

2000 Annual Report Executive Summary

Empower Lewiston Enterprise Community

MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The strategic plan for the Lewiston Enterprise Community (EC), administered by Empower Lewiston, Inc., has 26 strategies that are led by a number of partner organizations. Most of the major accomplishments this year naturally relate to implementation of the Strategic Plan and they are discussed in three groups: funded strategies, other strategies, and new strategies. Listed with them are the strategic plan number, USDA Benchmark (BMK, database system) number (the numbers vary due to the structure of the database), strategy name, and the strategy's leader organization. The section concludes with a brief summary of the board and committee accomplishments.

FUNDED STRATEGIES Four strategies received funding during CY 2000:

STRATEGY/BMK #1 – WERC (work, education, resource and community) First (Lewiston Adult Education) has as its most visible presence a Resource Coordinator on site at Faithworks (FW; see below). Empower Lewiston funding in the amount of \$61,000 was provided in early April of 2000. WERC First participant Lewiston Adult Education (LAE) and FW were notified in CY 2000 that they would be receiving the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce's 2001 Business/Education Partnership Award. The WERC First group hired a Resource Coordinator and made arrangements with partners to bring various classes on site for FW employees, including GED preparation, Individual Development Accounts (for matched savings to fund housing, education or business start-up), budgeting, basic computers, nutrition and smart shopping/cooking, home buying and maintenance, and others. The Resource Coordinator set up an office at FW, developed an intake and referral form to track assistance, needs and results; surveyed FW employees on child care and transportation needs; and met with various partners to bring community resources to Faithworks workers. She collected and made available a large volume of information, and provided individual assistance on various programs available to those FW employees needing asset building in order to improve their quality of life. By the end of the CY, the Resource Coordinator had responded to more than 100 requests for services. Plans include expanding her work to reach even more residents of the Enterprise Community, and collaboration with the Seeds of Change Community Outreach Workers (see below) increased and resulted in broader exposure for all concerned.

STRATEGY/BMK #3 – Faithworks (Faithworks) This non-profit production facility provides jobs, job skills development and educational opportunities for its employees and some residents of the surrounding Lewiston Enterprise Community. Faithworks received \$45,000 of Empower Lewiston funding in early April, 2000 in order to purchase additional shrink-wrap machinery, which in turn allowed the facility to hire more people (including EC residents). They also received \$175,000 from other sources to complete funding for this strategy. As mentioned above, Faithworks and LAE/WERC First were notified in CY 2000 that they would be receiving the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce's 2001 Business/Education Partnership Award. Many Faithworks employees are people who have single or multiple barriers that prevent them from traditional full-time, long-term employment. Due to the additional funding and the expansion it facilitated, Faithworks had been able to expand employment by 65 full-time equivalent (or 94 part-time) positions. On average, about one-third of its employees come from the Enterprise Community, two census tracts with poverty rates of 47% and 34% according to the 1990 census. Faithworks also has obtained funding for subsidized child care and employee-based housing, donated equipment and other resources for courses taught under the auspices of the Workplace Learning Partnership Project (based at the Univ. of ME), and assisted with support for the resource coordinator position. The business also provides space for the Resource Coordinator (see above) and for various classes that take place on site.

STRATEGY #25/BMK #31 – Seeds of Change (United Way) This strategy contains several tasks to empower the EC residents through a variety of means. Two EC residents were hired to share the full-time Community Outreach position, the most visible aspect. Funding in the amount of \$11,500 was provided by Empower Lewiston in early April of 2000 and was matched by United Way. The Outreach staff assisted with or initiated multiple projects as EC residents reaching out to other EC residents. Some of these efforts were: helped identify EC students who might be able to take advantage of summer camp scholarships; worked on the Healthy Communities/Empower Lewiston Community Dialog on determining general quality of life issues; assisted with the Longley School clothing giveaway (about 50 EC families were able to obtain new clothing for their children.); recruited 10 participants for a literacy program; worked on the health survey conducted with (see Strategy #4); and collected donations and assembled school supply bags for a "Back to School" block party. In addition, they attended Empower Lewiston Board meetings and served on Committees; they were particularly helpful with the Neighborhood Improvement Cmt., accomplishing much research to move towards the establishment of safe houses. They made numerous outreach efforts to residents for various EL efforts, particularly in reaching additional EC residents participated in the funding decisions for Year 3. They also provided support and technical assistance to the Downtown Neighborhood Association and are working with the WERC First Resource Coordinator to get the word out on available resources.

