

Community Plunge® - Learning History

All Aboard!

Since the early 1990's Memorial Health System has been working towards "creating a healthy community" here in South Bend, Indiana. The concept of a "healthy community" emerged as a result of the hospital's examination of its role as a health care provider. The hospital learned, by looking beyond its walls, that non-medical issues such as, employment, education, housing, and transportation, impact the health status of our community. From this knowledge, a new, broader concept of health care was formed. This concept has since been woven into Memorial Health System's mission. Memorial believes that a "healthy community " is as much a social, economic and environmental issue as it is a medical one. "We have a broad definition of health," says Barbara Wheeler, Memorial Hospital's Planning Director, "We go beyond medical issues and include social, mental and spiritual elements, We believe that if people live in a nice place, if they feel safe, they will have a better quality of life and, ultimately, be healthier."

Memorial Health System President & CEO, Phil Newbold, maintains that in order to create a healthier community, "We must recognize the gaps in services and begin to develop partnerships which will help to fill those gaps." One way in which Memorial has discovered those gaps has been through their 66 community plunge" initiative.

It all started in 1989 when Phil Newbold wanted to know more about older adult's needs. He began to ask questions about what types of services were presently available; what did seniors really need and care about; what misconceptions and myths about seniors were roadblocks to senior health; what could the hospital do to make things better; and, what current informal senior networks were already bolstering the community? In order to find the answers to these questions, Phil suggested gathering people together who were addressing senior needs within the larger community. The gathering was designed to take an inventory and to find out what, if any, gaps existed and to gain a greater awareness about the community and its needs. He had used a similar approach in Oklahoma City and it helped accomplished several goals: to identify existing assets, resources and services; to breakdown barriers and stereotypes; and, to bring people together to partner in addressing issues. This is what became know as the "Aging Plunge."

Aging Plunge Objectives

These objectives define the Aging Plunge as a tool for education, market research, team building and relationship building.

- to provide better awareness and understanding of services provided by the community for older adults;
- to identify service gaps, and explore unmet needs for the elderly in the community;
- to listen, participate and learn from the consumers of older adult services;
- to build a base of support within the hospital's board, medical staff and administrators for older adults programs; and,
- to build bridges for future cooperative efforts between the community. aging resources and Memorial Hospital.

The Aging Plunge results helped form what is now the Leighton Center for Senior Health, a Memorial Health System facility which is dedicated to older adult programming and services. Margo Demont, Ph.D., Director of Senior Services remembers, "When I came to Memorial in 1989 there was lot a trepidation

and skepticism about senior programming. The Aging Plunge helped breakdown barriers, build awareness and developed a coalition of supporters." In fact, the Aging Plunge built important new relationships within the community, among the participants, with service providers and even future funders.

An entire day was dedicated to the Aging Plunge. The participants visited eight community-based programs which included; the Area Agency on Aging; a seniors' educational/enrichment institute; a comprehensive senior activity center; a small neighborhood senior center; an adult day care; a retirement community; the country home for indigent aged; and, a church-sponsored extended care facility. The sites were chosen for the uniqueness and the richness of their offerings, and for their potential for cooperative partnership programming with Memorial's Senior Services.

Stop And Take an Inventory!

According to Margo, "As healthcare professionals, we tend to look only at acute care when dealing with the elderly. We forget about the other needs faced by the seniors in our communities. Our goal, with education as an objective, was to expose the participants to the wide spectrum of community services available. Seniors are not a homogeneous group; they have different levels of wellness and skills and need a variety of different services. The educational component of the Aging Plunge helped to introduce some of those services that do not concentrate primarily on acute care."

By including healthcare providers and physicians in the Aging Plunge, some of the best links in the chain of service got educated. Healthcare professionals can be the most important liaison between an elderly person and their caregivers, and the available community resources. Margo Demont believes that a senior is much more likely to investigate a program or service upon the recommendation of a physician, discharge planner, nurse, social worker or other healthcare professional. The Aging Plunge helped make that initial connection. Hospital Board members also participated, once again broadening the network of those educated about issues facing seniors, and the resources available to them.

