

Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

BELLEVUE, IOWA

Residents in Bellevue, Iowa, launched Community Heart & Soul to focus on getting everyone involved in setting priorities for strengthening their town. In considering the town's assets, natural beauty, heritage, neighborhood pride, and support for youth all ranked high. Attracting and retaining more Millennials (born 1981-1996) was identified as an opportunity for growth. That prompted taking a closer look at childcare needs, finding creative solutions to increase housing, and restoration of commercial space on the river. "We want the message to be, "You can thrive here, not just survive here," said Clairia Sieverding, a Millennial who works and lives in Bellevue and was a leader in Community Heart & Soul.

POPULATION:
2,200

CHALLENGE:
Economic
development

FOCUS:
Attracting,
retaining
Millennials

KEY TOOL:
Action Plan

Bellevue “by the numbers”:

- \$47,000 USDA Rural Business Development Grant for Community Heart & Soul.
- 265 employees at two biggest businesses in town.
- 71 percent of students surveyed said they would like to stay in Bellevue.
- \$100,000 grant to begin restoration of historic building on the river.

Residents in Bellevue, Iowa, launched Community Heart & Soul with a focus on involving everyone in setting priorities to strengthen their town. The town received a \$47,000 USDA Rural Business Development Grant to support the effort.

Local conditions:

Bellevue is a river town along the Mississippi about a half-hour from Dubuque, where many commute for work. Community Heart & Soul helped bring the town's assets into focus. Natural beauty, parks, and trails ranked high on the list. Heritage, close-knit community, neighborhood pride, and support for youth were also valued.

Volunteer and Community Response:

Attracting and retaining Millennials were seen as an opportunity for growth. Community Heart & Soul helped guide several actions aimed at drawing this group including:

- Studying childcare needs. Childcare is a vital component of drawing and retaining Millennials. Bellevue received a grant to join a study overseen by the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque.
- Restoring a historic building. A \$100,000 state grant was awarded to start restoration of a former button factory that juts out over the river. The buttons were punched out of clamshells from the river.
- Creating opportunities for new housing. In response to a lack of residential housing, the city and the Bellevue Economic and Tourism Association purchased 50 acres for residential development.

- Encouraging residential development downtown. A new downtown incentive program incentivizes creating apartments in the vacant upper stories of downtown commercial buildings.

Dave Heiar, senior advisor/community coach with Jackson County Economic Alliance, is optimistic about the town's ability to retain younger people. A Heart & Soul survey found that 71% of students would like to stay in Bellevue.

"When I was in high school, I wouldn't have said that. I wanted to get out of Bellevue. However, after spending a few years out, I wanted to come back," Heiar said. "I was awed by how many current high-school age students said they'd like to stay in the area."

