

Northwest University

Integrative Project

Collective Impact: Building Strong Bonds to Serve the Homeless and Low-Income Populations

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Introduction

Throughout the summer of 2021, I conducted qualitative research throughout Parker County and Tarrant County, Texas. The research was initiated as an attempt to find practical and sustainable solutions for developing housing for local homeless and low-income communities. While conducting this research I was able to interview nonprofit leaders, local homeless and low-income individuals, and community leaders. I worked specifically with Hearts Full of Love in Parker County. Hearts Full of Love is a local nonprofit that seeks to “lead families and individuals to self-sufficiency through job training, financial education, life skills and other opportunities” (Hearts Full of Love). However, collective impact involves multiple entities so to properly research this idea I also spoke with other homeless and low-income organizations, community leaders, school officials, and the homeless and low-income individuals themselves. Throughout my research, I found some organizations that were more connected with other entities and some that were hardly connected at all. This can have consequences that may not seem immediate or legitimate to everyone. However, the isolation or lack of connection between nonprofits, school districts, religious organizations, governments, and other entities can lead to a lack of understanding an individual’s personality, history, current situation, passions, and fears. Local entities must be connected to identify and develop holistic practices and theories.

This thesis will contend that to create practical, sustainable, and economically friendly solutions to eradicating homelessness a group of entities must participate in collective impact by setting up a structure with a backbone organization to help identify and take on specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats pertaining to the local communities homeless and low-income population. A collective impact group can help develop and implement practical and sustainable solutions to eradicating homelessness that will transform the lives of homeless

and low-income families and individuals. This thesis concludes with a proposal to identify a core group of leaders that will form a collective impact group. The collective impact group will work with the local homeless and low-income community, other surrounding entities, and each other to develop and implement practical, sustainable, and holistic theories and practices to eradicate homelessness and poverty in Parker County, Texas.

Why Collective Impact and Homelessness?

When I was an eighteen-year-old freshman in college I ate lunch with a homeless woman named Hillary. This lunch with Hillary was the first time that I had sat down and had a legitimate conversation with a homeless person. Hillary's story changed my life. She changed my perspective on homeless people and she helped ignite a passion in me to want to help homeless and low-income communities locally and around the world. However, the more I talked with homeless groups and individuals the more I realized the holistic nature of the vicious cycle of homelessness. I began to research and talk to organizations regarding their strategies and initiatives to end homelessness. Many organizations had strategies that were thought out and full of compassion and desire. However, after seeing and hearing about the holistic nature of homelessness I was amazed to hear that many of the organizations were working as though they were in a silo. The partnerships that were developed were with other nonprofits or with the local police departments. Partnerships with other non-profits and local police departments are great to have within the conversation of ending homelessness. However, the root causes and factors that keep individuals and families in the cycle of homelessness reach far beyond what nonprofits and police departments can assist with. To research, develop, and implement preventative measures as well as measures that can assist those already experiencing homelessness, communities must adopt a collective impact model.

Throughout the ICD program one of the values that has resonated with me the most is copowerment. We often hear of the word, empowerment, however, the ICD program emphasizes copowerment. Copowerment involves the development practitioners and the locals working together mutually to learn and invest in one another. Author Bryant Myers uses the term empowerment here, however, his point is relevant when discussing copowerment as well. Myers claims that “it can be argued that empowerment through participation is the single most critical element of transformation” (217). There is so much that development workers and locals can learn from each other, but we must be willing to be relational and invest fully into the lives of these individuals.

Research Methodology

This paper is a result of a study conducted over the summer of 2021 starting from May and spanning roughly four months into August. Applied qualitative research was the primary method of research through this study. Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell identify the major characteristics of qualitative research as “the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive” (15). Qualitative researchers are described by Merriam and Tisdell as “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (6). I collected information through interviews, peer-reviewed articles, news articles, and observations. Several of the research questions that I attempted to gather qualitative answers for included, but were not limited to:

1. When looking at permanent housing solutions, what do partnerships between the government and nonprofits look like?

2. What does it look like to develop and implement policies that benefit everyone?
3. How much do local, social justice organizations work together?
4. What are some specific ways you believe the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the homeless and low-income communities?
5. What are some of the economic and public health consequences of homelessness?
6. As someone who is homeless in Parker County, do you feel valued and seen by this community?
7. Is there a section (i.e. housing, employment, health) that you feel is the best place to start when combatting homelessness and assisting the low-income populations?

Qualitative research was necessary throughout this process to gather the legitimate and genuine feelings and emotions of the homeless and low-income community members. I also needed to utilize qualitative research to gather the current thoughts and ideas of the community leaders and nonprofit leaders as well.

The reason why qualitative research was utilized instead of quantitative research for this specific study was because many of the numbers regarding homelessness are public and there are, typically, readily available reports annually and, occasionally, monthly that give the public a rough idea of the statistical figures regarding homelessness. These numbers have been taken into consideration and a few of them will be introduced later in these writings. Author Katie Willis explains that “development measures are nearly always quantitative, i.e. they can be expressed in numerical form” (13). Willis continues by reinforcing that, “this means excluding the feelings, experiences and opinions of individuals and groups. This approach also tends to reinforce outsiders’ ideas about ‘development’, rather than what local people think ‘development’ is, or should be (13). Bryant Myers includes David Korten’s thoughts on what people-centered

development looks like as well, “development is not something arrived at, an end point; it is a continuing process. This process, according to Korten, should be driven by three principles: sustainability, justice, and inclusiveness, each a transformational frontier” (96). Julie Wilke gives a great example of a strategy that implements this well. Julie Wilke, reveals that, “the asset-based community development approach involves identifying and tapping all of the potential assets in a neighborhood” (5). Wilke goes onto reference that this involves including talents, skills, connections, and many other resources within a community (5). To get to the root of homelessness and why one entity cannot eradicate this tragedy I need to continue to sit down and have conversations, conduct interviews, and learn from the experience of those that homelessness affects as well as those who have been attempting to eradicate homelessness.

As mentioned previously, the research took place in Parker County, Texas. I decided to conduct my fieldwork and qualitative research with an organization called Hearts Full of Love. I had been volunteering and working with Hearts Full of Love for about a year before I started fieldwork. Through qualitative research and being at several events I was familiar with their vision and mission as well as the leadership within the organizations and where they felt some of their strengths and weaknesses were. The more time I spent around Hearts Full of Love and their leadership and the more I continued to volunteer with their programs and events I realized that Hearts Full of Love has several beneficial partnerships. However, Hearts Full of Love and their partners are missing many of the factors that makeup collective impact. I felt like Hearts Full of Love had a few of the pieces, but didn't have the understanding or the knowledge of what collective impact is and how it can benefit them and their mission. Through volunteering and gathering information from the leadership previous to the start of fieldwork, I believed Hearts

Full of Love and other Parker County entities fighting homelessness could benefit from a collective impact model.

Collective Impact

Collective impact is a social practice that can be used in efforts that attempt to solve some of the most complicated social issues in many communities. Collective impact is often confused with collaboration. However, collaboration and collective impact are two vastly different practices. John Kania and Mark Kramer suggest, “collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants” (Collective Impact SSIR). Collective impact allows for there to be multiple entities that can share their perspectives, theories, and practices in an organized manner. These differences in perspectives, theories, and practices can allow for a more holistic development and implementation of solutions.

Over the last decade there have been more and more collective impact groups forming. The Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR) published an article in 2021 updating readers on how the collective impact model has fared, “Over the last decade, organizations working around the globe have applied the practice of collective impact to solving a broad range of social and environmental challenges, and the approach has been incorporated into the structure of national and local public programs in the United States and abroad” (SSIR). Collective impact has been continuously developed and implemented in several contexts and settings over the last decade. This document will continue to dive into some of these case studies and success stories after it explains the reason behind the need.

