

United Way Silicon Valley

A Narrative View -

Self-Sufficiency - Through Capability Building

January 18, 2007

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Santa Clara County, known as the hub of Silicon Valley, has a reputation as the nation's center of innovation, creativity, diversity, and wealth. Santa Clara County, once known as the Valley of Heart's Delight for its agriculture, has evolved into a booming "Valley of Opportunity" for some – but not all.

Over 400,000 people live at or below a level of economic "self-sufficiency," which means having adequate income to provide the basics – food, clothing, shelter, health care and transportation – without external private or public support. Those who lack self-sufficiency – whether longer-term residents affected by the recent economic downturn, or recent immigrants with limited English and job skills – face daunting barriers as they struggle to provide for themselves and families. They live in a world apart in Silicon Valley – where owning a home, attending college, even seeing a doctor or dentist on a regular basis are unattainable luxuries due to the steep challenges inherent in daily living.

United Way will continue to support services for those in crisis and will also devote increased resources to building capabilities for self-sufficiency by investing in three Focus Areas:

- I. Building life skills for adults**
- II. Developing children and youth**
- III. Building broad-based community and neighborhood leadership**

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Achieving economic self-sufficiency and success in today's society requires an unprecedented level of preparation, career planning, resources, financial management skills, and breaking down barriers in the areas of education for those that will be the first in the family to graduate, whether from high school or college.

At first glance the countywide economic status averages suggest that there is "*no problem*" with people attaining self-sufficiency. However, examining individual census tract data grouped by income level changes the answer to a resounding "*yes, there is a problem.*"

Overall county economic health appeared very strong at the height of the “dot com” boom. Median household income in 2000 was well above state and national levels. UWSV grouped the county’s three hundred and forty-one “2000 Census” census tracts, averaging about 5,000 people each, into the highest twenty percent (green), lowest twenty percent (red), and middle sixty percent (yellow) based on household income per household member. We next color coded them and geo-mapped each tract for comparison purposes, averaging the median household incomes within each of our three color area. When we compared across the three color groups, even households in the bottom 20% of county census tracts appeared to be doing relatively well compared to state and national averages.

Available median income to support each household member tells quite a different story as we take the county cost-of-living into consideration.

Self-sufficiency is the level of income needed for a family to meet basic needs without public or private assistance. Achieving economic self-sufficiency means not having to forgo one basic need over another – such as housing, health care, child care or food – due to lack of income. Applying a self-sufficiency standard of about \$22,000¹ per household member, we estimate that nearly 25%, or over 400,000, residents in this county are not economically self-sufficient. The burden on single women is even greater: 39% of Female Headed Households are below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, while 45% of single mothers live below this Standard; this is nearly double the % of married households with children living below Self-Sufficiency (20%). Although average incomes are higher than state and national figures, the purchasing power available to support the basic needs of each household member - a measure of self-sufficiency – falls well below state and national levels. Furthermore, households in this county tend to be larger on average in comparison to the rest of the state, with the lowest income households larger still. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Santa Clara County residents are not economically self sufficient.

Cornerstones of self-sufficiency and long-term economic viability include adequate planning, education and training. Additionally, financial management skills, and socioeconomic asset-building opportunities are necessary to improve a resident’s position on the economic ladder. Adults, young or old, face major obstacles to improving their position on this ladder, especially those working full time. According to a 2003 Silicon Valley Workforce Investment Network client survey there are three main barriers to employment: lacking basic skills, low English proficiency, and single parenthood.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND EARNING POWER

One of the most significant factors in earning a self-sufficiency wage is education and the increased earning potential it provides. The average earning power in California for different educational attainment levels in 1999 dollars tells the story:

- The average income for a High School Drop Out is \$18,900;
- The average income for an individual with a High School Diploma is \$25,900;

¹ This self-sufficiency standard was defined by the National Economic Development and Law Center. The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Santa Clara County is approximately \$22,000 per household member or \$66,000 for a family of three.

- For an individual with a Two-Year College Degree (Associate’s Degree) is \$33,000; and
- For an individual holding a Four-Year College Degree (Bachelor’s Degree) the average is \$45,400. (Source: 2000 Census. Note average income levels do not reflect the value of government assistance through benefits that may be available to lower income families.)

