

## Howard County Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency Annual Report: 2015

The Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency was created by County legislation in 2009 with a mission to **reduce the incidence of poverty in Howard County by acting as a planning and coordinating body for initiatives that promote the economic stability of individuals and families**. Our vision is a community where those in need have the opportunities and pathways for getting ahead.

This mission and vision requires a collaborative effort by government agencies, non-profit organizations, local businesses and community groups to understand the existing programs and services that address the various elements of self-sufficiency. The Board has a role in advocating for these existing programs and services while also identifying new initiatives to address the barriers to self-sufficiency.

The diversity of the Board's membership and varying perspectives on poverty in Howard County have resulted in significant accomplishments over the past six years. The Board has been flexible in forming committees and workgroups to address specific issues based upon the community needs. The work of the Board has yielded significant efforts over the years as noted below:

- the adoption of the County's Plan to End Homelessness, with substantive work to that end over the past three years;
- the establishment of a Voluntary Income Tax Assessment site at the MultiService Center in southeast Howard County that assists low income families with their tax returns and accessing Earned Income Tax Credits;
- the creation of a unique apprenticeship program that allows low wage workers to nearly double their income after completion;
- adoption of the Bridges Out of Poverty (BOP) model, which provides a framework for service providers to examine how they view and treat those in poverty, including three community-wide training programs attended by over 450 people;
- implementation of an on-going series of "Getting Ahead" groups, based on the BOP model, that enable people in poverty to investigate the effects of poverty on their personal resources and what it takes to improve those resources; and
- the establishment of the Hire Power Awards which recognize local businesses that empower their workforce and our community through innovative and inclusive employment practices.

The Board has also lent support to initiatives that align with its mission. For example,

- in 2013, supported the planning and development of a Small Efficiency Apartment building to house 35 chronically homeless individuals and a new Day Resource Center.
- in 2015, submitted a letter to the County Executive and the County Council to support the Columbia Downtown Housing Corporation's (CDHC) original goal that 15% of new housing in Downtown Columbia be affordable at an average of 50% of Howard County Median Income.

## 2015 Highlights and Accomplishments

The Board's focus in previous years was driven by the Plan to End Homelessness which was created by the Committee to End Homelessness and adopted by the Board in 2010. This effort is now a County priority that is in its fourth year of receiving resources. The strategies and vision of the Plan are operationalized in County departments and non-profits in the community. The Board's role as the Continuum of Care Board for Howard County, and the fact that many Board members play a significant role in the Plan, will allow it to continue to stay intimately involved with its progress.

The focus of the Board this past year was on the six barriers to self-sufficiency which were included in the Environmental Scan completed the previous year. The Board's desire is to collaborate with existing organizations rather than duplicate any programs that are already being done in the community. The barriers to self-sufficiency include:

- Lack of **employment** and training opportunities
- Inadequate **transportation**
- Lack of affordable **housing**
- Lack of affordable **childcare**
- Comprehensive **healthcare**
- Access to sufficient **food**

The Board formed workgroups for each of these barriers to take a fresh look at each area and brainstorm potential new initiatives. One suggestion which arose from these workgroups was the opportunity to allocate surplus County vehicles to graduates of the Getting Ahead program to address their transportation needs. This idea has led to continuing discussions with Vehicles for Change to determine how a partnership could be formed to develop the program. The childcare workgroup deferred any further discussion in this area pending the recommendations of the Early Childhood Education Action Group being led by County Council Chairperson Mary Kay Sigaty.

The six barriers to self-sufficiency are consistent with the elements included in the Association of Community Services of Howard County's "Self Sufficiency Indicators" report. This report was updated in September 2015 and presented to the Board. We are currently evaluating how to incorporate this data with the self-sufficiency metrics that were previously identified by the Board to measure the progress of the community's efforts to address poverty.

The Board also provided input for two projects submitted by the Department of Citizens Services to the Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS) program, at the National Center for Smart Growth, University of Maryland. The "Bridging the Benefits Cliff" project will examine disincentives to self-sufficiency, evaluate the needs of households who are above eligibility limits but are unable to achieve stability due to the loss of benefits, and identify the policy implications of these scenarios. Another project will examine the best practices for ending homelessness in Howard County as part of the "Maryland Politics, Policy, and Leadership" class.

