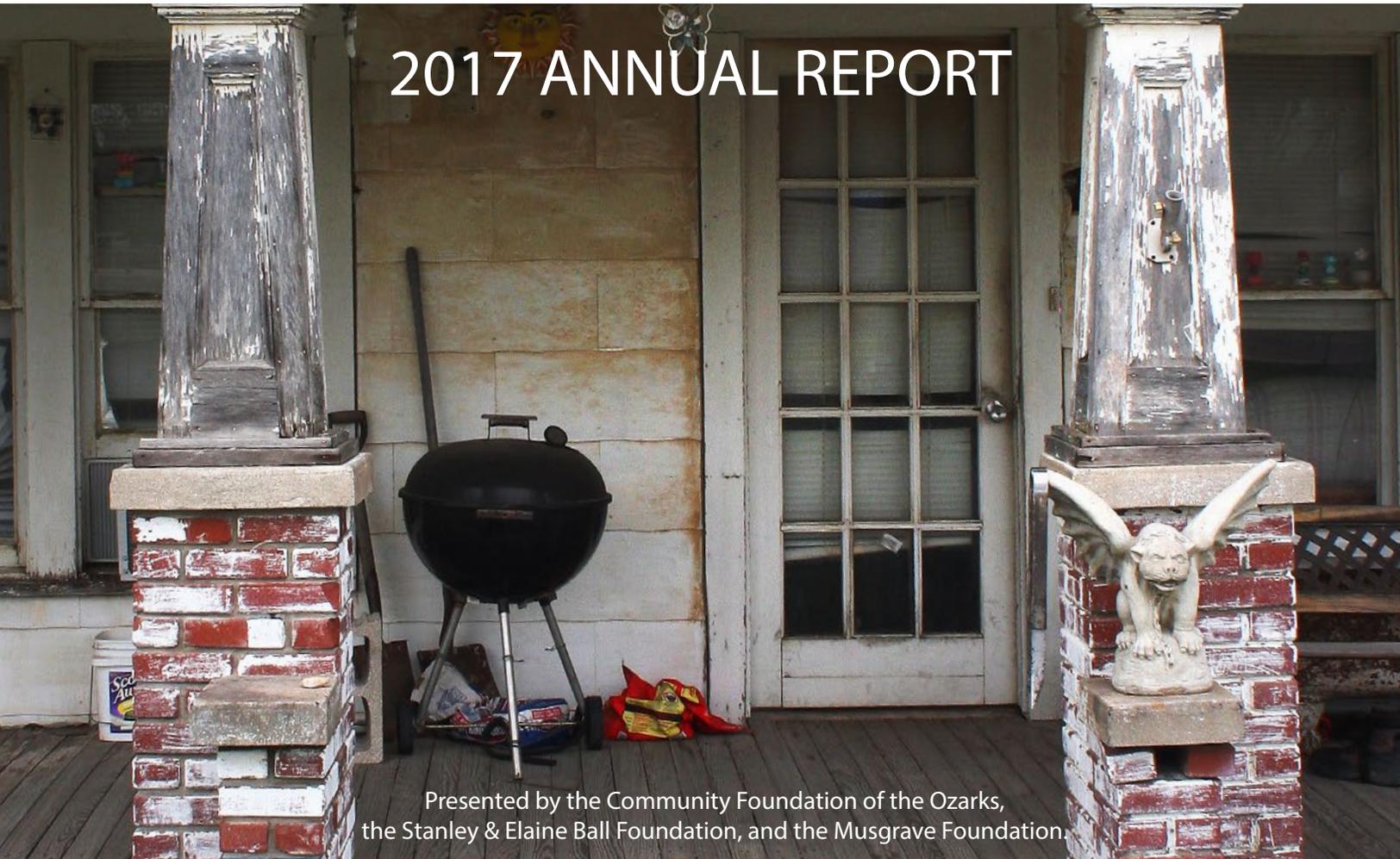


THE NORTHWEST PROJECT

Focusing on a Brighter Future for Families

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



Presented by the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, the Stanley & Elaine Ball Foundation, and the Musgrave Foundation.



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Introduction & Summary

In 2015, The Drew Lewis Foundation was awarded a \$1.3 million grant over five years by the Community Foundation of the Ozarks to implement The Northwest Project (NWP). Major funding for the grant is being provided by the CFO, the Stanley & Elaine Ball Foundation managed by Central Trust and the Musgrave Foundation.

The NWP is a collaboration among Missouri State University, Drury University, and the Drew Lewis Foundation working to address poverty in northwest Springfield. As described in further detail in subsequent sections, the goal of The Northwest Project is to pilot strategies over a five-year period to help families overcome the challenges that have kept them living in poverty and sustain their long-term success in emerging from those circumstances. The CFO selected northwest Springfield for this project because much of the area exceeds the city's overall 25.6 percent poverty rate. In addition, the privately funded Northwest Project will take place in concert with the City of Springfield's focus on improving public safety, infrastructure and chronic nuisance properties in this geographic area. The MSU/Drew Lewis/Drury partnership was selected for its vision of using a model that couples family support with neighborhood development and sustainability.



The Northwest Project vision for change is predicated on a model that includes both family support and a concentration on neighborhood development and sustainability. This type of community-driven development (CDD) focuses on bridging the gap between community members and community resources. CDD perceives people as assets and develops partnerships and social capital in the process. The strengths perspective underlying case management supports the CDD approach because it operates on the premises that (1) each person can change, learn and grow; (2) change occurs best in collaboration with families; and (3) every environment contains resources. NWP focuses on creating community access to information while developing an empowering environment within the neighborhoods served.

