

vision for a Thriving Community:

Our CommunityWorks Impact Plan

Executive Summary



DEKALB COUNTY
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Tools for Informed Land Use Decisions

Quality Child Care



Youth Prepared to Work

communityWORKS

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For Good. For Ever.

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INTRODUCTION

DeKalb County's past, present, and future is based upon its investment in and cultivation of young learners, wise land uses to benefit residents of all ages, and a strong workforce. In fact, thriving communities both recognize these values and work together to ensure they remain part of the culture of the community. We can enhance a thriving quality of life in our communities by giving our children their best start, providing the tools needed to help communities realize their own vision through quality land use planning, and equipping our workers with the skills needed to do their best work.

In 2003, the DeKalb County Community Foundation began its CommunityWorks initiative in DeKalb County. The Foundation's Board recognized the potential of a community foundation as a change agent and community leader. It was ready to use its convening and grant-making resources to help improve DeKalb County's quality of life. The Foundation set about getting input from throughout the County on the needs, resources, barriers, and opportunities related to child care, land use, and workforce development in DeKalb County. These community conversations confirmed that the people of DeKalb County put a high premium on their quality of life and recognize that excellence in child care, land use decisions, and workforce development are critical to assuring a bright future for DeKalb County.

Through a process of engaging the DeKalb County community, the Community Foundation has created this plan for working with the community to improve quality of life. This document tells the story of how we engaged with the community, what we learned together, and how we are acting to address ripe opportunities to improve child care, land use planning, and workforce preparation.

LISTENING FIRST: COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Under the direction of Community Foundation board members Bill Mullins, Tim Dunlop, and Jesus Romero as CommunityWorks Co-Chairs, the Foundation assembled advisory committees for each area of child care, land use, and workforce development. The advisory committees were chaired by members of the Board of Directors of the Community Foundation, who also had expertise in these respective areas. In addition to a strong leadership, each committee comprised professionals and key leaders in the community. The advisory committee members included:

CHILD CARE COMMITTEE

Micki Chulick (Co-Chair), Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C)
Mary Pritchard (Co-Chair), Northern Illinois University
Chris Herrmann, NIU Campus Child Care
Barb Hensen, First Friends Day Care
Steve Kimmel, Kishwaukee Early Care & Education Center
Dawn Littlefield, Kishwaukee United Way
Jill Olson, CASA
Susan Petersen, The Growing Place
Jan Scheffers, Federated Church Pre-School
Lynne Switzky, Children's Learning Center
Janie Torma, Child Care Court Watch

LAND USE COMMITTEE

Al Golden (Co-Chair), a retired DeKalb Ag and Soil Conservation professional
Joan Fenstermaker (Co-Chair), retired farmer from Sycamore
Susan Doubler, Northern Illinois University
Michael Haines, Northern Illinois University
Terry Hannan, DeKalb County Forest Preserve
Bill Lenschow, Sycamore Area Farmer
Porter Martin, Martin-Goodrich & Associates
Paul Miller, DeKalb County Planning Department
Loretta Muller, DeKalb County Farmland Foundation
Chet Palmer, Retired Veterinarian
Paul Rasmussen, City of DeKalb
Pat Vary, DeKalb County Board
Bob Wildenradt, Wildenradt & Associates
Anita Zurbrugg, American Farmland Trust

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Evelina Cichy (Co-Chair), Kishwaukee College
Tom Weber (Co-Chair), retired Superintendent, DeKalb County Regional Office
of Education
Pete Andrews, Illinois Department of Employment Security
Jan Benson, Sycamore School District
Steve Cunningham, NIU-Human Resources
Chris DeVlieger, Suter Company
Ken Doubler, The Midweek
Bruce Griffith, Kishwaukee Education Consortium
Roger Hopkins, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation
Liz Hoppenworth, Oak Crest – DeKalb Area Retirement Center
Barbara Iverson, River Valley Workforce Investment Board

Jesse Perez, Northern Illinois University
 Rose Treml, Sycamore Chamber of Commerce
 Kathy Watkins, Kishwaukee Education Consortium

