Call to Action Report
Addressing poverty and its correlates in Kalamazoo County
Spring 2014

University-Community Empowerment Center (U-CEC)
And
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Western Michigan University

June 25, 2014
Letter from the Co-Chairs

Dear Dr. Earlie Washington and Dr. Dawn Gaymer,

The entire nation felt the impact of the Great Recession and witnessed the near collapse of the auto industry in the first decade of this century. This crisis brought about severe economic times and at one point, the state saw unemployment rates shoot past 15 percent to nearly 50 percent in some of our cities. Although the economic crisis has eased a bit over the last few years, Michigan still has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

While there has been slight improvement in recent months, the most comprehensive data available in 2010 reported 1.6 million Michigan residents (16.8%) living in poverty, of whom 539,000 were children (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, U.S. People on Poverty 2010, National Priorities Project). The fact that 17% of all Michigan residents, nearly a quarter (24%) of its children and almost half (48%) of all black children in the state, were living in poverty is both alarming and cause for action.

Eliminating poverty is a moral, economic, and social imperative. And it must become a greater priority within communities. Poverty impacts all of us and it behooves everyone to work together to find ways to secure a better future for our children. We are pleased that Western Michigan University has recognized its role in educating and engaging communities, organizations, stakeholders, and community residents to come together to address poverty and its correlates.

We are grateful for your leadership and support, as well as your decision to forge a partnership between the University-Community Empowerment Center and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Western Michigan University. Together, we have combined our strengths to plan and host the recent Call to Action series of events. Over the course of three months (January-March 2014), in coordination with community partners, we provided information and data, engaged the community in thoughtful conversations, and shared experiences, optimism, and hope. This work has positioned the Kalamazoo County community to continue to work together to find ways to partner to improve services and outcomes for families impacted by poverty.

Much work remains to be accomplished to address the scourge of poverty head on; thus, a commitment from the entire education community, along with the public, private, and non-profit sectors is required. We feel confident that the critical step of calling the community to action and the act of urging individuals and stakeholders to work together to “build bridges” within the community, have inspired further relevant action toward eliminating poverty.

On behalf of the planning committee, we are pleased to submit this report that summarizes the recent Call to Action efforts.

Sincerely,

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Introduction

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. promised to lead a “Poor People’s Campaign” to force the nation to take action against the persistence of poverty. King stated in one of his last sermons, “[T]his is America’s opportunity to help bridge the gulf between the haves and the have-nots. The question is whether America will do it. There is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will.”

Today there are roughly 50 million Americans living in poverty, up from roughly 40 million - 46 years ago when this statement was made. The 2010 Census reported that 1.6 million Michigan residents now live in poverty, of which 539,000 are children. The poverty rate increased in Kalamazoo from 24.3 percent in 1999 to 38.8 percent in 2010. An estimated 20.5 percent of Kalamazoo County residents, including 26.7 percent of children, live below the poverty level. This disturbing fact is why the University-Community Empowerment Center fills an important niche in WMU in addressing the university’s strategic goal as a public research university.

Collaborations and partnerships among universities, communities, and human service organizations are necessary and effective in addressing an array of known and unknown factors that may act either as barriers or assets to poverty reduction work. In an effort to address and reduce poverty in this community, coming together is an essential step.

Background

On September 18, 2013, the Western Michigan University (WMU) Board of Trustees approved the University-Community Empowerment Center (U-CEC) as a University center. The center, which operates from the College of Health and Human Services, is a research and policy training center that collaborates with people who are engaged in critical research around poverty and the reduction of poverty and community practitioners and others who are in the business of delivering services to families. The mission of the U-CEC is to equip individuals, families and organizations with tools to advance from poverty and achieve a greater sense of dignity and worth through education and training that support meaningful participation in the economic, political and social life of their communities.

The overall goal of the U-CEC is to help build up distressed communities, create economic opportunities, and engage service providers, community residents and stakeholders to move them to collaborative action. The center fosters both discovery and community engagement and is part of an overall effort to empower people to meet their goals and needs in a culturally sensitive context.

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Western Michigan University (OLLI at WMU) is a member-run organization administered by WMU's Extended University Programs in Kalamazoo. One of the goals of OLLI at WMU is to collaborate on educational opportunities for older adults and to garner support and participation from community organizations located in the greater Kalamazoo area. The mission of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute is to provide intellectual and cultural stimulation, personal growth, and social engagement for mature adults in an informal, lively, learning atmosphere. OLLI at WMU strives to enrich and extend the quality of
life for participants as well as to create an academy of learners who can share with others what they have learned and experienced during their lives.

