



Community Leader

Blandin Community Leadership Programs Newsletter

Tapping Untapped Potential

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Community Leader

is a quarterly exchange for news, learning and connection published by the Blandin Foundation leadership programs for those engaged in the effort to develop and sustain healthy communities.

Please visit **Community Leader Online** at www.communityleader.wordpress.com

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We all know, without being expressly told, that our individual economic opportunity plays a vital role in the health, happiness and quality of our own lives and the lives of our family members.

We do not, however, always readily make the same connection when it comes to our communities.

Economic opportunity is essential to healthy community. When members of our communities don't have basic needs met, the entire health of the community is diminished and we all pay a price. The costs come in the form of financial costs - our communities collectively pay for higher use of the social welfare system and social capital costs - we have an entire socio-economic class whose skills, gifts and talents are never realized by the larger community.

A new leadership program launched by the Blandin Foundation last fall called Leaders Partnering to End Poverty (formerly CPIL - Community Partners in Leadership) seeks to address economic opportunity challenges at the grassroots level.

The primary goal of this new leadership program is "to build capacity in the community to increase access to goods, services and opportunity for those in poverty."

Looking Beyond Stereotypes

We've heard the stereotypes - people are poor because they make bad choices, because they want to be or just simply because they are lazy. They are the stereotypes that persist based on a post-WWII perception of poverty, passed on from generation to generation.

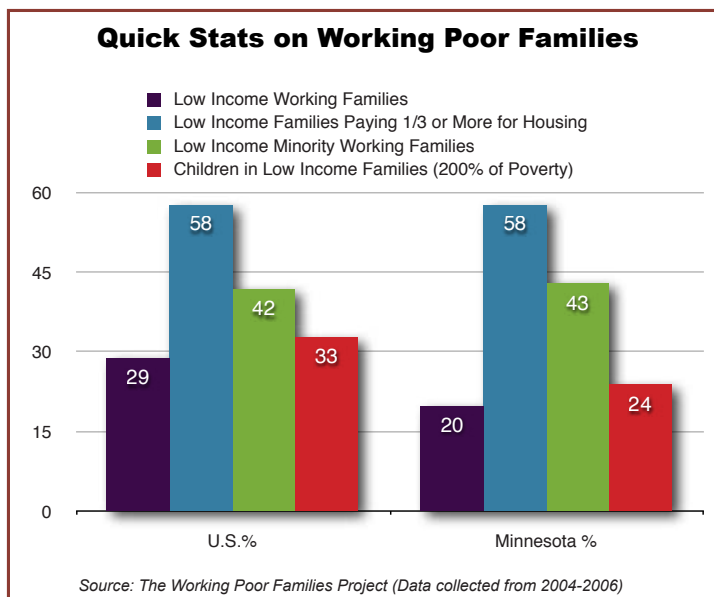
Today, poverty is embodied in the working poor, who often hold several low-paying jobs in an attempt to meet basic needs.

The 2004 report, *Working Hard, Falling Short*, written on behalf of the Working Poor Families Project (by Tom Waldron, Brandon Roberts and Andrew

Reamer, et. al.), provides additional insight into poverty in America today:

- One in four working families is low-income.
- Forty percent of minority working families are low-income, twice the percentage of white working families.

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Valerie's Corner

New Leadership Director Connects with Alums



Valerie Shangreaux wants to know what issues, concerns and opportunities are on the minds of Blandin Community Leadership Program alumni.

While she is in the process of gathering that information face-to-face, she also is connecting with leaders across the state and collecting their thoughts via the Internet.

Valerie's Corner, accessible only through Community Leader Online, provides a way for alumni to quickly connect with the new Leadership Director. By visiting this space alums can ask a question, post a comment, or share an issue they have encountered on their leadership journey. Visitors can view the

comments, questions and thoughts of other alums that have visited this area of the site, as well as read responses posted by Valerie. Alumni can visit Valerie's Corner at: communityleader.wordpress.com/2007/07/17/valeries-corner-2/.