Each committee met several times to identify some of the key issues and key players in each focus area. The Foundation then hosted a series of Town Meetings throughout DeKalb County. The first community conversation was held on September 29, 2005. Subsequent town meetings were held on February 9, 2006 in Waterman; April 6, 2006 in Genoa; June 13, 2006 in Cortland; and a Spanish-speaking meeting on September 12, 2006 at Conexion Comunidad in DeKalb. The last Town Meeting was held in Sandwich on October 3, 2006 at the Sandwich Opera House. For all six Town Meetings combined, there were approximately 200 participants that contributed their ideas and opinions.

PRESSING PROBLEMS AND CURRENT STRATEGIES

Input from the Town Meetings and advisory committee discussion of the findings helped the Foundation to identify the community's strengths, most pressing problems, obstacles, strategies, and key stakeholders for each issue area.

CHILD CARE

Problem Statement	Obstacles To Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a disincentive for child care programs to care for state subsidized children due to financial constraints in the state reimbursement level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State reimbursement level for subsidized child care is significantly lower than the market rate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of a uniform measure of quality in child care programs in terms of their facilities, curriculum, and administrative practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding to fully implement such a system utilizing a uniform measurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a perceived unawareness of, and low appreciation for, the value of quality childcare by employers and few examples of a clear partnership between employers and child care programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of an effective marketing campaign and initiative geared to the private sector that would provide clear evidence and an engaging story for the importance of quality care for children and the economic impact of such care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of access to quality child care programs for all families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to the financial loss incurred by most child care programs who take state subsidized children into care, the number of available slots is limited Without the availability of subsidized care many low income families cannot afford to work or are forced to place their child/ren in low quality care

LAND USE

Problem Statement	Obstacles To Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some communities lack the expertise and information to make effective land use planning and implementation decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for paid staff in various communities with an expertise in land use planning and implementation Training and other resources are often unavailable for staff who do work in the land use arena within their community

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a challenge to balance various stakeholder desires to protect farmland, implement environmentally friendly practices, and encourage orderly residential, business, and recreation growth and government development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No “neutral” committee exists as a representative group of various stakeholders that can objectively seek input from constituencies throughout the County related to Land Use planning and implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of coordination between communities in DeKalb County in terms of their active participation in the County’s Unified Future Land Use Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff, training, and resources prevent smaller communities from fully engaging in the plan and having the tools to make effective land use decisions

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Problem Statement	Obstacles To Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers are concerned about a lack of soft skills among youth, particularly those youth who are not college bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No agreed upon definition and use of “soft skills” in various schools throughout DeKalb County No collective knowledge of current, formal, and specific efforts to build soft skills among youth in the Middle School (6th-8th grade) age group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are varying resources available for school districts throughout the county in terms of vocational awareness and preparation for middle school youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community College catchments split up the school districts in DeKalb County which inhibits effective programs from being available to all youth in the County There are limited resources supporting existing effective programs that connect youth and educators with employers

RIPE OPPORTUNITIES

The Advisory Committees met several times to discuss the raw data from the Town Meetings and collapse the information into recurring themes and issues. Each Advisory Committee successfully sorted through the data and funneled the opportunities down to a handful. Then they made the deliberate decision to merge together and form a smaller, more focused Impact Plan Committee. The Impact Plan Committee was comprised of Community Foundation staff, the CommunityWorks Co-Chairs, the Co-Chairs for each interest area of child care, land use, and workforce development, and two non-board representatives from each of the three original Advisory Committees. The CommunityWorks Impact Plan Committee recommended that the Foundation consider ways to take advantage of the following ripe opportunities:

CHILD CARE

Opportunity	Rationale
There is a State of IL Quality Rating System (QRS) to set standards for practice and identify needs in child care settings. The higher the program’s score, the higher the rate of reimbursement from the state for subsidized children in their care.	Utilizing a state supported system for quality and access to increased state subsidy funds will help leverage local dollars and improve the overall quality of care for our children.
An information campaign will be needed to inform parents about the new quality rating system.	Parents who chose care in an informed way learn how to look for quality. Child care providers provide the highest quality care possible for prospective parents and their children.

