MINUTES

WDB Faith-Based Meeting

July 10, 2019
Attendees: Pastor Carolyn McCombs Chair, Cynthia Miller, Andrea Newton, Chrystal Cleaves, Mario Fontana, Walter Toombs, Stephanie Drag, Erica Marciano, Pastor Michael Odom

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Welcome and Introductions
Pastor Carolyn McCombs called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m.
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Minutes
Minutes from 6/5/2019 was approved.

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Recovery Café Conference Feedback

Committee Discussion
Committee members provided the following feedback heard or observed from attendees at the 2019 Faith-Based Conference. The following was noted:

- Adrien Byrd, of Passaic County Drug Court provided the following feedback: “Just want to congratulate the committee on an absolutely awesome event yesterday.
  - The workshops were outstanding – very relevant, not full of rhetoric, mumbo jumbo, and empty promises.
  - The vendors were welcoming, knowledgeable and ready to help.
  - The food....... delicious!

A+ on everything; your team delivered! Can’t wait till the next event.”

- Passaic Drug Court noted that many of the clients who went before the judge reported that their experience was very good and positive.

- Survey comments echoed feedback shared by Drug Court participants.

- Pastor Carolyn moderated the How I Made It Out workshop and shared that the majority of participants were engaged. One of her most impactful remembrances was of a gentleman from the last session of How I Made It Out who came over to thank the panel. He thanked us all for doing the workshop. He shared that he
had just come home from being incarcerated last week and he really needed something like this as he is trying to get reestablished in the community. Attending the conference was exactly what he needed.

- Walter noted that staff and customers who were all involved were in awe. Walter mentioned that he has been involved in three conferences hosted by the WDB Faith-Based Committee and they were also amazing. He noted that only two employers showed up for the Talent Search Workshop, but it worked out. He was not sure how many people were actually hired, but he hopes have a report at the meeting in September. Walter mentioned it was important to have the conference at the One-Stop because of the many resources that are available there. He noted that the committee should start capturing events by video so they can be archived.

- LeVar stated that he would like to commend the committee for maintaining focus when there was an oversight in coding the workshops. Many of the participants were not aware and everything still went forward as planned. The committee maintained professionalism and did it without a hitch which is extremely important.

- Mario noted that he did not get to sit in on any of the workshops due to trying to keep up with Cynthia. He noted that One Stop staff members looked in to see what was going on made some good comments as well. Pastor Carolyn noted that the committee is definitely visionary as everyone saw the possibility and believed we could create the experience which is called unity.

- Chrystal suggested that the committee send the young men from probation, who helped the committee setup for the conference, handwritten thank you notes which will go a long way. They came in and worked hard and a handwritten acknowledgement will let them know they were appreciated. The men also stayed after the conference to help breakdown everything. Cynthia will contact Jihad who was the overseer to get the names of the volunteers.
Pastor Carolyn suggested giving a certificate to the volunteers.

- Stephanie noted there were many comments about the vendor room. Many of the participants were a little resistant because they were not sure what to do. One suggestion is to offer more guidance in the future. When she was able to grab people and usher them in, they realized it was not so scary. They seemed to get something out of it. Stephanie mentioned one of the things they did at their conferences is a Tree Theme with many different branches and the participants have to sign off that they visited the vendors with some kind of incentive for visiting that table. Andrea noted that is similar to what the Faith-Based Committee did at the Youth Conference last year with the passports where the youth had to get the vendor that they visited to stamp their passport.

- Chrystal mentioned the vendors who were outside of the rooms were able to interact with the attendees because they automatically stopped at their tables.

Review Survey Results
Pastor Carolyn reported the following:

- The report was drafted by reporting out on each workshop. The committee collected 57 surveys which was great. **How I Made It Out** results averaged very positive with strongly agree & agree at 95%. Percentages for strongly disagree & disagree were minimal and not worth counting. 97% of the attendees noted they can use the information in their personal life which means that the committee hit the target and 96% stated they would recommend the workshop to others.

- **Talent Search** - Workshop response were also positive in the 90% - 93% range.

- **Entrepreneurship Is It For Me? The OFactor** the attendees loved it. 97% of responses were positive for all six questions. 98% stated they will use the information in their personal life and recommend the workshop to others which is
huge. While the response rate was lower than anticipated, those who did respond had a very positive experience.

- **Overall** – 80% felt the conference was meaningful and 91% noted the presentations kept their attention.

- **Comments** - Cynthia noted in the comments that attendees asked for more vendors in the future. Andrea noted that the survey asked participants about other topics they would like covered in the future and the following was stated – *Prison reform, How to help homelessness, Family resources, aftercare and self-care. Maybe the committee can invite 4Cs.* Pastor Carolyn noted the committee will have to work on the homeless piece because that continues to be a major problem. *They also mentioned help with life skills and mental health.*

Pastor Carolyn shared that there was a man in the How I Made It Out workshop who was seeking a scholarship to become a chef. Coincidently, there was a lady in the room who stated she was part of a foundation which has funding to help him. Because the man raised his hand with a question, he connected with a foundation who could potentially fund his need. Andrea also noted the One-Stop offers $6,000 dollar Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) that cover funding for culinary. Pastor Carolyn noted the conference hit the core needs and the committee was intentional about what it said would be served up and the committee succeeded.

