

Midland Introspective 2007

Executive Summary

Overview of the Process

The Midland Introspective 2007 represents a departure from the earlier Midland Introspective reports. This report is less a descriptive assessment on the “needs” of the community and more a prescriptive assessment of what needs to be done to address the most critical issues facing the Midland area.

Every community has deeply imbedded problems that are resistant to solution, or even mitigation. Too often the citizens come to accept as inevitable the continuation of these problems, if not the tendency for them to worsen. There is great work being done by nonprofit and other agencies that wrestle with the effects of these problems and, as a result, many lives are improved. There is a need, however, to make better progress in solving, or at least substantially reducing, the problems themselves. In order to have different results, things need to be done differently.

These problems are complex and entrenched, with underlying barriers and causes that must be overcome if they are to be adequately addressed. This requires thoughtful strategies specifically designed to attack these barriers and underlying causes, as well as an investment of considerable resources to pursue those strategies. If there were unlimited resources perhaps it could all be done, but that is not possible. So, it is imperative to focus those resources and efforts in order to have impact. Difficult choices must be made and the choices are not simply between those things that are important and those that are not. Instead, it is necessary to make choices among the many “very important things” that are calling for attention.

This year, Midland Introspective 2007 brought together 100 individuals from 72 organizations and institutions and guided them through a process of “getting focused.” These were some of the most experienced health and human service professionals with collective expertise on the community’s most critical issues.

This process of getting focused is based on the premise that a rational, fact-based and outcome-focused decision-making process is essential for focusing limited resources to achieve meaningful impact for the community. It was designed to identify a limited number of issues on which those involved would collaborate, and ultimately, to also devise the best strategies for effectively addressing these issues. Over a three month period, participants in this process worked to develop the priorities plan presented in this report.

To aid with the interpretation of the report, it is important to define the terminology. The *Focus Areas* represent four very broad issue areas that are especially critical for this community’s current and future health and success. *Vision Statements* for each Focus Area seek to articulate what is hoped to be true about each issue area over time. *Target Issues* were then identified for each of these Focus Areas because of their central importance to achieving the Vision. For each Target Issue, participants identified specific *Objectives* that are critical to pursuing the Vision. The next step was to ask why those Objectives (or results) had not already been achieved, i.e. “What are the barriers or obstacles preventing those goals from being true already?” The “theory of change” for this process is that if the barriers preventing success can be eliminated or overcome,

then the Objective can be achieved. So *Strategies* for overcoming those barriers were then identified.

It is important to point out that not all of this community's resources should be focused on the specific priorities and strategies identified in this report. There are many programs and activities that are outside the scope of this report that need to continue and to be supported. They help maintain and improve quality of life for many Midlanders. Unless collaborative efforts begin to focus collective resources in support of specific strategies that are designed to deal with root causes, however, this community will not make the kind of progress it needs and deserves.

The Results

The result, as contained in the full report, is 24 specific Strategies to achieve 16 Objectives for ten Target Issues that are especially important to address in order to pursue the Vision Statements for each of the four Focus Areas. The following is a list of the Focus Areas, their Vision Statements and Target Issues:

Focus Area: Empowering Self-Sufficient Families

- *Vision:* All Midlanders have opportunities to build and preserve emotionally and financially stable families.
- *Target Issues:* 1) Emotionally Stable Families; 2) Financially Secure Families

Focus Area: Promoting Effective Education and Workforce Training

- *Vision:* All Midlanders have opportunities for educational and workforce training to enhance the quality of life.
- *Target Issues:* 1) Success in School; 2) Career Guidance and Training

Focus Area: Achieving Health and Wellness

- *Vision:* All Midlanders have opportunities for having their health and wellness needs met.
- *Target Issues:* 1) Physical Health; 2) Substance Abuse; 3) Mental Health

Focus Area: Promoting Safe and Affordable Neighborhoods

- *Vision:* All Midlanders have opportunities to live in safe and affordable housing and neighborhoods.
- *Target Issues:* 1) Permanent Housing; 2) Temporary Housing; 3) Quality Neighborhoods

Observations

The breadth and depth of involvement in this process by diverse institutions was impressive, as was the willingness of participants to not be hampered by their own institutional self-interest in analyzing issues and devising solutions. Among some overarching themes in the report are the following:

Marketing Plans - In a number of instances, lack of knowledge or unhealthy attitudes were seen as critical barriers, so key strategies involved improving knowledge or changing attitudes. In these cases, "marketing plans" were proposed as a strategy. The marketing plan would, among other things, identify distinct population groups, or "market

segments,” toward which specific message strategies would be targeted. These message strategies might vary in terms of specific content as well as the vehicles for communicating with the population. In order to develop these targeted message strategies, it will be necessary to conduct some research to better understand the identified populations and determine the most effective way of meaningfully communicating with them.

Targeted Research - Another theme was the need to gather specific data. In a number of cases, it was concluded that in order to design successful strategies to get at root causes, current information is needed. That may mean learning more about the specific population that is affected or about the problem itself.

Collaboration and Coordination of Programs and Services - A recurring theme was the need for greater explicit collaboration between organizations and institutions and greater coordination of their services and activities. A subset of this theme was engaging the business community in producing solutions. Some strategies involved enlisting the active support of businesses in developing and/or implementing programs that would not only help employees, but would also ultimately improve the success of the business.

Access and Capacity - In a number of cases, the participants identified a lack of access to existing services and/or limited organizational or program capacity as major issues and consequently proposed strategies for addressing these needs.

Next Steps

This report was created to be a springboard for collective, strategic action. It is expected that community institutions, those involved in this planning process as well as others, will take these recommendations and collaborate to refine the plans and work toward their implementation. It is envisioned that task forces, organized around the Focus Areas, Target Issues or perhaps even specific Objectives will be formed by those who are committed to carrying this work forward.

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