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&  
VIEWS

*THEME: Youth Development*

## America's Promise: A Crusade for Youth

*General Colin L. Powell, USA (Ret.)*

A majority of Americans support the proposition that “getting kids off to the right start” should be our number one national priority. Yet, despite our best intentions, one of the great ironies of today’s affluent America is the extent to which our youth are *not* getting the nurture they need to grow up into successful adults.

Dramatic social changes have occurred in our society over the past several decades. Among these are the greater incidence of divorce, the demands placed upon working parents, and the gradual undermining of extended families and traditional community support systems. These changes have given rise to an America in which even young people from comfortable homes may lack the moral and material resources they need to grow up healthy, confident, and successful.

None of our youth, however fortunate, is entirely safe from such menaces as drugs, violence, academic failure, irresponsible sex or the other social pathologies of our time. All young people are experiencing difficulties in growing up these days, and young people from disadvantaged circumstances have it hardest of all.

Virtually everyone involved in child-rearing feels overwhelmed at times. We are learning anew the wisdom of the old proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

Reclaiming the next generation of Americans is a national challenge that requires a national response. That response is America’s Promise – The Alliance for Youth.

America’s Promise was created to carry on the work of the Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future, which was held in Philadelphia in 1997.

The Presidents’ Summit was convened at the behest of every living President of the United States and First Lady. It brought together thousands of prominent Americans from all walks of life – governors, mayors, federal officials, corporate executives, leaders of non-profit and



*“One of the great ironies of today’s affluent America is the extent to which our youth are not getting the nurture they need to grow up into successful adults.”*

service organizations, people of faith, educators, and community activists. Governor John Engler of Michigan was one of the governors who personally headed his state’s delegation.

From that watershed event came a resolve to make the American Dream a reality for all our youth. America’s Promise was charged with equipping all young Americans with the character and competence they need to grow up into successful and contributing adult members of society.

America’s Promise calls on all Americans to scale-up their investment in our youth; to challenge them by having high expectations of them; and to engage them in opportunities to realize those expectations through constructive, character-building activities.

We cannot provide all our young people with idyllic childhoods, as much as we would like to do so. But we can – and we must – provide them with the minimum requirements they need to grow up into self-supporting and contributing adult members of society. We do this by keeping five basic promises. We promise every youngster who needs our help:

- **A caring adult in his or her life**
- **A safe place to learn and grow during non-school hours**
- **A healthy start in life**
- **A marketable skill through effective education**
- **An opportunity to learn the joys of serving others by giving back to the community.**

Our role is not to compete with or to supplant the many fine organizations that have been helping American youth for generations. Rather, it is to serve as a “force multiplier” for youth support agencies by enlisting additional contributions of time, talent, and treasure.

*Powell, continued on next page*

*Powell, continued from page 1*

Because our five basic promises are coherent and mutually reinforcing, a commitment to keep one or more of them enhances the total impact of the commitment and bolsters all existing efforts to help youth.

To date, we have more than 470 commitment-makers. They include corporations, associations, non-profits, faith-based communities, charities, and government at all levels. In addition, nearly 500 communities across the nation have become partners in our effort – including a number of cities, towns, and counties in Michigan. Last October, I was in Jackson, Michigan with First Lady Michelle Engler to celebrate the progress that has been made in the state so far. Mrs. Engler, by the way, is a valued member of the board of directors of America's Promise.

Among other plaudits, we have won the enthusiastic endorsement of leading philanthropic organizations. "Two years ago there were many organizations working to improve the lives of youth in our nation, but there was not a movement pulling in the same direction," said Betty Beene, president and CEO of the United Way. "Today ... [we] have a common set of goals to rally around. America's Promise made the difference."

Steve Culbertson, president and chief executive of Youth Service America, is equally enthusiastic about our contribution: "Thanks to America's Promise, I can walk into any foundation or corporation in America and make my case for supporting the youth volunteering movement. The youth development movement can now collaborate under one umbrella, with a common vocabulary and focus, and most important, a leader."

America's Promise is a crusade. In Michigan, and throughout the length and breadth of this great land, we are working together to put youth first by keeping the five basic promises. We are in this crusade for the duration, and we will prevail.

*General Powell is chairman of America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth.*

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## **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES ON-LINE**

America's Promise  
[www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)

Annie E. Casey Foundation  
[www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)

Childrens Defense Fund  
[www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

Children, Youth, and Families  
Consortium  
[www.cyfc.umn.edu/](http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/)

Institute for Youth  
Development  
[www.youthdevelopment.org/](http://www.youthdevelopment.org/)

Junior Achievement  
<http://www.ja.org/>

Kids Count in Michigan  
[www.msu.edu/user/mlhs/  
kids.htm](http://www.msu.edu/user/mlhs/kids.htm)

Michigan School Report  
[www.mde.state.mi.us/  
reports/msr/](http://www.mde.state.mi.us/reports/msr/)

Michigan State Universtiy  
Center for Urban Affairs  
[www.msu.edu/~cua](http://www.msu.edu/~cua)

Michigan State Universtiy  
Coalition for Children, Youth  
and Families  
[www.cyfc.msu.edu/](http://www.cyfc.msu.edu/)

National Youth Development  
Information Center  
<http://www.nydic.org>

Youth Mentorship Initiative  
[www.mightymedia.com/  
planetweb/mentorship/](http://www.mightymedia.com/planetweb/mentorship/)

# Michigan's Promise: The Alliance for Youth

by Mary Grill



A little red wagon – the symbol of childhood, of the delights and dreams of America's children – has been making its way across Michigan for the past two years as a symbol for America's Promise and Michigan's Promise.

At the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in April 1997, corporations, governmental bodies, industry and trade associations, nonprofit organizations, and local communities joined the movement to help build and strengthen the character and competence of America's youth. In support of this effort, Michigan's Promise was launched in October 1997 to improve the quality of life for our children. All across Michigan, communities are joining together to equip young people with five basic tools and resources that create opportunities for success: the five America's Promise fundamental resources (*see cover article*).

