

Power of We Consortium

Meeting Minutes – June 17, 2011

Present: Angela Austin, Randy Bell, Nan Na Luo, Molly Parker, Jennifer McMillon Shirin Timms, Mikki McCabe, Greta Wu, Troy Weber, Susan Moriarty, John Roy Castillo, Angie Mayeaux, Michelle Nicholson, Ken Sperber, Derrick Jones, Amy Henderson, Ivan Love, Grace Mensel, Lynne Martinez, Brad Patterson, Jessica Yorke, Debbie Edokpolo, Justin Sheehan, Alex Bryan, Graham Pierce, Marvin Cato, Ross Yednock, Amber Paxton, Sarah Lundquist, Rosanne Renauer, Carrie Burns, Serg Ruiz, Bill Nelton, Regina Allen, Christina Harris, Katie Ellero, Olga Hernandez-Patino, Susan Cancro, Mary Clark, Paul Opsommer, Peggy Roberts.

Welcome, Introductions and Announcements:

The membership acknowledged Terry Link's last meeting prior to his retirement from the Greater Lansing Food Bank. Terry was praised for his tireless good work on behalf of marginalized populations and his important way of looking at the ills of the world.

Mid-Michigan Capitol Caucus:

The bipartisan, bicameral Mid-Michigan Capitol Caucus was created to bring together elected officials from both parties to discuss issues pertinent to our Mid-Michigan community and to seek viable solutions. The eleven member group meets approximately every 4-6 weeks with a focus on 7 priorities areas. We will welcome two members of the Caucus, Chairperson Joan Bauer (D), State Representative, District 68, and Co-Chair Paul Opsommer (R) State Representative, District 93, who will provide an overview of the efforts currently underway to influence positive outcomes for the Capital Area. Time will be allocated for dialogue with Consortium members.

Mary Clark, assistant to Representative Joan Bauer, and Paul Opsommer together provided a summary of the various bills and initiatives before the Michigan House of Representatives and Senate.

Representative Opsommer sits on several committees which are working on the following topics: Health Policy (obesity focus), Insurance (regulating insurance discounts for premiums), Transportation (the bridge in Detroit with hearings in Sept), and Energy Technology (law that requires all businesses and nonprofits to have a phone system that identifies one's location if a call to 911 is made).

A discussion regarding the state budget reinforced that the end of the business tax required additional revenue and expense cuts in order to balance the budget. The budget was passed 4 months earlier than in past years. A teacher tenure reform was passed which allows teachers to reach tenure within 3 years (instead of 4) if they have excellent evaluations. Otherwise, tenure will change from 4 years to 5 years. Additionally, seniority for determining layoffs will not automatically be the only factor. Student academic growth will be part of a teacher's evaluation. Another major topic of discussion is the Urban Cooperation Act and how units of government can/should merge. Often, merging does not save money so the act needs to be reformed.

Mary Clark reported that a group of technology CEOs was invited to meet with Caucus members to talk about why they came to Michigan, why they have stayed, what they want, and what they

need to grow. Responses included the desire for walkable, bikeable community with a small urban environment. MSU's presence was considered a major plus.

Mary reported that Joan Bauer believes that the revenue sharing cuts adopted by the state impede the quality of life in our communities. Cuts to the state's EITC are another area of disagreement, though the 6% being retained is better than nothing. \$3700 personal exemption tax credits, \$2300 for seniors, is another loss for residents in the 2012 FY. Homestead property tax credits have changed dramatically and film credits for movie makers have been cut back. Brownfield tax credits will no longer be issued from MEDC and will now be issued through an appropriations process.

There is a bill being considered that would make it illegal in Michigan to adopt environmental restrictions that are stricter than the federal EPA legislation. Rep. Bauer opposes this bill. Legislation that requires institutions to pay no more than 80% of employee health care payments is under discussion. Bridge Card reform is underway to prevent a recipient's ability to use the card in ATM machines and in casinos. Rep Bauer voted against the initial bill to allow motorcycle riders to ride without a helmet due to the medical costs that fall on the citizenry. Health Exchanges and redistricting maps are hot topics at this time. The Pure Michigan campaign supported with public tax dollars was supported by all in the bi-partisan caucus.

One Consortium member questioned whether the end of the business tax will in fact create new jobs as suggested by the governor. Rep Opsommer suggested that job creation was not the expected outcome, but rather it was re-investment in businesses in general. Another Consortium member stated great concern that the actions taken by this administration are widening the equity gap between classes of residents and challenged the legislators to consider that inequality is bad for everyone and the economy.