While the business community provides very little direct support to specific child care programs in DeKalb County, there are proven strategies that could increase this support.	Giving area businesses a direct opportunity to support quality child care programs in their community helps meet practical needs for providers and demonstrates a commitment to their employee families.
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LAND USE

Opportunity	Rationale
Land use leaders in the county would like to see a process to gain comprehensive input from various stakeholders on annual land use planning and implementation priorities throughout the county.	Land use planning and implementation priorities informed through a comprehensive community input process will increase public ownership of each communities' land use decisions.
A proven, low-cost step to improve land use decision making exists, which is to provide basic land use planning training for elected officials, many of whom lack formal training in such practices, as well as additional tools for government staff and officials.	Various communities managing similar issues related to land use can share ideas and resources. Shared costs ensure an efficient way to provide quality training, research, or other resources for each community to access.
DeKalb County already has a centralized database for data and tools for government officials that could be expanded with more resources.	Capturing and making the resources created through CommunityWorks readily available provides an enduring benefit for current and future municipal representatives.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Opportunity	Rationale
There is broad support among a variety of employers and educators to improve the soft skills of young adults entering the workforce.	Young adults with effective soft skills (ex. work ethic, appearance, and attitude) are more likely to succeed, producing positive results for their employer and themselves.
A low-cost step exists to improve vocational preparation practices, which is to replicate existing effective practices among educational settings throughout the county.	Exploring existing vocational preparation practices (both within and outside of DeKalb County) and providing resources to ensure their utilization in schools throughout the County will give all students an opportunity to be even more prepared for work.
Many local employers are willing to serve as resources to improve vocational awareness and soft skills in youth.	When employers directly engage young people in demonstrating their profession, modeling and supporting the use of effective soft skills, and working closely with educators, students' opportunities become even more real to them.

STRATEGIC RESPONSES

The Impact Plan Committee developed recommended strategic responses in each of the issue areas that address pressing problems, take advantage of the ripe opportunities, and offer effective partners for the DeKalb County Community Foundation:

Childcare

Overall Goal: The quality, availability, and affordability of child care programs in DeKalb County have been increased and business support of child care programs has been increased.

- The Foundation will assist in funding initial education of child care programs and parents in DeKalb County on the new Illinois Quality Rating System (QRS).
- The Foundation will work through 4-C to assist eligible individual programs (benchmarked by the State of IL Quality Rating System (QRS) assessment) in raising their score on the rating scale through the provision of targeted validation, training, equipment, and/or curriculum enhancement.
- The Foundation and 4-C will work together to seek individuals and organizations in the community to “adopt a program” to assist in financing QRS enhancements.
- The Foundation, 4-C, Kishwaukee United Way, and select child care programs will work together to build employer financial and in-kind support of quality child care through building awareness of the value of child care and helping centers build 1:1 relationships with particular employers.
- **Key Partners for Strategic Response:**

4-C (Community Coordinated Child Care), Kishwaukee United Way (and perhaps other United Way entities in DeKalb County), individual/organizational donors who want to support comprehensive improvement in child care programs in the county, parents who will provide testimonials to the value of quality child care, McHenry County Community Foundation, and the State Department of Human Services, who will implement the QRS.

Land Use and Protection

Overall Goal: Tools that DeKalb County decision makers use to inform future land use decisions have been provided and utilized.

- The Foundation and the Regional Planning Commission will convene and utilize a DeKalb County Land Use Advisory Committee, representative of a variety of stakeholders, which will, on an annual basis, determine the priority land use issues and needs that various communities in DeKalb County have and identify ways to meet their information and training needs.
- The Foundation will, while seeking additional financial partners, fund efforts to provide information and tools to key government officials and staff based on the priorities and needs identified through the DeKalb County Land Use Advisory Committee.
- The Foundation and the DeKalb County Government will create a clearinghouse for land use resources, information, and tools for government decision-makers.