The project has recently completed its second cohort of participants, and participant-related outcomes are discussed in further detail below. The families in Cohort 3 have established goals and are working toward those goals with assistance in consolidating loans, improving credit scores, establishing and keeping a working household budget, and breaking the cycle of poverty in their families and communities. To date, 20 households have been served by the project. A summary of community collaboration, research efforts, awards and recognition, program expansions efforts, and other important outcomes and impacts is also discussed in the report.

Overall, while it may be too early to discuss long term program outcomes (such as reductions in generational poverty as the ultimate goal of the project), researchers are able to conclude the following at this time:



The NWP is changing and enhancing the resource structure of the Grant Beach neighborhood.

Homes are being fixed and neighbors are gathering over community dinners weekly. Community members, service organizations, and universities are collaborating to provide additional programmatic and systemic value to the NWP. Over 57 community service groups (including businesses, universities, and churches) have invested and partnered in NWP activities. Some 226 community members have provided 771 volunteer hours for an in-kind investment of \$16,425 in the past six months of the project alone. And approximately \$1.5 million has been sought in match grant funding for the project as it continues to grow and expand. These monetary and in-kind investments have provided the infrastructure needed for the wraparound support and community development.

Participants are making significant progress toward economic sustainability and self-sufficiency.

All three cohorts are located in City Council Zone 1 neighborhoods, namely the Grant Beach and Robberson neighborhoods. Intake and follow-up work has demonstrated that participants in Cohort 1 and 2 are on track for increasing income by at least 15 percent through workforce training, new

employment, and debt reduction, and attaining at least seven of the 10 sustainability assets by the end of 18 months. Currently, at the end of six months all Cohort 1 and 2 members have made improvement in seven assets (namely, housing, childcare, employment and parenting support). Three of five Cohort 1 participants are now employed full-time, bringing their total wages from \$50/month to about \$4,705. All but one of Cohort 1 were unemployed when they started the program. As described in the report, participants in Cohorts 1-3 have also made significant achievements in health and wellness, housing security, and social assets during the first year of programming, improving their lives and the lives of their families. Perhaps even as important is that the program has given NWP participants hope for the future.

Additional supports are being considered or added to meet household barriers to self-sufficiency.

Most NWP participants have a history of childhood trauma (namely childhood physical, sexual, or emotional assault). Trauma can have a significant impact on the life course and potentially hinder long-term efforts towards self-sufficiency if not addressed, therefore the NWP is considering additional options for support where abuse and trauma have been identified, as further discussed later in this report. Many participants also have a learning, mental, or physical disability, or are caring for, individuals with one or more disabilities. Additional support will also be sought to meet these needs among participants.

The economic value of the services provided by funders, community members, universities, and service organizations has, thus far, resulted in significant cost benefits that are profound.

Currently, researchers are attempting to calculate the total value of aligned programming provided by community organizations and industries, although it is currently estimated at least \$200,000 is in-kind services, programming, and resources. The total cash revenue budget for the NWP is approximately \$265,000 per year, resulting in a cash revenue of investment of approximately \$13,947 per household for those served in year one and an in-kind contribution of approximately an additional \$11,000 per household.



Description of the Northwest Model

The NWP proposal and vision for change are based upon a model that includes both family support and a concentration on neighborhood development and sustainability. Best practices demonstrate that by involving the priority population in development activities, poverty-reduction efforts are more inclusive, sustainable, and more cost-effective.

CDD is a grassroots focus that complements the local economy and government-run programs. Working within a neighborhood approach affords better opportunity to assess the needs of those who reside there, when compared to the more general or traditional approach where case managers and agency officials may not be fully aware of the unique needs of the neighborhood and the families that live therein. The strength of the selection process is predicated on the Fairbanks and its approach to neighborhood development. The NWP project model, at its inception, was loosely based upon the elements of the Jacksonville, Florida, 1,000 in 1,000 program.

Each family included in The Northwest Project will be effectively served by a trained case manager to assess its capacity for change. This assessment will be based on the family's current assets and unique needs as a family. Each year, the program will recruit at least 40 new families, achieved in two to three separate recruiting periods (two or three new cohorts, consisting of 10-15 individuals who have completed the intake process). As families progress through the program (each family obtains services for

an 18-month time period), program staff evaluate how well the individuals and the cohort system are helping families achieve their goals. For example, staff will reassess family progress through the stages of change and completion of their action plans. Staff will survey families, partners, and Social Work Case Management (SWCM) to ascertain how well they believe the program is progressing, e.g., caseload size, and how they should modify the processes.

Initial Intake Screening

The individuals in the NWP currently undergo an initial screening and intake process and are entered into a customized data entry and management system developed by Dr. Shannon McMurtrey of Drury University (formerly of Missouri State University), described in further detail in the "Community Collaboration" section of this report. This intake process includes: An assessment of financial needs, demographic data collection, evaluation of family willingness for action, creation of a plan for meeting immediate needs, and long-term goals. The intake process follows the informational meetings in which families learn about the opportunities offered and apply to the program.

The screening process includes an initial assessment of a family's eligibility.

Minimal eligibility requirements include:

1. Caregiver is currently employed or employable, but most likely in a job with limited career opportunities.
2. Caregivers possess their high school diploma/GED certificate or are GED eligible.
3. Families have stable housing.
4. Families demonstrate behavior indicative of the contemplation to action in the 10 program assets noted in NWP programming.
5. Individuals are at or below 200 percent federal poverty level (FPL).
6. Individuals have the capacity for change.
7. Resides in Zone 1 of Springfield, MO.



