental, civic, and religious sectors together to ensure the success of the city's youth. The collaborative acts as an advocate, catalyst, and coordinator of programs and initiatives designed to remove barriers and proactively encourage the positive development of all young men and women. For more information, see www.cycyouth.org.

Taller San Jose

Challenge: How do you provide basic life and work skills to undereducated and unskilled young people—particularly those who are first generation Americans?

Background: Preparing youth for productive participation in society is a challenge for any community. In Santa Ana, California, a city with a population comprised of 75% Latinos, many of whom are recent immigrants, the challenge is multifaceted. Equipping young people with the skills they need to be successful in the mainstream culture requires an understanding and respect for their native culture and mores. When a small group of the Sisters of St. Joseph relocated to Santa Ana in the early 1990s, they quickly became aware of the social problems that were threatening the community. They saw the need to reach out to Latino youth and build bridges into the community. Continuous immigration, low expectations for education in many families, linguistic isolation, gang activity, a large underground drug culture, and early pregnancy were combining to create high levels of unemployment and long-term underemployment among the city's young Latino population. Fewer than half of all adults in the

community held high school diplomas. Something needed to be done—and fast.

Solution: With the Sisters of St. Joseph taking the lead, public meetings were held to consider possible solutions to the problem. Backed by broad-based community support and ownership, Taller San Jose (TSJ) was created in 1995 to prepare Latino youth between the ages of 18 and 28 for successful participation in mainstream American society. TSJ provides young Latinos with educational and job training resources through collaborations with Santa Ana's city government, its criminal justice system, a local college, local employers, and other community-based groups. Taller serves a brokering function for students as they enter the workforce or educational system. The TSJ approach involves three components: education, learning mainstream cultural expectations, and building a foundation of skills from which young people can enter the American workforce. In response to students' isolation from America's educational system, TSJ helps them obtain their high school diplomas or GEDs. It educates students about the cultural differences that sometimes put Latino youth at odds with the expectations of American business. The life and work skills training is designed so that students will understand, and feel comfortable within, mainstream American culture.

Leveling the Playing Field

Taller San Jose provides a culturally familiar environment where students find a "circle of support" based on relationships of trust, truthfulness, and accountability. Students are asked to complete five of seven program objectives designed to facilitate their assimilation into American society. Those objectives are to:

- open a bank account;
- get a California driver's license;
- complete a computer class;
- register to vote;
- finish the GED or high school;
- get a job that pays more than minimum wage; and
- stay crime-free.

To provide the "circle of support" that its students need to meet five of the seven objectives, TSJ has implemented an extensive mentoring system. Mentors help students find their way through their classes and provide career counseling, personal guidance, and support. These relationships help to build trust. In addition, TSJ encourages trust by presenting a physical environment that embraces and appreciates Latino culture. Many staff members are bilingual, so language is never a barrier to participation.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Taller San Jose is achieving its goal of providing life skills to older Latino youth. Based on evaluation findings, TSJ prepares students to be successful in the American workforce. Graduates have an increased understanding of American business culture and encounter fewer barriers to employment than they did before participating. TSJ graduates are more likely now than before entering TSJ to: 1) have a résumé; 2) have practiced interviewing; 3) have attended a real job interview; 4) acquire a job with benefits; 5) earn more than a minimum wage salary; and 6) hold one job for more than six months. They are also better able to deal with previous barriers like work-related documentation, prior criminal convictions, or time spent in jail or prison. Finally, the majority of TSJ graduates report working in better paying jobs now than they did before entering the program.

Maintenance Required:

- Stay focused on developing life skills that will help students succeed in a broad range of future activities. Students need to be ready for employment and confident enough to negotiate effectively through the mainstream culture.
- Provide intensive, short-term training. Students have a practical need to finish the program as quickly as possible, both to support themselves and to reward their effort. Students are more engaged when the program is intensive and short-term.
- Keep the organization's name in the community. Use the media, word of mouth, and other communication tools to maintain a high profile.

- Ensure that the staff engages with students and doesn't just design programs. The stronger the relationship between students and staff, the more successful the students will become.

Warning:

- Avoid the "one size fits all" model of program delivery. Not all students need the same level of involvement. Some students just need a job and are seeking immediate requisite skills. Others want a high school diploma and to go on to another program or a community college.
- Failure to hold all students to the same standards and expectations can result in a damaged organizational reputation. Guard against unclear standards and expectations about job placement. Students need to complete the training before they seek employment.

Leveling the Playing Field

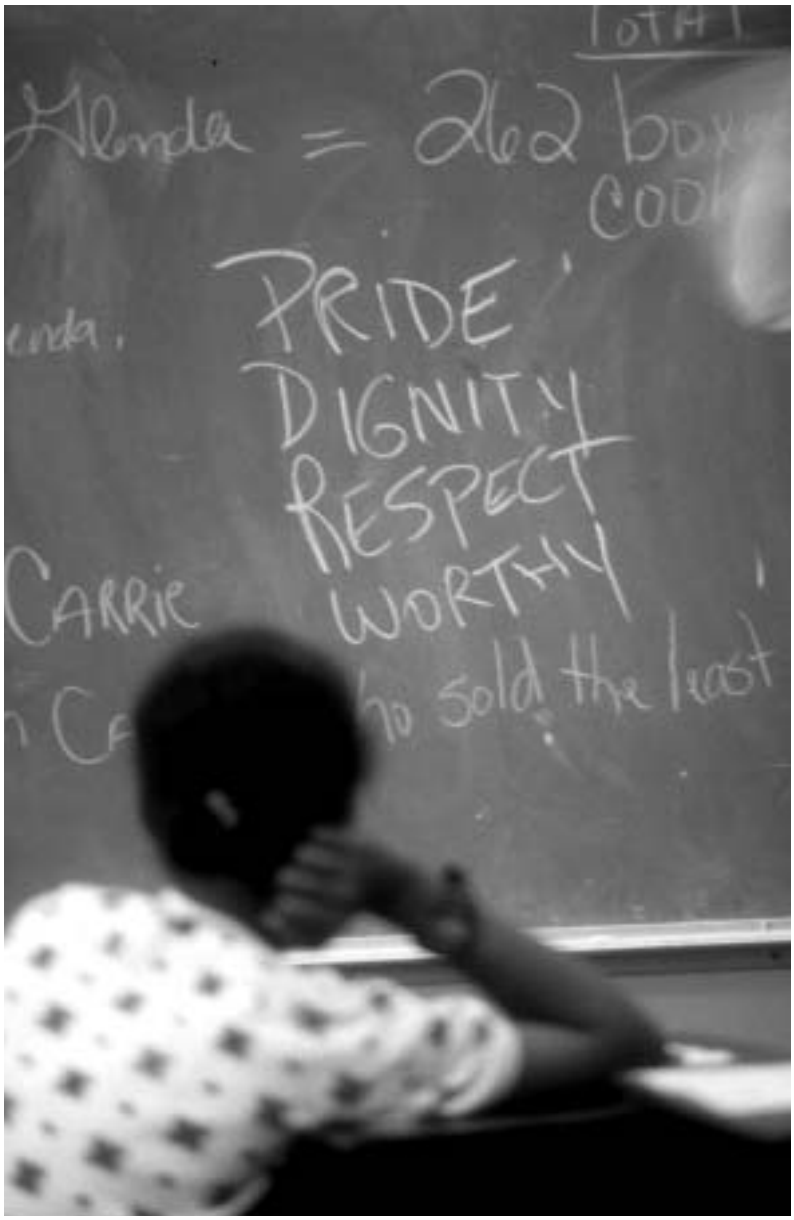
Taller San Jose is having a significant impact on the lives of its young students and their families. The services it provides will be become increasingly important in the years to come. Over the next 35 years, the state of California will add over 8.7 million immigrants to its population, most of whom will be Latino. Programs such as TSJ meet the critical needs of those new to the United States as they attempt to overcome the educational and economic challenges traditionally associated with immigration.

Massachusetts Youth Teenage Unemployment Reduction Network (MY TURN)

Challenge: How do you encourage students to have higher aspirations about work and college, and prepare them to succeed?

Background: Once a thriving regional economic center for textiles and other industries, Brockton, Massachusetts has been in a steady state of economic decline for the past several decades. Economic changes have negatively affected the community, resulting in high unemployment, poverty, and a loss of hope. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of residents living in poverty rose by 124%, a figure that continued to increase through the 80s. By 1991, Brockton's unemployment rate was 9.1%, the highest in the state. Over one fifth of Brockton's youth under the age of 18 currently lives

in poverty, and approximately 25% of those aged 17 and under live in families that receive TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).



Solution: In 1984, a local businessman and Brockton High School alumnus founded MY TURN as a way to address the needs of young people who were not being adequately prepared to enter the world of work after graduation from high school. Community members recognized the need for a program to help youth make successful postsecondary transitions from school to work or to college. Facing a depressed economy and limited employment opportunities, community members felt that it was imperative that Brockton youth receive the training and personal development necessary to become productive citizens. Students, especially those at risk of dropping out, needed basic services like career and college counseling in order to build their motivation and self-esteem, as well as career development activities, like job shadowing and job development, to connect the lessons they were learning with "real-world" experiences. MY TURN works to prepare Brockton youth for positive futures and give them life options.

The program helps youth identify their skills and goals and develop self-confidence through career exploration, employment training, and post-secondary planning. MY TURN's School-to-Work (STW) program teaches high school students the skills necessary to develop rewarding careers that pay a living wage. Participants learn to prepare for job interviews, complete job applications, and create résumés. The primary focus is on career exploration: determining how interests might translate into jobs and planning for

long-term work roles. Students receive career counseling, gain exposure to actual work settings, and develop leadership skills and connections to their communities. Eligible high school seniors are referred to the program by teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators, and participate in a highly selective application process. Once accepted into the program, each student meets three to five times per week with his or her MY TURN advisor.

MY TURN's School Training and Education Program (STEP), targets high school students whose families do not have the experience or expertise to encourage them to explore college opportunities. In order to master the tasks involved in applying for admission and financial aid, STEP offers the following services:

Leveling the Playing Field

- Assistance developing an individual plan of action;
- Academic help, including monitoring school progress, referring students to tutoring programs, and helping students improve their study and test-taking skills;
- Help with the college application process;
- On-site extracurricular classes at the high schools;
- Emergency scholarship money (through affiliation with the Dollars for Scholars program);
- Outreach and involvement of parents;
- Special events (e.g., recognition ceremonies, guest speakers, financial aid nights, college field trips); and
- Follow-up transitional services for students once they are enrolled in college.

MY TURN provides participating Brockton youth with the emotional support, knowledge, skills, and self-esteem they need to make these crucial transitions and to become successful, productive citizens.

Testing 1, 2, 3: An outside evaluation of MY TURN showed that the program prepares participants for college and/or the workforce. Of the more than 100 students who participate in STEP each year, nearly 100% enroll in an institution of higher learning. Approximately 97% of STW graduates are placed in full-time career-oriented positions after high school, earning 35% more than those who had not been in the program. Results indicate that MY TURN participants experience increased levels of self-esteem and self-mastery. A vast majority of students felt that they had developed competency in five areas: 1) having plans and knowing how to reach

goals; 2) knowing how to find, choose, and be accepted into a job/college; 3) knowing how to do well in job/college; 4) knowing how to communicate; and 5) having grown as a person and become a leader.