"I have created this space as an opportunity to continue my journey in life-long learning, says Valerie. "As the new Leadership Director I would like to invite you to share your stories, experiences and struggles as rural community leaders."

Other Community Leader features found only on the website include: surveys, space to comment on Community Leader articles, links to additional resources and newsletter archives.

Meet the Leadership Team:

Beth Bily: Editor, Community Leader



Education: I have a B.S. degree in political science and completed some post-graduate level work.

Last job prior to joining the leadership team: I was the editor of a twice-weekly newspaper, the Grand Rapids Herald-Review.

Role on the leadership team: I contract with the Blandin Foundation to write and edit Community Leader. I also work on a number of other writing/editing projects.

When did you join the leadership team? I began working as the editor of Community Leader in the spring of 2006.

How did you become involved with BCLP/Community Leader? I went through a BCLP cohort in 2004 when I was still working for the newspaper. I enjoyed the experience very much and when the opportunity arose to work on Community Leader, I jumped at the chance.

What is (are) the most gratifying aspect(s) of your job? I really love hearing (directly or indirectly) from alums that Community Leader is a helpful leadership tool. It's great to have something you do make a difference for others.

Personal information: I live in Itasca County with my husband and two children. I enjoy spending time with my family and cooking.

Leadership Toolbox:

Creating a community with more economic opportunity

The following are five tips alums can use to begin to bridge understanding about economic differences at the grassroots level.

No. 1 - Identify leaders:

Find people in your community both in and out of poverty that have an interest in building community economic opportunity and are willing to champion the issue.

No. 2 - Create across-class learning experiences:

Most people spend community involvement time with those of a similar socio-economic background. As a result, you may have little first-hand knowledge about what it's like to live in poverty in your community. Creating across-class learning experiences, such as hosting a community forum that brings people from all socio-economic classes together, can build relationships and understanding of the challenges faced by those in poverty.

No. 3 - Understand your leaders' perceptions:

Elected officials and other community leaders are those that can affect the most change and thereby have the most impact on economic opportunity. Knowing the prevailing perceptions - good or bad - about poverty can provide a good starting point to help identify education that might need to take place and later, frame issues in your community.

No. 4 - Understand your community :

What does it take for a family of four to make it? Knowing what the average local wages are and what it takes to financially make it are essential pieces of knowledge in determining how much economic opportunity (or lack thereof) there is in your community. The Jobs Now Coalition website can help with this task. The website has a wage and budget calculator that can help determine what wages are needed to be on solid economic ground in your county. The website address is: www.jobsnowcoalition.org.

No. 5 - Determine the poverty impact:

Gaining insight into just how much poverty affects your community can be achieved by gathering some widely available statistics. The percentage of students in your local schools receiving free and reduced meals, achievement scores of low income students, the rate of access to social services and the number of out-of-home placements which occur are all good indicators of how much income disparity costs in your community.

Leadership Notes and News:



Jerry Bentz, 1993 alum, New Ulm, was awarded the Bridge Builder Award by Bridging Brown County on November 11, 2007.

Bridging Brown County honors one Brown County resident each year for his or her exemplary demonstration of its mission: "Strengthening the Brown County community by bridging relationships of understanding and communication." Bridging Brown County received the Association of Minnesota Counties Innovation Award in 2006. Jerry's leadership and direction were the foundations upon which Bridging Brown County was organized.

He has been active in community leadership through his church, the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, the local chamber of commerce, Bridging Brown County and Parents-in-Partnerships Kids X-Cel Center. He worked for 10 years as chief administrative officer for Brown County and prior to that, was its treasurer and executive director of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority and Economic Partners, Inc. He also served a collective 31 years with the United States Army, National Guard and the Reserve.

