

**Collaborations for Change: Who's
Playing and Who's Winning in Community-Based Organization
Led Development in Rural Appalachia**

By Chris Baker

Reflexive Statement

My involvement with this research began in 1996 as an assistant professor of sociology at West Virginia University Institute of Technology (WVUIT). There I worked with the Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS) attending board meetings, evaluating programs, and conducting research. My experiences with SALS allowed me to develop a research base on Appalachian studies and witness a dynamic grassroots organization dedicated to indigenous leadership, social change, and the basic needs of the community. SALS has become a model for grassroots programs due, in part, to John David its director and prolific grant writer. Key to SALS's success is indigenous leadership and the level of networks and resources dedicated to specific, neglected areas of basic needs in rural Appalachia. Here I use a case study to analyze the initiatives the center. With programs involved in housing, basic provisions, healthcare, child and family services, and job training, SALS generates broad networks connecting resources and development initiatives through a community center approach. Three aspects of SALS are looked at. First I overview the gains made by program participants, volunteers, and communities in the areas of social capital, basic provisions, and housing. Second I focus on the collaborations and partnerships that have emerged involving nonprofit and private organizations, service learning and volunteer programs, and state and federal agencies. Finally, I address the impact of participation on service learning and volunteer groups. I suggest that SALS is effectively using broad-based social networks to address neglected aspects of rural development, increasing local participation in development policy, and generating networks needed to assist rural communities in the modern economy. Its programs and the emerging coalitions

represent unprecedented investment in infrastructure and human capital for West Virginia communities.

Grassroots Appalachia

Since the 1960s, academics, nonprofits, and community activist organizations in rural Appalachia have worked creatively together incorporating grassroots and participatory research perspectives to address underdevelopment and systematic inequality. The work has centered on critiques of the region's experiences with modernity and capitalism drawing on feminism, narrative analysis, and critical perspectives. Focusing on social and economic justice, some of the region's activism has conflicted with power brokers (ALOTF 1982; Fisher 1993; Gaventa 2002; Hay and Reichel 1997; Horton and Freire 1990; Lewis et al. 1978; 2003; 1982; Seitz 1995). Many of the groups have faced what Helen Lewis calls the "NGO Ceiling" in which good community based projects have been prevented from scaling-up to official structures and impacting long term planning and policy making (Taylor 2001:28). Key to the grassroots efforts has been the development of indigenous leadership and community based solutions. While the region's organizations represent a wide range of groups and issues, women have been at the center of much of the community-level activism addressing poverty and solutions to development through the region's tight-knit community networks and institutions (Appleby 1999; Hinsdale et al. 1995; Lewis et al. 1978; 2003; Pearson 1995; Smith 1998).

Recent approaches by the region's community-based organizations are expanding collaborations and generating new programs through mainstream development initiatives including empowerment zones and enterprise communities or EZ/ECs. The emerging collaborations are generating partnerships with for-profit companies, state and federal programs, service learning, and volunteer groups in an effort to combat social problems, provide services, and develop social capital (Taylor and Cook 2001). Couto's (1999) *Making*

Democracy Work Better: Mediating Structures, Social Capital, and Democratic Prospects represents the most recent comprehensive work analyzing Appalachia's grassroots organizations. Using Nisbets' concept of mediating structures, Couto chronicles how grassroots organizations are linking communities with resources throughout the region. For isolated rural communities negatively affected by economic change, nonprofits and community groups have become important providers of basic needs such as housing, social services, childcare, and social capital. In a similar vein, Anglin (1999) looks at how small scale communities are able to address basic needs using grassroots approaches in rural Kentucky. She points to the success of the Blair Development Association (BDA) and the Eastern Kentucky Project in dealing with multiple political and economic issues in Blair County, Kentucky. Both groups have developed local and community-centered programs addressing childcare, transportation, housing, and industrial recruitment.

Along with community based organizations, increasingly, activist scholars throughout the country are linking service learning programs to collaborative partnerships transforming civic engagement into long term social changes (Maher et al. 2003). New programs in Appalachian schools engaged in service learning are developing college courses and curriculum with initiatives addressing the regions' problems. For example, Emory and Henry College's new Appalachian Center for Community Service works directly with the poorest of coalfield communities. These experiences are behind a new education for social change within what Stanley and Fisher call a place based education (2001:20).

