

Missouri Valley

Community Action Agency

Strategic Direction
and
Transformational Plan

2005

***“Service to others, compassion, concern,
empathy, generosity,
are not the preserve of saints and heroes.
They are daily occurrences that we witness
and experience and that remind us
who we are and who we may be.”***

- Ernesto Sirolli -

Introduction

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA) began the journey of focused strategic planning in 2001. However, for the past year, the Board of Directors, Executive Director, agency leaders and staff have been involved in taking planning to the next level; that of true transformational change.

Such a plan provides a benchmark, or reasoned foundation, by which Agency decision makers can guide the future of the organization.

From the beginning of the transformational planning process, the goals have been to:

1. Improve the development of staff to better meet the needs of our families, community, and agency;
2. Improve the organizational structure to be more efficient and effective to better meet the needs of our families, community, and agency;
3. Improve the quality of service delivered to customers, families, communities, and staff;
4. Develop expanded services for our families, communities, and agency; and
5. Improve and increase internal and external communication by developing marketing strategies, advocacy, and community partnerships.

Community Action's origins lie with the "War on Poverty" that was declared over 40 years ago by President Lyndon B. Johnson. During that span of time, Community Action has faced many challenges and has often had to adapt to changing political climates. Today, we find ourselves questioning our role as a social service provider by asking, "Do we truly move people out of poverty?" We found the answer to be "Some", but certainly not enough. With 2005 being our 40th anniversary, MVCAA is re-committed to waging our own "War on Poverty" and returning to one of the original mandates of Community Action, that ***poverty is no longer acceptable!***

The Mission of Missouri Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA) is ***to engage communities and focus resources to end poverty.***

Our agency Motto is ***“Promoting opportunities for success”***. MVCAA is committed to providing and promoting opportunities for families and communities to be successful, whatever the definition of success is for that specific family, individual or community. MVCAA is also committed to serving as a leader in our area, promoting opportunities for our communities to serve the needs of all citizens.

Board of Directors

Strategic Direction

2005-2008

***“All the money in the world cannot solve problems
unless we work together.
And, if we work together, there is no problem
in the world that can stop us as we seek to
develop people to their highest potential.”***

- Ewing Kaufman

Message from the
Board Chairman

To be completed and included in final draft

Message from the
Executive Director

To be completed and included in final draft

The Role of the Board of Directors of Missouri Valley Community Action Agency

The Board of Directors of Missouri Valley Community Action Agency is charged with setting the strategic direction for the Agency. The founders of this organization left high expectations for future board members to look ahead – to analyze the issues and to continue to develop the Agency's strategic direction. To accomplish this, the Board of Directors must continuously examine new opportunities and strategies. The Board has provided strategic direction related to the Agency's vision, mission, case for change, preferred future, overall approach, agency approach, assessment of our work, and the transformational planning process.

Vision and Mission

MVCAA has devoted a year of planning to refocus our strategies in order to address the original goal of Community Action - eliminating poverty. The Agency has been a highly successful Community Action Agency since 1965 in delivering federal and state grant programs to low-income families and individuals, such as housing, financial emergency assistance and early childhood development programs as support and intervention services for those living in poverty. However, like our counterparts across America, we continue to see the persistence of poverty, with rates virtually unchanged over the past 35 years. The War on Poverty was never fully funded at the level required to end poverty, causing the Community Action initiative to evolve into agencies that addressed the symptoms of poverty rather than focusing on the actual causes of poverty.

We have come to the conclusion that our work must now be to engage the imagination and commitment of the citizens in our area to embrace the ambitious vision of actually eliminating poverty. However, this goal cannot be accomplished by MVCAA alone, all individual and communities must face the current truths about poverty and join MVCAA in developing bold, transformational strategies to address these local issues. MVCAA believes the strategies included in this plan are the beginning of true transformational change in our communities and ending poverty in our seven county area.

According to our Corporation Bylaws, the purposes for which the corporation was originally organized in 1965 are as follows:

- To create a multi-county coordinating unit to study, collect, develop, and disseminate factual data and other information relative to all aspects of poverty;

- To determine general and specific needs of the poor;
- To identify available and potential resources for the poor on a multi-county basis;
- To identify and/or provide the stimulus for community economic development, including projects to provide affordable housing, employment, and business opportunities; and
- To provide stimulation and incentive for communities and rural areas to mobilize their resources, public and private, professional and volunteer, and the poverty stricken people themselves, to combat poverty through community action programs.

These words written 40 years ago continue to serve as the guiding Vision of the Mission of Missouri Valley Community Action Agency.

The Case for Change

In 1998 the federal government enacted welfare reform measures requiring public assistance recipients to look for and find work as well as imposing life-time limits on benefits. The goal of this initiative was to get people off welfare – not get them out of poverty. The good news is that, today more low-income parents are holding down jobs and bringing home a paycheck than at any other time in recent history. Like all parents, they hold fast to the belief that their hard work and sacrifice will translate into a better life for themselves and their children.

