

**Kalamazoo**

**Poverty**

**Reduction**

**Initiative**

**###**

**Kalamazoo, Michigan**

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## **1. - BACKGROUND:**

The Kalamazoo Poverty Reduction Initiative began after the conclusion of the November 2001 Kalamazoo city elections. This election included a heated debate about a proposed living wage ordinance. Although the proposed ordinance was defeated, the campaign raised community awareness about the prevalence of poverty and the need to address this issue in a comprehensive and focused manner with clear lines of accountability. A group of concerned individuals and organizations, including the Community Task Force on Poverty and the Coalition for a Living Wage, have come together under the auspices of the Kalamazoo County Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of taking measures to address the issue of poverty. The resultant joint effort has raised significant questions about:

1. What should be done short-term and long-term?
2. How should an effort be organized?
3. Who is accountable?
4. How can the effort be sustained?
5. How can impact be assured and measured?

### **1A. -Some of the Past and Current Poverty Efforts -**

The Kalamazoo community has sponsored a myriad of efforts to address poverty. A wide variety of private and public human service agencies, including funders and direct providers of services (e.g., Greater Kalamazoo United Way, Kalamazoo Community Foundation, Housing Resources Inc., etc.) are actively at work every day to address many of the causes and effects of poverty.

- The Kalamazoo County Human Services Department, particularly through its Human Development Bureau, provides many programs, such as Head Start and others. The Human Development Bureau is the local Community Action entity, which has been a part of the War on Poverty 1960's.
- In 1992, the State of Michigan required local areas to form what are called Multi-Purpose Collaborative Bodies. The purpose of these entities is to create and facilitate opportunities for collaboration for improving the quality of life for children and families, many of whom live in poverty. Here in Kalamazoo County, that entity is called the Kalamazoo County Children and Family Consortium, and since 1995, has initiated or facilitated a number of projects directed toward poverty.
- In 1995, Healthy Futures was formed as a public/private partnership to address key indicators of community health and, at that time, formed one of its action teams around the poverty issue. This action team implemented a program aimed at reducing illiteracy, which is a barrier to gainful employment. Healthy Futures is the conduit for such programs as Communities in Schools and the new Kalamazoo County Health Plan initiative to provide health care to uninsured and under insured individuals.

- Since the mid 1970's, The Upjohn Institute for Employment Research has served as the administrative agent for federal, state and privately funded employment and training programs. The Upjohn Institute is currently the administrative agent for Michigan Works! in the county and, as such, continues as the conduit for federal and state employment and training programs. Many of these programs are directed to individuals who are economically disadvantaged. Its largest program, Work First, is intended to assist welfare recipients to gain economic self-sufficiency.
- In 1999, the Kalamazoo County Family Independence Agency initiated Project Zero, which is an effort to reduce welfare caseloads and to help welfare recipients make the transition from welfare to work. Project Zero is a partnership between the FIA, Michigan Works, and a variety of other entities, including the City of Kalamazoo (primarily through Metro-Transit). But even beyond Project Zero, the FIA, through numerous other programs, provides millions of dollars in direct services and is the primary safety net for children and families in poverty.
- During 2000, the City of Kalamazoo passed a resolution to establish a poverty reduction initiative. As an outgrowth of this resolution, Kalamazoo City and County Commissioners have been engaged in discussions about how to join forces in a poverty reduction effort.
- The Community Task Force on Poverty was also formed in 2000 and has been meeting to discuss possibilities for a community-wide poverty reduction strategy.

### **1B. - Background Conclusion -**

Clearly, this community is already doing a great deal about poverty, which includes considerable expenditure of public and private dollars (and the above list is not exhaustive). Despite all the poverty efforts, a considerable number of individuals live in poverty conditions. Some indicators on the incidence of poverty are:

