



4041 N. Richards Street
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 906-2700
www.cr-sdc.org



sdic Journal

Social Development Commission March, 2009

Strategizing Against Poverty

Hundreds of Milwaukee area community, business and governmental leaders were called on to enable the dreams of the poor. That call came during the 2nd Annual Symposium on Poverty.

The Symposium was organized by the Social Development Commission (SDC) and was held December 9th at the Midwest Airlines Center. The event had two parts. The first portion was a Job and Resource Fair that attracted approximately 250 people despite a winter storm. Residents were able to apply for jobs in person and on-line at the Fair as well as gain access to valuable information and program services.



Residents apply for jobs at Symposium

The second portion was a program that attracted more than 300 people. The Bridge of Hope, a collaboration of organizations, businesses

and individuals who have been strategizing and drawing up action plans based on the root causes of poverty as identified by attendees at the 1st Symposium, reported their plans to the gathering. The Bridge of Hope focuses on Education, Job Opportunities and Racism as the basic causes of poverty.

Nationally recognized figures Dr. Marc Lamont Hill and Professor John A. Powell gave keynote addresses at the evening session. Dr. Hill urged the Bridge of Hope workgroups to continue their work and to begin including low-income residents in the discussions and planning sessions. "The movement to end poverty," he argued, "must be of the poor, not for the poor."

Dr. Powell predicted that major changes in the political and social landscape of America, and specifically Milwaukee, are coming in the near future. He stated that African-Americans and Latinos as well as the low-income need to make sure they are at the table when those changes are formulated to ensure that no one is disenfranchised. Dr. Powell urged the Bridge of Hope to draw up and send a policy paper on their plans to combat poverty to the White House by early 2009 to be part of the process.

Deborah Blanks, CEO of SDC, asked those in attendance to join in the Bridge of Hope and help move the work groups forward. "If we don't do it, who will?" she asked in addressing the group's goal of eliminating poverty. She promised the Bridge of Hope will be there to challenge, to cajole and to encourage the poor of the Milwaukee area to dream and then help enable them to make their dreams come true.

For more information on the SDC Bridge of Hope, visit the SDC website at www.cr-sdc.org and click on the "Symposium" tab and then "Bridge of Hope."



Dr. Marc Lamont Hill, Deborah Blanks, M.C. Jason Newton of WISN and Professor John A. Powell.

SDC Staffer Appears in Movie

A young Milwaukee man is part of a major motion picture being viewed across the country.

Elvis Thao is a 26-year old Milwaukee resident who is currently working at the Social Development Commission through the Public Allies Program. Thao is a client support worker at the agency's Welcome Center at its facility at 4041 N. Richards Street.

Thao auditioned for a part in Clint Eastwood's new movie "Gran Torino" in May of 2008. The film has many Hmong characters in it and Eastwood was looking for Hmong people to act in it. Thao learned later in the summer that he had been selected for a role in the movie and spent much of August in the Detroit area filming with the legendary actor and director.

Thao said he is new to filmmaking but that his background in music helped him adjust to the experience as did Eastwood who directed the movie in addition to acting in it. Thao said that "Gran Torino" had many young actors who, like him, had little film experience. He noted Eastwood worked hard to make everyone on set comfortable and spent time training and coaching those new to acting. He called the whole experience "awesome."

Thao described his part as that of a member of a Hmong gang and his name appears on the film's credits. He added that the portrayal of Hmong culture is not perfect in the movie but that it is a good step in the helping the public learn about it. "Gran Torino", he says, has an overall positive message that he feels makes it a good film for these times. He notes specifically that the film portrays traditional Hmong family values in such a way that Eastwood's character comes to appreciate.



Elvis Thao in SDC Welcome Center and on set of Gran Torino with fellow actors including Clint Eastwood.

Weatherization Program Showcased

Efforts in Milwaukee County to make homes more energy efficient were on display for Federal Department of Energy leaders.

Gil Sperling, Program Manager for the Weatherization and Intergovernmental Program of the Department of Energy, visited the Weatherization Program of SDC in November. He was briefed on the program that makes approximately 800 Milwaukee County homes more energy efficient every year.



Weatherization staff Vincent Montgomery and Ed Byrnes explain work done to touring federal officials at a Milwaukee home.

