



About Bridges Out of Poverty

www.sjcbridges.org

Community and agency leaders continually ask how to create change that will end the cycle of poverty. In St. Joseph County, a large group of organizations has recognized the potential of the Bridges Out of Poverty model and is working to implement it to bring positive change to our community. The St. Joseph County Bridges Out of Poverty Initiative now involves more than 50 member organizations from social service, education, business and government, working to create a strategy for change. The organization has a three-year strategic plan with the following vision statement:

Using Bridges Out of Poverty as a framework, transform St. Joseph County into a sustainable community in which individuals move from generational poverty to self-sufficiency, enhancing the quality of life for everyone and creating a model for other communities.

Developed by Phil DeVol and Ruby Payne, The Bridges Out of Poverty model examines the sources and impact of generational poverty on families and communities, reveals the hidden rules and norms of social class, and supports addressing and solving generational poverty at the community level. It begins with a mental model of prosperity and addresses poverty across a continuum that moves from the individual to infrastructure and policy.

The Bridges Out of Poverty model first came to the South Bend/ Michiana area in 2004 through the Center for Women's InterCultural Leadership (CWIL) at Saint Mary's College and its Women in Leadership in Community Organizations (WiLCO) program, which involved women leaders from six agencies. CWIL has continued to provide coordination of the effort to date, and is working on connecting student learning and faculty research to the project.

Since then, more than 500 community members have been trained in the Bridges seminar and about 75 people have been trained as Getting Ahead facilitators. Getting Ahead provides people from generational poverty a process to explore the impact of poverty in their own lives and build the necessary resources to build a better life. In his 2007 State of the City address, South Bend Mayor Stephen Luecke announced that Bridges Out of Poverty will be one of his five goals for the year, and he pledged to "work with local leaders to explore the Bridges Out of Poverty program as a way to help local families out of poverty."

Phil DeVol considers South Bend to be a "leading community" that has reached a critical mass of training, interest, investment and partnerships in implementing the Bridges model. Other communities working with the Bridges model include Evansville, Ind.; Burlington, Vt.; Traverse City and Battle Creek, Mich.; Syracuse, N.Y.; and Toledo and Springfield, Ohio. DeVol hopes that these leading communities will help create the road maps to help other communities address poverty using this model.

If you are interested in getting involved with the St. Joseph County Bridges Out of Poverty Initiative, contact Bonnie Bazata at (574) 284-4058.