



# PATHWAYS-VA, INC.

## PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

*A Case Study*





## 1. Key Program Distinctions

Pathways-VA, Inc. was selected as an interfaith community development corporation. Serving individuals and families in Petersburg, Virginia, Pathways provides services to its and other clients through an extensive and diverse network of partnerships that includes government entities, faith- and community-based organizations, and for-profit businesses. These partnerships are supported by the numerous community volunteers who enable Pathways to significantly expand its capacity to serve the local community. Recognizing the critical role these partnerships and community members play in supporting their clients, Pathways actively seeks out and is receptive to feedback and technical assistance, and has developed a business model acknowledging that volunteer and working relationships must be mutually beneficial. Pathways serves as a critical example of how one agency can build and support a community safety net to provide holistic support and services to YouthBuild participants and TANF recipients alike. Pathways supports the local TANF program by fulfilling the terms of a formalized Memoranda of Understanding, which allows it to support TANF recipients and other low-income residents with job-training and other wraparound supports. A list of site visit participants consulted in developing this report is included as an appendix.

## 2. Petersburg's Demographics

As of 2007, Petersburg had a population of 32,672, of which 2,866 families had children younger than age 18.

With the highest dropout rate in the State, Petersburg's high school dropout rate reached 42.8 percent in the 2007-08 school year.<sup>1</sup> With school completion being a key indicator of future employment, it is not surprising that, in 2007, Petersburg had a median income of \$34,573 and an unemployment rate that—including chronic unemployment measured by the local Employment Commission—reached as high as 44 percent.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Virginia Department of Education statistics, and those of EdWeek.org for additional data.

<sup>2</sup> See ESRI Business Analyst for additional unemployment measures.

<b>Exhibit 1: Demographic Information for Petersburg<sup>a</sup></b>	
<b>Population</b>	
2007	32,672
<b>Ethnicity (2007)</b>	
White	20.3%
African-American	77.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.8%
Hispanic or Latino origin <sup>b</sup>	2.6%
<b>Age Composition (2007)</b>	
0-19	8,938
20-24	2,188
25-44	8,385
45-64	7,906
65 +	5,255
Median Age	38.4
<b>Gender Composition (2007)</b>	
Male	14,768
Female	17,904
<b>Median Income (2007)</b>	
per household	\$34,573
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	
2007	8.5%
<b>Dropout Rate for grades 7-12</b>	
2007-2008	42.8%
<b>Virginia TANF Indicators (FY 2009)</b>	
Recipients (average)	83,313
Families (average)	35,104
Children (average)	56,582

<sup>a</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, TANF Caseload Data.  
<sup>b</sup> Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories



## PATHWAYS-VA, INC. | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

Historically known for its tobacco, peanut, and luggage manufacturing—as well as some cigarette manufacturing and shipping/distribution—Petersburg has been significantly affected by deindustrialization. While a few large companies continue to operate in Petersburg, current economic development efforts tend to focus on historic preservation.

### 3. Pathways' Historical Background and Development

Started by the United Methodist Church, and formerly known as Petersburg Urban Ministries, Pathways originated as an interfaith grassroots organization in 1995 to move area congregants out of the pew and into the streets to build relationships with community members in Petersburg. The cofounders, two United Methodist clergy, developed Pathways in collaboration with key leaders from various community congregations. Building on these interfaith partnerships, Pathways now serves as one of Petersburg's leading providers of workforce development and social service programs.

When reflecting on the history of Pathways, agency leaders and partners identified four key milestones in the organization's development:

- **Relocation of Pathways out of the United Methodist Church.** When Pathways was established, it was housed in the basement of a United Methodist Church facility on a budget of \$500. As Pathways began to grow, it was able to move into a rented warehouse. By moving out of the United Methodist Church facility, Pathways was able to advance its image as an interfaith organization, as opposed to a Methodist-based organization, resulting in increased acceptance and buy-in from community members.
- **Award of Pathways' first YouthBuild grant.** In 2001, Pathways received its first YouthBuild grant, allowing it to help high-risk youth between the ages of 16 and 24 to learn housing construction job-skills and complete their high school education. This \$290,000 grant provided Pathways

with a firm financial foundation that enabled executive leaders to expand Pathways' programs and provide holistic services to meet the needs of the Petersburg community.