- According to the 1998 US Census, 238,603 persons live in Kalamazoo County, of whom 24,944 or 10.5 percent live in poverty, including 9,156 or 3.8 percent are under the age of 18 with 6,164 or 2.58 percent being age 5 to 17 and 2,992 or 1.3 percent from birth to age 4.
- Although the percent of children for 1999/2000 in the public schools in Kalamazoo County receiving free or reduced price school lunches is 33 percent, this rate ranges between 45 and 90 percent for Kalamazoo Public School System Elementary Schools.
- According to KIDS Count 1999:
  - Economic security for children living in poverty and children receiving free and reduced price school lunches is worsening in Michigan. In Kalamazoo County, it is worsening at a faster rate than Michigan.
  - Child Safety is declining - Children in out-of-home care for abuse or neglect and for delinquency are increasing across Michigan. In Kalamazoo County, the rate is

- increasing faster.
- Child Health is mixed – while overall infant mortality is improving in Michigan, the number of low birth-weight babies is increasing and again, faster in Kalamazoo County than the State of Michigan.
- And, these indicators are expected to get worse in the current recession.

The Kalamazoo Poverty Reduction Initiative establishes an improved method of coordinating and integrating the current efforts, with clear lines of accountability. The systemic integration that the Initiative promotes is intended to provide more effective and efficient delivery of services, and will give a clearer understanding of gaps and how to fill them. Until steps are taken toward better integration, the debate about poverty cannot be turned into new action.

## 2. – MISSION/ GOALS

The Mission of the Kalamazoo Poverty Reduction Initiative is *“to effectively alleviate the causes, consequences, and incidence of poverty in Kalamazoo and to improve the quality of life for all citizens of Kalamazoo”* through the achievement of the following Goals:

- A. **Dramatically increase resources available** to individuals, families and community by:
  - Connecting existing resources;
  - Enhancing existing resources;
  - Seeking and securing new resources for needs not met elsewhere.
- B. **Engage** institutional systems in collaborative, mutually accountable partnerships working together toward the mission.
- C. **Develop and sustain** a structure capable of accomplishing the mission.

## 3. – GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- A. **Accountability:** mutual ownership of established goals which are measurable and include evaluation and feedback components, regularly communicated to partners and community.
- B. **Asset-based:** maximize existing resources and avoid unnecessary duplication
- C. **Capacity-Building:** empowering individuals and organizations to enhance and develop.
- D. **Collaboration:** mutually beneficial and well-defined relationships entered into by two or more organizations or individuals to achieve results they are more likely to achieved together than alone.
- E. **Comprehensive:** Community-wide and system-wide in approaches.
- F. **Inclusive:** opportunity and responsibility for the whole community to participate, and contribute.
- G. **Relationship Building:** strong diverse partnerships based on integrity, knowledge and trust sharing resources, rewards and lessons learned without blame.
- H. **Systemic Change:** “...changing how we do business.”

#### **4. - STRUCTURE:**

The proposed Kalamazoo Poverty Reduction Initiative is designed to counter the current fragmentation of efforts to reduce poverty. Community systems for employment, education and literacy, human services, housing, health, legislative (elected officials) and legal issues, economic and neighborhood development tend to operate in isolation of one another. Coordination efforts focus on organizations and activities *within* each of these systems. Much more rare are effective collaborations *across* the traditional system boundaries of these organizations and service systems. Therefore, this initiative takes on the important task of building and supporting effective communication, connection, and collaboration both *within* and *among* these various organizational systems to facilitate work on poverty reduction.

Further, the collaborations facilitated by this community initiative will greatly increase the funding and resources available to groups and organizations responding to poverty issues, by bringing together current resources, identifying gaps, and securing new resources to address the gaps and unmet needs. The increased availability of resources and further coordination between systems will also increase community awareness and provide a broader base for community participation and support for poverty reduction strategies in Kalamazoo. Clearly, this initiative offers the Kalamazoo community something new and promising in our efforts to alleviate poverty.

In the Structure section, three key roles are outlined – the Steering Committee, the Core Team, the Project Teams. Additionally, a partial listing of the agencies and organizations which make-up the nine community-wide institutional systems that will need to be involved to make the Kalamazoo Poverty Reduction Initiative a viable option for change in the Kalamazoo Community are included

#### **4.A. – The Steering Committee functioning as a Board of Directors -**

The governance of the Kalamazoo Poverty Reduction Initiative begins with a Steering Committee functioning as a Board of Directors. The roles and responsibilities of the Kalamazoo Poverty Initiative Steering Committee include:

- Setting policy
- Selecting projects
- Setting budgets and financial oversight
- Providing oversight of the core team and all project teams
- Being accountable to the community for the Initiative, and
- Ensuring that the initiative’s decisions and efforts are communicated to, reviewed by, and informed by active participation by members of the community at large.