Margo explained that, "Community programs and agencies list a breadth of services, but first-hand knowledge is needed to truly acquaint oneself with the depth of any program. Market research is not only knowing the strengths of the available resources but also the weaknesses. The questions that needs to be answered is, 'where are the existing service gaps?'

During the Aging Plunge we asked the program directors what they did especially well and where did they need help. We asked the seniors at the sites what their perceptions were of the aging resources available. Our goal in senior programming is not to wastefully duplicate what is being done well, but rather to ferret out the under-served areas and to determine if we have the resources to meet those needs."

In a sense, the Aging Plunge provided an opportunity for the participants to rejoice with the seniors, to better understand the joy of aging and the ability to overcome potentially disabling conditions to enhance the quality of senior life. It also acquainted the participants with the realities of the need for assistance that many seniors have. Assistance that is necessary to maintain a crucial part of life-quality: independence.

A very important goal of the Plunge was to build a base of support to help Memorial fulfill the mission of helping older adults and their caregivers. The nature of the Aging Plunge allowed participants to build up a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement. A special camaraderie was formed among the members of a each Aging Plunge, breaking down the resistance and leading to wonderful exchanges of ideas. Margo remembers that, "Group members began to personally identify with the seniors and share anecdotal remembrances about their own parents or grandparents. As empathy and understanding increase, the buying-in process unfolds and the essential base of support is built."

In addition to building from within, the Plunge enabled the hospital to build relationships with agencies in the community. Programs that offer exemplary services are most willing to showcase their efforts and are quite honored to be invited to participate in the Aging Plunge.

The Aging Plunge was an investment in building partnerships. Partnerships with some very significant players in our community - agencies that serve the seniors, our board of trustees, the medical staff, hospital administrators and, most importantly, with the seniors themselves.

Intersection Ahead

The Aging Plunge was so successful in developing a new model or concept for aging that it was expanded and used by Memorial Hospital to help educate board members, administrators, staff and other community leaders about a wide variety of community issues and needs. Some of the plunges that evolved throughout the next several years included such topics as: housing and homelessness, domestic violence, cultural diversity, neighborhoods and urban life.

For years before this exercise became known as a "plunge," Carl Ellison, Vice President, Community Affairs at Memorial Hospital, delivered, what he termed "alley tours" to individuals who would ask him to share his knowledge of South Bend. Carl believes that "If you really want to see conditions of neighborhoods its much better to drive through alleys and look at the backs of houses rather than driving along the street. The backs of houses are very revealing - they show the condition of the neighborhood they tell their own story." Carl would drive around the neighborhoods, through the alleys, and into places his passengers had never been before. This experience helped them to better understand community issues from a firsthand look at both the strengths and assets, as well as the places in need.

A community plunge is a way for people to become involved in the community and help improve the health status of those who live there. It is an effective way to find out "what's going on out there." Too often, the board room walls block our perspective of our own communities. Much of what we do "know" about our communities often comes from accounts in the local newspaper or other secondhand sources. A plunge offers leaders a way to actually participate in learning about their community at the grassroots level, while providing the opportunity to form the linkages that will be essential to creating a "healthier community." A plunge connects organizations with communities, puts faces on the statistics, and motivates people to act.

Why take a plunge?

A plunge is a valuable tool for getting back in touch with your community. Serving as a complement to more formal needs assessment surveys and other activities aimed at refocusing your organization on improving community health status, a plunge offers your leadership an experiential learning opportunity that puts them in touch with both the needs and strengths of the community your organization serves. By listening to people's personal stories, and by asking questions of the people they meet, plunge participants can develop a new understanding of the dynamics of their community.

