

Milwaukee Brighter Futures

A Better Community Through Prevention

Summary of Meeting: Feb. 16, 2010

Public Policy Institute aims at reducing poverty

Riemer outlines role of Community Advocates program to affect policies

The ultimate goal is to “have fewer poor people.”

That summed up the comments of David Riemer in outlining the role of the Public Policy Institute, a two-year-old program of Community Advocates, at the February Brighter Futures meeting.

Riemer said the Institute was founded out of the vision of CA Executive Director Joe Volk to work at reducing poverty and involves three projects.

The first project, “Pathways to Ending Poverty,” is the broadest of all, he said, and is an effort to answer the question of “why are the poor poor?”

He said the Institute is looking at “What can we do



to get us to a point where we have dramatically reduced poverty?” and to ask, “What causes poverty and what can be done to effectively reduce it?”

Riemer indicated that the Institute looks to find those

specific actions that can be done to chip away at certain aspects of poverty, taking actions in smaller steps to develop a long-term reduction. A panel of experts has helped the Institute as it seeks to answer the question: If we changed 8 to 10 laws to reduce poverty from 11% in Wisconsin to 2 or 3%, what would we do?

Riemer listed three broad groups of persons where actions could be considered:

- *Those with disabilities so serious as to make it difficult for them to work and those whose age also makes it difficult to work their way out of poverty.* In such cases, we need to do something to make sure Social Security, along with SSI and SSDI, provide enough to get above the poverty line, he said.
- *Those who are able to work but can't find a job.* Minority males, in particular, have found it difficult to find work. He said that with far

more persons looking for work than there are available jobs, this is a difficult area. He said the Institute worked during the last state budget process with State Sen. Spencer Coggs to create a jobs program which he explained was a “miniature WPA.” He described it as a “demonstration project” that offers a start in creating transitional jobs.

- *Those who are working but don't earn enough to stay out of poverty.* There are supports available, such as Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), FoodShare, BadgerCare, and Wisconsin Shares (childcare subsidies), for which access may be improved and benefits could be increased. He said that while there are plenty of programs, not everyone knows they exist or how to access them; also there often is a lack of funding. Riemer noted that the last state budget provided nearly a \$40 million increase in funding for the state EITC, and there will be an effort to remove the enrollment cap for the Badger Care Core plan for adults with no dependent children.

The second project that the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute has taken the lead on is the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative (MATI). The starting point for MATI is that addiction to alcohol and other drugs should be treated as an illness and not dismissed as a “moral failure.” He said, “We never say to people who eat the wrong food, and develop diabetes, that their insurance won't cover the treatment of their illness.... We never tell a person who has cancer because they smoked that we're only going to provide \$8,000 in benefits.” But, Riemer said, we deny or arbitrarily limit insurance coverage to persons who have an addiction or mental illness.

He added that, just like diabetes or cancer, the addiction problems people face are a result of both physiological and behavioral factors.

The Institute is working on two levels to remedy the problem. The first is to insure that the federal Wellstone-Domenici parity law is fully implemented as it affects low-income individuals enrolled in the BadgerCare Standard, Benchmark, and Core plans.

The second activity is to pass state legislation, the Wisconsin Parity Act, to cover the gaps in the federal law. He suggested going to www.parityforwisconsin.org for information on the measure, Senate Bill 362, currently before the State Assembly.

In response to a question as to why there is opposition to the Wisconsin Parity Act, Riemer said that many persons still feel that addiction and mental illness are not illnesses in the traditional sense, and still impose the same stigma that was prominent in society in years past. The principal argument, however, seems to be objections by small employers that their health insurance premiums would increase. He answered that the Congressional Budget Office's analysis showed that such coverage would increase premiums by only four-tenths of one percent, and this small cost would be more than offset by long-term benefits to employers in the form of reduced absenteeism and improved productivity.

