

# *Mobilizing Resources for Healthy Communities and Neighborhoods:*

*A Preliminary Report on the  
Stanislaus County Asset Base*

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*by the  
Center for Public Policy Studies  
at  
California State University, Stanislaus*

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The Center for Public Policy Studies at CSU, Stanislaus is a non-profit, non-partisan entity dedicated to research and public education about important policy issues and to providing a forum for discussing public policy issues with community representatives, academics, and policy makers in the CSU Stanislaus service area. The center is committed to facilitating regional and community problem-solving through activities and research projects that bring together diverse constituencies and perspectives to clarify issues, consider options, and build consensus.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Summary	iv
Introduction	1
Assessment of Stanislaus County Assets	3
Visions of Healthy Communities and Neighborhoods	19
The Effective Mobilization and Use of Resources	22
Recommendations	32

**Summary**

The Center for Public Policy Studies utilized key informant interviews, focus groups, existing directories, and a lengthy telephone interview protocol to create a Stanislaus County resource inventory. The inventory has been inputted into the Harvest Bank database; both electronic and hard copy versions have been provided to the County.

In the process of creating the inventory, it became obvious to the Center's researchers that the resource directory project raised broader questions regarding the effective mobilization and use of resources. In turn, resource mobilization and use concerns could not be disentangled from the broader issues involved in promoting healthy families, neighborhoods and communities.

Our work on this project remained within the rather modest original funding. Nevertheless, the broader issues became so compelling to us that we have decided to take this opportunity to offer preliminary comments about the linkages of resource mobilization and use, community building, and healthy families and communities in the context of low and moderate income areas in Stanislaus County.

We conclude that if the ultimate goal is to strengthen the ability of individuals and families to prosper and succeed and to create healthy neighborhoods throughout the county, the resource with the greatest potential is the neighborhood-based, resident-driven organization. There are numerous neighborhood organizations currently in existence in Stanislaus County and many more which are emerging or could do so with additional support and leadership. The City of Turlock developed a process whereby neighborhood associations can gain official recognition. Although the benefits to the associations from this process currently are quite limited, Turlock is attempting to garner additional resources to assist neighborhood associations. More importantly, perhaps, the Turlock process suggests the possibility of a model whereby neighborhood associations, the cities, and the County could partner in numerous ways for the purpose of problem solving and the betterment of the neighborhood.

Our preliminary research into resource mobilization and community needs suggests that neighborhood associations hold the greatest promise for strengthening families and neighborhoods in Stanislaus County. However, all neighborhood associations subsist on a quite limited resource base and no association has reached its potential. To do so, the associations will need assistance and nurturing.

Neighborhood associations are not the only resource in the county nor are they the only examples of exciting and innovative efforts occurring in the county to better meet the needs of residents in low and moderate income areas. Our project uncovered a vast array of resources from individual skills, to the values and attitudes held by many residents, to myriad nonprofit organizations and public programs.

Actions undertaken by public agencies to decentralize services, to locate services in low and moderate income areas, and to collaborate—both with other agencies as well as with nonprofit organizations and businesses—are part of a concerted effort to improve human service delivery in the county. These actions should continue and be expanded.

The Center's project also revealed serious limitations of the resource base in the county. Charitable giving needs to be strengthened. As one measure of the problem, we examined United Way's funding campaign. Per capita giving to United Way in Stanislaus County ranks in only the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally among counties of comparable size. If giving to United Way in this county were increased to just the national average, an additional \$4 million dollars would be available to help low and moderate income persons.

Strengthening the capacity of the nonprofit sector is another important challenge. While the nonprofit sector is active and plays a critical role in the mobilization and delivery of services, existing needs in the county far outstrip current nonprofit capacity. One measure of the problem is to compare the number of nonprofit organizations in this region to other regions in the state. In the San Joaquin Valley, there are 152 nonprofit organizations per 100,000 persons. This compares to 200 per 100,000 persons in the Los Angeles area and 270 in the Bay.

We recommend to the County several actions that would strengthen the county's resource base. A countywide dialogue about community building, resources and the needs of low and moderate income areas should be held. The dialogue needs to be an on-going effort and ought to involve key stakeholders.

Additional efforts to strengthen neighborhood associations and community building would include the creation of a Community Foundation and a Community Building Institute. The County could be a catalyst to energize a collaborative undertaking to accomplish both tasks.

Strengthening nonprofit capacity and increasing charitable giving are two other areas that need to be addressed. Certainly, the County cannot achieve these on its own. Again, however, partnering with key stakeholders could be a fruitful strategy.

The appropriate role for the County in strengthening neighborhood associations is necessarily constrained by the reality that most associations and other community development organizations exist within the boundaries of incorporated cities. Nevertheless, neighborhood associations can be an important part of effective service delivery reform strategies. From this perspective, the County has a legitimate interest in the work of the associations. Moreover, it is appropriate for the County to partner with the cities to assist their efforts in building healthy neighborhoods and communities.



**MOBILIZING RESOURCES FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AND  
NEIGHBORHOODS: A PRELIMINARY REPORT  
ON THE STANISLAUS COUNTY ASSET BASE**

**Introduction**

The Center for Public Policy Studies began this project as a simple, straightforward initiative—to create a countywide directory of resources. The directory was intended to be of use to anyone facing difficult economic circumstances and needing free or low-cost services or goods. The directory has been completed and published under separate cover entitled, “A Resource Directory of Stanislaus County.”