That's particularly important today. Our communities demographic, social and economic landscapes have shifted significantly in the past few decades, leaving many of those who serve the public wondering if their time-tried efforts are still working. At the same time, our corporate structures have distanced us from our communities. A plunge, on the other hand, is action-oriented. It lets you look at Your community from the inside and become involved in learning about it from people who live there. Plunges are designed to seek out the positive. The idea is to find the strengths in your community, to identify assets and opportunities for partnerships that will create the positive foundations for a brighter future.

After all, if you don't know where people's strengths are, it's difficult to meet their needs, says Michael Mather, Pastor of the Broadway Christian Parish in South Bend, who is among the area leaders who have opened their doors to the plunge experience.

Plunges are extremely useful experiences for board members, administrators, medical staff, community leaders and anyone who is in a decision-making role that impacts the quality of life in their community. The experience will be useful in:

- Developing a better understanding of the assets and resources in your community
- Creating partnerships that make the most effective use of your community's resources
- Identifying unmet needs in the community

At Memorial, our efforts to help create a healthier community are rooted in our belief that health is as much a social, economic and environmental issue as it is a medical one. Educational plunges have served as valuable tools as we endeavor to learn as much about the people we serve as we can.

"Most of what makes people sick has very little to do with the medical care system," says medical futurist Leland Kaiser, Ph.D., whose vision of collaborative, community-based health care has helped guide Memorial's leadership. "The major variables of morbidity in a population are sanitation, nutrition, lifestyles, education and income. And most of those are outside the medical system.."

The plunge experiences have served very much as a "reality check" for our leadership, much as it will for you. They can provide your leadership with something tangible: An opportunity to meet real people in a real setting to get a better feel for what's really happening in your community. As your board, administrators and medical staff plot the future course for your organization, impressions from the plunge experience will help ensure that the decisions they make are on target with the needs and strengths of your community.

A plunge can take many different forms depending on the number of participants and objectives you set out to accomplish. Some plunges can involve as few as one or two people spending their day talking to residents in a neighborhood. Others might require a bus to carry participants from place to place. Plunge sites vary as well, from senior centers, soup kitchens and recreation centers to churches, schools and countless other places that serve a representative group of people. Some plunge participants, for instance, have examined the issue of homelessness over a meal at the local rescue mission. They have learned about barriers to health care for the elderly in the community by visiting with seniors at nutrition sites and day programs.

The general idea of a plunge, no matter what the setting, is to seek out the group of people you're interested in learning more about. Your goal is to meet with a representative group of people, (this number may vary widely, depending on the plunge setting, time allotted and other factors), ask questions about their lives and experiences (their experiences with access to local health services, for example), and to really listen to what they have to say. Free-flowing conversation is an essential element to a plunge. Try not to structure your plunge agenda so rigidly that it stifles a good exchange of ideas or issues that you might not have thought of beforehand.

Plunges are typically user-driven programs. In other words, you are asking people to allow a glimpse into their everyday lives. And you are asking them to lead, right down to helping you plan the plunge itself. For a plunge in a neighborhood on South Bend's southeast side, for example, Memorial approached residents of the neighborhood to help us find out what they thought would be important for plunge participants to know about their community. The Broadway Christian Parish served as a great source of

support and helped "break the ice" with neighborhood residents. Memorial continues to have a strong and growing relationship with the southeast neighborhood to this day.

The same strategy applies to any kind of plunge you are thinking of organizing. Want to find out more about drug abuse in your community? Talk with people in drug rehabilitation programs. Want to learn more about juvenile crime? Talk to young offenders and their families. Teen-age pregnancy? Meet with young mothers. Let the people involved help plan your plunge to ensure a successful experience. This involvement builds trust and helps open doors that might otherwise be closed to you.

Other variations on the plunge experience can be provider-driven. For example, you may want to learn more about the services that are and are not available for the elderly in your community. As a result, you'll want to spend some time at program sites and discuss the services provided with representatives of the various agencies that serve the elderly population.