There are always exceptions to the rule, particularly for individuals who are able to establish a successful small business or master a trade. For the most part, however, people who attend college earn more money than people who do not. As the figures show above, additional years of educational attainment yield increases in annual earnings. Simply put, all residents need at least a high school diploma, or comparable job skills that enable self-sufficiency earning power, to have the capacity to maintain a living wage while building a financial foundation for long-term self-sufficiency. To date, there are nearly 200,000 adults over age twenty-five with no high school diploma throughout the county. Unsurprisingly, the highest concentration of those adults (115,000) lie in identified ‘red zones,’ or high need areas.

Educational pathways for moving adults towards economic self-sufficiency and success are primarily in the domain of our institutions, whether at a community college or workforce development program. UWSV strategies not duplicate these efforts, but instead find creative and effective means to complement educational institutions and support the greater achievement of students who are struggling in school. These strategies will be discussed further in Section II under Investing in Developing Children & Youth.

I. Focus Area: Building Adult Living Skills

UWSV Community Needs Assessment research identified households within Santa Clara County with the greatest self-sufficiency needs. These households are more likely to have a combination of the following characteristics:

- Adults have not completed high school
- Led by a single mother
- Hold low paying jobs without health benefits
- Difficulties speaking English well
- Have family obligations that create obstacles to advancing their language proficiency, education and/or employability
- Recent immigrants
- Are renters, not homeowners
- Above average family size
- Alcohol and substance abuse issues in the family
- Involvement in the criminal justice system and/or victims of violence/abuse

THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY

As these characteristics demonstrate, no single service approach will be adequate to move individuals and households closer to self-sufficiency and economic success. The overall UWSV strategy for increasing self-sufficiency for adult householders will need to include a combination of the following: developing English language proficiency, employment preparation strategies, lifelong education, and developing financial management skills. In

addition, Stability Services, such as child care or dependent care, may also be required to help support the healthy functioning of the family members.

UWSV's Building Adult Living Skills Goal will focus on strengthening the income earning potential, financial management skills, and the social and economic asset building capacity of low-income households. We have identified over 400,000 residents in geographically concentrated neighborhoods that have not attained the prerequisite education and job skills to achieve self-sufficiency across Santa Clara County. UWSV will implement a multi-faceted, coordinated and targeted program strategy that will include playing the specific role, or in combination with others, as an intermediary, a service provider, and/or network connector. This will be done using assets, partnerships, and influence across the following areas:

- **Education programs** advancing basic and intermediate conversational and occupation English to allow for advanced educational, employment, and civic opportunities.
- **Employment preparation**, placement, networking opportunities and training/educational services for career advancement, wage increases, and health benefit coverage.
- **Financial management skill development** designed to inform participants on cost effective financial practices which include: money management basics, protecting one's credit, banking services, income tax credits, home financing programs, credit counseling, saving programs, and asset building vehicles.
- **Partnerships to increase the availability of public/private dedicated saving accounts** (such as Individual Development Accounts) that can be used for purchasing a home, education or job training expenses, to capitalize a small business, or for retirement planning.
- **Linkages with *Stability Services*** to help support healthy functioning while working toward the obtainment of self-sufficiency service goals. Such services may include: Dependent Care, Housing Assistance, Food/Public Assistance, Counseling and Case Management support, Immigration Services, Effective Parenting Support, and Access to Health and Mental Health Services. Existing work with multi-problem families have verified the need for intervention/case management functions in specific cases.