In designing the directory, the Center interviewed several civic leaders, conducted five focus groups and conferred with organizations who have developed resource directories. Later in the study, additional interviews were held with community leaders and agency officials. What became obvious to the Center’s researchers as the interviews, focus groups, and a review of the literature unfolded was that the resource directory project raised broader questions regarding the effective mobilization and use of resources. In turn, resource mobilization and use concerns could not be disentangled from the broader issues involved in promoting healthy families, neighborhoods and communities.

Four features of the Stanislaus County context convinced us that this was an especially propitious time to undertake a preliminary investigation into resource mobilization in the county. Continuing high rates of unemployment and poverty mean that many people

experience hard times and require low- or no-cost goods and services to meet basic individual and family needs. Identifying opportunities that might address these problems through long-term, structural solutions is an important undertaking.

A second feature of the Stanislaus County landscape was the existence of the Community Building Project. With funding from the California Endowment, the Community Building Project (CBP) was well into a planning process to determine how to build and maintain a viable, grassroots community development effort. Led by experienced organizers, the CBP is a collaborative of fifteen community-based organizations throughout Stanislaus County. With their strong ties to residents, the CBP and its member participants offered an experiment in addressing the needs of residents of low and moderate income neighborhoods.

The third feature was a new and creative initiative designed by a group of civic-minded residents. Named the Harvest Bank, this initiative's primary goal was to create an electronic database to facilitate the exchange of goods and services within low and moderate income neighborhoods, and between these neighborhoods and other resource bases within Stanislaus County. In an early development stage, the intent of the Harvest Bank designers was to have the Bank incorporated into existing and new community building efforts. Thus the Harvest Bank offered yet another experiment in resource mobilization.

The fourth feature was the existence of an active neighborhood association movement in Turlock. Five neighborhood associations have been created and have received official recognition from the City. These provided us an additional opportunity to investigate the nexus between neighborhood organizing and resource mobilization.

The Policy Center's work on this project remained within its rather modest original funding and resource limitations. We do not claim, therefore, to have broadened our research into healthy communities and neighborhoods to a sufficient extent. But the issues have become so compelling to us that we have decided to take this opportunity to offer preliminary comments about the linkages of resource mobilization and use, community building, and healthy families and communities Stanislaus County.

### **Assessment of Stanislaus County Assets**

Stanislaus County is blessed with an array of resources that can be used to alter conditions in low and moderate income communities. Interviews with community leaders and discussions with focus groups yielded an impressive list of assets in the County.

From the interviews, four lists of potential focus group participants were identified. The groups were neighborhood and other community organizations, service providers, business, and the faith community. Each had a distinctive view of the assets that exist in Stanislaus County. There is general agreement among the groups, but priorities and perspectives differ in several ways. For instance, business named more concrete items,

community organizations and businesses named more delivery systems, and community organizations cited more relationships and values.

**The values and attitudes considered most important by community organization participants were:**

- caring people,
- local communities and community identity,
- family ties,
- responsible officials,
- responsible and receptive individuals,
- the ability to innovate,
- flexibility and credibility,
- awareness, and
- a sense of mission.

**Institutional and associational assets named by the community organization participants included:**

- city council townhall meetings,
- community churches,
- Department of Mental Health,
- substance abuse programs,
- health clinics,
- the Family Group Conference,

- the Ceres Family Resource Center,
- the Bridge,
- the Turlock Preservation Officer and Tool Trailer,
- PIC and Jobshare,
- Westside Neighborhood Association of Turlock,
- United Way Leadership Training and Quickfind,
- the Salvation Army,
- mentoring and training programs,
- churches and temples and community religions,
- faith communities in general,
- schools and the PTA,
- youth-oriented activities, such as, youth groups and after school sports,
- clubs, for example the Hmong Youth Association and the Black Student Union,
- civic clubs and the Hispanic Leadership Council,
- businesses,
- partnerships between businesses and schools,
- ethnic communities, and
- yard sales.

**Skills seen as useful resources included the following:**

- bilingualism,
- plumbing,
- automotive repair,
- electronics,
- furniture-making,
- child care,
- cooking,
- needlepoint.

**Service providers saw institutions and associations that are essential in the development of community as particularly important assets. These included:**

- the collaboratives,
- neighborhood associations,
- schools,
- libraries,
- newspapers,
- youth groups,
- “twilight schools,”
- kiosks,
- consignment shops,
- California State University, Stanislaus,

- Modesto Junior College, (especially its programs at high schools),
- the University of California Cooperative Extension Service,
- Healthy Start,
- Even Start,
- Parents United, and
- 4-H.

Service providers were also quick to mention that people who volunteer are especially valued assets. Professionals, such as doctors and dentists, who volunteer their services were given as specific examples of resources that made a difference. Also, principals, teachers, coaches, mentors, parents and youth were mentioned.

**The view of the County's assets provided by the business focus group was extensive.**

**Values and attitudes were given prominent mention. These included:**

- patriotism,
- generosity,
- free enterprise,
- a loyal and skilled workforce,
- tolerance, and
- a positive outlook.