Key Causes of Homelessness

Identifying and addressing key causes of homelessness is essential to the goal of eradicating homelessness. There are often assumptions made regarding people that are homeless and the reasons why they are homeless. The reality is, homelessness can engulf anyone at any point. I met a man named Tyler who is roughly my age. Tyler had a great job and was living in a great apartment and one day it all changed. Tyler and I were talking one day and he explained to me that one day him and his friends were drunk playing football in their apartment and he fell off of his balcony. He had injuries that prevented him from work and sent him to the hospital. Due to his injuries, Tyler ended up being late on his rent payments as well as his car payments. Tyler was removed from his apartment and had his car taken. Tyler was now sleeping behind a Walmart (Kane Interview). Tyler was a “normal”, average looking guy who all the sudden was thrust into homelessness. Not due to hard drugs, addictions, or imprisonment. Tyler simply was faced with a relentless chain of events that propelled him into homelessness. We cannot act or not act based off assumptions. The group of leaders and organizations that will form the collective impact group cannot move far until they thoroughly understand several key causes of homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless identifies a few of these key causes:

Housing: Affordable and sustainable housing is crucial to preventing homelessness. Without affordable housing it is difficult to maintain housing and to obtain housing for low-income individuals and families. Affordable housing has been a weakness in America for roughly the last forty years (Jared Bernstein, et al.) However, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic America has seen this crisis escalate. Jared Bernstein, Jeffery Zhang, Ryan Cummings, and Matthew Maury report

These pandemic-related changes interacted with the existing housing inventory shortage, resulting in sharp price increases for both owned homes and rental units. Indeed, national home prices, as measured by the Case-Shiller Index, increased by 7 to 19 percent (year-over-year) every month from September 2020 to June 2021. Home prices outpaced income growth in 2020, with the national price-to-income ratio rising to 4.4—the highest observed level since 2006 (Jared Bernstein, et al.)

In a study conducted by the Texas A&M Real Estate Research Center the average housing price in Texas has increased from \$198,774 in 2012 to \$358,896 in 2021. This is an astounding 80.55% increase over the last decade. In the meantime, the housing inventory has also decreased significantly in the same time frame (Texas Comptroller). I wanted to understand this phenomenon more specifically within the Weatherford, Parker County context. I spoke with Hearts Full of Love board member, Laurie McCullar. Laurie’s husband is in real estate and Laurie was expressing to me, “where the housing prices are now and where they are projected to go, there is no way anyone who is homeless or considered low-income will be able to afford a livable, viable home” (McCullar Interview). In addition to the increasing housing prices and decreasing inventory, the transition to the end of COVID-19 has presented new struggles for the homeless and low-income communities.

The government passed an eviction moratorium towards the beginning of the pandemic to help protect the most vulnerable from losing their housing. However, this moratorium has been lifted and has left many low-income people with no place to go. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition explains “the Supreme Court’s ruling invalidates the federal eviction moratorium, eliminating vital eviction protections that have kept millions of households –

predominantly people of color – stably housed” (National Low Income Housing Coalition). The combination of rising rental and housing prices skyrocketing, and eviction moratoriums being lifted has the potential to produce a drastic increase in homelessness. The potential for a drastic increase in homelessness can bring many other issues to the forefront. For example, the nation could see growth in mental illness, physical illness, addiction, abuse, and holistic poverty.

Other key causes of homelessness include but are not limited to poverty, lack of employment opportunities, decline in available public assistance, lack of affordable health care, social and personal struggles, and domestic violence. Domestic violence and homelessness unfortunately, have a close relationship. The Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness report

National estimates are that roughly 80% of homeless mothers with children have previously experienced domestic violence. Even with its strict and limited definition of homelessness, applying this estimate to HUD’s most recent data reveals that over 230,000 children living in a shelter have been exposed to the traumatic and long-term effects of domestic violence at some point. (Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness)

Women are often forced to decide whether or not they should stay with their abuser or take their chance in a shelter or on the streets. Abuse can affect the individual(s) physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and financially. Domestic abuse can also have an incredible impact on the children at any age. This proposed solution looks to have an impact on poverty in a holistic manner. When trying to solve poverty from a holistic perspective we must consider the impacts of generational poverty. When speaking on child poverty writers from Save the Children argue that children, “at all stages, children lack capacities and opportunities to cope with and address

poverty and its associated deprivations” (5). Even if the children are not abused, they can still be drastically affected. John Townsend reports, “Teens, by definition, are going through a season of chaos, developmentally, neurologically, emotionally, and socially. And when an adolescent’s family struggles as well, it can add chaos to chaos. Not good for anyone” (Cloud-Townsend Resources). The Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness also reveals,

“Studies have shown that one in four teenagers aged 14 to 17 had witnessed an assault involving a parent. These children who witnessed domestic violence are at increased risk of experiencing anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, depression, problems in school, and are more likely to be involved in abusive dating relationships.” (Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness)

The amount of intense stress that domestic violence puts on a mother is astounding. No mother should have to make the decision between her and her child being homeless or abused.

Racial Disparity

Due to the unfortunate social and legal history of America the minorities in America experience homelessness at a much higher rate than the majority. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development reports,

“African Americans and indigenous people (including Native Americans and Pacific Islanders) remained considerably overrepresented among the homeless population compared to the U.S. population. Almost 4 of every 10 people experiencing homelessness in January 2020 were Black or African American (39% or 228,796 people)”. (HUD)

For many years, dating back to slavery, the Tulsa Massacre, the Red Summer, the World Wars, the Civil Rights Movement, and others America has continuously, socially and legally massacred

minority wealth and prosperity. Writer Anthony Smith calls out many of us and our communities for a lack of empathy and understanding of this issue. Anthony communicates:

we fail to look with empathy, for example, at the massive amount of wealth and resources transferred by the Federal Government to whites in the form of land grants and educational benefits after WWII and the concomitant alienation of people of color, which fostered the creation of white-dominated suburbia and the creation of the black ghetto (106).

David Pellow echoes Anthony's sentiment by reporting, "Contemporary racism by global North nations builds on a rich tradition of conquest, slavery, and colonization. Racism has been an organizing principle of the modern world system since the rise of European states centuries ago". (Pellow, 37) It is no coincidence that Vincent Fusaro, Helen Levy, and Luke Shaefer found that, "non-Hispanic blacks [are] three times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to have experienced homelessness at some point during their lives" (US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health). The percentage of minority children living in low-income families compared to white children living in low-income families is staggering as well. The National Center for Children in Poverty suggests:

- 26% (9,348,812) of white children live in low-income families.
- 58% (5,458,150) of black children live in low-income families.
- 53% (9,598,174) of Hispanic children live in low-income families.

Generational poverty is also prevalent among many of our minority communities. Julie Clawson, author of *Everyday Justice*, writes a chapter in her book discussing 'debt'. Clawson is

specifically speaking to international demographics, however, there are parallels in her example to minorities living in generational poverty in America. Clawson relays:

Imagine for a minute that someone stole your wallet. After the initial panic, you'd start canceling your credit cards, hoping to ward off fraudulent charger. Besides having to deal with the hassle, though, everything will generally work out just fine. Now imagine, instead, that before you were even born, someone stole your credit card, charged ten billion dollars in weapons on it and is requiring you to pay it all back with interest. The hardship of being forced to pay back those charges results in you not having clean water, in health services not being available to you and in your children not being able to even attend school (166).

