



## Summary of Quarterly Gathering ~ October 25, 2007

### Topic: Life Ventures Partnership Catalytic Project

*A part of the City of Milwaukee's Economic Development Strategy & Policy Framework*

UEDA's first Quarterly Gathering in 2007 grew out of the discussion at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Development Summit this past July. This event, the first in a series, was intended to discuss and provide feedback to one of the five catalytic projects presented in the City of Milwaukee's *Economic Vision and Strategy Framework*, which was developed in conjunction with the Milwaukee 7. This process is intended to inform the development and implementation of the City of Milwaukee's Economic Development Plan, to be released in 2008. To access a copy of the City of Milwaukee's economic framework handout, visit [www.mkedcd.org/planning/EDP](http://www.mkedcd.org/planning/EDP).

This project, **the Life Ventures Partnership**, is an approach designed to align employers, schools, government agencies and community-based organizations in reaching Milwaukee youth, particularly those at-risk, to educate and link them to future career opportunities. What can be done to motivate Milwaukee youth to stay in school, get additional training and education and attain employment? To access a copy of the Life Ventures Partnership presentation, visit [www.uedawi.org/2events.htm](http://www.uedawi.org/2events.htm).

Over 60 attendees representing a wide variety of agencies from the public, private and nonprofit sectors engaged in discussion and provided feedback on the Life Ventures Partnership concept. The morning started with a presentation by the Department of City Development on what they think this catalytic project could look like by:

- Martha Brown, Department of City Development
- Matt Armbrust, MIED Fellow, City of Milwaukee
- Remarks by Mayor Barrett

A panel response and discussion followed, with the following participants:

- Randy Crump, Dream Chasers
- Latoya Freeman, UW-Extension / YouthQuest
- Jeff Roman, Brave New World, Inc.

The discussion was moderated by Bill Johnson of UEDA, and the panelists focused their comments on the following areas:

### ***Collaboration and partnership is key***

Forming links between the private sector, schools and youth-serving agencies is critical and meaningful in terms of impacting the choices youth make. There is a clear, demonstrated need for role models and mentors for Milwaukee youth, who can help them make long-term choices

about their education and future career opportunities. Partnerships can reinforce the learning in school, and are important in terms of leveraging funding and other resources. Lastly, corporations need to become “ambassadors” to share their positive experiences, encourage other businesses to participate, overcome indifference, and see youth as the future workforce.

### ***Showing Milwaukee youth what their future can hold***

Studies have shown that youth are currently making decisions without direction, yet over 80% wanted to continue their education after high school. Very few are prepared to make decisions regarding future career paths and do not have someone to help them. Exposing them to experiences they normally do not have, asking them to think about their dreams and work them on goal-setting to achieve those dreams, and using role models and mentors are all significant ways of reaching young people so they attain the education and skills required for what they see as their future career path. “The final result is a job, not to be in school.”

### ***Linking career opportunities to Milwaukee’s regional assets***

Not only should the Life Ventures Partnership project form collaborations among all sectors, but it should link these agencies to the opportunities and projects identified in the City of Milwaukee’s *Economic Vision and Strategy Framework* and Milwaukee 7 regional planning efforts. Milwaukee youth need to be connected to the emerging industries and job opportunities that will comprise future economic development efforts. Additionally, youth-serving agencies and others need capacity-building support so they have an inventory of internship and school-to-work opportunities, as well as relationships with private industry and business to connect youth to potential mentors and role models.

## **Common Themes from Participant Feedback**

After the panel discussion, participants were asked to focus on and respond to four main questions:

- 1) How could the creation of a Life Ventures Partnership have a real impact on the educational achievement and career success of Milwaukee’s youth?
- 2) How should Milwaukee’s youth-serving agencies, community organizations and churches agree to align their programming to intentionally expose youth to the world of work, develop work-readiness skills and introduce them to career choices? If you are affiliated with such an organization, does this project align with your mission?
- 3) What stakeholders need to be at the table to establish the structure for the Life Ventures Partnership?
- 4) How can employers be encouraged to participate? What barriers exist to their involvement and how can they be overcome?

### ***Connection and Integration***

Need to connect all sectors and integrate efforts to engage youth in future career opportunities – partnerships between private, public and nonprofit sectors are crucial. Building consensus is the best way to leverage resources and programming that will both fit the needs of employers and link youth to career/future opportunities. This effort also needs to tie into the emerging industries and sectors being pursued by the Milwaukee 7. Communicating future employment

needs with schools, youth-serving agencies and the public sector will help this effort meet the needs of Milwaukee area employers.

***Reinforce the perception that youth are an asset and the future workforce***

The Life Ventures Partnership needs to actively pursue and communicate positive stories about youth, corporate and agency participants. This will help overcome indifference and the stigma attached to hiring or working with inner-city youth. There is significant success for employers when individuals educated in this region stay in this region. Showing youth that they are worth investing in increases everyone's expectations, empowers them to become proactive members of a community, and reinforces future commitment. Lastly, the Partnership should collect qualitative and quantitative data about the experiences of youth that participate – this can be a way to positively promote the Partnership's efforts, gain the support of funders, and increase involvement by the private sector.

***Link youth to new experiences, mentors/role models and skills development opportunities***

Role models and mentors are an important part of offering Milwaukee's youth new experiences and showing them the wide range of opportunities if they stay in school and move on to additional education and training. Engage families as well as youth – parental involvement is an important part of linking at-risk youth with new opportunities. Connecting with youth before graduation is a way to create a sense of commitment to this region and the opportunities present here. Showing them the benefits of education and employment is a way to help them feel more confident about the decisions they need to make regarding future career opportunities.

***Commitment from private sector needed***

The Life Ventures Partnership will need the involvement of employers from a variety of industries, sizes and locations to be truly successful in offering youth a wide range of opportunities. Asking employers to network with other corporations and businesses about participating in this initiative is a key way to create more “buy-in” and open up internship, school-to-work and mentoring opportunities for Milwaukee youth. Additionally, members of the Life Ventures Partnership should do presentations to potential private sector partners, showcasing success stories and highlighting positive experiences with Milwaukee youth.

***Share resources and best practices***

One of the main benefits of forming the Life Ventures Partnership will be to youth-serving agencies and others that offer educational and outreach programs to youth. The Partnership can be a way to not only focus key resources and funding, but to also share information and best practices. Regular communication, proactive collaboration, and learning opportunities for staff will help agencies and staffs align their efforts in a coordinated way. Developing an inventory of private sector partners, mentors, and internship/work opportunities, and creating a “toolbox” of resources for agencies in the Life Ventures Partnership will allow everyone to tap into a broad network of resources.