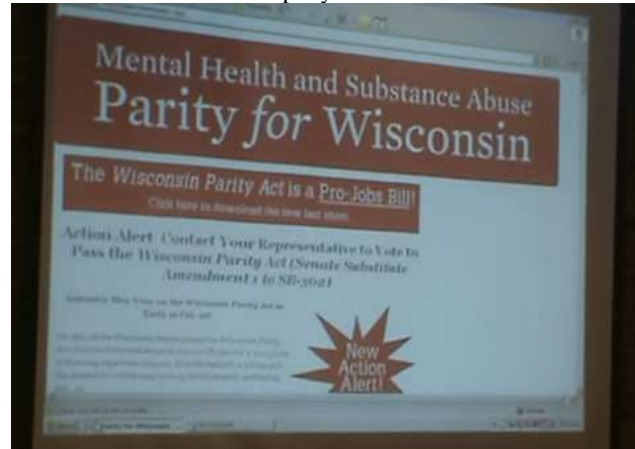
Finally, the Institute is working at making sure that Milwaukee area addiction treatment programs work better, he said. For example, MATI is working with Mental Health America to have that organization's online and printed directories of mental providers include addiction treatment services as well.

The Institute's third project is the Mental Health Policy Initiative, Riemer said. The project involves working with Department of City Development to change the zoning code to make it easier to make sure that individuals who are homeless, and who have a mental illness, can obtain transitional living facilities and supportive housing.

The challenge is dealing with the "Not in my backyard" objection. Everyone wants such facilities to exist, but not in their own neighborhoods, he said. The goal is to develop a policy to permit these facilities to exist, but not to

put too many of them in one area, he said. "We need to share the responsibility across Milwaukee County and the surrounding counties," Riemer said.

In other areas, Riemer described the Institute as "a fairly flexible organization," ready to take on efforts as the need arises. He cited a recent jobs forum to discuss unemployment that the Institute



A view of slide show presentation on parity bill.

organized in partnership with the Northwest Side Community Development Corporation, UMOS and the Urban League. In addition, he said the Institute is doing some work on education reform and other issues.

"We are advocates for policy changes for poor people, mainly at the state level," he said. The Institute has one great advantage in being connected with Community Advocates, which directly serves low-income persons. Most advocacy groups do not have direct contact with the persons they serve, and most don't have any direct connection with poor people, but the Institute does. In addition, Community Advocates coordinates Brighter Futures, whose agencies serve many poor persons and their families.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network shows active times

Anthony McHenry, co-chair of TPPN, outlined various activities of the group as it tackles the mission of reducing the rate of teen pregnancies in Milwaukee. He urged persons to join the Network at its regular monthly meetings at noon on the Second Thursday of each month at Silver Spring

Neighborhood Center, 5460 N. 64th St. He promised lunch (“at least pizza”) would be served.

“2028.” He said the group discussed the movie trailer, “2028,” which was produced in Milwaukee as a “teaser” to show the impact of unprotected sex upon teens. He explained that while there is no such movie, the trailer portrays what could be a potential “escape movie,” and is something that would attract the interest of teens, he said. The trailer portrays a girl who has a child at early age and follows her for 18 years, providing “really graphic” views of the difficulties she faces. “In 20-30 seconds or so, the movie gets you from one stage to the back end,” McHenry said.



The 4th Annual Family Unity Night, scheduled for Oct. 14 from 5 to 9 p.m., is being transformed to make it more interactive with families, he said. The purpose is to build communication within families, parents and/or caregivers to children and the reverse. “If I’d ask you what one thing we could do to reduce teen pregnancy,” he said, “You’d say increase communication. Talk, talk, talk.”

He urged agencies to follow through with the request from Racquel Bell, BF coordinator, to identify families that would promise to begin the practice of eating together and to build for an eventual community dinner get-together in October. McHenry said that TPPN hopes to have much media attention to promote the idea.

The Youth Ambassadors, another activity of TPPN, are “young people teaching young people.” It was formed in 2008, and the youth are trained to train other youth on positive behaviors. The Ambassadors help to plan the three “youth summits” that TPPN hold each year, usually in middle or high schools.