Jerry served on the Bridging Brown County Board of Representatives from 2000 to 2004. He was the board chair from 2000 to 2002. He continues to serve as the board advisor in the areas of programming and finance.

Pam Collins, 2007 alum, Staples, was named 2007 Staples Citizen of the Year and was recognized for her achievement at an award ceremony on Oct. 11. Citizen of the Year is one of four awards given each year in Staples for outstanding community service.



Pam has lived in the Staples area since 1999. In 2003, after a full year of planning, she helped local students open a coffee shop, the Stomping Grounds, which has become a community gathering place. Pam also has been in productions and a board member for Lamplighter Community Theatre and serves on the Staples Motley Area Arts Council.

Each week, she donates about 10 to 15 hours of her time to working at the coffee shop. She also donates her time and artistic talent to students in local schools. (Source: Staples World)

Lourdez Schwab, 2006 alum, Willmar, was named one of the "25 on the Rise" by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Her achievement was featured in a January 2008 supplement of Twin Cities Business.

Lourdez is a real estate agent who works with Latino families and facilitates English/Spanish workshops for first-time homebuyers. She also is development coordinator for the Willmar area multicultural market, a regional resource for entrepreneurs, and consults with business owners from a wide array of fields and industries.

While her work has focused on housing, she also previously headed health and wellness programs for Latinas at the West Central Integration Collaborative. She is involved in a number of community efforts, including helping create a foundation that will assist with education or business start-up for Latinos. Her foundation work is on behalf of the Terrazas family, whose son was killed in Iraq. (Source: Twin Cities Business)

Community leaders from the Grand Rapids/Itasca County area attended the YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities Conference in Washington D.C. in early December to help make their community a healthier place to live.



Launched in 2004, the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative drives policy, new programming, structural and environmental change in communities to help promote healthy lifestyles. Each year, the YMCA of the United States selects a new group of communities to take on the task of transforming their hometowns into healthier environments. Each community team received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for its team members to travel to the nation's capital for the conference, and next fall each team will be eligible to receive a one-time grant to assist in the implementation of activities identified by the team.

Participants from the Grand Rapids/Itasca County area who attended the conference included: Betsy McBride (2004 BCLP alum), CEO, and Grant Frashier, Health & Fitness Director, representing the Itasca County Family YMCA; Malissa Bahr (2005 BCLP alum), Community Leadership Program, Recruitment Manager, Blandin Foundation; Matt Richie (1996 BCLP alum), Clinic Administrator, Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital; Rob Mattei (2004 BCLP alum), Community Development Director, City of Grand Rapids; Barbara McDonald, Dean of Academic Affairs, Itasca Community College; Mary Kosak (2005 BCLP alum), Children First Director; Ruth Pierce, Health Educator, Itasca County Public Health; Sue Holm, Physical Education Teacher, Greenway High School; and Tom Saxhaug (1992 BCLP alum), Minnesota State Senator.

Mobilizing Resources

Blandin Leadership Participants Help Create Youth/Elder Connections



Bois Forte Community Elder Marybelle Isham, assists fifth grader Patricia Lien with her dance regalia. Fern Isham was the head seamstress for the project and taught the other Elders how to sew the patterns.



Young Bois Forte Community members danced in their regalia during the Sah Gii Bah Gah Pow-Wow in June of last year.

Mobilizing Resources defined: Engaging a critical mass to take action to achieve specific outcomes. Gaining a critical mass means getting enough people, financial resources, votes and organizations to make the project a reality.

When Brent Chosa, Deanna Drift, Leo Vidal, Donovan Strong and Corinne Whiteman graduated from BRCLP in May of 2007, they took their leadership skills back into the Bois Forte community.

A plan for giving back to the community came into focus when a member of the District 1 Tribal Council approached Brent. The tribal council member suggested developing a program that would help retain Bois Forte traditions and culture. It was just the kind of idea the group of BRCLP graduates could embrace and take forward.

