

Gheens Bridges To Tomorrow Strategic Partners

In order for children to be successful, families need the stability to encourage that success. Because of this we have embarked on the Gheens Bridges to Tomorrow Partnership. With support from the Gheens Foundation, PNC, the Humana Foundation, Chase and other generous supporters, Metro United Way is partnering with Americana Community Center, Louisville Central Community Centers, Neighborhood House, Presbyterian Community Center and New Directions Housing Corporation to create an innovative new endeavor that not only works to increase children's preparation for kindergarten, but also works to ensure financial stability for their families.

A bold new vision demands a new approach to strategy. Metro United Way is convening a team of strategic partners to work synergistically with Service Provider Partners. There is a set of roles and responsibilities for each partner as we embark on this new endeavor. Partnership Agreements are based on our shared vision and values, and outline the unique position that each partner has in accomplishing the desired outcomes of the initiative.

Leading the collaborative is **Project Director Ron Jackson**, who brings experience, talent and commitment to family leaders and other collaborative participants. Ron joined the team as Project Director on September 26th. Ron comes to us from Louisville Metro Housing and Family Services Department with a wealth of knowledge on effective strategies to engage the community. A Louisville native, Ron's commitment to this community is inspiring, and we are proud to have him on our staff. In addition to the amazing reputation that he has built, he is also currently working on his Masters Degree in Social Work.

New Directions Housing Corporation (www.ndhc.org) has agreed to bring their innovation and expertise to the table in the vital role of intermediary service coordination. New Directions is a not-for-profit community development corporation, founded in 1969 with a mission to develop and maintain affordable housing and vital communities in partnership with neighborhoods and other stakeholders.

New Directions is a member of both the NeighborWorks America® network and Metro United Way. Services and programs range from the development, construction and maintenance of affordable housing to human services tailored to aid homeless or distressed families of low income. The agency offers neighborhood-based services and provides technical support to grassroots groups. New Directions applauds volunteerism and civic participation as ways to increase neighborhood resiliency. In the last year alone, nearly 4,000 volunteers have worked through New Directions to repair housing, tutor children and aid neighborhood associations. Led by Executive Director **Joe Gliessner**, New Directions brings skills in logistics and operations the Gheens Bridges to Tomorrow initiative. Assistant Director **Lisa Thompson** and an **NDHC Service Coordinator** will support Family Coaches as they begin their work with family leaders.

Community Engagement

Another exciting step for the project is the recruitment and meeting of the **Gheens Bridges to Tomorrow Advisory Committee**, supported by **Metro United Way's President and CEO Joe Tolan and Julia Inman, Vice President of Community Impact**. This group of community leaders from The Gheens Foundation, Greater Louisville Project, Lex Link, the Humana Foundation, Making Connections Louisville, and other organizations hopes to push the vision of the project forward and ensure connection

to the best ideas and approaches possible. When they are successful, they will create “**An enriched initiative that yields transformative learning, a replicable open-architecture approach, and multi-disciplinary methodologies for our community; as well as improved financial and health opportunities for the engaged families and improved school readiness for their children.**”

Many other community volunteers and experts are engaged in the program planning on both the **Financial Stability Sub-Committee** and the **Early Childhood Sub-Committee**. These committees are led, respectively, by Metro United Way’s **John Nevitt, Associate Director, Community Impact**, and **David Caldwell, Community Coordinator**.

Strategic Partners

In addition to the generous support of the Gheens Foundation, this project was launched with the announcement of **PNC’s commitment to become the Financial Literacy Partner**. Another leading community provider of financial services, **Chase**, has also joined the initiative as a funder and provider of volunteer support.



Since these announcements have been made, we have acquired an additional strategic partner that will undoubtedly add to our ability to effectively serve families. **The Humana Foundation** (www.humanafoundation.org) has come on board as the Health Guidance Partner. Using a model currently in development in Atlanta, Humana will work to provide families with reliable and

easily accessible healthcare information.

