

# **The ConnectMichigan Alliance Campaign A Case for Support**

## **The American Disconnect**

A 1995 Newsweek poll determined that 86 percent of all Americans agreed with the statement that there was once "a time when people felt they had more in common and shared more values than Americans do today." Disconnection is a fundamental problem in our society today, a force that erodes our confidence in each other and our ability to work together to solve today's challenges.

The evening news each day illustrates the depth of disconnection that we feel: the elderly and frail die in a heat wave because no one knew they were there, children die or are permanently scarred because they have been neglected, teens kill without thought over a pair of sunglasses, or take their lives because they have become alienated from school, friends or family.

Disconnection is also felt in conflicts between races and ethnic groups, and gives rise to a growing number of disturbing hate crimes against those with differences of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation. This is a critical juncture for us all. We must decide to build a shared future or we will continue the fragmentation of our communities. These confusing times demand that an organization step forward and provide the leadership to initiate a new level of engagement.

## **Building New Connections**

Voluntary service has historically been the way that Americans have helped each other in times of trouble, building connections to each other and building vibrant and caring communities. Michigan has been recognized throughout the nation as the leader in the community service movement for more than a decade, building bridges between people and offering them the opportunity to work together toward common goals. Continuing this legacy of leadership, the creation of the ConnectMichigan Alliance is the natural next step in the evolution of community service in Michigan.

Created by the merger of the common programs of four existing entities, the ConnectMichigan Alliance will enhance the statewide infrastructure supporting local community volunteer and service efforts. Community service realizes its greatest potential when it becomes a vehicle to connect people of differing and unique backgrounds together to solve problems. The ConnectMichigan Alliance will promote life-long community service and civic engagement through the support of community-building initiatives.

The ConnectMichigan Alliance will be funded, in large part, by an endowment created to ensure long-term sustainability and the development of new and innovative programs designed to promote volunteerism and service-learning throughout Michigan. The ConnectMichigan Alliance vision is to secure \$20 million in endowment funds from two funding streams. The State of Michigan has challenged the private sector to match \$10 million to initiate an endowment to continue the commitment to community service in Michigan in perpetuity. The endowment will provide the funds necessary to sustain administration, services and programming at their current level as well as enhance and expand current programs and services and develop new, innovative programs.

## **The ConnectMichigan Alliance Strategy for Success**

Michigan's leaders have long envisioned volunteerism as an important support system for services and programs helping people throughout the State. Governor George Romney believed that local centers promoting volunteerism should be as common as the post office in each local community. And, in the past ten years, a number of statewide organizations focusing on the promotion of volunteerism and community service have developed in Michigan, providing a shining beacon of light for the rest of the nation to follow.

The ConnectMichigan Alliance will provide the support systems to strengthen community responses throughout Michigan and enable local centers to achieve their considerable potential to connect people through service including the following:

- **Service Learning.** The ConnectMichigan Alliance will expand service learning in Michigan by providing new venture grants to colleges and universities to increase volunteer opportunities in the classroom and faculty fellow grants to increase research in service learning. By making connections in our communities, college students truly learn the depth of community problems and participate in community solutions.
- **Capacity Building.** The ConnectMichigan Alliance will provide opportunities for capacity building throughout Michigan by providing opportunities for seminars, conferences and training programs, and improving the Resource Library.
- **Community Connections.** The ConnectMichigan Alliance will work with local communities to strengthen their Volunteer Centers and to provide volunteer opportunities for people of all ages.

The leadership of Michigan envisions a day when a college student can learn about the problems of homelessness in America by volunteering in a homeless shelter, a child can assist a child less fortunate by volunteering at a camp for children who are disabled, and a senior citizen can spend some time with a dying patient in a Hospice program.

When people work together, they begin to work through their differences and begin to build shared understanding that assists in resolving conflicts. The ConnectMichigan Alliance will work towards convincing people of the value of bridging their differences through community service and offering them opportunities to work together towards common goals.

### **Creating Connections through Community Service**

The four organizations included in this new partnership currently provide programs and services impacting civic engagement for volunteers in any stage of life. These programs and services, programs and services serving as the foundation of the ConnectMichigan Alliance, have been thoughtfully considered and implemented to promote civic responsibility statewide.

