Changing Systems to End Homelessness

Partnership for Strong Communities

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Objectives

- Understand why good intentions are not enough to solve chronic social problems
- Distinguish conventional from systems thinking
- Experience the challenges of acting systemically, i.e. “getting the whole system in the room”
- Apply systems thinking to understanding why homelessness persists, identifying leverage points for change, and measuring progress
- Clarify elements of a community approach
Context

- The role of interconnectedness
- Where a systems view is complementary
- Why this is an important lens
Traditional Approach

- Housing
  - Director
  - Asst. Dir.
  - Dep. Asst.
  - Manager
  - Asst. Mgr.

- Employment
  - Director
  - Asst. Dir.
  - Dep. Asst.
  - Manager
  - Asst. Mgr.

- Social Services
  - Director
  - Asst. Dir.
  - Dep. Asst.
  - Manager
  - Asst. Mgr.

- Education
  - Director
  - Asst. Dir.
  - Dep. Asst.
  - Manager
  - Asst. Mgr.

- Health Care
  - Director
  - Asst. Dir.
  - Dep. Asst.
  - Manager
  - Asst. Mgr.
Systemic Approach
Examples

- Homeless shelters perpetuate homelessness
- Food aid leads to increased starvation
- Drug busts increase drug-related crime
- “Get tough” prison sentences fail to reduce fear of violent crime
- Job training programs increase unemployment
Common Characteristics of Failed Solutions

- Obvious and often succeed in the short run
- Short-term gains undermined by long-term impacts
- Negative consequences are unintentional
- If the problem recurs, we do not see our responsibility
Good Deeds Are Not Enough

- “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

“When you are confronted by any complex social system … with things about it that you’re dissatisfied with and anxious to fix, you cannot just step in and set about fixing with much hope of helping. This is one of the sore discouragements of our time.” (Lewis Thomas)
The Need for a New Way of Thinking

**Conventional Thinking**
- The connection between problems and their causes is obvious and easy to trace.
- Others, either within or outside our organization, are to blame for our problems and must be the ones to change.
- A policy designed to achieve short term success will also assure long term success.
- In order to optimize the whole, we must optimize the parts.
- Aggressively tackle many independent initiatives simultaneously.

**Systems Thinking**
- The relationship between problems and their causes is indirect and not obvious.
- We unwittingly create our own problems and have significant control or influence in solving them through changing our own behavior.
- Most quick fixes have unintended consequences: they make no difference or make matters worse in the long run.
- In order to optimize the whole, we must improve relationships among the parts.
- Only a few key coordinated changes sustained over time will produce large systems change.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>And …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elected Official</td>
<td>Permanent housing with support services and jobs are important</td>
<td>Takes a long time, expensive – and community has other more immediate issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Leader</td>
<td>It’s important for everyone to have shelter</td>
<td>Homeless people downtown hurt business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Shelter Director</td>
<td>Giving people shelter is humane</td>
<td>The more beds we fill, the more money we get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care for Homeless Director</td>
<td>Homeless people need basic health services outside the ER</td>
<td>We also depend on donors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing Advocate</td>
<td>All people need permanent housing first</td>
<td>Our funding depends on elected officials and private donors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>We are committed to helping homeless people</td>
<td>Our board wants to help people now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned Citizen</td>
<td>No one should be homeless, and shelters provide a humanitarian solution</td>
<td>I don’t want homeless people living near me; taxes should go to more pressing problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Person</td>
<td>Permanent housing gives me ongoing security</td>
<td>My community is other homeless people; don’t know if I can make it in normal world</td>
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Reflections

- To what extent do these people represent “the whole system in the room?”
- Are these views familiar to you?
- Given these perspectives, what are coalition members talking about – and how likely are they to work together to end homelessness?
Deepening Our Understanding of Problems: The Iceberg

What happened?

What’s been happening?

Why?

FOCUS

ACTION OR RESPONSE
React Firefight

Anticipate Forecast

Change Create

Learning Leverage

EVENTS

TRENDS & PATTERNS

STRUCTURE (Forces and Pressures)

Pressures
Policies
Power dynamics
Perceptions
Purpose
Ending Homelessness: **Events**

**Focusing Question:** Why, despite our best efforts, have we been unable to end homelessness in Calhoun County?

- Calhoun County, MI: estimated 250-500 people homelessness among population of 100,000
- Homeless Coalition meetings again fail to deal with the problem: disagreements, competition, and lack of knowledge cited
- Opportunity to receive funding to develop ten-year plan to end homelessness
- Systems analysis integrated with community building process – involving political and business leaders, service providers, and homeless people – to produce the plan
Ending Homelessness: Asking Powerful Questions

Interviews held with a community cross section of 50 people:

• What leads to people being at risk?
• What prevents people from becoming homeless?
• What enables people to move off the streets into temporary housing?
• What causes people to move back to the streets?
• What keeps people from moving into permanent housing?
Ending Homelessness: Trends

![Graph showing trends in homeless population, efforts to reduce homelessness, and visibility of the problem over time.]
Analyzing Structure: Recognizing Feedback

The world is circular, not linear:

From: Problems or Crises → Actions or Interventions

To: Problems or Crises → Actions or Interventions

Unintended and Delayed Consequences
We live in complex webs of interconnected reinforcing and balancing processes.

Reinforcing process:
- virtuous cycles that generate growth
- vicious treadmills that create disaster
Reinforcing Loops

Structure

Performance or Condition
Growing Action

Pattern

Performance or Performance
Time
Balancing Process

Balancing loops seek to correct or adjust toward a goal

Structure

Performance or Condition

Corrective Action

Pattern

Performance

Goal

Time
People are aware of a long-term, fundamental solution to a problem symptom. However, it is easier for them to implement a quick fix instead. Over time, their dependence on the quick fix makes it difficult to implement the long-term solution.

