BUILDING BRIDGES
to
Family Economic Success

Addressing Poverty and Economic Opportunity in Wisconsin
A strong future for Wisconsin depends on all our residents having the opportunity to be successful. Too many of us live in poverty. This hurts all of us today and limits us tomorrow. Governor Jim Doyle and the Department of Children and Families are committed to helping build the bridges families need to move toward economic success.

Many of the pieces of the puzzle for increasing family economic success exist. Our challenge is to bring these pieces together effectively and identify what may yet be missing. This cannot be a single project but an ongoing process focused on achieving tangible results. It requires collaboration among families, communities, the private sector, and government.
Building Bridges to Family Economic Success

With support from the National Governors Association, Governor Doyle and the Department of Children and Families pulled together a core team of stakeholders to plan the 2009 Governor’s Summit, Building Bridges to Family Economic Success. This team established the goals for the summit:

- Provide an overview of current family economic challenges
- Illustrate evidence-based best practices for improving family economic security
- Highlight local and state innovations
- Create a sense of shared responsibility among key partners
- Launch a process to develop shared priorities for reducing poverty and increasing economic opportunity
- Serve as the basis for an ongoing effort to move family strengthening efforts forward

Over 300 community and state leaders – representing elected officials, public agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, foundations, and community collaborations – gathered in Milwaukee on May 4 and 5 for the Governor’s Summit.

The planning process identified six focus areas that represent the key pieces of the puzzle for creating increased family economic success:

- Job Creation
- Adult Education
- Income & Assets
- Housing
- Family Support
- Birth to Grade 12 Education

The Summit initiated a Call to Action process. For each focus area, a work group started sketching out an action plan. These work groups are ongoing. Their plans provide a blueprint for achieving measurable successes for Wisconsin families.
Focus Areas for Building Bridges to Success

The focus areas are interdependent. Progress in one likely contributes to progress in the others. They fit together to build the bridges to family economic success.

Each focus area is a part of the overall answer to the essential question: “What does it take to keep Wisconsin families moving forward on the pathway to success?”

**Job Creation**  “The opportunity to work”

**Adult Education**  “Viable career pathways and connections to them”

**Income & Assets**  “Supportive financial resources and tools to grow them”

**Housing**  “Safe and affordable housing”

**Family Support**  “Ability to grow up in strong and supportive families”

**Birth to Grade 12 Education**  “Access to high quality care and education beginning at birth”

Each focus area is itself a composite of issues and initiatives. Understanding these pieces, pulling them together, and discovering what is missing are necessary steps in the larger process. This report summarizes conclusions to date of each focus area’s work group.
The path to economic success for Wisconsin families requires that everyone able and willing to work has access to a job.

Ensuring adequate employment opportunities involves:

- Utilizing targeted incentives to generate private sector jobs in areas of high need
  - Subsidized jobs
  - Tax credits
- Offering employment to those who want to work but cannot find a regular job
  - Temporary community service jobs at minimum wage
  - Longer-term supported jobs for individuals with disabilities who face substantial barriers to employment
- Enhancing entrepreneurial opportunities
  - Micro-lending
  - Small business development
- Improving the connection between job seekers and available opportunities
The path to economic success for Wisconsin families requires articulated career pathways that clarify the skills building needed to compete in the job market, paired with support to connect students and workers to opportunities.

A career-focused adult education system involves:

- Focusing on lifelong learning and job progression
- Coordinating with the job market
  - Efficient workforce information systems
  - Continuous communication with employers
  - Identification of high-demand occupations
- Investing in career pathways
  - Curriculum development with industry partners
  - Access to varied training leading to standardized credentials
- Improving transitions for workers in training
  - Easy transferability across institutions and levels
  - Coordination among public workforce programs
  - Economic support during training
- Meeting literacy and other basic skills remediation needs
The path to economic success for Wisconsin families requires that those who work (and those who are unable to) can financially support themselves and their families and build greater economic security for themselves over time.

Work-focused income and asset building support involves:

- Bridging the gap between low-wage work and basic household needs
  - Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax credits
  - Food Stamps
- Assisting those unable and unexpected to work
  - SSI and other assistance for persons with disabilities
  - Social Security and other assistance for older adults
- Improving access to supports
  - Outreach to increase awareness and utilization
  - Free tax return preparation
  - Technological tools for information exchange and benefits delivery
- Promoting financial literacy
  - Credit and financial education for youth
  - Network of resources, training, and support for adults
- Enhancing market availability of affordable financial products
The path to economic success for Wisconsin families requires safe and affordable housing for all.