The bad news is that, despite working hard and playing by the rules, far too many low-income families still find severe obstacles in their path out of poverty. Despite their best efforts to succeed in the workplace, many find it nearly impossible to build the savings and assets that are, for all families, the critical ingredients for achieving genuine economic security. Even though low-income parents are working harder and longer, too many find it difficult to get by and get ahead.

The popular misconception is that poverty in America is mainly an urban phenomenon. In fact, almost **one in five** rural children is poor (18.9 percent in 2000) and **rates of rural child poverty are higher** than all urban child poverty for all children and for every minority group. Of the 50 U.S. counties with the highest child poverty rates, **48 are located in rural America.**ⁱ

In many rural communities, employment is only a partial answer to bringing families out of poverty. Too often our jobs are low-wage jobs. The business and industries that are located in many of our communities tend to be lower-paying industries, or the lower-paying segments of higher paying industries. It is

not solely a matter of better skills, better connections with hiring networks or more work supports. Rather, the jobs that many workers can access simply do not pay enough to raise a family, let alone get ahead. One in four workers, age 25 and older, earns low wages – wages that even when earned on a full-time, full-year basis are less than the poverty threshold for a family of four – and half of these workers are the sole or main wage earner in their family.ⁱⁱ

And if chronically low wages were not enough of a burden, the simple fact is that many low-income families end up paying far too much for many of life's necessities: food, shelter, transportation, credit, and financial services. Furthermore, the incomes of many low-income families are excessively "taxed" as a result of the loss or reduction of public benefits because of improved job earnings. Combined, these factors make it more difficult for many low-income parents to translate their increased work efforts into the economic security that they and their children so desperately need.

For the low-income working family, it must seem as though they are bringing their hard-earned wages home in a leaky bucket – losing some of it to taxes, some to work-related expenses, and some to lost government benefits. And sadly, when they get home with what little is left, they find that the cost of caring for their families is greater than it is for everyone else.

When all is said and done, many Americans pay more because they are poor. They pay more to participate in the workforce, more to provide the basics for their families, and more for the basic financial mechanisms that families need to save, build assets and get ahead. They have less to spend and have to work even harder than most people to get the most value for their money. Most important, they have the most difficulty developing any economic cushion that can help them through tough times.

The modesty of their earnings, combined with the failure of the local markets and public policy, leave low-wage earners and their families in a state of asset poverty. They cannot save enough to acquire assets because a disproportionate share of their income goes to paying for subsistence. And they frequently cannot borrow to acquire assets because the business practices of the credit industry – both mainstream institutions and predatory lenders – work against them. As a result, low-income families are commonly one crisis away from economic catastrophe. Even in the best of times, they cannot leverage their earnings into real, lasting prosperity for themselves and their children.

Lack of assets means entrenched, intergenerational poverty for millions of Americans, no matter how hard they work. In the end, despite their efforts, far too many low-income workers find themselves with few options that can help them build the economic security they aspire to and their families desperately

need. Given this, it's easy to understand why so many hard-working, low-income Americans feel more vulnerable to crises and less confident of ever getting ahead.ⁱⁱⁱ

All this does not even address those individuals and families that are totally dependent on some type of public support/assistance – our most vulnerable populations. These individuals may have disabilities or act as a caregiver for a family member with disabilities, live on a fixed income or are single parents trying to raise their small children on their own. The majority of these people have no other resources to tap into when a need arises, and yet, they have lost the most ground during slowing economic times. The State of Missouri is currently enacting Medicaid cuts that will directly impact many of these individuals and families, eliminating health care as an affordable option. The rising costs of energy resources not only impacts the affordability of gasoline and home heating costs, but adds to the retail price of many of the items needed to fulfill basic needs. With so little financial assets available, we ask the question, “Where do these families turn when they are facing these crises?” Reality tells us that we are living in an age of shrinking federal and state resources and we must address these needs in new and innovative ways.

And now for the facts... there are 30,000,000 people living in poverty in the United States. In Missouri 637,691 people – that's 11.7 percent - are living at or below the federal poverty guidelines, according to the 2000 Census. These are the poorest Missourians. ***There are 20,170 individuals in our seven county area that fall into this category.*** There are an additional 989,702 Missourians with incomes just above the poverty level. ***That's another 31,688 people in our service area.*** Most of these families lack sufficient resources to adequately meet their basic needs.^{iv}

It is also estimated that **1 out of every 3 people** lives in poverty for at least two months out of the year in the United States – the richest country in the world. This translates to be ***62,126 people in our seven county area.***

We find this to be ***unacceptable.***

The Preferred Future

MVCAA board members, leadership and staff have a vision of how the Agency can make a difference in their lives, the lives of others, and in their communities. When they look into the future, they see:

- < communities where poverty is not allowed to exist;
- < communities where all citizens and communities thrive;
- < communities where citizens of all ages are valued, cared for and healthy;
- < communities led by men and women who understand that community health and prosperity is dependent upon the provision of real opportunities; and
- < the Agency as the catalyst for community transformational change.