By drawing on multiple resources and levels of society, community based organizations are in a position to assist underprivileged communities to address their needs and make development policy accountable to local communities. Who decides how funds

are used and who participates in decision-making in recent initiatives such as EZ/ECs are open questions. One of the goals of the EZ/EC is to catalyze systemic change in how localities address social problems and how community groups, nonprofits, private firms, and public agencies interact (Baum 1999; Gaventa et al. 1995; Herring et al. 1998; HUD 1994). Involvement in mainstream development can lead grassroots groups to a larger voice in development decision making. Along with the Clinton era EZ/EC legislation, the growing popularity of participatory research is leading to continued pressure to incorporate all levels of society in development decisions. Key aspects of participatory research center on how ordinary people define services and their distribution, and how they affect social policy formation (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). Early results of studies on the effectiveness of the EZ/EC show mixed results with variations between sites and use of resources. Of the goals of the programs, i.e. economic opportunity, sustainable community development, community based partnerships, and strategic vision for change, much of the emphasis has been on job growth and business development (American City and County 2002). . In looking at the early results of EZ/EC programs, Gaventa, et al. (1995:118), document that while some cases exhibited top down tendencies,

“In other cases, however, private nonprofit organizations took the lead and successfully galvanized and sustained broad based community involvement. For some organizations, such widespread community participation provided focus and established momentum that they previously failed to achieve”.

There is little research dedicated to how well community organizations and nonprofits are able to utilize resources and take advantage of the increased opportunities provided by EZ/EC projects. The complexity of measuring the gains made by communities is heightened by the multiple programs and organizations involved in many of the initiatives. In this paper

I look at SALS programs and the collaborations that result from the increased participation of more levels of society in development. I point out some of the most visible gains in the areas of basic needs and social capital and the impact of participation on volunteers and participants.

Data collection was conducted beginning in 1995 using content analysis, participant and direct observation, surveys, and interviews. Formal and informal interviews were conducted at West Virginia University Institute of Technology (WVUIT), the SALS Community Center, and at Fayette County housing sites with participants from SALS, YouthBuild, AmeriCorp, visiting college volunteers, and the participants in the Global Volunteers program. Surveys and interviews were directed toward goals, program satisfaction, and reflection on volunteer activities. Along with content analysis, I conducted fieldwork while participating as an AmeriCorp and YouthBuild evaluator, service learning coordinator, and lecturer on Appalachian culture between 1995 and 2000. Participant observation provided in-dept understanding of the coordination of programs through observation at board meetings, staff meetings, on-site activities, dedications, training sessions, and community festivals.

Defining the Problem: Rural Poverty and its Consequences

The problems faced by central Appalachia's rural communities are complex. Even though the region's overall poverty rate has been reduced in the last twenty years, its distressed rural counties continue to stand apart (ARC 2000). Largely unrecognized, rural poverty is at the base of many of the nation's social problems (Moore 2001). Rural communities suffer more chronic poverty with larger working poor populations than urban areas. Moreover,

distressed communities house a disproportionate number of unskilled single women, children, and the elderly resulting in a higher proportion of those residents who possess a limited amount of education, experience in accessing government programs, and fiscal resources (Findeis and Jensen 1998; Riposa 1996). Wealth inequality remains central to the region's poverty. Rural communities continue to combat the effects of declining coal and heavy industries, coal camp housing, absentee land ownership, and divided local politics, and they also continue to be plagued by large tracts of undertaxed, unimproved land (ALOFT 1982; Baun 1997; Billings and Blee 2000; Couto 1995; Lewis et al. 1978; Rasmussen 1995).

Economically worst hit are eastern Kentucky and West Virginia's rural populations who increasingly depend on growing low-wage service sector employment (ARC 2000; Mencken 1997). West Virginia's top employers are Wal-Mart followed by the state. Formerly employed in heavy industry, rural workers now find themselves in service, tourists, and prison occupations. Telemarketing jobs in Charleston alone outnumber mining jobs throughout the state of West Virginia. The remaining coal mining jobs pay an average of \$50,300 opposed to the \$24,700 made by the average West Virginian (Baker 2002; Ewen 1995; 1996; Ewen and Lewis 1999; Maggard 1994; Mencklen 1997; West Virginia Mining and Reclamation Association 1999). The emerging information/service economy has negatively affected lower-educated rural workers who historically were well paid in heavy industry jobs. Because of the concentration of opportunities for male workers in heavy industry, West Virginia has historically had a low female labor force participation rate.

The above trends have left contemporary rural communities faced with less economic opportunity, substandard housing, and declining schools and infrastructure. The region's population has experienced a dramatic shift that underlies a crisis in available social capital.

Heavy industries have also left West Virginia communities facing the nation's highest disability rates. The lack of employment has facilitated the out-migration of young, educated workers. The state has one of the nation's highest populations over 65 and is last in median income and percent of the labor force employed (*United Mine Workers Journal* May-June, 2000 p.8). While over one in four of its working aged men are disabled, West Virginia's child population declined 28 percent between 1980 and 2000. Overall, one out of three children in central Appalachia is below the poverty line (Wilson 2002; *Appalachian Focus* 2001). With welfare reform and as companies have become less involved in resource provision and community involvement how will rural communities already in crisis adapt to postindustrial economic transformation? One answer to this question comes in the outcomes of the increased involvement of nonprofit organizations in mainstream development initiatives.

