

2011 MENDING Poverty Conference

The 4th Annual MENDING Poverty Conference was held at MEND in Pacoima on June 15th. This year's theme was Two Checks or Two Grants Away from Poverty. The opening keynote speaker was Homeboy Industries founder, Father Gregory Boyle. Fr. Greg's presentation, "The Power of Compassion and Staying Afloat in Today's Troubled World", highlighted the struggles and successes of Homeboy Industries. Fr. Greg also shared stories from his latest book, Tattoos on the Heart.

Conference co-host, Valley Nonprofit Resources (VNR), honored outgoing Advisory Committee chair Paul Vandeventer, and welcomed new chair and longtime friend of VNR, community leader and former Los Angeles City Councilmember, Joy Picus. In addition, VNR was recognized on its fifth anniversary by a presentation from Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, 3rd District.

I attended the Nonprofit Financial Management - Tools for Changed Economic Times skill-building workshop sponsored by Bank of America. They discussed the secrets of effective nonprofit financial management in these troubled times. Tools discussed included cash flow planning, program profitability analysis and scenario planning to deal with financial crises.

The Luncheon Keynote Address "The Challenges and Opportunities from Sacramento" was given by California Budget Project Director, Jean Ross. Ms. Ross discussed the current budget talks and proposals.

The Los Angeles Alliance to End Poverty made a brief presentation about our efforts to organize and create a coalition to secure economic security for our most vulnerable individuals and families. Over 60 conference attendees signed up to get more information on the Alliance and possible join our efforts. Founding members include: Marianne Haver-Hill, MEND, Cheryl Branch, Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches, Norma Gallegos, Los Angeles County Commission for Women, Rhonda Meister, PATH, David Kietzman, Youth Speak Collective, Michael Flood, Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, Andi Lane, Office of State Senator Carol Liu, Neal Dudowitz, Los Angeles Neighborhood Legal Services, Rudy Espinoza, Community Financial Resource Center, and Sarah Brennan, Office of Los Angeles Councilmember Richard Alarcon. This collaborative was developed as a result of the 2010 MENDING Poverty Conference.

Submitted by Commissioner Norma Gallegos



MISSION AND ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

Vision

A Los Angeles County where every resident has access to the tools necessary to be economically secure.

Mission

The Los Angeles Alliance to End Poverty seeks to foster economic security for our most vulnerable individuals and families by providing organizations and individuals a forum to convene and a platform from which to forge a shared vision for a Los Angeles where every resident is able to live a healthy and productive life.

The Unmet Need

After a preliminary analysis, there are no coalitions in Los Angeles expressly formed to tackle poverty holistically. While there are some important coalitions that address housing, homelessness and education, there are no “umbrella” organizations that bring them all together. The Alliance to End Poverty has the potential to serve as the platform by which organizations and stakeholders already engaged in various aspects of the fight against poverty can magnify impact by joining together in a common commitment to address the full spectrum of issues that can lift communities out of poverty.

Strategy

To achieve its mission, the Alliance to End Poverty will employ several key measures:

- Strong Advocacy

Through a united membership, the Los Angeles Alliance to End Poverty (AEP) will advise elected officials on policies that affect the poor and organize its constituent base to support poverty-relief policy.

- Improved Public Awareness

AEP will leverage its extensive neighborhood-level relationships and contacts to launch grassroots marketing campaigns that educate the public about the root causes of poverty, its relevancy and impact on everyone’s lives, and the steps we can take as a community to solve it.

- Collective Impact

The Alliance will build a comprehensive infrastructure to connect poverty-relief agencies and stakeholders. This infrastructure will also serve to guide the group’s priority setting and decision-making. AEP will be managed through a bifurcated system – a steering committee and general member body. The steering committee will meet regularly and be responsible for communicating decisions and actions to the general membership and the public. The general membership body will meet semi-annually and be responsible for using its networks to promote the work of AEP.

- Engaged Learning

In semi-annual meetings, or in specially scheduled conferences, the Alliance to End Poverty will bring stakeholders together to learn best practices, build their capacity to serve the poor, and offer the opportunity to collaborate on work related to supporting vulnerable families. These convenings will offer informational workshops, guest speakers, and facilitated discussions.

2011-2012 Priorities

The Los Angeles Alliance to End Poverty's (AEP) work will revolve around the major issues affecting low-income families in Los Angeles. Its founding priorities are:

- Instituting a Poverty & Self-Sufficiency Standard

The Los Angeles Alliance to End Poverty is working with the City of Los Angeles to redefine the traditional measures of poverty to not only better understand the problem, but also to identify the interventions that can help families reach self-sufficiency.

- Facilitating Asset-Building in Low-Income Communities

Recognizing that one of the major causes of poverty is a lack of economic security, the Alliance will promote key asset-building initiatives that can help families move out of poverty and into prosperity. As a convener, facilitator and promoter, AEP will support key efforts such as the Los Angeles Earned Income Tax Credit Campaign, the Ramp-Up/IDA Campaign, Citywide workforce development and micro-enterprise initiatives.

- Connecting Community Members to Existing Resources

Unfortunately, many current programs and services that are available to assist low-income families are under-utilized. Through AEP's network of organizations and community relationships, a concerted effort will be placed on connecting individuals to existing resources like CalFresh, the Earned Income Tax Credit, Utility Assistance, nonprofit and private sector services, and other resources to help vulnerable households save money.

These issue areas start to address the root causes of poverty through deliberate advocacy and strategic community-based initiatives. Through these priorities, AEP aims to solve poverty through a holistic lens by harnessing policy solutions, economic interventions, and existing social service resources.