

About Skills For Living and the Strategic Plan

Skills For Living, Inc., founded by Lorraine and Ken Decker, was incorporated on December 13, 2004 in Houston, Texas as a 501(c)3 organization. As a non-profit, grass-root organization, Skills For Living transforms lives to *break the cycle of poverty*.

Skills For Living improves the lives of low-and moderate income, working families and at-risk high school and college students through financial, career, college planning and asset building workshops and coaching.

As a partner in United Way THRIVE, Skills For Living focuses on increasing family income and wealth to empower working poor families to become financially stable and secure. We offer short, engaging programs to introduce financial concepts and then more challenging programs, such as the three-part program, 20-20 Power Workshops.

20-20 Power Workshops

Individuals in the 20-20 Power Workshops have a goal of increasing their income and net worth by 20%, volunteering 40 hours, passing a difficult financial education exam and achieving benchmarks of success. Workshops and coaching are held in collaboration with the City of Houston Health and Human Services, and non-profit organizations. From inception, through October 2010, 163 families who have graduated from the course have increased their incomes \$1,227,000, an average of \$7530 per year or 55% and increased their net worth by \$1,444,000, an average of \$8,859 or 59%.

The Game of Real Life

The Game of Real Life provides high school and college students with relevant financial, career and college planning information through a Texas Education Agency approved curriculum. The Game integrates critical thinking, with academic teams and a demanding curriculum preparing students to interview and train with Houston business volunteers for positions they will hold in a reality simulation Game. In the game, students have income tax and financial statement audits, buy homes, cars, insurance, rent apartments, have eye exams, take scholarship exams, pay tuition, fees, take out Stafford loans and manage credit card debt and life events, such as marriage, winning a karaoke contest and filing auto insurance claims. In 2010, more than 600 students, business volunteers and parents were present at the graduation to hear student testimonials and celebrate the accomplishments in the Game.

This year, students attended from 17 high schools from Alief ISD, Cristo Rey Jesuit, Crosby ISD, Fort Bend ISD, Houston ISD, Kipp, Spring Branch ISD, YES Prep. College Team Leaders came from Clark-Atlanta, Columbia University, Duke, Northwestern University, Prairie View A&M, San Jose State University, Texas Southern University, Texas Women’s University, Tulsa State University, University of Houston, University of Southern California, Vanderbilt, and William & Jefferson College. And businesses represented in the Game were American General, DeMontrond Auto Group, Dodge & Phelps, ExxonMobil, Financial Planning Association of Houston, Halliburton, Harris County Department of Education, InsurTexas, KPMG, Panorama Construction, Re/Max, Rice, Shell, University of Houston – Bauer School of Business, University of Houston College of Optometry and Xerox providing more than 150 volunteers for each Game.

In the fall and spring of each year, S4L also hosts, with the University of Houston Bauer College of Business, a Leadership Development Institute to give Game students the opportunity to gain valuable skills. These all-day Saturday programs emphasize critical thinking, time management, and leadership. We are also using the Institute to create a unique program for the students called Team Academic Study Skills. In the work we have done with these students we recognize that parents and teachers are not available to review homework and take subjects to higher levels of cognitive understanding. The only people a student

has in his influence circle are other students – peers. S4L is developing a model that will function much like masters degree or law school study teams do. It will be difficult, but we believe these concepts will work with teens. Students will review each other’s work and hold each other accountable for completing homework and passing courses.

Staffing and Support

Skills For Living has 3 full-time staff employees, an active Board of Directors, an Advisory Board, and a host of corporations, collaborators, groups, individuals, and donors that support our thriving organization with their time, talent and treasures. As we move forward with our vision and the many families and lives already touched by our dedicated volunteers and staff, we reached out to city leaders, education administrators, experts, consultants, donors, and volunteers for feedback, guidance and input into this Strategic Plan.

This document lays out the Strategic Plan of Skills For Living for fiscal years 2011 - 2013. [Note: S4L’s fiscal year begins on July 1 of the numbered year.] This document captures our strategic direction as of December, 2008. As we continue to grow, gain additional insight and direction, partner with additional collaborators, engage more corporations and funders, and gain greater participation in our programs, this document will be revised accordingly. Currently, the demand for our programs across the greater Houston area and beyond has stretched our staff, volunteers, and donor support. However, we will continue serving the community to the best of our shared abilities, and look at ways to expand prudently with our vision.

