

## **POPI – Power of Partnership Initiative**

In the years that I ran non-profit organizations, I learned a lot of lessons about the importance of setting goals. These old lessons resonated deep within me as I recently learned about POPI – Santa Barbara’s Power of Partnership Initiative.

POPI was born out of a realization by key community leaders that there were no clearly articulated goals shared among Santa Barbara’s community service organizations. Yes, groups and agencies were all working hard to help people, but they were each going in different directions, focusing only on their particular issues. Without a common vision about the future well-being of south coast Santa Barbara’s children, seniors and families, there was no mutually supportive partnership for our community’s finite energies and resources.

“In 2006, we started out with a simple question,” explains Paul Didier, President and CEO of United Way of Santa Barbara County, who took a leading role in initiating and driving POPI. “We wanted to know ‘What are the goals of our community? What does the community want?’ What we were looking for was kind of like the keel of a ship, to provide us with stability and direction for the next 5 to 10 years.”

To answer that basic question, the logical first step was to conduct visioning exercises in the community. “The strategy,” according to Didier, “was to get people together and ask them ‘If you could dream, what community would you want to see in ten years?’ “

Beginning in early 2008, visioning councils and steering committees were organized. Then numerous visioning forums were held where people were asked, with respect to children and seniors, to write down what they wanted the community to look like in the coming years.

“We set up committees of experts and community leaders,” explains Jerry Bellamy, who served as POPI Project Leader for the visioning effort. “But what we really wanted was a more grassroots approach, with ideas coming from the bottom up, not from the top down. We wanted everyone across the community to participate and be represented.”

Over two years, visioning forums were held throughout the south county, and ultimately more than 5,300 people, 250 organizations and 150 leaders and experts participated, sharing their hopes and dreams for a better future. POPI eventually became the largest community engagement activity in the history of Santa Barbara, involving community service

organizations, government agencies, educators and local business leaders.

After all this information gathering, the results were reviewed, assessed, digested and distilled by committees made up of a broad spectrum of local experts, agency directors, foundation managers and other community leaders. The result was a shared community vision comprised of four fundamental goals for children and for seniors. Out of hundreds of suggestions, the four POPI key outcomes for seniors and their families were:

- **Education:** seniors should be engaged in life-long learning activities.
- **Health:** seniors with complex health service needs and their families should have access to affordable services locally.
- **Transportation:** the availability of accessible, affordable, and convenient transportation is increasing.
- **Stability:** all seniors should stay independent and live safely in their homes as long as possible.

Upon successful completion of Step 1 visioning effort, the POPI initiative is now poised to tackle Step 2. This second step entails developing and implementing programs that will address unmet needs and improve the lives of our community's seniors, children and families. This can be achieved by building on neighborhood assets, as described in POPI's "A Call to Action" brochure:

"The community discovered a key strategy that would help achieve (POPI's) vision, goals, and outcomes: building on existing neighborhood strengths and resources, (which are) are the people, places, and assets in every neighborhood."

With respect to serving our local seniors, the POPI plan currently envisioned is called the Senior Neighborhood Project. The idea is to develop a system of coordinated services that allow Santa Barbara seniors to remain in their homes independently and safely for as long as possible.

Since Step 2 process involves a whole new endeavor by POPI, FrankTalk will monitor the Senior Neighborhood Project and report on it in future columns. In the meantime, if you would like to learn more about the POPI visioning effort and its subsequent plans for children, seniors and families in our community, please pick up "A Call to Action" brochure for free at the United Way office (320 E. Gutierrez Street; phone 965-8591) or visit the POPI Web site at [www.partnershipsb.org](http://www.partnershipsb.org).