

ESPRI Education Work Group – Meeting Highlights
March 20, 2017 3:30 – 5:00 PM
Watertown Urban Mission – 247 Factory Street

Present: Linya Bell, Community Member
Erin Cordova, Fidelis Care
Michael Del Signore, Community Member
Ian Grant, Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization
Cody Horbacz, City of Watertown
Leslie Keefer, Community Advocate
Krystin LaBarge, Community Advocate / Education Chair
Patti LaBarr, Watertown City School District
Mike Lawrence, Community Advocate
Kim Leonard, Department of Social Services
Beth Linderman, Watertown City School District
Carole, McCoy, Jefferson Community College
Stacy Neddo, Community Member
Rafael Reyes, Community Advocate
Lori Sears, Watertown City School District
Anita Seefried-Brown, PIVOT, Alliance for Better Communities
Katy Troester-Trate, Jefferson Community College

Peter Schmitt, Watertown ESPRI Director
Dawn Cole, Watertown ESPRI
Tobi Darrah, United Way of Northern NY
Michael Kirkland, VISTA

Excused: Roger Ambrose, Jefferson County Community Services
Anne Garno, North Country Prenatal Perinatal Council
Myron Jamerson, The Rock Church
Carolyn Mantle, Community Advocate
Tammie Miller, Resolution Center
Steven Todd, BOCES

Welcome

Chair Ms. LaBarge called the meeting to order at 3:35 PM and welcomed members of the group.

VISTA Introduction

Ms. Darrah of the United Way of NNY introduced Michael Kirkland, the new VISTA staffer, and explained that he will lend support to Watertown ESPRI and to the United Way by helping to conduct surveys and working with non-profits to update the 211 Directory.

Engagement Update

Ms. Cole provided an overview of the engagement sessions conducted to date at Urban Mission, Community Action Planning Council, Meadowbrook/East Hills, and Midtown Towers. She explained the format of each meeting which includes an overview of ESPRI (collective impact model and the committee/group structure), followed by identifying barriers and brainstorming. Each meeting closes on a positive note as individuals are asked to share good things happening in their lives. Participants have been welcoming and willing to share. Three additional meetings have been planned – Workplace on March 23, Jefferson Community College on March 27 and Centennial Apartments TBD.

Common themes gleaned from the engagement sessions include reinforcement of the interconnectedness of areas of focus and barriers, as well as a lack of knowledge of available resources. Themes specific to education include uncertainty about the availability of educational offerings and the complexities of applying for education-related services. Interest in financial management education was expressed – focusing on short-term month-to-month finances and long-term financial planning, such as saving for children’s college education.

Work Group Barriers Review

Mr. Schmitt presented a summary of the barriers and employer challenges identified by the work group during their initial meeting on February 27, along with barriers identified as part of community engagement sessions (noted with asterisks).

- Managing job requirements and parenting
- Availability and cost of child care
- Cost of education*
- School readiness for preschoolers, ages birth through 5
- Parents level of education – expectations for children are low
- Youth quitting school without graduating*
- Academic infrastructure is built around traditional stay-home parenting hours
 - Long breaks (summer / school breaks) impact working parents
 - Snow days
- Unintended pregnancies
- Fiscal management training*
- Disconnect between parents and school
- Language and writing skills

- Impact of drugs
- Hunger
- Understanding and awareness of resources available to assist
- Need for improved training to work programs in certain areas (STEM)
- Job training relating to immediate attainment of employment
- Child care for adults in school
- Lack of supports for non-traditional students

Mr. Schmitt encouraged the group to narrow the focus, as the barriers identified encompass the gamut of education – pre-k, public school and post-secondary. The group was also asked to begin thinking about a potential target audience and reminded that the ultimate goal was to move people out of poverty.

Given the need to identify measurable outcomes within a one-year period, the group agreed that objectives associated with pre-k and early learning would not be a good fit within the parameters of the poverty grant. The discussion turned to adult education, as several members of the group suggested that the focus should be on building existing resources / services as opposed to introducing new programs.

The idea of “just-in-time” job skills training was introduced. Through short-term training, individuals could brush up on specific skills needed for vacancies within the local market.