CHALLENGES TO IMMIGRANTS AND NEWCOMERS

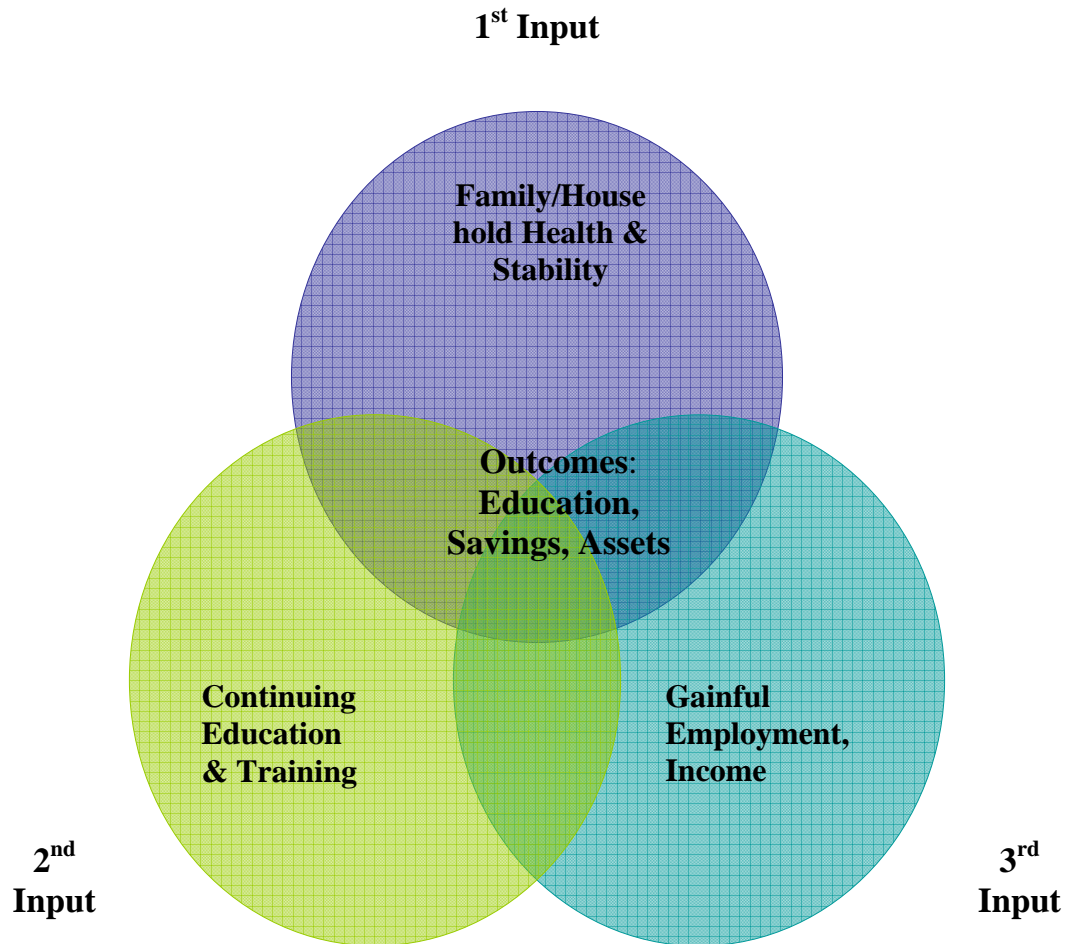
Immigrants or persons born outside the United States constitute over one-third of the population of Santa Clara County. With their US-born children, they comprise well over 60% of the county population, or 1.1 of 1.7 million persons. Almost all immigrants arriving in Santa Clara County have special needs that US-born county residents do not, notably the need to adjust their legal status to become a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) or naturalized citizen. In 2000, Santa Clara County surveyed the needs of the 16 largest and neediest immigrant groups in Santa Clara County and provided findings at its Summit on Immigrant Needs and Contributions. Following income and housing, the most important need identified was community education. Immigrants simply cannot access the pool of knowledge on how educational, social service, non-profit, and public benefit systems operate in Santa Clara County without appropriate language and cultural support.

There are two groups of undocumented immigrants: those who crossed a border without inspection and those who entered with inspection but overstayed their visa. Together they

comprise tens of thousands of immigrants (as many as 100,000 persons) in Santa Clara County—and have uniquely critical needs. However, the former group typically has greater needs due to the lack of ever having received work authorization, a social security number, or a driver’s license. Compound these challenges with a much lower education level (typically a 6th to 8th grade education versus a college education) and a lack of English (English is actually required for those entering on a temporary work visa), and economic self-sufficiency becomes all but impossible to these groups.

The large number of refugees and undocumented immigrants in Santa Clara County pose special issues of economic, social, and civic integration as well as huge concerns of family stability. The latter is particularly true because a large percentage of families are mixed status families (parents born abroad with US-born children) and another large percentage suffer from the mental and social anguish of family separation (leaving wife and children behind in their native country, for example). The challenges do not stop there, however. Additional obstacles facing immigrants and their children, whether it be child development or community involvement and engagement will be addressed in Focus Area II as well as Focus Area III.

