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Project information report, engaged scholars academy 2010: addressing community needs while building social capital and improving organizational wellness through the warmth from the millyard initiative

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1) Project Title

Addressing community needs while building social capital and improving organizational wellness through the *Warmth from the Millyard* initiative.

2) Project Description

The mission for the UNH Manchester *Warmth from the Millyard* project is “to mobilize the UNH Manchester community in a winter clothing drive to demonstrate the collective power of college/community members to address the community need for warm clothes through collaborative partnerships.” The purpose of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Warmth from the Millyard*, a service learning project that matches donors and recipients of warm clothing, to address community needs while:

- building a sense of community and increasing social capital, philanthropy, and civic engagement at UNH Manchester and the Department of Transportation (NHDOT) and
- Increasing organizational wellness and improving communication at UNH Manchester and the Department’s divisions and bureaus and the communities they serve.

The *Warmth from the Millyard* project reflects the application of the university’s objectives for outreach and engagement outlined in the UNH 2020 strategic plan to increase interdisciplinary scholarly practices and social entrepreneurialism to solve social problems, in this case addressing the implications of poverty on a growing number of New Hampshire’s citizens. The collaborative partnership between UNH Manchester and the NH Department of Transportation provides a framework to connect individuals to the university and to their communities to build social responsibility and increase social capital while developing students’ skills in project management, communication. The project also provides a shared exploration of social justice issues and the value of volunteerism in building community and individual and organizational health among college students, faculty and staff, NHDOT employees and community members.

3) Background information/statement of the issues/problem

Recent reports and data from UNH Carsey Institute and Kaiser Family Foundation provide the context for the *Warmth from the Millyard* project.

- In the City of Manchester, 25 percent of children live below the poverty line. Ten percent of all New Hampshire children live below the federal poverty line. (2009)
- In the first six months of 2008, real estate foreclosures were up 62 percent from 2007 and up 152 percent from 2006. (2008)

- New Hampshire workers' median wage, \$17.25 in 2008, was lower in 2008 than in any of the previous five years. Hourly wages of low-wage workers declined by seven percent over the last five years. (2009)
- Full-time workers now form a smaller share of the state's labor force, which now comprises a growing share of involuntary part-time workers, due to layoffs and cutbacks. (2009)
- A considerable proportion of New Hampshire jobs do not pay a livable wage, or a household wage sufficient to pay for basic needs such as housing, food, transportation, child care, and healthcare. (2008)

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) explained that social capital strengthens communities and individuals by "widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked." He noted that "the networks that constitute social capital also serve as conduits for the flow of helpful information that facilitates achieving our goals." Putnam presented evidence that social capital "operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individuals' lives" and as a factor that enabled innovation, mutual learning and productivity. These characteristics of social capital are reflected in the goals of the *Warm from the Millyard* project.

Since 2007, the UNH Manchester's Community Leadership (Coaled) program has organized the *Warmth from the Millyard (WFMY)* initiative that addresses the need for warm clothing in the region. Each year classes from across disciplines, including courses in biology, business, computer information systems, economics, education, and the First Year Experience program, connect student learning objectives and research to the project. Each fall, *Warmth from the Millyard* partnered students, faculty, and staff with non-profit organizations, businesses, K-12 schools, and government agencies to raise awareness about poverty, to build civic responsibility, and to respond to the need for warm clothing in New Hampshire. These classes have partnered with more than 100 businesses, schools and nonprofits and received more than 11,000 donated items that were delivered to an ever growing number of area nonprofit organizations for distribution to those in need.

In the fall of 2009, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation expressed interest in participating in the drive. The NHDOT's interest in participating emerged from a 2009 internal study that indicated a lack of community among DOT employees, a need to increase communication and address the silos within the DOT's operating structure, and to provide DOT employees with opportunities to connect to the external communities they serve through volunteerism that would serve as one measure to improve individual and organizational wellness. The project had the support of the NHDOT Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, the wellness coordinator and a number of bureau and division heads.

The *Warmth from the Millyard* project is an initiative that exposes the UNH Manchester college community and external community partners to the needs of the greater community. Students and community partners participating in the project have told project organizers that organizational silos have been bridged and a measure of trust has been built among and between various NHDOT bureaus and divisions and recipient organizations that has strengthened internal and external communities. This project seeks to identify key characteristics and attributes of individual experiences and organizational practices that foster success toward achieving the project goals and provide benefits to participants at

UNH Manchester and NHDOT during the 2010 drive. This project will support the author's further study that will ask: Has participation in the project increased individual or organizational social capital, awareness of social justice issues, created a climate for innovation and collaboration with community partners, or improved biological or psychological wellness among participants?

4) Project Details

Goals and objectives

The purpose of this project is to identify key attributes or characteristics that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Warmth from the Millyard* initiative. Specifically what factors are identified that:

- Build a sense of community and increase social capital and civic engagement at UNH Manchester and the NH Department of Transportation and
- Increase organizational wellness and improve communication at UNH Manchester and the Department's divisions and bureaus and the communities they serve.

Target population/Audience

The target population of this study will be the employees of the NH department of Transportation, specifically those participating in the Warmth from the Millyard initiative, and students, faculty, and staff at UNH Manchester participating in the warm clothing drive.

Methods

Surveys, interviews, and focus groups will be conducted prior to the 2010 warm clothing to identify key characteristics and attributes of individual experience, organizational structures, and that foster success toward achieving the project goals and benefits to participants. The NHDOT study conducted in the 2009 will provide a baseline for this study.

Evidence of external collaboration and partnership

Evidence will include partnership agreements between NH DOT divisions and bureaus, support from the NHDOT Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, bureau and division heads, and wellness coordinator. These agreements are being formalized at this writing, but are anticipated to be completed by June 2010. The NHDOT will be a partner in the project and involved at each step. They will be asked for input with regard to dissemination of the results to their specific audiences and professional associations.

Expected impact

The expected impact will be to identify the types of activities that build social capital, improve communication and provide recommendations to enhance individual and organizational involvement to foster a climate of trust, collaboration, engagement and support of wellness and philanthropy. The results will guide the development of training and process improvement practices to support the NHDOT's objectives of improving wellness and communication building social capital. The results will be presented to NHDOT administrators and other audiences for presentation will be identified and the agreements are finalized. From the UNH Manchester perspective, the study will

guide further exploration in the relationship between bridging and bonding social capital and philanthropy with the goal of furthering the understanding of how to build organizational capacity and improve mutually beneficial relationships between colleges and universities and the communities they serve.

Scholarly connection

This study will serve as a pilot for a broader study on that will explore the questions: Has participation in the project increased individual or organizational social capital and philanthropy through the awareness of social justice issues and social responsibility. Does involvement in service activities create a climate for collaboration and innovation among community partners to increase institutional capacity? Does involvement in service activities support or improve biological or psychological wellness among participants?

5) **Evaluation plan**

The plan will be evaluated at various points during its implementation to assure that the objectives of the study are achieved. This includes regular meetings with NHDOT and UNH principle partners to get feedback and critique on the instruments and survey questions. Surveys and meetings held after the study will be conducted to assess the results including the accuracy of the attributes and characteristics identified in the study to assess the effectiveness of the project and the goals of building community, increasing social capital and civic engagement and increasing organizational wellness and improving communication.