



Taking Action to Address Poverty

A City Practice Brief

November 2007

In the face of persistently high poverty rates, growing income disparities, and the changing skill needs of today's knowledge-based economy, city leaders are taking action to address family economic insecurity and decreased participation in civic life. This City Practice Brief presents examples of innovative leadership, effective coalition building, and the creative use of resources to improve the quality of life for low-income families.

For more examples, visit the City Practices database on the NLC website.

Partners for a Prosperous Athens

City: **Athens, Georgia**

Population: 111,580

For more information, contact: Joseph Whorton, Staff Coordinator
(706) 542-7553
www.prosperousathens.org

In 2007, Mayor Davison brought together the Chamber of Commerce, the Clarke County education department, the Family Connection Partnership and the University of Georgia to create a collaborative initiative called Partners for a Prosperous Athens (PPA). The purpose of PPA is to develop comprehensive strategies to challenge the community to think in new ways about combating poverty. In doing so, PPA has involved thousands of Athenians in conversations about their community, encouraging unique and collaborative partnerships in addition to promoting a new way of thinking amongst all community interests and institutions.

OneAthens, a successor organization to assure accountability and align the strategic planning processes of the co-conveners, sees that funding addresses the most important community needs. Ten initiatives for OneAthens were created out of the 155 recommendations from the community to PPA for an anti-poverty plan. These initiatives are aimed at boosting the regional economy, early learning, education, workforce development, family engagement, public transportation, affordable housing, health, teen pregnancy, and economic development.

Columbus' Community Reinvestment

City: **Columbus, Georgia**

Population: 188,660

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www.columbusga.org/communityreinvestment/index.htm

The City of Columbus has partnered with key local agencies, including the Urban League, Habitat for Humanity, Columbus Housing Initiative, and Fourth Street Towers, Inc., in order to leverage federal funds and address the housing needs of poverty stricken families. Through the Project Care Program, the Department of Community Reinvestment is tackling accessibility issues for low-income elderly and disabled persons. The Homeless Resource Network serves approximately 1,500 homeless individuals each year through advocacy, education, and the coordination of homeless services in the community. Through the "One Team-One Dream" Program, city employees reached out to low and moderate income persons, informing them about various city programs available as well as empowering them to improve their neighborhoods. To help discharge low-income and/or special needs individuals, the Continuum of Care Plan connects foster care, health care, mental health, and correctional institutions to the organizations most qualified to assist this population. One of the city's strongest anti-poverty strategies has been to leverage funding through the Section 108 loan in order to retain the corporate campus of a major employer with 4,712 jobs, of which 1,150 are for low to moderate income individuals.

Partnerships to Build Wealth and Reduce Poverty Among Dayton Families

City: **Dayton, Ohio**

Population: 156,771

For more information, contact: Kathy Emery, Community Affairs Manager
(937) 333-4271

Dayton's anti-poverty initiative, Partnerships to Build Wealth & Reduce Poverty Among Dayton Families, is a three-pronged approach that addresses homelessness and unemployment, and seeks to increase the wealth and self-sufficiency of Dayton families. The city sees its role as that of a convener, facilitator, catalyst, advocate, and policy maker, as well as the agency that leverages resources and provides data analysis.

The four goals of the initiative are to: retain, grow and attract living wage jobs with advancement potential; increase adult self-sufficiency; improve educational outcomes, graduation rates, and the employability of youth; and partner with neighborhoods to make them safe, vibrant, desirable places to live, work, and raise a family.

The City of Dayton works with employers to assist low-income workers to take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit and promote its "Living Wage" policy, which ensures that employees receive a fair wage, currently starting at \$7 per hour. Dayton has also partnered with community organizations to implement many initiatives that include improving school readiness, reform, and attendance; a comprehensive workforce development project; welfare reform; an Anti-Predatory Lending Ordinance; Individual Development Accounts; and increasing homeownership.

Greenville's Community Development

City: **Greenville, South Carolina**

Population: 57,428

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Greenville's poverty work began in the early 1970s when, based on census data indicating poverty levels above 50 percent, the City of Greenville designated several 'special emphasis' neighborhoods. The city began developing master plans for these neighborhoods, addressing their environmental, social, and economic needs. In 2001, Greenville directed more public service funds to programs that address the root causes of poverty, specifically fair housing, after-school tutoring, homeownership, and employment. The general vision was to provide meaningful opportunities for low-income residents to move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

Two vital programs have developed out of Greenville's more recent efforts: the LADDER Program and the KEY program. Both programs have successfully engaged the entire community in a collaborative effort to address poverty through revitalization partnerships and comprehensive, community-owned and driven programs. The LADDER Program provides an intense system of services and support to meet the employment needs of eligible participants. The goals for participants include: increased earnings, self-sufficiency, financial assistance, and job skills training. The KEY program for homeownership provides free counseling and education to help low-to-moderate income residents through the home-buying process. As of May 2007, 154 individuals participating in the LADDER program had been placed in jobs with a retention rate of 92 percent, and total earnings of these placements since the program measurement period began is over four million dollars. The KEY program has placed a total of 41 first-time homebuyer families in new housing constructed since July 2002.

Poverty Reduction Initiative

County: **Kalamazoo County, Michigan**

Population: 240,720

For more information, contact: Kimberly Crider, Director
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The Kalamazoo County Poverty Reduction Initiative (PRI), started in 2004 with help from the City Commission and Chamber of Commerce, works with community members to identify and coordinate poverty reduction efforts. Through leadership, research, planning, facilitation, and resource development, PRI sees itself as the catalyst for creating and coordinating poverty reduction initiatives in the county. PRI stresses the need for not only a holistic, best-practices approach to poverty reduction that utilizes various

methods of engagement, but also believes in the importance of cross-sector (public, private, and non-profit) collaboration and accountability.

