

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Impact Poverty Holds April Meeting

Paducah, KY April 15, 2011 – The Impact Poverty Task Force held its monthly meeting on Thursday, April 14, 2011 at the Paducah Public School Board of Education.

Ashley Wright, Executive Director of the United Way of Paducah-McCracken County, served as the meeting facilitator. This meeting focused on domestic violence, mental health, homelessness, drug addiction and crime and how those things relate or do not relate to poverty.

The first panel that addressed the Task Force consisted of: Chief James Berry, Paducah Police Department, Chris McNeill, Drug Court and Department of Public Advocacy, Sergeant Gilbert, Paducah Police Drug Unit, Captain Matt Carter, McCracken County Sheriff's Department Drug Unit and Darrin Thomas, Director of Center Point (residential drug treatment center in Paducah).

The panel discussed crime and drugs in Paducah and McCracken County. The group agreed that not all cases that come through their offices have a link to those in poverty; however that can sometimes be an issue. They commented that they see a great deal of generational offenders. They deal with many individuals from within an extended family. The panel also agreed that most of the arrests dealing with theft and burglary can be traced back to drug habits. Those on drugs typically do not have the means to maintain the habit and resort to stealing in order to pay for them. Chief Berry brought data to the group to support the fact that, "there are a lot of good kids in Paducah. For crime rates to come down we need to engage kids proactively." The panel stressed the importance of educating and mentoring the youth in Paducah and McCracken County as a way to deter them from the generational offender cycle.

The second panel to address the Task Force consisted of: Vonnie Hayes-Adams, Merryman House Domestic Violence Center, Heidi Surheinrich, Paducah Cooperative Ministries and Parry Hughes, Vice President of Clinical Services at Four Rivers Behavioral Health.

The panel discussed domestic violence, homelessness and mental health in Paducah and McCracken County. This panel made the point that most people that come to receive their services do come from poverty and they have no other means for support. Vonnie Adams said, "Women in poverty don't have the means to get out of domestic violence. Most people we serve are in poverty because they have nowhere else to go." Heidi Surheinrich commented on the fact that homelessness is very different here than in urban cities. Homelessness here is not as visible. She also said that the adults that are coming into the shelter are younger than in the past; about half of the adults in shelter currently are under the age of 25. The panel stressed the importance of early intervention and education. Most of the individuals and families that seek their services need the proper tools to better themselves and their environment. This panel commended the work of Getting Ahead and the resources it's providing.

The Task Force greatly appreciated the insight from the experienced panel members.

The Task Force is scheduled to meet next in May.

The goal of Impact Poverty is to develop a 10-Year Plan to reduce poverty in Paducah and McCracken County and break the cycle of generational poverty for its citizens. The United Way of Paducah-McCracken County is spearheading this effort.

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