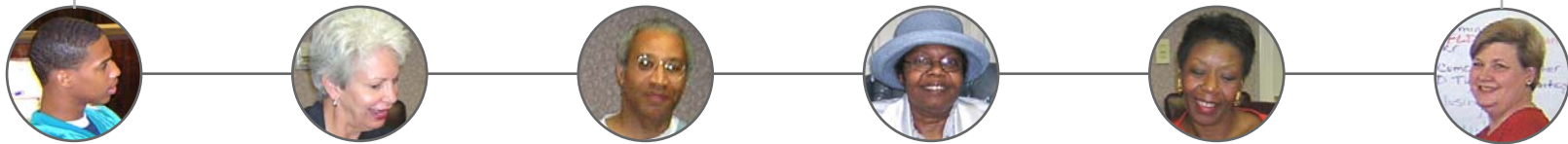


Community Partnerships for Adult Learning

Partnership Profiles



**The Midlands Literacy Initiative
and its partners in Columbia, South Carolina
(now the Education, Jobs & Life Skills
Community Council of the United Way of the Midlands)**

The Midlands Literacy Initiative (MLI) is a coalition of partnerships that provides literacy services to adults, families, and employers in the four-county Midlands area of South Carolina.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN THE SOUTH CAROLINA MIDLANDS . . .

- **The United Way of the Midlands** provides a home, staff, and financial assistance for the Midlands Literacy Initiative (MLI).
- **Local businesses** work with the MLI to design training to raise the literacy levels of their workforce.
- **School districts** supply instructors, classroom space, and materials to MLI programs.
- **The Midlands One-Stop Center** refers clients to adult education services and provides space and equipment for classes.
- **Community-based organizations**, including churches, recruit learners and provide space for classes.
- **Philanthropic organizations and donors** contribute funds and in-kind support.

AND WHY THEY WORK . . .

- **The United Way provides a “neutral forum” for the partners.** This allowed them to overcome their concerns about turf and work together on a common issue.
- **The MLI is a “business-driven” effort.** A strong business presence on the MLI board makes clear the link between education and work.
- **Early success built credibility for the MLI.** Demonstrating early success and taking the time to gain credibility in the business community helped the MLI expand and get involved in developing state policy on adult education.
- **The MLI adapts to the needs of the community.** The initiative has evolved from pre-employment training to workforce education to family literacy, as needs in the community change.

INTRODUCTION

In a church at the end of a dirt road, the New Horizon Family Care Center, Inc. provides free computer classes, job preparation, childcare, summer tutorials, and after-school programs for the residents of Hopkins, a rural community just fifteen minutes outside of Columbia, South Carolina. One woman is at the center of all this activity. She goes door-to-door to recruit learners, maintains the computer lab, and coordinates a program that serves people from newborns through older adults. Moreover, she is a volunteer. Fannie Rumph simultaneously oversees the daily operations of the family literacy program and helps set the future direction for New Horizon.

For her dedication and passion, the United Way of the Midlands recently recognized Fannie with its Meritorious Award, its highest honor given annually to a volunteer. Fannie was completely surprised, and she accepted the honor modestly. “It hasn’t been easy, but it’s rewarding,” she reflected. As one of the partners of the United Way’s Midlands Literacy Initiative (MLI), Fannie dedicates herself to serving adults in the Hopkins region and to promoting adult literacy in the community.



Fannie Rumph

The Midlands Literacy Initiative is a partnership of business, adult education providers, workforce development agencies, colleges, and the United Way, brought together to serve the literacy needs of communities in the Columbia, South Carolina region. Early MLI activities focused on helping employers to improve the literacy skills of their workforce, but the initiative has since evolved and expanded to include family literacy, basic skills, and employment training activities. Driven by the needs of the community, particularly those of employers, and by the work of dedicated staff and partners, the MLI has won state and national recognition as a model of collaboration.

BACKGROUND

The Midlands Literacy Initiative coordinates adult literacy services in four counties: Newberry, Fairfield, Lexington, and Richland. The counties vary considerably. Newberry and Fairfield are very rural; Lexington has a mixture of small cities and rural areas; and Richland contains Columbia, the state capital. The University of South Carolina is located in Columbia, as are a number of large manufacturers such as Louis Rich/ Kraft Foods and Honeywell International. Richland County itself is diverse, with many small rural communities surrounding the large industrial capital.

