

Ending Poverty in our Communities—What communities can do right now to thrive in the new economy

Ending Poverty in our Communities

What communities can do right now to transform and thrive in the new economy

By

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A pull-out-all-the-stops transformation in your community

As President-elect Barak Obama proclaimed, "There are some years that roll into the next. This is not one of them."

To that point: the Department of Labor announced that 524,000 jobs were lost in December of 2008, bringing the year's total to 2.6 million lost jobs, the worst since WWII.

Life has become more difficult for those in poverty and more people found themselves vulnerable to poverty for perhaps the first time. I have long argued that poverty has been presenting itself at a level ten and our national and community response to poverty has been at level three. Now the problem is at level fifteen and our response must be radical and immediate.

The Obama administration has stated its intent to create 4 million new jobs. This will be a dramatic year regardless of how it turns out. When relief will come and how it will look is anyone's guess. One thing is clear-- it will not look the same as it did before we entered into this crisis. We are learning hard lessons. How should we as communities transform to meet this emerging reality? I always liked Einstein's quote: "The problems of today cannot be solved with the same level of thinking that was used when they were created." I think Einstein got it right and what's going on in today's world is fundamentally going to change the way we need to think and act. It already has.

The role of the business community

One of the keys for solving this current crisis is for more businesses to fully engage in community-wide and regional change initiatives. Philanthropy will continue to be an important element but even more important than giving money will be giving time; i.e. providing leadership, direction, and human resources to community change initiatives whether it is engaging in new forms of workforce development, education reform, poverty reduction, reducing recidivism, or assisting the underserved.

Businesses will need to actively engage in community change initiatives as outlined in this paper. To solve the problems facing the United States today will require all entities to come together in a spirit of mutual benefit: social agencies, all levels of government, education, faith-based institutions, health care providers, and businesses each contributing what it does best. None of these entities can do it alone. If they could we wouldn't have the ongoing struggles of today.

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However, of all the entities, business has the most to offer in terms of leading, directing, innovating, guiding, goal setting, and contributing to community change initiatives. Business understands processes and systems thinking. It understands problem solving and project management. And it has the greatest opportunity to impact the hearts and minds of its employees who, by the way, live and participate in our communities where these change efforts need to occur.

The issues we face cannot be solved until every single human being that lives in our communities and works in our organizations understands their role and potential contribution in correcting the problems of the day.

Businesses can motivate their employees to engage in community-wide or regional change initiatives. What skills and values they learn and experience at work will transfer to their personal lives and into the community in which they reside. Through jobs, employee education, and motivation, business can have significant impact on community wide change efforts.

Why would a business want to engage in community wide or regional change initiatives?

A primary driver for engagement is the organization's sense of social consciousness and commitment to transformative systemic change in American communities that eliminates domestic poverty. They believe it is important to participate in and positively contribute to the wellbeing of the community in which they reside. The question is does this heart-felt philosophy of community involvement provide any tangible and bottom line benefits for the organization? The quick answer is absolutely! Organizations who participate in community

initiatives (above and beyond just giving money) enjoy excellent reputations and high levels of visibility and name recognition in the community. "In many cases, these same corporations have created a positive work environment where people from all walks of life are treated with dignity and respect and respond by improving the productivity and bottom line of the company.

As organizations engage in successful community wide initiatives, it creates tremendous organizational pride in the workforce. People are proud to work for a company who "gives back". In the most progressive companies, employees are encouraged to participate themselves sometimes on company time. This also creates a positive reputation in the labor market and the community as a whole.

Research indicates that the new worker is looking for a company that is socially conscious and transformative. As one survey found, younger workers entering the workforce want to work for an organization that is involved in "saving the world". Workers who feel a sense of pride in not only their contributions on the job, but in impacting positive change in their community as a whole are happy workers, connected to a deep sense of purpose.

In summary, involvement in community wide initiatives establishes the organization as a socially conscious systemic change leader in their community, positioning it well for the recruitment and retention of talented individuals who make a positive difference in the lives of others.

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Move the Mountain

We chose our name, Move the Mountain in 1992 because we could see that communities were either in denial or too overwhelmed to address their poverty at a pace and intensity that would bring about the necessary change. We set out to *move the mountain* by inspiring and equipping communities to focus on helping people completely out of poverty rather than doing only part of the job. In addition, we helped organizations to *engage the community to change* the policies and structures that only fueled poverty rather than placing all of the responsibility at the feet of the individual.