This example is not full proof as Americans do not live in absolute poverty. But generational poverty, oftentimes, means you are starting out in life paying interest on expenses you weren't in control of. Margaret Hagerman reinforces this thought by sharing, "Forms of racism that have been used across time to justify the mistreatment of people of color by whites have certainly mutated as times have changed, but the material consequences of racism still exist alongside reworked racial ideology" (14). These statistics and examples are not to bring shame or guilt, but instead to bring realization to local communities and to the nation that homelessness affects all people, however, homelessness and poverty have a strong weight in our minority communities

Public Health & Homelessness

Homelessness can have a significant negative impact on the homeless communities and the housed communities. Douglas Polcin asserts, "the public health implications of homelessness are significant and include syndemic interactions that exacerbate substance abuse, health

problems, HIV risk, and mental health symptoms” (US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health). Polcin continues by adding, “Mortality rates among homeless persons are more than three times that of persons with some type of housing” (US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health). Many individuals and families within the homeless communities are subject to increase risks of physical and sexual assault, poor nutrition, and injuries and illnesses that are escalated due to lack of care. Jeff Carter is a former homeless and current low-income individual living in Parker County. Last summer during fieldwork, Jeff would talk to me about a pain in his stomach. I kept telling him he should see a doctor, but he would mentioned, “I can’t get off work” or “that’s too expensive” (Carter Interview). Eventually, Jeff’s pain was unbearable and he was forced to go see a doctor. It was at this point that Jeff required surgery and would be out of his job for roughly a month. His employer decided they could not wait on him and moved on. Jeff was then out of a job once again. The personal and public health factors involved with homeless and low-income communities have effects that many who are not in these communities do not realize.

Many homeless and low-income individuals and families can only afford cheap food that lacks proper nutrition. Through my experience working with homeless and low-income nonprofits and communities I have seen several organizations or independent groups give out sugary and starchy foods that exacerbate hunger and leave individuals feeling groggy and malnourished. The sugary and starchy foods that lack proper nutrition can escalate an individual’s physical health and motivation.

Throughout my fieldwork I learned that organizations within Parker County and Tarrant County have had issues with the types of foods that the other county or organization is giving to their homeless and low-income populations. However, I learned this through a few of my

interviews that I conducted for fieldwork purposes. I don't believe these frustrations have been communicated or resolved between the two parties. This issue is an example of something that could be resolved through a collective impact group. The food we are providing for our homeless and low-income communities are a crucial conversation when it comes to holistic practices.

Why Collective Impact?

Throughout the research and statistics that have been reported so far, the reader can see that homelessness is a holistic issue. Homelessness can come from poor economic conditions, poor health, abuse, addiction, mental health, childhood trauma, lack of jobs, unexpected events and accidents, and so many other factors can play a role. Communities cannot look at homelessness and poverty as a "money issue" or a "job issue". Financial security and quality jobs are a significant need for eradicating homelessness; however, they are not the only needs or causes for homelessness and poverty. Mounah Abdel-Samad and his colleagues explain:

Very few programs or policies simultaneously address preventative measures (i.e., explicitly focused on upstream causes of homelessness) while also reducing the chronic cycling of homelessness. In addition, people experiencing homelessness are not often included or consulted in devising efforts to develop programs and policies that impact their lives. Furthermore, academics, policymakers, and other agents of change often operate in silos rather than across disciplines. (2)

To work towards the most holistic solution possible regarding homelessness we must include as many parties involved as possible. These parties may include, but are not limited to, disciplines such as, "public health, social work, public administration, political science, engineering, city planning, economics, mass media and communication, fine arts, and design" (Abdel-Samad et al.

3). These specific disciplines all have something to add to the conversation of homelessness. One important group of individuals that were not listed but need to be included are homeless and former homeless. Destin from the YouTube channel, “Smarter EveryDay”, creates a video where he tries to ride a bicycle that has backwards handles. Destin tries several times and finally comes to a profound realization that, “knowledge does not equal understanding” (1:25). These leaders from all these disciplines can have all the research they want, but the collective impact group needs the understanding and experience from somebody who has been homeless or experienced poverty. Whether it is preventive measures for preventing homelessness or strategies for ending chronic homelessness the individuals and groups that have the combination of research and experiences can make a holistic impact in their communities through collective impact.

The collective impact group within Parker County, Texas will be open to welcoming leaders from local nonprofits, school districts, community centers, religious organizations, rehabilitation programs, mental health facilities, women’s care facilities, etc. Collective impact groups must practice “urgent optimism” (Kelley, 47). Tom and Dave Kelley describe urgent optimism as “the desire to act immediately to tackle an obstacle, motivated by the belief that you have a reasonable hope of success” (47). Collective impact groups must also practice five main pillars that include, agreeing upon a common agenda, compiling shared measurement systems, creating mutually reinforcing activities, practicing continuous communication, and agreeing on a backbone organization to support the group (Collective Impact SSIR). These five pillars are crucial to the mission of the collective impact group. These pillars allow the group to be a cohesive team that functions with the same guidelines and goals while having the freedom to express diverse perspectives, theories, ideas, and practices.

1. Common Agenda

Establishing a common agenda is an important step in developing a healthy collective impact group. The Collective Impact Forum defines common agenda as, “One of the principles of collective impact. It is a vision for change shared by all participants that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions” (3). There can be overarching common agendas that pertain to the entire lifespan of the group. There can also be specific common agendas that are agreed upon periodically or for specific projects.

For example, proposed common agenda would be: Listen and learn from fellow entities, community members, and current and former homeless individuals to imagine, develop, and implement new theories and practices for eradicating homelessness in Parker County, Texas.

This will be a proposed over-arching agenda. However, the group would also establish periodic common agendas. For example, the collective impact group can establish monthly, quarterly, and yearly agendas that fall under the umbrella of the overarching agenda. Once you have a strong vision, your plans open up because your employees and partners can bring their brilliance, creativity, and commitment to the table to help move the project or the organization forward (Lynch and Walls Jr. 61).

The Collective Impact Forum breaks the common agenda step down into five common agenda elements:

1. Principles
 - a. Agreed upon values that guide the group in laying out the rest of the common agenda, making decisions, and how the group is going to work together overall.
2. Common Problem Definition
 - a. A common understanding of the problem the group is trying to solve. Often this involves establishing boundaries for what issues, players, and systems the group will in engage with, and which are outside its scope. The problem definition is built on a shared understanding of the root causes of the issue at hand.
3. Goal
 - a. A measurable, population level goal that demonstrates how you will define success.
4. Framework for Change
 - a. A structure for how the group will split up the work (into working groups, backbone roles, policy groups, etc.) and prioritize limited resources.
5. Plan for Learning
 - a. A plan for how you intend to track your progress and learn from your efforts as an initiative. (Collective Impact Forum, 4)

Some of the steps within ‘Common Agenda’ are similar to a few of the other five main general steps. There is some freedom within how specific you make the common agenda elements. These are up to the discretion of the entire collective impact group. However, the common agenda will guide and steer the rest of your steps and decisions, so these crucial factors must be thoroughly discussed and agreed upon before moving forward.

2. Shared Measurement Systems

It is vital for the collective impact group to come up with and agree upon shared measurement systems. Without an understanding of the shared measurement systems each entity may be seeing success in a different way. When an entity sees success in a different way than another, they may develop different means to reaching that vision of success. This could create division and regression within the group.

Shared measurement systems may include but would not be limited to: PIT counts, number of new affordable housing solutions, amount of rent payments being paid for by those not staying in the apartment or hotel, etc.

Similar to the common agendas, the collective impact group can have shared measurement systems that are periodic. For example, the group may have weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly measurement systems or a combination of the options.

3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities

Researching and thinking through collective impact and its five core steps, mutually reinforcing activities caught my eye because of the importance, but also the difficulty of getting entities from many different sectors to mutually agree upon and enact activities that are going to hopefully push the group closer to its goal. Bill Barberg, President of Insightformation, Inc., explains:

It should come as no surprise that effectively managing mutually reinforcing activities is usually the most challenging part of achieving Collective Impact. This is where the actions happen, where resources are deployed, and where sharing and trust are required. (1)

Mutually reinforcing activities are crucial to the collective impact group because this step is where the group starts to see implementation and practical, tangible strategies be put in place and carried out. It may be easy to establish a common agenda, agree upon shared measurement systems, be in constant communication, and decide on a backbone organization. However, mutually reinforcing activities forces the individual to put themselves and the organization or sector that the individual represents on the line. This is where trust and submission to the collective group can come into play. This is also why the other four steps are so crucial. All these steps help build the trust and cohesiveness it takes to feel confident when it comes time to implement and carry out these mutually reinforcing activities.

