



BETHEL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION MILLVILLE, NEW JERSEY

A Case Study





1. Key Program Distinctions

Bethel Development Corporation (Bethel) started out as an outgrowth of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Millville, New Jersey. Bethel is mission-driven to provide services to both TANF and low-income clients. Bethel was founded as and continues to be centered on its soup kitchen, which provides more than 3,000 meals per month to any Millville residents in need. In addition to fulfilling this basic service, Bethel has grown to function as a community center, providing GED preparation courses, crisis assistance and counseling, and employment and job-search assistance. The organization also functions as a Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) site, which means that TANF recipients are able to work at one of the Bethel facilities and fulfill their TANF work participation requirements. In short, Bethel supports the local TANF program by serving TANF recipients and low-income residents, fielding CWEP participants, and helping to provide meals in the community.

The organization’s relationship with TANF and other government entities is furthered through its unique partnership with the Cumberland County Office of Workforce Development and One-Stop Career Center. In this capacity, Bethel serves as a satellite “One-Stop” and provides publicly funded services to clients in its own, nongovernment facilities. This collaboration assists the State in reaching those in need who may not typically come to the One-Stop Career Center, due to transportation difficulties. With its faith-centered mission and ability to provide an array of services, Bethel serves as an example of how the faith community often addresses physical needs—including the provision of employment support—for the community. Bethel’s reciprocal relationship with the local TANF program was described in more detail by a group of officials listed as an appendix to this report.

2. Millville Demographics

The Bethel is a faith-based organization serving low-income residents in Millville, New Jersey. As of 2007, Millville had a population of 27,272, of which 3,356 families had children under the age of 18.

Exhibit 1: Demographic Information for Millville^a	
Population	
2007	27,272
Ethnicity (2007)	
White	74.7%
African-American	17.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.1%
Hispanic or Latino origin ^b	14.3%
Age Composition (2007)	
0–19	7,764
20–24	1,563
25–44	7,967
45–64	6,615
65 +	3,363
Median Age	36.9
Gender Composition (2007)	
Male	12,934
Female	14,338
Median Income (2007)	
per household	\$47,943
2007	8.8%
New Jersey TANF Indicators (FY 2008)	
Recipients (average)	79,565
Families (average)	33,468
Children (average)	56,373

^a Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *American Community Survey 2005-2007*. Retrieved September 2009 from [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=&_lang=en&_ts=U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. \(2008\). TANF Caseload Data. Retrieved September 2009, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/caseload/caseload_recent.html#2008](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=&_lang=en&_ts=U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2008). TANF Caseload Data. Retrieved September 2009, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/caseload/caseload_recent.html#2008)

^b Hispanics may be of any race, so are also included in applicable race categories.



Millville is located in Cumberland County, the poorest county in New Jersey, and was ranked 628th out of New Jersey's 702 municipalities, in terms of per capita income. With a number of industries having left the region over the years, in 2007, Millville had a median income of \$47,943, and an unemployment rate of 8.8 percent.

In 2008, a total of 79,565 recipients in the State of New Jersey—including 33,468 families and 56,373 children—were receiving TANF benefits. More information regarding Millville's demographics are presented in Exhibit 1.

3. Bethel's Historical Background and Development

Started by Reverend Charles Wilkins of Bethel AME Church, Bethel's program mission is to provide social services and job training to low-income residents of south Millville. Through Bethel AME Church, Reverend Wilkins and others have been serving the Millville community since 1999. Bethel was formed in 2003, and incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)(3). Prior to the incorporation of Bethel, Reverend Wilkins and other community members operated a soup kitchen, which distributed meals to seniors and low-income residents in the church's neighborhood. Over the past 10 years, Bethel has grown from a soup kitchen to a "one-stop shop," providing services such as a food pantry, sanction outreach (i.e., outreach to individuals whose TANF benefits have been reduced due to the imposition of a sanction for failing to comply with TANF program rules), employment and training services, GED education, a Community Work Experience Program, and an out-of-school youth program.

