

Changing mindsets. Building bridges out of poverty.



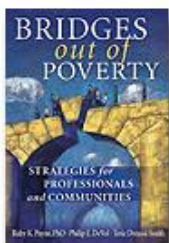
A publication of

Unite Escambia's *Poverty Solutions Team*

www.uniteescambia.com

Solution Partners in Action

By Janice Thomas, Circuit 1 Administrator, Department of Children & Families
Chair of Poverty Solutions Team



Lakeview Center Inc. is making strides in helping to educate others about the barriers and solutions related to poverty in our community. Families First Network of Lakeview's Training Director, Elena Aldridge, recently received national certification as a trainer in Bridges Out of Poverty from aha! Process. Mrs. Aldridge has adapted this training to provide it to all area child welfare staff thus enabling case workers, child protective investigators and contracted service providers to have a better understanding of barriers caused by poverty and how to work with families to develop solutions. Based on Dr. Ruby Payne's, *Bridges Out of Poverty*, participants were able to identify their own stereotypes and "mental models" regarding people who struggle with poverty.

While Lakeview offers diverse services for behavioral health, vocational services, developmental disabilities and child protection, its employees share a common challenge to help individuals living in poverty. The benefit to Lakeview Center's other staff was apparent, thus at the January 13, 2010 Lakeview Center leadership meeting, all the agency's leaders had the opportunity to see poverty through new eyes.

The efforts of Lakeview Center to promote solution-based poverty information is a good example of how *Poverty Solutions Partners* can be a part of the solution to reduce poverty in our community.

Visit www.uniteescambia.com to learn more about becoming a solutions team partner.

Community Assessment

The community assessment is an essential component of the *Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' By World* course. During the assessment individuals from the community join with course participants in evaluating eight crucial areas to a sustainable community.

This is an excellent opportunity to interact with poverty experts (those who have experience in living below the federal poverty level).

We need **twelve participants** to participate on:

Tuesday, April 13 from 6:00-8:00 pm at the Sacred Heart School, 1301 Moreno Street at Twelfth Avenue.

If you are able to be a part of this community assessment, contact Haley Richards, (850)429-7296, ext 17 or richardsh@cc.ptdiocese.org.

Training Opportunities



STEPPING OUT

Ally Training

This two hour session presents an overview of the Bridges to Circles poverty initiative and begins to equip the individual to serve as an ally for an individual moving from poverty to self-sufficiency. Ally training is conducted at the Catholic Charities Outreach Center at 1815 N Sixth Avenue. **Upcoming training date is Thursday, April 15, 2010, 6:00-8:00pm at Catholic Charities Outreach Center.** Contact Haley Richards 429-7296, ext 17 or richardsh@cc.ptdiocese.org to register!

Bridges Out of Poverty

If you are looking to counter poverty or its impact on the people and businesses in our community, explore the innovative concepts and training found in Bridges Out of Poverty by Dr. Ruby Payne.

To schedule a presentation contact Haley Richards, Bridges to Circles VISTA at 429-7296, ext 17 or richardsh@cc.ptdiocese.org.

URGENT APPEAL for ALLIES

Bridges to Circles needs to reach as many people as possible as quickly as possible. Our Circle Leaders need allies. Help us help those who want to work their way out of poverty. Give us an audience with your fellow employees, parishioners and/or members of organizations with which you are involved. We can provide:

*A 3-5 minute talk about the need
(Perfect for staff meetings)*

*A 45-60 minute presentation about the impact of poverty
A staffed table display in a break room or entry area
A flyer or email you can distribute*

The *Bridges to Circles* poverty initiative, as part of Unite Escambia's Poverty Solutions Team and Catholic Charities, is working with families who currently live below the federal poverty level with a strong desire to move to self-sufficiency. Circle 'Leaders' as they are called, have completed the fifteen week *Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' By World* program and are now meeting weekly on Tuesday nights as they work their plans to better their lives.

A key component to the success of Circles Leaders is the support of Allies. Allies are individuals from the community who commit to meeting at least twice each month on Tuesday evenings. Allies come to build a relationship with them as well as encourage them on their plans and to serve as a resource as needed.

