

RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEED



Improving the effectiveness of the nonprofit system of care to respond to community needs

OPPORTUNITY

Ensure community members can access the right service at the right time by improving the responsiveness and effectiveness of the nonprofit system of care through coordination, information sharing and data-informed approaches.

CHALLENGE

In a region rich with community resources, too many community members and partners lack easy access to information about those resources. Nonprofit partners and community members see the need for building stronger connections across the sector, yet there is also an important place for specialized services – especially when addressing time-sensitive challenges such as mental health concerns or family violence. There's opportunity to improve community information sharing, streamline access and connect across systems of care to meet community needs and fill gaps.

PORTFOLIO COMPOSITION

Investment of
\$1,575,000
in 18 partners



SYSTEMS CHANGE PARTNERS

- Adams Brown Counties Economic Opportunities Inc.
- Beech Acres Parenting Center
- Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio & Su Casa Hispanic Center
- Cincinnati Union Bethel, doing business as HER Cincinnati
- Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency
- Clearinghouse
- FamiliesFORWARD
- Freestore Foodbank
- Health Care Access Now
- Jewish Family Service of the Cincinnati Area
- Last Mile Food Rescue Inc.
- Pro Seniors Inc.
- RefugeeConnect
- Safety Net Alliance of Northern Kentucky
- Strategies to End Homelessness
- The Bail Project Inc.
- The Healing Center
- Women Helping Women

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

Nonprofit organizations play a vital role delivering services, supporting neighborhoods and advocating for change so more community members can meet basic needs, achieve goals and maintain their well-being throughout life.

The nonprofit sector is deeply rooted in American history dating back to Britain's influence and the perspectives and civic efforts of well-known figures such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Carnegie.ⁱ Rapid growth of nonprofit organizations in the 1960s, in part due to shifting funding from government-managed services to contracts with nonprofits, resulted in the nonprofit sector being labeled the "third sector" in 1973.ⁱⁱ Since then, the landscape evolved to an industry of more than 1.5 million organizations across the country.ⁱⁱⁱ

Locally, our region is home to more than 1,800 nonprofit organizations.^{iv} This doesn't include individuals, groups or entities providing social services voluntarily or very small nonprofits. Intertwined closely with local communities, social service providers help to buffer the stressors and threats to well-being that all people may face at some point. Nonprofits help fill gaps in the public safety net, support residents in navigating complex systems and offer highly specialized services to address specific community needs. But COVID-19 brought new challenges and exposed holes in systems of care – many nonprofits struggled with workforce challenges and staff burnout, changing donor trends and increased demand for services.^v

While it's pivotal to provide individual services communities rely on, building sustainable economic well-being requires systems change. It is equally important that the nonprofit system of care strengthen its coordination to work more effectively today while also looking upstream for solutions that address root causes, so communities need less support in the future.



UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE:

As the nonprofit sector grew, it responded to increased regulation, siloed funding sources, competing funder expectations and requirements, and shifts in community demographics and needs. These factors helped create a system of specialized, yet often fragmented, services. The resulting complex system of care can be frustrating, confusing and difficult for community members to navigate, especially people with chronic mental illnesses, unaccompanied youth and people with serious health conditions.^{vi}

Improvements in technology and the need to provide virtual access points and services during COVID-19 presented new opportunities for community partners and essential businesses to streamline operations, improve collaboration and innovate.^{vii} Contrastingly, these changes also bring new challenges to accessing services for communities with limited technological resources or literacy.^{viii} While broad digitalization can improve accessibility, it can also broaden existing inequities or create new ones.^{ix} COVID-19 also exposed holes in the nonprofit system of care and public safety net. Instead of seeking assistance at traditional organizations, many families, especially those seeking help for the first time, went to trusted entities within their local community, such as local places of worship, schools and community groups.^{x xi} These organizations helped fill gaps when the public safety net couldn't respond fast enough, shared information to ensure communities knew where to seek help and helped coordinate local distribution of services to make sure families could easily access support.

Without nontraditional and trusted community groups, the nonprofit system of care would have been less effective in responding to community needs over the past two years.

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“Somewhere along the way we forgot the golden rule. Nobody chooses the poorer conditions and that needs to be understood by the community and we need to remember to look out for our neighbors . [We need to] break down the silos and the walls between communities.”

– Community volunteer

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NATIONALLY

- **COVID-19 dramatically impacted nonprofits of all sizes across the nation, 40% of which reported revenue losses in 2020** while often seeing an increase in demand for services.^{xii}
- **A growing body of research between social determinants of health and health outcomes is increasing public support and private efforts** to improve coordination across systems providing human services.^{xiii xiv}

LOCALLY

- **As of June 2021, health and human services organizations across Ohio were far more likely to report an increased demand for services** than other types of nonprofits.^{xv}
- **Local involvement in integrated systems, such as kynect resources, the National 211 data platform, and service referral processes embedded into electronic health record systems,** provide new opportunities to align systems and meet community needs in more effective and efficient ways.

“ Collaboration ...
We all have the same
problems, so why not
come together to
fix them? ”

– Community member
and parent

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

COORDINATION AND LEARNING

Across our region, there are examples of strong cross-system collaboration, partnership and innovative efforts to improve service delivery and meet community need. Yet, these often take place in silos and lack a systematic approach to sharing learnings or innovations broadly across the nonprofit system of care. At a time when many nonprofit organizations operate with limited capacity and are trying to do more than ever, there is opportunity to strategically learn and improve together. Not only can this help the nonprofit system of care build new coordination practices that improve the effectiveness in service delivery today, but it can inform opportunities to address the root causes of community needs.

How might we strategically learn and innovate together to maximize cross-system coordination and improve how the nonprofit system of care effectively addresses community needs?

COMMUNITY VOICE AND TRUST

Our local nonprofit system of care is diverse. It includes large or highly specialized organizations that provide more transactional services and others that provide holistic, longer-term support. Some serve the entire region, while others focus on specific communities or populations. Navigating this web of resources is complex, yet families are asked to figure it out daily. To help overcome this challenge, nonprofit organizations increasingly turn to co-creation practices to engage families in informing and designing improvements to service delivery. But this approach has not been universally applied to improve coordination within the nonprofit system of care or between other systems that support families, such as education, health and public benefit systems.

How might we regularly use community voice to improve the effectiveness of the nonprofit systems of care and coordination between systems of care?

DATA FROM INSIGHTS

- Survey participants prioritized the need to engage community stakeholders in developing and implementing new community solutions:
 - Provide opportunities for community members to be part of the design, decisions and/or implementation solutions (59%)
 - Build stronger connections between stakeholders in our community – such as improving the communication between social services and the communities they work in (59%)
- Improving partnerships across systems and access to services were identified by survey participants as among the most beneficial solutions to addressing pressing community challenges:
 - Ensure easy access to available resources (35%)
 - Improved partnership between social services, communities and public officials to coordinate solutions (31%)
 - Availability of resources especially focused on supporting underserved community members (28%)
 - Increased opportunities for families to guide improvements in social services and educational systems (24%)
 - More use of family feedback to determine how to change or improve programs (23%)
 - Innovative approaches designed with community members (22%)

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