

# Bike Walk Twin Cities

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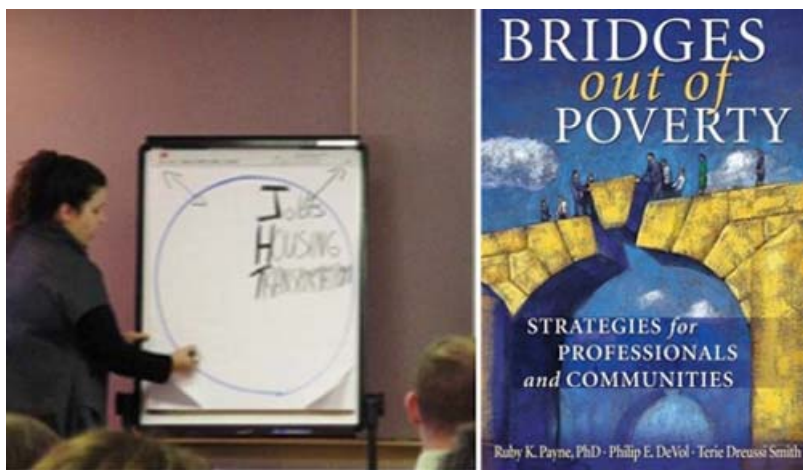
## Bridges Out of Poverty

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By Joan Pasiuk, Bicycling and Walking Program Director

In shaping policy, undertaking research, organizing for engagement, and delivering programs, TLC/BWTC continues a process of tending more deeply to equity and social justice in our work. With this in mind, TLC/BWTC recently hosted *Bridges Out of Poverty*, a workshop presented by Jodi Pfarr that examines economic class as a lens of interaction.

We invited other local stakeholders and partners to join us for the workshop, and the room was full of the energy of learners. For me, and perhaps many of us who spend a fair amount of time in a cultural comfort zone, the information, experience, and challenges Jodi presented were pure ahas.



*Left: Jodi Pfarr in action. Photo Credit: SC Ministry Foundation; Right: The book at the core of our recent workshop, Bridges out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities.*

Jodi posed seemingly simple questions that challenged our assumptions about economic class and social norms: How do we value time? What is the length of our vision into the future? What is my expectation about dealing with agencies or authority? How do we build trust in relationships, or establish social status? What are the hidden rules of my class?

When organizations such as TLC/BWTC reach out to collaborate or engage, there is often a conception of shared schedules, motivations, and values across populations. But it's important to recognize that we each bring our own worldview and experience to the table. Post-workshop, our staff processed takeaways and learning processes that may also have value at your organization or in your own life.

1. If we want to build bridges across communities, we must expand on our own internal dialog and understanding.
2. Regardless of our background or current economic class, people are strongly socialized, and often without realizing it, we act upon hidden rules of our class. As Jodi said, "The more we understand how class affects us and are open to hear how it affects others, the more effective we can be."
3. TLC/BWTC is working to make explicit our organizational theory of change, employing cross-cultural lenses and input. My personal theory of change is rooted in a strong sense of the common good and a commitment to future generations. Establishing a theory of change at the organizational level involves sharing how we believe our community can and wants to change, and building a bridge of understanding across differing viewpoints. The result must incorporate the voices of people living in poverty, not the middle-class interpretation of poverty.
4. We are all defined by our own stories. With little sense of a future story and limited choices and social mobility, people in generational poverty can have a limited sense of power. Is there a way to make transportation—the ability to get around easier—part of a positive present, with a sense of a more promising future? Helping to alleviate the challenges people face today may be the key to successfully building positive change together over the long-term.

**Low-wage households (earning \$20,000 to \$35,000) living far from employment centers spend 37 percent of their incomes on transportation. [PolicyLink](#)**

5. For people in the middle class, achievement is typically a big driver. For people in generational poverty, trusting relationships are often primary motivators. This doesn't mean people in generational poverty aren't driven to succeed. But with limited resources, people often must rely on and trust in one another. A big question in our work remains, how do relationships to mode(s) of transportation affect the way people in generational poverty get around? Through our Transportation Options program, in partnership with Neighborhood House, we are listening to folks who are "transit dependent" to better understand these relationships.

**A transit-dependent Twin Cities resident is only able to access 40 percent of the region's employment opportunities in less than 90 minutes.**

*Brookings Institution*

6. The concept of *customer life cycle* is particularly provocative at TLC/BWTC. Jodi's workshop left us thinking more about how transportation options can be better integrated into people's lives, particularly for those facing the challenges of generational poverty. For example, could transit routes and stops be improved so that it's easier for someone working third shift to commute without a car? Could bicycle access be strategically placed in both middle-class and low-income neighborhoods to make reaching key destinations easier? Could services be combined to cut down on wasted transportation and agency time? Could providing childcare at a meeting or bus fare to and from that meeting make it possible for more parents to get involved in making change in their community? These are questions we will certainly be thinking more about in the coming year.

7. Messaging effectively and respectfully to the range of transit users, bicyclists, and walkers across age, culture, and economic circumstances is a huge challenge. TLC just completed a survey of members, and we are driving tough questions forward: Whom do we engage? Whom have we failed to engage? What kind of engagement is critical to advancing transportation options in our region? Hearing from more people across diverse Twin Cities communities will be essential to answering these questions in a meaningful way.

8. With more input and understanding, transportation *can* work better, and it needs to work for everyone. The transit system has been heavily focused on serving the peak commute. Accomplishing errands on weekends by bus is daunting. Public policy could establish frequent access for the most transit-reliant neighborhoods as the funding priority, modeled after the federal New Starts Program that counts service to transit dependent populations at double the score as service to populations with high car ownership. TLC is in a position to advocate for equity as a funding priority in new ways.

Generational poverty is a complex intersection of social inequities and disparities. There is no easy solution, but there is a path to economically sustainable communities, a path that is based on understanding and mutual respect. TLC/BWTC is committed to building more of these bridges, and then crossing them.

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