

United Way of Williamson County

2008 Hopeful Future Forum Final Report



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Introduction

United Way of Williamson County (UWWC) has a vision that everyone in Williamson County has a hopeful future. In order to achieve this vision, UWWC is committed to mobilize the caring power of our community. In an effort to mobilize the community the first Hopeful Future Forum, a day of information sharing and discussion with community stakeholders from across the county, took place on January 24th, 2008 at the Georgetown Public Library. The ultimate goal of the forum was development of powerful collaborations around community identified priority health and human service challenges. Throughout the day expert facilitation and community sharing created priority areas. Currently, collaborations are being formed to explore solutions for the most pressing human service challenges identified during the Hopeful Future Forum.

Process and Methodology

Edge of Your Seat Consulting, Inc. teamed with UWWC to plan and facilitate the forum as a community information gathering session. This day long forum included both large and small focus group discussions. UWWC presented detailed information about community health and human service trends and a community resource update. Large group discussions focused on currently available data that may strengthen community knowledge about health and human service needs and gaps in Williamson County. Small group sessions identified current community health and human services needs and provided evidence for those needs. Needs were then prioritized by the groups. Further small group discussion created visions about what the Williamson County community would look like if each of the priority issues areas were properly addressed. Participants in the forum included stakeholders from many communities throughout the county including nonprofit, business, local government, and education.

Outcome

Out of a full day of conversation and facilitated discussion came the priorities of the stakeholders present and the communities they serve:

- *Creating Successful Young People*
- *Assuring Physical and Mental Health Care for All*
- *Developing High Quality Affordable Housing Options*
- *Beginning a Community Action Alliance*

Next Steps

United Way of Williamson County will work to develop and/or strengthen collaborations around each of these issue areas, solidify visions for success in each area, and develop a community level strategy for achievement. Stakeholders who attended the forum were invited to actively participate in areas of their preference. It is the hope of UWWC that new stakeholders, energized by the efforts of their fellow community members at the Hopeful Future Forum, will attend collaborative meetings as well.

Creating Successful Young People

Stakeholders at the Hopeful Future Forum identified the needs of young people as an issue in the community. These issues ranged from quality early childhood care to success in higher education and poor workforce participation. The following list was identified by Hopeful Future Forum Small Group participants.

- Early childhood care-subsidized and affordable
- Pre-K programs, particularly in rural areas
- Lack of Head Start expansion
- After school care-subsidized and affordable, including teens
- Youth activities within walking distance of their homes
- Childcare for children with special needs
- Poor transition services for children with disabilities
- No support for children with disabilities
- Services for autism
- Mentors for students
- Substance abuse in schools
- School safety
- Educational system that does not prepare children for success/outdated education system
- TAKS testing affects on school ratings
- Drop out rate and drop out prevention services
- Opportunities to achieve a GED
- Inability to find living wage jobs with benefits
- Juvenile justice issues/juvenile crime
- Gangs
- Child abuse continuum
- Youth experiencing family violence
- Diverse cultures not connecting
- Teenage pregnancy
- Family planning and sexual education (beyond abstinence)
- Lack of Planned Parenthood
- Youth mental health
- Homeless teens; teens couch surfing
- Youth issues
- Family issues
- Youth feeling that adults don't care
- Parent education and resources
- Youth/intergenerational relationships
- Bilingual education
- Literacy
- ESL

Components of a vision for creating successful young people:

"affordable and high quality comprehensive childcare"

"all youth feel safe, valued and inspired"

"multigenerational support"

"diverse, age appropriate out of school programs"

"resources that help [youth] reach their unique potential"

Next Steps for the "Creating Successful Young People" Collaborative

Meeting: April at United Way of Williamson County Offices, Round Rock (details TBA)

Suzanne Hershey, facilitator of the Ready by 21 Coalition will present to the collaboration about their coalition's formation, model, progress and success. A panel of youth service/support organizations will discuss the topic "Barriers to Youth Success in Williamson County and Current Actions."

Assuring Physical and Mental Health Care for All

Stakeholders at the Hopeful Future Forum identified mental and physical healthcare as a priority need and identified challenges individuals face in accessing quality, affordable healthcare. The following list was identified by Hopeful Future Forum Small Group participants.