**Institutions and associations cited by the business sector participants were:**

- good government such as the sewage treatment plant and recycling facilities,
- public safety,
- the Stanislaus County Economic Development Corporation (SCEDCO),
- the Planning Department,
- Modesto Irrigation District,
- libraries,
- the Community Reinvestment Act,
- medical facilities,
- alternative healthcare,
- higher education,
- the Modesto Bee,
- insurance providers,
- child care,
- the Internet,
- churches,
- nonprofit organizations,
- the Museum,
- the McHenry Mansion,
- the farmer's market,
- the Modesto A's,
- health clubs, and
- youth soccer.



The business group also cited several features of the natural landscape that constitute part of the resource base. These included rivers, trees, climate, and water. Infrastructure, such as access to markets, railroads, the airport, and technology, were mentioned as well.

**Participants in the faith-based focus group identified the following as assets:**

- “doers”
- religious leaders,
- counselors,
- mentors,
- trainers,
- community-based police officers,
- the Hispanic and Asian communities,
- diverse ethnic and cultural groups in general,
- a sense of self,
- dignity,
- loving and accepting,
- commitment,
- reconciliation,
- confidence,
- spirituality,
- listening,
- praying,

- mentoring,
- communicating, and
- budgeting.

Dealing with issues of teen pregnancy and successful marriage were also cited as important.

Institutions and associations cited as assets were churches, families and after school clubs. Farmland, time and funding were also mentioned as assets.

Besides the focus groups described above, interviews were conducted with community leaders and public officials to obtain an additional perspective. These interviews focused on identifying some of the assets possessed by residents in low and moderate income neighborhoods.

**The most commonly cited assets possessed by residents in low and moderate income neighborhoods were:**

- the vast knowledge of the neighborhood,
- cultural and linguistic diversity,
- commitment and pride,
- the relationships that exist,
- faith, and
- a strong sense of survival.

**Organizationally, the most commonly cited resource was a block house program.**

People also possess a wide variety of specific skills which, under the right circumstances, can be marshaled in support of neighborhood-wide development and building efforts.

Many of the assets which are part of the formal service delivery systems of nonprofits and public agencies have been compiled by the Center for Public Policy Studies in a directory which can be obtained from the County. All of these, including detailed information about accessibility, application requirements and so forth, have also been entered into an electronic database maintained by the Harvest Bank. Currently, the Harvest Bank database is being developed on a pilot project basis. Ultimately, it will become available county-wide. However, it is important to understand that maintaining and up-dating such a database has always been a problematic task. Managing a complex database is a time-consuming and, hence, costly endeavor. The budgets of nonprofit organizations and public services agencies are always under such strain that it becomes difficult to find the dollars to support adequate database management, at least of this type. Determining how the resource inventory/database will be maintained remains an unsolved problem.

If the ultimate goal is to strengthen the ability of individuals and families to prosper and succeed and to create healthy neighborhoods throughout the county, **the most valuable resource might well be neighborhood-based, resident-driven organizations.** Whether the goal has been to improve the conditions of senior apartments in Patterson, or to provide sheltered bus stops on the westside, or to obtain street lighting and paved roads

near Modesto, or to clean up yards and fight crime in Turlock, volunteer organizations are essential to successfully mobilizing and using resources in low and moderate income neighborhoods. In a later section, we discuss the value of neighborhood organizations for the efficient and effective mobilization and use of resources. In the remainder of this section, we briefly describe some of the neighborhood organizing efforts in Stanislaus County since they too are part of the asset picture.

**Healthy Start and Sierra Health Foundation-funded collaboratives exist throughout the County as follows:**

- Airport Neighbors United (Modesto)
- Ceres Healthy Start
- Ceres Partnership for Healthy Children
- Downey Healthy Start (Modesto)
- Empire Healthy Start
- Grayson Healthy Start-FAMA
- Hanshaw Healthy Start (Modesto)
- Hughson Collaborative
- Mark Twain Healthy Start (Modesto)
- Newman Healthy Start
- Oak Valley Family Support Network (Oakdale)
- Orville Wright Healthy Start (Modesto)
- Peterson Alternative Center for Education (PACE)
- Rio Altura Healthy Start (Riverbank)

- Robertson Road Healthy Start (Modesto)
- Wakefield Healthy Start (Turlock)
- West Modesto/King Kennedy Neighborhood Collaborative
- Westside Community Alliance (Patterson)

Healthy Start programs have been funded by the California Department of Education and were originally designed to improve the academic performance of children. This was to be accomplished through providing an array of services such as health, counseling, tutoring and mentoring. Similarly, Sierra Health Foundation projects were designed to increase access to preventative health care to children and families. This was to be accomplished through increased participation in community building.

Although the extent and institutionalization of organizing varies among the collaboratives, all have engaged in many community organizing activities. Every collaborative has assisted residents in low and/or moderate income areas to obtain more social services than previously had been the case. In each instance, the collaborative has played a role in strengthening relationships in the neighborhood and, thereby, contribute to community building.

In some instances, such as the Robertson Road Healthy Start, the West Modesto/King Kennedy Neighborhood Collaborative, and the partnership between Airport Neighbors United and the Orville Wright Healthy Start, the collaboratives have led the way in

extensive community-building efforts. In these instances, elaborate grass-roots organizing has occurred that have made important contributions to improving communities.