- **Key Partners for Strategic Response:**

DeKalb County Government, DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission, agricultural organizations, and all DeKalb County city and town government officials and land use related staff.

Workforce Development

Overall Goal: Soft skills education for all DeKalb County middle school (6th-8th grade) youth has been enhanced and local employer participation in youth workforce preparation has been improved.

- The Foundation will work with the Regional Office of Education, Kishwaukee College, and Northern Illinois University to gather DeKalb County educators in an initial exploratory meeting to collect input on needs related to soft skills training with middle school youth.
- The Foundation will fund an evaluation to assess existing curriculum and programs in DeKalb County designed to build soft skills in middle school youth.
- The Foundation will lead an effort utilizing intern assistance to research existing smart practices and resources across the nation directed to soft skills development for youth in this grade range.
- The Foundation, the Regional Office of Education, school district representatives, Kishwaukee College, Kishwaukee Education Consortium, and Northern Illinois University will work together to evaluate the results of the previous steps and determine the best opportunities to implement soft skills education for DeKalb County youth.
- The Foundation, Kishwaukee Education Consortium, Indian Valley Vocational Center, and the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation will explore employer and educator collaborative opportunities for vocational awareness and soft skills development among youth.
- **Key Partners for Strategic Response:**

Kishwaukee College, Kishwaukee Education Consortium, Kishwaukee Education to Careers Partnership, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, Indian Valley Vocational Center, Northern Illinois University, Chambers of Commerce, DeKalb County Regional Office of Education, and DeKalb County educators of middle school (6th-8th grade) youth.

ASSESSING PROGRESS AND IMPACT

A CommunityWorks Advisory Committee (CWAC) will continue to exist as an oversight body to the CommunityWorks initiative and Impact Plan. It will include one Foundation Board member chair, Foundation staff, and 2 people (including one Foundation Board member and one non-Board member) per area of child care, land use, and workforce development. The non-

board members are professionals in the community that represent the interest areas in which they serve. This committee will meet regularly to approve grants, hold everyone accountable to our goals, objectives, and strategies by referring to the plan, as well as make decisions at critical points in the process that affect our strategy.

Evaluation of the CommunityWorks Impact Plan will occur annually and through a more comprehensive three-year reflective cycle. The outputs of our evaluation activities, initiated by the CWAC, will be shared with all active partners as well as the full DCCF Board. In addition to the measures identified in the Grantmaking and Leadership Implementation activities, the full Impact Plan, available on the Community Foundation website, lists progress and outcome measures that will be used to assess and guide the Impact Plan.

RESOURCES REQUIRED TO SUCCEED

The goal of the DCCF is to raise at least \$3.5 million dollars in combined CommunityWorks Endowment Funds by 2011. This would allow our available annual grant dollars to grow to approximately \$175,000 to support Impact Plan strategies and activities. We have approved an allocation of \$50,000, including a portion of dollars from our unrestricted pool of funds, to provide funding for the initial activities of our Impact Plan. Our goal is to leverage additional dollars from the community to help meet the various needs, particularly for child care program improvements. Sponsorship will be sought to help cover the costs of trainings that occur. The success of the CommunityWorks Impact Plan will be determined, in part, by the participation of co-investors in specific elements of the Plan as well as growing the Endowment Funds. Financial institutions, private business owners, municipal governments, local and non-local Foundations, as well as individual citizens can join us in this important work by financially contributing to this initiative.

CONCLUSION

The people of DeKalb County enjoy a proud and extremely rich heritage in our community. We honor the past; work, learn and play in the present; and envision our future together. Our communities throughout DeKalb County and our collective community will continue to thrive as we invest in our children and our land. CommunityWorks offers a set of strategies designed to help forge a common vision along these interest areas in DeKalb County and implement it. We have spent considerable time and effort “planning the work” in terms of our opportunities to enhance child care, land use, and workforce development in DeKalb County. As we “work the plan” in the years ahead, the CommunityWorks Advisory Committee will be challenged to ensure that our efforts continue to make a real difference in the many lives and communities throughout the County.

January, 2008