A caring adult gives a child a guide, a mentor, and a role model to emulate. A safe place with something constructive to do gives a child an alternative to street corners, gangs, and undisciplined behavior. A healthy start means a child will not come to school hungry, exhausted, or with hearing, vision, or other medical problems that can impede the vital business of learning. A marketable skill means a child will be able to find work in our fast-paced, competitive, globalized economy. Finally, a chance to give back teaches a child the joy of service to others, and the self-respect that comes from knowing one has a contribution to make to the world. Each of these resources may seem obvious, but the cumulative effect of providing access to all five fundamental resources in the life of every young person is powerful. Instilling these resources will change the lives of children.

In communities throughout Michigan, the five fundamental resources have been adopted as a viable means to build youth into happy, contributing adults. Currently, twenty-three communities in Michigan are Communities of Promise and are working to strengthen the lives of children by supporting the five fundamental resources (*see inset below*). Michigan is also home to our country's first Tribe of Promise, the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, based in Chippewa County.

Perhaps you have seen General Powell, First Lady Michelle Engler, or the little red wagon recently representing America's Promise activities. Perhaps you have seen the little red wagon in your own community symbolizing the work of caring community members striving to build competence and character in local youth. Or perhaps you have seen children in need, children that need you to pick up the handle of their little red wagon to propel them toward a successful future. Get involved, and point a kid in the right direction!

*Mary Grill is coordinator of the Community of Promise initiative in Michigan.*

## General Powell Visits Michigan

As the Michigan Promise effort continues to grow, General Colin Powell and Michigan's First Lady Michelle Engler received rousing reports of progress from local efforts for youth this October in the cities of Saginaw and Jackson.

At the Saginaw Civic Center a crowd of 6,000 joined Gen. Powell and Mrs. Engler in witnessing the unprecedented launch of a \$3 million endowment fund by Saginaw's Promise to support efforts to fulfill the five promises of America's Promise in perpetuity.

In Jackson, the pair received a report and issued a call for new commitments with Jackson County's Promise to Kids. Among the commitments announced at the Jackson High School Auditorium were a three-year, \$250,000 grant allotment by the Jackson Community Foundation to fund programs delivering one or more of the five promises, and a pledge by the United Way of Jackson County to raise the same amount above their 1999 campaign goal and dedicate it to programs delivering support for the five promises.

FROM AMERICA'S PROMISE WEBSITE: [WWW.AMERICASPROMISE.ORG](http://WWW.AMERICASPROMISE.ORG)



*Michigan's First Lady Michelle Engler with General Colin Powell, chairman of America's Promise*

State of Michigan

## Michigan's Communities of Promise

Alpena and Montmorency Counties  
Calhoun County  
Capital Area (Lansing/East Lansing)  
Chippewa County  
Delta County  
Detroit  
Dickinson-Iron Mountain  
Eaton County  
Flint/Genesee County  
Grand Rapids  
Isabella County  
Jackson  
Kalamazoo County  
Kalkaska County  
Luce County  
Mackinac County  
Marquette and Alger Counties  
Montcalm County  
Muskegon  
Saginaw  
Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians  
St. Clair County  
St. Joseph County  
Tuscola County

# Reclaiming Missed Opportunities:

Engaging our youngest citizens in community and economic development initiatives

by Melissa S. Q. Huber

Youth are essential components of our communities and our economies, but we often miss opportunities to more fully involve our younger members into our adult-led community and economic development activities [1]. This is unfortunate since youth are important to the current and future health of the community and its economy, and both youth and communities have much to gain from improving the community [2]. This article highlights research focusing on the reciprocal relationship between youth and their communities, and it offers some practical tips on strengthening this relationship by involving youth in community initiatives.



## **Children need healthy communities**

Children need healthy economies to insure that they have access to appropriate health care, educational opportunities, and daily supports that ensure their physical and mental well-being [3,4] and several of these indicators of healthy communities can be assessed for each county nationwide[5]. Healthy economies also reduce the adult stresses of unemployment or underemployment that may lead to abusive behaviors [6] and provide safer environment for children and families. The level of economic distress in the community also appears to influence the general educational and career aspirations of the children in the community [7,8]. Therefore, community economic development initiatives that strengthen the health of the economy are also important for fostering the health and overall resources of our youngest citizens who will be the next generation of community residents and leaders.

## **Healthy communities need youth**

The future of local communities and their economies rests on the development and retention of the next generation of leaders. This is critical because the economic status of a community is closely linked to the developmental well-being of its young people [9]. The future of the local community and the economy also depends on youths' willingness to remain in the area to contribute their resources of their time, talent, and money in the local area. Unfortunately, youth that receive additional training or educational investments often migrate to other areas to find more gainful employment, taking their resources with them [10]. The encouraging news is that many of these youth would like to remain in their home communities because of their strong social ties [11]. Furthermore, they would remain in their home communities if there were a slight improvement in either the type of job opportunities or the pay scale [12]. By building on the strengths of the social ties in the communities and strengthening the local economy it may be quite possible to retain local youth and their many assets in the future.

## **Youth participation can help fuel economic development**

Focus groups with youth have revealed their desires for more places to spend their money on recreation, entertainment, food, and places where they can socialize [13]. This is an important point because youth have sizeable economic power within communities. Teens between the ages of 12 and 19 were estimated to have spent nearly \$109 billion dollars in 1995 [14]. By examining where youth make their purchases, communities can involve youth in finding ways to increase the amount of expenditures made locally. They represent an important segment of the local economy as both current and future consumers. Such efforts to solicit community youth in community and economic development planning can strengthen the linkages between youth, adults, and community resources to build a bridge to a better future for individuals and the community.

## **Youth have a stake now in the community and economy**

It is important that we do not have to wait until our youth reach adulthood to view them as contributing members of our community or our economy. However, school improvement initiatives, economic strategies, and even community youth programming have often failed to consider youths' views. This is unfortunate since they have many assets to contribute as youth members of the community. They have many forms of capital that could contribute to local initiatives, such as research, writing, drawing, creating, questioning, investigating, and an enthusiastic desire to have a meaningful role in the community. By emphasizing their role as stakeholders, we can strengthen their ties to the community and solidify their investment in the future and vision of their hometown.

## **Tips for involving youth in local organizations**

Many communities have successfully involved children and youth in their community development initiatives [15]. Below are several practical suggestions for community-based organizations and individuals to involve youth in community economic development:

### **HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD YOUTH.**

Adults routinely underestimate the competence of children and their desires for autonomy [16,17]. Instead, adults can:

- Believe youth have important contributions
- Build on the skills they already have
- Be willing to teach them new skills
- Be open to learning skills and ideas from them
- Expect youth to succeed
- Give them input on decisions
- Provide guidance and constructive feedback but don't keep checking up on them or taking over a project if they are not doing it as you expect
- Invite rather than requiring participation.