4. Continuous Communication

Continuous communication is crucial for the collective impact group to ensure that they are maintaining the common agenda, discussing successes and challenges, as well as encouraging each other throughout the process.

The group will decide how often they can meet as a whole, but it is also crucial for entities to continuously meet with each outside of the large group meetings. For example, if there is an initiative being developed and implemented between the local government and the local school districts then the entire group still needs to be giving their perspectives, but the government and the school districts can also meet separately and update the entire collective impact group throughout.

5. Backbone Support Organizations

There are also multiple potential political and economic advantages to joining with entities outside of the nonprofit field. Alan Pierce writes, “collective impact initiatives include:

- Gaining powerful leverage to increase opportunities for government / public grants.
- Gaining the power to lobby for beneficiary legislation by demonstrating that nonprofits are working where businesses do not and create socio-economic improvement.

- Better demonstrate meaningful and effective measures of the organization's mission and vision" (3 Reasons Why Collective Impact Model Is the Future of Social Change).

However, the role of a backbone organization can be tricky which makes it crucial to ensure that the correct backbone organization is chosen for the collective impact group. Writers from the Spark Policy Institute, Marvin Strategies as well as one independent consultant explain:

At times the backbone organization – the group providing support to the collective effort – takes on the work of a fiscal intermediary. This dual role has two distinct functions: engagement of collaborative partners to advance a shared agenda, and distributing funds while holding those partners accountable (81).

The role that is taken on by the backbone organization is significant and weighty. However, if the correct organization is selected, they can be a mighty driving force that accelerates the efforts and the success of the collective impact group.

Homelessness is an issue that needs a wide range of resources to achieve its goal. Due to the wide range of resources needed to eradicate homelessness, it would be ideal to elect a backbone organization that has a plethora of resources and connections that have already been established and cultivated. It is also imperative that the backbone organization is an organization that is supported well financially and by the local community. Without trust and support from the local community it will be incredibly difficult for a chosen backbone organization and subsequently the rest of the collective impact group to have success in their

endeavors. However, this relationship with between the backbone organization and the community can become tricky. Kevin Sweeney, assistant dean at the Barney School of Business, emphasizes backbone organization must be, “someone who is willing to listen, someone who is willing to be neutral, and not be affected by the politics of the community” (14:25). The tension between gathering support and remaining neutral is a difficult but necessary line that needs to be walked carefully.

Collective Impact: Challenges

Collective impact presents several challenges throughout its implementation process and post-execution process. Mounah Abdel-Samad explains, “The implementation of this model has financial, institutional, and human resource challenges” (3). The challenges that collective impact presents go beyond these three, however, these are three significant challenges that can severely hinder the implementation and development of a collective impact model.

There can be significant financial challenges when it comes to implementing and sustaining a collective impact model. The backbone organization must be supported financially to have the capacity and ability to organize, guide, sustain, and perform the research and actions needed to cultivate a healthy and effective collective impact group. The backbone organization will be carrying out roles that are in addition to the roles that their organization carries out aside from the collective impact group. This may lead to needing to hire a new individual or group of individuals which is also a significant financial investment. While this is a significant financial investment, the National Alliance to End Homelessness reports, “A chronically homeless person costs the taxpayer an average of \$35,578 per year” (National Alliance to End Homelessness).

Statistics such as this one and others may give the backbone organization a strong argument for the local government to help financially invest in new employees or a new department.

One challenge that presents itself when thinking about recording data and analyzing the data is knowing what has stemmed from the collective impact group and what has stemmed from preexisting strategies or practices. Authors writing for ORSIMPACT and Spark Policy Institute explain this struggle by suggesting:

Isolating the effects of collective impact initiatives is difficult given the likelihood that other system initiatives may be occurring in the space at the same time. This is especially true when collective impact efforts leverage existing policy or practice initiatives. (13)

Being able to have shared measuring systems that can distinguish between the effectiveness of the strategies and practices implemented by the collective impact group versus the effectiveness of strategies and practices that are already in existence will be crucial. This is not to try and compete with other entities chasing the same goals. However, the isolated effectiveness needs to be tracked to better understand what is effective and what is ineffective; what can be changed and what can be left alone.

Collective impact is built on individuals and groups across multiple sectors coming together and pushing towards a common goal. Because of this, many of the challenges within collective impact can often be people oriented. For example, there are also challenges that the collective impact group can face within their leadership team. These include but are not limited to:

Turnover: Turnover can be high, either when leaders exit entirely, or when they become less active over time

Individual effectiveness: Some leaders are more effective than others in the role they take on, such as advancing the work of a workgroup or influencing policymakers.

Diversifying leadership: Overall, many sites recognize they could diversify their leadership more, including having more community members, youth, people directly affected by the problem, and people of color in leadership roles throughout the initiative. (ORSIMPACT and Spark Policy Institute, 57-58)

Collective impact groups may also find challenges in aligning organizations that can play a role in their initiative, but do not explicitly work towards this as a primary or secondary goal. For example, when looking at eradicating homelessness communities may look to the non-profits and religious groups in the area. However, businesses, law enforcement, and schools could also play a role in this venture. But that is not their primary or secondary goal. When speaking about leaders in social entrepreneurship David Bornstein and Susan Davis explain, “he or she works to attract resources and usually has to persuade people to abandon conventional careers in order to join a small team of people committed to an unproven idea” (34). Businesses, law enforcement agencies, and schools all have their own separate agenda. Should the collective impact group leave them out and focus solely on the nonprofits? I would say absolutely not. The writers from “Street Psalms” share:

Since the earliest origins, urban areas have performed three separate critical functions—the creation of sacred space, the provision of basic security, and the host for a commercial market. These three functions correspond to the three classic systems that make up a city—the religious, political and economic systems. Any serious effort to transform a city must engage these social systems. Urban mission that does not engage

the social systems that order and shape society is not serious about city transformation.

(31)

These entities must be included, but it is a challenge to implement them and align them with a common agenda. Researchers from ORSIMPACT and Spark Policy Institute cite “Many site visit sites reported challenges with engaging partners and aligning across partner agendas, particularly when organizations had very different purposes” (58). Resolving or mitigating this challenge will be different for each specific community. However, a great place to start is establishing and building great friendships and partnerships as well as developing a great line of consistent communication.

Challenges for collective impact groups also include community engagement. This is listed as a factor that leads to success and it is. However, it is also a very relevant challenge for collective impact groups. Collective impact groups may run into community members who are uninformed, disengaged, overly opinionated, frustrated at the collective impact group, or a variety of other reasons. Community engagement is a crucial part of community development and collective impact; however, it is a strategy that should be executed with an agreed upon plan, humility, and flexibility.

Collective Impact: Successes

The idea of collective impact has been intensely dissected, tested, and evaluated for the last ten to eleven years. There have been challenges that have slowed the progress of communities. However, there have also been many success stories. Petra Kuenkel shares with her audience, “every change endeavor starts with people seeing future possibilities – sometimes an individual grasping the potential of an idea, sometimes a group of people who develop a vision for a future state. This then grows into a more structured change initiative or even a

movement” (59-61). Each community is unique and the entities that are present in each specific community have their unique strengths and weaknesses as well. This does not mean that we should ignore the successes and challenges of other communities. There is a lot for each community to learn from the experiences and ideas of other communities.

The Collective Impact Forum is an incredible organization that explains and promotes the collective impact model to solve complex social issues. The Collective Impact Forum reports:

Using the collective impact approach, a number of complex social challenges have been addressed and some remarkable results have been achieved. Youth incarcerations dropped by 45% in just three years with no change in public safety improving the lives of thousands of youths. Six thousand public housing residents were placed in new jobs during the recession. More than one thousand acres were restored and over two-hundred and eighty million pounds of pollution were reduced to conserve and restore a river. (0:35 – 1:09)

I want to provide a few examples of communities that utilized collective impact models and saw great success. This section will also attempt to expand on what worked and why. What factors played a role in the successful development and implementation of each community’s collective impact model?