- **Construction of Pathways' current facility.** In 2006, with the support of program participants and partnering organizations, Pathways began the construction of its current facility. This new building demonstrated Pathways' commitment to Petersburg and the community members it serves. The establishment of this facility also resulted in increased recognition and support from funders and government representatives.
- **Development of Shalom Homes.** In 2004, Shalom Homes was incorporated as a parallel entity and, over the next several years, it increasingly operated as an independent 501(c)3 organization. This was due in part to outside support for Pathways from an intermediary organization affiliated with the Ford Foundation, called the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)—which, perhaps most importantly, helped to diversify Pathways' own base. In 2007, LISC began providing Pathways with loans, grants, and technical assistance—and one of its recommendations was that the executive director of Shalom Homes (who was also a cofounder of Pathways) no longer be supervised by the executive director of Pathways, who is his spouse. This reorganization helped improve the broader efficacy and sustainability of both organizations, which could function more independently than before.

Pathways today serves as a community center and a beacon of hope for the Petersburg community. With a \$1.9 million annual operating budget, Pathways employs 22 staff and coordinates the efforts of more than 1,000 volunteers annually.

### 4. Programmatic Information

Serving approximately 2,600 individuals a year, the programs offered by Pathways have been developed to serve both TANF and other clients. As part of the intake process, Pathways



## PATHWAYS-VA, INC. | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

counselors identify the government programs in which participants are enrolled, and other services for which they may be eligible. In cases where participants are TANF-eligible but not enrolled, counselors work with TANF case managers to facilitate the enrollment process. As a rule, all program applicants are required to report benefits on the Pathways' application, prior to enrollment.

YouthBuild is one of Pathways' best-known programs in the community, and is a 10-month program that targets youth ages 16–24 who have not yet completed high school. Through YouthBuild, participants receive academic instruction on a locally approved new construction and conversion system, providing each graduate with transportable accreditation. They also receive workforce development training focused on the construction and renovation of affordable housing units, including instruction on data-cabling and green-certification. Program participants are required to arrive on time, and cooperate with Pathways leaders, and in exchange for their active participation all YouthBuild participants receive a stipend.

When participants graduate from the YouthBuild program, Pathways' job placement coordinator helps them identify and secure employment opportunities. Pathways has found that graduates from this program have a competitive edge in entry-level jobs because employers recognize that program participation requires commitment and that graduates possess both hard and soft employment skills. As one partner expressed, "Pathways is not an easy program to complete ... [Pathways' graduates] have proven themselves and proven that they can stick with a program." Pathways also provides graduates with a letter of recommendation, and offers follow-up services to employers upon request. According to executive leaders, the majority of YouthBuild students enter the program with a fifth- or sixth-grade reading level, and approximately 50 percent leave having attained a GED. They note that Pathways' credential rate is nearly 100 percent and that, as of fall 2009,

93 percent of all program graduates had successfully attained a job placement within 90 days of completing the program.

Pathways' workforce development programs are complemented by its waste management, urban gardening, and composting programs. Through these programs, Pathways has sponsored a significant number of container gardens where low-to-moderate-income families can produce food for themselves, as well as selling fruits and vegetables as a source of income. Pathways also operates a lead hazard reduction program that offers lead paint remediation, education, and access to medical treatment, to help reduce the hazards associated with exposure to lead paint.

Recognizing the lack of affordable healthcare in Petersburg, Pathways also operates free rheumatology and cardiology clinics. These clinics are supplemented by a number of health initiatives, including a substance abuse rehabilitation program, exercise classes, mental health counseling, domestic violence services, and educational events.

### 5. Partnerships and Community Engagement

Petersburg's social service organizations have historically been recognized as short-lived and uncooperative; yet, despite this backdrop, Pathways has been able to grow, and even thrive, by building and cultivating successful partnerships with government entities, nonprofit agencies, and for-profit organizations.

Among Pathways' most important local partnerships—and one of its most central partners with respect to TANF-eligible populations—is the City of Petersburg's *Department of Social Services* (DSS). While part of this relationship is currently supported by a memorandum of understanding, the partnership between Pathways and the TANF office is not contractual. Pathways primarily partners with the TANF office through mutual referrals. DSS case managers report that they refer clients to Pathways as a result of its proven track record and holistic approach to serving TANF recipients. Referrals



## PATHWAYS-VA, INC. | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

are typically made for adults who need Pathways' workforce development services and for out-of-school youth. DSS case managers note that, "Pathways is the only local organization which addresses [TANF recipients'] academic and social needs." Communication between DSS case managers and Pathways counselors primarily takes place through phone calls. Pathways counselors also complete monthly reports on participants' attendance, progress, and earned income.

