

LexLinc to Close its Doors After a Dozen Years Serving the Underserved

by Erik A. Carlson

Lexington, Ky. - After learning the last of its public funding would come to an end, LexLinc's board decided to shut its doors at the end of the summer.

"We feel like it's the responsible action to take and the right action to take," said LexLinc's Executive Director Wanda Bertram who lead the organization through its entire 12-years.

"Just like every organization, especially non-profits in this economy, we've seen a lot of funding slip away. It's not any one person or organization's fault, but we're established as a public/private collaboration and with the last of these public funds, it really creates a situation where we're not able to accomplish what we've done as we have before," Bertram said.

LexLinc and its board learned recently that Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services grants would no longer be coming through, leading the board Friday to vote for the organization to dissolve. The decision was announced Monday morning.

LexLinc, the Lexington Local Investment Commission, was started in 1998 by long-time board chairman and homebuilder Don Ball as a way to leverage resources to assist those in need in underserved neighborhoods. Bertram said the organization – which has consisted of mainly her since a cutoff of funding from the city forced a staff reduction in 2008 – will continue to operate its programs through the end of the summer, including the Back-to-School Rallies.

The rallies, which Bertram hopes will continue on through partnership organizations, are distribute school supplies including backpacks, paper, pencils and coloring materials to more than 8,000 students on August 7.

"We have several commitments like that and we're going to make sure we're there for the neighborhoods and for the community," Bertram said.

Another program already taken over is the Central Kentucky Economic Empowerment Project, which was started by LexLinc and now run by the Kentucky Poverty Law Center. During the most recent tax season the program served more than 3,000 clients with average income of less than \$19,000, according to Bertram. One of the program's main facets is helping those eligible take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit, "which is touted as one of the most important tools for raising families out of poverty," she said.

No definite date has been set for the closing of LexLinc, but Bertram figures it will be late in August or some point in September. In that time, she also hopes to find a home for the Citizen's Leadership Academy, which is "a 12 week curriculum that teaches citizen engagement, how people can be active and advocate for themselves and their neighborhoods."

Though LexLinc will no longer be around to facilitate the programs, Bertram says there is great need for them to continue. "It's very important that initiatives like (these) perpetuate and that the community gets behind it," she said.

"This is all about partnership and collaboration - it's not just what LexLinc has done, it's what the partnerships have done. I look at those partnerships and the economic impact they have had in this community and it's pretty profound so I just hope that our partners and people in other organizations that we worked with continue thinking in terms of how they do business and building those kinds of collaborations and partnerships," she said.