Six years ago, Bergen County, New Jersey ended chronic homelessness in their county. When trying to answer the question of ‘how did they do it’? writer Fishman et al explained that Bergen County successfully ended chronic homelessness in their community:

By dispensing with its old strategies of aggregating data and one-size-fits-all solutions in favor of an unorthodox approach. The county assembled a regional team, aligned around

a shared goal of getting to zero; it collected real-time, person-specific data on its homeless population; and it used these data to redesign its response. (8)

To find success using collective impact models, a community must start by realizing that old strategies are not working. This may be a hard realization. When it comes to homelessness one organization 'A' could be focused on signing people up for the housing list in their community and organization 'B' could be focused on feeding the homeless every day. Organization 'A' might look at homelessness in their community and say 'we have signed up one-hundred people for housing' and organization 'A' could be doing what they are intending to do exceptionally well. Same goes for organization 'B' feeding the homeless. They could be feeding the homeless at an exceptional rate, exceptionally well. However, there could still be an increase in homelessness or the rate of "repeat" homeless individuals and families, among other measurement criteria, could be rising. Organizations in these situations must look at homelessness in a big picture context and not just in the context of what their specific organization does. Without this focus, there will never be a realization that something needs to change and a new shared goal or common agenda needs to be proposed.

Bergen County also changed the way that they collected and evaluated data. The new way of collecting and evaluating data makes it easier to develop shared measuring systems for collective impact groups. Fishman et al continue to report:

At the micro level, communities need to know who is experiencing homelessness, and that list needs to be updated regularly. Annual point-in-time data aren't sufficient.

Communities such as Bergen County have used high quality, real-time data to understand their homeless populations, tailor their response to end homelessness for high-risk populations, and sustain that progress over time. (11)

It is crucial to the collective impact group's success that the organizations that are working to eradicate homelessness are on the same page. Lauren King, the executive director of Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, emphasized the importance of cohesiveness between partnering entities in an interview I conducted with Lauren over the summer of 2021. Lauren argued that without this unity and cohesiveness organizations are battling against each other and their own initiatives (King Interview). Bergen County used the new data that they collected to redesign its response. If the shared data criteria and measuring systems are not the same, then organizations may drift from the common agenda back into what the organization was doing before.

Another group that was successful in developing and implementing a collective impact model is the 'Milwaukee COVID-19 Civic Response Team'. Writer Paul Schmitz elaborates on the COVID-19 Civic Response Team by sharing:

Milwaukee's COVID-19 response has been a remarkable mobilization of resources and organizations to address needs for shelter, food, testing, internet connection, and more. Necessity has forced such collective efforts in many cities, but Milwaukee's may be unique in the civic architecture that has been built and that may be sustained beyond the crisis. (Collective Impact in Emergency Response)

To form a successful collective impact group, it takes a lot of factors including humility and teamwork. Humility and teamwork are essential when developing, implementing, and sustaining a collective impact model. When referencing the major takeaways that made the Milwaukee Covid-19 Civic Response Team so successful Schmitz highlighted three specific takeaways:

1. Collective impact is a useful approach for organizing and aligning a community during an emergency, especially when there is a solid foundation of relationships and skills.

2. Effective partners center themselves on equity and community need rather than their organizations' interests, and the sense of urgency bypasses the petty.
3. Funders and government closely collaborate with each other and with providers and use their role beyond dollars to advance the common agenda. (Collective Impact in Emergency Response)

All three of these takeaways emphasize 'solid foundation of relationships', equity and selflessness among partners, and close collaboration with others in order to do more than just offer money. Money and other capital resources play a major role in many social justice initiatives. However, the willingness to be humble and work as a team are far more important. These characteristics build trust and rapport with those that are working towards the same common agenda. These relationships make the development and implementation of reinforcing activities easier as well. Being able to develop reinforcing activities and trust those around you to carry them out is crucial to the success of a collective impact group.

ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute recently published a report that studies 25 collective impact initiatives. These groups identified several factors that are crucial for a successful collective impact group and one of the major things that the researchers from ORS Impact and Spark Policy discovered was:

Strong leadership is critical to the success of a collective impact initiative, as was identified previously. The site visit sites reported on the importance of this leadership among backbone staff and partners in the initiative, defining and describing strong leadership as values-based, stable, committed, and collaborative. Leadership is also responsible in some initiatives for clearly articulating the nature of the problem and creating space for the public discourse. Many initiatives identified the importance of leaders having a deep understanding of the problem and issue. (ORS Impact and Spark Policy, 56)

The leadership present in the backbone organization is imperative to the success of the collective impact group. While there are several ‘leaders’ all mixed into one collective impact group, the leaders within the backbone organizations must know what they don’t know. William Easterly explains the difference between two styles of leadership within development, planners and searchers. Easterly contends:

a Planner thinks he already knows the answers; he thinks of poverty as a technical engineering problem that his answers will solve. A Searcher admits he does not know the answers in advance; he believes that poverty is a complicated tangle of political, social, historical, institutional, and technological factors. (6)

Leaders within a backbone organization are given the significant task of guiding the group as well as developing, sustaining, and growing the cohesiveness of the group. The leadership within the backbone organization must identify current and potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the group and their approach, but they must first be self-aware of their own strengths and limitations.

No Kid Hungry is a nationwide organization that aims to serve meals to kids in need. In 2012 the No Kid Hungry branch in Detroit, Michigan was looking at a disaster. No Kid Hungry states, “the Department of Health, the biggest sponsor of summer meals sites, had its certification revoked. This threatened the loss of 200 summer meals sites and thousands of meals for hungry children” (5). No Kid Hungry and several other entities came together and were able to still serve kids despite the Department of Health being absent. No Kid Hungry continued by reporting:

Further, the group continued to build on their success in 2012 by realizing a 50% increase in the number of sites (from 200 to 300) and a 29% increase in summer meals in Detroit in 2013. In the process, this team established a collaborative group that is (1) making

strides to increase summer meals participation in Detroit, (2) building a model of collaboration around summer meals that could be replicated across Michigan, and (3) laying the foundation to realize statewide No Kid Hungry goals beyond summer meals. (5)

This is an incredible story that continues into a successful collective impact model. No Kid Hungry and their partners continued after the summer of 2012 to develop new thoughts and practices that built towards a collective impact model. The group continues by explaining “As the group has grown and evolved, they have made strong progress toward incorporating the building blocks of collective impact” (No Kid Hungry, 6). Because of their efforts to form a collective impact group this group was able to “ensure strategic coordination of resources, accelerate learning and improvement, alleviate ‘red tape’ barriers and affect systems change, create the opportunity for a shared awareness campaign, inspire healthy sponsor-site-vendor competition, and uncover new possibilities (No Kid Hungry, 8-10). What No Kid Hungry and their partners were able to accomplish is an incredible testament to the possibilities that collective impact brings to the table. No Kid Hungry and the community of Detroit, Michigan were able to take a potential disaster head on and use what they learned and develop it into a collective impact group. This helped bring about practical and sustainable change for the community of Detroit and others as they find this case study and many others like it.

Another factor that is vital to developing a successful collective impact model is community engagement. Moira O’Neill explains “successful community development initiatives require community engagement CI (collective impact) is no exception, requiring community engagement to avoid the failings of “top-down” strategies” (17). Social justice initiatives are developed to attempt and help resolve an issue within the community. If the collective impact group excludes the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of those within the affected community

they are doing themselves and the community a great disservice. Without community engagement it can be extremely difficult to develop and implement a solution. Even if a solution is developed and implemented it may be completely rejected by the community or just be ineffective entirely. Many collective impact groups that see success in their respective communities have engaged their community members thoughtfully, respectfully, and intentionally. Nakia Cole, a coordinator for Fort Worth ISD's Family Action Center is one of the greatest vessels of community engagement I have ever met. During our interview, Nakia relentlessly mentioned the importance of asking questions to those in the community that you are trying to reach. Nakia passionately communicated:

every person is different and has different needs and circumstances. I'm not going to suggest or impose something on someone that I don't know anything about. I go and sit down with them and ask them about who they are as a person, what kind of situation are they facing, and how would they like to be helped. (Cole Interview)

Nakia is a trailblazer in the Fort Worth community when it comes to loving the homeless and low-income communities and pushing for them to be engaged in decision making as much as possible.