Pathways also partners with the Petersburg local workforce office, by serving as one of the Workforce Investment Agency's (WIA's) largest youth contractors. Pathways is viewed by WIA personnel, and by many community members, as a kind of "youth One-Stop." As part of its WIA contract, Pathways bring its YouthBuild participants to the local One-Stop twice a year to introduce them to the One-Stop staff and inform them of its services. WIA staff have also provided training and technical assistance to Pathways staff on the WIA process, WIA documentation, and using the WIA management information system. WIA representatives reported that this training has resulted in significant improvements in Pathways' data tracking.

While Pathways' partnerships with DSS and the local workforce office are generally positive, representatives from all three agencies acknowledged that they could be further enhanced through increased and more routine communication—particularly with respect to the DSS office. For example, it was suggested that the relationship between Pathways and TANF case manager-driven client-monitoring could be improved by creating formal systems for information-sharing and data tracking, much as Pathways currently does with the workforce office. Provided they were received with discretion, Pathways counselors could provide DSS case workers with a list of the program participants enrolled in TANF prior to each YouthBuild program cycle, to facilitate agency collaboration. Additionally, representatives from all three organizations suggested improving communication through more consistent meetings to discuss student progress and share programmatic updates and information.

In addition to DSS and the local workforce office, Pathways partners with other government agencies such as the Probation and Parole Office, the local Housing Authority, and the Petersburg Health Department. As Pathways' executive director describes, "Petersburg's a small town, and the more we can work together, the more we can accomplish on behalf of our participants—regardless of who gets the credit."

Recognizing that attaining and sustaining self-sufficiency generally requires a holistic approach to service delivery, Pathways leadership and staff have always understood the importance of supporting and supplementing their programs through partnerships with local businesses and other service-providing entities. Over the years, Pathways has developed and fostered formal and informal partnerships by hosting community events, conducting focus groups to solicit feedback from partnering agencies, and seeking broad funding opportunities that support collaborative partnerships. One partner describes Pathways as "uniquely able to respond to community needs without an agenda around what ought to happen [in the community]." As a result of this philosophy, Pathways has developed a wide range of partnerships.

*Community organizations* are also critical to ensuring that Pathways is able to comprehensively support their clients. Pathways' partnership with Virginia Supportive Housing (VSH) serves as one example of such partnerships. Through financial literacy classes for YouthBuild students, VSH helps ensure that program participants are able to manage their finances once they graduate, reducing the chance that they will need government assistance in the future. VSH also partners with Pathways to support its affordable housing efforts. Specifically, VSH identifies prospective homebuyers, provides homebuyer education, and conducts community outreach for Virginia Individual Development Accounts (VIDA). By partnering with VSH on its affordable housing efforts, Pathways is able to help low-income community members become homeowners by purchasing the homes Pathways constructs through its YouthBuild program.



## PATHWAYS-VA, INC. | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

As a testament to Pathways' unique ability to partner across agencies, Pathways has also developed a number of partnerships with local *for-profit businesses* in Petersburg. One for-profit partner appreciated in particular Pathways' recognition that these partnerships should be mutually beneficial: "if a for-profit like mine gives Pathways money, they should ask how they can support us—for example, by the help of volunteers on the job." Pathways partnerships with for-profits have taken a variety of forms with for-profits serving as contractors, subcontractors, and prospective employers. Additionally, on occasion Pathways has hired its for-profit partners to provide services to Pathways itself. For example, Pathways contracted a partnering design firm to help design and develop its current facility. On a number of occasions, Pathways has convened discussion groups with its for-profit partners to discuss the city's employment issues and ways to enhance the employment prospects for their program graduates. Information gained from these discussions has provided Pathways with important insights and advice. By increasing their understanding of how for-profits perceive the current job market, Pathways staff are able to ensure that their programs are designed so that graduates can attain the necessary skills to meet the changing needs of the local business community.

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Interestingly, while Pathways' faith-based partners identify Pathways' faith foundation as critical to its success, for-profit partners identify Pathways' ability to operate as a business as instrumental. It is likely that the success of Pathways is

in part due to these differing talents, as well as Pathways' simultaneous commitment to both faith-based convictions and a strong business sense.

### **Volunteer Strategy**

In addition to partnering with community agencies and organizations, *volunteers* also play a critical role in the life of the organization. With the majority of volunteers originating from local congregations, Pathways consistently asks volunteers "to do something with us, not do something for us."

Pathways staff members recognize the importance of developing the relational components of volunteer work—and they have seen successful long-term results. Rather than working as groups of volunteers on a painting project or some other task, volunteers are asked to work alongside program participants—"supported at the edges by staff," so they can engage in meaningful relationships.