Waltzing with Hegemony

SALS was created in the mid-1970s focused on educating mine workers in labor disputes and other adult education initiatives. Receiving its 501 C (3) nonprofit classification in 1981, SALS is directed by John David a Professor of Economics at WVUIT. Located in the Beards Fork community in rural Fayette County, the current SALS Community Center was created in 1995. Fayette County is divided by the New River Gorge with Beards Fork and surrounding coal camps rural enclaves between the Kanawha Valley and Oak Hill/Fayetteville in the eastern part of the county. As coal has declined, the county has promoted tourism along the gorge (Colias 2002). Along an isolated mountainous stretch off Route 61 between Oak Hill and Montgomery, the community center serves twelve different former coal camp communities

with a playground, dining room, meeting rooms, childcare rooms, group sleep area, and kitchen. Recently an annex has been added near the center to house visiting volunteers. The SALS board is a coalition representing activist groups, education, human services, labor, and other organizations. Through their affiliations, board members incorporate college presidents, governors, union leaders, and congressmen into direct support for the programs. SALS uses grants to fund most of the programs. Under the direction of John David, the staff writes grants, coordinates outside and local volunteers, and operates the programs and numerous partnerships with local agencies and companies. Helen Powell, the SALS board chair, helped draft the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act and the 1972 Black Lung Amendments and is the former social services coordinator of Fayette County Child Development Inc or HeadStart. Other board members represent the Catholic Church, WVU extension, the United Mine Workers, and a number of local community organizations. SALS operates a worker education program around the idea of forming a union of communities including families, children, and seniors (SALS 25th Anniversary Publication, May 11, 2002). Labor education is incorporated into training, ceremonies, and community programs.

The community center is the base of multiple programs often with overlapping funding sources, agencies, and participants. The programs operate in two EZ/EC zones. They include the Upper Kanawha Valley Enterprise Community (UKVEC) and the Central Appalachian Empowerment Zone or CAEZ. The CAEZ is a designated rural Enterprise Community covering five counties in rural southwest West Virginia. In its planning stage, the CAEZ held 83 public meetings involving 1,400 citizens in 28 committees (West Virginia Enterprise Communities 2000). The UKVEC originated in 1999 and its lead entity is the Kanawha County Commission centered in Charleston. SALS programs fall into the following

categories: housing, educational training, worker education, community center, and community service. The community center combines food distribution, 21st Century Community Center, Starting Points and MIHOW, senior health, and after school and summer services in the same building. The largest program at the center, YouthBuild trains high school dropouts to build houses and take GED classes at Fayette County's vocational technical school. YouthBuild, a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program, provides up to \$400,000 each cycle for training high school dropouts. YouthBuild participants have daily contact with SALS staff, community members, college students, and other volunteers groups (*Fayette Tribune* Dec 25, 1998; Casto 2000).

Community service programs based at the center are Global Volunteers, Group Work Camp, College Workcamp Program, and AmeriCorps - USA, Learn and Serve, and VISTA. Several college volunteer groups use the programs for alternative spring break and service learning programs. The center offers six on-going housing programs designed to build new homes for low income residents (New Page Housing), provide rehabilitations in the CAEZ (New River Safe Housing) and in the UKVEZ (Coalfield Housing). SALS also works with the West Virginia Housing Development Fund and is a Community Housing Development Organization or (CHDO) designation.

Building Social Capital

The political economy of rural central Appalachian communities has left a population with less access to social capital and fewer institutions that link communities to available resources. In addition to these realities the postindustrial economy provides fewer available resources for communities and workers (Couto 1999). Historically, West Virginia's heavy

industries provided unionized jobs requiring little formal education. Today, one out of four people in the state over the age of 25 do not have a high school degree. Twenty-seven percent of Fayette County adults lack basic reading, writing, and computational skills (*Charleston Gazette* March 28, 1998). Research on social capital suggests that rural areas faced with rigid stratification and a small middle class are less able to generate the changes needed to create community level social capital or generate an environment able to create positive experiences for young people (Duncan 2001). Studies also suggest that community based organizations can be an important component for building social capital in poor neighborhoods (Gittell and Thompson 2001). In this section, I look at how the SALS Community Center and its programs affect social capital formation.

Participant observation reveals that when combined with programs and services, the presence of large networks at the community center increases participants contact with cultural diversity, new ideas, social institutions, government agencies, and professionals. SALS programs reaffirms that operating the programs at a community center level offers experiences that are needed to generate social capital for troubled youth. Participant observation also reveals that the role of women in social capital formation is an important characteristic of this process. The community center concentrates a large number of volunteers and people from outside the community who provide mentors for local youth and Youthbuild participants. Often teen parents, YouthBuild participants face dropping out of high school, criminality, and other social pathologies. Local retirees at the community center and program leaders provide informal supervision and occupational guidance. Staff and the Beards Fork Community Organization members Floyd McKnight and Kenneth Fox often police the center. SALS is on its sixth YouthBuild grant with funding of approximately

\$450,000 per cycle. On average twenty participants are enrolled in YouthBuild with over half receiving a GED (YouthBuild Evaluation, 2000; HUD Report July 2003). YouthBuild participants have to pass drug tests to stay in the program. SALS construction coordinator, Vickie Smith, spends time with as many as six crews at different sites during an average day (Casto 2000). Besides GED training, participants receive mentoring in career counseling, homebuilding and life skills. Examples of life skills and topics covered at the center include conflict resolution, AIDS, CPR, and cultural diversity. Most participants take multiple attempts at their GED and younger participants are more likely to finish. Some members are suspended, quit, or take jobs without finishing their GED.

