April 2017 Update
At the Deland Community Roundtable back in July 2016, we discussed the need to engage in dialogs about the intersectionality between race and poverty. In response to that discussion, in April 2017 the Color Line Roundtable was the principal organizer of an event combining diversity, sports and family-friendly music entitled “Community Unity Day.” In collaboration with other organizational sponsors including the City of Deland, the Rotary, the Volusia County Sheriff’s Office and the Deland Police Department, the Color Line Roundtable organized this event to bring residents from different backgrounds together and to benefit non-profit organizations that help at-risk children and youth in West Volusia County. Community Unity Day featured five sporting events and the top three teams from each event won the right to designate financial prizes to one of the 9 designated at-risk children and youth programs. The event also served as an opportunity for community members to meet the new Deland Police Chief-designate, Jason Umberger, who was selected in early April 2016 by a diverse group of 10 Police Chief Selection Committee members based on his demonstrated commitment to community policing. See attached Community Unity Day flyer for details on the breadth of collaboration and sponsorship that made this event a model of success.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION AND HUMANIZING POVERTY PANELS PROPOSAL
Starting with an initial meeting on April 20, 2015, West Volusia residents from a variety of backgrounds—including business professionals (from insurance, legal, manufacturing and real estate sectors), non-profit leaders and providers (focused on food, healthcare, homeless and jobs) as well as perspective from local pastors, a local newspaper journalist, former soldier and current VA social worker, and a DeLand High School student have participated in a series of monthly roundtable discussions to develop an proactive anti-poverty agenda for the West Volusia area. The group initially met twice a month at the Law Office of Theodore W. Small, P.A., and then agreed to set aside the first Monday of each month from 5:30-7:00p.m. as a regular meeting date
and to rotate the location of the roundtable. Rising Against All Odds, Inc. hosted the October 5th roundtable discussion, which was the seventh roundtable in the ongoing series.

During that initial meeting, Ted Small, a local attorney and chair of the ABA Commission on Homelessness & Poverty (“Commission”), framed the discussion as a continuation of efforts to develop and implement collaborative anti-poverty strategies that began during the Commission’s Fall Business Meeting in Washington, DC (October 10-11, 2014), and then continued during an anti-poverty roundtable of local advocates and anti-poverty experts convened by the Commission in Houston, TX during the ABA’s Midyear Meeting (February 6, 2015). Small distributed draft Notes from the Houston Poverty Roundtable which summarized both of those prior discussions. He described how the primary focus of the Commission’s discussion in October 2014 was to develop consensus on a working definition of poverty, how poverty as defined manifests itself and effective strategies to implement the Commission’s new anti-poverty initiative. Small suggested that the group gathered on April 20th continue to generate ideas along the same lines with three goals: 1. Reflecting upon the Commission’s consensus definitions of poverty and top ten manifestations and coming up with proposed revisions, if any; 2. Identifying the top priorities for a local anti-poverty consensus agenda for the DeLand community; and 3. Preliminary discussion about how to operationalize efforts to reduce the numbers of those experiencing poverty in the DeLand area.

The DeLand, Volusia County, Florida Anti-Poverty Roundtable is honored to share the attached Humanizing Poverty Panels proposal for communities seeking to operationalize an anti-poverty agenda. The proposal represents a collaborative set of ideas from all of our participants, which has at its core a belief that in order to build a constituency for satisfying even the most basic needs (e.g., water, food, clothing and shelter) and certainly the relative social, economic, political and cultural needs of those experiencing poverty, we must first raise the level of community awareness about poverty and create a bridge for meaningful discussion between those who have resources and those seeking empowerment opportunities. Before reaching this consensus, we devoted several meetings to discussing the potential benefits of trying to persuade the County Council, City Commission, School Board, the Volusia-Flagler Continuum of Care or its constituent organizations to consider funding or authorizing other oft-considered program ideas, such as more community gardens, affordable housing, homeless shelters, jobs/apprenticeship programs, crisis centers and other wraparound services for those experiencing poverty. We ultimately agreed that raising public awareness through the Humanizing Poverty Panels was our best, first step. It was also the most practical way for us to make a difference without any funding or staffing resources.

Humanizing Poverty Panels: Poverty through the eyes of those who’ve
lived it

Purpose:
The goal of the Humanizing Poverty Panel Discussions is to facilitate the sharing of personal stories of those who are experiencing or have experienced poverty with their local neighbors who represent a broad range of social, economic and political backgrounds. With these panels, we hope to establish a bridge between the diverse members of our community and help facilitate honest and open dialogue about potential solutions that address both the manifestations of poverty as well as the root causes. By focusing on local issues experienced by local community members, we hope to show that poverty isn’t an abstract idea or a problem “in other communities;” rather, we will demonstrate why poverty is a problem that affects people every day in Volusia County as well as what role individuals can play in addressing poverty in our community. It is hoped that these panels will not only inform audience members about the severity and impact of poverty around them, but also empower both the panelists and audience members to identify and advocate for effective solutions to eliminate poverty.

