

Brighter Futures

Meeting Summary • July 15, 2008

C/o Community Advocates, 4906 W. Fond du Lac Ave., Milwaukee WI 53216
general@communityadvocates.net



Personal connections make for success in MPS 'Futures First' program

- Success told at July Brighter Futures meeting



A different approach is being developed to assist some Milwaukee Public School students become successful in school, the July meeting of Brighter Futures heard.

It's the Futures First Program and Jim Koleas, a retired assistant chief of police in Milwaukee, said the program is designed to serve up to 265 students as they return to school from incarceration, expulsions, having dropped out or aged out of foster care.



Jim Koleas describes Futures First program to participants at July Brighter Futures meeting.

Koleas now works as the initiative's project coordinator and said that the project kicked off in February with the opening of Transition High School. Presently, there are 37 students enrolled there and about another 30 at each of the other four program sites; North Division, South Division, James Madison and Bradley Tech.

To demonstrate the potential of the program, he told of a young man who had been in foster care, committed armed robbery and had a questionable record that made his chances of success seem small. Yet, Koleas said the young man graduated and is enrolled in higher education.

The young man seemed to be transformed, he said, when he agreed to stand before a group and explain what he felt about transition high school. The young man's statement and well as those who have been a success in the program

tells us, Koleas said, demonstrates that such youth need relationship-based educational strategies. He said the program shows that there was a "a caring adult, or some other caring person that had an impact on them."

He said that when students say, "I come to school and the teachers are happy to see me," the statements are refreshing words for a teacher to hear, particularly from students who have been troubled.

Koleas said Transition High School is using an online teaching program with many of the students, since many of them returned to school in mid-semester. This permits the student to get back into learning at the student's own speed. Students have told us that they're often afraid or reluctant to raise their hand because others might think they're stupid, he said. "It is another hurdle that we are accidentally overcoming," he added. He described lots of "hugging" and "smiles" in contrast to the usual school setting. One of the factors is keeping the students together in a small group, rather than in large classes. Transition High School classes have no more than 35 students, he said.

MPS may get as many as 500 students a year coming back from incarceration, and the system can't handle all of them, he said. The next year the program will include putting teams in at four schools, North, South, Bradley Tech and James Madison. The teams will include a social worker, guidance counselor and a youth career development specialist from our partner at the Milwaukee Workforce Investment Board. The ratio for social workers and guidance counselors will be no more than 1 to 70 compared to 1 to several hundred at many high schools.

The program contracts with the Milwaukee Workforce Development Board (MWIB) to do career planning. He said that a good share of the participants are in jobs now. The program staff also monitors the students in their jobs, seeking to have employer contact the program about problems before the student is fired. The staff of the team will go out

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'211' service outlined; BF agencies to get data access

As one tool in the fight against poverty, there is the Milwaukee area's 211 IMPACT line.

Outlining the program at the July Brighter Futures meeting, Bob Waite of Impact 211 said that the line has been active since 2002 and has fielded 600,000 calls, averaging 120,000 annually in the last two years.

His presentation at the BF meeting was to assist funded agencies in instructing their customers on how to use the service.

All BF funded agencies will be offered free access to the 211 data base of some 3,500 listings in the next few weeks, Waite said. He will email information to the BF agencies in late July to give them instructions on how to download and use the system.

The value of the database is that it removes the need for workers to maintain and update their own resource listings, he said. The 211 service attempts to update the listings at least annually, relying upon participating services to respond to the queries to provide timely information, he said.

He said 211 Impact is basically an information service; it does not provide direct service. Because of that, 211 is able to be unbiased in making referrals, Waite said.

Food pantries. The service operates a cooperative program with Hunger Task Force that provides information on 62 food pantries in the community. All of the pantries in the list are required to supply food that offers a balanced diet. The HTF monitors the pantries to assure they meet the standards. The agency maintains a database on the families, assuring that

families will receive food pantry referrals only once in three days. "We act as a gateway to the free delivery system," he said. "Emergency food is there for emergencies, and it is a very scarce resource," he said.