Gender plays an important role in the community center. Women make up most of the staff positions and engage the family and church networks needed to identify problems in the communities. Black lung widows and single parents are often the most at risk in the community. SALS uses a women construction coordinator in a male dominated industry. Staff jobs are retained locally by community members some with college degrees or other training. Jennifer Hamm is a certified housing counselor at the center who has worked with the other education programs. She became involved with housing after the experience of working with youth. "I'd go see these kids and there would be rain pouring in through the roofs. The houses were falling apart. The children with low reading skills are the same ones living in these houses, so I wanted to fix that" (*Charleston Daily Mail* June 15, 2001). There are four fulltime VISTA coordinators. Skills obtained in the VISTA jobs include procuring home loans, coordinating work crews, and serving as after school program directors. Staff and community participants work with state and federal agencies and private companies

including lending institutions like Fannie Mae, WV Housing Development Fund, and the USDA Rural Development, Federal Home Loan Bank, and local banks.

SALS programs offer local program participants the opportunity to go outside the region, often for the first time. Staff and the participants travel to organizational and professional meetings, leadership conferences, and state and national rallies and ceremonies. Cultural integration is also one of the organizations' goals. Historically, segregated by race along the forks, black and white families often are isolated from each other. Today, at the community center black and white families work together. The integration of different age groups also supports community integration with senior programs operating beside youth based programs at the center. Yearly celebrations at the center celebrate Black History Month along with the now 13th annual Solidarity Cultural Festival celebrating workers held every spring. The center celebrates the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Service Day by special projects and continuing ongoing work.

The presence of community center staff, visiting volunteers, and program participants generates an active social environment. AmeriCorps surveys found the most cited gains were learning about other cultures, human needs, making friends, and serving the community (AmeriCorps Evaluation 1998). Volunteers also become aware of the class system. Open-ended responses by the AmeriCorps participants revealed that personal gains were made in the area of human relationships. This is the same for skills. When asked what skills were obtained from the programs, participants provided the following responses,

“Learning to work with difficult people. With Teams. Problem Solving.”

“Community- getting along with different people.”

“How to build a home, How to be sociable with people, How to use my art.”

Members also responded to how the experience has created new goals.

“Because I now realize that I want my own shop so I can go out on my own and help people’

“Because I can work through my problems now and I enjoying working with people.”

“Learning to work with young people, mentoring young people.”

“My future goals are still far from me but learning to do things inside the home was very interesting and helpful to myself.”

Heritage preservation is a goal at the center. All groups experience lectures, presentations, and art exhibits on labor, coal camps, Appalachian culture, economics, community lore, and oral narratives. The inclusion of WVUIT professors and local retirees into the programs provide perspectives from the social sciences, engineering, and health and human services. Community ceremonies include new house dedications, Christmas present drives, and graduations. The center often hosts international visitors from Ireland and Africa. The speakers and guests at ceremonies include the president of United Mine Workers, Cecil Roberts, folk singers, social activists, college presidents, state officials and Vermont’s Bread and Puppet Theatre. Next, I look at the programs used at SALS to address basic needs.

Basic Services and the Provision of Needs

“We are dealing with people who have had problems all through their lives” (Kathryn South, SALS Staff)

Addressing basic needs and service delivery is a challenge in poor rural areas.

Census data for the surrounding Loup Creek Catchment area reveals per-capita income of between \$7,000 and \$8,000 dollars a year with a third of the population below the poverty line. Local schools have up to 80 percent of students in free breakfast/lunch programs (*Charleston*

Gazette Sept 1, 2000). The concentration of the elderly, retirees, the disabled, and single mothers in an isolated rural area means many families lack transportation and do not receive health and dental care, before and after school services, and social services. This has become even more difficult with welfare reform and as health care providers and social services have restructured through consolidation and centralization. Increasingly, basic services are located outside of rural communities (Murty 2001). In addition, the closing of blacklung clinics and tightening of eligibility for benefits has narrowed the options of blacklung victims.

This research points to multiple roles carried out by the community center replacing the declining community services once available in a successful economy. Current and past programs serving families include School Day Plus, a latch key program reaching 20 children, and Energy Express a summer camp program for 40 children. With SALS as Fayette counties only Energy Express program it provides breakfast and lunch, transportation, and nutrition counseling. Currently, the center operates the after school program, Accent Education. The program serves snacks and dinner and focuses on assisting school age children with homework, computer technology, fine arts, and public speaking (*Fayette Tribune* November 13, 2003).

