

## **FISH Executive Overview Revitalization Project, Nevada**

The biggest issues in our region have to do with housing and our business environment. The recent economic downturn stifled construction and brought with it the nation's highest mortgage foreclosure rates and unemployment. Now that the economy has improved, our recently re-employed, who are just happy to have a job, are accepting the "low hanging fruit" of minimum wage jobs. In addition, the demand for housing is high, and supply is low... driving up rental rates by 50-80%. Ironically, our business environment is booming, but they can't find locals with the right skills, and employees recruited from outside the region, can't find housing. As a result, multiple local organizations have become motivated to implement a fix to these problems. Some think we need to add more low-income housing, FISH wants to reduce the number of families that need it.

Envision single parents who are working one or two low-paying jobs for daycare costs and other essentials, barely keeping their heads above water. Think about the impact, if we could "adopt" several of these families at a time... allowing the parent to completely focus on their education, with no upfront cost, earning a certificate in Medical or Information Technology; Construction or Manufacturing Management... with employers willing to hire them at \$18-24/hr. Candidates agree that once hired in their new career, they will "pay it forward" by volunteering, recruiting others, and helping us to improve the overall program. A local foundation has agreed to fund the initial cost of the education, and local businesses are eager for this talent pool, and will provide tuition reimbursement to further help those they hire. Since existing non-profits will be doing the "leg-work", there will be no additional "process costs".

This spring, our consortium is planning to roll out a pilot program to shift these families from minimum wage to meaningful careers. Our partners include Western Nevada College (WNC) providing the "formal education," the CIRCLES program developing the team skills/people skills/relationship skills and FISH providing the stability of housing, food, on-the-job training, and other support as needed. We are working with other organizations to provide interviewing and other job skills. In addition, we are partnering with the Northern Nevada Development Authority (NNDA), who will function as the liaison with our regional employers. The state of Nevada has budgeted over \$200,000 for administrative costs of our pilot program, so they can eventually roll it out to other Nevada counties.

Our track record is a good one: FISH recently spearheaded the design and concept of Richard's Crossing, which we handed over to the Rural Nevada Housing Authority. This 39-unit apartment complex primarily for veterans and the disabled was funded with federal government dollars. The project was a great success, but the government funding did not allow us to drive the residents through our other programs, to change behaviors. This time, we are looking at private funding. Earlier this year we purchased an aging motel property. We will use this property, with minor improvements, until we raise the resources to build a new "dormitory" for families while they are in this "career" program. Clients would be able to live in these apartments for free and will receive wrap-around services as long as they follow their development plans. Once their education/development plan has been completed, they will transition to other housing.

Applicants would be assessed, and coached to find the best suited career path. Our "team" would provide multiple "touch points" to keep the students and their family members on track. Following their successful employment, graduates would help to recruit, market and refine our process to bring in the next wave of students. We will also provide critical training to family members who are not attending college, as we work to impact generational poverty.

The recent COVID shut-downs have highlighted the instability of our service sector jobs. In addition, the automation of self-driving taxis, delivery trucks, food service, etc.; and the high cost of secondary education, will continue to haunt our low skill workforce. Our timely pilot program uses private/public collaboration to provide a nimble solution to our ever-changing employment and housing needs.