Collective impact is still a relatively new concept and practice. However, the success stories are incredibly encouraging. The success stories should encourage reader and development practitioners around the world to try developing and implementing a form of a collective impact model. There are challenges and factors that need to be wrestled with and deeply thought through, but collective impact does work and when it does it creates something beautiful for a community that was once struggling with issues such as homelessness.

Reflexive Commentary

Throughout the ‘Why Collective Impact and Homelessness’ section I briefly discussed my initial exposure to the homeless community and those attempting to help these communities. Throughout the last 2 years I have been fortunate enough to be volunteering for a local homeless and low-income organization in Weatherford, Texas (Parker County). The things I have been fortunate enough to experience and learn about from volunteers and employees at Hearts Full of Love as well as, and most importantly, the homeless and low-income community at Hearts Full of Love, has been a blessing. Many of the homeless and low-income individuals that Hearts Full of Love assists have come to my wife and I’s wedding shower and wedding. We have had many meals together, experienced many move-in days, been to funerals, parties, and everything in between. My heart breaks for the homeless and low-income community in Parker County, but they have loved my wife and I so well. I love this community immensely, so I felt I had to attempt to do something. I knew it was more than just a resolution, but I didn’t know what helping this community heal actually looked like. John Lederach articulates these questions by explaining, “Resolution’s guiding question is this: How do we end something that is not desired? ...Transformation’s guiding question is this: How do we end something not desired and build something we do desire?” (28). I knew there had to be a transformation. I decided to do my fieldwork and thesis on something that I truly believe can help them and their families to end generational cycles of homelessness and poverty.

Applied Thesis

I have been fortunate enough to be able to start having conversations with the members of the board of Hearts Full of Love about the collective impact model and how I believe this can benefit Hearts Full of Love and the community within Parker County. The board and I have had

mostly surface level conversation to date. However, there is intrigue and excitement around this idea. There is a project called Hope Community that Hearts Full of Love said they would be interested in applying this collective impact model to. While my hope is that collective impact will be applied to the entirety of the organization, starting with applying collective impact to a specific such as Hope Community can be beneficial to work out any kinks as well as familiarize ourselves with the steps and processes it takes to form a collective impact group to a contextualized situation.

To begin the process of applying this solution I will attempt to follow the timeline shown in the project portion of this document. The first meeting will be with the founder of Hearts Full of Love, Tony Froid. I will present to Tony my findings from the fieldwork project and follow up this presentation with the proposal of the solution for a collective impact model. As mentioned in the paragraph above, I have had brief, surface level conversations about collective impact. However, I have not gone into any depth regarding the breadth of the proposed solution. Following the conversation with Tony, I will then attempt to share a similar proposal with the board of Hearts Full of Love. I have scheduled out three months in between my conversation with the board and the next step which is proposing this solution to additional entities. I have built in these three months to the schedule in anticipation of additional questions or corrections that may need to be addressed in the proposal. These three months will give me time to answer questions, make corrections, and have another discussion with the board if need be. Following approval from the board, I will move to present these findings and the proposed solution to other entities believed to be key contributors to a collective impact model. Once a group of organizations is formed the group will start meeting as a collective impact group and begin

discussing the pillars discussed in this document as well as the pressing need for a wholistic approach to homelessness and the challenges within low-income communities.

Conclusion

Parker County, Texas has a community of homeless and low-income individuals and families that are in a viscous cycle of poverty and homelessness. Parker County has some resources for this population, however, many of them do not work together and are not on the same page. The collective impact model is a strategy that can be developed and implemented given the proper steps are taken to cultivate an environment for success. This is a community that is close to my heart and one that I have heard the laughs and joy from, and I have also been there during the deep pain and brokenness they have felt. I understand that homelessness and poverty is an extraordinary, intimidating issue. To respond to this, I would encourage the reader:

We are not morally powerless in facing the economic and ecological violence that inundates our lives. To the contrary, as ‘I’s’ that are ‘we’s’ spanning the globe, and as ‘we’s’ attentive to the beckoning of God whose love will bring abundant life for all, we are replete with moral power. That divine love breathes in us, urging us to dedicate intelligence, creativity, energy, political savvy, skill, and the song of our souls toward a world in which all people and all of creation may flourish. That love beckons us to renounce economic and ecological violence and to craft more moral economic policies and practices (Moe-Lobeda, 271)

Collective impact has its’ strengths and challenges, but I believe it can be a strategy and tool that brings practical and sustainable joy and breaks the chains of generational poverty and despair.

Whether applied to specific projects, such as Hope Community, or adopted to support the entirety of an organization such as Hearts Full of Love, collective impact is a practical and

sustainable model that will bring long-lasting, impactful, and wholistic change to the homeless and low-income communities within Parker County, Texas and beyond.

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Appendix

Project Proposal

Community based, integrated awareness, education, and diverse action

A Community Project in Parker County – Texas

Startup Timeline: 2 Years

Target Population: Homeless and Low-income individuals and families living in Parker County, Texas.

Partners: Hearts Full of Love, Center of Hope, Weatherford Housing Authority, Weatherford Neighborhood and Development Services Office, New River Fellowship, Tarrant County Public Health Department, Neon Life Church, and Safe Harbor Counseling Center.

Project Manager (s): Tony Froid and Laurie McCullar

Introduction

It is common to see many different nonprofits, government entities, social enterprises, and other entities fighting towards the same noble end goal. Whether it is to end hunger, eradicate homelessness, or abolish human trafficking, we collect and pour out resources that, to an extent, help solve these issues. However, these organizations and government entities often hinder each other's progress. Specifically, nonprofits often isolate themselves from other entities and resources. Isolation is not an effective strategy for social enterprise or for resolving social issues. This proposal will include information and suggested practices needed by social and governmental entities within a specific local community.

The isolation that we see may be due to many factors. However, one could argue that the isolation of nonprofits and other entities within Parker County is due to ignorance. During fieldwork, organizations said things that were contradictory to what other organizations were saying about one another. Collective impact is also a new concept and practice. Researchers from the National Council of Nonprofits indicate, "the term 'collective impact' caught attention in an article published in the Stanford Social Innovation Review in 2011" (National Council of Nonprofits). A community may see churches working together or schools working together, etc. However, diverse entities banding together to solve pressing social issues is a fresh and growing practice.

Parker County does not have its own standalone organization to gather detailed information regarding Parker County's homeless and low-income population. However, Tarrant County Homeless Coalition considers Tarrant and Parker County in their data. Within Parker County, homelessness is also a newer, steadily increasing phenomenon. The Tarrant County Homeless Coalition claims:

53% of people experiencing homelessness on count night accessed emergency shelter, while 38% were staying in places not meant for human habitation. Like most other large counties across the United States, Tarrant County has experienced a significant increase in unsheltered homelessness. At the same time, we also experienced a decrease in outreach teams, impacting our ability to respond and connect people to housing. (State of the Homeless Report 2020, 15)

Count night refers to a night when organizations and volunteers go out and count unsheltered homeless individuals living in a specific area. This, among other reasons, is an example of why outreach teams within the community play a significant role in assisting non-profits like Hearts Full of Love, Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, and Center of Hope in reaching the local homeless and low-income communities.