Keep in mind, however, that in a plunge experience it's more important to talk candidly with the people who actually use or need these services than service-providers. This reflects a view closest to the community issue the plunge explores. Listening to people who use services may be more time-consuming or create different challenges for plunge participants, but focusing on service-users rather than providers is ultimately more effective. It's the most direct route to personal life stories, the main street of any plunge trip.

Agency or organization administrators should be aware that your project is about hearing from people who know the plunge issue from experience, not "experts" or people who work in the field. Time spent hearing from agency representatives should be carefully limited. Rich and insightful stories from unique individuals working personally with issues of aging, homelessness, growing up, or neighborhood development, lay waiting for plunge participants to take in and process. These journeys and the people who have lived them are the core of a successful plunge.

In a plunge, your preconceived notions must be put in neutral. Participants must open their ears, eyes and minds to the experience. You are not on a plunge to "tell" people what your organization is *doing for them*, you want to know what you and they *are capable of doing together*.

Pedestrians and Other Participants

A plunge is most useful for people who are in decision-making roles that can impact your community. Participants can vary widely, from members of your board of trustees, medical staff and key administrators to legislators and business leaders. The idea is to orient policy makers to the current realities of their community to help them in the decision-making process.

Anyone who would benefit from first-hand knowledge of the community - and would put that knowledge into action - is a plunge candidate. Plunges that bring together a diverse cross-section of participants create other experiences and purposes too, besides merely offering education about a certain theme in the community; they reflect as well, the strengths every member brings to the table, and the possibilities to effect change the plunge participants generate as a group. A minister, a school super, a board member, a neighborhood participant, a police captain - these are all great plunge candidates, and as participants of the *same* plunge their collective potential for community involvement and change is tremendous.

Todd Schurz, Editor & Publisher of The South Bend Tribune and Board of Trustee of Memorial Health System and Hospital, was not only a new board member but also new to the community when he was invited to participate in the Urban Plunge. "My first year in South Bend was spent learning as much as I could about the community. The South Bend Tribune, in order to be a successful newspaper, needs to be

in touch with the community - the plunges offered a way for me to find out more from an insiders perspective," remembers Todd.

Plunge participants have a chance to learn through dialogue, face-to-face contact, and real community challenges that they can *see* through the plunge, not from statistics or presentations. The hands-on plunge learning style breaks down prejudices, myths, and stereotypes that often serve as barriers to involvement and change. Caitlin Hale, who plans to publish a new magazine for the Healthy Communities Initiative of St. Joseph County under the local Chamber of Commerce, and South Bend resident for nearly 15 years, said this after her plunge experience: "I realize you can't accurately talk about what's going on in your community until you've walked the streets and talked to the people. I learned a lot today."

Bridging the Gaps

From our experience, we know that people are very willing to be candid about their lives, their hopes, their feelings and their needs. Plunge participants and the people they visit all have stories to tell as a part of bridging the gaps between each of our different experiences. Charles Burnside, a Memorial Health Systems security guard, went on a plunge because he and his family lived in the neighborhood where the plunge took place. "There was a shooting a few months ago - a guy was walking home from work and got shot, " he said, "My house has been broken into. I see the improvements being made, and I'm encouraged by them. But I know change takes time. And I can't afford to have my kids get hurt."

Betty Hubler, an elderly widow, told plunge participants that she can't depend on neighbors like she used to. "I was born in this house, and I have seen big changes," she said, "At one time, everyone owned and took care of their homes. Now, there is so much rental. Years ago, I knew everyone. Now I don't know anyone."

How To Construct A Plunge

Step 1: Decide the general theme, pick a topic, identify a community need you'd like to learn more about. (Examples: crime, drugs, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, aging, etc.)

Step 2: Determine when and where you will go on your plunge.

Step 3: Ask others on your own staff, other agencies and organizations, individuals who are directly affected, and community leaders to participate in both (or either) the planning or implementing stages.