The families begin their programming with enrollment in Circles®, a 16-week, proven model of intensive programming led by NWP staff.

Case Management Teams

Along with Circles®, a case-management team works with families to refer them to additional resources, including Jobs for Life, Community Partnership of the Ozarks' CASH programming and neighborhood centers, OACAC child care, Consumer Credit Counseling of Southwest Missouri, Great Circle, and/or other agencies as needed. Individuals with felonies or past criminal issues are, and will continue to be, paired with the Springfield Metropolitan Bar Association for support. Families with youth will be connected to quality child care services, such as Life 360, Lighthouse Child & Family Development Center, Boys & Girls Club, and the Ozarks Regional YMCA. To be a part of the long-term case management program individuals/families must commit to participating in Circles® and/or Jobs for Life. Other programs will be referred based on need and availability.

Families enter the program in cohorts, which allows for intense interactions and plans in the first few months of participation. As families make progress, caseworkers slowly decrease their services to encourage naturally occurring interdependence with the community. Social work students from Missouri State University and Evangel University assist families in completing their action steps. In addition, students assist families determined ineligible for the program to achieve the competencies to either be eligible or to exit poverty on their own. Therefore, families may receive in-depth case management services for four to eight months and less intense services for as long as needed to achieve goals as provided by partners, students, and volunteers. The families, their team members, and their caseworkers meet as often as necessary to review, reassess, and modify the action plan as necessary. The CM team also develops emergency procedures and resources to help families avoid succumbing to the "Cliff Effect" that occurs when financial improvement leads to loss of subsidies and may force a regression, such as obtaining a high-interest payday loan.



Individuals will be in the case management program for at least 18 and up to 36 months, depending on need. On a monthly basis, agency partners, Circles® Allies, and other advocates will meet to review case notes for the individuals in the program. At this time, the group collectively works to address any unmet needs of individuals in the program.

Up to Today

The Northwest Project first focused on the Grant Beach neighborhood because it has a strong sense of community-driven development and support from within the neighborhood.

To date, program partners have identified a second community—the Robberson neighborhood—to begin programming. There is potential progression to four communities by the end of year two.

The NWP goal is to serve families from a central hub located within one mile of their home. The annual goal is to add 30 to 40 households into intensive programming every five-to-six months. These families will begin with case management and weekly group programming for accountability. In five years, it is anticipated that 500-600 households will be directly affected by the programming; however, through collaboration and directing families to additional programming, there is potential to reach far more citizens.

For the first CDD hub location, program partners are offering most of the services at The Fairbanks or within Grant Beach to reduce transportation and time commitment issues for the first three cohorts.

Participant Outcomes

Success of NWP poverty reduction depends in part on reliable and accurate information on the nature and causes of poverty. Evaluation of NWP participants includes collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Data is collected through an initial screening form, intake form, follow-up forms, case-management logs, and qualitative interviewing processes.

Factors explored include Missouri Self-Sufficiency Scale benchmark, social capital, employment history, childhood experiences, and other indicators that may contribute to poverty. Quantitative data provide insight into crucial dimensions of poverty, while qualitative data highlight less-measurable subjective dimensions such as fear, hope, and resilience.

Cohort Demographics

Comparison of Grant Beach Cohorts

	Cohort #1 Graduates Initial intake Apr. 2016	Current Cohort #2 Initial intake Sept. 2016	Cohort #3*	Grant Beach Totals Avg.*
Lives Impacted	26	45	31	87
Adults	10	23	16	46
Children	16	22	15	41
Families	5	10	8	20
Average Monthly Income	\$1,489	\$1,444	\$1,633	\$1,522
Average Family Size	5.4	4.5	4.5	4.8
Median Participant Age	40	48.9	34.3	41.1
Average Yearly Income	\$17,863	\$17,331	\$19,596	\$18,263
Average Number of Children Under 6	2.2	1.5	.66	1.45
Participants Employed	20%	20%	50%	30%

*Note: 3 families participated in both cohort group 1 and group 2.
Data was taken when participants started the Northwest Project.

Cohort Group Outcomes

Originally, the NWP had planned to utilize the “9 pivotal assets” as benchmarks for success as outlined by the Jacksonville 1,000 in 1,000 homes model. These assets were predicated on providing participants with: (1) **Social Assets** such as assets required for taking care of children and building productive relationships with others, (2) **Human Assets**, such as assets to attain knowledge, skills, and abilities to earn adequate income and (3) **Financial Assets** like assets to effectively manage money and build wealth. The “9 pivotal assets” included: (1) Affordable Housing (housing representing no more than 30 percent of one’s total monthly budget); (2) Transportation (participants have reliable transportation); (3) Quality Childcare (children are enrolled in quality child care, before-school, or after-school programming as needed for children over two years old); (4) Parenting classes (where participants have not participated in other similar classes for three years. This includes Triple P and Parenting Cafe and also includes quality programming like Parents as Teachers, Pregnancy ABC’s, and Prenatal Classes by the Doula Foundation); (5) Resolution of Criminal Background (where applicable); (6) Accountability (such as attending required program and community resource meetings and engaging consistently in the program); (7) Job training; (8) Taking Advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit (attainment of EITC benefit and application of benefit to personal plan where applicable); and (9) Monthly Budget management (adhering to a budget, reducing debt and working on a credit score of 650) . In addition to these assets, the NWP has added a 10th pivotal asset, termed (10) Health and Wellness (including access to healthcare and insurance). These 10 NWP assets have been termed the “10 Sustainability Assets” needed for economic mobility, sustainability, and self-sufficiency.