- Inability to pay for “affordable” healthcare
- High cost of healthcare and/or health insurance
- Problems with insurance
- Large number of uninsured individuals/families
- Lack of jobs with healthcare benefits
- Lack of Medicare & Medicaid providers, doctors and dentists
- Lack of prepared healthcare workers
- Lack of healthcare providers
- Affordable dental service options
- Preventative health services
- Health and nutritional education
- Education and support for diabetics
- Mental health services for adults
- Affordable high quality mental healthcare
- Long waiting lists for mental health service providers
- Non-English mental health services
- Mental health providers that take VA benefits
- Services, including reintegration, for disabled veterans
- School-based mental health care for kids
- Dental, medical and mental health care in school district
- Substance abuse
- Quality substance abuse services in correctional facilities
- Sexual health education beyond abstinence
- Rate of teenage pregnancy
- Family planning
- Prenatal care
- Affordable home health services
- Assisted living options
- Adult day care options
- Caregiver support
- Case management for seniors and those with disabilities to assist with health and well-being issues
- Transportation for medical care for persons with disabilities and seniors
- Barriers to end of life care
- Services for low-income women with breast cancer
- Services for autism

Components of a vision for assuring physical and mental healthcare for all:

“mental wellness...through an affordable, accessible care system”

“a quality healthcare system that is accessible and affordable for everyone”

Next Steps for the Assuring Physical and Mental Health Care for All Collaborative Meeting: May; Date, Time and Location TBA

A panel of health service provider organizations will discuss the topic “Barriers to an Integrated, Affordable Physical and Mental Healthcare Program in Williamson County and Current Actions” .

Developing High Quality Affordable Housing Options

The Williamson County Homelessness Taskforce has begun to discuss the issue of homelessness in our community; how it differs from “traditional” homelessness and the importance of those “acutely at risk of becoming homeless”. During the Hopeful Future Forum community members identified affordable housing and subsequent housing and shelter situations (including “couch surfing” and homelessness) as a priority issue in Williamson County. The following list was identified by Hopeful Future Forum Small Group participants. *Note: This group’s affordable housing vision included a desire for “access to quality employment” so job related issues are noted here as well.*

- Homelessness
- Homeless kids
- Homeless teenagers/couch surfing
- Effects of homelessness on students
- Multiple families living in overcrowded conditions
- Homeless shelter
- Emergency shelter
- Shelters for women and children
- Emergency family violence shelter
- Addressing the “don’t build in my back yard” perspective
- Housing services for families in crisis
- People living in substandard housing
- Lack of assistance for improvement to substandard housing
- Subsidized housing wait list
- Affordable housing
- Temporary affordable housing
- Lack of transitional housing
- Permanent affordable housing
- Affordable assisted living
- Affordable housing for seniors
- Case management for seniors and those with disabilities to assist with housing
- Job training and life skills education
- Job training related to emerging occupations
- How to find jobs
- Jobs with benefits
- Living wage
- Lack of employment base for community
- Concerns about a countywide economic development plan

Components of a vision for developing quality affordable housing options:

“access to safe, affordable housing options”

“access to employment and [supportive] community services”

Next Steps for the “Developing High Quality Affordable Housing Options” Collaboration:
Meeting: February 12th, 2:30pm at United Way of Williamson County Offices, Round Rock
Rick Rivera of the Austin/Travis County Ending Community Homelessness Organization will discuss strategies for identifying the number of homeless in the community. Housing organizations throughout Williamson County will discuss the topic “Affordable Housing in Williamson County and Current Action”.

Beginning a Community Action Alliance

Stakeholders at the Hopeful Future Forum discussed how UWWC's Hopeful Future Forum could catalyze true change in Williamson County. Many participants identified lack of overall community involvement, governmental awareness and nonprofit collaboration as possible roadblocks to a hopeful future for everyone in Williamson County and identified this issue as a priority. The following list was identified by Hopeful Future Forum Small Group participants.