The small group proved that the critical mass needed to move a project along could be just a handful of motivated leaders when they launched *Follow in Our Footsteps*, a program that brought youth and elders together in a celebration of traditional dance last summer.

Tradition and connection among generations are vitally important to the Bois Forte people. The introduction on the Bois Forte website (www.boisforte.com) underscores the significance of both: "Two of the honored traditions among our people are to share with others and to always look seven generations ahead when making decisions."

Deanna, like the other BRCLP alums, was closely involved with the program's development. She said it filled a need in the community to bring youth and elders together in meaningful ways.

"There was definitely a lack of opportunity (for youth and elder connection)," said Deanna. "It hasn't been there for years."

"There didn't seem to be much participation by young kids in traditional dance," added Leo.

The group of five BRCLP leaders developed plans for the *Follow in Our Footsteps* program, and then approached the Bois Forte Tribal Council with the concept. The tribal council endorsed the plan and provided \$10,000 to help make it a reality.

Follow in Our Footsteps was divided into two programming sections. With the help of three elders in the community, the five leaders began by teaching traditional dance to about 20 youth from the Nett Lake Sector of Bois Forte Band. Later in the program, the youth participants chose a style of dance and colors. The youth worked side-by-side with elders to make their own dance regalia, which they danced in at the Sah Gii Bah Gah Pow-Wow in June of last year.

Leo noted that the participation of the elders and the dedication of the BRCLP leaders were instrumental in the success of the program.

"Having the people, the elders, the tribal government, help made the difference," said Leo. "If it hadn't been for all those people (coming together), we wouldn't have gotten it done."

"Getting it done" created a positive experience within the Bois Forte community for both elders and youth.

"I think they bonded," said Deanna of the youth and elder participants. "Our children reinforced their respect of elders as they gained knowledge of traditions that will be passed down for generations to come."

Reflections on Leadership

By Jim Krile, Retired BCLP Director

**“Start where you are,
“Use what you have,
“Do what you can.”**

This quotation has been attributed to sources as diverse as Arthur Ashe, Theodore Roosevelt and my brother-in-law, Maury. Regardless of its origin, it captures three key elements of effective leadership, which in my 36-plus years of community work, I have seen stand the test of time.



loosen the door hinges or dismantle the doorknob? As community leaders, how much time do we spend leading or enabling discussions about the lack of resources a community has to tackle an issue and how much time do we spend helping the community recognize and use the resources it already has?

Effective community leadership helps the community recognize ALL of its assets and resources. What are the human (time, skills, resilience, knowledge, creativity), financial (corporate, individual), educational (schools, on the job training potential, formal/informal mentoring), natural or other assets that are being underutilized or misdirected in your community?

Do What You Can:

What can be done today lays the groundwork for what can be done tomorrow. During each step we need to pay attention to both product (what gets done) and process (how it gets done). The tasks need to get

done and celebrated so people feel their time was well used and there is realistic hope for the future. Community members need to feel welcomed, included and valued, even if they choose not to participate in any given step. Burned up social capital is very hard to replace.

Not every challenge will be fully met or every opportunity fully realized. But, just because we will never be perfectly healthy does not mean we should stop watching our diet, skip all exercise and never see a physician.

Each of these three elements anchor community leadership in

the realistic hope and dream that our communities will have a positive, healthy future based on who we are as a community rather than who we are not. The future will not ask, “Why were you not New York or Tupelo or Edina?” It will ask why did you not become the best Redby or Caledonia or Grand Portage or Luverne you could be?”

On a Personal Note:

As I leave the Blandin part of my journey, I say a heartfelt *Thank You* and *Godspeed* to all of you (participants, internal and external leadership staff, other Foundation staff, trustees) who have walked with me, carried me and inspired me everyday during these last 21 years.

Valerie, congratulations! If you experience even half the fun, joy, excitement and learning I participated in as part of the BCLP team, your life will be rich indeed!