Maintenance Required:

- Maintain a clear focus. Having well-defined goals and expertise in relevant areas ensures a program's success and maximizes resources.
- Establish a self-evaluation process. Programs must adapt to perpetually changing financial and political climates. Remain open to change in ways that will enhance program services and viability.
- Create opportunities to "show off" the program and its participants' accomplishments. An awards day event, for example, gives participants and staff members an occasion to celebrate their individual and collective achievements.

Warning:

- Have a plan for program sustainability. While grant funding can help build a new or existing initiative, organizations need to think about how they will keep the program going once the funding ends. Planning ahead ensures that a program remains viable.
- Refrain from making language a barrier. Provide non-English-speaking youth with staff members who are bilingual. Work to understand the role of parents in various immigrant populations to identify ways to engage their participation in the program.
- Avoid unequal partnerships. Adopt policies in which partnering agencies must assume some financial responsibility for joint programs. This enables a program to leverage its fundraising capabilities and to ensure that partners have a stake in, and commitment to, the shared program.

MY TURN is a dynamic, effective vehicle for improving the lives of young people who need assistance in identifying opportunities necessary for success. This program helps students enter the world of careers and higher education with the information necessary to succeed. For more information, see www.my-turn.org.

The Bridge of Northeast Florida

Challenge: How do you reduce teen pregnancy and help young people make better life choices?

Background: In the early 1980s, the Springfield area of Jacksonville, Florida was in a state of decline—one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. Children faced streets stained with blood from recent crimes, littered with crack and cocaine "baggies" and other drug paraphernalia, and populated by drug dealers and prostitutes. Many homes and businesses had steel grates over their windows and doors, and yards encircled by metal security fences. Entire blocks of buildings were marked as condemned, many of them labeled as old drug houses by the Drug Abatement Response Team. Given the negative environment in which the area's young people were living, they had little hope for the future. The results of a 1982 community study of teen pregnancy conducted by the Jacksonville Community Council Inc. (see below, p. 81), showed what many in the community already knew—teen pregnancy was at a crisis level.

Leveling the Playing Field

Solution: Community members chose to take action. Their goal was simple: to reduce teen pregnancy in the Springfield area of Jacksonville. They knew that young people were struggling to make the right choices for themselves and needed guidance and a reason to stay in school. Aware that teen preg-

nancy was also a symptom of a larger problem, they worked to create a program that would address the many needs of young people, not just pregnancy prevention. In 1983, The Bridge was established as a model program to reduce teen pregnancy in the Springfield area. Its secondary goals were to provide a safe place for teens to go; to feed them healthy meals; and to develop educational programs that would help them succeed.

The Bridge is a comprehensive after-school program for children and youth between the ages of 5 and 18. It offers a wide variety of services and activities, including homework help, intensive tutoring, career skills training, employment placement, case management, and medical services. The Bridge mobilizes numerous partnerships to achieve its wide range of programs. It also has numerous social and recreational activities that include nutritious meals. All of The Bridge's programs are grounded in developing positive relationships with youth and using an asset-building approach to youth development, focusing on young people's inherent strengths rather than their weaknesses.

Given the negative environment in which the community's young people were living, they had little hope for the future.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Data from an outside evaluation showed that not a single participant became pregnant during the two-year study period. Children and youth who attended the after-school program at The Bridge three or more times per week also attended school more often and tended to get in less trouble than those who attended the program less often. In-depth interviews with children and youth indicated that they believed The Bridge offered them support, cared about their overall well-being, and had high expectations for them.

Maintenance required:

- Be clear about your mission. Make sure the community and any potential partners understand what you are doing and why.
- Strengthen and expand quality programs at a controlled rate of growth, only adding programs that further the goals of the organization.
- Become a youth advocate. Stay on top of public policy issues that affect young people in your community, and let your voice be heard.
- Strive to recruit, train, and retain highly competent staff. Allocate sufficient resources to staff recruitment and development.
- Develop a holistic approach to program delivery. Recognize that staff members are not just tutors—they are also mentors, big brothers and sisters, advisors, stand-in parents, and even referees.

- Programs need to integrate the emotional and situational aspects of young people's lives. Combining educational sustenance and physical sustenance with an evening meal is one example of this approach.
- Understand that youth programming is a community investment and needs to be long range.

Warning:

- Don't underestimate the value of just being there.Youth need to have relationships with caring adults and to be able to count on adults as a consistent part of their lives.
- Be aware of changes in the community. Changing demographics require that organizations stay flexible and prepared to modify program delivery.

Leveling the Playing Field

The Bridge shows that young people who face the toughest odds have the potential to succeed. A caring relationship, high expectations, and programs that participants value can lay the foundation for a positive future. The evaluation report showed that virtually everyone—from clients to board members, from funding agencies to competing agencies—views The Bridge as a positive, effective program. The only criticism that sticks, it seems, is that it is too successful, and the community "wants more" of it. Programs like The Bridge that serve youth educationally, socially, and nutritionally are literally the "bridges" that encourage young people to make smart choices the first time. For more information, see www.thebridgeofnefl.com.

West Virginia Dreamers Project

Challenge: How can you expand the horizons and aspirations of children who are displaced from their community and need some personal roots?

Background: For parents in Big Ugly Creek, West Virginia—one of the most economically distressed parts of a county where 45% of families live in poverty and less than half of adults hold high school diplomas—the local elementary school served as a rally point. Families with children at Big Ugly Elementary had something in common; the school fostered a sense of community in a small rural town. So when the local school board decided to close the school in 1993 due to state pressures to consolidate, parents justly

feared that their families would become even more isolated and disconnected from the outside world. Rising at dawn to ride the bus over switchback mountain roads, Big Ugly's children had to deal with a new and sometimes hostile school environment, and were unable to participate in after-school activities due to the long bus ride home. Younger children lacked access to quality preschool programs, resulting in a disproportionate number of students entering school with developmental delays. They were considered to be less cognitively able and socially and culturally underdeveloped. The resulting erosion of self-esteem only worsened the children's already damaged attitudes toward school. Accordingly, the children's school experiences were less than viable and often unpleasant.

Solution: In an effort to keep the local school open, parents formed the Big Ugly Dreamers committee. Despite the decision by the county to go forward with the closing, the parents continued to explore ways that the school might be maintained as an integral part of the community. Their perseverance resulted in permission from the school system to begin conversion of the elementary school building into a community center, and the first after-school program at the retrofitted facility was launched in 1996. Since then, the Big Ugly Dreamers project has expanded to include more after-school and summer enrichment programs, out-of-school enrichment trips, and family-strengthening activities throughout the year. A local organization (Step by Step) later added an additional layer of services, and pro-

gram sites now include two more elementary schools as well as the local high school.

The Dreamers project helps children to imagine greater possibilities for themselves and to begin to achieve what they imagine. In the short term, this translates into improved self-esteem, a positive attitude toward learning, and better attendance at school. Participants work with their families, community members, and a Dreamers project representative to develop a "dream contract" in which they identify their "dream time," "dream work," and "dream place." Children then explore their dreams through a series of learning experiences including cultural outings, family field trips, and mentoring sessions. These learning experiences actively raise the aspirations and expectations of participants and their parents, improve participants' academic skills, engage them in community service, and strengthen family life. As part of the Dreamers contract, the program representative promises to provide or facilitate one dream-related activity per month. Upon completion of a twelve-month dream contract, the program commits at least $50 into a postsecondary scholarship fund on behalf of the student. (These funds are provided by existing grants but could also be part of a community sponsorship effort in larger communities.)

Leveling the Playing Field

Testing 1, 2, 3: Data indicate that the Dreamers program has had a statistically significant impact on participants' self-concept, academic performance, and attitude toward school subjects. Dreamers youth in high school have a slightly more positive attitude toward school than the age group average. Likewise, teachers rated the Dreamers children on selected concepts on par with their peers from other communities, in spite of entering the program with a higher perceived prognosis for failure.

Maintenance Required:

- Keep the program small. Personal interaction among program personnel, children, and their parents is a key to success.
- Build linkages and partnerships with community groups in order to maintain adequate resources, supervision, and community buy-in. It must be seen as a community program. Think as broadly as possible about partners and what they might bring to the table. In other words: dream.

- Clarify your program focus so that everyone understands what you are trying to do. Simply put, you want to give children experiences that will broaden their thinking about what they can become.
- Include families in activities and decision-making—without judgment. Don't leave parents out, no matter how hard they are to reach.
- Have a funding plan. Don't assume that the money will naturally flow. Think of partners and funding sources *before* you need them.

Warning:

- Beware of program fragmentation. Program staff may be tempted to take a piece of the program and allow someone else to run it or duplicate it independently; this can be counterproductive if the spin-off loses sight of the big picture.
- Think slow growth. Trying to expand too soon, without adequate resources or personnel, can cause an otherwise sound program to fail. This is a particular danger in communities with the greatest needs. Remember: you won't help anyone if you put yourself out of business or lose quality control.
- Minimize staff turnover. When local residents have learned the skills needed to direct part of the program, they often move on to better paying positions. This is the good news. The bad news is program disruption. Build this into your thinking.

The Dreamers project helps children to imagine greater possibilities for themselves and to begin to achieve what they imagine.

The Dreamers project reinforces the importance of parental inclusion and of providing a wider frame of reference for community work. In the short term, the Dreamers project is about keeping children in school and maximizing their success. In the long term it is about imagining, and then achieving, a different kind of future. The primary lesson learned from the Dreamers project is that seemingly extraordinarily dependent populations can be served, and can serve, in a local program. It is all in following the instructions. For more information, see www.wvdreamers.org.

BRINGING DOWNTOWN BACK TO LIFE

SOLUTIONS

FOR AMERICA

PROGRAMS THAT CREATE VIABLE LOCAL ECONOMIES

BRINGING DOWNTOWN BACK TO LIFE

Programs that Create Viable Local Economies

UNTIL THE 1960s, AMERICANS SHOPPED DOWNTOWN. Main Street had grocery stores and shoe stores, stationers and milliners. With the ensuing flight to the suburbs, however, and the advent of new and more efficient means of personal and commercial transportation, the nature of our retail lives changed. In his book *City Life*, Witold Rybczynski (1995) observes how personal mobility influenced the shift from downtown shopping to suburban shopping. At the personal level, higher rates of automobile ownership led to increased individual freedom. The shift in commercial practices was even more dramatic:

> *Large long-distance trucks replaced the railroad. Since trucks arrived in the city on highways, the edge of town was the ideal location for distribution warehouses, the new railroad depots. Small industry and workshops, the kind that earlier would have been downtown, near the railroad tracks, also relocated; small trucking companies distributed services as well as goods around the city. (p. 202)*

These changing patterns led to a boom of stand-alone shopping centers and, later, shopping malls. There were 100 such shopping centers in 1950; by 1990 there were more than 30,000. Many of these included large supermarkets which were not suited to downtowns. Their one-story floorplans and onsite parking required large plots of land that were usually more affordable away from the city center (Rybczynski, 1995).

These factors, along with the growth of residential suburbs, resulted in a decline of downtowns and the businesses that had supported them. But as time has shown, the impact was more than just economic. Downtowns provide citizens with a central forum, a place to connect with business, government, and other citizens. When downtowns fall into economic decline, they leave many communities with no place to congregate as a public. The

Downtowns provide citizens with a central forum, a place to connect with business, government, and other citizens.

shift from downtown shopping to mall shopping reinforced the divide in cities between those who stayed and those who left. Once a bonanza of choices, downtown shoppers were given fewer options and higher prices; downtown merchants were left with fewer customers and falling revenues.