***"The leadership isn't hung up on its own organizational, geographic, or philosophical territory .... Pathways staff have crossed many barriers that keep most organizations mostly an entity unto themselves."***

This makes a significant difference to outsiders. Pathways has found that, as a result of new relationships formed, many volunteers decide to make long-term commitments to the organization and its participants. Perhaps not surprisingly, many congregations that send volunteers come from outside the city of Petersburg itself, and Pathways' leadership is always looking for new ways of engaging local voluntarism.

### **Community Engagement**

Pathways also fosters community engagement by encouraging program participants to give back through community service projects. The founders of Pathways believe that, in order to support comprehensive community development, it is



## PATHWAYS-VA, INC. | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

important for service recipients to also be *service providers* themselves. Thus, Pathways offers short- and long-term community service opportunities to its participants. One example is its partnership with the Petersburg Health Department, in which YouthBuild students support the city's new teen health clinic, both through service projects and through opportunities to shadow health educators. The experience has been win-win in many respects, as a number of YouthBuild student volunteers have been able to obtain needed health services. Conversely, staff members at the local clinic often refer at-risk teens to Pathways, including those who are no longer in school or those who have had a child, so that they can attain needed support and job-training opportunities. Ultimately, this spirit of community partnership helps build institutional partnerships that can enhance Pathways' ability to resource and serve TANF clients more effectively.

While Pathways' initial efforts to engage and support the Petersburg community were met with some skepticism by local partners, these concerns have largely been put to rest, as a result of Pathways' ability to demonstrate long-term commitment to collaboration—as well as increasing opportunities for Petersburg residents. According to one partner, “The leadership isn't hung up on its own organizational, geographic, or philosophical territory. That is why we are committed to helping other groups when they need it. Pathways staff have crossed many barriers that keep most organizations mostly an entity unto themselves. Although everyone can easily feel like they're in a fight for limited resources, Pathways hasn't gotten caught up in that kind of in-fighting—and that's attached me to them.”

Partnering agencies also consistently observe the dedication of Pathways' leadership. Several board members expressed admiration for that fact that, in times of funding difficulty, several of Pathways' lead staff members have chosen to go without pay, in order to continue program operation. Many community partners have picked up on this overall spirit of

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commitment to service and broad collaboration, borne from both faith convictions and dedication to serving low-income and at-risk youth.

### **Faith-Based Roots—and Orientation**

Given early beginnings that developed out of the United Methodist Church, the wider *faith-based community* has been a crucial supporter of Pathways throughout its history. Pathways has used its faith-based partnerships to share information about and solicit volunteer support for its various programs. Over the years, Pathways has partnered with congregations on a number of programs, including a recent missionary trip where faith-based volunteers and program participants went to the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, a number of local congregations have selected Pathways as their mission project, donating considerable time and resources to the organization.

Volunteers from the faith-based community also sit on Pathways' and Shalom Homes' board of directors. These board members report that the executive leadership of Pathways has cultivated a community in which congregations are willing and able to collaborate and work across religions—which, in a small town such as Petersburg, is no small feat. This openness to interfaith partnership is the hallmark of the organization: as one congregational leader and long-time Pathways board member described, “When I was a boy, I thought what it meant to be Christian was to be Baptist, to be black, and to work on a farm. But as I grew, I realized the kingdom of God was far bigger than I first thought—*far* bigger. Today, I see firsthand that my Jewish brother and my Methodist sister and my Catholic friends are all engaged in what God is doing in this small city, on behalf of endangered children he loves. We believe in the shared work of this place.”



## PATHWAYS-VA, INC. | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

Pathways has also resisted easy labels. In the words of another Methodist leader who has played an instrumental role in supporting the organization, “Pathways wouldn’t survive if it were simply Methodist. To put a label on it would kill it.”

### **Being “Teachable:” Accepting Intermediary Support**

While all of Pathways’ partners serve critical roles in helping to meet the holistic needs of TANF recipients, Pathways’ relationship with LISC has significantly increased both the capacity and breadth of Pathways’ services. As an intermediary organization affiliated with the Ford Foundation, LISC has provided Pathways with loans, grants, and technical assistance since 2005. Specifically, LISC has given Pathways grants that could help strengthen and support leadership development in Petersburg, as well as loans to construct affordable housing. Additionally, LISC has served as an important advocate with other community partners.