Wellness Zones, staffed by Humana volunteers, will be established in each center. These stations will connect families to important health information that will allow them to make informed decisions about their health. Families will also be able to access Health Coaches that will further guide them in acquiring adequate quality healthcare. (See www.Wellzone.org)

Curriculum and Assessment

The Early Childhood Sub-Committee has chosen to adopt a uniform curriculum and assessment for the three childcare centers involved in the project. The Creative Curriculum is flexible enough to allow connection to what is currently going on in each center, but will provide a common framework across all centers. It crosswalks with the Kentucky Early Childhood Standards and has gotten extremely positive reviews from programs using it across the state. We will be utilizing the associated Creative Curriculum assessment tool and the Work Sampling assessment tool to measure the children’s progress. Both tools are recommended by the Kentucky Early Childhood Continuous Assessment Guide, and the Work Sampling tool is currently being used by Jefferson County Public Schools. This connection increases the credibility and continuity of the high quality care children receive in these centers.

Community Coordinated Child Care (www.4Cforkids.org) will serve the partnership in a consultative role. 4-C is a private, non-profit Metro United Way agency dedicated to improving the quality, availability, and accessibility of child care and early childhood development programs in the Kentuckiana area. It is one of the oldest Child Care Resource and Referral agencies in the United States. Established in 1969 as part of a pilot program, the 4-C goal was, and continues to be, to develop a comprehensive approach to coordinating child care services in the local community. For nearly 40 years, 4-C has supported and enhanced child care and continues its tradition of supporting families by coordinating a vision of a high quality early childhood care system available to all children and families.

Financial Empowerment

After doing a national scan of financial education curricula, the **Financial Stability Committee** has chosen the “Financial Opportunity: Family Success” curriculum developed by the National Endowment

for Financial Education (www.nefe.org) in partnership with the Louisville-based National Center for Family Literacy (www.famlit.org). This has been tested locally with powerful results related to knowledge-based outcomes. Several committee members have direct experience working with the curriculum and have been impressed by their own experiences. The committee has identified the core components of the financial stability assessment, and plans to contract with the National Center for Family Literacy to weave in a number of attitudinal questions about finances that will allow a thorough snapshot of a family's economic stability. In addition, the Financial Stability Committee has chosen **TRIBE** as an additional source of training for Family Coaches, the NDHC Service Coordinator and agency supervisors. Tribe (www.tribecoaching.com) is a consulting and coaching firm providing experiential training, high impact organizational development, and workplace performance coaching. Tribe has a professional team of trainers and facilitators who align with each corporate client and their specific needs. They are aligned with a coaching system that comprises 250 coaches throughout North America. Tribe is committed to creating high performance organizations through the development of high performance individuals and teams.

The momentum behind the Gheens Bridges to Tomorrow Initiative (www.metrounitedway.org) continues to grow and the potential and excitement seems to increase every day. Metro United Way has advanced the Bridges To Tomorrow Initiative in a variety of ways.

- Gaining buy-in and commitment from our service provider partners; developing a compelling vision of success based on our shared values for the project
- Engaging community volunteers to provide expertise in advising and planning for implementation of the project
- Adding more strategic partners to increase our ability to holistically support the success of the families we will engage
- Choosing curriculum and assessment instruments for both the early childhood and financial stability portions of the program

Measuring results

Designing a framework of measurement and analysis is of extreme importance to a venture as important as the Gheens Bridges to Tomorrow initiative. **@Work Solutions** (www.atworksolutionsinc.com) is tailoring the state-of-the-art Client Track software to support case notes, outcome measurement and communications between the many agencies committed to family success.

Of course, great appreciation is due to **The Gheens Foundation** (www.gheensfoundation.org) whose Trustees' creativity and generosity enabled Metro United Way to convene this amazing team. The Gheens Foundation is one of the largest private foundations in Kentucky. Most of the grants are made in the Louisville area and are used to support a wide variety of endeavors at all levels, including education, economic development, medical, arts, social/health services, as well as mental health programs. Interest in academic achievement is longstanding. In 1982, the Foundation, in partnership with the Jefferson County Public School System, established the Gheens Academy, a resource center providing professional training for teachers. The Academy has attracted national attention and is still providing professional training. Led by Executive Director Carl Thomas, the foundation pro-actively seeks new and creative ways to have profound and long-term community impact.