A Visual Model of the Self-Sufficiency Components



II. Focus Area: Investing in Developing Children and Youth

Insuring the positive social, physical and emotional development of all children in Santa Clara County will always be a cornerstone of UWSV's mission. Starting with pre-natal care and kindergarten readiness, and extending into and beyond adolescence, healthy development (social, physical, and emotional) can increase a child's chances of graduating high school, entering into a vocational program or postsecondary institution, and obtaining self-sufficient wage employment. For children and youth living in low-income neighborhoods, speaking a language other than English as their first language and/or having educational/behavioral difficulties puts them at serious risk for school achievement and reaching their full potential in later life. Furthermore, a 2004 Project Cornerstone Survey of 14,327 students revealed that 62% of county 4th-6th graders and 92% of county middle and high school youth do not have the adult relationships, opportunities, positive values and social competencies that they need to thrive.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Over 60,000 students, or 25% of the Santa Clara County student body, speak a primary language other than English and 44% of kindergarteners are English Language Learners. The majority of English learners (64%) speak Spanish and 20% speak Asian languages, including Vietnamese, Filipino, and Mandarin. Of these English learners, nearly 60% are in the "red zone" while 8% are in the "green zone." A look at 2005 STAR-CAT/6 test results for 7th grade reading scores "at or above the 50th national percentile" demonstrates that English Learners re-designated as Fluent in English (71%) outperform English Only (65%) students by 6%, and compare favorably to Asian (76%) and White (74%) students. Only 16% of English Learners and 33% of Hispanic 7th graders reach this threshold, compared to 66% of Vietnamese students. While it is vital that we view as a strength the reservoir of cultural and language assets our students provide to our County, , additional resources and strategies need to be developed to improve the performance of some students.

PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Insuring the physical and emotional well being of children is one of the more basic missions of UWSV. Prenatal care, health and dental care coverage, physical activity, and nutrition are all essential for the healthy growth of youth. Other efforts would be centered on building developmental assets that strengthen resiliency: teaching and reinforcing positive/healthy behaviors, promoting the connection of youth with caring adults/community, youth leadership development, and education preparation/motivation/self-esteem programs. Identifying and approaching the needs of youth in a culturally competent way, while also taking gender differences into consideration, are vital for effective community responsiveness to the most vulnerable youth.

The Developmental Assets Model allows children to be assessed in both external and internal assets, which can be viewed as building blocks that are critical for healthy development. There are 20 external assets organized around 4 areas including support, empowerment,

boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. There are an additional 20 internal assets organized around 4 areas, including commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. All children should have at least 31 of the developmental assets to grow up healthy and responsible. Current findings on the development assets of children in Santa Clara County raise some concern. A 2004 Project Cornerstone survey of 14,000 youth revealed the following:

- The average number of developmental assets fourth graders have is 27 out of 40. Three percent were reported having 0-10 assets, 19% had 11-20 assets, 40% 21-30 assets, and 38% had 31-40 assets
- Sixth graders averaged 26 assets, dropping to 22 in 8th grade. Ninth graders averaged 18 assets, while 12th graders averaged only 15. Fifteen percent of middle and high school students had between 0-10 assets, 44% had 11-20 assets, 33% had 21-30 assets, and only 8% had the highest threshold of assets (31-40)
- Additionally, 62% of County 4th-6th graders and 92% of County middle and high school youth do not have the adult relationships, opportunities, positive values and social competencies that they need to thrive

Additionally, local data shows:

- Thirty percent of 11th graders reporting using alcohol in the past 30 days in 2004
- Juvenile misdemeanor arrests rates were 30% higher than the State in 2003, and both misdemeanor and felony rates increased between 2002 and 2003

An obvious pattern has emerged with regard to the number of assets our students display – as they get older, the number of assets decreases. Rather than build on their levels of assets, it seems that counter-influences lead to deficits, which can influence the choices students make concerning everything from the peers they keep, to doing homework, to engaging in risky behavior. Moving a higher percentage of our youth into the top threshold would strengthen their resiliency and the overall community.