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

- **Structural Partnership with Community Services.** Two years after Reverend Wilkins arrived at Bethel AME Church, the existing church was torn down, with plans to build a larger structure. Reverend Wilkins recognized that, though the congregation was made up of middle-class professionals, the neighborhood was significantly depressed. In order to better serve the local neighborhood, Reverend Wilkins decided not only to build a new church, but also a space where he and others could provide a range of support services to the community. In order to afford the structure, Reverend Wilkins formed a partnership with a large nonprofit agency, the Tri-County Community Action Program, Inc. (Tri-County), which was looking for space to house its Head Start program. Today, the Bethel building provides services in conjunction with Head Start; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and a Neighborhood Services Center, all due to its Tri-County partnership.
- **Receiving commodities from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).** During construction of the Bethel AME Church and the Bethel, Reverend Wilkins and participating community members led the daily operations of the soup kitchen, and cooking and delivering meals to the elderly. Volunteers provided not only hot meals but also ministry to those in need. During that time, without the knowledge of any of its leaders, Bethel Church began regularly feeding a woman whose daughter worked for Rural Opportunities, Inc., an agency that supplies USDA commodities. The woman offered to help Bethel by providing monthly food deliveries. This partnership continued until the demand for Bethel's services exceeded the Rural Opportunities' supply. Today, given the effectiveness of its past cooperation, USDA has forged a commodities partnership with the Community Food Bank of South Jersey.



- **Incorporating Bethel into a 501(c)(3).** In 2003, the incorporation was the first step in Bethel's transition from a small organization providing food to those in need to a one-stop community center. With a desire to help community members attain self-sufficiency, Bethel established a computer lab where clients could receive employment training, and conduct job searches. In leading this effort, Reverend Wilkins soon realized that many clients were computer illiterate. Bethel's co-located partner, Tri-County, ran a literacy program to which Bethel began referring clients. Reverend Wilkins also recognized the need for additional educational services, and began offering GED courses. Today, the list continues to grow, as new services are added to Bethel's offerings each year.
- **Award of Project Connect grant.** Most recently, Bethel was awarded the Project Connect grant, a 2-year funding opportunity from the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The purpose of the grant is to connect nonprofit agencies with the State's One-Stop Career Center system. Bethel's role is to deliver workforce information and training to job-seekers in the community and filter them into the system. With the grant, Bethel has opened three satellite offices, in addition to the Millville office. This has significantly expanded the reach of Bethel to Cumberland, Salem, Cape May, and Atlantic Counties, and Bethel's staff has now grown from 5 full-time staff members to 10.

Now, 13 years after Reverend Wilkins was assigned to Bethel AME Church as an interim pastor, his vision to serve not only his congregation, but also those in the immediate neighborhood surrounding his church, has come to life and evolved. With an \$825,000 annual operating budget, Bethel employs 10 full-time staff in 4 locations, providing work experience to TANF recipients and serving thousands of people in need, throughout Millville.

4. Programmatic Information

Each year, Bethel conducts outreach to between 5,000 and 6,000 individuals. Last year, it provided comprehensive

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Individuals served through Bethel are low-income residents, out-of-school individuals, young students in need of assistance, single mothers, returning prisoners, unemployed or under-employed individuals, and the homeless. While the programs offered by Bethel have been developed to serve both TANF and low-income clients, approximately 85 percent of the individuals served through Bethel are either TANF recipients or TANF-eligible. As part of Bethel's intake process, counselors meet individually with clients to determine their needs and goals and, in cases where participants are TANF-eligible but not enrolled, counselors make referrals to the TANF office.

Current Bethel programs focus primarily on meeting individuals' and families' basic needs and secondarily on assisting program participants in gaining employment so they can become self-sufficient. Bethel provides basic-need support through its soup kitchen and food pantry, and operates a Neighborhood Services Center, which helps supply other needs such as utility assistance. Individuals struggling with substance abuse or addiction can receive services through Bethel's partnership with the New Jersey Access Initiative (NJAI). Through this partnership, individuals are provided assessments, transportation, case management, and mentoring services.