As cities wrestled with how to stem the flow from their downtowns, urban observers and planners weighed in often and consistently. One of these was Jane Jacobs, who contended that four conditions must be met to generate "exuberant diversity" in a city's streets and districts:

- The district must serve more than one purpose.
- Blocks should be short; opportunities to turn corners must be frequent.
- The district must mingle buildings that vary in age and condition, including a good portion of old ones, so the economic yield varies.
- There must be a sufficiently dense concentration of people.

Bringing Downtown Back To Life

Jacobs explains that "these four conditions create effective economic pools of use. The potentials of different districts differ for many reasons; but, given the development of these four conditions . . . a city district should be able to realize its best potential, wherever it may lie" (1992, pp. 150–51).

Downtown revitalization and urban development projects are not one-size-fits-all, and they don't often lend themselves to textbook analysis. Rather, says M. J. Brodie, president of the Baltimore Development Corporation from 1997 to 2001, "questions of urban development challenge traditional methods of planning and implementation, requiring new, sometimes radical—meaning 'from the root'—ideas, combining seemingly opposite or unrelated concepts into new paradigms, into synthesis of thought and action" (1997). Several principles flow from this observation.

- There must be an understandable physical vision—large enough to excite the imagination of all the participants, but structured so that it can be achieved in the increments that realities of time and funding usually dictate.
- The vision must be grounded in the authentic character of the place (its history, climate, terrain, cultural values) and informed by an articulated set of goals for the future—goals that describe what the city wants to be.
- To implement the vision (the plan), a partnership must be formed between the public and private sectors, each sector bringing its skills

to the process, to produce a better result than either could have achieved alone.

- The public sector, through redeveloping the city's infrastructure (transportation, utilities, public open spaces), must set the stage for private investment.
- A high level of quality must be set for design and construction (major redevelopment is often a once-in-a-generation opportunity!), in both public and private projects.
- Methods must be developed to broaden the base of the redevelopment project, and to obtain not only cooperation but enthusiasm from those involved.
- A structure for implementation must be created that combines responsibility with necessary authority; that is results-oriented and accountable to the citizens; and that is capable of guiding the process over an extended period of time. (Brodie, 1997)

Downtowns still matter. They are home to millions of Americans and provide a link to economic prosperity for the people who live in them. According to Harvard professor Michael Porter, the inner city has a competitive edge that can and should be tapped. He and others have documented that there is disposable income in the inner city and that residents would be more willing to shop closer to home if there was availability (1995). The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City documented the economic impact of inner-city retailing in a 1997 survey that found that these markets account for 7% of national spending. Some inner-city grocery stores have 40% better sales per square foot than the surrounding metropolitan areas as a whole (Grogan and Proscio, 2000).

Downtown revitalization—whether big city or small town—is not easy, but it can be done. Often the hardest step is the first one. In the case studies that follow, three communities of different sizes and situations illustrate how main street can be the key to a new development strategy. In very different venues and under widely divergent circumstances, these programs all illustrate that downtown still matters in the lives and economies of citizens. In each case, revitalization in the purest sense is a secondary result of the larger accomplishment of citizen reinvestment—in each other and in the place where they live.

Boston Main Streets

Challenge: How can urban communities revitalize their neighborhood business districts?

Background: Boston is an old city of densely populated residential neighborhoods, most of which have traditional business districts. These districts have battled decline and disinvestment for several decades. As families moved to suburban communities, Boston's residential population fell from 800,000 residents in 1950 to 574,000 residents in 1990. In the same period, the population became more diverse, with new generations of immigrants replacing predominantly white residents. Shopping malls lured customers away from traditional shopping areas, which, coupled with the demographic changes, caused many local stores to close. Under these conditions, remaining businesses have struggled to hold onto a vanishing customer base, and potential customers are harder than ever to reach in a rapidly changing marketplace. New kinds of retailers, such as outlet malls, big box stores, and online merchants have further complicated the market for independent business owners, eroding their ability to compete. Social problems like real and perceived crime have also tarnished the image of the city's neighborhood business districts in the minds of residents and business prospects. Boston's city government recognized the problems its neighborhood business districts faced. During the preceding decades, the city had tried a variety of different revitalization strategies, but none was sustained over time. Government officials found that the piecemeal nature of these efforts did not adequately address the complex challenges facing the districts.

Bringing Downtown Back To Life

Solution: During the mid 1980s, the city piloted an urban revitalization project in the Roslindale Village neighborhood. Spearheaded by a member of the city council, this project was the first urban site to use the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street revitalization approach. In 1993, when the councilman became the mayor of Boston, the success of the pilot project prompted him to work with the National Trust's Main Street Center to launch Boston Main Streets as the first citywide Main Street program in the United States. The Boston Main Streets program applies an integrated, comprehensive approach to tackle the multiple challenges of creating healthy business districts.

The program is based on the National Trust's Main Street model. The four-point approach includes design and physical improvements, marketing and promotion, economic restructuring, and organizational development. Since Boston is the nation's only citywide program, it has adapted the Main Street model to match the individual needs and characters of the 21 designated districts, while retaining the general framework. Each district establishes its own administrative office, with one full-time staff person and supporting local committees made up of volunteers. The city provides multi-year matching funds as well as training, technical assistance, and promotional support. Each district organization also has a "Corporate Buddy" that agrees to invest $40,000 over four years and provide technical expertise and in-kind support to the district. This broad-based grassroots organizational structure is designed to sustain revitalization efforts over time.

By establishing a vehicle for broad-based civic engagement in improving local business districts, the program brought residents into the process.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Studying a subset of three program neighborhoods, outside evaluators found that all of the districts showed physical, financial, and civic improvements. By establishing a vehicle for broad-based civic engagement in improving local business districts, the program brought residents into the process and fostered cooperation among existing stakeholders and civic organizations. The Main Streets program was a major factor in implement-

ing district-wide physical improvements, and contributed to expanded business activity and higher sales revenues.

Maintenance Required:

- Target large, prominent, and strategically located buildings for renovation and beautification. Improving key buildings has greater visual and economic impact and more potential to shift resident and business perceptions.
- Leverage the program's citywide scope to improve local implementation. Information sharing, training and technical assistance, citywide promotions, and city-led recruitment of corporate and foundation support all enhance local program performance.
- When adding program participants, make district selection a competitive process. Focus resources on districts with broad-based support for the program and an initial implementation agenda.
- Stay in touch with key stakeholders as the process moves past the planning stage. Communicate and build consensus both within and between the districts.

Bringing Downtown Back To Life

Warning:

- Keep a long-term perspective. Revitalization of a neighborhood business district often requires 10 to 15 years of sustained effort to succeed.
- Ensuring participation across all economic and ethnic groups requires special effort. Low-income, newcomer communities, and minority groups may require special outreach efforts and new approaches to secure and sustain their participation.

The Boston Main Streets program succeeds by taking the national Main Street model and adapting it to fit the needs of a large, diverse city. Through its citywide approach, hands-on technical assistance, long-term funding, and leveraging of corporate resources, the program has greatly expanded neighborhood capacity to improve local business districts. It has brought significant physical and economic changes to neighborhoods, and contributed to the improved economic performance of local businesses. For more information, see www.bostonmainstreets.com.

HandMade in America Small Towns Revitalization Project

Challenge: How can small communities honor their heritage and maintain their values, yet remain economically viable?

Background: Across America, empty storefronts, deteriorating infrastructures, an exodus of talented youth, and a spirit of malaise haunt many once-vital communities. Some have turned to organizations like the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street program for help. But many small rural communities cannot meet the size and resource requirements to qualify for established revitalization programs. This was the case in rural western North Carolina. In 1993, a citizen-founded organization called HandMade in America initiated a program that linked the rich craft heritage of the region with a plan for civic renewal. The desire to create sustainable local economies resulted in the idea for a craft "heritage corridor" with the Blue Ridge Parkway as the "spine." In 1996, HandMade published a guidebook for the region that included craft and heritage sites in 22 counties. While the guidebook was successful in highlighting many of the region's most valuable economic assets, there were identifiable gaps in its coverage of the smallest towns. Some communities—like Andrews (pop. 1,770), Bakersville (pop. 330), Chimney Rock (pop. 138), and Mars Hill (pop. 1,642)—had few offerings included or were omitted from the guidebook entirely.

Solution: Leaders from these four communities realized that

inclusion in the guidebook would help stimulate their economies and promote civic action. They approached HandMade in America and asked the organization to help "put their towns on the craft heritage map." The Small Towns Revitalization Project was born. More towns were added to the list between 1997 and 2002, bringing the program total to 12. A philanthropic organization provided seed money for the project, with 50% of the funding tied to dollar-for-dollar matching by the towns themselves. Each participating community entered into an explicit agreement with HandMade and the sponsor, thus formalizing its commitment to the renewal process.

Bringing Downtown Back To Life

The project began by conducting a needs assessment with each community. The team made recommendations for organization, design and appearance, economic restructuring, and marketing and promotion strategies that communities could use in the next step. Committee members then organized local community meetings and developed work plans for the projects to be undertaken. The towns developed working relationships with one another and each selected a "sister" community from the other towns in the region that had successfully implemented their own economic development efforts. HandMade serves as a central clearinghouse, convenor, and informational resource to the local committees, which in turn organize, plan, and take ultimate responsibility for project implementation in their own communities.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Outside research results showed that of the 11 towns studied, 10 experienced increased public, private, and volunteer investments as a direct result of their participation in the program. In a two-year period ending in July 2001, there were 77 building or facade restorations and a net gain of 326 jobs. In the same period, the towns logged 31,000 hours of volunteer community service.

Maintenance Required:

- Develop and sustain the seven critical factors for rural revitalization: local commitment, realistic community assessment, a written plan for renewal, key partnerships, timely completion of projects, knowledgeable leadership, and community mentoring.
- Build relationships and partnerships. While 10 of the towns noted tangible, visible improvements in community appearance, most highlighted intangible relationship improvements as keys to their success.

- Focus on organization and visibility in the program's first 24 to 36 months. Articulate a shared vision and plan for renewal. Complete highly visible, doable projects. Get organized. Develop good working relationships with outside resources. Line up needed technical assistance and recruit volunteers.
- Respond to changing needs as the program matures. Plan for leadership succession. Reassess and rejuvenate long-term plans. Maintain projects already completed (including funding, staffing, and physical maintenance). Be patient and persistent; be prepared to stay with the process over a period of years.

The towns developed working relationships with one another and each selected a "sister" community from the other towns in the region that had successfully implemented their own economic development efforts.

Warning:

- Understand that communities face challenges in initiating and sustaining rural revitalization in isolation. Outside resources, including assessment teams and facilitators, help communities develop a realistic action plan and work through difficult parts in the process.
- Bring in local business leaders and naysayers early on in the process. Stakeholders often want to make sure that those involved in the revitalization efforts are "serious" before they commit their time and resources.
- Resist pressure to expand the program too quickly. Due to the Small Towns project's success, many other communities in the region have asked to join the program, but limited resources at the regional level make formal expansion impractical. The towns that are not accepted, however, are invited to attend regional cluster meetings and encouraged to use the participating towns as resources and models. Several towns have taken advantage of this opportunity.