We urgently need Allies to sustain Bridges to Circles. Lend a hand, and help us reach more people in our community as we work to reduce poverty in Escambia County by 50% by 2020. To get involved contact Haley Richards, 429-7296, ext 17 or richardsh@cc.ptdiocese.org.

Building Assets toward Self-Sufficiency

By Haley Richards, Bridges to Circles VISTA

The Bridges to Circles poverty initiative is pleased to announce:

Levettra Gabito and Princess Robinson

have been accepted into the Individual Development Account (IDA) Program. The IDA is a matched savings account for low to moderate income individuals committed to moving from poverty to self-sufficiency through Bridges to Circles. For every dollar saved it is matched with two dollars! Both Levettra and Princess recently completed phase one of the financial literacy requirements which enabled them to open their IDAs at Beach Community Bank.

The IDA program is an option for Circles Leaders actively working their goals to save money for a specific purpose; higher education, start a small business, or buy a first house. Bridges to Circles led by Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida received match funds through a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services Assets for Independence (AFI) Program. Building assets is a goal that both Levettra and Princess has accomplished on their journey toward self-sufficiency.



The story you've just read is about community more than about poverty. Building bridges can begin with simple acts or it can begin with great commitments. Joining the *Bridges to Circles* community is one of those commitments. It is a commitment to build bridges among people and across many segments of our community. Remember, it is about community.

Pathways for Change: A Better Way

By Charlotte Crane Member, Poverty Information Group

Seth, 25 – five times in jail, several years in addiction programs – was serving time at the Escambia Road Camp when he was contacted by Pathways for Change (PFC) and asked if he was interested in participating in their program.

Seth is now 10 months into his 18-month program at PFC where he is rising early, attending classes, receiving therapy, participating in rehabilitation, taking college courses, planning to learn welding, doing community service, learning about parenting, and praying. Seth and his fiancée had been on food stamps, evicted from their home, and living in a shed before starting the program. “It’s (PFC program) the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” says Seth. “Before, I was aiming at nothing and hitting nothing: running from problems, doing drugs, working low-level jobs. My fiancée was pregnant and I couldn’t support her.”

Today Seth’s eyes light up when he talks about his stepson and baby son, whom he gets to see with his fiancée during weekend family time.

PFC has proven itself a less costly and more effective way to turn lives around. Cost is \$15,000 per year per inmate, compared to \$44,000 for inmates in state prison. Of those completing PFC, research shows only 8% have been re-arrested after release, compared to 68% of offenders released from county jails or state prisons.

Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of criminal behavior. PFC executive director Connie Bookman says, “If you take the breadwinner out of the household, the public pays through food stamps, public housing, welfare payments, foster care, and more.”



Bay Area Works Conducts Employment Barriers Survey

During the month of February, the Bay Area Works Team conducted a survey of unemployed and under-employed individuals in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties to identify barriers to employment. Over three hundred individuals completed the survey.

Along with demographic information, survey questions included information about soft skills, financial barriers, transportation, child care, education, credit, and other topics to identify issues preventing individuals from obtaining adequate employment.

Some of the financial barriers identified include gaining skills, cost of training, transportation, and child care. Other barriers included soft skills, self esteem, confidence and motivation.

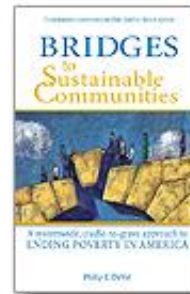
In conjunction with a survey of employers, these results will be used to develop a business case that will guide Bay Area Works implementation.

Visit www.uniteescambia.com to view survey results.

Poverty Book Review

By Kathleen Logan, Community Volunteer / CO- Chair Poverty Information Group

The most succinct statement I’ve ever read about poverty comes from a high school student: “We have been doing a lot to help people live in poverty—but not a lot to help people get out of it. We all have to do something to change that.” – Alivia Douglas, Student Volunteer, Corcoran High School, Syracuse, NY.



What a powerful observation! And a book to help Escambia County make such changes is *Bridges to Sustainable Communities: A Systemwide, Cradle-to-Grave Approach to Ending Poverty in America* by Philip E. DeVol. If you’ve read previous newsletters, you know Philip is intimately involved in eradicating poverty in America. He co-wrote *Bridges Out of Poverty*, describing a process that we are using locally to move individuals and families up and out of poverty in conjunction with Circles™. Don’t worry about the terminology—just get on board with the hundreds of citizens who are already involved in making a difference. Read DeVol’s most recent book for a summary of what’s going on in our country and how to make life work for everyone...including right here in Escambia County. YOU can be a partner in this community effort.

