

PPL leaders' bring passion to mission of nurturing self-sufficiency

Written by Christopher Toliver MMMC Technology Reporter/Blogger
Tuesday, 10 August 2010 13:57

How many times have you had to scramble for those necessary resources needed to make your engine go? You scroll down through your cell phone contacts, spin the Rolodex, and Google the 'Net to find the solution that dots the Is, crosses those Ts, and ends with a period. Perhaps, during your "seek and ye shall find" venture, a "kick the bucket" attitude surfaces while impending failure makes its bed in your thinking. But no matter how badly you may want to dispatch an SOS signal, you still conceal a smidgen of self-will. If you can relate to this scenario, please come with me as I replay and escort you on my recent field trip.

I knocked, and the door was opened to me by an organization that is in the business of making it happen! I met with Steve Cramer, Executive Director of Project for Pride in Living. Right off the bat, Cramer stated, "The mission of PPL is to assist individuals of low income in becoming more self-sufficient and receive the resources they need to excel in a more positive direction in their lives." He meant it, too! Cramer's countenance and body language reminded me of a street evangelist who fiends to hear that question from a practicing sinner, "What must I do to be saved?" According to Cramer, those saving factors consist of affordable housing, job training, job placement, transportation, health and wellness, youth development, day care, education, and above all, a computer lab – the necessary tool that has launched our world into a vast growing system that has become dependent on technology.

Thankfully, PPL's computer lab is a huge hand-up for the clients to create resumes of interest to potential employers. The lab is fully staffed with qualified personnel who are not there to enable the clients, but on the contrary, the staff challenges and encourages clients to exercise initiative in seeing their own dreams come to fruition. A recent plus regarding the PPL computer lab is its partnership with the Broadband Access Project – a project that has been set in place to provide up-to-date software and the correct training to give the "have-nots" the capabilities to one day have it all.

Another integral piece to this well-rounded establishment is PPL's involvement in community re-entry. Sarah Koschinska, Self-Sufficiency Program Director, said it best, "We provide an environment where people can thrive and feel hope. We support clients in reaching their goals." Koschinska is excited about PPL's 14-unit apartment complex in North Minneapolis which targeted toward those with criminal histories. With housing available to ex-offenders, PPL helps alleviate that barrier and gives their clients a sense of relief by having a place to call home as opposed to that do-what-I-gotta-do attitude. Now they are able to do what they need to do and can access that needed help right on the grounds on which they reside.

Conveniently at the clients' beck and call, on-site staff and case managers are available and ready to assist the residents in their new journeys of responsibility. An on-site community room is the location for multiple services such as AA meetings, employment groups, workshops, and the 14-unit mobile computer lab which was received through the Broadband Access Project. The computer lab will rotate between three different PPL housing units, giving a variety of tenants computer access. So, PPL brings the lab to you without your having to travel. How convenient!

With all success stories come disappointments and those discouraging nemeses that always seem to find a way to prick wholesome efforts. Just like in life, we all have our challenging

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issues, and so does PPL. Cramer mentioned how today's economy affects public donations, foundation funds, and personal donations. Shrinking resources also affect the prisoners who were incarcerated in the 80s and early 90s, he said. "If you can't help prisoners return productively, then recidivism becomes off the charts," said Cramer. "Ultimately, they'll continue replaying that same cycle again and again. The sad thing about it is that it becomes costly from a dollars-and-cents aspect as well as a human."

Cramer and Koschinska both remain optimistic, mainly due to the success stories and the 13,000 people they were able to help in 2009 alone. Both are appreciative of the highly skilled professionals who have been willing to volunteer their time. Cramer and Koschinska have been able to capitalize on these professional services by creating job coaches, one-on-one counselors, and new programs. They have designed a program to meet your every basic need. When starting anew, everyone needs to begin with the basics. Where you go from there is entirely up to you!

I was told a long time ago that I was as useless as tennis courts in the ghetto, but the success of the Williams sisters confirmed that to be a lie. If one chooses not to make the conscious decision to change and tap into available resources, then that person will continue to live that lie. I encourage the reader who is searching and in need of services to contact the Project for Pride in Living and take advantage of the many opportunities PPL offers. Allow PPL to uncover your hidden potential that has been in limbo for years. The tennis ball is in your court!