The Steering Committee membership will be representative of public, private, nonprofit, and other community interests. There will be representatives from the leadership of each of nine institutional systems – health, housing and neighborhood development, legislative (elected officials), legal, economic development, human service,

education and literacy, employment and faith-based systems. (Please refer to the included lists of agencies within each system later in this section – 4.D. and to Figure 1 attached.) It is imperative that the members in the Kalamazoo community most directly affected by poverty must have effective voices on this committee. It is recommended that some members be low-income residents of our community.

#### **4.B. - Core Team:**

A core team that reports to and receives direction from the Steering Committee will be primarily responsible for helping to build and maintain these system linkages and to secure various resources for the community. The core team will be comprised initially of staff committed by several major community institutions, including: the Greater Kalamazoo United Way, Kalamazoo County Human Services Department – Human Development Bureau, the Kalamazoo County Chamber of Commerce, the public school systems, the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo County Government, City of Kalamazoo and others.

Core team staff will be responsible for ensuring the implementation of the initiative’s action plans in order to reach the initiative’s goals and objectives. Specifically, the core team will be responsible for the “identifying, researching, coordinating and facilitating functions”:

##### Core Team activities:

- Serve as a clearinghouse
  - \*\*Community wellness indicators
  - \*\* Best practices
  - \*\* Collaborative resource development
- Research
  - \*\* Compile existing poverty information
  - \*\* Initiate new research as necessary
- Engage each institutional system to:
  - \*\* Identify current poverty reduction efforts
  - \*\* Identify relevant new projects to address poverty reduction
  - \*\* Build relationships among partners in each institution and across institutional systems
- Develop abstracts for projects recommended from institutions and institutional systems to present to the Steering Committee for consideration.
- Present projects for consideration to Steering Committee.
- Facilitate implementation of projects through Project Teams

The reality of the year one activities is that a more permanent staffing structure can be designed based on the “lessons learned” in year one.

#### **4.C. - Project Teams -**

Project teams will perform the work on specific projects identified by Kalamazoo community citizens, organizations, and the Initiative's core team. These teams will be comprised of community residents and agency staff drawn from across the traditional institutional boundaries, which agree to work together on the research, design and/or implementation of projects that support the stated mission, values and goals of the Initiative. Core team staff will provide support to project teams by facilitating the identification and convening of potential partners, communication, coordination, and resource acquisition. A successful project team will have engaged partners across many or all of the nine institutional systems, as well as community residents.

**4.D. – A partial listing of the organizations and agencies within the Nine Institutional Systems** – Agencies and organizations may be listed in more than one of the institutional systems based on the diversity of services each one may offer. The listing is not inclusive and others exist, but it is intended to be representative.

**Health System:**

Healthy Futures, Borgess Medical Center, Bronson Methodist Hospital, Family Health Center, Senior Services, Family Independence Agency, Kalamazoo County

Human Services Programs such as AIDS/HIV Prevention and Testing Program, Care-A-Van, Children's Special Health Care, Environmental Health, Immunizations, Infant Support Services, Substance Abuse Services, Maternal Support Services Program, Vision and Hearing, Well Child Clinic, Woman, Infant and Child (WIC) program, Kalamazoo County Health Plan, Visiting Nurse and Hospice Services of SW Michigan, Planned Parenthood of South Central Michigan, Diabetes Outreach Network, Bronson Health Answers, Sexual Assault Program, Kalamazoo County Community Mental Health, ACT of Kalamazoo, Continuing Education for Young Families, Family Health Center, First Presbyterian Church Health Center, Medical and Dental Referral Access Network, Community Placement Program, Gryphon Place, Family and Children's Services, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, Meals on Wheels, Catholic Family Services, Hospitality House of Southwestern Michigan.