The agency also has a relationship with Red Cross and other similar agencies for emergencies.

How 211 Works. Waite said that, except for calls for the food pantry, family shelter information, and in fol-



Bob Waite of '211' outlines how referral service works.

lowup call situations, the 211 line will not be seeking to learn the names of the callers, asking only very few questions mainly for demographic purposes.

Now, it has become possible for most people to use cell phones to reach 211, except for Verizon. In some calls made from the fringe areas of neighboring counties, the 211 line will get calls meant for the 211 lines of the other counties because of the cell tower locations. These calls will be referred to the other counties. "By the end of the year, the 211 number should be universally accessible," he said.

There are about 250 different '211' services throughout the nation, Waite

said, covering three-quarters of the nation. All of Wisconsin is served by 211, he said, through the services of 11 systems.

An alternate phone number to use to reach the service is 1-866-211-3380

Sensitive to Callers. Waite said the staff is trained to treat callers with sensitivity and to assure that the caller is comfortable. He said that people are often angry or frustrated and the staff is prepared to handle the cases with gentleness.

He said the 211 problem solving process involves identifying a problem, finding options, deciding on a course of action, offering resources, providing advocacy if needed, reviewing the process with customer and follow-up when appropriate.

In some cases, they staffer may have to ask questions to assure that the family will be safe or that they will be able to survive the crisis, he said.

In many cases, the 211 worker will attempt to transfer the call to the agency involved, to assure the agency can handle the case and accept the customer.

Waite said the agency has capability to be able to provide access to the Milwaukee County economic support unit for food stamps, Medicaid, or child care in some situations.

BF Agency Usage. Waite said all BF agencies will be given 5 licenses, if needed. There will be training offered to use the service. He gave a brief demonstration on how to use the database. He noted the database is designed to be simple to use.

He said 211 is upgrading the system to eventually make it possible to open use of the service to the general public.

Waite said that agencies may call 256-4808 and ask for the resource dept. to update agency service and program information.

Ending Poverty in State:

Report from David Riemer

David Riemer discussed the draft of a new proposal, "Ending Poverty in Wisconsin," which has been put together jointly by Community Advocates, the Wisconsin Council of Children and Families (WCCF) and the Wisconsin Association of Community Action Agencies (WISCAP).

Riemer said the plan of action is an effort to spell out several policies that could lead to ending poverty in this city and state. There is a huge amount of poverty here and it's not getting any better, he said.



David Riemer

While many people question whether it's possible to "end poverty," which has been part of the economy for years, "our premise is just the opposite," he said.

It's not impossible to reduce poverty, based on history. He noted that poverty in USA dropped from 30 % in the 1950s to 11% in the 1970s. In 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau had the poverty rate at 12.3% (or, 36.5 million persons). "We have the know how and the ability to end poverty," he said.

Highlights of Plan:

The planning group has identified four goals which could make a difference:

- Making work available at a livable wage and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- Assuring that parents have access to quality child care and early education. (*Research shows that parents need good information on parenting and that parental involvement does work.*)
- Quality health care, such as through the expansion of BadgerCare and the folding of Milwaukee County's health program,

GAMP, into BadgerCare Plus, thus creating easier access to affordable health insurance.

- Housing, and things related to housing, such as utility issues.

"We've got to work on all of these fronts, but we've left out a lot, such as nutrition and transportation," he said. "There's a lot of evidence that if we make progress in these areas, we'll have an impact on ending poverty."

Riemer said the recommendations come in three parts:

- Including within the State budget actions that will make some progress in this area.
- Legislation in non budget items, such as drivers' license reforms to give judges flexibility to restore drivers' licenses and raising the minimum wage.
- Longterm changes, such as a transitional jobs program and issues that the Federal government handles, such as increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

The challenge facing this is that the state and other governmental units face budget crises, Riemer said. He said the planners of the proposal have recognized this. He encouraged persons to provide suggestions, since the proposal is still in "draft" stage. His contact information is: driermil@yahoo.com.