### **ATTEND YOUTH MEETINGS AND EVENTS.**

Ask to be a guest at a youth group meeting to solicit their opinions on current community issues. Listen to their concerns, visions, desires, and goals for the community.

### **INVITE YOUTH MEMBERS AND THEIR FRIENDS TO ATTEND YOUR MEETINGS AND JOIN YOUR BOARD OF ADVISORS.**

Many organizations have included youth on their advisory boards, and the State of Michigan recently adopted legislation to enable individuals as young as sixteen to serve as voting members of a board of directors. In doing this:

- **Invite more than one youth member.**

Organizations who have successfully integrated youth members report that it is helpful to have more than one youth member on the board in order to have an impact on adult decisions and for youth to feel comfortable.

- **Provide an orientation for adults and youth members.**

Familiarize youth members with information about the organization, acronyms, how meetings work, and other information that adult members may take for granted. Help the adult members anticipate the need to adjust their expectations and behaviors so that youth members will be encouraged to ask questions and feel comfortable.

- **Hold meetings when youth members can attend!**

Many students can attend meetings after school before the normal business day concludes. Students may also be able to get release time to attend special events.

### **SPONSOR A YOUTH EVENT OR A YOUTH PLANNING CHARETTE.**

Hold a special event day specifically designed to attract youth to gather together to discuss their concerns and goals. Providing food and transportation will help increase attendance. Be sure to have key youth members publicize the event since peer-to-peer communication is highly effective. Some school districts have been supportive of such youth events and allow release time for students to attend these events which will also help increase attendance. Materials for a youth planning charette, which involves intensive focus on community planning, are available from the American Planning Association, [www.planning.org/educ/charet97.html](http://www.planning.org/educ/charet97.html).

### **INVITE A CLASS OR GROUP OF STUDENTS FOR A FIELD TRIP TO YOUR ORGANIZATION.**

Teach students where they can find information about their community and how your organization addresses community issues. Show them how to access public information (e.g., local ordinances, zoning regulations, property assessments, etc.) and how to access public officials.

### **INVITE YOUTH MEMBERS OR A YOUTH GROUP TO PARTICIPATE IN YOUR PROJECTS.**

Be sure to give them important tasks. Here are some things you may have them do:

- Conduct interviews or library research
- Provide data entry, word processing, or other computer support
- Design newsletters or create logos for your public relations campaigns

- Write articles for the local newspaper or have them report on meetings to their local school paper
- Ask them to create and maintain a web page
- Give youth disposable cameras to use in their neighborhoods to document the best and worst aspects of the community from their perspective

### **ENCOURAGE YOUTH MEMBERS TO INITIATE AND CARRY OUT THEIR OWN PROJECTS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION.**

Provide support for their leadership intentions and assume that their projects have value and merit for the community. Allocate some of your agency resources to support their initiatives, and help youth members through the process of applying for grants to fund their initiatives.

### **BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH YOUTH LEADERS FROM VARIOUS SCHOOLS AND OTHER AGENCIES THAT SERVE YOUTH.**

This will help you identify youth that will be affected by community issues and may want to serve on your committees. Schools may also provide support for their students to work on your projects or attend meetings during the school day.

### **INVOLVE YOUTH IN ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKING.**

Foundations all across Michigan use youth advisory councils to successfully engage youth from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade in grant making decisions for youth programming funds. If your agency grants funds, invite youth to participate in designing proposal submission guidelines and evaluating proposals. If your organization does not disburse grant funds, involve youth in developing budgets, seeking bids, and evaluating purchasing decisions.

### **HELP YOUTH TO IDENTIFY ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES THAT SERVE THEIR INTERESTS.**

Invite your youth leaders to assemble a group of youth together to identify the types of goods and services they routinely purchase and how much the average person their age spends on these items inside and outside of the community. Help them to identify the number of people in their age group within the community using your local census data. By multiplying the number of youth in the community by average youth expenditures on goods and services outside of the community. These large pools of funds can signify potential areas of economic opportunity to retain more dollars in the local economy and serve the interests of the local youth. Support youth-initiatives to create these businesses.

### **SHARE YOUR IDEAS AND SUCCESSES.**

The Michigan Partnership for Economic Development Assistance is interested in your experiences in youth development activities and invites you to share them with us. Mail your stories to: MP/EDA, 1801 W. Main St., Lansing, MI 48915. You may also fax materials to us at (517) 484-0068 or direct e-mail to [hubermel@msu.edu](mailto:hubermel@msu.edu).

### **REFERENCES**

1. Israel, G. D., Coleman, D. L., & Ilvento, T. W. (1993). Student involvement in community needs assessment. *Journal of Community Development Society*, 24(2), 249-271.

# Kids Count Assesses the Well-Being of Michigan Adolescents

by Jane Zehnder-Merrill



Dramatic improvements have occurred in some indicators of well-being for the state's young adolescents, while others suggest troubled transitions, according to the Kids Count in Michigan 1999 Data Book. For the first time, this year's annual data book includes measures of well-being for young adolescents, ages 10 through 14, for the state and its 83 counties.

The report focused on this pivotal stage in development when youth are extremely vulnerable to both negative and positive influences in their environment, and communities have a key role to play, according to project staff at the Michigan League for Human Services.

Among Michigan's young girls, ages 10-14, the pregnancy rate plummeted by 45 percent between 1986 and 1997, and births dropped by 23 percent, according to Kids Count.

The report also highlights that roughly two of five Michigan K-12 students expelled during the school year are in the middle grades, and that tobacco use escalates steadily during this period. While expulsion policies affect a significant share of young adolescents, most alternative education programs in the state serve older youth, ages 16 and up. Also, since most older teen smokers report starting tobacco use as young adolescents, more tobacco prevention initiatives could target this vulnerable age group.

In its overview of education outcomes for middle graders, the Kids Count report notes that about half or more of seventh graders perform at proficient levels on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) math and reading tests, and only about 20 percent of eighth graders demonstrate proficiency in science. These findings show that many Michigan students are not prepared to succeed in high school or high-skilled and well-paid occupations.