There was also a presentation to the Board by the Real Property Research Group on a rental housing survey prepared for Howard County's Housing Department. The presentation gave an analysis of the rental housing stock in Howard County in context of employment, income, household composition, geographic submarkets, vacancy and penetration rates (supply/demand), rental costs, accessibility, and trends in housing development.

The Board is integrating these external initiatives and data into our work as part of the four guiding principles that were developed as part of our strategic planning process in 2014. These principles include:

1. Maximize the unique opportunity for collective impact;
2. Promote planning and decision making that is guided by the people being served;
3. Focus on prevention and creating pathways to long-term stability; and
4. Be informed by reliable data and best practices.

The Board committees continued their efforts in 2015 as listed below.

The Getting Ahead Committee continued to oversee the growth of this program in 2015. There were seven new groups in 2015 bringing the number of graduates to over 150. The third "Bridges Out of Poverty Community Training" was held bringing the number of service providers involved to over 450. There was also a focus on supporting the Getting Ahead graduates after graduation. A Staying Ahead Council was created as one of many options for Getting Ahead graduates in an effort to continue meaningful support along their journey toward self-sufficiency.

The Leadership Howard County Premier project that investigated the feasibility of the Circles, USA model for Howard County presented their findings in May 2015. Although there were some benefits to the Circles, USA program, the project team's recommendation was that an alternative program be investigated. This has resulted in a follow-up project by this year's Premier class to research a mentorship model that would be more suitable for Getting Ahead graduates.

The success of the Getting Ahead program would not be possible without the involvement of the community. The number of community partners involved with Getting Ahead increased, most recently adding Howard Community College, Leadership Howard County, The Jacaranda Center and Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) to our list. We also focused on improving opportunities for Getting Ahead graduates to access reliable and affordable car maintenance and care through new partnerships with the HCPSS Applied Research Lab Automotive Technology Department and the Full Circle Service Center which is affiliated with Vehicles for Change. Finally, in an effort to improve communication between graduates and community partners, a Getting Ahead webpage is being developed.

The Housing Committee was formed in the past year to increase awareness of the severe shortage of housing that is affordable to the county's lowest income households (i.e. 67% or 6,653 of all renter households with income under \$50,000 are paying rents that require a substantial portion of their income). This shortage is a barrier to self-sufficiency and contributes to homelessness. The goals of this committee were: 1) to identify and recommend initiatives that will increase the stock of rental housing in Howard County that is affordable to households with annual incomes under \$50,000; and 2) inform the Board of community plans, discussions and activities concerning affordable housing.

The committee's accomplishments and highlights from the past year include:

- Recommended a measurable goal for the Board: to increase rental housing that's affordable to households with income under \$50,000
- Recommended and developed a letter that the Board sent to the County Executive and County Council to support the Columbia Downtown Housing Corporation's (CDHC) original goal that 15% of new housing in Downtown Columbia be affordable at an average of 50% of Howard County Median Income.
- Recommended and developed a letter that the Board sent to the County Executive and County Council to urge that a name be given to the planned Single Efficiency Apartment / Day Resource Center that conjures up a positive image and does not label the people who will live and/or receive services there.

The Community Outreach Committee was also formed during the year based upon the needs identified in the strategic plan. The committee includes key community members with the goal of informing and engaging community stakeholders about the work of the Board. Their first task was to create a one-page document that summarizes the work of the Board that can be shared with members of the community.

This committee also managed the second annual Hire Power Awards program which was held in June 2015 at Wegmans. Five awardees were recognized: Boston Market, Pure Technologies, Success in Style, Wegmans & Victoria Secret. The County Executive attended the event, which was covered live by Fox 45, to recognize the recipients. The event created a lot of positive energy among the approximately 35 people who attended including prior award recipients. The Board plans to build upon the success of this event with nominations now open for the 2016 Hire Power Awards.

The Evaluation and Resource Allocation Committee continued its role of evaluating the best use of state and federal funds as they align and complement local resources. They reviewed community data throughout the year and were responsible for ranking the projects put forth in the Continuum of Care application for Howard County.

