

# Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation

## *Investing in Our Communities: West Side of Charleston*

Charleston, WV

### Challenge

Mary C. Snow Elementary serves 500 students, 93 percent of whom are from low-income families on the West Side of Charleston, West Virginia. The school is located in an area designated a Drug Marketing Intervention Zone—a region plagued by drugs and violent crime—and its surrounding neighborhood faces challenges including historic disinvestment, absentee property owners, and abandoned buildings. The foundation thus sought programs that address the root causes and not merely the symptoms of systemic community problems.

### Innovation

The initiative uses cross-sector collaboration to advance community issues that span various fields (property development, civic leadership, health and safety, and education). Direct community engagement reassured community members that their voices are important, empowered them to contribute to initiative efforts, and provided the foundation with sound data to guide future investments.

In December 2014, the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation developed its Investing in Our Communities-West Side of Charleston initiative that strategically concentrates assets within a nine-block area around Mary C. Snow Elementary. Systemic changes are achieved at a deeper and more sustainable level through targeted resource allocation. The Foundation has committed \$600,000 to this initiative over a 3-year period with the overall goal of improving housing, civic engagement, and health conditions. To date, this initiative has funded three intersecting projects: (1) Project West Invest, which incentivizes neighborhood home ownership/renovation for law enforcement; (2) Second Avenue Community Center Restoration, which targets reformation of a historic center in the heart of the neighborhood; and (3) Handle with Care, which provides trauma-informed care and anti-bullying mentorship to Mary C. Snow Elementary students. Through this initiative, the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation uses all of the strategies in its toolbox: grants and investments, leveraging assets, leadership and advocacy, convening stakeholders, and building community capacity. All partners contribute resources to improve conditions for an impoverished at-risk population.

### Public Sector Partners

The City of Charleston, the Charleston Police Department, the Charleston Urban Renewal Authority, Kanawha County Schools, the West Virginia Bar Association, the West Virginia State Police, and the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of West Virginia