Bridges out of Poverty

About the same time we began our mission, Dr. Ruby Payne, Phil DeVol, and Terie Dreussi Smith wrote the book *Bridges out of Poverty* and began teaching communities new mental models about poverty. Communities used the models and self organized into Bridges Steering Committees to find new solutions to the issues of poverty. Many of them started *Getting Ahead* classes designed by Phil that guided people with low income through a process of investigating why they were in poverty, why the community tolerates poverty, and what they might do about both.

Move the Mountain and Dr. Payne's company, aha! Process, Inc. formed a partnership in 2006. Communities that were doing Getting Ahead realized that they needed a structure for helping people pursue their goals after the Getting Ahead classes. MTM and aha! Process launched the Circles™ Campaign in the beginning of 2007 to provide communities with new tools for building long-term relationships across income lines to help people out of

poverty and to work together to make systemic changes.

aha! Process, Inc. published our book, *Until It's Gone, Ending Poverty in our Nation, in our Lifetime* in 2008 to provide an introduction to the Circles™ model and Move the Mountain's framework for ending poverty.

The Bridges Continuum

The attached Chart, *The Bridges Continuum, Comprehensive Strategies for Bridges Steering Committees* provides a mental model for understanding what communities can do to transform and thrive in this emerging new world. This article will outline several of the strategies that Move the Mountain and its partners are pursuing with Bridges Steering Communities to begin generating vital new outcomes in our communities.

The good and the bad

The good news is that our denial of how extensive a grip poverty reaches into our community, a denial that has been so firmly embedded in our American minds for all these past decades is now lifting due to an unprecedented year of calamity that has negatively impacted people of all income levels. We can now move more quickly on solutions that have been waiting in the wings for years but have lagged because we have insulated ourselves from the problems people in poverty have been dealing with for years.

The bad news is that life for people in poverty has gone from awful to even worse: The housing bubble burst and the implosion of the financial world has choked off credit. Foreclosures are now and will probably continue to be common place. More people

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with little to no savings who have lost their jobs or have seen full-time jobs become part-time may have to move in with their nearest relatives. Many may become temporarily homeless for the first time. People who hoped to buy a home soon will now need more cash up front and better credit before they can join the ranks of homeownership. People who have homes but unwieldy mortgages may need to look for solutions such as sharing their home with others.

Those in poverty must now compete with those who have been recently laid off and who have more experience and education for job opportunities. We do not yet know what government will be able to do create new, long-lasting jobs.

The mental model held by the majority of Americans is that people on welfare or in poverty are lazy, ignorant, unmotivated, and abusers of the systems. Businesses have a great opportunity to change this mindset by educating their employees and challenging their mental models about those in poverty. Cascade Engineering, based in Grand Rapids, MI, did just that when their Welfare-to-Career (W2C) program was experiencing 60% turnover. Initially, the leaders in the organization, including the *Front Line Leaders*, adhered to the paradigm that people from poverty were lazy, unmotivated and ignorant. They did not like to deal with them and treated them with the disdain of the old paradigm. However, once educated in *the Framework for Understanding Poverty* materials, their mental model shifted dramatically. Supervisors moved from being overly critical and hard on the W2C employees to a deeper understanding of the hidden rules of class. That knowledge led them to

supporting people in their efforts to improve their lives.

The “Next Community”

In the long run, the growing pressure to solve things locally is a good thing. But in the short run it will undoubtedly be an awkward and somewhat uncomfortable change for most.

At the end of the day everyone needs access to shelter, energy, food, transportation and wellness. We cannot lose sight of this critical truth. Communities need to ensure people can figure this out first and foremost, or else poverty will intensify and trigger higher, and maybe *much higher* crime, drug abuse, child abuse, and disease.

The “Next Community” is the new paradigm in which all community members are invested in the eradication of poverty and the preparation of people for the challenges and opportunities of this new millennium.

The Bridges Continuum

The Bridges Continuum (see chart on accompanying document) shows us that poverty is the result of our community’s shortcomings in providing equal education and opportunity to all from birth to the grave. The assumptions posed by the Continuum are quite obvious but surprisingly easy to lose sight of unless we have a mental model to refer to ourselves during the course of our shared work across the many community institutions of human development.