Asset Independence Coalition, one of the 12 coalitions of the Power of We Consortium, coordinates resources of public and private institutions to promote the financial independence of low to moderate income residents of Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties. Coordinator Amber Paxton will provide recent figures of the very successful 2011 tax filing season for area residents. Amber will also engage the Consortium membership in discussion about the benefits of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and how the Consortium can support efforts underway to increase the number of income tax returns for eligible residents and expand financial education opportunities.

Amber Paxton, coordinator of the Asset Independence Coalition, reported that the mission of AIC is to coordinate resources of public and private institutions to promote the financial independence of low to moderate income residents of Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties. AIC partners include IRS, Ingham County, City of Lansing, NorthWest Initiative, Capital Area Community Services, Capital Area Michigan Works!, Community and Economic Dev. Assoc. of Michigan, MSU, LCC, Walmart, PNC banks.

AIC's total annual budget of \$31,000 leverages hundreds of thousands of dollars on behalf of the community. In brief, for the 2010 tax season the AIC was able to facilitate the completion of 1,339 federal tax returns (50% increase over 2009) and 2,035 state returns. By utilizing 162

volunteers, \$2.68 million in total refunds were generated, of which \$567,918 were federal EITC and \$104,896 were state EITC.

Free and scholarship-supported financial education courses are listed under “Financial Education” on the www.assetindependencecoalition.org website. AIC seeks tax refund preparer volunteers, tax sites, and donations.

AmeriCorps VISTA & AmeriCorps State Programs

The PWC has sponsored a VISTA Program for 5 years, and an AmeriCorps State Program for 2 years. Current members from both programs will provide a lively demonstration of the valuable service being provided throughout Ingham County and the impact this service is having on our community.

Katie Ellero, AmeriCorps State program coordinator, introduced the AmeriCorps State and AmeriCorps VISTA programs sponsored by the *Power of We Consortium*. Jen McMillon, (State member at Mid-MEAC), Carrie Burns, (State member at South Lansing Community Development Association), Christina Harris, (VISTA member at Advent House), and Nikki McCabe, (VISTA member at the Refugee Development Center) each provided slides and commentary on the work they are doing at their respective sites. The impact of their work was evident at it relates to reducing environmental stress, increasing access to healthy foods, serving the homeless, and increasing opportunities for refugees.

The AmeriCorps State program will begin its 3rd grant year in October, while the VISTA program is completing its 5-year grant, with no word yet as to whether a new 5 –year grant will be approved.

Early On Application Approval & Great Start Collaborative Update

Early On is designed to assist families in accessing and coordinating social, health and education services that will promote the development of their young child under age three with a disability or developmental delay. On an annual basis the Early On Program re-applies for a non-competitive grant from the State Department of Education, the lead agency for the State’s Early On program. The Birth to Five Great Start Collaborative supports the 2011-12 application and requests Consortium approval. Michelle Nicholson will provide pertinent information regarding Early On, the broader initiatives of the Great Start Collaborative, and the impact of the recently secured \$942,000 Kellogg Foundation grant for Birth To Work.

Michelle Nicholson, Ingham ISD and Great Start Collaborative (GSC), offered an overview of the Early On program, its successes, and its challenges. The budget for FY 2011-12 will provide an approximately \$82,000 reduction from FY 2010-11.

Brad Patterson moved that the Consortium approve the Early On application to the State Department of Education for the 2011-12 FY. Marvin Cato provided the second. The motion was approved. Angela Austin signed the application on behalf of the Consortium.

Michelle, with assistance from Ken Sperber, provided a brief overview of the Birth to Five Great Start Collaborative and showed its new website, which is linked to the *Power of We Consortium*

site. The creation of this new site helped the GSC to think through what it does and how best to focus attention on its work.

Michelle and Ken then gave a very brief account of Birth To Work, recently granted \$942,000 by the Kellogg Foundation, and the critical role that GSC will play in rolling out this initiative. A job description for a project manager for Birth To Work will be released by June 27th.

Proposed Summer Recess

Historically the PWC has taken votes of the membership to cancel meetings in July, August and December each year. We will consider a recommendation by our co-chairs to cancel our July, August and December meetings on a permanent basis. Alternative means to conduct business will be utilized, e.g. e-mail.

Brief discussion was held with the membership as to whether to permanently cancel *Power of We Consortium* meetings during the months of July, August and December annually. It was agreed that if important business arises during these months, the membership may be contacted via email or a special meeting can be called.

Regina Allen moved that *Power of We Consortium* meetings be permanently canceled during the months of July, August and December annually. Lynn Martinez provided the second. The motion was passed.

Next meeting of the *Power of We Consortium* is Friday, September 16, 2011