Approximately two years ago, the collaboratives (with the exception of the most recently funded ones) came together to pool their experience and knowledge to further the process of community building. This alliance of collaboratives came to be known as the Community Building Project (CBP). Through resident-based, local organizing efforts, the CBP seeks to be a catalyst to improve neighborhood economies and the delivery of human services and thereby to strengthen families and the broader community.

Five neighborhood associations have been established in Turlock with the first, the Westside Neighborhood Association, formally organized in 1993. The California Neighborhood Association came into existence officially in 1997 followed by the Sunnyview Neighborhood Association, the Eastside Neighborhood Association and, most recently, the Crane Community Group Neighborhood Association. In the context of this report, the Westside and Sunnyview associations are particularly critical as they serve areas consisting primarily of low and moderate income residents. However, what is interesting about the Turlock process is that neighborhood organizing has not been limited to low and moderate income neighborhoods. Any neighborhood that feels a need to mobilize resources or to strengthen families and community is encouraged to form an association.

Each Association has its own goals and agenda. No two are identical. What they have in common is that they are locally-based, resident-driven, and formally recognized by the City of Turlock.

Another attempt to develop a grassroots organization currently is underway in west Modesto. The Harvest of Hope has garnered funding from California Healthy Cities and Communities to assist its efforts to provide a wide range of services in a low income neighborhood. Based at a local church and with loaned staff from the Community Services Agency, the Harvest of Hope has shown significant progress toward becoming a true community organization. As the initial pilot project of the Harvest Bank, the Harvest of Hope simultaneously devotes significant efforts to mobilize resources and to organize the neighborhood for strengthening families.

In all the examples of local organizing, impressive potential exists to help garner and deliver assets in a dramatically new way. Each and every one of the organizations is, in itself, a valuable asset. But these must be nurtured and supported to achieve their potential. To date, these organizations have received relatively modest support from city and county governments, businesses, and wealthier individuals.

An assessment of assets in the County would, however, be incomplete without an examination of asset deficits, i.e., what is missing. While the County's resource base is impressive, significant deficits remain and the resource base must be expanded if the

challenges facing low and moderate income families and neighborhoods are to be addressed successfully.

The low level of philanthropic and charitable giving in Stanislaus County is one shortcoming. As one indicator of the problem, we compared the fundraising accomplishments of the United Way of Stanislaus County with United Way fundraising in other areas of the country. In its most successful campaign to date, the United Way of Stanislaus County raised \$3.6 million. Counties of comparable size in other parts of the country typically raise at least twice that amount.

The United Way's 1998-99 campaign raised the equivalent of \$8.08 per capita. Of counties of comparable size, this placed Stanislaus County giving in only the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally. If corporate and individual giving in Stanislaus County were raised just to the level of the national average, an additional \$4 million dollars would be available to help low and moderate income persons.

A report recently released by the Healthy California Progress Report Initiative provides additional information. According to the report, in 1997 per capita financial support to charities in Stanislaus County was \$136. This compared to a statewide average of \$446. Clearly, charitable giving in Stanislaus County relatively is quite low.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Northern California Council for the Community. Healthy California Progress Report Initiative. *Stanislaus County Report Card-1999*.



The necessary research has not been done that would allow us to fully explain the relatively low level of charitable and philanthropic support in this area. However, two dimensions of the economic and civic structure suggest part of the explanation. Stanislaus County possesses very few foundations or other entities established for the purpose of philanthropy. Perhaps the most active local foundation in this regard is the United Samaritan Foundation. The Bright and Gallo Foundations have made important contributions too. Nevertheless, there are no philanthropic organizations in the County comparable to the Hewlett, Ford and Irvine Foundations.

This is related to another shortcoming. Almost all of the businesses which operate in Stanislaus County are either small to moderate sized, independent establishments or they are branch or franchise subsidiaries of larger corporations. What is missing are the headquarters of the large corporate enterprises. While some do exist, Gallo, Save-Mart and United Rentals are notable examples, the County suffers from a relative dearth of headquarters of large companies. Corporate headquarters tend to be sources of significant charitable giving since they tend to invest in the communities in which they are located. Moreover, philanthropic organizations typically are endowed by corporate headquarters and/or by the families of the corporate founders. The Gallo Foundation is an example of a local, corporate-funded foundation that does invest in the community. A local foundation that is particularly important in the context of this report is the United Samaritan Foundation. It has been active in funding programs to assist people in need. For instance, the United Samaritan Foundation is a partner in the new Hughson Collaborative and provided funding for a shelter and food program in Turlock.

Attracting corporate headquarters to the county would significantly improve the resource base. The advantages would accrue both in terms of the added employment opportunities and the financial and technical assistance resources a headquarters would provide to the community.

Strengthening the capacity of the nonprofit sector is another important challenge. While the nonprofit sector is active and plays a critical role in the mobilization and delivery of services, existing needs in the county far outstrip current nonprofit capacity. One measure of the problem is to compare the number of nonprofit organizations in this region to other regions in the state. In the San Joaquin Valley, there are 152 nonprofit organizations per 100,000 persons. This compares to 200 per 100,000 persons in the Los Angeles area and 270 in the Bay Area<sup>2</sup>.

Funding for nonprofits in our region is precarious. Most rely quite heavily on federal and state grants. We know of no nonprofit service organization in Stanislaus County that is fully endowed, i.e., that does not essentially live from grant to grant. It is vitally important that both the private and public sectors give attention to how they might work together to increase nonprofit capacity.