Tarrant County Homeless Coalition and others have extensively expressed difficulty in locating and connecting at risk individuals to the proper resources. Beginning on September 1st, 2021, through House Bill 1925, it became illegal to camp publicly in the state of Texas. This bill was enacted despite strong disapproval from nonprofits and the local government. Lauren King, the executive director of the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, expressed her distain for the bill. Mrs. King comments:

This was something we wrote letters to the governor's office and petitioned with our local officials to fight against, but ultimately, the bill was passed. I could go and camp out on the steps of the state capital and protest this but the challenge for us is we have to pick our battles to maintain and build on relationships with our local and state government. (Lauren King)

The bill has made it even more difficult to locate and connect homeless individuals with needed resources and guidance. These difficult factors further exacerbate the need for collective impact. The community of Parker County needs entities with a diverse reach to help the local homeless and low-income populations.

The community of Parker County also needs entities to come together to creatively develop and implement sustainable housing solutions for these communities. However, the entities cannot move forward with housing solutions yet. First, the community needs to be educated regarding the local homeless and low-income population.

Weatherford is a booming and hospitable Texas town. However, Weatherford is not hospitable towards homeless individuals and families. There have been instances when local individuals spoke with homeless individuals and Weatherford community members will drive by and yell “go get a job you lazy *expletive*”. The collective impact group will spread awareness and education through the community. The collective impact group will give strategies for how those within the community can practically help those in need. There will still be hardened hearts and misunderstood and misguided comments or feelings. However, to create practical and sustainable change there must be a collective impact group in Weatherford, Parker County, Texas dedicated to this cause.

Thesis Paragraph

To create practical, sustainable, and economically friendly housing and housing opportunities a group of entities must participate in collective impact by setting up a structure with a backbone organization to help identify and take on specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats pertaining to the local communities homeless and low-income

population. This proposal serves as an outline for a new program that can be presented to local entities such as, nonprofits, churches, housing authorities, police departments, etc.

Project Objectives:

A core group of leaders will teach a diverse group of entities the themes, values, and practices that form a collective impact group. The same core group of leaders will help each organization familiarize themselves with the other organizations and each organization's resources. However, the collective impact group will be developed for the main purpose of striving to give assistance to the various challenges and needs of these entities that are actively pursuing the eradication of homelessness. Specifically, the collective impact group will focus on developing and implementing practical, sustainable housing solutions for the homeless and low-income communities within Parker County. This proposal would be suitable for social, religious, and governmental entity leaders that have little to no knowledge and experience pertaining to collective impact.

The goal of the proposal is to share the importance of collective impact and give practical and useful information, practices, and tools for developing and implementing a contextualized collective impact structure. This proposal will first be presented to the board of Hearts Full of Love, a local homeless and low-income nonprofit in Weatherford, Texas.

Specific Objectives Include

During the first year the proposal will be shared with at least two local non-profits, two religious entities, one local government, and one school district. The one-year timeframe gives the presenter a chance to make any adjustments or corrections to the proposal so that the proposal is contextualized to each entity. Through the first year and a half there will be a group of organizations forming into a collective impact group. Before the end of year two, the group

will have selected a backbone organization. Selecting a backbone organization can be difficult; the wrong backbone organization can affect the entire group. Julius Walls and Kevin Lynch give advice on what to look for in a leader. Walls and Lynch argue that two detrimental characteristics within a leader are “not admitting you know too little” and “thinking you know it all” (65). All members of the group, but especially the backbone organization, must lead with humility. In addition to selecting the backbone organization, the group will agree upon the four remaining pillars of collective impact. These pillars include establishing a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and continuous communication.

Continuously throughout this process the collective impact group needs to build trust and relationships with the homeless and low-income communities. One way to build strong relationships is by asking these homeless communities about what the homeless community has experienced. Writers from the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health suggest, “people experiencing homelessness are not often included or consulted in devising efforts to develop programs and policies that impact their lives. Furthermore, academics, policymakers, and other agents of change often operate in silos rather than across disciplines” (Abdel-Samad, et al., 2). Many of these entities already have relationships with the targeted homeless communities. However, the entities within the collective impact group must continuously strive to maintain and develop trust among these homeless communities. The collective impact group must also ensure that they are slowly facilitating local community involvement. These goals and objectives will be extremely hard to complete if the local community members are not cooperative and eager to help.

The goal for the collective impact group is to end chronic homelessness in Weatherford / Parker County within the next ten years. However, this does not mean the collective impact

group will focus solely on the chronically homeless. Quite the opposite is true. Kevin Ebi declares, “a new Economic Roundtable report that examined Los Angeles County's homeless situation suggests that getting just 10 percent of the newly homeless back on their feet more quickly could cut the chronic homeless rate in half” (American City & County). A practical example of this idea is portrayed in the story of my friend Tyler. Tyler was a successful young guy. He had a car, an apartment, and a well-paying job. Tyler was severely injured one night hanging out with his friends. Tyler’s injury placed him in the hospital for about a month. Due to Tyler’s hospital stay he could not work and fell behind on rent and car payments. Tyler lost his apartment and his car and quickly found himself homeless. Tyler was proactive and looked for jobs every day. However, he expressed the difficulty of keeping a job without a car by claiming:

It was difficult for me to find a job close enough to where I was staying for me to walk. I started looking for delivery jobs where the company provided the car / truck. I was lucky and worked for a bread delivery service and then eventually found a job where my boss would come pick me up every morning. (Tyler Kane)

Tyler is a fitting example of someone that Hearts Full of Love was able to assist with minimal necessities. This quick action helped prevent Tyler from falling deeper into a cycle of chronic homelessness. Tyler now works an excellent job and is back on his feet. The comprehensive approach that collective impact brings will help the group to identify and reach newly homeless and chronic homeless individuals and families.

Project Implementation Strategy

Agreeing on and holding fast to the five main pillars of collective impact are key in a successful and sustainable implementation of the collective impact group. Writers from *The Collective Impact Forum* emphasize, “with all five elements in place, collective impact efforts

can greatly accelerate the pace of change and drive deep and lasting social impact” (pg 5). Secondly, the backbone organization will develop and implement strategies to promote equity within the collective impact group and cross-sector collaboration. The backbone organization will develop processes for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data to continuously assist the collective impact group in making data driven decisions. The collective impact group must have equity among its members. The collective impact group needs diverse opinions and methods to best solve the issue of homelessness. Sherri Welch touches on this idea beautifully by quoting a colleague, “you can’t just solve education or hunger, he said: You have to see what environment is preventing the people you serve from being successful” (Working Together). Homelessness does not come down to one factor. The collective impact group will need to see homeless from a holistic perspective.

Next, the collective impact group will develop and implement relationship-based practices. A collective impact group must have healthy, sustainable relationships. Collective impact groups consist of relationships between entities and the individuals within the local community, both housed and homeless. The collective impact group will focus on the continuous, healthy growth of partnership relationships as well as developmental relationships within the collective impact group. The collective impact group will continuously train those within the group so that the collective impact group can be ready to replace a role if necessary or to expand the roles within the group.

Lastly, the local government will play a key role within the implementation process. This will not be a government run collective impact group. However, it will be extremely difficult to complete the goals the collective impact group will want to accomplish without the opinion and equitable assistance from the local government. *The Color of Law* talks extensively about the

role of the Federal, state, and local governments pertaining to real estate and public housing. In 1939 the main housing economist, Homer Hoyt, oversaw “sound public and private housing and home financing policy” (Rothstein, 93). Hoyt justified racial segregation by claiming, “where members of different races live together...racial mixtures tend to have a depressing effect on land value” (Rothstein, 94). This proposal is not specifically discussing the racial disparity within homelessness. However, ways of thinking, such as Mr. Hoyt’s, attempt to diminish the intrinsic human value of an individual or a group of people. These perspectives of thinking have led to brutal and unfair housing legislation. These thought patterns can also impact the attitudes of others towards marginalized communities such as the homeless. The collective impact group must have the government buy-in to the values and strategies of the collective impact group.