STRATEGY#26/BMK #32 – Administration (Empower Lewiston) The Executive Director began work Jan. 31, 2000 and set up the Empower Lewiston office. FY 2000 Empower Lewiston expenditures were approximately \$61,000 for office-related, community participation, and other activities and expenses. The organization obtained IRS 501(c)(3) status; developed a listing of addresses with EC census tract designations for use by various partners in tracking EC participation and services; completed three federal surveys (Health and Human Services EZ/EC health strategies survey, USDA food survey and US Dept. of Education request for local schools information), and had a very good first audit. The Director also obtained and passed on to local and other Round II Rural ECs information on the status of Year 3 appropriations for EZ/EC funding. The Director was engaged in many of the projects described elsewhere, and handled such ongoing efforts as the monthly Board meetings, Committee meetings, certain strategies, the weekly and annual reports to USDA, benchmark data collection and entry, LA Excels (two cities' collaborative effort for improvements) Steering Committee participation, publicity, outreach, funding for the smaller or one-time community events described elsewhere, and others.

OTHER STRATEGIES Several elements of the strategic plan progressed without direct funding from Empower Lewiston: Strategy/BMK #4 – Health Care (Sisters of Charity Health System) -- saw the development and administration of a health survey; 119 participated, and the results were compiled and distributed to the board and others; Strategy/BMK #7 – Safe Neighborhoods (EL's Neighborhood Improvement Cmt.) – the Lewiston Police Dept. hired two patrol officers, a neighborhood safety meeting was held, and work began on establishing safe houses in the EC; Strategy/BMK #11 – Neighborhood Beautification & Cleanup (EL's Neighborhood Improvement Cmt.) – the Committee addressed the removal of unsafe and unsightly stockpiles of bulky waste through the tipping fee issue; Strategy/BMK #18 – Community Arts Center (LA Excels) – The LA Excels Board brought in a consultant to collect and analyze necessary background data and to determine siting, size and other aspects of this project; the consultant's work will be completed in FY 2001; Strategy/BMK #8 – Home Ownership & Housing Rehab (City of Lewiston) – the city made a residential rehabilitation housing loan to address four units in census tract 204; Strategy/BMK #16 – Greenspaces(City of Lewiston) – background planning work continued and the Lewiston Rotary raised \$10,000 to improve the EC's Maple St. Park; Strategy #20/BMK #22 – Government Center (City of Lewiston) – collaboration among city, state and federal entities to develop the Center/retain existing government services continued and work began on determining improvements to a site for use by the Dept. of Human Services (Lowell Square); and Strategy #23/BMK #33 – Economic Development (City of Lewiston) – had four major tasks accomplished to date that resulted in the creation of 435 jobs and the receipt of \$5.4 million in

funds for these projects.

Most of the other strategies are very expensive, capital-improvement type projects with a multi-year time frame. Progress was made on those in terms of the largely unseen planning and design work that is a necessary component of those projects. In addition, some strategies (see Problems/Obstacles and Solutions sections) have experienced implementation delays. The expectation is that most, if not all, will ultimately proceed.

NEW STRATEGIES The board also worked on addressing new needs by soliciting proposals for new projects. After a mailing to 100+ organizations and public notice, it received 14 proposals with the Empower Lewiston funding requested totaling about \$358,000. The board, assisted by the input of eight EC residents (in addition to the five on the board), rated the proposals and by year's end had determined it would fund 12 of the proposals, with total EL funding of \$172,400 (and a total budget for the activities of \$513,500). The final vote on the decision will be made at the Jan. 2001 Board meeting.

OTHER SUPPORT Empower Lewiston wrote/signed several letters of support and/or HUD Certificates of Consistency during CY 2000. Three received funding (all from HUD sources): Coastal Enterprises Inc., \$12,500 for home ownership education classes; AIDS Project, \$1,330,000 for housing and other assistance for low-income people with HIV/AIDS; and Maine State Housing Authority, \$1,382,238 for three projects addressing housing, case management and supportive services for homeless youth and for homeless individuals with mental illness, substance abuse problems, or HIV/AIDS. We also participated in a number of one-time events that related to the goals of the strategic plan (e.g., the "Green Sweeps" cleanup in the EC); and helped with funding for three projects: "Lots to Gardens" program, a teen survey and summit, and a "Back to School" block party.