Agency Approach

The Board is committed to programs and service that allow our citizens and communities to thrive. This broad commitment allows the Board to constantly seek new areas and opportunities to expand our operational base. As new or existing opportunities arise, they will be pursued if they are consistent with the Agency's mission.

The values shared by the founders of this organization serve as our driving force. We are committed to honoring the expectations that the Agency remains an organization that pursues excellence in everything we do and fosters culture that supports personal growth, respect, honesty, openness and humility. The Board will continue to encourage investment in people internally and externally in its programs and operations.

In pursuit of the goals and the mission, the Board's approach is to abide by the following key principles:

- Identify opportunities where application of the Agency's people, ideas and capital can benefit society in significant and measurable ways.
- Develop innovative, research-based programs and services leading to practical, sustainable solutions that are widely accepted and implemented.
- Incubate programs in our service area when feasible, in which new approaches can be tried and tested before being disseminated.
- Partner with others to leverage our resources and capabilities.

- Be willing to experiment, evaluate, modify and communicate what worked and what did not work.

Further, it is the Board's desire that within the next ten years Missouri Valley Community Action Agency will be:

- An organization that addresses significant and timely issues in constructive and innovative ways;
- A leader and colleague in the world of the anti-poverty and community development movement;
- An organization that attracts outstanding local board and staff members who bring experience, intellectual rigor, and local/community perspectives to the organization's work; and
- A recognized leader in advancing the knowledge of emerging issues in the twenty-first century and seeking solutions to problems inherent in economic and social issues.^v

Agency Scope

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency is an organization with a regional approach, serving seven counties: Carroll, Chariton, Johnson, Lafayette, Pettis, Ray, and Saline. The Board will periodically review its program initiatives in light of need, emerging opportunities and the most effective use of resources.

- We recognize that each community has specific needs and the Agency is committed to addressing opportunities and innovative solutions to addressing those specific needs.
- In light of demographic trends that are changing, we must continuously adapt to the ever-changing needs of our citizens, particularly the underserved, in our communities.
- The Board must develop a public policy and feels it is vitally important to define the Agency's advocacy role.

Assessment of Our Work

The Board will undertake two activities to make informed assessments of our work:

- The Agency will utilize the Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) Assessment and Reporting System.
- The Board will evaluate existing programs to ensure they are the most productive and prudent investment. Evaluation may address contractual compliance, accomplishments, impact, cost-effectiveness, return on investment, and will recommend future action.
- The Agency may also solicit advice from expert practitioners and observers of the social and economic sectors on local and national trends, research challenges, events, movements, gaps and opportunities related the organization's mission.

The Board is committed to communicating successes, failures, and lessons learned to help program concepts be adapted and replicated by others. An emphasis will be placed on disseminating information, convening people, and creating and sustaining partnerships.

The Transformational Planning Process

The Agency leadership is responsible for developing the strategic plan in response to the strategic direction set by the Board of Directors. A community needs assessment planning process assists staff in identifying, monitoring and measuring results of our program services and activities to determine whether they actually make a difference in the lives of the individuals and families we serve. This planning process enables us to identify the desired strategies we seek and to determine the outcomes that will allow us to accomplish those strategies.

While the Agency's strategies drive the focus of our work for three or more years, the strategic plan outlines the outcomes and performance targets within our six planning areas – relationships, leadership, education, employment, housing, and agency. This plan develops a sound basis for estimating time, cost and other resource requirements to accomplish the work of the Agency.

Summary

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency's strategic direction reflects the complex work of the organization and must be continually adjusted to take advantage of new and timely opportunities. We understand that we must be flexible, continually listen, learn, innovate, and take risks to achieve the greatest results for individuals, families, partners, communities, and our staff.

We hold ourselves accountable for demonstrating the value of the organization and developing leadership in our areas of expertise. The strategic direction is our guide to continually identify how we can best serve MVCAA in achieving the desired outcomes and ultimately realizing our vision of ending poverty in our seven county service area.

“Goals serve as a stimulus to life.
They tend to tap the deeper resources
and draw out of life its best.
Where there are no goals,
neither will there be significant accomplishments.
There will only be existence.”

- Anonymous -

Missouri Valley
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Transformational Plan
2005-2008

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency

Vision

MVCAA's Vision for Families: *To be healthy, responsible, contributing citizens.*

MVCAA wants all citizens to thrive in our communities, taking an active role in guiding community leaders, so all citizens remain vital, diverse and safe.

MVCAA's Vision for Communities: *To be a safe place, offering unlimited opportunities for growth through partnerships.*

Our communities must have a thriving economy, a strong education system, and safe and affordable neighborhoods for their citizens. Communities need to be a source of pride and meaning for all their residents. MVCAA is committed to providing the leadership necessary to strengthen our communities so that all citizens have the opportunity to be successful.