Weatherization Program Manager Vincent Montgomery described for Sperling and other state and federal weatherization experts the SDC program that uses contractors to retrofit homes identified by the State of Wisconsin as having high energy usage from Energy Assistance Program client lists. He noted the program has put into place checks

and balances to ensure that high quality weatherization work is done on time and on budget.

During the meeting, Sperling shared his vision of weatherization in the future. He predicted funds for the work will increase and said nationally, he would like to see the retrofitting of more than 100-million homes over the next 15 years. Sperling stated in the near future, weatherization will need to go hand in hand with efforts to develop new energy sources.

SDC Weatherization staff and Sperling conducted a field tour of several weatherization sites including a home on N. 47th Street. That home had work done that includes insulation, a new dryer vent and efficient shower heads installed, and updating the home's furnace, refrigerator, and light bulbs to drastically lower the home's energy bills.

Sheree Dallas Branch of the Wisconsin Division of Energy Services took part in the meeting with SDC Weatherization and the federal officials. She noted the customer service of the program reflects the high standards the agency is known for in the community. Sperling discussed with Dallas Branch and SDC staff the possibility of expanding the Weatherization Program in the future to include more people, multi-unit residential buildings, and possibly some moderate income residents.

SDC's Weatherization program serves homes that come from a list submitted by the State of those Energy Assistance clients in Milwaukee County that have the highest energy consumption rates. For more information on the program, visit the SDC website at www.cr-sdc.org and click on the "Our Programs" tab and then the "Help For Your Home" page.

Helping Workers Improve

An SDC program is helping provide a wide range of opportunities for greater earning power to area residents.

The Skills Enhancement Program assists low-income working adults to gain the skills needed to obtain a better paying job with employer benefits. The program offers financial and technical support that allows the participants to get the job training needed to accomplish this.

One Skills Enhancement Program participant was Passionate. After three months of program assistance with tuition, she moved from a part-time job to a full-time position in a new line of work that pays \$2.76 an hour more. Residents taking part in the Skills Enhancement Program are engaged in a wide variety of job training including welding, nursing assistant, fire fighter and automotive mechanic.



Skills Enhancement participant Joseph Johnson practices fire fighting skills in class at MATC.



Skills student Solomon Zewdie learns car repair skills at Esperanza Unida School.

Congregation Rallies to Help Homeless



A Northshore Congregation is adopting a homeless shelter to be the object of a year-long service project.

Congregation Sinai, located at 8223 N. Port Washington Road in River Hills, has taken on working with families staying at the Family Support Center, located on Milwaukee's Southside. The Center is operated by the Social Development Commission and is one of the few shelters in Milwaukee County serving homeless families.

Lisa Phillips of Congregation Sinai says the project started when members of the synagogue decided to get involved in a long-term project that would help people in need. They contacted SDC and quickly became involved with the Family Support Center.



On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, approximately 100 Congregation Sinai members met at the Family Support Center for the kickoff of the yearlong project. Children as young as four years to adults in their 80s from the temple took part in a wide variety of projects at the homeless shelter including painting, carpentry work, making of children's blankets, assembling personal hygiene kits and interacting with the children staying at the center.

Lisa Phillips said the response from congregation members was overwhelming and that she has been hearing from participants since the work day at the shelter what a positive experience it was. She adds many have been asking when the next activity will be. That sentiment was echoed by staff at the Family Support Center who said that they and the residents were greatly impressed by all the positive interaction with the workers from Congregation Sinai as well as all that the workers were able to accomplish.



Members of Congregation Sinai are already planning their next activities with the shelter. The synagogue has held a drive to collect diapers that were used by young families staying at the SDC Family Support Center.

The project linking Congregation Sinai and the Family Support Center is being coordinated by the Social Development Foundation Friends (SD Friends). This effort organizes volunteer efforts that benefit the thousands of low-income families and individuals who come to SDC for assistance. For more information on the SD Friends and other volunteer opportunities, call Amy Flanders at 414-906-2728 or email at aflanders@cr-sdc.org.



Congregation Sinai members paint, make children's blankets, build shelving and interact with children from the Family Support Center.

Wish List

In-kind donations are greatly appreciated and can truly make a difference in a person's life. Your gift starts working right away for individuals in our own community. For more information or questions please contact Michele Nash at: 414.906.2721 or mnash@cr-sdc.org.

