



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY

Focus: HOPE

Program

*Community-based
Integrated
Employability
Skills Development*

Date Established

1968

Contact

*Mrs. Eleanor Josaitis
Executive Director
Focus: HOPE
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Employability Skills Developed

- *Academic*
- *Personal
Management*
- *Teamwork*
- *Technological*

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FOCUS: HOPE

Study Visit Report

BY MARYANN MCLAUGHLIN

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Overview

On Friday, June 19, 1998, a Conference Board delegation participated in a one-day study visit to Focus: HOPE, a civil and human rights organization located in Detroit, Michigan.

The purpose of the study visit was to gather new learnings about leadership and creative partnership models that help forge the link between business economic performance and societal needs.

This report briefly describes the organization and the key learnings from the visit. It draws on written materials provided by the hosts, notes from a debriefing session and the published works of Noel M. Tichy, Andrew R. McGill and Lynda St. Clair.

Focus: HOPE was founded in 1968 in the wake of the 1967 Detroit riots by Father William T. Cunningham (1930–1997) and Executive Director Eleanor M. Josaitis. Focus: HOPE unites a multicultural community in common efforts to overcome injustice and build racial harmony.

Originally an interracial movement of volunteers, Focus: HOPE today employs

more than 754 colleagues and involves more than 49,000 supporters.

Over the years, it has initiated practical solutions to the problems of hunger, economic disparity, inadequate education and racial divisiveness. Answers can be found in Focus: HOPE's technology training programs, educational and corporate partnerships, and food programs.

Achievements/Outcomes

Three decades of success as a community development and business-building organization have produced a world-class model of systematic community improvement that could be replicated around the globe.

From its core roots in creating a food program to nourish babies, Focus: HOPE showed how under-educated inner-city children can—with hard work and tough love—be taught basic mathematics skills to become highly successful machinists and students of advanced technology. As a result, they become attractive candidates for well-paid jobs in the private sector—and personal models of accomplishment in their own right.

Mission

Recognizing the dignity and beauty of every person, we pledge intelligent and practical action to overcome racism, poverty and injustice. And to build a metropolitan community where all people may live in freedom, harmony, trust and affection. Black and white, yellow, brown and red from Detroit and its suburbs of every economic status, national origin and religious persuasion we join in this covenant.

Adopted March 8, 1968

Activities

Focus: HOPE is building an integrated set of activities over time in response to the reality of the community and its particular needs.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (1971)

- Feeds 19,000 at-risk mothers and 27,000 low income seniors each month

The Machinist Training Institute (1981)

- Provides state-licensed and accredited training in precision machining and metalworking; answers an acute industry skill shortage, placing graduates at manufacturing companies throughout Metro Detroit
- Current enrolment: 350

Focus: HOPE Companies (for-profit 1983; 1984; 1992)

- Three divisions supply manufactured goods and services to companies such as General Motors, Chrysler Corporation and Detroit Diesel
- About \$6 million in revenues

The Center for Children (1987)

- Early childhood education for children of trainees and colleagues; parent participation is important
- Current enrolment 204

Fast Track (1989)

- Seven-week program to upgrade the academic skills and disciplines of high school graduates and other adults to levels needed for further technical training, higher education or employment
- Current annual enrolment 525

The Center for Advanced Technologies (1993)

- Integrates hands-on manufacturing training and academic learning within a production setting
- Currently enrolls 74 candidates in a degree program

Community Arts Department (1994)

- Community Development Center/ Arts Resource Initiative funded by the Ford Foundation
- Varied activities and workshops involving the arts and the community

First Step (1997)

- Four-week program to upgrade the mathematics, communications and computer skills of trainees so they may enroll in Fast Track or the Machinist Training Institute
- Current annual enrolment 130

Tech Villas (in progress)

- Residential learning centre that will be home to visitors who want to observe and replicate facets of the organization in other areas

Resources Required

Operating Budget

- 1997–98: \$62.5 million
About \$6 million comes from revenues from the for-profit companies. The remainder comes from a variety of public and private benefits programs, all levels of government and fundraising by the organization.

Human Resources

Originally an interracial movement of volunteers, Focus: HOPE today employs 754 colleagues and involves more than 49,000 supporters.

The Technical Recruiting Department (1981) develops and maintains a network of contacts including schools, private companies, social service agencies and churches for the purpose of locating qualified candidates for the three-tiered technology training program.

Physical Plant

- Over 40 acres
- Over 1 million square feet of building space

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www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec

Innovation

A system of linked developmental programs designed to address the specific skills gaps and opportunities for economically valuable work in the Detroit community.

Principal Takeaways—Keys to Success

Following the site tours, Dr. Andy McGill facilitated a round table sharing of the biggest takeaways for the visitors and how the learnings might apply to Canada. All of the points made were captured on flipcharts and are included in this summary with some reorganization into broad categories.

Quality of Leadership

- Eleanor Josaitis, the current executive director, embodies vision and commitment
- Leadership “vocabulary”: equality, respect
- Power of passion
- Seeing and believing what is possible
- Trust
- Identity: for example, uniforms for trainees give them status in the community and a sense of belonging

Holding to a Stated Vision, Mission and Focus

- Having a dream and not compromising it—the power of a few people who believe
- Focus—listen and respond to focused needs
- Toughness—tenacity, firmness
- Focus on people—belief in them
- Focus
- Retain independence despite sources of funds and needs

Hard-Reality Situational Diagnosis of the Community and Its Particular Needs

- Importance of grounding in community needs/opportunities
- Transformation in community context
- Needs-driven change
- Machinist niche
- Integration of learnings from Fast Track
- Addressed human needs as they developed
- Run it like a business
- Place services where they are needed

Building Creative Partnerships and Alliances

- Doing things untraditionally (e.g., seeking partnerships with the military, U.S. Department of Agriculture)
- Success of business, government, people partnerships
- Strengthen, deepen, broaden capacity

How the Learnings Might Apply to Canada

- In situations where a crisis or a sense of urgency exists
- Regional applications for workforce transformation
- Youth unemployment
- Aboriginal applications
- Training system would improve current education system to match job needs/skills
- Apprenticeship training
- Process of Focus: HOPE plan and evolution could serve as a model
- Focus: HOPE nomination for the Conference Board’s Global Best Business–Education Partnership Award
- Have people visit to study community change
- Extract underlying core of why it works—its core philosophy

Suggested Reading

Noel M. Tichy, Andrew R. McGill and Lynda St. Clair, eds. *Corporate Global Citizenship: Doing Business in the Public Eye*. San Francisco: The New Lexington Press, 1995.

Noel M. Tichy with Eli Cohen. *The Leadership Engine: How Winning Companies Build Leaders at Every Level*. New York: Harper Business, 1997.

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NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

*Best Practices in Assessing and Developing
Employability Skills—20 Case Studies (Sept. 98)*

*The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in
the Workplace, 206-97 Report.*

*Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative
Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.*

*Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research:
Business and Education Collaborations That Work,
144-95 Report.*

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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