Step 4: Determine how you will transport people on the plunge - will you walk, take a bus, or some other inventive method. The number of people you invite will help you make this decision. Don't forget to consider your participants as well - Will they be able to walk?

Step 5: Make sure your transportation decision works with your visitation schedule. If you decide to use a bus but can't get it into the parking lot of the place you are going or down the alley way - you may have to rethink your route, topic or even transportation choice.

Step 6: If you are going to take a larger group on a neighborhood plunge, you may want to have the neighborhood organize the event - provide the tour guides and lead the discussion. Let the people have ownership in the plunge experience.

Step 7: Another thing to consider is the amount of time you expect to commit to your activity. A plunge can last anywhere from four to eight hours.

Step 8: Remember there are some advantages to having everyone traveling together. A bus or large van serve as good tour vehicles, allowing participants to get a perspective of the plunge setting. And while everyone is together, it's a good time to begin "debriefing" about the experience. Impressions are fresh on everyone's minds, ideas may have been sparked. Take advantage of the time you have together to talk about your experience and capture any new ideas. The interaction of participants between stops serves to enhance learning and reinforce the experience.

Step 9: It is important that the people and/or agencies you're interested in getting to know have a clear understanding of your objectives in order to guarantee effective participation. Past perceptions about your organization may play a large part in how receptive people are. The more positive the perception, the easier it will be to garner support.

Step 10: You must be clear about your intentions with the agencies or individuals you are approaching for a site visit. It's good to have any questions cleared up and ground rules understood well in advance of the visit, and it's important to communicate ground rules to plunge participants before you arrive.

Step 11: Give yourself a time line of a few months to get everything together. Of course, getting your board together for a day-long program isn't always easy. There is a lot of coordination that must go on between the plunge sites, plunge participants and transportation in order for all to work smoothly.

Step 12: Remember that plunges are generally informal events. Dress is typically casual and appropriate for the environment in which the plunge takes place. Business or formal attire can stifle conversation when the people you are talking with don't have the luxury of dressing likewise. Still, as a courtesy to the people you are meeting with, wearing name tags is a good idea.

Margo Demont noted that the bridges participants make between their own fears and the plunge issue can be very important. After a stop on the Aging Plunge to a County home for the indigent aged, she remarked that sometimes for participants . It was very depressing Some people are very fearful of aging." She added though, that these moments build participant self-awareness, a vital component in processing and coming to terms with our own unease, and even possible solutions later. Plunges may entail facing the gaps in our own certainty and comfort level in efforts to build bridges of understanding and acceptance.

Margo also tells of more lighthearted examples of learning on the Aging Plunge. At one stop, plunge participants stopped senior residents to ask what they liked best about the community in which they lived. She recalls one of the answers: "'Our little store - its' so fantastic - you can go in and buy two eggs and half a loaf of bread,'" Margo laughs, and points to the discovery about senior life to be made. "You realize, 'Well Gosh, when I'm old and alone, man, you're right - I'll only need two eggs. Gee, I never thought about a whole loaf of bread."

A new Memorial Health System Board member, Richmond Calvin, said that as a plunge participant he learned more "about the kind of partnerships the hospital is involved in ... It has also opened my eyes to the complexities and complications people go through and how our value systems are different - sometimes foreign - because our worlds are so different ..."

Exploring different worlds is exactly what a plunge is. By itself, a plunge is not a promise of some future action. Rather, it is an informationgathering tool that may help in future decision-making, refine projects already under way, or help to garner support for proposed new programs.

In another sense, however, a plunge is something that can help your organization develop and nurture better linkages in your community. It may be a catalyst for new ideas, it may help bring groups together (hospitals and schools, for instance) that might not otherwise have realized their commonalities. A plunge

can be one of the threads that weaves together the patchwork that eventually will become a Healthy Community!