This is the core archetype of Addiction.
Ending Homelessness: Systems Dynamics – The Irony of Temporary Shelters

- Homeless People
- Permanent Housing
- Critical Services
- Employment
- Temporary Shelters and Supports

Vicious Cycle (3)

Pressure to Make Fundamental Shifts → Problem Visibility

Vicious Cycle (4)

Donor Pressure for Short-Term Results

Funding to Individual Organizations

Willingness, Time & Funding to Innovate and Collaborate

Quick Fix (2)

Fundamental Solution (1)
Ending Homelessness: Surfacing Mental Models (Perceptions)

Svc Providers: We have to help people now. It’s the humane thing to do.

Public: What’s the problem? We have more pressing needs.

Problem Visibility

Pressure to Make Fundamental Shifts

Temporary Shelters and Supports

Donor Pressure for Short-Term Results

Donors: Our board expects results

Funding to Individual Organizations

Svc Providers: We have to protect our own funding

Willingness, Time & Funding to Innovate and Collaborate

Public Officials: It might be best practice - but this is too hard, takes too long, and is too expensive

Homeless People

Permanent Housing

Critical Services

Employment

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## Ending Homelessness: Choosing the Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Benefits</th>
<th>Espoused Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Feel good about helping people <em>cope</em> with homelessness</td>
<td>- <strong>End</strong> homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reduce <em>severity</em> of problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reduce <em>visibility</em> of problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Receive <em>funding</em> for current work</td>
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Thinking Systemically About An Issue: Affordable Housing Example

- List 3-5 factors related to the issue, e.g.,
  - Level of permanent, safe, affordable, and supportive housing
  - # people at risk of becoming homeless
  - Affordability for landlords (their ability to make a decent profit)
  - Level of vacant housing
  - Gentrification, i.e., # of unaffordable homes

- Show cause-effect relationships among the factors
  - Show cause-effect links among listed factors
  - Add other factors as necessary to complete your logic
  - Identify any feedback relationships, e.g., how causes become consequences and vice versa
Example: Dynamics Affecting Affordable Housing

Diagram:
- **Vacant Housing**
- **Gentrification**
- **Landlords’ Willingness to Rent**
- **Quality of Housing**
- **Affordability for Landlords**
- **Availability of Permanent, Safe, Affordable, Supportive Housing**
- **Strength of Risk Factors**
- **People at Risk**
- **Potential Problems for Landlords**

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Interrelated Issues in Ending Homelessness

- Affordable Housing for Low Income People
- Availability and Access for Living Wage Jobs
- Availability and Access for Social Services
- Availability and Access for Health Care
- Education
- Structural Racism
Making Sense of Complexity: System Archetypes

Virtuous/Vicious Cycles
Balancing Loops
Shifting the Burden
Fixes that Backfire
Limits to Success
Escalation
Drifting Goals
Success to the Successful
Tragedy of the Commons
Multiple Goals
Accidental Adversaries
Growth/Underinvestment

Amplification
Correction
Unintended Dependency
Unintended Consequences
Unanticipated Constraints
Unintended Proliferation
Inadvertent Drift to Low Performance
Winner Takes All
Optimizing Each Part Destroys the Whole
Conflicting or Excessive Commitments
Partners Who Become Enemies
Self-imposed Limits
Identifying Leverage Points

- Increase self-awareness
- Rewire cause-effect relationships
- Shift mental models
- Make an explicit choice about purpose
The Bathtub Analogy

Implications for Leverage: Increase Rate of Outflow and Reduce Rate of Inflow
A Theory of Change for Ending Homelessness

Chronic

- Chronic Homelessness Prevention
  - # of Chronic Homeless

Desire to End Homelessness

Pressure for Resettlement Into Permanent Housing

Multi-Sectoral Will

Episodic

- Episodic Homelessness Prevention
  - # of Episodic Homeless

Reducing Episodic Homelessness

Strength of Community

Strength of Economy

Funding

Service Provider Collaboration

Supporting People to Stay in Permanent Housing

Supporting People to Pay for Their Own Housing

Housing For Chronic Homeless

(permanent, safe, affordable, supportive)

Support Services For Chronic Homeless

(incl. mental & physical health, child support, community, life skills)

Reinvestment Dividend From Fewer Services

Housing For Episodic Homeless

(permanent, safe, affordable)

Support Services For Episodic Homeless

(incl. child support, job training and relocation, health care)

Reinvestment Dividend From Full Employment

Need for Support Services

Reducing Chronic Homelessness

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Evaluating Progress
Guidelines for Evaluating Progress

- Evaluate progress against 10-year plan and systems map
- Include positive and negative unintended consequences as well as actual results
- Assess your stage of growth (see next page)
- Evaluate progress against each stage of growth (see next page)
Align Human Expectations with Organic Growth

1) Ease Early Expectations – Build Capacity and Small Successes
2) Quantify and Communicate Outcomes
3) Combat Complacency
Evaluating Systems Change

1) Evaluate process to ease early expectations
2) Quantify and communicate outcomes to capitalize on momentum
3) Combat complacency through continuous improvement and learning
Emphasize Process to Ease Early Expectations

- Do we have the right people engaged – including a coalition of funders who support a collaborative approach designed to optimize the whole system?
- Is there shared understanding of what has been happening, why, and at what costs?
- Is there an initial statement of shared vision developed inclusively?
- Are collaborative projects taking shape that:
  - Focus on small successes – not quick fixes?
  - Ensure learning based on positive and negative unintended consequences as well as actual results?
- Are key players staying engaged?
- Are people shifting their orientation from coping with homelessness through shelters to ending homelessness?
Quantify and Communicate Outcomes

