

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was prepared by the Michigan State University Practicum Team for Inkster UP! Inkster UP! is a partnership of community and economic development stakeholders in the city of Inkster and surrounding areas led by the Inkster Public Housing Resident Council. Inkster UP! proposes to acquire and develop the building of the former Blanchette Middle School to house a one-stop shop of programs, services and educational opportunities for residents of Inkster geared towards job training and vocational services. The scope of this project is to perform a feasibility analysis to determine if the community of Inkster needs a community/technology center, and whether the specific site of the former Blanchette Middle School would be appropriate to house such a center.

The Michigan State University Practicum Team's scope of work included five main points: 1) The (Community) Vision, 2) Background Information on the city of Inkster, 3) Service Needs Assessment, 4) Site Analysis (of the former Blanchette Middle School), and 5) Recommendations.

The Michigan State University Practicum Team assessed the community's vision by conducting interviews with the founder of Inkster UP!, Bobbie Wallace, and by distributing a targeted community survey in order to gain a better sense of the range of services that residents use in Inkster and the services that they would like to see at the proposed community/technology center. Three hundred surveys were distributed and completed. Based on the survey results, the community envisions the community / technology center to provide access to job skills training (89%) and job placement services (80%). Sixty-percent of the respondents were unemployed. Respondents indicated that the most important aspect of a community is quality schools (88%), low crime (85%) and clean neighborhoods (82%).

The Michigan State University Practicum Team also compiled an extensive analysis of basic demographic information including household types, occupancy levels and education levels. The population in Inkster is 30,115 people, and 67.51 % are African American. The typical person in Inkster is 31 years old, African American, a high school graduate, earns \$35,950 annually, owns a single-family dwelling, works in service, manufacturing, or retail, owns one vehicle per household, and drives to work alone.

Additionally, the Michigan State University Practicum Team assembled an inventory of existing human and social services within the city of Inkster, and grouped these services into four categories: social service and welfare, job skills, child care, and educational and learning. These services include Hegira Next Step Clubhouse, Inkster Family Investment Center, Starfish Family Services, Inkster Weed and Seed, the Neighborhood Networks Center at Dartmouth Square Apartments, and various other organizations, which are explained in more detail in Chapter Five of this report.

The former Blanchette Middle School is currently used as a storage facility for Inkster Public School District, and also houses a Teen Health Center administered by Starfish: Family Services. The building is in generally good condition. There are various exceptions, such as water damage, minor cracks in the walls and tiles, and several areas of carpeting that require replacement, but many of these repairs would be minor cosmetic.

The Michigan State University Practicum Team separated the findings and conclusions into five categories: 1) location, 2) services, 3) collaboration and partners, 4) advertisement and promotion, and 5) transportation. The Michigan State Practicum Team offers the following recommendations:

1. The Blanchette Middle School Site is : structurally sound, located within a service gap, and easily accessible to SMART buslines route 285; however, is not feasible to house a one-stop-shop of services due to the abundance of pre-existing social services in the city. Having identified, however, the greatest need in Inkster is for job skills training, this site could be utilized as a vocational or technical center focusing on training for employment skills.

2. Given the transportation limitations, there is a need for a center with accessibility, especially in the southeastern region of the city. This could include more extensive bus service provided by SMART, or perhaps a free or reduced-fee curbside van service.
3. There is a need in Inkster for visibility of social service providers as well as updated information about the services offered, hours of operation and locations. The existence of community services and their accessibility must be advertised heavily throughout the city. This could take the form of a multimedia campaign, and would necessarily also include information about services outside the city, which also serve Inkster residents.
4. The Inkster Up! Organization should be formally incorporated, including permanent members from all partner organizations, in order to best address issues in Inkster, especially surrounding the future of the Blanchette site.