

Fox Cities Project Promise Poverty Coalition establishes new direction, affirming its war on local poverty

At its quarterly meeting on December 8, 2010 the Project Promise Poverty Coalition membership approved the strategic direction proposed by its steering committee. That direction reflects continued efforts to raise awareness and understanding of poverty in the Fox Cities, as well as new focus on engaging community leaders in local efforts to address contributing factors of poverty.

The revitalized direction responds to the coalition's updated vision of **“a community where everyone is engaged in maximizing the ability of all community members to achieve their full potential and participate fully in the life of the community.”**

The new Project Promise model includes three task forces under the umbrella of Project Promise. Each task force has a unique mission, tactics, and goals targeted at realizing the Coalition's common vision.

Specific near-term goals have been established for 2011 and were also approved by the members present on December 8.

Summaries of the structure and goals for the coalition may be viewed at the following links:

[Insert link to Coalition Structure and Roles document]

[Insert link to PPPC Goals for 2011 document]

So what exactly does all of this mean?

It's hard to believe that it was already four years ago that the Project Promise journey began. Recall that first 4-month emphasis on raising awareness of poverty in our community in January-April, 2007.

The success of this initial focus, along with the need for ongoing attention to issues of poverty, led to the formation of the Project Promise Poverty Coalition (PPPC) in 2008. Committees were formed and work ensued.

Many people played key roles in helping PPPC achieve impact over the years. PPPC is entirely volunteer-led and supported. Many individuals take time from their “day job” at service agencies to help guide and implement communications and activities to raise awareness, educate, and address poverty. Others are involved as community volunteers. Without these volunteers, PPPC would not exist and would not have positively influenced lives over the years.

During the past three years each of the PPPC committees worked to make progress toward both our short term goals and of course always with an eye toward our long term goal of eliminating poverty in the Fox Cities.

There have been many PPPC accomplishments:

- Analysis & Information Committee:
 - Root Cause Identification, esp. Financial Literacy Research
 - Gather and report poverty facts in the Fox Cities - knowing the numbers helps motivate all of us to continue our work
- Awareness & Education Committee:
 - Speakers Bureau - to help provide community groups education

- *Project Promise Brochure* - describing mission and focus of PPPC and ways to get involved
- Annual meeting planned and delivered in 2008-2010
- Action & Impact Committee:
 - Faith to Face Poverty Week gave more > 30 faith communities opportunity to focus on poverty
 - Resource Fair for past two years
 - Enhanced the PPPC website including monthly updates
 - Worked to create a Continuum of Care Schematic which led to better understanding of the range of services available in the Fox Cities
 - Post Crescent 4-page insert that featured poverty statistics, info and resources
 - Another edition is being developed

Indeed a lot has been accomplished! But as we all know there is more to do. Each of us, through our active participation, can help eliminate poverty.

As the coalition has evolved, we realized early in 2010 that we needed to review our direction. That led to review of our initial objectives and an update in our vision, which is

- **“a community where everyone is engaged in maximizing the ability of all community members to achieve their full potential and participate fully in the life of the community.”**

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As stated from the beginning, it is our intent to avoid competing with agencies that provide services directly to those in poverty. Yet we realize more needs to be done. And we hope that PPPC can help be an effective contributor.

Moving forward, PPPC will have fewer committees and more short-term/project task forces. Work and the associated volunteer time commitments will be focused. Our popular quarterly informational meetings over the noon hour will continue.

We are confident that if we continue to work together to increase our understanding of poverty, to build awareness and educate those around us, and take continuous action, we will be successful in reducing, and ultimately eliminating poverty in the Fox Cities.

Why all this change for Project Promise?

Following months of strategic planning and feedback from the membership and Project Promise Executive Steering Committee it was evident that we needed to make some adjustments in the current structure of Project Promise.

Some coalition members and leaders were experiencing fatigue. There was too much infrastructure with committee meetings. We felt we risked losing focus on what matters most – addressing poverty.

Review of the feedback from coalition members reflects a desire for us to continue to be the voice of poverty, understand the root causes of poverty, raise awareness about poverty, rally community support and action, connect people to opportunities, and address other aspects of poverty. We want to get the

entire community engaged in poverty related issues and we started moving in that direction by redefining our coalition and adding the Opportunity Task Force which will be populated by key community leaders.