MVCAA's Vision for the Agency: *To be a responsible, progressive leader, promoting opportunities for success.*

In order for MVCAA to continue to be a viable, effective organization, we must evolve to the next level of commitment, moving away from focusing on grants management to an integrated and comprehensive agency for our customers, as well as taking a leadership role in our communities.

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency

Mission

The Mission of Missouri Valley Community Action Agency is to engage communities and focus resources to end poverty.

Core Values

MVCAA has defined the following values that are important to our agency:

- Integrity:** We will demonstrate the highest standards of professionalism, treating everyone with respect, honesty, and fairness.
- Commitment:** We are dedicated to conducting business in an accountable and responsible manner, communicating and cooperating with customers, the community, and each other.
- Flexibility:** We will pro-actively explore innovative ideas, be willing to take risks, and be open to change.
- Enthusiasm:** We will exhibit a positive attitude and encourage it in others.

MVCAA's Definition of Poverty

Poverty results from limited hope, skills or resources necessary to achieve and maintain success and economic security.

Our Work

This transformational plan discusses our work in advancing the quality of life in our service area. This plan addresses six strategic areas: Relationships; Leadership; Education; Employment; Housing; and Agency. As a result of assessments and review of the "Current View of the Agency", families and communities in the seven-county service area identified several areas of concern; thus the development of these strategies. After careful examination of existing resources, it became evident that MVCAA needs an on-going plan to improve services and opportunities for customers and communities, especially those people who live and work in poverty.

MVCAA has identified the following concerns through the information/data gathered:

- The Corporation is very dependent on federal and state grants. A slowing economy has resulted in stagnant funding. The Agency needs diversified sources of income.
- The current social service model and "band-aid" approaches do not move families out of poverty.
- Community Action is one of the "best kept secrets". There is a lack of understanding and communication, both internally and externally. Some employees do not know what resources are available from other MVCAA

- programs and many local people are not familiar with our work. There is a need for more in-house training and better marketing.
- MVCAA cannot eliminate poverty in our communities alone.
 - There are not enough education and training resources and opportunities in our area. This lack of resources effects all ages in ways such as, providing quality child care and early childhood education opportunities, improving access and availability of adult literacy classes, and the provision of affordable post-secondary education opportunities.
 - Though employment may be obtained, not enough customers are moving out of poverty. There are not enough jobs that pay livable wages in our communities. There is a need for economic development. This includes job creation, entrepreneurial and small business development, and increased family, business and community supports.
 - There is not enough affordable housing in the area and what is available is often aging and in substandard condition. More efforts are needed to support families moving toward home ownership.
 - The “disincentives” associated with transitioning out of poverty are much too great. Public policy must be changed to support working families.
 - Through the development of “safety net” programs, the federal and state government has allowed communities, albeit unintentionally, to become disengaged from many community issues, such as poverty. Community leaders, partners, and private citizens must become involved in these important issues that affect the well-being of all citizens. MVCAA must take a leadership role, along with other community, public and private sector partners. It is necessary for low-income citizens to participate in the area’s prosperity. The Agency must act as a catalyst in our communities to gather support around the compelling issue of social justice.
 - Most low-income individuals and families feel the isolation of living in poverty. They feel disconnected from the very community in which they live. These families have identified the need for other community supports to assist in moving out of poverty.

These issues and concerns are what drive our transformational plan. Like the plans that preceded it, this plan invokes the principles and original vision developed by the founders of this agency in 1965. However, many circumstances have changed and many will continue to change. Ensuring that the programming has the flexibility to adapt to new realities is essential for all organizations.

This plan, for the next five years, rests on what we currently know. Inevitably, we will learn new things about our programs, our communities, and our citizens, and about the nature of the challenges we face over time. Accordingly, we will remain flexible, make changes in our services – and in future plans themselves –

to adapt to these realities.

Achieving our strategies and goals over the next five years will provide quality of life for the individuals and families we serve, promote leadership in our communities, engage citizens to become actively involved in contributing to society and advance the economic stability of individuals and our communities.

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency's Strategies

Relationship

Current View:

- The causes and conditions of poverty do not stand alone. There are a number of inter-related "core" aspects of family functioning that appear to be critical to both the economic survival and advancement of working poor families. These include:
 - Emergency Cash Assistance (for family stability)
 - Housing
 - Child Care
 - Health Insurance/Medical Care
 - Transportation
 - Positive, supportive relationships
 - Higher Education

- The *traditional* way of thinking about human service problems and needs is a one problem – one solution approach. **This won't suffice** when it comes to helping the working poor move toward greater self-sufficiency. Working poor families need stability in a variety of life functions in order to **maintain participation** in the workforce and additional supports to **advance** economically.

Working poor families need assistance and support to help them:

- Achieve a sufficient level of stability to function on a daily basis (including maintaining employment);
- Feel connected to the community in which they live through positive and supportive relationships;
- develop assets; and
- Advance economically through the acquisition of new skills, education, or other career enhancement opportunities.