- Quantify improvements in 3 areas (see next page):
  - Reduce flow of people becoming homeless (# people/month)
  - Increase flow of people moving into permanent, affordable, supportive housing (# people/month)
  - Reduce # people recycling through shelter system
- Establish ratios and other comparative indicators
- Over-communicate successes
Possible Ratios and Other Comparative Indicators

- **Overall Effectiveness** = (# people per month becoming homeless)/(# people homeless more than 1 week moved into supportive housing per month): indicates monthly decline in # homeless people
  - Also, measure decline in bed utilization per month

- **Prevention Effectiveness** = (# people per month becoming homeless)/(# people per month at risk of becoming homeless due to income level and family stressors): measure decline

- **Prevention Dividend** = ($ spent/person/year on homeless system) + ($ spent/person/year on supportive housing) – ($ spent/person/year on people at risk): measure annual $ to reinvest in prevention
Possible Ratios and Other Comparative Indicators (cont.)

- **Re-housing Dividend** = ($ spent/person/year on homeless treatment) - ($ spent/person/year on supportive housing): measure annual $ to reinvest in re-housing

- **Service Dividend** = ($ spent/person/year on services to support homeless people) – ($ spent/person/year on services to people in supportive housing): measure annual $ to reinvest in services

- **Living Wage Job Creation Dividend** = (Rent Paid by Tenants + Income Taxes generated/person/year) – ($ spent/person/year on job training and relocation): indicates annual $ to reinvest in job creation
Beware of Mission Accomplished Mindset
Combat Complacency through Continuous Improvement and Learning

- Anticipate limits to success, e.g. payoffs of status quo, pressure to invest elsewhere
- Invest to reduce limits before they become barriers
- Raise goals gradually
- Reinvest dividends to expand success – always building capacity before growth
- Cultivate new engines of success where necessary
- Learn from success and failure – refine your theory of change over time
Questions to Consider

- What stage are we at now? Why do we think so?
- How do the suggested measures for this stage compare with the ones we use now?
- Which new measures should we adopt?
- Which measures that we use now should we modify or drop?
Element of a Community Approach
When to Use a Systems Approach

- The problem is chronic and has defied people’s best intentions to solve it
- Diverse stakeholders find it difficult to align their efforts despite shared intentions
- They try to optimize their part of the system without understanding their impact on the whole
- Stakeholders’ short-term efforts might actually undermine their intentions to solve the problem
- People find it difficult to stay focused on a limited number of high leverage interventions
- Promoting particular solutions (e.g. best practices) comes at the expense of engaging in continuous learning
Elements of a Community Approach

1. Begin with a community organizing initiative to engage all key stakeholders
   - Involve stakeholders: social/private/public sector leaders; homeless people; media and citizen opinion
   - Build readiness: create initial statements of shared vision and current reality
   - Develop collaborative capacity: how to hold productive conversations around difficult issues and partner across sectors
Elements of a Community Approach (cont.)

2. Develop shared understanding of dynamics underlying local homelessness
   - Identify people to interview and questions to ask
   - Gather data
   - Develop preliminary systems analysis
   - Introduce stakeholders to systems thinking and get their input on preliminary analysis
   - Refine analysis including mental models and current purpose (payoffs)
Elements of a Community Approach (cont.)

3. Test for commitment to change – then revisit shared vision

4. Bridge the gap between current reality and vision
   - Establish shared goals
   - Propose and refine high leverage interventions with community input
   - Develop an implementation plan that provides a roadmap for change over time
Elements of a National Approach

- Expand model by running three additional local demonstration projects
  - Large urban area
  - Mid size urban area
  - Rural area

- Convene stakeholders at federal level (government agencies, developers, homeless people, national advocates, researchers, etc.)
Resources

- **Articles and Papers**

- **Books**
  - *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge
  - *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, Peter Senge et al
  - *Thinking in Systems*, Donnella Meadows

- **Websites**
  - Bridgeway Partners ([www.bridgewaypartners.com](http://www.bridgewaypartners.com))
  - Give US Your Poor ([www.giveusyourpoor.org](http://www.giveusyourpoor.org))
  - Applied Systems Thinking ([www.appliedsystemsthinking.com](http://www.appliedsystemsthinking.com))
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  - (617) 287-5532
A Systemic Approach to Ending Homelessness

Applied Systems Thinking
Use the Power of Structure to Create Lasting Change

Applied Systems Thinking Journal
Topical Issues, Article 4, October 7, 2007

David Peter Stroh and Michael Goodman
Overview

This article provides a case study of how Systems Thinking was applied by the authors with a community brought together by the Battle Creek Homeless Coalition to address the chronic homelessness in surrounding Calhoun County. Through this collaboration involving broad multi-sector representation, the community designed an initiative that is leading to change for lasting social impact. More detailed knowledge specific to the discipline of systems thinking is available at www.appliedsystemsthinking.com the authors’ web site.

Systems Thinking is an approach used to develop a shared understanding of why chronic, complex problems exist - as well as where the structural leverage lies to solve such problems in powerful and sustainable ways.

Case Study

Calhoun County, Michigan is an area of 100,000 people centered around Battle Creek – where service providers, business and political leaders, grant makers, and homeless people themselves asked, “Why, despite our best efforts, have we been unable to end homelessness here?” The area’s long-standing Battle Creek Homeless Coalition decided to combine an extensive multi-sector community organizing process with systems thinking to create a ten-year plan to end homelessness.

The problem in ending homelessness is often less about a lack of knowledge regarding best practices than about people’s motivations, both individually and collectively, to act on what they know. Our experience shows that the solution lies in developing a shared picture of the complex system dynamics underlying community homelessness and in establishing goals based on a common understanding of leverage points for transforming the current system. In this case stakeholders were engaged together in learning about the problem and its solutions through: providing data about the issue, refining several iterations of the analysis, and testing potential leverage points.