The community center has an ABC room for young children. Parents are encouraged to participate in the programs with their children. Over 3000 meals are served for six weeks each summer at the center. The programs also provide computer, cultural diversity, and communication skills (*Fayette Tribune* July 1, 2002; *SALS Journal* Spring 2000). The above programs utilize volunteers and donated books and computers (*Fayette Tribune* July 1, 2002; SALS Board Meeting 2000).

SALS provides information on available services and programs to the community. The center identifies and links specific families who are in crisis to available resources. The

center has seven bulletin boards in the area that describe its programs. The center links local families to human service programs such as the Mothers, Infants, Health Outreach Worker Program (MIHOW). Health services at the center are through its partnership with 21st Century Community Center, the New River Health Association, and Fayette County Schools. Other health services provided at the center include promoting free dental cleaning and x-rays provided for participants at WVUIT. The inclusion of the National Blacklung Association (NBA) on the SALS board helps local victims of the disease to gain support and information on clinics and eligibility. A former president of the NBA and board member Mike South, assisted local black victims with benefits and lobbied for support of clinics at the center until his recent death from blacklung disease. Today, John Cline from the Fayette County Black Lung Association serves on the SALS board (*Charleston Gazette* April 17, 2002; *SALS Journal* 2000).

The community center uses donated vehicles to transport local shut-ins along with program participants, and volunteers. The center houses a Senior Health Program providing health workshops and health bingo along with transportation for basic needs. Many families are in hollows off main roads several miles from the larger towns of Montgomery, Oak Hill, Fayetteville, and Beckley. The center hosts and operates the Self-Help and Resource Exchange (SHARE) program offering reduced cost groceries for between 50 and 100 people a month. SHARE distributes groceries to people for reduced costs, food stamps, or free with community service. The community center offers a centralized location for SHARE distribution and delivery (*SALS Journal* 2000). The board routinely acts on cases of indigent care and temporary homelessness by providing or directing individuals toward services. The social network created by the programs helps identify needy and ill residents throughout the

community. Substandard housing represents one of the most pressing basic needs in the area. In the next section, I look at the housing programs operated at the center.

Providing Communities with Housing

As a middle class housing boom helps drive the economy throughout the country, the crisis in affordable and safe housing in rural America remains virtually invisible. A recent HUD study reveals 30 million Americans in poor, inefficient housing (Auvil 2001 West Virginia's housing crisis dates back to the coal camp regime policies of renting to mining families. As labor practices changed in the 1960s, housing was privatized. Today, 77 percent of the residents in the state own their own homes with many in the coalfields remaining substandard. Early coal camp housing often lacked foundations, solid floors, inside walls, modern plumbing, and insulation. Consequently, contemporary families in southwest West Virginia, often live in dangerous, substandard housing (Auvil 2001; Spence 1979). Addressing the region's housing crisis is a key to developing its communities. Housing programs involve numerous community members and economic sectors. Programs in the region such as The Federal of Appalachian Housing Enterprises (FAHE) have been shown to successfully generate development within poor communities. FAHE has been described as able to make "social capital float up hill" (Couto 1999:163).

The negative effects of substandard housing fall disproportionately on the disabled, elderly widows, and young families with children in developmental stages (Auvil 2001; HUD 2001). Local families often can not afford repairs and also have trouble finding contractors who will work on small projects. A SALS construction supervisor describes the contractor market, "Most of the local contractors don't want smaller repair jobs. They're

dirty, they are time consuming, and they don't know what they are going to get into until they are there" (*Beckley Register Herald* Aug 7, 1996).

The housing programs rehabilitate and weatherize eligible houses, build new houses, and relocate rehabilitated manufactured homes. Crews engage in all aspects of construction and removal. Every rehab is different with most requiring insulation, windows, new doors, and wiring. Rehabs are based on five year forgivable loans and new homes are set up on payments of less than \$100 a month for 20 years. The SALS staff determines eligibility within the service area and then works with the mortgage company and the homeowner. The programs seek to provide affordable mortgages through HUD and Fannie Mae low cost loan programs. The goal is to provide mortgages based on the ability to pay. Homeowners receive low cost loans as long as they live in their homes. The New River Safe Housing Program uses West Virginia Housing Development grants to find and purchase homes for rehabilitation. The CAEZ and Fayette County help provide Small Cities Block Grants to SALS for its housing program (Benedum 2000). HUD also works with local governments to purchase foreclosed homes for rehabilitation. YouthBuild workers repair and sell the houses (*Charleston Gazette Mail* Sept 3, 2000). Another housing initiative is the locating of donated manufactured homes from the WV Manufactured Home Association and Excel Modular Home Units to qualified members of local communities.