Ensuring availability of affordable quality housing involves:

- Maximizing public and private resources
  - Coordinated governmental systems
  - Flexibility for local initiatives
  - Community-level resource navigators
- Creating permanent affordability models
  - Land trusts
  - Shared equity
- Supporting healthy housing
  - Weatherization
  - Lead abatement
  - Code compliance
- Preventing evictions and foreclosures
- Increasing access to appropriate and affordable housing for vulnerable populations
  - Homeless services
  - Transitional housing
  - Permanent supportive housing
The path to economic success for Wisconsin families requires that children are able to grow up in strong and supportive families.

Strengthening and supporting families involves:

- Enhancing parents’ ability to care for their children
  - Home visiting
  - Head Start
  - Parenting education
- Improving access to resources and support services
  - Food security
  - Health and wellness
- Reintegrating incarcerated parents
  - Pre-release prisoner assistance and family connection programs
  - Supported connections to the labor market
  - Post-release services and support
- Engaging fathers in family life
  - Incentives for and assistance with meeting child support obligations
  - Father-focused resource delivery systems
  - Grass-roots efforts for fatherhood support
BIRTH TO GRADE 12 EDUCATION

The path to economic success for Wisconsin families requires that children have access to high quality care and education beginning at birth.

Quality care and education involves:

- Enhancing parents’ ability to select affordable quality child care
  - System to reward, support, and communicate high quality
  - Professional development for providers
  - Reliable subsidies for low-income working parents
  - Collaborative pre-kindergarten programs
- Providing support for students with significant challenges
  - Family literacy assistance
  - Outreach to homeless families
  - Aides for students with disabilities
  - Service connections for foster youth
- Reducing academic achievement gaps
  - Early childhood education
  - Neighborhood involvement
  - Intergenerational support
  - School social work services
  - Service and applied learning
- Linking educational opportunities to workforce needs
Call to Action Planning Process

Beginning at the May Summit, the six focus area work groups have been using the Call to Action planning framework.

The framework begins by breaking down action areas for the focus subject. For each action area, the work group identifies the following:

- Measurable target – what result in what time period should be achieved?
- Key strategies – to reach the target, what will need to be implemented?

For each strategy:

- What’s working – what are the existing assets and strengths that can be built upon?
- What are the gaps – what is missing and needs to be addressed?
- Ideas for addressing the gaps – what do we know about the changes and improvements that need to be made, and what is the evidence of how they will work?
- Clear link back to overall goal – are the ideas for addressing gaps consistent with how the focus area is expected to move families forward on the pathway to success?
- Cross-links to other goals – how does this strategy affect other focus areas, and what coordination is necessary?
- Who should lead – where is the responsibility for action?

The focus area work groups have also built off the Call to Action framework. Some have been able to identify assessments of relative feasibility, key partners, divisions of responsibility, timing, and resources required.
Examples of tangible progress on the Call to Action agenda:

TRANSITIONAL JOBS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
The Department of Children and Families is proceeding with the Transitional Jobs Demonstration Project authorized in the 2009-11 state budget:

- Up to 2,500 jobs
- Low-income adults age 21 and older not eligible for W-2
- Unemployed & not receiving unemployment compensation

ACCESS
The Department of Health Services is expanding the capacity and reach of ACCESS, Wisconsin’s internet tool for benefits program information and applications:

- Spanish-language version
- Addition of Wisconsin Shares to eligibility and benefits application components
- Exploring other program additions such as Head Start
- Community partnerships to ensure ready availability to individuals statewide

REGIONAL INDUSTRY SKILLS EDUCATION (RISE)
Through the Department of Workforce Development and the Technical College System, RISE and other programming provide a new framework for adults to earn post-secondary credentials, including:

- Adult Basic Education or English as a Second Language offered concurrently with occupational training and as bridge to additional education
- Stackable credentials leading to 1- or 2-year diploma
- $1,000 Opportunity Grants for part-time technical college career pathway students
- Alignment of public workforce delivery systems to support career pathways blending training and work

QUALITY RATING IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM
The Department of Children and Families is proposing a child care quality assurance and recognition system to provide:

- Robust training and technical assistance for providers
- Information for parents about child care choices and the quality of care being provided
- Higher reimbursement rates for higher-quality programs

HOME VISITING
The Department of Health Services and Department of Children and Families are expanding current home visiting programs:

- Dual focus on ensuring healthy birth outcomes and preventing child abuse and neglect
- Statewide committee to develop criteria and align programs to be eligible for potential federal funding
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