Some other indicators of emotional development include:

- The rate for self-inflicted injuries requiring hospitalization in the County was 22 per 100,000, double the state rate
- Incidence of 7th graders reporting that they have felt sad/hopeless feelings almost everyday for two weeks: 33% Latina girls compared to 20% of all 7th graders
- Regarding ‘bullying’ – 49% of 5th graders reported “yes” vs. 42% of 7th graders - with race, gender, and sexual orientation being the most cited reason
- Self-Perception of Weight – 5th graders: 74.8% “about right,” 15% “overweight,” and 10.2% “underweight;” vs. 7th graders: 47% “about right,” 29.6% “overweight,” 23.5% “underweight”

Some other indicators of physical health include:

- Fitness – 5th graders 20.8% (with 18.7% of males and 23.1% of females) passed all 6 California fitness standards; 7th graders 32.7% (with 29.3% of males and 36.2% of females)
- 54% (10,400) of kindergarteners, and 71% (13,893) of 3rd graders had a history of tooth decay – with 28% (5,393) and 29% (5,675) having untreated tooth decay respectively
- Substance abuse –reported use among 7th graders – cigarette 3.6%, alcohol 9%, marijuana 6%.

Early childhood programs are often out of reach for low-income families due to high costs, long waiting lists for publicly subsidized programs, and lack of awareness for those opportunities that do exist. UWSV’s early childhood and pre-school efforts (including support

for Success By 6 and the Partnership for School readiness) promote effective parenting, healthy psychological/social/cognitive child development, and school readiness for kindergarten. 20% of children in the county have communication disorders, while 6%-8% suffer from language impairment. For school-aged children, after school activities, English language acquisition lessons, and role model/mentoring all play critical roles in connecting youth and their parents to the world outside of their family setting. This helps develop trust between families and institutions and increases the likelihood of K-12 success.

CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & ACHIEVEMENT

The foundation for completing high school, a vocational pathway, or moving into higher education begins early in life. Recent studies have concluded that the preparation begins even before preschool and extends throughout childhood. Quality childhood development programs can better prepare children for a successful learning experience in kindergarten, which usually translates into a more engaging and positive elementary and secondary experience.

Conversely, low parental involvement in the earliest years, compounded by successive grade-level academic underachievement, will often lead to student disengagement or self-doubt in their academic abilities. The underachieving student may then begin to exhibit at-risk behaviors, demonstrating low expectations and motivations, and/or develop a truancy problem which can ultimately lead to the decision to drop out. Other family or outside circumstances (i.e., foster youth or gang influences) can also affect a child's chances of graduating and reaching a level of economic self-sufficiency. Any disruption in a child or young adult's education experience (i.e., juvenile justice involvement or transient living conditions) can leave them unprepared for gainful employment. For the small percentage of those that do return to complete a high school diploma, it is usually later in age through a GED and/or adult education program.

According to the latest Assessment for Kindergarten Readiness in San Mateo and Santa Clara County Report (released in 2006), nearly 25% of children in Santa Clara County fall below teacher expectations for self-regulation, which includes things like controlling impulses, working cooperatively, and paying attention. In low-achieving classrooms this number is much higher: 75% of students are not socially or emotionally ready to be there. The study also reports that only 46% of children exhibit proficiency in nearly all 20 readiness skills, while 13% have not mastered any of the readiness at all. Factors that positively influence school readiness include higher family income; preschool experience and delaying kindergarten until 5 years old; English as the primary home language; parents reading to children; and higher parental education.

While the County as a whole is well-off, the results of the STAR/CAT 6, particularly third grade reading proficiency that are considered a predictor of later academic success tell a different story. About 25% of students residing in Red Zone areas score above the 50th percentile as compared to over 80% of students in the Green areas. While older Santa Clara County students generally fare better than students statewide on graduation rates, Language and Math proficiencies, UC/CSU eligibility and other measures, there are wide disparities among the County's high school districts in terms of academic achievement.

HIGH SCHOOL & HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVES

As a world leader in technology and innovation, the sustainability of Santa Clara County's competitive edge is dependent on a highly educated and skilled work-force. It is with this in mind, along with the significantly changing demographics of the Valley, that preparing youth for our information-based workforce through college prep training and guidance has been identified as a priority for UWSV.