Relationship Strategy:

Build and maintain supportive relationships across socio-economic and cultural lines to end poverty in our communities.

The Relationship Outcomes We Seek:

- **Outcome 1** - Community systems are developed and supported that allow residents to thrive.
 - Outcome Performance Target 1** - 25 families, 75 allies, and 30 partners are in place to support Circles of Support in Saline County by 9-30-06 and an additional county by 9-30-07.
 - Outcome Performance Target 2** - There is a 50% increase in formal/informal partnership agreements in our 7 county area by 12-31-08.
 - Outcome Performance Target 3** – There is a 10% increase in donations by 12-31-08.

- **Outcome 2** - Poverty is unacceptable to the community.
 - Outcome Performance Target 1** – The community experiences increased exposure to poverty issues by 50% by 12-31-08.

- **Outcome 3** - Individuals/families are self-sufficient (living wage) based on identified goals using the Family Self-Sufficiency Scale.
 - Outcome Performance Target 1** - 100 individuals/families are self-sufficient (living wage) by 12-31-08.

- **Outcome 4** – Communities plan to secure everyone’s basic needs are met.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - Community commitment to provide basic needs and awareness about the impact of poverty is increased by 10% by 12/31/08.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - Written plans are completed in two communities to assure everyone's basic needs are met by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 3 - Barriers to self-sufficiency are identified by community members in 7 counties by July 1, 2006.

Leadership

Current View:

- Without good leadership there will be no change.
- Currently, leadership development inside the Agency and inside the community is not intentional and not focused on ending poverty.
- Currently, few leadership opportunities and development are available to people with low-incomes.
- MVCAA, community leaders and partners cannot effectively deal with community issues alone

Leadership Strategy:

Build a knowledgeable, committed group of community leaders committed to ending poverty.

The Leadership Outcomes We Seek:

- **Outcome 1** – Change is lead by a knowledgeable committed group of community leaders.
Outcome Performance Target 1 - 200 community leaders are formally trained by 12-31-08.
Outcome Performance Target 2 - 50% of MVCAA staff members are actively engaged in more than one transformational plan activity to end poverty by 12/30/07.

Outcome Performance Target 3 - 50% of MVCAA Policy Council is engaged in transformational leadership to end poverty by 12/30/07.

Outcome Performance Target 4 – The MVCAA Board is fully engaged in implementation of the Agency's Transformational Plan by 12/30/07.

Outcome Performance Target 5 - 100 Low-Income individuals are engaged in transformational leadership to end poverty by 12/30/07.

- **Outcome 2** – MVCAA's culture is supportive of innovative learning, leadership and collaboration.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - A reward system is developed and implemented for staff innovation and creativity by 12/31/08.

Outcome Performance Target 2 – Innovation, learning, collaboration are identified as key agency values by 70% of staff by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 3 – All staff are well trained on core Agency issues.

Outcome Performance Target 4 - All staff are well trained, and knowledgeable regarding poverty issues.

Outcome Performance Target 5 - All staff are well trained, and knowledgeable regarding program information.

Education

Current View:

- Quality early childcare and early childhood education is crucial for children's healthy development. Research now tells us that 85% of a person's brain development occurs during the first three years. "The lack of appropriate experiences in early childhood programs is a contributing factor to the alarming percentage of children in Missouri –approximately 25%--that enter kindergarten without the knowledge to succeed in school." In order to support children's school readiness, teachers must provide activities in all domains of development (social, emotional, cognitive, language and literacy, and physical)" ^{vi} and in order to provide the kinds of learning experiences young children need, teachers themselves must have quality education and training.
- "In a recent study of center-based and home-based programs in Missouri, 57% of programs had overall quality scores that were rated as "less than good" with 11% rated as providing "poor" care." This study only looked at licensed programs: little or no data exists for unregulated childcare settings. ^{vii}
- Missouri state licensing does not guarantee quality educational experiences, but does provide minimum standards for health and safety. Even at this minimum level, licensed childcare slots are in short supply. The total licensed childcare slots in the 7-county area according to KidsCountMissouri 2003 was 3321; 477 of those were provided by MVCAA Head Start. ^{viii}
- **Almost 30,000 individuals in our seven-county area** have a reading level of second grade or below, and are, therefore, functionally illiterate. ^{ix}
- **10,781 or 37.2% of school-aged children in our seven county area participate in the free and reduced lunch program, another indicator of poverty.** These children score an average of 16 percentage points lower in academic achievement rates than other students. ^x
- High school drop outs are three times more likely to slip into poverty than those that finish high school. They are also at risk for other negative outcomes like becoming a teen parent or spending time in prison. ^{xi}

- The children of drop outs are less likely to graduate themselves, thus continuing a cycle of diminished opportunities. One-third of children whose parents did not complete high school must repeat a grade. These children often require special services and are suspended or expelled more frequently.^{xii}
- Families living in poverty tend to move more frequently. Children who move four or more times during their childhood are more likely to drop out of school than less mobile children.^{xiii}
- Only 1 in 10 students from families with incomes between \$10,000 and \$25,000 goes to college, and only 21% from low income families (\$24,999 or below) complete a bachelor's degree. This is in significant contrast to the 62% that come from high income families (\$75,000 and above).^{xiv}

Education Strategy:

Build community capacity to ensure all individuals receive a quality education and learning opportunities to meet their full potential.