We continue the umbrella coalition, supporting continuation of the awareness building and education which Project Promise is known for (and which the community expects from Project Promise), while working to launch a new, powerful team of community leaders to tackle resources and commitment issues. We plan to engage existing Project Promise coalition members while inviting a new cadre of poverty warriors.

Why change from committees to task forces?

We were concerned about meeting fatigue among members. We wanted to reduce the focus on meetings and increase the focus on action. This also creates the opportunity for coalition members to be involved where they are interested without feeling they have to commit to being on a committee for several years. We hope this will reduce the risk of burnout. And finally, we will focus on tapping agency resources through collaboration, rather than risking duplication by existing or new committees and initiatives.

What happens to the initiatives that Project Promise launched?

Much of PPPC's core work will continue under the Awareness Task Force. We will continue to:

- Create knowledge and understanding of poverty
- Support the ongoing work of existing agencies in the community
- Recognize, build upon and encourage more collaborations and relationships
- Partner with existing agencies to create opportunities for the community to learn more about poverty
- Build awareness about resources available in the community by communicating information about the current delivery system
- Facilitate community initiatives
- Pursue broad community membership in the coalition-seeking to enlist all members of the community in knowledge of poverty related issues and commitment to addressing those issues.

We are working on identifying key organizations and individuals who may keep past PPPC work alive, if the community wants it to continue.

Project Promise has become a "brand" name which most people associate with "creating awareness about poverty". We want to leverage and build on that brand, for the positive impact it will have in the community and on individual lives.

What else will continue from Project Promise as we've known it?

We'll continue to hold quarterly membership meetings with a format that includes a program speaker, sharing time and time to network after the meeting.

There will be no formal committees for the coalition to manage. Community members are encouraged to share information at the coalition membership meetings regarding work done by their own agencies or community committees, which will continue to do most of the actual hands-on service work.

We will continue to communicate through various means, including the PPPC website and Facebook with updated information regarding poverty related programs etc. We will continue to encourage community members to submit information.

Will you continue to use the same “definition of poverty”?

Yes, as stated throughout PPPC’s existence, we define poverty as follows:

In economic terms, poverty can be defined as a lack of income or resources to meet the basic needs of life. More broadly, it can be seen as a lack of opportunities, access, assets, or means to meet physical needs, participate fully in the life of one’s community, or strive to fulfill one’s potential and sense of purpose.

Is this new direction really the vision of Project Promise?

We went through several months of planning using a structured and effective process. This included gathering input from PPPC members at a general meeting and in follow-up phone calls. The steering committee was actively involved throughout. Steering committee member and Analysis & Information Co-chair Jeff Williams was our facilitator. Jeff is a professional planning facilitator with Kimberly-Clark. He helped articulate what we were saying and hearing from members. So our hope and intention is that this is indeed the collective vision of the community, particularly those passionate about poverty who have participated with the coalition and therefore gave input to this process.

The vision and direction also reflects a desire by the steering committee to continue to challenge us in our efforts to address poverty in our community. Building community awareness will continue. We believe greater awareness will spark individual and collective actions that help those in need, both in their current situations and in helping pave a better future through opportunity, through learning, and through prevention.

At the same time, it would have been easy to simply continue these awareness-building and educational efforts, but we felt we needed to challenge ourselves and the community to go farther. Our vision of “**a community where everyone is engaged in maximizing the ability of all community members to achieve their full potential and participate fully in the life of the community**” requires that we pursue our mission of “**achieving equality of opportunity and access to resources for a full life for every person.**” Pursuing that sense of opportunity for all led us to challenge ourselves and the community to focus on opportunity, which led to establishing the Opportunity Task Force.

Regardless of how successful the Opportunity Task Force is, our work on elevating awareness in our community will continue.

So who is actually doing all the work? It sounds as though the steering committee is not going to do anything.

Over the past few years PPPC’s work was accomplished primarily through its committees. The steering committee gave them autonomy and they sought guidance and support from the steering committee.