Santa Clara County in the 1970s was 71% White, 12% Latino, and 8% Asian/Pacific Islander. In 2004, the US Census update reported that the County was 40% White, 31% Asian, and 25% Latino. It is estimated that 60% of residents are either foreign-born or 1st generation citizens (SCC Beyond Borders Report). This trend has had tremendous social and economic implications concerning language proficiency, education attainment, and political participation. These demographic shifts have also changed the age composition of the Valley. As the predominantly Caucasian baby-boomer generation begins to retire in unprecedented numbers over the next fifteen years, there will be a demand for skilled labor and senior services that people of ethnic and cultural minority backgrounds, ranging in age from 16-24, will be required to fill.

One of our self-sufficiency strategies targets youth that need additional opportunities and greater support services in preparing themselves for a productive adult lifestyle. It is estimated that there are 14,000 county high-school youth that have one or more risk factors, indicating they may be better served by an alternative education program as opposed to traditional high schools. The Greater San Jose Alternative Education Collaborative (AEC), administered by UWSV, advocates for and facilitates the growth in capacity of high quality alternative education programs to serve youth who are dropping out or at risk of dropping out because of school failure. The AEC also looks to address the issues and needs of large student subgroups across our County, such as English learners, students with disabilities, and low-income students with regard to policies such as the California High School Exit Exam, receiving appropriate wrap around support services, and bringing alternative programs to the County such as Cyber High, Diploma Plus, and the Gateway to College model.

Other opportunities to help prepare families that are dealing with the college experience for the first time can include college preparation workshops that teach study tips, raise reading and math proficiencies, or motivation and support programs for first time college-bound students.

FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO COLLEGE ENTRANCE

Low-income students who have above average achievement and pass the High School Exit Exam often still face financial barriers to attending college, particularly four-year colleges. According to researchers (Milano, 2003), financial barriers prevent almost half of the academically-qualified low-income students from attending a four-year college and almost a quarter from attending any college. CSU and UC undergrad tuitions have increased by 85% over the last four years, up to \$3,164 and \$6,141 respectively excluding campus and book fees. These escalations have hit low-income families the hardest, as household income and financial aid has not kept pace. Currently, a typical low-income family (\$25,000) pays about 60% of their share of family income on four-year public college tuition and fees, compared to

17% for middle-income (\$43-\$65,000) and 5% for high-income (\$99,000 above) families according to the Pell Institute (2004). It is also estimated that only 7% of low-income twenty-four year olds have attained their college degree, compared to 39% of middle-income, and 52% of the highest income groups.

Completing post-secondary education is a longer term strategy toward achieving financial stability, acquiring assets, and building wealth for our targeted families, but it pays off in the long run by reducing dependency on safety-net resources, reducing the crime and incarceration rate, increasing the pool of local talent, increasing civic participation, and increasing the tax revenue base. Also, college graduates are more likely to have jobs with health insurance and retirement plans, two important factors contributing to financial well-being. They also have higher rates of investments, retirement saving, and homeownership.

EFFECTIVE PARENTING & CARE-TAKING OF CHILDREN

One of the goals of UWSV is to help parents and others increase the number of children socially and emotionally ready for school. These children will then be more likely to graduate from high school successfully and having made healthy choices. The well-being of children is the number one priority for residents in the Bay Area (71% extremely concerned), and higher for Latinos (87%), Parents (80%), and Santa Clara County residents (78%) (KIDSDATA, 2006). Whether it is developing positive parenting skills related to the education, exercise and eating habits, or disciplining their children, or warning signs related to juvenile delinquency, gang involvement, or substance abuse, no influence has a greater impact on a child's development than his/her parent(s). This can be especially true for single parents or guardians that may have more daily tasks to attend to, but the reality is that even in two-parent households both parents are required to work to make ends meet – meaning less quality time to interact and supervise their children. Having the skills necessary to help children achieve healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development is vital to our county - in which 22% of children are age 14 and below. Children and youth with higher levels of developmental assets are known to have greater school success.