The Education Outcomes We Seek:

- **Outcome 1** - Early Childhood programming is developed and supported by the community ensuring all children are ready to enter kindergarten.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - Early childhood slots in licensed facilities are increased by 10% by 6/08.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - Standards of Quality for Early Childcare are established in two counties (Johnson and Saline) by 06/08.

- **Outcome 2** - Adults' education resources are accessible to everyone in the community.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - Community coalitions are Developed in two counties (Johnson & Saline) by 6/30/07.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - Community Plans to address issues of accessible adult education resources are written by coalitions in two counties (Saline and Johnson) by 12/31/08.

Employment

Current View:

- Over 40% of the American workforce (*60 million* individuals) work, but ***lives in poverty***. Sixty-three percent of all poor families have one or more workers, and the majority of those workers have a high school diploma and even some college. Until the mid -1970s, the minimum wage kept those who worked full-time (year-round) out of poverty. Today, a minimum wage job is not enough. For example, minimum wage provides a family of three approximately 40% of the wages needed to be self-sufficient. The promise of the American Dream— “If you work hard, you will not be poor” — has not been kept for the last 30 years.^{xv}
- The **Self-Sufficiency Standard for Missouri**, issued in 2002 by the Missouri Department of Economic Development (DED), and updated by DED in 2004, provides a new framework for understanding what it takes for families to truly make ends meet. It is a more flexible measure than either the national minimum wage, or the federal poverty measure. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a *comprehensive and locally-specific* formula that measures and reports how much income people need to live in each county without public or private assistance.

Example: According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, in Pettis County it takes \$23,962 a year (or \$11.52 an hour plus health benefits) to meet the basic needs of shelter, utilities, food, clothing, child care, and transportation for a single parent with two children (one pre-school- and one school-aged). There are 5,737 households in Pettis County (36.7%) with incomes of less than \$25,000 per year. By comparison, the federal poverty guideline for a family of three is \$15,670 per year (gross wages). The amount of money actually needed to meet basic household needs in Pettis County is 37% more than what the federal government says the eligibility guidelines are for most programs that help families move out of poverty.^{xvi}

- Forty-three percent of all working Missourians (about 1.1 million people) are employed in just 30 occupations. Almost half of these workers (many of whom are in low-skill positions) are paid less than \$10 an hour for their work.

The average hourly wages for low-skill jobs in Missouri are:

- Cashiers/Waiters/Waitresses	\$ 7.07
- Office Clerks	\$ 10.30
- Food Service Workers	\$ 6.88
- Nurse Aides	\$ 8.14
- Janitorial Workers	\$ 8.62 ^{xvii}

- As a family's income rises, they experience:
 - Higher taxes
 - Loss of public assistance, such as food stamps, health insurance, child care, and housing subsidies
- Increased working expenses, such as clothing, meals, transportation, etc.

Employment Strategy:

Build community capacity to guarantee access to living wage jobs.

The Employment Outcomes We Seek:

- **Outcome 1** - A sufficient number of living wage jobs are available in the seven-county area.

Outcome Performance Target 1 – A 10% increase in living wage jobs is generated in three of the seven counties by 01/01/09.

- **Outcome 2** - There is sufficient access to living wage jobs in the seven-county area.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - A community plan is developed to address major access barriers to living wage jobs in 3 of the 7 counties.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - Living wage jobs are more accessible by 20% in three of the seven counties.

Housing

Current View:

- The inexorable rise in home prices and rents represents a serious challenge for the nation's 20 million lowest income households. Although renters receive a lot of attention, lowest income homeowners also face a severe housing affordability challenge. Most upwardly mobile households are unable to find suitable housing and are unwilling to live in high poverty areas. They leave when they obtain the resources to do so. This perpetuates the isolation of disadvantaged households in poor areas. In the last 20 years, the US labor force is increasingly divided between workers who are well educated and well paid and those who are poorly educated and poorly compensated. This polarization has created a sharp shift in the distribution of household income. An inequality of income and wealth widens the gap between those who can and those who cannot afford decent housing. Inability to qualify for a mortgage makes renting the only choice for low-income families.
- A significant share of the unsubsidized rental inventory is now more than 50 years old and in poor repair. Much of the unsubsidized rental stock consists of smaller multi-family properties and single-family homes owned by individuals with limited capacity to maintain and manage rental properties. State and local governments have taken on the responsibility of providing housing for disadvantaged families.
- The recent recession in combination with tax cutting has led to a drop in tax revenues, and caused a drop in the eligibility of state and local governments to fund housing needs. Lowest income elderly owners are particularly vulnerable to losing their homes because they have the added burden of rising health care expenses.
- Other than income, the single most limiting factor to families entering homeownership is poor credit.
- Based on area estimates, at any given time in our service area, 4,000 families are interested in owning their own home.
- Because there will never be enough money to build enough new housing in rural communities, weatherization is key to creating safer and more energy efficient homes in existing units. Escalating energy costs decimate

what little wealth flows through the hands of low to moderate income families. Increasingly, low-income families decide between paying utility bills and feeding their families.