The Continuum’s first row shows what we need to focus on as babies are born and move through our community systems. Special efforts need to be made to anyone born into a family experiencing poverty to interrupt

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generational poverty. Anything less than 100% success produces fallout which is shown in examples in the second row.

The third row provides a sample of strategies that share the same constructs and language being used by Move the Mountain and aha!Process, Inc. Communities can insert other strategies that are successful in reducing fallout costs. The fourth row suggests who needs to take responsibility for change. A major theme of the Continuum is that a wider swath of community engagement is necessary to implement effective strategies that have the promise of helping families out of poverty and others to avoid it altogether.

Community problem-solving infrastructure

The Next Community will need to become expert at building an infrastructure for community problem solving. Beyond the traditional political and governmental systems we currently have in place, and also beyond the array of social service delivery systems, the Next Community will have to fully investigate the power of facilitating people to self organize in associational ways that solve problems with meaningful and highly customized solutions. Any community service that functions in a rigid traditionally bureaucratic manner and which produces a fragmented approach to a family's plan to move out of poverty and into economic security will be viewed as antiquated for the realities of the Next Community. People need immediate and flexible support in finding solutions that meet their own needs for food, housing, energy, transportation, childcare, wellness and money.

Businesses are in a unique position to help here, too. Solving problems that affect diverse groups of people and systems is a core

competency of most businesses. This expertise could be employed to solve the community wide issues of poverty.

The Circles Campaign

Move the Mountain was incubated in a traditional anti-poverty community action agency in 1992 when the agency realized that all of its millions of dollars of traditional responses were having an insufficient impact in actually helping people get out of poverty. We first sought partnerships with area schools, hospitals, government agencies and private nonprofits. But we had left out two critical stakeholders in our original planning—those who were suffering the problems of poverty, and everyone else in the community at large, a vast diverse group who would, if invited, want to help struggling families in their communities.

After trying out endless focus groups with people in poverty, and pursuing middle class mentors to “fix” poor people, we finally stumbled upon the strategy to simply build friendships across class lines in circles focused on the goals families had to get to become economically self-sufficient. Dr. Ruby Payne had developed a language that described the different hidden rules of each class: the poor, the middle class and the wealthy. These insights provided people with a way in which to navigate powerful new relationships across class lines. We also worked with Phil DeVol and his *Getting Ahead* workbook and class to help train people how to enter into these powerful, albeit fragile and awkward relationships with people who have very different income backgrounds and world views.

Move the Mountain developed the Circles™ model to provide a stable structure for people to pursue getting out of poverty with the help

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of middle and upper income “allies.” Circles come together monthly to pursue plans to secure basic needs such as food, housing, transportation, energy, and childcare. Circles™ have helped people earn more income, rely less on public assistance, become more confident problem solvers, feel better about their lives, and raise their children more effectively. We have learned that there are three immediate benefits to this approach:

1. People in poverty become less isolated and build their resources. They are now better positioned to bring about positive change.
2. Through relationships with people who have middle and upper income, people in poverty expand their thinking about what is possible based upon the life perspectives of the middle and upper income members of their Circle. They have opportunities to enter into new and more powerful social networks that can positively impact the economic wellbeing of their family.
3. Those with middle and upper income find new meaning through their direct involvement with a financially struggling family. As they become more informed of all the barriers that keep their families locked in the cycle of poverty, they bring their voices and sense of urgency to address the community's issues that are contributing to keeping people in poverty.

The Circles Campaign is designed to reach 1000 communities within the next decade through a network of training centers across the country.

A weekly place to come out of the cold

Weekly Circles meetings typically run from 6-8pm once a week to provide support, networking, and problem solving to anyone who wants to address the problems of poverty. Meetings are held at the same place each week and can grow to support approximately 30 families. New meetings can be set up in the community as the need and popularity builds.

In weekly meetings, people come together from all income levels and focus on helping people with the immediate needs of food, housing, transportation, energy, and childcare, as well as set up long range plans to move into economic stability. The format is simple and effective:

1. Pot-luck and/or prepared dinner
2. A large welcome and brief set of instructions/ground rules
3. People can meet in small groups around self-sufficiency goals and topics that move their agenda forward.
4. Once a month the meeting focuses on community-wide barriers that need to be resolved. The entire community is invited to the “Big View” meeting to be part of the problem solving.
5. Circles comprised of people moving out of poverty and middle and upper income “allies” meet once a month to help meet immediate needs and to pursue longer range goals.
6. All the content of the meetings is driven by the needs and goals of those pursuing economic stability.

