

Tackling Poverty from Two Perspectives

When the Community Foundation and ACT Rochester released the startling report on the concentration of poverty in our region, Daan Braveman and Kay Wallace had similar reactions: “What can I do?”

“Poverty is an issue I have been concerned about most of my life,” says Braveman, president of Nazareth College and a former civil rights lawyer.

He wrote an op-ed article that appeared in the *Democrat and Chronicle* several days after the December 2013 release of *Poverty and the Concentration of Poverty in the Nine-County Greater Rochester Area*. In it, this Rochester native called for community leaders to work together on a coordinated and collaborative strategic plan to address the causes and effects of poverty, similar to an initiative led by the mayor in Richmond, Va.

“My sense of the Rochester community is that it has a lot of good ideas and lots of organizations focusing on aspects of poverty. But it does not have a plan that brings together these things,” he says.

He and representatives from the Rochester Business Alliance board, which he chairs, met with Mayor Lovely Warren and officials from Richmond to discuss that city’s approach.

Then Braveman, together with the Community Foundation and United Way, invited more than two dozen community and business leaders to hear from the report’s author, retired Community Foundation VP Ed Doherty, and discuss next steps. Talks between several key executives are continuing.

Wallace and her husband, Peter Oddleifson, responded with a

more grassroots approach to the report's findings.

"At our age and stage we know a lot of people in greater Rochester. We could help connect people across geographic borders in Monroe County," says this former strategic planning consultant to nonprofit organizations.

During Warren's campaign for mayor, the couple embraced her position on the need to build bridges between Rochester and its suburbs. Keeping that in mind, Wallace crafted a program to do just that and include discussions about issues related to poverty.

The goal of Dialogues Without Borders is to create "a more progressive constituency for change that will include many people who live in Rochester and in Monroe County," she says.

A gathering will be held once a month in a different suburban home with about 20 or 30 of the host's like-minded friends, family members, work colleagues, and town leaders to hear more about poverty and brainstorm ways to work together to make improvements and tackle the challenges. Mayor Warren has agreed to attend the first ones.

"We face a great set of challenges and together, I think, we can move things forward," says Wallace.