

Low-Income “Fellows” Voices Are Heard

Duluth’s Blueprint to End Poverty Fellows program has been the shining star of the initiative. Within the last six months these 13 low-income individuals have committed themselves to growing as community organizers, performing community-based research and educating the broader community on the reality of poverty in Duluth.

Each one of these Fellows has personal stories of poverty that are more powerful than all the statistics we can compile. Their participation in the Poverty Community Engagement Series was instrumental in educating the public about the everyday struggles of people in our community.

Part of the Fellows experience was gathering community research on the perception of poverty in Duluth. Fellows interviewed 115 low-income residents to find out their current struggles and concerns and also give them an opportunity to share their ideas of how poverty could be eliminated in Duluth. The results from the surveys supported the theory that there is not a single solution to ending poverty.

In addition to their outreach in the community, the Fellows worked on developing their skills as community organizers and leaders. They attended a series of workshops discussing the topics of race and discrimination, living wage, and telling their story. Fellows also attended Camp Wellstone for an intensive weekend of public policy and community organizing training.

Five Fellows traveled to St. Paul to be a voice for the low-income people of Duluth at the Minnesota Commission to End Poverty by 2020 meeting on June 27, 2007. Ernesto Rivas, a Blueprint Fellow and also a Damiano Social Worker, shared his personal story of poverty with the Commission.

“I can tell you from first hand what it’s like to wake up hungry, to wake up in someone else’s house, or living outside, walking around until it’s time to find a place to sleep,” Rivas said to the Commission in St. Paul. “I have moved from extreme poverty to the working poor class.”

Rivas shared his feelings about Blueprint. “The Blueprint project believed in me as a person that has experienced these hardships.” Rivas also shared his vision of the future, “I’m becoming the change that I want to see in the world, I want to contribute.”

Ernesto’s testimony is one example of the types of conversations Fellows are having throughout their work on the Blueprint. Sometimes it just takes one conversation at a time that can change the perceptions of a person or a community. Thanks to all the Blueprint Fellows and to all the low-income citizens of Duluth who shared their stories at the Blueprint events.

“The Blueprint project believed in me as a person that has experienced these hardships.”

—Ernesto Rivas, Blueprint Fellow and Damiano Social Worker



June 27, 2007. Blueprint Fellows William Brasted, Ashely Dyson, Stan Kaitfors, Justin Lenz, Gretchen Nickence, Senator Tony Lourey, and Ernesto Rivas after Minnesota Commission to End Poverty by 2020 meeting.