

Ionia | Kent | Lake | Mason | Mecosta
Montcalm | Muskegon | Newaygo
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a statewide effort to reduce
poverty in Michigan by
half between 2010 & 2020

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Michigan has more
working poor than
unemployed poor—
about 35% more.

On a national level, it's
50% more.

The next regional meetings will
be announced via twitter, email,
LinkedIn and on the blog.



All Empty Pockets Are Not Created Equal

Unemployment, Poverty, and the Working Poor

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Michigan's unemployment rate has been slowly decreasing from 2009 to 2011, after a steep climb between 2008-2009. As of September this year, Michigan's unemployment rate was at 11.1%, about double the rate from ten years ago.

In 2010, an estimated 243,364 (33.4%) of Michigan's unemployed workers lived below poverty level within the 12 months prior to being surveyed (data from the US Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey).

However, poverty doesn't just affect the unemployed. In fact, a greater number of employed workers in Michigan—estimated at 329,334 or 8% of the workforce—lived below poverty level during the same period. We have more working poor than unemployed poor—about 35% more. On a national level, it's 50% more.

What does this mean? For us, as advocates and policy makers, we must prioritize and publicize the plight of the working poor. Workforce development programs are not just about reducing unemployment—though that's important—they're also about increasing the quality of life and economic power of our workforce.

What can we do to foster job growth, decrease unemployment, and increase prosperity for all of our workforce?

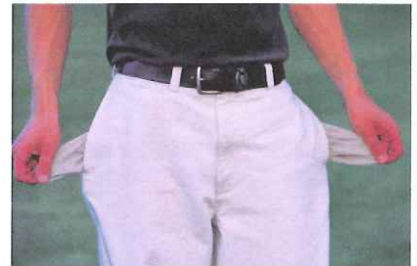
How do we prevent the unemployed from adding to the ranks of the working poor?

How do we get the job training and education to the working people who need it just as much as those who aren't working?

How do we ensure the jobs we create provide a healthy wage that can help people build assets and truly prosper?

We hope you'll keep these questions in mind as you speak within your communities, with local business leaders and with legislators. Share the work that Voices for Action partners are doing to build a stronger more educated and skilled workforce, as well as create new job opportunities. ♦

UNEMPLOYED!



EMPLOYED!



Michigan Unemployment Rate
Sept 2001 to Sept 2011
US Bureau of Labor Statistics



It's Not Just Getting a Job, It's Keeping It

A Trio of Programs Working to Stabilize Employment

As the nation focuses on job creation, Michigan's workforce development professionals have their focus on increasing employability and job retention. How do we help people get and keep that job? What about self-employment? At the October Region 3 Roundtable in Grand Rapids, attendees heard from three different organizations, offering three different perspectives, in public and private partnerships, that are helping people obtain and maintain stable employment.

Employers Step Up

Small to medium size employers often struggle with employee retention and engagement for low-skilled workers. Nor do they have the human resources capacity for traditional Employee Assistance Programs.

West Michigan TEAM is creating Employer Resource Networks (ERNs) to bring social service resources onto (or close to) the job site, freeing up company time for company issues—and keeping employees on the job.

TEAM's James Vander Hulst says, "We needed a social solution designed to fit with the need of employees. [We realized] it will take a partnership by private and public sectors to guarantee employability rather than a job."

Employers share overhead costs for public case managers and private coaches to address top employee needs such as transportation, counseling, financial literacy, financial assistance food assistance, and utilities.

A few features of the ERN model are:

- » employer-driven and focused on incumbent workers;
- » high-touch coaching and case management;
- » help engage employees to gain skills and climb the ladder;
- » root cause analysis and corrective actions to resolve barriers.

There are currently five ERNs in West Michigan, with 45 employers covering over 15,000 workers. Is it working so far?

Retention rates for employees in these programs is 85-98%, compared to 45% in the state; employers are seeing a 175-300% return on investment; and employees are getting the assistance they need and staying on the job.



Speakers at the Region 3 Roundtable share strategies (l to r): James Vander Hulst, West Michigan TEAM; Dawn Sweeney, Michigan DHS JET Program; Ron Irvine, HOPE Network.

Hope for Low-Income Entrepreneurs

"If it ain't there, let's create it!" This entrepreneurial attitude powers Hope Network of Grand Rapids' Micro-Enterprise program for marginalized populations, largely persons with developmental disabilities.

The Micro-Enterprise program helps people who might not otherwise have employment, start and develop micro-businesses into a viable source of income. Eligible persons receive funding through Medicaid.

It takes a step-by-step approach and a lot of support to help the potential business owner develop the leadership and capacity to move the business forward.

"We help people take steps toward success," says Irvine. "Is it feasible? Try a few steps - did it work? Try a few more."

The program basics include evaluating potential feasibility and profitability

of the business, as well as the client's support network. Once the business is on its feet, HOPE Network sends clients to other small business resources.

The 170 micro-businesses currently in operation statewide under Medicaid funding range from handmade crafts to snow removal, landscaping, and motivational speaking. Locally, 16 micro businesses at Hope Network receive Medicaid funding through Network180.

JET Program Gets New Wings

Michigan's Jobs Education & Training (JET) program is getting a makeover. The program began in 2006 to help clients receiving government cash assistance become self-sufficient and gain employment.

JET participants have required hours in core activities, including job search and job readiness training to meet the federal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) funding guidelines.

While JET was designed for cash assistance recipients, it doesn't turn away other populations that need its services, such as persons with disabilities who don't qualify for social security income, work ready with limitations, and others who don't meet the deferral requirements.

With the new 48-month limit on cash benefits, many clients will need to connect to additional resources.