**Housing and Neighborhood Development:**

- Housing Assistance  
City of Kalamazoo Development Services, Housing Resources, Inc, Kalamazoo Northside Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Kalamazoo County Veterans Trust Fund .
- Emergency Services  
Catholic Family Services, Bethany House Shelter for Women, Domestic Assault Program, Kalamazoo County Emergency Overnight Shelter, Gospel Mission, Housing Resources, Inc., Kalamazoo Youth Ministry (Open Door and Next Door), Alpha and Omega Ministries.
- Long Term

Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), Continuum of Care (LISC), City of Kalamazoo Development Services Department, Housing Resources, Kalamazoo Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc., Kalamazoo Northside Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Kalamazoo Valley Habitat for Humanity, Inc., Vine Neighborhood Organization, Partners Building Communities.

- Community and Neighborhood Centers  
Comstock Community Center, Douglas Community Center, Eastside Neighborhood Center, Edison Neighborhood Center, Northside Association for Community Development, Portage Community Outreach Center, Portage Senior Center, South County Community Services, Vine Neighborhood Association, West Douglas Neighborhood Association, Milwood Neighborhood Association.

### **Legislative System (Elected Officials):**

- Local Units of Government- Townships, City of Kalamazoo Commissioners, City of Portage Commissioners, Kalamazoo County Commission
- State Of Michigan House of Representatives - 60<sup>th</sup> District – Sandy Lipsey, 61<sup>st</sup> District – Tom George, and 63<sup>rd</sup> District – Jerry Vander Roest
- State of Michigan Senate - 21<sup>st</sup> District - Dale Shugars
- United States House of Representatives - 6<sup>th</sup> District Congressmen Fred Upton
- United States Senate – Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow

### **Legal System:**

- District Courts,
- Probate Courts  
Circuit Courts-Family Division, Diversion Programs - Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program, Domestic and Youth Services – Juvenile Home, CASA, Kalamazoo County Friend of the Court Kalamazoo Attorney Referral System, Legal Aid Bureau of Southwestern Michigan, Legal Outreach Clinic (Douglass and Old Central).

### **Economic Development:**

Southwest Michigan First, Kalamazoo County Chamber of Commerce, City of Kalamazoo Economic Development, Michigan Works!, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Kalamazoo Public Library.

### **Human Services System:**

Kalamazoo County Human Services Department, Greater Kalamazoo United Way, Healthy Futures, Family Independence Agency, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health, Family Health Center, Inc., Kalamazoo Neighborhood Housing Services, Bronson Healthcare, Borgess Medical Center, MSU Extension,

Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies, Michiana Addictions and Prevention Services, Guidance Clinic, Family and Children Services.

**Education and Literacy:**

Local public schools systems, Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency, Kalamazoo Literacy Council, Kalamazoo Communities In Schools, Goodwill Industries Partnership for Adult Learning, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Davenport University, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, Olympia Training Institute, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health, SLD Learning Center, Continuing Education for Young Families, Kalamazoo County Head Start, Project HELP (WMU), Michigan Works!, MRC Industries, Employment and Training Connections, Michigan Career and Technical Institute, Boys and Girls Club of Kalamazoo, Project Mentor, Kalamazoo Area Academic Achievement Program., Kalamazoo Public Library, and private schools.

**Employment System:**

Workforce Development Board, Michigan Works!, Kalamazoo County Chamber of Commerce, Northside Business Development Association, Goodwill Industries, KRESA Young Adult Program and Employment and Training Connections, Michigan Works Service Center, KPEP, Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court, Boys and Girls Club, Housing Resources, MRC Industries, Pathways, Human Resources Development, Inc., Family Independence Agency.

**Faith-based Systems:**

Northside Ministerial Alliance, Catholic Family Services, Lutheran Social Services, Bethany Christian Services, Catholic Diocese of Southwestern Michigan, Ecumenical Senior Center, African-American Health Initiative, New Genesis Christian Center, Deacons Conference, Fishes and Loaves, Families in Christ Church, Ministry with Community, Gospel Mission, Salvation Army, Downtown Churches Association, Synagogues, Islamic Faith (Mosques), etc.