BOARD/COMMITTEE WORK Significant accomplishments of the Board include: hired an Executive Director; adopted policies and procedures (Committee procedures to re-invigorate their work; child care reimbursement policy to facilitate board meeting); paid for two EC-resident Board members to attend a leadership development course; and elected new and returning Board members and officers. It also adopted an award agreement and reporting requirements for Empower Lewiston funding recipients; made decisions on the strategies having implementation impediments; and adopted a comprehensive approach for soliciting and rating proposals for Year 3 funding. Committee work was re-invigorated and each made progress; all were also involved with overseeing the progress of specific strategies within their purview.

LEVEL OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: Empower Lewiston believes community participation has increased in some ways, and it expects that to continue. For example, the Board began the year with only three residents filling the eight Board seats specifically reserved for EC residents; it ended the year with five of those seats filled, and a sixth ready to be nominated at the January 2001 Board meeting. We were more active with outreach to residents: in May, 19 people attended an Empower Lewiston community meeting; in August, several Board members, the Exec. Dir., and four board-affiliated EC residents teamed up to staff a table at the Prelude street-celebration and handed out about 70 flyers. Empower Lewiston and its partners worked hard to increase participation of the EC residents by actively soliciting their input for the upcoming Year 3 funding decisions. Eight EC residents, in addition to the five EC residents serving on the board, participated in that decision-making. Their ratings were incorporated into the overall scores, and their comments were solicited and considered (and in some cases resulted in changes to the board's initial votes).

Empower Lewiston was welcomed in April as a new member of the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce; the welcome included the reading of a brief description of Empower Lewiston before the more than 100 attendees. In addition, the organization furnished information to six local financial

institutions regarding the National Community Investment Fund as part of rural EC programs and handled individual inquiries from several in the business community. Finally, the director developed a two-page summary of financial incentives available due to the EC status, and began distribution to various business contacts.

As to contacts with nonprofit organizations, Empower Lewiston had many contacts with current and potential partners, whether through presentations at Board meetings, Committee efforts, or individual meetings. Committee and individual contacts were far too numerous to list here, but included the organizations listed in the opening appreciation section.

Finally, publicity and general presentations were also used to "spread the word." During CY 2000 there were 13 articles on Empower Lewiston or its strategies in the Sun Journal, the local daily newspaper, and six in the Twin City Times, a free local bi-weekly. There was also a special feature on the organization in the July Lewiston Update, a city publication delivered to all Lewiston households. There was an article or reference to the organization or its strategies in four other publications. In April, the Exec. Dir. spoke to about 30 at a monthly luncheon series at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center. On Aug. 9, board, staff and strategy representatives briefed the Lewiston City Council on Empower Lewiston. EL information was also included in the local Chamber's "Business to Business" directory, and the Chamber announced in Dec. that its 2001 Business/Education Partnership award will go to two of EL's strategies.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES: Empower Lewiston has generally maintained ongoing relationships with its partners. If anything, those partnerships were strengthened this year, as it became evident to all that the organization's work and implementation of the Strategic Plan were resulting in real improvements in the EC and for its residents. Our closest partnerships are with benchmark leads and participants, who include at least 20 organizations, in addition to various city departments. Work on the strategic plan to date reflects a total budget that exceeds \$53 million. By the end of CY 2000, the strategies had received more than \$17 million of the needed funding, including about \$177,500 of Empower Lewiston funds (or about \$95 received for every \$1 of our funding). This does not include the value of donations and in-kind services (volunteer hours, etc.), which easily exceeds \$50,000. Empower Lewiston has a high level, overall, of participation in benchmark review and implementation by its many partner organizations. In fact, through participation on the Committees, contact with the Director, or their own efforts, all benchmark leaders are directly involved in the implementation and updating.

PROBLEMS/OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS: The organization experienced four types of problems or obstacles, and is making progress on addressing them all.

