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Classes offer citizens "bridges out of poverty"

February 14, 2013

BY BRYAN DAVIS
dtleditor@bellsouth.net

There will be a very important community training seminar in Starkville one week from today.

Attendance from West Point's community leaders could lead to a significant impact on poverty and the town's economy.

"Bridges out of Poverty" is an organization that has taught communities that benefits and effectiveness of empowering those in poverty rather than just writing checks to different charities.

Lynn Phillips-Gaines spoke to the West Point Rotary Club last week about the "Bridges" program and the impact it has had on Starkville. West Point has an chance to bring the program here, and that is why a healthy number of community leaders is needed at next Friday's session.

"Once a community gets beyond 41 percent generational poverty, it's almost impossible to bring that community back," Phillips-Gaines said. "It only takes two generations to go from situational poverty to generational poverty." West Point and Clay County have hit hard times in the last few years, losing thousands of jobs due to industry closure. Phillips-Gaines says that many of the participants in the program in Starkville come from Clay County. Phillips-Gaines says that there is about \$3 million in the "compassion industry" another name for charity giving. There is nothing wrong with giving to charity, but perpetual charity becomes toxic.

"Bridges out of Poverty" promotes one-way gift giving to emergency situations only.

The organization says its goal is to "strive to empower the poor through employment, lending and investing." Erica Gillespie, a Clay County native and now resident of Starkville was a recipient of such empowerment when she went through the 17 class (two to two and a half hours) program.

"I learned more about life and the management of money," Gillespie said. "I learned about paying debts off. That class was very important to me."

The program prides itself on bridging the communication gaps between the poor class, middle class and even the wealthy class.

"People in poverty have a certain way they talk to people, and people in the middle class have a certain way they talk to people," Gillespie said. "The wealthy class has a different way they speak."

The licensed social worker completed the program and has worked her way out of poverty.

"West Point could use this program," she said. "I work in Noxubee County, and I see first hand what poverty does to families. It's sad."

The program encourages less charity and more empowerment for those in poverty. It's likened to the old truism, "give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime."

West Point and Clay County citizens who are struggling and need a better education on money management and how to get the job they are looking for can have this program.

There has to be sufficient support from the community to justify bringing the program here.

Registration is \$50 until Sunday. The program will start at 8:30 a.m on Friday and will last to 3:30 p.m.

Those interested can register at www.StarkvilleBridges.com or mail a check for the registration to 104 West Lampkin Street, Starkville, MS 39759.

For more information call 662-418-3100 or email bridgesoutofpoverty@gmail.com



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