**Michigan Campus Compact**  
**Connecting College Students and their Communities through Service Learning**

*Mission*

*Michigan Campus Compact is a coalition of Michigan's university and college presidents whose purpose is to facilitate, on their campuses, a commitment to community service that will lead students to develop a life-long service ethic and will promote service-learning in the curriculum.*

The Michigan Campus Compact is part of a national coalition of college and university presidents created in 1985. At the time, college presidents were growing concerned with the media portrayal of students in the "me generation" as materialistic and self-absorbed.

The founding presidents of the national coalition believed this media image to be false from their firsthand knowledge of the volunteerism supported by their students. They believed that many students were involved in community service and many more would become involved if community service were encouraged as part of the higher education experience. The Michigan Campus Compact was founded early in the national movement, spearheaded by Michigan State University President John DiBiaggio. Today, many college and university presidents throughout Michigan are involved and committed to providing service learning opportunities to college students.

**Volunteer Centers of Michigan**  
**Creating Opportunities for Local Community Connections**

*Mission*

*Volunteer Centers of Michigan is dedicated to mobilizing people and resources to deliver creative solutions to community problems.*

The Volunteer Centers of Michigan is part of the Volunteer Center National Network working in partnership with the Point of Light Foundation to meet volunteer needs in 450 communities nationwide. The Volunteer Centers of Michigan is recognized as a national leader in the Volunteer Center Movement and was the first to hire dedicated staff. The organization achieves their mission by offering programs and services that connect people with opportunities to serve, building capacity for effective local volunteering, promoting volunteering, and participating in strategic initiatives that mobilize volunteers to meet local needs.

The Volunteer Centers of Michigan has 29 local community Volunteer Centers with many more in development. These local programs impact volunteers by providing them with volunteer opportunities matched to their skill and interest level and impact organizations by providing them with appropriate volunteers for their tasks. The statewide Volunteer Centers of Michigan provides technical assistance to the local volunteer centers through retreats, training, funding, and consultation to strengthen their capacity to provide meaningful volunteer opportunities in their communities.

**Michigan Nonprofit Association  
Increasing Nonprofit Capacity to Maximize Community Connections**

*Mission*

*The Michigan Nonprofits Association's mission is to promote the awareness and effectiveness of Michigan's nonprofit sector, and to advance the cause of volunteerism and philanthropy in the state.*

The Michigan Nonprofit Association represents and serves nonprofit organizations located in rural communities, suburbs and metropolitan areas throughout Michigan. The membership of the organization ranges from nonprofits providing services to the homeless to arts councils. The numerous affiliates and foundations belonging to the Michigan Nonprofit Association are interested in the advancement of the nonprofit sector.

Funded, in part, by the Kellogg Foundation and the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Michigan Nonprofit Association provides services and technical assistance to its members including conferences and trainings designed to build organizational capacity, the provision of cost-effective insurance coverage for nonprofit organization employees, public policy updates, mini-grant funding to support volunteerism, and the annual Compensation and Benefit Survey.

**The Michigan Community Service Commission  
Encouraging Community Connections to Find Community Solutions**

*Mission*

*The Michigan Community Service Commission is dedicated to enabling all citizens, including youth, to engage in public problem solving through service and volunteerism.*

The Michigan Community Service Commission was created in Governor Engler in 1991 by Executive Order. The organization serves as a grantmaker for local programs, administers national service programs including Learn and Serve programs, and provides training for grantees.

Among the organization's programs and services is America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth, led by General Colin Powell since 1997 to recruit youth volunteers and provide America's youth with the essential resources to become healthy and productive adults. Michigan's Promise is the state's response to the national America's Promise effort. Launched in Lansing in 1997, the Michigan's Promise program promotes services for children.

The Michigan Community Service Commission also administers Make A Difference Day in Michigan. It is a day when friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers join together with nonprofit organization, schools, local business and service organizations to take part in community projects.

## **The ConnectMichigan Alliance – A Solution to Disconnection**

Community service is a powerful tool to bring people together and serves as an antidote to the disconnection that has become endemic in our society.

The ConnectMichigan Alliance creates a solution to the disconnect felt by many in our society. Through community service, people in Michigan will be reminded of what can be accomplished when we work together. Service creates individual connections between people through one-to-one relationships, brings people together who are in conflict with one another, and engages people who are recipients of services as volunteers. Diminishing disconnection through community service heals pain, creates confidence and good will, and brings communities together to solve community problems.