The City of Albany Poverty Reduction Initiative (CAPRI)
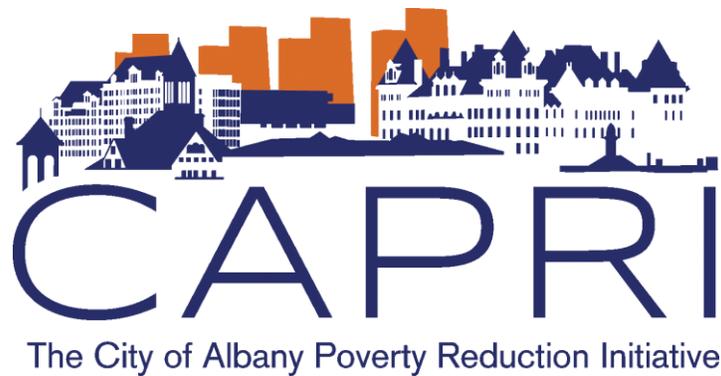
TOWN HALL SUMMARY

Albany Public Library
Delaware Branch

June 29, 2017

200 Henry Johnson Boulevard, Suite 4. Albany, New York 12210

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Town Hall Meeting Objective

The CAPRI initiative can only be successful if we listen to our community. The Town Hall Meetings bring together City of Albany residents impacted by poverty and community stakeholders serving our community to discuss the challenges and barriers those living in poverty face. Their expertise and informed opinions will help guide CAPRI to create meaningful and sustainable solutions that positively impact our community.

Head of Household/Family Group

Question 1: Why do you think some young people are not working?

There were many explanations that the group came up with to gain an understanding as to why many young people are not working. It was first mentioned that youth may be students, consequently, not having the time to work, while some may not even be of age to legally work. Also included was the lack of a resume, job readiness skills (interviewing), and an inability to meet the dress code. Those who have a short work history may not have established the necessary connections for references to obtain work. Disabilities, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, are issues that stem from the flaws of the health care system that too serve as reasons our youth may not be working. Transportation and a lack of connections within carpooling and Uber/Lyft is a top barrier to employment for those of all ages. Technological access to initially apply for employment as well as a lack of financial capabilities (a bank account) are often overlooked as barriers while online applications are becoming more and more preferred. Lastly, the 'isms' including racism and sexism prevent certain populations from being employed.

What are some solutions to the above issues that were raised?

To solve the issue of transportation, one member of the group suggested that bus passes be provided to the youth. While many high schoolers receive these passes, there is a number that do not due to their proximity to the school that they attend. A frequently mentioned suggestion revolved around job readiness. Mentorship could serve as a vital role to teach life skills while presenting a value within the community and families. Through conversations and workshops, peer mentors could successfully identify the specific interests of youth while simultaneously building necessary skills. Bridging the gap between services and demand would more efficiently serve the community. Bringing awareness to these issues could be done by radio station broadcasts, networking, community advertisements, and social media. Lastly, focusing on STEM (Excel, Word, Coding, etc.) could make a youth more valuable to an employer.

Support System Group

What systems are in place which help or prevent people from getting jobs?

The group pointed out several flawed systems that prevent people from getting jobs, but settled on the following as those with the most significant need for change.

The criminal justice system is a reoccurring system that is pinpointed as one that delays job opportunities. The group members felt that parolees did not have adequate support in finding housing, jobs, etc. after leaving prison. Finding a job is also difficult for some people due to the mandatory box asking about criminal history. Another system deals mainly with the job application process which, according to the group, is incredibly flawed affecting the majority of people. Within this system are technological barriers that are faced by those dealing with the "digital divide," caused by a lack of access and affordability. More frequently, these applications are online and require an address and phone number; people living in poverty may not have some or all of these resources. While libraries and other public areas may offer access, a lack of an address and current phone number may prohibit access to a library card. Lastly, the

healthcare system is one that is in place that may prevent people from getting jobs because there is a risk associated to those with health issues. This perceived risk with those associated with a disability, mental illness, or any other undiagnosed issue is likely to be discriminated against as well as seen as a liability to employers.

Other issues specific to The City of Albany?

The conversation shifted to where the members could speak out on issues that they have experienced or witnessed in The City of Albany concerning poverty and employment.

The group believed that existing organizations were not efficient or did not fully understand the challenges faced by people living in or on the brink of poverty. They also said that since people often rely on and/or are involved in many different systems such as the criminal justice, social service, and education systems, the adequate collaboration between them leads to gaps in service, "cracks" in the support system, that allow people to slip through into poverty. Also mentioned was the "Ladder of Assumptions." For example, service providers and employers may assume that a potential employee or client may live in certain neighborhood because of their socioeconomic status and will further assume that they will not have transportation to a job or service in a different neighborhood. One man in the group pointed out that assumptions such as this continue to perpetuate stereotypes and can prevent someone from being hired. Another assumption that is often made by employers is that those with children will not be able to work the appropriate hours or will not commit to their jobs because of their prioritization of their children and families.

Solutions and suggestions

Upon the completion of the conversation, members were given an opportunity to voice their own solutions and suggestions to the issues that are relevant to them.

Firstly, the collaboration between sectors/systems such as criminal justice, education, social service agencies, and nonprofit organizations is extremely necessary to provide services more efficiently and comprehensively. Secondly, it is important to hire more social workers in government institutions to make the systems in place ones that more efficiently provide services and support to people. This also assists in mitigating the risk of overload. The group desired to see cultural changes within the leadership of the various systems. One woman wanted to see a culture of tolerance and acceptance implemented by the decision-makers in these systems in a top-down process. They acknowledge the positive progress that has already been made but sought to see more being done on this issue. Combatting the "ladder of assumptions" was a priority for the group because of the dangers they believed it caused. A remedy to this is to include the cultural changes mentioned in the point above.

Jobs/Careers Group

What systems are in place which prevent people from getting jobs?

A large majority of this question revolved around basic job readiness skills, or the lack thereof. Included were hard skills such as sector specific trades and literacy with language, numbers, technology, and finances. It was mentioned that a lack of references, work history, as well as connections and networking is preventative when it comes to obtaining employment. Unfortunately, employers have assumptions when it comes to the risks of employing those who are living in poverty. It may be assumed that they will be unable to maintain

employment, or that they may operate with low work ethic. It is important to note that these vulnerable populations have experienced a cycle of perceived failure, thus causing a lack of confidence, value, and motivation.

What changes would you like to see in The City of Albany to help people get sustainable employment?

The group stressed that there is much work to be completed in The City of Albany in regards to poverty. Essentially, there needs to be a change in culture concerning job-readiness and the value of the community by encouraging community cohesiveness, awareness, and participation. Safe-places such as barbershops, gyms, libraries, parks, and faith-based organizations were identified as places that could cause grassroots movements. Also, the organization of job fairs, the assisting of businesses with micro loans and incubators, and making resources more attainable would attract commerce to improve the economy on the local platform.