Still, some very tangible things can come as a result of a plunge. Memorial's Leighton Center for Senior Health, which was constructed in 1989 thanks to the generosity of benefactors Judd and Mary Lou Leighton, was developed as a result of the Aging Plunge experience.

Caution: Bumps Ahead

Memorial has learned a great deal in our nine years of participating, organizing and facilitating plunges. There have been bumps along the road but ultimately we have gained a greater understanding about paving smoother roads to plunges in the future from these challenges. Margo Demont, Ph.D., Director of Senior Services, has made several observations about the process. She recommends that, "You should use participants to generate dialogue - clients, patients, older adults, whoever it is you are asking about - they should be the ones you talk to. Don't use a slide show or video to learn about people - talk to them individually and as a group." Todd Zeiger, former Executive Director of the Near Northwest Neighborhood Center, also believes that it is important for participants to hear from people who are impacted by the services or issues, rather than staff of the agency addressing their needs. "It is important to identify people who are willing to talk to the group, someone who will feel comfortable expressing themselves and sharing personal stories," agrees Todd.

Here is a list of other "insider" recommendations:

- Deciding how much time to spend on a plunge is critical. Too little time (you need at least 4 hours) and it's hard to build camaraderie, too much time (no more than 8 hours) and you risk losing participants.
- The number of participants you ask to join your plunge is also very important. If you have too few people (5-10) participate you may not get a good cross-section of the population, too many people (40-50) and it's hard to process information and the logistics become burdensome.
- Keep a clear focus and know exactly what you are trying to achieve with your plunge. Don't try to take on too much.
- You may want to start small and gain some experience before you try to present an all-day plunge.
- Go with what you know! Use your connections within the community to build a plunge that includes a wide variety of agencies, organizations and individuals. Always partner with another group to build trust and dialog.
- Try to make people feel comfortable - ask them to dress down that day or even bring their dog!
- Drive the route yourself. Really think through where you will be taking people and how you will get there - you don't want to waste time stopped at a construction site or have problems getting your bus through an alley.
- Encourage participants to get involved in the dialogue. Try to keep a dialogue going even while you're on the bus waiting to get to the next stop.
- Pick partners that will enhance your plunge experience. Choose partners who have a certain expertise or knowledge about something you do not. Collaboration is a very important part of the community plunge.
- Ask partners to involve people who are affected by the issues. Make sure that they are willing to speak openly to the group. Prevent a well intentioned Director or staff person from dominating the session by limiting their time to no more than a couple of minutes from the onset. Participants want to hear from those affected, not just those who provided them services.

- Be as flexible and understanding as possible. The best laid plans do not always turn out as designed - expect there to be issues that arise but be flexible enough to deal with them.
- Do not use audio/visual tools such as television, video and slides. They take time away from the true one-on-one interactions that take place on the plunge. Live people are much more interesting and engaging than a recreation.
- Choose a good facilitator! The person you choose needs to be able to keep a group focused, encourage dialogue and know when let things happen!
- Remember that not everyone who goes on the plunge is at the same level of understanding about the issues. Plan to have information for people at each level.
- Pick the hard stuff. You will learn the most from those issues that are the hardest to address. Don't let social constraints or political influences sway you from examining a difficult issue.
- Debrief. Leave enough time at the end of the plunge experience, 20-30 minutes, for participants to reflect together on their day and compare their reactions. This time can also provide space for discussion about future action steps.
- Follow-up! There will be lots of great ideas and energy that emerge from a plunge - try to harness some by following up with the participants, partners and those involved.

Work Ahead

A plunge is a very rewarding, worthwhile experience for your organization. You will find few tools as useful in helping your leadership develop and broaden its community perspective. Remember, plunges are personal experiences that help shape the way your organization perceives its community and its role in creating a healthy community.

Memorial Health System has sponsored over ten community plunges with hundreds of community leaders and residents participating since early 1990. Ranging in scope from issues of domestic violence to neighborhood improvement and revitalization, every plunge has put life to an issue and people to a story.