It is significant to note that the “9 pivotal assets” have been modified slightly in the NWP to reflect unique and local needs and to allow for alignment with existing and proposed community resources within these broad categories. For example, the Circles® program provides skill-based training on budgeting, parenting, and emotional health. Monthly budget management has also become an asset that could now be best termed “Financial Planning and Coaching” as the services provided are much more robust and comprehensive than simply budgeting best practices. The NWP also does not currently have the resources to address the many diverse needs of those with felonies or significant criminal records, although as the project expands, the hope is to be able to begin to address these needs as they pose significant challenges for economic mobility for ex-offenders. Where possible or applicable, participants are connected with legal services through a collaboration with the Springfield Metropolitan Bar Association.

All of the 10 stability assets are considered to be fundamental in a person’s ability to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. Within these broad categories, the NWP provides intensive case management and neighborhood/community resource coordination for participants.

Goals for NWP (also adapted from the Jacksonville 1,000 in 1,000 Home project) include:

1. 500 families/unique households served
2. 83 percent of families will be on track to complete program activities by the end of 18 months.
3. Participants will attain a 15 percent increase in income and 7 of the 10 Sustainability Assets upon completion of the 18-month program.

Progress in these 10 key areas are as follows:

10 Stability Asset Attainment Measures

	Cohort #1 Initial	Cohort #1 Current (10 months)	Cohort #2 Initial	Cohort #2 Current (5 months)	Cohort #3 Initial	Cohort #3 Current (2 months)
Total in Cohort	5	5	10	10	8	8
1 Affordable Housing	80%	100%	60%	80%	100%	100%
2 Quality Childcare	60%	80%	80%	80%	38%	50%
3 Transportation	80%	100%	60%	60%	88%	88%
4 Monthly Budget	0%	100%	30%	80%	13%	38%
5 Earned Income Tax Credit	20%	60%	30%	30%	50%	50%
6 Resolved Criminal Issues	100%	100%	100%	100%	88%	88%
7 Parenting Class	0%	60%	40%	80%	38%	63%
8 Job Training	0%	40%	10%	30%	38%	38%
9 Accountability	100%	100%	100%	90%	100%	100%
10 Health & Well Being	100%	100%	60%	70%	75%	75%

As noted in this chart, 100 percent of Cohort 1 participants who had established goals in transportation, childcare, or budgeting met or exceeded their respective goals and now have reliable transportation, affordable and quality childcare, and have a working budget by which they manage any income or revenue. As also noted in the chart, progress has been made in other areas of financial management (such as utilizing the earned income tax credit) and 40 percent of Cohort 1 was actively engaged in parenting classes and in improving relationships with their children or family (where this was identified as a specific goal). Twenty percent of Cohort 1 has also made progress towards job training and employment.

Collected data and outcomes demonstrate how NWP participants are benefiting from increasing community resources as they address issues related to self-sufficiency and stability. Participants are seeing positive and productive changes that are impacting the trajectory of their lives and families.

Overall, participants in Cohorts 1-3 have:

- **Reduced household debt, adhered to budgeting and financial coaching suggestions, and worked toward obtaining employment that encourages economic mobility:** Intake and follow-up work has demonstrated that participants in Cohort 1 and 2 are on track for increasing income by at least 15 percent and attaining at least seven of the 10 sustainability assets by the end of 18 months. Working with financial coaches and bank and credit

partners, participants have had medical debt has been forgiven, high-interest payday loans refinanced, and full-time employment achieved for all participants in Cohort 1. Specific attention has been paid to ensuring that the employment being encouraged for NWP participants is between at least \$12-16/hour to reflect area cost-of-living expenses.

- **Received intensive case management that has assisted in addressing individual needs and barriers, although additional case management throughout the 18-month program time frame has been noted as a need for future programming.** All participants receive several months of intensive case management to work toward specific goals within the 10 assets of sustainability. Given the complex and intersecting needs of many families, additional intensive case management throughout the 18 month time frame is recommended.
- **Participated in the Circles® program curriculum and been matched with ‘ally’ mentors:** Ally mentors have made significant connections with NWP Cohort 1 and 2 participants. These mentors provide additional guidance, help, and support for participants in meeting their goals.
- **Made efforts towards individual health and wellness.** NWP participants have also been working together toward healthy living, encouraging one another to exercise, eat healthy, and quit smoking.

Participant Impact Statements

“I have a new attitude towards money, people, and my future. I have learned to keep a manageable budget, which has helped reduce debt and increase my credit score. I learned that it is good to save; that not every penny needs to be spent as soon as I get it. I now have possibilities and goals to look forward to and strive for such as finishing college, beginning my career, and sky-diving.”

- **Meredith**, from her Circles® Graduation Speech

“You all have given me hope. You’ve given me a chance not to worry as much as I normally do.” “I can make plans. Me and the girls - we can go to McDonald’s, you know. We can go to the movies.” “I am just beginning to live again.”

- **Amber**, from KSMU Interview

“We were hopeless and the Northwest Project gave us hope!”

- **Bill & Norma**

“I finally came out of my shell and started to talk more. I have signed up for college, which I will be starting in August. I feel like I have become a more independent person. I’ve been able to talk to more people and to be able to express myself more.”