Housing Strategy:

Expand community and agency capacity to ensure safe, decent, affordable housing for all families and individuals.

The Housing Outcomes We Seek:

- **Outcome 1** - Community and agency capacity is expanded to ensure safe, decent, affordable housing for all families and individuals.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - A comprehensive Plan is developed with three cities and/or counties by 12-31-08.

- **Outcome 2** - Chronic homelessness is ended and families have permanent housing.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - Permanent housing is available for 35 homeless families by 8-31-06.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - 65% of formerly homeless families will remain in permanent housing for at least twelve months by 08-31-06.

Outcome Performance Target 3 - The employment rate of persons exiting HUD homeless assistance projects will be at least 10% greater than the employment rate of those entering the program by 08-31-06.

Outcome Performance Target 4 - At least 500 households will receive emergency rental and/or utility assistance to prevent homelessness by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 5 - 240 households will realize an increase in the assessed or market value of their home as a result of weatherization or rehabilitation by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 6 - 300 houses will be made more energy efficient through weatherization activities by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 7 - 300 houses will be made safer through weatherization activities by 12-31-08.

- **Outcome 3** - Homeownership opportunities are available to all citizens in our seven-county area.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - Homeownership opportunities are expanded in our seven-county area by _____%.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - Increase minority homeownership by _____% over baseline.

Outcome Performance Target 3 - # HUD-assisted renters become homeowners.

Outcome Performance Target 4 - _____ % of homeowners that remain in their homes.

- **Outcome 4** - Affordable rental housing is available for all citizens in our seven county area.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - Access to affordable rental housing is expanded by _____%.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - Availability of affordable housing for the elderly and persons with disabilities is increased by 40 units by 8-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 3 - 20 HUD assisted renters make progress toward self sufficiency

Agency

Overview:

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency is committed to continuous improvement in these areas:

- **Service Development** - The Agency will be aggressive in development of new initiatives and new service areas as well as new models of service delivery which meet the Agency's mission.
- **Service Integration** - The Agency is committed to providing comprehensive services through a unified system. All services delivered will be integrated to reduce duplication.
- **Public Policy Development** - All agency leadership will be actively involved in development of Public Policy which affects individuals experiencing low-income. These efforts will include attention at the local, state, and national level.
- **Resource Development** - The Agency will aggressively research and develop fee-for-service and entrepreneurial efforts. We will pursue fundraising and grant writing in order to diversify funding and provide resources for the organization.
- **Partnership Development** - The Agency will aggressively pursue relationships with city and county governments, community partners, businesses, organizations, funding sources and others to assure that the needs of all individuals, families and communities are met.
- **Public Relations/Marketing/Communication** - The communities we are involved in will know, understand and support our work. The Agency will carry out its public relations/communications plan.
- **Community/Economic Development** - The Agency will actively pursue relationships and contracts with communities to understand and develop community capacity surrounding supports for individuals experiencing low-income.

- **Human Resource Development** - The Agency will be the employer of choice in the local human service field. We will attract and retain the best employees. We will provide opportunities to improve their skills through regular professional development activities. Innovation and entrepreneurial activities will be encouraged and supported.
- **Information Technology** - The Agency will utilize our technology to optimize internal and external communications. We will regularly review our systems to assure optimal cost efficiency.
- **Fiscal Services** - The Agency will maintain sound, excellent financial management and accountability of all agency resources. We will maintain clear and accurate financial reports as required by funding sources. Management and building of assets, including property, investments, and financial resources will be emphasized. Systems will be regularly reviewed and monitored for accountability and efficiency.

Current View:

Business as usual is no more acceptable in the not-for-profit social service environment than it is in the for-profit business world. The only difference, and it is major one, is that MVCAA's customers are not paying customers. In a business sense, these federal and state programs are MVCAA's customers; they pay the bills. This means that MVCAA does not realize value in the same manner as a for-profit company. In fact, defining value in the not-for-profit environment is not straightforward at all.

For many years, MVCAA has been a social service agency, funded by many different state and federal programs. If MVCAA complies with programmatic and financial requirements of *each* of these many programs, MVCAA retains its competitive position when the time comes to reapply for funds to continue program operation. It also demonstrates the necessary organizational capacity to compete for new programs. If MVCAA maintains the status quo, keeps the funding sources happy, and does as they dictate, the presumptive result is that the Agency will be an effective and efficient organization that truly helps low-income people.