These variations in the type and size of communities in the four-county area require equally varied adult education and training services. For example, manufacturers in Columbia might need services focused on workplace skills, while the rural areas might want adult basic education courses. Successful partnerships enable the MLI to sponsor a continuum of adult education services that meets different needs throughout the four counties.

A recent study found that approximately 50 percent of adults in South Carolina have low levels of literacy¹. The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Columbia Chamber report that the high-school dropout rate is 48 percent². In response to these disturbing statistics, the state has focused intensively on adult education. In South Carolina, adult education is chiefly administered by local K-12 school

¹The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) reported 25 percent of adults living in South Carolina are at the lowest literacy level, and 27 percent are at the second lowest level. Source: www.sclrc.org/NalsNarrative.htm.

²Reported in *Facing Facts: A Study of Issues That Shape Our Region* (2003), a collaborative report compiled by the Central Carolina Community Foundation, Central Midlands Council of Governments, Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina, and the United Way of the Midlands.



districts, which extend their programs by forming partnerships with community and faith-based organizations. Many districts donate old school buildings, curriculum materials, tests, and, in some cases, teachers to adult education programs, which offer a wide range of courses at various locations in the area, such as churches and community centers.

Through the districts, adults can participate in courses in GED preparation, computer technology, English literacy (EL), adult literacy, and workplace skills. One adult education site, for example, operated by the Richland County School District One (called “Richland One”), provides courses in substitute-teacher training, medical business certification, adult basic education, GED preparation, customized workplace literacy, and other subjects.

What’s Best for Employees?

The programs offered through Richland One and other school districts are made possible through an extensive network of partnerships. Project BEST (Better Education Skills for Tomorrow), run by Richland One, is a collaboration among the maintenance department, student nutrition services, and adult education departments within the district. The district saw a need for literacy training for district employees, some of whom read at a third-grade level. For those working with chemicals or food, the inability to read and understand written directions potentially could lead to dangerous situations. Project BEST offers basic literacy courses for one-and-a-half hours two days a week. Participants are paid for their attendance and see much improvement in their skills over the ten-week period.

THE MIDLANDS LITERACY INITIATIVE AND ITS PARTNERS

In 1995, the United Way of the Midlands received a grant from the Knight Foundation, which funds community partnerships to address several priority areas, including education and economic development. Based on a community-wide assessment, the United Way had identified low literacy levels among area residents as a major obstacle to economic and social development in the Midlands, and this became the focus of the Knight grant. At the time, the various adult education programs operated independently, often duplicating their services, and businesses had very little involvement in adult education. The United Way of the Midlands used the Knight grant to create a neutral context for adult education providers to form partnerships and coordinate their services in the community.

The Midlands Literacy Initiative grew from this effort into an extensive coalition of partnerships. Businesses, faith communities, school districts, state agencies, and local literacy councils all contribute to the initiative. Since it began in 1997, the MLI has served several thousand³ learners through partnerships with family literacy, adult basic education, and workplace literacy programs.

The MLI unites adult education and business partners to advocate for high-quality literacy and basic skills education in the community and the workplace. The mission of the MLI is to “promote systemic change in the lifelong learning system, so that adults gain the skills they need to be successful and self-sufficient at work, at home, and in the community.” Since its inception, the MLI has been a business-driven initiative, actively seeking partnerships with businesses.

³United Way of the Midlands requires all grant recipients to submit data, including participation rates, but current data are not available for all MLI programs combined.

Local industries and sound business principles play a large role in enabling the MLI to recognize and serve the changing needs of the community effectively. Initially the MLI intended to offer pre-employment training for potential employees. However, the economy declined and local industries were not hiring as frequently. So the MLI shifted its focus to providing training for current employees. The idea of a pre-employment curriculum evolved into one that businesses could use to train their existing workforce.

Housed at the United Way of the Midlands, the Midlands Literacy Initiative is an umbrella organization for adult literacy and workplace training programs throughout the four-county area. The United Way supports the MLI by providing administrative and leadership support and by serving as its fiscal agent. In addition to supplying funds, United Way raises grant money for MLI-related activities. According to members of MLI, the United Way's role is important because it provides "neutral ground," allowing community groups to form partnerships around the central issue of adult education.