Those who would like to contact Jim can do so at jfkrile@yahoo.com.

Start Where You Are:

“Starting where you are” reminds us that in order to get to where we want to be as a community we need to be realistic about the people, beliefs, ideas and circumstances that make the situation what it is today. When someone says, “We tried that before and it didn’t work!!!” it can be easy to dismiss them as *Citizens Against Virtually Everything*. But, they are really telling us the truth about their own experiences and fears.

Effective community leaders know that creating shared meaning - essential for building healthy community - starts with taking into account the wellsprings and filters of others as they exist today, not as we would like them to be tomorrow.

Improving the health of our community is like improving our individual physical health. It is a developmental process. For example, the exercises and regimen a person recovering from a heart attack goes through in the first six weeks are simpler and less demanding than those the person does a year later. As our communities address the challenges and opportunities that come with changing populations, rolling economic cycles, accelerating climate changes and shifting political power, many of the first steps we take may be as simple (and as painful) as the first time on the treadmill. Each step accomplished increases our capacity to handle the next, more complex step.

Use What You Have:

How do we frame issues and opportunities as a community? Imagine for a moment that you are locked in a cold, drafty room in an abandoned house with only a screwdriver. How much time would you spend saying, “If I only had a cell phone.”? How much time would you spend trying to use the screwdriver to open the window,

“The future will not ask, ‘Why were you not New York or Tupelo or Edina?’ It will ask why did you not become the best Redby or Caledonia or Grand Portage or Luverne you could be?”

Duluth Alums Reflect on Leadership Experiences

“The difference Blandin is making is monumental,” according to Abbot Apter, a member of the first Duluth cohort to participate in the Blandin Community Leadership Program in October 2005. Since then, three more Duluth groups have become BCLP alumni and a fifth is scheduled for January.

On October 30, BCLP convened all four Duluth cohorts for an Alumni Gathering to celebrate work being done by alumni and develop a plan for mutual support and cooperation across initiatives. About 80 alumni reconnected with their cohorts, got to know other leaders and reflected on changes that have taken place in Duluth since the Blandin Foundation began investing in its community leadership.

“We are witnessing a new energy for community and public service that has been led by the Blandin leadership program,” Apter said. “People are stepping up and taking responsibility for being leaders.”

“The BCLP is capacity-building for our community,” according to Karen Anderson, a March 2007 alum. “Providing key skills to a diverse group of people promotes the development of institutional, financial, political and other resources in different sectors of our society.”

Among those skills is shared meaning about what leadership can mean, said Jennifer Hawkins, a member of the March 2007 cohort. “It has created a common language and understanding of community development among a large number of people who are committed to making Duluth a better place.”

Participants have great expectations.

BCLP “has definitely energized the Duluth community,” said Jim Roberts, who participated in the March 2006 retreat. “It seems like everywhere I go, people are talking about the Blandin program.

“The training has brought together a diverse group of individuals, including young professionals, older ‘experienced’ people, different ethnic, economic and political backgrounds,” Roberts added.

Alumni also say that BCLP has created a framework for community leadership.

“What really struck home for me throughout the Blandin program was the idea of bridging social capital,” said Hawkins. “I think that is the key to really getting things done in Duluth, leveraging the social capital that we all have now across the community that we didn’t have before and using that creatively to achieve community change that no one thinks is possible.”

Jeff Corey, an October 2006 alum, echoed Hawkins. “Many people that attended are excited about the positivity and vision of colleagues who have attended the training. The potential for that vision to be actualized is very hopeful to me.”

