

Summary of Feedback from 2010 Community Forums

In August 2010, Eileen Cackowski, Andrea Sieloff and Carrie Stith-Webster hosted 5 forums in several locations around the state: Erlanger, Morehead, Paducah, London and Elizabethtown. The intent of the forums was twofold: to solicit comments from the public which will be used in developing KCCVS' state plan, and to talk about the process of applying for an AmeriCorps grant. The categories we focused on during the first part of the day were based on CNCS's focus areas: **Clean Energy; Healthy Futures; Disaster Preparedness; Opportunity; Education; Veterans and Other**. We asked participants to identify challenges, consider opportunities and think about what success could look like in 5 years. 56 individuals from 37 organizations participated in the forums.

Participating agencies included the Merryman House; RSVP of McCracken County; McCracken County Senior Center; Murray State Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement; Audubon Area Community Services, Inc.; the United Way of Paducah-McCracken County; Kennerly's Chapel Foundation; North Logan Historical Commission; Big Brothers Big Sisters; DFRYSC; the Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky; the A-Team AmeriCorps Program; Spalding University; the Kentucky Division of the National Patient Advocate Foundation; North Hardin Hope/Helping Hand; St. Vincent DePaul Mission Store; United Way of the Bluegrass; Buckhorn Children's Home; Madisonville Community College; Glema Mahr Center for the Arts; Adanta; Green River Ministries; Bluegrass Oakwood; Lighthouse Ministries; Louisville Metro RSVP; Louisville Metro FGP; Gateway Community Action; the Kentucky College Access Network; MSU Corps AmeriCorps program; the Center for Regional Engagement at Morehead University; Ashland City Schools FRC; Gateway Homeless Coalition; CARES-Community Assist & Referral; the Simon House; Hope's Place Children's Advocacy Center; Northern Kentucky Education Council; Success Corps, an AmeriCorps Program; and Kentucky Campus Compact.

Healthy Futures

Challenges Identified:

Drug addiction; homelessness; depression; obesity; hunger; lack of access to safe and affordable exercise options, often due to local geography; lack of awareness and understanding of healthy food choices, people don't know how to interpret food labels; lack of affordable fresh, healthy food; there is a perception that healthy food is too expensive; many people in KY smoke; school lunches don't incorporate local, healthy food; children are growing up not knowing how to cook; there's a lack of after school programs that promote physical activity; a healthy lifestyle is not valued; and one organization identified the need for a soup kitchen in their community, which led to a discussion of the need for a location, a director of development to fund raise, and volunteers. The group would like to incorporate the arts into the project, and have art hanging on the walls, and have local musicians play during meals.

Responses Identified:

Developing community and backyard gardens; raise local communities' awareness of the issue(s) and get them involved in offering educational programs to the community and in schools; teach cooking in school; have community volunteers create local venues for exercise; increase the number of Farmers' markets across the state; get a program like Big Brothers/Big Sisters working with school age children one on one to educate them about healthy lifestyles; create a similar program for students at the college level and teach both nutrition and cooking. Other ideas included doing 'telephone checks' on elderly or disabled individuals living alone;

organizing a 'friendly visitor' program to check on homebound people; providing volunteer life coaches for teens to help them develop the skills they need to live as productive adults; initiating on-going food collections that utilize matching contributions from the community, making the meals on wheels program available to adults under 60 who have disabilities, and developing a training program for volunteers to work with adults and teens with addiction issues.

Visions/Opportunities Identified:

All children will have access to physical education in school; adults and children will be able to access the services of a personal trainer free of charge; volunteering will provide people with a purpose, clients will be volunteering as well, thus reducing the stigma about whatever their challenges are, and raising awareness at the same time; children will be volunteering more; the soup kitchen mentioned above will have a relationship with the local system and will provide a venue for the students' artwork, and a showcase for their musical talent. The clients will also be sharing their talents and volunteering along with community volunteers. As one forum participant said, 'their bodies and their souls' will be fed.. There will be fewer cases of diabetes in Kentucky; there will be access to a nutrition curriculum for the primary grades; and those in need will have access to free food.

Education

Challenges Identified:

Children are not prepared or ready to move on the next level; the community refuses to recognize that here is a problem; there are no standards for preparedness; educators need to be educated; teachers are spread too thin; students need help and don't know how to, or won't, ask for help; there are more students being diagnosed with disabilities, and more children with disabilities being mainstreamed; the schools need mentoring programs for supporting at risk children, new mothers, children of incarcerated parents and children with special needs.

Responses Identified:

Attract seniors to be in service and mentor at risk children and youth; utilize the post secondary program at the Human Development Institute at U.K.; take a 'whole family' approach in working with at risk children; develop a stronger partnership with CHFS; replicate Spalding's program in other colleges and universities; utilize more volunteers at Home of the Innocents in Louisville; and have more AmeriCorps members in the schools.

Visions /Opportunities Identified:

There will be a lower drop-out rate; there will be an increase in participation in post secondary programs; students will be better prepared; there will be an increase in younger students in service; and there will be better coordination in and between service programs for students.

Other/Ex-Offenders

Challenges Identified:

There is a lack of access to education, jobs, public housing, shelter and financial aid for re-training or further education.

Responses Identified:

Develop programs for children and youth in regular and alternative schools and churches to educate them about the risks of smoking, drugs, teen parenthood and not getting an education.

Visions /Opportunities Identified:

Ex-offenders will be able to be productive members of society, and the recidivism rate will go down. Ex-offenders will have an improved quality of life.

Other/Veterans

Challenges Identified:

Social isolation; veterans struggling with psychological issues don't have access to the resources they need; veterans are too young to get financial assistance/benefits that are available to those over 60; veterans are developing addictions to drugs as a way to self medicate.

Responses Identified:

Develop AmeriCorps specific to the needs of Vets. Give veterans access to transportation to help them better access needed services.

Visions /Opportunities Identified:

Vets will be able to be productive, contributing members of society because they have access to the services they need.

Other/Drug Abuse

Challenges Identified:

Drug abuse is a huge problem in some parts of the state, affecting the entire community. There is a lack of local, affordable drug treatment programs. Communities don't want to admit to have a drug problem, NIMBY; children are impacted by addiction in their family and are not getting any services or assistance themselves; drug abuse results in poor parenting and children become vulnerable.

Responses Identified:

Local coalitions need to come together and bring attention to the problem, especially as it relates to and affects children. Mentoring programs need to be developed and put into place, and public awareness needs to be increased. The community needs help in fund-raising and in developing a bigger volunteer base.

Visions /Opportunities Identified:

The community will enjoy an improved quality of life; community members will be engaged in public policy and advocacy; and leadership will be visionary. Service delivery will be more efficient and resources will be better managed. Generational poverty will be lessened, and chronic illness will be declining.

Other/Seniors

Challenges Identified:

Senior Corps programs do not get enough visibility and attention; there's a lack of volunteers in these programs, and volunteers are getting older because people have to work longer. The needs of seniors are not being met; 55 and older volunteer programs are not promoted enough; there's not enough collaboration with AmeriCorps and there's a lack of collaboration between service providers,

Responses Identified:

Senior Corps needs to develop collaborative relationships with other service programs, like AmeriCorps and with community based providers. All of the service programs need to work at getting corporate volunteers involved in service.

Visions /Opportunities Identified:

Senior Corps programs will have a strong collaborative relationship with AmeriCorps at the local, state and national levels. Senior Corps programs will be promoted through KCCVS. There will be more volunteers who come fm the corporate world; in fact there will be a corporate volunteer council.