MASH. TPPN has been working with Milwaukee Adolescent Sexual Health (MASH), a group which no longer is active. MASH is holding a final “closing” meeting to discuss further steps. Some of the work will be picked up by the TPPN, McHenry said.

Family Planning Waiver. TPPN also is urging greater promotion of the family planning waiver, which offers free reproductive health services for women age 15 to 44. He said agencies should consider making information on accessing the waiver available to their families.

MCAPS Activities

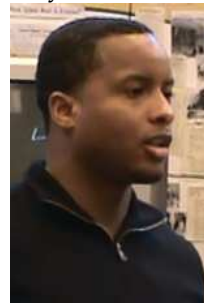
Jenny Von Helms, of The Parenting Network, reported in place of Jan Buchler.

She said “Welcome Baby” programs have begun at four locations and will expand to a fifth center in summer. She said the group is looking for volunteer nurses to help facilitate the program.

“AS One” is a healthy relationships program for unmarried couples in which the woman is pregnant, Von Helms said. It’s a new program that the Parenting Network is offering three times this spring.

UNCOM Report . . .

Terrence Maggitt urged agencies to contact him if they need assistance in becoming link to the UNCOM program. He said he is visiting the agencies.



He holds trainings for beginners, intermediate and advanced staffers; they will be held the 3rd Tuesday of each month. The sessions will be held at the offices at 710 N.

Plankinton Ave. at 11 a.m. for beginners, 1 p.m. for intermediate and 3 p.m. for advanced.

Agencies are urged to contact him with questions. (414-978-2003 or tmaggitt@uncom-milw.org)

Family Resource Connection

The next Family Resource Connection meeting will be held Tuesday, March 23, at Penfield Children’s Center, 833 N. 26th St. Directors will meet at 9 a.m. and the general meeting will begin at 9:30. The discussion will center on “Celebrate Children” event that will be held at Betty Brinn center on April 15.

Brighter Futures Meeting Attendance: Feb. 16, 2010

First Name	Last Name	Agency
Jason	Hargis	ACLU of Wisconsin
Laura	Watt	Alma Center
Joan	Lecus	Aurora Family Service
Cyndie	Ody-Weis	Bethany
Christina	Treiber	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Jeffery K.	Roman	Brave New World , Inc
Jane	Ottow	Children's Service Society
Heather	Monroe	COA-Milwaukee Public Allies
Joe	Volk	Community Advocates
Racquel	Bell	Community Advocates
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
Wendy	Mc Carty	Dept. of Children and Families
Mark	O'Neil	Diverse & Resilient
Patrick	Schrank	Hope House
Marina	Acosta-Fowlkes	La Causa
Laura	Wojciuk	Lad Lake Inc.
Jorge	Perez	Latino Community Center
Juanita	Valcarcel	Latino Community Center
Sandy	Dotson	Managed Health Services
Brittany	Gresl	Marquette Univ. Behavior Clinic
Carole	Poth	Marquette Univ. Center for Peacemaking
Eilene	Buege	Marquette University - Penfield
Deborah	Bryant	Milwaukee Adolescent Health
Lenora	Shaw	Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program
Kathi	Boyce	Milwaukee Christian Center
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Tracy	Hrajnoha	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Jody	Rhodes	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
David	Scholl	Ombudsman
Trudy	Ranallo	Parents Plus, Inc.
Joseph	Stanley	Pathfinders Youth Shelter
Joanna	Love	Penfield Childrens Center
Marge	Kreuser	Perez-Pena, LTD
JoCasta	Zamarripa	Planned Parenthood
Lonna	Kruse	Planning Council
Thelma	Newby	SET Ministries
Jim	Bartos	Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
Anthony	Mc Henry	Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
Theresa	Post	Sojourner Family Peace Center
Jenny	Von Helms	The Parenting Network
Daphne	Jackson	United Healthcare
Stephany	Pruitt	Vincent Family Resource Center
Kathy	Burkart-Lemke	WAWA Family Resource Ctr.