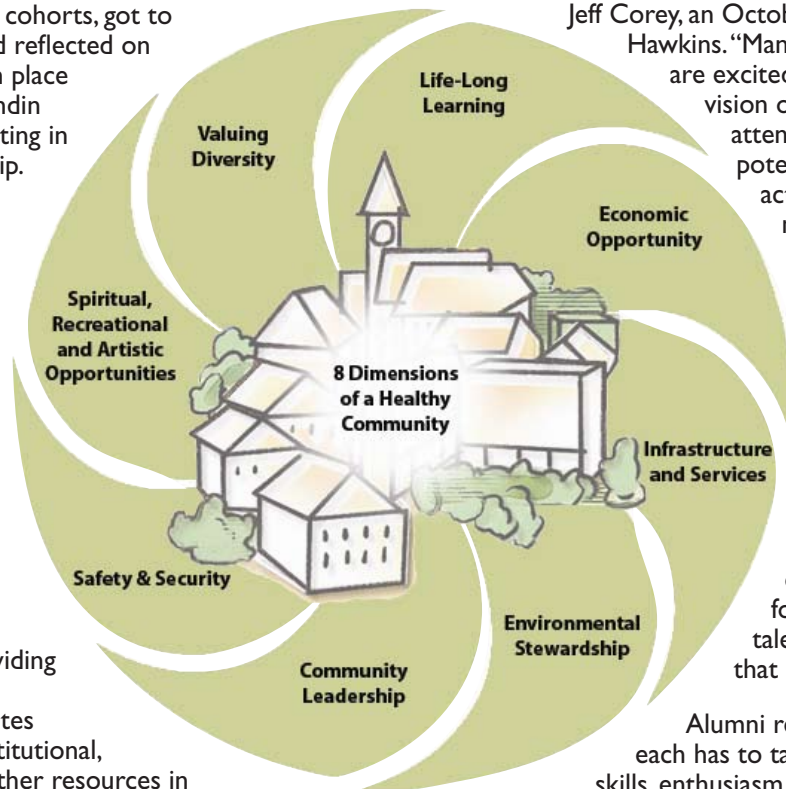
Anne Perry Moore also participated in the October 2006 cohort. “Any time 80-plus like-minded folks can get together, dream together, brainstorm and work together equates to a critical mass in my mind,” she said. “The community is much richer for the shared learning, talents and skills now available that didn’t exist in years past.”

Alumni recognize the responsibility each has to take advantage of the new skills, enthusiasm and connections BCLP has engendered.

“We each need to look more broadly to what our community needs and utilize the rich BCLP resources we now have available—with or without the Foundation’s involvement—but obviously because of it,” Moore said.

“To be effective at accumulating knowledge and skills we need to read, write and perform together with other leaders,” said Apter. “This is the only way I know how to accumulate the power necessary to do the important work of community building.”

Heidi Timm-Bijold, a March 2007 alum, notes that Duluth, through leadership training, has the ability to make real differences toward the goal of healthy community. “I think there’s a sufficient critical mass to make an impact on a variety of dimensions,” she said. “Duluth is uniquely positioned to demonstrate that—with four cohort groups—‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.’ ”



Untapped Potential

Continued from front page

- Of all children in working families, one third are in low-income working families.
- A married couple heads more than half of low-income working families.
- While 35 percent of low-income working families have a parent who did not complete high school, 42 percent have a parent with some postsecondary education.
- More than half of low-income working families pay more than a third of their income for housing; more than a third have a parent without health insurance.

Building Leadership Skills

Think back to your own BCLP leadership experience. Remember the three core competencies of leadership: framing, social capital and mobilization.

Although your BCLP training may have given these three core competencies names, as an established community leader, you were already familiar with the concepts. You knew that in order to be successful you have to identify and scope out the issue (framing), build alliances (social capital) and get the work done (mobilization).

For those in poverty, the competencies come less naturally. Imagine that you suddenly lost your job, which was your sole source of income. What would you do? Get a new job, of course. Now take this analogy one step further. Imagine you lost all sources of income and while looking for a job you discover that everyone you know is unemployed and homeless.

The above scenario is extreme and unlikely, but for those living in poverty, there is an element of truth. Emerging out of those dire circumstances would be exponentially more difficult without access to anyone who might know of an employment opportunity or be able to give a reference.