For example, when the slow housing market resulted in Pathways being unable to sell one of its houses, LISC accompanied Pathways to the bank to advocate for a loan extension. As one partnering organization noted, this lends real credibility to Pathways: “It’s different when a community-based organization is sitting there alone, versus their having somebody with national stature sitting there in partnership, saying ‘we think this organization is important.’” Once a month, a LISC consultant visits Pathways to provide technical assistance on a variety of issues, including governance, fundraising, finance, local infrastructure, and social enterprising.

Both LISC and other partnering agencies report that the executive leadership at Pathways is receptive to this input, and recognizes firsthand the benefit of receiving technical assistance and outside perspective. While structural reorganization always requires hard work—and in some cases, painful changes to established habits—one partner made clear that Pathways “has been very open to some hard suggestions

and recommendations—and today, they’d tell you they’re better for it.” This overall openness has enabled Pathways both to strengthen its service delivery and earn newfound respect and support from community members, including a Petersburg family foundation that previously had never served as a Pathways partner, but today supports the organization.

### **6. Lessons Learned**

A wide range of strategies used by Pathways to develop and cultivate successful partnerships with government entities, nonprofit agencies, and for-profit organizations—including the local TANF office—can help inform the development of future partnerships targeted at helping families attain self-sufficiency, thus reducing their reliance on public assistance.

The most promising lessons learned from Pathways include:

- **Successful partnerships must be mutually beneficial.** Government entities, nonprofit agencies, and for-profit partners all have unique missions and visions that drive their work. In each partnership, working relationships that support and aid the mission and vision of both agencies provide an incentive for agencies to engage in and sustain long-term partnerships.
- **Building a diverse network of partners enables service agencies to more effectively meet the needs of TANF recipients.** TANF recipients often need a diverse array of services, far beyond what any single agency can provide. Whether in a large city, a rural setting, or a small, low-income suburb like Petersburg, this means a network of partnering service providers and community organizations is far more able to provide holistic support, through direct service and referrals.
- **Actively engaging volunteers can substantially expand the capacity of service agencies.** Volunteers allow organizations to work beyond their own limited financial and personnel resources, bringing pro-bono assistance and



## PATHWAYS-VA, INC. | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

support. As has become evident in Pathways' experience, providing opportunities to build meaningful relationships with both staff and program participants can facilitate long-term commitments on the part of these volunteers.

- **Seeking input and support from community partners and outside consulting assistance can improve programming and overall infrastructure.** Partners provide an important pool of expertise that can be convened to solicit feedback, advice, and information to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of programs. Actively seeking this feedback enables partners to provide new perspective, and deepens partnerships across neighborhood divides.
- **Technical assistance can enhance service delivery and local partnerships.** When technical assistance is integrated into organizational habits, programs can attain new resources and enhance service delivery. Additionally, funding agencies that provide technical assistance bring significant value, especially when the receiving organization's leaders are open and receptive to integrating outside feedback.
- **Publicly recognizing partners is critical.** While this habit can easily be overlooked in the context of meaningful service, developing partnerships that are mutually beneficial should also have a kind of "public face." In Pathways' case, it has been important for agencies to enhance and strengthen their partnerships through formal and informal acts of recognition and appreciation for local partners.

### 7. Conclusion

According to community members, local organizations, and Federal partners, Pathways has made a profound, lasting impact on the Petersburg community, and in the lives of the YouthBuild and TANF recipients it serves. Numerous partners cite testimonies given by YouthBuild graduates as proof that Pathways has injected not only hope but key skills in the lives of its program participants. Participant families and the Petersburg community at-large bear witness to this

contribution, and the city's DSS case managers report that youth often request placement at Pathways, having seen the impact the program has had on their friends. In describing the impact of Pathways on the larger community, one supporter noted, "[Pathways] is a jewel and people don't even understand it. People don't understand that when you go through Pathways it reaches back to your whole family. I've lived here a long time, and a lot of key community developments have taken place here because of them."



## List of Site Visit Participants – Pathways

Dwala Ferrell, Executive Director, Pathways

Mike Watts, Executive Director, Shalom Homes

Juanita Epps, Youth Programs Director, Pathways

Dan Gagnon, Technical School Director, Pathways

*Focus Group* – Lead Counselors and Construction Team Facilitators, Pathways

Talibah Majeed, Job Placement Coordinator

Earlene Jones, Director, One-Stop Career Center/WIA Programs

*Focus Group* – *Methodist Beginnings* Founding and Current Board Members (for Pathways)

Deborah Hanson, Director, VA Supportive Housing

Ron Thompson, Program Assistant and Former Volunteer, Pathways

Kimberly Willis, Director of Social Services, Department of Human Services

TANF FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS INITIATIVE