Starting in 2000, the ongoing housing projects have been aided by Group Workcamps. In July of 2000, 800 volunteers from the U.S. and Canada repaired over 50 homes and in 2001 over 100 in Fayette and Kanawha counties through SALS. SALS and UKVEC organize the groups which includes the providing of temporary living space donated by local high schools and WVUIT (*The Beckley Register-Herald* July 26, 2000; *Charleston*

Gazette June 14 2001). The housing programs were diverted to flood relief in July 2001 as a once-in-a-century flood destroyed communities in the area. Due in part to logging operations, the flood washed away a number of homes, bridges, and roads in the Loop Creek area. Workcamp volunteers were used for the initial rescues and in the subsequent summers to rebuild water damaged housing (*Charleston Gazette Mail* July 15, 2001). In total between July 2001 to 2002 over 800 work camp and 200 college volunteers weatherized 104 homes, helped construct four homes, installed five moducraft units, and rehabilitated several others. Between January and November of 2003, 1500 volunteers worked on homes (*Charleston Gazette* July 15, 2001; Benedum Foundation October 12, 2002; *Fayette Tribune* March 13, 2003; *Montgomery Herald* August 13, 2003).

Nonprofit housing programs are addressing the housing crisis in rural West Virginia. The key is the ability to generate broad scale participation both from residents in need and volunteer labor. The next section focuses on the partnerships and collaborations involved in the center's programs.

Community Partnerships and Advocacy

One of the goals of the EZ/EC is to create partnerships linking resources and providers. The SALS board and the networks established through its programs have expanded community partnerships with universities, extensions, and colleges. The WVU-W.K. Kellogg foundation initiated community service projects with SALS beginning in 1999. The goal of service learning is to enhanced civic responsibility not just through volunteering but with course material (Bringle and Hatcher 1996). University service learning initiatives provide an available labor force. A number of partnerships have been made possible by the programs.

Most volunteer programs at the center are alternative spring break programs geared toward providing general labor. SALS utilizes service learning in program marketing, site planning, handicap ramp design, health care, basic nutrition, child care and education, dental care, and preventive health clinics. Students engaged in service learning from WVUIT and West Virginia University are from programs in health services, nursing, engineering, sociology, and economics. Health services majors developed and coordinated projects for emergence medical services, wellness, CPR, and workers compensation (Kellogg Report 1999).

Along with service learning, SALS is connected with multiple religious organizations and networks. Denominations and churches sending volunteers to the center include Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, and Church of Christ. Group Workcamp volunteers are hosted through the Commission of Religion on Appalachia or CORA and Church World Service. Group Workcamps is a Colorado based nonprofit group sending volunteers to 48 states each summer. The community center is also involved in numerous local church projects. Other ties that have emerged through the programs include the support of the West Virginia Council of Churches for the 2001 flood relief operations (Interview with John David, October 25, 2001). Private companies participate in SALS programs through the use of tax credits and direct donations of goods and services. Designed to encourage donations, tax credits allow businesses to donate surplus material and services. Nonprofits are given an allotment of credits and it is the responsibility of the programs to access companies. Tax credits are managed through the state's Neighborhood Investment Program, where 50 percent of the donated value can be used to reduce income tax. In 2003, the state has 102 applicants for \$2 million in credits (*Fayette Tribune* December 9, 2002). Staff at the center network and solicit to find businesses that will provide donations.

Participation by for-profit companies is prominent in the case of SALS's programs. The organization effectively uses state of West Virginia tax credits in part because of the diversity of programs. SALS draws donations from banks, mobile home dealers, hospitals, gas companies, and other corporations. Donations are in the form of cash, cars, vans, computers, carpet, clothes, food, insulation, paint, building material, mobile homes, books, and office equipment. Nonprofit organizations like Gifts in Kind also contribute materials. The U.S. Department of Agriculture donated \$26,000 in 2000 for a new van for the Energy Express program (*SALS Journal* 2000). When large amounts of material are donated storage is often a problem with institutions such as the Beards Fork volunteer fire department holding material on site (See Table One Below).

Table 1. Partnerships

<u>Nonprofits/Volunteer Coalitions</u>	<u>For Profit Partnerships</u>	<u>State/Federal</u>
West Virginia Rainbow Coalition	United National Bank	West Virginia University W.K. Kellogg Community Partnership
Good Shepherd Mission	One Valley Bank	Head Start
Concerned Citizens to Save Fayette County	City National Bank	West Virginia State Employees Union
Commission on Religion in Appalachia Association for Community based Education	Columbia Natural Resources Montgomery General Hospital	Central Appalachian Empowerment Zone Upper Kanawha Valley Enterprise Zone
West Virginia People's Election Reform	Lowe's	Department of Housing and Urban Development
Global Volunteers	Wal-Mart	West Virginia Housing Development
Gifts in Kind Organization	West Virginia Manufactured Housing Association	Governor's Cabinet On Children and Families
Coalition for a Tobacco Free West Virginia	AT & T	Appalachian Regional Commission
WorkCamp Volunteers	MADD Mobile Homes	Corporation of National Service – AmeriCorps
Claude W. Benedum Foundation	William Jones Mobile Homes	USDA Rural Development
United Mine Workers	Economy Heating	WVU Extension
United Way	Owens Corning	YouthBuild USA
WV Healthy Kids Coalition	Adventures Mountain River Outfitters	Kanawha/Fayette County Schools
Group Workcamps	Excel Homes	Valley/East Bank High Schools
WV Health Care Reform Coalition		WIA – Workforce Investment Act