**Poverty Reduction Discussions – “Call to Action” Series**

In January 2014, the U-CEC and OLLI at WMU launched a series of university-community “Call to Action” events. The series included five free seminar classes, site visits to several community-based organizations, a public lecture, and a community-wide planning meeting. The Call to Action series was designed to engage the public in learning about poverty and its correlates and challenges faced by the disproportionate number of residents who live at or below the poverty level. Overall, the events were designed to educate and equip individuals with information that is vital to taking action by establishing new and coordinating existing programs to reverse the negative impacts of poverty in Southwest Michigan. The four components of the Call to Action Series to Reduce Poverty consisted of a series of five classes, site visits to local community organizations, the Burian Lecture Series and strategy meeting.

**Call to Action Classes**

A series of 5 seminar classes were held, beginning January 28, 2014 and continuing weekly until February 25 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in Room 4010 of the College of Health and Human Services. Registration was required and free parking was provided. The videotaped classes featured a moderator and panel of local experts who provided information about Education, Income Security, Affordable Housing, Mental and Physical Health, and Legal Issues and Criminal Justice.

Although planning for the classes commenced in fall 2013, the timing of the classes corresponded with the release of a disturbing report in February 2014 by the Washington, D.C. based Economic Policy Institute that noted that all 50 states have experienced widening income inequality between 1979 and 2007. Michigan was among only four states (Nevada, Wyoming, Michigan, and Alaska) where only the top 1 percent experienced rising incomes between 1979 and 2007, and the average income of the bottom 99 percent fell.

(http://www.epi.org/publication/unequal-states/)

The seminar classes provided an arena for members of the community, leaders, and organizations in Kalamazoo County to discuss poverty and its correlates. Participants engaged in lively discussions about poverty and services and options available to equip individuals and families with tools and strategies to advance from poverty and achieve a greater sense of dignity and worth. Class topics and facilitators and expert panelists are listed below:

- January 28—Education
  - Facilitator: Dr. Betty Dennis, WMU Associate Dean of Extended University Programs
  - Panelists: Michael Evans, Director, Kalamazoo Literacy Council; Bob Jorth, Executive Director, Kalamazoo Promise; Karika Phillips, Director, Center for Health Equity and Supervisor for the Kalamazoo County Community Action Agency
• February 4--Income Security
  o Facilitator: Barbara Young, Past Director of the Kalamazoo County Community Action Agency, Vice President of the Kalamazoo County Poverty-Reduction Initiative and a Consultant for WMU’s new University-Community Empowerment Center
  o Panelists: Dr. James Houston, Board Chairman, Community Promise Federal Credit Union; Sonjalita Hubert, Vice Chair, Kalamazoo County Community Action Board; Jane Zehnder-Merrell, Kids Count Director, Michigan League for Public Policy; Dr. Timothy Ready, Director, WMU Lewis Walker Institute, The Study of Race and Ethnic Relations

• February 11--Affordable Housing
  o Facilitator: Dr. Ronald Crowell, WMU Professor Emeritus of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies
  o Panelists: David Anderson, Director of Housing and Facilities, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health Services; Michelle Davis, Executive Director, Housing Resources, Inc.; Bob Ells, Executive Director, Fair Housing Center of Southwest Michigan

• February 18--Mental and Physical Health
  o Facilitator: Dr. Gillian Stoltman, former director of the Division of Communicable Disease and Immunization at the Michigan Department of Community Health
  o Panelists: Linda Vail, Director/Health Officer, Kalamazoo County Health and Human Services Department; David Anderson, Director of Housing and Facilities, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; Debra Lindstrom, Professor, WMU's Department of Occupational Therapy

• February 25--Legal Issues and Criminal Justice
  o Facilitator: Teresa A. Bingman, Esq., Interim Director of the University-Community Empowerment Center
  o Panelists: The Honorable Curtis J. Bell, Probate Judge, 9th Circuit Court, Presiding Judge, Family Division; Dorphine Payne, Attorney at Law, E. Dorphine Payne Law Office, Kalamazoo; Donald Roberts, Managing Attorney, Legal Aid of Western Michigan

Lifelong Learning Institute members, students, city and county officials, Kalamazoo County residents and community organization leaders attended the classes. The response to the classes was outstanding, with classes ranging from about 70-120 people attending each week, in spite of the inclement weather. Moreover, some of the participants shared their personal experiences which engaged the audience and prompted comments about how the community might address the types of personal challenges expressed.