This year's Kids Count report continued to document trends on the project's key child well-being indicators measured by the national and other state Kids Count projects:

- Most measures of adolescent well-being in Michigan registered improvements over the trend period with drops in juvenile arrest, teen injury deaths (ages 15-19) and teen births for ages 15-17. The largest decline occurred in the rate of teen injury deaths—dropping by 23 percent from 75 to 61 deaths per 100,000 youth between 1986 and 1997.
- Economic security for the state's families with children, however, worsened in the first half of the decade. In 1995 (the latest year for which child poverty data were available for counties), Michigan's child poverty rate of 20%, although lower than a peak of almost 24 percent

in 1993, was still higher than it had been in 1989 (19%). Child poverty deepened in 59 of the state's 83 counties, with Macomb and Barry counties sustaining the largest increases.

- Statewide participation in the School Lunch Program at free and reduced prices—an indicator of families living in poverty—continued to rise through the 1997-98 school year, climbing by 37 percent between 1989-90 and 1997-98. In Macomb County the participation rate nearly doubled.

Indicators of well-being in the areas of education, child health, and safety presented a mixed review according to the report.

- Mortality rates for all groups declined between 1986 and 1997, with mortality for infants registering the largest decline—27 percent.
- In recent years, however, between 1995 and 1997, the infant mortality rate for African Americans actually rose slightly each year. The increase occurred in counties outside Wayne County and climbed from 17 to 19 deaths among every 1,000 African American infants; in Wayne County the rate dropped from almost 18 to below 17 over the three years.
- The incidence of low birth-weight babies, weighing less than five and a half pounds, rose from 7.2 to 7.7 percent of all births—about 10,300 infants a year.
- Indicators of access to preventive health care, so crucial to child well-being, reflect low or falling rates in Michigan. In 1997 the share of Medicaid insured children receiving preventive services decreased to 35 percent, compared to 47 percent in 1995. Only 8 percent of the state's children, ages zero to three, were tested for lead poisoning.

*Jane Zehnder-Merrill is Director of the Kids Count in Michigan Project at the Michigan League for Human Services.*

**Kids Count in Michigan, a collaborative project of the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children, regularly collects and publishes information about child well-being as a basis for public policy development and community action. The project is part of a broad national effort to measure the well-being of children at state and local levels.**

**Funding for Kids Count in Michigan is provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation, the Frey Foundation and the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, as well as the corporate fund of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.**

# It's Time to Be Fair to Our Children

by *Marian Wright Edelman*

One of the values that adults seek to instill in children is fairness. But if we want to do a better job of teaching children how to be fair, we must set a better example by treating children fairly.

*Is it fair* that in America no school system of any size, with any diversity of children, has ever educated the vast majority or all of its children to high levels of achievement?

*Is it fair* that poor children in the poorest neighborhoods have the poorest schools; the poorest prepared teachers; the poorest equipment, buildings, libraries, and laboratories; the fewest computers, counselors, school nurses, and enrichment programs; and the lowest expectations by teachers and a public that blame them for achieving poorly on the tests for which we have not prepared them?

*Is it fair* that every 66-year-old rightly has Social Security and health insurance while every pre-school child during the most important stages of development when brain, body, self-image, and spirit are being shaped for a lifetime does not? Too many of the millions of uninsured children sit in school unable to learn because of undetected and untreated eye, ear, and health problems.

*Is it fair* that corporations drain \$125 billion every year in corporate welfare and tax breaks, while we have cut billions from social programs and demolished the income safety net for our poorest children and families? Is it fair to give a \$300 million a year tax exemption to the owners of corporate jets while Congress lets children grow up poor without the basic necessities of life in a nation with the highest Gross National Product in the world? Of America's 14.1 million poor children, 9.5 million live in a household where at least one person works, 9 million are White, and more live in suburban or rural areas than in central cities. Shamefully, over 6 million poor children live in families with incomes of \$6,401 – less than half the poverty line for a family of three.

We adults must get our values and priorities straight before we waste the lives of these and other children who are struggling to live and learn. Something is morally awry in a world in which the 1998 United Nations Human Development Report says, “the world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion, equal to the annual income of the poorest 47



percent of the world's people (2.5 billion).” Sixty of these richest people live in the U.S. Their combined wealth is \$311 billion.

That's equal to the combined annual income of more than 19 million American families, or the GNP of more than 100 developing nations, or the 997 budget of 35 states combined. Just the interest on those billions would yield \$14 billion annually-equivalent to \$1,000 a year for every poor child in America. We could eliminate child poverty – lift every poor child up to the poverty line – for \$42 billion a year. Preparing all of our children for the future and protecting all of them in the present is the greatest human rights and moral challenge facing our nation today. Children are not human beings in waiting or citizens of the future. They are human beings, citizens, and our sacred charges right now. Their health, nutrition, housing, child care, education, and family needs cannot wait until they are 18 and can vote if they are to carry on American values and institutions, and if those values and institutions will be worthy of carrying on.

By showing our children what fairness is all about, we can do more than teach an important value – we can provide them successful passages to adulthood and build a healthy American future.

*Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans for her entire professional career. Her monthly Voice for Children columns are available on line at the CDF website,*

*www.childrensdefense.org.  
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**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**THE 13th Annual**  
**MP/EDA**  
**SUMMER INSTITUTE**  
**will be held on**  
**Thursday, June 8, 2000**  
**at the Kellogg Center**  
**in East Lansing**  
watch for more information in the  
next Community News and Views

# Recognizing the Importance of Early Childhood Development

by State Representatives *Patty Birkholz* and *Pan Godchaux*



*Rep. Patty Birkholz*

Given the chance, what parent wouldn't jump at the opportunity to give their child the necessary tools to succeed in life?

Yet according to recent research, the true emotional, intellectual and financial value of early childhood development continues to be underestimated by a large segment of the American population.

Since they cannot vote and do not have lobbyists advocating on their behalf within the political system, children have traditionally been confined to a life void of power and voice. In order to create widespread recognition on the importance of quality early childhood education and care, a by-cameral, bipartisan group of lawmakers has formed the Children's Caucus,

A goal of this caucus is to help every Michigan child enter school prepared to succeed. Armed with the capacity for success in both school and life, we seek to give every child the very best chance to meet the demands of the future.