PRI has been successful in advocating for more affordable housing, EITC outreach and coordination, and convening residents around the issue of poverty. With regard to affordable housing, PRI partners pressured the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to build more low and moderate income housing for Kalamazoo families. In addition, the Tax Counseling Initiative leverages funding and other resources to help low-income families get the tax credits they qualify for, bringing almost \$900,000 to the community. PRI engages the community through hosting Community Action Poverty Simulations, and convening community meetings around poverty with presentations from experts. Most recently, PRI has partnered with MassMutual Life Insurance Company to provide free life insurance to low and moderate-income residents.

ACCESS Miami

City: **Miami, Florida**

Population: 404,048

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www.accessmiamijobs.com

Standing for Assets, Capital, Community, Education, Savings, and Success, ACCESS Miami is one piece of Mayor Diaz's Anti-Poverty Initiative that was launched in 2001. ACCESS Miami works with financial institutions on a one-on-one basis to offer customized services to low-income residents. Services include financial seminars, tax preparation, match saving programs, micro lending, and employment opportunities.

ACCESS Miami has established numerous collaborations with partners including the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, H&R Block, and the Mortgage Bankers Association. These ACCESS Miami partners are jointly combating poverty and assisting working families.

Through ACCESS Miami, small business owners have received over \$1,000,000 in micro-loans, and city-affiliated tax preparation assistance has served more than 18,000 residents to date, saving them over \$1,600,000 in fees. More than 750 City residents have opened IRA savings accounts, individual development accounts and debit plus accounts.

Commission for Economic Opportunity

City: **New York, New York**

Population: 8,214,426

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Despite economic growth and changes in federal, state, and local welfare and related policies, poverty continues to be a persistent problem in New York City. One in five New Yorkers and a third of the city's children live in poverty. Moreover, there are pockets of concentrated extreme poverty where more than 40% of the population lives below the Federal Poverty Line. In response, in January of 2006 Mayor Bloomberg formed the Commission for Economic Opportunity (CEO) to study the issue and reduce the number of people living in poverty in New York City.

The CEO focused on several areas related to poverty: education, job growth, health, housing, workforce development, social service supports, and data collection and evaluation. In September 2006, it recommended reducing barriers facing the working poor, young adults, and young children. These three groups not only account for nearly half of the city's poor, but are also at risk of long-term poverty.

The strategies are to reduce need, reward personal initiative, and reaffirm hope. CEO implements and evaluates 30 programs and initiatives and leverages public and private resources to ensure the three identified key populations are targeted. One CEO initiative is Opportunity NYC, the nation's first conditional cash transfer program. Modeled after a successful program in Mexico that has been replicated worldwide, it helps the neediest families focus on investing in improving the health, education and nutrition needs of their children.

Communities of Opportunity

City: **San Francisco, California**

Population: 744,041

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www.coosf.org

Spearheaded by Mayor Newsom, Communities of Opportunity (COO) is an innovative partnership of members including 15 city departments, 8 private foundations, 30 nonprofits, and over 1,000 residents. COO started with a pilot initiative to change the lives of 2600 families in the southeast and as it demonstrates success will be rolled-out to other areas of the city. In each area of concern: youth, employment, health, safety, social capital, development, environment, and personal power, there is a series of "catalyst programs" that seek to move individuals towards living more safe, productive and fulfilling lives. COO is determined to see measurable improvement within five years and has leveraged over one billion dollars to change communities by helping residents.

The Mayor's office is leading an effort to share data, improve communications with families, and encourage city departments, nonprofits, and schools to work together in innovative ways that create positive change in the most disconnected neighborhoods. Action teams made up of residents help prioritize services needed and residents choose the neighborhood organizations to provide them. The city, nonprofits and residents alike are holding each other accountable for measuring and achieving real results.

Step Up Savannah

City: **Savannah, Georgia**

Population: 127,889

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Savannah's anti-poverty efforts were sparked not only by concern over the city's growing income inequality, but also the facts that children face a greater risk of poverty than adults and African American and Latino children are five times more likely to live in poverty in Chatham County than white or Asian children. Under the leadership of Mayor Johnson and assisted by the University of Georgia, the city convened an Anti-Poverty Task Force in 2003 to identify the challenges faced by residents living in poverty and the strategies needed to help them move out of poverty. The task force identified best practices and brought in community stakeholders from other communities for ideas and insights. The city of Savannah hosted a number of poverty simulations to educate the community about the complexity of poverty.

These efforts led to the development of a poverty reduction action plan that was adopted by the city council. With the help of over 50 different organizations, the city launched its anti-poverty initiative called Step Up Savannah with one of the strategic goals being to help families build assets. An action team was created and has set to work on reducing homeownership barriers, increasing savings through expanded EITC outreach, reducing the use of Refund Anticipation Loans, developing an IDA program, and increasing access to financial education. Additionally, Savannah developed a pilot program to provide intensive services to 25 families living in poverty, while also helping the city learn about the specific barriers that poor families face to building financial security.

Emily Gray, Intern with the Center for Municipal Programs and Resources and Sarah Bainton, Program Associate with the Institute for Youth, Education and Families, National League of Cities, developed this Brief.

City Practices Briefs contain examples from NLC's City Practices database, available at www.nlc.org. Series editors: Bruce Calvin and Larry Foxman. For more information contact the NLC Municipal Reference Service at (202) 626-3130 or email: mrs@nlc.org.