The sessions were evaluated based on factors such as what motivated individuals in the community to attend, what they liked best about the series, and how the sessions could be improved for the future. In general, evaluation results revealed that the content aligned with the
catalog description, the subject matter was interesting, and the presentations were effective. Overall, attendees expressed that they would recommend the series to others. The fact that the panelists for each class were prepared and knowledgeable in their respected fields, allowed many individuals who attended to gain more insight into the issues faced by people who experience poverty on a daily basis.

**Call to Action Site Visits**
The U-CEC and the Osher Academy coordinated site visits for the Burian Lecture Series speaker, Dr. Eva Evans, on January 28, 2014 to several sites in Kalamazoo. The site visits served as an opportunity for Dr. Evans to gather additional information in preparation for her lecture, titled “Building Bridges,” which was held on March 25, 2014. Site visits and hosts are listed below:

- Kalamazoo Promise (Bob Jorth, Executive Director)
- Douglass Community Association (Sherry Thomas-Cloud, Executive Director)
- Community Promise Federal Credit Union (Dr. James Houston, Board Chairman)
- College of Health and Human Services (Dr. Earlie Washington, Dean)

**“Building Bridges” Lecture**
The next step in the Call the Action collaborative effort featured a public lecture titled *Building Bridges*. The lecture took place on March 25 at 6:00 p.m. at the Fetzer Center on WMU’s Kalamazoo campus as part of the Burian University-Community Lecture Series was established in memory of the founding dean of Western Michigan University's College of Health and Human Services. Dr. Bill Burian perceived his community as being global. He was professor and dean of the college from its initiation in 1976 until his death in 1988. He had much foresight and vision. While on a trip to Africa, he contracted a rare and deadly lung infection.

To continue Burian's legacy and honor his outstanding professional achievements, the University, in conjunction with the College of Health and Human Services, established the Burian University-Community Lecture Series in 1989. The lecture series is intended to be a distinguished event that will have broad appeal to the health and human services sector in southwest Michigan.

The lecture, which was free and open to the public, was a collaboration of the College of Health and Human Services, the University-Community Empowerment Center (U-CEC), and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at WMU. Approximately 80 people attended the event, including individuals who participated in the Call to Action seminar/classes, WMU administrators, staff and students, Kalamazoo County residents and several guests from Lansing attended the lecture. The hosts were honored by the presences of the family of the late Dr. Bill Burian.

The theme of the Bill Burian lecture and a planning meeting that commenced the next day was centered around an excerpt from one of the last sermons preached by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wherein Dr. King promised to lead a poor people’s campaign to force the nation to take action regarding the persistence of poverty and “to help bridge the gulf between the have and the have-nots.” Thus, the seminar classes and lecture were among the first of what will be many steps that University-Community Empowerment Center will take in helping to build bridges to help make Dr. King’s dream a reality.
During the lecture, Dr. Eva Evans discussed a variety of successful approaches to “bridging the gap between the haves and the have nots.” Further, she shared approaches, based on her research specific to Kalamazoo County and weaved in success stories learned from her site visits that took place in Kalamazoo. Overall Dr. Evans stressed the urgency of the community coming together to create practical solutions to addressing poverty and its correlates.

Dr. Eva L. Evans was selected to deliver the lecture, based on her experience as a national leader in education and an accomplished humanitarian. Dr. Evans has dedicated her career to developing best practices for providing opportunities to underserved populations. In her home community of Lansing and throughout Michigan, Evans broke barriers and accomplished many firsts, including service as the first female deputy superintendent of Lansing Schools and chairperson of the Tri-County United Way. In these and other roles, she developed partnerships and implemented innovative programs that have endured over the years.

The impact of Evans’ dedication and talent has also been experienced throughout the world, particularly through service with the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority in a variety of influential, key roles, including that of international president from 1994–98. She was inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame in 2005 and has received the Capital Area United Way’s Walter A. Campbell Award for her continuing service that benefits countless individuals, shaping practice and policy in education, health care, social services and beyond.