Personal connections work . . .

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to the site to address the problem, he said.

He cited one student, Tiffany, age 19, who needed one credit to get her diploma; the guidance counselor called her at home to get her back into the program. A personal outreach with guidance counselor brought her back into the program. If there are no available services in MPS, the program works with community-based-organizations to provide services to the student, he said.

The program had early difficulties in getting the program started due to various hiring rules and other issues typical to a large organizations. These issues have been resolved. The grant allows us to do things not typically done in MPS,

Koleas said. The program is aimed at preventing violence and at preventing gang involvement. "We're talking about the same people," he said. "A personal connection with a caring adult can make a difference."

The program is funded for two years and will end June 30, 2009. It is a brainchild of Sen. Arlen Specter, a Republican. Besides Milwaukee, there are four other pilot cities, Chicago, Orlando, Philadelphia and Baltimore. "We're all taking different approaches," he said. Out of the effort some useful knowledge will be gained, he said. Koleas said that the program has a commitment to fresh approaches and to challenge the status quo..

Racquel Bell said that the Brighter Futures agencies are working with a similar population as is the Futures First initiative and that it is important to build collaboration.

July 2008 Brighter Futures Meeting Attendance
(Listed alphabetically by agency name)

Eva	Spencer	Agape
Cyndi	Ody-Weis	Bethany
Darryl	Davidson	City of Milwaukee Health Department
Geoffrey	Lowry	COA YFC - Goldin Center
Danielle	Luer	COA YFC - Goldin Center
Kari	Nervig	COA YFC - Riverwest Ctr
Racquel	Bell	Community Advocates
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
David	Riemer	Community Advocates
Joe	Volk	Community Advocates
Christina	Morris	Counseling Center of Milwaukee
Mark	O'Neil	Diverse & Resilient
James	Koleas	Futures First
Peggy	Neal	Heartlove Place
Karen	Kolberg	IMPACT
Bob	Waite	IMPACT
Duncan	Shrout	IMPACT Inc.
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Michael	Bersch	Journey House
Reyna	Gengler	La Causa
Betsy	Heinen	La Causa FRC
Jorge	Perez	Latino Community Center
Veronica	Lesheck	Loyola
Elizabeth	Bock	Loyola
Sandy	Dotson	Managed Health Services
Sandra	Malone	Mary Ryan Boys and Girls Club
Paul	Gannaway	Milw Family Services Integration Off.
Deborah	Bryant	Milwaukee Adolescent Health
Lenora	Shaw	Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program
Emilio	Lopez	Milwaukee Christian Center
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Norma	Madison	Milwaukee Urban League
Jim	Koleas	MPS Futures First
Lyn	Hildenbrand	Neighborhood House
Jody	Rhodes	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Kayla	Murphy	New Concept Self Dev. Ctr.
Kenyatta	Sinclair	Next Door Foundation
Trudy	Ranallo	Parents Plus, Inc.
David	Scholl	Planning Council
Joseph	Kubisiak	Safe & Sound
Anthony	Mc Henry	Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
Pastor Lee A.	Shaw	St. Gabriel COGIC
Jody	Ebbinger	TABS North
Theresa	Post	Task Force on Family Violence
Lisa	Gumm	The Counseling Center
Erin	Ebert	The Parenting Network
Georgann	Moore	United Health Care
Shaunte	James	Urban League
Lesl	Adebanke	UW Medical School
Luke	Jakubowski	UW Medical School
Erin	Polczynski	UW Medical School
Chris	Kolar	UWM SMPH
Chris	Mueller	UWM SMPH
Marissa	Lopez	Walkers Point Youth and Family Ctr.
Charles	Unger	West Allis Police Department
Janel	Hines	WI Dept of Children and Families
Monica	Lawrence	Wis Dept of Health and Human Serv.
Jan	Wilberg	

Please send any corrections to keng@communityadvocates.net
NOTE: All Brighter Futures funded agencies are expected to attend monthly MYFDA meetings, according to their contract.