

## Community Solutions Planning

### BLUE RIBBON ADVISORS AND COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS TEAMS

#### 7<sup>th</sup> CHECK POINT MEETING

September 30, 2009; 7:30-9:30 a.m.

Facilitated by: United Way of Benton and Franklin Counties and The Gladstone Group

#### Meeting Notes

##### Purpose

The 7<sup>th</sup> Check Point Meeting of the Blue Ribbon Advisors and the Community Solutions Teams was held on September 30, 2009. The meeting was attended by about 80 people. The purpose of the meeting was to identify additional ways to build a better community through the next Community Solutions initiative.

After welcoming everyone, John Inman, Kids Matter Team Leader, provided a brief overview of the purpose and expected outcomes of the meeting. He acknowledged the attendees for having been involved with Community Solutions since its inception back in October 2006 when the Community Leaders Summit was held. He reminded them that they were all selected to be an important part of Community Solutions because of their expertise, talent and vision to see the possibilities of our community. They have the collective vision that we can truly “improve people’s lives by creating lasting change in community conditions.”

John then covered what is intended to be accomplished today which included the following:

1. Providing reports of our collective work in Community Solutions and Our Babies Can’t Wait.
2. Focusing on selecting the next community-wide initiative. Sharing the feedback from the Community Solutions Teams and community regarding what the high-priority focus area should be for next initiative. Education” is the focus area that seems to have “bubbled” up from the work done by the Teams this summer and the community survey that was recently conducted. “Education” encompasses people of all ages and stages and pertains to lifelong learning, not just academics.
3. Discussing what problems, or issues within the “Education” area that should be focused upon, along with the impacts, benefits and risks.

##### Reports to the Community

John shared the term, Community Solutions, has become a household word. The “Report to the Community” was shared. It outlines some major accomplishments for our community in moving forward with Community Solutions.

1. Although it is too early to see results in all the areas of the comprehensive plan, we are beginning to see some exciting results.
2. We are especially pleased with the ongoing participation and support in our Community Solutions work. There is a group of about 200 people who have been actively participating and supporting Community Solutions.
3. Over the past couple of years, it has been reported that the Community Solutions Plan has provided many organizations with a helpful tool to use in their strategic planning efforts, as well as securing state and federal funding.
4. And of course, another milestone was the launching of the first community-wide initiative, Our Babies Can’t Wait.
5. We are just beginning on a long and exciting journey with lots of work to be done to achieve our vision of “improving lives by creating lasting change in community conditions.” John asked everyone to share this report with others.

John shared the Our Babies Can't Wait community report. He mentioned that at the last Check Point Meeting, in January, we launched the first Community Solutions' initiative, Our Babies Can't Wait. He acknowledged that many organizations have been working diligently on this initiative. Special recognition was given to Sandy Owen with the Benton Franklin Health District as Champion for Our Babies Can't Wait.

1. Eight months into the start of the first Community Solutions' initiative, Our Babies Can't Wait. The vision is that "all children, by the time they reach 20 years of age, will have graduated from high school, be in college or will have successfully entered the world of work." The long-term goal is that children are successful in life; and the short-term goal is that children are healthy and ready for kindergarten.
2. As of the middle of September, over 150 parents have directly benefited from services provided by this community-wide collaborative effort. Our Babies Can't Wait has brought numerous organizations together to leverage resources to expand services for babies and their parents. This initiative is a demonstration of how Community Solutions can be successfully implemented in this community.
3. Our biggest challenge was to increase parent participation in the array of services offered. One change we have made is to open up the eligibility for intensive services beyond East Kennewick to include residents throughout Benton and Franklin Counties. In August and September, many parents attended the workshops. Many more are on a waiting list.
4. There has also been an amazing amount of work down to create increased awareness and understanding of how very important our babies are and that we all have a vested interest in them growing up to be successful and productive.
5. And in support of that work, we have more materials such as posters, brochures, and flyers for you to take with you today for display at your organization and to pass on to others. We have prepared packets for you to take with you today. After the meeting, please see a representative out in the main hall to pick up a packet.
6. John encouraged everyone to share this report with others. He also emphasized that the group's efforts do not stop here. While continuing the work on the Our Babies Can't Wait Initiative, we want to identify additional ways to build a better community. We now have started the planning process for determining an additional community-wide initiative. Please know that this new initiative will not detract or reduce in any way our efforts on the Our Babies Can't Wait initiative.

### **Selecting the Next Community-Wide Initiative**

John introduced Mark Gladstone, with The Gladstone Group, to facilitate the main portion of the meeting. Mark opened with stating that as we implement more community initiatives, in addition to Our Babies Can't Wait initiative, we will be making serious headway on implementing the Community Solutions Plan. Initiatives help to mobilize our community to find lasting solutions to local conditions that will ultimately improve people's lives. He also pointed out that these initiatives are "owned" by the community. They are not United Way initiatives. United Way provides facilitation services, but is just one of many partners who make Community Solutions work in our area.

Written material was provided to all Community Solutions Teams and Blue Ribbon Advisors summarizing the work of Community Solutions Teams earlier this summer. They met twice--in June and again in July.

1. The first thing they did was to establish the criteria or guidelines for selecting future initiatives. They came up with four major areas of criteria that should be considered when determining the next Community Solutions initiative. The criteria and their description were sent to you before today's meeting. A copy (on green paper) is also in front of you today and they include:
  - a. Address root cause
  - b. Inspire community action
  - c. Integrate big-picture strategies
  - d. Create tangible results

The teams then discussed our community's most pressing community conditions. The list was certainly not exhaustive, but it did represent their collective wisdom at that moment in time.

