

What's In Store in Appalachia?

June 5, 2008

The Neighbor 2 Neighbor Exchange Time Bank in Philippi, WV, has a unique way of addressing one of its community's biggest problems: poverty. Like many communities that are struggling economically, residents in this part of rural Appalachia have played host to countless "mission" teams from upscale and suburban neighborhoods around the country each summer. Many neighbors have been on the receiving end of social services and volunteer-based activities, but few, if any, have ever been asked to contribute to the health and well-being of their neighborhoods before. Some even believe that they have nothing to offer.

Enter the Neighbor 2 Neighbor Time Bank, an initiative of the Christian relief organization, World Vision. World Vision has been providing economic and material relief to Appalachia for 25 years, through small grants, community service teams, the Storehouse program, and leadership training. The Neighbor-to-Neighbor Exchange builds on these programs by tapping the region's strong sense of community and family.

Lucy Kirby, Coordinator of the Neighbor 2 Neighbor Exchange, described how one of her members, an 83-year old woman on oxygen, first became involved in the Time Bank. The woman called Lucy because she needed help getting her lawn mowed, and wanted to know how to join. Lucy brought the membership application to her house, and the woman asked "How much is this going to cost me?"

Lucy explained that members exchange services with each other and don't pay anything to become members. The woman replied, "But I can't do anything!" Lucy said, "Tears filled my eyes as I spoke with her. I said to her, 'You are a valuable person, and maybe you can't do physical work, but can you stuff envelopes for me?' Her eyes lit up and she said, 'I can do that.'"

Now, Lucy picks up materials to be stuffed and drops them off on her way home from work, and the member's yard is being mowed on a regular basis. The two women frequently talk and share stories about their lives.

The Exchange also features a unique incentive program, whereby participants can earn chips by making exchanges with neighbors. Until recently, these chips could only be spent at a

How Does It Work?

Members of the Neighbor 2 Neighbor Exchange trade services with one another. For every ten hours of exchanges, they earn one chip (see picture below). There must be at least one service given and one service received among the exchanges, but members may exchange any kind of services imaginable.

Members pick up their tokens right at the Transformation Station, where they are redeemed for a wide variety of household and personal items. The "price" for these items varies, from one token, to as many as ten tokens.





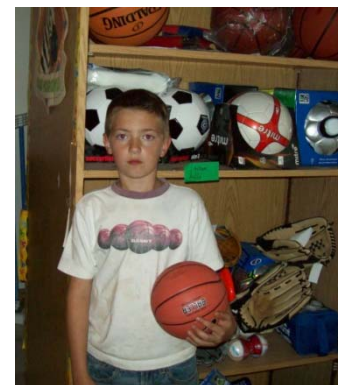
store with limited hours, which mostly offered building supplies.

On May 5, 2008, the Neighbor 2 Neighbor Exchange debuted the “Transformation Station” for members. The store will be open three days per week, and offers a wide variety of products needed by people in the community. Lucy is quick to point out that this is not a thrift store. “We have new small appliances and baby items, like diapers, car seats, baby swings and baby clothes.” The Transformation Station also carries new sporting goods, like baseball bats and balls, and basketballs. So far, residents aged 6 to 78 have visited the store to pick up numerous items, including tools and craft supplies.

Although most neighbors are happy to give their time, the Transformation Station certainly provides an incentive to receive services as well. Membership is up to nearly 300, with another Time Bank site planned in Morgan County in Ohio. In May alone, there were over 600 exchanges made among the members of the Neighbor 2 Neighbor Exchange. The Advisory Council is active, with members representing various communities throughout this rural county in central West Virginia. This month, the Advisory Council will sponsor a hot dog roast and membership drive in the southern part of the county. “I am really excited about (the) Time Bank,” says Lucy.



There is a lot to be excited about. In a county with negative population growth, where nearly 20% of families live below the federal poverty line, and where median household income hovers around half the national average, the temptation to give in to pessimism is great. The Time Bank offers hope, and with it, a different kind of wealth. Members of the Neighbor 2 Neighbor Exchange have in abundance the very kinds of assets not impacted by unemployment, inflation or economic depression. Wealth here is measured in Time Dollars, and consists of community cooperation, neighborliness, and the generous offering of valuable skills and services to one another in the spirit of reciprocity. As Lucy points out, it’s “Time Bank at its best.”



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