

## **Above the Violence**

**Team Members:** Kristen Adams, Brady Chianciola, Nicole Contois, Kathryn Girardin, Debi Kenyon, Joan Leahy, Lynn Page, Victor Rodriguez, Rachel Romano

According to the FBI Uniform Violent Crime Data Base, Holyoke's violent crime rate (murder, rape, assault, robbery, burglary, theft, auto theft and arson) is ranked at more than twice the national average. In Holyoke, "house parties" have resulted in two violent deaths and are commonly used for gang recruitment and the illegal consumption and sale of alcohol and drugs for Holyoke youth ages 13-20.

The goal of our group, "Above the Violence", was to assist a community based organization in providing this large group of youth with safe alternatives to the illegal and/or risky behaviors in which they may choose to engage. We chose to partner with the Holyoke Youth Task Force ["HYTF"] which is a coalition of youth serving non-profit agencies, city and state representatives, and community volunteers who are interested in creating positive opportunities and a healthier community for Holyoke youth. To that end, the HYTF has introduced the initiative "Holyoke Nights". Holyoke Nights provides a safe, free and accessible way for these youth to participate in night time entertainment in a positive environment. Holyoke Nights events are currently held four times each year with the goal of holding them more frequently.

In order to help HYTF achieve these goals, the mission of "Above the Violence" was to create a tool that demonstrates the need for Holyoke Nights and highlight the success that has been attained, even with the limited funding. The tool, in the form of a promotional video, would also serve as a means to assist the group in fundraising activities. The additional funding would enable HYTF to create a staff position that would primarily focus on the coordination and implementation of additional Holyoke Nights events. In addition, we created a step-by-step guide on how to begin seeking additional funding by successfully marketing their new video and seeking corporate sponsors for their events.

## **Bridgebuilders**

**Team Members:** Ray Berry, Jessica Collins, Zaida Govan, Tony Maroulis, Marla Shelasky, Sam Stegeman, and Lori Tanner

"Bridgebuilders" focused on the following challenge: "A variety of geographic, socio-economic and racial barriers fracture our region. Present creative programmatic solutions to begin breaking down these divides." Our team discussed these issues around economic inequities in the Pioneer Valley. We then created a goal to consciously challenge ourselves to learn and grow as individuals in our understanding of systemic and individual racism and to take steps towards bridging this divide in our communities and our region. Those steps included documenting our growth process through video, attending intensive Undoing Racism trainings, and looking critically at the LPV curriculum. We also intend to distribute a video via social media in an effort to encourage and inspire others in the conversation about race. Our final recommendations encourage LPV to integrate an understanding of systemic racism into LPV's organizational structure and its leadership curriculum. As each of us became further educated on this path, an unintended step emerged - our realization of the impact we could each have as individuals in our own spheres of influence. The final step is to take what we've learned and do our best to practice and encourage anti-racism on a daily basis.

## **Bridging Pathways**

**Team Members:** Lorenzo Gaines, Michael Lewis, Andrew Maxwell, Isolda Ortega-Bustamante, John Ramos, Rachel Stoler

The Bridging Pathways team combined, adapted and streamlined two project ideas into one initiative. The resulting collaborative project culminated in the “Bridging Pathways: From Convening to Results” event. It was held on May 15<sup>th</sup> at the Kittredge Center People’s Bank Conference Center, generously provided by Holyoke Community College, with additional financial support provided by Mass Mutual Financial Group and an anonymous donor.

The Bridging Pathways Convening brought together more than 97 high-level decision makers and innovators from the PK-12 public education, higher education, and private sectors to connect the pathways to the higher education and career development needed to expand the skilled workforce that will sustain the economic future of the Pioneer Valley. Model programs and collaborations were highlighted and persistent obstacles to achieving family-sustaining careers were examined. The goal was to spark new regional collaborations and to encourage increased program alignment between public PK-12 education, higher education, employers, and workforce training programs, with a focus on the STEM, health, and clean energy fields. Nurturing expanded or new collaborations can strengthen the education, training, and support needed by under-represented students and unemployed and under-employed workers seeking access to career paths in the STEM, health, and clean energy fields. As a result the team is working to foster and further the connections and potential collaboration discussed at the meeting.