Kathy Olson, director of the MLI and a United Way staff member⁴, guides the initiative, overseeing the daily operations of the MLI and its board and its many partnership activities. According to MLI board members and partners, the leadership provided by Kathy, coupled with the support and guidance of United Way administrators, has been essential to the success of the MLI. She writes grant proposals, follows up on MLI activities and initiatives, provides technical assistance to partners, and keeps the momentum going. She works directly with the MLI board and, in fact, was instrumental in recruiting the board members needed to build the MLI. Kathy says, "Adult literacy is a primary issue [affecting] other social issues in the Midlands and is the reference point for the MLI's development and for United Way's community-building focus. From the outset, we under-

⁴Kathy Olson is now the Vice President for Education, Jobs & Life Skills Community Council at the United Way of the Midlands.

stood that the right partners had to be at the table if we were going to be successful."

The advisory board assists the MLI director and plays an active role in fulfilling the MLI's mission by planning activities, such as assessing workplace literacy needs in the region, developing curriculum, or coordinating a screening day for new hires at a business. The board is also involved with initiating and maintaining partnerships and advocating for literacy in the community and among policy makers. Board members include representatives of local businesses, the state department of education, libraries, literacy coalitions, technical colleges, school districts, and adult education providers.

The MLI advisory board is headed by Robbie Barnett, Director of Operations for Honeywell International in Columbia. The centrality of businesses and their concerns in this group have brought structure and focus to its efforts. The board meets quarterly, and board members offer many reasons for its smooth functioning, such as open lines of communication, issue-centered agendas, passionately involved members, and strong leadership. As needed, the board forms subcommittees for particular issues requiring action, such as community awareness, curriculum development, and policy.

THE 80/20 RULE. *Board members believe that "success breeds success," so they worked quickly to complete their initial tasks. They knew that to keep all partners engaged and to build support for the MLI, they needed speedy results. Board chair Robbie Barnett says they operated by the "80/20 rule." Instead of aiming for perfection, they aimed to get it 80 percent right at the beginning and to fix the other 20 percent once the program was up and running.*

Partnerships with Business

As one of its first activities, the MLI board surveyed the needs of local industries. Industries in the Midlands were accustomed to using high school or GED diplomas as screening tools for hiring, but, as one employer observes, “I wish that everyone had a high school diploma or GED. However, that doesn’t always translate into skilled employees.” Some employers did not realize how many of their own employees had low literacy levels.

The MLI committee for curriculum development performed a job-skills needs assessment for local industries, and those responding generally identified a need for improved basic skills among their entry-level employees. Based on these responses, the committee created a “**Manufacturing Needs Matrix**” to categorize and compare skills across seven different industries. The matrix showed a need for practical skills, such as measurement, graphing, and computer skills, which would be directly applicable in the workplace. Skills identified in the matrix became the basis for units in the MLI curriculum.

Besides asking employers to review the matrix, the MLI talked directly with them, discussing the types of skills their employees needed. MLI members also reviewed workplace literacy programs and curricula, but found many of them too generic. They developed their own curriculum based on job profiles, task analyses, and advice from supervisors and workers. The MLI’s approach encourages employers to judge employees on the basis of their actual skills, instead of just their education credentials or lack thereof.

The MLI Workplace Skills Curriculum is a twelve-week, modular curriculum that can be tailored to specific industries. Instructors use materials taken directly from the business itself to adapt each MLI unit. The units address, for example, teamwork, specific workplace skills, and safety and technology in



the workplace, with an emphasis on mathematics, functional reading, basic problem solving, and communication. Pre- and post-tests and unit quizzes are aligned with the curriculum. Employees completing the course earn certificates detailing the skills they have mastered—skills that they hope will lead to a promotion or better job. To view the instructor’s guide for “Industry Skills Needed for the Workplace,” return to the South Carolina Partnership Profile Summary (<http://www.c-pal.net/profiles/southcarolina.html>).

To ensure the quality of the program, the MLI worked with the state adult education agency to develop a training program for workplace instructors, recognizing that teaching adults in the workplace demands different skills from those used in more traditional settings. Now instructors statewide are trained and certified to teach in the workplace. Although the MLI curriculum is not used statewide, the state adult education staff were involved in its development and have modeled other workplace education curricula after the MLI’s structure, approach, and content. In addition, the MLI curriculum has influenced the South Carolina’s State Adult Education and Family Literacy Plan, mandated by the federal Workforce Investment Act. MLI board members worked with former director of adult education, Dr. Samuel Drew, and other adult education experts to shape the state plan, including such ideas as certification for workplace instructors and using contextual materials in curriculum.