While the caucus itself will not introduce specific proposals, the legislative member can use the caucus as a clearinghouse of ideas to develop his or her own plan. In addition to serving as an information source, we are seeking to elevate the level of understanding so that parents and other caregivers appreciate the importance of nurturing and intellectually stimulating a child during the early years.

Studies indicate that, beginning from birth, the first 1,000 days are the most crucial in the development of a child's brain. During this critical period, a child's ability to reach his or her full potential is shaped.

The development milestones, which are refined, are a child's emotional controls and social attachments, as well as the basis for strong vocabulary, vision and coordination. While it is possible to make up for lost time, it only comes with great effort and expense and often with a lower rate of success.

One of the most comprehensive studies detailing that effort and expense was the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project. In an attempt to quantify the economic and social benefits of high quality early childhood education and care programs, the study was conducted over almost three decades and evaluated

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*Rep. Pan Godchaux*

the progress of 123 children from Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The children were randomly divided into a program and no-program group, with the former having participated in a quality early childhood education program. Researchers then tracked the two groups annually from ages 3 to 11, and then again at ages 14, 15, 19 and 27.

Their research showed that at age 27 those who had participated in the early childhood program had achieved a higher income level, a higher level of schooling, a higher literacy rate, less reliance on social services and less involvement with crime than those who had not participated in a similar program.

In terms of real dollars, the survey showed that for every one-dollar spent on preschool, more than seven dollars were saved that otherwise would have been spent to cover costs of crime.

Among other things, the researchers validated the comments of a Roman scholar who said to thousand years ago: "What we do to our children, they will do to our society."

Given the wealth of talent at our disposal, Michigan has a unique opportunity to become a national leader in the field of early childhood development and care.

Contributing to the recent debate are Dr. Harry Chugani, a pediatric neurologist at Wayne State University and Mr. Carl Ill, director of Early Education Services for Allegan County. Their collective research indicates that the most crucial years for a child's development take place between birth and age five.

Since the type of education a child receives largely determines the quality of his or her adult life, our primary concern should be the development, at the earliest stages, of the unique talent inherent to every child.

Yet statewide, Michigan spends three times as much to educate school-age children as it does for those under age five. Currently, taxpayers, families and businesses spend \$2,200 annually per child on preschool and day care, compared with an annual average of \$7,200 per child spent by the state on public schools.

This investment has not generated the expected dividends, as the percentage of kids graduating high school, both in Michigan and the United States, has remained stagnant.

Another complication to providing for the needs of children, despite all the research emphasizing the importance of intellectual and emotional development during the first three years of life, has been the change in family work patterns.

Two decades ago, 70 percent of households had a mother at home caring for the children. Today, almost half (46 percent), of Michigan children under five are receiving education and childcare, on an average of 40 hours a week, from someone other than a parent.

In addition to the home environment, other areas impacted by such changes in society include quality and availability of childcare, its operation and its cost.

Among the issues facing our society is determining how much value to place on caring for our children. One of the many challenges facing day care centers is attracting and keeping trained child care workers. The near poverty-level wages being offered to those caring for children means an individual is better off financially working at a fast-food establishment.

While children may be only 25 percent of our population, they are 100 percent of our future. To send our children through an educational system without contributing to their success is like sending them to climb Mount Everest without the tools or training to reach the summit.

By the time children enter kindergarten, a great deal of the emotional and intellectual wiring of their brains has been established. To create a greater level of factual awareness is a venture worthy, in its essence and in its scale, of the opportunities at hand.

Where the advocacy of children is concerned, the enthusiasm for the mission can only be exceeded by the confidence we have in our success. With over one third of the Michigan legislature expressing their intention to participate in the Children's Caucus, we are ready to translate research in to policy.

*Representative Patty Birkholz*

*(R-Saugutuck, 88th District) began her career as an Ottawa County Head Start teacher and served as Allegan County Treasurer.*

*Representative Pan Godchaux*

*(R-Birmingham, 40th District) is a former Detroit school teacher and served on the Birmingham School Board.*

### *Huber, continued from page 5*

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*Melissa S. Q. Huber is a Ph.D. candidate in community psychology at Michigan State University, where she has researched the impact of community and school environments on children's well-being. Her publications have appeared in the Academy of Management Executives and the Journal of Community, Work, and Family. She has also spent several years as a volunteer advisor for various youth leadership groups.*

# GivEm 40 Youth Asset Initiative Demonstrates Community Development Focus

by Marlene Caszatt and Gary Knapp

*“If the school exists as a center of learning for the entire community, then the relationship between the school and the community suggests that the school adopt a sustainable community as its goal. Relationships between schools and communities are most rewarding and the most powerful when they are reciprocal, when communities help schools and when schools help communities.”*

*Annenburg Foundation*



Five Northern Michigan counties are in the process of demonstrating the wisdom of this concept. The GivEm 40 Youth Asset Initiative in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties focuses on working within communities to help change the way they engage people, particularly youth and parents.

The five county GivEm 40 Youth Asset initiative originated with a commitment from 14 school districts to conduct the Search Institute *Profiles of Student Life; Attitudes and Behaviors* survey among students in grades 7 through 11 (The Search Institute has identified 40 developmental assets that will strengthen and encourage young people to make wise decisions and choose positive lifestyles). The survey was funded with a grant from United Way of Northwest Michigan. The GivEm 40 Youth Asset Initiative is founded on the results of this survey and each county is in the process of developing an asset building community plan with collaborative partners.

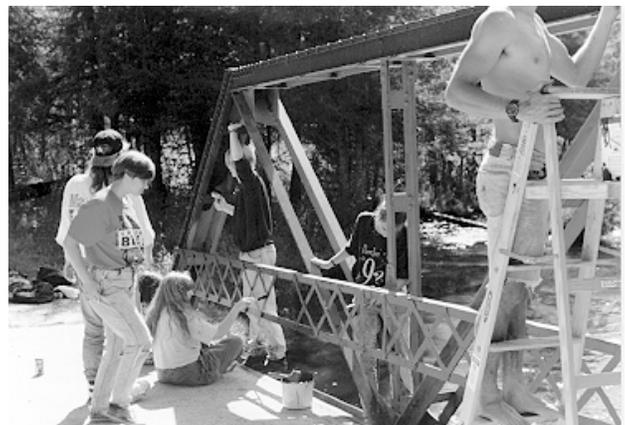
In Antrim County the Youth Asset Initiative has strong roots in illustrating a belief that schools can play a major role in using a sustainable community development approach for change. In 1994 a group of community and school leaders, in the Mancelona School District, developed a vision of providing school-linked, integrated services tied to educational, health, community and economic development, family stability and safety and enrichment outcomes. The key to the development and realization of this vision has been extensive collaboration and forging partnerships among health, human services and prevention organizations.