Systemically organizing what is known about the problem of homelessness:

- Captures the size and interconnectedness of the problem
- Clarifies the disincentives to change
- Helps each group see how it is responsible for both the existing situation and the desired state

The analysis identified:

- Four stages of homelessness in the community
- Risks that result in homelessness
- Why people get off the streets only temporarily
- What prevents people from moving into permanent housing
- Leverage points for change

Four Stages of Homelessness

One way to understand homelessness is as a series of stages through which people progress from being at risk of homelessness to securing permanent, safe, affordable, and supportive housing (see Figure 1). The process has four stages:

- People becoming at risk of losing their homes
- People losing their homes and having to live on the streets
- People finding temporary shelter off the streets
- People moving from temporary shelter back into permanent housing
Interviews with people throughout the community, including ones who were and are homeless, identified the primary factors and dynamics that led people to move from one stage to the next. Of particular concern in Calhoun County was the difficulty of moving people from temporary shelters back into permanent, safe, affordable, and supportive housing.

**Figure 1: The Stages of Homelessness**

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**Risks that Result in Homelessness**

Community members identified five factors that increase the risk of becoming homeless:

1. Individual risk factors
   - Poverty, discrimination, and lack of education
   - Substance abuse, mental illness, and domestic violence
   - Lack of support for minors
   - Absence of life management skills and low underlying self-esteem
   - Vulnerability to scams, slum lords, and quick cash schemes

2. Limited permanent, accessible, living wage jobs

3. Financial problems stemming from the above, e.g. difficulties paying for medical emergencies and child support – essentials beyond rent and food

4. Limited permanent, safe, affordable, supportive housing.

5. Social risk factors, such as aging, and the immigration of meth labs from Detroit and Jackson

The impact of these risk factors increased for people over time as their ability to find ethical landlords and affordable housing decreased. Faced with the added financial challenge of renting to people at risk for homelessness, well-intentioned landlords, worried about their own livelihood, often responded by:

- Leaving properties vacant and ironically creating abandoned housing even as the demand for affordable housing increased
- Not investing in their properties and lowering the quality of the rental stock
- Selling their houses to developers for gentrification purposes and increasing the price of housing as a result

All of these landlord responses reduced the availability of affordable housing even further and increased the likelihood of homelessness for people at risk.

One other major factor contributed to homelessness in Calhoun County. The county is home to a Veterans Administration (VA) psychiatric hospital. Veterans from all over the state came for both day treatment and in-patient services. Many of these veterans ended up staying in the area, without housing, and living on the streets, or in the shelters.
At the same time, there were those in the community who tried to prevent people at risk from losing their homes. Government and social service agencies provided rapid and quality emergency responses. Government also provided housing subsidies. Family, friends, churches, and schools offered community support. Many provided information about available resources. And the VA offered transitional support to veterans.

Unfortunately, in many instances this assistance was not enough to create a sustained solution. Many individuals and families still fell into the homelessness cycle or resorted to “surfing” from couch to couch among friends and family, hidden from service providers and the public.

**Why People Get Off the Streets Only Temporarily**
People who were homeless had short-term several ways to get off the streets. The best known option was the county’s formal shelters. These were truly temporary solutions, providing shelter for 30 days before people had to move on. Some ended up back on the street, while others found themselves in medical emergency rooms, jail, or resorted to unsafe, unsustainable housing (e.g. places run by slum lords, abandoned housing, or doubling up) as a way to get a roof over their heads.

Many people recycled through these temporary solutions for years. Occasionally, they obtained temporary jobs or restricted child support that enabled them to move into more permanent housing. Still, the provisional nature of such supports often led people to become homeless again within a short period of time.

Case management was another limited resource in the community. Clients received limited support, if any, once they left temporary shelter. Some people chose to leave Calhoun County in search of better services, but often returned when the demand for such services exceeded capacity to provide them.

People who were homeless cited their own determination as an additional important factor in overcoming adversity. Unfortunately, even strong determination was insufficient without structures in place to secure permanent, safe, affordable, housing and permanent, accessible, living wage jobs.

**What Prevents People from Moving Into Permanent Housing**
The painful irony of homelessness for some service providers, people who were homeless, and others in the community was that many already recognized at least some of the elements of a permanent solution. These included:

1. **Availability, awareness, and accessibility of critical services such as:**
   - Detox and substance abuse treatment
   - Mental health services
   - Services to women
   - Discharge planning for prisoners
   - Longer term case management
   - Life skills training
   - Transitional housing for selected groups
   - Housing placement services
   - Education, job training, and employment support

2. **Availability of permanent, safe, affordable, supportive housing**

3. **Permanent, living wage jobs and access to child care and transportation services to ensure reliable employment.**

The community identified that the individual or family ability to find and implement a fundamental solution was limited by several factors, including:

- Time delays in implementing a solution and waiting for results
- Barriers produced by homelessness itself
- Community ability to create permanent, living wage jobs.
When seeking to move people off the streets into permanent housing, it was important to address the barriers produced by homelessness itself. These obstacles included:

- The inherent uncertainty created by homelessness that compounds family risk factors
- Problems establishing legal identity
- Poor credit history
- Previous evictions
- Criminal record
- Negative stereotyping of people who are homeless

These barriers led to difficulties in people being able to develop or take advantage of the available resources that would enable them to move into permanent housing. For example, they limited people's opportunity to practice life skills, created reluctance on the part of potential landlords and employers to give them a chance, presented legal regulations and restrictions to reintegrating back into society, and prompted others in the community to resist affordable housing “in their backyard.”