EMPLOYERS SUPPORT THE MLI. *In addition to serving on the advisory board, Columbia’s employers support and participate in the MLI. Sixteen companies promised to interview MLI graduates. Nine companies sponsored workplace literacy programs and allowed employees to participate during paid work time. Six companies provided referrals to encourage workers to participate in adult education programs; six provided plant tours to both instructors and participants; and four companies helped train instructors.*

GETTING THE RIGHT FIT

When employees enroll in the Palmetto Health Alliance workplace education program, program staff meet with the supervisors from their departments. They ask about the knowledge and skills the employees need and the type of tasks they complete, and then they adapt the curriculum based on this information. This ensures that the curriculum is relevant to each employee and meets the needs of the hospital. Seeking this guidance from supervisors has had the additional benefit of increasing their support for the program.

ray technicians. Employees are granted up to 80 hours of paid training time each year, which can be used for the MLI job skills course. The program lasts for eleven weeks, with ten to twenty participants in each course. Palmetto hosts a graduation ceremony for workers who complete the program. Palmetto administrator

Over thirty local businesses, such as Honeywell International, Palmetto Health Alliance, and Louis Rich/ Kraft Foods, helped design the MLI's workplace curriculum. They also host job-training programs, provide in-kind donations, and serve on the MLI board. Those using the MLI curriculum include Louis Rich/ Kraft Foods and the Palmetto Health Alliance. Louis Rich/Kraft Foods revamped its training program in Newberry based on the MLI model.

At Palmetto Health, Richland One instructors conduct a customized version of the MLI program on-site, bringing together all types of employees, such as managers, nursing assistants, receptionists, janitors, and x-



Learners at
Palmetto Health

Expanding Capacity

MLI's partnership with the Family Dollar retail store allowed both partners to expand their capacity; Family Dollar increased its employee training offerings and MLI added retail to the industries it serves. Karl Haigler, a representative for Family Dollar, approached the MLI and the Midlands One-Stop with an idea for an innovative program to help train and promote employees. Hoping to curb high turnover among its management ranks, Family Dollar wanted internal training for current employees to become assistant store managers. MLI, the Midlands One-Stop, and the State Workforce Resource Center, a division of the South Carolina Department of Education, led a national demonstration project for Family Dollar called the Major Urban Strategic Training initiative (MUST).

Columbia was a pilot site for MUST. The One-Stop recruited and screened potential participants, performing interviews and assessments at an on-site mobile testing unit. Those who did not pass the initial screening were referred to adult education classes appropriate to their skill levels. Although retail was a new area for the MLI, which had previously focused on manufacturing, the MLI board saw this as an opportunity to expand its services. The program enrolled its first participants in late 2001 and, a year later, 50 had graduated.

The MLI worked with Family Dollar to design the program and customize the curriculum to include retail topics, such as creating store displays and providing customer satisfaction, in addition to basic literacy instruction. Company executives were so impressed with the quality of the program that Family Dollar is in the process of expanding this workplace training initiative to their other stores in major urban areas.

Cynthia Walters says that she sees the benefits of the program to workers in the "gleam in their eyes." Kathy Olson estimates that more than 1,500 workers have participated in the workplace literacy programs.

Partnerships for Family Literacy

The MLI is now developing partnerships with family literacy programs, a shift in emphasis that reflects the current economy and an understanding that improving family literacy will strengthen the community as a whole.

Family literacy is a priority for the United Way of the Midlands.

Administrators there explain that they want to invest in families by empowering them, not creating dependency, a philosophy in concert with the goals of family literacy programs. The family literacy programs build upon an already strong base of workforce training experience by combining job-readiness programs with parenting classes and instruction for children.

Success by Six

In the late 1990s, the MLI formed a partnership with Success by Six (SX6), another initiative of the United Way of the Midlands. SX6 strives to prepare children to be healthy and ready to enter school at age six. In the Midlands, SX6 obtains and distributes grants to build community-based childcare centers in neighborhoods where children are at risk. MLI and SX6 share the responsibility for implementing family literacy programs with these new centers. Currently there are three centers, including Tender Years in Hopkins, and they plan to build more in the future.

For the adults, these programs incorporate many aspects of the MLI employment training, such as courses on interviewing, creating resumes, and developing basic job skills. These courses are combined with SX6 services for children and other activities for the whole family. The goal is for each center to serve approximately 50 families each year.