- **Deandra**, from her *Circles@ Graduation Speech*

Several participants in the third cohort at Grant Beach shared their initial understandings and hopes for their involvement with the program.

“I just feel like we are going through the same circle every year. We change every year, but I want us to move forward.”

- **Dedra**

“My son needed shoes...and I couldn’t buy him shoes. I feel hope for this [year], that’s why I’m am in this program.”

- **Jean**

“Before, the people I hung out with were not good for me, so I want to improve my social life and financial life”

- **Beverly**

“We are just living paycheck to paycheck, and I want move past that. I have lots of ideas, but I don’t have any resources.”

- **Elisha**

Anne’s Story

Anne, also a participant in Cohort 2 of the NWP, began the program with a substantial amount of debt. When Anne began the program, she did not even want to discuss her debt and even debated dropping out of the program to avoid bringing it up. Through encouragement of the NWP staff, Anne stayed engaged and agreed to dive into finding a solution for her debt. Most of the debt was medical, totaling around \$40,000 of her total \$60,000 debt. The NWP assisted Anne in applying for financial assistance through Cox and Mercy charity funds. Cox approved Anne for the maximum assistance, a 95 percent forgiveness program, and wrote off about \$24,000 of her medical debt. The NWP staff connected Anne with Consumer Credit Counseling Services and they are considering her options regarding her remaining debt. With replacement donations from One Church One Family, she was also able to return her rent-to-own stove and toddler bed, saving her over \$200 a month.

\$24,000 Debt Forgiven
\$200+ Additional Income

Lori’s Story

Lori, a participant in the second cohort of NWP, has experienced major financial successes. Lori began the program with a payday loan, a consolidation loan, and an auto loan. Since beginning the program, Lori has paid the remainder of her payday loan off on her own with no financial assistance, just encouragement and budgeting assistance. With the assistance of Todd Parnell, Lori met with CUCCU in regards to refinancing her consolidation loan that had an interest rate of 38%. Lori learned that she had an outstanding credit score of 750. The bank refinanced at a much lower interest rate without the backing of the NWP. The bank was also able to add her auto loan in with the consolidation, giving her just one payment. The refinanced loan is saving Lori \$118 a month. The NWP has also assisted Lori with setting clear and realistic goals for obtaining her real estate broker’s license.

Credit Score of 750
\$118 Additional Income

Additional Outcome Research

Hardiness Index

NWP evaluators are using the Family Hardiness Index (FHI), an instrument that measures family resistance to stress (beginning with the third cohort of participants). The 20-item instrument measures the characteristics of hardiness as a stress-resistance and adaptation resource in families. Hardiness specifically refers to the internal strength and durability of the family; hardiness is characterized by a sense of control over the outcomes of life events and hardships. Higher levels of family hardiness are associated with better family coping and adaptation. Researchers⁵ found that parents with high coping used more coping strategies and used outside resources more frequently and freely than those with lower coping strategies.

This resiliency index was noted throughout the year-one data collection and measurement process as a significant component that was lacking in the assessment and progress measurement process.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

Research has shown that the impact of childhood experiences, whether positive or negative, has a direct impact on adult well-being. A seminal study, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE),¹ proved a strong relationship exists between stressful childhood experiences and adult health. The trauma of physical abuse, chronic neglect, sexual abuse and other types of maltreatment often lead to poor mental and physical health well into adulthood. High ACE scores contribute to major public health problems such as diabetes, cancer, stroke, and other fatal diseases. Other significant short- and long-term consequences include lower academic performance, depression, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, lower self-esteem, and delinquency.² In addition, lack of proper care during childhood sharply increases the likelihood of adult poverty and homelessness.³

Several NWP participants have experienced

NWP Participants Childhood Experiences

53%	Physical abuse
72%	Multiple adverse childhood experiences
39%	Lived with drug user
61%	Lived with a person who was mentally ill

adverse childhood experiences.

ACE scores of NWP participants were about 50 percent higher than those tested in previous nationwide studies, meaning these individuals experienced much higher levels of trauma in their childhoods. These factors are important because of the negative effect each may have on an individual's ability to function in the workforce and within the family unit.

Special Needs - Disabilities

Of the first 12 families participating in the Northwest Project, all but one of the families have a child with special learning needs or disabilities. This very high rate (91 percent) compares to the national rate of children with specific learning and physical disabilities – 35 percent.⁴

This has created compounding challenges for these families as they try to balance doctors' appointments, specialists' appointments, and managing their children's conditions on a daily basis. Pursuing employment can sometimes take a backseat to the more pressing needs of assisting a child with health conditions. This was one area in which the researchers believe more exploration may be needed. This may also be an area in which additional supports could be added to programming for families.

Two cohorts have graduated the Circles® program (although wrap around services are provided for a period of 18 months post Circles® graduation) and a 3rd Cohort has been accepted into the programming and is currently making its way through various case management and other programming. As noted, all three cohorts are located in City Council Zone 1 neighborhoods, namely the Grant Beach and Robberson neighborhoods.

[1] Felitti, et al., 1998

[2] English, Widom, & Brandford, 2004

[3] Herman, et al., 1997

[4] Natl. Center for Education Statistics, 2016

[5] VanCleve, *Journal of Pediatric Nursing* (1989): 172-176

Stakeholder Recognition & Investment

The NWP has been the subject of many media stories over the past year and has been acknowledged by various community award programs including:

- (1) Amy Blansit as a Civic Contributor Award;
- (2) an MSU \$500 Faculty Grant Recognition for Community Service;
- (3) Amy Blansit will be recognized by the MSU Foundation with a Public Affairs Mission Service Award;
- (4) Amy Blansit was also asked to speak of the program model at the most recent Federal Reserve Meeting in St. Louis;
- (5) The NWP was the recipient of the 2016 Community Engagement from the Missouri State University Center for Community Engagement (MSU CCE); and
- (6) The NWP received the MSU CCE for Community Recognition Award.