This is the type of program in which businesses could become key players and transformative leaders

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Getting Ahead

Author Phil DeVol, a primary partner with Move the Mountain, has worked with people in poverty to develop a 15-week class called *Getting Ahead*. We have integrated the class into the Circles model and have been very pleased with the results. Graduates report having a new future story filled with hopes about gaining control of their financial situations, as well as building new resources of all kinds—social, educational, emotional, mental, and physical wellness. We intend to continue offering Getting Ahead to anyone interested in better understanding the mental models of the poor, the middle class and the wealthy and applying that knowledge to creating a new life.

Many businesses are totally unaware of how many of their front-line employees do not understand the hidden rules of middle class in order to succeed at the workplace. Cascade Engineering conducted a study, discovering that 40% of its incoming workforce was either currently still on the active welfare rolls or had just come off.

Many middle-class blue collar workers do not know how to gain control of their financial situations. Why do so many in the middle class have so much debt? Is something missing from their education process? Why do some people bounce from temp agency to temp agency?

For businesses, the economic health of employees impacts productivity, quality, customer service, as well as physical health of their workforce. Again, there seems to be many benefits, tangible and intangible for businesses who engage in this work.

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) and Center for New Futures

WOW has a sophisticated tool box for helping people develop economic security. In conjunction with the Center for Community Futures (CCF), a West Coast think tank, Move the Mountain has begun working with this Washington DC based national group to bring best practices to communities and to inform policy makers how to make programs more flexible and effective based upon the experience of our families working their way out of poverty. WOW is in partnership with several national foundations to identify and transfer self-sufficiency calculators and financial tools to communities throughout the nation. MTM and WOW are approaching national foundations to provide the Next Communities with state-of-the-art resources and innovations.

The directors of WOW and CNF director sit on the board of MTM. CNF and MTM are working to establish connections in the Obama administration to pursue public resources to assist in building the community infrastructure and innovation brokering described in this article. Government strategies must be anchored in flexible, sustainable local activity that respectfully and effectively responds to the unique needs of individuals and the new demands of the Next Communities. The new cycle of national political priorities must ensure stable structures remain embedded in communities that reduce poverty.

Values for the Next Community

Crises like the economic one our nation finds ourselves can invite us to aspire to the higher ideals of generosity, compassion, love, gratitude, and empowerment. Communities of the future will build structures that reinforce

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the ideals of compassion and empowerment and discourage a mentality of greed and fear. The belief that someone who is poor cannot change and deal effectively with life's challenges is an old paradigm, one that should not be reinforced by handout programs. The key to successful models has been an underlying faith in the capacity of human beings to rise up and meet the challenges before them. An approach that changes systems structures and empowers without enabling is a key element to success.

Cascade Engineering, a case example

This was made evident at Cascade Engineering (CE) which over a 10 year period of time created a nationally recognized Welfare-to-Career (W2C) program. The W2C program was not a handout but a *hand up* and was the result of a partnership between Cascade Engineering, the Department of Human Services, and several social agencies. W2C proved that people from poverty can learn, change, and grow. In the early years of the program, a 40% to 60% rate of turnover was common, but once the partnership was formed, along with integrating the principles presented in Dr. Payne's book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, turnover was reduced to less than 5% and has held at this level for the past 5 years. Changes initiated by the W2C program also contributed to a reduction in turnover for all employees. Businesses engaging in community-wide or regional change initiatives can significantly impact their bottom lines as evidenced by the results of W2C at Cascade Engineering:

Average monthly turnover of full-time employees declined from 3.01 % in 2000 to .72% in 2008. In 2000, turnover cost CE \$3.6M whereas in 2008 that cost dropped to \$492,956.

Much of this reduction has been attributed to CE's new employee orientation program designed because of the W2C program. The W2C program received national recognition and exposure which resulted in tremendous employee pride which is hard to put a price tag on.

Cascade Engineering learned how to effectively utilize an undeveloped labor pool. They are expanding what they learned through W2C to help the community build a Prisoner Re-entry Program for ex-offenders, another potential labor pool.

Then there is the positive impact to the State of Michigan where the estimated savings from Cascade Engineering helping people bridge out of poverty and off welfare rolls is \$975,000 annually. That figure is based on approximately 30 people completely leaving welfare and another 70 working with reduced state benefits.