The Small Towns project has succeeded in stimulating rural revitalization. Participants report increased town pride, a renewed sense of community, and a new "can do" attitude that says residents really can direct their own futures. Leaders of revitalization efforts in small towns and rural areas across America should take a close look at the lessons learned in western North Carolina. For more information, see www.handmadeinamerica.org.

Charlottesville's Downtown Revitalization

Challenge: How can a small or midsized city reverse decades of economic decline in its downtown and rebuild it into a thriving civic center?

Background: During the 1960s and 70s, retail sales and real estate property values were on the wane in many urban areas. Charlottesville, Virginia's downtown was no exception. By 1966, retail sales in the central business district had fallen five percentage points in as many years. Property assessments had declined to pre-1960 levels. Charlottesville's city council reacted by creating a Central City Commission in 1971 to consider how to stop deterioration of the downtown. After heated debate, the council's majority concluded that city government should get involved. In 1974, the council approved a master plan for downtown revitalization; central to the plan was the creation of a pedestrian mall.

Bringing Downtown Back To Life

Solution: To counter the flow of dollars and people out of the central business district, the mayor and city manager decided to move forward immediately. They adopted the central concepts and policies put forth in the master plan: "that people will use the downtown area if the downtown area is a pleasant place to be"; and "that the commercial activity of the downtown will be substantially enhanced by an environment that is visually attractive, clean, safe, and auto-free." The city moved quickly to begin construction on the pedestrian mall and a new parking garage. Eight blocks of Main Street were closed to traffic and renovations were made to key buildings. The mall and surrounding area were redesignated as a Downtown Historic District, and an architectural review board was created to ensure that all new construction and renovation met the city's standards for historic preservation.

Twenty-five years later, the downtown revitalization effort continues to evolve. Partnerships change as new projects are initiated. The revitalization process in Charlottesville functions as a collaboration between the city government and multiple stakeholders, including private investors, consumers, public/private/nonprofit partnerships, and interested citizens.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Results from a two-year study showed that in all aspects of development, Charlottesville's downtown mall has been a success. Retail sales are stable, business and residential property values continue to rise,

and the vacancy rate on 1.5 million square feet of commercial space is 1%. Data showed that the city center is now a retail destination for people living outside the city limits. There has been a steady flow of investments in the mall over the last decade, including an ice-skating rink, a six-screen movie theatre, numerous new restaurants and shops, and the renovation and relocation of two banks. Perhaps most telling, however, is that despite the presence of city government, three major banks, the main library, and a large branch of the post office, pedestrian traffic is highest on weekends and after business hours, when employees are not present and offices are closed.

Maintenance Required:

- It takes committed leadership in both the public and private sectors to successfully revitalize downtown. Success requires a long-term vision and comprehensive approach, instead of one easy fix. It has taken this community more than 20 years to build a successful downtown, and it is still a work in progress.
- Encourage mixed land and building use, maintaining a balance between public, commercial, and residential zoning. This keeps pedestrian traffic flowing at different times of the day, seven days a week. Success depends on active street life.

- Nurture private and nonprofit investments and public activities that are consistent with the vision and design of the mall. Examples include open-air cafes, a children's museum, and free outdoor concerts during the summer months.
- Maintain the landscaping and other design features that create an inviting and aesthetically appealing space. Charlottesville's mall contains 63 trees, with an average height of 50 feet.
- In planning new construction, retain the small scale and rhythm of the area's historic structures. Preservation of historic resources is a necessary ingredient in creating and maintaining a place where people choose to be.

Bringing Downtown Back To Life

Warning:

- Do not neglect infrastructure. Constant attention must be paid to "nonaesthetic" issues such as maintenance, parking, and public utilities.
- Be patient and flexible. Downtown revitalization takes time and involves constant interplay among public officials, private investors, private users of facilities, consumers, nonprofit organizations, and interested citizens.

Charlottesville, Virginia's eight-block pedestrian mall constructed between 1975 and 1985 provided a catalyst for the revitalization of the central city, helped to stabilize the downtown retail market, and improved the quality of the physical environment in the downtown area. The pedestrian mall clearly is credited locally as being the most important reason for the downtown's success. Charlottesville has created a public space that integrates commercial, residential, and civic use—a place where public and private, work and play, form and function are intimately and beautifully connected. For more information, see www.charlottesville.org.

SOLUTIONS

FOR AMERICA

PROGRAMS THAT EQUIP FAMILIES FOR SUCCESS

CREATING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Programs that Equip Families for Success

One thing is clear — the pursuit of happiness is aided when the essentials of life are met.

THE FOUNDERS EMPHASIZED OUR INALIENABLE RIGHTS to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Over the years, the meaning of these three terms, especially the last one, has been hotly debated. Scholars and constitutional theorists will continue to argue the fine points, but one thing is clear—the pursuit of happiness is aided when the essentials of life are met. For families with children, the lack of access to society's basic necessities can be an extra burden. Decent housing, reliable transportation to and from work, the skills needed for a living-wage job, and access to affordable credit: these basics elude too many citizens and greatly impact their abilities to provide for their families. Too many Americans have no hope of achieving financial independence.

The housing dilemma is twofold. Not only are there far too many families without homes of any kind, but many thousands more pay a disproportionate amount of their monthly incomes to live in less than desirable places. According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, on any given night in 1999 the number of homeless people nationwide exceeded 700,000 (National Coalition for the Homeless [NCH], 1999a), and of these, 40% were families with children (NCH, 1999b). The most recent survey conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors (2000) found that "requests for emergency shelter by homeless families with children increased 72% between 1999-2000" (p. 40). The survey also found that 63% of all homeless families have only one parent present.

Those families that try to work their way back into the housing system are often met with inordinately high rents and other challenges that prevent them from doing so. According to a report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition (1999), in no local jurisdiction in the United States can a full-time, minimum-wage worker afford Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a one-bedroom unit in his or her community. In 70 metropolitan areas, a minimum-wage earner must work more than 100 hours a week to afford FMR.

Creating Access and Opportunities

For most Americans, the ability to own a home or have access to decent rental housing is dependent on having a living-wage job. Access to such jobs is hindered by numerous factors, but two significant barriers are 1) lack of reliable transportation; and 2) inadequate job skill training. Let's look at transportation first. In 1999, 78.2% of Americans commuted to work in personally owned automobiles; 9.4% carpooled; and roughly 5% relied on public transportation (Bureau of Transportation Statistics [BTS], 2000a). Personal transportation is expensive and accounts for 11% of the average American's disposable personal income. Americans spent over $700 billion on personal transportation in 1999 alone, a figure that continues to rise. Estimates for driving a single-occupant vehicle range from about $5,000 per year for a small car to as high as $10,000 for a large car, depending on mileage driven (BTS, 2000b).

Public transportation is an increasingly popular alternative to car ownership and car use. In January 2000, Americans made roughly 850 million trips on public buses, transit rails, commuter rails, and trolleys (BTS, 2002). But despite this upward trend, public transportation is not always an available option. Rural residents have far less access to public transit systems than those who live in cities (U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO], 1998). In fact, 80% of rural counties have no bus service and 41% of all rural residents live in an area with no form of public transportation (Federal Transit Administration, 1994).

While urban residents enjoy greater access to public transportation than rural residents do, the forms available to them are often insufficient and not geared to their work and family demands. Most of the urban poor live in central cities—often significant distances from the most lucrative jobs. Since 1970, two thirds of all new jobs have been created in the suburbs, not in the inner cities. These jobs frequently require entry-level workers to fill evening and weekend shifts, times when public transportation services are limited or completely unavailable (GAO, 1998). In short, you can't take a job if you can't get there.

Another barrier to overcoming poverty is the ability to find and hold a living-wage job. Wages are so low in certain occupations that even full time *plus overtime* is not enough to support a family. Many women find that the only occupations available to them pay the lowest wages. Coupled with the fact that women make less than men historically, access to higher paying occupations is a key strategy for moving women (and men) to a sustainable lifestyle. In 2001, for example, median weekly earnings for female full-time wage and salary workers were only 76% of the median for their male coun-

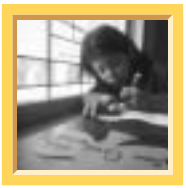
terparts—$511 versus $672 (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2002). Earnings for women in the year 2000 showed that 11.2% of white women, 9.3% of black women, and 14.8% of Hispanic women earned less than $6 per hour. In the same year, men were twice as likely as women to earn more than $20 per hour (BLS, 2001). One way to combat this trend is to train women for better paying jobs and to defy the stereotypes that say certain careers are for "men only." Programs like Women in Construction (see below) are doing just that.

Finally, a critical strategy for elevating the economic status of low-income individuals is to provide the tools that enable them to accumulate financial assets. Research has shown that low-income communities are often excluded from the mainstream banking and financial worlds. The resources that middle-class citizens often take for granted—e.g., no-fee checking and savings accounts, money market accounts, affordable mortgages, electronic banking, and prime interest lending—are not available to many low-income Americans. The creation of nontraditional funding sources that offer affordable credit and financial services to low-income or otherwise disadvantaged people is essential. Such services provide access to the American Dream for millions of citizens who suffer from poverty and disillusioning personal circumstances.

According to the Federal Reserve, almost a quarter of families with an annual income of less than $25,000 do not have a bank account of any kind. Of the approximately 10 million households that do not use banking services, the majority are low-income households headed by African-

Americans and Hispanics, households headed by young adults, and families that rent their homes (Kennickell, Starr-McCluer, and Surette, 2000). Without bank accounts or relationships with mainstream financial institutions, these households often must pay exorbitant check-cashing fees, higher interest rates on loans or credit cards, and are more likely to fall victim to predatory lenders.

Programs that provide affordable housing, reliable transportation, training for living-wage jobs, and access to financial capital and services are the keys to securing financial freedom for individuals and families. It is not acceptable that so many people lack the means to change their lives and circumstances. The programs profiled in this chapter are tested models that communities of all sizes have used to give disadvantaged citizens equal access to the pursuit of happiness.



Creating Access and Opportunities

Beyond Shelter: Housing First for Homeless Families

Challenge: How can families break the cycle of homelessness?

Background: Over the past two decades, homelessness has emerged as a major social problem in the United States. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (1999b), families with children are one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population. The majority of homeless families are "episodically homeless," meaning they have lost their homes due to unemployment, marriage breakup, or other temporary crises, and are able to exit homelessness quickly, often with the support of family or friends. However, a subgroup of homeless families—primarily minority, single-parent families on welfare—face major barriers to securing permanent, safe housing. In the mid-1980s, Los Angeles County experienced a surge in its numbers of homeless individuals and families. By 1986, the first family-oriented shelters were being developed, along with transitional housing facilities. It soon become apparent, however, that the neediest of these homeless families were being cycled through a variety of emergency and transitional housing programs for months and sometimes years at a time. Following stays in a continuum of increasingly more service-intensive facilities, large numbers of families were still homeless or at risk of becoming homeless again.

Solution: In 1988, Beyond Shelter was founded in response to the increasing numbers of homeless families and the need for a more comprehensive approach to serving them. The organization's "Housing First" concept provided a new approach to ending family homelessness. It placed homeless families as quickly as possible into permanent housing, with supportive services provided *after the move*. The program builds on the existing system of emergency and transitional housing for homeless families by providing the next step: assistance in relocation to permanent housing with transitional and time-limited support as families are integrated back into neighborhoods and communities.