Experiences

by Janet Westlake, *Bridges to Circles* community organizer

Hope in the midst of poverty in Escambia County became very real to me when I went on a Habitat for Humanity home visit in a rural section of the county. After traveling down a red clay road, I pulled up to a weathered rental house on pilings in the middle of a clearing. The house had no heat or air-conditioning. Over the years the windows had been painted shut. When the weather was too cold, the family opened the oven door. In the midst of all of this, there was a new computer sitting in the front room. The mother had leveraged her tax return to pay cash for it. She knew her daughters would struggle in high school without a computer. The mother had hope and a brighter vision for her family's future.

Hope and vision motivated me in September 2008 to become the community organizer for the *Bridges to Circles* poverty initiative; a ministry of Catholic Charities in partnership with Unite Escambia's Poverty Solutions Team. I was first exposed to Scott Miller's national Circles campaign and Ruby Payne's *Bridges out of Poverty* concepts through my volunteer service as the chair of the family selection committee for Habitat for Humanity. After meeting Circles staff stretching from New Jersey to Idaho at the Circles Hands-on Training, Estella Lee, the *Bridges to Circles* coach, and I launched into this new work.

Our first *Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' By World* was led by a team of dedicated volunteers. We had a diverse group of babies, toddlers, and teenagers who came with the class participants. 18 months later, the babies are talking and the teenagers have been inspired to volunteer in our community through their exposure to the Chain Reaction youth volunteers that helped with the childcare. Every class brought a unique perspective on the causes of poverty and the steps to self-sufficiency along with the desire to get ahead. The spring *Getting Ahead* class would break out into song in the midst of the class sessions which is reverberated at their present Circles meetings.

In March 2009 we matched our first *Getting ahead* graduates as Circle Leaders with volunteers from the community who serve as their allies. This group meets every Tuesday night and has truly built a community that sustains and supports each other. The Circle has grown to over 100 participants meeting together every Tuesday. Participants have focused on personal successes along with a Big View perspective that connects the small groups of allies and Circle Leaders with efforts for county-wide change. During Circles we have experienced smiles over new dentures, college grants, first-time home buyers, and children succeeding in school. I will always treasure the memory of our teenagers line-dancing with community leaders at Magee Field during *National Night Out* in 2009.

On October 8, 2009, Dr. Ruby Payne posed the question, "How does a society address the under-resourced without destroying the resourced?" This will continue to be the challenge and the growing edge for poverty eradication in Escambia County. Some of the next steps for *Bridges to Circles* and the Poverty Solution Team include:

- Utilizing the current and future stories of the Circle Leaders in community presentations. Their personal experiences impact the mindset of the listening audiences.
- Expanding the knowledge of community resources so that resources are available to all and program duplication is eliminated.
- Channeling the experiences of allies and Poverty Solutions Team volunteers into solution-based directions and activities.
- Persevering with the work of the action teams to create county-wide systemic change around poverty issues. Continuing the collaborative efforts of agencies, churches, businesses, and politicians. Together We Achieve More!

Through my experience as the *Bridges to Circles* community organizer I have come to a new awareness of predatory lending; emergency financial assistance; and collaboration among social service agencies, businesses, and churches. As I leave this role and move closer to family my personal and professional life will be changed by my experiences with individuals committed to self-sufficiency and a sustainable community through this wonderful program.

The logo features the words "Fight Poverty" in a large, bold, white font with a black outline. Below it, the word "with" is in a smaller, white font, and "PASSION" is in a large, bold, white font with a black outline, all set against a dark background.

For more information about the Poverty Solutions Team, including our Mission, a Call to Action for both individuals and businesses, Definition of Terms, Team Descriptions / Contacts and Training Programs, visit www.uniteescambia.com.

Don't forget to tune in to ***Bridges Out of Poverty*** airing on WUWF-TV at various times each week. Call us for more information at 479-9692

Together We Achieve More!