Bethel also offers educational services through its GED program called "Each One, Teach One." This program offers tutoring, secondary education, training, and assistance with college placement exams. In 2004, Bethel became one of nine satellite locations to provide services in conjunction with the State's One-Stop Career Centers. Through this partnership, individuals are offered assistance in career planning, resume writing, job searches, and job coaching. Individuals can also take



classes in customer service, time management, goal setting, life skills, financial literacy, budgeting, and computer literacy. These services are supplemented with supportive services and mentoring to help unemployed and under-employed individuals attain self-sufficiency. Bethel's success with this grant was noted by a One-Stop staff member, who stated:

Of the group of nine, only one is still operating today: Bethel. They embraced the idea and moved forward. They did things we hoped the other eight would do. [Bethel] sought additional funding and continued the activities. But with the others, when the grant ended so did the activities. I give all the credit to [its leaders] for taking a small seed and making it into what they have today.

As part of its employment and training program, Bethel operates an employment program specifically targeting low-income, out-of-school youth ages 18–21. Youth in this program must demonstrate at least one of the following employment barriers: test below an eighth-grade education level; be a school drop-out; be homeless; be an offender or ex-offender; be pregnant or parenting; or need additional assistance to complete an educational program. Educational programs for youth include support with basic academic skills, work readiness/work maturity activities, career-planning activities, and employment experience. Younger, elementary-age children can also be supported by Bethel's after-school programs, focused on tutoring and homework help.

Bethel is a Community Work Experience Program worksite; this means that individuals and families who have TANF work requirements related to their government benefits (e.g., TANF) are able to work in Bethel's Millville complex and Atlantic City office, and receive TANF credit. Individuals in CWEP receive job training and obtain letters of recommendation upon their successful completion of the program. Additionally, individuals who are required to perform community service as a condition of their probation or parole may be assigned to Bethel.

Through its Sanction Outreach Program, Bethel actively reaches out to TANF recipients who have been sanctioned by the local TANF office. The TANF office provides Bethel with a monthly list

of approximately 100 sanctioned individuals. Bethel provides these individuals with help to enable them to overcome whatever barriers may be preventing them from complying with the TANF program. According to key stakeholders, Bethel is viewed as a "last chance" for sanctioned TANF recipients to get back on track before otherwise losing their benefits. Some of the services provided through this program include utility assistance, rental assistance, child care referrals, and educational programs.

5. Partnerships and Community Engagement

Among Bethel's most important local partnerships are the Cumberland County Office of Workforce Development and One-Stop Career Center (One-Stop) and the Cumberland County Board of Social Services (BSS). These agencies, along with the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Office and Food Stamps agency, are all co-located. Out of this group of co-located organizations, the One-Stop Career Center is Bethel's primary partner. In fact, BSS uses the One-Stop as its principal vehicle for working with Bethel.

Through its partnership with the One-Stop, Bethel runs several grant programs, including the Sanction Outreach Program, Project Connect (which models the One-Stop access points in other counties), and the Out-of-School Youth Program. In addition to these initiatives, Bethel works with the One-Stop as a CWEP worksite. Bethel's partnerships with TANF, WIB, and the One-Stop are formally supported by Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)—although key partners said the MOUs are rarely referenced, simply because the partnerships work so well. As one partner noted, "At one point, I found that our MOU had expired years ago. We didn't realize that because

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the partnership kept working. A lot of times we pull MOUs only when there is a problem—it speaks volumes that we’ve had no problems with Bethel.” Workforce development agency staff also reported that they prefer to work with Bethel because the organization provides resources beyond what others organizations can offer. As one partner commented, “We have always looked at them as a complement—we know they can do some things better than we can ...while we have an MOU, I don’t think we need it, since there’s a trust there. Either one of us can pick up the phone anytime to ask for help.