The group identified that low-income individuals must visit multiple agencies within the community to access services. Staffers of human service organizations, including Department of Social Services, routinely act as “eligibility workers” helping individuals to apply for services offered within their home agency and making referrals to other agencies for additional resources. It was suggested that a “clearinghouse” with well-informed liaisons could connect individuals to services – more effectively than current practice.

Navigators and case management were discussed at length, as the group agreed that low-income individuals would benefit from having a mentor or coach to help them work through barriers to education. It was noted that low-income individuals are sometimes prone to a series of starts and stops when working toward the completion of long-term goals. Building relationships and providing customized one-on-one supports was discussed. It was suggested that with comprehensive case management, caseloads would be relatively small, as it requires a significant amount of time to understand the needs of the individual, develop plans of action, connect to services and follow up.

It was agreed that lack of a high school education is a barrier not only to college but to gaining entry level employment. A series of TASC blitzes was suggested as a means to encourage individuals to seek preparation / mentoring services. BOCES, JCC, Children’s Home, and Literacy

Volunteers were identified as organizations that help individuals to prepare for the high school equivalency test, referred to as TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion) although it was unclear as to whether there are costs associated with any portion of the process (books, testing, etc.). It was thought that existing programs would be more effective in preparing low-income individuals for the TASC test with wrap-around supports designed to help individuals work through road blocks, such as transportation and child care.

It was suggested that students studying Early Childhood Education provide care as part of an internship program. Given the stringent regulations associated with child care, it was decided that this would require additional research.

In terms of lack of awareness of available resources, the group discussed whether non-profits should increase their marketing efforts. It was pointed out that individuals are exposed to a lot of noise in terms of marketing messages. Outreach was discussed as an effective means of getting the word out about specific services. The idea of a travelling agency roadshow was discussed with agencies bringing workshops and information to the public – community centers, housing complexes, etc.

It was thought that working individuals often have little flexibility from their employers to achieve educational goals, especially those working non-traditional hours in the service industry. Mr. Schmitt explained that the Workforce Development work group is exploring an Employee Resource Network (ERN) as a means to educate employers to better understand the needs of low-income workers and to work directly with employees to provide coaching and referrals to available resources. The employee aspect of ERN was said to be comparable to case management.

A universal screening form was suggested to help agencies identify needs and connect individuals with services.

SPOA or Single Point of Access was described as a strategy used within Watertown City School District to bring together parents, students and service providers to remedy specific issues. Samaritan uses a similar model with nurse navigators. The idea of SPOA, or “triage for adults” was discussed.

Women, young adults and single parents were discussed as potential target audiences.

Mr. Schmitt agreed to seek out experts to attend subsequent meetings to share additional information about the ideas discussed, including current resources associated with TASC and the SPOA service delivery model / navigators.

Mr. Schmitt shared that Watertown ESPRI is currently operating under the assumption that projects must be identified in June and ready to roll out in July 2017. However, there is some confusion as to the exact timeline, especially given that many communities are lagging behind

in the process. Mr. Schmitt will take part in a conference call later in the week, during which it is anticipated that the timeline will be more clearly defined.

Work Group Specific Questions for Engagement Surveys

Mr. Schmitt asked the group for ideas for questions specific to education to include on the engagement survey targeting low-income individuals. It was suggested that respondents identify level of education to determine whether there is a need for assistance in achieving high school equivalency.

Engagement – Open Community Forum vs. Online Survey

Mr. Schmitt asked those present for their opinions on whether an open community forum should be conducted as part of the process or if an online survey would be sufficient to give voice to the community-at-large. The group agreed to hold off on a public forum until the fall when the process and identified projects can be highlighted.

Mr. Schmitt shared that a version of the survey targeting low-income individuals will be made available to the general public. This community version will include a question regarding household income level. The survey will be largely distributed online, including the newly-designed ESPRI website – available at <http://espri.unitedway-nny.org/>

Engagement – High School Session

Mr. Schmitt asked whether there was value in hosting a listening session at the high school level. Members of the group advised that careful consideration be applied before moving forward – given the risks of violating the privacy of students. Mr. Schmitt agreed to seek guidance from Watertown City School District as to whether a high school engagement session could be offered that was both legal and respectful.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Education Work Group is scheduled for April 3 at 3:30 PM at **Community Action Planning Council, located at 518 Davidson Street**. Note: venue change for the Education Work Group.