Who participates?
The Poverty Roundtable will have to identify and screen possible candidates to share their personal stories around the community. Candidates will have to be comfortable with speaking openly and honestly about their experience, have no conditions prohibiting them from interacting or speaking, and be willing to attend multiple speaking events at mutually agreed upon times. We would assist panelists with arranging transportation as needed. Potential panelists would include those who are currently experiencing poverty or those who have experienced poverty in the past. The exact size of the panel could vary, but the target size for timing and manageability would be 3 people, each allotted about 5 minutes to share their unique perspective of poverty. This could vary due to the chosen speaking venue and the amount of time the panel is allotted. Ideally, the three speakers would, together, have experiences in as close to all 10 manifestations of poverty as defined by the ABA’s Commission on Homelessness and Poverty as possible. However, panel size will also be adaptive to the target audience. For example, if a panel was invited to only speak for 10 minutes at a venue primarily concerned with “lack of personal a physical safety,” then the group might only choose 1 or 2 panel members with stories about that particular manifestation of poverty to present at that venue for a longer period of time. The manifestations of poverty are:

1. Substandard and unaffordable housing and homelessness;
2. Disproportionate involvement in criminal and civil justice systems;
3. Food inadequacy;
4. Inadequate healthcare and poor health outcomes;
5. Inadequate education outcomes;
6. Lack of opportunity for full employment at a living wage;
7. Living through an unending and continuous cycle of crises;
8. Lack of personal and physical safety;
9. Stigma and lack of personal dignity; and
10. Isolation from community and political infrastructure.

Where?
The purpose of the panels is to bring light to a subject that is often misunderstood in our community and around the nation. Therefore the panels would target local groups representing a variety of social, economic and political backgrounds and affiliations. Panels could target the messaging to both groups that already have anti-poverty programming, charitable giving or volunteer efforts and seek to better align those efforts with the needs of those being targeted as well as groups that are interested in establishing new anti-poverty initiatives. Facilitators would propose 15-20 minute programs with those in charge of coordinating outside speakers for the regularly scheduled meetings of local groups, to allow for an effective, but not overlong presentation on the problem of poverty and avoid the self-selection of audience that would occur if the panels were scheduled for a special meeting.

What should the panel emphasize?
The goal of the panels is to present a real, unedited account of poverty in Volusia County and America in general. The organizers are not lobbying the audience for any particular funding or programming; rather, they are seeking to raise the level of community awareness about poverty and those experiencing it. Keeping with this vision, facilitators would refrain from coaching a testimonial. However, each panelist will have a tightly defined time limit and assignment of manifestation of poverty areas. Going into presentations, panelists should refrain from having any preconceived perception of what they’re trying to get the audience to do. This makes the panels a lobbying group instead of a group sharing stories and information to try to humanize the subject of poverty. However, the panelists should be prepared to provide information about volunteer opportunities and charitable activities if audience members ask for that information. This prevents the group from becoming a lobbying effort while still allowing for information about practical solutions to poverty to be shared with our community.

How do concerned listeners get involved?
Organizers should bring along information describing local ongoing efforts to eliminate poverty and how to get involved in those efforts. Furthermore, organizers can make available hard copies or online links to the ABA Commission on Homelessness & Poverty’s Toolkit for Communities Seeking to Develop and Operationalize Local Anti-Poverty Agendas, which will contain a Blueprints for Action section on each of the Manifestation of Poverty areas, and a description of the Commission’s online blog: Operationalizing New Anti-Poverty Agenda: An Online Quilt of Community Discussions.
Next Steps:

Identify possible clients willing to participate-
At the next meeting of the Poverty Roundtable, participants should come prepared to identify at least 20-30 members of our community who should be considered as potential panelists. This large number of potential panelists would allow us to collectively refine the list down to only the top 10-15 who are most dependable, articulate, open and thoughtful spokespersons for those who have experienced or are experiencing each of the manifestation areas of poverty. These 10-15 would create a “pool” of expert panelists that could be asked to participate in different presentations. No panelist would be asked to participate in every presentation; rather, participants would be drawn from the pool based on availability and relevance to the particular venue and audience.

Schedule meetings with potential panelists-
The most effective way to screen potential panelists would be to identify candidates and set up a time when two facilitators can meet with them to talk about the project and determine whether they would be willing, able and effective at talking about their personal experience with strangers. This would give the facilitators a chance to screen out any candidates who may have problems presenting their stories to an audience in a succinct and coherent manner or present any other inhibiting problems. The interviews would avoid being overbearing on the possible participant and would not be set up like a “job interview.” Rather, the interviews would simply be a short conversation to better understand if the person is equipped to be a panelist.

Focusing the Panels-
After we have developed an approved listing of potential panelists, the attention of the Poverty Roundtable would turn to focusing the message and ideas of the panel presentations. This wouldn’t mean coaching any testimonials about poverty, but would include ideas on how to frame the discussion around those stories, and what those stories mean locally and nationally. Also, this will give each panelist a specific manifestation of poverty topic to focus on during the panel presentation, which would allow for each panelist to refine their selection of personal anecdotes to illustrate that topic.

Potential Audiences-
At the next meeting of the Poverty Roundtable, participants should come prepared to identify at least two or three civic, church or other community groups, some that already have a poverty agenda and others that do not, as potential audiences for a poverty panel presentation. At the last meeting we discussed generally that we could target one or more of the regularly scheduled meetings of local rotary clubs, church missionary groups, and ultimately public entities. At the next meeting we should begin to create a listing of potential audiences that takes into account how often a group meets, how long they would set aside for an outside speaker/panel, who
decides on such matters and which participants have the best relationship to pitch the ideas once
the panels are ready to be scheduled.