III. Focus Area: Broadening Leadership Capacity

Being an effective leader requires a special set of skills that can be developed, including communication, listening, organization and problem solving skills. In our local community, nothing is more important than the skills related to cultural competence and authentic advocacy and connection to the grassroots ethnic neighborhoods that United Way aims to serve. Other factors that contribute to effective leadership include experience dealing with bureaucracies and institutions, having strong networks, and projecting confidence. Perhaps the two most important qualities are a focused, non-abrasive passion and a commitment to day-to-day management as well as a long-term vision. Often those residents with the most social capital, or leadership skills, are empowered by these same skills to leave those very neighborhoods that need to build up social assets in order to reverse neighborhood conditions. We seek to empower leaders, residents, future leaders, and neighborhoods by giving them the tools to change their neighborhood conditions, thus increasing their personal stake in the greater community.

UWSV, other community organizations, and public institutions have a vested interest in developing appointed residents that can be the “voice” of the community; as well as building, strengthening and expanding the scope of “community networks.” Whether it be initiating conversations, informing, or following up with city entities, schools, service providers or other outside organizations, or bringing neighbors together to problem solve or socialize who wouldn’t otherwise interact, lead agents are necessary to plan, coordinate, build and sustain both work and momentum.

While we have already assessed the community needs for our county, we must begin to build our battery of “community assets.” These untapped “resource individuals” exist in our schools, public service providers, police departments, libraries, and colleges. By mobilizing the power of these organizations, previously disengaged communities, including immigrants and other new comers to this community, can exercise their civic participation, increasing the functionality and capabilities of their neighborhoods.

For example, some communities have utilized some form of a "Capacity Inventory," to uncover (and rediscover) the gifts and resources of community members.² This inventory may serve multiple goals:

For community building:

- Help the larger community become more open to hearing the voices of disenfranchised communities and uncover venues where those voices can be heard.
- Develop local skills bank, also based on an inventory of skills and knowledge. Housed with block captains, in churches or local community organizations, a skills bank can facilitate neighbor-to-neighbor help, whether with baby sitting, snow shoveling, carpentry, plumbing, or whatever.
- Institute a "Learning Exchange," by asking people both "What would you like to teach?" and "What would you like to learn?" One community for over a decade operated a learning exchange that grew to a listing of more than 20,000 topics.
- Discover new participants in community life and provide opportunities for expression. Questions about previous involvements and current interests uncover new contributors to community organizations, churches, and community institutions such as schools, police, libraries and parks.
- Discover new cultural and artistic resources. Inquiries about cultural and artistic skills in a number of communities have uncovered visual artists, writers, musicians, theater people, and crafts people, most of whom are willing and ready to be involved in community and civic activities, as well as schools, parks, libraries, etc.

For economic development :

- Develop new enterprises, based on an inventory of skills and knowledge. For example: linking good cooks to start a catering business; linking people who have cared for children to start a day care business.
- Discover market opportunities. Investigating consumption expenditures, even in the lowest income communities, can identify unserved or underserved markets, e.g. food stores, clothing shops, etc.

² Kretzman, J.P. 1995. *Building Communities Inside Out.*, Chicago, IL: Northwestern University
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These seven areas hardly exhaust the potential uses of a capacity inventory. But they do begin to define the possibilities for groups interested in mobilizing the gifts and skills of the community's residents.

A strategic investment in leadership development will have a direct impact at the neighborhood level as individuals develop the skills necessary to mobilize their neighbors in prioritizing the most pressing issues – and taking action! Having a void in leadership at the neighborhood level makes it that much harder for people within those neighborhoods to connect with each other, let alone with people outside of their neighborhood. Providing residents with the skills and opportunities to become lead agents can occur through many processes, often overlapping – including direct training courses, mentoring/shadowing opportunities, participating in a community project, etc.

We know that there are numerous organizations established where potential community leaders can be developed, as well as networking opportunities:

- Local government supported neighborhood groups (i.e. There are nineteen Strong Neighborhood Initiative Areas in San Jose alone)
- Neighborhood associations
- Business/labor/cultural associations
- Issue-oriented groups
- Parent groups affiliated with schools

In their role as “connectors,” leaders are the hubs of networks as they link together different fabrics of society, driving the maturation process which includes gaining internal and external credibility. Developing committed and responsive leaders in selected neighborhoods and in various community organizations will provide continuity of local leadership, increasing the likelihood of creating stronger networks, with the desired end result being the mobilization of the larger community around cross-cutting issues.