One consequence of the effectiveness of temporary shelters and supports was that it reduced the visibility of the problem to the community overall. Many people were naturally reluctant to see the problem in the first place. People who were homeless were also fearful of being seen and hid their condition as best they could. The lack of visibility reduced pressure on the community to solve the problem, and a lack of data also reinforced the invisibility of the problem.

The temporary success of shelters and other supports combined with the pressure created by donors for short-term success tended to reinforce funding to individual organizations for their current work. Such reinforcement decreased the service providers’ willingness, time, and funding to innovate and collaborate. This in turn led to:

- Fragmentation of services
- Competition for existing funds
- Lack of broader knowledge of best practices
- Reluctance to overcome government restrictions that make it difficult to innovate
- Shelter mentality

A complete picture of these dynamics is presented in Figure 2. It should be noted that they represent a common dynamic found in many complex social systems where a quick fix to a problem symptom undermines a fundamental solution.

This dynamic is known as “shifting the burden” (to the quick fix) or in psychological terms as “addiction.” The irony is that people committed to serving those whose homelessness sometimes stems from some kind of addiction can become addicted themselves – albeit to the noble response of providing temporary shelter to those in need.

![Figure 2: Constraints in Moving from Temporary to Permanent Housing](image-url)
Leverage Points for Change

Based on the analysis represented in Figure 2, there appeared to be seven leverage points or types of interventions that could end homelessness in Calhoun County. These fell into two categories displayed in Figure 3:

1. Increase and accelerate the number of people moving from temporary shelters into permanent housing
2. Decrease the number of people at risk from becoming homeless in the first place

Moving People from Temporary to Permanent Housing

To initiate change for lasting social impact, the Battle Creek Homeless Coalition chose increasing community visibility of the problem as its first leverage point. This involved increasing both accurate information about the extent of the problem and the community’s motivation to permanently solve it.

Step two was to increase collaboration and alignment among providers and community around implementing a permanent solution. The purpose of this change initiative was to reduce fragmentation of services and the shelter mentality, while increasing knowledge of best practices and the willingness to overcome government restrictions to innovate.

A third step followed as a consequence of increased alignment among providers: steps were taken to enhance collaboration and alignment among community investment. The result would be reduced competition for existing funds, further collaboration among the provider community, and greater support for necessary housing and services.

A fourth point of leverage was introduced to increase access to permanent, safe, affordable, and supportive housing. A fifth followed to access additional services such as substance abuse and mental health treatment for specific populations of people who were homeless. The sixth leverage point – to be implemented in partnership with other organizations focused on economic development in the county – was to increase availability and access to living wage jobs.

The seventh and final leverage point was to develop a permanent solutions mindset that permeated all of the other interventions.

Designing a System to Prevent Homelessness

Ultimately, the least expensive interventions are those that prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. The leverage points for this change were to increase affordable housing, jobs, and critical services that enable people at risk to keep their current homes.
Some approaches to help people retain their current homes included supporting ethical private property managers to rent to people at risk so that these landlords would be motivated to maintain or even increase the stock of affordable housing. Solutions related to employment included efforts to create sufficient living wage jobs that would enable people to pay their rent in the first place. A Homelessness Prevention Strategy was also developed to integrate a breadth of critical services that people needed to remain in the housing where they currently live.

Results to Date
Immediately after the plan was completed and the community had received state money to proceed with implementation, Jennifer Schrand, Chair of the Calhoun County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, observed:

“I learned so much, especially the difference between changing a particular system and leading systemic change. You helped involve our consumer – homeless people – in developing the community’s ten-year plan to end homelessness. You expanded the view of service providers so that they are now committed to helping the consumer overall instead of just “doing their own thing” as individual organizations.

Agencies took a hard look together at their individual and collective responsibilities for failing to end homelessness, and recognized that their emergency work hides the problem and reduces community pressure to solve it. The goals of our new plan to end homelessness derive directly from your analysis of the whole system and identification of leverage points to achieve a sustainable solution.”

Six months after the plan was completed, Jennifer noted that significant progress has been made on implementation. Perhaps most important was a breakthrough in collaboration achieved by the Homeless Coalition when it voted unanimously to reallocate HUD funding from one service provider’s transitional housing program to a permanent supportive housing program run by another provider. This was followed by these initiatives from other collaborating organizations:

- The United Way and two local foundations committed money to hire a Coalition Executive Director (E.D.), whose work will be overseen by a Community Board.
- A third foundation is committed to funding new services, and the business leader of the Coalition will work with the new E.D. to raise additional funds from the business community.
- A local hospital provided office space and supplies for the program.
- Eight committees are underway with clear charters to produce monthly progress reports for the Coalition and Executive Committee.
- The local Director of the Department of Human Services for the state of Michigan intervened to change the community-wide eviction prevention policy to enable people to stay in their homes longer.
- A Street Outreach Program was instituted to place people into housing.

Summary
We believe that systems thinking, when integrated with a strong community organizing approach that fosters multi-sector collaboration, can enable stakeholders to take the critical step of moving from an understanding of best practices to a shared commitment to implementing them.
About the authors

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Collective Impact

LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL CHANGE REQUIRES BROAD CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION, YET THE SOCIAL SECTOR REMAINS FOCUSED ON THE ISOLATED INTERVENTION OF INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS.

By John Kania & Mark Kramer

Illustration by Martin Jarrie

The scale and complexity of the U.S. public education system has thwarted attempted reforms for decades. Major funders, such as the Annenberg Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Pew Charitable Trusts have abandoned many of their efforts in frustration after acknowledging their lack of progress. Once the global leader—after World War II the United States had the highest high school graduation rate in the world—the country now ranks 18th among the top 24 industrialized nations, with more than 1 million secondary school students dropping out every year. The heroic efforts of countless teachers, administrators, and nonprofits, together with billions of dollars in charitable contributions, may have led to important improvements in individual schools and classrooms, yet system-wide progress has seemed virtually unobtainable.