SX6 relies on partnerships, including the close collaboration with MLI, to build family literacy programs. MLI brought expertise and resources in workplace literacy and adult education, and Success by Six brought assets in early childhood learning, preparation for school, and family literacy to the effort. One of their first joint projects was the New Horizon Family Care Center.

The New Horizon Family Care Center

The New Horizon Family Care Center exemplifies the MLI's growing involvement in family literacy. Since 1997, the program has provided educational services for Hopkins residents of all ages, from childcare to parenting classes to computer literacy. The program began with a small childcare center and has since expanded to include programs for adults and families.

According to staff members at the center, residents of Hopkins have low levels of education and many of the problems associated with poverty, including teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. Many need life-skills training, good childcare, and employment skills. Through various community partnerships, New Horizon offers an array of services aimed at meeting these needs, including:



- The Competitive Edge Computer Learning Center, a community-based computer lab offering Internet access and computer courses.
- GED preparation classes, offered, as funding permits, in partnership with Richland One.
- A business skills course, sponsored by the MLI and using the MLI pre-employment curriculum.
- Academic skills courses in mathematics and English language arts.

The MLI and United Way support the center by obtaining grants and funding, and the center uses the MLI job-training program to aid Hopkins residents seeking employment. The director, Fannie Rumph, attributes much of the early success of the computer learning center to its partnership with the MLI. Ms. Rumph says that the support from MLI and United Way went beyond dollars or curriculum. She remembers MLI director Kathy Olson proofreading her first grant proposals.

Another important partner is the Progressive Church, which developed the idea for and housed New Horizon at no cost. The church donates classroom and office space to the program and pays for all utilities. The church also donated land for the new childcare center. Other partners include the Salvation Army, Richland One, and the Midlands One-Stop. New Horizon now serves 300 clients a year.

The Competitive Edge Computer Learning Center is a popular program at New Horizon. Students complete homework assignments on the Internet and adults learn how to use computer programs, search for jobs, and prepare resumes on computers obtained through a grant from the Knight Foundation. Many learners participate in a thirteen-week self-paced computer course in typing and basic computer operations. Learners see the importance of these skills in the current job market. They say that the course teaches them to not fear computers and prepares them for work in the “computer world.”

As New Horizon evolved to address more family needs, they joined with Success by Six to create the Tender Years childcare center nearby. Seventy-five children are now enrolled in programs at Tender Years, which opened a year ago. Although they are still new, the programs at Tender Years are full, and the center has plans to continue expanding its work in family literacy. While the children remain at the childcare center, the adults will go to New Horizon for adult education, computer literacy, and basic work skills preparation.

The Eau Claire Community Council

In 1988, a group of residents formed the Eau Claire Community Council (ECCC) to represent the thirty-eight neighborhoods in the North Columbia area. Now a nonprofit organization, the ECCC connects the neighborhoods with city government agencies and provides a variety of programs to improve

services in the community and to create economic opportunities. One of the ECCC’s major efforts is an adult basic education program for adults in the area, most of whom are African American. The program also serves learners with learning disabilities, single mothers, teen parents, and immigrants.



The Eau Claire Family Literacy Program was started in 2001 by an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer who performed a needs assessment in the community and identified low literacy levels as a major issue. With the help of the United Way and MLI, Fronnie Harris designed the current program from scratch, creating a mission statement, vision, and strategic plan along the way. Now the program director, she recruits learners, does outreach to the community, and performs daily operational duties.

Without partnerships, especially with the MLI and Richland One, the literacy component of the program would not exist.

Finding qualified and certified adult education instructors was a big challenge in the beginning, because the program did not have the resources to pay them. The MLI solved this problem by agreeing to pay instructors’ salaries. The program now has one full-time paid instructor position, which is split between two teachers, and recruits volunteers to assist in the classes. Richland One helped to shape the literacy course, and the district provides the curriculum, materials, and tests.

The program offers a basic skills reading and writing course, which takes place twice a week for eleven weeks and provides adults with literacy instruction at the pre-GED level. The course and all materials are free to learners. The program also works with students at Willow Gray, a local military school for boys that grants GED diplomas. Willow Gray students needing supplemental instruction to prepare for the GED test can get this help through the ECCC basic reading and writing class. Twenty-five Willow Gray students participate annually.