The organization's "Housing First" concept provided a new approach to ending family homelessness.

Beyond Shelter's Housing First program is divided into two distinct functions, which operate both independently and collaboratively. The Housing Resources department is devoted exclusively to helping homeless families relocate to permanent and affordable rental housing. The Social Services department provides and coordinates delivery of a full range of transitional services after families are back in permanent housing. The program serves homeless families with dependent children at or below the federal poverty level ($17,650 per year for a family of four in 2001). Approximately 83% of participants are receiving welfare benefits at the time they enroll in the program. Nearly 90% of the families served are people of color, and of the 350 families enrolled each year, 90% are headed by a single parent. After they are provided initial emergency or interim services at an emergency shelter or transitional housing program, homeless families

are referred to Beyond Shelter. The referral network includes over 50 agencies throughout Los Angeles County. Beyond Shelter also works with homeless families who come directly off the street to one of the agency's satellite offices. After a family is referred to Beyond Shelter, the program staff conducts an extensive intake screening and needs assessment before enrolling the family in the program. They develop an individualized family action plan and the housing search begins. Once housing is secured, the family moves in and begins to receive services designed to help them move toward improved social and economic well-being. These services include tenant education, household management training, family and individual counseling, liaison with schools, child care, basic medical care, job training and placement, and English language classes. Finally, when the family is stable and integrated into the community, they graduate from the program. The average time spent in the program is six months after the move into permanent housing.

Creating Access and Opportunities

Testing 1, 2, 3: According to an outside evaluation, more than 90% of the mothers and 80% of the children who completed the program achieved the short, intermediate, and long-term goals identified in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's Program Logic Model for Homeless Mothers and Children. More than 80% of participating parents became employed, and still more enrolled in job training programs. Families who faced substance abuse or domestic violence issues successfully overcame them during the research period. Only 2.3% of those who entered the program with reported substance abuse problems relapsed, and less than 1% of domestic violence survivors returned to a dangerous relationship. Outcomes for children were also positive. During the evaluation period, 80% of school-age children were enrolled in school, and 77% attended regularly.

Maintenance Required:

- Focus efforts to help homeless families overcome barriers to permanent affordable housing.
- Work with outside referring agencies to coordinate services and provide a seamless transition between the shelter or temporary housing and the new permanent home. The homeless family becomes a partner in the process when they realize that the efforts of both agencies are addressing the same goal.

- Maintain home-based case management for at least six months. Offer an individualized plan that is structured to fit the family's needs. By interacting with families in the privacy of their own homes, case managers can better understand a family's specific strengths and weaknesses, how they communicate with one another and the outside world, and how best to help.
- Build and maintain close working relationships with landlords and housing authorities. Direct contact and negotiation between program staff and owners of safe, affordable housing is key to getting homeless families into the housing market.

Warning:

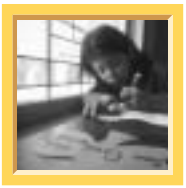
- Keep the case management function and the housing relocation function separate. Staff members with expertise in each field should focus on what they do best, while working together behind the scenes to ensure that overall goals and objectives are met.
- Stay involved in public policy. When faced with a housing shortage and the high cost of rental housing in general, organizations need to work closely with housing authorities that administer housing subsidies and/or nonprofit developers and local governments to help overcome these barriers.

From 1989 to 2001, more than 2,300 primarily high-risk and multi-problem homeless families have participated in the Housing First program, with more than 85% stabilizing in permanent housing within one year. Beyond Shelter's methodology successfully coordinates and integrates existing services and systems in new ways. It addresses gaps in services rather than simply duplicating existing programs, and it succeeds in getting vulnerable and at-risk homeless families into permanent housing without requiring them to first spend extended time in transitional housing. For more information, see www.beyondshelter.org.

Neighborhood Transportation Service

Challenge: How can communities provide reliable transportation to and from work for citizens without cars, when the job locations are not served by existing public transit?

Background: During the early 1990s, the Cedar Rapids–Iowa City corridor was the fastest growing area in all of Iowa. But Cedar Rapids, the state's second largest city, confronted a prevalent urban problem. A high rate of economic growth in the surrounding metro area was creating new jobs, but many of these locations were not served by public transportation, especially at night and on weekends when entry-level shifts were available. Residents of the inner city who did not own automobiles could not take advantage of the higher paying jobs and educational opportunities available in the metro area—not because they were unqualified or unwanted by employers, but simply because they couldn't get there.



Creating Access and Opportunities

Solution: Cedar Rapids' Neighborhood Transportation Service (NTS) was started in 1994 to provide door-to-door transportation to and from work and job training programs on weekday evenings and Sundays, when city buses did not operate. Originally, the service focused on a specific low-income neighborhood on the city's southeast side; it has since expanded to include all of Cedar Rapids and the two contiguous cities of Marion and Hiawatha. Taken as a whole, these three cities comprise 80% of the county population. NTS connects Cedar Rapids residents to jobs, job training, employment-related treatment services, and educational opportunities that further their employability. It is a "neighbor to neighbor" solution in that NTS employees come from the same neighborhoods that it serves. NTS operates five buses, each holding between 12 and 20 persons. Riders pay $3 per ride, which covers approximately 30% of the actual cost of providing the service. For the target population, NTS provides a safe and affordable alternative to private transportation. Ridership has grown from 556 riders in 1994 to 27,397 in 2001.

Testing 1, 2, 3: NTS improves its customers' employment options, a fact that has clear economic benefits. Nearly 83% of NTS customers reported using NTS services for primarily work-related transportation. According to the Rider Satisfaction Survey, in both 1999 and 2000, 100% of the riders surveyed

reported that NTS either always or usually got them to their destination on time. In addition, riders indicated that NTS helped them to keep a job and maintain a more regular work history, increase the hours they could work, get a job they wanted, advance in their current job, or change to a better job. As a result, NTS customers also reported that the service enabled them to increase their income, save money, pay off debts, and get off welfare.

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Maintenance Required:

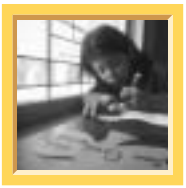
- Manage growth of services while sustaining efficiency and effectiveness. Customers depend on reliable service that gets them to their destinations on time.
- Select drivers from the service area and encourage them to build relationships with riders. This will enable the service to meet the changing needs of customers.
- Be aware that rider satisfaction is key to a "neighbor-to-neighbor" service. It is imperative to hire drivers and office staff who share the vision of the service and recognize the importance of building relationships with customers.

Warning:

- Recognize that demand changes with the economy. Transportation programs must be flexible enough to expand and contract services as needed.

- Do not undercharge. When NTS began, it charged only 50 cents per ride. While affordable, this fee did not generate enough income and tended to encourage no-shows at pickup. The new rate of $3 is still affordable, generates more revenue, and reduces the number of no-shows.

Neighborhood Transportation Service reduces barriers to employment for its customers and encourages autonomy and self-reliance. It fills the gap when public transit is not in operation and reaches a population lacking affordable means of transportation. Programs like NTS also have a positive influence on their employees. Interviewed NTS drivers reported deriving great personal satisfaction from being part of a much needed, effective service. Clearly, as their motto states, NTS is "More Than Just a Ride."



Creating Access and Opportunities

Women in Construction

Challenge: How can communities better prepare working mothers for living-wage jobs?

Background: East central Kentucky has worked long and hard to combat the detrimental effects of pervasive poverty. Since 1962, the Kentucky River Foothills Development Council (KRFDC) has promoted self-sufficiency for the low-income population in the area. As a community action agency, it administers a wide range of programs and services for low-income families and individuals. KRFDC has been effective in developing job training programs, and the agency also provides transportation, rent, utility, and food assistance; family preservation counseling; parent education classes; and life skills education. However, what was needed in east central Kentucky were training programs that prepared individuals for higher wage, long-term employment.

Solution: With a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Women in Construction program began in 1995 to train low-income women for highway construction jobs in east central Kentucky. The program was designed primarily for single mothers who needed to increase their earning power, particularly in light of welfare reform. State and interstate highway systems were then being expanded, providing numerous openings for construction jobs at a time when the government was actively seeking strategies to expand career opportunities for women. Women in

Construction now trains women at four sites across the state in both highway construction and general construction trades.

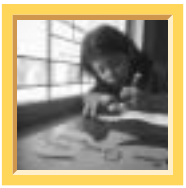
The Women in Construction program recruits women who demonstrate the potential for successful careers as construction tradeswomen and helps them overcome the barriers to success in this traditionally male-dominated field. Low-income women who receive public assistance and those who meet the 150% of poverty guideline are the main targets for recruitment. Enrollees receive technical training through a combination of classroom and hands-on instruction. Participants complete a 12-week, comprehensive course of study that includes heavy equipment operation, basic carpentry, masonry, commercial vehicle operation, safety, physical fitness, and sexual harassment prevention. In addition, they receive job readiness training to prepare them for the challenges faced by women as they enter the workforce. Upon completion of the program, graduates are offered placement assistance and support from project staff to assist them with the transition into the workforce.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Results from an outside evaluation show that Women in Construction is an effective job training and placement program. Its graduates are highly employable. In fact, 71% of Women in Construction alumnae are employed, two thirds of whom use the technical skills learned through their training. Graduates earn $10.28 per hour on average, about double the minimum wage. They enjoy higher levels of work stability and report being

satisfied with their current jobs (86%). Furthermore, employers and labor unions report positive experiences with program graduates, praising their dependability and low turnover rate.

Maintenance Required:

- Schedule the training program to optimize recruitment and job placement. Women in Construction recruits in the winter and completes its training program by the end of spring. During the summer, when the demand for construction workers is highest, program staff focuses on job placement and work support activities.
- Build and maintain relationships with current and potential employers. Training program directors must work closely with employers to develop or revise the training curriculum and respond to employers' needs.
- Keep counseling and training functions separate. The counselor should be an independent position in order to ensure that the "soft skills" are taught and practiced in a supportive environment.
- Bring program graduates back as mentors. Trainees are less likely to drop out if they can meet and talk to women who have successfully entered the trade.



Creating Access and Opportunities

Warning:

- Recruiting participants and employers must be an ongoing effort. Rotating the program to different sites, thus providing new pools of trainees and new pools of contractors, can be very effective.
- Ensure that all participants are aware of program requirements and expectations. Participants must be fully informed about attendance, alcohol and drug policies, and formal disciplinary procedures.
- Support services like childcare and transportation assistance are essential during training. But these services should not stop at graduation. Graduates often need help purchasing tools and work clothes, or temporary childcare while job hunting. Allocate resources for this.

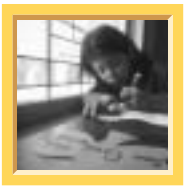
Effective workforce development programs such as Women in Construction are needed to increase higher wage, long-term employment opportunities that enable women to pull themselves and their families out of poverty—not just in Kentucky, but nationwide. For more information, see www.kyriverfoothills.org.

Vermont Development Credit Union

Challenge: How can poor and low-income people gain access to the financial resources and services they need to improve their lives?