Plunges emphasize community assets, while taking problems one step at a time, in parts that are manageable and solvable . If something just looks like a big faceless social problem, it's overwhelming and people don't know where to start," said Phil Newbold, "Plunges provide ports of entry into how people can make a contribution, how they can get involved."

This is the start of building stronger communities, the beginning of a trip we all take together. Travel safe, and take plenty of time to see the sites.

Community Plunges - Learning History Update (May 2000)

Memorial has sponsored several Community Plunges since the original learning history was written. The topics have varied but the format has remained mostly the same. The new plunges have included such topics as welfare reform, domestic violence, gang violence, rural health, and the most recent, Hispanic health issues.

A Memorial staff change has caused a shift in plunge planning. Barbara Wheeler, the Memorial staff person who was responsible for most plunge planning, has since left the South Bend area. Her duties were assumed by both a Community Health Action Group (CHAG) member and a support staff person. The CHAG member acts as a team leader for the plunge and identifies appropriate partner organizations. The CHAG member or team leader changes with each new plunge. The support staff person helps the team leader by providing clerical and correspondence assistance.

As Memorial Hospital has planned and executed community plunges throughout the years there has been a continued recognition of the importance of talking to user client populations. This is one of the most significant and consistent messages Memorial has received. It is critical to interact with client groups and not just the professionals who serve those populations in the plunge. This is the one of the reasons why Memorial partners with other community organizations to plan and implement the plunge activities. They partner with other organizations not only to obtain access to client groups, but to share some of the administrative and organizational responsibilities of planning and orchestrating the plunges.

A plunge is a valuable tool for getting back in touch with the community. A plunge offers an experiential learning opportunity that puts those involved in touch with both the needs and strengths of the community. By listening to people's personal stories, and by asking questions of the people they meet, plunge participants can develop a new understanding of the dynamics of their community. The plunge experience was originally designed to be useful in: developing a better understanding of the **assets** and resources in the community; creating partnerships that make the most effective use of the community's resources; and, identifying unmet needs in the community.

While the plunge experiences, over the years, have resulted in the objectives listed above, some Memorial staff believe that the experience does not "go deep enough." According to Mark Chambers, Memorial Hospital and Foundation Vice President, "It's hard to get beyond the surface of some of these issues. One reason for this is because we have a limited amount of time to expose participants to the issues. A four-hour block of time is a lot for some people to give on a workday, however, it's only enough time to see the surface of an issue." Lora Tatum, a Memorial support staff person and plunge organizer, agrees with Mark and adds, "If the plunges are meant to be strictly educational then they are great. But if they are supposed to generate action then there is always more work to be done." Recently, there has been some discussion about the purpose and role of the plunge. Some believe that plunges are meant to be educational and informational, and others would like to see the plunge generate some concrete action steps or follow-up activities.

Memorial has begun to ask itself some questions about the purpose of the plunge experience. Is the role of the plunge strictly to educate and inform the participants? Do we want (or need) to go beyond the job of educating and take the plunge experience a step further- is that our purpose? Should we survey plunge participants about their desire to "get involved" by taking action around what they have learned? Do we need to evaluate and measure the impact of the plunge? Should we be evaluating the effectiveness of the plunges or the need for plunges?

To date, the impact of the plunge experience on those involved, including both the individuals and the partner organizations, has not been quantitatively or qualitatively measured. Through informal discussions Memorial has gathered some anecdotal information. They have learned that some individuals have been moved to volunteer or donate or "get involved" because of their plunge experience. However, Memorial does not have a structured mechanism for measuring the impact that a plunge has on those involved, both individually or collectively. Therefore, it is hard to answer some of these questions regarding the future direction of the community plunge.

The future of the community plunge experience will evolve over time as the answers to these questions are investigated and a consensus is reached. In the meantime, Memorial will continue to bring

community organizations, partners and individuals together in ways that help build a stronger and healthier community.