Head Start

- Building improvements
- Playground renovations
- Site beautification, painting & gardening: shade tree, shrubs, potting soil, single peat cups, seeds, large indoor planter, and materials for raised planting beds (retaining wall lumber or rock, dirt and flowers)
- Professional volunteers (speakers, program planning experts)
- Underwriting for our Male Involvement Program called "24/7 Dad"
- One new children's bicycle
- Food for parent meetings
- Furniture for families

YFDP (Youth and Family Development Program)

- Prizes to award youth for accomplishing goals
- Motivational speaker for Annual Awards banquet
- Gifts to present to each youth at the annual awards banquet
- Tables and chairs for youth meetings
- 8 passenger van or mini bus for youth field trips
- Admission tickets to Great America, Milw. Brewers
- Admission tickets to summer events and festivals
- Board games
- Videos, DVDs & DVD player

Education and Training

- New computers
- New or gently used books
- School supplies
- Notepaper for taking class notes
- Pencils and pens
- Donations to purchase graduation gowns

Family Support Center Emergency Family Shelter

- New bedding for single beds (sheets/pillow cases/blankets)
- New or gently used bath towels
- Casey's Welcome Kits: Each includes a hand towel, washcloth, comb or hair-pick or hairbrush, bar of soap, razor, toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, lotion, and a pair of shower flip-flops
- Videos, DVDs & DVD player
- Speakers and trainers on various subjects including Job Search and Applications
- Children and infants: diapers (Sizes 4, 5 & 6), wipes, baby lotion, sippy cups, bibs, teething gel, changing pads-washable and disposable, infant socks, toddler socks and slippers, infant toys, PJ's, toys, board games
- Adults: new women's slippers (all sizes) new women's nightwear, sizes
- New women's underwear (all sizes), flip flops for shower (all sizes),
- Books for children, youth and adults. (A children's summer reading list is available at Reader's Choice Book Store on MLK Dr.)

Senior Companions

- Umbrellas, wallets, shaving crème, small appliances, ties, handkerchiefs or scarfs, flashlights, purses, earrings, slippers, socks, boxes of candy, lotion, nail kits, and/or gift cards from stores for food or merchandise.

Donations Help Babies



SDC Staff help with Community Baby Shower.

Milwaukee area residents braved frigid temperatures to help families with babies and young infants stay warm.

Thousands took part in the Community Baby Shower held in early January and sponsored by WTMJ TV and SDC by going to Sentry Food Stores and donating items like diapers, new clothing and baby food. The project works with agencies and programs in a seven county area to help needy families.

The many donations will help programs like La Causa Family Resource Center, Health-care for the Homeless, New Horizon Center, the Gerald Ignace Indian Center and the Social Development Commission Family Support Center serve families in the area. Other groups distributing the donations in Southeastern Wisconsin include the Racine YWCA, the Pregnancy Support Connection of Waukesha County and the Washington County Youth and Family Project.

Volunteers from the area helped make the Community Baby Shower a success this year. Groups assisting with the project include Veterans United for Community Service, the Cream City Wisconsin Chapter of the Links, Orthodox Christian Women's Association, Congregation Sinai, Nativity Jesuit Middle School and Boy Scout Troops from Brown Deer and Whitefish Bay. Organizers of the Community Baby Shower thank the volunteers as well as the many donors who will make a cold Wisconsin winter a warmer one for hundreds of local families with infants.

Youth Plan College Tour

Youth who participate in the SDC Youth and Family Development Programs (YFDP) are planning a trip that may turn out to be the first step towards a better future.

The youth who are juniors and seniors in high school are planning a spring college tour of educational facilities in the Atlanta area with YFDP staff. Up to 15 youth will tour Georgia Tech, Georgia State, Morehouse College, Spelman College and Life University. Past college tours have helped inspire and motivate YFDP youth to attend a school of higher learning.

The youth are planning to fund raise to cover the costs of the trip with the help of the Social Development Foundation. An online campaign will be held to help secure sponsorships of the youth. Those who help sponsor a youth on the college visit trip will be able to take part in a send-off when the youth leave on the trip and also hear from them after they return and report on their experiences. For more information or to help send the youth on the 2009 College Tour, contact Amy Flanders at (414) 906-2728.