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<sup>2</sup> Great Valley Center. 1999. The State of the Great Central Valley of California. Modesto, Ca: Great Valley Center. May: 3.

## **Visions of Healthy Communities and Neighborhoods**

The assessment of Stanislaus County's resource base indicated both the wealth of resources that can be found as well as the resource deficiencies. But a discussion of resources gets us only so far. Resources have to be used for something and they have to be mobilized and made available by willful human action. A complete discussion, therefore, requires having a vision of the purposes of assets—what they are to be used for, and an understanding of effective systems of mobilization and delivery.

In the next section, the discussion turns to an analysis of resource mobilization. This section focuses attention on understanding purposes, or end uses, of assets. The discussion is based primarily upon the focus groups described above. Additional insight comes from interviews with numerous leaders in the county as well as from the literature on social and economic development in low and moderate income communities.

One use of the assets described above is to increase the capacity of individuals to provide for themselves and their families. People in low and moderate income areas often struggle to meet their economic and other material needs. Resources that meet these needs are important. It is especially in this context that education, training, and mentoring play critical roles. Partnerships among neighborhood organizations, nonprofit organizations, schools and colleges, the private sector and government that focus on education, job skills training, mentoring and job creation are critical for achieving the goals of individual and family capacity building.

Far too often, conditions in low and moderate income areas foster feelings of dependency, inadequacy and even despair. The goal is to mobilize and use resources in ways that replace those feelings with attitudes of self-confidence, dignity and hope. Meeting people's basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and medical care is important. Until these needs can be satisfied, it may be difficult to effect change toward individual and family growth. But while meeting basic needs is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient.

What many of the focus group participants insisted upon was that the end goal of mobilizing and using resources is creating healthy communities and neighborhoods. Individuals and families are most likely to prosper in healthy and vibrant communities where both the human and physical components of community rest on a strong resource base.

What are the features of a healthy community? Among the focus groups, there were both differences and similarities in their depictions as the earlier descriptions of their asset maps revealed. The community organizations' group emphasized networks of relationships as a critical feature. Service providers also emphasized relationships and the importance of people being connected to others and to a purpose. The business group focused attention on such values as work ethic and loyalty as well as on very concrete items such as infrastructure. Values and spirituality were central to the faith-based group's vision of a healthy community.

In spite of the differences, a composite view of the healthy community in Stanislaus County can be drawn from the shared comments offered by the focus group participants.

**The healthy community consists of the following:**

- sense of oneness,
- shared experience and neighborhood identification,
- generosity and caring,
- democracy,
- stability and flexibility,
- awareness,
- wisdom,
- commitment,
- reconciliation,
- shared identities,
- family ties,
- responsible officials,
- understanding adults who listen,
- kids who can dream and are motivated to achieve their dreams,
- parents who have adequate time to be with their children.,
- a skilled workforce,
- people who have dignity and a sense of self,
- affordable, safe housing,
- programs for seniors and for youth,

- adequate transportation to work and for the elderly and disabled,
- an adequate number of jobs that pay a living wage,
- accessible and affordable healthcare and childcare,
- trust among residents, and
- strong networks of relationships.

### **The Effective Mobilization and Use of Resources**

The description of a healthy community highlights the importance of developing, mobilizing and using assets in a manner that is intimately linked to community building. People's basic needs must be met. But the most successful and enduring way to accomplish this is not by focusing on individuals' deficits but by supporting and working with individuals and families and the context in which they live, that is, their neighborhood and larger community.

Research for this project revealed a striking consensus that has emerged among many public officials and community leaders in Stanislaus County and that is supported by an even stronger consensus in the literature. The core truth of the consensus is that successful resource mobilization and the effective use of those resources in low and moderate income neighborhoods must include community building that is neighborhood-based and resident-driven, not driven by outside professionals and officials. Time after time agency heads and service providers told us that they have learned that to achieve change requires the effective involvement of residents. Building a resource mobilization and delivery system that is truly community-based is the goal of this new thinking.

Research demonstrates that traditional social service systems have not been able to fully address the problems of low and moderate income areas. Studies strongly suggest that these failures are often more the result of structural weaknesses in the delivery system than the characteristics of those being served.<sup>3</sup> Hence, research reinforces local experience and points to community-based, resident-driven organizing as the preferred model for effecting change.

Four developments in social service delivery in Stanislaus County are particularly noteworthy in this regard. First, there has been an increasing tendency by both public agencies and private, nonprofit organizations to decentralize services. For instance, in 1991 the Health Services Agency (HSA) had only one ambulatory clinic. By 1999, HSA had created an ambulatory clinic structure with ten locations throughout the County. The Agency has also decentralized its Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program which provides education, training and counseling to pregnant women or women with young children. WIC offices are spread among fifteen sites throughout the County.

Similarly, the Community Services Agency (CSA) offers many of its programs at various neighborhood locations in the County. CSA has 14 MediCal outstations and has assigned six social workers to the County's Healthy Start sites. Another example of decentralization of services can be seen in the cities' and the County's community policing programs.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. Thomas Kingsley, Joseph B. McNeely and James O. Gibson. 1999. *Community Building Coming of Age*. The Urban Institute.