**Call to Action Planning Meeting – “Building Bridges Breakfast”**

On March 26, the day after the Building Bridges lecture, a Call to Action: Building Bridges Breakfast commenced, bringing together Call to Action seminar/class participants, individuals who attended the Building Bridges lecture, and other community-university leaders and stakeholders. The purpose of the gathering, which was held from 9:00 a.m. – noon at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Kalamazoo, was to begin crafting a strategic action plan centered on collaborating to reduce poverty in Kalamazoo County.

The planning meeting resulted in the beginning of a plan for stakeholders to work together to address poverty and its correlates in Kalamazoo County. Dr. Eva Evans and Teresa A. Bingman, Esq. co-facilitated the discussion. The following individuals delivered informative and rousing presentations:

- **Dr. Carla Adkison-Johnson**, University-Community Empowerment Center Advisory Board, Western Michigan University and full professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University.
- **The Honorable Peter Battani**, County Executive, Kalamazoo County
- **Mary Gustas**, Executive Director, Comstock Community Center
- **The Honorable Bobby J. Hopewell**, Mayor, City of Kalamazoo
- **Dr. Addis Moore**, Pastor, Mt. Zion Baptist Church
- **The Honorable Stephanie Moore**, Commissioner, City of Kalamazoo
- **Shirley Swanson**, Chair, Advisory Board, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Western Michigan University
• **Dr. Lewis Walker**, Professor Emeritus of Sociology and namesake for the Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations, Western Michigan University
• **Dr. Charles Warfield**, President, Metropolitan Kalamazoo Branch NAACP and Associate Professor Emeritus of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
• **Dr. Earlie Washington**, Dean College of Health and Human Services, Western Michigan University; University-Community Empowerment Center Advisory Board, Western Michigan University

Individuals gathered for the planning meeting – beginning with Kalamazoo’s Mayor, the Honorable Bobby Hopewell- signed a “Pledge” that was crafted by U-CEC and the OLLI at WMU that reads as follows:

*Poverty is a real issue in our society that we have been silent about for far too long. In Kalamazoo County, we value our collective community and believe that people living in poverty, like everyone else, need access to opportunities and resources to realize their dreams. Therefore, we pledge to work together to provide a caring and supportive environment in which everyone has the opportunity to dream, achieve, and strive for excellence.*

Moreover, engaging break out sessions centered on the topics discussed during the Call to Action class seminars, which included Education and Training, Jobs and Income Security, Affordable and Stable Housing, Mental and Physical Health, and Legal Issues and Criminal Justice. The break out discussions were well-attended by participants and facilitated by the following individuals:

• **Dr. Carla Adkison-Johnson**, University-Community Empowerment Center Advisory Board, Western Michigan University and full professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University
• **Dr. Lloyd G. Bingman**, University-Community Empowerment Center Advisory Board, Western Michigan University and President and CEO of Brighter Day Consulting, LLC
• **Dr. Ron Crowell**, Co-Chair of Curriculum Committee, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Western Michigan University and WMU Professor Emeritus of Teaching, Learning and Educational studies
• **Dr. Betty Dennis**, Associate Dean, Extended University Programs, Western Michigan University
• **Michael Evans**, Executive Director, Kalamazoo Literacy Council
• **Mary Gustas**, Executive Director, Comstock Community Center
• **Marianne Novak Houston**, Chair of Membership Committee, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Western Michigan University and retired teacher, poet and community activist
• **Jennifer Malone**, Graduate Assistant, University-Community Empowerment Center
• **Dorphine Payne, Esq.**, E. Dorphine Payne Law Office, Kalamazoo
During breakout sessions, participants were asked to craft at least two thoughts for a vision related to their topic and to list several “S.M.A.R.T.” (Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) goals. It was determined that more time should have been set aside for this part of the program to allow the groups ample time to craft their excellent ideas into a vision and S.M.A.R.T. goals. Even with the limited time allowed, meaningful thoughts and ideas were generated during the breakout sessions. This information, which is summarized below, could be further explored once the planning teams come back together:

**Education and Training**

Areas of Focus:

1) Early Childhood Education  
2) No Pre-conceived notions- every child has the ability to learn  
3) Adult Tutors  
4) Adult Interaction/ Relationships  
5) Transportation Access (Bus Line), Access to services  
6) Outreach Workers  
7) Collaborate with churches, schools, city government  
8) Lift Up Through Literacy grant  
   • Engagement- alleviate barriers  
   • Partnering (building trust) with Parents  
   • Family Centered  
   • Family Valuing Education  
9) Help parents create time to look for work by having after-school programs  
   • Work specifically with parents to ask for needs  
   • Transportation to school for more than parent-teacher conferences  
   • Bring in retired teachers  
   • Focus on Math  
   • Bring youth into conversations  
   • Needs based assessment  
   • Teacher Resource Center- Allow teachers to borrow resources  
   • Creating Community around children  
   • Offer a Menu of Services  
   • Identify number of parents who have embraced the Role of First Teacher
• Go into the home to help the First Teacher gain the skills to change their home environment
• Get more mentors, tutors, and volunteers in the lives of children (7:00 AM - 9:00 PM)

**Jobs and Income Security**

Vision: Kalamazoo citizens should be able to envision a more secure financial future and have the opportunity to build the resources necessary to achieve it.

Goal: Assist families and individuals- value, participate and complete skills training and education necessary to obtain jobs.

Strategic Goals:

1) Women’s model of transformation and empowerment
2) Family success centers and support groups
3) Collective efforts and impact
4) Vanguard Momentum-mental preparation/soft skills & Seventy x Seven Model (Holland, MI)
5) Sustainable attitudes
6) Draw together those who are “now doing something” for learning and collaboration

**Affordable and Stable Housing**

Address:

1) Landlords
2) Investment
3) Barriers- lack of resources, credit checks, rental/eviction history, discrimination, lack of affordable housing
4) Bring Folks Back Together (Call to Action Participants)

**Mental and Physical Health**

Vision: Prevention, education, reduction of organizational silos. This issue needs to be approached from out of the box model.

Also Explore:

- What is Health Mental and Physical from a comprehensive point of view?
- Mental Health is an important issue, what needs to be done?
- Do not focus on the diagnosis but the issues that are impacting them…is it acute or chronic?
- How do institutions contribute to the issue as organizations; the systemic change is or has not been our focus, connecting to resources and not talking to them (citizens) about resources can help them navigate their situation.
- How are we contributing: Treatment orientation verses prevention orientation (working within systemic restraints, change takes time, the vision is to create a healthy community and people) another contributing factor includes their environment.
- Institutional inertia and politics have internal structures that create silos.
What are the ideas that can be identified?

1) “Somebodyness”: ideas are relevant and need to be addressed in the area of Mental Health, same ideas are always discussed without results. The perception from the community is that it is not culturally relevant; keeping the same traditions that have somewhat negated the ethnic experience.

2) How are we placing barriers and how are they established and how do we address the barriers that contribute to the process?

3) Education and training of professionals…need to respect the environment and the people seeking and receiving mental and physical health. What are solutions doing to prevent deficits in the current structure... funding is an issue (Grants, Salaries, Community Funds, cost of treatments)

Local Level Solutions: Out of the BOX discussion and solutions

1) Eliminate institutional silos and target the most vulnerable communities

2) Self Help; peer support, open communication

3) System also has barriers (navigation of the system is complex)

4) De-Value the mental health stigma.

5) Bridges and partnership; higher education and community involvement. How can we better prepare students (HHS Students) to engage in the community to provide resources? Common vision needs to be at the forefront. Create pipeline that connects all resources.

6) Inclusion, value, prevention, eliminate treatment disparities

7) Leadership needs to develop action plan… Need to identify key leaders who are willing to take action.

8) Citizen engagement is key.

Additional Issues to Explore:

- Mental Health of people in poverty-not diagnosed, but stress etc. Chronic stress due to social factors.
- Loss of hope
- Need systemic change
- Treatment rather than prevention
- To create a healthier community by forming a healthier environment and healthier people.
- Need to coordinate services to overcome this institutional inertia
- Indigenous healing system needs to be included-needs to be culturally relevant
- Less reactive systems
- Need for interdisciplinary/ecological approach
- Need to break down silos
- Better coordination between Higher Ed & community agencies especially student preparation…how can this be made to work?
- Bring leaders together
Legal Issues and Criminal Justice

Ideas:
1) Get voters out, Primary in August and vote in November
2) Once elected, keep pressuring them
3) Better Legal resource information in the community
4) Felonies- how can we change the system?
5) Child Support- how can we help support families?
6) Mentorship as a way of prevention- Juvenile Home (Janet Jones’ program?)
7) Refine employment process/ applications & expungement process
8) Form political action groups
9) Causes of impoverishment…what are they?
10) Look at models in developing countries

Next Steps – Continuing to Build Bridges
To end of the Call to Action Breakfast, Dr. Lewis Walker presented profound and heartfelt reflections that combined history with our current state of affairs related to people who live in poverty. He urged the group to fashion solutions to the problem in a collective manner. Further, the U-CEC and OLLI at WMU accepted Dr. Eva Evans’ challenge to reconvene in three months to discuss action that has ensued following the Call to Action series and to assess whether bridges are being built.