### **Program & Funding Recommendations**

The Board strongly recommends that the County continue its support of significant Board efforts. Funding for these programs and initiatives should be sought from both County funds and external sources to address the sustainability of these efforts over time. The areas which the Board supports include:

#### Existing Programs

- The Plan to End Homelessness: this funding provides the following critical services: case management, service coordination, flexible financial assistance, employment supports, addiction treatment, a housing locator, a landlord program, the United Way family stability initiatives and the continuation and expansion of the local housing subsidy program.
- Getting Ahead program: there is a continuing and increasing need for funding as Getting Ahead continues to grow and more people set out on their journey toward self-sufficiency through the program. Specifically, there is a need for additional funding to: 1) sponsor new Getting Ahead groups to reach more County residents in need; 2) offer additional Community trainings; and, 3) help support Staying Ahead opportunities and programming.

### New Initiatives

- Consolidated Human Services Center (CHSC, aka, the Nonprofit Center): the Board supports the continuation of the CHSC project beyond the pre-development phase. This facility would benefit the community by improving coordination of services that promote economic stability. The funding requirements for the next project phase, which includes the need for technical project management and additional planning expenses, are in the process of being developed. The Board will continue to monitor the project funding requirements and provide our recommendations as the details become available.
- Housing: resources are needed to create housing that is affordable to households with incomes under \$50,000, including housing that is dedicated for households moving to housing stability.
- Transportation / Employment: the Office of Transportation had a plan in the development stage for an employment shuttle service from Hickory Ridge east along Route 175 and then south to North Laurel. The project should receive additional consideration to address both the transportation and employment issues for the lower-income workforce.
- Food: the demand for food assistance has grown by more than 600% over the last six years in Howard County. An increasing number of individuals and children are food insecure and suffering from hunger. Resources are desired to support the essential nutritional needs of families who are food insecure, as well as increase access to the County's main food distribution site beyond normal working hours.

### **Looking Ahead**

The Getting Ahead program will continue to be the key initiative of the Board for the first half of 2016. These efforts will include:

- Continue to work with Leadership Howard County to develop a sustainable program designed to connect Getting Ahead graduates to mentoring opportunities in the community
- Continue to sponsor Community Trainings in the Bridges Out of Poverty framework
- Continue partnership development efforts
- Explore additional funding sources
- Begin preparations to transfer both implementation and oversight of the Getting Ahead / Staying Ahead programs to the Howard County Department of Citizen Services with support from the Board

The focus of the Community Outreach Committee will be the 2016 Hire Power Awards with a goal to increase the number of nominees and increased recognition of employers with innovative and inclusive employment practices. The Housing Committee will be discontinued in 2016 although the Board will continue to be informed by Board members about community plans, discussions and activities concerning affordable housing. The Evaluation and Resource Allocation Committee will continue reviewing the funding requests and prioritize the funding recommendations which maximize the client impact.

The Board's focus and committee structure will continue to be flexible as it works to incorporate the feedback of the Getting Ahead graduates into defining our initiatives. The Board faces complex issues that will require ongoing collaboration and partnerships to address the barriers to self-sufficiency that exist in our community. The Board will also undergo a leadership change in 2016 with the election of a new Board Chair and the addition of new members to the Board. This transition provides an opportunity to update the Strategic Plan to continue to maximize the effectiveness of the Board's work to address the needs of low income families and individuals.

## Board Membership

The BPSS is made up of key stakeholders from the public and private sectors. The 2015 Board members include:

Association of Community Service  
Joan Driessen  
Bridges to Housing Stability  
Jane O'Leary  
Housing Committee, Co-Chair  
Community Action Council  
Bita Dayhoff  
Community Advocate  
Brad Closs  
Community Advocate  
Lisa Jablonover  
Getting Ahead Committee, Chair  
Department of Citizen Services  
Phyllis Madachy  
Department of Corrections  
Jack Kavanagh  
Department of Housing and Community  
Development – Tom Carbo  
Department of Social Services  
Sherry Banks  
Department of Social Services  
Karen Butler  
Board Vice-Chair  
Evaluation & Resource Allocation, Chair

FEI Systems  
Stephen Martin  
Community Outreach Committee, Chair  
Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center  
Andrea Ingram  
Glen Mar United Methodist Church  
Matt Poole  
Housing Committee, Co-Chair  
Health Department  
Ronna Gotthainer  
Howard Community College  
Patricia Keeton  
Howard County Public School System  
Diane Martin  
Integrated Waste Analysts/FTK Group Inc.  
Julie Keough  
MakingChange  
Mike Couch  
Board Chair  
Mental Health Authority  
Donna Wells  
Office of Workforce Development  
Fran Trout