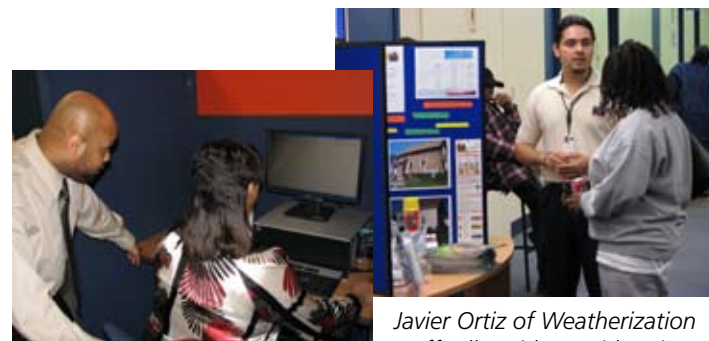
YFDP Youth on 2008 tour of Life University in the Atlanta area.

Welcome Center Offers Info

The new Welcome Center is making the time clients spend to see case workers more profitable. SDC programs and other agencies are staffing the area at SDC Richards where people coming for Energy Assistance and other programs wait.

One example of this came when staff from Weatherization spent a day at the Welcome Center. Celaneese Landon and Javier Ortiz handed out information on the program as well as materials on how to save energy and money. The Weatherization staff took the opportunity to talk with many people who are interested in energy conservation.

The resources provided by the Weatherization staff is an example of how the Welcome Center is offering helpful information and access to SDC programs and services to people waiting to see case managers. It has been estimated that as many as 20,000 people use the area during the year as they access programs like Energy Assistance, MABC's free tax preparation, and others. The renovated Welcome Center provides them with both a pleasant atmosphere and valuable information. For more information on the Welcome Center, visit www.cr-sdc.org and click on "Our Programs" and then the "Welcome Center" page.



Welcome Center Manager Torrence Taylor shows a client how to use one of Center's computers.

Javier Ortiz of Weatherization staff talks with a resident in Welcome Center.

A New Start on Life



Latisha Marizette celebrates her graduation with her family.

33 Milwaukee area residents marked a milestone on the road to their dreams.

The 33 received their graduation certificates for their GED or HSED course completion. The December graduation ceremony was held at SDC's Education and Training facility at 4041 N. Richards Street. The ceremony was attended by many family members and friends who shared in the celebration of their accomplishments.

SDC CEO Deborah Blanks congratulated the students. She also thanked their families for cheering them on and challenging them when the going got rough. Program Manager Terry Brennan urged the students to continue their pursuit of excellence and that by doing so, said it would help themselves, their families and their community.

The GED and HSED programs are part of SDC's Education and Training offerings. For more information on the GED and HSED courses, visit the SDC website at www.cr-sdc.org and click on the "Our Programs" tab and then on the "Education and Training" page or call 414-906-2700.

Help for Rehabilitating Homes



Southside home before and after work by NIP program.

A program is helping rehabilitate homes in a targeted Milwaukee neighborhood. The Neighborhood Improvement Program (NIP) of the Social Development Commission is fixing up a number of homes. The target service area for the program is bounded on the north by Vliet Street and the south by Becher Street and between 1st and 27th Streets.

The NIP program works with qualifying homeowners to provide rehabilitation services. One homeowner whose home received work through the NIP program is Mark who is on disability and struggling to maintain his house. He noted the program has provided critical help in fixing up the home. "The SDC-NIP house maintenance and repair program has, without a doubt, saved my home," Mark says.

The NIP program has a goal of helping 13 additional homes within the service area in the 2009 calendar year. To find out more about the NIP program and eligibility criteria, contact Robert Falk at 414-385-1125 or visit the SDC website at www.cr-sdc.org/Programs/NIP.html.

Helping Milwaukee Families with their Finances



Don Cohen of Landmark Credit Union discusses home buying at Money Smart session at Destiny Youth Plaza

SDC has partnered with businesses and others in an effort to help local low-income families improve their financial health.

The agency was an active participant in the 2008 Money Smart Week that organized financial literacy workshops and presentations in October across Southeastern Wisconsin. SDC joined a collaboration of banks, credit unions, community organizations and faith-based groups in organizing Money Smart Week.

Besides Money Smart events at South Division High School and Destiny Youth Plaza, the group published, with the help of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, a guide that lists financial literacy resources that are available year-round. The partnership also plans to conduct a Money Smart phone bank in late March of 2009 that will be aired on several television and radio stations.



Money Smart experts talk about financial literacy with residents at South Division High School.

**Coming soon...
Watch the SDC web
site for the Sankofa
Story Black History
Game.**

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MABC Kicks Off Tax Season

The 2009 tax season is in full swing at Milwaukee Asset Building Coalition (MABC) free tax preparation sites across Milwaukee County.

