



*Support for
Neighbor
Home Owners*



*Learning
through
Conversation*



*Youth
Learn
Lessons &
Skills*

To empower people and build community in Downtown Muskegon by sharing God's love, as we walk alongside neighbors, seeking justice and a better quality of life for all through long-term, sustainable changes.

Embracing it all: Barriers, Skills, and Love

“Before you can teach them the skills of a job, you have to learn where they’re coming from,” B says, sitting on the other side of the desk at the Community enCompass offices. I’m the only thing keeping him from lunch, and he’s the only thing keeping me from sleep. I’ve forgotten my digital recorder; I scratch phrases on a piece of paper, oblivious to the fully functional computer 18-inches to the right of me.

They come from a maze of barriers; they have to in order to qualify for the Youth Employment Program. They might have no home, or dropped out of school, or have a child at a young age. In an economy where college graduates can’t find a job, what chance do they have?

That’s where YEP and B Anthony come in. The program gives these kids a paying job where they learn outdoor beautification, maintenance and rehab, and urban farming, as well as classes in interviewing and job readiness.

But, as B said, he first has to learn where these kids are coming from.

They come from places you have to be tough to survive, where kindness is taken for weakness. B tells me about a trip he took with his workers to the cemetery. “Right across the street is life,” he told them. “Houses, people, everyday things. And here is death. There are people in here who didn’t expect to be.” Then he had them say the names of the most successful people they could think of, people whose lives they admired, wrote them on slips of paper, and had the kids imagine throwing the crumpled up slips into Lake Michigan. Because that is how much our lives matter compared to eternity. When the staff at Community enCompass reach out to them, it isn’t weakness. They’re living out a choice to participate with the Kingdom in a corner of Muskegon.

Community enCompass has a motto: Neighbors building community from the inside out. These kids are coming out from behind their barriers, becoming neighbors, and building something good. As Sam Beam once sang, “It was always the broken hand we learned to lean on after all.”

“In one year, of the 27 kids that have gone through the program, we have a 60% job placement rate,” B says. “You have to be patient, but the rewards keep coming.”



the enPulse

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enStory

Farming in the Snow....by Ben Worth

The neighborhood lies under a covering of soft snow. Silent, cold mornings are interrupted only by the sound of passing cars. It's a season that forces neighbors to exchange gardening and yard working tools for snow shovels. All, except Dustin Anderson. He spends the winter days pulling up weeds, watering the ground beneath a frost blanket, and looking for unhealthy plants inside the hoop house at the McLaughlin Grows Urban Farm.

In mid-February he'll be bringing on neighborhood youths from the Youth Employment Program to start planting the spring crop. McLaughlin Grows recently purchased a 2nd used hoop house from Flowers by Ray and Sharon that will be installed this spring to help get a bigger yield early in the season for its Community Supported Agriculture shares.

McLaughlin Grows will once again be offering CSA shares in the Summer or Winter for \$350 or a combined Summer/Winter share for \$600. A share entitles the buyer to



15 weeks (or 30 for a combined share) of fresh vegetables. The idea found its way to the US in the 1980's, with farmers and community sharing the risk and benefits of the unpredictable venture of growing crops.

This year, McLaughlin Grows also hopes to set aside 10 shares for neighborhood residents to purchase at the discounted price of \$50. The discounted shares will be possible through the generosity of donors who want to give low-income families in "food deserts" like neighborhoods Downtown Muskegon access to fresh, local produce throughout the year.

Calling All Who Care... Who Dareby Tom Pastoor

- Do you still believe in the goodness of your fellow man?
- Do you still believe that people in your midst have gifts and talents?
- Do you still believe that together we can make a positive difference in our world?
- Do you still believe we can learn from each other?
- Do you still believe that diversity is an asset to our community?

Our world is filled with messages of division; scorn for those who are not like us; hateful and hurtful verbal attacks for those who may disagree with us; fear of those who have less than us.

We do not need to cave to these messages. We can move forward with hope by engaging in conversations with others who also are willing to come to the table with hope and ideas and energy to assume responsibility for our world; not willing to wait for others to improve our situation.

