

## **EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: Community Partnerships**

**Source:** Marcia Cole, AmeriCorps \*VISTA, Jackson Community College, 2006-2007

In an ideal world, what would your community look like? How would it function, and what improvements would you make? Is a better world just a pipe dream, or can it be achieved? Believing it can is the beginning of any dream. "You see things and you say, 'Why?' but I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?'" (George Bernard Shaw, 1921). Bringing many dreamers together to form community partnerships can bring the much needed transformations that will make our worlds a better place to live. Vision, true collaboration, and effective communication are the keys that will yield fruits that are well worth the efforts.

### **VISION**

The vision is the foundation of any community collaboration. Having a common goal for improvement gives cause for every organization to come together. It will be the glue that holds the coalition together and sustains the group when problems arise. Beginning with an end in mind focuses the planning and activities around a joint task and creates purpose. The vision will also spawn guiding truths that give a framework for the activities that will follow.

### **COLLABORATION**

A true collaboration is all about "we" and not "me." Partnerships that are interconnected function at the highest levels and are stronger than individuals. Joining arms with other organizations creates bonds of teamwork, better problem solving capacity, and greater creative thinking. "We are more powerful when we do our work together than in a vacuum" (Hildy Gottlieb, 2000). Pulling on the same rope creates a sense of ownership that we are part of a team and part of a bigger solution. That's not to say that ad hoc groups can not be utilized effectively within the coalition, provided they are still working toward the same vision. Occasionally drawing on the expertise of certain community members who are able to give a long term commitment can bring an added benefit to the group. But by rejecting the ideas of turf and territory, we can change the world, or at least parts of it, by joining with other community partners. Building friendships builds caring, caring builds community, and community will help bring about those natural changes that community partnerships seek. "We need to start building an army of friends, an army of support. Those friendships are the key to building sustainable efforts to improve the quality of life in our communities" (Hildy Gottlieb, 2000).

### **COMMUNICATION**

True, effective communication will allow the committee to share ideas and air difficulties. It is important to allow all group members a voice and to monitor those members who consistently speak out while drawing in those who do not add to the discussion often. Different perspectives will add a depth to collaborations and bring about more ideas and generate solutions. If a level of trust has been developed, truth will spring forth goodness and the committee's vision will flourish. Keeping the lines of communication open via email, phone calls and personal visits is a necessity. Distributing minutes after routine meetings shows credibility to what is being done, and can be accomplished by establishing and utilizing a list serve and distribution list. Community partnerships (friendships) take vision, collaboration, and communication, but the rewards are well worth the efforts.

### **References:**

- Gottlieb, Hildy. *Friendraising: Community Engagement Strategies for Boards Who Hate Fundraising but Love Making Friends*, Resolve, Inc. D/A/A Renaissance Press (Sept. 2000).
- Shaw, George Bernard. *Back to Methuselah*. (1921, part 1, act 1) Irish Dramatist and Socialist (1856-1950).