Connecting the Dots: Challenges in Claiming Collective Impact

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Presented to the Community Indicators Consortium Impact Summit

November 16, 2012
College Park, MD
Comprehensive Community Initiatives

• Adopt shared responsibility for community-wide outcomes
• Aim for comprehensive, rather than piecemeal (problem: program) efforts: a new “civic infrastructure”
• Are data-driven: Rely on indicators, as well as system-performance measures
• Meaningfully engage community members in planning, and as change agents
• Understand the need for sustainability
But How Do We Know That It Works?

• If we see improved outcomes, can we attribute that to the new way of doing business?
• Why, or why not?
• The answer *matters*, not just for maintaining credibility, but because there are real *costs* to collaboration
If “It” Works, What’s the Explanation?

• “We believe”

• When something becomes the object of concerted focus, it is more likely to improve (aka the Hawthorne Effect, or is it the Heisenberg Effect?)

• A series of incremental, but cumulative improvements in the delivery and content of interventions (both formal and informal) make the difference
Second-Generation CCIs: Emerging Evidence

- The White House Council for Community Solutions reviewed a number of cross-sector community collaboratives.
- They identified 12 (including Strive) where “needle-moving change” had occurred.
- “Needle-moving change” was defined as at least 10 percent improvement in one or more community indicators.
- But the Council’s review is still a collection of anecdotes . . .
Collaborative Strategies

• Substantial public awareness campaign
• Nearly 1,000 classroom teachers trained on evidence-based sexuality curriculum

Outcomes

30 percent decline in teen birth rate, 2006-2010
Nashville
Focus: High School Graduation

Collaborative Strategies

• After identifying attendance as a critical issue, revamped public transportation system

• Extensive involvement from youth, the Hispanic community

Outcomes

• Graduation rates up more than 20 percentage points since 2002

• Truancy rates down 35 percent
Chicago
Focus: High School Dropouts

Collaborative Strategies

- Institute multiple graduation pathways for students not well served by traditional route
- Profile and monitor at-risk and off-pace students
- Create On-Track Labs to test strategies for freshmen

Outcomes

- Freshmen on-track for graduation up 10 percent
- Graduation rates up by 3 percent
Memphis
Focus: Violent Crime

Collaborative Strategies

• Tougher gun laws
• Re-entry programs for juvenile offenders
• Monitoring of crime “hot spots”

Outcomes

Major violent crime dropped by 27 percent, 2006-2011
San Joaquin County (CA)
Focus: *Gang Violence*

**Collaborative Strategies**

- Co-locate multiple social services in neighborhood centers
- Create a mobile unit to take services to more remote areas

**Outcomes**

- Arrests, CPS interventions, unexcused absences, school suspensions, down by 25 percent or more
- Crime down by 65 percent
Herkimer County (NY)
Focus: Youth in Residential Placements

Collaborative Strategies

• Focus on five risk factors
• Monthly review of community indicators
• Identify children who are candidates for community-based services
• Provide counseling, probation, and family support

Outcomes

• Number of children in foster care dropped by more than half (2003-2011)
• Residential care-days down by 32 percent (2002-2011)
Parramore Neighborhood (Orlando, FL)
Focus: *Pervasive Neighborhood Decline*

**Collaborative Strategies**

- Tutoring and youth development programs at neighborhood sites
- Housing improvement projects
- Invest in social capital
- Improve quality of child care

**Outcomes**

- Improved scores on standardized tests in reading and math
- Juvenile crime rates down by 81 percent (2006-2010)
East Lake Neighborhood (Atlanta)
Focus: Community Violence, Economic and Educational Disadvantage

Collaborative Strategies

- Raze housing project; build mixed-income apartments
- Provide early childhood education
- New K-8 charter school
- Offer physical education classes, employment opportunities

Outcomes

- Math and reading proficiency improved, esp. in charter school
- Crime down by 65 percent
What’s Missing Here?
A theory of change

• We need, first, to specify (in detail) *what we think* is in the “black box”

• Then, we need to document (quantitatively as well as qualitatively) *what actually happened* in the now-not-so-black box

• Both the documentation and the earlier specification need to include, in addition to measures of system functioning, *indicators of short-term progress* toward outcomes
Making explicit the theory of change
What Does This Do?

• Provides a level of transparency
• Offers a basis (a “roadmap”) to revise practice, and your theory of change, based on actual experience
• Ideally, provides early signs (short-term indicators) that things are either on- or off-track
• Shifts the burden onto skeptics to give an alternative explanation for the changes observed
What Else Would be Helpful for “Making the Case”?

• Identifying comparison communities, and running a “quasi-experiment”

• More data that are longitudinal (follow individual kids over time)
In Georgia,

- The Georgia Family Connection Partnership compared 25 GA counties that had targeted *infant low birthweight*, with 387 similar counties without CCIs in four other southeastern states.
- Used *propensity score matching* (a weighting procedure that adjusts for demographic differences).
- In the GA counties with CCIs, rates of LBW were *essentially stable* over time, while in the comparison counties rates *increased*.
In Washington State,

- Researchers developed a way to score the capacity of county-level community networks
- Capacity included:
  - Focus/shared responsibility for targeted social problems,
  - Learning and collaborative leadership, and
  - Attention to results
- Outcome indicators were rates of child and family problems (child maltreatment, teen pregnancy, high school dropouts, etc.)
- Higher levels of capacity were highly correlated with reductions in problems between 1998 and 2006.