

Foundation teams with county to address poverty, health issues

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OSWEGO – The Richard S. Shineman Foundation has approved a grant application submitted by the county Legislature providing funding for a newly established task force aimed at improving the lives of Oswego County residents.

Shineman Foundation Executive Director Karen Goetz confirmed Tuesday that the foundation awarded a \$36,500 grant to the Community Health and Poverty Reduction Task Force, saying that the foundation supports the group's goal of tackling poverty and health issues in Oswego County.

"While various groups have tried very hard with their programs to address the issue, the big concern by our foundation, as well as the county and the school and service groups that provide help in the area, has been that the problem isn't getting better. It has, in fact, gotten worse over the past decade," said Goetz.

Legislator Roy Reehil, R-Constantia, who is the chairman of the Community Health and Poverty Reduction Task Force, explained that the group would consist of three other legislators – Marie Schadt, D-Oswego, being the co-chair – and four school administrators from districts throughout the county.

He said the overarching aims of the task force are vast and hopefully long-lasting, including boosting the middle class and tackling poverty issues, improving literacy and looking to address health behaviors.

"A long list" of advisors from diverse professional backgrounds are also considered a part of the task force, Reehil noted, saying the purpose of the task force right now was to talk to as many people from as many backgrounds as possible to gain an understanding of the issues vexing Oswego County.

"A big part of this is going to be a divide and conquer strategy," Reehil said.

As the task force is currently in its beginning stages, Reehil said that they were primarily concerned with collecting data – something the grant money will allow them to do via a study conducted by CZB, LLC.

Goetz said the foundation was "very impressed" with CZB, which previously conducted a study of neighborhoods in Oswego.

Concurrent with the study, Reehil said the task force has been hosting "focus groups" in which its members gather community members and discuss the county's issues and potential measures for

confronting them.

"There's been a lot of interest in preventative measures and programs that were in place in the past but lost their funding," Reehil said, noting that "early education and parental education for young, single moms" were recurring concerns.

When asked about the timeline of the task force's goals, Reehil said that the study was the first step, and that he hoped for the task force to have "real concepts" of initiatives in about "three or four months," but that nothing is "set in stone." "Ultimately, our goal is to come up with concrete projects and processes we can attempt to implement," he continued, saying that the aims of the task force weren't issues that could be solved overnight.

Goetz said it was important for the community that all these groups work together to help solve the poverty and health issues in Oswego County.

"We have to break through and work together. We don't have the answers, but have funding that we can hopefully use to help (address) the issue," said Goetz.