Imagine if you had 100 companies with a functioning and effective W2C program. How would that help society as well as your state? The potential to get more individuals out of poverty is tremendous. The process has been proven, and several models exist. Businesses can seriously and actively engage in a program and commit to collaborating with other entities in the community to move people to self-sufficiency. Business benefits, the agencies benefit, the individual benefits and the state benefits, a classic win-win opportunity.

Leadership Development

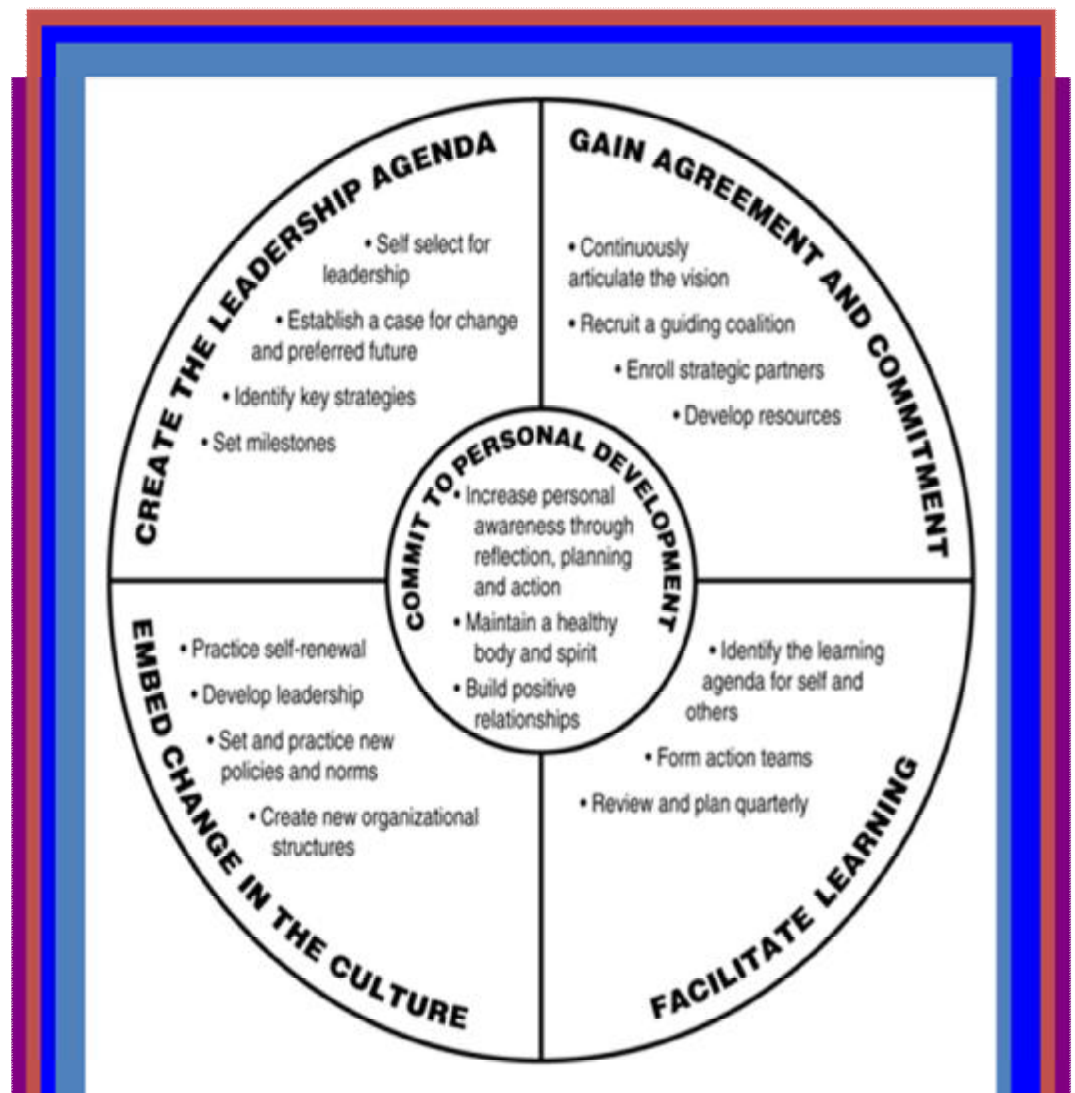
Leadership development is critical. Move the Mountain has developed a Transformational Map for leaders who want to lead community change. Based historically on what all transformational leaders have done to facilitate

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dramatic societal changes, the map outlines the leaders' work: 1) articulate a vision; 2) gain commitment and agreement to the vision; 3) facilitate the learning required to achieve the vision; and 4) embed the vision into the culture.