2. As the teams shared their concerns, they broke these issues down into problems, symptoms, root causes and solutions. The conditions shared are some of the current barriers that we have that prevent us from achieving our vision of "improving people's lives by creating lasting change in community conditions." This information was then categorized under the outcome areas on the Community Solutions Plan: Self-Sufficiency, Education, Health and Safety.
3. The next job of the teams was to discuss each of the 4 groups of community conditions and determine to what extent each has the potential of being focused upon for a future initiative. The various initiative criteria were applied to each of these to help with this process.
  - a. The first criteria pertain to addressing the root cause.
    - 1) To what extent could we realistically "address the root cause" of a particular community condition?
    - 2) To what extent could individuals, most in need, be targeted for an initiative?
  - b. The next criteria are to "inspire community action".
    - 1) To what extent could we "inspire community action" if we focused on a particular area for our next initiative?
    - 2) Will we be able to engage a wide segment of the community?
  - c. Another important criteria pertains to the "integration of big-picture strategies"
    - 1) To what extent could big-picture strategies be integrated into a particular initiative?
    - 2) Are there organizations available in our community to participate in the planning and implementation efforts?
    - 3) Would it lend itself to shared leadership, management, promotion and evaluation of a potential initiative?
    - 4) What service gaps or needs would be filled?
    - 5) What are the available resources?
    - 6) Would it address multiple priorities?
  - d. The last criteria relates to "creating tangible results."
    - 1) Could results be achieved?
    - 2) What would be some of the indicators of success? How would they be measured?

The Community Solutions Teams applied the above initiative criteria to each of the four outcome areas (Education, Health, Safety and Self-Sufficiency) to determine the degree to which each would align with the criteria if it were selected as an initiative area. Their consensus was that an initiative in the Education area would most closely align with the criteria, next closest alignment would be Health, next would be Safety and Self-Sufficiency would least align with the criteria.

4. Community Solutions Survey
  - a. The teams decided at their July meeting that the larger community should also weigh-in on what they feel are the pressing issues, root causes and solutions.
  - b. An electronic survey was developed, as well as paper copies in English and Spanish, using the most frequently expressed community concerns shared by the teams. As a framework for the survey, we used media, email lists and asked for the help of all of you and others to get the word out about the survey, and encourage folks to participate. There were 137 survey responses received.
  - c. In general, responses from the community survey mirror the input from the Community Solutions Teams. This was of no surprise because the Community Solution members are very in tuned with the needs of the community.

- d. When responses from the Teams and the survey were combined, education came up on top as the area people were most concerned about with 44% of the responses. It was followed by health with 14% of the responses, safety with 13%, and self-sufficiency with 29%.
  - e. The following examples of the comments related to education were provided in writing to the Community Solutions Team members and Blue Ribbon Advisors:
    - 1) Education is in everything we do. Learning starts at birth and occurs every day after. If parents had what is needed from the onset, our children would be better off.
    - 2) If we have more students prepared for school, we will have fewer students dropping out of the system later on and becoming under-employed, involved in gangs or other criminal activity, or having health care issues.
    - 3) By emphasizing the need for the entire community to support the most at-risk students, it sends a message that students need to finish high school in order to have better life opportunities. Schools cannot do it alone, they need the entire community to step up and play a role in the lives of our most valuable resource, our children.
    - 4) Young people who stay in school and find jobs at graduation are more likely to have a sense of "belonging" within the greater community, and are less likely to be drawn into gangs and/or criminal activity. However, "education" means much more than just teachers in classrooms. They can't possibly do it alone.
    - 5) Improved parenting skills will help solve many of the problems faced in our community such as high school dropouts, gangs and other areas of concern.
    - 6) Through positive role models and successful adults taking a personal interest in children, dreams of the future can become a reality. Positive adults can find resources and network to expand the horizons of children. Education is a huge part of this dream.
  - f. The following problems areas within education were identified by the teams and the community:
    - 1) Lack of parenting, poor parenting
    - 2) Inadequate training/education
    - 3) Dropping out of school
    - 4) Problems in school
    - 5) Children not ready for kindergarten
    - 6) Truancy
    - 7) Lack of after-school activities
    - 8) Illiteracy
    - 9) Teens running away
5. Mark then led an exercise in which all attendees were assigned one of the nine problem areas. Each person teamed up with someone who was assigned a different topic to discuss the impact, benefits and risks of each of the assigned problem areas in terms of it being the next community-wide initiative. The pair distributed 10 points between their topics, e.g., 7 for "illiteracy" and "3" for "truancy". They then moved onto the next person assigned to yet another problem area. The discussion and point distribution process continued until everyone had spoken with 8 other people.
6. When all one-on-one discussions concluded, every one convened with the others who had been assigned the same problem area. They tabulated the total points for that problem area in order that the top areas of concern could be identified. Mark shared that results of the exercise that pointed out that parenting/mentoring, literacy and kindergarten readiness ranked highest in concern among the attendees.

### **Next Steps**

Mark summarized the work accomplished during the meeting. He stated that after the meeting today, United Way will pull together a group of people based on the input and suggestions shared during the meeting in order to begin a more detailed discussion about the 3 top focus areas within education.

### **Wrap Up**

Mark asked people to list their responses in the following areas on the card provided:

1. Rate the effectiveness of the session using a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being the highest;
2. Provide comment on what was missing and what needs to be done differently in future meetings;
3. List name and phone number if interested in participating in detailed planning of the next initiative.

John thanked Mark for leading the group and the work accomplished during the session. He also thanked everyone for their attendance, participation and continued support of Community Solutions.

Recorded by,

Marilyn Davis  
Vice President