First, the organization is working on more resident participation, an ongoing concern of Empower Lewiston. One approach is the outreach work being done by the Seeds of Change Community Outreach workers, as EC residents to other residents. Their work on both programs and spreading the word gives credibility to the organization and its strategic plan, and shows EC residents how they themselves can participate. Related to that is the work done by the WERC First Resource Coordinator, working on site at Faithworks with its employees (about one-third of whom are EC residents). She will also be expanding her outreach to include work from additional EC sites. Another is that continuing publicity of our activities will increase awareness and interest in helping with the various projects ("success breeds success"). Also, the board adopted a child care reimbursement policy and brought in additional EC residents to participate in funding decisions for new projects. Finally, there is the ongoing, person-to-person contact made by various board members, staff and partner organizations to reach out on general and specific projects.

Second, several strategies experienced unexpected obstacles which have delayed their implementation.

Four were to receive funding per the Board's previous authorization: Strategy/BMK #2 – Lifelong Learning Center (Lewiston High School and Androscoggin Head Start; \$75K); Strategy/BMS #6 – Neighborhood Center (Lewiston Housing Authority;\$50K); Strategy/BMK #13 – Cultural Learning Center (Lewiston Public Library; \$21K); and Strategy/BMK #14 – Visitor Center/Heritage Museum (Museum LA; \$42K). In addition, three strategies that have not requested EL funding also need jump-starts: Strategy/BMK #10 (Lead-based Paint Program), Strategy/BMK #12 (Furniture Bank), and Strategy #24/BMK #30 (St. Dominic's & St. Peter's Schools). Solutions for the problems/obstacles associated with specific strategies have been identified and are being worked on. They include examining a scaled-back approach, assistance from the organization, and/or additional/new partners; in some cases, time is a necessary component. In general, work will proceed apace as additional approaches and assistance are brought in.

Third, the community had originally developed the strategic plan with Empowerment Zone status as the goal; thus the original plan budget of \$65+ million is not realistic given our Enterprise Community status. The solutions are to work harder on finding additional funding, take additional time for implementation, and cut back approaches and therefore budgets when truly necessary. These approaches are expected to work, especially in tandem with more awareness of the organization, strategic plan successes, and the heightened interest in the community in assisting with that implementation of improvements.

Lastly, Empower Lewiston is caught in something of a "Catch 22" in that it received an exemption to be designated a "rural" Enterprise Community. The Enterprise Community consists of 0.9 square miles of the downtown, containing two census tracts that had a 1990 population of 6,000 and poverty rates of 47% and 34%. The EC is part of a city with a population of about 37,000. This means that the EC is not eligible for most of the USDA's programs that are otherwise available to rural ECs. Empower Lewiston will step up its collaborative efforts with civic and Congressional leaders to address the problem of being a "rural" EC that is not able to access many USDA programs.

BEST PRACTICES: Empower Lewiston believes that one of its best practices is the outreach to residents conducted through a variety of means. One of the most important is the work done by EC residents and Seeds of Change community outreach works. Residents reaching out to residents on behalf of an organization with which they actively participate is the best "advertising" available. Another is the work of the WERC First Resource Coordinator, who is on-site at Faithworks and has daily contacts with its employees, about one-third of whom are EC residents. Related to this is also meeting residents on their own "turf" as much as possible, which is done through a variety of means: Board and some Committee meetings are held at facility in the EC that houses other local activities and thus is a more comfortable site for many residents; Board members and staff make themselves visible by attending meetings and events held in the EC; and the Director meets with an EC resident/board member for summer lunch hours in the EC's Kennedy Park to meet other residents. Another practice that is helping to make the community better aware of the organization and the implementation of the strategic plan is publicity on Empower Lewiston and Strategic Plan successes. More general awareness seems to foster both more of a "we can do it" feeling and more interest in participation by potential partners. Finally, an additional best practice is scaling down seemingly huge projects into smaller and more manageable parts. For example, the Culture, Recreation and Natural Resources Committee will begin work on a Nature Walk in Franklin Pasture, although the ultimate goal is to develop all the trails in the EC. This will show the community that the organization can use limited resources to begin addressing larger needs at a pace where visible progress is made quickly enough to encourage additional participation and efforts.

PLANS/PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE: Of course, the organization plans to continue to implement the strategic plan and increase resident participation. In particular, it will work on further

implementation of the solutions to the identified problems. As well, it hopes to mature as an organization, and will conduct a board team building session, develop a new board member orientation package, and work on incorporating the 12 new projects into the strategic plan.