

Getting People Out of Poverty: Programs, Policies and Collaborations That Work

Third Annual MENDING Poverty Conference - June 16, 2010

Critical Issues Paper

This brief paper summarizes recommendations for reducing poverty in Los Angeles - concentrating on what leaders from nonprofits, government, foundations and corporations can do together, along with community advocates and coalitions. The recommendations are presented in four categories; they were made by participants and speakers in three workshops held at the Third Annual MENDING Poverty Conference. These workshops concerned effective poverty reduction programs, roles for nonprofits in policy change, and strategies for successful community collaborations. This Critical Issues Paper is being used to inform the new Los Angeles Poverty Action Collaborative on advocacy and other strategies that are being developed, and also to shape the agenda for the 2011 MENDING Poverty Conference.

Policy

- 1 - Policies for poverty reduction need to address the reality that loss of public benefits and financial support is a huge disincentive for many poor people to take a low-paying job that does not provide health coverage.
- 2 - Policies need to address the reality that people who need help often will not accept it because they do not want to be seen as "charity cases."
- 3 - Policies need to support provision of housing for children of undocumented workers.
- 4 - Policies need to be built on a universal value - the right of people to have their basic needs met.
- 5 - Many local efforts (such as re-entry programs for prisoners) need to be addressed at the state policy level for real change to take place.

Collaboration

- 6 - More active collaboration is needed between nonprofits in the community.
- 7 - There is a need to bring churches more actively into the work of reducing poverty, and to promote collaboration between churches and nonprofits.
- 8 - There also is a need to promote more collaboration between nonprofits and universities - in particular so the universities can help nonprofits with research and evaluation to show impact.
- 9 - Multiple participants in collaborations are necessary to leverage resources and facilitate larger-scale change.
- 10 - The role of local government in community collaborations needs to be explored - e.g., an expanded role for neighborhood councils.

Building Nonprofit Capacity

- 11 - Nonprofits need help in building capacity to provide affordable child care for young women (both single and married) with children.
- 12 - Nonprofits need help in building capacity to help low income people develop a better understanding of their rights and obligations as tenants.
- 13 - The nonprofit sector as a whole needs to coordinate an effort to reduce duplication of nonprofit and community programs.
- 14 - More effort is needed to share lessons learned from mistakes, not just successes.
- 15 - There is a need to overcome a "social Darwinism" mindset – which leads to nonprofits fighting with each other, especially in the face of changing demographics and economics.
- 16 - Nonprofits need help in providing low income people with more opportunities for education beyond the high school level.
- 17 - Constant quality improvement for nonprofits is essential to good community change.
- 18 - When good programs have emerged from a nonprofit, local effort is needed to spread them more widely and bring them "to scale."

Advocacy

- 19 - As a matter of general philosophy, the nonprofit sector needs to stop waiting for government to solve problems - many of the best solutions will come from within the sector.
- 20 - There is a need to connect all these issues with each other, in the larger cause of promoting overall social change in the community.
- 21 - Policy makers and nonprofit leaders more often need to get down to the grassroots level for real change to happen.
- 22 - There is a need to weave together the issues about reducing poverty across the "silos" of different types of social and community services.
- 23 - As part of the process of change, people need to "stand up" as well as show up, especially when real injustices are observed (e.g., violence against tenants who speak up about unfavorable conditions where they live).
- 24 - Multigenerational aspects of community benefits of new programs and policies need to be emphasized.

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For more information about the MENDING Poverty conference, go to: www.valleynonprofitresources.org