Much of this work was done by small but dedicated groups of committee members. We intend that the task force structure creates flexibility in an individual’s involvement. We still need steering committees for each task force to provide structure and leadership, but an individual member can participate in work on one or more initiatives without committing to long-term committee membership. We will still need leaders for these steering committees, who will guide and coordinate initiatives. But we will also increase our efforts to engage existing agencies and organizations to assist and or lead this work, which they may already be prepared to do, and are already participating in many cases.

The Executive Steering Committee will set overall coalition direction and goals, guide/react/support task forces, arrange for quarterly coalition meetings, identify and prepare future coalition leaders, and other activities designed to maintain the viability and vitality of the Coalition.

Are there other initiatives and organizations with which Project Promise should align?

Undoubtedly there are additional opportunities for partnership. We continue to seek collaboration to eliminate gaps and reduce overlaps and inefficient use of resources.

What will drive Project Promise work?

Our biggest driver is the compassion of PPPC leaders and members for their fellow citizens, their neighbors throughout our community.

We are motivated by several abiding questions:

- What can we do for those in or near poverty?
- Are we doing enough?
- How can we move upstream to address contributing causes of poverty?
- How can we create opportunities for all members of our community?
- How can we promote responsibility and capability instead of dependency, and motivate compassion rather than apathy?

Is Project Promise a success? How are we measuring the impact of Project Promise?

This a topic with which the executive steering committee will continue to grapple.

Several community metrics have been used previously. On the PPPC website we currently report:

- Total poverty rate for the Fox Cities (including Oshkosh).
- Number of local residents living in poverty.
- Hourly wage needed to afford fair market rent in the Fox Cities.
- Estimated wait for rental subsidy through Federal housing programs administered by the three Fox Cities Housing Authorities.
- Number of partially subsidized or free meals provided in the three counties in the Fox Cities.
- Number of food stamp recipients in the Fox Cities.
- Increase in the number of households served by the St. Joseph Food Program.
- Number of clients served by LEAVEN.

There may be other community metrics that would be more descriptive and we will continue to seek and report objective measures that are accurate, informative, and give perspective on the presence of poverty and trends therein. We anticipate these metrics will evolve over time. We also anticipate that some metrics are macro/global in nature, reflecting large groups or large scale regional change, while others are micro-level, measuring individual experience or the impact of specific interventions.

Some things cannot be measured, such as:

- Compassion demonstrated in small acts of kindness
- Silent prayers for those less fortunate
- Respect and generosity to those who serve us (wait staff, cleaning staff, trash collectors, etc.)

Measurement is also made more difficult when rowing against a tide of:

- National and international economic challenges.
- Swings in the political pendulum.
- Societal norms that focus on self before others.
- National and international religious extremes that in some cases emphasize separation and exclusivity over compassion.

Finally, we will also continue to remind our community that behind every number are individuals: parents, children, brothers, and sisters. These numbers represent real lives, real people, right in our community, nearby every one of us. We seek to give them respect, human dignity, hope, and opportunity.

What happens with the root cause analysis?

Initial stages of root cause analysis (RCA) were completed in Spring 2008. From this work we know key contributing causes of poverty and can identify points of intervention in the poverty cycle, including mental and physical wellness, education and skill development, and general economic conditions.

Poverty root cause was further investigated by the Analysis and Information Committee during 2009-2010. More in-depth research was pursued in the area of financial literacy.

Future work will be dependent on needs of the Executive Steering Committee or the Awareness or Opportunity Task Force. For example, the Opportunity Task Force may want additional data to determine its priorities and if so, could charter additional RCA efforts. The Executive Steering Committee may also pursue a deeper dive on RCA if this becomes a priority.

Who sets the task force goals?

High level goals for the coalition are established each year by the Executive Steering Committee. Some of these goals may include specific objectives for a task force. Task forces will also have the autonomy to create additional goals for themselves as their volunteer resources may allow.

What role will past committee members play in the new structure?

We hope all past and current committee members, as well as others who have helped on PPPC's work in other ways, will choose to participate on task force initiatives. We will also need many of these volunteers to participate on the Awareness Task Force steering committee. We anticipate contacting as many of these individuals as we can to invite them to continue to be involved with Project Promise. The community needs their talents, insights, and energy.

The Fight Against Poverty Pledge

Today and every day, I am the difference in the fight against poverty. I am committed to building a community where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.