When reflecting on the success of their partnerships, staff from all of the agencies identified open communication as a critical element. Communication between agencies is generally kept at the supervisor level. This allows Bethel to deliver a message to the One-Stop through a single point of contact, who is then able to disseminate the information to others. Maintaining communication at the supervisor level also increases the chances of One-Stop staff buy-in. As one partner put it, “Some people have the mindset that they don’t want to do something an outside agency tells them to do. That is why we communicate through supervisors, who in turn ask them directly to serve a particular client—not an outside agency.”

While communication between agencies is generally strong, staff from all sides acknowledged that more cross-agency trainings on the different programs offered by each agency could still enhance their collaborative partnerships.

Community organizations are also critical to ensuring that Bethel can comprehensively meet the needs of TANF-eligible populations, and current TANF recipients. Bethel’s relationship with Cumberland County College—and in particular the college’s Center for Leadership, Community, and Neighborhood Development—serves as a strong example of such partnerships. Cumberland County College operates an onsite ACCUPLACER test—that is, the college’s entry exam—at Bethel, which allows Bethel clients to take the test in a familiar environment. There are also discussions of building a learning community at the college, where clients from Bethel could attend classes as a cohort, and offer one another peer support. If it emerges, this

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new learning community could also provide students with a mentor to help them navigate the college system.

More broadly, the Center for Leadership, Community, and Neighborhood Development provides training, technical assistance, and resources to the nonprofit community and to others who are looking to partner with community organizations. The Center currently provides capacity-building and other support to Bethel. When Bethel has a need for volunteers, resources, or other support, it can work directly with the Center to disseminate announcements to the community, through email blasts or in conjunction with other programming affiliated with the Center. Bethel and the Center also partner on several grants. Both agencies say the partnership has been extremely positive. One Center staff member explained that Bethel is known around the community as a reputable partner that can be trusted to follow through on its promises.

Founded with deep faith-roots, Bethel partners with *churches* and other *faith-based organizations* in the community. Bethel works with several churches in the city, including New Life World Outreach Ministries (New Life). Reverend Wilkins and New Life’s pastor began working together informally to provide service to the community. The partnership formalized when the two churches, along with members of the Millville Greater Ministerial Alliance (a group of faith-based organizations), decided to collaborate and form the “Everybody Eats Coalition” to better address the needs of Millville’s hungry population. Churches and other faith-based organizations support the work at Bethel by contributing both food and volunteers, in partnership with the soup kitchen and food pantry. According to its faith-based partners, Bethel is highly beneficial because it allows local congregations to serve Millville citizens on a much larger scale than they could by themselves. Additionally, its



partners are pleased with the way Bethel communicates with them through monthly reports, letting collaborating churches and organizations know how their donations, money, and volunteers are making a difference.

Aside from government agencies and other community organizations, Bethel works with several *for-profit businesses*. Bethel works with temp agencies to locate employment opportunities for CWEP and other clients. Though the jobs are initially temporary, they commonly lead to permanent work, or provide clients with valuable experience they can include on their résumés. Another example is Bethel's partnership with B.J.'s Wholesale Club, which donates some of its extra food to the soup kitchen.

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Last, *volunteers* play a critical role in Bethel's ability to serve such a large number of people in need. Volunteers come from the Bethel AME Church and from the community at large. Since the organization's soup kitchen has such a strong reputation, community residents are often eager to help out—especially during the holiday season. Partners said that, while they collaborate professionally with Bethel, they also enjoy volunteering on a more personal level. During the Thanksgiving meal, volunteers include staff from partnering organizations such as the Millville Chief of Police, and the City Planner. Cumberland County College students, local sports teams, and previous CWEP participants have also served regularly in the soup kitchen. Bethel staff members recognize the importance of developing volunteer relationships and, as a result, they have been successful in recruiting and maintaining long-term volunteers. This strong base of dedicated volunteers demonstrates Bethel's strong presence and engagement in the community.