- County wide needs assessment; identified group to do it regularly
- Communication-resource referral
- Client awareness of services
- Support services-no real time source of information
- Inappropriate referrals from 211
- Shared knowledge among the social service community regarding available services countywide
- Increased need for awareness about community challenges
- Volunteer Center for western Williamson County
- Lack of resource pool; information and money
- Lack of ownership in helping others in the community
- Community involvement in meeting needs; need more philanthropy throughout the county
- Funding for social service issues
- Nonprofits competing for money
- Effective use of incoming resources
- No input on CDBG Funds
- Strategic planning awareness
- Lack of countywide media
- Public awareness/political awareness of nonprofit value
- Political structure lacks understanding about the magnitude of social service needs in Williamson County
- Awareness raising of elected officials
- Local nonprofit organizations trying to fill voids left by government
- Lack of cooperation among county agencies and agency to agency
- Lack of coordination of faith based organizations to share services available
- Lack of collaboration between faith based and community based organizations
- Lack of networking between nonprofit agencies
- Territorial issues between different cities in Williamson County
- No co-location of services makes providing services more difficult
- Lack of a Community Resource Center
- General lack of community/health and human services resources
- Few social service providers
- Access to social services in outlying/rural areas
- Lack of representation/infrastructure for support services
- Support for nonprofit workforce
- Building capacity of agencies to support growth
- Mobilizing new residents for volunteerism
- Support network for newcomers
- Moving the planning agenda forward
- Lack of implementation of identified community objectives
- County/City wide growth planning

Components of a vision for beginning a Community Action Alliance:

"representing all voices"

"identify, plan for and respond to the needs of its citizens"

"resulting in quality, accessible services"

Next Steps for the "Beginning a Community Action Alliance" Collaboration:

Meeting: April; Date, Time and Location TBA

Sam Woolard, former Assistant Director of the Community Action Network (located in Austin) will discuss the CAN's formation, successes, challenges and recommendations for a developing collaboration. A panel of social service providers will discuss the topic "Barriers to Countywide Collaboration in Williamson County and Current Action".

A Comprehensive and Efficient Transportation System

Many stakeholders identified transportation as a priority issue however, very few individuals identified it as an issue that they were interested in working on in collaboration. Due to this lack of interest a collaboration team will not be convened at this time.

Transportation

- Lack of affordable transportation options
- Lack of public transportation
- Lack of public transportation to health and human services from smaller cities
- For those with disabilities and seniors

Components of a vision for a comprehensive and efficient transportation system:

"comprehensive and efficient transportation system"

"responsive to growth"

"accessible and affordable to all"

"maintained at the highest safety and environmental standards"

Other Issue Areas

Stakeholders identified a mixture of other issues with varying levels of "priority" attached to them. While these issues appeared to be important to many individuals they did not get rated by the group as the highest priority areas. These issues/issue areas include:

Eldercare Issues

- Guardianship needs
- Adult day care
- Coordinated system for indigent elderly
- Supporting seniors to remain independent

- Literacy
- GED
- Life skills

Family Violence and Child Abuse

- Domestic violence services
- Batterer's interventions

Crisis Services

- Food pantries in rural areas
- Crisis services for the working poor
- Hunger
- Basic food and nutrition needs
- Emergency funds

Language/Cultural Barriers

- Bilingual services
- Bilingual education
- Diverse cultures not connecting

Issues of Undocumented Individuals

- Healthcare access

Immigrant Issues

- Immigration services
- Tax services
- Legal services
- Banking

Poverty

Population Growth

Re-entry services for Incarcerated Individuals

Adult Education

- Financial education
- ESL

Veteran Issues

Summary

The Hopeful Future Forum was a step for the Williamson County community toward systematically identifying and addressing health and human service priorities from a countywide perspective. As our cities continue to grow closer together and our county continues to grow overall, United Way of Williamson County will provide a bridge to facilitate sharing of successes, challenges, and expertise through support of community collaborations. UWWC will support the service providers in our community to increase effectiveness and the ability to secure additional resources for the community. United Way of Williamson County believes this cooperative spirit will bring us closer to our vision of a hopeful future for all.

For more information or if you have questions about anything presented here, please contact:

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