Decentralization of public agency services and co-location of services is an important first step towards a more community-based delivery system. It demonstrates both a desire and willingness on the part of government policy makers and agency managers to begin a process of partnership with local residents. This beginning needs now to mature into a fuller partnership.

Large nonprofit organizations have also engaged in a substantial decentralization of services. For instance, of the 110 employees of the Center for Human Services (CHS), only a handful work at the central site in downtown Modesto. Most of its employees are spread among a variety of field sites, principally in Modesto, but in other cities as well. The second noteworthy development involves the extension of collaboration among public agencies and nonprofits. The work originally promoted by the Stanislaus Children's Council and implemented in the Healthy Starts that brought together various organizations to promote school success and healthier children has now seen further elaboration. A recently opened site in the city of Hughson is one example of this. It is a partnership among several County agencies, the United Samaritan Foundation, the city of Hughson, a privately-owned pharmacy and a privately-owned restaurant. The creation of a Healthy Start at Wakefield Elementary School in Turlock is another example.

Another intriguing effort just underway is the Stanislaus County Employee Mentor Program. The Employee Mentor Program, originated and promoted by the County, is a



partnership of the Volunteer Center and the Stanislaus Mentoring Network with the Center for Human Services as the host agency.

The focus of asset collaboration to date, however, has been the public schools. Through the Healthy Starts and other mechanisms, schools have been the sites of service delivery systems that include nonprofits and a wide array of public agencies to provide health care, counseling, mentoring, job training, child care and after school youth activities. In the current jargon, the Healthy Start sites have become the model of co-location of services. Additional co-location efforts are underway by County agencies.

The third development consists of recent decisions taken by the United Way of Stanislaus County to alter the manner in which it funds agencies. Through fundraising, educational outreach, technical assistance, publicity and communications, the United Way of Stanislaus County has long played a critical role in helping to identify and mobilize resources. The United Way has been instrumental in providing support to the nonprofit sector in the County. Through its Central Valley Information and Referral system, the United Way also maintains a large database of resources.

The United Way of Stanislaus County historically followed a funding method typically utilized by other United Way organizations. Generally, funds have been allocated to nonprofits on the basis of their perceived ability to deliver critical basic goods and services to people in need. The effectiveness of the recipient agencies was judged largely by output criteria: numbers served, numbers treated, dollars spent and so forth.

During the 1999-2000 year, United Way will begin to re-orient its policies and principles to reflect three priorities. First, nonprofit programming will need to place relatively more attention on prevention and less on intervention. Second, nonprofit programming will have to be much more community-based. Ideally, this will mean not only that the nonprofit organization will service people in their neighborhoods but that neighborhood-based organizations will partner with the nonprofit service provider in the design and delivery of services. One particularly important, albeit inchoate, example involves a collaboration between Airport Neighbors United (Modesto) and the Center for Human Services. The Center will offer a program in the neighborhood focusing on job training, job placement and mentoring. The program design involved a series of negotiations between the Center and the neighborhood association.

Finally, United Way will place an emphasis on assessing outcomes. In the future, nonprofit providers will have to provide clear data to United Way that demonstrates how programs improved the well-being of individuals and communities.

The fourth development in service delivery in the County to be highlighted is the growth of neighborhood-based, resident driven organizing. In some respects, this is not a particularly new development. In his pivotal work, *Democracy in America*, Alexis deTocqueville described the American penchant to engage in voluntary organizing to deal with local problems. One could write a Stanislaus County version of *Democracy in America*. Throughout the County, examples abound of residents coming together to deal with a variety of problems from neighborhood cleanup projects, to pressing city and

county governments for services, to working with local school administrations and so forth.

What has changed is that organizing has become longer-term and the members are taking more comprehensive approaches to community assessment, goal setting and planning. Residents of the Riverdale area in Modesto have come together for several significant accomplishments: creating a lighting district, getting streets paved, establishing a fund to pay a water bill. The Harvest of Hope is a new project in west Modesto involving residents, a local church and staff from two County agencies to mobilize and organize assets to meet a wide variety of local needs. This group has established its own formal, nonprofit status and receives funding from California Healthy Cities and Communities.

Two broad-based developments in community building are occurring with the neighborhood associations in Turlock and the county-wide Community Building Project. The five Neighborhood Associations in Turlock, described above, are mechanisms for residents to better understand the problems they face and to more effectively identify, garner and employ their assets. In turn, the city has put some assets at their disposal. Though quite limited at this time, the city provided assets are at least an early recognition on the part of local officials of the potential value of community organizing as a critical part of a strategy for building healthier neighborhoods and communities. It is to the credit of Turlock that its public officials recognize the valuable role that grassroots organizations can play in building healthy neighborhoods. Nevertheless, more support

will be needed if these associations are to be given meaningful opportunities to achieve their goals.

The process established by the City of Turlock to support and officially recognize neighborhood associations suggests the possibility of a model whereby neighborhood associations, the cities, and the county could partner in numerous ways for the purposes of problem solving and the betterment of the neighborhood. Ultimately, this process would need to include a broader array of resources than is currently available. In the long run, it holds significant promise.

The Community Building Project is a partnership of the 15 community collaboratives—referred to above—that work to develop the assets and talents of communities, families, and individuals throughout Stanislaus County. During the past decade, these communities mobilized to improve the safety and health of children, their families, and the communities in which they live. Each collaborative provides neighborhood-based services in areas where residents are predominantly ethnic minorities, of low and moderate income, and who are economically disenfranchised.

