

August 23, 2016 Empathy Dinner Table Discussion Highlights

1) What can we do to encourage and/or support trusting and empathetic connections between individuals and groups in Transylvania County?

- Invite, involve and interact with elected officials, public officials and clergy at events where discussion, and breaking bread are taking place with diverse segments of the county.
- Recognize there is a need to improve.
- Welcome and respect each other in all venues.
- Showcase our history, including local, national and individual histories.
- Foster communication, cooperation and empathy within and between families.
- Address divide between locals and newcomers.
- Build commonality.
- Support frequent inter-group activities, such as mentoring, sports programs, and events that bring people together for greater interaction, communication and understanding.
- Ensure community programs are open opportunities for all to come together (shorter programs with free childcare and special invitations to encourage greater participation for lower socio-economic and young people).
- Change mindset from doing things **FOR** people to doing them **WITH** people.
- Tell stories across socio-economic divide and learn from the communication.
- Become a model of inclusivity through reaching out to others from different backgrounds.

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2) What ideas or action steps could we take now for little or no cost?

- Set up local networks within the community to meet regularly and encourage open dialogue, active listening, understanding, trust and examination of assumptions between people of different backgrounds, origins and current geographies. Must have parallel youth component (to act as childcare while encouraging empathy with the youth programming).
- Start diversity programs with the schools – that provide the history of different groups and encourage interaction between the children of different backgrounds sitting together. Include media component with kids creating scripts/stories/art show on empathy.
- Provide employer based diversity training, open dialogue opportunities and team building opportunities using resources (space, students, instructors) from Brevard College BRCC and local churches.
- Fund transportation, tutoring support and community events at Rise & Shine and ElCentro.
- Initiate Story Corps/Video documentation of personal stories of community folks, their family history, their struggles, and their vision for community. Use library and schools' resources to coordinate interviews and videotaping as well as archiving and presentation.
 - Encourage nonprofits to document stories of their clients sharing struggles with poverty, addiction, mental illness, racism, domestic violence, and homelessness.
 - Document the perspective of different cultures within the community...contrast of white, African American and Latino parents in what they tell their children about living in community.
- Work with the schools to reintroduce parenting classes to middle and high school students with a model of not only classroom activities but real-life interactions with preschoolers, coordinated through NC Pre-K classrooms.
- Support an Acorns to Oaks program that provides activities for children and elders to interact with each other (centralized art programs for a combination of daycare participants and assisted living residents?).
- Provide training and opportunities to practice communication, cooperation, empathy and listening skills within and between families.
- Support employer based sensitivity training.
- Explore the principles associated with the concept of 8-80 cities (www.8-80cities.org).

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3) If we could access one million dollars to build empathy throughout the county, how could we use that money?

- Develop and implement programs in schools to build empathy – involve administration, students, staff, and parents.
- Give tax incentives or grants to support minority businesses and local businesses in all of the various communities throughout the county.
- Fund Community Centers to bring people from throughout the county, and from all races, socioeconomic classes and origins to engage in dialogue over a free meal with free childcare and free transportation. Encourage discussion on empathy – through listening to each other’s story (history, music, family, experiences, struggles).
- Increase early childhood facilities so that more of our youngest citizens can get exposure to quality education with diversity enriched programming.
- Increase summer camp opportunities for Transylvania County at-risk kids.
- Implement empathy skill building from preschool (using words they can relate to and discussion of how people different from them are just as important and diversity is what makes a community strong).
- Provide resources for a group (or more) from Transylvania County to visit other places who have made progress in building community empathy.
- Build and maintain gathering places for the entire community (recreation sites, picnic sites, sports sites, community centers).
- Implement more conferences on issues of community interest and empathy.
- Facilitate community celebrations every year similar to the 150th Celebration.
- Start a discussion on empathy on Facebook.
- Hire a Community Coordinator to organize and facilitate implementation with participating agencies, board of education, County government and churches.
- Fund local consultants to develop/gather leaflets, parenting tips, time management resources, ideas for and implementation of family nights, ideas and demonstration of home children chores, implement Peace Begins with Me programs, and develop interview questions for Transylvania Story Corp.
- Help fund college education opportunities (Blue Ridge Community College or Brevard College) for Transylvania County disadvantaged youth that lead to jobs in the County.