The NWP in the last year has also served as a model for the NW Arkansas Jones Center, Nebraskans for Civic Reform, and ENACTUS Arkansas, all of whom have toured The Drew Lewis Foundation facility at The Fairbanks to learn more about NWP programming.

Springfield Public Schools has deepened its commitment to programming by expanding the NWP into the neighboring Robberson School District, also located in Zone 1. The Robberson School District is currently ranked 770th (of 865) elementary schools in the State. The need for additional support for

under-resourced families in this neighborhood is evidenced by a free and reduced lunch eligibility rate of approximate 86 percent.

NWP staff held a resource fair for Robberson families and began Circles® programming at this location in April 2017. Thirty families have attended community dinners and the first cohort of families for Circles® programming is currently being screened.

Other media mentions include:

The Northwest Project Brings Together Community. (February 7, 2017). Missouri State University Communications.

Maroon Minute Recognizes the Northwest Project. (October 10, 2016). Missouri State University Communications.

Northwest Project Brings Community Together. (January 24, 2017). KSMU Ozarks Public Radio.

\$1.3 Million to Go Toward Building Neighborhood Hubs in Northwest Springfield. (April 5, 2016). Springfield News-Leader.

Northwest Project to Bring Families Out of Poverty. (2017). OzarksFirst.com.

From Hopelessness to Hope: The Story of One Low-Income Residents Struggle to Get By. (December 27, 2016). KSMU Radio.

A Lot of Good Happened in 2016 Despite a Peculiar Year. (December 27, 2016). Springfield News-Leader.

Community Collaborations

Alignment with Current Community Initiatives

The Northwest Project is intended to reduce and provide solutions for poverty, specifically by building the capacity of households and neighborhoods and addressing opportunity gaps within economic and social infrastructure.

Poverty has been named one of the top 'Red Flags' in the Community Focus Report for Springfield-Greene County. The goal of the Community Focus Report is to identify the overall conditions that deserve recognition and attention in Springfield and Greene County. Various red flags in the report are addressed by NWP project activities including job training; creating conditions that are necessary for supporting economic development in neighborhoods and communities (such as Reliable Transportation, Affordable Housing, Quality Childcare, Resolved Criminal Background, Healthcare & Well-being), mitigating the negative impact of poverty on families; increasing neighborhood trust; facilitating avenues towards appropriate physical, emotional, and mental health care; addressing neighborhood social determinants of health; and connecting households with educational and housing resources. (Part of the report also identifies the need to build such infrastructure.)

In addition the City of Springfield announced in July 2016 what has been termed a "Zone Blitz" intended to promote economic development, reduce poverty, promote civic



engagement, improve community resources (including food access) and repair or build infrastructure in one Council Zone at a time (starting with those that are particularly under-resourced). The first Zone that is being served by this initiative is Council Zone 1. The Grant Beach Neighborhood is located in Zone 1 and therefore not only aligns the project with current community initiatives, but also allows the model utilized to be replicated as different Council Zones are served each year.

Current Community Partnerships

The NWP has received substantial and unprecedented community support. Currently, there are over 57 community-based agencies and organizations that have committed their services, time, or resources to support the efforts of the NWP. These groups include a variety of organizations.

The NWP includes a number of community agencies that provide resources related to the 10 pivotal assets. These partners include organizations like Ozarks Technical Community College, the City of Springfield, Consumer Credit Counseling of Southwest Missouri, Springfield Community Gardens, Springfield Public Schools, Life360 Family Services, Habitat for Humanity, Boys & Girls Clubs of Springfield, Great Circle-Parenting Life Skills Center, Hand in Hand Multicultural Center, Care to Learn, Springfield Metropolitan Bar Association, Ozarks Regional YMCA, and Schweitzer United Methodist Church Jobs for Life Program, along with many others.



Community partnering organizations work to bring stability and success to the community at large. They partner with the NWP to provide resources including affordable housing, quality childcare, job training, and food security.

Part of the original grant proposal also noted that Missouri State University would explore opportunities for companion funding (specifically federal funding). Several grant applications have been submitted to date. In November 2016, a federal grant proposal was submitted on behalf of the NWP to the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services, Assets for Independence grant program. The NWP requested \$225,000 per year (\$1 million over the course of five years) to provide savings match funds and financial literacy and empowerment programming to 250 NWP participants. Project activities would include: (1) 1:1 matching of IDA savings (housed at CUCCU) using participant employment funds as match; (2) Hiring a part time “Economic Empowerment” Coordinator who will coordinate financial literacy and support education (along with partners such as Great Southern Bank) and who will provide guidance and IDA action plan coordination/financial case management with NWP participants; and (3) collecting project specific data, in cooperation with Missouri State University and the Department of Health and Human Services to assess the relative strengths of asset based empowerment models as the NWP continues to expand and as it is replicated in other under-resourced neighborhoods in Springfield, MO. As of the date of this report, funding decisions by OCS have not yet been made.