In the fall of 1997, the collaboratives identified the desire to move to a more comprehensive level of collaboration and community building. At the time, they sought funding support from the California Endowment to identify the practice and impact of community economic development, service system reform, and community organizing in their neighborhoods. The process has resulted in the evolution of the collaboratives from

isolated efforts to a coalition with collective values and a unified vision for neighborhood organizing throughout the county.

Efforts such as Riverdale, the Harvest of Hope, the Turlock Neighborhood Associations, and the Community Building Project offer the potential to create substantially more effective ways to mobilize and use resources. If individuals and families are to be strengthened, if neighborhoods and communities are to become safer and healthier and more vibrant places to live, and if all this is to be accomplished in the most cost-effective manner possible, then residents should play a central role in designing and implementing strategies for their own improvement. This is the meaning both of recent, local experience and of the preponderance of research.<sup>4</sup>

In his review of the past century of social service reform and neighborhood organizing in the United States, Robert Fisher demonstrates that the service delivery system will not be reformed and neighborhood change will not be effected unless residents are involved in the process as central actors.<sup>5</sup> The principal lesson is that “community-based” and “citizen participation” mean neighborhood-based and resident-driven efforts. Professionals and experts can and ought to play important roles. Government social services agencies must be involved. Their involvement, however, needs to be one of partnership, not of control. This is the lesson of the 1920s and 1930s and of the 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>4</sup> Inter alia, Community Building Resources. Available at [www.cbr-aimhigh.com/](http://www.cbr-aimhigh.com/); Comprehensive Community Initiatives. Shelterforce Online. Available at [www.nhi.org/online/issues](http://www.nhi.org/online/issues); John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing Community Assets*. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Fisher. 1994. *Let The People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America*. Twayne Publishers: New York. Second edition.

Virtually all of the community leaders and public officials interviewed for this project commented that the key to community building is developing trust among residents. This takes time and is best accomplished through sustained, long-term, neighborhood-based, resident-driven relationship-building. For a host of very understandable reasons, outside professionals tend to be mistrusted by residents of low and moderate income areas. Sometimes the mistrust is caused by the mismatch between how professionals define peoples' needs and problems and how the people themselves see the situation.

Priorities may be different. In many cases, local agency priorities are set by a state or federal agenda and do not necessarily reflect particular local circumstances. Over time, the federal and state agendas change. As these agendas change, so do the programs offered locally. Too often, residents in low and moderate income areas feel a sense of abandonment. Programs get publicized and resident commitment is garnered but implementation is short-circuited by the adoption of new approaches.

**By contrast, a process of developing, mobilizing and using resources that places neighborhood organizations in a key role has the following advantages:**

- greater potential for sustained effort,
- a reduced bureaucracy,
- greater efficiency,
- lower costs,
- increased innovation,

- heightened sensitivity to local conditions,
- extended services to heretofore underserved groups,
- enhanced potential for individual and collective empowerment,
- commitment to the theory and practice of grassroots democracy,
- strengthened civic life at the community level, and
- greater diversity in terms of who gets to participate in the decision-making process.<sup>6</sup>

These same advantages accrue to any system of resource mobilization and use where the goal is not only to provide short-term assistance to individuals but to increase people's capacities and to strengthen communities.

Developing and nurturing a sense of responsibility and citizenship is about allowing people control over their own lives. Residents should be in a position to have ownership of their challenges and their opportunities. Inevitably there will be some failure.

Responsible citizenship is also about owning the failures and having enough invested in the community to continue the effort to find what does work. As one interviewee stated to us: "As residents work on issues, they experience their own power, recognize that they do make a difference, and are energized."

In our judgment, all of the neighborhood-based organizing efforts in Stanislaus County live a precarious existence. For the most part, the organizing is nascent, resources are limited, and the organizations tend to be at arms-length to government decision makers and the service delivery systems. The advantages of a neighborhood-based system of

resource mobilization and use will only be realized if the organizing efforts underway throughout the County receive significant governmental and business sector support.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Convene a forum to discuss the meaning and importance of community-based service delivery.**

**Discussion:** Our research revealed that there are substantial differences as to the meaning of “community-based.” Similarly, differences exist as to what is meant by “citizen participation,” “grassroots” and other related terms. It would be useful for the County to partner with the cities, nonprofit organizations, and neighborhood-based organizations to sponsor a dialogue about the meaning, opportunities and challenges in community-based, social service delivery.

Another item of discussion for the dialogue would be to best determine how to manage a resource directory to most effectively benefit all local community building efforts throughout the county. Currently, the two most comprehensive resource directory efforts are undertaken by United Way (through its Central Valley Information and Retrieval—CVIR) and the Harvest Bank. How to maximize these efforts is a matter for further discussion.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



**2. Develop a plan for an on-going community building dialogue.**

This might involve the following: occasional townhall meetings sited in low income neighborhoods jointly sponsored by the county, city and local neighborhood associations; portions of city council, municipal advisory council, and board of supervisors meetings devoted to updates on community building efforts; holding city council, municipal advisory council, and Board of Supervisors meetings in low income neighborhoods.