Background: Vermont has 64,000 residents living in poverty (11% of the population) and 90,000 low-income households. These Vermonters work long hours at low-wage and seasonal jobs, live in mobile homes or substandard old-stock housing, and depend for transportation on private vehicles well past their prime. Many are women. Increasingly they include people of color and refugees. Isolated and credit-starved, these Vermonters have limited access to conventional financial institutions. The burgeoning predatory lending industry exploits them, reducing or eliminating what few assets they may possess. Lacking wealth, education, and access to affordable and trustworthy financial services, these families and their communities face a downward spiral of poverty and debt.

Solution: In 1988, the Burlington Ecumenical Action Ministry (BEAM), a faith-based organization, looked back at its 20-year history of seeking effective solutions to social problems and recognized an underlying constant among the chronic poor. They had no opportunity to build wealth and financial stability through access to market-rate capital and affordable financial services. Out of this recognition, BEAM created the Vermont Development Credit Union. This banking institution is dedicated to Vermonters of low wealth, bringing a culture of respect and support through its counseling-based affordable banking services.



Creating Access and Opportunities

VDCU's services include lending, financial services such as check cashing and savings accounts, and development services such as home ownership counseling. From 1989 to 2001, VDCU grew from $10,000 in operating grants to a $17 million institution with 8,700 members in 205 of Vermont's 255 towns. In its first 12 years it made 7,370 direct loans, injecting $58 million into the lives of low-income Vermonters. Its loan repayment rate is 99.5%. The VDCU solution links economically underserved populations with basic financial services that middle-income citizens may take for granted. Central to its success is creating an atmosphere of respect in which members can get the information, education, counseling and advocacy they need. Members view VDCU as their institution, working on their behalf. VDCU has demonstrated that affordable lending and financial services for low-wealth populations can be provided and sustained. Its motto is "we don't say no, we say when."

Testing 1, 2, 3: VDCU services have a dramatic impact on members' lives and a high social return on investment. The first $50 million in loans VDCU made to its members saved them an estimated $8.5 million in interest payments compared with predatory forms of credit. In terms of asset building, the study showed that credit union members have increased their wealth as measured in two ways: savings over time and loan paydown rates. The data revealed that a relationship with VDCU brings measurable improvement in members' lives not only in the form of financial benefits, but also in improved health, expanded hopes, and increased community engagement.

Maintenance Required:

- Recognize that members may need varying amounts of information, education, counseling, and advocacy.

- Get the whole family involved. Clients at VDCU report that they want their children to learn to save and manage money.
- Understand that success depends on member motivation. The institution must provide targeted services that members use to help themselves; not push services on potential users, motivated or not.
- Continue to work on forming strong partnerships. Mutually beneficial relationships can take a long time to develop. For VDCU, key partnerships with Fannie Mae and the Burlington Electric Department, for example, took several years to establish.

Warning:

- Be aware of the anxiety and apprehension that many low-income clients experience when it comes to financial matters. Clients may feel guilty and ashamed that their income is inadequate. They need to feel respected and valued before they will accept help.
- Recognize that serving low-income clients is expensive and may require some ongoing public or private financial support.
- Sustainability depends on achieving a balance in membership and services by marketing across the entire spectrum of low- to moderate-income households, many of whom are also financially underserved.
- Provide information about predatory lending practices. Affordable financial services, delivered in an atmosphere of respect, helpfulness, and education constitute the best defense against financial predators.

The Vermont Development Credit Union changes lives in many important ways. It empowers members to organize their finances and take control of their futures. The VDCU solution enables members to build stronger financial lives and to become steadfast members of their neighborhoods and communities. Because of VDCU, members pay off high-interest debt, buy houses, start businesses, and give their children education options they never thought possible. For more information, see www.vdcu.org.

SOLUTIONS

FOR AMERICA

PROGRAMS THAT BEGIN WITH NEIGHBORS

IMPROVING THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE

Programs that Begin with Neighbors

SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS have traditionally taken a deficit-model approach to community development, focusing on what is missing in a community rather than trying to strengthen and develop existing assets. Many well-intentioned people have looked at the numerous problems in low-income neighborhoods and suggested a range of services to "fix" the situation. The prevailing wisdom has been that residents of low-income neighborhoods have a great number of needs to be met, but very little to offer in return. While job programs, youth development efforts, and affordable housing campaigns are critical to personal and community well-being, they too often only scratch the surface of the "services to need" ratio. After decades of outside assistance, poverty remains a real challenge for many American communities.

The prevailing wisdom has been that residents of low-income neighborhoods have a great number of needs to be met, but very little to offer in return.

In 1990 there were nearly 3,000 neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40% or higher, almost double the figure from 1970 (Jargowsky, 1997). Over the past 40 years, the federal government and others have spent billions of dollars trying to reverse this trend. From the War on Poverty initiative of the 1960s to the more recent Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Communities programs, government and nongovernmental agencies alike have tried to reinvigorate communities and stimulate regrowth in high-poverty neighborhoods. Despite the ongoing debate about the effectiveness of these and other programs, it is clear that outside intervention alone, governmental or otherwise, cannot succeed in rebuilding distressed communities (Green and Haines, 2002). Community development specialists and researchers have found that an approach based solely on residents' needs cannot rebuild communities and enhance capacity in a sustainable way. What is needed is an asset-model approach, one that focuses on a neighborhood's existing strengths. The defining question for community development is no longer "How can we help these communities?" but "How can these communities help themselves?"

In the last two decades, the community development field has been steadily shifting its thinking away from the deficit-model approach. Experts now talk instead about an idea called "community building," which begins with the assumption that efforts to rebuild communities must also include efforts to increase the capacity of citizens to solve their own problems. Comprehensive community initiatives that aim to improve physical and economic conditions must simultaneously improve the ability of local residents to affect personal and community change on their own.

In the early 1990s, two researchers at Northwestern University, John McKnight and John Kretzmann, launched a local research effort to map the capacities and assets that already existed in a low-income, high crime neighborhood. Their research uncovered a startling finding: this outwardly impoverished community had a wealth of assets on which to draw (1993). As they looked at individuals, community and faith-based organizations, and local institutions like libraries, schools, and businesses, they saw considerable personal and physical assets in the community: people who had untapped talents for childcare and auto repair; organizations that were neighborhood connectors; and traditional institutions whose roles and services had been too narrowly defined. This initial work led to an intensive look at how poor communities are labeled and, more importantly, how they are best served. They found that asset-based community development required a different approach and new kinds of measurements.

Improving the Street Where You Live

Ultimately, McKnight and Kretzmann determined that the deficit approach to community development—what's not present rather than what is—leaves residents thinking that they and their neighbors are "incapable of taking charge of their lives and their community's future" (1993, p. 4). The alternative approach that they suggest—the asset model—"leads toward the development of policies and activities based on the capacities, skills, and assets of lower income people and their neighborhoods" (p. 5). The asset approach becomes the only viable alternative for poor neighborhoods for two reasons: 1) there is evidence that significant community development can only occur and be sustained when the local community is invested in the results; and 2) the availability of outside resources will always come up short. Even in federally targeted areas like the Enterprise Zones, there is never enough support to adequately rebuild communities with outside resources. There must be something else.

The "something else" for low-income communities is to come together around their strengths and build on them. In cities and rural areas, whole communities often suffer from disinvestment and lack of hope. Once thriving communities are now shuttered and barred. The reality of crime and poverty is all around. But within these neighborhoods there are citizens and organizations that *can* connect people, that *can* create better links to existing services, and most importantly, that *can* build trust again.

The two communities profiled here are attempting to rebuild their neighborhoods one block at a time. By building on what they have, maximizing external assistance through local resident participation, and counting on the gift of neighborliness that still exists, these communities are succeeding in connecting people the old-fashioned way.

Carmel Hill Project

Challenge: How can a blighted inner-city neighborhood reinvigorate itself?

Background: In the early 1990s, the block of West 118th Street between Fifth Avenue and Lenox in central Harlem had a lot of problems. The street was lined with condemned or abandoned structures and city-owned apartment buildings that were in horrendous, life-threatening condition. Families were living with holes in walls and ceilings, fire and water damage, kitchens and bathrooms that did not work, and pest infestation. Vacant lots were eyesores, and safety was a major concern. Behind the obvious evidence of

disinvestment, families were struggling even to access the benefits and resources for which they qualified. Residents of this block had many obstacles to overcome.

Solution: In 1992, a group of neighborhood residents, together with a private philanthropist and the Children's Aid Society, established the Carmel Hill Project, a community-building and social service project based on 118th Street. The premise of the project was that a devastated urban block could transform itself if residents were given the opportunity and the support they needed to create a different kind of neighborhood environment. The Carmel Hill Project is a comprehensive and multifaceted effort at block renewal. Its mission is defined around four closely related objectives:

Improving the Street Where You Live

- Strengthening families through services, better housing and community conditions, and developing capacity;
- Improving the lives of children through educational opportunities, family counseling, and outreach and training to parents;
- Creating a better physical and social environment on the block; and
- Community organizing.

The project has had an interesting trajectory that highlights how success breeds success. When the Carmel Hill Project first began, it dealt mostly with housing issues. Since then, three buildings on the block have been rehabilitated and residents have formed tenant associations. A partnership

between the Children's Aid Society and Mt. Sinai Hospital has led to improved access to health care in the form of a community health clinic. A block association now provides a vehicle for maintaining contacts with the local police precinct, resulting in vastly improved police responsiveness. Most recently, the project has focused on improving education for children on the block in the form of scholarships for 78 children to attend a local parochial school. Prior to the scholarship program, children on the block attended 26 different schools. Embedded in all these components is a strong commitment to case management for individuals and families on the block.

Eighty percent of residents who had lived on the block 10 or more years said that the block is better or much better than it was before.

Testing 1, 2, 3: An outside evaluation concluded that almost 10 years after the Carmel Hill Project began, West 118th Street between Lenox Avenue and Fifth is close to what the project founders envisioned. Residents feel safe. Even at night, 94% of the survey respondents felt safe walking with someone on their block, and well over half said they felt safe even when alone. In addition, apartment buildings were renovated, new townhouses were constructed, vacant lots cleaned, and streetlights installed. Residents felt great pride in their block and confidence in their neighbors. More than 55% rated life on 118th Street as great or very good. Eighty percent of residents who had lived on the block 10 or more years said that the block is better or much better than it was before. Nine out of 10 residents felt that people who live on the block know each other by face, get along with one another, and can be counted on to take action, to maintain order, and to fix problems in the community.

Maintenance Required:

- Stay within a fixed geographic area, such as a city block. Focus on a natural community that is small enough for face-to-face contact and for program staff to get to know everyone individually.
- Develop strategies that build trust. Get to know one or two key people whom everyone on the block respects. Be responsive and make sure to follow through on promises.
- Sponsor social events on a regular basis. These events help build relationships and reinvigorate efforts to improve the community.
- Think long-term. Benchmarks of success are important, but lasting change for families and communities takes a long-term commitment.

Warning:

- Don't assume you know what residents need. Listen to them and work to address both individual needs and those of the community. This also requires that the program stay flexible enough to meet changing circumstances over time.
- Work to discourage the perception that residents are "clients" in need of services. The program's success depends on residents seeing themselves as citizens.

Improving the Street Where You Live

The Carmel Hill Project supports the idea that natural communities formed by fixed geographic boundaries can have enormous benefits for residents. Working simultaneously at both the individual and community levels yields impressive results. While individuals' specific needs are addressed, they also see physical improvements in their immediate environment, which gives them faith that the project really can help. Best of all, the Carmel Hill model of creating a meaningful urban community where residents have access to resources and work together on neighborhood improvement can apply to all communities, not just impoverished ones.

Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal

Challenge: How can neighbors reconnect to solve the toughest of problems?

Background: In the early 1990s, Shreveport, Louisiana, a midsized city with a population of just over 200,000, faced what seemed to be overwhelming problems: high crime, joblessness, welfare dependency, homelessness, and substandard housing. Even residents of "stable" neighborhoods lacked a basic sense of security.

Solution: Recognizing the tremendous challenges the community faced, citizens, including many in the faith community, established Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal (SBCR) in 1995. SBCR is a relationship-building process based on practical lessons, socioeconomic theory, and faith-based teaching. The group's philosophy is that the social isolation of individuals is the root of community problems, and that rebuilding neighborhood and communitywide relationships ultimately restores the foundations of a safe

and caring community. The organization's work is based on the following assumptions: 1) people need to have strong connections with one another where they live; 2) neighbors must engage in an intensive relationship-building process to restore connections in neighborhoods where requisite relationships have long since broken down; and 3) the city, as a community, must come together in a grassroots volunteer corps to marshal citywide resources and leverage them as needed.

The Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal solution embraces a systematic restoration of human relationships in the community through a three-pronged action strategy. First, paid staff members establish "Friendship Houses" in target neighborhoods. Friendship House leaders are the nexus of the neighborhood-based approach. By building relationships with neighbors and connecting needs with resources, they act as catalysts for caring connections and problem solving throughout the neighborhood. Second, Friendship House leaders help recruit "Haven House" leaders. Haven House leaders are volunteers who commit to the SBCR approach and receive training and support in their work to foster communication among their neighbors. Leaders meet regularly with their neighbors and mobilize them to help each other. Finally, the solution involves organizing a grass-roots volunteer corps or "mission team" to unite the whole community in efforts to help people by connecting resources with needs. Currently, there are 350 leaders and over 5,000 individuals who have joined the SBCR effort.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Like all substantive efforts to rebuild devastated communities, SBCR has mapped a long-term approach; the program is currently in

stage two of an eight-stage plan. Survey results gathered on the early stages of the program indicate that the community-building process is working. Friendship House programs have succeeded in reaching families that wish to participate, and Friendship House leaders have developed excellent relationships with participants. The research also suggests that one-on-one communication with adults in the target neighborhoods is a more effective way of engaging residents in the SBCR solution than a service-delivery approach.

Improving the Street Where You Live

Maintenance Required:

- Take advantage of existing neighbor-to-neighbor connections. More is accomplished when people can build on established relationships.
- Foster the neighborhood's sense of ownership in the program. The staff can initiate the process of community building, but long-term sustainability is dependent upon transferring responsibility for the program to residents of the neighborhood. It will also help to reduce turnover in participating families.

Warning:

- Insist on buy-in at all levels of the community, not just in distressed neighborhoods.
- Make training personnel a priority. Staff must understand all the components of the program and how they relate to the larger goal.

The common sense approach of SBCR demonstrates how a community facing tremendous challenges can develop a structured way to marshal citizens' talents and energies to improve their communities. This solution doesn't demand unusual or exotic resources—instead it puts neighbors, religious organizations, and civic institutions to work reweaving the bonds that create a caring community, person by person. For more information, see www.shrevecommunityrenewal.org.

SOLUTIONS

FOR AMERICA

PROGRAMS THAT CREATE COLLABORATIVE CHANGE

WORKING TOGETHER WORKS

Programs that Create Collaborative Change

MOST COMMUNITIES FACE PROBLEMS that prevent the full development of their citizens' potential. The issues are as universal as racism and poverty, and as individualized as teen pregnancy, poor health care, and insufficient living-wage jobs. There are innumerable programs aimed at finding solutions to problems like these, but they too often fall short because of the interrelatedness of the problems or because the full force of the community has not been brought to bear on the issue. Organizations and individuals who are trying to solve deep-rooted, systemic social problems too frequently work in isolation: the so-called "silo" syndrome. In cases where communities come together to identify problems broadly and create a course of action that involves multiple organizations and sectors, the results are inevitably better and more sustainable. This approach to community problem solving goes by many names: partnership, coalition, collaboration, etc. Each of these labels implies a different level of commitment, but they share one thing in common: the desire to *collaborate*—literally "to work together." The secret behind many communities' success in problem solving is that they have found the means and developed the vehicles needed to work together around critical issues.

Organizations and individuals who are trying to solve deep-rooted, systemic social problems too frequently work in isolation.

While the concept of collaboration is easy enough to understand, in practice it is never as simple as it sounds. Serious problems arise when we try to apply the concept to a real community setting with its complex web of differing points of view, agendas, and levels of commitment. Barbara Gray (1989) outlines a three-phase approach to developing effective collaborations. They are: 1) the problem-setting phase; 2) the direction-setting phase; and 3) the implementation phase. The problem-setting phase allows a community to get its bearings about the problem to be solved, generate a commitment to the collaborative process, and decide who needs to be at the table to solve the problem. In the direction-setting phase, the group organizes the work to be done by setting an agenda, deciding on the informa-

tion that is needed, agreeing on a general course of action, and communicating the plan to the larger community. The implementation phase develops the procedures and methods needed to get the job done and assigns specific tasks to the collaborators. These steps provide a general guide for organizing community problem-solving efforts. They are not intended to be linear or all-inclusive. Communities may be doing work in all three phases at the same time; the important thing is that all of the steps are taken. Full-fledged collaboration is a gradual process. Communities need to build a foundation of trust before they can tackle specific issues.

Working Together Works

The joint approach to problem solving is gaining credibility in communities across the nation. In a national survey on community partnerships commissioned in 2001 by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, almost 90% of the top business, nonprofit, and local government leaders in the 200 largest cities said that working together across sectors is more effective than tackling problems alone. A large majority of those interviewed said that their organizations were actively engaged with others in the community to solve problems. If anything, these leaders wished they had *more* opportunities to work across organizational lines.

The following case studies feature proven strategies for effecting a collaborative approach to problem solving. In the cases of Aiken, Arlington, and St. Louis, a clear understanding of a problem has mobilized a wide range of citizens and organizations to work together. Jacksonville Community Council Inc. is a national model for mobilizing the community to anticipate and think broadly about issues and opportunities. Taken together, they provide practical advice to all sectors—government, business, and nonprofit—on new ways to address community issues.

Growing into Life

Challenge: Faced with an alarming public health issue such as infant mortality, how can citizens, medical professionals, and public officials collaborate to address the problem?

Background: Aiken County, South Carolina is a large rural county of 135,000 people, comprised of a small middle class and a large low-income population. In the late 1980s, Aiken's infant mortality rate was among the highest in South Carolina, which in turn had one of the highest infant death rates in the country. The rate for minority children was double that of white

children. Community members understood that this devastating problem was demoralizing the community at large, but no one seemed to know how to approach the issue. Bereaved families were not the only victims. Health professionals, police officers, and social service providers all felt a sense of helplessness that affected their lives and professions.

Solution: In response to the alarmingly high infant mortality rates in Aiken County, the governor of South Carolina instigated the formation of Growing into Life in 1989. A community-based collaborative, the program began as a forty-member task force comprised of doctors, nurses, emergency medical technicians, health department and social service case workers, local government officials, police, and religious leaders. Governed by a "virtual board" that met on-line, the partnership established several key programs to combat infant mortality. The task force created the Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) board to examine in depth each infant death that occurred in Aiken County. It also investigated current practices in prenatal care and postnatal services. Growing into Life then developed innovative educational programs and interventions for pregnant women and new mothers. Through the collaboration, nurses and police officers were able to create a program called "MOMS and COPS" which combines prenatal education with community policing. Working in collaboration with the health department, the program also created the VIPP (Very Important Pregnant Person) card that entitled pregnant women to move to the head of the line at public health clinics.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Based on an outside evaluation, Growing into Life programs helped to reduce the overall infant mortality rate in Aiken County by 50%:

from a high of 15.2 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1985-87, to 7.6 deaths per 1,000 in 1999. The 1999 rate was lower than the state average of 10.4 and only five tenths of a point higher than the national average.

Maintenance Required:

- Be creative in reaching out to target populations. "MOMS and COPS" is an example of how nurses and community police can work together to solve a community problem. Seek out new kinds of collaborations.
- Gather the hard data necessary to understand the real nature of the problem. The FIMR board's review of all infant deaths disproved the assumption that most of the deaths were due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Armed with this new, more accurate information, Growing into Life was able to launch a campaign to address the real causes of the area's infant mortality.

Working Together Works

- Take the time necessary to develop effective programs. Growing into Life members worked together over a two-year period to create a toll-free pregnancy care line staffed by on-duty maternity nurses. Their patience paid off. Once established, this program saved the life of a woman and her baby during its first month of operation.

Warning:

- Be careful not to place blame. Infant mortality is an emotional issue that affects all members of a community. Growing into Life members understood that pointing fingers would not lead to solutions.
- Understand that having a nontraditional board structure can impact an organization's ability to get funding. Growing into Life's "virtual" board, which used the Internet for communication and meetings, did not conform to the standard structure of most 501(c)(3) organizations and as a result lost many funding opportunities.

As an organization, Growing into Life is no longer in operation, but its impact on reducing infant mortality in Aiken County has resulted in statewide implementation of its most successful components. The FIMR board continues to meet on a quarterly basis. "MOMS and COPS" remains a powerful tool for prenatal education, and the toll-free pregnancy line continues to provide immediate medical advice to pregnant women. Thanks to the program's collaborative leadership, Aiken County is now in a position to address its public health concerns in new and innovative ways.

Dental Health for Arlington

Challenge: How can a community maximize its resources to provide basic health services to low-income children?

Background: Dental decay is the most prevalent chronic childhood illness in the United States—resulting in an estimated 51 million school hours lost annually by children suffering from dental problems. Children living in poverty, who lack access to appropriate dental services, suffer disproportionately from oral disease. Low-income children and their parents in Arlington and southeast Tarrant County, Texas were no exception. In 1991, a United Way community needs assessment revealed that poor dental health and the absence of affordable and accessible dental services were major problems among Arlington and Tarrant County residents. Patients often waited seven months for an appointment with a county dental program 25 miles away.

Dental decay is the most prevalent chronic childhood illness in the United States.

Solution: Community members in southeast Tarrant County were determined to find a way to provide dental care to low-income families. Representatives from 16 community agencies and professional dental health organizations worked together to resolve the problem. Established in 1992, Dental Health for Arlington, Inc. (DHA) is a not-for-profit community

service agency that offers dental care to low-income residents of southeast Tarrant County through two programs: the Allan Saxe Dental Clinic and the SMILES program (Sealing Molars Improves the Life of Every Student). The clinic provides free restorative dental care to low-income or indigent adults and children. SMILES provides dental screening, prevention education, and sealants to low-income children in public schools.

SMILES aims to improve the oral health of children in order to improve their overall health, self-esteem, and ability to learn. There are four components to the program: 1) a comprehensive oral health screening by a dentist at the child's school (parents of children with severe dental problems are referred to outside services for free or low-cost dental care); 2) a new toothbrush for each child; 3) oral health education; and 4) with parental permission, application of sealants to healthy molars using portable dental equipment at the school. More than 200 volunteer dental professionals have provided $4.8 million in free dental care to low-income residents.