After accepting the challenge on March 26, the event organizers announced that the group would reconvene on June 26, expressing that they felt confident that over the next three months, a leader would emerge to take on the charge of bringing people and organizations together to craft and sustain a community-wide plan to address poverty and its correlates.

On April 14, 2014, the Kalamazoo City Commission decided to create a community task force to address poverty in the city, under the guidance of Mayor Bobby Hopewell, after having established becoming advocates for poverty reduction as one of their five priorities for 2014. The City of Kalamazoo will provide general information about the task force during the June 26 meeting, which will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. at WMU’s College of Health & Human Service building, room 4010. During the meeting, the U-CEC and OLLI at WMU will also share highlights from this Call to Action report.

The University-Community Empowerment Center (U-CEC) may be contacted at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5243, (269) 387-8881. The Osher Academy of Lifelong Learning at Western Michigan University (Osher Academy) may be contacted at 3202 Ellsworth Hall, Kalamazoo, MI 49008, (269) 387-4200.

Appendix

History of the University-Community Empowerment Center
In November 2008, Western Michigan University participated in the state’s poverty summit held in Detroit, Mich. This event attracted over 5,000 people from throughout the state who participated as individuals and representatives from the public, private, non-profit and education
Following the summit, the state launched the Voices for Action poverty reduction initiative. Recognizing that poverty is a significant and growing problem in Michigan, the state sought to organize a statewide approach to effectively identify ways to help individuals advance from poverty. Thus, Voices for Action leaders set out to re-engage policy makers and service providers in terms of how they think about poverty assistance. Through the Voices for Action network, with generous support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, leaders and service providers worked together to shift back to an approach that focused on poverty reduction—not just managing the effects.

In December 2010, Voices for Action and WMU (College of Health and Human Services and the Lewis Walker Institute) came together to implement certain community-based poverty reduction activities. Through the University-Community Collaborative, pilot models were created in Kalamazoo that provided an array of service delivery programs and interventions that were designed to advance from a think tank context to actual implementation in a community.

WMU students, community partners, and University professors were involved in developing the community-based models. The collaborative also sponsored several community forums and conferences that involved discussions about best approaches to assisting and empowering low-income consumers and spotlighted best practice poverty reduction models from various parts of the state. Also, in 2012, the University-Community Collaborative completed a statewide evaluation assessment and report for the Voices for Action.

This entire process evolved into the University-Community Empowerment Center, which the WMU Board of Trustees approved as a University center on Sept. 18, 2013. The center operates from the College of Health and Human Services and Teresa A. Bingman, Esq. serves as its Interim Executive Director. Advisory Team members include: Dr. Earlie Washington, Barbara Young, Dr. Lloyd Bingman, Dr. Linwood Cousins, Dr. Carla Adkison-Johnson and Dr. Phillip Johnson.

**History of the Osher Academy for Lifelong Learning at Western Michigan University**
Founded in 2011, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at WMU strives to offer high quality non-credit programs for mature adults in the greater Kalamazoo community who have a passion for learning. This volunteer organization, with support from WMU’s Extended University Programs, works with community members, WMU emeriti, faculty and staff to offer courses and trips year-round.

The Institute provides intellectual and cultural stimulation, personal growth, and social engagement to its members in an informal, lively, learning atmosphere. It aims to enrich and extend the quality of life for participants. The Institute is proud to have created a community of lifelong learners in Kalamazoo and looks forward to continued growth as it creates more and more diverse learning experiences for its members.

On April 1, 2014, Western Michigan University's Academy of Lifelong Learning (as it was then known) received a $100,000 grant from the Bernard Osher Foundation. The grant and new
affiliation with the Osher Foundation is recognition and validation of WMU's exceptional non-credit educational programs specifically developed for seasoned adults aged 50 and older. In accepting the grant, the academy is now known as the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Western Michigan University.