Other Partners

Other partners support the MLI by serving on the MLI Board, donating classroom space and materials, providing instruction, and much more. These include:

- **School districts:** Local school districts supply instructors, classroom space, and materials to many MLI programs, in addition to advising the MLI board on adult education issues in the community.
- **The Midlands One-Stop Center:**
The One-Stop refers clients to appropriate adult education services, donates classroom space, provides employment services, and hosts a variety of computer, pre-employment, and basic skills courses.
- **Community-based organizations:** Community-based organizations provide adult education services and classroom space, and they recruit learners in collaboration with the MLI. Examples include the Oliver Gospel Mission, Progressive Church, Eau Claire Community Council, and New Horizon Family Care Center.
- **State agencies:** State government offices, such as the state Division of Adult Education, the Literacy Resource Center at the South Carolina Department of Education, and the Department of Labor, help the MLI formulate policy, obtain funds and resources, provide professional development, and disseminate information on the MLI throughout the Midlands area and the rest of the state.
- **Philanthropic organizations and donors:** Like the Knight Foundation that provided the initial grant to the United Way for the MLI, other charitable organizations, such as the UPS Foundation, and individual donors contribute funds and in-kind support. The Sisters of Charity, for example, helped New Horizon equip its classrooms, and an individual donor contributed to the building of the Tender Years Child Development Center.

United Way Provides a Base for Partnerships

There were several reasons why MLI was successful in getting grants for their initiative and for their partners. United Way paid a full-time staff member, Kathy Olson, to coordinate and lead the MLI. This gave her the time and organizational resources to develop grant proposals. It also helped that United Way is a private nonprofit that regularly forms partnerships with government agencies, making them eligible for a wide range of private and public grants – local, state, and national. Access to United Way funds also helps when grants require matching funds. Finally, their nonprofit status enables them to receive in-kind donations from businesses.

Influencing Adult Education Policy

In recent years, the MLI has moved into a new phase of its development: working on state policy regarding adult education and literacy. MLI board members and partners believed that their initiative was successful, that their approach to curriculum and instruction worked, and they wanted to see their ideas reach a broader audience. They found a willing partner in South Carolina's state Division of Adult Education. Working with the directors of adult education, first Dr. Samuel Drew and now Dr. Cherry Daniels, MLI board members helped create a state plan for adult education in 1999 - 2000, a process that met the requirements of the federal Workforce Investment Act. As a result of MLI's influence, the state now requires all instructors who teach in a workplace to complete a training program – the same type of training program MLI developed for its instructors. Participation in the development of the state plan brought the MLI into the policy arena.

MLI board members also served on a committee to assess the strengths of communities across the Midlands. Committee members brought together relevant research on topics such as education, health, families, and economic development. They also looked at data on poverty, high

school graduation, literacy levels, family violence, access to health care, and access to affordable housing. The resulting report, *Facing Facts: A Study of Issues That Shape Our Region*, is a blueprint for the work of United Way and its partners. To view this report, visit <http://www.uway.org/needs.asp>.

Earning Credibility First

Members of the MLI board knew from the start that working on policy would be vital to their long-term success. They waited, however, because they also knew that they first had to build credibility in the adult education and business communities. By providing high-quality services, the MLI made itself a worthwhile investment for businesses and demonstrated clearly the link between adult education and a stronger workforce. Credibility came with the visible success of their workplace and family literacy projects.

Challenges and New Directions

Agencies like the United Way must be judicious in spending limited resources and able to see the impact of their work in the community. Administrators say it is important to define the roles of partners, identify what is expected, and do what is expected.

MLI partners and board members emphasize that strong leadership is important to their success, but that leadership must extend beyond the board chair; it's critical at every level. MLI's working committees, for example, must be given the autonomy to respond to changes and take advantage of unexpected opportunities. Staff leadership is also crucial. The MLI learned that it needed a dedicated staff person to keep things going, someone who can "own" the partnership and the initiative.

Working on specific, concrete tasks and meeting goals is important, according to MLI board members. Developing the curriculum, for example, brought the team together; they had a specific task and a



product to show for their efforts. They also learned that it is more important to sustain momentum than to aim for getting everything exactly right the first time.

Concentrating on a common goal, despite differences among the partners, and honoring commitments are vital. If one partner does not follow through or does only the bare minimum, other partners learn not to trust that group and look for new partners. And as United Way President Cary Smith says, "If people get too territorial, roads get built around them." United Way and the MLI have learned to see partnerships as a continuum, a range of engagement with each organization. They try to take advantage of what each organization and person does best and to find new partners when expectations are not met.