Against these daunting odds, a remarkable exception seems to be emerging in Cincinnati. Strive, a nonprofit subsidiary of KnowledgeWorks, has brought together local leaders to tackle the student achievement crisis and improve education throughout greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. In the four years since the group was launched, Strive partners have improved student success in dozens of key areas across three large public school districts. Despite the recession and budget cuts, 34 of the 53 success indicators that Strive tracks have shown positive trends, including high school graduation rates, fourth-grade reading and math scores, and the number of preschool children prepared for kindergarten.

Why has Strive made progress when so many other efforts have failed? It is because a core group of community leaders decided to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement. More than 300 leaders of local organizations agreed to participate, including the heads of influential private and corporate foundations, city government officials, school district representatives, the presidents of eight universities and community colleges, and the executive directors of hundreds of education-related nonprofit and advocacy groups.

These leaders realized that fixing one point on the educational continuum—such as better after-school programs—wouldn’t make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time. No single organization, however innovative or powerful, could accomplish this alone. Instead, their ambitious mission became to coordinate improvements at every stage of a young person’s life, from “cradle to career.”

Strive didn’t try to create a new educational program or attempt to convince donors to spend more money. Instead, through a carefully structured process, Strive focused the entire educational community on a single set of goals, measured in the same way. Participating organizations are grouped into 15 different Student Success Networks (SSNs) by type of activity, such as early childhood education or tutoring. Each SSN has been meeting with coaches and facilitators for two hours every two weeks for the past three years, developing shared performance indicators, discussing their progress, and most important, learning from each other and aligning their efforts to support each other.

Strive, both the organization and the process it helps facilitate, is an example of collective impact, the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most
collaborations, 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. (See “Types of Collaborations” on page 39.)

Although rare, other successful examples of collective impact are addressing social issues that, like education, require many different players to change their behavior in order to solve a complex problem. In 1993, Marjorie Mayfield Jackson helped found the Elizabeth River Project with a mission of cleaning up the Elizabeth River in southeastern Virginia, which for decades had been a dumping ground for industrial waste. They engaged more than 100 stakeholders, including the city governments of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach, Va., the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Navy, and dozens of local businesses, schools, community groups, environmental organizations, and universities, in developing an 18-point plan to restore the watershed. Fifteen years later, more than 1,000 acres of watershed land have been conserved or restored, pollution has been reduced by more than 215 million pounds, concentrations of the most severe carcinogen have been cut sixfold, and water quality has significantly improved. Much remains to be done before the river is fully restored, but already 27 species of fish and oysters are thriving in the restored wetlands, and bald eagles have returned to nest on the shores.

Consider Shape Up Somerville, a citywide effort to reduce and prevent childhood obesity in elementary school children in Somerville, Mass. Led by Christina Economos, an associate professor at Tufts University’s Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, the program engaged government officials, educators, businesses, nonprofits, and citizens in collectively defining wellness and weight gain prevention practices. Schools agreed to offer healthier foods, teach nutrition, and promote physical activity. Local restaurants received a certification if they served low-fat, high nutritional food. The city organized a farmers’ market and provided healthy lifestyle incentives such as reduced-price gym memberships for city employees. Even sidewalks were modified and crosswalks repainted to encourage more children to walk to school. The result was a statistically significant decrease in body mass index among the community’s young children between 2002 and 2005.

Even companies are beginning to explore collective impact to tackle social problems. Mars, a manufacturer of chocolate brands such as M&M’s, Snickers, and Dove, is working with NGOs, local governments, and even direct competitors to improve the lives of more than 500,000 impoverished cocoa farmers in Cote d’Ivoire, where Mars sources a large portion of its cocoa. Research suggests that better farming practices and improved plant stocks could triple the yield per hectare, dramatically increasing farmer incomes and improving the sustainability of Mars’s supply chain. To accomplish this, Mars must enlist the coordinated efforts of multiple organizations: the Cote d’Ivoire government needs to provide more agricultural extension workers, the World Bank needs to finance new roads, and bilateral donors need to support NGOs in improving health care, nutrition, and education in cocoa growing communities. And Mars must find ways to work with its direct competitors on pre-competitive issues to reach farmers outside its supply chain.

These varied examples all have a common theme: that large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is still limited, but these examples suggest that substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact. It doesn’t happen often, not because it is impossible, but because it is so rarely attempted. Funders and nonprofits alike overlook the potential for collective impact because they are used to focusing on independent action as the primary vehicle for social change.

**ISOLATED IMPACT**

Most funders, faced with the task of choosing a few grantees from many applicants, try to ascertain which organizations make the greatest contribution toward solving a social problem. Grantees, in turn, compete to be chosen by emphasizing how their individual activities produce the greatest effect. Each organization is judged on its own potential to achieve impact, independent of the numerous other organizations that may also influence the issue. And when a grantee is asked to evaluate the impact of its work, every attempt is made to isolate that grantee’s individual influence from all other variables.

In short, the nonprofit sector most frequently operates using an approach that we call *isolated impact*. It is an approach oriented toward finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely. Funders search for more effective interventions as if there were a cure for failing schools that only needs to be discovered, in the way that medical cures are discovered in laboratories. As a result of this process, nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other and exponentially increasing the perceived resources required to make meaningful progress. Recent trends have only reinforced this perspective. The growing interest in venture philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, for example, has greatly benefited the social sector by identifying and accelerating the growth of many high-performing nonprofits, yet it has also accentuated an emphasis on scaling up a few select organizations as the key to social progress.

Despite the dominance of this approach, there is scant evidence that isolated initiatives are the best way to solve many social problems in today’s complex and interdependent world. No single organization is responsible for any major social problem, nor can any single

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TYPES OF COLLABORATIONS

Organizations have attempted to solve social problems by collaboration for decades without producing many results. The vast majority of these efforts lack the elements of success that enable collective impact initiatives to achieve a sustained alignment of efforts.

