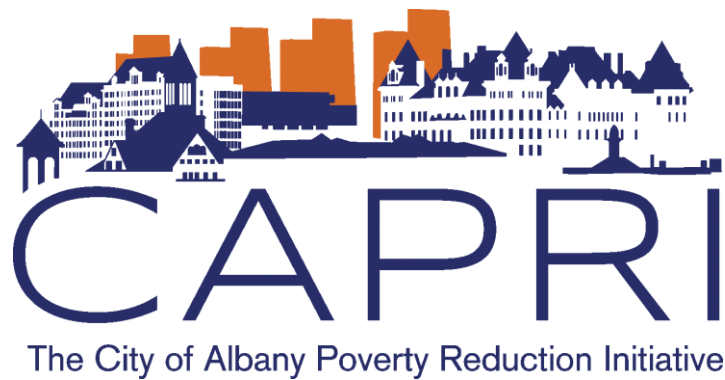The City of Albany Poverty Reduction Initiative (CAPRI)

TOWN HALL SUMMARY

Albany Public Library
Pine Hills Branch

July 31, 2017

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

Table of Contents

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

Why do you think some young people are not working?

The members of the Town Hall Meeting identified a lack of education, a lack of job skills (including appropriate attire), lack of time management skills, and lack of resume writing skills. Lack of healthcare, lack of access to technology, lack of self-confidence, and lack of work experience resulting in lack of references. Many Opportunity Youth are products of generational poverty; however, youth should recognize the value they have the fresh, new ideas that they possess that may be beneficial to potential employers. Additional barriers to employment included teen pregnancy, competition with experienced adults during a suffering economy, and the risk associated with employing youth. It was suggested that youth should identify their own definition of success/wins while constructing their own personalized objectives and goals.

What could you, your community, or community organizations do to help you and those you know get into school and/or get a job?

Role modeling and mentorship for youth and for parents could prove to be effective in obtaining an education or employment. Many members of the group have witnessed a lack of motivation within the community and believed that persistent outreach could serve as the remedy while also instilling sense of self-worth.

What are the day-to-day challenges that you and those you know face?

A middle-aged Black male began the conversation surrounding this question by sharing an encounter he had while on his way to the meeting. As he was driving to the library, a racial slur was yelled to him by a Caucasian male. Racism and other "isms" are struggles that many endure in our day-to-day lives. The general struggles of life and financial burdens were also mentioned as trials that occur every day.

What changes or solutions do you want to see happen in yourself? Your neighborhood? Your school? The City of Albany?

Many members agreed on the longing to see the termination of the school to prison pipeline. Along with human rights advocacy, housing and healthcare should be a human right. The conversation of housing continued into a conversation concerning the need for more investment in city infrastructure. As far as services go, interaction and care management should be emphasized while service gaps close. A single point of entry system was offered as a possible solution.

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, the job application process, and the healthcare system.

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 and affects 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 for 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 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 operate more efficiently. 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 barriers exist that prevent the hiring of youth?
The core answer to this question revolved around the lack of education, training, and previous work experience. It is extremely difficult for those deficient in experience to create a resume, and therefore,

they are unappealing to employers. It was also mentioned that gaps in work history may be another barrier to employment. The group discussed how gaps in work history are common due to a lack of child-care or a lack of transportation due to jobs not being in their community.

What could you and your community do to retain young people?
This question was broken down into separate employee and employer perspectives. As for employees, they should seek job coaching and employee mentorship. The reward of this type of mentorship could assist with conflict resolution as well as with policy comprehension. For employers, it was suggested that they become more employee-centered and understand the needs of the community. Exit interviews could prove to be enlightening as well for a future reference.

What are the day-to-day challenges the job seekers you know/work with face?
Domestic Violence arose as an issue that many have witnessed. Whether it be having a partner sabotage employment or suffering job loss due to excessive absence because of a physical injury. The reoccurring issue of housing is also seen as a day-to-day challenge that prevents many from working. Other complications include not having the proper attire for a place of employment as well as not understanding work policies.

What changes do you want to see happen in yourself? Your neighborhood? The City of Albany?
In the short amount of time that was available to answer this question, the group contructed two solutions that they considered as priorities. The first was comprehensive bus lines to make employment more attainable to communities living in poverty. The second solution was to begin assisting those in poverty at earlier stages of life, meet them where they are, and have a more enduring impact.