Strong social networks that can make things happen for those in poverty are often a missing link, noted Alice Miller (2000 BCLP alum), lead coordinator for Koochiching and Itasca counties' Circles of Support program.

"Leadership is fueled by confidence and self-esteem," said Miller. "When people have the skills they need, they are their own best advocates."

Leaders Partnering to End Poverty already has made inroads in creating social networks across socio-economic groups. Piloted in the Grand Rapids community in October of 2007, the leadership program has created new alliances. Those in poverty have new relationships with allies who can help identify new opportunities. Those out of poverty have a more powerful awareness and shared meaning about the costs of economic difference in our communities.

The result is a win-win for all in the community.

Want to Know More?

Resources on Poverty :

Books to Read:

Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich- The author writes a "diary" style description of her experiences working in different low-wage jobs across the country. Great humor and insight.

Until It's Gone by Scott C. Miller- Scott Miller makes the case for ending poverty in America. Community change is created through the knowledge of what it really takes for people to get out of poverty.

The Working Poor: Invisible in America by David Shipler- A journalist's perspective on what it means to be poor in America. Many portraits of poverty combined with an analysis of the failure of economic systems and other societal systems in America.

A Framework for Understanding Poverty by Ruby Payne- Teaches the "hidden rules" of economic class and that there are strategies for overcoming class differences. She describes poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources."

Websites to visit:

www.jobsnowcoalition.org – The JOBS NOW Coalition clearly documents what families in Minnesota need to meet their basic needs. There is a wage and budget calculator to determine what it takes to support your family in your county.

www.indicators.nwaf.org – This website includes forty-six indicators of local population characteristics - poverty and other family stability indicators.

www.workingpoorfamilies.org The Working Poor Families Project is a national initiative focused on state workforce development policies

www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/lcep/ - This is the website for the Minnesota Legislative Commission to End Poverty by 2020. There are many resources about poverty in Minnesota.

Jim Woehrle (2004 BCLP alum, Grand Rapids) helped launch Leaders Partnering to End Poverty. He summarized the potential benefits: "People that are underutilized – that are not meeting their full potential – that is economic development in the community that is not being realized."

Editor's Note: The Community Leader expresses deep thanks to Jim Woehrle and Alice Miller of KOOTASCA Community Action for helping compile the information for this article.

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Blandin Community Leadership Programs Newsletter



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BCLP 2008 Recruitment Underway

The Blandin Community Leadership Program's fall 2007 retreat season has come to a close. This fall we had the pleasure of serving four remarkable community cohorts from across the state:

- Albert Lea, Minnesota
- Winsted, Minnesota
- New Ulm, Minnesota
- Reservation Community Leadership Program: Fond du Lac, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Red Lake & White Earth

Thank you everyone who helped with recruitment. The programs' success is due not only to the hard work of participants but also the efforts of those who encourage and inspire their fellow community leaders to attend the retreat.

The Blandin Community Leadership Program will be partnering with the following communities in winter 2008:

- Duluth, Minnesota
- Itasca Area: special focus on Hwy 169 corridor
- Clay County, Minnesota
- Pipestone, Minnesota
- Fergus Falls, Minnesota

You are invited to connect with friends and family in these areas and encourage them to fill out an application. Applications are available online at: www.blandinfoundation.org.

If you would like your community to participate in the Blandin Community Leadership Program please contact Malissa Bahr at mjbahr@blandinfoundation.org or 877-882-2257.

rural. voice...

The Community Leader Editorial Team wants to know what our alums are saying about important leadership issues.

Visit Community Leader Online and answer this quarter's survey question:

How is your community growing the next generation of leaders?

- Mentoring programming
- Leadership programming
- Civic/Service organizations
- Social or spiritual networks
- Other Unknown

Survey results will be published in the next edition of Community Leader. www.communityleader.wordpress.com