Sometimes it has been necessary for the MLI to disengage from a partnership. Some partners rarely completed tasks as promised. MLI board meetings include discussions of all projects completed or in progress. If a member has not followed through on a project, the entire board discusses it openly. No person or organization has ever been asked to leave the board, but, when necessary, the MLI has found ways to disengage the partner, such as excluding that organization from working groups, subcommittees, or events. These group norms help apply pressure to follow through on promises.

Funding is first on the list of many MLI partners when asked about their challenges. Deep funding cuts in school districts have forced staff

CAN YOU FIRE A VOLUNTEER?

A United Way administrator posed this question, adding, "Can you fire a partner?" He answered it himself: "Sometimes you have to."

Crossing Boundaries

Collaboration between the adult education providers and the business community was not smooth at first. “Old enemies were in the room,” said one MLI member, and some partners came to the early meetings mainly to protect their turf. They argued and disagreed, but they kept trying to understand each other. MLI partners worked to build a common vocabulary and develop trust. They say they were able to cross some of their organizational boundaries because the United Way provided a neutral forum. Solving problems together helped them understand more about each other, as did a rule of conduct to “pick on the idea, not the person.”

reductions. For example, New Horizon depends on Richland One for instructors, but the district now requires that classes maintain participation of at least fifteen students, or they will cancel the class. This is a high number of students for a rural area like Hopkins and difficult for them to maintain.

Maintaining the quality of instruction is also a continuing challenge. When the MLI began its first pilot test of the new workplace curriculum, they quickly realized that even experienced adult education instructors were not always prepared to teach in that setting. With the help of the state Workforce Resource Center, the MLI developed a training course for workplace skills instructors. The fifteen-hour training included principles of contextual teaching and learning, instructional strategies, and tours of manufacturing plants. MLI members found the training program successful—and it was adapted for statewide use—but they say that finding and keeping qualified instructors remains difficult.

CONCLUSION

The MLI began as a local initiative to address the low literacy levels of workers in their region. This successful program expanded and adapted as the community and the economy changed, evolving to include a focus on families, not just individual workers. The initiative has inspired changes within its parent organization as well. Internal collaborations formed and reformed among divisions within the United Way of the Midlands to reach an organizational model driven by initiatives, not departments.

Beyond the walls of the United Way building, the MLI also helped catapult the issue of adult education onto a statewide agenda. MLI board members were asked to help develop training and certification programs for the state, share the MLI curriculum as a model, and participate in setting state adult education policy.

The MLI continues to change. As of August 2003, the MLI no longer exists as an initiative, but has evolved into the Education, Jobs & Life Skills Community Council, a division of the United Way of the Midlands. The MLI’s success was a powerful model for change, and United Way administrators, observing its effectiveness, eventually transformed the entire United Way organization around target areas, of which the Education, Jobs & Life Skills Community Council is one. Although the MLI has taken a new form, the seeds of its work continue to grow.

Manufacturing Needs Matrix							
	Fibers	Steel	Fabricators	Chemical	Food Processing	Brick Mfg.	Assembly
SKILL							
Measurements:							
Volume							
Length, etc.							
US/Metric							
Numbers:							
Read							
Write							
Add							
Subtract							
Multiply							
Divide							
Decimals							
Fractions							
%							
Ratio							
Graphing:							
Plot							
Interpret							
Charts:							
Read							
Enter Data							
Guages:							
PSI							
Vacumn							
Conversion							
Temperature(C & F)							
Log Sheets:							
Read							
Enter Data							
Write Comments							
Schedule:							
Military Time							
Read & Comprehend							
Follow							
Prints:							
Basic Process Flow							
Hand Sketch							
Find Measurements							

	Fibers	Steel	Fabricators	Chemical	Food Processing	Brick Mfg.	Assembly
Computer:							
Point & Click							
Enter Data							
Electronic Notebook							
Locationing:							
Map Reading							
Logic Sequencing							
Team:							
Listening							
Participation							
Talking							
Conflict Resolution							
Consensus							
Safety:							
Basic First Aid							
Read Procedures							
Follow Procedures							
Tool/Work Aids:							
Calculators							
Scales							
Hand Tools							
Communications:							
Follow Oral/Written Directions							
Listening Skills							
Use Phone/Pager							
Consensus							
Attend Meeting							

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