

Community Foundation Leadership in Action Stories

Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque

- ***Homes for foster care youth, a new health center and a vision for the community's future***
- ***Visibility, credibility, new donors for a new community foundation***

In 2003, the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque had its first president, its first office and a vision. As the new President of a new community foundation, Nancy Van Milligen believed that the foundation, despite its limited financial capacity, could demonstrate the added value of this new resource in the community. But the community foundation understood that before you can tell your story, you must listen intently to the stories of others and quickly brought the community together in Envision 2010 to determine the ten most important things for the city to do in the next ten years.

What began with a small group that included the community foundation and the local chamber of commerce ultimately led to 15,000 people out of a community of about 60,000 meeting in small, self-facilitated groups (even a slumber party) to generate more than 2,300 ideas about what it would take to create a thriving community for all. Behind the scenes, the project's partners spent three months preplanning and then met weekly for 18 months to keep the visioning project on track. After the meetings, the committee sorted, grouped and culled the ideas down to 100 and a community-wide vote reduced the number for action to 30. Eighty people volunteered and fifteen were selected to serve on the committee to choose the final ten ideas. More than 400 people attended the widely-publicized announcement of the community's priorities. All of this was done with lots of color, theater and marketing.

The visioning process revived efforts for a long sought-after community health center. Over the years, four proposals for funding to the federal government for a health center had been turned down, despite high scores and the support of Iowa's two U.S. senators. One of Envision 2010's ten priorities was such a health center. After the public announcement of community priorities, a donor contacted the community

To learn more
about the Framework for
Community Leadership by
a Community Foundation
and the building blocks
illustrated in this story,
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foundation and offered to get involved. What resulted was a \$1.3 million gift to the foundation to endow a community health center. With this commitment, the foundation and its partners were able to secure major grants from the local racing authority and from the state, and federal funds were secured. The added legitimacy derived from community engagement and the community foundation donor's leadership gift were keys to successfully leveraging the federal grant that created the new community health center.

Effective convening by the foundation has eased seemingly intractable barriers facing youth aging out of foster care. The community foundation used a state planning grant of \$28,000 to convene public and private stakeholders around the needs of youth aging out of foster care and to energize an advisory group of foster youth. Thirty partners including schools, providers, and human services and juvenile justice agency staff deliberated for six months but the group's work took off when it set goals and targets that involved changing public policy. As one example, recognizing the high rates of homelessness among former foster youth, the group set its sights on changing city policy so that foster youth now go to the top of the list for subsidized housing vouchers. The foundation and its partners worked with the housing director to draft policy and presented testimony to the housing commission. With that body's endorsement, Dubuque's city council passed the necessary legislation.

The Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque is one of 19 community foundations that belong to the River Partnership of Community Foundations, a multi-year effort to improve the vitality and environmental health of communities in the ten-state Mississippi River region. The community foundation has been a convener and catalyst with the city, chamber of commerce, historical society, private developers and others to continue revitalization and development of the region's riverfront.

In partnership with America's Promise, in 2008, the community foundation introduced a "growth chart" to monitor seven benchmarks of the wellbeing for the community's children and youth. The foundation's youth philanthropy board was active in the 14-month community conversation that produced the report.

Community foundation staff credits a willingness to think big, persistence in relationship-building and close attention to detail in supporting coalitions for the improvements the community has enjoyed. The foundation has creatively used planning grants, Americorps volunteers and interns to complement its small staff. People skills are highly valued and systems are in place to maintain contact with a wide range of partners and potential partners.