Using dialogue to unleash potential

Over one-fifth of residents in Neshoba County, Miss., live in poverty, and they are working together to turn those numbers around. By participating in Turning the Tide on Poverty, an initiative led by the Southern Rural Development Center, over 100 residents organized to talk and work together to build a prosperous community.

Residents were inspired to take action after connecting with other members of the community. “In Mississippi, we are accustomed to seeing poverty, and we often don’t realize what an emergency it is. It is eye-opening when it affects your neighbors,” said Karen Benson, Area Extension Agent. These connections have been the catalyst for the ongoing changes in the community.

Public education and information emerged as a top priority. Residents from the town of Philadelphia, Miss., and the local Choctaw Indians worked to update the Community Resource Guide, and to make it available online. The Mayor’s office started a citizen’s corps to help people access information about services and employment. The action team also worked to expand Family Life Education Classes to give families access to resources such as Money Mentors and parenting classes.

Other action teams have focused on food access: Families in need have received community garden kits, empowering them by being able to grow vegetables in their own backyard. Additionally, the Baptist Association Center partnered with Wal-Mart to give the food bank overstocked produce, frozen meats, and eggs.

Everyday people in Neshoba County are making real progress in reducing poverty, and others are starting to take notice. Several anonymous donations have been made to the program to help sustain their transformation.


About Everyday Democracy

A national leader in the field of civic participation and community change, Everyday Democracy helps people of different backgrounds and views talk and work together to solve problems and create communities that work for everyone.

www.everyday-democracy.org