In order to organize this collaboration the school district applied for and received a Kellogg Foundation grant and formed Project S.H.A.R.E. (School and Home Alliance for Restructured Education). Project S.H.A.R.E. formed a governance body of which the membership mirrored the Strong Families Safe Children initiative at the state level. Over time Project S.H.A.R.E. evolved to become the Antrim County Multi-Purpose Collaborative Body (MPCB).

Through the collaborative efforts of Project S.H.A.R.E. the Mancelona Family Resource Center was built and became a seamless outlet for community resources and services. It was a short step from having a resource center partnered with a school district to creating collaborations and activities directed at services for and with youth. Among the identified goals of the resource center is the use of a strength/asset-based approach to “better prepare children for entering and succeeding in school; ensuring that children feel safe in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods, and promoting healthy lifestyle choices by providing holistic care for children and families.”

These goals are very similar to the Strong Families Safe Children goals adopted by the MPCB. In order to take advantage of the lessons learned through Project S.H.A.R.E., and similar initiatives at the state and national level, the Antrim County MPCB created a school-linked integrated services planning and implementation process with the six school districts in the county by partnering with Communities In Schools. Communities In Schools (CIS) is the largest “stay in school” organization in the nation. It exists to “champion the connection between schools and community resources”.

This approach to community development has set the stage for the GivEm 40 Youth Asset Initiative, a plan focused on interacting, nurturing and supporting youth. Even as the Communities In Schools provides leadership to the GivEm 40 Youth Asset project in Antrim County the effort is expanding into a wider community collaboration. Change is occurring in the way organizations, businesses, schools, neighborhoods and public agencies are working together to achieve better results for children, families, communities and schools.



*Terry Ryan*

Youth refurbish Pinney Bridge in Antrim County

Throughout the five counties Youth Advisory Councils and Community Foundations are actively integrating the asset model into their grant initiatives and the way these grants are reviewed and evaluated. Collaborative Bodies are including youth representatives on their boards and councils, businesses are becoming aware of how they interact with youth consumers. School systems are incorporating the asset model into their school improvement plans and the Intermediate School System is working with youth to organize a Youth Rally. The media is beginning to develop awareness of how youth are portrayed in the media and are helping promote community awareness of asset building skills.

The strength of the GivEm 40 Youth Asset Initiative lies in the unified focus created by a multi county coalition, composed of a variety of collaborators at the local level, (including school districts) in partnership with Michigan State University Institute for Children Youth & Families, United Way of Northwest Michigan, Michigan State University Outreach, and Michigan State University Extension. For more information on the Givem40 initiative, contact Marlene Caszatt ([caszatt@msue.msu.edu](mailto:caszatt@msue.msu.edu)) or Gary Knapp (231-587-5085).

*Marlene Caszatt is the MSU Extension Educator for Antrim County. Gary Knapp is the Community Development Coordinator for the Mancelona Schools and Multi-Purpose Collaborative Body.*

**Michigan Partnership for Economic  
Development Assistance  
Seeks Nominations for Community  
Development Award**

The Michigan Partnership for Economic Development Assistance (MP/EDA) invites nominations for the Fifth Annual Community Development Award, to be announced at the June 8, 2000 MP/EDA Summer Institute in East Lansing. The purpose of this award is to recognize and encourage scholarly commitment and innovative practice in revitalizing distressed communities.

The Community Development Award program was established in 1996 by the MSU Center for Urban Affairs in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Urban Programs and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. Past Research Award recipients have explored such issues as employer discrimination in Detroit, social capital and its relation to community economic development, and the state of intergovernmental aid ten years after Reagan federalism.

The deadline for nomination is April 2000. Nominations are accepted in two categories: Best Scholarship and Best Practice. Self-nomination is permitted. For more information or to receive nomination materials, contact Siew Tan or Cassandra Ray-Smith at 517-353-9555.

## The Search Institute's Forty Assets

In an effort to identify the elements of a strength-based approach to healthy development, the Minneapolis-based Search Institute has developed the framework of *developmental assets*. This framework identifies 40 critical factors for young people's growth and development, divided into "external" and "internal" assets.

### EXTERNAL ASSETS

#### *Support*

- Family support
- Positive family communication
- Other adult relationships
- Caring neighborhood
- Caring school climate
- Parent involvement in schooling

#### *Empowerment*

- Community values youth
- Youth as resources
- Service to others
- Safety

#### *Boundaries and Expectations*

- Family boundaries
- School boundaries
- Neighborhood boundaries
- Adult role models
- Positive peer influence
- High expectations

#### *Constructive Use of Time*

- Creative activities
- Youth programs
- Religious community
- Time at home

### INTERNAL ASSETS

#### *Commitment to Learning*

- Achievement motivation
- School engagement
- Homework
- Bonding to school
- Reading for pleasure

#### *Positive Values*

- Caring
- Equality and social justice
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Responsibility
- Restraint

#### *Social Competencies*

- Planning and decision-making
- Interpersonal competence
- Cultural competence
- Resistance skills
- Peaceful conflict resolution

#### *Positive Identity*

- Personal power
- Self-esteem
- Sense of purpose
- Positive view of personal future

# Alternatives Youth Credit Union Approaches Tenth Anniversary

by Erin L. Peterson



The Youth Credit Union Project idea started as a seedling at Alternatives Federal Credit Union in Ithaca, New York, in 1990. Centered around a mission to provide youth with opportunities to have fun while learning about financial responsibility and small business ownership, the grant-funded program was promoted to local youth. A group of young people responded and Alternatives Staff began training the youth on proper Credit Union procedures. The Credit Union held a contest and a local child (who is now a high school volunteer with the program) named the program Dollars for Dreams. A higher interest rate than the adult account was offered as an incentive for young people to save. Just a year later there were 82 accounts and \$7,000 in deposits.