Other comments highlights were: *I can make it regardless of my background, there is help and I can turn over a new leaf.*

These comments hit the core of what the committee was hoping for when planning the conference. These comments point to intended outcomes.

Mario noted the committee always tries to give the people what they need and participants felt comfortable attending the conference. Pastor Odom mentioned the
setup was very warm and not corporate so the people felt comfortable which is very important.

Chrystal also mentioned in one of the comments it was stated that *it is a good feeling to know there are people out there who understand, as of Friday my daughter and I may be homeless.* Chrystal noted it would be interesting to know who this person is.

LeVar apprised the committee members of the homeless prevention program run by Charles Featherston & Glenis McCloud. They may be able to assist and wondered if the committee could have mini workshops to piggy back off this conference. For example, make it educational. Pastor Carolyn echoed LeVar’s comment and noted that it would be a great way to follow-up. Reflect the feedback gathered by offering opportunities for individuals to come in and get information on mental health issues, homeless situations and/or getting an ITA or IDA.

Chrystal noted the committee could reach out to the people on the registration list and inform them that we are offering a workshop on self-care and target emails to persons who have expressed interest in that particular topic. LeVar mentioned the committee could collaborate with some of the programs possibly offering incentives for the participants. Pastor Carolyn agreed that this is a conversation the committee could have with probation. Chrystal noted that this lines up with the Faith-Based mission statement. Key words in our mission are collaboration and partnership which helps to and keep the committee focused on the mission.

Andrea noted if the committee decides to do the same conference next year to make sure to get a name or email address of the attendees on the sign-in sheet for future reference to facilitate follow-up.

Pastor Odom noted it is better to get the clients before they return back to the community from incarceration. Ultimately, when they are released the success rate will be higher and the rate for returning back to prison will be lower. Stephanie noted they have a program that offers support for addiction and recovery with support for 90 days. At the end of the 90 days, there is nothing but this
program allows the person to get an additional year of case management or recovery support and able to get to people just as Pastor Odom explained before they go out on their own.

Pastor Carolyn noted the committee has been discussing mini conferences and now has a starting point based on the feedback and the collaborations the committee has built. There were quite a few people attending the conference from other programs such as Kintoch, Fenwick House, and Damon House and it would be helpful to invite people who supervise those programs to attend one of the Faith-Based committee meetings in the Fall. Use this as an opportunity to share feedback we've received and ask for their thoughts and get them engaged in the process early.

Pastor Odom asked if it is possible to meet with the partners from the other programs in between the regular scheduled meeting. For example, meet in October and possibly have a two-hour workshop and then every month instead of just meeting have mini workshops. Pastor Carolyn noted the committee would have to meet initially to get the structure and then begin to meet every other month. We could meet one month then host a mini conference the next month. LeVarr noted that will increase the committee member involvement because the committee will have something fresh and different presentations. Pastor Carolyn noted, for example, if the committee decided to have the workshop on the ITA, it would address the types of training grants available and requirements to qualify.

Pastor Carolyn noted the September meeting should focus on looking at various mini-workshops moving forward based on our four target areas: Adult Education, Health & Wellness, Economic Development and Mental Health/Substance Abuse.

The committee had various conversations in reference to: Homelessness; need for higher skill levels to become employable; mental health among people who may have a degree; the retirement calculator; and, a subculture of youth coming out of high school who cannot read/write
and end up with diplomas, enrolling in colleges and dropping out because they are not able to pass remedial.

Pastor Carolyn noted the problem is people were not properly mentored and find themselves on tracks which become dead ends. They lose their way and do not know what to do after getting off track. This is also seen among persons 50 and older who are not able to reinvent themselves. Stephanie mentioned many are older and being told they are over qualified etc. Pastor Carolyn noted there may be an audience in regards to the side hustle and could be one of the mini workshops. Andrea noted the workshop could be called *Entrepreneurship "The New Side Hustle"* and merge the two.

Andrea noted there are people who help others but may actually need help for self. Pastor Carolyn noted that all members on the committee are in the helping profession. The committee may need to think about self-care for professionals and possibly have a wellness day and let people know what resources are there for the professionals.

Pastor Carolyn mentioned that New Destiny administers the PAGE program and currently serves as the only agency in Passaic County providing support to help working families qualify for utility assistance for up to $1,500 hundred dollars per year. Pastor Carolyn will have one of her team members come to the September meeting to present the guidelines for the program.

**Wrap-up**

**Meeting concluded at 2:39 p.m.**
The schedule for the next meeting: September 11, 2019