6. Lessons Learned

Some of the most promising lessons from Bethel are the following:

- **Building a diverse network of partners enables service agencies to more holistically meet the needs of TANF recipients.** TANF recipients often need a diverse set of services—far beyond what any single agency can provide. Whether in a large urban center or a rural setting, a network of partnering service providers, faith partnerships, and community organizations can better meet the wide array of TANF client needs.
- **Providing diverse services makes an organization more appealing to potential partners.** TANF recipients who have particular needs—and commonly require multiple services—are often best served when a TANF office or other government agency partners with organizations providing differing kinds of support to individuals and families in need.
- **Faith-based and community organizations that follow through on agreements are appealing partners.** Bethel has witnessed this lesson firsthand. When an organization looks to form a partnership across agencies, its history of follow-through is critical—and determines whether public and private partners will remain partners.
- **Actively engaging volunteers can substantially expand capacity.** Volunteers allow organizations to work beyond their own financial and personnel resources, bringing in pro-bono assistance and support from the organization's larger network. Providing opportunities for community members to have meaningful experiences with program participants can also facilitate long-term commitments on the part of these volunteers.
- **Hiring past or current TANF recipients can help an organization better understand and reach its clients.** When a client has the opportunity to meet a staff member who came from a similar situation—especially when the person has succeeded in attaining self-sufficiency—they often feel more comfortable discussing their own needs.



- **Providing a safe, comfortable environment for TANF recipients greatly improves overall service delivery and client impact.** Because program recipients are more likely to seek services and succeed when they feel comfortable, it is important that both the physical environment and staff members are inviting and supportive. Providing outside support services, such as offering the ACCUPLACER test onsite, helps provide clients with a greater chance at remaining in the program. Similarly, traditional social service agencies that wish to support fathers in their responsibilities to their children have found that a welcoming environment (e.g., highlighting posters featuring men, as well as women, in family settings) is critical to retaining men in their programs.¹
- **When leading a faith-based organization that is an outgrowth of a religious congregation, it is important to distinguish** between the service delivery organization and the congregation itself. Often this means setting up a 501(c)(3) organization: while an organization’s faith-driven focus may help make it successful, the service organization should operate in a manner that allows for clear financial accounting and reporting.

7. Conclusion

According to community members, Federal partners, and an array of collaborating faith-based and community organizations, Bethel has made a profound, lasting impact on the Millville community, and in the lives of the TANF recipients it serves. Numerous partners stated that they were proud to be working with Bethel’s staff members and volunteers—and that there are valuable lessons that can be derived from their work.

In describing the impact of Bethel on the larger community, one supporter noted, “Bethel understands that you can’t just plug into a single component and expect success. They get [clients] to understand the importance of soft skills—and help them learn how to commit and succeed through experience. They understand how to infiltrate the whole process, rather than just target one component of it...that is the difference and what makes them successful.” As a faith-based service organization

with a strong history of supportive services and community involvement, Bethel’s collaboration with local TANF leaders and other partners makes it a good example of how strategic partnerships can develop over time and effectively enhance the lives of TANF recipients.

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¹ This is a frequently observed fact in the context of emerging public funding for Responsible Fatherhood programs. See www.fatherhood.gov for a complete listing of resources and recent evaluations.



List of Site Visit Participants – Bethel Development Corporation

Reverend Wilkins, Executive Director, Bethel Development Corp.

Hope Heldreth, Director of Operations, Bethel Development Corp.

Selinet Rodriguez – former TANF program recipient and current staff member, Bethel Development Corp.

Dante Rieti (WIB), Allison Spinelli (WFNJ) & Christy DiLeonardo (CWEP). Lead Staff, One-Stop Career Center

Focus Group – TANF and Food Stamps recipients

Jill Thompson, Cumberland County College

Focus Group – CWEP participants, City Planner from the City of Millville, Weed & Seed Program Coordinator for the City

TANF FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS INITIATIVE

