

# Ladder Out of Poverty Task Force

## *Advisory Work Group Summary:*

### *Community Supports 10.19.10*

**A. Group Name:** Community Supports

**B. Members Present:**

Rep. Morrie Lanning, Task Force Chair

Amy Brenengen (MN Office of Economic Status of Women), Pam Johnson (Minnesota Community Action Partnership), Mary Nienow (Child Care Works), Mary Ackerman (Search Institute), Alice Moren (Kootasca Community Action), Penny Clements (Circles of Support-Itasca County), Jenny Schwoppe (MN Office of Economic Status of Women, Gregory Gray (Minneapolis Community Action), David Hicks (Senate Majority Research), Susie Schatz (Lutheran Social Services of MN), Marie Melroe (MN Office on The Economic Status of Women)

*(See below for full list of committee membership as of 10.19.10)*

**C. Scope: How would you summarize the focus area of your group?**

This group is focused on defining, identifying, and promoting social asset programs and initiatives, and illustrating the return on investment of such programs and activities.

**D. Findings: What key themes, facts and/or background information has your group discovered so far?**

**New but old:** Social Asset programs, and/or programs promoting social capital, are not necessarily new, but perhaps these programs have never been intentionally linked together.

**Universal Approach, Customized Implementation:** Several models for building social capital through community engagement were examined. One of these models is called Circles of Support, and is an initiative of Minnesota's Community Action network. An important feature of this initiative is that it employs a an overall theoretical and social framework, yet is implemented differently in each community that uses the Circles of Support model based on local needs and resources. Implementation of the Circles of Support initiative will be unique to each community and setting. This characterization is also an appropriate descriptor of Social Asset development programs in general. While our discussion during this first meeting focused on two specific models, there was agreement that the use of Social Asset development programs is viewed as universally unique to each community that operates them.

The Search Institute model for Social Asset Development was a second approach reviewed by Work Group members. This volunteer-based initiative offers a set of 40 research-based Assets considered critical for youth to grow up as healthy and contributing members of society. Among the sixty communities that have used the “40 Assets” as a guide to youth development programming report that this model reduces competition among youth-serving organizations and promotes cooperation as “Healthy Community” initiatives.

There was also discussion about the Minnesota Alliance for Youth, which grew out of the national “America’s Promise” initiative championed by Colin Powell at the national level. This model engages youth in leadership development skills building, and is focused on intergenerational community involvement. Two hundred “Promise Fellows” have been placed in communities in a format similar to VISTA volunteers, conducting community-building efforts that meet locally identified needs.

Other initiatives discussed for inclusion in our program inventory included Child Care Works’ interest in expanding its focus to include parent engagement activities, and efforts by Lutheran Social Services to support the needs of veterans and senior citizens. Northern Connections is a model operating in 11-12 rural communities in northern Minnesota that links isolated people needing services to a one-to-one support system via telephone. Community Action Agencies helped to launch Northern Connections, which could be expanded beyond a regional approach to offer statewide support.

Minnesota Investment Foundations were mentioned as a source of expansion funding beyond state resources.

### **Our Challenge to Articulate the connection between the Community Supports Work Group and Asset-Building and Financial Education Work Groups.**

Members examined ways in which this Work Group differs from the Asset Development/Wealth Creation and Financial Education Work Groups operating under the overall Ladder out of Poverty Task Force umbrella. It was noted that our members will have the challenge of clearly articulating the financial return of investment in Social Asset-building programs in order to assist other Task Force members in recognizing the connection between these programs and other financial asset-building initiatives.

### **E. Potential Recommendations: What ideas is your group considering for further exploration and vetting?**

- 1. Defining Features of Social Asset Programs:** As the group discussed social asset programs, several common features of the programs were identified. Social Asset programs:
  - Work *with* communities, not *for* them.
  - Employ a universal approach that is customized to each community setting, incorporating equal input from participants and program staff regarding program implementation.

- Prioritize community engagement as a critical element
- Are holistic in nature, understanding the complexities of living in poverty within the overall challenges that life presents to all community members.
- Are intentional in their efforts to engage people of diverse backgrounds, income levels, age and gender.
- Operate for at least one year, and often longer.

The group will continue to shape and refine this list as we move forward in our work.

2. **Re-aligning funding** streams to include resources for social asset programs – dollars to mobilize and expand current successful efforts. We discussed the idea of introducing and supporting legislation that promotes the goals of this Work Group.
3. **Partnering with Federal delegation** to expand education and interest in such programs.
4. **Engage private philanthropy and interested individuals** in advancing social assets that promote the greater common good.

**F. Standout Considerations: What do you most want the members of the full Commission to know about your group and its work so far?**

Tentative plan for 11.18.10 task Force meeting:

-1 hour for presentation including:

- Overview of definition of social assets, fit with the larger task force work (Pam)
- Testimony from Circles (Alice, Xavier or delegate?)
- Testimony from Search Institute (Delegate of Mary Ackerman).

**G. Next Steps: How do you intend to proceed and what will you focus on?**

Homework:

- review documents distributed at meetings (Amy will post online)
- continue to compile Social Asset Inventories
  - one for programs;
  - one for studies/evaluations/reports, etc.

**H. Follow Up Tasks**

- Schedule a second meeting if needed before November 18 (If your group chooses this option, please communicate date, time and locale to Amy Brenengen so it can be posted and announced). **CONFERENCE CALL ON WED NOV 10 at 3:00 PM - PAM WILL DISTRIBUTE CALL-IN INFORMATION.**

Minutes taken by: Amy Brenengen – [amy.brenengen@oesw.leg.mn](mailto:amy.brenengen@oesw.leg.mn) // 651-296-0711

**Ladder Out of Poverty Task Force  
Community Support Work Group as of 10.19.10**

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