Nearly ten years later, the program has evolved, expanded, and prospered. Dollars for Dreams continues to offer its members savings accounts, and has expanded its services to provide checking, small loans, and access to Alternatives financial services. The Youth Credit Union now boasts half a million dollars in deposits, and approximately 1000 accounts.

A major expansion came in January of 1998 with the first in-school branch of Dollar for Dreams. Working in conjunction with Marcie Wyant, a teacher at Boynton Middle School, Dollars for Dreams began operating out of a space shared with the school store. The Boynton Branch is operated by several dedicated sixth through eighth grade students who volunteer two lunch times and one day after school every other week to perform transactions and ensure the smooth operation of the credit union. Recently, Dollars for Dreams installed an after-hours deposit box at the Boynton location.

We expanded again in September of this year. Dollars for Dreams, with the help of teacher Jon Raimon, opened its second in-school branch at the Alternative Community School, a local school that offers experiential learning to sixth through twelfth grade students. Working as a school committee, Dollars for Dreams staff meet twice a week to discuss and plan marketing, outreach, loans, and other member services. Volunteers also work during their lunch periods on Mondays and Wednesdays offering transaction services to students and faculty.

The main branch at Alternatives Federal Credit

Union continues to operate successfully on Fridays and Saturdays. This branch offers its members a full range of financial services and is involved in all other aspects of running a credit union. Quarterly, the volunteers at Dollars for Dreams produce a newsletter titled "The Dreamer." This newsletter provides members with information on where their Credit Union is heading, as well as an on-going story about financial responsibility. The main branch is also involved in upholding a positive relationship with the "adult" Alternatives. Dollars for Dreams is coordinated by a full-time Alternatives staff member, who acts as a mentor to the youth volunteers. Dollars for Dreams volunteers offer their services to staff at Alternatives to assist in filing, mailings, shredding, and just about anything else that needs to get done.



*clockwise from top left: Youth Coordinator Erin Peterson, Lisa Smith, Matt Kaproth, Maggie Marisa, Anne Koplinka-Loehr, Greg Warden, and Joey Kilmer.*

Dollars for Dreams is also involved in community service and financial education projects. Volunteers hold an annual toy drive to benefit the local hospital, and participate in an annual youth fair. They also participate in networking with other Youth Credit Unions. Youth volunteers have attended several conferences held by the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions, and boast two New York State Credit Union League Volunteer of the Year awards, one in 1996 (Volunteer of the Year, Kate Kaproth, High School Volunteer) and one in 1999 (Youth Volunteer of the Year, Renee Boisvert, High School Volunteer).

*Erin Peterson is Youth Coordinator at Alternatives Federal Credit Union, 301 West State Street, Ithaca, New York 14850-5431. [www.alternatives.org](http://www.alternatives.org)*

# The Young Spartans Program

by *Bette Downs*

When Michigan State University's Dr. Gordon Guyer asked 50 community leaders whether they would welcome assistance from the land grant institution, they responded win an unqualified "Yes". That meeting spawned the Young Spartan Program (YSP), now in its seventh year at nine Lansing elementary schools. Described as a community partnership, the YSP promotes "academic achievement and career awareness through hands-on learning experiences."

Hundreds of MSU student volunteers plan and implement varied activities at Allen Street School, Forest View, Grand River, Henry H. North, Pleasant View, Vivian Riddle, Walnut, Wexford, and Willow.

Over 100 volunteers work at just one school. Undergraduate MSU students serve as in-school coordinators, establishing liaison with available resources.

Karen McKnight Casey, academic outreach specialist and YSP director, identifies three components of the partnership:

- ◆ community, business and government;
- ◆ schools (elementary students, staff, administration);
- ◆ Michigan State University (students, faculty, staff).

A YSP slogan, "children reaching out to adults, adults reaching to children", characterizes the partnership. Projects range from one-on-one math and reading tutoring to group activities involving children, teachers, parents, and MSU volunteers.

A unique trick or treat event marked the YSP 1999 Halloween festivities. Volunteers and teachers accompanied children to Brody Hall, an MSU dormitory, where students welcomed them with traditional fare. Describing this activity, Suzie Murphy, in-school coordinator at Allen Street, emphasized the role of teachers in YSP, "a dedicated group willing to take on special tasks."

Field trips and clubs organized by MSU volunteers bring new experiences to the elementary students. Allen third graders recently visited the MSU Museum and Abrams Planetarium. A science club focuses on ecology with meetings scheduled during recess, lunch hour, and after school.

Go Green, a program for young gardeners, has reached every elementary grade with a regimen on plant growth. Students planted bean and corn seeds and observed their development. Even first graders discussed monocot and dicot seeds and studied their differences.

Pen Pals, another project monitored by MSU volunteers, featured classroom visits by athletes. Correspondence among students and the athletes followed. All grades participated and all MSU sports were represented.

Dean Transportation, Inc., became the first Young Spartan business partner and Kellie Dean, owner, has continued as a major supporter, providing buses for field trips. Other businesses offer settings where children learn about the world of work.

Project Job Shadowing brought fifth graders to business sites where they encountered work situations. The MSU Credit Union and the McNenly Group, a design and advertising firm,

joined in this activity along with Lansing Mayor David Hollister who asked students to share his tasks during a two hour session at this office.

Dr. Joanne Keith, MSU professor, Family and Child Ecology Department, became the first YSP director and now serves as an advisor. Karen McKnight Casey began her Young Spartan affiliation as a Parent Teacher Association activist. Next she became an advisory board member, and, with a degree in social work from MSU, she "gradually moved into the director position".

Dr. Charles Blackman, MSU professor emeritus in teacher education, sought "a meaningful role for retirees" and found it with YSP. He chairs an advisory and development group of teacher representatives, one from each of the nine participating schools.



*Tyler Blair, MSU volunteer; James Jenks and Jonathan Fields, second graders; and Suzie Murphy, in-school coordinator, Allen Street School*

The hundreds of YSP student volunteers have varied majors, and placements at the schools are based primarily on interests rather than career goals. Suzie Murphy, as in-school coordinator at the Allen School, supervises the volunteers and plans programs in cooperation with teachers and principal Marc Cory. A junior majoring in education, Murphy looks forward to a teaching career, but volunteer Tyler Blair has other objective for his future. A sophomore majoring in general business administration, he will soon be heading for law school. Yet, on his first day at Allen, he immediately and enthusiastically engaged in a study session with second graders.