At the core of the map is the leader's own personal transformational process. The Next Community will need to inspire and equip a new generation of transformational leaders who are able to navigate this map.

The Transformational Map



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The Guiding Coalition of Innovation--Bridges

Again, people need first and foremost food, shelter, transportation, utilities, childcare, and enough money for the rest of essentials in life. Money and income producing activities in the Next Community are going to be different. A community based guiding coalition (which we call a Bridges Steering Committee) is established to identify and incorporate best practices from around the country and world that can help the local community meet new demands. The coalition is comprised of people from all levels of income to ensure the solutions are relevant, powerful, and effective. Move the Mountain has been a broker of best practices since 1992. What we have learned in that role is being passed along to these new coalitions so that communities can integrate the ideas that they find most pertinent and promising.

Move the Mountain is pursuing partnerships with those who have best practices. We help to bundle those practices into coherent packages that communities can unwrap and use. Below is a sample inventory of new partnerships MTM is initiating this coming year. We hope that each one will move successfully through its testing phase and be available to our entire network of communities:

Traditional entry-level jobs

Opportunities will continue to exist for people to work in entry level jobs making \$8-\$10/hr. Two outstanding programs Cincinnati Works (CW) and Cascade Engineering (CE) have long track records of planning and retaining people from poverty in their current jobs. CW places 800 people a year into jobs and has an amazing track record of 85% retention after a full year.

They have developed a training strategy and are ready to transfer their ideas to other communities. For more information, see *Harvard Business Review's* December 2006 article on the *Risky Labor Pool* (www.hbr.org). The key to their success is using 70% of their resources to break down the barriers that have traditionally kept people from staying with a job over the long haul. Traditional workforce development programs place the vast majority of their resources into placing people into jobs and have much lower retention rates as a result. CW ideas are necessary to reduce turnover and increase the economic stability of people who want to pursue entry level work. CW also helps people to advance to higher level wages through customizing education and certification. Once a member of CW, you are a member for life and can use their services to achieve economic stability.

As discussed, Cascade Engineering, with 1600 employees, has dramatically increased welfare to work retention rates from 29% to 95%. A Stanford University case study showed that they saved themselves \$500K and the government \$900K using ideas from Dr. Ruby Payne's work on the hidden rules of class (www.ahaprocess.com). CE has set up a training company, Quest Sustainable Solutions, to transfer this knowledge to companies throughout the country. West Michigan Team has helped to transfer their work to other smaller companies who form a consortium (known as the SOURCE) to provide entry level workers with soft skills and support systems that not only keep them in work but also advancing to higher levels of wages. Friendlier employer environments and "community-wide employee assistance services" will save everyone money, increase business

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opportunities, and help to stabilize a major segment of the Next Community's population.

New small business enterprises: Community Action Association of New Mexico and Operation YES

Given the changing demand for entry level workers, more people will need to learn how to set up their own businesses. The Community Action Association of New Mexico (CAANM) has been very successful in supporting people out of poverty by starting new enterprises. Using matched savings programs sponsored by federal and state governments, (known as individual development accounts- IDAs), people have been able to save enough money to invest in restaurants, internet businesses, and a variety of local services. The director of CAANM sits on MTM's board and works closely with us on strategic planning both in New Mexico and the nation. Small business development models are being developed in New Mexico and elsewhere in conjunction with IDAs that are ready for replication by communities everywhere.

Joe Vitale, author of several self-help books, and featured leader in the popular book and movie, *The Secret*, has brought a team together to explore how MTM and his new Operation YES (Your Economic Salvation) can work together to end homelessness. YES is focused on steps to boost self esteem, clear crippling emotional baggage, and teach people how to avoid foreclosures and find new ways to generate income using the internet to sell products and services. MTM is interested in learning how to fully utilize the internet for both helping families start up businesses as well as engaging a wider swath of the American public in the mission of ending poverty.