**Discussion:** Our focus group sessions and interviews revealed that residents of low and moderate income neighborhoods have been particularly appreciative of the efforts by city and county officials to hold meetings in their communities. This has provided improved access to public officials, has increased residents' positive attitudes toward government, and has given residents a more positive self-image. The other side of the coin is that it is important for public officials to continue to listen to and trust what people in neighborhoods have to say. They understand what is needed in their communities very well so their knowledge and experience needs to be valued.

**3. Provide increased support to neighborhood-based, resident-driven organizing efforts.**

**Discussion:** Stanislaus County, particularly through its human services agencies, has provided a modest level of support to neighborhood-based organizing. Significantly more can be done.

Our fundamental contention is that social service delivery by the County, and the cities too, can be made both more efficient and more effective through a partnership in which the neighborhood associations play central roles in service delivery design and implementation. This will require lengthy discussions and negotiations among County service agencies, neighborhood associations and nonprofit service providers. We believe the end goal of these negotiations is to have a significant portion of agency spending determined in collaboration with neighborhood associations.

**4. Create a Community Development Foundation as a source of financial support for neighborhood-based, resident-driven organizing efforts.**

**Discussion:** To help support community organizing efforts, a Community Development Foundation should be created. The Foundation would be a partnership of the County, cities, the private sector and neighborhood-based organizations, each with representation on the Foundation's governing board.

This is a particularly propitious moment to create a Foundation given the substantial new monies that will become available through the tobacco litigation, Proposition 10 (Children and Families First funding) and new welfare reform funding. While there are limits to how some of these funds can be spent, particularly with regard to Proposition 10 funds, the County has a rare opportunity to consider long-term financial support for projects that show promise for sustained community improvement.

**5. Collaborate with neighborhood-based organizations, California State University, Stanislaus and the United Way (and, perhaps, others) to create a Community Building Institute.**

**Discussion:** While community building efforts underway throughout the county have significant financial needs, they also have substantial technical and information needs. These include such challenges as developing leadership, designing local economic development plans, creating microenterprises, writing grants, and improving and expanding local telecommunications networks.

Community building is a daunting task and requires a broad range of expertise. Conversely, much has been learned by those involved in community building in Stanislaus County. A Community Building Institute would, therefore, not only provide technical assistance but provide a mechanism whereby people with local experience and expertise could contribute to building the appropriate information base. An Institute could involve university faculty in a variety of academic departments in partnership with neighborhood associations to build a curriculum to train new generations of community builders and human services providers.

In addition to the organizations referred to above—neighborhood associations, CSU, Stanislaus and the United Way of Stanislaus County, other educational and nonprofit organizations may wish to participate in the design of a Community Building Institute. Collaboration with foundations will also be critical to secure the requisite support for a viable and sustainable Institute.

**6. Consider how the process of neighborhood association formation in Turlock could be adopted by other cities and the county.**

**Discussion:** The City of Turlock has designed a process whereby neighborhood associations are assisted with their development and given official recognition. In addition, the Turlock process encourages people in all areas of the city to consider developing associations to improve their neighborhoods and communicate needs and innovative ideas to the city. To date, the program has operated with very limited resources. These will need to be expanded for the program to be fully effective. Nevertheless, the Turlock process suggests a model that could be developed on a county-wide basis.

**7. Link strategies to attract businesses to the community with more programs and outreach to help local residents start and maintain their own businesses.**

**Discussion:** The single most effective long-term strategy for improving low and moderate income communities will be creating more jobs with good wages and benefits. This should involve a two-prong approach: attracting new businesses from outside the region and developing businesses within the community. The latter would include developing mechanisms for supporting community start-up businesses and cooperatives. An asset to this process is the Small Business Development Center. The County's Job Creation Plan, written by the Stanislaus County Economic Development Corporation (SCEDCO), provides a blueprint for accomplishing these tasks. The Workforce Investment Board becomes a critical agency in the process of implementing this plan. We therefore also recommend that consideration be given to

including representatives of neighborhood associations on the Workforce Investment Board.

**8. Encourage increased charitable and philanthropic giving.**

**Discussion:** Compared to the rest of the nation and state, per capita charitable giving in Stanislaus County is low. The County should collaborate with United Way, nonprofit organizations, the business community, the media, the faith-based community, public employees, and community leaders to determine how to enhance charitable giving to increase the County's asset base.

**9. Partner with United Way, nonprofit human services agencies, neighborhood organizations and the cities to increase nonprofit capacity.**

**Discussion:** The nonprofit organizations in our county are stretched to the limit in their capacity to meet human needs. Means must be found to increase their capacity. A well-conceived, collaborative approach to major foundations might prove the most successful avenue to expand capacity.

**10. Consider supporting additional research into the relationships between community-building, service delivery reform and strengthening families and neighborhoods.**

**Discussion:** The research summarized in this report was an important but only very preliminary effort at understanding the resources and opportunities that exist in Stanislaus County that might address the needs of residents of low and moderate

income communities. We have been encouraged by three very innovative and promising practices in Stanislaus County: (1) local, neighborhood-driven, community building efforts, (2) the decentralization and co-location of public agency human services programs, and (3) the efforts by nonprofits to engage in more community-based service delivery in the county. Based on our research and based upon a review of the literature, we believe there is much yet to be learned about how these efforts might most effectively address the long-term needs of low and moderate income neighborhoods.

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