A teacher associated with the YSP recently reflected on its benefits. She said, "I have been told what to teach (by) the federal government, state government, the state board, the school district, parents. The Young Spartan Program is the first educational program that asked me my opinion, invited me to work with them in developing this partnership".

A summary of the YSP quotes a Dakota Indian proverb: "Come let us put our minds together and see what we can do for our children". The YSP fulfills this mission by enriching the lives of both elementary and college students. The initial commitment of MSU and the Lansing School District covered three years. Today, with readily measured success, the YSP is firmly established as an ongoing enterprise.

*Bette Downs is a long-time regular contributor to Community News and Views. She lives in East Lansing.*

# CEDP

## Michigan Partnership for Economic Development Assistance Begins 12th Annual Luncheon Seminar Series

On October 28, the first of the 1999-2000 MP/EDA Luncheon Seminars was held on the campus of Michigan State University. Sharon Parks, from the Michigan League for Human Services, spoke to students and faculty members about the work of the Michigan Budget and Tax Policy Project.

The Seminar series is an annual activity of the Michigan Partnership for Economic Development Assistance intended to showcase timely research and to improve awareness of community economic development issues within the MSU community. Seminars are scheduled for February 3 and April 13, 2000. For more information call (517) 353-9555.

## Saginaw Residents Organize Family Child Care Network

What do buying a home and starting a child care business have in common? The Saginaw Family Child Care Network (SFCCN) believes both can be important investments for one's personal financial future and for the vitality of the community. The SFCCN, a non-profit community development corporation founded in 1997, is committed to supporting quality child care and strong communities by mobilizing personal savings and applying asset-building strategies to support home ownership and child care home development in the City of Saginaw.

With initial funding from a grant by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Family Child Care Network has applied economic development tools (*including Individual Development Accounts, described in CN&V, Summer 1998*) in order to increase access to child care in the east side of Saginaw. Comprised of local residents, the SFCCN is creating a locally-developed, employee-owned, private non-profit child care network. The plan is to:

- purchase homes in the Houghton Jones Neighborhood and Cathedral districts
- restore and repair homes to include living space upstairs and space for a child care business downstairs
- sell the homes to neighborhood residents who previously could not afford homeownership
- train the new owner to become an entrepreneur providing child care
- continue to support Network members to ensure the long-term success of their small businesses.

As a result of the training provided by the Saginaw Family Child Care Network, 11 of the group's 17 members have become licensed, resulting in 193 new child care slots in their Saginaw neighborhoods.

To receive more information about this project, please contact Susan Cocciarelli at the Lansing office of the CEDP.

*Community News & Views, page 14*

## Detroit CEDP Announces Plans for EDA sponsored Conference on Eco-Industry

Industrial Ecology and Eco-Industrial Development can reduce pollution and waste in communities while creating jobs, increasing opportunities for improved business success, and supporting sustainable communities. Learn more about these topics and how eco-industrial development can be used in your community by attending:

### **The Eco-Industrial Development Roundtable and Conference: Strategies and Case Studies in Sustainable Community and Economic Development**

**March 14, 2000 at Cobo Hall in Detroit**

Hosted by the Southwest Detroit Contaminated Sites Demonstration Task Force, in collaboration with Michigan State University, Cornell University, and the Economic Development Administration, of the U.S. Department of Commerce, this conference introduces the eco-industrial park development as a new way of conducting business, reducing environmental impacts, and developing compatible uses.

For more information please contact Lillian Randolph at (313) 833-7273. For up-to-date conference information, check the Work and Environment Initiative website at: <http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/wel>

## CEDP Student Publishes Disaster Recovery Report

CEDP Program Assistant Jack Rozdilsky has written a monograph, entitled "Disaster Recovery in an On-Going Hazard Situation on Montserrat: The July 20, 1999 Volcanic Dome Collapse," published online by The Natural Hazards Center. Rozdilsky's paper is one in a series of Quick Response Reports that present the results of research sponsored by the Center, a Colorado-based national and international clearinghouse for information on natural hazards and human adjustments to hazards and disasters.

With funds contributed by the National Science Foundation, the Center's Quick Response Program enables social scientists to travel to the site of a disaster soon after it occurs to gain valuable information concerning immediate impact and response. Rozdilsky, a Ph.D candidate in resource development at Michigan State University, is a member of the MP/EDA Sustainable Communities Research Team. Rozdilsky's paper may be read online at:

[http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/q121.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/qr/q121.htm)

# UPDATES

## MSU CEDP Releases Report on Community Development Credit Unions

The statewide CEDP office has released its final report to the Michigan Family Independence Agency on the feasibility and effective operations of Individual Development Account programs within Community Development Credit Unions.\* This seven-month study of 23 credit unions draws upon the experience of practitioners, board members, and members of Community Development Credit Unions (CDCUs) in 16 states, and demonstrates the potential of Individual Development Account (IDA) programs based in CDCUs. Using telephone and face-to-face interviews, on-site observations, and documentary analysis along with baseline information collected by the National Federation of CDCUs, investigators developed eighteen case descriptions and five longer profiles of IDA programs, and synthesized what was learned about those practices and how they might be used in Michigan. The report summarizes these insights and affirms that the asset-based community development approach of IDAs could indeed be a useful tool for combating poverty in Michigan.

Now chartered in more than 400 communities across the country, CDCUs represent a growing infrastructure for self-help initiatives to strengthen local economies and build wealth among the nation's least advantaged citizens. Through these locally owned and governed financial institutions, IDA Programs are assisting people to save and invest in productive assets. In addition, IDA programs based in CDCUs become part of the continuum of CDCU services to provide a ladder out of poverty and dependency, a goal which is at the heart of the CDCU mission.

The study, commissioned by the State of Michigan Family Independence Agency, was conducted by Maryellen Lewis, Susan Cocciarelli, and John Melcher of the MSU CEDP. Assistance was also provided by the Michigan Credit Union League and the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions.

*\* Community Development Credit Unions (CDCUs) are financial cooperatives that serve the financial need of low-income populations and disinvested communities. Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are savings accounts for low-income persons, with matching contributions provided when the savings goal is reached, that are targeted for a designated purpose such as purchasing a home, starting a micro-business, or investing in training or education.*

### CEDP Directory

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