Community Engagement and Resource Development

Jon Biel and his co-founder and daughter, actress Jessica Biel have launched the Make a Difference Network (MTDN) a powerful new web tool that connects people who need financial support with those who want to give. MTM is piloting MTDN in a select group of our partner sites to determine its fit in our national Circles Campaign.

Nonprofits can be sponsored by private companies to engage hundreds of allies in their community to support their local Circles initiative and to help families solve financial barriers as they pursue educational and employment goals. MTDN increases grassroots philanthropy by teaching nonprofits how to use the full power of the internet to tell stories through video, blogs, photos, etc. MTDN has numerous features that facilitate people working together to fulfill wishes that individuals and groups post. It is both fun and interactive. MTM is pursuing a partnership with MTDN to help all Circles Campaign partners use the internet to engage people who would not otherwise find their way into the process of helping families out of poverty.

Most nonprofit and government leaders still rely on their traditional sources of revenue—government, United Way, foundations, and fundraisers to keep the doors open. We have already begun to see the frenetic reaction to the new economic challenges. Local services are diminished, staff are reduced, and planners get caught up in the tyranny of the moment, just like those in poverty. It becomes a cycle of hopelessness that is passed along into the fabric of the community.

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The Suddes Group, based out of Columbus, OH, is another new partner of MTM. They have helped nonprofits raise a billion dollars to date using effective tools to tell the story and ask for money.

The media has exposed how a select group of wealthy individuals has been spending billions of dollars in frivolous ways while others work long hours eking out an existence. The disconnect is facilitated by the isolation of both the poor and the wealthy from one another. The resources upper-income people have—financial, networks, creativity and know-how—need to be harnessed by the Next Communities to create an experience of prosperity by the larger community and not just a select few. The values of generosity and compassion are needed by the Next Communities. Leaders focused on ending poverty need to learn how to make a strong case for change and directly ask wealthy individuals for the necessary resources to accomplish this mission.

For the past forty years, we have abdicated the responsibility of our community's poverty to government and nonprofits. Government programs that have to work with thousands of people inside of one program quickly organize their services for administrative convenience. One size shoe does not fit all. When abuses occur, it is easy to use a sledgehammer on a tack. When resources contract in the face of mounting demand, program impact basically amounts to a squirt gun being used on a forest fire. Public and formal nonprofit supports need to be complemented with the flexible supports of community members working together.

Educating Everyone Forever

When children's natural gifts are not tapped and developed by schools, when they are

labeled and forced into a one-size-fits-all education system, when they find schools indifferent to the stresses they face at home and ill-equipped to help them overcome barriers (due to schools' own lack of resources), children will quickly become jaded and drop out, often turning to crime, gangs, and drugs to meet their needs. The cost to our communities is extraordinary in terms of squandered talent, and young adults unprepared to handle life's challenges and be effective participants in our democracy.

Education must be a forever proposition promoted by the Next Communities. *Forever* implies that people are always changing, and that life is changing constantly around them. Therefore, static educational approaches need to be abandoned. Children need high differentiated learning that is geared to their unique pace and interests, ensuring that they master the basic skills of life: reading, writing, analyzing, synthesizing, negotiating, and innovating. Everyone needs to understand the language of money, how to build assets, create products, add value to the world around them, and develop future realities where assets and liabilities are managed effectively.

Education begins immediately and carries on to the grave. MTM already has a partnership with aha!Process, Inc. to promote Bridges and Circles. We are becoming more acquainted with the vast set of educational tools developed by Dr. Ruby Payne and her team. The language of hidden rules and the mental models are the same on the education side as they are in Bridges. The advantages of shared language and mental models for a community are many: speeding up the processes of articulating a vision, gaining commitment to it, facilitating the

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learning required to achieve it, and embedding the vision into the culture.

We are also exploring a new partnership with Thinkronize, a for-profit company that has developed and sold worldwide a product known as netTrekker d.i. (differentiated instruction). Thinkronize creates tools to support differentiated learning for all kids from K-12 grades and all subject areas through a customized search engine of teacher-reviewed websites. All websites are geared to support the basic skills and aligned to all state standards of learning. No matter what grade a student is in, they can utilize this safe and individualized web tool to move at whatever pace they wish, no longer held back or pushed inappropriately ahead by their peers.