Strategic Planning Committee

Vision	<i>To provide every hard working, low income adults and every student at-risk of dropping out of high school or college, an opportunity to step into their future through S4L programs and realize the success and strategies they need to apply to achieve their goals. By building financially stable individuals, we can build financially sustainable communities, where families and businesses are prosperous, healthy and happy, and where poverty has no place.</i>
Mission	<i>By working with collaborators, Skills For Living provides low and moderate-income working individuals and at-risk high school and college students comprehensive financial, career, life skills and college planning programs to increase their income, build wealth and transform their lives to break the cycle of poverty and enable sustainable, economically thriving communities.</i>
Values	<i>We believe that all human beings have the inherent capability and responsibility to create their individual lives. We believe people should be treated with respect and dignity. We believe that everyone shares in the responsibility of the betterment of our communities.</i>

Group	Governance	Finance & Development	Program & Evaluation	Marketing
Focus	Board Committee governance and policy Board strength	Sustainable Funding Organizational relationship Direct, controlled relationships	Sustainability Scalability Critical review of methodologies, results and alignment of measurement	Organizational relationships Consistent, effective messaging
Goals 2010-2011 Operation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support Board members to accomplish their responsibilities 2. Meet with every Board member to create their \$10,000 funding strategy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement a model for sustainable funding 2. Engage businesses in Scholar Intern program and Game for sustainable funding 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate staffing for programs* 2. Hire Director of Development* 3. Performance Review 4. Evaluate programs for effectiveness 5. Seek relationship with objective evaluators <p>*Subject to funding</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop relationships for organizations that support our adult programs – workforce, housing & universities 2. Develop relationships with school districts, COCs, universities and governmental orgs to support growth of youth programs.
Goals 2010-11 Board	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Board to 12 diverse members, providing talent, touch and financial support 2. Define Advisory Board goals and recruit 5 members 3. Board members rate their experience as “very good” and participate in either Business Strategic Alliance, Game or Annual Meeting each year 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create and manage development goals per board member at \$10,000 with help of DOD 2. Conduct fundraising event to raise 10% of annual budget 3. Develop relationship with individual donors 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Board outreach in business community – 17 new businesses 2. Board to meet with 60 board members of Junior Achievement , United Way and School Districts to gain financial support and share evaluation data 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manage donors – Board members assigned donors and potential donors to engage 2. Each Board member to Identify a forum for S4L to present 3. Attend annual fundraising event 4. Identify companies to provide fundraising event – marathon, golf tournament, silent auction, etc.
Goals 2011-12 Operations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide staff support to each Board Committee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand Scholar Intern and Game business units to sustain the Game 2. Identify another source of funding 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to scale programs 2. Create model for S4L University and identify potential partner 3. Review effectiveness and determine best form of publicizing results 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand staff with bi-lingual members and media people 2. Develop a marketing plan including a base package of multimedia marketing tools that can be readily used with our target audiences 3. Spanish docs on website

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<p>Goals 2011-12 Board</p>	<p>1. Expand Board to 16 members. 2. Implement Board & Committee evaluation process 3. Consider Executive Committee 4. Engage Advisory Board in Strategic Plan and Fundraising</p>	<p>1. Maintain relations with current and potential donors 2. Hold semi-annual fundraising events 3. Identify funding sources for expansion of programs</p>	<p>1. Identify geographic areas for expansion and engage partners in preliminary discussions 2. Have 25 influential persons from JA, UW & school boards engaged in support of S4L 3. Discuss results with national funding sources to obtain funding</p>	<p>1. Engage pro-bono PR firm and media sponsors from radio, TV and press 2. Host four events in Houston to support S4L sponsored by companies, etc. 3. S4L hosts a major annual event and three smaller events. 4. Engage volunteers in social media 5. Activate First Friday</p>
<p>Goals 2012-13 Operations</p>	<p>1. Create model for expansion for replicating S4L programs</p>	<p>1. Create 1 year operating reserve for new location 2. Have local reserve at 6 months of expenses</p>	<p>1. "Box" programs 2. Enhance evaluation process 3. Expand Game to more high schools and college students 4. Launch S4L University with funding 5. Invite to present at national forum</p>	<p>1. Permeate local governmental organizations and school boards. ID volunteers of influence and persuade them to be active community leaders.</p>
<p>Goals 2012-13 Board</p>	<p>1. Create model for expansion related to Board and committees 2. Add new location Board to Head quarter's Board</p>	<p>1. Develop a six month operating reserve 2. Conduct annual fundraising <u>events</u> to enhance S4L in the community</p>	<p>1. Have a collaboration with a university to provide S4L access to a full time independent program evaluator 2. Have S4L Game as a statewide program</p>	<p>1. Engage PR firm to manage S4L events</p>
<p>Technology</p>	<p>1. Skipe meetings for easy access</p>	<p>1. Place secure site for Board on website to review finances and development records</p>	<p>1. Improve internal and external communication 2. Hire IT person to manage website, S4L University, accessibility of site and customer service 3. Implement S4L University for Training, Education, Collaboration and Communication</p>	