MABC officially kicked off its tax season January 30 even though tax sites had been open several weeks to begin processing returns. At the Kick Off event, which also celebrated National Earned Income Tax Credit Day, Jane Moore of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation praised the work of the coalition, saying it provides real money to low-income working households. She noted that during the past six tax seasons, more than \$69-million have been returned to families in tax refunds and credits.

Sheila Seigel of the IRS also participated in the MABC Kick Off. She told those gathered for the event that MABC's free tax sites have become a national model for other cities trying to set up similar tax preparation programs. The IRS is one of more than 30 agencies, community groups, faith-based organizations and private foundations that make up MABC.

Deborah Blanks, CEO of SDC which is MABC's lead agency, noted that the MABC tax sites had been busy so far this year. She reported that tax preparers at just the SDC Richards Street tax site alone have prepared almost 500 state and federal tax returns in just the first two weeks of the tax season. Last tax season, all MABC sites filed more than 10,000 returns at no charge that brought back more than \$13-million in refunds and credits for local residents.

MABC site locations, times of operation and required documents for the free tax service can be found by calling 414-963-2694 or by going to the SDC website at www.cr-sdc.org and clicking on the "Our Programs" tab and then going to the "Asset Building" page.



Sheila Seigel of IRS applauds MABC's free tax service at tax season kick-off.



MABC tax preparer helps a resident with her state and federal taxes.

Ways to Work Success Story

An SDC program is helping working families succeed in reaching their dreams. Ways to Work provides low-interest loans to working low-income families who would otherwise be unable to secure reliable transportation for going to work and/or school. Janice provides an example of the difference Ways to Work is making in the lives of those families.

Janice is a single parent who struggled for years with low-paying, dead-end jobs. When she finally landed a stable and good-paying job, she realized that her inability to get safe transportation was holding her back. Her credit problems of the past prevented her from purchasing a car and relying on public transportation was a tremendous hardship for her and her children.

She applied to Ways to Work and was overjoyed when she was approved for a loan. Janice did a lot of research and finally ended up buying a used car that she now uses to get to and from her job as well as take her children to doctor's appointments.

Janice says participating in the program has provided unexpected benefits. "To me, this is the first step in becoming a responsible and productive mother. It helped nudge me in the right direction in bettering mine and my children's lives," she writes.



New Home for Head Start Cudahy

A program that prepares preschoolers for kindergarten has a new home in Cudahy.



The Head Start program operated in Cudahy by the Social Development Commission has opened its new site at 5885 S. Packard Avenue. The opening comes after a month of moving from the previous site on East Plankinton.

An Open House and Orientation was held in January for Head Start children and parents at the new facility. The children were

Head Start family checks out a new classroom at Head Start Cudahy.

literally jumping for joy to see their brand new classrooms. The families met Miss Charlotte who will be the crossing guard for the facility. She stressed safety measures being taken to insure the safety of the children at the new site.

The new Cudahy Head Start classrooms will serve 17 students during both the morning and afternoon sessions. Site Coordinator Fredricka Patrick notes there are openings at the new facility. Information on enrolling in the free program can be obtained by calling the center at 414-453-5700. Head Start prepares three and four year old children for kindergarten with a mix of academic and social skill preparation, dental and health screenings, and parental involvement.



Nursing Students Teach Head Start Students

A class from the UWM School of Nursing is working with preschool students to the benefit of both.

The Clinical Practice students from UWM are working with the young pupils from SDC Head Start sites. Professor Dr. Sandra Underwood says the partnership has been on-going for years and allows the nursing students to get out into the community while also promoting the value of preventative medicine.



Head Start students learn how to "fix" a hurt friend.

On a visit in November of preschool children from the SDC Head Start- 78th Street site to UWM, the nursing students put on a demonstration using stuffed animals to show the youngsters how to avoid burns, a common injury youth can suffer. The nursing class designed the interactive program to engage the Head Start students and teach them how to identify and avoid possible sources of burns in their homes. They also taught the preschool children what to do if they do suffer a burn.



UWM Nursing students perform a skit to show Head Start students how to avoid burns.

the youngsters in that it provides valuable knowledge as well as health screenings. The nursing students, on the other hand, are able to get valuable experience working with children while also learning the value of taking their skills and knowledge out into the community.

Nursing students noted the partnership between the College of Nursing program and Head Start is beneficial to