Additionally, Thinkronize has successfully formed partnerships with not-for-profit organizations that provide free home computers and internet access for kids unable to afford them. The playing field needs to be leveled so that all students, regardless of their household's income, can have easy access to a computer and the appropriate learning tools to excel.

Post Secondary Success

In a recent meeting with a Pennsylvania community college president, I was told that the biggest concern on his mind was the 45% drop out rate in the first year. "So many students are just one failed car transmission away from dropping out of school." With our partners in New Jersey and Pennsylvania we are adapting Circles using faculty, alumni, community members, and students themselves to be allies to the incoming freshman with the primary purpose to help them finish what they

start. Phil DeVol is working closely with Youngstown State University faculty and staff on the next level of Getting Ahead for under-resourced students. YSU's pilot Learning Community Model, using *Getting Ahead* as the context for remedial reading and composition courses is showing promising results both in skill development and retention. Learning Community graduates will serve on a university planning committee to shift institutional culture and systems to better serve under resourced students. The implementation of Circles on campus will further support student success. We have just submitted a proposal with our sites in New Jersey to a national foundation to work with three community colleges to embed Bridges and Circles for the purpose of increasing retention and academic success for students marginalized by poverty.

Wellness

As healthcare insurance continues to increase at mind-boggling rates, universal health insurance is going to be a tricky proposition, posing major design and execution challenges. Hopefully, we will eventually ensure that everyone has access to affordable healthcare. Wellness, however, is another matter altogether. Regardless of income, people tend to try and get away with diets that cause obesity and heart troubles. People in poverty have more disease in general and die younger than their counterparts. Community-based wellness is a function of boosting people's immune system to protect them from unnecessary stress, low self-esteem, and self-sabotaging lifestyles. Wellness is promoted through the local Circles infrastructure and needs to be promoted more powerfully in the Next Community. People can learn how to adopt better diets and exercise habits, quit

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smoking, and balance their time with work and rest *if they are supported* by others.

Mental health and addiction problems are extremely prevalent in families with low resources. We do not have adequate treatment and recovery resources in any of our communities to accommodate all the people who need it. The community at large is still significantly in denial of these kinds of problems and therefore enables addictions through a myriad of caretaking behaviors and general indifference towards the addicted. Extra care and attention needs to be paid to recovery services and plans for people willing to overcome their addictions. The same is also true for those willing to address their mental health issues.

Move the Mountain has been in conversation for the past year with Albuquerque based St. Joseph Community Health, a think tank which is the community wellness lab of the Catholic Health Initiative's network of hospitals. MTM intends to find common-ground strategies that can be tested in New Mexico Circle sites to help people take charge of their wellness and remain healthier throughout their lives. We will help disseminate the strategies described in our partnership agreements above to the Next Communities.

The Next Community is emerging right now—how do we get going?

It is time to take the strategies laid out above to scale, right now. Move the Mountain is currently a staff of three with a group of 16 certified trainers, 24 national partners, 40 community-based collaborations, and a group of over 100 consultants, board members and nonprofit leaders who have been working with us for years. Our key strategy is to build

effective partnerships like those described above, and to develop high-impact strategies with them that can change the mindset of communities and pave a new way for people to self-organize. Through our partnerships we are attracting the resources necessary to continue testing and supporting adaptations of the Circles™ approach so that communities have a vibrant infrastructure to build relationships across class lines to meet local needs. We are learning how to fully utilize the internet and our national media system to promote new ideas, provide training, and disseminate the exciting tools of best practices.

Let's make our communities what they need to be for a bright and sustainable future, reinventing our economics to serve us all, and push the envelope of human potential. Let's build community in ways that allow us to aspire to the higher ideals of love, generosity, and compassion and unleash a new and profound joy. The crisis of today's economy is the seed of tomorrow's triumphs. We are going to be happier people if we learn to build community and care about one another more effectively. Let's declare our national period of isolation and cocooning over and enter into a new mode of neighborly interest and care for one another.

All entities must come together in a spirit of mutual cooperation and mutual benefit. Government, businesses, social agencies, for profits and not-for profits, education, and faith-based institutions must forget power and petty politics and focus on doing the greatest amount of good. Not by a one size fits all, but via regional change initiatives based on models that have been proven to work.

Humans were born to live in groups. Let's stop denying that and get on with building

Ending Poverty in our Communities—What communities can do right now to thrive in the new economy

communities that serve who we are at the next evolutionary station. The Next Community is emerging and personally, I can't wait!