Partnerships with Nonprofits and Community Based Organizations

Nonprofit coalitions are another level of partnerships supporting the program initiatives. SALS has on staff an issues coordinator, Gary Zuckett, who along with other board members, link the center with the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA), West Virginia Health Care Reform Coalition, the West Virginia Environmental Council, People's Election Reform Coalition, and the West Virginia Rainbow Coalition (See Table 1 Above). The partnerships address universal health care, tort reform, and support for environmental issues. Examples of activism include advocating the extension of welfare benefits, marching in opposition to the KKK, opposing strip mining, and supporting efforts to impose weight limits on trucks. SALS has also co-sponsored three of the nonprofit theater Appalshop

documentaries including *Coal Bucket Outlaw*, *Ethel Coffee Austin*, and *Stranger with a Camera*.

The community center approach has proven effective in identifying at-risk community members in need of services. Advocacy at the center includes assistance for flood victims for FEMA signup, CHIP (Children Healthcare Initiative Program), and eligibility for child assistance with DHHR. In April of 2002, the Welfare Law Center filed briefs on behalf of SALS against the state's cutting off of hardship welfare cases. The brief argued that the state has imposed stricter requirements than federal law mandates and violated children's equal protection rights and due process (*Charleston Gazette* April 14, 2002). The center distributes information on earned income tax credits for low-income families. Nonprofit groups also connect the community with the actions of the legislature and its impact of rural communities outside of Charleston. Next, I overview how the integration of multiple social networks shapes the experiences of those involved in the programs at the center.

Experiences of the Heart: Community Service, Volunteering, and Social Development

"...I picked up many pointers on tearing down, then building up the walls of a house, dry-walling, wiring, and avoiding incarceration" Bryan Gibson, (Coming Soon, AmeriCorp Portifilo, P. 23).

SALS facilitates service learning and volunteering by coordinating volunteer groups and resources within programs. The integration of programs, community, service learning, and other volunteer groups at the community center sets the stage for transformational collaborations involving live changing experiences, exploring long term commitments, and fundamental changes in institutions (see Mahler et al. 2003). A number of educators point to the crucial role service learning plays in critical thinking. Moreover, the incorporation of

grassroots groups into service learning initiatives can facilitate critical reflection and pedagogy (Horton and Freire 1990), generate a greater understanding of and commitment to civil society (Bellah et al. 1996) and lead to a broader concept of community and cultural diversity (Rhoads 1997). Reid and Taylor (2002) argue that critical thinking and exposure to the region's oppositional politics to global capitalism are essential for students in the region.

What have volunteers gained from participating in the community development programs at SALS? Measuring the outcomes of community service is proving difficult (Thomson and Perry 1998). The AmeriCorps program has been critiqued as a service program with an educational component. While many students cannot use the program to fully fund a college degree they are assisting community programs like SALS to survive along with getting education credit. John David comments on the role of AmeriCorps, "If we had to rely on regular volunteers showing up every morning, the whole thing wouldn't stay glued together...People just can't take months away from their lives to renovate houses" (Selingo 1998:A40). Surveys given to the global volunteers, visiting Americorps NCC, and local AmeriCorps Learn and Serve provide evidence of what volunteers receive from their experience in community level programs.

During their stay, AmeriCorps and other volunteers travel to surrounding rural communities, towns, and recreational areas. They support local diners and attend church services. Volunteers experience rural community solidarity and West Virginia's natural ecology through hiking and rafting. The trip includes exposure to American's most dramatic waterfalls, state parks, and natural areas. By using volunteers from more than one age group, region of country, religious affiliation, and culture, contact with different people is accelerated. For instance, during the flood of June 2001, program volunteers, and staff ended

up cut off from the main road without power for an extended period. The community center was used for “serving gigantic community meals” (*Charleston Gazette Mail* June 15, 2001).

The themes emerging from the service learning surveys relate to personal transformation, community and the social bond, and consciousness of social conditions, ecology, and diversity. Most of the AmeriCorps participants and visiting college students represent young people in college looking for diversity and life experiences. AmeriCorps participants, from outside the area, spending weeks in coal communities engage in self-transformation in a place foreign to them. Survey responses include:

“The most important thing that I did while I was here was to take a look at my life. I asked myself a lot of different questions concerning a lot of different aspects of my life. I might not have come up with all the answers, but I did some re-prioritizing of the important things in my life.”