Collective Impact and Housing Solutions as Copowerment

A collective impact group within Weatherford can be used as a form of copowerment. The collective impact group will constantly be learning from each other while also learning from current and former homeless and low-income individuals. It is important throughout this process that all parties involved are attentive to and learn from those that the collective impact group is trying to reach and assist.

Project Location

The project will take place in Weatherford, Texas located in Parker County. Specific advice and some collaboration will be desired from Tarrant County entities as well. As mentioned previously, Tarrant County collects data for Weatherford / Parker County and Tarrant County has more resources and experience than Weatherford / Parker County. Weatherford is a rapidly growing, small to midsize western town in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Weatherford has grown over 30% in the last ten years and over 10% of its population lives in

poverty (US Census Bureau). Weatherford is a place that has potential to excel within a collective impact model, however, Weatherford will face its challenges. Many Weatherford residents are set in their ways due to long lasting traditions established by a specific way of life.

Project Beneficiaries

Many people will benefit from the collective impact group. The homeless and low-income individuals will benefit most directly from the collective impact group. The homeless and low-income community will receive more holistic care. The homeless community will be seen and heard by the individuals and groups that can help these specific individuals and families.

Local community members will also benefit from the collective impact group overall. Homelessness is a hefty expense for local communities. Homelessness has a negative impact on local economies for a plethora of reasons. Researchers from Homeward Bound assert that “people without housing are high consumers of public resources and generate expense, rather than income, for the community” (*Homelessness, 1*). Homelessness is a deterrent to tourism. Weatherford is working to position and promote themselves as a tourist destination and as a permanent residence for those migrating from the West. These factors, among others, are important when attempting to reach the local government.

Homelessness can cost the individuals and the communities a fortune in health expenses. Researchers from Homeward Bound indicate, “without their own housing and the social status to use restrooms in businesses or other public places, people who are homeless often have to relieve themselves outside” (*Homeless, 1*). However, the issue of public health for the homeless and low-income spans beyond using the restroom outside. The same researchers go on to insist that, “they lack access to health care and often have chronic illnesses, made worse by tough living

conditions: sleeping outside in all weather, eating cheap starchy foods, and being in close quarters at social service agencies with other unhealthy people” (*Homeless, 1*). David Sleet and Louis Francescutti reveal more of the health issues homeless men and women commonly face. Sleet and Francescutti affirm that, “homeless persons experience high rates of health problems such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and Hepatitis A infections, alcohol and drug addiction, mental illness, tuberculosis, and other serious conditions” (Sleet and Francescutti, 1). Jeff Carter, a former homeless man in Weatherford, was gracious enough to let me in on his recent struggles with his health. Jeff commented:

I was having a lot of stomach pain a few weeks ago but didn’t want to go to the doctor because I can’t afford to miss work. Eventually, I had to go to in because of the pain and they told me I need surgery in the next few weeks. I don’t know how I am going to pay for surgery, and I don’t know if I’ll still have a job post-surgery. (Jeff Carter)

Jeff worked ten-to-twelve-hour days at a labor-intensive job were his condition worsened pre-surgery. Jeff lost his job after the surgery and thankfully was able to obtain a new job. The conditions that these individuals and families live is detrimental to their health, expensive for the city, and inhumane. As mentioned before, one task the group will be charged with is educating the public on these topics. Nakia Cole, a coordinator for the Fort Worth ISD Family Action Center, spoke with me about her frustration with the lack of desire from many community members to want to get to know the local homeless community. Nakia is an incredibly special woman whose heart for the marginalized radiates off her. Nakia pointed out, “one thing I ask individuals of all ages is what are your dreams. People light up and tell me all their dreams and what they want to do or become. I tell them you’re going to have to work for it, but I am going to

walk alongside you and help you achieve your dreams” (Nakia Cole). Furthermore, Kris Roche and Joel Van Dyke from *Street Psalms*, lay this out beautifully. Roche and Van Dyke note, “the advantage of seeing our cities anthropologically is that it forces us to face ourselves and deal honestly with the complex reality of the human condition” (Street Psalms, 18). Local community members must start seeing homeless and low-income individuals as people with goals and dreams. Not just as druggies and criminals.

If the homeless and low-income communities are treated with more holistic care and solutions Parker County will be able to cut down on economic expenses. Parker County will do this by increasing tourism and small business activity, decreasing wasted resources, and caring for the health of all community members.

Project Impact

The impact of this project has the potential to span generations. Through the MAICD program at Northwest University I had the privilege of taking a Child Poverty and Development course. The realization that struck me the hardest was the generational impact of poverty. The cycle of poverty is vicious and knows no limits. Poverty will take financial peace, mental health, physical health, and spiritual well-being. Poverty does not stop with the individual. Poverty will also take mothers from children, brothers from sisters, husbands from wives, etc. While there are many factors that play a role in homelessness, the lack of housing accelerates and increases the chance of generational poverty.

Through the collective impact group, I strongly believe Weatherford can end chronic homelessness in their community within the next 7-10 years. With a successful model, this practice can be replicated and contextualized for surrounding counties and people all over the country. Kathryn Welch, the CoC Planning Coordinator for Tarrant County Homeless Coalition,

spoke with me about a project that Tarrant County Homeless Coalition worked on with other local entities. While discussing this project I couldn't help but recognize that this sounded like a quick, temporary version of a collective impact model. Kathryn discussed how within three months of receiving funding through the Cares Act, TCHC was able to work with Fort Worth Housing Solutions, Ojala Partners (a development partner), and the city of Fort Worth to renovate a hotel to be used as permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless in Fort Worth. Kathryn beamed at the opportunity to talk about how quickly and smoothly the plan was able to come together through their collaboration with these other entities (Kathryn Welch). Collective impact is a relatively new practice and because of this I don't think the world knows or has seen the full impact that it can have on alleviating our social issues.

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

Project monitoring and evaluation will be decided by the collective impact group. The board of Hearts Full of Love will create a rough draft of the five pillars of collective impact, two of them being shared measurement system and continuous communication. After the proposal, the project managers will ask each entity involved to create a rough draft of the five pillars as well. This request is part of the reason the proposals and the first collective impact group meetings are spaced out the way they are. The collective impact group will aim to use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative monitoring and evaluation practices. The collective impact group will use the data gathered from these practices to make qualitative and quantitative, data-driven decisions.

Project Activities and Timelines

No	Main Activities	Time
1.	Meet with the Hearts Full of Love Founder, Tony Froid	June 2022
2.	Present proposal to the board of Hearts Full of Love	August 2022
3.	Present proposal to New River Fellowship & Neon Life	November 2022
4.	Present proposal to Center of Hope & Safe Harbor Counseling	January 2023
5.	Present proposal to Tarrant County Public Health & Weatherford Housing & Neighborhood Departments	March 2023
6.	Present Proposal to Weatherford ISD & Local Government	May 2023
7.	First Collective Impact group meeting	July 2023
8.	Establish Five Pillars of Collective Impact (these will be discussed with each entity in the proposal phase)	October 2023
9.	Start Meeting as a Group Regularly	January 2024
10	Begin Developing Plans for Practical Sustainable Housing	January 2024

Conclusion

Homelessness is prevalent and growing within Weatherford / Parker County, Texas. Weatherford has local nonprofits and churches that do help the homeless community to an extent. However, homelessness and poverty cannot be eradicated through one or two organizations. Homelessness cannot even be eradicated through one or two types of organizations. The local community must take a comprehensive approach in their fight against homelessness and poverty. However, before the local community can develop and implement a holistic strategy, they must know that there is a problem. The collective impact group must make the local community aware that there is a problem. This proposal desires to show several entities across Parker County that there is a relevant issue with homelessness, and the entities must work together to end it. Homelessness affects communities in a number of areas such as the economy and public health. Above all homelessness is inhumane. Homelessness has the power to humiliate and brutalize men, women, and children for generations to come. On the contrary, a successful collective impact model developed and created by individuals and groups who care about the human, can set men, women, and children free for generations to come.

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