

***Alex Area Stewards have defined 13 key destiny drivers that will work to strengthen economic vitality for the region. Over the next thirteen weeks you will read about each destiny driver and its importance to the region. If you find a destiny driver that ignites your passion for the future, call the stewardship committee at 763-4545 and become a part of shaping the destiny of our region.***

## **“The Challenge of Addressing Poverty”**

**Destiny Driver - Decreasing poverty and improving quality of life for all by 2015.**

### **The Facts:**

Locally, there is a 12.0% poverty rate; 27% free and reduced lunch rate for District 206; 200-250 families are served by the food shelf each month; Douglas County HRA’s waiting list for low income housing is 468, more than double one year ago; and an unemployment rate approaching 7.6% in the Alexandria Region. In addition 4,225 local residents meet the federal poverty guidelines, while 10,376 are actually eligible for government assistance such as free and reduced lunch, energy assistance and other programs.

### **The Challenge:**

Decreasing poverty and improving quality of life for all residents.

### **The Question:**

How can a community deliver on a mission to bring hope for economic prosperity to even the most impoverished and make measurable improvements in the lives of those around us?

When addressing poverty, Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute, states “there simply is no amazingly effective ‘silver-bullet’ idea out there that we’ve somehow overlooked. He suggests it is getting the right combination of “old” and “new” ideas and, more essentially, building the political will to implement them.” The stewardship committee recognizes in the absence of a singular resolution, we must join together to decide what solutions will work best for our region.

The Alexandria area has many resources to draw on, including high quality education systems, exceptional health care facilities, an active nonprofit sector, a devoted faith community, a business community with a tradition of philanthropy and service, public programs to serve people in poverty, and most importantly people with a desire to improve their quality of life.

Maximizing this long-term impact on our communities is more than a transition it’s a transformation. According to the America’s Community Action Network, there are five themes for rooting out poverty:

***Maximize participation*** = Stronger, more responsive communities and broader range of people working together lead to more thoughtful and effective solutions to problems that cause or prolong poverty or limit economic opportunity.

***Build an economy that works for everyone***= More broadly based and more effective economies provide better job

***Invest for the future***= Education and skill levels rise for all; sound policies and practices protect and preserve vital assets, leading to greater capacity to meet challenges of the future.

**Maximize equality of opportunity**= More people and communities can reach their full potential through a greater range of opportunities in a wider variety of situations.

**Ensure Healthy People and Places**= Healthier people reduce medical costs; increase well-being; and improve quality of life, better enabling people to avoid or advance out of poverty. Communities that are safe and environmentally healthy improve their attractiveness and their economic as well as physical health.

The transformation is already happening through the Stewardship Committee as a whole. Many of the noted themes for rooting out poverty will be tackled through collaboration with other destiny drivers, such as: developing a new industrial park by 2011; establishing 12 new businesses per year and implementing a coordinated system to develop, attract and sustain a highly skilled workforce by 2010.

This destiny driver is charged with determining what it will take to decrease poverty and to form a plan to bring economic prosperity to every citizen.

There is incredible energy in our community right now. In order for this destiny driver to be successful we need talent, energy, and commitment from a broad range of citizens. Residents are working to create a community where everyone can succeed. We must continue to work together if to truly succeed. You are invited to join this movement to support our communities' ability to decrease poverty and improve quality of life for all by 2015. Now is the time to advance the common good. This is a unique opportunity to work along side others in our communities.

Published in Echo Press – May 22, 2009

Author: Alex Area Stewards