Working Together Works

Testing 1, 2, 3: In 1999 and 2000, 21 low-income public schools participated in the SMILES program. More than 5,000 children were screened; 1,819 children received sealants; and 6,029 teeth were sealed. Annually, approximately 40% of the children screened receive sealants on one or more teeth. SMILES has expanded to meet local community needs. Between 1993 and 2000 the number of participating schools has increased by 90%; the number of children screened has increased 93%; the number of children receiving sealants has grown by 99%, as has the total number of teeth sealed. Testing of students showed increased knowledge of dental health.

Maintenance Required:

- Develop a positive working relationship with the school system. Any school-based program's success is dependent upon the support of the school administration, nurses, and classroom teachers.
- Providing on-site services eliminates many of the barriers that prevent low-income children from receiving needed care.

Warning:

- Simply referring parents of children with severe decay to low-cost care may not be enough. Educate parents about oral health and follow up with them to address obstacles to accessing service.

- Clarify the program's mission and limit interventions to those that further the mission. Establish specific criteria and parameters for collaborations and partnerships.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of all fundraising events. Consider computing a benefits ratio by dividing the income earned by the staff hours required to plan and implement the event.

SMILES is an effective school-based program that annually reaches over 5,000 underserved children. The children who participate in SMILES receive not only prevention education, but also free treatment and referrals to free and low-cost dental care. SMILES proves that basic education teaches children to take an interest in their dental health, leading them to brush their teeth regularly and maintain good dental hygiene. A large part of the SMILES program's success lies in the staff's ability to work with school officials to bring dental services directly to the children who need it. For more information, see www.dentalhealtharlington.org.

Jacksonville Community Council Inc.

Challenge: How can communities get citizens involved in planning and implementing civic change?

Background: In the early 1970s, Jacksonville, Florida stood poised to enter a period of tremendous physical growth and development. Community leaders and citizens alike questioned the city's readiness for the future and its ability to respond to the challenges the changes would bring. In 1974, the president-elect of the Jacksonville Area Chamber of Commerce convened a three-day planning meeting for 100 civic leaders including public officials, city council members, labor representatives, military personnel, religious leaders, and top-level business executives. For the first time in the city's history, representatives from a fragmented community with diverse sectional interests came together and talked about Jacksonville, its problems and its opportunities. The participants created a priority list of critical issues facing the community and developed a shared commitment to solving the identified problems. In addition, participants agreed that there needed to be a mechanism for continuing the dialogue begun at the conference.

Solution: Jacksonville Community Council Inc. (JCCI) was established in 1975 as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, broad-based civic organization. It grew out of the Community Planning Council, the social services planning arm of the United Way. JCCI expanded its membership and scope to include all facets of the community. In this way, JCCI became a hybrid community organization with characteristics of both a planning council and a civic league.

JCCI's citizen-led studies are a hallmark of the program. Each year, through a citizen participation process, JCCI identifies a number of significant community problems and selects two for concentrated study. Diverse citizen study committees meet weekly for six to nine months, gain an understanding of each issue, reach consensus on key findings, and recommend solutions. Typically, there are 24 to 27 weekly meetings composed of 30 to 50 study committee members. Following completion of the study process and the publication of a report, a newly formed citizens' implementation task force takes the report to the community and seeks to place issues on the community agenda. The short-term goal of the citizen study process is to increase public awareness of important community issues. The long-term goal is to realize positive community change as a result of study recommendations. Since 1977, there have been 57 citizen studies conducted through JCCI on topics ranging from adult literacy to growth management to race relations.

Working Together Works

Testing 1, 2, 3: Findings from an outside evaluation show that JCCI's study process is highly effective. Once citizens begin the study process, they stay with it to the finish. Overall, the retention rate of participants in the study process was between 59% and 83% during the evaluation period. Researchers found that the JCCI study process provides a critical structure for informed consideration of community problems with a near-term focus on solutions. Most of the study committee recommendations in the cases analyzed have been implemented, and evaluators found that implementation efforts were most likely to succeed when the recipients of recommendations had participated in the process.

Maintenance Required:

- Develop and follow a detailed set of guidelines for citizen-led committees. Focus on the problem itself rather than the approach needed to solve the problem. This creates a shared set of expectations among participants and maintains the focus of the group on working through issues, not jumping to unsubstantiated conclusions.

- Provide analysis-based recommendations. The study process reflects a well-rounded understanding of the problem and the roles of the players involved. The report should provide a documented basis for action including background facts and detailed analysis.
- Recognize that the study process is a learning experience. Participants gain a greater understanding of the issue and acquire valuable listening and consensus-building skills. They become better qualified to continue work in community problem solving, whether through the program or in other organizations.

Warning:

- Recruit a diverse group of participants for each study committee. New voices in the conversation are critical to ensure that all citizens in the community are represented.
- Recognize the danger of stakeholder domination. Avoid having specific interests overwhelm committee discussions. Ideally, stakeholders would actively present their points of view and bring their organizations' interests in line with developing community consensus.
- Don't be afraid to change. Continuous self-evaluation is a necessary part of a healthy organization. When problems are discovered, changes can be made to improve the program and its results.

JCCI became a hybrid community organization with characteristics of a planning council and a civic league.

JCCI seeks nothing less than to improve the quality of life in Jacksonville. It is founded on a deep faith in the ability of citizens to set aside their differences and join together to learn and reason about problems of mutual concern. Its growth and success offer renewed hope for this basic democratic concept as a means of addressing the complex issues of modern urban communities. Through a combination of analysis and implementation, the study process goes beyond talk and creates real change in the community. JCCI's work has served as a blueprint for change in governmental structure and processes, the delivery of human services, education, public safety, health, and other areas of community life. For more information, see www.jcci.org.

Bridges Across Racial Polarization®

Challenge: How can communities address chronic social issues such as racial polarization through a citizen-led initiative?

Background: Racial polarization remains one of the core problems facing the nation and St. Louis, Missouri is no exception. An analysis of 2000 census data found that of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States, St. Louis was the ninth most racially segregated. In a 1995 study, residents of the St. Louis region perceived the quality of race relations in the metropolitan area to be on the decline. Respondents reported that interaction between the races was limited, with most contacts occurring in public arenas, such as shopping malls and workplaces. While 80% of citizens polled in the study said that good race relations are very important to the quality of life in the community, the majority of respondents also admitted that they did not know how individuals could begin working to improve those relations. Citizens in the St. Louis region needed to create a way to address the racial polarization in their community.

Working Together Works

Solution: In the spring of 1993, two Leadership St. Louis program graduates—one white, one black—met to discuss racial polarization and the perceived lack of interracial social contact among St. Louisans. They decided to pilot the concept of informal, interracial social gatherings, which they hoped would offer opportunities to develop new friendships. Initially, 40 people formed small interracial social groups that met over a nine-month period. Encouraged by participants' enthusiasm and the success of the pilot program, the Bridges Across Racial Polarization® program was adopted by the Leadership Center of Greater St. Louis, the predecessor to FOCUS St. Louis. From that initial group of 40 people, the Bridges program has grown to include over 300 participants.

Bridges Across Racial Polarization® is a voluntary program that brings together groups of 8 to 12 people from a mix of racial backgrounds. The groups meet regularly on an informal, social basis, often in each other's homes. Program participants have the opportunity to interact and build relationships with people from other races whom they might not otherwise meet, to hear different ideas and perspectives, and to increase mutual awareness and understanding. To launch a Bridges group, program staff recruit and train one person of color and one white person to act as co-

hosts. The co-hosts help recruit group participants from different racial backgrounds. Usually the participants do not know each other before the groups are formed. Groups typically meet for a potluck dinner six to eight times a year, with each session lasting two to three hours. Often groups discuss books or media articles about race, share family traditions, and talk about personal experiences with racism and prejudice. Other activities include attending theater performances, concerts, and lectures on race issues. Program staff provide support, training, and materials.

Testing 1, 2, 3: Based on findings from an outside evaluation, Bridges Across Racial Polarization® is effective in improving individual relationships between people of different races and promoting racial understanding. Participants report developing deeper, more trusting relationships with members of their Bridges group who are of different races than themselves. In addition, Bridges program participants apply their new knowledge about racism and racial polarization in their personal lives and in their communities outside of the group. This is groundbreaking research using an approach sometimes disregarded as too "soft" to assess quantitatively.

Working Together Works

Maintenance Required:

- Recruitment and marketing require ongoing attention. School groups, youth, and faith communities may be particularly interested in participating.
- Develop and disseminate up-to-date information about racial issues. Incorporate knowledge on how interracial contact works into training and written materials.
- Ensure a diversity of race, gender, and marital status in each group of participants. This balance is meant to eliminate any sense of isolation among participants and leads to a more productive discussion and interchange of ideas.
- Rotate hosting the session among participants' homes. This allows everyone to share in some aspect of support for each gathering (either hosting or bringing food for the meal). Potluck dinners also reinforce the social and personal aspect of the project. It should not feel like a business meeting.
- Form a steering committee comprised of individuals from various stakeholder groups to advise staff in maintaining and growing the program.
- Program staff should track the progress of all groups and share ideas and success stories with the others. Groups benefit from learning about their counterparts' activities, issues, and questions.

Warning:

- Determine the appropriate organizational home for a racial polarization program. While a regional civic organization is well suited for Bridges in St. Louis, a different type of organization may be a more appropriate home in a different community.
- Support each group's activities. Naturally, some existing groups do not want or need much special assistance from program staff; however, some other groups may need help improving or enriching their discussions.

For many communities across the United States, racial polarization negatively impacts the growth and development of civic-minded communities. Racism and racial polarization are embedded in issues such as urban sprawl, light rail expansion, political campaigns, equal education, and economic opportunity. Programs like Bridges help to reverse racial polarization and to promote interracial communication and understanding. Bridges is not the answer to all systemic racial issues, but it is a model that citizens in any racially polarized community can adopt to begin improving race relations. For more information, see www.focus-stl.org.

Conclusion

WRITING MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO IN A LETTER to Smithsonian director Samuel Langley, aviation pioneer Wilbur Wright summed up his hopes for the invention we now call the airplane. He wrote "I believe that simple flight at least is possible to man. I am an enthusiast but not a crank. I wish to avail myself of all that is already known and then if possible add my bit."

The mechanics of invention have never really changed. Discovery still requires knowing what's out there, having a vision of what could be, and staying focused. Inventors don't often get it right the first time; they survey the information available, gather data from previous experiments, and stay the course until the problem is solved. They build and expand on knowledge, often taking risks to reach greater understanding.

Because they had studied the aerodynamic theories of those who came before them, Orville and Wilbur Wright understood that in order to achieve the "lift" required to sustain flight over time, opposing forces had to be in balance. Without resistance there could be no flight. The same theory holds true for community inventions. Community solutions are not easy to achieve. There must be a proper balance of forces—of push and pull—for a good idea or solution to get the "lift" required to take off, and take hold, in a community. Ideas do not change systems unless they overcome resistance and create new thinking.

Many good ideas would never get off the ground without an advocate organization pushing against the wind. Who knows how long we might have waited for the airplane if Orville and Wilbur Wright hadn't had a passion for doing just that? The 19 community solutions profiled in this book have asked the right questions, remained focused day after day and year after year, and been creative in their approaches to problems and opportunities. They have added their "bit" to what's already out there, and we hope this book will do the same.

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CONCLUSION

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