



**Knox County Community Conversation
Camden Public Library
May 24, 2016**

What is your vision for Knox County?

- Every student will have access to high quality, individualized education
- Every student will have access to early learning, food, clothing, housing, and health care and arrive at school ready to learn
- All children will be raised in homes not diminished by poverty
- Environments created to prevent addiction, more treatment programs/facilities
- Everyone has a safe place to live and enough healthy food
- A community that attracts and keeps young people (millennials)
- A strong, robust, and diverse economy so that people will be gainfully employed
- Children are in an emotional state where they are able to receive education
- Climate change will be addressed
- Better transportation – perhaps a bus line that would connect different parts of the state
- Weatherization
- Good energy use
- Knox County will continue to preserve open space and farmland for young farmers
- Knox County will continue to support its unique working waterfront

What are the greatest strengths of Knox County communities?

- Caring people
- Vibrant, active, engaged downtown
- Fantastic network of adult mentors
- Cooperative strengths, worker/development
- Healthy, active cultural community
- Beautiful natural resources
- A travel destination/tourism/economic stimulation
- Burgeoning local food economy
- Strong grassroots organizations that are collaborative
- Strong public libraries as community centers

- A large number of unique educational institutions/programs; examples include: Maine Media Workshops in Rockport; boatbuilding schools; Camden Conference; Camden International Film Festival – how can we better share these opportunities with our children?

What are the greatest challenges for communities in Knox County?

- Hopelessness
- Wealth disparities
- Food insecurity
- Competitive communities (Knox County is not very well knitted together)
- Need to prioritize issues
- Mental health issues (even among the very young)
- Fragmentation (treating people with mental health issues differently)
- Navigating the system of helpful services is difficult
- Political divisions lead to apathy, hopelessness
- Knox communities appear to be thriving, which masks the challenges
- Lack of opportunities, especially good early childhood education
- Declining population = declining financial capital
- Tax structure that can be discouraging to people/businesses
- Need more walkable communities
- Need better public transportation
- Inadequate quality affordable housing
- Lack of opportunities for vocational education
- Low student aspirations
- Too many students start school with cognitive and non-cognitive deficits
- Distance (both real and perceived) from Portland
- Maine is losing population
- Need to come together as a state, pool resources
- Lack of democracy in critical local decisions

How can we build on the strengths to address the challenges?

- Focus on the actual job opportunities in the area and develop educational programs to match new workers' job skills with the jobs needed
- Leverage the local food movement to address food insecurity
- There is some fragmentation with employee assistance services and persistence in jobs; how can we collaborate and coordinate better? Does the chamber of commerce have a role here? Is there a way for funders to work more collaboratively? Get funders and nonprofits together; schools could use parents for mentoring
- Bring Uber to Knox; use 211 for transportation
- Need data-driven stats to help achieve goals; good governance is needed and nonprofits could use help with business strategies. Knox has a wealth of human resources with experience in

good governance – how can we tap into this? Could we develop some kind of scholarship/mentorship program in the technical services industry?

- We need to use our resources to address lack of opportunity with regard to early learning
- We have a challenge of many priority needs. Could we rotate various priorities to focus energy on a particular issue and have more immediate impact? Philanthropy can be directed to align with the priorities in a shared focused way; plan gatherings to feature a specific issue
- Employ the strengths of existing organizations like Penquis, to help coordinate outreach and share information about access to existing resources within the community
- We need a better network of resources available to the consumer, a central place for information
- We need to build awareness of our whole community and take action against economic disparity
- We need to pair available mentors with children, youth, families who could benefit from them
- Make resources available to help alleviate disparities
- Need education and salary equity, cooperation for public education
- Use our creative resources to help create a unified identity for Knox County that would foster a shared sense of pride and wholeness in our county
- We need a shared, collaborative vision for the whole county
- Utilize social media as community networking program
- Invite those living in low-income situations to be part of the conversation
- Consider forming a network for a peer-to-peer recovery system for those in addiction
- We need more young voices in community leadership roles, including town government
- We have an inability to compromise, which creates silos
- Are we using resources wisely if we aren't collaborating? Human resources need to be coordinated better to be more effective
- We need to educate children from a young age and empower them so they see that they can make a difference
- Comprehensive planning/coordination is needed in Knox County
- Connect people across Knox County who are working on similar issues/challenges in order to decrease duplication of efforts
- Find ways to listen to populations in need rather than telling them what we think they need.