

Colorado State University center's open house gives community opportunity to fight local poverty



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Contact for Reporters:
Dell Rae Moellenberg
(970) 491-6009
DellRae.Moellenberg@colostate.edu

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FORT COLLINS - Colorado State University's Center for Public Deliberation will host an open house focused on mobilizing the community to raise poverty in Larimer County. The open house, held from 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesday, April 30, at the Northside Aztlan Community Center, allows the community a chance to interact with the Pathways Past Poverty project, a grassroots local initiative to help raise people out of poverty.

More than 150 community members have taken on eight issues, or "Pathways Past Poverty," to examine the problems and develop a list of goals for a community effort, spearheaded by the United Way. The eight areas to be addressed are:

- Enhance childhood education and achievement
- Create more and better jobs that lead to self sufficiency
- Provide job training and increase skill sets
- Increase individual responsibility for financial stability
- Provide solid foundations for families
- Address diversity and inequality
- Strengthening youth and families
- Enhance safety net through policy change

Goals for each area will be presented and community comment is encouraged. In particular, input from the community concerning the prioritization of the goals will be sought as the project transitions into researching and developing specific programs and ideas to reach the goals.

Open house participants will be given a survey to allow them to rank the importance of the goals and also will be able to provide comments and during small group discussions throughout the evening. New small group discussions will begin every 30 minutes

throughout the evening. In addition, participants will also be given a chance to identify if and how they would like to be involved as the project moves forward.

In May, the steering committee for the Pathways Past Poverty project will decide the next steps for the project. Over the summer and into the fall, committees will examine and propose specific programs to help the community reach the goals.

"It is clear that poverty has increased in our community in recent years, and the rising cost of food, health care, and gas is only likely to cause further problems," said Martin Carcasson, assistant professor in the Colorado State Department of Speech Communication and director of the university's Center for Public Deliberation. "The good news is that there are many things that can be done within communities to address poverty and help individuals recover and get back on the road to self-sufficiency. We hope to really engage people in a process to come up with-or borrow from other communities across the nation that are having success in this area-all kinds of ideas that will make an impact."

A follow-up forum will be held from 5 - 7 p.m. on Wednesday, May 7 in Loveland at city council chambers. Focus groups are also being held on low-income audiences that may not be able to attend the public forums.

For more information, see www.pathwayspastpoverty.org or www.cpd.colostate.edu.