## **The Next Generation Pioneers**

**Team Members:** Christin Deremian, Peter Ellis, Annamarie Golden, Brittney Kelleher, Giuseppe Perniciaro, and Adam Robinson

The Next Generation Pioneers’ mission was to identify and engage Young Professionals in efforts to create a more vibrant culture within the Pioneer Valley. As a team, we recognized the issues surrounding the attraction and retention of this emerging demographic with the Pioneer Valley and formed a partnership with The Economic Development Council of Western MA to create and distribute the first ever, regional survey on individuals between the ages of 18-45. The survey focused on identifying Young Professionals’ perceptions about the Pioneer Valley and its amenities. The survey was created with the following goals in mind, so that the data collected...

- Provides insight as to the needs and wants of this emerging demographic identifying their perceived benefits of the region and its culture;
- Becomes the voice of young professionals;
- Creates a catalyst for deeper discussion and change in the region;
- Engages local business and community leaders into creating a more vibrant community to attract and maintain young professionals within the Pioneer Valley.

The survey was distributed electronically from April 10 through May 17, 2012, and professionally analyzed. The survey sponsorships include Baystate Health, The Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts, Health New England, Moran Sheet Metal, Northampton Area Young Professionals, United Bank, United Way of Pioneer Valley, Western Massachusetts Electric, Westfield Bank, and Young Professional Society of Greater Springfield. One of our largest concerns was to ensure the survey results were diverse and inclusive of all individuals living within the Valley, as well as ensuring

a large sample of survey participants. We implemented a strategic communications plan that yielded 682 survey participants with demographics are relatively consistent with 2010 US Census data. Our next step includes discussions of how best to leverage the uses, and distribution, of the data.

## **Power to the People**

**Team Members:** Steve Abdow Steve Abdow, Alesia Days, Haydee Lamberty-Rodriguez , Ruby Maddox,Kelvin Molina, Kimberly Williams

**Power2thePeople Pioneer Valley** created a model program to assist in empowering residents across the Pioneer Valley to be able to access, engage and understand government and other power structures and perform self-advocacy in any context.

Our mission is to provide a *virtual platform* for residents and organizations within the Pioneer Valley to learn how to access, understand, and self-advocate with all power structures to include local, state, and federal government. Our target audience includes all residents within the Pioneer Valley and community organizations that provide services to residents.

The core of our project was the creation of self-use/help resource tools including:

- Social Media – **PowerToThePeoplePioneerValley** Facebook group and page
- Website – [www.power2thepeoplepioneervalley.net](http://www.power2thepeoplepioneervalley.net)
- Written Materials

## **The Valley Connectors**

*Asset Mapping Entrepreneurial and Small Business Development Services*

**The Valley Connectors are:** Madeline Landrau, Calvin McFadden, Katie Stebbins, Sarah Tanner, Tom Thacher, David Thibault

A robust entrepreneurial community has long been heralded as an indicator of a strong overall growth economy. The question for Western Massachusetts then becomes, how does the western regional economy of the state benefit from or conversely influence this top ranking? Is there a critical role that the western region plays and how do the resource providers support this position?

Upon coming together, the Valley Connectors wanted to address the current service providers who promote small business and entrepreneurial development. We worked to define what is a small business or entrepreneur. Though there is benefit to the local economy for large business to relocate to area, the group wanted to concentrate on the small businesses and entrepreneurs that make this area great and drive the national economy. We would focus our project on the current service providers for new and existing business, who provide resources in business planning, consulting services, mentoring and start-up financing.

On this journey, we discussed numerous ideas, including an entrepreneur conference or contest, the creating of an online one stop resource center, or isolating into one smaller segment in this market (i.e skilled professional from 3rd world countries, who cannot find employment primarily due to language barriers.) The crossroads of our project came when we interviewed 3 different service providers. Upon completion of the interviews, it became apparent that there was disconnect among the service providers and that a formal asset map was needed, prior to suggesting any solutions. Ultimately, we created and distributed a survey to capture how organizations are currently servicing the entrepreneurial community.