

Lesson 4 CCHD Funded Group Solutions

Scenario A: The **Brockton Interfaith Community (BIC)** looks past ethnicity and religion to bring together area pastors to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable families in the city of Brockton, MA. For example, at a 600 person meeting at St. Patrick's Church in downtown Brockton, BIC members asked Congressional Representatives and the Federal Reserve of Boston to secure new loans for unemployed homeowners and for a speedier loan modification process for troubled homeowners. This led to 4 billion dollars being distributed to help homeowners, with another billion dollars yet to come. As a result, at least 3000 families in Massachusetts will be able to keep their homes. More recently, in 2010, BIC worked for the passage of a bill that allows for those released from prison to have a better chance at finding a job and thus have a fresh start.

Scenario B: In fall 2010 the **Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (WAGES)** celebrated 15 years of empowerment of low-income women, especially those in the San Francisco Bay Area. Research has shown that women, especially minority women, tend to have a lower income than men, especially in positions that are considered "unskilled labor." Because of this, WAGES set out to train low-income women to launch environmentally friendly business cooperatives. These cooperatives give women the opportunity for safe working conditions, good pay, and a say in how the business is run. WAGES has given seminars in the Bay Area and around the country on their co-op model, thus empowering women on a national level. WAGES has helped increase the income of the women they train by 50%, provide access to health care, and, with its green cleaning services, protect the environment.

Scenario C: The Office of Catholic Social Ministry of the Diocese of Las Cruces, NM, became aware of the situation of the migrants and farmworkers and committed itself to work alongside them to improve conditions in the *colonias*, which are underdeveloped rural communities along the U.S. Mexican border where there are often poor sewage systems and a lack of safe and healthy housing. The diocese, together with the migrants and farmworkers, started the Farmworker Organizing Project, which in 1994 became the **Doña Ana County Colonias Development Council (CDC)**, an independent non-profit organization which currently receives funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Over the years, CDC has helped residents of the *colonias* to become civically engaged and to attain much-needed access to infrastructure and services in the *colonias*. CDC has also empowered residents to develop community-based solutions, most recently establishing a family development center, micro-lending projects and a community gardens project in which residents learn about gardening and community responsibility.

Scenario D: When a study conducted a few years ago revealed that the town of Lawrence, Kansas, did not have job training programs for hard-to-employ, low income, homeless individuals, the **Lawrence Community Shelter (LCS)** decided to expand its services. It now offers case management to form individual plans to help guests find jobs, seek benefits, find housing, and overcome substance abuse. LCS also realized the need for skills training and real-world experience for homeless persons, many of whom lacked experience working in a professional environment or holding a long-term job. To achieve this, LCS created the St. Joseph Project, a small business enterprise whose purpose is to provide income, meaningful employment, skills development, and work experience for individual workers as well as important economic development for the community. With the St. Joseph Project, homeless workers suggest and test mixes of ingredients for their product, "Good Dog! Biscuits and Treats," make and package the product, and distribute it through several local outlets. In three short years of initiating and growing the project, the dog biscuits have caught on as a local product in Lawrence. Even more importantly, homeless individuals have quickly moved into supervisory positions and now actively participate in planning meetings. Guests of the LCS are now involved with production, packaging, distribution, sales, marketing, and development of future products. Many have gained the skills and experience necessary to find and maintain other jobs, and ultimately, to overcome homelessness.

Scenario E: In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, chemicals from oil rigs and other industrial facilities leached into the soil and air, affecting the health of surrounding populations. In response the **Louisiana Bucket Brigade (LABB)** trained community members to use "buckets" approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to test air quality. This led to a discovery by community members of over 150 environmental infractions. This group has also organized community members to petition the state of Louisiana and the EPA as a way of encouraging increased protection of the state's natural habitats and most importantly those people living closest to environmental disasters. LABB has organized political action and was influential in the state installation of air monitors across from a major oil refinery near a residential community. In 2010 LABB implemented one of its largest projects, creating an Oil Spill Crisis Map in the wake of the BP Oil Spill. This Crisis Map was the first of its kind in the United States and proved instrumental in enabling LABB to measure the health and ecological impact of the spill on Louisiana towns.