



Jeffco Prosperity Project

Breaking the cycle of poverty in Jefferson County

What is the Jeffco Prosperity Project?

Jeffco Prosperity Project (JPP) is a collaboration of community, school, business and county partners working together to help Jefferson County families break the cycle of generational poverty. JPP assists young children and families in poverty foster educational and family success. JPP is a shared idea among partners to reduce poverty by increasing:

- School readiness
- High school graduation rates and post-secondary opportunity for low income students and their parents
- Family self-sufficiency

JPP will be the background “operating system” for a variety of county services, ensuring that existing services are aligned and that families do not slip between the cracks during major life transitions (Head Start to Kindergarten, elementary school to middle school, etc.). The goal of the project is system change to:

- Help families develop new, long-term resources
- Develop economic self-sufficiency
- Make existing service models more effective, more efficient and more holistic than they are now

BACKGROUND

Since 2010, the Jefferson County Department of Human Services, The Action Center, the Jeffco Schools Foundation, cities, businesses, communities, non-profit agencies, and faith-based organizations have worked to address the need for a strategic realignment of services, systems and shared outcomes in Jefferson County. These diverse organizations share the goal of tackling increasing poverty, helping families gain self-sufficiency and breaking persistent generational cycles of poverty. The project is called the Jeffco Prosperity Project (JPP.)

Poverty is a growing issue in Denver’s suburban communities. With the housing crash and subsequent recession of the last decade, Jefferson County and its 13 incorporated cities and towns have seen exponential growth in the number of families living in or near poverty.

Enrollment data in Jeffco Public Schools reflects this growing problem. In 2008-2009, the district’s free and reduced lunch enrollment, a measure of poverty, was just 24%. In 2012-2013, that percentage has climbed to 34%. To qualify for free lunch, families must make less than 130% of poverty, or about \$28,000 a year for a family of four.

Over the past year, the Action Center, a non-profit helping homeless, near homeless, and the working poor of Jefferson County, has responded to the ever-growing suburbanization of poverty and homelessness by helping 28,000 people with food, clothing, shelter and much more. Demand for services has jumped 40% since the beginning of 2008, many coming to the Action Center for the first time, never having needed assistance before.

With the Action Center and many other agencies doing everything they can to decrease poverty, why is poverty increasing rather than decreasing? How can Jeffco families develop financial security?

DID YOU KNOW?

- Generational poverty is defined as families who have lived in poverty for at least two generations, meaning children of parents in poverty grow up to live in poverty themselves.
- Children who experience chronic poverty will lag behind their more affluent peers in language development, which delays literacy and hinders academic success at all grade levels.
- Poverty is the largest risk factor for dropping out of school before completion.
- Children raised in poverty are likely to remain there when beginning their own families, creating generational cycles of poverty.
- A GED is enough for acceptance to certain colleges or for obtaining certain jobs. However, more opportunities are available to those who obtain a high school diploma.
- Childhood poverty imposes costs on society equal to nearly 4% of GDP, or about \$500 billion per year.
- A single adult supporting one preschooler and one school-age child living in Jefferson County needs a wage of \$26.34 per hour to be self sufficient and no longer need assistance.

HOW IT WILL WORK

Over a period of 15+ years, JPP will change the way human services and education services are provided to low-income families in Jefferson County. JPP will look at the whole family and take a two generation approach – dealing with both children and their parents or caretakers. JPP staff will work with Head

Start families who opt into the program, and will continue guiding them as they transition from Head Start into Jeffco Public Schools. Then, each child is followed from kindergarten through high school graduation, ensuring graduation and family self-sufficiency.

Jefferson County Head Start is a no-cost preschool offered to families living in poverty.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Long-term, JPP will:

- Ensure children from low-income households graduate high school on-time, ready for and with access to post-secondary opportunities
- Create strong, self-sufficient families no longer in generational poverty
- Reduce duplication of programs and services and reduce cost of providing these services

JPP is one of a few suburban poverty projects in the country. This innovative project has grown from early planning stages in 2010 to an implementation-ready program. Program partners launched the project's first phase in 2013, and by the end of the 2017-2018 school year, they will have developed new strategies for success for families, students, schools and communities.

For more information call:
720-497-7900

*“This program is a gift for a lifetime.
My kids will have more opportunities
for a better future than I had.”*
— JPP Parent

JPP Model can be duplicated across the country.