In the transformational planning process, staff members have examined this presumption and challenged the status quo. They have identified issues that need to change and articulated a vision for the future. The current MVCAA business model is not customer-focused; it is program-focused. Despite great intentions, senior management focuses too much of its time and energy on

compliance issues, rather than on the development of strategies to help families move out and stay out of poverty. The reality is that this model may be limiting the Agency's capacity to help our customers for the following reasons:

- This model encourages the formation of a fragmented rather than integrated agency;
- Important synergies are lost;
- Currently, MVCAA is a consortium of independent programs, rather than a unified agency;
- Customers are overwhelmed by an "acronym-soup" of programs, and customer referrals to programs within the Agency are not handled efficiently;
- This model does not provide optimal services to our customers;
- The Agency as a whole does not track whether services have successfully moved a family out of poverty; and
- The program compliance model discourages innovation through emphasizing compliance.

If MVCAA is to genuinely commit itself to helping low-income families move out and stay out of poverty, creating, providing and promoting opportunities for success, creating a workplace where employees are valued and truly engaging our communities, significant leadership and innovation is required. This seemingly simple task of transforming the Agency culture and structure from the current consortium of independent programs model to a fully integrated and comprehensive human service agency requires tremendous dedication and commitment from all agency staff. None of the Agency's funding sources requires the change. Some, in fact, may even perceive the transformation as a threat. Nonetheless, it is almost a certainty that the Agency will do a better job of serving the customers and mobilizing communities once the transformation is complete.

Agency Strategy:

To build a nationally recognized, innovative agency focused on high impact strategies to end poverty.

The Agency Outcomes We Seek:

- **Outcome 1** - The Agency is recognized as an anti-poverty expert and change agent.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - MVCAA is recognized in all 7 counties as an anti-poverty agent and change agent.

- **Outcome 2** – Agency policy, procedure, practice, structure are aligned with agency mission, vision, values and strategies.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - All policies, Policy Council bylaws and Board bylaws are aligned with Plan by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 2 - 90% of practices and procedures are aligned with Plan by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 3 - 100% of staff job functions are aligned with Plan by 12-31-08.

Outcome Performance Target 4 – Employee’s compensation plan is reflective of the area’s living wage.

Outcome Performance Target 5 – An Asset Management Plan is developed by 06/30/06.

- **Outcome 3** – Staff are recognized as MVCAA’s most valuable resource.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - 100% of staff feel valued.

- **Outcome 4** – MVCAA has ample funding to carry out its mission.

Outcome Performance Target 1 – MVCAA’s Resource Development Plan is developed by 12/31/05.

Outcome Performance Target 2 – Current annual funding is increased by 10% by 12-31-08

- **Outcome 5** – MVCAA Board of Directors is recognized as innovative and effective.

Outcome Performance Target 1 - The Board is fully engaged in implementation of the Agency’s Transformational Plan by 12-31-08

“Never doubt
that a small group of
thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world.

It’s the only thing
that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead -

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- ⁱ *Strengthening Rural Families* (2004), The Annie E. Casey Foundation, pp.1-2.
- ⁱⁱ *A National Report – Working Hard, Falling Short, America’s Working Families and the Pursuit of Economic Security* (2004, The Working Poor Families Project, pp. 8-11.
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Strengthening Rural Families” (2004) The Annie E. Casey Foundation, pp.13-14.
- ^{iv} U.S. Census Data (2000).
- ^v The Kaufman Foundation (2005).
- ^{vi} *Ready or Not, Here We Grow! Cultivating Successful Learners: Tracking School Readiness.* (2004), Jefferson City, MO: Center for Family and Policy Research.
- ^{vii} Thornburg, K, Mayfield, W.A., &Scott, J. (2004) [Missouri Midwest Child Care Research Consortium Quality and Workforce Data]. Unpublished raw data, cited in *Who is Educating Missouri’s Youngest Children?* (2004) Jefferson City: Association for the Education of Young Children of Missouri (AEYC-MO) and University of Missouri Center for Family Policy and Research
- ^{viii} *Who is Educating Missouri’s Youngest Children?* (2004) Jefferson City: Association for the Education of Young Children of Missouri (AEYC-MO) and University of Missouri Center for Family Policy and Research.
- ^{ix} US Census Data (2000).
- ^x *KidsCountMissouri* (2004).
- ^{xi} Missouri Women’s Council, (2004).
- ^{xii} Missouri Women’s Council, (2004).
- ^{xiii} Missouri Women’s Council, (2004).
- ^{xiv} *Money: How Much and Why?*, (1997), Andrew Hacker.
- ^{xv} *A National Report – Working Hard, Falling Short, America’s Working Families and the Pursuit of Economic Security* (2004) The Working Poor Families Project, pp. 8-11.
- ^{xvi} *Missouri Self-Sufficiency Standard: Necessary Wages for Essential Needs* (2004), Missouri Department of Economic Development.
- ^{xvii} Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC) Data (2004).