Please consider joining me and others from the City of Muskegon at the Community Conversations meeting on March 12th in Grand Haven, Michigan. This meeting will feature a participative workshop with Peter Block, author of *The Abundant Community* and *Community, The Structure of Belonging*.

Come and be energized by the possibilities of putting our beliefs into action, and together changing our world.





Learning through Conversations...by De Bray



Conversations are a common in the Muskegon Learning Lab. The subject matter varies but often reveals the rich experiences of the neighborhood that are not evident in the government statistics. Likewise, formal education does not adequately describe intelligence or their knowledge. I could share those stories, but I won't--it would feel like betraying a trust or breaking a confidence. For too many, the limits of their education have been a long-kept secret, concealed behind lies or side-stepped with a skillful change of subject; speak-

ing it out loud is shameful, like baring the soul or uncovering nakedness—even worse than confessing a crime. These are sacred stories, told only in a sanctuary. I listen knowing that I am on holy ground.

Those who participate in the Learning Lab are not the only ones learning. I find I have a new understanding of wisdom that reflects the instructions of the father to his son in Proverbs: “Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do!” (Proverbs 4:7). The father compares Wisdom to a virtuous woman who will bring honor. Then Proverbs 5:3-14 describes Wisdom’s harlot sister, Ignorance.

Proverbs personifies Ignorance as an immoral woman, poisonous and deadly, to be avoided at all costs. We are quick to read the Proverbs and tell young people of the dangers of sex before marriage, but we dare not overlook the deeper implications of this passage for education. Those who lack education suffer: they lose their honor; they are caught in the clutches of merciless lenders, landlords, or partners in crime; strangers collect what little they have through interest and scams; when they work, others profit from their labor; they are subject to misery and illnesses that waste their health and strength; and they live in perpetual shame. Today our use of the word education better fits the biblical meaning of wisdom, but the lesson is the same: Education brings Life; Ignorance leads to death.



Home Owners In Downtown Muskegon Receive Blessing!



Rose VanLent, a 2011 HOA recipient, stands between Contractor (Juan) and Kimi, Community enCompass’ Housing Specialist.

Community enCompass has received \$240,000 to facilitate the Home Owner Assistance (HOA) Grant through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. HOA is a deferred loan program in which eligible families can borrow up to \$25,000 for repairs to their home. During the first 5 years, half of the loan is forgiven, and the rest is deferred for up to 50 years.

Last year Community enCompass rehabbed 6 houses, replacing windows, siding homes, replacing roofs, among other repairs that addressed health/safety concerns, code violations, the treatment of lead-based paint hazards. This year we are hoping to partner with 8-10 families who live in the North McLaughlin and North Nelson Neighborhoods. Call us if you are interested!

Also, if your church group would like to participate in these rehab activities, call us! This is a great way to share your skills and get to know someone you might otherwise not meet. AND it’s not uncommon for our partner families to treat you to their home cooked baked goods as a way to say thank YOU! Come, get a taste of the vibrancy of our neighborhoods!

2011 By the Numbers

Bethany Housing Ministries:

- * 77 families housed;
- * 100% of exited people moved into permanent housing

Sacred Suds:

- * 4,822 laundry loads; 584 showers;
- * 1,472 volunteer hours logged

Healthy Neighborhood Project:

- * 144 children registered for CATCH Camp; 52 families shopped at Xmas Store!

McLaughlin Grows:

- * Over 2,000 lbs of food grown.

Muskegon Learning Lab:

- * 148 individuals utilize the learning lab since we opened in July!

Youth Employment Program (YEP!)

- * 30 YEPs employed, logging 5400 work hours, earning \$39,960.
- * 60% of the YEP graduates employed!



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How Can You Help?

My donation will allow Community enCompass to continue working in Downtown Muskegon to seek positive and lasting change.

Therefore (please check):

- I have enclosed my donation of \$____
- I pledge to give \$____ monthly
- I request to be informed of ongoing work by Community enCompass

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, St, Zip: _____

Email: _____

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*Creating the
future...
one
mustard
seed
at a time*



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