"The JET rebuild will be how we can best serve all the populations that we have," says Dawn Sweeney, Director of the JET Program. The eight rebuild teams are working on streamlining and automating communications across partner agencies. ♦



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Michigan JET: SweeneyD1@michigan.gov.

What's up in Region 3?



Voices for Action Region 3

Muskegon Learning Lab Opens Doors for Participants

Free Computer Center Helps with Job Search & Education

By Dolores Bray, Community enCompass

The Muskegon Learning Lab, operated by Community enCompass in partnership with Michigan State University and the State of Michigan, brings technology into the heart of the city for education and career development. Best of all, it's free for the community.

The learning lab offers resources to overcome educational barriers to success:

- » 16 state of the art computers
- » Broadband internet service
- » Microsoft Office Professional Plus software
- » Internet-based educational curriculum for basic skills, GED prep and job readiness
- » A full-time instructor

The newly hired Outreach Specialist/Instructor has been building relationships with other local agencies and educational programs to better serve the present needs of the participants and empower them to make long-term improvements in their quality of life.

Participants can tailor their schedule to fit their needs and learning pace. We have web-based GED Prep and SkillsTutor for those who need to boost their basic skills. There is also a job readiness component to Skills Tutor and we work with participants to access

the Michigan Talent Bank, update their resume, prepare cover letter and use the internet to apply for jobs.

The reception in the community has been enthusiastic. Grant funding means the MLL will not be competing with other programs for participants or funding. The MLL is able to support any individual who wants to improve their computer literacy, basic education or job readiness.

Over 70 people have accessed a variety of

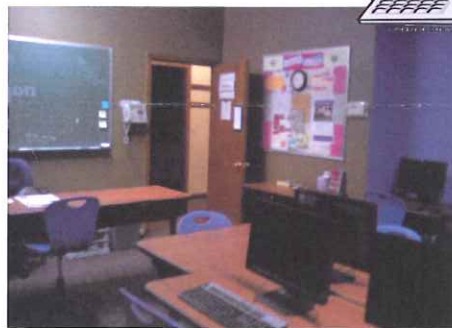
services at the Muskegon Learning Lab since we opened August 15th. Participants hear about the Learning Lab from a friend, neighbor, or spouse or have been referred to the Learning Lab by Michigan Works or community education program.

The smiles on the faces of participants who have learned a new skill tells the whole story. The lab is open at 10 a.m. weekdays, and closes at 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday and at 4 p.m. Thursday-Friday.

Spread the good news! For information, email delores@communityencompass.org.

Community enCompass is a Christian Community Development Organization for McLaughlin Neighborhood, Downtown Muskegon.

Our mission is to empower people and build community in McLaughlin Neighborhood area by sharing God's love, as we walk alongside neighbors, seeking justice and a better quality of life for all through long-term, sustainable changes.



Kent Essential Needs Task Force Focuses on Collaborations

Economic & Workforce Development Subcommittee Report

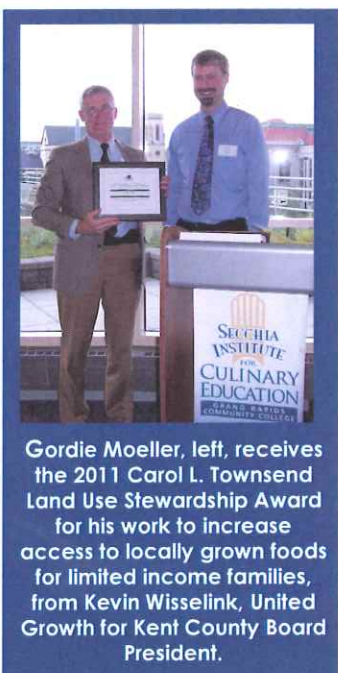
The Kent County Essential Needs Task Force is approaching 30 years of work helping citizens become economically self-sufficient. Their current focus is on developing community structures. Here's what the Economic and Workforce Development (E&WD) Subcommittee is doing to ensure access to opportunities, community resources and education/training for individuals to achieve their full potential. Contact David Schroeder at 616.752.8642 for details.

2010-2011 Accomplishments

- » Developed plans for increasing local and state connections around economic and workforce issues into 2012, anticipating changes in funding.
- » Developed an Economic Development and Workforce Assessment survey mapping education, employment and economic development resources.
- » Started Subcommittee member training and education activities to build community awareness and understanding.

2011-2012 Agenda

- » Host or co-host a locally focused, community or regional economic and workforce development symposium.
- » Continue expanding community awareness of E&WD work to gain greater understanding, participation and membership.
- » Create funding strategies to provide an ongoing support structure for E&WD work.
- » Develop best practice tested effective collaboration models and strategies to enhance outcome achievement. ♦



Gordie Moeller, left, receives the 2011 Carol L. Townsend Land Use Stewardship Award for his work to increase access to locally grown foods for limited income families, from Kevin Wisselink, United Growth for Kent County Board President.



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Unemployment Slowly Trending Down over Past Year

Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Data Online

We've pulled some data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) on unemployment in Michigan's Region 3. Unemployment rates have decreased in all counties over the past year, with Newaygo showing the most slowing and Mecosta the least. To look at data for other geographic areas visit their site at: <http://data.bls.gov>

Here's a quick look at local area unemployment statistics for metropolitan areas in Region 3 for August 2011:

Grand Rapids-Wyoming

Employed: 355,200
Unemployed: 33,200
Unemployment rate: 8.6%

Holland-Grand Haven

Employed: 117,900
Unemployed: 10,900
Unemployment rate: 8.5%

Muskegon-Norton Shores

Employed: 73,800
Unemployed: 8,800
Unemployment rate: 10.7%

12 MONTH CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY COUNTY