Funder Collaboratives are groups of funders interested in supporting the same issue who pool their resources. Generally, participants do not adopt an overarching evidence-based plan of action or a shared measurement system, nor do they engage in differentiated activities beyond check writing or engage stakeholders from other sectors.

Public-Private Partnerships are partnerships formed between government and private sector organizations to deliver specific services or benefits. They are often targeted narrowly, such as developing a particular drug to fight a single disease, and usually don’t engage the full set of stakeholders that affect the issue, such as the potential drug’s distribution system.

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives are voluntary activities by stakeholders from different sectors around a common theme. Typically, these initiatives lack any shared measurement of impact and the supporting infrastructure to forge any true alignment of efforts or accountability for results.

Social Sector Networks are groups of individuals or organizations fluidly connected through purposeful relationships, whether formal or informal. Collaboration is generally ad hoc, and most often the emphasis is placed on information sharing and targeted short-term actions, rather than a sustained and structured initiative.

Collective Impact Initiatives are long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and are staffed by an independent backbone organization.

Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public-private partnerships. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of nonprofit management organizations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed.

THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE SUCCESS

Our research shows that successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

Common Agenda | Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Take a close look at any group of funders and nonprofits that believe they are working on the same social issue, and you quickly find that it is often not the same issue at all. Each organization often has a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate goal. These differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives, yet these differences splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field as a whole. Collective impact requires that these differences be discussed and resolved. Every participant need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem. In fact, disagreements continue to divide participants in all of our examples of collective impact. All participants must agree, however, on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole. The Elizabeth River Project, for example, had to find common ground among the different objectives of corporations, governments, community groups, and local citizens in order to establish workable cross-sector initiatives.

Funders can play an important role in getting organizations to act in concert. In the case of Strive, rather than fueling hundreds of strategies and nonprofits, many funders have aligned to support Strive’s central goals. The Greater Cincinnati Foundation realigned its education goals to be more compatible with Strive, adopting Strive’s annual report card as the foundation’s own measures for progress in education. Every time an organization applied to Duke Energy for a grant, Duke asked, “Are you part of the [Strive] network?” And when a new funder, the Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile Jr./U.S. Bank Foundation, expressed interest in education, they were encouraged by virtually every major education leader in Cincinnati to join Strive if they wanted to have an impact in local education.
**Shared Measurement Systems** | Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other’s successes and failures.

It may seem impossible to evaluate hundreds of different organizations on the same set of measures. Yet recent advances in Web-based technologies have enabled common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes. These systems increase efficiency and reduce cost. They can also improve the quality and credibility of the data collected, increase effectiveness by enabling grantees to learn from each other’s performance, and document the progress of the field as a whole.1

All of the preschool programs in Strive, for example, have agreed to measure their results on the same criteria and use only evidence-based decision making. Each type of activity requires a different set of measures, but all organizations engaged in the same type of activity report on the same measures. Looking at results across multiple organizations enables the participants to spot patterns, find solutions, and implement them rapidly. The preschool programs discovered that children regress during the summer break before kindergarten. By launching an innovative “summer bridge” session, a technique more often used in middle school, and implementing it simultaneously in all preschool programs, they increased the average kindergarten readiness scores throughout the region by an average of 10 percent in a single year.2

**Mutually Reinforcing Activities** | Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder’s efforts must fit into an overarching plan if their combined efforts are to succeed. The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations.

All participants in the Elizabeth River Project, for example, agreed on the 18-point watershed restoration plan, but each is playing a different role based on its particular capabilities. One group of organizations works on creating grassroots support and engagement among citizens, a second provides peer review and recruitment for industrial participants who voluntarily reduce pollution, and a third coordinates and reviews scientific research.

The 15 SSNs in Strive each undertake different types of activities at different stages of the educational continuum. Strive does not prescribe what practices each of the 300 participating organizations should pursue. Each organization and network is free to chart its own course consistent with the common agenda, and informed by the shared measurement of results.

**Continuous Communication** | Developing trust among nonprofits, corporations, and government agencies is a monumental challenge. Participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Even the process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to developing shared measurement systems. All the collective impact initiatives we have studied held monthly or even biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations’ CEO-level leaders. Skipping meetings or sending lower-level delegates was not acceptable. Most of the meetings were supported by external facilitators and followed a structured agenda.

The Strive networks, for example, have been meeting regularly for more than three years. Communication happens between meetings too: Strive uses Web-based tools, such as Google Groups, to keep communication flowing among and within the networks. At first, many of the leaders showed up because they hoped that their participation would bring their organizations additional funding, but they soon learned that was not the meetings’ purpose. What they discovered instead were the rewards of learning and solving problems together with others who shared their same deep knowledge and passion about the issue.

**Backbone Support Organizations** | Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. Strive has simplified the initial staffing requirements for a backbone organization to three roles: project manager, data manager, and facilitator.

Collective impact also requires a highly structured process that leads to effective decision making. In the case of Strive, staff worked with General Electric (GE) to adapt for the social sector the Six Sigma process that GE uses for its own continuous quality improvement. The Strive Six Sigma process includes training, tools, and resources that each SSN uses to define its common agenda, shared measures, and plan of action, supported by Strive facilitators to guide the process.

In the best of circumstances, these backbone organizations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people’s attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders.
Creating a successful collective impact initiative requires a significant financial investment: the time participating organizations must dedicate to the work, the development and monitoring of shared measurement systems, and the staff of the backbone organization needed to lead and support the initiative’s ongoing work.

