

Community Solutions effort has eye on future

I truly believe that we live in the best community in the country. We have a temperate climate, low cost of living, rich cultural heritage and diverse and beautiful surroundings.

But it is the caring, compassionate people who make this a genuinely great place to call home. While I have always known the residents of Benton and Franklin counties are very gener-



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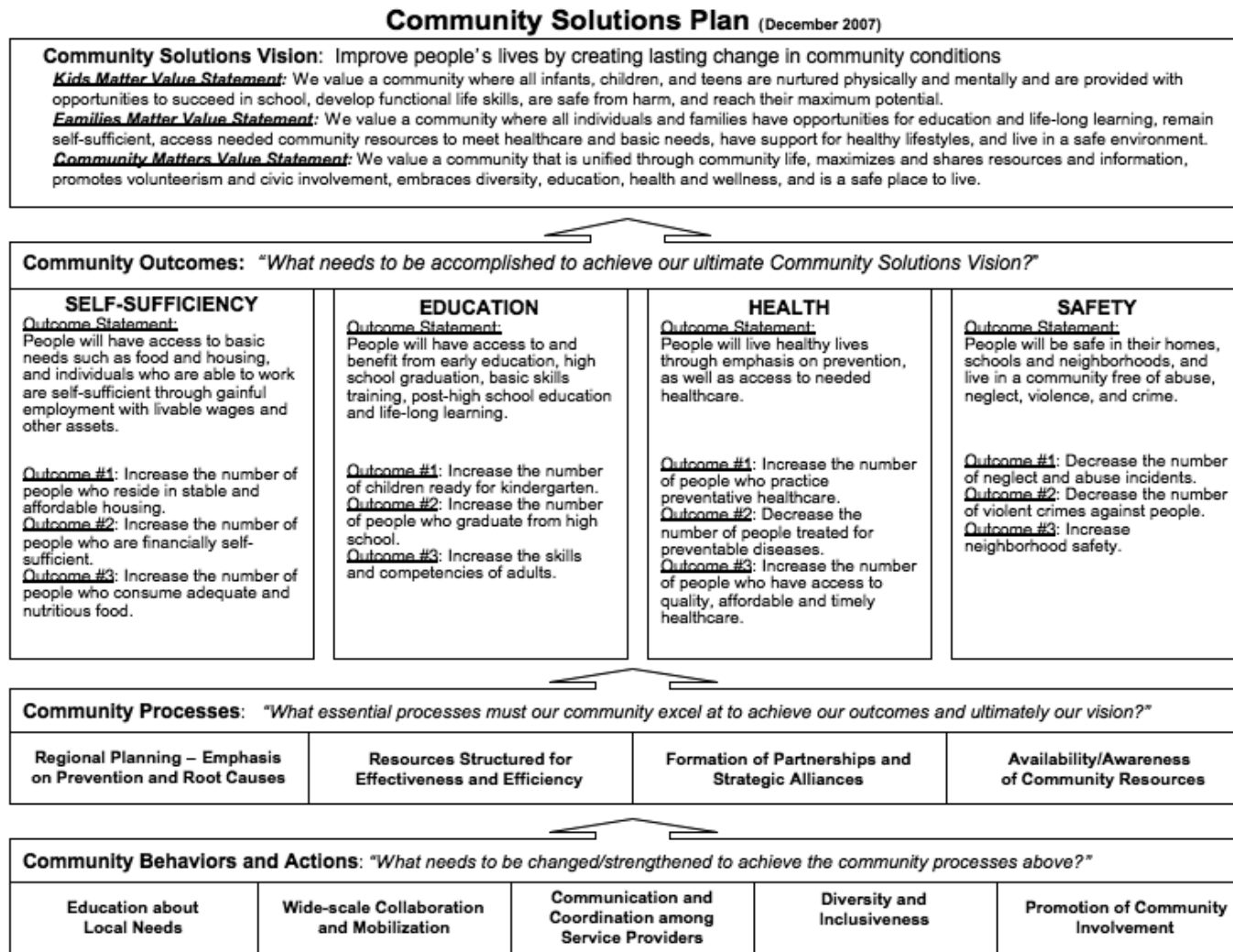
ous, my two years as a member of the United Way board of directors has given me a much greater appreciation for the charitable essence of our community.

In the past 12 months, however, I have had the opportunity to experience a new level of energy and responsiveness in the way our community provides for those in need.

Last January, I joined more than 200 leaders from all sectors of our community in the challenging work of developing a regionwide health and human services plan that would provide a well thought out, coordinated approach to addressing our area's most serious issues.

With United Way serving as the facilitator, these community leaders provided incredible insight and wisdom throughout the yearlong process of creating the first cut of the plan. This is a tremendous accomplishment and one in which our community should take great pride.

Called simply Community Solutions, the effort marks the first time in Benton and Franklin counties' history that



such a comprehensive planning process has occurred.

The plan identifies solutions to critical needs that will lead to lasting improvement in community conditions and ultimately people's lives. It is a road map for some powerful and necessary changes in our community.

A recent Community Needs Assessment conducted by Washington State University Tri-Cities found that our community has many good services, but our coordination and communication must improve if we are

going to effectively meet the needs of our residents.

In other words, we need to get smarter and more strategic about how we provide help to people in our community. The regionwide plan is designed to do just that.

The key to understanding the structure of the plan is that all parts are of equal importance and all must be successfully implemented to achieve results.

At the top of our road map is the "vision" that we ultimately want to accomplish for people in Benton and Franklin

counties. Corresponding value statements for kids, families and the community further describe what community leaders envision for residents in our area.

The mid-section of the plan is made up of "Outcome Areas and Statements." These are the long-term goals that we must accomplish if we are to ultimately achieve our vision for our community.

Four major outcome areas were identified during the in-depth planning process: self-sufficiency, education, health and safety. Each major out-

come has a descriptive statement along with three more detailed outcomes.

The development of this portion of the plan was accomplished using two primary sources of information: the collective knowledge and experience of the 200 community leaders involved in the process and data gathered through a Community Asset Assessment that identified and quantified our area's strengths and resources that could be used as the foundation for creating solutions to critical problems.

Additional work will be

done in early 2008 to determine baselines and realistic targets for identified population groups within each of these outcomes.

Next on the plan are the "Community Processes" that describe the infrastructure we need to have in place in order to achieve our long-term outcomes and ultimately our vision.

At the bottom of the plan, but of equal importance, are "Community Behaviors and Actions." These characterize the ways we must interact in order to promote systems change and support the vitally important community processes.

The Community Solutions Plan is a dynamic document that will accommodate refinement as new information becomes available. Successful implementation of the plan requires many individuals and organizations working in tandem including health and human service agencies, schools, law enforcement, health care, local government and the faith community.

If any community can carry this plan to fruition, ours can. However, to do so we must invest the same energy, share the same commitment and collaborate with as much enthusiasm as we did in creating the plan.

I am confident that if we do, we will improve the quality of life in our community in a way that none of us ever could have imagined.

► *John Inman is the senior sales manager for McCurley Integrity Dealerships. He is chairman of the "Kids Matter" Community Solutions Team and member of the board of directors for United Way of Benton and Franklin Counties.*