



Leadership Asheville 31 Leadership Learning Team (LLT) Project Description Cost of Living Challenges in Asheville

In October 2012, the Leadership Asheville 31 Class began community research to learn more about the local economy, regional costs of living, living wages, and how to improve the financial security of low-income earners. After researching industry standards and trends across a variety of employment sectors and comparing that data with regional costs of living, Leadership Asheville 31 chose to form teams focused on the four most important issues currently facing low income earners in the WNC region: housing, childcare, wellness, and transportation. In order to highlight these issues and explore possible solutions, a series of community service projects were designed by the LA 31 teams and included collaborations with Mountain Housing Opportunities (MHO), Pisgah View Center, the YMCA of WNC, WNC Healthy Kids, Green Opportunities, and the City of Asheville.

Mountain Housing Opportunities Project

- Mountain Housing Opportunities is a non-profit community development corporation serving Asheville and Buncombe County. MHO builds homes for low income and middle class families and improves neighborhoods and communities. The organization is most well-known for its Self-Help Homeownership program, which provides low or moderate income families and individuals in Buncombe County the chance to own an affordable home through "sweat equity" construction hours. On March 28, 2013 the LA 31 Housing Team launched the first community service project with a half-day of painting a new 2-story home recently built by MHO.
- LA 31 members also consulted with Lisa Keeter, a member of MHO administrative staff, on how to research potential donors and enhance MHO's funding capacity. According to team coordinator Anita Silver, "The most exciting thing is that the qualified families are grouped together to work on the Self Help homes all together as a group."

Pisgah View Head Start Center Project

- The LA 31 childcare team launched the second community project with Pisgah View Head Start Center in April of 2013. The childcare team chose Pisgah View Center, the home of a head-start program for kids ages three through five, from a variety of organizations in need of volunteer help. Pisgah View Center currently serves approximately 90 children from diverse demographics. Lorraine Riddle, an Early Childhood Education Supervisor, has worked closely with LA 31 class members and has been with the program for 31 years!
- The service projects included multiple activities such as building a new raised bed garden, redistributing the padding chips in the playground, washing all outside windows of the building, and more. Lorraine feels "We are very blessed and

thankful that Pisgah View Head Start Center was chosen as one of the projects of the LA 31 class. Pisgah View depends entirely on volunteers to provide the upkeep of their grounds and equipment. We are also excited about the garden box where the children can be involved in preparing soil, planting seeds, and watching flowers and vegetables grow!"

YMCA Healthy Kids Day

- Accessing health care can be challenging for many of us, but it is especially tough for people with low incomes. This issue is compounded by patterns of unhealthy behavior. The LA 31 Class wellness team is focused on spreading information about services and opportunities for families to maintain wellness and enjoy the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. The team joined in the YMCA's Healthy Kids Day to present a day of fun and education.
- Team members helped set up the event and remained to help the 3-2-1-Almost None campaign spread their message about how to choose healthy meals.

Transportation Service Project

- The LA 31 transportation team began their service by supporting the Bike Love benefit for Asheville on Bikes and the Asheville Middle School bike club. Their project will highlight the vital importance of our public transit system and the challenges to rider access.
- Working with Green Opportunities, the LA 31 transportation team identified transit stops that need repair and worked to completely renovate one such stop on the corner of Depot St. and Livingston St. Several members also took part in the Asheville Bike and Pedestrian Task Force.

LA 31 is dedicated to demonstrating that, although a living wage is important to the financial health and dignity of every working person, there are also essential elements within Asheville's community that must be supported to improve the quality of life for all people, especially those at the lower end of the wage spectrum. Future service projects will highlight the way the community as a whole can contribute to improving the quality of life for individuals who are striving to reach a reasonable level of prosperity.

Improving the quality of life in Asheville and the region depends on good paying jobs and support from the public and non-profit sector. By promoting a community where people are healthy, children are cared for, transportation is accessible, and homes are available, Leadership Asheville 31 wants to show that there are many factors affecting the lives of local workers that need to be addressed by the community as a whole.