“There was lessons everyday I was there. From when to keep my mouth shut...to appreciating the moon and the stars, mountains, and land, or how I need to simply my life” Emily, AmeriCorps Portfolios, Team #4, 2000 ().

“I became very emotionally attached to my sheetrock, and every piece had to be exactly in place” (Rachel AmeriCorps Portfolios, Team #4, 2000).

Volunteering also allows students to get a greater sense of the historical factors behind uneven development and the human side of underdevelopment. The labor education is exemplified at the housing sites. Comments reveal the participants learn about social disorganization, poverty, and human suffering. These are experiences Rhoads (1997) sees as crucial for mythbreaking. Comments include:

“The owners of the houses in Mossy and Page have thanked us for their now beautiful homes. They are now living in homes with roofs that will not cave in, walls that will not crumble, and wires that will not catch fire” (Team Coming Soon, AmeriCorps Portfolios, 1998).

“Start to work in a cold house with barely enough walls to keep out the wind and with a floor that cracks and breaks every time you walk on it...But our most impressive accomplishment is our friendship with a lady that adores us. Whether it’s because

Dan looks like her son, or because she thinks Tim is Dan, or because Natascha' a girl, who knows; but she loves having us" (En Fuego, AmeriCorps Portfolios, 1998).

"I will be sad because she has grown to truly care for us...being a single women, a life riddled with broken relationships, nearly tragic health problems, and few friends or visitors to give her simple company, she has grown to care for us and our presence the way a mother does her own children. This was further exemplified by her exquisite meal preparation, all for us, because she cared for us so" (En Fuego, AmeriCorps Portfolio, 1998).

"I enjoy that we get direct results from our work. We have created a house that will be nice to live in out of a shanty" (En Fuego, AmeriCorps Portfolio, 1998).

"We have spent six weeks renovating houses, helping run shelters in a state of emergency, reaching out to the community, and helping those in need. This project has left a permanent impact on our lives (Team Coming Soon, AmeriCorps Portfolio, 1998).

For older adults in the Minnesota based Global Volunteers, the stay in West Virginia and the programs were different than their daily lives. Global volunteers pay \$450 to volunteer at a number of venues around the world. Beards Fork has become the destination for executives from Disney and IBM, military commanders, teachers, pet groomers, managers, state agricultural commissioners, photographers, and bankers. Surveys of Global Volunteers show differing responses in their awareness of problems faced by YouthBuild participants. Some respondents wanted to change how the programs were run and the participant's attitudes. They were concerned about the slow pace of work, and YouthBuild participants' behavior. The surveys revealed that the visiting Global Volunteers also experienced community solidarity. Comments from global volunteers on West Virginia include,

"Very warm, genuine friendliness and concern...I though it was very beneficial in 'team building' to be housed in a community building instead of a hotel/motel"

“Everyone was so nice here; they all really embraced the group and made us feel welcome. Even people, who didn’t really know what we were doing here, were very friendly...They treated us like family”

After her third whitewater trip, eight-one- year old volunteer Betty Mein offered, “everyone thinks I should be petrified, so they are watching after me” (*Montgomery Herald* August 16, 2003). Evidence from the surveys suggests that while rural communities lack economic capital, they offer volunteers alternative experiences through civic involvement with tight-knit community bonds embedded in rural social structure and the natural environment.

Participants in service learning gain a broader sense of Appalachia’s history and culture along with the issues reflective of global capitalism and confrontational politics. They see first hand the failure of the economy, the effects from the neglect of basic needs and social capital for communities, and the process of renewal.

Conclusion

This research suggests the following findings. First, nonprofit organizations working with EZ/EC zones and other collaborations can successfully initiate rural community development and expand participation. Second, the interactive community center proves to be an effective tool for identifying problems, fostering indigenous leadership, and the generating available resources required to empower local communities and eventually make changes in large-scale institutions. Third qualitative research suggests that the multiple groups and community integration involved in the programs further enriches the experience of service learning, volunteers, and participants. The paper has laid out a case for future support and an expanded role for nonprofit organizations in development policy.

The next step is to connect the blocks into regional and sustainable networks capable of articulating political and economic change or scaling-up. Gaventa (1998:153) lays out the road participatory based organizations face:

“The challenge that is before us now is how to build upon the successes of participatory development that have occurred at the micro and macro levels to take them to a larger scale-to incorporate participation into the development and implementation of national policies and large-scale institutions”.

Scaling up will require larger coalitions. Citing Bill Horton, Fisher points to Appalachia’s need for “coalitions of opposition, coalitions of advocacy, and coalitions of alternatives” (Fisher 1999). SALS not only engages in broad local capacity building it also incorporates the business sector, volunteers, and nonprofits into a debate on rural Appalachia’s development plight. These groups represent sectors of the population essential to institutional change.

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