

Bridges to Opportunity

Bridges to Opportunity is a local effort bringing together individuals and organizations to develop a collaborative approach that enhances resources which promote opportunities for individuals and the community.

Key Concepts:

- Bring all classes, all sectors and all political persuasions to the decision making table
- Address all causes of poverty (Individual Choices & Circumstances, Community: Human & Social Capital, Exploitation, and Political/Economic Structures)
- Stabilize the environment and build resources to provide long-term support for transition
- Create a sustainable community where everyone can live well

Structure:

There is a Steering Committee and five workgroups. The Steering Committee includes individuals transitioning out of poverty and representatives from financial institutions, healthcare, faith-based communities, higher education, non-profits, social services, the school system, law enforcement, behavioral health, the government, community action, and business.

The workgroups include: Getting Ahead/Engagement of All, Mentoring, Youth Engagement, Resource Building and Policy.

Actions:

- Gain insight from the community about the frustrations experienced trying to get ahead in life, what holds people back from moving forward in life, factors that make life most difficult, and what would need to happen for individuals to be part of this community effort?
- Coordinate an educational campaign including:
 - *Bridges Out of Poverty* – to change the way people think about economic class, all the causes of poverty, and their influence on the entire community
 - *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World* – to enable participants to examine their own experience of poverty as well as explore issues in the community that impact poverty – banking, housing, jobs, transportation – providing critical information the community can use to take action to end poverty.
- Develop and implement an allies program to help individuals in transition with resource and confidence building
- Seek insight from youth and identify opportunities to engage youth in the future of our community
- Advocate for education/career development, civic engagement, and support opportunities
- Identify resources and gaps in affordable, quality housing, transportation, child care, employment and financial sufficiency
- Explore ways to move resources from Getting By to Getting Ahead
- Engage businesses in resource building as a means of improving retention, employee relations and performance.
- Explore barriers to financial independence and policy changes to create better opportunities, at the local, state and federal levels
- Advocate for policy changes that will address the causes of poverty and support resource building which will result in a sustainable community for all

Outcomes:

With action by individuals and organizations in the community, *Bridges to Opportunity* will help:

- Move individuals from poverty to self-sufficiency
- Reduce social costs related to crime, poor health, and welfare
- Strengthen educational attainment and job skills
- Enhance economic development and revitalize neighborhoods

If you want to share an idea, participate in training or become involved in Bridges to Opportunity, please contact Nancy Forlifer, Facilitator at 240-964-8422 or nforlifer@wmhs.com.