

## WHY YOUTH? WHY COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS?

*Russell G. Mawby, W.K. Kellogg Foundation*

*Following is a keynote address delivered by Dr. Russell G. Mawby, Chairman of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, at the June 21, 1991 launching of the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project. More than 300 civic leaders from throughout the state were present for the kickoff event in Battle Creek.*

It is a pleasure, indeed, to be with you today for the launching of this initiative in philanthropy, which we believe is one of the most exciting ever undertaken in the State of Michigan. If all of us are successful in our efforts, the next five years will witness, in communities across the state, a series of activities that will help young people develop life-long values of generosity and leadership, and which will at the same time build stronger and more caring communities.

If we do well, these next five years will truly leave their mark on Michigan. It will make our state a better place in which to be born, and to grow up. Since the first announcement of this initiative was made, many people asked me why the Kellogg Foundation, which could have directed these resources in any number of ways, chose to commit them to youth and to Michigan's forty-five community foundations. So, today, I want to answer these two questions: **Why Youth? Why Community Foundations?**

First, I would like to address the question 'Why Youth?' As new, as exciting, and as daring as it is, the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project has precedents in our Foundation's history. For example, from 1931 to 1948, the Kellogg Foundation supported the Michigan Community Health Project (MCHP) in seven south central Michigan counties. This was a comprehensive community development project that consolidated rural schools, built modern hospitals and health departments, and encouraged volunteers to help deliver essential services.

The children served by the Michigan Community Health Project are only now beginning to retire. Most are still active in their communities as volunteers, and many are still going strong in their chosen careers.

It has been sixty years since the Kellogg Foundation began to support MCHP, and forty-three years since our support ended. And society is still reaping the benefits from it. So, I don't think of MCHP as an 18-year project. I prefer to think of it as a 60-year, 70-year, or 80-year project. If we look at the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project in the same light, we realize that this is an initiative that will still be paying social dividends in the year 2051 and perhaps well beyond. In fact, the direct beneficiaries of this program will still be making contributions to society for most of the next century.

Of course, it is not given to us to know the long-range consequences of many of our philanthropic actions. But we can guess that working with youth will be like a stone thrown into a pond; the ripples keep expanding far beyond our time and place, far beyond our ability to measure or perhaps even envision.

The Kellogg Foundation chooses to work with youth because we continue to believe that our generation has an obligation to express our gratitude to the generations that came before by helping the generations that will come after. We recognize no limits on what can be achieved, what deficiencies can be eliminated, and what good and decent things can be accomplished, if we but give our young people the tools to do the job the opportunities to fulfill their potential.

### **WE ARE INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEXT GENERATION.**

The Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project gives young people the opportunity to learn generosity in the only practical way: by being generous. It will teach them to meet community challenges by raising funds for good works. It will teach them to be good stewards by giving them opportunities to make the hard decisions on wise giving. It will give them the opportunity to ask, to serve, and through serving, to lead. Tomorrow's governors, mayors, chief executive officers, and executive directors will be trained through the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project. Even more importantly, so will tomorrow's Little League coaches, Big Sisters, Cub Scout leaders, Sunday school teachers, and community foundation trustees.

Perhaps here is the real significance of working with youth. Youth grow up to become people who work with youth. When we invest in the development of today's young people, we are really investing in the development of the next generation, and the next, and the next. The ripples spread out from our investment - and where, they will end, we can never know.

Now I would like to turn to the next question, "**Why Community Foundations?**" The shortest and most profound answer to this question is that the most exciting solutions to today's problems are not those coming from Washington or from Lansing. They are those coming from our local communities. Local leaders are the ones who are closest to the problems, and the ones best equipped to solve them.

### **YOUTH AND COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ARE A DYNAMIC COMBINATION.**

Local leaders, of course, cannot solve community problems all by themselves. They need to have arrows in their quivers, and perhaps the sharpest arrow is the community foundation. Community foundations are the most community-based of all philanthropic institutions. They are also the most flexible; they can support a wide range of initiatives to improve the community, from economic development to social services, from recreation to health care, from ecumenical church projects to neighborhood development.

But community foundations are more than money givers. They also serve as conveners for important community meetings, as "honest brokers" to help build teams of organizations to solve problems; in short, community foundations serve as catalysts for change. Since they serve all of the nonprofits in the community, they can bring all of them together to make things happen. Since the trustees and staff of community foundations live in their communities, they can help new initiatives with their personal involvement, as well as with funds.

When we look at the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project, we can see all of these roles of the community foundations being called into play. In addition, we see community foundations as manufacturers of new philanthropy and new philanthropists. They are the

generators, if you will, turning out new givers by helping the community to raise, manage, and disburse charitable funds.

The Michigan Community Youth Project combines all of these functions of the Community Foundation:

1. Each community foundation will raise money to meet the match with the help of a local committee.
2. Each community foundation will endow permanent field-of-interest funds.
3. Each community foundation will form an advisory committee that will involve youth, thus teaching fund-raising and stewardship.
4. Each community foundation will serve as the meeting place and the think tank for new initiatives in the community.

Thus, this initiative will help community foundations to become all that they can be, and when this happens, it is a fair bet to say that the communities in which they live will become all that they can be as well.

To sum it all up, **youth and community foundations are a dynamite combination!** This initiative will help us identify young leaders of tomorrow. It will help us recruit them. It will give them experience in raising money and it will give them training in the wise stewardship of charitable funds. It will raise fresh money for new needs in communities and permanently endow these funds so that resources will be there for future generations. It will help communities to grow and to ease the pain and the suffering of those who are hurting. It will enrich the lives of uncounted numbers in incalculable ways. It will enable communities to face an uncertain future with an unshakable confidence in their own ability to deal with their own problems.

**Why Youth? Why Community Foundations?** Perhaps the most succinct answer to these two questions comes from the eloquent pen of Abraham Lincoln. We must remember, however, that he wrote these words nearly a century and a half ago, so I have had the audacity to edit Mr. Lincoln, changing from the masculine singular to the plural, changing "child" to "children", and changing "he" to "they". So, to paraphrase Mr. Lincoln:

"Children are the persons who are going to carry on what we have started. They are going to sit where we are sitting, and when we are gone, attend to those things which we think are important. We may adopt all the policies we please, but how they are carried out, depends on them. They will assume control of our cities, states, and nations. They are going to take over our churches, schools, universities, and corporations. The fate of humanity is in their hands".

It has been a great pleasure to welcome you to Battle Creek today for this launching. A mere 16 months from now, in November, 1992, the Council of Michigan Foundations will be holding its annual conference in Battle Creek. We look forward to seeing all of you here again at that time to share good news of your accomplishments in the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project.

Thank you very much, and all the best to you as you set out to shape a brighter future for the young people of your communities and our State.

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