As successful as Strive has been, it has struggled to raise money, confronting funders’ reluctance to pay for infrastructure and preference for short-term solutions. Collective impact requires instead that funders support a long-term process of social change without identifying any particular solution in advance. They must be willing to let grantees steer the work and have the patience to stay with an initiative for years, recognizing that social change can come from the gradual improvement of an entire system over time, not just from a single breakthrough by an individual organization.

This requires a fundamental change in how funders see their role, from funding organizations to leading a long-term process of social change. It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single nonprofit or to build that organization’s capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive.

This is a shift that we foreshadowed in both “Leading Boldly” and our more recent article, “Catalytic Philanthropy,” in the fall 2009 issue of the Stanford Social Innovation Review. In the former, we suggested that the most powerful role for funders to play in addressing adaptive problems is to focus attention on the issue and help to create a process that mobilizes the organizations involved to find a solution themselves. In “Catalytic Philanthropy,” we wrote: “Mobilizing and coordinating stakeholders is far messier and slower work than funding a compelling grant request from a single organization. Systemic change, however, ultimately depends on a sustained campaign to increase the capacity and coordination of an entire field.” We recommended that funders who want to create large-scale change follow four practices: take responsibility for assembling the elements of a solution; create a movement for change; include solutions from outside the nonprofit sector; and use actionable knowledge to influence behavior and improve performance.

These same four principles are embodied in collective impact initiatives. The organizers of Strive abandoned the conventional approach of funding specific programs at education nonprofits and took responsibility for advancing education reform themselves. They built a movement, engaging hundreds of organizations in a drive toward shared goals. They used tools outside the nonprofit sector, adapting GE’s Six Sigma planning process for the social sector. And through the community report card and the biweekly meetings of the SSNs they created actionable knowledge that motivated the community and improved performance among the participants.

Funding collective impact initiatives costs money, but it can be a highly leveraged investment. A backbone organization with a modest annual budget can support a collective impact initiative of several hundred organizations, magnifying the impact of millions or even billions of dollars in existing funding. Strive, for example, has a $1.5 million annual budget but is coordinating the efforts and increasing the effectiveness of organizations with combined budgets of $7 billion. The social sector, however, has not yet changed its funding practices to enable the shift to collective impact. Until funders are willing to embrace this new approach and invest sufficient resources in the necessary facilitation, coordination, and measurement that enable organizations to work in concert, the requisite infrastructure will not evolve.

Notes
1 Interview with Kathy Merchant, CEO of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, April 10, 2010.
4 Indianapolis, Houston, Richmond, Va., and Hayward, Calif., are the first four communities to implement Strive’s process for educational reform. Portland, Ore., Fresno, Calif., Mesa, Ariz., Albuquerque, and Memphis are just beginning their efforts.
Give US Your Poor is a national public education campaign addressing homelessness. It is housed at the McCormack Graduate School of Policy & Global Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston. In 1999, Give US Your Poor began as a documentary film project looking at homelessness, and has grown into a wider education campaign utilizing networks, media, public support, and the latest research on homelessness. From the beginning, Give US Your Poor has existed not to compete with other homeless organizations, but rather to complement and work with them.

**MISSION**

The Give US Your Poor mission is to create a revolution in public awareness, dispel myths and inspire action towards ending epidemic homelessness in the United States. It works to affect change at the policy level, engage volunteerism and contributions at the individual and corporate levels through media, technology and education; and to channel support to partner homeless organizations.

**VISION**

After participating in a Give US Your Poor event or viewing, attendees/viewers are affected in their mind and heart. They see a homeless person in a different light, as a whole person, and they see the issue as a blend of factors (what becomes a homelessness "cocktail") that happen to real people in tough situations. As a result they are more likely to feel “connected” to the issue and to the person they pass on the street. The immediate result is they do not ignore the person on the street anymore but stop to talk. They also become engaged in the pyramid of involvement engaging in the issue in easy ways, and for some steadily increasing their involvement.

At the macro level, Give US Your Poor directs support to homeless partner organizations so donations go up for them; A large number of students are exposed to issues of homelessness and recognize myths vs. complex realities and engage in service learning around homelessness; Major legislation is passed that recognizes systemic causes and solutions of homelessness and addresses those in systemic, long-term manner.

The framing of the homeless issue is changed, in partnership with a great national and international network that affects policy and attitudes towards the homeless. Homelessness decreases dramatically in 10 years.

The name ‘Give US Your Poor’ is inspired by the Emma Lazarus poem, "The New Colossus," inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"
John McGah, MSPA, is the founder and Executive Director of Give US Your Poor. A former Senior Research Associate at UMass Boston’s Center for Social Policy, he is an acknowledged expert on issues of homelessness. John is a 2002 International Eisenhower Fellowship recipient, which allowed him to study homelessness in Eastern and Western Europe.

He speaks nationally on homelessness issues at conferences and community groups. John has worked closely with community leaders in Massachusetts and across the United States developing relationships with national homeless organizations; shelter directors and staff; homelessness advocates; nationally known scholars; city, state and federal policy makers, and homeless people.

In 2009, he spent a year in Mexico with his family focusing intensely on issues of leadership, sustainability, and systems-thinking.

He has developed and teaches a Master's level seminar on Systems Thinking at UMass Boston's McCormack Graduate School of Policy & Global Studies.

“Government alone cannot solve homelessness. Corporations need to be involved to help bring to scale solutions as well as promote innovation; therefore cross sector collaboration, between government, non-profits, corporations, and individuals, is key.

In order to engage all stakeholders of each sector there is a need to dispel myths about homelessness and homeless people. Through art and music a collective and empathetic connection is established, and myths are dispelled.

Ultimately it is the diverse sources of input, the use of technology and art, and a belief that systems thinking and cross sector collaboration lies at the heart of the solution for homelessness that distinguishes Give US Your Poor.”