Grant requests have been made to assist with mental health needs, building fundraising capacity, community dinner resources, and transportation. It is also significant to note that a grant strategy has been established that attempts to garner additional local and regional foundation funds of upwards of \$500,000 for the project (including potential workforce development training funds) through May 2017. Missouri State University has designated a faculty member to assist with the development of this strategy and to assist in grant-writing efforts on behalf of the project. It is also significant to note that Drury University and Missouri State University have been in communication to apply together for certain programs that

may be beneficial for the program at large. Drury was recently awarded an AmeriCorps subcontract from Mission St. Louis that will be assisting specifically with NWP research efforts.

Improvements that have been made to programming based upon any barriers identified. Currently The Northwest Project is utilizing Charity Tracker, Microsoft Excel, and SPSS to collect and analyze program-related data. However, these systems have proved to have limited data capabilities needed for effective program outcomes measurement.

The NWP is now in collaboration with Dr. Shannon McMurtrey of Drury University to create a customized web-based data collection platform. Dr. McMurtrey has provided these services at no cost to the program (see chart for value of this donated service). The web-based data entry system would allow potential participants to apply for the program online, and allow staff and volunteers to manage the data in an easier, more user-friendly, and most importantly, HIPAA-compliant format. He has started work on a system that has a temporary URL of www.northwestproject.org.

Once development of the application is complete, it will be hosted with Amazon

Shannon McMurtrey’s In-Kind Contributions

100-150	Hours Donated
7,500	Lines of Code Created
270	Files Created
\$25,000	Value of Project Development
\$4,000	Value of Annual Maintenance Fee

Web Services to allow for scalability and the option of having a business associate’s agreement to be in compliance with the HIPAA Omnibus rule of 2013.

Having a custom-developed system will allow the team to collect data that is of specific interest to the project as well as be in a format that can be exported for statistical analysis. Initial goals for the system include the ability to assign a code to each neighborhood center participating in the project, which they can share with interested individuals who can then sign up for the project. From there the team members at The Northwest Project can screen applications and assign individuals to cohorts. This will

allow the efficient tracking of attendance, follow-up assessments, and further analysis. The hope is that this system can be shared with other neighborhood centers as the program expands into subsequent neighborhoods.

It is also significant to note that progress has been made in developing relationships with financial institutions that can assist NWP families in repairing credit, developing financial literacy, and establishing a relationship with a financial home.

To date, these institutions include Commerce Bank, City Utilities Community Credit Union,

Central Bank, Regions Bank and Great Southern Bank.

These groups have provided one-on-one financial coaching, small loans to build credit, simplified banking vehicles for low-income families entering the banking system, and personal support and praise for families reaching financial goals. These personalized touch points are the difference NWP families need to understand a financial system they have previously avoided.

Other Notable Numbers at One Year General Updates

Engaged with more than
57 organization & business partners

Over **\$18,000** in
donated dental services
(Ozarks Preferred Dental)

More than **\$31,000**
in **refinanced loans**

\$25,000 in medical **debt forgiven**

More than **226 volunteers**,
performing **771 hours of service**
in **294 occurrences of volunteering**,
with an **economic impact of \$16,425**

More than **13**
Northwest Project recognition
awards & media stories

2 Families placed in homes
through "The Blue House Project,"
providing stable housing for these families through a
\$100,000 private investment

8 Churches
involved in One Church One Family,
supporting **13 families**
with **5 additional churches**
currently considering their involvement

(The intention is to assist families in gaining stability so that they are able to purchase their home within 2-5 years.)

Cohort #1 Updates

3 out of 5
Cohort #1 participants are
now employed full-time,
bringing their total wages from
\$50 a month to about \$4,705

Cohort #1 participants celebrate
6 months
of timely loan payments this week.

(All but one of Cohort #1 were unemployed when they started the program. The one that was employed worked very part-time.)

Community Awareness on Poverty-related Issues

Currently there has been some discussion in the larger Springfield community on the public's perception of poverty (causes and consequences) as well as what solutions are most effective for addressing poverty as a community. Missouri State Sociology faculty member Christina Ryder and Drury Center for Nonprofit Leadership Executive Director Dan Prater will explore current community attitudes, opinions, and understandings about poverty and solutions to poverty. The study may also point to trends that are present in current community debates and will be supported by various groups in the community. The study will be based upon the "Perceptions of Poverty" survey, an established measure used over several decades in multiple settings and locations in the United States, allowing for comparative data. It is hopeful



that this survey will not only benefit NWP research and activities, but other community efforts.

Ally Survey & Staff Impact

In addition to collecting data on the participants and families, the NWP also recently started studying community allies and their experiences with the NWP.

As part of programming, NWP participants are matching with a mentor (called "Allies"). Allies are able to help participants in meeting their goals, provide support through the process, and help build their social networks.

NWP researchers are creating a survey to evaluate the community ally/mentor experience. The survey will include demographic information and specific questions about ally motivations and ways their experiences have changed their views on poverty. The survey should be completed in spring 2017.

A nationwide online platform, GivePulse, is being used locally to allow community members to find details of various volunteer opportunities, including those with the NWP. GivePulse also assists NWP team in

accurately tracking and managing volunteers' time served on the project.

NWP Volunteer Data (from October 2016 to April 2017)

226	People
771	Hours
294	Occurrences of Volunteering
\$16,425	Economic Impact of Time Donated

The NWP has also made a difference for many staff that are working on the project and graduate assistant students from both Missouri State University and Drury University that have dedicated time and resources to program activities. This investment has notably impacted their lives, career paths, and understandings of community engagement and involvement.

“I am truly grateful everyday for the opportunity to be involved with the Northwest Project. This kind of work is a personal passion of mine. I believe that this program is making a real difference in people’s lives and changing our community. Seeing our participants light up with hope after many years of feeling the heavy weight of poverty is indescribable. I love that this program allows, and even encourages, me to be transparent about my own life and come alongside my neighbors, not as an expert or a “helper,” but as what I like to call “a friend on the journey.” I think real change and growth, both personally and for our participants, often happens through deep and authentic relationships. The Northwest Project participants are amazing and courageous people. They touch my life and my heart nearly every day. I am so thankful to be a part of this team and honored to walk alongside those who are working toward self-sufficiency. Thank you, Missouri State University, for giving me this opportunity! You have truly changed me forever.”

- Amy F.

“I’ve never felt more impactful and useful as I do as an employee of The Northwest Project. Every day is a new adventure, and I love having the freedom to say, “yes” when hearing new ideas and ways to change our community from the inside out. We invest in families and we commit for the long-haul. I am grateful to find an employer that values real, sustainable change.”

-Kristina

“I really enjoy all the leadership opportunities I’ve been given. I have had some great experiences working with the community and health and wellness promotions.”

- Ben

Community-based Resource Building

Blue House Project

In December 2016, a private donor committed a \$100,000 investment to begin improving the residential concerns in Grant Beach.

Two homes have been purchased, and two Northwest Project families have moved into the homes. The families intend to purchase the homes within two-to-five years. The rent is low, but similar to the purchase price, allowing the families to continue working on budget, while learning about home ownership. The families commit to remain involved with The Northwest Project through the duration of their tenancy.

This project, named “The Blue House Project,” will work with families to build credit, use resources for down payments, and educate on home maintenance.

Photo of first home in the Blue House Project.



Financial Report

NWP leaders have learned that each cohort's needs are unique, and the flexibility of a private grant allows the staff to serve the true needs of the individual participants. For example, the first two cohorts needed extensive dental care. A local dentist offered nearly \$18,000 in services for the cost of materials and supplies. Funds were pulled from office supply and technology line items to pay for the co-pays. The funds for the office supplies and technology were provided by The Rotary Club of Southeast Springfield.

Once the grant was awarded, the grant was leveraged to attract additional funds. The Rotary Club of Southeast Springfield provided funds for computers and other technology improvements at The Fairbanks.

The Rotary Club of Southeast Springfield and other organizations have also donated food resources, allowing for funds marked in this category to be shifted to back small consolidation loans at City Utilities Community Credit Union (CUCCU). (Entering the banking system is the best means to improve credit score.)

Cohort 1 primarily needed assistance

with consolidating payday loans while Cohorts 2 and 3 need more traditional loans consolidated to decrease interest rates. Cohort 3 needs help with both of these, further demonstrating the need for a flexible grant budget. By shifting funds and depositing \$20,000 into an account with CUCCU, the NWP is able to financially back the small consolidation loans.

To date, all CUCCU loans have been paid on time.

Community volunteers and business partnerships have provided free parenting resources, free financial education, free legal services, and donated food. Coupled with financial stewardship, the NWP is able to fund expansion into other neighborhoods at a faster pace than predicted. In 2017, will include the additions of Robberson, Woodland Heights, and Heart of the Westside neighborhoods will be added. Should the community continue to support the NWP at the current rate, two additional neighborhoods could be included by spring 2018.

2017 Annual Financial Report Chart

	Description	Financial Year 1	Financial Year 2
Personnel	Programming, Social Work, GA's, VISTA	59%	68%
Travel	Circles® training, DC Advocacy	1%	1%
Supplies	Office, operations, food, resources	3%	4%
Programming	Booklets, education, legal, childcare, transportation	11%	8%
Subcontracts	Drury Evaluation, GivePulse, Circles®, lease	26%	19%
Match/In-kind	Partner Agency Resources	\$307,000	\$320,000

Recommendations for Year Two

As noted in the report, there are additional areas in which added supports have been noted as significant to moving forward, including: The possibility for additional trauma-informed, care-support structures (an option being currently explored with grant funding) additional support for those with disabilities, or caring for those with disabilities, additional intensive case management for the period after Circles® programming and coordinating transportation support for households. In addition, while the program has expanded into differing neighborhoods, more coordinated outreach with neighborhood groups and allies may be needed in order to meet the goals of reaching 500 separate households by the end of the five-year pilot project timeframe.

Looking ahead to the second year, NWP researchers will continue identifying critical factors that impact families and neighborhoods. A consideration in selecting measurable outcomes is whether it is reasonable to believe individuals and communities can achieve them. Robert Sampson, author of “Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect,” a landmark study on neighborhoods, found that individual outcomes are not simply the result of personal choices. Instead,

key informants within neighborhoods have wide influence on health, civic engagement, immigration and other well-being indicators. These social structures and processes can limit options and reproduce existing inequalities between individuals, households, and neighborhoods. Using this model, NWP researchers will assess the prevalence of neighborhood dynamics and how these may also influence individuals and families.

The researchers also recommend additional processes for neighborhood involvement in programming activities (such as a NWP advisory group comprised of NWP graduates and other neighborhood members). Currently, both Drury University and Missouri State University are exploring opportunities for training community members in neighborhood development best practices and structures (such as how to run or coordinate neighborhood meetings). This training, in addition to more formalized input from NWP graduates who are that have graduated the program and are able to speak to gaps in services or programming as they attempt to maintain forward momentum, is expected to only enhance and complement additional neighborhood research and neighborhood capacity building.

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